

CHAPTER SIX

Broken Hill in Context

One minute the Capitalist Press is helping to bruise and baton the workers into submission and the next it is expressing fear that the workers' lot may be jeopardised by the Chinese and Japanese.

Editorial, *Barrier Daily Truth*, 3 March 1923.

Introduction

E. P. Thompson employed the notion of class, not as a structure to be frozen and examined in isolation, but as 'something which in fact happens', a constantly evolving 'historical relationship'. In this vein, *The Making of the English Working Class* began with an exhortation that:

The relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context. Moreover, we cannot have two distinct classes, each with an independent being, and then bring them *into* relationship with each other. We cannot have love without lovers, nor deference without squires and labourers.¹

Thompson's approach informs this examination of Broken Hill during the 1920s and early 1930s. While no account of the town's history would be complete without inspiring stories of tenacious union struggles, these compelling events are only part of a complex whole. Indeed, it is arguable that erstwhile portrayals of Broken Hill as a 'union town' have obscured the equally important class mobilisations of the mine managers and their supporters. When scholarly attention has addressed industrial divisions along the line of lode, the lion's share of attention has been directed towards fractures *within* working class

¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1968, p. 9.

organisations – the cleavages caused by support for, and opposition to, syndicalist propaganda, the effect of political and industrial divisions among various trade unions, and the enormous political rifts between ALP and CPA activists in the late 1920s and early 1930s.² Equal attention has not been directed towards local employers. In most accounts of Broken Hill's industrial history, the mine managers are either hidden from view or portrayed as lifeless caricatures, devoid of complex motivations and strategies.

Exemplifying the wider historiographical trend regarding explanations of racism in the workplace, evidence of a possible employer role in Broken Hill 'race debates' has also been neglected. Brian Kennedy's excellent social history of the town predominantly portrayed local racism as a simple British/foreign dichotomy, although he did note the part played by mine managers, clergy, business people and the *Barrier Miner* in whipping up pro-war xenophobia.³ Moreover, Kennedy's study concluded with the Big Strike of 1919-20 and so did not examine the racist campaigns that flared in Broken Hill a few years later. Ellem and Shields have scrutinised this period, providing a gripping account of a crusade waged by a vexatious racist, Richard Gully, to split the Broken Hill labour movement on the basis of anti-southern European agitation.⁴ However, in Ellem and Shields' portrayal, Broken Hill's 'race debate' is largely one carried on between the 'solidarists' and the 'exclusionists' within the labour movement. The employers are relegated to the historical background, merely instituting workplace changes that seemingly inadvertently inspired racist responses from workers. The question of whether Gully was a lone agitator or, as Edgar Ross suspected, an 'agent provocateur' for wider employer interests, is yet to be fully examined.

² In line with Joseph Stalin's pronouncement that social democratic parties were more dangerous to working class progress than European fascist movements, CPA members were instructed to treat the more moderate reformists in the ALP as 'social fascists'. For their part, ALP members were encouraged to support anti-working class measures for the restoration of capitalist profitability and 'national prosperity'. For detailed descriptions of the 'Third Period' in Australia, see T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, Stained Wattle Press, Sydney, 1985; S. Macintyre, *The Reds*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998, esp. p. 143. For a global picture, see D. Hallas, *The Comintern*, Bookmarks, London, 1985, pp. 123-38.

³ B. Kennedy, *Silver, Sin and Sixpenny Ale: A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1978, p. 132.

⁴ B. Ellem and J. Shields, 'H. A. Turner and "Australian Labor's Closed Preserve": Explaining the Rise of "Closed Unionism" in the Broken Hill Mining Industry', *Labour and Industry*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2000.

World War One was a period of enormous political and industrial upheaval in Broken Hill. In the face of considerable support for Australian involvement in the conflict, the local labour movement managed to build significant movements against conscription and militarism. However, such a challenge to the nation's war effort did not go unopposed. Conservative forces in Broken Hill banded together during the war years, mounting frequent campaigns to discredit local opponents of the war as cowardly, treacherous and irresponsible. Further, members of this close alliance realised that their mutual interests did not end with the Armistice. In the 1920s and 1930s, Broken Hill unionists faced a well organised enemy from within their own town, in the form of a relatively politically homogeneous network of employers, representatives of the Nationalist Party and the local RSL sub-branch. This largely informal alliance worked together to oppose any and every sign of labour unity and militancy. In particular, mine manager activism around the question of race was, I argue, part of a concerted attempt by capital and its supporters to steer debate towards industrial and political outcomes advantageous for employers. Certainly, if Broken Hill was a 'union town', local employers gave no sign that they were cowed by, or even acknowledged, such a sobering state of affairs.

Despite a widespread and often deserved reputation for industrial unity, the Broken Hill labour movement was divided over a number of political questions – reform versus revolution, industrial militancy versus arbitration, racism versus internationalism.⁵ In particular, the labour movement struggled to work out an appropriate response to the presence of southern European labour on the mines. The industrial unity of the mining workforce was vulnerable on this subject and the conservatives knew it. They took every opportunity to split labour ranks on the 'race' question, knowing that the more Broken Hill workers saw migrants as the enemy, the greater would be the industrial benefits for employers. The ensuing debates within the labour movement, and the struggles between the labour movement and the employers over migrant employment, illuminate the dynamics of

⁵ B. Ellem and J. Shields, 'Making the 'Gibraltar of Unionism': Union Organising and Peak Union Agency in Broken Hill, 1886-1930', *Labour History*, no. 83, 2002.

racism at close quarters. In particular, they provide an opportunity to assess the class interests that were represented in the local ‘race debate’.

This chapter provides a political and industrial context from which to examine the case study material regarding racism in Broken Hill which appears in Chapter Seven. Firstly, it describes the development of local union and employer organisation and the nature of the relationship between these two contending groups. Secondly, it examines two of the most important ideological influences in the town – the conservative *Barrier Miner* and the labour movement-owned *Barrier Daily Truth* (*BDT* or *Truth*) to demonstrate that racial attitudes within Broken Hill were a subject of intense debate. Thirdly, it outlines the character and influence of the RSL in Broken Hill, focussing upon the troubled relationship between returned soldiers and the labour movement alongside the much more friendly affiliation between the RSL and local mine managers.

Industrial relations along the ‘line of lode’

Like Kalgoorlie, Broken Hill is an outback city. It is situated in the Barrier Ranges, approximately 1,100 kilometres from Sydney, its State capital. The formation of the town was stimulated by the discovery of a massive lode of silver, lead and zinc and mines began operating from 1884.⁶ An initial syndicate of seven rural workers developed into the dominant mining company on the field, the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP).⁷ Large companies like BHP controlled mining along the line of lode from its earliest days and, consequently, waged and contract labour were always widespread.

Broken Hill miners were first organised into the Barrier Ranges Miners’ Association late in 1884. Shortly afterwards, this organisation became a branch of the Amalgamated Miners’ Association (AMA), linking the Broken Hill workforce with miners from all over

⁶ G. Blainey, *The Rise of Broken Hill*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1968.

⁷ For a brief summary of the period, see E. Stokes, *United We Stand: Impressions of Broken Hill 1908-1910*, Five Mile Press, Canterbury, 1983, p. 8.

Australia and New Zealand.⁸ Initially, the Broken Hill branch was not militant. Its first executive was made up of men of distinctly middle-class occupations, such as bankers, coaching agents and other businessmen.⁹ However, the harsh nature of mining rapidly brought grievances over wages, conditions, union preference and health and safety to the fore. Four years after the mines opened, Broken Hill miners had elected a more militant union leadership and organised their first strike – many more periods of industrial disputation were to follow. It was these disputes which kindled the equation of Broken Hill's name with trade unionism. However, as was the case in so many other industrial histories, a dialectical relationship existed between the strength of local trade union organisation and the subsequent vigour of employer mobilisations.¹⁰ While the history of Broken Hill is filled with union struggles, it is, almost by definition, equally entwined with the activities of an highly motivated and organised group of employers and supporters.

In 1889, the miners struck to win the closed shop. In 1890, union labour forced the closing of the Broken Hill mines in protest against the employer-initiated class warfare of the Depression period. In 1892, a bitter eighteen week dispute arose over employer attempts to introduce contract mining, an anti-union offensive that was ultimately successful. The AMA lost its employer recognition and more than half its membership. During 1908-9, BHP and its workforce fought a long battle over wage rates; the workers were able to successfully defend the existing award, but many union members suffered unemployment and employer discrimination upon the resumption of work.¹¹ Out of the strike in 1909 came the Barrier Labour Federation, a permanent combined union representative body. Nevertheless, relations between the miners' union and the various craft unions were often strained because of widely differing viewpoints regarding arbitration, militancy and political action. In 1915-16, miners began walking off the job at lunchtime on Saturdays, in an ultimately successful campaign for the forty-four hour week. During the ensuing strike,

⁸ E. Ross, *A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia*, (2nd ed), Macarthur Press, Parramatta, 1984, pp. 49-51.

⁹ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 30.

¹⁰ See, for example, J. Merritt, *The Making of the AWU*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 109. See also G. Osborne, 'Town and Company' in J. Iremonger et al (eds), *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian History*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1973.

the local Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) chapter provided the motto, worn on badges that said, 'If you want a 44 hour week, take it'. Turner described this dispute as the high-point of IWW influence in Broken Hill.¹² Radical influence over trade union activity was not welcomed by supporters of industrial moderation. 'Breakaway unions' formed in the aftermath of the hours dispute, expressly organised around the principle of opposition to industrial action. In May 1919, in a climate of intense union rivalry between the militants and the arbitrationists, Broken Hill miners struck in support of their log of claims, little knowing that it would be eighteen months before they returned to work with a thirty-five hour week and improved health and safety measures.¹³

Throughout the period under review, health and safety were perennial concerns for the miners, but mine management strenuously resisted the implementation of less perilous work practices, preferring to blame employee negligence for high 'accident' rates. As Couch argued, technical evidence regarding the injurious effects of underground mining to workers' health rarely provided the key impetus for change. Instead, mine managers used the maintenance of profitability as an excuse for continued violation of their duty of care and, consequently, the outcome of class struggle became the eventual arbiter of health and safety questions.¹⁴ One report stated that:

[w]hatever may seem desirable from the humanitarian standpoint must be governed by the consideration of remunerative operation of the mines, and [that] shortening of hours, expensive provision of ventilation schemes, and abolition of night shift may mean the partial closing of the industry'.¹⁵

¹² I. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1979 (first published 1965), pp. 81-8. See also G. R. Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement in Broken Hill 1914-1919*, unpublished Honours thesis, Flinders University, 1969; G. Dale, *The Industrial History of Broken Hill*, Fraser and Jenkinson, Melbourne, 1918.

¹³ See B. Hammond, *The Spuds and Onions Strike, The Origin and Course of the Broken Hill Strike 1919-1920*, unpublished Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1970.

¹⁴ M. Couch, 'Workers' Health and Safety in the Broken Hill Mining Industry: The Generation of Competing Rationalities' in K. Tenfelde (ed), *Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich, 1992, pp. 1136-54.

¹⁵ *Underground Managers' Report on Mining Conditions in Broken Hill*, 29 March 1920, Broken Hill South collection, Melbourne University Archives [hereafter BHS/MUA].

Even when compelling evidence from overseas regarding miners' phthisis was at hand, the mine managers only agreed to a welfarist agenda because, they hoped, a spirit of industrial cooperation might be gained from such an approach. A committee formed to discuss the question advised regarding:

the desirability of improving conditions voluntarily before being forced to do so through union demands, and upon the necessity of making such improvements forthwith by reason of the strong probability that recent theories regarding lead poisoning would subsequently be found correct.¹⁶

Mine managers attempted to deflect blame for the unhealthy work environment from themselves by disingenuously claiming that, although the numerous lead poisoning cases might appear to be connected with mine employment, they might 'just as easily be attributed to the privations endured as a consequence of the strike or that 'obscure' cases are simply labelled as lead poisoning in the absence of another diagnosis.'¹⁷

In all the struggles against the managers, various groups of left-wing agitators played decisive leadership roles. In the 1892 dispute, four of the seven strike leaders arrested were leading members of the local branch of the Australian Socialist League.¹⁸ Bob Ross, who went to Broken Hill in 1903 to work on the *Barrier Truth*,¹⁹ helped to form the Barrier Socialist Propaganda Group. In 1908, it was a Wobbly sympathiser who encouraged the Combined Unions Committee, formed to organise the impending struggle against the mine managers, to appoint visiting British socialist, Tom Mann, as a union organiser.²⁰ Other radicals, such as J. J. O'Reilly and Percy Brookfield were attracted to Broken Hill

¹⁶ Report of Underground Managers' Committee on 'Underground Conditions in Broken Hill as Affecting the Health of Employees', 27 January 1920, BHS/MUA.

¹⁷ Underground Managers' Report on Mining Conditions in Broken Hill, 29 March 1920, BHS/MUA.

¹⁸ V. Burgmann, *In Our Time' Socialism and the Rise of Labor, 1885-1905*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 76.

¹⁹ *Barrier Truth* was first published in 1887. In 1908, its successor, *Barrier Daily Truth*, became the first daily labour movement newspaper.

²⁰ V. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 23. See also J. Laurent, 'Tom Mann, R. S. Ross and Evolutionary Socialism in Broken Hill, 1902-1912: Alternative Social Darwinism in the Australian Labour Movement', *Labour History*, no. 51, 1986.

because of its militant reputation and because, like O'Reilly, they had been 'blackballed' for their union activities elsewhere. From 1910, industrial unionism propaganda was disseminated by the International Socialist Club. Although the Broken Hill Left was divided over whether to support the IWW Preamble,²¹ a measure of the support gained by the IWW can be gauged from the acceptance of dual unionism in Broken Hill, whereby an IWW pence card was, for a time, recognised by the AMA as a union ticket.²² Percy Brookfield, easily the most revered labour movement leader in Broken Hill's history, had distinct Wobbly sympathies and was indispensable to the campaign to release the IWW Twelve.²³ Most importantly, the group's insistence that racism and nationalism were the ideology of the class enemy was to have a lasting effect on labour movement politics in Broken Hill. Many radical migrant workers were attracted to the fervent anti-racism of the Wobblies and significant numbers of Britisher workers became convinced that internationalism was an essential ingredient of successful union organisation.

In 1886, responding to the growing pressure of trade unionism, a group of leading mine managers formed the Amalgamated Mining Managers' Association (MMA). Like many employer groups of the period, two of its early concerns were to defend the principle of 'freedom of contract' and to administer an effective labour blacklist.²⁴ However, its principal function was to provide an organised employer response to union claims for higher wages, shorter hours and better conditions.²⁵ The question of national allegiance

²¹ Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp. 11-12.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 158. This was not achieved without a struggle. IWW delegates to an AMA meeting that had been called to discuss the presence of non-unionists on the mines, felt that the union officials were more concerned with the IWW than with the BWA, the openly pro-employer organisation. IWW delegates from Sydney recommended that Broken Hill IWW members should join the AMA. Minutes Book of the IWW, Broken Hill Branch, dated 4, 11, 25 March 1917, IWW papers, reference: 7/5588, NSW Police Service records, State Records NSW.

²³ G. Roper, *Labor's Titan: The Story of Percy Brookfield, 1878-1921*, W. & A. Scarfe (eds), Warnambool Institute Press, Sherwood Park, 1983. The 'Twelve' was a group of IWW leaders jailed on a 'trumped-up' charge of conspiring to burn down Sydney. See I. Turner, *Sydney's Burning: An Australian Political Conspiracy*, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1969.

²⁴ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 31. The MMA subsequently dropped 'Amalgamated' from its title.

²⁵ D. Palmer, 'Too many men on the scapheap': Mining Union Struggles over Health and Safety at Broken Hill and Mount Isa between the World Wars', in D. Palmer et al (eds), *Australian Labour History Reconsidered*, Australian Humanities Press, Adelaide, 1999, pp. 51-74. The Broken Hill mine management

proved a thorny issue for some Broken Hill mine managers. While they actively encouraged the local workforce to identify with the interests of the Australian nation, for their own part, it was a question of which business relationships were most profitable. Carrigan details the high level of German investment in the Broken Hill mines before the war and the reluctance of some sections of mine management to break lucrative economic ties with ‘enemy’ capital. Indeed, he cited the admission of one company director that BHP had more German shareholders than British.²⁶ The outbreak of war inspired cooperative ventures between a number of Broken Hill companies, resulting in the formation of the Collins House Group.²⁷ The Group comprised four major companies – Broken Hill South, North Broken Hill, Zinc Corporation and Amalgamated Zinc. Financiers W. L. Baillieu and W. S. Robinson brought these companies together to cooperate on a number of ‘forward integration’ projects – most notably, the establishment of Broken Hill Associated Smelters (BHAS) and Electrolytic Zinc.²⁸ It was Carrigan’s view that Robinson and Baillieu’s prescient decision to hitch the fate of the Collins House Group to Billy Hughes’ empire-loyal patronage secured its ensuing good economic fortune and the subsequent eclipse of BHP influence in Broken Hill.²⁹ As Robinson recalled in his memoirs:

W. L. said to me: ‘Bill, we’ve got to get to work quickly to replace the German interests with something of our own, something British, within a

did expend considerable time considering various ‘welfarist’ approaches. Perhaps the best summary of their approach can be found in Sir Colin Fraser’s comment regarding ‘old Captain Hancock’ from Wallaroo. Fraser wrote that many people had laughed at Hancock’s methods, but that he ‘was very close to his workmen, [and] showed a much clearer appreciation of the position when he said ‘tuppence in comforts be worth sixpence in wages.’ Letter Fraser to Robinson, dated 13 February, 1919, Sir Colin Fraser, personal papers, Broken Hill Associated Smelters collection, file no. 1/37/11/2, held in the Melbourne University Archives. See also M. Robinson, *Cap’n ‘Ancock: Ruler of Australia’s Little Cornwall*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1978.

²⁶ F. Carrigan, ‘The Imperial Struggle for Control of the Broken Hill Base-Metal Industry, 1914-1915’ in E. L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol. 5, Australia and New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, 1983, p. 166.

²⁷ J. Kennett, *The Collins House Group*, unpublished Masters of Economics thesis, Monash University, July 1982, p. 84. See also P. Richardson, ‘Collins House Financiers W. L. Baillieu, Lionel Robinson and Francis Govett’ in R. T. Appleyard and C. B. Schedvin (eds), *Australian Financiers: Biographical Essays*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1988.

²⁸ See E. W. Campbell, *The 60 Rich Families Who Own Australia*, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1963, pp. 104-7; P. Cochrane, *Industrialization and Dependence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1980, pp. 76-102.

²⁹ Carrigan, ‘The Imperial Struggle for Control’, pp. 181-84.

week'. A few days later Britain and Germany were at war, and Australia immediately joined the mother country.³⁰

The outbreak of World War One and the ensuing disruption of world metal markets resulted in swelling unemployment on the Barrier. As in other parts of Australia, non-British migrants were singled out for State-sponsored discrimination; 600 people were forced to identify themselves under the *Aliens Registration Act* and many were subsequently interned.³¹ Local resident, Hilda Ferguson, remembered six Italian men who were taken away in her street alone.³² Initially, the war was greeted with jingoistic enthusiasm and many young men enlisted. The AMA frequently expressed the belief that relief work was unfairly distributed among single men, 'encouraging' them to enlist.³³ Opposition to war fervour was only kept alive by a tiny number of anti-conscription activists. As Brian Kennedy related, a brigade of socialists who jeered the troop trains as they were leaving for Adelaide only narrowly missed a severe beating from soldier well-wishers by dashing into the Trades Hall building and locking themselves in.³⁴ However, while supporters of the war initially won the day, the effect of continued anti-conscription protests began to yield results. As the hardship of the war ground on, as mine managers pushed harder and harder for military contracts to be met while resisting wage increases, as news of dead family came from the front, many began to openly question military priorities. As a consequence, the 1915 campaign for the forty-four hour week in Broken Hill became one of the earliest Australian industrial struggles to protest, not only against war-time privations, but also against the war itself. Indeed, the town's soldier send-offs became something of a political barometer. Initially well-attended, in 1916, the secretaries of the Barrier Empire League (BEL) were forced to announce that: '[o]wing to the very few Volunteers offering locally, it has been decided to POSTPONE the usual Thursday Evening

³⁰ G. Blainey (ed), *If I Remember Rightly: the memoirs of W. S. Robinson 1876-1963*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1970, p. 71.

³¹ R. H. B. Kearns, *Broken Hill 1915-1939: New Horizons*, Broken Hill Historical Society, Broken Hill, 1977, p. 9.

³² Interview with *Hilda Ferguson*, conducted by Edward Stokes on 17 July 1981. Tape held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 1873, Tape 3.

³³ Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement*, p. 31.

³⁴ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 128.

“Send-off” indefinitely.³⁵ So effective was the propaganda of the anti-conscriptionists that Broken Hill went from being extremely jingoistic to voting ‘no’ in both the 1916 and 1917 referenda.³⁶ Nevertheless, this mobilisation from the Left inspired a closer alliance between the mine managers and their key supporters – the newly-formed Nationalist Party, the local sub-branch of the RSL, ‘loyal’ workers who joined two ‘breakaway unions’, the Barrier Workers’ Association (BWA) and the Trades and Trades Labourers’ Union (T&TL), and the *Barrier Miner* newspaper.

Ideological influences: *Barrier Miner* versus *Barrier Daily Truth*

One of the most illuminating ways of viewing the progress of the ‘race debate’ in Broken Hill is to trace the ideological war that waged between two bitterly-opposed camps – the offices of the *Barrier Miner* and the *Barrier Daily Truth* newspapers. The *Barrier Miner* first appeared in 1888 and, although not initially a conservative paper, it progressively became a prominent distributor of anti-labour comment. Between 1919 and 1922, the paper was owned by J. E. Davidson, who later founded the *Adelaide News* and from 1922, it passed into the hands of Sir Keith Murdoch’s News Limited. In 1908, when the labour movement-sponsored *Barrier Daily Truth* was being planned, it was promoted as a much-needed antidote to the ‘impossible’ *Barrier Miner*.³⁷ As a young child, Pearl Delatorre worked with her mother on a women’s committee to raise money for a daily labour newspaper. She said:

we worked hard for that ... We were raising money to help with the printing ... [Mother] was always involved in anything that would help her husband.

³⁵ *Barrier Miner*, 15, 28 November 1916.

³⁶ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 140. Le Duff argues that the results for the entire Barrier district revealed a 60 per cent opposition to conscription, whereas, in the urban localities, the ‘No’ vote ranged from 65 per cent to 75 per cent of the total, far exceeding the state average. Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement*, pp. 57, 84.

³⁷ *Barrier Truth*, 4 September 1908.

He thought the *Barrier Miner* took the part of the companies and they wanted a paper that would give their side of the questions.³⁸

In *Truth*'s first daily issue, a congratulatory message from Arthur Griffith MLA expressed the view that a daily labour paper was a huge victory for the working class, as 'public opinion governs the world, and the newspapers create and mould public opinion'.³⁹ Its principal aim was 'to send forth to the world [the worker's] protest against a rotten social system.'⁴⁰ Implacably opposed to such a project was the *Barrier Miner*. Under the editorship of John Smethurst, a former construction contractor who had built the local Town Hall, the *Miner* was firmly pro-arbitration, pro-conscription, pro-White Australia and opposed to industrial action.⁴¹ During World War One, Smethurst's editorials pulled every possible heartstring to garner support for the war effort, with eulogistic praise for enlistees and a weekly spread of soldiers' letters home. So effective was the special Sunday edition containing letters from the front that crowds would gather outside the *Barrier Miner* offices to await the first copies. Nevertheless, the paper's pro-militarist stance also provoked an angry response from anti-conscription activists and its offices were bombed twice during the war.⁴²

Although, like most newspapers, both described events that took place in the town and played a role in the dissemination of various political agendas, the principal value of the *Truth* and the *Miner* can be found in the heated exchanges that took place *between* the two papers from their respective ideological vantage points. Both papers battled to win the political allegiance of Broken Hill residents. *Truth* referred to the *Miner* as 'the perplexed

³⁸ Interview with *Pearl Delatorre*, conducted by Edward Stokes on 5 May 1982. Tape held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 1873, Tape 37.

³⁹ *BDT*, 2 November 1908.

⁴⁰ *Barrier Truth*, 21 August 1908.

⁴¹ One *Miner* editorial accused the anti-conscriptionists of being a lawless section of the community and that using the Reserve for their own purposes was trampling on the rights of citizens. *Barrier Miner*, 15 July 1916. The newspaper also became a mouthpiece for every pro-conscriptionist who wanted to wipe the anti-conscription struggle off the streets. See letters from 'Done My Bit' and 'True Loyalist', *Barrier Miner*, 28 July 1916; 'A Soldier's Daughter', 'Anti "Sinn Fein"' and 'Direct Action', *Barrier Miner*, 4 August 1916.

⁴² One police report on the second bombing noted that Mr Smethurst had 'fought the I.W.W. and other disloyal sections in Broken Hill for months, giving them no quarter'. IWW papers, reference: 7/5588, NSW Police Service collection, State Records NSW.

organ of vested interest'⁴³ and sometimes, with more colour, as 'that gramophone of the profit-hunting mob'.⁴⁴ The Labor paper's strategy was to expose the *Miner's* expressions of concern for working people as inconsistent with its trenchant support of arbitration, the British empire, the Nationalists, conscription, secret ballots and the like. For its part, the *Miner* portrayed the *Truth* as anarchistic, disloyal and untrustworthy, with politics that would irresponsibly lead working people into ruinous strikes and the subsequent starvation of their families. In Melba Shannon's words, 'only the people that was in positions bought the *Miner*'. Known locally as the 'snobs' paper', it was more for 'first class people', she said.⁴⁵

The mine managers kept a close eye on what was printed in both major Broken Hill papers. W. Wainwright, of the Broken Hill South mine, described the *Barrier Daily Truth* as a 'disloyal, contemptible, scurrilous rag' and expressed disbelief that the paper had not been suppressed under the *War Precautions Act*. In his view, the paper was 'one of the worst sinners in fostering industrial unrest' and that there should have been 'some means of keeping it within bounds'.⁴⁶ In W. S. Robinson's attempts to have a welfarist agenda adopted in Broken Hill, he recognised a potential role for a sympathetic newspaper. He argued that labour movement suspicion of the ulterior motives behind the industrial welfarist strategies of the mine managers might be 'allayed by useful publicity'. He advised Colin Fraser that '[t]he press men should be used to educate them. Their views should be quietly moulded so that any proposals put forward or action taken will not create suspicion which would kill all chances of co-operation.'⁴⁷ In the battle against the *Truth*, Fraser expressed approval of the new regime of J. E. Davidson, who took over the *Barrier Miner* in 1919. He argued that, under Davidson's tutelage, the *Miner* was taking some of the wind out of *Truth's* sails by 'preaching the "square deal", sane economics, reform by

⁴³ *BDT*, 4 June 1920.

⁴⁴ *BDT*, 1 October 1923.

⁴⁵ Interview with *Melba Shannon*, conducted by Warwick Eather on 27 February 1987. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 2301/0021, Tape 2.

⁴⁶ W. Wainwright, *What is Wrong with Broken Hill?*, 8 March 1918, reference no. 1/18/5/11, Sir Colin Fraser collection, Melbourne University Archives [hereafter CF/MUA].

⁴⁷ Letter, Robinson to Fraser, 25 April 1917, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

constitutional methods, decent citizenship [and] what Australians can make of Australia'.⁴⁸ The *Miner* was central to Fraser's suggestion that the mine managers maintain a publicity campaign 'to combat the baneful effects [of the *Truth*] and to keep the Companies' case placed fairly before the community.'⁴⁹

The *Barrier Miner's* position was one of consistent support for immigration restriction. In the lead-up to the 1916 conscription referendum, its editorials attempted to address the argument that conscription would allow coloured labour to take the jobs of those serving overseas. Smethurst, the then editor, pointed out that the importation of some cheap labour would be an expedient measure to meet demands for unskilled labourers, and to prevent the need for women to take on these unfeminine tasks. However, if readers wanted to grasp the real threat to the White Australia policy, then they need look no further than the IWW-influenced AMA. As one editorial argued:

The rules of the A.M.A. were specially altered to make provision for the admission of men belonging to coloured races, including Chinese. Certain coloured races were excluded from the privileges of membership, but that bar was removed by a special alteration of the rules, apparently because the party running the A.M.A. and the anti-conscription movement believes that the yellow man is as good as the white.⁵⁰

Certainly, AMA rules concerning membership eligibility make no mention of any racial qualifications at this time. In fact, the main onus of eligibility lay, not on skin colour, but on a prospective member not being an employer of labour. As one official put it, 'no man holding the position of boss' could be a member of the AMA.⁵¹ In reply to Smethurst's 'accusations' of union anti-racism, one AMA member argued that, while he was no fan of the IWW, AMA members were not as stupid as the *Miner* seemed to think and were clever enough to see the uselessness of support for the White Australia policy. He said that importing goods made by lowly-paid Asiatic labour undercut the conditions of Australian

⁴⁸ Letter, Fraser to Robinson, 20 March 1919, reference no. 1/37/12, CF/MUA.

⁴⁹ C. Fraser, *What is Wrong with Broken Hill?*, CF/MUA.

⁵⁰ *Barrier Miner*, 25 September 1916.

⁵¹ Revision of rules, AMA minutes, 8 July 1917.

labour and, therefore, there was no point in keeping Asians out – they should be allowed to enter the country so that they could join unions and get decent conditions.⁵²

So seriously did Smethurst view this letter that he published another long editorial, mounting a spirited defence of the White Australia policy, and again attacking the IWW for having the temerity to challenge such a noble ideal. Unable to hide his contempt, he derided local labour movement leaders as:

The upholders of the equality of all men, of all colours and degree of civilisation or savagery, [who] have apparently succeeded in convincing many former believers in a White Australia that this policy is a wrong one, and that the ports of the Commonwealth should be opened wide to the labour of Africa and Asia.⁵³

He trotted out all the old excuses – that if they were not good enough to marry your daughter, then they were not good enough for Australia; that Australia was better kept ‘for our own breed’ rather than filled with ‘mixed colors’; that the proposed IWW revolution would only bring Australian standards down to the lowest level and that Asiatics would set that level, lowering living standards ‘by their habits’. If this was not enough, Smethurst fulminated, ‘some Asiatics live in Australia under low conditions, with their pockets full of bank notes, gold rings on their fingers and gold chains round their camels’ necks.’⁵⁴ In short, it was fine to import ‘cheap’ workers as a temporary measure to ease labour shortages, but only if they remained isolated and exploited.

Just in case workers were in any doubt regarding the benefits of the White Australia policy, *Miner* editorials campaigned against Labor as the party of pro-Asian immigration during the 1917 election campaign. One editorial contended that the ALP’s policy could be viewed through the AMA’s industrial approach to migrant workers and that ‘from a worker’s point of view in particular’:

⁵² *Barrier Miner*, 27 September 1916.

⁵³ *Barrier Miner*, 28 September 1916.

⁵⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 28 September 1916.

[t]he White Australia principle is one of the foundations on which the future of Australia ... must be built. Without any narrow minded prejudice against people who are born a different colour to ourselves, the experience of the United States has proved that it is impossible for those who have sincere regard to the future of Australia to encourage a mixture of blood between Europeans and Asiatics in this continent. And it is especially contrary to the interests of the wage earning classes that thousands of cheap Asiatic labourers should be invited to Broken Hill in accordance with the principle established by the A.M.A. in the alteration of its rules ... the A.M.A. policy of a coloured Barrier is undesirable.⁵⁵

While the *Barrier Miner*'s description of AMA internationalism rather flattered the miners' union, the issue of immigration *was* constantly debated within the Broken Hill labour movement and *Barrier Daily Truth*'s position on the question owed a great deal to the IWW's anti-racist stance.

Barrier Daily Truth published frequent articles on the struggles of Asian workers and defended them against the incursions of British and French imperialism.⁵⁶ These positions were not automatic, but derived from the politics of some AMA officials and activists who recognised the importance of battling against racist ideas within the union movement. Towards the end of the war, the AMA embarked on a campaign to rid the mines of non-unionists and, at one meeting, particular mention was made of 'foreigners' who were not in the union. Even in the existing climate of war-inspired nationalism, the union resolution was not to exclude the southern Europeans, but to make contact with migrant workers 'with the object of bringing them into the union'. One official took exception to the use of the word 'foreigner' in the motion, arguing that the term should be replaced with 'non-unionist'. Recognising the important role that the labour newspaper could play in winning the membership around to a similar position, another official prompted a resolution that 'all antagonism against foreigners be obliterated from "Barrier Daily Truth"'.⁵⁷ When the 'Foreign Workmen's Meeting' was held, the AMA operated on the basis that migrant

⁵⁵ *Barrier Miner*, 13 April 1917.

⁵⁶ See, for example, *BDT*, 20 November 1922.

⁵⁷ AMA minutes, 20 January 1918.

workers should be included in the battle for the closed shop – the recommendation from the meeting simply stated that ‘the rule dealing with the working with and reporting of non-unionists be strictly adhered to’.⁵⁸ A few years later, Richard Quintrell, president of the Workers Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA), argued that he was fully in support of any moves by the trade union movement to resist the implementation of immigration schemes that would swell the labour market in the interests of the employers. However, Quintrell argued, it was essential that, once in Australia, those migrants should be recruited to the union and offered the same protections as other members. Any attempts to stand against migrant workers would surely drive them into the hands of the employer and turn potential allies into fodder for the ‘non-union army’.⁵⁹ While this position did not go unchallenged, it remained the official attitude of the union leadership – a leadership that, as will be demonstrated below, was repeatedly endorsed in ballots held during bitter campaigns for migrant exclusion.

Barrier Daily Truth editor, Ern Wetherell, reflected the ideological turmoil over racism in Broken Hill. A former Wobbly, Wetherell had shifted politically rightwards after the demise of the IWW and, during the early 1920s, could best be described as a lukewarm supporter of the internationalist position.⁶⁰ He would periodically print favourable stories about eugenics in among articles offering sympathy to the migrant victims of capitalist exploitation. One example was his publication of a largely uncritical review of the work of Dean Inge, a cleric who maintained that the real tragedy of the World War One had been that most of those who died had been ‘white’.⁶¹ Yet, the *Truth* also contained historical analyses of the origins and applications of racist division that placed the blame for the

⁵⁸ AMA minutes, 12 February 1918.

⁵⁹ *BDT*, 22 September 1927.

⁶⁰ This description might seem harsh when measured against Wetherell’s magnificent role against the racist campaigner, Richard Gully, outlined in the following chapter. Gully, himself, was quick to identify the contradictions in Wetherell’s early responses to the arrival of Maltese workers, and to claim that Wetherell was hiding his real politics from the internationalists in the WIUA leadership. In reality, Wetherell was torn on the issue but moved in an anti-racist direction in response to Quintrell’s political leadership, the actions of migrant workers themselves and the obvious industrial ramifications of Gully’s campaign. In one speech, he said that ‘he saw in front of him faces of men, some of whom were Italians and Maltese, with whom he had worked, and he would be disgraced forever as a unionist were he to leave unchallenged the brutal statements of Mr Gully.’ *Barrier Daily Truth*, 19 September 1927.

emergence of racism squarely upon the capitalist system. One editorial argued that the ‘alleged Asiatic menace’ was a fiction created by those who wanted to turn Australia into an armed camp in order to reap armament profits. *Truth* blamed capitalists for making an issue out of ‘racial purity and the menace of the Asiatics.’ It pointed out that migration had an integral place in human history and that no ‘white man’ was exempt from this history. Capitalist development had encouraged immigration to cheapen the price of labour. One article argued:

There was no such protest so long as they remained menials. So racial purity was only the varnish that covered economic hatred ... We hear much about racial pride, and the desire to keep the race pure by not inter-marrying with foreign people, but this is largely national “swank”.⁶²

In short, the *Barrier Daily Truth* published articles and letters that reflected the gamut of ideas that were being debated within the labour movement and the wider working class but, on balance, its editorial policy promoted an anti-racist attitude. The conflicting content of the newspaper on the subject of racism clearly demonstrates that there was little labour movement unanimity on the question. The *Miner*, in contrast, argued that while racial equality was a ‘nice-sounding’ theory, White Australia was not to be questioned. Its editor accused the *Truth* of supporting ‘inter-racial’ marriage and shared political rights with ‘non-whites’, stating that these travesties were simply out of the question. Outraged at their mere suggestion, Smethurst argued that such breaches of the White Australia policy ‘would not be tolerated in practice by even the most rabid advocate of internationalism.’⁶³ In essence, he was appealing to working class readers not to be misled by the anti-racists in the labour movement.

The historiography on Australian racism does not acknowledge that such a race debate within the labour movement was possible. Certainly, none of Willard’s ‘higher motives’ for White Australia emanated from the anointed ‘mouthpiece’ of the Broken Hill

⁶¹ *BDT*, 7 July 1925.

⁶² *BDT*, 30 June 1924.

⁶³ *Barrier Miner*, 16 May 1924.

ruling class. The *Barrier Miner*'s crude allusions to the horrors of miscegenation, using the counterpoints of 'white superiority' and 'coloured savagery', were analogous to the 'mob' responses more commonly attributed to the 'uneducated' working class. On the contrary, the *Barrier Daily Truth* contained some of the most theoretically sophisticated anti-racist positions available in Australia in this period. Far from uncritically espousing non-British immigration exclusion, the labour movement paper decried racial exploitation, acknowledged that Asian and Australian workers were engaged in a similar struggle against their employers and struggled towards a set of politics that could simultaneously reject employer attempts to cheapen the price of labour *and* offer solidarity to migrant workers. Nevertheless, just as the Broken Hill labour movement contained a number of activists who were prepared to promote the cause of anti-racism, the conservative camp had its share of energetic organisers promoting Australian nationalism and cross-class unity through racial homogeneity. The most prominent of these was F. G. White.

The 'White army'

During World War One, the militant miners of Broken Hill were among the few who had used their industrial strength to oppose, not only conscription, but the war itself. Such formidable organisation was instrumental in cementing political ties between conservative sections of Broken Hill society, as they sought to oppose labour radicals. Just as activists were important to the direction of the labour movement, so conservative campaigners were integral to the political and industrial successes of local employerdom. On this side of the industrial divide, one of the most prominent advocates of establishment interests was a Broken Hill businessman, whose close links to the RSL afforded him significant social contact with a considerable number of conservative working class men and women. Indeed, F. G. White was described in one *Truth* editorial as 'the bitterest and most consistent anti-Labor force, as an individual, in Broken Hill'.⁶⁴ Paddy O'Neill said of White that he had once 'tried to get a widowed school teacher dismissed from her job because she was an

anti-conscriptionist'.⁶⁵ Born in Britain, White arrived in Adelaide in 1884 and went into the employ of Elder Smith and Company in Adelaide. He moved to Broken Hill in 1895 and became a prominent stockbroker in the town. He acquired a motor vehicle dealership, became president of the Scouts Council, chairman of the Broken Hill Parents and Citizens Council and, later, was an influential 'booster' for the shale oil industry as a director of the South Baerami Shale Oil Company. In 1912, business must have been doing well. His brokerage, White and Hosier, financed the construction of new premises in Chloride Street and, just up the road in the most salubrious part of Broken Hill, White had a 'handsome "Californian bungalow-style" built.⁶⁶ During World War One, he became an Honorary Secretary of the BEL, a pro-war, pro-conscription organisation that was, according to local labour movement leader, Walter Riddiford, primarily composed of Broken Hill's small business proprietors.⁶⁷ The BEL's aims were: 'To hold out the right hand of fellowship for those enlisting for active service, to assist those returning wounded or sick, and generally to help the Empire in the job it has undertaken.'⁶⁸ Melba Shannon remembered patriotic marches in Broken Hill during the war, organised by the BEL. Although not a left-winger, Melba said:

There'd be a march down the main street and they used to wave the flag.
They had no intentions of going but to send everybody else ... It was none of

⁶⁴ *BDT*, 26 November 1931.

⁶⁵ *BDT*, 5 December 1931. This was Frances Mortimore, an English woman who taught at the Broken Hill Public School. She attracted the attention of the Criminal Investigation Branch in 1916 because of her anti-conscription activities, and for her association with the IWW's Tom Barker, Adela Pankhurst, and the Labor Volunteer Army with its associated 'extremists' and 'foreigners'. IWW papers, reference: 7/5590 no. 142, NSW Police Service records, State Records NSW. According to Ern Wetherell, it was H. L. Hosier, White's business partner and co-secretary of the BEL, who attempted to discredit Mrs Mortimer, by reporting to the Minister for Education that she was 'an evil and disloyal influence'. In retaliation, the AMA 'blackballed' the Broken Hill Jockey Club, of which Hosier was Secretary. Under pressure from his colleagues to resign, Hosier capitulated and moved to Melbourne, after a residence of nineteen years in Broken Hill. The confusion over the identity of the informant is probably explained by the popular impression that the two men were cohorts, both equally active and strident opponents of the labour movement. E. Wetherell, *The "Stormy" Years of 1910-1921*, unpublished manuscript, Charles Rasp Memorial Library, Broken Hill, chap. 4, pp. 6-7; *Barrier Miner*, 24 April 1917.

⁶⁶ R. H. B. Kearns, *Broken Hill 1894-1914: The Uncertain Years*, Broken Hill Historical Society, Broken Hill, 1976, p. 63.

⁶⁷ Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement*, pp. 25-6.

⁶⁸ Kearns, *Broken Hill 1915-1939*, p. 8.

the heads that went, it was just the common people of Broken Hill that their boys all went away and, of course, a lot of them never come back.⁶⁹

After the war, White was appointed an administrator of the local War Memorial Trust and was frequently to be found dining at the ‘top table’ at local RSL functions.⁷⁰

Early in 1917, White formed the National Citizens’ Association (NCA), which ran the local election campaigns for Nationalist candidates.⁷¹ As he told a general meeting of the NCA in 1917, the new organisation’s objectives were to provide citizens with a voice in local politics and to enable them to meet and decide which candidates would receive their backing in elections. However, democracy was not a strong feature of the NCA’s constitution and it was White’s voice that clearly dominated proceedings. In his words, the organisation’s members:

would not necessarily nominate anyone, but they [would] consider it their bounden duty as citizens having a stake in the city and the British Empire to combine and work for the return of such candidates who in their opinion would best represent this district from a national standpoint.⁷²

For White, the NCA provided a structure that he, and people like him, could control in the interests of Broken Hill’s establishment and the wider interests of the Nationalists, while still attracting a conservative activist base from which right-wing politics could be organised. In the lead-up to the 1924 State election, A. G. Huie complained about the selection processes of both major parties. ‘Take the National “selections”’, he argued with particular venom:

A few delegates get together, profess to listen to the various aspirants, and then fix up to suit what appear to be the interests of the machine for the time

⁶⁹ Interview with *Melba Shannon*.

⁷⁰ *BDT*, 25 April 1927

⁷¹ For a description of the National Federation, of which the NCA was a part, see M. Booker, *The Great Professional*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1980, p. 208; P. Cochrane, *Industrialization and Dependence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1980, p. 105.

⁷² *Barrier Miner*, 30 March 1917.

being. The rank and file of National supporters are treated with utmost contempt.⁷³

A *Truth* editorial remarked that Broken Hill Nationalists were much more open than their Federal and State counterparts in pursuing lower wages and longer working hours for local workers and that White was their ‘local archangel’.⁷⁴ In the lead-up to the 1931 Municipal election, another editorial warned:

Mr White stands squarely against unionism ... he stands for the longest hours of labour, the lowest wages and the most profits ... Well alert to his class interests, Mr White attends to politics, State, Federal and Municipal. He is the master of ceremonies in the Nationalist camp in Parliamentary elections, and organiser, guide, director and selector of the so-called Independents in municipal campaigns. [His candidates] are mostly well-known – mine officials, managers of warehouses, a squatters’ official and a business head.⁷⁵

Indeed, at the 1931 Anzac smoke social, and at a time when unemployment was rife in Broken Hill, White had the effrontery to favourably recall the wage levels of 1895 and to assert that it was essential that current wage levels be reduced.⁷⁶ White’s children did not appear to suffer the privations that he recommended for Broken Hill workers. In April 1931, enjoying the ‘flapper’ lifestyle that her father’s money could provide, Miss Babs White embarked on a year-long cruise around the world on the *Niagara* and, in 1937, when the Broken Hill Aero Club was founded, she was its first trainee pilot.⁷⁷

The link between White’s NCA electoral activities and his work in the RSL were recognised by many in the labour movement. One *Truth* correspondent complained that it

⁷³ *Barrier Miner*, 30 September 1924.

⁷⁴ *BDT*, 1 December 1928, 15 August 1929.

⁷⁵ *BDT*, 26 November 1931. In a subsequent article, *Truth* described the anti-Labor credentials of the team of Independent candidates put together by F. G. White in the following way – F. Johns, an assayer; A. Wadge, an ex-shift boss, conscriptionist and ‘Blue Whisker’; R. Baldwin, shift boss and RSL executive member; J. Wall, local representative for the Rosella Preserving Company; C. Wood, secretary of the Pastoralists’ Association; F. Kerr, surveyor and ‘solid Tory’; R. Watson, surface foreman. *BDT*, 8 December 1931.

⁷⁶ *BDT*, 27 April 1931.

⁷⁷ *BDT*, 20 April 1932; R. H. B. Kearns, *Broken Hill 1915-1939: New Horizons*, Broken Hill Historical Society, Broken Hill, 1977, p. 65.

was ridiculous to accept the RSL's 'non-political' mantle, since it was clear that the RSL helped only those returned soldiers who were anti-Labor. Further, the correspondent wrote, the RSL called meetings immediately prior to elections at which its leaders promoted the Nationalist platform.⁷⁸ For the 1917 federal elections, there was some disagreement over the choice of the Nationalist candidate. The NCA supported J. Doe, who had become a 'Labor rat' over the conscription issue. The popular choice among returned soldiers, however, was surface worker, AMA member and secretary of the local RSL, H. L. Frusher. 'A soldier's sister' wrote to the *Miner* saying that the two groups should get together and reach agreement about the most suitable nominee – she was critical of the NCA which was, in her opinion, very small and cost five shillings to join, making membership and, therefore enfranchisement for the purposes of choosing a candidate, difficult for wage-earning Nationalists.⁷⁹ Shortly afterwards, a compromise on the choice of candidate was announced – the very respectable Lieutenant Montgomery was endorsed as the Nationalist nominee, a man who had the indisputable electoral advantage of conspicuous war injuries.⁸⁰

While White was busy organising the conservatives, he also took all available opportunities to foment division within the labour movement. During the war, the AMA band had religiously turned up to play at the soldier send-offs organised by the BEL, but when the AMA leadership ordered band members to play at an anti-conscription rally in 1916, the musicians resigned *en masse* from the union.⁸¹ A. E. Haden, former secretary of the AMA Band, wrote a letter to the *Miner* appealing for funds to support a reconstituted Barrier Citizens' Band.⁸² F. G. White responded immediately, encouraging the patriotic unionists of Broken Hill to demand the reinstatement of the band and praising its members for 'refusing to be associated with any disloyal and seditious body.' Eager for the band to show its 'capabilities and patriotism' and knowing that its performances would be a thorn

⁷⁸ *BDT*, 20 September 1927.

⁷⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 31 March 1917.

⁸⁰ *Barrier Miner*, 13 April 1917. For a discussion of the prestige attached to war wounds, see P. Cochrane, *Simpson and the Donkey*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1992, pp. 74-81. Doe remained a candidate, but received a very small proportion of the votes. See Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement*, p. 66.

⁸¹ *Barrier Miner*, 2 August 1916.

⁸² *Barrier Miner*, 7 August 1916.

in the side of the anti-conscriptionist AMA, White forwarded a cheque for the enormous sum of more than £53, which he had collected to assist in the purchase of new instruments.⁸³ A couple of weeks later, a further £10 was forwarded.⁸⁴

By 1922, however, the band was again in a financially precarious state and appealed to the mine managers for a stipend of 30 shillings per week. The mine managers concurred with White on the importance of the Band's 'loyalty'. For them, 'the question was whether it would not be advisable for the Companies to continue to support the men who in the past had refused to comply with the dictates of a disloyal section of the unionists'. The band's request was forwarded to the Melbourne Committee with an, albeit unheeded, suggestion that 'sympathetic consideration be given to the matter'.⁸⁵ When, several months later, the Broken Hill Band submitted a similar request for financial assistance, they were summarily advised by the MMA that the 'cupboard was bare'.⁸⁶ Similarly, in 1929, it was agreed that the MMA would match, pound for pound, a collection for the Citizens' Band, with their contribution capped at £100.⁸⁷ Their generosity to the 'loyal' musicians should be seen in the context of a request, made in that same year, for the MMA to contribute to a fund for the widow and children of a miner who had worked on the British Mine and who had recently died from pneumonia, a known consequence of miners' phthisis. The MMA was wary that contributing to such funds might constitute an admission of liability and, seeing no political advantage in contributing to the welfare of the widow and children, replied that it had no funds available for such philanthropy.⁸⁸

The 'battle of the bands' illustrates F. G. White's willingness to use any and every possible issue to promote conservative politics and to encourage division within the labour movement. Still, organised Broken Hill workers were aware of White's bitter opposition to

⁸³ *Barrier Miner*, 17 August 1916.

⁸⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 1 September 1916.

⁸⁵ Minutes of Meeting of Broken Hill Mine Managers' Association [hereafter MMA minutes], 7 August 1922, Broken Hill South collection, Melbourne University Archives.

⁸⁶ MMA minutes, 8 March 1923.

⁸⁷ MMA minutes, 14 March 1929.

⁸⁸ MMA minutes, 12 December 1929.

labour's cause, were suspicious of his political machinations and, as a result, had a certain immunity to them. In this context, the RSL provided White with a unique opportunity to meet and connect with working class returned soldiers who, he hoped, would be able to agitate more effectively than he for conservative positions among their fellow workers.

Industrial influences: the AMA versus the 'breakaway unions'

F. G. White, the *Barrier Miner* and the MMA were overt supporters of two 'loyal' unions – the Barrier Workers' Association (BWA) and the Barrier Trades and Trades Labourers Union (T&TL).⁸⁹ Known derogatorily within the labour movement as the 'Blue Whiskers Brigade', the BWA organised underground miners, in competition with the AMA, on the basis of opposition to direct action, non-affiliation with the ALP, and support for the continuation of contract mining.⁹⁰ Consisting of approximately one hundred members, a significant proportion of the BWA were conservative returned soldiers.⁹¹ The T&TL organised surface workers and, while not as explicitly 'returned soldier' as the BWA, its members were openly hostile to militant unionism. Formed in 1916, the BWA was described by labour movement stalwart, George Dale, as 'a bogus boss-ridden conglomeration of derelicts.'⁹² In part, this description was induced out by the involvement of F. G. White and his supporters in the formation of this 'breakaway union'.

In response to a 1916 stop-work day organised by the AMA as part of the forty-four hour week campaign, the *Barrier Miner* published several advertisements that equated AMA industrial action with disloyalty. Placed by White, the advertisements appealed to

⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Silver, Sin and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 148.

⁹⁰ It should be noted that, when reporting on the industrial situation in Kalgoorlie, the *BDT* identified the loyalist CFMU by the same 'blue whiskers' epithet. *BDT*, 6 November 1919.

⁹¹ This estimate of Wally Riddiford's is the only numerical assessment of the BWA's strength that I have been able to find. As detailed below, more than sixty BWA members participated in the 1917 Anzac Day march which suggests that more than half of the BWA was returned soldiers. Interview with five Broken Hill miners, conducted by M. Laver in 1974. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 341, Tape 3.

⁹² Dale, *Industrial History of Broken Hill*, p. 244.

conservative workers to closely observe which miners worked and which did not. ‘TO LOYALISTS’, one read, ‘Please take a careful note of all those who STOP WORK on Thursday.’⁹³ The BEL, of which White was an Honorary Secretary, also placed similar advertisements – ‘Workers of the Barrier, Show your loyalty to Empire and Australia and to the boys fighting for you at the front. Work To-day.’⁹⁴ As a consequence of such support from the ‘loyalists’, the mine managers considered that a sufficient breach existed between the militants and the arbitrationists to call the bluff of the AMA, by threatening to dismiss any miner who did not work the forty-eight hour week. However, the AMA retaliated with a promise to strike if any worker was sacked. As Ern Wetherell described the ensuing resolution of the dispute in the AMA’s favour: ‘The companies’ bomb had fizzed.’⁹⁵ Despite this defeat, the conservatives were able to organise in the aftermath of the forty-four hour campaign. Advertisements were placed in the *Barrier Miner* under the pseudonym, ‘Legal’, calling for anti-militant workers to meet.⁹⁶ Shortly afterwards, the new organisation gained registration under the *NSW Trades Union Act (1881)*.⁹⁷ Support for local mine managers and hostility to the industrial militancy of the AMA were the foundations upon which the BWA was built. One BWA supporter and RSL stalwart, T. H. Barson, wrote to the *Barrier Miner* to denounce the AMA. He argued:

These so-called leaders love peace so passionately that the whole of their energies are devoted ... [to] the open advocacy of sabotage in its worst form; for inciting the men working in the mines to use personal violence against the shift bosses in the dark passages of the mines so that no boss would put his head underground; for advising the use of open and general intimidation; and for teaching that all governments are the enemies of the people, these people have openly declared themselves to be anarchists, traitors and rebels, for the destruction of all law and a reversion to barbarism.⁹⁸

In a letter to the *Miner*, ‘Legal’ outlined the aims and objects of the new union. The first aim was ‘to establish a union ruled by the whole of its members, and not by a section’,

⁹³ *Barrier Miner*, 6 September 1916.

⁹⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 6 September 1916.

⁹⁵ Wetherell, *The “Stormy” Years*, p. 10.

⁹⁶ These advertisements were headed with exactly the same typeface as that of BEL announcements.

⁹⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 5 February 1917.

suggesting that the BWA intended to attract all those who were hostile to the tactics of the industrial militants in the AMA. The second aim was to establish a decision-making system, based upon holding ‘a referendum of the whole of the members of the association on all questions of importance’. This policy reflected ‘Legal’s belief that a section of the miners were hostile to mass meetings as a way of deciding union policy. Thirdly, the new union would ‘abolish the present system of running the paper, “Barrier Daily Truth”, meaning that it would no longer collect a subscription from all union members for the upkeep of the newspaper and instead support a system of ‘user-pays’. Indeed, many BWA members were expelled members of the AMA, who had become unfinancial for refusing to pay the shilling levy to support the *Barrier Daily Truth*.⁹⁹ Lastly, ‘Legal’ called for ‘the disbanding of the benefit section and reconstructing it on a sound and proper basis’, an accusation that the current administration of benefits by the AMA was corrupt.¹⁰⁰ Such a policy was explicitly formulated to appeal to unfinancial ex-members of the AMA, because becoming unfinancial rendered miners ineligible for benefit payments.

One letter to the *Miner*, in defence of BWA members, claimed that the union was made up of ‘a very large proportion of the most respectable unionists of Broken Hill.’¹⁰¹ As such, its links with the Nationalist side of politics were clear. In 1917, sixty BWA members took part in the Anzac Day parade and, at the conclusion of the march, their meeting was addressed by Lieutenant Montgomery, the Federal Nationalist candidate.¹⁰² Such open support for the conservative side of politics ensured a political rift between returned soldier organisation and the AMA. When the RSL invited AMA representation at the 1918 Anzac Day commemoration, the AMA resolved to advise the RSL that ‘in view of an objectionable union taking part [the BWA], we object to being represented.’¹⁰³ In 1919, it was McAlister, the Secretary of the BWA, who stood unsuccessfully as the Nationalist candidate against Labor’s candidate, Considine.

⁹⁸ *Barrier Miner*, 17 July 1916.

⁹⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 20 March 1917.

¹⁰⁰ *Barrier Miner*, 12 September 1916.

¹⁰¹ *Barrier Miner*, 23 March 1917.

¹⁰² *Barrier Miner*, 29 April 1917.

¹⁰³ AMA minutes, 26 March 1918.

In that same year, the BWA and the T&TL offered strikebreakers to the mine managers during the course of the Big Strike.¹⁰⁴ Gerald Mussen, the MMA's adviser on welfarist employment practices, received a visit from the Secretary and the President of the BWA, who proudly reported that there were 3,000 men along the line of lode who were not in any union. Although Mussen expressed disbelief at this figure, the BWA leaders assured him that their men, along with those in the T&TL, were allowed to work in peace, without interference from other unions.¹⁰⁵ However, the 'harmonious' approach of these bodies did not serve their members well. The next wage rises that these unions received from the NSW Wages Board were so miserly that Mussen felt that many BWA members would be driven into the fold of the more militant AMA, if the mining companies did not grant some extra concessions to 'loyal unionists'.¹⁰⁶ However, despite Mussen's misgivings, the MMA later received word that the President of the T&TL had 1,000 members who were prepared to unload concentrates, although this was the preserve of striking Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) members.¹⁰⁷ In short, the BWA and T&TL's support for the mine managers and conservative politics was a persistent irritation to the AMA.¹⁰⁸ During the Big Strike of 1919-20, out-of-town scabs often slept on the mines and had their meals brought to them by the management to avoid the picket lines, but local scabs, many of them BWA members, would sometimes try to sneak out and go home. According to Mr A. Byrne, if such men were caught, they were offered a choice between a beating and a 'tar and feathering'. He said:

Most of them preferred tar and feathering to getting a belting. So they were stripped naked and there was a pot of tar that was warmed up and they had plenty of feathers there and they tied them to posts or a fence and then they got a brush and painted them all over with tar. [Laugh] 'Course, they were naked, too. It'd stick pretty well. And then they threw feathers at them and they were all over feathers. Well, then they'd let them go. And when they went home, their wives'd have a terrible task, trying to remove the feathers

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *BDT*, 17 July 1919.

¹⁰⁵ Letter, Mussen to Fraser, 24 March 1919, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

¹⁰⁶ MMA minutes, 4 September 1919.

¹⁰⁷ MMA minutes, 17 September 1919.

¹⁰⁸ For illustrations of the supine industrial position of the BWA and the T&TL, see Appendix B and C.

and the tar. And in those days, there was only kerosene really to do it with. We didn't have petrol and things like that. So, anyhow, it was better than getting a belting, they thought, and ending up in hospital.¹⁰⁹

'Splitters' such as White and members of the BWA had an enormous effect on Broken Hill trade unionism in the interwar period, providing a right-wing pole of attraction that militated against greater labour movement unity. During the forty-four hour week struggle in 1915-16, the more moderate, arbitrationist surface unions led by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers formed a peak council, the Broken Hill Trades and Labour Council, to which most of the surface unions had become affiliated by 1917. This meant that the AMA was organisationally and ideologically isolated from the other sections of the local union movement.¹¹⁰ As Le Duff pointed out, socialist ideas and IWW propaganda found a much more receptive audience among AMA members than elsewhere in the labour movement.¹¹¹ Post-war moves to build industrial unionism in Australia saw several unions, including the Miners' Federation to which the Broken Hill branch of the AMA was affiliated, agree to form the WIUA. This attempt at the One Big Union came to nought, but, in 1921, 'in a gesture of ironic defiance', as Edgar Ross called it, the Broken Hill branch of the AMA became known as the Barrier Branch of the Mining Division of the Workers Industrial Union of Australia.

For a period, the local WIUA remained aloof from the more moderate unions on the Barrier, but its own increasing industrial restraint and tactical considerations eventually prompted closer organisational unity. WIUA officials negotiated a rapprochement with the T&TL. They also developed a policy of 'mutual assistance' with the local branch of the FEDFA, an agreement that assisted the move towards a closed shop on the mines. The two unions cooperated on badge show days, the mechanism by which non-union members were identified, and either recruited or sequestered. FEDFA winder-drivers governed all access to the underground mines. On badge show days, these union members simply refused to

¹⁰⁹ Interview with five Broken Hill miners, conducted by M. Laver in 1974. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 341, Tape 4.

¹¹⁰ Ellem and Shields, 'Why do Unions form Peak Bodies?', p. 393.

¹¹¹ Le Duff, *Factions in the Labour Movement*, p. 44.

lower any non-unionist and, given that the BWA was considered a ‘bogus union’, this strategy delivered a mortal blow to the much-detested WIUA rival.¹¹² By the mid-1920s, the BWA had ceased to exist, WIUA/FEDFA badge shows having made it impossible for BWA members to get work on the mines. Arguably, however, the very existence of the BWA had, in the past, further radicalised the decisions of the underground miners, by claiming those supporters of moderation and arbitration, who would otherwise have watered down the decisions of the WIUA militants. Ironically, the subsequent usurpation of the ‘breakaway unions’ coincided with an increasing conservatism in the WIUA. Such industrial unity paved the way for greater organisational unity and, between 1923 and 1925, the Barrier Industrial Council (BIC) emerged to replace the Trades and Labour Council, with the much sought-after affiliation of the WIUA. As one local described the move: ‘When they formed the BIC they dragged in and quietened the WIU of A and also made the ‘blue whiskers’ a bit more active, it cut both ways, suited everybody.’¹¹³

Significantly for the shape of future industrial relations in Broken Hill, the BIC gained the recognition of the MMA as the sole bargaining agent for all the local unions and, in 1925, was able to negotiate an inaugural locally-based industry agreement, signalling the beginning of a relatively autonomous industrial relations system in the town that would last almost sixty years. From 1925 onwards, workplace negotiations in the Broken Hill mining industry were not conducted under the auspices of either federal or state arbitral bodies, although certainly affected by them.¹¹⁴ Bill Eriksen suggested that the miners’ distrust of arbitration was matched by that of Cyril Emery, the president of the MMA. Eriksen said that Emery’s off-the-record position was:

Emery sat at the head of the table and he said, “I don’t want any bastard with his horse’s tail on his head to tell me what I can afford to pay my men.” Of

¹¹² Ellem and Shields, ‘Why do Unions form Peak Bodies?’, p. 403.

¹¹³ Interviewee in Hammond, Spuds and Onions Strike, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ See W. A. Howard, The Rise and Decline of the Broken Hill Industrial Relations System, Management paper no. 34, Department of Administrative Studies, Monash University, September 1990, pp. 719-21.

course, he never put it on record, but that's what he said. He was prepared to deal with us straight out and we got along alright with him.¹¹⁵

As Ellem and Shields have pointed out, the bureaucratic moves within the miners' union were nevertheless accompanied by a continued commitment to participatory democracy and the central place of the mass meeting in WIUA decision-making processes.¹¹⁶ It is these features of Broken Hill trade unionism which supply important windows into local race relations. Through them, it is possible to see that the attitudes of trade unionists to the arrival of southern European workers in the 1920s was enormously diverse – in fact, bigots and internationalists were repeatedly at loggerheads. Their points of view reflected significant nuances or 'shades of grey' in the debate about the presence of migrants on the mines that were not always represented in the final wordings of union resolutions. They also provide a context in which the closure of the WIUA's books can be accurately assessed. In 1931, the WIUA refused to accept new members into the union in an attempt to force mine managers to hire local unemployed. That the Union's definition of a 'local' included long-term resident southern Europeans makes Broken Hill a revealing focus for this study, suggesting that proponents of migrant exclusion faced stiff opposition from those who, at the very least, recognised the industrially damaging ramifications of racial division.

Kimber described politics in 1920s Broken Hill as a "tug of war" between competing agendas advanced by the Leftists and the Communist party, Labor moderates and localists'.¹¹⁷ Also looking for a contest was the conservative side of town, which pulled out all stops to get the labour movement to let go of its solidarist tendencies. If it is not stretching this effective analogy too far, the rope used for this tug of war might best be portrayed as one frayed at the labour movement end, pulled this way and that by sectional interests and competing political ideologies. At the other end of the rope, however, was a

¹¹⁵ Interview with five Broken Hill miners, conducted by M. Laver in 1974. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 341, Tape 1.

¹¹⁶ Ellem and Shields, 'Why do Unions form Peak Bodies?', p. 404.

determined and united team of mine managers, *Barrier Miner* journalists and members of the local RSL.

“Under the flag of British imperialism”: the Broken Hill sub-branch of the RSL

Broken Hill was fertile ground for wartime AIF recruitment officers. In the four years of the war’s duration, approximately 3,250 men enlisted and 365 of those were killed.¹¹⁸ Founded in 1915, what was originally called the Barrier Returned Soldiers’ Association had close relations with the MMA from its inception.¹¹⁹ Fervent patriot, James Hebbard, manager of the Central Mine, became the driving force behind local returned soldier organisation, making it clear to his fellow mine managers that the issue of returned soldiers was an important one for them.¹²⁰ In 1919, the President of the MMA, Cyril Emery, reported that a delegation from the RSL had visited him. In view of post-war increases in membership, the RSL was anxious to ascertain exactly what the mine managers were prepared to do for returned soldiers, following a report in the *Barrier Miner* that assistance should be forthcoming. The delegation reported that they currently had a membership of around 200 men and that they hoped to increase membership to 1,000 by the end of the year. The mine managers unanimously resolved to report the situation to their superiors on the Melbourne Committee¹²¹ with a strong recommendation that financial support should be given to returned soldiers. Hebbard’s proposal that the MMA donate £10,000 to the RSL, to be spent

¹¹⁷ J. Kimber, ‘A Case of Mild Anarchy?’ The Rise, Role and Demise of Job Committees in the Broken Hill Mining Industry c1930 to c1954, unpublished Honours thesis, University of New South Wales, 1998, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ *Barrier Daily Truth*, 12 October 1925.

¹¹⁹ This group became a sub-branch of the South Australian branch of the RSL in 1917.

¹²⁰ In early RSL correspondence, Hebbard signed himself as the President of what was then known as the Returned Soldiers’ Association. It was Hebbard who donated five horses to R. N. J. Resch [more below] to give to volunteers in his Light Horse contingent. Later, however, the Broken Hill RSL would list Oliver Holmes Whitford as its first President. It is likely that Hebbard took the initial steps to set up the local organisation, handing the presidency over to a suitable returned soldier some time afterwards. An officer and an MC winner, O. H. Whitford was certainly suitable – he later became the general manager of North Broken Hill Limited. A public statement that he would like to line up militant workers and shoot them did not endear him to the Broken Hill labour movement. Kearns, *Broken Hill 1915-1939*, pp. 6, 9.

¹²¹ Committee of Representatives of Barrier Mines, Melbourne.

on a suitable building, with the remainder invested in war bonds to provide future income for RSL activities, was agreeably received.¹²²

Local mine managers reflected the general ruling class apprehension about the response of a large body of organised, militarised men to an increasingly militant labour movement. At war's end, *Barrier Daily Truth* made concerted efforts to appeal to returned servicemen to join the fight against capitalism and war. Its propaganda stressed the working class background of most of those who fought in the war and attempted to build bridges between the interests of returned service personnel and the demands of the labour movement. One front page article with accompanying photograph decried the broken promises made to returned soldiers and exposed the terrible conditions facing those who had taken up barren farming land in Soldier Settlement schemes. In many cases, the paper pointed out, the work required was little different from 'scabbing on horses'.¹²³ Left to themselves, the mine managers feared that returned men might be influenced by such propaganda. Colonel Dyett, Federal President of the RSL, described Broken Hill returned men as having had:

a particularly hard time in remaining solidly behind the principles for which they went away to fight. They have not fallen in with the wishes of a certain element, but remained aloof and in consequence of strikes and industrial unrest they and their families are acute sufferers.¹²⁴

Manager of the South mine, W. Wainwright decided that he would financially reward such loyalty. Les Buck recalled bemusedly that he was one of five returned soldiers on the South mine to receive a bonus for his years overseas, which he said, 'was a very rare thing from the South mine. They didn't give money away unnecessarily!'¹²⁵

¹²² MMA minutes, 13 February 1919.

¹²³ *BDT*, 29 July 1919.

¹²⁴ Letter, Dyett to PM, 5 September 1919, RSL Collection, reference no. MS 6609, item 763, National Library of Australia.

¹²⁵ Interview with *Les Buck*, conducted by Ed Stokes on 9 March 1982. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 1873, Tape 12.

Local RSL leaders did not appreciate labour movement sympathy for the plight of returned soldiers. When Percy Brookfield remarked in a speech in Adelaide that many of the four thousand Broken Hill men who went to war were ‘starved into going’, G. F. Barson, Secretary of the Broken Hill sub-branch, wrote to the *Barrier Daily Truth* to reject Brookfield’s suggestion that the interests of the returned soldier were synonymous with the labour movement. Barson reminded Brookfield that he and other returned soldiers had not ‘forgotten many of the railway scenes and street utterances when we [left] for the front, and we know who, of the soap-box orators, are our friends and our enemies.’¹²⁶ Looking back on this period, one *Truth* editorial maintained that employers, such as Barson, deliberately attempted to maintain a wedge between returned soldiers and the labour movement. Their aim, according to the Editor, was to guard the soldier from any connection with working class ideals and ‘the field of unbiased thought and inquiry’.¹²⁷ The employers’ fears were not without foundation. As one of Hammond’s interviewees noted:

When the soldiers were coming back, the middle class of Broken Hill thought they’d sool the soldiers onto the unionists ... because they were jack of the unionists who were always striving for some conditions ... at the weekend a monster procession took place of unionists ... there were 5,000 people there and to our surprise the soldiers, the Returned Soldiers’ League, sent a speaker too, supporting the unionism; that took the wind out of the sails of our very best citizens of Broken Hill.¹²⁸

In short, the MMA took little convincing that returned soldiers needed to be properly managed, lest there were further liaisons between returned soldiers and the labour movement. Unstinting efforts were required to ensure that returned soldiers were kept distant from post-war union militancy. Unfortunately for the MMA, however, predictions that the RSL would attract a large local membership were not well-founded. By 1923, the sub-branch numbered only just over 300 members and such a poor showing suggested that most returned soldiers were not impressed with the League’s activities or its ‘friends in high

¹²⁶ *BDT*, 11 September 1919.

¹²⁷ *BDT*, 12 April 1927. To ‘sool’ is to urge or provoke.

¹²⁸ Interviewee in Hammond, *Spuds and Onions Strike*, pp. 3-4.

places'.¹²⁹ By 1927, membership had climbed to 370, but still represented only a small proportion of those eligible to join.¹³⁰ For the mine managers, this made it even more important to support the 'loyal' core who identified with RSL politics.

In 1917, Colin Fraser returned to Australia after a two-year absence and noted that relations between management and labour had seriously deteriorated. An industrial advisor to the Collins House Group, Fraser alluded to the 'very large profits' made during the war and surmised that working people felt that they had not received their fair share of this bounty.¹³¹ To garner ideas from the town's elite about what could be done to rectify the situation, Fraser issued a circular in 1917, entitled *What's Wrong with Broken Hill?*, asking for opinions on what most ailed the town. His own opinion was that, in order to avoid industrial disputation, mine managers would have to institute some welfare measures. Many of those who responded agreed with Fraser's summation, adding that returned soldiers should be the primary recipients of such benefits. James Hebbard recommended that, apart from the merits of having approximately 2,500 returned soldiers mingling among the mine workforce, a meeting place for returned soldiers should be established as 'such an institution would have a good effect in counteracting undesirable influences in labour matters, and make for industrial peace.' Hebbard argued:

I need not dilate on the beneficial influence of this Association on the general tone of opinion in Broken Hill as I believe the members have already had ample evidence that the fostering of the opinion there from will benefit employees generally.¹³²

Several months later, Hebbard more strongly reiterated these sentiments, warning that the *Barrier Daily Truth* was seeking to win returned soldiers to the labour movement 'by a display of sympathy and ventilation of grievances'. He wrote:

¹²⁹ Report of RSL meeting in *BDT*, 20 June 1923.

¹³⁰ Annual Report and Balance Sheet for year ended 31 December 1927, Broken Hill RSL, held at the Australian War Memorial.

¹³¹ C. Fraser, *What's Wrong with Broken Hill?*, CF/MUA.

¹³² J. Hebbard, *What's Wrong with Broken Hill?*, CF/MUA.

The Bolsheviks of the Barrier Unions will use every endeavour to accentuate the disgruntled feelings which many of the returned men have towards the Government and employers generally, and it seems to me if employers desire to assist the Government in repatriating these men in such a way that the better opinions with which they have returned (in a large measure utterly antagonistic to the Bolsheviks) may be strengthened, it is time the Companies were “up and doing” with a view to preventing the spread of these opinions as well as to prove that they have the welfare of the men who have earned the Country’s gratitude, sincerely at heart. The aggressive attitude of the militant unionists towards the Companies and those workmen who desire to be loyal to the Country by doing their duty in maintaining its industries can only be squelched by supporting the loyal men who will undoubtedly as time goes on, create a more harmonious atmosphere, and it is hoped to render temperate the malcontents who have been in evidence in Broken Hill for years past.¹³³

Clearly, the RSL had an important strategic place in mine management plans.

The Barrier Industrial Association (BIA) was formed to investigate, and implement where possible, measures that would improve the lot of workers in Broken Hill and, it was hoped, their industrial disposition. The BIA’s Secretary, George Nicholson, said that the welfarists were most anxious to secure ‘the confidence of the workers and to disabuse their minds that there may be ulterior motives in any proposals that may be put forward.’¹³⁴ To this end, the BIA appointed Gerald Mussen, an American welfarist, who was to play a key role in mine management policy in the post-war period. Mussen met with representatives of the RSL to discuss the responsibilities owed by the companies to their former employees, now returned soldiers. His advice to the mine managers was to curry favour with the RSL and to re-employ all Broken Hill soldiers upon their return. It was advice that was closely heeded. Frank Allen, Secretary of the MMA, felt that the provision of facilities for the RSL ‘would have a good effect in counteracting undesirable influences in Labour matters and make for industrial peace.’¹³⁵ In private correspondence, W. S. Robinson added the following postscript: ‘I have taken it for granted that the Company takes every man being a

¹³³ Letter, Hebbard to MMA, 19 February 1918, reference no. 1/37/12, CF/MUA.

¹³⁴ Letter, Allen to Fraser, 9 January 1919, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

¹³⁵ Letter, Allen to Hebbard, 20 June 1917, reference no. 1/18/5/11, CF/MUA.

returned soldier whatever his condition back into employment.’¹³⁶ In a similar vein, Nicholson urged that ‘great care must be taken not to segregate returned soldiers, but rather, the sooner the men get back into the general body politic the better for the country at large.’¹³⁷ Union official, Bill Eriksen, said that when the soldiers returned, they got a good welcome from the mine managers. He said, ‘The companies put them on, whether they had work for them or not. When the returned men came back, particularly those that had been in the industry before they went, they all got jobs.’¹³⁸ Despite this commitment to returned soldier welfare, the mine managers’ dichotomy was to achieve the maximum ‘improving’ effect from returned soldiers mixing with the rest of the workforce, while placing the least financial burden on the mining companies. For example, in an attempt to defray some of the costs onto the Federal Government, Mussen was part of a committee formed to lobby the Repatriation authorities for returned soldier housing.¹³⁹

After the Big Strike ended in 1920, the AMA complained to the MMA that, at the Zinc Corporation mine, returned servicemen were being given the jobs of those who had been employed before the strike. The MMA saw no problem with this policy and cynically advised the AMA that, unlike many Australian employers, the mine managers believed that it was ‘imperative upon the Companies’ to meet the obligations dictated in the *Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Act (1919)*.¹⁴⁰ In 1920, the RSL suggested that non-returned men be asked to take turns with returned soldiers when relief labouring work was allotted. This request was circulated to all the mining companies and the MMA sent assurances to the RSL that ‘the Companies would do all they could to provide the greatest amount of employment for returned soldiers.’¹⁴¹ Later, the RSL sought to extend its privileged position, requesting that several fathers of returned men be given jobs.¹⁴² In July 1922, the RSL wrote to request that the question of giving absolute preference to returned soldiers

¹³⁶ Letter, Robinson to Fraser, 25 April 1917, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

¹³⁷ Letter, Nicholson to Allen, 9 January 1919, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

¹³⁸ Interview with *Bill Eriksen*, conducted by Edward Stokes on 14 March 1982. Tape held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 1873, Tape 25.

¹³⁹ MMA minutes, 25 March 1919.

¹⁴⁰ MMA minutes, 20 November 1920.

¹⁴¹ MMA minutes, 2 February 1920.

with necessary qualifications, should be applied in every possible case. The MMA requested that the RSL provide them with a list of unemployed returned men and that the mine managers would endeavour to find positions for them. They also advised that, if the RSL was willing ‘to supply particulars of cases where they thought men had been unfairly treated, such cases would be carefully looked into.’¹⁴³ To further assist, the MMA funded relief work on the Palace Hotel.¹⁴⁴

The Palace Hotel was a concrete demonstration of mine manager support for the RSL.¹⁴⁵ The MMA purchased the Palace in 1919 from Emil Resch, one of the principals of the large brewing company of the same name.¹⁴⁶ Resch’s nephew, Richard, was a leading RSL member in Broken Hill, where he initially managed his uncle’s soft drink business.¹⁴⁷ On New Year’s Day in 1915, it was Richard who had led a group of police and Volunteer Rifles to ‘deal with’ two Turkish sympathisers who had fired on a local train.¹⁴⁸ In 1919, the MMA made the Palace Hotel available to the RSL for a nominal rental of one shilling per annum. Built in 1889, the hotel was valued at £12,000 and a further £4,000 for renovations was authorised.¹⁴⁹ By 1922, the sub-branch report boasted that Broken Hill had the ‘finest returned soldier club rooms in the Commonwealth’. It comprised 63 bedrooms, two bars, a large billiard room, reading and writing rooms, a lending library and a recreation ground with tennis court. The rooms housed returned soldiers at a discounted rate but were

¹⁴² MMA minutes, 8 December 1921

¹⁴³ MMA minutes, 13 July 1922.

¹⁴⁴ MMA minutes, 2 February 1920.

¹⁴⁵ *BDT*, 19 October 1919.

¹⁴⁶ Edmund Resch, Emil’s brother, was 67 years old when World War One began in 1914 and his subsequent internment at Holdsworthy provides a clear example of the indiscriminate nature of state harassment of Germans during World War One – he had lived in Australia for 50 years and had been an Australian citizen for 25 of those years. See C. Carr, *The Resch Brothers in Australia*, unpublished manuscript held in National Library of Australia, 1992, pp. 23-33.

¹⁴⁷ Resch married Emma Fletcher and adopted her name in 1916, perhaps wishing to avoid anti-German hysteria to which his uncle would fall victim. For Resch’s change of name, see *Barrier Miner*, 7 June 1916. Resch’s commanding officer described him as the ‘mainstay of the Citizen Force’ and ‘an indefatigable Recruiting Officer’. See Department of Defence, file nos. MP84/1 1128/1/16, A2023 A95/5/36, National Archives of Australia, Melbourne.

¹⁴⁸ This episode is widely acknowledged to be the only incident where ‘enemy’ shots were fired on Australian soil during World War One.

¹⁴⁹ *Diggers’ Gazette*, 15 December 1919.

also open to the general public. So successful was this venture that Hostel income alone rendered unnecessary any further public appeals for funds.¹⁵⁰

Financial assistance from the mine managers to the RSL did not stop at the mere provision of a building. In 1923, the MMA also agreed to pay for the painting of the Hostel and provided a mines engineer to supervise the preparation of specifications for the contract.¹⁵¹ In 1924, the RSL requested permission to sub-let the Palace billiards room, an arrangement that would necessitate the construction of a new entrance to the room. This request was also approved and, again, the Association arranged appropriate supervision of the work.¹⁵² By 1927, the Palace had no fewer than 27 staff and was turning a healthy profit.¹⁵³ In July 1934, the Committee of Representatives of Barrier Mines advised that they had approved a request from the RSL for a loan of £2,000 for additional remodelling of the Soldiers' Hostel.¹⁵⁴ The RSL valued this relationship with the employers and worked hard to protect it. Colonel Jacob, President of the South Australian branch of the RSL, attended a MMA meeting for a round of mutual back-slapping and to personally thank the Companies for the considerable corporate assistance given to returned soldiers. Jacob was fulsome in his praise, remarking that the RSL had been 'handed over' a 'wonderful building ... at a peppercorn rental' and had been generously lent another sum to make renovations, again 'at peppercorn interest'.¹⁵⁵ In 1946, with membership levels re-invigorated by another war, the RSL sought new premises and bought land upon which to build. The MMA sold the Palace to the South Australian Brewing Company and donated the entire proceeds of the sale to the RSL's building fund.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ *Diggers' Gazette*, 7 February 1922.

¹⁵¹ MMA minutes, 23 August, 29 October 1923.

¹⁵² MMA minutes, 10 July 1924.

¹⁵³ Annual Report and Balance Sheet, Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, Broken Hill Sub-Branch, for year ended 31 December 1927, p. 5, held in Australian War Memorial.

¹⁵⁴ MMA minutes, 2 August 1934.

¹⁵⁵ MMA minutes, 9 May 1935.

¹⁵⁶ R. H. B. Kearns, *Broken Hill 1940-1973: New Horizons*, Broken Hill Historical Society, Broken Hill, 1977, pp. 17-8. In what I like to think of as the southern Europeans' revenge, the RSL Club in Broken Hill ceased operation in 1994, whereas its former premises is now trading under the name of its proprietor, Mario Valentino Celotto, and has been renamed Mario's Palace Hotel.

Apart from the Palace Hotel, the BIA suggested that a war memorial would also raise the profile of returned soldier sacrifice in Broken Hill,¹⁵⁷ but it was to prove to be a far more contentious addition to the landscape and emblematic of the ideological struggle being waged between the conservatives and the anti-militarists. In 1921, *Truth* gleefully reported that two guns that had been sent to Broken Hill for memorial purposes had been left in the Railway Town station yard for several months after their arrival.¹⁵⁸ Initially, all attempts to have the guns placed in a suitably prominent position came to nothing. Permission was sought for them to be placed outside the local courthouse but consent was not forthcoming. A suggestion that the guns be placed on the Reserve was also quashed as it was felt that ‘the red-rag element might vent their spleen on them.’¹⁵⁹ Eventually, it was decided to put the firearms on the tennis court at the back of the Soldiers’ Hostel. This location was an acknowledgement that there was considerable hostility towards memorialising of the war in Broken Hill.

In 1925, a more imposing memorial was unveiled by Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash. A figure sculpted by C. Webb Gilbert, ‘The Bomber’, as it was called, was situated prominently on the corner of Argent and Sulphide Streets. Although its RSL commissioning committee found it to be ‘true in every detail’, the *Barrier Daily Truth* reporter described it as ‘almost repulsive and bestial in its attitude and expression.’¹⁶⁰ The unveiling ceremony, as reported in Broken Hill’s rival newspapers, provided a graphic illustration of the divided attitudes of townspeople towards the war. Inglis compared newspaper reports of the event thus. *The Barrier Miner* described a large, and visibly moved crowd at the ceremony, while *Barrier Daily Truth* reported ‘no great enthusiasm’ from the crowd and that, in dispersing, they left the ‘war glorifier ... in the perpetual act of hurling a bomb on to the roof of the hotel opposite’. Inglis argued that ‘no other paper reported an unveiling with such irreverence.’¹⁶¹ Clearly, the memorial was not an

¹⁵⁷ Letter, Nicholson to Allen, 9 January 1919, reference no. 1/37/11/2, CF/MUA.

¹⁵⁸ *BDT*, 14 June 1921.

¹⁵⁹ *BDT*, 14 June 1921.

¹⁶⁰ *BDT*, 12 October 1925.

¹⁶¹ K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1999, pp. 223-4.

uncontroversial addition to the Broken Hill landscape for, at the Anzac day smoke social in 1927, Mr F. G. White, in his capacity as a member of the War Memorial Trust, exhorted all those present to be ‘eternally vigilant’ in protecting the memorial from vandalism.¹⁶²

The labour movement was not immune from the ideological warfare of the conservatives and the ramifications of the war still loomed large in political debates. For example, in 1927, the Labor Mayor, Alderman R. Dennis, made a controversial speech at an Anzac Day event, remarking that one of his ambitions was to inculcate in young people a recognition of the need for soldiers to protect Australia. *Barrier Daily Truth* reported, ‘He had no time for the man who would not go to the front, and no time for the man who said that men should not enlist when it was necessary.’¹⁶³ This clear swipe at the anti-conscriptionists provoked a swift outcry. One Letter to the Editor expressed outrage at the Mayor’s pro-war attitudes, alleging that he had ‘out-jingoed the jingoes’, that men had been expelled from the Labor movement for saying less, and asking what action was the Barrier District Assembly of the ALP going to take. Another letter from ‘Disgusted’ called for disciplinary measures against Dennis, arguing that his speech was ‘supporting militarism and flouting every sentiment that the Labor movement stands for.’¹⁶⁴ At a subsequent meeting of the WIUA, the following motion was passed:

That this meeting of members of the WIU of A view with amazement and disgust the anti-working class utterances made by the alleged Labor Mayor ... and, further, the delegates from the A.L.P. and Industrial Council be instructed to demand his resignation as Mayor.¹⁶⁵

Beyond the MMA’s ostentatious display of support for the RSL as an ideological weapon lay a different story. Requests of relief payments to ease the suffering of individual unemployed returned soldiers and their families were often treated in a much more parsimonious fashion. For instance, the RSL asked the mine managers for wood and coal donations for returned servicemen with large families, and for a horse and cart to deliver

¹⁶² *BDT*, 25 April 1927.

¹⁶³ *BDT*, 25 April 1927.

¹⁶⁴ *BDT*, 26 April 1927.

these items. The Secretary of the BIA was instructed to reply that ‘present difficulties’ prevented the request from being fulfilled, although the RSL was asked to keep the mine managers informed about returned soldier matters.¹⁶⁶ Subsequently, the RSL’s support for the mine managers during the Big Strike did much to fortify employer support for such a loyal organisation. In return, the RSL leadership did their utmost to keep returned soldiers respectful and hard-working. In mid-1919, it estimated that 150-200 returned soldiers were unemployed, but was anxious to avoid any accusation that ex-soldiers would avoid work. While other workers might be ‘shirkers’, the RSL leadership contended that ‘[t]he returned man who is able bodied wants work, and is naturally averse to accepting sustenance money.’¹⁶⁷ This was also the line that the Federal President of the RSL, Gilbert Dyett, used when lobbying the Prime Minister for special consideration of Broken Hill ex-soldiers. It was not money, but work, that was required ‘for these soldiers who have behaved so magnificently during days of industrial action’.¹⁶⁸ In discussion, Cyril Emery stated firmly that ‘if anything was to be done it should be done for Returned Soldiers’ and although Hebbard felt that giving preference to returned soldiers would antagonise the AMA, it was agreed that the Public Works Department and the Melbourne Committee should be approached to supply extra relief for returned soldiers.¹⁶⁹ This was eventually forthcoming but the Melbourne Committee was determined to get value for money, stipulating that the £500 donated was only to be directed towards relief work for returned soldiers and those in unions that were not on strike.¹⁷⁰

Returned soldiers themselves were aware that better treatment was accorded to the ‘loyal’ soldier, and that those who wanted to be re-absorbed into the labour movement could not expect any favours from the RSL leadership or local employers. In 1919, one returned soldier wrote an outraged letter to the *Truth*, in which he referred to a friend of his,

¹⁶⁵ WIUA minutes, 26 April 1927.

¹⁶⁶ MMA minutes, 4 July 1919.

¹⁶⁷ MMA minutes, 4 September 1919.

¹⁶⁸ Letter, Dyett to Prime Minister, 5 September 1919, RSL collection, MS 6609, item 763, National Library of Australia.

¹⁶⁹ MMA minutes, 4 September 1919.

¹⁷⁰ MMA minutes, 7 October 1919.

a returned soldier and an AMA member, who had been refused relief money from the police. At the same time, he argued, NSW Wages Board proceedings had granted 'loyal' T&TL members one pound per week. When he himself had applied to the Repatriation Office, assistance was only forthcoming when he lied and said that he would be prepared to scab during the strike. He predicted that similar pressure to work on the mines would be put on all returned soldiers.¹⁷¹ In the following year, when a deputation approached an MMA meeting to acquaint the employers with the seriousness of the unemployment situation for returned soldiers, A. A. Lawrence thanked the Association for receiving the delegation and respectfully stated that the purpose of the deputation was to 'get some moral support from the Mining Managers' Association in any representation which they might make to the Government to start relief works.'¹⁷² The MMA were clearly prepared to give the RSL more than moral support and, for the duration of the strike, money for returned soldier relief works was by far the largest recurring expenditure of the MMA.¹⁷³

It was not long after the war that the RSL leadership's 'aloofness' towards working class living standards became apparent. Not only were they prepared to undercut the militants in the mine workforce, they were also prepared to undermine the industrial demands of returned soldiers as well. This was borne out by a dispute which took place in Broken Hill in 1920. A group of forty returned soldiers who were engaged in relief work on the Wilcannia road, some distance from the centre of town, refused to work until they were granted paid walking time to the job. As one of the soldier strikers said, '[i]f the unionists around the district are allowed this privilege of travelling time, then why is it refused to us? All we are asking is a fair deal.'¹⁷⁴ The RSL branch executive thought the demand was just, but heartily disapproved of the men's 'unconstitutional methods' and decided to send a new list of willing employees to the Public Works Department. The strikers returned to work

¹⁷¹ The letter was signed 'A.M.A., A.I.F.' *BDT*, 6 September 1919.

¹⁷² MMA minutes, 23 January 1920.

¹⁷³ See, for example, Financial Statements, MMA minutes, 12 February, 11 March, 28 April 1920; MMA minutes, 23 January 1920.

¹⁷⁴ *BDT*, 19 February 1920.

before this plan was enacted, but it was clear that the RSL leadership was prepared to organise scabbing against fellow returned soldiers.¹⁷⁵

Racism was one of the means by which the RSL sought to hide its antagonism towards improved worker rights. By masquerading support for White Australia as concern for Australian wage and employment levels, the RSL promoted an ideology that militated against the very industrial strength that was needed to improve working class living standards. The League's constant agitation for 'white unity' encouraged racial division within the labour movement, weakening union capacity and thereby assisting employers to limit wage increases. In 1921, the annual general meeting of the local sub-branch discussed the 'regrettable fact' that, while there were many 'aliens' working on the mines, 'returned soldiers capable of doing the same work were unemployed and practically penniless.'¹⁷⁶ However, this was an argument that elite members of the RSL could not prosecute among working people, who would be naturally suspicious of arguments made by their industrial enemies. It was in this regard that conservative working class returned soldiers were so important to the influence of the League. As Chapter Seven will confirm, in the mid-to-late 1920s, rank-and-file RSL members actively sought to plant this anti-migrant dichotomy in the minds of Broken Hill workers.

Perhaps the most revealing insight into the relationship between the RSL, the mine managers and racism against migrants was provided by Cyril Emery, President of the MMA. In 1931, at the Anzac Day Smoke Social held at the Palace Hostel, Mr Fisher, a State Councillor of the RSL, toasted the visiting guests. He also drew particular attention to the fact that, if not for the mine managers, they would not have the room in which they were sitting. This was the cue for Emery to make his speech. The mine manager was in a feisty mood and did not shirk the question he knew was uppermost in the minds of RSL members. Emery began brazenly, by stating that he realised that many RSL members thought, 'Why doesn't the old blackguard put off a lot of foreigners on the North [mine] and put on

¹⁷⁵ Report of Broken Hill Executive by S. W. Barson, RSL Collection, reference no. MS 6609, item 763, National Library of Australia.

Anzacs?’ The *Barrier Miner* reported that there was much ‘applause and commotion’ in response to this statement. Emery’s provocative reply to his own rhetorical question was to laugh and say, ‘Well, make it rough, boys, I like it that way.’ Then, adopting a more conciliatory tone, the politically astute mine manager reeled out a number of predictable platitudes. He acknowledged that ‘Australia’ was having a difficult time at present, that things were not as they would like, but that there were better times ahead. In closing, Emery repaid Fisher’s verbal obeisance by firmly stating that ‘men who stormed Gallipoli would come through with the right leaders’.¹⁷⁷

Emery’s speech was intended to achieve a number of political ends. In bringing up the presence of ‘foreigners’ in Broken Hill, he reinforced in the minds of RSL members that migrants were the main source of their unemployment problems. At the same time, he affirmed that freedom of contract was an inviolable principle that he and his associates would always exercise as they saw fit and that the employment of cheap labour was their prerogative. In exhorting the men to ‘make it rough’, he clearly saw no problem with racism against migrants, as long as it deflected workers from blaming the mine managers for insufficient jobs. In tandem, the latter half of the speech reinforced the idea that the fortunes of Britisher mine managers and workers were integrally linked and that everyone in Broken Hill had a stake in the revival of the mining industry. All that was needed were steady heads and strong leadership.

F. G. White was one of those leaders. Given his well-known opposition to union organisation, it was unlikely that White would get much of a hearing in labour movement circles. However, White was able to cultivate working class supporters in the local RSL. Three such men were returned soldiers Richard Gully, A. A. Lawrence and Fred Rilen who, as Chapter Seven demonstrates, were encouraged by White to stand as Nationalist candidates in elections for the municipal council and to actively promulgate conservative politics within the labour movement. In the 1920s, Gully became known as the leader of a

¹⁷⁶ *Diggers’ Gazette*, 21 January 1921.

¹⁷⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 27 April 1931.

campaign for migrant exclusion. Arthur Anson Lawrence, a Gallipoli veteran and one of the founding members of the BWA, supported Gully in his increasingly shrill campaigns to get migrant workers removed from the mines. Gully and Rilen joined forces to attack the WIUA's 12½ per cent levy in support of striking coalminers. The RSL was the common denominator between White, a pillar of the local Broken Hill establishment, and Gully, Lawrence and Rilen, three workers who were employed at different mines along the line of lode. While all these men made liberal use of racist invective in their public activities, their racism should be seen as part of a general orientation towards union-busting. However, their racism was not unimportant to the mine managers who, in this period, hired southern Europeans on a racist basis – as cheap labour for unskilled work. The activities of White, Gully and Lawrence were motivated by a desire to drive a racist wedge between the southern European workers and their British counterparts, as part of a struggle to keep the newcomers isolated and cheap.

Conclusion

Employers, unions and radical and conservative activists were all involved in debating attitudes towards the presence of migrant labour in the community. The local mine managers adopted a panoply of strategies designed to increase the rate of exploitation of the Broken Hill workforce, reduce costs, and thereby increase profits. They attracted a number of allies – individuals and groups that opposed militant trade unionism and supported a range of conservative agendas. In particular, they galvanised Nationalist supporters, conservative workers in anti-militant organisations and conservative returned soldiers. Unlike sections of the labour movement, all these groups were fervent supporters of the White Australia policy. In response, the Left of the Broken Hill labour movement battled against the divisive tactics of the organised Right and, in the process, waged an argument that racism would weaken the industrial strength of local workers. That sections of the labour movement engaged in a struggle against racial division suggests that important questions can be raised regarding the previous historiographical emphasis on the

unquestioning labour movement support for migrant exclusion. At the very least, the progress of this local 'race debate' demonstrated that labour movement support for migrant exclusion was never a foregone conclusion and depended on the interaction of a range of often contradictory and unpredictable forces.