

School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages

**How Local Autonomy was Lost
A History of Stevedoring at Fremantle, 1880 to 1950**

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the stevedoring industry at Fremantle was absorbed into a national framework of port cargo-handling services during the first half of the twentieth century. The process of change compelled a local industry with its own peculiarities to conform to standards imposed by central authorities with priorities which were not necessarily in harmony with local practice or custom.

In part this was the result of the inexorable forces released by Federation. After the creation of the Commonwealth, there was no isolation for anyone from the Commonwealth government's powers to legislate change if it was deemed to be in the national interest. Power, therefore, would flow towards central authorities: for the shipowners and their stevedores this meant to a central organisation, the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL); for the labourers it meant, eventually, to the national executive of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF).

The Commonwealth government had the power and the will to intervene in stevedoring when the national interest dictated. The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court started the process in 1914. The Commonwealth government in the War of 1914-18, in 1928, made further inroads into curtailing the levels of local autonomy. In the 1939-45 War the process was completed by the creation of government stevedoring industry commissions and boards. The final impact to local autonomy came in 1950 when the policies of a new conservative Commonwealth government forced the Fremantle Lumpers Union to seek the protection of a national union, the WWF.

This thesis follows the path taken by the Fremantle stevedoring industry on its way to complete integration and absorption into the national port cargo-handling service. It examines the resistance to the changes brought about by centralisation and the part played in that struggle by both employers and employees at Fremantle to retain some control over their respective destinies.

Preface

A very great number of people have helped me conduct my research for this dissertation about the stevedoring industry at Fremantle. I wish, therefore, to thank the staff of the following libraries and archives for their assistance. The Western Australian State Archives, The Battye Library of WA History, The Alexander Library and the LISWA. The staff at my own local library, the Alcoa-Pinjarra Library, particularly the late Ron Ashley. In addition I have received invaluable help from the staff at the ANU Archives of Business and Labour, the Melbourne University Archives, and the Australian Archives State Branches of WA, the ACT, NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Finally the staff at the T.L. Robertson Library at Curtin University, particularly, the External Loans Section.

My thanks too are extended to the School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages at Curtin University of Technology which enabled me to make a research trip to Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne to examine documents and gather information vital to the thesis. My special thanks to my supervisor, Professor Peter Reeves, who has guided me with great patience through the preparation of this thesis. Finally thank you to my wife Anne who has encouraged and supported me throughout my work.

There are, also, a number of people who were there when the foundations of this thesis were being laid. These are the company of men and women who lived and worked in what used to be the busy port of Fremantle, when every berth was filled with the ships of many nations, and more than two thousand people toiled each day fulfilling a myriad of roles on the waterfront. This dissertation in part has been written as a memorial to them.

To achieve this aim, the most comprehensive records available, the waterside worker union documents from 1889 for Fremantle and from 1901 Federally have been examined in the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour at the ANU. These give

an extensive picture of the labourers' side of the stevedoring industry from their standpoint.

Government stevedoring instrumentality archival records located principally in the Australian Archives NSW and ACT branches, with supporting records in the Noel Butlin Centre at the ANU have been scrutinised closely. These records commenced in 1942 when the Commonwealth government's Stevedoring Industry Commission was established. These are valuable because they are a perception of the stevedoring industry not motivated by commercial interests or the workers' concerns. They are in fact the nearest that can be found to a commentary unaffected by the bias caused by employer-employee antipathy.

A third avenue of research has been more limited because shipowner and stevedoring employer records are not extant. However, the interchange of letters and minutes of meetings between employers, union officials and government representatives found in union and government sources has enabled me to overcome some of the deficiencies caused by the unavailability of employers' records. Furthermore, later in the period, shipowner and stevedoring employer associations did become less secretive about their affairs and their collective views were published and deposited, principally in the Noel Butlin Centre.

Another important source of information is the WA Arbitration Court records from 1901 to 1913 when the period in which stevedoring affairs were subject to its jurisdiction. In 1914 the employers and employees at Fremantle became appellants before the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court and that court's records from that date until 1950 are therefore another research source. The appellants' evidence presented before the court gave a picture of industry conditions experienced at the time, albeit, one in support of a particular claim from the appellant's perspective.

For an examination of stevedoring at Fremantle and to assist in an understanding of local employer attitudes, the records of the Fremantle Harbour Trust (FHT) are vital. The FHT was also an employer of waterside labour and quite comprehensive records of the Trust's stevedoring activities are deposited in the WA Public Records Office (WAPRO) and the Battye Library of WA History. These records have been particularly helping me to discern features of local stevedoring. These local features support the notion of there developed in Fremantle a distinctive form of

stevedoring; this thesis examines that development and seeks to measure the changes that were made to it up to the middle of the 20th Century.

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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Measurements.

Ships.

GRT (Gross Registered Tons); a ship measurement derived from calculating the inner volume of a ship and dividing that figure by 100. It is used for ship classification purposes and levying harbour dues and Customs charges. It has no practical application for mariners and stevedores, who use 'deadweight' (DWT) tonnage, which is the carrying capacity of a ship. A second volume-measurement ratio is Net Registered Tonnage (NRT) which is the GRT minus certain spaces in the ship. A rule of thumb comparison is 100 tons NRT = 160 tons GRT = 200 tons deadweight. Elderton, W.P., *Shipping Problems 1916-1921* (London: A&C Black, 1928) p.4.

Stevedoring efficiency.

Throughput. Tons of cargo stevedored in a given time by a given number of men. Expressed in tons per day (tpd) for a ship working cargo with an undefined number of men. It is the stevedoring industry's equivalent of 'productivity' measurement in other industries.

Tons per gang hour (tpgh) cargo handled in one hour by one stevedoring gang of usually 15 men.

Tons per man hour (tpmh) cargo handled by one man in one hour.

Gross time. Time worked and paid for in stevedoring operations.

Nett time. Gross time minus all time deemed 'unproductive'.

Unproductive time. Stevedoring time charged to the client but when the labour force is not engaged in moving cargo, i.e., when rigging derricks, uncovering hatches, laying dunnage, or preparing cargo spaces for example.

Weight.

1 ton = 20 cwt = 1,015 kilos. 1 tonne = 0.98 tons

1 pound weight (lb) = 0.45 kilos 1 kilo = 2.2 lbs

Length-Distance.

1 inch (in) = 25.4 mm. 12 ins = 1 foot (ft) = 305 mm

1 fathom = 6 ft = 1.83 metres

1 nautical mile = 1.15 statute miles = 1.85 kilometres

1 statute mile = 1.61 kilometres

Liquids-Volume.

1 gallon = 4.55 litres

1 litre = 0.22 gallons

Money.

One Pound £ = very approximately \$2.

one shilling (s or 1/-) 1/20th of £1

one penny (1d) 1/12th of 1/-, halfpenny-½d, farthing-¼d.

Shillings and pence usually shown as shillings/pence e.g. 1/6.

Pounds-shillings-pence (£.s.d) grouped as e.g. £1-1-6

Abbreviations.**Employers Organisations.**

ASOF. Australasian Ship Owners Federation

CSOA. Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association

OSRA. Overseas Shipowners Representatives Association

AEWL. Association of Employers of Waterside Labour

AEWL CEN.COM. AEWL Central Committee

AEWL WA. Western Australian branch of AEWL

Maritime Unions.

FLU. Fremantle Lumpers' Union

FLU COM. FLU Committee of Management

WWF. Waterside Workers' Federation

SUA. Seamen's Union of Australia

WA State government harbour authorities.

FHT. Fremantle Harbour Trust 1903-1964

FPA. Fremantle Port Authority 1964 to present day

Commonwealth Government Stevedoring regulatory bodies.

SIC. Stevedoring Industry Commission. 1942-1949

ASIB. Australian Stevedoring Industry Board. 1950-1956

ASIA. Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority. 1956-1976

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Chapter 8 p.183 Tonnages of General cargo imported into WA from overseas and interstate for selected years 1925 to 1939 including tons imported per head of population.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine how and why a locally-based waterfront industry lost its autonomy. It will follow the path taken by the Fremantle stevedoring industry as it evolved from a purely local enterprise serving the needs of what was, initially, an insignificant isolated community to becoming 70 years later an integral part of a national network. As part of that national network it was compelled to obey the dictates of Commonwealth government-instituted policies and its workforce became a branch of a monolithic federal union.

Originally the stevedoring industry was moulded by the economic forces at work in Western Australia late last century into an appropriate form for WA and the port of Fremantle. A vital part of that process was the policies espoused and the actions taken by the WA government to ensure that management of the shore sector of stevedoring remained uncompromisingly in their control. This control, completely against the practice observed in other ports, was because the port infrastructure development was financed by the public purse.

Arising from these policies, and consolidated by the growth in the volume of shipping calling at Fremantle, stevedoring at Fremantle reached the zenith of its local effectiveness and character by 1913. It became the 'Fremantle model'. By then there were readily identifiable groups involved in stevedoring: the stevedores, interstate and overseas contract employers controlling cargo work on board ship; and the Fremantle Harbour Trust firmly established as the State government's manager to employ men ashore to handle cargo at each ship. In this capacity the FHT was the port's innovator in materials handling technology. Employed in the waterfront work force were the foremen and labourers, both groups members of the Fremantle Lumpers' Union (FLU). In the latter group was a core-body known as the 'preferred men', required by stevedores and foremen to force the pace of work to enable each ship stevedored to sail on time.

The first intrusion by external forces came in 1914 by interests outside Western Australia, the Federal union of waterside labourers, the Waterside Workers Federation and the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. The Court's award proceedings, and the antipathy displayed by WWF, President Billy Hughes exposed all the constituents of the Fremantle industry to the harsh realities of the practice of industrial relations in the national arena.

This awakening was followed by ruder shocks caused by the effects on the industry of the First World War which removed the last remaining vestiges of employer-employee harmony previously enjoyed by the Fremantle model. The wartime upheavals were followed by a period of industrial stability and growth experienced before and after the Depression. During this time the industry managed to retain a proportion of local autonomy, although the employers' dispute resolution mechanisms became increasingly centralised. In contrast, their opponents, the FLU, managed to keep control of their affairs by resisting efforts to force them under the WWF umbrella. Operationally, however, the period brought further changes to the industry, particularly in grain-handling, which had a detrimental effect principally for the lumpers.

Central to the efficacy of the Fremantle model were the 'preferred men' whose domination of the work force was fortified between the wars to maintain their position as the driving force of the industry. Their actions caused tensions within the labouring work force because they were central to the pressure used to force the pace of work and ensure their own continued selection by employers. The rank-and-file lumpers did not have the ability or stamina to respond to employer-instigated pressure to perform.

The employers centralised their command and control structure by forming an association of waterfront employers, AEWL, in 1928. This organisation was the shipowners' offspring, conceived by both Australian and overseas shipping companies. Its purpose was to present a united front against not only the waterfront unions but also the shippers who imported and exported cargo.

There is a need here to explain that in this time from 1880 to 1950 shipping companies were more often than not referred to as the shipowner in the media, industrial courts, and throughout the sea transport industry. This identification arose because for many of the shipping companies of the day, most particularly the British, were driven by one man not a corporate body which is common today. For example

there was Inchcape of P&O, Holt of Blue Funnel, Vestey of Blue Star Line, Weir of Bank Line and Thomas and James Harrison of T & J Harrison Lines to name but a few. Australian shipping companies in contrast had chairmen of boards of directors responsible to share-holders but these men lacked the charisma of their British counterparts because they were constrained by corporate limitations, but even so, they too were known collectively as 'shipowners'.

Finally, there were the great changes brought by the Second World War which carried Fremantle further into the mesh of the national stevedoring industry controlled and directed, not by shipowners, but by bureaucrats in Canberra. The dissertation will show how the changes came about and how they remodelled the Fremantle waterfront. In spite of this reorganisation the State government retained, without challenge, its hold on the control of shore stevedoring by accepting that they too, had be part of the national stevedoring network.

The culmination of all this change came about during the period of postwar reconstruction when in 1950 the local lumpers became fully integrated into the Waterside Workers Federation and formally accepted WWF management of industrial relations campaigns. The political forces at work at the time had forced the lumpers to realise that their only protection was to become part of a national union. The industry at Fremantle had now evolved from a local industry to one which was a completely integrated part of a national industry.

To achieve the purpose of this thesis it is essential to keep in mind that the development of the local version of stevedoring was a link in the entire transport chain moving cargoes from producer to consumer rather than as an isolated component of that flow. Stevedoring was, however, taking place on a national frontier where leverage could be exerted. Government, commerce, and naturally the sea transport operators, therefore, for their own specific reasons needed an efficient stevedoring service.

It was for this reason that the stevedoring industry was regarded as having a special status in the socio-economic life of the nation. Stevedoring, therefore, became the target of close government attention and commercial scrutiny when the waterfront was perceived to be inefficient. Few industries in Australia have received the same level of probing from government and commerce. A survey of government, commercial and industrial court hearings and inquiries held between 1900 and 1950

show that there were eight Royal Commission hearings and Parliamentary inquiries, five pieces of Commonwealth government legislation aimed at reforming stevedoring, two commercially-instigated inquiries, and numerous major and minor Arbitration Court hearings, held about the stevedoring industry. None of these inquiries were specifically about Fremantle; however, the port's stevedoring service was scrutinised in the context of the problem being addressed at the time. The reasons the industry attracted such attention from government, the effects of government intervention and how that impacted on the Fremantle industry will be a key focus of the thesis.

The extent of other literature about the Australian waterfront, is limited. That limitation was caused in most cases because the authors recognised stevedoring was a multi-faceted industry making it too complex for comment within the context of their own core subject. It is the aim of this dissertation to go some way to overcoming that deficiency.

Nonetheless, it is surprising that such a vital sector of the sea transport industry has been so neglected. The literature is replete with the history of epic journeys, the development of trade routes and ports, the evaluation of personalities involved in ship-owning and of course, the history of ships; but there is little about what happened when the ship finally arrived in port to discharge or load its cargo. Stevedoring appears to be an activity ignored by the writers because it lacked the drama of travel on the high seas; the process of stevedoring was to many observers a mundane activity and, therefore, unremarkable in their perception of sea-transport processes.

There are four main groups of works in which stevedoring activity is reported. These are general histories about shipping services to and around Australia; particular histories about the development of the port of Fremantle; academic theses interpreting specific waterfront incidents or patterns of port development; and, finally, the transcripts of inquiries, and industrial court hearings about the stevedoring industry.

In Australian maritime history, the seminal work by John Bach refers to the stevedoring industry in terms of its propensity for industrial disputation.¹ He makes merely passing references to the port and stevedoring at Fremantle. It is strange that this should be so because his book was commissioned in 1966 by the Australian Chamber of Shipping whose members at that time were at the forefront of fundamental

¹ Bach, J., *A Maritime History of Australia* (Sydney: Pan, 1982), pp.215, 225, 309, 372, 376, 376, 400.

stevedoring reform by introducing containerisation into the interstate general cargo trade from 1960.

A recently published book by Frank Broeze has approached Australian maritime history from another direction. In a wide-ranging and lively examination of the national maritime experience, Broeze interprets Australia's maritime experience from a number of internal and external bearings. These include the growth of ports and the waterfront working population each developed; the effect on shipping services as sea transport technology changed; and the interaction between governments, commerce, shipowners and maritime unions.² As with Bach the development of the national stevedoring industry is only alluded to when it touches a particular theme being examined. The main difference between Bach and Broeze is that the former was writing when Australia had a merchant fleet and large waterfront work force whereas the latter had to be content with what little remained thirty years later.

A third major study is James Bird's *Seaport Gateways of Australia* examination of seaport evolution³ which describes how a port's services grow to serve the shipping using the port. Each step is linked in each case to the physical provision progressively of jetties, wharves, land-backed berths and finally container terminals. However, the stevedoring industry in each port is not examined in detail to find how it developed along with the port infrastructure.

The two major works relating to the development of Fremantle, written respectively by John Hitchcock and John Ewers, focused on port infrastructure growth and neglected the waterfront industry except to chronicle the major disputes experienced in 1899, 1917, and 1919.⁴ Hitchcock's book, published in 1929 to mark the centenary of Fremantle, had a section devoted to the history of the port infrastructure development and the Fremantle Harbour Trust by the Trust's Secretary, F.W.B. Stevens. However, this did not describe how the stevedoring industry had

² Broeze, F., *Island Nation: A History of Australians and the Sea* (St. Leonards NSW: Allan & Unwin, 1998).

³ Bird, J., *Seaport Gateways of Australia* (London: OUP, 1969).

⁴ Ewers, J. K. *The Western Gateway. A History of Fremantle*. (Fremantle: Fremantle City Council, 1971), pp.119, 144-160.

developed in concert with the progress of the port.⁵ Ewers' book is a social history of Fremantle but curiously he very nearly ignores a large sector of the port's working population and activity involved in stevedoring. Both Hitchcock's and Ewers' books were commissioned by the Fremantle City Council and of necessity, had to be about civic progress. However, to ignore an important source contributing to that progress gives an unbalanced perception to the port's history.

Academic discussion and analysis of the stevedoring industry at Fremantle contained in historical journals and theses has also focused on industrial disputation and the development of the Fremantle Harbour Trust (FHT).⁶ The first industrial dispute experienced in 1899 on the Fremantle waterfront, when community arbitration was used to resolve the dispute before industrial courts were established, is analysed by Ian Vanden Driesen.⁷ Brian deGaris interpreted the events leading to the 'Battle of the Barricades' in 1919 and the resultant death of lumper Thomas Edwards which gave the Fremantle waterfront a rallying point in future disputes.⁸ Malcolm Tull has examined the establishment and growth of the administration of the port and the exercise of power by the Fremantle Harbour Trust (FHT). Of all the academic interpretations of stevedoring events he alone has touched on the development of the industry as it related to the progress of the FHT.⁹

In addition to these works, there are also the previously-mentioned proliferation of government and industrial court inquiries into the stevedoring industry, each of which published their findings. None of these were solely about stevedoring at

⁵ Hitchcock, J. K., *The History of Fremantle. The Front Gate of Australia 1829-1929* (Fremantle: Fremantle City Council, 1929), contains Stevens, F. W. B., 'History of the Harbour', pp.129-152.

⁶ Vanden Driesen, I.H., 'Confrontation and Reconciliation on the Waterfront: The Fremantle Lumpers' Strike-1899', in *Labour History* no.40 May 1981, pp.29-48; deGaris, B.K., 'An Incident at Fremantle', in *Labour History* no.10 May 1966, pp.32-37; Tull, M., 'Blood on the Cargo', in *Labour History* no.52 May 1987, pp.15-29; Tull, M., 'The Development of the Port of Fremantle. Australia's Western Gateway 1093-1939', unpublished PhD thesis Murdoch University 1985; 'The Development of Port Administration in Australia: The case of Fremantle 1903-1939', Economics Programme Working Papers Murdoch University 1988.

⁷ Vanden Driesen, I.H., in *Labour History* no.40 May 1981, pp.29-48.

⁸ deGaris B.K., in *Labour History* no.10 May 1966, pp.32-37.

⁹ Tull, M., in *Labour History* no.52 May 1987, pp.15-29; unpublished PhD thesis Murdoch University 1985; Economics Programme Working Papers Murdoch University 1988.

Fremantle, although the port was considered each time in the context of the theme of the inquiry. There were Parliamentary Inquiries and Royal Commissions which examined aspects of stevedoring in 1906, 1919 (two separate inquiries), 1920/1, 1928, 1939, 1942, and 1945. Commonwealth government legislation specifically relating to the stevedoring industry was enacted in 1917, 1928, 1942, 1947, and 1949/50. There were Commonwealth Arbitration Court proceedings handing down and amending stevedoring awards and conditions first in 1914 then in the ensuing years to 1950. There were also two inquiries into stevedoring commissioned by commercial interests made in 1938 and 1950.

There are general histories of work on the waterfront written from a personal perspective. One by Gaby about life on the Sydney waterfront from 1920 to 1950 giving a management interpretation of events in those years.¹⁰ Lowenstein and Hill's account of life on the Melbourne waterfront in the same period gave the view from the other side of the frontier.¹¹ A history celebrating the centenary of the Fremantle wharf labourers' union edited by Griffiths is concerned more with the workers' struggle to achieve industrial justice and is less about industry evolution.¹²

Recently (1997) the history of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) has been written by Margot Beasley. Although generous reference¹³ is made to the development of the lumpers union, the FLU, and its subsequent affiliation with the WWF there is little about the development of the stevedoring industry itself.¹⁴

The focus of all this literature with relation to stevedoring, therefore, is about waterfront industrial relations, or Fremantle port infrastructure and administrative development. The actual stevedoring process and industry which evolved as a result of the establishment of the port has received scant attention in all these writings. This is because their subject matter was oriented towards a specific point of port development.

¹⁰ Gaby, J., *The Restless Waterfront* (Sydney: Antipodean, 1974).

¹¹ Lowenstein, W., & Hills, T., *Under the Hook* (Melbourne: Melbourne Bookworkers, 1982).

¹² Griffiths, B., *Wharfies: A celebration of 100 years on the Fremantle Waterfront 1889-1989* (West Perth: Platypus Press, 1989).

¹³ 37 references compared with a port of similar size Adelaide with only 14 entries.

¹⁴ Beasley, M., *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers Federation* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1997).

The stevedoring industry and particularly its evolution at Fremantle was then left to be addressed separately.

Stevedoring is an integral part of the shipping world. As such it developed in concert with the manner in which ships and their trade routes evolved. Trade in Western Australia progressed as the economy grew, stevedoring was part of that growth and responded to the fluctuations it experienced. As Western Australia became a part of the federal whole, stevedoring similarly had to become part of a national entity.

The effectiveness of the stevedoring service has three prime ingredients, labour relations, materials handling technology and the port infrastructure in which it has to perform its task. Each of these elements interacted with the others to produce influential forces which the industry has to recognise, consider and apply the appropriate remedial action. The manner in which this is implemented is at the heart of the dissertation.

The commercial and financial foundation for stevedoring operations was tightly incorporated within the shipowners' own cost-effectiveness regime. For this reason stevedoring companies did not have a financial identity which could be analysed. The shipowner recovered his stevedoring costs from within his freight charge structure, which were paid, ultimately, by the consumer. Yet, they were never revealed to the shipowner's client. Stevedoring charges and accounts raised by stevedoring companies to their shipowner clients were a closely-guarded secret. No stevedoring company financial records were discovered throughout the research undertaken for this thesis. One possible reason (suggested by the experience of the writer at McIlwraith McEacharn, Fremantle) was that all accounting records were kept for the mandatory period of five years. Each subsequent year the defunct year's records were taken to the FHT/FPA incinerator to be burnt, supervised by a senior accounting staff member.

This work, therefore, is not merely a history of stevedoring and its factional conflicts, or ships and owners, or of the waterfront union of workers and the Fremantle community of which they were a principal component. Importantly it tries to be a history of all the participating elements in the stevedoring industry which existed in the period covered. It is a study of the influences each exerted on the other to determine the principal reasons for the change the industry experienced as it evolved from its local *ad hoc* origins in the 19th century to being integrated into a national waterfront industry by 1950.

Chapter 1

The Evolution of the Port

This chapter will consider the establishment of the port at Fremantle, the extent of the shipping services which called there and how each evolved and diversified to meet the community's needs caused by the prevailing circumstances.

The period from 1829 to 1890 in Western Australia saw sporadic economic and community growth. Shipping services, therefore, were limited and the port of Fremantle was underdeveloped before the 1890s. There were two constraining factors for the port: the parlous economic health of the Colony¹ and detrimental topographical features at the mouth of the Swan River.² Both combined to preclude infrastructure development in Western Australia. There was, however, progress over time which enabled the port to advance from being known merely as a 'beach landing place', to become a harbour with cargo handling facilities deemed adequate for the ships which called.

The services which were provided by shipowners for Fremantle reflected the sporadic nature of the development of the Western Australian society, its commerce and industry. The first wave of settlers arrived from 1829 to 1832, bringing all their effects and a quantity of stores on a range of small sailing vessels. After the initial surge of settlement the Swan River Colony community made little progress for fifty years.

¹ Statham. P., 'Swan River Colony 1829-1850' pp.181-210. Appleyard, R.T., 'Western Australia: Economic and demographic growth 1850-1914' pp.211-236 in Stannage. C.T., ed. *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1987), (subsequently Stannage, ed. *A New History*).

² Palmer, C.S.R., 'Fremantle Harbour Works. Western Australia.' *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Session 1910-1911*, (London: The Institution, 1911), pp.8-14.

In 1848, the colonial outpost on the Swan River was described in the *Emigrant's Friend* as 'far inferior to the other Colonies'.³ It was reported that 'little water' was to be found there; that the settlers suffered from the effects of 'tropical heat'; and agriculture could not be sustained because of the 'thin sandy soil'. The Colony's future prospects, it claimed, could only be deemed 'bleak'. The *Emigrant's Friend* commented that,

...were 100,000 Emigrants to land at Swan River with money, goods and labor [sic] and had all the assistance that government could render them, they could not raise Swan River Colony to eminence or permanent prosperity.

We will not dwell longer on the Swan River Colony, no Emigrants have gone there for years past, nor would we advise any one to choose his resting place there. Swan River has little or nothing to recommend it, and when compared with the far richer and more healthy districts of South Australia, and especially Port Philip, it falls far short of them in every one of the requisites for a successful Colony.⁴

This was the perception of Western Australia held by the rest of Australia, London and other commercial centres for the next 35 years.

Early Port Development

It was realised shortly after the first European settlers had landed in 1829, that the provision of an adequate harbour at Fremantle was crucial to the survival and any possible future progress of the colony. Moreover, this harbour had to have an appropriate ship's cargo handling infrastructure to move the goods from ship to storage locations on shore. The primitive technique initially used to disembark passengers, effects, and community stores was to bring them ashore from the ship at anchor in the ship's rowboats and dump them on the nearest beach. This procedure soon proved totally unacceptable to the settlers.⁵

When the European settlement of the Swan River began the Fremantle harbour consisted simply of three anchorages near the mouth of the river: Gage

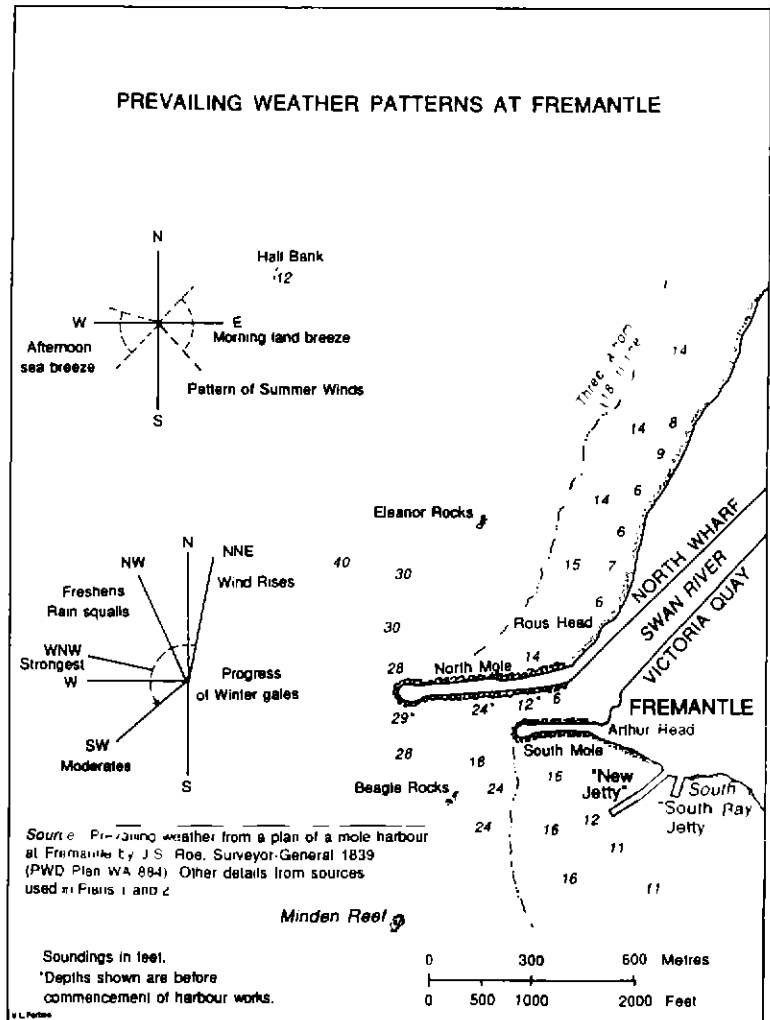
³ Allen, J. & Francis, D. *The Emigrant's Friend*, (London: Allen & Francis, 1848), p.19.

⁴ *ibid.* 'South Australia' in this context was meant by the authors to be all of the southern portion of the continent east of Spencer Gulf.

⁵ Palmer, p.9.

Roads, Cockburn Sound and Owen Anchorage. These early refuges were found by mariners to give little protection from the frequent winter gales which commenced by blowing from a northerly direction, which backed westerly, and finally blew themselves out from the south west. Equally detrimental was the mariners' experience in summer. Then the anchorages gave inadequate shelter from the strong easterly forenoon breezes off the land, and then in the afternoon the fresh westerly-onshore-sea breezes.

It was also found that ships could not seek shelter from any of these winds by anchoring closer to the land because in both winter and summer they risked grounding on the shallows of a lee shore. To add to these hazards, the shallows extended at least a mile from the shore line near the river mouth or adjacent to the islands lying to the west of the anchorages.⁶ Furthermore, a seagoing vessel could not seek shelter in the



river-mouth as a safe haven. Access there was possible only for very small vessels because of an extensive and seemingly insurmountable limestone rock bar located at the mouth of the estuary.⁷ Once in the river, passage was obstructed by frequent

⁶ The navigational detail in this paragraph is taken from *Australia Pilot vol. 5* (subsequently *Pilot*), (Taunton: Hydrographic Department, Ministry of Defence, 1972), pp.169-180.

⁷ Palmer, p.9.

sandbars located progressively up-river.⁸ These impediments precluded the use of the river as a major transport artery from the anchorages to the main population centre, Perth, for a number of years. The rock bar proved to be the major topographical restriction to port development. This was not overcome until it was removed in 1895 during the construction phase of Inner Harbour development.⁹

One beneficial asset for the port was that there was an adequate depth of water found in the anchorages.¹⁰ The precise location of Fremantle Harbour is in Latitude 32 degrees 03 minutes South, Longitude 115 degrees 44 minutes East, on the west coast of the continent of Australia.¹¹ Because of that geographical location, there is a small diurnal tidal range of only one metre, which did not cause any problems for shipping using the port. There were, therefore, no strong tidal streams running to hinder ship or boat handling in any of the anchorages, the river mouth, and later in the Inner Harbour or within the river itself.¹² The small rise and fall of tide equally did not restrict stevedoring operations as it was to do in the WA northern ports of Derby or Wyndham. There, the large tidal range experienced prevented cargo work when the low-water mark was reached and the ship's derricks would then not reach onto the wharf decking.¹³

Notwithstanding this lack of tidal movement, until as late as 1890 there was a commonly held local belief that there had to be a continual drift of sand southwards into the river mouth caused by wind and tides. This 'southerly sand drift' in conjunction with the 'rock bar' was thought to be the major problem which had to be overcome when planning any form of harbour development. However, after detailed observations were carried out and an objective assessment made of the effects of wind and tide, these fears were proved to be without foundation.¹⁴ In the first

⁸ Peel, T., 'Report to Sir George Murray', 19 September 1829, in *Swan River Papers* vol.4, pp.37-8.

⁹ Palmer, p.18.

¹⁰ Gage Roads, maximum depth 56ft., Cockburn Sound, 72ft., and Owen Anchorage 56ft. Surveyed by Navigating Lieutenant W.E. Archdeacon R.N. 1874. Chart in Battye Library.

¹¹ *Pilot*, p.173.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ WA north west ports Wyndham and Derby, *Pilot*, pp.80 & 121.

¹⁴ Palmer, pp.8-13.

instance deep-sea ships' boats and crews were the means used to land cargoes and passengers from ships anchored in the three anchorages.¹⁵ It was not long, however, before a ship to shore transport system was provided by a number of locally-built and manned barges and boats.

There were recurrent complaints made about the unsatisfactory nature of these arrangements and in the late 1830s attempts were made to rectify the situation. In 1837 the Colony's first jetty was constructed. It was located at 'Bathers Beach', on the foreshore south of the mouth of the Swan River.¹⁶ This jetty, however, was an unsatisfactory response, because although it extended 150ft from the shoreline the end was still only in a mere 5ft depth of water at its seaward extremity.¹⁷ Consequently, ships could not berth alongside it or land cargo on it. The only real advantage of the jetty was that barges could land cargoes away from the open beach. Its defects were so great, however, even for barges, that frequently passengers and their belongings had to make the final part of their journey ashore through the shallows carried on the backs of boatmen. This procedure was used rather than attempting to bring the barge alongside and risk it going aground near the jetty.¹⁸

By 1869, a 'New Jetty' was constructed which extended about 1,400ft from the beach into 11ft of water. It consisted of a long approach structure at the end of which was a T-shaped head, 90ft long by 55ft wide.¹⁹ This configuration did permit some small ships to berth alongside the seaward face of the T-head. However, even here the depth of water alongside the head was found to be inadequate, especially during rough weather. The strong winds created a violent sea swell, which caused ships moored alongside the jetty to pitch and toss ferociously. This movement caused vessels to 'pound' on the bottom, or at times go aground, which could cause extensive damage to the underwater section of a ship's hull. At the very least during

¹⁵ Nind, M., 'Sails and Oars on the Swan 1829 to 1849' in the *Journal of the Royal Western Australian History Society, Early Days*, vol. 18, part 5, 1981, pp.54-5

¹⁶ Thompson, J., 'Inaugural Address by the President.' in the *Proceedings of the Western Australian Institution of Engineers*, 31 March 1910 (Perth: Government Printer, 1910), p.8.

¹⁷ 'Fremantle 1877' Plan drawn for the Select Committee on Harbour Development of the Legislative Council, December 1877. Deposit no 281c in Batty Library. This drawing shows the jetty configuration as it was in 1869.

¹⁸ Ewers, J.K., *The Western Gateway*, p.19.

¹⁹ Thompson, p.9.

its fierce movement up and down the jetty a ship could break mooring ropes and cause damage to the vessel's upperworks.²⁰

Further jetty extensions and improvements were undertaken to try to overcome these problems in 1873, 1881 and 1883. Ultimately the jetty was extended out to a distance from the shore of 3294ft into almost 24ft depth of water, and the jetty's approach structure was widened to 48ft.²¹ This configuration became known to the community and to incoming passengers as the 'Long Jetty' at Fremantle.²²

To expedite cargo movement from ship to shore, railway tracks were laid along the jetty.²³ These tracks were later connected to the railway network, when that service started to operate in 1881.²⁴ The early rail connection initiated the government's policies which favoured the railway distribution infrastructure for many years. The support given by government for the railway system was also intended to displace the community's previous dependence on the privately-owned barge services.²⁵

In concert with the progressive construction of the jetties, a number of harbour improvement schemes were considered by the Colony's authorities. The primary proposal was made by Sir John Coode, a leading harbour works engineer. Coode made an initial proposal, sight unseen, in 1877 and a more complete plan after a short visit in 1887. However, Coode's cost projections, based principally on the need to overcome the effects of the 'southerly sand drift', increased from an initial estimate of £242,000 in 1877 to a final estimate of £1,040,000 made in 1887. It was evident that this level of expenditure was far beyond the financial capability of the Colony at that time.²⁶ Moreover, the limited revenue earned from shipping

²⁰ Shaw, D.B., 'A Curse on Fremantle.' November 1892, in the *Swedish Shipping Gazette* (Sweden: np, nd), pp.328-330; Battye Library deposit PR1362.

²¹ *Statistical Register of Western Australia 1897* (subsequently *Blue Book*), Part IV-Interchange table, no.54 (Perth: WAGPS, 1897).

²² Jones, T. 'The History of Fremantle 1829-1902' (Teachers certificate research thesis, Claremont Teachers College, 1960), p.7.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Hitchcock, J.K., *History of Fremantle*. (Fremantle: Fremantle City Council, 1929), p.64.

²⁵ Fremantle Harbour Trust Information Handbook, 1909 (Perth: WAGPS, 1909), pp.10-12.

²⁶ Palmer, pp.10-17; Thompson, pp.14-16.

movements in those years inhibited support for such a harbour infrastructure improvement.²⁷

Economic Development and Shipping Services

The irregular shipping services to the Colony were the response made by shipowners to the meagre economic growth experienced in the settlement's early years. An added deterrent to successful settlement was the daunting distance from all the established trading centres of the Swan River Colony. Blainey calls this factor which determined the pace of development on the whole of the Australian continent as the tyranny of distance.²⁸ The sea passage for the average sailing ship from England to Fremantle via the Cape was at least four months duration.²⁹ The introduction of steam powered vessels on the UK-Australia service shortened the time taken to about three months.³⁰ The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 reduced the distance for steamers on passage from England to Australia by 1,200 nautical miles and lessened the time taken by about ten days.³¹

In spite of the reduction in time for the sea-passage, steamship owners were still reluctant to call at Fremantle, because there was so little 'backloading' cargo offered to supplement the earnings from the small volume of inward cargo.³² These limitations caused the main overseas maritime-commercial contacts for Fremantle to be established with Singapore and Manila, because the sandalwood trade from Western Australia generated some financial capability for reciprocal trade.³³ There were also intermittent exports of small quantities of wool. This started in 1834 when 18 bales of wool were exported, an accumulated

²⁷ Thompson, p.16.

²⁸ Blainey, G., *The Tyranny of Distance* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1987), pp.viii-x.

²⁹ Bach, J., *A Maritime History of Australia*. (Sydney: Pan, 1982), p.36. Bach cites the passage time as 'over four months'. The contemporary newspapers indicated the time taken to be at least five months and quite often six depending on the time of year. 'Shipping Intelligence' columns in *The Inquirer* (Perth), in the years between 1840 and 1855.

³⁰ Bach, p.113.

³¹ 'Distances from British Ports to Principal Foreign Ports', Brown's Nautical Almanac (Glasgow: Brown Son & Ferguson, 1982), pp.626-633.

³² Bach, pp.36-38.

³³ Bach, p.64.

clip from about 30 sheep.³⁴ By 1900 the wool clip exported had increased to 9,531,000 lbs., the annual product of the Colony's two million sheep.³⁵ In the first 50 years of European settlement, the Colony did, however, in addition to wool, export varying quantities of timber, whale oil, pearl shell, and also locally-bred horses as the settlers looked to create a viable community.³⁶ Before 1870 the balance between the value between the colony's exports and imports favoured the latter. After 1870 they became more evenly balanced.³⁷

Limitations to colonial infrastructure development, imposed by the colony's financial difficulties, were removed after 1890. The Colony's fortunes had already improved dramatically when extensive gold deposits were found in the Coolgardie-Kalgoorlie region about 450kms east of Perth.³⁸ The economic surge which came from this discovery gave an injection of vitality to the Colony's affairs, and increased commercial activity which in turn required the proposed harbour works to be completed. The construction phase undertaken in the 1890s transformed the port into the configuration which was known as the 'Inner Harbour'.³⁹

Before gold was discovered there had been considerable agitation by a group of Fremantle merchants for enhanced harbour facilities at Fremantle to attract the steam ships in the Europe-Australia service to call and supplant Albany as the first and last port-of-call in Australia. These calls, it was argued, would make Fremantle the principal mail and bunker port for Western Australia.

The granting of responsible government to the colony in 1890 enabled the Premier, John Forrest, to raise loans without reference to Whitehall. This economic independence made harbour development at Fremantle a reality.⁴⁰ The investment of

³⁴ Glynn, S., *Government Policy and Agricultural Development* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1975), p.32.

³⁵ *WA Year Book 1970*, pp.323, 516, & 521.

³⁶ Bach, p.64.

³⁷ Appleyard in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA* pp.235-6. There was one exception 1865 when the value of exports exceeded the value of imports by £10,734, the wool clip earned £101,903 that year.

³⁸ Appleyard, Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p.219.

³⁹ *Pilot*, pp.177-180.

⁴⁰ Appleyard, in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA* pp 222-4; Brown, P., 'Western Australian Merchants and Political agitation: The Struggle for Fremantle Harbour in the late 19th Century' in *The Great Circle* vol.12 No 2 1990, pp.73-94.

public monies in the new harbour development reinforced the government's management role in the harbour and its cargo operations.

The government revenue generated by the gold mining and commercial expansion reinforced the capability of the Colony to raise additional loans in London to finance the host of improvements needed for the Colony's transport infrastructure and other community services.⁴¹ These were required to sustain the activity caused by the influx of men, mining machinery and range of merchandise which came with the growth in the Colony's European population from 48,502 persons in 1890 to nearly 180,000 in 1900.⁴²

Effectively this population growth and the increase in the volume of shipping calling at Fremantle made the construction of a modern port and the development of port services essential. However, while there was now the financial backing and commercial justification to improve the harbour facilities, there were still the topographical problems to be overcome: the rock bar at the mouth of the Swan river, and the 'southerly sand drift'. The catalyst which enabled these problems to be surmounted was the appointment by the government of C.Y. O'Connor to the post of the Colony's Engineer-in-Chief.⁴³ Along with O'Connor's appointment the government appointed his administrative assistant, F.W.B. Stevens.⁴⁴ O'Connor died in 1902, long before the port's full potential as a modern efficient harbour was realised.⁴⁵ Stevens, however, later became an influential figure in the development of the port of Fremantle in his capacity as its administrative Secretary for almost thirty years.⁴⁶

⁴¹ WA, *Votes and Proceedings* (subsequently *V&P*), session 2, 1891-2 vol. 2, pp.814-52; Appleyard, in Stannage ed., *New History of WA*, p.222.

⁴² Population figures from Western Australian Year Book 1970 (Perth: WAGPS, 1970), p.509.

⁴³ Tauman, M., *The Chief: C.Y. O'Connor* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1978), pp.64-88; Appleyard, in Stannage ed., *New History of WA*, pp.218-224.

⁴⁴ Tauman, p.77.

⁴⁵ Stevens, F.W.B., 'The History of Fremantle Harbour', in Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, pp.134-144; Tauman, p.229.

⁴⁶ Tull, M., 'The Development of Port Administration in Australia: the Case of Fremantle 1903-1939' *Murdoch University, Economics Working Papers, No 11*, (Perth: Economics Department Murdoch University, 1988), p.6. (subsequently *Port Administration*, 1988).

From personal observation O'Connor arrived at the conclusion that the relevance of the southerly sand drift factor had been greatly exaggerated. He proposed that the hitherto insurmountable problem of the rock bar at the river mouth would be overcome by blasting the bar and recovering the rubble by dredging operations. The reclaimed rock-rubble would then be used to build protective moles (or groins), north and south of the river entrance. The residue of rubble after the moles had been completed was to be used as back-fill for wharves to be built along the southern and northern banks at the river mouth. These wharves and protective moles were to be the basis of the Inner Harbour at Fremantle.⁴⁷

The initial harbour work was agreed to by government at an estimated cost of £800,000 and the blasting, dredging and construction of the moles commenced in 1892. By 1897, the Inner Harbour, North and South Moles and a South Quay wharf frontage of 3,605 linear feet were completed. The harbour was dredged to a depth of 23 feet alongside the wharf face and in the entrance channel. Small timber jetties were also completed on North Mole of 1,000ft length, and dredged to a depth of 22ft alongside. On South Mole a 300ft jetty with 20ft depth of water was constructed.⁴⁸

These harbour works and the surge in economic activity provided two of the prerequisites for the establishment of a local model of a stevedoring industry at Fremantle. The gold mining industry provided the necessary financial reserves and economic stability for the Colony and the resulting mining activity gave the Colony's commercial ventures a sustained impetus created by the incoming flow of people and goods. The result of all this activity was that there was now an adequate volume of shipping using the port to demand dependable stevedoring services.

In May 1897, the first vessel to use the Inner Harbour, S.S. *Sultan* (2,062 GRT), a passenger-cargo ship regularly trading on the Fremantle-Singapore run, berthed at South Quay. Five months later the first general cargo carrier from the UK, SS *Cornwall*, berthed at South Quay.⁴⁹ The first overseas passenger-mail ships called at Fremantle in August 1898; these were German vessels.

⁴⁷ Palmer, pp.13-26; Tauman, pp.78-87.

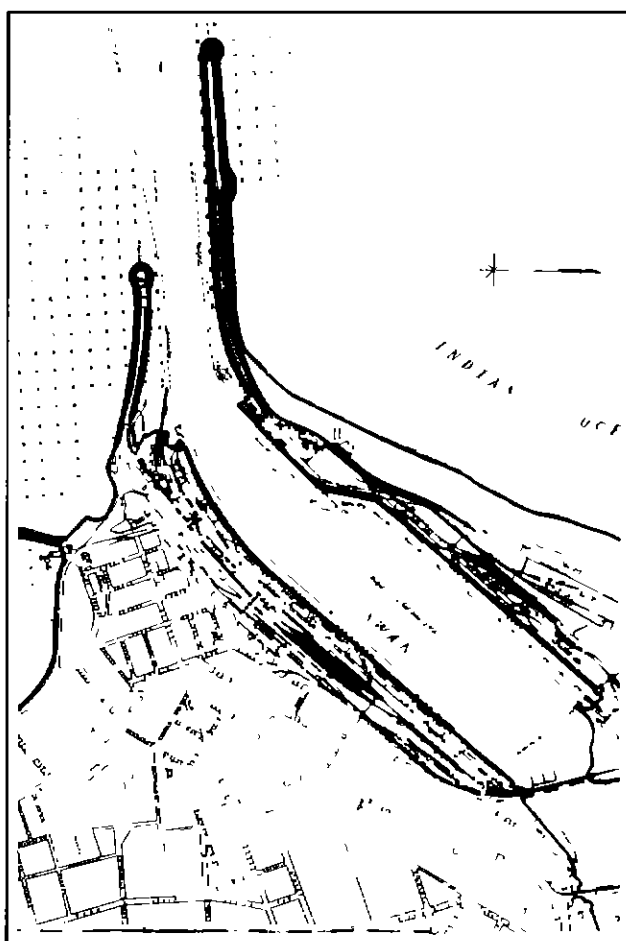
⁴⁸ Palmer, *ibid.*; Tauman, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Hitchcock, Fremantle History 1929, p.73; *Fremantle Advertiser*, 17 June 1898, p.1.

British and French passenger liners did not commence their services to Fremantle until 1900. This was after additional jetties had been constructed on North Wharf. These jetties were built by the Western Australian government at the insistence of the British passenger shipowners. Those owners had argued that their large ships could not be manoeuvred off South Quay during the winter north-westerly gales. They claimed that their ships would be 'pinned' onto the berth, their departure would be delayed, and this would have detrimental effects to their sailing schedules and passenger bookings. In practice, the 'pinning' contention was found to be mistaken and the jetties had to be dismantled. The cost to the WA government for erection and removal was £44,000 or 3% of the total harbour works budget⁵⁰

The Port's Evolution

After the completion of O'Connor's primary construction plan, harbour works construction and development continued progressively throughout the ensuing years.⁵¹ By the State's centenary year, 1929, there was 10,000 linear ft. of berthage space. On Victoria Quay (the old 'South Quay'), eight transit sheds, designated 'A' to 'H', had been constructed which gave a total 340,000 square feet of secure undercover storage space for the various imports and exports shipped through the port.



AUS77 chart of Cockburn Sound & Gage Roads.

⁵⁰ Palmer, pp.21-22.

⁵¹ Hitchcock, Fremantle History 1929, p.145.

On North Wharf there were ten berths from No.1 at the western extremity to No.10 at the eastern end near the railway bridge. There were two grain storage sheds at Nos.6 & 7 berth and Nos.9 & 10 berth with a total of 90,000 square feet floor space of storage for about 400,000 bags of grain.⁵² By 1936 another large grain storage shed had been constructed on North Wharf at nos. 4 & 5 berth.

Electric cranes were progressively introduced on the wharves at Fremantle after 1907. The purpose of these cranes was to augment ships' cargo-lifting gear in the interchange of cargo at the ship's side.⁵³ By 1929 there were fourteen electric quayside cranes in use, each with lifting capacities which varied from three to six tons. In addition there were a number of 'run-about' electric and petrol driven cranes available for use in the sheds to expedite the receipt and delivery of cargo.⁵⁴

Bagged-grain conveyors to facilitate the receipt, stacking and delivery of bags to the ships' side were first introduced at North Wharf and were ready for use at the start of the 1910/11 grain export season.⁵⁵ By 1929, the handling facilities had been improved by the provision of 22 mobile electric bag-conveyors. These were located at the specially constructed North Wharf grain storage sheds to not only facilitate bag stacking, but also to augment the five fixed conveyors used to maintain a constant flow of bags over the ships' rail into the holds for stowage.⁵⁶ This expenditure had been made necessary by the growth of the State's grain export tonnages which later became, for a time, Western Australia's primary source of income. North Wharf was also the site for the discharge of bulk cargoes of coal, coke, superphosphate, sulphur, bulk chemicals and bagged sugar into rail wagons. In addition large steel sections, railway lines and bulky machinery were handled at the west end of North Wharf because the unimpeded wharf space available at No 1, 2, and 3 berths made the handling of such awkward cargoes less hazardous.⁵⁷

⁵² *ibid.* pp.145-150.

⁵³ *Fremantle Harbour Trust Annual Report 1907*, p.12 (subsequently *FHT Annual Report*).

⁵⁴ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, pp.147-148.

⁵⁵ *FHT Annual Report 1909*, p.10.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, pp.145-150.

The railway distribution infrastructure dominated cargo operations and was essential to the success of the port's cargo activities. This transport system was considered by the harbour authorities to be the port's primary transport mode for movement of cargo between the ship's side and the merchants' storage facilities. However, barges did continue to compete for cargo carriage to Perth.⁵⁸ From the opening of the Inner Harbour, barge transport from Fremantle to the Perth jetties was seen by many merchants as the principal means of overcoming the wharf and railway congestion being experienced before the establishment of the Fremantle Harbour Trust in 1903.⁵⁹

As the network of sealed roads around Perth and Fremantle was progressively expanded, the use of barges and rail transport was replaced by road transport. In time, the motor truck became the preferred transport mode for many merchants, because of its flexibility which gave the merchant the opportunity to provide a door-to-door service from wharf to store.⁶⁰

In an attempt to retain cargoes and maintain levels of government revenue, the harbour authorities worked towards improved railway efficiency and operational economy on the wharves. To this end 'electric capstans' were installed to replace shunting locomotives used to position the wagons alongside the ships.⁶¹

The use of electric power on the wharves at Fremantle was not confined to cranes and capstans. Extensive lighting on the wharves and in the sheds had been provided from the early 1900s. In addition, each berth by 1910 had power outlets positioned on the wharf edge, which enabled portable lighting to be hired by ships to permit cargo work to proceed through the night.⁶² At that time few ships had adequate electric power generation machinery in their engine rooms; many still used oil lamps in the cabins and for their navigation lamps.⁶³ The Fremantle harbour usage of electric power grew from a monthly consumption of 15,000 units in 1919, to

⁵⁸ 'Swan River Transport.' *West Australian* (Perth), 6 August 1937, p.27.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Snooks, G.D. 'Development in Adversity' in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p.261.

⁶¹ *FHT Annual Report 1907*, p.12.

⁶² *FHT Annual Report 1910*, p.7.

⁶³ Brown, C.H., *Nicholl's Seamanship and Nautical Knowledge* (Glasgow: Brown Son and Ferguson, 1938), pp.256-7 (subsequently *Nicholl's Seamanship*).

40,000 units used in 1929.⁶⁴ Later usage increased even more because large portable fans connected to the shore power supply were placed in ship's holds in summer to overcome the heat experienced by lumpers working in confined spaces.⁶⁵

Another facet of stevedoring was the ship bunkering facilities provided at Fremantle soon after steam ships began calling there in the 1890s.⁶⁶ Coal was stored in hulks (the dismantled hulls of old sailing ships), or in barges at the port. The floating storage vessels were then moored alongside the ship and coal was lifted on board by ship's gear in baskets.⁶⁷ The coal bunkering service continued until after the end of the Second World War by which time oil fuelled ships had become the predominant mode of sea transport. The last coal-fired cargo ships called at Fremantle in the late 1960s, and the last coal-fired harbour tug was decommissioned in 1968.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, p.149.

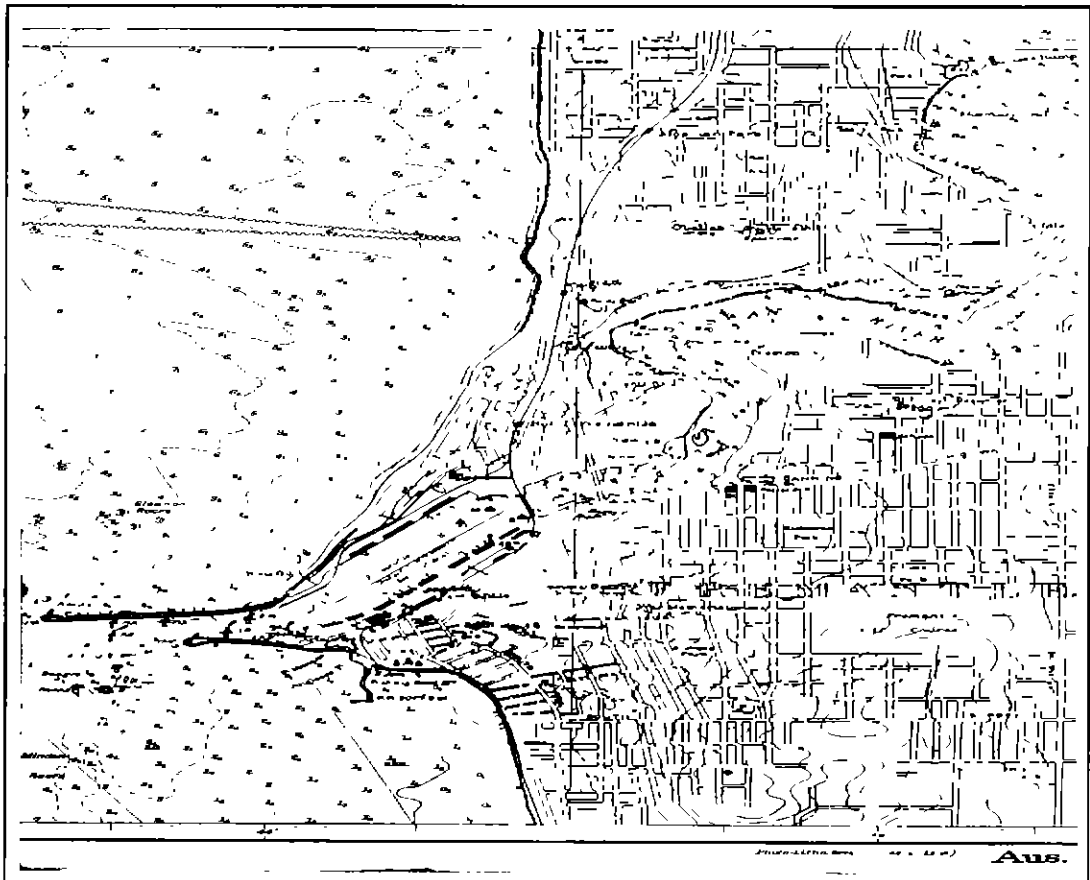
⁶⁵ Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (ASIA), *Annual Report 1965*, p.5 (subsequently *ASIA Annual Reports*).

⁶⁶ Bach, J., *A Maritime History of Australia* (Sydney: Pan, 1982), pp.104-105.

⁶⁷ FHT correspondence; 'Coal Handling at Fremantle,' Wharf Manager to Secretary [F.W.B. Stevens] 10 July 1908. Batty Library FHT deposit Acc. 3466 48/08.

⁶⁸ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p.147.

FHT plan of the Inner Harbour 1936



In spite of the preponderance of coal-burning steamers after the First World War, boiler fuel oil for steam ships was in demand during and after the war. By 1922 Fremantle had oil pipeline outlets for bunkering these ships at all the Victoria Quay berths.⁶⁹ The North Wharf berths were connected to the oil pipeline system in 1939.⁷⁰ Incoming supplies of oil and petroleum were discharged at the flammable liquids berth at No 1 North Wharf until the BP refinery was constructed at Kwinana in the 1950s.

In the development period after the 1939-45 war the harbour's cargo handling facilities were further improved by the introduction of palletised stacking and fork lift cargo movement in the Trust's transit sheds in 1952.⁷¹ Modernisation of harbour cargo handling facilities was increasingly undertaken as the 'unitisation' of general cargo proceeded through all its stages until the final change to containers and cellular

⁶⁹ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*. p.151; *FHT Handbook 1935*, p.45.

⁷⁰ FHT Annual Report 1939, p.7; Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, p.147.

⁷¹ Tydeman, F.W.E., *Report on the Port of Fremantle*. (Perth: WAGPS, 1948), p.16. *FHT Annual Report 1952-3*, pp.1-2.

ships after 1960. The handling of bulk cargoes particularly grain were also modernised in the same period.⁷²

The Diversity of Shipping Services

The categories and volume of shipping services calling at Fremantle were the measure of Western Australian development. Shipping diversified as the economy strengthened and the port infrastructure evolved to meet the needs of the community and the sea transport services which were established to meet those needs.

The prime example was gold which gave the colony the economic impetus it needed to generate increased shipping services, not only with other Australian ports, but also in the European and American trade routes. The population grew. As a result, there was growth in import tonnages of mining machinery, and all kinds of consumer goods, explosives, gold ore processing plant and chemicals passed over the Fremantle wharves to the goldfields.

The change from sail to steam also intensified the demand for efficient stevedoring operations⁷³ Ships were now faster on passage and consequently service between ports became increasingly reliable. Ships, therefore, called more frequently if there were cargoes on offer to be carried. The ships, in addition to enhanced means of propulsion, were now equipped with steam-driven cargo lifting gear which improved stevedoring efficiency.

The surge in economic activity caused the number, type, and size of ships calling at Fremantle to increase. In 1890, 59 sailing vessels and 5 steamers, with a total Net Registered Tonnage (NRT), of 30,037 tons called. In 1900, 13 sailing vessels and 467 steamers, with a total NRT 801,072 tons, visited to discharge and load cargo. By 1950 the annual volume of shipping was close to 1,000 ships (total NRT 4.6 million), all steamers or motor ships. Sailing ships, except those operated as training ships, were rarely seen at Fremantle or employed as commercial cargo vessels after 1920.⁷⁴ The diversity of vessels calling at Fremantle generated the need

⁷² *FPA Annual Report 1968*, pp.5-8.

⁷³ Bach, pp.133-158; Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, p.123.

⁷⁴ Pre-1894 shipping figures were taken from the *Blue Books*. For figures after 1894,
Continued on next page...

for stevedoring services for three distinct categories of shipping: those trading to Western Australian ports; a second to Australian destinations⁷⁵; and a third to ports outside Australia.

Cargoes carried by the WA coastal service from Fremantle were mainly domestic consumer goods, vehicles, and farm machinery. On the ship's return journey, farm produce, mainly livestock, was shipped from the Kimberley pastoral stations. Wool, hides and skins came from the Pilbara and Gascoyne ports and Geraldton.⁷⁶ In addition, small quantities of minerals including tin ore and asbestos were brought south from the Pilbara.⁷⁷ A call was often made to the Shark Bay anchorage to load pearl shell and fish.⁷⁸

Initially these small coastal trading ships did not have regular operating schedules. They sailed from Fremantle when a full cargo had been loaded. In 1912, the WA government commissioned its own fleet of ships for the trade. Stateships, which operated in conjunction with the British Blue Funnel liners, provided a combined passenger-cargo scheduled service to those ports along the WA coast.⁷⁹ The volume of coastal trade decreased, however, over the years as the remote port

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from the *FHT Annual Reports, Appendix III*, which gave tables showing numbers and NRT of Sail and Steam vessels arriving at Fremantle from UK, Interstate, British Ports other than UK, Foreign Ports and WA Coastal ports, for each year from 1894.

⁷⁵ 'Intrastate' and 'Interstate' became the trade route's designation after Federation, prior to this it was 'coastal' and 'inter-colonial'.

⁷⁶ Sources *FHT Annual Reports* Appendix II 1913 to 1939. There are no detailed records of these shipments available after 1939.

⁷⁷ Tin ore and asbestos, 'blue asbestos', was shipped south in second hand bags interwar, and postwar, from Point Samson, Cossack, and Port Hedland. (Interview J. & B. Tearle by the author 18/2/89, copy of transcript in WA Oral History archive (WAOH), Battye Library).

⁷⁸ *FHT Annual Reports* Appendix II before 1939.

⁷⁹ Bach, pp.238-245; Stephens, A. *The Stateships Story* (Fremantle: Stateships, 1977), pp.10-11.

communities were linked progressively to Perth by railways, sealed roads, and commercial aircraft services carrying passengers and light cargo.⁸⁰

The second category of shipping between Fremantle and the other Australian ports existed from the time of the first European settlement of the Swan River Colony. The community there was not self-sufficient, nor was it likely to be so in the foreseeable future. The bulk of its processed food and manufactured domestic consumer goods had to be imported from the eastern colonies.⁸¹

The volume of inter-colonial trade expanded during the Gold Boom. These ships operated regular service schedules and discharged full cargoes at Fremantle, although the amount of 'backloading' cargo remained minimal for many years.⁸²

A number of the colonial shipping companies which had their Head Offices located in Melbourne and Adelaide became those which consistently served Western Australia. These were: Adelaide Steam; McIlwraith McEacharn; Howard Smith; Huddart Parker; Melbourne Steam; and the Australasian United Steam Navigation Co (AUSN).⁸³ Two of these companies, Adelaide Steam and AUSN, also extended their services beyond Fremantle to some of the northern WA coastal ports.

Each of the Australian shipping companies had its own 'first-class' cargo-passenger ships which maintained regular services to Western Australia until 1960.⁸⁴ The ships, known in Fremantle by the 1950s as the 'week-enders'⁸⁵, maintained strict arrival and departure schedules. Prior to the advent of interstate rail and air travel services they were the only means of intercontinental travel for Western Australians.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Appleyard, in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p. 231; also Manford, T 'A History of Railway development Policy in Western Australia 1870-1911.' PhD thesis University of Western Australia, 1976; Maps showing railway expansion in WA, Glynn, S., *Government Policy and Agricultural Development* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1975), pp.54-65.

⁸¹ Bach, 1982, p.36.

⁸² *Report of the Royal Commission on Ocean Shipping Services* (Melbourne: Commonwealth Government, 1906), p.318, paragraphs 7305 & 7306.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ A list of these ships in alphabetical order is in Fitchett, T.K., *The Vanished Fleet. Australian Coastal Passenger Ships 1910-1960* (Sydney: Rigby, 1976).

⁸⁵ The vessels sailed from Fremantle on Friday evening or Saturday morning for the eastern states ports.

⁸⁶ Fitchett, pp.7-9.

The colony's trade in domestic consumables was augmented by imports brought by 'overseas ships' which arrived infrequently before 1892 from British ports, Straits Settlements and the Dutch East Indies. This trade classification characterised all ships which called at Fremantle from ports outside Australia. Their operational pattern was that they usually arrived with a full cargo for discharge at Fremantle. Once empty, the vessel then proceeded to the eastern colonies or Asian ports to load a homeward cargo.⁸⁷ During the Gold Boom, ships from many ports in Europe and the USA arrived at Fremantle to discharge the prospectors and their effects. The bulk of the domestic and consumer goods of superior quality demanded by the increasingly affluent colony still originated in the United Kingdom, although the ship's manifests published in the newspapers' 'Shipping Intelligence' columns showed that a number of luxury items, such as grand pianos, and other musical instruments, as well as a range of 'non-essential' items were also imported from Germany and the USA.⁸⁸ The volume of export cargo offered from the port remained limited until 1900. There had been, however, a growing demand in Europe, South Africa and India for WA hardwoods, particularly for railway sleepers.⁸⁹ Also Western Australia's wool exports increased after 1900. Importantly, from 1910 the export of bagged grain caused a change in the overseas ships' operational pattern.⁹⁰ After that, ships which had discharged their cargo now remained at Fremantle to load a full homeward cargo of timber or bagged grain, although sometimes the ship loaded a composite cargo of grain overstowed with wool or timber. This change in operating procedure meant that ships remained at Fremantle for a number of weeks to discharge and load.⁹¹

⁸⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on Ocean Shipping Services 1905*. Commonwealth Parliamentary Paper 36 of 1906 paragraphs 7305 & 7318; Burley, K., *British Shipping and Australia 1920-1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p.19.

⁸⁸ *West Australian* and *Daily News* (Perth), 'Shipping Intelligence' columns published incoming cargo manifests as soon as they were released by the Customs House clerks. This practice had ceased by 1904 when the FHT was formed.

⁸⁹ Bach, p.64.

⁹⁰ Glynn, Appendix I, pp.139-149.

⁹¹ Burley, K., *British Shipping and Australia 1920-1939* (London: CUP, 1968), p.19.

In the interwar years, the pattern of shipping schedules changed once again. This happened because primary produce from the Southern Hemisphere had seasonal market opportunities in Europe. For example, the grain harvest from Western Australia became available for shipment between December and May. Similarly the State's wool clip was ready for export from about February until August.⁹²

There was also during this period a growing trade in frozen and chilled meat for export both interstate and overseas in the other months of the year. Fruit, mainly apples, and some dairy products were also exported from Western Australia.

Grain was a cargo usually fully loaded at a particular port. Grain exports from Western Australia were carried increasingly from 1910 in a class of ships known as 'tramps', so-called because their sailing schedules were not fixed beyond the current voyage.⁹³ On some ships, part shipments of grain were loaded at Albany, Bunbury and Geraldton and then completed at Fremantle. This was because limited depths of water in the out-ports precluded some ships from loading a full cargo.

However, after the First World War, wool, frozen or chilled meat, fruit and dairy produce now became cargoes which were part-loaded progressively around the Australian coast. This commercially-generated development caused the shipowners to design and build faster, more specialised 'liners', equipped with refrigerated cargo spaces, which had a strict sailing schedule to maintain to enable the ship to arrive in European ports in time for wool sales or other market opportunities.⁹⁴ The operational pattern devised for these 'liners' was that the outward cargo from the UK and Europe be discharged at a number of ports around the Australian coast.⁹⁵ The ship, once empty, would then return to each port to load. For these ships the outward sector of the voyage often ended at Sydney or sometimes at a port in New Zealand. However, on this trade route Fremantle was always the first and last port of call.

⁹² *WA Year Book 1970*, 'Seasonal Calendar', p.335.

⁹³ Tramp ships began operating at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1904 British shipowners owned 1600 of these ships. Gardiner, R., *The Golden Age of Shipping* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), p.50.

⁹⁴ Burley, pp.33-89.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

The Port's Cargo-Working Community

There was, therefore, a pattern of ebb and flow in shipping movements. The availability of stevedoring work dominated the fortunes of the port's community. Changes to stevedoring caused by altered shipping trading patterns which involved, initially, the ship discharging all its cargo then loading fully in one visit to discharging and loading part cargoes in two separate visits, usually weeks apart, affected the lumpers lives and work. These variations combined with fluctuations in the Western Australian economy made waterfront employment remain a notoriously uncertain way to make a living.

Before the Gold Boom long periods would pass without any shipping activity. Gold did bring increased shipping and enhanced employment opportunities for the lumpers. After the Boom declined in the late 1890s, waterfront employment opportunities returned to almost pre-1890 levels. The grain trade which commenced in earnest in 1910 helped to give a seasonal boost to stevedoring activity and give the lumpers a level of continuity from December to May each year.

There had been, however, as Fremantle grew, another source of more secure employment available in the town before 1901 not connected with shipping or cargo lumping. That was the railway engine and wagon repair shed which had been established at Fremantle in 1891. This provided assured employment for a number of men.⁹⁶ These men were, however, mainly skilled artisans and only a few labourers were employed at the repair sheds.

As the Colony's railway networks were extended, and the railway repair sheds at Fremantle grew in size and importance, there were increased employment opportunities there for some men. The port had become the centre of the colony's commercial activity and most of the railway traffic was generated by the port's stevedoring industry. Nevertheless, in 1901, against very strong protests from the Fremantle community, the government moved the repair sheds to Midland.⁹⁷ This decision caused 250 men and their families to be relocated at the other end of the rail

⁹⁶ Ewers, pp.72 & 111.

⁹⁷ Ewers, pp.111-113; Hitchcock, pp.77 & 142.

network.⁹⁸ This made the waterfront the port's principal source of employment and the dominant sector of its working class community.

The Western Australian economy strengthened by gold, made it imperative to construct a port at Fremantle. The later economic activity created by primary industry exports reinforced the port's importance. These developments generated increased volumes of cargo passing over the wharves which created the need for an established stevedoring industry. How that industry evolved; who was able to influence it; and how the changes it experienced were brought about are all themes which will be explored.

⁹⁸ Ewers, p.113.

Part A

The Fremantle Model, 1880 to 1913

Chapter 2

Establishment 1880-1906

Stevedoring at Fremantle changed as the nature of the port and the shipping calling there diversified. This chapter will describe how stevedoring was performed before and after the modern Inner Harbour was constructed. The employers during this time became established commercial enterprises to provide stevedoring services for the varied types of shipping. The manner in which employers and labourers dealt with these changed circumstances is studied as the pattern for the development of a formal relationship between labour and management was established.

The new harbour created a different work environment for everyone. This required stevedores, merchants, the WA government and the union to recognise that spheres of responsibility had to be realigned. When finalised in 1906 this arrangement became the basis of the 'Fremantle model' for the local waterfront cargo-handling industry.

The Beginning of a Stevedoring Industry at Fremantle

The stevedoring industry's development into the Fremantle model began in earnest during the 1880s. Before 1880 stevedoring had been carried out on an *ad hoc* basis by the cargo owners or government employees working ashore with the crew working on board. After 1880 growing numbers of steamships called at the port and the volume and pace of stevedoring operations increased. From that time shipping companies needed to have local representatives to organise stevedoring services for them. These were appointed as either directly ('in-house') or as contracted ('independent') companies.

This development arose primarily because the shipowner was defined by the contract of affreightment, the Bill of Lading, as the legal custodian of the cargo until the consignee took delivery of the goods. As Fremantle developed from being merely

a remote anchorage into an established port, shipowners had to fully assume their legal responsibilities and conform to the cargo-handling practices used in established ports around the world.

The port's cargo-handling industry now became similar to stevedoring services found in ports elsewhere. This was except for one striking difference: control of the shore sector of operations. The division between the management of shipboard and shore stevedoring was caused initially by the colonial government's use of a railway infrastructure to receive and deliver cargo alongside on the 'Long Jetty'. Alternatively, cargoes were handled overside into barges. Ashore, however, because of space limitations on the jetties, the government had to use the railway system to move and store cargoes. The dependence on railways remained the chosen policy after the Inner Harbour was completed. The colonial government, therefore, through its railways Department had a direct influence on the development of the Fremantle stevedoring industry.

The colonial ship owners, Adelaide Steamship Co, and McIlwraith McEacharn¹, had their own 'in-house' stevedores domiciled at Fremantle. The other colonial shipping companies except AUSN employed either Adelaide Steam or McIlwraith's stevedores and lumpers. AUSN, which was P&O's Australian subsidiary, employed one of the independent contract stevedores.²

The two independent contractors were Captain Robert Laurie who founded Robert Laurie Stevedoring Co. in 1890,³ and the Fremantle Stevedoring Co., which was owned by Captain John Abbott, managed by Mr Alan McLennan and which started operations in 1895.⁴

¹ Bach, pp.187-218.

² McKellar, N.L., *From Derby Round to Burketown: the AUSN Story* (Brisbane: QUP, 1977), p.265.

³ Black, D., & Bolton, G., eds. *Biographical Register of Members of Parliament of Western Australia vol. 1 1870-1930* (Perth: Parliamentary History Advisory Committee, 1990), p.119.

⁴ Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia of Western Australia vol. 2* (Adelaide: Cyclopedia Co., 1912-13), pp.666-7.

From its inception Laurie's stevedoring company had been closely identified with the major British companies, P&O, British India Steam Navigation Co. (BISN), and their Australian subsidiary, AUSN.⁵ The Fremantle Stevedoring Company, however, had no identifiable ties with foreign shipowners, except as a contract stevedore.⁶

Both Laurie and Abbott were qualified experienced Master Mariners. Captain Laurie had been a ship's master in the Adelaide Steamship Co. and was appointed as their Fremantle representative in the 1880s.⁷ Captain John Abbott, had previously operated a number of pearling boats in Shark Bay and off Broome. Also, he had owned and commanded small coasting sailing vessels trading to the north and north west coasts of Western Australia.⁸ McLennan's connection with seafaring and ships is not recorded.

The wharf superintendents and stevedores employed at Fremantle were usually master mariners who had taken shore appointments. The practical benefit of this policy was that they were able to communicate and deal with ship's personnel as equals in experience and expertise.

The port's stevedoring foremen were mostly former lumpers who had firstly been frequently employed by a particular stevedore, 'preferred men', and then later had displayed leadership characteristics. Although they were preferred men and loyal servants of the stevedoring companies, they were still casual employees without staff benefits or status.

The inter-colonial owners became dependent on local labourers much earlier than the overseas owners. This was because the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA),

⁵ McKellar, p.465; Jones, S., *Two Centuries of Overseas Trading. The Origins and Growth of the Inchcape Group* (London: McMillan, 1986), p.154.

⁶ Their independence was confirmed in the *Transcript of the Stevedoring Industry Inquiry 1956-8. Interim Report* (Canberra: AGPS, 1957), p.168. There it is shown that they were still a family-owned business without shipping company share holding.

⁷ Black & Bolton (eds.), p.119.

⁸ Battye, J.S., *Cyclopedia*, vol.2, pp.666-7.

placed restrictions on crew working cargo in main ports to support the waterside workers' unions formed in many of the major Australian ports.⁹ Another reason was because most Australian shipowners paid off their crews if the ship was to have a protracted stay in its home port. Both the wharf labourers' and seamen's unions were initially formed in 1872 in Sydney and were perceived as mutually supportive.¹⁰

The overseas owners, unlike the Australian owners, did not have the problems caused by a militant seamen's union and continued for some time to use their crews for cargo work. Furthermore, when their ships were in Australia, away from their home ports, the crew had to be retained on board, paid, and fed. It was economical, therefore, for the overseas shipowner to use them on cargo work while in port. Evidence of this practice was confirmed at a Parliamentary inquiry when a Lloyds' cargo surveyor at Fremantle, Captain Webster, was questioned about crew working cargo. His response was that in his experience, 'All foreign ships do [use crew] and a great many English ships too.'¹¹

Nevertheless, an increasing number of overseas shipowners from the 1880s progressively came to employ gangs of labourers recruited locally to stevedore their ship's cargoes. These men, as a community of workers, grew to depend totally on ships' cargo work to support themselves and their families.

Contained within this dependence was an underlying conflict of interest between the aims of the ship owner and those of the lumper: the ship owner wanted his ship turned around as quickly as possible; the lumper wanted each ship to last as long as possible to improve his earning capacity.¹²

The irregularity of work had a detrimental effect on the industry's equilibrium. Shipping frequency and volumes of stevedoring work was influenced by many factors, few of which were determined by the port's labour force. Ships could

⁹ Healy, J., 'Brief History of the Australian Waterfront and the Waterside Workers' Unions.' unpublished manuscript, undated, p.4. ANU Archive of Business and Labour deposit N114/1760.

¹⁰

ibid.

¹¹ Captain Webster; Joint Select Committee Inquiry into 'The Harbour and Pilot Services of the Colony'. WA Parliamentary papers 1899 Paper A12, (v.3), p.31, paragraph 565.

¹² GB Parliamentary papers *Transport Workers-Court of Inquiry* (London: HMSO, 1920) (subsequently *The Shaw Inquiry*) cmd. 936, 1920, para.17.

be delayed by such diverse causes as adverse weather conditions affecting arrival times, engine breakdowns necessitating repairs at sea or at another port, or delays experienced to cargo work in previous ports caused by weather or strikes.¹³

Other sources of uncertainty determining the volume of stevedoring work were the fluctuations in colonial economic fortunes. This could vary from the extremely busy times of the 1890s Gold Boom, or conversely the subsequent decline in stevedoring work experienced in 1899. The number of ships which called at Fremantle in 1890 was 281; in 1895 485 ships arrived, and the number peaked in 1897 at 721. By 1899 the volume of shipping had fallen to 1895 levels.¹⁴

In these years the majority of shipping came to Fremantle from other Australian ports, however, the record does not show how many were Australian-owned. This makes it difficult to make an assessment of the volume of stevedoring work actually performed by the various stevedores in the port before detailed records began to be kept in 1903.¹⁵ The stevedoring industry at Fremantle had, however, become established and had taken on a local character, which included the establishment of an industrial relations environment defined by two clear groups, the employers and the employed, stevedores and lumpers.

The Start of an Industrial Relationship

An essential part of building any industry lies in the development of its industrial relations. As employers became a formal part of the structure, the labour force equally took on an established form. Australian wharf labourers began to form trade unions in 1872. In that year waterside workers in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide made concerted efforts to achieve better pay rates by taking united strike action. Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), General secretary Jim Healy¹⁶, in his history of wharf labour unionisation, observed that all these strikes were defeated because

¹³ Ship owners' liabilities for delay and their insurance coverage explained in, Giles, O.C., *Shipping Law* (London: Pitman, 1980), pp.112-251.

¹⁴ *FHT Annual Report*, 1904, appendix III.

¹⁵ The Fremantle Harbour Trust first annual report was published in 1904. This gave a detailed list of ships, cargoes, with their original loading ports, which had been stevedored in the port.

¹⁶ Jim Healy, General Secretary of the WWF from 1936 until his death in office in 1961. Member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) executive council.

the employers used non-union labour to ‘starve [them] into submission’.¹⁷ Unions of craft workers had been formed in Australia prior to 1870; nevertheless, the wharfies’ unions were the first to be recruited from the ranks of workers in casual employment.¹⁸

By 1885 wharf labourers’ unions had been founded in a number of Australia’s main ports. In 1886 a strike of Melbourne wharf labourers was settled by the first recorded use of independent arbitration. Professor Kernot of Melbourne University was co-opted as the arbitrator and the ‘award’ he handed down served employers and employees in that port for a number of years.¹⁹

In July 1889 the lumpers working on the Fremantle jetties formed the Fremantle Lumpers’ Union (FLU) with a founding membership of 136. The union’s objectives were to, ‘enable its members to fill their positions with profit and credit, and advantage to their employers ...members must bear in mind the Union is not formed to work in antagonism to their employers.’²⁰ These estimable sentiments were reinforced by the community standing of the first union officers elected. The President was a Fremantle businessman, A.J. Diamond, manager of Tolley & Co, and the union Secretary was W.H. Clifford, an accountant with the same company. The other office bearers were all identified as ‘solid citizens’.²¹

Diamond was a prominent Fremantle businessman and a strong advocate that all businesses should employ union labour. He was, also, connected with the town’s football, cricket, and racing clubs.²² It is intriguing to note that at the time of being elected President of the FLU, Diamond was also a member of the Western Australian Liberal Association.²³ His connections with Fremantle sporting clubs, his advocacy of union employment, and his prominence in local affairs enabled him to be the

¹⁷ Healy J., ‘Brief History of the Australian Waterfront’, p.1 in ANU deposit N114/1760.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.6.

²⁰ Griffiths, B., *Wharfies A Celebration of 100 years on the Fremantle Waterfront 1889-1989* (Perth: Platypus, 1989), pp. 14-16.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Stoddart, B., ‘Sport and Society’ in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p.671 .

²³ de Garis, B., ‘Self-Government and Political Parties’ in Stannage ed., *New History of WA*, p.337

person seen as best suited to lead the lumpers' union, in spite of his political persuasion. He won a seat in the Legislative Assembly in 1901 which he retained until 1906.²⁴ It was a natural choice that Diamond's employee and company accountant, Clifford, would be chosen to keep the union's records.

The FLU was not founded, therefore, to promote industrial disputation but for personal 'profit and credit' and to work for their employer's 'advantage'. This display of altruism was possible for most of the union's early life, because the customary industrial relations' interchange was stifled by the Colony's exceptional economic activity. The rest of Australia for most of this time was in depressed economic circumstances. This was reflected in the levels of unemployment and industrial disputation which were being experienced in eastern ports, principally the Maritime Strike of 1890.²⁵ In that span of years Fremantle by comparison enjoyed its busiest time while the other ports languished. The nature of the relationship engendered initially by this union was an extension of the 'craft union' ethos into a non-craft industry based firmly on the master-servant attitude of mind.

After 1897

The opening of the Inner Harbour in 1897 combined with the flow of cargo caused by the Gold Boom created an environment which gave both stevedores and lumpers plentiful opportunities to profit from their labours. Operationally, much of the cargo discharged went into railway wagons but the delays which arose came from rolling stock shortages rather than congestion caused by shunting operations. Barges were still used to overcome railway deficiencies. In this busy workplace there was little occasion for detrimental labour relations to arise.

Confrontation between Fremantle's stevedoring employees and employers did not arise until ten years after the formation of the union when economic circumstances in Western Australia had begun to deteriorate.²⁶ The boom had caused a steady stream of ships to come to the Colony loaded with people and cargoes. By

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ There are no union or employer records extant for this period. I have used the *West Australian's* reports of the 1899 dispute in the Battye Library as my primary source. Vanden Driesen and Ashworth have also used this primary source in their interpretation of this dispute.

late in the decade, however, the pace of economic activity had declined, shipping arrivals were less frequent, unemployment was rife throughout the Colony, and on the waterfront jobs had become scarce.

During the boom times the ships' cargo operations had caused considerable congestion on the Fremantle jetties. This situation increased work opportunities for the lumpers. The level of activity and labour shortages experienced had enabled the lumpers in 1896 to demand and be granted wage increases from 1/- to 1/6 per hour for ordinary time, and in overtime from 1/6 to 2/- per hour.²⁷

When the economic circumstances deteriorated, the colonial shipowners, led by Adelaide Steam, decided that the propitious moment had arrived in February 1899 to revert to paying the lumpers at the pre-Boom rates.²⁸ The owners also decided to increase the spread of hours paid at ordinary time from eight to twelve for a working day. In addition to decreased pay and increased hours the owners announced that the men would now be paid from the time they arrived at the job, regardless of whether it was in the Inner Harbour, out in Gage Roads, or at the Rockingham jetty. In the latter two cases, unpaid travelling time could add two to four hours to the working day.²⁹

In the changed economic circumstances the employers now had the advantage of a large reservoir of unemployed men to draw on, each one desperate for work and prepared to accept any conditions to obtain employment.³⁰ The shipowners announced that the employer would now exercise 'freedom of choice' and revoked their previous recognition of the FLU as the 'preferred men' to be employed. The employers would now pick up unskilled outsiders or 'volunteers' if the FLU refused to accept the new conditions of employment.³¹

The FLU balked at the conditions in the owners' announcement. The ensuing strike, therefore, became the first of many waterfront altercations between employer and employee at Fremantle. The strike promoted the notion in the port of industrial 'heroes' and 'villains', the epithet applied depending on the recipients' place in the stevedoring industry's structure.

²⁷ *West Australian*, 16 Nov. 1896, p.4.

²⁸ *West Australian*, 16 Feb. 1899, p.2.

²⁹ *West Australian*, 17 Feb. 1899, p.7.

³⁰ *West Australian*, 13 Mar. 1899, p.5.

³¹ *West Australian*, 16 Feb. 1899, p.2.; 17 Feb., p.7; 20 Feb., p.7; 22 Feb., p.327 Feb., p.7.

In this first wharf dispute the lumpers reacted to what they perceived as unfair treatment inflicted during a time when economic circumstances favoured the employers. The nature of relationships between employers and their employees was changing in Western Australia. A large part of the influx was of working men and their families from the eastern states where there had been a history of turbulent industrial relations. Their influence caused the local unions to become increasingly militant towards employer policies to diminish wages and conditions.³² The owners, however, argued that with declining cargo tonnages and reduced freight earnings they were forced to cut costs, or go out of business.³³

Competition for the Colonial shipowners did not come at this time from east-west rail or road transport. It was, however, a constant threat applied to them from overseas-owned ships because the Australian owners did not have the protection of cabotage to confine the carriage of coastal cargoes to their vessels.³⁴

The Australian shipowners judged that operating costs could only be reduced by either cutting crews' employment conditions or cargo workers' wages. The owners' attempts to make economies by cost-cutting on board failed because the crews were in a strong position. They were essential to the running of the ship and, therefore, were able to aggressively resist any attempt to reduce their conditions of employment.³⁵

It was evident to the owners that any possible savings had to be in reducing cargo handling costs. This meant adjusting the lumpers' wages and working hours. The lumpers' employment conditions became the target of the ship owners' economy drive, because they had no alternative avenue for reducing costs. It was not possible to improve the ships' cargo handling equipment or practices at that time because shipping operational technology was still adjusting to the changes caused by the alteration from sail to steam. Also, at Fremantle improvement of the shore stevedoring sector was managed by the Railways Department over which the

³² Vanden Driesen, in Stannage ed., *New History of WA*, pp.352-6.

³³ *West Australian*. 12 Feb 1899. p.4.

³⁴ King, J., *Australian Shipping* (Melbourne: Australian National Maritime Association, 1989), pp.100-1.

³⁵ Bach, p.137.

shipowner had little direct influence. Any improvements, therefore, had to be confined to shipboard cargo handling to lessen the owners' operating costs.

With regard to this altercation with the employers Healy commented that although the Fremantle lumpers had their own union from 1889, and wharf labourers' unions had been formed in eastern ports in 1872, the waterfront unions did not become a 'national' force until 1914. Consequently in this dispute there was no evidence of inter-union or inter-port strength of purpose to combat the shipowners' economies. Each port fought its industrial battles largely unsupported by the waterfront unions in other ports.³⁶ Detrimental also to Fremantle was its geographical isolation which caused the events there to pass before notice was taken of them in other Australian ports.

The leadership of the FLU had changed by 1899. A lumper, John Rasmussen was now secretary and played a leading part in the dispute negotiations. In contemporary records he was seen to carry out his duties in an exemplary manner. Indicative of his strength of character was the report that he refused to draw his salary as a union official for the duration of the dispute.³⁷

The qualities which a lumpers' union 'leader' had to display were not only to have leadership qualities, but also the ability to perform the work as well, if not better than others, to gain respect of the men who had pride in their physical abilities. The tough manual nature of the work attracted young strong men. Leadership of such a group called for qualities which Rasmussen displayed throughout.

To add to the Fremantle lumpers' troubles in the 1899 dispute the shipowners appeared to have a covert ally in the Western Australian government's Railways Department. The Department employed the shore lumpers and railway truckers, all of whom were FLU members. The Railways Commissioner denied collusion with the ship owners. However, it appeared strange to many observers, including the editorial writer of the *West Australian*³⁸, that there was a concerted effort by many parties, including the Railways Department, to enforce the new conditions of employment.³⁹ There were some, however, who did not comply. They were stevedore contractor

³⁶ Healy, pp.8-9.

³⁷ *West Australian*, 21 March 1899, p.5.

³⁸ *West Australian*, 6 March 1899, editorial p.4; report p.5.

³⁹ *West Australian*, 2-6 March 1899, has an article each day on p.5.

Captain Laurie, ship agents Streilitz Bros, and the stevedoring company owned by the now former FLU President A.J. Diamond & Sons. These employers preferred their own experienced labourers to a group of unskilled men unused to shipboard work.⁴⁰

The dispute lasted for about five weeks and at times physical violence erupted between the FLU members aided by their supporters on the one hand, the police, and the employers' 'volunteers' on the other. These 'volunteers', although eager to replace the lumpers, were described as being without the stamina for sustained cargo work, or the ability to perform the tasks involved in handling the various commodities.⁴¹

In the latter stages of the industrial dispute many in the community, including leading Church dignitaries normally not involved in industrial disputes, became concerned by the apparent lack of resolve shown by either party to come to a resolution and end the dispute. This concern arose because the waterfront stoppage had caused widespread shortages of goods, particularly foodstuffs.⁴²

Fights between unionists and volunteer labourers took place on a number of vessels including SS *Wollowra*, SS *Adelaide*, and SS *Bothwell Castle*.⁴³ On 23 March unionists and 'volunteers' fought a pitched battle on a German Mail Ship (GMS) *Karlsruhe*, and police were called to restore order. The unionists, urged on by a large crowd of onlookers, charged the police lines. The Captain of *Karlsruhe* appeared at the gangway brandishing a pistol. The police managed to restore order by use of superior numbers and disciplined tactics. As a result of this disturbance, *Karlsruhe* sailed the following day for Adelaide without discharging her cargo or taking on coal bunkers.⁴⁴

After this incident the WA Steamship Owners Association wrote to the Premier on 27 March 1899 reporting that,

⁴⁰ Ashworth p.6; vanden Driesen, pp.35 & 41.

⁴¹ *West Australian*, 11 March 1899, p.5.

⁴² *West Australian*, 6 & 7 March 1899, articles in each issue on p.5.

⁴³ *West Australian*, 6,9,10 March 1899, p.5.

⁴⁴ *West Australian*, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, & 30 March 1899, each issue has reports on p.5 and editorial comment on p.4.

The River Harbour is practically blockaded by the mob led by members of the Lumpers union, who not only refuse to work themselves but by intimidation and violence prevent others, who are willing, from doing so⁴⁵

The letter continued by detailing the incidents of violence which had taken place on SS *Wollowra* and GMS *Karlsruhe*. The Shipowners' Association 'respectfully requested' the government to take 'vigorous steps' to end the blockade.⁴⁶ The association was frightened that after encouraging the overseas owners to have confidence in Fremantle as a 'safe' port, that confidence would be destroyed by a display of weakness in the government's treatment of the strikers.

The violent confrontation, however, hardened public opinion towards instituting an improved mediation process between the disputing parties. The precedent for this course of action had been set by an independently arbitrated solution for a wharf dispute in Melbourne when Professor Kernot arbitrated a lasting agreement.

The Western Australian Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist church leaders were co-opted to act as mediators between the parties. The respective cases were argued before one of them. Anglican Bishop Riley, who acted as the 'umpire'.⁴⁷ The result of the ecclesiastical arbitration was an Award which both parties adhered to for a number of years. It remained the cornerstone of industrial relations on the Fremantle waterfront until the first State waterfront award was handed down by the WA Arbitration Court in 1906.⁴⁸

The 1899 Award struck pay rates at 1/3 per hour in ordinary or single time, 2/- per hour overtime and 2/6 per hour for work on Sundays and Public Holidays. Concessions were made by both sides to gain industrial harmony. Although the employers maintained the right to select their own workers, the FLU won a guarantee that the Award wages would be paid to everyone employed as lumpers, union or non-union, which prevented any attempted wage-cutting by employers. It was felt at

⁴⁵ Letter in WA Premiers' Department deposit 421/99 in WAPRO.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *West Australian*, 3 April 1899, p.5.

⁴⁸ *West Australian*, 1 April to 1 May 1899 inclusive has reports on p.5. Editorial comment on 5 April and 14 April is on p.4. The replacement award is in *WA Arbitration Reports* 1906, Vol. V, p.103.

the time that the agreement had brought ‘peace with honour’ to both sides in the dispute.⁴⁹ The dispute and its resolution heralded a change in relationships from master-servant to one closer to that of employer-employee later enshrined by the award process.

A new influential force in industrial relations arrived when legislation established the State’s own industrial arbitration court in 1901. This changed employment negotiations from direct face-to-face events to the use of the provisions of the WA Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act promulgated on 5 December 1900 argued in court.

Employers, employees’ unions and industrial agreements now had to be registered with the court. The FLU registered with the Court on 1 March 1901 and its membership at that time was 548 men.⁵⁰

FLU membership numbers 1901 to 1913

Year	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907
Members	548	476	590	645	577	566	638
Year	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	
Members	630	614	769	865	900	1,067	

Source *WA Arbitration Report 1914* ⁵¹

In 1904 the ASOF reported that attempts had been made to consolidate minor amendments made to the 1899 Award in 1901 and 1902. This quest proved fruitless because the FLU demanded that the preamble to the Award which contained the right of employers to ‘free selection’ should be changed. The employers, however, refused to forego that provision.⁵²

Nonetheless, the level of disputation remained low. An example of this was the dispute which arose in 1905 over the payment of ferry fares. The FHT decided to

⁴⁹ *West Australian*, 5 April 1899, p.4.

⁵⁰ ‘A History of Stevedoring 1890 to 1952’. p.121. An unpub. manuscript in Aust. Archives NSW deposit C4511. (subsequently unpub. Stevedoring History).

⁵¹ *WA Arbitration Report*, vol.XIII, (1914), p.246.

⁵² *ASOF Annual Report 1904*, p.23, in ANU deposit E217/89

charge a penny per head ferry fare to transport men from Victoria Quay to North Wharf. The FLU contention was that the employer should pay the fare because it was the employer's responsibility to transport the men from the pickup location on Victoria Quay to their place of employment. In the past the employers had transported men in the employer's own boats until the FHT established its own service. The dispute was settled when the employers agreed to pay the fares.⁵³ This was a simple matter to resolve for the employers because the contract stevedores added this charge to their account rendered to clients, following their traditional accounting procedure known as 'cost-plus'⁵⁴. The interstate owners absorbed the added charges within their own cost structure, and included it in their freight charges to clients. The FHT included it in its scale of charges to all its clients.

In 1906 the employers sought to amend the provisions of the '1899 Agreement' because they now had to comply with the requirements of the Employers' Liability Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act and Common Law obligations. The employers' contention was that many things had changed since 1899 and it was 'desirable to overhaul it [the agreement]'.⁵⁵

The employers argued that the FLU had also introduced a number of union rules since 1899 which usurped their authority. The union, for example, now required its members to take a 12 hour break after 24 hours continuous work. It also ruled that union men were not to work alongside ship's crew members, and placed restrictions on the transfer of labour from job to job. There were also claims for extra men to be employed in working certain cargoes. Agreement could not be reached at a conference held on 12 September 1906 and the matters went to arbitration.⁵⁶

A new Award was handed down by the West Australian Arbitration Court on 19 September 1906.⁵⁷ This provided that no man could work in excess of twenty-four hours without a break. A mandatory rest period of eight hours had to be taken before

⁵³ *West Australian*, 11 July 1905, p.6; 12 Oct., p.6; 14 Oct., p.6.

⁵⁴ 'Cost-plus' was the cost of labour, equipment hire plus 20% charged for overheads including a profit component.

⁵⁵ *West Australian*, 13 September 1906, p.5.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁷ *WA Arbitration Reports*, vol.V, p.103.

attending the next pickup.⁵⁸ This rule was rigorously enforced by union officials, and men contravening it were fined by the Committee of Management, often to the full extent of their additional earnings.⁵⁹

Hourly pay rates awarded by the court remained at the 1899 levels of 1/3 per hour in ordinary time, 2/- per hour overtime rates including working a shift from midnight to 7am. The rate for Sundays and public holidays was increased from 2/6 to 3/- per hour. The award specified shift times, the frequency and duration of meal breaks and smoke ohs⁶⁰, and the numbers of men to be allocated to specific tasks. Penalty rates for working on coal, coke, bulk ore and freezer cargoes were also awarded.⁶¹

Concessions won in the interim were confirmed in the Award. Men received free transportation to North Wharf, ships moored at the Inner Harbour buoys and those anchored outside. Wages were still paid from the commencement of work wherever it was located. However, men detained on board anchored ships waiting for transport, those who were ordered to stand by, or 'ordered but not required' received a limited payment to recompense for inconvenience caused by the employer. Men working on ships anchored in Cockburn Sound received 'victuals', although this was not granted on ships worked in any of the other anchorages.⁶² By 1906 industrial relations in the Fremantle stevedoring industry had reached a level of sophistication equal to the professional level of the service it offered.

A Shore Sector Management Responsibility Defined

The new harbour at Fremantle was funded totally by government money. The economic condition of the colony before 1880 was parlous and not attractive for any private money to be invested in harbour works. Even after the discovery of gold there were no loans floated by entrepreneurs to build private wharves at Fremantle.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *WA Arbitration Court Proceedings, (1906)*, vol.V, p.103; *West Australian*, 3 Sept. 1906, p.2; 4 Sept., p.3; 5 Sept., p.5; 13 Sept., p.5.

⁶⁰ There is a variety of ways the terminology used for a waterfront rest period granted by the award is written. Smoke oh(s), smoke-oh(s), smoko(es). During the 1939-45 war some government regulations referred to them simply as rest periods. The waterfront vernacular always called them 'smokohs' spelt in various of ways. I have used the form written into the particular document at the time it was published.

⁶¹ *WA Arbitration Record*, vol.VI, (1907), pp.103-4.

⁶² *ibid.*

Although there had been considerable pressure brought to bear on government to build an adequate harbour, it was always assumed that this would be financed by public money. It was, therefore, always going to be a factor in the arrangement of matters at the port that government would continue to exercise a controlling interest, first through Customs, then by the Railways department.

The stevedoring industry at Fremantle had by the late 1890s become established in the port's commercial world. The opening of the Inner Harbour gave stevedoring an environment which encouraged an increase in industry efficiency and consequent enhancement of its measure of productivity-daily tonnage throughput. Although before Federation there had been a form of industry structure in place there was still an underlying weakness which was to solve the problems posed by an absence of efficient management of cargo operations ashore.

The stevedores had control on board. However, the shore sector, still the preserve of the railways, showed few signs of achieving improved throughput. The volume of trade had grown and it was now impossible for either the Minister of Works' administrative officers, the Harbour Master's Department, or the Railways Department to manage the port's cargo affairs ashore satisfactorily. It was, therefore, imperative to resolve the matter.

The Western Australian government had now to choose whether to hand total control of cargo work to stevedores (i.e., the shipowners which was the common practice elsewhere) or to create its own management structure dedicated to ship's side cargo operations. Continual systemic inefficiencies ashore made this a vexing problem which had to be resolved because it affected the future viability of the port.

It was decided that a separate port administrative body had to be established. This was debated in the Western Australian Parliament during October 1902. The Minister of Lands⁶³, Hon. M.L. Moss, expressed concern the growth of trade combined with an absence of proper harbour management caused ship owners to charge higher freight rates for cargoes to Fremantle. This he claimed was detrimental not only to commerce, but also to the whole community.

⁶³ Although Fremantle harbour works came within the portfolio of Works, the Minister for Lands represented the government at the second reading of the Bill.

To overcome this the government proposed the appointment of a board of commissioners to control the port.⁶⁴ Fears were expressed during the debate that the Minister was delegating his authority by appointing commissioners. However, he gave an undertaking that ‘the best possible men’ would be appointed favouring no particular interest but being made ‘with the general approval of both the shipping and mercantile communities ... and for the general interest of the State’.⁶⁵

The other major speaker to the Bill, the member for West Province and Master Stevedore, Captain Laurie, argued that poor management ashore by the Railways department caused many delays and ensured a bad reputation among ship owners for the port. The worst feature of all this, he argued, was that the Railways department retained all the shore cargo handling revenue which went into the department’s coffers and none went into badly needed wharf maintenance.⁶⁶

Two major points were taken up in the debate: how the commissioners would be selected; and the merits of appointment as opposed to election. It was argued that elected members could give rise to a Board comprised of unqualified men with ‘no business qualifications’.⁶⁷ Also considered was the payment of an attendance fee of two guineas for each meeting of Commissioners, which Laurie felt was unnecessary, because it was a public duty to undertake the work if called upon to serve.⁶⁸

The outcome of this debate was contained in the Fremantle Harbour Trust, Act 1903. The Act gave responsibility for the harbour’s administration and management to a government port authority, named the Fremantle Harbour Trust (FHT).⁶⁹ The Trust’s regulations and scale of charges were approved and gazetted by government on 13 August 1903.⁷⁰ The legislation, however, did not specify the party

⁶⁴ *V&P*, 14 October 1902, p.1528.

⁶⁵ *V&P*, 14 October 1902, p.1530.

⁶⁶ *V&P*, 14 October 1902, p.1536.

⁶⁷ *V&P*, 14 October 1902, p.1538.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ The Fremantle Harbour Trust Act 1902, No 17 of 1902.

⁷⁰ WA, *Supplement to Government Gazette* 17 August 1903.

responsible for managing cargo movement from and to the ships' hook. This had to be resolved by the new Trust's policy makers, the five appointed Commissioners.⁷¹

The initial Harbour Trust Commissioners were A.G. Leeds, C. Hudson, A. Sandover, T. Coombe and Captain Robert Laurie.⁷² Captain Laurie was appointed Chairman and the Trust's office staff was managed by its appointed secretary, F.W.B. Stevens, C.Y. O'Connor's former private secretary.⁷³ Leeds was the Fremantle manager of Dalgety & Co. ships' agents and exporters of primary produce; Hudson was an insurance agent located in Fremantle; Sandover, was the manager of W. Sandover & Co merchants, importers, and exporters: and Coombe was the manager of Coombe Wood & Co, timber merchants.⁷⁴ None of them, particularly Laurie, could be perceived to be without conflict of interest in the matter of the management of cargo operations ashore. Nevertheless, in addressing the decision about cargo handling management, Laurie in particular had to suppress his natural commercial concerns, and finally agree to an outcome seen as beneficial to port efficiency, although detrimental to his own business, and ultimately to the interests of his shipowner connections.

For about twelve months the parameters of control were debated by the Commissioners and by the Chambers of Shipping and Commerce. During that time stevedoring at Fremantle, for the first and only time, was run along conventional lines, i.e., the stevedore took responsibility for cargo movement both on board and over the wharves. In spite of this, delays were still being experienced because there continued to be a shortage of railway wagons, augmented by a scarcity of alternative storage space adjacent to the wharf.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, p.12. 'Limit of area of Trust's jurisdiction; 'Working ships at wharves', FHT papers WAPRO AN27 Acc 3466 (1903), items 16-03 & 25-03.

⁷² Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, p.81; *V&P*, 14 October 1902, Second Reading of the Fremantle Harbour Trust Bill pp.1527-1529. Also FHT papers, 'Criticisms of Trust' WAPRO, AN27 Acc 3466 (1904), item 34-04.

⁷³ Battye, *Cyclopedia* vol. 1 pp. 721/2; *Sunday Times*, 20 October 1929, p.3.

⁷⁴ *Sunday Times*, 14 June 1903, p.11.

⁷⁵ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, pp.10-13. *Morning Herald* (Fremantle), 11 March 1901, p.9.

Moreover, there was another major problem to be solved. This was the question of the security of goods after they left the ship and before the consignee took delivery. Although in stevedoring operations speedy handling was a vital component contributing to efficient port cargo work, of equal importance to the client was responsibility for the cargo's quality of 'out-turn'. Consignees and shippers not only wanted their goods handled expeditiously, but also be delivered undamaged.

Under the terms of the contract of carriage, the Bill of Lading, the ship's liability for cargo out-turn ended at the 'ship's-rail', unless a 'through' Bill had been agreed nominating an alternative custody interchange location.⁷⁶ Once ashore at Fremantle, goods received into rail wagons became the Railway Department's responsibility for safe delivery. However, if landed and stored ashore the goods lay in an area of uncertain responsibility until the consignee made arrangements with the ship's agent to clear the cargo, which usually involved paying outstanding freight charges and Customs duty. The usual procedure was for the consignee, the ship's agent and Customs to view the cargo to attest to its condition at the time of taking delivery. The problem was that, if damage or a shortage was discovered, how to allocate responsibility for reimbursement.

A scale of charges set by the FHT to recoup costs ostensibly for wharfage and handling became the centre of intense argument between the various parties.⁷⁷ Implied in making those charges was the contention that the FHT had a responsibility for the security and safekeeping of the goods until they were delivered to the consignee. Legally, it was clear that the shipowners, and their stevedores, were not responsible for the goods' satisfactory out-turn after they had left their care. The merchants and shipowners argued that because of the storage location and the fee charged, the Trust had become the *de facto* custodian responsible for satisfactory out-turn until delivery took place.

The resolution of the problem came at a conference held in 1904 between the shipping companies and the chambers of commerce. The parties involved decided to

⁷⁶ Cargo intended for Perth could be consigned on a 'through' Bill, the shipping company then being responsible for its safety until it was transported up-river by barge and landed at the Perth jetty

⁷⁷ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, pp.10-11.

request the Trust to take over the management of cargo handling over the wharves, which would include the responsibility for goods lodged on the wharf until cleared.

To ensure that the Trust's liabilities were safeguarded Stevens wrote to his counterpart in Wellington New Zealand, where the Harbour Board was the shore stevedore and cargo custodian for details of operational procedures and charges. Stevens had seen cargo operations at Wellington and was impressed by the 'perfect unanimity' of purpose displayed there.⁷⁸ The evidence he was able to present to his Commissioners and the WA government of the advantages demonstrated at Wellington were convincing.

The Trust took control of shore stevedoring and assumed responsibility for the security of cargo on 1 May 1904. The demarcation point for the changeover of cargo management was determined to be the point where the ship's cargo hook landed on the wharf. These arrangements were given the seal of parliamentary approval in the FHT Amendment Act of 1906.⁷⁹

This landmark decision signalled a critical turning point in the evolution of the stevedoring industry at Fremantle. In many ways it was to be as important as the opening of the Inner Harbour. The division of accountability in stevedoring affairs became the hallmark of the industry at Fremantle. Fremantle and Wellington, as ports with divided control were distinctive in the stevedoring world.

The stevedores were now confined to being solely in charge of shipboard operations. This division of cargo management also effectively restricted the shipowners' influence. In practice each owner had to apply to the Trust for not only a berth, but also for a shed to store the ship's cargo before and after the ship had called. In most other ports the shipowner had exclusive control over certain berths and attendant sheds. In addition the owner had to request the Trust to pickup labour to receive, deliver and move the cargo between the ship and the shed, a procedure seen only in Fremantle and Wellington. The range of responsibilities now made the Trust the major employer of labour in the port.

Control of shore stevedoring also made the Trust answerable to any criticism made about poor throughput or an insufficiency of cargo handling equipment ashore.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *FHT Annual Report, 1906-7*, p.3.

The Trust had to examine, therefore, deficiencies in cargo handling which could prove detrimental to the port's reputation. The FHT commissioned their technical staff to make a continual analysis of improvements required to rectify perceived problem areas.⁸⁰

The stevedore companies, on the other hand, did not feel the need to undertake any examination of technical methods to improve throughput. Their solution to any inefficiencies was to ensure that their labour force worked at top speed. This lack of interest in technical solutions was because both interstate and contract companies had always worked within the operational limitations imposed on them by their employers, the shipowners.⁸¹ This was the reason stevedores had only invested in limited amounts of basic cargo handling equipment, (eg., slings, trays and nets) of sufficient quantities to satisfy their immediate needs.⁸² Furthermore, in Fremantle, because a large proportion of discharged cargo was handled into rail wagons, the stevedore had little incentive to be concerned with handling methodology ashore. Even when they had, briefly, been responsible for shore stevedoring, the stevedores had not felt compelled to seriously consider improvements to work ashore by implementing better handling methods or equipment.⁸³

Initially, the merchants had the choice of 'direct delivery' using rail wagons for direct delivery, or arranging for goods to be handled over the ship's side in or out of barges. In the latter case the barge operator took charge of the cargo, and consequently, the Trust was not involved.⁸⁴ Now there was a third alternative: the merchant could use the Trust's sheds and services. The shipowner, the stevedore, and the Trust now had clearly defined areas of responsibility.

⁸⁰ In each of the *FHT Annual Reports 1903-4* to the present day the Commissioners report in detail on cargo handling activities and improvements made to cargo handling plant and equipment.

⁸¹ 'The Efficiency of the Stevedoring Industry', *First Report of the Australian Stevedoring Industry Board 1950* (Canberra: AGPS, 1950), pp.42-44.

⁸² *Committee of Inquiry into the Stevedoring Industry. Interim Report* (Canberra: AGPS, 1956), p.28.

⁸³ 'Report as to the best method of providing appliances and accommodation for dealing with cargo and vessels at Fremantle.' Leslie, W., Resident Engineer, Fremantle Harbour Works, to F.D. North, Under Secretary WA Government, 2 July 1903 in *FHT Annual Report 1903-4*, pp.5-6.

⁸⁴ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, p.12

This demarcation of spheres of responsibility prompted the FHT's core policy to be, 'to run an efficient port and provide a reliable cargo handling service at reasonable cost. but without making a profit from that service.'⁸⁵ Wharfage and handling charges were calculated to recover the costs incurred in moving, sorting, stacking, storing, protecting and delivering cargo. Any excess revenue, after the costs had been recovered, was returned to government and placed into Consolidated Revenue.⁸⁶ Under this arrangement, the 'profit' earned was not used by the Trust to finance capital works, or purchase new equipment. Revenue for that type of expenditure came from government. The Trust's purse strings, therefore, were held firmly by the Minister of Works. This arrangement was the underlying basis for government involvement in stevedoring at Fremantle.

The Trust stressed the attention it gave to cargo-handling efficiency.⁸⁷ In its early annual reports, an appendix was included giving the reasons ships had remained at Fremantle for lengthy periods. In including this data Stevens was mindful of past criticisms of 'slow cargo work' at the port.⁸⁸ The report was, therefore, aimed to offset any criticism which could be levelled at the newly formed Harbour Trust.

To this end Stevens reported, for example, that in 1903-4 thirty nine ships, or 5% of the total annual shipping had been delayed for periods in excess of 14 days. All these vessels were sailing ships; furthermore, most had used their own crews to work cargo. The longest delay recorded was for 72 days on the barque *General Fairchild* (1,307 GRT). This vessel loaded 2,097 tons of timber in 20 days, about

⁸⁵ Transcript of the Royal Commission on the Australian Shipping Service (1906) paragraph 7276; Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration Hearing No.1 & No 14 1914, WWF Award Hearings Transcript 25/3/14, p.732; Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, p.12; Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, pp.145-6.

⁸⁶ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, pp.12-13.

⁸⁷ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History 1929*, pp.145-152. Supported by entries in the 'Statistical Abstract', 'Trade and Shipping' and 'Cargo Handling' sections of the *FHT Annual Reports* 1903/4 to date.

⁸⁸ A summary of these criticisms and their causes which occurred before the establishment of the FHT is found in 'Stevedoring Efficiency at Fremantle 1829-1903. The problems experienced by a waterfront industry in a developing port.' Fletcher, T., *The Great Circle*, vol.17, no.1 (1996), pp.28-30.

100 tons per day, however, before loading the timber, 51 days had been used to load ballast which was necessary for the safety and seaworthiness of the ship.⁸⁹ Stevens made the observation that all the excessive delays experienced by the sailing ships were ‘caused purely by the ship’ and could not be attributed to conditions at the port-or the weather at the time.⁹⁰

In contrast, when the port’s stevedoring personnel were employed on board, and the Trust’s staff and equipment ashore, Stevens reported that there were no undue delays. On the steamer *SS Ras Dara*, for example, 5,593 tons of general cargo including 50 heavy lifts-locomotives and machinery-had been discharged in 14 days at an average throughput rate of 300 tons per day.⁹¹

Shortly after the commencement of the FHT, the WA government instructed their Resident Engineer for Fremantle Harbour Works, W. Leslie, to report on the methods and equipment needed to improve throughput. Leslie took as models the experience gained in a number of ports in Britain, Europe, South Africa and South America. He not only described new methods and appliances used in those ports but also made a stringent analysis of the financial structure of the port’s cargo operations with particular reference to detrimental aspects of railways operations.

Leslie advised that electric cranes capable of travelling the length of the wharf on railway lines adjacent to the ships’ side had proved their worth in other ports. In addition he urged them to increase the number of transit sheds to overcome congestion caused by the dependence on the railway system. To improve railway wharf side efficiency he suggested the installation of electric capstans to speed railway wagon shunting. Finally, he concurred that the Harbour Trust should be responsible for the management of shore cargo operations, a move which he argued would expedite throughput and enhance revenue earnings.⁹²

One decision had already been taken which did facilitate cargo operational efficiency. This was the installation of electric lighting on the wharves and in the

⁸⁹ There is no record of the amount of ballast loaded; however, it was unlikely to be in excess of 200 tons of dry rubble or sand. *FHT First Annual Report 1903-4*, p.19.

⁹⁰ *FHT Report*, 1 January-30 June 1903 p.19;

⁹¹ *FHT Annual Report*, 1903-4, p.19.

⁹² Leslie report to Colonial Under-Secretary F.D. North, *FHT Annual Report, 1903-4*, pp.5-12.

sheds.⁹³ Another aid was the provision of electric power connections for portable lighting at each berth. These were made available for hire for use in ship's holds for night cargo work. These facilities enabled ships to work cargo through the night, which was considered to be a highly beneficial innovation at the time.⁹⁴

Prior to the completion of the Inner Harbour railway wagons had been the primary cargo distribution mode used. Because of this dependence on rail, initial planning and early construction of the Inner Harbour perpetuated this policy. The government, therefore, had only allocated the finance to build three small storage sheds on Victoria Quay.

A letter from the Secretary of the Steamship Owners of Australia, Fremantle Branch, sent to the Acting Premier, complained about inadequate facilities for working ships at Fremantle, caused by the lack of goods sheds, and a scarcity of rail trucks. The owners very strongly recommended action be taken to 'obviate the very serious consequences which will follow if steps are not taken to meet the requirements set forth in this letter'.⁹⁵ The consequences feared by the owners' representatives at Fremantle were that their principals, Australian and European, would refuse to send their ships to Fremantle, or at the very least impose a freight rate surcharge to recover delay costs. If this happened Fremantle would revert to being considered by shipowners the *bête noire* among ports which had been alleged five years before.⁹⁶

Responding to this threat, the government built four additional transit sheds on South quay in 1904. This provided the alternative cargo storage needed to obviate the congestion caused by 'direct delivery' rail wagons. Ironically, in spite of constructing

⁹³ *West Australian*, 19 Sept. 1903, p.3.; 11 Oct. 1905, p.4.; *FHT Handbook 1909*, p.10.

⁹⁴ *West Australian*, 11 Oct. 1905, p.4. *FHT Annual Report, 1907*, p.8.

⁹⁵ Ewers, *Western Gateway* p.146; FHT papers, WAPRO AN2 Acc 1496 1901 item 72/01; 'Truck Question. Shortage at Fremantle. The Gravity of the Situation. Brought under Official Notice. Government unable to do anything.' *Morning Herald*, (Perth), 11 March 1901, p.9.

⁹⁶ A description applied to Fremantle by a visiting shipmaster at the height of the 'Fremantle Block' in 1896. *Morning Herald* (Perth) 5 Aug. 1896, p.3.

the transit sheds, the government continued to charge concessional cargo handling rates to encourage the use of 'direct delivery' procedures for many years.⁹⁷

In contrast to predominantly general cargo handling on South (now Victoria) quay, North quay remained the discharge location for much of the coal, most of the coke, and all of the fertilisers and other agricultural chemicals discharged at the port. These commodities were moved from the ships' side by both rail and road transport and were seldom stockpiled on the wharf apron.⁹⁸ Stockpiling would have disrupted transport movements, particularly wagon shunting. Moreover, loading from the stockpile into wagons had to be undertaken by men with shovels, because there was no loading machinery available. Moreover, pieces of coal and coke became jammed in the railway lines, causing derailments.

Nevertheless, in spite of the availability of railway distribution and transit shed storage at the port, river barges were used extensively at this time to move goods from Fremantle to Perth. These were used to avoid the congestion suffered on the jetties and wharves caused by the initial total dependence on the rail system.⁹⁹ The frequency of delays were diminished by the transit sheds, and uncovered storage areas adjacent to the sheds were also created. Congestion was also alleviated by the increased use of road transport as formed roads were built around Perth and Fremantle.

The other use at the port for barges was the storage of coal for ships' bunkers. The introduction of steam ships necessitated storage dumps of coal to be positioned along the main shipping routes. Fremantle, by necessity, became a bunkering port. Coal handling, therefore, grew to be an important part of the port's stevedoring activity and further enhanced the industry's viability.¹⁰⁰

Although it was Trust policy to enhance the cargo-handling reputation of the port, it remained standard practice that men moved and stowed cargo by hand. There was little 'man-assisting' machinery available. Ashore, apart from a very small

⁹⁷ Leslie to North, pp.5-7; *FHT Handbook, 1909*, pp. 10-11; Ewers, *Western Gateway*, pp.154-155. 'Working of ships at wharves' FHT papers in WAPRO AN27 Acc 1056 1903 item 25-03.

⁹⁸ *FHT Handbook, 1909*, pp.10-11.

⁹⁹ 'End of Barge Services.' *West Australian*, 6 Aug. 1937, p.27.

¹⁰⁰ 'Coal handling methods and costs at Fremantle', FHT Internal memo, Wharf Manager To FHT Secretary, 10 July 1908 FHT files in WAPRO, AN27, Acc 3466 (1908) item 48/08.

number of run-about steam cranes, the bulk of the cargo handled was moved across the wharves on hand barrows and 'floats'.¹⁰¹ After observing the fatigue displayed by lumpers after working a long shift in the sheds, Stevens proposed the use of horse-drawn carts to assist the cargo movement ashore. The FLU refused the offer, fearing that the use of horses would diminish the role of their members.¹⁰²

The Fremantle Harbour Trust appointment procedures for supervisory personnel followed the precedent set by the other stevedoring employers. Master mariners were employed as wharf managers, and former lumpers as foremen. The Trust wharf management was able to communicate with clients and employees on equal professional terms. Stevens had acquired sufficient professional expertise through his work with O'Connor to overcome any perceived lack of seafaring experience or qualification.

The FHT, because of its control of shore cargo operations at every working berth, had become the port's predominant stevedoring employer. The Trust, therefore, had – through the numbers of men it regularly employed – acquired a *de facto* hegemony over the conduct of stevedoring operations at Fremantle. Shipowners had to consult with the Trust's representatives daily to ensure that 'unanimity of purpose' was maintained in their day-to-day work.

Initially the stevedores at Fremantle and the Trust did not take a cooperative approach to industrial relations and the FLU. This arose for two reasons. The interstate companies were already members of the Australasian Steamship Owners Federation (ASOF) founded in 1901, and a parallel shipowner group, the Commonwealth Steamship Owners Association (CSOA) founded in 1905.¹⁰³ The ASOF dealt with industrial matters relating to shipboard personnel and cargo policy including freight rates. CSOA represented the Australian shipowners in the industrial courts in award hearings and disputes involving all maritime unions. Therefore, the two organisations provided a collective front for the Australian shipping companies against unions, governments and foreign shipowners.

¹⁰¹ *FHT Handbook 1909*, p.10.

¹⁰² Tull, 'Blood on the Cargo', p.22.

¹⁰³ Bach, pp.206-208.

The overseas owners at this stage remained aloof from any employer affiliation and dealt with stevedoring matters through their local agents or branch offices. There were chambers of commerce and shipping federations in the port on which they were represented by their local officials, but these bodies were concerned with commercial aspects relating to shipping services, and not primarily with stevedoring industry activities although they were discussed if found relevant to a particular topic being discussed.¹⁰⁴

The Trust stood alone. Adoption of this distant attitude could be construed to result from their self-imposed role as custodians of the public interest, financed by the public purse. Consequently, they did not want to be seen acting in concert with their clients, or being manipulated by 'vested interests'.¹⁰⁵

The stevedoring industry now had four identified sectors. Three were local, the stevedores, the FHT as the shore stevedore, and the lumpers' union. But all were beholden to the fourth sector, the shipowner, based principally overseas or in eastern Australia. The shipowner held the dominant part in this relationship because he had the freedom of choice to call at the port or not. The shipowner could alter the model's equilibrium by exercising freedom of choice to respond to the prevailing economic forces, change his shipping schedules, even his stevedoring services contractor. None of the others had that latitude.

In this relationship the union had not yet reached a position of strength to exercise control over the supply of labour. The FHT was the most powerful local employer because the stevedores were limited to managing work on a particular ship. As long as the Western Australian economy supported a flow of imports and exports through the port the FHT was assured of work and revenue. The limitations of the situation, therefore, within the industry were that the stevedores only had work when the contracted shipowner sent his ship to Fremantle. The lumpers offered for work when work was available. Their primary concerns naturally remained those based on the need to support themselves and their families.

The most important outcome for the stevedoring industry's evolution at Fremantle was that by 1906 a State government body controlled shore operations.

¹⁰⁴ Hitchcock, *Fremantle History* 1929, pp.55,57 & 105.

¹⁰⁵ Tull, *Port Administration* 1988, p.12.

The shipowners and their stevedores, therefore, had limited influence on how the port was operated, except the owner had the ultimate choice, to call there only if it was to his economic advantage.

The Early Influence of Federation on the Waterfront

As the Fremantle stevedoring industry evolved into the model suitable for the port, leadership of the wharf labourers in the eastern states had come to the conclusion that the only way they could reach a negotiating position of strength to deal with shipowners was by forming a national union of waterside workers. This action would prevent employers from applying divide-and-rule tactics previously employed to frustrate the labourers' quest for adequate wages and conditions.

The creation of a national waterside workers' union had been under discussion since political federation in 1901. Then a group of Labor politicians, convened by W.M ('Billy') Hughes, considered a federal union of waterside workers could be established. The group convened comprised, in addition to Hughes, politicians Andrew Fisher, F.W. Bamford, Senator de Largie¹⁰⁶, Senator Higgs, and a Melbourne wharf union official-Joe Morris.¹⁰⁷ The move was seen by some in the union movement as a step towards forming 'One Big Union' (OBU) of labourers involved in a particular industry. The only Western Australian invited, de Largie, was known to be a supporter of the OBU concept through his union advocacy on the WA goldfields. Senator de Largie, although initially without waterfront connections, advocated the formation of industry-based unions in opposition to those presently affiliated to craft employment. de Largie became Hughes' way of communicating with WA to publicise his strategies to the Fremantle Lumpers' Union. When the occasion arose they in turn used de Largie as their avenue of contact with Hughes and the Federal WWF.

Hughes thought that the formation of a national wharf labourers union was the best policy to combat the united power exerted by the shipowners. The creation of a federal union under his leadership also represented the way for him to expand his

¹⁰⁶ de Largie, Hugh, (1859-1947) miner, trade unionist, federal politician. Inaugural Senator with Pearce elected for WA in 1901.

¹⁰⁷ Healy, p.1.

power-base beyond that of his federal constituency in West Sydney, which included the harbour-side district of Balmain.

After their initial meeting the group constituted themselves as a working committee and circularised all the existing wharf unions in Australia to determine each group's attitude towards the formation of a federal union. The committee re-convened in February 1902 to consider the responses from the various port labour unions. Nine ports indicated their willingness to join a federated union. Later in 1902 a further eight ports joined. By the end of 1902 seventeen ports and 6,250 waterside workers had agreed to be represented by a national union. The lumpers in Fremantle, Geraldton and Albany, however, remained unconvinced, and did not join the proposed organisation.¹⁰⁸ The reluctance by the lumpers to join a national organisation was a reflection of Western Australia's caution displayed in some quarters to join the Federation.¹⁰⁹

Once the result of the inter-port inquiry was known the Federal Committee of Management was constituted. Hughes was confirmed as President, Bamford as Vice-President, de Largie as Treasurer, and Morris as Secretary. Hughes claimed that the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) represented the bulk of labourers working on Australian wharves. Although not formally appointed by the FLU when the WWF was formed, de Largie was to hold a 'watching brief' at federal WWF proceedings on behalf of the WA waterfront unionists.

The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act was passed in 1904. After lengthy consultation between the various Branches and Federal Committee of Management, an application for the WWF to be registered with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court was made in 1906.

¹⁰⁸ Healy, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ de Garis in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p.346. The No vote recorded in the Federal Poll 1900 was 18% of the total polled for the colony, however the three ports recorded a 39% vote against Federation.

Chapter 3 Operations 1906-13

This chapter deals with three themes during the period from 1906 to 1913, after the stevedoring industry had reached the point of being fashioned into a recognisable Fremantle model. These were, first, the system which prescribed how the principal classes of cargo handled at Fremantle were stevedored. Second, were improvements introduced to handling methodology to respond to increasing volumes of coal, coke, fertiliser and grain and the effects those developments had on the work force. And, third, there were the consequences which these operational changes had on industrial relationships. In this latter field there was also the manoeuvring in the eastern states which took place before and after a federation of waterside workers was registered with the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court.

One further development which took place in 1912 was the introduction of a State government shipping service to 'isolated outposts of the State north to Wyndham [and Darwin] and south to Eucla'.¹ This development had additional significance for Fremantle's stevedoring industry because on these ships the shipboard stevedoring was supervised by FHT personnel because it was a government enterprise and the Trust had the people and expertise needed to carry out the work.²

Cargo Handling: methodology and efficiency

General cargo and later bulk cargo handling efficiency was improved at Fremantle by the Trust commissioning electric cranes, bag conveyors and wagon moving capstans. The growth of the grain export activity caused the Trust to equip the port with the first 'man-assisting' machinery used to stack and load bagged grain.³ This was

¹ Stephens, A.M., *The Stateships Story 1912-1977* (Perth: Stateships, 1977), p.11.

² *FHT Annual Report 1913*, p.8.

³ *FHT Annual Reports 1907-1913*, pp.1-3.

because the number of bags handled by the Trust and the stevedores had increased to over one million bags in the 1912-13 season and twice that amount was exported 1913-14. Bulk cargoes of coal and phosphate were handled more expeditiously in this period by the introduction of grabs replacing the use of baskets and bins filled by men with shovels.

In the main, however, the balance of stevedoring work performed during the period, apart from the bag handling and bulk cargo innovations, sustained its traditional materials handling methodology. The hesitation shown by the port's stevedores, in contrast to the Trust, towards introducing changes to improve the cargo-handling process was restrained by the shipowners' adherence to established ship designs and hold stowage patterns. There was, therefore, little encouragement for the stevedore to change general cargo working methods or equipment.

A measurement of industry efficiency can be gained from the throughput on the regular interstate ships which averaged about 400 to 450 tons of general cargo per day.⁴ Vessels in this trade could be expected to achieve the best rates, because their cargoes and stowage had become standardised voyage by voyage. This enabled the stevedores and lumpers to achieve an operational flow of cargo interchange which became the optimum for that ship. Overseas ships tended to be about 100 tons per day less for general cargo, because they visited less frequently and had a less stereotyped mix of cargoes.

The volume of shipping activity experienced at Fremantle between 1906 and 1913 reflected stability in most trading categories. The passenger-mail steamers had settled into a pattern of scheduling which saw as many as three of these vessels calling at Fremantle each week. This class of shipping, however, had minimal stevedoring work; on some the mail and passengers' baggage was still handled by the ship's crew.⁵

The interstate shipping calls varied during the period from an average of about four per week in 1906 dropping to three per week in 1909, and then increased to five per week. Intrastate shipping followed the same trends as those observed in the interstate trade between 1906 and 1913. There was, however, a 50% increase in

⁴ *FHT Annual Reports* 1906-1913. Tonnages stevedored, classes of cargo handled and number of days and hours in port are contained in appendix II in each of these reports. A calculation of tons per day stevedored is made from these records.

⁵ *Fremantle Herald*, 6 June 1913, p.8.

the numbers of overseas cargo ships between 1906 and 1913. This was caused by the expansion of exports of Western Australian grain. The overall increase in total shipping numbers for the period was 33%.⁶

The export cargoes combined with the general and bulk cargoes imported gave the stevedoring industry consistency in its facility to provide work.⁷ These tonnages were augmented by coal brought to Fremantle from New South Wales to be re-exported as ships' fuel bunkers. These two stevedoring operations were an important sector of the port's work, principally for the interstate stevedores.

In 1906-7 nearly 119,000 tons of coal and coke was imported from Newcastle NSW, and 3,000 tons from Britain. By 1911 coal imports had increased to 162,000 tons from NSW and about 1,000 tons from Britain. In 1913, 196,000 tons of NSW coal had been imported and 3,000 tons from Britain.⁸ This sector of stevedoring work, which increased by 38% in coal tonnages handled as the bunker trade flourished, became as important as their general cargo operations for the interstate stevedoring departments in Fremantle. The handling of this cargo began by the coal being shovelled into baskets to be discharged. The baskets were lifted out of the ship by the ship's gear or later by the FHT crane. Later a wooden bin was initiated to replace the baskets constructed with a 'drop' bottom which was used to discharge coal, coke, and phosphate into rail wagons.⁹ Nevertheless, these bins still had to be filled by teams of men using shovels.

In a memo sent from the FHT Wharf Manager to the FHT Secretary on 10 July 1908, it was noted that when using baskets the best handling rate experienced for coal was 5 tons per hour. Another memo noted that in NSW the use of cranes and special railway wagons enabled 100 tons per hour of coal to be loaded.¹⁰ Loading also required teams of men to hand-trim the coal into the spaces in the hatch wings away from where it had been dumped.

⁶ *FHT Annual Reports* 1906-1913, Appendix II.

⁷ 1906-1913 the general cargo component imported into Fremantle averaged 0.8-0.9 tons per head of population consistently. *FHT Annual Reports* 1906-13, appendix II. Population figures *WA Year Book* 1970, p.509.

⁸ *FHT Annual Reports* 1906-1913, appendix II.

⁹ FHT Wharf Manager to FHT Secretary 3 April 1908 in WAPRO FHT deposit WAA 71 48/08.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

In spite of any improvements made later in the period for the bulk discharge process, the tonnage rates for loading coal as ship's fuel remained low. The procedures for coal bunkering were both primitive and extremely arduous because most ships did not have derricks and winches positioned at the coal bunker hatchways. The bunker hatches were also positioned adjacent to the ship's boiler room some distance from the cargo holds. The bunker hatchway (or 'saddle-back') was restricted when compared with cargo hatch openings. The former were constructed to enable coal to be loaded in baskets alone. This was because in African, Middle Eastern and Asian coaling ports the baskets were carried on board by a constant stream of labourers; at Fremantle at least the baskets were lifted on board by steam power.

The procedure adopted was that the closest set of ship's gear to the bunker opening was used to lift the baskets of coal from the hulk. They were landed onto a trolley running on portable rails. The rails were placed along the deck to the bunker hatch. A man would push the basket and trolley to the bunker opening, often 40ft from the landing point, and tip the basket into the bunker. The coal was then trimmed by the men in the bunker until it was full. In some bunkers the only way out for the trimming hands was through the bunker opening and at the end of a shift the men below had to literally dig themselves out to get on deck.¹¹

Progress in bulk cargo stevedoring discharge was first achieved when fertiliser, mostly as rock-phosphate, was imported. This trade further increased the work potential for the overseas shipping sector and their contract stevedores. The phosphate was needed to improve the soil quality of the expanding grain-growing acreage tilled in the State. This area increased by 75% in seven years from 900,000 acres in 1906-7 to 3.5 million acres in 1913.¹²

Bulk phosphate imports commenced in WA in 1906 when 2,855 tons was discharged at the port.¹³ This alternative source of bulk cargo work increased to an annual tonnage of 18,556 tons in 1907. By 1913-14 it had further increased to be 66,000

¹¹ Transcript of interview, pp.4-6, with Jock Stewart, retired lumper, interviewed by Colin Puls on 17 September 1976 for the Battye Library Oral History Programme OH 160T 1976.

¹² Glynn, S., *Government Policy and Agricultural Development* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1975), p.142.

¹³ *ibid.* Prior to this there had been small quantities of bagged guano brought in by coaster from the Shark Bay region.

tons.¹⁴ The bulk rock phosphate was processed at the superphosphate works established by Cumming Smith and Mount Lyell Co. at Rocky Bay, Mosman in 1910-11.¹⁵

As the stevedoring of bulk cargoes became an increased sector of the work undertaken by the various companies and departments based at Fremantle, improved methods of bulk handling had to be found. The cargoes of fertiliser now imported required the stevedores to be innovative. The management at the fertiliser works demanded improved cargo throughput. This was because the stevedores' handling methods had a direct effect on the fertiliser production costs. As grain growing came to dominate the State's economy, the cost of fertilisers became an important factor in the grain production chain. Therefore improvements had to be made at the point of entry of fertiliser into that sequence.

It was at this time grabs were introduced at Fremantle to discharge bulk cargoes. These mechanical lifting units were attached to the ship's cargo gear or to the FHT cranes and the speed of discharge operations increased. In addition, reduced numbers of men were needed to shovel the bulk cargo, because only the residue had to be cleaned out after most of the cargo had been discharged by the grabs.

To reduce manpower usage even further, elaborate raking systems were rigged in the holds. This apparatus fed the bulk cargo into the square of the hatch where it could be lifted by the grabs. The grabs could only 'plumb' the square of the hatch, and coal or phosphate remaining underdeck in the hatch wings would 'hang' and often not flow freely into the hatch square. Consequently cargo had to be either shovelled by hand adding to costs or economically 'raked' into the hatch square.

The 'rakes' consisted of metal plates shaped like plough-shares. These were attached to wires, rigged through a series of lead-blocks attached to the ship's side and over the hatch coaming to the ship's winches. The winches dragged the rakes back and forth in a particular section of the hatch until most of the cargo had been moved into the square and discharged. In this process the rakes were 'tripped' to lie flat on the reverse movement to avoid dragging the cargo back into the hatch wings.

The final remnants of cargo had then to be shovelled out into the square for discharge. The men picked up as 'rake hands' developed a fine perception for

¹⁴ *FHT Annual Reports 1910-1913*, appendix II,

¹⁵ *FHT Annual Reports 1910-1913*, appendix II; Glynn, p.100.

positioning the 'lead blocks' to achieve maximum raking effectiveness. They accumulated a knowledge of difficulties in positioning blocks they had experienced in each ship, because most of the ships carrying coal from NSW were regular traders. They also had to crawl into confined spaces over the cargo to initially position the blocks. Because of the skills they developed they became the 'preferred men' *par excellence* employed by the interstate stevedores. The introduction of grabs and rakes improved discharge rates to double the rate previously achieved for coal, coke and phosphate.

After introducing grabs and rakes coal cargoes soon averaged a discharge rate of 6-700 tons per day and phosphate increased to about 300 tons per day.¹⁶ General cargo throughput varied from ship to ship, and tonnages were influenced by the type of vessel, the class of cargo, the quality of its cargo lifting gear, the weather conditions experienced, and the speed at which its cargo could be moved from the ship's hook to its storage location onboard or ashore.

The Trust, in fulfilment of their policy objective to enhance the port's cargo handling infrastructure ashore, had commissioned six electric cranes and ten electric capstans in 1907.¹⁷ Five of these cranes had a 3 ton lifting capacity and one had a 10 tons Safe Working Load (SWL).¹⁸ The Trust noted that the cranes were not only to augment the ship's gear cargo interchange, but had the added benefit of being able to move the cargo landing points away from the ship's side. This reduced congestion caused on the wharf apron when rail wagons were shunted which interrupted the flow of men and hand barrows used to transfer cargo between ship and shed.¹⁹

In concert with the increased tonnage of grain being exported, there was also a growth in imports directly related to the outgoing grain. This was because of the importation of the hessian bags ('gunnies') from Calcutta, which were used for the storage and transport the grain from the farm-gate to the ship's hold. The increase in bags imported created more work at the port.

¹⁶ *FHT Annual Reports 1906-1914, appendix II.*

¹⁷ *FHT Annual Report 1907, p.5.*

¹⁸ The safe working load of a wire, rope, block, or any form of lifting apparatus is deemed to be about one sixth of its ultimate breaking stress point. *Nicholl's Seamanship Manual, p.34.*

¹⁹ *FHT Annual Report 1907, p.12.*

However, the escalating cost of bags was a concern to growers. A.M. Oliphant, the manager of the Producers' Union of WA expressed alarm at a cost increase from four shillings and six pence per dozen bags in 1910 to seven shillings per dozen bags in 1913. Oliphant claimed that in the 1913 price regime and returns to growers, the increased cost of bags meant a loss to growers of about seven pence per bag. He, therefore, advocated strenuously the introduction of 'bulk loading' machinery and procedures at Fremantle. Oliphant's perception of bulk loading was free-flowing grain being loaded onto ships similar to the processes which had been introduced in North America eliminating completely the use of bags.²⁰

Oliphant's vision of the future was not supported by the practicalities of handling grain in the early decades of the 20th Century in WA. Bulk loading facilities at the wharf had to be fed by a compatible system of storage and transport arrangements from the grower to the wharf. The cost of implementing these facilities was then beyond the grain producers' capabilities. Grain handling, therefore, remained labour intensive and physically arduous.

Mechanical bagged-grain handling equipment, such as elevators were introduced, however, by the FHT progressively after December 1910. Bagged grain was stacked by men using the elevators to move a continuous stream of bags both within the sheds and also over the ship's side into the holds. The method of bag handling enabled full use to be made of shed space. It also enabled the Trust's rate of cargo presentation at the ship's side to always be in excess of the capacity of the stevedores to receive cargo in the hold during loading operations. (This, of course, was not always advantageous to a smooth operational flow of cargo.)

The speed of these operations was controlled by the method of stowing grain in the ship's hold called 'necking'. A platform was made from a stack of bags of grain, two lumpers would place a bag on the neck and shoulders of another lumper who carried the grain to the stowage location. The team of bag carriers had to try to keep pace with the flow of incoming bags of grain. The distances from stack to stowage point varied on each ship, on many ships it could be 40-50ft. Men protected their necks with a 'hood' usually made from a discarded 50lb calico flour bag. The FHT annual cargo records indicate that a maximum of 2,000 tons of bagged wheat

²⁰ *West Australian*, 13 January 1914, p.8.

was loaded in a twenty four hour period, although the average loading rate achieved was more often about 500 tons per day.²¹

In the light of this performance level it is noteworthy that an excessive weight of wheat in an individual bag became a source of complaint periodically made by FLU members as the volume of grain exported intensified. When this arose the union executive called on the Customs department to investigate, have the weight of suspect bags checked and if necessary have them re-bagged by the exporter.²² Customs were approached in this case because they were responsible for ensuring the accurate measurement of cargo tonnages was being entered on the export documentation. This accuracy was needed because the Bill of Lading was recognised by banks as a negotiable document of title.²³

The trading pattern for overseas ships did alter to reflect the growth of the grain export tonnages from Fremantle. In most cases ships now arriving from overseas ports discharged a full cargo inwards, then loaded a full bagged grain cargo, or in some cases a composite cargo of timber, wool, and grain. Many of these ships remained in Fremantle for five and six weeks to complete this programme.²⁴ Overseas ships in port for long periods, and the regular calls by interstate and coastal vessels contributed to the industry achieving a level of stability in its work and industrial relationships. There were, however, indications that there was sometimes a breach in the facade of operational serenity at Fremantle. The cargo tonnage throughput, which showed that on average rates were improving and some cases reached record levels, did have a reverse side.

One of those became evident when the captain of the barque *Hilston* of London complained that throughput at Fremantle for his ship was only '34 to 53 tons per day' whereas in other ports he would expect the rate achieved to have been '160

²¹ *FHT Annual Report 1913-14*, p.29.

²² An instance of this was recorded in FLU Committee of Management minutes 8 April 1914 pp.226-7 in ANU deposit N28/5.

²³ A cargo, particularly grain, identified by a Bill of Lading can be bought and sold a number of times before it arrives at its port of discharge, hence the need to verify the accuracy of the weight being loaded. Giles, O.C., *Shipping Law* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1980), pp.187-9.

²⁴ *FHT Annual Reports 1906-1913*, appendix II.

to 170 tons per day'.²⁵ The situation was not helped by the vessel's captain publicising his displeasure in the newspapers. This generated adverse publicity for his predicament which had a detrimental effect on the discharge rates he experienced for the rest of his stay at Fremantle. Added to this was the effect on the lumpers caused by the captain's prosecution of a crew member who had refused to work cargo when lumpers were available. The seaman was represented in court by the Fremantle Trades Hall but was jailed for eight weeks for 'refusing to work as directed'.²⁶ The outcome increased the animosity of the lumpers which had a further detrimental effect on the discharge rate for the vessel.

Nevertheless, in 1913, the *West Australian*, in a report titled 'Fremantle Shipping. A Record Year', recorded that 9,313 tons of general cargo was discharged in eight days from SS *Ajana*. The previous best stevedoring effort the newspaper noted had been 7,000 tons of general cargo discharged in six days on an unnamed ship.²⁷

These levels of stevedoring activity were accompanied by a human cost. This was the range of injuries suffered by lumpers, some which resulted in death. The FLU recorded that in 1906, the number of accidents was 82 in the year, a rate of 14.4 incidents per 100 members. Seven years later the figures were 123 accidents, a rate of 11.5 per 100 members.²⁸

The record also showed the number of members who died between 1906 to 1911. However, in most cases the cause of death was not listed. There were three deaths listed in 1906, eight in 1907 and 1908 respectively, seven in 1909, twelve in 1910 and two recorded until the entries ended in May 1911.²⁹

Of the thirty-two deaths, only five were recorded as not in a hospital, all the others had been hospitalised. That is indicative that either the union ensured its members were given the best care available at the time, or they were hospitalised under the provisions of The Workers' Compensation Act 1904. The oldest member

²⁵ *West Australian*, 27 August 1912, p.8.

²⁶ *West Australian*, 26 Aug. 1912, p.8; 27 Aug. 1912, p.8; 28 Aug. 1912, p.5.

²⁷ *West Australian*, 13 January 1914, p.8.

²⁸ FLU membership 1904-14 *WA Arbitration Reports* Vol.XIII 1914, p.246; 1918-19 Tull 1987 p.24; 1920-6 *Advertiser*. Accidents per calendar year from the FLU Accident and Death Record in ANU deposit N28/317.

²⁹ 'Death and Accident Register' in ANU deposit N28/317.

died at age sixty-six, the youngest was twenty six, and the average age at death of the others was forty eight. Life expectancy at the time for males in Australia during the period 1901-1911 was 55.2 years.³⁰ The conclusion to be drawn from this was that, on average, lumpers working on the Fremantle waterfront died seven years before the average age of death recorded for the rest of the male European population.

It is difficult to arrive at any other deductions because the record lacks detail. The men listed as deceased are not listed among the injured, therefore the only certainty about their record is that when they died they were financial union members. The numbers of injured each year can not be attributed to a particular cause, however, speed of operations, the use of grabs, mechanical rakes, and elevators all contributed to an increasingly dangerous and arduous work environment.³¹ This danger was exacerbated by the pressures exerted on the men to perform and fulfil their employers' operational goals.

There is, however, some evidence to suggest the increased incidence of deaths in 1909 and 1910 can be attributed to the rigours of bagged grain handling. The FHT annual report dated 30 June 1909 reported that the 1909 grain shipment which ended in May had been 14,774 tons, the first substantial export tonnage handled at the port. It had been achieved, the FHT stated, with no appliances having been used.³²

The Trust reported that there had been many difficulties, which increased the Trust's cost of handling per ton from one shilling and sixpence per ton to two shillings.³³ Among those difficulties were that the men had to carry the bags on their backs for a distance of frequently 100ft. They then had to carry the bags, still on their backs, up a series of steps formed by layers of bags onto the top of the stacks.³⁴ Although not stated in the report this work was all carried out during the heat of summer from December until May.

³⁰ *WA Year Book* 1970, p.157.

³¹ A summary of waterfront deaths for this period is in the chapter appendix. The only detailed analysis of waterfront work injuries I am aware of was made in 1983 by P.F. Warren-Langford, a synopsis is also shown in the chapter appendix.

³² *FHT Annual Report* 1909, pp.9-10.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

After this experience, the Trust Commissioners despatched Stevens to investigate stacking machinery used in eastern states' ports and commissioned their engineer to equip the port with the same type of bag-handling machinery Stevens had seen in the eastern ports. This was completed by December 1910.³⁵ Both the 1908/9 and 1909/10 export tonnages, a total of about 700,000 bags were stacked, therefore without the benefit of any man-assisting machinery. The nineteen deaths recorded in 1909 and 1910 were conceivably the additional 'cost of stevedoring' paid by the lumpers.

Waterfront Relationships 1906-1913

Following the 1906 Award there was minimal industrial disputation until 1910. Then an increase in certain wage rates³⁶ was negotiated by direct consultation between employers and lumpers to offset cost of living increases.³⁷ That agreement was registered with the Court in December 1910.

Although it was intended that the award was to last three years, a year later the FLU demanded increased wages because living costs had risen even further. On this occasion, the CSOA would not agree to the union's demands. The two parties agreed to refer the matter to arbitration. The Speaker of WA House of Assembly, M.F. Troy, acted as the arbitrator. A new Award, known as 'The Troy Award', was registered with the Arbitration Court to operate from 1 January 1912 until 17 December 1913.³⁸

To recover the wage increases the independent stevedores and the FHT adjusted their scale of charges to include the added costs and passed them on to their clients. The Troy Award granted wage rates of 1/6 per hour in ordinary time, 2/3 per hour overtime and 2/10 per hour for work performed between midnight and 7am. Ships worked on Sundays and public holidays paid the premium rate of 3/1 per man-hour. The wage 'loading' was adjusted for a range of special cargoes, i.e., coal,

³⁵ *FHT Annual Report* 1911, p.8.

³⁶ General cargo, coal, and phosphate remained at 1906 pay levels. Rates paid for wheat, sulphur, and explosives were set by 3d per hour above ordinary time payments and by 6d per hour in overtime.

³⁷ *West Australian*, 15 April 1910, p.6; 11 July, p.5; 12 July, p.6; 16 July, p.7.

³⁸ *WA Arbitration Record*, vol.XI, (1912), pp.246-7.

wheat, superphosphate and other chemicals. The maximum loading paid was four pence per hour for overtime worked on bagged wheat.³⁹

This was the last time the lumpers and their employers at Fremantle had an award arbitrated by a Western Australian industrial court or for that matter by direct negotiation with each other because in 1914 they became participants in the Federal arbitration system and a national waterfront award.

During the period from 1906 to 1913 the Fremantle Harbour Trust consolidated its position as the principal sector of the port's stevedoring industry. The Trust added to its strength in port affairs by playing a central role in the growth of the State's export activity as the government encouraged agricultural and pastoral activity, particularly a rapidly expanding grain export industry. This export was supported by increases in imported tonnages of fertiliser and bags ('gunnies') to promote the growth, transport and storage of increased tonnages of grain.⁴⁰

Consequently, the port's range of stevedoring activity became much more diversified. Although the general cargo work remained at the centre of the industry's services, bulk cargo-handling increased as rock phosphate and other chemicals to manufacture fertiliser augmented coal and coke in the range of work undertaken by the stevedoring companies. This diversification led to lumpers becoming skilled in particular aspects of the work. The riggers were 'preferred men', not only to certain employers but also to certain types of work.

The variety of skills that lumpers acquired had the effect of increasing/strengthening divisions between the two groups within the Fremantle Lumpers' Union: one group comprised those with skills who were preferred men; and the other without any particular skills. Men who had no skills and who were, therefore, not 'preferred' earned the least. The competition for jobs also required the preferred men to constantly display their abilities to ensure retention of their status with an employer. Preference, therefore came with an added price often detrimental to the lumpers' health.

The investment of public monies in the port ensured that in the remaining years before the First World War the stevedoring industry remained 'newsworthy'. Evidence of this interest was contained partially in columns in local newspapers

³⁹ *WA Arbitration Record*, (1912), vol.XI, p.247; *West Australian*, 22, 23, 27-30 December 1911, p.4, and 27-28 August 1912, p.5.

⁴⁰ *FHT Annual Reports*, 1906-1913, pp.1-2.

entitled 'Wharf Whispers' and 'Shipping Notes' which appeared regularly in the Fremantle and Perth contemporary press. The reports gave a picture of a workplace different to most yet recognisable as a locality where the individualism and humour portrayed was a prized commodity. An implication of this kind of attention was that workers on the waterfront were becoming part of the emerging national ethos.

The conservative *West Australian* also frequently printed items of waterfront news. The tone employed was seldom critical of the waterfront labour force. The style of writing was often whimsical, frequently humorous, and sometimes laudatory when a record piece of cargo handling throughput had been achieved at the port. This level of reporting sustained the idea that lumpers had a different quality from the average labourer, because the lumpers' work was in an environment which was alien to the average citizen's experience. It raised general awareness of a port operating harmoniously and an investment well made returning a good dividend in the service rendered.

There was, however, another side to the press comments, which took authority to task if it was perceived to be acting against the common good. The FHT was sometimes subjected to savage criticism in Perth's weekly paper, the *Sunday Times*, for alleged nepotism, corruption, bias and incompetence in its business dealings or administrative procedures.⁴¹

The newspaper alleged that 'the Fremantle Harbour Trust management is rotten.' Not only was the management said to be rotten, but the wharf structures and cargo handling machinery had become unusable through neglect. Furthermore, it was alleged that wage sheets and wharf charges accounts had not been audited. The alleged nepotism arose from the report that a relative of the Trust's accountant had been reinstated to senior clerical position after a two-year absence overseas. On each occasion these allegations were refuted in considerable detail and with some heat by Stevens, ever watchful to guard the Trust's good name.⁴² As both these articles and the allegations they contained appeared in isolation in the *Sunday Times*, and there was no comment in other newspapers, it must be assumed from the tone of the

⁴¹ 'Decay of the Harbour Trust', *Sunday Times* 14 May 1911 p.4 & *Sunday Times* 6 August 1911 p.4. Cuttings in FHT file 118/11 deposit Acc 3466 WAPRO.

⁴² *Sunday Times* 14 May 1911 p.4. & 6 August 1911 p.4; copy annotated by Stevens in WAPRO deposit AN27 Acc 3466 118/11.

unsubstantiated virulent attacks on the integrity of Stevens and the Commissioners that they were inspired purely by malice. There was a tradition of vitriolic attacks and character assassination of public figures established by the *Sunday Times*' founder, Frederick Vosper, and continued by his successor, James MacCallum Smith noted to be, 'a man given to broadcasting invective at random'.⁴³ In the absence of further supporting comment in that paper or debate in other newspapers or in parliament it is reasonable to conclude that this attack was confined to the 'Vosperite' journalistic style the *Sunday Times* had adopted to sell its newspaper.

Furthermore, the Fremantle Harbour Trust was able to dismiss the *Sunday Times*' claims as spurious because of its strong position in the port's stevedoring industry, which had been enhanced by the growth of the bagged grain export handling and storage operations. In terms of the development of the State's economy, although the boom times of the gold-inspired commercial activity had ended, other cargoes, i.e., timber, wool, and especially grain, were growing to be important export commodities.

One of the factors which contributed strongly to building the Fremantle model was the FLU's demonstrated support for its members. As a registered society the FLU charged membership fees based on an individual members' earnings. The union was then able to provide sickness and death benefits to members' families from this revenue base. It was also able to make small loans to financial members during 'slack periods' to help them support their families.⁴⁴ This level of support to individuals in conjunction with the close community interaction engendered by living in proximity to the harbour gave union loyalty an added impetus. This union loyalty strengthened the authority of the union executive and the power it could exert. The union also disciplined those who broke the rules and could in extreme cases expel a member. Union expulsion in a small community was tantamount to social exile for a man and his family.

⁴³ Tauman, p.213. Although Vosper had died in 1901, the attacks on Laurie in 1903 and the Trust in 1911 continued Vosper's traditional journalistic style 'which had apparently caused O'Connor's suicide'. Stannage, C.T., *The People of Perth* (Perth: Perth City Council, 1979), pp.327-9. MacCallum Smith operated under the credo of 'To Expose an Abuse is to Destroy it.' *Sunday Times* supplement 'A Century of Sundays.', 19 October 1997, p.6.

⁴⁴ Details of assistance, loans and family support are contained in the FLU Minutes of General meetings, Committee of Management meetings for 1906 to 1913 are in ANU deposit N28/2, 3 & 4

This period in the history of the port's stevedoring industry was defined, then, by a pattern of moderately steady shipping frequency and predicability. These features had the tendency to give the local industry an air of stability. This balance was reflected in the generally amicable climate of industrial relations displayed at the port between 1906 and 1913.

The waterfront relationship was a reflection of the Western Australian community's stability after a period of hectic activity in the 1890s to one of less spectacular growth before the onset of the First World War. The population of Western Australia had grown in volume by about 20% in the period from 1906 to 1913. In spite of this the socio-economic balance remained favourable because the levels of value for exports exceeded imports which were needed to sustain the population throughout this time. This promising state of affairs was experienced throughout the period except for two years, 1912 and 1913, when imports exceeded exports.⁴⁵

Underlying these favourable economic factors, however, there had been a surge in the cost of living, which gave rise to the agitation for increased pay experienced on the Fremantle waterfront in those years. Prior to 1910 prices had been relatively stable.⁴⁶ Even so, there was an overall increase in the cost of living of 20% from 1906 to 1913. This was particularly evident in 1910/11 and 1911/12 when the cost of living index reached highs of 7.0 and 6.2 respectively creating a situation where wage increases were demanded.⁴⁷

Although these various economic influences affected everyone working on the waterfront a position had been reached in stevedoring at Fremantle by the end of 1913 where there were clearly-defined areas of employer responsibility. The FHT was active at every berth ashore; the shipowners' stevedores managed work onboard ship; and the lumpers were working either as preferred men or casuals. It is important here to note in the industry context that the preferred men had 'regular' employment whereas the casuals were only employed if there were not sufficient preferred men. The stevedoring industry at Fremantle had evolved a clear structure. It fulfilled not only the needs of the community but on most occasions the requirements of the shipowners.

⁴⁵ Statistical Summary, *WA Year Book 1970*, pp.509-20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid. Australian Historical Statistics*, p.226.

⁴⁷ Snooks, in Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*, p.246.

The lumpers in the Western Australian ports were registered with WA Conciliation and Arbitration Court. In the minds of the Fremantle lumpers there was, therefore, no need to be involved in national unions or Commonwealth arbitration courts while negotiations which were carried out successfully at the State level. The first of these agreements was an Award for Albany waterfront labourers which had been registered in the State Court in November 1902.⁴⁸ The first Fremantle lumpers' award was registered by the Court in 1906.⁴⁹ The result of these agreements, aided by a sufficiency of work, was that industrial peace was enjoyed at Fremantle. The years 1906 to 1913 were a period of 'calm' which were valued in retrospect by the members of the FLU, their employers-the FHT and the interstate and contract stevedores.

The FLU Secretary, Frank Roe, told a union meeting in December 1913 that, 'Neither the lumpers or the ship owners [here] could afford to have any trouble and it is bad enough to have the trouble in the eastern states.'⁵⁰ The 'trouble' alluded to by Roe were stoppages in eastern states ports called by the WWF Federal Committee of Management as part of the campaign for a comprehensive national award to replace various individual port agreements between the ship owners and the Federation all of which expired in November 1913.⁵¹

Basic workplace industrial association at Fremantle, however, remained at a personal level because the lumpers' relationship with authority was determined by individual relationships. The waterfront community was small and defined by the nature of its task. Consequently the employers were notables, distinguished by being not only managers of shipping and stevedoring enterprises, but also community leaders involved in local government, church, sporting and social bodies. Equally, elected union officials were not remote beings seen only on the platform at union meetings, but as well known fellow workers and family men who literally 'lived next door'.

Waterfront employers and employees were segments of an industry which was without a counterpart in Western Australia. This effectively created perceptions

⁴⁸ Stevedoring History p. 121 unpub., in Aust Archives NSW deposit C4311 Box 1.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.122.

⁵⁰ *Transcript of the Hearings of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court*, 19 March 1914, p.489.

⁵¹ Report of Conference between CSOA, Ship Owners representatives and Stevedores and the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia held in the ASOF offices Melbourne on 13 January 1914.

of an exclusive work community. At this time there was no consultative chamber of employers of waterside labour to enable discussion of their problems. This created a degree of exclusiveness from other employers who were involved in commerce, manufacturing, agriculture or retailing. However, because many had been 'master under God'⁵² of a ship, and consequently, used to the exclusiveness of command, they were not unused to the isolation determined now by their place at the pinnacle of this waterfront community.

In contrast to the stevedores, the lumpers' union officials were elected to office annually, and had to win consensus to run the affairs of the union. The democratic process tempered the aspirations of any potential leader. The FLU was also part of the trade union movement in WA and affiliated to the Labour Party. Union officials, therefore, had an extensive network of colleagues to consult in time of need.

Although there was a federal labourers union and the beginnings of centralised representation for employers, the overseas owners only formed the Overseas Shipping Representatives Association (OSRA) in 1913. Fremantle continued to operate in the way it had come to find best suited for itself. There appeared to be sense of satisfaction evident within the stevedoring industry at Fremantle that they had reached a stage in their industrial development which gave them a reason not to want either change or outside intervention, even though that evolutionary plateau had been reached at a cost sometimes in human life lost and well-being diminished

It was a time therefore, when there appeared to be a spirit of industrial harmony at Fremantle although within the union there were strains evident caused by the free-selection employment system and the consolidation of power by the preferred men.

⁵² This relationship between the ship's master and the crew was defined in the preamble to the Articles of Agreement signed by the crew defined the ship's master as, e.g., 'William Smith, Master under God of the ship *SS Nonsuch* of London bound for'. Aubrey-Rees, W.C., *Shipmaster's Business Companion* (Glasgow: Brown Son & Ferguson, 1955), pp.16-19.

Appendix to Chapter Three

Accident Levels on the Fremantle Waterfront 1904-1926

FLU Membership 1904-1914 from WA Arbitration Reports vol XIII 1914 p. 246; 1918-19, Tull 1987 p.24; 1920-6, *Advertiser*; est = estimated from previous known figure. Accidents per calendar year from FLU Accident and Death records in ANU deposit N28/317.

Year	Membership	Accidents reported	Incidents per 100 members.
1904	645	51	7.9
1905	577	83	14.3
1906	566	83	14.6
1907	638	99	15.5
1908	630	66	10.4
1909	614	63	10.2
1910	769	97	12.6
1911	865	94	10.8
1912	900	92	10.2
1913	1,067	123	11.5
1914	965	114	11.8
1915	est 920	91	9.8
1916	est 890	118	13.2
1917	est 875	34 Record ends	14/8***
1918	843	51	6.0
1919	843	63	7.4
1920	est 900	153	17.0
1921	1,000	78	7.8
1922	est 958	101	10.5
1923	est 916	104	11.3
1924	est 890	169	18.9
1925	872	175	20.0
1926	900	91 Record ends	16/5 10.1 (5 months)
Average yearly membership			828
Average annual injuries			98
Average injuries per 100 members each year 1904-1926			12

NOTE 1917 dispute commenced in August ended in November, therefore no records of injuries kept for rest of year.

General Comment. The annual total of injuries recorded shows no particular pattern. It varies too much to discern any trend up or down. The annual injury rate per 100 members is totally dependent on the level of membership recorded. The WA Arbitration Court Register records 1901-14 were based on the returns the union had to make to the Registrar each year and would therefore be reasonably accurate. After that I have taken newspaper reports of union membership levels recorded when votes were taken for the election of officers which should also be reasonably accurate.

FLU Deaths listed 1906-1911

Date	Name	Place died	Age
2 July 1906	J. Noble	E. Fremantle	none given
11 Dec.1906	Alex Coulthard	Frem. Hospital	53 or 55
6 April 1907	Gustave Adolph Johanssen	Frem. Hospital	31*
19 April 1907	N. Flaconer	Cliff St	66
24 July 1907	P. Covacevich	Frem. Hospital	45*
21 Aug 1907	J. Norman (payed comp.£223-10-0)	Killed ship	none given
1 Dec.1907	H Spieman	Frem. Hospital	56
22 Dec.1907	A Parry	Frem. Hospital	none given
19 Feb. 1908	P. Bolt	Frem. Hospital	50*
29 Mar.1908	C. Griffiths	Frem. Hospital	60
19 April 1908	James Moody (Buggy Accident)	Frem. Hospital	45*
28 April 1908	Thomas Patrick (Lung trouble & Heart disease)	Perth Hospital	35*
13 May 1908	Lars Pearson	Home of Peace	47*
24 July 1908	David Power	Frem. Hospital	57
19 Aug.1908	Maurice Coghlan	Frem. Hospital	65
23 Nov.1908	John Robert	O.M. Home	66
26 Jan.1909	John Marcel	Frem. Hospital	43*
26 Jan.1909	M. Donnelly (off SS <i>Bullama</i>)	Onslow Hospital	none given
21 Feb.1909	P.J. Bjourn	Frem. Hospital	59
31 Mar.1909	N. Gillespie	Home of Peace	43*
28 April 1909	R.N. Becket	Frem. Hospital	38*
11 June 1909	B. O'Shaunessy	Frem. Hospital	48*
12 June 1909	N. Hawkins	Frem. Hospital	48*
20 Aug.1909	C.B. Swanson	Frem. Hospital	45*
6 Jan.1910	D. Cunningham	Frem. Hospital	42*
24 Jan.1910	A. Carroll	Frem. Hospital	46*
24 Jan.1910	John Quirk	Frem. Hospital	46*
22 Feb. 1910	Henry John	Frem. Hospital	65
3 March 1910	James Campbell	Frem. Hospital	51*
4 April 1910	C. Horne	Frem. Hospital	61
25 April 1910	H. Brown	Drowned Swan River	49*
11 June 1910	John Brown (Gallie)	Frem. Hospital	62
12 July 1910	C. Williams	Vict.Hospital Subiaco	51*
15 July 1910	C. Morgan	Frem. Hospital	52*
19 July 1910	J. Shepperd	Home of Peace	54*
6 Oct.1910	C. Byrne	Victoria Hospital	41*
26 Feb.1911	P. Roberts	Claremont Hospital	57
26 Mar.1911	B. Cusack	Frem. Hospital	26*

Transcribed from pages 366 & 380 FLU Death and Accident Book in ANU deposit N28/317.

Comment. * indicates all who died under the average age for males at that time.

Age at death under	30	30-40	40-50	50-55	55-60	over 60	not given
Total number of men	1	3	12	6	5	7	4
							38

The largest group 40 to 50 year old men coupled with the next two groups can be attributed to death from combined factors, age and fatigue, which even if they were injured would not help their recovery. The under 40 groups would likely be accidents, the drowning and buggy accident were possibly not work related, similarly Donnelly off SS *Bullama* may not have been because of a work injury. The over 60s were likely to be simply old age. No comment can be made about the 'age not given' group.

Research into Causes and Locations of Waterfront Accidents

Drawn from Warren-Langford, P.F., 'Industrial Accidents on the Western Australian Waterfront 1980-83' unpublished research project for a degree of Master of Business at WAIT Bentley 1984.

A synopsis of the findings of an analysis of 3476 industrial accidents reported on the WA waterfront from April 1980 to March 1983. The work processes for the class of cargo shown below had changed very little from 1906-1913, the danger was the same only the pace of activity had decreased.

Figure 5.5 p.81. Accident frequency with regard to site.

On Deck 23%; Ship's Hold 24.5%; Wharf Apron 28.8%; Wharf Shed 17.5%; Other locations 6.2%.

Figure 5.21 p.103. Age of accident victims.

up to 39 26.7%; up to 49 19.8%; up to 59 43.8%; over 60 9.7%.

Table 4a p.xiii. Level of treatment required, numbers injured by cargo type recorded in three years.

General cargo	timber	steel	wool	bulk cargo	Total
First Aid 241	65	282	71	213	872
Attend Doctor 24	3	27	6	12	72
Hospitalised 12	0	9	1	9	31

Note. Warren-Langford's analysis is considerably more comprehensive than the above figures indicate, because I have only drawn on the sections relevant to conditions experienced in 1906-1913. The conclusions I want to illustrate are that work on general, steel and bulk cargoes was more prone to injury, this was exacerbated by pressure to perform absent in later years.

Part B

Outside Influences, 1914-1939

Chapter 4

National Award/Federal Union: 1914

This chapter discusses a defining moment for stevedoring at Fremantle: the impact of the first national intervention into the conditions of local waterfront employment. It shows how a national waterfront award was accomplished and the effect that had on the Fremantle model. The national industrial agreement was the first step taken towards making each port's stevedoring performance a component of a national industry framework. Also examined in this chapter are the industrial court proceedings, its results and the impact they had on the Fremantle model.

Groundwork for a National Award

In 1914 the long and often tortuous path taken towards establishing a national stevedoring industry commenced. To begin with, standardisation in waterfront employment practices had to be established. This could only be done by having a federal structure in which all parties involved in stevedoring participated. To work successfully this industry relationship had to have a framework which could only be realised by the formation of federal representation for each participant.

The interstate shipowners were already represented federally by the CSOA. The overseas owners had formed the Overseas Shipping Representatives Association (OSRA) in 1913.¹ Initially this group had been concerned with freight rates and cargo bookings, and was not registered as an employer group with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. It was inconceivable, however, that industrial relations matters were not discussed at their meetings and common ground decided.

¹ Bach, p.301.

The first formal step towards an Australian stevedoring industry was taken when the national waterside workers award was handed down by Mr Justice Higgins in April 1914.² This agreement was seen by waterside workers as giving them a national framework of employment conditions and a base from which to negotiate wage rates.

To achieve this goal the WWF had held a number of industrial stoppages in late 1913 and early in 1914. These disruptions to shipping schedules and the consequent build-up of cargoes on the wharves in eastern ports led to a compulsory conference being called between employers and the Federation representatives meeting in the ASOF's Melbourne offices in January 1914³. Agreement could not be reached at this meeting because the employers would not agree to the log of claims put forward by the WWF.

This resulted in a further work stoppage called in February 1914 to force the arbitration process to be invoked. Mr Justice Higgins intervened in the dispute and commenced arbitration court proceedings which were then held in Melbourne and Sydney in March and April 1914.⁴

It was only in February 1914 that the FLU became directly involved in the dispute process. Initially the Fremantle lumpers had not wanted to be involved in the series of disputes held in eastern states' ports in 1913. Evidence of this attitude was union secretary Roe's remarks at Fremantle to his members in December 1913.⁵ Nevertheless by February 1914 the FLU had come to recognise that some benefits could be gained by being party to a national award and consequently joining forces with the WWF.

² CAR vol.8 1914, pp.53-73. Commonwealth Arbitration Court Award no.1 & 14 of 1914, pp.1-32. CSOA and Others, Gilchrist Watt and Sanderson and the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia.

³ In ANU deposit Z430 Box 4.

⁴ ANU Deposit Z430 Box 4.

⁵ CAR vol.8 1914, *Transcript of Hearings WWF Award 1914* (subsequently *1914 Award Transcript*), p.489.

The FLU, then, was prepared to support the WWF without querying in detail the reason for a national stoppage. They were requested by the Federal WWF Committee of Management on 4 February 1914 to enforce an overtime ban to start immediately which was to be effective in all Australian ports.⁶

The ban, when applied at Fremantle, stopped all work on weekdays after 5pm until 8am the following morning, and closed down the port from midday Saturday until 8am on Monday morning. The extent of this ban had a ruinous effect on lumpers' earnings, because most men worked at least until 11pm and often until 7am the next morning when a ship was discharging or loading.

The overtime ban was intended by the WWF Committee of Management to expedite the dispute process and force it to be brought before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to win a national waterfront award by placing the dispute on a 'national' basis.⁷

The FLU agreed to implement the ban to show 'solidarity with the WWF'. Locally, it was called the 'Lazy Strike', because it limited the hours worked and consequently reduced earnings.⁸ After eight days without overtime work, the Fremantle union executive and members became concerned that the embargo was becoming a grave financial burden on them and their families.

Evidence of an absence of communication between the union executives was shown by the FLU having to telegraph Hughes on 12 February to ascertain the reason for the dispute. This revealed that the FLU had called a stoppage without receiving detailed explanation from the Federal office of the ban's objectives. By then the FLU had come to the conclusion that their support for the ban had disadvantaged them financially, without any discernible result or reason.

They asked 'for full particulars in connection with the trouble in the Eastern States ports'.⁹ On 14 February, the FLU did receive a comprehensive report given in

⁶ FLU Committee of Management Minutes (COM) 4 Feb. 1914 p.192. *West Australian*, 9 Feb. 1914, p.8, 'Waterside Workers. 'Lazy Strike' Extends to Fremantle. No overtime from today. Serious position of affairs.'

⁷ *CAR* vol.8 1914, p.53.

⁸ *West Australian* 9 Feb. 1914, p.8. Documentation for telegram of 12 Feb. is contained in FLU COM Minutes of 14 Feb 1914.

⁹ FLU COM Minutes 12 Feb. 1914, p.198. One can only assume the WWF Federal executive realised that Senator de Largie would arrive back in WA about 14 Feb. and be able to answer all the queries raised by the FLU.

person by Senator de Largie which included details of the failed compulsory conference held in Sydney one month earlier and the ensuing WWF strategy agreed by WWF Committee of Management to accelerate the award hearing process.¹⁰

Until de Largie arrived in Fremantle, the FLU had seen only the delayed and sketchy reports about the disputes and conference printed in the local press. The eastern states' ports' disputes and delays to shipping received local press coverage, not so much as industrial relations coverage, but mainly because of their potential to disrupt shipping services to Western Australia.¹¹

The Minutes do not give a record of the Senator's report to the FLU members except to note that he 'Congratulated the members for their loyalty to the Federation'.¹² The members responded with a vote of thanks to the Senator for his work on their behalf.

Senator de Largie, attended executive committee meetings and the award proceedings in his capacity as 'watchdog' for the Fremantle union and on the evidence entered in the union's minutes gave the FLU admirable service. For example the minutes show on 11 January 1914 that,

Moved. We ask Senator de Largie to represent this Union at the conference with Shipowners to be held in Melbourne but not to commit this Union in anyway whatever. Carried.¹³

In the same laudatory vein were Minutes on 14 February 'Vote of thanks to Senator de Largie for his work on behalf of the union recorded.'¹⁴ On 22 March 'Senator de Largie instructed to watch over our interests in Melbourne [Award

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ The Sydney wharf labourers strikes in 1908, which lasted from January to April, the Sydney waterfront dispute in October 1911, and the disputes in Sydney progressively from August 1912 were covered in the *West Australian* accompanied with warnings about their effect on the flow of cargoes coming to Fremantle from the eastern states.

¹² FLU COM Minutes 14 Feb. 1914, p.200.

¹³ FLU COM Minutes 11 Jan. 1914 p.179 in ANU deposit N28/5.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.200.

Hearings].¹⁵ And on 22 April, 'Senator de Largie returned on *SS Zealandia* and requested a general meeting of the FLU to report on the Award proceedings.'¹⁶

At the same meeting, the FLU announced receipt of a telegram from the Federal WWF, this time couched in less diplomatic terms. This instructed them to resume overtime work to allow proceedings before the Arbitration court to commence 'without delay'. The meeting voted unanimously to resume overtime work.¹⁷ The resumption of normal work then enabled court hearings to commence promptly.

Proceedings Before Justice Higgins

The award proceedings commenced in Melbourne on 9 March 1914.¹⁸ The Fremantle party on the employers' side, comprised Laurie, McLennon and Stevens; the FLU delegates were Monksfield and Owen.¹⁹

There is ample evidence to show that the Fremantle union men went into court unprepared for what was required of them. They received no briefing from Hughes on what to say and what evidence to present. It is not surprising that later they expressed bewilderment at their rough handling by Hughes.²⁰

The decision to send two FLU delegates was taken by the union executive, with no debate in the record, on 8 March 1914, one day before the hearings were to start in Melbourne. They were given first class return tickets by sea to Melbourne and were paid £1-5-0 per day expenses.²¹ It is astonishing that this expenditure was decided as a peripheral matter in an executive meeting called primarily to discuss if the FLU should become shareholders in the Trades Hall newspaper *Labour Daily*. At that meeting they decided to invest £500 in the newspaper venture. Attendance at the Award hearings appeared from the minutes to be of secondary importance, because

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.220.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.237.

¹⁷ FLU COM Minutes 14 Feb. 1914, p.200.

¹⁸ *1914 Award Transcript* 9 March 1914 to 8 April 1914 in *CAR* vol.8 1914, pp.1-734, WA appearances.

¹⁹ *1914 Award Transcript CAR* vol.8 1914, pp.448-464; pp.470-482; pp.482-500.

²⁰ FLU COM Minutes, 15 April 1914, p.229 in ANU deposit N28/5.

²¹ FLU COM minutes, 8 March 1914, pp.212-213 in ANU deposit N28/5.

there is no record of discussion or a vote to determine the delegates. It appears they nominated themselves without opposition.²²

The two men were absent from Fremantle for about one month, consequently their total expenses would have been approximately £75 and their travel costs about £15 each, the total cost to the union was then £105 or 3/6 per member. When considering the value of their evidence and the effect its presentation had on the court, it is arguable that the costs they incurred achieved nothing other than giving the union a visible presence in court.²³

Equally so was the effect in court of the Fremantle employers other than those represented by CSOA, Captain Robert Laurie, and Mr Alan McLennon for Fremantle Stevedores. Frank Stevens for the FHT did make an impact on the proceedings because he alone came fully prepared with statistical evidence to give to the court.²⁴

Laurie, master mariner, master stevedore and former FHT Chairman, therefore, ostensibly the senior Fremantle representative, played a subordinate role throughout the hearings, which reinforced the view that he was prepared to accept without dissent the ruling of the court. The absence of any counter-argument to Hughes by the Fremantle employers was because a federal award would bring stability to pay and conditions at Fremantle. Effectively, acceptance of a national award relieved them of the onus of negotiating waterside workers' pay rates and conditions in the State Arbitration Court where they would be expected to defend their position vigorously.

The transcript showed evidence of the 'comfortable' relationship existing between the lumpers and their employers at Fremantle, which gave Hughes good reason to be annoyed with the FLU. The comments made by Frank Roe, FLU Secretary, with reference to the wharf disputes during December 1913, implying that no one in Fremantle, union or shipowners, could afford trouble and did not support the eastern states' stoppages, was repeated during the cross examination of John

²² *ibid.*

²³ The Committee of Management Minutes quoted in the previous footnote gave no indication of the reasons for their attendance. Senator de Largie was already appointed as the FLU 'observer'.

²⁴ *1914 Award Transcript*, WA Appearances 19/3/14, pp.424-427.

Owen.²⁵ This kind of evidence did nothing to enamour the FLU with Hughes or advance their cause with Higgins.

It was also alleged by John Owen that, accompanied by Frank Roe and other unnamed FLU officials, had spoken to Captain Laurie and Mr McLennon at that time, 'in the street', to advise them that there was no possibility of a similar dispute happening at Fremantle.²⁶ This directly contradicted Hughes' assertions that a dispute was effective in every port in Australia.

John Owen was a former President of the FLU, although he admitted to being a union member for only about 2½ years. During his time on the waterfront he had worked mainly as a winch driver, usually employed by the Fremantle Stevedoring Company. In the last three years his average weekly earnings had been about £2-5-0.²⁷ He was, therefore, a 'preferred man' in the context of his employment record and consequently could be perceived as a prejudiced witness in favour of the employers.

The suggestion that an atmosphere of industrial harmony existed at Fremantle coming from the evidence of union officials, albeit 'preferred men', may appear tenuous. However, at the least, the conversation between union officials and stevedores was symptomatic of an employer-employee relationship which permitted industrial relations matters to be discussed informally. It was also, no doubt, the result of a long- held practice used for industrial and community communication in a small town dedicated to one industry. Roe and Owen's comment to Laurie that troubles experienced in the east would not spread to Fremantle could also be seen as a statement of confidence in the local union's ability to secure satisfactory results for their members by direct negotiation with their employers. The other Lumpers' Union delegate, Charlie Monksfield, stated in evidence 'We have a few little things [disputes] which are always settled between the employers and ourselves.' Monksfield had been a union member for about 18 years, and was usually employed as a winch driver by either Robert Laurie, McIlwraith's, or Adelaide Steam which categorised him as another 'preferred' man. His weekly earnings varied between £2-6-0 and £2-19-0, which confirmed his 'preferred' status. Monksfield was an

²⁵ *1914 Award Transcript*, 19/3/14, J. Owen, p.489.

²⁶ *1914 Award Transcript*, J. Owen, 19/3/14, p.490.

²⁷ *1914 Award Transcript*, J. Owen, 19/3/14, p.482.

official of the FLU, having been elected a vice president six months prior to the hearings.²⁸ In spite of being an elected union official he was also a preferred man, therefore, bringing into question his ability to give unprejudiced evidence supporting the union case before the hearings.

One interpretation of this apparent industrial affinity is that the FLU and the port's employers enjoyed a relationship devoid of major controversy. In support of this contention, Owen stated that the union's feelings towards their employers were 'friendly and we always intended to remain friendly if possible.'²⁹ All this was an anathema to Hughes' arguments before the court.

However, verifying FLU statements and the definition of the level of industrial harmony enjoyed at Fremantle was thrown into confusion. A prime factor was that both FLU delegates reversed their evidence about the level of disputation at Fremantle under sustained pressure while in the witness box from Hughes. He could not allow them to present testimony describing a harmonious port when his whole case was premised on the existence of a national dispute.

Both men reversed their evidence and stated that a dispute did exist in Fremantle, in spite of their earlier protestations of 'friendly relations' enjoyed with their employers. In response Justice Higgins expressed confusion and bewilderment at the evidence they presented.³⁰ At one stage Higgins had to warn Hughes against 'leading the witness' particularly when questioning Owen.³¹ Justice Higgins became so exasperated during the interrogation of Monksfield by the revised evidence presented that he commented that if the witness was to be believed, 'the Fremantle branch should be dismissed from the arbitration.'³² The thrust of his remark was that what was being said would preclude Fremantle from being a party to the national award.

The FLU delegates were dismayed to find that their supposed comrades, the Federal WWF, were singularly intent on exerting complete control over the presentation of union evidence. This was done to gain a successful result in national

²⁸ *1914 Award Transcript*, C. Monksfield, 19/3/19, pp.452, 461, & 475.

²⁹ *1914 Award Transcript*, J.B. Owen, 19/3/14, p.491.

³⁰ *1914 Award Transcript*, pp.491, 497.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *1914 Award Transcript*, Hughes-Monksfield, 19 March, pp.473-479; Hughes-Owen, 20 March 1914, pp.496-500.

terms for the waterside workers in the more populous eastern ports. The men who worked on the Fremantle waterfront were only considered by the WWF executive to be peripheral to the award negotiations, because their performance at times endangered the outcome for Hughes.

This attitude should not have been surprising to the FLU because the Fremantle union had not agreed to be affiliated with the WWF, even though they had accepted Hughes' leadership at the time of the 'lazy strike'.

Conscious of the cost involved in keeping Monksfield and Owen in Melbourne the FLU Committee of Management minutes of 4 April 1914 showed that a telegram was sent to Hughes to inquire if the FLU delegates were still required to attend court and if not to instruct them to return to Fremantle 'at once'.³³

On their return on 15 April they reported to a general meeting of union members. Both complained that they had received no advice on how to present their evidence from the Federal WWF's executive delegates. Furthermore, because they had received no assistance they 'had done the best they could'. Their report showed clearly that their influence on the Court proceedings had been close to disastrous for the FLU and almost prevented the application of the award to Fremantle. The discussion at the FLU meeting was reported then to have become, 'heated'.³⁴ The rank-and-file members wanted more for their expenditure of union funds than that shown by the delegates' report, especially as de Largie was already there to report on proceedings.

In addition to displaying their naiveté before the court there was a total lack of preparation because the two Fremantle men had not been provided with the detailed statements of earnings and employment conditions required by Higgins and Hughes. It was Hughes' responsibility to ensure all his witnesses were fully briefed for the task ahead. In the case of the Fremantle men this was not done.

The records they did present were only personal 'work diaries' which were not the type of evidence needed to be presented for the scrutiny of Justice Higgins. Their evidence was inconsistent, incomplete, and for periods not relevant to the

³³ FLU COM Minutes in ANU deposit N28/5 4 April 1914 p.223.

³⁴ FLU COM Minutes 15 April 1914 p.229 in ANU deposit N28/5.

processes of the hearing.³⁵ In fairness, before now the FLU had had little experience of court proceedings of this intensity even though they had been participants in the WA arbitration process which had only narrow jurisdiction.

This was also apparent in the case of the Fremantle employers, with the exception of the FHT Laurie was equally unprepared to present the required evidence and had to urgently telegraph his office for details of wages paid to lumpers in the immediate past.³⁶

In sharp contrast, Stevens for the FHT, was appropriately prepared and armed with a plethora of statistics and documentary evidence. Much of the evidence described the Trust's role at Fremantle. Justice Higgins, and Hughes, took Stevens through the detail of the stevedoring costing process used, the methods of working, and the hours of employment on the Fremantle waterfront. They were particularly interested in how the Trust's charges were calculated and noted that the Trust calculated that their gross earnings for cargo handling in excess of expenditure for that purpose was about 10%.³⁷ Calculations were also produced which showed the average handling cost per ton of cargo for the Trust was 18/7 per ton in 1912-13.³⁸ This was the first time that any employer had indicated at the hearings the costs and profit level their stevedoring business had achieved.

In response to a question about the level of output of work, Stevens responded that it was his impression that it was less in 1913 than it had been when the Trust commenced operations in 1903. Stevens could not support this impression with statistical evidence, which he said would be a 'big job'.³⁹ When pressed he responded that it was his 'fixed impression' that although wages had increased and that the provision of man-assisting handling appliances had improved, the level of output was not as great as in 1903. This caused His Honour to reply,

³⁵ Monksfield, *1914 Award Transcript*, pp.445-454, 457-461, 472-474, 481-2; Owen, p.482, Owen admitted he did not keep any records of earnings but gave an 'approximate average' of earning per week between £2-5-0 and £2-12-0.

³⁶ *1914 Award Transcript*, pp.454-455.

³⁷ *1914 Award Transcript*, p.701.

³⁸ *1914 Award Transcript*, p.724.

³⁹ *1914 Award Transcript*, p.695.

It is a common infirmity of belief that men worked for us better in the old days than now. It used to be believed that men were bigger in the feudal times until they measured the knights' armour and found that men of now-a-days were bigger ... I do not attach any importance to a general impression of this sort.⁴⁰

Stevens was able to produce detailed evidence of lumpers' earnings. The FHT exhibit no 6, 'Schedule of wages paid to Fremantle Lumpers 7 Nov. 1912 to 30 Oct. 1913.', showed that the 738 men employed by the Trust earned an average annual wage of £51-10-0. However, this was misleading because these earnings varied from as little as £1 for the year up to £130 maximum individual annual earnings. In a further analysis of the schedule of lumpers' earnings it was found that of the 738 men listed 249 men earned between £1 and £10 for the year, 61 men earned £10 to £100 and about 153 earned in excess of £100 annually. The foremen and sub-foremen - 'pannikin bosses' - earnings varied between £163 and £353 per year.⁴¹

In retrospect, all the Fremantle delegates except Stephens had little impact on proceedings. For the FLU this had near-disastrous consequences. This perception of ineffectuality was strengthened even more when, two weeks after the union delegates' homecoming, the FLU received an instruction from Justice Higgins that future negotiations before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court had to be placed completely in the hands of the Federal executive of WWF.⁴² This was his response to the ample evidence to show that the FLU delegation had nearly stopped Fremantle from benefiting from a national award. This was particularly galling to the FLU because they had advised the WWF on 22 March 1914 that the FLU, 'would be seen as a branch of the WWF, but that they would refuse to rely on the WWF in the award negotiation process'.⁴³ This response was made because on 18 March the WWF had demanded that the FLU pay a levy of three shillings per member to finance the WWF at the award hearings.⁴⁴ This demand came ten days after the FLU had decided to send their own delegates. The levy payment for the Fremantle members would have

⁴⁰ *1914 Award Transcript*, p.696.

⁴¹ *1914 Award Transcript*, 25 March 1914, F.W.B. Stevens, pp.692, 726-727.

⁴² FLU COM Minutes 29 April 1914 p.240 in ANU deposit N28/5.

⁴³ FLU COM Minutes 22 March 1914 p. 220.

⁴⁴ FLU COM Minutes 18 March 1914 p.217.

amounted to about £90 and, if paid, would have been in addition to the expenditure already made

In the absence of any records showing discussion what the FLU hoped to achieve at the hearings it can only be assumed that they thought it necessary to attend because the WA employers were also sending a delegation. The view that the FLU's decision was taken hastily is reinforced by the note in the union's minutes that as late as 25 Feb 1914 the WA employers were inquiring if the FLU were to be party to the Arbitration Court hearings in Melbourne. The minutes show that it was moved that, 'the communication lay on the table', and no response to the employers' inquiry was recorded.⁴⁵ The impression gained is that the FLU executive were inexperienced and unprepared to enter the national arbitration arena. Their inability to grasp what was at stake when thrust into the limelight, and their later bewilderment at Hughes' and Higgins' responses to their efforts, is ample evidence of this.

It was also evident from the transcript that the Fremantle union had not been involved in formulating the Federal union's log of claims. The FLU delegates told the court that they 'had not had it [the log] in their hands'.⁴⁶ Their ignorance of the details of the WWF log of claims was made in spite of the attendance of their 'watchdog', de Largie, at that meeting.⁴⁷ Their ignorance of the log's content is made even more inconceivable by the knowledge that de Largie had reported to a general union meeting held on 14 February, at least three weeks before they had left Fremantle for Melbourne. There is an aura of disingenuousness in the preparedness of the delegates to undertake such an important mission on behalf of their union, which brings into question their competence and the executive's ability to protect members' interests.

In spite of all the conflicting evidence previously given, Owen said in his final submission to the court that the union was not satisfied with the present working agreement at the Fremantle and, 'wanted more'.⁴⁸ Justice Higgins then put

⁴⁵ FLU COM Minutes 25 Feb. 1914 p.203.

⁴⁶ *1914 Award Transcript*, C. Monksfield 19/3/14 pp.473-476. Monksfield claimed 'The union was not a party to drawing up the log [of claims].' Owen pp.487-489; Owen claimed that the FLU had not had anything to do with drawing up the log of claims although Senator de Largie had been present at that meeting.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *1914 Award Transcript* p.487.

to Captain Laurie the dilemma he had when presented with conflicting evidence about the existence of a dispute at Fremantle. Because of the conflicting evidence the Court could not determine if a dispute actually existed in the port; and if that were the case the Court would rule that the award was not applicable on the Fremantle waterfront. Justice Higgins suggested to Laurie that the result of this denial would be that higher wages and better conditions would apply in the eastern ports to the detriment of industrial relations at Fremantle. Laurie responded by observing that, 'we all know what human nature is'. He stated that there then would be an immediate dispute, because the Fremantle lumpers would naturally want parity in wages and conditions with their eastern states' counterparts.⁴⁹

The outcome was that Laurie agreed to telegraph the WA employers the proposal that they should respect the determination of wages and working conditions made by the Court even if technically a dispute did not exist at Fremantle.

In taking this action, Higgins acted as though the Fremantle employers were independent parties before the Court, although in reality except for the FHT, they were already represented there by the CSOA and OSRA. Higgins also noted that, technically, it would be necessary for the parties to apply to State Arbitration Court to allow the 1912 Troy Award to lapse after the statutory three month period.⁵⁰ The Troy Award had in fact lapsed on 17 December 1913 without the parties re-negotiating a new award.⁵¹ This seemed to have escaped the notice of all the Fremantle delegates. Nevertheless, agreement to all these prerequisites suggested by Higgins was received from the Fremantle employers on the next court sitting day, Monday 25 March 1914.⁵²

The Impact of the Award at Fremantle

The Award was handed down by Justice Higgins on 16 April 1914. It was to be made applicable in Fremantle after the expiry of the current agreement-The Troy Award-on

⁴⁹ *1914 Award Transcript* pp.500-502

⁵⁰ *1914 Award Transcript* 20 March 1914 p.503 Higgins J-Laurie.

⁵¹ *WA Arbitration Reports* vol.XIII p.256

⁵² *1914 Award Transcript* 25 March 1914.

receipt of three months notice from the parties to the Award.⁵³ The FLU Committee of Management (COM) minutes 22 April 1914 noted that notice would be given the next day to the employers and the WA Arbitration Court.⁵⁴ In the FLU COM minutes of 29 April it was noted that the WWF had advised that Justice Higgins would only apply the Award in Fremantle if the FLU agreed to hand over control of working conditions prescribed by the Award to the Federal Council of the WWF. This was agreed by the FLU at a special meeting held on 30 April 1914.⁵⁵

Senator de Largie returned again from Melbourne to report to the union on the final stages of the award negotiations, including the Fremantle employers' response to Higgins. It was at that same meeting a telegram from the Federal WWF was tabled advising that Justice Higgins had ruled that the national award would not apply at Fremantle until the current Troy Award had expired after receipt of the required notice and following the statutory three months waiting period. Immediately, the FLU decided they would advise the employers 'the next day' that the union wished to terminate the current agreement.⁵⁶ They also appeared to be unaware that the Troy award had already lapsed.

Four days later the Federal WWF telegraphed the FLU that Mr Justice Higgins had also ruled that he had made an additional provision before applying the award to Fremantle. The FLU had to give the Council of the Federation complete control over negotiations relating to the working conditions at Fremantle to be prescribed by the Award. Justice Higgins had decided that the WWF had to take responsibility in industrial matters for all waterside workers in Commonwealth ports in a centralised arbitration system. A special meeting of the FLU was held on the evening of 30 April and it was agreed that the FLU had to accede to this requirement by the court.⁵⁷

The result of this ruling was that the Fremantle union had lost all pretensions of local autonomy in waterfront industrial matters before the Commonwealth court.

⁵³ *CAR* vol.8 1914 pp.1-32, 53-73.

⁵⁴ FLU COM minutes 22 April 1914.

⁵⁵ FLU COM minutes 29 & 30 April 1914.

⁵⁶ FLU COM Minutes 22 & 29 April 1914. The committee minutes do not detail Senator de Largie's report to them and the members.

⁵⁷ FLU COM Minutes, 30 April 1914.

This was a position which they could not avoid. If they did not accept the Award with all its attendant provisions they would have had to continue to operate within the State arbitration system under an award with conceivably diminished wages and conditions. Moreover, the FHT and the other employers had accepted the Commonwealth court's ruling. The award was made applicable in Fremantle on 30 April 1914.⁵⁸

One effect of the award proceedings was that retrospective payment to waterside workers was caused by the new award being back dated. At Sydney £300 had to be divided between 700 men. To facilitate this payment being made, 4 clerks, the stevedore, and the wharf manager were present during payment. It was noted on 14 May by the wharf manager that, 'We found, with the exception of about a dozen men, none had any idea of the amount due to them.'⁵⁹

There is no record of retrospective payments being made at Fremantle, possibly because of the low level of shipping activity during April and May 1914. As noted, the Troy Award had already lapsed in December 1913 and consent to waive the three month waiting period was not needed before applying the Federal award at Fremantle.

The national Award, which was handed down in Melbourne on 16 April 1914 granted improved wage rates. Ordinary time payment was increased to 1/9 per hour, overtime payment for work performed from 6pm to 7am was increased proportionately and Sunday and Public Holiday pay rates raised. The major gain for the union was the affirmation of job preference; non-union men could only be employed if all union men had a job and more labour was needed. At the same time, working times were formalised; regular pickup times and locations were designated; and penalty payments and special cargo rates were broadened. Boards of Reference (BOR) with employer and employee representation to arbitrate on matters at a local level were constituted as part of the Award process. Finally the Award was intended to last for five years and was expected by all the parties to bring peace and stability to the industry.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ CAR vol.8 1914, p.92.

⁵⁹ Melbourne Steamship Co. Branches and inter-departmental memos in Melbourne University deposit group 2 2/6/2/8.Melb.ss.co. Head office from Melb. SS. Co. Sydney.

⁶⁰ CAR Order No.14 of 1914. The National Award for Waterside Workers in Australian Ports.

The implication of this Commonwealth Arbitration process was that no longer would lumpers at Fremantle discuss industrial relations matters conclusively with their employers informally at a personal level, or 'in the street'. Control of negotiations about working conditions had passed to the Federal WWF appearing in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. The lumpers' contact with an authority determining wages and conditions had been moved from the local and State level to the Federal arena. Although the Fremantle employers were still perceived by the lumpers as the visible level of that authority, the local employers had lost their power to dictate some of the conditions of employment. They did, however, retain control over certain employment imperatives, e.g., when and for how long they worked. Furthermore, and probably more importantly the employer chose the man he wanted. Effectively, though, another tier of authority had been introduced at the Federal level. This level was isolated from the direct employer-employee relationship which they had enjoyed for many years. Although the new set of circumstances gave each party a convenient excuse for avoiding direct confrontation if that was thought desirable. For the employers this was a convenient way of shifting responsibility for resolving a dispute to the Federal bodies, ASOF, CSOA and OSRA.

The significance of the new system of labour relations did not appear to have any impact for some considerable time on the Fremantle waterfront, certainly not amongst the rank and file lumpers. Their concerns were unchanged and consisted of how much work was going to be available over the ensuing months. By the time the new wage rates were applicable at Fremantle the busy time of the year was almost over, because the 1913 grain harvest had been completed and most of it exported.

Employees, employers and the general public made their assessments of the effect of the new award. For the labour force there was 'considerable satisfaction' after the details of the new award became known.⁶¹ The employers assessed the level of increased charges they had to apply to recover the increased wages bill caused by the new wage rates.⁶² An illustration of the effect was cited *The Argus* (Melbourne) 26 May 1914 which noted that,

⁶¹ 'Considerable satisfaction was manifested amongst waterside workers when Justice Higgins award became known.' *Fremantle Herald*, 24 April 1914, p.1.

⁶² 'Meanwhile employers are thinking hard about the effects of the award on their profits or capital.' *Fremantle Herald*, 24 April 1914, p.1.

Increased stevedoring charges noted arising from the new award pay rates; prices charged per ton.

General cargo	new rate: 1/1	old rate 10.5d
Cement	11d	9d
Scrap iron	11d	8.5d
Plate glass	1/6	not listed

Increases in cost of coal because of WWF new pay rates and Miners strike. quantity not shown (possibly per cwt)

Screened coal (household)	25/6 old rate,	27/9 new rate.
Engine coal	24/6	26/9 ⁶³

The increases shown above were duplicated in Fremantle by the discharging stevedore and the FHT. This made it obvious to everyone that the effects of a national waterside award was applicable to all goods passing over all wharves.

It was recognised, therefore, that in the end everyone would have to pay for additional cost of stevedoring. It was noted in the local press that, ‘everything will be passed on to every little household’.⁶⁴ In another issue of the newspaper it was noted that, ‘it was doubtful if the men are better off today at 14/- per day than they were for 10/, for the cost of living and house rents have gone up at a greater rate than wages.’⁶⁵

It was the availability of work on the waterfront, however, that continued to dominate the average lumper’s living conditions. It was noted at union meetings that there were continuing complaints about the unfair distribution of work. Some men would go home with £4 to £6 for a week’s work, whereas some lumpers would have to be content with only a few shillings. In the circumstances it was, ‘a lucky man who can meet a moderate food bill for his week’s sustenance’.⁶⁶

In a letter written by a lumper’s wife there was also a plea for the FHT foremen to look more favourably on their husbands when allocating work. Noted on

⁶³ *Argus* (Melbourne), 26 May 1914, p.3.

⁶⁴ *Fremantle Herald*, 24 April 1914, p.1.

⁶⁵ *Fremantle Herald*, 5 June 1914, p.5.

⁶⁶ *Fremantle Herald*, 9 Oct. 1914, p.1.

it was the comment made by the FHT wharf manager to Stevens that on any given day, 'some of the men worked on empty stomachs'.⁶⁷

A few were able to obtain short term relief from penury by borrowing from the FLU, although this could only provide temporary relief and had to be paid back as soon as earnings permitted.⁶⁸ At least at Fremantle the lumpers' borrowing was channelled through the union and did not reach the extent of debt and repayment experienced by British and American waterside workers. In Britain it was common practice for foremen to force prospective employees to accept a loan at exorbitant rates of interest as a precursor to obtaining work.⁶⁹ In America, loan sharks fostered by employers and their foremen operated a similar racket on hapless longshoremen.⁷⁰ The absence of an organised system of 'economic manipulation' at Fremantle was because the foremen were also members of the FLU and, therefore, under union and community scrutiny, which resulted in avoidance of the extreme levels of corruption experienced elsewhere.

The responses to national arbitration by the Fremantle employers and employees seemed muted. There was little comment apart from the expectation that there would be peace on the waterfront, which effectively was the situation before the Award hearings. It was realised that costs would rise, however, this was deemed acceptable because they came from a national award applicable in all ports employing waterside workers. The FLU, which had first hand experience of interference in local affairs by others, continued to conduct its business as before ostensibly unperturbed by the experience. The interstate and contract employers were equally unmoved because they were subject to outside direction. The FHT was similarly undisturbed because they dominated the port and their control was made by the State government, not Federally in their operational management. After the

⁶⁷ Details of the letter and FHT memo quoted in Tull 'Blood on the Cargo' p.27.

⁶⁸ ANU deposit N28/317 'Accident and Death record book. 1903-1924.' This volume was also used to record loans made to members 1906-12. The COM Minutes on each occasion had an accounting of expenditure and receipts since the last meeting, loans were not shown, however, there were regular entries for payments in and out of the Accident Fund. As loans were recorded in the Accident and Death book it may be they were accounted for in the Accident Fund transactions.

⁶⁹ Jackson, M.P., *Labour Relations on the Docks*. (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973), p.7.

⁷⁰ Larowe, C.P., *Shape Up and Hummg Hull* (USA: U of California, 1955), pp.19-20.

disturbances the orderly flow of work experienced from January to April 1914 the stevedoring industry settled back into rhythms experienced in 1913. A national award was in place. However, the industry structure at Fremantle did not conform to 'national' parameters and remained fixed in the 'customs' of the port. There were, nonetheless, forces able to create change looming.

The national award gave the waterfront a framework intended to introduce stability, and hence efficiency, in an industry based on employment prone to uncertainty. However, the award could do nothing to overcome the source of all the industry's problems, the irregular nature of employment on the waterfront. This was a weakness which was soon emphasised that same year firstly by drought then by the world war.

Chapter 5 The War's Impact

After the distractions caused by the Award proceedings, the industry had from 1914 to face the effects of the world war, effects which in 1914-15 were exacerbated by a crippling drought which affected grain exports. The Great War caused changes to the social and political relationships in general society which had repercussions for the conduct of stevedoring and on the collective attitudes of the Fremantle stevedoring work force. This was the time when all on the Fremantle waterfront suffered from a fundamental change in industrial relationships. In this they were not alone because the War caused a great upheaval in society generally. During this time, of equal importance for the stevedoring industry, was the first attempt by government to force change in the manner stevedoring conducted its business in all major Australian ports.

The Changes to Shipping Caused by the First World War

In August 1914 the beginning of the Great War was seen by some Fremantle merchants as a 'red letter day', in anticipation of accelerated economic activity.¹ The FHT was more realistic and recognised that war with Germany would bring to an end the flow of ships and cargoes from that country. On the basis of the 1913-14 figures the loss of the trade from the German mail and cargo steamers would reduce the volume of shipping overall by about 30%. The Trust noted that in 1913-14 there had been 115 visits by German ships, which had discharged and loaded 92,525 tons of cargo and had contributed £34,500 in revenue for the Trust.²

A minor nuisance for stevedoring operations was caused through anti-German feelings being expressed by the lumpers when they resolved that, 'they would not work alongside anyone with a German background'.³ After a few months the

¹ *Fremantle Herald*, 15 Jan. 1915, p.3.

² *FHT Annual Report 1915*, p.17.

³ *Fremantle Herald*, 18 Dec. 1914, p.2.

agitation died down, mainly because most of the so-called 'aliens' had been collected together and placed in detention camps.⁴

The new award, acceptable as it was to the port's lumpers, had little real effect when fewer ships called. The war did give some men an alternative employment opportunity by volunteering to join the Army or Navy. As jobs became scarcer others decided to seek employment elsewhere away from the waterfront. However, the hard core of 'preferred men' remained to offer for work on whatever shipping arrived to be stevedored.

Reduced shipping numbers caused by the war and withdrawal of German registered shipping, the exodus of young men into the Services, the recognition by others that jobs on the waterfront had become even scarcer had the effect of enforcing a period of industrial calm on the industry. Industrial relations, therefore, were defined by the new award, by fewer ships and fewer men seeking employment, which gave those remaining to work on the waterfront a level of job security, if not continuity, the industry had not enjoyed since the 'Gold Boom'.

The war years for the Fremantle stevedoring industry and consequently the port community became a time of seemingly unremitting gloom. The perceptions of an economic bonanza to equal the Gold Boom years did not eventuate; the volume of shipping and stevedoring work declined markedly. The annual volume of shipping fell each year from 857 at the outbreak of war to 376 in 1918. Most noticeable was the reduction in ship numbers from the United Kingdom from 78 in 1914 to 10 in 1918. General cargo inwards stevedored declined from 327,457 tons in 1913-14 to 173,016 tons in 1918-19, which meant a reduction from 1 ton to ½ ton of goods imported per head of population.⁵ To discover the reasons behind the causes of this industry decline in activity it is necessary to examine the world-wide shipping situation which developed as the war evolved and how those circumstances came to affect Fremantle.

At the commencement of hostilities German ships comprised 30% of the overseas registered tonnage calling at the port. Nearly all the rest flew the British

⁴ Turner, I., '1914-19' in Crowley, F., ed., *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: Heineman, 1988), p.318.

⁵ Calculated from cargo tonnages listed in the *FHT Annual Reports Appendix II for years from 1913 to 1919*. Population figures from *WA Year Book 1970*, p.509.

flag. This predominance was because in 1914 Britain and its Dominions owned and operated 20.3 million GRT or roughly half the world's shipping tonnage.⁶ About 6 million GRT of this total was employed on services and trades not calling at United Kingdom ports; for example the Australian interstate ships and Canadian Lakes traders. About 12 million GRT was employed trading to and from the UK to overseas ports including the Australian and New Zealand services. The rest were engaged in the UK coastal trade.⁷

Shipping Tonnage (GRT) Sunk (built)			
1916		1917	
Aug.	43,000 (188,000)	Jan.	154,000 (94,000)
Sept.	105,000 (184,000)	Feb.	313,000 (116,000)
Oct.	176,000 (133,000)	Mar.	353,000 (170,000)
Nov.	169,000 (103,000)	Apr.	545,000 (163,000)
Dec.	182,000 (100,000)	May	352,000 (149,000)
		June	415,000 (120,000)
		July	356,000 (135,000)

The monthly level of shipping sunk started to decrease in August 1917.⁸ The loss of ships sunk was rectified by building new ships but the loss of experienced seafarers killed, 1,125 in 1916 and 3,833 in the first half of 1917⁹ was not easily overcome. One effect of the latter was it restricted the scheduling of new ships to the shorter sea routes to make the best use of the depleted numbers of mariners.¹⁰

At the beginning of the war the 12 million tons of shipping which served Britain's commercial requirements to import food and raw materials, export coal and manufactured goods, was reduced to about half, or roughly 6-7 million GRT.¹¹ Of

⁶ June 1914 World total shipping tonnage 42,514 GRT, British Empire 20,284 GRT or 47.7% of total world merchant ship tonnage. Fayle, C.E., *The War and the Shipping Industry* (London: OUP, 1927), p.416. Also Elderton, W.P., *Shipping Problems 1916-1921* (London: A&C Black, 1928), p.7.

⁷ Elderton, p.7.

⁸ *ibid.*; Salter, p.37

⁹ Wilson, T., *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p.431.

¹⁰ Salter, p.37-8.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.8.

that original prewar fleet, 4.5 million GRT was immediately appropriated for use by the British Admiralty and Army. The fastest cargo-passenger ships, which were the ships equipped with refrigerated cargo holds, became armed merchant cruisers (AMC). Passenger ships became troop ships. A number of ships, usually those employed on the grain trades with large uncluttered hatches, became storage ships and languished in French ports to augment the local storage sheds. Another 2.1 million GRT was chartered to Britain's Allies, the French and Italian governments to assist their own merchant fleets in the war effort.¹² As the war progressed ships lost to enemy action were replaced promptly by the British shipyards until the commencement of unrestricted U-Boat warfare in December 1916.¹³

Until late in 1916 unrestricted freight and charter rates charged by ship owners escalated and determined the trades in which ships would be employed. The freight rate per ton for Australian grain to the UK increased from 24/- per ton in 1914 to a maximum rate of 124/- per ton in 1916.¹⁴ Therefore, it was impossible for the Australian grain exporters to fix a ship at commercial rates in time to export the 1916-17 harvest. It was claimed that shipowners were enjoying 150% profit on their investments by the end of 1916.¹⁵ The volume of shipping trade services to any part of the globe before the end of 1916 was, therefore, determined by the shipping freight costs charged, rather than the normal balance between trade and commercial factors. From that point ship sinkage became the overriding factor in deciding the destination of ships and the cargoes carried.

To overcome the effects of cost factors and sinkage, government controls on ships and their owners were introduced. This was done initially by the British government; the Dominion and Allied governments followed later.¹⁶ The British government under Asquith was initially reluctant to introduce any form of control

¹² *ibid.*

¹³

Year	Sunk	Built
1914	241,000GRT	1,683,000GRT
1915	856,000GRT	651,000GRT

 Fayle, pp.416-417.

¹⁴ Fayle, p.439.

¹⁵ Salter, J.A., *Allied Shipping Control*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p.114.

¹⁶ Salter, pp.36-7. Scott, E., *Australia During the War* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1943), pp.220-4 & 607-13.

mechanism. They preferred to allow market forces, claimed to be ‘business as usual’, to regulate shipping services. However, increases in cargo and charter rates and shipping losses forced, in December 1916, the newly created Government of Lloyd George to introduce strident controls for ships, their owners, trades served and cargoes carried.¹⁷

The British Ministry of Shipping was formed in December 1916 and the Allied Shipping Committee was formed in February 1917. All British-registered shipping came under government control in February 1917.¹⁸ In Australia the Commonwealth Shipping Board was formed February 1917. A retired RN officer, Rear Admiral Clarkson, was appointed Controller of Shipping, and shipping company executives, Messrs Cox and Hunter, were appointed controllers of overseas and interstate shipping respectively under Clarkson.¹⁹

Shipping services were effectively rationed and allocated to trades which facilitated maximum usage. The Allied shipping controllers divided the world into zones based on a ship’s round voyage time from the UK to its loading port and return to a port in North Europe. This arbitrary form of classification disadvantaged Australia and New Zealand; consequently, those countries received the lowest level of shipping allocation. Refrigerated ships, which had normally traded to Australia, were transferred to carry frozen meat from North and South America. Similarly ships which had usually been employed on the Australian grain trade were directed to load grain in Canada and the USA. In their new trading patterns the ships were able to complete three round trip voyages in the same time when previously making two voyages to Australia.²⁰

Nonetheless, the stevedoring industry, although it experienced events with the potential for change-the national award and the World War-did not undergo any fundamental alteration in its employment structures or functional methodology. The underlying reason for this was because the essential relationships between shipowner, stevedore, and wharf-labourer remained unchanged.

¹⁷ Salter, p.37.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Scott, p.621.

²⁰ Elderton, pp.13-15.

However, recognition that the stevedoring services supplied in Australian ports were a vital section of the economic activity of the nation had been noted by Justice Higgins in 1914. He observed that a national waterfront strike would have been, ‘...immeasurably disastrous to the whole continent and its producers’.²¹ The perception of a ‘national’ industry was slow to receive recognition after April 1914 by both labourers and employers at Fremantle. More immediate interest for them was the effects of the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914.

Local Trade Constraints Which Reduced Stevedoring Work at Fremantle

The endemic unemployment experienced on the Fremantle waterfront was exacerbated at the commencement of the First World War by the effects of drought on the State’s grain harvest during the 1914-15 export season.²² This was the first time in the short history of grain export from WA that an adverse weather pattern had a detrimental effect on the port’s stevedoring industry.

The drought had the immediate effect at Fremantle of stopping the flow of bagged grain to the wharf storage sheds and its loading on to ships from November 1914 to May 1915. The press noted that, ‘the spectacle of so many unengaged men at the wharf is not pleasing, ‘Poverty Point’ has been the congregating point for some hundreds of men attending the morning and afternoon pick up to no avail.’²³

‘Poverty Point’ has been identified as being an area located just west of the present position of ‘A’ Shed Victoria Quay, about where the FPA Building is now established. Foremen for each stevedoring company would have their particular ‘patch’ and men wishing to be employed by that company would gravitate to that area and wait there for the chance of a job. Lumper ‘Jock’ Stewart started work on the wharf at Fremantle in 1916 and remembered the pickup locations to be ‘on the ramp between A and B sheds, another behind B shed and a third where the O’Connor monument stands now.’²⁴

²¹ Preamble to the national Waterside Workers’ Award no.1 and no.14 of 1914. *CAR* vol.8 1914, p.2.

²² The *FHT Annual Report 1916*, p.7 noted that ‘the failure of last year’s [1914/15] crop was disappointing.’ The report continued that, ‘it was pleasing to see the complete change in climatic conditions... which promised a record harvest.’

²³ *Fremantle Herald*, 27 November 1914, p.1.

²⁴ Transcript of interview Battye Library oral history library OH 160t 1976.

In an attempt to redress the inequity suffered by some of its members the FLU Committee of Management had written to the Fremantle employers to ask them to consider a 'better distribution of work' for the lumpers, because while some had received no work, others had been 'taxed to the utmost'. The FHT and McIlwraith McEacharn were the employers noted by the union to be most at fault in this respect. The minutes of subsequent meetings of the Committee of Management only showed that the response received from the respective employers was that the matter was being 'dealt with'.²⁵

The concern was caused by a State-wide drought experienced during the 1914 grain growing season which wiped out the harvest and export of grain for the period 1914/15.²⁶ Grain had to be imported that year, 17,196 tons for local consumption was shipped in from the eastern states and overseas. Grain exports resumed the following two seasons to almost prewar record levels.²⁷ The next grain-growing season was blessed by good rains and bags of grain began being received in December 1915. However, by then the war had affected the export of grain from Fremantle.

Some relief was experienced by Australian grain farmers, and consequently the stevedores in Australian ports including Fremantle, when it was realised in 1916 that the North American crop tonnages had been overestimated and the Argentinian grain harvest had been decimated by drought and locusts. The Australian wheat crop in storage was then considered to be a 'bright spot' by the British government.²⁸ The British shipping controllers, however, did concede that Australia and New Zealand were best placed to supply the Allied armies fighting in the Middle East and consequently ships were allocated to carry wheat, frozen meat, hides for leather to make and repair saddlery and boots, also other supplies to the Suez Canal area. Australia was also the principal source of supply for horses for the AIF and Indian Army. This factor served as another reason to allocate ships for the Australia-India trade route.²⁹

²⁵ FLU COM Minutes, 30 Sept. 1914, pp.340-342; and 24 Oct. 1914, pp.353-354.

²⁶ *FHT Annual Report 1915/16*, p.7. Also Glynn, pp.111-112.

²⁷ *FHT Annual Reports*, 1914/15 to 1919/20, 'Wheat and Flour Handling and shipping', p.5 & Appendix II.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Scott, pp.541-3.

To arrive at a complete picture of the restrictions placed on shipping and, hence, stevedoring work around the Australian coast, it must also be noted that of the 117 steamers in the prewar interstate and intrastate fleet, 48 were transferred to Atlantic and Mediterranean routes in 1917 and 1918 to help relieve the extreme situation caused by the unrestricted U-Boat warfare on Allied merchant shipping.³⁰

By 1916 it was obvious to the Australian government and Prime Minister Billy Hughes that Australia had no control over ship allocation and therefore lacked the ability to export its primary produce and metals unless it supplied its own ships. Hughes purchased fifteen ships, with a total GRT of 63,684 for £2,068,000. These ships entered the government's service to carry Australian cargoes, including grain from WA, to overseas destinations in August 1916.³¹

The foregoing is intended to show the reasons for reduced shipping services to Fremantle by both overseas and interstate carriers. The State's major export-grain-was devastated by drought in 1914/15 and later restricted by shortages of shipping. There was little else the State produced except wool which was needed for the war effort. However, even the export of this potentially valuable cargo for Australian producers-and stevedores-was restricted in the war, because the British government required mainly *crossbred* rather than *merino* wool. The *crossbred* variety was considered suitable for the general range of military clothing, whereas *merino* was used for the production of finer cloth used in civilian suitings.³² Therefore both a lack of suitable cargoes and a shortage of ships conspired to reduce stevedoring work at Fremantle from 1914 to the end of the war. The lumpers at Fremantle, although not fighting in the front lines were, therefore, to a degree the victims of the war.

Traditionally the lumpers in the port had given, and to some extent received, an allegiance with a particular employer, either the interstate or the contract stevedores. The lessening activity caused by war had the greatest impact on the overseas trades for the reasons outlined above. The interstate men, although working at reduced levels, were not subjected to sudden loss caused by the cessation of

³⁰ Fayle, p.337; Scott, pp.623-4.

³¹ Fitzhardinge, L.F., *The Little Digger* (Angus & Robertson: London, 1979), pp.105-08, 137-45. Scott, pp.625-632.

³² Scott, pp.526-7.

German shipping and the drought.³³ They did suffer because some Australian coastal shipping was diverted to overseas trades by the shipping controllers.

There were many complaints of the lack of work and unfair distribution of what work there was reported in the local press and at union meetings.³⁴ There were some short periods of activity during the time in port of a 'coal-boat' or one of the infrequent 'Home-boats' from the UK.³⁵ The FHT, because of their unique position in the port, continued to be the most consistent employer of waterfront labour. The 'preferred men' were able to make a living from the waterfront. However, those without 'friends' left the community to join the armed forces or seek work elsewhere.³⁶

The Repercussions of Government Intervention

Stevedoring at Fremantle would have survived the war unchanged but for influences which were socially and politically inspired from 1917 until 1919. During the period from the onset of war until 1917 the relationship between the Fremantle lumpers who remained in the industry and those in authority was reasonably quiescent. No doubt this relationship was determined by the desire of those remaining lumpers to retain their 'preferred' status, which had been gained by any method condoned by the port's community.

The WWF, and through them the FLU, had applied to the Arbitration Court in 1915 for amendments to the award to cover overtime rates and meal hours. Mr Justice Higgins set overtime and meal hours to confine the work in ordinary time to forty four hours per week. While setting these limitations he noted that waterside workers were frequently called upon to work a continuous stretch of twenty four hours without sleep or rest. He also agreed that union men should not be required to

³³ *Fremantle Herald*, 28 May 1915, p.2, reported 'another week of little activity on the wharf.' The least affected the paper noted were the men who worked the interstate ships because, 'this trade maintained services'.

³⁴ *Fremantle Herald*, 24 April 1915, p.1.

³⁵ *Fremantle Herald*, 9 April 1915, p.1. 'A good many months since Victoria Quay presented such a busy appearance.' *Fremantle Herald* 25 June 1915 p.1 'A busy week experienced. The coal lumpers were particularly busy and SS *Chronas* from the UK will give 50 or 60 men work for a few weeks.'

³⁶ *Fremantle Herald*, 28 May 1915, p.1.

work alongside non-union men or ship's crew. Finally he complimented the Federation for not attempting to contravene the award he had handed down in 1914.³⁷ Under the headline 'Suggested amendments to working conditions.' the *Fremantle Herald* quoted a large percentage of FLU members who said that they were 'not only satisfied with the present working conditions, *but are absolutely reluctant to disturb the present happy relations that exist between themselves and the employers.*[my emphasis] The paper continued, 'unfortunately a minority of vocal members dictate the destiny of the union.'³⁸

In April 1916 the WWF, this time solely on behalf of the Fremantle union, applied to the Federal Arbitration Court for increased overtime rates to be paid at that port for lumpers at the port working general cargo. It is not stated in union records that this was an attempt by the Federation to arrive eventually at increased payments Australia-wide by applying for them on a port-by-port basis. There is also no evidence to suggest that the increase was to be confined to Fremantle alone. However, Justice Higgins refused the application. He expressed surprise that Fremantle should apply for different rates to be applicable at Fremantle when their original application in 1914 was based on obtaining parity with other Australian ports.³⁹

The labour force at Fremantle was now clearly part of the national stevedoring scene. This became evident during 1917. At Fremantle the absence of change in methods or employer-employee relationships can be related simply to a lack of shipping activity caused by the war and the drought. Those who remained as part of the stevedoring industry at Fremantle were forced by circumstances into observing circumspection in all matters.

Matters changed for the worse nationwide in stevedoring during 1917. Then the Commonwealth government took regulatory action to restore discipline in the Australian stevedoring industry. This action arose because the government perceived a growth of anarchy within the waterfront work force damaging the national war effort. The irony of this perception and the ensuing action taken was that it was

³⁷ *CAR* 1915, vol.9, pp.293-301.

³⁸ *Fremantle Herald*, 23 June 1915, p.3.

³⁹ *CAR* 1916, vol.10, pp.148-50.

principally the perceptions of the former WWF President, and now Prime Minister, Billy Hughes.

The action taken was the first time the Commonwealth government had intervened in waterfront affairs. The intervention was experienced not only in the eastern states, but also in Fremantle. The actions of both Commonwealth and, later WA, State governments upset the industrial relations equilibrium which had been previously enjoyed in Fremantle.

The change in the port's industrial and community relationships came after three years of war, and was caused throughout it by a growing feeling of despondency. The deterioration in morale came from the stalemate on the Western Front and the horrendous wastage of young men's lives there without any signs of military success. Those losses, coming soon after the initial calamitous combat experience of Australian troops at Gallipoli, had impacted on the whole community. Also there was wide-spread unemployment, and rising prices caused shortages of goods and services, which affected everyone.⁴⁰ In three years, real wages had dropped 100 points below the 1914 level, whereas in the same time retail prices had risen 200 points above the 1914 base rate.⁴¹

The Conscription referenda held in 1916 and 1917 had divided the Australian community. This split was exacerbated by the electoral manoeuvring of Prime Minister Hughes. The divisions in the Labor party caused by the conscription referenda, culminating in the formation of a Nationalist government under Hughes affected the morale of workers throughout Australia, and particularly the waterfront labour force.⁴²

The waterfront felt betrayed by Hughes, their former union leader. This was caused by the deep-seated resentment they felt when he went into partnership with right-wing politicians to attempt to win passage of the conscription legislation. Hughes was expelled from the Labor party, but retained the post of Prime Minister in the new Commonwealth government. Added to Labor Party unrest were the activities

⁴⁰ Fitzhardinge, L.F., *The Little Digger* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1979), p.272. Snooks, in Stannage ed. *New History of WA*, table 7.7 p.246.

⁴¹ Perlman, M., *Judges in Industry* (Melbourne: MUP, 1954), p.193 Appendix II, graph showing wholesale and retail prices and real wage index numbers.

⁴² Fitzhardinge, p.276.

of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) movement whose agitation had an unsettling effect on the nation's waterfront industrial relations.⁴³

On 10 August 1917 the wharf labourers in Sydney, followed by the Melbourne wharfies refused to load foodstuffs for export, until food prices were reduced in Australia. On 13 August Hughes issued a statement that the Government would ensure that the ships would be loaded or unloaded; however, the unionists would have nothing to fear from the government's action unless, 'they wanted to play into the hands of the enemies of Australia and the Empire'.⁴⁴

The following day a proclamation was issued which commanded unionists to return to work within twenty four hours, and called upon all loyal citizens to carry on the work of the nation. There was no response from the waterfront union to the proclamation. On 15 August, a regulation promulgated under the War Precautions Act made it mandatory that work had to continue unimpeded on the nation's waterfront. A National Service Bureau in each State capital and major seaport was established to enrol volunteers to load and unload ships unimpeded. Hughes had formed a Nationalist government in February 1917 with the proclaimed intention of winning the war at all costs. The newly-enrolled volunteer waterside workers were called Nationalist volunteers and their union the Nationalist union.⁴⁵

The waterfront trouble at Fremantle, which started on 13 August 1917, had the same origins as those experienced in eastern states ports. Initially, however, the dispute at Fremantle ostensibly arose over a shipment of flour being loaded for Java on SS *Mindaroo*. It was alleged by the Fremantle lumpers that this flour would be trans-shipped into a neutral ship in Java and carried to its final destination, a German port.⁴⁶ The lumpers claimed that previous shipments of the commodity must have followed the same route. Letters home from WA soldiers reported that Western Australian flour in locally branded bags had been discovered in German trenches on the Western front.

This anecdotal evidence was refuted by the Commonwealth government, because there was a strict embargo system in place controlling the movement of

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Fitzhardinge, p.273.

⁴⁵ Fitzhardinge, pp.273-4.

⁴⁶ *West Australian*, 14-30 August 1917, articles on p.5 & editorials on p.4.

cargoes to overseas destinations. Under this scheme advice was sought from Australian and British Trade Ministers whether it was safe to export a commodity to neutral countries. Subsequent on-carriage to enemy nations was the concern behind these inquiries.⁴⁷ It was deemed unlikely, therefore, that this particular cargo would slip through the stringent embargo system.

Furthermore, shipowners and exporters would only move cargo if it was covered by insurance. In wartime that was encompassed by war-risk clauses in the policy contained in the contract of carriage between shipowner and shipper, which was a further reason the cargo on SS *Mindaroo* was lawful. The shipment of flour would not have been accepted by the shipowner if it was not legally covered by insurance.

The FLU walked off that ship and others in the port as a protest against trading with the enemy in scarce commodities.⁴⁸ To rebut the allegation of supporting unpatriotic activity, Prime Minister Hughes arranged for the flour to be consigned to the British Consulate in Java to ensure the cargo's legality for on-carriage or distribution at the discharge port.

The Fremantle lumpers then announced that their stoppage would continue in protest against the high cost of living caused by the shortage of goods including flour.⁴⁹ The local men were now aligned with the eastern states' waterside workers and adopted the same reasons as them for the disputation.

The enrolment of Nationalist volunteers commenced in Melbourne and Sydney, and they started work on the Melbourne wharves on 21 August and shortly after in Sydney. Matters in Western Australia moved somewhat more slowly. The enrolment bureaux in Perth and Fremantle did not open until 24 August and continued to sign on volunteers until 12 October in Perth, and 25 November in Fremantle.⁵⁰ Some volunteers were employed during October and November.

⁴⁷ Scott, pp.516-7.

⁴⁸ *Report of the Royal Commission Report Nationalist Workers 1919* (subsequently *RC 1919*) pp.1-2; Nationalist Union Leader L.L. Williams letter to Acting Prime Minister W.A. Watt, 14 June 1919 p.1 in *RC 1919*; Ashworth, chapter 2; Jock Stewart, interview transcript p.8 in Battye Library Oral History Section.

⁴⁹ *West Australian*, 24 & 26 Sept. 1917, p.5.

⁵⁰ *West Australian*, 3-22 October 1917, p.5 & 1-27 November 1917, p.5; *RC 1919*, p.3.

There was, however, a fundamental difference in the enrolment forms signed at the two bureaus. The Perth form stated that the volunteer would work until, 'a suitable settlement had been made with the industrial workers now on strike'.⁵¹ The Fremantle volunteers, however, signed an agreement that they would be paid the wages and work under the conditions set by the 1914 Waterside Workers Award amended by the Arbitration court in 1915 and 1916. This difference, in effect, categorised the Perth volunteers as strike breakers, whereas, the Fremantle volunteers were working under award conditions and employed under the 'free selection' criteria which was the practice of the port.⁵²

The strike at Fremantle lasted from 13 August to 25 November 1917.⁵³ During this time some volunteers were employed after assurances for their physical safety and protection were given, firstly by the Prime Minister, then later on 21 September in more practical terms by the State Premier, Sir Henry Lefroy. Furthermore the Premier guaranteed that they would receive consideration for future employment and protection against victimisation 'on the return to normal times'.⁵⁴

It is interesting to note, in light of subsequent events, that the matter of protection at the workplace was first put in the hands of Colebatch, the Colonial Secretary. He expressed considerable doubt about endorsing the Prime Minister's promise of protection for the volunteers. It was recorded that he was 'very disinclined' to provide the level of action called for. Eventually, however, the Premier took the matter out of his hands and gave the promise of protection for the volunteers who sought those guarantees before starting work.⁵⁵

The level of employment of volunteers at Fremantle from September 1917 until May 1919 is difficult to determine.⁵⁶ There are indications that on 25 November 1917

⁵¹ *RC 1919*, p.1.

⁵² *RC 1919*, pp.2-3.

⁵³ *West Australian*, 26 & 27 Nov. 1917, p.5.

⁵⁴ *RC 1919*, pp.4-6.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ In the copy of final report about this matter, apparently abridged, contained in the PM's file obtained from Aust. Archives Canberra there is mention of shipping company records of employment used in evidence. The shipping company records

Continued on next page...

all the FLU members signed on 'under protest' as volunteers, while still retaining their union membership.⁵⁷ There certainly does appear to have been a union organisation functioning from 1917 until 1919 because the FLU membership and 'Death and Accident' records continued to be kept.⁵⁸ Also on a number of occasions W.Renton was identified in press articles in those years as 'president of the Lumpers' Union.'⁵⁹

Prime Minister Hughes had commenced proceedings on Wednesday, 29 August 1917, to deregister the WWF. This was to be accomplished by securing an order in the Executive Council, which gave the Governor-General power to deregister **any** striking union. The following day Hughes applied to the President of the Arbitration Court, Mr Justice Higgins, for an order calling on the WWF to show cause why they should not be deregistered and requested the order be served on the union four days later on Monday 3 September. Justice Higgins was incensed by the level of pressure applied to the Arbitration Court by a politician. An argument ensued between Hughes and Higgins. Eventually Higgins did make the order, but made it applicable for a week later than the date required by Hughes. Responding to Hughes' demands, Higgins noted that he did not like to act with 'a sword hanging over the court' and also that it was 'embarrassing' to have a litigant apply to the court for an order to reinforce something the Prime Minister had given himself power to do.⁶⁰

To fight the deregistration order, the WWF, and the FLU, applied in November 1917 to the Arbitration Court for restoration of the employment preference clause in the award. In handing down his judgement Justice Higgins refused to renew the union preference because the union's right of employment had

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of men employed have not been found. 214 volunteers gave evidence of their individual earnings to the Royal Commission. The WA Premiers Department WAPRO file AN2 Acc 1496 item 217/19 'Wharf Trouble at Fremantle' is missing. FLU committee of management minutes for the period are also missing from the union deposit in the ANU Archives of Business and Labour.

⁵⁷ *West Australian* 26 & 27 November 1917, p.5. Some indication of the intensity of union loyalty can be gained from the interview with lumper Jock Stewart particularly on transcript p.8 contained in the Battye Library of Oral History.

⁵⁸ ANU deposit N28/317

⁵⁹ In particular the *West Australian* during April and May 1919.

⁶⁰ Fitzhardinge, pp 273-5. Higgins J. *CAR* 1917 vol. 11, p.600, 24 Sept. 1917; *CAR* 1917 vol.11. p 758. 22 Oct 1917; *CAR* 1917 vol.11, p.821.

been based on the members giving assurances that ships would be worked without hindrance. These promises had been broken and to maintain the national wartime economy the shipowners had employed volunteers to ensure cargoes were moved. Furthermore, the shipowners had promised the volunteers preference of employment after the strike ended. Therefore, Justice Higgins declined to interfere with an employer's right to employ the men he had selected.⁶¹

The volunteers, or 'loyalists' as some preferred to call them, formed their own union at Fremantle. The local union of volunteers claimed it could not be registered with the Federal Arbitration Court, because the FLU had federal court registration. So the volunteers' union was registered with the State Arbitration Court on 21 October 1917 as the 'Fremantle National Waterside Workers Union of Workers' (subsequently referred to as the National or Nationalist Union).⁶²

Registrations of Nationalist volunteers were claimed to have reached 600 by 7 November 1917 at Perth and Fremantle. In 1919 at the Royal Commission the National Union declared their membership of '300 to 400'.⁶³ These men and the FLU members became embroiled in the most divisive incident experienced on the Fremantle waterfront since 1899. For the Fremantle model it was the focus of a number of socially-and politically-motivated influences. It was the end of innocence for the Fremantle waterfront industry. From that point onwards most of the events which shaped the Fremantle model had sources outside the local milieu.

The *Dimboola* Affair: a change of relationships

The *Dimboola* affair was an example of the consequences of government intervention in stevedoring which resulted in a polarisation of attitudes for the whole community. Brian de Garis has provided an account of the *Dimboola* affair. In this he emphasises its social consequences and its Western Australian political implications. The significance of the event for the stevedoring industry was the growth of disquiet it generated within WA government circles exacerbated by the Commonwealth

⁶¹ CAR 1917 vol.11, p.758 & p.821

⁶² Nationalist Union Fremantle Branch Secretary L.L. Williams to Acting Prime Minister W.A. Watt, 14 June 1919 on history of the union and dispute at Fremantle from 1917 to 1919. In Australian Archives Canberra deposit series Prime Minister's Department A1606/1 item B26/1 '1917 and 1919 Troubles at Fremantle'.

⁶³ RC 1919, p.1, in Aust. Archives Canberra A1606/1 item B26/1.

security forces' covert surveillance of unionists. In May 1919 these factors all contributed to the resultant violent confrontation.

The catalyst, however, which caused the *Dimboola* dispute initially, was the antipathy between FLU and National Union men, without which the incident would not have occurred. The primary cause of the FLU antagonism was the preference ruling handed down in November 1917 by Justice Higgins which gave *de jure* recognition to the National Union. This was exacerbated by a guarantee of first employment preference given to returned ex-servicemen by the Commonwealth government and most State governments.⁶⁴ Some of these had been FLU men, and could not now be denied employment before the National Union members. Equally the returned servicemen who subsequently became members of the competing National Union could not be refused employment. There were also widely held fears of unrest fomented by returned servicemen and others termed the 'revolutionary elements' of the immediate postwar society.

Premier Lefroy drew attention to this potentially explosive situation on the Fremantle waterfront arising from the Commonwealth government promise in November 1918 in a telegram to the Acting Prime Minister A.F. Watt.⁶⁵ The Prime Minister, Hughes, accompanied by Navy Minister Cook was then in London attending the Imperial Conference and Treasurer A.F. Watt was Acting Prime Minister. Hughes and Cook remained in Europe to attend the Versailles Peace Conference throughout 1919. One could speculate how the volatile Hughes would have handled the matter; Watt appears to have been more restrained in his approach to the trouble at Fremantle

As a precaution against waterfront unrest Lefroy urged the Federal government not to remove naval forces presently stationed at Fremantle. He was fearful the WA Police force would not be able to prevent the 'probable bloodshed' which was likely to arise when the two waterfront unions with returned soldiers' support clashed.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Turner, '1914-19' in Crowley, ed., *New History* p.354. The Queensland State government did not legislate to give employment preference for returned servicemen.

⁶⁵ Lefroy to Watt telegram 30 November 1918 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit PM's Dept.B26/1.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

The Premier's fears appeared groundless because a few days later he telegraphed Watt that relations between government and the returned soldiers in WA would be considerably improved if the Repatriation Minister, Senator Millen, visited the State to talk to the servicemen and resolve a number of outstanding repatriation matters. Watt undertook to send Minister Millen to Perth 'towards the end of January'.⁶⁷ On the filed copy of Lefroy's telegram was a note in shorthand, 'Have considered your telegram and consulted with Minister Repatriation, its impossible for him to visit Western Australia while he is [indecipherable] but hopes [to be] free to get across towards end January and thinks it will allay the feeling you refer to. You are at liberty to make that announcement'⁶⁸

A report from 'Intelligence sources' dated 11 December indicated that an observer had attended a Returned Soldiers Association (RSA) meeting on 29 November held at Fremantle.⁶⁹ The report noted that a resolution was passed to urge the Federal and State governments to withdraw the National volunteers from the Fremantle wharves, or the RSA would not be responsible for the serious trouble which would ensue if the government refused. The report also noted that the most vocal members at the meeting were members favouring the RSA uniting with Trades Hall to form a Soldiers and Workmen's Council. This proposal was viewed with alarm because it caused the agent to comment that, 'such councils have done harm enough in the world already'. That observation referred to the violent activities of soldiers and workers' revolutionary councils in Russia during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

This 'intelligence' report was unsigned and had a covering comment dated 11 December 1918 to Watt stating that 'I transmit herewith copy of a report from our representative in Perth, with respect to the activities of the Fremantle Branch of the Returned Soldiers League. A copy has been sent to Senator Pearce.'

After the Christmas and New Year break enjoyed in the first year of peace, Premier Lefroy resumed reports about the RSA and its activities. In a coded telegram dated 2 January 1919 to Watt, Lefroy reported that 'Forces of disorder in this State [are] making determined efforts to capture Returned Soldiers Association with a view

⁶⁷ Lefroy to Watt telegram dated 2 December 1918 in Aust. Archives Canberra B26/1.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* My thanks to Carol Elfgren-Gadsden for her help in decoding the shorthand note.

⁶⁹ Prime Minister's Office marked Secret in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

to having their support in big industrial upheaval.' Furthermore, he advised that the RSA executive contained 'a sprinkling of the most dangerous element'. Lefroy tempered his warning commenting that the 'constitutionalists are in the majority'. The Premier continued to urge that Minister Millen's visit to the State be expedited for 'if the revolutionary section prevail much trouble certain to result.' Watt called on Ministers Pearce and Millen to confer with him on 7 January.⁷⁰

A handwritten notation on the telegram decode instructed that copies of the telegram be sent to Senators Pearce and Millen with the request for both to confer with the APM was initialled on 6 Jan. The telegram full of foreboding sent from Lefroy on 2 Jan., a Thursday, was not acted upon until 7 Jan., the following Tuesday. Either matters moved more slowly then, or the Federal authorities did not attach the same level of urgency to the matter that Lefroy and his government did, or possibly a combination of both.

The reduction in the volume of shipping calling at Fremantle, caused by the war and by an Australian seamen's strike in 1919, exacerbated the situation. All the wharf labourers at Fremantle, both FLU and National Union members had little employment and were, therefore, in competition for the limited work available.

The scarcity of work was aggravated by a world-wide influenza epidemic in 1919. A particularly virulent strain was experienced in Victoria and South Australia. The WA State Government naturally took every precaution to stop the epidemic spreading to Western Australia by applying strict quarantine restrictions on the movement of people and goods into the State by rail or sea. This action effectively stopped the transcontinental rail service, and the seamen's strike curtailed shipping services.⁷¹

Foodstuffs, particularly perishables, were in short supply. Consequently, the Perth and Fremantle communities felt increasingly isolated and deprived of the necessities of life. SS *Dimboola* was the first ship to arrive from the eastern states on 10 April 1919 with a few passengers and a considerable quantity of much-needed

⁷⁰ Lefroy to Watt telegram dated 2 January 1919 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

⁷¹ *West Australian*, 1 Feb. 1919, p.4; De Garis, 1966 p.33.

food stores. Among the passengers was Sir Henry Lefroy, the Premier of WA.⁷² While he had been absent Colebatch was Acting Premier.

A number of *Dimboola's* passengers were found to be suffering from influenza, and as a result the ship, cargo, crew and passengers were all placed in quarantine. Normally this would have required the ship to remain at the Quarantine Anchorage in Gage Roads off Fremantle for four days while the ship, and its contents underwent fumigation procedures.⁷³

The Commonwealth Shipping Control Board (SCB),⁷⁴ which still controlled all Australian registered ships, gave the owners of *Dimboola*, Melbourne Steamships Co., instructions to berth the ship with a skeleton crew before fumigation had been completed. This order had been given because intense pressure was exerted by the WA government and merchants responding to the public insistence that the cargo of foodstuffs be made available without delay.⁷⁵ Earlier berthing was feasible because the Master of *Dimboola* had a pilotage qualification for Fremantle which exempted him from having to employ an FHT pilot. It was possible, therefore, given the right weather conditions, to berth the ship without a pilot or tugs. However, the FHT allocated berths and controlled the harbour movements, therefore, it would have been a very courageous Master who would have contravened a port authority instruction without government and shipping company authorisation.

Nevertheless, the FHT, asserted its authority and insisted that the vessel remain anchored until fumigation had been completed.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the attempt by the SCB to circumvent quarantine regulations angered the Fremantle community, the FHT and the FLU in spite of agitation for the early release of the foodstuffs. They argued that they would be the first to suffer if an influenza epidemic arrived in WA.⁷⁷

⁷² De Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle', p.33

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Formed by the Commonwealth government in 1916 to coordinate coastal shipping to eliminate inefficient scheduling of Australian shipping and make best use of the coastal sea transport resource in wartime. *Argus* (Melbourne) 21/6/16 This newspaper report predates Scott's contention that the control board was formed in Feb. 1917.

⁷⁵ de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle' p.33.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

On 14 April the ship completed fumigation and berthed at Victoria Quay. The shipping company had engaged National Union labour to discharge the cargo. However, they were prevented from carrying out the work by a large group of FLU men. The FLU executive thought this action would force the government and the shipping company to employ their members to discharge the urgently-needed cargo.

To reinforce the warnings that trouble lay ahead, the WA government sent another report to Watt that, when the ship berthed on 14 April, 800 lumpers had marched onto Fremantle wharf and driven off all the National union men working there. The police had been unable to deal with the situation and were bringing reinforcements from the country. A special State Cabinet meeting was called to monitor the situation. The report concluded with the ominous warning 'Position serious will advise.' This coded telegram was sent at 1.17 pm 14 April 1919 originating from a disguised source identified as, 'Subsided Perth'. All other coded telegrams at this time originated, 'from Premier to Acting PM.' However, this particular telegram had a handwritten comment 'left with Mr Groom by Major Jones'. Major H.E. Jones was the first Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) which incorporated the Special Intelligence Branch (SIB). In addition to the report about the RSA from intelligence sources this telegram appears to confirm that the Fremantle dispute had become a matter for covert Commonwealth surveillance in addition to the overt activity of the State's police force.⁷⁸

Moreover, the State government was fully occupied at the time with internal political wrangling. Colebatch had replaced Lefroy as Premier on 15 April. The outcome of this was that Colebatch was too involved in political matters to give his undivided attention to the wharf crisis.⁷⁹

In conflict over SS *Dimboola* were, therefore, the Commonwealth Controller of Shipping and the Melbourne Steamship Co, the Nationalist Union workers on the one hand. And on the other was the FLU, supported by Trades Hall, many within the Fremantle community and militant sectors of the RSA. The State government and its police force were caught in the middle: they were principally concerned with

⁷⁸ Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

⁷⁹ de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle', p.34.

maintaining law and order, and enforcing government undertakings given to protect the National Union workers.

Premier Colebatch reported to Watt on 23 April that each day a crowd of about 2,000 persons comprising FLU members supported by a large number of women paraded on the wharves and 'adopted a menacing attitude'. Colebatch argued that since the ship was controlled by the Commonwealth Shipping Control Board, the waterside workers they employed were employees of the Federal government. It was, therefore, for the Commonwealth to resolve the problem.⁸⁰

Colebatch advised Watt that an impasse existed at Fremantle which could only be settled by the Commonwealth government shouldering their responsibilities and taking direct control. Furthermore, he advised that the FLU executive had warned him that there would be bloodshed if they were not given the work. Moreover, the FLU assured him that if the old employment preferences were restored, work would commence immediately. Colebatch reminded Watt of the undertaking given to protect National union men and asked him to submit proposals to resolve the situation.⁸¹

To expedite a response, Colebatch telegraphed the next day that the State's Police Commissioner advised that police forces were inadequate to prevent the widespread violence if government attempted to employ National Union men. Colebatch stressed there was considerable local sympathy for the FLU supported by a number in the RSA. He concluded that any effort made to force the position would, 'Without doubt, provoke violence and grave disorder, probably followed by widespread industrial trouble.'⁸²

The attention of the Commonwealth government to the trouble at Fremantle appeared to have sharpened somewhat in the last few days. One reason was that the Third International, the Bolshevik form of international socialism, had been established in March 1919. The trouble at Fremantle appeared to be a manifestation of this to Premier Colebatch and Major Jones.

⁸⁰ Telegram from Colebatch to Watt dated 23 April 1919 copy sent to the Controller of Shipping by Watt on 24/4/19 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² This coded telegram was dated 24 April and 'seen by Acting PM 24/4.' The telegram was also copied to Controller of Shipping on the same day. In Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

Copies of the telegrams sent from Perth to Canberra on 23 and 24 April were forwarded by Watt to Clarkson, the Commonwealth's Controller of Shipping in Melbourne. The Controller of Shipping had absolute powers over the allocation of scarce ships and services. He could only be overridden by the PM.

Clarkson was adamant that pledges given by the Commonwealth and State governments to protect the 'Loyalist' workers had to be unreservedly implemented. This being implemented, 'the "hold up" would have been of short duration'. Clarkson's contention was that the WA Government's 'signs of weakness' dealing with the wharf stoppage and 'hysterical policy' about the influenza epidemic gave the FLU grounds to attack existing national waterfront employment arrangements. He recommended, no attempt be made to discharge *Dimboola* or two other ships now en route to Fremantle, furthermore if the Union does not alter its attitude before Wednesday 30 April all ships [should] be withdrawn from Western Australia and that State [should] be absolutely isolated.'⁸³

Clarkson followed this proposal with a warning on 25 April that the State Government and the union were using the influenza epidemic 'for ulterior purposes'. Clarkson observed that Watt would be the better judge of this, but that he was sure the union were doing their utmost to get 'increased wages and conditions'. He advised that both should be resisted by a statement from Watt which would 'stop their game...and spike their guns'. A handwritten comment on his letter was that 'Acting PM decided not to adopt suggested action'.⁸⁴

Watt, however, did telegraph the Premier on 26 April that the pledges of employment and protection made to the National Union men had to be respected. The Fremantle employers also met the Premier on 30 April to urge that the Nationalist workers be given the necessary protection to enable work to recommence in the port. The State government continued to consider the matter but did not give a reply to the employers.⁸⁵

⁸³ Controller of Shipping to Acting prime Minister 24 April 1919 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

⁸⁴ Controller of Shipping to Acting PM 25 April 1919 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

⁸⁵ de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle' p.34.

Colebatch conferred with the FLU executive in an attempt to arrive at a peaceful resolution to the impasse.⁸⁶ The FLU leaders were adamant that no agreement could be reached until the National union men were removed from employment on the wharf. A vital factor in the debate was that the Commonwealth power to dictate the conditions of employment on the waterfront, granted under the War Precautions Regulations, was due to expire in July 1919.⁸⁷ Although these regulations could be renewed by the Commonwealth government they had to be passed by Parliament and renewal was very uncertain. Also to be considered were the Award amendments of 1917, which abolished WWF and FLU preferences. These could be fought in the Arbitration court where they were not subject to Commonwealth government legislation.

After conferring with the FLU the Premier listed a series of proposals as the basis for negotiation between all the parties involved in the dispute. The proposals, which the Premier thought would bring a 'just and amicable' settlement appeared to have been drafted by the FLU and aimed at the abolition of preference for 'loyalists'.⁸⁸

Clarkson and the Fremantle employers strenuously objected to the proposals outlined by Colebatch.⁸⁹ Between the 1 May and 3 May there was an exchange of messages between the Controller of Shipping, the Fremantle consignees of Dimboola's cargo and their legal representatives to the effect that the consignees should be permitted to discharge their own cargo. The unions representing the consignees' employees intervened and advised that their members would not handle the cargo from the ship or off the wharf. On 3 May the State Premier advised the consignees that the State government had taken control of the wharves that evening and would provide the necessary protection for the National union men to enable them to discharge *Dimboola's* cargo.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *West Australian* 29 April 1919 p.4.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* This implication was contained in a comment by a politician at a meeting in Fremantle. The War Precautions Act actually lapsed in July 1920. Fitzhardinge, 1979, p.444.

⁸⁸ *West Australian*, 29 April 1919, p.4.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ A report prepared for the Acting Prime Minister dated 13 May 1919 outlined all the steps taken and communications made by the various parties. (Subsequently Report 13 May 1919) pp.2-3. In Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

On Sunday 4 May, the FHT carpenters refused to erect the barriers which the authorities thought necessary to prevent interruption of cargo work from *Dimboola*. An attempt by 'citizen workers' led by Premier Colebatch to put up the barricades was thwarted by a large force of lumpers, their families and supporters.

It was reported that shots were fired from the groups of lumpers and their allies, to which the police responded with baton charges. Mounted police rode into the crowd in attempts to disperse them.⁹¹

The police, commanded by the officer-in-charge at Fremantle, Inspector Sellenger, realised that it was probable they would be overwhelmed. Consequently he issued rifles and bayonets, but at the time did not distribute ammunition. The situation became even more desperate with the police being under a continual barrage of coal, road metal, and pieces of iron. The Commissioner of Police, who was also present accompanying Premier Colebatch, then summoned a Magistrate and had the Riot Act read. At this juncture ammunition was also issued to the police, because it was realised that an extremely critical point had been reached.⁹²

Fortunately, at this juncture cool heads on both sides reached agreement to cease hostilities. The Premier and his volunteers retired from the 'battlefield'. The police also retired to leave the lumpers and their supporters in temporary control of the wharves. The barricades, and a temporary pickup office were thrown into the harbour by the triumphant lumpers. Both sides counted the cost of the melee. Twenty six police officers and six lumpers were injured. Two police and two lumpers were detained in hospital; one of the lumpers, Thomas Edwards, died from a serious head injury three days later at 5.15pm on 7 May. All the other wounded eventually recovered from their injuries.⁹³

Arising from the 4 May events at Fremantle the State Premier approached the State Governor, Sir William Macartney, the following day to request that he call on the Commonwealth to act under section 119 of the Constitution.⁹⁴ The response to

⁹¹ *West Australian* 5 May 1919 p.5 & 6 May 1919 p.5; de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle', pp.34-5.

⁹² de Garis *ibid.*

⁹³ *West Australian* 5, 6, & 7 May 1919, p.5

⁹⁴ Section 119 of the Commonwealth Constitution reads; The Commonwealth shall protect every State against invasion, and on the application of the Executive Government of the State, against domestic violence.

Macartney's application from the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Ferguson, advised by Watt, was that the situation at Fremantle did not appear to call for Commonwealth intervention. The Commonwealth authorities asked for assurances that the State government had exhausted all the avenues open to it including the full extent of its police powers; on all the advice available to the Commonwealth, the Governor General considered that situation had not been reached in Western Australia.⁹⁵

The impasse at Fremantle had to be resolved promptly: to remove the continuing threat to public peace and safety; to enable cargoes to be worked at Fremantle; to defuse the potential for trouble by having two waterfront unions competing for limited work and last but no means least, get foodstuffs back into the shops in Perth and Fremantle.

The Trades Hall Disputes Committee⁹⁶ had proposed to the Premier that peace at Fremantle could only be achieved if the Nationalists were removed and employment practices on the waterfront returned to pre-August 1917 conditions. It was also stressed that Quarantine regulations should be strictly adhered to, and no attempt be made to circumvent them for any reason.⁹⁷

The Controller of Shipping and the employers advised the State government that confirmation of the pledges of government protection given to the Nationalist workers was the central issue. On 7 May Colebatch told the National Union executive that the State government could not guarantee protection, and suggested that they withdraw from the wharves.⁹⁸ The Premier also promised the National

⁹⁵ The letter in the Aust. Archives deposit B26/1 dated 6 May 1919 from Watt to the GG is an interesting example of a Prime Minister 'advising' the Crown on a course of action. The channel used for communication from PM to GG to Governor to State Premier is also an example of one of the constitutional pathways of the Federal system particularly when matters of Commonwealth intervention are involved.

⁹⁶ The Disputes Committee was the Trades Hall representative body which negotiated with employers and government on behalf of the union involved in a dispute. The WA Interstate Sub-Committee represented waterfront employers and ship owners, this body was in constant communication with the Controller of Shipping and the State Premier during the dispute.

⁹⁷ The proposals put forward by the Disputes committee were detailed in the report prepared for the Acting Prime Minister 13/5/19 in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1. During the Fremantle dispute the remains of Lord Forrest, allegedly no friend of the unions, arrived from overseas. The coffin was brought ashore secretly at night by boat to avoid the ignominy of possible interference, delay, and involvement in the fracas at Fremantle. De Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle', pp.36-7

⁹⁸ Report for APM, 13/5/19, p.4.

Union representatives that his Government, 'would do the best they could for them.' The union executive formally withdrew their members from applying for work on the waterfront later that day.⁹⁹

Work resumed on the Fremantle waterfront at 7am on the morning of Thursday 8 May 1919. The FLU had successfully achieved its objectives by restoring the working conditions in place before August 1917. There were many sore heads and bodies among the work force, but there was a sense of satisfaction realised by resuming working as lumpers and as FLU members. Government authorities, particularly the military, looked on the lumpers with grave suspicion. The Military Commandant for Perth, Colonel Pope, in a report to Major Jones indicated that the returned servicemen involved in the Fremantle riots did so as lumpers not as returned servicemen. Furthermore he advised that the 220 members of the RSA's East Perth and South Fremantle branches had been principally supporting the lumpers' cause.¹⁰⁰

Work stopped on the Fremantle waterfront on Friday 9 May to enable the work force to attend the funeral of Thomas Edwards.¹⁰¹ The State government paid £686 compensation to his family,¹⁰² indicative of the government's desire for a peaceful outcome to the situation they had provoked.

The Trades Hall Disputes Committee and the FLU executive urged the lumpers to refrain from victory demonstrations.¹⁰³ Premier Colebatch resigned on 15 May, because of his participation in the 'Battle of the Barricades'.¹⁰⁴

The State Government appointed a Royal Commissioner on 6 September 1919 to consider compensation claims presented by 289 National Union 'loyalists'. The Royal Commissioner's recommendations, handed down on 24 December, were that 203 cases would be entitled to £84-5-0 compensation each for lost earnings, limitations on future employment, and 'distress' arising from the troubles at

⁹⁹ Williams to Watt, 14 June 1919, p.4.

¹⁰⁰ Report dated 13/5/19 addressed to the Prime Minister initialled 'F.J.'.

¹⁰¹ *West Australian*, 9/5/19, p.5.

¹⁰² de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle', p.36.

¹⁰³ *West Australian*, 8/5/19, p.5.

¹⁰⁴ de Garis, 'Incident at Fremantle' p.36

Fremantle. A further 12 unspecified 'special' cases were awarded £68-15-0 each. The balance of 74 claims were disallowed.¹⁰⁵

The outcome of it all was that the FLU had achieved victory and were able to return to their traditional work conditions. A competing union had been eliminated from the waterfront and the Fremantle lumpers' union provided the work force handling the cargo. They had re-established their control over the supply of waterfront labour. Some eight hundred men were now competing, still under the terms of 'free selection', for, at this time, a limited number of jobs.

Work opportunities did increase as war-time restrictions on shipping services decreased. However, the 'friendly' relations with employers and authority enjoyed up to 1914 were no longer evident. Rather, an uneasy truce now existed between the parties. Government and employers, perceived returned servicemen within the ranks of the lumpers with uncertainty. There was a constant fear of the spectre of Bolshevism and 'mob rule', particularly on the nation's waterfronts. And yet the average rate of cargo handling throughput remained reasonably constant throughout this period. Stevedoring efficiency in the port, therefore, did not suffer significantly from the hiatus caused by the disputes experienced from 1917 to 1919.

The reason rates were maintained was because the bulk of the remaining lumpers were the established preferred men. The introduction of the Nationalist labourers had given the original lumpers motivation to keep their hold on jobs by maintaining throughput levels.

The events of 1917 and 1919 are also important because they emphasise that, in wartime, the waterfront employers were marginalised by the Commonwealth and State governments and became, until wartime regulations lapsed in 1919, 'servants of the State'. The Commonwealth government took regulatory control of all sectors of the stevedoring industry. They acted in this manner because most other Allied governments exercised similar controls on shipping and stevedoring.

Conservative forces in government and the broader community began to fear the emergence of a radical disruptive force found in unions representing workers on the waterfront, in the mines and heavy industry. That force was perceived by the middle and upper classes to be creating anarchy and class warfare already

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Royal commission in Aust. Archives Canberra deposit B26/1.

demonstrated in Russia after 1917 and in postwar Germany. For the stevedoring industry at Fremantle the sharp division between shipowners' and lumpers' interests emerged more forcefully after May 1919. The war and the Commonwealth government had injected political connotations into what had been previously a purely industrial conflict of aims. The national award and the war had made the Fremantle stevedoring industry comprehend the harsh realities of industrial and social life which had been learnt by bitter experience elsewhere. The events of 1917, arising from circumstances experienced not only at Fremantle but throughout Australia, caused a climate of disharmony. This was exacerbated on the waterfront by a scarcity of work and the existence of two competing unions. There was also stress caused by right-wing elements in society who perceived the FLU at the centre of a revolutionary movement intending to overthrow the established social fabric. These all contributed to the 'loss of innocence', a phenomena not confined to Fremantle alone. The intervention by government was unsuccessful because its motivation had dubious intent, the implementation of its policies were fragmented and at its conclusion, the result was an unconditional surrender to the FLU and their supporters in the community. This left the government with its credibility in tatters, unable to intervene effectively to change the way the stevedoring industry conducted its affairs. Once the shipowners, stevedores, FHT and the FLU returned to pre-1917 operational patterns, if not 'happy' relationships, government had no part to play.

Chapter 6

Stevedoring at Fremantle 1920 to 1939: The Form and Effect of the Industry's Human Structure

Introduction

From 1920 the local stevedoring industry had to come to terms with a world vastly different from the one it had operated in before the war. The 1914 national waterfront award had brought changes to employment conditions. The disputes of 1917 and 1919 had polarised attitudes. Nevertheless, as most found in practically every sphere of life there could be no return to 1913 attitudes and relationships. Consequently, those involved on the Fremantle waterfront had to come to terms with this new social and industrial environment.

This chapter will discuss how the stevedoring system operated in this changed climate between 1920 and 1939. This industry structure which eventuated became the working design which is best remembered when variations to its form were discussed in later years. There were some changes to work patterns experienced during this time, the most significant of which was caused by the introduction of bulk cargo handling for grain cargoes, a major, albeit seasonal, source of stevedoring effort for the local industry. In essence, however, the principal year-round work involved in general cargo handling remained unaltered throughout.

The introduction of Commonwealth legislation in an attempt to break the power of the waterfront unions and the formation of a centralised employer group based in Melbourne further removed decision-making away from the port's stevedoring managers, which effectively reduced their authority. The local waterfront union was not immune from outside intervention caused by elements intent on taking control. In the end all elements of the local stevedoring industry had increasingly to accept policies externally imposed by centralised authorities and the commensurate loss of local autonomy.

The Economic Context

The stevedoring industry's fortunes were orchestrated by national and international economic interaction. After early economic growth in the postwar period, it had become apparent by 1928 that the national economy was in trouble because of its dependence on the export of primary agricultural produce.

The main exports from WA in order of concern to the stevedoring industry were wheat, wool, timber, frozen meat and flour. All these and many other smaller export items except wheat and sometimes timber, were sold in quantities or 'parcels' which comprised less than a complete ship load. This determined the pattern of overseas shipping throughout the 1920s and 30s. Consequently, a ship would call at Fremantle at scheduled intervals to load parcel lots of produce, the frequency and duration of which were dictated by the demands of the commodity market. This exigency caused a change to more frequent but tighter scheduling for overseas general cargo ships. No longer would a ship empty completely at Fremantle and then fully load everything on offer for export; sometimes indeed, waiting for cargo to become available. The frequency of stevedoring work, therefore, became influenced greatly by fluctuations in market opportunities in the UK and to a lesser extent in Europe.¹ The detailed effect of this change on stevedoring will be examined later in this chapter. By 1927 the value of Australia's vital export commodities, wool, grain, sugar and meat had fallen. The sale price of wool had fallen from 23 pence per lb. in 1925 to 17 pence per lb. in 1927. The sale price of wheat had fallen from 5.06 shillings per bushel to 3.77 shillings per bushel in the same period.² The returns from exports were affected directly by the sea freight costs because the landed price included stevedoring costs. The cost-efficiency of stevedoring, therefore, was vital to the growers and producers. Evidence was presented by stevedoring employers in the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court that stevedoring efficiency was

¹ Burley, pp.90-1 & pp.185-191.

² Commonwealth Year Book 1928, p.224. Cumpston, I.M., *Lord Bruce of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1989), pp.80-1. *Australians: An Historical Library*, vol X '*Australians Historical Statistics*' (ed.) Vamplew, W., (Australia: Fairfax Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987). Table PC 106-7, p.223.

being eroded.³ The combination of the diminishing returns from exports and also a claim that waterfront efficiency was declining directed attention on stevedoring as being in need of reform.

Economic activity in Western Australia mirrored the national scene except for one very important factor in the State's favour: the export of gold. The collapsing primary produce export prices and unfavourable international capital movements caused in the short term a severe depression to be felt in the WA economy from 1928 to 1931.⁴ This had a detrimental impact on stevedoring because wool, wheat, and meat were the State's main export commodities handled over the wharves. Gold, in contrast, did not affect stevedoring activity greatly, in spite of its value, because the total tonnage handled was small. When depressed agricultural prices started to improve after 1932 recovery in the wheat industry was restricted even though world prices were rising because of difficult seasonal weather conditions.⁵ However, these effects were counterbalanced by the devaluation of world currencies in 1930/1 leading to increased gold prices which greatly helped the State's economic recovery. This beneficial outcome, however, did not increase stevedoring activity.⁶

The unexpected, and certainly unplanned, improvements in the fortunes of the wheat and gold industries were then able to deflect some of the worst aspects of the depression for Western Australia. Nevertheless unemployment in WA at the nadir of the depression in 1932 was 30.3%, compared with the national figure at the time of 30%.⁷ Bolton argues that, because of the resilience of the gold industry, Western Australia plunged into the depression later and recovered earlier than the rest of Australia. He further argues that because of this 'dampening' effect the State was spared much of the social and political conflict experienced elsewhere in Australia during the depression.⁸

³ *CAR* 1928, vol.26, p.878.

⁴ Snooks, *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29-1938/39* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1974), pp.130-131

⁵ *ibid.*, p.38.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.130.

⁷ Bolton, G.C., 'Unemployment and Politics in Western Australia' in Cooksey, R., ed. *The Great Depression in Australia* (Canberra: Labour History, 1970), p.8

⁸ *ibid.*

The shipping services provided to a port are dependent on economic development of its hinterland. A basic fact of national commercial life is that, in the long term, exports must pay for imports. In 1920 WA export income exceeded import debt by £6.5 million. This was reversed during the 1920s; by 1931 import costs exceeded export earnings. The trend from then was reversed and by 1939 export earnings had reached £7.3 million in excess of import costs.⁹ The improvement in the State's economy from 1936 to 1939, when shipping volumes increased, enabled the stevedoring industry to regain strength to pre-Depression levels.

The major concern for everyone in the Fremantle waterfront industry in the 1920s and 30s was the volume and frequency of ships to be stevedored. During the 1920s an average of 750 ships serving all trade routes called at Fremantle each year. During the 1930s the average number of overseas, inter and intrastate ships calling at Fremantle dropped to 740 annually.¹⁰ But the worst years for shipping numbers and hence stevedoring work, were from 1932 to 1934 when an annual average of 680 ships called at the port. This level of activity improved after 1935 when shipping numbers increased steadily and by the outbreak of war when 847 ships were stevedored in 1939.¹¹ Of these, 50% were Australian-owned ships trading interstate, 35% were British and foreign-owned trading with overseas ports; and the remaining 15% were small coasters which traded on the Western Australian coast.¹²

The most marked decrease in the lean years, 1932-4, was in the interstate shipping sector, when almost 100 fewer Australian ships called annually. However, after 1935 that sector grew rapidly back to the 1930 level of 362 ships stevedored each year. The overseas sector decreased in the 1932-4 period when 35 fewer ships called annually, after which the level increased and by 1939 almost 90 ships of this category above the 1930 level were stevedored annually. WA coastal shipping went

⁹ Snooks, 'Development in Adversity' in *New History of WA*, (ed.) Stannage, Table 7.1, p.238. Summarised in *Western Australian Year Book 1970*, p.520.

¹⁰ *FHT Annual Reports* Appendix II 1920-1929 & 1930-1939.

¹¹ *FHT Annual Reports* Appendix II 1930 to 1939.

¹² *FHT Annual Reports*, Appendix II. Vessels trading with Interstate and Coastal ports (including Singapore); part 2, English and Foreign ports direct or via way ports (including New Zealand) 1920 to 1930. (subsequently *FHT Annual Reports* Appendix II.) Detail lists ship names, number of calls in year, duration of call, tonnages and types of cargo loaded and discharged.

into decline for a longer period, from 1931 to 1935, when 30 fewer vessels operated annually. However, that sector regained its 1930 level of shipping in 1936 and maintained that volume of activity until the war started.¹³

The intensity of employment opportunity naturally followed the ebb and flow of shipping volumes. Nevertheless, competition for waterfront work remained intense at all times and, consequently, remained always in the favour of the shipowner and his stevedore.

Managing Stevedoring: Shipowners, Stevedores and the FHT

A hierarchy of relative levels of power and influence within the industry at Fremantle emerged even more clearly after the end of the Great War. These relationships had always been there, but the divisions became even more noticeable after the 1917 and 1919 strikes.

In the context of industry power and influence it is important to emphasise that the shipowners and their shipboard stevedores were synonymous. The stevedoring industry was an extension of the shipowner's sea carriage of cargo business which was based in a particular port. Importers and exporters were the shipowner's clients under the contract of carriage they entered into with each other; consequently, the stevedore was the servant of the shipowner fulfilling his designated function for the ship's owner to discharge and load cargo.

In this context the FHT was another link in the movement chain between ship and shore. The cargo responsibility frontier under FHT control at the ship's side placed the Trust in a unique but equal position of industry power with the shipowners and stevedores. The basis of the Trust's power lay in the fact that they operated ashore at each berth working cargo, whereas the shipowner and his stevedore were responsible purely for stevedoring on a particular ship.

The close shipowner-stevedore relationship was, in the case of the Australian shipowners, due to the fact that the interstate stevedores were an integral part of the company structure i.e., they were 'in-house'. They provided the technical and practical expertise for their shipowner management pertaining to waterfront activity.

¹³ *ibid.*

The overseas stevedores were contractually bound to the shipowner by the very nature of their commercial arrangements and therefore controlled by them. In a number of cases shipowners were shareholders in the stevedoring company and exercised added influence through that relationship. As with their interstate compatriots, the overseas stevedores supplied technical advice when called upon. It would have been a very foolhardy shipowner who embarked on a new commercial enterprise or industry policy without first consulting, among others, his stevedore about the materials handling aspects of a new venture. However, in matters of broader concern, the stevedores were subordinate to the shipping company executives.

Shipowner-stevedore contact with the FHT relating to stevedoring operations was maintained at two levels: overall policy including ship-scheduling by the shipowner's representatives; and cargo operational detail flowing from policy imperatives was supplied by the stevedore.

This cargo operational organisation, control of the work process and flow of information within the industry became entrenched during this period. This was a process which had evolved because cooperation between the stevedores and the FHT lay at the heart of good stevedoring at Fremantle. Without this, divided control of stevedoring would have made operational efficiency impossible. There were, nevertheless, changes caused by centralising employer responses to waterfront industrial relations matters which affected senior management although they did not alter the local practices of stevedoring control.

The stevedore, therefore, was the conduit through which the shipowner's operational intentions flowed. These ranged from the time limits for the vessel's visit to the stowage sequence of cargo being handled including the special stevedoring requirements owners demanded. For example, Blue Funnel's *Cargo Notes* contained 200 items classified as cargo 'liable to' or 'likely to' cause damage, taint or infestation to other cargoes stowed in the same hold. This had to be avoided at all costs. Ship's officers and stevedores incurred grave penalties meted out by the shipowner if damage to ship or cargo occurred which was proved to have been caused by inefficiency or poor supervision.¹⁴

¹⁴ Falkus, M., *The Blue Funnel Legend* (London: Mcmillan, 1990), p.35.

A ship's stevedoring operational plans were imparted by the stevedore to the Trust's wharf manager before the ship arrived. While the ship was in port working cargo, constant communication was maintained by the stevedore with the Trust's shed supervisor. This kept him informed of the discharge 'run' of cargo to come ashore. When loading, the sequence of ports and types of cargo to be handled was advised to enable the shed supervisor to lay out his shed to give a constant flow of cargo to the ship's side.

The stevedore also maintained a watch on throughput to ensure that the shipowner's scheduled departure day and sailing time was achieved. This meant keeping his foremen and preferred men informed of overall progress because their perceptions were limited to the flow of cargo in their own location on board. Depending on the number of hatches being worked and the nature of work being performed, one foreman was stationed at the forward hatches and another aft. The preferred men, essentially gang leaders, ensured throughput performance was maintained in each hatch.

The Trust had a similar supervisory structure ashore. In charge of a berth was the shed supervisor reporting to the Wharf Manager. A foreman was stationed on the wharf, controlling the shore labour forward and aft, which was organised in gangs. Each gang had its own gang-leader or sub-foreman to make sure the pace of work was maintained. Each gang also had its component of preferred men to apply pressure on the other gang members. A third foreman was responsible for operations within the shed. Occasionally he was assisted by a fourth foreman who was given control of cargo receiving and delivery for clients at the back of the shed.

On-the-spot orders relating to the sequence of cargo to be handled were passed between ship and shore from foremen to foremen. Shore lumpers would not accept instructions from a shipboard foreman and vice-versa. The only communications from the ship accepted by shore lumpers were safety warnings given by the hatch topman guiding his winch drivers as loads were being lowered or lifted. Divided control imposed impediments to the work process which had to be surmounted by successive generations of supervisors, foremen and lumpers. The

procedures for successfully dealing with the divided control barrier and making the system work were an operational imperative.¹⁵

The stevedoring companies in service at Fremantle survived the fluctuations in economic fortunes experienced in the 1920s and 30s relatively unscathed. This was principally because they had few permanent staff. The senior supervisory staff employed in operational control while a ship was in port acted in a dual capacity as superintendent of an interstate stevedoring department, or in the case of the contract stevedore company, as manager. The foremen employed by each company, although they were valued men, were not full-time staff employees. They did not have to be given the security of being staff employees because they chose to remain members of the FLU.¹⁶ This enabled them to revert to being lumpers if the volume of work declined or they fell out of favour. The office staff employed by stevedoring companies were very limited in numbers, usually comprising a few clerks and typists. The interstate stevedores were an integral part of the shipowner's establishment at the port and consisted principally of a superintendent stevedore with access to the office clerical staff when needed. The limited staff levels were caused by the underlying fact that stevedoring was a service industry working for the shipowner only. The latter carried out all the wider business activity involved with the importers and exporters of cargo.

The FHT was a government instrumentality and it had few permanent wharf staff. Basically there was a Wharf Manager and a small number of clerical staff. Therefore, stevedoring administration and equipment overheads were a minimal cost item. The cost structure for the industry was such that the industry could survive a period of lower activity or recession.

The domination by the shipowners of the broader stevedoring policy-making process-particularly in industrial relations-made it possible for them to institute quite easily a structure for centralised command when it became an imperative in the late

¹⁵ This is based on the writer's experience when he joined the stevedoring staff of McIlwraith McEacharn in 1960. Long established practices were drummed into a newcomer to ensure the company maintained excellent relations with the Trust and, as far as possible, with the WWF Fremantle Branch.

¹⁶ 'Fremantle Foremen decided to stay in the FLU'. AEWL Central Committee minutes 23 Oct. 1928, in ANU deposit Z430, Book 1. The matter was not raised again until 11 May 1950. AEWL Central committee minutes in ANU deposit Z430, Book 12.

1920s. A major shift in the national organisation of the management of stevedoring policy came in 1928 with the organisation of the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL) by the ASOF and OSRA.

The enactment of the Transport Workers Act in 1928 and the subsequent threat of industrial disputation caused the shipowners to form this waterfront employers' association. It was founded by the ASOF and OSRA to enable their own waterside employer bodies to be united when dealing with the waterside workers' union movement and when appearing before the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. Shipowner representatives in each major port formed a committee which reported to a central committee in Melbourne.¹⁷ The central committee had the power of veto over the port committees and all industrial relations matters had to be referred to the central committee before any action could be taken. The purpose of this restriction was to prevent employers in a particular port from creating an industrial relations' precedent which would then be binding on all ports.

The membership of this employers' body was restricted to representatives of shipping companies. No stevedoring company, not even the major employer of waterside labour at Fremantle, the FHT, was invited to be represented in this organisation.¹⁸ Stevedoring company management and interstate Wharf Superintendents were consulted by AEWL on practical matters affecting throughput or the stevedoring procedures but were not involved in the policy-making process.¹⁹ It was, therefore, not considered necessary or even desirable for stevedores or the Trust to be members of an exclusive shipowners' organisation, AEWL. This premise could be construed as a narrow interpretation of 'employer' based on the principle that the source of payment for stevedoring services determined policy and, consequently, the shipowners ensured that they alone controlled industry policy decision-making. It was the shipowners' intention to keep tight control over

¹⁷ The records of minutes and correspondence of the Central and State committees of AEWL from August 1928 to December 1960 are contained in the Archives of Business and Labour at ANU in 18 ledgers. E217/30-1,52-56. This is the first authentic archive available to us recording the employers' opinions, policies and actions. Prior to this we have only newspaper reports and the FLU COM minutes.

¹⁸ AEWL WA minutes of meetings 30 August 1940 in ANU deposit Z430, box 1, book 6.

¹⁹ AEWL WA minutes commenced in 1928 in ANU deposit Z430.

stevedoring and that control was exercised centrally by being based at Melbourne to ensure a unified response to the arbitration system and the waterfront unions.

To ensure policies were based on practicalities, constant contact was maintained between the interstate shipowner's branch manager and his stevedoring department head while the ship was working. Similarly, the representative of the overseas shipping company kept in close communication with the contract stevedore. The shipowners' port management, therefore, had all the facts and perceptions of the waterfront at their fingertips when they met as members of AEWL.

Before the formation of AEWL, the interstate and overseas shipping companies did not have concerted representation to negotiate on purely stevedoring matters with the waterfront labour unions. The records show that from the beginning the Central committee of AEWL had to restrain the Fremantle committee of AEWL from taking punitive court action against the FLU. Fremantle AEWL complained that the FLU would not observe award provisions, and preferred their own local arrangements with stevedores.²⁰ Each time Fremantle AEWL urged that action be taken against the FLU, Central Committee would veto this, counselling that court action should not be taken fearing that it would bring repercussions in other ports.²¹ The Fremantle committee were reminded that they were now part of a national web of employers and could no longer be simply concerned with resolving local issues unilaterally.

The shipowners' attitude was also reflected in the annual reports of ASOF regarding the Fremantle lumpers. They consistently complained that the FLU would not observe award provisions. In particular, the union condemned the introduction of a second pickup to be held at 1pm each weekday.²² That dispute was not resolved until 1932²³ by the exercise of a degree of cooperation and conciliation between the two parties which had not been seen since 1913. It was, however, an isolated incident as, increasingly, local employers became subservient to a centralised industrial relations management regime. This was inevitable because the local interstate

²⁰ AEWL WA minutes 17 Sept. 1928 in ANU deposit Z430, box 1, book 1

²¹ AEWL WA minutes contain frequent communications between themselves and AEWL Central Committee with this theme from 1928 to 1939 in ANU deposit Z430, boxes 1 to 4.

²² ASOF Annual Reports 1928-30 p.14, in ANU deposit E217/90-108.

²³ ASOF Annual Report 1933 in ANU deposit E217/90-108

managers were responsible to Head Office in Melbourne or Adelaide. The overseas sector managers were equally controlled by their foreign-based Head Offices.

Working on the Wharves

Within the ranks of the FLU there was another graduated structure. At the top were the elected executive members and, equally powerful, the foremen. The foremen chose who was to be employed, but they remained FLU members subject to union discipline and influence. The foremen were not staff employees of the stevedoring companies, but were high calibre preferred men. Next, were the 'pannikin bosses', sub-foremen, or gang leaders, men trusted by the foremen to maintain the pace of work in their absence. Then the rank-and-file preferred men, who were classified as more as energetic followers rather than as leaders. Finally, the lowest of waterfront classifications, the 'casuals'. Each group exerted an influence intended to protect their employment prospects, although the casuals had little power and were, consequently, the most exploited group of all in an industry based on a system of exploitation prescribed by 'free-selection'.

The fundamental feature in the system for all the men at Fremantle was that they were picked up as individuals. In the eastern States' ports the working unit picked up was the gang which gave the men a collective strength to combat the more blatant forms of coercion but they were still subjected to the stress caused by free selection. The nearest to a formal gang structure seen at Fremantle were two groups of men regularly employed by the interstate stevedores on the cargo-passenger ships. These were known as the 'Big six' and the 'Little six'. They were employed in No.2 hatch where the most cargo was stowed on each vessel. The 'Big six' worked on the big or forward set of derricks. The other gang worked on the little or aft set of derricks in the same hatch. Work in No.2 hatch controlled the sailing time of the ship. These men were therefore, judged to be 'gun' lumpers.²⁴

The numbers of men who offered for work on the wharves decreased from 'about one thousand' reported in 1921²⁵ to 872 lumpers recorded working the ships

²⁴ Jim 'Jigger' Dix. Transcript of interview in Battye Library Oral History section.

²⁵ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 23 Sept.1921, p.1. Membership numbers shown in industrial documentation are often at variance with press reports. The newspapers reported verbatim the union officials' count at the meetings, the table in the statistical appendix is the *WA Industrial Gazette*'s annual record of registered members.

in 1925.²⁶ Thereafter the union membership increased to 900 in 1926²⁷, then grew to be 1,196 in 1928²⁸ and maintained approximately that level until 1939.

Employment for most of these men was spasmodic. There were arguments early in the period about the unequal distribution of work. In 1921 plans were proposed by a section of the FLU for a system to ensure the equitable sharing of work by introducing a 'rotary roster'.²⁹ A rotary roster allocated jobs systematically as opposed to the 'free selection' process which favoured the preferred few. These plans were defeated after two ballots of union members had been taken to ensure all the membership had the opportunity to vote on the proposals.³⁰ It was argued by the union executive-with the support of the preferred men-that under a roster system good workers would be disadvantaged by having to share work opportunities with men with 'lower ability'.³¹ This collective attitude enforced the notion of the hierarchy found within the ranks of the labour force based on preference.

The Advertiser reported that the 'preferred men' were now referred to disparagingly by other lumpers as the 'white mice', i.e., as employer's pets frequently employed to the detriment of the other, less favoured, lumpers.³² This derogatory term symbolised the underlying division and tensions evident which divided the union ranks into the 'haves and the have-nots'; i.e., those with regular work and those on the fringe of the industry.

In 1923, although the level of unemployment for the port's lumpers was still recorded as 'regrettable', the numbers of men without work were not seen to be as many as reported previously. This, the *Advertiser* claimed was because many men had moved away from the waterfront.³³

Essentially, working on the Fremantle waterfront was a labouring job which had prospects for a man prepared to work hard for a number of days but without the

²⁶ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 30 Jan.1925, p.1.

²⁷ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 19 March 1926, p.7.

²⁸ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 12 Oct. 1928, p.1.

²⁹ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 23 Sept. 1921, p.1.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *Fremantle Advertiser*, 25 May 1923, p.1.

prospect of regular employment. This was why there was great competition for 'regular' employment whenever it was available.

Assessing the level of earning for a lumper in this time is difficult, because the stevedoring company records no longer exist. An indication of the level of lumper's earnings can be gained from two sources. Tull cites a letter from the FLU to the Federal office of the WWF noting that in 1931, 251 members, or 12% of the membership, averaged only 30/- per week for the year.³⁴ And in 1933 the FLU Secretary, O. Cooke, noted in a newspaper article that the lumper's earnings could vary from £15 to £75 per year.³⁵

Snooks has tabulated the earnings of waterside workers for all ports in Western Australia and those for 'other' labourers in the service sector from 1923 to 1939 from records in the *WA Industrial Gazette* and the State income tax records. His figures are shown below in the table of annual earnings for lumpers and for a selected group of 'others' engaged in labouring work. Examination of the lumpers and 'others' earnings show that, after 1926, lumpers received on average 8.6% less pay than other workers, because they worked on average 32% fewer hours each week. To arrive at this Snooks used a hypothetical 30 hour working week and a 46 week working year for the lumpers; for the other workers he assumed employment to be the standard employment hours for the time of 44 hours each week of a 50 week working year.

Snooks does not attribute the source which he uses for the lumpers' employment hours, only stating that it is 'approximately the number of working hours on the Western Australian waterfront.'³⁶ However, from the table it would appear that the lumpers were earning annual wages close to 'other' labourers in the 1920s but on average 18% less for much of the 1930s. This was based on working an average lower number of hours in the week. What is not shown in this summary is that, unlike the 'others' in fixed or regular weekly employment, the lumpers worked

³⁴ Tull, 'Blood on the Cargo' p.27.

³⁵ *Fremantle Mercury*, 2 Feb. 1933, p.3. 'Wages averaging between 6/- and 32/- per week for a 46 week year.'

³⁶ Snooks, G.D., *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29-1938/39* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1974), p.153.

for periods of intense activity preceded and followed by times without much employment caused by the irregular nature of their employment.

Annual Earnings Waterside Workers (*other workers)

Year	w/workers yearly income £'s	year	w/workers income £'s
1923	1,367 187 (180)	1931	2,049 150 (197)
1924	1,397 196 (182)	1932	1,901 155 (191)
1925	1,401 196 (197)	1933	1,808 161 (188)
1926	1,844 196 (197)	1934	1,765 167 (189)
1927	2,416 201 (215)	1935	1,707 170 (191)
1928	2,321 204 (217)	1936	1,632 175 (196)
1929	2,308 210 (217)	1937	1,654 190 (203)
1930	2,169 201 (217)	1938	1,655 193 (210)
		1939	1,636 196 (216)

Explanation. Waterside work force numbers are from the WA *Industrial Gazette*. These are all WA waterfront labourers, 50% of whom worked in Fremantle. * Income figures in parenthesis are average annual earnings for male 'others', i.e., labourers in service industries, based on their taxation returns. Source. Snooks, G.D., *Depression and Recovery in Western Australia 1928/29-1938/39* (Nedlands: UWAP, 1974), pp.152-163.

These periods of stevedoring unemployment forced many lumpers to search for alternative ways to earn money from sources which would not appear in the WA taxation records used by Snooks to compile his summary. Evidence from waterside workers' oral histories indicate these were activities which were paid for cash-in-hand such as chopping wood, lawn-mowing, gardening, rabbit catching, and other types of part-time work.³⁷ The search for all kinds of alternative work was indicative of the difficulties experienced by many of the lumpers trying to make any sort of a living from work on the waterfront. Competition for jobs determined the attitudes of employers and employed during the interwar years and moulded the Fremantle model into its definitive shape. The interaction of the FLU executive, and nationally their WWF counterparts, with the employers and State and Commonwealth governments at the leadership levels had a limited impact on the actual daily process of stevedoring at Fremantle. It is apparent from the FHT shipping records during this time that ships called regularly, were stevedored

³⁷ Transcripts of interviews with lumpers, Jock Stewart, Jim Dix and Fred Weyman, in the Batty Library Oral History section, acc.160t 1976.

efficiently at increasing levels of daily throughput at Fremantle within the constraints of existing technology. The flow of cargoes across the Fremantle wharves recorded by the FHT had few impediments in spite of all the complaints made by ASOF about local difficulties experienced, difficulties they alleged, caused by the 'depredations of the FLU' during the period.³⁸

These union activities, allegedly detrimental to shipowners, mainly related to the FLU's fight to retain the customs of the port imposed by the preferred men and not to accept changes imposed by the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court. The problems experienced were grounded in the unchanging irregular nature of the work enshrined in the daily free selection pickup of labour. There was nothing unusual about this system of labour hiring. The eastern states ports had similar gathering points adjacent to each wharf gate. In the United States longshoremen attended employment locations known as the 'shape-up'. British dockers waited each day for their 'call-up' at the dock gates. If work was scarce and consequently competition for limited employment intense, these gatherings became scuffles, which sometimes led to violence amongst the men competing for jobs.³⁹ Although competition for jobs created the same tensions at Fremantle, there was only one recorded incident of violence at the local pickup proceedings. This incident is examined in detail later in the next chapter. The underlying cause of the apparent lack of physical violence was because no one wanted to be ostracised by the foremen and preferred men, for fear of being placed in the 'unacceptable' category of worker who was to be employed only as a last resort.⁴⁰

The situation where there was unrestricted competition for waterfront work suited the shipowners. The powerful shipowner representative groups, the interstate owners' and overseas owners' representatives, were adamant that the waterfront employment system had to remain unchanged. The owners always wanted sufficient

³⁸ ASOF Annual reports each in a section specifically about the port of Fremantle, 1920-1939, in ANU deposit E217/2-24, E217/30-31 and E217/70-72.

³⁹ Jackson, M.P., *Labour Relations on the Docks* (Farmborough: Saxon House, 1973), pp.5-7. Larowe, C.P., *Shape up and Hiring Hall* (USA:U of California, 1955),pp.10-15. cf. the television documentary, 'Harry Bridges: a man and his union' shown on ABC TV 21 Sept. 1994 at 9.30pm.

⁴⁰ Oral history transcripts from lumpers, Weyman, Dix and Stewart, in the Battye Library Oral History Library.

men ready on call to fully service every ship when it arrived. They did not want to see the anomalies which rose when ships worked limited hatches or hours or the uncertainty affecting man-power requirements which were caused by shipping being delayed in preceding ports. The owners' primary concerns was always for their ships to be despatched rapidly from the port and the effects of casual employment on the social fabric of the work force did not concern them.⁴¹

Stevedoring Efficiency

It is apparent from the FHT records that throughput tonnages remained at a high level throughout the period from 1920 to 1939. This is an indication of an industry under extreme pressure from employers and shipowners.⁴² Those results came solely from the efforts of men desperate to keep their jobs because there was no improvement for them arising from the technology of materials handling on the Fremantle waterfront. The general cargo and coal were handled with methods unchanged from pre-Great War times throughout the period. By 1939 the tonnage rates achieved for all stevedoring work, the manner in which the work was performed and the terms of waterfront employment had become the accepted norm for Fremantle-the definitive model for stevedoring at the port.

The shipping schedules which were the work calendar for stevedores and lumpers did, however, undergo radical change in this period for the overseas sector. Stevedoring operational programs, therefore, underwent change in the 1920s and 30s when the nature of cargo stowages and sailing schedules of overseas shipping calling at Fremantle altered. Nevertheless, this did not alter the basic methods of stevedoring materials handling; but it did change the duration of time the ship spent in port.

Previously ships arrived at Fremantle with a full cargo for discharge at the port. Once empty, they often loaded a full cargo of bagged grain topped up with wool and timber as a homeward bound cargo. During the interwar years that pattern altered to one of ships calling at Fremantle to discharge limited amounts of cargo and then

⁴¹ Evidence supporting this is contained in Transcript of Proceedings. *Transport Workers-Court of Inquiry, vol.1. Report of Minutes of Evidence* (London: HMSO, 1920), p.6; Lascelles, E.C.P., & Bullock, S.S., *Dock Labour and Decasualisation*. (London: P.S. King, 1924), p.1; *The Foster Inquiry 1945-6* (Canberra: AGPS, 1946), pp.6-7.

⁴² *FHT Annual Reports 1920-1939*, appendix II.

proceeding to the eastern states' ports to complete discharge. The ship would then load 'parcels' of primary produce including frozen and chilled meat on the return journey. These ships called at Fremantle on the homeward run to 'top-up' and were scheduled to reach their European destination in time to catch specific market opportunities.⁴³

One effect which this scheduling had at Fremantle was that often much of the outward-bound discharge time had to be spent searching for Fremantle cargo over-stowed by cargo for other ports. It was recorded that as much as 15% of cargo working time at Fremantle could be expended in this activity.⁴⁴ The effect of this was that, although the stevedore earned additional revenue from unplanned cargo handling activity, the time allocated for actual discharge at Fremantle was reduced. The consequence was that added pressure was placed on stevedores and lumpers to have everything discharged and re-stowed by the scheduled sailing time. There was no leeway because the time in port remained unchanged to enable the ship to maintain its schedule of sailings and achieve its ultimate commercial goals.⁴⁵ The loading of small parcels of specialised cargo on the return call enabled stevedores to effect enhanced throughput although at times the limited space remaining acted against them while increasing the pressure on lumpers to perform at maximum levels.⁴⁶

A similar amount of operational pressure was placed on the interstate stevedoring departments at Fremantle. In the composition of the east-west trade Fremantle was a 'terminal' port. A number of Australian cargo-passenger ships plied the east-west trade competing for passengers by maintaining precise schedules. However, it was the cargo freight earnings which kept them in service. The interstate owners' shipping association, the ASOF, ensured that no unfair or underhand practices were used to attract cargo.⁴⁷ To obtain their share of the freight offering for carriage to Western Australia the shipowner had to rely on the speed, security and regularity of his cargo service to recommend his ship to a prospective client. In this, his stevedores and lumpers were his most precious asset in the competition to win

⁴³ Burley, K., *British Shipping and Australia 1920-1939* (London: CUP, 1968), pp.33-89.

⁴⁴ *FHT Annual Report 1928-9*, pp.10-11.

⁴⁵ Burley, pp.33-89.

⁴⁶ *FHT Annual Report 1929*, pp.10-11.

⁴⁷ Bach, pp.206-7.

cargo for his ships. Nevertheless the only incentive offered the lumpers was the prospect of a job on the next company ship to arrive. Stevedoring supervisors and foremen were expected to ensure the company's level of service was sustained. Fear of dismissal if company goals were not accomplished was, consequently, the motivating force for all stevedoring supervisory staff.

Debate over throughput tonnages became a point of contention when it was used to emphasise the measurement of industry efficiency. During the 1920s, the level of daily throughput measured by the tonnages of general cargo handled between ship and shore grew to be as much as 2,000 tons per day on the interstate cargo-passenger ships which called regularly at Fremantle.⁴⁸ There were, however, lower throughput estimates made during this time taken from the FHT records for all classes of shipping. In 1925, Sir George Buchanan, a leading British specialist in transport and port administration, was commissioned by the Commonwealth government to report on the Australian transport and port infrastructure. He noted that an average daily throughput figure for all Australian ports for general cargo handled was 313 tons discharged and 267 tons loaded.⁴⁹ There is no explanation contained in Buchanan's report of the method of calculation used to arrive at these figures except that they were calculated from figures supplied by ship's agents and shipowners in each major port, except for Fremantle where the FHT supplied the data.

The difference between the practical throughput recorded in the *FHT Annual Reports* on interstate vessels at Fremantle and a theoretical national average figure put forward by Buchanan was because the latter was purely an estimation made with no regard to practical realities. The former recorded results were achieved because they resulted from the interstate ships consistently stowing the same class of cargo in the same hatches. This enabled gangs like the 'Big six', spurred on by the foremen, to work so advantageously for their employers.

In 1928, in a summary of throughput levels prepared for Justice Beeby by the Commonwealth Statistician, Fremantle recorded the lowest level of cargo handling

⁴⁸ Calculated from the records of ships, cargoes and time-in-port in the *FHT Annual Report*, Appendix II, 1920-1930 & 1931-9. A full range of throughput data calculated from Fremantle shipping records from 1880 to the present day is contained in the Statistical Appendix to Chapter Six.

⁴⁹ Buchanan, G., *Transport in Australia vol.1* (Canberra: AGPS, 1928), p.140.

for all Australian ports at 12.53 tons per gang per hour.⁵⁰ The Commonwealth statistician used tonnages supplied by stevedores in the eastern states ports and by the FHT in Fremantle. Beeby came to the conclusion, based on these figures, that the reason for the lower throughput at Fremantle was the result of the 'divided control' of stevedoring operations at Fremantle.⁵¹ In all the other ports there was continuity of control between ship's hold and transit shed whereas Fremantle was radically different. Beeby thought, therefore, that the FHT factor was the reason for lower throughput at Fremantle.

To arrive at a comparable daily throughput tonnage to measure the veracity of Beeby's, and the FHT's, hourly throughput figure against actual results, an extrapolation can be made in the following manner. This calculation was based on the writer's practical stevedoring experience. Stevedoring a conventional four hatch ship employing one gang in each hatch, and each gang handled 12.5 tons per hour, then 50 tons per ship working hour would be handled overall. Working the normal two shifts at Fremantle, 8am to 11pm and midnight to 7am, and allowing for a total non-working time component in 24 hours of five and a half hours for meal breaks and smokes gives a nett daily working time of 16.5 hours. That time and hourly tonnage gives 825 tons per day (tpd).

The throughput statistic given in Beeby's summation was based on the same hourly average tonnage figure given by the FHT to Sir George Buchanan.⁵² This was a general average tonnage taken from a number of ships. A more accurate practical figure was available from the *FHT Annual Reports*, Appendix II, which gave each individual ship's time in port and the tonnages and types of cargo stevedored on that ship. Not shown in these records, however, is how many gangs were employed, the number of shifts worked, the quality of the ship's lifting gear and the number of times work was delayed by weather or other factors. These factors were not recorded, despite the fact they greatly affected the ultimate efficiency of stevedoring activity.

⁵⁰ *CAR*, vol.28, p.881.

⁵¹ *CAR*, vol.26, 1928, pp.878-883.

⁵² Buchanan, G. *Transport in Australia vol.1*, p.140. Also FHT files 'Minutes and reports relating to the visit of Sir George Buchanan in August 1925.' in WAPRO deposit acc. no. 3466, item 106/25.

The daily tonnages stevedored varied because of these factors from ship to ship, but maximum rates achieved ranged between 1,430 tpd to 2,300 tpd, although there were also occasions when daily tonnages were as low as 214 tpd.⁵³ Both Buchanan's and Beeby's throughput figures, because they were based on estimated averages and not recorded actual throughput tonnages can be seen to be statements for political purposes to support government policies aimed at implementing waterfront reform rather than arriving at a true measure of stevedoring efficiency.

The adverse comments about Fremantle's efficiency made by Justice Beeby elicited a stinging response from the FHT. F.W.B. Stevens claimed that Beeby's remarks were, 'invidious and misleading'.⁵⁴ Stevens asserted that they were without substance and Beeby's comments were made 'without the full knowledge of the varying circumstances in the various ports'. Stevens argued that a ship's throughput tonnage was influenced by a number of factors peculiar to each port and ship examined. For Fremantle, these were that the port was a first and last port of call for most overseas ships; consequently men had to work in confined spaces, had to 'break into' stows and had to complete stows by forcing the last bale or bag into place. Also there was the delaying effect caused by the over-stowage of Fremantle cargo. For the interstate ships, Fremantle was a terminal port which required time to be set aside for hatch cleaning and preparation which was reflected by poorer throughput levels being recorded, although on days when purely working cargo, without losing time cleaning, record tonnages were achieved.⁵⁵

It is apparent that throughput figures were used to support a particular stance when viewing the waterfront. For example there was the contention by employers that waterfront throughput rates had been steadily falling in all Australian ports for decades. Evidence was presented by them at the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court in 1928 that, in 1912, the average throughput for general cargo had been 16 tons per gang hour and that it had now fallen to 13 tons per gang hour in

⁵³ 1,430 tpd of general cargo on the interstate cargo-passenger ship MV *Duntroon* in 1936. 2,300 tpd of general cargo on the interstate cargo-passenger ship MV *Kanimbla* in 1939. 214 tpd of general cargo on the interstate cargo ship SS *Koolinda* in 1928. Sources: *FHT Annual Reports Appendix II*, 1936 & 1939.

⁵⁴ Stevens in *FHT Annual Report 1928-9* pp.10-11; Beeby J. in *CAR*, vol.26, 1928, p.881; Buchanan-FHT report 2/9/25 p.1 in WAPRO Acc 3466, item 106/25.

⁵⁵ *FHT Annual Report*, pp.10-11, 1928-9.

1926-7.⁵⁶ These assertions, however, were not supported by the practical experience in Fremantle. There, the lowest levels had improved and enhanced higher levels of throughput were achieved in the same time span.

Highest and Lowest Recorded Daily Throughput 1920-1939

Year	Recorded Lowest	Recorded Highest
1920	300 tpd	1,800 tpd
1925	280 tpd	1,520 tpd
1928	214 tpd	2,024 tpd
1930	370 tpd	1,420 tpd
1935	290 tpd	1,780 tpd
1939	600 tpd	2,300 tpd

Source: *FHT Annual Reports Appendix II 1920-39*

The throughput figures Justice Beeby received from the Commonwealth Statistician came from records examined by the Statistician, J.T. Sutcliffe. He provided, from these, the following estimates for general cargo throughput in tons per day (tpd) achieved in the main Australian ports: Fremantle 400 tpd; Melbourne 435 tpd; Adelaide 640 tpd; Sydney 735 tpd.⁵⁷ However, Sutcliffe said he had reservations about the accuracy of his figures because they were drawn from very sparse records kept by those who had supplied the data and not from any independent source.⁵⁸

The debate about throughput was open to manipulation for political purposes. Practical considerations which placed many reservations on the veracity of the method used to obtain the figures, seldom, if ever, entered the debate. Only Stevens, who had the interests of the FHT and the good name of the port at heart, was able to shine some light on the things which could have a detrimental affect on general cargo stevedoring performance. The only records of stevedoring performance with an element of veracity was contained in the FHT records showing the ship, the number of days it was in port and the tonnage and type of cargo stevedored. No one appeared to make use of them because they did not support the particular argument being made by the employers and government to break the power of the established waterfront unions.

⁵⁶ *CAR*, vol.26, 1928, p.878.

⁵⁷ *CAR*, vol.26, 1928, p.881.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Nevertheless, when not clouded by political rhetoric, the levels of cargo throughput for Fremantle were considered to be adequate for the era by the shipowners and their stevedores. In the climate of trade flow and stevedoring competition at the time, the daily throughput tonnages achieved were produced by the proficiency and determination of the local stevedores and their lumpers.

Appendix to Chapter Six

Statistical Summary.

Throughput levels 1898-1960

Port Quotas, throughput, 'productivity' 1950-69

Estimated cargo ship running costs 1960

Throughput rates achieved at Fremantle.**Pre-1914. Records scanty before the FHT formed in 1903 sources newspaper reports.**

1898 SS Cornwall	400 tons per day
1903 SS Ras Dara	396 tons per day
1902-07 20 ships sampled	412 tons average per day
1907-13 26 ships sampled	470 tons average per day

Table 1 Throughput rates ships working general cargo at Fremantle 1914-1960 from FHT, ASIB & ASIA records.

Year	VsIs sampled	Average Tons per day throughput
1914/5	26	642
1918	20	732
1920	16	979
1925-1930	40	1029
1936-1938	42	1016
1939	22	1186
1941	32	896
1943	30	918
1944	38	841 Jan-May
1944	24	648 May-August
1944	30	502 August-Dec.
1945	30	336 Jan-August
1947	26	672
1949	30	525
1950	ASIB annual statistics	518
1960	ASIA annual statistics	256

Sources. 1914-1939 FHT Annual Reports; 1939-1945 *Customs Arrivals Record*; 1946-1949 *FHT Annual Reports*. 1950 *ASIB Report*. 1960 *ASIA Report*.

Table 2 Stevedoring Throughput (general cargo) at Fremantle measured in tons per gang hour.

Year	on Interstate Cargo	on Overseas cargo
1915	15.40#	16.83#
1928	12.80*	13.78*
1948	12.48	15.40
1950	12.05	16.69
1952	11.83	14.32
1954	11.12	14.54
1956	9.69	12.66
1958	8.29	8.35
1960	9.55	8.60

Sources ASIB & ASIA Annual Reports.

& * quoted by Mr Justice Beeby in 1928 CAR 1928 p.878-883.

in Melbourne no figures available for Fremantle.

* for Fremantle.

Table 3 General cargo throughput tons per gang hour; Loading(L) and Discharging(D) at Fremantle and Sydney 1938 to 1945 from SIC records.

Year	Fremantle	Sydney
1938	12.8(L) 12.0(D)	22.0(L) 18.0(D)
1939	no records	no records
1940	no records	no records
1941	no records	no records
1942	12.34(L) 12.97(D)	20.6(L) 20.78(D)
1943	14.65(L) 14.3 (D)	16.26(L) 17.64(D)
1944	13.55(L) 13.64(D)	15.47(L) 17.33(D)
1945	11.02(L) 12.36(D)	16.12(L) 17.88(D)

Table 4 Bulk Cargo discharge rates tons per gang hour for Coal, Phosphate, Sulphur and bags of Raw Sugar at Fremantle in 1938 and 1941 from SIC records.

Cargo	Discharged by	1938	1941
Coal	Grabs	21.1	20.48
	Baskets	15.0	12.5
Phosphate	Grabs	24.0	19.0
	Tubs	17.0	12.5
Sulphur	Grabs	21.0	21.0
	Tubs	15.0	15.0
Raw Sugar	Bags	19.59	16.68

Table 5 Wheat and Flour loading rates tons per gang hour at Fremantle in 1938 and 1941 from SIC records.

Cargo	Loaded by	1938	1941
Wheat	Bags on crane or gear	16	14
	Gantry-bag conveyor	25	25
	Bulk	80	60
Flour	Bags on ships' gear	15	12

Gantry-bag conveyor 25 20

Table 6 Wool, Freezer and Timber scantling loading rates tons per gang hour at Fremantle (Sleepers-Bunbury) in 1938 and 1941 from SIC records.

Cargo	Loaded by	1938	1941
Wool	Bales on ships' gear	12	14
Freezer	Ships' gear	15	12
	Gantry-conveyor	25	20
Timber	Jarrah scantling	6(9.38)	4.5(8.63)
	Jarrah Railway Sleepers	9(16.5)	7.5(11.5)

Above tables summarised from SIC records in Aust.Archives NSW SP1509/1 item 01430.

Table 7 Further throughput rates for a variety of cargoes in tons per gang hour from stevedores' reports at Fremantle prepared for the SIC, ASIB and ASIA.

Year	Cargo	Rate achieved
1946	Disc. interstate general	9.8
1947	Load bulk wheat	398.0*
1948	Dis. overseas general	19.1
1949	Load overseas Wool	8.7
1953	Dis. Interstate general	10.64
1953	Dis. Sulphur by gear/grab	18.99
1954	Dis. Sulphur by crane/grab	24.36
1955	Load Flour-Bags/ship's gear	12.4
1955	:: :: ::	14.8
1956	Load Pig Iron-skips	8.88
1957	Load Freezer-cartons	9.24

* The SIC memo 12 May 1947 noted that this was the first loading of bulk wheat using the bulk wheat elevator and mechanical trimmers.

In Aust.Archives NSW deposit SP1510/1/0 item R&S 383B Fremantle Reports. SIC pt.2,3 & 4.

NOTE. The above rates were contained in a series of memos correcting the original figures sent daily to the Fremantle SIC and ASIB offices. Regrettably none of the actual daily reports, SIC-3 and ASIB 1 and 1a were filed. Doubtless the SIC-ASIB office staff felt that their filing would become congested which such a volume of paper in storage. Furthermore Aust.Archives cannot locate SIC part 1 1942-1946 for Fremantle-another grievous loss.

Table 8 Stevedoring throughput rates in tons per day (TPD) for homogeneous cargoes, coal, phosphate, bags and bulk grain, bags flour, bags sugar from FHT records.

Year	TPD	Cargo (L-load;D-discharge)
1904	618.2	coal (D)
1904	747.2	coal (D)
1907	819.7	coal (D)
1907	422.5	coal (D)
1912	202.2	c/s tiles(D) Bq. <i>Hilston</i> ¹
1913	441.1	coal (D)
1913	889.4	coal (D)
1913	167.2	phosphate(D)
1913	224.8	:: ::
1913	591.8	bgs.grain (L)
1913	536.3	bgs.grain (L) contd...
1913	2,598	bgs.grain by elevator(L)
1913	2,233	bgs.grain by elevator(L)
1913	1,983	bgs.grain by elevator(L)
1914	486.0	phosphate(D)
1914	297.7	phosphate(D)
1915	837.5	coal(D)
1915	680.7	coal(D)
1915	527.2	phosphate(D)
1915	358.6	bgs.wheat(D) Harvest failed SS <i>Thistleban</i> discharged a full cargo of bagged grain for local use.
1915	513.2	bgs.fertiliser(D)
1918	937	coal(D)
1918	371	coal(D)
1918	892.3	phosphate(D)
1918	599	bgs.grain(L)
1918	330.5	bgs.fertiliser(D)
1920	895.4	coal(D)
1920	814.5	bgs.grain(L)
1920	194.0	bgs.flour(L)
1925	801.7	coal(D)
1925	1,119	phosphate(D)
1925	1,000	phosphate(D)
1925	754.5	bgs.grain(L)
1925	582.7	bgs.fertiliser(D)
1928	874	coal(D)
1928	601	phosphate(D)
1928	521	bgs.grain(L)
1930	823.5	coal(D)
1930	730.5	phosphate(D)

¹ Master of vessel Captain Hodgson, complained of slow rate of work and excessive costs at Fremantle. WA 27 Aug. 1912

1930	708.4	bgs.fertiliser(D)
1936	976	coal(D)
1936	1,018	sulphur(D)
1936	868	phosphate(D)
1936	1282	bgs.& bulk grain(L)
1936	1220	:: ::
1936	1542	:: ::
1939	1134	bgs sugar(D)
1939	1539	phosphate(D)
1939	2056	bgs & bulk grain(L)
1939	1193	bgs & bulk grain(L)
1939	1004	:: ::

Source FHT Annual Reports 1903/4 to 1938/39. end 30 June 1939.

Table 9 Bulk Cargo throughput rates Sept.1939 to Aug.1945

Year	TPD	Cargo
1939	1134.4	bgs.sugar(D)
1939	1109.2	coal(D)
1939	1539.07	phosphate(D)
1939	2056.0	bgs.& bulk grain (L)
1939	1193.10	:: :: :: :
1939	1004.3	:: :: :: :
1941	1299.6	coal(D)
1943	680	bgs flour(L)
1943	921.5	coal(D)
1943	1,215	coal(D) contd....
1945	517	phosphate(D)
1945	1,120	coal(D)

Source Customs Shipping Arrivals and Departures records 1939-1945 in Aust.Archives WA. on microfilm.

Table 10.Port Quotas, Throughput and 'Productivity' Fremantle 1950-1969.

Year	Quota	Cargo tonnage	Throughput	'Productivity'
stevedored	tons per man hour		tons per man year	
1950	1400	2.6 million	1.13	1857
1951	1600	3.1 million	1.10	1937
1952	1700	3.1 million	0.99	1823
1953	1700	2.5 million	0.81	1470
1954	1800	2.2 million	0.76	1222
1955	1820	2.0 million	0.64	1098
1956	1830	1.8 million	0.60	983
1957	1850	1.9 million	0.71	1012
1958	1835	1.3 million	0.52	745
1959	1795	1.4 million	0.60	780
1960	1650	1.9 million	0.84	1150
1961	1687	2.3 million	0.91	1363
1962	1847	2.1 million	0.92	1153

1963	1763	2.2 million	1.00	1262
1964	1765	2.2 million	0.92	1246
1965	1660	2.8 million	1.19	1686
1966	1715	3.1 million	1.48	1807
1967	1675	3.4 million	1.51	2029
1968	1447	3.7 million	1.90	2557
1969	1481	3.5 million	1.75	2363

Sources Port quotas ASIB/ASIA Annual Reports appendix ix 1950-1969.

Cargo tonnage stevedored FHT/FPA annual reports 1950-1969

Throughput ASIB/ASIA Annual Reports appendix ii

'Productivity' Annual cargo tonnage divided by Port Quota The throughput figure is based on the total cargo tonnage for all types handled overseas and interstate, bulk and general divided by the total man hours paid for while employed.

NOTE.

'Productivity' can be seen to be the result of the cargo tonnage exported and imported through the port which is determined by the economic circumstances prevailing. The throughput levels are how much cargo a man handles in an hour calculated from the cargo tonnage stevedored and the man hours paid for to handle that cargo. It is the measurement of the efficiency of the industry

It can be seen from that table that throughput is the true measure of industry efficiency and the standard definition of 'productivity' does not apply to stevedoring, see chapter 8 pp.22-28. A comparison between 'productivity' and throughput can be made from the following calculation based on the 1960 data.

The 1960 port quota was 1650 men. If they worked consistently an 8 hour day, 5 day week, 50 week year would perform 3,300,000 man hours of work which at the average throughput of 0.84 t.p.m.h for 1960 would stevedore 2.7 million tons of cargo. However only 1.9 million tons was shipped through the port decided by the prevailing economic situation.

Table 11. Throughput rates tons per gang hour Fremantle 1950-1968 from ASIB & ASIA records.

Year	Interstate	Overseas	Coal	Phosphate	Grain	Gen.Load
Disch.	Gen.Load Disch.	Bulk Disch.	Bulk Disch.	Bulk Load		
1950	10.26	12.05	11.03	16.69	21.14	14.17
375.25						
1955	9.56	10.77	11.37	14.19	20.09	16.50
495.57						
1960	7.81	9.55	6.93	8.63	21.08	16.64
479.87						
1965	14.28	17.36	7.01	9.63	nr	58.34
463.30						
1968/9*	20.72	34.62	14.15	17.60	nr	58.90
995.52						

* Last operating year of interstate unit load ships, after that all interstate cargo was handled by cellular fully containerised vessels.

Table 12. Throughput rates general cargo tons per man hour Fremantle 1950-1970 from ASIB & ASIA records.

Year	Interstate	Overseas
1950	0.74	1.29
1960	1.23	1.03
1965	1.75	0.55
1968	2.59	0.63
1970	****	0.70

**** by 1970 all interstate general cargo was handled in containers on cellular ships. Sources. *ASIA Annual Reports 1950-1970*.

Table 13. Container Terminal throughput.

1970 360 tons per hour or an average of 18 x 20 ton containers per hour per container-crane on either interstate or overseas cargo. The Container Terminal man power per crane was 9 men to move a container from ship to consignee's truck, therefore, throughput was 40 tons per man hour in 1970.

Sources Captain R. Leggatt STL Manager 1970 interviewed by T. Fletcher April 1992.

Table 14. Effects of Technological Change on Number and Throughput of Waterside Workers Employed in the Stevedoring Industry. Comparison 1955/6-1976/7.

Year	Avg. No WWF on National	Tonnes Cargo Handled per Man Hour	Man Hours Worked Register
1955/6	25,248	25,317,704	38,552,456
1976/7	11,130	50,372,800	13,013,756

Variation -55.92% +98.96% -66.24% +489.19%

Source Fitzgibbon, C., 'Address to Seminar at the Australian Trade Union Training Authority' 17 November 1977 in ANU deposit P102/94 (Reproduced by kind permission of Mr C. Fitzgibbon)

Estimated voyage costs for a conventional general cargo ship circa 1960. Source. Goss, R.O. *Studies in Maritime Economics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968 reprinted 1976) Shipping companies and stevedores are notoriously close mouthed about their operating costs and revenue earned, The following is calculated using figures supplied by Goss extrapolated by the writer based on his own experiences in sea transport.

Ship type. 10,000 grt.; cargo capacity 8,000 stevedoring tons **Estimated Voyage Costs for a Conventional General Cargo Ship circa 1960**

Source. Goss, R.O. *Studies in Maritime Economics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1968 reprinted 1976)

Shipping companies and stevedores are notoriously close mouthed about their operating costs and revenue earned, the following is calculated using figures supplied by Goss extrapolated by the writer based on his own experiences in sea transport.

Ship type. 10,000 grt.; cargo capacity 8,000 stevedoring tons
 Voyage. London-Fremantle-Melbourne-Sydney-Melbourne-Fremantle-London.
 Total distance 23,574 nautical miles, days at sea from departure to arrival London – 65.5.

Cargo carried 8,000 tons of mixed general cargo outward bound and 8,000 tons of wool, skins and hides, refrigerated meats, timber, cartons dried and canned fruits and bags mail homeward bound. Time in Port. Discharge rate 250 tons per day, loading rate 350 tons per day. Tonnages per port estimates only based on AISB/ASIA returns of cargo handled.

Outward bound.	Homeward bound.
Loading London 23 days	Load Sydney 5 days
Discharge Fremantle 4 days	Load Melbourne 12 days
Discharge Melbourne 12 days	Load Fremantle 6 days
Discharge Sydney 16 days	Discharge London 32 days
Total port days 110	
Total sea days 65.5. Total days on voyage 175.5.	
Total voyages per year of 365 days, 2.1.	

Operating costs incurred.

Cost per day at sea	£624
Cost per day in port	£669
Port exit and entry charges	£300 per call
Total stevedoring cost	£2,833 per ton loaded and discharged.
Commissions and agency	£0.563 per ton stevedored.

Voyage costs.

Sea days 65.5 x £624	£40,872
Port days 110 x £669	£73,590
Stevedoring costs 16,000 x £2.833	£45,328
Commission, agency 16,000 x £0.563	£9,008
Total voyage costs	£170,598
Annual outlay 2.1 x £170,598	£358,255

Shipowners' earnings per gross registered ton of shipping per year Goss has reservations about the accuracy of these figures but both he and consequently I use them in the absence of alternative verifiable data..

1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1963
£12/8	£11.1	£6.4	£6.4	£4.6	£6.0

² A ton of 40 cu.ft measurement or 2,200 lbs weight whichever gives the most revenue earned as sea freight, or as stevedoring or FHT charges. (s/t) six hatches, 3 ton SWL derricks and winches at each hatch; service speed 15 knots.

³ Goss, p.136.

⁴ Goss, p.57.

Chapter 7

Stevedoring at Fremantle 1920-1939: Changes to Industry Practices and in Union Politics

Introduction

Stevedoring in the period was affected by fundamental changes to the handling of grain, which had a devastating effect on the work force. There was also intervention by the Commonwealth government to change the national stevedoring industry structure which the FLU by using the politics of passive resistance were able to nullify. Attempts were also made by the Federal WWF to influence affairs in the West without success because of longstanding mistrust arising from the experience during the 1914 Award proceedings. And finally there was a Communist Party attempt to take control of the FLU which was prevented at considerable financial cost to the union. These all had the effect of emphasising that the Fremantle stevedoring industry had to contend with forces for change which originated outside the waterfront and indeed from beyond Australia.

Changes to Bulk-Handling Stevedoring and the Bunker Trade

In the field of bulk cargo stevedoring in contrast to general cargo, the throughput attained for grain, phosphate, and coal handled over the Fremantle wharves was consistently between 800 to 1,000 tons per day.¹ The tonnages achieved were defined by the class of ship stevedored and the stevedoring equipment available at the port for the cargo being stevedored

The handling of homogeneous cargoes-coal, coke, the components of fertiliser, sulphur and rock phosphate-had reached an optimum level of efficiency. This could not be improved until ship-design was changed from multi-purpose vessels to those built specifically for the carriage of bulk cargoes and discharging

¹ Calculated from the ship records contained in the statistical appendix contained each year in the *FHT Annual Reports from 1920 to 1939*.

equipment provided on-board or ashore was enhanced. This change required capital investment in specialised ships and berths which neither the shipowners nor the FHT was prepared to make. There was, however, one cargo for which the WA government was prepared to modernise handling facilities: this was wheat which was the major export cargo from WA in the 1920s and 1930s. This was the result of pressure from the growers' lobby and from exporters. Grain stevedoring was principally the province of the overseas stevedores on-board and the FHT ashore. These were the employer-groups which were most affected by the change.

The impetus towards changed handling methods came from the fact that the shipping freight rate for bulk grain was reduced by 2/6 per ton on shipments to the UK, and 1/6 per ton to Asian ports. This reduction helped the WA exporters compete with exports from other major grain growers.² The overall annual savings by handling in bulk for the exporter Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd (CBH) was £115,575.³

The change to bulk handling in the 1930s came as a result of a decline in grain prices. The returns to the grower in the 1920s when wheat prices averaged around 5/5 per bushel were considered an adequate yield. In 1930 these had dropped to 2/3, then remained around 3/- per bushel⁴ until 1936 when the price started to increase to a high of 5/6 in 1937. The price dropped again to 2/8 in 1939.⁵ These changes in income led the government to embrace bulk handling as the best way to assist the State's economy.⁶

Evidence presented at the Royal Commission hearings showed that individual growers experienced no financial benefit from bulk handling because they received the same price whether it was in bags or in bulk; the return was based on the London price paid for grain after the handling charges had been deducted.⁷ In these handling charges the payment to lumpers, consequently, was the major handling expenditure incurred by the CBH and FHT. The reduction of this labour cost was the prime

² RC 1935, p.6.

³ RC 1935, p.12.

⁴ RC 1935, pp.25-26.

⁵ *Western Australian Year Book 1970*, p.515.

⁶ RC 1935, p.113.

⁷ RC 1935, p.231.

objective of the change to bulk handling since this would cut costs and enhance the competitiveness of the WA grain export industry.

The Royal Commission proceedings made the acceptance of bulk handling a foregone conclusion. The CBH board was formed from the directors of the State's wheat growers and grain marketing organisations. The Board had the strong support of the State government. The Board, therefore, pressed for extended bulk handling facilities in the country, on the railways and at the port.⁸

Initially the concept was resisted by the FHT, because of the losses it would sustain to its revenue earning capacity. Nevertheless, the FHT had to accept the new handling method because the State government supported the change. However, the FHT ensured they would be insulated from financial loss as far as possible. They altered their bulk grain handling cost recovery from their long established method of charging only the operational labour cost to the method used by the stevedore companies; the companies charged all the grain handling expenditure incurred by them loading the ship plus a 20% surcharge to recoup all their overhead costs.⁹ The FHT did initially resist the storage of bulk grain on the wharf area. To overcome this problem CBH had to build their own storage shed at Leighton outside the Trust's area of jurisdiction.¹⁰ However, after the Royal Commission's recommendations were accepted by the State government, the Trust was instructed to convert one of the three bagged-grain sheds on North Wharf to bulk grain storage with a capacity of 3,500 tons.¹¹ The bulk loading equipment, which was in fact the existing portable gantry conveyor belt systems continued to be used for bulk instead of bagged grain. They were reported as being capable of loading at about 200 tons per hour.¹² A new stevedoring company was formed in 1937 specifically to stevedore grain ships chartered by the WA Wheat Pool, Wesfarmers, and CBH. This company was called

⁸ RC 1935, p.13,

⁹ Appleyard, 'Co-Operative Bulk Handling', p.17.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *FHT Annual Report 1936/7*, p.8

¹² *FHT Information Booklet* (Fremantle:FHT, 1936), p.34.

Nichols Pty. Ltd., with the Trustees of the Wheat Pool of WA as one of the major shareholders.¹³ In this way the grain exporters of WA were able to ensure that their loading costs remained at comparable levels with those charged by the port's other established stevedoring companies when they were contracted by a shipowner to load grain on charters independent of the Wheat Pool and its partners.

Grain handling had traditionally been a labour-intensive operation although some attempt had been made previously to reduce handling costs. A primitive form of bulk loading had been tried in 1928; this had consisted of using the traditional method of loading the grain in bags over the elevators and 'bleeding' the bags through openings in the hatch boards into the ship's hold.¹⁴

Then, during the 1931-2 season, a small amount of grain was handled by mechanical 'bulk loading' methods.¹⁵ Commencing in the 1931-2 season the bulk grain for export was delivered to the ship's side in rail wagons and loaded by use of conveyor belts and a gantry structure.¹⁶ The amount of bulk grain a ship could load was limited by the various grain loading regulations. These were enforced under international conventions for the safety of life at sea (SOLAS) which were introduced to prevent grain stowed in bulk shifting while the ship was at sea. Approximately one third of the tonnage of grain in each hatch had to be in bags to secure the bulk grain stowed below.¹⁷

The WA State government established a Royal Commission in 1935 to inquire into all aspects of bulk wheat handling from farm gate to ship's hold.¹⁸ The evidence presented showed that a change to bulk wheat handling was detrimental for lumpers' earnings and FHT revenue. This was because 60-70% fewer lumpers were

¹³ *Proceedings of the Stevedoring Industry Inquiry 1954-6* (Canberra:AGPS, 1958), p.168.

¹⁴ *FHT Annual Report 1933-4*, pp.6-7.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ This method was used until silos and a more sophisticated loading gantry system was constructed at No 10 North Wharf after the Second World War. For the prewar history of mechanical grain handling see Appleyard, R.T., 'Co-Operative Bulk Handling 1933-1983' in *Early Days* vol. 9, part 1, 1983, pp.11-21.

¹⁷ Thomas, R.E., *Stowage; the properties and stowage of cargoes* (Glasgow: Brown Son & Ferguson, 1961), pp.204-13 & pp.435-463.

¹⁸ Royal Commission into the bulk handling of wheat. Chairman W.C. Angwin. WA p.1935, no.5 (V.1). Subsequently RC 1935.

needed to stevedore bulk grain. The FHT charged a per bag handled rate to recoup their costs, consequently, the change forced the Trust to reconsider their cost-recovery structure for grain handling. The change to bulk handling effectively decreased the lumpers' total annual earnings by £26,000 or about 14% of the composite annual pay they had formerly received.¹⁹ In contrast to the lumpers the FHT annual revenue loss was claimed to be £7,152 or 1.5% of FHT annual gross earnings.²⁰ It is important to realise that the majority of the men employed in the bagged wheat sheds were the casuals whose only regular employment on the waterfront occurred during the grain receipt and export period which commenced in December and was usually completed by May-June each year. During the rest of the year these men only obtained wharf work if there were not enough preferred men and regulars to cope with an influx of ships.

The following exchange between Royal Commission Chairman, W.C. Angwin, and Tom Fox of the FLU is indicative of the socio-economic cost to the lumpers of bulk handling,

Chairman. The one thing that is certain is that bulk handling has come to stay. It remains to be shown what number of men it will displace. Do these lumpers get continuous work on the wharf?

Fox. No, all are casually employed by the hour.

Chairman. What do they do when they are not engaged in lumpers' work?

Fox. Nothing.²¹

The receipt from rail trucks and stacking in the FHT sheds of each grain harvest had given many casual lumpers consistent work from December until May each year since 1910. This was now lost. In the season of 1930-1, before bulk handling was introduced, 845,968 tons was exported in 10.3 million bags. Each of the bags was stacked and handled individually three times by lumpers.²² In the season of 1938-9, 278,845 tons of grain was exported, only 14,000 tons being

¹⁹ RC 1935, p.9.

²⁰ RC 1935, p.7.

²¹ RC 1935, p.281.

²² Once out of the rail truck into the storage shed; secondly, off the shed stack onto a conveyor from the wharf over the ship's rail into the hold; then finally from the necking stack into the stow.

handled in 174,000 bags. The rest was exported in bulk.²³ In the course of eight years the lumpers had lost 98% of their grain-working opportunity for employment, the major impact of this loss being experienced by those casuals whose employment was usually on the periphery of the industry.

The changes to employment opportunities arising from altered grain handling procedures affected the contract stevedores and the FHT. The interstate stevedores found that, for them, the alternative to general cargo remained in the coal trade and bunkering the coal-fired steam ships which some of the overseas and most of the interstate shipowners continued to employ. The supply of coal bunkers to overseas shipping did diminish as more foreign shipowners, particularly the Scandinavians, converted to boiler oil used for steam-turbines or diesel-fuelled motor ships. Even so, British shipowners tended, in the interwar years, to retain coal-fired steam propulsion, particularly in the tramp ship trade.

Coal tonnages overall did decrease steadily throughout the period whereas the tonnages of oil supplied increased consistently²⁴, because many overseas shipowners converted to oil fuel to benefit from increased engine efficiency and reduced crew numbers. In contrast the interstate owners maintained the bulk of their fleets on coal fuel, because many had close commercial links with the owners of the NSW coal mines. Some of these ships, however, carried sufficient coal for the round-trip and only took on small tonnages of bunkers in Fremantle at the Chief Engineer's discretion.

The FHT Annual reports detailed the slide in coal tonnages. In 1926-7 77,239 tons of coal and 99,173 tons of oil fuel were supplied; in 1929-30 coal had decreased to 41,634 tons and oil increased to 144,023 tons. By 1939 coal had dropped to 21,884 tons supplied, and oil had increased to 174,410 tons.²⁵ Furthermore, lower quantities of coal were also imported into WA because the Collie coal mines were able to provide sufficient fuel for the Perth and Fremantle gas and electricity generation, in addition to many of the State's railway engines. By the start of the war the coal stevedoring work performed by the interstate stevedores had been reduced by 86% from the coal bunker tonnage handled in 1922.

²³ *FHT Annual Report* 1939-40, p.7.

²⁴ *FHT Annual Reports* 1920-1939, Commissioners Report, p.5.

²⁵ *The FHT Annual Reports* 'Table of Bunkers Supplied', 1926-7 to 1939-40, p.5.

Nevertheless coal bunkering did remain an important part of interstate stevedoring work at Fremantle. In 1922 253,260 tons of coal was supplied to ships calling at Fremantle for bunkers. Of this about 70% was NSW coal imported by sea and 30% was Collie coal.²⁶

The Advertiser noted in 1922 that the FHT still charged a 'War Surcharge' on coal loaded as fuel which the newspaper claimed was to the detriment of the port's bunker trade and, consequently, Fremantle general commerce.²⁷ The 'War surcharge' was still being charged in 1924. To illustrate the detrimental nature of this policy for Fremantle the loading cost quoted for 500 tons of coal was £66-9-7 at Fremantle compared with £25 for the same quantity taken on at Albany.²⁸ The ASOF noted in 1927 that 'iniquitous 20% war surcharge' was still being levied by the FHT.²⁹ The ASOF argued unsuccessfully to have the levy rescinded. The reason for the FHT obstinacy was to maintain their revenue levels from bunker activities which can be shown from records of coal and oil bunkers supplied at the port³⁰. The overseas contract stevedores had their share of bulk cargo stevedoring. The fertiliser trade which encompassed all the materials imported to make fertiliser were handled by them because the ships carrying the ingredients were chartered foreign flag vessels. On the rare occasions high grade coal was imported in a foreign vessel, it was a special shipment handled by one of the interstate stevedores, although the other cargoes were stevedored by the contract men. This was because the interstate men had the expertise and the specialist lumpers to expedite coal discharge.

In spite of these changes to bulk cargo handling the quantity and frequency of all classes of stevedoring work fluctuated widely. This was the main factor which maintained throughput levels at the levels experienced in the interwar years. Stevedoring efficiency was enforced by the pressure on the industry exerted by the prevailing free selection employment practices.

The physical detail of the lumpers' general cargo work remained unchanged. The class of ship calling and the stowage patterns used altered to conform with the new

²⁶ *The Advertiser*, 5 Sept. 1924, p.1.

²⁷ *The Advertiser*, 6 Jan 1922, p.1.

²⁸ *The Advertiser*, 4 July 1924, p.1.

²⁹ *ASOF Annual Report 1927*, p.11 in ANU deposit E217/70-72.

³⁰ *FHT Annual Reports*, 'Table of Bunkers supplied', 1926/7-1939/40, p.5.

trading schedules but this did not change the way general cargo materials handling was performed by the lumpers. A considerable portion of the port's stevedoring effort had become less labour-intensive when bulk grain handling was introduced. Consequently, competition for the remaining work became even more intense.

The Transport Workers Act (TWA)

The Commonwealth government stepped into stevedoring affairs from 1925. Its excuse was the perception that revolutionary influences were being brought to bear on the work force in key industries-mining, heavy engineering and the waterfront. It saw this influence gathering strength as a result of the formation of a communist party in Australia.

The Australian Communist Party (CPA) had been inaugurated in Sydney in October 1920 and became significant in union politics by 1925.³¹ This organisation sought to influence and win strength by drawing on the class loyalties of the waterfront communities, noticeably in Queensland ports and on the Sydney waterfront. There was, however, little evidence on the Fremantle waterfront in the 1920s of support for world communism influencing the politically-moderate FLU leaders and membership. The union movement in Western Australia, and particularly the lumpers, were mainly ALP supporters who supported the use of the democratic process to protect workers' rights. Most, did not support what John Curtin described as the 'bloody revolution'³² advocated by the Communist Party. Indeed the invitations to participate in the creation of Communist Party of Australia stated clearly that it was:

An endeavour to bring about unified action of all who stand for the emancipation of the working class by revolutionary action.³³

³¹ Brown, W.J., *The Communist Movement and Australia* (Sydney: Australian Labour Movement Publications, 1984), p.23. At this stage it was known as the ACP and did not change to being the CPA until 1951. For the sake of continuity and to avoid confusion I have used the acronym CPA throughout.

³² Black, D., *In His Words. John Curtin's Speeches and Writings* (Bentley; Paradigm Press, 1995), pp.54-5.

³³ Macintyre, S. *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p.12.

Although CPA membership Australia-wide declined from 750 members in 1922 to 249 in 1928³⁴, the CPA's influence was the reason used for conservative government action which was intended to curb waterfront union power. This was to be accomplished by encouraging further competition in the maritime labour market-both wharfies and seamen-with the intention of improving efficiency by increasing the already intense competition for work inherent in the free selection process. The government initiatives effectively polarised the attitudes of everyone engaged in, or dependent on, stevedoring.

Among the government actions undertaken to soothe the apprehension felt of communist-inspired class warfare throughout the interwar years there was the attempted deportation of recalcitrant union leaders in 1925, the amendments to the Crimes Act in 1926, and the enactment of the Transport Workers Act (TWA) in 1928.³⁵

Industrial relations and stevedoring activity on the Fremantle waterfront in the 1920s was influenced to a degree by this government action, coupled with the effect of overseas and eastern states seamen's disputes.

In Federal parliament in February 1923, Hughes was forced from office and the new leader in the national government, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, was commissioned to form a ministry. Bruce, and the Country Party leader, Earle Page, led the new government. The Bruce-Page ministry was confirmed in office by a Federal election held in November 1925 which was dominated by the promotion by Bruce-Page of the spectre of the 'Red Menace'.³⁶

Bruce became obsessed with industrial relations and Communist infiltration of the unions. A series of amendments to the Crimes Act were introduced and passed during 1926 to deal with industrial extremists.³⁷ Legislation was also proposed to enable the Commonwealth government to regulate essential services, i.e., those provided by the mines, coastal shipping, and the waterfront. To achieve this the

³⁴ Brown, W.J., *The Communist Movement and Australia*, p.23.

³⁵ Edwards, C., *Bruce of Melbourne* (London: Heineman, 1965), p.114; Cumpston, I.M., *Lord Bruce of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1989), pp.55-8.

³⁶ Brown, pp.37-8; Black, pp.77-9; Edwards, pp.120-1.

³⁷ *Hansard* (1926) vol.112, pp.1049-1077 and pp.1079-1104.

Constitution had to be amended by a national referendum which failed to gain a sufficient majority in September 1926. Other means had to be found and this was the basis of the TWA legislation.³⁸

Disruptions on the eastern states' waterfronts, during 1927 and 1928 aggravated the industrial climate, and further diminished throughput. The situation at Fremantle was by comparison peaceful and throughput remained at a constant level. In 1926 and 1927 there were labour shortages on the Fremantle waterfront reported in the local press. To overcome these shortages the FLU expanded its membership.³⁹ In spite of the possibility that increasing membership included recruits with CPA loyalties there were no reports of politically-motivated stoppages by lumpers during those years.⁴⁰

Changes to awards and variations to employment opportunities were always contentious matters which had to be taken into consideration, but these did not change the industry control structures at Fremantle or the way stevedoring was carried out at the port. That needed major changes to ships and cargoes which were not forthcoming during the 1920s and 30s. Only the arbitration courts and the government, through industrial legislation, attempted to make changes to the way the industry's labour force was organised.

In the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court, Justice Beeby handed down amendments in 1928 to the Waterside Workers Award intended to improve throughput by creating an alternative source of waterside labourers.⁴¹ Beeby's judgement effectively resurrected the former 'Nationalist' union first constituted in 1917 and now named the Permanent and Casual Wharf Labourers' Union (P&CU). The provisions for a source of alternative labour led subsequently to violent waterfront disruptions when the WWF rejected the Beeby Award. Savage clashes erupted when WWF men confronted P&CU workers in many eastern states' ports.⁴² The disruption caused on the waterfront by this conflict enabled the

³⁸ Edwards, pp.112-122; Cumpston, p.60

³⁹ *West Australian*, 10 Oct. 1926, p.4; 5 Dec.1926 p.3; 4 Feb. 1927 p.3.

⁴⁰ Minutes of FLU Committee of Management 1926-1928 in ANU deposit N28/8.

⁴¹ *CAR*, vol.26, 1928, p.867.

⁴² Lawson, J.N., *Conditions on the Waterfront at Principal Ports* (Canberra: AGPS, 1939), pp.10-11 in Aust. Archives Qld. deposit BP107/4.

Commonwealth government to force through the Transport Workers Act (TWA) in September 1928.

The disputation against the Beeby award took place primarily in the eastern states. However, the introduction of a second pickup in the general Award provisions caused considerable union displeasure and stoppages at Fremantle.⁴³ The FLU argued against a second pickup and insisted that they would only work under the provisions of the old award and the 'custom of the port'.⁴⁴ Their reason for objecting to the second pickup was that it would preclude them from seeking work elsewhere if they had not obtained a job at the morning pickup.⁴⁵ This local dispute was finally resolved in 1932, at the height of the Depression, by conciliatory moves made on both sides. It was agreed that instead of having a full pickup at 12.45pm a limited number of men would be notified at the morning pickup and ordered to present themselves at 12.45pm 'for orders'. The agreement was subsequently filed with the Arbitration Court and was ratified.⁴⁶ Thus the potential for continual industrial disputation had been resolved by local negotiations, no doubt influenced by the economic conditions of the time when fewer ships called and less work was available. In the prevailing circumstances of general economic hardship, a level of industrial harmony was achieved because neither side could afford to continue the dispute.

The licensing provisions of the TWA and the formation of a second waterfront union, P&CU, had limited effect at Fremantle.⁴⁷ The main reason was the compliance of the union with the Act's provisions to register waterside workers. The FLU voted at a mass meeting held on 28 September 1928, by 625 to 571 for all the members to register as licensed men to avoid being penalised for not complying with the legislation.⁴⁸ The rationale for that decision was that the preferred men knew they

⁴³ FLU COM minutes September 1928 in ANU deposit N28/8. AEWL minutes September 1928 in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1, book 1.

⁴⁴ Minutes of AEWL Cen.Com., 17 Sept. 1928 in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1, book 1.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ASOF Annual Report 1932-3* p.20.

⁴⁷ Lawson, Hon. J.N., *Conditions on the Waterfront at Principal ports of the Commonwealth* (Canberra: AGPS, 1939), Prepared by the Federal Minister for Trade and Customs for the Attorney General, covers the period from 1928 to 1939 detailing the effects of the Transport Workers Act port by port.

⁴⁸ AEWL minutes 28 Sept. 1928 in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1, book 1.

would get work with or without a licence, while the casuals hoped a licence would improve their prospects of employment. Nevertheless, there were always some who would vote against any proposed government interference in their affairs on principle. The Labor Party State Disputes Committee advised the lumpers to return to work immediately after the vote had been taken to avoid giving the shipowners the opportunity to employ non-union 'scabs' in their place.⁴⁹ *The Advertiser* reported that one union official had told the newspaper that, 'We don't agree with many of the clauses of the new Act. It is a bitter pill for the lumpers to swallow but the ballot [to elect a new Commonwealth government] on November 17 will decide if the Government stands or falls.'⁵⁰

The closeness of the vote taken on 28 September was indicative of the strength of the division between the two forces in the union. Those who voted to register for licences hoped that action would increase their work opportunities; a vote taken against licences was support for the individual's right to find work based on his record and abilities, the attitude of the preferred men. It was recognised by everyone that holding a licence only enabled a man to seek employment on the waterfront. It did not guarantee him a job; only his ability would achieve that.

Another reason for the legislation's lack of impact was the attitude of the WA State government. The Commonwealth government had promised to protect the licensed non-union men offering for work against victimisation. Telegrams had been sent by Bruce to all the State Premiers urging them to provide the necessary police protection.⁵¹ However, police protection for alternative labour, 'scabs', was not forthcoming in Western Australia because the Collier Labor government held power. It was not their intention to order the WA Police Force to enforce the provisions of an Act passed by a Federal conservative government acting against unionists, particularly when the FLU were obeying the letter of the law by registering for licences. Furthermore, past experience at Fremantle had been that police action on the wharves to implement industrial relations policies resulted in many more police

⁴⁹ AEWL Cen.Com. minutes 28 Sept. 1928 in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1, book 1. *The Advertiser*, 12 October 1928, p.1.

⁵⁰ *The Advertiser*, 12 Oct. 1928, p.1.

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 21 September 1928, p.7077.

being injured than unionists. And, of course, there was the memory of the death of a union member during one such event less than ten years previously.

In the November 1928 election the Bruce-Page government's majority was reduced to thirteen in the House of Representatives. One of the newly-elected members was the Labor representative for Fremantle, John Curtin. Curtin had contested the previous election held in 1925 and had been defeated by the 'Red Menace' landslide. The sitting member, Watson, an Independent had a 6,000 vote majority. This was just one circumstance which no doubt contributed to harden Curtin's attitude towards Communists and their attempts to infiltrate the Labor Party and the Union Movement.⁵² Whilst sympathetic to their social aspirations, Curtin could not countenance the Communists' espousal of loyalty to Moscow and the concept of world revolution.⁵³ The CPA's influence in WA was so small that it was ludicrous to claim it had an effect on the Fremantle waterfront. Macintyre records that in 1928 there were 14 members on the books but only four were active including the writer Katherine Susanna Pritchard.⁵⁴

In the year 1928/29, 2,882 licences were issued in Fremantle and Perth. In 1928/9 the FLU membership was 970 therefore there were potentially two men waiting to take each union member's job if the opportunity arose. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that in November 1928 it was reported to the Central Committee of the recently formed Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL) that, '...specially good work was being done by the lumpers [at Fremantle] and men handling phosphates'. The employers thought that the men were performing well, 'to get the full benefit of the award conditions'.⁵⁵ Perhaps more truly, the lumpers were making sure employers had no reason to engage alternative, licensed, P&CU men to replace them.

Union Politics

National union politics also played their part in the industry's evolution from 1920 until 1939. The consequences of these activities experienced in eastern states' ports,

⁵² Black, D., *In His Own Words; Speeches of John Curtin*, pp.54-8.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp.113, 149.

⁵⁵ AEWL Cen.Com. minutes 1 Nov. 1928 in ANU Deposit Z430, Box 1, book 1.

nevertheless, were muted in Fremantle by the port being distant and isolated from the upheavals experienced interstate. There was also still a strong sense of parochialism in the WA community. Its strongest expression, the push for Secession, had a limiting effect on political activity emanating from elsewhere.

An expression of this resistance was seen on the Fremantle waterfront in 1932-3, the worst years of the Depression in WA. In those years there was a bitter battle between the FLU and the CPA represented by its industrial wing, the Militant Minority Movement (MMM). The MMM goals were stated to be to establish contacts with 'red international labour unions', to rely on militant industrial action rather than arbitration to improve working conditions, and to promote and foster class struggle and socialism to replace capitalism.⁵⁶ This was a direct challenge to the authority of the FLU executive and the preferred men.

This kind of dispute appeared unusual for Fremantle because although there were frequently allegations of Communist-inspired agitation in the eastern states, in Western Australia the government defused potential communist-led trouble by moving the unemployed from Perth and Fremantle out to work in the country.⁵⁷

Bolton argues that a reason for the minimal communist-inspired activity among the WA working class was because there was no mass industrial proletariat ready for incitement. The State's economy was based on primary production served by a scattered and isolated work force. There was a potential for trouble in two pockets of mining activity at Kalgoorlie-Coolgardie and Collie. However, gold mining was mainly unaffected by the Depression. The mining community at Collie had assured employment stability because they provided the coal for power generation, the railways operating within WA and some of the coal exported as ship's bunker fuel. Furthermore, the ALP was in government in WA from 1933. Industrial interests, therefore, were often subordinated to political expediency because the party's political and industrial wings were combined in a unique unitary structure within the party.⁵⁸ In

⁵⁶ Brown, p.38.

⁵⁷ Bolton in Cooksey, ed., 'Unemployment and Politics', pp.95-96.

⁵⁸ The party structure at that time is described in detail in Sheridan, T., *Division of Labour: Industrial Relations in the Chifley Years 1945-49* (Melbourne: OUPA, 1989), p.71.

the FLU, the ALP officials dominated industrial matters and the CPA-MMM militants were never given the opportunity to seize ascendancy.⁵⁹

Moreover, the State's two major population centres, Perth and Fremantle, had a combined population of only about 200,000 inhabitants, which made them, by comparison with major eastern states' population centres, merely overgrown country towns.⁶⁰ Of the two, only Fremantle had a labour-intensive industry, stevedoring, which could provide fertile ground for CPA-MMM activists intent on taking control of the industry's labour union.

The FLU's troubles with communist agitators were publicised in December 1932 and February 1933 when court action was taken against them by two lumpers, William Slade and Harry Hawkings. The FLU executive claimed that the court action was a prime case of 'union bashing' by Communists.⁶¹ The December 1932 Supreme Court action taken by Slade and Hawkins, who the FLU executive claimed were MMM members, alleged that union officials had physically prevented them from obtaining work on the waterfront.

The Court awarded Slade and Hawkins compensation from the FLU. Legal costs were also awarded against the FLU. Supreme Court orders 26 and 47 of 1932 ordered that damages of £300 and £500 be paid to Slade and Hawkings respectively.⁶² The legal costs charged by the FLU's solicitors, Richard Haynes & Co, were £542-8-0. These costs were all paid in September 1934. It is not clear how the FLU raised the total sum of £1342-8-0, a considerable amount of money in 1934, but it was paid in full.⁶³

This costly and damaging affair strengthened the anti-communist resolve of the union's executive and that of many of its members. That determination influenced a majority of the FLU against closer ties with the WWF which by 1936

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp.81-2.

⁶¹ *Fremantle Mercury*, 14 Dec. 1932, p.1. & 2 Feb. 1933, p.3.

⁶² A list of 1,117 registered members of the FLU appears in Schedule B of the award operating from February 1936. Not surprisingly Hawkings and Slade do not appear on the list.

⁶³ Court orders and solicitors statement of account in ANU deposit N28/269. For a history of the CPA and MMM activity in relation to the WWF see Johnson, C. 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity 1939-1945' in *Labour History* no.52 May 1987 pp.1-16. Also Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp.154-5.

had become communist-dominated in the larger eastern states' ports. Leadership of the WWF had by then passed to men who were avowed communists, among them Jim Healy and Ted 'Cock' Roach, the new General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary.⁶⁴

Throughout the interwar years the FLU resisted attempts by the WWF Federal office to persuade Fremantle to formally re-join the Federation. The Federal Secretary, A.E. Turley, visited Fremantle during 1932 to attempt to alter the lumpers' minds and resolve a dispute between the WWF and the FLU about the collection of fees and accepting transfers from other ports.⁶⁵ The FLU refused to ratify any transfer applications from 1931 for three years because it claimed that, by then, it had a surplus of 400 members.⁶⁶ This oversupply and the fees dispute gave the FLU reasons which reinforced the break with the WWF.⁶⁷ Resolution of these matters was not helped by an antagonistic personal relationship between the FLU President, Tom Fox, and Turley. It seemed, therefore, a forlorn hope that there was any possibility of rapprochement between the two waterfront unions.⁶⁸

There was also at this time the secession debate in WA. Although opposed by the Labor Party, the debate served to reinforce the community's continual fear of loss of any kind of autonomy to eastern states' domination.⁶⁹ All these factors influenced the lumpers' thinking against becoming a branch of one large federal union of waterside workers.

The FLU continued to demonstrate their independence. During the 1936 Award hearings, Justice Beeby noted that, although the Fremantle lumpers enjoyed the benefits of a Federal Award in concert with WWF members, the members of the FLU were nevertheless 'a law unto themselves' and displayed disloyalty to the

⁶⁴ Brown, p.256; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp.329, 334-5.

⁶⁵ ASOF Annual Report 1932-3 p.20 in ANU deposit E217/101.

⁶⁶ This ban was first raised at a FLU committee of management meeting held in September 1929 when it was proposed and carried that no transfers would be permitted for five years from 2 September 1929. FLU minutes in ANU deposit N28/8 p.304.

⁶⁷ Beasley, M., *Wharfies: the History of the Waterside Workers' Federation* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1997), p.96.

⁶⁸ Tull, 'Blood on the Cargo', p.17.

⁶⁹ Black, 'The Era of Labor Ascendancy' Stannage, ed., *New History of WA*. pp.419-21.

Federal union.⁷⁰ In 1938 the new Federal General Secretary, Healy, attempted to mend the rift. Once again this was unsuccessful.⁷¹

There was also a peculiarly Fremantle industrial relations problem for the port's employers that was brought periodically to the attention of the AEWL central committee. This was that foremen at Fremantle were FLU members. Attempts were made by employers to divorce them from the union, but their attempts were resisted by both the foremen and the FLU.⁷² The AEWL WA minutes recorded that in October 1928 that it was, 'very desirable that the foremen [at Fremantle] leave the FLU'. Later that month it was recorded that, 'the WA foremen may form their own union at a later date'.⁷³

The AEWL in Fremantle tried, in fact, to draw the foremen away. In 1937 a foreman was fined by the FLU for breaches of union rules including 'forcing the pace of work':

Foreman Brosnan [Robert Laurie & Co.], on SS *Mooltan* hooked two slings of cargo on and sent them out of the hatch while the gang was fully occupied putting [hand] hatches in place. Brosnan fined £2-6-3, hatchman J.Cameron fined 10/- and winch driver J.Treloar fined 5/, rest of gang exonerated.⁷⁴

AEWL Fremantle tried to use this case: it offered to pay the foreman's fine or at least advise him to refuse to pay. However, this offer was countermanded by the AEWL Central committee, because it feared that it would create a precedent which could have been exploited in another port.⁷⁵

The FLU did act in support of action taken by waterside workers around Australia in 1938 when a ban was placed on working Japanese vessels at Fremantle. On 13 March 1938 the employers agreed to delay the pickup of labour to enable the Fremantle MHR John Curtin to address the lumpers on the ban they had imposed.

⁷⁰ Tull, 'Blood on the Cargo', p.18.

⁷¹ FLU COM minutes 13 March 1938, in ANU deposit N28/11.

⁷² AEWL WA and Cen.Com. minutes in ANU deposit Box 1 Z430.

⁷³ AEWL minutes in ANU deposit Box 1 Z430.

⁷⁴ FLU COM minutes 12 January 1937 in ANU deposit N28/11.

⁷⁵ AEWL committee minutes in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1.

Curtin advised the lumpers to raise their ban because, 'if it was not lifted the government would invoke the Transport Workers Act and bring volunteers on the wharf.'⁷⁶ Curtin further advised the lumpers 'it was not worth it to run the risk of your liberty here at Fremantle.' Curtin referred here to the FLU not wanting to have to compete with another union for work. The minutes record that there was a warm round of applause and appreciation for the address. The motion referring to working Japanese ships was rescinded at that meeting.

In September 1938 the AEWL noted that once again the FLU confirmed it would not re-affiliate with the WWF. However, in October, the AEWL noted that the FLU was cooperating with the WWF to formulate a new log of claims.⁷⁷ These actions reinforced the perception that the FLU was determined to maintain its freedom of action and, where possible, some remnant of its former autonomy in industrial affairs. The activities of the FLU throughout the interwar period was one of firm self-interest and wherever possible, independence from the policies and actions of the WWF.

The Fremantle stevedoring system survived the interwar pressures caused by economic trends and political intrusion, even though employment opportunities had been severely curtailed by the introduction of grain bulk handling and the reduction in tonnages of coal bunkers loaded. These affected principally the casuals, although the preferred men had to maintain their status by the consistency and vigour of their efforts. The pressures inherent in the employment system maintained its momentum and drove it to achieve its best results to date. Nevertheless, at the same time the local industry was being drawn further into the national industry network by the intrusion, for local employers, of a centralised authority imposed by the AEWL. The FLU remained steadfast in its resistance to control imposed from elsewhere. The question of its relations with the WWF remained firmly on the agenda.

⁷⁶ FLU COM minutes 13 March 1938 in ANU deposit N28/11.

⁷⁷ AEWL WA minutes 20 Sept 1938 and 25 Oct. 1938 in ANU deposit Z430, Box 1, Book 5.

Part C

Commonwealth Intervention, 1939-1950

Chapter 8

A National Stevedoring Plan

The war caused the stevedoring industry at Fremantle to be drawn even closer into conformity with the network of waterfront activity undertaken in other Australian ports. Government industry regulation was introduced to eliminate the chaos being experienced in eastern states' ports. There was no chaos at Fremantle, only some disruption to stevedoring activity caused by short-term labour shortages and poor manpower usage. These had to be rectified locally. However, once a national industry management system had been introduced in the eastern states' ports Fremantle was forced to follow suit.

Although the war had the effect of bringing the practice and procedures of stevedoring at Fremantle closer to conformity with those established in other Australian ports, one fundamental difference always remained: the FHT's control of shore stevedoring. The Trust had to become part of the national reorganisation forced by factors over which the FHT, the port's stevedores and lumpers had no control. The control and hiring mechanisms of the Fremantle stevedoring industry were revised by government regulation which resulted in the end of 'free-selection'. This chapter examines what brought about this turning point for the industry.

The War's Effect on Stevedoring from September 1939 to December 1941

There was an early change of attitude by lumpers towards stevedoring management seen at Fremantle as soon as war was declared on 3 September 1939. The FLU agreed that because ships could no longer give radio advice of impending arrivals the lumpers' pickup times had to be amended. The union agreed to extend the morning pickup and to attend a second pickup in the afternoon from 12.45 to 6.45pm, with a

meal break taken between 5pm and 6.30pm.¹ This caused the ASOF to note in its 1939-40 annual report that,

At this port [Fremantle] where in previous years disputes had constantly occurred waterside workers appeared to recognise more than any other main port the necessity of keeping the ships moving and during the whole year work proceeded smoothly with a minimum of trouble.²

In broader terms the war affected the volume of stevedoring work at Fremantle as elsewhere. The frequency of shipping handled at the port decreased, as soon as war was declared, because almost 40% of the Australian coastal fleet was requisitioned by the government for use as military transport.³ In the first six months of war the Navy requisitioned 66 Australian registered ships from the total coastal fleet of 171 vessels. All the five elite prewar cargo-passenger ships, the backbone of the east-west trade, became Armed Merchant Cruisers (AMC), troop carriers, hospital ships or supply ships for the duration of the war.⁴

The interstate trade was carried to Fremantle by the remaining coastal cargo ships. Over time these vessels were augmented by 'refugee' ships, that is ships stranded in Australian ports, when their countries of origin were overrun by the Germans during 1940 and 1941.⁵ By December 1941, 27 of these 'refugee' ships, Greek, also Greek-owned but Panamanian-registered vessels, and Norwegian-owned had been procured by the Australian Shipping Control Board. After December 1941 and during January 1942 this exiled fleet was bolstered by British and Dutch ships, normally based in Hong Kong, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies which were forced to flee by the Japanese invasion.⁶

¹ AEWL WA minutes 19 Sept. 1939 Book 5 in ANU deposit Z430 box 1. Also FLU COM minutes 12 Sept. 1939 in ANU deposit N28/12.

² ASOF Annual Report 1939-40 p.10.

³ Butlin, S.J., *The War Economy 1939-1942* (Canberra: AGPS, 1956), p.189.

⁴ Fitchett, T.K., *The Vanished Fleet. Australian Coastal Passenger Ships 1910-1960* (Sydney: Rigby, 1976).

⁵ Butlin, p.193.

⁶ Fletcher, T., 'Fremantle 1939 to 1945; extraordinary events at the port.' paper presented at Fremantle History Society seminar 4 May 1996. Sources: Customs Records of Fremantle Shipping Arrivals and Departures 1941-2, Aust. Arch. WA & deposits CHIN 7 & 8 Aust. Archives ACT.

The overseas sector of shipping which customarily called at Fremantle decreased markedly for two reasons. Firstly, German submarine and surface raider warfare threatened shipping on the Europe-Australian run. Secondly, the overriding requirements of military strategy meant that the remaining ships had to be redeployed from their traditional trade routes to the essential Atlantic and the Middle East convoys.

By the end of 1941, 832 ships totalling 3.7 million tons of British-registered shipping had been sunk by enemy action.⁷ Most of these ships had been sunk in the Atlantic theatre of operations. However, they had to be progressively replaced by ships normally engaged on other trade routes, in particular the United Kingdom-Australia-New Zealand trade. Before the war, sixty percent of shipping calling at Fremantle had been British ships carrying cargoes from UK ports. Now these became a meagre one per cent of the annual shipping calling at the port.⁸

Apart from enemy action and strategic re-deployment of shipping there was another cause limiting shipping tonnages. This was the frequent withdrawal of ships for use as floating warehouses in many theatres of war.⁹ Notwithstanding this, ship-warehouses never had to be used at Fremantle because the adequacy of storage facilities at Fremantle were never questioned. The port infrastructure was found adequate throughout the war to cope with Australian, American and later British naval requirements in addition to the flow of merchant shipping.¹⁰

Early in the war the FHT complained about RAN incursions into the space usually allocated for wool storage at G and H sheds Victoria Quay. This conflict of priorities was resolved promptly by the State and Commonwealth governments' use of wartime emergency requisition powers to ensure the Navy's needs were met. This government intervention forced the FHT management to recognise that wartime circumstances had diminished the Trust's power to dictate matters in the port.¹¹ In

⁷ The problems which beset the British and later Allied Shipping Controllers are extensively described in Behrens, C.B.A., *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War* (London: HMSO, 1955 reprinted 1978) Table of shipping losses in Behrens, appendix xxvi, p.178..

⁸ FHT Annual Report June 1945 pp.1-13, published 28 March 1946 was the first comprehensive report of wartime port activities 1939-45 issued by the FHT.

⁹ Behrens, pp.424-5.

¹⁰ *FHT Annual Report June 1945* pp.1-13.

¹¹ FHT files NEM vol.1 & 2 in WAPRO WAA 71 Acc 3466.

Fremantle, reduced shipping numbers and limited stevedoring activity also arose because the Allied and Commonwealth government strategic direction of shipping curtailed the export of Western Australian grain.¹² This coupled with shortages of rural labour and fertiliser, forced the Commonwealth government to order WA growers to curtail wheat cultivation by 30% in 1942 because the State was least favourably situated for the provision of sea transport.¹³ These circumstances combined to make the wharf grain loading equipment to lay idle for long periods and, consequently, to begin to deteriorate.¹⁴

The volume of shipping calling at the port throughout the early war years, therefore, was predominantly determined by the availability of Australian coastal shipping supplying minimum community needs. These civilian requirements, moreover, were dictated, not by the demands of a domestic economy, but by the Commonwealth government's national security priorities. Nevertheless, the average amount of imported general cargo from eastern states' sources from 1925 to 1936 of almost one ton per head of population appeared to have been maintained during the war.¹⁵ The resurgence in the State's economy from 1937 increased cargo imported per head of population to 2 tons until the war started.¹⁶

Tonnages of General cargo imported into WA from overseas and interstate for selected years 1925 to 1939 including tons imported per head of population.

Year	Overseas	Interstate	Total Tons	Tons Per Head
1925	157,990	171,397	329,387	0.87
1928	196,840	197,201	394,041	0.95
1930	182,773	225,233	408,006	0.95
1936	103,720	295,153	398,873	0.88
1937	586,545	329,933	916,478	1.99

¹² Behrens, p.436.

¹³ Butlin, S.J., & Schedevin, C.B., *War Economy 1942-1945* (Canberra: AGPS, 1977), p.205.

¹⁴ *FHT Annual Report 1946* pp.9-12

¹⁵ During the war years as a security measure the FHT did not publish their annual reports. An assessment of the volume of shipping and cargo handled at the port has been made from the Customs records of arrivals and departures held in the Aust. Archives Perth office. This record also gave the tonnages and in most cases the class of cargo discharged and loaded.

¹⁶ Snooks, *Depression and Recovery*, pp.9-11.

1938	621,249	349,453	970,702	2.08
1939	606,536	311,109	947,645	2.01

Source: tonnages FHT Annual Reports. Population from WA Year Book 1971.

Tonnages of General Cargo imported into WA from overseas and interstate in the period 1941 to 1945 including tons imported per head of population.

Year	Overseas	Interstate	Total	Tons per head
1941	88,431	382,259	470,690	0.99
1943	40,913	439,083	487,995	1.02
1945	106,254	462,508	568,762	1.16

Source FHT Annual report 1946 p 4. Customs Records of Shipping Arrivals and Departures. Population from WA Year book 1971.

All these factors ceased to affect waterfront activity once the national government took control of all aspects of life by enforcing a progression of wartime regulations.¹⁷ Government officials in Canberra now determined the amount of cargo coming to WA working to a national centralised plan. Although British and other overseas registered ships now called at Fremantle infrequently, the West Australian-Singapore-Malaya-Netherlands East Indies trade serviced by British and Dutch ships continued uninterrupted until December 1941.¹⁸ The regular movements of these passenger-cargo ships in conjunction with operational surges caused by the troopships and the interstate cargo ships helped to maintain a facade of normality for shipping and stevedoring activity at the port. In spite of these experiences, Fremantle's remoteness from the major theatres of war excluded it, to some extent, from the vicissitudes experienced by other Australian ports.

As Fremantle continued to work with limitations to its flow of work imposed by the war, the stevedoring industry performance in the east coast ports was markedly disrupted by industrial turmoil. Shipowners experienced lengthy delays. These were caused by both manpower shortages, and persistent industrial disputation. The latter arose because wharf labourers wanted to redress the injustices they had suffered during the Depression and acted accordingly.¹⁹ In this respect the

¹⁷ Butlin, pp.348-9.

¹⁸ Dalgety Fremantle ANU deposit 100/3/11 Stevedoring and Shipping includes freight and passenger schedules operating up to December 1941.

¹⁹ *Foster Report* (Canberra: AGPS, 1946), p.10.

AEWL and ASOF central committee minutes noted frequently the disruptive activities of 'Communist agitators' on the Sydney and Melbourne waterfront.²⁰

There is no evidence to be found in the records of the Fremantle committee of AEWL or the FLU that disputes inspired by so-called agitators caused delays on the Fremantle waterfront during the war.²¹ Nevertheless, industrial disruption did occur in Fremantle, but this was caused by manpower shortages and poor management systems in place to allocate the reduced labour force.

The manpower shortages and the absence of a waterfront labour allocation system also enabled some men to manipulate the labour pickup to acquire the most pay for the least number of hours worked. It is worth noting that in Fremantle this practice did not meet with the approval of the FLU executive and wherever practicable it was actively suppressed.²²

In June 1941 the nature of political alignments in the war changed which caused allegations of the Communist source of industry disruption to become groundless.²³ The invasion of Russia in June allied the Soviet Union with the British Empire and its allies fighting against Germany and its Axis partners.²⁴ Prior to the invasion of Russia the communist 'Red Menace' had been held up as the real or imagined cause of every industrial dispute on the Australian waterfront. Now, however, the communists were allies.

Sheridan notes that, with the invasion of the USSR there was a CPA turn-around in attitude towards the war effort. Membership of the CPA Australia wide increased to 15,000 in October 1942 and to 23,000 in 1944. However by the end of the war it had declined to 16,000.²⁵ Just how many CPA members resided in Fremantle and worked on the waterfront is not recorded.

²⁰ ASOF minutes 1939-1942 in ANU deposit E217/16-19. AEWL minutes 1939-1943 in ANU deposit Z430 boxes 1 & 2 books 5, 6, & 7.

²¹ AEWL records 1939-1945 in ANU deposit Z430 boxes 1 & 2 books 5, 6, 7, 8. FLU Committee of Management minutes 1939-1945 in ANU deposit N28/16 & 17.

²² In ANU deposit E217/289 'Labour shortages in Wartime'.

²³ Evidence found in the A & D Cameron collection of CPA material including the newspaper *Workers' Star* supported prompt resolution of problems caused by lack of organisation and labour shortages on the Fremantle waterfront in 1942.

²⁴ Johnston, C., 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity, 1939-1945' in *Labour History*, no.52 (May 1987), pp.77-78.

²⁵ Sheridan, *Division of Labour*, p.225.

Near the end of this period there was a change of government in Australia in October 1941. The conservative Fadden United Australia Party-Country Party coalition was replaced by a Labor Party ministry, led by John Curtin. This created a political climate in power for the ready acceptance of a centralised control structure now found necessary to mobilise all Australian industry towards increased effort and efficiency. This included the nation's stevedoring industry.

The Waterfront Crisis

The entry of Japan into the war in December 1941 made Australians aware how vulnerable to invasion they were. From December 1941 the tempo of war activity and realisation of danger on both the east and west coasts of the continent increased markedly.

Moreover, after December 1941 the disruptions already being experienced to orderly stevedoring in the east coast ports were exacerbated by the influx of American ships, troops and cargoes. Consequently the port and stevedoring services in the eastern states' ports were overwhelmed.²⁶ The surge of shipping activity aggravated the already turbulent industrial situation in those ports. The fact was that Australian ports in general, and stevedores and the waterfront labour in particular were incapable of dealing with these volumes of men and war material. The reorganisation of stevedoring operations to meet this challenge was now an immediate and overriding concern for the Allied political leaders and military commanders.

The changes implemented related principally to the employment system which was seen to be at the heart of attaining efficient cargo handling at each port. To achieve this the Commonwealth government had to find a way to assume management of stevedoring employment and replace the traditional free-market employment structures of the shipowner-stevedores.

The war effort in eastern states' ports from the onset had been frustrated by the WWF encouraging and leading an already militant work force, demonstrating that it was finally 'their turn' to dictate their conditions of employment.

At Fremantle there appeared little need to change established employment structures and practices. Decreased shipping numbers, although being worked by a

²⁶ Butlin, S.J., & Schedevin, C.B., *War Economy 1942-1945* (Canberra: AGPS, 1977), p.228.

diminished pool of labour, still enabled the stevedoring industry at Fremantle to perform its function most of the time as it had prewar. In fact the FHT observed that in the early part of the war there had been ‘comparatively little effect on the port’.²⁷

Any problems that did arise at Fremantle were because of labour shortages which were common to all ports. In some eastern ports men not normally employed in stevedoring took advantage of the situation. These men, registering under the war direction of labour regulations, could claim ‘reserved occupation’ status without producing any evidence they had worked as waterside workers. However, it was found that some had little experience with only a scanty association with wharf work.²⁸ Attempts at this deception did not succeed in the small, tight-knit, Fremantle waterfront community.

The registration of workers did bring a sense of formality to the difference between regulars-FLU members- and the so-called casuals. The former now became Division A men who had first call on waterfront employment and the latter, Division B men, who were called upon when the Division A men were fully employed and more men were needed or when the Division A men had refused the jobs offered because they were too arduous or dirty.²⁹

Some of the men regularly employed on the Fremantle waterfront did take advantage of the restricted labour circumstances for their own benefit. Stevedores reported that frequently 30 to 40 lumpers did not seek a full week’s work when it was available. Some lumpers, employers noted, only offered to work the more lucrative midnight shifts when required and seldom worked other shifts. Consequently, the stevedores wanted midnight shift work restricted to ensure sufficient men were available to work the day and evening shifts.³⁰

Adding to the problems associated with some men choosing to work the most lucrative shifts, there were also days when union men refused certain dirty or arduous work, usually handling coal or flour, and few Division B men were available at short notice to replace them. An instance of this behaviour in March 1942 was reported by AEWL WA. On 23 March the port labour shortage had been 4 gangs; on 24 March it

²⁷ *FHT Annual Report 1946* p.8.

²⁸ Butlin, p.228.

²⁹ SIC Inquiry 1946 pp.20-22.

³⁰ AEWL WA. report to Cen.Com. AEWL 19 Sept. 1940 in ANU deposit Z430 book 6.

increased to 18 gangs; on 25 March it grew to a massive 30 gangs or about 450 men. Then on 26 and 27 March the shortage declined from a peak of 30 gangs to 10 gangs. In a letter from AEWL to the FLU commenting on these occurrences the employers noted that the shortages had been caused by union members refusing 'dirty' jobs on coal or flour which they left to the limited number of Division B men. On one particular day, the AEWL noted that as many as 230 Division B labourers had to be found because 200 union members had refused the unpopular jobs.³¹

Central to early waterfront disruption, and later throughput decline, was the shortage of man-power. Young men had joined the services. Some of the reservoir of Division B men were absorbed into an expanded framework of national industry to provide for the needs of war. Those who remained working on the wharf were on average older than before the war. The FHT noted in 1942 that, 'the brunt of the work fell upon the older men'.³² At that time it was noted that generally the age of waterfront labourers had increased to be two years above the 1939 average age.³³ The work force, therefore, now wholly comprised of the men who had worked the long hours demanded interwar and who felt that present circumstances allowed them to decide the pace of work and conditions of employment. Consequently they had neither the stamina, nor the inclination to work sustained long shifts which the influx of wartime shipping dictated.³⁴

To overcome some of the problems being experienced the Australian Army formed their own wharf labour units for use principally in northern Australian ports. These soldiers, however, were used to augment, not replace, the regular WWF gangs and were limited to handling military cargoes. Ironically, the army gangs were often former wharfies, who it was noted, frequently outperformed their previous colleagues. A newspaper report noted that Australian Army cargo gangs had discharged cargo in an unidentified port at 27 tons per hour beating the previous best effort by a civilian gang of 22 tons per hour. It was also noted that the Army gang had worked for 36 hours non-stop to ensure vital cargoes reached its destination.³⁵ In

³¹ AEWL WA. to the Secretary FLU 27 March 1942 in ANU deposit N28/273.

³² *FHT Annual Report* 1946, p.10.

³³ Butlin & Schedevin, pp.488-9.

³⁴ *The Foster Report*, pp.18-19.

³⁵ *West Australian*, 6 June 1942, p.3.

retrospect this was hardly a fair comparison because the Army gangs were young and fit men subject to military discipline, while the civilian gangs more often comprised of the older 'reserved occupation' men.

The deluge of American military shipping after December 1941 engulfed the port services. Furthermore, there was no possibility of immediate assistance for the work force forthcoming from the introduction of mechanised materials handling. Ports in eastern Australia had few mobile cranes or fork lifts to expedite throughput. Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane had virtually no mechanical wharf equipment. In many cases this was because the decking on most wharves and piers was of poor quality which precluded any heavy machinery being used over them.³⁶ The only port which did have quay-side cranes and mobile run-about cranes was Fremantle!

It was also claimed, by the US authorities, that the Australian port and stevedoring management lacked the logistical expertise needed to handle the accelerated flow of ships and cargo.³⁷ Their assertion was that the huge armada of shipping and cargo required more planning and distribution infrastructure than the conventional port services could provide. The US Army command and logistical services were appalled by the extensive delays experienced in the flow of cargo from ships' holds to their bases. They informed the Australian government that they could not tolerate the chaotic conditions which prevailed in Australian ports.³⁸

The Americans warned the Commonwealth government that to overcome the problems they had encountered in Australian ports, the US Army would dispense with Australian stevedores and labourers and would bring in its own port labour battalions, which consisted predominantly of black troops, to handle the cargoes.³⁹ In light of this warning it became imperative for the Commonwealth government to act

³⁶ Butlin & Schedevin, p.228.

³⁷ Justice Foster, Report on Stevedoring Industry (Canberra: AGPS, 1946) p.6; *Joint Report Sir Owen Dixon, Sir Thomas Gordon, Mr J. Healy March 1941* (Canberra: AGPS, 1941) p.1; see also Butlin & Schedevin, p.485.

³⁸ 'Slowing up Shipping' *Age* (Melbourne) 12 March 1941 p.3; 'Waterfront Trouble' *SMH* 13 March 1941 p.2; 'Subversive Acts on the Waterfront' *Age* 20 March 1941 p.2; 'Subversion on the Waterfront' *Argus* (Melbourne) 20 March 1941 p.3; cuttings in ANU deposit 217/649 see also Butlin & Schedevin, p.228.

³⁹ Butlin & Schedevin, p.228.

decisively to overcome the port congestion experienced on the east coast. Their response was not long in coming.

The Curtin Government's Response

To overcome the underlying problems in sea transport and stevedoring the government had to assume total management control of all sectors of sea transport operations afloat and ashore.⁴⁰ The Commonwealth government had also to deal with an industrial relations' situation which had defined the Australian stevedoring industry for decades.⁴¹ The shipowners, stevedores and wharf labourers had to accept government industry direction gazetted in the National Security Regulations.⁴²

The government, consequently, became legally and operationally the shipowner and stevedoring employer. In practice, the shipowner became the government's agent to operate the ships while they were on time-charter for the duration of hostilities. The government paid all operating charges-including stevedoring costs-to move all cargoes around the Australian coast.⁴³

The government was thus in a position to dictate its own terms and conditions to each sector of the sea transport industry. Had government not taken these powers it would have found it extremely difficult to acquire and maintain the required levels of control it needed to operate a vital part of the war effort.

Curtin's government was able to draw on the practical experience in stevedoring operations used by the British employing an extensive wartime centralised control mechanism to resolve shipping and stevedoring problems they had experienced after the fall of France in 1940. The British had organised all sectors of the nation's transport infrastructure in war to be directed by one body, the Ministry of War Transport (MoWT). Furthermore, that Ministry's representative in Australia, Sir Thomas Gordon, sat on all the boards and commissions formed by Curtin to control

⁴⁰ The Australian Shipping Control Board met first in September 1939. Butlin , pp.150-1. Gazetted under *Statutory Rules 1940 no 275*. The equivalent body in the UK was formed in January 1940. Behrens, p.33.

⁴¹ Identified initially by Huggins in *CAR* vol.8, 1914, p.76, then in 1946 by Foster in his *Stevedoring Industry Report* p.7.

⁴² National Security (Stevedoring Industry) Regulations 1942 and amendments. (Canberra: AGPS, 1942).

⁴³ Butlin & Schedevin, *War Economy 1942-45*, pp.215-6.

Australian sea transport and stevedoring. Consequently, the Australian government had direct contact with the British MoWT detailing the manner in which they had overcome their waterfront problems caused by enemy action.⁴⁴ The range of Australian government policies which evolved for the whole sea transport sector, therefore, were not unique in the context of a nation waging 'Total War'.

To resolve their problems the British government effectively nationalised their stevedoring industry and dock labour force. Compulsory registration of dock labour was introduced in 1940 after the east coast ports had been closed by constant bombing. All cargo handling activity was concentrated on four west coast ports, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and Glasgow. Consequently, in 1941, all the dockers in those ports became government employees, and were paid a guaranteed weekly wage with incentive bonuses. The British stevedores maintained their traditional technical roles as labour supervisors, operational planners and directors. Their operations were scrutinised by government appointed port managers and, if necessary, they were reprimanded if performance did not meet government targets. Similarly, dockers were censured if their performance was deemed unsatisfactory.⁴⁵ These practices provided a model for the Australian government to resolve their waterfront crisis.

To overcome the waterfront problems and the dilemmas posed by the Americans, Prime Minister Curtin appointed a committee of inquiry which comprised High Court Judge and Chairman of the Shipping Control Board, Sir Owen Dixon; Director of Australian Shipping and Australia's British MoWT representative, Sir Thomas Gordon; and the Waterside Workers' Federation General Secretary, Jim Healy. The joint committee was formed early 1942 and was required to urgently examine the situation and propose policies which could be applied to quickly rectify the problems posed for the Allied war effort by waterfront inefficiencies.⁴⁶ The special committee reported to Curtin in March 1942 and recommended that the Commonwealth government take total control of the nation's wharves and waterfront industry.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Butlin and Schedevin, pp.215-246.

⁴⁵ Jackson, M.P., *Labour Relations on the Docks* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1973), pp.26-7.

⁴⁶ *ASIB First Annual Report 1950*, p.19. Butlin & Schedevin, p.228.

⁴⁷ *The Report of the Special Committee. March 1942.* (Canberra; AGPS, 1942).

Responding to the committee's report the government legislated the National Security (Stevedoring Industry), Regulations on 11 April 1942, and formed the Stevedoring Industry Commission (SIC).⁴⁸ Its central committee of management was chaired by Sir Thomas Gordon, and Healy was also a committee member. The administrative structure of the SIC was under the direction of a former judge of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, Mr Justice Piper.⁴⁹ On 13 June 1942, branches of the SIC were established in all major Australian ports including Fremantle. The Fremantle branch was chaired by R.A. Woods, the Registrar of the WA Arbitration Court who had been seconded by the WA government to take up the Commonwealth government appointment.⁵⁰

There was resistance from both employers and employees of the stevedoring industry to the formation of a government overseer to manage the waterfront. The OSRA was forced to circularise all its members in September 1942 to instruct them to obey the SIC's directives without reservation, because, the stevedoring commission was the government's answer, 'to our representations regarding the control of labour and its primary object is to secure better dispatch of vessels'.⁵¹

In spite of the 'commendable' industrial relations record Fremantle had enjoyed at the outbreak of war, and its relative quiescence since, it was essential that the port be included in the national re-organisation of the waterfront. This included establishing the principal component for reorganisation, a Waterfront Employment Committee (WEC), chaired by SIC State Chairman R.A. Woods. The other committee members at Fremantle were shipping company managers and FLU officials. Initially the FHT declined to participate in the committee's work claiming they only wanted to run their side of cargo-handling on shore, which they perceived to be separate from 'stevedoring'.⁵² However, the State government gave instructions

⁴⁸ ANU deposit N29/275.

⁴⁹ Butlin & Schedevin, p.216.

⁵⁰ *West Australian*, 13 June 1942, p.2.

⁵¹ OSRA Sydney, N. Kingsbury Deputy Chairman to OSRA State Committees 11 September 1942 in WAPRO 3471 NEM 37 v1.

⁵² SIC records WAPRO 3471 NEM 109.

that they were to cooperate fully with the SIC and that the FHT Manager was to be a member of the port committee.⁵³ Had they not done so the FHT would not have been able to register under the SIC regulations and become a licensed employer of waterfront labour.⁵⁴ The co-operation of Healy and WWF central executive was secured by giving the undertaking that the Federation had employment preference implied in the National Security (Waterside Employment) Regulations.⁵⁵ In the parliamentary debate before the regulations were promulgated the Opposition claimed that by imposing this legislation, the Government was conspiring to eliminate the competing wharf union, the Permanent and Casual Wharf Labourers Union.⁵⁶ This was a charge tacitly admitted by the government because it wanted to prevent shipowners from continuing to exercise free selection which the government claimed had a detrimental effect on industry efficiency and harmony.⁵⁷

Healy made a radio broadcast in December 1942 to promote stevedoring industry efficiency and harmonious waterfront industrial relations and to respond to negative perceptions of the waterfront industry's war effort. Healy's message was simply that whatever differences the waterside workers, shipowners and employers had in the past they were now engaged in a common enterprise to turn the ships around as quickly as possible and 'defeat fascist aggression now'.⁵⁸

The Operation of the New Stevedoring Management Structure

In its new regulations the government had created a commanding port executive body, the Waterfront Employment Committee, which had the authority to allocate

⁵³ WA Crown Solicitor to WA Chief Secretary, 28 May 1942. WAPRO 3471 NEM 109. SIC records WAPRO 3471 NEM 109.

⁵⁴ Section 12 of the National Security (Stevedoring Industry), Regulations 1942. in ANU deposit N28/275.

⁵⁵ CAR vol. 62 1947. Mr Justice Kirby stated, 'background to demarcation disputes on the waterfront ... in 1942 discussions before the establishment of the SIC the WWF was given the right to claim all work inside the yard [wharf] gate.' This claim made by Healy was denied by shipowners and was not substantiated by subsequent examination of SIC files.

⁵⁶ Established in 1928 during the wharf strike in response to the implementation of the licensing provisions of the Transport Workers Act. Lawson Report 1939 p.6.

⁵⁷ Hasluck, *Government 1942-5*, p.124.

⁵⁸ Transcript of broadcast made by Mr James Healy General Secretary of the WWF on 29 December 1942 in WAPRO 3471 NEM 37 v1.

labour to the ships in order of arrival priority and the degree of urgency of dispatch required for the vessel. In the past the supply of labour to any ship had been decided by the constraints of supply and demand. This *laissez-faire* ideology could not continue during the war when the dispatch of ships was dictated by strategic policies imposed by the war.

Under the new regime, a ship's working program was scrutinised by the WEC to ensure it complied with national guidelines. Initially these directions required every ship to be worked fully-manned round-the-clock in all hatches.⁵⁹ This order was modified when practical shipping men and stevedores alerted the bureaucrats to the wasteful misuse of scarce labour resources which the application of the twenty-four hour manning rule involved. The first principle of economic stevedoring practice was that all hatches be worked to finish as far as practicable on the same day. This meant that hatches with the most cargo - 'long hatches' - had to be worked every available hour, and hatches with less cargo worked as required to finish at nearly the same time as the 'long hatches'. The SIC changed the order and ships were then manned to be worked economically. It also had to be borne in mind that the conclusion of cargo work and, subsequently, the ship's sailing day were in addition dictated by the convoy control organisation and their dispatch determinations.⁶⁰

The WEC structure, with an independent chairman, ensured that no one party dictated the direction of a port's operations.⁶¹ This approach to port working practices changed the balance of power completely. The intention of government was that the old order, incompatible with the efficient cargo work manpower usage should be scrapped. The best use of the labour force and efficient berth occupancy had to be maximised. Effectively all forms of 'free selection' were dead. At Fremantle the employers opposed the concept of a controlled labour market. AEWL in Fremantle complained to the SIC Central Committee that the chairman, Woods, should be replaced by someone with a 'stronger personality' preferably an independent person from interstate.⁶² Woods' experience in the WA Arbitration Court enabled him to weigh each side of every argument. This was a course which

⁵⁹ SIC Bulletin no.4 orders 7 & 8, 1 Oct 1942 in ANU deposit N28/275.

⁶⁰ SIC Bulletin no.9 7 Dec. 1942 in ANU deposit N28/275.

⁶¹ AEWL WA to SIC Cen.Com. 5 & 7 Feb. 1943 in ANU Z430 box 2 book 8.

⁶² *ibid.*

did not endear him to the stevedoring employers. The SIC administration chairman, Justice Piper, advised in February 1943 that he would come to WA and investigate the situation.⁶³ From subsequent correspondence it appeared that Woods continued as chairman until February 1944 when he was replaced by John McDowell.⁶⁴

The port's WEC had to work in conjunction with other Commonwealth government bodies controlling the flow of cargo, the Shipping Control Board (SCB), and the Cargo Control Committee (CCC). Each of these regulatory bodies had a State committee to ensure the requirements of the central planners were met and also to ensure that in the case of WA, the civilian population still dependent to a great degree on sea transport, had sufficient essential supplies provided within the limitations set by wartime regulations and rationing.⁶⁵

Committee members of the cargo control and shipping control organisations met daily in the main ports to decide the amounts of military and civilian supplies which had to be moved. After the cargo and ship committees had deliberated further meetings were then held with the stevedoring control committees to ensure the cargoes nominated were handled expeditiously. The implementation of a centrally-controlled national economy had brought an unprecedented level of cooperation and efficiency to the waterfront.

Indicative of the other results of centralised control on the Australian wharves were the number of peripheral waterfront work-place improvements implemented by the SIC. These were initiated on a national basis, and applied equally to the Fremantle work force. These were all sound initiatives introduced by the Commission. At Fremantle these included a fixed covered labour pickup location; formalised notification of work availability; and regulation of working times and shifts.⁶⁶ These provisions were contained in a document promulgated and gazetted in Port Orders for each port progressively and known as the 'Rules of Engagement and Organisation Scheme'. Each was identified by an order number and often identified in meetings simply as order number of date such-and-such. The progressive Port

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Section 4 of the *National Security (Cargo Control), Regulations of 1942 no.25 22 April 1942* in Aust. Archives ACT deposit A472/1 item W6973.

⁶⁶ in ANU deposit N28/276.

Orders were promulgated for Sydney on 26 March 1943; Melbourne on 1 June 1943; Brisbane an undated document in 1943; Newcastle on 7 Jan 1944; Adelaide and Port Pirie on 3 March 1944; and finally at Fremantle in December 1944.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the SIC recognised that, all too often in the past, vital working time had been lost because of disputes over relatively minor matters. Hours of potential work had been perceived to be dissipated because employers adopted an apparently intransigent attitude to the provision of industrial clothing, items of protective safety gear, or special pay rates for working obnoxious or dangerous types of cargo. In response to these charges it must be stressed that before the war the provision of industrial clothing and special pay rates were additional cost burdens for the employers which had then to be justified to their clients by the proceedings of a Board of Reference. Now that the government controlled the waterfront and paid the bills, the cost of industrial amenities was far outweighed by the need for industrial harmony and stevedoring efficiency.

The Port Orders applicable in every Australian port also included the provision of other minor amenities not previously even contemplated on the waterfront. These included a properly equipped first-aid box at each job and the supply of protective industrial clothing for ‘noxious’⁶⁸ cargoes including freezer gloves, clothing and boots. Cheese cloth was provided for use as dust masks wherever necessary.⁶⁹ Gloves replaced rags or handfuls of newspaper used to handle drums of corrosive chemicals, tar and bitumen.⁷⁰ At Fremantle, the FHT, funded by the Commonwealth government, built a 400 seat brick and tile cafeteria and five 200-seat smoko sheds equipped with hot water urns to improve waterfront amenities for the lumpers.⁷¹

Employer and employee attitudes to industrial relations had to change because Government was now in control on the waterfront. All the parties involved

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Cargoes which were worked in conditions which caused discomfort e.g., frozen or chilled meats, drums containing hazardous chemicals, tar or bitumen, and cement, asbestos, sulphur, phosphate, coal or coke.

⁶⁹ Ironically this included handling South African white asbestos, although North West blue asbestos did not warrant such protection.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *FHT Annual Report 1946 p.6.*

on the waterfront were required to observe the regulations laid down in the Port Orders. If the employers contravened a regulation they could be de-registered. Similarly the FLU and its members could also be de-registered for a serious breach of the rules and so cause them to lose their eligibility as workers in a 'protected' industry. Both parties realised their continued existence was under threat if the regulations were contravened.

In the eastern states' ports the SIC soon recognised that there were too many loopholes in their early arrangements which could be exploited by an unscrupulous sector of the labour force. Regulations were introduced to register all waterside workers. In most ports men had a union membership 'tally' number; each man was allocated an SIC bureau number which was retained by the man throughout his working life on the waterfront.⁷²

An inspectorate was set up to ensure that only licensed men were given work. Furthermore, in the eastern states, because the gang system had been the traditional manner of picking up labour for a ship, men were also registered as gang members or as 'build ups'. Gangs were allocated a bureau identifying number.⁷³ Gangs were then allocated to a ship by the port's WEC, and its employment at the ship monitored to enable it to be redeployed when no longer required at that ship. Each port was allocated a labour quota commensurate with the port's estimated work load.

In Western Australia a different labour register had to be established because there had never been a formal gang system. Men were picked up as individuals and were formed into gangs by mutual consent between the men and their employer. In WA, therefore, the registration of lumpers only went as far as allocating each man a bureau number and defining his category of work, i.e., deck hand, general hand, shore hand and 'hookie-on'. The 'hookie-on' category was peculiar to Fremantle; these men were older, less fit, lumpers employed by the FHT to ensure that there was a constant supply of empty slings at each hook and obviously, to hook slings on and off the lifting hook.⁷⁴ There were also two further categories, 'fit' and 'unfit'. The fit men could be allocated to work on-board or ashore, the unfit men ashore only. Once men

⁷² National Security (Stevedoring Industry), Regulations orders 13 & 14 26 March 1943 in ANU deposit N28/276.

⁷³ Port Order 13 & 14 26 March 1943 in ANU deposit N28/276.

⁷⁴ Fremantle Port Order no.76 of 1944 in ANU deposit N28/276.

had been registered and a labour bureau established the orderly allocation of men to ships could ensue without the prewar factors caused by labour market competition.

The introduction of a roster system in each port to allocate men to form gangs and create a pool of 'build-ups' was the first step taken towards de-casualising the stevedoring industry. Surprisingly this was not seen by the rank-and-file workers as beneficial to their well-being. It was noted in Sydney for example that a major factor underlying the men's refusal to accept registration and direction to jobs was because man-power inspectors were constantly present at the pickup centres. These government officers noted those men who refused jobs and they could subsequently lose their reserved occupation status and be directed into other work. The men resented direction and wanted to continue picking their jobs, hours of work, and employers⁷⁵.

In Fremantle before regulation was firmly established, men applied their own 'free-selection' criteria to choose to work the best-paid hours. The Western Australian SIC recorded an example of this on 11 September 1942 when it observed that some men preferred to be unemployed rather than take a weekday shift work of 12.5 hours work for £2-7-0, when they could get a 7 hours night shift for £3-0-0, or Sunday work for 8 hours to earn £5-16-0⁷⁶. In an extreme case under free choice, a man who worked a total of 14 hours in two midnight shifts on Saturday and Sunday could earn as much as a man who had worked 60 hours in five shifts, 8am to 11pm Monday to Friday⁷⁷.

To overcome free-selection traditions harmful to the war effort, the efficient use of the waterfront labour force required restrictions to be placed on all previously enjoyed freedoms. Rostering and work allocation was progressively introduced on the national waterfront. Fremantle, because it was relatively removed from the volume of wartime cargo activity and because of its quiescent industrial relations was the last port affected by the introduction of full-scale rosters and job allocation.

⁷⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald* 30 March 1943 p.1 in Aust. Archives ACT Prime Minister's Department deposit A5954/1 item 455/20.

⁷⁶ SIC report WAPRO 3471 NEM 109

⁷⁷ SIC Fremantle report 11 Sept. 1942 in WAPRO deposit NEM vol. 1.

To comply with the SIC port orders, the allocation of bureau numbers, the registration of lumpers, and the establishment of a rudimentary scheme of employment in Fremantle had started in August 1942⁷⁸. This had resulted from complaints made by the US military authorities regarding the delays to their vessels experienced after they commenced to arrive in WA in March 1942⁷⁹.

It was soon identified that probably the greatest impediment to port efficiency was the absence of regular shift times for the lumpers in the port's traditional working arrangements agreed by local employers and lumpers alike. Men normally started cargo work as soon as the vessel arrived, worked as long as the employer required them to (usually for a 24 hour period) and then stood down for 8 hours under FLU rules. In times of chronic shortages of wharf labour this work pattern resulted in cargo operations ceasing for a number of hours until sufficient men became available to recommence work.

To overcome the problem, it was agreed by the employers and the FLU that a nominal three shift system of working would be introduced on a trial basis. The shifts to be worked would be from 8am to 5pm, 5pm to midnight, and midnight to 8am. It was noted by *The Workers' Star* that under the new system only two hours in every 24 was lost to meal-breaks whereas under the old it had been five and a half hours. Furthermore, the paper noted that under the new arrangement continuity of effort was maintained⁸⁰.

The use of shifts on a ship would be commensurate with its working program decided by the required sailing day and individual hatch cargo tonnages. It was recognised that because of the limited numbers of men available, on most ships the day and evening shifts would have to be worked by the same man, relieved by another lumper at midnight. Finally an organised working scheme utilising all the port's available labour force was introduced⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Contained in a report from the WA SIC committee chairman to the central SIC committee in Melbourne dated 11 August 1942 in ANU deposit E217/248.

⁷⁹ Minutes of Conference attended by US Navy, RAN, SIC WA State Committee, FHT management and FLU executive on 12 March 1942 in ANU deposit E217/248.

⁸⁰ 'Lumpers do their bit' *Workers' Star* 24 March 1942 p.1 in A & D Cameron Collection WAPRO.

⁸¹ Memos, circulars and minutes of meetings 12 to 19 March 1942 in ANU deposit E217/248.

This arrangement did not overcome the basic problem caused by men continuing to pick and choose their jobs. However, the registration of workers and the threat of losing their reserved status forced the lumpers to become increasingly circumspect in the way in which they chose their jobs and hours of work. There were fewer incidents reported of men choosing only to work weekends to obtain the premium rates of pay and not report for work on weekdays.

The framework was in place at Fremantle for the introduction of labour allocation to the job now processed each morning from the SIC bureau by a person who was not the employer. A new day for waterfront employment had dawned, although its effect on efficiency had still to be determined.

There was also a glimpse of the future for general cargo handling in a limited beneficial development introduced by the American Army. In 1943 they initiated a new concept in materials handling for their cargoes in Sydney and Melbourne. This was the fork-lift truck-pallet system. Regrettably, because in most cases the ships involved were conventional general cargo ships, the pallet loads could not be stowed intact in the ship's holds; nevertheless, by bringing the pallets to the ship's side by fork truck and lifting two pallets simultaneously, a 50% increase in throughput was achieved. On one ship which was suitable for pallet loading in the holds an even greater throughput level was seen; 10,700 tons of palletised Army stores were loaded in 2.5 days. This represented an average throughput of 4,280 tons per day⁸².

The key to this operation was that full cooperation had to be made between the manufacturer, or supplier, carriers, wharfingers, and stevedores. It was the first time the 'door-to-door' delivery and receipt concept had been attempted in Australia. The SIC and the Commonwealth government were impressed by this demonstration of stevedoring efficiency. The British Ministry of War Transport representatives visiting Australia in 1943 had also urged that 'modern handling equipment' must be used to enhance waterfront throughput⁸³. The shipowners, however, retained the conventional design for general cargo ships when new ships

⁸² AEWL report on mechanisation of cargo handling 19 October 1944 in WAPRO 3471 NEM 146.

⁸³ Among these BMWT representatives was Sir John Nicholson a senior Director of Blue Funnel. When Blue Funnel resumed control of its berths on the Liverpool and Wallasey docks after the war they purchased towmotors and fork lifts to improve handling ashore

were commissioned. The lessons learnt arising from palletisation and the use of fork lift trucks to improve handling ashore were not applied to ship design to enable the full benefits of unit handling and door-to-door delivery to be realised in the stevedoring industry. The AEWL noted that full-scale mechanisation was not contemplated in ports other than Melbourne and Sydney for the foreseeable future dependent on the volume of flow of war cargoes⁸⁴. Shipowners, by ignoring the materials-handling lessons learnt in war, locked themselves into the resumption of prewar cargo working practices without the ability to ‘drive men’ to achieve the results they required to maintain their economic survival.

Implementing the Rotary Roster System 1944-45

Firm action by the Commonwealth government, including the threat of conscription for all waterside workers if they did not comply with SIC regulations, backed by visits to each port by Healy, forced most lumpers to observe the rules⁸⁵. Progressively, rostering was implemented in the east, commencing with Sydney in March 1943. By March 1944 all eastern ports, including the South Australian ports, had roster systems operating⁸⁶.

In an effort to divert the government and the WWF from their chosen regulatory path, the FLU during 1943 put forward a proposal to Fremantle AEWL that the union be permitted to run a version of the roster system and a hiring hall similar to the arrangements introduced prewar by the Longshoremen’s Union on the US west coast⁸⁷. The proposal was not accepted because it contravened the government’s guidelines for waterfront labour employment management. Furthermore the US system was union-operated and-controlled, which did not conform with the policies of the government’s wartime national security structure

⁸⁴ AEWL report on mechanisation of cargo handling 10 Oct. 1944 in WAPRO 3471 NEM 146.

⁸⁵ Cutting from *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 March 1943 and 1 April 1943 and teleprinter message, Prime Minister to Minister of Labour 17/4/43 in Aust. Archives ACT series A5954/1 item 455/20.

⁸⁶ Reports, circulars and correspondence in ANU deposit N28/277

⁸⁷ AEWL WA to AEWL Cen.Com. 15 Nov. 1943 in ANU deposit Z430 box 2 book 8. The 1934 establishment of West Coast USA longshoremen’s hiring halls is dealt with in Larowe, C.P., *Shape Up and Hiring Hall* (California: U of California Press, 1955), pp.97-103.

because it merely transferred labour management procedures from the control of one vested interest to another within the industry. Equally, because it was a Fremantle lumpers' union initiative, acceptance was contrary to WWF central committee policy which was to support the SIC roster system. The concept was doomed, therefore, because it defied the centralised control of the stevedoring industry.

During 1944 some refinements to the working time were introduced in Fremantle. Vessels were given 'urgent' and 'non-urgent' status by the WEC shipping priority committee. A 'non-urgent' vessel's day and evening spread of hours was reduced to 8am to 10pm on all days except Wednesday, which was worked 8am-5pm, and on Saturdays with ships in this category worked from 8am to noon. Traditionally in the port Wednesday evening was regarded by the majority of lumpers as a time to be spent at home attending to family matters. Saturday afternoon required the almost mandatory participation in supporting East Fremantle or South Fremantle football teams in winter, and the local cricket teams including the 'Lumpers XI' in the summer months⁸⁸. This arrangement effectively reduced the strain imposed on the men working the longer spread of the hours. The midnight relief gangs continued to be employed on urgent ships and in 'long' hatches on non-urgent ships-when there were sufficient men available⁸⁹. It also became a practice for the SIC to transfer men from Bunbury to Fremantle to overcome some of the labour shortages at the latter port. The SIC, not the shipowner, paid the transfer costs for travel, accommodation and certain living expenses involved in this operation⁹⁰.

In spite of all the government and SIC efforts towards creating a 'fairer' work place, stevedoring efficiency measured in tons per day handled at Fremantle began to fall during 1944. In the first five months until May the daily tonnages averaged 841, slightly less than the 1943 average throughput of 918. From May to August the daily throughput declined to 648, and then fell to 502 for the period August to December.

The SIC had instituted a report system which required stevedores to fill in daily report forms known as SIC-3 on work performance noting reasons for delays

⁸⁸ Transcripts of oral histories taken from retired lumpers Stewart, Dix and Weyman in the Battye Library Oral History section.

⁸⁹ These arrangements were to be in force for a trial period of three months and were promulgated in SIC Port Order for Fremantle no.76 (Revised), Nov. 1944. in ANU deposit N28/277.

⁹⁰ AEWL WA to AEWL Cen.Com 19 April 1943 in ANU deposit Z430 box 2 book 8.

and sub-standard work but because of their volume these records have not been preserved⁹¹. Without this detailed evidence to show the cause of decreased throughput it must be considered that the detrimental effects of the age of the labour force coupled with the re-emergence of the war-weariness seen 30 years before during the 1914-18 war were understandable reasons for the decline in waterfront performance. The news of the roster system's implementation in the east and its consequences, primarily the complete elimination of the shipowners' powers of coercion inherent in the free-selection labour hiring process, also played an important part in the decline in stevedoring performance.

The conclusions drawn by the Fremantle men from their observations of events in eastern states ports arising from the implementation of a rotary roster used to place men on the job was that they now had no reason to work hard to retain their job status and employment prospects. It was at this point the Fremantle model lost the incentive which gave its momentum and industry performance began to decline.

The SIC introduced the 'rotary roster' system at Fremantle in December 1944⁹². The delay in implementation in the port was because the SIC had to attend to seemingly mandatory disputes caused by the progressive introduction of rostering in each eastern state's port before it could turn its undivided attention to Fremantle⁹³. These disruptions in conjunction with a perceived lack of urgency to start rostering at Fremantle while the main thrust of military operations were concentrated in the Pacific region caused further delays to its realisation in the west.

When the Fremantle roster was being formulated it preserved the port's traditional method of picking-up labour as individuals to create the pool of men from which gangs were then formed at the ship's side. This was the essential difference from the roster practice in the eastern states to regulate and allocate jobs and labour. The FLU executive categorically rejected the introduction of the new roster system as

⁹¹ Search made in the Australian Archives NSW, ACT and Victorian branches where the wartime SIC records were housed. The ANU archives of employer and FLU records 1943-45 were equally devoid of comment or explanation for falling throughput levels.

⁹² Port Order for Fremantle No.76 dated 5 December 1944 in ANU deposit N28/277.

⁹³ The detail of progress of the disputes over the introduction of rotary rostering in individual ports in the eastern states is found in a file of cuttings from *Sydney Morning Herald* in the employers' records in ANU deposit E217/649.

soon as it was implemented⁹⁴. The dispute commenced on 11 December 1944 when the SIC called for labour to man ships using the new roster and allocation system⁹⁵. The Fremantle lumpers were adamant that they did not want 'rotary rostering', because it denied them the freedom to choose their jobs and hours of work. They were determined that they would continue to offer for work at the pickup centre under the old 'free-selection' arrangements. Those men already allocated to ships continued to work until the ship was finished and they then joined the stoppage⁹⁶.

By 16 December nearly all the lumpers were unemployed because of the strike. About 800 men attended the pickup each day, but refused to be allocated jobs by the roster system. Meanwhile, an additional six ships had arrived at Fremantle to commence cargo work. The *West Australian* noted, in particular, that among the vessels being delayed were two interstate ships with cargoes of Christmas goods for the shops⁹⁷.

The newspaper maintained its own measure of pressure on the lumpers by printing the port order implementing the roster system gazetted in sections 12 and 13 to enable the WA community to see the inherent fairness of the new system as opposed to the old free selection competition for work on the waterfront. By now it was recorded that only 150 lumpers were still working 80 men were employed by the FHT on shed and wharf apron work; the stevedores had 30 men discharging coal from an interstate ship; and 40 men were loading a flour ship for export to India⁹⁸. Ironically the men loading the flour ship continued to work for most of the time their compatriots were on strike. The rationale behind their action was that they were not presenting at the pickup centre for re-allocation.

In the last week before Christmas the waterside workers announced they had found valid grounds for the strike, unspecified anomalies in the roster system, to counter the newspaper's implied criticism. They did not detail the alleged

⁹⁴ The dispute was reported fully by the *West Australian* which is the primary source used here and in subsequent footnotes. The ASOF Central Committee in Sydney also kept a file of *Sydney Morning Herald* cuttings about the dispute in Fremantle which is in ANU deposit E217/649

⁹⁵ *West Australian*, 11 Dec.1944, p.4.

⁹⁶ *West Australian*, 14 Dec.1944, p.6.

⁹⁷ *West Australian*, 16 Dec. 1944, p.4.

⁹⁸ *West Australian*, 18 Dec. 1944, p.4.

irregularities and stated that they were adamant they would only discuss their grievances with the SIC Federal Committee of Management, not with the WA SIC committee. The FLU press statement asserted that, ...they had altered their working arrangements two and a half years ago to aid the war effort and had given more hours available [for work] every day...they objected to the [new] roster system as a whole⁹⁹.

As Christmas approached only 75 men remained working out of a total union membership of 887 men registered with the SIC, and 300 of the Division B men listed on the SIC's books. The *West Australian* noted that the union's action had cost the lumpers about £10,000 in lost wages and consequently many local businesses were 'feeling the pinch' in the Christmas season¹⁰⁰.

Acting Prime Minister Forde¹⁰¹ issued an ultimatum to the FLU members on Friday 22 December that they either resume work within twenty four hours or the government would order troops to discharge military cargoes. The union responded with an announcement that it would hold a general meeting on an unspecified day shortly after Christmas. It was also announced that the proposed meeting was to be attended by WA Labour Senators Clotheer and Nash, WA MHRs Burke and Johnston and WA MLA Tom Fox¹⁰². MLA Tom Fox was a former FLU Secretary, union Vigilance Officer (VO), and President, and was, consequently, well aware of all the under-currents in the union motivating their resistance to regulation.

In response to the union's continued defiance of the order to resume work the Commonwealth government sent troops onto the wharves on 26 December to work military cargoes, essential supplies of coal and foodstuffs: and, finally, Christmas goods. The use of troops to work cargo had been a standard procedure in each of the eastern states' ports when the WWF rank-and-file had rejected the new rostering arrangements¹⁰³.

During the lumpers' strike a letter from the WA State Secretary of the CPA, Barbara Boyce, was published in the *West Australian* appealing to the lumpers to return to work immediately, '...and give 100% to the war effort and receive an equal

⁹⁹ *West Australian*, 20 Dec. 1944, p.4.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Curtin was ill at the time.

¹⁰² *West Australian*, 23 Dec.1944, p.6.

¹⁰³ *West Australian*, 26 Dec. 1944, p.4.

share of work for each lumper'¹⁰⁴. This plea conformed with CPA industrial relations resolutions procedures which were to advise the government how to solve operational problems while exhorting workers to greater efforts, all made in the name of helping win the 'Anti-Fascist Peoples' War'¹⁰⁵.

The FLU Division A and B men continued to attend the pickup each day but consistently refused to accept the new roster system. The SIC advised the stevedores that it was no longer necessary for them to lodge daily requisitions for labour, because the military authorities had taken control of the port and cargo-working activity. This action was taken by the Commission because it had been mandatory prior to making this order for employers to lodge labour requisitions each day to maintain the dispute procedures. If there had been no labour requisitioned, there was, consequently, no requirement to roster men. The dispute would then collapse, because one side, in this case the employers, would have appeared to have withdrawn from the dispute. The FLU continued their dispute with the SIC and advised that there was no change in their position and that they were still waiting for a response to their message to the SIC Federal Committee¹⁰⁶.

The *West Australian* on Thursday 4 January noted that another general union meeting was to be held on the Monday, 8 January. The agenda for this meeting was to be for the discussion of routine union business including the annual election of union officers. There had also been an indication, however, that the withdrawal of the FLU from the central arbitration system would be discussed at the meeting. although there had been still no sign of change in the stated positions of any of the parties in the dispute about rostering¹⁰⁷.

The newspaper had sent one of its reporters to unobtrusively interview rank-and-file members of the union in an attempt to discover their reasons for the men rejecting the rotary roster system. The reporter came to the conclusion that the bulk of those interviewed preferred the freedom of choosing the work they would perform and the spread of hours they worked which best suited them. They elected not to work on dirty or arduous jobs, such as coal, coke, wheat phosphate and

¹⁰⁴ *West Australian*, 28 Dec. 1944, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Johnston, p.78.

¹⁰⁶ *West Australian*, 1 & 3 January 1945, pp.4 & 5.

¹⁰⁷ *West Australian*, 4 Jan. 1945, p.5.

sulphur. If at all possible those jobs were left to the Division B men. The union men, however, insisted that work on general cargo ships, both overseas and interstate, was their prerogative, because those vessels often worked to achieve maximum dispatch which required overtime and midnight shifts to be worked. The reporter concluded that, ‘...human nature dislikes change and human nature has a strong hold on the wharves where they are doing very nicely-thank you’¹⁰⁸. He also observed that it did appear strange that men who remembered the old days and the fight to get a job should want to cling so firmly to the old ways¹⁰⁹.

This dispute did emphasise the sharp divisions within the ranks of the FLU signifying the power of the ‘white mice’ who dominated the union executive and who were against change, over the less fortunate lumpers, who wanted their fair share of the work being offered particularly performed at premium overtime rates of pay. On 6 January the SIC Federal Committee announced it would visit Fremantle as soon as possible to resolve the dispute at the port. In the meantime the Commission ordered the FLU to hold a secret ballot of all its membership to ascertain how many supported the change to the new rotary roster and would return to work if it was implemented. Elaborate arrangements were made to ensure the plebiscite was authentic. A time limit for voting was imposed from 7.30am until 1pm on the chosen day. Provision of transport was made to enable sick and incapacitated members to vote and a 5/- fine was imposed on anyone failing to register a vote¹¹⁰.

The ballot’s result was announced on 8 January. A total of 896 voted:461 had voted in favour of accepting the new roster, 435 against. The dispute was settled by this vote¹¹¹. It was a victory for the less-fortunate lumpers over the ‘white mice’. It also meant the elimination of the pressure exerted for men to work hard to ensure they earned higher wages; all were now equal in this context. The progress of the dispute had been controlled by the executive and the preferred men, however, when a secret ballot was held, the ‘silent majority’ comprising the less-favoured men prevailed on this occasion.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ The article under the by-line ‘Investigator’ appeared in the *West Australian*, 4 Jan. 1945, p.5.

¹¹⁰ *West Australian*, 6 Jan. 1945, p.4.

¹¹¹ *West Australian*, 8 Jan. 1945, p.4.

Consequently, when the results of the poll were announced it was proclaimed that work under the new roster system would commence on 9 January on the firm understanding that service labour would be withdrawn from the ships and wharves. At that stage 800 servicemen were engaged on all types of cargo work¹¹².

There were some obstacles which had to be overcome before the new system was fully implemented. Initially, the service labour had not been withdrawn from the wharves, but that was speedily rectified and all the service-men had left by mid-day on 9 January¹¹³.

There were also some disruptions to orderly allocation experienced at the pickup centre. It was noted by those observing the process that these were because the men took time to understand the mechanics of the new system. It did not appear to the witnesses that the lumpers were obstructive, rather they appeared slow to understand the detail of the allocation process and the part they played¹¹⁴. This is an understandable – if not excusable – reaction when almost half of the lumpers did not want the system implemented.

In retrospect, the system used does appear cumbersome when compared with later allocation procedures. Each man had to respond to his number being called by the allocator, then go to the window to collect an allocation slip marked with his registration number, job allocated and roster position at that job. The latter determined the location he would work on the ship or shore and also his position in the re-allocation process when less labour was required at that particular job¹¹⁵.

By the morning of 10 January it was reported that all the union-registered Division A men and a full complement of Division B men were employed and the port was fully operational under the new rotary roster system¹¹⁶. The SIC Central Committee visited Fremantle shortly after the resumption of work and observed later that the port then was in a ‘tragic industrial state’¹¹⁷. By March that year the State SIC Chairman reported that the lumpers had ‘quickly settled down’. They had accepted the

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *West Australian* 10 Jan. 1945, p.4

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *West Australian*, 9 Jan. 1945, p.4.

¹¹⁶ *West Australian*, 10 Jan. 1945, p.4.

¹¹⁷ SIC Report Feb.1946 p.23.

roster system, and recognised its benefits. The employers, in particular their foremen, however, had a great deal of difficulty in working within the provisions of the roster system¹¹⁸. This is not surprising because the roster system destroyed at least 60 years of labour exploitation. The last word on this dispute remains with former union official Jock Stewart interviewed thirty years after the event:

...it was just that it was a new scheme and they didn't know what it was like...when they saw how much better the new system was they kicked themselves for not adopting it years ago.¹¹⁹

The Consequences of the Changes in Fremantle Stevedoring Employment Practices

The old order had finally changed at Fremantle. There were no 'white mice' because all men had to be treated equally by the employer. The shipowner ceased to arbitrarily decide how many men he would employ for how many hours in each day. Labour was allocated and supplied by a government bureau. However, the recruitment of labour was firmly in the hands of the waterfront union subject to maximum and minimum limits imposed by the Stevedoring Industry Commission. To obtain a level of job security the lumpers had to forego some of the freedoms they had previously enjoyed. The stevedores and the FHT were no longer permitted to force the pace of work. They were, therefore, to some extent insulated from criticism from their employers, the shipowners, because they could now blame the SIC for any apparent shortcomings. The port's employers, however, now had to answer to the independent industry regulator, the SIC. The FHT, although still a powerful force on the Fremantle waterfront was answerable on equal terms with the other employers to the SIC in matters of operational efficiency, labour supervision and discipline, and the competent usage of labour resources. The SIC had replaced the shipowner as the driving force in stevedoring. It had become the source of immediate pressure applied equally to everyone in the government's search for waterfront efficiency.

The lumpers were insulated from shipowner pressure by the SIC. They were assured a fair share of available work and did not have to compete for jobs. Although

¹¹⁸ SIC circular 516/45, 29 March 1945, in AANSW R&S 383 part 2.

¹¹⁹ Transcript of interview in Battye Oral History Library dated 17 Sept. 1976

the lumpers now had a degree of job security, the frequency with which shipping called at the port still governed their lives and earnings. The number of men on the port roster controlled the extent of individual earnings and therefore now became the primary concern of the waterfront union's executive and members.

What was evident was that industry performance suffered after rostering was introduced. Daily throughput tonnages never recovered after the removal of the free selection 'incentives' for Fremantle lumpers. During the remainder of 1945 daily average tonnages reached a low point of 336. This was apparently the price paid for progress in social reform on the waterfront. The introduction of a government industry regulator brought fairness to waterfront activity. However, it was not able to maintain or restore industry efficiency measured in daily throughput tonnages.

There had been no change to the actual way stevedoring work was performed at Fremantle during the whole of the wartime period. It was possible to gain a better assessment of the daily levels of throughput achieved at the port, within the limits imposed by the accuracy of the recording process and data availability. The introduction in October 1942 of statistical record keeping by the SIC enabled government and stevedoring management to arrive at an assessment the levels of industry efficiency based finally on statistical evidence¹²⁰.

In November 1945 this evidence enabled the employers at Fremantle to support their contention that throughput rates had declined after the introduction of the rotary roster. In a report prepared for AEWL WA the overseas owners' representative claimed that there had been a 25% decline in throughput on their vessels after the implementation of the roster system. It was pointed out by another overseas shipping agent that grain loading had dropped from 80 tons per elevator operating hour to about half that tonnage and similarly flour loading had decreased from 15 tons per gang hour to 10 tons per hour. In the circumstances of demonstrated lost throughput the employers wanted the roster system abolished and 'free selection' reinstated to improve throughput rates¹²¹.

¹²⁰ SIC Fremantle 1942 circulars in WAPRO deposit 3471 item NEM 109. SIC Fremantle 1943-7 orders and circulars with reference to SIC-3 record keeping in Aust. Archives NSW deposit GAI-A part 1.

¹²¹ AEWL WA circular no.286 8 Nov. 1945 in ANU deposit E217/52.

The evidence demonstrating the effects of the demise of unfettered waterfront employment was contained in the record of throughput achieved after the introduction of rostering was invariably below that achieved before rostering¹²². Consequently it became an article of faith, certainly by many shipowners and waterfront employers after the war, to claim that the introduction of rostering detrimentally affected stevedoring efficiency¹²³.

There had been a general decline in cargo handling throughput recorded in other ports in Australia. In a summary prepared by the SIC Central office statistical section for Justice Foster's inquiry held in 1945-6 the following trends between tonnage per hour levels achieved in 1938-9 and 1945 on general cargo were noted; Brisbane down 23%; Sydney down 27%; Melbourne down 29%; Adelaide down 25%; Hobart down 35%¹²⁴. Curiously this document showed Fremantle having a minimal decline in throughput from 12.8 tons per gang hour loading in 1938-9 to 11.02 tons per hour in 1945. It was equally apparent that Fremantle's throughput figures were the lowest achieved for any port at the beginning and the end of the survey period¹²⁵.

Certain assumptions can be made to explain lower throughput at Fremantle which are commensurate with those applicable on the national scale. The Fremantle waterfront labour force was, on average, an older work force, and was, therefore, less capable of sustained physical effort. This situation was exacerbated by the restricted pool of labourers which caused the existing work force to work longer hours. Finally there was the feeling that prewar pressures to perform had been eliminated by the introduction of a government regulated industry. Effectively, that transfer of authority had 'got the shipowner off their backs'.

The other causes of throughput decline in the eastern states were not seen at Fremantle. There was no evidence of shipping chaos present at Fremantle. Equally, evidence suggests that the port's management infrastructure was competent and

¹²² 'Tonnage rates, loading and discharging' dated 18/6/46 in Aust. Archives NSW deposit SP1509/1 item 01430.

¹²³ *The report of the Foster Inquiry* held in Nov.-Dec.1945 & Jan.1946, p.14.

¹²⁴ 'Tonnage rates, loading and discharging.' dated 18.6.46 in Aust.Archives NSW deposit SP1509/1 item 01430.

¹²⁵ *ibid*

equal to the task imposed by war. In Fremantle, it was therefore the effects of an ageing work force without the motivation enforced by free selection which were the major factors for the decline experienced in general cargo throughput.

Lower throughput in bulk materials handling, however, had other causes. That was because rates were mostly dependent on the age and efficiency of the machinery being used. Only basic maintenance was possible during wartime because of shortages of labour and materials. This situation was exacerbated because until 1943-4 the State's grain cargoes were shipped in small quantities, seldom as full ship loads but usually as part cargoes, to the Middle East and India. Consequently under-used loading machinery without adequate maintenance deteriorated rapidly¹²⁶.

The situation did change in 1943 when there was wide-spread famine in India. The Allied central shipping planners released additional shipping to carry grain from Australia to India and Ceylon. Total wheat exports from Australia to India in 1942 had been only 30,000 tons. In 1943 famine relief increased grain exports to 303,000 tons, and these doubled in 1944 to 639,000 tons. In 1945 the Australian grain export to India reached 871,000 tons¹²⁷.

The irony of all this was that while in 1942 there was a shortage of shipping restricting wheat exports, yet in 1944 there was a drought in the eastern states which caused a national shortage of wheat for export in spite of ample shipping being available¹²⁸. Nevertheless, the Customs' records show that most of the 1944 wheat export to India came from Western Australia and was loaded through Fremantle¹²⁹.

The war ended in August 1945. By then, Fremantle had a waterfront labour bureau, a roster system to allocate men to ships in numbers determined by a labour-and-ship priority committee. In this manner men received a fair share of available work and the ship owner received an equally fair share of men available for work. 'Free selection' had been replaced by a central command system of regulated employment. The employers, however, were convinced that this caused the decline in stevedoring efficiency.

¹²⁶ *FHT Annual Report 1946* pp.9-12.

¹²⁷ Behrens, p.356.

¹²⁸ Behrens, p.436.

¹²⁹ Customs departures record 1944 on microfilm in AA WA.

As a footnote to the changes war brought to Fremantle the November AEWL report noted that the FLU had voted 497 to 402 to approach the Federal Government to have the roster system abolished¹³⁰ This was one of the rare occasions when the employers and lumpers were in agreement, albeit out of step with the government and the Federal executive of the WWF. It was quite inconceivable that the government would agree to revoking the roster system at Fremantle which could have had every port in Australia wanting to return to 'free selection' and the unregulated selection system applied to securing jobs and men. Eleven months after the union voting to accept the roster the experience of having to forgo some of their freedoms had clearly soured some of the membership. However, the die was cast, freedom of choice had clearly ended. The implications of this, however, took some time to be realised in Fremantle.

¹³⁰ 'Tonnage Rates, loading and discharging.' 18.6.46 Aust.Archives NSW deposit SP1509/1 item 01430.

Chapter 9

Recasting the Fremantle Model, 1946-1950

In the period from 1946 to 1950 the process of completing the total integration of Fremantle into the framework of the national waterfront industry was completed, a process moved as much by political concerns as by a desire to achieve an efficient industry. Stevedoring became, therefore, an industry in which government came increasingly in conflict with a completely united nationwide union of waterside workers firmly resistant to any government intervention perceived detrimental to their livelihood. This chapter, therefore, examines how the Curtin government controls introduced during the war and reaffirmed during the period 1946-1949 by the Chifley government affected the Fremantle model and what the local response was to that government intervention. In the immediate postwar period, the Chifley Labor government attempted to lay the framework for an efficient national stevedoring industry. Curtin had succeeded in wartime in imposing his will on shipowners and wharf labourers alike. After the war Chifley's government had to adjust to a situation where it did not have the unopposed authority to force the shipowners, stevedores and wharf labourers to accede to solutions dictated by the Commonwealth. In war it had been able to create an employment structure which ensured that the labour force was shared equitably between the employers, and the labourers were guaranteed tenure of employment within the constraints imposed by the flow of shipping. After initial altercations everyone came to terms with that system. It was now imperative to devise a peacetime system which everyone involved in stevedoring would support. The contest also re-commenced for waterfront hegemony between the employer and the employed. The war had enforced compliance to achieving national goals on the Australian waterfront which was not apparent before the war.

Postwar there was also an excellent opportunity to modernise stevedoring. This was addressed by the FHT with some limited success. However, shipowners remained

convinced that cargo work could only be improved when there was a pool of men competing for work urged to greater efforts by the stevedores' foremen.

Finally a new government under Menzies elected in December 1949 introduced a new approach to waterfront affairs which completed the national integration of Fremantle and completed the demise of any vestige of its autonomy.

The National Inquiry into Stevedoring

At the end of the war, the government progressively released the ships it had requisitioned. The refugee ships which had become a significant part of the interstate trade returned to their liberated homelands. Australian and overseas shipowners resumed operational and financial responsibility for the sea transport industry. Government stopped paying sea freight costs, ship charter fees, and stevedoring accounts as quickly as it could divest itself of the responsibility. Progressively freed from government controls, many shipowners and their stevedores wanted to return to prewar operational routines.¹

The debate continued about the future character of the nation's stevedoring industry. Central to that debate was the level of government participation which should be exercised postwar. Furthermore, the Labor government in power, now led by Ben Chifley, had an ideological commitment to government involvement in national waterfront affairs to ensure industry stability and efficiency.

In the Australian context the shipowners were divided in their attitude towards the extent of government involvement and control. On the one hand, the interstate owners demanded total deregulation and a return to 'free selection'. They argued this was the only way to resolve the problem of falling throughput levels by re-introducing worker incentives enforced by the exercise of free-choice rights by the employer. On the other hand, the overseas owners wanted to retain the elements of government control of the labour supply, which they found guaranteed them an equitable share of the available labour and berths for their ships. The third force on the waterfront, the wharfies, had accepted a government-regulated labour market, and wanted the status quo preserved. Their overriding concern was to maintain control over the extent of each port's labour quota, and consequently the numbers recruited into the industry. The

¹ Bach, p.375.

groundwork for resolving these factors were hammered out before the inquiry undertaken by Justice Foster.

Initially the government intended only to play the role of ‘honest broker’ in the process of finding a stevedoring industry structure acceptable to everyone. In October 1945, to promote this policy the Labor government appointed Mr Justice Foster to inquire into the industry’s future.² After consulting industry representatives Justice Foster decided that the form of the inquiry was to be a court where each side, employers and employees, presented and argued a case to support their proposals for the future direction of the stevedoring industry.³

The WWF, represented by its General Secretary Jim Healy, undertook the role of plaintiff to present their case for the reform of the stevedoring industry. The shipowners and stevedores, represented by legal counsel, made counter-proposals and argument.⁴ The inquiry lasted from 19 November 1945 to 11 January 1946. Evidence was given under oath and subject to cross-examination. Visits were made to wharves and ships at Sydney and Melbourne. Evidence was also presented about aspects of stevedoring operations unique to other ports including Fremantle, although no witnesses appeared at the hearings. In his summation Justice Foster noted that, ‘all interests expressed the view they had full opportunity of presenting their case and argument’.⁵

W.F.J. Foster,⁶ Industrial officer for McIlwraith McEacham Ltd, giving evidence for the interstate shipowners argued for a return to ‘free selection’ because industry discipline, efficiency and their profitability, was founded in the ability of employers’ foremen and supervisors to compel worker discipline using the ‘free selection’ employment system. The Stevedoring Industry Commission, they contended, had destroyed their ability to ‘drive’ men and that, consequently throughput levels had

² The transcript of the *Foster Inquiry*, pp.1-40 in ANU deposit N28/345.

³ *Foster Inquiry*, pp.2-3.

⁴ *ibid.* p 1-2.

⁵ *Foster Inquiry*, p.5.

⁶ Not related to Mr Justice Foster. CSOA was also represented by legal counsel E.R. Reynolds KC and R.R. Sholl.

declined. They demanded the restoration of the 'status quo ante Commission' to return the industry to its prewar levels of efficiency.⁷

The OSRA, the overseas owners, supported the retention of the Commission and a regulated wharf labour market. Their argument was that this arrangement would ensure their ships would obtain an equitable share of labourers on any occasion. Their main argument was that they did not want to have to compete with other owners or the interstate services for available labour.

Their legal team, J.W. Shand KC and J.W. Smyth, drafted a Bill for the constitution of stevedoring regulator to support their arguments.⁸ Justice Foster while complimenting them on 'a keen appreciation of the constitutional problems involved'⁹ did not accept their model because he argued that 'it will serve to raise vividly the constitutional problems of the draftsman who may be called upon to draw the bill'.¹⁰ In particular he noted the employers' proposed bill might challenge Parliament's Constitutional right to regulate trade with other countries and States of the Commonwealth (section 51i), or arbitration legislation (section 51xxxv). Not only could these rights be challenged, there was the added challenge implied to the power of Parliament to make laws with respect to trade and commerce, navigation and shipping (section 98).¹¹

Healy also put forward the WWF's proposed bill for industry legislation. However, Justice Foster argued that Healy's draft bill was flawed on constitutional grounds, because it did not sufficiently differentiate between the arbitral and judicial powers inherent in their plan for a stevedoring industry management structure. Justice Foster observed that Healy's recommended model was effectively a blueprint for the nationalisation of the stevedoring industry which he was not able to accept.¹² The terms of Justice Foster's commission of inquiry were wide-reaching, particularly as he was required to ensure the establishment of a mechanism by which the stevedoring

⁷ *Foster Inquiry*, pp.14-16.

⁸ *Foster Inquiry*, p.36.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.37.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *Foster Inquiry*, p.37.

operations in Australia could be carried out efficiently and without delay.¹³ However, this was to be attained within the framework of the existing Arbitration system or a continuation of all or part of the SIC powers.¹⁴

In a later attack on the case for government intervention, the interstate owners argued for an extension of the powers of the Arbitration Court to administer the stevedoring industry. Some of the interstate owners' proposed expansion of the Arbitration Court's powers to undertake this role, Justice Foster argued, was open to constitutional attack if a government industry regulator was retained. He therefore rejected their proposal.¹⁵

On completion of the Inquiry, Justice Foster made a number of recommendations, the main thrust of which was that the government had to continue to exercise a regulatory function through a statutory organisation. He proposed that the wartime SIC should continue to function as the labour bureau in each port in the Commonwealth, and should continue to allocate workers to ships in their customary arrival priority sequence. The numbers of men available for allocation, i.e., the port quota, would be determined by the Commission in each port. The Commission would be given statutory powers to settle industrial disputes without recourse to the Arbitration courts. The SIC would have a full time Chairman, secretariat, individual Port Chairmen and Committees. Each port would have SIC inspectors to examine and report on disputes, allegedly poor work practice and generally observe and report on stevedoring activity to the Port Chairman. Finally there would be only one recognised industrial union and source of man power on the national waterfront, the WWF.¹⁶

The Foster Inquiry recommendations were drafted into government legislation and waterfront reforms along with initiatives in health, social services, immigration and postwar reconstruction were accepted by the electorate when the Chifley government was re-elected in September 1946. The continued involvement of government in the management of the waterfront was, consequently, accepted by the wider electorate, if not by the interstate shipowners, as the answer to all the ills the industry had previously

¹³ *Foster Inquiry*, p.1.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *Foster Inquiry*, pp.38-40. Perlman p.144.

endured.¹⁷ The postwar Commission's charter was to prevent or settle stevedoring industry disputes by conciliation or arbitration, to regulate industrial relations matters relative to stevedoring, and to monitor stevedoring industry operational performance.¹⁸

The SIC's policy imperatives were to ensure that stevedoring operations were carried out in a speedy, efficient and safe manner. The bureau in consultation with all parties had to ensure that there were sufficient waterside workers available for cargo work. The SIC was required to monitor the situation to ensure that the labour force was being used to the best advantage.¹⁹ The wartime powers conferred on the first SIC to run the stevedoring industry in 'the national interest' were, consequently, confirmed by the postwar legislation. The Stevedoring Industry Act 1947 reinvested the waterfront industry with the status of being a national asset. Stevedoring, therefore, was protected by government action from the threat of domination or direct influence inflicted by Australian or international shipowners and also to curb the activities of waterfront unions. Stevedoring had become a truly national industry. Even so old fears and animosities re-emerged to plague stevedoring, namely the conflict of interest between employer and employed on the waterfront.

Affirming the New Order: Fremantle January 1946

During the national stevedoring industry debate and while the Foster Inquiry was taking place, a microcosm of the national debate was being enacted at Fremantle in late 1945 and early 1946. The local industry's port management structure was in crisis. The local employers were in conflict with the port's SIC-WEC personnel over the continuity of the commission's authority in the day-to-day running of the industry. The employers challenged the authority of the SIC now the war had ended.

The FLU was also concerned about the delineation of the port labour quota because shipping numbers had decreased. The union members wanted the SIC to protect their job security by limiting the numbers of the rostered labourers to ensure they did not return to the prewar free selection employment contest. Their union was

¹⁷ *ASIB First Annual Report 1950* p.22.

¹⁸ Perlman, p.151.

¹⁹ Stevedoring Industry Act 1947 section 12 (1).

prepared to work with the SIC as long as that protection was forthcoming. It became an imperative, therefore, for the SIC Federal committee to adjudicate in this contest.²⁰

The minutes of the various meetings held make it clear that the crisis had arisen because the port's stevedoring employers and their foremen vehemently resented the SIC's retaining authority over the stevedoring process. During the war, the employers were forced to accept that authority, however, now the war was over, they perceived the SIC processes interfered with the way they wanted to carry out their business.²¹

At Fremantle this attitude was evident in the foremen's uncooperative reaction to the SIC labour bureau procedures for allocating and transferring labour.²² The orderly process required the stevedores and their foremen to conform to the deadlines and procedures set for lodging labour applications and arranging labour transfers for labour no longer required. Observance by stevedores and their foremen of these vital administrative requirements had become at least negligent, and on occasions, positively obstructionist. This had caused difficulties for the bureau's allocation staff, which resulted in further delays for stevedores when labour was being re-allocated to ships the next day. The SIC and its processes were blamed by employers for the delay.²³

The members of the Stevedoring Industry Commission management committee, chaired by D.V. Morrison, visited Western Australian ports from 31 January to 10 February 1946.²⁴ The Commission committee also visited the WA outports of Geraldton, Bunbury, and Albany.²⁵ Morrison was no stranger to WA and Fremantle because he had led the SIC investigative group which had been there after the conclusion of the 1945 dispute over the implementation of the roster system.²⁶

²⁰ Stevedoring Industry Commission 'Report of visit of inspection to Western Australian ports 31 January to 10 February 1946 inclusive.' (subsequently SIC Report Feb. 1946), In ANU deposit N28/275.

²¹ SIC Report Feb. 1946, pp.1, 3, & 10.

²² SIC Report Feb.1946, pp.3, 16, 22, 23,& 45.

²³ SIC Report Feb. 1946, p.16.

²⁴ In Fremantle meetings were held from 31 Jan. 1946 to 4 Feb.1946 and on 9 Feb.1946 after returning from the WA outports.

²⁵ Geraldton 4 Feb., Bunbury 5-6 Feb. Albany 7 Feb. 1946.

²⁶ No record of this visit has been found in any of the archives including newspaper files searched, although Morrison does allude to it at the end of the record of his 1946 visit.

In addition to Morrison the other members consisted of three SIC Federal representatives of the shipowners' organisations the CSOA and the OSRA. The employees were represented by three members including Healy who on this occasion was acting in his capacity as a member of the SIC central committee of management, not specifically representing the WWF. Nevertheless he scrutinised the FLU submissions closely to ensure conformity because they were still not affiliated with the WWF and were not directly under his control. The Commonwealth Director of Shipping was represented and Morrison ensured that meetings were minuted to his satisfaction by bringing his own Chief Administrative Officer.

The WA delegates attending the meetings were the SIC and Fremantle Waterfront Employment Committee (WEC), chairman and staff, the FHT Commissioners and management, other local stevedores and employers, and members of the FLU committee of management.²⁷

Morrison's comments recorded in the minutes of meetings held at Fremantle strengthened the realisation that there was intense local opposition to the authority vested by government in the SIC and WEC. This was underscored by the foremen's attitude to SIC procedures for labour allocations and transfers, matters at the heart of an orderly, equitable labour supply to ships. Right from the outset, Morrison made it absolutely clear that both the Commission and the rotary roster system implemented in 1945 were 'here to stay'.²⁸

Although his declaration pre-empted the waterfront legislation to be enacted arising from the Foster Inquiry²⁹ it was made with the full knowledge that the SIC would continue to be the control mechanism for the industry's employment structure in the future. Making this comment Morrison put an end to any notion held locally that Fremantle was a 'special case', autonomous and exempt from Commonwealth control.

The visit of the SIC central committee was intended primarily to enforce the Commission's authority in Fremantle and also to adjudicate on matters which had been left in abeyance because local employers would not accept continuation of the role played by the SIC postwar. A strong voice had to be heard to ensure that the

²⁷ SIC Report Feb. 1946, p. 1.

²⁸ SIC Report Feb. 1946, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Commenced November 1945 completed January 1946.

stevedoring industry at Fremantle performed its function within the limits imposed by the end of free selection.

Morrison listed the salient points to be discussed and clarified during the visit. These were: the unreserved acceptance of the authority of the Commission; the application of industrial discipline, not only by the SIC for everybody, but also by the FLU executive for their own members which included the foremen; and SIC disciplinary action which might be taken against foremen and their employers for breaches of the Port Order. The standardisation of the port's shift times also had to be resolved, and the introduction and implementation of a consolidated pay system for lumpers was to be finalised. The resolution of disputes arising from FLU restrictive practices applied when working 'obnoxious' cargoes including coal bunkering; the definition of the port quota of registered Division A men had to be decided and the levels of availability and usage of Division B labour were matters for settlement. Finally, Morrison had to give rulings on a number of minor local difficulties arising from the mechanics of application of the roster system.³⁰

Separate meetings were held by the Commission representatives with local stevedoring employers, the FLU executive, the executive of the Division B pickup yard, the FHT Commissioners and management, and the port's WEC chairmen and staff. In the course of these meetings it became obvious that everyone expected Morrison to resolve all their difficulties before he returned to the eastern states.³¹

Certain matters were ruled upon by Morrison. He arbitrarily set the shift times: day shift 8am-5pm, with the smoko times 10am-10.15am and 3pm-3.15pm; and an evening shift 6pm-11.30pm with one extended smoko break 9pm-9.30pm. In a ground-breaking development an important stipulation was made to the extent of shift working hours, which was that if the vessel could finish within two hours after the normal shift completion time, labour should continue to work on until 7pm and 1.30am respectively to finish that ship. The ship had then to sail before the next morning's pickup of labour to justify the use of the extra hours worked. Men working until 1.30am had to be supplied with transport home because public transport in the

³⁰ SIC Report Feb.1946, pp.1-6.

³¹ SIC Report Feb 1946. FLU executive pp.6-12, Fremantle employers pp.14-17, Executive of Casual Yard pp.20-22, FHT Commissioners & management pp.23-26, port's WEC and SIC staff pp.41-47.

Fremantle area ceased at about midnight. The new shift system was to commence from 4 March 1946.

Morrison noted, however, that although outside the regular shift times, midnight to 8am shifts could still be worked, provided there was sufficient labour available after day and evening shift requirements had been allocated. Furthermore, the need to work midnight shifts had to be proved to the satisfaction of the SIC and FLU before labour was allocated. Healy supported the limitations placed on midnight shift work, intimating it was WWF policy implemented in other ports to limit such work to special cases agreed to only after consultation with the Commission and the union.³²

Morrison was not prepared to make a ruling on the extent of the port labour quota. He argued that, at that time, no one could estimate with any certainty the labour requirements for the port over an extended period. The WEC records indicated that from 21 January to 8 February there had been daily surpluses of labour from both registered and casual yards which had varied from 676 men on 26 January to only 35 men not being allocated a job on 6 February. Morrison felt that under those uncertain circumstances, it was impossible to arrive at a quota which would ensure that there was neither an oversupply or an under-supply of registered men and casuals. However, Morrison placed an embargo on any additional men being permitted to join the casual yard, with the exception of returned servicemen, who were entitled to take up their previous employment.³³

Labour Surpluses. Jan.-Feb. 1946

J A N U A R Y	21	384	F E B R U A R Y	1	258
	22	598		2	129
	23	631		3	310
	24	515		4	61
	25	676		5	71
	26	564		6	35
	29	428		7	353
	30	463		8	212
	31	258			

Source SIC Report Feb. 1946 p.44.³⁴

³² SIC Report Feb 1946, pp.46-7.

³³ SIC Report Feb.1946 pp.44-46.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.44.

There were some matters Morrison left to be resolved locally, among which were the FLU disciplinary action taken against its own members who had contravened SIC rules. Morrison agreed that, providing the Fremantle SIC was consulted and concurred with the severity of the FLU's punishment, no further penalty would be given against the offending lumper.³⁵ A summary of names of lumpers found guilty of breaching Commission orders in March 1946 and disciplined by the FLU was presented as evidence of good faith by the union. The list showed that of 22 cases investigated, 17 had been stood down and lost pay for 24 hours, and 3 had lost 48 hours pay. Two cases were left pending and had to appear before the full FLU Committee of Management for more serious breaches of discipline calling for severe punishment.³⁶

The work force disciplinary process implemented by employers, particularly by their foremen was another matter which had to be resolved locally. Morrison noted that as a result of his investigations, he was firmly of the opinion that there was a great deal of room for improvement in the way foremen performed their duties in the workplace and in the administrative process. He expected stevedoring management and the port's WEC to watch this matter closely. In particular, he was concerned about any evidence of a foreman exercising prejudice against a particular man and 'consistently giving him rough jobs'.³⁷ Morrison ruled, however, that limited preference was possible so that an employer was free to place a man at a hatch or job where he had a specialised skill or knowledge.³⁸ At the conclusion of each meeting Morrison was given assurances by everyone there that the SIC and all its staff would receive their utmost cooperation.³⁹

The introduction of a consolidated pay system was another matter which had stalled because of local management procrastination. Morrison made it clear that the pay system was either implemented voluntarily or he would make a port order which effectively made it mandatory and subject to the imposition of penalties against an employer not carrying out the required procedures.⁴⁰

³⁵ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.6.

³⁶ AANSW deposit SP1509/1 item 1213.

³⁷ SIC Report Feb 1946, pp.46-7.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ SIC Report Feb 1946, employers p.16, FHT p.26.

⁴⁰ SIC Report Feb. 1946, p.24.

The collection of pay by a lumper had, in the past, followed a time-honoured procedure. On Friday each man had to visit each employer's pay office to collect wages earned during the preceding week. This was a time-consuming business and often led to altercations between pay-masters and lumpers if a discrepancy in hours or pay rates was discovered. Commonwealth income taxation, and men frequently working for a variety of employers during the week, made the calculation of tax deductions difficult both for company pay-masters and for the lumpers to verify. As with all the other matters it appeared that impetus for implementation had to be made by someone outside the port's management circle i.e., Morrison.

The FLU's limitations on working times handling so-called 'obnoxious' cargoes, which they listed to be frozen meat, coal bunkers, bulk phosphate and bulk sulphur, had been resolved by the declaration of the new shift times.⁴¹ Coal bunkering from hulks was still a feature of stevedoring work at Fremantle in spite of the union's contention that it was too dangerous. Morrison and the other committee members, after viewing bunkering in progress, agreed that the system was 'antiquated and dangerous' and should cease.⁴² It was a system, however, which had evolved over many years, the process being dictated more by the nature of the ship's coal bunker facilities and practical stevedoring procedures than by considerations of safety or costs.

There were minor matters brought before the Commission which should have been dealt with by local management.⁴³ These were trivial topics which should never have been brought before a Federal Commissioner. Their airing and pleas for adjudication, however, illustrated the divisions prevailing between stevedoring management, the SIC and the FLU, which could not even resolve such minor matters. Among them, the opening and closing times for the wharf canteen, cleanliness of ships' holds arriving in ballast from eastern states' ports, the use of covers over lower hold cargoes to prevent rain damage when tween decks were worked in inclement weather, and the collection of discharge dockets from North Wharf sheds.⁴⁴ All of these should have been resolved by positive management action tempered with a modicum of common sense.

⁴¹ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.46.

⁴² SIC Report Feb 1946, p.3.

⁴³ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.46.

⁴⁴ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.45.

At the conclusion of his visit Morrison again made it absolutely clear to everyone that the SIC administrative and regulatory structure was a permanent fixture at the port, as it was going to be throughout all major Australian ports. It was, therefore, imperative that everyone involved in the port's stevedoring industry had to accept and work with that condition of their employment.⁴⁵

Morrison was also adamant that the SIC's regulatory powers did not absolve employers from their management responsibilities. He emphasised that although the Commission despatched men to a job, it was not the Commission's function to supervise them. Responding to the criticism levelled at the Commission that because they exercised control over the stevedoring process, cargo throughput had fallen, Morrison made it clear that it was not the SIC's 'duty to force men to work.' He added that the way to get results was by the foremen exercising sensible control of the work force.⁴⁶ The local employers were left in no doubt that the SIC and, ultimately, the government, placed the responsibility for industry efficiency firmly at their door. This sentiment was endorsed by the employers' representatives on the central committee who wholeheartedly supported Morrison's comments.⁴⁷

Morrison tempered his criticism of the Fremantle industry by observing that there seemed to be greater harmony there now than that displayed when he last visited the port in January 1945 at the time of the 'rotary roster' dispute. He observed that industrial relations in the port had been lamentable then, with everyone pulling in different directions. However, he noted that better results were being achieved now; although, he commented, 'there was still room for improvement'.⁴⁸ Morrison and his party left Fremantle believing that the waterfront was on a relatively 'even keel'. Although a number of matters had been left to be resolved by local consultation, nonetheless the authority of the SIC had been reaffirmed.

Unfortunately this perception was short lived. An industrial dispute arose on 17 May at the Victoria Quay transit shed alongside where SS *Marella* was discharging cargo. This dispute arose because the FHT shed foreman had allocated jobs to the lumpers in accordance with the time honoured principles of 'free selection' and had not

⁴⁵ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.14.

⁴⁶ SIC Report Feb 1946, p.23.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

followed the roster sequence. The FLU stopped work at that berth, the union executive and FHT management conferred and, after some conciliatory moves by both parties, work resumed.⁴⁹

The significant point here was that shortly after Morrison's visit, which was undertaken to ensure compliance by Fremantle employers of the roster system and SIC authority, the FHT manager told the Chief Secretary and the WEC chairman, that the FHT management insisted that it was within the rights of the employer and his foreman to allocate lumpers to jobs the foreman considered the men suitable to perform. The FHT management was using the loop-hole provided by Morrison, despite the fact that he had intended that it should be used only in isolated special circumstances not as a general principle. Furthermore, the FHT manager insisted that divergence from the free selection principle reduced throughput and increased costs. From the tone adopted in later correspondence, particularly that from the Chief Secretary, it appeared that FHT management had received blunt instructions to adhere to the letter of the SIC's instructions, or they would risk de-registration as a waterfront employer.⁵⁰

The visit of Morrison and his party had the timely effect of emphasising to the Fremantle stevedoring industry representatives that they were a sector of a national industry with a responsibility to conform to guidelines set Commonwealth wide. Consequently the notion of Western Australia's isolation and remoteness previously enjoyed from the rigours of centralised control in stevedoring matters had been further diminished.

Modernising the Shore Sector of the Fremantle Waterfront 1946-50

The port of Fremantle came through the Second World War relatively undamaged by the rigours of war. It had, however, suffered from infrastructure deterioration caused by wartime shortages, both of materials and tradesmen, to carry out progressive maintenance. The port now needed refurbishment and, even more importantly, a plan for future development. The stevedoring industry based ashore at Fremantle also had to find a their own ways to return to their prewar levels of efficiency within the

⁴⁹ Correspondence between the FLU COM, the SIC WA Chairman, the FHT Commissioners and the WA Chief Secretary relating to this incident are in ANU deposit N28/273.

⁵⁰ Correspondence in ANU deposit N28/273.

constraints posed by a regulated work force. This section discusses the search made to achieve those goals.

In the aftermath of the war the WA government's sector of the port's stevedoring industry introduced man-assisting machinery and made minor refinements to the grain-handling process to improve throughput. The cargo-handling improvements introduced by the FHT and CBH were intended only to overcome purely local problems within their areas of responsibility.

Immediately after the war, the State government and the FHT had to decide how to address the future development of the port of Fremantle in the context of what was now Commonwealth government-regulated industry. While working within that imposed framework, the Trust had to consider how best to improve the technical competence of the port.

The war had forced shortages of labour and materials which had by necessity limited even minor port maintenance, let alone the development of the port's infrastructure. Wartime controls of labour were now being lifted. Building materials were being released to enable repairs and restoration of the national industrial infrastructure to be accomplished. The time for planning for the future of the postwar port had arrived.⁵¹

In 1946, with all this in mind, the State government commissioned a British expert in harbour engineering and port development, Colonel F.W.E. Tydeman, to analyse port and stevedoring operations at Fremantle. His task was to report how best to enhance the port's postwar viability.

Tydeman made the first comprehensive analysis of the port and its operations since Sir George Buchanan's limited examination of Fremantle in 1925/6 within the context of an Australia-wide analysis of the whole national transport industry. This time Tydeman worked with a statistical base from the FHT's 1938/9 records and was concerned with the Fremantle waterfront alone. Tydeman's report, tabled in Parliament in 1948, was far-reaching in its approach and thorough in its methodology.⁵² He constructed an array of mathematical models to arrive at efficiency ratios to illustrate the port's working capabilities, deficiencies and where future improvements could be made.

⁵¹ Ewers, *Western Gateway*, pp.149-50.

⁵² Tydeman F.W.E., *Report on the Port of Fremantle*. (Perth: WAGPS 1948). Subsequently *Tydeman Report 1948*.

Among the factors assessed Tydeman noted that berth usage efficiency was only 26% of the possible maximum. He indicated that the theoretical 100% maximum level of usage was neither attainable nor even considered practicable. Although he did argue that by berthing ships closer together berthing operations could be improved to become 35% in excess of existing practices.

Tydeman made another recommendation intended to improve harbour operations which was that dredging be undertaken to increase water depths alongside certain berths to accommodate the larger ships anticipated postwar. He also recommended building improved breakwaters(moles) to give better protection to the Victoria Quay berths A and B in winter, therefore increasing their usage in all weather conditions.

Tydeman also considered it vital for overall port operational efficiency to institute procedures to shorten the time taken to berth and unberth ships. This latter comment, however, was tempered by the observation that it had been demonstrated during the war that the port services were capable of achieving this operational level of efficiency when it had been needed.⁵³

The measurement of cargo-handling efficiency reached at the port was subjected to the same rigorous assessment process. Ship operations were classified in two divisions: homogeneous-bulk-cargo work carried out on North Quay; and general cargo handling on Victoria Quay. Tydeman's calculations of optimum throughput levels based on experience recorded in other ports gave potentially 40 tons per gang-hour for bulk cargoes and 30 tons per gang hour for general cargo. The recorded average throughput rates for Fremantle at the time were 22.7 for bulk cargoes and 12.3 for general cargo. These he noted were 57% and 41% below those achieved elsewhere.⁵⁴

The measurement of port and stevedoring efficiency was, before Tydeman's analysis, a 'rule of thumb' assessment. The measurement of stevedoring efficiency-productivity on the waterfront was assessed as an average volume of cargo handled in a given period from a ship, i.e., tons per day and called 'throughput'. As record keeping improved this was refined to become tons per gang hour for a specified class of cargo, e.g., general, coal or grain. This measurement was, therefore an average throughput

⁵³ *Tydeman Report 1948*, p.104.

⁵⁴ *Tydeman Report 1948*, p.109.

during a year for all ships in a particular trade and it was no more than a 'rounded figure' arrived at for the port when a particular class of cargo was being stevedored.

In reality in stevedoring, 'productivity' is a misnomer because it is the measurement derived from a volume processed in a given time by the number of men employed in that particular industrial procedure. In stevedoring the manpower unit was the gang. The number of gangs used was dictated by the type of ship, the cargo distribution within the ship, and class of cargo being stevedored. There were, therefore, many reasons affecting any measurement process making analysis of performance difficult to standardise.

Tydemans was convinced that one of the key reasons contributing to lower stevedoring efficiency at Fremantle was the port's traditional 'divided control' of stevedoring. His argument was that to overcome this problem, 'there should be unity of control and not divided control.'⁵⁵ Tydemans did not state whether that meant total control was to be assumed on-board and ashore by the Trust, or that shore stevedoring was to be handed over to the shipboard stevedore.

To support his contention, Tydemans quoted the FHT Commissioners' comments of June 1925, when they claimed that because the stevedores slung cargo in a traditional manner, i.e., 'the custom of the port', the pace of cargo work on shore was, consequently determined by the stevedores, often to the detriment of the Trust as shore stevedore.⁵⁶ The Commissioners' assertion appeared to ignore the opposing corollary that their own 'customary' handling methods were harmful to the shipboard stevedore's efforts. Nevertheless, Tydemans' criticism of this aspect of the port's stevedoring operational structure was neglected by government and, consequently, it made the political decision to retain FHT control of shore stevedoring.⁵⁷ This decision effectively restated after the war that the WA government's policy was to continue to maintain public ownership of the port's ship-handling and shore cargo operations

Tydemans did, however, argue that the port could double its cargo handling efficiency ratio, if the port was furnished with additional quayside cranes.⁵⁸ He

⁵⁵ *Tydemans Report 1948*, p.109.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *FHT Annual Report 1950*, p.1. Control of shore stevedoring was finally relinquished by the FPA in 1991. *FPA Annual Report 1991*, p.8

⁵⁸ *Tydemans Report 1948*, p.111.

suggested five at each berth instead of the two which were then available. Furthermore, he argued that improved efficiency would be achieved if more hours were worked at each ship by providing more labour to ensure the optimum level of crane usage.

Tydeman observed that the Trust's cargo transit sheds had to be modernised to enable fork lifts and towmotors or small tractors to be used. To do this the frequent internal columns supporting the roof had to be replaced by fewer stronger supports, thus clearing the way for machinery to operate unrestricted. The cargo receipt and delivery facilities for road and rail transport had also to be improved. To achieve this, once again, more working time and more labour had to be made available which was unattainable until agreement could be reached.⁵⁹

Tydeman's most revealing comment related to the volume and quality of the mechanical cargo handling equipment available at the port. The FHT had been particularly proud of this aspect of their cargo handling infrastructure. It had been acknowledged previously by Buchanan in his 1925 report, in Justice Beeby's observations in the 1928 Arbitration Court proceedings and frequently by F.W.B. Stevens throughout his long career as FHT Secretary. Tydeman was less complimentary in his assessment.

He summarised how much equipment was available at the time and the types and quantities required to achieve the levels of throughput he calculated was possible to accomplish in the future.

FHT Equipment in 1948

Available now.	Required.	Deficiency
Quayside cranes 14*	90	90
Runabout cranes 13	20	7
Towmotors 11	44	33
Trailers/'floats' 258	164	nil
Fork lifts nil	44	44
Pallets nil	large quantities	

*All assessed as 'obsolete'.

Source *Tydeman Report 1948* p.16

In making his assessment Tydeman showed that he was familiar with the vast improvements to throughput experienced wherever the Americans had introduced fork

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

lifts and palletised cargo handling methods.⁶⁰ He was convinced that the FHT should follow the same path to accelerate throughput for their sector of the stevedoring equation in the port. In advocating this plan, however, he recognised its limitations because shipboard stevedoring throughput would continue to be dictated by the nature of ships and their cargoes. These factors were not determined at Fremantle but in ports and boardrooms far distant from there. Tydeman could only offer solutions to improve handling on shore at Fremantle, he could not impose those developments on the world's shipowners.

Nevertheless, in Western Australia the 'Tydeman Plan' as it became known, was seen to be the blueprint for the future development of the port. With the benefit of hindsight it can be seen that Tydeman's vision for harbour expansion did not foresee the industrial development which eventuated based on Kwinana and Cockburn Sound and the harbour works undertaken there. He planned up-river harbour extensions of the Inner Harbour with additional protected harbour berths built north of the existing harbour.⁶¹ The Inner Harbour consequently remained little changed because of the development of Cockburn Sound, although changes have been made to individual berth configuration to cater for specialised modern ship designs and cargo handling procedures.

The government accepted most of Tydeman's proposals for port modernisation except the elimination of 'divided control' and he was appointed General Manager of the FHT in May 1950 when G.V. McCarthy retired after 47 years service in the Trust's employment.⁶² The appointment of an outsider to the highest office in the FHT, particularly a man with Tydeman's engineering and administrative expertise, set the FHT on a new course for the future. The appointment was also indicative of the extent of the man's personality; there was no evidence that Tydeman suffered any of the personal or professional antagonism similar to that directed at his predecessor, C.Y. O'Connor.⁶³

⁶⁰ AEWL Report on mechanised handling of palletised cargo in Melbourne and Sydney 1944. in ANU deposit Z430. *Tydeman's Report 1948*, p.16.

⁶¹ Ewers, p.150.

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Tydeman was a man with adequate life-skills and capable of self-preservation in any context. He was not only an engineer, administrator and soldier, but was also a judo black belt who had during the war lectured on the subject of 'how best to kill a man with the bare hands'. Frank Dunn, Obituary, *Australian*, 30 May 1995, p.16.

The other State government initiative, the Co-Operative Bulk Handling Ltd.(CBH) modernisation programme, was limited by the class of shipping chartered for grain exports. The conventional cargo ships used caused grain to be stevedored until the mid 1950s in the traditional manner, two thirds of the loaded tonnage in bulk trimmed mechanically overstowed by the remaining one third in bags. Then, in the 1950s, the type of ship chartered to load the grain changed. Dry cargo bulk-carrier ships made their appearance on the world's trade routes in sufficient numbers to impact on grain stevedoring methods.⁶⁴ The delay in their emergence was because of the large number of war-built 'utility' dry-cargo ships, the *Sam*, *Fort*, *Empire* and *Victory*⁶⁵ classes of vessel. After the war these ships were offered at low charter rates on the homogeneous cargo market until by the mid-1950s most had become uneconomical to operate.

There was little change in the methods or equipment used at Fremantle to discharge the other homogeneous cargoes, coal, coke, phosphate and sulphur by grabs into railway wagons or road trucks. Bulk carrier ships for other homogeneous cargoes were introduced at about the same time as bulk grain ships made their appearance on the world scene for much the same reasons.⁶⁶

General cargo carriage and handling remained unchanged, simply because the configuration of ships, even newly-built postwar tonnage, did not alter. The shipowners and their naval architects designed and built ships in the traditional mould but now with improved engines to shorten time taken on passage between ports. During the 1950s the new ships, often with 15 knot service speeds, replaced the 10 knot wartime standard built ships used until then to overcome short term deficiencies in operating fleet numbers.

By 1950, therefore, Fremantle had a plan and a harbour management capable of dealing with the anticipated growth in ship numbers and cargo tonnages. Soon after taking command, Tydeman put into motion his plan for the future development of the port. Central to the master plan was the introduction of improved cargo handling

⁶⁴ Gardiner, R. ed., *Golden Age of Shipping. Merchant Ship 1900-60* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1994), pp.75-80.

⁶⁵ *Lloyds Register of Shipping 1945-50*. So called because the ship's names were prefixed Sam or Empire, Victory was used as a suffix, e.g., *Samkey*, *Empire Windrush*, *Willamette Victory*.

⁶⁶ Bach, pp.370-82.

facilities, modernised quay-side cranes to speed movement over the wharf, and the mechanisation of cargo-handling in the Trust's transit sheds.⁶⁷

Waterfront Politics: Effects at Fremantle 1946-50

Fremantle's integration into the national industry network was strengthened by government and waterfront union moves taken in every Australian port. The government policies were intended to improve throughput by consolidating even further the centralised direction of every aspect of stevedoring. The waterfront unions fought this threat to their control of the postwar labour force. To combat the government's strategies the union also had to have an equally unified centralist mechanism for dispute management. Consequently everyone at Fremantle, particularly the FLU, was forced to surrender even more their independence.

It must be emphasised here that while government and the WWF fought for waterfront supremacy, the shipowner was not directly involved in the political fray. The shipowners remained in that position when Menzies achieved government, because the costs incurred by delays were passed to their clients in increased freight rates. These included the cost of stevedoring and surcharges were added for calls at the most militant ports where most delays were experienced. In this conflict between the new government and union, the owners were seen to be eager to encourage the government, but unwilling to participate for fear of being harmed. Support for Menzies in his fight with the WWF for control of the nation's waterfront industry was also promoted by a large sector of the nation's press and radio.⁶⁸

This clash between government and the WWF began in earnest when, during 1949, the SIC became unworkable as a statutory body because the WWF refused to fulfil its role within the Commission's legislated structure. The changes arose because in April 1949 a general waterfront stoppage was called to protest against the jailing for sedition of Lance Sharkey, the General Secretary of the CPA.⁶⁹ This stop-work call was followed by another in May 1949, when another CPA official, J. McPhillips, the

⁶⁷ *Tydemans Report 1948*, part xii, pp.134-7. Ewers, pp.150-1.

⁶⁸ Sheridan, T., 'Australian Wharfies 1943-1967: Casual Attitudes, Militant Leadership and Workplace Change.' *Journal of Industrial Relations* vol.36 no.2 June 1994, pp.259-60.

⁶⁹ Perlman, *Judges in Industry*, p.154.

Assistant National Secretary of the Ironworkers Federation was judged to be in contempt of the Arbitration Court.⁷⁰ McPhillips was sentenced to serve one month in jail unless he withdrew his statement and apologised to the Court, which he refused to do. Subsequently, the ACTU revoked McPhillip's commission as one of their Arbitration Court advocates. The CPA-dominated WWF executive led by Healy and Roach supported McPhillips and ordered another national one day stoppage in protest against his imprisonment.⁷¹

On both these occasions the FLU rejected the strike call for them to hold a two hour sympathy stoppage at Fremantle.⁷² By this demonstration against centralised union orders, the Fremantle lumpers showed their own attitude by being independent of WWF control. Furthermore, they did not support communist policies.

The SIC Chairman, Justice Kirby, argued these stoppages were of political intent, because their origins were neither to improve wharfies' conditions economically or in the workplace. In Kirby's opinion these dispute reasons were the proper business of unions and, therefore, could be supported by strike action.⁷³ Justice Kirby then appealed directly to the union rank-and-file over the heads of Healy and Roach for everyone to continue work allocated to them by the SIC. The eastern states' ports stopped work in defiance of Kirby's appeal. In spite of the overwhelming support in the east for Healy and Roach, Fremantle complied with Kirby's request and did not stop work.

Justice Kirby then recommended that unless Healy and Roach observed the Commission's rulings their appointments to the SIC Board of Management would be revoked. Both refused to comply. The WWF executive refused to put forward alternative names to replace them. The Commission's charter was annulled by this sequence of events and, consequently, the 'second' SIC was declared inoperative by the Commonwealth government in May 1949.⁷⁴ The SIC did, however, continue to function as an interim labour bureau and administrator until its successor was formed in

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² SIC monthly reports for April and May 1949 p.4 in AANSW deposit SP150/2/0 item GA11A pt 1.

⁷³ Perlman, pp.154-5.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

June 1949 by the new Stevedoring Industry Act 1949. The new administrative organisation was called the Australian Stevedoring Industry Board (ASIB).

The Act gave the ASIB wide-ranging functions and responsibilities. These were to regulate and control the performance of stevedoring operations in most Australian ports. The exceptions were Darwin and a few seasonal ports in WA's north west. The Board could make, subject to Treasury approval, finance available for the improvement of stevedoring, mainly by mechanisation. One of their functions was to ensure sufficient waterside workers were available in each port and that they were used to the best advantage. Other functions were to administer a labour bureau, to pay attendance money, to train men to perform their work safely, efficiently, and to enhance their skills as more mechanical equipment became available. The ASIB had the task of providing first aid equipment, ambulance facilities and medical attendants. In the field of workers' amenities the ASIB were empowered to provide wharf-side amenities for washing and toilets, canteens and cafeterias, smoko sheds and change rooms. Last but not least the Board had to publish frequently information including detailed statistics relevant to every facet of stevedoring operations.⁷⁵

The ASIB Board of management consisted of three public servants, who reported to the Minister of Labour in the Commonwealth Government. The newly appointed Chairman of the ASIB was J.M. Hewitt.⁷⁶ Hewitt was not unfamiliar with the waterfront and all its problems and undercurrents. He was a lawyer who had been on Evatt's personal staff and involved in the interaction between a Labor government ministry and the WWF. He had also, for a time, been acting chairman of the second SIC while its chairman, Justice Kirby, was engaged in other arbitration bench matters.⁷⁷

Direct links were severed with the ASIB management structure by removing Arbitration Court Justices Kirby and Foster and WWF representatives Healy and Roach. However, a special section of the Arbitration Court was formed to deal promptly with stevedoring industry disputes.⁷⁸ Therefore, the stevedoring industry's regulatory and administrative master was now lodged within the portfolio the Minister

⁷⁵ *Stevedoring Industry Act 1949 section 13. ASIB First Annual Report 1950*, pp.1-141 in AANSW deposit SP150/2/0 item GA11A pt 1.

⁷⁶ *ASIB First Annual Report 1950* p 1 in AANSW deposit SP150/1/0 Item GA 11A Pt 1.

⁷⁷ Sheridan, *Division of Labour* fn82 p 347.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

of Labour and National Service placing the industry's administration further away from influence of shipowners and waterfront labour unions. A government bureaucracy was now firmly in control of the day-to-day running of stevedoring Australia-wide while the resolution of stevedoring industry disputation returned to the Arbitration Court. Any changes contemplated by government could now be channelled through a body under Ministerial supervision.

Although the creation of the ASIB put the bureaucrats in control of the stevedoring industry, stevedoring work continued to be managed and supervised by stevedores and on shore in Fremantle, the Harbour Trust. Lumpers remained the sole source of the work force employed to handle cargo over the wharves. The ASIB, however, did exercise daily, even hourly, jurisdiction through their monitoring structures over the procedures used by the employers to direct the lumpers' employment.

The Board's officers analysed performance and by publishing periodic statistical summaries ensured that anyone interested in the throughput levels achieved in stevedoring at least had circumstantial evidence before them. How improvements to efficiency were to be forthcoming was a matter for stevedores and shipowners to propose and attempt to implement. The shipowners, however, looked for performance improvements arising from altering the allegiance of the work force rather than by changing the manner in which the work was performed.

There was a change of government in December 1949 from Labor to Liberal-Country Party in Australia. This was seen by employers as the opportunity for the performance improvements to be achieved. In a short time this was to bring government in direct confrontation with a united, disciplined, waterfront union for the control of the nation's stevedoring industry. The shipowners were once more restricted to being observers rather than active participants in the battle for waterfront hegemony. They made their influence felt indirectly by lobbying the Menzies government through their respective representative bodies, the ASOF and the OSRA, but took no direct action themselves.

The shipowners did have one weapon with which to influence government: the level of freight rates charged for the nation's exports and imports. Shipowners' freight charges included an insurance component surcharge against delays caused by waterfront disputes. If time lost by this cause became excessive, insurance charges

increased and eventually increased the cost of all commodities.⁷⁹ The nation's exporters and importers complained bitterly in submissions to the press, State and Commonwealth governments when this happened. Canberra was expected to control the stevedoring industry to keep freight rates down to ensure the nation could trade competitively and the citizen's standard of living was maintained. To ensure this goal, the government had to enforce centralised industry control.

Ironically it was the union at Fremantle which was the first victim of fundamental change in the industrial alignment demanded by centralism. In late 1949 Healy achieved union solidarity and centralised dispute management nationally for his union. He persuaded the Fremantle lumpers to become 'wharfies' by stressing that strength in the future lay in them being members of a national union.⁸⁰ The change caused the FLU to now become the 'Waterside Workers Federation of Australia-Fremantle Branch'. This ended the protracted affiliation argument which had dragged on for decades.⁸¹ This finally came about because many of the lumpers who had resisted affiliation, either because of parochial loyalty or anti-communist sentiment, had either retired or died. Their successors had experienced the power of government centralised control through the SIC followed by the ASIB. It had become evident that only an equally strong national union would provide any real protection in the future. Self-preservation was stronger motivation for change rather than political loyalty.

These changed circumstances, therefore, enabled Healy to accomplish what none of his predecessors had been able to achieve: Fremantle's wholehearted consent to be part of the federal union of waterside workers. This was a personal success for

⁷⁹ This was a constant theme in editorials of the overseas shipowners' journal *Fairplay International Shipping Weekly* and in the *Australian Daily Commercial News and Shipping Gazette*.

⁸⁰ FLU COM minutes for 1950/1 in ANU deposit N28/19 and Biennial Conference of the WWF minutes 1950 in ANU deposit N28/183 and 1952 in ANU deposit N28/184.

⁸¹ Form 50 (Reg 25) Industrial Arbitration Act 1912-41. Application for Consent to Change Name. Applicant Union the Fremantle Lumpers Union of Workers registered First of March 1901 to change name to the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia-Fremantle Branch. Change of name advertised in a notice in *West Australian* 21 November 1949 p.27. Name changed at Union meeting held on 30 November 1949. Registered in the Industrial Court Second of December 1949. In ANU deposit N28/208.

Healy, who now commanded a unified response from a truly national waterfront labour force in his conflict with Menzies and Labour Minister Holt.

The national waterfront force now consisted of 24,643 registered men in 52 ports, 1,800 or 7% of whom were located in Western Australian ports of which the majority, 1,298, were employed at Fremantle.⁸² Although relatively small in number, the WA wharfies were now able to be supported by the full power of the WWF in any dispute. But they also in the future had to obey commands issued by the WWF central committee.

The strength of the WWF had to be consolidated nationally because the union was not only industrially opposed to the employers; it was also ideologically opposed, except for some virulently anti-CPA pockets mainly located in Melbourne, to the newly-elected government. The battle-lines on the Australian waterfront were drawn then on both industrial and political grounds. The waterfront union was not alone in this situation. A number of unions in other key industries, particularly coal mining and heavy engineering, had executives dominated by officials deeply antagonistic to the Menzies government. This caused repercussions throughout Australia; this was a period of extreme industrial turbulence which appeared often politically motivated. Politics, generally, in the western world in the 1950s reacted to the intensification of the Cold War, exacerbated by the outbreak of a shooting war on the Korean peninsula between communist and non-communist forces. The fears generated by the east-west global conflicts polarised society in the western world. This encouraged the growth of McCarthyist extremism which prejudiced the lives and influenced the attitudes of many citizens.

The newly-elected Menzies' ministry was convinced that communists were a threat to the security of the nation.⁸³ Consequently their perception of a CPA-dominated WWF placed it firmly on the government's agenda for any proposed anti-communist action. There is an irony here in that only two of the six members of the Federal executive and six of the 26 members of the Federal council were CPA members.⁸⁴ Clearly the CPA men could have been out-voted by the rest on any

⁸² *ASIB Annual Report 1950*, p.135.

⁸³ Sheridan, *Division of Labour*, p.228.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

occasion. But, for conservatives, Healy dominated the union and Healy was a communist; accordingly the CPA ran the WWF.

The government believed their intervention would have a two-fold effect: to end communist domination of unions and to implement the reforms needed to return wharf throughput to prewar levels. To achieve these aims it became, therefore, more often the clash of political ideologies which directed the course of industrial relations on the waterfront rather than a desired real improvement in stevedoring efficiency. Bolton argues that a fear of Communism governed Australian political debate from 1949 to 1951.⁸⁵ For the waterfront, that fear continued until Healy's death while still in office in 1961.

Although this phobia dominated the conduct of affairs between the Menzies' government and the WWF, evidence suggests that the CPA did not dominate domestic union affairs at Fremantle. This perception became pronounced because Roach or Healy had to visit the port to ensure an increase in hard-line union activity which was subsequently implemented by a small band of union activists, some but not all of whom, were CPA members.⁸⁶ Menzies and his supporters were convinced the CPA was a treasonable organisation.⁸⁷ Menzies argued that communism had destructive designs on Australian society cunningly hidden behind the respectable facade of labour unions.⁸⁸ It was imperative, therefore, to purify unions like the WWF of communist influences. Menzies had held the view that banning the Communist party would be counterproductive⁸⁹, but once in government he was persuaded by the coalition's more conservative elements the CPA had to be stamped out.

This was to be accomplished in 1950 by legislation to outlaw the CPA. This was expected ultimately to reduce the power of the WWF central executive by jailing its principal officers, Healy and Roach, and other CPA officials positioned throughout the union. Menzies' anti-communist policies were opposed by Chifley. The latter

⁸⁵ Bolton, *Oxford History of Australia vol.5, 'The Middle Way'*, p.59.

⁸⁶ Interview with retired Fremantle WWF official Ken Sherlock 25 April 1992. Also ASIB monthly reports June 1952 to Jan. 1957 in AANSW deposit SP1510/1/0 GA 11B parts 2 & 3. Industrial activity arising from visits by Federal officials and resultant action taken by the ASIB noted.

⁸⁷ Brett, *Menzies' Forgotten People*, pp.77-8.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.102.

⁸⁹ Sheridan, *Division of Labour*, p.356 fn.12.

maintained the only safe remedy for communist union-domination was through industrial action.⁹⁰ He stressed his experience in union affairs was that the successful infiltration by communist officials had been because many non-communist members and officials had been apathetic. In contrast the communist organisers had ‘worked like beavers’ to obtain benefits for their members by overcoming entrenched opposition from employers.⁹¹ Such officials were supported by the rank-and-file for their efforts being considered ‘good blokes’ in spite of their communist party membership.⁹² For many in the union, including a number of Fremantle men, Healy was a ‘good bloke’ because he was very active on their behalf, despite his communist connections.⁹³

Menzies’ Communist Party Dissolution Bill was passed in October 1950. An injunction was obtained immediately in the High Court by communist-controlled unions including the WWF which claimed that the Act was *ultra vires*.⁹⁴ Subsequently in March 1951 the CPA escaped dissolution because the High Court ruled by a majority of six to one that the legislation was unconstitutional.⁹⁵ Following this defeat, Menzies manoeuvred a double dissolution and called an election in April 1951 with the suppression of communism as his main platform.⁹⁶ The waterfront now became the main battleground between conservative forces in government and the waterfront labour movement guided by Healy.

There was now no longer a Fremantle stevedoring industry model. All its autonomy had gone, subsumed by the aims of government, and the waterfront union, to achieving centralised control in the hope of attaining, on one hand, industrial efficiency, on the other, industrial justice.

⁹⁰ Crisp, L.F., *Ben Chifley* (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1960), p.356.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.354.

⁹² Transcript of interview with retired wharfie Jock Stewart in Battye Library Oral History archive, p.12.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Davidson, *Australian Communist Party History*, p.111. *ultra vires*-going beyond the legal power of parliament

⁹⁵ Galligan,B., ‘Constitutionalism and the High Court’ in Prasser,S., Nethercotte,J.R., Warhurst,J.,eds. *The Menzies Era: A Reappraisal of Government, Politics and Policy* (Sydney:Hale & Ironmonger. 1995) pp.160-165

⁹⁶ Crisp, *Ben Chifley*, pp.404-413. Galligan, *Menzies Era* pp 162-3.

Fremantle, because it was now a fully integrated part of the national stevedoring industry, had to conform to the rules and industrial relations policies set by others, who had the national picture in mind and who had little regard for Fremantle's parochial concerns.⁹⁷

The Fremantle model of a stevedoring industry had reached the end of the road. The future industry development would bring increased national influence to be replaced finally by the international control interest in containerisation.

⁹⁷ The final act of conformity to national organisational industrial relations structures took place in 1960 when the Fremantle foremen left the waterside workers' union and joined the national stevedoring foremen's union, the AFSA.

Chapter 10

Conclusion: The Loss of Local Autonomy

This thesis has examined how the stevedoring industry at Fremantle was absorbed into a national framework of port cargo-handling services during the first half of the twentieth century. The process of change compelled a local industry with its own peculiarities to conform to standards imposed by central authorities with priorities which were not necessarily in harmony with local practice or custom.

The type of stevedoring practiced at Fremantle took on its own special character because of the Port's geography, topography and economic circumstances. Fremantle was the only significant port on the west coast of Australia and it did not have to compete, therefore, with other ports in comparative proximity which was the experience on the eastern seaboard. Moreover, Fremantle's port development, from its early days as an open anchorage through to the period when a protected harbour had been constructed, dictated the nature of stevedoring operations.

The parlous state of the colony's economy until the discovery of gold also played a determining part in the development of stevedoring. Although sea transport was vital to the colonist's survival the volume and frequency of cargoes and ships depended solely on the colony's financial strength. While that remained weak, government had to play a major industry role because no private capital was forthcoming to develop a port infrastructure or underwrite a stevedoring industry. Once gold revenue put the colony in a stronger economic position, the new harbour was built with government money. As a result, government retained control of the facility.

The ultimate effect of this development continued government's involvement in stevedoring which had previously been effected through the Customs and Railways departments. To maintain a desirable level of involvement and control, the state government now found it necessary to institute in 1902-3 their own harbour management organization, the Fremantle Harbour Trust (FHT). One year later, by mutual consent of all parties involved in stevedoring, the Trust was given the task of

managing all shore stevedoring operations, effectively confining the other stevedoring operators to responsibility only for shipboard cargo-work. This was a division of responsibility that was unique to Fremantle and not seen in any other port with the sole exception of Wellington within the British Empire.

The relationship of stevedores, their labourers (the 'lumpers') and the shipowners whose ships they stevedored, evolved to become very distinctive. For the stevedores and lumpers this caused the establishment of a group of preferred labourers who were chosen to form the nucleus of a particular stevedore's work force. In the case of stevedores and Australian shipowners, the local stevedore became an 'in-house' department. In the case of overseas owners, a contractual arrangement was made and strong bonds were formed between certain shipowners and their chosen stevedore over time

In its early phase these arrangements governed the development of the stevedoring industry at Fremantle. The port's isolation, WA's varied economic fortunes and the involvement of government throughout determined the operational model taken by the stevedoring industry. This was in spite of newfound input of Federation from 1901 into the nation's political and community affairs.

In eastern Australia, in the period between Federation and 1913, stevedoring was increasingly centralized. Firstly, Australian shipowners formed the OSRA (1913). In 1905, the all-important arena of industrial relations came under the control of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court which determined how an industry operated by handing down legally-binding awards. The third force in stevedoring, the labourers, joined Hughes and created the WWF in 1902. For Western Australia, because of its isolation, these activities were perceived as irrelevant and their consequences were frequently unheeded.

In Fremantle the moves outlined were inconsequential because the stevedores, FHT and lumpers resolved their industrial relations problems before the WA Arbitration Court. The shipowners either directed policy to their in-house stevedores or by contractual arrangements in the case of overseas owners. The WA government protected its stevedoring interests through the activities of the FHT. At this stage the Fremantle model had matured and was fully autonomous.

The results of changes and outside influences, however, were felt at Fremantle in the second decade of the twentieth century. The 1914 waterside workers' national award, and the FLU's consequent loss of authority which was forced to accede to the WWF by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, was the first intrusion by outsiders into the affairs of the Fremantle model.

The 1914-18 war then saw further effects as the volume of shipping was reduced and stevedoring activity lessened. The Commonwealth government's attempts to command shipping and stevedoring resources in the national interest, in particular, by the formation of a secondary wharf labour source which the government hoped would diminish the power of the WWF. The combination of these experiences, all coming from sources outside Fremantle, was unsettling for the industry and resulted in a 'loss of innocence' for all involved.

The next two decades saw increased pressure for change exerted by the Commonwealth government, especially through the powers of the Transport Workers Act, which was a persistent effort to provide a secondary source of labour from the established union work force. This legislation also caused the shipowners to form their own waterside employers' organization, AEWL, which concentrated their industrial relations policy decision-making in the hands of a committee of shipowners in Melbourne. Fremantle employers were forced to defer to this body.

The FLU also experienced, throughout this period, concerted pressure to affiliate with the WWF. This was resisted wholeheartedly by the lumpers because of their experience before the Commonwealth industrial court. The FLU also had to withstand in the 1930's the new political militancy of the CPA intent on radicalizing the union.

The floodgates of change and consequent virtual total loss of local autonomy were opened during the Second World War. War brought again a change in shipping patterns. It also brought total industry control enforced by government regulation. This arose from the effects of WWF intransigence in eastern Australian ports, overwhelming growth in the volume of military cargoes and US Army pressure, all of which forced the Commonwealth government to take charge of the stevedoring industry in all Australian ports.

A management structure, the SIC, empowered to command both employers and employees to observe its directives or risk deregulation ensured the

Commonwealth government's requirements were achieved. Industry policy, management, operational structure and employment systems were standardized and now controlled by bureaucrats in Canberra.

Fremantle made minor changes to its operating procedures because of its remoteness from the forefront of the military activity concentrated through the Eastern states' ports. However, because the Commonwealth government commanded total observance of its industry reorganization, Fremantle had to fall in line with the new industry structure. As a result free selection, preferred men, employer driven work practices were all abolished. The rotary roster system ensured all labourers received equal status for job selection. The roster also ensured each employer was allocated an equitable share of the available work force. After initial resistance by the FLU in 1944/5, the lumpers accepted the new system when threatened by the Commonwealth government with deregulation. As soon as the war ended the employers at Fremantle were eager to return to prewar working conditions and regain their control over the lumpers. The Chifley government legislated that government industry jurisdiction remained enforced by a revised SIB, subsequently replaced by the ASIB in 1949. Waterfront employers and employees, consequently, remained under the authority of Canberra bureaucrats. The FLU maintained a semi-independent status until Healy persuaded them it was in their best interests to affiliate with the WWF in 1950 under fear of threats to their continued existence posed by an anti-union (and anti-CPA) Menzies' government elected in 1949.

What were the processes by which autonomy was lost? In part the inexorable forces released by Federation, seclusion for anyone under the circumstances which evolved from the Commonwealth government's powers to legislate change would steadily decline. Power would flow towards central authorities, for the shipowners to AEWL, for the labourers eventually to the WWF. The Commonwealth government had the power and the will to intervene in stevedoring when the national interest dictated. The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court started the process. The Commonwealth government in WWI and 1928 made inroads into local autonomy. In WWII the process was in essence completed, there only remained the final impact to local autonomy in 1950 when a new Commonwealth government drove the FLU into the arms of the WWF.

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II. Radio broadcasts, Videos & Television programmes.

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- 'Wharfies: A History of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia'. video SRL Perth BRN 574418
- 'Harry Bridges.A man and his union'. ABC TV 9.30pm 21 Sept. 1994.