

**A History of the Electrical Trades Union
in Western Australia and Its Place in the
Labour Movement from 1905 to 1979**

Linda Jane McLaughlan BA (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Signed: _____

ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first scholarly study of the organisation representing electrical trades workers in Western Australia, from its inception in 1905 to 1979. It examines how a small craft union was created, how it won and maintained its independence and fostered the singular skill base of its members, and how it developed and strengthened its power. The thesis argues that the union fought to create and maintain a separate trade union identity based on specific trade skills within the electrical trades in the face of opposition from already-established metal trade unions.

In 1905 the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU) was established. This was the first union to represent electrical workers in Western Australia. In 1914 the METU amalgamated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) / Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). Many electrical workers were unhappy with this amalgamation and in 1926, with the assistance of the national body of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia, a union known as the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) was established. From 1927 until 1949 the ETUWA was embroiled in a long bitter struggle to regain its independence. The ETUWA's main opposition to independence came from the engineering unions, the ASE/AEU and Australasian Society of Engineers. Even after re-registration in 1949 the ETUWA remained a small ineffectual union.

However, from the late 1960s onwards immigrants from the British Isles and from the eastern states of Australia began to expand a grass roots activism that promoted and strengthened the ETUWA. Electrical installers working in the electrical contracting industry flocked to WA to work in the State's expanding industrial complexes on the Kwinana Industrial Strip and the iron ore projects in the Pilbara. And, from 1970 onwards, these newcomers aided in the development of a stronger more militant union, eventually succeeding in creating an independent award for the electrical contracting industry, thus breaking the nexus between the electrical trades and the engineering trades. This thesis has added to the history of industrial development in Western Australia, from the early twentieth century by examining, from a labour history perspective, the growth of unionisation in the electrical industry.

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I wish to thank the Electrical Trades Union in Perth, Western Australia and the national ETU office in Sydney for allowing me unrestricted access to their records. I also want to thank the office staff in both these locations for all their help. I would also like to acknowledge the help I received from various staff at the WA State Records Office and the Battye Library.

I want to thank my children, Laura and Paul, and my friends, especially Margaret, who have been so very patient and I am grateful for the good grace with which they allowed me to talk endlessly about my thesis. And finally to my husband Les, I am so very grateful for the patience and support you have shown throughout this whole process. There have been times when I wanted to give up but your encouragement and support kept me going. Your persistent belief in my ability to be able to tell the history of the ETUWA has been a constant source of encouragement, thank you.

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List Abbreviations

AEEFEU (WA)	Australian Electrical, Electronics, Foundry and Engineering Union (WA)
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASE/AEU/AMWU	Amalgamated Society of Engineers/Amalgamated Engineering Union/Amalgamated Metals Workers' Union
ASEMU (WA)	Australasian Society of Engineers, Moulders & Foundry Workers Union (WA)
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BEEI (WA)	Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers (WA)
CDRHUWU	Coastal, Docks, Rivers and Harbour Workers' Union
CEPU	Communications, Electrical, Plumbing Union
ECA (WA)	Electrical Contractors' Association of WA
ECB (WA)	Electrical Contractors' Board (WA)
<i>ETJ</i>	<i>Electrical Trades Journal</i>
ETU	Electrical Trades Union of Australia
ETUWA	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch)
EWB (WA)	Electrical Workers' Board (WA)
FMTELB	Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board
FMWU	Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union
FTEU	Fremantle Tramway Employees' Union
GEWU/GETU	Goldfields Electrical Workers Union/ Goldfields Electrical Trades Union
METU	Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union
PGU	Plumbers' and Gasfitters' Union
SEC	State Electricity Commission
<i>WAA Act</i>	<i>Western Australian Arbitration Act</i>
WAAC	Western Australian Arbitration Court/Commission
WA ALP	Western Australian Branch of the Australian Labor Party
WAASRE	Western Australian Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees
WACAB	Western Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Board
<i>WAGG</i>	<i>Western Australian Government Gazette</i>
WAGRC	Western Australian Government Railway Commission
<i>WAIG</i>	<i>Western Australian Industrial Gazette</i>
<i>WAPD</i>	<i>Western Australian Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>WARDA</i>	<i>Western Australian Register of Disputes and Awards</i>
<i>WARP</i>	<i>Western Australian Reports of Proceedings before the Boards of Conciliation and the Court of Arbitration</i>
WASL	Western Australian State Library
WASRO	Western Australian State Records Office
WATLC	Western Australian Trades and Labor Council
WATUIC	Western Australian Trades Union Industrial Council
WAVP	<i>Votes and Proceedings of the Parliament of Western Australia</i>

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The following is a history of the Electrical Trades Union in Western Australian, its creation and development from the first meeting of electrical workers in 1905, the watershed union election in 1970 and the subsequent achievement of an amended and consolidated independent award for the electrical contracting industry in 1979. As I contemplated my approach to this history I reflected on how I had arrived at this position. Since leaving school and starting my first job I have been an ardent supporter of the union movement. For twelve of the sixteen years I worked at the Rockingham district office of the Western Australian Department for Community Development I held the position of delegate for the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association of WA (CPSU/CSA). I regularly attended meetings at the union office in Perth and was involved in negotiations for one of the Department's enterprise bargaining agreements.

My interest in politics and unionism grew from many evenings spent in passionate debate with my father, an electrician and committed unionist. James McNicol began work, in 1946, as an armature winding apprentice in Glasgow at the age of sixteen. He was the first of his family to be apprenticed to a trade. At twenty-one, after completing a five-year apprenticeship, he was conscripted into the defence force to serve his national service. He joined the Royal Air Force as a storeman and spent the next two years at an RAF camp in Aldershot, England. In 1953, he returned to Glasgow to work at his trade, securing a job as a maintenance electrician with an engineering company. He remained working in this area, except for a short stint

in the late 1960s on the production line of a local car manufacturing plant, a job which he hated. He had been envious of the high wages earned by the unskilled workers in the car factory and thought he would enjoy a job that paid well and did not entail working under the constant pressure of being the sole electrician ensuring an unbroken supply of electricity to lighting and machinery in a small workplace. However, he soon found that working on the production line at the car factory was boring and demeaning.

I grew up therefore with an understanding that my father, like many tradesmen, defined himself through his trade. He took great pride in being a highly skilled tradesman and shared a strong work culture and bond with other electricians. In the early 1950s the electrical trade was viewed as the trade of the future. Electrical tradesmen, especially electrical fitters and armature winders, saw themselves as the most skilled of this increasingly important occupation, and especially aligned themselves with the elite of the craft trades at this time, engineering fitters and turners.

My husband, Les McLaughlan, began his electrical apprenticeship in Scotland in 1969 and went on to work in the electrical contracting industry there until we migrated to Western Australia in the late 1970s. He served his apprenticeship with the Scottish Joint Apprenticeship Council for the Electrical Contracting Industry. In 1973 he completed a four-year apprenticeship and qualified as a journeyman electrician. On arrival in Western Australia in 1978, and after attending a three month course of night school classes, he passed his electrical licence examination for the State Energy Commission of Western Australia under the *Electricity Act, 1945*, and was issued with a 'B' Grade license, allowing him to work as either an electrical fitter or electrical

installer.¹ From his arrival he worked, for the most part, on large industrial construction sites in the south-west and north-west of the state. In 1983, after a ten-week strike held by electrical contracting workers,² he became an active member of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) [hereafter ETUWA]. This strike marked the beginning of our ongoing involvement in the union movement. In 1986 he was appointed to the union state council to fill a casual vacancy for the remainder of the term and then elected as a state councillor in 1987. He became a keen and active attendee of all union meetings from this point.

Western Australia in the mid-1980s proved to be a tough place for skilled tradesmen. An economic downturn meant there was not a lot of work around and Les had the added disability of being marked as a union activist. With very little money coming in and a family to look after, in order to save money, he took the bus from Rockingham into Perth (approximately 55 kilometres) to attend weekly union meetings for alternate meetings of the state council and state executive. This was not too difficult on the way to the union office but the bus service returning from Perth to Rockingham stopped at 6.00 pm, making it very difficult to get home, as the meetings usually did not finish until after 8.30 pm. To get home by public transport he had to catch a train from Perth to Fremantle and a bus from Fremantle to Rockingham. This was a two hourly service after 6.00 pm. It was a long day, with Les usually not reaching home until 12.45 am.

¹ In Britain and Australia electrical installers have also been known as electrical mechanics and in the United States go by the name of Inside Wireman (as opposed to an Outside Lineman who works on power distribution lines), NJATC (National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee), 'Training, Apprenticeship Training. What Do Electrical Workers Do?'

² Linda McLaughlan, 'A History of the 1983 Electrical Trades Union Contracting Industry Strike and Changing Political Dynamics', Honours Thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, 2002.

Over the next few years he managed to obtain work away from home on large construction jobs, generally arriving on site in the last throes of the job. Since he was viewed by employers as one of the last workers they would want to take on he managed to get only short stints of six or eight week periods on the major jobs at the time. From 1986 he worked for the union as an organiser on a temporary basis, usually to fill in for an elected official on annual leave. In 1989, under an agreement negotiated because of a growing number of electricians on large city centre projects, he was appointed union convenor for the Perth city block.

Over the following two years the temporary organising appointments became progressively longer and in 1991 he was employed by the union on a full-time, ongoing basis. There were only three elected organising positions in the ETUWA, and all were filled; therefore he continued as an appointed temporary organiser for the electrical contracting division until 1995 when he was elected by the members into the position. In 2003 he led a team in a challenge for the secretary's position. He lost the election by five votes. He won positions on the national divisional council and national divisional executive of the Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) and the team he led won most of the ETUWA state council positions.³ Therefore, with the

³ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETU News*, Special Summer Edition 1992, Sydney, p. 1. The Electrical Trades Union of Australia amalgamated with the Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union in 1993 to become the Electrical Plumbing Union (EPU). *Ibid.*, Winter 1994 Edition, pp. 2–3. The EPU and the Communication Workers' Union amalgamated in 1994 to become the CEPU, all three unions kept their own identity by becoming divisional branches of the CEPU. Therefore on a national level the CEPU — Electrical Division, (also known as the Electrical Trades Union of Australia) kept its own national divisional council and executive. The Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) state council was the representative body of the WA branch of the CEPU — Electrical Division. For the sake of clarity throughout this thesis the CEPU national body will be referred to as — the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (the ETU). Between 1905 and 1926 the organisation representing electrical trades workers in Western Australia will be referred to initially as the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union — the METU. After 1926 and for the remainder of the thesis the WA branch of the ETU will be referred to as the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) — the ETUWA. See Appendix 4.

overwhelming support of the newly elected state council, he was appointed as a special organiser on an ongoing basis, and took over many of the incumbent secretary's duties. Les continued to work for the union in this position until the state secretary resigned and Les formally took over in 2006. Since then he has been re-elected unopposed. Les' work history and involvement in the ETUWA has had a big impact on our family over the last twenty years and, because of my strongly supportive role towards his work in the union movement, this has been the major influence on my choice of subject for this doctoral thesis.

Another major influence on my choice of subject was the rise, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, of vicious attacks on the union movement by the Court/Kierath State Government in Western Australia and the Howard/Reith Federal Government. In early 1997, in Western Australia, the proposed 'third wave' of anti-union legislation mobilised the state union movement into a cohesive force. It was a highly charged, emotional period for committed union activists. Union officials, union activists and their families worried for the future of their children – what would their working life be like in a deregulated workforce with no unions to protect them. With the sharp decline in union density and power over the last fifteen years a number of noted academics have endeavoured to find out why this has happened and find a solution. Respected labour historian, Greg Patmore, stated that every problem we face, every solution we propose, has already been tried at some point in the past. For this reason he urged an audience of academics, at the Working Futures Conference in 2000, to look to labour history and learn from the example of those who have gone before us.⁴ Therefore it is because of

⁴ Michael Crosby, *Power at Work. Rebuilding the Australian Union Movement*, The Federation Press, Annandale, New South Wales, 2005, p. 31.

my strong personal and family involvement in the labour movement and the recent increase in anti-union feelings in general that I am deeply committed to the ideology of unionism. And it is for these reasons that I felt a great need to examine and analyse the creation, development and ultimate survival of the ETUWA, its members and their trade.

As I began my research it became evident that, in order to understand why the ETUWA existed at all, I would have to research the beginnings of the union movement in Western Australia. Since I migrated here as an adult and began tertiary studies as a mature student, I had very little knowledge of the history of the Western Australian labour movement or its unions. However, a number of primary and secondary texts have aided in my understanding of the establishment and development of Western Australian unions and the state labour movement. Also, I have situated this thesis within a methodological framework using the disciplines of unionism, politics, economics, industrial relations, genealogy and oral history.

First and foremost I had to find out if any primary documentation relating to the ETUWA survived. I was afraid that I would not find any original records relating to the early years of the ETUWA as the organisation had moved on a number of occasions, twice since the 1990s, and much paperwork was thrown out. However, after a thorough search of the ETUWA's present office, two lever arch folders were found. The first was labelled 'History of the WA Branch of the ETU' and contained copies of original documents. These documents included the 1906 registration of the first body to represent the electrical trades in Western Australia, the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU), and the certificate of registry of the next organisation to represent

electrical workers, the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch). Also in the folder was a copy of the draft of the rules of the METU and a copy of an affidavit from ETUWA secretary (1951 – 1970) R.W. Fletcher with a brief history of the union. The folder also holds copies of transcripts of hearings held in the WA Arbitration Court relating to the 1927 and 1928 appeals against the refusal to register the ETUWA. The second folder is labelled 'History of Kalgoorlie ETU' and contains copies of a number of documents relating to the initial union, established in 1911, to represent electrical workers on the goldfields, the Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union (GEWU). This paperwork relates to the GEWU's amalgamation with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1914. Also this folder holds paperwork relating to the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Goldfields' Sub-Branch) Kalgoorlie, which was registered in the State Arbitration Court in 1935. The compiler of these two folders containing documents relating to the early history of the ETUWA is unknown, however it was most likely secretary Fletcher.

Other documents contained in the first lever arch folder were 285 photocopied pages of extracts of journal entries submitted by the ETUWA to the *Electrical Trades Journal (ETJ)*, the official journal of the ETU produced by the national office in Sydney. While there are only seven extracts from March 1922 to July 1926, from September 1926 they are in an uninterrupted monthly run through to 31 December 1946. As well, other primary source records that have been found include four bound volumes of the monthly edition of the *ETJ* in a complete run from January 1941 to December 1954, these journals contain articles from every state branch of the ETU. I am also grateful to the ETU national office in Sydney for allowing me to borrow a number of

bound volumes of the monthly publication, the *ETU News* (this is the *ETJ* in a different format), this includes four volumes in an uninterrupted sequence from January 1955 to December 1970. As well as these editions of the national journal there are also two bound volumes of the ETUWA's locally produced journal, *Live Wire*. These are in an uninterrupted run from its first edition in September 1959 to June 1971. From this point on only nine editions of *Live Wire* are in the union's possession, the date range is between December 1971 to June 1974. All of these union journals contain a wealth of information and I am grateful to have been allowed access to fifty two years of contemporaneous reports outlining a fairly comprehensive history of the ETUWA from 1922 through to the June 1974 edition of *Live Wire*. The union journals have proved to be a significant source of information from which I have been able to piece together a detailed timeline of events that shaped the union.

Another source of contemporaneous documentation has been the records of the Western Australian Arbitration Court (WAAC). Archived files of the WAAC are held by the WA State Records Office (WASRO) and include information relating to union administration records, transcripts of hearings for a variety of matters and apprenticeship issues. Of particular interest are the annual volumes of the *Western Australian Industrial Gazettes* (WAIG). I have been fortunate in that the ETUWA holds a full set of WAIGs from 1921 to present. Having this resource so easily to hand has enabled me to examine, in great detail, each industrial award or agreement or dispute that the ETUWA has been involved in. The WAIGs have proved an important source of information in relation to the history of unions and the State's industrial relations system.

Several secondary source texts have aided in my understanding of the Western Australian and Australian labour movements. Throughout the first 70 years of the twentieth century, a number of authors sought to understand how Australian unions began and developed.⁵ During the 1980s and 1990s interest in the history of the development of unionism in general diminished, and, as Barbara Webster argues, in her history of the Queensland labour movement, ‘Since the early 1980s, there has been a paucity of academic histories of unionism...’⁶ However, from the late 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century, a renewed interest in the history of the trade

⁵ Examples include (from earliest to latest):

J.T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia*, MacMillan & Co., Ltd., Melbourne, 1921

Brian Fitzpatrick, *Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*, Rawson's Bookshop, Melbourne, 1940.

H.J. Gibbney, 'Working Class Organization in Western Australia from 1880–1902', Honours Thesis, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia, 1949.

Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia 1850–1910*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1960.

Orwell De R. Foenander, *Trade Unionism in Australia Some Aspects*, The Law Book Co. of Australasia Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1962.

B.A. Santamaria, *The Australian Labor Movement (1966–71): The Issue of Control*, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1971.

J.E. Isaac and G.W. Ford, eds, *Australian Labour Relations — Readings*, Second Ed., Sun Books Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1971.

Barry McIntyre, 'The Development of Trade Unionism in Western Australia and the Operation of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration, 1900–1914', MA, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia, 1972.

Michael Poole, *Theories of Trade Unionism: A Sociology of Industrial Relations*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

I.H. Vanden Driesen, 'Evolution of the Trade Union Movement in Western Australia', in *A New History of Western Australia*, C.T. Stannage, ed., University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981.

Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Longman Cheshire Pty, Ltd, Melbourne, 1991.

Michael Hess, ed, and others, *Labour Organisation and Development : Case Studies*, Development Issues : No. 7, NCDS Asia Pacific Press, Australia, 1998.

David Peetz, *Unions in a Contrary World. The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1998.

Richard Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism. Between Market, Class and Society*, Sage Publications, London, 2001.

⁶ Barbara Grace Webster, 'Fighting in the Grand Cause : A History of the Trade Union Movement in Rockhampton 1907–1957', PhD Thesis, Central Queensland University, Australasian Digital Theses Project, 1999.

union movement has arisen, with the publication of a number of new and informative works.⁷

When I came to examine the established unions in Western Australia there was a dearth of information on the ETUWA. Webster also found this in her study of the Rockhampton union movement. Webster argued that Rockhampton's absence from Queensland's labour history was because:

...of its failure to fit comfortably into the traditional conceptual framework. Urban unions like those in Rockhampton did not play any direct role in the Australian Labor Party's legendary foundations in the 1890s as did the western pastoral unions, nor were they prominent in Labor's 1915 parliamentary victory in Queensland as were the mining, sugar and pastoral unions. Thus, Rockhampton unions were neither central to the search for origins nor instrumental in the structural development of state or national peak industrial or political bodies which traditional historiography favoured. Rockhampton was not the site of overt union militancy and no major strikes began there.

The union representing electrical trades workers in Western Australia had similar problems. It was first registered as a trade union in 1906 as the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU)⁸ until 1914. After 1914 until 1926 electrical workers were amalgamated into the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).⁹ In 1926, the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA), applied

⁷ Examples of more recent works include:

Rae Cooper and Greg Patmore, 'Trade Union Organising and Labour History' in a thematic edition of *Labour History* entitled 'Trade Union Mobilising and Organising', Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Inc., No. 83, pp. 3–18, November 2002.

Greg Patmore, 'Union Birth, Growth and Death : The Impact of the State, Management and Community at the Lithgow Ironworks, 1900–1914', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 21–38, March 2004.

Barbara Webster, 'A "Cosy Relationship" If You Had It : Queensland Labor's Arbitration System and Union Organising Strategies in Rockhampton, 1916–57', *Labour History*, No. 83, pp. 89–106, November 2002.

⁸ This was the name of the first electrical trades union formed in 1905 and registered in 1906 under the Trades Union Act and the Western Australian Arbitration and Conciliation Act. It amalgamated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1914 as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers Perth No. 2 Branch.

⁹ In order to differentiate this union from the Australasian Society of Engineers it will be referred to by its initials, the ASE, and the Australasian Society of Engineers will be referred to by its full name. In later chapters, after 1921, the ASE changed its name to the Amalgamated Engineering Union, and from that point it will be referred to as the AEU.

for registration as an independent union under the State Arbitration Act. It was denied this independence, however, until 1949. Therefore, throughout this period (1926–1949), the ETUWA, while it continued as an independent organisation representing electrical workers and registered under the WA Trade Union Act, it did not exist as an independently registered union under the state arbitration system and was denied affiliation with the state branch of the Australian Labor Party (WA ALP) and so was unable to have any voice in the state labour movement or state Labor politics. When it finally did achieve affiliation with the WA ALP and win registration and full recognition as an independent union under the Industrial Arbitration Act in 1949,¹⁰ it was non-militant, indeed conservative, for the next twenty years. Its history has not previously interested any historian.

A number of texts have provided invaluable in order to situate the ETUWA within its historical, political, economic and geographical context. *A New History of Western Australia*, edited by C.T. Stannage, supplied useful information on the general growth and development of the state's economy, politics and labour movement and I was able to situate the ETUWA within each time period under examination.¹¹ These readings helped me comprehend the problems of size and isolation of the State and the effect these had on the creation, and continuing growth and development of the ETUWA and electrical workers in Western Australia.

¹⁰ *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 30, 1950, p. 274. The ETUWA was registered on 12 September 1949.

¹¹ Examples: R.T. Appleyard, 'Western Australia: Economic and Demographic Growth 1850–1914'; David Black, 'Liberals Triumphant: The Politics of Development 1947–1980'; I.H. Vanden Driesen, 'Evolution of the Trade Union Movement in Western Australia' in C.T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australian Press, Perth, 1981.

In order to place the ETUWA within the context of commercial and industrial development one text proved particularly useful, *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, edited by P. Firkins. This book was one of a series commissioned to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of Western Australia and constituted a business history of the State. It was helpful in identifying where electrical workers would have been located within the commercial and industry areas of the State.¹² Another work which helped my understanding of one particularly intense period of industrial development in Western Australian labour history, during the early 1950s, was Lenore Layman's 'Development Ideology in Western Australia, 1933 – 1965'.¹³ From this text I was able to grasp a better insight of the different development strategies used by both State Liberal and Labor governments and how the outcomes of these differing policies in turn affected the growth and development of the ETUWA.

Bobbie Oliver's *Unity is Strength: A history of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia*, provided me with a valuable overview of the WA ALP and its part in the political and industrial development of the State.¹⁴ Upon its registration and affiliation with the WA ALP in 1949 and into the 1990s, the union's leadership, in the main, were members of the ALP. Bob Fletcher, ETUWA secretary from 1951 to 1970, was awarded a life membership of the WA

¹² P. Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Nedlands. In particular: Norman Dufty, 'The Development of Industrial Relations in Western Australia'; Peter Ellery, '1945–1960'; Ted Joll, '1901–1930'; D. Lipscombe, '1960–1979'.

¹³ Lenore Layman, 'Development Ideology in Western Australia, 1933–1965', in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 20, pp. 234–60, October 1982.

¹⁴ Bobbie Oliver, *Unity is Strength: A History of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia*, API Network, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 2003.

branch of the ALP in 1980.¹⁵ From the early 1960s, as the union developed and as it moved into a more influential position, it took on a more active role within the State labour movement with union officials such as organiser Owen Salmon, secretaries Bob Fletcher, Errol Smith and Barry Gilbert all committed and active members of the ALP and the WA Trades and Labour Council (WA TLC). Over the period of this examination, they held a variety of positions in both organisations. Organiser and ETUWA president John Gandini, whilst not a member of the ALP, was an active member of the WA TLC.¹⁶ Therefore, through her in-depth history of the Western Australian branch of the ALP and the State Trades and Labor Council, Bobbie Oliver has provided me with a wealth of background information with which to position the ETUWA within a political framework for the whole period under review.

Richard Hyman, in his 2001 book, *Understanding European Trade Unionism. Between Market, Class and Society*, argues that there are three models of union identity and each union is a combination of at least two of the three types. Unions are, in the first model, a form of anti-capitalist opposition, with a common theme of ‘militancy and socio-political mobilization’, with an over-riding mission to promote class interests.¹⁷ The second model, developed as a rival to the first, was one where trade unions provided ‘a vehicle for social integration’.¹⁸ He explains that this type of unionism was a late nineteenth century expression of social catholicism, counter-posing a functionalist

¹⁵ R.W. Fletcher, interview with Stuart Reid, 1988, audio tapes held at Battye Library, WA State Library (WASL), Perth, OH 2054. Fletcher states that he and his wife received life membership of the ALP. He has been erroneously recorded as John Fletcher in Bobbie Oliver’s, *Unity is Strength*, p. 379.

¹⁶ Oliver, *Unity is Strength*, p. 378. Barry Gilbert was president of the WA TLC from 1980–1981 and John Gandini was president from 1990–1993 and has been awarded a life membership.

¹⁷ Richard Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism*, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

view of society to a socialist one.¹⁹ The third model — which he explains is not always clearly demarcated in practice from the second because its ideological foundations are more implicit than explicit — is business unionism or labourism. This model he views as one pursuing economism, which prioritises collective bargaining.²⁰ Hyman encapsulates his argument as ‘the eternal triangle’, and describes this as the ‘geometry of trade unionism’.²¹ Trade unions, he argues, can be viewed as being simultaneously embedded in a combination of either class and market, market and society or society and class.²²

While Hyman’s argument of the differing models of unionism provides a tool to make comparisons between unions, Michael Hess, in his introduction to *Labour Organisation and Development: Case Studies*, defines unions more succinctly as ‘...organisations formed to promote the interests of people employed in a particular occupation or industry’.²³ Comparing these different union models allowed me to compare and contrast where the ETUWA sat within state politics and with other state unions. This is an important feature of the ETUWA’s history, and explained different aspects of its history, such as why the ETUWA had so much difficulty in expanding its membership and influence for such a long time and why, throughout my research, I found continual conflict between the ETUWA and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) because, from the beginning, there has been conflicting political views expressed by both the leadership and membership of each union.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 4.

²² Ibid., pp. 4–5.

²³ Michael Hess, Ed, and others, *Labour Organisation and Development: Case Studies*, ‘Development Issues : no. 7’, NCDS Asia Pacific Press, Australia, 1998, p. 1.

According to Hyman's categorisation, the ETU can be identified as a union which is between market and society, whereas the ASE can be identified as being between market and class. The ETU was, and still is, a model of what R.F. Hoxie, the early analyst of American labour, termed 'business unionism'.²⁴ Hoxie states that this is 'essentially trade-conscious, rather than class-conscious'.²⁵ The ASE, on the other hand, although initially very much a craft-based union, has from the outset been much more aware of the need to be politically active and class conscious and more inclusive of semi and unskilled workers. The ASE and later the AEU membership was not averse to voting in an organiser who was member of the Communist Party, for example Jack Marks and Harold Peden. Hyman would classify the ASE as facing towards the economy (market) but, at the same time, just as strongly anti-capitalist (class). This framework for defining union identity has helped in placing the ETUWA within the established political and union movements in Western Australia.

As well as using the political ideologies of each union to classify whether they were left or right of the prevailing labour dogma, another identifier of a union was whether it was a skilled (craft or trade union) or unskilled (general or industry). This can be further defined in terms of how unions developed over time into exclusive (skilled) or inclusive (skilled and unskilled) organisations. Late in 1905, when electrical workers in Western Australia held their first meeting, they met as members of a specific occupation, electrical workers. They wanted to form a craft union, a union that would look after their interests only. The prototype of the craft union was the ASE.

Frank Burchill explains that this union:

²⁴ Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism*, p. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

...developed efficient systems of administration, subscription contributions, democratic decision-making processes and, above all, the basis for continuity. Equally important, it controlled entry to membership by requiring apprenticeship qualifications or experience... The ASE set the pattern of exclusive, male-dominated, craft organisations.²⁶

The ETU, in both Britain and Australia, was keen to follow in the footsteps of the ASE and established its organisations along the same lines.

Another issue which was central to the ETUWA as a craft union was that of apprenticeship and the methods used to acquire the skills necessary to become an electrician. A number of sociological texts on theories of work and some articles on the history of apprenticeship helped inform my understanding of skill as a concept.²⁷ I regard Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* as a valuable study pointing the way to understanding the twentieth century struggles around the issue of workers' skills. I found a great deal of information on the development of training for electrical apprentices in a number of

²⁶ Frank Burchill, *Labour Relations*, (3rd Ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, UK, 2008, p. 26.

²⁷ William Somerville, 'The Apprenticeship System Instituted by the Court of Arbitration of Western Australia', *WAIG*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 144–5, Perth, 1922; James Nangle, 'Report on Technical Education in Western Australia', in *Western Australia Votes and Proceedings*, Perth, 1928; New South Wales Department of Technical Education, 'Schedule of Courses Conducted in New South Wales Technical Colleges from 1884 to the Present Day', Statistics Unit, Division of Educational Research and Planning, 1973; Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974; J.P. Dunne, *I Will Arise: History of Perth Technical College*, Perth Technical College, Perth, 1976; M.A. White, 'The Establishment of Technical Education in Western Australia', *Melbourne Studies in Education 1979* in S Murray-Smith, ed., Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1979; M.A. White and W. Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in Western Australia: A History' in S. Murray-Smith, ed., *Melbourne Studies in Education 1981*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981; Craig R. Littler, *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, London, 1982; Stephen Wood, ed., *The Degradation of Work? Skill, Deskillling and the Labour Process*, Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, London, 1983; John Shield, 'A Matter of Skill: The Revival of Apprenticeship in Early Twentieth-Century NSW', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 236–62, June 1995; R.G. Maddison, 'Skill and the Commodification of Labour in New South Wales 1840–1915', PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, 1995; A.M. Dockery and T. Stromback, *The Development of the Apprenticeship System in Western Australia*, Centre for Labour Market Research, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, July 1997; John Ray, *Apprenticeship in Australia: A Concise History*, National Centre for Vocational Educational Research Ltd, 2001.

volumes of the *Electrical Trades Journal* and also in a variety of government documents.

Throughout the thesis I have compared and contrasted the growth and development of the ETUWA against its main antagonist the ASE/AEU. Although both were craft unions, they had a number of differences which caused continual conflict. For most of its existence the ETUWA has had a relatively small membership in comparison with the large membership of the ASE/AEU. The ETUWA had a limited number of members working in the main industrial areas of the State (for example, the State Railway Workshops), whereas the ASE/AEU had a large number of members in these areas. Until the late 1960s the ASE/AEU was the main obstacle in the way of the ETUWA organising and recruiting members.

Another reason for conflict was that between 1927 and 1949 the ASE continually objected to and appealed against every application the ETUWA made to register as a union under the State Arbitration Act, thereby excluding it from the State wage bargaining system. If the ETUWA had been allowed its independent registration, the ASE would have lost control of electrical workers, resulting in a serious loss of members. The ASE also used its influence to keep the ETUWA from being permitted to affiliate with the State branch of the ALP. By these means the ASE severely limited the ETUWA's influence on issues relating to electrical licensing regulations, electrical safety regulations and electrical apprenticeship issues and post trade training. It was, therefore, a constant struggle for the ETUWA to assert any control or authority in any area concerning its members. This theme of inter-union conflict has been frequently

discussed in political labour histories but much less attention has been paid to it in industrial labour histories.

As the ETUWA represents a singular trade within a particular industry it was difficult to find studies of other comparable unions with which to evaluate an up-to-date view of how union activism has developed within the ETUWA.²⁸ Three works which proved useful as comparisons of small, struggling unions were the more recently published: *Against All Odds. The History of the United Firefighters Union in Queensland 1917–2008*, published in 2008 by Bradley Bowden and Michael Hess’ *From Fragmentation to Unity – A History of the Western Australian Branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union*, published in 1989 and his more recent article, published in 2009, ‘Against the Odds: Establishing the Miscellaneous Workers’ Union in Tasmania, 1949–59’.²⁹ These three works proved to be valuable sources and were used to compare the problems of other small unions struggling to gain members in similar conditions to the ETUWA in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania.

A number of individual union histories were published in the 1960s and 1970s. One of these, Tom Sheridan’s *Mindful Militants*, a history of the ASE in Australia from 1920 to 1972, has proved to be an important source of information. Sheridan argues that

²⁸ Some other works published in the 1990s and 2000s include: Paul Miller and Charles Mulvey, *What Do Australian Unions Do?*, Western Australian Labour Market Research Centre, Perth, 1992; Barbara Grace Webster, ‘Fighting in the Grand Cause’, 1999; David Peetz, *Unions in a Contrary World*, 1998; Stephen Deery et al., *Industrial Relations: A Contemporary Analysis*, (2nd Ed.), McGraw-Hill Australia Pty Limited, Roseville, New South Wales, 2002; Bob James, *Squandering Social Capital : Trade Unions, Freemasons, and Friendly Societies in Australia*, B. James (self published), Newcastle, New South Wales, 2003; Michael Crosby, *Power at Work*. 2005; Tom Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 2008.

²⁹ Bradley Bowden, *Against All Odds. The History of the United Firefighters Union in Queensland 1917 - 2008*, The Federation Press, Sydney, 2008; Michael Hess, *From Fragmentation to Unity. A History of the Western Australian Branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union*, Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union of Australia, Nedlands, WA, 1989 and his article ‘Against the Odds: Establishing the Miscellaneous Workers’ Union in Tasmania, 1949–59, in *Labour History*, Vol. 96, pp. 101–16, May 2009.

the ASE has always been ‘an industrially aggressive union’, when pursuing its general aim of improving its members’ wages and conditions.³⁰ And, whether in its own right or in conjunction with other metal trades unions, such as the Boilermakers Society and the Moulders Union, it always had the numerical strength to take militant action when necessary.

This situation was also true for the Electrical Trades Unions in Britain and the larger Australian States of New South Wales and Victoria. On the other hand, the ETUWA remained politically conservative, primarily because it continued to be politically, industrially and numerically weak until well into the 1970s. From 1970 a combination of an increase in union members and activists from Britain and the eastern states of Australia, brought about by a huge growth in industrial construction projects in the north-west, and a radical leadership change, led to the union developing into a more militantly active union.

As well as the global identifiers of union creation and development, another more specific influence on the development of the ETUWA was the individual union official or activist. Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles wrote a recent interesting article on this issue entitled: ‘Struggling for Recognition: Reading the Individual in Labour History’.³¹ Initially I based my understanding of the electrical trade and what it meant to be an electrician and union activist on my own personal knowledge of my father and husband. These two individuals provided an insight into the mindset of a typical electrician of both the early 1950s and 1970s. Each took up his trade in periods of

³⁰ T. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920–1972*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1975, p. 56.

³¹ Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, 'Struggling for Recognition : Reading the Individual in Labour History' in *Labour History*, No. 87, pp. 1–10, November 2004.

change, such as the restructure of industry in Britain after World War Two and the innovative technological changes of the 1970s.

Another difference between my father and husband, that proved an important insight for my thesis, was that each of them worked in a different area of the trade, my father as an electrical fitter and my husband as an electrical installer. My father, like many electrical fitters, believed that he was more skilled than were electrical installers. As, more often than not, the only electrician in a workplace, he was called on regularly to find and solve the electrical fault causing production to stop. He viewed the work of my husband's trade, as an electrical installer, of lower skill, in one discussion calling them 'contracting bears' and 'tubing wrestlers' (the job of manipulating plastic and metal conduits which carry electric cables).

The similarities and differences from my personal experience proved a useful means by which to base my understanding of individual electrical tradesmen. I added to this personal knowledge with an examination of past officials of the ETUWA to help me understand and determine how each individual may have influenced the ongoing development of the branch. Each of them had particular areas of interest and strength. For example, the secretary from 1932 to 1949, Marmion Barrington (Barry) d'Almeida, was keen to see an improvement in electrical apprenticeship training and strongly advocated an improved safety system for electrical workers. Owen Salmon, the first full-time organiser for the union throughout the 1960s, was particularly keen to work within the industrial arbitration and conciliation system, and spent a great deal of his time researching past cases put before the Industrial Arbitration Commission. Errol Smith, who worked for the union as an organiser from 1965 and was elected State

secretary in 1970, worked hard to improve apprentice wage rates by making them a percentage of the tradesman rate instead of a percentage of the basic wage. And, finally, Barry Gilbert, an organiser for the union in the late 1960s and secretary from 1976 to 1983, was very keen to improve wages and conditions and achieve parity for electrical installers during his time as a union official.³² These four and many more individuals have been influential in the history of the electrical trades union in Western Australia.

I found very little official information on the members and officials of the first electrical trades union, the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union, of 1905 to 1914. However, by using genealogical research into the backgrounds of the main individuals, I was able to construct a general representation of each one. As Kerby observes:

I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point.³³

In another article, 'Writing Labour Lives', Harry Knowles argues that by using the comparative biography method the historian is allowed to go beyond the normal biographical format of the description of the individual. Using comparative biography to examine trade union leaders can, he argues 'provide additional insights into how trade unions developed'.³⁴

A final text that informed my general argument was David Peetz's, *Unions in a Contrary World*. Dr Peetz, a noted author in Australian industrial relations theory and practice, argues that it is important to consider the historical background of Australian unionism in order to understand why unions have been in decline since the late 1970s.³⁵ He explains that a critical issue for unions is the need for them to mould themselves into

³² Both Errol Smith and Barry Gilbert were interviewed by the author for this study.

³³ Anthony Paul Kerby in Hearn and Knowles, 'Struggling for Recognition', 2004, p. 3.

³⁴ Harry Knowles, *Writing Labour Lives*, online: 'Working Lives Site', p. 3.

bodies that are 'democratic, efficient and effective at both the workplace and organisational level'.³⁵ Peetz concludes that, in order to survive and flourish, unions must be flexible, able to change and adapt their internal management to suit ongoing changes to union objectives and strategies.

This analysis of the history of the ETUWA supports Peetz's conclusions. While I found lengthy periods, for example between 1926 and 1949, when the union languished outside of the state political and regulatory system and the state union movement, this was largely beyond its control. It was only the tenacious commitment of particular individuals such as ETUWA secretaries Frederick Cox and Barry d'Almeida and a small following of union activists, all with a strong belief in the need for an independent electrical trades union, which held the union together throughout this period.

Even after gaining its independence in 1949 the union struggled to grow. Throughout the 1950s it continued to suffer from a small membership base spread over a large geographical area, proving very difficult for one man on his own, full-time secretary, Bob Fletcher, to organise. In 1961, with support from the national body, the ETUWA was able to take on a full-time organiser, Owen Salmon. And, in the early 1960s the national executive of the ETU instigated an internal restructure of all branches, strengthening and revitalising the Western Australian organisation. By the end of the 1960s, strongly influenced by an influx of militant migrants in the electrical installing area of the trade employed on the growing industrial projects, the union was ready to again reorganise its internal administrative structure.

³⁵ David Peetz, *Unions in a Contrary World*, 1998, pp. 24–30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

In 1970 an election of a younger and more vibrant executive with a greater representation from electrical installers working in the burgeoning electrical contracting industry allowed a changing membership demographic a stronger and more inclusive voice that demanded the establishment of an independent award for the electrical contracting industry. This was achieved in 1974 and then in 1979 this award was amended and consolidated as the Electrical Contracting Industry Award, finally breaking the nexus between the electrical contracting industry and the metal trades.

It is at this point that my thesis ends. The struggle of the ETUWA to survive, grow and represent its members' interests effectively from its formation in 1905 to 1979 was shaped by a succession of committed union executives and activists. In order to elevate the value of electrical workers the ETUWA has sought to identify, develop and preserve a strong apprentice system. Throughout its first seventy-four years it struggled against numerous obstacles to attain independence in order to achieve industrial awards improving wages and conditions for all electrical workers. It is this struggle to establish, maintain and develop the union representing electrical trades workers in Western Australia, which is the subject of my thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

Beginnings and Endings — 1905 to 1914

In the early years of the twentieth century a small but committed number of men sought to create an independent trade union to represent workers in the nascent electrical industry in Western Australia. This chapter will examine the struggle to establish an independent trade union and recognition of a skilled trade for this new, experimental and fast growing industry. The chapter, beginning in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and ending in 1914 in Western Australia, explores the prevailing ideologies and events which led to the initial formation and ultimate demise of this first electrical trades union.

The Creation of an Industry

During the second half of the nineteenth century scientists and industrial innovators began to discover how electricity could be put to practical use. The first applications of electricity were in the field of communications, first by telegraph and then by telephone, followed by the introduction of electric street lighting. The electromagnetic telegraph used batteries to produce electric current, wires to conduct the current over distances and electromagnets that allowed an effect at one end when a switch was closed at the other.¹ This initial form of instant communication spread around the industrial world by 1870.² By the 1890s most of the major centres of the world were connected by electrically powered telecommunications and this technology required workers with a new set of skills.

From the early 1840s men working in the electrical trades in the United States of America began, in much the same way as they did in Britain, as electrical linesmen and wiremen employed in the new industries created by these new forms of

¹ EC&M (Electrical Construction and Maintenance) website, 'The Age of Electrical Enlightenment'.

² Dr. J.B. Calvert, website, 'The Telegraph, The Electromagnetic Telegraph'.

communication. The earliest telegraph lines were put in place from Washington to Baltimore in 1844, this being the first commercial application of electricity in the USA. In 1848 the first telegraph station was built in Chicago. By 1861 the United States was linked by telegraph lines and in 1866 a transatlantic cable was in place. By 1876 the telephone, where sound was conveyed over a distance by electric wire, was being developed and in the 1880s major cities in Britain and the United States of America began installing telephones in public and private buildings.³ By the 1880s the use of electricity was increasing and several towns in Britain had their own electric light and telephone companies.⁴

The early 1880s saw the invention of alternating current (AC) and the use of electrical transformers as the next major innovations in electrical power generation and distribution.⁵ Initially, direct current (DC) power invented by Thomas Edison in 1880, was the only form of electrical power distribution.⁶ This power distribution system was produced by batteries but was limited, in that it could provide electricity only to customers within a one and a half mile distance from the generating station. The invention of AC power distribution, by Nikola Tesla in 1886, revolutionised electrical power generation. The great advantage of AC over DC is that AC voltage can be stepped-up to higher levels with a transformer, sent longer distances through high tension wires and then stepped-down again at its destination. The three-phase electricity produced in AC power is much more efficient than DC power.⁷

Over the last two decades of the nineteenth century AC power rapidly superseded DC power and electrical workers had to learn new skills. In 1891 the

³ Mary Beliss, *About.com*, website, 'The History of the Telephone'.

⁴ A.G.L. Shaw, *Modern World History, Social Political and Economic Development, 1780–1950*, (Book One), F. W. Cheshire Pty, Ltd, Melbourne, 1961, p. 197.

⁵ Thomson Gale, *World of Invention*, website, 'Alternating Current'.

⁶ Mary Beliss, *About.com*, website, 'Inventors, The Inventions of Thomas Edison, Electricity and the Light bulb'.

⁷ Gale, *World of Invention*, 'Alternating Current'.

London Electric Supply Corporation built the world's first high-voltage generating station designed by Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti and others, supplying consumers with high-voltage AC power.⁸ It was to be a further 25 years before Western Australia's first AC power station was completed at East Perth in 1916.⁹ This change to an AC power generation and distribution system is not to say that the men who had worked with DC power became unemployed; they carried the knowledge they already had with them into the latest innovation. And, as the use of electricity in industry and domestic use increased, so too did the demand for a skilled workforce. A new category of workers — electrical workers — was created by these activities.¹⁰ As uses for this new source of power increased, demand for these skilled electrical workers increased also.

Electrical Workers Emerge

In the early years of the electrical trade there were four main areas of work. First, workers in the electrical trades whose job it was to place cables inside buildings and connect up wiring for light, power and communication, were known initially as wiremen or electrical mechanics and subsequently referred to in this study as electrical installers. (They are known as inside wiremen in the USA.) Men in this area of the trade did not work in a permanent workplace but wherever new electrical installations were required. Second, the men working at repairing the new electrical equipment, such as electrical motors and electrically powered machinery, were initially also classified as electrical wiremen; however, these men were, in the main, employed by government instrumentalities in their maintenance workshops and were

⁸ Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester 2008, website, 'Ferranti Online, Company History, Deptford Power Station.

⁹ Western Power, *The History of Electricity in Western Australia. Commemoration of Power in Western Australia*, Western Power, Perth, 2000 and Joseph Christensen, 'Industrial East Perth in Growth and Decline: The Power Station in Its Suburb' in *Powering Perth — A History of the East Perth Power Station*, Lenore Layman, ed., Black Swan Press, Perth, 2011.

¹⁰ International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, USA, website, 'About Us, IBEW History'.

closely aligned with the engineering and metal trades. In Western Australia they became known as electrical fitters. A third category of electrical workers, armature winders, evolved as a separate part of the trade. Armature winders located the broken part of an electric motor, where the coils are burnt out or damaged, and repaired or replaced it or completely rewound all the coils.¹¹ As the majority of this work was carried out in manufacturing and maintenance workshops this part of the trade was closely aligned with electrical fitters. A fourth category, electrical linesmen (known as outside wiremen in the USA) placed in position and connected up wires outside buildings.¹²

The state of the economy — whether in boom or recession — determined which area of the trade was in the ascendancy, and therefore taking control of the electrical union executive and shaping union decision making and policy. During the first two decades of the twentieth century when there was a dramatic increase in electrical power installations in houses and factories, the electrical installing area of the trade was in the ascendancy in Western Australia. By the late 1920s and 1930s, with less commercial building or industrial construction and with the increased use of electrical machinery and domestic electric appliances, electrical fitters became pre-eminent. This ebb and flow of control between the areas of the electrical trade was especially obvious in Western Australia. For most of the first half of the twentieth century Western Australia was slow to develop and electrical installers

¹¹ Western Australian Government, *Western Australia Reports of Proceedings before the Boards of Conciliation and the Court of Arbitration* [hereafter *WARP*], Vol. V, 1906, 'Award between the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union and Splatt, Wall, & Co., Unbehaun & Johnstone, Ritchie & Jackman, The Perth Gas Company, Limited, The Perth Electric Tramways, Limited, The Fremantle Tramways, The Bullock Engineering Company, Cheffins & Co., Airy & Stradwick, A.G. Wright & Co., The India Rubber Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Co., Limited, Kidston & Co., and Edmiston & Co.', trade definitions for electrical lineman and electrical wireman, pp. 53–6. This will be hereafter referred to as the 1906 award. The definition of an armature winder was found at: www.career-descriptions.co.uk/armature-winder-career-description.htm.

¹² Electrical linesmen have never been required to hold a licence in Western Australia. They have always been entitled to be members of the ETU.

worked in small numbers in scattered locations throughout the State and were hard to organise. Electrical linesmen, working in the power and communications industry, worked in scattered locations as well but usually were employed permanently by one main employer — the State Government. Electrical fitters and armature winders worked in larger numbers in more concentrated areas and were easier to organise than were installers.

In the late nineteenth century in Britain, just as electrical workers were beginning to organise, other small unions were already regulating entry to their trades by means of restricting membership only to journeymen who had served an apprenticeship. Sidney and Beatrice Webb in their pre-eminent work, *Industrial Democracy*, state that it was the smaller trade unions, such as the Boilermakers' Association, that held the most 'stringent limitations' on the numbers admitted to their trades.¹³ They argue that it was the rapid increase of their industry that had strengthened the union and this had resulted in the union being able to enforce a 'genuine apprenticeship system'.¹⁴ The Webbs explain:

A Trade Union may conceivably strengthen its position if, by limiting the number of persons learning the trade, it restricts the number of competitors for its particular kind of employment. But once those competitors exist, their presence on the market as non-unionists is fatal to the Method of Collective Bargaining.¹⁵

The Webbs conclude that this regulation of their trade enabled unions to negotiate better wages and conditions for their members.¹⁶

Therefore, one of the first objects of the British ETU in 1890 was to create an exclusive trade;¹⁷ however, as the uses of electricity multiplied, other trades and

¹³ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, new edition in two volumes bound in one, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1902, p. 462.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 710.

¹⁷ John Lloyd, *Light and Liberty. The History of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union*, George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, London, 1990, p. 60.

unions saw a future source of work and members within the new industry.¹⁸ The main bread and butter work which electrical installers carried out, and wanted to retain as their domain, was that of fixing the bare wires used to connect the electrical supply to the motor or appliance. Originally these bare wires were encased in wood and later they were run through metal pipes and later still plastic, by a process called ‘barrelling’, ‘pipework’ and then ‘conduiting’. It was this basic work of the early electricians that was of particular interest to the carpenters and plumbers, and the British ETU noted that during the early 1900s it was a constant fight to stop other trades in the shipyards from taking the barrelling work from the installers.¹⁹

The general secretary of the British ETU, Alf Ewer, recognised in the 1901 annual report that electrical tradesmen would have to fight hard to retain control over the skills they had been working at for over twenty years. He stated:

...the Carpenters Society never wanted the work, even when offered it ... the skilled joiner looked on it with contempt. But now, the electrical industry having grown into a great business, they are, whenever possible, pushing the wireman to one side and not only fixing the casing, but running the wire and fixing the fittings.²⁰

On the other hand, in these early years, the main engineering union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), did not view electrical work as skilled work, and had no intention of taking over any specific electrical work.²¹ It was, however, interested in recruiting electrical workers as members and incorporating electrical trades workers under its constitutional coverage. In an early effort, in 1905, to poach members from the British ETU, the ASE began referring to electrical wiremen working in the ship building industry as electrical fitters, thereby closely

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gordon Schaffer, *Light and Liberty, Sixty Years of the Electrical Trades Union*, the Electrical Trades Union of Britain, Bromley, Kent, UK, 1949, p. 2.

associating them with the engineering fitter.²² And, in later years, attempts were made to align the trade of electrical installing with the engineering trades by referring to electrical installers as electrical mechanics.

Unionisation of British Electrical Workers

At the end of the nineteenth century the electrical industry in Britain was growing at an enormous rate and the men working in it recognised a need to organise. During the late 1880s two separate unions emerged. The first, in Manchester, developed out of the emerging telephone and telegraph industries and was named the Amalgamated Union of Telegraph and Telephone Construction Men. The majority of its members came from electrical engineering companies which installed and commissioned the dynamos and electric motors they manufactured and maintained.²³ In 1889, in London, another group of electrical workers in the burgeoning telephone industry established the Union of Electrical Operatives. Its membership came mainly from the rapidly growing industries of construction and engineering.²⁴ An amalgamation of these two unions into the Electrical Trades Union of the United Kingdom was first proposed at a meeting of the Manchester electrical union in November 1889.²⁵

This first meeting decided on a name for the new organisation, and a set of rules that were drawn from the rules of the ASE, a union that workers in the new trade respected. The ASE was a craft union and electrical workers in Britain set out to follow the engineering union in its main objectives. Initially the leaders of the London electrical trades intended to join forces with the ASE, believing that the electrical trades were skilled workers and seeing themselves as part of the

²² Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 1990, p. 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Schaffer, *Sixty Years of the Electrical Trades Union*, 1949, p. 6.

‘aristocracy of labour’ represented by the engineers.²⁶ The London leaders of the electrical trades approached the engineering union in 1890 but were informed by the ASE executive that ‘electrical workers had not the necessary qualifications demanded of new entrants’ and were given a minute book and told to go away and form their own union.²⁷

The ASE, as one of the older and well-established craft unions, regarded the electrical trades as not sufficiently skilled to be part of the ‘chosen circle’ of the craft unions.²⁸ Nevertheless, by the late 1910s, the ASE could see that this upstart electrical industry was growing into a force with which to be reckoned. In August 1918 the ASE, wanting to remain the premier union, instigated amalgamation talks with the ETU leadership, in a bid to put right its initial refusal to admit electrical workers.²⁹ To the engineers their union had not been formed primarily as a means of fighting capitalist exploitation but as a means of safeguarding the skilled worker against any attacks on his skill base from the growing number of unskilled workers.³⁰ By the early 1920s the ASE leadership acknowledged that to give the union a greater chance of survival against the encroachment of increasing numbers of semi and unskilled workers, it would need to join with the ETU to create one strong engineering industry union. However, a majority of the ETU membership rejected the advances of the ASE, preferring to remain an independent union for the electrical trades.

Notwithstanding the ETU membership’s rejection of amalgamation, the ASE continued to recruit electrical workers and inserted electrical categories entitled to membership in its constitution. The 1902 ASE rule book (revised at the tenth

²⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lloyd, *Light and Liberty*, 1990, p. 126.

³⁰ Schaffer, *Sixty Years of the Electrical Trades Union*, 1949, p. 1.

delegate meeting of the union in Manchester) stated that trades to which members might belong included ‘armature winders and electrical engineers, generally’.³¹ And, in Australia in 1926, the Perth branch of the ASE was even more inclusive, its rules specifically stating that, ‘electrical fitters, electrical installers, electrical wiremen, electrical linesmen and electrical workers, generally’, could be members.³²

Electrification Begins in Western Australia

Western Australia, like the rest of Australia, raced to link the colony by telecommunications. F.K. Crowley explained the excitement and wonder that this new invention of telegraphy held for people when a telegraph line between Perth and Fremantle became operational in 1869.³³ Then, in 1875, when contractors began erecting poles which would carry the wires linking Perth with London via South Australia, it was seen as ‘the greatest single achievement in the history of the colony’s communications up to that time’.³⁴

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Perth evolved from a small market town into a city. C.T. Stannage has described the difference the gold rushes of the 1880s and 1890s made to the economic and social makeup of Perth, its surrounding suburbs and the mining towns that sprang up, especially on the eastern goldfields.³⁵ As men rushed into Western Australia from other colonies and from overseas to find gold, many brought with them their wives and families, and the populations of Perth and the new goldfields towns increased dramatically.

³¹ Western Australian State Records Office [hereafter WASRO], Western Australia Arbitration Court files [hereafter referred to as WAAC files], ACC No. 1101, Item No. 285/1902, various correspondence relating to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. As this organisation was a branch of the British union until 1920 it used the British rules and a copy of this rule book is held in these files.

³² WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 264/1922, correspondence relating to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

³³ F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times*, MacMillan & Co., Ltd, London, 1960, p. 37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

³⁵ C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth*, Perth City Council, Perth, Western Australia, 1979, pp. 193–4.

R.T. Appleyard identified the three circumstances of the ‘discovery of gold, responsible government and political leadership’, which changed the economy of Western Australia in the 1890s.³⁶ Within ten years, the small, isolated, rural-based economy was enormously strengthened by the huge increase in population and a large injection of capital.³⁷ The impetus for public works expenditure resulting from the gold rushes, such as the railway and water supply systems, helped the colony to grow during the 1890s and 1900s. Before this time the railway network in Western Australia consisted of no more than a line between Geraldton and Northampton, a rail line east to Southern Cross and a privately funded line from Beverley to Albany.³⁸ With the completion of the railway line to Kalgoorlie in 1897, life for the population of the goldfields became more comfortable.³⁹ The development of the colony’s infrastructure increased the need for skilled workers in the various industries related to the railway, tramway and telephone systems, which sprang up around the colony.

In November 1888 Tamworth in New South Wales became the first town in Australia to use electricity to light up the main street. Manning Clark wrote of this event:

The inhabitants of Tamworth had been aglow with enthusiasm all that day, because their town had now been placed in the front rank of populated centers in Australia, having outstripped all competitors in the race for colonial progress. For ever since the use of the electric light had been first canvassed in Sydney in 1882 its contribution to a revolution in business had been stressed as its main asset... The other great advantage was its contribution to the reduction of crime, crime having to fly further afield, it was said, once the dark alleys and courts of a city were brought out of the darkness into the light by the glare of the electric lamp.⁴⁰

³⁶ R.T. Appleyard, ‘Western Australia: Economic and Demographic Growth 1850–1914’ in C. T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1981, p. 219.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁴⁰ C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia Vol. V, The People Make Laws, 1888–1915*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1981, p. 29.

By March 1894 Melbourne had a network of streetlights powered by twenty General Electric dynamos supplying 3,000 volts of DC electric power surging through sixty miles of cable to light up the city streets.⁴¹ Because of the slow economic progress of Western Australia until the 1890s and the reluctance of the Western Australian government to spend public money on the infrastructure needed to supply electricity, however, it took longer to achieve an electric power supply in Perth and Fremantle than in Melbourne and Sydney.

Although there were a couple of one-off experiments using electricity during the late 1880s, such as the lighting of the Government House ballroom in 1888,⁴² it was not for another eight years that the goldfields town of Coolgardie became the first place in Western Australia to install electric street lighting. Vera Whittington describes the occasion, in June 1896, when the first electric streetlights were turned on, 'instantly transforming Coolgardie's night'.⁴³ By August 1896 the town of Coolgardie had eight electric lights at the corners of the main street and at the railway station, an innovation that put it in advance of Perth.⁴⁴ By the end of 1897 the towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder had a joint population of about 20,000 and the suburbs were supplied with electric street lighting.⁴⁵ And, by 1902 Kalgoorlie was supplied electricity by a substantial power station.

⁴¹ Ken Purdham, *A Century of Struggle. A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Victorian Branch*, Hyland House Publishing Pty, Ltd, Flemington, Victoria, 2002, pp. 2–3.

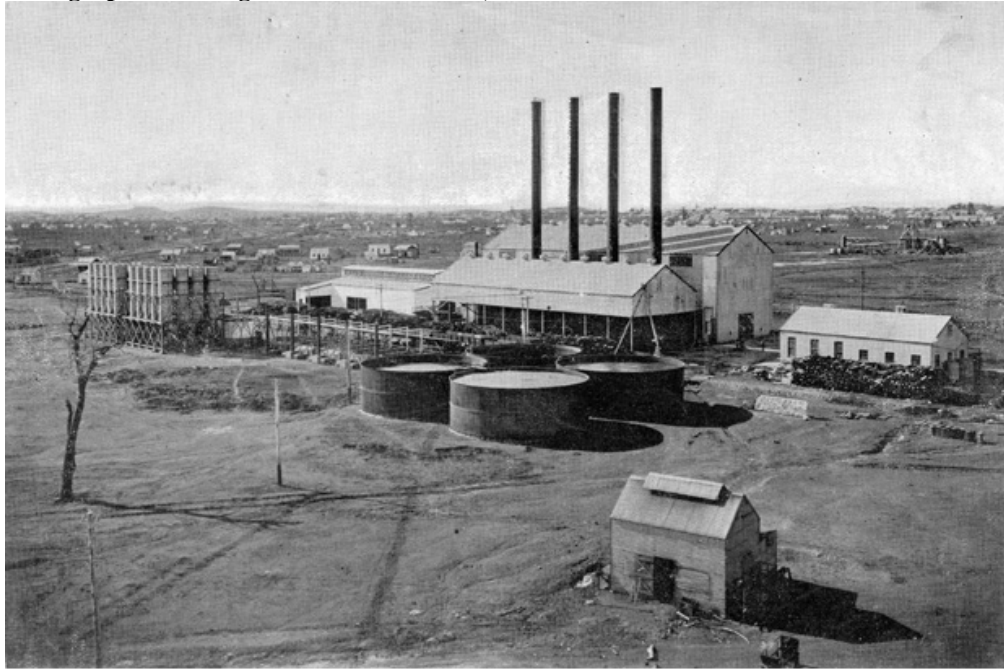
⁴² Louise Boylen, John McIlwraith and David Gladwell, ed., *Power for the People : A History of Gas and Electricity in Western Australia*, Appendix IV, Public and Government Affairs Branch, State Energy Commission of Western Australia, Perth, 1994, p. 123.

⁴³ Vera Whittington, *Gold and Typhoid Two Fevers A Social History of Western Australia 1891–1900*, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1988, p. 134.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times*, Macmillan & Co., London, 1960, p. 124.

Photograph 2.1. Kalgoorlie Power Station, 1902.



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Source: Batty Library, SLWA, online image, 009074D.

In Perth the electrification of street lighting began in earnest only in 1912.⁴⁶

The first mention of using electricity to light up the city streets was made in

December 1891 at a Perth City Council meeting.⁴⁷ Between 1891 and 1912 there were numerous discussions and delays to the electrification of the city's lighting.

The main problem seemed to have been the existence of a previous contract with and the vested interests of individual Perth City Councillors in the Perth Gas Company, as well as disagreement about whether the contract to supply electricity to the city would be by private company, by the municipality of Perth or by government licence. At the Perth City Council's half-yearly meeting of ratepayers in May 1892 the Mayor, S.H. Parker, explained that the Council proposed to light up the city with electric light. This brought a round of cheers from the ratepayers. The Mayor acknowledged that:

...the matter had been in abeyance for some time past, and eventually the Council had come to the conclusion that it would be advisable and economical to adopt this

⁴⁶ Stannage, *The People of Perth*, 1979, p. 285.

⁴⁷ City of Perth Council Meetings, Minutes, 4 December 1891, CONS. No. 2826, Item Nos. 6–9, Years 1887–1902, p. 445.

light, which was apparently the light of the age. ...Had it been possible for the Council to see its way to have carried on the system of gas-lighting in Perth at a reasonable rate, he believed the question of electric lighting would have been postponed for many years.⁴⁸

It was indeed postponed for many years. Not until 1912, under the influence of the Town Clerk, W.E. Bold, and the Mayor, Tom Molloy, did the City Council purchase the Perth Gas Company and the electrification of street lighting in Perth began on a comprehensive scale.⁴⁹ The installation of electric street lighting was very slow nevertheless and by 1914 there were only 131 electric lamps lighting up the city streets.⁵⁰ Perth street lighting did not become fully electric until 1922.⁵¹ In 1912 the Western Australian government took over the Perth Electric Tramways, the main producer of electric power, and this action took power generation out of local government control and made it a state government responsibility.⁵² The growth in domestic electric lighting was steady and by 1914 nearly 5000 meters had been connected to the city's power supply.⁵³

Fremantle Town Council in the late 1890s undertook some large municipal ventures, one being the establishment of the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Scheme. In February 1905 construction of the electric tramway was underway and was completed by April 1906.⁵⁴ Fremantle Council was also ahead of Perth when it came to supplying electricity to domestic and business consumers. The Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board supplied electricity to the ratepayers of East Fremantle, North Fremantle and the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9 May 1892, p. 512.

⁴⁹ Stannage, *The People of Perth*, 1979, pp. 285 and 295. Stannage states that the City Council bought the Perth Gas Company in 1912 and from then began to increase the electric lighting scheme but also states that the City Council pushed through the purchase of the Perth Gas Company in 1909. I have used 1912 as the more likely date.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 286.

⁵¹ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, 1960, p. 234.

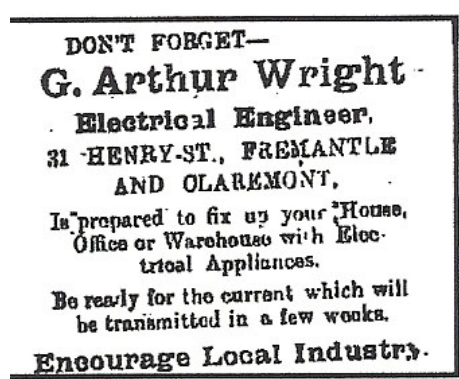
⁵² Western Power, *Commemoration of Power in Western Australia, The History of Electricity in WA*, Western Power, Perth, 2000.

⁵³ Stannage, *The People of Perth*, 1979, p. 286.

⁵⁴ John K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway, A History of Fremantle*, (2nd ed.), University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1971, p. 106.

Fremantle Harbour Trust and Railways Board.⁵⁵ Prospective consumers could pay for the installation of electricity by hire purchase at an interest rate of 10% per annum over a three-year period.⁵⁶ Electrical firms were keen to promote the coming electrical power and advertised their ability to install the necessary wiring. (See Figure 2.1) In all, Western Australia's major urban centres on the goldfields and in the metropolitan area set out on the path of ever-rising electricity demand.

Figure 2.1. Advertisement to supply electrical appliances, 1905.



Source: *Evening Mail*, 13 September 1905.

Beginnings of Regulation

The new industry needed some controls and the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board recognised that need in 1905. In that year the Board published in the *Western Australian Government Gazette* a set of rules and regulations which covered the installation of electricity in public and private buildings.⁵⁷ These Regulations were promulgated under the *Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Act, 1903*,⁵⁸ and empowered the municipalities of Fremantle and East Fremantle, jointly, to construct, maintain and work tramways within their boundaries, and also works for the generation and supply of electricity

⁵⁵ Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board (FMTELB), Minutes, ACC No. 1331, AN No. 306, Item No. 1, Years 1904–1905, 26 April 1905, p. 200.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1906, p. 521.

⁵⁷ Western Australian Government *Western Australian Government Gazette* [hereafter WAGG], July – September, 1905, pp. 2688–90.

⁵⁸ *Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Act, 1903*, WA.

for motive and lighting purposes. The Board also stipulated that it would be the responsibility of the manager and engineer in charge of the tramway, A. Mitchell, to advertise and issue a wireman's certificate to anyone intending to carry out electrical installations in the Fremantle area.⁵⁹ (See Figure 2.2) The Board had numerous applications from men who wanted to work as wiremen or electricians.⁶⁰ The first wireman's certificate to undertake electrical work was granted to C. Fisher in April 1906.⁶¹

Figure 2.2. Advertisement for a Wireman's Certification, 1905.



Source: *West Australian*, 7 October 1905, p. 10.

The State government had legislated for the new infrastructure and during 1892 the Electric Lighting Bill was debated in the Legislative Assembly. The then Member for Moore, G. Randell, argued that other parts of the world had introduced legislation to cover the regulation of the supply of electric power for reasons of public safety:

No company could take steps for the installation – he believed that was the word; it was rather a grand word, and perhaps the light was a grand light – no company could take steps for introducing the electric light into any town without the sanction of the municipality. As he had already said, there were elements of danger connected with this system of lighting by electricity, as there was connected with gas; and it was necessary, he thought, that at the very outset we should be prepared

⁵⁹ FMTELB, Minutes, 5 October 1905, p. 319.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11 April 1906, p. 510.

to lay down certain rules and regulations by which these companies should be guided in distributing their lights.⁶²

W. Traylen, the member for Greenough, had concerns about electric light wires already running overhead without approval.⁶³ G.T. Simpson, from Geraldton, wanted the State government and not the municipalities to control the supply of electricity for public and private consumers. He had concerns that the Perth City Council had strong ties with the Gas Company and would hold back the installation of electric light because of this connection, saying:⁶⁴

He had no wish to interfere in any way with vested interests or vested rights, or with any company's dividends and bonuses, but he did think it would be very much wiser and better, in the interests of the citizens, if the power under the contemplated bill were vested in the hands of the Government of the colony, instead of the municipality of Perth.⁶⁵

F.H. Piesse, MLA for Williams, also expressed concern about the supply of electric power being placed under the sole control of the Perth City Council, which would mean that only Perth would be covered by the legislation. What of other towns that would be installing electric lighting? He argued:

There could be no cheaper or more efficient means than the electric light as an illuminant and he had no doubt that it would eventually be adopted, not only in our larger towns but also in the smaller towns of the colony.⁶⁶

The Attorney General, Septimus Burt, was not only concerned about electric wires being hung in inappropriate places; he also wanted to ensure that the regulations to govern the installation of electric light came under the powers of an Act which was controlled by public legislation and not a private organisation.⁶⁷ Two photographs taken in central Perth at the beginning of the twentieth century clearly show the

⁶² Electric Lighting Bill, Necessity for, speech by Mr Randell, for Moore, 12 January 1892, *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter *WAPD*], Vol. II, 7 December 1891 – 18 March 1892, pp. 221–3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

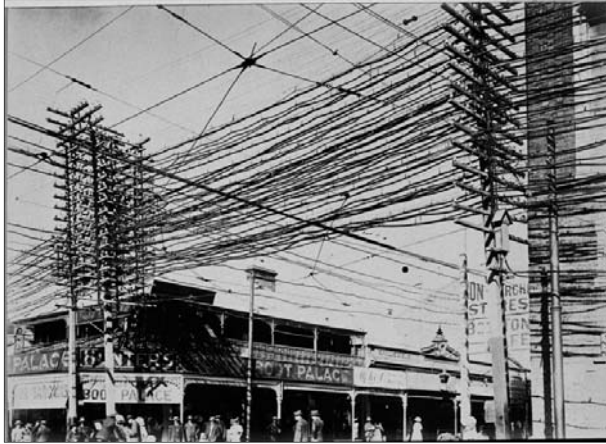
⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

proliferation of overhead electric wires and testify to the substance of Traylen's and Burt's concerns. (See Photographs 2.2 and 2.3)

Photograph 2.2. Boot Palace, Perth, 1913.



Source: Battye Library, SLWA, online image - 025579PD.

Photograph 2.3. Hay Street, Perth, 1900.



Source: Battye Library, SLWA, online image – 004084D.

In the end, the Electric Light Bill — ‘an Act to authorize Municipal Corporations to supply or to grant Licences to make Contracts for the supply of Electricity for Lighting and other purposes’ — was passed on 8 March 1892.⁶⁸ The general provisions of the Act empowered the Perth City Council to grant licences or

⁶⁸ *Electric Lighting Act, 1892, WA.*

make a contract with a private company, or to provide a supply of electricity itself. According to the Act, it was the City Council that would secure a regular and efficient supply of electricity and make sure that the public was safe from personal injury and hazards by ensuring a safe and correct installation process.⁶⁹ In 1905 the Act was amended to cover a larger geographical area than the city of Perth and the word 'Council' was replaced throughout by the words 'Local Authority'.⁷⁰

Unionisation of Western Australian Workers

By the beginning of the twentieth century conditions in Western Australia were conducive to the establishment of trade union organisation among the State's electrical workers. Electricity had emerged as an essential lighting, transport and industrial technology; and State and local governments had put in place the foundations of a regulatory framework. Electrical workers were in demand and the industry was a growing one. Union organisation to protect workers' interests was a logical consequence, given the rapid unionisation of other sectors of Western Australia's workforce in the 1890s and early 1900s. Unionism in the metropolitan area increased rapidly after the initial disruption of the gold rushes of the early 1890s. By 1896 there were about 20 unions covering the coastal area, led by 'sober, respectable, nonconformist tradesmen'.⁷¹ Engineering unionism grew with the general development of the Western Australian economy, especially important being the growth of the railways. The railway workshops, established to repair and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Electric Lighting Amendment Act, 1905*, WA.

⁷¹ H.J. Gibbney, 'Western Australia', in D.J. Murphy, ed., *Labor in Politics, the State Labor Parties in Australia 1880 - 1920*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1975, p. 346.

maintain equipment,⁷² were initially located in Fremantle but moved to Midland in 1904.⁷³

An early union to be established in Western Australia was the Fremantle branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners in 1884 and the premier engineering union, the ASE, established branches in Perth and Kalgoorlie in 1892 and 1899 respectively.⁷⁴ In 1904, with the establishment of the State Conciliation and Arbitration Court, all unions were required to register under both the *Trade Union Act, 1902* and the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1902*. The ASE registered a number of branches with the new Industrial Court, one of these being at the railway workshops in Midland in 1905, with 38 members.⁷⁵ The Western Australian Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees (WAASRE), a large union with a total of 2317 members, had already established a branch at the Midland railway workshops in 1903 with a membership of 28.⁷⁶ The Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU) was recorded as a registered union in 1906 with 34 members.⁷⁷ Notwithstanding this electrical workers in the Midland Workshops were too small in number at this point to form their own union and would have been included in the membership of the ASE and WAASRE.

Workers in the engineering trades were employed in a wide range of industries, such as railways and mining — wherever they were required to fit and maintain machinery.⁷⁸ As industries began, if slowly, to use electric motors to run machines the ASE saw electrical workers as a promising membership source.

⁷² K.D. Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852–1920*, Department of Economic History Research School of Social Sciences Australian National University, Canberra, 1970, p. 15.

⁷³ Ewers, *The Western Gateway*, 1971, p. 112.

⁷⁴ H.J. Gibbney, 'Working Class Organization in Western Australia from 1880–1902', History Honours Thesis, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1949, Appendix VI, Formation Dates of Unions, pp. i and vii.

⁷⁵ *WARP*, Perth, Vol. V, 1906, Appendix III, p. 106.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, 1910, Appendix II, pp. 296–303.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, 1906, Appendix III, p. 106.

⁷⁸ Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers*, 1970, p. 13.

Electrical workers already worked alongside a number of engineering trades such as engineering fitters, turners, pattern makers and machinists and, as previously noted, the ASE's constitution already allowed for electrical trades workers.⁷⁹

In Australia, as was also the case in Britain, the ASE was the model union for the establishment of many craft unions. As a craft union, the ASE's main policy was one of restriction, with entry to the trade limited by apprenticeship and prohibition on union membership for unskilled workers.⁸⁰ In order for this union to continue as an elite craft union, the membership fees were set at a higher rate than in the majority of other unions. These high membership fees contributed towards payment of benefits for sickness, superannuation, accident, loss of tools by fire, funeral benefit and benevolent grants.⁸¹ Some unionists were critical of this benefits policy. They accused the unions that promoted this insurance system of enticing members to join their unions over others. One anonymous correspondent to the *Kalgoorlie Miner* in 1898 stated:

Men join the union from insurance motives, not from principles... Unionism should stand on its own base and men with those principles at heart should look to the shearers for example.⁸²

In comparison, as a mass labour union and not a craft union, the Shearers' Union based its membership criteria on principles of socialism and co-operative action for the collective good.⁸³

Compulsory arbitration became law and entered the Western Australian Statute Book in December 1900.⁸⁴ In order to be recognised as part of the system of

⁷⁹ Western Australian State Records Office [hereafter WASRO], Western Australian Arbitration Court [hereafter WAAC] files, ACC NO. 1101/285, 1902, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gibbney, 'Working Class Organization', 1949, p. 77.

⁸³ Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics. A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850–1910*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1960, p. 106.

industrial conciliation and arbitration, trade unions had to be registered as legal organisations. Completed in two stages, the necessary legislation of, first, a Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, which declared trade union activities to be lawful, was passed along with the Arbitration Bill in December 1900. Two years later the second piece of legislation, the Trade Union Regulation Act, finally gave official recognition to trade unions in Western Australia.⁸⁵

From the beginning of the twentieth century workers in the electrical trades formed themselves into autonomous groups throughout Australia. In June 1900 thirty electrical workers met in Sydney to discuss the formation of a union they intended to name the Operative Electrical Union.⁸⁶ Electrical workers in Melbourne were next to call a meeting of 'Electrical Men' in May 1902 (see Figure 2.3) and formed the Electrical Association of Australia.⁸⁷

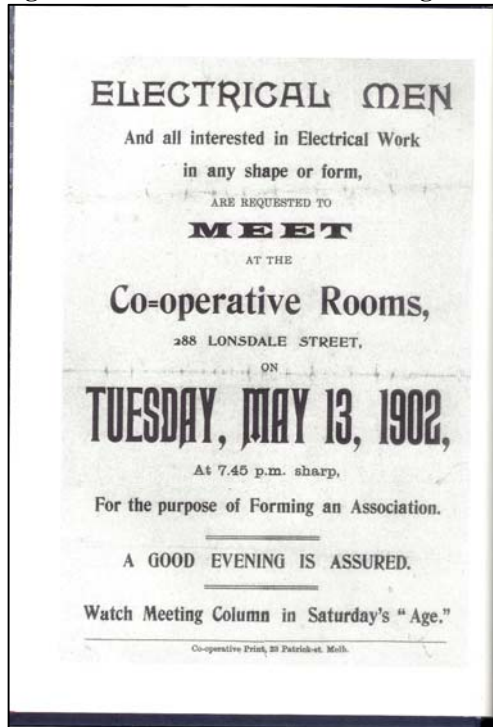
⁸⁴ I.H. Vanden Driesen, 'Evolution of the Trade Union Movement in Western Australia' in C.T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1981, p. 373.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 373–374.

⁸⁶ John R. Pola, *The Greatest Servant. A Social History of the Electrical Trades Union (New South Wales Branch)*, 2B Graphics Pty, Ltd, Sydney, 1983, p. 14.

⁸⁷ Ken Purdham, *A Century of Struggle A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, Flemington, Victoria, 2002, p. 6.

Figure 2.3. Advertisement of Meeting of Electrical Men, Melbourne, 1902.



Source: Ken Purdham, *A Century of Struggle*, p.4.

It was not until 1908 that this Association changed its name to the Electrical Trades Union of Victoria.⁸⁸ In 1911 the Victorian Electrical Trades Union proposed registering under the Federal Arbitration Court as the Federated Electrical Trades Union of Australia.⁸⁹ This move was initially opposed by the New South Wales ETU, protesting that the electrical trades unions in other States had not been allowed to be part of the decision to federate.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding this protest by New South Wales, the Victorian union registered under the Commonwealth Arbitration Court as the Federated Electrical Trades Union of Australia.⁹¹ And, in 1914 New South Wales had joined the federation along with South Australia and Tasmania.⁹² In Brisbane electrical workers were initially members of the ASE or the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association and it was not until June 1915 that a

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.13.

⁹² Ibid.

meeting was held to form a Queensland branch of the Federated Electrical Trades Union of Australia.⁹³ Therefore, in the first decade of the twentieth century, a significant number of electrical workers in the larger and more industrialised eastern states had organised themselves into independent electrical trade unions and had created a national union named the Federated Electrical Trades Union of Australia, changing its name to the Electrical Trades Union of Australia in 1919.⁹⁴

On the other side of the continent, however, in the midst of a state wide economic downturn, electrical workers in Western Australian were only just making moves to form a trade union. In 1906 there was widespread unemployment, manufacturing was stagnant and there was a serious decline in government revenue.⁹⁵ To add to this decline unemployment in the gold industry rose and men, looking for jobs, began to move from the goldfields to the coast. A continuous stream of job-seekers from the eastern states, particularly Victoria and South Australia, also poured into the State.⁹⁶ There is little doubt that among these workers there were a number of electrical workers with firmly established union backgrounds, and, finding no electrical union in Perth, moved to create an organisation able to represent their unique trade.

The Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union

On 18 August 1905 a meeting of the Building Trades Vigilance Committee was called to discuss a proposal to form a union of electrical engineers, fitters and wiremen. The Building Trades Vigilance Committee (set up as an executive body to

⁹³ Archie H. Dawson, *Points and Politics : A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Queensland*, Colonial Press, Stafford, Queensland, 1977, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, National Office, Sydney, website. On 24 December 1919 the Electrical Trades Union of Australia federally re-registered under the *Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1904* as an association of employees.

⁹⁵ Ted Joll, '1901–1930', 1979 in Peter Firkins (ed.), *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Perth, 1979, p. 43.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

represent all the building trades in the metropolitan area) had been informed only one week prior to this meeting of the necessity of organising the electrical trades and, in recognising the urgency to call a meeting, had borne all the advertising costs and made its meeting room available. This is the first indication that workers in the electrical trades aligned themselves more closely with the building trades than with the engineering trades.⁹⁷ At the first meeting held by electrical workers, Arthur Mills urged everyone present to unite as a union in order to make the electrical craft the highest and best paid in the State. This resolution was carried unanimously and 40 men enrolled as members. Ernest Robert Wight and Arthur Mills were appointed temporarily to the positions of president and secretary respectively.⁹⁸

Who, then, were the first members of this initial organisation to represent electrical workers in Western Australia? Richard Broome has argued that, 'we all populate our histories with individuals albeit in mere fragments, as we use people to support and colour our generalisations'.⁹⁹ An examination of the individual members of a union can be a useful tool with which to create an overview of union membership. With very few surviving union records it has proven difficult to track down many of the individuals involved in the formation of the electrical trades union in Perth in 1905. However, by investigating the background of a small number of individuals, it has been possible to create an indicative picture of the men making up the union in 1905.

Of the initial 40 members it has been possible to identify two who arrived in Western Australia just prior to the creation of the electrical trades union.

⁹⁷ *Westralian Worker*, 18 August 1905, p. 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 August 1905, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Richard Broome, *Tracing Past Lives* in Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, 'Struggling for recognition: reading the individual in labour history' *Labour History*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 87, Nov 2004, pp. 1–10.

Arthur Mills migrated from Britain and arrived in Western Australia in 1903. He was 43 and travelled with his wife, two sons and a daughter. Both sons were born in England, one in Newcross in London, and the other in Chatham, Kent. Mills' name first appears in the 1904 *Western Australian Post Office Directory* and, in subsequent volumes of this publication, the initials AMIEE (Associate Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers) were added after his name. He was recorded as an electrical engineer until 1912. After this date he and his sons are registered as farmers in Kurrenkutten, near Corrigin in the central wheat belt of Western Australia.¹⁰⁰ William Jowett, member in 1905 and secretary in 1910, was born in Tasmania and his son was born in South Melbourne, Victoria. He arrived in Perth sometime prior to 1905 when he would have been aged 42. Mills and Jowett were both in their early forties and are likely to have been experienced tradesmen and perhaps electrical trades unionists.

Another member in 1905, Clement Wilder Benporath, was born in Kent in England and arrived in Albany as a child with his family in 1895. He served his electrical apprenticeship in Perth.¹⁰¹ Another four members recorded their place of work as their address and a further three at what were most likely boarding houses or hotels; for example, W. Rees, trustee, records the Perth Coffee Palace as his address and H. Fleming gives his address as 'care of Cheffins House, Perth'. These members' addresses indicate that these workers had no permanent address in Western Australia and had most likely only recently arrived from overseas or

¹⁰⁰ *Western Australian Post Office Directory* [hereafter *WAPD Directory*], 1900–1914; National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA] website, First World War Records; NAA website, Passenger Arrivals Index; Genealogy websites: *Findmypast.com*, Migration Records; *Ancestry.com.au*, Australian Electoral Rolls, 1901–1936; Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages website.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

interstate.¹⁰² The first three individuals comprised 7.5% of the total membership in 1905 and, if combined with the other incoming seven members, made 25% of the total membership, all from areas with already well established electrical trades unions.

On 15 September 1905, a second meeting of electrical trades workers took place at 147A Barrack Street, Perth.¹⁰³ This address, on the corner of Barrack Street and Wellington Street, in the Queen's Chambers above the Adelaide Café, housed the premises of a tailor, a land agent and the Australian Workers' Association. The rooms belonging to the Australian Workers' Association were often used for political and union meetings.¹⁰⁴ The *West Australian* reported that there was a large attendance at the meeting. The union rules had been drawn up by a special committee, no doubt appointed at the initial meeting. Members voted to affiliate with the Eight Hours Demonstration committee and the United Building Trades, and delegates to these groups were appointed. The *West Australian* noted that several members of the building trades were present at the meeting and gave assistance by way of advice to the new union.¹⁰⁵ Ernest Robert Wight was elected president, Arthur Mills, secretary and the treasurer was Max Reiter. Again the close links with the building trades (rather than the engineering trades) are notable.

In October 1905 electrical workers met once again. At this meeting it was decided that the new union would construct a working display for the forthcoming Eight Hours Demonstration. And, while no union records survive this period, contemporary newspaper reports provide evidence that between 1906 and 1913 the union continued to encourage all members to attend labour movement and trade

¹⁰² 'Copy of Resolution desiring Registry' of Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union, 9 October 1905, held by author with union records.

¹⁰³ *West Australian*, 18 September 1905, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *WAPO Directory*, 1904, p. 246.

¹⁰⁵ *West Australian*, 18 September 1905, p. 4.

union events such as the Eight Hours' Day celebrations, trade exhibitions and the METU's annual picnics.¹⁰⁶ This meeting also reviewed and altered the rules in accordance with correspondence received from the Registrar of Friendly Societies.¹⁰⁷

The rules were forwarded in November 1905 to the Department of Labour. The name of the new union was to be registered as the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union of Workers (METU) and its offices at 147a, Barrack Street, Perth.

The objects of the union were:

To unite and render legitimate assistance to its members, to uphold a fair remuneration for their labor, to protect the well-being of the trade in general, to improve the position of its members and in other ways watch over its interests. The Union shall be non-political and non-sectarian.¹⁰⁸

As Gibbney explained, the objectives of the early unions usually fell into two groups. The first covered short-term industrial objectives and the second dealt with the union's long-term ideals.¹⁰⁹ The objectives of the electrical union, as set out above, demonstrate this argument. The short-term goals of the union were to unite and provide assistance to its members and to use its registration, as a legitimate union, to fight for fairer wages and conditions. The long-term goals were to ensure the electrical trades were protected from dilution and that the organisation grew in strength.¹¹⁰ Further, according to Richard Hyman's classification, the METU fell into the domain of business unionism. Hyman explains that the fundamental function of business unionism is collective bargaining and that these unions are:

¹⁰⁶ *Daily News*, Perth, 19 September 1905, p. 3; *West Australian*, Perth, 25 June 1906, p. 6; *West Australian*, 8 October 1906, p. 4; *West Australian*, 2 March 1907, p. 11; *Western Mail*, Perth, 14 November 1908, p. 42; *West Australian*, 25 March 1912, p. 6; *Daily News*, 15 March 1913, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Westralian Worker*, 20 October 1905, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Draft copy of the rules of the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union of Workers, 1905. Held by ETUWA.

¹⁰⁹ Gibbney, 'Working Class Organization', 1949, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

...primarily organizations for the representation of occupational interests, a function which is subverted if their operation is subordinated to broader socio-political projects: hence they must eschew political entanglements.¹¹¹

Electrical trades workers viewed themselves as craftsmen and part of the ‘aristocracy of labour’, a class above the exploited masses of unskilled labour.

Schaffer, in his history of the Electrical Trades Union in Britain, argues that the early leadership of the British ETU did not view the union primarily as a weapon against capitalist exploitation, but as a method of protecting craft standards.¹¹² Robert F. Hoxie, an economist with the University of Chicago, with a particular interest in trade and labour unions in the early part of the twentieth century, defines craft unionism as:

Essentially trade-conscious, rather than class-conscious. ...It aims chiefly at more, here and now, for the organized workers of the craft or industry, in terms mainly of higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions, regardless for the most part of the workers outside the organic group, and regardless in general of political and social considerations, except in so far as these bear directly upon its own economic ends. It ... accepts as inevitable, if not as just, the existing capitalistic organization and the wage system, as well as existing property rights and the binding force of contract.¹¹³

Over the period of this history, the electrical trades unions, in Britain and the eastern states of Australia, were established and remained exclusive craft unions representing only workers within the family of electrical trades, thereby creating a group of workers with a strong work culture, bound together by a common interest.

The 1906 rules registered for the METU in Perth described those workers eligible to join. Potential members had to have been working in the trade for a period of four years as armature winders, battery makers and erectors, battery attendants, dynamo and motor attendants, electrical fitters and mechanics, instrument makers, installation attendants, switchboard attendants, linemen or wiremen. Other

¹¹¹ Richard Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism. Between Market, Class and Society*, Sage Publications, London, 2001, p. 3.

¹¹² G. Schaffer, *Light and Liberty :Sixty Years of the Electrical Trades Union*, Electrical Trades Union of Britain, Bromley, Kent, UK, 1949, p. 1.

¹¹³ Robert F. Hoxie in Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism*, 2001, p. 8.

potential members included the designation of improvers. These were men who had come into the trade as adults and had not served an apprenticeship but had worked in the electrical trades with a journeyman for at least two years.¹¹⁴ A final category of members were apprentices (over the age of sixteen) who were employed in any electrical work.

The union was specific about the terms on which a worker could be enrolled. Each worker who wanted to join the union had first to be approved by an investigation committee, and the worker's application had to be proposed and seconded by this committee. The prospective members paid two shillings and sixpence as an initial entrance fee within the first three months of the union's formation but, after this time, the entrance fee increased to five shillings. In order to ensure members kept up-to-date with their contributions the first re-entrance fee was set at ten shillings and sixpence, which increased to £1 for every subsequent re-entrance. The entrance and re-entrance fees for apprentices were half of those for journeymen. The contributions for journeymen and improvers was sixpence per week and for apprentices threepence.¹¹⁵ It was the duty of each member, in every way possible, to advance the interests of his fellow unionists and pass on to brother members information regarding possible employment. Members unemployed for more than a week were to enter their names in a book that would be kept at the union's regular meeting place. This entry would exempt the worker from paying contributions or levies until he found work again.¹¹⁶

In December 1905 the Coastal Trades and Labor Council objected to the METU's registration on the grounds that the union was not a *bona fide* union of workers because there had been a number of employers admitted to membership

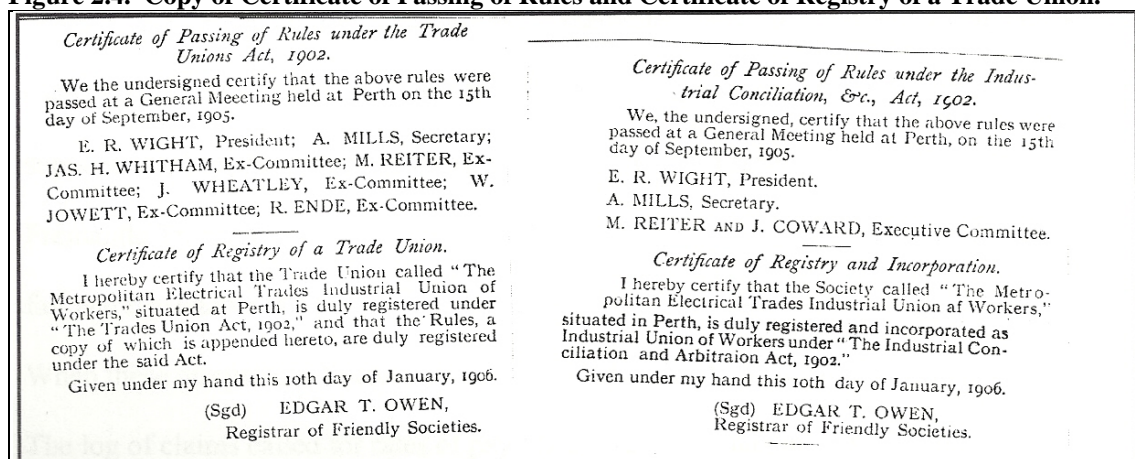
¹¹⁴ Draft copy of Rules of the METU, held by ETUWA.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

prior to the application for registration. The METU secretary wrote to the registrar of friendly societies stating that intensive enquiries had been made regarding the allegation and that, as far as he was aware, only one man, G. Brown, had been jobbing at the time of enrolling as a member. The union had deemed him to be a worker not an employer but, when approached by the union, Brown agreed to have his name struck off the list of members so that there could be no further objection to the registration.¹¹⁷ The METU was registered under the *Trade Unions Act, 1902* and the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1902* and signed by the Registrar of Friendly Societies, on 10 January 1906.¹¹⁸

Figure 2.4. Copy of Certificate of Passing of Rules and Certificate of Registry of a Trade Union.



Source: ETUWA records.

Unfortunately for the ongoing success of the new union, it had formed as the State's rapid economic and demographic growth sparked by the gold rushes was slowing. Between 1905 and 1909, for the first time since 1888, there was a net loss in population, and manufacturing output fell 4.64%. This decline affected total union membership figures, which fell from 16,330 in 1904 to 14,544 in 1907.¹¹⁹ In the longer term Western Australia's population continued to rise: from 250,138 in

¹¹⁷ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 1911/0215, 'Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union. 1. Application for Registration under Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. 2. Amendment of Rules' (1911).

¹¹⁸ Copy held in ETUWA records.

¹¹⁹ H.J. Gibbney, 'Western Australia' in D.J. Murphy, ed., *Labor in Politics, the State Labor Parties in Australia 1880-1920*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1975, p. 360.

1905 to 327,860 by 1919.¹²⁰ This increase was due, for the most part, to the State government's policy of encouraging immigration from Britain by offering free or assisted passages. Between the beginning of 1903 and the end of 1913, 54,777 immigrants arrived from Britain, some to work in the expanding Railway Workshops, electric tramways workshops in Perth and Fremantle and the growing number of manufacturing workshops.¹²¹

Industrial Awards for Electrical Workers

During 1906 the METU remained small but active and by the end of its first year it had 36 financial members. Although the METU had begun operating in the midst of a state-wide economic downturn, in accordance with the main tenets of its establishment and within eight months of registering, the union endeavoured to advance the standing of the trade by improving the wages and conditions of its members by negotiating its first industrial award. This was granted on 27 November 1906.¹²² The award was agreed after a dispute, starting in August 1906, which involved the union and thirteen employers. Of these thirteen employers one was an engineering company; another was an electric wire and cable manufacturer; four of were electric lighting and supply companies; and seven were electrical contractors. The METU, in its application for this award, was clearly trying to establish the scope of the existing electrical industry in which its members in the electrical generating and supply and electrical contracting industries worked, thus not limiting itself to a narrow interpretation of the industry.

¹²⁰ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, 1960, p. 157.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹²² *WARP*, Vol. V, 1906, industrial award between the METU and Splatt, Wall & Co., Unbehaun & Johnstone, Ritchie & Jackman, The Perth Gas Co. Ltd, The Perth Electric Tramways, Ltd, The Fremantle Tramways, The Bullock Engineering Company, Cheffins & Co., Airy & Stradwick, A G Wright & Co., The India Rubber, Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Co., Ltd, Kidston & Co., and Edmiston & Co., pp. 53–6.

According to a report made at the first meeting of electrical workers in 1905 the unorganised electrical workers earned 9 shillings per day, 2 shillings a day less than engineering tradesmen and 1 shilling less than some unskilled labourers who were earning a maximum of 10 shillings per day.¹²³ As soon as it was registered the METU set out a log of claims it considered were fair and reasonable rates of pay and conditions, and held discussions with employers throughout the early months of 1906.

By late August 1906 discussions between the parties had failed and the union applied for the Court of Arbitration to intervene.¹²⁴ A compromise was finally reached between all parties, and the wages and conditions were agreed. The award of 1906 applied to the electrical trade and covered a fourteen-mile radius from the Perth General Post Office. It was operative for a two-year period, from 1 December 1906 until 1 December 1908. The 48 hours per week which were agreed covered a six-day period, but hours were not to exceed 56 in a seven-day period, unless by paid overtime. Workers were entitled to paid overtime at a rate of time and a quarter for the first three hours of overtime, for the following four hours at time and a half, and then until starting time the next day at double time. Workers were to receive double time rates for working on Sundays, Good Friday, Christmas Day and the Eight Hours' Day.¹²⁵

In this claim the union tried to cover as wide a range of electrical work as possible by naming ten classifications of electrical workers, whereas the employers' counter-claim named only two — electrical foreman and electrical worker.

Notwithstanding the union's claim for coverage of ten classifications the Court

¹²³ *Westralian Worker*, 18 August 1905, p. 4.

¹²⁴ WAAC files ACC. No. 1489, Item No. 10, Years 1902–1908, *Western Australian Register of Disputes and Awards*, [hereafter *WARDA*] Application No. 225, 23 August 1906, p. 108.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, ACC. No. 1383, Item No. 1, Year 1906, Award File, Industrial Commission.

awarded minimum rates of pay for only four main classifications of the electrical trades, armature winder, electrical installer, electrical fitter and electrical linesman. The union's claim for the classifications of instrument maker, battery maker and erector, battery attendant, dynamo and motor attendant and switchboard attendant were omitted from the final award, possibly because they were already covered under other awards already in existence. While the union had claimed for a rate of 12 shillings per day for both the electrical fitter and electrical installer the rates awarded were 11 shillings and 10 shillings respectively.¹²⁶ (See Table 2.1)

¹²⁶ *WARP*, Vol. V, 1906, pp. 53–6.

Table 2.1. Wage Claim and Outcome of METU Award Negotiations - 1906.

Wage Claim and Outcome of Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union Award Negotiations - 1906							
Class of Worker	Existing Rate (Per day of 8 hours)		METU Claim (Per day of 8 hours)		Employers' Claims (Per day of 8 hours)	Awarded Rate (Per day of 8 hours)	
	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.
Instrument Maker	12	0	16	0	-	-	-
Armature Winder ¹²⁷	10	0	13	6	-	12	0
Electrical fitter / installer ¹²⁸	10	0	13	0	-	-	-
Electrical Fitter¹²⁹	10s	to 11s	12	0	-	11	0
Electrical Installer¹³⁰	10	0	12	0	-	10	0
Battery maker and erecator	No member employed on wages at present, but will probably be in the next three months		12	0	-	-	-
Battery Attendant	Same as above		12	0	-	-	-
Dynamo and Motor Attendant	10	0	11	0	-	-	-
Switchboard Attendant	10	0	11	0	-	-	-
Electrical Linesman	8s,	9s and 10s	11	0	-	9	0
Electrical Foreman					10	0	-
Electrical Worker					8	0	-

Source: *WARP*, Vol. V, 1906, p. 53.

The 1906 award also provided a limit for each employer of one 'incompetent worker' to three fully paid workers or a fraction of the first three. An 'incompetent worker' was someone who was unable to earn the prescribed minimum wage of a

¹²⁷ There was no definition for the classification of armature winder in the 1906 award but they were defined in other awards as skilled tradesmen who wound copper wire around the armatures, which were then fitted into generators. Armature winders were classed at the same level of skill and experience as leading hand blacksmiths, coppersmiths, fitters and turners. The definition was found in, WAAC files, ACC. No. 1381 Item No. 10, Vol. 1902–1910, 'Industrial agreement between the Commissioner of Railways and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers', 1904.

¹²⁸ An electrical fitter / installer is a worker experienced in both areas of the trade and ultimately (by the early 2000s) is classified simply as an 'electrician'.

¹²⁹ In the original log of claims electrical fitter is named as an 'installation attendant' - 'a man in charge of an electrical installation required to do necessary repairs, or add to or take from the installation'. In 1923 an electrical fitter was defined as a worker engaged in making, repairing, altering, assembling, or testing (with or without wiring) electrical machines, instruments or apparatus. Therefore for the sake of future clarity an installation attendant will be referred to as an electrical fitter. The definition for electrical fitter in *WAIG*, Vol. 3, 1923, an award between the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Minister for Works and the Minister for Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage, the Colonial Secretary and Minister for North-West, pp. 111–14.

¹³⁰ In the original claim this classification was named electrical wireman, however, as explained previously, this classification was changed to electrical installer.

tradesman. He was probably a trades assistant or an 'improver'.¹³¹ Another inclusion provided against discrimination towards union members, and employers were required not to:

...do anything directly or indirectly for the purpose of injuring the union. When members of the union and non members are employed together there shall be no discrimination between them and they shall all work together in harmony.¹³²

The METU attempted to restrict apprentice numbers by asking for a ratio of one apprentice for every four journeymen employed while the employers wanted one apprentice or boy for each tradesman. However, the final award did not include any conditions covering electrical trades apprentices because no statutory regulations governing apprenticeships in Western Australia existed until 1909, when the state government amended the Conciliation and Arbitration Act giving the Court power to include conditions governing apprentices in all future awards.¹³³

The 1906 award had some success in increasing the minimum wage rates of armature winders and electrical fitters to 12 shillings and 11 shillings per day respectively, thereby bringing them into line with other skilled engineering tradesmen; for example, engineering fitters and turners were paid 11 shillings per day.¹³⁴ This wage increase achieved a small measure of recognition for these two areas of the electrical trades within the engineering industry. The award failed, however, to recognise fully the trade of electrical installer, the area of the trade more aligned with the building trades than the engineering trades. The METU claimed that electrical installers should be on the same rates of pay as electrical fitters — 12 shillings per day. However, the Court awarded electrical installers 2 shillings per day less than that claimed and 1 shilling less than that granted to an electrical fitter at

¹³¹ *WARP*, Vol. V, 1906, p. 55.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹³³ M.A. White and W. Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in Western Australia: A History' in S. Murray-Smith, ed., *Melbourne Studies in Education, 1981*, Melbourne, 1981, p. 159.

¹³⁴ *WARP*, Vol. II, 1903, pp. 105–13.

a rate of 10 shillings per day.¹³⁵ It was to be another 56 years before electrical installers achieved wage parity with electrical fitters in the Metal Trades Construction (Alumina Refinery) Award, 1962.¹³⁶ This was only after the numbers of electrical installers had reached a critical mass enabling this section of the trade to forcibly press its case for equal pay.¹³⁷

During 1910 and 1911 the State experienced an economic upturn. Alfred Sandover, president of the Perth Chamber of Commerce, enthusiastically proclaimed, 'At no time in the commercial history of the State has there been such buoyancy'.¹³⁸ This was in part due to a State Government campaign encouraging immigration from the United Kingdom and in 1911, 9562 people arrived in Western Australia. This was the greatest number of government-aided immigrants ever to arrive in one year.¹³⁹ No doubt there were a number of electrical workers amongst them; but it has proved difficult to trace the arrival dates of individual union members. However, with a membership of 27 in 1906 growing to 56 in 1911,¹⁴⁰ the METU felt the time was right to lodge a claim for an improvement in the wages and conditions of electrical workers in Western Australia.

In September 1911 the METU lodged a log of claims on six electrical contracting employers in the metropolitan area.¹⁴¹ The 1906 award had been negotiated between the METU and thirteen employers over a cross section of the full electrical industry.¹⁴² In the 1911 award the six respondents included one firm of electricians, Deague and Deague; three electrical engineering companies (Cheffins &

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, 1906, p. 55.

¹³⁶ *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 42, 1962, pp. 537–44.

¹³⁷ This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter 8.

¹³⁸ Joll, '1901–1930' in *A History of Commerce and Industry*, 1979, pp. 57–8.

¹³⁹ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, 1960, p. 158.

¹⁴⁰ *WARP* Vol. X, 1911, Appendix II, Industrial Unions Registered 31 December 1911.

¹⁴¹ *WARDA*, ACC No. 1489, Item No. 16, Vol. 1902–1908, Reference No. 11/1911, date of lodging 21 September 1911, p. 129.

¹⁴² *WAPO Directory*, 1906, Trades section.

Co., Unbehaun & Johnstone and Ritchie & Jackman); and two electrical lighting and supply companies, The Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electrical Lighting Board and the Perth Gas Company Ltd.¹⁴³ The final award, however, was between the union and the electrical firm of Deague and Deague and the three electrical engineering companies, the electrical supply companies having been omitted. The following table is an outline of the union's claim and the employers' counter claim for four electrical classifications and the rates eventually agreed.¹⁴⁴ (See Table 2.2)

Table 2.2. Wage Claim and Outcome of Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union Award Negotiations — 1911.

Wage Claim and Outcome of Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union Award Negotiations — 1911						
Class of Worker	METU Claim (Per day of 8 hours)		Employers' Counter Claim (Per day of 8 hours)		Agreed Rates (Per day of 8 hours)	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Armature Winder	15	0	12	0	12	0
Elevator erector and repairer	13	6	12	0	12	0
Electrical Installer	12	6	10	0	10	0
Linesman – Alternating Current	13	0	9	6	9	6
Linesman – Direct Current	11	0	9	6	9	6
Apprentice rates(Per Week)						
1 st year	15	0	10	0	10	0
2 nd year	20	0	15	0	20	0
3 rd year	25	0	25	0	30	0
4 th year	30	0	30	0	40	0

Source: *WARP* Vol. X, 1911, pp. 104 – 111.

The main difference between this award and the 1906 award is that the classification of electrical fitter was omitted, most likely because this classification was already covered under the 1906 award, a more relevant one for this classification, which had continued as the prevailing award for this area of the trade.

¹⁴³ WAAC files, ACC No. 1383, Item 11, 1911, Award files, Applicant: METU and Respondents: Unbehaun & Johnstone; Cheffins & Co.; Deague & Deague; Ritchie & Jackman; The Fremantle Municipal Tramways & Electric Lighting Board; and the Perth Gas Company, Limited.

¹⁴⁴ *WARP*, Vol. X, 1911, pp. 104–11.

The METU had once again claimed for an increase in the rates of armature winders and electrical installers of 15 shillings and 12 shillings 6 pence respectively. However the Court refused any wage rises above those already awarded in 1906.¹⁴⁵ Therefore electrical installers remained on a rate of 10s per day. The 1911 award was between the METU and the main electrical contracting firms, and these employers used only electrical installers and had no use for electrical fitters. The classification of elevator erector/repairer was added to the 1911 award (no definition for this classification was given)¹⁴⁶ on a rate of 12 shillings per day, the same rate as armature winders and 2s more than electrical installers.¹⁴⁷

An important addition to the 1911 award was the requirement for employers to keep a record, and make it available for inspection by the union (or by any person authorised by the President of the Court of Arbitration), of every worker employed and to whom the award applied, the class of work performed by each worker and the wages paid to each of them. This meant that the union secretary had access to worksites at any time during ordinary working hours, using the inspection of the company's record book as a valid reason for his visit.¹⁴⁸ Another difference between the new award and the 1906 award was the inclusion of a clause relating to the regulation of the conditions of apprentices under the terms of the regulations governing apprenticeship in the 1909 *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, Amendment Act*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *WARP*, Vol. X, 1911, p. 105.

¹⁴⁶ With the amalgamation between the METU and the ASE in 1914 the classification of elevator erector/repairer was not covered under any award. This continued until 1973 when the ETUWA, the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Australasian Society of Engineers negotiated an award for these workers. This matter is discussed fully in Chapter 8.

¹⁴⁷ *WARP*, Vol. X, 1911, p. 105.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁹ Statutes of Western Australia, Vol. 1909, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, Amendment Act*, 1909, an Act to amend the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1902*, p. 141.

In the 1911 award, the METU managed to restrict the number of apprentices being trained and set an apprenticeship term of four years, thereby protecting and promoting the electrical trades as a skilled occupation. Apprentices were to be employed under the following terms: one apprentice to every three or fraction of three permanently employed electrical tradesmen (excluding linesmen); a term of apprenticeship of four years; and a requirement that, if an employer could not continue to employ an apprentice for any reason, the apprentice was to be transferred to another employer. At the end of an apprenticeship the employer was to give each apprentice a certificate that proved he had served an apprenticeship, the time served and the rate of wages he had been paid.¹⁵⁰

The 1911 award also stipulated that each apprentice was to submit himself for an examination by the Board of Examiners at the end of each year and that the first examination would take place in December 1912. The Board of Examiners consisted of the secretary of the union (or any person nominated by the union) and a person nominated by the employers who was skilled in his trade. The employers could hold back wage increases if an apprentice failed an examination. Finally, the award stipulated that the Board of Examiners was expected to report to the Arbitration Court any employer who did not provide sufficient opportunity for an apprentice to learn his trade.¹⁵¹ This inclusion of conditions governing apprentices in the 1911 award indicated that the electrical trades were becoming increasingly recognised as a skilled trade that required a system of regulated training.

By 1911 the METU had more than doubled its membership from 27 to 56, and continued to be active in the electrical contracting industry. However, it remained a small, weak union in other areas, and particularly compared with the

¹⁵⁰ *WARP*, Vol. X, 1911, p. 108.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

larger and more powerful ASE, which had a combined membership in all branches of 682. The ASE maintained constitutional coverage of electrical workers in the main engineering workshops and mine sites on the goldfields, thereby holding on to coverage of armature winders and electrical fitters, while the WAASRE had coverage of these workers in the Midland Railway Workshops. While the METU was unable to gain coverage of electrical fitters in the main engineering areas of the trade it was able to represent electrical installers. On at least four occasions between 1906 and 1908 the METU applied for the enforcement of the award with regard to under-payment of wages to its members. In one case against the Bullock Electric Manufacturing Company, in 1908, the Court upheld the union's application that the company had breached the award by underpaying five electrical installers and ordered the company pay a fine of £10.10.0 and pay the union's costs of £3.3.10.¹⁵²

Electrical Workers on the Goldfields

At the same time as the METU was negotiating its second award, in 1911, electrical workers in Kalgoorlie initiated the establishment of their own union.¹⁵³ The Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union (GEWU) applied for registration in July 1911 with a membership of 36 men. The registered office of the new union was the Trades Hall, Kalgoorlie, and the union was granted a Certificate of Registry and Incorporation on 4 October 1911. The GEWU's rules were similar to those of the Perth union, with one difference. Rule 2b had a more militant tone: 'The securing of the betterment of the conditions of labor for the worker by political action'.¹⁵⁴ This rule indicates that electrical workers in the goldfields were more politically aware than workers in Perth and were closer in their thinking to unions such as the ASE.

¹⁵² WAAC files, ACC No. 1489, Item No. 38, Vol. 1908–1912, *Register of applications other than disputes*, Application No. 18/1908, 21 November 1908, p. 18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, ACC No. 1101 Item 1449/1911, Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union, application for registration.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Two years later the union changed its name to the Goldfields Electrical Trades Industrial Union of Workers (GETU), thus bringing the union into line with all other electrical trades unions in Australia.¹⁵⁵ A further amendment to the rules included another category of worker eligible for membership. Biograph Operators had no other union on the goldfields to which they could belong and had joined the GETU.¹⁵⁶

In January 1913 the GETU along with the Westralian Goldfields Federated Miners' Union (Kalgoorlie and Boulder Branch), the Goldfields Amalgamated Surface Workers' Union and the Boulder Amalgamated Certificated Engine-Drivers' Union applied for an Arbitration Court conference.¹⁵⁷ These unions were in dispute with the Chamber of Mines which represented the major employers on the eastern goldfields. The principal matter in the dispute was wage rates. The Federated Miners' Union sought an increase in the minimum rate of pay for underground workers, the Amalgamated Surface Workers wanted an increase in the minimum rates of pay for steam-boiler and roaster firemen as well as for boy labour, the Certificated Engine-Drivers' Union was asking for special rates for special grades of work and the establishment of a classification board, and the GETU wanted minimum rates of pay and recognition of electrical trade classifications.¹⁵⁸

By the end of March 1913 the parties had reached an agreement. The subsequent industrial agreement stated that the minimum rate of pay for members of the GETU would be 15 shillings per shift of eight hours for the classification of electrician, 13 shillings 4 pence per shift for linesmen and 11 shillings 8 pence per

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *WARP*, Vol. XII, 1913, pp. 16–18.

¹⁵⁸ WAAC files, Application for a Conference between the Chamber of Mines and the Federated Miners' Union of Workers, Goldfields Amalgamated Surface Workers' Union, The Amalgamated Certificated Engine-drivers' Association and the Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union of Workers, 1913. (Copy held by ETUWA)

shift for motor attendants.¹⁵⁹ These rates were higher than those being paid under the METU award of 1911 but the mining areas provided higher rates of pay for all workers. Linesmen working under this award on live overhead wires carrying 550 volts of alternating current were entitled to the services of a labourer or other assistant. The METU had claimed this provision in its 1911 award but the claim was not agreed to. The overtime rates specified in the goldfields award, however, were lower than those in the metropolitan award. The goldfields award only allowed for the first four hours at time and one quarter, and from then until the normal time for re-commencement of work, time and one half and that this extra time might be worked at ordinary rates on five days of the week to allow for a shorter shift on Saturdays. The holidays of New Year's Day, Good Friday, Eight Hours' Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day were recognised holidays and were to be paid.¹⁶⁰ The Metropolitan Electrical Trades Award of 1911, on the other hand, did not recognise these days as public holidays and workers were paid only if they worked them.

Another important difference between the METU 1911 award and the GETU agreement of 1913 was that it defined the categories of electrical workers in detail.

The following is a description of the work carried out by an electrician:

'Electrician' is a person competent to undertake the general work appertaining to the electrical trade. He may be employed or usually employed as assistant electrician to the electrical engineer, looking after generators, motors, switchboard, lights, bells, telephones, wiring armature and motor winding or other work in connection with an electrical plant. He shall be a person with five years' practical experience at different branches of the trade, or he may be a person with three years' technical training at a school of mines, technical college, university, or any other recognised technical institution, together with three years' practical experience.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *WARP*, Vol. XII, 1913, p. 202. (Copy of this agreement held by ETUWA)

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

This explicit definition shows that the three main areas of the trade, namely, electrical fitting, electrical installing and armature winding were viewed as components of one trade, that of an electrician and that, by the mid 1910s, electrical workers had begun to more clearly define their trade. It also illustrates that the mining industry recognised that electrical workers required a high level of technical training, along with practical experience, to be a fully qualified electrician. This definition also demonstrates that, in the goldfields, an electrical worker was required to be fully competent in every section of the trade. Being able to negotiate for only one classification, which included all areas of the electrical trade, made it easier for the GETU to negotiate on behalf of its members. In Perth the electrical trade was separated into distinct sections of the trade, making it difficult for the METU to represent all its members who were fragmented and scattered by occupation and geography.

From their beginnings the METU and the GETU worked towards creating a higher standing for the electrical trades in Western Australia. As the membership of both unions increased they endeavoured to negotiate, with a cross-section of the employers in the electrical industry, increases to minimum wage rates and better working conditions for electrical workers, striving for a greater recognition of the growing importance of the electrical trade. However, by 1914, both unions were still relatively small and weak. By 1911 the METU had negotiated two awards, the first covering electrical workers working for a comprehensive cross section of employers in the electrical industry and the second covering electrical installers in the metropolitan electrical contracting industry. The GETU had negotiated agreements covering electrical workers employed by gold mining companies and local government. However, in order to gain coverage of electrical workers, not already

covered by awards negotiated by the METU and the GETU, these two unions sought to be included in existing awards previously negotiated by the ASE that already covered electrical workers in the metropolitan, goldfields and south-west land division. This was to prove an impossible task, because, by the early months of 1914, both the METU and the GETU were under threat of being taken over by the larger and more powerful ASE.

Amalgamation of the Perth and Goldfields Electrical Unions with the ASE

From the METU's establishment in 1905, there was evidence of a struggle between the METU and the ASE for coverage of certain areas of the electrical trades. At one of its first meetings, in 1905, the fledgling METU noted correspondence from the ASE. The letter was reported as causing a great deal of discussion among the members but unfortunately no record survives of any decisions or recommendations from these discussions.¹⁶² There is, however, a copy of a letter to the Registrar of the Court of Arbitration early in 1906 where METU secretary Arthur Mills argued the justification for armature winders being included in the proposed electrical trades award. He insisted that:

The material used in the winding of armatures is purely of an electrical nature and used for electrical purposes only, by electrical workers and, that the Amalgamated Society of Engineers have not up to the present time made any provision in this State for electrical workers.¹⁶³

It is therefore likely that the ASE had written to the METU stating that it already had coverage of armature winders, thereby aligning the METU with the engineering industry as opposed to the building industry. At this time the Perth branch of the ASE had 101 members, many more than the mere 27 members of the METU.¹⁶⁴

Notwithstanding the greater power of the ASE and obviously disregarding any

¹⁶² *Westralian Worker*, 20 October 1905, p. 7.

¹⁶³ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item 0215, Year 1911, Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union. 1. Application for Registration under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. 2. Amendment of Rules.

¹⁶⁴ *WARP*, Vol. V, 1906, p. 106.

suggestions made by the ASE, electrical workers continued in their endeavours to establish an independent electrical trades union.¹⁶⁵

In February 1914, A.W.B. Pettit, the METU secretary at the time, wrote to the Registrar objecting to the registration of a new branch of the ASE specifically set up to cover electrical workers.¹⁶⁶ It has been noted previously that the ASE viewed certain classifications of the electrical trades as being within its family of trades. The establishment of this new branch and objection to it by the secretary of the METU makes it likely that the ASE was in 1914 aggressively seeking to have constitutional coverage of all electricians. Notes attached to the file observe that the ASE's rules had been registered in August 1904 and the METU's not until January 1906. Another note stated that the ASE rules already provided for armature winders and electrical engineers generally. And a final notation pointed out that the ASE already had a number of electrical fitters and engineers in its membership in both railway and general work.¹⁶⁷ The Registrar noted, in March 1914, the ASE's prior coverage. In the end the METU was unable to prevent the registration.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Perth No. 2 branch was registered on 17 April 1914.¹⁶⁹

In another measure to secure the ASE's coverage of electrical workers, the ASE, Perth No. 2 branch together with this union's Perth, Fremantle and Midland Junction branches were called to meetings early in May 1914 to confirm or amend a resolution passed by the Coastal District Committee of the ASE, with regard to this union making an application to the Industrial Court. This application was in

¹⁶⁵ *Westralian Worker*, 20 October 1905, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ WAAC file, ACC No. 1101, Item 363, Year 1914, Registration of Amalgamated Society of Engineers Industrial Union of Workers, Perth No. 2 Branch.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

connection with an industrial agreement made between the ASE and Millar's Timber and Trading Company Limited. The ASE wanted to turn this agreement into an industrial award which would cover every worker in the engineering industry.¹⁷⁰ This proposed Agreement could be seen as an early forerunner to the Metal Trades General Award of 1966 which covered all metal manufacturing workshops and a number of other industries in the south-west of the State.¹⁷¹

In a final step towards increasing and consolidating its membership of electrical workers the executive of the ASE entered into discussions to amalgamate with the METU. On 29 May 1914 a notice was placed in the *West Australian* by the secretary Pettit of the METU calling for members to attend a meeting on 2 June to 'consider the advisability of amalgamation' with the ASE, Perth No. 2 Branch.¹⁷² And, on 4 June 1914 the ASE placed a notice calling for a special meeting of the members of the Perth No. 2 Branch to discuss the same amalgamation.¹⁷³ Ten weeks later, on 21 August 1914 the two unions registered under the name of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers Industrial Union of Workers, Perth No. 2 Branch. At registration the METU amalgamated with 47 members while the ASE had 96. Fearing the threat of an encroachment into their area of coverage from an expanding ASE, a number of other unions, such as the Australasian Society of Engineers, the Boilermakers Society, the Iron Moulders Union, the Perth Electric Tramways Union, the Gas Workers Union, the Federated Clerks Association and the Stove Range and Grate Unions of Employers all objected to the registration but apparently without success.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ *West Australian*, 8 May 1914, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 46, Part 1, 1966, Metal Trades (General) Award 1966, No. 13 of 1965.

¹⁷² *West Australian*, 29 May 1914, p. 1.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1914, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Copy of objection held ETUWA records.

The *Westralian Worker* reported this amalgamation between engineering workers and electrical workers as a step in the right direction which could only strengthen the position of the workers of both unions. The report explained that the ASE had been, from its commencement, 'for the linking together of all the unions in the engineering industry'.¹⁷⁵ And so it was inevitable that, in December 1914, the only other independent electrical trades union covering electrical workers in Western Australia, the GETU, entered into discussions with the ASE with a view to amalgamating. The amalgamation process was finalised in 1915 when the combination of the two unions was agreed to by the majority of members. The new union was registered on 23 August 1916 as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers Industrial Union of Workers, Kalgoorlie Branch.¹⁷⁶

These earliest endeavours to establish and consolidate an independent skilled trades union organisation for Western Australian electrical workers only very briefly succeeded. Their eventual failure and the amalgamations of the Perth and Goldfields Electrical Trades Unions with the ASE were the result of a number of forces. First, the numbers of electrical workers in the metropolitan area and the goldfields in the years before and during the First World War were not large enough to sustain independence. At the beginning of the twentieth century minimal numbers of electrical workers were employed, mainly in small scale electrical contracting or engineering firms. These workplaces consisted of one or two men with perhaps one apprentice. The principal employer of electrical tradesmen and electrical apprentices was the railway workshops at Midland and the majority of electrical workers, working mainly alongside engineering fitters and turners, would have automatically joined the powerful ASE. With its members spread over a number of workplaces

¹⁷⁵ *Westralian Worker*, 28 August 1914, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ R.W. Fletcher, Affidavit on Union History, p. 3. Held in ETUWA records.

and with only a small number of members in comparison to other unions in the Midland workshops, it was difficult for the METU to establish a secure position of power.

The second reason for the amalgamation was that union membership numbers constantly fluctuated. For instance electrical installers moved from State to State wherever the work was, and regularly resigned their membership to set up their own electrical contracting businesses. It was common practice for electricians to set up in their own business if the general economy took a downturn, returning to a waged position when the economy picked up.¹⁷⁷ One of the original members of the METU, John Coward, set up an electrical engineering and contracting business, trading as Coward & Bergin, in 1907. In 1909 METU founding member Leslie Deague and newly arrived electrician John Tipping established an electrical contracting business, Deague & Tipping. By 1914 they had parted and were both in business for themselves. Another member, Harcourt Larenson Swaine, born in Christchurch, New Zealand, was working for himself as an electrician in 1914. Also, Arthur Mills, the first secretary of the METU, resigned to take up farming. These resignations, and the resultant fluctuation in the payment of membership fees, constantly undermined the ongoing independence of the METU.

The impact of war undoubtedly was another important factor in the demise of the METU. Enlistment details reveal that at least six members of the METU went off to war. The executive and members of the METU who enlisted in the armed forces included the last secretary prior to the amalgamation, Albert William Bloomfield Pettit. Pettit was born in London in 1882 and was the son of a grocer. At age nineteen he joined the Imperial Yeomanry and fought in Boer War. He

¹⁷⁷ *WAPO Directory*, 1906 to 1910, Trade Section.

served a three year electrical apprenticeship at the Jandus Electrical Company in London. In the 1911 census for Essex, England, Albert is working as a poultry farmer and living with his wife Ivy and his mother Susanah. The following year Albert and Ivy immigrated to Western Australia, arriving at the end of 1912, and by the end of 1913 he was recorded as the secretary of the METU. Other members who enlisted in the armed forces were Clement Wilder Benporath and his brother Frank Hilton Benporath, both from England; treasurer Horace Cowley Gravenall Wilson, born in South Yarra, Victoria; Leslie Edwin Herbert Eggleston, who was born in Hay, NSW; and Geoffrey Elphick, born in Surrey, England, who served his electrical apprenticeship with Brown & Co., London.¹⁷⁸ A tiny union such as the METU could ill-afford to lose so many active members.

A fourth reason behind the amalgamation was the different work areas in which electricians were engaged. As mentioned previously, electrical installers in the metropolitan area worked, in ones and twos, for small electrical contractors, installing electric power to houses, factories, commercial and public buildings, whereas electrical fitters and armature winders worked in large workshops such as the Midland Railway Workshops and on mine sites on the goldfields. These electrical fitters and armature winders spent their day maintaining, repairing or manufacturing electrical motors alongside engineering fitters and turners and boilermakers. Consequently electrical fitters and armature winders viewed their electrical skills not as separate from but as equal to other engineering trades. Electrical installers, on the other hand, regarded their trade as completely different from the engineering trades, more aligned with the building trades and requiring a unique set of skills. The amalgamation between the engineering and electrical

¹⁷⁸ NAA website, digital copies of Attestation Papers for the Australian Imperial Forces; *Ancestry.com*, Military, Electoral Rolls and Census Records.

unions therefore made electrical installers second-class tradesmen, viewed as less qualified than engineering and electrical fitters. When METU secretary Pettit objected to the amalgamation it was possibly because he was one of a number of electricians who did not want to see the electrical trade being subjugated by the engineering trades.

It was to be another twelve years before the numbers of electrical workers in Western Australia increased sufficiently for their calls for the re-establishment of an electrical trades union in the State to be heard, and a further 23 years before the ETUWA gained state registration as an independent force. Over this 35-year period electrical workers were forced into joining other unions in the particular industry in which they were employed at the time. However, as will be explained in the following chapters, a small but committed number of Western Australian electrical workers resisted their unique trade being subsumed into one engineering industry union and continued to agitate and work toward the registration of an independent trade union for electrical workers in the State.

Two themes evident in this early history of the organisation established to represent electrical workers will recur through its subsequent history. The first is the central importance of the electrical skills base to the success of the union as demonstrated by its creation and preservation of an apprenticeship system, and its recognition as a skilled trade by increased wages and better working conditions. Richard Hyman states there are three fundamental principles of craft unionism: first, that an apprenticeship system would give craft workers a monopoly over the trade's work; second, that wage rates should reflect the investment of long years of training; and third, that the skills required imparted a high degree of autonomous control of

the job for the individual worker.¹⁷⁹ In embracing these fundamental values of craft unionism the METU attempted to turn the rules of a market economy to its members' advantage; however, due to its small membership and lack of influence it was unsuccessful in achieving these aims before its demise.

The second theme that emerges from this chapter is the bifurcation of the trade between fitters and installers (and hence between the engineering and building industries). Throughout the nine years that the METU existed it was the installing section of the trade that drove the idea of a separate electrical trades union. However, during the first sixty years of the twentieth century the numbers of electrical installers in Western Australia increased too slowly to enable this section of the trade to agitate for greater recognition of their skills. Not until the 1960s were the times ripe for the installers to win equal recognition of their trade skills. And it was not until the last quarter of the twentieth century, as the use of electricity increased and the new technology of electronics emerged, that electrical installers and electrical fitters became known by the generic designation of electrician, finally establishing all electrical tradespeople as the workforce for the electrical industry.

¹⁷⁹ Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism*, 2001, p. 75.

CHAPTER THREE

The Wilderness Years — The Struggle for Registration — 1926 to 1949

For twenty-three years, between 1926 and 1949, a small but continually active group of electrical workers in Western Australia fought to extricate their union from the 1914 amalgamation with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).¹ This chapter will examine the endeavours of this small, committed number of electrical trades workers as they fought to regain an independent registration under the State *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act*. In 1926, as part of their struggle to regain registration, electrical workers established a branch of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA). And for the following twenty-three years objections to the registration of the ETUWA under the State Arbitration Act were raised by a number of unions, all using their influence with the Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Party (WA ALP) to stop the registration being granted.

The period under review proved to be an arduous time for electrical trades union members in WA. The ETUWA came into existence during a period of economic prosperity with a buoyant State economy in 1926.² A rise in population from immigration increased housing construction and commercial and industrial development. Skilled workers were in demand and because of its small population and small number of tradesmen the State government looked to the eastern states and

¹ T. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants, The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920 – 1972*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. ix. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) became the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) on 1 July 1920 and will be referred to as the AEU after its name change. The Australian ASE continued to be an integral part of the British ASE until 1968. In 1972 the AEU in Australia merged with the Boilermakers' and Blacksmiths' Societies and the Sheet Metal Workers' Union to become the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU).

² F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third. A History of Western Australia from the first settlements to modern times*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd, London, 1960, p. 200.

Britain to fill its need. Throughout the following two decades an increasing number of electrical workers arrived in Western Australia, particularly electricians experienced in the electrical installing section of the trade who were required in the growing electrical contracting industry.

By 1930 members of the ETUWA had elected four electrical installers, two linesmen and one electrical welder as their representatives on the union executive.³ The predominance of electrical installers emphasised the increase in electrical installation work, and the absence of any electrical fitting representative accentuated the low numbers of electrical fitters at this point. Both sections of the trade fluctuated in numbers on the union executive throughout the union's history, according to the ebb and flow of the State's economy. Throughout the building boom of the early to mid 1920s electrical installers were pre-eminent. However, by the late 1940s manufacturing and engineering workshops were increasing in number and the electrical fitter was paramount.

While there continued to be a core of union activists with an enduring urge to maintain a trade union for electrical workers which could be the nucleus of a strong electrical trade, the ETUWA remained a small and ineffectual organisation. From the mid 1920s through the 1930s and 1940s the ETUWA made repeated attempts to be involved in the establishment and development of an electrical apprenticeship system and an electrical licensing system. And, while it was successful in these efforts in a minor way, especially after the registration of its Kalgoorlie sub-branch in 1935, it was not until the ETUWA regained its registration in 1949 that it was able to play a major part in the State's burgeoning electrical industry.

³ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal* [hereafter *ETJ*], Sydney, Vol. XVIII, No. 11, 1930, p. 8.

This chapter argues that it was the influx of migrant electrical workers from Britain and the eastern states that provided the initial catalyst to establish a branch of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia in Western Australia. After the initial push to establish a union, the fledgling organisation was inhibited in its development by the politically dominant State branch of the ALP, which was in power at the State level for twenty-six years out of the thirty-five years between 1924 and 1959. A further hindrance to the development of the branch was the lack of an independent State trades and labour organisation to represent all unions. Pervan explains that the fusion of the political and industrial wings of the extra-parliamentary body of the State ALP made the Western Australian trade union movement subordinate to political expediency.⁴ An independent Western Australian Trades and Labor Council was not formed until 1962.⁵ Throughout its time in office the State ALP remained:

...moderate, cautious, 'responsible' and determined to rebut charges that its concern was merely to advance a sectional interest rather than the interests of the community as a whole.⁶

Another impediment to the ETUWA's development was the continual objections to its registration by other unions. The ASE/AEU in particular was determined to hold on to electrical trades members by any means and was the main objector to every application.

Preliminaries to the Re-establishment of the ETUWA — 1914 to 1926

In 1914, with the approaching world war, a small union such as the METU was unable to withstand the force of the more powerful ASE. The Australian trade union movement in the early decades of the twentieth century struggled to increase its

⁴ Ralph Pervan & Douglas Mitchell, 'The Changing Nature of the Australian Labor Party' in Ralph Pervan and Campbell Sharman, eds, *Essays on Western Australian Politics*, University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Perth, 1979, pp. 132–3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

industrial power. The ideology of industrial unionism was one expression of this struggle and was intended to lessen the fragmentation of the trade union movement.⁷

When in August 1914 the *Westralian Worker* (the official organ of the Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Federation and the Western Australian labour movement) noted the amalgamation of the ASE and the METU, it applauded this move towards industrial unionism.⁸ The report outlined the original aims of the ASE and its reasons for initiating the amalgamation, stating that:

...its influence on the life of the workers and the progress of trades unionism has been of a material character. It has stood from the commencement of its history for the linking together of all the unions in the engineering industry, and a fair amount of success has attended its efforts in this direction.⁹

The *Westralian Worker* was in full agreement with the move to amalgamate these two unions into the Perth, No. 2 branch of the ASE and saw this as a 'step in the right direction', which would strengthen the position of the workers in both organisations. It encouraged other unions connected with the engineering industry to take the necessary steps to consolidate the whole of the engineering industry into one industry union, pointing out that in New Zealand the Stove and Range Makers' Union had joined the ASE there and concluded that, 'the movement there promises fair to arrive at the desirable condition of one union for all workers in the iron and engineering trades'.¹⁰

In Western Australia, at this time, engineering tradesmen worked within an already established engineering industry; however, there was no recognised electrical industry. Therefore, while the 1914 amalgamation may have assisted the cause of industrial unionism in the engineering industry, it proved to further fragment electricians as a collective. In the first decades of the twentieth century

⁷ Jack Hutson, *Penal Colony To Penal Powers*, Revised Ed., Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights' Union, Surrey Hills, New South Wales, 1983, p. 122.

⁸ *Westralian Worker*, 28 August 1914, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

electricians in Western Australia were spread throughout the State working, as the nature of their trade dictated, in various industries such as mining, railway maintenance workshops, and the emerging electricity generation industry,¹¹ local municipal councils, in their lighting and power generating facilities, and, increasingly, in the electrical contracting industry on industrial and commercial construction sites. This meant that electricians were members of a number of unions covering these areas. For example, the ASE, the Australasian Society of Engineers and the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association were three unions which covered workers in the metal industry and mining areas. Other unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees covered workers in the various railway workplaces, and the Perth and Fremantle Electric Tramways Unions covered workers in the expanding municipal tramway system. This in turn meant that electrical workers were covered by a number of industrial awards. During his 1926 organising tour of the State, J.A. Beasley, President of the New South Wales branch of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU), found it difficult to speak to electrical workers *en masse* because they were divided among a number of worksites and unions,¹² proving that the amalgamation of 1914 had done little to bring the bulk of the electrical workers in Western Australia into one union.

The records of the ASE/AEU Perth No. 2 branch show that the majority of the trustees and senior officials of the branch came from the engineering trades, such as fitters, turners and furnacemen. Over a 38-year period from 1914 to 1952 a mere seven electrical trades workers held the minor position of trustee while engineering tradesmen held the positions of secretary, treasurer and auditor, thereby allowing the

¹¹ Companies such as the Fremantle Electric Tramways Company generated more power than it needed to run the trams. The private companies then sold this power on to the local municipal councils, which sold it to consumers to use for lighting and power, a process now known as co-generation.

¹² *ETJ*, Vol. XIII, No. 13, 1925, p. 14.

engineering trades to have a greater say in union policy making. Throughout the whole period of amalgamation electrical trades members of the branch were outnumbered by engineering workers and therefore could not win union ballots for branch positions.¹³ A few electricians continued to be members of the ASE/AEU even after the establishment of the ETUWA. One of them was Michael Kingston Healy, an electrical fitter. Healy is first recorded as being a trustee in 1941 and in 1945 was appointed assistant organiser with special reference to the electrical trade for the Perth No. 6 branch of the AEU (the importance of this branch of the AEU will be discussed later in this chapter).¹⁴

It was not only in Western Australia that the engineering unions tried to exert their influence against an expanding electrical trades union. In 1915, under the auspices of the Federated Electrical Trades Union, an organising trip to Queensland was undertaken. It was reported that a branch of the Federated Electrical Trades Union had been formed in Brisbane despite opposition from the ASE, which had a paid organiser touring through the northern towns of Queensland, 'enrolling every electrical tradesman he can, and where he cannot visit the Australian Workers' Union are doing so'.¹⁵ Notwithstanding this opposition, by September 1915 all electrical workers in the Commonwealth were organised on federal lines with the exception of Western Australia.¹⁶ Sheridan argues that craft unions federated in order to help union members travelling interstate in the search for work. By

¹³ Western Australian State Records Office [hereafter WASRO], Western Australian Arbitration Court [hereafter WAAC] records, Record Series: 2473, Arbitration files, Vols for the years 1914 – 1952, CONS. No. 1101, Item Nos. 1778 and 1552, Year 1916 and Item No. 0292, Years: 1919, statements of receipts and expenditure for the ASE, Perth No. 2 branch. These files hold the annual statements of receipts and expenditure of the ASE/AEU Perth No. 2 branch which were supplied to the Arbitration Court and record the names and occupations of the various officers of this branch.

¹⁴ J.F. Newman, 'Educate Organise ... Twenty-five active years in the AEU', unpublished manuscript, Perth, 1984, (copy held by author) p. 199.

¹⁵ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETJ*, Sydney, 1915, p. 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

federating with organisations representing electrical workers in other states the ETU was seeking to consolidate its authority throughout Australia.

In March 1922, the annual conference of the ETU held at Hobart resolved that the ‘...matter of organising Western Australia be left in the hands of the Executive’,¹⁷ a decision which was reiterated at the 1924 Conference.¹⁸ Finally, at the 1925 conference, a Queensland branch delegate moved that a special levy be struck to cover the cost of sending an organiser to Western Australia. The resolution was carried and J.A. Beasley was appointed to travel to Western Australia for a period of six weeks to organise the electricians there.¹⁹ A notice inserted in the *Electrical Trades Journal* announced that Beasley would be in Western Australia in early January 1926 and that ‘supporters of our movement in the West are requested to get into communication with him’.²⁰

Beasley stated that, from the very beginning of his stay, he had to contend with strong opposition from the State branch of the Australian Labor Party²¹ which represented the industrial as well as the political arm of the labour movement in Western Australia.²² Beasley found that the electrical workers in Western Australia did not like their scattered membership and were anxious for the establishment of ‘a straight-out electrical organisation’.²³ The WA ALP called for a meeting of electrical workers to determine their feelings and ascertained that the majority of electrical workers favoured establishing a branch of the Electrical Trades Union in

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. X, No. 1, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. XI, No. 12, 1924, p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 11, 1925, p. 6.

²⁰ Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 8, 1925, p. 11.

²¹ Ibid., No. 13, 1926, p. 14.

²² Michael Hess, *From Fragmentation to Unity : A History of the Western Australian Branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union*, Federated Miscellaneous Workers’ Union, Perth, 1989, p. 16.

²³ *ETJ*, Vol. XIII, No. 13, June 1926, p. 14.

Western Australia.²⁴ Notwithstanding this result the ALP wrote to the national council of the ETU requesting the union to refrain from establishing a branch in Western Australia on the grounds that electrical workers in the State were ‘...fully conserved under present arrangements’.²⁵ As a result of this report and the negative attitude of the State ALP the national executive of the ETU decided to give an extended leave of absence to S.J. Bryan, secretary of the Queensland branch, in order that he could spend a protracted period of time in Western Australia to establish a branch of the ETU ‘...in conformity with the strongly expressed wish of a large body of working electricians in Perth and the surrounding districts’.²⁶

Six months later, at a well-attended meeting, numerous enrolment cards for the Electrical Trades Union of Australia were signed²⁷ and in September 1926 the newly established ETUWA inserted a notice in the *Electrical Trades Journal*, announcing that meetings in Perth would be held on the first Tuesday in each month.²⁸ On his return from Western Australia, S.J. Bryan reported that:

Notwithstanding opposition from the AEU, Federated Engine Drivers and the Western Australian Railway Workers’ Unions, a Branch of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia has been formed. Over 100 members were enrolled.²⁹

An executive was elected and committees for the areas of general trades and the Perth City Council were formed. The union was registered under the *WA Trade Union Act* on 11 September 1926.³⁰

The impetus for an electrical trades union most likely came from the influx of electrical trades workers arriving from Britain. At the same time as the ETUWA was established, Britain was on the verge of economic depression. After the war, in

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1926, p. 7.

²⁸ Ibid, No. 4, 1926, p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Government of Western Australia, *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Perth, Vol. 6, 1926, p. 429.

1919, there was a sharp boom and then a period of inflation, when prices nearly trebled compared to pre-war days.³¹ Unemployment was high and the men returning from the war found it difficult to find jobs. Old industries, such as mining, were in decline and the transition between the old industries and the new electrical, chemical and automobile industries was slow.³² When men returned from the war they expected a land fit for heroes; instead they found high prices and high unemployment.

In contrast, in the decade following the war Western Australian industry, aided by a supply of cheap electric power from the East Perth powerhouse, was growing.³³ From 1919 an inflow of capital and a surge in immigration, mainly from the UK, combined to promote an increase in prosperity throughout the State.³⁴ The highest numbers of migrants entered the State between the years 1923 to 1925 and 1927 to 1929.³⁵ Between 1920 and 1929 the State Government assisted 43,700 immigrants to travel to Western Australia. In addition there were hundreds more who paid their own fares, attracted by the State Government's publicity campaign conducted by the Agent-General's office in London.³⁶ Among them a number of electrical workers looked to join an electrical trades union, in line with their union affiliation in the UK.

On its establishment in September 1926 the ETUWA elected its first executive. William James was secretary; Joseph Gallagher president; Jack Boddy, vice president; Harry Simons, treasurer; representatives for the general trades were

³¹ D.W. Roberts, *An Outline of the Economic History of England*, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, London (Hong Kong impression), 1964, p. 307.

³² A.G.L. Shaw, *Modern World History. Social, Political and Economic Development, 1780 – 1950*, (Book Two), F.W. Cheshire Pty, Ltd, Melbourne, 1961, p. 123

³³ Ted Joll, '1901–1930, Hard Time in Early Federation' in P. Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, 'Western Australian Sesquicentenary Series', University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 61.

³⁴ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*, 1960, p. 200.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 202.

Ernest Wight and Harold Hughes; representative for the Perth City Council was J. Hull, and the trustees were Frederick Richard Cox, John Yates and William Hugo. It has proved difficult to find any information on the first secretary, William James. He was secretary for only six months, after which Frederick Richard Cox was appointed temporary secretary from January 1927 and registered as the secretary on 12 March 1927.³⁷

Cox, aged 39, along with many others, left Britain on 4 June 1925 for a new life in Australia. He was born in 1886 in Shoreditch, London. In the 1891 census his father, Robert, was a mail van driver and in the 1901 census for Shoreditch he was a Post Office porter and Frederick, age 15, was an errand boy. In the 1911 census Frederick, age 25, was recorded as an electrical wireman (installer), living with his father, mother and sister Lilian at 6 Churchill Road, Highgate, London.³⁸ In May 1915, aged 29, Frederick joined the 39th Signals Company of the Royal Engineers. In October 1916 he was raised to the skilled rate of an electrician and promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal. He remained in the army until the war ended. Cox arrived in Western Australia in July 1925, six months prior to the organising trip to the State by the secretary of the ETU Queensland branch, S.J. Bryan. At the meeting which decided to establish the ETUWA in July 1926, within a year of his arrival, Cox was elected a trustee of the new union. It is more than likely that he had a strong union background, having worked as an electrical wireman in London before and after the First World War.³⁹

³⁷ *WAIG*, Vol. 7, 1927, p. 41.

³⁸ The information on Cox was found in a variety of sources, including: NAA website, Records Search, Passenger Index and *Findmypast.com*, Census, Migration and Military records. His sister Lilian Cox, machinist, left London on 23 November 1927 for Fremantle and there is another entry for her leaving London, again bound for Fremantle, on 31 July 1930. Information found at NAA website, Records Search, Passenger Index.

³⁹ *Findmypast.com*, Military Records.

Cox was not the only recently arrived migrant in this first executive. The treasurer, Harry Simons, wireman, had arrived from Britain in 1925 and it is likely that trustee William George Hugo, who was born in Swindon, England, had arrived just prior to 1926. Another member of the executive to come from out of the State was vice president Jack Boddy. He was born in Sydney but had arrived in Western Australia some time before 1916 when he enlisted in the AIF. The general trades committee member, Ernest Wight, was the engineer of the Cottesloe electric light and power station and had been an executive member of the METU.⁴⁰ This preponderance among the elected officers of the ETUWA of newly arrived electrical workers in addition to a couple of past METU members suggests that the men already working in the electrical trades in Western Australia had needed this injection of committed and active union members to carry the new union forward.

In March 1927 Cox represented the ETUWA at the national conference held in Hobart. This conference resolved that the national council of the ETU would pay a subsidy of £4 per week for a period of twelve months to the ETUWA on the condition that it make up the balance necessary to pay a full-time salaried officer. Applications for the secretary's position were advertised in the *Electrical Trades Journal*, and by November 1927 Cox was appointed full-time secretary.⁴¹

In order to achieve any relevance within the State labour movement, the ETUWA first had to establish a set of union rules and register under the Arbitration Act. At the first general meeting of the union in July 1926 it was resolved to apply for registration.⁴² On the 11 September 1926, the ETUWA was registered under the

⁴⁰ A variety of genealogy internet sites were used to research these men: NAA website, First World War Records; *Findmypast.com*, Migration Records; *Ancestry.com.au*, Australian Electoral Rolls, Western Australia, 1901 – 1936.

⁴¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XIV, No. 9, 1927, p. 15.

⁴² WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 28, 1927, ETU of Australia (WA Branch) Application for Registration, Resolution made 27 July 1926.

Trade Unions Act, 1902, and adopted a set of rules. The following are the main objectives of the union rules which outline the basic tenets of a craft union:

To advance the trade interests of members and secure a proper classification of the workers in the industry

To obtain adequate pay for its members and the institution and maintenance of the apprenticeship system

To afford legal protection to its members in industrial matters

To establish and maintain an employment bureau for electrical workers

To publish a trade journal

To provide for the acquisition of property

To secure preference of employment of unionists, and

To assist kindred unions and to support councils or other bodies having for their objects the betterment of the conditions of the workers, and such projects for the advancement of labor and the union may determine⁴³

With this set of principles in place the union felt itself ready to develop a strong electrical trade and trade union in Western Australia.

There were, however, obstacles to growth. Two of the most important were the opposition of other unions and the refusal of the Metropolitan Council of the ALP Perth to grant affiliation to the ETUWA. The *Electrical Trades Journal* was scathing in its report on the matter:

The ETU as a bona-fide Labor organisation is fully affiliated in five States, and it is unthinkable that we will tamely allow a branch of the political organisation to treat an integral part of our Society as a bogus Union. We must insist that the ETU is one and indivisible throughout the Commonwealth and claim full industrial rights with all other Labor organisations, especially in the matter of affiliation with the general councils of the Movement. ...Our Western Australian comrades are counselled to stand to their guns, and we shall surely succeed in removing the embargo which is being imposed, mainly we believe, at the instigation of the local branch of another Federal Union of a composite character, which seeks to fence off the Western portion of this continent as a close preserve to the exclusion of the recognized and only distinctively electrical Union in the Commonwealth.⁴⁴

The AEU certainly had a vested interest in the ETUWA failing to gain independent registration. In the 1920s and 1930s the federal council of the AEU

⁴³ Ibid, CONS No. 5942, Item No. 35, 1926, Trade Union Act, Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Registration File, Registration No. 81.

⁴⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XIV, No. 7, 1926, p. 7.

endeavoured to bring together the various unions whose members worked in the engineering industry in order to discuss the proposal to amalgamate all the skilled metal trade unions.⁴⁵ Instead of supporting an industry union which encompassed skilled, semi and unskilled workers, the AEU worked towards amalgamation with other, smaller, craft unions. The AEU was also conscious of the need to protect itself against its members being poached by other industrial unions such as the railway workers', the miners' and meat employees' organisations.⁴⁶ The AEU not only opposed the registration of the ETU in Western Australia, in 1933 it opposed the registration of the Motor Omnibus Employees' Association in New South Wales and the National Union of Railwaymen under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act.⁴⁷

The First Attempt at Registration — 1927–1928: Initial Success Ultimate Failure

While the ETUWA had registered under the *Western Australian Trades Union Act, 1902* in September 1926, this was not sufficient for it to be able to function effectively in the State's workplaces. It also needed to be registered under the *WA Industrial Arbitration Act*. The Collier Labor Government legislated a new Act in 1925. Trade unions registered under the Arbitration Act were entitled to negotiate awards and industrial agreements for their members and resolve industrial disputes through the Arbitration Court. The ETUWA initially achieved registration under the State Arbitration Act on 13 August 1927,⁴⁸ and, while it acknowledged that its '...numerous opponents' had the right to appeal the decision the ETUWA had not heard of any case where, after registration was granted by the Arbitration Court, that

⁴⁵ Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Souvenir — 25th Anniversary 1945*, Amalgamated Engineering Union, Sydney, 1946, pp. 102, 103, 157.

⁴⁶ Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 1975, p. 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴⁸ *WAIG*, Vol. 7, Industrial Unions Registered during quarter ending 30 September 1927, p. 200.

decision had been reversed.⁴⁹ However, this was to prove a false assumption and the ETUWA spent the next 22 years battling against the combined forces of a number of unions and the WA ALP to achieve its registration.

The ETUWA's first application for registration as an industrial union to the Western Australian Arbitration Court was made on behalf of the union's 148 members and fourteen elected officials.⁵⁰ The application covered a number of classifications of workers, including electrical fitters, armature winders, electrical installers, battery fitters, railway electricians, telephone fitters, cable jointers, linemen, arc lamp trimmers, electrical labourers, electrical crane attendants and electricians employed in running and maintaining electric plants, dynamos, motors and switchboard attendants, and also all employees whose callings were peculiar to the electrical industry.⁵¹ As these workers were employed in a variety of industries covered by a number of unions, the Industrial Registrar sent a Notice of Objection to Registration to twelve unions as well as to an employers' association, an electrical employer and an industrial association.⁵²

Over the period of the application process sixteen separate organisations, nine of which were branches of the AEU, submitted objections.⁵³ State law required each branch of a union to be registered as a separate union and the objectors to the ETUWA's application took advantage of this legislation making sure that each one of their branches voiced its objection. Apart from the AEU branches, there were two branches of the Australasian Society of Engineers, two of the Federated Engine

⁴⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1927, p. 8.

⁵⁰ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, File No. 28, Year 1927, 'Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) Application for Registration — general correspondence.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ACC No. 1101, Item 1552, Year 1916, Annual statement of receipts and expenditure of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (Perth No. 2 branch). The Amalgamated Society of Engineers formally changed its name to the Amalgamated Engineering Union in 1926.

Drivers and Firemen's Union, two of the Railway Unions and the Tramway Union. All of the objections to the application argued that they already existed as industrial unions to which the bulk of electrical trade workers could conveniently belong.⁵⁴

The State secretary Frederick Cox and S.J. Bryan, ETU national vice president and secretary of the Queensland branch, represented the ETUWA at the hearing.⁵⁵ Bryan's first argument was that there was a branch of the ETU in every other State of the Commonwealth, and, although the ETU was not directly affiliated with any of them, it was in contact with electrical trades unions in Britain, the USA and New Zealand.⁵⁶ He contended that the objecting unions were all registered unions in each of the other States and that none of them had objected to the ETU being registered there and there was no friction between them.⁵⁷ The most likely reason for unions in the eastern states, Britain and the USA working well together is that the engineering and electrical unions there had already developed into large and powerful individual organisations in response to the high levels of industrial development in these countries.

Bryan's second argument was that electrical workers wanted a separately registered union because they felt that their trade was '...entirely different from any other trade'.⁵⁸ Thirdly Bryan stated that, in his experience, the electrical trades were mainly associated with the building trade and not the engineering trades, with at least 50% of members engaged in wiring buildings, particularly since the large power stations had come on line. And other electrical workers such as linemen working for city councils and men working in manufacturing workshops, such as switchboard

⁵⁴ Ibid., ACC No. 1101, Item 28, Year: 1927. Transcript of a hearing of application for registration of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), before Industrial Registrar Frank Walsh, 23 and 28 June and 5 August 1927, [hereafter ETUWA Registration Hearings, 1927], (Copy of transcript held in ETUWA records), p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

operators, were also not working in the 'iron trade'. They worked in the electrical trade, a trade which had come about because of the development and increased use of electricity. Bryan contended that:

We are associated with the iron trade in some engineering works, where one electrician might be engaged; but you might just as well say that we are associated with the tailoring industry if an electrician happened to be employed in a tailoring establishment.⁵⁹

The hearing concluded with a number of questions put to Bryan by the objecting unions with regard to the classifications of engineering workers that the ETUWA sought to cover. The Australasian Society of Engineers disagreed with Bryan on which union should cover electrical fitters and argued that the job of an electrical fitter should be classed as one of the engineering trades.⁶⁰ It was stated that an electrical fitter working in a power station:

...takes down a motor and installs different machinery, and this is part and parcel of the engineering industry. I am referring to the electrical fitter employed in a power station who is engaged on upkeep and maintenance.⁶¹

Bryan countered by arguing that an electrical fitter worked only on the electrical component of the machinery and had to have

... a knowledge of insulation and the conductivity of metal and proper circuits. A man who is possessed of that knowledge is an electrical fitter. We do not claim that a man who puts a pinion on a motor is an electrical fitter. ...our work ends at the end of the spindle.⁶²

At the adjourned hearing eight unions (and one branch of a union) submitted objections to the ETUWA's application. This included the three unions represented at the first meeting: the Perth Electrical Tramway Employees' Union, the Metropolitan and South Western Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Union and the Perth branch of the Australasian Society of Engineers. The others were: the Western Australia Midland Railway Employees' Union, the West Australian

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees' Union and the AEU, Coastal District and Fremantle branches.⁶³ The main objecting union, the AEU, was represented by Hedley Symons, Junior,⁶⁴ who was an organiser for the AEU.

The sole representative for the ETUWA was secretary Frederick Cox. Cox provided a statutory declaration stating that he was a qualified and licensed electrical installer under the *Western Australian Electric Lighting Act, 1892*. He pointed out that he had worked in a number of industries in which electricians were employed; for example, as an electrical installer and maintenance man in the building trade, in the shipbuilding trade and engineering trade, and as an electrical fitter and armature winder in the engineering trade. He had also worked in the electrical installation, generation, distribution and maintenance industries, in the railways, tramways, mines and public and private electricity undertakings. His work history testified to the range of an electrician's employment and showed that he had an in-depth knowledge of the electrical trade in all major areas of the electrical industry.

Cox stated it was the contention of the union that 'the vocation of the worker is in reality the industry'.⁶⁵ Since the 1914 amalgamation the electrical industry had grown and the trade had evolved and developed along with it. In 1914, with only approximately 50 members, the METU had good reason to amalgamate with the ASE, desiring the protection of a much bigger union. With a growing number of

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 14–15.

⁶⁴ Amalgamated Engineering Union, *Souvenir*, 1946, pp. 82, 85, 88, 111, 120, 157, 231, 259; the Western Australian Metropolitan Cemeteries Board website; Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, 1975, pp. 212 and 223. Hedley Vicars Symons Jnr, was elected organiser for Division 7 of the AEU in 1924 taking over from E.H. Barker who had resigned to take up the position of general secretary of the Western Australian branch of the ALP. His father Hedley Vicars Symons, Senior was an organiser for the ASE in 1918. He died in either 1919 or 1920. H.V. Symons Jnr died in 1940, age 68. His son Hedley James Symons was also an organiser for the AEU during the 1950s. He died in 1984 age 69.

⁶⁵ F.R. Cox, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 28, 1927, Statutory Declaration with regard to Application for Registration of the ETUWA, June 1927.

members, the ETUWA was now entitled to independent registration.⁶⁶ As a new migrant from Britain, Cox most likely believed that electrical workers were highly skilled members of a unique trade union. As H.A. Turner explains:

British trade unions, more than those of most countries perhaps, are historical deposits and repositories of history. And anyone with close experience of trade unionism will be aware of the extent to which every union possesses a personality of its own.⁶⁷

However, the AEU objected that its constitution already covered the different categories of electrical workers and there was therefore no reason for a separate union.⁶⁸ Symons pointed out that an object of the Western Australian Arbitration Act was to stop the proliferation of unions in a specified industry in the same locality.⁶⁹ He argued that the AEU already had awards covering electrical workers in the metropolitan area within a radius of 25 miles of the GPO, the whole of the State Railways of Western Australia, the whole of the gold mining industry, the south-west timber industry and an award which covered every state government department.⁷⁰ In the years after the 1914 amalgamation between the ASE and the METU the ASE Perth No. 2 branch represented electricians in industries where it had coverage. The ASE included the classifications of electrical fitter, electrical installer and electrical lineman in its negotiations for wages and conditions in industrial awards. The ASE/AEU, along with other unions, continued to include electrical workers in its negotiations in a number of industrial agreements within the metal trades industry, in the State railways and a number of municipal public works departments.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ H.A. Turner in Richard Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism Between Market, Class & Society*, Sage Publications, London, 2001, p. 66.

⁶⁸ ETUWA Registration Hearings, 1927, p. 22. (Copy of transcript held in ETUWA records)

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 25–6.

⁷¹ These awards included, among others which are discussed later in this chapter and in chapter three, the South-West Land Division Awards No. 4 and 8 of 1929; the State Railway Awards 10, 11, 12 and 13 of 1928; the Public Works Department Award No. 12 of 1930,

ETUWA secretary Cox argued that the number of unions objecting to the application and the number of separate industrial awards covering electrical workers proved that there already was confusion in the industry and there was an urgent need for a separate union to organise the electrical industry. He argued that the ETUWA would bring together electrical workers who were scattered as members of numerous organisations with no central executive to look after their interests.⁷² If granted registration the ETUWA would be in a position to apply for one award which would cover all electrical workers in every industry and so simplify a confused industrial situation.⁷³ Cox also argued there was a need for consistency in the electrical industry throughout Australia and one union representing all electrical workers would achieve this. He argued that, as a duly registered State body, the ETUWA would police the electrical industry and ensure that electrical workers were properly trained and licensed and therefore competent to carry out electrical installations.⁷⁴ He concluded that, while the objecting unions feared a multiplicity of awards and agreements with the ETUWA's registration, this was already the case and the disorganised conditions of the electrical industry in Western Australia were the fault of the other unions.⁷⁵

At a further hearing before Industrial Registrar Walsh, the AEU engaged a legal representative, W.H. Dunphy, to represent the various branches of the AEU. Dunphy stated that the AEU would remove its objections to the present application if the ETUWA was willing to confine its registration to the locality of Perth. The

which covered all government departments outside of the Government Railway Department and the Coal Mining Industrial Award No. 12 and 13 of 1934. In fact, electrical workers continued to be included in awards covering the metal trades throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. However, in 1974 the electrical contracting section of the ETUWA eventually broke this nexus by negotiating an independent award, the Electrical Contracting Industry Award. This will be discussed in depth in Chapter 8.

⁷² ETUWA Registrations Hearings, 1927, pp. 28–30.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

ETUWA rejected this suggestion.⁷⁶ To register as a Perth only union would restrict the ETUWA's coverage to a 25 mile radius from the Perth GPO, and render the union unable to apply for awards to cover electrical workers working in other parts of the State.

Much of the hearing hinged on the definition of whether electrical work was distinct and separate from engineering work. The ETUWA argued:

The electrical fitter is a man who has mechanical knowledge, and in addition a knowledge of electricity. The number of electrical fitters engaged in this State is a very small number, but they come within our constitution and we regard them as being definitely engaged in the electrical industry, when engaged in testing, repairing, assembling generators or other electrical gear.⁷⁷

The Registrar reserved his decision and the ETUWA stated its determination to fight on, even if the application was rejected. Cox was prophetic when he stated, 'We shall fight the whole way if it goes on for 20 years'.⁷⁸ Initially, however, the ETUWA emerged the victor.

On 13 August 1927 the Registrar granted the ETUWA registration under the State Arbitration Act.⁷⁹ The objecting unions were given three months in which to appeal.⁸⁰ Industrial Registrar Frank Walsh stated that, in his opinion, there did not exist in the same locality another union to which electrical workers could conveniently belong. He explained that the principal reason for coming to this decision was that evidence produced at the hearing proved that the objecting unions existed in the eastern states as both state and federally registered organisations, with similar constitutions. Hence members of the ETU in these other States could not 'conveniently belong' to any of these unions, when the word 'conveniently' was

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

⁷⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1927, p. 199.

⁸⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1927, p. 8.

used in the sense of industrially convenient. The Registrar stated that he could find no grounds under which the registration could be denied.⁸¹

While the officials of the ETUWA were delighted at this result, their joy was short-lived as the new registration came under immediate attack.⁸² The union readied itself and its members for a protracted and expensive legal battle. By November 1927, ten objections to the registration had been lodged with the Commission. Seven were from branches of the AEU, one from the Engine Drivers and Firemen's Union, one from the Australasian Society of Engineers and one from the Western Australian Railway Employees' Union.⁸³ The ETUWA could see no other reason for this fierce opposition than fear of a rapidly expanding industry.⁸⁴ The union looked forward to a time in the future when its members would dominate the union movement and:

...by the natural evolution of industry occupy that position now so jealously guarded by our opponents. ...Their attitude is that of the historical ostrich, and King Canute has got nothing on them.⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this renewed attack, the ETUWA was determined to forge ahead and secretary Cox continued to visit job sites in Perth and country areas organising and enrolling electrical workers into the union.⁸⁶ The appeal against the ETUWA's registration was not heard until eight months later in March 1928. It was heard by Court President Judge Dwyer and this time W.H. Dunphy, KC represented all of the objecting unions.⁸⁷ President Dwyer was a partner in the law firm of Dwyer, Durack, and Dunphy and had been appointed full-time President of the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, No. 5, 1927, pp. 7–8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XV, No. 9, 1928, p. 4.

⁸⁷ WAAC files, 'Appeal against decision of Industrial Registrar registering the respondent union (ETUWA)', 7 March 1928, [hereafter Appeal against ETUWA registration, 1928], p. 1. (Copy of transcript held in ETUWA records)

Arbitration Court by the WA ALP under the amended *Industrial Arbitration Act* of 1925.⁸⁸

Dunphy put forward a legal argument for the objecting unions. First, he asked the President for clarification on Section 6 sub section 3 of the *Industrial Arbitration Act*, as to what was the difference between an ‘industry’ and a ‘trade’. Dunphy argued that Section 6 of the Act provided for the registration of a society of employees for the purpose of protecting or furthering their interests in or in connection with any specified industry and that sub section 3 carried this point even further. Since the application was in connection with a specified trade, that being the electrical trade, and not an industry, there was no need for a separate union to cover this industry as it was already covered by the objecting unions. Dunphy also questioned whether ‘electrical engineer’ was actually a separate vocation and whether it fitted within the definition of an ‘industry’.⁸⁹ There was a great deal of discussion between the President and Dunphy as to whether the Registrar had properly exercised his discretion and, indeed, whether the application had been applied for correctly in the first place. Almost half the hearing was taken up with these legal arguments.

The decision went against the ETUWA and the appeal was upheld. Dwyer explained that:

...the real deciding factor must be the position in Perth, and in Perth there exists a duly registered body formed by the amalgamation in 1914 of the electrical trade workers with another Engineering Union, to which the bulk of the members of the respondent union as a fact do belong.

It would be inflicting an injury on that body should an order of the Court bring about a dissolution of its component parts without some adequate and substantial grounds.

It appears to me that in this case the wrong principles were applied in considering the application for registration owing to the fact that the effect of the 1914

⁸⁸ *WAIG*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1926, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

amalgamation was not fully considered and that the policy of the Act leans strongly against the creation of a needless multiplicity of registered organisations.⁹⁰

The ETUWA felt robbed of the right to fully represent its members but assured them that the decision would have no effect on either the stability or usefulness of the union. It would remain a separate entity as part of a national organisation. Cox argued that the President had failed to realise that:

...conditions in the electrical industry have changed, and that throughout the world the electrical industry is recognised as a distinct industry apart from the so-called engineering industry. ...all that their opposition has done has been to antagonize a large body of workers who are justified in saying that there is a lack of balance in the Labor Movement.⁹¹

The Second and Third Failed Attempts at Registration between 1928 and 1935 But Goldfields Success

The ETUWA lost no time in continuing the fight, lodging its second application for State registration in May 1928.⁹² An answer came within a month; the Registrar rejected the application. He stated that while the ETUWA had a good case to present to the court but he did not feel justified in recommending its registration so soon after the President had made his decision. Secretary Cox noted that the Registrar had commented on the fact that the ETUWA represented the majority of the organised electrical workers and that it had increased its membership even after the registration had been cancelled when the appeal against the Registrar's decision had been upheld.⁹³

After this second application was denied the ETUWA felt that it had no other recourse than to apply for a federal award. The eastern states branches had lodged a comprehensive log of claims covering all parts of the electrical trade and the ETUWA decided to join this application.⁹⁴ The union over the next 21 years

⁹⁰ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 28, Year, 1928, [hereafter Decision on Appeal against registration of ETUWA] pp. 30–3. (Copy of transcript held in ETUWA records)

⁹¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XV, No. 10, 1928, p. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, No. 11, 1928, p. 7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, 1928, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

continued its pursuit of a federal award, in conjunction with its pursuit of State registration. However, it did not achieve coverage under the Federal Arbitration Commission because of continual delays by the Commission in hearing the case. When the ETUWA finally gained State registration in 1949 separate federal coverage was no longer required.

The ETUWA held back an appeal on its second State application because of the Bruce-Page government's plans for a referendum to ask Australians to agree to a proposal that the Commonwealth government withdraw from the industrial arbitration system.⁹⁵ These proposals for a national poll put the union into a 'state of flux'⁹⁶ and all plans were put on hold until the proposal was defeated in the House of Representatives and the Bruce government called a general election.⁹⁷

The ETUWA lodged its appeal against the decision of the second application in September 1928 but the case was not heard until March 1931, two years and six months later.⁹⁸ In March 1931 President Dwyer ruled against the union's appeal, stating that it had not satisfied the Court that it was more convenient for electrical workers to belong to a separately registered body.⁹⁹ He explained once again that 'It will thus be seen that the question of convenience is the deciding factor'.¹⁰⁰

Dwyer decided that the question of whether to grant registration, or not, was more of a matter for legislation than one for the Arbitration Court and suggested that the ETUWA lobby government to amend section 19 of the Act which related to the matter of 'convenience' in order to achieve registration.¹⁰¹ At the ETU annual

⁹⁵ F.G. Clarke, *Australia, a concise political and social history*, (Fourth Revision), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, Marrickville, New South Wales, 1992, p. 217.

⁹⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 1930, p. 21.

⁹⁷ Clarke, *Australia*, 1992, pp. 215–6.

⁹⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, 1931, pp. 4–5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ An application for registration could be refused under Section 19 of the *Western Australian Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912*, which stated: The Registrar may refuse to

conference in April 1931, secretary Cox stated that this decision was not in accordance with the spirit of section 19 of the State Act and the Court was ‘...in error in failing to recognize that the electricians belonged to a separate and distinct industry’.¹⁰² Nonetheless it was resolved that the ETUWA would take any steps necessary to induce the WA ALP to introduce amending legislation.¹⁰³ In September 1931, however, the Attorney-General replied that there was no need for an amendment to the Act and that the Court already possessed the power to approve the application.¹⁰⁴

At a ‘splendidly-attended meeting’ in September 1931 the union resolved to make its third application for registration.¹⁰⁵ Secretary Cox wrote:

I have no desire to enlarge on the injustice we have suffered in the past, but will proceed with this application in the hope that we shall, at last, convince our opponents that we, as workers in a specified industry, have a legal right to self-government.¹⁰⁶

Members were asked to give their full support. Cox explained that it would be the strength of the rank and file which would prove to the Court that the union was indeed ready and able to become a fully independent organisation.¹⁰⁷

The hearing for the third application for registration began in November 1931, once again before Industrial Registrar Frank Walsh.¹⁰⁸ This time eleven organisations objected to the application.¹⁰⁹ The ETUWA argued that it had tried unsuccessfully to obtain an amendment to Section 19 of the Act, that there was no

register any Society, Trade Union, or Company as an industrial union if in the same locality there exists an industrial union to which the members or the bulk of the members of such Society, Trade Union or Company can conveniently belong.

¹⁰² *ETJ*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, 1931, p. 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 9, 1931, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 10, 1931, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 41, Year 1931, Hearing of third application for ETU registration, 17 November 1931 [hereafter ETUWA Registration Hearing, 1931].

¹⁰⁹ Objecting unions included: the Amalgamated Engineering Union; the Australasian Society of Engineers; the Federated Engine-drivers’ Association; and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees’ Union.

Electrical Union of Workers registered under the Act and, therefore, the union was entitled to registration. The main question being asked in this application was ‘...exactly which industrial union could electricians belong to, if they could not belong to the ETU?’¹¹⁰ The objecting unions replied that electrical workers could conveniently belong to any one of their unions in any locality. The objecting unions argued that this third application was an abuse of the process of the Court.¹¹¹

At this hearing the ETUWA produced a number of witnesses to testify as to why it was ‘definitely and emphatically’ not convenient for them to belong to any of the opposing unions. The first witness was Claude Bishop. Bishop, employed as an electrical fitter by Perth City Council for 23 years, testified that he had originally been a member of the Coastal Electricians’ Union, and in 1919 had joined the ASE.¹¹² He had joined the ETUWA when it was formed in 1926 but had been unable to obtain clearance from the ASE/AEU until 1929. During this period he had tried to resign from the AEU but the union had not replied to his letter and after some time had threatened to sue him for being in arrears with his contributions.¹¹³

Another witness, Alfred Wilson,¹¹⁴ testified that he had been working in the electrical industry for nineteen years and was currently working as an electrical fitter for the Western Australian Government Railways, in the signalling branch at Midland Junction. He stated that he had been a member of the ETU in other States and had been a member of the Glasgow branch of the ETU in Scotland. As his job entailed the maintaining of outside electrical apparatus, he travelled to most of the

¹¹⁰ WAAC files, ETUWA Registration Hearing, 1931.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² No record of a Coastal Electrician’s Union exists, therefore Bishop is most likely referring to the METU.

¹¹³ WAAC files, ETUWA Registration Hearing, 1931.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., CONS No. 5942, Item No. 69, 1984, Trade Unions file, Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Officers and Members. There is an Alfonso Hawkrige Wilson, electrical fitter, appointed a trustee of the ETU in 1932. No further information has been found on his background.

outlying areas and had the opportunity of speaking to a number of electrical workers. He was asked by the Court what he thought was the general opinion regarding registration of the majority of electrical workers working for the railways. He replied that electrical workers would like to see their own union organised ‘...so that the business in general would benefit’. He had worked in the USA, Canada, Germany and France, had been an electrical engineer on board ships and had worked with electricians from all over the world. He said that he found the position of the ETU in Perth, ‘...one of the most ambiguous situations he had ever come across’.¹¹⁵

A third witness, Sydney Francis Smith,¹¹⁶ testified that he had joined the Subiaco branch of the AEU on arrival in Western Australia on the advice of H.V. Symons whom he had spoken to at Trades Hall. He had been under the impression that Symons was the secretary of the ETU, when in fact he was the secretary of the AEU. He had asked Symons if there was a branch of the ETU in Western Australia and Symons had said that the AEU catered for electricians. Smith stated that at the AEU branch meetings ‘...most of the talk was about blacksmithing and striking and it did not appeal to me’.¹¹⁷

Secretary Cox argued that electrical workers should not be forced into joining other unions which covered their workplaces. He claimed that there was a conspiracy between the AEU and the other unions to insist that electrical workers be members of the AEU wherever they worked. He claimed that even though the Australasian Society of Engineers covered a large percentage of workers at the Midland Railway Workshops, it was willing to give up its electrical trades members

¹¹⁵ WAAC files, ETUWA Registration Hearing, 1931.

¹¹⁶ *Findmypast.com*, Migration. Smith migrated from the UK in March 1929, as an electrician age 42. He was appointed a trustee of the ETUWA in 1930.

¹¹⁷ WAAC files, ETUWA Registration Hearing, 1931.

to the AEU as long as it could keep the electrical workers at the East Perth Power Station.¹¹⁸

The objecting unions argued that the ETUWA was losing members, Symons stating that ‘...the return of membership figures ... definitely shows that the membership of the ETU is dying, and dying fast’.¹¹⁹ Although members had returned to Britain and New Zealand and there had been some deaths, Cox insisted that the main reason for the decline was the general economic depression. Falls in membership numbers would be the case for other unions as well, he argued, with many union members unemployed and therefore unable to pay union contributions.¹²⁰

The ETUWA had to wait nearly seven weeks for the Registrar’s decision. Registrar Walsh rejected the application because he said no fresh facts had been supplied since the decision by the President on the previous application. He had been impressed with the evidence from the witnesses which had confirmed his opinion that the ETUWA was entitled to be registered as an industrial union, but that ‘...it would be manifestly improper for me to register it as such, in view of the opinions expressed by the Honourable the President on the two previous appeals’. The ETUWA was disappointed but determined to fight on.¹²¹ The editor of the *Electrical Trades Journal* summed up the situation:

All the facts and all the justice are on our side. With the will and determination to win, win we must. Surely the Court must realize that whatever the outcome of the present proceedings, the splendid spirit of the past few years will not permit our organisation to be dismembered and dispersed among a half-dozen miscellaneous organisations representing in the main other trades or callings.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *ETJ*, Vol. XX, No. 1, 1932, p. 7.

Although the union immediately lodged an appeal it took a further fifteen months before it was heard.¹²³ The national council of the ETU agreed to fund the services of H.B. Jackson, K.C., to argue the case. While waiting for the Arbitration Court to clear its backlog of cases the ETUWA reported on the registration of another union. In June 1932 a group of print industry workers sought to register a new union, the Newspaper Industry Union, Perth, after a dispute with the original union — the Printing Industry Employees' Union of Western Australia.¹²⁴ The Printing Industry Employees' Union had expelled some members after a number of disagreements regarding union management issues. Arbitration Court President Dwyer stated that because of the resultant bad feelings the members of the Newspaper Union could not 'conveniently belong' to the older body and explained that:

...there can scarcely be anything more serious to a worker than expulsion from a registered and organised society. He is thus placed outside the pale and suffers a loss of status in industrial relationships which may have most serious consequences on his whole future career and prospects of employment and advancement.¹²⁵

On reading the reports on the successful registration of the Newspaper Industry Union the ETUWA asked its members if they could suggest ways of antagonising the objecting unions enough so that they would expel their electrical trades members and then the union would be sure of registration!¹²⁶

Between the years 1929 and 1931 the ETUWA suffered a number of delays in the hearing of its third application for State registration and its application for coverage under a federal award. At the same time as these two applications progressed through the state and federal arbitration systems the union entered into discussions with the WA ALP over its failure to allow affiliation. The annual

¹²³ *Ibid.*, No. 2, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *West Australian*, Perth, 22 June 1932, p. 11. *WAIG*, Vol. 12, 1932, p. 290.

¹²⁵ *Daily News*, Perth, 26 October 1932, p. 5.

¹²⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XX, No. 11, p. 8.

national conference of the ETU was held in Perth during March 1929 and was judged an opportune time to meet with the State Labor Party. The WA ALP rejected the approach stating that it could not grant affiliation to the ETUWA because it was against the policy of the State labour movement to ‘...encourage a multiplicity of unions’.¹²⁷

In May 1932 secretary Cox resigned due to ill health and returned to the UK.¹²⁸ The position of acting secretary was filled by Marmion Barrington (Barry) d’Almeida.¹²⁹ By December 1932, after nearly a year of waiting for its appeal to be heard by the Arbitration Court, the ETUWA executive was despondent. The union appealed for financial support from the membership. The acting secretary urged:

It is up to you therefore as a member to firstly fully realize that five years of untiring effort have been utilized in constructing this Branch of the ETU; secondly, that our appeal is awaiting hearing at the Arbitration Court, and unless your personal monetary assistance is immediately forthcoming, it is on the cards that the five years’ work will be wasted, if we cave in prior to the hearing.¹³⁰

The appeal was finally heard in April 1933.¹³¹ This time the case was conducted by two legal representatives, H.B. Jackson, K.C., for the ETUWA and W.H. Dunphy for the objecting unions. President Dwyer dismissed the appeal for the same reasons as he had previously given.¹³²

Because of a severe shortage of funds the ETUWA was unable to send a delegate to the national conference of the ETU at Brisbane in June 1933. On its

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. XVI, No. 10, 1929, p. 7.

¹²⁸ *Ancestry.com*, Incoming passenger list for UK. Cox arrived in London on 7 July 1932 age 46 and gave his country of intended future permanent residence as England and his address as, c/o Australia House, The Strand, London.

¹²⁹ *Findmypast.com*, Passenger lists, Marmion Barrington d’Almeida, Snr, age 30, left London for Sydney on 3 September 1895; *ETJ*, Vol. XI, No. 9, 1950, p. 1. Marmion Barrington d’Almeida, Jnr, began his electrical apprenticeship with the Kalgoorlie Municipal Council in 1921, gaining experience working in the electric light station and small armature winding. He then worked in Adelaide as an electrical installer and later he spent some time on the installation and maintenance of lifts and elevators.

¹³⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. XX, No. 12, 1932, p. 9.

¹³¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 13, 14 August 1933, Decision by Justice Dwyer, President, of Appeal against decision of Industrial Registrar refusing to register the ETU, Hearing 27 April 1933 [hereafter Registration hearing 1933], pp. 91–93.

¹³² *ETJ*, Vol. XXI, No. 5, 1933, pp. 12–13.

behalf, however, the Queensland branch put forward the following agenda item for discussion, 'The West [sic] Australian Branch under all circumstances to be kept in operation, even if special conditions as to membership are allowed'.¹³³ The ETUWA was grateful to the Queensland branch. It knew that it was completely dependent on the national council for its survival and recognised that any hope of obtaining State registration lay in its ability to keep the ETU in Western Australia going.¹³⁴ The national council agreed to continue paying a £2 per week subsidy and the national executive agreed to take any steps necessary, including obtaining legal advice, to help the ETUWA achieve registration.¹³⁵

By mid 1934 the morale of the union was at an all time low. ETUWA secretary, d'Almeida, was working under difficult circumstances. Failure to gain State registration, together with the economic depression, made it difficult to retain members, let alone increase numbers. Something had to be done. In November 1934 the ETUWA decided to hold a plebiscite of the membership on the matter of State registration. The heading in the *Electrical Trades Journal* shouted 'MUST OBTAIN REGISTRATION. CALL TO ALL ELECTRICAL WORKERS'.¹³⁶ In order to find out what support it had to carry on with the fight for registration the union had to test the strength of feeling among the membership. It prepared for a renewed push in 1935 and sent out the plebiscite. However, before any action was taken to reapply for registration, there were moves to establish a sub-branch of the ETUWA on the goldfields at Kalgoorlie. The ETUWA had previously considered forming a sub-branch in Kalgoorlie but thought that any attempt to do so would be

¹³³ Ibid, p. 13.

¹³⁴ Ibid., No. 6, 1933, p. 10.

¹³⁵ Ibid., No. 7, 1933, p. 10.

¹³⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXII, No. 11, 1934, p. 10.

met with opposition from other unions, as had already been used to block the ETUWA registration.¹³⁷

Early in 1934, however, events conspired to change the situation on the goldfields. In April 1934 a number of members of the Plumbers' Union in Kalgoorlie wanted to join the Kalgoorlie branch of the AEU. In order to achieve this, the AEU thought it had only to amend its rules and constitution to include plumbers as a classification. When the Plumbers' Union objected to the AEU's application for these amendments, the President of the Arbitration Court judged that the application was not a legal procedure. The President stated that in order for a union to alter and enlarge the scope of its membership it could not merely amend its rules or constitution but would have to register as a new union.¹³⁸ Therefore, in December 1934, the AEU had to apply to the Court to cancel the State registration of its Kalgoorlie branch.¹³⁹ At a subsequent hearing it was found that the area that had been designated in the registration of the amalgamated body of the AEU, Kalgoorlie branch, and the Goldfields Electrical Trades Union, in 1916, was incorrect. At this point the Kalgoorlie branch of the AEU was deregistered and its award coverage for the area made invalid. It could not apply for any new awards to cover its members on the goldfields. The ETUWA moved quickly to take advantage of the situation.¹⁴⁰ And, on 28 March 1935, the ETU (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-branch), Kalgoorlie was registered under the *State Trades Union Act*.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, 1935, p. 8.

¹³⁸ *WAIG*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 5 December 1934, Application No. 81 of 1934 by the Western Australian Plumbers and Sheet Metal Workers' Union (Perth) and the AEU Kalgoorlie Branch, Hearing dated 22 August 1934, p. 163.

¹³⁹ AEU, *Souvenir*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, 1935, p. 8.

¹⁴¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, 1935, 'Unions Registered at the Office of Registrar of Trade Unions', p. 139. The ETU (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-branch), Kalgoorlie was registered under the *Trade Unions Act, WA, 1902*, on 28 March 1935 and under the *WA Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912–1935* on 11 June 1935.

Heartened by this development, the ETUWA called a meeting where it was resolved the union would again apply for registration and proceedings were instigated to obtain registration of the ETU in the goldfields, under the State Arbitration Act.¹⁴² On 23 May 1935 the hearing for registration of the Goldfields sub-branch of the ETUWA was held at Kalgoorlie. The union called only one witness and argued that, since there was no registered body covering electrical workers in the goldfields area and that the question of ‘convenience’ was not an issue, the application should be granted. The AEU again argued that, because of the amalgamations in 1914 and 1916 between the ASE/AEU and the METU and the GETU, there was no need for a new electrical trades union in the goldfields because electrical workers were already well catered for by the AEU.¹⁴³

The first witness for the AEU, John Alexander Paterson, secretary of the Kalgoorlie branch of the AEU, proved no help to the AEU’s case when cross-examined by ETUWA secretary, d’Almeida. Paterson was not an electrician and did not know the difference between an armature winder and an electrical fitter or an electrical installer.¹⁴⁴ D’Almeida questioned whether Paterson was competent to ensure that all parts of the electrical trades were properly looked after.¹⁴⁵ The ETUWA argued that Paterson did not know where electrical workers were working on the goldfields and was not aware of junior workers employed in the trade without apprenticeships.¹⁴⁶ D’Almeida expressed surprise that there was only one man on the district committee of the Kalgoorlie branch of the AEU, an unlicensed lineman,

¹⁴² *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, 1935, p. 6.

¹⁴³ WAAC files, transcript of hearing of the application for registration of the ETU (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-branch), Kalgoorlie before, Industrial Registrar F.E. Walsh, 23 May 1935 [hereafter Kalgoorlie registration hearing, 1935], copy of transcript held in ETUWA records.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

who was expected to represent and give advice on electrical work being undertaken throughout the goldfields.¹⁴⁷

Another witness for the AEU, Edward McMahon, an electrical wireman and a shop steward at one of the mines, said that he had never been approached by the ETUWA to become a member of that union. When asked if he thought it would benefit electricians to have a registered branch of the ETU in the goldfields he explained that, in his opinion, craft unions should be absorbed in one industry union, as this was more beneficial to both employers and employees. He reported that he had not received any complaints from electrical workers about not being properly represented by the AEU. Cross-examination found that McMahon was a motor attendant and was not qualified to carry out electrical work. He had worked at this job for two and a half years and had previously worked as a professional musician. He did not have an electrical licence and was not prepared to take an examination for one in the near future. He admitted that he was not conversant with the rules and regulations of the electrical trade.¹⁴⁸ He proved a poor choice of witness for the AEU's case.

In his decision Registrar Walsh decided that the case hinged on the issue of the registered locality of the AEU Kalgoorlie branch and concluded that it was not, in fact, registered to cover the locality which was included in the present application by the ETUWA. Therefore:

...it is impossible for me to hold that the members of the Applicant Society can "conveniently belong" to a Union that does not exist (as far as this Act is concerned) in the area over which registration is sought. ...The Applicant Society will, therefore, be registered.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 19–22.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Decision by Industrial Registrar F.E. Walsh on registration of the ETU (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-Branch), Kalgoorlie, 11 June 1935, p. 3. Copy held in ETUWA records.

The Registrar admitted that the mistake of the locality in the registration of the AEU Kalgoorlie branch would not have been brought to light but for the action of the Kalgoorlie plumbers.¹⁵⁰ Thus, on 11 June 1935, because of a mistake in the 1916 registration of the Kalgoorlie branch of the ASE (which came out of the amalgamation between the GETU and the ASE), the ETUWA achieved registration under the State Arbitration Act in at least one area of Western Australia.¹⁵¹

The ETUWA (Goldfields Sub-branch) Kalgoorlie extended its coverage early in 1936 to cover all the goldfields, including Eucla and the North West Division.¹⁵² The wider area held only approximately ten percent of the total number of electrical workers in the goldfields but an extension of coverage consolidated the union's position. The ETUWA was now able to apply for awards and industrial agreements in the goldfields without continual objections from other unions.

During September 1935 the AEU applied for the registration of its branches in Kalgoorlie and Wiluna. A number of unions had been found to be in a similar position to the AEU with regard to their registered locality and in 1935 the State Arbitration Act was amended to rectify the matter.¹⁵³ The ETUWA objected to these applications, on the grounds that if these branches of the AEU were registered there would again be more than one union in the locality to which electrical workers could conveniently belong.¹⁵⁴ The President of the State Arbitration Court finally validated the registrations of the AEU's branches in Kalgoorlie and Wiluna in January 1936.¹⁵⁵ And, in March 1936, the Arbitration Court validated the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, 1935, 'Industrial Unions registered at Court of Arbitration', p. 135. The ETU (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-branch), Kalgoorlie was registered under the *Trade Unions Act, WA, 1902*, on 28 March 1935 and under the *WA Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912-1935* on 11 June 1935.

¹⁵² *ETJ*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, 1936, p. 8.

¹⁵³ AEU, *Souvenir*, 1945, p. 181.

¹⁵⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 10, 1935, pp. 11-12.

¹⁵⁵ AEU, *Souvenir*, p. 189.

registration of all of the AEU branches in Western Australia in accordance with the amended State Arbitration Act.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the ETUWA, along with workers in the radio industry, discussed whether or not radio workers should form a union of their own or join the ETUWA. The ETUWA advised radio trade workers on the need for caution. It had learned the lesson of how difficult it was to extricate itself from a binding amalgamation. As some of the radio workers were members of the AEU and this union was in the process of lodging a claim against a radio employer for a substantial increase in wage rates for radio workers, the two parties decided to hold back on negotiating an amalgamation. The ETUWA had no wish to prejudice the chances of an imminent wage rise for radio workers. The meeting concluded with the radio workers indicating that they felt it was only a matter of time before they would join the ETUWA and in the meantime radio workers pressed ahead with their application to form their own union.¹⁵⁷

The ETUWA decided to give every support to the Radio Workers' Union when it lodged an application for registration with the Industrial Registrar early in May. The AEU also wanted to cover radio workers; however, the Radio Workers' Union managed to lodge its application before the AEU's. Radio workers had formed themselves into a separate body mainly because the ETUWA was not a registered body, and had intimated that as soon as the ETUWA was granted registration they would enrol as members of this union. The ETUWA was confident that the Arbitration Court would view the fact that radio workers had been compelled

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁵⁷ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 6, 1935, p. 9.

to form a separate organisation in order to obtain their industrial rights as another strong reason to reconsider the ETUWA's fourth application for registration.¹⁵⁸

The case for registration of the Perth Radio Workers' Union began in August 1935.¹⁵⁹ ETUWA secretary, d'Almeida, represented the radio workers against objections by the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers. These two unions claimed that their constitutional coverage of electrical fitters was wide enough to cover any worker in the radio trade. Under cross examination by d'Almeida, however, witnesses for the two unions admitted that a knowledge of radios could be acquired through working on them as a hobby and it was not an apprenticed trade and they could in no way be termed 'electrical fitters'. D'Almeida, arguing on behalf of radio trade workers, stated that theirs was a distinct vocation, different from that of electrical fitter, and that therefore the objecting unions could not cover this new occupation without changing their constitutions and re-registering their unions. By mid-August the Perth Radio Trade Union had secured its State registration.¹⁶⁰

The State Arbitration Court dismissed appeals by the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers against the registration of the ETUWA Goldfields sub-branch and the Radio Workers' Union in November 1935. The fight to achieve registration had cost £150, most of it borne by the national body of the ETU. In order to be able to carry on the fight for registration it was decided to strike a levy of two shillings per week per member. From this point forward all expenses would have to be met by the union itself.¹⁶¹ As a result of the recent victories the ETUWA was gaining more support among electricians. For instance, all of the electricians

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 5, 1935, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 8, 1935, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, No. 11, 1935, pp. 7–8.

working for the Fremantle Tramways Sub-Station voted in December 1935 to secede from their own union and join the ETUWA.¹⁶²

Fourth Application for Registration by the Perth Branch

The ETUWA's fourth application for registration was refused in June 1936. The union had intended to put forward evidence to the Arbitration Court to show that the objecting unions discriminated against electrical workers and did not properly represent them. The Court, however, refused to take evidence at this hearing.¹⁶³ Nine unions objected to this fourth application, including a new organisation, the Theatrical and Amusement Employees Union.¹⁶⁴ The recent increase in the number of cinemas around the State had witnessed a rise in employment for electrical workers and the ETUWA wanted coverage of these workers. In some small towns the electrician in charge of the local electrical plant was expected to run a small plant, maintain all outside lines, do all the internal wiring, read meters and collect accounts and run the cinema; in other words be a jack of all trades.¹⁶⁵

At the hearing Symons again outlined the AEU's objections. He made the usual argument that the AEU already covered electrical workers. He also argued that the ETUWA was not financially viable. According to Symons, the ETU in Western Australia had lost 55 members, reducing the membership from 257 in 1931 to 202 in 1935 and the union was £216 in debt.¹⁶⁶ D'Almeida countered the objections by the other unions by arguing that the very presence of these nine unions proved that electrical workers worked in nearly every important industry in the State but that

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, 1936, pp. 8–9.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, No. 4, 1936, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 13 August 1936, p. 108. Fourth Application for Registration of ETUWA, objecting unions: branches of the AEU; branches of Australasian Society of Engineers; Western Australian Government Electric Tramways, Trackless Trams and River Ferries Union; branches of the Federated Engine Drivers' Union and the Theatrical and Amusement Employees Union.

¹⁶⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 50, Year 1935, ETUWA, Application for Registration.

each of these unions had only a few electrical workers as members. Therefore, individually, each of these unions could not cater for electrical workers as a whole trade. The AEU and Australasian Society of Engineers were cases in point. These two unions were registered for and limited to the engineering trades. The ETUWA also questioned how the AEU and Australasian Society of Engineers used members' contributions and money obtained by levies. D'Almeida pointed out that electrical workers, as members of the AEU in Western Australia, were being forced to contribute funds to a union whose finances might be unequally controlled by its Commonwealth Council which was based in the eastern states.¹⁶⁷

The ETUWA also submitted the results of a plebiscite of members held during the previous year as evidence of its increasing status in the electrical industry. The union executive had asked electrical workers whether they desired that the union be registered under the State Industrial Arbitration Act as opposed to continuing to be under the control of various other unions.¹⁶⁸ At the time of the plebiscite the ETUWA had a membership of 225.¹⁶⁹ The union was able to record that as well as its total membership a further 165 electrical workers had indicated their preference for '...the registration of this Union over the other Unions now in existence.'¹⁷⁰

In his decision on the application, announced in June 1936, the Registrar again stated that the ETUWA had made a good case for registration. He agreed that its members did not find it convenient to belong to the existing registered industrial unions and acknowledged the fact that this union had continued to exist even after three failed attempts at registration. Despite these facts the Registrar stated that he had to follow the 1933 decision by the President of the Arbitration Court because

¹⁶⁷ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIV, No. 5, 1936, pp. 5–6.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXII, No. 11, 1934, p. 12.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, No. 5, 1936, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

there was no evidence to show that conditions or circumstances had changed since then.¹⁷¹ The Registrar concluded:

The real question I have to consider is – have the conditions so altered since the date of the last decision of the President in April, 1933, as to justify me in departing from the decision of the Honourable the President on that occasion? And, after reviewing all the facts that have been very ably put before me by Mr d’Almeida for the applicant society, I cannot say that the conditions have altered to such an extent since April, 1933, as to justify me in registering this society. I consider that it is my duty to follow the decision given by the Honourable the President on the last occasion, and to refuse registration of this application.¹⁷²

The ETUWA was bitterly disappointed but still determined to appeal against the decision. Legal counsel for the union advised that there were excellent grounds.

The appeal against the Registrar’s decision on the fourth application for registration was set to be heard in November 1936 but, because of the inability of the AEU’s legal representative to appear, the President postponed the hearing date. At the same time the AEU applied to amend its constitution to include in its Perth branch the locality of the South-West Land Division and to insert classifications which covered all the electrical trades. The ETUWA successfully argued that this application would prejudice its appeal against the refusal to grant registration. Therefore, the President of the Court decided to hear the ETUWA’s appeal and the AEU’s application conjointly at a future date.¹⁷³

In December 1936 the union still awaited a date for the hearing. Discussions were also going on during this period to secure an amendment to Section 19 of the *Western Australian Industrial Arbitration Act*. It was hoped this amendment would remove the stumbling block of ‘convenience’ from the path to registration.

Although several members of Parliament had expressed support there was no sign of assistance from the State ALP. The ETUWA did not hold out any hope that the WA

¹⁷¹ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 50, Year 1935, Appeal against decision on Application for Registration, Appellant: ETUWA and Respondents: AEU and Others, No. 271/1936 [hereafter Appeal against decision, 1936], p. 2. Copy of transcript held in ETUWA records.

¹⁷² *ETJ*, Vol. XXIV, No. 6, 1936, pp. 8–9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, No. 11, 1936, pp. 13–14.

ALP would change its mind and offer its support, as it had stated time and time again that it had no control over the AEU or indeed any other union. The ETUWA knew that, while some Labor members expressed a willingness to help, the majority of the State ALP would not become involved in the situation because it wanted to maintain political and industrial stability. Secretary, d'Almeida stated bitterly that, even though the WA ALP would not allow the ETUWA to affiliate, it still expected members of the union to give assistance to the Party during elections.¹⁷⁴

ETU National Council Support

The appeal of the Registrar's decision on the fourth application for registration, lodged in June 1936, had still not been heard by February 1937. At the ETU's annual conference in Melbourne during April and May 1937, the New South Wales branch put the following motion:

That unless the embargo of the ALP against the registration of the Western Australian Branch of the ETU is withdrawn the Federal Council will instruct all Branches of the ETU to withdraw their affiliation in all States. Further, a copy of this decision to be forwarded to Mr Curtin and Mr Beasley.¹⁷⁵

The ETU, nationally, had been affiliated with the ALP for 35 years, so this was a significant threat in support of the Western Australian branch. Not all the branches were supportive of the motion and delegates expressed the hope that the union was serious about this motion and every branch would be prepared to carry out the threat. The motion was carried with an amendment stating that the national council was to communicate with federal members of the Labor Party and organise a conference with the federal executive of the ALP to insist that the ETUWA be granted affiliation or all ETU branches would carry out the threat.¹⁷⁶

Correspondence between the national council of the ETU and the federal executive of the ALP and Labor Members of Parliament resulted in two conferences

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., No. 12, 1936, pp. 15–16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Vol. XXV, No. 2, 1937, p. 20.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., No. 6, 1937, p. 8.

which were held in Perth. At each of these conferences representatives from the State Labor Party, P.J. Mooney and P.J. Trainer, acted as mediators between representatives from the opposing unions and the ETU. Although there was considerable discussion, in the end nothing of any consequence resulted from the meetings. A conference held between the general secretary of the ETU, federal Labor Ministers J.J. Curtin and J.A. Beasley¹⁷⁷ and A.R.G. Hawke, State Minister for Employment and Labor, along with representatives from the AEU, took place during October 1937 and also ended with no resolution.¹⁷⁸

Finally the appeal against the Registrar's decision in the fourth application was heard in March 1938. The ETUWA argued that the Registrar had not taken into account a number of issues. These included the rapid advance of the electrical industry in the State; whether members of the ETUWA were either eligible or desirous of joining the objecting unions; the importance of the formation of the Goldfields sub-branch and the Radio Workers' Union and the additional support provided by these groups, along with support promised by the Fremantle Tramways electrical workers; the plebiscite which indicated electrical workers' wishes; the AEU's use of electrical members' contributions; and undue control by its controlling body in the eastern states.¹⁷⁹

The Deputy President of the Court answered all of the points raised by the ETUWA. He argued that the two main objecting unions, the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers, were properly established and registered unions and the AEU's constitution had '... at all material times purported to cover armature

¹⁷⁷ This is the same John Albert (Jack) Beasley (1895–1949), who, in 1926, as an organiser for the ETU New South Wales branch and later secretary of this branch, had come to WA to help set up an ETU branch in Perth. Bede Nairn, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 13 (MUP), 1993.

¹⁷⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XXV, No. 10, 1937, p. 12.

¹⁷⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1938, Appeal against decision of Registrar of Industrial Unions in refusing to register the Western Australian branch of the ETU, Appeal Dismissed, 28 April 1938, pp. 234–36.

winders and electrical engineers generally.¹⁸⁰ He stated that, under the 1914 amalgamation, the AEU's constitution embraced all classifications of workers included in the scope of the ETUWA. Given the good standing in the industry of the engineering unions, he believed that equity should favour the engineering unions. He was sure the original constitutions of the two established engineering unions were sufficient to cover all classes of electrical workers in a variety of industries.¹⁸¹ This decision was a tremendous blow to the ETUWA, and d'Almeida argued that the formation of an electrical section within any other union, covering between forty or fifty different crafts, could not 'make for a clear independence or satisfactory government of electricians' affairs'.¹⁸²

Early in 1939 the ETUWA found it imperative to send a delegate to the annual national conference of the ETU, to be held in Sydney. There had been numerous conferences in the past when the ETUWA had not been represented because of financial restrictions. This time the union felt strongly that the national council should fund someone to attend, stating:

The Branch is determined at all costs that Western Australia shall have representation. It has been pointed out that it is futile to continue as we are doing without more specific knowledge of affairs as they stand and the possibilities of a Federal Award. Upon this latter matter we have reached, it would appear, an impasse, but we are still a little doubtful as to its finalization. In any case the future of this Branch needs urgent consideration.¹⁸³

As a result of this plea secretary d'Almeida attended the conference and was able to lobby support from the conference delegates for the ETUWA. A motion was agreed to renew the threat that the national council of the ETU intended to recommend to all its branches that they should withhold all financial support to the ALP until the ETUWA was given affiliation to the State ALP. And, failing a satisfactory solution

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 234–36.

¹⁸² *ETJ*, Vol. XXVI, No. 6, 1938, p. 11.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, 1939, p. 20.

within six months, all branches would be requested to withdraw their affiliation from the ALP simultaneously.¹⁸⁴ The threat must have rung hollow on this third occasion. In 1940 the national executive of the ETU indicated that branches could decide on an individual basis on whether they would disaffiliate, contrary to the resolution passed at the last national conference.¹⁸⁵

In 1939 the AEU pressed its arbitral advantage. During d'Almeida's attendance at the national conference in Sydney, the Public Works Department in Perth threatened to dismiss all electricians who were not members of a 'recognised union', namely the AEU. Another incident occurred on the goldfields during this time, where the AEU took further advantage of d'Almeida's absence by trying to undermine the ETUWA's status on the fields by having discussions with employers with regard to the licensing of electrical workers.¹⁸⁶ The ETU national secretary communicated with solicitors in Perth and succeeded in having the matters held over until d'Almeida's return. These two incidents helped the national council of the ETU realise what the ETUWA was up against.¹⁸⁷

By the closing months of 1939 the ETUWA accepted the fact that it could do nothing further about its failure to achieve State registration. It turned to other matters. These included the setting up of an Electrical Licensing Board; amendments to the Electric Lighting Act; amendments to the Rules and Regulations governing electrical installations; dilution of the electrical trades; and new awards for electrical workers on the goldfields. At the 1940 national conference, however, the ETUWA made another small foray. It demanded that the national council carry out its resolution to instruct all branches to withdraw affiliation from the ALP. The

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., No. 5, 1939, p. 15.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1940, p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXVII, No. 6, 1939, p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

conference decided against this course of action and the proposal for all branches to withdraw their affiliation from the ALP did not proceed.¹⁸⁸ The threats had indeed been hollow. Once again the ETUWA retreated.

At the 1943 national conference, the ETUWA's position was reviewed. The union was not growing and was still subsidised by the national council. D'Almeida did not attend the conference due to pressure of work and lack of finances. Another reason why the union was failing was probably because, by the early 1940s, d'Almeida's position was only part-time. He would have found it difficult to visit and organise electrical workers in remote areas in a part-time capacity.¹⁸⁹

Personnel Change Within the Unions

In December 1940 AEU organiser Hedley Symons died. Initially B.A.L. (Baden) White took the position as organiser for the Perth branch, but he resigned after a year to take up the position of Assistant Deputy Director of Manpower for Western Australia. J.F. (Jack) Newman held the position of AEU organiser early in 1942.¹⁹⁰ Newman could count as close associates Percy Trainer, secretary of the State ALP from 1933 to 1941, and Trainer's successor to that position, Tom Davies, from 1941 to 1949¹⁹¹ and also, secretary of the Railways' Union, Geoff Keating, all three of whom had been involved in the ongoing dispute with the Perth branch of the ETU.¹⁹²

One of the first tasks to which Newman had to attend as AEU organiser was a claim for an amendment to the Railway Award to provide for a full margin of thirty shillings for electrical installers. Newman stated that the job of electrical installer

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Vol. XXVIII, No. 8, 1940, p. 14.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Vol. XXXI, No. 11, 1943, p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ J.F. Newman, 'Educate Organise ... Twenty-five active years in the AEU', unpublished manuscript, 1984, pp. 114-119.

¹⁹¹ B. Oliver, *Unity is Strength: A History of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia*, API Network, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 2003, Appendix, p. 377.

¹⁹² Newman, 'Educate Organise', 1984, p. 177.

had, at one time, been viewed as a second grade classification but that over the past decade the electrical industry had become more complex and, with the advent of three phase power, the trade was in need of more intelligent workers. Since Newman knew little about the electrical industry or electricity he called on a friend and fellow AEU member and activist, Michael (Mick) Kingston Healy, for advice on how to proceed in this matter.¹⁹³ Healy, an electrician, had once been a member of the ETUWA. While working as an official for the AEU in May 1940 he was involved in a three-month strike at the Big Bell Gold Mine and had been dismissed. He claimed to have been victimised by the company. A subsequent inquiry by the Arbitration Court did not find in his favour and he was not re-employed. Healy was to play an influential part in impeding the progress towards the total independence of the ETUWA. In 1945, while working as an electrical fitter with James Hardie at Rivervale, he actively organised electrical workers for the AEU.¹⁹⁴ In February 1945 the ETUWA urged members to be aware of these attempts by Healy, who had been employed by the AEU, to persuade electrical workers to join that union. Healy, an ex-member of the ETUWA, had been asked to resign some years previously because he had been a member of both unions at the same time. In 1936, while he was working at the Youanmi gold mine, he actively expressed the view that there was 'only one union for electricians', namely the ETU, and at the time the union expressed its appreciation of his good work on behalf of the organisation.¹⁹⁵ Some time after this he had offered to assist the ETUWA in every way he could through his association with the AEU but, in the opinion of the ETUWA, was instead doing all he could to force the ETU out of the State.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁹⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIV, No. 6, 1936, p. 8.

The ETU national executive was appalled at the actions of the Western Australian branch of the AEU in appointing an organiser to enrol electrical workers and requested that the Commonwealth Council of that union meet with representatives from the national executive of the ETU and d'Almeida.¹⁹⁶ From the beginning of 1945 the AEU began to recognise that the electrical industry was growing at an exponential rate and there was a need to look at establishing an electrical branch of the AEU. AEU Commonwealth Council approval was sought to appoint Healy as an assistant organiser with special reference to the electrical trades. The AEU Perth No. 6 branch was opened in August 1945 with Healy as its secretary.¹⁹⁷

The final straw for the ETUWA came nearly a year later when d'Almeida lost his seat as the workers' representative on the Electrical Workers' Board to electrician and AEU member Conrad Bruechle.¹⁹⁸ This election had been a vital one for the ETUWA because, while the union was represented on this Board, it retained some degree of recognition in the industry. ETU national secretary, A.W. Henderson, informed the ETUWA that the national executive '...was greatly perturbed over the position' and saw this as another move by the AEU to wipe the ETU out in Western Australia.¹⁹⁹ The national executive decided to embark on a renewed push for State registration. In order to help this matter along the national president was to approach the Commonwealth Council of the AEU to explore the possibility of negotiating a working agreement.²⁰⁰

In order to obtain first hand information of the situation it was decided that the 1947 annual national conference of the ETU would be held in Perth and a

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXXIII, No. 6, 1945, p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Newman, 'Educate Organise', Appendix XVIII, Apprentices, passim.

¹⁹⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, 1946, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

meeting arranged between the ETU national executive and the executive of the Western Australian branch of the AEU. The AEU, however, refused to meet. The national council of the ETU had to decide on another course of action. The conference resolved to arrange a meeting between the ETU and the metropolitan district council and executive of the WA ALP, in order to discuss the case for ETUWA affiliation with this body. It was hoped that, because of the good standing of the ETU in the eastern states and the fact that two former branch secretaries of the ETU now occupied the positions of State secretary of the ALP in New South Wales and Queensland, there would be a change in attitude towards the difficulties faced by the ETUWA.²⁰¹ The meetings between the WA ALP and the ETU went well and the ETU national council's case was well received. The national president and secretary of the ETU were invited to attend the quarterly meeting of the south western district council of the ALP in Bridgetown. Again they were given an opportunity to discuss the position of the ETUWA to good effect. Although there was no substantive outcome from these meetings attitudes were slowly changing.²⁰²

One result of the discussions held during the ETU annual conference in 1947 was that the conference resolved to immediately lodge a fifth application for registration under the *Western Australian Industrial Arbitration Act*. Under the direction of the conference ETU national secretary, A.W. Henderson, visited Kalgoorlie, where the Arbitration Court was in the process of holding a hearing for an application by the goldfields' unions for increased wages. While Henderson was there, the AEU representative asked if he could give evidence in support of the wage case. Henderson agreed to do so. His main reason for visiting Kalgoorlie, however,

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., Vol. XXXVII, No. 9, 1947, p. 5.

was to discuss with the President of the Court any legal points that he thought might have an impact on the ETUWA's application for registration.²⁰³

It was to be a further sixteen months before the ETUWA finally heard the outcome of the meetings with the ALP. During this time representatives of the ETU's Victorian branch visiting Perth promoted the case for independent registration.²⁰⁴ After this, members of the ETU national executive met with Members of Parliament during the Prime Minister's production conference in Sydney during October 1948. And, when the national secretary visited Canberra during the ALP federal conference, he was able to again stress the importance of party affiliation to the secretary and president of the WA ALP and WA ALP Members of the Federal parliament, Lemmon, Beazley and Cook.²⁰⁵ Finally, in February 1949 affiliation with the WA ALP was granted to the ETUWA. Of course the AEU, along with a number of other unions, objected strongly to this decision. Nevertheless the majority of the State executive of the WA ALP voted in favour of the affiliation.²⁰⁶

With ALP affiliation obtained, the union immediately made its fifth attempt at obtaining State registration. The ETUWA expected that this time there would be no objections from other affiliated unions.²⁰⁷ This proved a vain hope. When the union's application came before the Industrial Registrar in August 1949 once again the AEU, the Australasian Society of Engineers and a number of other unions objected on the old grounds that electrical workers could conveniently belong to any one of the unions already registered. L. Seaton, K.C. put forward a strong case on behalf of the ETUWA. And, facts submitted during the hearing showed that,

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, 1949, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, No. 8, 1949, p. 15.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., No. 2, 1949, p. 2.

although the AEU had many hundreds of electrical workers as members in its Perth No. 6 branch, this branch had not been registered as a union under the *Trade Union Act* or the *Industrial Arbitration Act*. In fact the AEU had only 30 electrical members in its properly registered Perth No. 2 branch. The AEU Perth No. 6 Branch which, in 1945, had been specially established to represent electrical workers, could not legally represent its members.²⁰⁸

Finally, after twenty-three years of struggle after its establishment in 1926, on 22 November 1949 a Certificate of Registration was granted to the ETUWA.²⁰⁹ It had proved a costly business, in money, time and energy. The union had spent more than two decades on the periphery of the State political and labour movements as an outcast of the system. Notwithstanding its lack of influence and power a strong core of members had remained determined to maintain an independent organisation that would represent and fight for the wages, working conditions, training and licensing interests of all ETUWA members and the electrical trade.

Secretary d'Almeida was so exhausted by his efforts over the previous seventeen years that he resigned as soon as registration was achieved. During his period as secretary he had worked hard to organise electrical workers throughout the State. However, it had proved difficult to build the membership given that even existing members were hard to hold onto, as they knew that without registration the union could do little for them. During his period as ETUWA secretary, d'Almeida succeeded in gaining the registration of the Goldfields sub-branch, fought for and achieved improvements to apprenticeship conditions and licensing provisions throughout the goldfields, and was congratulated on his efforts in this by the President of the Arbitration Court. He organised radio workers into a union and

²⁰⁸ Ibid., No. 11, 1949, p. 1.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Vol. XI, No. 5, 1950, p. 5.

helped them obtain State registration and licensing (the first in any State in Australia); later, an award and apprenticeship provisions for this union were obtained. The national executive thanked d'Almeida for his hard work and acknowledged his efforts.²¹⁰

It was to be a further nine months before Frederick James Francis Stahl was elected full-time secretary of the ETUWA in August 1950.²¹¹ The Western Australian Arbitration Court dismissed all appeals against the union's registration in October 1950.²¹² However, Stahl resigned fifteen months later and the secretary's position was filled by committed ALP member Robert William (Bob) Fletcher.²¹³ ETUWA members were asked to spread the word that the ETUWA was now a fully recognised union.²¹⁴ Now the business of building a strong electrical trades union representing electrical workers and electrical apprentices throughout Western Australia could begin in earnest.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. XI, No. 9, 1950, p. 1.

²¹¹ Ibid., No. 8, 1950, p. 16.

²¹² Ibid., No. 13, 1950, p. 1.

²¹³ Ibid., No. 24, 1951, p. 14.

²¹⁴ Ibid., No. 13, 1951, p. 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

Regulation of the Electrical Industry and Protection of the Trade — Early 1900s to 1949

As the Electrical Trades Union (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) struggled over 23 years to achieve registration it also strived to be part of the development of a comprehensive regulatory and licensing system for the State's electrical industry. This chapter will examine the importance the union placed on this issue and what role, if any, the ETUWA played in the construction and policing of such legislation. Until the late 1960s the union's small membership limited its influence on government policies. It was men who worked for government agencies and were interested in the burgeoning electrical industry who took the lead in developing a system of regulation including a comprehensive licensing scheme for electrical workers. As an unregistered organisation for much of the period under review the ETUWA was unable to carry out the work usually associated with a trade union, which was to negotiate members' wages and conditions in an arbitrated award system. As well, its members perceived themselves as craftsmen and were, for the most part, not radical or active in wider social and political struggles (for instance, in socialist or communist campaigns for social transformation). Therefore the union did not view itself as a protagonist in a class war. Instead the union set itself the task of ensuring that the status of the trade as well as its members and the general community's safety would be properly protected by qualified and licensed tradesmen.

The Western Australian government was also conscious of the need to regulate the electrical industry and by 1922 had issued a set of Regulations under the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892* to protect the general public. In 1925 a further set of Regulations were brought out allowing for the licensing of electrical installers. It was not until 1939 that a set of Regulations setting out the licensing requirements for all electrical

tradesmen was issued. This chapter will argue that the ETUWA, from its formation in 1926, was persistent in its attempts to be part of the ongoing process of maintaining a properly policed and safe electrical industry for electrical workers and the general public. However, because it remained outside the authorised government and trade union system until 1949, it was blocked from having effective influence in these areas.

An early article in the *Commonwealth Engineer* explained the necessity to control the installation of electricity into buildings:

It is essential that in the performance of installations there will be no 'slumming'; that proper material will be used by workmen, who are qualified as wiremen, and that electrical work shall not be entrusted to gasfitters and jack-of-all-trades...All that is required by the electrical industry is that wiremen shall be licensed as skilled operatives, and, in the words of Mr Noel Murray, of the Fire Underwriters' Association, that the work shall become 'a skilled occupation in the interests of public safety and general efficiency'.¹

As a craft union the ETUWA was intent on the ongoing protection of the electrical trades and an excellent method for achieving this was to ensure that there was a strong and secure licensing system in place for electrical tradesmen.

Development in the Eastern States

All State governments in Australia were keen to establish a comprehensive licensing system for electrical workers and the ETU, in every State, was eager to be involved in the process. Electrical work was a dangerous occupation and, nationally, between 1924 and 1950 at least twenty people each year were seriously injured in accidents involving the use of electricity or died by electrocution.² Most of them were workers but some were members of the public. State branches of the ETU initiated their individual negotiations with State legislatures to ensure electrical workers were well trained and had safe working conditions within a regulated industry.

¹ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal* [hereafter *ETJ*], Sydney, Vol. May 1918, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, Vols. 1924–1950.

Victoria

In 1918 the Victorian government passed the *Electricity Commissioners' Act*, placing the administration of electrical installations and electricity supply under the control of three government appointed Commissioners.³ The Victorian branch of the ETU applauded this legislation as it had been campaigning vigorously to this end for five years.⁴ By 1920 electrical installers were categorised into three grades of licence in Victoria: 'A', 'B' and 'C', each dependent on age, testing and years of experience. An 'A' grade licence was granted to someone over the age of 21 who had passed a prescribed examination and also to those who had been working as an electrical installer for at least five years and held a 'B' grade licence. A 'B' grade licence holder had to have at least five years' experience but could work only under the supervision of an 'A' grade licence holder. A 'C' grade was someone under the age of twenty-one and entitled to carry out wiring work under the direct supervision of an 'A' or 'B' grade licence holder while in the employment of a stated employer.⁵

New South Wales

By 1921 licensing had become a major issue for the New South Wales branch of the ETU and the union resolved that members would refuse to work with any unlicensed electrician.⁶ A Bill proposing a licensing system was put before the New South Wales parliament in 1924, however it provided only for the licensing of the electrical contractor (the employer), not the individual electrical worker and would not stop employers using untrained workers. Therefore the majority of the trade would still be unregulated.⁷ The union used its influence with the State Labor Party to amend the Bill

³ Ken Purdham, *A Century of Struggle A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, Flemington, Victoria, 2002, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

⁵ *ETJ*, No. 26, May 1920, pp. 6–8. (Cited in Purdham, *A Century of Struggle*, 2002, pp. 239–40).

⁶ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, New South Wales Branch, *100 Years of Lighting the Way, The Electrical Trades Union in NSW*, compiled by Anna Collins, Focus Publishing, Sydney, 2002, p. 43.

⁷ *ETJ*, Vol. XII, No. 3, 1924, p. 3.

but to no avail. The New South Wales *Electrical Contractors' Licensing Act, 1924* passed through both Houses of State Parliament without amendment.

The union called it a 'feeble apology for an electricians' licensing law' that did nothing to regulate the industry.⁸ The union wanted the individual electrician (employee) to be licensed.⁹ Finally, in 1927, the *Electrical Contractors' Licensing (Electricians) Amendment Act* provided for the registration of electrical installers and fitters (employees) as well as electrical contractors (employers) and reconstituted a new Board consisting of a president appointed by the Governor, a member representing the public electricity supply bodies, a member to represent the Fire Underwriters Association of New South Wales, a licensed electrical contractor elected by the electrical contractors licensed under the Act, a member elected by the ETU, and two licensed electricians elected by electricians licensed under the Act. This Act renamed the principal Act the *Electrical Contractors and Electricians Licensing Act, 1924* and renamed the Board the Electrical Contractors and Electricians Licensing Board.¹⁰

South Australia

The South Australian case for licensing the electrical trade was very different. In 1929 the South Australian branch of the ETU lamented the fact that theirs was the only State that had no licensing legislation covering any part of the trade. The union complained:

As things are now anyone can engage in the work of an electrician; it matters not whether he be competent or not. Plumbers and ironworkers, gasfitters and many of other callings undertake to install electrical work. Recently a firm of drapers in a large way of business took on a man well past middle age as an electrician. This man had for years past followed the calling of a woodworker, doing shop and office fittings in wood, and was in partnership with another in the woodworking business, his electrical knowledge being confined to what he had learned by observation – certainly could not have been very high.¹¹

⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XII, No. 4, 1924, p. 3.

⁹ New South Wales Government, *Electrical Contractors and Electricians Licensing Board*, online resource, State Records NSW, concise guide to the State archives, 3rd Edition.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XVII, No. 6, 1929, p. 9.

Membership of this ETU branch was small and it had little influence within government circles in promoting regulation of the industry. Therefore, South Australia had no electrical licensing system in place until 1968, considerably later than in all other States.¹²

Queensland

Queensland was the leader in passing licensing legislation covering electrical installers, fitters, linemen and jointers. In 1923 the *Electrical Workers Act, Queensland*, was introduced to regulate the electrical power industry and the different classifications of work within the electrical trades. This was also the first legislation that allowed for union representation. Members of the ETU Queensland branch voted in representatives to sit on the Electrical Workers' Board in that State,¹³ and its first meeting was held at the end of January 1924.¹⁴

The Board's purpose was to control the issuing of certificates of competency to electrical workers, ensuring that, from this point on, every worker in the electrical industry was a fully trained and qualified tradesman.¹⁵ In 1925 the Queensland branch inserted examples of licence examinations papers for electrical installers, electrical fitters and electrical linemen in the *Electrical Trades Journal*, as information for electrical workers throughout Australia.¹⁶ This information was of particular interest to the newly formed ETUWA.

The Beginning of Licensing Regulation in Western Australia: Safety Concerns

The State that had the most influence on the ETUWA and its struggle for legislative controls over the industry was Queensland. After Sid Bryan's visit to Western Australia to organise the electrical workers the Queensland branch persisted with a paternal

¹² Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETU News*, Sydney, Vol. XLIV, No. 145, May 1967, p. 3.

¹³ *ETJ*, Vol. XI, No. 10, 1924, p. 3.

¹⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XI, No. 11, 1924, p. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XIII, No. 4, 1925, pp. 14–15.

interest in the development of the ETUWA. However, notwithstanding Queensland's legislation which covered electrical installers, fitters, linesmen and jointers, legislation in Western Australia was initially created to cover electrical installers only, as in Victoria. Government, industry and the general public wanted assurance that workers installing electricity into workplaces and homes had the necessary qualifications and experience to ensure the safe application of this dangerous new energy source.

In the 1910s, prior to any legislated regulations covering electrical installations in Western Australia, the Fire Underwriters' Association issued certificates to approved installers. Cyril Leonard Grantham, an electrical installer and a member of the ASE/AEU, was one of the first electrical workers to be given a certificate. The certificate stated that:

This is to certify that _____ has given an undertaking to strictly observe this Association's General Rules for Wiring for the Utilisation of Electrical Energy, his / their name has been placed on the List of Approved Installers of Electrical Lighting Heating or Motive Power recognised by the Fire Underwriters' Association of Western Australia. This Certificate expires on 21 December 19__.¹⁷

A footnote stated:

The issue of this Certificate does not relieve the person to whom it is issued of the necessity of his obtaining any license [sic] or Certificate which may be required by any Government of Local Authority.¹⁸

In the early 1920s the Western Australian State Government charged the Public Works Department with the duty of framing a set of general regulations to govern the supply and use of electric power in the metropolitan area.¹⁹ A report in the *West Australian* explained that the object of these regulations was the protection of life and property and 'to provide protection [to the public and workers] as far as practicable'.²⁰

The outcome of meetings held by the Public Works Department was the insertion, in

¹⁷ Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), *Live Wire*, Perth, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Department of Public Works and Trading Concerns, Report No. 26, in *Votes and Proceedings of the Parliament of Western Australia* [hereafter WAVP], 1922 – 1923, Vol. 2. *Western Australian Government Gazette* [hereafter WAGG], *Electric Lighting Act, 1892*, 'The Electric Lighting Regulations, 1922, Nos. 1–18', Vol. 1922A, 12 May 1922.

²⁰ *West Australian*, 8 June 1922, p. 6.

1922, of additional regulations to the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892*. These new regulations outlined the exact electrical pressure to be supplied, the necessity for installations to be earthed, the responsibilities of suppliers and protection against electric accidents for the general public. The regulations stipulated that no electrical installations in any public or private building could be connected to any public electricity supply system unless the installation had been approved by the supply authority and provision for the appointment of government inspectors of electrical installations was made.

In July 1922, A.F. Williamson, chief electrical engineer in the Public Works Department, and A.S. Walton, general foreman in charge of all maintenance work, were appointed as electrical installation inspectors.²¹ The regulations, however, exempted any inspection of electrical installations in mines,²² and did not provide for the licensing of electrical installers. It was not for another two years, in September 1924, that a conference was called to discuss draft regulations for the licensing of electrical installers. This conference was attended by representatives from the Government, the Electrical Contractors' Association, the City Council Electricity and Gas Department, the Government Tramways and Electricity Supply Department, the Fremantle Tramways and Electrical Lighting Board, the Electrical Traders' Association, the State Fire Underwriters' Association and two representatives from the AEU, Hedley Symons, union organiser and Cyril Leonard Grantham AEU member and electrician.²³

There had been fourteen electrical accidents during the two-year period between 1923 and 1925 involving electrical workers and members of the public, seven of whom died from electrocution. In an effort to bring the electrical industry under tighter control and prevent more deaths, the Minister for Works, Alexander McCallum, called for an

²¹ WAGG, Vol. 1922B, 4 August 1922, p. 1443.

²² Ibid., Vol. 1922A, 12 May, 'Electric Lighting Regulations, 1922', pp. 958–9.

²³ *Live Wire*, Perth, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, pp. 3–5 and 9.

investigation into regulations covering the supply and installation of electricity.²⁴ He was anxious to issue guidelines for electrical workers to ensure safe working conditions for both workers and consumers.

Accidents caused by electricity were graphically reported by the newspapers. The deaths of two young children were included in the number of recorded electrocutions.²⁵ In March 1924 Eric Gibson, four years old, had climbed onto the roof of his house where his father was carrying out some repair work. The child was killed when he became entangled in a live electric wire after his father had left him alone on the roof while he collected more tools.²⁶ Eight months later in November 1924 Walter Francis Smith, aged eight, was electrocuted while playing on the roof of an old bakery at Midland Junction. Walter was thought to have touched a live electric wire with a piece of wire he had been holding in his hand. The *West Australia* stated that 'Death must have been instantaneous'.²⁷

As the Minister for Works acknowledged, workers dealing directly with electricity were in most danger. Of the fourteen incidents involving electric shock reported between April 1923 and January 1925, five involved electrical workers. One worker was seriously injured, two were slightly injured and two linesmen died. On 3 August 1924 Stanley George Kent of North Fremantle, an electrician employed by the North Fremantle Municipal Council, was seriously injured while repairing high voltage wires on top of a pole. Kent was thrown clear of the wires by the force of the shock. He received severe burns to his back and arm and was taken to Fremantle Hospital. Only a month later Henry Lynch, an employee of the Perth City Council's electricity and gas department, was electrocuted while painting an electric light pole in St Georges Terrace, Perth. Workmates saw Lynch fall unconscious across the overhead wires. He

²⁴ *West Australian*, 21 February 1925, p. 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Index and various issues between 1923 and 1925.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1924, p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 November 1924, p. 6.

was lowered to the ground and artificial respiration was applied, to no avail. Evidence given at the inquest stated that he had rubber gloves but was not wearing them. The Coroner decided the cause of death was electrocution by contact with live wires.²⁸ In September 1924 in Kalgoorlie, Jesse Legget fell fourteen feet to his death after receiving a severe shock while repairing electric light wires. In January 1925 another two linesmen were injured. Albert Mickleburg of Fremantle, a linesman employed by the Fremantle Municipal Tramways, was caught in electric wires while working at the top of a telegraph pole in Beaconsfield. He was taken to Fremantle Hospital suffering from shock and a broken thigh. And, on the same day Edward Woolley, another linesman also working on telegraph lines at Beaconsfield, was admitted to Fremantle Hospital with shock and slight abrasions.²⁹

The remaining seven incidents of electric shock involved people working in the vicinity of electrical power carrying out their normal business. On 1 April 1923 volunteer fireman, Charles Gilbertson White, was electrocuted when he went to the aid of another volunteer fireman who had become entangled in electric wires swinging loose from an overhead electric main in the street.³⁰ One member of the public to die was Edwin Alfred Davey, a twenty-year-old youth on his way to work. Early in June 1923 Davey walked into a live electric wire that had broken and was swinging loose between the electric mains connection on a pole in the street to an adjoining house. A post-mortem examination revealed Davey had died due to heart failure following the passage of an electric current through his body.³¹ In October 1923 Claude Stanley Dickson, an oxywelder and boilermaker with his own business, was electrocuted while working at the Fresh Food and Ice Company in Pier Street, Perth.³²

²⁸Ibid., 4 August 1924, p. 6.

²⁹Ibid., 17 January 1925, p. 8.

³⁰Ibid., 2 April 1923, p. 8.

³¹Ibid., 27 June 1923, p. 7.

³²Ibid., 16 October 1923, p. 8.

Seven months later in March 1924 Benjamin Haseldene, a plumber, was screwing up some pipes on the fifth floor of the Harvey Hotel when he placed his hand on a conduit containing electric wires. He was unable to remove his hand and his shouts alerted the hotel liftman who promptly turned off the main electric switch. Lily Taylor received a severe electric shock while working in the kitchen of the Palace Hotel.³³ In another incident in July 1924, Ashley Ford, aged about fifteen, narrowly escaped electrocution when he became entangled in a faulty electrical extension. His screams attracted a number of people to the house and he was rescued when the electric current was turned off.³⁴

This succession of serious accidents and deaths among electrical workers and the general public was the impetus for a new set of regulations finally published in the *Government Gazette* on 30 January 1925.³⁵ It should be noted that three of the five electrical workers to die or be injured were unlicensed electrical linemen, suggesting that fully trained and licensed or certified electrical installers had a better safety record.

Licensing for Installers but Failure to Set Up an Adequate Inspectorate

The 'Licensing of Electric Installers' Regulations' were promulgated in 1925 under Section 7 of the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892*, which stipulated that any company supplying electricity would be subject to regulations to secure a regular and efficient supply of electricity, securing the safety of the public from personal injury or from fire and authorising inspections.³⁶ More importantly, these new 1925 regulations outlined the steps for electrical workers to obtain an electrical installer's licence. The regulations also defined an electrical installer as any person over the age of 21 or anyone who had served a five year apprenticeship, and:

³³ Ibid., 2 June 1924, p. 6.

³⁴ Ibid., 8 July 1924, p. 6.

³⁵ WAGG, Vol. 1925A, 30 January, 'Licensing of Electric Installers Regulations', Nos. 21–34, pp. 150–1.

³⁶ *Electric Lighting Act, 1892*, WA.

...who for gain or reward carries on or is engaged in the work of installation of wires and other apparatus for electric light, heat or power in buildings, supplied or to be supplied with electric current at a pressure exceeding 110 volts.³⁷

A Board of Examiners of Electrical Installers was established and anyone working as an electrical installer was to apply for a licence. A 'general licence' would be issued to any person who had been engaged as an electrical installer for a period of five years prior to the date of the application, and who had passed the prescribed examination. A 'provisional licence' would be issued to those who, at the date of the regulations, could satisfy the Board that they had been engaged on work as electrical installers. All holders of provisional licences had to submit themselves for examination within twelve months of the issue of the provisional licence if required by the Board.³⁸

The Board could exempt an applicant from an examination if there was satisfactory proof that he had passed an equivalent examination held by an approved body prior to the passing of these regulations. The Board could also grant a licence to installers holding a licence from another State, provided the Board was satisfied with the system of licensing in that State. The fee for both a general and provisional licence was £1.10.0. Under the regulations the Board could also cancel or suspend the licence of an installer who had not complied with the regulations or who had carried out work not in accordance with the wiring rules of the Australian Institution of Engineers.³⁹

In February 1925 a further set of regulations relating to work on alternating overhead power lines was published.⁴⁰ Although these regulations did not make any provision for electrical linesmen to be licensed it was hoped that by specifying detailed work practices they would ensure that workers had 'the greatest amount of safety possible in carrying out their duties' and consumers had 'efficient men' for any

³⁷ WAGG, Vol. 1925A, 'Licensing of Electric Installers Regulations', pp. 150–1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Vol. 1925A, No. 8, 13 February, 'Regulations relating to work on alternating current overhead lines', Nos. 35–47, p. 270.

electrical work.⁴¹ These additional regulations were required because alternating current is more dangerous to work with than direct current. An electric shock at 50 Hz AC is more dangerous to the body than one at the same frequency of DC, and produces an increased risk of future heart failure.⁴²

The responsible Minister, Alexander McCallum, stated that linemen working on supply lines carrying 200 volts or more ‘should be experienced’, not a junior worker or a trainee, and would be supplied with assistants, gloves, belts and rubber coverings for lines other than the ones on which they were working. ‘Under these regulations accidents to linemen such as had occurred, particularly in the Fremantle district of recent years, should be eliminated’, he promised.⁴³ Also, where possible, a localised control device would be fitted. This device, invented by the electrical engineer of the Subiaco Municipal Council, W.R. Groom, enabled power to be cut off immediately in the event of an accident. News of this safety device had spread to the eastern states and a detailed explanation, extolling the benefits of the device, was given in the *Electrical Trades Journal* of January 1925.⁴⁴ Work on high voltage lines had in the past been highly dangerous and totally unregulated, leading to workers losing limbs and even their lives.⁴⁵ The invention of this safety device was therefore welcomed as a means of preventing fatal accidents to linemen.

In August 1925 McCallum appointed a Board of Examiners to regulate the issuing of electrical installers’ licences. The Board consisted of three members, one appointed by the Minister, one nominee representing the Fire Underwriters’ Association, the Electrical Contractors’ Association and the Electrical Suppliers’

⁴¹ *Western Australian Industrial Gazette* [hereafter WAIG], Vol. V, No. 1, 21 May 1925, ‘Electrical Accidents -New Safety Regulations’, pp. 4–5.

⁴² D.A. Ayre, ‘A History of the South West Electrical Power System’, Honours, Murdoch University, 1999, p. 47.

⁴³ WAIG, Vol. V, ‘New Safety Regulations’ pp. 4–5.

⁴⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XII, No. 9, 1925, p. 9.

⁴⁵ WAIG, Vol. V, ‘New Safety Regulations’, pp. 4–5.

Association and one nominee from electrical installers, the latter two appointments to be submitted for approval to the Minister. If the three associations or the installers did not nominate a representative then the Minister could nominate and appoint someone to represent the associations or the workers on the Board.⁴⁶ From the outset the majority of the Board members came from the public service.

The Chairman, representing the Government, was A.F. Williamson, the electrical engineer for the Public Works Department.⁴⁷ The other representative on the Board, B.M. Holt, represented the Fire Underwriters' Association; the Contractors' Association and the Suppliers' Association. Holt was born in New Zealand in the early 1880s. After serving an apprenticeship he worked for a civil engineering firm in Wellington. He arrived in WA in 1904/5 to take up a position with the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board. After a year in Fremantle he left to gain more experience in the industry in England. While there he worked for the electrical engineering firm of Ernest Scott and Mountain Ltd, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, and studied electrical engineering at the University of Durham. He returned to WA in 1907/8 to take up the management of the electrical department of J.J. Horrocks and Company, representatives of Ernest Scott and Mountain Ltd. In 1909 he was appointed electrical inspector to the Fire Underwriters' Association of Western Australia.⁴⁸ J.W. Attey, was the officer in control of accounts and clerical work in the electrical section of the Public Works Department, and was the secretary of the Board.⁴⁹

Cyril Grantham was appointed the electrical installers' representative on the Board. Grantham was a member and trustee of the AEU Perth No. 2 branch between 1922 and 1935 and was involved in drafting the new regulations in the early 1920s. He

⁴⁶ WAGG, Vol. 1925B, 3 July – 31 December, 14 August, p. 1483.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1925B, 28 August, p. 1559. (Information on Williamson found in WAGG, Vol. 1925B, 10 September, p. 59)

⁴⁸ *Evening Post*, Wellington, New Zealand, Vol. LXXVIII, Issue 79, 30 September 1909, 'Personal Matters', p. 7. (Online resource: National Library of New Zealand website, *Papers Past*.)

⁴⁹ WAGG, Vol. 1925B, 28 August, p. 1559.

represented electrical installers on the Board for nine years from 1928 until 15 April 1937.⁵⁰ He is not recorded, in the Board minutes, as having attended any further meetings after this date and P. Davey took over as employee representative.⁵¹ New regulations published on 8 December 1939 allowed for a representative of employees to be voted in by ballot. And so it was not until 1940 that the secretary of the ETUWA, Barry d'Almeida, was voted in by a workers' ballot as the representative of electrical workers on the re-named Electrical Workers' Board of Examiners.⁵² In 1925, within the first month of the regulations being enacted, the Board issued general licences to Grantham and a number of others, indicating that the Board issued these first licences on the credentials of the applicants and not on the results of an examination.⁵³

In September 1926 a meeting was called to discuss the setting up of an inspectorate to govern the new regulations, at which Symons and Grantham of the AEU again represented electrical installers. The proposed inspector was to have served an electrical apprenticeship, be experienced in general electrical work and hold a general installer's licence, and B.M. Holt, representative for the Fire Underwriters Association was selected unanimously.⁵⁴ Holt was the best candidate for the position as another set of by-laws promulgated under the *Government Electric Works Act, 1914* published in the *Government Gazette* in December 1926 stipulated that all electrical installations were to be wired in accordance with the Electrical Wiring Rules of the Institution of Engineers of Australia and these wiring rules had already been adopted by the Fire Underwriters' Association of Western Australia.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Electrical Trades Union (Western Australian Branch), *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, p. 5.

⁵¹ Western Australian State Records Office [hereafter WASRO], Western Australian Arbitration Court files [hereafter WAAC files], ACC No. 1101, Item No. 1552, Year 1916, Amalgamated Society of Engineers / Amalgamated Engineering Union, Perth No. 2 branch, Annual Statements of Receipts and Expenditure files. There are no records of P. Davey being appointed to the Board during this period and his background is unknown.

⁵² WAGG, Vol. 1940, 25 October, p. 1940.

⁵³ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ WAGG, Vol. 1926B, No. 57, 10 December 1926, p. 2463.

After the publication of the Licensing of Electric Installers' Regulations in January 1925 the first examination of candidates residing in the metropolitan area and requiring an electrical installer's licence was held in November 1925.⁵⁶ However, it was not until September 1928, nearly three years after its establishment, that the Board resolved that provisional licence holders in the country areas 'must now be examined for general licences' and a programme of visits by two members of the Board to the goldfields and great southern districts was arranged.⁵⁷ Examinations conducted by Holt and Grantham were held at Northam and Kalgoorlie in October 1928 and at York, Wagin, Katanning and Albany in November. Distances between centres proved to be one of the major stumbling blocks to the work of the Board. An initial proposal that Roads Board officials supervise examinations on the Board's behalf did not eventuate and examinations were kept to a minimum and held only when there was judged to be a sufficient number of applicants from an area.⁵⁸

The main problem that impeded the Board's efficient issue of licences was its inability, due to distance and lack of funds, to provide a regular service to electrical workers in the country areas. Over the eleven-year period between 1928 and 1939 the Board of Examiners met in Perth on an irregular basis, its main brief being the examination of qualifications and the issuing of provisional and general licences. In other words, the Board met only when a number of licences had to be issued and there were two or three periods of one or two years between meetings. The Board was able to police the licensing of electrical workers in the metropolitan area and in 1929, within the first year of its formation, it charged B.M. Holt with the duty of visiting the Hoyts theatre work site to ascertain if men, working on the electrical installation, were in

⁵⁶ Ibid, Vol. 1925B, No. 51, 18 November 1925, p. 2298.

⁵⁷ WASRO, Western Australian Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers [hereafter WABEEI] Minutes, CONS. No. 5854, Item 01, Years 1928–1946, 24 September 1928.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

possession of a licence.⁵⁹ However, because of the 1930s depression, the Second World War and subsequent lack of finances and manpower, the government appointed no more permanent full-time electrical licence inspectors in the metropolitan area between 1929 and 1944.

Ensuring the safe installation of electricity into homes and businesses was an important aim of the early regulations. By-laws under the *Government Electric Works Act, 1914* gazetted in December 1926 stated that:

All installations shall be wired in accordance with the Electrical Wiring Rules of the Institution of Engineers of Australia, which have been adopted by the Fire Underwriters' Association of Western Australia, and no service connection will be made until the Installation Certificate from the Wiring Contractor has been lodged with the Department.⁶⁰

Provisions to police these by-laws were made under Clause 39, which explained that no installation would be connected to the Government Electricity Department's mains until the Department had tested it.⁶¹ The 1922 'General Regulations' had already provided for the appointment of electrical installation inspectors 'for the proper carrying out of these Regulations' and A.F. Williamson and A.S. Walton had been appointed as Inspectors in July of that year.⁶² Given that Williamson was chief engineer and Walton was general foreman in charge of maintenance work in the Public Works Department it is unlikely that either had much or any time at all for this additional work. In 1934, however, the ETUWA found out that boiler inspectors had been instructed to inspect electrical installations in the course of their ordinary duties. The union complained to McCallum, Minister of Works, that it was not good enough that engineering tradesmen were inspecting electrical installations, arguing that the government should appoint fully

⁵⁹ WABEEI, Minutes', 30 September 1929.

⁶⁰ WAGG, Vol. 1926B, No. 57, 10 December 1926, 'The Electric Works By-laws, 1926', effective 1/11/1926, Clause 31, 'Wiring of Installations, Rules, etc.', p. 2463.

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 2464.

⁶² Ibid, Vol. 1922B, 4 August 1922, 'Appointment of Inspectors under Regulation 14 of the *Electric Lighting Regulations, 1922*', p. 1443.

qualified electrical tradesmen as installation inspectors.⁶³ Throughout the 1930s the union continued to lobby the State government, through its representation at conferences and on committees and also frequent correspondence to the electricity advisory committee, to appoint a full-time inspector who would police all electrical installations and the electrical licensing system.⁶⁴

While the *Electricity Act, Regulations, 1939*, included provisions for the appointment of electrical inspectors with the power to inspect any electrical installation or any electrical work in progress and also all electrical licences,⁶⁵ it was not until the new regulations came into effect in July 1940 and the Board received a letter from the AEU nominating H.V. Symons and B.A.L. White for the positions of electrical installation inspectors that the issue of non electrical tradesmen as inspectors was again raised. Neither of these men had electrical trades' qualifications. The Board moved, most likely influenced by the ETUWA secretary d'Almeida,⁶⁶ to advise the Minister of its opinion that all electrical inspectors should hold electrical workers' licences.⁶⁷ Therefore, after some discussion and advice from the Crown Law Department, the Board rejected the AEU nominations, stating that 'all electric inspectors should hold electrical workers' licences equal to, or of a higher grade than the work they are required to inspect'.⁶⁸ However, it was not until the end of 1945 that the Government

⁶³ *ETJ*, Vol. XXII, No. 6, 1934, p. 11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, 1938, p. 12 and Vol. XXVI, No. 10, 1938, p. 15.

⁶⁵ *WAGG*, Vol. 1939B, 8 December 1939, 'Electricity Act Regulations, 1939', 'License [sic] inspectors shall have power to enter any building or place where electrical wiring is installed or being installed, or any electrical work has been or is being done, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the electrical workers employed are duly licensed, and of examining the license [sic] of any duly licensed electrical worker', p. 2146.

⁶⁶ At this point d'Almeida had been elected as the workers' representative onto the Electrical Workers Board.

⁶⁷ *WASRO*, Cons No. 5854, Item 1, 1928–1946, Electrical Workers' Board, [hereafter EWB] Minutes, 1 July 1940.

⁶⁸ *EWB*, Minutes, 1 July 1940.

announced it would appoint one of its own employees as an electrical installation inspector to enforce the new *Electricity Act, 1945*.⁶⁹

The Union Struggles for Tighter Regulations

At the end of 1930 discussions to revise the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892* were held by a committee with representatives of electrical energy distributors, contractors, equipment suppliers and workers. Although not officially recognised by the government, ETUWA secretary and vice president, F.R. Cox and R.R. Paton, were invited to attend a conference arranged in December 1930.⁷⁰ The union put forward suggestions for the committee to consider; first, that a central supply authority be established, second, that the government appoint inspectors for electrical installations and select them from nominations by electrical workers; and third, that all applications for licences to install or supply power should have the following notice attached: ‘Electrical workers are expected to have a thorough knowledge of the correct method of resuscitation in cases of electrical shock’.⁷¹

The union was also anxious that the definition of an electrical worker should reflect the increased knowledge base of all electrical workers and define all three areas of the trade in one classification, that of electrician:

...any person of the age of 21 who has had five years electrical experience or who has served an apprenticeship in the electrical trade, who is engaged on the work of installing, rewinding or repairing electrical apparatus for electric light, heat, power or any other purpose (whether it be of a temporary or permanent nature) supplied at a pressure above 100 volts.⁷²

The union was pleased to note that the committee had already endorsed many of its suggestions for inclusion into the amended Act and Regulations.⁷³

After the ETUWA achieved state registration of its Goldfields sub branch, in 1935, the union had more opportunity to promote the requirement for every electrical

⁶⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 10, 1945, p. 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, Vol. XVIII, No. 12, 1930, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ *Ibid*.

worker to hold the relevant licence. The realisation of 100 per cent licensing of the electrical trade would signify the acceptance of the electrical trades as highly skilled.

The union secretary, d'Almeida, explained:

The recognition of a standard qualification will do much to improve the general status of electrical workers, resulting in better conditions and rates of pay, as employers will no longer be able to urge inefficiency as a ground for keeping wages at a low level. On the grounds of skill and the danger of occupation, factors which appear in the past to have been almost completely overlooked, we are entitled to recognition.⁷⁴

As the use of electricity increased and spread throughout the State the government continued throughout the 1930s to deliberate the revision of the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892*. The proposed new legislation would include a new electricity advisory committee and regulations to protect the public from personal injury and any property from damage. The latter would be achieved by establishing a comprehensive licensing system administered by a Board of Examiners for electrical workers and cinematography workers.⁷⁵ In early December 1937 the ETUWA noted that many of its suggestions for the proposed *Electricity Act* had been included in a notice paper put forward for consideration. The union was pleased at the introduction of the Bill, stating it would greatly increase the status of electrical workers. The ETUWA submitted a proposal that a representative of the union should be appointed as an honorary inspector who would check that men at the trade were properly licensed and report on any use of faulty or shoddy materials.⁷⁶

In December 1937 two electrical workers wrote letters to the *West Australian* expressing their concern at the delay in legislating for more control covering the electrical industry. 'Sparks' of Norseman and 'Live Wire' of Kalgoorlie complained that Western Australia was far behind the eastern states with regard to control and protection of the public and workers from the dangers of electricity. Licensed

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, No. 6, 1936, p. 8.

⁷⁵ WAGG, *Electricity Act Regulations, 1939*, pp. 2141–51.

⁷⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XXV, No. 12, 1937, pp. 13–14.

electrician ‘Sparks’ explained that in Sydney and Melbourne the licensing of electricians was law and ‘most rigidly observed’:

...imagine my surprise when I came to this State and found that only some of the electricians of the State had to be licensed. For instance, under the Act here, only those electricians doing installation work in buildings have to be licensed. The same licensing should apply to electrical fitters and all of the other classifications of electrical workers who come just as much in contact with electricity and whose work can be just as much a danger to the public as the general installation work. This, I am sure, is badly needed here, and the licensing of electrical fitters especially would go a long way to preventing the faulty installation and faulty repair of portable appliances from which so many shocks occur.⁷⁷

‘Live Wire’ wrote that the ‘...amendment of the Electric Lighting Act has been a long-felt want so far as electricians are concerned’. This was especially so in the mining areas where he had found ‘quite a number of these unlicensed mine electricians doing work outside the mines on householders’ installations’. As a licensed electrician who had served a five-year apprenticeship he explained that the existing Act did not allow for the legislation to be properly policed, leaving it up to local Councils to control what should be a government initiative:

I cannot see the fairness of an Act which makes fish of one section and flesh of the other. Just recently in Kalgoorlie and Boulder the municipal councils gave instructions that all electrical work must be done by licensed electricians. I applaud the efforts of these bodies but fail to see why they should be forced into the position of having to police the Act. Surely, as there are penalties provided in the Act for breaches with respect of unlicensed persons doing electrical work, etc., the Government, as it is a Government measure, should, if they have any sense of protection of the public, see to the proper policing of this Act. The position throughout the Goldfields has been ridiculous for years and we have had the glaring spectacle of all and sundry having a go at electrical work. The electrocutions and accidents in this State and in other States through faulty electrical installations are too numerous to mention, and this practice should be discontinued.⁷⁸

After the new *Electricity Act, 1937* was enacted in January 1938 the Minister for Public Works, H. Millington appointed the members of the electricity advisory committee. These men were, William Henry Taylor, general manager of the Department of Tramways, Railways and Electricity Supply, Francis Charles Edmondson of the City of Perth Electricity and Gas Department, and Frank Shaw,

⁷⁷ *West Australian*, 22 December 1937, p. 14.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

mechanical engineer of the Public Works Department.⁷⁹ W.M. Marshall, MLA for Murchison argued that, while he accepted that the members of the proposed committee were all ‘technical and highly trained men’, he wondered why there was to be no representative of the workers in the electrical industry appointed to the committee.

Marshall argued:

I can quite understand the necessity for technical men, but surely those who have control of the practical side of the work should also have representation. My experience is that electricity, while a great friend and benefactor to society, is at the same time an extremely dangerous plaything. From that standpoint alone, a representative of those who work in such a dangerous industry should have representatives on the committee.⁸⁰

Millington replied that there would be provision within the legislation to call on the staff of the Public Works Department for expert and practical advice, therefore there was no need to appoint an electrical workers’ representative.⁸¹ The ETUWA expressed its disappointment that the Minister had refused to consider its proposal for the advisory committee to comprise of five members, two of whom to be workers’ representatives.⁸²

The first duty of the committee was to draft regulations to give effect to the requirements of the Act.⁸³ Although the ETUWA was not represented on the advisory committee it continued, during 1938, with a campaign to be involved in the drafting of the new regulations and approached the advisory committee requesting that it consider suggestions from the union for the draft regulations. The union argued:

We contend that had we an opportunity of going into this matter fully this Act should have been far better framed in accordance with the requirements of the workers, and we must endeavor [sic] to secure an amendment of it as soon as possible. The Queensland Act appears to cover the ground very well, and a lot of its provisions will be considered in submitting our own draft of regulations. Matters such as the appointment of a representative of the workers, which representative is to be elected by vote of the licence-holders, and other matters concerning the method of examinations, etc., are ones requiring a great deal of consideration.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter *WAPD*], Vol. 100, No. 2, 'Electric Bill. Second Reading', Perth, 1937, p. 2075 and *WAGG*, Vol. Jan-Mar, 1938, 'Appointment of Electricity Advisory Committee under Section 4 of Electricity Act, 1937', p. 317.

⁸⁰ *WAPD*, p. 2427.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 2427–32.

⁸² *ETJ*, Vol. XXVL, No. 3, March 1938, p. 12.

⁸³ *West Australian*, 24 February 1938, 'Electricity Control', p. 21.

⁸⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XXVL, No. 3, 1938, p. 12.

In the end the electricity advisory committee recommended the need for increased safety and efficiency in the electrical industry, and eventually published a set of regulations in December 1939 as the *Electricity Act Regulations, 1939*.⁸⁵

According to the union the government had been forced into bringing out the new regulations after strong criticism in the daily press. On 18 January 1939 d'Almeida criticised the government for failing to enforce the *Electricity Act* and for its delay in bringing out safety regulations. In an interview given for an article for the *Daily News* he stated that 'The government is to blame for a great extent for the lack of proper supervision and inspection', that the Act had been rushed through Parliament and was full of anomalies, and that 'the Government has not had any inspection, of general electrical work'.⁸⁶ He extolled the necessity of enforceable regulations, stating:

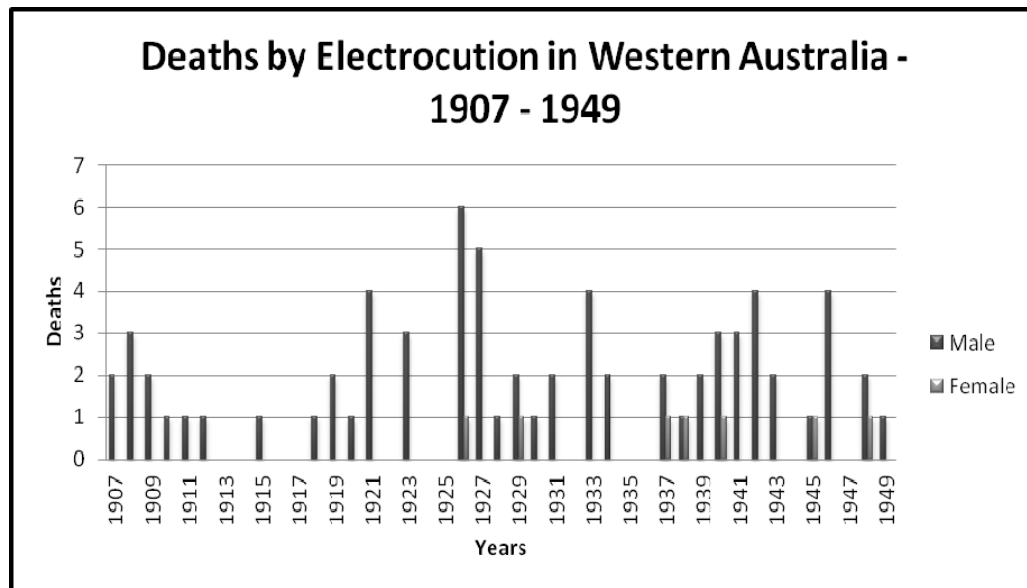
At the present time not only are amateurs tampering but hundreds of unlicensed electricians are practicing. The non-enforcement of the Electricity Act is a farce, and must continue so until drastic action is taken. Very few laymen realize the enormous dangers attached to tampering with apparatus and installations supplied with voltage exceeding 110 volts. Cases have arisen and are constantly arising of deaths through faulty installations and repairs — usually through the handling of irons or other laundry apparatus. Almost invariably these could be traced to faulty installations or repairs, usually carried out by amateurs — a very serious risk for any person without knowledge of electricity.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Vol. XXVII, No. 12, 1939, p. 17.

⁸⁶ *The Daily News*, 18 January 1939, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

Chart 4.1. Deaths by electrocution in Western Australia - 1907 - 1949.



Source: Western Australian Statistical Record Books from 1907 to 1949, held in the WASRO.

A Tighter Regulatory Regime — 1939

When finally introduced, the regulations covered a number of these important issues and the majority of the union's concerns were addressed. A new board of examiners was established, with four appointed members, consisting of F.E. Shaw, chairman of the electricity advisory committee, as chairman, B.M. Holt, representing the Fire and Accident Underwriters' Association, J.B. Jukes, representing the Electricity Supply Authorities and H.A. Doonan representing the Electrical Contractors' Association. The fifth member of the Board, most important for the electrical trades, was to be a representative nominated and elected by electrical workers themselves.⁸⁸ All members of the Board were to hold an 'A' grade electrical licence and the member representing electrical workers would be voted in by a postal ballot of all electrical workers holding either an 'A' or 'B' grade licence.⁸⁹

Prior to July 1940 only electrical installers required a licence and the Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers had overseen the issue of these. On the establishment of the Electrical Workers' Board its functions included the establishment

⁸⁸ WAGG, Vol. 1940, pp. 2023–4.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Vol. 1939, Date: 8 December, 'Electricity Act Regulations, 1939', pp. 2141–68.

of examinations for, and issuing of, electrical licences and the keeping of a register which recorded the particulars of every licensed electrical worker in the State. The Electrical Workers' Board worked under the 'Electricity Act Regulations, 1939' and these regulations outlined the requirements of four grades of electrical licences.⁹⁰ An 'A' grade licence would be granted to electrical workers who had at least seven years' experience in the industry and had passed the prescribed examination in all three areas of armature winding, electrical fitting and installing. This was an unrestricted full licence, covering all aspects of electrical work. A 'B' grade licence would be granted to an electrical worker with at least five years' experience and who had passed the relevant examination, in any one or two areas covered under the 'A' grade licence. The Board could also restrict the 'B' grade licence holder to working only in either DC or AC power and confine the licence holder to a particular class of electrical work, either armature winding, electrical fitting or installing. The 'C' grade licence would be issued to apprentices, cadets or juniors learning the trade. Holders of this grade of licence would be able to work only under the 'constant and personal' supervision of a worker holding an 'A' or 'B' grade licence.⁹¹ The restricted 'Sales' grade licence would be issued to shop workers who, in the course of their work, had to fit adaptors and cords to electrical appliances.

Secretary d'Almeida, was elected onto the new Electrical Workers' Board in October 1940. He immediately began to agitate for the appointment of licence inspectors and electrical installation inspectors.⁹² Early in 1941, C.W. Walker, secretary of the Goldfields Sub-Branch of the ETUWA, was appointed by the Board as an

⁹⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 1941, p. 15.

⁹¹ *WAGG*, Vol. 1939, Date: 8 December, 'Electricity Act Regulations, 1939', Regulations 27–34, pp. 2143–4.

⁹² *EWB Minutes*, 29 October 1940.

honorary licence inspector to oversee the qualifications of electrical workers on the goldfields.⁹³ In this capacity Walker was said to have been:

...particularly zealous and active in investigating cases where the applicant claims to have had a certain amount of experience and is particularly anxious to find out the actual experience which has been obtained by labourers [sic] who now claim to have had a few years' experience and are thus making application for a license [sic].⁹⁴

A volunteer undertaking the position of licence inspector was not ideal. Board secretary, W. Orr explained:

This of course may present some difficulties as it is hardly likely a person so appointed would be prepared to, and if necessary, take action for any misdemeanour against his employer.⁹⁵

After some discussion, it was decided to propose that Shops and Factories Inspectors be empowered to inspect electrical workers' licences at the same time as their normal visits to shops and factories throughout Perth and Fremantle.⁹⁶ On the goldfields and other country areas, the union continued to undertake, in honorary positions, the job of licence inspection. The Shops and Factories Inspectors would not be able to inspect electrical installations because of lack of qualifications, however their inspection of electrical licences was a step further along the road to full regulation of the trade.⁹⁷

Late in 1945 the Board acknowledged the need for an independent licence inspector and drafted an advertisement calling for applications.⁹⁸ However, in October 1945 the government appointed one of its own employees to the position, stating that this was the best method, financially. The union argued that while it was a step in the right direction the job of inspecting licences should be the sole work of anyone employed as a licence inspector.⁹⁹ In June 1946 the Board was made aware of a lax enforcement of the regulations. H.A. Doonan, Electrical Contractors' Association

⁹³ Ibid, 13 February 1941.

⁹⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, 1941, p. 21.

⁹⁵ EWB, Minutes, 22 October 1941.

⁹⁶ WASRO, Cons No. 749, Item 250, 'Correspondence File. Appointment of Inspectors under Electricity Act, 1937 to assist re Electrical Workers' Board', Dated: 6 March 1944 – 23 October 1944.

⁹⁷ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXII, No. 5, 1944, p. 13.

⁹⁸ EWB, Minutes, 5 September 1945.

⁹⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 10, 1945, p. 16.

representative, reported that he knew of several unlicensed workers in the metropolitan area. He stated that ‘...it was time the Board endeavoured to straighten the trade out again’.¹⁰⁰ D’Almeida agreed and successfully moved that under the regulations of new State Electricity Commission Act, 1945:

...the Electrical Workers’ Board recommend to the State Electricity Commission that applications by called for the appointment of an Inspector under the Electricity Act primarily for the purpose of policing the Electricity Act Regulations.¹⁰¹

By November 1946 the State Electricity Commission had called for applicants for the proposed position of licence inspector and secretary Orr assured Board members that such an inspector would be solely engaged in the work of the Board, be a qualified electrician holding an ‘A’ grade licence and be capable of conducting prosecutions on the Board’s behalf.¹⁰²

The Regulations of 1939 raised a number of problems, especially in the mining areas, which had been exempt from previous regulations. The main difficulty was how to deal with the large number of workers who did not have the required five years’ experience in the trade and had not served an electrical apprenticeship but were being paid as fully qualified electrical workers by the mining companies and expected to be granted a licence. The mining companies were employing men who had little or no knowledge of the trade and who had, according to the union, ‘no regard to the value of maintaining the proper requirements of tradesmanship’.¹⁰³ D’Almeida expressed his concern that:

This state of affairs does not reflect a great deal of credit on qualified electricians who have assisted in creating this position by the sentimental taking under their wing of persons not apprentices and helping such persons to get into the trade by backdoor methods. ...From now on this can be made a worthwhile trade unless electricians themselves pull it down by sentimental disregard for the rules which apply, and to the unwritten code of assisting each other in improvement generally.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ EWB, Minutes, 17 June 1946.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 18 November 1946.

¹⁰³ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, 1941, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

In order to address these problems the secretary of the Board of Examiners together with d'Almeida visited Kalgoorlie to supervise written examinations for applicants in April 1941.¹⁰⁵ D'Almeida had requested that all members of the Board of Examiners visit the main work areas of the goldfields in order for them to be directly involved in the examinations but the costs were prohibitive and only one member of the Board, d'Almeida, was allowed to accompany the Board secretary on this visit.¹⁰⁶ It is significant that the electrical contractors' representative, Doonan, usually supported motions put by d'Almeida, suggesting that employers also recognised the need for a better regulated trade.

After this visit to the goldfields d'Almeida argued that a number of the applicants should not have been allowed to sit the examinations because a great many of them did not have the necessary experience or qualifications to work in the electrical trades or to hold a licence. Only nine of the eighteen who sat the examinations in Kalgoorlie passed. D'Almeida argued that the Board of Examiners would have to establish a basic standard of experience and qualifications and then give the workers concerned the chance to acquire the technical knowledge as well as practical experience to allow them to pass an examination. This included a thorough knowledge of the Standards Association of Australia Wiring Rules. D'Almeida explained:

The future electrician is not going to be a half-educated one, but a man whom the union can honestly and justifiably say is worth the wages it claims for him due to the standard which he has to attain to obtain a license [sic].¹⁰⁷

The adoption of a national standard for wiring rules was another important piece of regulatory history that influenced the licensing requirements for electrical workers. Electricity has such a high potential risk associated with its use that governments, electrical contractors' associations and the union recognised the need for a national

¹⁰⁵ EWB, Minutes, 3 April 1941.

¹⁰⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, 1941, p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 6, 1941, p. 16.

standard.¹⁰⁸ The Fire Underwriters Association of Western Australia produced the first set of electrical wiring standards in 1905 in conjunction with the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board.¹⁰⁹ In 1923 by-laws gazetted by the WA government stated that:

All wiring of installations shall be in accordance with the Standard Wiring rules of the Institution of Engineers, Australia, and the rules of the Fire Underwriters Association of Western Australia, for the time being in force, and no connection will be made without a certificate that the installation is in order and on such form as may be from time to time prescribed by the Department.¹¹⁰

And the 1925 ‘Licensing of Electric Installers’ Regulations’ included the following clause:

The scope of the examinations for licences may include tests in such theoretical and/or practical works and in knowledge of such Rules and Regulations as may be prescribed by the Board.¹¹¹

The Victorian Electricity Commission first published a uniform set of wiring rules early in 1924 and the Victorian branch of the ETU warned its members to make sure they obtained a copy of these rules and to remember that ‘it is the licensed man, not the employer, who is responsible for the work being done in accordance with the regulations’.¹¹²

In 1930, at the same time as the *Electric Lighting Act 1892* was under review, a revision of the wiring rules was also undertaken. The Standards Association of Australia Wiring Rules eventually replaced the Electrical Wiring Rules of the Institution of Engineers of Australia and were embedded in the ‘General Regulations’ of the *Electricity Act Regulations, 1939*.¹¹³ As part of a continuous effort by the Standards Association of Australia to keep electrical wiring standards up-to-date ETUWA secretary d’Almeida was invited to join the Western Australian Standards Association

¹⁰⁸ Government of Western Australian, Department of Commerce website, Energy Safety, Licensing, Electrical Contractors and Workers.

¹⁰⁹ WASRO, ACC No. 1331, Item 1, 1904–1905, Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board [hereafter FMTELB], Minutes, correspondence between 11 January – 2 August 1905.

¹¹⁰ WAGG, Vol. 1923, 22 June, ‘Electric Works By-laws, 1923’, effective from 1 July 1923, pp. 1185–7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1925A, 30 January, ‘Licensing of Electric Installers Regulations, Nos. 21 - 34’, pp. 150–1.

¹¹² *ETJ*, Vol. XI, No. 12, 1924, p. 4.

¹¹³ WAGG, Vol. 1939, 8 December, ‘Western Australian Electricity Act Regulations, 1939’, p. 2151.

of Australia Wiring Rules committee in 1941 and was part of this committee until he retired from the union in 1949.¹¹⁴

During 1940 members of the Board of Examiners had begun working on the construction of a general syllabus of examinations for electrical licences to cover every area of the trade.¹¹⁵ However, it took a number of months for any licensing examinations to be arranged for the metropolitan area because examination papers were not finalised until May 1941.¹¹⁶ (See Appendix 1.) At d'Almeida's insistence the examination was to be held not later than 15 November 1941.¹¹⁷ By this date the chairman, F.E. Shaw had retired and R.J. Dumas had taken over and E.C. Plues had replaced J. Jukes as representative for the Supply Authorities.¹¹⁸ A 50% failure rate at the first examination was an indication that the Board now expected a higher standard.¹¹⁹ The objective of the Board was to raise the standard of electrical qualifications in Western Australia to meet those in the eastern states, so that licences could be transferable.¹²⁰

From its establishment in 1926 the ETUWA strongly supported the adoption of a national unified electrical licensing system and this required a national standard of qualifications. Following a motion by the Queensland branch for the introduction of a uniform licensing system throughout Australia at the 1928 annual conference,¹²¹ the ETUWA put forward a successful motion to the 1930 conference, which requested that the federal council embark on discussions with the federal government to take over the examinations and licensing of electrical workers. The ETUWA argued:

That the examination and the licensing of electricians [should] be vested in the Commonwealth Government. The WA Branch feels that there is a need for uniformity

¹¹⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, 1941, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ EWB, Minutes, 29 October 1940.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 May 1941.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 September 1941.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 April 1941 and 19 September 1941.

¹¹⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 12, 1941, p. 6.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, 1944, p. 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, No. 10, 1928, p. 10.

of examinations with a view to enabling a licensed holder to operate in any State without the need of further examination and the payment of fees.¹²²

The issue was again put as a motion to the 1931 federal conference and it was resolved that:

...failing the adoption by the Commonwealth Government of an Electricians' Licensing Act the licensing bodies of the various States get together and endeavor to arrive at a common basis that will make the interchange of licences possible.¹²³

The ETUWA proposed a further discussion of the matter at the 1946 federal conference and the federal executive resolved that officers of the ETU would approach the federal association of electrical contractors to discuss its implementation throughout Australia.¹²⁴ A uniform licensing system for Australia has never been adopted however, although reciprocity between all States was eventually achieved in the 1990s.¹²⁵

During the first half of the 1940s the ETUWA was more focused on and involved in the licensing issue than the other State branches for several reasons. One was the close involvement of secretary d'Almeida in the trade dilution issue between 1941 and 1945.¹²⁶ At the advent of the Second World War skilled labour was scarce and the Government sought an agreement with the unions to permit the use of partly-trained workers. The unions were wary. This would mean substantial additions to the numbers of workers qualified to work in industries with strong craft unions which had long-established policies in relation to standards of skill with specific periods of apprenticeship.¹²⁷ Secretary d'Almeida and president W.A. Pearce were appointed by the federal government as representatives on the committee organised to oversee the

¹²² Ibid, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 1930, p. 22.

¹²³ Ibid, Vol. XIX, No. 4, 1931, p. 9.

¹²⁴ Ibid, Vol. XXXIV, No. 5, 1946, p. 3.

¹²⁵ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 32, May 1957, p. 6. Recognition of electrical licences was achieved between Victoria and New South Wales in 1936, Victoria and Queensland in 1956 and Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania in 1957.

¹²⁶ Dilutee labour was the term used to describe workers who had not served an apprenticeship but were given minimum training in order to fill positions left vacant by tradesmen who joined the armed forces in World War II.

¹²⁷ *Australian War Memorial website*, S.J. Butlin, 'Official Histories, Australia in the war of 1939–1945, Series 4, Civil, Vol. 3, War Economy, 1939–1942 (1st Edition, 1955), Chapter 7, Labour in Wartime Industry'.

control of electrical trades' dilutees in Western Australia.¹²⁸ D'Almeida was determined to ensure that the electrical trade was not flooded with semi-skilled workers after the war and was resolute in protecting the jobs of fully qualified and licensed tradesmen during the war period. At the same time he tenaciously defended the electrical licensing system and resisted the granting of licences to unqualified workers. D'Almeida was also focused on the licensing issue because the union was not registered in the Arbitration Court for the South West Lands Division (which included the Perth metropolitan area) and therefore was unable to pursue other matters of importance for this area, such as industrial awards.

One other major reason for the ETUWA's continued presence in the regulation process was its involvement with radio trade workers and electrical workers in the mining areas. D'Almeida was secretary of both these areas since the registration of the Goldfields sub-branch and the Radio Trades Union in 1935 as well as being secretary of the ETUWA. Throughout the period between 1935 and 1946 he was active in the development of legislation that would regulate radio workers, as were most of the other State branches of the ETU. Regulating the radio industry involved constructing a skilled trade and the ETUWA was anxious to maintain coverage of another classification of skilled electrical workers.

The development of radio broadcasting in Australia began in the early 1920s.¹²⁹ By the mid 1940s nearly every household owned a radio set and broadcasting was an important aspect of everyday living. The union was concerned that unqualified people, unaware of the dangers of electricity, would attempt to connect up or repair radios and it wanted to secure safe working conditions for its members. A comprehensive

¹²⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1942, p. 14.

¹²⁹ F.G. Clarke, *Australia, a Concise Political and Social History*, Fourth Revised ed. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group (Australia) Pty Ltd, Marrickville, NSW, 1992, p. 254.

amendment of the *Electricity Act, 1937* was proposed towards the end of 1945 and a specific inclusion for the independent licensing of radio workers was intended.¹³⁰

Towards the end of 1945 the Wise Labor Government introduced new legislation in the form of an Electricity Bill and a State Electricity Commission Bill. Minister for Works A.R.G. Hawke, MLA for Northam, introduced the State Electricity Commission Bill by explaining that:

...the development of electric power in Western Australia has now reached a stage where the administration of all the important activities associated with it should be co-ordinated and placed in the hands of a body calculated to be able to handle the administration in a capable, prompt and effective manner.¹³¹

The passing of the *State Electricity Commission Act, 1945*, as the principal Act, would necessitate amendments to the *Electricity Act, 1937*, as the new *Electricity Act, 1945* would be administered by the State Electricity Commission. One of the main clauses of the new Act provided for 'the appointment of suitable inspectors' to inspect electric works, service apparatus, electric fittings and other apparatus used in connection with the generation, transmission, distribution, supply and use of electricity.¹³² Provisions in the existing legislation, covering regulations and by-laws, such as the examination, qualifications and licensing of electrical workers, would be re-enacted under the new Act.¹³³

The *State Electricity Commission Act, 1945* was proclaimed on 20 March 1946¹³⁴ while the *Electricity Act, 1945* became operational on 29 March 1946.¹³⁵ The new Commission was to consist of seven members, three of whom had to be members of Australian Institute of Engineers; two members would represent consumers; one member would represent Commission's employees; and the seventh member would be

¹³⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 10, 1945, p.16.

¹³¹ *WAPD*, 'State Electricity Commission Bill, second reading', Vol. 1, 1945, p. 1339.

¹³² *Electricity Act, 1945*, WA.

¹³³ *WAPD*, 1945, p. 1346.

¹³⁴ *WAVP*, Vol. 1, 1947, Report No. 3, Government Railways, Tramways, Ferries and Electricity Supply for the Year ended 30 June 1946, Part V – General, p. 392.

¹³⁵ *WAGG*, Vol. 1946, January – March, p. 310.

the Under Treasurer or his deputy.¹³⁶ The State Electricity Commission met on 20 May 1946 and confirmed Wallace Hugh Orr as Secretary and R.J. Dumas as Chairman.¹³⁷ Draft regulations outlining legislation to cover the electrical trades, radio workers and cinema workers which would be embedded in the *Electricity Act, 1945* were welcomed by the union. The ETUWA informed the membership that:

The regulations include many of this Union's recommendations, and some of the provisions are a great improvement on the old Electric Lighting Regulations. ... It is with pleasure that we advise the actual introduction of radio licensing and it can be said that we are the first in the Commonwealth in that direction.¹³⁸

The regulations called for the setting up of licensing boards to control the examination, qualifications and licensing of all electrical workers, cinema workers, radio workers and electrical contractors.¹³⁹ The regulations also covered the areas of supply authorities and overhead line working safety regulations.

The Electrical Workers' Board was already in existence, having been constituted in 1928 as the Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers and then reconstituted as the Electrical Workers' Board in 1940. Members for the Board of Examiners for Cinematograph Operators were appointed in June 1946 and included, W.H. Orr, Secretary and Chairman (he was also the secretary for the State Electricity Commission and the Electrical Workers' Board), Cyril Guy Norton representing the employers and Reginald Otto Starr representing the operators. The Radio Workers' Board was formed in July 1947 and had its first meeting on 10 July 1947. The union nominated D.A. Farquhar to the Board and he was accepted as the employees' representative.¹⁴⁰ The Electrical Contractors' Board held its first meeting on 11 July 1947.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ WAPD, p. 1341.

¹³⁷ WAGG, Vol. 1946A, p. 578.

¹³⁸ ETJ, Vol. XXXVII, No. 7, 1947, p. 16.

¹³⁹ WAGG, Vol. April – June 1947, Date: 27 June, 'Electricity Act Regulations, 1947', pp. 1156–72.

¹⁴⁰ ETJ, Vol. XXXVII, No. 7, 1947, p. 16.

¹⁴¹ WASRO, Cons. No. 5852, Item 1, 1947–1958, Electrical Contractors' Board [hereafter ECB], Minutes, 11 July, 1947.

The end of the Second World War heralded a major change in Australian politics. In 1944 the United Australia Party was reconstituted on an Australia-wide basis as the Australian Liberal Party. With R.G. Menzies as leader the party began an election campaign based on a policy emphasising free enterprise and individual freedom from government control.¹⁴² In Western Australia on 1 April 1947 a Liberal-Country Party coalition, led by Ross McLarty, defeated the Wise Labor government. The ETUWA was even less likely to have any influence with this Government than it had with the previous one. In September 1947 the new Government vehemently debated certain aspects of the 'Electricity Regulations'. The opinion of many of the Members was that some of the regulations were restrictive and biased towards the needs of the metropolitan area.

Speaking against the motion to disallow nine regulations under Part III covering Cinematograph Operators, Labor Member for South Province R.J. Boylen, argued:

I consider that, with their rejection, [the regulations] the public would have virtually no protection and the Electricity Commission would be deprived of the services of a board that enforces the application of these regulations. Further, there would be no inducement for able men to operate. It would mean that for men entering the trade or profession there would be no standard at all with regard to the competency of those engaged in the work.¹⁴³

Alexander Thomson, Country Party Member for Katanning, a builder and timber and hardware store owner, was passionately against the regulations covering radio workers and he moved to disallow thirteen regulations covering them. He was concerned that the regulations would stop returned servicemen from obtaining jobs in the industry. He stated:

The creation of the Electricity Commission is causing immense problems. No thought has been given to returned soldiers. Apparently no consideration has been extended to men, who in answer to their country's call, went away to fight and who now, simply because they are over 21 years of age, are being forced into a position where they have little hope of becoming electricians. It would seem that these regulations as a whole have been framed – whether intentionally or not, though it appears to have been

¹⁴² Peter Ellery, '1945–1979' in P. Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 123.

¹⁴³ *WAPD*, Vol. 1, 1947, p. 877.

intentional – to make it more difficult for men to obtain a living in the electrical trades, and therefore to reserve the jobs for a select few.¹⁴⁴

The Labor Member for West Province, E.M. Davies, opposing the motion, argued:

It has to be remembered that electricity is a force that must be controlled, and therefore there must be certain regulations issued for that purpose. The ones I am referring to at present deal with radios, which depend upon electricity as a force. ...It is consequently necessary for regulations to be promulgated in the first place for the protection of the public; secondly, for the protection of those who have wireless plants for repair and so forth, and, thirdly to protect those who employ technicians for the purpose of handling such sets.¹⁴⁵

In the end the motions to delete some of the regulations covering the licensing of cinematograph operators, radio workers, electrical contractors and general regulations were passed and the new regulations gazetted on 25 March 1948.¹⁴⁶

A Loss for the ETUWA

From 1930, over the period when Cox was the union secretary, the union was represented on at least three government committees. These were the Technical School Advisory Committee, the Committee dealing with amendments to the *Electric Lighting Act, 1892* and the State Committee of the Australian Standardisation Association.¹⁴⁷ In the years just before and during the Second World War, when d'Almeida was secretary, he also represented the union on a variety of committees. These included the Standards Association of Australia Wiring Rules Committee, the Electrical Trades Dilution Board, the Electrical Tradesmen's Rights Committee and from 1940, the Electrical Workers' Board.

However this situation changed in May 1946 when Conrad Alois Bruechle was elected by a ballot of electrical workers as their representative on the Electrical Workers' Board, unseating d'Almeida from the position. Bruechle was a member of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 733.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 818.

¹⁴⁶ WAGG, Vol. 1948A, 25 March, pp. 695–696.

¹⁴⁷ WAAC files, 'Appeal against the decision of the Industrial Registrar on the Registration of the Electrical Trades Union Western Australian Branch', 1933. Copy of transcript held with ETUWA records.

AEU¹⁴⁸ and had been nominated for the position by this union.¹⁴⁹ He had joined the staff of the Perth Technical College in 1936 as an electrical trades instructor. However the position was only part-time so he took on extra work as a sub-contractor re-winding power transformers and wiring multi-storey buildings. During the war years he worked for the Commonwealth Government setting up training programmes for electrical trades personnel in the armed forces. When the war ended he returned to the Perth Technical College as a full-time instructor in charge of the electrical trades department.¹⁵⁰

The loss of this position was a serious blow to d'Almeida personally and placed the ETUWA in a weakened position. He explained:

The loss of the election as stated is a vital one to the future of the ETU as, while this union's representative remained on the Board, at least we retained some degree of recognition.¹⁵¹

At the same time there was a move to increase the number of electrical trades dilutees from returning soldiers. It would have been valuable to have had d'Almeida on both the Electrical Workers' Board and the Electrical Trades Dilution Board in order to give the union some voice on these issues in the period of post-war reconstruction.

Conclusion

For twenty-three years, between 1926 and 1949, the ETUWA struggled to be influential in the setting up of legislation which governed the regulation of the electrical trades.

During this period the union had only two secretaries: Frederick Cox and Barry d'Almeida. Both men were electrical tradesmen and both believed in the need for a strong regulatory system that would confer on the electrical trade the high status both men felt it deserved. First Cox and then d'Almeida, along with a number of committed members, fought continuously over these years to advance the union and hold on to any

¹⁴⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, 1946, p. 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Vol. XL, No. 43, 1953, p. 13. Bruechle did eventually become a member of the ETU probably during the early 1950s because it was the ETUWA that nominated him for the same position in 1953. To be further discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁰ J.P. Dunne, *I Will Arise : History of Perth Technical College*, Perth Technical College, Perth, 1976, p. 79.

¹⁵¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, 1946, p. 16.

achievement. While the union managed some gains, specifically that of securing d'Almeida's position on the Electrical Workers' Board and the establishment of a Radio Trades Board, in the main the ETUWA was unable to exert much influence on the State regulatory bodies.

Hearn and Knowles argue that 'The limitations of the evidence demand that the historian develop skills to yield as much as possible from it'.¹⁵² It is this lack of evidence that reveals the character of Barry d'Almeida. Throughout the seventeen year period when he was ETUWA secretary there is no record of any involvement with either the WA ALP or indeed the wider state labour movement. This non-participation in issues unrelated to the ETUWA and the electrical trades, demonstrates that d'Almeida spent these years quietly pursuing the union's registration and building a strong foundation for the trade by being actively involved in apprenticeship training and electrical licensing issues. It was through his unwavering determination and tenacity that Barry d'Almeida was instrumental in achieving the union's ultimate goal of registration. And, for this commitment, the ETUWA owes him an enormous debt.

Since the early twentieth century there have been demands from governments, professionals, the insurance industry, workers and the ETU for licensing requirements for electrical workers. While a national system of licensing between all Australian states has yet to be achieved in the 2010s, there has been a measure of reciprocity of licensing between all states. The requirement for regulation and licensing of electrical workers has remained strong both in Australia and in other countries. In 2000 there were demands to reinstate laws which governed the licensing of electrical installers working in Florida, USA. After the tragic and unnecessary death of a child from electrocution, the following letter was received by the *South Florida Sun – Sentinel*:

¹⁵²Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, 'Struggling for Recognition: Reading the Individual in Labour History' in *Labour History*, No. 87, November 2004, p. 2.

We once again urge Rep. LaCasa and the entire Florida Legislature to ensure that every citizen of Florida has the protection and peace of mind of knowing that the individuals working on the electrical installations in their homes, offices and recreation areas have their qualifications subject to the same scrutiny and requirements of experience, training and examination as do the licensed individuals who dye their hair.¹⁵³

The above incident again demonstrates the need for a continuing system of licensing for the electrical industry in order to safeguard electrical workers and the general public.

It was a major blow to the ETUWA when d'Almeida lost his position on the Electrical Workers' Board. It was not until the early 1950s, after it gained its State registration that Bruechle resigned from the AEU and became a member of the ETUWA and once again the union had a representative on the Electrical Workers' Board. From this point the employee representative on the Electrical Workers' Board has always been a qualified electrical tradesman and an ETUWA member. Another failure was the ETUWA's inability to secure a full-time licence inspector position, achieving only one person in an honorary position for the goldfields. It was also unable to secure uniform licensing with the other States, and, while it gained reciprocity of licences with some States during this period,¹⁵⁴ it did not come to an arrangement with all States until the 1990s. A national uniform system of licensing has yet to be achieved in the 2010s.

¹⁵³ Walter L. Bost, Executive Manager South Florida Chapter, National Electrical Contractors' Association, Miami, letter to the *South Florida Sun – Sentinel*, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 16 October 2000, p. 24A.

¹⁵⁴ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 32, May 1957, p. 6. Recognition of electrical licences was achieved between Victoria and New South Wales in 1936, Victoria and Queensland in 1956 and Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania in 1957.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Development of an Apprenticeship — 1905 to 1960

As a craft union the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) focussed on the vital goal of constructing a defined skill base for the trade through the development of an apprenticeship training course. An apprenticeship would be the foundation for a strong, protected trade and the basis for all future trade training. The ETUWA, however, was unable to have much influence in the achievement of these goals until the beginning of the 1950s. This chapter examines the development of an electrical trades apprenticeship in WA and argues that the union was held back from shaping electrical apprenticeship training for a number of reasons. A major factor was its lack of registration under the State Arbitration Court until 1949, although it did manage to gain some influence over apprenticeship policy when it gained registration for the goldfields in 1935. This lack of registration combined with Western Australia's slow industrial development and low population growth until the mid 1950s impeded the union's aspirations for a well constructed apprenticeship training scheme in the State.

Apprenticeship

Craft unions and many employers of trades workers have viewed apprenticeship as the best way of producing a well-trained journeyman. Thus apprenticeship training has been the main method of training for manual workers in Australia. Bernard Elbaum has argued that, from a trade union perspective, the establishment of an apprenticeship is important because it assists unions to maintain trade skills and wage standards by

preserving a role within the division of labour for the fully trained craftsman.¹ Unions saw apprenticeship training as a way of controlling entry into their trades and allowing them some say in early regulatory policy, although in the early twentieth century unions were not strong enough to enforce apprentice rules and conditions by themselves.²

In his history of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers / Amalgamated Engineering Union (ASE/AEU) Sheridan argued that five years of practical instruction and observation on the job combined with theoretical instruction at a technical school produced a well-trained tradesman who at the end of his apprenticeship had a sense of trade pride, separateness and superiority.³ This was not merely an old-fashioned view held only by the craft unions but was also the view of employers looking to employ skilled tradesmen with a strong work ethic.⁴ The development of a state and federal arbitration system has also been an important reason why the Australian apprenticeship system survived and prospered.⁵ Howard Gospel has pointed out that from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century onwards compulsory arbitration and the award system:

served to restore and codify apprenticeship rules and make them legally enforceable on employers. The award system came to lay down, for each major trade, rules on formal indentures, recruitment, numbers, conditions and wage of apprentices.⁶

¹ Bernard Elbaum, 'Why Apprenticeship Persisted in Britain But Not in the United States' in *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 337-49, June 1989, 'The Tasks of Economic History', Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Economic History Association, p. 349.

² Howard F. Gospel, 'The Survival of Apprenticeship Training in Australia?' in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 36, March 1994, pp. 37-56, Sage Publications, p. 40.

³ T. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 20-1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵ Gospel, 'The Survival of Apprenticeship Training in Australia?', 1994, p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The state and federal governments were also, generally, the largest employers in institutions such as the railways and public utilities which took on large numbers of apprentices and played an active part in the development of apprenticeship training.⁷

Defining a Trade

From its inception in Britain in the late nineteenth century the ETU decided that electrical trade apprentices would be best served by a comprehensive training in all areas of the electrical trade. A broad and all-inclusive training would ensure that electrical apprentices finished up as well skilled journeymen qualified to work in all sections of the electrical industry, either as electrical installers in industrial, commercial or housing construction, shipbuilding or the manufacturing industry or as electrical fitters, working as maintenance electricians in general industry or in the electrical power generation industry. This general training provided the individual electrical worker with the opportunity to move across the broad spectrum of the electrical industry changing jobs if or when personal or industry circumstances changed. The union was aware the trade would have to make itself sufficiently strong to prevent encroachments on its trade rights and privileges. And so in 1899 at a conference to revise the union rules it was agreed that, in order to improve the standard of skill in the industry and, as a result, the standing of the trade, an electrical apprenticeship system be established.⁸

In 1905 in Western Australia the newly established Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU) also tried to create clear definitions of skilled and unskilled categories within the electrical trade. The METU's first award in 1906 outlined two areas of work: first, the then equivalent skilled grades of instrument maker, electrical

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Lloyd, *Light and Liberty. The History of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union*, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited, London, 1990, p. 39.

foreman, electrical installer, electrical fitter, armature winder, battery maker and erector and electrical lineman and, second, the unskilled categories of battery attendant, dynamo and motor attendant, installation attendant and switchboard attendant. These classifications effectively defined the skilled and unskilled categories in the electrical industry.⁹ But at this stage the beginnings of electrical apprenticeships in WA were still several years away.

With larger populations and stronger industrial infrastructure the electrical trades union organisations in the other Australian States were better equipped to demand a say in the development of effective skills training. In January 1912 the ETU in New South Wales proclaimed its initial success:

...the log prepared for submission to the Wages Board in 1909 embodied the first serious attempt at classifying the various branches of the trade. Although ridiculed by an interested opposition, the soundness of our definitions has received confirmation in their adoption — almost without amendment — by the New South Wales Electrical Trades Board, and subsequently by similar tribunals in the other States. A period of apprenticeship and system of technical instruction for youths entering the trade has been provided, the respective spheres of electrical fitters and electrical mechanics [installers] have been defined, and the objectionable practice of describing men possessing general electrical qualifications as 'wiremen' and 'attendants' superseded by the more accurate trade designations of 'electrical mechanic' and 'shift electrician', as the case may be.¹⁰

And twelve years later, in 1924, the amended rules of the national ETU stated that the first two objectives of the union concerned the securing of a proper classification for workers in the industry, and the institution and maintenance of an effective apprenticeship system.¹¹

While the electrical trades unions in Britain and Victoria and New South Wales, as recognised organisations representing electrical workers, were able to influence government policy on training for the electrical industry, because of its non-registration

⁹ Western Australian Government, *Western Australia Reports of Proceedings before the Boards of Conciliation and the Court of Arbitration* [hereafter *WARP*], Vol. V, 1906, Perth, pp. 53-6.

¹⁰ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal* [hereafter *ETJ*], Sydney, 1912, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 10, 1924, p. 7.

in the State Arbitration Court from 1914 to 1949, the ETUWA had no such power.

During these decades, and particularly in the years after the establishment of the ETUWA in 1926, the union struggled with the more industrially dominant ASE/AEU to involve itself in electrical trades training. For 35 years the ASE/AEU was the legally recognised union for the electrical trades in the two main industries employing the majority of electrical apprentices in WA, the Government Railway Workshops and the state electricity generating and supply industry. In both of these areas the ASE/AEU had the upper hand and was able to influence all government initiatives relating to electrical trades training. Many members of the ASE/AEU saw the electrical trades as merely one small but nevertheless important component of the engineering industry. Thus the ETUWA would have to wait until it became the recognised union for the electrical trades before it was able to fight for a strong definition of trade skills and a well-structured apprenticeship training system.

Initial Electrical Apprenticeship Training in Western Australia

When the METU was established in Western Australia in 1905 there was almost no formally structured training in place for electrical apprentices. Many electrical workers entered the trade as adult workers, known as improvers, and picked up the required skills on-the-job from already experienced journeymen, many of whom were immigrants from Britain or the eastern states of Australia.¹² In 1906, when the METU

¹² M.A. White and W. Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in Western Australia: A History' in S. Murray-Smith, ed., *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 1981, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981, p. 157. And, M.A. White, 'The Establishment of Technical Education in Western Australia' in S. Murray-Smith, ed., *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 1979, pp. 121–140, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1979, p. 122.

negotiated its first industrial award¹³ there were then within the arbitration system no general conditions covering apprentices and therefore this initial award did not include any. However, in 1909 the Moore government amended the Conciliation and Arbitration Act and gave the Arbitration Court the power to add conditions governing apprentices to every new Industrial Award.¹⁴ The Court had taken this action after an investigation into complaints from parents about the exploitation of juniors in the tailoring trade.¹⁵

Another legal requirement that aided in the construction of an apprenticeship system was the establishment of Apprenticeship Registers. Many unions began registering apprentices in 1908 and the Clerk of the Arbitration Court administered the registers. However, the first registration of electrical apprentices did not take place until 1913, the five-year delay most probably because at this point the electrical tradesmen were still very new and no firms were big enough to take on apprentices until 1913.¹⁶ Also, many small firms were not covered under any awards or agreements and so were outside of the arbitration system and therefore not compelled to register apprentices. Even after 1908 the numbers of electrical apprentices remained low. (See Table 5.1.)

Table 5.1. Annual Electrical Apprentice Registrations 1913–1916.

Year	Number of Apprentices Registered in each year
1913	2
1914	4
1915	3
1916	6

Source: Information gathered from the *WA Register of Apprentices*, held by WASRO.

¹³ Western Australian Arbitration Court files, [hereafter WAAC files] ACC No. 1383, Item No. 1, 1906, 'Industrial Award between Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union of Workers and the Employers'. Accessed Western Australian State Records Office [hereafter WASRO].

¹⁴ White and Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in WA', 1981, p. 159.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ WA Government, *Registry of Apprentices*, ACC. No. 1489, Item No. 41, Year range: 1908–1922. Accessed WASRO.

In an atmosphere of progressive reform, the Scaddan Labor Government was elected in 1911. At the time WA industry was growing, an indication being the sharp increase in union members from 15,596 to 34,552 between 1901 and 1912.¹⁷ Skilled workers, however, were scarce and the Western Australian Employers' Federation resorted to advertising in British newspapers, actively recruiting skilled workmen, reducing the need to take on unproductive apprentices.¹⁸

The METU negotiated a second award in 1911. This award included the conditions allowed for by the amended 1909 Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act: that every apprentice be registered with the Clerk of the Court of Arbitration, the ratio of apprentices be set at one to every three electrical tradesmen (excluding linesmen) permanently employed, the term of apprenticeship be four years, the employer be allowed to transfer an apprentice to another employer to finish his apprenticeship if there were any unforeseen circumstances and every apprentice be required to submit to an annual examination by a Board of Examiners beginning in December 1912.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the amalgamation in 1914 between the METU and the ASE meant that this award became null and void and electrical apprentices were consolidated into the engineering trades.

Throughout the first half of the 1920s there was much debate on the regulation of the apprenticeship system. The Arbitration Act was to be amended and it was proposed that apprenticeship regulations would form part of the Act, thereby becoming legally

¹⁷ A.M. Dockery and Thorsten Stromback, *The Development of the Apprenticeship System in Western Australia*, Centre for Labour Market Research, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, July 1997, p. 4.

¹⁸ White and Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in WA', 1981, p. 160.

¹⁹ Western Australian Government, *WARP*, Vol. X, 1911, 'Award between Metropolitan Electrical Trades Industrial Union of Workers and Unbehau & Johnstone; Cheffins & Co., Deague & Deague and Ritchie & Jackman', pp. 104–11.

constituted regulations. However, in 1926, the Legislative Council disallowed the model apprenticeship regulations. Disappointed, the Arbitration Court had to carry on as previously and insert the model regulations into each new industrial award or agreement.²⁰ The new regulations included provisions to set up apprenticeship advisory committees, with equal representation from employers and employees.²¹ In addition, the Arbitration Court now had the power to appoint boards of examiners consisting of representatives nominated from employer and employee associations, and the Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers was set up for the electrical trade. The new regulations also stipulated that examiners would come from ‘persons skilled in the industry’.²² The boards were to draw up syllabuses and conduct examinations and specify a technical education programme.²³ As the AEU was viewed as the union representing electrical workers it nominated one of its members from this section onto the Board, C.L. Grantham, allowing the AEU more influence than the ETUWA over the regulation of electrical trade training.²⁴

Even though it was a condition of all awards after 1909 that apprentices must pass Arbitration Court examinations before they could progress to the next year of apprenticeship and receive a wage increase, it was not until 1923 that examinations for apprentices working in the electrical trades were introduced. The results of these examinations for electrical trades apprentices were recorded in the 1923 *Western*

²⁰ White and Birman, ‘The Apprenticeship Training System in WA’, 1981, p. 165.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²² Western Australian Government, *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 7, 1927, ‘Apprenticeship Regulations’, pp. 236–239.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ WA Government, Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers [hereafter *BEEI*] (later the Electrical Workers’ Board), Minutes, WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Cons No. 5854, Item: 1, Year: 1928–1946, 17 September 1928. Accessed WASRO.

Australian Industrial Gazette with the issue of nine final certificates and twenty progress certificates.²⁵ In August 1924 the Arbitration Court noted that:

In the Electrical Trades branch of the Engineering Trade the standard of efficiency seems to be exceptionally high, several of the apprentices having gained 80 marks and over out of a possible 100. H.R. Grant, who was examined for his final certificate, heads the list, having secured 95.²⁶

In the years after the First World War the Western Australia economy picked up.²⁷ With a ready supply of electric power produced by the East Perth powerhouse and the expansion of the metropolitan power grid, there was a growing need for electrical installers.²⁸ From 1920 new electrical trades' apprenticeships recorded in the *Western Australian Industrial Gazette (WAIG)* show the numbers remained steady at below ten each year until 1927 when there is a sharp increase. (See Chart 5.1) In December 1926 only three electrical apprentices were registered with the Arbitration Court; but by 31 January 1927, the number had risen to 42. It is unclear why the apprenticeship numbers increased so rapidly, however it may have been because of the general debate over the previous few years of the need to promote more apprenticeships in general²⁹ and the State's favourable economic situation.³⁰ Also prior to this, not all employers worked under Arbitration Court awards or registered their apprentices. In the past electrical apprentices could be apprenticed under common law anywhere in the State but were required to be registered under the Arbitration Court only if they worked in the

²⁵ *WAIG*, Vol. III, 1923, p. 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, 1924, p. 92.

²⁷ Ted Joll, '1901–1930, Hard Time in Early Federation' in P. Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations, Nedlands, 1979, p. 61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ WA Government, *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates* [hereafter *WAPD*], Vol. 69, 1923, pp. 962–4 and pp. 1862–9.

³⁰ Joll, '1901–1930', 1979, pp. 70–1.

metropolitan area.³¹ However, with the increase in manufacturers and industry in general from the mid 1920s more employers may have been added to award coverage and therefore compelled to register any new apprentices.

Another reason for the sudden surge of electrical apprenticeships was the introduction of the *Licensing for Electrical Installers' Regulations* in 1925.³² Prior to this there were no provisions for electrical apprentices to hold a licence, as only qualified and experienced electricians working as electrical installers needed to be licensed. However, to obtain a licence under the new regulations, electrical workers had to prove at least five years' experience in the trade and the best way to acquire this in the future was by serving a registered apprenticeship. In September 1925 the Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers was established.³³ The first meeting took place three years later, on 17 September 1928³⁴ and in March 1929 C.L. Grantham stated that he would ask H.V. Symons of the AEU the exact conditions of apprentices covered under awards relating to areas out with the metropolitan area.³⁵ It was ascertained that apprentices could be apprenticed under common law anywhere in the State and were only required to be registered with the Arbitration Court if working within the metropolitan area.³⁶ Therefore, while electrical apprenticeships were recognised and apprentices were examined, it was not until 1940 when new legislation establishing the Electrical Workers' Board (the reconstituted BEEI), that all electrical workers (except

³¹ BEEI, Minutes, 11 April 1929.

³² These regulations and the establishment of the Board of Examiners for Electric Installers have already been discussed in Chapter 4.

³³ WAGG, Vol. 1925B, 1925, p.1559.

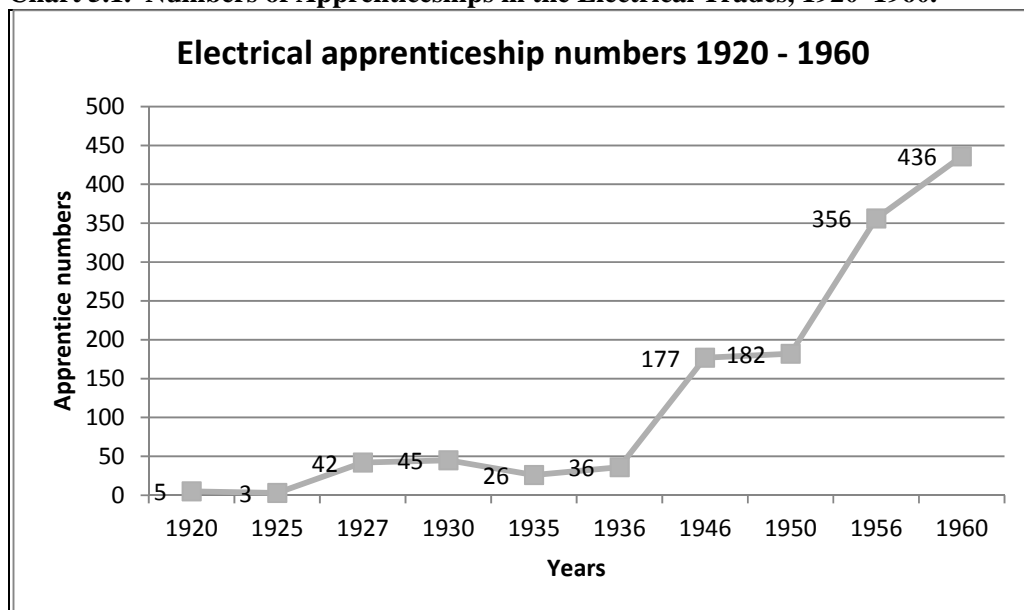
³⁴ BEEI Minutes, 17 September 1928.

³⁵ Ibid., 15 March 1929.

³⁶ Ibid., 11 April 1929.

for electrical linesmen), including apprentices, were required to hold a licence and all registered apprentices were automatically issued with one.

Notwithstanding these explanations for the sudden increase in electrical apprenticeships, apprenticeship numbers were directly connected to the ebb and flow of the economy. In 1930 electrical trades apprenticeships increased slightly, however during the depression years between 1930 to 1936 the numbers remained low. It was not until after the Second World War that the numbers increased dramatically. (See Chart 5.1) While electrical trades apprenticeship statistics recorded in the *WAIG* are exact it proved difficult to delineate between the electrical and engineering trades because, throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, electrical apprenticeship numbers were combined with those in the engineering trades. For the purpose of this study, therefore, electrical trades apprentice numbers have been deduced from infrequent examination reports recorded in the *WAIG*. After the ETU's registration in 1949, however, electrical trades apprenticeships were recorded as a separate category.

Chart 5.1. Numbers of Apprenticeships in the Electrical Trades, 1920–1960.

Source: Chart created from figures gathered from *Western Australian Industrial Gazettes*

Apprentices in Electrical Installing

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the main engineering union, the ASE/AEU, disregarded the electrical installing trade. This disdain is illustrated during an investigation by the WA Arbitration Court into the formation of an Apprenticeship Board for the building trades in April 1926. H.V. Symons, secretary of the AEU, who had been invited to attend the Court, highlighted the problem of the non-integration of electrical installers into the engineering trades, when he stated:

I do not think we are in any way concerned with this Board. The only workers we have in the building trade are electricians, wiremen, [installers] to whom apprentices are not allowed. Electrical wiremen are provided for under our award, but there cannot be apprentices to them.³⁷

In other words, Symons was stating that these electrical workers were not skilled. At another meeting in May to discuss proposals for the proposed general apprenticeship regulations, nineteen unions were represented covering engineering, building trades,

³⁷ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item 13, Year 1926, 'Transcript of meeting of Apprenticeship Board for the Building Trades', 7 April 1926, pp. 2–3. Accessed WASRO.

furniture trades, clothing trades, coachbuilding and farrier trades.³⁸ The ETUWA was not represented at this meeting, the electrical trades being represented by the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers. It was decided to include electrical fitting as an apprenticeship under the general engineering trades but no mention was made of apprenticeships in electrical installing or for that matter, armature winding.³⁹ The ETUWA lamented this fact when it informed members:

...that no boy can be legally apprenticed to the business either of an electrical mechanic [installer] or battery fitting work in this State. In spite of this fact the result of the last examination of apprentices shows that 80 per cent of the apprentices examined were on electrical installation or battery fitting work. Strange, there must be a demand for these two sections.⁴⁰

Because of its lack of registration in the State Arbitration system the ETUWA was frustrated in every attempt to influence the development of a strong electrical apprenticeship structure or in the definition of work categories that would outline future training requirements for electrical workers, particularly in the electrical contracting industry. The AEU's ignorance of the relevance of the expanding trade of electrical installing in the building and construction industry is borne out by the ETUWA's recognition of it. In June 1930 union secretary F.R. Cox argued:

If further proof of our contention, namely, that the Electrical Trades are more closely allied to the Building Trades than the Engineering Trades, is required, will someone inform the scribe why when there is a slump in the building industry that slump is immediately reflected in the electrical industry?⁴¹

Nevertheless the trade of electrical installing continued to be covered under the metal trades awards until the creation of the Electrical Contracting Award in 1974 (discussed in Chapter Eight).

³⁸ Ibid., ACC No. 1101, Item 9, 1926, WAAC and Crown Law Department, transcript of meeting and correspondence in the matter of 'Draft Apprenticeship Regulations', Perth. Accessed WASRO.

³⁹ WAGG, Vol. 1926B, 20 August 1926, 'Apprentice Regulations', pp. 1629–52.

⁴⁰ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal* [hereafter *ETJ*], Sydney, Vol. XVIII, No. 6, June 1930, p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 7.

The Development of Trade Training in the 1920s

Another important clause in the model apprenticeship regulations inserted into all industrial awards after 1925 specified the number of hours of technical school attendance all apprentices were required to complete. The Engineers Award of 1925 negotiated by the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers covered all engineering workers (which included electrical fitters) in the Perth metropolitan area. Clause (k) of the award stipulated that every apprentice had to attend any Technical School classes that were provided for his trade. The classes were for four hours each week and the fees were to be paid by the employer.⁴²

A further innovation was the introduction of day time classes for apprentices. The Director of Technical Education, F.B. Allen, wrote to the Perth Technical School advising the number of day time hours per week apprentices were to attend. Day classes of four hours per week for the trades of carpentry, engineering fitting and turning and the electrical trades began in 1927.⁴³ Until this point theory classes for the various trades were held at night, after the tradesman or apprentice had finished work. Many workers found studying on an ongoing basis in this way too arduous and either did not enrol or did not complete the course. These night time courses continued until 1958, however, with apprentices attending on a voluntary basis to augment their day time training. However, night school training was thought to be the cause of a high failure rate in apprentice examinations because apprentices were either too tired to attend and missed too many classes or gave up night school classes altogether.⁴⁴

⁴² *WAIG*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1925, pp. 172–176, ‘Engineers Award’, p. 176.

⁴³ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item: 22, Year: 1927, ‘Apprentices: Technical Education of Proposed Day time Classes at Perth Technical School’. Accessed WASRO.

⁴⁴ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETU News*, Sydney, Vol. XLII, No. 44, July 1958, p. 8.

The 1927 course of apprenticeship training was designed for apprentices who had passed through the 8th standard of the 'Industrial Classes' and prepared students for the Junior Certificate and Engineering Matriculation Examination. Certificates and diplomas would be issued to students who had followed a systematic course of study in engineering subjects and could produce evidence of practical experience in an approved workshop.⁴⁵ Until 1927 there were no individual training courses for electrical fitting, installing or armature winding. As all electrical apprentices are taught the same basic trade theory and had to have some mathematical knowledge from the beginning of their training these first classes provided the basic building blocks for all electrical apprentices. Apprentices were expected to attend two classes, one in a trade subject and one in a theoretical subject. By the end of 1927 twelve certificates were given out for Practical Electricity, eight for Trade Electricity I and five for Trade Electricity II.⁴⁶

In 1928, in response to a growing discontent with the technical education system, especially from within the labour movement, the State Labor government commissioned James Nangle, the superintendent of technical education in New South Wales, to carry out an investigation into Western Australian technical schools.⁴⁷ The Minister of Education, J.M. Drew, felt that the 1925 arbitration amendments obligated the Education Department to ensure that efficient technical instruction was provided for

⁴⁵Western Australian Government, *Perth Technical School Prospectus*, Perth, 1927.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1928. Note: G.W. Benporath (relative of C Benporath, one of the members of the METU in 1906) and A. Unbehaun (relative of one of the first Electrical Contracting firms in WA in 1906) are listed as receiving certificates in 1927 for the subject of Mechanical Drawing as part of their electrical apprenticeship at the Perth Technical School.

⁴⁷ White and Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System', 1981, p. 165.

apprentices.⁴⁸ However, the under-resourced technical education system was unable to cope.⁴⁹

Nangle found that there had been too little money put aside for technical education; in fact, the amount spent per head of population was much less than in other states.⁵⁰ He reported that the classrooms at the Perth Technical College and the School of Mines were not designed or equipped to hold trade classes. He did not blame anyone in particular for this state of affairs, stating that:

...in justice to the officers-in-charge of the Branch it should be pointed out that Western Australia is only just beginning to be a manufacturing State, and it is very doubtful whether before the present time there was any great need for provision on anything like a proper scale for giving supplementary instruction in the secondary industries.⁵¹

The report acknowledged that the lack of training facilities had been highlighted when the legislation to provide daytime classes for apprentices had been introduced in 1925.

Nangle found that employers in Perth felt that their apprentices did not benefit from attending the trade classes at the Perth Technical College. He argued, however, that apprentices were not able to acquire satisfactory skills from practical work alone and insisted that '... the getting of a complete knowledge of the fundamentals of the trades, can in these days be obtained only in a trades school'.⁵²

In his subsequent proposals for reorganisation of the technical training system Nangle recommended the allocation of more money and new facilities to house the training classes. He also recommended some plain workshops for trades such as fitting, machining, engine smithing, moulding, patternmaking, carpentry, joinery, plumbing and

⁴⁸ WA Government, *Western Australia Votes and Proceedings of Parliament* [hereafter *WAVP*], Vol. 2, No. A1, 1928, 'Report by James Nangle, [hereafter *Nangle Report*] on Technical Education in Western Australia', Perth.

⁴⁹ White and Birman, 'The Apprenticeship Training System in WA', 1981, p. 165.

⁵⁰ *Nangle Report*, p. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

electrical trades at a cost of approximately £8,000.⁵³ A trade inspector for each trade was another of his proposals. He stated: 'no one man, however capable he might be, and though he were technically trained in one branch of work, could carry on inspection satisfactorily over a wide range of trade classes'.⁵⁴ Only a few suggestions from the Nangle report were implemented before the depression took hold, during which period overall apprentice registration dropped from 613 in 1929 to a low of 118 in 1931.⁵⁵

ETU Involvement in Apprenticeship Training — 1920s and 1930s

In 1928 the ETUWA had been in existence for only two years. Over this period secretary Cox spent much of his time preparing for Arbitration Court hearings to answer appeals against its 1927 registration. Unfortunately all the work was for nothing as the union was deregistered in April 1928 and the following 21 years were spent fighting for re-registration. While the ETUWA understood that the apprenticeship scheme was its main link to the development of the trade this lack of registration blocked it from any involvement in the establishment of a regulated apprenticeship system for the electrical trades. Early in its establishment secretary Cox noted that once the union was again registered under the State Arbitration Court it would look into what he described as an abuse of the apprenticeship system.⁵⁶ This abuse related to electrical contractors using boys, unsupervised by a journeyman, to carry out electrical installation work, thereby allowing employers to utilise cheap labour, reducing their costs and increasing the profits of their projects. While the ETUWA had no influence in the Arbitration Court this situation continued and in 1933 the new secretary, d'Almeida, complained:

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Dockery and Stromback, 'The Development of the Apprenticeship System in Western Australia, July 1997, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XIV, No. 12, 1927.

It is to be regretted that, in many cases, advantage of apprentices is being taken to the detriment of journeymen, thus causing further unemployment. Our present plight, [lack of State registration] unfortunately, restricts our field of jurisdiction, yet the Court cannot see why we should obtain registration.⁵⁷

As the depression of the 1930s deepened the numbers of new electrical apprenticeships continued to fluctuate, with the highest number of 51 in November 1929 falling to 30 in June 1932.⁵⁸ Between 1935 and 1936 no new electrical apprentices were registered with the Arbitration Court, while the engineering trades kept steady at an average of 25 per year.⁵⁹ The depression pressured apprenticeship training. Because of the low number of electrical apprentices enrolling each year, students from different years were taught together in the same class, making it difficult for the instructor. Suggestions to alleviate the problem, such as a subsidy from the federal government and altering regulations to permit employers to engage apprentices on a casual or part-time basis, proved unworkable.⁶⁰

The major turning point for the ETUWA's involvement in apprenticeship training was its registration on the goldfields, the establishment of sub-branches at Kalgoorlie and Wiluna and its first independent industrial agreement (No. 23 of 1935) for electrical workers employed in the gold mining industry.⁶¹ As the recognised union representing electrical workers in this area, it was able to play a constructive part in the development of a strong skill base for the electrical trades. Now, at last, the ETUWA would be able to influence the standard of apprenticeship training in the mining industry with the opportunity to negotiate industrial agreements that stipulated conditions

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, 1933, p. 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXII, No. 10, 1934, p. 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, 1935, Industrial Agreement between Electrical Trades Union of Australia Goldfields Sub-branch and various gold mining companies, registered 17 November 1935 [hereafter ETUWA Industrial Agreement 1935], pp. 352–361.

specifically applicable to apprentices in the electrical trade; however, in this industrial agreement only apprentices in electrical fitting were covered.

By 1935 the number of apprentices and tradesmen requiring examination had increased since the establishment of the Board of Examiners of Electrical Installers in 1928, and, after 1937, the meetings were attended on a regular basis by only three Board members at any one meeting.⁶² With its registration and the added pressure on the Board the ETUWA could now utilise an important provision in the apprenticeship regulations attached to awards for its own benefit. Regulations provided that examiners for electrical apprentices were to be:

persons skilled in the industry and appointed as prescribed by the Award. Failing provision or appointment as aforesaid the Court may appoint such person or persons as it may deem fit. ...It shall be the duty of the examiners to examine the work, require the production of the certificate of attendance, inquire into the diligence of each apprentice, and as to the opportunities provided by the employer for each apprentice to learn, and to submit a report to the Court in writing as to the result of the examination. ...Such examination shall, where possible, include theory and practice as applied to the trade, industry, craft, occupation, or calling to which the apprentice is indentured.⁶³

After 1935 the ETUWA used its registration on the goldfields and the apprenticeship regulations to ensure that electrical apprentices were examined by electrical journeymen, and not engineering tradesmen, as they had been.⁶⁴ Under awards the representative union could appoint an examiner for the trade. By the end of 1936 the Under-Secretary for Mines had agreed to the union's nominee, J. English, to be apprentice examiner at Wiluna. However, the union's request to have E. Johns, ETUWA member and lecturer at the Kalgoorlie School of Mines, to act as an examiner in Kalgoorlie was rejected (for reasons unknown).⁶⁵ In 1937 the union appointed

⁶² BEEI, Minutes, 1937.

⁶³ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, 1935, 'ETUWA Industrial Agreement 1935', p. 358.

⁶⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XXVL, No. 2, 1938, p. 12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, No. 11, 1936, p. 13.

another of its members as an examiner of electrical apprentices⁶⁶ with explicit instructions that the examiner was ‘...to carefully watch the standard of training and see that that standard was not low’.⁶⁷ The union stated that a high number of electrical apprentices were failing their trade examinations because in the past examiners, appointed by the AEU, were mechanical men and not electrical men.⁶⁸ By the end of 1938 the union celebrated the fact that it was well on the way to rectifying this situation.⁶⁹

In November 1936 the union negotiated a second industrial agreement, No. 22 of 1936.⁷⁰ This agreement covered electrical contracting firms working in the goldfields and the union was able to stipulate that approved apprenticeships were to be allowed in electrical installing as well as electrical fitting and armature winding, a major step towards the recognition of the growing importance of the electrical installing area of the trade on the goldfields.

In September 1935 a School of Mines was established in Wiluna and electrical training was begun there. In order to keep up the pressure for union involvement in apprenticeship training, a deputation from the union approached the government to petition for increased enforcement of apprenticeship conditions, such as correspondence courses for country members, qualified electricians as examiners for electrical apprentices and a revised syllabus for apprentice training for the Kalgoorlie School of Mines.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVL, No. 2, 1938, p. 12. The report did not state the member’s name.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVI, No. 11, 1938, p. 13.

⁷⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. 16, 1936, pp. 387–396. ‘Industrial Agreement No. 22 of 1936’ [hereafter *ETUWA Industrial Agreement 1936*], Registered 23 November 1936.

⁷¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIV, No. 9, 1936, p. 6.

By the end of 1936 the ETUWA, after holding discussions with the superintendent of technical education, obtained his promise that the union's concerns with regard to apprenticeship conditions at the technical school in Kalgoorlie would be investigated. The union had identified the need for more equipment, separate instruction for trade apprentices and an up-dated syllabus of training for electrical apprentices. These objectives were achieved in full by July 1939.⁷² It also requested that all training be carried out in the employer's time as, although this was a specified clause in many awards, it was not a legal requirement. The union also brought to the notice of the Arbitration Court instances of faulty training and unsuitable facilities offered by individual employers and asked for improvements under the Apprenticeship Regulations.⁷³

Radio workers also needed some help in establishing an apprenticeship system. The ETUWA lamented the fact that radio workers did not have to undergo an apprenticeship, allowing employers to decide on the extent of trade training. The lack of formal qualifications made it difficult to negotiate improved rates of pay in the industry's first industrial agreement.⁷⁴ The ETUWA initiated negotiations with employers to establish an apprenticeship scheme immediately, however agreed to wait for twelve months in order to allow the trade to find its own level.⁷⁵ By the middle of 1936 the union was pleased to note that the Perth Technical School had obtained workshop equipment to aid the training of radio workers, another step towards the

⁷² *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVII, No. 7, 1939, pp. 7–8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVL, No. 2, 1938, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 15, 1935, Agreement No. 19 of 1935 between The Perth Radio Trade Union and various companies, registered 28 November 1935, pp. 344–6.

⁷⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XXIII, No. 12, 1935, pp. 6–7.

establishment of a proper apprenticeship system for the radio trades.⁷⁶ However, this goal took another four years to achieve. It was not until 1939, with the introduction of the *WA Electricity Act Regulations*, that for the first time in the Commonwealth apprenticeships were introduced for radio trades under an industrial agreement negotiated by the ETUWA for radio workers on the goldfields.⁷⁷ Employers of radio workers had been extremely reluctant to allow the establishment of an apprenticeship in this area, mainly because it would delete the classification of junior workers in this award and they would have to pay higher rates for apprentices.⁷⁸

ETUWA secretary d'Almeida made many trips to the goldfields after the establishment of the union there and continually promoted the need for a strong apprentice system of training. Notwithstanding this position, early in 1938, within the first three years of its establishment on the goldfields, the union lamented the lack of progress in fixing the apprenticeship situation at the Kalgoorlie School of Mines. At this time electrical apprentices were receiving very little training in manual or practical elements of the trade; instead they were being taught initial classes for a diploma course in electricity. The union argued that this work was far too advanced for an apprentice at that stage of his training and not consistent with the nature of his work at that point. Apprentices who were unable to obtain training facilities were encouraged to contact the union and the union would apply, under the Apprenticeship Regulations, to the Arbitration Court for suitable courses to be provided and paid for by the employers.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, No. 7, 1936, p. 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVII, No. 10, 1939, p. 20.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXVL, No. 2, 1938, p. 12.

By 1939, after some struggle, the union used its influence with the School of Mines to persuade the government to finance equipment required to begin suitable apprenticeship classes at the School.⁸⁰ Since the union had a permanent full-time representative in the form of the local secretary, C.W. Walker, it was able to apply pressure to achieve improvements. The School was given the necessary equipment and was able to establish daytime classes where apprentices could train during working hours and not in their own time. It was now also able to employ a properly trained instructor, ETUWA member E. Johns. The electrical examiner, A.B. Smith, reported that apprentices showed a renewed keenness and there was a marked improvement in the general standard of training.⁸¹ By July 1939 the union felt triumphant that its hard work had resulted in the establishment of independent electrical classes for the goldfields and could look forward to a greater involvement in apprenticeship training with the appointment of an Electrical Apprenticeship Advisory Committee.⁸²

Even after these gains the union wanted more and criticised the cramped space, urging the building of a new wing to accommodate the electrical equipment which was to be supplied by the mines for use by the apprentices. By the end of 1939 the union was able to report that, as the School had obtained more equipment, electrical apprentices would be examined at the School of Mines, instead of at their individual places of work, where it was felt the apprentices would achieve more favourable results.⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid., Vol. XXVII, No. 4, 1939, p. 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., No. 7, 1939, p. 8.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., No. 10, 1939, p. 19.

Apprenticeship and Training in the 1940s

While the ETUWA was the recognised union for the electrical trades on the goldfields and could push for improvements in conditions and training for electrical apprentices there, it was a different matter in the rest of the State. The establishment in 1940 of the Electrical Workers' Board was a turning point in the management of electrical trades training. This Board, with the benefit of its members' experience in the trade, was able to have an input into all aspects of electrical trade training. ETUWA secretary d'Almeida was elected as the workers' representative on the Electrical Workers' Board in 1940. As the workers' representative for all sections of the trade d'Almeida was now in a position to influence the development of a strong skill base for the trade throughout the State, even though the union was still not registered to cover the metropolitan or the south-west land divisions.

In 1940, just as d'Almeida took up his position on the Board, discussions were being held between the Electrical Workers' Board, the Public Works Department and the Perth Technical School with regard to a proper syllabus for apprenticeship training. Under the new apprenticeship regulations attached to all award and industrial agreements registered with the Court there was a provision for trade examiners to draw up a syllabus showing what, in their opinion, was the stage of proficiency that any apprentice should attain at each examination.⁸⁴ The previous Board (the Board of Examiners for Electrical Installers) had already prepared a draft syllabus for Arbitration Court examinations in electrical fitting and installing, therefore when d'Almeida took up his position on the new Board he was able to comment on the content of the proposed

⁸⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 31 March 1942, 'Apprenticeship — Examination Syllabi', p. 79.

syllabus, which was the first time in Western Australia that a consolidated syllabus of training for the electrical trades had been created.⁸⁵ (See Appendix 2.)

Another point of concern was the ‘deplorably low’ standard found by the Electrical Workers’ Board in its final examination of apprentices to achieve their electrical licence.⁸⁶ In May 1943 the union expressed concern at this situation and d’Almeida urged the Electrical Workers’ Board to arrange a meeting of all relevant bodies to discuss the problem.⁸⁷ It was felt that, after five years of training, both practical and theoretical, apprentices should have a far greater knowledge of the trade than they were presenting.⁸⁸ The Board questioned what was needed, and debated the following: was the educational standard for admission to an apprenticeship too low; was the quality of the syllabi of annual apprenticeship examinations carried out by the Arbitration Court high enough; was a practical examination of apprentices by Arbitration Court examiners, on a regular basis, required; was the quality of staff and the facilities at the technical college of a high standard; were electrical apprentices being placed in workplaces that did not have opportunities for wide practical training; and, finally, was there the necessity for uniform action between the Electrical Workers’ Board, the Arbitration Court, the ETUWA and the technical college?⁸⁹

In May 1943 the Electrical Workers’ Board announced a number of agreed improvements to be submitted to the Electrical Trades Advisory Committee with the

⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol. 21, 1941, ‘Apprenticeship - Examination Syllabi’, p. 318.

⁸⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXI, No. 6, 1943, p. 15. At this time electrical apprentices were examined by the Arbitration Court and the Technical College at the end of each year of apprenticeship and in their final year by the Electrical Workers’ Board in order to gain their electrical licence.

⁸⁷ Ibid., No. 5, 1943, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

request that the Board meet with the Committee to decide what combined action should be taken. The proposals were:

1. That the educational standard of electrical apprentices be the equivalent of the 8th standard of the State school system and passes in mathematics, physics and English be compulsory.
2. That there should be a syllabus of examinations for each year of apprenticeship. The syllabi to be designed after discussions with the Advisory Committee of the Technical College, the Board and the Arbitration Court.
3. That a recommendation be forwarded to the Government for a grant to provide ample accommodation and equipment for the efficient tuition of electrical apprentices and for sufficient instructional staff to be made available in this area.
4. That electrical apprentices be placed only in premises where a reasonable opportunity was offered for apprentices to obtain practical training in the trade.
5. That practical examinations of apprentices to be by Arbitration Court examiners. Practical examinations to be based on syllabus, not on the actual work the apprentice was engaged on.
6. The need for uniformity of any action between the Arbitration Court, the industrial unions, the Technical College and the Electrical Workers' Board.⁹⁰

The proposed conference was held in October 1943 between the Perth Technical College Electrical Trades Advisory Committee, the Electrical Workers' Board and the Arbitration Court Apprenticeship Advisory Committee. The Electrical Workers' Board was anxious that:

...the two syllabi [the Arbitration Court and the Electrical Workers' Board licensing syllabi] should together, represent a complete training and so enable the Board to licence without further examination any apprentice satisfactorily completing the training prescribed by both sets of syllabi.⁹¹

The conference discussed ways to co-ordinate these syllabi.

After considerable discussion the 1943 conference decided that a general improvement in apprenticeship conditions was needed but that this would entail comprehensive changes to legislation in areas such as the school leaving age, the standard of qualification for applicants for apprenticeship, extra time for technical training over and above award provisions, an improvement in technical training

⁹⁰ Electrical Workers' Board, Minutes, Cons. No. 5854, Item No. 1, Years: 1928–1946, 21 May 1943. Accessed WASRO.

⁹¹ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 64G, 1943, 'Conference between Apprenticeship Advisory Committee Engineering Trade Liaison with Technical College, Electrical Trades Advisory Committee and Electrical Workers' Board, 29 July 1943. Accessed WASRO.

equipment and a common syllabus suitable to the Electrical Workers' Board, technical school and Arbitration Court examiners. Such major changes would ultimately affect all apprentices and take considerable time to achieve, so the immediate goals of the 1943 meetings were not achieved and the Electrical Workers' Board continued to set its own final examination for apprentices before issuing licences.⁹²

Omission of an Electrical Installing Apprenticeship in the South-West Engineering Award

Another reason why electrical trades apprenticeships were held back in Western Australia was the small number of electrical contracting employers outside of the metropolitan area as well as the non-recognition by the engineering trades of the skills required by electrical installers. These influences were highlighted by the omission of this trade as an approved apprenticeship in the engineering award for the south-west land division.⁹³ From 1929 to 1951 electrical fitting was the only electrical trade to be a recognised apprenticeship in the south-west land division. This omission became an important issue for the ETUWA and, until it was rectified, electrical installers in the electrical contracting area of the trade would continue to be viewed as less skilled than other engineering tradesmen.

Until the mid-1960s Western Australia had a small manufacturing and industrial base resulting in low demand for electrical workers and employers were reluctant to take on apprentices in the trade, particularly as electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry. It was easier for the AEU to organise and obtain a structured training system for its electrical fitting apprentices than for those in electrical installing.

⁹² ETJ, Vol. XXXI, No. 10, 1943, p. 16.

⁹³ WAIG, Vol. 10, 1930, 'Engineers' Award — South-West Land Division, Nos. 4 & 8 of 1929 [hereafter Engineers Award, 1929], registered 11 September 1930, between the AEU, Australasian Society of Engineers and McBolt & Nelson and others, pp. 117–24.

The majority of the AEU's electrical trades members were electrical fitters employed in workplaces such as the Government Railway Workshops and these workplaces managed their own apprenticeship training. Meanwhile electrical installers were scattered in small numbers around the State making it difficult to promote or oversee the small number of electrical installing apprentices.

In 1929 the AEU, the Australasian Society of Engineers and a number of employers of motor garages, engineering plants and electric light stations negotiated the Engineers' Award for the South-West Land Division. In discussions for this award the Arbitration Court agreed with the employers' representative, L.L. Carter, that because there was not enough work for particular trades in the south-west only eight types of apprenticeships were necessary. These apprenticeships were patternmaker, coppersmith, blacksmith, engineering fitter, universal miller, turner and motor mechanic and electrical fitter. No apprenticeship was allowed for electrical installer although a clause was added allowing junior workers to be employed in any unapprenticed trade, which included the trade of electrical installing.⁹⁴

At this point the omission merely highlighted the Court's lack of understanding of the level of skill required by this area of the electrical trades. In a further award delivered for the south-west in 1937 the employers were pleased with the decision to again omit electrical installing from the permitted apprenticeships, their reasons being that the intermittent nature of their work made it difficult for them to anticipate their workload as far ahead as a five-year apprenticeship term. Also, in their experience, apprentices were less amenable to discipline than junior workers who, it was stated, made more of an effort to hold on to their positions. A further point was made that there

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

was no facility for technical school education or training outside the metropolitan area, although this fact did not bar the taking on of apprentices in the eight approved trades.⁹⁵ There were few employers in the electrical contracting industry in the south-west at this time and only 17 of 87 employers (a large number of firms were motor garages) were likely to employ electrical installers.⁹⁶ While the Court acknowledged the future requirement for more trained motor mechanics and encouraged employers to take on more apprentices in this area by making it an allowed apprenticeship, it had not been made aware of any future need of electrical installers by the engineering trades union representatives, H.V. Symons for the AEU and T.H. Baird for the Australasian Society of Engineers.⁹⁷

During the late 1940s the ETUWA remained unregistered in both the metropolitan and south-west areas of the State. The electrical contracting industry remained underdeveloped in the south-west; however, in the metropolitan area it was expanding. In 1947 the AEU, the Australasian Society of Engineers, the Boilermakers' Society and the Federated Moulders' (Metals) Union negotiated a new award for electrical and engineering workers in the both the metropolitan and south-west areas of the State. While the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award,⁹⁸ made provision for electrical installing apprentices as well as electrical fitting apprentices, The Engineering (South

⁹⁵ Ibid., Vol. 17, No. 4, 18 March 1938, 'South-west Engineers' Award', No. 16 of 1936, between Amalgamated Engineering Union, Australasian Society of Engineers, applicants and Vacuum Oil Co. Pty Ltd; Millars' Timber and Trading Co. Ltd; Mayor and Councillors Municipal Council, Collie; Jane's Motors, Ltd, and others, respondents, pp. 385–97.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. 10, 1930, 'Engineers' Award', 1929, Schedule B, pp. 123–4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 117

⁹⁸ Ibid., Vol. 27, 1947, Engineering (Metropolitan) Award, No. 64 of 1947, registered 6 October 1947, pp. 389–416, electrical installing apprenticeship provided for, p. 405.

West) Award,⁹⁹ did not include provision for an electrical installing apprenticeship.

Once again unapprenticed male juniors were allowed to be employed in all occupations for which apprenticeship was not provided, at junior worker rates of pay which would always remain lower than a tradesman's rate.

When this issue was brought to the attention of the Electrical Workers' Board it immediately advised the Industrial Registrar that this omission would have a detrimental effect not only on the electrical trade in general but on the electrical installing area in particular.¹⁰⁰ However, there were only a small number of employers in the electrical contracting industry in the south-west and out of 70 employers only 13 were likely to employ electrical installers.¹⁰¹

In April 1948 the Electrical Workers' Board again wrote to the Industrial Registrar, pointing out that the State Electricity Commission's planned expansion of the south-west power scheme would require a large number of properly trained electrical installers and stating that under the Electricity Regulations it was unable to issue 'C' grade apprentice licences to unapprenticed junior workers. The Board asked for the assistance of the Industrial Registrar to rectify this matter. The Registrar in turn asked the Western Australian Employers' Federation for its opinion on the matter. The Employers' Federation advised that the unions (the two engineering unions) involved in the award negotiations had not claimed for an approved apprenticeship for electrical installers and at the time both the employers and the unions had agreed to the

⁹⁹ Ibid., Engineering (South West) Award, Nos 90 and 91 of 1947, registered 31 December 1947, pp. 389–400, no electrical installing apprenticeship included, p. 393.

¹⁰⁰ Western Australian Industrial Commission files [hereafter WAIC files], ACC. 1101, Item No. 31, Year: 1948, 'Engineers Award (SW). Proposal to Register Electrical Installers as Apprentices'. Accessed WASRO.

¹⁰¹ WAIG, Vol. 27, Nos. 3 and 4, December 1947, 'Engineering (South-West), Schedule 'B', p. 400.

employment of junior workers in electrical installing work. Therefore the Federation saw no reason to alter the award. The Federation and the AEU came to an agreement that nothing could be done to change the situation until the award had been in force for twelve months when an amendment to include electrical installing as an approved apprenticeship could be sought.¹⁰²

When the ETUWA did negotiate its own independent award covering the metropolitan area, the Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award, 1951,¹⁰³ it was based on the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award of 1947, with one notable addition, the provision allowing for an electrical installing apprenticeship was included. Within a few short months of this award being registered the ETUWA joined with the other metal trades union, the AEU, in negotiations for a new Metal Trades Award for the whole of the State. This award superseded the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award, the Engineering (South West) Award and the Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award, nonetheless the provision for an electrical installing apprenticeship had successfully been embedded in a general award.¹⁰⁴

Apprenticeship and Training Issues During the Second World War

The war precipitated a further apprenticeship problem for the union namely, how was it to protect the system from employers attempting to break down the licensing and apprenticeship structures during a time of skilled labour shortage?¹⁰⁵ During the Second World War the electrical trades were classified as ‘protected’, under Proclamation 317 made on 13 March 1940; in other words, in order to retain skilled electrical labour for

¹⁰² WAIC files, ACC. 1101, Item No. 31, Year: 1948, ‘Proposal to Register Electrical Installers as Apprentices’.

¹⁰³ WAIG Vol. 31, Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award, 1951, No. 13 of 1951, registered 4 May 1951, pp. 191–2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Metal Trades Award, 1951, No. 5 of 1951, pp. 574–600, Clause 22, Apprentices, pp. 595–596.

¹⁰⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, 1942, p. 14.

defence and factory work electrical tradesmen of 25 years and over were included in the schedule of 'reserved occupations' and exempt from service in the Citizen Forces.¹⁰⁶

Many men wanted to enlist and many were called up for special duties relating to their trade skills. Yet many others were put into jobs where their trade skills were wasted, thereby taking electricians away from the already depleted domestic labour force and leaving the way open for the inappropriate use of dilutee labour.¹⁰⁷

In 1941 the federal government issued the National Security (Electrical Trades Dilution) Regulations. Their object was to ensure that an adequate number of skilled electrical workers would be available to meet the domestic requirements for electrical tradesmen throughout the period of the war.¹⁰⁸ Due to the severe shortage of skilled tradesmen the federal government was determined to increase its skilled workforce by ways other than relying solely on apprentices. Although the ETUWA did not like the idea of electrical trades' dilution it felt that being involved in the training of dilutees for the electrical trade would be better than allowing the AEU complete control.¹⁰⁹ The union questioned the need for an electrical trade dilutee scheme in Western Australia stating that there were more than enough electrical workers for defence work, if only the army would release them.¹¹⁰ Notwithstanding this view, the ETU general secretary nominated ETUWA secretary d'Almeida and president A.W. Pearce as the WA representatives on the Electrical Trades Dilution Committee.¹¹¹ Given his position on

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, No. 7, 1941, pp. 14–15.

¹⁰⁷ Ken Purdham, *A Century of Struggle. A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Victorian Branch*, Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, Flemington, Victoria, 2002, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No. 68, 1941, File relating to National Security (Electrical Trades Dilution) Regulations. Accessed WASRO.

¹⁰⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 7, 1941, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 40, No. 8, 1942, p. 16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 40, No. 1, 1942, p. 14.

the Electrical Workers' Board d'Almeida was in a good position to make sure that ETUWA principles were adhered to.

Regardless of the union's concerns, the authorities continued with plans to train people to work in the electrical industry. After completing a four month course the dilutee was known as an 'added tradesman' as opposed to a fully trained journeyman, who was known as a 'recognised tradesman'. The 'added tradesman' was issued with a twelve month restricted 'B' grade licence.¹¹² By 1943 only twenty trainees had completed the first three month course and a further twenty were in the process of completing a new four month training course, and the union was sure that all forty would be absorbed into the workforce as there was much electrical installation work involved in the construction of ammunition works and other defence work.¹¹³

In early 1944 the demand for electrical workers had lessened and there was a surplus of trainees.¹¹⁴ The Electrical Trades Dilution Committee decided not to train any more. By September 1944 demand for electrical tradesmen had slightly exceeded the supply again; however d'Almeida and W. Orr of the Electrical Workers' Board argued that no further dilutees should be trained. The rest of the Committee disagreed and it was decided to train another group. A total of 49 men had been trained under the dilutee scheme and nearly all had been absorbed into the industry. Now a further fifteen to twenty men were to be recruited.¹¹⁵

Yet not all employers were satisfied with dilutee labour. The Electrical Workers' Board representative for the Electrical Contractors' Association,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., Vol. XXXI, No. 4, 1943, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. XXXII, No. 3, 1944, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., No. 10, 1944, p. 16.

H.A. Doonan, reported that the members of the Association were, on the whole, disappointed in the standard of the dilution trainees. The Association felt that the trainees had failed to attain a standard of efficiency necessary to be of any real use to electrical contractors. He argued that what was needed was a trained man who could be sent out to do jobbing work unaccompanied by a recognised tradesman; in other words, a journeyman who had completed a full apprenticeship. He predicted that the shortage of skilled electrical workers would be alleviated in the near future as about 100 apprentices in the metropolitan area alone were approaching completion of their apprenticeships. As well there were a number of returning servicemen re-entering the workforce.¹¹⁶

The war also brought female labour into previously male workplaces, especially in defence work. The Kalgoorlie Foundry began employing female labour on the manufacture of electric motors and alternators. When women employed at the Kalgoorlie foundry joined the Goldfields branch of the ETUWA in 1943 secretary d'Almeida noted that 'this marks the beginning of women's employment as far as this union is concerned.'¹¹⁷ The union acknowledged that these women required representation and applied to the Arbitration Court for an amendment to the award to cover them, however there are no records to show that this happened.¹¹⁸ Some six months later the AEU applied to the Women's Employment Board to cover female workers employed by G.G. Martin and Company, a metropolitan manufacturer of electric alternators. The ETUWA was made a party to the award and applied to have it made a common rule to include the Kalgoorlie foundry and other workplaces throughout

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. XXXI, No. 5, 1943, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. 40, No. 11, 1942, p. 11.

the State, bringing conditions in the country areas into line with the metropolitan area and also giving the ETUWA some jurisdiction in the metropolitan area.¹¹⁹ The ETUWA's application to make it a common rule was rejected and female process workers carrying out electrical work at the Kalgoorlie foundry were not included in the award.¹²⁰

A number of months later in September 1944 the ETUWA again applied for an award to cover the foundry workers as well as at the Westate Engineering Company but succeeded only in gaining coverage of the workers at Westate Engineering. The ETUWA then had coverage of female workers in G.G. Martin and Company and Westate Engineering, two metropolitan based manufacturers but still had no coverage of the Kalgoorlie foundry. This was until early in 1944 when the Women's Employment Board brought down a decision that female workers in the foundry must be paid 90% of the basic wage plus a margin of 8s per week. This decision enabled the ETUWA to cover female process workers in the foundry without the expense incurred if the case had been fought in Kalgoorlie. The union was grateful to the ETU national secretary for his advice and assistance as a representative of the Women's Employment Board.¹²¹ Gaining coverage allowed the women workers at the foundry to join the ETUWA and a significant event occurred during December 1944 when Mrs I. Johns was elected as one of the trustees of the Kalgoorlie branch, perhaps not the first female to be elected as an officer of an ETU branch in Australia but certainly the first in Western Australia.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. XXXII, No. 1, 1944, p. 13.

¹²⁰ Ibid., No. 4, 1944, p. 16.

¹²¹ Ibid., No. 3, 1944, p. 16. Female workers were to be paid 90% of the basic wage plus 8 shillings margin or 90% of £5/15/0 and junior female workers were to be paid no less than the male junior worker's rate payable at the age of 17 years, and thereafter at the same rate as junior males according to age.

¹²² Ibid., No. 12, 1944, p. 16.

The end of the war brought with it the problem of rehabilitation for ex-servicemen, many of whom desired to be retrained as electricians, and to facilitate this, the Tradesmen's Rights Regulations were introduced in 1946.¹²³ The ETUWA was determined to protect the trade and the rights of 'recognised tradesmen' and electrical apprentices from a flood of returning servicemen. It was invited to join the Post-War Reconstruction Committee and insisted on the necessity to be mindful of the 'absorptive capacity of the industry'.¹²⁴ In 1946 the Electrical Trades Dilution Committee released a statement to aid in the understanding of the Rehabilitation Committee, stating that in its opinion the 'orthodox methods of gaining entrance to the electrical as well as other skilled trades is by a course of apprenticeship'.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, by mid 1947 the number of trainee electrical fitters and installers actually allotted to an employer was 12 and 26 respectively and the number of probationer electrical fitters and installers employed was 7 and 9 respectively.¹²⁶ Over the same period apprenticeship numbers increased dramatically, by 1946 the engineering trades had attracted 849 apprentices while 177 electrical apprenticeships were registered. Over the following decade the number of electrical apprentices continued to increase exponentially, however the engineering trades attracted more than three times the electrical trades apprenticeships.¹²⁷ (See Chart 5.2.)

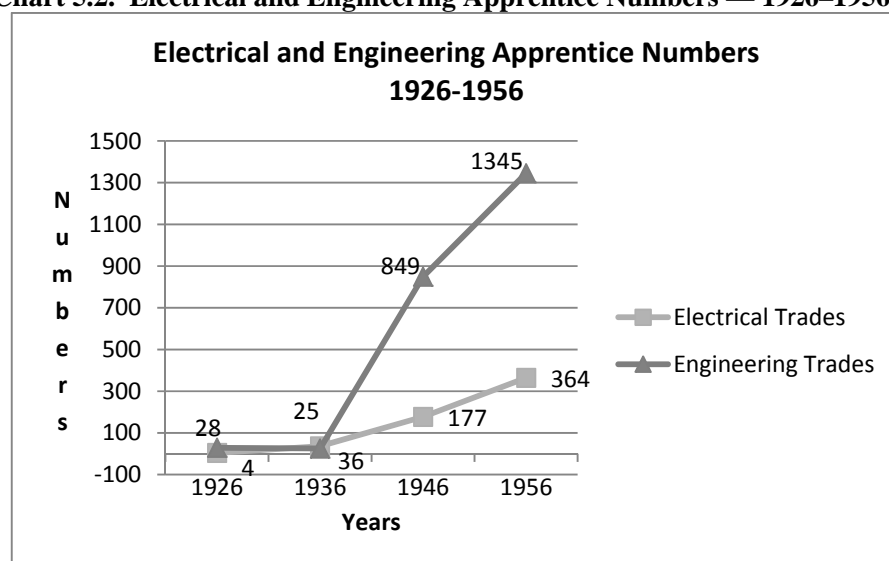
¹²³ Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, No. 8, 1948, p. 15. Regulations governing tradesmen's rights were introduced on 15 August 1946.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Vol. XXXIII, No. 8, 1945, p. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid., Vol. XXXIV, No. 3, 1946, p. 17.

¹²⁶ Ibid., Vol. XXXVII, No. 6, 1947, p. 16.

¹²⁷ WAIG, Apprenticeship statistics taken from volumes covering the years 1935 and 1946.

Chart 5.2. Electrical and Engineering Apprentice Numbers — 1926–1956.

Source: Chart created from figures gathered from Volumes of the *Western Australian Industrial Gazettes*

Post War Methods to Promote Electrical Apprenticeship

In the immediate post-war years, although there was a severe shortage of skilled labour, electrical apprenticeships rates continued to be low. One reason for the low uptake was because there was still very little electrical construction or manufacturing in Western Australia and the State was recovering from war time economic measures.¹²⁸ It was not until the mid-1950s with the expansion of the south-west power grid and the growth of heavy industry and manufacturing that the demand for electrical workers increased. Another reason for the low uptake of apprenticeship was the low wages. Young workers were able to earn more than double the first year apprenticeship rate at minor clerical jobs and the parents and boys saw this as a more immediately attractive proposition. The ETU's Victorian branch secretary urged the ACTU to take up the matter of low rates of pay for apprentices on behalf of all unions.¹²⁹ It argued that:

¹²⁸ Peter Ellery, '1945–1960' in P. Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, 'Western Australian Sesquicentenary Series', University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979.

¹²⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, 1949, pp. 7–8.

...the trades must be made more attractive from the wages point of view so that promising lads will become craftsmen instead of being diverted to semi-skilled occupations, which for the present are offering much higher remuneration.¹³⁰

In 1949, in an effort to increase low apprentice wage rates, the federal ETU, along with other unions, applied for a variation to the federal Metal Trades Award seeking to change the basis of apprentices' wages from a percentage of the basic wage to a percentage of the tradesman's rate. However, the variation was outside the 1940 original log of claims and was constitutionally unobtainable. A new award would be needed. A wage increase was granted to apprentices, although not as great an increase as the union had initially intended.¹³¹

While the federal ETU, along with the other unions, attempted to change apprentice rates to a percentage of a tradesman's rate by amending federal awards the ETUWA took another tack. Under an independently negotiated Industrial Agreement with the Western Australian Newspapers Limited, in 1961, the ETUWA won an agreement that included electrical apprenticeship rates paid as a percentage of the tradesman's rate.¹³² The union managed to achieve this change only in privately negotiated agreements while under the State award system apprenticeship rates calculated as a percentage of the basic wage continued until the early 1970s.

During the post-war period there was a general feeling among electrical workers that the attributes of trade skills and level of responsibility and expertise needed for working with electricity were not fully recognised. One way of changing this view would be for the union to promote the need for higher wages and better training facilities for electrical apprentices. And, with the registration of the ETUWA in

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³¹ Ibid., No. 12, 1949, p. 1.

¹³² Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Western Australian Branch (ETUWA), *Live Wire*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1961, Perth, p. 1 and 5-7.

November 1949, it now had the chance to make a determined effort to achieve these goals. In 1951, the new secretary, Frederick Stahl, launched a special drive to enrol apprentices into the union. He urged members to advise apprentices that the ETUWA could ‘...assist them greatly in matters pertaining to their training’, as he was their representative on the Technical School Committee.¹³³

The welfare of apprentices was a nation-wide issue concerning all trades. In 1952, at the ETU’s annual conference, the union resolved to appoint its national vice president, A.W. Henderson, to represent the union at the Commonwealth State Apprenticeship Inquiry. And, in 1955, the ETU’s national executive urged federal and state governments to increase apprentice wage rates in order to encourage boys into the trade. The union stated:

The burden on apprentices and their parents through inadequate wage rates is attracting potential apprentices to the lesser skilled and better paid luxury industries. Continuance of this state of affairs is a national calamity and we call on State Governments to take all steps within their powers to remove such anomalies so that Australian lads will be attracted to the skilled trades.¹³⁴

The union, as a whole, was aware that a high standard of education was required for success in electrical trade education. During the later years of the 1940s the New South Wales branch received numerous complaints from the various technical colleges concerning apprentices who were finding it difficult to keep up with their studies because they had not reached a satisfactory educational standard before beginning their apprenticeship. The ETU in New South Wales expressed the view that employers should be dissuaded from apprenticing boys who had not passed the Intermediate Certificate, particularly in Maths I and II and also in Physics. The union explained:

¹³³ Ibid., Vol. XL, No. 15, 1951, p. 15.

¹³⁴ Ibid., Vol. XLII, No. 10, 1955, p. 4.

If this were fully appreciated by employers and parents, there would not be so many cases of failures in apprenticeship and lads at the earliest possible age would be diverted to other employment to which they were more suited.¹³⁵

One way of ascertaining whether a boy would successfully complete an electrical apprenticeship was by aptitude testing. The ETUWA was fully supportive of the proposal to instigate a process to vet boys applying for apprenticeships by means of an aptitude test. In 1943 T. Terrell, Arbitration Court examiner for the electrical trades, successfully moved a motion at a meeting of the Electrical Apprentices Syllabus Committee ‘that all lads be required to take an aptitude test prior to their apprenticeship’.¹³⁶ In the same year the Perth Technical College created a new department run by Hayden Williams — the Aptitude Testing Service. This service had been initiated under the auspices of the Commonwealth Technical Training Scheme and was used to grade students and give essential vocational guidance. It proved to be popular and many large private companies as well as Apprentice Selection Boards for the WA Government Railways and the Public Works Department used it to select apprentices.¹³⁷

From the end of the 1940s and throughout the 1950s the union tried, by different means, to encourage apprentices to take an interest in the union. One method was to exempt apprentices from payment of contributions for the first two years of their apprenticeship.¹³⁸ Another was to encourage apprentices to keep up with technical college study by awarding annual prizes for the best college results. ETUWA president

¹³⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 7, 1948, p. 6.

¹³⁶ WAAC files, ACC No. 1101, Item No: 64G, Year: 1943, ‘Apprenticeship Advisory Committee Engineering Trade Liaison with Technical College Electrical Trades Advisory Committee and Electrical Workers’ Board, 15 November 1943. Accessed WASRO.

¹³⁷ J.P. Dunne, ‘*I Will Arise*’. *History of Perth Technical College 1900–1980*, J.H. MacKell, ed., Perth Technical College, Perth, 1980, p. 40.

¹³⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, 1949, p.3.

Reg Lockwood was particularly keen to promote the benefits of technical training for apprentices. In 1947 the ETUWA made arrangements with the Technical School to donate an amount of £10 to be distributed in amounts of £2 prizes for the best apprentice in each year of training per annum and these were to be awarded at a social event held at the end of the year. This was to be known as the D.E. Black Memorial Prize.¹³⁹ By 1954 the union executive had divided the prize into two prizes of £5 each and added two extra prizes to the value of £2.10s.¹⁴⁰ At the 1955 national conference held in Perth the prize money was used to present the winning apprentices with slide rules, technical books and satchels of small tools.¹⁴¹ The following photographs from 1955 to 1959 show the increasing importance given to the apprenticeship award ceremonies.¹⁴²

Photograph 5. 1. ETUWA apprenticeship prize winners – 1955.



(left to right) Presenter: Federal President, A.W. Henderson, Apprentices: B.H. Thomas (first year fitter), G. Gunson (second year installer), G. Ludlow (second year fitter), G. Thorne (first year installer).
Source: *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 1, 1955, p. 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 9, 1945, p. 1. D.E. Black, State secretary of the ETU NSW branch from 1903 to 1940 and general secretary of the national ETU from 1916 to 1940.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. XLI, No. 4, 1954, p. 13.

¹⁴¹ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 1, 1955, p. 3.

¹⁴² *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 31, 1952, p. 11. Reg Lockwood won a ballot to fill the vacancy of branch president on the resignation of W.V. White.

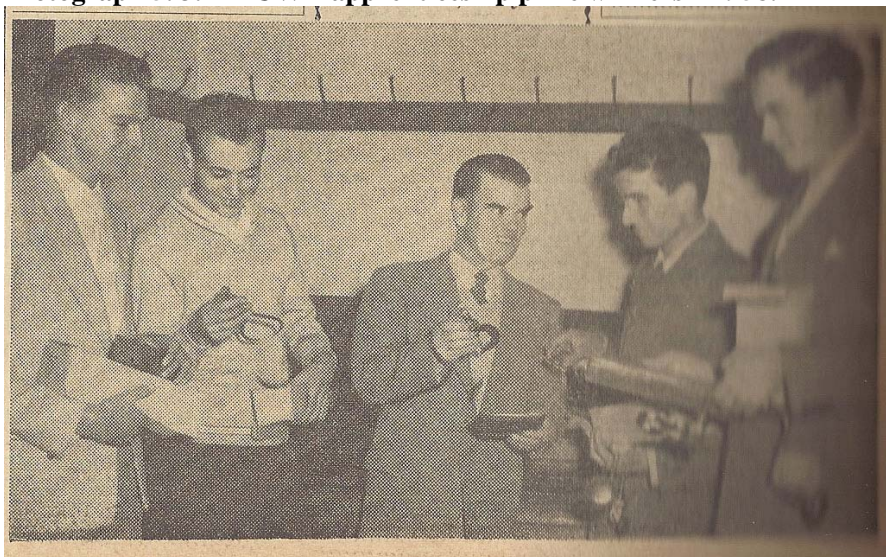
Photograph 5. 2. ETUWA apprenticeship prize winners – 1956.



Presenter: (Middle) R. Lockwood, (left to right) Apprentices: L. Heath (first year installer – State prize), A. Jolly (second year installer – Donald Black prize), D. Ellis (second year fitter – Donald Black prize), B.K. Goldman (first year fitter – State prize).

Source: *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 17, 1956, p. 3.

Photograph 5. 3. ETUWA apprenticeship prize winners – 1958.



Presenter: (Middle) R. Lockwood, Apprentices: (left to right) William J. Hooper, 1st year; Ross E. Leighton, 2nd year; Colin R. Jones, 3rd year; and Dane L. Hall, 4th year.

Source: *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 44, 1958, p. 8.

Photograph 5.4. ETUWA apprenticeship prize winners – 1959.



Apprentices receiving the D.E. Black Memorial prize were: M.J. Taylor, 1st year electrical installer; K.J. Randall, 2nd year electrical fitter; 3rd year D. Harmsen, electrical fitter; 4th year C.R. Jones, electrical installer; C. Walmsley, refrigeration fitter and D.W. Maguire, electrical fitter Kalgoorlie.

Source: *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 54, 1959, p. 5.

From 1949 the ETUWA tried to extend its influence with government departments connected with electrical apprenticeships. After Bob Fletcher took over as secretary in 1951 the union applied to the Industrial Registrar proposing that one of its members be appointed as the apprenticeship examiner for the Arbitration Court and Dale Pugh was the successful nominee.¹⁴³ The union was also successful in its nomination of member R.L. Seddon to the position of employees' representative on the Electrical Contractors' Board.¹⁴⁴ It was also helpful to the union that secretary Fletcher was president of the Perth Metropolitan Council of the Australian Labor Party and union representative on the Electrical Trades Advisory Committee.¹⁴⁵

The position of employee representative on the Electrical Workers' Board was an important issue for the union. In 1946 d'Almeida lost his position on the Electrical

¹⁴³ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 31, 1952, p. 11 and No. 34, 1952, p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 32, 1952, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. XL, No. 43, 1953, p. 11.

Workers' Board to AEU member Con Bruechle. However, in 1953, Bruechle was nominated by the ETUWA to serve a further term as the workers' representative on this Board.¹⁴⁶ After the Second World War Bruechle was employed as a full-time instructor in charge of the Electrical Trades Department of the Perth Technical College.¹⁴⁷

Bruechle also supervised the practical and theory licence examinations set by the Board for 5th year apprentices and incoming electrical workers. This, along with his position on the Electrical Workers' Board, placed him in a good position to promote the union's policy on electrical trades training. He was also intimately involved in the construction of a revised training and examination syllabus for electrical fitters and installers in 1952.

Effect of Technological Advancement on Electrical Trades Training

The rapid development of new technologies, such as electronics, at the end of the Second World War, required electrical workers to learn new skills and the creation of new classifications of the trade; for example, an electrical instrument maker, someone who could design, test, repair and build electrical measuring and/or recording appliances and/or instruments and be able to carry out experiments on the same equipment in a workshop or laboratory.¹⁴⁸ The union applied to have this new classification added to the schedule of apprenticed trades.¹⁴⁹

The introduction of television into Australia in the 1950s was another important area of training for electrical workers. At a union meeting in 1951 ETUWA member G.H. Hatton gave a short talk on the television industry in Britain and the USA.¹⁵⁰ Within five months of this talk the union had approached the principal of the Perth

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Dunne, 'I Will Arise', 1980, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 6, 1948, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, 1947, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. XL, No. 24, December 1951, p. 14.

Technical College with regard to the college offering television classes.¹⁵¹ And, by 1953, J.P. Dunne noted that television units were being constructed within the College.¹⁵² The 1950s also witnessed the birth of the electronics industry, with the invention of the transistor in 1947, which created a further new area of electrical trade training — electronics.¹⁵³ The training syllabus for electrical fitting and installing, however, did not reflect the increasing use of electronics until 1974 when a new syllabus was published in the *WAIG*.¹⁵⁴

In 1956 the Perth Technical College offered ETUWA members a special course in industrial electronic and industrial instrumentation.¹⁵⁵ And by 1957 a sub-committee of the electrical trades advisory committee was looking into revising the electrical trades training syllabus to include training in electronic control of electronic equipment.¹⁵⁶ Bob Fletcher stated that ‘Automation is only a matter of time and the Union is taking steps to prepare its members for what has been called the 20th century revolution’.¹⁵⁷

While the majority of electrical apprentices were keen to attend technical college, with more than 96% of electrical apprentices who were registered with Perth and Wembley Technical Colleges attending classes regularly,¹⁵⁸ the failure rate at end of year examinations continued to be high. The main reason seemed to be that apprentices were either missing or giving up the extra night classes needed to pass their examinations.¹⁵⁹ In 1958 the union initiated a course for ‘backward apprentices’,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., No. 28, April 1952, p. 16.

¹⁵² Dunne, ‘*I Will Arise*’, 1980, p. 57.

¹⁵³ *Nobelprize.org* website, ‘The Transistor’.

¹⁵⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 54, Part 2, pp. 1241–1244.

¹⁵⁵ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 20, May 1956, p. 7

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., No. 35, September 1957, p. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., No. 20, May 1956, p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., No. 23, August 1956, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., No. 44, July 1958, p. 6.

(apprentices who had failed two consecutive examinations) run by union member Jock Baillie. Initially promoted as an experiment, the course was limited to ten apprentices and held over a ten-week period with each boy given personal tuition. The classes were a success, the boys improved considerably and were able to return to normal technical school night classes. The union arranged for a further course to be held, this time in Fremantle, and arrangements were made to borrow technical films to assist with the training.¹⁶⁰

Conclusion

What therefore was the influence of the ETUWA on the creation and development of an electrical apprenticeship in Western Australia? The evidence demonstrates that the union's endeavours to be part of government apprenticeship training policies were ineffectual until its registration on the goldfields in 1935 when it achieved a small measure of influence. Throughout the remainder of the 1930s and the 1940s the union, under d'Almeida, advanced issues relating to electrical apprenticeship whenever possible. Throughout the 1950s, after gaining its State registration in 1949, the ETUWA was able to advocate more strongly for electrical trades apprentices. The men leading the union from 1926 to 1949, Frederick Cox and Barry d'Almeida,¹⁶¹ were qualified, experienced electrical workers and therefore understood the relevance to the union of a planned and regulated apprenticeship system. When Bob Fletcher took over as secretary in 1951, while not a qualified electrician, he also was aware of the necessity for the union to strive for a well constructed apprenticeship system. Therefore, each in his own way worked hard to promote the union's goal of a strong electrical trades apprenticeship

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 11, 1947, p. 16.

by whatever means available and, especially after 1935, the ETUWA did influence the development of apprenticeship training in the electrical trades.

In one of a number of academic works published over the last twelve years relating to the history and development of apprenticeship and trades' training, Bobbie Oliver discussed industrial apprenticeships as 'Another Dying Labour Tradition'. She quoted Dr Norman Dufty who in 1983 identified:

An ideological basis that has become all too familiar in the past decade – an economic rationalist perspective that seeks to break down skills and skill differentials in order to tailor workers to a particular workplace rather than fully skill them for their trade.¹⁶²

And, she concluded her own paper by arguing:

Indeed, the sterile and short-sighted economic rationalist ideology that undergirds concepts of 'global competitiveness' shows no sign of being reversed, and it would appear that the trades apprenticeship, designed to produce fully skilled trades people with high employment prospects rather than so many limited-skill workers with limited functions and employment prospects will soon be a thing of the past.¹⁶³

This chapter has shown that this break down of a trade into smaller and smaller components is something that the ETU strenuously resisted through the continual and fervent insistence of active union officials and members.

¹⁶² Bobbie Oliver, 'Industrial Apprenticeships — Another Dying Labour Tradition?' in 10th National Labour History Conference, J. Kimber, P. Deery, P. Love, eds, *Labour Traditions : Proceedings of the Tenth National Labour History Conference*, Held at the University of Melbourne, ICT Building Carlton, 4–6 July 2007, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and Business and Labour History Group, Melbourne, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

CHAPTER SIX

In From the Cold and the Work Begins — the 1950s

This chapter will examine the steps taken by the Electrical Trades Union (Western Australia branch) (ETUWA) to secure its position within the State labour movement during the 1950s. After gaining its registration in September 1949 the ETUWA immediately set about establishing a secure and effective administrative base for the organisation. The first step was the appointment of a full-time secretary and, the new secretary, the union's only paid official in WA, initiated a recruitment and organising policy. The second step was to establish the union within the State's industrial award system by applying for independent industrial awards covering electrical workers throughout the State.

After all appeals against its registration were denied in October 1950 the ETUWA could begin this work. The Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Party (WA ALP) had held government for 26 of the 35 years between 1924 and 1959.¹ In this period, large, conservative unions such as the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and the Western Australian Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees (WAASRE) dominated the industrial and political labour movement in the State. From the end of the 1940s through the 1950s these dominant unions were in large part controlled by the extra-parliamentary arm of the State ALP, under the leadership of F.E. 'Joe' Chamberlain. It was within this larger union movement that the ETUWA

¹ Ralph Pervan and Douglas Mitchell, 'The Changing Nature of the Australian Labor Party' in Ralph Pervan and Campbell Sharman, eds, *Essays on Western Australian Politics*, University of Western Australia Press for the Education Committee of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations 1979, Nedlands, 1979, p. 129.

existed as a small, uninfluential trade union.² Its small size and lack of power had resulted in it being unable to gain entry to worksites employing electrical workers. However, with registration and affiliation with the WA ALP, the ETUWA could begin the work required to recruit members, organise and consolidate wages and employment conditions for its members on a state-wide basis. Nevertheless the ETUWA remained a small union and found security in the 1950s within the dominant moderate-conservative fold of the State ALP.

The need for independent registration was imperative for the ETUWA. Without registration the union was unable to negotiate independent awards and therefore unable to improve wages and conditions for its members. Lack of registration made it difficult to recruit potential members and impossible to protect its members from being poached by rival unions. Deery and Plowman explain ‘...the system of conciliation and arbitration gave registered unions considerable protection from rival organisations’.³ Although the ETUWA had been granted its registration with the State Arbitration Court on 12 September 1949, the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers immediately lodged an appeal, and the battle continued for another eleven months until all appeals were dismissed in October 1950.

The first appeal before Conciliation Commissioner Schnaars was dismissed on 26 May 1950 and the *Westralian Worker* proclaimed, ‘Electrical Trades Union Registration Gained After 23 Years’.⁴ In his reserved decision Schnaars stated that this was the tenth occasion on which the ETUWA had appeared before either the Industrial

² David Black, 'The Era of Labor Ascendancy 1924–1947' in C.T. Stannage, ed., *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1981, pp. 406–440.

³ Stephen J. Deery and David H. Plowman, *Australian Industrial Relations* (3rd Ed.), McGraw-Hill Book Company Australia Pty Limited, Roseville, New South Wales, 1993, p. 282.

⁴ *Westralian Worker*, 9 June 1950, p. 1.

Registrar or, because of appeals, before the President or Deputy President of the Arbitration Court, since August 1927. One of Schnaars' reasons for dismissing the appeal arose from a case before the Commonwealth Court of Arbitration, where it was stated that:

...it is clear that the Act does not say that any particular organisation shall be entitled to monopolise or to set apart any particular sphere or area of activities and to say 'This is our ground; hands off everybody else.'⁵

And, another reason:

That the electrical trade can be regarded as a separate and distinct industry from that of general engineering is evident from the fact that for the purpose of registration it is so regarded throughout Australia except for the South-West Land Division of this State.⁶

Schnaars supported the principle of freedom of association and argued that this principle should be restricted only if other workers, employers, the general interests of the community, the effective and efficient use of the machinery of arbitration, and the peaceful carrying on of industry were prejudicially affected by the establishment of too many unions within the one industry. He did not feel that this was a valid objection in the ETUWA's case.⁷

Commissioner Schnaars, previously a militant unionist and a close friend of Paddy Troy, secretary of the Coastal, Docks, Rivers and Harbour Workers Union (CDRHWU) during the 1940s and 1950s, was personally acquainted with the newly appointed secretary of the ETUWA. This association with Stahl may have persuaded Schnaars to look more favourably on the union's position than previous Registrars and Presidents of the Arbitration Court had done. Macintyre argues, that during his period

⁵ Western Australian Government, *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 30, 1950, p. 275.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

as Commissioner, Schnaars always tried to do the best for unions, within the limits of his position.⁸

The result of the final appeal made against the ETUWA's registration was announced on 20 October 1950 when President J. Jackson brought down his judgment on Commissioner Schnaars' decision to register the union six months previously. The union had argued that the Court should not interfere with the Conciliation Commissioner's decision unless it was satisfied that he had based his decision on a wrong principle or taken into consideration facts that were not material or relevant. The President concluded:

Perhaps, however, I should add, in order to dispel any doubts on the subject, that I myself am in any event in agreement with the decision given by the Conciliation Commissioner ... and I therefore find it unnecessary to add anything further. It follows that, in my opinion, this appeal must be dismissed and the decisions of the Registrar and the Conciliation Commissioner confirmed.⁹

The work of the union could begin in the knowledge that it now had authority to legally represent its members.

A New Administrator is Appointed

Directly upon its registration the ETUWA sought a new secretary.¹⁰ In 1947 d'Almeida, secretary since 1932, had indicated that on registration he would resign his position. The ETU national executive acknowledged that, even though d'Almeida had been secretary on a part-time basis, throughout his secretaryship he had '...shown great tenacity of purpose and had not relented in his efforts to obtain recognition for the

⁸ Stuart Macintyre, *Militant. The Life and Times of Paddy Troy*, George Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1984, p. 163.

⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 30, 1950, pp. 531–532.

¹⁰ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal* [hereafter *ETJ*], Sydney, Vol. XL, No. 5, 1950, p. 5. The ETUWA was granted a Certificate of Registration by the State Arbitration Court Registrar on 22 November 1949.

union'.¹¹ At its national conference in May 1950 the ETU resolved that the ETUWA required a full-time secretary. It was decided that national council would make the appointment in consultation with WA members, and the position would be reviewed at the end of twelve months.¹² At this conference it was also resolved that the national council would pay the secretary's salary of £11 per week.¹³

Michael Hess' examination of the establishment of the Tasmanian branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU), shows that this union had similar challenges to the ETUWA. As small branches of large national unions both were dependent on financial support from their national organisation to run the State branches. Hess states that in the late 1950s the national organisation of the FMWU decided to pay the salary of a full-time branch secretary for its Tasmanian branch. The national organisation would have been unwilling to provide funding unless the candidate was capable of doing the job. He explains:

What the federal officials needed was someone who would promote the national organisation's industrial agenda as well as take a leading role in establishing the FMWU as an industrial and political force in Tasmania. ...someone deeply embedded in the Tasmanian scene with the capacity to organise and represent the interests of existing members, so that they saw the benefits of organisational growth, and other workers within the FMWU's formal coverage, who had previously shown little enthusiasm for joining the union.¹⁴

The ETUWA was in a similar position to the FMWU's Tasmanian branch and it is very likely that the WA ALP executive had some influence on the appointment of the secretary of the newly registered ETUWA. It is notable that the first two secretaries of

¹¹ Ibid., No. 9, 1950, p. 1. Although d'Almeida ceased to be secretary of the ETUWA from June 1950 he remained as secretary of the Western Australian Goldfields Sub-Branch of the ETU, covering 67 members, and the Perth Radio Trade Union, with 20 members, until June 1951. He was also secretary, representing 93 members, of the South West Land Division Wood Extract Industrial Union from 1945 until March 1951 when only 49 members remained. Information gathered from *WAIG* Vols 30 and 31.

¹² Ibid., No. 5, 1950, p. 7.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Michael Hess, 'Against the Odds: Establishing the Miscellaneous Workers Union in Tasmania, 1949–59', in *Labour History*, Vol. 96, May 2009, p. 9.

the newly registered union, Stahl and Fletcher, were more closely involved in State Labor Party affairs than the ETUWA's previous secretary, d'Almeida. While d'Almeida had worked hard at his union duties for seventeen years there is no evidence to suggest that he had been involved with the ALP or indeed politics in general.¹⁵ Thus, the appointment of two staunch Labor Party men, Stahl and subsequently Fletcher, indicates that the operation of the ETUWA was now closely aligned with the State ALP and associated with the WA labour movement in a way it had not previously been.

A new secretary had not been easy to find, however. In March 1950 the ETU national council resolved to continue to financially assist the ETUWA and lend it the sum of £520 for a period of two years and from this amount £5 per week would go towards the salary of a full-time secretary.¹⁶ After several advertisements in the *Electrical Trades Journal* and the Perth and Kalgoorlie press, the national executive reported that there had been no 'worthwhile applications' for the job.¹⁷ It was not until August 1950 that six applicants for the position were interviewed by the ETU general secretary, J.N. Thom, who had travelled to Perth for this purpose. Finally, Frederick James Francis Stahl was judged most suitable and awarded the position.¹⁸

Although the new full-time secretary of the ETUWA was not an electrician by trade, he was an experienced union administrator. Prior to World War I he had been employed as a linotype mechanic by the *Kalgoorlie Miner* newspaper. During the war he sustained severe injuries and, on his return to WA, gained work as an organiser of the Cleaners, Caretakers and Watchmen's Union. He was later appointed secretary of this

¹⁵ J.F. Newman, 'Educate Organise ... Twenty-five Active Years in the AEU', unpublished manuscript, Perth, 1984, p. 134.

¹⁶ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 3, 1950, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 5, 1950, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 8, 1950, p. 16.

organisation and remained in this position until his enlistment for active service in World War II in 1940. On his discharge from the army in 1945 he was appointed part-time secretary of the WA branch of the Merchant Service Guild. A strong ALP supporter, he was a delegate on the Metropolitan District Council and a member of the State executive of the Party. Vitally interested in the welfare of returned servicemen, he was, over a period of three years, between 1945 and 1950, employed as an executive officer for sixteen industrial committees set up to deal with the problems of ex-servicemen.¹⁹

Stahl was an experienced administrator and union organiser. He took on the job of secretary of the WA Cleaners, Caretakers, Lift Attendants, Window Cleaners, Attendants and Watchmen's Union in 1937 with a membership of 812. By the end of 1945 there were 1,088 members, a reasonable increase given the difficult economic times and a testament to Stahl's hard work.²⁰ In 1947 when he took over the position of part-time secretary of the Merchant Service Guild of Australasia, from S.F. Schnaars, there were 70 members.²¹ By the end of 1948 this number had increased to 88 and by the end of June 1950 the membership stood at 96.²² Again the increase showed that Stahl had worked hard at recruiting members.

One of Stahl's first tasks as ETUWA secretary was the recruitment of new members 'to make the [electrical] tradesmen in this State 100 per cent ETU'.²³ He used a variety of means to encourage electrical workers to join. Through the trade journal existing members were urged to spread the word that the ETUWA was now a legally

¹⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 10, 1950, p. 1.

²⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. II, 1923, p. 208, Vol. XVIII, 1938, p. 118 and Vol. XXVI, 1946, p. 143.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Trade union membership returns, Vol. 27, 1947, p. 866.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. 28, 1948, p. 979 and Vol. 30, 1950, p. 626.

²³ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 10, 1950, p. 15.

registered union and able to fully represent electrical workers in the State Arbitration Court. There was much to do and, because of the increase in the union's involvement in award negotiations and increased representation for individual members, he warned that 'If we are to succeed, the money must come in'. Therefore he urged members to be prompt in the payment of their union dues.²⁴ To assist Stahl the national executive of the ETU announced that it would meet the cost of sending the January 1951 issue of the *Electrical Trades Journal* to every electrical and radio licence holder in WA, asking them to 'earnestly consider joining the ETU', because 'the greater the membership of the branch the stronger the union's claim will be in any case presented to the [Arbitration] Court'.²⁵

Prior to its registration the ETUWA had operated in isolation from the wider union movement in the State. From 1950 it had the ability to break into and become part of the established structure. It was still, however, a union with a small membership and lacked industrial strength. Throughout the previous three decades, due to the expansion of the State's engineering industry, the ETUWA had been at risk of larger, stronger unions poaching its members. Notwithstanding this threat the union had managed to maintain a determined core of members, albeit a small one and at registration in December 1949 the combined membership of both the ETUWA and its Goldfields sub-branch was 201. By December 1950 union membership had increased 325.²⁶ However this may not have been the actual financial membership of the union,²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., No. 13, 1951, p. 1.

²⁶ *WAIG*, Vol. 30, 1950, p. 271 and p. 625.

²⁷ While, according to Fletcher, these numbers may have been inflated they are the officially recorded figures in the *WAIG* and therefore have been used in this thesis as a base mark to calculate all subsequent membership totals.

as, in his annual report for 1953, Fletcher admitted that these figures had been inflated, filled in by many electrical workers desperate for an independent union to represent the trade:

...many [membership] cards had been filled in by sympathetic electrical workers who were anxious for the union to obtain registration with the Court, but who had not and were unable to obtain clearances from the engineering unions to which they belonged.²⁸

Within two years the membership had risen to 481,²⁹ however, this still did not give the union sufficient funds to cover the heavy expenditure in connection with legal and Arbitration Court costs, therefore a more substantial increase in membership was essential.

The ETUWA's small membership compared with the unions to which it most closely related can be seen in Table 6.1. A leading union official of the period, Bill Latter, has argued that the largest unions during the late 1940s and early 1950s reflected the absence of a strong industry base. He recalled that in 1948 the largest unions in the State were the AWU with 9902 members working in the goldmines and shearing sheds, the union covering clerical workers with 4255 and the shop assistants' union 4494 members. In comparison the two main engineering unions, the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers had only 5000 members between them.³⁰ Comparing membership numbers over a fifteen year period between 1950 to 1965 it can be seen that the ETUWA managed to increase its membership by a huge 358%, the Australasian Society of Engineers by 35%, the WAASRE by a small 0.5%, and the AEU was in negative growth, at minus 8%, while the AWU maintained its membership over the whole period.

²⁸ *ETJ.*, No. 37, 1953, p. 14.

²⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 32, 1952, pp. 558–61.

³⁰ W.S. Latter cited in J. Read, *Marksy. The Life of Jack Marks*, Read Media, South Fremantle, Western Australia, 1998, pp. 77–8.

Table 6.1. Membership of WA Unions — 30 June 1950–31 December 1965.

Name of Union	Membership Totals			
	Dec 1950	Dec 1951	Dec 1952	Dec 1965
ETU	325	358	481	1481
Australasian Society of Engineers	2991	3846	3967	4037
AEU	4775	4637	3250	4336
Western Australian Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees (WAASRE)	5970	6000	5660	6009
Australian Workers' Union, Westralian Branch	9628	10292	9904	10453

Source: *WAIG*, Vols. 30-32 and Vol. 45, Part 2.

The ETUWA and the Goldfields Sub-branch

With the registration of the ETUWA in 1949 there were, in fact, two independently registered branches of the ETU operating in the State. The Electrical Trades Union of Australia, (WA Goldfields sub-branch), Kalgoorlie, had been established in 1935, registered under both the *Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912 - 1925* and the *Trade Unions Act, 1902*, and was viewed by the WA Arbitration Court as a separate organisation. From 1935 the Goldfields sub-branch had already negotiated awards and agreements for electrical workers throughout the northern and eastern goldfields. In 1950 the ETUWA, already registered under the Trade Union Act, was now registered under both Acts as the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), Perth, (ETUWA) allowing the union to cover electrical workers in the Perth metropolitan area and the South West Land Division. While there were moves, in the early 1950s, to amalgamate the two organisations, up to the present time they remain separate State registered bodies that are incorporated as a common WA branch of the national ETU with common office bearers, ie, secretary, president and treasurer, however, union rules have been changed to allow the ETUWA coverage of the whole state.

The Work of Organising Begins

During the early years of the 1950s the ETUWA continued with its twin strategies of a determined programme of recruitment and the construction of industrial awards and agreements for its members. Deery and Plowman have argued that unions in other countries had to build up 'coercive strength in order to survive and remain industrially effective under collective bargaining',³¹ whereas, due to the conciliation and arbitration system, Australian unions had no need for large memberships as their registration with the Arbitration Court ensured their survival. They also argue that, the Australian system of institutional comparative wage justice with a practice of monitory flow-ons indicates that numerically weak unions were not overly disadvantaged by a lack of industrial militancy.³² Therefore, the small membership of the ETUWA was not necessarily an inhibiting factor in its survival. Notwithstanding, it remained imperative to recruit more members in order for the union to secure its financial position.

Although the ETUWA had finally achieved its registration it still had to contend with resistance from the two main engineering unions, the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers along with other unions such as the AWU and the WAASRE. These unions continued to fight for coverage of electrical workers in engineering and government industries and attempted to hold on to any electrical trades members well into the 1950s. Electrical trades workers who were employed by government controlled industries such as the railway workshops and the State run electrical generation and distribution industry had to remain with the engineering unions or industry unions that did have coverage of these areas because the ETUWA had not been party to any

³¹ Deery and Plowman, *Australian Industrial Relations*, 1993, p. 251.

³² Ibid.

industrial awards covering these areas. The only way of changing this situation was for the ETUWA to become party to existing awards or create its own awards and industrial agreements covering workplaces where electrical workers were employed. This was the key means by which the ETUWA could gain more control over all aspects of employment, apprenticeship, wages and conditions of electrical workers in every industry employing electrical trades and embed itself in the Western Australian industrial relations system.

A Change in Union Leadership

Stahl worked hard during his term of office to establish industrial awards for the ETUWA.³³ In August 1951 the executive members of the Victorian branch of the ETU announced that he had impressed them with his energy and enthusiasm, and they decided to help out financially with a gift of £50 to equip the WA branch with office equipment.³⁴ Just weeks after this gift was made, however, Stahl resigned as secretary on 26 October 1951. He had been granted a farm under the Soldiers' Settlement Scheme, after many years of waiting, and felt it would be in the best interests of his children to accept.³⁵ The branch fell into a tailspin of uncertainty.³⁶

Stahl had been persistent during his fifteen months in office in laying the groundwork for the union and he continued to represent it in the Arbitration Court until his resignation. However, the union could not be left without a leader to run a rapidly expanding and demanding organisation; a new secretary had to be found, quickly. The union called on the membership, asking for anyone interested to nominate for the

³³ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 19, 1951, p. 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 20, 1951, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 23, 1951, p. 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 22, 1951, p. 16.

secretary's position. It pronounced the work interesting and the salary commensurate, and:

it can quite confidently be said that any man with the right initiative could make a wonderful success of this job, and at the same time would be giving a very great service to the electrical trade by guiding its destiny in the West.³⁷

There was little response from either the membership or standing officers. In the interim Bob Fletcher was elected by the ETUWA executive to fill the vacancy of acting secretary.³⁸ And, notwithstanding that further applications for the position had come from NSW, Victoria and Western Australia,³⁹ on 12 December 1951, ETU general secretary Thom made a recommendation to the membership, which was carried unanimously, that acting secretary Fletcher be appointed as secretary.⁴⁰

Robert William (Bob) Fletcher, like Stahl, was not an electrician although, prior to his appointment, he was a member of the ETUWA. Also, he had experience within the labour movement. He had arrived in Western Australia from England in 1926 and spent the following sixteen years on the goldfields where he was active in the union movement and local government. He worked as a pipe fitter in the mines and was a shop steward for the AWU. In 1942 he moved to Perth with his wife and family and worked in a variety of jobs. He joined the Australasian Society of Engineers while working as a welder assembling trucks at Whittakers and was elected president of the Perth branch of his union.⁴¹ He had joined the Young Labour League while working in

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., No. 23, 1951, p. 9.

³⁹ *West Australian*, 7 December 1951, p. 7.

⁴⁰ *ETJ.*, Vol. XL, No. 24, 1951, p. 14.

⁴¹ R.W. Fletcher, Interview by Stuart Reid, 1988, audio tape and transcript held at Battye Library, WA State Library, Perth, OH2054.

the goldfields and later became a member of the ALP's State executive.⁴² While working as an electrical battery fitter for the Fremantle Tramways, one of the classifications of electrical worker covered under the ETUWA constitution, he was recruited as a member into the ETUWA by two workmates who were electricians, one of whom was Reg Lockwood, treasurer and future president of the union.⁴³

Fletcher took the position of secretary of the ETUWA during a period of political uncertainty. He attributed his appointment, as acting secretary for the ETUWA, to T.G. (Tom) Davies (State secretary of the ALP, 1941–1949)⁴⁴. Davies had been the secretary of the Clerks' Union sometime during the 1920s and 1930s and Macintyre argues that this union was one of a few to have a strong influence on the WA labour movement.⁴⁵ Fletcher had been a member of the AWU for a number of years and acknowledged that he was a good friend of Davies, demonstrating his involvement in Labor Party politics.

Fletcher had no previous experience as a union secretary although he had been a shop steward for the AWU for a number of years. He took office only two years after F.E. Chamberlain was elected the general secretary of the State Labor Party. Fletcher and Chamberlain had much in common. They were approximately the same age, Fletcher born in 1905 and Chamberlain in 1900. Both were British by birth and had immigrated to WA during the mid-1920s. Neither had a trade and both spent their initial years in the State working in a variety of unskilled jobs, either in the mining area of

⁴² Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA), *Live Wire*, Perth, Vol. 51, June 1970, p. 8.

⁴³ Fletcher, interview, 1988.

⁴⁴ Bobbie Oliver, *Unity is Strength: A History of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia*, API Network, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 2003, p. 377.

⁴⁵ Macintyre, *Militant*, 1984, pp. 137–8.

Kalgoorlie, as Fletcher did, or, in Chamberlain's case, working as a farm labourer and then running a dairy farm with his wife in the southwest of the State.⁴⁶

Prior to his appointment as ETUWA secretary Fletcher had worked as a battery fitter for the Fremantle Tramways and over the same period Chamberlain was the secretary of the union covering this industry. Therefore, it is likely that these two men knew each other. Both men were strong advocates for their fellow workers, taking on organising positions within their respective unions.⁴⁷ In 1953 Fletcher was elected president of the Metropolitan District Council of the WA ALP and the national executive of the ETU acknowledged that, given the close association between the political and industrial movements in WA, the prestige of the union would be enhanced with this appointment.⁴⁸

Promoting and Building the Union

During Fletcher's nineteen-year period in office there was a steady growth in membership from 358⁴⁹ to 2883 financial members.⁵⁰ When he became secretary late in 1951 he and other members of the ETUWA executive tried a variety of ways to recruit members. He attempted to visit every worksite he thought might employ electricians to persuade them to sign up. In the beginning he had help from two other members of the union, Reg Lockwood being one of them. Fletcher used to buy half a dozen bottles of beer and other members of the executive would contribute another six bottles as an enticement to members to attend the monthly meetings.⁵¹

⁴⁶ F.E. Chamberlain and Harold Chamberlain, *My Life and Times / F.E. 'Joe' Chamberlain*, Harold Chamberlain, North Beach, WA, 1998.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Also, Fletcher, Interview, 1988.

⁴⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 48, 1953, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 31, 1951, p. 743.

⁵⁰ *Live Wire*, Vol. 51, June 1970, p. 8.

⁵¹ Fletcher, Interview, 1988.

Another way of involving the membership in organisational aspects of the union was to encourage them to take part in celebratory events, such as the Eight-Hour Day processions and May Day. In Western Australia, from the late 1940s, considerable controversy surrounded the holiday celebrating workers' achievements. Arguments raged over whether workers should celebrate in May or on a designated Labour Day holiday which had been held in both October and March in previous years. Chamberlain preferred the celebration to be held in March as Labour Day, in direct opposition to the Communist controlled unions, who preferred workers to celebrate on May Day. A number of Communist led unions had been unhappy with the way the ALP had controlled the Labour Day celebrations in Perth in 1947 and 1948. Communists had been prevented from marching under their own banners and the Coastal, Docks, Rivers and Harbour Workers Union (CDRHU) was criticised because its members had carried placards calling on the labour movement to stop the Communist witch-hunt.⁵²

Fletcher certainly concurred with Chamberlain that holding Labour Day celebrations in March was the better option. In 1949 he was assistant organiser for the Labour Day celebrations and in the following year he was fully in charge. He promoted the 1950 procession by walking through the streets of Perth carrying a plaster model of a young woman which was to be placed in a shop window advertising a 'bathing beauty contest' to be held as part of the Labour Day celebrations.⁵³ In 1952 he was pleased to announce the successful participation of the ETUWA's Fremantle sub-branch in the Fremantle Labour Day Procession. He reported that the:

Fremantle sub-branch is to be congratulated on the way its members turned out in the Labor [sic] Day Procession. This is the first time that the ETU has taken part; its

⁵² Macintyre, *Militant*, 1984, p. 131.

⁵³ *West Australian*, 24 January 1950, p. 13.

decorated truck exhibiting a transformer and a large ETU banner, was very favourably commented upon. I am sure that the publicity the Union received will more than repay the Fremantle members for the work they did. Our thanks also go to the Tramway and Lighting Board for their co-operation.⁵⁴

And in 1958 the ETUWA enthusiastically promoted the Perth Labour Day procession, urging 'every member residing in the metropolitan area' to attend. The membership was informed that arrangements had been made to borrow a union banner from the New South Wales ETU to use in the procession and Fletcher announced that this would be an ideal opportunity for the union to 'advertise itself to the public of Western Australia'.⁵⁵

During this period some Fremantle unions continued to favour holding their workers' celebrations on May Day and the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party supported this decision in direct opposition to Chamberlain's position.⁵⁶ It is quite probable that Fletcher promoted the ETUWA's involvement in the 1958 Labour Day procession in Perth to show his support for Chamberlain's position of opposition to the Communist led May Day marches in Fremantle. Fletcher led the 1958 Perth procession because of his position within the Metropolitan District Council of the WA ALP and as president of the Labour Day committee.⁵⁷ According to Fletcher, the 1958 Perth Labour Day was an outstanding success and photographs of him leading the procession and ETU members on decorated floats appeared in the *ETU News* in the following month.⁵⁸ (See Photographs 6.1 and 6.2.) The ETUWA's involvement in Labour Day marches did not, however, continue for long. By September 1960 the union, in answer to a request from

⁵⁴ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 28, 1952, p. 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. XLII, No. 38, 1958, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Oliver, *Unity is Strength*, p. 229.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 41, 1958, p. 5.

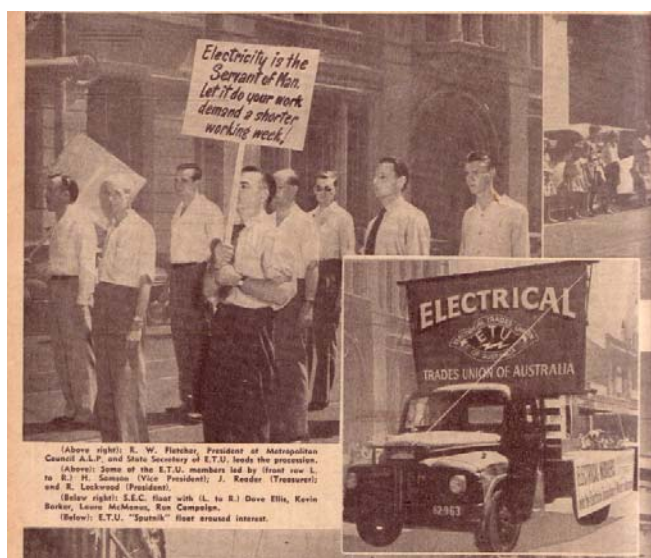
the Labour Day Committee, stated that due to lack of support from members, it would be unable to support the 1961 procession.⁵⁹

Photograph 6.1. ETU members take part in Labour Day March, Perth, 1958.



Source: *ETU News*, April 1958, p. 8.

Photograph 6.2. ETU members take part in Labour Day March, Perth, 1958.



Source: *ETU News*, April 1958, p. 8.

From the beginning of his secretaryship Fletcher made it clear that he felt strongly the members should be kept informed of local and interstate events and he was a regular contributor to the nationally produced *Electrical Trades Journal* and the

⁵⁹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1960, p. 3.

instigator of the locally produced ETUWA trade journal — *Live Wire*.⁶⁰ He continually urged members to attend monthly meetings, held on the second Thursday of each month at the Fremantle Trades Hall and on the third Thursday at the Perth Trades Hall. All members were invited ‘to attend and so assist the executive by expressing their views’.⁶¹

In September 1959, in the first edition of *Live Wire*, Fletcher hoped that:

...this will become the means of bringing all our members in closer contact with each other and informing them of the branch’s activities, thus creating a better understanding, and also a better insight, as to what the Union is doing on behalf of its members.⁶²

The *Live Wire* continued as a method of promoting the union until the mid 1970s when its publication became irregular.⁶³

The ETUWA and Industrial Awards and Agreements in the 1950s

Once registered the ETUWA had the right to represent workers in all industries where any classifications of the electrical trades were employed and seek exclusive award coverage for these workers.⁶⁴ The ETUWA immediately took advantage of its entitlement to apply for new awards or seek to be joined with other unions in existing awards in order to become part of the legal process to secure better wages and conditions for electrical workers.

The industrial development of Western Australia at the beginning of the 1950s was a contributing factor to the expansion of the ETUWA. The end of 1950 witnessed the beginning of a short but intense period of development for the State, as already, over

⁶⁰ *Live Wire* was first published in September 1959.

⁶¹ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 26, 1952, p. 9.

⁶² *Live Wire*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1959, p. 1.

⁶³ A trade journal has continued to be published in different forms, such as the *Circuit* during the 1980s and 1990s, and then sporadic editions of a newsletter produced by the ETUWA up until the present time.

⁶⁴ S.J. Deery, ‘Union Aims and Methods’ in Bill Ford and David Plowman, eds, *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, (2nd Ed.), The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty, Ltd, South Melbourne, 1989, p. 85.

the previous three years, 7500 houses had been connected to the electricity system.⁶⁵ The conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 ended a difficult economic period for Western Australia. Ellery argues that Western Australians 'began a new period of growth leading to dynamic prosperity'.⁶⁶ On 1 April 1947 the State elected a Liberal-Country Party coalition government, led by Ross McLarty, ending fourteen years of continuous Labor government.⁶⁷ And, in 1949 a Liberal-Country Party coalition led by R.G. Menzies swept into power as the new federal government.⁶⁸ Layman argues that the State Liberal-Country Party coalition, with the forceful assistance of R.J. Dumas, engineering head of the Public Works Department and first chairman of the State Electricity Commission in 1946,⁶⁹ actively sought large-scale private capital for future industrial development.⁷⁰

By early 1952 Western Australia had begun an intense programme of industrial development, beginning with the construction of an oil refinery, for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company at Kwinana.⁷¹ In the same year, BHP invested £4 million in the construction of the nucleus of a steel industry at Kwinana, in the shape of a steel fence-post factory and a steel-rolling mill. At the end of 1952,⁷² the newly formed Cockburn Cement Company established a major new cement works at Coogee, an event which

⁶⁵ *West Australian*, 1 November 1950, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Peter Ellery, '1945–1960' in Peter Firkins, ed., *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1979, p. 118.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Lenore Layman, 'Development Ideology in Western Australia, 1933–1965' in *Historical Studies*, Melbourne, Vol. 20, Issue 79, pp. 234–60, October 1982, p. 234 and p. 245.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷¹ Ellery, '1945–1960', 1979, p. 131.

⁷² Layman, 'Development Ideology', 1982, p. 249.

Ellery argues ‘capped what was the most dazzling era of industrial development in the state’s history to that time’.⁷³

This industrial development necessitated a rapid expansion of the State’s electrical generation and supply system. Government and business were aware of the urgent need to expand supply capabilities, both to meet existing consumer demand and to cater for this new development. The South Fremantle Power Station was constructed and came on-line on 13 May 1951 and the Collie Power Station began supplying power to the south-west network in August 1951.⁷⁴ The expansion of large industrial projects in the early 1950s promoted a demand for electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry and the subsequent rise in numbers in this trade had a significant impact on the ETUWA as an organisation.

At the beginning of the 1950s Western Australia had very few major industries and Ellery argues that in 1951 Western Australia was still considered an isolated and rural backwater.⁷⁵ The end of the war brought a surge of migrants and an urgent need for more houses. The necessary equipment was in short supply and took a long time to arrive from the eastern states, which led to an increase in costs. There was a severe shortage of skilled labour.⁷⁶ In July 1950 Western Australian trade union officials acknowledged the problem. Despite a steady influx of skilled migrants, the demand for labour was greater than the supply.⁷⁷ In reply to the Commonwealth Government’s

⁷³ Ellery, ‘1945–1960’, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Leigh Edmonds, *Cathedrals of Power : A Short History of the Power-generating Infrastructure in Western Australia 1912–1999*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 2000, pp. 35–42.

⁷⁵ Ellery, ‘1945–1960’, p. 130.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁷⁷ *West Australian*, 18 July 1950, p. 7.

move to encourage skilled workers from Britain a spokesman for the unions stated 'We'll take all we can get'.⁷⁸

In December 1951 J.N. Thom, national secretary of the ETU, in Perth to assist in the election of the new ETUWA secretary, announced that the Commonwealth Government had sent an experienced Australian electrical tradesman to Europe to ensure that European electricians who wished to migrate to Australia complied with Australian standards. He said that 10,000 more electricians were needed in Australia and it was hoped that many of this number would migrate from the United Kingdom, Italy, Holland and Germany within the next few years.⁷⁹ And, as part of this wave of migration, many electrical workers would be required for the new projects beginning in WA. This then was an ideal time for the newly registered ETUWA to establish awards and industrial agreements and to consolidate its membership base.

Initial Industrial Awards and Agreements

In October 1950, in his first report in the *Electrical Trades Journal*, ETUWA secretary Stahl assured members that one of his first objectives was to create a log of claims to cover all industries where electricians were employed, arguing 'it is vital that the Electrical Trades Union be made parties to all awards affecting the welfare of its members'.⁸⁰ Over the next three years, between November 1950 and September 1953, the union made fifteen applications either to be joined as a party to applications for amendments to existing awards or to create discrete awards for electrical workers based on existing awards already negotiated by other unions. Although electrical tradesmen were covered by the other unions representing metal trades workers in a variety of

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12 December 1951, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *ETJ*, Vol. XI, No. 10, October 1950, p. 15.

industries, they wanted awards that addressed their specific occupational requirements in all industries, and were not just grouped together with general engineering workers.

One of the union's first applications was for an award to cover electrical workers employed by the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Electric Lighting Board (FMTELB). The ETUWA reached agreement through negotiations with the FMTELB and the Electrical Trade (Tramways Fremantle) Award was achieved by consent.⁸¹ The award was to run concurrently with the Tramways (Fremantle) Award⁸² between the FMTELB and the Fremantle Tramway Employees' Union (FTEU). The FTEU's award covered 23 classifications and the ETUWA's new award was for seven of these, being: electrical fitter, electrical installer, electrical lineman, sub-station attendant, pole preparer, pole trimmer and tradesman's labourer. The FTEU's award did not allow for apprentices to be taken in the trades of electrical fitting or installing,⁸³ however, the ETUWA had included these apprenticeships in its award, allowing the ETUWA some authority to oversee apprenticeship training in this industry. The new award did not achieve any wage increase for any of the classifications, being negotiated merely as a means of achieving an independent award for the ETUWA in the industry.

During his first few months in office Stahl pushed through another three award applications, endeavouring to secure a strong base in any claims for future awards. While the union worked to embed itself more securely into the industrial system by negotiating with a variety of employers as an independent organisation, it stayed in the main within the confines of the engineering industry. Stahl was successful in

⁸¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 30, 1950, pp. 373–7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 159–65.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 162. This award allowed for apprenticeships in carriage building, painting and engineering fitting and/or turning trades.

negotiating three consent awards registered during May and June of 1951. The first was the Government Electrical Trades' Award, covering all electrical workers employed by the Department of Works, the Department for Water Supply and Sewerage, and the Fremantle Harbour Trust within a 12-mile radius of the GPO, Perth.⁸⁴ The second consent award was the Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award, No. 13 of 1951,⁸⁵ covering electrical workers within a 25-mile radius of the Perth GPO, but excluding the undertakings of the State Electricity Commission. In this award the ETUWA had taken clauses relevant to its members in the same industries from those already laid out in the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award, No. 64 of 1947,⁸⁶ with 125 private companies as the respondents in a variety of industries including a number of electrical contracting firms.⁸⁷ The third award to be registered was the Electrical Trades (Tramways and Ferries) Award, 1951,⁸⁸ which included provisions already allowed for in the Engineering (Railways) Award, 1947 (as amended),⁸⁹ however, the new award stated that it would apply only to electrical workers in trades and callings employed by the general manager in connection with the tramways in Perth.

The next major award that the ETUWA successfully applied to be party to was the Metal Trades Award, 1951. Early in March 1951 the union applied to the Arbitration Court to be joined with metal trades unions in a dispute regarding the construction of a new award for metal trades employers in the south-west land division.⁹⁰ L.W. Jackson, President of the Court, after hearing the evidence, directed

⁸⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 31, 1951, pp. 190–1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, 1947, pp. 400–16.

⁸⁷ This award is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

⁸⁸ *WAIG*, Vol. 31, 1951, pp. 192–3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 27, 1947, pp. 305–23.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, 1951, p. 98.

that the ETUWA become joined as a party.⁹¹ When it was delivered in November 1951 the new award consolidated a number of previous awards,⁹² one of which was the Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award negotiated by the ETUWA and granted in May 1951. The new award was crucial for the ETUWA to become party to, as it covered all private employers in the metropolitan and south-west land division, giving the union a voice for its members (including a growing number of electrical installing members) within an area that had previously been under the sole control of the metal trades unions.

Previous awards covering the metal trades in Western Australia had operated only within a 25-mile radius of the GPO Perth. However, in this award, the unions requested that the area be extended over the whole south-west land division. There were no objections from the employers, except from the timber milling companies and it was agreed that a separate award be constructed for this industry.⁹³ A separate award covering the northern and eastern districts of the State,⁹⁴ to which the ETUWA was also party, allowed it involvement in the electrical industry under one award throughout the whole of the State. Although the union had some success with these initial awards it had less success in becoming party to an award already in place between the metal industry unions and the Government Railways.

Seeking an Award with the Government Railways

In September 1951 the ETU made its first application in what was to be a ten-year struggle to achieve inclusion with other industry unions in the WA Government Railway (WAGR) award. The ETUWA initially applied for a separate award to cover its

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 589–600. This new award consolidated the following awards: No. 64 of 1947, as amended, No. 90 and 91 of 1947, as amended, and Award No. 13 of 1951.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 576, and pp. 609–15.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 601–9.

members employed by the WA Government Railway Commission (WAGRC).

However, the Arbitration Court upheld the Railway Commission's objection to this application, stating that there was no industrial reason for a separate award. The union acknowledged that this was not, in fact, what it wanted. The Court advised the ETUWA it should seek agreement with the AEU to be a party to a pending reference for an award between this union and the Railway Commission.⁹⁵

The subsequent application by the ETUWA to be joined with the AEU in the WA Government Railway award was refused.⁹⁶ At this hearing the ETUWA argued that, while it only had twelve members employed by the WAGRC at present '...in order to properly function as a Union and to give service to such members', it needed to be a party to this award.⁹⁷ The ETUWA was of the opinion that, as a specialist union, it catered specifically for the electrical trade, whilst the AEU did not. And, if made party to this award, its potential to enlarge its membership in this area would be guaranteed. Secretary Stahl explained that one of the reasons the union was applying to be included in the Railway Award was that '... it can concentrate and do a great deal in connection with electrical workers in the matter of apprenticeships and looking after the interest of the workers'.⁹⁸

The application was 'strongly' opposed by the AEU and the WAGRC and the WAASRE also submitted an objection.⁹⁹ T.G. Davies, arguing against the ETUWA's application, stated:

...if the Court granted the application, four Unions by right would be entitled to cover electrical workers with ultimate confusion to all concerned and that it would open up

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 700–2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 700.

⁹⁸ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 23, 1951, p. 9.

⁹⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 31, 1951, p. 701.

avenues for canvassing of members one from the other which could lead to industrial discord which ought to be avoided.¹⁰⁰

Electrical workers employed by the WAGR as electrical fitters, were aligned with the engineering trades in that they worked in the repair and maintenance of equipment, and the WAGR had little use for electrical installers. The AEU, determined to hold on to every member, fervently opposed the application, arguing that electrical workers had been covered by the AEU for the past 40 years and ‘it had not failed in its duty of looking after the interests of those electrical workers’.¹⁰¹ Davies explained that while the Railways Commission objected on similar grounds to the AEU, which was that, although it did not have any objection to the ETUWA, it was felt that the fewer unions covering the same group of employees the less likelihood there was of industrial unrest.¹⁰² Stahl, in support of the claim, argued that the ETUWA had already secured a number of awards since its recent registration and could not see why it could not be party to another. In the end the objections were upheld and the application disallowed.¹⁰³

In June 1953 it was reported that 70 electrical fitters at the Midland Junction railway workshops had resigned from the AEU. While the number may have been exaggerated,¹⁰⁴ these workers’ intended to resign from the AEU and join the ETUWA, however they were unable to carry out their intentions as the ETUWA was not part of the industrial award for the railway workshops and had no legal coverage of these workers.¹⁰⁵ Such a large number of prospective members was most likely the impetus

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 701–2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 701.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 702.

¹⁰⁴ *West Australian*, 2 July 1953, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 30 June 1953, p. 1.

for another application by the ETUWA to gain coverage in the government railways. In November 1953 the union tried a different tack and applied for a separate award with the WAGR covering two workers in different classifications. This time President J. Jackson remarked:

The Applicant Union has in the past, with a consistency which has our admiration, endeavoured to become a party to or obtain an award covering electrical workers employed by the Railways Commission.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, he was of the view that the application could not be taken seriously:

I regard it merely as a means of the Applicant Union becoming concerned in an award to which the Railways Commission is a party. In other words, I think the Applicant Union is seeking to overcome the difficulties raised by the decision of this Court in October, 1951, when the Court unanimously refused an application by the Electrical Trades Union to be joined as a party to a then pending reference between the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the W.A. Government Railways Commission.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, once again the union was refused. Three years later, in 1956, the ETUWA again tried and failed to become party to the Railway Employees' Award. This award was the consolidated Railway Employees' Award of 1956 and replaced five existing awards between the AEU, the WAASRE, the Australasian Society of Engineers, the Boilermakers' Union, the Federated Moulders Union, and the WAGRC.¹⁰⁸ This consolidated award applied to all workers employed by the WAGR in the working and maintenance of the railways and road services operated by the Commission, and included the Midland Railway Workshops.

By 1959 there was an increasing demand from electrical workers employed by the WAGR wanting to join the ETUWA but forced to be members of the AEU. The ETUWA informed these workers that it had drawn up a log of claims to serve on the WAGRC, but it could not do this until the existing award expired on the 20 January

¹⁰⁶ *WAIG.*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1953, p. 642.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 642–3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 36, 1956, pp. 503–37.

1960.¹⁰⁹ The issue of a pamphlet by the joint Railway Unions' Committee is an indication that all of the unions involved with the WAGR had combined to collectively campaign for a new award for all railway employees.¹¹⁰ The hearings for the new award were held in July 1960 and ETU national secretary, Thom, in Perth for a national executive meeting, gave evidence for the ETUWA. The national executive was impressed by the evidence given by a further ten ETUWA members.¹¹¹ In 1961, because of an increasing desire by electrical workers for their own union to represent them, the ETUWA succeeded in becoming joined as a party to a new award, finally achieving the strength of numbers to overcome the objections of the other unions involved.¹¹²

Winning an Award for the State Electricity Commission

After taking over as secretary in late 1951, Fletcher continued Stahl's push to attain independent awards and industrial agreements. In 1953 the ETUWA had success in gaining a foothold in the State Electricity Commission (SEC). On its creation in 1946 the SEC controlled the two areas of the power industry — the generation and supply of power. Prior to its registration in 1950 and its first industrial agreement with the SEC in 1953, the ETUWA had no coverage of electrical workers in either area.

The majority of electrical workers employed by the SEC in power station workshops were electrical fitters. As in the WAGR, these workers aligned themselves with the engineering tradesmen they worked alongside and were, in the main, members of the AEU whereas electrical linesmen working in the power distribution industry were

¹⁰⁹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 1, No. 6, February 1960, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 9, May 1960, p. 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 12, August 1960, p. 2.

¹¹² *WAIG*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1961, pp. 74–111.

members of the Australasian Society of Engineers. Electrical workers in the power generation, distribution and supply industry were therefore industrially covered by either the AEU or the Australasian Society of Engineers under the Engineering and Engineering (State Electricity Commission) Award, 1948.¹¹³ This award had been achieved by consent between all parties and subsequent amendments to the award, with regard to the wages schedule, were also by consent between the Government and the engineering unions.¹¹⁴

In June 1952, 60 members of the ETUWA were transferred from their jobs with the Fremantle Municipal Tramways and Lighting Board (with which the ETUWA already had an award) to the State Electricity Commission. This transfer increased ETUWA members employed by the SEC to 130 and Fletcher was adamant that the ETUWA should obtain coverage for these workers. With this object the union applied to become party to the existing award. Whilst the Arbitration Court would not allow this initial application the President was prepared to grant an early hearing of the log claims the ETUWA had lodged against the SEC.¹¹⁵ The union was successful in its claim and the resulting industrial agreement was the Electrical Trades (State Electricity Commission), registered on 12 May 1953.¹¹⁶ This agreement was solely between the ETUWA and the SEC, and allowed the union to gain a foothold in the industry.

The ETUWA appropriated only seven definitions of workers of the sixteen classifications of workers in the engineering award for the SEC. These were electrical tradesman (meaning a tradesman holding the requisite licence under the *Electricity Act*,

¹¹³ Ibid., Vol. 28, 1948, pp. 323–37.

¹¹⁴ Western Australian Arbitration Court files, [hereafter WAAC files] Cons No. 5809, Item No. 00037/LIB, No. 10/57, 'Application to Amend Award No. 2 of 1957, p. 4. Accessed WASRO.

¹¹⁵ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 31, July 1952, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ *WAIG*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 1953, pp. 228–9.

1945, who performs the work of electrical fitter, electrical installer and armature winder), patternmakers, casual workers, temporary workers and permanent workers, the other definitions already in the award covered general engineering workers.¹¹⁷ The ETUWA's agreement did not include linesmen,¹¹⁸ therefore these workers remained under the previous award and were in the main covered by the Australasian Society of Engineers. Although the ETUWA did not succeed in gaining coverage of linesmen employed by the SEC under this agreement it did give the ETUWA easier access to the majority of SEC workers allowing it greater opportunity to recruit and organise in this industry.

In January 1957 the ETUWA retired from its independent agreement with the SEC and applied to join with the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers for a new award with the State Electricity Commission.¹¹⁹ The unions wanted to establish a new consolidated award and, on 21 January 1957, the Engineering (State Electricity Commission) Award was registered.¹²⁰ With this consolidated award the ETUWA now had access to SEC linesmen, thus opening up another area of potential members.¹²¹

Kwinana Oil Refinery Award

During the early 1950s the main area for potential growth of members for the ETUWA was in the electrical contracting industry. This industry, employing electrical installers, was directly linked with the State's emerging industrial construction industry. A burst of large scale industrial development, beginning with the construction of the Anglo-

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. 28, 1948, pp. 323–37.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. 33, No. 2, 1953, pp. 228–9.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 37, No. 1, 1957, p. 117 and p. 161.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 64–71.

¹²¹ Over the following decades electrical linesmen increasingly joined the ETUWA and as at 2013 all electrical linesmen employed by the WA Government are members of the ETUWA.

Iranian Oil Company's oil refinery at Kwinana¹²² in December 1952, led to an increasing demand for more skilled workers, in particular a greater number of electrical installers. This was followed with the construction of a steel rolling mill for BHP and the construction of a cement works at Cockburn (all within an area approximately 50 kms south of Perth).¹²³ However, this intense period of industrial development was short lived and with the defeat of the McLarty-Watts Liberal-Country Party government in 1953 the State entered a six-year period under a Labor Government that reverted to a policy of conservative investment and development and no further major industrial projects were undertaken during this period.¹²⁴ It was not until the 1960s, when a Liberal Government, under the leadership of David Brand and Charles Court was elected, that there was a renewed push to attract large scale industrial development to the State.¹²⁵

Early negotiations between the government and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company included an important inducement, by way of a verbal agreement understood to have been made between the government and the company.¹²⁶ This was a pledge that no labour problems would disrupt the construction phase.¹²⁷ Another concession made by the State Government to attract industry to Kwinana was a promise to supply enough migrant labour to complete the construction of the refinery in a timely manner.¹²⁸ Another potential area for recruitment of electrical installing members was through the construction of houses for the prospective workers to the Kwinana area. Therefore,

¹²² By the 1960s this area had become known as the Kwinana Industrial Strip (KIS)

¹²³ Layman, 'Development Ideology', 1982, p. 245.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 253.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 257.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 252.

¹²⁷ Macintyre, *Militant*, 1984, p. 143.

¹²⁸ Layman, 'Development Ideology', p. 247.

while these initial industrial development projects did not, in themselves, employ large numbers of electrical installers, the general increase in industrial and housing development in Western Australia during the early 1950s provided the ETUWA with an opening to recruit and organise an increasing number of electrical installers working in the expanding electrical contracting industry.

Whilst the ETUWA welcomed prospective members, it was also concerned that the State would be swamped by large numbers of electrical workers from overseas and the eastern states and end up with an oversupply of electrical tradesmen. Many electrical tradesmen were keen to obtain jobs in Western Australia. The ETUWA warned members, however, of possible lack of work and accommodation if they arrived in Western Australia unprepared. In November 1952 it pointed out that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company would not require electrical workers before the beginning of 1953, and that initially the numbers required would be low, approximately ten to fifteen, increasing to 150 by the middle of the following year.¹²⁹ The union had already cautioned members not to journey from the eastern states in the hope of getting a job at Kwinana, as accommodation was ‘exceedingly hard to obtain’, and also advised them that four different grades of electrical licences were required to work in Western Australia.¹³⁰

By April 1953 sub-contracts had been given to building firms to erect houses and public buildings in the Kwinana area. One company, the Kelloggs Corporation, advertised for electrical installers in a number of newspapers in the eastern states. The company negotiated a ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ with the ETUWA, agreeing to pay an

¹²⁹ *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 35, 1952, p. 13.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 34, 1952, p. 13.

extra £2 per week, plus 8 shillings per day bonus, making a total wage of £18 per week. The 1951 metal trades award allowed a basic wage of £10.4.7 with a margin for electrical installers of £2.10.0, making a total weekly wage of £12.14.7. The union was pleased with this significant over-award increase for its members.¹³¹ After obtaining the necessary number of electrical installers from the eastern states, however, the company informed these workers that they would receive only award rates and a bonus of 16.66% of their weekly pay. Nor did the workers receive any extra money for travelling time, as the depots for the Kelloggs Corporation were located at Kwinana. In order to rectify this position the union, in conjunction with other unions, attempted to obtain an agreement with the company similar to that already covering the construction of a refinery for the Standard Vacuum Refining Company at Altona in Victoria.¹³² However, there is no evidence that the union succeeded in winning such an agreement.

Two incidents, early in 1954, highlight the growing power of the ETUWA when the union was provided with a chance to represent members working on the oil refinery construction project. In February 1954 six electricians from Britain arrived in Western Australia with their families to work for the Kwinana Construction Group at the oil refinery site. Another two families arrived two days later. The company had told the workers that immediately on arrival they would be housed at government hostels until given one of the houses under construction at Medina (the area of Kwinana used to house workers at the refinery). While on board ship, however, they received a cablegram from the company informing them that there was no work available for them at Kwinana. They were informed that they could still disembark at Fremantle or

¹³¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 31, pp. 598–9.

¹³² *ETJ*, Vol. XL, No. 40, 1953, p. 12.

proceed to Melbourne. The workers decided to take their chances in WA. After discussions between the workers, the union and the Department of Immigration, all found other employment within a day or so.¹³³

The second incident also involved the Kwinana Construction Group Pty Ltd on the refinery site. Late on Friday 26 February 1954 management asked for volunteers of electrical installers to work over the upcoming Labour Day long weekend. When there was no response to this request by late afternoon the senior manager of the company approached the ETUWA's shop steward asking him to sort the problem out. However the shop steward was sure that, if the management could not persuade the men to work overtime, he had very little chance of succeeding where it had failed and did not carry out the request. The company representative then made a list of sixteen electricians and gave instructions that these men were expected to turn up at work on one of the two days in question. When the men arrived at work on Tuesday having ignored management's weekend list, they found that they had no time cards and were informed that they had been sacked because for either the Saturday or Sunday they had been on the list to work and had failed to turn up.¹³⁴

Harold Peden, president of the AEU/Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU), long-time member of the state executive of the Western Australian Trades and Labour Council (WATLC) and member of the Communist Party from the 1940s, argued that it was commonplace to use overtime as 'a regular, systematic extension of the working week' on the oil refinery construction site. The workers for the most part accepted that they were expected to work seven days a week, and it became the

¹³³ *ETJ*, Vol. XLI, No. 3, 1954, p. 15.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. XLI, No. 3, 1954, pp. 15–16.

normally accepted routine, as there might not be another job to go to once the one they were on finished.¹³⁵ In this instance, however, it was suggested that the men had decided to ban overtime ‘unless it was made available to all of them every weekend’.¹³⁶ The sixteen men were ‘summarily dismissed for misconduct’.¹³⁷ Immediately the remaining fifteen electrical installers took strike action in support. After a heated meeting between the 31 men involved in the dispute and the union, it was resolved that the striking men would return to work and the matter of the dismissals would be referred for arbitration.¹³⁸

Conferences, presided over by Conciliation Commissioner Schnaars, were held between ETUWA secretary Fletcher and president Lockwood, the workers concerned and a representative from the Employers’ Federation. No acceptable resolution was found, therefore the matter was referred to the Arbitration Court. The case was heard by the Conciliation Commissioner, who was asked to give a decision on the following question ‘...whether the alleged refusal of electricians employed by Kwinana Construction Group Pty Ltd, at Kwinana to work overtime warranted their instant dismissal on the grounds of misconduct’.¹³⁹ After hearing all the evidence the Commissioner ordered that the dismissed employees be re-instated starting on Monday 22 March, and paid the wages they would normally have received for ordinary hours of work for the period they had been out of work.

¹³⁵ Harold Peden, transcript of an address (with questions) to the Perth Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Annual General Meeting, August 1990 in Charlie Fox and Michael Hess, eds, *Papers in Labour History*, Perth Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth, Vol. 6, November 1990, p. 68.

¹³⁶ *West Australia*, 11 March 1954, p. 17.

¹³⁷ *WAIG*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1954, p. 51.

¹³⁸ *West Australian*, 3 March 1954, p. 13.

¹³⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1954, p. 52.

The employer immediately appealed this decision. President Jackson dismissed the appeal on 26 March. He argued that in his opinion the Commissioner had been right in ordering the reinstatement of the workers. Jackson argued that the evidence had shown that the workers had not acted in combination or even under a common understanding against the employer, that some employees had strong personal reasons for their refusal to work the overtime and that none of the men 'had been guilty of that wilful disobedience of a lawful order which justifies summary dismissal'.¹⁴⁰ It was a victory for the ETUWA, and provided the union with a substantial amount of positive publicity in the *West Australian*,¹⁴¹ demonstrating to members that it now had the ability to provide members with strong representation in the Court and on the job.

Conclusion

The ETUWA entered the 1950s in a promising position. While it had been hoped that its new secretary, Fred Stahl, an experienced union official, would lead the union into the second half of the twentieth century, this was not to be. Nevertheless the following secretary, Bob Fletcher, also had a number of years experience as a union activist and understood that it was imperative to involve the ETUWA in negotiations for industrial awards and agreements in its own right or joined with other unions. And, while the engineering unions, such as the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers and the large and influential WAASRE tried to keep it out of major awards the ETUWA persevered to achieve its goal.

Over the first nine years of his secretaryship Fletcher worked alone. He realised the urgent need to increase union membership and regularly made trips to distant work

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ There were sixteen articles related to the issue in the *West Australian* over a 24 day period between 3–27 March 1954.

sites to enrol and organise new members. A further method to make and keep contact with members was the publication of the trade union journal *Live Wire*, his initiative. At the same time he strived to build the influence of the ETUWA through his dedicated involvement in the State labour movement and the ALP, and used his connections within these organisations to secure a stronger footing for the union and embed it within the dominant, conservative faction of the State labour and political movements.

Fletcher was aided in the task of strengthening the union by a surge of industrial development during the first years of the 1950s. These large industrial projects promoted an increased demand for skilled electrical workers, particularly electrical installers. While many of these incoming workers from the British Isles and the eastern states had strong union backgrounds,¹⁴² ETUWA membership, at this point, was not large enough to encourage a culture of industrial militancy, particularly within the electrical contracting industry. Nonetheless, throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century this section of the trade was set to become the main influence within the state and national organisations of the union. By the mid-1950s, after the initial industrial construction projects in the State were completed, the demand for electrical installers fell. And it was not until the mid-1960s that the next wave of industrial construction projects in the Pilbara began and brought with it the promise to build, over the next decade, a bigger, stronger and more militant Electrical Trades Union in WA.

¹⁴² Harold Peden, transcript of an address, August 1990, p. 72.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Organisational Change — the 1960s and 1970s

After the election of the Liberal/Country Party government in 1959, an intense period of economic development attracted migrants from overseas and inter-state. This chapter examines how these events affected the ETUWA during the 1960s; how the need for an increased labour force for industrial development projects undertaken in Kwinana in the early to mid 1960s, and the growth of iron ore mining in the Pilbara from the mid 1960s onwards, changed the fortunes of this union in Western Australia.¹ In 1961 the union employed its first full-time organiser, a move which allowed it to recruit and organise the increasing numbers of electrical workers coming to the State. In 1962 the union underwent major organisational reform. It instigated a new management structure in the form of a state council, comprising members elected from industry sections of the trade, giving it a much needed injection of new blood. It will be argued that, by the beginning of the 1970s, with a more inclusive management structure, a larger and more active membership, and an increased number of officials, the ETUWA became a more militant union.

Throughout the 1960s other Western Australian unions were able to increase their membership. Unions such as the WA branch of the Federated Miscellaneous

¹ The only original minutes of meetings books held by the ETUWA recording executive meetings (prior to January 1962) and state council meetings (from January 1962) that still exist for the 1960s are in two bound volumes and date from 22 November 1962 through to March 1965 and from May 1967 until April 1971. The missing original minutes of meetings for the rest of the 1960s were, however, printed verbatim in the monthly union journal – *Livewire*, and the union holds a full set of *Live Wire* journals in two bound volumes for September 1959 to December 1963 and January 1964 to June 1971. There are a number of separate volumes for the period between 1971 to 1974, however the minutes of state council meetings have not been recorded in these issues. All references relating to material sourced from the original minutes will be recorded with the meeting date and references sourced from *Live Wire* volumes will have the *Live Wire* volume details along with the relevant meeting date.

Workers Union grew by incorporating smaller (but growing) unions into their ranks.² The ETUWA, however, was reliant on recruiting from a finite number of workers in the electrical trades. Nevertheless in the 1960s greater numbers of electrical installers were required on the large development projects and the ETUWA had new recruitment opportunities.

These electrical workers came from the eastern states and overseas and the majority were already unionists who were used to a high level of service from their union officials. Rapid growth in electrical workers along with the growing number of large industrial construction projects, placed in two widely distant areas of the State, brought with it an increased workload for the small and under-resourced ETUWA, so much so that throughout the 1960s the union's financial and administrative resources were stretched to the limit as it struggled to service both the Kwinana Industrial Strip (KIS) (an area approximately 50 kms south of Perth) and the burgeoning iron ore mining industry in the Pilbara, in the north-west of the State.

The chapter examines the means by which the union dealt with its growing workload; for example, its use of temporary organisers in times of need and the development of an effective network of on-the-job shop stewards. A further indicator of potential change to the ETUWA's leadership was a greater involvement of electrical installers on the union's newly established governing body, the state council. By the second half of the 1960s this increasing involvement, mainly from members of the Medina sub-branch³ (established in 1966), pressed the leadership to develop a more proactive position on a number of issues. These members were

² Michael Hess, *From Fragmentation to Unity. A History of the Western Australian Branch of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union*, Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union of Australia, Perth, 1989, pp 109–28. Between 1963 to 1970 the WA FMWU increased its membership from 1492 to 2820, by amalgamating with five other smaller unions during this period.

³ Medina is a suburb of Kwinana and was developed to house workers brought in to work initially on the BP Refinery in 1954. The growth of the Kwinana industrial strip, in the 1960s, necessitated the building of more houses in the area.

particularly interested in the creation of an independent award for electrical workers employed in the electrical contracting industry on large commercial and industrial construction projects in order to achieve better wages and conditions.

The electrical contracting trade had previously been regarded as less skilled than electrical fitters. In the 1950s there had been no call for the union to organise this section of the trade; however, the industrial development of the 1960s forced the union leadership to change. By the end of the decade the composition of the state council had altered with more active and militant members from the electrical contracting industry demanding a change in union policy. By 1969 organiser Owen Salmon had submitted his resignation, secretary Bob Fletcher was about to retire and, by 1970 the ETUWA was led by three licensed electrical tradesmen as its secretary and two new full-time organisers, all knowledgeable in the requirements of members working in the electrical contracting area of the trade.⁴ This change in union personnel is evidence of the changed dynamics of the electrical industry in Western Australia in the 1960s and 1970s.

Industrial Development in Western Australia

The 1960s was a decade of intense industrial development for Western Australia. After the first phase of industrial development during the early 1950s, a second phase was initiated in 1959 with the election of the Liberal/Country Party, under the Premiership of David Brand. By this point the WA Liberal Party had been reorganised and the new parliamentary leadership of David Brand and Charles Court were 'fully committed to and argued constantly for major overseas investment for economic growth'.⁵ The first major project began in September 1961 with a

⁴ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, Western Australian Branch, *Livewire*, Vol. 51, June 1970, Perth, p. 2.

⁵ Lenore Layman, 'Development Ideology in Western Australia, 1933–1965' in *Historical Studies*, Melbourne, Vol. 20, Issue 79, pp. 234–60, October 1982, p. 257.

£10 million extension to the BP Oil Refinery at Kwinana in the form of a lubricating oil production plant, completed early in 1963.⁶ Then came the construction of a £10 million alumina refinery for Alcoa of Australia Pty Ltd, with work beginning in December 1961 and officially opened in July 1963.⁷

These two projects were just the beginning and within the next decade 33 companies were operating in the Kwinana and south-west areas.⁸ Early in 1962 construction began on a 120-megawatt coal-fired power station at Muja, 225 kilometres south-east of Perth,⁹ which had a projection of 400 workers at the peak of construction,¹⁰ with an estimated 80 to 100 electrical workers required during the mechanical and electrical phase, with the highest numbers on site estimated to be mid-way through to completion of the job.¹¹ Further, Laporte Australia Ltd began construction of a titanium dioxide plant in Australind near Bunbury in 1962, which was officially opened in November 1963.¹²

As well as the projects under construction in Kwinana and the south-west a further surge of construction projects was foreshadowed in the Pilbara when in 1960 the new State government persuaded the Commonwealth to remove its embargo on

⁶ Department of Industrial Development and Decentralisation, *Kwinana: Western Australia's Industrial Heart*, Western Australian Government, Perth, 1971, p. 9. And, *Live Wire*, Vol. 4, No. 19, April 1963, p. 8.

⁷ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, pp. 6–7. And, Alcoa Australia website, 'Alcoa Kwinana Refinery, History'.

⁸ *Kwinana: WA's Industrial Heart*, 1971, p. 2. The industries included: the Alcoa aluminium refinery completed by 1964; the Australian Iron and Steel blast furnace, completed in 1968; CSBP, a bulk materials wharf and nitrogenous fertiliser plant commissioned in 1969; the Western Mining Corporation nickel refinery, in production by 1970, and, the Kwinana Power Station, in operation by 1970. These were the five largest projects undertaken during the period with many other smaller projects being constructed at the same time.

⁹ Verve Energy website, 'History, Muja Power Station'. This project began in 1960 and was officially opened in 1966.

¹⁰ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 5, January 1962, p. 5.

¹¹ Les McLaughlan, CEPU secretary, in conversation with author, 4 March 2012.

¹² J.M. Bailey and A.N. Saunders, *Environmental History of the Titanium Dioxide Plant at Australind, Western Australia*, Environmental Discussion Paper 3/87, Murdoch University, Perth, 1987, pp. 2 and 4.

the export of Australian iron ore,¹³ and in 1963 mining leases were granted to thirteen Australian and international companies.¹⁴ Between 1963 and 1964 the State government signed agreements with six prominent companies, five of the projects located in the Pilbara region.¹⁵ These contracts specified the commencement of production within short time frames, and speedy completion as an essential requirement.¹⁶ So much so that Goldsworthy Mining began construction of its mine site in February 1965 and only fifteen months later the first shipment of iron ore was underway.¹⁷ And so, between 1965 and 1972, Goldsworthy Mining Limited, Hamersley Iron Pty Limited, Mt Newman Mining Company and Cliffs WA Mining Co Pty Limited had constructed the necessary mine sites and infrastructure to mine, process and export large amounts of iron ore.¹⁸

The lifting of restrictions on the export of iron ore in 1960 initiated a mining boom that caused the population of the Pilbara to increase by tenfold in ten years and led to the establishment of nine new towns in the region by 1970.¹⁹ This rapid expansion resulted in a huge increase in the workforce in that area. For instance, the building and construction workforce in the Pilbara increased from 207 in 1961 to 2267 in 1966 and by 1971 there were 4603 workers in this sector.²⁰ These workers included electrical installers and this placed pressure on the ETUWA to organise and service this growing group of members and potential members.

¹³ Gary Scadding, 'Development of the Iron Ore Industry in the Pilbara' in *Sustainability in the Pilbara, Socio-Cultural: Non-Indigenous History*, website created by students from the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University, Semester 2, 2003.

¹⁴ Western Australia Department of Industrial Development, *The Pilbara Study: A Report on the Industrial Development of the Pilbara*, Governments of Australia and Western Australia, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1974, pp. 8–9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Julie Tracy, 'The Construction Phase Of The Pilbara Iron Ore Industry 1965–1972: Workers, Their Unions, and Organising The Industry' in Janis Bailey, ed., *Papers in Labour History*, No. 13, Perth Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth, June 1994, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ WA Department of Industrial Development, *The Pilbara Study*, 1974, pp. 15–16.

¹⁹ Scadding, 'Development of the Iron Ore Industry', 2003.

²⁰ *The Pilbara Study*, 1974, p. 4.

It was a ‘burst of activity probably unparalleled in Australian construction history’ according to one observer.²¹ Workers were spread throughout the State but there was a sharp increase in the Pilbara between 1966 and 1971 when the populations in Port Hedland and Dampier increased by 273% and 229% respectively.²² The following tables and charts illustrate the enormous increase in the number of workers associated with the building industry in the key areas of Kwinana and the Pilbara between 1963 to 1972 and support the argument that this sudden increase in workers stretched and strained the resources of all unions involved, particularly a small union such as the ETUWA. A further issue that pressed the unions into organising prospective members employed on the growing numbers of construction projects, particularly in the Pilbara, was the insertion of a preference clause for the employment of unionists under the Metal Trades (General) Award, 1966, which came into force in June 1966. This clause ensured that all workers employed under this award would be members of their relevant union.²³

Increasing Numbers of Electrical Workers Arrive in Western Australia

The following tables and chart were constructed with information garnered from a number of sources. They indicate significant increases in the number of workers, over a ten year period, in the construction and building trades in two main industrial areas, the Pilbara and the Kwinana Industrial Strip (KIS). Tables 7.1 and 7.2 were constructed from data sourced from the Commonwealth Electoral Rolls for the Pilbara and Kwinana and indicate a significant increase, not only in workers in the

²¹ Don Lipscombe, ‘1960–1979’ in *A History of Commerce and Industry in Western Australia*, Peter Firkins, ed., ‘Western Australian Sesquicentenary Series’, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, p. 142.

²² Tracy, ‘Construction Phase of the Pilbara’, 1994, p. 16.

²³ Western Australian Government, *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 46, 1966, Perth, pp. 747–8. Also, *Ibid.*, Vol. 45, 1965, p. 385. The ETUWA, along with the Australian Society of Engineers and the Federated Moulders (Metals) Union had previously achieved this provision in July 1965, however, it was not until the registration of the new Metal Trades (General) Award that the AEU and Boilermakers’ Society were included.

electrical trades being employed in each area and in particular years, but also in the other main construction and building trade occupations.²⁴

Table 7.1. Numbers of workers in various occupations registered on the electoral roll for the sub-divisions of Murray and Kwinana, 1963 and 1968.²⁵

Occupations	Commonwealth of Australia Electoral Roll for Western Australia, Division of Canning, Sub-division of Murray, 1963	Commonwealth of Australia Electoral Roll for Western Australia, Division of Canning, Sub-division of Kwinana, 1968
Electrical Trades	5	47
Metal Trades ²⁶	41	160
Welders	14	38
Boilermakers	5	23
Crane Drivers	3	27
Painters	11	23
Plumbers	10	13
Carpenters	9	62
Tradesman's Assistants	6	42
Labourers	40	211

Source: *Ancestry.com*, Western Australian Electoral Rolls, 1963 and 1968. Note: The sub-division of Kwinana (1968) was part of what had been the sub-division of Murray (1963).

²⁴ Given that many electrical contracting companies have merged or are no longer in existence and no employment records have been retained it has been difficult to ascertain exact employment numbers. Past officials of the union (Errol Smith and Barry Gilbert can recall only approximate numbers, for example Errol Smith recalls that there were work gangs of 10 to 12 electrical installers wiring new houses in the Pilbara and Barry Gilbert states that electrical workers were on a ratio of one to every six metal tradesmen on the major construction sites at Kwinana. A further source of ascertaining the numbers of electrical workers in Kwinana and the Pilbara has been the Australia Electoral Rolls for the area and, while not an accurate indicator, they do show there was a marked increase in every category of occupation involved in the construction and building industry.

²⁵ *Ancestry.com* website, 'Australian Electoral Rolls, 1903–1980, Australian Electoral Commission, Electoral roll for Western Australia, Years: 1963, 1968 and 1972 for the Division of Canning, sub-divisions of Murray and Kwinana and the Division of Kalgoorlie, sub-division of Pilbara'.

²⁶ The general title of Metal Trades has been used to incorporate a number of occupations. These include mechanical fitters (the largest category), turners, engineers and metal workers.

Table 7.2. Numbers of workers in various occupations registered on the electoral rolls for the Pilbara in 1963, 1968 and 1972.

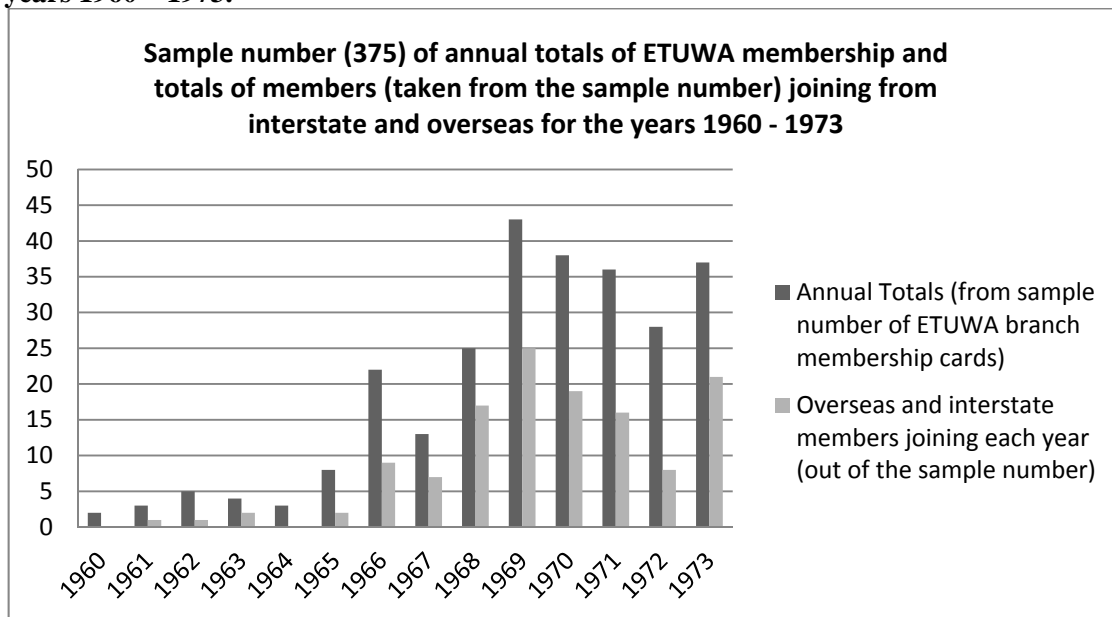
Occupations	Commonwealth of Australia Electoral Roll for Western Australia, Division of Kalgoorlie, Sub- division Pilbara, 1963	Commonwealth of Australia Electoral Roll for Western Australia, Division of Kalgoorlie, Sub- division Pilbara, 1968	Commonwealth of Australia Electoral Roll for Western Australia, Division of Kalgoorlie, Sub- division Pilbara, 1972
Electrical Trades	7	52	210
Metal Trades	13	71	428
Welders	6	16	40
Boilermakers	1	13	122
Crane Drivers	1	6	25
Painters	6	-	23
Plumbers	2	-	38
Carpenters	9	24	92
Tradesman's Assistants	-	12	101
Labourers	61	68	152

Source: *Ancestry.com*, Western Australian Electoral Rolls, 1963, 1968 and 1972.

The following Chart 7.1 was constructed using union membership cards, held by the union, that record each member's personal information, for example: date of birth, their current place of work, where they were previously employed, previous union membership details and, if not from Western Australia, their date of arrival in WA. There are, however, thousands of cards filed by surname in alphabetical order and it proved impossible to examine all of them. Therefore, a sample number of 375 cards were examined. Of this total of 375 membership cards it was possible to estimate the approximate number of overseas and interstate workers who may have joined the ETUWA each year.²⁷

²⁷ Past and present ETUWA membership cards have been filed alphabetically. As well, many membership cards from this period were destroyed when the union moved office in the late 1990s. It has therefore proved difficult to calculate exactly how many members joined the union in the 1960s.

Chart 7.1. Sample number (375) of annual totals of ETUWA membership and totals of members (taken from the sample number) joining from interstate and overseas for the years 1960 – 1973.



Source: Information taken from a sample number of ETUWA membership cards.

Under examination Chart 7.1 indicates there were particular periods of time when an increased percentage of electrical workers from overseas and interstate joined the union. In the first period, during the construction phase of the BP Oil Refinery extensions and the Alcoa alumina refinery on the KIS, a three year period between 1961 and 1963, the percentage of new arrivals to WA averaged 35%. The second period was during 1969, when construction in the Pilbara was at its peak, and 60% of new members came from outside the State. After this, when the number of major construction projects eased off, the numbers of incoming electrical workers dropped to an average of 34.8% between 1970 and 1972, before rising again to 57% in 1973. This indicates that the growth in ETUWA membership was tied to the number of industrial construction projects being undertaken.

Anecdotal evidence from past and present union officials explains these surges of arrivals and new members by describing the numbers of electrical workers required at each phase of a large industrial construction project. In order to situate electrical installers within the context of a major project, it is important to understand

the different phases of a large construction job, to calculate how many electrical installers were employed on a individual project at particular phases of the job.

The first phase of a construction project begins with the civil works: that is, clearing the ground. Then comes the installation of concrete pads for future building, the laying of in-ground services, and then the building of some basic structures. All of this requires the work of concreters, plumbers, pipefitters and electrical workers. During this first phase approximately 5% of the workforce are electrical workers, laying conduit pipework for electrical cables which are required for the forthcoming electrical installation. The second phase of the job is mainly mechanical structural work, requiring metal workers (boilermakers, welders and sheet metal workers), to erect the steel structure. There is also electrical work to be carried out. At this stage of the job electrical workers install electrical cable onto metal ladders in readiness for electrical connection of motors, conveyors, crushers and other machinery. Former organiser and union secretary Barry Gilbert estimates that at this stage of the job electrical workers are employed at a 1 in 6 ratio to metal workers, approximately 15% of the workforce.²⁸ The third phase of the job is the mechanical engineering and electrical installation stage, and it is at this point that the electrical construction workforce reaches its peak. The number of electrical installers on site increases from a ratio of 1 in 6 to 1 in 4, or, from 15% to 25% of the workforce. Phase four of the job includes the rectification and modification stage, commissioning and handover. During this last phase of the job numbers of electrical workers increase from between 50% to 70% of the workforce left on site.²⁹

The foregoing method of estimating the approximate numbers of electrical workers on large construction projects has been used in two examples. The first is

²⁸ Barry Gilbert, ETUWA organiser (1970–6) and secretary (1976–83), communication with author, 24 August 2011.

²⁹ Les McLaughlan, 4 March 2012.

Alcoa's alumina refinery at Kwinana. This project reached a peak labour force of 1000 workers during its construction between December 1961 and December 1963.³⁰ Therefore, if electrical workers comprised 25% of the peak workforce, it is estimated that there were approximately 250 electrical installers were employed on the project. Hamersley Iron's iron ore mine at Mt Tom Price in the Pilbara completed in August 1966, employed, approximately, 700 workers at the peak of its construction.³¹ Using the same estimations approximately 175 electrical installers were employed on this project. These two examples comprise only a fraction of the projects under construction throughout the 1960s, but they help illustrate the growth in the building and construction industry and specifically in the electrical trade in WA throughout this period.

Photograph 7.1. The First Single Men's Quarters at Mt. Newman, Western Australia, 1968.³²



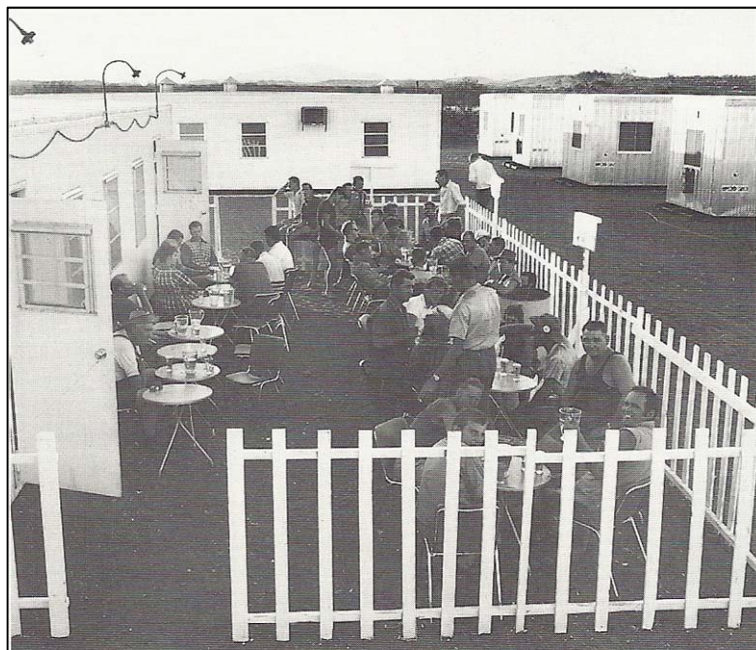
Source: J. McIlwraith, *The first 500 million. The Mt. Newman Story*, p. 81.

³⁰ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, pp. 6–9.

³¹ Tracy, 'Construction Phase of the Pilbara', 1994, p. 17.

³² John McIlwraith, *The First 500 Million. The Mt Newman Story*, Public Affairs Department, Iron Ore BHP-Utah Minerals International, Perth, June 1988, p. 81.

Photograph 7.2. Mt. Newman Construction Camp Watering Hole, Known Universally as Sufferers Paradise, Offered Spartan Facilities, 1967.³³



Source J. McIlwraith, *The first 500 Million. The Mt. Newman Story*, p. 70.

Growth of the ETUWA as an Organisation

Because the 1960s were a boom period for economic development in Western Australia, it was a time of change and expansion for the ETUWA. This section of the chapter will examine the changing dynamics of the union as an organisation. Deery argues that for unions to advance the interests of their members they must be able to ensure their own organisational survival and stability.³⁴ Therefore, in January 1961 the union appointed Owen Salmon as its first full time organiser, an appointment which was to raise the ETUWA's profile within the State's political and industrial labour movements. And also, in January 1962, the management structure of the ETUWA changed. This restructure facilitated the union's changing dynamics reflecting a more active and militant membership.

³³ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁴ Stephen Deery, 'Union Aims and Methods' in *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, Second Edition, Bill Ford and David Plowman, eds, The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty, Ltd, South Melbourne, 1989, p. 85.

The increasing demand for electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry produced an influx of active and often militant union members to WA which began the move to break the nexus of the electrical contracting industry with the metal trades industry and the development of a separate award. By the end of the 1960s, members in the electrical contracting area had grown in numbers sufficiently to transform the ETUWA from a small organisation, led by a conservative leaning executive, into a larger, more democratic union that was able to exert more influence to gain better wages and conditions for its members.

At the end of the 1950s the ETU's national conference advocated change to union governance.³⁵ It proposed the alteration of union rules to ensure a more democratic union³⁶ and changes to the union's national rules to standardise the governance structure of all branches. Instead of each branch having a different method of management, with some governed by a small executive body not fully representative of all members, all branches would be governed by an elected state council made up of members from either geographical sub-branches or industry sections or a mixture of both. From the members of this state council each branch would elect an executive committee. Also a new rule provided for each branch to hold a biennial conference, at which state council members would meet to discuss future policy for the branch and also the national body.³⁷

³⁵ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 51, February 1959, Sydney, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The new rules stipulated that each branch would require 2000 financial members before it could hold a biennial conference. In order to get council members to a conference the union would have to pay travel expenses and reimburse members for lost wages. The union would also have to supply food and accommodation expenses over the period of the conference. During the 1960s and 1970s the ETUWA did not have a big enough financial membership and therefore sufficient funds to be able to organise a biennial conference. The author has been unsuccessful in ascertaining exactly when the ETUWA held its first biennial conference, however, it was most likely not until the mid to late 1980s.

In December 1960 secretary Fletcher returned from the ETU national conference and informed the ETUWA executive of these changes.³⁸ The amended rules were authorised by the Court of Arbitration in May 1961, allowing the ETUWA to form a state council made up of six industry sections. Each section comprised a work area which was, in most cases, covered by a discrete award already in existence. The largest industry section was general trades and members falling under this sector were employed in mining; government instrumentalities, such as the Public Works Department; maintenance electricians in hospitals and private industry;³⁹ and, at this time, the small but growing group of installers working in the electrical contracting industry.⁴⁰ The supply authority section represented members working for the State Electricity Commission and the transport section covered members employed by the State Government Railway Commission. The other industry sections represented members in: manufacturing and the radio trades as well as salaried officers.

Many ETUWA members were represented under the general trades section by default, as the other industry sections had discrete awards covering their sections of the electrical industry. For example, the Engineering (State Electricity Commission) Award covered the supply authorities section, the Railway Employees' Award covered electrical workers in the transport section and the Radio and Television Workers' Award covered the radio trades. The general trades section, however, was covered by a number of different awards covering employees in a

³⁸ *Live Wire*, Vol. 2, Issue 5, January 1961, p. 2.

³⁹ Industries such as: BP refinery, Alcoa Alumina Refinery, BHP Steel Rolling, Cockburn Cement and many other companies operating in WA.

⁴⁰ A separate section for the electrical contracting industry specifically to cover electrical installers on the WA state council was not created until the mid to late 1980s.

variety of general metal trades industries.⁴¹ Gradually through the 1960s workers in the general trades section achieved awards covering their specific industrial area and ultimately members working in the electrical contracting industry achieved independent recognition and formed their own section which was to become the biggest section of the state council.⁴²

After the State Arbitration Court had authorised the necessary rule changes, the union was able to call for nominations for the positions of union officers and state councillors. Since there were fewer nominations than vacant positions the secretary, president, organiser and state councillors were elected unopposed in September 1961 and took office in January 1962.⁴³ In a further effort to give union members more power the federal executive recommended to the federal council that all branch secretaries should be elected every three years by a ballot of the financial membership. Prior to this, all branch secretaries (except in New South Wales) were permanent officers of the union and therefore appointed to the position by the branch management committee. The ETU national executive felt ‘...that every effort should be made to democratise the Union to give members the biggest say possible in the election of their officers’.⁴⁴ Therefore, at the beginning of 1962, the ETUWA had restructured the branch management and was ready to move forward as a revitalised organisation.

Although the union rules were changed to allow for the six industry sections and councillors to represent these sections it took another eighteen months before the

⁴¹ This was until 1973 when the ETU broke the nexus with the Metal Trades (General) Award and successfully achieved a new award, the Electrical Contracting Industry Award, which covered all electrical workers employed in connection with the installation of electricity. The creation and development of this award will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴² *CEPU (Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union) Engineering and Electrical Division WA, Newsletter*, CEPU Engineering and Electrical Division, Western Australia, Winter 1995, p. 1. This is the first reference, that the author has found, to a separate electrical contracting division of the state council in the 1995 union elections.

⁴³ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1961, p. 5a. And, *Ibid.*, No. 6, March 1962, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 44, July 1958, pp. 1–2.

union management began to organise the union into industrial sections. At the 1963 general meeting, attended by 150 members, it was resolved that an inaugural meeting of each section of the union would be convened, in accordance with the union rules, to appoint a chairman and secretary and decide when they would hold meetings.⁴⁵ It took another eight months before the majority of the sections held their inaugural meetings. The transport section was first on 25 July 1963, the radio section next on the 28 July 1963, the supply section followed on 9 December 1963, and the general trades did not hold its first meeting until 27 February 1964.⁴⁶ Inaugural meetings for the other two sections of manufacturing and supply were not recorded in the union minutes.

Union membership grew with the growth of WA industry. In circumstances similar to the early 1950s, with a ‘rash’ of major construction and development projects that seemed to have broken out ‘almost overnight’, Western Australia faced a serious shortage of trained workers in the major trades.⁴⁷ *The West Australian* reported that:

Because of limited or non-existent demand in the past for the people who provide the key skills in these projects, we have neither the trained workers available nor adequate numbers under training.⁴⁸

To alleviate this shortage the state government dispatched a migrant recruiting team to Britain to encourage skilled workers to come to WA.⁴⁹ The WA Employers’ Federation estimated that over the second half of 1962 there would be vacancies for 165 boilermakers, 255 first-class welders, 136 fitter-mechanics (particularly for earthmoving machinery), 100 first-class machinists, 101 riggers, 164 pipe fitters and

⁴⁵ ETUWA Minutes, General Meeting, 11 July 1963, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., state council minutes, 25 July 1963; 28 July 1963; 9 December 1963 and 27 February 1964.

⁴⁷ Fred Morony and John Slee, *West Australian*, 18 June 1962, Perth, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

78 electrical fitters and installers.⁵⁰ Again, as in the early 1950s, whilst the ETUWA acknowledged that there was a possibility of a serious shortage of electrical workers required for future projects, it was concerned that the government, in its hurry to import skilled labour, would deregulate the electrical contracting trade and allow unlicensed migrants to flood the trade.⁵¹

The union argued that the WA Government had provided misleading advice to prospective migrants and state council authorised secretary Fletcher to write to the mayor of each town in Britain which the migrant recruiting team was to visit, supplying them with a copy of the licensing regulations for electrical workers in WA and asking them to publish this information in local newspapers ‘...in order that tradesmen in the United Kingdom would be fully aware of the restrictions that they would encounter on coming to Australia’.⁵² While the ETUWA received a number of replies from local authorities in the UK, acknowledging receipt of its correspondence and thanking it for the advice, ultimately the intervention appears to have made little difference to electrical workers’ decision to travel from the UK to work in WA.⁵³

By August 1962 the government’s migrant mission was arranging for the first group of British migrants, about ten or twelve single men, to fly to WA.⁵⁴ Premier Brand stated that ‘...during its first ten days in Britain the WA team had received applications from more than 750 people wanting to be considered as migrants’.⁵⁵ Of the sample of 375 union membership cards examined in this thesis three electrical workers from Britain arrived in Western Australia and joined the union within six

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 3, No. 8, April 1962, ‘state council meeting 15 March 1962’, p. 8.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., Vol. 3, No. 13, September 1962, ‘state council meeting 19 July 1962’, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *West Australian*, 4 August 1962, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

months of this newspaper report. Andrew Downie Miller joined the union on 5 October 1962 and noted that he had previously been a member of the ETU in Scotland. Next was Frederick Quate who joined on 14 January 1963, a former member of the Coatbridge, Scotland branch of the ETU. The third to join was John Wilfred Arnell on 14 February 1963. He had been a member of the Chichester branch of the union. All three men recorded their residence at the time of joining as the Graylands Migrant Hostel.

It is not known where these men worked on joining the union; however, given that Quate was one of the founding members of the Medina (Kwinana) sub-branch, it is likely that he worked on the Kwinana industrial strip during the 1960s.⁵⁶ Arnell became a state councillor early in 1967, evidence that he continued to be an active union member after his arrival in 1963.⁵⁷ And Miller's membership card notes that in 1967 he was working for Utah Construction and Mining Company in the Pilbara.⁵⁸ This very small sample of union members arriving from overseas during the early 1960s suggests the beginning of an ongoing grass roots movement of union activism.

The numbers of electrical licence holders also increased in the 1960s. As can be seen in Table 7.3 numbers increased from 1960 with significant increases in 1961–62, 1963–67 and 1968–73.

⁵⁶ *Live Wire*, Vol, 18, August 1966, 'state council meeting 14 July 1966', p. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 25, March 1967, 'state council meeting, 9 February 1967', p. 1.

⁵⁸ ETUWA membership cards.

Table 7.3. Total Electrical Licence Holders from 1960 to 1973

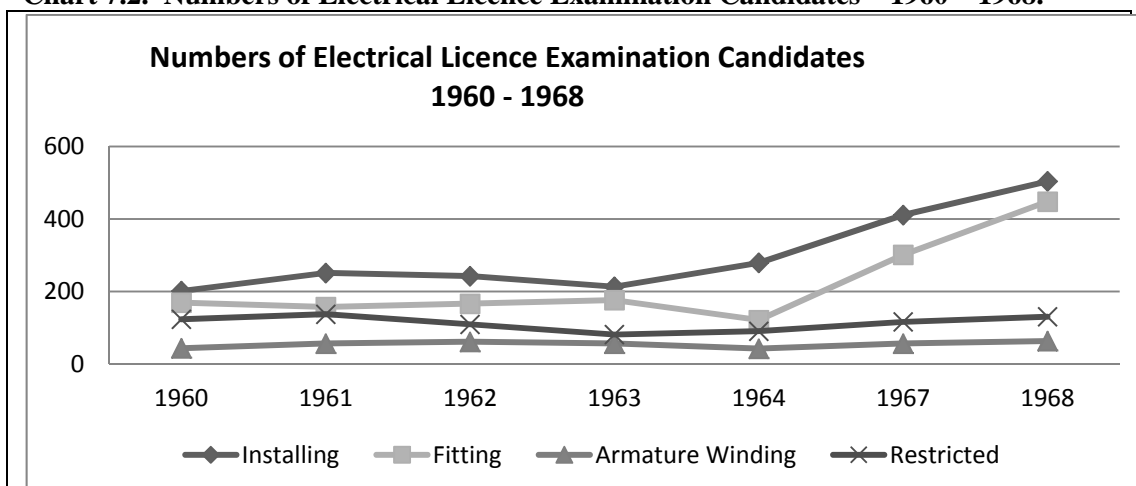
Total Electrical Licence Holders from 1960 to 1973								
Licence Grades	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1967	1968	1973
'A' Grade	613	636	654	619	702	767	713	942
'B' Grade	1714	1811	1907	1809	2000	2429	2317	3733
'C' Grade	478	478	542	630	715	688	972	922
Restricted	565	644	712	697	697	782	676	1169
Totals	3370	3569	3815	3755	4114	4666	4678	6766

Source: State Energy Commission of Western Australia, Annual Reports, 1960–1973.

Table 7.3 shows an increase in the numbers of 'B' grade electrical licence holders over a thirteen-year period from 1714 in 1960 to 3733 in 1973. A breakdown of each section of this grade of licence for the year 1964 indicates a significant increase in the electrical installing trade within the 'B' Grade licences. The ETUWA annual report for 1964 recorded that totals of new licences issued were: 233 for electrical fitters and 803 for electrical installers.⁵⁹ This indicates that the electrical contracting industry in Western Australia was coming into its own.

Chart 7.2 shows a steady increase in electrical installers sitting licence examinations. All electrical workers coming to WA for work were and are issued with a temporary permit allowing them to work at the trade until they sat and passed an examination in their particular area of the trade.

⁵⁹ ETUWA minute book. This was a separate sheet of paper inserted into the union minute book at the end of the annual report for 1964 dated 30 November 1964.

Chart 7.2. Numbers of Electrical Licence Examination Candidates – 1960 – 1968.

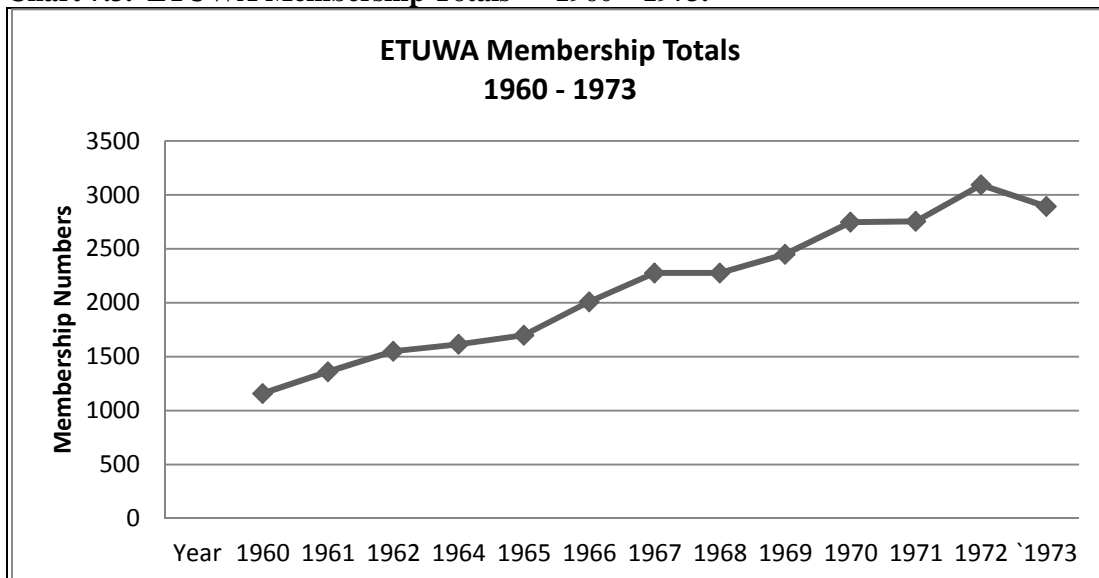
Source: Annual Reports of Electrical Workers' Board in ETUWA trade journal *Live Wire*.

The foregoing graphics show a small jump in electrical installer numbers in 1961, when work on the large construction projects on the KIS began. In 1963 the numbers dipped slightly as major projects on the KIS were being completed.⁶⁰

However, from 1964 the number of workers coming to WA and sitting examinations for electrical installing licences increased steadily until 1968. This evidence substantiates the statement made at the beginning of this section that the growth in union membership followed the industrial expansion in the State.

The increasing union membership numbers throughout the period of extensive industrial development from 1960 to 1973 is shown in Chart 7.3. During this period union membership increased by a substantial 149.6%.

⁶⁰ For example the Alcoa Alumina Refinery at Kwinana was officially opened in July 1963. Alcoa Kwinana Refinery website, 'History'.

Chart 7.3. ETUWA Membership Totals — 1960 – 1973.

Source: ETUWA Annual Reports, printed in *Live Wire* journals, 1960 to 1964 and in the *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, Vols. 43, 1965 to 53, 1973. Membership numbers for 1963 are not recorded in the *WAIG* and there is no mention of membership totals in the union's annual report for 1963, therefore the year 1963 has been left out of the Chart.

A comparison of union membership in 1960 (Chart 7.3.) with the total number of electrical licence holders (Table 7.3.) indicates a percentage of 34% union membership of the trade. In 1968, at the peak of the workforce on the Pilbara, with a union membership total of 2276 compared with the total number of licence holders of 4678, there was a percentage of 48% union membership. This increasing percentage demonstrates the growing strength and influence of the ETU in Western Australia during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Organising

With the appointment of its first full time organiser in January 1961, and a restructure of branch governance resulting in the election of a new state council and union executive in January 1962, the union was ready and eager to organise and recruit more electrical workers. It proved, however, a difficult task.

In the early 1960s, while numbers of electrical workers had begun to increase, they remained in mostly small numbers in remote sites. By the mid-1960s numbers were increasing at a greater pace on the growing number of construction

projects throughout the State. Communication between the union office in Perth and the projects employing electrical workers was difficult, and it was not until the installation of a land line connecting Roebourne with Port Hedland, Meekatharra, Mullewa and Perth in 1961, that the union gained a better, but still limited, ability to contact its members directly by telephone.⁶¹ In 1965 the telecommunications network in the Pilbara still had only a limited number of good quality circuits to Perth and most communication between Perth and the projects in the Pilbara was by organisers' visits or telegraph messages. An example of this isolation is described in a report concerning a dispute involving ETUWA members in Dampier in June 1966, when the secretary received a telegram informing him that all union stewards had been sacked and workers were on strike. The secretary was only able to contact the ETUWA shop steward by radio, an inconvenient method of communication as arrangements for a time and place had to be made first by telegram.⁶² The situation improved in 1969 when work began on an underground coaxial cable network throughout the area, completed in 1972, which allowed for a greater number of telephone installations to worksites, public facilities and increasingly into private accommodation.⁶³

The appointment of a full-time organiser was the union's method of initiating and maintaining contact with its growing number of members. Owen Salmon was appointed to the position in January 1961. He had been employed by the State Electricity Commission for nine years, working as a linesman on extra high-tension live line work for six years. During this period, as an employee of the SEC, he had travelled all over the south-west and was well known and popular with SEC

⁶¹ Scadding, 'Development of the Iron Ore Industry in the Pilbara', 2003.

⁶² *Live Wire*, Vol. 17, July 1966, p. 15.

⁶³ WA Department of Industrial Development, *The Pilbara Study*, 1974, p. 84.

workers.⁶⁴ Within his first week as union organiser he embarked on a two-week organising trip during which he visited more than twenty worksites around the metropolitan area and at Busselton, Collie and Picton Junction in the south-west. At each visit he held on-site meetings with the electrical workers to discuss union membership, arrange for the election of a shop steward, deal with any ongoing disputes on behalf of members and, where appropriate, arrange for the formation of a sub-branch for the area.⁶⁵

Both Fletcher and Salmon continued with joint and individual visits to outlying worksites throughout the first six months of 1961, successfully embedding the ETUWA into these areas by setting up sub-branches in Collie, Bridgetown,⁶⁶ Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, Albany and Geraldton.⁶⁷ However, these organising tours proved a significant drain on union resources and, consequently, the union had to devise other methods of maintaining contact with its members. One method was to establish a network of shop stewards. For example, in mid-1965 Salmon travelled to a job at King Bay (the Hamersley Iron Company's construction site for the port of Dampier), a distance of some 1550 kms from Perth, where he met with electrical workers and discussed their conditions of employment. While there he organised for the election of a shop steward who would be the union's representative on the job.⁶⁸

Throughout the first half of the 1960s the ETUWA struggled to meet the needs of its growing and far-flung membership. While a preference to unionists' clause was inserted in the amended Metal Trades Construction (Alumina Refinery) Award in 1962,⁶⁹ it was not until the insertion of a preference clause in the Metal

⁶⁴ *Live Wire*, Vol. 2, No. 6, February 1961, p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 7, March 1961, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 8, April 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 10, June 1961, p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, August 1965, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 42, 1962, pp. 543–4.

Trades (General) Award in 1966 (the new award covering construction work in the whole of the State) that the need for another union organiser became pressing and it was agreed that all other State branches would pay proportionately towards the costs.⁷⁰ It was by this means that Errol Smith, a future secretary of the ETUWA, began his career with the union. In June 1966 he obtained special leave from his employer, the WA Government Railways, to take up a position as temporary organiser for six months.⁷¹ Along with another temporary organiser, Joe Skidmore,⁷² he was expected to recruit and organise members under the new preference clause. They did a remarkable job, recruiting 480 new members in all.⁷³ Smith was seconded for a further three months some time in early 1967 and eventually terminated his services with the WAGR and began working for the union as an appointed organiser on 1 May 1967.⁷⁴

With the opening up of the Pilbara from the mid-1960s, the ongoing industrial expansion on the Kwinana industrial strip and increasing commercial development in the Perth metropolitan area, the union's resources were stretched to the limit. To add to this heavy workload, from 1965 onwards Salmon began spending all his time on preparing cases for Industrial Commission hearings, and the work of general organising was left to Fletcher and Smith.⁷⁵ Throughout the mid to

⁷⁰ *ETU News*, Vol. XLIV, Issue 136, July 1966, p. 6.

⁷¹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 51, June 1970, p. 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Vol. 21, November 1966, 'state council meeting 20 October 1966', p. 3. Joe Skidmore was also on special leave from the WAGR and also extended his leave until November 1966.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 26, April 1967, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *WAIG*, Vols. 46–49. From 1965 Salmon represented the ETUWA in the majority of Industrial Commission hearings and he was the main advocate for the metal trades unions in a number of award hearings. Some of these included: the Metal Trades (General) Award, No. 13 of 1965; the Iron Ore Production and Processing Award, No. 13 of 1966; the Engineering Trades (Government), Award, 1967 (a new award for engineering and electrical workers employed by the majority of government departments and instrumentalities); and a new award to replace the 1966 award for the iron ore production and processing industry. At the hearing for the new award for the iron ore production and processing industry Salmon represented eight unions at the hearing (these being the AEU; the Australasian Society of Engineers; the Boilermakers' Society; the WA Carpenters and Joiners, Bricklayers and Stoneworkers Union; the WA Plumbers and Sheet Metal Workers' Union; The

late 1960s both officials undertook organising trips to the Pilbara, the south-west and the goldfields. Whenever they visited a worksite they would organise the election of a shop steward and endeavoured to establish a sub-branch in order to strengthen the lines of communication between the Perth office and its distant members.⁷⁶

Julie Tracy explains that organising the construction phase of the Pilbara iron ore industry was not easy, with union officials facing hostile employers and non-unionised workers during the early construction period. While none of the unions had the money or the number of organisers needed to adequately recruit or service members it was easier for unions representing tradesmen, as opposed to non-tradesmen, because these workers tended to speak English, have come from unionised jobs, and have been used to unionism during their apprenticeship.⁷⁷

Although union organisers had right of entry onto the job sites to meet with their members, security guards would often follow them around the site, employers would refuse to tell them where their members or potential members were working, and they would be refused accommodation.⁷⁸ ETUWA organiser, Errol Smith, found a way to solve the twin problems of being away from home for long periods (sometimes up to six weeks at a time) and the lack of onsite accommodation at remote mine sites. He made numerous trips to the Pilbara during the late 1960s and he recalls that on these trips he would take his wife and young daughter along with him, making camp just outside the mine site, where he would leave his family while he held meetings with the electricians on site before moving on to the next project.⁷⁹

Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association; and the Transport Workers' Union). Salmon's part in the creation of the Metal Trades' Kwinana Area (Large Industrial or Civil Engineering Projects) Agreement will be discussed in full in Chapter Eight.

⁷⁶ Various ETUWA state council minutes.

⁷⁷ Tracy, 'The Construction Phase of the Pilbara Iron Ore Industry', 1994, p.23.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 22–3.

⁷⁹ Errol Smith, Interviewed by Stuart Reid, 1988, Oral History OH2054, Batty Library, WASL, Perth.

Strengthening the Structure of the Organisation

As union membership increased, the need to create a stronger and more efficient organisation became imperative. This was partly achieved in 1968 with the establishment of three committees to cover the industrial, administrative and organising areas of the union. Each committee had a union official as a convenor, Fletcher became the convenor of the secretarial committee to oversee the administrative side of the union, Salmon was the convenor of the industrial committee to deal with all aspects of industrial awards and Smith was the convenor of the committee dealing with the organising area of the union. Committee members were ETUWA members or state councillors who had a particular interest in the activities covered by each of the committees.

The organising committee, for example, comprised of six members. Three of the six were relatively new arrivals to WA, one newly returned from the eastern states and one who had migrated to WA at the beginning of the 1950s. John Wilfred Arnell and his family migrated from Britain to Australia in 1962.⁸⁰ He joined the ETUWA on 14 February 1963 and became a state councillor in May 1967.⁸¹ Rudolph Wotzko, born in Midland Junction, Western Australia, had moved to Victoria in the 1930s and did not return to WA until the late 1960s. He was an active member of the ETUWA from then until his retirement which was sometime in the mid 1970s, and he was a state councillor in 1971.⁸² The third was Albert Henry Choularton who migrated from the UK between 1949–1951 and was an active member of the union from then until the mid-1970s.⁸³

⁸⁰ National Archives of Australia website, 'record search'. Arnell has already been noted earlier in this chapter.

⁸¹ ETUWA membership cards and union minutes.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

These three committees helped set the union on a steady path for the next few years. The industrial committee considered matters relating to the many industrial awards to which the ETUWA was party. The secretarial committee discussed matters such as uniform licensing, workers' compensation cases and problems concerning individual members. The organising committee planned and arranged a timetable of meetings to take place throughout WA, where the organiser would listen to members' complaints and take them up with the management on behalf of the members, with most problems rectified on the spot.⁸⁴

Growth of Union Activists and the Costs to the Union of Increased Industrial Development

With the increase in industrial development throughout WA during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ETUWA increasingly relied on its growing network of shop stewards and sub-branches as the conduit between distant work sites and the office in Perth. In an effort to support this growing contingent of active members in carrying out their duties, the union published a draft shop stewards' manual in the *Live Wire* and called on all shop stewards to send any amendments to the union office by the beginning of 1973.⁸⁵ The proposed manual included information such as: the duties of a shop steward, how to handle grievances, how to handle complaints, how to hold a meeting of members, and the leadership qualities needed by the steward.⁸⁶

A downturn in the economy in 1972 resulted in a reduction in the membership and the union struggled financially during this period.⁸⁷ Added to this, the union's limited resources were stretched as officials endeavoured to make regular visits to distant projects. The increased costs to the union over a seven year period

⁸⁴ *Live Wire*, Vol. 46, December 1968, p. 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 59, September 1972, pp. 3–12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 58, June 1972, pp 7 and 9.

are outlined in Table 7.4. The items, taken from the 1966, 1972 and 1973 income and expenditure statements, are indicative of a changing pattern of union costs.

Table 7.4. Comparison of ETUWA costs for the years 1966, 1972 and 1973.

Costs to Union	1966	1972	1973
	\$	\$	\$
Audit Fee	72	295	325
Motor Vehicle Running Expenses	748	2256	3265
Telephone	248	1608	2657
Postage	418	942	1467
Printing and Stationery	418	1448	2696
Arbitration and Legal Expenses	1176	1044	584
Rents, Rates, Taxes and Lighting	628	1625	1976
Lost Time and Delegates Expenses	216	1244	2062
Country Organising Expenses	202	3801	6678

Source: *Live Wire*, Vol. 65, June 1974, p. 1.

Within seven years the union's telephone bills had soared by 971%. This was mainly due to the increase in communications between the union office in Perth and its members working in the iron ore industry. Secretary Smith noted, however, that it was cheaper to pay \$10 for a phone call than fly an organiser to the site, as a large percentage of the increased country organising expenses (which had increased by an enormous 3205%) was attributed to the cost of air fares for union officials' visits to the north west.

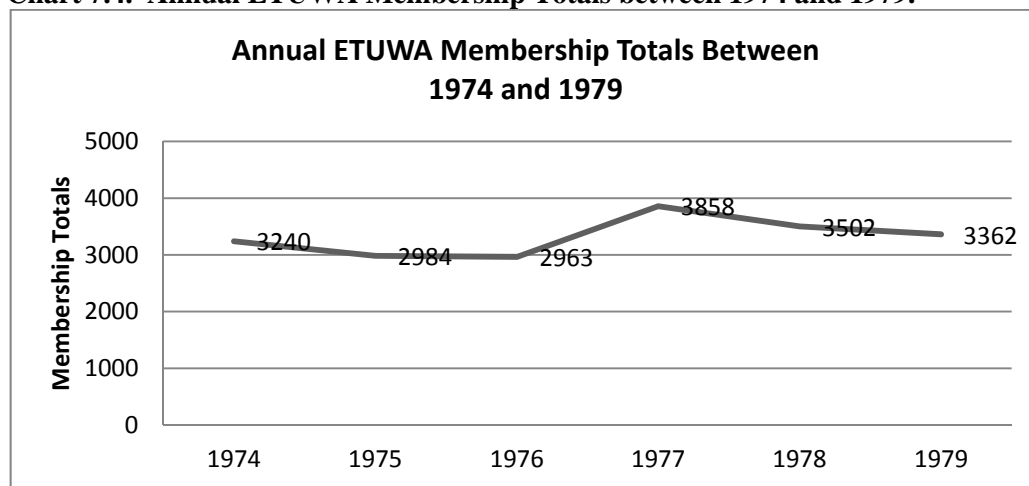
A further two items of interest were, first, the decrease in costs to the union for arbitration and legal expenses and, second, the large increase in money paid to members for lost time and delegates expenses. The 1973 total for the first item, arbitration and legal expenses, was half of that spent in 1966, indicating a departure from arbitration in favour of negotiated agreements. The second item, lost time and delegates expenses, increased from \$216 in 1966 to \$2062 in 1973, indicating a far greater participation by rank and file members in union affairs. Also, by comparing the amounts for items such as motor vehicle expenses, telephone bills, printing and

stationery bills, and expenses for country organising, it is obvious that the work load in the union office had increased considerably over the period under review.⁸⁸

ETUWA Membership Totals — 1969–1979

At the end of 1974 the union had a financial membership of 3240⁸⁹ with a network of over 200 shop stewards throughout the State. Membership growth was steady throughout the year, with 201 new members enrolled in July.⁹⁰ It was acknowledged by secretary Smith that this growth could be attributed to the efficiency of the union's shop stewards '...without whom the Union could not operate'.⁹¹ And, while the union continued to receive a subsidy from the national ETU, secretary Smith was confident that, with a continual increase in membership, the union's financial position would improve.⁹² The membership dipped in 1976 to 2963 but by 1977 it reached its peak for the decade at 3858, after which it started to fall again in 1978 and 1979. This variation in membership totals was linked to the highs and lows of industrial work being undertaken during this period.

Chart 7.4. Annual ETUWA Membership Totals between 1974 and 1979.



Source: *WAIG*, Vols 1974–1979.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol 65, June 1974, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 54, 1974. The annual membership total for 1974 has been taken from Vol. 54 of the *WAIG*, as have all the membership totals for the period 1974 – 1979.

⁹⁰ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 60, December 1972, p. 1.

Moving Away from Industrial Arbitration to Consent Agreements — 1970s

A move away from compulsory arbitration, from the late 1960s, to more individually negotiated documents also caused a strain on the limited resources of the new and inexperienced union officials. Table 7.5 shows the increase in attendance by the ETUWA and, for comparison, the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU)⁹³ and the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), at the Industrial Commission for compulsory conferences and dispute settlements between 1969 to 1979. The ETUWA was called for only one compulsory conference by the WA Arbitration Commission in 1969; in 1979 it attended on 47 occasions. In 1969 it was not involved in any disputes; from 1975 there was a steady increase in the union's attendance at the Industrial Commission to settle industrial disputes.⁹⁴

⁹³ *WAIG*, Vol. 53, 1973, p. 1619–20. The Amalgamated Engineering Union (the AEU) changed its name to the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (the AMWU) in November 1973.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vols 49–59.

Table 7.5. Number of times the ETUWA, Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) and Australian Workers' Union (AWU) attended the Industrial Arbitration Commission between 1969 and 1979.

Number of times ETUWA, AMWU and AWU attended the Industrial Arbitration Commission — 1969–1979				
Year	Category	ETU	AMWU	AWU
1969	Compulsory Conferences	1	9	5
	Dispute Proceedings	–	–	–
1970	Compulsory Conferences	–	18	12
	Dispute Proceedings	–	4	1
1971	Compulsory Conferences	6	18	14
	Dispute Proceedings	1	3	–
1972	Compulsory Conferences	6	16	4
	Dispute Proceedings	–	–	–
1973	Compulsory Conferences	7	16	25
	Dispute Proceedings	–	2	2
1974	Compulsory Conferences	4	18	14
	Dispute Proceedings	–	4	–
1975	Compulsory Conferences	6	13	20
	Dispute Proceedings	4	21	22
1976	Compulsory Conferences	6	21	16
	Dispute Proceedings	6	35	20
1977	Compulsory Conferences	19	64	47
	Dispute Proceedings	9	29	20
1978	Compulsory Conferences	35	76	52
	Dispute Proceedings	11	38	18
1979	Compulsory Conferences	47	52	47
	Dispute Proceedings	9	28	19

Source: WAIG, Vols 49 – 59, 1969 - 1979.

These yearly totals are an indication that, as the 1970s progressed, the ETUWA and its members were increasingly taking part in direct action in order to achieve their aims. It has also been noted that, in 1973, union expenses for arbitration and legal costs were half that spent in 1966, indicating a departure from arbitration in favour of direct action leading to more negotiated documents settled by conciliation and consent.⁹⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the steps taken by active members of the ETUWA to develop their union into an organisation that could ably represent electrical workers to achieve better wages and conditions in all sections of the trade. Many members and union officials, over a period of nineteen years from 1960 to 1979, worked hard

⁹⁵ *Live Wire*, Vol. 65, June 1974, p. 1.

to make the union into a strong and effective organisation. In 1960 the union was a small, ineffectual organisation, struggling to remain viable, relying on subsidies from the ETU national body. With an increase in commercial and industrial development throughout the State but particularly in the metropolitan area of Perth, the industrial strip at Kwinana and the iron ore projects in the Pilbara, the union grew in size. This was mainly due first, to the many hundreds of electrical contracting workers who came to Western Australia looking to make money on the large construction projects, and second, to the introduction of a preference clause in the main industrial award covering workers employed in this industry.

With this growth came problems. The union, at times, found it difficult to find the necessary funds to adequately service its growing membership. Nevertheless, by the late 1970s, the yearly membership totals show that the union was better able to stand on its own. With more organisers, a strong network of shop stewards and sub-branches, and a growing number of more active grass roots members the union executive had the necessary support to influence changes to union policy. By the mid-1970s, due mainly to the significant growth in membership from the electrical contracting area of the trade, the ETUWA was developing into a militant organisation, leaning to the left of politics, and emerging as an influential organisation within the political and trade union movements in Western Australia.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Steps Towards an Independent Award — the 1960s and 1970s

From the introduction of the arbitration system at the beginning of the twentieth century one of the most important tasks for any union operating in Australia was to negotiate an award prescribing wages and conditions for its members and to have this registered with the Industrial Arbitration Court. On its establishment in 1906, one of the first tasks carried out by the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union was to negotiate an industrial award for electrical workers in the nascent electrical industry. Subsequently between 1914 to 1949, as an unregistered union, it was unable to repeat this outcome. And, even after its registration in 1949, it was prevented from negotiating for its members as an independent entity because the electrical industry continued to be tied in with the metal industry. While entangled within the metal industry electrical workers were unable to demand wage rates and conditions specific to their industry. In the 1960s powerful and militant unions such as the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU),¹ the Federated Engine Drivers and Fireman's Association and the Boilermakers' Society covered metal trades workers. In comparison electrical workers were numerically small in membership within an industry where a multitude of different classifications of workers were covered by the all encompassing metal trades award and it proved impossible for electrical trades workers, working under these awards, to achieve higher wages rates or conditions specific to their unique trade.

¹ Australian Trade Union Archives website, 'Amalgamated Engineering Union, 1969–73, Summary'. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers became known as the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Australian Section in 1921. In 1973 it became the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union.

From its beginnings, in both the UK and Australia the ETU was closely aligned with the largest union covering the metal trades, the ASE/AEU. As noted previously, this connection worked well for electrical fitters, as these tradesmen were mainly employed in permanent employment maintaining and repairing electrical motors and machines in large government instrumentalities such as the WA Government Railway Workshops and electrical power generating stations, and private industries, such as metal fabrication workshops and workshops servicing the coal, gold and iron ore mining industries. Until 1951, electrical fitters employed under the metal trades awards covering government and private industries were paid the same margin as engineering tradesmen, whereas electrical installers were paid less. Errol Smith explained that electrical fitters were settled in permanent positions in workshops as opposed to electrical installers who lived a precarious, gypsy style of life moving around the country from job to job.²

This alliance with the metal trades then was beneficial for electrical fitters but not for electrical installers working in the electrical contracting industry on commercial and industrial construction sites. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century in WA under the metal trades award these workers were classed as less skilled than engineering tradesmen and were paid a lower margin than other metal tradesmen. Electrical installers believed their industry, the electrical contracting industry, was a separate industry and their particular needs could be achieved only under an independent award, not under awards covering a multitude of other trades. This chapter will examine the steps taken by the union, with the help of a growing number of active members, to achieve an independent award that would result in electrical installers being rewarded with a substantial wage increase, a

² Errol Smith, audio taped interview with author, 19 October 2007.

special allowance to compensate for the extreme conditions found on industrial construction projects, and the insertion into all awards of an allowance for holders of an electrical licence, the ultimate recognition of the unique skill and responsibility associated with this trade.

The Struggle to Achieve Wage Parity for Electrical Installers

The first step required to increase the status of electrical installers was to gain wage parity with electrical fitters in all awards covering the electrical contracting industry. At the end of 1957 the ETUWA was hopeful of achieving this goal when it and the other metal trades unions applied for amendments to the Metal Trades Award of 1951. ETU president, Reg Lockwood, was the only witness called by the union to give evidence on behalf of the installing section of the trade. Lockwood stated that electrical installers in Victoria, where he had worked ‘did exactly the same work as the installer in this State and received the same margin as that of an electrical fitter’.³ However, this application to raise the installer’s margin of £3.7s.6d to that of the electrical fitter’s margin of £3.15s, was not granted.⁴

In the early 1960s, when the first of the large industrial development projects attracted greater numbers of electrical installers to the growing electrical contracting industry in WA, the union made a renewed push to win margin parity for these workers. It was during this period that a significant change in the creation of industrial awards occurred. There was a move away from industry-based general awards towards agreements and awards created specifically for individual projects. The first award explicitly created to cover a distinct project was the Metal Trades (Oil Refinery Extensions Construction) Award, which was registered on

³ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *ETU News*, Sydney, Vol. XLII, No. 37, December 1957, p. 7.

⁴ Western Australian Government, *Western Australian Industry Gazette*, [hereafter *WAIG*] Vol. 38, 1958, pp. 694–5.

6 March 1962.⁵ In this first project award the ETUWA was unsuccessful in winning an increase in the installer's margin, as President Nevile was of the opinion that electrical installers had 'restricted abilities', and he could see no reason to change the existing metal trades award on which the new award was based.⁶

At the hearings for an award to cover construction work for the Alcoa alumina refinery at Kwinana in August 1962 the ETUWA put the case for margin parity for electrical installers more forcefully. In preparation for its case the union wrote to Mr McDonald, the chief inspector of the State Electricity Commission, requesting him to inspect the refinery construction project, with the view of setting a demarcation line as to what work was that of electrical fitters and of electrical installers.⁷ However, while the chief inspector was willing to concede that there was 'considerable overlapping' of the work, he was not prepared to state which worker was responsible for the majority of the work.⁸ In spite of this negative response the union pressed ahead, gathering evidence and preparing witnesses for the upcoming hearing.

The employers demanded that the Arbitration Court keep to the existing award conditions.⁹ In putting the case for the ETUWA secretary Fletcher pointed out that, under the federal award and in every other State except Queensland, both the electrical fitter and electrical installer received the tradesman's margin and produced evidence to support this claim. The union called on Mr Mitchell, chief instructor for electrical trades at the Perth Technical College and the chief examiner for the State Electricity Commission to explain. Mitchell stated that both

⁵ Ibid., Vol. 42, 1962, pp. 180–90.

⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

⁷ Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA), *Live Wire*, Perth, Vol. 3, No. 14, October 1962, 'minutes of state council meeting, 16 August 1962', p. 1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 42, 1962, p. 538.

classifications served a five-year apprenticeship and their training syllabi were substantially identical, although in the last year of each course of training there was a degree of bias towards the particular side of the trade.¹⁰ While the electrical fitter was trained to work to blueprints and to tolerances of a very precise nature:

...the installer in many cases also has to work to plans and blueprints and has to have a detailed knowledge of the very complicated Wiring Rules of the Standard Association of Australia and, particularly in recent years, must understand and be able to instal very complicated wiring circuits.¹¹

Further, Mitchell stated that in his opinion it was ‘impossible to draw any hard and fast line between a fitter and an installer’; each trade needed a similar period of intensive training and each had to hold an appropriate licence from the State Electricity Commission (SEC).¹² Although he was not a friendly witness the union subpoenaed McDonald, chief electrical inspector for the SEC, who stated that while he was of the opinion that there was no clear line of demarcation between the two classifications he admitted that their work constantly overlapped. He said that in the past electrical installers had been employed mostly on cottage work, however, with the big industrial construction works of recent years the installer had to have much greater knowledge and skill, and he admitted that now there was practically nothing to choose between the knowledge and skills required by either type of tradesmen.¹³

President Nevile stated that this evidence, presented by two highly placed independent witnesses, was particularly convincing and was supplemented with even more evidence from two electrical workers from the industry. Nevile concluded that on construction projects such as the Alumina Refinery there was no longer any justification for paying the installer less than the tradesman’s rate and he allowed the

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 538–9.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 539.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

union's claim.¹⁴ On 31 August 1962, the Metal Trades Construction (Alumina Refinery) Award, 1962 was registered,¹⁵ and, within two months, the Metal Trades (Oil Refinery Extensions Construction) Award, 1962 was amended to reflect the new margin for electrical installers.¹⁶

As industrial development increased it became obvious that a more inclusive award for the whole industry was required. And, while construction workers accepted amendments to the Alcoa alumina refinery construction award, they felt that:

...the Court's decision falls far short of what we are entitled to, but we believe that some new principles have been established which will give our Unions a good basis for successful argument for increased allowances and improved conditions in future construction award applications.¹⁷

This is an indication of the growing unrest within the ranks of construction workers in general and among electrical contracting workers specifically. These two initial awards, then, were the first steps towards creating a specific award to cover large industrial construction projects in Western Australia and the evidence shows that by achieving margin parity for electrical installers the ETUWA had benefitted this section of the trade within the industrial construction industry.

By mid 1963 there were increasing episodes of militant action on the Alcoa refinery site at Kwinana and particularly at the Laporte Australia Ltd titanium dioxide plant construction site near Bunbury. On 27 June 1963 the Arbitration Court ordered the workers on this latter site back to work.¹⁸ With the fear that the Arbitration Court might instigate de-registration proceedings, ETUWA organiser Salmon, in reporting on the position at the site, informed state council that he had given assurance to the Court that the unions would do everything in their power to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 540–4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 645.

¹⁷ ETUWA state council minutes, 9 May 1963, p. 1.

¹⁸ WAIG, Vol. 43 Part 1, 1963, p. 423.

prevent further disputes on the understanding that the case for an award to cover this project would be heard in the near future.¹⁹ And, in September 1963 the Arbitration Court registered the Metal Trades (South-West Land Division — Industrial Construction) Award.²⁰

This award was the first general award for metal trades workers in the construction industry. President Nevile stated that he was now convinced that large-scale industrial and commercial construction projects were totally different from the building industry, which already had an award in place.²¹ The building trades award covered an industry made up of hundreds of small, mainly local companies, whose employees lived locally. In contrast, work in the large scale industrial and commercial construction industry was, in the main, undertaken by a few large national and international companies, contracted to carry out work throughout Australia and also overseas, including countries such as the USA and the UK. It was not uncommon for these companies to bring in their own key personnel,²² and Neville pointed out that ‘many other workers in this industry travel from one State to another seeking work on such construction projects’.²³ He argued:

Even those workers recruited in this State have in many instances – certainly to a much greater extent than in the building industry – to spend their working days at places which necessitate separation from their families and homes.²⁴

¹⁹ ETUWA state council minutes, 4 July 1963, p. 3.

²⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. 43 Part 1, 1963, pp. 698–711.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 703.

²² The electrical contracting trade is, for the most part, made up of transient workers. These workers move from one job to the next, and the next job may well be in a different State. Electrical licences are not universal throughout Australia and so electrical contracting workers are required to sit and pass a licensing examination for each State they intend to work in. And, as they will probably return to their State of origin they rarely cancel any electrical licence gained in that State, therefore totals of State electrical licences issued continue to lengthen. As for union membership, in an interview with the author on 15 October 2007 Barry Gilbert recalled that electrical contracting workers from interstate usually joined the ETUWA. Initially they would join the State branch where they began their trade, then join the branch covering the project they are working on. However, as they move from job to job and perhaps from State to State, they usually cancelled their membership of an individual branch and rejoined the branch covering the next job.

²³ *WAIG*, Vol. 43 Part 1, p. 703.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

He was now convinced that the industrial construction industry in WA could not be regarded in isolation but as an industry that was carried on throughout Australia and, for the State Arbitration Court to view the industry in WA as different from that in other States, was unrealistic. He therefore awarded a construction industry site allowance of £2 per week, on top of the tradesman's margin.

The Metal Trades (General) Award, 1966

In the mid 1960s the metal trades unions pressed for a consolidated metal trades award to cover all workers working in private industry over the whole of the State and ETUWA organiser Owen Salmon was appointed the sole advocate to present a case for an increase in the tradesman's margin. He prepared and presented evidence for what he referred to as a 'work value' case for all trades covered by this award.²⁵

The case Salmon presented illustrated his overriding belief in the good sense of the arbitration system and his understanding that all tradesmen should receive the same margin. The new Metal Trades (General) Award was, according to Salmon, an attempt by the State Industrial Commission to alleviate industrial unrest on the worksites on the Kwinana Industrial Strip (KIS) and the north-west, although it failed to do so. The new award did include clauses specific to the industrial construction industry; for example, a clause covering distant work and one for district allowances and there was also liberty to apply for a clause defining construction work.²⁶ And, in September 1967, a definition of construction work was inserted into this award.²⁷ This was an important inclusion because now every type

²⁵ Ibid., Vol. 46 Part 1, 1966, p. 738.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 744–66.

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. 47 Part 2, 1967–1968, pp. 853–6. Definition of construction work: a. The construction or erection of any building or structure intended to house the plant or forming part of the plant of a large industrial undertaking including the installation of machinery and electrical equipment carried out in the course of such construction or erection; b. Any large civil engineering project; c. The construction or erection of the fifth and subsequent storeys of any multi-storeyed building but only until the exterior walls have been erected and the windows completed and a lift made available to carry the worker between the ground floor and the floor upon which he is required to work; d. The

of construction work was concisely outlined. However, while the new metal trades award addressed some problems associated with the growing industrial construction industry, it did not deal with the specific needs of electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry.

The award did nothing to alleviate a growing dissatisfaction among electrical installers as it was a 'general' award covering a multitude of trades employed in a number of industries. In 1966 electrical installers were being paid at a lower rate than electrical installers working in Victoria, where an independent electrical contracting award was in place. An agreement between the Victorian branch of the ETU and two large industrial construction companies (Constructors John Brown Australia Pty Ltd and McDonald Constructions Pty Ltd), gave electrical installers \$55 and \$58 per week, respectively. These weekly wage rates included a basic wage component of \$30.70 per week making the margin payment \$24.30 and \$27.30 per week respectively.²⁸ Electrical installers in Western Australia at that time earned \$48.15 per week, made up of a basic wage of \$32.65 plus a margin of \$15.50.²⁹

By the late 1960s there was serious unrest on construction projects on the KIS. Industrial disputes were, in the main, caused by the wide disparity in over-award payments being paid to construction workers working on the same project for different employers. These payments by individual sub-contracting companies on each project varied from \$16 per week to 10 cents per hour (\$4.40 for a 44 hour week).³⁰ The main contractors at the nickel refinery project and Alcoa's alumina refinery construction project (on the KIS) had restricted over-award payments made

construction or erection of any other building, structure or civil engineering project or the installation of any other plant which the employer and the union or unions concerned agree or, in the event of disagreement, which the Board of Reference declares to be construction work for the purposes of this award.

²⁸ *ETU News*, Vol. XLIV, No. 133, April 1966, p. 8.

²⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 46 Part 1, 1966, p. 757.

³⁰ *ETU News*, Vol. XLIV No. 169, August 1969, p. 4.

by sub-contractors on these projects, however this meant that workers on these sites worked for less than employees of the same employers on other projects. This situation caused great unrest amongst the workers and Owen Salmon recalled that by 1969 the number of strikes occurring on the KIS 'was outrageous'.³¹

Salmon explained that employers at that time were very supportive of the arbitration system, as was the ETUWA. He believed that, since the employers and the other two main unions on sites (Boilermakers' Society and AEU) were at loggerheads with the employers, the ETUWA 'could play the role of honest broker'.³² He decided to approach privately Stan Carter, a representative of the WA Employers' Federation, to work out an agreement that would be acceptable to all parties.³³ After successful negotiations between the relevant unions and the employers, on 1 July 1969 the AEU requested a compulsory conference with Industrial Commissioner Kelly to determine the possibility of signing a memorandum of understanding of an agreement between all parties with regard to industrial construction projects on the KIS.³⁴

Salmon called a meeting of electrical workers involved in construction work on the KIS to explain to them the importance of the proposed agreement. He stated that the agreement could be a turning point in industrial relations in Western Australia, because it joined the best principles of arbitration and collective bargaining. He also pointed out that this agreement could produce the industrial climate to proceed with an independent award for the electrical contracting industry.

³¹ Owen Salmon, 'The 1969 Kwinana Metal Trades Construction Agreement' in Michael Hess, ed., *Papers in Labour History*, No. 3, May 1989, Perth Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Perth, 1989, pp. 14–17.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 49 Part 2, 1969, pp. 735–41.

He stated that steps had been taken to secure such an award from the beginning of 1970.³⁵ The meeting unanimously voted to adopt the following two motions:

That the secretary [Fletcher] or assistant secretary [Salmon] be authorised and instructed to do all things necessary to have the matter of an award known as the 'Metal Trades Kwinana Area (Large Industrial or Civil Engineering Projects) Award in operation at the earliest possible date, and, that the secretary or assistant secretary be authorised and instructed to serve on employers in the electrical contracting industry a log of claims for an award known as the 'Electrical Contracting Industry) Award and failing agreement from the employers on the matters contained in the log, refer the dispute to the WA Industrial Commission for settlement.³⁶

The Metal Trades' Kwinana Area (Large Industrial or Civil Engineering Projects) Agreement [the Kwinana Agreement] was registered with the Industrial Commission on 18 September 1969.³⁷ While the Kwinana Agreement solved the majority of the industrial disputes on the KIS and was viewed as a prototype for future awards for the construction industry, it did not give electrical contracting workers what they wanted: independence from the metal trades industry.

Electrical workers employed in the electrical contracting industry wanted an independent award to be able to shape their future wages and conditions within a distinct industry, an industry which was recognised as such in other states, as opposed to being an uninfluential cog within the large metal trades industry. While an award for this industry had been discussed by the ETUWA on and off from the late 1950s it was not until 1974 that the union managed to achieve an independent award for this section of the trade. At the time it was meant to be only a short-term award, lasting six months, but, although there were amendments to it along the way, it was not until 1978 that the union managed to achieve a consolidated Electrical Contracting Industry Award. The following section of the chapter will examine the

³⁵ ETUWA state council minutes, 31 July 1969, p. 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ WAIG, Vol. 49 Part 2, 1969, p. 848.

steps taken by the ETUWA to develop an award for electrical installers working in the electrical contracting industry, finally breaking the nexus with the metal trades.

Breaking the Nexus

In order to fully understand the background to the strong desire by electrical contracting workers for an independent award, a re-examination of the history of awards covering electrical workers in WA is needed. In 1911 the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union negotiated an award with electrical contracting employers for electrical installers working in the then nascent electrical contracting industry.³⁸

In 1914, after its amalgamation with the ASE, electrical workers were subsumed into awards governing the metal trades industry. By 1947 workers in the metal trades were covered by the Engineering (South-West) Award, Nos 90 and 91 of 1947 and the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award, No. 64 of 1947.³⁹

In May 1951, twenty months after its re-registration as the ETUWA in September 1949, the union negotiated a new independent industrial agreement to cover electrical workers in the electrical contracting industry. The Electrical Trades (Metropolitan) Award, No. 13 of 1951 covered electrical workers employed by electrical contracting companies.⁴⁰ This initial agreement was for only a three-month period and used the Engineering (Metropolitan) Award, No. 64 of 1947 as its basis. However, by November 1951 the metal trades unions had negotiated a new metal trades award to cover the metropolitan and south-west of the State, the Metal Trades Award, 1951. The ETUWA was made party to this award and therefore, once again, electrical contracting workers were incorporated within a metal trades award.⁴¹ This continued to be the case when the 1951 award was replaced by the

³⁸ A more detailed examination of these awards has already been made in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

³⁹ *WAIG*, Vol. 27, 1947, pp. 389–416.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 31, 1951, pp. 191–2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 574–600.

Metal Trades Award, 1954⁴² and again when this in turn was replaced by the Metal Trades (General) Award, 1966.⁴³

Meanwhile, electrical contracting industry workers in Victoria, as early as 1953, also lamented the fact that their industry was ‘lumped in with the metal trades for award purposes’, believing that the electrical trades constituted an industry on its own.⁴⁴ The Victorian branch secretary, A.W. Henderson argued that the electrical industry was:

...an industry with unlimited possibilities whose magnitude may be forecasted with substantial accuracy for the next fifty years at least.

Can this be said of the Metal Trades?

Will capitalism continue to foster Australian manufacturing industries when industrialisation of Asia offers a more profitable investment.

...Politically we speak with one voice and will continue to strive to retain what has been achieved by those who pioneered our movement, but in industrial organisation and planning each group must under the present system work out its own destiny.⁴⁵

In February 1957 the Victorian branch of the ETU reported that the ETU had been a party to the federal metal trades award for the last 28 years and argued that this situation was causing great dissatisfaction within the electrical contracting section. A campaign was begun to let employers know that members thought the metal trades award rates insultingly low and that electrical workers deserved a higher rate commensurate with their skill.⁴⁶

In May 1958 the Victorian branch of the ETU served a log of claims on 1813 electrical contracting companies operating in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania as the launch of its negotiations for an Electrical Contracting Industry Award. The union stated:

⁴² Ibid., Vol. 34, 1954, pp. 408–20.

⁴³ Ibid., Vol. 46, 1966, pp. 744–66.

⁴⁴ Electrical Trades Union of Australia, *Electrical Trades Journal*, [hereafter *ETJ*] Sydney, Vol. XL, No. 44, August 1953, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *ETU News*, Vol. XLII, No. 29, February 1957, pp. 4–5.

It has been acknowledged by those genuinely interested in this phase of the electrical trade that there is very little affinity of interests, if any, between the parties engaged in the work of electrical contracting and those firms engaged in the metal working and fabricating industries. As a result we hope to have the support of the electrical contractors in our endeavour to separate this section of the trade from its association with an Award that does not cater for the requirements of electrical contracting work.⁴⁷

At the initial hearing, however, the representative for the metal trade employers stated that they would oppose a separate award being made to cover electrical contractors and the Commissioner decided that a dispute did exist and the case was adjourned to allow the parties to come to an agreement as to how to proceed.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding this opposition, the Victorian branch of the ETU successfully negotiated a new award for the industry which was ratified in March 1960.⁴⁹

At this stage in ETUWA had neither the force of numbers nor sufficient officials of the union concerned enough with the electrical contracting industry to take up an industrial campaign to fight for an independent award for this area. However, by the end of the 1960s, circumstances were changing as Salmon resigned as assistant secretary at the end of 1969 and Fletcher retired in 1970, leaving two vacant positions. As Hearn and Knowles argue, 'It is inconceivable that the history of any trade union could be written without reference to individual leaders, including significant rank and file activists',⁵⁰ it is therefore significant that by the end of the 1960s the ETUWA's leadership was changing because of a steady stream of electrical workers arriving in WA to work on industrial construction projects. Many of these incoming workers were the driving force calling for an independent electrical contracting award.

⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 41, April 1958, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol. XLII No. 43, May 1958, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., No. 65, April 1969, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, 'Struggling for Recognition : Reading the Individual in Labour History' in *Labour History*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 87, November 2004, p. 7.

Although not a migrant, the first of these influential union officials was Barry Gilbert who was appointed acting organiser in Salmon's place.⁵¹ During the early 1960s Gilbert had worked on the KIS on the Alcoa Refinery site. He was the ETUWA shop steward on this job and had, along with other members, such as A.S. DeHaas and Fred Quate, established a sub-branch of the union at Medina (a suburb of Kwinana). Members of the Medina sub-branch worked mainly on construction projects on the KIS.⁵² He recalls that, while he felt that an independent award for the electrical contracting industry was important, as he had only just become an official of the union and was swamped with work from other areas, it was some time before he felt capable enough to undertake the promotion of a new award.⁵³

In 1970 Errol Smith was appointed acting secretary on Fletcher's retirement and this left a vacant organiser's position which was filled by Joe Watson, another member working in the electrical contracting industry. Watson had been a member of the ETU in the UK before emigrating to Australia in 1969.⁵⁴ On his arrival in Western Australia he had taken the position of shop steward on construction projects at Cockburn Cement on the KIS and Port Hedland and his last job was with Bechtel Pacific on the Nickel Refinery construction project, again on the KIS.⁵⁵ Therefore, by the beginning of the 1970s, the union now had a new secretary and two organisers with years of experience in the electrical contracting industry and a growing number of active grass roots members who were ready to take on the fight for an independent award for the electrical contracting industry in WA.

⁵¹ *Live Wire*, Vol 51, June 1970, Secretary's Report, p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Vol. 18 August 1966, WA state council minutes, 14 July 1966, p. 3.

⁵³ Barry Gilbert, telephone communication with author, 24 August 2011.

⁵⁴ Australian Government, National Archives of Australia website, 'Record Search, Name Search'.

⁵⁵ *Live Wire*, Vol 51, June 1970, p. 11.

It was during this time, the late 1960s and early 1970s, that an increasing number of union activists began their association with the ETUWA. One such activist was John Rivo Gandini, who joined the ETUWA in 1967.⁵⁶ In 1973 he was elected as a councillor onto the general trade division (which represented electrical contracting members) of the union's state council and was a delegate for the union on the Trades and Labour Council.⁵⁷ In 1983 he was elected branch president and employed as a temporary organiser, retaining this position until his retirement in 1993.⁵⁸ (See Appendix 4.) Table 8.1 illustrates that it was electrical contracting industry members who took over as the leaders of the ETUWA from the early 1970s.

⁵⁶ ETU membership cards.

⁵⁷ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Stuart Reid, Interview with John Rivo Gandini, 1996. John Gandini served his electrical apprenticeship in Kalgoorlie between 1945 and 1950. From 1953 until 1972 he was a full time official of the Communist Party. He was a member of the ASE/AEU during his apprenticeship and when he worked as an electrical journeyman, because it was his understanding that the ETU did not exist in the Perth metropolitan area at the time.

Table 8.1. Electrical workers from overseas and inter-state who played an active part in the ETUWA and joined between 1963 and 1974.

Name	Year of arrival and from where	Date of Joining ETU	Industry employed in and union positions held
Frederick Quate	1962 – from UK	14/01/1963	Electrical contracting industry ETU shop steward Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee
Louis Mesnage	Year unknown – from Queensland	12/12/1968	Lift Industry
Thomas Dodds Rynn	1969 – from UK	14/04/1969	Electrical contracting industry Medina sub-branch secretary Temporary organiser
Daniel Roger John Killgallon	1968 – from UK	23/04/1969	Electrical contracting industry ETU shop steward Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee
Joseph Watson	1969 – from UK	19/05/1969	Electrical contracting industry ETU shop steward ETU organiser
Michael Henry Beatty	Year unknown – from UK	26/06/1969	State Electricity Commission ETU shop steward ETU organiser ETU secretary (1983–1985)
Ivor Edwin Beer	1970 – from UK	20/02/1970	Electrical contracting industry Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee ETU Shop Steward
William Scobie Rankin	Year unknown – from UK	12/11/1970	Electrical contracting industry Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee
Fergus Donald Miller	September 1970 – from Ireland	27/10/1970	Lift Industry
Terence David Ratcliffe	Unknown	28/08/1971	Electrical contracting industry Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee State council delegate
Alvin Dudley Berry	Year unknown – from New Zealand	01/10/1971	Lift Industry
Vladimir Babaeff	1970 – from Chile	08/10/1971	Lift Industry
Robert Francis Bishop	August 1971 – from UK	08/10/1971	Lift Industry
Walter Lawrence Palmer	1971 – from UK	10/02/1974	Electrical contracting industry ⁵⁹ ETU shop steward. Member of Electrical Contracting Rank and File Committee ETU Organiser (1983–1985) ETU Secretary (1985–1992)

Source: ETUWA records.

As chapter 7 showed, during this period, 1966 to 1973, the money spent on the payment for union delegates lost time and expenses rose from \$216 to \$2062,

‘indicating far more rank and file participation in union affairs’.⁶⁰ The arrival and enlistment of these union activists and their involvement on union committees during

⁵⁹ Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), *Circuit*, Perth, WA, Spring 1988, p. 35. An article entitled ‘Sparks from the Past’, has photograph taken outside the office of Liberal Minister for Employment and Industry, Bill Grayden following mass retrenchments at the CBH Kwinana construction site in 1977. Caption reads ‘An angry Wally Palmer, then an unemployed rank and file ETU members, shown explaining the frustrations of unemployed construction workers to the media’.

⁶⁰ *Live Wire*, Vol. 65, June 1974, p. 1.

the early 1970s is an indication that the membership of the ETUWA was changing and an increasing number of members were willing to take a more active and militant stance to achieve their goals.

At the same time, while the new union management team may have been eager to begin the campaign for an independent award, it was held back by three problems. First, within the team there was a lack of experience in putting together a new industrial award. Second, the WA Electrical Contracting Association was still establishing itself and was not able to fully represent all electrical contracting companies and therefore was not in a position to meet and begin negotiations on behalf of these companies with union representatives; and, third, there were a number of ongoing industrial matters to resolve in other areas of the trade.

Unrest had been growing within the ranks of ETUWA members working in the electrical contracting industry employed on the KIS and in July 1969 they had met to discuss matters relevant to this area of the trade. The meeting was attended by 27 ETUWA members, including Barry Gilbert, Owen Salmon, Joe Watson and Fred Quate. It was at this meeting that Salmon had explained that it was his intention to lodge an application for an electrical contracting industry award.⁶¹ However, at the annual general meeting of the ETUWA, on 23 April 1970, some nine months later, a question was asked regarding the progress of the electrical contracting industry award and the president, S.D. Allen, reported that this matter was being handled by Salmon, who had resigned four months earlier. This information caused concern among the contracting industry members and, at the next state council meeting, there was a call for an extraordinary general meeting to

⁶¹ ETUWA, state council minutes, meeting of electrical contracting industry members, held on 21 July 1969.

discuss, among other matters, the 'future progress of the contractors' award'.⁶² The meeting was set for 13 May 1970; however, there is no record of this meeting ever taking place.

Progress towards an independent electrical contracting industry award continued slowly throughout 1970, partly because of industrial disputes in other areas of the trade, including one where organiser Gilbert represented 150 ETU members involved in a stoppage on the Alcoa site, regarding the last-on-first-off principle.⁶³ In another issue secretary Smith represented the union in negotiations for an award with the SEC for all workers in temporary employment on the construction of the Kwinana Power Station.⁶⁴ A further dispute to impact on the progress of an independent award was a six-week strike in February-March 1970 involving 740 workers employed by Australian Iron and Steel at Kwinana. In his article examining this strike Dufty reported that, in the opinion of two-thirds of the sample number of strikers, the strike had achieved nothing and, while an increase to the production bonus payment had been achieved, this could have been achieved without striking.⁶⁵ Only a small number of ETUWA members were involved in this strike and there was very little discussion about it during state council meetings. However, there is no doubt that the strike was viewed by the workers as unsuccessful; in fact Dufty states that it was generally accepted that the result was a defeat for the unions.⁶⁶

In 1970 many members in the electrical contracting industry were working on the KIS and it was proposed, as a means of promoting the urgent need for an

⁶² ETUWA, state council minutes, 30 April 1970, p. 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1970, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 20 August 1970, p. 2. And *WAIG*, Vol. 50 Part 2, 1970–1971, pp. 900–11. The State Electricity Commission, Construction Award, was registered on 9 December 1970.

⁶⁵ N.F. Dufty, 'The A.I.S. Kwinana Strike of 1970' in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1971, p. 184.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

electrical contracting industry award, that the Medina sub-branch be reinstated.⁶⁷

Meetings at the sub-branch had stopped due to poor attendance and it was hoped that, if regular meetings were reinstated, these could be the means by which to inform members in the area and reignite the campaign for an electrical contracting industry award.

A further reason for not initiating the application of an electrical contracting industry award during 1971 and 1972 was the union's involvement in a number of other award negotiations.⁶⁸ During the same period, as secretary Smith reported, while the union membership stood at 3250 and continued to grow rapidly, the numbers in the electrical contracting area fluctuated continually with electrical workers from all States and also New Zealand travelling to WA to 'reap some of the harvest from the West and after a period return to their respective states'.⁶⁹ The bulk of the membership increase in this area was associated with the ongoing projects in the north-west, so much so that union officials travelled to this area on average of every two weeks in 1971–72,⁷⁰ therefore hindering them from proceeding with any other projects. The increasing industrial unrest also brought added work for union officials with the increase in compulsory conferences called by the Industrial Arbitration Commission in the early 1970s; so much so that by the end of 1972 the ETUWA had taken part in 11 court appearances and 15 compulsory conferences in nine months.

⁶⁷ ETUWA state council minutes, 9 July 1970, p. 5. The Medina sub-branch was established in 1966, *Live Wire*, Vol. 18, August 1966, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Some of these awards were: the Pinjarra Alumina Refinery construction project; an award for construction workers in projects north of the 26th parallel; negotiations for amendments to the Kwinana Agreement; application to amend the Metal Trades (General) Award; application to amend the Engineering (SEC) Award and an application to amend the Radio and Television Award. The union was also involved in negotiating the insertion, into all relevant awards, of a new classification for Electrician – Special Class. During this period Gilbert was also involved in negotiations for an award to cover construction work on the Robe River project. Smith was working with the other metal trades unions on improved conditions and wages for electrical apprentices.

⁶⁹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 58, June 1972, p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

A further cause of delay in the establishment of an award for the electrical contracting industry was the insufficient number of union officials able to carry out the preparatory work. Secretary Smith stated that once again the ETUWA, this time in the form of organiser Gilbert, was supplying the advocacy position for the metal trades group of unions.⁷¹ With Gilbert spending his time researching and presenting cases in the Commission and Smith dealing with the administrative side of the organisation it was left to organiser Watson to shoulder a greater load of the organising work and this meant that little time was left to organise a campaign for an electrical contracting industry award. As well, in 1972, WA suffered a serious downturn in the economy, resulting in many electrical workers leaving the industry to work for themselves, or moving inter-state, as jobs in the construction industry became harder to find. Even discussions for amendments to the Metal Trades (General) Award, in October 1972, were overshadowed by predictions of a negative result to union applications for wage increases when Commissioner Collier explained that he had ‘...kept the economic downturn well in mind when considering the respective claims of unions and employers’.⁷²

A New Award for Electrical Workers in the Lift Industry — a Catalyst for Change

On 16 March 1973 the union became involved in its first dispute of any size or significance when electrical workers employed in the lift industry took direct action after employers had rejected their pay claim. Until this point electrical workers employed in the WA lift industry had been technically award free, previously

⁷¹*Live Wire*, Vol. 60, December 1972, p. 8. Amendments to the Metal Trades (General) Award included additional allowances for construction workers and a 17½ % leave loading allowance. The ETUWA was involved in numerous application to the Industrial Commission throughout 1973 and 1974. Some of these included: individual agreements with Goldsworthy Mining Ltd, Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd, Dampier Mining Col. Ltd and Western Mining Corporation Ltd along with Mt Newman Mining Co. Pty Ltd, in *WAIG*, Vol. 54 Part 1, 1974, pp. 185, 499, 524 and 549.

⁷² *WAIG*, Vol. 52 Part 2, 1972, p. 966.

coming under the Metal Trades (General) Award in a *de facto* relationship.⁷³ When amendments to the Metal Trades (General) Award were negotiated in October 1972 the unions applied for an allowance for lift industry workers and also a licence allowance for electrical workers of \$12 per week in addition to the prescribed wage rate in this award.⁷⁴ After discussions regarding an allowance for lift industry workers it was ascertained, during the hearing, that although inspections had been made of lift installation work at the award hearings for the Metal Trades (General) Award in 1966, none of the employers associated with this industry was listed as a respondent, neither was the 'lift industry' included in the third schedule of the award.⁷⁵ It was therefore pointed out that these workers were, in fact, 'award free' and, since the particular employers could not become respondents to the Metal Trades (General) Award after the fact, Commissioner Collier strongly advised that a new award for this industry should be negotiated as soon as possible.⁷⁶

On 23 February 1973 about 200 lift installation and maintenance workers stopped work, initially refusing only to work overtime or shift work, until the next meeting on the following Friday.⁷⁷ However, nearly two weeks later at another meeting, the lift workers decided to stop work completely. The union officials, Gilbert from the ETUWA and Jack Marks from the AEU, stated they had tried to negotiate with the employers but 'had not even got their feet under the table'. The lift workers wanted an increase in wages from \$70 to \$110 per 40-hour week.⁷⁸ By the end of March the Brewery Employees' Union had agreed to impose sanctions in support of the striking lift workers at sites where lift installation supervisors were

⁷³ WAIG, Vol. 53 Part 2, 1973–1974, p. 780.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Vol. 52 Part 2, 1972, p. 970. An electrical licence allowance in all awards covering the electrical trades was not achieved until 1979. This issue will be discussed in full later in this chapter.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ *West Australian*, 24 February 1973, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 7 March 1973, p. 9.

doing the maintenance work instead of the lift workers. And, at a special meeting at the Trades Hall, 80 striking lift workers, members of the ETUWA and AEU, were told by ETUWA organiser Gilbert that they would be supported by the Brewery Employees' Union and that sanctions would remain until lift workers asked for them to be lifted.⁷⁹

By 16 April the strike was in its fifth week and at a further meeting 65 lift industry workers voted to continue with the strike action. Support from fellow unionists enabled strike payments of up to \$40.00 per week to be made at this meeting.⁸⁰ There were also regular distributions of food parcels and, where necessary, arrangements were made to defer hire purchase and other financial commitments for the strikers.⁸¹ A few days later the strikers agreed to free people trapped in lifts; nevertheless no payment would be accepted for this work and the lift would not be repaired.⁸²

In early May the workers were still on strike and had rejected the employers' latest offer. ETUWA organiser Gilbert explained that the strikers would not return to work for no less than \$97–\$98 per week. Lift workers in Melbourne had also been on strike and they had accepted this amount, which was a \$7.00 a week wage rise. Another distribution of strike pay was paid out at a meeting on the following day.⁸³ In its eighth week the strike gathered momentum. Striking lift workers began picketing outside Royal Perth Hospital, stating that hospital lifts used to carry patients on stretchers were not safe. ETUWA organiser Gilbert said that the men wanted to draw the public's attention to the problem.⁸⁴ Commissioner B.J. Collier

⁷⁹ Ibid., 31 March 1973, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16 April 1973, p. 3.

⁸¹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 7.

⁸² *West Australian*, 19 April 1973, p. 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 4 May 1973, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 9 May 1973, p. 9.

had, on his own volition, called a compulsory conference on 26 March, reconvened another on 27 March and finally called another on 21 May.⁸⁵

The strike lasted for eleven weeks, from 16 March to 3 June 1973. ETUWA organiser Gilbert praised the lift workers for ‘the magnificent solidarity and determination’ which won them large wage increases in a new award for the industry.⁸⁶ The Lift Industry Workers (Electrical and Metal Trades) Award was registered on 16 July 1973, between the ETUWA, the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers (who had been given leave to be a party to the award).⁸⁷ Table 8.2 compares the new wage rates for electrical trades classifications covered under the electrical section of the Metal Trades (General) Award amended in June 1973 with the wage rates for the same classifications covered under the new Lift Industry Workers (Electrical and Metal Trades) Award registered on 16 July 1973, showing a significant wage increase of \$57.45 per week for lift industry workers.

⁸⁵ *WAIG*, Vol. 53 Part 1, 1973, p. 736.

⁸⁶ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 7.

⁸⁷ *WAIG*, Vol. 53 Part 2, 1973–1974, pp. 781–90.

Table 8.2. Wage rates for electrical workers under the amended Metal Trades (General) Award of 1973 and the Lift Industry Workers (Electrical and Metal Trades) Award, 1973.

Classifications	Metal Trades (General) Award		Lift Industry Workers (Electrical and Metal Trades) Award		
	Margin	Total wage: Margin plus basic weekly wage of \$44.00	Margin plus special weekly rate of : \$17 p/w for Tradesmen and Electrician Special Class \$13.50 p/w for Tradesman's Assistant \$14.00 p/w for Tool and material storeman	Plus Special Payment	Total Wage per week including basic weekly wage of \$44.00
Electrician Special Class	46.55	90.55	86.80	103.80	147.80
Electrical Fitter	37.35	81.35	77.80	94.80	138.80
Electrical Installer	37.35	81.35	77.80	94.80	138.80
Mechanical Fitter	37.35	81.35	77.80	94.80	138.80
Tool and material storeman	No corresponding classification		64.45	78.45	122.45
Trades Assistant	20.15	64.15	60.60	74.10	118.10

Source: WAIG Vol. 53 Pt 2, 1973, p. 790 and p. 843.

Prior to the new award all tradesmen in the industry had an award rate of \$81.35 per week, while the new award brought this up to \$138.80 per week, a sizeable increase, and the rate for electrical trades assistants went from \$64.15 to \$118.10 per week.

As well, the new award granted that apprentice rates were calculated as a percentage of the tradesman's rate, not as a percentage of the basic wage, giving them a much-needed increase to their wages.⁸⁸

The achievement of an award for electrical workers employed in the lift industry in July 1973, and the solidarity shown by these workers throughout their dispute, was another impetus for electrical installers working in the electrical

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 790.

contracting industry to make a renewed push for an independent award for this section of the trade.

Progress Towards an Independent Electrical Contracting Industry Award

The Metal Trades (General) Award, 1966 which covered the electrical contracting industry prior to the achievement of an independent award, covered 131 metal trades classifications, including 22 classifications in the electrical section. As respondents there were 422 employers contained in 119 industry groups, ranging from accounting machine distributors to window frame manufacturers. It also included thirteen electrical contracting companies.⁸⁹ In comparison the proposed Electrical Contracting Industry Award had seven classifications of electrical workers and 71 respondents from one industry group — the electrical contracting industry. A separate award would enable the ETUWA to negotiate exclusively for its members in this industry.

It is unfortunate that from 15 April 1971 until March 1972 there are no extant union records.⁹⁰ Even after this date records are sketchy with only erratic publications of the union journal *Live Wire*.⁹¹ It has proved difficult, therefore, to identify the steps taken to establish an independent award. There are no reports in the press of any direct action taken by electrical contracting workers, as there was with the lift industry workers. As has been explained, the electrical contracting industry was a difficult industry to organise. It would have been hard to bring and hold together a large enough number of electrical contracting members to take up a strong, determined fight for an independent award.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1293–1302.

⁹⁰ Errol Smith and Barry Gilbert gave interviews to the author. Owen Salmon did not wish to be interviewed.

⁹¹ State council minute books covering the rest of the 1970s were thrown out when the union moved offices in the 1990s. The union has copies of *Live Wire* journals for March, June, September, December 1972; March and December 1973 and March and June 1974 and these contain several of the secretary's annual reports, however, they do not record minutes of meetings as they previously had.

Barry Gilbert recalled that, prior to the early 1970s the union leadership saw the Kwinana Agreement, and a similar agreement for the Pinjarra Alcoa refinery construction site, as solving the problems in the construction industry, making another award unnecessary.⁹² However, in April 1973, just after the handing down of the Lift Industry Award, there was a renewed interest among the membership in an independent award for the electrical contracting industry.⁹³ ETUWA members employed in this industry met to discuss the matter in October 1973. At this meeting 200 electricians passed the following resolution ‘that the Contractors’ Association and any other major contractors outside of the Association begin negotiations immediately with the Union on the log of claims for an electrical contracting award’.⁹⁴ This call for negotiations to begin suggests a growing unrest among workers desiring an independent award.

In December 1973 a log of claims for an independent electrical contracting industry award was drawn up by the union and submitted to over 200 electrical contracting employers throughout the State, including the as yet to be formally registered Electrical Contractors’ Association.⁹⁵ The union’s claim had eighteen demands, including an increase in wage rates to a weekly rate of \$110.00, a new classification covering cable jointers, a licence allowance for holders of an electrical licence, a construction disability allowance, four weeks annual leave, living away from home allowance, compassionate leave and a clause stipulating that on site

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, pp. 11–2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 11. The Metropolitan Electrical Suppliers’ and Contractors’ Association of Western Australia was registered on 18 April 1921, Registration No. 289, and continued through to 1946 (approximately) when it changed its’ name to the Electrical Contractors’ Association (ECA), keeping the same Registration No. 289. In 1950 the ECA was registered with Registration No. 99. This organisation continued under this name and Registration No. until its’ registration was cancelled on 28 January 1955. It was not registered again as an association under the Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912-1971, and the Trade Union Act, 1902, until 4 March 1975, Registration No. 226. In *WAIG*, Vol. 1, 1921, p. 98; Vol. 26, 1946, p. 207; Vol. 30, 1950, p. 271; Vol. 35, 1955, p. 125; Vol. 55 Part1, 1975, p. 512.

amenities were to be provided and maintained at a high standard, such as those contained in the federal Builders Labourers (Construction on Site) Award, 1972, and that the apprentices' wage should be a percentage of a tradesman's rate and not a percentage of the basic wage.⁹⁶

Errol Smith, ETUWA secretary at the time, recalled that, after the completion of construction work on the iron ore project sites, there were only pockets of electrical workers left in the Pilbara by 1973, for instance ten or twelve in Dampier, fewer at Tom Price and small numbers of teams, with around ten installers in each, installing electricity in newly constructed houses for permanent staff at Mount Newman. He recalled that throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s the majority of electrical contracting workers were located on the KIS with approximately 100 electrical workers employed on the CBH (Co-operative Bulk Handling) wheat silo construction site, as just one example.⁹⁷

Notwithstanding these organisational problems, by the second half of 1973 the ETUWA was ready to do whatever was necessary to establish an independent award. In 1969 the Electrical Contracting Association had refused the union's request for a meeting to discuss the matter.⁹⁸ However, Errol Smith recalled that by 1973 many electrical contracting employers were anxious to have an award for the industry as they believed an award with a comparatively high rate of pay would attract apprentices and thereby strengthen the trade.⁹⁹ The association represented some 291 individual electrical contracting employers and, at a general meeting of

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–12. In an amendment of the Metal Trades (General) Award apprentice wages were calculated as a percentage of the tradesman's rate and not as a percentage of the basic wage. In *WAIG*, Vol. 53 Part 1, 1973, pp. 387–90.

⁹⁷ Errol Smith, interview with author, 19 October 2007. Construction on the CBH grain terminal began in 1970/1 in Government of Western Australia, The Department of Industrial Development and Decentralisation, *Kwinana: Western Australia's industrial heart*, Perth, WA, 1971, p. 29. Construction was complete and it was opened in 1976, found in Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd website, 'About Us, History'.

⁹⁸ ETUWA state council minutes, 27 February 1969, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

this body, members supported the concept of a separate award for the industry.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the year therefore the timing was right to rally electrical contracting workers and on 24 October 1973, a mass meeting of 200 electricians from the electrical contracting industry called for negotiations to begin.¹⁰¹

Achievement of an Electrical Contracting Industry Award in Western Australia

While the lift industry dispute had been reported in the press and Commissioner Collier had called the parties to three separate compulsory conferences to discuss the dispute, it was a different matter with negotiations for the electrical contracting industry award.¹⁰² Errol Smith recalled that the union was approached by the Electrical Contractors' Association to discuss the proposed award because they could not hold onto electrical tradesmen and they could not persuade apprentices to take up the trade. They therefore wanted an award with wage rates that would reverse this trend. Gilbert met with the electrical contractors a number of times and together they came to an agreement. Employers reportedly said that they had to appear to oppose a new award, when in fact they did not. In the end the award was achieved without a single dispute except for a half-day stoppage to report back to the members.¹⁰³

Initially the union and the electrical contracting employers were happy to base the award on the federal Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1966, which covered workers employed by the Electrical Contractors' Federation of Victoria and the Electrical Contractors Association of South Australia. W.G. Merrett, the secretary/manager of the Electrical Contractors' Federation of Victoria, who represented the majority of the respondents, stated that this award had:

¹⁰⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. 54 Part 2, 1974, p. 604.

¹⁰¹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 12.

¹⁰² *WAIG*, Vol. 53 Part 1, 1973, p. 736.

¹⁰³ Errol Smith, interview with author, 19 October 2007.

...assisted materially in minimising disputes and time had shown that the decision of the Commonwealth Commission in 1960 to certify an agreement between the Electrical Contractors Federation and Electrical Trades Union despite argument that it was against the public interest, had proved to be sound.¹⁰⁴

While the majority of employers in WA were happy to have a separate award for the industry there were a few who had misgivings, especially since a recent strike in the industry in Victoria had resulted in a considerable wage increase with the possibility of other changes, making the objecting employers uneasy, preferring to hold off creating an independent award until the industry had settled down.¹⁰⁵

Commissioner Collier was of a different mind. He stated that, in his opinion, the union was entitled to have a separate award to regulate the industry. He was not prepared, however, to base this new award simply on the federal award. He felt that it would be better if the WA Industrial Commission issued a short-term award, for only six months, in order to establish the electrical contracting industry as a distinct industry and, at the same time, grant the workers a substantial special payment. This payment would be regarded as substitute for and not in addition to existing over-award payments.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, to make an easier transition from the State Metal Trades (General) Award to the new award he proposed using this as the base award. The Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1974, was registered 21 June 1974 with 71 respondent electrical contracting companies named.¹⁰⁷ The most important result of the award was to break the nexus between the electrical contracting industry and the metal industry.¹⁰⁸

Until the registration of the Electrical Contracting Award, 1974 the AEU had been the chief union in all negotiations for awards covering the metal and electrical

¹⁰⁴ *WAIG*, Vol. 54, 1974, p. 604.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 618–9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 603. And, at page 609, a preference clause allowing only the ETUWA to cover workers in this industry aided in breaking the link with the metal trades unions.

trades workers. Throughout this period the AEU was resolute in ‘...gaining better conditions for all metal workers’¹⁰⁹ and, while this was the case, the ETUWA found it difficult to negotiate conditions specific to its members. One important change in the new award was its area and scope. It restricted the ETUWA’s coverage in that the award would not apply to the manufacturing section of the business of any of the respondents nor to the areas specified in the following three registered industrial agreements: the Metal Trades Kwinana Area (Large Industrial or Civil Engineering Projects) Agreement; the Robe River Project Agreement (Metal Trades and Federated Engine Drivers) Agreement and the Metal Trades (Mt Windarra Construction) Agreement 1971.¹¹⁰

In addition the award was not to apply to workers employed on construction work at the Pinjarra Alumina Refinery or to workers employed on construction work within the boundaries of the site at Woodman Point leased to Transfield Pty Ltd by the Western Australian Government, where an oil and gas rig was under construction.¹¹¹ These restrictions were removed after the ETUWA applied in August 1975 to extend the operation of the award to the whole of the State. When Commissioner Collier decided that there was:

...every justification to extend the operation of the award, thereby ensuring that workers employed by electrical contractors in the extended areas receive the same rate of pay as other workers covered by the Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1974.¹¹²

The new award included two different clauses from that of the Metal Trades (General) Award. The first of these was a new clause for the provision of payment for compassionate leave of one day on the death within Australia of a wife, husband,

¹⁰⁹ T. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants, The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920–72*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 62.

¹¹⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. 54, 1974, p. 609.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 55, 1975, p. 1165.

father, mother, brother, sister, child or stepchild.¹¹³ The second was a reworded clause covering payment of wages. In the Metal Trades (General) Award this clause stated that only if a worker requested his employer to state in writing the amount of wages he was entitled to, the number of hours worked, the amount of deductions taken and therefore the net amount due to him, the employer was required to provide this information no less than two hours before the payment was made.¹¹⁴ This clause in the Electrical Contracting Industry Award stated:

The employer shall provide each worker with a statement showing -

- a. The worker's rate of wage.
- b. The hours worked including overtime.
- c. All deductions.
- d. The net amount of wages.¹¹⁵

During discussions regarding the wage rates for the new award

Commissioner Collier explained that under the federal Electrical Contracting Industry Award an electrical worker's base rate of \$100.50, two industry allowances aggregating \$30 per week plus a special rate of \$10 per week amounted to \$140.50 per week. By comparison an electrical worker in WA received a maximum wage of \$103.45, and then only if he was working on the construction of a large industrial undertaking. Further, he may or may not have been receiving over-award payments from his employer.¹¹⁶ For the new State Electrical Contracting Industry Award Collier proposed an all purpose special payment of \$25 per week on top of a tradesman's weekly wage rate of \$97.30. This was in addition to the basic weekly wage of 48.50, making a total weekly wage of \$122.30 and, in addition, there was a maximum allowance of \$6.25 per week for construction work.¹¹⁷ The special payment of \$25 was intended to be in substitution for and not in addition to any

¹¹³ Ibid., Vol. 54, 1974, p. 617.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. 53, 1973, p. 1288.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Vol 54, 1974, p. 613.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 607-8.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 618.

over-award payments. Apprentices' rates were to be based on a percentage of the tradesman's weekly rate and apprentices would receive also a special payment of \$20 per week.¹¹⁸ The new rates meant an increase of 18.12% to the weekly wage for electrical fitters, electrical installers and, the new classification of cable jointer.

Table 8.3 compares the wage rates for electrical tradesmen contained in the Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1974 with wage rates for tradesmen and other classifications covered under the amended Metal Trades (General) Award of 1974. It must be noted, however, that workers in the construction area of the metal trades received over-award payments. The amounts of over-award payments varied greatly between employers and have not been used in the comparison.

Table 8.3. Wages rates for electrical trades classifications covered under the Metal Trades (General) Award amended 26 April 1974 and the Electrical Contracting Industry Award registered 21 June 1974.

Classification	Metal Trades (General) Award, amended 26 April 1974		Electrical Contracting Industry Award, registered 21 June 1974		
	Weekly Margin Column A	Column A + basic wage of \$48.50 per week = Total Weekly Rate	Weekly Rate = Margin + basic wage of \$48.50 Column A	Special Payment of \$25 per week + \$6.25 per week maximum allowance for construction work Column B	Column A + Column B = Total Weekly Rate
Electrician - Special Class	58.00	106.50	106.50	31.25	137.75
Electrical Fitter	48.80	97.30	97.30	31.25	129.05
Electrical Installer	48.80	97.30	97.30	31.25	129.05
Cable Jointer	No corresponding classification		97.30	31.25	129.05
Metal Tradesman	48.89	97.30	No corresponding classification		
Linesman – Grade 1	48.80	97.30	97.30	31.25	124.20
Grade 2	44.65	93.15	92.95	31.25	107.95
Electrical Assistant	31.60	80.10	79.60	26.25	105.85

Source: WAIG, Vol. 54, 1974, amended Metal Trades (General) Award, pp. 384–6 and Vol 54, 1974, Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1974, pp. 608–19.

It can be seen from these wage increases that the ETUWA achieved a considerable increase of between \$31.75 per week for electrical installers and \$25.75 per week for trades assistants compared with the same workers' payments under the Metal Trades

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

(General) Award, thereby establishing a significant change in wage relativity between electrical workers and metal trades workers.

In the four years between 1975 and 1979 the ETUWA made 26 applications to amend the new award. Inside ten months of the award being granted the union had applied to vary the wages rates, when, in March 1975, it applied for an increase of \$50.00 per week for tradesmen and \$41.00 per week for electrical assistants and substantial increases for apprentices based on percentages of the rate claimed for an electrical fitter.¹¹⁹ Commissioner Collier concluded that, while he agreed an increase was justified, he could not grant the amount claimed. He decided on a total increase of \$9.00 per week for all classifications to be added to the rate per week, making the weekly rate for an electrical installer \$106.20 and an increase of \$8.00 per week to the special payment for all classifications, increasing this payment from \$25.00 to \$33.00 per week, except for electrical assistants who would receive an increase of \$5.00 per week to bring their special payment to \$25 per week. With a basic wage of \$82.20 per week the total weekly wage for an electrical installer amounted to \$231.70.¹²⁰

The Fight for an Electrical Licence Allowance

The 1974 log of claims for the Electrical Contracting Industry Award included a further issue of great importance to the ETUWA. Barry Gilbert, in particular, felt strongly that electrical workers should be paid an allowance for each electrical licence they held. From his early days as a shop steward for the ETUWA on the KIS Gilbert had recognised that payment of a licence allowance would increase the status of the trade and, in his opinion, the union needed to agitate to achieve it.¹²¹ Eight years earlier, during negotiations for the new Metal Trades (General) Award in 1966,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 55 Part 1, p. 360.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 361–2.

¹²¹ Barry Gilbert, interview with author, 15 October 2007.

the union made a claim for an electrical licence allowance of \$10 per week.¹²²

Commissioner Kelly explained that this claim was based on a principle similar to an allowance paid to licensed plumbers in the building trades and could see ‘little wrong with the principle’, however, he was not prepared, at this point, to grant the application.¹²³ Plumbers, issued with a licence by the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Department and covered under the Building Trades Award, 1953, were granted a licence allowance of £3 per week. This award was for building workers employed in the private sector.¹²⁴ In a consolidated award for the building trades covering private industry in the whole of the State, registered in December 1960, plumbers were granted a licence allowance of \$5 per week.¹²⁵

In 1968 the ETUWA applied for an increase of \$3.10 per week to the margin of an electrical tradesman in possession of an electrical licence employed under the Steel Industry Workers (Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd) Award.¹²⁶ Commissioner E.R. Kelly argued:

It may be that electrical fitters exercise a higher degree of skill than some other tradesmen but, whatever the extent of that skill may, it was taken into consideration and given due weight in arriving at the margin to be paid to all tradesmen. To fix a higher margin for electrical tradesmen now, before the term of the Metal Trades (General) Award has run its course, would, in my opinion, be an improper exercise of the Commission’s discretion.¹²⁷

While Kelly refused the ETUWA’s claim for a licence allowance, in December 1968, just two months later Commissioner Cort granted a licence allowance of \$10 per week to plumbers working for private employers in the building and construction industries covered under the Building Trades Award, 1968.¹²⁸

¹²² *WAIG*, Vol. 46, 1966, p. 732.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 733.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 33, 1953, Building Trades Award, 1953, pp. 57–69, Clause 8 (b), p. 62.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 40, 1960, Building Trades Award, pp. 677–95, Clause 14(f) (iii), p. 683.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 48, 1968 - 1969, ‘Judgment of application by ETUWA to amend the Steel Industry Workers (Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd) Award, 1962’, pp. 648–9, p. 648.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 48, 1968, Building Trades Award, 1968, pp. 1015–38, Clause 9, p. 1022.

The ETUWA and its members in the electrical contracting industry believed that a licence allowance for holders of an electrical licence was the ultimate recognition of their special skills and responsibilities. Therefore, in the log of claims for an electrical contracting industry award a claim for a licence allowance was the second item after a claim for a wage increase. The 1974 log of claims for an Electrical Contracting Industry Award demanded a weekly wage of \$110 with an additional 5% paid to the holder of a single licence issued by the State Electricity Commission (SEC) of Western Australia. In addition an allowance of 10% extra was to be paid to the holder of a licence issued by the SEC for both electrical fitting and installing.¹²⁹ However, by the time the union's ambit claim was submitted the licence allowance claim was changed to a flat \$12 per week. Commissioner Collier was not prepared to agree to this amount in this initial award. Collier stated that the union had not supplied him with sufficient evidence to accept the claim.¹³⁰

The union did not give up and applied for a licence allowance in a further application to amend the Electrical Contracting Industry Award in 1975 and again in 1976, but on both occasions the application was rejected. In the 1976 application, while Commissioner Cort applauded the persistence shown by the union in applying for a licence allowance since the claim for a discrete award for this industry had first emerged, but, notwithstanding the 'creditable and tenacious efforts' of ETUWA representative Gilbert who appeared for the union on each occasion, he once again rejected the application.¹³¹

In 1977 the union tried a different approach and applied for a licence allowance to be inserted into awards covering electrical licence holders employed by government instrumentalities. This time Commissioner Cort recognised 'the

¹²⁹ *Live Wire*, Vol. 63, December 1973, p. 11.

¹³⁰ *WAIG*, Vol. 54, 1974, p. 608.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 56, 1976, pp. 338.

carefully prepared and well documented submission' of the union and was prepared to grant a flat weekly allowance of \$6.50 for holders of electrical licences in a number of awards.¹³² In 1978 the union applied for a licence allowance in a number of awards covering private industry — such as the Metal Trades (General) Award — and, at the same time, for the Lift Industry (Electrical and Metal Trades) Award, and, once again for the Electrical Contracting Industry Award. The application was successful for awards covering private industry and a licence allowance of \$6.50 per week was inserted into six awards.¹³³ However, once again the union's application for a licence allowance in the Electrical Contracting Industry Award and the Lift Industry Award was denied. Commissioner Cort argued that the higher wage rates granted to electrical workers in these two awards were adequate compensation for holding an electrical licence. It was not until the amended and consolidated Electrical Contracting Industry Award of 1979 was registered that the union finally achieved the inclusion of a licence allowance for electrical workers in this industry.¹³⁴

Another significant provision in the 1979 Electrical Contracting Industry Award was the provision for a worker to return home every six weeks at the employers' expense and with additional leave on pay for that purpose. This was to become known as Rest and Recreation Leave (R and R Leave).¹³⁵ During the first half of the twentieth century workers in the building and construction industry were

¹³² Ibid., Vol. 57, 1977, pp. 1858–1862. The awards were: the Engineering Trades (Government) Award Nos. 29, 30 and 31 of 1961 and 3 of 1962; the Government Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Employees Award No. 14 of 1969 and the Railway Employees Award No. 18 of 1969.

¹³³ Ibid., Vol. 58, 1978, pp. 541–543. The awards were: the Building and Engineering Trades (Nickel Mining and Processing) Award, No. 20 of 1968; the Electrical Trades (Goldmining) Award, No. 57 of 1968; the Engineering and Engine Drivers (Nickel Smelting) Award, No. 4 of 1973, the Iron and Steel Industry Workers (Australian Iron and Steel Pty Ltd) Award, No. 1 of 1968, the Metal Trades (General) Award, No. 13 of 1965 and the Metal Trades (MTT) Award, No. 1 of 1974.

¹³⁴ Ibid., Vol. 59, 1979, p. 320. Provision for a licence allowance in the Lift Industry Award was not achieved until October 1980. *ETU News*, Vol. L, No. 290, December 1980/January 1981, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 308.

expected to work until the end of the job, sometimes being away from home for up to one year at a time. There were no provisions in awards or agreements for workers on distant projects in the north west to travel home after a specified period until the consolidated Building Trades Award registered in December 1960. In this award, if it was impracticable to return home for a weekend every three months, then after six months the worker was granted one day's leave without pay to enable him to return to his home for a 'long' weekend.¹³⁶ In 1979 Commissioner G.J. Martin was not prepared to grant the ETUWA's claim for R and R leave after six weeks.¹³⁷ Instead it was agreed that a worker could return to his home or to Perth or to any other place at a weekend to be mutually agreed, after four months' continuous service. In addition to the weekend the worker would be entitled to two days' leave on ordinary pay. Further, the employer would reimburse the worker the equivalent of an ordinary air fare to Perth on the first pay period after his return.¹³⁸ By the 1980s the period of R and R Leave had increased to four days after three months' continuous service, and by 2008 the unions had negotiated R and R Leave of seven days after 28 days' service (for some projects).¹³⁹

Table 8.4 outlines the increased wage rates achieved by the ETUWA for electrical workers in the electrical contracting industry under the amended Electrical Contracting Industry Award registered in February 1979. These rates included a construction allowance, to a maximum of \$14.70 per week and a tool allowance of \$1.50 per week, giving electrical workers the highest rate of pay of any worker in this industry. These rates are compared with the rates for construction workers covered under the amended and consolidated Metal Trades (General) Award, 1966,

¹³⁶ Ibid. Vol. 40, 1960, Building Trades Award, p. 686.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Vol. 59, 1979, p. 308.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 321.

¹³⁹ Conversation with Les McLaughlan, 24 November 2012.

Part II, Construction Work, which was registered in March 1979, just after the amended Electrical Contracting Industry Award.

Table 8.4. Weekly wage rates for electrical workers covered under the consolidated and amended Metal Trades (General) Award registered 20 March 1979 and the Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1979 registered 27 February 1979.

Classifications	Metal Trades (General) Award (Part II) consolidated and amended to cover metal trades classifications working in the construction industry. Registered on 20 March 1979		Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1979 registered on 27 February 1979	
	Column A	Column B	Column A	Column B
	Includes: Licence Allowance of \$6.50 p/w for holders of electrical licences. A maximum allowance of \$40.00 p/w for workers engaged on a large industrial undertaking, this included: Electrician Special Class; Electrical Fitter and Electrical Installer. Maximum allowance of \$31.40 p/w for Tradesmen's Assistants. A further maximum construction allowance of \$15 p/w is included in this amount.	Base weekly rate of \$165.90 for Electricians Special Class. \$153.80 for Electrical and Metal Tradesmen. \$131.50 for Tradesmen's Assistants.	Special Payment of \$53.90 p/w. Plus Licence Allowance of \$6.50 p/w and Tool Allowance of \$1.50 p/w for Electrician Special Class, Electrical Fitter, Electrical Installer and Cable Jointer. Special Payment of \$43.12 p/w for Tradesman's Assistants. And, a maximum construction allowance of \$14.70 per week for all workers.	Weekly rate of \$165.90 for Electrician Special Class. \$153.80 for Electrical Tradesmen. \$131.00 for Tradesmen's Assistants.
		Plus Column A		Plus Column A
Electrician Special Class	61.50	227.40	76.60	242.50
Electrical Fitter	61.50	215.30	76.60	230.40
Electrical Installer	61.50	215.30	76.60	230.40
Cable Jointer	No corresponding classification		76.60	230.40
Metal Tradesman	55.00	208.80	No corresponding classification	
Trades Assistant	46.40	177.90	68.60	199.60

Source: *WAG*, Vol. 59 Part 1, 1979, Electrical Contracting Industry Award, p. 324 and Metal Trades (General) Award, p. 613.

These new rates meant that electrical workers engaged in any large-scale construction project and covered under the Electrical Contracting Industry Award received \$15.10 per week more than metal trades classifications covered by the Metal Trades (General) Award, Part II, in the same industry. And an electrical trades assistant's wage rose to \$199.60, which was \$21.70 more than trades

assistants covered under the Metal Trades (General) Award, Part II. The ETUWA had managed to increase significantly the wage relativity between all electrical trades classifications and metal trades classifications in the construction industry in Western Australia.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 1960s the ETUWA, with Fletcher as secretary, seemed content to remain within the State arbitration system and under a general metal trades award. Salmon's appointment, in 1961, saw the ETUWA gradually become more influential within the State industrial relations arena, as by the mid 1960s Salmon had become the main advocate for the metal trades unions in major award hearings. Throughout the 1960s the ETUWA leadership endeavoured to keep the union within the guidelines of the State arbitration system, opposing any calls by the membership to move the union to a more militant stance. Dufty argues that unions without 'industrial muscle' used the arbitration system, only unions with 'more muscle' were able to take direct action when negotiations reached an impasse.¹⁴⁰ By the end of the 1960s, although there was an increasing number of electrical workers arriving in Western Australia from inter-state and overseas, the ETUWA continued to be a numerically weak union. It became, however, progressively more difficult for the union leadership to keep electrical contracting industry members confined within the strict limits of the State arbitration system.

Moreover, due to the rapid rise in population and a greater number of large-scale industrial projects being undertaken from the mid-1960s industrial relations in the State changed dramatically. In 1970 the new branch secretary, Errol Smith, argued that the 1969 Kwinana Agreement was the nexus in WA between an

¹⁴⁰N.F. Dufty, 'The Operation of Western Australian Unions and the Prospects for Collective Bargaining in *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 1979, p. 76.

industrial relations system based on arbitration and one of conciliation. Prior to the Kwinana Agreement the majority of wage increases and extra award benefits were contested before arbitration. Due to the far reaching effects of arbitral decisions the increases were minimal and any improved conditions achieved were conservative. However, by the end of the 1960s, with the increasing use of conciliation the unions were more successful in obtaining better wages and conditions for members based on an individual industry's capacity to pay.¹⁴¹

After gaining wage parity for electrical installers working in the electrical contracting industry in 1962 members in this area of the trade showed an increasing desire to be more active in union affairs. However, since the majority of these members worked on the KIS and on industrial construction sites in the north-west it was difficult for them to regularly attend State council meetings in Perth. As a means of rectifying this problem a number of sub-branches were established to aid in communications between members and ETUWA officials based in Perth. The Medina sub-branch of the ETUWA, established in 1966, was one of them. This sub-branch, in particular, became a centre for electrical contracting industry members to meet and discuss issues of importance directly relating to this area of the trade.

The change to the union executive in 1970 promoted a more militant stance by the union and the new leadership encouraged members in the electrical contracting area of the trade to take a more active part in union affairs. Evidence of this change in mood is shown when in late 1973 members such as Tom Rynn, secretary of the Medina branch, and John Gandini, both militant unionists, nominated and were accepted for positions onto the general trade section of the State

¹⁴¹ *WAIG*, Vol. 47, 1967, the 'Iron Ore Production and Processing Award, p. 26. Salmon argued strongly on behalf of the unions affiliated with the Trades and Labour Council for an industry allowance based on the 'the emerging prosperity of this industry'. And, in February 1969 Commissioner Kelly approved '...in principle the claim for an additional wage in this industry based on the capacity of the individual employers engaged therein', in *Ibid.*, Vol. 49, 1969, p. 116.

council. From this position they could represent members working in the electrical contracting industry and agitate for change.

After the protracted dispute to achieve an award for electrical workers employed in the lift industry, the ETUWA undertook, with new vigour, negotiations for the establishment of an award for electrical workers employed in the electrical contracting industry. ETUWA organiser Barry Gilbert had taken over the role previously undertaken by Salmon as the ETUWA's main advocate in the Industrial Commission and, in October 1973, began negotiations with electrical contracting employers. The achievement of an independent award for this area of the electrical trade was very important for both the union and members alike. An independent award meant that the ETUWA could negotiate better wages and conditions solely for electrical trades workers in this industry.

The Electrical Contracting Industry Award was registered on 21 June 1974, finally breaking the nexus between the ETUWA and the metal industry. From this point on, as the union of a recognised and separate industry, the ETUWA was able to achieve better wages and conditions for its members. And the struggle did not end there. The union continued to fight for what it believed was the ultimate recognition and reward of the unique skills and responsibilities of the electrical trade — the payment of a licence allowance for electrical licence holders. By February 1979 this was achieved in the majority of awards covering electrical workers. Moreover, the amended and consolidated Electrical Contracting Industry Award, 1979 was just the beginning of the ETUWA's endeavours to ensure that electrical trades workers continued to maintain a high wage relativity and strived to obtain, for its members, conditions specific to their unique industry.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

This thesis has told the story of a unique union comprising of a singular trade — the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) and the position it shaped for itself within the Western Australia labour movement. This thesis has shown that since its conception the ETUWA has resolutely maintained a stance of being craft conscious and trade-focussed. This is in contrast with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers/Amalgamated Engineering Union (ASE/AEU) which, by gradually amalgamating with other unions, has, over the period under review, developed into a general industry union. For most of the first fifty years of the twentieth century the ETUWA struggled with its main opponents, the ASE/AEU and the Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Party (WA ALP), to establish a place for itself within the WA labour movement, eventually becoming recognised as an independent organisation and as the only union representing all electrical workers employed in the electrical industry.

The slow development of the ETUWA was due to a number of factors. Throughout the first sixty years of the century commercial and industrial development and the manufacturing industry was slow to develop in WA and therefore economic circumstances were not conducive to the union's growth. Until the mid 1960s it remained a numerically small union with a scattered membership spread over a large area making it difficult to successfully organise. The main opponent to its establishment was the larger and already well-established ASE/AEU. It was only in Western Australia that this union had legitimate coverage of electrical workers. The situation was different in other large developed centres of population

in the eastern states and Britain. There the electrical trades and the unions representing electrical workers had grown in conjunction with the electrical industry and this was also the case with the engineering trades in the engineering and manufacturing industries. While discussions to amalgamate had taken place between both these unions in the larger eastern states and in Britain, on a few occasions throughout the last century, neither union had wanted to relinquish its independent status.¹

Another area of divergence has been in the political stance of the ETUWA and the Western Australian branch of the ASE/AEU. By the end of the 1960s the AEU had grown considerably, becoming less dominated by craft concerns and more focussed on general industrial and political campaigns. In their article examining the transformation of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) from 1973 to 1985,² Scalmer and Irving argue that, by the beginning of the 1970s, the vision of the modern union (the AMWU) was broad-ranging:

based around a number of strategies: amalgamation to form industry unions; industrial activity and collective bargaining as an alternative to arbitration; identification and response to automation; promulgation of policies of worker control and interest in broad social questions; creation of union education and research facilities; and a greater activity of the rank and file, especially in the form of shop committees.³

Meanwhile, even though some of the executive and members of the ETUWA were committed and active members of the WA ALP, the ETUWA remained stalwartly committed to the view that, as a craft union, its attention must remain fixed on the interests of its members and the ongoing development of the electrical trades.

¹ The ETU in Britain has since amalgamated with the union representing the engineering industry.

² Australian Trade Union Archives website. In 1921 the ASE became the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Australian Section (AEU), a name change that more accurately reflected its association with the British Amalgamated Engineering Union. In 1972 the AEU began amalgamations with other engineering and metal work unions, and in 1973 became known as the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union.

³ Sean Scalmer and Terry Irving, 'The Rise of the Modern Labour Technocrat: Intellectual Labour and Transformation of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union, 1973-85' in *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 77, pp. 64-82, November 1999, p. 65.

In 1905 in Perth a small group of electrical workers came together with a common interest. They were craftsmen and were proud of their trade and the position they held in this fast developing and exciting new industry. They wanted to establish a trade union to organise workers employed solely in the electrical industry and to achieve acceptance as an independent union within the WA labour movement. And, so, in January 1906, the Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU) was registered under the Trades Union and Industrial Arbitration and Conciliation Acts.

One reason why these men wanted a trade union of their own was to give electrical workers a strong independent voice. Another reason was that they wanted their occupation to be recognised as a skilled trade. A further reason was that they wanted a union that covered only workers employed in the electrical industry, as prior to this electrical workers had to join unions that covered the many different industries in which electrical workers were employed. In the early 1900s a number of the new union's members were employed as electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry and had more in common and felt more aligned to the building and industrial construction industries. At the same time electrical fitters employed at the Railway Workshops and other engineering workshops working alongside engineering tradesmen, were more aligned to the larger and more powerful ASE/AEU.

The METU was registered just a few years after the creation of the Western Australian Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1902. This Act was passed to regulate the labour market in response to the growth of trade unions and the surge in industrial action of the 1890s.⁴ Ray Markey argues that under arbitration craft

⁴ Stuart Macintyre and Richard Mitchell, eds, *Australian Studies in Labour Relations. Foundations of Arbitration. The Origins and Effects of State Compulsory Arbitration 1890-1914*, Centre for Industrial Relations and Labour Studies, University of Melbourne, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p. 9.

unions could benefit 'from widespread unionization of the workforce in an entire industry whilst maintaining their own separate organization'.⁵ Therefore, arbitration aided the METU in proving its worth by allowing it to successfully negotiate independent industrial awards specific to the whole of the electrical industry, achieving better rates of pay and conditions for all electrical workers. And, at the same time the union was able to use the Act to promote the inclusion of clauses for a government-approved apprenticeship system into its awards and agreements.

In 1911, as the METU began negotiating its second round of industrial awards, electrical workers on the goldfields were establishing their own union, initially known as the Goldfields Electrical Workers Union. In 1913 it changed its name to the Goldfields Electrical Trades Union (GETU). The formation of these two separate unions, in the early years of the twentieth-century, is evidence that electrical workers throughout the State were intent on forming separate organisations which would act as a single, independent voice for their trade. Further evidence that the union was keen to promote unity in the trade and between members is shown by the union leadership actively encouraging its members to participate in a variety of labour movement and trade union events. Member attendance at these events encouraged pride in the trade and the industry, and developed a strong bond between individual members and the organisation as a whole.

Between 1907 and the First World War the Australian engineering industry prospered,⁶ while the electrical industry in Western Australia did not develop at the same rate. Under the prevailing ideology union amalgamation was a quick way for

⁵ Ray Markey, 'Trade unions, the Labor Party and the Introduction of Arbitration in New South Wales and the Commonwealth' in *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶ K.D. Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852–1920*, Department of Economic History Research School of Social Sciences Australian National University, Canberra, 1970, p. 163.

the ASE to increase its membership and influence. In 1908 Tom Mann advocated industrial unionism, arguing that:

The broadening of the basis [of trade unionism], the merging of sectional unions, the separation of the economic or fighting fund from the friendly society portion, and the trend towards unity of action over the whole industrial field, is receiving attention now in New South Wales, Victoria and New Zealand more particularly... The needs of the hour are for all unions to pool their fighting funds...and never have a strike that is not backed by the whole of the kindred trades.⁷

Under growing pressure from the ASE, the majority of METU members, mostly those members working in the Railway Workshops, voted to amalgamate, albeit under protest from METU secretary, A.W.B. Pettit. And, in August 1914 the METU and the ASE Perth No. 2 Branch amalgamated, taking the latter organisation's name. Over the next twelve years electrical workers in Western Australia were subsumed into the engineering industry.

Unlike most unions, whose main hindrance to growth and development was the attitudes and actions of employers, the ETUWA's most vigorous opposition did not come from employers but rather from the engineering and metal trades unions, with the main protagonists being the AEU, and the WA ALP. The WA economy and therefore the electrical contracting industry grew in the mid-1920s, leading to an increase in the number of electrical workers coming to WA, and therefore a rising demand for an independent electrical trades union. Notwithstanding initial opposition, and with significant help from the national council of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU), the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) was formed in 1926.

This move infuriated the AEU and led to years of concerted campaigning against electrical workers in their attempts to achieve registration as an independent union. Within months of the ETUWA's formation, in 1926, the AEU opposed its

⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

registration asserting that electrical workers conveniently and industrially belonged to the AEU. And, for the next twenty-three years, between 1926 to 1949, the AEU persuaded other unions to join with it in opposing the ETUWA's registration under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act.

The AEU, one of the influential unions in the WA labour movement, brought its influence to bear on the WA ALP to deny affiliation to the ETUWA. This situation continued even after other branches of the ETU, on a number of occasions, threatened to disaffiliate from the ALP in their respective States. As well, over the same period, the AEU (along with other unions) successfully objected to every application the ETUWA made for registration as an independent union. These successes strengthened the AEU's legitimacy to continue to claim representational rights over the electrical trades in all industries over which the AEU had coverage.

This situation was ripe for change when in 1947 the WA ALP established itself as a branch of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). This arm of the WA ALP was known as the WA Trades Union Industrial Council (WATUIC) and its main objectives were to 'promote and develop the closest possible relations between the Trade Union Movement and its political wing, the Australian Labor Party'.⁸ Thus, as a member of a national body, the ACTU, the WA ALP was forced to confront national union issues as opposed to simply focussing on WA issues.

This history of the ETUWA clearly demonstrates that without the support of the national ETU it is unlikely that the ETUWA could have survived for so long. Apart from the importance to the membership of maintaining a sense of unity by supporting the ETUWA the national body of the union also benefitted through maintaining and strengthening its presence in every State. And so, in yet another

⁸ Bobbie Oliver, *Unity is Strength. A History of the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council in Western Australia*, API Network, Australia Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 2003, p. 204.

push to solve the problem of the ETUWA's lack of affiliation and registration, the national council of the ETU deliberately chose to hold its 1947 annual conference in WA.

The decision to hold the 1947 ETU annual conference in Perth was designed to force the WA ALP to address the 'vexed' issue of ETUWA affiliation. As a result of this conference and ongoing discussions, the WA ALP in 1949 accepted the ETUWA as an affiliated union thus clearing the path to State registration under the WA Industrial Commission later in the same year. The two ETUWA secretaries during this period were F.R. Cox and Barry d'Almeida. Both ran the union on their own and struggled, at times, under severe adverse conditions, however they always maintained the great effort required to keep the union operating. D'Almeida, in particular, spent sixteen years as secretary, resigning in 1949 after registration was finally achieved and receiving grateful thanks from the national ETU and ETUWA members.

Without the ongoing moral and financial support of the national ETU the ETUWA could not have continued to function and survive the twenty-three years it took to obtain registration. The solidarity shown by the other ETU branches made it possible, in 1949, for the ETU to be registered and recognised in every State as the legitimate union representing the interests of all Australian electrical workers. In his study of another emerging union, the Miscellaneous Workers' Union in Tasmania, Hess argues that it was necessary for the national body of this union to give 'serious organisational assistance' to its branch in Tasmania as:

Aside from any other consideration, this [an unorganised and weak branch] posed a potential problem for the organisation federally because of competition from other

unions which might have been able to use the FMWU's weakness in Tasmania to extend their own coverage claims first within the state and subsequently nationally.⁹

As an unregistered and non-affiliated union, prior to 1949, the ETUWA had no bargaining power within the state arbitration and conciliation system, except on the goldfields, after it gained registration there in 1935. During the period between 1914 to 1949 electrical fitters were grouped with other engineering workers and were treated equally, however, electrical installers were not regarded as qualified engineering tradesmen and were paid at a lower rate. Even after 1949 the ETUWA had to compete with demands made by the AEU and the Australasian Society of Engineers for any wage increases or conditions in general awards covering electrical workers in opposition to the larger numbers of engineering trades. It was not until the early 1960s, when electrical installers reached a critical mass, that the ETUWA was able to demand these tradesmen be recognised as being as skilled as electrical fitters, armature winders and engineering tradesmen.

After registration in 1949 the first issue to be tackled was the negotiation of independent awards. The union was able to achieve its first independent award for electrical installers employed in the electrical contracting industry in 1951. This was not to be a lasting award though, and, due to the continuing low numbers in the electrical contracting industry in WA, the award was cancelled and electrical installers were once again subsumed into a general metal trades award. As well, the majority of ETUWA members employed in other areas were already enmeshed in existing awards registered by other unions. Therefore, instead of using up its limited resources in fighting for independent awards, the ETUWA applied to be party to already existing awards as they came up for renewal.

⁹ Michael Hess, 'Against the Odds: Establishing the Miscellaneous Workers' Union in Tasmania, 1949–59' in *Labour History*, Vol. 96, pp. 101–16, May 2009, p. 108.

The ETUWA placed enormous importance on the development of a strong apprenticeship-training scheme and ongoing post-trade training. A first-rate training scheme for apprentices and journeymen is a cornerstone issue for a craft-based union. A supported and strong apprenticeship system produces journeymen proud of their trade and interested in its ongoing development. Therefore, from its inception the ETU saw, as one of its main aims, the need not only to understand current trade skill requirements but prepare for emerging technological change such as the move from DC power to AC power, the widespread introduction of electric motor and control systems, the expansion of electrically operated lifts and conveyors, the growing telecommunication industry and the early electronic technologies associated with the radio and television industries. In contrast to this process of enskilling in the electrical trade, by the late 1960s, the AEU was under threat of their trades becoming deskilled due to the increasing automation of the engineering industry.

It was because of this view of the importance of the need for a solid apprentice training system that, immediately after its registration in 1950, officers of the ETUWA and interested members nominated and were accepted on a number of government boards and committees overseeing areas such as the governance of apprenticeships, apprentice and post-trade training syllabi committees and as representatives of the union on the Electrical Workers Board dealing with electrical licensing issues. Another issue with which it had some success was the acceptance of electrical installing as a recognised trade in the engineering award for the south-west land division. Because of its lack of understanding that electrical installing was a skilled trade equal to electrical fitting, the AEU had allowed to continue the situation in which electrical installing was omitted from the award as a recognised apprenticed trade. It was not until the award was under review in 1951 that, as the

recognised body representing electrical workers, the ETUWA was able to change the relevant clause.

The ETUWA was determined to future-proof the electrical trade by promoting the enrolment of members in post-trade training courses. The 1950s saw the rapid development of new technologies, such as television and electronics, and therefore the need for electrical workers to learn new skills. With its registration and acceptance as the sole representative of the electrical trades, officers and active members of the ETUWA were able and willing to give of their time to take part in the development of new training syllabi for apprentices and tradesmen. The ETUWA was influential in the introduction of classes in television repair at the Perth Technical College. Further, the union and interested members promoted the need for the establishment of classes for apprentices and electrical tradesmen in industrial electronics and industrial instrumentation at the Perth Technical College in the mid 1950s.

Another issue central to the development of this union was the change in 1962 to a more member-dominated and democratic structure of union governance. Prior to this, the ETUWA was governed by an executive committee of management, established in 1926, consisting of the secretary, president, vice president, treasurer and three trustees when the ETU in Western Australia was formed as a self-funded branch of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia. The ETUWA Goldfields Sub-branch, established in 1935, was managed by the same executive as the ETUWA with a locally elected secretary and president to see to the day-to-day running of the sub-branch.

In 1962 the ETUWA adopted the new national ETU structure allowing for tiered committees of management consisting of, an executive overseen by a state

council which was made up of rank and file delegates from six industry sections of the trade. The ETUWA held general meetings regularly and these were attended by the full council and interested members. As well, the ETUWA was entitled to send a representative to the annual ETU national conference. Each State branch of the ETU was represented at this conference held in all States on a rotating basis. Each State was entitled to submit items for the conference agenda on issues ranging from rule changes to general policy. Therefore, with the participation of a larger and more active rank and file contingent elected as delegates on state council, after 1962 the union was more democratic and more representative of members' demands than it had been under the old structure.

The decade between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s was a period of change in the industrial relations system in Western Australia. Throughout the 1950s the ETUWA had remained small and ineffectual and was content to stay within the confines of the larger metal trades industry awards. By the mid-1960s, ETUWA organiser, Owen Salmon, had established himself as an eloquent advocate for the metal trades unions during the hearings in the Industrial Commission for a new metal trades award. This award, however, did nothing to alleviate the problems affecting electrical installers employed in the growing electrical contracting industry. In 1969 he successfully negotiated a private industrial agreement for all metal trades workers and employers involved in any project on the Kwinana Industrial Strip (KIS). The Metal Trades' Kwinana Area (Large Industrial or Civil Engineering Projects) Agreement (the Kwinana Agreement) was a turning point in industrial relations in Western Australia, joining the best principles of arbitration and collective bargaining. While Salmon's role allowed the ETUWA more credence within the

WA labour movement, it remained a union with little strength to take any direct action to achieve its demands. This situation, however, was about to change.

This change could not occur until Western Australia achieved the level of industrial development to sustain a critical mass of electrical workers in the electrical contracting industry. From the late-1960s to the mid-1970s Western Australian experienced a rapid growth in its population and ETUWA membership number followed. A surge in industrial development on the Kwinana Industrial Strep (KIS), south of Perth, and on the iron ore projects in the Pilbara saw the next wave of population growth in WA. The arrival of greater numbers of skilled workers from overseas and interstate included a large number of electrical workers, particularly for the electrical contracting industry. Over the previous forty years the ETUWA had struggled to survive. It had grappled with the problems of dealing with a small and scattered membership. Then, increased industrial development in the State brought an increase to its membership, but the union remained under the conservative leadership of secretary Fletcher and organiser Salmon until 1970. At that point the union leadership changed. Errol Smith became secretary, Barry Gilbert and Joe Watson took up organising positions and this new union executive promoted the participation of a more actively involved state council, moving the ETUWA's previous conservative position to a more militant stance.

The early 1970s was not only a time of change for the ETUWA, the other Australian states and indeed the rest of the industrialised world were experiencing a period of political radicalism. Tom Bramble argues that between 1969 and 1974 Australian workers had 'not only won back the right to strike; they had gained the

confidence to use it'.¹⁰ He states that it was 'rank-and-file workers who were driving the agenda, and union leaders who did not keep up were simply bypassed'.¹¹

Therefore, it was timely that the ETUWA's new leadership team was more empathetic of the conditions under which electrical installers in the electrical contracting industry worked and the need for the union to demand the establishment of an independent award for this area of the trade that would properly reward these workers for their skills, position of responsibility and adverse conditions under which they worked.

It took another four years before an independent award for this area of the trade was achieved. The main reason for this delay was the increased workload that the growing membership placed on the new secretary and organisers. In this period electrical installers were making increasingly strident demands for the ETUWA to break the nexus between the electrical contracting industry and the metal industry. This new cohort of electrical workers was more willing to take direct action to achieve its objective. By 1974, with a numerically larger and more militant membership but without the need for any direct action, the ETUWA successfully negotiated an independent award covering all electrical workers employed in the electrical contracting industry.

After achieving an independent award for the electrical contracting industry the union turned its attention to achieving full recognition of the skills and responsibilities required by all electrical tradesmen, an electrical licence allowance. After several unsuccessful applications between 1974 and 1977 the union was successful in achieving a licence allowance in awards covering government instrumentalities in 1977. It continued to struggle to widen the coverage and in 1979

¹⁰ Tom Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia. A History From Flood to Ebb Tide*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2008, pp. 45–6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

the ETUWA was finally rewarded for its tenacity when a licence allowance of \$6.50 per week was included in the consolidated Electrical Contracting Industry Award.

It was only by the establishment of an independent electrical trades union that all workers employed in the electrical industry in Western Australia could achieve effective union representation. Only with an independent voice could electrical workers ensure that wages, working conditions, governance of apprentices, legislation and regulations for the industry, and the ultimate status of the trade, were improved. High amongst the union's principal objectives was the promotion of a safe working environment for electrical workers and regulations for the safe installation of electricity to protect property and the safety of the general public. With a separate and discrete electrical trade union and a growing, active and committed membership, electrical trades workers have found appropriate and militant industrial representation to protect their legitimate work interests.

This dissertation has filled a gap in WA labour history by situating this unique craft union within the WA labour movement and acknowledging its long, determined struggle for independence. It has also left scope for further research into the subsequent development and growth of this union over the following three decades.¹²

¹² On 28 February 2013, after a modernisation of the state union rules the union known as the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (WA Branch, Engineering and Electrical Division) (CEPU) changed its name back to the Electrical Trades Union Western Australia (ETUWA). At a national level the ETUWA remains a branch of the national CEPU's Electrical, Energy and Services Division. See Appendix 4 for a timeline of the organisations established to represent electrical workers in Western Australia.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Examination papers for electrical trades, 1941.

Format for examination papers for electrical trades - 1941	
Examination papers for each licence area of the electrical trades	Number of questions on each subject
Electrical Installer	
Elementary theory and calculations	Two
Wiring Rules and their application	Three
Practical methods of wiring	Four
Resuscitation	One
Electrical Fitter	
Elementary theory and calculations	Two
Knowledge of construction and connection of machines, appliances and switchboards	Three
Use of tools of trade and materials, and knowledge of fitting processes	Two
Wiring Rules	Two
General regulations	One
Armature Winder	
Elementary theory and calculations	Three
Practical and general knowledge of machines, materials and tools	Five
Wiring rules	One
General regulations	One
Applicants for an 'A' Grade licence would be examined in all three section papers.	

Source: Electrical Workers' Board Minutes, 28 May 1941.

APPENDIX 2. SYLLABUS OF TRAINING FOR ELECTRICAL INSTALLING AND ELECTRICAL FITTING AND, FOR COMPARISON PURPOSES, SYLLABUS OF TRAINING FOR ENGINEERING TRADES OF MECHANICAL FITTING AND TURNING.

Source: *Western Australian Industrial Gazette*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1952, pp. 364–366 and pp. 537–539.

Electrical Installing

First Year

- Elementary principles of electricity and magnetism. Production of electricity, electrical circuit and current. Ohms law and its application to resistance in series and parallel. Volt, ampere. Properties of materials used as conductors and insulators, with a knowledge of their qualities and applications in wiring practice. Knowledge of the commonly used tools of trade, their application and correct method of usage, including the hack saw, soldering iron, files, drills, taps, dies, etc.
- Accessories in common use – their composition and under what conditions are they used, including switches (single, double and triple pole), cut-outs, fuses, wires, cables, insulators, ceiling roses, plugs, holders, lamps, Class A and B conduits and fittings.
- Batteries (primary cells). The principle and application of bells, trambler – their construction and operation. Bell indicator boards, operating in a bell circuit.
- Soldering methods and types of flux.
- Standard wire gauge. Sizes of wire and cables commonly used in wiring practice.
- Earthing – what is implied; a knowledge of earth situation.
- Simple wiring circuits.
- A knowledge of the essential requirements of the Electricity Act, Regulations, Parts I, II and V.
- A knowledge of the Standards Association Wiring Rules as applied to this Syllabus.
- A knowledge of the procedure in cases of electrical accidents, release of victim from contact with live conductors, resuscitation, and treatment of persons suffering from shock and for electric burns.

Second Year

- Principles of electricity and magnetism (advanced on First Year Syllabus). E.M.F. current (magnetic action of current). Definition of power. Relations between electrical units and heat units.
- The magnetisation of iron by electric current. The electro magnet magnetic induction. Electrical testing and measuring instruments; the application, use and care of the megger, voltmeter and ammeter.
- Wiring circuits, AC and DC. The loop in system; use of connectors and making insulating joints; open-wiring on cleats and insulators. Lead and hard-rubber covered. Systems of wiring in plain and screwed conduits. Carrying capacities of Class A and B conduits.
- Necessity for and methods of obtaining mechanical and electrical continuity in metallic protection of conductors; protection afforded by earthing and how obtain. Methods of testing installations and procedure.
- Insulators and conductors – the effects of conditions such as heat, moisture and exposure on their behaviour and durability.
- Recognition at sight of types and grades of commonly used cables and wires.
- Principles of domestic appliances in common use.
- A knowledge of the S.A.A. Wiring Rules as applied to this Syllabus and that contained in the First Year Syllabus.
- A proper knowledge of the subjects as enumerated in the First Year Syllabus.

Third Year

- Power developed in a circuit, watt, kilowatt, horsepower. Work and energy, watthour, kilowatt hour (Kelvin). Electric bells, indicators, buzzers, alarms and bell circuits operated from supply mains. Grades of insulation required for low and medium pressures.
- The arrangement, connection and making of diagrams and sketches of wiring and circuits.
- Switchboards and switchgear – methods of setting out, assembling, wiring construction and testing.
- Faults – method of testing for, locating and remedying AC and DC.
- Meters, use and construction of and connection. Voltmeters, ammeters, watt meters and megger.
- Transformers – the principles of construction and use.
- Distribution – two and three wire DC. Three and four wire AC systems.
- Service lines and supply authorities' equipment for lighting and power.
- Drawings and specifications of work.
- A proper knowledge of the subjects as enumerated in the First and Second Year Syllabi.

Fourth Year

- Electric lighting, foot candles; desirable intensities of illumination. Types of incandescent lamps; relations between candle power, lumens and watts in each type of lamp, and effect of voltage variation on candle power, efficiency and life.

- Constructional details; uses and methods of connecting various types of non-automatic accessories operated from supply mains; single-pole, multi-pole and intermediate switches; master switches, three-heat switches, knife, ironclad and all insulated switches.
- The operating principles and installation of direct and alternating current motors in general use, and non-automatic starting equipment, speed variation and control; alteration of direction of rotation and maintenance.
- The arrangement, connection, and making of diagrams and sketches of wiring switchboards and connections for lighting and power points and apparatus operated from two and three wire DC systems and AC single, two and three phase (three and four wire) systems.
- Drawing up brief specifications for the above.
- Calculations on the following: The current required to supply a number of lamps, motors, heaters, etc., taking into account efficiency, power factor, and diversity of load; a cross section of conductors required to carry a given current under given conditions of distance and voltage drop; the energy consumed by and the cost of running an installation or piece of apparatus for a given time.
- Measuring up and estimating the quantities of materials required and drawing up schedules of same for low and medium pressure installations.
- Motor starters – a knowledge of the construction method of operating, connection, and maintenance of the commonly used types of motor starters.
- A proper knowledge of the subjects as enumerated in the First, Second and Third Year Syllabi.

Fifth Year

- Recapitulation of previous years.

Electrical Fitting

First Year

- A knowledge of the commonly used tools of an electrical fitter, including those used in workshop practice – their description and use. A knowledge of the common screw threads and the cutting of same, using stocks with dies and/or taps; description and name of various types of screws.
- Drills – their use and description of; method of sharpening.
- Description, use and application of the micrometer.
- Physical and electrical properties of materials used in appliances and installations; their uses and application.
- Lathe – a description of the various parts and their uses, with a knowledge of simple hand turning.
- Drilling machine – speeds necessary for various types of commonly used metals.
- Elementary principle of electricity and magnetism. Production of electricity; electrical circuit and current. Ohms law and its application to resistance in series and parallel. Volt ampere.
- Properties of materials used as conductors and insulators, with a knowledge of their qualities and application in wiring practice. Knowledge of the commonly used tools of trade, their application and correct method of usage, including the hack saw, soldering iron, files, drills, taps, dies, etc.
- Accessories in common use – their composition, and under what conditions are they used, including switches (single, double and triple pole), cut-outs, fuses, wires, cables, insulators, ceiling roses, plugs, holders, lamps, Class A and B conduits and fittings.
- Batteries (primary cells) – the principles and application of bells, trembler – their construction and operation.
- Bell indicator boards, operating in a bell circuit.
- Soldering methods and types of flux.
- Standard wire gauge – sizes of wire and cables commonly used in wiring practice.

Second Year

- Lathe work – preparation and centering work for lathe turning with set tool.
- Toolholders and tools for lathe – various types, description and their uses.
- Marking out, drilling and tapping of materials counter-sinking and boring, correct use of various types of chisels.
- Scrapers, reamers, punches, description, use and application, bearings – types and lubrication.
- Solders and fluxes, various types – description, uses and application. Methods of soldering.
- Principles of electricity and magnetism (advanced on First Year Syllabus); E.M.F. current (magnetic action of current). Definition of power. Relation between electrical units and heat units. The magnetisation of iron by electric current. The electric magnet magnetic induction.
- Electrical testing and measuring instruments, the application, use and care of the megger, voltmeter and ammeter.
- Wiring circuits, AC and DC – the loop in system, use of connectors and making insulating joints, open wiring on cleats and insulators. Lead and hard rubber covered. Systems of wiring in plain and screwed conduits. Carrying capacities of Class A and B conduits. Necessity for and methods of obtaining mechanical and electricity continuity in metallic protecting of conductors, protection afforded by earthing, and how obtained. Methods of testing installations and procedure.
- Insulators and conductors – the effects of conditions such as heat, moisture and exposure on their behaviour and durability. Recognition at sight of types and grades of commonly used cables and wires. Principles of domestic appliances in common use. A knowledge of the S.A.A. Wiring Rules as applied to this Syllabus and that

contained in the First Year Syllabus. A proper knowledge of the subjects as enumerated in the First Year Syllabus.

Third Year

- Lathe work – the principle of screw-cutting, single short threads, calculations for change wheel combinations. Making of simple bearings for small motors. Making and fitting simple electrical apparatus. Cutting keyways and fitting keys. Armature and commutators, construction, assembly, repairs and testing for faults and continuity, and balancing armatures. Testing equipment, construction, application and maintenance. Brush gear and brushes, construction assembly, and characteristics of brushes. AC and DC motors, starters, construction of simple starters, testing location and repair of faults. Use of simple jigs and templates. Power developed in a circuit, watt, kilowatt, horsepower. Work and energy, watt hour, kilowatt hour (Kelvin).
- Electric bells, indicators, buzzers, alarms, and bell circuits, operated from supply mains. Grades of insulation required for low and medium pressures. The arrangement, connection, and making of diagrams, and sketches of wiring and circuits. Switchboards and switchgear. Methods of setting out, assembling, wiring, construction and testing.
- Faults – method of testing for, locating, and remedying AC and DC meters, use and construction of and connection – voltmeters, ammeters, wattmeters, and megger. Transformers – the principles of construction and use. Distribution – two and three wire DC. Three and four wire AC systems. Service lines and supply authorities equipment for lighting and power. Drawings and specifications of work. A proper knowledge of the subjects as enumerated in the First and Second Year Syllabi.

Fourth Year

- Motors – a general knowledge of the construction, efficiency, power factor, starting torque, and performance of the commonly used types of motors, AC and DC, and the characteristics of the various types of AC motors, motor starters. Factors governing the choice and type of starters for a given motor and load.
- Elevators – A knowledge of the automatic and non-automatic control gear of lifts, and the principles of operation.
- Electric lighting, foot candles; desirable intensities of illumination. Types of incandescent lamps, relation between candle power, lumens and watts in each type of lamp, and effect of voltage variation on candle power, efficiency, and life.
- Constructional details, uses and methods of connecting various types of non-automatic accessories operated from supply mains, single pole, multi pole and intermediate switches, master switches, three-heat switches, knife, ironclad and all insulated switches.
- The operating principles and installation of direct and alternating current, motors in general use, and non-automatic starting equipment, speed variation and control, alteration of direction of rotation and maintenance.
- The arrangement, connection, and making of diagrams and sketches of wiring switchboards and connections for lighting and power points and apparatus operated from two and three wire DC systems and AC single, two and three phase (three and four wire) systems.
- Drawing up brief specifications for the above.
- Calculations on the following: The current required to supply a number of lamps, motors, heaters, etc. Taking into account efficiency, power factor and diversity of load; cross-section of conductors required to carry a given current under given conditions of distance and voltage drop; the energy consumed by and the cost of running an installation or piece of apparatus for a given time.
- Measuring up and estimating the quantities of materials required and drawing up schedules of same for low and medium pressure installations.

Fifth Year

- Recapitulation of previous years.

Mechanical Fitting

First Year

At the end of the first year the apprentice shall have a fair knowledge of hand tools and their uses which includes types of chisels and cuts of files. To be able to identify on sight the different sizes of 'Whitworth standard nuts' and spanners. To screw and be able to use hammer and chisel reasonably well.

Second Year

Show increased efficiency in the use of the hammer and chisel and file and be capable of using the surface plate on small jobs, to be able to do simple marking-off for plain drilling and be conversant with Whitworth threads and sizes of tapping holes.

Third Year

To be proficient with all hand tools of the trade, and have some knowledge of its, fast fits, and shrinking fits, and so be able to fit a plain key, bed brasses to journals, to scrape and face joints. To be able to read a simple drawing, and to mark-off plain work for machining.

Fourth Year

To be able to dismantle ordinary engines and machinery and re-assemble same after repair, to do ordinary repairs under the guidance of a tradesman. To have a knowledge of how to erect machinery, knowledge of different holding down bolts, the material for the foundations and the proper lining up of same, also to be able to give the proper diameter of pulleys to regulate the speed of different machinery.

Fifth Year

To have a good knowledge of internal combustion engines, to be able to set both ignition and valve timing, to be conversant with lubricants and cutting compounds for the drilling and machining of different metals, to be able to use a drilling machine, temper all hand tools, sharpen the drills, and if the shop in which he is apprenticed has either the oxy or electric welding machine to be able to do ordinary jobbing work on same, to have a knowledge of the micrometer and other measuring tools, if used in the shop.

Mechanical TurningFirst Year

Working either to a sample or a simple drawing, to be capable of performing plain cylindrical turning, facing, parting off, filing up and polishing, centring parts to be turned, and be able to true up lathe centres. To use rule and callipers accurately, and grind and set simple cutting tools.

Second Year

To be able to perform both chuck and faceplate work. Grind cutting tools with correct angle of clearance and rake for the various metals.

To have a reasonable knowledge of all forms of screw threads and the pitches of the various diameters, also core diameters of 'Whitworth' standard screws.

To show competency in the rules for calculating the gear changes for simple thread cutting.

Third Year

To be able to do change wheel calculations for compound gearing fractional threads, and be familiar with the principle and application of the thread indicator.

To calculate feed and speeds for turning the different metals. To be competent to turn and bore tapers with the compound rest and tailstock and to do the necessary calculations for same. To have a fair knowledge of fits and tolerances and be able to use the micrometer correctly.

Fourth Year

To be able to cut multiple threads both right and left hand, and use the correct setting of tools when cutting threads of this type.

To have a good knowledge of running, fast shrinking and forced fits.

To be conversant with the formulas for the sizing and turning of involute gear blanks. To be competent in the use of gauges and their purposes, and to read a simple drawing.

Fifth Year

To be a qualified tradesman, and be capable of working all types of lathes, and be competent to undertake any job direct from the drawing. To have a good knowledge of the various classes of tools in use, viz., carbon steel, high speed steel, and Tungsten carbide, and their separate uses. A good knowledge of timing and values of work.

Appendix 3. List of secretaries and presidents and details of the evolution of organisations representing the electrical trades in Western Australia from 1905 - 2013.

METROPOLITAN ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION

Secretary	President
The Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union (METU) was registered under the Trades Union Act and the WA Conciliation and Arbitration Act on 10 January 1906.	
Arthur Mills, 1905 – 1910	E.R. Wight, 1905 – 1911
William Jowett, 1910 – 1912	J. Phillips, 1911 – 1913
R.W.B. Johnson, 1912 – 1913	A.J. Powell, 1914
A. Andre, 1913	
Albert William Bloomfield Pettit, 1913 – 1914	
The METU amalgamated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) to become the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Perth No. 2 Branch on 21 August 1914.	

GOLDFIELDS ELECTRICAL WORKERS' UNION

The Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union (GETU) was registered under the Trades Union Act and the WA Conciliation and Arbitration Act on 4 October 1911.	
Secretary	President
Edward William, 1911 – 1914	Leo Byrne, 1911 – 1912
H. Morrison, 1914 – 1916	G. Metcalf, 1912 – 1914
	Edward William, 1914 – 1916
The GETU amalgamated with Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Kalgoorlie Branch in 1916 taking the latter union's name.	
On 11 June 1935 the Electrical Trades Union (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-branch) Kalgoorlie was recorded as a separately registered State union (and remains so in 2013) under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act. The State secretary M.B. d'Almeida was the registered secretary of the Goldfields sub-branch from 1935 – 1950.	
The Goldfields sub-branch continued to elect a sub-branch secretary and president into the 1950s.	
Sub-branch Secretary	Sub-branch President
R.G. Adams, 1935 – 1936	R. Baldock, 1935
G.E. Bosustow, 1936 – 1938	
D.H. Smith, 1938 – 1939	
C.W. Walker, 1939 – 1946	

ELECTRICAL TRADES UNION OF AUSTRALIA (WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BRANCH)

<p>The Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch) (ETUWA) was registered under the WA Trade Union Act on 11 September 1926 and under the WA Arbitration Act (WAA Act) on 13 August 1927. An appeal against the union's registration under the WAA Act was granted on 2 April 1928, and its registration cancelled. The ETUWA did not regain registration under the WAA Act until 12 September 1949, however it remained a registered union under the State Trade Union Act during this period.</p>	
Secretary	President
William James, 1926 – 1927	J. Gallagher, 1926 – 1927
Frederick Richard (Dick) Cox, 1927 – 1932	J. Hardy, 1927 – 1929
Marmion Barrington d'Almeida, 1932 – 1950	W.H.C. Riley, 1929 – 1935
Frederick James Francis Stahl, 1950 – 1951	T. Thomas, 1950 – 1951
Robert William Fletcher, 1951 – 1970	W.V. White, 1951 – 1952
Errol H. Smith, 1970 – 1976	R. Lockwood, 1952 – 1967
K.B. (Barry) Gilbert, 1976 – 1983	R.L. Holman, March 1967 – September 1967
Mick Beatty, 1983 – 1985	Errol H. Smith, 1967 – 1968
Walter L. Palmer, 1985 – 1991	S.D. (Don) Allen, 1968 – 1983
	John Rivo Gandini, 1983 – 1991
<p>On 6 February 1991 the Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), (ETUWA) and the Australasian Society of Engineers, Moulders and Foundry Workers' Union, (ASEMU) amalgamated to form the Australian Electrical, Electronics, Foundry and Engineering Union (AEEFEU)</p>	
Secretary	President
Walter L. Palmer, 1991 – 1994 Palmer continued in the position of State secretary of the ETUWA and was secretary of the AEEFEU.	Gandini continued to be the ETUWA president until 1993 after which Les McLaughlan took over as the ETUWA president until 1995.
William E. (Bill) Game, 1994 – 1995 Game continued as secretary of the ETUWA and AEEFEU until the union's name was changed to the CEPU in 1995.	Terry Cook, AEEFEU — 1991 – 1992 Derek Forster, AEEFEU — 1992 – 1995
<p>In 1995 to align the State union to the national CEPU the AEEFEU changed its name to the Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Workers' Union of Australia, Engineering and Electrical Division WA Branch to be commonly known as the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union, Engineering and Electrical Division (CEPU). After this both the secretary's and president's positions for the AEEFEU and the CEPU were joined together.</p>	
Secretary	President
William E. (Bill) Game, CEPU — 1995 – 2006	Derek Forster, 1995 – 1999
Les McLaughlan, 2006 – to present	Robert (Bob) Manhood, 1999 – to present
<p>On 28 February 2013 after a rule change the name of the State registered union was changed from the Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Workers' Union of Australia, Engineering and Electrical Division, Western Australian Branch (CEPU), to the Electrical Trades Union, Western Australia — ETUWA.</p>	

APPENDIX 4. Timeline of organisations established to represent electrical trades workers in Western Australia.

10 January 1906	Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union registers under both the WA Trade Union Act and the WA Court of Arbitration.
4 October 1911	Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union registers under both the WA Trade Union Act and the WA Court of Arbitration.
2 August 1914	The Metropolitan Electrical Trades Union amalgamates with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers to become the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Perth No. 2 Branch under the Western Australian Court of Arbitration, Registration No. 233.
14 January 1916	Goldfields Electrical Workers' Union amalgamates with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers to become the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Kalgoorlie Branch under the Western Australian Court of Arbitration, Registration No. 250.
11 September 1926	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (West Australian Branch) (ETUWA) was registered under the WA Trades Union Act, Registration No. 81.
13 August 1927	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), Perth (ETUWA) was registered under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act, Registration No. 320. (Note slight difference in name)
2 April 1928	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), Perth was de-registered from the WA Industrial Arbitration Act but continued to be registered under the WA Trade Union Act.
11 June 1935	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-Branch), Kalgoorlie was registered under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act, Registration No. 349 and was recorded as a sub-branch of the ETUWA's registration under the Trade Union Act.
12 September 1949	Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), Perth (ETUWA) was registered under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act, Registration No. 177 and continued to be registered under the WA Trade Union Act, Registration No. 81. The Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Goldfields Sub-Branch), Kalgoorlie was registered as a separate union under the WA Industrial Arbitration Act, Registration No. 137.
6 February 1991	The Electrical Trades Union of Australia (Western Australian Branch), (ETUWA) and the Australasian Society of Engineers, Moulders and Foundry Workers' Union, (ASEMFWU) amalgamated to form the Australian Electrical, Electronics, Foundry and Engineering Union (AEEFEU).
1995	To align the WA State union with the national amalgamated Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia (CEPU) (formally the ETU of Australia), the WA state registered AEEFEU changed its name to the Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Workers' Union of Australia, Engineering and Electrical Division WA Branch, to be commonly known as the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU), Engineering and Electrical Division Western Australian Branch.
28 February 2013	The CEPU, Engineering and Electrical Division, Western Australian Branch changed the name of the State registered body of this union to the Electrical Trades Union, Western Australia — ETUWA.

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