

## **Shades of the Cold War: The role of Communist workers at the Midland Railway Workshops**

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*Although a small minority among the 2500-strong workforce at the Midland Railway Workshops in the 1950s, the Communists were an active group, whose physical focal point was a section of the Machine Shop in Block 3, known as 'Red Square', where Jack Marks, a fitter and turner who was an active CPA member, operated a lathe. This paper argues that the activities of Marks and fellow CPA members went far beyond political proselytising and that herein lay their success as union activists. The paper explores the growth of Communism among the workforce at the Midland Workshops; the role of agitators and activists such as Marks in achieving better working conditions, their political and industrial influence upon other unionists, and the response of management. It concludes that the extent of the Communists' acceptance and popularity among their fellow workers lay in their commitment to every day issues, rather than in their ideological understanding of world events.*

In 1950 – the year that the Federal Government passed legislation to ban the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) – Rod Quinn entered his training as apprentice Car and Wagon Builder at the Western Australian Government Railway (WAGR) Workshops at Midland. According to Quinn, 'on the face of it, international events barely affected life in the Workshops [and] life there also barely affected international events', yet he described his six years at Midland as 'the birth of my activism'.<sup>1</sup> Among the work force, he met men from all over the world, including a former Red Army soldier and prisoner of war, who taught him a few words of Russian. This man – exiled from his homeland by Stalinist policies – must have seen a grim irony in Quinn chalking in Russian the words 'Stalin the Teacher' and 'other absurdities' on the sides of wagons.<sup>2</sup>

Although a small minority among the 2500-strong workforce at Midland in the 1950s, the Communists were an active group, whose physical focal point was a section of the Machine Shop in Block 3, known rather grandly as 'Red Square' or less grandly but perhaps more accurately as 'Red Alley'. Here, within easy sight of the Machine Shop Foreman's office, stood two rows of fourteen lathes. Jack Marks, a fitter and turner who was an active CPA member, operated one of the heavy Dean and Grace lathes. In the lunch break, he would 'proselytise' his fellow workers, but (as this paper will argue) Marks was also an active unionist whose popularity among the wider workforce was despite – rather than because of – his communist beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

This paper explores the growth of Communism among the workforce at the Midland Workshops; the role of agitators and activists such as Marks in achieving better working conditions, their political and industrial influence upon other unionists, and the response of management. It concludes that the extent of the Communists' acceptance and popularity among their fellow workers lay in their commitment to every day issues, rather than their ideological understanding of world events.

Firstly, to contextualise, Midland was the last of the major railway workshops to be built around Australia in the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is beyond the scope of this study to ascertain whether Communists were significantly active in all of these factories during the inter-war and 'Cold War' periods; however, Lucy Taksa's research has revealed the emphasis placed by Stan

Jones, communist shop committee and ARU member, on the Eveleigh Railway Workshops' importance in 1939 to the political and industrial development of the NSW labour movement.<sup>4</sup> This has echoes at Midland – although, prior to World War II, Communists played an insignificant role in that development. Furthermore, the Left/Right factional struggles that gripped the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) from the 1940s to the 1960s<sup>5</sup> no doubt also impacted upon every workplace where that union had significant representation – as it did at Midland, where the AEU was one of the four most numerically powerful unions and perhaps the most militant. Sheridan's is just one of a number of studies of the labour movement, which depict the 1950s as an ideological battleground at national, state and regional level.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, as will be discussed in more detail shortly, even in the Depression and post-World War II eras, when communists were massively impacting upon Eastern States labour movements,<sup>7</sup> in Western Australia, conservative views dominated. The moderate Parliamentary Labor Party was in government for all but three years of the 1924-47 period. Conversely, the CPA, founded in 1920, struggled to maintain even a minute membership. There was no independent Trades and Labor Council; therefore, no forum existed for unions or unionists who were not affiliated with the ALP, which consisted of a political and an industrial wing united in one body, to which the great majority of the State's unions and unionists were affiliated with the ALP. The AWU dominated this body until after World War II. Affiliates had to swear allegiance to the ALP, and union officials who belonged to other political parties were not permitted to attend meetings of the ALP's District Councils, thus seriously disadvantaging the unions they represented. After the Second World War, the increase in numbers and influence of several militant unions (for example, the AEU, the Collie Miners Union and the Waterside Workers' Federation); the decline of the conservative AWU, and the State ALP's loss of government in 1947 were significant factors leading to the eventual formation of an independent TLC in 1963.<sup>8</sup> In this hostile context, therefore, the achievements of a 'small cell' of communist workers within the State's largest industrial workplace may be vested with a greater significance than would otherwise be the case.

### **Communist activity in the 1930s and '40s**

True to the moderate nature of the Western Australian labour movement, Kathy Bell's interwar study of the Midland Railway Workshops reveals a politically and industrially conservative workforce, with a significant proportion of British tradesmen. The WA Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees (WAASRE), the dominant union, was moderate, although Bell indicates that the Midland Junction Branch was 'on the radical wing'. The AEU and the Boilermakers, on the other hand, were militant unions, with the AEU State branch being possibly 'the most militant in Australia'.<sup>9</sup> According to Bell, 'oral evidence supports the view that there was a degree of leftist influence in the workshops', with one of the workers whom she interviewed recalling that, although they were only a small minority, 'there was a definite "Communistic crowd"'.<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of World War II, there were only about 300 CPA members in Western Australia. The Federal Government's national ban of Party members in June 1940 resulted in police raids, arrests and the imprisonment of several leaders.<sup>11</sup> After the Curtin Labor Government lifted the ban in 1942, and while Russia enjoyed the status of wartime ally, the CPA's membership increased to an estimated 25,000 nation-wide, with 1,500 in Western Australia. Despite the Party's insignificant presence in the State, Western Australians voted in favour of a ban on the CPA in the 1951 referendum.<sup>12</sup> As the Cold War descended

upon the post-war world, the union movement in Australia divided into warring 'Communist' and 'anti-Communist' camps – which, as Sheridan has shown, sometimes fractured individual unions – and the ALP dissociated itself from the CPA in a series of resolutions, ultimately permitting the passage through the Senate of legislation to again ban the Party.<sup>13</sup>

The Communists also suffered from their association with several bitter and ultimately unsuccessful post-war industrial disputes.<sup>14</sup> One such dispute erupted after the October 1951 national decision by Commonwealth Conciliation Commissioner J.M. Galvin not to increase metal workers' margins. This was purportedly an attempt to prevent inflation, but it incensed the unions involved. According to Jan Archer:

The Galvin decision did not directly affect metal trades workers in Western Australia as they came under a separate State award, already higher than the Federal Award [but] ... the Galvin decision was used by union activists, particularly those affiliated with the Communist Party, as the catalyst for the longest-running strike in Western Australian industrial history.<sup>15</sup>

Archer's emphasis on the role played by Marks, Jack Coleman and other CPA members at the Workshops during the six months strike, is confirmed by oral and other sources. Communist-linked groups, such as the Modern Women's Club organised lunches and sewing bees for the strikers' families.<sup>16</sup> But the communist presence was also a disadvantage, which apparently was instrumental in the strike's failure. With the right-wing unions – in particular the giant WAASRE with 900 Midland members – refusing to join in, the smaller AEU and the Boilermakers had little hope of success. Some union secretaries warned their members against attending meetings in connection with the 'Double the Margins' campaign – as it became known – because they believed it was Communist-inspired.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, despite widespread community support,<sup>18</sup> nothing was achieved by the strike and, according to some ex-employees, not only did many Midland workers become even more hostile to the Communist members in their midst, they also became disillusioned about the promises made by unions. As the factory was a closed shop, each worker had to belong to a union, but many played no role in union activities. How then did active communist unionists such as Coleman and Marks make an impact on this largely sceptical workforce?

### **The role of Communist agitators at the Midland Workshops**

The dedicated Communists appear to have impressed because they were excellent tradesmen and committed unionists who, as shop stewards, worked hard to obtain better pay and conditions for their fellow workers, and in some cases, they had considerable personal skills of oratory, persuasion and humour. According to Jack Coleman, 'wherever there were communists in industry they were never criticised for their work. They were not loafers and were very honest people in that regard'.<sup>19</sup> Thus, although few workers at Midland embraced the Communist philosophy, the Communists began to exert a significant influence in the workplace. Owen Salmon, who often visited the Workshops in his role as State Organiser for the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), commented that there was 'virtually a communist cell' at Midland; its members were veterans of the 1952 strike who continued to work for improvements in this 'Dickensian' workplace, despite the failure of the 'Double the Margins Campaign' and their subsequent unpopularity.<sup>20</sup>

The activities of Red Square were closely linked with the public space around the flagpole in front of Block 1 (the Carriage Shop and Wood Mill). Originally built in 1916 as a memorial to Workshops employees who died on active service in the First World War, the flagpole was relocated to its site outside Block 1 in 1924, prior to the erection of the Peace Memorial. It soon became a focus for workers' gatherings when there were grievances to discuss, as well as a forum for parliamentarians, political candidates and other public figures wishing to address the assembled workforce. It was the perfect platform for an orator. Marks was popular as a flagpole speaker. According to Coleman:

There would be a flagpole meeting on ... and people would ask if Marksy was speaking. He would come back from deputations over at the main office, which he called 'bullshit castle', and say things like: 'Well apart from an aching anus, I got nothing!' It appealed to the blokes.<sup>21</sup>

The Workshops was a very territorial place; in referring to the Chief Mechanical Engineer's (CME) office as 'bullshit castle', Marks was cleverly playing on the class divisions between white and blue-collar workers. Although many workers passed from trades to clerical, after studying to become engineers or draftsmen – three men worked their way up from being junior workers to CME of the Workshops – the site itself was demarcated into 'blue' and 'white-collar' territory, and within that into the territory of the individual trades. For example, foundry worker Fred Cadwallader described the intense rivalry between workers in the Foundry and the Boiler Shop. During the period of this paper, the only 'female gendered spaces' were the canteen and the CME's office; even the Casualty Room Sister had been replaced by a male Casualty Room Attendant in 1950.<sup>22</sup> Then there were appropriated spaces such as the flagpole, the origins of which were described above. 'Red Alley' was another space with two uses: the industrial purpose for which the lathes had been placed there, and the socio-political purpose invested by the communists who worked the lathes and used the space between them as a gathering point in lunch hours. 'Red Alley' gained its own mythology, so that employees who joined the Workshops long after Marks had left 'recall' what went on there.

Since the closure of the Workshops in 1994, and the subsequent redevelopment and reinterpretation of the site, 'Red Alley' has featured on heritage walks, with ex-employee guides delighting in pointing out the proximity of the 'alley' to the foreman's office.<sup>23</sup> But in traversing the empty, open spaces of the disused workshop today, it is difficult to construe the power struggles that made this spot so significant, and easy to lose the real meaning of 'Red Square'. Yet, increasingly, heritage practitioners are becoming aware of the significance of power relations in the creation and adaptation of physical sites. In her study of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, Cathy Brigden discusses the power invested in that site, acquired in the 1850s as a 'place' for the unions, and later, in the imposing Trades Hall building that became a 'dominant landmark. The idea that a "place on the map is also a place in history" underscores the spatial and temporal significance of the [Melbourne] Trades Hall'.<sup>24</sup> In the vicinity of Red Square, the structure that most represented managerial power was the elevated foreman's office. Furthermore, its occupant, the foreman, was 'one of us' who had become 'one of them'. In order to understand the full significance of the Communists' bravado, it is necessary to appreciate the attitudes of shop floor workers to the foremen, their superiors and fellow tradesmen, whom they regarded as

‘policemen’ and objects of suspicion. According to Dave Hicks, a fitter and turner, who worked in the ‘Red Square’ area during the 1970s:

The senior foreman’s office ... would be elevated and he could see right down each end of the [Machine] shop; he could stand in his window and watch what’s happening. And the clerk would always be up there. So if you wanted to get out of the joint, if you needed to go to the doctor or you were feeling sick, you would have to go up to the clerk and ask for a pass, a leave pass. It was like a jail. The control they exercised in that place was absolute.<sup>25</sup>

Irrespective of their personal political beliefs, most of workers in the Machine Shop would have relished verbal battles between Marks and Leo McNamara, Foreman Fitter during the latter part of the 1950s, who was known to be a strict Catholic and who may have belonged to the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

Many past employees had fond memories of Marks. Phillip Bristow Stagg, a turner and iron machinist, recalled that Marks had got him ‘involved’ in the AEU. He felt that if Marks had joined the ALP, instead of the CPA, he would have become a Member of Parliament because ‘he could talk people into anything’.<sup>26</sup> Patrick Gayton, a pattern maker, also said that Marks was ‘a great orator’ who ‘could talk us into anything really. He was funny, he used to [say]... “have you seen the daily sausage wrapper today?” [meaning] ... the *West Australian*, of course’.<sup>27</sup> Even Ron Wadham, (Works Manager, 1978-89) regarded Marks as:

... a remarkable character ... a fine controller of men and a persuasive speaker. He would stand at Flagpole meetings and point towards the Management buildings and decry the exploitation of the workers and pronounce the ineptitude of the Manager’.<sup>28</sup>

Wadham was well aware of the power relationships in the Workshops, which he described as being ‘a natural battleground’. His memoirs are replete with phrases such as ‘the troops [were] marching on the office’ and ‘the excitement of marching en masse to frighten me in my office soon lost its attraction’. He referred to Marks as ‘a great guy and always good-natured *outside the battle zone*’.<sup>29</sup> Reading Wadham’s recollections, however, one feels that he regarded the ‘battle’ as a cynical game and that he thought the union officials did likewise.

Irrespective of whether many workers shared Wadham’s cynicism, however, the communist shop stewards appear to have been popular because they worked to improve conditions for the employees. Many of those interviewed referred to ‘Dickensian’ conditions on the factory floor: inadequate washing and lunch time facilities, no safety gear, and noise, smoke and dirt (like Dante’s inferno – as one worker described it), which made dangerous working conditions even worse. Despite years of agitation by the unions, many of these conditions prevailed until the passing of Occupational Health and Safety legislation in the 1980s forced management to adopt practices more appropriate to the late twentieth century – including provision of safety glasses, heavy boots, helmets, overalls and ear plugs, and the investigation of all incidents in which workers were injured.<sup>30</sup>

Shop stewards Coleman (WAASRE), and Marks (AEU) operated in the unreformed atmosphere of the 1950s, when there were many causes for complaint. Coleman looked after the ‘day to day’ needs of ‘the blokes’, such as ensuring that they got disability money for those working in confined spaces, or ‘dirt money’ for

people employed on particularly dirty jobs, and other pay claims. According to Coleman, Midland was the first government workshops to get an 'industry allowance' to compensate for workers being on award pay when private factories paid higher rates for the same skills. He would discuss claims with the relevant foreman. 'Most foremen were good. I wouldn't argue or anything. They respect you if you recognise their position'.<sup>31</sup> It was this reasonable attitude – far from popular contemporary images of 'fanatical' communists – which no doubt won the respect of the foremen. Mutual respect extended beyond individual relationships. The Joint Railways Union Committee (JRUC) on which communist and non-communist union officials co-operated to achieve improvements in the work place, was frequently praised by the Workshops' own communist publication, *Unity*. In 1962, for example, *Unity* congratulated the JRUC for the 'job they've done on behalf of workers in these Shops' and stated that the Committee had been 'savaged by the DLP, the Employers' Federation and the monopoly press urging a return to unions going their separate ways'.<sup>32</sup>

It would be incorrect, however, to impute that communists did not encounter prejudice and injustice because of their activities. The Workshops Rules could be applied quite selectively, as when communist activist Norm Lacey, who had been employed for six months as a labourer, was dismissed on 11 May 1949 for 'breach of Workshops Rule 61, posting of unauthorised pamphlets in Workshops'.<sup>33</sup> There were also sinister aspects to the way the communists operated. Edward King, a turner and iron machinist at the Workshops during the 1950s, regarded Marks as 'a genuine communist' – although not elaborating on what being 'a genuine communist' might mean to him – but despised 'the "red ragers" who trotted around in Jack's wake ... [who] would not know a communist if they fell over one'. King once complained to Marks because one of the 'red ragers' had demanded money for the wharfies and, when King refused to contribute, started a rumour that he was 'scabbing on supporting the wharfies'. King claimed that he told Marks, 'I do not like people demanding money from me. If you want something from me, ask. Don't send your bully-boys over to demand it'. Apparently Marks agreed with him, and reprimanded the worker in question.<sup>34</sup> Research has not yet revealed whether this was an isolated case or a common practice.

Some ex-employees also spoke of 'inter-union' fighting or of power struggles within unions, involving communists, ALP and DLP members.<sup>35</sup> Although there were DLP members among the Workshops employees, and some may have held roles in the executives of more conservative unions, such as the Moulders, the ASE or the WAASRE, the DLP in Western Australia never developed a union base.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, *Unity* rarely mentioned the DLP or 'groupers', although an article in the March 1955 issue attacked 'Industrial Groups', declaring that it was not a 'sectarian' issue but rather that employers used the groups to weaken and pacify the labour movement.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the DLP presence at Midland was insufficient to warrant further mention. If so, this would contrast with Sheridan's finding that, as early as 1938, the anti-communist movement found strong support among unionists in Victoria's railway workshops.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, some workers at Midland expressed strong anti-Communist views.<sup>39</sup>

But perhaps the most revealing indicator of how workers regarded the Communists in their midst may be the results of elections. Marks was elected repeatedly to the AEU executive and was Branch President in the early 1960s. He was shop stewards' convenor at Midland Workshops, represented staff on the Punishments Appeal Board, and was the Metal Trades Federal delegate. But, it

would appear, people were less willing to have him represent them in Parliament. Marks and other prominent communists such as Joan Williams and John Rivo Gandini, stood for the House of Representatives and the Senate during various election campaigns in the 1950s and '60s but none came close to victory. According to *Unity*, the Communist vote increased in the Federal electorate of Swan from 493 in 1959 to 801 in 1962 which, if accurate, would suggest a considerable increase in support – but which sections of the electorate voted for communists is unknown. The residences of the Workshops workforce were widely scattered and it would be impossible to ascertain their impact on the vote.

### **The response of management**

Workshops management appeared to have an ambivalent attitude to the activities of activists on the site. Anecdotal evidence suggests that known Communist activists were not employed at the Workshops. Marks, in fact, claimed that he was certain he would not get a job there even though he was qualified in his trade. On the day of his interview, the Works Manager was conducting a visitor around the Workshops and left the interview to his clerk, who did not know Marks. By the time management realised 'that they had let this dangerous red into the place it was too late because they were employing trainees and so they couldn't sack a tradesman'.<sup>40</sup> Thus Marks claimed to owe his position partly to luck and partly to the political and economic conditions prevailing after the war. Whether the circumstances of his interview are correct is unknown, but foremen's reports from the era attest to the extreme shortage of skilled tradesmen.<sup>41</sup>

On entering employment at Midland, each employee was required to sign – and abide by – a set of Workshops Rules, which were under by-Law 84 of the *Government Railways Act*. Copies of the Workshops Rules were posted upon walls in the various Workshops. Rule 61 prohibited 'canvassing', and Rule 62 forbade workers to hold meetings, take up collections, post notices or advertisements, or distribute literature of any kind, without the permission of the Works Manager.<sup>42</sup> Yet the CPA newsletter, *Unity*, was distributed throughout the Workshops during the 1950s and 1960s. The fact that *Unity* clearly stated that it was published by the 'Workshops Branch of the Communist Party of Australia' and sometimes contained details of flagpole meetings to be held that same day indicates that it was handed out to workers as they arrived in the morning. This activity quite possibly occurred outside the main gate of the premises, but there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that workers regularly flouted the Rules, most notably in the area of making 'foreigners' – items crafted in Workshops time and with Workshops materials for private use, or profit, in some cases. With regard to management response to political activity, apart from the above-mentioned sacking of Lacey, Dennis Day, a fellow Communist and contemporary of Marks, who worked as a turner and iron machinist at the Workshops for 24 years, stated that he was sacked three times. On one occasion, his sacking was connected with an accusation that he had copied of a banned book, *Portnoy's Complaint*, hidden at his house. CPA members had objected to the ban and sold copies of the book in the Pioneer Bookshop. In the other cases, Day appears to have been reinstated by union might and the threat of the strike weapon.<sup>43</sup>

Day also recalled an occasion where the Works Manager, Lucas Pitsikas, supported him against the Machine Shop Foreman, Leo McNamara. McNamara had refused to recognise Day as union shop steward. Day claimed that McNamara, a devout Catholic who 'hated Coms', was forced by Pitsikas to recognise Day in his

union role, despite his communist principles.<sup>44</sup> This transaction took place on the shop floor in front of the tradesmen and probably undermined McNamara's authority.

Although all flagpole meetings had to receive the Works Manager's prior permission, management even permitted the use of a loud speaker and allowed an electrical tradesman employed at the Workshops to set up the platform and amplification system in work time. By sanctioning properly organised flagpole meetings, management provided the workers with a means of 'letting off steam' and airing legitimate industrial grievances, but they also provided a platform for Communists. A survey of *Unity* issues from the 1950s and '60s indicates that Communist candidates for State and Federal elections – as well as those representing the major political parties – spoke on a number of occasions at flagpole meetings. Examples include Jack Marks and Paddy Troy,<sup>45</sup> candidates for the Senate, addressing workers on 5 December 1961, and a meeting for 'Communist candidates' on 11 February 1965. In June 1958, however, Jim Healy, CPA member and Federal Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) spoke at a lunch time 'gate meeting' – which indicates that he was not permitted on the premises.<sup>46</sup> Better known is the refusal by the Works Manager, Bill Britter, to permit American singer, Paul Robeson, to give a concert on the premises during his visit to Western Australia in December 1960.<sup>47</sup> To the delight of hundreds of workers, Robeson defied the ban by performing on the back of a truck parked outside the perimeter fence. He then proceeded to a civic reception, hosted by the Mayor of Midland – thus making the Workshops management look rather petty.<sup>48</sup> According to Coleman, during the 1940s or 1950s, management banned flagpole meetings, and, after the intervention of the then Minister for Railways in the Labor administration, Bert Styants, revoked the ban, except to stipulate that candidates speaking on behalf of political parties could only address the workers at election time.<sup>49</sup> This may have been why Healy and Robeson were not permitted on the premises, whereas Troy – in capacity of a Senate candidate – was.

Despite its large and fairly militant workforce, the Midland Railway Workshops was relatively free of industrial disputes. Research has not yet been completed to enable comparisons to be made between Midland and similar workplaces, regarding the loss of man hours over industrial disputes, but in the site's 90 year history, only three strikes are commonly referred to: a dispute in 1912, the 1952 metal workers strike and a stoppage during the 1970s over the issue of working with asbestos. Apparently, the union stewards' diligence in fighting for important issues; their access to management – irrespective of how negatively they represented these delegations at flagpole meetings<sup>50</sup> – and these meetings themselves, were sufficient to defuse many potential strikes.

## **Conclusion**

Why then did Marks, Coleman, Day and other communists enjoy such popularity at the Workshops? Thousands of workers, of many political persuasions, were committed to bettering their own conditions and those of their fellow workers long before, and after, communism became a recognised ideology in Australia. It has been suggested that Marks could have had a long career in the Parliamentary Labor Party, rather than belatedly joining the ALP in old age, after his resignation from the CPA. Ultimately, Marks' political career was limited to local government; he served as inaugural mayor of the Town of Vincent (1995-98). Yet Marks influenced the lives of thousands of workers. He and the other communist shop stewards played prominent roles at Midland and in the Trades and Labor Council of Western



Australia, and later became State organisers for their unions. Through their membership of the Joint Unions Council, they also influenced many other non-communist union officials and members – men such as Colin Hollett, Frank Bastow and Gordon Grenfell – some of whom also became State organisers. According to Jack Coleman, although his union, the WAASRE, barred him from its leadership because he was a communist, the men on the shop floor simply did not care about his politics as long as he achieved victories for them. He spoke of men coming up and congratulating him on making a stand against management, and saying that his adherence to communism would not make any difference to them.<sup>51</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the communist ‘cell’ at Midland was not concerned with international events, for they often filled as much as half of *Unity* with articles on happenings overseas. In the mid 1960s, for example, issues featured articles on the war in Vietnam (February 1966), and the political situation in Czechoslovakia (August 1968), as well as the frequent discussion of significant national issues such as poverty, military conscription and amount of salary paid to Federal politicians, and an accusation that most of the Australia’s wealth was accumulated by 60 families, including Bailleau, Symes and Coles (December 1961). Furthermore, it was the political and industrial conditions generated by the Second World that largely created a climate in which activists flourished for the decades of the 1950s and ‘60s. As the CPA membership waxed and waned, however, it is evident that pragmatic Australian workers in the Midland Workshops, as elsewhere, were prepared to accept the industrial benefits fought for by communist shop stewards, and to respect them as individuals, while emphatically rejecting their political ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Quinn, ‘The birth of my activism’, *Papers in Labour History No. 25: the WAGR/Westrail Midland Workshops, September 2001*, pp. 63-66.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> For example, J. Read, *Marksy. The life of Jack Marks*, Read Media, South Fremantle, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> L. Taksa, ‘“Pumping Life-Blood into Politics and Place”: Labour Culture and the Eveleigh Railway Workshops’, *Labour History*, no. 79, November 2000, pp. 11-34. Jones is quoted on p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Sheridan, *Mindful Militants. The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, pp. x-xi, 192-265.

<sup>6</sup> Examples include R. Murray, *The Split. Australian Labor in the fifties*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1970; R. McMullin, *The Light on the Hill. The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, ch11; B. Oliver, *Unity is Strength. A history of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia, 1899-1999*, API Books, Bentley, 2003, chapters 9 & 10; W. Eather, ‘Organised Labour and Anti-Communism in Wagga Wagga in the 1950s’, in D. Palmer et. al. (eds), *Australian Labour History Reconsidered*, Australian Humanities Press, Unley, 1999, pp. 102-114.

<sup>7</sup> For example, R. Markey & S. Nixon, ‘Peak Unionism in the Illawarra’ in B. Ellem, R. Markey & J. Shields, (eds), *Peak Unions in Australia. Origins, Purpose, Power, Agency*, The Federation Press, Annandale, 2004, pp. 161-172.

<sup>8</sup> B. Oliver, ‘The Formation and Role of an Independent Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia’, in *ibid*, especially pp. 120-4.

<sup>9</sup> K. Bell, ‘The Midland Junction Railway Workshops, 1920-1939’ in J. Gregory, ed., *Western Australia between the Wars 1919-1939: Studies in Western Australian History XI*, June 1990, p. 34. For ALP attitudes to the CPA, see Oliver, *Unity is Strength*, p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> Bell, ‘The Midland Junction Railway Workshops’, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> B. Oliver & W.S. Latter, ‘Spooks, Spies and Subversives! The Wartime Security Service’ in J. Gregory, (ed.), *On the Homefront. Western Australia and World War II*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1996, pp. 176-85.

<sup>12</sup> The results of the referendum in WA were: 164,989 in favour; 134,497 against. See S. Macintyre, *Militant. The life and times of Paddy Troy*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1984, p. 107.

- <sup>13</sup> For details of the situation in Western Australia, see Oliver, *Unity is Strength*, pp. 182 ff; 207-11.
- <sup>14</sup> See, for example, K. Barry, 'Labour Divided: The Garratt Strike of 1946' in P. Bertola, ed., *Papers in Labour History*, no. 17, December 1996, pp. 46-67.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Archer, 'The 1952 Metal Trades Strike in Western Australia: A War of Attrition', *Papers in Labour History No. 25*, p. 68.
- <sup>16</sup> Flyer drawn by Ray Montgomery, a tradesman and amateur cartoonist at the Workshops. Midland Railway Workshops History Project Collection [henceforth MRWHPC], J.S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, as yet unaccessioned.
- <sup>17</sup> Archer, 'The 1952 Metal Trades Strike', p. 70: Read, *Marksy*, p. 68; *Daily News*, 7 August 1952.
- <sup>18</sup> Frank Bastow, interviewed by B. Oliver, 8 November 2000, Midland Railway Workshops History Project Oral History collection, Battye Library.
- <sup>19</sup> Jack Coleman, cited in Read, *Marksy*, p. 61.
- <sup>20</sup> Owen Salmon, cited in *ibid*, p. 62.
- <sup>21</sup> Cited in *ibid*, p. 61.
- <sup>22</sup> Fred Cadwallader, interviewed by Ric McCracken, 2 July 2002; Dave Hicks, interviewed by Katina Devril, 14 September, 2003, MRWHPC.
- <sup>23</sup> The author was present at a number of these occasions between 1999 and 2004.
- <sup>24</sup> Cathy Bridgen, 'Power and Space in the Victorian Trades Hall Council' in Ellem, et. al, (eds), *Peak Unions in Australia*, p. 220.
- <sup>25</sup> Hicks, interview 14 September 2003.
- <sup>26</sup> Philip Bristow-Stagg, interviewed by Richard Noyelle, 25 March 2004, MRWHPC.
- <sup>27</sup> Patrick Gayton, interviewed by Kendall Clarke, 20 March 2003, MRWHPC.□
- <sup>28</sup> Ron Wadham, 'Ronald Arthur Wadham with the WAGR 1969 to 1989', unpublished memoirs donated to MRWHPC, June 2004; used with permission, n.p.
- <sup>29</sup> Ron Wadham, 'Supplement 2: Industrial Relations' in *ibid*. My emphasis.
- <sup>30</sup> Don Manning, Safety Officer, interviewed by D. Yap, n.d., MRWHPC.
- <sup>31</sup> Jack Coleman, interviewed by S. Reid, 19 September 1988, Battye Library Accession No. OH 2062, transcript p. 28.
- <sup>32</sup> *Unity*, 18 April 1962, in A. & D Cameron Papers, Battye Library Accession No. 4765A (MN 1504), Box 18, item 20. All the issues of *Unity* cited in this paper are from this collection.
- <sup>33</sup> R. McCracken, 'Work Culture' in P. Bertola & B. Oliver, (eds), *The Workshops. A history of the Midland Government Railway Workshops*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 2006.
- <sup>34</sup> E.Y.V. King, 'I've been working on the railroad', unpublished memoirs donated to MRWHPC.
- <sup>35</sup> See, for example, Neil McDougall, interviewed by Bonnie Mitchell, 12 March 2003.
- <sup>36</sup> Oliver, *Unity is Strength*, p. 230.
- <sup>37</sup> *Unity*, 29 March 1955.
- <sup>38</sup> Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, p. 193.
- <sup>39</sup> The author has sighted one anti-Communist leaflet circulated in the Workshops. Signed by 'F. Hrubos', it accused the Communists of being 'cripplers of the prosperity of Australia' who did not have 'the interests of Australia at heart, so they should take the "A" out of CPA', n.d., possibly 1959, in Cameron Papers, Box 18, item 20.
- <sup>40</sup> Read, *Marksy*, p. 35.
- <sup>41</sup> See Annual Reports of Foreman Fitter, 1951; Foreman Boilermaker 1951, 1953, 1956; Foreman Paint Shop, 1944/45, in WAGR Papers, SROWA CONS 5267, WAS 1405, item 66/2841, various volume numbers.
- <sup>42</sup> The *Government Railways Act 1904 – 1967*, By-law 84: Workshops Rules, No. 61 and 62. Copies held in WAGR Papers, SROWA, CONS 5267, WAS1403, item 1976/2799, vol 1.
- <sup>43</sup> Dennis Day, letter to Ric McCracken, n.d., MRWHPC.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>45</sup> Troy was a well-known Communist and militant union official of the Coastal Dock, Rivers and Harbour Workers Union and its successors, the Federated Ship Painters and Dockers Union and the Maritime Workers Union of WA. See Macintyre, *Militant*.
- <sup>46</sup> *Unity Special Edition*, n.d., June 1958?
- <sup>47</sup> SRO: 66/2880, Volume 6, CME Joint Railways Unions Deputations, Marks to Britter (Works Manager) 29 November 1960.
- <sup>48</sup> The full story of Robeson's concert may be accessed at: [www.radio.Murdoch.edu.au](http://www.radio.Murdoch.edu.au)
- <sup>49</sup> Jack Coleman, cited in Read, *Marksy*, p. 63.
- <sup>50</sup> Wadham, 'Unpublished Memoirs' op. cit.
- <sup>51</sup> Coleman, interview 19 September 1988.