

THE GENERAL

authorised biography of Norm Gallagher

EARLY DAYS 1931-1946BIRTH

Norman Leslie Gallagher grew up in the tough inner Melbourne suburb of Collingwood. The son of a bricklayer <sup>LABOURER, Albert</sup> Albert (who died at the age of 74), and Minnie (who died of diabetes at the age of 49), his working class credentials, including his accent, are impeccable.

← repeated on pg 8

I was born in Carlton, at the Women's Hospital in Carlton, and I lived in Collingwood for most of my younger life. But it's always been a bit of an argument about my date of birth because my mother, who really should know, said that I was born in 1932, but my birth certificate said 1931. It's a bit of a laugh we have, you know, between the family.

FATHER

I can remember dad in the late 1930's. I always remember the old man because we would always line up outside the house at 83 Campbell Street and we got our two bob a week. He always gave us two bob a week pocket money. That was a lot of money in those days. For instance in 1948 the basic wage was only about three pounds a week. So two bob a week was big money. Dad always looked after us kids.

We'd spend the money going to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon. Always after the theatre we would go and buy some fish 'n chips at Old Franks'- an old Greek bloke who had a fish 'n chip shop in Johnson Street, Collingwood. Sometimes I would buy a pie which was three pence.

I used to go with mates of mine. There was Georgie <sup>Frasdale</sup> ~~Starr~~. He grew up and went to the waterfront. There was the Lewis' boys. The <sup>✓ there Thomas</sup> was the ~~Thompson~~' boys. We had a local gang of our own. I was about seven or eight... but you never went looking for trouble in those days, because there was always someone there to accomodate <sup>m</sup> you.

My father was a very hard working person. He <sup>drank</sup> drunk very heavy, but he always <sup>Saw to it</sup> seen that we had something to eat. They were very hard times and I can remember the old man- in those days things were very crook in the building industry. You had to buy your own pick, and shovel, you had to cart your own tools around. And you had to have a pick and shovel and a mash hammer and a <sup>D</sup> ~~gav~~ he even had an old lowry-hook that he used to mix up the lime, because in those days they used to run lime mortar for the brick work.

English?  
to be  
fixed  
or not

So the old man would get off to work of a morning with his old sugar bag, with the tools in it. He used to have an old penny in the corner of the bag and he'd tie a knot around it so he could put it over his shoulder and it wouldn't slip.

You had to be careful with your tools, because when they broke you had to replace them yourself. Not the employer. And that time you had no sick leave, you never got paid for public holidays, there was no loading. If it looked like rain then they'd just send you home, and you didn't get paid for it. I think those were the things that really had a big impression on me. I remember the old man worked hard; you had the forty-four hour week and worked on Saturday mornings. I used to get up and go to work with him- about five o'clock in the morning. He was looking after bricklayers in those days.

But they were hard days. There were times when dad was out of work, there would be days when he wasn't wanted. I can remember, he took on one job scrubbing floors, just to see that we had food. He always looked after his kids. Those early days left many scars on me. That's why I fought so hard to improve the living standards of builders' labourers.

Dad was a bit of a loner, a bit like me in some respects. He would have a few beers after work and he'd come home by about 7.00 of a night time. He'd be early to bed and early up in the morning. He had one old mate, old Joe <sup>B</sup> West, a real bushman, but he didn't mix that much. He'd be at work at <sup>6.30</sup>~~5.00~~ am- he had a good name in the industry for being a hard worker.

Dad was a good family man. He would sometimes take us to the zoo and very often we would walk over to Studley Park on a Sunday. We didn't live very far from there. I can remember one Easter he took us to Studley Park and we had to find the Easter eggs. He used to hide them. He reckoned it was the Easter Bunny. I can remember very vividly. We found the eggs but you know, at that time he never had much time on his hands because he was always working.

### SCHOOL DAYS

Norm spent eight stormy years at St Joseph's School in Collingwood, making life difficult for teachers, until he was expelled at 13. He took with him few academic accolades, but many memories of the bruises inflicted by the nuns for misbehaviour. The beatings gave him a temporary spe<sup>e</sup>ch impediment and encouraged Norm to learn boxing.

I had a bad time at school. I went to St Josephs' in Collingwood. In my early days I used to stutter a hell of a lot. You know, I never stuttered until I started school. I was very nervous and the nuns were a bit rough on me, probably because I was very slow in learning. You know, you'd be trying to concentrate to do something and someone would go to talk to you and you go to talk back- then the nun would either grab you by the bloody hair or pull your ear or give you a belt over the knee. I'd say all the nuns went in for their chop.

They were hard days at school. <sup>school of today could not</sup> The kids <sup>imagine what it was like.</sup> don't know what school is all about today. And the nuns had their favourites. We were a fairly poor family in those days, compared to most of the others at the school. I was fairly conscious about those sorts of things.

I can remember one time, we never had enough money for me to get a hair cut, so my mum cut my hair. When I went to the barbers' later on, when I had the money to get a hair cut, he said to me "Who's been messing about with your hair?" I said "Me mum." "Ah, she's bugged it all up." So he shaved me bald. I went home and my mum hit the roof. She went back and called this old Lewis, the barber, all the bastards under the sun. So for about three months I had to wear <sup>A</sup> this cap. By Jesus I had some fights.

Mum was tough. Mum had my temper... or I had my mum's temper. I used to fly off the handle a bit. It would take a lot, but when I got put out, I got put out. We all tended to have a bloody temper. Even my brother. I had one brother and one sister. I'm the youngest in the family, and my brother was a builder's labourer. Later he went down to the wharves and he ended buying his own semi-trailer. He got disqualified from the wharves because he started sharing the profits. Anyway he's kicked on just fine.

My sister, she was the oldest and she was mum's favourite, naturally being a girl. When it came to responsibility- I don't know, maybe because I was the youngest, I always had all the responsibility. I had to do everything. If mum sent my brother down to the greengrocers' to get a pound of potatoes, you'd bet your life he would come back with a pound of butter. You know, he deliberately done it so that mum wouldn't give him the messages.

Then she'd say "Come on Norm, you go down to the butchers and get some bloody..." I remember at that time we used to have sheeps' head soup. Mum would say to me "Go down and get a sheep's head, I'll make you some soup." I'd say, "Why don't you send <sup>ALF</sup> ~~Sophie~~ or <sup>MAUREEN</sup> Lloyd down?" "No, no, no- they'll mess it up. You go

down." When it came to management, she always trusted me. My sister was the favourite with mum, but mum and I were very, very close.

Anyway, when I started stuttering, mum tried to help. She took me to the Children's hospital for months and months. And the kids used to have a bit of a go at me at school because I couldn't pronounce words properly, and that had a big detriment on my schooling, on my learning.

So by the time I was 13, I tended to have a chip on my shoulder. At that time we had a merit system at school, you had to sit for your merit. You had 8 grades, and in the seventh grade one nun said to me "Look Norm, there is no hope for you." She said "You got two choices, you can either stay home and come back and we'll give you your certificate when you're 14, or else you can help old Mr King clean up the yard." Mr King was the caretaker. Old Ernie had a bit of a deformity. He had no neck and he was a bit of a <sup>ruffian</sup> roughian. So anyway I stayed at school and cleaned up the yard. There used to be a billiard table in the hall, and we used to play billiards much of the day.



RELIGION

My sister got into a bit of trouble when she was a kid. She was a bit uncontrollable. She ran away from home a few times. Mum used to walk the streets sometimes all night looking for her- I reckon she took a few years off her life.

So my mum put her in the convent for a few weeks. And then when she wanted to get her out- she couldn't get her out. She went to see old Father Lombard at the time, and he wouldn't help. My sister up till then was a very religious person. She never missed mass, but after that she got very cool on the church and her religion. And I just turned right off. When we wanted help it just wasn't there.

It's funny. When my mum got sick, my sister stuck to her like bloody super-glue. Mum was a diabetic. She had it late in her life. Mum was about 49 when she passed away. The old man was about 74 when he passed away.

I don't know much about where my family comes from, but I do know that my father was a twin. He had a brother who was a merchant seaman, and he lived in England. I can remember he came out here in 1939 when the Test was on. I can remember staying up one night with him and the old man, and they were listening to the Test. I don't know what happened to him.

But we didn't mix in a big circle as far as our relations went. We mainly kept to ourselves.

### THE BOXER

I lived in Collingwood all my life. And I never ever went looking for a fight. I always knew that if you went looking for it, you'd always find someone better than you. But I'd ~~always like to know that~~ I could give as much as I got.

I took up boxing when I was about 13 years of age. I was still at school. My trouble was that I was very heavy. When I started fighting I was meeting blokes 6'3'' and 6'4''. You'd have to get a banana box to get somewhere near them. But I just wanted to defend myself- I used to like to keep fit, so I done a bit of amateur boxing. I never won that many fights.

I did win a medal out at Yarraville one night. They had a tournament out there, "the Gamest Boxer". They should have called it "the Maddest Boxer"! The bloke that I was fighting must have been a foot higher than me. But I just had to get in and give as much as I took. I also had a couple of professional fights. But there again I met a bloke, by the name of Al Green, and he must have been at least 6'4''. That was crazy! And that's one of the things I didn't like about boxing- that the matching was very poor.

So I just done it to look after myself, because in those days Collingwood was notorious for street-brawling. They used to have gangs, and when you got a mob together, they used to strip every picket off a fence. So I just nice and quietly learnt to box; and I didn't get picked on because people knew that I knew how to look after myself.

### THE FRUIT JOCKEY

Norm left school at the age of 14, and got his first job as a jockey on fruit trucks at the Victoria market, delivering fruit to the country.

I stayed on at school for 12 months clea<sup>N</sup>ing the yard.  
Then I left and went to work for the Melbourne Fruit Company in the Victoria Market. That's how I got to love the Victoria Market. When they were going to pull it down, I got the Union to put a ban on it. And it's still there. We saved it, no thanks to those bloody Melbourne City Councillors who wanted to flog it off to some bloody American monopoly to build a bloody international hotel on the site.

I was a jockey on a transit truck. I'd have to be in the market by about 3.00 o'clock in the morning, and Jesus you put in hard during the week, especially when you had to go and unload. You know, 400 dozen cauli's

and cabbages, and your hands would be blue with the cold. We'd deliver to the Western district, down as far as Port Fairy, and then on the Thursday market we would deliver down to Gippsland, down as far as Sale and sometimes we would do the Echuca run.

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I got the job at the market through a mate of mine, Jimmy Lewis. He lived in our street and we knocked about as kids together. Jimmy had a job there. He was working, and he recommended me. I went to see Frank Morgan, who owned the business, and he put me on. There was a bloke by the name of Neil West who was the manager, an ex-copper, and you really knew your bloody work when you were working with him. It was a good experience. You really got to know a lot of people in the market.

We would load up first thing in the morning, and we'd hope to get away around about 9.00- 10.00 a.m. We'd make our last delivery around about 10.00 o'clock at night and we'd stay overnight at this pub in Warnambool. I was with these two blokes, Cliffy and Snowy, and they'd send me to bed. They would say "Early start in the morning, you better get to bed." And they'd drink just about all bloody night at the pub. On the Wednesday we would go down to Port Fairy and unload. Then we'd drive back and be in Melbourne about 3.00 o'clock Wednesday afternoon. Then you'd start at

3.00 o'clock on Thursday morning and load up, and off you'd go again.

They were hard days. And in the winter months it was bloody hard work, especially when you were expected to lug these huge sacks of potatoes or pumpkins. I was about 14 or 15 at the time, and it was heavy work alright. But my family has always been a hardworking family. I've always had an attitude that 'work is life's discipline', and one of the things that really worries me about the period that we are in now is that there will be a lot of kids that will never get the opportunity to even experience work.

And it's just so important that in a kid's upbringing that they get the experience of work, that they get the experience of discipline- having to get out of bed in the morning, having to go to work, having to have the supervision during the day. Now it's my view that kids who leave school today, some of them will never get the opportunity to do that."

#### BUILDERS LABOURER

And then I got a job as a builders labourer out at APM in Fairfield. My brother was working out there at the time and he got me the job.

There <sup>were</sup> was a lot of old builders labourers who were working out there who had some connections with the union. Blokes like Tom ~~Magnun~~ <sup>MAN TON</sup> who used to be the president of the union. A mate of mine George Drinkwater who was on the union executive. Then I got to know a bloke who was very staunch Labor Party- bloke by the name of ~~Heey~~ <sup>HUGH. TIENEY</sup> Teaney, who called one of his sons Eureka, after the Eureka Stockade. He asked me to join the Eureka Youth League, this was about 1947.

And then George Drinkwater asked me to join the Communist Party, and I did. I didn't know much about it then, just that I could observe <sup>at</sup> they were blokes who were working on the job and that they were the best defenders- the best fighters for the blokes, always wanting to do something to support the blokes.

And that caring for the blokes really impressed me. I always cared. Even at school if I seen someone picking on somebody else I'd always come up and say "You keep your hands off him". I always had the attitude that somebody had to look after the little people. The big people don't need looking after. And whether it was at school with some bully trying to bully some poor little kid I'd always take the side of the little bloke. I think I got that from mum.

<sup>HUGH</sup>  
So I went to ~~Heey~~ and told him that I'd been asked to join the Communist Party, and I asked him what he

thought about it. And he said "Look Norm, I think you'd be the ideal bloke for that party." He said "I've seen how you've defended the blokes on the job (because I was a shop steward). You've got a lot of human care in you- you care about people" And then he said "Actually your brother (who was working there at the time), your brother would be no good joining the Communist Party- he'd be more fitted if he got a block of land up on a hill and started his own religion- he's a real conman."

So then I joined the Communist Party. But I never joined the Labor Party. No! To me they were just an opportunist party. They didn't have any caring, weren't prepared to stand on principles, they were always selling out. So I never had much time for the Labor Party. I did think they had some terrific members, but they were always too easy to capitulate and compromise. And I was never a compromiser. I think that's why I fought so hard when I became an organiser.

Then about 1950 I went overseas to the Berlin Youth Festival. The blokes on the job paid my way for me. I had a number of experiences overseas. I got onto this youth delegation and I went to Moscow, then to Peking. The land reform in China had a special effect on my life. I'll never forget one old bloke who told me that he'd worked for a landlord for about forty years. And

the way he'd been exploited, the way they'd have to sell their kids to the landlord. Now with the reforms he'd been given a block of land where he'd built a house... the look on his face... it really captured me a bit. So I asked if I could see his farm. It wasn't far so we walked for about ten minutes and there it was... a single room mud house! And there was his farm, about ~~60~~<sup>10</sup> foot by ~~160~~<sup>10 FOOT</sup>. But that was his, he never owned anything else in his life, and he was growing vegetables on it... But it was his! Chairman <sup>Mao</sup> Mea and the People's Army had got it for him. And he was telling me how he was going to defend it. He was just so proud.

And then when I came back and Paddy Malone, who was the state secretary for the Victorian Branch, could see that I had some potential. He asked me if I'd be interested to stand to become an organiser in the Victorian Branch. I thought it over and told him I'd give it a go. So I started organising in 1950. And I organised for ten years for the Victorian Branch. Then in 1960 I was asked to stand as general secretary of the union.



WIFE

Jean

I met my wife... she used to walk past the milk bar in <sup>VERE ST</sup> Collingwood and a couple of my mates were always sweet on her. They called her a winner and I invited her out one night to a dance. They used to have dances at the Collingwood Town Hall on a Saturday night. I got talking and invited her out. This was in 1950. She was about 18<sup>m</sup> months older than me. I guess I was courting her for about 6 years. And she finally said 'yes'.

But eventually we grew apart. I hold no grudges against her- we just grew apart.

I had a job I just had to do in building the union. I started to spend more and more time interstate and away and we just drifted apart. I guess I spent too much time interstate building up the union. It was more my fault than hers.

But she always stuck by me, she was a good wife. It was probably my fault but these things happen in life.

But I must<sup>say</sup> that she had done a great job in raring the kids. My kids never got into any serious trouble and I never had any problems with them.

So we se<sup>a</sup>parated in the early '70s. I just couldn't quit the union. I made a committment that I was going to

build a union and I carried out that committment. It's as simple as that.

I had a vision as to how I wanted to see the union organised and what its place in Australian society should be, and I went all out to achieve that vision.

Many people knock me for what I've done, but I can honestly say that I've achieved what I've set out to do. The poor boy from Collingwood did good.

The poor boy from Collingwood had a vision that working people should be given a fair go, and from out of that vision I can honestly say that I achieved <sup>e</sup>evrything I set out to do- to make people more aware about their conditions and their way of living.

Now how many people can sit back and say, "Yes, I have made a difference in this life, I have made a difference to other people, I have made a difference by improving the lives of others"? I did it with the builders labourers.

EARLY UNION YEARS- THE 1950's + 1960's

Old Paddy Malone had a great impact on me in those early days. We were close mates... He was the one who saw something in me.

I always had an attitude of trying to help people. Always. So after I joined up with the union they made me a shop steward. And I've always been the type that if I've got a job to do, I put my heart and soul into it. Old Paddy Malone- he could see some potential in me so I had a go at the job of being shop steward. I liked it.

At that time old Paddy was the Victorian State Secretary of the Builders Labourers Federation when I joined the union in 1950. He could see that I was loyal, and in those days loyalty meant a great deal. He could see I had that loyalty. He took an instant liking to me and I soon realised the similarities between us.

Paddy was born in Ireland and, like me, he left school when he was 13. He was the oldest of six brothers and he went to work on a farm. When he was 15 he was active in the struggle against the English for Irish independence.

He arrived in Melbourne in 1927 and couldn't find a job. After many weeks of searching he got a job with

the (State) Rivers Commission. He joined the Australian Workers Union, but when the Great Depression hit in 1929, old Paddy found himself without a job. He had little money saved and no relatives to turn to, so like so many others he was forced to tramp the countryside looking for any work he could get. He slept under bridges and ate from an old tin mug he carried in a nap-sack. He spent months looking for work that didn't exist.

Paddy moved about from Melbourne to Cairns looking for work, begging and scraping up bits of food where ever he could. These humiliating experiences left bitter impressions on Paddy. Seeing thousands of young men like himself so humiliated, so degraded, hardened his thinking to try to prevent this situation happening again.

Paddy worked in the cane fields of North Queensland until 1935. In that year there was a nine week strike which was part of the fight to improve work conditions on the fields. Paddy was a member of the committee which organised that strike.

After the strike Paddy returned to Melbourne and got a job as a builders labourer and joined the BLF. He found the union in those days very weak and poorly led. He assisted in a campaign to strengthen the leadership and in 1939 he became a member of the Union Executive

Committee. He was then appointed to represent the Union in Sydney at the ACTU Congress in 1940. A few months later he was appointed a Union organiser and in 1941 he became Victorian State Secretary. By the time I joined the Union I don't think old Paddy had ever been opposed for the position of state Secretary.

I spent most of my early days in the union looking, just watching and listening and learning. I saw how the Government and the employers were always trying to take away our working conditions and reduce our wages.

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1952 was a very important year for me. The employers demanded a 2 pound 6 shilling reduction in the basic wage and a return to the 44 hour week. They wanted more work for less pay. That was the attitude they had then, and they never changed in the forty years I've been in the union movement. I could see that it was going to be a grim and desperate fight for the members to retain what little they had and that the only way we were going to be successful was by closing ranks and working together. The only way I thought we could succeed was by way of counter-attack- by demanding more pay.

Menzies was the Prime Minister at the time, and the workers struggle against Menzies during the early 1950's had a profound impact on me. It solidified my attitude with respect to Government and the employers.

Menzies introduced amendments to the Arbitration Act to have the Government run Union elections instead of the rank and file. This was an attempt to cripple the Trade Union Movement. It was an attempt to weaken the unions and prepare the way for the employers to reduce our wages and take away our conditions- which were pretty poor in the first place.

Under Menzies' union-bashing Arbitration Act amendments the government organised a petition to be signed by union members. The petition sought to have the Victorian State elctions of the BLF conducted by a Government official- a Registrar of the old Arbitration Court.

Our members were largely uneducated and many could not read. They were told, falsely, that it was just a Labour Party petition for an election. But really the aim of the petition was to take the union's internal affairs out of the control of the membership and to flout the democratic rules of the union. Menzies aim was to remove the leadership of unions which were organizing to resist his program of unemployment and wage-freeze.

I remember blokes were running around from site to site petitioning members and telling them that the ballot was supported by the Union.

After challenging the validity of the Ballot, we won the right in the Arbitration Court to check signatures to the petition against the membership records of the Union. Paddy argued that before he would give the government access to the Union records, that he be given the right to examine the petition himself to see if it was genuine. The Court grudgingly allowed him to do that. At the end of his inspection it was obvious that many names on the petition did not appear on the Union record of members. The names were faked by the government.

The Ballot grab was purely a bid to bust the Union. Under the Amendments to the Arbitration Act, people who signed the Government petition were not required to be financial members of the union. So you had the position where a person who is not even a member of the union collecting names of people who pay union fees to the union. We won the battle to stop the petition when the Industrial Registrar conceded that the union did not 'request' the petition.

Under the law the Registrar was not required to check against Union records any names submitted to him on the petition. He could accept the names on the basis of the declarations attached to the list.

Only 16 of the 54 people check by Paddy (Malone) were members of the Union...In some cases the name of one person appeared on two different lists and was counted each time. Some persons names were printed and were not the persons' signatures.

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The campaign by Menzies and the employers taught me that you can't wait till you're beaten before you start fighting. You have to anticipate the fight and go in hard- boots and all. Because if you don't, they sure will. It's like boxing- you don't wait to be hit before you start fighting. To survive, you have to go in first.

The 'Sack Menzies' campaign built up. In 1952 it was moved that the working week be increased, that wages be cut by 2/6/- and the cost of living adjustments be done away with. In light of increasing unemployment, the Government felt it could get away with such a move.

I remember that about that time GMH (General Motors Holden) posted a profit of 3.5 million pounds and BHP posted a profit of 2 million pounds. And this was whilst thousands of people were unemployed, when prices of everyday goods were skyrocketing, and when the employers were looking for a wages freeze.



I saw the big firms making profits in the millions of pounds, yet the employers were telling us we should be getting 2 pound 6 shillings less per week and work longer hours- so that they could make even bigger profits. I saw that it was through the sweat of the workers that these companies were making such huge profits and yet the workers were told that they had to keep suffering. And what was supposed to happen to those who couldn't find work or make ends meet? Starve, I suppose?

Looking about today, nothing's changed. Unemployment's only getting worse, and to think that the Government, especially a Labor Government, can use unemployment to achieve economic and therefore political goals, disgusts me. It's always been my attitude that you can't solve an economic problem by putting a worker through the degradation of being unemployed. That disgusts me. It degrades every individual worker. Only hard work is the answer to economic problems- but hard work at a reasonable pay and in reasonable working conditions.

And that's all I've ever wanted for my members. That they work hard for a good pay and good working conditions. Under Menzies I saw that only united action by the workers could improve the living standards of the workers and safeguard their jobs and conditions.

And then in December of 1952 the Cain Labor Government was voted into office in Victoria. After many years of shortages of all kinds the people of Victoria voted solidly for the return of a Labor Government in the hope that their needs in the way of hospitals, homes, schools, etc would be met.

Building workers too were urged to vote Labor in the hope that they held the answer to the chronic unemployment in the industry.

But we were disappointed. More schools were closed. More hospitals were shut. The housing crisis deepened whilst men were being sacked from building Housing Commission Estates. Everyone remembered the depression days when no money could be found to give people a decent standard of living, but when war broke out hundreds of millions of pounds were set aside.

Now that the (second world) war was over, Cain refused to allocate money to where it was really needed- the creation of jobs, the building of hospitals, schools, housing, etc. Menzies failed us, but we knew what side of the fence he sat; but Cain also failed the people of Victoria. He was Labor, and he had no excuses... It must have run in the family!

x And with Menzies as Prime Minister- his policies of inflation, taxation, wasteful war preparations, sale of public assets, attacks on trade union freedoms and sabotage of public works and social services, I saw that the working class could not rest until the Governments- be they Liberal or Labor- of big business was driven out of office and those policies drastically changed.

With Cain I saw that the Labor Party was no different. That's why I never joined the Labor Party. I could see that the real <sup>reforms</sup> changes in favour of the working class would have to be attained from outside the Governem<sup>ment</sup>nt process- through the trade union movement. Through militant unionism. *And that permanent change will only take place by the working class taking state power.* *More policies?*

And so I looked to China. The trade union movement was the leading mass organisation in China and provided splendid amenities, such as trade union clubs, libraries, workers orchestras, cultural palaces and night schools, with part-time teachers for illiterate workers.

I saw the launching of large-scale building construction and great new factories, mills, power plants, housing, hospitals, schools and other large scale projects. These I saw where-ever I went in China. I saw an attitude of national development and industrialisation in China which I didn't see in

Australia. It was an attitude that I still haven't seen develop here.

Within 5 years of the People's Government taking over in 1949 wages had increased by about 200%. Prices had been stabilised, and workers could not be charged more than 5% of their total income for house rent.

Everywhere I went the Chinese people expressed their desire for international friendship with people from all countries. And yet the Liberal Government refused to recognise and trade with the People's Republic. I thought this was madness. Here were 600 million people on our doorstep wanting to trade with us, we were in the middle of a deep recession, and we said 'no, we don't want to trade with you because you think differently to us!' That was madness. And it was detrimental to the Australian people.

Right from the beginning the union stood for higher wages, better living and working conditions, a strong trade union, peaceful national development, a free and independant<sup>e</sup> Australia and international friendship. We've always maintained these as our goals. That's always been our <sup>o</sup>philosophy<sub>^</sub>, and we've always stuck to it.

Menzies taught us to work outside the centralised wage fixing system. During the mid-1950s we began winning job by job wage increases despite the combined opposition of the Master Builders and the Arbitration Court. The Master Builders refused to talk to us, refused to listen to our demands- so we attacked the problem on a job by job basis. The tactic worked.

At that time we learned very quickly about the operation of the Arbitration system. In fact it was Arbitration Court Judge Foster who taught us a real lesson. I've still got the quote here... He said:  
"There is no justice in the Arbitration Court...When I sat in a Court of Law I did justice according to the Law, but in the Arbitration Court I do justice according to Judge Foster."

You can draw your own conclusions from that.

In 1954 the Executive Committee of the union recommended that support should be given for the mass signing of a petition directed against preparations for atomic war. It became clear to us that the Governments of the world were preparing people psychologically by trying to convince people that atomic war was inevitable.

I always believed that the money and materials used for rearmament should be used more the development of our country and serve the needs of our people. Urgently needed housing, schools and hospitals could then be built, taxation reduced and prices of essential goods lowered. In fact a policy of peace would mean jobs for all.

Then we got the Bolte Government. The first thing they did was attack the worker's pay envelopes. Rents skyrocketed by 25%, and the cost of ~~of~~ gas, electricity and public transport fares increased out of all proportion. I saw these increases an being nothing more than a straight out pay cut for the workers. It was a way of reducing the worker's pay without having to go to the Arbitration Court. But when we asked for a wage increase as compensation for the prices, the Bolte Government told us to 'go to the Arbitration Court' when they knew that the arbitration system was loaded to protecting their interests.

Our statistics show that for 1955 and the first half of 1956 1 in every 5 building workers had an accident on the job. Many of these accidents were serious, leading to loss of life or permanent disablement. Seeing these figures we launched a massive safety drive. It was a long drawn out campaign which in fact we never really stopped fighting.

In a capitalist society workers are an expendable commodity. There is always a worker ready to step into the shoes of one that is taken off the job by ambulance, so why should the boss worry? By the same token, the Government which is expected to bring down laws in matters such a safety, legislates to preserve capitalism and the profits of the employing class, so why should they bring in laws on more safety which might interfere with the rate of profit? That was the attitude in the 1950s.

As a union we felt that we had to change this way of thinking. And the only way to do that was by united action and education of workers on a job by job basis, pressuring individual employers, and by introducing safety as a bargaining tool during wage negotiations with Government and employers. The strategy worked. Rank and file struggle on the job was the key to our success.

In those days, the boss would come up to you and say "It's gonna rain today, home you go". That was it. No pay. He was laughing. No sick leave. No paid public holidays. We just took it. We probably didn't know any better.

When I found out about China, and about conditions in China, it changed my life.

X I made a number of trips to China and I met Chairman Mao Tse Tung and Prime Minister Chou En-lai on two occasions. And I must admit that for a person who was the leader of a nation of some 600 million people, Mao Tse Tung made me feel perfectly relaxed. You would

think that a person, the leader of a nation of 600 million people would have been arrogant- but he wasn't. He was relaxed and he made me feel relaxed.

I can remember at the time that the British Government devalued the pound. Ted Hill, who was the Chairman of the Communist Party of Australia, was with me. Mao Tse Tung asked Ted Hill if he knew anything about economics and the effect of the devaluation of the English pound. X Ted was answering the question, but he was going the long way round. Mao Tse Tung said to him "Look Comrade Hill, if you don't know the answer don't worry about it, because in the meantime the skies won't fall in". I just thought that was absolutely bloody terrific. To me, it just depicted the person that Mao was. On the X two occasions I met him I always felt at home.

I had some private meetings with Mao and we discussed class struggle in Australia, and he was very interested in the builders labourers. He felt the builders labourers could be developed into a revolutionary force- into a force that could be at the forefront of



raising class- consciousness in Australia. I could also see the possibilities of a builders labourers revolutionary army. It was all possible.

They took us around to the factories and the building sites, and we talked to the people. It was an experience I will always remember. I am happy to say that I had met in my view the world's greatest working class leader. I have always been a firm supporter of the Chinese people. I have always had the greatest admiration for them.

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So in 1960 it was decided that I become general secretary of the union. The person who should have taken the position was Paddy Malone, but he was getting up in years and didn't want to run around the country. At that stage the union nationally was <sup>just</sup> about non-existent. There was a tremendous job that had to be done. The Federal <sup>body of</sup> the union had no money. The Federal award was in very poor shape... An enormous amount of work had to be done, <sup>+</sup> To develop the membership. Because at that stage the builders labourers were looked upon as second class citizens in the building industry.

I saw that the first job I had to do was develop an army.

X  
X  
So in 1961 I was virtually pushed into the position of ~~Federal~~ general secretary of the union. I took over from a bloke named Terry Foster. Federally our leadership was really corrupt. They worked hand in glove with employers, they <sup>had</sup> done absolutely nothing to improve the memberships' wages and conditions. They just done what the employers wanted them to do. And they were really corrupt!

When I became general secretary I got rid of the bad ones but kept the good people. Even those who opposed me politically. I set out to work with people who were opposed to me politically, but were honest in wanting to do something to improve the members conditions. And rather than me going around using the big stick getting rid of everybody who opposed me, I took the attitude that I'd work with them and build up their confidence so they could have confidence in me. And I could only do that by getting out into the field- having lots of meetings of the members, showing them that it can be done. It took a lot of strain on me, and of course on my marriage. And the big problem was that the union had no money.

The BLF was in really bad shape- the books weren't kept properly and we were about \$25,000 in debt. And there was a Federal award coming up which was to cost us about \$15,000. So we were in really financial trouble.

? pounds  
in 1961.

I went and got a TAA credit card and an Ansett credit card and went flying around on their credit cards... I knew one day we'd pay it back but at that stage we just didn't have the money. We had a Federal award coming up that was going to cost us about 40,000 pounds, coming up- and we only had about 39 pounds in the bank! Not much to go on. So I knew that unless I got the active support of the union members then I wasn't going to overcome these problems. If I got the labourers decent wages and conditions, they'd respond by joining the union and the money would start to roll in.

I went around to the meetings and told the labourers that I was prepared to stand with them and fight. That I needed an army... That I needed an army that knew how to fight and knew when to draw back. And what I wanted was a guerrilla army. A hit and run army. I never ever supported the policies of Jack Munday of one big general strike... what we needed was to adapt guerrilla tactics to the building industry and I was prepared to devote my life and energy to them- and if they were prepared to fight I was prepared to stand by them and never sell them out. Because in the past they had a lot of experience of being sold out.

Our awards had been neglected for many years. I saw my first job was to improve members wages and working conditions to show the members what we were all about- the possibilities of what we could achieve if we stuck

x together. There was a need to make the union independant<sup>e</sup> as a fighting force, to instill into the membership that they had industrial strength to bargain with the employers. They listened to me. Our membership was about 10,000 then compared to about 38,000 at our peak in the 1980s.

x Now, being a supporter of Socialism, I believed that the membership had to go through a process of struggle to get what they wanted. And in going through that process they would develop politically also. That they would develop a social consci<sup>e</sup>nce. But for them to get that experience, they needed to participate in this struggle on wages and conditions. On my part, this was a conscious plan to do it.

x This was quite a radical thing to be doing in the early 1960s in Australia. And at that time penal clauses were being used quite frequently against unions. Bans clauses which cropped up again against us in the 1980s were used quite often. And the union movement was getting no support from the ACTU who had really gone along and accepted the penal clauses and<sup>had</sup> done nothing- just gave lip service but really<sup>did</sup> done nothing. I'm not sure if there was corruption at the ACTU, but I've never known them to get out of bed with the employers. x And even when Clarrie O'Shea was<sup>gaoled</sup> jailed and workers were downing tools everywhere, the ACTU never came out

X to call for national action against Clarrie O'Shea's ~~jailing~~ <sup>gaoling</sup> in 1969.

But those were the old days, and by 1970 I had consolidated the union to an extent that I was put into a position where I could change things. From then on there was nothing that was going to stop me. Nothing.

X It wasn't till the early 1970s that the union emerged from its low profile. The base rate for a rigger (builders labourer) in 1958 was 38/6 compared with that of a tradesman of 4 pounds. By 1972 the difference was ~~only~~ \$1. We were on the move.

But the battle wasn't an easy one. Our delegates were assaulted on building sites by the tradesmen union (the Building Workers Industrial Union) and employers hired scab labour to do our work. At times the battle got rather bloody. But by the early 1970s, after I consolidated the membership, we slowly developed into a position of strength. And the only way we could manage that was by the use of the most basic weapon available to the working man- the withdrawal of his labor.

And in the 1970s we became masters in the use of that weapon.

GREEN BAN1970-1974

Norm's <sup>gaoling</sup> jailing on 4 February 1971 threw Victoria into a state of industrial upheaval. Workers in 26 unions walked off their jobs and began a series of rolling-stoppages thereafter.

As the <sup>gaol</sup> jail sentence was pronounced at the Carlton Courthouse, about 200 placard waving unionists were fighting a battle with police outside. Four people were arrested.

Norm was convicted of two charges of trespass and one charge of assault. The charges followed a dispute over a block of railway land in North Carlton in November 1970. The land was leased to a company to build a warehouse. The BLF placed a black-ban on the land, arguing it should be retained as parkland.

"The first time I went to jail, I did 14 days over a green ban dispute in Carlton. A friend of mine brought along Councillor Fred Hardy who was the councillor for the area, and we had a bloke by the name of Reg Rainer who was notorious for all these bloody lurks and perks that used to go on in Glenroy or the Broadmeadows Council.

Rainer was on the Council. He was an ex-Lord Mayor and he had seen Kimberley-Clark Kleenex and said that they

wanted him to build a warehouse up in Carlton. But I knew this was where the kids used to play. Councillor Hardy asked me would I get the union to put a ban on it.

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The block of land was at that time owned by the railways. Prior to the current argument over the warehouse proposals the land was subject to a dispute between the Melbourne City Council, which wanted to acquire the land for recreational purposes, and a firm which wanted to build a butter factory on the site. Then in 1969 Princess Hill High School attempted to obtain the land for sporting facilities, but this request was rejected by the MMBW. ?

Two months later, in 1970, the MMBW, under pressure from Cr Fred Hardy and the Melbourne City Council, was advised that Mr Rainer did not need a planning permit to build a warehouse on the site. Mr Rainer was automatically granted a building permit.

We put a ban on it and then Rainer came in and seen me and I had a meeting with him in our old general meeting room. He said to me that if I let him put a warehouse up on the block we could all run around in Rolls Royces. I said to him "Well you've got 5 seconds to get out of this office and if you're not out by then I'll get the boys to throw you out." Rainer was the ex-Mayor of Broadmeadows.

He got the message, so he attempted then to break the ban by bringing blokes in on a morning to pour some concrete.

At 5 am on Thursday 14 November, local residents noticed workmen on the site. They immediately contacted Norm who drove to the site. Somehow several police cars and a riot wagon also happened to have turned up- before Norm got there. It was then that the 'Gallagher incident' occurred.

After the 'incident' but before being arrested, local residents heard Mr Rainer senior exclaim to police "If that's Norm Gallagher, I want you to charge him with assaulting my son... That's what you are here for." The person who smashed Norm over the head after the scuffle with Rainer junior was not arrested.

I got rung up about 5 o'clock on Saturday morning by the Malones and I went down there. I walked on the site and Reg Rainer's son came up to me and started to throw punches and with that I gave him one.

Norm was charged with having assaulted David Rainer. Rainer told the court that the land belonged to his father. He said on November 14 he was helping pour concrete for foundations for the warehouse when he saw Norm come up to the concrete truck and talk to the driver. Rainer told the Magistrate, "I went to the driver and told him 'Don't



X listen to that man, he doesn't have anything to do with the job'". Rayner said Norm, who was standing behind him, then yelled an obscene expression at him and struck him under the jaw with a clenched fist. Rayner also claimed Norm bit him on the left hand.

Norm refused to plead to the charges and read a statement to the court: "This is an attempt to use police prosecution and intimidation in an industrial dispute. We will not tolerate police action or action by this court. We shall continue to carry out our industrial and political duty to serve the workers and working people."

The police were down there already. I went down and the police put the boots into me. I had a couple of ribs busted but I was charged with a<sup>s</sup> assault. That was when the State Cabinet met and decided that I was going to get 14 days. They brought a Magistrate down from Shepparton Court to sit on the bench that day to give me 14 days. The Magistrate was some bloke called O'Conner. I had the local Magistrate at the time come down and see me and complain about it.

It was a fix. It was an absolute fix. I was told that the Cabinet had met <sup>with</sup> by Richard Malone and that I was getting 14 days, and I said, they can't do that- I haven't been to Court yet. Sure enough when I fronted on the day, I got 14 days. I knew it was going to happen. It was Dick Hamer who organised that. He was the Premier at the time and green bans were very much

X on the go, very much in the forefront of the day to day  
news and that's the first time I<sup>had</sup>ever been in<sup>gaol.</sup>jail.  
That was in 1970. 01 1971?

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X A representative of 26 rebel unions sympathetic to the BLF cause, Mr K Carr, stated that he planned to "... call for a State wide stoppage of all rebel unions. We will also be contacting unions in other states for support. The trade union movement will not tolerate this sort of action. It can lead to any union official being summarily arrested for going onto a job or into a factory to serve the interests of his members. We view it as no different <sup>to</sup> as the <sup>gaoling</sup> ~~jailing~~ of Clarrie O'Shea over the penal clauses issue."

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The then President of the ACTU, Bob Hawke, was asked by the BLF to make representations to the Government to seek Norm's release. He initially refused, saying it was not a matter to which the union movement should get involved. But after intense pressure from other unions, Mr Hawke announced later that day that he would ask the Victorian Attorney-General Mr Reid, <sup>gaol.</sup> to release Norm from ~~jail~~.

Norm spent 11 of the 14 day sentence in <sup>gaol.</sup> ~~jail~~.

We eventually forced Rainer to stop building and  
Kimberly-Clarke actually came and seen us and offered  
to provide some playground equipment and they were  
happy to get out of the deal that they had with Rainer-  
they found out what sort of a crook he really was.

Today its' been turned into a lovely park with lovely provisions there for barbeques. They named it "The Hardy-Gallagher Park". It's quite a nice park, and its better the kids have it that it being made into a warehouse. To me that's really what the green bans were all about. The locals were absolutely terrific."

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During the early 1970s, at a time when Australia did not have any effective building preservation legislation, an unlikely partnership developed in an attempt to preserve Melbourne's heritage. Rodney Davidson was was a senior partner in an old law established firm. He was a director in some 20 companies, a week-end farmer, ex-Melbourne Grammer<sup>a</sup>, Toorak resident. He was the grandson of Dame Mabel Brookes and Member of the Atheneum Club. His background was therefore both professional and strictly Establishment. He was also Chairman of the National Trust.

In July 1973 Mr Davidson received a letter from a real estate agent asking the Trust to remove its classification from the Windsor Hotel because it was depressing the hotel's value. "The request was unprecedented. The letter stated if we don't remove the classification we'd be issued with a Supreme Court writ. (I relied that) we'll be delighted to get it." Norm's response was, "With our ban on city hotels none of them need fear demolition." Both men listed the Hooker and Hammersom companies who buy the most

heritage properties and who were therefore targeted by the union and the Trust. (Hammerson bought the Oldfield Rialto building).

X As defenders of the environment, Davidson and Norm Gallagher made for a strange partnership. "Some buidings<sup>1/</sup> ought to be pulled down- our members rely on building for employment.

But Norm was adamant about what he wanted saved. The ANZ Gothic Bank building (corner Collins and Queen Streets), the City Baths, Princess Theatre, the Regent Theatre and the Windsor Hotel- all targeted for demolition. X But on something like the Melbourne Club, Norm would not assist, "There wouldn't be any of our members belonging to it- I don't think the club has got any particular significance."

For five years Davidson lobbied the Bolte government to introduce preservation legislation with no satisfaction. He then turned to the union movement.

At the time Norm said that, "We're affiliated with the National Trust, but they don't own us. There have been many times when they've asked us to stop an old building going to the bulldozer and we've knocked them back. We think a lot of Trust-classified buildings ought to be pulled down. Call us philistines if you like, but we don't regard their architectural or historical value as very great. But their are many exceptions."

The CBA building was one example. The BLF stepped in to prevent demolition of the building without being invited-

X X which was their usual method. "My attitude is that the union must be self-re<sup>a</sup>liant and independ<sup>e</sup>ant. We make our own decisions. So we don't need to be invited by anyone else."

But Norm also stressed that he believes in picking his mark. An example was the Princess Theatre. "They can forget about pulling the Princess down. That's a closed book." The same principle applied to The Windsor Hotel and much of the corner of Collins and Queen streets. "People have got to take more interest in conservation. But they have to be educated to it. That's why we've chosen well-loved old buildings. We're making examples of them. It doesn't do any good to get too far ahead of public opinion in these matters. Demolition bans must have public support. If we'd moved in straight away with our ban on the CBA, people would never have taken such a sympathetic interest. That's the way it is when a union is involved in anything."

Norm's attitude to conservation was always pragmatic, "If we went around banning demolition of every building the public wanted preserved, our members would run out of work."

A good example of our attitudes to 'green bans' was the Dromana quarry dispute.

In March 1973 we placed a black ban on materials coming from a 20 acre quarry site at Dromana. I sent a letter to Hamer (then Victorian Premier) requesting that he stop the proposed quarry going ahead. I told him that

the Government has to take a more active role in protecting our environment. And if they don't, the unions will. But the AWU were willing to work on the site. They didn't want to talk to us about joining the ban. They were quite willing to mine the 4 million ton of rock from the foreshore. They didn't give a damn about the environment, about the interests of all Victorians.

That was about the time Hawke, when he was ACTU president, wanted to start an ACTU cut-price housing scheme. I was dead against that. Hawke wanted to use the ACTU to raise foreign capital to finance the scheme. I couldn't believe that Hawke was prepared to use the ACTU as a vehicle to bring foreign capital into Australia. If anything it was the responsibility of Federal and State Governments to organise low-interest housing. Anyway, the scheme could not have gotten off the ground without our support, and we weren't about to give it. I don't think ever forgave me for that. He felt that I undermined his power.

In 1973 I determined that the union would act as a watch dog to make sure that high rise buildings have installed in them adequate fire prevention and fire protection equipment. I determined that our members would refuse to work on any sites unless we were first satisfied that that equipment was adequate. I'd seen some buildings go up without fire-sprinklers. That

/ <sup>a</sup>wsn't good enough. Public safety has always been a big  
issue with the builders labourers."

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On 19 August, 1974, the Mainline Corporation, then one of Australia's largest property development and construction groups, was placed into receivership.

"Mainline ought to act as a warning to all other building companies who are still plotting to destroy our union... I said it then and I'll repeat it now, 'It couldn't have happened to a greater pack of bastards'".

The ANZ Bank, the companies bankers and one of the largest creditors, appointed Mr JH Jamison as receiver. Mr Jamison's initial response to the collapse was, "This is rather terrifying- I always have had the greatest respect for Mainline." At the time Mainline had construction contracts worth \$289 million at the end of June 1974- \$185 million of which represented uncompleted work. These figures did not include other property investments of about \$250 million.

Mr Jamison gave "Rapidly increasing costs and continuing industrial unrest have increased the strain on liquidity" as the major reasons for the groups collapse.

X Norm said that Mainline had openly expressed its desire to have the BLF deregistered and this had been one of the factors in the companies' downfall.

"This company openly boasted that it would destroy our union. It deliberately provoked blues on the job and spearheaded moves to get our union deregistered from the Arbitration Commission. Well, we are still here, and Mainline is in the hands of the receivers. When companies adopt that attitude it's no wonder they go broke. In some ways it's a victory for the working class. That company deliberately provoked disputes on the job in an attempt to get at our union."

X "Really, the building industry was better off without this type of company. They didn't give a damn about wages, work conditions, anything to do with their workers. They were greedy, and tried to get too big, too fast."

X Norm<sup>m</sup> felt that the jobs of the 5000 labourers employed by the company were not in jeopardy because the building work would have to be finished, and the only people who might suffer were the sub-contractors. Mr Jamison had announced that Mainline projects around Australia "must be finished", so Norm wasn't concerned about his members' jobs.

X Mainline's major construction projects included the \$100 million AMP-ANA Bank Collins Place project in



Melbourne and the 50-storey AMP centre at Circular Quay in Sydney- when completed to the tallest building in Australia. It's subsidiary company, Glenville Mainline Homes, was Victoria's second largest home builder.

Norm maintained that "Mainline ought to act as a warning to all other building companies who are still plotting to destroy our union."

"Right throughout the deregistration of the BLF in 1974 Mainline deliberately provoked industrial strife on their jobs to allow them to get evidence against us to put before the industrial court. This was happening in 1974, and it happened later in the 1980s with Costain and many others."

"We told them on a number of occasions that the course they were adopting could only lead to disaster to the company. Now the shoe was on the other foot. We told them that we would defend ourselves. This company made no contribution to the building industry. All it has done, as all developers do, is to take money out of the industry, destroy the environment, and put nothing back."

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On hearing the news that Mainline was put into receivership, plans to rescue the company were being sought. Norm pulled all builders labourers from Mainline

projects until the company or its clients guaranteed full payment to all building workers.

"Because of the Whitlam Government's credit squeeze, building companies were going broke all over the place. We wanted guarantees of full pay and leave entitlements for all building workers. We also at the time sought urgent talks with the Federal Government to allow for capital projects in the coming budget, to build schools, hospitals and homes. We weren't going to sit around and see the collapse of development companies affect our member's wages and conditions. The government had to step in. And if I couldn't get satisfaction from the management of Mainline that our workers were going to get paid, then I'd close them down."

On 28 August, Mr Jamison announced that Mainline would be "dead and buried" within days if building workers did not return to work.

"Immediately the Building Workers Industrial Union (the tradesmen) announced they'd go back to work without being given guarantees of payment by the company. I thought they were crazy. This company was on its way out and when a horse breaks its leg you shoot it, you don't keep it running. The Company then ran to the Government for help. Again that's crazy. The

Government- and especially a Labor Government- should be building schools and hospitals, not supporting failed companies who represent the establishment and foreign interests."

On 4 September, Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Jim Cairns announced that the Federal Labor Government would guarantee a bank loans scheme to Mainline in an attempt to save the company. Dr Cairns indicated that the loans would be allocated to finishing existing projects, "I am trying to find out if we can do this under existing legislation. ..Each major project is being assessed- there is a lot of work in it."

"At the same time as this so-called Labor Government was telling the company it was trying to save it, Mainline lost a NSW Housing Commission contract to build more than a hundred houses in Sydney. I didn't think then that the Government was fair dinkum in trying to save the company- it was all show for the electorate. As it turned out, the Federal Government called on the ANZ Bank under the terms of a performance bond. That saved the company, and all I can say is, that it helps to have friends in high places."

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In July 1974 ~~the~~ Norm announced that the BLF will appoint ombudsmen in all states and throw its power behind home-buyers with legitimate complaints. The union and the ombudsman would provide free legal advice, and if the offending builder did not rectify the complaint, the union would put a black ban on all their jobs. The ombudsman would be available to any couple getting a house built who found that the builder had not fulfilled his contract in standards of work, materials or time.

"We will put a stop to rackets in the home building industry."

Norm announced that "We will approach the Federal Government and ask it to take responsibility for ensuring that home-buyers get a fair deal, and until they do, we will fill the gap."

Norm's attitude was that young couples "are the victims of rackets in the home-building industry, and we will use our industrial strength to help them and put an end to the rackets."

"I felt that our policing the home-building field was just an extension of the union's green-ban policy. It came from the need to protect the public- especially low income home-buyers- against shoddy building practices. We were in the best position to do this...We also came up with the idea for a new form of building

contract whereby builders would be prevented from raising their charges before a home was completed. I remember in the first few days of our announcement we got about two hundred calls. It was amazing. The MBA responded to our announcement by saying that home-builders were protected under laws then in existence. But judging by the response we got, that's rubbish. Home-buyers were just not given a fair deal."

In August, the Victorian Local Government Minister, Mr Hunt, announced that the Building Liability Act would become effective within six months. This Act proposed to cover a home buyer for up to \$12,000 where a serious defect appeared in the first year after the home was completed. If a defect appeared in the second to sixth years, the home buyer was covered for up to \$5,000.

"That was a very successful campaign. It shows how industrial pressure can speed up the role of government."

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In August of 1974 the union black-banned the construction of new supermarkets in Victoria because of continuous price rises. The union also refused to repair or extend existing supermarkets.

"We took this action in an attempt to combat inflation. The Government's policies didn't seem to be working, so

we decided to give them a hand. Supermarkets at that time had a practice of peeling off old pricing stickers and putting on new ones at a higher price. After enough pressure from us that practice eventually stopped."

The union announced a 'dobb-in' scheme. "We call on all residents to inform us of price movements at supermarkets." On 18 August the Federal Government was asked to use the Prices Justification Tribunal to stop supermarkets over-stamping old stock with new prices. As a response the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations was established. The organisation included the National Council of Women with 750,000 members, the Country Women's Association with 157,000 members and the Australian Consumer's Association with 128,000 members.

On 20 August the BLF refused to demolish seven houses and a service station which were to make way for a Coles supermarket in Nepean Highway, Mordialloc. The Furnishing Trades Society, whose members included glaziers, announced that its members would not install or repair windows on the entire Safeway chain.