

The 1928 Waterfront Strike and the Fall of the Victorian Government.

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Synopsis

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This thesis seeks, for the first time, to examine the relationship between the waterfront strike of 1928 and the concurrent fall of the Victorian Labor Government. The central theme concerns the role of the Premier, E.J. Hogan, in trying to deal simultaneously with Spring Street and Bay Street – with parliamentary imperatives and developments on the wharves.

The thesis mainly draws upon published primary sources, especially newspapers. Where available, archival material relating to the union movement has also been utilised. It should be noted, however, that the records of the Waterside Workers' Federation for 1928 are significantly incomplete. Similarly, archival sources relating to the Premier's role in the strike are almost non-existent. There are no secondary sources on the Government generally, and none dealing with its role during the strike. Thus, in piecing together an understanding of the relationship between parliamentary developments and waterside events, there is a central reliance upon daily and weekly newspapers (although no copies of the *Waterside Worker* for this period have survived).

The thesis argues that the strike and the fall of the Victorian Government were inextricably linked, having a decisive mutual impact upon personalities and bodies in both the industrial sphere and the parliamentary arena. It further argues that the Premier's handling of the strike was primarily driven by a concern to protect his Government from potentially dangerous repercussions, rather than any altruistic sense of obligation to the industrial labour movement.

Abbreviations

ACTU – Australasian Council of Trade Unions

COM – Committee of Management of the WWF

CP – Country Party

CPP – Country Progressive Party

MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly

MWLU – Melbourne Wharf Labourers' Union (Based on the city wharves along the Yarra River)

P & C – Permanent & Casual Wharf Labourers' Union

PPSA – Port Phillip Stevedores' Association (Based at Port Melbourne and Williamstown)

TWA – Transport Workers' Act

WWF – Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia

WWF COM – Committee of Management of the WWF

Introduction

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Today, the exclusive beachside suburb of Port Melbourne seems a stranger to her own history. As one strolls along the beachfront, past chic cafes and illuminated health clubs, one could be forgiven for imagining that a slice of the Gold Coast has been transplanted to the grey surrounds of Melbourne. Glitzy high-rise penthouses offer no clues to an austere and often dark past. It was here that the children of striking watersiders walked barefoot to Nott Street Primary School, many of them with empty stomachs. It was on Prince's Pier, now demolished, that unionists fought running battles with blacklegs and the men in blue who protected them. Bay Street is now a photogenic thoroughfare that features boldly in realty brochures, inviting covetous eyes. But it once played host to a cutting scene of pathos. During the 1928 strike, the defiant stevedores of Port Phillip had flown a red standard from the mast of their clubrooms in Bay Street bearing the words "No Surrender." As the strike wore on, and surrender became a path to the preservation of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), it was replaced by a tattered white flag.¹ Such stories and scenes, which in their time seemed inextricably linked with the sights and sounds of their surroundings, are disappearing as former working class boroughs transmogrify into opulent enclaves.

As natural attrition diminishes the ranks of the 1928 combatants and their kin, it is important to seek out the experiences and events that animated their lives, and to pursue new angles of inquiry that have been neglected or passed-over. Furthermore, in light of a recent political trajectory that asserts the irrelevance and obsolescence of trade unionism, it seems especially important to maintain the ongoing relevance of union struggles to the study of Australian society.

There exists only a small body of literature that deals with the 1928 strike. Lockwood's history of the Melbourne branches provides the most detailed published account.² Lowenstein & Hills' oral history of the Melbourne waterfront offers a frontline perspective, told in the words of the wharfies themselves.³ These studies, along with unpublished honours theses by

¹ *Argus* (Melbourne), 20 October 1928, p.19.

² Rupert Lockwood, *Ship to Shore. A History of Melbourne's Waterfront and Its Union Struggles*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1990.

³ Wendy Lowenstein & Tom Hills, *Under the Hook: Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember Working Lives and Class War: 1900-1980*, Prahran, Victoria: Melbourne Bookworkers, 1982.

Miriam Rechter⁴ and Lynette Redmond,⁵ which also look closely - though not exclusively - at Melbourne, afford us a more thorough account of the strike in Melbourne than in any other port. It must be noted that this preoccupation with Melbourne is warranted, considering that the Melbourne Wharf Labourers' Union (MWLU) and the Port Phillip Stevedores' Association (PPSA) constituted the vanguard branches of the WWF. Melbourne watersiders, along with their counterparts in Brisbane, had accumulated the best pay and working conditions in the Federation. It was no surprise, then, that these branches put up the most prolonged and heated struggle. Indeed, the fatal violence in Melbourne between police, "volunteers," and unionists seems a testament to the particular bitterness of the strike in that port. Moreover, the aftermath of the strike was especially traumatic for the Melbourne branches, which were forced into an ignominious amalgamation in order to keep waterfront unionism alive in Victoria. Furthermore, Melbourne was the locus for the pivotal meetings and conferences of the major players, such as the WWF, the new Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and the central strike committee of the shipowners. Any account of the strike which aims to go beyond a cursory view must invest disproportionate space in the experience of Melbourne.

Besides the focused literature mentioned above, there are also generic and tangential works whose paths of inquiry intersect with the strike. For example, broad-based histories of the Australian labour movement by Fitzpatrick⁶ and Turner⁷ place the strike within the wider sweep of previous and contemporaneous union struggles. Cecil Edwards' biography of Stanley Melbourne Bruce details the legislative background of the Bruce-Page Government, positioning the strike within the broader chronological context of the Prime Minister's previous showdowns with the Seamen's Union, and his subsequent battles with timber and coal workers.⁸ Also, Perlman's somewhat dated study of the history of arbitration focuses on the role of George Beeby, the Chief Justice of the Arbitration Court, who handed down the

⁴ Miriam Rechter, 'The Strike of Waterside Workers in Australian Ports, 1928, and the Lockout of Coal Miners on the Northern Coalfield of New South Wales, 1929-30', University of Melbourne, B.A. Master of Arts Thesis, 1957.

⁵ Lynette Redmond, 'The Waterside Workers' Strike of 1928 in Melbourne', Monash University, B.A. Honours Thesis, 1982.

⁶ B. Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*, South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968.

⁷ Ian Turner, *In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia 1788-1983*, 3rd Edition, Melbourne: Nelson, 1983.

⁸ Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne. Man of Two Worlds*, London: Heinemann, 1965.

contentious award for watersiders that sparked the whole saga.⁹ Despite their periphery focus on the events of 1928, such studies have contributed to the key debates surrounding the strike.

A principal point of agreement between some authors is that the strike was subject to supposedly premeditated and malevolent agendas of those in high places. According to this apparently leftwing view, the troubles of 1928 were utilised by the Bruce Government, shipowners, and the Arbitration Court to consummate the efficacy of long-nurtured legislation by inflicting long-term damage on one of Australia's strongest unions. According to Lockwood: '...shipowners, the Bruce Government and the Arbitration Court were anxious to shatter the union for all time.'¹⁰ Similarly, Rechter¹¹ and Morris¹² argue that the deployment, protection, legal preference, and ongoing providoring of strike-breakers amounted to an attempt to permanently supplant unionised labour in militant ports. In attesting to premeditation, Rechter¹³ and Fitzpatrick¹⁴ point out that punitive industrial legislation from 1926 and 1928, such as the Crimes Act, the (twice-amended) Arbitration Act, and the Transport Workers' Act was utilised by Bruce and the Arbitration Court before, during, and after the strike. Lockwood¹⁵ and Turner¹⁶ also note that Bruce's nominees for appointment and promotion at the Arbitration Court had histories of anti-union bias.

Rechter, Fitzpatrick, and Morris further refine this theme of premeditation by contending that the strike was a beachhead for wider onslaughts against other prominent trade unions. This argument seems to be predicated upon the apparent prescience of shipowners, the Bruce Government, and the Arbitration Court, whereby wages and conditions in key industries, such as transport, timber, and coal, were pre-emptively lowered in preparation for an expected economic downturn. Rechter refers to '...the imminence of economic depression, of which the employing groups were far more keenly aware than the trade unionists.'¹⁷ Likewise, Fitzpatrick states that workers' share of national wealth throughout the 1920s had grown to levels that were now deemed exorbitant by Bruce's handpicked Arbitration Court. The

⁹ Mark Perlman, *Judges in Industry: A study of Labour Arbitration in Australia*, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1954.

¹⁰ Lockwood, p.242.

¹¹ Rechter, p.111.

¹² Richard Morris, 'Australian Stevedoring and Shipping Labour under the Transport Workers' Act 1928-47,' *The Great Circle*, Vol.11, No.2 (1989), p.19.

¹³ Rechter, p.52, 62, 86.

¹⁴ Fitzpatrick, p.194.

¹⁵ Lockwood, p.210-12.

¹⁶ Turner, p.77.

¹⁷ Rechter, p.241.

enforcement of the Beeby Award, according to Fitzpatrick, was a bellicose warning and template for subsequent wage cuts in the timber and coal industries during 1929-30.¹⁸ Similarly, Morris asserts that 'The Beeby Award strike became the testing ground for a new authoritarian approach to industrial relations which by-passed the traditional trade union role in the negotiation of industrial peace through the arbitration court.'¹⁹ These arguments for government prescience are perhaps bolstered if one recalls that the Arbitration Act of 1928 drastically altered the established criteria for wage adjustments by decreeing that, henceforth, the exigencies of workers' material needs must be coupled with consideration of industry's capacity to pay. Furthermore, wage-cuts were prominent factors in the timber and coal strikes of 1929-30. Thus, according to the aforementioned arguments, the 1928 strike constituted a kind of interregnum, where Bruce's carefully cultivated legislative arsenal, which culminated in the *coup de grâce* of the Transport Workers' Act, was wielded to inflict simultaneously long-term damage on the WWF and soften up the wider labour movement for wage-cutting measures in an increasingly deteriorating economic climate.

In contrast to those authors who view the strike through a prism of sinister foreknowledge, Edwards and Perlman see the actions of Bruce and Judge Beeby through a more rose-coloured lens. Here, the strike is depicted as a perverse reaction to Bruce's admirable and justified campaign to build industrial tranquillity. Edwards infers that Bruce's strong and surgical behaviour during the strike should be seen as part of his government's higher agenda of nation-building.²⁰ According to Edwards, Australia's pivotal exports, such as wool, wheat, and meat, were endangered by the waterfront's habitual disorder and inefficiency. Bruce believed that Australia's future growth as an economy and a society depended upon a reliable and proficient export industry that would attract migrants by the offer of secure employment. According to this view, Bruce was not attempting to inflict lasting damage on the WWF. Instead, he was guarding the long-term economic interests of Australia. Similarly, Perlman frames the actions of Judge Beeby within Bruce's rubric of supposed concern for the nation's wellbeing. Perlman contrasts greatly with Lockwood and company by asserting that the Beeby Award was an attempt to bring 'administrative orderliness'²¹ to the waterfront.

¹⁸ Fitzpatrick, p.194.

¹⁹ Morris, p.19.

²⁰ Edwards, p.122.

²¹ Perlman, p.137.

The viewpoints of Edwards and Perlman fail to account adequately for the Prime Minister's long record of provocation, as well as his incendiary actions during the strike. For example, during a time of unrest in the shipping industry in 1925, Bruce rekindled a Seamen's Union strike by issuing summonses against union leaders three weeks after they had returned to work.²² Similarly, during the 1928 waterfront strike, Bruce issued summonses against the MWLU the day after the men had returned to work. The unionists responded by going back on strike for another month. These episodes do not correspond with Edwards' portrait of an altruistic man concerned only with the public interest. Moreover, Bruce's sale of the publicly-owned Commonwealth Line of Steamers in 1928, to overseas purchasers, did not seem conducive to nation-building. As for Edwards' and Perlman's argument that the strike must be seen as part of Bruce and Beeby's quest for tranquillity and orderliness on the waterfront, the reality seems, once again, quite different. For example, the Transport Worker's Act was enforced incommensurately across Australia's ports in the aftermath of the strike. Port Adelaide was exempt from compulsory licensing in early 1929, Fremantle was exempt before the end of 1928, and Sydney, Australia's biggest port, was never subject to its provisions at all. Whilst in Melbourne, Bruce and the Arbitration Court's cultivation of a rival blackleg "union" sowed seeds of mutual distrust, unequal access to employment, and administrative complexity that would beset the Melbourne waterfront until the mid-1950s. Such vindictive measures, it could be said, fit in more closely with the arguments of the left historians, than with the paeans advanced by Edwards and Perlman.

The body of literature mentioned above is sufficiently diverse to enable such an historiographical exchange. However, there are avenues of inquiry that have not been adequately pursued. For example, the supposed role of the Communist Party of Australia was the subject of much comment from politicians and press in 1928, yet this aspect has not been examined closely. Similarly, the more detailed works of Lockwood, Rechter, Redmond and Lowenstein & Hills make only passing references to the Victorian Labor Government of Edmond John Hogan. This aspect of the strike has been overshadowed by an understandable focus on the principal national players, such as Bruce, Beeby, the ACTU, the WWF leadership, and the shipowners. But the salience of Melbourne in the events of 1928 warrants a closer examination of the role of the Hogan Government and the part the dispute played in bringing down his administration in November 1928.

²² Brian Fitzpatrick & Rowan Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia 1872-1972*, Sydney: Seamen's Union of Australia, 1981, p.64.

The literature provides tantalising glimpses of the impact of the Hogan Government, as well as intense reactions to its behaviour. Lowenstein & Hills recount an episode in the public gallery at Parliament House shortly after police had shot watersiders on Prince's Pier. The indignant wives of Port Melbourne wharfies were ejected after launching a diatribe that ended with the words 'Shame on the Labor Government!'²³ Baker also hints at the possible complicity of Hogan in the fatal violence against unionists: 'The minority Hogan Labor government placed full control in the hands of the police commissioner.'²⁴ He continues, 'The government, like the police department, refused to investigate the shooting...'²⁵ Indeed, Hogan's memoirs are mysteriously bereft of any mention of the strike, despite the fact that his Government fell due to a no-confidence motion that was partly based upon the waterfront troubles. Lockwood asserts that 'The presence of a Labor Government in Victoria was of dubious value.'²⁶ He also hints at tension within the Labor Party over its handling of the strike, particularly Hogan's refusal to pursue the policeman responsible for killing a wharfie. He provides quotes from several indignant Labor backbenchers, including the lower house member for Port Melbourne, J.L. Murphy, who stated in Parliament: 'A man who deliberately kneels down to shoot for the purpose of taking life is not fit to undertake the duties that a Sub-Inspector of Police is supposed to discharge.'²⁷ Redmond alludes to the fact that Hogan's lack of a parliamentary majority may have diminished his ability or desire to render aid to the industrial wing of the labour movement.²⁸ Rechter notes that Hogan responded to the Arbitration Court's punitive changes to waterfront labour practices by providing crown land for the new pick-up site. '...This action,' she comments, '...intensified the distrust that watersiders had already begun to feel for the Victorian Government.'²⁹ The wharfies felt sufficiently bereaved by the conduct of Premier Hogan to name the exposed and windswept area "Hogan's Flat." If the wharfies on the frontline of the strike felt compelled to symbolise their sense of betrayal through vernacular place-naming, and their wives sufficiently outraged to disrupt Parliament, then it appears that the role of the Hogan Government warrants a more thorough examination than it has previously received.

²³ Lowenstein & Hills, p.65.

²⁴ David Baker, *Batons and Blockades: Policing Industrial Disputes in Australasia*, Beaconsfield, Victoria: Circa, 2005, p.40.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lockwood, p.240.

²⁷ Ibid., p.290.

²⁸ Redmond, p.50.

²⁹ Rechter, p.103.

This thesis endeavours to uncover the role of the Victorian Government in the waterfront strike of 1928, and to explore the mutual repercussions of events on the waterfront and in the parliamentary chambers. The aim is to seek tenable answers to the following questions: Did the existence of a Labor Government in Spring Street constitute a helping hand to the watersiders or a hindrance? Did parliamentary arithmetic constrain or coerce the Government's behaviour? To what extent was Hogan's behaviour during the strike influenced by his personal history as a trade unionist? How deep was the Government's impact on the outcome of the strike in Melbourne and across Australia? How much blame for the failure of the strike should be apportioned to the WWF, the wider trade union movement, and the Hogan Government? Was Hogan guilty of inflaming the violence connected to the strike? Was there deep tension within Government ranks over the handling of the strike? How did the waterfront dispute impact upon Hogan's ability to implement his legislative agenda? In the process of shedding light on these themes it will be necessary to devote considerable space to national bodies, personalities, and interstate events. This is unavoidable. After all, the 1928 strike encompassed an entire continent, and much of its momentum was levered from Canberra. Victorian watersiders and politicians were not hermetically sealed off from national forces. Nonetheless, the strike in Melbourne induced especially strong commitment from Bay Street and Spring Street alike. This interplay between Parliament and public shall be the central focus.

Chapter One

Tinder Days: The Beeby Award and the All Ports Conference

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Great industrial and political events do not arise in a vacuum. Grievances, hopes, and fears, whether real or imagined, current or past, propel the respective players and imbue their actions with heightened importance. The 1928 waterfront strike was no different.

This chapter will examine the initial phases of the strike, focusing on the controversial Beeby Award and the wharfies' response to it, the All Ports Conference. The Premier's impact upon this Conference shall also be appraised, paying attention to his simultaneous role as industrial mediator and parliamentary leader. But it is necessary first to outline briefly the salient historical developments that preceded and informed the strike.

By 1928, the WWF had established itself as a militant and successful union, which was not content in relying on either the parliamentary wing of the labour movement or the arbitration system for desired gains. The first wharf labourers' unions were established in Sydney and Melbourne as early as 1872. Wharfies from the various colonies featured prominently in the eight hours movement, as well as the great strikes of the 1890s.<sup>1</sup> In 1902, these organisations became united under a federal body, the WWF. William Morris Hughes was the inaugural President, holding this post until 1916, when, as Prime Minister, he was unceremoniously expelled from the union because of his crusade for conscription and harassment of trade unions. The Arbitration Court handed down the first waterside award in 1915, which fixed a high hourly rate for a thirty hour week, in order to combat the irregularity of waterfront work. The Federation demonstrated its disposition to militancy in 1917, when it became involved in the Great Strike, and lost its preference of employment. The rank and file had disobeyed the leadership's call to resume work. By such indignant recalcitrance, the members had highlighted some of the Federation's other prominent tendencies; the overarching power of grassroots members, and branch autonomy. Militancy was again shown in 1919, when the union unsuccessfully attempted to regain the losses of 1917 via the same route that had apparently caused them - a strike. The Arbitration Court made alterations to the original waterside award in 1919, 1922, and 1924, mainly to adjust the hourly rate to increases in the

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<sup>1</sup> Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: A History of the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia*, Rushcutters Bay, New South Wales: Halstead Press, 1996, pp. 7-8 & 12-14.

cost of living. However, in further examples of branch autonomy and the self-reliance of rank and file members, various ports achieved their own special rates and labour customs through direct action and negotiation with shipowners. For example, the ports of Sydney, North Queensland, Port Adelaide, and Port Phillip had acquired the coveted single morning “pick-up” or labour engagement, while the branches at Geelong, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Fremantle and Geraldton had won superior overtime rates.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by March 1927, when Chief Justice Beeby began his inquiries into a new award for watersiders,<sup>3</sup> WWF members had well and truly established their willingness to take on whoever threatened or prevented union gains, whether they be avaricious owners, apostate Prime Ministers, august judges, or the nominal leaders of the Federation itself.

Beeby’s personal past aroused suspicion in the eyes of watersiders. In 1912, as the Federal Minister for Labor in Andrew Fisher’s Government, he had brought down an Industrial Arbitration Act that sought to punish workers who went on strike. During the 1917 strike, as Minister for Labor and Industry in W.A. Holman’s NSW Labor Government, Beeby had coordinated the introduction and protection of strikebreakers.<sup>4</sup> Hughes appointed him to the Arbitration Court in 1920, and Bruce promoted him to Chief Justice in 1925. Before the ink marked the paper on the proposed award, watersiders feared an unfavourable judgement.

In November 1927, the wary WWF imposed a ban on overtime, in protest at what it saw as Beeby’s procrastination in dealing with its log of claims. The Judge had refused to hear the Federation’s application until all of its branches acceded to two pick-ups.<sup>5</sup> The nascent ACTU, to which the WWF was not yet affiliated, intervened in the dispute. It negotiated a resumption of overtime after apparently obtaining assurances from Beeby that he would speed up inquiries and allow the single pick-up to continue in those ports where it currently existed. The men resumed work accordingly, only to discover that the single pick-up had been removed from all ports. The wharfies’ suspicions about Beeby had been confirmed. As for the fledgling ACTU, its unsuccessful intervention had not ingratiated the peak union body with the WWF. The Federation released a bitter statement conveying its ‘disgust’ at the supposed

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<sup>2</sup> Redmond, pp.11, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>4</sup> Lockwood, p.211-213.

<sup>5</sup> Rechter, p.12-13.

intrusion into its affairs, and issued a call for all trade unions to immediately secede from the ACTU.<sup>6</sup>

Beeby eventually handed down the Award on 21 August 1928, and it was to be effective from 10 September. From the wharfies' point of view, it was a provocative and incendiary judgement. The Federation was denied its principal claim: extension of the single pick-up to all ports. In fact, this was cancelled in the four ports that currently enjoyed it. The single pick-up was so important because it offered a measure of relief from the frustratingly casual nature of waterside employment. For example, under the two pick-ups, if a man was not allotted work during the first engagement from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m., then he would be compelled to wait around the wharves until the next engagement from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., where he may again not receive work. This meant that he could spend a whole day seeking employment at the wharves without a penny to show for it, whereas under the single pick-up, he could utilise the rest of the day to seek casual employment elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the single pick-up was further augmented during tough economic times.

In addition to imposing two pick-ups, Beeby also reduced the superior overtime rates that had been won through direct negotiation at the ports of Melbourne, Geelong, Port Phillip, Fremantle, and Geraldton. These ports would now receive 3d less per hour on the nightshift from 6 p.m. to midnight, and 10½d less per hour on the graveyard shift from midnight to 7 a.m.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, while he ostensibly granted claims for time-and-a-half for the nightshift, and double-time for the graveyard shift, he inserted a catch-22. These rates would only be paid to those men who began work at 8 a.m. and continued working past the end of the normal day at 5 p.m. Those who commenced work during extraordinary hours would receive only time-and-a-quarter for the nightshift, and time-and-a-half for the graveyard shift.<sup>9</sup> Saturday rates were cut from time-and-a-half to time-and-a-quarter. Sunday rates were truncated from double-time to time-and-a-half. A flat rate of 3d an hour was set for working obnoxious cargoes, such as sulphur or frozen carcasses, whereas these rates had previously been as high as 2s 6d.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the union was denied its request for two fifteen-minute smokos on the day shift.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Beasley, p.74.

<sup>8</sup> Lockwood, p.223.

<sup>9</sup> *Argus*, 12 September 1928, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Lockwood, p.230.

These were only granted to those men working bulk or freezer cargoes.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Beeby refused to limit the weight of sling loads.

It should be noted that the Federation's grievances over sling loads, smokos, overtime pay, and special rates went above and beyond any possible sloth or shallow cupidity. At the core of these demands was a concern for safer working conditions. Smoko breaks allowed tired bodies and frayed minds to regain a measure of alertness, which was crucial in a workplace environment full of swinging sling loads and cavernous hatches. Beeby's effective reduction of overtime rates would coerce men to work shifts of sixteen, twenty-four, or even forty-eight hours. Accidents would be more likely to occur amongst severely fatigued workers. Wharf labouring was dangerous enough without such coercion. Rupert Lockwood calculated that throughout the 1920s, each wharfie lost between one and two days every three months due to injury.<sup>12</sup> The men wanted greater assurance that when they left for work, they would return home in their shoes, and not in plaster or wood. In addition to these practical concerns for safety, it could be said that opposition to extended hours was also important in a symbolic and historical sense. For example, the founding name of the PPSA was the Port Phillip Laborers' Eight Hours' Association.

Beeby had decreed the Award after a less than thorough inspection of Australia's ports. He had not set foot on Queensland soil, yet he saw fit to cancel that State's McNaughton Award, which had, among other concessions, granted special rates for working in tropical climates. Furthermore, he had spent only five hours inspecting the multifarious wharves of Melbourne.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, he felt that such cursory glances had afforded him license to pronounce judgement upon the essence of waterfront labour. Beeby opined: 'It is by no means the hardest work in the community. In many occupations the work calls for greater physical effort, and is accompanied by much greater discomfort.'<sup>14</sup>

Characteristically, the WWF's response to the Beeby Award was led by the branches, rather than the executive leadership. Brisbane, Sydney, Fremantle, MWLU, and the PPSA had signalled their disapproval early, holding condemnatory meetings soon after the draft award was handed down on 29 June 1928. At a meeting of the PPSA on 15 July, the WWF

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<sup>11</sup> Rechter, p.16.

<sup>12</sup> Lockwood, p.226.

<sup>13</sup> *Age* (Melbourne), 8 September 1928, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 September 1928, p.22.

Committee of Management (COM) was called upon to ‘repudiate’<sup>15</sup> the Award. The response of the COM was drowsy in comparison, possibly due to the belief that Judge Beeby, who had broken his leg after releasing the draft award, would not be handing down his final judgement until October.<sup>16</sup> Once it was discovered that 21 August would be the judgement day, the COM hurriedly brought forward the annual All Ports Conference from 22 October to 6 September. The main purpose of this meeting was for the Federation to officially formulate its industrial response to the Award. Invitations were sent to other maritime unions and the ACTU, in order that the opinions of the wider labour movement could also be considered.

While the industrial wing of the labour movement was hurriedly manoeuvring at Trades Hall, around the corner in Spring Street the Victorian Labor Government was plodding along. Hogan had clinched office in April 1927 on the back of considerable public discontent over the conservative Government’s failure to tackle the long-standing problem of electoral malapportionment. Under the prevailing system of voting, which Hogan had denounced during the campaign as ‘an outrage on democracy,’<sup>17</sup> 47 rural votes for the Legislative Assembly were equivalent to 100 metropolitan votes.<sup>18</sup> This persistent anomaly in Victorian politics was difficult to handle because it aroused the parochial passions of the Country Party (CP) and the Country Progressive Party (CPP), whose subordinate numerical strength was obviated by their strategic ability to court, coerce, or crush Governments with weak grips on power. Indeed, attempts to alter the arithmetic of the lower House had brought down a Nationalist Party Government in 1924. In light of such facts, Hogan, who lacked a majority in both Houses, had chosen to settle in to the ministerial benches before attempting to navigate through the minefield of electoral redistribution. Furthermore, Hogan was leading only the third Labor administration in Victoria’s history. The two previous Labor Governments, in 1913 and 1924, had lasted fourteen days and four months respectively. Victoria had churned through seventeen Ministries since Federation. It appeared that the sword of Damocles was almost permanently dangling above the ministerial benches. Joan Rydon summed up the zeitgeist of Victorian politics as one characterised by ‘a style of politics with emphasis on tactics rather than on doctrine or policy.’<sup>19</sup> Hogan had to tread lightly.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 16 July 1928, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Redmond, p.25.

<sup>17</sup> E.J. Hogan, *The Labor Policy for Victoria: Policy Speech delivered at Ballan, in the Warrenheip-Grenville Electorate, on Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1927*, Melbourne: Australian Labor Party, Victorian Branch, 1927, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Wright, *A People’s Counsel. A History of the Parliament of Victoria 1856-1990*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.174.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.159.

Edmond John “Ned” Hogan had trodden winding tracks before taking office in Spring Street. Born into a Catholic family at Wallace, near Ballarat in 1883, he left school in grade six and worked on the family farm before heading to the Gippsland goldmining town of Walhalla in 1903, where he worked as a timber cutter. He continued with this occupation after arriving in Kalgoorlie in 1904, where he also embarked upon a heavy regimen of self-education. After toiling all day on the timber lines, he would hunch over books on history, politics, economics, and literature by the flicker of a candle light.<sup>20</sup> His erudite ways and impressive physical stature made him popular with his fellow timber workers. When these men went on strike in 1908, they elected Hogan to be chairman of the Firewood Workers Strike Committee, and he duly led the workers to victory after intervention by the conservative Premier of Western Australia. Another strike in 1911 saw Hogan, now the secretary of the Kurrawang Workers Union, once again lead the strike to a successful conclusion after similar political intervention, this time by C. E. Fraser, a Member of the House of Representatives.<sup>21</sup> After returning to Victoria in 1912, he won the rural seat of Warrenheip in 1913. By 1922, Hogan had risen to be President of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party. He continued his ascent through the ranks, becoming a Minister in the fleeting Government of George Prendergast in 1924, leader of the party in 1926, and Premier the following year.

Just as the wharfies were suspicious of Beeby as he formulated their award, Hogan was wary of covetous glances from the Opposition benches. His Government held twenty-eight seats in the Legislative Assembly, while the Nationalists held seventeen, the CP, ten, and the CPP, four. There were also two Liberals, and two Independents.<sup>22</sup> Thus, not only did the fate of legislation hinge upon the minor parties and Independents, the fate of the Government itself also rested in their hands. By joining with the two conservative parties in a no-confidence motion, the minor parties or Independents could put the Government to the sword. Indeed, the Nationalist Party unsheathed this very weapon in August 1928, when it accused the Government of excessive interference in the affairs of the Chief Commissioner of Police, Thomas Blamey. However, they were unable to concoct a sufficiently heady potion to lure the

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<sup>20</sup> Frank Y. Turley, *Big Ned: Hon. Edmond John Hogan (1884-1964), Twice Premier of Victoria*, Bentleigh, Victoria: Frank Y. Turley, 1999, p.13.

<sup>21</sup> E.J. Hogan, *Memoirs of Honorable E.J. Hogan. Premier of Victoria 1927-28, 1930-32, Minister of Agriculture and Mines, 1935-43*, Melbourne: Renown Press, 1964, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> *Age*, 15 November 1928, p.8.

crucial votes of the minor parties and Independents.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Hogan had been put on notice. Nationalists and CP members, so unaccustomed to the vista from the Opposition benches, would be on constant guard for propitious opportunities to force a relapse to the “natural” order, regardless of whether these openings originated in the parliamentary chambers or in the streets of Melbourne. On 4 July 1928, the opening day of the last parliamentary session for the year, the *Age* reaffirmed the parlous leitmotif of Victorian politics: ‘At any moment it is possible that a storm will break, creating a crisis that will again throw the State into political turmoil.’<sup>24</sup>

The first flash of a potential tempest was sounded on 7 September at the All Ports Conference. Delegates from all WWF branches assembled in Trades Hall, and passed the following terse motion: ‘That the WWF repudiates entirely the pernicious and vicious Beeby Award of 1928.’<sup>25</sup> Branches were subsequently instructed by the COM that when the Award became operative on 10 September, they were to work under their pre-established conditions until these clashed with the new conditions imposed in the recent Award.<sup>26</sup> In the meantime, the WWF would request a meeting with shipowners in order to seek the removal or mitigation of the most egregious features of the Award, such as the cancellation of the single pick-up, and the sly gutting of overtime rates. Delegates signalled the intensity of their loathing for the Award by voting to affiliate with the ACTU, whom the WWF distrusted, in order to better facilitate any potential extension of the strike.<sup>27</sup>

The COM’s order for branches to adhere to pre-existing conditions was, in effect, a recipe for an incommensurate national response. This scenario, as Lynette Redmond has pointed out,<sup>28</sup> meant dissimilar strike activity in different branches. For instance, Brisbane attended its usual two pick-ups, while the PPSA attended only one. Fremantle, Geraldton, Geelong and the two Melbourne branches did not work overtime, because their superior rates had been cut by the Award. Some Queensland branches did not work certain cargoes that attracted their usual “tropical allowances.” Moreover, before the Conference had even begun, some major branches had demonstrated the Federation’s inveterate disposition to branch autonomy by

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<sup>23</sup> *Sun* (Melbourne), 16 August 1928, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> *Age*, 4 July 1928, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> *Argus*, 8 September 1928, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Canberra (hereafter NBAC), Waterside Workers’ Federation of Australia (hereafter WWF), T62/16/4, Telegram from General Secretary to branches, 8 September 1928.

<sup>27</sup> *Argus*, 13 September 1928, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> Redmond, p.28.

initiating stoppages at Newcastle, Port Adelaide, Brisbane, and Cairns.<sup>29</sup> Thus, from the very beginning of the strike, the Federation's prospects of a taut and united stand had been weakened. Disunity was further compounded by wrangling amongst the Conference delegates. On 13 September, for instance, two conflicting motions were both narrowly rejected: one for extending the strike to include other unions,<sup>30</sup> and another calling for acceptance of the Beeby Award.<sup>31</sup> The centrifugal character of the WWF was further evidenced by the list of delegates for the proposed meeting with shipowners. It was cleaved into separate sets of delegates, one for the nominal leadership, the COM, and one representing the assertive and self-reliant branches.<sup>32</sup> To attempt to control or even influence such a swirling conglomeration of mixed temperaments and customs would be an exceedingly difficult task.

In contrast, the shipowners and the Federal Government immediately established a common course of action. On 10 September, the Commonwealth Steamship Owners' Association and the Overseas Shipping Representatives' Association, who had not always seen eye to eye,<sup>33</sup> elected a joint strike committee. Within hours, the committee was discussing the use of the Crimes Act with the Federal Attorney-General, John Latham.<sup>34</sup> The Prime Minister duly sent letters to the WWF and the Premiers the next day, stating his intention to utilise punitive fines under the Crimes Act, as well as seeking the Premiers' future cooperation in protecting "volunteer" labourers, should they be mobilised. The shipowners also rejected the WWF's repeated entreaties for a meeting, stating that they would only consider such a conference once the union was acting lawfully and continually working under the Beeby Award.<sup>35</sup> When the WWF COM naively beseeched Bruce to facilitate a meeting between wharfies and shipowners, the dour-faced cove from Flinders Lane, who was also in the midst of an election campaign, echoed the shipowners' mantra of law and order. He bristled, and stated that the proposed facilitation would be '...equivalent to asking the Government to become party to an unlawful act.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Age*, 7 September 1928, p.10.

<sup>30</sup> *Argus*, 14 September 1928, p.7.

<sup>31</sup> *Rechter*, p.36.

<sup>32</sup> *Age*, 10 September 1928, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> *Perlman*, p.127-28.

<sup>34</sup> *Argus*, 11 September 1928, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> NBAC. WWF, T62/20/1, Letter from A.S. Elford to WWF, 10 September 1928.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, T62/26/3, Telegram from Prime Minister to WWF, 13 September 1928.

On the other hand, the Victorian Government had apparently missed the jump. Hogan was in Sydney when the strike began. The *Age* was looking to the horizon for a quixotic saviour to ride into Trades Hall and coax the wharfies back to work: 'Where are the real Labor leaders, and what advice do they tender? Before another move aggravates the existing situation those responsible men at the forefront of the movement should tell the Federation where it is heading and use their influence to apply the brake.'<sup>37</sup> Hogan returned to Melbourne on 12 September, and immediately threw himself into the role of brakeman. He met that day with the WWF COM, and urged them to reverse their decision to strike. He asserted that there was 'very little difference'<sup>38</sup> between the old and new Awards. Melbourne wharfies, of course, felt differently. The PPSA in particular had a lot to lose from the Beeby Award. The stevedores of Port Phillip, who resided mainly in the beachside suburbs of Port Melbourne, Williamstown and South Melbourne, represented the vanguard of the entire Federation. They were the only wharfies in Australia to enjoy both the single pick-up and superior overtime rates. They had been the first to achieve a single pick-up, which they won in 1912 via the blunt method of simply and stubbornly refusing to attend a second one.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the shipowners' foremen did not pick-up the stevedores from the wharfs. PPSA men enjoyed the symbolically-powerful experience of being selected from the comfort of their Bay Street headquarters, which, incidentally, was equipped with an impressive library containing leather-bound copies of Dickens and the like.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to Hogan's seemingly indifferent opinion on the Award, the PPSA had enunciated its hostility in July, before the final judgement had even been handed down: '...the application of this award will be productive of endless friction in the industry...'<sup>41</sup> In further contrast to Hogan's view, Port Melbourne's local newspaper was openly sympathetic to the wharfies' grievances: 'We are inclined to believe that there are solid grounds for complaint.'<sup>42</sup> Any potential arrangements to end the strike would have to mollify the especially aggrieved PPSA.

Paradoxically, while Hogan was trying to slow things down at Trades Hall, he was simultaneously trying to accelerate Government business at Spring Street. The parliamentary session was to close in December, and his Government had not yet introduced its key election

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<sup>37</sup> *Age*, 10 September 1928, p.8.

<sup>38</sup> *Argus*, 13 September 1928, p.8.

<sup>39</sup> Lowenstein & Hills, p.58.

<sup>40</sup> Lockwood, p.310.

<sup>41</sup> *Age*, 16 July 1928, p.15.

<sup>42</sup> *The Record* (South Melbourne & Port Melbourne), 15 September 1928, p.4.

proposals, such as the unification of Melbourne's local councils, a totalisator to formalise racecourse gambling, relocation of Melbourne's sale yards and, biggest of all, redistribution of seats. Hours after making first contact with the WWF, Hogan announced his intention to suspend standing orders in the Legislative Assembly, so that new business could then be introduced at any time. During the proceeding sitting, which lasted until 5 a.m. the following morning,<sup>43</sup> the CPP flexed its strategic muscle by forcing Labor to make substantial amendments to an Unemployed Workers' Insurance Bill. A clause to establish Government-run labour farms to assist the increasing number of unemployed was reluctantly removed. Some Labor representatives felt that Hogan had prioritised parliamentary exigencies over the party's traditional support for the underdog. Three of them, including Maurice Blackburn, crossed the floor.<sup>44</sup> The House then adjourned until 18 September, giving Hogan more time to focus on his new role as brakeman at Trades Hall.

Hogan clearly needed this time to focus. On 13 September, the stakes of the dispute were raised considerably. Sixty-five ships were now idle in Australia's ports.<sup>45</sup> The Arbitration Court, acting under Bruce's recently amended Arbitration Act, formally declared the existence of a strike. This vicissitude allowed for the immediate legal mobilisation of "volunteer" labour. The shipowners would have little trouble finding such labour; the unemployment rate was just under eleven percent.<sup>46</sup> The following telegram from the joint shipowners was promptly sent to all Australian ports: 'Make preliminary arrangements...to commence operations to handle volunteer and outside labor.'<sup>47</sup> But at a meeting on the morning of 14 September, Hogan persuaded shipowners to send one final warning letter to the WWF before unleashing throngs of volunteer labour.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, he obtained a crucial assurance from shipowners that if the men resumed work under the Beeby Award, then a meeting between shipowners and the WWF would ensue under his mediation.<sup>49</sup> This message was promptly conveyed to not only the WWF COM and the ACTU, but also to representatives of the MWLU and PPSA. All parties, including the two pivotal Melbourne branches, gave their assent to Hogan's proposal. Hogan reaffirmed his offer to the WWF

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<sup>43</sup> *Argus*, 14 September 1928, p.10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Age*, 14 September 1928, p.9.

<sup>46</sup> W.F. Mandle, *Going it Alone. Australia's National Identity in the Twentieth Century*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1980, p.49.

<sup>47</sup> *Age*, 15 September 1928, p.21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), pp. 2767-68.

COM at a further meeting the following morning, just hours before it was put to a vote at Trades Hall.<sup>50</sup> The All Ports Conference was apparently influenced by Hogan's option. Since 7 September, the Conference had toyed with conflicting proposals to resume work or extend the dispute to other unions. On Saturday 15 September, delegates reversed the decision to strike, voting by forty-eight to twenty-two to resume work under the Beeby Award, pending Hogan's proposed meeting.<sup>51</sup> The importance attached to the Premier's proposal was perhaps reflected in the wording of the successful motion:

...the resolution repudiating the Award has served its purpose for the time being, and to persist with it any further would be detrimental to the best interests of the Federation as a whole, by preventing negotiations with Shipowners, and although we, as your representatives realise the conditions are hard, we instruct you to accept work under the new Award.<sup>52</sup>

Branches were ordered to present for work in two days' time, on Monday 17 September.

Despite the almost pleading tone of the motion, and its subtle allusions to branch recalcitrance, pundits, punters and the Premier seemed satisfied that the trouble was over. News of the Conference's decision was promptly aired over the speakers at Moonee Valley racecourse, to the palpable relief of patrons. The *Age* also breathed a sigh of relief, declaring 'The crisis at the waterfront is over...For bringing about the wished-for result it would seem that the Premier of Victoria is entitled to a considerable measure of credit.'<sup>53</sup> Hogan stayed on message: 'I will convene a conference of the shipowners and waterside workers in accordance with my undertaking, and that conference will be held as soon as possible.'<sup>54</sup> He added, 'I am very pleased that the trouble has been settled.'<sup>55</sup>

Once Hogan had returned to Melbourne on 12 September, he held meetings with affected parties on four consecutive days, seeking to influence the All Ports Conference to end the strike. In doing so, it would appear that he was propelled by varying factors, some of which were economic and political, and others subjective and personal. Perhaps most important of all, he did not wish Victoria's trade and commerce to be paralysed. With the season for wool sales approaching, he wished to avoid aggravating rural producers and their leveraged

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<sup>50</sup> *Age*, 17 September 1928, p.9.

<sup>51</sup> NBAC. WWF, T62/51/6, Telegram from General Secretary to branches, 15 September, 1928.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Age*, 17 September 1928, p.8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

parliamentary representatives. Hogan had demonstrated his desire to avoid such alienation when he reluctantly acceded to legislative amendments demanded by the CPP.

After the use of “volunteer” labour was flagged, the prospect of violence on the streets increased. The mobilisation of “scab” labour during previous maritime disputes, particularly in 1917, had resulted in fierce clashes between wharfies, volunteers and police. As Premier, Hogan was concerned about more than just the physical repercussions of violence. Considering that the Nationalists had previously moved a no-confidence motion based upon Hogan’s dealings with the police, it is understandable that he sought to prevent headlines screaming about swinging batons and crimson trickling down faces. Furthermore, violence involving unionists would probably embarrass the parliamentary wing of the labour movement as it moved towards a Federal election on 17 November. Bruce had successfully milked industrial unrest at the previous poll, when he expediently played the dual role of industrial arsonist and parliamentary fireman.<sup>56</sup> Labor had been absent from the reins of Federal power for twelve years, and did not welcome another industrial conflagration to cloud its attacks on Bruce’s ageing Government. Maurice Blackburn highlighted this concern the day before the waterside strike began. He warned: ‘When the last Federal election was coming on Labor was mixed up in the British seamen’s strike and doing exactly the work their opponents desired...The next election will be the testing time of the Australian Labor Party...’<sup>57</sup> Thus, parliamentary concerns in Canberra and Spring Street compelled Hogan to seek a swift end to this loaded dispute.

On the other hand, Hogan was advantaged in some respects. Geographically, he was in the perfect place to facilitate face to face discussions with the WWF, the MWLU, the PPSA, the ACTU, and the joint shipowners.<sup>58</sup> All these bodies were based in Melbourne. Furthermore, Hogan was experienced in dealing with industrial disputes. His leading role in the settlement of two strikes in Kalgoorlie may have convinced him that political intervention in strikes could yield greater industrial tranquillity, as well as gains for workers. It was likely that such experience also made Hogan aware that a strike is not a neat forum in which the monolithic forces of capital and labour meet each other head-on; rather, that a strike is porous, and can absorb and converge with processes outside the immediate industrial setting, such as

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<sup>56</sup> See above, p.4-5.

<sup>57</sup> *Age*, 10 September 1928, p.9.

<sup>58</sup> Redmond, p.50.

parliamentary or electoral processes. Hogan seemed aware of such nuances by seeking the opinions of varied players involved in the waterfront strike. He was not content in simply ascertaining the views of the immediate parties to the dispute - the WWF and the joint shipowners. He also met with the ACTU, in order to look beyond wharfside grievances to the concerns of the wider labour movement. Here, it is likely that other unionists' fears of unemployment militated against any possible extension of the dispute, which in turn would have influenced the Conference to seek less militant options, such as the Premier's offer. On the other hand, Hogan also met with the MWLU and the PPSA, in order to gain a sharper focus on rank and file feeling towards pursuing the less-travelled path of mediation instead of militancy. The Premier's facilitation of a pending meeting between shipowners and the WWF provided the breakthrough development at the All Ports Conference, which had hitherto been mired in unproductive wrangling between militants and moderates, and seemed incapable of providing impetus to the dispute. When a punitive impetus appeared, in the form of "volunteer" labour, Hogan stayed the hand of the shipowners, and provided a more congenial fillip to the Conference to end the strike. Whether or not the agreement would hold was an entirely different matter. The tinder box was still ajar.

## Chapter Two

### **Dog Collars and Bombs: The Transport Workers' Act and the Maritime Conference**

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The Premier's breakthrough intervention during the All Ports Conference confirmed that a strike can play host to a multitude of varying agendas. Where tempers appear tamed in one corner, or frayed in another, interpolations from uniquely motivated parties can alter the speed or direction of events. With Hogan's meeting pending, this apparent maxim still framed the 1928 strike.

This chapter will focus on what could be described as the seminal development of the strike, the Federal Government's introduction of the Transport Workers' Act. It will examine the responses of both wings of the labour movement to this development. Particular attention will be paid to the Premier's increasingly calculated efforts to prevent the escalating strike from enmeshing his Government.

The All Ports Conference had concluded by ordering all branches to work under the Beeby Award from Monday 17 September, as a prelude to meeting with shipowners. However, the efficacy of this arrangement hinged upon branches overcoming not only their pride by acceding to the hated Award, but also their ingrained habits by supplanting local allegiance with fidelity to the national body. Nature won the day. Eleven of the Federation's forty-seven branches could not blunt their instinctive indignation, and refused to present for work. The rebel branches were Port Phillip, Port Adelaide, Fremantle, Brisbane, Bundaberg, Innisfail, Bowen, Lucinda Point, Thursday Island, Port Kembla, and Newcastle. Sydney, however, obeyed the call to resume work. Whilst Sydney watersiders had been stripped of their single pick-up, and thus were inclined to stay on strike, their decision not to do so was likely informed by bitter memories of the 1917 upheaval.¹ Non-union labourers recruited during that trouble set up their own rival "union," which continued to undercut the Federation's preference and organisation until 1925. With unemployment now abounding, Sydney wharfies were particularly reluctant to risk long-term damage. In doing so, they were acting on their own unique memories, customs, and fears, just like the members of rebel branches

¹ Rechter, p.37-38.

were acting on their respective idiosyncrasies. Once again, the mosaic nature of the WWF had shone through.

The contrasting responses of Sydney and the rebel branches illustrated the inherent difficulty that Hogan faced in seeking the Federation's adherence to a common policy. The Premier had acted on his own agenda in making an offer, but the outcome was becoming hostage to the myriad agendas of the union's branches. Hogan had deliberately sought out the express opinions of both Melbourne branches to his proposed conference. Representatives of the MWLU and the PPSA had agreed, and subsequently voted in favour of resumption at Trades Hall. Nevertheless, on 17 September, only the MWLU resumed work.² As for the PPSA, things initially ran according to Hogan's best hopes. In the morning, the members voted by 800 to 620 to work begrudgingly under the Beeby Award.³ However, news of the continuance of the strike in some of Australia's other ports may have insulted the stevedores' sense of being the Federation's militant trailblazers. Joe Goddard, the President of the PPSA, resuscitated the strike in Melbourne by standing up at the end of the vote, and convincing the rank and file to disregard the new afternoon pick-up.⁴ Goddard was not only renegeing on his promise to Hogan, he was also going against his own vote at the recent Conference, as well as disregarding the vote of his own branch. The news travelled rapidly from Bay Street to Spring Street. Hogan immediately summoned the PPSA leadership.⁵ He reiterated that his pending conference was contingent upon an Australia-wide resumption of work, otherwise the shipowners would not agree to a meeting: 'There will not be any conference until the whole of the men return to work.'⁶ Goddard corrected his position, and duly called upon the rank and file to accept the Beeby Award.⁷ A meeting of the stevedores was convened for 19 September, at which the members could vote upon the leadership's call to resume. Obviously, Hogan could not guarantee that other rebel ports would end the strike, but it is possible that he banked on the PPSA using its venerated status to lead others back to work. In any case, the trouble could be over in Victoria, and the Premier would then be free to focus on accelerating his legislative agenda.

² *Argus*, 18 September 1928, p.7.

³ *Age*, 18 September 1928, p.9.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p. 2768.

⁶ *Age*, 18 September 1928, p.10.

⁷ *Argus*, 20 September 1928, p.7.

While Hogan was trying to piece together his agreement with shipowners and wharfies, he was also busily preparing the State budget. In addition to his dual role as Premier and industrial brakeman, Hogan was also Treasurer. The budget was to be handed down on 26 September.⁸ In the meantime, the Premier persisted with efforts to speed up Government business. He re-introduced a Business Agents Bill after it had previously been passed by the lower House but rejected in the upper chamber.⁹ Hogan also suspended standing orders in the Legislative Assembly, telling the Opposition that ‘...satisfactory legislative progress is not being made.’¹⁰ But the dethroned custodians of Victorian politics were not to be harried by a minority Government. The leader of the Nationalists, Sir William McPherson, warned: ‘If the Premier thinks he can ride the Opposition he will have a very rough time.’¹¹ This was no idle threat. The next day, the Government’s Sheep Stamp Duty Bill, which was a kind of financial rescue package for rural abattoirs, was rejected by the Legislative Council. This chamber was dominated by Nationalists and the CP. Hogan had shielded the Bill through the lower House after once again accepting amendments from the CPP,¹² which held the balance of power. The Premier had manoeuvred and accommodated, only to see his partial gains stymied by the autonomous wills of others. It seemed that Hogan was constrained by contrary agendas in both the parliamentary and industrial arenas.

Unfortunately for Hogan and the wharfies, another interested party was pursuing an election agenda. Industrial strife had worked to Bruce’s advantage in the past. During this current strike, the Prime Minister had pointedly framed himself as the guardian of law and order by refusing to meet the WWF while it was disobeying the Arbitration Court. The inference was that Labor, whether at the Federal or State level, could not be trusted to uphold the law while some of its financial backers in the union movement were breaking the law. An end to the trouble on the waterfront would deprive Bruce of a tried and trusted election placard. On 18 September, one day before the vanguard PPSA was to vote on ending the strike, the Federal Government utilised its recently amended Arbitration Act to issue summonses on the leaders of the MWLU for incitement to strike. However, the MWLU had resumed work the previous day. Hogan sensed that his efforts had been subverted by electoral

⁸ *Age*, 22 September 1928, p.22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 September 1928, p.8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1928, p.16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Argus*, 13 September 1928, p.9.

expediency. He labelled the summoning a 'provocative'¹³ act. PPSA members agreed. At their crucial meeting in Port Melbourne Town Hall, the incensed stevedores voted overwhelmingly to fight fire with fire and continue the strike.¹⁴ One wharfie asked whether the Prime Minister was sincere in his pursuit of industrial tranquillity: 'What about Mr. Bruce's prosecutions. Does he want peace?' A member replied: 'Well, when you see what his tactics are you ought to know what to do.'¹⁵ Bruce had rekindled the strike by prodding the militant instincts of the WWF's pre-eminent branch. Hogan's efforts had again been thwarted by forces beyond his direct control.

The pace of events now quickened. The dynamics of the dispute were swiftly altered. Shipowners signalled that Hogan's pending meeting was now off the table. On 20 September, they began advertising for non-union labour to work the increasing number of idle vessels.¹⁶ The very same day, Bruce fundamentally reframed the parameters of the strike. The Transport Workers' Act (TWA) was hastily introduced to Parliament, passed all requisite stages, and became law in just six days. The TWA was centred upon the use of strikebreaking labourers in industrial disputes. It was designed to safeguard both the physical security of volunteers as well as their longer-term job security once unionists resumed working. All waterside workers, both unionists and non-unionists, were required to purchase licenses, which could be revoked at any time for disobeying a 'lawful order.'¹⁷ Once revoked, a wharfie could not reapply for another license for six months.¹⁸ If a unionist refused to work alongside a non-unionist, his license could be cancelled. A wharfie who disobeyed a 'lawful order' by refusing to work in unsafe conditions could find himself barred from his craft for six months. At a time of high unemployment, his prospects of finding another job would be slim. In his absence from the wharves, he would be unable to prevent neophyte volunteers from withering away special employment conditions that had been built up over many years of arduous struggle. Furthermore, a blacklisted wharfie would find it difficult to meet the financial needs of not only his family, but also his union. Thus, the TWA posed a long-term threat to the viability of waterfront unionism. Richard Morris highlighted that Bruce's seminal legislation went

¹³ Ibid., 19 September 1928, p.7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20 September 1928, p.7.

¹⁵ *Age*, 20 September 1928, p.12.

¹⁶ *Sun*, 21 September 1928, p.3.

¹⁷ W. Jethro Brown, 'The Strike of the Australian Waterside Worker: A Review,' *The Economic Record*, vol. 5, no.8 (May, 1929), p.28.

¹⁸ Redmond, p.34.

beyond transient electioneering: 'In unprecedented fashion the Transport Workers' Act attempted to permanently institutionalise the supply of free labour on the wharves...'¹⁹

Furthermore, the definition of a transport worker under the TWA was sufficiently vague to enable wider application of licences to any workers engaged in the provision of interstate or overseas commerce,²⁰ such as seamen, marine cooks, ships' painters and dockers, marine stewards, carters and drivers, or railway workers. This threat of wider application meant that the concerns of the broader union movement were now projected onto the waterfront dispute. Interested parties began to remould their speech and actions to fit the altered contours of the strike. James Scullin, the leader of the federal Labor Party, asserted that the TWA was designed to '...foster non-union organisations in order to break the unions of this country.'²¹ However, he was wary of Bruce's attempts to paint him as an apologist for unlawful industrial action. Scullin stressed that the TWA and other punitive legislation '...can only be remedied by Parliament, and they will be remedied by a Labor Government.'²² The Victorian branch of the Seamen's Union responded to the TWA by ordering its members not to work aboard vessels that were loaded or unloaded by volunteers.²³ The WWF also realised that the strike against the Beeby Award had now morphed into a potential vanguard sortie to defend an assortment of unionists. During the All Ports Conference, the Federation had sidelined its distrust of the ACTU by deciding to affiliate. On the 21 September, the day after the TWA was promulgated, the WWF took the previously unthinkable step of handing over control of the strike to the ACTU.

Although both wings of the labour movement were fully aware that their opponents had extended the dispute, not even the bodies in control of the waterfront strike were sure of how to actually respond. The ACTU, now the nominal leader of the strike, convened a rolling Maritime Conference at Trades Hall from 24 September, which was attended by the WWF COM, and representatives of the Seamen's Union, Marine Cooks' Union, Carters' and Drivers' Union, Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association, and the Clerks' Union.²⁴ The venue may have been the same as the All Ports Conference, but the tenor and tone of

¹⁹ Morris, p.19.

²⁰ Brown, p.28.

²¹ *Commonwealth of Australia. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.119 (1928), p.7081.

²² *Workers' Weekly*, 19 October 1928, p.2.

²³ *Age*, 21 September 1928, p.11.

²⁴ *Argus*, 22 September 1928, p.17.

discussions within Trades Hall had grown shriller. The Conference commenced by ordering the Federation's rebel branches to work under the Beeby Award, but to refuse employment under the TWA.²⁵ Wharfies were also forbidden from working alongside volunteers. Licences, or "dog collars" as unionists dubbed them, were to be issued from 29 September, and operational from 1 October.

The wording of the Conference's opening motion reflected the changed priorities of the strike. Rebel branches were accused of '...acting inimically to the solidarity of the Labor movement...'²⁶ Delegates lambasted the TWA as '...a direct challenge to the trade union movement of Australia...'²⁷ The rebel branches, hitherto so fixated on their own domestic grievances, now elevated their purviews. On 25 September, branches at Brisbane, Fremantle, Port Adelaide, and Port Phillip offered for work under the Beeby Award.²⁸ However, none of these branches received work because strikebreaking labourers had already saturated the rebel ports. There were 1070 working in Melbourne alone.²⁹ Adherence to the new Award had come too late to be a denouement. The spotlight had moved, yet the rebel wharfies offered their concession in the shadows.

The Conference's order to accept the Beeby Award, reject the TWA, and refuse to work alongside volunteers was, in effect, a call to continue the strike.³⁰ Acceptance of the new Award was no longer enough. The TWA was now law, and shipowners had proven that they were not going to bypass ample supplies of volunteers in order to briefly employ unionists who would only refuse to work under the TWA when it became operational on 1 October. Shipowners neither wanted nor needed Federation labour. If the union movement was committed to smashing the TWA, then the paralysing inertia of the Conference's policy would have to be replaced by a vigorous effort to extend industrial stoppages to other industries. Failing this option, the only other way to fight the TWA and end the strike was to take out licences, and then to seek the Act's amendment or annulment via Parliament.

²⁵ Ibid., 25 September 1928, p.8.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Age*, 26 September 1928, p.8, 13.

²⁹ Ibid., p.13.

³⁰ Lockwood, pp.246-47.

The ubiquitous presence of free labourers in Melbourne presented significant new challenges to the PPSA, MWLU, the Premier, and the police. Volunteers were registered at a bureau in the heart of the city, firstly near the corner of King and Bourke Street, and subsequently at the corner of Flinders and Market Street. They were then immediately conveyed to Port Melbourne or the Yarra Docks via various protected means, including charabancs, special trains,³¹ and police escort. Even though the MWLU had been working under the Beeby Award since 17 September, the influx of non-union labour allowed shipowners to simply deny unionists employment.³² Furthermore, the advent of the TWA enabled shipowners to consolidate a workforce that was more amenable to their interests. The chairman of the joint shipowners declared to the press that employers and the Commonwealth Government were in for the long haul: ‘We mean to go right on to the end, for it is a fight against constitutional Government.’³³ This was not hollow rhetoric. Entry to the MWLU’s stomping ground at Victoria Dock was confined to a police-guarded compound, equipped with high walls and razor wire.³⁴ Inside, volunteers were provided with sleeping quarters, fully catered meals, a post office, and a savings bank.³⁵ Such facilities were a lavish incentive for men to weather the bruising gauntlets of unionists. A *Labor Call* journalist asked volunteers why they were willing to incur the moral and physical wrath of striking watersiders. He explained that their offer of labour was born more of economic compulsion than voluntarism: ‘Those I spoke to said it was not a matter of principle, but of dire necessity. They wanted money and would go to hell to get it.’³⁶

Wharfies were keen to give them a dose of hell. Violence between unionists and “scabs” erupted from the very first day of enrolment, and escalated rapidly. On 22 September, there were intermittent brawls outside the bureau, resulting in the arrest of two unionists.³⁷ At Port Melbourne, local residents and members of the PPSA set up road blocks near Prince’s Pier, and attacked any vehicles containing volunteers. Two volunteers suffered fractured skulls. Shots were fired into a taxi.³⁸ On the night of 28 September, the sound of exploding bombs rang out over the waterside suburbs. The homes of two foremen in Middle Park and South

³¹ *Herald* (Melbourne), 2 November 1928, p.1.

³² NBAC. WWF, T62/51/6, Arbitration Court affidavit of Percy Salvada, 26 October 1928.

³³ *Age*, 24 September 1928, p.9.

³⁴ NBAC. WWF, T62/51/6, Arbitration Court affidavit of Percy Salvada, 26 October 1928.

³⁵ *Age*, 9 October 1928, p.11.

³⁶ *Labor Call*, 4 October 1928, p.1.

³⁷ *Age*, 24 September 1928, p.9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Melbourne were partially destroyed, though no serious injuries were sustained.³⁹ The Premier condemned this latest steep surge in violence, describing it as ‘...a dastardly and cowardly criminal act, which must arouse the indignation of every decent man and woman.’⁴⁰ Although the PPSA leadership denied responsibility for the bombings, some of the local rank and file exchanged esoteric winks.⁴¹ This crude violence and picketing had not been sanctioned by the WFF. Rather, the militant PPSA was once again acting on local initiative, drawing on its traditional ethos of direct action. It could also be said that the stevedores were attempting to compensate for the Maritime Conference’s inability or unwillingness to alter the development of the strike. Vicissitudes were not emanating from Trades Hall. Port Melbourne was perhaps trying to generate movement, even if it was the violent motions of slivers, blue metal, bullets, and bombs.

It was no coincidence that Port Melbourne was a hotbed of intense strike activity. Besides being contiguous to Prince’s Pier and Station Pier, Port Melbourne was largely inhabited by stevedores and their families. Locals were inexorably drawn into the strike. In their eyes, interloping volunteers were doing more than just keeping food off watersiders’ tables. They were also undermining workplace gains that had been accumulated and bequeathed through successive generations of Port Melbourne families. Furthermore, as volunteers were not locals, they did not spend their wages in Port Melbourne, so local business and employment was further impaired.⁴² Tom Hills, a wharfie and local resident, explained that ‘scabs’ who ventured to Port Melbourne were at constant risk of being attacked by locals: ‘It was like coming into the lion’s den. It didn’t matter if you was a wharfie or not...Wherever we met scabs they would be attacked.’⁴³ The many police officers who were sent to protect volunteers also became targets. Policemen riding bicycles on night patrol were often brought to ground by strategically-placed kerosene tins.⁴⁴ Port Melbourne had a symbiotic relationship with waterfront unionism, and many denizens were prepared to use serious violence in order to defend the financial and social lifeblood of their community. In light of such intense feeling, the strike was escalating, enveloping wider layers of the public, capturing more headlines. The Premier was anxious to ensure that Spring Street would not be engulfed.

³⁹ Ibid., 29 September 1928, p.23.

⁴⁰ *Argus*, 1 October 1928, p.7.

⁴¹ Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour. An oral record of the 1930s depression in Australia*, Newham, Victoria: Scribe, 1978, p.68.

⁴² Lowenstein & Hills, p.67.

⁴³ Ibid., p.68.

⁴⁴ Lowenstein, p.68.

After the mobilisation of volunteers and concomitant violence, the Victorian Premier was forced to alter his role in the strike. It appeared that Hogan developed a two-pronged strategy, based on the binary issues of industrial affairs and law and order. In both spheres, the Premier's role was aimed towards image rather than impact.

In the industrial arena, Hogan sought to engage actively with the Maritime Conference by carrying out mediation and facilitation with various parties. By doing so, he would be offering delegates an alternative to extending the strike to other unions. The possibility of wider and potentially paralysing strike action posed a serious threat to Hogan's minority Government. The Opposition had already demonstrated its desire to snatch back power when it recently moved a no-confidence motion. Moreover, the Opposition was currently confirming its inveterate hostility by obstructing the Government's accelerated legislative agenda. The Premier did not want the deepening strike to become a launching pad for attacks on his young Government. He sought to lessen the likelihood of extension by offering the Maritime Conference a red herring.

It is arguable that Hogan was not entirely sincere in his efforts to grapple with the new conditions wrought by the TWA. It seemed that the Premier was primarily concerned with keeping up appearances, in order to temper the labour movement and stave off criticism from the covetous Opposition. It is probable that Hogan sought to insulate his Government by cultivating a flexible image of an effective, bipartisan, and civic-minded statesman. During the feverish and violent days in which the TWA was making its brisk journey through Federal Parliament, Hogan continued to work with a suspiciously redundant formula. Even after shipowners had mobilised non-union labour, and the Federal Government had utilised and was presently updating its arsenal of industrial legislation, Hogan was still trying to salvage his proposed meeting between shipowners and the WWF. He persisted in conferring with shipowners, and called on Bruce to hold the TWA in abeyance while he continued to work for a '...complete settlement.'⁴⁵ The Premier told the press he was still hopeful that such a settlement could be effected.⁴⁶ Hogan could not have been counting on Federal Parliament to reject the TWA because Bruce had the numbers. The Premier seemed to be pinning his hopes on the possibility that a proven industrial pugilist might suddenly temper his behaviour in the

⁴⁵ *Sun*, 22 September 1928, p.3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

midst of an election campaign. This was highly unlikely. Indeed, Hogan had just recently accused the Prime Minister of provoking the PPSA to continue the strike, thereby ruining the very conference that he now implored Bruce to help facilitate. The Premier, who had spent most of his adult life in the midst of industrial and parliamentary politics, was too experienced to believe genuinely that such facile entreaties would bear fruit.

Nonetheless, Hogan persevered. On 24 September, shipowners informed the WWF that they had applied to the Arbitration Court to suspend the Beeby Award in those ports still on strike.⁴⁷ The application was subsequently granted. Shipowners also expressly told the Federation that the mere consideration of a conference was now conditional upon its acceptance of both the Beeby Award *and* the TWA.⁴⁸ Still, Hogan applauded the Maritime Conference's contradictory order to obey the Beeby Award but to refuse to work under the TWA. This policy, of course, effectively precluded any possible meeting between the Federation and shipowners. Nevertheless, the Premier praised the unionists for their 'wise decision.'⁴⁹ Moreover, he again met with shipowners on 26 September, and was once more informed that the mere contemplation of a future conference was contingent upon the Federation acceding to the TWA.⁵⁰ Hogan appeared to be expending a lot of movement without actually going anywhere.

The Premier persisted in attempting to run a marathon down a cul-de-sac. He postponed the introduction of his budget on 26 September, in order to focus on the escalating strike situation. On 28 September, Hogan mediated a meeting between leaders of the ACTU and the Commonwealth Attorney-General, John Latham. Latham was the principle framer of the TWA. He had a reputation for being cold and staid, with a rigidly legalistic mind. The press had dubbed him 'the disembodied brain.'⁵¹ Nonetheless, Hogan beseeched Latham to withhold the issuing of TWA licenses for a few more days, so that the Premier and the Maritime Conference could continue their efforts to get the rebel branches back to work.⁵² The licences were to be issued the following day, yet the Conference had still not altered its standstill policy, refusing to embrace either capitulation or extension. In effect, Hogan was

⁴⁷ *Argus*, 25 September 1928, p.7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Age*, 25 September 1928, p.11.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 September 1928, p.9.

⁵¹ Edwards, p.69.

⁵² *Age*, 29 September 1928, p.23.

asking Latham, the author of the TWA, to suspend the pivotal feature of his own legislation. Moreover, the 'disembodied brain' was requested to do this in the midst of an election campaign. In return, Hogan was offering a concession that had already been attempted by wharfies and rejected by shipowners on 25 September, when the main rebel branches offered for work under the Beeby Award. After conferring with shipowners, Latham unsurprisingly rejected Hogan's entreaty.⁵³ The Premier and the Maritime Conference were still mired in static. But importantly for Hogan, delegates were still unwilling to pursue the path of extension. The Premier was maintaining the image of an engaged statesman. On the eve of the TWA becoming operational, he stated: 'I earnestly appeal to the waterside workers, the shipowners, and Federal Ministry to settle this industrial dispute at once, so that it will not extend and inflict further harm on the rest of the community.'⁵⁴

It is important to note that Hogan did not need to expressly advocate temporary acceptance of the TWA as a means of ending the strike. There were already militating factors and personalities aiding his efforts to prevent escalation. Firstly, the WWF COM was refusing to order all branches to come out on strike as a prelude to seeking solidarity action from other unions. Furthermore, the mass use of volunteer labour was not only a punitive incentive for rebel wharfies to resume work, it was also a compelling reminder to other unionists of what might be in store for them if they too went on strike at a time of high unemployment. As the Maritime Conference procrastinated, the number of volunteers only increased, and the likelihood of extension further receded. By 1 October, Port Adelaide wharfies decided to accept the TWA. They could no longer wait for solidarity action while growing numbers of volunteers took their jobs.⁵⁵ However, on the same day that Port Adelaide capitulated, members of the MWLU rejoined the strike after the TWA was provocatively imposed on them.⁵⁶

Fortunately for Hogan, James Scullin was also working to contain the dispute. He attended the Maritime Conference during its closing days, and tried to influence delegates to back a motion calling for acceptance of the TWA as a prelude to fighting it in Parliament. The motion reflected the interests of both Scullin and Hogan: '...a prolongation of the present fight can only end in the sacrifice of loyal members of the industrial Labour movement,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Argus*, 1 October 1928, p.7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3 October 1928, p.7.

⁵⁶ *Age*, 1 October 1928, p.9.

and...the only way to defeat the machinations of the Bruce-Page Government is at the ballot-box...⁵⁷ Even though this motion was voted down, Scullin's influence ensured that proposals for extension of the strike were similarly rejected.⁵⁸ The goal of containment which was overtly advocated by Scullin and obliquely nurtured by Hogan was in direct contrast to the wishes of many of Melbourne's rank and file wharfies. During the final days of the Conference, the PPSA led three consecutive marches of more than 500 wharfies to the steps of Trades Hall, where delegates were urged to extend the strike.⁵⁹ The marchers also passed motions demanding that politicians be banned from partaking in the Conference, and that police be immediately removed from the wharves.⁶⁰ Despite this, the Conference adjourned on 5 October without having ordered either capitulation or escalation. Trades Hall had presided over twelve weightless days of hollow words and ineffective policy. The efforts of Scullin and Hogan had been sufficiently distracting and divisive to prevent a majority of delegates from opting for extension of the strike. Leadership of the dispute was then passed on to a Central Strike Committee, which comprised the leaders of the ACTU, the WWF COM, and representatives of the Seamen's Union and the Australian Railways Union.⁶¹

The other part of Hogan's two-pronged strategy towards the strike was to bolster law and order. The Premier was driven by more than just a civic desire to lessen unrest and violence. Increased public order was absolutely essential to his overarching desire of appeasing a loaded Parliament. The Premier's role in addressing law and order was less conspicuous than the one he played in the Maritime Conference. Hogan sought to address indirectly law enforcement issues by conferring quietly with the police force. Just as the WWF had yielded to the expanding situation by delegating responsibility to another independent body, Hogan similarly handed control of law and order to the Chief Commissioner of Police, Thomas Blamey. In doing so, Hogan was continuing his elastic strategy to avoid riling either the Opposition or the labour movement. The Premier had only just recently survived a no-confidence motion based on his supposed interference with the Chief Commissioner. If Hogan became too heavily involved in the policing of the strike, he ran the risk of inviting another challenge to his minority Government, a challenge that might be more likely to succeed in the febrile atmosphere that was now prevailing in parts of Melbourne.

⁵⁷ *Argus*, 3 October 1928, p.7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Age*, 4 October 1928, p.9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Argus*, 6 October 1928, p.19.

Furthermore, the Government was just beginning to accelerate its legislative agenda, and did not want the few remaining Parliamentary sittings of the year to be consumed with questions about the Government's handling of violent disorder. The Premier sought to make himself a small target.

On the other hand, the Labor Party had very close links with the union movement, and would need to draw on this financial and organisational strength as the Federal election wore on. The Commonwealth Government's recent legislative measures had underlined the dire necessity for Labor to have a strong presence in Canberra. Inversely, there was also the obvious danger that violence involving unionists might taint Scullin's campaign. Hogan did not want to assume an active and direct role in police affairs, which might see him closely associated with police activity involving unionists. By assuming a passive role, where he merely consulted with Blamey but did not offer instruction, Hogan was hoping that the police would quell disorder and absorb the resultant indignation of unionists. Indeed, the police were already inviting of unionists' suspicions before the strike even began.⁶² The Force was largely drawn from a pool of volunteers who had replaced striking policemen in 1923. Therefore, it could be reasonably assumed that many policemen would not have had favourable views of striking watersiders, and were possibly more inclined to take heavy-handed measures against them. Indeed, subsequent events seemed to confirm this. Furthermore, the Chief Commissioner was seen as an establishment figure. Blamey had served in the upper echelons of the military during the Great War. In 1925, he was hand-picked by a Nationalist Government for the role of Chief Commissioner.⁶³ Perhaps the Premier hoped that any potential criticism from unions about police behaviour would be directed at an apparently tendentious police force, rather than the man with a trade union history who was immersing himself in the wharfies' dire struggle. However, there were obvious dangers in giving free rein to armed men who might conceivably harbour bias.

Hogan afforded Blamey *carte blanche* to maintain law and order during the strike. The Premier would later declare that his Government had been 'entirely guided'⁶⁴ by the Chief Commissioner. Blamey, too, would later confirm this: 'The duty of the distribution of the

⁶² Lockwood, p.287.

⁶³ John Hetherington, *Blamey: Controversial Soldier. A Biography of Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey*, Canberra: The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, 1973, pp.50-51.

⁶⁴ *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

police and the protection of the public has been placed on my shoulders...'⁶⁵ Blamey's first major response to the violence was to bring 232 rural policemen to the city on 23 September.⁶⁶ The police presence on the wharves and surrounding areas was strengthened, particularly at Port Melbourne. The stevedores' habit of setting up intermittent roadblocks at different intersections near Prince's Pier meant that the police were repeatedly called upon to protect terrified volunteers. The presence of police in Port Melbourne was further augmented after the bombings. Blamey's response to these explosions was indicative of Hogan's overall approach to dealing with the sticky question of law and order. On 1 October, the Chief Commissioner sent a letter to the Premier, informing him that it may be necessary in the near future to recall retired policemen for temporary service, and that he would like the Premier's permission to do so.⁶⁷ Blamey stressed that this was merely a contingency measure, stating: 'The worst of the trouble appears to have passed...'⁶⁸ The Premier immediately granted permission. Blamey neither sought nor received instructions or advice from Hogan. Rather, the Premier simply afforded perfunctory approval to the wishes of the Chief Commissioner. Hogan was keeping the issue of law and order at arm's length.

The Premier had carefully constructed a flexible dual strategy to divert strike developments away from the parliamentary chambers in Spring Street. However, the first cracks in Hogan's plan appeared on 2 October. The Government was continuing its program of pressing ahead with crucial measures. The budget was finally handed down, after being postponed while Hogan was dangling stale bait in front of Conference delegates. Also, the first of the Government's big election promises was introduced: a Bill to establish a totalisator for regulating racecourse betting. This measure proposed to direct revenue to hospitals and charities. The Bill represented an exciting new opportunity for Victorian Labor to finally implement the kind of progressive social legislation that was the *raison d'être* of the labour movement's parliamentary wing. But the parliamentary debate on the budget and the totalisator soon tapered off into discussion of the escalating strike. Hitherto, Parliament had not mentioned a word about the waterfront trouble. Sir William McPherson prodded the Premier's law and order credentials, asking Hogan to assure the House and the public '...that everything is being done by the Government to maintain law and order.'⁶⁹ The Government

⁶⁵ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2776.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.2772-73.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2774.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 177 (1928), p.1908.

was also asked whether it was prepared to offer compensation to the victims of the bombings, and offer a reward for the apprehension of the perpetrators.⁷⁰ Hogan gave the perfunctory response: ‘...the Government has taken every precaution to ensure the preservation of peace and order.’⁷¹ Hogan added that compensation and a reward would be considered.

The conservative parties were far from satisfied with Hogan’s reticent responses. A rare joint meeting between the Nationalists and the CP, who were not in a coalition, was held the following day. It was suggested that if the Premier failed to give more definite responses in Parliament later that day, then the two parties should seriously consider challenging the Hogan administration on account of its handling of the strike.⁷² McPherson continued to probe the Government. He highlighted that on the previous day, the Maritime Conference had discussed a motion to extend the strike. In light of this development, the Government was asked what measures it had put in place to protect volunteers.⁷³ In replying, Hogan carefully deployed both parts of his binary strategy. On the question of law and order, he answered: ‘On last Saturday morning [the morning after the bombings]...I conferred with the Chief Commissioner of Police. I saw the Chief Commissioner again yesterday, and he assured me that the matter is well in hand.’⁷⁴ As for the Conference’s deliberations on extending the strike, Hogan quietly confirmed the efficacy of his strategy at Trades Hall by pointing out that the motion was submitted but never carried.⁷⁵ The House then adjourned until the following week. The swords were sheathed for the time being, but the strike had made its first intrusion into the parliamentary arena.

By the end of the Maritime Conference on 5 October, the tinder days of the All Ports Conference had receded far from view, overshadowed by the pall of exploded bombs. The Beeby Award had been eclipsed by an infinitely darker entity, one that cast a much wider shadow. Where emptiness had previously lingered on the wharves and piers, it now resided on the tables of watersiders. One thing, however, had not changed. The strike was still a repository of vastly differing agendas. It was only the expression of these various agendas that had mutated. The Premier still sought to protect his minority Government from the strike. But

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Argus*, 4 October 1928, p.8.

⁷³ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 177 (1928), p.1979.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

as the nature of the strike had grown larger, denser, and bloodier, he was forced to develop a more nuanced and rearguard response. He switched from an enabling role to a parrying role. Where he once sought to facilitate a forum in which wharfies' grievances might be ameliorated, he now channelled their grievances into a dead end, where the promise of mitigation was absent and the prospect of escalation was cornered. In developing this increasingly self-protective strategy, Hogan seemed to be responding to successive rebuffs. The Premier had repeatedly seen his efforts at denouement unthreaded by incongruous behaviour from autonomous players. His pending meeting had been jeopardised by the WWF's darting branches, including the capricious behaviour of a PPSA leader. His tenuous proposal was then completely undone by the Federal Government's provocative summoning and groundbreaking TWA. Bruce strengthened his legislative arsenal, the shipowners galvanised a favourable labour force, and the strikers hardened their physical response. The Premier then shifted to an acutely defensive policy of containment. Here, his agenda was a melting pot of stratagems at Trades Hall, contingencies at Spring Street, and containment at Bay Street. But despite all these efforts, the porous strike had seeped into the parliamentary chambers.

Chapter Three

White Flag Over Bay Street: The Strike Collapses

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The Premier's domain had been breached. The first pointed parliamentary questions had been uttered. Hogan's adroit manoeuvres in other forums had worked to a certain extent, but he was now forced to defend his Government at the coalface.

This chapter will examine two dimensions of the dispute. First, the Central Strike Committee's intensified efforts to formulate effective decisions capable of transcending the current stale policy. Second, it will focus on the Premier's attempts to simultaneously push ahead with Government policy whilst dealing with the ongoing parliamentary fallout of his role in the strike and fresh events connected with it.

After the Maritime Conference petered out on 5 October, the strike staggered on. The rebel branches that were still standing included the PPSA, MWLU, Brisbane, and certain North Queensland ports. Therefore, Melbourne was still the cockpit, with the two WWF branches being afforded solidarity action from Victorian members of the Seamen's Union. But the horizon still offered no glimpses of union brethren bearing succour, only the massed shapes of volunteer hordes, and the distracting spectre of a Federal election on 17 November.

There were now over 3000 licensed volunteers working on Melbourne's waterfront.<sup>1</sup> This blunt practical reality was Hogan's greatest assurance that extension of the strike was increasingly unlikely. Moreover, the nominal leadership of the strike, which had now carried on its flaccidity to a third-phase Central Strike Committee, was still refusing the demands of Melbourne's rank and file to extend the strike to other unions. In light of these developments, as well as the need to push ahead with legislative business, the Premier discontinued his role as brakeman at Trades Hall.

On the other hand, the law and order side of Hogan's binary strategy now demanded more focus. Although high numbers of volunteers constituted a growing deterrent against other unions joining the strike, they also made the provision of law and order increasingly difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> *Age*, 8 October 1928, p.9.

With so many men going to and from the various wharves, the police found it difficult to impose a coherent and consistent logistical plan to contain violence. Blamey had responded to the PPSA's roadblocks by shuttling certain groups of volunteers to and from Port Melbourne via barges.<sup>2</sup> However, this route back to the volunteer compound in the city took longer than catching a train from Port Melbourne station. Impatient volunteers who disregarded these strengthened police provisions found themselves under attack in the 'lion's den' of Port Melbourne. On 6 October, the Chief Commissioner updated the Premier on police activities, including the logistical difficulties of containing disorder, and the ongoing investigations into the bombings.<sup>3</sup> Despite a heavy police presence in the waterside suburbs, investigators were still finding it difficult to cultivate leads, especially amongst the reticent inhabitants of Port Melbourne. Three days after meeting with Blamey, Hogan announced in Parliament that his Government was offering a £250 reward for apprehension of the bombers.<sup>4</sup> The Opposition had specifically asked about this measure a few days earlier. Hogan now endeavoured to sate their demands. The strike did not need to escalate into a State-wide stoppage in order for the bristling Opposition to seriously threaten the Government. A no-confidence motion had previously been attempted amidst a much calmer public atmosphere. Continued violence on the streets of Melbourne was a more than ample pretext for stalling or even felling the Government. In light of this threat, Hogan strengthened his credentials on law and order.

Meanwhile, the patience of the rebel branches was dwindling down to the bone. On 7 October, the PPSA, MWLU, and Brisbane pleaded with the Central Strike Committee to extend the strike.<sup>5</sup> The PPSA, characteristically, went a step further. The stevedores threatened that if the Committee did not decree a black ban on goods handled by volunteers, then the WWF's leading branch would secede from the union.<sup>6</sup> The titular leaders of the dispute were forced to seek a way out of the mire into which they had been sinking since the beginning of the Maritime Conference. On 8 October, the Committee requested the Carters' & Drivers' Union to refrain from handling black cargo at Victoria Dock, as a prelude to further action from other unions involved in the maritime industry. But the carters and drivers refused, pointing out that volunteers would simply step in, carry out their tasks, and possibly

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<sup>2</sup> *Argus*, 28 September 1928, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Age*, 8 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>4</sup> *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 177 (1928), p. 2091.

<sup>5</sup> *Age*, 9 October 1928, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> *Argus*, 9 October 1928, p.7.

usurp their jobs.<sup>7</sup> Carters and drivers were not willing to risk long term unemployment or invite the wrath of the TWA for the sake of a belated and ineffectual stoppage, especially when WWF branches were themselves handling tainted cargo. In response, the Committee did not push the issue. No further attempts were made to extend the strike. Indeed, it was likely that this tentative and fleeting change of policy was merely intended to appease the militant branches, particularly the crucified PPSA. Capitulation would be easier to sell if its inverse option had been seemingly pursued and proven untenable.

The fears of carters and drivers were probably representative of many other unions. Most trade union delegates at the Maritime Conference had shrunk from calling for extension, and the Central Strike Committee had only half-heartedly done so under coercion. The strike had been ossifying for almost a month, and the time had now come for something to break. Either the Committee or the rebel branches had to force a change. Frank Anstey, a Labor MHR, asserted that a retreat was the only way for wharfies to salvage some kind of footing on which to base their bleak future in the industry: 'It is worse than madness for men to strike when there are other men driven by force of hunger to take their place...My advice to the Waterside Workers' Federation is – get back to work now and make it lively on the job for the volunteers.'<sup>8</sup> The Committee confirmed the parlous state of the strike by setting up a distress fund for wharfies and their families. The list of donors highlighted that the waterside trouble had captured the close attention of various powerful players, including James Scullin, John Wren, L.V. Lukin, and Hogan's Chief Secretary, George Prendergast.<sup>9</sup> The Premier, however, did not make a contribution. For Hogan, the strike had beguiled the unwanted attention of one particularly pernicious personality. Sir William McPherson, watchful as ever, donated £2 to the struggling wharfies, perhaps in gratitude for enhancing his career prospects.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the strike appeared to be in terminal decline, Melbourne's rank and file refused to go gently into that good night. During the evening of 8 October, the jagged sound of explosions again pierced the Melbourne sky. A boarding house in West Melbourne containing Italian volunteers was bombed, though no serious injuries were sustained.<sup>11</sup> On the following afternoon, further events demonstrated that the waterfront trouble was still highly

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<sup>7</sup> *Age*, 11 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> *Argus*, 3 October 1928, p.7.

<sup>9</sup> NBAC, WWF, T62/36/10, List of donors to distress fund, 14 June 1929.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Argus*, 10 October 1928, p.7.

visible and relevant to the Victorian public. The PPSA led a rank and file rally of seamen and wharf labourers through the city streets from Trades Hall to the banks of the Yarra, where the Committee was again called upon to extend the strike.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, police at Russell Street received information that further bomb attacks were going to be made that evening. The purported targets were the special trains conveying volunteers on the Port Melbourne railway line. Police scoured the tracks, and services along that line were duly suspended from 9:30 p.m. till 11:10 p.m., but the attacks never eventuated.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, one of Victoria's vital logistical conduits had been paralysed for nearly two hours. Paradoxically, it seemed that as the strikers' prospects of victory waned, the public disorder connected with the dispute increased, leaving the Premier with yet more loaded questions to answer.

The industrial apex of the strike appeared to have passed, yet its parliamentary fallout was only just beginning to descend on Spring Street. The maritime industry was up and running again, but the same could not be said for Hogan's legislative program. On 9 October, the Legislative Council again rejected the Sheep Stamp Duty Bill, which Hogan had reconfigured after it was previously snubbed by the upper House.<sup>14</sup> The same chamber also postponed consideration of one of the Government's important social measures, a Bill to aid unemployed workers.<sup>15</sup> Still, the Premier persevered. If he was to implement more of his election platform this year, he had only two months left to do so. A Bill to set up a ministry of transport was introduced.<sup>16</sup> The Opposition, however, wanted to talk about the Premier's efforts to deal with the bombings. Hogan's announcement of a £250 reward failed to satisfy their curiosity. Instead, McPherson probed further, seizing on press reports that stated Hogan had rejected a reciprocal reward offered by the Prime Minister in a recent letter.<sup>17</sup> In response, the Premier stuck to his established plan to remain free from entanglement in police affairs. He carefully stated: '...I forwarded that letter to the Chief Secretary [the minister responsible for the police] for his consideration and for the consideration of the Police Department, and requested a report.'<sup>18</sup> Hogan continued, emphasising a non-partisan position: '...as soon as I receive a report I will communicate with the Prime Minister.'<sup>19</sup> McPherson elaborated on his

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<sup>12</sup> *Labor Call*, 11 October 1928, p.6.

<sup>13</sup> *Argus*, 10 October 1928, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> *Age*, 10 October 1928, p.10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Argus*, 11 October 1928, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 177 (1928), Melbourne: John Ferris, p.2164.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

parliamentary line of attack by issuing a press statement contending that Hogan should accept the Prime Minister's offer because it would strengthen the legal writ of the TWA.<sup>20</sup> The inference of this statement, along with the tenor of his questions in Parliament, suggested to the public that the Government was soft on law and order. The Opposition was beginning to complement its usual parliamentary obstructionism with strike-related sorties designed to distract, impugn, and slow the Government.

As the strike became more prominent in Parliament, decisive moves were finally being made by the union movement to end it. The immediate and embryonic effects of the upheaval were eviscerating the Melbourne branches. There were more than 3800 volunteers on Melbourne's waterfront,<sup>21</sup> and shipowners had already commenced plans to set up a permanent labour bureau.<sup>22</sup> Distress amongst the families of watersiders was becoming increasingly acute. A Catholic school in Port Melbourne was compelled to open a soup kitchen for its hungry pupils.<sup>23</sup> Something had to staunch the haemorrhaging. Extension had already been attempted. Capitulation now seemed to be the only option. On 11 October, the Central Strike Committee ordered the rebel branches to take out licences under the TWA, adding that the union movement would challenge the constitutional validity of this legislation in the High Court.<sup>24</sup> This was part of the legal and parliamentary path that Scullin had overtly advocated at the Maritime Conference. But it was starkly at odds with the WWF's traditional reliance upon direct action, which was on current, glaring display by the indignant rebel branches. As the TWA shackled the Federation and menaced the wider trade union movement, rebel wharfies were still clinging to their weapon of choice, and imploring other unionists to wield it too. The PPSA, MWLU, and Brisbane spurned the call to capitulate, and revoiced their incantation of extension.<sup>25</sup> Their mantra again fell on deaf ears.

On the night of 12 October, the bombs spoke again. The target this time was a volunteer residence in West Brunswick.<sup>26</sup> Once again, though, no serious injuries were inflicted. This was now the fourth bomb attack that Melbourne had witnessed. The union movement and the Premier had each done their part to prevent industrial extension of the strike, but in the face of

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<sup>20</sup> *Argus*, 12 October 1928, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> *Age*, 12 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>22</sup> *Argus*, 9 October 1928, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> *Age*, 12 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 October 1928, p.21.

<sup>26</sup> *Argus*, 15 October 1928, p.8.

such desperate action from other concerned parties, they appeared almost powerless to prevent its physical escalation.

The thorn in Hogan's side was sinking deeper and deeper. Established questions required further attention, and awkward new developments emanated from unexpected quarters. Just hours before the fourth bombing, Blamey met with Hogan to discuss the ongoing search for the increasingly brazen perpetrators. The Premier was urged to double the reward to £500. In accordance with Hogan's complaisant policy on police matters, this request was immediately granted.<sup>27</sup> Hogan was paying close attention to law and order affairs because he knew that the Opposition was doing exactly the same. However, Hogan's parliamentary comrades were also keeping a close watch on strike developments. Labor members in the House had hitherto refrained from initiating debate on the waterside trouble, no doubt because they did not want to hand ammunition to the opposite side of the chamber. But now that it was being mentioned more frequently in Parliament, and in a generally pejorative way, some Labor men felt compelled to go into bat for their working class constituents. J.L. Murphy, the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Port Melbourne, echoed the grievances of waterside families when he pointed out that shipowners, the Arbitration Court, the Federal Government, and volunteers were systematically dismantling workplace conditions that had been won by successive generations of wharfies. He reminded the House that the ongoing strike was driven by deep-rooted iniquities, such as losing the single pick-up that had existed since 1912. He declared: '...the men have fought year after year in an attempt to obtain better treatment.'<sup>28</sup> Similarly, J.J. Holland, the member for Flemington, felt it was necessary to air the wharfies' point of view. He had taken the time to inspect the quality of work being done by volunteers. He was appalled by their dangerous incompetence. On 11 October, he placed the Premier in an awkward spot when he stated: 'I trust that the Government will consider the question of protecting the lives of these unfortunate fellows by removing them from the wharves and work which they are totally unfitted to perform.'<sup>29</sup> The Premier did not respond, even though Holland's assertion about the hazardous ineptitude of volunteers was rather valid. Two of these men had already been crushed to death by poorly-loaded slings.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in the aftermath of the strike, BHP, a company not noted for its love of unionism, insisted on the use of Federation men because volunteers were too slow, too destructive, and too dangerous. The

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<sup>27</sup> *Age*, 13 October 1928, p.22.

<sup>28</sup> *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 177 (1928), p.2371.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2211.

<sup>30</sup> *Age*, 5 October 1928, p.10.

company was repeatedly forking out costs for the repair of broken equipment, as well as insurance pay-outs for damaged goods and frequently injured volunteers.<sup>31</sup> However, Hogan was not eager to risk heightened Opposition attacks for the sake of helping wharfies to get their jobs back. Rather, his priority was to hang on to his own. Nonetheless, dissidents had drawn the Premier's attention to the plight of the very Laborite constituents who had helped to make his career possible.

Hogan, it will be recalled, had spent much time during the Maritime Conference in appealing to the Federal Government to facilitate an end to the strike. The Premier had done his best to appear sincere in these efforts, in the hope that such an alternative path would keep delegates from opting for extension. However, now that industrial extension of the strike appeared to be safely beyond the bounds of possibility, Hogan unlatched his true feelings. Whilst campaigning alongside Labor candidates for the upcoming Federal election, the Premier stated that 'mysterious factors'<sup>32</sup> were prolonging the strike in order to hinder Labor's chances at the polls. He alluded that the Federal Government was using *agents provocateurs*. In making these tacit accusations, it seemed that the Premier was motivated by personal pride and party loyalty. Perhaps he was trying to provide an explanation as to why his seemingly successful intervention during the All Ports Conference had ended in failure. On the other hand, Hogan was a Labor man, and was no doubt trying to lend a hand in Scullin's crusade to end twelve years of conservative rule.

The Victorian Nationalists pounced on these revelations, utilising them in their ongoing campaign to stall Government business. Additionally, like Hogan, they were keen to aid their Federal colleagues. On 18 October, during what was supposed to be a debate on the budget, the Opposition demanded that Hogan fully explain what he meant by 'mysterious factors.'<sup>33</sup> The Premier stated that the Federal Government had undone his pending meeting with shipowners by prosecuting the leaders of the MWLU for incitement to strike, even though these men had voted to end the strike and had successfully put their men back to work.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Hogan explained, two "communist" trade union officials who had openly urged continuance of the strike were never prosecuted. The officials in question were Charles O'Neill of the Seamen's Union and J. S. "Jock" Garden of the ACTU. Hogan suspected that

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<sup>31</sup> Lockwood, p.298-300.

<sup>32</sup> *Argus*, 15 October 1928, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.177 (1928), p.2362.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2361-63.

Bruce, the inveterate arsonist and fireman, had ruined his salutary efforts through expedient electioneering. He posited an immunity deal between Bruce and the two unionists, declaring: ‘Garden and O’Neill...have been allowed by the Commonwealth Government to go unscathed. That is the mysterious influence.’<sup>35</sup> The Nationalists revelled in this opportunity for red scare rhetoric. They accused the Victorian Government of being pulled and swayed by red puppet masters.<sup>36</sup> The Premier felt compelled to stop this worn line of calumny, lest it gather momentum. He offered his stern opinion on communists and their ideals: ‘Their object is to prove that constitutional action is useless...They hope by that means to drive the working people into a mad gamble – to embark upon a revolution. I am opposed to that absolutely...’<sup>37</sup> Such parliamentary exchanges were stark evidence that Hogan’s parliamentary agenda was straying off course. A debate on the budget, which had been before Parliament for sixteen days now, had degenerated to a point where the Premier was compelled to declare his abhorrence of revolution. All this was playing out while the Government’s legislative measures were being obstructed, and its big election promises, such as electoral redistribution and a Greater Melbourne Bill, remained wrapped and gathering dust on the shelf. Indeed, the *Age* criticised the Government for ‘...sending out a procession of weaklings while holding back its legislative giants.’<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Burnett Gray, a Liberal supporter of electoral redistribution, was becoming impatient at the Government’s reluctance to bring in its pre-eminent proposal. On 11 October, he asked the Premier: ‘Where is this most important piece of legislation about which we have heard so much?’<sup>39</sup> Albert Dunstan, the leader of the CPP, interjected: ‘There might be a chance to bring down the Government upon it.’<sup>40</sup> In light of the Opposition’s ability to hinder legislation, coupled with its increasingly sticky questions about Hogan’s role in the strike, it seems plausible to suggest that the Government was fearful of placing precious offerings on the parliamentary anvil at a time when Melbourne was playing host to bombings, transport stoppages, and soup kitchens. The strike was spluttering to an ignominious finale, yet the Government was mired in its parliamentary fallout, and was still no nearer to implementing its ‘legislative giants.’

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2362.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2357-61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2365.

<sup>38</sup> *Age*, 17 October 1928, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 October 1928, p.8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

As the Premier ducked and weaved at Spring Street, Melbourne wharfies finally bowed to the sheer enormity of their predicament, and the impossibility of their hopes. They had come to learn that solidarity was not forever at all, that it was highly amenable to time, particularly a time of high unemployment and high political fevers. On 17 October, members of the MWLU gathered at the aptly-named Temperance Hall in Russell Street, where they begrudgingly agreed to work under the TWA.<sup>41</sup> Brisbane wharfies and Victorian seamen duly ended their stoppages too. The stevedores of Port Phillip, with a red standard fluttering above their Bay Street headquarters bearing the rubric “No Surrender,” defiantly clung to that ethos for one more day. The end of the strike was confirmed when a tattered white flag, flying at half-mast, cast its bitter shadow over Bay Street.<sup>42</sup>

The recriminations now began in earnest. The Victorian branch of the Seamen’s Union issued an oblique denunciation of the Victorian Premier and Scullin, stating that it ‘...appreciates the action of those waterside workers who fought against the Beeby Award, and the Transport Workers’ Act, and strongly condemns the action of those Labor politicians and trade union officials who sabotaged the fight throughout.’<sup>43</sup> Charles O’Neill, whom the Premier had accused of being in bed with Bruce, was more explicit in his condemnation of Hogan’s role. He asserted that the Premier ‘...appeared to be more concerned with the political position than the fate of the strikers...the watersiders had to be sacrificed for political reasons.’<sup>44</sup> Thus, the industrial component of Hogan’s binary strategy had been cited and condemned for contributing to the crushing failure of the strike. As for the other part of the Premier’s plan, his ongoing efforts to deal with law and order also came in for criticism. The wives of Port Phillip stevedores convened a meeting of incensed local women, and forwarded a motion to the Premier demanding that he ‘...immediately withdraw all police from the district, as they tramp up and down all night flashing their torches in windows, frightening the children and setting the dogs howling.’<sup>45</sup> This condemnation of the Premier was not only notable because it came from a public meeting of women, but also because it emanated from a Labor Party stronghold. In fact, at the upcoming Federal election, the Nationalists were planning to contest every seat held by Labor, except for Melbourne Ports.<sup>46</sup> The women of

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<sup>41</sup> *Herald*, 17 October 1928, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Argus*, 20 October 1928, p.19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 October 1928, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> *Age*, 20 October 1928, p.21.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 October 1928, p.9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 September 1928, p.9.

Port Melbourne felt that a Labor Premier should be doing more to aid the very people who constituted the foundation of politicians like himself. Indeed, some of Hogan's own colleagues had voiced similar grievances in Parliament. Furthermore, elements of the trade union movement had basically accused Hogan of expedient perfidy. Labor was still in office at Spring Street, but it was no longer in high esteem in corners of Trades Hall and along Bay Street.

On paper, the trajectory of the strike had tapered off after the end of the Maritime Conference, proceeding on its downbound journey until, finally, it crashed heavily while other unionists averted their eyes. But the rhythm of physical and parliamentary events connected with the strike had increased. As the rebel wharfies slid closer towards TWA licences, bombs continued to explode. As the press spoke less and less about industrial paralysis, parliamentarians spoke more frequently about explosions, monetary rewards, *agents provocateurs*, aggrieved strikers, and revolution. The Opposition had taken strike-related incidents from outside Parliament, such as Bruce's offer of a reward and the Premier's comments about 'mysterious influences,' and transplanted them onto their parliamentary agenda. Here, their established plan to block, retard, denigrate, and distract the Government was flourishing as the strike provided them with new rhetorical fodder and bait. The Premier sought to keep pace with current parliamentary attacks and pre-empt new ones by meeting more frequently with Blamey, and acceding to his extended requests. Hogan was corralled into spending precious parliamentary time defending his law and order credentials, while legislative measures languished. Moreover, his political credentials were called into question by his own chargers, as well as trade unionists and grassroots Labor people, who suggested that the Premier's office at Spring Street had become a matrix of amnesia. Hogan's role in the strike attracted attacks from the opposite side of the chamber, his own side of the chamber, Trades Hall, and Bay Street. From one side, he was accused of lacking fortitude on law and order. From other directions, he was accused of abandoning a granite foundation built throughout the past, for the chance to continue tiptoeing into tomorrow on shifting sands. His personal history as a victorious striker must have seemed like an estranged memory. The wharfies had lost their battle over the wharves and piers. The Premier's fight for his domain was only just beginning.

## Chapter Four

### **White Flag Over Spring Street: The Government Collapses**

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In a strictly nominal sense, the strike was over. The wharfies now began a bitter new struggle to eke employment, dignity, and organisational subsistence from a hostile industrial environment. The gaunt and sallowed faces of waterside families now held their desperate daily countenance in the tenuous hope that fathers or brothers might chance some work amidst the hordes of volunteers. In light of such personal stakes, the inertia of the strike was bound to carry in its train new friction and renewed violence. However, the residual theme of the porous strike remained that autonomous players would seek their own advantage from events.

This chapter shall focus on the Victorian Premier's attempts to bed down the new waterfront scene, so as to make unprecedented steps in his legislative program. Particular attention will be paid to growing feelings of disillusionment with Hogan amongst unionists and the people of Port Melbourne.

Shipowners, wharfies, and the Premier each sought to lay down their own favourable foundations in the post-strike epoch. On 20 October, the day after the strike finished, shipowners established an organisation for volunteers, known as the Permanent & Casual Wharf Labourers' Union (P & C).¹ Members of this "union" were pledged to abstain from all forms of industrial action, and no WWF men were permitted to join.² Employers also sought to galvanise a favourable future via the Arbitration Court. Justice George Dethridge granted their requests for alterations to the Beeby Award, including suspension of the Federation's preference of employment, and abolition of a clause requiring that labour be picked-up from WWF premises.³ For twenty years, PPSA members had revelled in the daily experience of being selected for work from the comfort of their Bay Street headquarters.⁴ From now on, though, they would have to wait for engagement on an open tract of land in between Prince's and Station Piers. In addition to these jagged pills, the shipowners sought to further strengthen their control over the composition of the workforce by imposing a permit system for

¹ *Age*, 22 October 1928, p.10.

² *Argus*, 22 October 1928, p.8.

³ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴ NBAC. WWF, T62/51/6, Arbitration Court affidavit from Dr. Harley Grover, 11 December 1928.

employment.⁵ Entry to the compound and piers at Victoria Dock was conditional upon all wharfies, both Federation members and P & C members, presenting colour-coded cards, which were pink for unionists and brown for non-unionists.⁶ It would now be easier for employers to identify and punish those who had gone on strike. These developments left no doubt that shipowners were putting flesh on their stated intention to go ‘right on to the end.’

With over 4000 volunteers working under police protection,⁷ shipowners were in a leveraged position to deny unionists employment, and inflict long-term damage on the financial and organisational health of waterfront unionism. During the fortnight immediately following the end of the strike, jobs were allocated to volunteers and unionists at an average ratio of four to one.⁸ More specifically, it appeared that shipowners and foremen were twisting the knife into the PPSA. Under the permit system, which was only initiated in Melbourne, police carried out shipowners’ instructions to bar the stevedores from entering the compound at Victoria Dock.⁹ The PPSA was therefore denied the opportunity to seek employment at one of the stipulated pick-up sites under the Beeby Award. Dick Cranny, the General Secretary of the PPSA, was furious that police and shipowners could engage in such partisan collusion under the auspices of a Labor Premier. He lambasted Hogan’s established strategy to give free reign to a tendentious police force: ‘...to my mind the Hogan Government is lending its support to the policy. The State police are being used to help in breaking down the waterside workers’ conditions...and everything points to the fact that the Hogan Government is in league with the Federal Government in the fight.’¹⁰

In addition to the effective lockout on the Yarra wharves, when minimal employment was offered to the stevedores at Port Melbourne, it was not their traditional and customary type of work, which centred upon stowing cargo aboard the ships. Rather, they were offered unfamiliar work on the wharves, carting and storing cargo.¹¹ This wharveside labour was the traditional domain of the MWLU, and was subject to a reciprocal and well-known understanding between the wharf labourers and the stevedores, whereby each branch refrained

⁵ Ibid., Arbitration Court affidavit from Percy Salvada, 26 October 1928.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Age*, 22 October 1928, p.9.

⁸ Ibid., 24 October 1928, p.12; 25 October, p.10; 27 October, p.22; 2 November, p.10.

⁹ NBAC, WWF, T62/51/6, Arbitration Court affidavit from Percy Salvada, 26 October 1928.

¹⁰ *Age*, 24 October 1928, p.12.

¹¹ Ibid., 25 October 1928, p.10.

from encroaching upon the other's special craft.¹² Thus, even though wharfies had hungry mouths to feed, both branches refused to bow to a vindictive measure that was designed to belittle their sense of artisanship. The stevedores also refused to attend the new pick-up site. At a meeting with the Premier, they complained that heavy numbers of police were harassing and intimidating them as they waited on the barren beachfront plain.¹³ Hogan, though, refused to interfere with the Chief Commissioner. Enmity, frustration and self-preservation were each as fierce as ever in the post-strike milieu.

The Premier, meanwhile, continued to reinforce his law and order credentials by adapting his strategy to the pace and course of events. Hogan sought to minimise new industrial friction that could lead to fresh violence, in the hope that Government business could push ahead without being severely impeded by Opposition attacks based on wharf-related incidents. Increased tranquillity was especially important from this time on, as the Government began formulating its controversial legislative centrepiece, the Redistribution of Seats Bill. Whilst Cabinet was piecing together this Bill in the days following the end of the strike, Hogan was also busy holding several meetings with shipowners, the PPSA,¹⁴ and the Chief Commissioner.¹⁵ Federation men were reacting violently to the discrimination they encountered when seeking employment. On 26 October, more than 500 wharfies tried to force their way into the compound at Victoria Dock, but were driven back by police.¹⁶ On the following night, a fifth bombing attack occurred in West Melbourne.¹⁷ Despite such incidents, the Chief Commissioner deemed the situation to be sufficiently containable to allow him to return the rural constables that had been sent to Melbourne as reinforcements.¹⁸ However, Blamey recommended that Hogan double the reward for the bombers to £1000. His request was immediately granted.¹⁹ This was the second time in three weeks that the Premier had instantly acquiesced to Blamey's wishes. With a contentious piece of legislation on its way to Spring Street, Hogan was seeking to pre-empt tangential Parliamentary criticism by affording the Chief Commissioner every license to pursue public order.

¹² Redmond, p.42.

¹³ *Age*, 30 October 1928, p.10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 October 1928, p.13.

¹⁵ *Argus*, 30 October 1928, p.7.

¹⁶ *Age*, 27 October 1928, p.22.

¹⁷ *Argus*, 29 October 1928, p.7.

¹⁸ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2773.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2564.

The Premier was not content in merely addressing the symptoms of violence. He also sought to address its underlying causes. Hogan judged that the frustration and desperation which apparently fuelled disorder would only begin to subside once wharfies were obtaining meaningful employment. However, the first step towards getting work and feeding hungry children was for the stevedores to start attending the new pick-up site. The Arbitration Court had ordered the alteration at the behest of shipowners, but Hogan did not try to persuade leveraged employers to restore previous pick-up arrangements in the interests of industrial harmony. Instead, he helped to confirm, entrench, and perpetuate this invidious change by providing crown land in the stipulated area.²⁰ In a facile attempt to ease wharfies' resentment and coax them into the new status quo, a tin hut was hastily erected to provide them with shelter from the elements. This hut subsequently blew over in strong winds, and was duly torched by the insulted stevedores.²¹

Hogan's decision to help facilitate the new pick-up site suggested that he had learnt cold lessons from his experiences during the strike. His earlier attempts to consummate decisive industrial outcomes, such as a pending meeting between shipowners and the WWF, were continually blocked by other interested parties. When he was again confronted with the question of whether or not to seek the alteration of legally constituted working conditions, he instead erred on the side of Realpolitik, and merely sought to reinforce the legal bounds set by the Arbitration Court. In doing so, he was yielding to the national power plays that informed the strike and now seemed to control the fate of the waterfront. The Beeby Award and the TWA were safeguarded by the shipowners, the Commonwealth Government, and the Arbitration Court. The *Workers' Weekly*, a communist publication hostile to the Premier, conceded that Hogan's industrial policy was essentially hostage to systemic and systematic forces: 'The Hogan Government is impotent to help the stevedores because the existing laws are completely on the side of the shipowners and all Hogan can do is to whimper to the workers about the sanctity of law and order.'²² Although the Premier was apparently powerless to abrogate such legal edicts as the new pick-up site, he drew the ire of wharfies by failing to mitigate its worst features, including his refusal to lessen police provocation, and his dubious effort to provide shelter.

²⁰ *Age*, 29 October 1928, p.10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

²² *Workers' Weekly*, 9 November 1928, p.1.

Regardless of the Premier's motives for facilitating the new pick-up site, the wharfies and denizens of Port Melbourne saw the limp hand of craven collusion. They immortalised their disillusionment by dubbing the barren and windswept area "Hogan's Flat." The local Medical Officer described the locale as '...an offence against the principles of both sanitation and common decency...'²³ Jim Nagel, a local stevedore, recalled the ignominy of seeking employment at the new site: 'It was freezing, the worst conditions you could ever put men in to look for a job. We were just like cattle being driven up to stand in front of the foreman.'²⁴ Port Melbourne, a solid Labor area, had longed to see someone from its own side settle in at Spring Street, forwarding the interests of Bay Street and similar working class communities. Now that Hogan was the longest serving Labor Premier in Victorian history, the wharfies who had aided his journey to those august surrounds were being repaid with incessant night-time visits from police, humiliating working conditions, and a jerry-built hut.

The recent actions of the Premier no doubt made Melbourne wharfies feel that their ballot papers had diminished in value. In a literal sense, they were absolutely correct. Under the current electoral scheme, which was introduced by the previous Nationalist and CP Government, 100 metropolitan votes for the Legislative Assembly carried the same value as 47 rural ones.²⁵ Demographic change had further tipped the scales to a ratio of 100 to 45.²⁶ At the 1927 State election, Hogan had steadfastly committed his party to reforming what he called an 'outrage on democracy.'²⁷ However, this contentious issue was fraught with potential danger, considering it had played a prominent part in the downfall of Governments in 1924 and 1927. Although the CP, CPP, and most Nationalists were bitterly opposed to a dilution of rural clout, Hogan was nevertheless spurred by the likely support of the two Liberals, and possibly a handful of Nationalists who were known supporters of electoral reform. The central plank of Hogan's triumphant election platform had lain dormant for eighteen months, and with the last parliamentary session of the year approaching its close, and the Chief Commissioner signalling that law and order was under control, it was time for Victorian Labor to start building its legacy.

²³ NBAC, WWF, T62/51/6, Arbitration Court affidavit from Dr. Harley Grover, 11 December 1928.

²⁴ Lowenstein & Hills, p.67.

²⁵ Wright, p.174.

²⁶ *Age*, 1 November 1928, p.8.

²⁷ Hogan, *The Labor Policy*, p.3.

On 30 October, the Government introduced the Redistribution of Seats Bill. As suspected, the CP and CPP were wholeheartedly against the measure, while certain Nationalists sought to draw back the extent of reform. Hogan was once again forced to compromise on key legislation. He had intended to cut the number of rural seats from thirty-nine to thirty-three, whilst increasing the total of urban seats from twenty-six to thirty-two. But in order to garner the pivotal support of three Nationalists and an Independent, the Premier was compelled to settle for thirty-four country electorates and thirty-one metropolitan electorates.²⁸ Nevertheless, Hogan's core legislative measure was nudged through Introduction and First Reading after Labor members were joined by three Nationalists, two Liberals, and an Independent.²⁹ The first steps had been taken to remedy an 'outrage on democracy,' and the Labor Party had issued a public reaffirmation of the progressive ideals that had informed its genesis and sustained its promise.

However, the day after Spring Street made sanguine progress, the waterfront witnessed its most seminal and sanguinary development. On the morning of 2 November, PPSA members melted away from their ashen-faced children and trudged to the new pick-up site at Hogan's Flat. But the shipowners' foreman did not even bother to show up.³⁰ Incensed at this latest dose of vindictive discrimination, the stevedores moved to nearby Port Melbourne railway station, where alighting volunteers were welcomed to the lion's den with rigid blows from pallid fists. The picketers pursued the volunteers as they fled across Hogan's Flat to the apparent haven of Prince's Pier. The entrance of the pier was guarded by a cordon of 50-odd policemen, but some of the stevedores managed to break through and continue chasing the volunteers.³¹ This advance body of wharfies was met forcefully with police batons, and the stevedores went toe to toe with Victoria's finest, while the volunteers sought refuge on the ships or in the water. The pier soon became '...a patchwork of blood and injured stevedores.'³² One PPSA official, James Morris, who was not involved in the fight, quickly ascertained the asymmetry of the battle. He approached the advance body of stevedores, convinced his colleagues to cease fighting, and managed to lead them back to the entrance of the pier.³³ The worst of the trouble had apparently subsided. But the 1928 strike had so often

²⁸ *Australian Worker*, 7 November 1928, p.7.

²⁹ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2658.

³⁰ *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

³¹ Lockwood, p.284.

³² *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

³³ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), pp.2847-48.

seen chaos snatched from order, and provocation reign in the midst of better judgement. Now, as the stevedores retreated and relapsed into their bleak reality, one final twist would leave an indelible mark on the history of both Bay Street and Spring Street. Inspector Mossop, the policeman in charge that day, rushed over to James Morris, the pacifier, and attacked him with his cane.³⁴ The retreating wharfies, as well as their colleagues at the entrance of the pier, began throwing stones at Mossop and the other policemen. In response, the Inspector and his men drew their pistols, firing over one hundred bullets at the recently subdued stevedores.³⁵ Four PPSA men were wounded by gunfire.³⁶ One of the injured, Allan Whittaker, died a few months later, as a result of the bullet that entered through the rear of his neck and exited through his mouth.³⁷ Indeed, all of the injured stevedores sustained bullet wounds to the rear of the body.³⁸ The *carte blanche* that Hogan had afforded to Blamey's police force was dripping red.

The shootings marked the failure of Hogan's strategy to deal with law and order by means of passive delegation to the Chief Commissioner. The Premier had hoped to avoid criticism from the public and the Parliament by abstaining from direct responsibility for police matters. But the actions of partisan players had once again stymied Hogan's favoured outcome. On this occasion, though, he was not entirely blameless. The WWF, the wider union movement, and the Victorian Parliament now demanded that Hogan step out of Blamey's shadow and deliver some answers. J.L. Murphy, the MLA for Port Melbourne, facilitated a meeting between PPSA leaders and the Premier on the morning of the shooting, before the blood had even dried.³⁹ The stevedores demanded a full and fair inquiry into the day's events, emphasising that the actions of Inspector Mossop were provocative, reckless and excessive. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council also called for an inquiry, and passed the following motion: 'That this council...deplores the action of the Hogan Government in allowing the Police Commissioner a free hand to instruct the police to fire on unionists.'⁴⁰

The union movement was right to refute Hogan's pretence of impartiality. The Premier had given an unconditional imprimatur to a body of armed men that was suspected of being

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

³⁶ *Argus*, 3 November 1928, p.19.

³⁷ Lowenstein & Hills, p.64.

³⁸ Lockwood, p.292.

³⁹ *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9 November 1928, p.10.

prejudiced against strikers. As stated previously, the police force was largely made up of volunteers who had replaced striking policemen in 1923. Moreover, Blamey's anti-communist leanings were demonstrated in his links with the White Army (1920s), League of National Security (1930s) and The Association (1940s).⁴¹ The shootings, which had occurred after the high water mark of the affray had subsided, appeared to confirm this prejudice, while the nature of the stevedores' wounds suggested excessive aggression. The fatal violence on Prince's Pier did not arise as a result of abstract or aberrant conduct, unconnected from the history of the police force or recent friction between police and stevedores. Rather, it was the conclusion of a crescendo that had built-up over the weeks and months. The PPSA had protested to the Premier about abrasive police conduct at Hogan's Flat. Numerous rank and file marches during the Maritime Conference had voiced opposition to the high numbers of police at Port Melbourne. Similarly, local women had also conveyed to Hogan their indignation at night-time harassment of local households. Still, Hogan made no attempts to reduce the cumulative tension between stevedores and police by seeking to reduce heavy police numbers in Port Melbourne or confine their activity to the protection of volunteers. The stevedores' intense frustration was primarily drawn from industrial grievances, and the Premier lacked the jurisdiction to wholly remedy these. However, Hogan seemed to exacerbate industrial frustration by refusing to check the volume and conduct of police activity. Furthermore, he failed to provide adequate shelter at the new pick-up site, and did not afford humanitarian relief to hungry waterside families. The Labor MLA for Port Melbourne reminded Parliament of the distress that the stevedores were feeling on the morning of the shootings: 'They knew that their wives and children at home were in dire straits; they saw the work that was rightfully theirs being taken away from them by volunteers...'⁴² It could be said that violence breeds where desperation and provocation coalesce. There was no shortage of unmitigated desperation, frustration and provocation on the streets of Port Melbourne.

In the aftermath of the shootings, Hogan steadfastly maintained his refusal to interfere with or undermine the Chief Commissioner. 'I regret exceedingly what has taken place...'⁴³ noted the Premier, before reaffirming his faith in Blamey: 'The Commissioner of Police has had and

⁴¹ Andrew Moore, *The Right Road?: A History of Right-Wing Politics in Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.63.

⁴² *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2846.

⁴³ *Age*, 3 November 1928, p.21.

still has full and complete authority to take every precaution to prevent these outbreaks.’⁴⁴ Hogan continued to grant instant approval to Blamey’s wishes. On 3 November, the Premier acceded to a request for seventy police recruits.⁴⁵ The total number of men in the Force was thus increased to 2054, which was fifty-two more than under the previous Government.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Premier refused to initiate a public inquiry into the shootings, even after the Labor MLAs for Port Melbourne and Flemington had demanded this. Moreover, when Hogan received the police force’s own report on the events, he would not disclose its contents to the press. The Premier was still trying to keep parliamentary fodder out of the hands of his covetous opponents, but it was too late.

The bloody events on Princes Pier were too conspicuous and too sensational for the Opposition to resist challenging the Government. After all, it had previously attempted to topple Hogan at a time of comparative placidity. The current acrid atmosphere was rendered even more propitious now that the Seats Bill had prodded the ire of rural Parliamentarians, including CPP members and Independents, who held the balance of power. During the first parliamentary sitting after the shootings, the Nationalists moved a no-confidence motion against the Government. The ostensible basis of the challenge was that Hogan had failed in his duty to maintain law and order. The Nationalists accused Hogan of allowing the numerical strength of the police force to become depleted, thus making it difficult to protect the thousands of volunteers.⁴⁷ Also, it was asserted that the Premier had effectively encouraged disorder by failing to make emphatic public declarations that volunteers would be vigorously protected.⁴⁸ Despite the sanctimonious tenor of these accusations, the *Age* suspected that the Nationalists were using the veiled bait of “law and order” to entice those who were upset with the Government on account of its Seats Bill. During the intervening days between the shootings and the no-confidence motion, the Nationalists held several meetings or covens, of which the *Age* commented: ‘...no secret was made of the fact that the opposition to the redistribution of seats scheme was the real basis for the attack...’⁴⁹ Indeed, the Nationalists’ accusations had already been refuted by the State’s top policeman. Although Blamey had recalled 150 of the 232 rural policemen back to Melbourne on 3 November, he did not feel the

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Argus*, 5 November 1928, p.7.

⁴⁶ *Age*, 14 November 1928, p.11.

⁴⁷ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2739.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Age*, 6 November 1928, p.9.

need to enrol special constables.⁵⁰ Furthermore, after the recent addition of recruits, the police force was stronger than it had been when the conservatives were in office. Just hours after the shootings, Blamey assured the *Herald* that law and order was under control: ‘Although the strike position is serious, it cannot be said that a state of national emergency exists.’⁵¹ The following day, he reiterated this message, and categorically reconfirmed that he, and not Hogan, was wielding the reins of law and order: ‘The duty of the distribution of the police and the protection of the public has been placed on my shoulders, and as the ministry’s instructions to me are to use all means to maintain law and order, I am going to do so.’⁵²

The majority of MLAs seemed to agree with the Chief Commissioner’s judgement. Crucially for Hogan, his Government was absolved of wrongdoing by the leveraged minor parties and Independents, upon whom the fate of the motion rested. Burnett Gray, a Liberal, stated: ‘The case against the Government has failed so far as I am concerned. The charges are not proven.’⁵³ Albert Dunstan, the leader of the CPP, declared: ‘...I exonerate the Government from any neglect of duty in regard to the police.’⁵⁴ The no-confidence motion appeared doomed. However, the Nationalists had deliberately cultivated a malleable foundation upon which others could pursue their own interests. On 13 November, Dunstan proposed an amendment to the flagging motion, changing its basis from “law and order” to the contentious issue of electoral redistribution. The amendment read: ‘That the Government’s redistribution of seats proposals would deprive the country districts of a number of seats, the loss of which would be detrimental to rural interests...Upon this question only, the Government does not possess the confidence of the House.’⁵⁵ Thus, with the point of contention now completely reframed, Hogan’s Government was put to the sword by a convenient conglomeration of self-interested players. Expediency reigned. On the back of support from the Nationalists, the CP, the CPP, and an Independent, the new no-confidence motion passed by thirty-one votes to thirty. The affirmative column included the crucial votes of three particular Nationalists and an Independent who had voted *in favour* of the Seats Bill just two weeks earlier.⁵⁶ Political virtue had been cast aside in order to reimpose conservative

⁵⁰ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2776.

⁵¹ *Herald*, 2 November 1928, p.1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3 November 1928, p.1.

⁵³ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.178 (1928), p.2825.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2840.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2842.

⁵⁶ *Age*, 15 November 1928, p.8.

dominion at Spring Street after the intolerable aberration of a Labor Government. Events on the waterfront had yet again been appropriated for partisan use.

The “natural order” of Victorian politics was restored on 22 November, when Sir William McPherson was sworn in as Premier of a composite Government consisting of Nationalists and CP members. After the no-confidence motion, Hogan had sought to resume the fight for his domain at an early election, but the Governor rejected his request to dissolve Parliament, and he was forced to resign. Therefore, Hogan, like the rebel wharfies during the strike, was propelled by indignation to seek an extension of his battle. But when his entreaty to an autonomous player was rejected, he was compelled to raise the white flag.

Hogan gave his own final testimony to the mosaic nature of the strike, in which various Federal, State, and local bodies jostled to extract advantage or dodged to avoid disadvantage. He pinned the crux of the strike and all its repercussions on the Federal Government’s adroitly timed summonses in the aftermath of the All Ports Conference: ‘If no discordant note had been struck between the 17th and the 19th September, I am satisfied that the trouble would have been absolutely settled, so far as Victoria is concerned.’⁵⁷ Hogan also appraised the efficacy of his binary role in the strike: ‘I regarded it as my duty to try to bring about a settlement of industrial trouble in this State and to preserve law and order.’⁵⁸ He concluded: ‘Apparently, I have not succeeded in pleasing the militants on the waterside workers’ side, and I have not pleased the Leader of the Opposition. In these circumstances, I come to the conclusion that my action has been pretty nearly correct.’⁵⁹

Bay Street handed down a very different verdict. The vanguard PPSA, the hereditary lifeblood of Port Melbourne, was sliding towards oblivion. Continued discrimination in employment, compounded by the advent of the Great Depression, would see it erased from the annals of Australian history by 1930.⁶⁰ For the stevedores and their families, the last months of Victoria’s longest serving Labor Government had dimmed the light on the hill to a frail flicker. The women of Port Melbourne delivered a devastating final judgement during the no-confidence debate. From the public gallery, they bellowed their disillusionment and enunciated their nightmare:

⁵⁷ *Victoria. Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 178 (1928), p.2768.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2766.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.2769.

⁶⁰ Rechter, p.110.

We are the wives of the stevedores of Port Phillip, and our children are starving while the scabs are scabbing. Why are you bringing in this no-confidence motion? Hasn't Mr. Hogan played into your hands? Has he not allowed the workers to be shot down? What more do you want? Shooting down the workers because they are taunted by you people. Shame on the Labor Government!⁶¹

It seemed cruelly poetic that after all the Premier's travails to keep the ire of Bay Street from flooding Spring Street, the fatal clash of the twain was confirmed by the physical presence of these indignant women. The 'lion's den' was in the chamber: 'You keep quiet. You men, see you do your job properly. We elect you, and we expect you to look after the interests of the workers.'⁶²

For both the stevedores and Hogan, the tinder box of the Beeby Award sparked their mutual pyres. But both would rise again. The PPSA merged with the MWLU to form a united Melbourne branch of the WWF. After a long and bitter struggle, they eventually wore down and swallowed up the P & Cs in 1955.⁶³ As for Hogan, he regained the Premiership in December 1929, only to be expelled from the Labor Party for supporting austere financial measures that were deemed inimical to the party's progressive spirit.⁶⁴ He subsequently joined the Country Party, thus providing belated vindication to those who had long ago deemed him a traitor. In contrast to the man who inspired "Hogan's Flat," J.L. Murphy, the Labor MLA for Port Melbourne from 1917 to 1942, had a local football ground named in his honour. In a suburb that was famous (or infamous) for its football teams, this glowing dedication suggested that the events of 1928 did not completely extinguish Bay Street's faith in the Labor Party.

The Hogan Government had collapsed in circumstances that were ironically consonant with a prominent theme of the waterfront strike. The maritime scene remained a melting pot for a myriad of different agendas. Time and time again, the Premier's efforts to plug and channel the porous strike had been hindered by the contrary actions of other self-interested parties. Hogan had felt safe enough to finally bring in his legislative holy grail, only to be thwarted by unprecedented events on Prince's Pier. Inspector Mossop's bullets set in motion the various forces that had built up over many weeks or even years. The Nationalists' no-

⁶¹ Lowenstein & Hills, pp.64-65.

⁶² *Age*, 9 November 1928, p.8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1955, p.3.

⁶⁴ Peter Love, 'Elmslie, Prendergast and Hogan: Labouring against the tide,' in Strangio, Paul & Costar, Brian (eds.), *The Victorian Premiers 1856-2006*, Leichhardt, New South Wales, 2006, pp.182-83.

confidence motion was the crowning phase of their campaign of obstructionism, which was driven by an historical sense of entitlement to office. Then Dunstan's crucial amendment claimed another incumbent victim for a fatal leitmotif of Victorian politics. Just like the strike had been pushed and pulled by the touch of countless hands, the Premier's fall was brought about by a mixture of his own self-absorbed policy of minimalism, the respective experiences of policemen and wharfies, the habitual hostility of the Opposition, and one last crushing intervention from Dunstan with an axe to grind.

Conclusion

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The relationship between wharfies and the Victorian Premier in 1928 was a plaintive tale of internecine confluence. Two protagonists, apparently linked by broadly shared ideals, found themselves tethered to one another, wrenching in opposite directions, each seeking the other to give ground in his domain, so the other could move forward in his. Throughout the strike and its aftermath, the Premier's overarching priority and his intrinsic reason for action and inaction, was to safeguard the interests of the parliamentary wing of the labour movement. A corollary to this was that industrial and social gains for workers were best pursued with a legislative quill in one hand, and a ballot paper in the other. Put bluntly, Hogan saw his harried Government as the indispensable vanguard of Victorian labour, the key to a millennial future. By protecting his young Government, he believed he was essentially protecting workers. Conversely, wharfies fought in the industrial arena to defend past gains and safeguard the future with their own hands. They generated force from the ground up, and were bitterly disillusioned when it was contained, suppressed or driven downwards by the highest political office in the State.

However, interaction between the Premier's office and the waterside was never merely a two-way process. The strike was always an inherently national dispute, which drew in powerful national players: the Federal Government, the Arbitration Court, national and international shipowners, interstate WWF branches, and the wider Australian union movement. These manifold and largely inexorable forces were constant banes to the Premier and Melbourne wharfies, and would prove to be the seeds of their respective demise. To the eventual detriment of Hogan, Federal industrial laws and Federal legislation opened up beachheads for his bellicose Spring Street opponents.

The strike was sparked by a clash of national forces. Even though Hogan's initial intervention was driven by domestic parliamentary concerns, his breakthrough role at the All Ports Conference was unavoidably predicated upon Australia-wide outcomes. Here, Hogan's local agenda was subjected to its first telling interventions from self-interested parties. The WWF was splintered between acceptance and repudiation of the Beeby Award, and vacillated while the Victorian Premier's pending meeting hung in the balance. Hogan responded by lowering his scope, and working to ensure the pacification of Melbourne wharfies. Just as the

spectre of industrial paralysis was about to ascend from Victoria, the Commonwealth Government sent it downwards again, by imposing and enacting multiple doses of provocative and punitive legislation. The bounds of industrial and physical repercussions were then expanded by the ominous mobilisation of volunteer labour. The course of events in Melbourne became even more susceptible to various autonomous agendas, including Bruce's battle with Scullin, the conflicting desires of rebel wharfies and apprehensive unionists, and the watchful plotting of Victoria's Opposition.

In the aftermath of the All Ports Conference, the Premier shifted to a decidedly self-protective strategy. His binary approach to industrial affairs and law enforcement was only partially successful in the short term, and fatally inadequate in the long term. Industrial escalation was contained through Hogan's cunning role during the Maritime Conference. Paradoxically, though, maintenance of law and order was increasingly hindered by widening violence. Thus, the grasping Victorian Opposition could not beat the slackened drum of industrial paralysis, so its obstructionism took the form of parliamentary offensives based on law and order.

It was Hogan's handling of law and order, rather than industrial matters, that elicited the sharpest denunciations from the labour movement and the most cumbersome attacks from Parliament. After the strike waned and collapsed, the Premier underestimated the danger to his Government that was inherent in the brooding post-strike milieu. Although he was no doubt preoccupied with accelerating legislative business, the Premier lacked the foresight and the courage to seek a more nuanced answer to the violence. Instead, he leant on Blamey. Wharfies' residual grievances from the industrial arena did not merely wither away because the strike had nominally ended. Inversely, they were exacerbated by continued harassment, including the abrasive actions of a hostile police force. And while Hogan's goal of containing disorder was certainly made more difficult by the punitive actions of shipowners and the Arbitration Court, he failed to take ameliorative measures that were well within his jurisdiction, measures that might have lessened the likelihood of a steep surge in violence. This failure, it must be said, was not only counterproductive to Hogan's salient goal of saving his administration, it was also a craven abdication of his duty to Labor's grassroots supporters. The stevedores and denizens of Port Melbourne were not asking for the sun to be pulled down from the sky. By ending the strike, they had come to fully understand the

industrial and political goliaths reined against them. They were not beseeching the Premier to facilitate the annulment or significant alteration of Federal laws. Rather, they were pleading for “one of their own” to mitigate their frustration, to partly alleviate their chastened lives by reducing police provocation, or to at least afford them rhetorical succour drawn from the same compassionate and fraternal spirit that had engendered the Labor Party and fuelled its lustre.

Whilst the principal vicissitudes of the strike were often due to parties with a national writ, the *coup de grâce* of the Victorian Government came from a combination of local players, who sought their own respective advantage from the Premier’s failed law and order policy. Here, Spring Street’s various self-interested parties weaved a denouement from the common thread that had run throughout the strike.

The kernel of the Premier’s role in the 1928 waterfront strike was a desire to appease a loaded and precariously balanced Parliament. In pursuing this marathon task, he was continually willing to subordinate the grievances and hopes of Melbourne watersiders, who epitomised the backbone of the Labor Party. However, the Premier was never going to be able to appease the Nationalists and CP. The conservatives had blocked and challenged the Government before the Beeby Award was even handed down. Incurable obstructionism was a given, regardless of strikes, bullets, or bombs. Still, Hogan sacrificed the bedrock of Bay Street on a flimsy parliamentary altar. He did not validate the wharfies’ stand against the Beeby Award, in fact he inferred that their grievances were spurious. When his own MLAs pointed out his perfidy, he ignored them. The Premier cultivated subterfuges with regard to industrial affairs and law and order, only to be brought undone by his own self-interested, condescending and increasingly passive policy. By the end of 1928, the distance between Bay Street and Spring Street had never seemed so far.

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