

CHAPTER SEVEN

Broken Hill between the Wars: the RSL in a 'union town'

Union meetings were systematically disrupted, with divisions on motions presented as "This side for unity!" and "This side for Australia!" ... With Gully defeated, Broken Hill's class integrity and internationalism were vindicated.

E. Ross on Richard Gully's racist campaign among Broken Hill miners, *Of Storm and Struggle*¹

Introduction

Despite Broken Hill's reputation as a beacon of working class solidarity, the local labour movement was riven with political and industrial tensions in the interwar period. These fissures were not, however, solely the result of political disagreements within the organised working class. In fact, local employers delighted in each sign of labour movement disunity and did all in their power to exacerbate rivalries. Although this general point might not be regarded as terribly contentious among labour historians, the general acceptance of racism as an almost inevitable response to working class competition for jobs has led to a concomitant neglect of employer activism around the question of race. In the absence of further analysis, employer attempts to import migrant labour might be portrayed as evidence of an ambivalent, even hostile, attitude towards White Australia as a policy that inhibited the 'natural' free flow of the labour market. On the contrary, as this case study of Broken Hill demonstrates, employers in Broken Hill expressed unswerving loyalty to the 'principles' behind White Australia, even as they looked far and wide for the cheapest labour to exploit. These outwardly contradictory positions offered potential industrial advantages to employers seeking to profit from racist division among workers, in the form of cheap labour and industrial rifts.

In order to highlight employer activity around the issue of racism, this chapter outlines a range of right-wing campaigns that sought to weaken the militant unionism of the 1920s and, through them, assesses the strategies and influence of conservative forces in Broken Hill. Racism, it is demonstrated, was but one item on their divisive agenda. Union responses to employer campaigns are also examined. While concern about the presence of migrant labour on the mines was common, there was no unified labour movement attitude to the new southern European arrivals. Instead, in contrast to local employer tactics, union debates and strategies exhibited a distinct tension between the need to protect available jobs for local unemployed and the wider principle of international solidarity. As happened in Kalgoorlie, the Broken Hill sub-branch of the RSL organised conservative returned soldiers. Members of the local establishment held leadership position in the Broken Hill RSL, beginning with local mine manager, James Hebbard, who was its first president. Mine managers, magistrates, clergy and members of the business community used RSL 'debates' as opportunities to propagate conservative politics and to drum up support for Nationalist politicians. Most noticeably, the RSL's opposition to the presence of southern European labour on the mines became an important adjunct to employer requirements for cheap and unorganised workers.

To demonstrate these links, I present biographies of F. G. White, Richard Gully and A. A. Lawrence who, with their associates,² had an enormous effect on Broken Hill political life during the interwar period. Although, as a local businessman, White's social background differed markedly from the other two working class men, all three were linked by RSL affiliation, empire loyalty and an active hatred of militant trade unionism. Primed with the virulent form of nationalistic, anti-southern European racism that was integral to RSL politics, and egged on by White, Gully and Lawrence fought to gain support among fellow workers for a range of anti-union initiatives, such as anti-immigrant crusades, anti-preference clauses and opposition to strike levies. Through these campaigns, racism is presented, not just as a sign of labour movement division,

¹ E. Ross, *Of Storm and Struggle*, Alternative Publishing Co-operative, Sydney, 1982, p. 41.

but as one of a range of important *employer* tools used in the quest for industrial supremacy.

Racism on the mines: evidence from the 1914 Royal Commission on the Broken Hill mining industry

In June 1914, the NSW government set up a Royal Commission into conditions on the Broken Hill mines. The Commission's terms of reference were based on a premise that southern European immigration was unquestionably objectionable and, in and of itself, posed a direct threat to the health and safety, living standards and working conditions of local workers. The Commissioners were appointed to investigate, among other things, means for the 'prevention of the wholesale influx into Australia of foreigners unable to speak the English language, with a view to minimising the number who may seek and obtain employment in the said mines in place of Australian miners'.³ A return was prepared by the Inspector of Police at Broken Hill showing that, of the 748 foreigners in Broken Hill, 100 could not speak English and 544 only spoke English 'imperfectly'. It was estimated that the Maltese, Bulgarians, Germans, Austrians, Italians and others who made up the migrant population were approximately seven per cent of the total population of Broken Hill [see Appendix D].

With war-time unemployment on the rise, the closure of mines in neighbouring Cobar and a perceived increase of new arrivals under migration contracts with local employers, the Amalgamated Miners' Association (AMA) executive was suspicious that the mine managers were trying to swell the labour market and so cheapen contract rates. Although the Commission found no shortage of workers willing to testify that non-English speaking workers were a danger to themselves and others, this was not the only response that was elicited from union witnesses. Some evidence given at the Commission suggested that AMA miners were reluctant to cooperate with inspectors

² Returned soldiers, Fred Rilen and J. J. Hatch, were key associates, but biographies were not possible due to lack of sources.

³ *Report of the Royal Commission on Mining Industry at Broken Hill*, [hereafter *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*] presented to NSW Legislative Assembly, Sydney, 1914, p. iii.

when they went in search of non-English speaking workers. J. C. James, an Inspector of Mines, revealed that, acting on a letter of complaint he had received from the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), he had endeavoured to make inquiries about foreign workers on the Broken Hill mines. When asked if there had been any correspondence from the miners' union, the AMA, about the presence of migrant labour, the Inspector replied, 'No; we had no complaints from the miners whatever.' Nevertheless, despite the lack of complaints, he had not anticipated 'that there would be any difficulty in getting the members of the union to assist us in finding out the places and the mines in which the foreigners were employed'.⁴ He had been wrong.

The Mine Inspectors were, according to Ern Wetherell, commonly referred to as the 'Three Blind Mice' by mine workers.⁵ W. Eddy, a mine Checkweigher, said in evidence that he thought that the Inspectors should be renamed 'Government Mining Visitors'. He said:

my experience is they come underground with a guard of honour, perhaps the underground manager on one side and the foreman on the other, and they walk through the mine ... I have only been spoken to by one Government inspector ... I could hear them coming, they were talking tennis; and when he got up to the stope he said, "Good-day, boys; how is the back [of the stope]?" I said, "Not bad," and he walked on.⁶

The Chief Inspector of Mines for New South Wales, J. B. Jaquet, testified that 'there was difficulty in searching the mines to locate such foreigners, and the inspectors consequently had to rely on the information by the management and shift bosses'.⁷ This suggests that there was no campaign by the miners to get rid of migrant workers. Even if opposition to migrant labour had been official union policy, but the workers had been afraid of giving information to the Inspectors, they could have deputed their Check Inspector, an employee of the AMA charged with taking up the workers' concerns with management, to identify the non-English speaking workers. They did not do so. When Sam Deed, the AMA Check Inspector, gave evidence, he was evasive about the

⁴ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 41.

⁵ Ern Wetherell, 'The "Stormy" Years of 1910-1921', unpublished manuscript, Charles Rasp Memorial Library, Broken Hill, p. 139.

⁶ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 201.

presence of non-English speaking migrants on the mines. When asked why he did not, as a rule, check the union 'pence card' of the foreigners he came across, Deed replied that there was no need to do this because 'they generally come and join'.⁸ When the Commission Chairman suggested to Tom Gamboni, a miner, that the AMA play a role in identifying those who could not speak English and informing on them to the mine managers, Gamboni replied, '[o]ur rule provides that every man working in the industry shall be eligible to membership.'⁹ For his part, W. D. Barnett, Secretary of the AMA, made a clear distinction between new arrivals and southern Europeans who had been in Broken Hill for some years, whom he did not class as 'foreigners'. He was equally concerned about the recent increase in English miners who had been given work in preference to local men.¹⁰

The evidence offered by mine managers to the Commission suggests that they incorporated a range of strategies to take advantage of the migrant labour on offer. Some mine managers adopted a policy of placing inexperienced or non-English speaking migrants with more experienced workers or with those compatriots who could act as interpreters. Others hired migrant workers to do only the less skilled work, where there was professed to be little danger but, whatever the particular motivation, racist attitudes were part and parcel of each hiring policy. Consider the position of W. E. Wainwright, Manager of the South mine, who praised the suitability of Maltese labour for loading coal. He said:

I have had some good experience of Maltese on a particular class of job; I find they are very good at loading coal. Loading coal is a dirty job, and the Maltese do well at it; they do not want so much looking after as the Englishmen, and they get paid the same rate.¹¹

Underground Superintendent of the South mine, Andrew Fairweather assured the Commissioners that there were 'practically no foreigners on mining work; they only

⁷ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 46.

⁸ A pence card demonstrated whether a miner was a financial member of the AMA. *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 84.

⁹ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 133.

¹⁰ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 428.

¹¹ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 671.

occupy the positions of ore-truckers, mullockers, and ore-fillers'. One party of these workers was employed with an interpreter, a migrant worker who spoke sufficient English. When that man decided to 'pull out', the foreman simply sacked the rest of the party. In addition, Fairweather insisted that he only employed such men when Britishers were not available. '[I]n every case we would rather have a man of English descent than a foreigner', he said.¹²

The Commissioners presented wage sheets to T. H. Palmer, Manager of the Junction North mine. These records demonstrated that contract trucking and mullocking parties of foreigners were systematically paid very low returns, lower even than wage rates. Palmer defended these wage rates on the basis that the party was made up of 'inferior workers', adding that '[a]s a rule we have kept the Englishmen separate as much as possible from the foreigners.'¹³ Charles Johnston was called before the Commission to give evidence regarding a letter he wrote to the day shift foreman, Charles Lock, requesting that four new workers be hired and that they should not be 'white men'. When pressed for the reasoning behind such an order, Johnston and Lock both claimed that the men were required for a particular trucking party, that this party was made up of foreigners and that white men refused to work in such parties.¹⁴ However, on several occasions, both men stated that it was desirable to keep the work groups ethnically homogenous.¹⁵ Johnston justified his request for foreign workers thus: 'Because I wanted the men of the same nationality to be working together, whether foreigners or Englishmen.'¹⁶ Subsequently, the Commissioners produced contract records to show that the party in question did contain British and foreign workers and that contracts where foreigners predominated were paid less than the going rate for the job.¹⁷

Nevertheless, such nuances in the responses of Broken Hill workers and managers did not find their way into the final report of the Royal Commission that was

¹² *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 586-7.

¹³ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 614.

¹⁴ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 167.

¹⁵ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, pp. 164, 167, 194, 196.

¹⁶ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 167.

¹⁷ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 195.

presented in December 1916. Unable to comprehend basic solidarity between Britisher and migrant workers and principled political positions against racism, the Commissioners swiftly surmised that the miners must have been reluctant to make complaints in front of the shift bosses, fearing recrimination. Their subsequent recommendation was that no worker should be employed underground unless that person could read and speak 'intelligible' English. They also warned of 'the grave social danger which may arise from the presence in an Australian town of a large number of aliens, of inferior civilisation and of a lower standard of life'.¹⁸

Only divided they were ruled: battling the elite ideological terrain

In the mid-1920s, increased numbers of southern Europeans came to Australia for work, as part of a deliberate policy on the part of the Bruce government to increase the labour market for rural land clearing and other menial work. Unsurprisingly, many of these workers found such isolating, back-breaking work at low pay unattractive and were instead drawn to mining towns like Broken Hill, where better pay and conditions might be obtained. Union accusations that the mine managers were again trying to 'flood the labour market' were not unfounded. In fact, the MMA was intentionally, and secretly, organising to attract mining labour to the town, but only of a certain industrial 'type'. In 1923, the MMA met to discuss methods for increasing the supply of underground workers. It was resolved to recommend to the Melbourne Committee¹⁹ that 'an official be sent from Broken Hill to the capital cities to ascertain what labour supply was available and engage suitable miners for Broken Hill'.²⁰ The Melbourne Committee approved the plan, but advised the MMA to begin by making contact with the local government-run labour bureau. Local mine managers rejected this suggestion because, in the past, the men supplied from this source had been 'not at all satisfactory'. Instead, they discussed various contact persons who might be asked to act as representatives for the purpose of interviewing applicants in a range of population centres, namely Sydney,

¹⁸ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. xxviii.

¹⁹ Committee of Representatives of Barrier Mines, Melbourne.

²⁰ Minutes of Meeting of Broken Hill Mine Managers' Association [hereafter MMA minutes], 19 April 1923, Broken Hill South Collection, Melbourne University Archives.

Adelaide, England (specifically, Cornish miners) Bendigo, Ballarat, Wallaroo and Kalgoorlie.²¹ When the Melbourne Committee again raised the question of the labour bureau, the MMA Secretary advised that use of the bureau was counterproductive, as the unions quickly became aware of employer plans and immediately began to advertise that there were no jobs in Broken Hill. It was also stated that the labour bureau often supplied 'derelict labour'. The MMA also tried to avoid contact with the labour movement in its search for workers, fearing them to be contaminated by anti-employer propaganda. In 1917, it passed a motion advising members not to place advertisements in the *Barrier Daily Truth*. By 1923, this motion had been rescinded as impractical, because too few workers read the *Miner* with its anti-labour bias, making advertising in *Truth* the only way to reach potential employees.²²

During this period, both major Broken Hill newspapers engaged in spirited debate on the question of migrant labour in the town. For its part, the *Barrier Daily Truth* promoted an equivocally internationalist position; editorial comments championed the plight of destitute migrant miners alongside claims that migration should be more strictly regulated to ease pressure on unemployment levels. In contrast, the *Miner* claimed that the Workers Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA) was the 'foreigners' union' and that it had traitorously put interpreters in the mines to instruct the newcomers in English. Conservative supporters of the mine managers were in a predicament. While they supported the right of mine managers to employ the best labour, they did not like it when the mine managers chose southern Europeans. One Letter to the Editor of the *Barrier Miner* from 'Friend of the Digger' resolved this dichotomy by insisting that there was no way that Maltese workers *could* be superior to Britisher workers. Instead of attacking the mine managers however, he chided the WIUA's inclusiveness. Reflecting eugenicist fears of miscegenation and racial degeneration, the writer argued:

Ever since the armistice ... those coloured aliens were having the preference, and were taking the jobs rightly belonging to the returned soldiers and other white workers ... Are the unionists indifferent to their

²¹ MMA minutes, 10 May 1923.

²² MMA minutes, 4 June, 10 May 1923.

own interests? Have they no respect for the future generation, in permitting those hordes of nondescripts into their ranks and homes? If so, I say they are degenerating, and will soon be on the level of a Maltese coolie.²³

While supporting employer attempts to choose young, single men who were not likely to be a burden on the compensation system, the *Miner* reflected a section of ruling class opinion which recognised that Australian nationalism did not come cheaply. Its editor argued:

however desirable unmarried foreigners may be as beasts of burden, and however good they may be as donkey workers, they are very bad citizens as regards helping to make a prosperous town on the Australian standard of working-class culture.²⁴

Truth called the *Miner*'s bluff, exclaiming:

what does the "Miner" desire the union to do in the matter? Does it propose that the union should declare a strike against working with these men who are coming from foreign countries? ... Meanwhile the duty of unionism is to organise those who are here, come they from the farthest or nearest part of the world.²⁵

When Dr Finlayson reported that many non-English speaking newcomers were coming to him for medical tests as a precursor to getting jobs on the mines, the *Miner* attacked the short-sightedness of the WIUA, and especially its check inspector, J. Beerworth, who, when questioned about the situation on the mines, simply replied that he had heard no complaints from the workers about the matter.²⁶ Using some of the invective that had latterly been directed at Chinese workers, the *Miner* candidly complained that:

as long as a man is a financial member, and conforms to their rules during working hours, the unions are little concerned with his private life. They prefer men of their own race, who can speak their own language, but as long as the foreigner is a good unionist and knows

²³ *Barrier Miner*, 3 April 1924.

²⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 28 April 1924.

²⁵ *BDT*, 8 August 1924.

²⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 17 May 1924.

enough English to understand and be understood he is accepted as a fellow worker, and taken on his own merits off the job. The business people measure by a different standard again. They are not interested in a customer's industrial views as long as he pays his way. They prefer the man who lives well, dresses well, makes his home in the town, and spends his money locally, and Broken Hill has a well-deserved reputation as a place where money is spent freely. However, it is alleged that many of the later arrivals from foreign parts have no intention of making their homes here, but simply regard the town as a good place to make and save money in and then get out of as soon as possible back to their own country ... they live as cheaply as possible, spend no more than absolutely necessary, and herd together in rooms or hovels under conditions which are far from sanitary. These are the foreigners who are objected to, and classed as undesirable aliens, and it is to keep these people from coming in and lowering the general standard of living that the aid of the Federal Government is invoked.²⁷

A few weeks later, the *Miner* expressed outrage that the WIUA should make scapegoats of the employers and the government for the increased number of southern Europeans in the town. The editorial put the blame squarely at the feet of the union for not protesting strongly enough against the 'influx' in the beginning, seeking only to build up the union's funds by welcoming the migrants 'with open arms'.²⁸

In State Parliament, debate took place about the arrival of destitute southern Europeans in Broken Hill, sparked by a resolution that had been sent to Premier Fuller from the Barrier Chamber of Commerce, of which F. G. White was a prominent member, 'objecting to the influx of foreigners which was a menace to the business and industrial life of the community'.²⁹ Not satisfied with simply sending a message to the State Parliament, R. E. A. Kitchen, from the Chamber of Commerce executive, took himself to Sydney to make representations to sympathetic parliamentarians. Insults were traded back and forth from both sides of the Assembly that the other supported the migrants' arrival. Fuller remarked that he was 'reliably informed that Considine [Labor

²⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 14 October 1924.

²⁸ *Barrier Miner*, 4 November 1924.

²⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 9 September 1924. Announcing White's death, the *Barrier Miner*, described him as 'the grand old man of the local business community' and 'one of the stalwarts of the Chamber of Commerce'. *Barrier Miner*, 24 August 1953.

member for Barrier] has set himself out to champion the arrival of men from these revolutionary countries'.³⁰ Labor members denied this was so.

In October 1924, the Barrier Industrial and Political Council³¹ resolved to call a mass meeting to discuss the issue of foreign labour in Broken Hill. To apprise readers of the different positions being adopted, *Truth* outlined the three main divisions that existed within the labour movement. On the Left were those who argued that it was not the place of organised labour to regulate immigration and that migrants had as much right as anyone else to live and work on the Barrier. Further, the Left argued that those who supported immigration restrictions advocated a policy which was 'selfishly national and an abrogation of the basic principles of the Labor Movement – a movement that must be international if it is going to serve the proletariat'. In contrast, the right-wing of the meeting advocated 'drastic action to prevent workers from foreign countries working in the industry'. In the middle were those, the *Truth* editor among them, who did not seek to make nationality an issue, but recommended regulation of the 'influx' for economic reasons.³² A labourist approach was clearly evident in this position, as the question then became who to lobby for regulation – the government or the employers?

When a motion reflecting the labourist position was put to a mass meeting on 2 November 1924, the discussion ranged far and wide, demonstrating the ideological ferment that existed on the question of immigration.³³ Gough, in presenting the first motion, spoke of the American situation in typical racist stereotypes of the time – foreigners lived in squalor, did not spend their wages locally, drove down conditions and then moved on. Lamb questioned this view of American history, arguing that Bill Haywood had told him that organising migrant workers was the key question and that race was a class question. Wetherell attempted to deflect this argument by stating that immigration restrictions were not aimed at 'creating a conflict of nationalities, but at preventing it' and that 'passions would be aroused' if migration levels were allowed to create unemployment. Wood responded by saying that 'it was impossible to measure a

³⁰ *BDT*, 26 September 1924.

³¹ An organisation of affiliated unions and the local ALP.

³² *BDT*, 1 November 1924.

³³ *BDT*, 3 November 1924.

man's principles by his nationality, the colour of his hair or complexion'. As proof, he used the example of Irish immigrants being used to drive down conditions in America. As each group of new arrivals acclimatised and organised, he said, the employers tried to use a different group of immigrants. Quintrell joined the debate by saying that it was a pity that the meeting was called to discuss disunity, rather than unity. Lord countered with a claim that he was not against foreigners *per se*, but against an 'influx' of any kind. As a rejoinder to this argument, Davey cited the 1892 strike, where it was Australians who had scabbed.³⁴ Finally, Michael Considine moved an amendment to Gough's motion which read:

That this meeting of Barrier workers deprecates the efforts of the mine owners and other capitalistic agents to create dissension and disunion in the ranks of the workers here by trying to filch from us the hard won conditions now enjoyed by the mine workers; and, further we are of the opinion that only by working class solidarity can such conditions be maintained.

In support of his amendment, Considine argued that the employers encouraged workers to alienate foreigners from the unions, so that they were easier to organise and exploit. 'The movement today should bring the workers together', he said. Despite the arguments of the internationalists, the amendment was narrowly defeated. The original labourist motion, put by Gough, won by 117 votes to 83, indicating that a substantial minority supported the internationalist position and that the labourist position received an amalgam of votes from those occupying the 'middle ground' and right-wing exclusionists.³⁵

Nevertheless, the arguments continued unabated. In early 1925, Labor MHR, Arthur Blakely, used a public meeting to argue that there was a conspiracy to bring southern Europeans into Australia and that immigration preference should be given to 'the English-speaking races'.³⁶ On the other hand, *Barrier Daily Truth* would periodically print snippets describing the plight of the new southern European arrivals

³⁴ See letter from 'Old Miner' advising that he had kept every 'scab list' issued in Broken Hill and that 'practically all of [the scabs were] dinkum Aussies or true-born Britishers'. *Barrier Daily Truth*, 25 October 1927.

³⁵ *BDT*, 3 November 1924.

and listing the difficulties that they faced, such as having no means of support, nowhere to live, few or no words of English and no work.³⁷ One editorial attacked those with hostile attitudes towards immigrants and suggested that the unions employ men to interview the new arrivals, especially the non-English speakers, to acquaint them with 'the labour conditions prevailing'.³⁸ Another condemned those who suggested refusing to work with southern Europeans, arguing that 'such a campaign would insult some of the oldest unionists on the Barrier who happen to have been born elsewhere'.³⁹

In October 1925, Ern Wetherell and the *Barrier Daily Truth* staff became even more active participants in the Broken Hill 'race debate'. With the evocative headline, 'Starving Strangers Imposed Upon and Cheated', they announced that some mine officials were extorting money from southern European newcomers in return for jobs on the mines. However, unlike the situation in Kalgoorlie, the paper expressed a great deal of sympathy for workers who had been subjected to these hiring practices. The accompanying editorial comment argued:

the poverty of these strangers in a strange land, their lack of knowledge of the customs here, and the needs of their dependants far away, were exploited to enrich those villainous enough to pursue this shocking course.⁴⁰

The paper identified F. C. 'Boomer' Rolfe, a Central mine foreman, as one who took payments in return for jobs. It also stated that Rolfe purposely 'tramped' or sacked miners in order to increase the job turnover on the mine and his subsequent ability to extort new payments. Even those who had paid the money to Rolfe were not exempt from this process. The article related how one man had worked only a single shift before being given notice for an allegedly unsatisfactory performance. While the paper never suggested that Australians may also have paid the extortion, it did point out that the money was exacted from all newcomers until only those who had paid the money to the foreman were retained. However, it is possible that Rolfe restricted his extortion to

³⁶ *BDT*, 19 February 1925.

³⁷ *BDT*, 26 September 1924, 9 March 1925.

³⁸ *BDT*, 9 February 1925.

³⁹ *BDT*, 4 September 1924.

⁴⁰ *BDT*, 23 October 1925.

recent arrivals, believing them to be unfamiliar with the local customs and, therefore, less likely to protest.

Truth staff devised a plan to catch Rolfe in the act. They went to the Central mine with a Maltese man who had complained to them about Rolfe's practices, giving him a marked £5 note to give to the foreman. Rolfe immediately gave the man work, after depositing the marked note in his desk drawer. When the *Truth* staff approached the mine manager, Mr Gardner, for permission to search Rolfe's office, they were refused access. Even when Gardner was told the entire chain of events, he would allow no further investigation of the matter, stating that he had every confidence in Rolfe's integrity. Wetherell was left with no further recourse but to publish an account of the events and to wait for Rolfe to reply to the charges. While expecting to be charged with libelling the foreman, *Truth* staff felt sure that the testimonies of numerous witnesses to the effect that Rolfe did, in fact, take bribes and that the charges against him had been published in the public's interest, would be sufficient to protect the paper from a successful prosecution. They concluded that:

the confidence of the company in this rascal will not screen him from the odium of the masses of people in this town, who hate his tactics and detest his methods that are a danger to every citizen in this community, irrespective of class, creed, colour or nationality.⁴¹

The most revealing aspect of *Truth*'s attitude to the Rolfe incident was its opposition, in true labourist fashion, to an industrial campaign around the question of employment corruption. Advising the Central workers that the matter would be best handled in court, *Truth*'s reporters were prepared to scapegoat Rolfe for a system of extortion that clearly had the tacit support of mine management. The article concluded:

It was with some difficulty that representatives of this paper influenced the men at the Central mine to continue work at the time, leaving the matter to us. The men themselves were at high tension when prevailed upon not to do anything that would cost any man the loss of even a shift, and it was pointed out that the issue did not involve the Company at all – rather, that it was against Rolfe and his practices that the exposure was

⁴¹ *BDT*, 23 October 1925.

made. The men at the Central evinced the greatest consideration for "Barrier Daily Truth" in that matter and it is not forgotten.⁴²

Some days later, the expected writ from Rolfe's solicitor arrived but on the day that the case was due to be heard, Rolfe withdrew and costs were awarded against him.⁴³ A few weeks later it was announced that 'Boomer' Rolfe's house was empty. The Rolfe incident is one of the few concrete examples of slingback payments in the mining industry, as both extortionists and the extorted have been understandably reluctant to speak of the practice. While Rolfe may have been a lone extortionist, it is also possible that his exposure curtailed the payment of 'slingbacks' in Broken Hill, by making other foremen reluctant to risk similar opprobrium. In interview, Maltese trucker, Paul Sultana, described some quarrying work that he had done before he came to Broken Hill in 1926, shortly after the Rolfe affair. Sultana said that the work was very hard, the foreman was a tyrant and, on top of this, 'you had to slingy, sling some money, you see'. Broken Hill was a vast improvement, he said; '[w]hen I came here it was a different matter altogether.'⁴⁴

Clearly, for the labour movement, the question of immigration was contentious and would remain a source of political and industrial tension. In themselves, the strenuous debates regarding appropriate political attitudes and correct tactics provide evidence that the outcome of the 'race debate' would depend on the interaction of a number of unpredictable economic and political factors, not least of which were the actions of activists on both sides of the debate and their ability to win adherents to their arguments. Enter stage extremely right, F. G. White, with his RSL protégés, Richard Gully, Arthur Anson Lawrence and their 'lieutenant', Fred Rilen.

⁴² *BDT*, 6 July 1926.

⁴³ *BDT*, 27 April 1926.

⁴⁴ Interview with *Paul Sultana*, conducted by Barry York on 2 November 1984. Transcript held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 3582/6, p. 56.

'Gullyism'

In September 1927, a number of Broken Hill mines closed and more than 1,200 workers lost their jobs.⁴⁵ Although this was ostensibly due to the low market price of lead, there were rumblings in the *Barrier Daily Truth* that the managers were attempting to frighten the miners into accepting an unfavourable industrial agreement, soon due for renegotiation. The Minister for Labor and Industry, Mr Baddeley, argued that the mining companies should not have paid a dividend to shareholders in 1926, so that the money could have been used to cover such exigencies. F. G. White quickly put pen to paper, arguing in the *Barrier Miner* that the Proprietary Company had paid its employees £1,500,000 in 1926, while the shareholders had received only £270,000 for the same period. 'What does Mr Baddeley suggest?', he expostulated, '[t]hat shareholders get nothing?'⁴⁶ A number of meetings were held to decide what should be the labour movement response to this crisis, and motions were passed to pressure the State government into funding job creation schemes, such as road works and a water supply scheme. However, some anti-southern European agitators saw these meetings as an opportunity to agitate for migrant exclusion. One of F. G. White's associates in both the RSL and in Nationalist political circles, Richard Gully, found the ensuing political and industrial situation much to his liking, becoming the leader of an anti-southern European campaign that waxed and waned in Broken Hill throughout the late 1920s.⁴⁷ Edgar Ross, who was in Broken Hill during this period, named Gully the 'orator and organiser' of the racist campaign. 'His stamping ground was the unemployed ... They were the people who had lost their jobs and so this approach tended to appeal to them. Get rid of the Maltese and I'll have a job' was their attitude, he said.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cyril Emery later estimated that 1200-1300 men had been thrown out of work due to the closure of the Proprietary, Block 14 and Junction mines. Report of conference between MMA and representatives of Broken Hill unions, 10 February 1928, Broken Hill South Collection, Melbourne University Archives.

⁴⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 26 September 1927.

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of the Gully campaign and the levy dispute, see Ellem and Shields, 'Australian Labor's Closed Preserve'.

⁴⁸ Interview with *Edgar Ross*, conducted by Barry York on 24 January 1997. Transcript held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 3557, p. 35.

Born in Mount Bryan, South Australia, in 1883, Gully served with the 6th Australian contingent in South Africa in 1901, and was mentioned favourably in dispatches.⁴⁹ In September 1903, he married Olive Watson and they had one son. The family lived in the Yorke Peninsula area and Gully worked on the railways. During World War One, he served with the 27th Battalion in France and was promoted to the rank of Lance Sergeant. In 1917, Gully was wounded in action, evacuated to England, returned to Australia and discharged as medically unfit.⁵⁰ He was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and, during his period of incapacity, the family was able to draw on benefits from this fund. In 1918, Gully stood unsuccessfully as a Nationalist candidate for the seat of Port Adelaide, supporting the Peake-Barwell Government.⁵¹ It was later remarked by one Broken Hill worker that Gully's only contribution to the course of the Big Strike in 1919-20 had been to 'run the Broken Hill miners down from the "Nationalist" platform in the Botanical Gardens of Adelaide, Sunday after Sunday, for not going to the Arbitration Court'.⁵² It was not only to the workers that Gully was 'treacherous'. In 1920, it appears that Olive Gully became tired of her husband's womanising and sued for divorce, alleging that Gully had engaged in 'misconduct' with Frances Jane Smith, a widow from Croydon in Adelaide. She claimed that her husband had been unfaithful many times and that he had, on more than one occasion, sought medical treatment for venereal disease. Olive was awarded a decree absolute on the basis of her husband's proven adultery.⁵³ A few years later, this shady personal history was to come back to haunt Gully when he became involved in Broken Hill public life.

⁴⁹ Gully is listed as serving between April 1901 and April 1902, with the Sixth (South Australian Imperial Bushmen) Contingent. He was promoted to the rank of corporal and was mentioned favourably in dispatches in the *London Gazette*, 29 July 1902. He was not, as was alleged by one of his political opponents in Broken Hill, one of 'Morant's mob'. See Murdoch University website, www.tlc2.murdoch.edu.au/community/dps/military/bor-sa6.htm#sa6, accessed 6 July 2000.

⁵⁰ For details regarding Gully's World War One service record, see personnel record no. 5538, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

⁵¹ *BDT*, 22 September 1927.

⁵² *BDT*, 18 October 1927.

⁵³ *Gully vs Gully*, Case no. 428 of 1920, Supreme Court Matrimonial Causes Jurisdiction, South Australia, Courts Administration Authority, Adelaide.

In the 1924 South Australian state elections, Gully announced his intention to stand as a Nationalist candidate for the seat of Wallaroo but did not get pre-selection.⁵⁴ He stood instead as an Independent, but received an ignominious 109 votes, only marginally more than the number of informal ballot papers.⁵⁵ In his speech at the declaration of the poll, Gully advised business interests to flee South Australia to escape the Labor government, which inspired one heckler to shout 'go back to Moonta' in response.⁵⁶ Gully was no stranger to mining town crises. His Wallaroo election campaign had been held in the wake of the Moonta mines being placed in receivership; the subsequent closures dramatically swelled the ranks of the unemployed.⁵⁷ Gully appears to have arrived in Broken Hill late in 1924 and it was not long before his anti-migrant activities attracted attention. In a Letter to the Editor of the *Truth*, 'Spaghetti' referred to Gully as a 'paid or honorary tool'.⁵⁸ Another letter from 'Digger' argued that the *Barrier Miner* was 'planking for him [Gully] right and left'. 'Digger' surmised that Gully was aiming to cause a split among the miners and possibly provoke a strike, hence assisting the employers to close the mines and take their pick of the jobless before the industrial agreement expired.⁵⁹ Edgar Ross concurred, claiming that Gully 'smelt strongly of the agent-provocateur' and had been seen in discussion with F. G. White, 'allegedly seeking financial aid'.⁶⁰

Towards the end of 1926, Gully and his supporters began to agitate at WIUA meetings for the closure of the union books to southern Europeans and for employment preference to unemployed Australians. Gully argued that the principal solution to the crisis was not to stand by and allow foreigners to work while locals were unemployed. Knowing that influential members of the WIUA Management Committee were against

⁵⁴ Letter from ex-secretary of the Kadina ALP, *BDT*, 28 September 1927.

⁵⁵ *The Register*, 8 April 1924.

⁵⁶ *Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 9 April 1924.

⁵⁷ K. Bailey, *Copper City Chronicle: A History of Kadina*, self published, Kadina, 1990, p. 125. In the wake of these mine closures, a racist diatribe against Maltese workers appeared in the local paper. This letter contained all the political positions which Gully would soon after promote in Broken Hill – opposition to strikes, antagonism towards Labor leaders, and hostility to union recruitment of foreigners. Published under a pseudonym, I have been unable to confirm that the letter writer was Gully. Nevertheless, it was expressed in a recognisably Gully-style and was written during his campaign for the 1924 State election, showing that mining crises, Gully and racism were common companions. See *Kadina and Wallaroo Times*, 2 April 1924.

⁵⁸ *BDT*, 8 October 1927.

⁵⁹ *BDT*, 20 September, 5 December, 19 October 1927.

such proposals, requests were made for a secret ballot on the question.⁶¹ A motion requesting that the issue be taken up by the Union's Central Council was passed by one vote, and only after much debate. It became obvious that Gully's propaganda was having an effect. In mid-1927, officials from the Federated Engine-Drivers' and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) advised the WIUA that they had passed a resolution against the migrant 'influx' and that, as a result, their subsequent refusal to work with a migrant WIUA member was consistent with that decision.⁶² The logic of Gully's propaganda could not have been made more clear to the miners' union. The WIUA Management Committee castigated the FEDFA decision as one that was 'against a member of the working class' and that 'such action is only playing into the hands of the Boss'.⁶³ However, the *Barrier Miner* published a letter from 'Centre Cut', who praised the FEDFA decision and castigated his own union leaders who, he argued, 'prate of "international working class brotherhood" and similar fallacies'. In particular, 'Centre Cut' felt that returned soldiers had a role to play in migrant exclusion. He called on the men who fought during World War One to:

wake up, and throw into the discard this casual acceptance of a foreign invasion and apply some of the "guts" you devoted to that other cause, to the settlement of this problem which is sitting on your own doorstep.⁶⁴

In a similar vein, Gully continued to gather steam. He protested that his erstwhile agitation for the union's books to be closed had been opposed as 'unconstitutional'. The result was, he said, that 'Asiatics' [by this he meant Maltese workers] were now working along the line of lode while men 'who had given their lives in Broken Hill' were being 'tramped' out of the town. He resorted to a familiar 'White Australia' diatribe which asserted that 'dagoes' only spent ten per cent of their earnings in Broken Hill and sent the rest of their money overseas. Another heinous crime, in Gully's view, was the unmarried status of eighty per cent of migrants. His claims became more outrageous as his sense of high dudgeon grew. On one occasion, he exclaimed:

⁶⁰ Ross, *Of Storm and Struggle*, p. 40.

⁶¹ WIUA minutes, 21 August 1926, 6, 13, 27 March, 3 April 1927.

⁶² WIUA minutes, 5 July 1927.

⁶³ WIUA minutes, 19 July 1927.

I wanted to close the books on the cows. They are the men who scabbed on you. And you deserve to be tramped if you allow it. They'd get a living under conditions you wouldn't tolerate. They live in hovels with three and four to a room.⁶⁵

Leading figures in the Broken Hill labour movement castigated Gully for his outbursts. George Dale accused him of 'tickling the ears of the mob to get limelight'. Ern Wetherell received much applause when he argued that Gully was creating a division that would play into the hands of the mining companies and that workers were all members of the same class 'whether they were born in Crystal Street, Sulphide Street or the middle of Malta'. Even Alderman Dennis, who was certainly no radical, told Gully that he would not be allowed on the platform again because he did not know how to behave.⁶⁶ Richard Quintrell made veiled references to the interested parties that might have been supporting Gully and argued that his interference at this juncture might create more damage to industrial unity in a week than could be undone in a decade. He also pointed out that it was an Italian man who gave Gully his job on the Big Mine, that this had meant that Gully 'went quiet' on his anti-foreigner campaign, and that the two had worked peacefully together until this crisis had been created by the companies.⁶⁷

Gully also faced stiff opposition from many migrants. Some wrote letters to the *Barrier Daily Truth* to protest against Gully's vitriol.⁶⁸ At meetings, groups of migrants would interject, attack the stage and generally disrupt his speeches, so much so that Gully frequently needed police protection to leave the area. One migrant interrupted one of Gully's speeches by insisting that all migrants were fellow workers. Turning Gully's invective around, he shouted 'You're a big dago, more than I am!'⁶⁹ Agnes Dini, an Australian woman whose husband was Italian, challenged Gully at meetings, and in the pages of the *Truth*, to answer some difficult questions – did he think, then, that his beloved King George was also from 'a mongrelised race'? How did Mr Gully propose to deal with foreigners who had been in Broken Hill for twenty years? What of the many

⁶⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 14 July 1927.

⁶⁵ *BDT*, 19 September 1927. Being 'tramped' was being forced to leave town in search of work.

⁶⁶ *BDT*, 19 September 1927.

⁶⁷ *BDT*, 20 September 1927.

⁶⁸ *BDT*, 28 September, 1 October 1927.

⁶⁹ *BDT*, 26 September 1927.

Australian women, like herself, who were married to southern Europeans?⁷⁰ Gully facetiously replied that he had been too busy looking for a job to answer letters, but that Mrs Dini was welcome to attend his next meeting.⁷¹ Mrs Dini replied that she, herself, had no time for Gully's antics but would happily debate him before a mass meeting of unionists.⁷²

In its coverage of the mine closures and anti-migrant campaign, the *Barrier Miner* was unquestionably 'planking' for Gully. While the Editor had clearly decided not to explicitly intervene in the debate about southern Europeans on this occasion, he was happy to criticise the labour movement-run meetings as 'too political' and devoid of practical suggestions, while letting Gully do the racist propagandising. Much was made of a meeting of four hundred unemployed, which Gully chaired and the labour movement boycotted, being ninety per cent in favour of migrant exclusion.⁷³ The *Miner* journalist caricatured the 'excitability' of the migrant protesters in the audience, dismissed the words of every Maltese interjector as incoherent, and praised Gully's 'witty' replies to his detractors. While the *Miner* had faithfully reproduced all of Gully's interjections at official labour movement meetings, on this occasion, it was appreciatively reported that any abuse against Gully was met with a stern reprimand from police, who allegedly feared a migrant riot.⁷⁴ The vast majority of *Miner* Letters to the Editor were pro-Gully and one letter, signed 'Caucasian' and purporting to be from 'an interested spectator', made a veiled comment that, 'what struck [him] forcibly was the well organised foreign element which ought to be a warning to all Australians'.⁷⁵ Another letter supported Gully's implied references about the WIUA withholding relief money, an absurd charge given the short duration of the crisis.⁷⁶

As in Kalgoorlie, racist campaigners like Gully faced the task of having to undo years of interaction between local and migrant workers, in both the workplace and the wider locality. While racism was not uncommon and affected all aspects of people's

⁷⁰ *BDT*, 19 October 1927.

⁷¹ *BDT*, 21 October 1927.

⁷² *BDT*, 22 October 1927.

⁷³ *Barrier Miner*, 29 September 1927; *BDT*, 29 September 1927.

⁷⁴ *Barrier Miner*, 29 September 1927.

⁷⁵ *Barrier Miner*, 27 September 1927.

lives and thoughts, there were also many opportunities for fraternisation through shared experiences. Formally, of course, the vast majority of mine workers in Broken Hill in the interwar period were linked by unionisation and, in the workplace, they were brought into daily contact with each other, despite aforementioned attempts by some managers to keep their workforces ethnically segregated. However, in all sorts of informal ways, workers broke down the barriers presented by racist ideology. When Paul Sultana described the euchre games that used to take place at crib time,⁷⁷ Barry York asked him if it was just the Maltese workers who played. Sultana said, 'No, no, everybody; all these people. There's half an hour for crib ... they stay there until they finish the game. Until they know when the foreman's coming ... and piss off.'⁷⁸ If anyone was ostracised underground, it was not the migrants, but the assortment of managers who wandered past the stopes. In interview, Tom Dwyer recalled, 'Only the bosses had lamps in them days ... we'd only have to see the light and we'd say "Here comes the blue light". And everybody knew what that meant.'⁷⁹

Frank Bartley lived in South Broken Hill and had people from many different countries – Italy, Russia, Yugoslavia – as neighbours. He made special mention of an Italian family who would come around for a cup of tea and whom he counted amongst his close friends. In halting speech, Bartley said:

They were good neighbours ... no arguments around ... people used to get on so well. Especially us people out the South where we were more in [unintelligible] with them, you see. They used to go to our churches and our schools ... treated just the same as everyone else and they used to live as we did. More than one feed I've had at an Italian place when I've gone up to play with their kids. Then when it come Christmas, one Italian there used to, every New Year, put on a turn-out for people and they come up there and he'd have buckets of beer and stuff in buckets and take 'em around a different pannikin and have a drink and some cake.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *Barrier Miner* 26 September 1927.

⁷⁷ Euchre is a card game. Crib time is meal time.

⁷⁸ Interview with *Paul Sultana*, p. 42.

⁷⁹ 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 5.

⁸⁰ Interview with *Frank Bartley*, conducted by Ed Stokes on 23 March 1982. Tapes held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 1873.

Hilda Ferguson recalled similar instances of friendly relations among people of different nationalities. In her words, 'everybody ... kept to themselves, but you were still friendly'. She particularly recalled an Italian family called Pinciella [spelling not given] who lived behind her house. The husband worked on the mines and the wife provided a boarding house and meals for single men. In the evenings, the Pinciellas and their boarders would gather round and sing together, accompanied by a piano accordion. It was 'absolutely beautiful', Hilda said, 'of course, in their own tongue, but their voices blended so gorgeous'. Hilda also recommended to her husband that he see an 'Italian quack' about his recurring stomach pains, word having got around that the man was making numerous 'wonderful cures'. Subsequently, she came to believe that this Italian man had cured her husband of cancer.⁸¹

Anxious to defeat 'Gullyism' and its social and industrial consequences, Ern Wetherell challenged Gully to a public debate on the question; 'Is Mr Gully's propaganda in Broken Hill in the interests of the Australian-born workers?'⁸² More than one thousand people attended this forum, which was so 'lively' that it had to be abandoned midway through the proceedings, as a number of fights had broken out. President of the Barrier Industrial Council (BIC), E. P. O'Neill, chaired the discussion, threatening from the outset to close the meeting if both speakers were not given a fair hearing.⁸³ Gully opened by stating that his opinions were not intended for any specific purpose, and that nothing was further from his mind than attempting to divide the labour movement. His only concerns were that Australians were not being given employment preference and that Australia might shortly be 'mongrelised' and 'overrun' by southern Europeans. If, as he and other RSL members believed, 'eternal vigilance was the price of liberty', then Australians were 'taking things easy' and not protecting their 'great heritage'. He advocated that the WIUA close its books to southern Europeans and that those currently employed should be given three months notice to quit. 'The fight is on',

⁸¹ 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.

⁸² *BDT*, 17 October 1927.

⁸³ O'Neill was no internationalist and his insistence on a 'fair hearing' was almost certainly an attempt to ensure Gully was not silenced by the crowd. Of itself, O'Neill's reluctance to openly support Gully indicated that such a position was not dominant amongst local union officialdom.

he declared, expressing his full support for strike action to expel the southern Europeans from the mines.

Wetherell countered Gully's arguments by pointing out that the current market price for lead would enable the mine owners to withstand a lengthy strike and that Gully's strategy would only result in more suffering for the workers. While he did not support mass migration, he felt that workers from any part of the world should be offered solidarity in Broken Hill. Migrants were 'victims of the same system as the Australian-born workers'; jobs were always the property of the employing class, he said, and any attempts to set one group of workers against another over job ownership would lead to damaging weaknesses in their ability to mobilise industrially. In reply, Gully declared that he would continue his propaganda, even if it meant closing down the mines.⁸⁴ At a subsequent mass meeting of the WIUA, the union leadership moved a motion which read:

That the agitation being carried on for the purpose of ejecting a section of the workers from the Organisation and the Industry is not in the best interests of the working class, but only tends to disintegration and the smashing up of this organisation, thereby allowing the mine owners to impose their own conditions on the mineworkers at the termination of the present agreement, or later, followed by a stupid and disastrous strike.⁸⁵

After much debate, a division was taken and the motion was declared carried.

Not to be deterred, Gully organised another meeting which was chaired by fellow RSL member, Arthur Anson Lawrence. In the same vein as Gully, Lawrence argued that there were 800,000 unemployed in Great Britain and that Australia should absorb 'their kith and kin, rather than allow aliens into the country'. Their principal aim, he said, was to keep Australia white.⁸⁶ In an attempt to discredit Gully, J. J. Porter, President of the Barrier District Assembly of the Australian Labor Party, said of Lawrence that unionists should note Mr Gully's choice of chairman – 'a man it fell my lot to prevent from scabbing at Round Hill in the strike – a "Nationalist" and a blue

⁸⁴ Full report of this meeting, *BDT*, 17 October 1927.

⁸⁵ WIUA minutes, 18 October 1927.

whisker'.⁸⁷ Lawrence was born in Wiltshire in 1893 and arrived in Australia aged 18 years. He enlisted in 1914, was wounded at Gallipoli and repatriated to Australia in the following year.⁸⁸ During the 1920s, he was employed as a timberman on the South mine, was a prominent member of the 'loyalist union', the Barrier Workers' Association (BWA) until its collapse, and was then a member of the WIUA until his premature death from pneumonia and typhoid fever in 1930. Lawrence had held a number of executive positions in the Broken Hill RSL and was one of only two Broken Hill members to be awarded an honour medal for services to the League. In the obituary composed by his political enemies at the *Barrier Daily Truth*, he was described as a 'rather able opponent' and 'a fairly good platform speaker and debater'.⁸⁹ Throughout the 1920s, Lawrence served as an alderman on the City Council with F. G. White's team of Independents, or rather, anti-Labor Nationalists.⁹⁰ In 1928, he appeared in court in support of a case brought by Percy Wilks against the City Council for not giving him returned soldier employment preference for a job at the Burke Ward Hall. From this, it might be seen that Lawrence was an unproblematic defender of returned soldier rights. However, subsequent events detailed below proved that Lawrence had a stronger loyalty to Broken Hill employers.

An accurate estimation of support for Gully's campaign is difficult to reach. At regular Sunday labour movement mass meetings on Central Reserve, attendees were often diverted to nearby meetings provocatively called by Gully and his supporters. According to the *Barrier Daily Truth*, one noticeable feature of Gully's meetings was that groups of noisy, young, often unemployed, men were particularly vocal in their support for the racist campaigner.⁹¹ Because both meetings attracted a fluid mixture of supporters and hecklers, the extent of support for migrant exclusion is not clear. *Truth's* reports of these meetings must also be considered too partisan to accurately reflect the

⁸⁶ *BDT*, 10 November 1927.

⁸⁷ *BDT*, 12 November 1927

⁸⁸ For details regarding Lawrence's World War One service record, see personnel record no. 625, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

⁸⁹ *BDT*, 17 March 1930.

⁹⁰ *BDT*, 23 January 1929.

⁹¹ One report stated that Gully's remarks 'were constantly cheered, the big volume of noise coming from a vanguard of youngsters enjoying the fun in the front "benches".' *BDT*, 19 September 1927, 12 November 1930.

balance of forces, although the paper did print letters from both sides of the campaign, including those from Gully's poisoned pen. Gully ran for president of the WIUA several times and the results of the ballots are perhaps the most reliable indicators of his fluctuating political fortunes. In 1926, he received 148 votes to his main rival Richard Quintrell's 593.⁹² In 1927, at the height of his racist campaign, Gully's support peaked at 854 votes to Quintrell's 1700, with the increased member participation in the poll suggestive of the political polarisation that Gully's campaign had engendered. *Truth* concluded from this result that '[e]mpirically it has been decided by the WIUA that Mr Gully must go elsewhere to pursue his anti-union propaganda.'⁹³ In 1928, Gully again sought union office, but received only 270 votes to Quintrell's 926.⁹⁴ It should be pointed out, however, that Quintrell's position was not without its contradictions. In 1926, before Gully's campaign had gained any momentum, he had moved a motion at a WIUA conference held in Sydney which read that the Barrier District of the WIUA 'resents and strongly protests against the great influx of foreigners into Broken Hill and asks the Central Council of the WIUA to take immediate action in an endeavour to prevent such influx'.⁹⁵ However, the WIUA election results suggest that Gully managed to polarise the local immigration debate. While he gained undoubted support from some organised workers, the implications of his divisive diatribes galvanised others in the labour movement, most prominently Quintrell and Wetherell, into stronger opposition to his more objectionable conclusions. Maltese miner, Paul Sultana, was in no doubt that it was the labour movement who prevented his expulsion from Broken Hill, while simultaneously isolating Gully. Sultana said:

One bloke [Gully] was in the union and he wanted to take all the foreigners, Europeans, off the union list. Strike us off the union list. They used to have meeting after meeting but the union wouldn't let him. He finished up in Mount Isa, I think. He went away. We were all frightened, you know.⁹⁶

⁹² *BDT*, 29 April 1926.

⁹³ *BDT*, 15 December 1927.

⁹⁴ *BDT*, 20 December 1928.

⁹⁵ *BDT*, 22 December 1926.

⁹⁶ Interview with *Paul Sultana*, pp. 86-7.

While the MMA denied any formal support for Gully, its members relished the resulting division in the Broken Hill labour movement at no cost to management, while Cyril Emery was quick to exploit the contradictions in the WIUA position that Gully had brought to the surface. When union leaders requested a conference on the southern European 'influx', the MMA replied by denying that the unemployment level was high, disingenuously claiming that there was no influx in Broken Hill and that, even if this *was* the case, the MMA did not control labour mobility. Further, each mine had a register of unemployed men and that preference was always given to Australians over foreign labourers.⁹⁷ The MMA was well aware of claims that the majority of those looking for work were foreigners, and they used the issue in their wrangling with the union, disingenuously asking whether the WIUA wanted the mine managers to 'discriminate between members of the same union' to exclude the migrants.⁹⁸ This rhetorical question both exposed the element of racism attached to the union's position on immigration and blamed the WIUA for encouraging migrants to stay in Broken Hill by recruiting them. Implicitly, the MMA shrugged off its own responsibility for unemployment by blaming the WIUA for allowing the 'foreigners' to gain union membership. As others have argued, Gully's push for strike action over the presence of migrants clearly alienated him from the majority of organised workers.⁹⁹ Nor was this a price the mine managers were willing to pay. In conference, Quintrell advised the MMA President, Cyril Emery, that Gully had made a statement on the Central Reserve that he had the MMA behind him. Emery's reply was: 'And then he woke up!'¹⁰⁰ As Sultana said, 'The mine wouldn't follow him. The mine said, "I've got nothing to do with this business."' ¹⁰¹ By the end of 1928, with Gully's campaign to split the labour movement on the question of migrant labour in tatters, backing him was clearly a losing bet.

⁹⁷ MMA minutes, 11 April 1927.

⁹⁸ MMA minutes, 11 April 1927.

⁹⁹ Ellem and Shields, 'Australian Labor's Closed Preserve', p. 81.

¹⁰⁰ Report of conference between MMA and BIC [hereafter MMA/BIC], 13 December 1930, Broken Hill South Collection, Melbourne University Archives.

¹⁰¹ Interview with *Paul Sultana*, p. 87.

Union-busting before returned soldier preference – the Broken Hill Municipal Council strike

Racism was not the only tool that Broken Hill conservatives used to weaken labour movement solidarity. National Party supporters, with RSL members prominent in their ranks, were also involved in a campaign to challenge the principle of union preference. Just as racism was used in attempts to weaken labour movement commitment to internationalism, so, in the 1928 Municipal Employees Union (MEU) dispute, did White, Gully, Lawrence and their 'fellow travellers' fight hard to break an employment preference agreement between the local council and its employees, a group of workers that was second only in number to the mine workers in Broken Hill. Indeed, the prominence of conservative aldermen on the town's Municipal Council throughout the 1920s is an important qualification to the view that Broken Hill was a 'union town'.

On 1 December 1928, municipal elections were held in Broken Hill; thirteen Nationalist and twelve Labor candidates vied for the twelve available seats on the Council. Among the candidates were the incumbent Labor mayor, Richard Dennis, the president of the WIUA, Richard Quintrell, and Nationalist candidates, William Shoobridge, A. A. Lawrence and Richard Gully. White's Nationalists promoted themselves on an 'Independent' ticket, claiming that the team's main strength was an ability to operate without 'outside', read 'union', interference.¹⁰² *Truth* editorials predicted that the Nationalists, if victorious, would begin by attacking the wages and conditions of council workers and that local mine owners would be able to use any concessions won as a precedent for a more generalised assault on employment standards in the town.¹⁰³ Despite these warnings, the Nationalists won seven of the twelve seats with William Shoobridge topping the poll. Shoobridge was another working class conservative who was typical of the men that White courted. One *Truth* correspondent described him as a 'puppet of the Nationalist Association' and that, as 'merely a labourer plying for hire', he could not afford to mix socially with Broken Hill's establishment figures. 'Besides, the food would be too rich for him. He would be out of

¹⁰² *BDT*, 1 December 1928.

¹⁰³ *BDT*, 1 December 1928.

place', the letter maintained.¹⁰⁴ Other successful candidates in the poll were a conservative Labor nominee, Dennis, who came second and A. A. Lawrence, who was placed fourth. Richard Gully was placed an ignominious last, in a clear voter backlash against his racist campaign.¹⁰⁵ At the official declaration of the poll, some of the Aldermen made speeches. Lawrence expressed satisfaction that electors had ignored party politics and voted for the twelve ablest men.¹⁰⁶ He said that the result had proved that 'extreme Labor' was not wanted in Broken Hill. 'Thank God,' he concluded, 'that we can claim that Broken Hill is still loyal and British.'¹⁰⁷ Henry Kelly, for Labor, replied that the Independents were yet to prove that they were 'non-party'.¹⁰⁸ He did not have to wait long to have his suspicions confirmed.

Early in the new year, the Council provoked a battle with the MEU. The former Labor-run Council had had an agreement with the MEU that if a job became vacant first preference would be given to unemployed former employees or current casuals. When a labouring job at the abattoirs became available, the new Nationalist councillors defended the appointment of A. E. Chigwidden, who had not previously been a member of the MEU. The union leadership and the Labor councillors protested against this violation of the preference agreement and a conference between the councillors and the BIC was held to seek a resolution, with the Nationalist aldermen claiming that Chigwidden was simply the better applicant. Alderman Lawrence then moved a motion declaring that there was to be no preference for unionists and that the merit principle would henceforth be applied. It did not go unnoticed that Lawrence read from a typed motion which had obviously been drafted before the discussions had even begun.¹⁰⁹ It was also pointed out that Lawrence's support for the principle of returned soldier preference had slipped because, in promoting Chigwidden's appointment, he was overlooking the claim of a more qualified casual named Crabb, who was a returned soldier but also a trade unionist. Clearly, for Lawrence, breaking the union was a higher

¹⁰⁴ *BDT*, 27 October 1930.

¹⁰⁵ *Truth* argued that the Labor vote had been damaged by the inadequate state of the electoral roll – it was estimated that one in three people who turned up to vote were not on the roll. *BDT*, 3 December 1928.

¹⁰⁶ A minority of electors voted the full ticket of one party, most choosing a mixture of Labor and Independent candidates. *BDT*, 3 December 1928.

¹⁰⁷ *BDT*, 4 December 1928.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *BDT*, 23 January 1929.

principle. The Town Clerk and ardent Nationalist supporter, Mr Jonas, later revealed a similar prejudice when he was charged with ignoring the credentials of the unionist casuals, remarking, 'I do know all about them. That's the trouble.'¹¹⁰ When the stand-off could not be resolved, the BIC announced that all municipal workers would strike from the following Friday.

Before the strike began, the local business community met and agreed to press the Councillors to delay Chigwidden's commencement and to seek the services of an independent conciliator. F. G. White was reportedly a lone voice in this meeting, arguing that it was time for them to fight union control, but the other employers were apparently reluctant to fan open class warfare.¹¹¹ The Independents and the BIC agreed to the process and the strike was temporarily averted. This retreat on the part of his fellow Independents so incensed Lawrence that he resigned from the Council, arguing that he opposed recourse to arbitration because labour organisations could 'get things from it'.¹¹² R. C. Atkinson, the local Magistrate, was appointed as conciliator and, after some discussions, advised the Nationalists that the BIC was prepared to trial a system whereby the union would be approached whenever a position became available to provide a list of unemployed and casual union members and that, all things being equal, the successful applicant would be chosen from that list. The Council replied that it was willing to accept the compromise but that Chigwidden's appointment must stand. They felt, as Alderman Duffy had previously pointed out, that Chigwidden was being victimised by the BIC because, as a former member of the Trades and Trades Labourers Union, he had continued to work at De Bavay's after the AMA had ceased work during the 1919-20 dispute.¹¹³ Both sides argued that the by-election prompted by Lawrence's resignation would be a clear signal of voter views on the issue. Lawrence did not contest the seat, having clearly displeased F. G. White with his somewhat petulant resignation.¹¹⁴ Labor won the subsequent poll, resulting in an equal division of seats on the Council between Labor and the Nationalists.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *BDT*, 20 February 1929.

¹¹¹ *BDT*, 23 January 1929.

¹¹² *BDT*, 23 January 1929.

¹¹³ *BDT*, 20 February 1929.

¹¹⁴ *BDT*, 23 February 1929. Some time later, Gully also appeared to fall out of favour with the Nationalist organiser, perhaps when his unpopularity rendered him less politically useful to White. He stood in the

The uneasy stalemate between the two groups ended abruptly when Chigwidden was convinced to begin work. He had previously been concerned that he would be blamed for causing a dispute and remarked that he had been 'between the devil and the deep sea'.¹¹⁶ His doubts were allayed, he contended, after consultations with the Mayor, during which he was assured that he would not be held responsible for any ensuing union action. In the face of this clear provocation, all Municipal Employees' Union members downed tools, and work at the Council stables, the lightworks, the road maintenance, parks, gardens, baths, libraries, offices, sanitary department and, of course, the abattoirs ground to a halt. Even Chigwidden's father and brother joined the striking workers.¹¹⁷ So total was the stopwork that all the animals kept by the Council had to be fed by the Mayor and the Town Clerk. Shoobridge petulantly cancelled a planned Council meeting, claiming that nothing could be done while the Town Hall was in darkness.¹¹⁸

The following evening, the electricity supply was restored as part of an agreement between the BIC and the Country Traders' Association (CTA), pending acceptance of the deal by a meeting of the workers. It was suggested that a worker on the road gang swap places with Chigwidden and that two other workers who were casually employed, Crabb and Coffey, were to continue in relief positions, but were guaranteed work by the CTA in the event that they were retrenched by the Council. As a result of these moves, no MEU members would remain unemployed. *Truth* painted a very amusing picture of the Mayor's response to this agreement, remarking that he presented a 'Gilbertian' figure as he ran around Argent Street 'like a clown in a circus seeking information as to why somebody or other had had the audacity to put the lights on without consulting [him]'.¹¹⁹ Clearly miffed that he had been sidelined from the dispute and that his planned showdown with the MEU had been thwarted, Shoobridge was forced to ask BIC officials what exactly were the terms of the agreement. On

1931 municipal elections as an ungrouped candidate, came last and remarked that he was 'used to defeats'. *BDT*, 5 December 1931.

¹¹⁵ *BDT*, 23, 25 February 1929.

¹¹⁶ *BDT*, 25 January 1929.

¹¹⁷ *BDT*, 28 February 1929.

¹¹⁸ *BDT*, 1 March 1929.

Saturday, a meeting of MEU members was held to discuss the deal. The main sticking point was that a sizable proportion of the meeting did not want to work with Chigwidden. A ballot was held to decide the issue and the vote was 71/42 in favour of accepting the agreement.¹²⁰ Again, a sizeable minority supported a more radical stance, but the labourist position held sway.

During the 1928 municipal election campaign, union leader, Bert Speck, had argued that it was important to emphasise F. G. White's role in the 'Independents' campaign because unionists knew that White was on the employers' side but that the same could not be said for other Nationalist candidates 'who were used to swinging spawlers or picks, who were traitors to their class, their union and the Labor Movement'.¹²¹ This was an important observation. It indicated that White's strategy was to, where possible, cultivate talented working class associates who could make conservative arguments among their fellow workers. Labour movement fears that the Independents would use their control of the Council to drive down wages and attack trade unionism were well founded. The Nationalist team wasted no time in provoking a dispute with the MEU, in order to break union control over hiring practices. A. A. Lawrence was at the forefront of this dispute and demonstrated that his commitment to returned soldier employment preference was secondary to his support for a job applicant who, as a former member of a 'breakaway' union, was considered a 'scab' by many unionists. For F. G. White, J. N. Jonas and A. A. Lawrence, the principle of returned soldier employment preference had an important qualification – no trade unionists need apply.

Fighting against union solidarity – the anti-levy campaign

In 1929, the imposition of a twelve and a half per cent levy by the Central Council of the WIUA on all working members in support of the locked out miners on the northern coal pits, presented the conservatives with another opportunity to attempt union-busting. One

¹¹⁹ *BDT*, 2 March 1929.

¹²⁰ *BDT*, 4 March 1929.

¹²¹ *BDT*, 27 October 1930.

letter to *Truth* argued that Broken Hill workers should look after their 'own' unemployed before sending money out of the town. The correspondent expressed the view that coal was becoming a redundant resource, that the strike would be of short duration and hence, the levy was ridiculously high. While not a mineworker, 'M.V.' concurred with the sentiment that earnings should remain in the town to benefit the unemployed, urging that 'if [the writer] was one of the men', he/she would not agree to pay the levy. Edward Bulling wrote that the levy was a 'bare-faced imposition' and challenged the right of the Central Council to take such measures without a mass vote to endorse the decision.¹²²

At one of the semi-regular BIC propaganda meetings on the Central Reserve, Richard Quintrell outlined the urgent need for solidarity with the coal miners. While he spoke, a rival meeting was held on the Reserve with Gully and Frederick Rilen, another returned soldier who was frequently referred to as 'Gully's Lieutenant', as the main speakers. Advertised in the *Barrier Miner*, the meeting was aimed at galvanising those who were discontented about paying the levy. One correspondent to *Truth* argued that Gully was far more concerned with the national implications of the coal strike, and quoted him saying that 'he would rather serve under the flag of British Imperialism than in the cause of the workers'.¹²³ Gully argued that those who opposed the WIUA leadership should form their own union or should approach the AWU about joining up with that organisation. He maintained that the cost of WIUA membership was overburdening the workers and that it was the women and children who suffered. Mr Vinall, secretary of the WIUA, was quick to respond to this charge. Vinall provided details of Gully's own union membership to show that Gully had actually *benefited* financially from his union because he had received considerable assistance while unemployed. Vinall claimed that Gully had joined the WIUA in July 1925, and that, while his union dues had totalled £8/5/3, he had received £27/4 in unemployment benefits by 1929.¹²⁴ According to Gully, his opposition to union militancy was inspired by concern for the families of strikers. Industrial action brought nothing but hunger and want to helpless dependants, in his view. Thus, supporters of the levy were able to

¹²² All the abovementioned letters were printed in *BDT*, 28 March 1929.

¹²³ *BDT*, 1 April 1929.

expose Gully's purported concern for women and children, when information concerning Gully's own family life came to light. Union leader, W. E. Dickson, mounted the stage at a propaganda meeting on the Central Reserve, and denounced Gully, who was in the crowd, as a hypocrite. He read from an alleged report in Norton's *Truth* of December 1920,¹²⁵ that Gully was a womaniser who had carelessly exposed his wife to his syphilitic condition.¹²⁶

Undeterred, Gully, Rilen and some of their supporters took up a petition on the mines against the levy. However, they soon had to admit that the response constituted only a 'small number of the total workers' and that they were therefore compelled to cease their campaign against the levy.¹²⁷ F. G. White, however, was not prepared to let the matter rest, writing a letter to *Truth* to claim that the twelve and a half per cent levy was being used to give the coalies a holiday at the expense of Broken Hill workers and that a secret ballot should be held on the issue. He also blamed the union for causing a stoppage on the South mine, where one miner had been accused of inaccurately declaring his earnings for the purpose of reducing the amount he owed to the WIUA. This man, Stephens, continued to present himself for work, despite a decision of the men to refuse to work with him. Naturally, mine management, Gully and F. G. White openly expressed their support for Stephens' stand.¹²⁸

For a short time, the campaign against the levy appeared to be defeated, but the anti-unionists rallied. At the hall where the BWA had formerly met, a meeting of approximately forty men resolved to close the mines at the next badge show day in November, knowing only too well that the presence of one non-unionist was enough to close a mine. One observer noted that Gully walked directly from this meeting to report to the office of the *Barrier Miner*, discreetly using the side entrance to the building.¹²⁹ However, on the day of the badge 'show-down', Gully, Rilen and another supporter, Hastings, lost their nerve. They met with BIC officials and promised not to work that

¹²⁴ *BDT*, 3 April 1929.

¹²⁵ Despite a careful search, I have been unable to locate the article cited by Dickson.

¹²⁶ *BDT*, 21 October 1929.

¹²⁷ *BDT*, 6 April 1929.

¹²⁸ *BDT*, 17-21 May 1929.

¹²⁹ *BDT*, 23 October 1929.

day, to get financial with the union and to advise the other men to do likewise.¹³⁰ Astonishingly, however, Rilen had another change of heart. With a fellow anti-levy campaigner, Hatch, the two decided to present themselves at the North and British mines respectively, but they did not get very far before they were intercepted and harassed by angry pickets. Rilen was chased into a local hotel where he barricaded himself in. An angry crowd picketed the hotel to make sure that he did not escape or try to work. Later that day, Hatch was apprehended by some unionists and 'had his head cooled under the tap in front of the Trades Hall'. Bill Eriksen suggested that the mine managers now saw limited advantage in supporting Gully and company. In interview, Eriksen recalled, 'He got a letter from [Cyril] Emery saying that he was not able to work in harmony with his mates, therefore his job was forfeited on the North mine.'¹³¹ The BIC managed to strike a deal with local police that Rilen be kept in their cells until he could be put on the evening train to Adelaide.¹³²

It was not long before Richard Gully's political activism would be similarly cut short. Part of Gully's anti-union agenda had always been to attack the labour movement for not doing enough to help the unemployed and, in this capacity, he often acted as a spokesperson on their behalf, even while he was in employment. His platform was the familiar simplistic calculation – too many migrants, too few jobs. In late 1930, Gully became president of the local unemployed organisation but was met with frequent charges of 'dictatorial methods' and unfairly distributing relief goods.¹³³ In a statement reminiscent of Orwell's Napoleon, Gully replied that there was a rule in the constitution of the unemployed organisation that committee men, such as himself, were entitled to higher levels of relief by virtue of their selfless activity.¹³⁴ Labour movement supporters made impassioned appeals to the unemployed not to fall for Gully's brand of racist populism. One Letter to the Editor from 'Wake Up' argued that support for Gully would estrange the labour movement from the unemployed, stating that association with 'a discredited individual like Gully, who has shown himself to be a squib of squibs' would

¹³⁰ *BDT*, 19 November 1929.

¹³¹ 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 no. 25.

¹³² *BDT*, 21 November 1929.

¹³³ *BDT*, 8 November 1930.

¹³⁴ *BDT*, 24 October 1930.

anger anti-Gully unionists.¹³⁵ In response, Gully became increasingly bombastic, heightening his attacks on the unions and boasting that threats to run him out of town had come to nought.¹³⁶ One Sunday afternoon, an intoxicated Gully turned up at a Central Reserve meeting that had been arranged to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution to heckle the speakers. Shortly afterwards, several trade unionists went in search of their unruly nemesis, and found him presiding over a distribution of food to the jobless. Sent by the Management Committee of the WIUA, Edgar Ross was one of the men who urged the unemployed to get rid of Gully. As a leading member of the Militant Minority Movement (MMM) with its favourable reputation for good work among the unemployed, Ross had an excellent speaking position from which to argue with the unemployed that Gully was a politically bankrupt president. He appealed to those present to remove Gully from his position or risk losing the support of organised labour. Ross recalled that he 'virtually put to them the alternative of unionism or Gully and the result was that they literally physically chased him out of the meeting'. The deposed leader was forced to run down Beryl Street, with his opponents in hot pursuit. *Barrier Daily Truth* gleefully reported that Gully had knocked half a second off Rilen's time as he ran for the protection of the police station.¹³⁷ New representatives of the unemployed were subsequently elected.

In summary, these three campaigns demonstrate that racism and union-busting were two sides of the same coin tossed by the Broken Hill conservatives. While these examples might appear dissimilar on the surface, the end result of the demands were strikingly similar. In each instance, the case for disunity was peddled by White and his RSL supporters. Not only did Gully advocate migrant exclusion, he also proposed that those dissatisfied with the WIUA leadership should break away and/or join the more conservative AWU. In the council workers' dispute, A. A. Lawrence led the push to break a union preference deal, determinedly promoting the employer's right to freedom of contract. In the struggle against the levy, returned soldiers Gully and Rilen attempted to lead the charge out of a union solidarity campaign. In each instance, these men promoted division in place of solidarity. Far from being a tower of industrial unity, the

¹³⁵ *BDT*, 10 November 1930.

¹³⁶ *BDT*, 10 November 1930.

Broken Hill labour movement showed signs of vulnerability in the face of these concerted attempts to win workers away from the politics of international and inter-union solidarity.

Nevertheless, while the Right tried to employ racism to deflect worker anger from the real source of their problems, such attempts were by no means always successful. The ideological debates that raged over the issues of internationalism, union solidarity and militancy played a role in shifting the political allegiances of local workers. A majority of local workers knew that RSL-types were more likely to be industrial enemies, rather than allies. They knew that migrant workers could be staunch union members, and often had proud industrial traditions of their own. They knew that disunity would be applauded by the mine managers. They listened to the timely warnings of Quintrell, Wetherell and others when the dangers of support for Gully were outlined at numerous public meetings. Even some racist workers were won over by the arguments of the internationalists. In June and August of 1930, A. R. 'Flossy' Campbell wrote letters to the *Barrier Daily Truth* arguing that there were too many foreigners on the mines. It was useless, he spat, to complain to the union officials because they were all 'internationalists'. All Gully's talk was a poor substitute for direct action to get rid of the foreign workers, he argued, before 'they walk us out like they have done to the men in Queensland'. In addition, he appealed to businessmen to support the anti-foreigner campaign because migrant earnings were not spent in Broken Hill.¹³⁸ The union books should be closed, Campbell argued. While he was aware of the arguments of his political opponents that such a measure would 'split the ranks', force the foreigners to scab and weaken the fight against the mine managers, 'it behoves us all to support our own first', he wrote.¹³⁹ Who could have predicted that, four years later, this man would be a leading member of the staunchly-internationalist MMM, successfully elected on its ticket to the influential Check Inspector position?¹⁴⁰ It is not known precisely what

¹³⁷ *BDT*, 11 November 1930.

¹³⁸ *BDT*, 23 June 1930.

¹³⁹ *BDT*, 29 August 1930.

¹⁴⁰ 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. 48.

happened to effect this change in Campbell, but it must be assumed that anti-racist activists played an important part in his 'conversion'.¹⁴¹

It should also be noted that these sorts of debates about racism and immigration were taking place beyond Broken Hill as well. Early in 1930, for example, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) decided by a narrow majority to disaffiliate from the Pan-Pacific Secretariat.¹⁴² Who, in Broken Hill, supported this move? The *Barrier Miner* editorial crowed that this was a victory for all supporters of the White Australia policy. One of the worst aspects of the Pan-Pacific Secretariat, according to the *Miner*, was that it had advocated the removal of any 'colour bar' and that there were 'Chinese and representatives of other coloured races among its members: all of course thoroughly imbued with Red ideals'.¹⁴³ For its part the *Barrier Daily Truth's* editorial strongly censured the 'reactionaries in the Australian Labor Movement' as having temporarily handed a victory to the ruling class, and urged militant sections of the labour movement to agitate for international labour unity.¹⁴⁴

From solidarism to 'international' localism: the WIUA closes its books

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, conferences between the BIC and the MMA continued to discuss the question of employment preference. The BIC accused the MMA of using the medical examination and preference to southern Europeans to weed out local union members. The MMA denied that this was so. At all times, the employers consistently defended their right to employ the most 'suitable' workers for the job and, in their racist views, southern Europeans were physically and temperamentally suited to the most

¹⁴¹ It should be noted that Campbell volunteered for the A.I.F. in 1918. He contracted influenza before embarkation and was discharged in Australia after the cessation of hostilities. For details regarding Campbell's service record, see personnel record no. 14836, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

¹⁴² For a summary of this political battle, see F. Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1981, pp. 188-200.

¹⁴³ *Barrier Miner*, 20 March 1930. The *Miner* editorial reflected ruling class opinion more generally. The Bruce-Page administration consistently frustrated moves for closer international trade union links, by refusing passports to Australians wanting to attend Pan-Pacific trade union conferences held overseas and by refusing entry to those 'foreign' trade unionists who attempted to come to Australia. As Farrell demonstrated, conservative politicians linked internationalism and Communism with treason. F. Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932', *Historical Studies*, vol. 17, no. 69, 1977, p. 450.

menial tasks on the mines.¹⁴⁵ The union representatives, on the other hand, seemed decidedly torn on the question. They knew that the mine managers were deliberately exploiting, even assisting to create, the employment situation along the line of lode and, while some officials were reluctant to make any concessions to their divisive tactics, they found it difficult to prevent their protestations regarding local employment preference from containing a nasty vein of racism.

E. P. O'Neill charged that the MMA was exploiting the current unemployment situation on the mines, citing instances where men had technically been 'out of the industry' for more than six months and were, as a result, required to face a medical examination. If the medical examiner found any evidence of 'dusted lungs', he would refuse permission for the man to resume work, leaving the worker unemployed and ineligible for compensation for a condition which had, in all likelihood, been contracted on the Broken Hill mines. The BIC claimed that the medical examination rule was not being applied universally and that it was being used to discriminate against local men and union members, citing cases where they felt employment procedures had been unfairly applied. It also complained about inconsistent hiring practices, suggesting that such irregularities appeared to discriminate on a political basis. Some workers were refused employment because of expired medical clearance tickets, while others were put on without any examination. Some appeared to fail the examination for a flimsy reason, while others who were clearly sick had passed.¹⁴⁶ One BIC representative, Eriksen, reported that he knew of a returned soldier who passed the examination; when his job 'cut out' he was examined by the Medical Board and received a full invalid pension.¹⁴⁷ Quintrell argued that the union's case was simple – any man who had been considered fit enough for work when the mines closed should be able to resume work without the examination.

¹⁴⁴ *BDT*, 1 March 1930.

¹⁴⁵ Of course, not all southern Europeans were able to fit the mine management's pigeonholes. Paul Said went to Broken Hill in 1925 but was not able to find work, except for hotel work. Although he spoke some English, he put his lack of employment down to being of small build. In retrospect, he was pleased that he had not risked his health in the mines. 'Bugger the job there', he said. Interview with *Paul Said*, conducted by Barry York on 12 September 1984. Transcript held in the National Library of Australia, Canberra, reference no. TRC 3582/2.

¹⁴⁶ MMA/BIC conference report, 20 September 1933.

¹⁴⁷ MMA/BIC conference report, 20 September 1933.

By the end of the year, the situation was even worse for Broken Hill workers. The union estimated that there were 800 unemployed in Broken Hill, with 350 of them local men. In conference, the MMA and the BIC discussed the initiative introduced by the Bureau of Medical Inspection to attach a photograph to miners' medical clearances to prevent workers from using other men's tickets. Mr Emery stated that the measure had been adopted to prevent misrepresentation, thereby emphasising that failure to implement union preference was not the fault of the mine managers, but was due to unscrupulous migrant workers. Attempting to create allies among the union leaders, and to involve them in finding measures against the migrant workers, he said, '[a] lot of this misrepresentation has gone on amongst foreigners – they were trafficking in certificates ... do you fellows know any better way of preventing it?'¹⁴⁸ At first, Quintrell took Emery's bait, replying, 'Can you distinguish the foreigners from the photo?', a racist insinuation that all southern Europeans looked alike. However, Quintrell then asked Emery whether he knew of any Australians who were trafficking in certificates. At first, Emery replied in the negative but then added that there had, in fact, been a certain amount of trafficking amongst Australians, but that it had been worse among foreigners.¹⁴⁹

This conversation is important for three reasons. Firstly, it demonstrated that Quintrell could be influenced by racist ideology but, at the same time, might also defend international solidarity. Secondly, Emery was keen to emphasise that the illicit trade in medical certificates was a 'foreign' practice and to encourage the union representatives to focus on foreign, rather than management, culpability for the lack of jobs. Thirdly, Emery's admission that some *Australians* had used deception to get work confirmed that such practices were *not* the preserve of southern Europeans, but were a product of the desperation caused by high levels of unemployment in the town. Similarly, if Australians were prepared to engage in this deception, it seems unlikely that they would recoil from paying foremen for jobs, another allegedly 'foreign' ploy. In 1928, the

¹⁴⁸ MMA/BIC conference report, 2 December 1929.

¹⁴⁹ MMA/BIC conference report, 2 December 1929. Later, Emery sought to further emphasise 'foreigner' involvement in the trafficking of clearance tickets. He said: 'We get men working with other men's

MMA discussed a case of impersonation where Harris Stanley Jones failed his medical examination but was subsequently found working on the Central Mine as William John Fielder. He was dismissed.¹⁵⁰ In fact, such practices were integral to mine employment. At the 1914 Royal Commission, S. C. Robinson gave evidence that he had pulled out of an inequitable contract and had subsequently found it necessary to adopt an assumed name, because he was unlikely to be re-employed under his real name. He had also played a prominent part in union struggles and was convinced he had been blacklisted. Defending his decision to adopt a false name, he said, 'This sort of thing applies to hundreds of men.'¹⁵¹

Quintrell claimed that some foremen were giving preference to southern Europeans on the basis of job type, citing an example of a particular incident at the South Blocks mine.¹⁵² One union member had applied for work, only to be told by the Underground Manager that the particular position was 'a foreigner's job'. Subsequently, two southern Europeans were given the work. Quintrell interviewed the Manager, Mr Broad, taking the position that the BIC 'does not stand for any individual, but what they did stand against was a Foreman or Underground Manager stating that a certain job was for a certain man that happened to be born somewhere else than in Australia'.¹⁵³ Broad saw no problem with employing southern Europeans for particular jobs and admitted that he had employed the southern Europeans on the request of the foreman. On the same mine, an inexperienced man had been placed immediately into a mining party, despite union assurances that they had six hundred unemployed men on its books, sixty per cent of whom were competent miners. Quintrell remarked that, 'there seemed to be something "fishy" about the matter'.¹⁵⁴ Bert Speck argued:

We know that some men who come from over-seas may be bigger or stronger men for the time being, but it is only a matter of a few years in the industry when they will be old employees, and we consider that those men who are in Broken Hill today – men who have their homes and

tickets, but cannot find out how it happens. We have found that it occurs amongst foreigners; if one goes away another one gets his ticket and gets on.' MMA/BIC conference report, 4 August 1932.

¹⁵⁰ MMA minutes, 8 November 1928.

¹⁵¹ *Royal Commission on Mining Industry*, p. 98.

¹⁵² MMA/BIC conference report, 31 January 1929.

¹⁵³ MMA/BIC conference report, 31 January 1929.

¹⁵⁴ MMA/BIC conference report, 31 January 1929.

families here – should be given preference of employment along the line of lode.

Emery responded that, in general, old hands received consideration and that, if some new men were getting jobs, they were very few in number. Another mine manager attempted to defend the applications of men from Western Australia, contending that the BIC's concern was only with overseas men. Quintrell replied heatedly, 'A man may come from Alaska and be as good as a Broken Hill man, but we want preference for Broken Hill men'.¹⁵⁵

In May 1931, 'Australia First' wrote to the *Barrier Miner* in an attempt to get Richard Gully to come out of 'retirement'. The letter writer argued that a body of the unemployed should approach the MMA with a view to ousting the foreigners and replacing them with 'local' workers. Further, he/she 'sooled':

I think that such a move would get support from the Returned Soldiers' League. As there are Germans working among these foreigners, is not that a great insult to our returned men who offered their lives fighting in the Great War?¹⁵⁶

Curiously, 'Australia First' offered Gully the incentive that there were, at that moment, fewer foreigners in the town 'to join in the hooting with the Reds' and that, regardless, 'to suffer defeat is no disgrace'.¹⁵⁷ Gully declined the invitation to return to public life, but encouraged 'Australia First' to do so in his place.¹⁵⁸ Clearly, Gully recognised defeat and had no wish to repeat the experience. 'Australia First' replied darkly, 'I am sorry to say that I can't accept Mr Gully's suggestion to come out on the platform or yet make myself known for reasons of my own.'¹⁵⁹ Clearly, by 1931, Broken Hill had become an inhospitable place for would-be racist campaigners.

A few days later, after years of relentless pressure on the question of race, the WIUA executive made a huge concession to the demands of the 'localists', by

¹⁵⁵ MMA/BIC conference report, 31 January 1929.

¹⁵⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 15 May 1931.

¹⁵⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 15 May 1931.

¹⁵⁸ *Barrier Miner*, 18 May 1931.

¹⁵⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 21 May 1931.

developing rules to insist that members of the union meet a strict residential requirement before they could gain access to mine employment.¹⁶⁰ This move was subsequently endorsed by the BIC.¹⁶¹ *Barrier Daily Truth* explained the rule change as a decision not to work with non-unionists, whether they were willing to join the union or not. If a man was not a member of the union before the closure of the union books, he would have no choice but to leave the industry or force others to down tools. The rule change was 'based upon the contention that preference to out of work members of the union should be enforced'.¹⁶² In this way, the union maintained its income from membership dues, by enforcing continuation of membership for those miners who wished to come back into the workforce when the economic situation improved. However, the manner in which this decision was taken suggests that the closure of the books was recognised as a defeat. In 1928, the WIUA had donated £100 to striking waterside workers, accompanied by a message to the effect that they did not agree with the Waterside Workers' Federation decision to close its books, as this was 'detrimental to Unionism'.¹⁶³ Less than three years later, in a very secretive fashion, the WIUA announced that its books were now closed to new members. The decision appears not to have been minuted by the WIUA and *Barrier Daily Truth* raised only those matters that arose from the decision, not the decision itself.

With only the Zinc Corporation, Broken Hill South and North Broken Hill still in operation at the time, these companies requested a conference in order to negotiate reduced costs. In the face of devastating levels of unemployment, labour movement leaders defended the exclusionary policy as one which would limit the mine managers' ability to exploit the flooded labour market. However, in the course of these negotiations the different political positions of local union leaders became apparent. Staunch localist, O'Neill, stated simply:

Mr. Emery, seeing that there is so much depression, and so many out of work on the mines here, who have been out for such a long time, we contend that the Companies should not employ men who are coming from other parts.

¹⁶⁰ *BDT*, 25 May 1931.

¹⁶¹ *BIC* minutes, 25 May 1931.

¹⁶² *BDT*, 26 May 1931.

¹⁶³ WIUA minutes, 4 December 1928.

When Emery replied that he didn't think any newcomers were getting work, Quintrell insisted that there were a few instances where new men were getting jobs. He reported that new men were still arriving in the town and were able to find work on the mines and that such a situation had forced the WIUA 'to take a stand on the matter'. He outlined the union's commitment to non-acceptance of new members into the organisation, citing the case of two men who had arrived last week, had attempted to join the union but had been refused. Categorically, he stated, 'We are going to keep the work for the Broken Hill men.'¹⁶⁴

However, the most important factor of the union closure was its 'non-racial' aspect. As Ellem and Shields pointed out, the definition of 'local' included many southern European men who had not been born in Broken Hill, but who had lived there for some years.¹⁶⁵ In the eyes of the WIUA executive, these men were more 'deserving' of a job than an Australian newcomer to the town. When Mr Gall, one of the mine managers, stated that a party of Italians had recently taken in a man who had been away for six months, Quintrell replied that this man could not then be considered a newcomer and that the union was not concerned about a man who had merely been away for a while. Later in the discussion, Quintrell reiterated that if the Italian man had gone away and drawn his clearance he would be readmitted to the union.¹⁶⁶ BIC representatives Gough and Eriksen attempted to turn the conference back to questions of racial 'loyalty'. They attacked the mine managers on the question of British preference, saying that newcomers were more likely to get employment. Again, Quintrell deflected the debate towards the benefits that mine managers gained from employing migrant labour, pointing out that the Workmen's Compensation Act allowed the companies to dodge compensation payments if a miner was killed and was not from a country with which Australia had a reciprocal agreement.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ MMA/BIC conference report, 17 February 1931.

¹⁶⁵ Ellem and Shields, 'Australian Labor's Closed Preserve', pp. 85-89.

¹⁶⁶ To 'draw a clearance' was to notify the union of a prospective absence from mine employment and to pay all outstanding dues. Upon return to the industry, a worker with a clearance would re-enter the union without paying new member fees.

¹⁶⁷ MMA/BIC conference report, 17 February 1931.

Conclusion

In the interwar period, Broken Hill workers were subjected to a relentless array of campaigns aimed at weakening their industrial unity. In this way, the campaign against migrant workers in Broken Hill must be seen in the same context as opposition to the strike levy and attacks on union preference arrangements. The personnel and the politics behind all these campaigns were remarkably similar. The Broken Hill mine managers had much to gain from racial division. In workplaces organised along Taylorist lines, heavy labouring work was allotted by the foremen to those deemed 'racially suitable' to the task. Reflecting the current orthodoxy, southern Europeans were deemed especially suited to heavy, repetitive work; jobs that would attract low rates of pay. Newly-arrived southern European workers would be less cognisant of local conditions and were, hence, more likely to remain cheap. However, for such workers to remain in this condition, it was necessary to discourage any moves by the labour movement to fraternise with, and unionise, the 'foreigners'. Racism, and those who were prepared to peddle it, were important adjuncts to the more general mine manager campaign to weaken trade unionism. As such, the RSL and the local newspaper, the *Barrier Miner*, acted as conservative ideological forces in the locality. Far from uncritically accepting this propaganda, the Broken Hill labour movement struggled against the logic of racial division and its concomitant effect on union strength. The albeit limited form of internationalism that prevailed in Broken Hill during the 1930s is a testimony to the energy and commitment of the exponents of solidarity who recognised the racist campaigns of the 1920s for what they were – an employer-led strategy to divide and rule.

Quintrell's recognition that mine managers were the only beneficiaries of racial division among workers in Broken Hill was vital to the maintenance of a limited form of internationalism within the labour movement. Although not immune to the argument that immigrants caused unemployment and lowered living conditions, he and his supporters were able to insist that any policy other than recruiting migrants to the union was tantamount to industrial suicide. By maintaining this position, Quintrell galvanised

many Broken Hill workers to reject the victimisation of southern European workers and successfully stiffened the anti-racist resolve of sufficient labour movement leaders to isolate Gully's racist campaign. Most importantly, as editor of the most widely-read labour movement newspaper, Ern Wetherell followed Quintrell's lead. As a result, *Barrier Daily Truth* can be viewed as an outstanding example of an anti-racist mouthpiece that emanated from the labour movement.

Mine management attempts to harness racism as part of its battle for industrial supremacy were an integral part of the class struggle in Broken Hill; it is impossible to understand the pressures on the labour movement in the interwar period without considering the full extent of this employer offensive. The RSL's successes and failures in whipping up racism illustrate how ideas within the working class were in constant flux, as voices from the Left and the Right attempted to promote international solidarity and nationalist exclusion respectively. To make racist initiatives palatable, appeals to labour movement nationalism frequently adopted the guise of concern for working class living standards, with attacks on the presence of southern Europeans dressed up as support for local workers. There is little doubt that such a platform provided a pole of attraction for sections of the labour movement and the wider working class, but, contrary to the historiography of Australian racism, such invocations were by no means universally supported within the labour movement. The highpoint of industrial solidarity reached during World War One came under sustained attack during the 1920s and 1930s. Although the miners' militancy was severely diminished, some political traditions did not evaporate completely. A number of key activists who were prepared to attack racism as a divisive ideology that suited only the interests of the employers, and the majority of rank-and-file unionists who supported their lead, maintained a battered form of international solidarity on the Broken Hill mines.¹⁶⁸ Despite the best efforts of the employer camp, racist strategies were by and large rejected by the Broken Hill labour movement but, as in Kalgoorlie, that outcome was never pre-determined.

¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, married women workers were not accorded the same consideration. See Ellem and Shields, 'Making a 'Union Town': Class, Gender and Consumption in Inter-war Broken Hill', *Labour History*, no. 78, 2000.