TRADE UNIONISM IN AUSTRALIA
A history from flood to ebb tide

In the late 1960s Australian unionism was on the flood tide: growing in strength, industrially confident and capable of shaping the overall political climate of the nation. Forty years on, union membership and power is ebbing away despite community support for trade unionism and the continuing need for strong unions. Even the unprecedented mobilisation against WorkChoices, which defeated a government and lost the prime minister his own seat, has done little to turn the tide.

With compelling rigour, Tom Bramble explores the changing fortunes of what was once an entrenched institution. Trade Unionism in Australia charts the impact on unions of waves of economic restructuring, a succession of hostile governments and a wholesale shift in employer attitudes, as well as the failure of the unions’ own efforts to boost membership and consolidate power. Indeed, Bramble demonstrates how the tactics employed by unions since the early 1980s may have paradoxically contributed to their decline.

Ultimately this timely book traces union-led action from the workplace to the political sphere over a period of significant change, and concludes by pointing to strategies for a renewal and revival of Australian unions.

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Tom Bramble
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABCC</td>
<td>Australian Building and Construction Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABOA</td>
<td>Australian Bank Officials’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCI</td>
<td>Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACOA</td>
<td>Administrative and Clerical Officers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACSPA</td>
<td>Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEU</td>
<td>Amalgamated Engineering Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALAC</td>
<td>Australian Labor Advisory Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMC</td>
<td>Australian Manufacturing Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMIA</td>
<td>Australian Metal Industries Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMIEU</td>
<td>Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMWU</td>
<td>(before 1995) Amalgamated Metal Workers’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMWU</td>
<td>(after 1995) Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APESMA</td>
<td>Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPM</td>
<td>Associated Pulp and Paper Mills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARU</td>
<td>Australian Railways Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASE</td>
<td>Australasian Society of Engineers</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASIO</td>
<td>Australian Security Intelligence Organisation</td>
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<td>AWA</td>
<td>Australian Workplace Agreement</td>
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<td>AWU</td>
<td>Australian Workers’ Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>Business Council of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>BHP</td>
<td>Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLDC</td>
<td>Builders Labourers for Democratic Control</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Acronyms

BLF Builders Labourers’ Federation
BWIU Building Workers’ Industrial Union
CAGEO Council of Australian Government Employee Organisations
CEEP Commonwealth Employees (Employment Provisions) Act 1977
CERR Commonwealth Employees (Redeployment and Retirement) Act 1977
CFMEU Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union
CMC Council for Membership Control (AWU)
CPA Communist Party of Australia
CPA(M-L) Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)
CRA Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd
DLP Democratic Labor Party
ECCUDO Electricity Commission Combined Union Delegates Organisation
EPAC Economic Planning Advisory Council
ETU Electrical Trades Union
FCU Federated Clerks’ Union
FEDFA Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association
FIA Federated Ironworkers’ Association
GMH General Motors-Holden’s Limited
HEWRR Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements
IRB Industrial Relations Bureau
IRC Industrial Relations Commission
JIR Journal of Industrial Relations
LHMU Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union
MIM Mount Isa Mines Limited
MTEA Metal Trades Employers’ Association
MTIA Metal Trades Industry Association
MUA Maritime Union of Australia
NDA National Day of Action
NFF National Farmers’ Federation
NTEU National Tertiary Education Union
NUW National Union of Workers
OECD Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PKIU Printing and Kindred Industries Union
RAAF Royal Australian Air Force
SDA Shop Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEC</td>
<td>State Electricity Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEQEB</td>
<td>South East Queensland Electricity Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>Socialist Party of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUA</td>
<td>Seamen’s Union of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLC</td>
<td>Trades and Labor Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUTA</td>
<td>Trade Union Training Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWU</td>
<td>Transport Workers’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBEF</td>
<td>Vehicle Builders Employees’ Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSTA</td>
<td>Victorian Secondary Teachers’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIRA</td>
<td>Waterfront Industry Reform Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWF</td>
<td>Waterside Workers’ Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>YRW</td>
<td>Your Rights at Work</td>
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PREFACE

This book represents a first attempt to tell the story of trade unionism in Australia between the 1960s and 2000s in the context of the class struggle between capital and labour. It is framed within a Marxist perspective; that is, a perspective that takes as its starting point the struggle by the working class for its own liberation. My understanding of the shifting contours of this struggle is shaped not only by my own involvement since the mid 1980s, but also by discussions with many hundreds of participants. These have included unionists, employers and political activists. I would particularly like to thank my comrades in Socialist Alternative who have taught me so much and whose thinking has made a major contribution to this book.

This book has benefited greatly from comments and suggestions by Mick Armstrong, Kaye Broadbent, Diane Fieldes, Phil Griffiths, Rick Kuhn, Tom O’Lincoln, Louise O’Shea and Liz Ross. Louise O’Shea also provided invaluable research assistance. The University of Queensland gave me the time free from teaching, and the University of Melbourne supplied me with the space and facilities to get this book started in the first half of 2007, for which I would like to thank them. During my sabbatical at Melbourne University, Christina Cregan was a valued source of encouragement. For permission to use materials or for assistance in their use, I am grateful to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au), Stephen Bell, Frank Stilwell and Margaret Gardner. Finally, I would like to thank Debbie Lee and all at Cambridge University Press for their assistance during production of this book and Frances Wade for her care in editing the manuscript.

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Harry and Margaret, for raising me, and to Kaye for her love and support and for giving me the impetus to write it.