

Foot Soldiers for Capital:

The influence of RSL racism on interwar industrial relations in Kalgoorlie and Broken Hill

by

Sarah Gregson B. A. (Hons)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
School of Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour
Faculty of Economics
University of New South Wales

2003

CONTENTS

Abbreviations		iii
Acknowledgements		iv
Introduction	Foot Soldiers for Capital: Why focus on the RSL?	1
Chapter One	Workers, Racism and the RSL: a review of the literature	16
Chapter Two	Plotting the Ebb and Flow of Racist Ideology: a discussion of theory and methodology	45
Chapter Three	‘Australia’s Picked Citizens’: the RSL in the interwar years	87
Chapter Four	Kalgoorlie in Context	117
Chapter Five	Kalgoorlie between the Wars: a mine of racism?	151
Chapter Six	Broken Hill in Context	199
Chapter Seven	Broken Hill between the Wars: the RSL in a ‘union town’	246
Conclusion	Racist Ideology: the end of history?	292
Bibliography		303
Appendixes		334

Abbreviations

ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ALF	Australian Labor Federation
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMA	Amalgamated Miners' Association
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BDAALP	Barrier District Assembly of the Australian Labor Party
<i>BDT</i>	<i>Barrier Daily Truth</i>
BEL	Barrier Empire League
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited
BIA	Barrier Industrial Association
BIC	Barrier Industrial Council
BWA	Barrier Workers' Association
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CTA	Country Traders' Association
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
FEDFA	Federated Engine-Drivers' and Firemen's Association
FMU	Coolgardie Federated Miners Union
HRH	His Royal Highness
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World or the 'Wobblies'
MC	Military Cross
MEU	Municipal Employees Union
MHR	Member of the House of Representatives
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
MMA	Mining Managers Association
MMM	Militant Minority Movement
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NCA	National Citizens' Association
NSWPD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
OBU	One Big Union
PM	Prime Minister
PPTUS/M	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat/Movement
PSI	Italian Socialist Party
RSL	Returned Soldiers' Association Returned Soldiers' League Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia
T&TL	Trades and Trades Labourers' Union
VC	Victoria Cross
WIUA	Workers Industrial Union of Australia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the reference staff at all the institutions that hold sources used in this thesis. May you continue to do so. Despite the continual funding cuts and staff reductions that seemingly haunt all such publicly-funded organisations nowadays, you went placidly amid my noise and haste, providing invaluable assistance and never baulking at my strange inquiries. Special thanks go to the much-put-upon workers at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre – it is my sincere wish that your morning teas remain a haven in a heartless world for travelling historians. In addition, I confess to overworking staff at the NSW State Reference Library and the Mitchell Library in Sydney, the Battye Library in Perth, the Mortlock Library in Adelaide, the William Grundt Library in Kalgoorlie, the Charles Rasp Library in Broken Hill, the National Library of Australia and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the National Archives of Australia offices in Melbourne, Canberra, Perth and Sydney, the Melbourne University Archives and the UNSW Library. At the fearful risk of omitting important debts of gratitude, I would like to express appreciation for the individual assistance given by John Terrell, Victor Oates at the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and Wendy Carter at the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society. They were enormously helpful and generous with their time.

When it comes to acknowledging supervisory help, things get a bit tricky. Of my supervisors four, Michael Quinlan was there at the kick-off. John Shields suggested the case study approach, sharing his own enthusiasm for Broken Hill history, while simultaneously sparking my transformation into a Kalgoorlie-phile. Peter Gahan made me write – no small task. However, special thanks go to Lucy Taksa, who exhibited unique staying power to be there at full-time, offering encouragement, useful advice and continual exhortations not to write in the passive voice. In addition, Phil Griffiths provided unofficial, but not unappreciated, guidance, inspiration, debate and red wine. Diane Fieldes and Sigrid McCausland were meticulous proofreaders, exhibiting friendship and good humour above and beyond the call. To all of you go my many thanks and a sincere hope that you think the final result was worth your collective efforts. Its shortcomings are not your fault.

When I started university as a mature-age student in 1990, I had never even heard of ‘doing Honours’ and had certainly never imagined that I would take such a path and eventually enter upon PhD research. From start to finish, my family and friends provided constant support and, despite all evidence to the contrary, faithfully believed that I could pull it off. To Ian, the Gregson Five, Sue, Mel, Michael, and all at the Sydney Trade Union Choir – I am, somewhat uniquely, speechless in my infinite gratitude. Lastly, to my cat, Toby, who thinks lizards and rats are infinitely more interesting than PhDs – thanks for the reality check, moggy.