

‘to the bitter end’: the 1977 State Electricity Commission of Victoria maintenance workers’ dispute

Kathryn M. Steel
BA, DipEd, DipLib, MLib

School of Applied Media & Social Sciences
Faculty of Arts
Monash University

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Abstract

This thesis describes and analyses the 1977 State Electricity Commission of Victoria maintenance workers' dispute. As a significant regional industrial dispute, an analysis of its origins and development adds much to our understanding of regional labour history in the Latrobe Valley, as well as making a contribution to the literature on the causes of lengthy Australian disputes.

The dispute is examined within its complex local, state and federal context, including relevant economic, political and industrial factors. This influenced both the items in the log of claims which was provided at the start of the dispute in March 1977, and impacted on its course and its ending. While the dispute over the log of claims was expected to be a minor event, the actions of the SECV over a more emotive issue, that of contract labour, provided the trigger for a strike which was ill-advised in its broader context.

During the severe power restrictions which were imposed by the SECV over a period of four weeks, industry was almost at a standstill and up to 500,000 workers were stood down. The state government amended the *Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic), and had a state of emergency declared. Both the SECV and the state government insisted that the major claims go to arbitration. Despite the length and personal costs of the dispute, in the short term the maintenance workers received little benefit from it.

The narrative of the dispute is enhanced by the inclusion of material from interviews of participants. This brings subjectivity to an account otherwise derived from documentary sources. These interviews also indicated three themes which come out in the narrative: the control over the dispute by the rank and file, the extensive support for the dispute from the community, and the effect of the Melbourne-LV divide. The latter operated across the unions and their members, between the local and the state peak councils, and within the SECV.

In order to add to our understanding of lengthy disputes, the events of 1977 are analysed using Kelly's Mobilisation Theory. This provides a greater focus on social relationships and interactions than traditional methods of industrial relations analysis. In particular, it provides a means of incorporating the local industrial identity when considering those factors which impact on the origin and continuation of disputes.

The dispute is compared and contrasted to two other lengthy disputes in the Australian electricity industry. These are the South East Queensland Electricity Board 1984-86 dispute over contract labour, and the Electricity Commission of New South Wales 1973 35-hour week dispute. This comparison, which also uses Mobilisation Theory as the research framework, assists in understanding the common or unique features of each dispute, including the particular contexts of each. While Mobilisation Theory has much to offer as a means of examining lengthy disputes, the length of the 1977 dispute is better explained by the changed local, state and federal contexts since previous mobilisations. These were no longer conducive to a dispute which could be viewed as a challenge to the government or to the SECV's managerial prerogative.

Statement of authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Last, but certainly not least, thank you to Gerry for the title of the thesis.

Abbreviations

AAESDA	Association of Architects, Engineers, Surveyors and Draughtsmen of Australia
ABCE&BLF	Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Federation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AC	Companion of the Order of Australia
ACAC	Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission
ACSPA	Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AGM (O)	Assistant General Manager (Operations)
AIMPE	Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AM	Member of the Order of Australia
AMFSU	Amalgamated Metals, Foundry and Shipwrights' Union
AMWSU	Amalgamated Metal Workers' and Shipwrights' Union
AMWU	Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia
APEA	Association of Professional Engineers, Australia
APM	Australian Paper Manufacturers
AR	Industrial Arbitration Reports (NSW)
ASC&J	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia
ASE	Australasian Society of Engineers
ATWU	Australian Timber Workers' Union
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BWIU	Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia
CAR	Commonwealth Arbitration Reports
CGTLC	Central Gippsland Trades and Labor* Council
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
ECCUDO	Electricity Commission Combined Unions Delegates Organisation
ECNSW	Electricity Commission of New South Wales
ESA	<i>Essential Services Act 1958</i> (Vic)
ETSA	Electricity Trust of South Australia
ETU	Electrical Trades Union of Australia
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australasia
FIA	Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia
GTLC	Gippsland Trades and Labour Council
GVR	Generation Victoria Records
HECT	Hydro-electric Commission of Tasmania
ICAC	Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (Qld)
ICNSW	Industrial Commission of New South Wales
IR	Industrial Reports
IRB	Industrial Relations Bureau
IRO	Industrial Relations Officer

LCNSW	Labor Council of New South Wales
LPT	Labour Process Theory
LV	Latrobe Valley
MOA	Municipal Officers' Association of Australia (SEC Branch)
Moulders'	Federated Moulders' (Metals) Union of Australia
MTF	Metal Trades Federation of Unions
MTHC	Melbourne Trades Hall Council
MW	megawatt
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NBAC	Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University
NEPC	National Employers Policy Committee
NLA	National Library of Australia
NLCC	National Labour Consultative Council
NSW	New South Wales
NWC	National Wage Case
OIRC	Office of Industrial Relations Co-ordination (Public Employing Authorities)
OPDU	Operative Painters' and Decorators' Union of Australia
PROV	Public Record Office Victoria
PS	Power Station
QEC	Queensland Electricity Commission
Riley	Riley and Ephemera Collection
SECC	SECC Records Project
SECV	State Electricity Commission of Victoria
SEQEB	South East Queensland Electricity Board
SIPS	State Incremental Payments Scheme
SLV	State Library of Victoria
SMHES	Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme
SSC	SEC Latrobe Valley Shop Stewards Committee
TLCQ	Trades and Labor Council of Queensland
TWU	Transport Workers' Union of Australia
UMA	University of Melbourne Archives
VBEFA	Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation of Australia
VFL	Victorian Football League
VPD	Victorian Parliamentary Debates
VTHC	Victorian Trades Hall Council
YDTLC	Yallourn and District Trades and Labor Council
YPS	Yallourn Power Station Records

*This was the spelling according to the notification to the State Electricity Commission of Victoria in 1947 when the name changed from the Yallourn and District Trades and Labor Council. Much of the future correspondence both to and from the Central Gippsland Trades and Labor Council used the spelling 'Labour'

Note: Some organisations have changed their names over time. The name used in the thesis is generally that as at 1977.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Tuesday 18 October 1977. A fine, sunny morning in the Latrobe Valley, which at 10.30am sees some 2,000 men streaming onto and around the oval at the Morwell Football Club ground.¹ They are members of 11 unions² at the State Electricity Commission of Victoria's (SECV) Latrobe Valley (LV) operations, and have been out on strike, off and (mostly) on, since 9 August. There is a sense that today will be the day for resolution of this lengthy dispute, which has resulted in the imposition of severe power restrictions across the state, the virtual shutting down of Victorian industry, and up to 500,000 workers being laid off,.

The mood is generally one of optimism – today the Full Bench of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ACAC)³ will give its decision on their claim for a pay increase through an Anomalies hearing. After more than nine weeks out on the grass, the men were persuaded to go back to work the previous Thursday, assured by Bob Hawke, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions⁴ (ACTU), that their wage claim had justice. The ACAC had promised a speedy hearing over the following

¹ The detail on the mass meeting is based on a tape recording of this meeting lent to me by Lloyd Davies, as well as newspaper reports of the time.

² The eleven unions involved were the Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Federation (ABCE&BLF), Amalgamated Metal Workers' and Shipwrights' Union (AMWSU), Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia (ASC&J), Australasian Society of Engineers (ASE), Australian Timber Workers' Union (ATWU), Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (BWIU), Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU), Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia (FIA), Federated Moulders' (Metals) Union of Australasia (Moulders'), Operative Painters' and Decorators' Union of Australia (OPDU) and the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation of Australia (VBEFA).

³ The body was titled the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ACAC) during the period 1973 and 1989. Prior to that, it was the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration (1904-1956) and the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (1956-1973). After 1989 it became the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC). ACAC will be used for the period before 1989, to reduce confusion.

⁴ In 1977 the ACTU was the largest federal peak union body, representing 131 mostly blue collar unions. It merged with the white collar peak councils, the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations representing 30 unions in 1979, and the Council of Australian Government Employees' Organisations representing 24 unions in 1981.

three days, including sitting over the weekend, with a decision to be handed down the following Monday.

The men had gathered on that Monday, the day before, full of optimism, to be presented with the news that the presentation of the unions' case had taken longer than anticipated. The decision was promised for today, Tuesday 18 October 1977.

Expectations are high – surely being given more time to present the unions' case was a good sign? However, the decision was made known to the shop stewards at 10am, and the news has trickled out to others. There are no smiles from the men at the microphone. Despite this, when the meeting is opened by Ted Turnbull,⁵ he is greeted with the usual good-natured banter from the men, and has to struggle to be heard. His opening statement is brief, merely handing the microphone over to John Halfpenny,⁶ who has the unfortunate task of telling the men the result of the Anomalies hearing.

Halfpenny commented that he was given 'all the rotten jobs', and the news would be short, 'I can't say sweet', giving notice to the gathering that they weren't going to like what he had to report. He was indeed brief, simply paraphrasing from the summary of the decision of the ACAC, telling the men that 'on the material put before us we are unable to find any grounds which would justify granting the unions' claim for a wage increase. Therefore the unions' claim is rejected'.⁷ The men greeted the news with disbelief and disappointment. Halfpenny's passionate report went on to implicate ongoing government interference in the dispute as at least partly to blame for the unfavourable decision. He further implied that it was only due to the intervention of

⁵ Ted Turnbull, ETU shop steward, Secretary of the ETU Latrobe Valley (LV) sub-branch, President of the SEC Latrobe Valley Shop Stewards Committee (SSC), Vice President of the Central Gippsland Trades and Labor Council (CGTLC).

⁶ John Halfpenny, State (Victoria) Secretary of the AMWSU, had been at a number of the later mass meetings and had generally presented a report on proceedings in the ACAC, where he had been given leave to appear for the AMWSU.

⁷ For the full decision see *Electrical Trades Union of Australia and Others v State Electricity Commission of Victoria* (1977) 194 pt 2 CAR 654.

ACTU President Bob Hawke that the men had agreed to take their grievance to the ACAC for resolution. The men had been assured that the ‘justice and the merit of the argument in support of the claims’ would be recognised. Halfpenny finished by noting that the men had ‘tried it their way’ and now the decision was whether to ‘go on and do it our way’. Members of the crowd, who cheered and clapped, greeted this statement with enthusiasm.

The popular shop steward Sam Armstrong⁸ [we can’t see you Sam, stand up - *interjector*] was then asked to move a recommendation to the meeting on behalf of the Shop Stewards Committee (SSC). The crowd was riled by this time, and greeted a shouted interjection of ‘gonna get a fight’ with cheers of approval. Sam Armstrong, another passionate orator, reminded the men of the extensive support for the strike from all around Australia; he also noted that it was not the wish of the men to engage in a political struggle, all they wanted was to be able to negotiate with the SECV over the justice of their claims. He stressed to the men that if they decided to continue the fight ‘it will be a long, hard battle’ with the SECV expected to issue notices of dismissal, and to ask the government to send in troops to keep the power stations running. This last suggestion led to much muttering which drowned out Sam’s words. Sam reminded everyone that solidarity continued to be critical, that ‘there will be pressures from all parts on you ... to split us down the middle’, and that everyone needed to support each other. He then moved the resolution to the meeting: ‘That we continue the dispute and retire indefinitely’, which was received enthusiastically by the crowd.

The motion was seconded by George Wragg,⁹ another respected shop steward, who also spoke to the meeting. He was known for his intellectual approach to industrial

⁸ Sam Armstrong, AMWSU shop steward, Secretary of the LV Branch of the AMWSU, Secretary of the SSC, President of the CGTLC.

⁹ George Wragg, AMWSU shop steward, President of the LV Branch of the AMWSU, Executive Committee member of the CGTLC, member of the CGTLC Disputes Committee.

matters, and responded in kind on this occasion. He called this the mens 'moment of truth'. He described the decision of the ACAC as 'an insult', an 'arrogant disregard of our intelligence' which demonstrated that the court represented only the interests of the employers. He exhorted the men to fight on, that they were at the point of success and should hold out a little longer. Acceptance of the judgment (and the resulting return to work) would be nothing less than defeat. In his opinion, and in that of many others he said, they should fight on, that 'we should take up the struggle where we put it down last Thursday [the decision to return to work to allow the anomalies case to go to the ACAC] and force the issue to an acceptable and honourable result'. He asserted that the decision rested with the men, that no-one could blame them if they were exhausted by the struggle. His words however belied the suggestion that there was a choice in the matter, and that a decision to return to work would be an acceptable alternative. For George Wragg, the fight would be 'with the knowledge that what we do is right, is just, and in the final analysis is the only thing which is left for us to do'.

Other speakers for and against the motion were invited to come to the microphone. One speaker, who noted that in previous disputes he had been a supporter of the Arbitration Commission, expressed his anger at the members of the ACAC, whom he described as 'bloody fools' who were 'frightened of the federal and state governments'. The crowd clapped this statement and started to talk amongst themselves, drowning out another speaker who was against the motion. This speaker managed to make himself heard, but his call for commonsense, that there was nothing to be gained and even more to lose by continuing the dispute was not what the men wanted to hear, and he was jeered and heckled. Another speaker jumped in, pointing out that it was not a matter of being able to afford to stay out. The issue was the fight for their rights, that it was a just fight which would be supported by every workingman in Australia, that 'all

the members of the union movement in the whole of Australia will come forward and support you in this fight, and I will guarantee that to you today'. The crowd was in a fighting mood. This was what they wanted to hear, and it was greeted by claps and applause.

Sam Armstrong in reply to the speakers noted briefly that the decision made that day was critical. If the decision to continue the strike was supported, it would need to be every man in it together for a successful outcome. He was asked to read the revised recommendation which now stated 'We condemn the Arbitration for its inhuman decision on the SEC workers' claims. Now we continue the dispute and retire indefinitely. We call on all unions throughout the country to give us their full support in this dispute.' This motion reflected the mood of the crowd and was cheered and clapped.

The chair of the meeting, Ted Turnbull, called for unanimous support, but after a show of hands for and against, announced that the recommendation had been carried 'almost unanimously'. The meeting was closed with the shop stewards leaving to meet in the town to discuss the next steps in the campaign.

So after ten weeks, the dispute appeared to be no closer to resolution.

The decision of the meeting to continue the strike encapsulated the frustrations of the maintenance workers. Their concerns included: the restrictions on wage increases by the ACAC which was holding firmly to its wage indexation principles; the perception of ongoing interference in the dispute by both the state and the federal governments; and suspicion on the part of the workers as to why the ACTU had intervened, with Bob Hawke viewed as a 'settler' not a 'winner' of disputes. Furthermore, members of the key operational unions in the SECV, the Municipal Officers' Association of Australia (SEC Branch) (MOA) and the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australasia (FEDFA), had continued to work during the dispute, maintaining electricity

generation. Lastly, the maintenance men perceived that they were not being given the respect that they were due, both as individuals and as a significant group of workers in the state's vital electricity generation industry.

So how did this day come about, what events led up to it, and how was the dispute eventually resolved? What were the issues that caused this dispute to be so significant? What themes emerged from the dispute and what lessons can be learnt from it? This is the story that follows.

Over two months earlier, on 9 August 1977, approximately 2,300 maintenance workers at the SECV in the LV, Victoria, had voted to withdraw their labour indefinitely. This unsanctioned strike resulted in the longest period of electricity restrictions in the SECV's history to that time, and was the most severe in terms of its effects on personal and community hardship.¹⁰ The maintenance employees did not return to work until 25 October 1977.

The 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute (hereafter referred to as 'the dispute', or the '1977 dispute') was an important regional labour dispute. It was a significant event in the industrial history of both the LV and the SECV. Three decades later, participants described the bitterness between unions which still exists. This study seeks to describe and analyse the dispute as a means of extending understanding of this crucial event, and to build on and add to the literature of lengthy disputes. The knowledge generated from this study will offer new insights into, and so inform, labour history practice. As well as contributing to labour history, it will enrich local social and corporate history.

The dispute demonstrated a significant example of industrial relations activity which was controlled by and focused on shop floor structures. Such activity at the

¹⁰ Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Chief Engineer to AGM(O), 2 November 1977.

workplace level was generally accepted to be not well developed in Australia during the 1970s with its centralised industrial relations structure.¹¹ There was however a ‘diversity of practice’¹² and this was noticed in the LV SECV, where a strong workplace organisation was well established. This resulted in a unique and complex series of relationships between the SECV, the unions, employees and the local community.

Industrial relations analysis in Australia has traditionally focused on the role of institutions such as the national and state industrial relations systems,¹³ resulting in such analysis being conveniently located within the seminal framework offered by Dunlop’s Systems Theory.¹⁴ This was not surprising given the key role played by industrial tribunals (and by extension trade unions and employer associations) in Australia, reflecting the prominent role of the state in industrial relations.¹⁵ Dunlop’s model favours structures over process and motivation,¹⁶ and is thus less concerned with the behaviours and relationships which affect the commencement and sustaining of disputes.

Australian labour history has similarly been accused of having a narrow focus on the study of institutions such as trade unions and political parties and their behaviour.¹⁷ While it may be the case that ‘institutional forces ... have played the crucial role in

¹¹ Norman F. Dufty, *Industrial relations in the Australian metal industries*, West, Sydney, 1972, p. 255; K.F. Walker, 'The development of Australian industrial relations in international perspective', in W.A. Howard (ed.), *Perspectives on Australian industrial relations: essays in honour of Kingsley Laffer*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 1-19, p. 113.

¹² Roger Lumley, 'Control over the organisation and conduct of work: evidence from some Australian workplaces', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 1983, pp. 301-316, p. 303.

¹³ J. Benson and K. Hince, 'Understanding regional industrial relations systems', in G.W. Ford, J.M. Hearn and R.D. Lansbury (eds), *Australian labour relations: readings*, 4th ed., Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1987, pp. 129-146.

¹⁴ John T. Dunlop, *Industrial relations systems*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1958.

¹⁵ Russell Lansbury and Grant Michelson, 'Industrial relations in Australia', in Peter Ackers and Adrian Wilkinson (eds), *Understanding work and employment: industrial relations in transition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 227-241.

¹⁶ Braham Dabscheck, *Australian industrial relations in the 1980s*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p. 2.

¹⁷ For example, see Robin Gollan, 'Australian labour history', in Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore (eds), *Canadian and Australian labour history: towards a comparative perspective*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Kensington, N.S.W., 1990, pp. 5-19; Peter Sheldon and Louise Thornthwaite, 'The state, labour and the writing of Australian labour history', *Labour History*, no. 100, May 2011, pp. 83-104; Lucy Taksa, 'Oral history and collective memory: labour rituals and working class memory', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 16, 1994a, pp. 46-52.

shaping relationships between workers and employers',¹⁸ there is now an increased awareness that working class history is more than the history of such formal institutions.¹⁹ There are many different types of groups, and the relationships within and between them may have differing impacts on industrial relations.²⁰ This recognition has accompanied a move in Australian labour history away from an institutional focus to a greater emphasis on the role of social structures and relationships, and the actions and discourse of workers.²¹ It is important to recognise that not only the relationships within and between institutions, but the personal interactions between managers, supervisors and workers which may develop as part of the local industrial identity, are pivotal when discussing the notion of conflict in the workplace. Thus for the 1977 dispute, while the structures which were in place as a result of the local, state and federal economic, political and industrial contexts were important in shaping events, it was the social relationships and interactions which played a major part in determining the cause, and the course, of the dispute.

¹⁸ Jonathan Zeitlin, 'From labour history to the history of industrial relations', *Economic History Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, May 1987, pp. 159-184, pp. 177-8.

¹⁹ R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class structure in Australian history: documents, narrative and argument*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1980; Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: public and private life in Richmond 1900-1965*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1984.

²⁰ Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore, 'The politics of consumption and co-operation: an overview', *Labour History*, no. 91, November 2006, pp. 1-12; Bradley Bowden, Simon Blackwood, Cath Rafferty and Cameron Allan (eds), *Work and strife in paradise: the history of labour relations in Queensland 1859 to 2009*, Federation Press, Annandale, 2009; Bobbie Oliver (ed.), *Labour history in the new century*, Black Swan Press, Perth, 2009; Barbara Webster, 'To fight against the horrible evil of Communism': Catholics, community and the Movement in Rockhampton, 1943-57', *Labour History*, no. 81, November 2001, pp. 155-73.

²¹ See for example Wendy Lowenstein, *Under the hook: Melbourne waterside workers remember working lives and class war, 1900-1980*, Melbourne Bookworkers in association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Prahran, Vic., 1982; Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils at work: what's happening to work in Australia - an oral record*, Catalyst Press, Annandale, N.S.W., 1997; John Merritt, *The making of the AWU*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986; Georgina Murray and David Peetz, *Women of the coal rushes*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010; Greg Patmore, 'Australia', in Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy (eds), *Histories of labour: national and international perspectives*, Merlin Press, Pontypool, Wales, 2010, pp. 231-61; John Shields (ed.), *All our labours: oral histories of working life in twentieth century Sydney*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, N.S.W., 1992; Lucy Taksa, 'Toil, struggle and repose: oral history and the exploration of labour culture in Australia', *Labour History*, no. 67, November 1994b, pp. 110-127; Claire Williams, *Open cut: the working class in an Australian mining town*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

This study moves on from traditional methods of analysis to consider and utilise more recent social movement theory and in particular its application to industrial relations analysis through Kelly's²² Mobilisation Theory. This provides a basis for consideration of lengthy disputes by the analysis of the social interactions which affected the initiation, continuation and cessation of mobilisation. These relationships and interactions including those between workers who supported the action and those who stayed at work; between the peak union bodies involved; and between the union officials and the rank and file, were important in the development of the dispute.

The relationships which had been established within the industrial identity of the maintenance workers and the interactions which occurred during the course of the dispute will be highlighted through three themes which emerge from the dispute. These are the effect of the Melbourne-LV divide which existed between the unions, the peak councils and the SECV; the extensive support during the strike from both the local and the wider community; and the control over the dispute by the rank and file.

Two specific sets of questions will be focused on. Firstly, why did the strike occur, given the insistence by the SECV during the 1970s on referring claims to arbitration? What event or events precipitated the decision to strike? Secondly, why did the strike last for such a long period? That is, how was the momentum of the strike maintained? This study will use qualitative methodologies including individual interviews of participants and documentary research within both primary and secondary sources to assist in the collection of relevant data to answer the research questions.

²² John Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, Routledge, London, 1998.

The 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute has generally been neglected in the academic literature, despite its length and impact. This is surprising, given that 'long strikes are exceptional in many places and many times.'²³

The exceptions are two publications by John Benson which have examined the 1977 dispute. The first,²⁴ an article in the *Journal of Industrial Relations* co-authored with Dennis Goff, provided background to the dispute, including the major industrial issues, as well as looking at the immediate causes and giving a chronology of the major events during the dispute. This was an important contribution to the historical record, coming as it did so soon after the handing down of the decision in the work value case conducted by the ACAC. Benson and Goff noted 'the peculiar circumstances of the Latrobe Valley'²⁵ as well as raising key issues such as the role of the state government and the relationships between the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), the Central Gippsland Trades and Labor Council (CGTLC) and the LV shop stewards which might explain the length of the dispute.

The other significant contribution by Benson²⁶ was a chapter in his doctoral thesis. This thesis focused on the role of shop stewards in a centralised industrial relations system; the relationships through which this role manifests itself; and how the perception of the role affects the behaviour of individual shop stewards. Two case studies of lengthy disputes in the LV SECV, one of which was the 1977 maintenance dispute, demonstrated the control exercised by the stewards. This case study examined the dispute in terms of local union leadership, including stewards' role definition, tactics

²³ Vivienne Ruth Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes: an investigation of three twentieth century United Kingdom garment industry strikes*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, School of Social Sciences (Sociology and Social Policy), Faculty of Law, Arts and Social Sciences, University of Southampton, 2005, p. 5.

²⁴ John Benson and Dennis James Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 1979, pp. 217-228.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁶ John Benson, *Shop stewards in the Latrobe Valley*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 1987.

and strategies used. In addition, the functions of the stewards, their strike organisation and their social relationships were discussed.

The dispute remains part of the industrial folklore of the region, with bitterness between unions lingering more than 30 years later. As a long-time resident of the LV, I witnessed the impact which the dispute had, both at a personal and at a community level. The inability of the strikers to provide for their families was a blow to their pride, and for many, recovering financially was a lengthy process. In the community, businesses suffered, and many other local workers were laid off as a result of the severe power restrictions. These resulted in industry across the state of Victoria coming almost to a standstill, sporting and community events being cancelled, and heating, cooking and television watching limited.

The impact of the dispute, and in particular the lengthy strike which formed a part of it, was extensive. The full story of the dispute deserves to be told as an acknowledgement of its impact on those who were involved. It is also important to have an accurate historical record of such a significant event while those who were directly involved are still able to assist in its reconstruction.

This thesis will examine the dispute of which the strike was one part, albeit a newsworthy and significant one. The term ‘dispute’ will be used to refer to the events which occurred between the serving of a log of claims in March 1977, until December 1979 when a new industrial award for builders’ labourers employed by the SECV was granted. The term ‘strike’ will be used to refer only to that part of the dispute between 9 August and 25 October 1977 when the maintenance workers in the LV withdrew their labour from the SECV.

This thesis will argue that the physical and industrial context within which the dispute occurred was a significant factor in the way it started and why it lasted for so

long. This context centred around the LV and its evolution from an isolated rural area to a new industrial region; the nature of work under the paternalistic management style within the SECV; and the industrial history and behaviours which accompanied the growth of the SECV within the region. These all influenced the development of relationships between the local rank and file and their unions, the CGTLC and the VTHC, and between the local and Melbourne-based management and industrial relations staff of the SECV. The locale formed the basis of the socially constructed traditions, organisations and relationships which evolved. These led to a particular industrial identity which was important in the conduct of the dispute. This theme will be more extensively developed in Chapter Four which describes the local context within which the dispute occurred.

As well as the specific local context, the wider context at both state and federal levels impacted on the course of the dispute. What began as just an ordinary dispute developed into a perceived trial of will between the LV maintenance workers, the SECV management and the state government. Because of the importance of these contexts, and in order to fully explore them, they will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

I will now outline the structure of the thesis.

The thesis is a description and analysis of the lengthy 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute, framed within the industrial, political and economic context of the time. It has commenced with a description of a critical event during the dispute. This was a mass meeting of the workers held on 18 October to hear the decision of the ACAC on the wage claim. This has set the scene, giving an idea of the depth of emotions among the rank and file after ten weeks on strike, and the concerns of the men. At this meeting the men learnt of the unfavourable decision of the ACAC and in response voted to continue the strike indefinitely.

Chapter two will locate the 1977 dispute within the literature relating to lengthy disputes. This will be done firstly through an examination of the frequency of lengthy strikes in Australia. This will be followed by a similar examination of strike length and frequency in the electricity generating industry in Australia and within the SECV. These will confirm the unusual length of the 1977 dispute. A discussion of the theoretical literature relevant to lengthy strikes will introduce the literature focussing on conflict as the basis of strikes. It will then move on to Mobilisation Theory, which has developed more recently from the social movement literature, and which emphasises the social processes involved in initiating, sustaining and ending industrial mobilisation.

Chapter three will explain and describe the use of narrative method to tell the story of the 1977 dispute. To enable the construction of the narrative, two sources were used to collect data about the dispute and its specific contexts. These two sources were semi-structured personal interviews of participants in the dispute, and documentary research within both primary and secondary sources. This enabled the triangulation of content from multiple sources, as well as providing an opportunity for participants to recall the dispute some 30 years later. Data from these two sources were melded to compile the narrative of the dispute, and from within this, several key themes were identified.

Chapters four and five will describe key features of the local (LV), state (Victorian) and federal (Australian) environments at the time of the dispute. They describe the industrial, political and economic contexts, which are important in framing the factors which sparked and then maintained the dispute. The local and the broader state and federal contexts will be described in separate chapters of the thesis, since the story of the dispute itself is quite complex. Trying to link the elements of the context at multiple levels with events during the dispute would have made for a complicated

narrative branching off in a number of directions, seemingly not directly related to the events on the ground. The other way of managing the various contextual issues would have been through footnotes, but these would have been lengthy. The context is significant for the way the dispute began, unfolded and ended, and it was thus seen as meriting a fuller description than might otherwise have been possible.

Chapter four describes the complex local context of the dispute. It begins with a description of the physical setting and its impact on the development of a local industrial identity. This is followed by a brief history of the establishment and growth of the SECV, and a discussion of some specific industrial features within this organisation in the LV. The features described include the strong shop stewards organisation; the role of the CGTLC in coordinating local industrial action; the general state of industrial relations within the SECV; and three specific industrial issues which were of particular importance to the LV SECV maintenance workforce at the time of the 1977 dispute. These were the issues of wage relativities, the ongoing campaign for a single federal award to cover SECV workers, and the emotive and longstanding issue of contract labour. The first two issues were both important in the formulation of the log of claims early in 1977, and the third provided the trigger for the strike.

Chapter five extends our understanding of the context within which the dispute was located by describing the broader state (Victorian) and federal (Australian) economic, political and industrial environment. Three specific factors which had an impact on the dispute will be discussed. These are firstly, the economic context which featured high inflation and high unemployment. The second factor is the impact of the Australian arbitration and wage setting context, which centred at that time around wage indexation as the principal means of awarding wage increases for employees. The third

factor is the industrial context, including the legislative responses of both the state and federal governments to a series of high profile strikes earlier in 1977.

Chapter six provides a detailed narrative of the dispute, from the serving of the log of claims until the end of the last related case in the ACAC in 1979. This chapter is divided into three sections covering the three phases of the dispute: the serving of the log of claims through to the placing of bans; the withdrawal of labour and escalation of the dispute; and the return to work and the events after the strike ended. In this, the main chapter of the thesis, the narrative of the events which transpired will draw out some of the significant themes of the dispute. These include the control over the dispute by the rank and file, and the extensive support for the strike by the wider community. Also described are those occasions when the 'them and us' divides – local versus Melbourne, and wages versus salaried workers - came to the fore. These three themes, as well as the interplay between individuals and groups, illustrate the importance of the social interactions which occurred in the withdrawal of labour, the consequent lengthy mobilisation, and the return to work.

Chapter seven will provide an analysis of the dispute, keeping in mind that any strike is 'a social phenomenon of enormous complexity which, in its totality, is never susceptible to complete description, let alone complete explanation.'²⁷ This chapter will focus on the three themes which were identified in the narrative of the dispute. These were firstly the control over the dispute by the rank and file. The second theme is the extensive support for the strikers and their cause from the wider community including unions and rank and file from all over Australia. The third theme from the dispute is around the Melbourne-LV divide, which formed a part of the local industrial identity. This divide was seen across the unions and the peak union councils, and within the

²⁷ Alvin W. Gouldner, *Wildcat strike: a study in worker-management relationships*, Harper & Row, New York, 1965, p. 65.

SECV itself. A final section in this chapter will consider the ending of the strike and the impact of the strike both personally and on relationships.

Chapter eight will discuss the wider significance of the 1977 SECV maintenance dispute. This will be done in two ways. Firstly, the dispute will be located within the relevant literature on lengthy strikes, in order to relate it to that literature. This discussion will focus on Mobilisation Theory and its applicability to the 1977 dispute, and in particular whether it contributes to an explanation for the length of the latter. Secondly, a comparison with two other major Australian disputes will be used to reinforce the importance of context (political, economic and industrial), the particular grievance, and mobilisation by both unions and the employer/government on the commencement and continuation of lengthy disputes. The two lengthy disputes which have been selected for comparison are the Electricity Commission of New South Wales (ECNSW) 35-hour week dispute of 1973, and the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB) contract labour dispute of 1984-1986. These two disputes are then compared and contrasted with the 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute. This analysis provides a contribution to the literature on lengthy disputes, as well as shining further light on the distinguishing features of the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute.

Chapter nine will provide a brief conclusion to the thesis. It will discuss the effectiveness of Mobilisation Theory as a means of analysing industrial disputes, and the extension to it which this thesis contributes. It then discusses the two sets of research questions which were posed at the beginning of this chapter, provides some thoughts on lessons from the 1977 dispute, and outlines suggestions for further research. This is followed by a series of Appendixes which provide additional information on the personalities involved, the interviewees and some more detailed data relating to the dispute.

This concludes the outline of the thesis.

The next chapter will frame the dispute within the literature of lengthy strikes. This will be done firstly by providing a brief overview of the pattern of strikes, including their length, in Australia after 1945. That will be followed by a discussion of the strike pattern, including length, in the electricity generating sector in Victoria, and in particular within the SECV. These discussions will place the length of the 1977 dispute into perspective and confirm its unusual nature. The literature on lengthy disputes will then be considered. The latter will focus particularly on the contributions offered by social movement theory and more recently by John Kelly's²⁸ Mobilisation Theory. The latter places more emphasis on the social processes involved in industrial disputes, and may provide greater insights into explaining lengthy disputes.

²⁸ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

Chapter Two: Review of the literature

The previous chapter began by describing the mood of the strikers at a significant point during the dispute. They were not prepared to return to work without what they regarded as wage justice, and respectful treatment from the ACAC. The 1977 dispute was a major event within the LV, but despite this, it has not generally featured within the literature on Australian lengthy disputes.

In order to place the strike within this dispute into its context, this chapter will discuss the literature within three areas. These are firstly around strike frequency and length in Australia. Secondly, the length and frequency of strikes within the SECV, and particularly in the LV, will be considered. Thirdly, a discussion of the theoretical literature of strikes will focus on two areas: the role of workplace conflict as the underlying cause of industrial disputation, and consideration of the social processes and relationships which are involved in a decision to take strike action. The latter has been recently articulated within Mobilisation Theory.

There is an acknowledgement that some strikes become protracted battles,¹ but in general the literature does not offer a distinction between the short and the lengthy strike. Yet this is of interest in trying to differentiate the reasons for each, and in trying to predict the course of particular strikes.

The strike pattern in Australia

This section will provide an overview of findings relating to the length of strikes in Australia since 1945. An examination of this strike pattern demonstrates that the pattern of disputation in Australia after World War II was generally of short strikes of between one and two working days, a trend which has continued to the present with

¹ Richard Hyman, *Strikes*, 4th ed., Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989; Dave Lyddon, 'Rediscovering the past: recent British strike tactics in historical perspective', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, no. 5, Spring 1998, pp. 107-51.

some minor exceptions.² The generally small proportion of lengthy strikes, which I have defined as strikes of 20 days or longer, serves to demonstrate the unusual nature of the eleven-week strike of the SECV maintenance workers.

In Australia, the short strike (a temporary cessation of work as a collective response) has become a way of showing dissatisfaction to management, in the absence of formal grievance procedures, rather than the beginning of a trial of strength over an issue.³ The Australian arbitral system is generally considered to have shaped this pattern of short strikes, which became a means of accessing arbitration rather than a means of coercion.⁴ Thus the trend has developed of short strikes followed by a resumption of work, in the majority of cases without recourse to formal negotiations.⁵ It has been suggested that one reason for this is the large proportion of 'illegal' (not officially sanctioned by the relevant union/s and/or a state or federal peak union council) strikes often called at plant level.⁶ The growth in the number of short strikes may thus indicate a slow but discernible division between union executives and officials and their members, both in the need for industrial action and in identifying those issues important to the rank and file. This is an important context for the 1977 dispute.

Explanations of the cyclic pattern of Australian strikes have tended to be based on variations in the domestic economic environment, although this may be governed by

² L. J. Perry, 'Comments on the decline in strikes in Australia', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol. 30, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 134-148.

³ Braham Dabscheck, *The struggle for Australian industrial relations*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 95.

⁴ Chris Briggs, 'The changing contours of labour disputes and conflict resolution in Australia: towards a post-arbitral measurement framework', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2006, pp. 345-364; Braham Dabscheck, 'A decade of striking figures', *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 1991, pp. 172-196; Braham Dabscheck and John Niland, *Industrial relations in Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p. 71; W.A. Howard, 'Australian trade unions in the context of union theory', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 3, September 1977, pp. 255-273; Walker, 'The development of Australian industrial relations in international perspective', p. 7; Malcolm Waters, *Strikes in Australia: a sociological analysis of industrial conflict*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, p. 26.

⁵ L.J. Perry, 'A long-term perspective on industrial disputes in Australia: 1913-2003', *Economic Papers*, vol. 24, no. 3, September 2005, pp. 263-279; Walker, 'The development of Australian industrial relations in international perspective', p. 8.

⁶ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *Trade unionism under collective bargaining: a theory based on comparisons of six countries*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1976, p. 77.

international influences.⁷ Changes in the duration of strikes have also been correlated with the economic situation, with longer strikes during periods of low inflation and higher unemployment. It is suggested that this results from greater resistance of employers during economic downturns,⁸ and a greater commitment required by members over issues seen as important.

By the mid-1970s, the Australian economic environment had changed significantly from the previous boom times. During the 1950s and 1960s, a rapidly expanding economy as a result of the growth, differentiation and protection of the manufacturing industry, strong consumer demand and low unemployment had resulted in a seller's labour market. Shop floor organisation expanded in the traditionally militant areas such as the waterfront, meat processing, public transport and the metal trades, managerial prerogative became limited, and closed shop or union preference arrangements were common. This resulted in a number of unions taking direct action rather than waiting for changes via the arbitration system,⁹ with employers encouraged to make over award payments to hold labour and avoid stoppages. During the early 1950s increased numbers of strikes were seen to be a reaction to high inflation, although strike frequency fell from then until the late 1960s during a period of growth in real wages.¹⁰ As well, in the early 1960s, there was the beginning of a significant change in the composition of Australian trade union membership. From 1954 to 1971, a slow but consistent decline in Australian union density to 49 per cent from its peak of 63 per cent was attributed to the rise of white-collar employment and service industries where

⁷ Paul Miller and Charles Mulvey, 'What do Australian unions do?', *Economic Record*, vol. 69, no. 206, September 1993, pp. 315-342; L.J. Perry and Patrick J. Wilson, 'The Accord and strikes: an international perspective', *Australian Journal of Labour Economics*, vol. 4, no. 4, December 2000, pp. 232-247.

⁸ L.J. Perry, 'Trends in Australian strike activity: 1913-1978', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol. 6, no. 1, December 1979, pp. 31-51.

⁹ Christopher Wright, *The management of labour: a history of Australian employers*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 94-5.

¹⁰ Perry, 'Trends in Australian strike activity: 1913-1978'.

unionism had often been weak,¹¹ to the anti-communist propaganda arising from communist influence in many unions,¹² and to reduced employment in areas of union strength such as coal mining and the railways.¹³ The increased numbers of white collar workers in unions were generally less accustomed to taking industrial action, and this assisted in maintaining a period of relative industrial calm.

During this period (1950-1970), the proportion of strikes which were four weeks or longer fell from an average of 2 per cent (between 1951-1955) to only 0.7 per cent (between 1966-1970). This pattern changed in the early 1970s, when the relative importance of these longer strikes increased, moving upward again to 2 per cent of all strikes. There was also an increase in the proportion of all strikes lasting for five days or more from an average of 8.9 per cent between 1961-65, to 11.8 per cent between 1966-1970, then to 19.4 per cent in 1971-75, after which this proportion fell slightly.¹⁴

The increased duration of strikes over wage issues to an average of more than three days was particularly noticeable. These strikes over wage issues on average had over twice the strike frequency and four times the lost time than was the case during the 1960s.¹⁵ An all time high in the number of disputes occurred in 1970, a year of economic prosperity, after which the rate was lower but variable except for 1974 when the number of strikes peaked again, at 2809,¹⁶ after plateauing at about 1500 per year between 1950 and the early 1970s.¹⁷ 1974 also recorded the highest number of working days lost ever recorded, over six million, with white-collar unionists becoming more militant, and with

¹¹ D.W. Rawson, *Unions and unionists in Australia*, 2nd ed., Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p. 22.

¹² David Peetz, *Unions in a contrary world: the future of the Australian trade movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 29.

¹³ Rawson, *Unions and unionists in Australia*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Michael P. Jackson, *Strikes*, Wheatsheaf Books, Brighton, UK, 1987, p. 36.

¹⁵ Perry, 'Trends in Australian strike activity: 1913-1978', p. 36.

¹⁶ Braham Dabscheck, 'New right or old wrong? Ideology and industrial relations', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1987, pp. 425-449, p. 438.

¹⁷ Waters, *Strikes in Australia: a sociological analysis of industrial conflict*, p. 50.

1977 the lowest point of the decade.¹⁸ This was a time of high inflation following the oil crisis and after 1974, of high unemployment, and the withdrawal from involvement in the Vietnam War.

The change in the composition of union membership continued, with most growth in the unions of non-manual employees in the public sector, at both state and local levels, and in some service sector and mixed unions, including nursing, public servants and shop employees.¹⁹ During the period 1969 to 1976, the proportion of white-collar members grew from 29.6 percent to 38.3 percent.²⁰

In the mid-1970s, the introduction of wage indexation, and the combination of high inflation and increased unemployment were associated with a subsequent decline in strike activity. From 1976 figures returned to those of the 1969 and 1970 level.²¹ The characteristics of strike activity did not change however, with strikes over money matters continuing to be important, although the majority of strikes during the second half of the 1970s were related to physical conditions and managerial policy, including retrenchments.²² Longer strikes however remained relatively important for the rest of the decade. For example, in 1973, almost twenty per cent of working days lost were the result of strikes of twenty days or longer, and in 1977, these longer strikes resulted in over 26 per cent of working days lost.²³ The proportion of lengthy strikes of four weeks or more however hovered at around 2.0-2.2 per cent during the 1970s, but in the context

¹⁸ Rawson, *Unions and unionists in Australia*, p. 98.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 22-24.

²⁰ Stephen Frenkel, 'Australian trade unionism and the new social structure of accumulation', in Stephen Frenkel (ed.), *Organized labor in the Asia-Pacific region: a comparative study of trade unionism in nine countries*, Cornell University, Ithaca, 1993, pp. 249-281, p. 255.

²¹ Mark Wooden and Stephen Creigh, *Strikes in post-War Australia: a review of research and statistics*, National Institute for Labour Studies, Flinders University of South Australia, Bedford Park, 1983, p. 31.

²² Milton Derber, 'Changing union-management relations at the plant level in Australian metalworking', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 1, March 1977a, pp. 1-23; Wooden and Creigh, *Strikes in post-War Australia: a review of research and statistics*, p. 31.

²³ Philip Bentley, 'Recent strike behaviour in Australia: causes and responses', in G.W. Ford, June M. Hearn and Russell D. Lansbury (eds), *Australian labour relations: readings*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1980, pp. 21-49.

of an average overall duration of strikes of between one and three days between 1960 and the early 1980s.²⁴

From 1982 the number of disputes and working days lost commenced a steady downwards trend,²⁵ and the overall trend to shorter strikes resumed. This has been related to the Prices and Incomes Accord between the ACTU and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) which was reached just before the federal Labor government took office in March 1983.²⁶ This reduction in strike numbers occurred despite a shift away from centralised wages determination to greater enterprise and workplace bargaining, which might have been expected to introduce more opportunities for striking as part of the bargaining process.²⁷ However, it was also a time of decreasing inflation and the onset of recession, and the start of a period of the highest unemployment levels since World War II.²⁸ It was also a time when casual and part time employment started to become more significant, together with the disadvantageous working conditions often associated with them.²⁹ Employment growth moved from areas of union strength to areas of union weakness, with casual employment growing between 1982 and 1989 by 89 percent,

²⁴ Jackson, *Strikes*, p. 36.

²⁵ Bob Bennett and Kathryn Cole, 'Industrial relations', in Brian W. Head and Allan Patience (eds), *From Fraser to Hawke*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 177-212, p. 204.

²⁶ John J. Beggs and Bruce J. Chapman, 'Australian strike activity in an international context: 1964-85', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 2, June 1987a, pp. 137-149; John J. Beggs and Bruce J. Chapman, 'Declining strike activity in Australia 1983-85: an international phenomenon?', *Economic Record*, vol. 63, no. 183, December 1987b, pp. 330-339; B.J. Chapman and F.H. Gruen, 'An analysis of the Australian consensual incomes policy: the Prices and Incomes Accord', in Chris De Neubourg (ed.), *The art of full employment: unemployment policy in open economies*, North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1991, pp. 475-504; Alan Morris and Kenneth Wilson, 'Strikes and the Accord: the final word?', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol. 25, no. 1, March 1999, pp. 63-71; D. Rawson, 'How much change in the public sector?', in Kevin Hince and Alan Williams (eds), *The Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand: proceedings of the biennial conference, January 1987*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand and the Industrial Relations Centre, Victoria University, Wellington, 1987, pp. 301-324.

²⁷ Mark Wooden, *The transformation of industrial relations*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 17.

²⁸ Jackson, *Strikes*, p. 34.

²⁹ Cameron Allan, Michael O'Donnell and David Peetz, 'Three dimensions of labour utilisation: job broadening, employment insecurity and work intensification', in Chris Leggett and Gerry Treuren (eds), *Current research in industrial relations : AIRAANZ 99, the 13th AIRAANZ Conference*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Adelaide, 1999, pp. 13-24.

while unionisation rates in this group of workers fell to only 18.8 percent by 1990.³⁰

Overall union density continued its decline and by 2000 Australian union density, once the highest in the world, was reduced to only 25 percent.³¹

These changes to union density and changes in forms of employment from the early 1980s were associated with a decline in both strike numbers and their average duration,³² and in 1990, the proportion of disputes lasting 20 days or longer was only 0.9 per cent.³³ The continuing decline in inflation and a move to right-wing values since the 1970s have also been suggested as significant factors.³⁴ This trend to fewer disputes, and the predominance of short disputes, continued into the 1990s.³⁵

This brief examination of trends in strike length has confirmed that the general pattern in Australia has been for strikes of short duration. Although at some times the proportion of longer strikes has shown an increase, this has been of relatively small magnitude and of short duration. It supports the significance of the length of the 1977 dispute. It was unusual in the context of Australian strikes, and the large number of employees involved meant that it also had a significant impact on total working days lost for that year.

The next section will consider strike patterns within the electricity generating industry in Australia, in Victoria, and within the LV. It will note the frequency and length of disputes in these areas. This will place the 1977 dispute within its specific industrial context, and permit a comparison of the length of the 1977 strike within the context of strikes in the electricity generating industry in Australia and within the SECV

³⁰ Greg Patmore, 'The future of trade unionism - an Australian perspective', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 3, no. 2, September 1992, pp. 225-245.

³¹ Michael Crosby, *Power at work: rebuilding the Australian union movement*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 12.

³² Perry, 'A long-term perspective on industrial disputes in Australia: 1913-2003'.

³³ Dabscheck, 'A decade of striking figures'.

³⁴ Perry, 'Comments on the decline in strikes in Australia'.

³⁵ Josh Healy, 'Peace at last? recent trends in Australia's industrial action', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, vol. 28, no. 2, June 2002, pp. 80-87.

in particular. This will enable an assessment of whether such a lengthy dispute is unusual within that closer context.

The strike pattern in the SECV

The previous section has shown, using statistics of strike length in Australia, that between 1945 and the end of the 1990s strikes were generally of short duration. This has confirmed that the 1977 maintenance workers' strike was unusual in its length within the Australian strike context. Thus the initial expectation of the workers that the strike would only last a few days was not unreasonable given the nature of strike length in Australia. This section goes on to examine the strike in relation to its more specific contexts, those of the electricity generating industry, and that of the industry within the LV. This will provide some meaningful general comparisons with the 1977 dispute. A number of surveys of strike frequency and length within the electricity generating industry are available to assist with this. While industry aggregate statistics are used for the Electricity Industry comparisons, this is a limitation imposed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) use of the Australian Standard Industrial Classification as a grouping of industries for statistical purposes. While it is imperfect, the data on strike frequency is still useful in indicating trends for comparative purposes.

The electricity industry, and particularly the generation sector, in Victoria gained a reputation for militancy after a series of campaigns during the 1960s for higher wages and better conditions. This culminated during the 1969/1970 year when man-hours lost reached 348,774, electricity restrictions were imposed on three occasions, and up to half a million workers were stood down.³⁶

³⁶ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1969-70*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1970, p. 39.

Despite the public perception that ‘the Latrobe Valley ... is a strike prone oasis’,³⁷ a number of studies have concluded that workers in the LV SECV were no more prone to strikes than workers anywhere else. For example, an examination of industrial conflict of all types in the LV operations of the SECV between 1960 and 1977, including those involving SECV contractors, by Holden and Iverson³⁸ concluded that the pattern of disputes, both in length and number, reflected the national trend. During the period examined, there was an increase in the length of disputes from an average duration of four working days in the 1960s, to an average of 19 working days each year from 1970 to 1977, as well as an increase in the number of strikes. However, since these data were taken from newspaper accounts, the average duration of disputes in reality is likely to be overstated. This is because many short disputes may never have been reported, either because they involved few workers, did not impact on services, or simply because the information missed the newspaper publication deadlines. Many may simply have never been publicised beyond their participants or the SECV. Holden and Iverson concluded that ‘there is no evidence to support unsubstantiated statements that promote the Latrobe Valley S.E.C.V. as a hotbed of industrial conflict’ and that this image has developed ‘because the consequences of workers action has an immediate effect on the community’.³⁹

Data collected by Benson between 1982 and 1987 indicated that the majority of shop stewards in the LV accepted that industrial action to influence the ACAC or to speed up negotiations was justified.⁴⁰ Despite this, only about half of the blue collar

³⁷ John Benson and Kevin Hince, *Determinants of industrial relations in coal winning, power generation and associated construction in the Latrobe Valley: a preliminary analysis*, Schools of Business and Social Sciences, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Churchill, 1982, p. 1.

³⁸ Maxine Holden and Ricky Iverson, *Industrial conflict: the Latrobe Valley S.E.C.V. 1960-1977*, Churchill, School of Business and Social Sciences, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, 1982.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ John Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991, p. 139.

stewards had been involved in strike action, and the majority of blue collar stewards did not believe that strike action was the most effective tactic.⁴¹ Most strikes in the LV involved only a single union (61 per cent) and fewer than 250 workers (62 per cent). Strikes were generally short with 84 per cent ending with a return to work within two days, and only ten per cent of stewards had been involved in a dispute lasting ten or more days.⁴² Benson also found that the number of strikes had decreased since the earlier analysis by Holden and Iverson.

This is in accordance with the pattern of strike length pattern in Australia, as well as perhaps having been influenced by previous success in using short strikes when negotiating.⁴³ When industrial action did occur in the LV, it was often the result of events originating outside the region and the industry⁴⁴ indicating a strong feeling of union solidarity.

Benson and Hince⁴⁵ also noted that in any given year, one or two major disputes may account for the majority of man-hours lost within the SECV. This was most clearly shown by the 1977 maintenance workers strike, which resulted in 975,900 of the 987,500 man-hours lost during that year. That is, while there may be lengthy disputes in some years, which do not originate from outside the SECV, these do not occur often. These figures are confirmed by the SECV's internal statistics. These indicate that during the 1970s the number of strikes each year, apart from 1977/78, varied between 28 and 49 strikes, with days lost per employee varying from 0.37 to 2.82 each year. The 1977 figures were markedly different, with only 12 strikes, but an average time lost per

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 142.

⁴² Ibid., p. 144.

⁴³ David Card, 'Longitudinal analysis of strike activity', *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 6, no. 2, April 1988, pp. 147-176.

⁴⁴ Benson and Hince, 'Understanding regional industrial relations systems', p. 134.

⁴⁵ Benson and Hince, *Determinants of industrial relations in coal winning, power generation and associated construction in the Latrobe Valley: a preliminary analysis*, p. 10.

employee of 6.47 days.⁴⁶ This figure serves to confirm the unusual nature of the 1977 dispute within the SECV.

Benson and Hince⁴⁷ also examined interstate comparisons of statistics for industrial disputes in the ABS category of Electricity, gas and water, SECV workforce strike statistics, and statistics on strikes and other disputes for the SECV Latrobe Valley workforce. During the period 1977 to 1980, apart from 1977, Victoria compared favourably with other states when either total working days lost per year, or total working days lost per employee per year were examined. They concluded that at the aggregate level, industries classified in the category of Electricity, gas and water do not stand out as strike prone.

Gordon,⁴⁸ presenting data from an earlier time period, noted that during the period 1968-1973 in the category of Electricity, gas and water supply, no one state registered either high employee lost time or high employee involvement. However the average duration of strikes in Victoria of 4.25 days in this sector was the highest of all the states.

Benson and Hince⁴⁹ have suggested that when strikes do occur in the power industry or in associated construction they tend to be long and difficult to resolve. Referring to the LV, they noted that 'a strike involving the power industry, generation or construction, has a high public and political profile; and this must be seen as part of the backdrop to industrial relations in the region.'⁵⁰ This view was echoed by the SECV's Chairman and General Manager who noted that publicity arising from stoppages in the

⁴⁶ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 440, File 80/1094 pt 2, Strikes SEC, 23 July 1979.

⁴⁷ Benson and Hince, *Determinants of industrial relations in coal winning, power generation and associated construction in the Latrobe Valley: a preliminary analysis*.

⁴⁸ Barry Gordon, 'A ninety-sector analysis of industrial disputes in Australia, 1968-73', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 17, no. 3, September 1975, pp. 240-254.

⁴⁹ Benson and Hince, 'Understanding regional industrial relations systems', p. 134.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5.

industry gave a distorted view of their frequency not supported by the facts.⁵¹ However, despite the perception sometimes given in the media, in general the electricity industry both Australia wide and in Victoria is not more prone to strikes than industry in general.⁵²

This section has examined statistics concerning strikes in the Electricity generating industry, both in Victoria and Australia, and in the LV SECV. While in general it has been concluded that this industry is no more industrially active or has lengthier strikes than others, it is also worth highlighting the comments about the effect of publicity and public concern that an electricity strike has. Such impact and publicity act in concert to make it appear that there is a high strike rate and employee militancy in this industry. This provides an important context for the 1977 dispute.

The pattern of strikes in Australia has been linked to a range of economic and political factors including inflation and legislation, and affected by the extent of unionisation. What then causes a small proportion of strikes to turn into long trials of strength between employees and their employer? As has been shown, a lengthy dispute is unusual. While there have been many suggestions about the causes of strikes, there have been few attempts to theorise lengthy strikes as a specific class of dispute. In the next section, a range of theories about the causes of strikes and the factors which turn them into lengthy disputes will be considered. This will permit a later assessment of the 1977 dispute in terms of this examination of the theory around strikes, and in particular, lengthy strikes.

The literature of strikes

The previous sections have placed the lengthy 1977 dispute within strikes in Australia, as well as within those of the electricity generating industry and the SECV.

⁵¹ *Australian Financial Review*, 11 February 1974, pp. 27-29.

⁵² Stephen Rosenthal and Peter Russ, *The politics of power: inside Australia's electric utilities*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988, p. 109.

This has confirmed that such lengthy strikes are unusual within those two contexts. This section will discuss the literature of strikes, in order to understand the suggested causes of such mobilisations, the means by which they are sustained, and how they are brought to an end. As was noted earlier, there is generally no differentiation between the possible causes of, and reasons for, lengthy as opposed to short strikes. This is despite the usefulness of such a distinction, in both predicting lengthy disputes and perhaps avoiding them. When and how does a decision to take industrial action become a decision to withdraw labour? What are the factors which turn what may be expected to be a brief strike into a trial of strength and a protracted struggle? Despite the fact that they are uncommon, lengthy strikes have not generally been regarded as exceptional cases in the literature.

A number of accounts describe and analyse lengthy disputes and thus provide an important record.⁵³ However, the literature of lengthy disputes is generally one which focuses on workplace conflict and the resulting efforts to control (by management) and to resist (by labour) within the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of workplace regimes. The interpretation of such events could often benefit from an increased theorization which is not generally undertaken. An additional complexity in industrial disputes lies with the terminology. Lengthy disputes are often emotional events, and the issue on some occasions of whether there has been a withdrawal of labour by employees, that is a strike, or whether the employer has chosen to lockout his employees, may be contested. The strategies then decided on to progress a claim may be

⁵³See for example accounts of Australian disputes such as Max Brown, *The black Eureka*, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1976; Phillip Deery, *The 1949 coal strike*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, School of Humanities, Department of History, La Trobe University, 1976; Carol Fox, *Enough is enough: the 1986 Victorian nurses' strike*, School of Health Services Management, University of New South Wales, Kensington, NSW, 1991; Brad Norington, *Sky pirates: the pilots' strike that grounded Australia*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Crows Nest, NSW, 1990; Mark Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, Rank and File Press, Brisbane, 1993; Alan Stewart, *Mt. Isa: in search of a culprit*, Hill of Content, Melbourne, Vic., 1965; Stuart Svensen, *The shearers' war: the story of the 1891 shearers' strike*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1989; Helen Trinca and Anne Davies, *Waterfront: the battle that changed Australia*, Random House, Milsons Point, 2000.

quite different in each situation. In the following discussion, I focus on the strike, where the decision to withhold labour has been made by the employees, since this appears to be the most common scenario in lengthy disputes.

In an exception to the general lack of literature on the theorising of lengthy strikes, Vivienne Mackay's⁵⁴ recent work provides an important contribution through her discussion of the specific roles of grievance, mobilisation and the interaction of connected parties in the unfolding of lengthy strikes. After analysing three lengthy strikes in the United Kingdom garment industry, she concluded that both the extent to which the workers' grievance challenged workplace control, and 'resonated with potential supporters (on both sides of the conflict)'⁵⁵ had an impact on the length of the strike. Mackay suggested that grievances 'that posed a broad challenge to management and had wider economic resonance made settlement harder.'⁵⁶ In addition, a lengthy dispute itself provides a sustained challenge to the employer, quite apart from the formal issue resulting in the dispute, and this needs to be taken into account when examining the length of mobilisation.⁵⁷

There have been a variety of approaches to theories of strikes.⁵⁸ Efforts to establish underlying causes of strikes have focused on themes such as frustration of workers and lack of communication, conflicts of interest, and social disorganisation, as well as on economic influences and the nature of particular industries and regions.⁵⁹ The discussion around causes of strikes which follows will consider two major streams

⁵⁴ Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. i.

⁵⁷ Jack Dromey and Graham Taylor, *Grunwick: the workers' story*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1978.

⁵⁸ John E. Kelly and Nigel Nicholson, 'The causation of strikes: a review of theoretical approaches and the potential contribution of social psychology', *Human Relations*, vol. 33, no. 12, December 1980, pp. 853-883.

⁵⁹ P. K. Edwards, 'The 'social' determination of strike activity: an explication and critique', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 1979, pp. 198-216; Stephen J. Frenkel, 'Inter-industry strike patterns: towards a new analytical framework', *Australian Journal of Management*, vol. 5, no. 1/2, October 1980, pp. 27-43; K.G.J.C. Knowles, *Strikes: a study in industrial conflict, with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1952.

within this debate. These are firstly, the role of workplace conflict and secondly, the nature of the social processes and relationships which are involved in a decision to mobilise for industrial action. One significant focus has been on employer-employee conflict, as the underlying cause of industrial disputation, and its relationship to the issue of workplace control. A number of writers have proposed that conflict is inevitable because of the irreconcilable interests of capital (including management) and labour in a system which generally favours capital.⁶⁰ This is because the employer wishes to purchase labour at the lowest possible price to maximise profit, while the employee wishes to sell his labour for the highest possible price to provide a reasonable standard of living.⁶¹ The extent of the resultant conflict is then said to be determined by the extent of control in the workplace.⁶² If the extent of managerial control is not accepted as legitimate, the result is resistance, less willingness to contribute, and other displays of conflict.⁶³ The individuals who are the owners of the labour power have their own interests and needs, and resist being treated like a commodity.⁶⁴ They retain their right to withdraw labour completely, or to reduce effort, as appropriate in the particular circumstances.

⁶⁰ Including V.L. Allen, *The sociology of industrial relations: studies in method*, Longman, London, 1971; Robin Blackburn, 'The unequal society', in Robin Blackburn and Alexander Cockburn (eds), *The incompatibles: trade union militancy and the consensus*, Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, Harmondsworth, England, 1967, pp. 15-55; Gregor Gall and Robert Hebdon, 'Conflict at work', in Paul Blyton, Nicolas Bacon, Jack Fiorito and Edmund Heery (eds), *The Sage handbook of industrial relations*, Sage, Los Angeles, 2008, pp. 588-605; Richard Hyman, *Industrial relations: a Marxist introduction*, Macmillan, London, 1975; Hyman, *Strikes*; Claus Offe and Helmut Wessenthal, 'Two logics of collective action', in Claus Offe (ed.), *Disorganized capitalism: contemporary transformation of work and politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 170-220; Charles Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass, 1978, pp. 159-61.

⁶¹ Allen, *The sociology of industrial relations: studies in method*, p. 10; Arthur Kornhauser, 'Human motivations underlying industrial conflict', in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (eds), *Industrial conflict*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1954, pp. 62-85.

⁶² Colin Crouch, *Trade unions: the logic of collective action*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1982, pp. 106-9; P. K. Edwards and Hugh Scullion, *The social organization of industrial conflict*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982.

⁶³ Dorwin Cartwright, 'Influence, leadership, control', in James G. March (ed.), *Handbook of organizations*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1965, pp. 1-47; Edwards and Scullion, *The social organization of industrial conflict*; Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 97.

⁶⁴ Richard Edwards, *Contested terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century*, Basic Books, New York, 1979, p. 12; Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 103.

Yet the existence of conflict by itself cannot explain how and why workers choose to withdraw their labour, what form of withdrawal is used, and why some withdrawals are longer than others. The strike is only one way⁶⁵ of attempting to control the labour process, and of expressing frustration at a lack of power.⁶⁶ Edwards and Scullion have suggested however that 'the highly particular circumstances to which they are subject'⁶⁷ in their workplace relations is part of why different workers respond in different ways.

While pay is most often given as the reason for a strike, the actions of management and perceptions of fairness or otherwise are also often cited as reasons for action.⁶⁸ Claims for a pay increase have been viewed as a 'legitimate' reason for a dispute, whereas action over those less tangible matters affecting the conditions of work may be viewed as more diffuse and impacting to a greater extent on managerial prerogative.⁶⁹ As Lane and Roberts have stated, 'It often appears as though the only way that strikers can make themselves understood is by putting a price on their return to work even though the original reason for coming out may have possessed only the most tenuous relationship to money.'⁷⁰ These issues may surface as part of negotiation related to a demand for a pay increase, and it is difficult to know whether they were the foundation for a dispute in the first instance. The underlying grievance may never be precisely articulated in the public sphere, but remains something known only to the individual or the group, or expressed only within the framework of a more 'acceptable'

⁶⁵ Edwards and Scullion, *The social organization of industrial conflict*; Hyman, *Strikes*, pp. 55-56.

⁶⁶ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *The changing system of industrial relations in Great Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p. 269; Knowles, *Strikes: a study in industrial conflict, with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, p. 218.

⁶⁷ Edwards and Scullion, *The social organization of industrial conflict*, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁸ Clegg, *The changing system of industrial relations in Great Britain*, p. 271.

⁶⁹ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 129.

⁷⁰ Tony Lane and Kenneth Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, Fontana, London, 1971, p. 17.

concern.⁷¹ There may be many reasons for disputes, not just the formal and perhaps most visible issue.

Issues of management prerogative have been proposed to result in longer disputes, because they are more fundamental to working life and determine the attitude/s of employees to their employer and to their job.⁷² In addition, these issues may be seen as a personal threat to managers.⁷³ The employer, via the manager, is said to value the control over the means of production to a greater extent than wage rates which may have the same financial costs. Conflict over the means and extent of control over the labour process is then seen as a threat to the power relationships which exist.⁷⁴ Any move to increase the power held by workers will be contested by management and employers, in order to retain the status quo or increase the control (power) which is available to them.⁷⁵ This will result in greater resistance to concessions in this area and thus result in a longer dispute, and assumes that workers will only mobilise for job control issues if they regard them as as valuable as an equivalent pay rise. Yet the tradeoff for the rank and file may be that the negotiations need to go beyond what may be accomplished at the local level, removing the dispute from the control of the shop stewards. This factor may be sufficient to reduce the likelihood of mobilisation over conditions and increase that over pay.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Knowles, *Strikes: a study in industrial conflict, with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, p. 219; Kornhauser, 'Human motivations underlying industrial conflict'; Paul F. Salipante and René Bouwen, 'Behavioural analysis of grievances: conflict sources, complexity and transformation', *Employee Relations*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1990, pp. 17-22.

⁷² Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. i.

⁷³ Arnold S. Tannenbaum, 'Unions', in James G. March (ed.), *Handbook of organizations*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1965, pp. 710-763, p. 722.

⁷⁴ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 96; Paul S. Kirkbride, 'The neglect of power in industrial relations theory', in Jean F. Hartley and Geoffrey M. Stephenson (eds), *Employment relations: the psychology of influence and control at work*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, pp. 67-88; Lumley, 'Control over the organisation and conduct of work: evidence from some Australian workplaces'.

⁷⁵ Eric Batstone, Ian Boraston and Stephen Frenkel, *The social organization of strikes*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, pp. 28-9; Harry Braverman, *Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974, p. 62; Crouch, *Trade unions*, p. 152.

⁷⁶ Crouch, *Trade unions*, pp. 138-45.

A second approach to the consideration of strikes has examined the social processes involved, as well as the nature of the particular issue. Early work included that of Hiller,⁷⁷ who produced a phasic model of particular processes, and Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel,⁷⁸ who examined the specific roles of shop stewards. This approach has been more extensively developed through the literature of social movement theory, emphasising processes rather than causes per se of strikes and other industrial mobilisations. Such theory has developed from the work of Tilly⁷⁹ which focused on the importance of group organisation and mobilisation as a result of individual powerlessness. He proposed a model which combined shared interests, collective action, opportunity, organisation and resources to sustain mobilisation.

These factors have been articulated more recently within Kelly's⁸⁰ theory of industrial relations, which he has termed Mobilisation Theory. Kelly's work has built on that of Tilly,⁸¹ McAdam⁸² and Gamson⁸³ to provide a framework for examining the conditions under which collective identity emerges and is sustained by individuals, and the forms of the collective action which may ensue. Mobilisation Theory provides a general framework consisting of the five concepts of interests, mobilisation, organisation, opportunity and the forms of collective action, as proposed by Tilly.⁸⁴

The concept of interest refers to the particular interest of the working class and how they are defined, their relationships to the interests of their employers, and whether they are defined around an individual or a collective group. Mobilisation refers to the

⁷⁷ Ernest T. Hiller, *The strike: a study in collective action*, Arno, New York, 1969.

⁷⁸ Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, *The social organization of strikes*.

⁷⁹ Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France 1830-1968*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974; Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*.

⁸⁰ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

⁸¹ Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*.

⁸² Doug McAdam, 'Micromobilization contexts and recruitment to activism', *International Social Movement Research*, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 125-154.

⁸³ William A. Gamson, *Talking politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; William A. Gamson, 'Constructing social protest', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *Social movements and culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995, pp. 85-106.

⁸⁴ Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*.

‘ways in which individuals are transformed into a collective actor’⁸⁵. The third component, organisation, refers to the structure of a particular group and how this affects its capacity for collective action. Opportunity for mobilisation includes the balance of power between those groups involved, the cost of repression to those taking action, and those opportunities available for the pursuit of claims. The final component is collective action, which can take different forms depending on the balance between the other four components.⁸⁶

In addition, within Mobilisation Theory a more specific framework highlights the roles of injustice (‘the conviction that an event, action or situation is “wrong” or “illegitimate”’)⁸⁷, agency (the likelihood of change through collective action), identity (the social categories with which individuals identify, and those attitudes and attributions which accompany them) and attribution (where responsibility lies for an event or action) in shaping the ways in which people define their interests. These may be modified through workplace interactions, and provide the opportunities for leaders to foster issue identification and collective identity. Mobilisation Theory attempts to redirect the focus of collective action away from bargaining structures and institutions, and towards the social processes of industrial relations.

Both strengths and weaknesses have been identified in Mobilisation Theory.⁸⁸ The strengths of Kelly’s theory include recognition of the role of power in the industrial relations dynamic, and the importance of agency as well as political, social and economic factors in the development of collective action. Deficiencies include difficulties defining the circumstances under which an injustice is attributed to the employer rather than to another agency, and deciding the means by which a sense of

⁸⁵ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, p. 25.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-6.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁸ Roderick Martin, ‘Mobilization theory: a new paradigm for industrial relations?’, *Human Relations*, vol. 52, no. 9, September 1999, pp. 1205-1216.

injustice is acquired and given weight. In addition, the lack of consideration of class structure, the social relations of production and service, and forms of collective organisation and action, together with an over-emphasis on leadership, have also been seen as constraining the usefulness of Mobilisation Theory.⁸⁹

In an extension to Mobilisation Theory, Atzeni⁹⁰ has suggested that any theoretical discussion about grievance, the framing of an injustice by leaders, and the form which mobilisation should take, is not relevant in the case of a spontaneous mobilisation. Rather the leadership and the collective meaning to an injustice are ascribed to after the fact; mobilisation leads to the sharing of the same perceptions of the injustices within the workplace which then become collective. However while this may to some extent be true, it does not take account the situation, more common in Australia, where the individual grievance is expressed via the shop steward/shop committee/union network, thus communicating the foundation of a collective grievance prior to any spontaneous mobilisation, and within which the leadership of the rank and file plays an important part in either fostering, or suppressing, the grievance. However, if strike action is made as a spur of the moment choice by a group of workers, the effect is likely to be the lack of a coherent strategy for the campaign.⁹¹

In theorising lengthy disputes (modifying Kelly),⁹² I suggest there are three particular questions to be addressed. Firstly, how do individuals acquire a collective, as opposed to individual, grievance; second, how and under what conditions do individuals take collective action; and third, what circumstances are required to maintain, or conversely, to terminate, collective action?

⁸⁹ Peter Fairbrother, 'Book review of Gregor Gall (ed.), Union organizing: campaigning for trade union recognition', *Capital & Class*, no. 87, Autumn 2005, pp. 257-263.

⁹⁰ Maurizio Atzeni, 'Searching for injustice and finding solidarity?: a contribution to the mobilisation theory debate', *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 40, no. 1, January 2009, pp. 5-16.

⁹¹ Lyddon, 'Rediscovering the past: recent British strike tactics in historical perspective', p. 113.

⁹² Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

Kelly⁹³ has proposed that acquiring a sense of collective grievance will be aided by three processes: attribution of a grievance to a specific agency which thus provides a specific focus for collective action; determined leadership, which will also focus action on a particular issue as well as promoting group cohesion and identity; and social identification of individuals with a specific group with particular interests and values.

The importance of employee grievance has been seen as significant, with Salipante and Bouwen⁹⁴ suggesting that recognising the scope of grievances, both formal and informal, is necessary to understand why they continue or are resolved. The ability to attribute the grievance to a particular agency will determine whether or not mobilisation will occur.⁹⁵ The role of leaders is to suggest and facilitate this attribution⁹⁶ by promoting group cohesion and identity. The interpretation of the grievance by the stewards (leaders) and the rank and file, rather than the grievance itself, will provide the rationale for mobilisation.⁹⁷

The need for the grievance to be accompanied by a sense of injustice has also been seen as important.⁹⁸ Such injustice is viewed by Gamson⁹⁹ as leading to anger and a sense of righteousness, and Jasper¹⁰⁰ has suggested that mobilisation is most likely to happen when strong emotions, likely to be negative, such as threat, outrage, anger or fear, are present. Shared emotions such as feelings towards outsiders or government actions, and reciprocal emotions such as loyalty, friendship and solidarity are key

⁹³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁴ Salipante and Bouwen, 'Behavioural analysis of grievances: conflict sources, complexity and transformation'.

⁹⁵ Nancy Brown Johnson and Paul Jarley, 'Justice and union participation: an extension and test of Mobilization Theory', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 42, no. 3, September 2004, pp. 543-562.

⁹⁶ James M. Jasper, 'The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1998, pp. 397-424.

⁹⁷ David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford, 'Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51, no. 4, August 1986, pp. 464-481.

⁹⁸ Henry Friedman and Sander Meredeem, *The dynamics of industrial conflict: lessons from Ford*, Croom Helm, London, 1980; Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, p. 126; Bert Klandermans, *The social psychology of protest*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, pp. 38-40.

⁹⁹ Gamson, *Talking politics*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Jasper, 'The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements'.

sources of identification with a movement.¹⁰¹ Such emotions frame the issues important to a group and define group identity.

Leadership has been seen by Kelly and others¹⁰² as playing an important role in mobilisation. Leaders play a crucial role in shop floor activism by constructing a sense of grievance and attributing blame to the employer or the state, by promoting a sense of group identity, by persuading use of collective action, and by legitimating or defending such action.¹⁰³ Darlington¹⁰⁴ has suggested that left-wing steward activists commit to building workplace activism through targeting the sense of injustice at management, while Green, Black and Ackers¹⁰⁵ linked leadership style to the commitment and participation of rank and file union members. In similar vein, Metochi and others¹⁰⁶ have focused on union leadership which influences identification with the union and the workgroup, resulting in greater willingness to participate in trade union activities. Such identification assists the view that management is 'not one of us', making it more likely that injustice or illegality will be perceived in management daily activities. Such leaders

¹⁰¹ Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 'The return of the repressed: the fall and rise of emotions in social movement theory', *Mobilization: an International Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 65-83.

¹⁰² Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*. See also for example Ralph Darlington, 'Union militancy and left-wing leadership on London Underground', *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, March 2001, pp. 2-21; Ralph Darlington, 'Leadership and union militancy: the case of the RMT', *Capital & Class*, no. 99, Autumn 2009, pp. 3-32; Anne-marie Greene, John Black and Peter Ackers, 'The union makes us strong?: a study of the dynamics of workplace union leadership at two UK manufacturing plants', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 38, no. 1, March 2000, pp. 75-93; Melvina Metochi, 'The influence of leadership and member attitudes in understanding the nature of union participation', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 40, no. 1, March 2002, pp. 87-111.

¹⁰³ Darlington, 'Leadership and union militancy: the case of the RMT'; John Kelly, 'The future of trade unionism: injustice, identity and attribution', *Employee Relations*, vol. 19, no. 5, 1997, pp. 400-414; Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

¹⁰⁴ Darlington, 'Union militancy and left-wing leadership on London Underground'; Ralph Darlington, 'Agitator 'theory' of strikes re-evaluated', *Labor History*, vol. 47, no. 4, November 2006, pp. 485-509; Darlington, 'Leadership and union militancy: the case of the RMT'.

¹⁰⁵ Greene, Black and Ackers, 'The union makes us strong?: a study of the dynamics of workplace union leadership at two UK manufacturing plants'.

¹⁰⁶ Metochi, 'The influence of leadership and member attitudes in understanding the nature of union participation'. Naomi Ellemers, Dick De Gilder and S. Alexander Haslam, 'Motivating individuals and groups at work: a social identity perspective on leadership and group performance', *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 29, no. 3, July 2004, pp. 459-478; Caroline Kelly and John Kelly, 'Who gets involved in collective action?: social psychological determinants of individual participation in trade unions', *Human Relations*, vol. 47, no. 1, January 1994, pp. 63-88.

may encourage a type of shop floor organisation which is willing to present ‘a challenge from below’¹⁰⁷ to management.

Leadership is important in influencing not only union involvement but also attitudes. Jasper¹⁰⁸ has suggested that the feeling of group cohesion fostered by leaders creates a positive affect of friendship, loyalty and solidarity toward other group members, as well as shared negative emotions towards outsiders. Identification with, and thus loyalty to the union, is then proposed to be a pre-condition for members’ willingness to participate in union activities including mobilisation.¹⁰⁹ Successful action helps to consolidate union organisation and member commitment, thus encouraging future industrial action.¹¹⁰ However this conformity to the collective idea must be attractive enough to outweigh individual rivalries or prejudices.¹¹¹ Conversely, the taking of collective action to strike has also been seen as a factor which may encourage collective organisation.¹¹² The former encourages solidarity and inclusiveness, highlighting the shared conflict between labour and capital. This then demonstrates the value of collective organisation and encourages union membership.

Nepstad and Bob¹¹³ have suggested that effective movement leaders are believed to possess cultural capital (skills, knowledge and abilities) useful in both the aggrieved community and in a wider audience; social capital as embodied by ties created by ‘frequent face-to-face interactions, a history of personal or social relations, common

¹⁰⁷ Ralph Darlington, 'Workplace union militancy on Merseyside since the 1960s: extent, nature, causes, and decline', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, no. 19, Spring 2005, pp. 123-152, p. 124.

¹⁰⁸ Jasper, 'The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements'.

¹⁰⁹ John Ignatius Griffin, *Strikes: a study in quantitative economics*, AMS Press, New York, 1968, p. 98..

¹¹⁰ John Kelly, 'Union militancy and social partnership', in Peter Ackers, Chris Smith and Paul Smith (eds), *The new workplace and trade unionism*, Routledge, London, 1996, pp. 77-109; Bert Klandermans, 'How group identification helps to overcome the dilemma of collective action', *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 45, no. 5, January 2002, pp. 887-900.

¹¹¹ Hiller, *The strike: a study in collective action*, p. 35.

¹¹² Roberto Franzosi, *The puzzle of strikes: class and state strategies in postwar Italy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. ch 4; Gerald Friedman, *State-making and labor movements: France and the United States, 1876-1914*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1998, p. ch 1.

¹¹³ Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Clifford Bob, 'When do leaders matter?: hypotheses on leadership dynamics in social movements', *Mobilization: an International Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, February 2006, pp. 1-22.

meeting places and points of reference' which make it easier for a group to mobilise, as well as access to the media and other communication means which allows for the dissemination of information, appeals for support and the recruitment of followers from a much larger audience; and symbolic capital, 'including charisma, that reflects respect, social prestige and moral authority.'¹¹⁴ Charismatic leadership moves the 'needs, values, preferences and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests.'¹¹⁵

However, while consolidation and attribution of a collective grievance, identification with the union, and effective leadership are important, they do not of themselves result in mobilisation. A decision is required to take industrial action, and in a particular form. Klandermans¹¹⁶ has proposed that participation in mobilisation will be related to the perceived costs and benefits of participation based on the likelihood of a particular outcome being achieved. That is, reflecting a union which is well organised and with strong networks; the type of industrial action proposed; the expected numbers who will support the industrial action; and the influence of external events relevant to the particular issue in dispute. However, mobilisation depends on more than calculations of individual self-interest, but also on group interests and group gains and losses, as well as on social norms or involvement in networks.¹¹⁷ As Marks and Thompson have noted, the individual is more than 'a collective outcome of interest articulation,'¹¹⁸ but has his own identity.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Boas Shamir, Robert J. House and Michael B. Arthur, 'The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: a self-concept based theory', *Organization Science*, vol. 4, no. 4, November 1993, pp. 577-594, p. 577.

¹¹⁶ Bert Klandermans, 'Mobilization and participation in trade union action: an expectancy-value approach', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, vol. 57, no. 2, June 1984, pp. 107-120.

¹¹⁷ Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of solidarity: consciousness, action, and contemporary American workers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988, pp. 83-85; Bert Klandermans, 'Introduction: social movement organizations and the study of social movements', *International Social Movement Research*, vol. 2, 1989, pp. 1-17.

¹¹⁸ Abigail Marks and Paul Thompson, 'Beyond the blank slate: identities and interests at work', in Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (eds), *Working life: renewing labour process analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010, pp. 316-338, p. 326.

While there may be a decision to take industrial action, on what basis is the decision about the particular form made? It is not necessarily the case that the action will be proportional to the perceived seriousness of the grievance: a strike may be less effective than other forms of action. Other sanctions such as go-slows may be as effective as strikes, with significant effect on firms but generating less public disapproval, and they may be less expensive for workers.¹¹⁹

A number of factors may precipitate a strike, and it has been suggested that 'a distinction must be made between the incidents which precipitate a crisis and the underlying complex of factors which render the parties vulnerable to conflict over such incidents.'¹²⁰ Clack¹²¹ and Marsh¹²² have both highlighted the possible incongruence between the action triggering a strike and the subsequent bargaining demands which has also been seen in other disputes.¹²³ Kelly and Nicholson¹²⁴ have also noted that a distinction needs to be made about the demands made prior to the strike, the triggers of strikes (that is the event which starts them) and the issues subsequently used in the bargaining process, and have suggested that the greater the variation between these three issues, the longer will be the strike.

Once the decision to mobilise is made, how then is collective action maintained, or conversely, terminated? While there is a range of suggestions about why disputes start, these do not generally address the issue of why on some occasions they continue

¹¹⁹ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 59; Lyddon, 'Rediscovering the past: recent British strike tactics in historical perspective'.

¹²⁰ Desmond W. Oxnam, 'Issues in industrial conflict: Australian experience 1913-1963', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1967, pp. 13-25, p. 13.

¹²¹ Garfield Clack, *Industrial relations in a British car factory*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1967.

¹²² Peter Marsh, *Anatomy of a strike: unions, employers and Punjabi workers in a Southall factory*, Institute of Race Relations, London, 1967.

¹²³ Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel, *The social organization of strikes*.

¹²⁴ Kelly and Nicholson, 'The causation of strikes: a review of theoretical approaches and the potential contribution of social psychology'.

for a lengthy period. This is despite the cost to individuals of such events¹²⁵ and the end result for the gaining or loss of power by employer or union.¹²⁶ Kelly has little to say about the cessation of mobilisation and what causes it. We are left to conclude that if each of the five elements which it identifies is required for the commencement of some form of industrial mobilisation, then if one of the elements ceases to exist, mobilisation, regardless of its form, will end. Alternatively, it may also be the case that if one factor changes significantly, such that its importance relative to other factors changes, then this will affect the form of mobilisation or result in its cessation.

A key factor in maintaining mobilisation is access to resources. These may include money and control over how it is distributed, sufficient people to fundraise, to visit other trade union and community groups, to look after families, distribute leaflets and arrange other publicity, to organise events to boost and sustain morale such as social events, and to man picket lines.¹²⁷ These activities encourage commitment, cohesion, and collective dependence of the workgroup, whereas taking up other paid work reduces collective independence and cohesion. The ability of family and community support to affect the length of mobilisation lies with the reinforcement of the decision of the strikers that their grievance is justified. This support in practical terms is demonstrated by donations of money or goods for the workers in dispute. In addition, it assists in affirming and maintaining the collective identification and thus may have a significant effect on maintaining mobilisation.¹²⁸ It has been suggested that being on an extended

¹²⁵ Jean Hartley and John Kelly, 'Psychology and industrial relations: from conflict to cooperation?', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, vol. 59, no. 3, September 1986, pp. 161-176; Hyman, *Strikes*, pp. 20-22.

¹²⁶ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, p. 18.

¹²⁷ John Gennard, *Financing strikers*, Macmillan, London, 1977; Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*.

¹²⁸ Peter Cochrane, 'The Wonthaggi coal strike, 1934', *Labour History*, no. 27, November 1974, pp. 12-30; John Dargavel, 'Not easy work to starve their employees': the 1921-22 Tasmanian timber dispute', *Labour History*, no. 84, May 2003, pp. 47-67; Murray and Peetz, *Women of the coal rushes*; Andrew Reeves, *Up from the underworld: coalminers and community in Wonthaggi, 1909-1968*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2011; Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*; Stewart, *Mt. Isa: in search of a*

strike becomes a way of life, a 'liberating experience'¹²⁹ instead of going to work.¹³⁰

This leads to maintaining the strike becoming a goal in its own right.

Kelly and Nicholson¹³¹ have noted that management and the media both play a role in the presentation of strikes, including interpretation and public presentation of demands, viability and outcomes. In addition, a continued media presence is likely to boost morale thus increasing cohesion¹³² and maintaining mobilisation, while any perceived attack on the group may also act to increase cohesion.¹³³ The extent to which a grievance is relevant to potential supporters (on both sides of the conflict) provides a reason to lend support thus encouraging continued mobilisation.¹³⁴ The extent of such support may provide a signal to both employers and employees, who then decide whether to compromise or not on a settlement to the dispute.¹³⁵

The reaction of other parties may limit or prolong a strike. The police, the courts or the government may become involved¹³⁶ and union officials or non-involved unions may support or undermine a particular dispute for various reasons,¹³⁷ including ideological values,¹³⁸ or a desire to retain existing relativities.¹³⁹

culprit; Diane van den Broek, 'Partners in protest: the case of the 1929 timber workers' strike', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 7, no. 2, December 1996, pp. 145-163.

¹²⁹ Lane and Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, p. 167.

¹³⁰ Friedman and Meredeem, *The dynamics of industrial conflict: lessons from Ford*, p. 199; Michelle Perrot, *Workers on strike: France 1871-1890*, Berg, Leamington Spa, UK, 1987, pp. 145-9.

¹³¹ Kelly and Nicholson, 'The causation of strikes: a review of theoretical approaches and the potential contribution of social psychology'.

¹³² Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. 179.

¹³³ Hiller, *The strike: a study in collective action*, p. 90.

¹³⁴ Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. 178.

¹³⁵ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Karen Beckwith, 'Hinges in collective action: strategic innovation in the Pittston coal strike', *Mobilization: an International Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, Fall 2000, pp. 179-199.

¹³⁷ V.L. Allen, *Power in trade unions: a study of their organization in Great Britain*, Longmans, Green, London, 1954, pp. 196-8; John Kelly, *Trade unions and socialist politics*, Verso, London, 1988, pp. 149-53; Offe and Wiesensthal, 'Two logics of collective action', p. 188.

¹³⁸ John Kelly and Edmund Heery, *Working for the union: British trade union officers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Eng., 1994, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Andrew L. Friedman, *Industry and labour: class struggle at work and monopoly capitalism*, Macmillan, London, 1977, p. 53.

A key aim of mobilisation is the cessation of production as a precondition for a successful outcome.¹⁴⁰ However, if the organisation continues to provide its product, there is likely to be significant tension between the strikers, who see a lack of results from their mobilisation, and their leaders, who may have encouraged or recommended the mobilisation and would lose face if they acknowledge that they have miscalculated. Any continued production by an organisation may thus threaten the success of mobilisation.

A strike is not an action taken in a vacuum by workers. It results from a series of interactions between workers and employers which result in a decision to withdraw labour.¹⁴¹ Prior management–union relations are significant, both in their interpretation, in the lessons which were learnt, and as a guide to how a dispute could be expected to develop.¹⁴² The previous success record in industrial action will to a large extent govern the taking of industrial action in the future. Disputes can only be fought on the basis of previous behaviour of both sides in order to make any prediction at all about their likely course.¹⁴³ However, if the context changes significantly, then there can be little predictive ability. Thus any attempt to explain strikes needs to take such interactions into account. The interactions which affect the mobilisation decision may lie not only with the present but also in interactions and decisions in the past. In any given dispute, an

¹⁴⁰ Beckwith, 'Hinges in collective action: strategic innovation in the Pittston coal strike'; Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. 183.

¹⁴¹ Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as sequences of interaction: the American strike wave of 1886', *Social Science History*, vol. 26, no. 3, Fall 2002, pp. 583-617.

¹⁴² R.E. Fells, 'Industrial relationships at the plant level: a case study', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 29, no. 3, September 1987, pp. 350-364; Margaret Gardner and Rob McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute', in Roman Tomasic and Ric Lucas (eds), *Power, regulation and resistance: studies in the sociology of law*, Canberra College of Advanced Education, Canberra, 1986, pp. 57-69; Andrew W. Martin, 'Bureaucracy, power, and threat: unions and strikes in the United States, 1990-2001', *Mobilization: an International Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 217-237; David P. Waddington, 'The Ansell's brewery dispute: a social-cognitive approach to the study of strikes', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, vol. 59, no. 3, September 1986, pp. 231-46.

¹⁴³ Crouch, *Trade unions*, p. 82.

analysis of the sequence of interactions will assist to demonstrate the rationale behind the decision to mobilise, and also to help explain the length of the dispute.

Mackay¹⁴⁴ has suggested that the interactions between would-be strikers, or strikers, and management may result in a perception that if they hold out, their demands may be met. Similarly, interactions for example with other employers or with government may also strengthen the employers' determination to hold out. There may also be a lack of congruence over the nature of the issue between workers and the employer, such as in the 1970 seven-week Pilkington glass factory strike, where 'each party had its own conception of what were the main issues, each also tended to refuse even to acknowledge the relevance of issues that were considered important by the others.'¹⁴⁵ This incongruence affects the interactions between players, and thus the possible length of the strike.

It has been suggested that the longer a strike continues, the greater the chance of it continuing for even longer.¹⁴⁶ One reason for this may be that the longer the dispute lasts the more opportunities are provided to employers and the state to mobilise.¹⁴⁷ Actions may include stand downs, employing scabs, planning for increased mechanisation, and use of repressive legislation.

Are longer strikes more successful than their shorter counterparts? While it could be expected that a lengthy strike will put more pressure on an employer to provide a positive outcome, a long strike may also be viewed as a desperate reaction in an attempt to force a settlement. Card and Olsen, and others,¹⁴⁸ have concluded that strike length is

¹⁴⁴ Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*.

¹⁴⁵ Lane and Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, p. 236.

¹⁴⁶ Yigal Gerchak, 'Decreasing failure rates and related issues in the social sciences', *Operations Research*, vol. 32, no. 3, May-June 1984, pp. 537-546.

¹⁴⁷ Franzosi, *The puzzle of strikes: class and state strategies in postwar Italy*, pp. 301-2; Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁸ David Card and Craig A. Olson, 'Bargaining power, strike durations, and wage outcomes: an analysis of strikes in the 1880s', *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 1995, pp. 32-61; John Kennan, 'The economics of strikes', in Orley Ashenfelter and Richard Layard (eds), *Handbook of labor*

negatively associated with success. This is supported by Perrot,¹⁴⁹ who states that strikes over one month in length are less likely to result in a win than those which are shorter. Ragin, Coverman and Hayward¹⁵⁰ have concluded that long strikes are more likely to be associated with a compromise result rather than a successful outcome, while Hiller¹⁵¹ has suggested that the majority of disputes will end in compromise or defeat for the union/s, that lengthy strikes are less successful than short strikes, and that wildcat or unplanned strikes are less successful than planned strikes.

This thesis argues that strikes need to be analysed within the social, political and industrial context of the time. The particular context of each dispute will affect the conduct of that dispute.¹⁵² Disputes which at first glance may appear hasty and unreasoned, when interpreted in the social, historical and cultural context in which they occur, are in fact logical actions. The context is also impacted on by the ways in which the actors in the dispute have dealt with each other before and during the dispute, and their relationship (or perception of their relationship).¹⁵³

As well as the union officials and the rank and file, the local shop stewards, the employer, peak and regional trades and labour councils and the press, are all possible actors. Both positive and negative interactions between all the parties involved will clearly influence the length of a dispute. For example the strike may be unofficial thus placing union officials at odds with their member stewards, and members of other unions

economics, North-Holland, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1986, pp. 1091-1137; Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman, *Changing patterns of industrial conflict*, Wiley, New York, 1960, p. 56.

¹⁴⁹ Perrot, *Workers on strike: France 1871-1890*, p. 258.

¹⁵⁰ Charles C. Ragin, Shelley Coverman and Mark Hayward, 'Major labor disputes in Britain, 1902-1938: the relationship between resource expenditure and outcome', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 47, no. 2, April 1982, pp. 238-252.

¹⁵¹ Hiller, *The strike: a study in collective action*, pp. 207-8.

¹⁵² See for example Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes: causes, conduct & consequences*, Federation Press, Annandale, NSW, 1993; Phillip Deery (ed.), *Labour in conflict: the 1949 coal strike*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, ACT, 1978, p. xii; Gardner and McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute'; Martin, 'Bureaucracy, power, and threat: unions and strikes in the United States, 1990-2001', p. 222.

¹⁵³ Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross, 'Problems and viewpoints', in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (eds), *Industrial conflict*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1954, pp. 3-22.

may continue to work. Mackay¹⁵⁴ also considered these social relationships to be important when considering how lengthy strikes unfolded. However, the roles played by the various parties involved, and the impact of these roles, were not explicitly examined. She did not comment explicitly on context and its importance in the starting or resolution of particular lengthy disputes, or on the possible impact of changes or potential changes in power relationships.

Crouch,¹⁵⁵ discussing long strikes, has noted that there is a point in time when the cost to both strikers and employer is such that both sides are more willing to reach a compromise position. However, when the role of the employer in the dispute is taken over by the government then this may no longer be the case. This is of particular relevance when considering disputes in government instrumentalities, and this is an important contextual factor in the 1977 dispute. The government is a step removed from the place of production and has no direct involvement, but this may not stop it from intervening in a dispute. It is thus motivated by factors other than a possible loss of production when considering the cost of the strike.

The capacity of members to continue a lengthy dispute changes, perhaps dependent on strike pay, ability to find alternate work, having a spouse who is employed or eligible for social security benefits, and community attitudes. Thus it is only as time goes on that stewards and/or officials will be able to gauge the willingness of members to continue, or what settlement terms have become acceptable.

The other important factor I will argue is not the particular power relationships involved, but changes, or potential changes, to these relationships, which combine with the context at that time to signal a particular level of ‘threat’ which may not be seen as significant under other circumstances.

¹⁵⁴ Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*.

¹⁵⁵ Crouch, *Trade unions*, p. 80.

Kelly's¹⁵⁶ Mobilisation Theory, based on social movement theory, offers the possibility of examining the social processes which occurred both before and during the 1977 dispute, rather than just focussing on structural institutional issues. While Kelly's theory does not specifically concern lengthy strikes nonetheless it provides a useful starting point which has been used to frame industrial action¹⁵⁷ and has become generally accepted in the analysis of contemporary industrial relations. It offers a greater ability to answer specific questions about mobilisation, including the effectiveness of the mobilisation of a group, and the effectiveness of the mobilisation in terms of positive change, than traditional methods of industrial relations analysis.

This chapter has located the 1977 maintenance workers dispute within the literature of lengthy disputes, their causes and maintenance. This has been done through a discussion of Australian strikes in general, and those in the electricity generating industry and the SECV in particular. These have confirmed that the 1977 dispute was unusual in its length in those two contexts. The theoretical literature which was then discussed focused on two areas: the theme of workplace conflict as the underlying cause of industrial disputation, and the more recent emphasis on the social processes involved in disputes as articulated within Mobilisation Theory. In general, there is little distinction

¹⁵⁶ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

¹⁵⁷ See for example Vidu Badigannavar and John Kelly, 'Why are some union organizing campaigns more successful than others?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 43, no. 3, September 2005, pp. 515-535; Donna M. Buttigieg, Stephen Deery and Roderick Iverson, 'Mobilisation theory and its application in two wage campaigns', in Donna Buttigieg, Sandra Cockfield, Richard Cooney, Marjorie Jerrard and Al Rainnie (eds), *Trade unions in the community: values, issues, shared interests and alliances*, Heidelberg Press, Heidelberg, Vic., 2007, pp. 81-95; Donna M. Buttigieg, Stephen J. Deery and Roderick D. Iverson, 'Union mobilization: a consideration of the factors affecting the willingness of union members to take industrial action', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 46, no. 2, June 2008, pp. 248-267; Sandra Cockfield, 'Mobilising at the workplace: state regulation and collective action in three workplaces, 1900 to the 1920s', *Labour History*, no. 93, November 2007, pp. 35-55; Ralph Darlington, 'Shop stewards' leadership, left-wing activism and collective workplace union organisation', *Capital & Class*, no. 76, Spring 2002, pp. 95-126; Darlington, 'Leadership and union militancy: the case of the RMT'; Gregor Gall (ed.), *Union organizing: campaigning for trade union recognition*, Routledge, London, 2003; Geoffrey Wood and Pauline Dibben, 'Deprivation, delivery and union mobilisation: the case of the Congress of South African Trade Unions', *Irish Journal of Management*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2010, pp. 67-86.

made between short and lengthy strikes and the possible differences in the processes involved.

The next chapter will describe and justify the use of narrative method to tell the story of the dispute and to answer the research questions which have been posed. In order to compile the narrative, data on the 1977 dispute were collected using semi-structured interviews of participants in the dispute, and documentary research of relevant primary and secondary sources. The advantages and disadvantages of these means of collecting data will be discussed, together with the detail on the conduct of the interviews and the location of documentary sources.

Chapter Three: Research method and data collection

The previous chapter surveyed the literature on strike length in Australia and the electricity generating industry. This confirmed the unusual length of the 1977 dispute in these contexts. Following this, the literature on strikes was discussed. This discussion initially focused on conflict as the underlying basis of industrial disputation, and then moved to the more recent use of the social movement literature, and specifically the development of Mobilisation Theory, to examine the social processes involved in industrial mobilisation. In this chapter, the use of narrative method to tell the story of the dispute as an historical event will be discussed. After this, the specific data collection techniques used, semi-structured oral history interviews and documentary research, will be described.

In order to tell the story of the dispute, this historical event has required reconstruction. The examination and analysis requires access to the historical experiences of the people and organisations involved, each of which had their own motivations, limitations and meanings. This access provides a way of understanding the event through both its context and its participants. This history is not just a means of explaining the facts of an event, but is also a way of viewing cultural meaning and the expression of collective memory.¹

The way in which we perceive an historical event may be framed by how we perceive 'time'. According to Griffin, time defines history, which may be seen as either 'part of the social context in which things happen, or as processual unfolding'.² In both ways, time is part of the structural and cultural context within which people live, act and

¹ Larry J. Griffin, 'How is sociology informed by history?', *Social Forces*, vol. 73, no. 4, June 1995, pp. 1245-1254.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1247.

think. Time as context joins with place to provide the specific setting for the event; time as event involves the interplay of social structure and social action.³

The events that shape people's lives occur in a sequence of actions within and through time. These social actions, through the progression of time, make and thus remake the circumstances through which social action occurs.⁴ The dynamic processes occurring within a social event are dependent on or sensitive to actions, events or conditions which exist locally, that is in a given place and time. The analysis of such an event thus requires the use of methods that can conceptualise and analyse both the historical sequence and the historical context. The data should track social actions through time, and be intrinsically sequential in their definition and construction, as a mirror to the social event which they are representing and analysing.⁵ Telling or re-telling the story of an event in temporal order is important because 'when things happen within a sequence affects how they happen'.⁶

Thus the types of data which will be useful may include the contemporaneous accounts such as those in documentary reports of the time, as well as the accounts given at the time or after the event by its individual participants. Aminzade⁷ has signalled the need to examine both the subjective accounts and the objective conditions of an event to better explain the possibilities for remaking the context and thus the changing possible outcomes of an event. Actions taken at a particular time will close off some possibilities and affect a closer move towards certain outcomes.⁸ Thus the small actions of people

³ Larry J. Griffin, 'Temporality, events, and explanation in historical sociology', *Sociological methods & research*, vol. 20, no. 4, May 1992, pp. 403-427.

⁴ Philip Abrams, *Historical sociology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1982.

⁵ Griffin, 'How is sociology informed by history?'.

⁶ Charles Tilly, *Big structures, large processes, huge comparisons*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1984, p. 14.

⁷ Ronald Aminzade, 'Historical sociology and time', *Sociological Methods & Research*, vol. 20, no. 4, May 1992, pp. 456-480.

⁸ Ibid; William H. Sewell, 'Three temporalities: toward an eventful sociology', in Terrence J. McDonald (ed.), *The historic turn in the human sciences*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1996, pp. 245-80, p. 263.

and events are important parts of the story.⁹ The use of multiple sources of data enables the research questions to be explored from a number of viewpoints. This provides a variety of perspectives, each of which will offer its own interpretation of events, thoughts and actions, providing a multi-dimensional exploration.¹⁰

However, understanding an historical event involves more than the reconstruction of the processes and decisions that occurred. To explain the structuring of social action through time, Griffin¹¹ suggests the use of the narrative method, which is itself intrinsically temporal in its logic. Narrative may be viewed as a connection of events seen as important by a speaker into a contingent sequence which offers the meanings desired by the speaker. Narrative is based on the sequences of events or actions within their contexts, whether personal, temporal or physical,¹² thus looking deeper than the surface of the story. Narrative method operates on the assumption that sociohistorical processes occur in sequences of actions embedded in localised social relations¹³ and events which are dependent on place.¹⁴ While social life unfolds in a temporally sequenced way, it also unfolds in a particular place. An awareness and understanding of the social significance of place and the particular local combination of conditions provides the means of understanding the way they determine local social life, culture and the means of social change.¹⁵ This emphasis on locale is an important context for the 1977 dispute and will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Narratives are thus based on a series of social actions. They ‘unify a number of past or contemporaneous actions and happenings ... into a coherent relational whole that

⁹ Donald N. McCloskey, 'History, differential equations, and the problem of narration', *History and Theory*, vol. 30, no. 1, February 1991, pp. 21-36.

¹⁰ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative researching*, 2nd ed., Sage, London, 2002, p. 190.

¹¹ Griffin, 'How is sociology informed by history?', p. 1252.

¹² Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative methods for the human sciences*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2008, pp. 3, 11.

¹³ Larry W. Isaac, 'Transforming localities: reflections on time, causality, and narrative in contemporary historical sociology', *Historical Methods*, vol. 30, no. 1, Winter 1997, pp. 4-12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

gives meaning to and explains each of its elements and is, at the same time, constituted by them.¹⁶ Narrative is inherently temporal and can describe, represent and explain the unfolding of social actions and events. It can also link social actions occurring in multiple times and different places.¹⁷ The use of narrative is enhanced by considering it within particular circumstances, conditions and goals,¹⁸ in order to better interpret and analyse the meaning and quality of the account. Acknowledging this context, whether of local culture and mores, jobs or occupations, or as a member of one or more organisations or groups, will assist in the framing and interpretation of a story. The use of narrative methodology in historical analysis offers a means of incorporating human agency and particular events at the micro level, since people and their actions may be viewed on the individual rather than on the collective level.¹⁹

The reconstruction of the historical record means the interweaving of the fragments that exist in order to achieve understanding: analysing the past in order to gain insight into the issues of the present. In reconstructing the historical record of a social event thirty years later, there are several sources which are both relevant and available, each with advantages and disadvantages. In this case, the event is not so long ago that there are no eyewitnesses, or participants, to ask about the dispute. Documentary sources also include accounts written at the time of the event, for example within the organisations involved, as well as those by the media. However, ordinary participants are less likely to have had their views recorded, a significant omission when attempting

¹⁶ Larry J. Griffin, 'Narrative, event-structure analysis, and causal interpretation in historical sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 988, no. 5, March 1993, pp. 1094-1133, p. 1097.

¹⁷ Isaac, 'Transforming localities: reflections on time, causality, and narrative in contemporary historical sociology'.

¹⁸ Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *Analyzing narrative reality*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2009, p. xvi.

¹⁹ Edgar Kiser, 'The revival of narrative in historical sociology: what rational choice theory can contribute', *Politics & Society*, vol. 24, no. 3, September 1996, pp. 249-271.

to reconstruct an historical event. The accounts of the participants form an important part of the narrative and analysis of the 1977 dispute.

Use of narrative analysis is both enabled and constrained by the types and limits of data available, but is an accepted way of working with the content of both oral and documentary sources. The particular type of narrative used in the thesis is more than an account of the events in the dispute. It also draws out the relationships and interactions which occurred. The oral histories provide a means of making these more subjective, by bringing life to the events which came from them. In addition, during the collection of data and the construction of the narrative, a number of themes were identified. This prompted and facilitated a thematic analysis of the content, with the themes taken from within the story rather than being treated as separate to it. This approach is suitable for a variety of narrative and data types, and may demonstrate 'social identities, group belonging, and collective action'²⁰ as is the case in the narrative of the 1977 dispute. The particular themes which emerged from the data and the narrative: the control of the dispute by the rank and file, the extensive support by the community, and the Melbourne-LV divide, will be discussed more fully in Chapter seven.

In order to compile the narrative of the 1977 dispute, this study uses data from oral histories via semi-structured interviews and from documentary research within both primary and secondary sources. The combination of a range of primary documentary sources and information from participant interviews provides a more balanced view of an event. They allow the data to converge in a triangulating fashion,²¹ with oral and written accounts complementary rather than mutually exclusive.²²

The following sections discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these particular data collection methods in the reconstruction, narrative and analysis of the

²⁰ Riessman, *Narrative methods for the human sciences*, p. 54.

²¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case study research: design and methods*, 3rd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2003, p. 14.

²² Bill Thorpe, 'Further verbals in the oral history debate', *Quadrant*, vol. 34, no. 7, July 1980, pp. 54-59.

1977 dispute. I also discuss how these data were collected in order to reconstruct the historical record. The first means of data collection to be discussed is that of semi-structured oral history interviews.

Oral history interviews

Oral history has been described as ‘the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction’.²³ Its strength is the opportunity to explore personal relationships and obtain rich evidence about the subjective or personal meanings of past events, and to ask questions of participants and to evoke recollections, something not possible of the written word.²⁴ The increased focus in the academic literature on the ‘socio-spatial dialectic’²⁵ has helped to draw attention to the importance of the relationship of the present to the past and the interpretation of that relationship.²⁶ Oral history is a means of examining and assessing this relationship and the interpretation and re-interpretation of the past.

Yet it has not been without its critics, who have accused it of leading us ‘Not into our history, but into myth.’²⁷ It may be seen as ‘the revised edition of one’s life’²⁸ and claims for accuracy, immediacy and reality become doubtful. However, although the

²³ Ronald J. Grele, 'Directions for oral history in the United States', in David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral history: an interdisciplinary anthology*, 2nd ed., AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 1996, pp. 62-84, p. 63.

²⁴ Alistair Thomson, 'Fifty years on : an international perspective on oral history', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 21, 1999, pp. 82-91.

²⁵ Edward W. Soja, 'The socio-spatial dialectic', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 70, no. 2, June 1980, pp. 207-225.

²⁶ Bain Attwood, Winifred Burrage, Alan Burrage and Elsie Stokie, *A life together, a life apart: a history of relations between Europeans and Aborigines*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994, p. 204; Andrew Herod, 'From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism', *Antipode*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1997, pp. 1-31; William Schneider, 'Introduction', in William Schneider (ed.), *Living with stories: telling, re-telling, and remembering*, Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah, 2008, pp. 1-17, p. 2.

²⁷ Patrick O'Farrell, 'Oral history: facts and fiction', *Quadrant*, vol. 23, no. 11, November 1979, pp. 4-8, p. 8.

²⁸ John Murphy, 'The voice of memory: history, autobiography and oral memory', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87, October 1986, pp. 157-175, p. 167.

process is selective and influenced by many factors,²⁹ it is now accepted that the acknowledged unreliability of human memory is a resource rather than a weakness.³⁰ The telling of a story constructs meaning from memory, which 'is a central, if not the central, medium through which identities are constituted.'³¹

Oral histories are able to locate individuals and events in the local context and in the everyday life of the time, so providing a more people-centred account of an event or time period. The departure from facts in the individual's interpretation and remembrance of history is an important part of oral history, as the view of the past which is held will be congruent with the values of the individual and his social context. Oral history 'tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*'³² via the participants' subjectivity, which informs the thoughts and reasoning behind mere facts: 'what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.'³³ The creation of a 'myth' may be a necessary part of being able to remember significant events and the individual's role in them.³⁴ The power of oral history resides in the meanings which come from it,³⁵ and recognizing that the way events are understood or viewed by a particular individual will differ from the memory of other individuals and from the 'collective memory' of the event. Indeed, contradictions and inconsistencies in the recalling of an event provide clues to an interpretation which may differ from the initial

²⁹ Louise Douglas, Alan Roberts and Ruth Thompson, *Oral history: a handbook*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p. 27; Yin, *Case study research: design and methods*, p. 86.

³⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The order has been carried out: history, memory, and meaning of a Nazi massacre in Rome*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p. 16; Thomson, 'Fifty years on : an international perspective on oral history'; Alistair Thomson, 'Four paradigm transformations in oral history', *Oral History Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, Winter/Spring 2007, pp. 49-70; Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording oral history: a guide for the humanities and social sciences*, 2nd ed., Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, 2005, p. 19.

³¹ Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social memory studies: from "collective memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 24, 1998, pp. 105-140, p. 133.

³² Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London, 2006, pp. 32-42, p. 36.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alessandro Portelli, 'The peculiarities of oral history', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 12, Autumn 1981, pp. 96-107.

³⁵ Valerie J. Janesick, *Oral history for the qualitative researcher: choreographing the story*, Guilford Press, New York, 2010, p. 1.

impression conveyed.³⁶ Accepting the subjectivity of oral accounts is important. What we are interested in is what people think happened, and this may be quite different to what actually happened. Only the individual can explain what he did and why.

Chaison³⁷ has suggested that oral history has much to offer in reconstructing events behind the scenes in labour disputes, since these are often not part of any written record of the event. Official transcripts of hearings miss the unofficial exchanges which occur in less formal settings, and which may then determine the direction of official negotiations. Even where official records survive, oral history provides a view of a union or event through non-official eyes. Oral history is a useful adjunct to traditional sources, since it provides insights into the personalities of participants which may not be found elsewhere.³⁸ It enables the gaining of insights through those involved at the grass-roots level, rather than written reports which may focus on institutions and their leaders.³⁹ Oral testimony may be more likely to reflect the viewpoint of 'the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated'.⁴⁰ Some strikes are seen as such major events that they dominate the sense of time of participants, as climactic moments that may result in a sense of power and victory even if the end result would not appear to warrant that feeling.⁴¹ Personal narratives may also challenge the popular view or historical perception of an event: an event lauded as a 'win' for a group may not be seen that way by participants.

³⁶ Erik Eklund, 'Memories of place: local history and oral evidence', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, vol. 19, 1997b, pp. 73-77.

³⁷ Gary N. Chaison, 'Applications of oral history to the history of labour and business', *Canadian Oral History Association Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1978, pp. 9-17.

³⁸ Tom Sheridan, 'Oral history and industrial relations', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 6, 1984, pp. 81-83.

³⁹ Raymond Markey, *The making of the Labor Party in New South Wales, 1880-1900*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, N.S.W., 1988, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Paul Thompson, *The voice of the past: oral history*, 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 7.

⁴¹ Marianne Debouzy, 'In search of working-class memory: some questions and a tentative assessment', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 2, 1986, pp. 261-282, p. 268.

The recollection of emotions and context is just as important as recollection of objective and factual matters. In this study, emotions from recollecting the dispute varied, but many interviewees still became very emotional when recalling the distress they felt at the time. This was obvious not only from those who were direct members of the group on strike, but also from supervisors of the men, and from local SECV managers who saw the impact on individuals but felt powerless to do anything to end the dispute. Some supervisors and industrial relations staff who spoke to me recalled the suffering of the men and their families, and the effect on local businesses. The residual effects of the dispute are still so strong that some men involved do not want to talk about it.⁴² One participant in the dispute rang me to say exactly that – he could not bear to think back to that time because he still found it too distressing to speak about. Other research has also suggested that older people would rather forget the past if it does not provide welcome memories.⁴³ This residual emotional effect may help to explain the relatively low numbers of union members who responded to the initial approach for an interview (see Appendix 5).

The basic tests of reliability for oral sources are the same as those for any other sources: internal consistency, cross-checking from other sources, and weighing evidence in a wider context. All sources have their own strengths and weaknesses in a particular situation.⁴⁴ Oral and written accounts should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive aspects of an activity,⁴⁵ with Young⁴⁶ concluding that no one method or source should be privileged over any other. 'Both are essential for

⁴² Richard Curlewis, 'The 1986 nurses strike', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 13, 1991, pp. 30-31.

⁴³ James Green, 'Engaging in people's history: the Massachusetts History Workshop', in Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig (eds), *Presenting the past: essays on history and the public*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1986, pp. 339-359, p. 352.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *The voice of the past: oral history*, p. 153.

⁴⁵ Thorpe, 'Further verbals in the oral history debate'.

⁴⁶ Alan Young, 'Oral history as an emergent paradigm', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 28, 2006, pp. 1-6.

illuminating and understanding the past which was once a living present.’⁴⁷ Memory evokes colour and atmosphere, with other sources providing the detail and the particulars, and the emphasis placed on a particular source, and the uses made of it, will vary with the issue being researched. As Jamieson has noted ‘All sources of history gathered by whomever and for whatever purpose need to be treated with a healthy scepticism, and oral history is no different.’⁴⁸ The use of a variety of sources provides a variety of insights to an event and its reconstruction and analysis. In this way we can contrast and compare institutional, social and personal perspectives.

A total of 23 interviews of people directly involved in the 1977 dispute were conducted over the period August to November 2007. These covered as wide a range as possible of rank and file participants from various unions, union officials, and SECV managers and supervisors. While the dispute was only thirty years ago, a large proportion of participants from the maintenance unions (estimated at about 33 percent, see Appendix 5), and certainly the majority of the key men on the union side (for example, two of the perceived leaders of the dispute, Sam Armstrong and George Wragg, as well as the then state secretary of the Amalgamated Metal Workers’ and Shipwrights’ Union (AMWSU), John Halfpenny), were no longer living. Other key players from the SECV, the CGTLC and the various unions had also passed on.

The opinions and recollections of people involved in the strike are likely to vary with their role, or perceived role in the events leading up to and maintaining the strike. Thus it is important to obtain a variety of viewpoints and areas of involvement. While the primary focus was on what was happening in the LV, there were also those with a different role and perspective, such as state union officials. A different perspective was also available from supervisory and managerial staff within the SECV, particularly in

⁴⁷ Thorpe, 'Further verbals in the oral history debate', p. 58.

⁴⁸ Ronda Jamieson, 'Questions and more questions: adventures and challenges in oral history', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 28, 2006, pp. 48-54, p. 53.

the LV, whose views also need to be heard to provide a balanced perspective on this event. For those reasons, the participants were selected across the following groups: as members of those unions which were directly involved in the dispute, as supervisors of those directly involved, as members of the major unions which were not involved in the dispute, as union officials, or as members of industrial relations staff or operational managers in the SECV. The former level of involvement is important, as first hand mental and emotional involvement in an atypical event increases the likelihood of recall.⁴⁹

As I read material about the dispute, from newspaper accounts, SECV material and CGTLC material, I started compiling a list of names of people involved. A number of people volunteered to assist by contacting those involved and passing on information on my behalf. The list of names expanded and became linked with addresses as I talked to more people, who also kindly sent out information on my behalf. The onus was on contacts to indicate their willingness to participate by contacting me and non-respondents were not followed up.

This use of participants to identify other possible interviewees through network sampling is an appropriate form of sampling when attempting to identify populations that are either rare or constrained by the specific boundaries of the research.⁵⁰ Also called chain referral sampling, it is appropriate when the pool of possible participants is limited and a specific population with a particular shared experience needs to be targeted. This was used in addition to purposive sampling which targeted key respondents or ‘cases that are especially informative’⁵¹ from the population. While

⁴⁹ Yow, *Recording oral history: a guide for the humanities and social sciences*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ Alan Bryman, *Social research methods*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 100; W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 6th ed., Pearson, Boston, MA, 2006, p. 223; Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a guidebook and resource*, 3rd ed., John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1998, p. 93.

⁵¹ Neuman, *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, p. 222.

naming potential participants was not a problem, follow up in terms of identifying those still alive, whose whereabouts could be traced, and who were interested in participating was more difficult.

In order to ensure the validity of the data, it was necessary as far as possible for interviewees to be representative of the dispute participants and to be adequate numerically. Once interviews commenced, the patterns of responses were consistent enough so that the number of interviewees was deemed to be sufficient, and that nothing further would be gained by expanding the search for further participants.⁵² It could safely be deduced that 'saturation' had occurred, that is, replication of data was occurring. Because of the restricted nature of the sample, and the clear delineation of the domain, this point occurred quite quickly.⁵³

The interviews were semi-structured in format. This format is appropriate when information regarding beliefs, opinions and insights is required, since this information is difficult to obtain through a structured interview format which does not allow for the follow up of interesting angles or eliciting more information.⁵⁴ Such interviews enable us 'to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee'⁵⁵ and focus on 'specific situations and action sequences in the world of the interviewee.'⁵⁶ It also allowed participants the opportunity to express the views and values which were important to them at their own pace and sequencing. Other benefits include the ability to clarify and elaborate on information, facilitate the discussion of sensitive information,

⁵² Taylor and Bogdan, *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a guidebook and resource*, p. 93.

⁵³ Janice M. Morse, 'The significance of saturation', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, May 1995, pp. 147-149.

⁵⁴ Julia Connell, Colin Lynch and Peter Waring, 'Comparing research methods: three ways of undertaking qualitative research', in John Burgess and Glenda Strachan (eds), *Research on work, employment and industrial relations 2000: proceedings of the 14th AIRAANZ Conference, February 2000, Newcastle, N.S.W.*, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, 2000, pp. 11-19.

⁵⁵ Nigel King, 'Using interviews in qualitative research', in Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon (eds), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*, Sage, London, 2004, pp. 11-22, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Steinar Kvale, 'The qualitative research interview: a phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding', *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, vol. 14, no. 2, Fall 1983, pp. 171-96, p. 176.

allow for new insights through the interviewee bringing up unforeseen topics and issues, allow a dialogue to be conducted, and follow up non-verbal cues.⁵⁷

Notes were taken during the conversation of points that needed to be followed up or elaborated on later in the interview. Use of this improvised format⁵⁸ ensured that the interview remained flexible and that the flow of reminiscence was not interrupted unnecessarily by the researcher. A range of question types was used which provided a variety for the participant as well as ensuring that as much information as possible was obtained.⁵⁹ The interviewees were generous in sharing their memories of the dispute with me. Lack of reticence about the dispute perhaps reflected the fact that the dispute was 30 years earlier; that there was acceptance of the disappointing outcome; and that the bitterness between the various unions was acknowledged. Because the dispute remained generally in the memories of participants and was not extensively written about after the event, there was no positive commemorative memory to be upheld.⁶⁰

The taking of oral testimony is a two-way process, with both the interviewee and the participant having a role. The interviewer has the opportunity for personal interaction in the event being documented and discussed, while the participant has the opportunity to express his own perceptions, views and role,⁶¹ and is made to feel that he has a real place in the history which he is recounting. The presence of an interviewer gives

⁵⁷ Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, 'The interview: from structured questions to negotiated text', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2003, pp. 61-106; King, 'Using interviews in qualitative research'; Tim May, *Social research: issues, methods and process*, 3rd ed., Open University Press, Maidenhead, UK, 2001, p. 123; Colin Robson, *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*, 2nd ed., Blackwell, Malden, 2002, p. 273; Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill, *Research methods for business students*, 4th ed., Prentice Hall, Harlow, England, 2007, p. 315.

⁵⁸ Valerie J. Janesick, 'The choreography of qualitative research design', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2000, pp. 379-399.

⁵⁹ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2009, p. 134.

⁶⁰ Lenore Layman, 'Reticence in oral history interviews', *Oral History Review*, vol. 36, no. 2, Summer/Fall 2009, pp. 207-230; Ben Morris, 'Permission to speak, sir - official history, whose history?', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 32, 2010, pp. 3-7.

⁶¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The battle of Valle Giulia: oral history and the art of dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1997, p. 68.

credibility and importance to the story, which has often not been told as a full and coherent narrative before.⁶² The opportunities which arise within the later stages of the interview process, for example, return of the transcript, discussion about any changes or corrections, and follow up with extra material, provide an opportunity for a two-way process which results in a mutually satisfactory outcome,⁶³ since it is important to remember that our informants are people, not merely sources.⁶⁴

Research conducted under the auspices of Monash University which involves people must comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.⁶⁵ This ensures that 'the welfare and rights of participants' (www.monash.edu.au/research/ethics/human/humanethics/what-is-human-research.html accessed 6 November 2008) are protected via a formal process of research project approval and review. Prospective participants were fully informed about the research and any possible personal impact by the use of a written Explanatory Statement. In the present research, ethical considerations included the well-being of participants, informed consent, and anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.⁶⁶ These issues were considered at multiple stages of the research, including its design, in the interview situation, when transcribing the interview, and during the analysis, verification and reporting of the information imparted by participants.⁶⁷ All interviews were completed with the approval

⁶² Alessandro Portelli, 'Oral history as genre', in Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (eds), *Narrative & genre: contexts and types of communication*, Transaction, New Brunswick, NJ, 2004, pp. 23-45, p. 24.

⁶³ Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin, *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction*, Longman, White Plains, N.Y., 1992, p. 87.

⁶⁴ Portelli, *The battle of Valle Giulia: oral history and the art of dialogue*, p. 64.

⁶⁵ National Health and Medical Research Council, *National statement on ethical conduct in research involving humans*, National Health and Medical Research Council, Canberra, A.C.T., 1999; National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee., *National statement on ethical conduct in human research*, National Health and Medical Research Council, Canberra, A.C.T., 2007.

⁶⁶ Barry Godfrey and Jane Richardson, 'In deep water: the ethical use of transcribed oral material', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 23, 2001, pp. 74-79.

⁶⁷ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, p. 63.

of, and monitoring from, the relevant Monash University ethics approval processes (approval number: 2006/774LIR).

Informed consent is generally defined as involving a full explanation of what the research is about and how it has been designed, how far anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed, and possible uses of data. Sufficient discussion needed to occur to ensure that participants were in fact giving an informed consent to participating and being recorded. It was also seen as important to provide some opportunity for the participants to ask questions of me, whether related to the research or my personal situation and reason for interest in the 1977 dispute.⁶⁸ The exception was for the telephone interviews, which both occurred unexpectedly, and in those cases the consent form was sent to the participants later on the same day.

All taped interviews were fully transcribed, and notes made from telephone interviews, and these were sent to participants. This is important to ensure that the intended meaning is reflected in the narrative⁶⁹ and provides interviewees with the opportunity to see how their memories have been recalled. Transcripts were edited only as far as any tidying up needed to assist the reading (ums, repetitions, anecdotal diversions) but not so far as to negate the feel, flavour and character of the interviewee. This was seen as appropriate given the nature of the research project and the type of information obtained from the interviews.⁷⁰ The transcripts reflect the individual voice, making it possible for quotations to reflect the class and educational background of the participant without giving offence.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Jane Ribbens, 'Interviewing - an "unnatural situation"?', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 12, no. 6, 1989, pp. 579-592, p. 584.

⁶⁹ Rebecca Jones, 'Blended voices: crafting a narrative from oral history interviews', *Oral History Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2004, pp. 23-42.

⁷⁰ Ibid; Pranee Liamputtong, *Qualitative research methods*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Vic., 2009, p. 57.

⁷¹ Tim Bowden, 'Let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 27, 2005, pp. 63-67.

The issue of confidentiality and de-identification is a vexed one. In the present situation, the locality is explicit and indeed even if the location was not specified the nature of the employer and the industrial environment would soon make it very obvious. The dispute was extensively reported on in the newspapers at the time, and is well remembered today within union and power industry circles. It is often possible to identify participants through descriptions of their roles, and their relationships to others,⁷² even if a pseudonym is used. Thus the issue becomes one of how far it is possible to maintain the anonymity of the participants: some are defined by their positions at the time within the SECV and the unions; others are more easily able to become part of the 2300 workers directly involved in the dispute. Barnes⁷³ has suggested the use of the rule of thumb proposed by Humphreys⁷⁴ which is to present data in such a form that an outsider cannot identify any participant, while any participant is able to recognize his contribution. This provides a way of ensuring the provision of sufficient disguise without being unnecessarily elaborate, which may in turn reduce the value of the data presented. Openness may be also seen as a protection against error, carelessness, or misinterpretation of actions and their meaning on the part of the researcher.⁷⁵

All participants were offered a pseudonym for any of their material that was to be used in publication/s. Most declined, noting that it was so long ago, and that they had never made any secret of their views and didn't see why they should do so now. This attitude may well be a result of both the age of the participants (now mostly into their

⁷² Raymond M. Lee, *Doing research on sensitive topics*, Sage, London, 1993, p. 186.

⁷³ J.A. Barnes, *Who should know what?: social science, privacy and ethics*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, UK, 1979, p. 139.

⁷⁴ Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom trade: impersonal sex in public places*, Enlarged ed., Aldine, Chicago, IL, 1975, p. 172.

⁷⁵ Katherine Borland, "'That's not what I said': interpretive conflict in oral narrative research", in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds), *Women's words: the feminist practice of oral history*, Routledge, New York, 1991, pp. 63-75.

50s and including some very spry 80 and 90 year olds), as well as the fact that many of them were involved in the traumatic downsizing and privatisation of the power industry in the LV during the 1980s and 1990s. Only one interviewee did not wish to be named, and is referred to as 'P' when the content of that interview is referred to.

In an area such as the LV, where news spreads rapidly via word of mouth, there was certainly awareness on the part of the participants that the nature of the topic, the community and the electricity industry workforce meant that it would be almost impossible to guarantee individual confidentiality, even with use of a pseudonym. This particular dispute was carried out in the full gaze of the public eye, and with a significant involvement of the community. This is an issue when conducting research within small, closed groups, where individuals can pick up clues to identity of which the researcher is unaware. This is certainly likely to be the case when a unique story is related.⁷⁶

In fact, many of my participants mentioned to me that they had been discussing my research and their participation with others in the community, both participants and non-participants. In the present study, while all participants except one gave consent to having their own name used, first names only have been used to provide some anonymity for their families, while recognizing that in some instances any description of employment role is sufficient to identify the person involved.

The oral history provided by participants in the dispute is not only an interpretation of history, but is also an interpretation of the history of a specific place and time. Participants are recalling and interpreting the past within the present, which is a very different reality to that which existed in 1977. Privatisation and downsizing of the SECV, and economic globalization, among other factors, have significantly changed the LV, the electricity industry, and the context within which it operates. For those people

⁷⁶ Lesley Hall, 'Confidentially speaking: ethics in interviewing', in Anna Green and Megan Hutching (eds), *Remembering: writing oral history*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, New Zealand, 2004, pp. 152-167.

who were not resident in the LV or employed by the SECV at that time, it is a different history because it has a different personal impact. Newcomers may not perceive how the strike became part of the framework of the present and continues to have an impact on some relationships within the community.

As well as data collection via the semi-structured oral history interviews, data for the narrative of the 1977 dispute was collected through examination of documentary sources. The use of this technique for gathering data will be discussed in the next section. In addition, the major sources of documents relevant to the 1977 dispute will be detailed at the end of the section.

Documentary research

In addition to the collection of oral histories of the dispute through semi-structured interviews, a second means of data collection was used in this study. This was documentary research within both primary and secondary sources. Documents provide an important context for an event since they often provide information about who did what: the rank and file, the stewards, the employer, the government, and the union officials. Documentary sources may also be used to aid triangulation, that is, to confirm and add to evidence from other sources.

It is important to remember however that documents are not produced in a vacuum, but are the product of the social, political and economic environments of which they are a part. Archival records reflect the organisation and interests of their agency, and are thus shaped by the political context in which they are produced, and the cultural and ideological assumptions which lie behind it.⁷⁷ They reflect the prevailing attitudes of the time.⁷⁸ They are also the product of the selective thought of their authors, along with

⁷⁷ John Scott, *A matter of record: documentary sources in social research*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1990, p. 60.

⁷⁸ E. Nathan, 'Archivists and historians', in G. Osborne and W.F. Mandle (eds), *New history: studying Australia today*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp. 175-179.

their interpretations and biases. Indeed, documentary sources, like oral histories, may be 'sometimes incomplete, inaccurate and deceiving.'⁷⁹ Unless we can locate them within the context of their institutional setting, we cannot understand the 'spatial, temporal and practical contingencies'⁸⁰ associated with them. They do not merely reflect, but actually construct, versions of events, and are thus a means of expressing social power.⁸¹

Despite these limitations, archival documentary sources may be the only source of much data; they may shed light on the internal workings of organisations; they provide an opportunity to triangulate data from other sources such as newspapers, interviews, broadsheets, and flyers; and they may assist in tracing the generation and evolution of policies and strategies over a longer term.⁸² The challenges which are produced by these organisational records include gaining access to them, understanding how and why (and by whom) they were produced, determining their accuracy, linking them with other sources, and deconstructing them.⁸³ In addition, while documents may be available, there may be minimal or no finding aids which enable the researcher to determine their usefulness for reconstructing an event.

Employers, trade unions and governments regularly dispose of records for a variety of reasons.⁸⁴ Decisions are made about what is significant from the organisation's perspective and what records portray them favourably, records they do not want organisational factions to have access to in the future, descriptive rather than

⁷⁹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing oral history: a practical guide*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Gale Miller, 'Contextualizing texts: studying organizational texts', in Gale Miller and Robert Dingwall (eds), *Context and method in qualitative research*, Sage, London, 1997, pp. 77-91, p. 78.

⁸¹ May, *Social research: issues, methods and process*, p. 183.

⁸² Ben Gidley, 'Doing historical and archival research', in Clive Seale (ed.), *Researching society and culture*, 2nd ed., Sage, London, 2004, pp. 249-264.

⁸³ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*, 3rd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2002, p. 499.

⁸⁴ Anne-Marie Condé, 'Capturing the records of war: collecting at the Mitchell Library and the Australian War Memorial', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 125, April 2005, pp. 134-152; Joanna Sassoon, 'Phantoms of remembrance: libraries and archives as 'the collective memory'', *Public History Review*, no. 10, 2003, pp. 40-60.

financial records, or merely to make mischief for future searchers. Those documents that are retained by organisations may also be those that reflect the 'official' view prevailing at any given time, rather than the perceived importance of the documents. Such records as do survive may not be representative, yet without some idea of what was produced originally, this may be impossible to ascertain.⁸⁵ For example, lists such as those available via the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) indicate what has been retained, and not what was produced by a government body. Thus there exists the possibility that those records that have survived have done so because of an inherent bias in that process. Many organisational records also have restricted access, which may be imposed for reasons of security, commercial information or privacy.

Documentary sources should have the usual criteria for quality control applied to them, including authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.⁸⁶ It is also important to look for internal consistency, to seek confirmation from other sources, and to be aware of possible bias.⁸⁷ Documents are written for a particular audience and a particular purpose and these need to be understood when assessing their contents and value.⁸⁸ The researcher has no control over the quality or the form of the data, and needs to be aware of issues such as bias towards the views of leaders and a disinclination to acknowledge internal debates or conflicts.⁸⁹ News media particularly are viewed as constructing a story that may not so much stand on the facts but on the supposed biases of its readers, editors or publishers. They may also use sensational headlines, metaphoric language, and dramatized descriptions.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Scott, *A matter of record: documentary sources in social research*, pp. 26-7.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁷ Thompson, *The voice of the past: oral history*, p. 119.

⁸⁸ Yin, *Case study research: design and methods*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ Elisabeth S. Clemens, 'Securing political returns to social capital: women's associations in the United States, 1880s-1920s', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 29, no. 4, Spring 1999, pp. 613-638.

⁹⁰ May, *Social research: issues, methods and process*, p. 187.

As with any source, historical records have their shortcomings, since any account which is constructed from them ‘must necessarily be incomplete and imperfect.’⁹¹ The researcher who examines documents must ‘bring together fragments of the past’,⁹² understanding that they are the result of human agency, and produced within a certain historical context. In order to determine accurately the sequence of events and who was involved, as much of the record as possible should be investigated.

This thesis has drawn on an extensive range of primary documentary material which was geographically dispersed. The records of the trade unions involved in the dispute were accessed at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University (NBAC), and at the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA). Holdings in the latter included the records of the VTHC, as well as the personal papers of shop steward Sam Armstrong and ACAC Commissioner Allan Vosti.

The extensive SECV records were mostly available from the PROV. These records also contained the full transcripts of the ACAC hearings related to the dispute. As the result of a Freedom of Information request to the Office of the Administrator, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, I gained access to a closed series at PROV, and subsequently to an extensive range of records in the custody of the Administrator following the disaggregation of the SECV, and privatisation of Generation Victoria.

I was granted access to the records of the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC), which are unfortunately incomplete for some periods. I was also fortunate to be lent copies of recordings of three mass meetings, which provided an excellent indicator of the rank and file attitude as the dispute progressed.

⁹¹ E.P. Thompson, *The poverty of theory & other essays*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1978, p. 40.

⁹² Greg Patmore, 'Digging up the past: historical methods in industrial relations research', in Keith Whitfield and George Strauss (eds), *Researching the world of work: strategies and methods in studying industrial relations*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1998, pp. 213-226, p. 221.

The Cabinet documents from the first and second Fraser Cabinets (1975, 1976-1977) were available online via the National Archives of Australia (NAA) web site on their release in January 2008 under the 30-year rule. Unfortunately, the papers for the corresponding years of the Victorian Hamer government were not available owing to an unwillingness to split the Cabinet records of the entire Hamer government.

Some sets of journals and newsletters produced by the unions involved in the dispute were held in the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the State Library of Victoria (SLV). The SLV also holds the Riley and Ephemera Collection, which contains a range of flyers and posters relating to the 1977 and other disputes, and the subject files of the Merrifield Collection of labour movement records. More detail on sources is given in the list of references.

Melding the information from the documentary and oral sources enabled the narration of the timelines for the dispute and its location within a wider context. It is the establishment of this wider context for information which aids in the understanding of complex social situations and processes such as the 1977 dispute.⁹³ The availability of primary source material, both written and oral, together with a number of secondary documentary sources, provided a variety of perspectives on the dispute as well as indicators of the effect of various relationships which affected its initiation, continuation and cessation. These relationships will be discussed in Chapters four and five of the thesis in order to provide greater detail on the local, state and federal contexts within which the dispute was located.

This chapter has described and justified the use of narrative research to construct the story of the 1977 dispute. The two data collection methods used in the compilation of the narrative were the taking of oral histories via semi-structured interviews from

⁹³ Jim Kitay and Ron Callus, 'The role and challenge of case study design in industrial relations research', in Keith Whitfield and George Strauss (eds), *Researching the world of work: strategies and methods in studying industrial relations*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1998, pp. 101-112.

participants in the dispute, and the examination of a range of documentary sources, both primary and secondary. The data gathering process has been described in some detail.

The next chapter of this thesis will describe the complex local context within which the 1977 dispute occurred. It is the first of two chapters which will provide an overview of the important economic, political and industrial environment within the local, state and federal spheres. These were important for two reasons, firstly in providing the issues which formed the basis of the 1977 log of claims, and secondly, in contributing to the dispute becoming a protracted struggle.

The discussion of the local context will start with a brief description of the locale of the dispute. This will be followed by a history of the establishment and growth of the SECV in the LV and some of its specific industrial features. These include the strong shop steward organisation, the role of the Central Gippsland Trades and Labor Council, the industrial relations environment within the SECV, and three specific industrial issues which were important to the LV maintenance workforce. These were wage relativities, the campaign for a single award, and the contract labour issue.

Chapter Four: The local context

Anyone who has driven down the Princes Highway from Melbourne has noticed the panorama that catches the eye as you come over the hill at Hernes Oak and the LV opens up in front of you. Standing out in particular are the scattered power stations, and the enormous open cut coal mine of Yallourn to your left. It is an awe-inspiring sight, especially at night when the dredgers are lit up. This was the setting for the 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute, the memory and legacy of which persists within local union ranks to this day.

The players in the drama that was to come included the SECV, a paternalistic organisation which was the largest employer in the region, and the CGTLC, the regional peak union body which at that time operated principally as the combined voice of the SECV unions. There was intervention at both federal and state government levels, as well as by Bob Hawke, then President of the ACTU. The public face of the dispute on the union side became four of the senior shop stewards: Sam Armstrong and George Wragg of the AMWSU, Ted Turnbull of the ETU and Ross Miles of the Building Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (BWIU).¹ For the SECV, the public roles would be played by its Chairman Charles Trethowan, Frank Sims, Manager Industrial Relations, and Bill De Campo, Assistant General Manager (Operations) (AGM(O)), who was to pass away not long after the end of the strike.

This chapter, and that which follows, will describe in detail the industrial, political and economic context within which the dispute was located. The key factors in those contexts and the reasons for their importance to the dispute will be explained.

While the local context was significant in determining the initial course of the dispute,

¹ Benson identified these four stewards as key to the dispute. He obtained information from a questionnaire response and interviews of each of these stewards. See Benson, *Shop stewards in the Latrobe Valley*, p. 360.

the wider state and federal contexts played important roles. Government policies in these two arenas had imposed some of the constraints around the items in the maintenance workers 1977 log of claims. In addition, government reactions affected both the way the dispute proceeded and its outcomes.

While the organisational structures in place provided constraints for the LV unionists, they also provided opportunities. The local unions developed a series of relationships with the SECV, and with the CGTLC, which formed a part of their industrial identity and embodied their expectations. These relationships, operating within the constraints imposed by governments and the VTHC, were also a major factor in shaping the course of the 1977 maintenance dispute. They included an ambivalent relationship with the VTHC which was the result of early experiences of the rank and file. The relationship with the CGTLC was similar, because of the preference of some local unions to decide on their own forms of action, rather than to coordinate action through the CGTLC. A similarly uneasy relationship developed between the LV unions and their state branches, despite the former in theory being subordinate. This Melbourne-LV divide became a feature within the unions, the peak union councils and the SECV.

This chapter begins with an overview of the physical location within which this study is located. The characteristics of the LV, the establishment and growth of the SECV, and the nature of the industrial identity developed by the local workforce, are a key part of understanding the dispute. The work of economic and human geographers connecting labour, place and identity is discussed where it is relevant to the development of the specific industrial identity of the SECV maintenance workers in the LV. Labour Process Theory (LPT) is used to frame the highly structured and paternalistic bureaucracy which characterised the SECV operations during the 1970s as another factor which contributed to the local industrial identity.

This is followed by a discussion of some specific industrial features within this context. These include the strong shop stewards organisation within the SECV; the history and role of the CGTLC in coordinating local industrial action; the general state of industrial relations within the SECV; and three specific industrial issues which were of particular importance to the LV SECV maintenance workforce at the time of the 1977 dispute. These were the issues of wage relativities, the ongoing campaign for a single federal award to cover SECV workers, and the emotive and longstanding issue of contract labour. The first two issues were both important in the formulation of the log of claims early in 1977, and the third provided the trigger for the strike.

Physical location and context of the study

The LV is about 140 kilometres east of Melbourne and in the middle of Gippsland, a region rich in natural resources including fertile agricultural land, extensive native forests, the beauty of the Gippsland Lakes, and brown coal, oil and gas reserves. It was the last part of the south eastern corner of Australia to be settled by Europeans and then not until the 1840s.² The LV is that part of Gippsland flanked by the Baw Baw ranges to the north, and the Strzelecki-Jeeralang ranges in the south, and stretching from the town of Moe in the west to Traralgon in the east, a distance of about 30 kilometres, with a land area of about 9,382 sq kms. It began as a grazing area in the 1870s, with dairying becoming the primary sector of the economy by the end of the century.

The three major towns of Morwell, Moe and Traralgon began on old squatting runs which became stopping points on the coach road and then the railway line. A new township of Yallourn was planned and built by the SECV from the 1920s as a ‘model town’ for power workers and their families. It was described as the ‘gem of the Valley’.³

² Patrick Morgan, *The settling of Gippsland: a regional history*, Gippsland Municipalities Association, Leongatha, Vic., 1997, p. 7.

³ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Power without glory*, Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2001.

By 1938 Yallourn was the largest town in the Central Gippsland region with a population of 3839. The next largest town was Morwell with 1762 people, but with large farming populations scattered around the area.⁴ Yallourn became the regional leader in health (with a hospital opened in 1929) and education (its High School and Technical School were the only secondary facilities between Sale and Warragul). It competed as a cultural centre with Orchestral, Madrigal, Choral and Glee societies, and a picture theatre.⁵ Nonetheless it remained a 'company town' with its 1069 homes rented from the SECV, which owned and administered the town, controlling both its physical design and who and where people could live in it.⁶

Significant population growth within the Latrobe Valley region coincided with bursts of activity of the SECV, not only because of the employment opportunities in the power stations, but because of the almost constant construction work. Growth which significantly increased the local population occurred during 1921-33 when the Yallourn power stations were being built, and during 1947-54 when construction was underway at Morwell.⁷ It was during the latter period of expansion that the Latrobe Valley received an influx of skilled migrants, many from the United Kingdom, and often young and male.⁸ Workers flocked to the area for jobs, and a vibrant working-class culture thrived.⁹ This influx doubled the area's population, creating the critical mass of population and cohesiveness which resulted in the LV being viewed as a distinctive region in its own right.

⁴ Stephen M. Legg, *Heart of the Valley: a history of the Morwell Municipality*, City of Morwell, Morwell, Vic., 1992, p. 204.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁶ Meredith Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2002, p. 21.

⁷ I Puffin, *Life in the Latrobe Valley: companion volume to Central Gippsland social survey*, C.H. Rixon, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1975, p. 4.

⁸ Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley: a sociological study of immigrants in the brown coal industry in Australia*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1964.

⁹ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Power without glory*.

During the mid 1970s the combined population of the three major towns in the Latrobe Valley was about 43,000. Morwell was viewed as the ‘hub’ of the Valley and was ‘the most cosmopolitan and outward looking town, the preferred location for those contemplating a move within the area, the possessor of the most generally admired schools, the dominant shopping centre, and the source and destination of most intra-town traffic.’¹⁰ In the 1980s, Traralgon became the preferred town, with a better lifestyle, government and administrative services, and the construction of the new Loy Yang power stations nearby.

In 1975, the SECV employed about 6860 people in the LV with another 258 in its Electricity Supply Branch in the area; the Australian Paper Manufacturers (APM) employed 1057 people in its Maryvale pulp and paper mill, 166 in its forestry subsidiary, and a contract workforce of about 450 in forestry and wood procurement. Together they employed about one-third of the total LV workforce, and about 43.5 percent of the male workforce.¹¹ The SECV was seen as stable and safe employment and employee numbers in the LV grew steadily, reaching a peak of about 10,000 in the mid-1980s. Just under half of the total SECV workforce was in the LV and was generally young and male, with more than 60 percent of employees under 40 years of age.¹²

¹⁰ Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, *Central Gippsland social survey: a socio-economic study of the Latrobe Valley*, C.H. Rixon, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1975, p. 94.

¹¹ Puffin, *Life in the Latrobe Valley: companion volume to Central Gippsland social survey*, p. 24.

¹² Michael Johnson and Stephen Rix, *Powering the future: the electricity industry and Australia's energy future*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1991, pp. 163-5, 173.

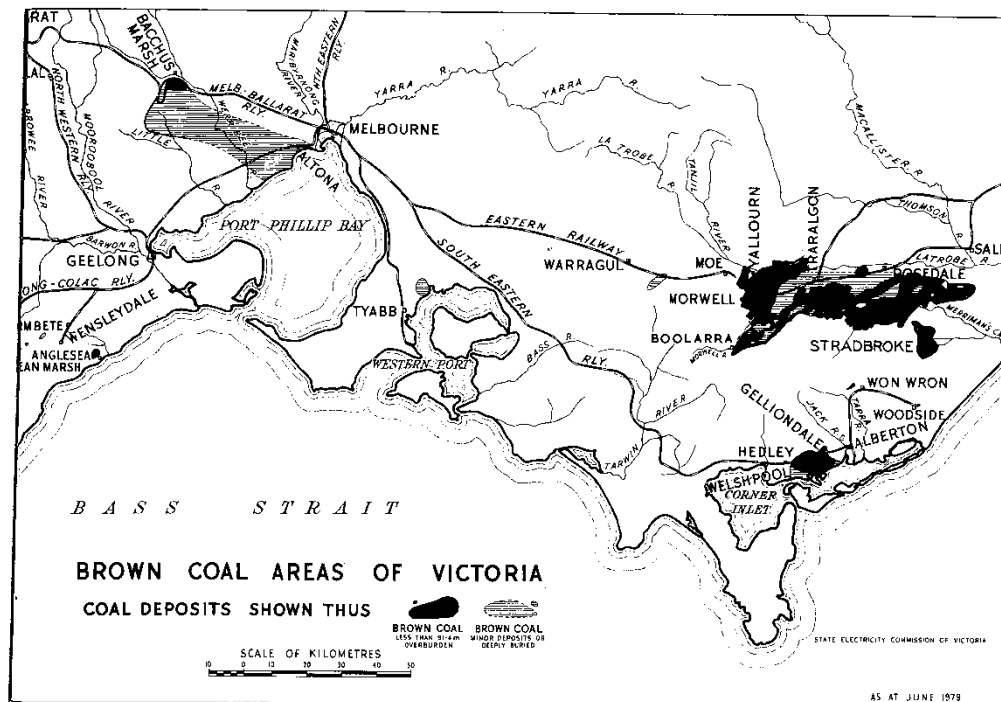


Figure 4.1. Brown coal areas of Victoria. Source: Digby Crozier, Ministerial statement on the Victorian brown coal resource, Minister for Minerals and Energy, 1981

The LV in the 1970s I suggest was a community shaped by its geography. The development of the LV as a new industrial region resulted in a particular set of industrial relations between the unions, the peak union councils and the SECV. These were the result of a combination of factors which included: the particular structure of work and work relationships within the SECV; the industrial history which resulted from the isolated location and poor working conditions; and the development of a particular industrial identity which emphasised local industrial and community relationships. The relationships and organisations which had developed as part of its individual industrial history resulted in a particular industrial identity based on a combination of work and its location.

Awareness of the different patterns of industrial relations which had developed in specific Australian locations or regions led gradually to the recognition of the importance and effect of location. This interest increased in the 1980s, aided by work

such as that of Benson and others.¹³ Much of the earlier research into regional industrial relations systems was based on the major framework offered by Dunlop's Systems Theory, with a significant application that of Benson and Hince¹⁴ who drew on examples of industrial relations behaviour and activity from various regions.

The regional milieu began to come into focus as a topic of research in its own right, and greater interest in a number of regions developed. These included the LV in Victoria,¹⁵ the Pilbara region in Western Australia,¹⁶ and the Hunter region of New South Wales (NSW).¹⁷ A special edition of *Labour History* in 2000 focusing on local and regional studies demonstrated the increased interest in this subject.¹⁸

¹³ Benson and Hince, *Determinants of industrial relations in coal winning, power generation and associated construction in the Latrobe Valley: a preliminary analysis*; Benson and Hince, 'Understanding regional industrial relations systems'; John Benson, Kevin Hince and Gerard Griffin, *Industrial relations policy: a case study of organisational change*, Schools of Business and Social Sciences, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Churchill, 1983.

¹⁴ Benson and Hince, 'Understanding regional industrial relations systems'.

¹⁵ See for example Ibid; Richard Gough and Len Pullin, 'The nature of industrial relations and workplace change in the Latrobe region: a comparative analysis', in Len Pullin, Maureen Fastenau and Dennis Mortimer (eds), *Regional employment relations: contemporary research*, Centre for Employment Relations, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, Kingswood, 1996, pp. 135-159; Len Pullin, 'Restructuring: implications for the Latrobe region labour market', in Douglas Blackmur (ed.), *Contemporary Australasian industrial relations research: proceedings of the 6th AIRAANZ Conference*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 1992, pp. 471-497; Len Pullin, Melanie Bryant and Ali Haidar, *A longitudinal analysis of Latrobe region industrial relations: 1992 to 1996*, School of Business and Electronic Commerce, Monash University Gippsland Campus, Churchill, 1997; Len Pullin and Ali Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region', *International Employment Relations Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, pp. 1-16; Al Rainnie, Tina D'Urbano, Rowena Barrett, Renee Paulet and Mardelene Grobbelaar, *Industrial relations in the Latrobe Valley: constructing myths and confounding realities*, Department of Management, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University, Caulfield, 2004; Al Rainnie and Renee Paulet, 'Images of community, industrial relations and regional development', *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2003, pp. 151-168.

¹⁶ Bradon Ellem, 'Power, place and scale: union recognition in the Pilbara, 1999-2002', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 13, no. 2, December 2002, pp. 67-89; Bradon Ellem, 'Dialectics of scale: global capital and local unions in Australia's iron ore industry', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 26, no. 3, August 2005a, pp. 335-358; Stephen J. Frenkel, 'Industrial conflict, workplace characteristics and accommodation structure in the Pilbara iron ore industry', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 20, no. 4, December 1978, pp. 386-406; Pam Swain, *Strategic choices: a study of the interaction of industrial relations and corporate strategy in the Pilbara iron ore industry*, School of Management, Curtin University, Perth, 1995.

¹⁷ Michael Alexander, John Burgess, Roy Green, Duncan Macdonald and Suzanne Ryan, 'Regional workplace bargaining: evidence from the Hunter workplace change survey', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 6, no. 3, October 1995, pp. 113-126; John Burgess, Roy Green, Duncan Macdonald and Suzanne Ryan, *Workplace bargaining in a regional context: Hunter region case studies*, Department of Industrial Relations, Canberra, 1994; Duncan Macdonald, Glenda Strachan and Leanne Houston, 'Unionism in the Hunter Valley: an exploratory regional study', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 8, no. 3, April 1998, pp. 115-130; Glenda Strachan, G.H. Morgan, Duncan Macdonald, Leanne Houston and Roy Green, 'Industrial change, employment and unionism: a regional case study', in Gerard Griffin (ed.), *Contemporary research on*

However, while the 'region' has been of interest to industrial relations researchers, in early writings it was often merely a part of industry studies, with place being assumed rather than addressed as an important factor in its own right. More recently, Ellem and McGrath-Champ have suggested that geography is a central aspect informing the social relations of work.¹⁹ This view has been further developed through increased theorising of the impact of geography or place on industrial relations.²⁰

The construction of a sense of place is based on understanding 'how workers seek to make space in particular ways'.²¹ It is thus a social construct made by labour itself, and dependent on the particular context, organisations and relationships.²² Places may thus be seen as networks of social relations and understandings at a range of scales,²³ which develop a meaning and an identity for their inhabitants

Capital which is dependent on a locality is likely to seek to influence and change those local conditions which may be inimical to accumulation,²⁴ with these contests over

unions: theory, membership, organisation and non standard employment, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Monash University, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 347-364.

¹⁸ 'Labour history and local history', *Labour History*, no. 78, May 2000.

¹⁹ Bradon Ellem and Susan McGrath-Champ, 'Industrial relations meets human geography: spatialising the social relations of work', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 13, no. 2, December 2002, pp. 1-3.

²⁰ An overview of this literature is available in Susan McGrath-Champ, Andrew Herod and Al Rainnie (eds), *Handbook of employment and society: working space*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2010. See also Bradon Ellem and John Shields, 'Rethinking 'regional industrial relations': space, place and the social relations of work', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 41, no. 4, December 1999, pp. 536-560; Andrew Herod, Jamie Peck and Jane Wills, 'Geography and industrial relations', in Peter Ackers and Adrian Wilkinson (eds), *Understanding work and employment: industrial relations in transition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 176-192; Andrew Herod, Al Rainnie and Susan McGrath-Champ, 'Working space: why incorporating the geographical is central to theorizing work and employment practices', *Work, Employment and Society*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 2007, pp. 247-264; Al Rainnie, Andrew Herod and Susan McGrath-Champ, 'Spatialising industrial relations', *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2, March 2007, pp. 102-118.

²¹ Herod, 'From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism', p. 3.

²² Harald Bathelt and Johannes Glückler, 'Toward a relational economic geography', *Journal of Economic Geography*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 117-144; Andrew Herod, *Labor geographies: workers and the landscapes of capitalism*, Guilford Press, New York, 2001, pp. 37-46; David Sadler and Bob Fagan, 'Australian trade unions and the politics of scale: reconstructing the spatiality of industrial relations', *Economic Geography*, vol. 80, no. 1, January 2004, pp. 23-43.

²³ Doreen Massey, 'Geographies of responsibility', *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 86, no. 1, 2004a, pp. 5-18; Doreen Massey, 'The responsibilities of place', *Local Economy*, vol. 19, no. 2, May 2004b, pp. 97-101.

²⁴ Andrew E.G. Jonas, 'Local labour control regimes: uneven development and the social regulation of production', *Regional Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, July 1996, pp. 323-338.

space not only confined to the workplace or to issues arising in the workplace.²⁵

Strategies which may include paternalism and welfarism attempt to extend capital's influence over the institutions and sites of labour reproduction (home, neighbourhood, community, training and education) and consumption (company stores, company housing). These typified the early practices of the SECV in relation to its model township of Yallourn.²⁶ The employer creates his own version of the region, not only consolidating local relationships, but also creating others at wider scales.²⁷

However, differentiated local development results not only from the actions of the employer but also from the relationships developed with and the interactions between local employees and organisations.²⁸ Both labour itself and intra-labour relations construct and maintain local labour control regimes particularly in regions with an established industrial history.²⁹ Working people, their families and institutions may create 'distinctive, lasting local communities and cultures'³⁰ which enhance collective power. Thus when labour is truly embedded in the local community it becomes a powerful force,³¹ since these contingent and socially constructed relationships will determine the form of local industrial relations and labour practices and, reinforced over time by local practice, form the basis of a local industrial identity.

²⁵ Bradon Ellem, 'New unionism in the old economy: community and collectivism in the Pilbara', in Julian Teicher, Peter Holland and Sarah Turberville (eds), *Reflections and new directions: AIRAANZ Conference 2003*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Kensington, 2003, pp. 151-160.

²⁶ Peter Fairbrother and Jonathan Testi, 'The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour', in Peter Fairbrother, Michael Paddon and Julian Teicher (eds), *Privatisation, globalisation and labour: studies from Australia*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2002, pp. 102-130; Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*.

²⁷ Herod, Rainnie and McGrath-Champ, 'Working space: why incorporating the geographical is central to theorizing work and employment practices'; Michael Storper and Richard Walker, *The capitalist imperative: territory, technology, and industrial growth*, Basil Blackwell, New York, 1989.

²⁸ Herod, 'From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism'.

²⁹ Bradon Ellem, 'What about the workers? labour and the making of regions', in Al Rainnie and Mardelene Grobbelaar (eds), *New regionalism in Australia*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005b, pp. 217-235.

³⁰ Storper and Walker, *The capitalist imperative: territory, technology, and industrial growth*, p. 157.

³¹ Ellem, 'What about the workers? labour and the making of regions', p. 219.

Acknowledgement of the fact that workers are active social and spatial agents allows consideration of how they shape the geography of capitalism, and the motives which underlie their actions.³² However, given that labour is not a single or homogeneous entity, attempts to alter local space may move in a number of significantly different directions. Different groups of workers may have greater or less agency in the making of a geography, dependent on their own interpretation or view of it and how it responds to their needs or goals. This results in different solutions and practices in different geographical contexts.³³ Such focus on worker agency is a key part of the importance of place.³⁴ By placing workers at the centre of their economic landscape, it becomes possible to see their way of changing it. In addition, a consciousness of place may inform an alliance not only of employees or managers, but of 'local' employees and managers in defence of 'their locality'.³⁵

The interactions of work and place with the ongoing and changing social relationships of which they form a part mean that workplaces are themselves locations where 'meanings, values and relationships'³⁶ are created and sustained. Workplace industrial relations cultures develop partly as a result of the interaction of work and the wider community, such that the history and geography of industrial relations will shape the current decision-making and actions of both employer and employees.³⁷ These internal connections between workplace and community result in particular industrial traditions and became part of the industrial history and landscape in particular places,

³² Herod, 'From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism'.

³³ Herod, *Labor geographies: workers and the landscapes of capitalism*, p. 34; Jane Wills, 'Uneven reserves: geographies of banking trade unionism', *Regional Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, July 1996, pp. 359-372.

³⁴ Noel Castree, 'Workers, economies, geographies', in Susan McGrath Champ, Andrew Herod and Al Rainnie (eds), *Handbook of employment and society: working space*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2010, pp. 457-476.

³⁵ Huw Beynon and Ray Hudson, 'Place and space in contemporary Europe: some lessons and reflections', *Antipode*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1993, pp. 177-190, p. 183.

³⁶ Ray Hudson, *Producing places*, Guilford Press, New York, 2001, p. 267.

³⁷ Herod, Peck and Wills, 'Geography and industrial relations'.

since worker activity is generally workplace based.³⁸ These may shape union power, but only within the context of local conditions, which is where labour is mobilised.³⁹

In turn, the local industrial identity results in group norms, for example during industrial disputes, which ensure group conformity.⁴⁰ Conflict then serves to reinforce the allegiance to a particular local identification resulting from 'common historical experiences and shared cultural codes'.⁴¹ However, the local industrial identity is not only derived from local experience, but exists in relation to other places and communities, causing tensions both within and between groups.⁴²

The difference in the respective economic landscapes sought by employers and their labour will result in conflict over their implementation and challenges on both sides.⁴³ The changing nature of the relationships within a location, including non-local factors such as effects of government policy on the employer and community, will affect the roles which local institutions develop. When work or its context changes, these roles affect how quickly places adapt to the need for different relationships, expectations, and strategies.⁴⁴ Roles which have developed through historical relationships need to be constantly reassessed as the context and thus the character of the relationship changes.

³⁸ Castree, 'Workers, economies, geographies'.

³⁹ Darlington, 'Workplace union militancy on Merseyside since the 1960s: extent, nature, causes, and decline'; Jamie Peck, *Work-place: the social regulation of labor markets*, Guilford Press, New York, 1996, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Lucy Taksa, 'Like a bicycle, forever teetering between individualism and collectivism: considering community in relation to labour history', *Labour History*, no. 78, May 2000, pp. 7-32.

⁴¹ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: community, culture, difference*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1990, pp. 222-237, p. 223.

⁴² Soren C. Larsen, 'Place identity in a resource-dependent area of northern British Columbia', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 94, no. 4, December 2004, pp. 944-960; Taksa, 'Like a bicycle, forever teetering between individualism and collectivism: considering community in relation to labour history'.

⁴³ Andrew Herod, Susan McGrath-Champ and Al Rainnie, 'Foundations', in Susan McGrath-Champ, Andrew Herod and Al Rainnie (eds), *Handbook of employment and society: working space*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2010, pp. 1-16.

⁴⁴ Rainnie, Herod and McGrath-Champ, 'Spatialising industrial relations'.

As production relationships change, so they change the space they inhabit, so that the past is reshaped to become the present.⁴⁵

The discussion of the industrial identity which developed around the LV maintenance workers has focussed on a specific place and its role in the local industrial history. However, in order to better understand the effect of this local industrial identity on industrial action, it is also pertinent to consider the impact of geographic scale.

While geographic scale has often been viewed 'in terms of areal boundaries which circumscribe particular territorial units',⁴⁶ it is now more generally perceived as socially produced rather than a purely physical construct.⁴⁷ In a recent extension to this conceptualisation, Latour⁴⁸ has suggested that scale may be viewed as a series of variant networks. An examination of the relative power or relevance of such networks allows greater consideration of how scale affects industrial action. The result of connections between players within a particular network at a given time may be to overrule those within another less powerful or less relevant network, leading to the shifting of the scale of action on a particular issue. Because they are socially constructed, the importance and strength of alternative networks will vary over time. They are susceptible to the effects of the political, economic, cultural and industrial context within which they operate and to changes to the linkages within and between them. Thus the decision about the scale of action required will depend on the particular situation and the power or relevance of a series of networks and their actors at that time. The choice of networks, or scale, as the basis of campaigning will be important for success or otherwise.

⁴⁵ Doreen Massey, *Spatial divisions of labour: social structures and the geography of production*, 2nd ed., Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1995, pp. 114-6.

⁴⁶ Herod, McGrath-Champ and Rainnie, 'Foundations', p. 12.

⁴⁷ Andrew Herod, 'The spatiality of labor unionism: a review essay', in Andrew Herod (ed.), *Organizing the landscape: geographical perspectives on labor unionism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, pp. 1-36, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Bruno Latour, 'On actor-network theory: a few clarifications', *Soziale Welt*, vol. 47, no. 4, 1996, pp. 369-381, p. 370.

As Rainnie et al⁴⁹ have noted, local practices affect how quickly places adapt to the need for different relationships, expectations and strategies when work and its contexts change. Some issues, while originating at the local scale, require action at a different scale, that is, within a different network of relations, to move towards a successful outcome. Thus the effect of the local industrial identity may be to impede the willingness, or even the ability, to consider action with or by a different network of actors, that is, at a different scale, because of an insistence on retaining control on a local basis. It becomes important to recognise when action is needed at a broader scale than can be sustained locally.

Thus to understand industrial relations in the LV it is important to determine the ways in which space and spatial choices have been perceived and acted on over time by both individuals and groups, and how constraints imposed by legacy relationships affect future choices.⁵⁰ The industrial identities which developed within the SECV were firmly based in the particular social relations which had developed from the start of power generation activities of the SECV in the LV. The early relationships which developed between the LV employees, their unions and their peak council and their counterparts in Melbourne became established over time as local industrial action met with success. These developments, originating in a single site, Yallourn, provided a regional coherence which was actively sustained by workers.⁵¹ This early industrial identity which developed around Yallourn was retained as the SECV developments spread across the LV.

This section has discussed the factors which influenced the nature and development of the particular industrial identity of the LV maintenance workforce. This

⁴⁹ Rainnie, Herod and McGrath-Champ, 'Spatialising industrial relations'.

⁵⁰ Ron Martin, Peter Sunley and Jane Wills, *Union retreat and the regions*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 1996.

⁵¹ David Harvey, *The limits to capital*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982, p. 416.

includes an embeddedness in a region far from Melbourne which assisted in promoting a sense of difference, and a willingness to take local industrial action over local industrial issues. In the following section, a brief history of the SECV will include a discussion of the nature of work in this organisation, which also affected the local industrial history and identity which developed.

The development of the SECV

The decision to establish the SECV was the logical extension of an ongoing series of interventions by the Victorian state government during the late 19th- and early 20th- centuries to maintain the critical supply of coal to industry and the railways. These interventions did not cease however with the establishment of the SECV. In its early years, the government intervened frequently in an attempt to influence the decision making of Sir John Monash, the founding Chairman.⁵² He needed to demonstrate that the SECV was viable and to prove that the decision to make electricity with the poor quality coal in the LV could be justified. It was not until the SECV proved itself financially viable in 1927 that intervention was to become less onerous, although it did not cease. From 1967 the state legislated to require the SECV to ‘contribute’ a proportion of its income to government consolidated revenue.⁵³ During the 1970s, the impact of state government decisions was also reflected in the industrial relations structures within its government instrumentalities. For the unions represented in the SECV workforce, there were two particular decisions which resulted in significant change and made negotiating over wages and conditions more complex than with other employers. These were firstly the establishment of a state government body, the Office of Industrial Relations Co-ordination (Public Employing Authorities) (OIRC), to coordinate industrial relations across state government instrumentalities. The unions

⁵² Geoffrey Serle, *John Monash: a biography*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1982.

⁵³ Cecil Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1969, p. 227.

could no longer expect to negotiate directly with the SECV over wages and conditions. The second decision was the inclusion of the SECV in the State Incremental Payments Scheme (SIPS). As well as introducing a differential 'over award' payment, it replaced an indexed special payment granted in 1961 as acknowledgement of the SECV's status as 'a special industry'. The effect of these latter two interventions will be detailed later in this section.

While the production and distribution of electricity in Victoria had commenced in 1878 with power stations using black coal from NSW, electricity supply was costly and unprofitable in its early years. Supply of black coal from NSW was often uncertain due to strikes on the coal fields or in the transport industry. In 1909 when a series of lengthy strikes closed down the NSW coal mines the Victorian state government decided to intervene and took over the operations of the black coal mine (the State Coal Mine) development at Wonthaggi in south eastern Victoria.⁵⁴

The coal at Wonthaggi was mainly purchased by the Victorian Railways (to which the mine was transferred in 1910) for use in their Newport power station. A government town was established to ensure 'fair rents, stable prices and social welfare.'⁵⁵ This provision of a settled life was seen as the means of avoiding industrial disputes, and provided a model for the later establishment of the Yallourn township. However, state ownership did not make Wonthaggi immune from industrial unrest, and it developed a reputation for militancy.⁵⁶

A Royal Commission established by the Victorian government in 1911 recommended electrification of the state's railways and a single electricity supply

⁵⁴ E.W. Russell, *The State Coal Mine and state socialism in Victoria*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, History Department, Monash University, 1980, pp. x, 331.

⁵⁵ Andrew D. Spaul, *The origins and rise of the Victorian brown coal industry 1835-1935*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, University of Melbourne, 1966, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Cochrane, 'The Wonthaggi coal strike, 1934'; Morgan, *The settling of Gippsland: a regional history*, p. 141; Jennifer Thompson, 'The militant history of Wonthaggi', *Green Left Weekly*, no. 247, 18 September 1996.

authority for Melbourne.⁵⁷ These recommendations were given greater impetus during the World War, when electricity supplies were stretched to the limits and mining and transport strikes disrupted supply of NSW black coal. An Advisory Committee on Brown Coal established by the Victorian government in 1917 recommended building a power station at Morwell in the LV, which had one of the largest brown coal deposits in the world. This was despite the poor quality of the coal, which had only one-third the energy content of the black coal of NSW, and having about 60-70 percent water content. Industry requiring 'large quantities of cheap electrical energy'⁵⁸ was to be encouraged to locate in Victoria. In 1918 the *Electricity Commissioners Act* (Vic) for the generation and distribution of electricity in Victoria was passed in the Victorian parliament. Another act in 1920 established the SECV as a public corporation, with the mandate to electrify Victoria with a state-wide supply system.⁵⁹

In order to meet anticipated consumer demand, Newport B Power Station (PS) was built at the existing Newport site from 1921. Attention then turned to the LV, where the first sod for the Yallourn power station was turned on 5 February 1921.⁶⁰ Work had also commenced on the site for a model township (Yallourn) to house the workers, many

⁵⁷ Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Advisory Committee on Brown Coal, *Report of the Advisory Committee on Brown Coal*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1917, p. 8.

⁵⁹ By the 1920s the largest private undertaking in Victoria was the Melbourne Electric Supply Company which operated power stations in Geelong and Richmond, the latter of which supplied much of the metropolitan area (Hermon Gill, *Three decades: the story of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from its inception to December 1948*, Hutchinson, Melbourne, 1949, pp. 17-18.). The North Melbourne Electric Tramway and Lighting Company ran trams and provided an electricity service in North Melbourne and Essendon (Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, p. 13.) Melbourne City Council was generating power for the city proper from its Spencer Street PS, as well as selling it to some other municipalities. The Newport PS operated by the Victorian Railways and fuelled by NSW and later Wonthaggi black coal, was committed to supplying the planned electrification of the railways.

⁶⁰ David C. Rich, *The industrial geography of Australia*, Methuen Australia, North Ryde, 1987, p. 187.

of whom lived at the township of Brown Coal Mine (later renamed Yallourn North) next to the Great Morwell Mine.⁶¹

Power from Yallourn flowed to nearby regional areas from 1922 and to Melbourne from June 1924.⁶² By 1928 nearly all of Melbourne's electricity, as well as that of more than 100 regional centres, was being supplied from Yallourn. By 1939 the SECV supplied 4376 farms and 419 towns, many of which previously had no electricity supply and one-fifth of Victoria's power came from the SECV's hydro-electric stations.⁶³ A larger project, the hydro-electric Kiewa PS, commenced operations in 1944. Newport C PS was completed in 1950 and originally burnt NSW black coal but was converted to use brown coal briquettes during the 1950s.⁶⁴

As demand for electricity grew, the SECV planned and built increasing numbers of larger power stations that took advantage of the plentiful supply of brown coal. The result was to create a new industrial region, the LV, rather than merely a power station, mine and industrial town at Yallourn.⁶⁵ Yallourn power stations A, B, C, D and E were all operational by 1962, and a new electricity and briquette plant and open cut at Morwell came online at the end of the 1950s. The commissioning during the 1960s of the units of the new flagship Hazelwood PS, made it the largest in the Southern hemisphere. This nearly doubled the previous system capacity of Victoria which had

⁶¹ This mine had pioneered brown coal mining and briquette manufacture between 1889 and 1899, see Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 15. It had recommenced operations in 1916, when a strike brought the NSW coal fields to a halt, and was later transferred to the SECV.

⁶² Generating facilities in the metropolitan area were also increased by the acquisition by the SECV in 1922 of the North Melbourne Electric Tramway and Lighting Company, and in 1930 of the Melbourne Electric Supply Company's operations in Melbourne and Geelong, and those in Ballarat and Bendigo in 1934 (Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, pp. 298-9.) The Newport B PS was transferred to the SECV in 1939, with Newport A following in 1948 (Gill, *Three decades: the story of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from its inception to December 1948*, pp. 76,121.) Spencer Street PS became part of the state generating system in 1941 and closed in 1982.

⁶³ Gill, *Three decades: the story of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from its inception to December 1948*, p. 73; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Generations of power: a 75-year history of the SEC*, Melbourne, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, 1993b.

⁶⁴ Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, pp. 299-300.

⁶⁵ Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 137.

taken almost 40 years to establish.⁶⁶ The building of Yallourn W PS was announced in 1965 with service planned from 1974. Plans for the next power station to be built, an extension of Yallourn W, would double its capacity to 1400 megawatt (MW), and use coal from underneath the town of Yallourn.⁶⁷ Planning for the Loy Yang A and B power stations commenced in 1974 and construction commenced in 1979. When the electrification of Victoria was completed in 1972, it became the only mainland state where all customers were served by a single supply network.⁶⁸

However, while the establishment of a single electricity authority in Victoria provided economies of scale, it resulted in a two-tier structure. The SECV established early the principle of separation of management from the operations of the enterprise. The production functions were located within the Valley where the appropriate labour was available and self-perpetuating; managerial control, and research and development functions were placed 150 km away in Melbourne. Massey⁶⁹ has described this process as producing new geographies of consumption and production and new sets of relationships between places, with some geographies being seen as more equal than others. This separation complemented the established paternalistic management style as well as indicating an enhanced status for white collar employees. The development of different working conditions for the white-collar and blue-collar employees would rankle with the latter.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *The timeless force*, Melbourne, Public Relations Department, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, 1984.

⁶⁷ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 30 August 1972, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁸ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1992-1993*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1993a.

⁶⁹ Doreen Massey, *Spatial divisions of labour: social structures and the geography of production*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1984; Massey, *Spatial divisions of labour: social structures and the geography of production*.

⁷⁰ Interviews with John E. p. 1; Gerry p. 1; Lyle p. 2.

As a result of the ongoing paternalistic management approach, there appeared to be a definite line between boss and worker – ‘they wouldn’t shake your hand’.⁷¹ Maintenance employees, ‘a lesser class’,⁷² were viewed as being treated less favourably than those in operations.⁷³ While in general the SECV was viewed as a good employer, willing to listen, there was also a sense that supervisors and local management considered themselves to be ‘above the workers’.⁷⁴ However, the previous good relationship between the unions and management, which ‘tolerated’⁷⁵ the unions, was said to have changed in the 1970s with the appointment of new senior management staff.⁷⁶

This separation of functions was not unusual within the prevailing attitudes to work and its organisation in general, and in large enterprises such as the SECV in particular. Braverman,⁷⁷ within his seminal work on LPT, discussed the impact of the shift in control over the labour process from the worker to the employer. This was proposed to lead to the degradation of work for the working class and struggles over job control. Increasing dissatisfaction with the conditions of work then led to absenteeism, high turnover, group restrictions on output and overt hostility.⁷⁸ The privileging of the management level resulted from its role of control over labour, and particularly over manual labour.

⁷¹ Interviews with Gerry p. 10; Luke pp. 18-19.

⁷² Interview with Luke p. 3.

⁷³ Interviews with John H. pp. 2-3; John E. p. 7.

⁷⁴ Interviews with Paul C. p. 7; Harry p. 7; Lindsey p. 5.

⁷⁵ Interview with Kevin p. 9; Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, *Industrial relations in the Latrobe Valley: a report prepared for C.S.R. Corporate Personnel Projects and Planning Group*, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Churchill, Vic., 1981, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Interview with Jack p. 13.

⁷⁷ Braverman, *Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Despite this, worker agency ensures that control is not all one way, with active worker resistance over the meaning and value of work.⁷⁹ Workers use strategies such as informal rules and practices directed at creating space and time, and controlling earnings, to make work relatively more interesting and satisfying. This ‘structured antagonism’ shapes but does not determine workplace-level outcomes since strategies of management control will differ with different organisational contexts.⁸⁰ In addition, employers need not only control over workers (thus generating conflict), but cooperation to ensure engagement in the production process.⁸¹ This capital-labour relationship will also be shaped by the spatial context, since ‘what occurs on the shop floor is shaped by what goes on outside the factory or office gates’.⁸²

The means of control included a range of strategies apart from direct supervision, such as elimination of direct labour, subcontracting, multitasking and job degradation through deskilling, as well as technological change, corporate welfarism and company unionism.⁸³ These controls over the labour process were used in a variety of industries in

⁷⁹ See for example Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing consent: changes in the labor process under monopoly capitalism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979; Edwards and Scullion, *The social organization of industrial conflict*; Peter Fleming, 'Beyond the panopticon?', *Ephemera*, vol. 1, no. 2, May 2001, pp. 190-194; Paul Thompson, 'Crawling from the wreckage : the labour process and the politics of production', in David Knights and Hugh Willmott (eds), *Labour process theory*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990, pp. 95-124, p. 101; Paul Thompson and Chris Smith, 'Debating Labour Process Theory and the sociology of work', in Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (eds), *Working life: renewing labour process analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010a, pp. 11-28.

⁸⁰ Andrew Sturdy, Peter Fleming and Rick Delbridge, 'Normative control and beyond in contemporary capitalism', in Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (eds), *Working life: renewing labour process analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010, pp. 113-135.

⁸¹ Craig R. Littler and Graeme Salaman, *Class at work: the design, allocation & control of jobs*, Batsford Academic and Educational, London, 1984.

⁸² Al Rainnie, Susan McGrath-Champ and Andrew Herod, 'Making space for geography in Labour Process Theory', in Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (eds), *Working life: renewing labour process analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010, pp. 297-315, p. 299.

⁸³ See for example Nikola Balnave, 'Company-sponsored recreation in Australia: 1890-1965', *Labour History*, no. 85, November 2003, pp. 129-151; George Callaghan and Paul Thompson, 'Edwards revisited : technical control and call centres', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 22, no. 1, February 2001, pp. 13-37; J. Child, 'Managerial strategies, new technology and the labour process', in David Knights, Hugh Willmott and David Collinson (eds), *Job redesign : critical perspectives on the labour process*, Gower, Aldershot, 1985, pp. 107-141; John Storey, 'The means of management control', *Sociology*, vol. 19, no. 2, May 1985, pp. 193-211; Graeme Thompson and Stephen Ackroyd, 'All quiet on the workplace front: a critique of recent trends in British industrial sociology', *Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 4, November 1995, pp. 615-633; Paul Thompson and Chris Smith (eds), *Working life: renewing labour process analysis*, Palgrave

Australia,⁸⁴ with Williams noting as late as 1981 that 'highly bureaucratised, authoritarian domination of manual workers is still pervasive'.⁸⁵

While Braverman's LPT was developed within the context of a mass production environment, it nonetheless provides a framework for considering working life at the SECV. The size and complexity of the latter resulted in some of the classic features leading to workplace conflict according to LPT, namely, the differential treatment of the wages and salaried employees, the control over daily tasks, a paternalistic attitude, and a strongly hierarchical bureaucracy which separated operations and policy.

While most SECV employees enjoyed their jobs, the common complaints were that work was too boring, too dirty or unhealthy and there was too much union activity.⁸⁶ Trades people and women worked below their skill level, and this, together with the increasing use of technology, resulted in greater alienation of the worker from the task.⁸⁷ The SECV itself had recognized that more satisfying and challenging work was needed for its employees to improve motivation and performance.⁸⁸

In the SECV, as with other Victorian government instrumentalities, its employees worked under a multitude of awards and determinations. In order to ensure that decisions made by one instrumentality did not result in unanticipated flow on effects of wages and conditions to other instrumentalities, an informal industrial coordinating

Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2010b; Christopher Wright, 'Historical interpretations of the labour process: retrospect and future research directions', *Labour History*, no. 100, May 2011, pp. 19-32.

⁸⁴ See for example Thomas Bramble, 'Union management co-operation in the vehicle industry, 1983-1992', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 5, no. 1&2, March-June 1993, pp. 83-104; Erik Eklund, 'Managers, workers, and industrial welfarism: management strategies at ER&S and the Sulphide Corporation, 1895-1929', *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 37, no. 2, July 1997a, pp. 137-157; Constance Lever-Tracy and Michael Quinlan, *A divided working class: ethnic segmentation and industrial conflict in Australia*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1988.ch. 5; Michael Quinlan, 'Managerial strategy and industrial relations in the Australian steel industry 1945-1975: a case study', in Mark Bray and Vic Taylor (eds), *Managing labour?: essays in the political economy of Australian industrial relations*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1986, pp. 20-47.

⁸⁵ Williams, *Open cut: the working class in an Australian mining town*, p. 39.

⁸⁶ Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, *Central Gippsland social survey: a socio-economic study of the Latrobe Valley*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Puffin, *Life in the Latrobe Valley: companion volume to Central Gippsland social survey*, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁸ J.C. Trethowan, 'Public enterprise', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 36, no. 1, March 1977, pp. 44-51.

arrangement in place since 1947 was formalized in 1972. The new body, the OIRC, was tasked among other things with facilitating joint negotiations where appropriate and helping to avoid the creation of unjustifiable anomalies, but without removing responsibility for 'dealings with industrial organizations'.⁸⁹

Until 1972, the SECV and the unions had been able to conduct direct negotiations,⁹⁰ and the creation of the OIRC in effect removed the ability of the SECV to directly negotiate with its workers, despite most SECV workers having their own federal awards. The unions were unhappy with this new restriction of their options available in disputes, and the serving of the log of claims by maintenance unions in 1973, 1975 and again in 1977 directly to the LV SECV management may be seen in part as an attempt to return the formal negotiation process back to the protagonists.

The result was that during the 1970s, the SECV referred all claims to arbitration, on the basis that they affected other state instrumentalities.⁹¹ While formal coordination of wage and conditions claims had benefits for the government in terms of consistency of industrial relations policy and the prevention or mitigation of flow ons, for the unions responses to claims took longer and became more complex with an additional party involved, making the process of dispute resolution longer and more difficult.⁹²

Another factor which affected the conduct of industrial relations within Victorian government instrumentalities such as the SECV was the operation of SIPS. This scheme of over award payments had been introduced by the OIRC (and its informal predecessor) in conjunction with the VTHC, and was renegotiated at irregular intervals. It was

⁸⁹ K.W. McDermott, 'Industrial relations in Victorian public employment', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 15, no. 4, December 1973, pp. 360-364, p. 364.

⁹⁰ Ibid.; PROV, VPRS 9819/P1, Unit 9, File Industrial Relations Co-ordination Committee (Cabinet sub committee), Notes on discussion re industrial relations co-ordination 29th September 1972, 2 October 1972.

⁹¹ Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

⁹² Kevin Hince and Gerard Griffin, 'Co-ordination and public sector industrial relations', *Australian Economic Review*, no. 48, 4th quarter 1979, pp. 57-60.

originally introduced in 1964 to reduce anomalies that had arisen within the gas and electricity authorities because of wage increases and applied to blue-collar workers and their supervisors only.⁹³ When the SECV became a party to SIPS in 1972, this introduced for the first time increments of service to the SECV over award entitlement.⁹⁴

Prior to the introduction of SIPS, SECV workers had been in receipt of a 'special payment' in recognition of the SECV's declaration of itself in 1961 as a 'special industry'. This payment was claimed by the SECV to have been a means of attracting tradesmen to the isolated LV area.⁹⁵ In the process of introducing SIPS into the SECV, the 'special payment' column in the Metal Trades Award 1952 was deleted, converting an award entitlement to an over award payment.⁹⁶ However, this deletion was contrary to the understanding of both the VTHC and the SECV unions,⁹⁷ and effectively decreased wages relative to other public sector employees.

By 1977 the difference in relativity arising from the absorption of the special payment column in the Award was calculated to be worth around \$25.70, the figure behind the ambit claim of \$40 in the 1977 maintenance dispute.⁹⁸ The introduction of SIPS was seen to have aggravated the anomalies already existing within the SECV's wages structures, and changed the relativities between classifications, thus increasing the potential for industrial disputes.⁹⁹

⁹³ Milton Derber, 'State government management-union relations in Victoria and New South Wales', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 4, December 1977b, pp. 366-387.

⁹⁴ PROV, VPRS 9819/P1, Unit 9, File Industrial Relations Co-ordination Committee (Cabinet sub committee), Meeting of Heads of statutory authorities, Statement by Chairman SEC, 29 June 1972.

⁹⁵ Generation Victoria Records (GVR), MORS 0347, Box C0006, File Central Gippsland Trades & Labour Council-1978, Historical summary of industrial relations events ... April 1978?

⁹⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 21, File Correspondence & writing of S. Armstrong, History of S.E.C.V. relativities, undated.

⁹⁷ UMA, VTHC 88/62, 1/4/2/1 VTHC Disputes Committee 25 July 1972.

⁹⁸ PROV, 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/110 pt 3, George Wragg, Origins of the dispute, September? 1977; Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

⁹⁹ *In the matter of The Engine Drivers' and Firemen's (State Electricity Commission of Victoria) Award, 1964* (1973) 149 CAR 478.

These two issues, the formalisation of the OIRC, and the introduction of SIPS into the SECV, both the result of intervention by the state government in the management of its statutory authorities, thus provide an important context for the 1977 dispute.

The SECV was tied to the LV by the location of the brown coal and a huge capital investment. This was perceived to give the LV workers and the unions a significant advantage in negotiating industrial claims. Part of the strength of the LV unions was the development of a strong and well organised shop stewards' network within the SECV, which was particularly evident in the LV. Supporting the SECV shop steward network was a local peak council which primarily affiliated SECV unions and provided a means of coordinating their inter-union activity.

The next section will briefly describe the SECV shop steward organisation. The strength of the organisation of shop floor stewards in the LV SECV was a significant factor in local industrial relations. The relationship with the state unions and the VTHC, both distant in Melbourne, reinforced both the local industrial identity and a willingness to take local action in support of local issues. This resulted in a reputation for militancy which was seen as inherent in the local union movement.

Shop steward organisation

The strength and extent of the shop steward organisation within the SECV was unusual in Australia during the 1970s. It was strong and active and included the white collar unions. There were twenty-four unions representing the approximate 9,000 employees in the LV, and most employees worked under federal awards, some specific to the SECV.¹⁰⁰ Some of the wages employees, such as bricklayers, plumbers, plasterers

¹⁰⁰ These awards included the Engine Drivers and Firemen's (SECV) Award 1975, the Municipal Officers' Association of Australia (SECV) Award 1975, and the SECV Appendix to the Metal Trades Award 1952. Approximately 88 percent of the LV SECV workforce was covered by these three awards (Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, pp. 8-9.)

and storemen and packers, worked under state determinations. About 90 percent of SECV employees belonged to one of the six major unions (MOA, Association of Professional Engineers, Australia (APEA), FEDFA, AMWSU,¹⁰¹ Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) and Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia (FIA)), with overall union density in the SECV at over 95 per cent.¹⁰² While the SECV did not endorse the principle of a closed shop, in practice it supported this as an 'industrial fact of life'.¹⁰³

In the majority of workplaces in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s union bargaining power was relatively weak.¹⁰⁴ In general a strong shop steward organisation was seen as unnecessary within the centralised system of arbitration.¹⁰⁵ There was variation however, with Rimmer suggesting that the 'growth of over-award pay, the application of job control, and several features of the Australian strike pattern, are all consistent with the existence of a significant volume of workplace bargaining between shop stewards and manager'.¹⁰⁶ Electricity generation was one of the industries which were organised before the 1950s,¹⁰⁷ and so the formation and sometimes militant

¹⁰¹ In 1972, the Amalgamated Engineering Union amalgamated with the Boilermakers' and Blacksmiths' Society of Australia and the Sheet Metal Working Agricultural Implement & Stove Making Industrial Union of Australia to form the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU). The AMWU amalgamated in 1976 with the Federated Shipwrights' & Ship Constructors' Association of Australia to become the Amalgamated Metal Workers' & Shipwrights' Union (AMWSU). In 1983 the AMWSU and the Federated Moulders' (Metals) Union of Australia formed the Amalgamated Metals Foundry & Shipwrights' Union (AMFSU), which in 1985 reverted to the name Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU). Another series of amalgamations and name changes followed during the 1990s. In order to avoid confusion, the name current at the time of the 1977 maintenance dispute, the Amalgamated Metal Workers' & Shipwrights' Union (AMWSU), will be used.

¹⁰² Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, p. 9.

¹⁰³ Generation Victoria Records (GVR), MORS 0347, Box C0001, File Union matters 1977-78, Refusal to join a union, 3 October 1978.

¹⁰⁴ Dufty, *Industrial relations in the Australian metal industries*, p. 255; Wright, *The management of labour: a history of Australian employers*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁵ Howard, 'Australian trade unions in the context of union theory'; Wooden, *The transformation of industrial relations*.

¹⁰⁶ Lumley, 'Control over the organisation and conduct of work: evidence from some Australian workplaces'; Malcolm Rimmer, 'Union shop floor organisation', in Bill Ford and David Plowman (eds), *Australian unions: an industrial relations perspective*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, Vic, 1983, pp. 120-144, p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm Rimmer and Paul Sutcliffe, 'The origins of Australian workshop organisation, 1918 to 1950', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 23, no. 2, June 1981, pp. 216-239.

character of shop committees was not solely the influence of British immigrants after the Second World War.¹⁰⁸ The metal industries in particular were seen as having more emphasis on plant level industrial relations and direct negotiation than most industries, with the shop steward organisation tending to be ‘numerous, powerful and well-organised’.¹⁰⁹

Some Australian unions, such as the AMWSU and the ETU, actively encouraged shop steward organisation in the workplace. Stewards were expected to have a role to play in a range of issues, including negotiating over award payments and conditions of employment.¹¹⁰ The steward was viewed as ‘the key agent to the mobilization of the membership’.¹¹¹ Sam Armstrong, shop steward for the LV AMWSU, and a leader in the 1977 maintenance dispute, considered that the role of the steward was to negotiate to win better wages and conditions.¹¹²

This was in contrast to the policy of the ACTU, which considered that industrial actions taken by shop committees undermined uniformity in policy and wage negotiations by the union.¹¹³ The Shop Stewards Charter adopted by the ACTU in 1961 expressly precluded stewards from becoming involved with ‘matters affecting wage rates and conditions of employment covered by Awards or Agreements’ which were the

¹⁰⁸ Norman F. Dufty, 'The shop steward in Western Australia', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 22, no. 4, December 1980, pp. 377-399.

¹⁰⁹ Dufty, *Industrial relations in the Australian metal industries*, p. 249.

¹¹⁰ Edward Davis, *Decision-making in the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union: a study of the Victorian Branch*, Unpublished Master of Economics thesis, Monash University, 1977b, p. 201; Electrical Trades Union of Australia NSW Branch, *Shop steward manual*, Workers Educational Association of South Australia, Adelaide, 1976, p. 43.

¹¹¹ Edward Davis, 'Decision-making in the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 4, December 1977a, pp. 348-365, p. 357.

¹¹² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Writings, Role of shop stewards and their organizations, undated.

¹¹³ UMA, 88/62, 15/2/1/14, File ACTU meetings with other unions 1961, 19 April 1961; UMA, 88/62, 2/8, Resolutions carried by the THC 1962-64 and business sheets 1964, Decision of A.C.T.U. 9-13th December 1963 for endorsement re area and shop committees.

responsibility of the relevant unions.¹¹⁴ The ACTU later become more tolerant of shop committees, and in 1980 a detailed charter expanded their role.¹¹⁵

The ACTU policy was firmly supported by the VTHC,¹¹⁶ so the activities of the shop stewards and the shop committees in the SECV were a constant source of irritation. Their activities were questioned by the VTHC on a number of occasions.¹¹⁷

In 1966 the issue came to a head when an unauthorized stop work meeting resulted in a strike at the SECV.¹¹⁸ The result was rule changes that enabled the VTHC Executive to intervene in and take control of disputes, so that unions were not obliged to support such 'unauthorised' actions,¹¹⁹ and to avoid further 'industrial anarchy'.¹²⁰ This deliberate reduction in rank and file involvement added to the perception, particularly by unions associated with the left, that the VTHC was not committed to advancing affiliate interest through direct action.¹²¹ It was also viewed by the regional trades and labour councils, such as the CGTLC, as a move against their local autonomy.¹²² Industrial action was viewed as appropriate when sanctioned by the VTHC, but not when it was initiated by individual unions, shop committees or the rank and file.¹²³

Blue-collar stewards at the SECV were often involved in negotiations around employment issues such as pay problems and classifications, allowances, general

¹¹⁴ UMA, 88/62, 18/1/10, Circular, 6 November 1963.

¹¹⁵ Greg Patmore, *The arid terrain?: a historical survey of the workplace in Australia*, Centre for Industrial Relations Research, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1988, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ The Melbourne Trades Hall Council (MTHC) changed its name to the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) in 1970. To avoid confusion, the later name will be used when referring to events post 1945.

¹¹⁷ See for example UMA, 88/62, 1/2/1/36, VTHC Executive meeting, 14 February 1963.

¹¹⁸ Cathy Brigden, 'Beyond peak body authority: power relations in the Trades Hall Council (THC)', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 11, no. 2, December 2000, pp. 59-74.

¹¹⁹ Catherine Brigden, *A vehicle for solidarity: power and purpose in the Victorian Trades Hall Council, 1948-1981*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Work & Organisational Studies, University of Sydney, 2003, p. 164.

¹²⁰ UMA, 88/62, 7/1/132, File General correspondence S 1966, Comments on resolution, September 1966.

¹²¹ Brigden, 'Beyond peak body authority: power relations in the Trades Hall Council (THC)'.

¹²² D.H. Plowman, 'Unions in conflict: the Victorian Trades Hall split 1967-1973', *Labour History*, no. 36, May 1979, pp. 47-69.

¹²³ Brigden, 'Beyond peak body authority: power relations in the Trades Hall Council (THC)'.

working conditions, health and safety, staffing and manning, overtime and discipline,¹²⁴ along the lines of the 'British tradition'.¹²⁵ It was a very 'democratic' workplace-based form of unionism, with members generally being consulted by the stewards when decisions needed to be made, a factor which also assisted in maintaining a strong and relevant union organisation.¹²⁶ They also actively participated in a range of activities related to industrial action, although the extent and type of workplace involvement varied with the type of union and the location of the shop steward.¹²⁷ In addition, a significant minority of stewards also attended meetings with stewards from other unions, demonstrating the perceived importance of the development of a strong shop floor organisation.¹²⁸

The willingness of the SECV in the LV to recognise or incorporate the steward or shop committee into plant level industrial issues may have been partly a function of the distance of the LV from mainstream industrial relations activity, both on the unions' and on the SECV's part. As a result, activity at the local level was often seen as more important than state or even national-level activity, which is not uncommon for workers in areas such as the LV.¹²⁹ Officials, while recognising that unity at the local level is necessary for mobilisation of member power at any level, were often reluctant to accept local independence which might later have effects on overall union policy or strategy, or on inter-union relations.¹³⁰ For most of the blue collar SECV unions, the membership in

¹²⁴ John Benson, 'Workplace union organization in Australia', *Labour & Industry*, vol. 1, no. 3, October 1988, pp. 407-430.

¹²⁵ Interview with Jack p. 6, referring to his perception that British shop stewards had greater involvement in negotiations on matters viewed as relating to awards and which were thus considered by many Australian unions as not within the role of the shop steward. See for example Clegg, *Trade unionism under collective bargaining: a theory based on comparisons of six countries*, pp. 56-7; Hyman, *Industrial relations: a Marxist introduction*, p. 153.

¹²⁶ Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, pp. 89, 148.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-103.

¹²⁹ Clyde Cameron, *Unions in crisis*, Hill of Content, Melbourne, 1982, p. 83.

¹³⁰ M. Kampf, *State/federal union relations: a case study of intra-union conflict*, Department of Industrial Relations, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 1986, p. 5.

the LV was only a small proportion of state or federal membership. This reinforced the perceived reluctance of officials to press local views, and exacerbated the perception of a divide between Melbourne and the LV.¹³¹

The SECV preference was to resolve industrial disputes at the shop floor level without outside intervention, and to resist approaches made in the name of the CGTLC, the local peak union council.¹³² The CGTLC provided a direct forum for the SECV shop stewards in regional industrial mobilisation and exchange through local union affiliation and representation. For the LV SECV unions, this occurred primarily through an SECV subcommittee.

The following section will briefly describe the CGTLC, which played a major role in the 1977 dispute, within the context of the LV and the SECV. In addition, mention will be made of the uneasy relationship which developed with the state peak council, the VTHC.

The Central Gippsland Trades and Labor Council

The local peak union body was the CGTLC. It was established as the Yallourn and District Trades and Labor Council (YDTLC) in 1932, and became active in the 1940s and 1950s. The geographic coverage of the YDTLC expanded as the SECV moved from Yallourn into other locations in the Latrobe Valley and as other industries became established locally. This prompted a change of name in 1947 to the Central Gippsland (and still later to just Gippsland) Trades and Labor Council.¹³³ At the time of the 1955 split in the labour movement, it lost almost half of its affiliated unions, and thus much of its power and cohesiveness over industrial action in the Latrobe Valley. In

¹³¹ Interview with Evan pp. 8, 10.

¹³² The lines were sometimes blurred between the roles carried out by some of the SECV shop stewards. They could also be delegates and/or officials to the CGTLC, officials of the local union branch or sub-branch, and in one case, acting organiser for a union; PROV, VPRS 9822 /P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-4.

¹³³ The abbreviation CGTLC will be used for events post-1947, to avoid confusion with the later name, the GTLC.

1960, control of the Executive was returned to the Left after nine years under the ALP Industrial Groups¹³⁴ (the Groupers), and was more inclined to direct action as the means of improving conditions.

During the 1960s the CGTLC was mainly a forum for SECV maintenance unions. While many of the trade unions representing workers in the SECV were affiliated to the CGTLC, notable exceptions during the 1970s were the FIA (a maintenance union) and the major unions representing the salaried employees, the FEDFA and the MOA. The mediation of industrial mobilisation and exchange by the CGTLC enabled the SECV to organise, control and bring some discipline to union behaviour; effectively the SECV 'shared control to regain and maintain control'.¹³⁵ The CGTLC and the SECV were seen as 'bound together',¹³⁶ with the CGTLC 'an integral part of the power industry'.¹³⁷

The strength of the CGTLC in mobilisation and exchange with the SECV during the 1970s arose mainly from the affiliation of the blue collar unions.¹³⁸ However, during the late 1970s and 1980s the CGTLC reinvented itself with a stronger central organisation and commenced coordinating inter-union industrial action both within the SECV and the wider community. When the key operations unions, the FEDFA and the MOA, re-affiliated in the early 1980s, the CGTLC was greatly strengthened due to its perceived hold over the state's electricity supply. The CGTLC gained a new relevance and prominence in the Latrobe Valley, with its power peaking from 1987 to the early

¹³⁴ The ALP Industrial Groups were formed to facilitate the election of ALP-backed (Groupers) rather than Communist candidates to executive positions in trade unions and peak union councils. In Victoria, they were established in 1946 and by the 1950s the Groupers were a powerful force, both in the unions and in the ALP. The ALP withdrew its recognition of them in 1955.

¹³⁵ Pullin and Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region', p. 12.

¹³⁶ Interview with Harry p. 6.

¹³⁷ Interview with Lindsey p. 25.

¹³⁸ Kathryn M. Steel, 'The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council and industrial agency in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria', in Julie Kimber, Peter Love and Phillip Deery (eds), *Labour traditions: proceedings of the tenth national labour history conference*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History - Melbourne, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 177-184.

1990s. It was able to negotiate for all its affiliates with regional employing bodies on over-award and cross industry issues, as well as being an important forum for developing regional negotiating strategy and aiding communication.¹³⁹

To operate most effectively as an agent of mobilisation and exchange it was important that the CGTLC be part of the representative structure established by the VTHC. The actions of SECV shop committees were seen on occasion as a struggle for power between the VTHC and the rank and file,¹⁴⁰ despite the recognised benefits of having the support and influence of the VTHC during industrial disputes.¹⁴¹ The CGTLC preferred to 'control its own destiny',¹⁴² and had claimed autonomy over disputes within its geographic area of coverage in 1965.¹⁴³ This did not necessarily accord with the stated wishes of the VTHC.¹⁴⁴

The VTHC viewed the CGTLC as operating outside the limits of its authority and moved to investigate its operations on a number of occasions during the 1950s and 1960s. The VTHC intervened in 1952 after complaints from affiliated unions,¹⁴⁵ in 1957 over handling of industrial matters,¹⁴⁶ after the elections of 1960 which returned control to the Left,¹⁴⁷ and in 1961 after complaints from affiliated unions.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁹ Pullin and Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region'.

¹⁴⁰ Brigden, 'Beyond peak body authority: power relations in the Trades Hall Council (THC)'.

¹⁴¹ Brigden, *A vehicle for solidarity: power and purpose in the Victorian Trades Hall Council, 1948-1981*, pp. 232-3.

¹⁴² Interviews with Bruce p. 2; Frank p. 14.

¹⁴³ Plowman, 'Unions in conflict: the Victorian Trades Hall split 1967-1973'.

¹⁴⁴ See for example GTLC, Box 7 (3rd), File GTLC correspondence etc (folder 13), VTHC to CGTLC, 22 June 1964; GTLC, Box 7 (3rd), File GTLC correspondence etc (folder 13), CGTLC to SECV, 3 August 1964.

¹⁴⁵ See for example UMA, 88/62, 1/2/1/25, VTHC Executive, 29 April 1952; UMA, 88/62, 7/5/6, File Correspondence Trades Hall Councils 1950-1-2, Transport Workers' Union to VTHC, 28 April 1952, and PPWFA to VTHC, 26 April 1952.

¹⁴⁶ *The Age*, 1 November 1957, p. 3; *The Sun*, 1 November 1957, p. 11; *Industrial Review* 1 December 1957; UMA, 85/61, Box 43, File 19/9, THC Circular to unions with members in the Central Gippsland area, 27 November 1957; UMA, 1/1/1/25, VTHC meeting, 5 December 1957.

¹⁴⁷ *Industrial Review* v. 7, no. 4, June 1960, p. 4; *The Herald*, 17 March 1960, Final ed., p. 7; GTLC, Box 7 (3rd), File Correspondence CGTLC (File15), VTHC to CGTLC, 15 March 1960; UMA, 88/62, 1/1/1/26, VTHC meeting, 21 April 1960.

¹⁴⁸ UMA, 88/62, 1/2/1/34, VTHC meeting, 19 June 1961, p.118; UMA, 88/62, 1/1/1/27, VTHC meeting, 5 October 1961.

In addition, the CGTLC was accused of usurping the place of the VTHC over the SECV dispute in 1966, and in the contract labour disputes of 1968.¹⁴⁹

However, there were occasions when the CGTLC and the VTHC worked together for common goals. One example of this was the campaign to save the SECV township of Yallourn. When the SECV announced in September 1961 that it had committed to winning the quality coal under Yallourn, the decision shocked and bewildered the inhabitants of the town, who were completely unprepared for it.¹⁵⁰ The initial date for clearing the town was 1995, but when the state government in 1972 announced that the generating capacity of the planned Yallourn W PS would be doubled, the date for demolition of Yallourn was brought forward to 1979.¹⁵¹ A Save Yallourn Campaign commenced in 1974. The VTHC, on the recommendation of the CGTLC, placed black bans on the removal of houses from Yallourn.¹⁵² However, the level of community opposition to the destruction of Yallourn decreased, so the bans were removed in September 1975 and the removal of houses resumed.¹⁵³ By mid-1977, only 464 tenants remained, and the last resident left in 1981.¹⁵⁴

The relationships between the SECV, the unions and the CGTLC, which may have had advantages for all parties, did not result in an industrially quiescent workforce. The development of the SECV and the history of electricity generation and supply in Victoria is one which demonstrates ongoing industrial activity. While the LV workforce was seen as less troubled than its black coal counterparts,¹⁵⁵ the early years in particular

¹⁴⁹ UMA, 88/62, 1/23/11, Decision of VTHC Executive, 2 October 1968; GTLC, Box 7 (3rd), File Minutes meetings CGTLC (File 1), Report to CGTLC re VTHC meeting, 13 May 1967.

¹⁵⁰ Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 163.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁵² UMA, 88/62, 1/1/1/33, VTHC meeting, 9 May 1974.

¹⁵³ GTLC, Box 7 (2nd), File Yallourn township history, letter VTHC to CGTLC, 12 September 1975.

¹⁵⁴ Brian Courtis, 'Yallourn: the town that brown coal built, then took away', *Australian Geographic*, no. 10, 1988, pp. 98-110; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1976-1977*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1977.

¹⁵⁵ Monash University Centre for Gippsland Studies, CGSV 4423. AD Spaul, The pattern of industrial conflict at the Yallourn brown coal mine, 1969.

were marked by a number of large strikes by the miners, members of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU). The relationships which had developed around the organisational structures of the SECV, the government and the shop stewards' network were important in setting expectations and traditions. Within the SECV, the Melbourne-LV divide became established early on, and this reflected the uneasy relationship between the LV unions and their state branches, and between the local and state peak union councils. It framed the industrial relationships which had been developed by the LV rank and file. The SECV had preferred to deal directly with the VTHC since the 1920s, and this continued after the formation of the CGTLC in the 1930s. As a result, the local unions did not always trust the VTHC to act in their interests. A similar uneasy relationship had developed between the CGTLC and the VTHC. However, the unions used the CGTLC only when it suited them,¹⁵⁶ resulting in fragmented action and demarcation disputes.

The next section will briefly look at the industrial relations climate in the SECV. A description of the more significant industrial disputes from the early days to the 1970s will be followed by some general observations concerning SECV industrial relations. Two significant disputes occurring in the SECV during 1977 in the period leading up to the maintenance dispute will also be described. These were the ETU/Coronet Homes dispute, and the MOA shift work dispute. Some features of these disputes provide an important context for the maintenance dispute which occurred later that year.

Industrial relations within the SECV

As the SECV grew, it became the significant employer in the LV. It created a newly industrialized region to which the unions and the employees adapted, developing a series of relationships around the organisational structures in order to achieve their

¹⁵⁶ Leo Ruschena, *The impact of competition and privatisation on change and workplace relations: a study of the Victorian electricity generation industry 1989-1997*, Unpublished Master in Industrial and Employment Relations thesis, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University, 2000, p. 54.

industrial aims. The bargaining power of the LV unions became greater once demand for electricity increased and the SECV built more power stations in the LV. This large capital investment tied it even more tightly to the LV coal fields, and thus to its LV workforce.

While Victoria's power stations were located next to extensive brown coal reserves, Victoria did not have a competitive electricity cost advantage over other states. In part this was due to the poor quality of the brown coal supply, but Teicher, van Gramberg and Holland ¹⁵⁷ have also suggested that it related to the SECV's history of making concessions concerning staffing and work practices which increased its labour costs relative to suppliers in other states. Certainly other employers in the Latrobe Valley considered that labour costs and labour discipline were major hurdles to industrial expansion in the Latrobe Valley, and blamed both of these on the SECV's generation and construction activities.¹⁵⁸ Allegations of low productivity, and continued demarcation disputes within the SECV, served to perpetuate the image of the Valley as an area high in industrial conflict.¹⁵⁹

However, industrial disputes in the electricity sector receive more scrutiny from the mass media, both because of their possible impact on the public, and because in a monopoly there are political implications and expectations on both sides. In addition, the large size and complexity of such organisations, centralised labour negotiations which result in lack of flexibility on both sides, and communication difficulties between both workers and management, and between workers and unions, mean that there is greater opportunity for disputes to occur. In addition, it has been suggested that working in

¹⁵⁷ Julian Teicher, Bernadine Van Gramberg and Peter Holland, *Outsourcing in Australia and the trade union response: electricity generation in Victoria*, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University, Clayton, 2000a, p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Birrell and John Stanley, *Major employment and training issues in the Latrobe Valley: findings from initial community consultations*, Ministry of Employment and Training, Melbourne, 1983, p. 49.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

physical conditions which are isolated, dangerous and unpleasant will affect the attitude of workers to their jobs and to management. While these conditions may not in themselves create militancy, they assist in creating a climate which produces conflict, and provide the impetus for the development of a job delegate or shop steward network.¹⁶⁰

The large scale development in a newly industrialised and remote area (by the standards of the time) resulted in a unique set of relationships between the SECV as the major employer, the unions which came to the LV with the jobs, and the workers. The latter developed their own bargaining structures and established a local peak union body to provide support for common claims around SECV wages and conditions.

The first documented strike at the SECV was in 1924, and during the period 1924 until 1926 there were six major stoppages at the open cut. These included strikes in early 1926 by the AWU miners for more than four days over the delay in taking a log of claims to arbitration; two months later, over 1,000 coal miners without the support of their state branch went on strike for five days over the interpretation of the award for Yallourn coal labourers; in November that year a strike by the AWU over a 44-hour week and better conditions lasted nearly three weeks, resulting in the first electricity use restrictions.¹⁶¹ When the Melbourne Trades Hall Council (MTHC) sent a deputation to Yallourn to persuade the miners to end the strike, it gave the impression that the MTHC was negotiating with the SECV without reference to the miners' position. This increased allegiance to the local AWU and bred resentment of the MTHC.¹⁶²

Another walkout occurred in March 1927 over the attitude of a foreman, who was eventually transferred to another section when the local AWU would not back down

¹⁶⁰ Margaret Bridson Cribb, 'Causes and catalysts of strikes', in D.J. Murphy (ed.), *The big strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983, pp. 3-14.

¹⁶¹ Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, p. 109.

¹⁶² Spaul, *The origins and rise of the Victorian brown coal industry 1835-1935*, pp. 192-7.

and members went on strike for three days. When the coal miners were placed under industrial pressure they reacted with a high degree of solidarity. The AWU was able to win concessions through strike action, thus encouraging other unions to do the same. The improvement of working and living conditions, together with the 1930s Depression, reduced the amount of overt conflict temporarily. However it then moved from the mines to the power stations.¹⁶³

Sir John Monash, founding Chairman of the SECV, developed a paternalistic style of governance to support the development of an efficient workforce. He saw this as an 'enlightened, scientific management'¹⁶⁴ which would encourage greater productivity within the SECV. The MTHC supported Monash and dealt directly with him as a means of increasing its control over the unionists at Yallourn.¹⁶⁵ In 1944, Justice Stretton, investigating serious fires which had threatened the township of Yallourn, noted the 'atmosphere of suffocating paternalism'¹⁶⁶ of the town and asserted that 'the SEC's administration of the town actually provoked dissent'.¹⁶⁷ However, the SECV continued to drive the location, constitution and reproduction of its workforce, community development and training and education both within Yallourn and its workforce.¹⁶⁸ The SECV had made its workers 'cogs in the industrial machine'¹⁶⁹ and imposed a work hierarchy on Yallourn's social structure.

In the early 1940s, the YDTLC suggested the establishment of a joint consultative committee for the Yallourn site, with the aim of creating 'harmonious

¹⁶³ Monash University Centre for Gippsland Studies, CGSV 4423. Spaul, AD, The pattern of industrial conflict at the Yallourn brown coal mine, 1969.

¹⁶⁴ Serle, *John Monash: a biography*, p. 455.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

¹⁶⁶ Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ Fairbrother and Testi, 'The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour'.

¹⁶⁹ Fletcher, *Digging people up for coal: a history of Yallourn*, p. 66.

industrial relations'.¹⁷⁰ This followed an earlier attempt by the YDTLC to set up an 'Appeals and Reference Board' which would adjudicate on industrial matters with the approval of the relevant union. This Board would consider such matters as dismissals, anomalies, changes to working conditions and hours and any other matter in dispute.¹⁷¹ Despite these proposals from the YDTLC, the SECV noted in 1949 that the unions had been inspired with a confidence in the SECV,¹⁷² and that most problems could be settled in amicable discussion. Where this was not possible the SECV looked to the VTHC to represent organised labour.

A series of major disputes ensued over the years after World War II. The issue of contract labour, which was to develop into such a major concern for the maintenance unions in particular, came to the fore with action under the auspices of the CGTLC in the late 1950s.¹⁷³ In the 1960s the white collar unions also began to be involved in major industrial action,¹⁷⁴ accompanying an increase in strikes Australia-wide. Campaigns initiated by combined shop stewards committees across the SECV's LV and metropolitan operations were also successful during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷⁵

Actions which were described as 'unauthorised and wildcat' occurred by a number of unions, both CGTLC-affiliated and non-affiliated, such as the FEDFA.¹⁷⁶ These occurred with or without coordination and negotiation on inter-union industrial

¹⁷⁰ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0001, File Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council 1932-1953, Yallourn file, Proposed Joint Consultative and Advisory Committee ... undated (between 1940 and 1943).

¹⁷¹ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0001, File Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council 1932-1953, Yallourn file, Appeals and Reference Board, Yallourn, 6 September 1933.

¹⁷² Gill, *Three decades: the story of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from its inception to December 1948*, p. 169.

¹⁷³ *The Age*, 27 September 1957, p. 5; *The Sun*, 18 September 1957, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Derber, 'State government management-union relations in Victoria and New South Wales'; Edwards, *Brown power: a jubilee history of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria*, p. 251; Peter Gahan, 'Did arbitration make for dependent unionism?: evidence from historical case studies', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 38, no. 4, December 1996, pp. 648-698.

¹⁷⁵ See for example GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0016, File 1970 log of claims, S.E.C. Council Shop Committees, 17 October 1970; GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGTLC 1954/1967, The S.E.C. is trying to split up the alliance of S.E.C. unions, 20 June 1966.

¹⁷⁶ Malcolm McDonald, *FEDFA: a Victorian Branch history 1907-2005*, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, Carlton, 2005, p. 151.

activity by the CGTLC. The local unions wanted their issues handled 'more aggressively'¹⁷⁷ than the VTHC was prepared to do.

Expectations were established during the boom years of the 1960s, due to the success of larger unions such as the AMWSU and ETU in obtaining over award wages.¹⁷⁸ This was particularly true during periods of shortages of skilled workers.¹⁷⁹ Wage demands were often met, and this set the pattern which continued into the 1970s, when prices increased sharply, despite the onset of recession early in that decade.

The SECV workforce developed a reputation for collective strength and militancy, both within the power industry and in the community at large.¹⁸⁰ This was assisted by the migration of British workers who brought with them their experiences and traditions as trade unionists and became 'very active in the local union movement'.¹⁸¹ This reputation remained with the industry in the LV into the 1970s, and was attributed to conflict between an authoritarian management and a militant and high profile shop steward organisation.¹⁸²

The unions, described as 'powerful, militant and somewhat intransigent',¹⁸³ often had their demands met, thus entrenching poor work practices and causing increased costs. Government pressure was usually applied so that disputes impacting on the supply of electricity were solved quickly, so as not to inconvenience the public or industry.¹⁸⁴ The result was to increase the perceived power of the operational unions, the MOA and

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Jack p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Dufty, *Industrial relations in the Australian metal industries*, p. 248.

¹⁷⁹ J.E. Isaac, 'Wage drift in the Australian metal industries', in J.E. Isaac and G.W. Ford (eds), *Australian labour economics: readings*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 214-221.

¹⁸⁰ Fairbrother and Testi, 'The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour'.

¹⁸¹ Birrell and Stanley, *Major employment and training issues in the Latrobe Valley: findings from initial community consultations*, p. 51.

¹⁸² Derber, 'State government management-union relations in Victoria and New South Wales', p. 385.

¹⁸³ Len Pullin, 'Trade union perspectives and perceptions on industrial restructuring in the Latrobe region', in Ray Fells and Trish Todd (eds), *Current research in industrial relations: proceedings of the 10th AIRAANZ Conference February 1996*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 1996, pp. 443-453, p. 447.

¹⁸⁴ Julian Teicher, Bernadine Van Gramberg and Peter Holland, *Outsourcing in electricity generation and union responses*, Faculty of Business and Economics, Monash University, Caulfield East, 2000b.

the FEDFA in particular. Within the SECV, these operations unions were seen to have a better relationship with the SECV¹⁸⁵ and were 'looked after'.¹⁸⁶ Generally speaking, the SECV tended toward the 'carrot' rather than the 'stick' approach to industrial relations. Labour turnover was generally low, disciplinary terminations rare and employment conditions above average. This resulted in wage rises and overmanning, but resulted in less industrial disruption than in states such as Queensland where a policy of confrontation rather than conciliation was in operation.¹⁸⁷

Several disputes in the SECV between 1966 and 1974 stand out and are worthy of a brief mention. These demonstrate the strength of the blue collar shop steward network, the ability of the shop stewards and shop committee to influence the rank and file to take industrial action, the use of industrial action which was not always authorised by the unions or the VTHC, intervention by government and/or the ACTU, and the ambivalence by the rank and file toward use of the Arbitration system. These major disputes often resulted from lengthy delays in having claims considered or acted on, and support Benson's finding that SECV shop stewards usually took direct action only after other options had been exhausted.¹⁸⁸ That is, it required the level of grievance to escalate before mobilisation was considered as a means of resolving an issue.

The 1966 dispute had its origins in the serving of a log of claims for all blue collar SECV workers by the VTHC in August 1965. Early in 1966 the CGTLC was informed that it was not to call mass meetings regarding the log unless the VTHC had approved them.¹⁸⁹ The offers made by the SECV went to meetings of members in May and June 1966, and were rejected as unacceptable. Three months later, negotiations involving Commissioner Winter, the SECV and the unions were still continuing. The

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Frank p. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with John H. p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ Rosenthal and Russ, *The politics of power: inside Australia's electric utilities*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁸ Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, p. 162.

¹⁸⁹ GTLC, Box 5, folder 8, Circular 10 March 1966.

VTHC had reminded the unions involved that there must be no stoppages of work while negotiations continued.¹⁹⁰

However a ‘spontaneous’ strike, not supported by all union branches in the LV, resulted from an unauthorised stop work meeting on 19 September.¹⁹¹ The strikers were threatened with loss of union membership, disaffiliation, loss of the CGTLC Charter, and use of the *Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic) (ESA) against the stewards.¹⁹² Sympathetic commentators laid the blame for the dispute at the feet of the Coordinating Committee (later the OIRC) and the Victorian Premier, who had delayed resolution of the log for an unreasonable 14 months.¹⁹³ It was not until 7 November 1966 that the revised offers of the SECV and the state government, and Commissioner Winter as regards wage increases, were accepted. This was seen as a ‘resounding victory’¹⁹⁴ for the leadership of the VTHC despite the unauthorised nature of the strike. This was perhaps because the result flowed onto all government instrumentalities.

Another significant SECV industrial dispute was in 1972 in support of a claim for an extra weeks leave for SECV blue collar unions. The claim had been placed before the SECV in July 1971 by the VTHC. The SECV had previously made its own decisions about leave entitlements, but decided this claim was ‘of national significance’¹⁹⁵ and should be arbitrated. Bans and stoppages were applied in January 1972 and in early February the SECV began to stand down workers at Yallourn. The result was a complete ban by the CGTLC on coal mining at Hazelwood, which was supported by the VTHC Disputes Committee.¹⁹⁶ After generating plant went out of service, severe state-wide

¹⁹⁰ UMA, 88/62, 1/1/1/29, Council meeting, 23 September 1966.

¹⁹¹ UMA, 101/20, Box 4, Item 31, Report on events associated with unofficial strike ... , 29 September 1966.

¹⁹² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 23 November 1966, p. 15.

¹⁹³ *The Herald*, 15 October 1966, p. 20.

¹⁹⁴ UMA, 88/62, 7/1/132, File General correspondence S 1966, general comments on the dispute, undated.

¹⁹⁵ Blanche d'Alpuget, *Mediator: a biography of Sir Richard Kirby*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1977, p. 247.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 250.; UMA, 88/62, 1/1/1/32, Council meeting, 10 February 1972.

power restrictions were imposed by the SECV for six days. Bob Hawke was accused by the LV shop stewards of acting for the employers and by the Victorian Premier Sir Henry Bolte of directing the strike.¹⁹⁷ At a mass meeting on 15 February, Hawke managed to persuade the strikers to go back to work by promising to conduct the case in the ACAC. The ACAC however rejected the claim for an extra weeks leave, although it extended the 3 days 'special leave' days granted to staff employees to wages employees.¹⁹⁸ This result provides an important context for the 1977 dispute, since it resulted in a lack of confidence in both Bob Hawke and his promises, and in the outcomes likely from the ACAC. The dispute was accompanied by threats to call an early federal election over industrial relations, the Victorian Premier stated that radicals were attempting to cripple the economy, and the Federal Minister for Social Services said that workers stood down would not be eligible for unemployment benefits. These reactions foreshadowed similar reactions from the government during the 1977 maintenance dispute.¹⁹⁹

A third significant dispute occurred in August 1974. After a five day strike by maintenance employees, Commissioner Vosti awarded increases in margins of between \$5.50 and \$11.00. This result was appealed by state government instrumentalities on the basis that Commissioner Vosti made his decision without argument, and because there was some conflict with previous ACAC decisions.²⁰⁰ This appeal was seen as hypocritical given the government and the SECV's insistence on claims going to arbitration, and prompted another walkout by the maintenance men which lasted for 12 days.²⁰¹ The appeal by the government was unsuccessful.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ John Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, Angus & Robertson, London, 1979, p. 121.

¹⁹⁸ *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1972) 144 CAR 794.

¹⁹⁹ *The National Times*, October 24-29 1977, p. 4.

²⁰⁰ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0004, File Metal Trades 1974, Newsgram, 16 September 1974.

²⁰¹ Yallourn Power Station Records (YPS), YAPS 0051, Box A0008, File Industrial disputes – General, Metal maintenance shop s/s committee, 13 September 1974.

As well as the major disputes within the SECV, there was ongoing industrial action by various unions or combinations of unions, and for a range of reasons. During the 1970s these included wage claims (MOA in 1970 and 1972), flow on wages, shift premium and allowances claims (FEDFA in 1971, 1972, 1973), annual leave, SIPS and 35-hour week claims (all wages employees in 1971, 1972, 1975, 1976). There were claims by various unions for salary increases and non-award items such as travelling allowances, safety footwear and improved overtime rates, provision of new awards, proposals for restructuring of classifications, and work value cases often resulting in pay increases.²⁰³ One result was that the average salary of SECV employees rose during the 1970s to be significantly more than the average male earning rate for Victoria.²⁰⁴ There were ongoing demarcation problems within the AMWSU (as regards fitters), the FIA (riggers), and inter-union problems in the operations area between the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE), the MOA and the FEDFA.²⁰⁵ However, not all stoppages resulted in power restrictions despite public perception to the contrary. During the mid-1970s, of 137 SECV strikes resulting in lost time, only 4 led to power restrictions, and only one of the four was a strike which originated in the SECV.²⁰⁶

The unions in the Valley were not a unified force, despite being seen by outsiders as strong and militant. There was often in-fighting over coverage and membership, and cases where unions worked with management to the detriment of other unions.²⁰⁷ Lack of union solidarity reduced the ability of the unions to confront management with a

²⁰² *Her Majesty the Queen in right of the State of Victoria v The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union and Others* (1975) 164 CAR 200.

²⁰³ For example, see State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1978-1979*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1979; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1979-1980*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1980.

²⁰⁴ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1976-1977*.

²⁰⁵ Rosenthal and Russ, *The politics of power: inside Australia's electric utilities*, p. 83.

²⁰⁶ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 440, File 80/1094 pt 2, Strikes SEC, 23 July 1979.

²⁰⁷ Ruschena, *The impact of competition and privatisation on change and workplace relations: a study of the Victorian electricity generation industry 1989-1997*, p. 54.

convincing show of strength. Union resources were committed to protection of the membership base rather than unity in times of need.²⁰⁸

Despite the LV being the source of all major disputes, the SECV industrial relations machinery was centralised, with the major control, information, policy decisions and related actions coming from Melbourne. The locals were expected to restrict themselves to ‘fire-fighting’, implementing policy, and providing information.²⁰⁹ The relationship between local and Melbourne management of the SECV thus mirrored that between the LV stewards and their state union officials. The LV industrial relations staff were sometimes ‘treated like pariahs’,²¹⁰ and there were ‘entrenched views about the country guys’.²¹¹ While LV industrial issues were often handled locally, it was felt that LV industrial relations staff were not included in relevant discussions over industrial matters, for example with the VTHC.²¹² This may have led to a perception that local staff were inferior or untrustworthy.

Despite the general lack of autonomy of local management in dealing with industrial relations issues, there was a long tradition of informal local dispute resolution.²¹³ This involved local managers using the expertise of industrial relations officers, and dealing directly with shop stewards, particularly from the main manual unions. The former were not permitted to interpret awards, in the interest of maintaining uniformity.²¹⁴ This separation of industrial dispute processes resulted in a complex series of relationships which saw both union pressure on the SECV at the local level and the

²⁰⁸ Teicher, Van Gramberg and Holland, *Outsourcing in electricity generation and union responses*.

²⁰⁹ Benson, Hince and Griffin, *Industrial relations policy: a case study of organisational change*, p. 2.

²¹⁰ Interview with Evan p. 8.

²¹¹ Interview with Kevin p. 1.

²¹² Interview with Evan p. 8.

²¹³ Fairbrother and Testi, 'The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour', p. 111.

²¹⁴ Derber, 'State government management-union relations in Victoria and New South Wales'.

use of the centralised industrial tribunals.²¹⁵ This resulted in frustration on both sides as disputes went slowly through the formal conciliation processes.²¹⁶ Despite this, within the LV relations between the shop stewards and the industrial relations staff were seen as good, even friendly.²¹⁷

By mid-June of 1977, when the maintenance workers imposed bans in support of their log of claims, there were two significant disputes within the LV SECV. These were the MOA shift work dispute, and a dispute between the ETU and Coronet Homes which was affecting the SECV. The first dispute resulted from the MOA serving a log of claims in 1976 seeking improved shift work conditions. The claims were rejected by the SECV, and in January 1977 operators decided to strike for 24 hours. However the MOA postponed the stoppage, and instead imposed bans from February which the Chairman of the SECV stated showed 'a total disregard for the community'.²¹⁸ The bans were supported by the FEDFA, and affected plant maintenance and restoration to service, thus seriously threatening power supplies. The ACAC made several attempts to settle the dispute, however the log of claims continued to be rejected by the SECV. A Full Bench of the ACAC also rejected the major claims in June of that year.²¹⁹ While the MOA was unhappy with the decision of the ACAC, it decided that the existing political and economic climate was not conducive to further militant action and the campaign was temporarily discontinued.²²⁰ The claim was revived in September 1977 during the

²¹⁵ Fairbrother and Testi, 'The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour'.

²¹⁶ J.A. Vines, *Technical history of Yallourn Open Cut, July 1965 to December 1987*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1989, p. 275.

²¹⁷ Interviews with Bruce p. 18; Kevin p. 10; Frank p. 6.

²¹⁸ PROV, VPRS 9677/P1/Unit 3, Press release 28 January 1977.

²¹⁹ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria v The Municipal Officers' Association of Australia* (1977) 189 CAR 358.

²²⁰ Alan Reid, 'The men who leave you powerless', *The Bulletin*, July 16 1977, pp. 43-46; Julian Teicher, *Breakaway unions in the Australian industrial relations system: Victorian power station operators*, Labour Studies Programme, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, University of Melbourne, Parkville, 1985, pp. 14-15.

maintenance workers dispute and again rejected by the SECV.²²¹ The MOA was willing to use the threat to power supplies resulting from the maintenance dispute to progress its own claims despite only a short time having elapsed since they had been before the ACAC.

The second major dispute at this time was the result of the ETU refusing to connect mains power to homes built by the firm Coronet Modular Homes, in a dispute over non-union labour. This reflected unfavourably on the SECV, since homeowners were not interested in the reasons for the dispute, but only in having electricity made available. In an attempt to break the impasse, in May 1977 the SECV stood ETU members down under the 'no work, no pay' principle. This resulted in fellow ETU members going out in sympathy, bans on after-hours restoration of electricity due to break downs, and the threat of a state-wide strike from Sunday 19 June.²²² The dispute was resolved in the ACAC and the bans imposed on the SECV were lifted on 17 June. All other bans were lifted on 10 August after hearings in the ACAC.²²³ This dispute was occurring at the time of the MOA bans and reinforced the public perception of a militant workforce in the electricity industry. The Coronet Homes dispute demonstrated the willingness of the SECV to implement a 'no work, no pay' stand down of its employees. The implementation of another such 'no work, no pay' decision would play a significant role in triggering the maintenance strike later in 1977.

The industrial relations between the SECV and the LV unions were based on a complex series of factors. These included the leverage of the unions due to the initial need to develop and the ongoing need to maintain power supplies independent of other states; the poor conditions of the construction, mining and generating work especially in

²²¹ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 428, File 80/981, 17 October 1977.

²²² Reid, 'The men who leave you powerless'.

²²³ PROV, VPRS 9677/P1/Unit 3, Press release 17 June 1977; PROV VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 181, File 79/768, ETU/Coronet Modular Homes dispute, 11 August 1977.

the early years; labour shortages, especially of skilled tradesmen; the perceived role of the CGTLC in coordinating local industrial exchange and mobilisation within the SECV; and the ongoing paternal attitude of the SECV management. For the maintenance workers specifically, there were a number of issues which were deemed to be of sufficient importance that they were either regularly placed on the log of claims, or resulted in ongoing disputation. Three of these issues were wage relativities, a single electricity industry or SECV maintenance employees' award, and the contract/day labour issue.

During the 1970s, the compression of wage relativities, and the increasing difference in wages between the LV maintenance employees and those working for contractors on SECV construction sites became a significant grievance. It became even more so when from the mid-1970s inflation rose rapidly, aiding the perception that SECV maintenance wages were falling further behind. There were also concerns about retaining relativities internal to the SECV, and the granting of a federal award for SECV employees was viewed not only as the way to gain common employment conditions for all employees, but also as the means of maintaining internal wage relativities. There were also fears that the SECV was attempting to reduce its maintenance workforce by increasing the use of contract labour for routine maintenance. The LV rank and file, under the auspices of the CGTLC, waged an ongoing battle with the SECV to maintain employee numbers, by insisting on full utilisation of day labour before contractors were permitted to work on SECV projects.

These three issues will be discussed individually in the following sections, together with their importance in relation to the 1977 maintenance dispute.

Key industrial issues for the SECV maintenance workers

Relativities

In 1977 the SECV blue-collar employees were covered by eight awards, the main one being the SECV Appendix (Division IV of Part III of the Appendix to Part I) to the Metal Trades Award, 1952. Some blue-collar workers were covered by a series of state determinations, and there was also a series of SECV regulations, the latter applying differently to white- and blue-collar employees. There was a separate series of awards for white-collar employees. This resulted in a complex arrangement of internal relativities, and was behind the proposal for an industry award, to maintain relativities and apply a uniform set of working conditions and entitlements. Sam Armstrong, an acknowledged leader amongst the local shop stewards with his extensive SECV experience, was emphatic that workers in the same enterprise should be able to work under the same conditions, on the same award.²²⁴

The Metal Trades Award, under which many of the maintenance workers were employed, occupied a key place in the Australian industrial relations system. Its centre point was the margin for the fitter, and this relativity flowed through most other federal wages awards.²²⁵ The Metal Trades Award was usually the pace setter for higher skill differential applications, partly due to historical precedent and partly due to the success of larger unions such as the AMWSU and ETU in obtaining over award wages, especially during periods of shortages of skilled workers.²²⁶

The relativities issue was exacerbated when the ACAC granted partial rather than full indexation of wages against the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in National Wage Case (NWC) decisions during the 1970s. This changed the relativities, resulting in some

²²⁴ GTLC, Box 25 (4), Report to the S.E.C. shop stewards meeting held Morwell Town Hall supper room, 17 March 1977.

²²⁵ d'Alpuget, *Mediator: a biography of Sir Richard Kirby*, p. 220.

²²⁶ Dufty, *Industrial relations in the Australian metal industries*, p. 248; Isaac, 'Wage drift in the Australian metal industries'.

tradesmen earning little more, and in some cases less, than labourers.²²⁷ The ACAC had made it quite clear within its wage fixing principles that the correction of a compression of relativities was not a ground for special wage increases.²²⁸ Pressure was thus placed on 'margins' or over award payments, which were not generally indexed,²²⁹ but which were for base rate tradesmen in the SECV covered by the Metal Trades Award during the late 1970s equivalent to about 25 per cent of the award payment.²³⁰

According to Sam Armstrong, relativities within the SECV only became an issue after the later 1960s, when the actions of some unions led to 'a deterioration of the metal workers position in money amounts & in conditions'.²³¹ The maintenance workers contended that improved wages or conditions won by the Metal Trades would flow on to other unions such as the MOA and the FEDFA as an entitlement,²³² but it was unlikely to happen in the other direction. This constantly widened the relativity gap between blue-collar and staff wages.²³³ Despite increases in wages for tradesmen in 1973 and 1974²³⁴ which assisted to improve the wage relativities of the maintenance workers, the feeling remained that they were still behind the relative position which the Metal Trades Award should have occupied in the SECV. It would not be until the 1980s that negotiations for other special tradesman classifications, such as Pressure Welder and

²²⁷ 'Red scare in the unions', *Rydge's*, vol. 50, no. 11, November 1977, pp. 13-14.

²²⁸ National Wage Case – minimum wage and National Wage Case – April 1975 (1975) 167 CAR 18, p. 38.

²²⁹ UMA, 95/96, Box 92, File History of wage rates, C.P.I. and wage indexation, 21 April 1978.

²³⁰ N. Brown, 'Wage drift in the Australian metal industries revisited', in W.A. Howard (ed.), *Perspectives on Australian industrial relations: essays in honour of Kingsley Laffer*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, Vic., 1984, pp. 140-148.

²³¹ UMA, 96/92, Box 11, File Victorian Provincial THC's, Problems of industrial action in the S.E.C.V., undated.

²³² Interview with Peter p. 6; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC circular, 16 February 1977; see also *In the matter of The Engine Drivers' and Firemen's (State Electricity Commission of Victoria) Award*, 1964 (1974) 157 CAR 710; *In the matter of The Municipal Officers' Association of Australia (State Electricity Commission of Victoria) Award* 1965 (1974) 157 CAR 854; *In the matter of The Timber Industry Consolidated Award*, 1974 (1974) 163 CAR 729.

²³³ UMA, 96/92, Box 21, File Correspondence & writing of S. Armstrong, History of S.E.C.V. relativities, undated; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, esp re 1977 dispute, untitled document, pp. 6-7.

²³⁴ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria v The Amalgamated Engineering Union and Others* (1973) 148 CAR 61; *In the matter of the Metal Trades Award*, 1952 (1974) 160 CAR 860.

Special Class Tradesman (Mechanical) and for a power industry agreement, were said to put the metal workers in a better position.²³⁵

As well as the issue of internal relativities, wages received by tradesmen outside the SECV in the LV were also a significant concern. The construction workforce on SECV projects was noticeable because, in contrast to other development areas in Victoria and Australia, the overlap in SECV construction projects meant that a large proportion of construction workers lived in the LV permanently. The workload had been steady from the mid-1950s apart from a few years in the mid-1970s.²³⁶ Contractor employees in the LV received far higher remuneration, although on different and less secure conditions of employment. Nonetheless, the wages difference for what was perceived as equivalent skill levels was a constant and very visible issue for the maintenance workers.²³⁷ This difference increased significantly after June 1974 and by 1977 the disparity was estimated to be \$43.50, or over 23 per cent of the SECV fitter wage, after taking experience payments and SIPS into account. If the commencing rate at the SECV was used, the disparity was even more marked, and estimated to be \$63.90, or 38 per cent.²³⁸ The differential widened steadily, with the estimated disparity in cash terms estimated in 1981 at around \$120 on base rate.²³⁹ One effect of this during 1979

²³⁵ UMA, 96/92, Box 11, File Victorian Provincial THC's, Problems of industrial action in the S.E.C.V., undated. See also *In the matter of an application by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to vary The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1982) 270 CAR 597; *In the matter of an application by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to vary the Metal Industry (Victorian Government Departments and Instrumentalities) Award 1981* (1985) 301 CAR 67; *In the matter of an application by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to create the Power Industry Agreement 1983* (1985) 298 CAR 231.

²³⁶ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Proposed Driffield project environment effects statement*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1981.

²³⁷ UMA, 101/38, Box M13, File Power Industry Committee, Meeting 13 May 1974, and, AMWSU circular to shop stewards SECV, 2 September 1974.

²³⁸ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0007, File Contractor industrial relations 1979 no.2, Rates of pay, 29 March 1979.

²³⁹ Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, *Industrial relations in the Latrobe Valley: a report prepared for C.S.R. Corporate Personnel Projects and Planning Group*, p. 48.

and 1980 was a relatively high resignation rate from the SECV of skilled tradesmen, half of whom were leaving to take up work with local contracting firms.²⁴⁰

While the SECV provided excellent service benefits, such as service grants, longer periods of annual leave, and long service leave before it was general in industry, these were not as visible however as the difference in take-home pay for tradesmen in particular.²⁴¹ The impact of this differential was significant during the early to late 1970s due to the effect of high inflation allied to concern over the increasing unemployment rate. The extra wage would have had a major impact on the household purchasing power. This added to the perception that the SECV maintenance workers were always playing catch up in wages when they went to the ACAC. In addition, the operational unions were seen to be treated more favourably in their wage claims²⁴² because of the immediate impact of industrial action on electricity generating capacity, and this added to the importance of the wage differential as a source of grievance.

Single award campaign

The achievement of a single award for all SECV workers was a long time dream for AMWSU steward Sam Armstrong.²⁴³ He believed that ‘workers who have common responsibilities, who have common obligations and who have common disabilities, must have common aims and must receive common conditions and wages, comparable to their degree of skill’.²⁴⁴ When the VTHC had first raised this issue in 1957, the SECV gave ‘cautious acceptance in principle’.²⁴⁵ Discussions commenced in the later 1950s but broke down when the issue of increased margins was raised.²⁴⁶ The principle was re-

²⁴⁰ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Proposed Driffield project environment effects statement*.

²⁴¹ Interview with Evan p. 3.

²⁴² Interview with John H. p. 2.

²⁴³ *Industrial Review*, v. 7, no. 5, July 1960, p. 3.

²⁴⁴ GTLC, Box 25 (4), Report to the S.E.C. shop stewards meeting held Morwell Town Hall supper room, 17 March 1977, p. 2; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 September 1973, p. 3.

²⁴⁵ PROV, VPRS 11222/R3, Unit 53, File Personnel-Awards-Industry award study, memo, 14 December 1977.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

established when a separate Division IV was added to the Metal Trades Award in 1961 to cover the SECV and a separate MOA SECV Award was made in 1965. The push for a single award for all the SECV employees, not just the maintenance unions, was seen as a powerful means of uniting the unions, as well as achieving the practical aims of maintaining relativities and reducing demarcation and union coverage disputes.

The possibility of an SECV or power industry award had been mooted in the ACAC on several occasions during the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴⁷ The log of claims served on the SECV at the beginning of the 1977 maintenance dispute attempted to move this longstanding issue along by including a claim for a single award covering all SECV maintenance workers. This would smooth out the conditions which applied to the multiple unions involved in maintenance work at the SECV.²⁴⁸ However, when the dispute went to the ACAC, the proposal for a common award was opposed by the SECV and rejected by Commissioner Mansini, and the maintenance workers declined to take further action on this issue.²⁴⁹

The proposal was broadened in the early 1980s to a single award covering all employees in the Victorian power industry.²⁵⁰ The State government approached the VTHC to hold discussions with the relevant unions and the SECV, in order to negotiate a power industry agreement.²⁵¹ By 1983, many of the unions with members in the SECV operated under an SECV-specific award or agreement, which should have

²⁴⁷ *Electrical Trades Union of Australia and Others v Electricity Trust of South Australia and Others* (1964) 106 CAR 535; *Metal Trades Employers' Association and Others v Amalgamated Engineering Union (Australian Section)* (1967) 121 CAR 587; *In the matter of the Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1974) 160 CAR 860.

²⁴⁸ Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

²⁴⁹ *In the matter of an application by the Electrical Trades Union of Australia to vary the Metal Trades Award 1952 re wage rates etc. State Electricity Commission of Victoria* (1978) 202 CAR 312; *Latrobe Valley Express* 7 April 1978, p. 16.

²⁵⁰ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), VTHC circular re Power Industry Agreement, 12 July 1982; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1981-1982*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1982.

²⁵¹ *Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union, Addresses, reports and decisions of the 1982 biennial national conference*, AMWSU, Surry Hills, 1982, p. 38.; *In the matter of an application by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to create the Power Industry Agreement 1983* (1985) 298 CAR 231.

facilitated the making of a single power industry agreement,²⁵² and about 88 per cent of the LV workforce was covered by three federal awards.²⁵³ The SECV put forward a proposal which established new classifications and broad banding arrangements.²⁵⁴ A draft agreement produced in 1983 consolidated pay rates and provided common conditions. This draft industry agreement, covering 23 unions, went to the ACAC for consideration of some alleged anomalies in proposed classifications and payments in 1984. This was despite opposition from a number of key unions including the ETU, the Australasian Society of Engineers (ASE) and the FEDFA,²⁵⁵ which either did not wish to be included, or did not wish any industry agreement to include pay rates. The ACAC expressed concern over this, noting that any Power Industry approach to the setting of wages and conditions would only be meaningful if all the key unions were committed parties. Because of the opposition to the inclusion of wage rates, the approach agreed on with the SECV when the next round of negotiations commenced in 1986 involved working towards a set of common conditions to be inserted into the relevant awards.²⁵⁶ This agreed approach consolidated conditions of employment in the industry, and rationalised existing customs and practice.²⁵⁷ This compromise was an attempt to ensure the retention of unity and common cause amongst the state branches of the unions involved in these negotiations.

²⁵² UMA, 96/92, Box 21, File Correspondence & writing of S. Armstrong, letter to the Editor LV Express, 30 September 1983.

²⁵³ Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, p. 9.

²⁵⁴ UMA, 101/20, Box 284, Item 158.3/1982, Metal industry anomalies: SECV proposal, 22 November 1982.

²⁵⁵ *In the matter of an application by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to create the Power Industry Agreement 1983* (1985) 298 CAR 231; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 24 May 1984, p. 7.

²⁵⁶ GTLC, Box 9, SECV position paper, Power industry approach: common conditions of employment, 11 July 1986; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1985-86*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic., 1986.

²⁵⁷ GTLC, Box F12, File Common conditions, SECV to VTHC re Power Industry Approach, 27 April 1987.

By June 1988, the five SECV awards that contained conditions of employment were ready to go to the ACAC for ratification.²⁵⁸ However, the advent that year of award restructuring, including rationalisation of awards within an industry, as the principal basis of wage increases²⁵⁹ opened fresh negotiations with the unions, SECV and CGTLC. This was done on the assumption by the CGTLC and the unions that a single award would result which would include a wage increase from the same operative date.²⁶⁰ However the preferred approach for the SECV seemed to be to negotiate on an award-by-award basis. At this time, the SECV was proposing a restructure of the state's electricity industry that foreshadowed massive job losses.²⁶¹ The unions became more interested in protecting themselves and their membership, and in September 1989, the MOA and the SECV agreed on a new award to be ratified by the ACAC.²⁶² When the ETU became aware of this, it became a respondent to the new SECV Electrical, Electronic and Engineering Award 1989. The MOA and ETU argued that this could become the basis for an industry award if the other unions chose to become parties to it.²⁶³ In the ACAC, the excluded unions argued against ratification of the new award, expressing a preference for a single award across the SECV.²⁶⁴ While Sam Armstrong

²⁵⁸ These were the Municipal Officers' Association (SECV) Award 1975, Metal Industry (Victorian Government Departments and Instrumentalities and Public Hospitals) Award 1985, Australian Workers' Union (SECV) Award 1976, SECV Building Trades Award 1978, The Engine Drivers and Firemen's (SECV) Award 1975; GTLC, Box 5, File Common conditions (SECV), SECV to Mr Justice A. Boulton, Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, re Power Industry Agreement SEC of Victoria, 3 June 1988.

²⁵⁹ Richard Curtain, 'Emergence of workplace bargaining within a centralised wages system: the new industrial relations in Australia', in Gerard Griffin (ed.), *Current research in industrial relations: proceedings of the 5th AIRAANZ Conference, University of Melbourne, 4-7 July, 1990*, Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 1990, pp. 443-478; James J. Macken, *Award restructuring*, Federation Press, Sydney, 1989.

²⁶⁰ GTLC, Box 30, VTHC Award restructure SECV unions response to SECV, 22 September 1989.

²⁶¹ GTLC, Box 70, File News item etc restructuring, VTHC Combined SECV unions campaign 31 July 1989; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 22 June 1989, p. 1.

²⁶² GTLC, Box 70, File News item etc restructuring, VTHC re SECV award restructuring, 22 September 1989; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 15 September 1989, p. 1.

²⁶³ Ken Purdham, *A century of struggle: a history of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, Hyland House, Flemington, Vic, 2002, p. 171.

²⁶⁴ See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 28 September 1989, p. 1.

exhorted the unions to work together to achieve their common goals,²⁶⁵ he noted that some unions appeared to put their own interests before those of the SECV community of employees unless there were gains to be made by acting together. This campaign also served as a reminder that the unions used the CGTLC only when it suited their agenda.²⁶⁶

Contract Labour Agreement campaign

A long-standing area of disputation between the maintenance unions and the SECV was that of use of contract labour for maintenance projects. The perception of the LV unions and of the CGTLC was that the preference of the SECV was for all maintenance to be carried out by contract rather than by SECV employees, and for the permanent workforce to be scaled back thus giving the SECV greater flexibility in its manning levels.²⁶⁷

The origins of the Contract Labour Agreement lay in a longstanding policy of the CGTLC that work previously carried out by SECV day labour would continue to be carried out by SECV day labour.²⁶⁸ This policy had been reinforced since the early 1970s by negotiations between representatives from relevant unions, the CGTLC and the SECV over the minor capital works which would be let to contract, and supported on the unions' part by mass meetings and bans.²⁶⁹ The VTHC had supported moves by LV unions and the CGTLC to enforce the use of day labour as much as possible and referred

²⁶⁵ GTLC, Box 25 (4), Report to the S.E.C. shop stewards meeting held Morwell Town Hall supper room, 17 March 1977.

²⁶⁶ Ruschena, *The impact of competition and privatisation on change and workplace relations: a study of the Victorian electricity generation industry 1989-1997*, p. 54.

²⁶⁷ Rosenthal and Russ, *The politics of power: inside Australia's electric utilities*, p. 129.

²⁶⁸ GTLC, Box F12, File Contract agreement, Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, Policy in regard to contract work within the State Electricity Commission, Latrobe Valley Region, 11 January 1968

²⁶⁹ For example GTLC, Box 7 (2nd box), File Contract work disputes, Central Gippsland Trades & Labour Council recommendation, 20 September 1968; UMA ETU Victorian Branch 85/61 Box 42, File 19/3, Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council resolution 9 February 1971; GTLC Box 59, File Disputes, Disputes Committee resolution 30 May 1974; GTLC, Box 85, Notes of meeting with CGT&LC on 5 April [1977] re: bans on contract work; GTLC, Box F12, File SECV contracts, CGTLC, S.E.C. contracts, 16 March 1978; GTLC, Box 85, GTLC to SECV, 31 October 1985.

the SECV to the CGTLC when negotiations were required.²⁷⁰ The process aimed to balance the preference of management for as much work as possible to be let under contract, with that of the unions to keep as much of it as possible for their members to maintain employment levels within the SECV.²⁷¹

In March 1977, this issue was brought to a head by a refusal of the building trades unions to discuss the works program proposed by the SECV and bans were placed on the contracted work.²⁷² A hearing in the ACAC before Commissioner Vosti in April 1977 resulted in what became known as the 'Vosti principles', which required negotiations between the CGTLC and the SECV on works to be let to contract.²⁷³ In practice however these did little to resolve the issue, and disputes over the use of contract labour continued. Early in 1978 the maintenance unions again placed bans on contracts which had been let. After a series of hearings in the ACAC, the bans were lifted and discussions on the items to go to contract were resumed.²⁷⁴ This continued the pattern of previous years, and little changed over the succeeding years.

In an attempt to reduce industrial action around this issue, the CGTLC, the VTHC, the SECV and 23 unions formalised the maintenance works program process with the negotiation of the Contract Labour Agreement during 1985 and 1986. This Agreement provided for the introduction and implementation of agreed processes for the allocation of work for operation, service, maintenance and construction, other than major works, expected to be the subject of contract labour.²⁷⁵ It included an agreed consultative

²⁷⁰ UMA, VTHC 88/62, File 1/23/11, Miscellaneous minutes 1968-69, S-Z, letter to VTHC, 9 March 1966

²⁷¹ Pullin and Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region'.

²⁷² GTLC, Box 27, Statement relating to current dispute on contract work, 24 March 1977.

²⁷³ UMA, VTHC 101/20, Box 163, Item 96a/1978, CGTLC Resolution re S.E.C. contracts, 2 May 1977; UMA AMWSU 101/38, Box M13, File SEC contractors, VTHC to SECV, 20 December 1977.

²⁷⁴ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1978, Contract work, Operations Group Latrobe Valley, Historical outline August 1978; PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 159, File 79/503, Bans on contract work, 14 March 1978.

²⁷⁵ GTLC, Box F12, File Contract agreement, SECV Contract labour: composite agreement with the VTHC and SECV unions for the introduction and implementation of agreed processes in relation to the allocation of work to contract, July 1986.

mechanism via a joint central committee, and procedures to be followed on both sides in the event of contracts in dispute. This maintained a united front by unions and frustrated management attempts to introduce change concerning the amount of work to be let out under contract.²⁷⁶

However, the unions and the CGTLC continued to have concerns over the interpretation of the Agreement, and the issue remained contentious. Bans and other limitations were in place on a regular basis.²⁷⁷ The SECV was described as inept in its communication and consultation as the result of threats of stoppages over the use of contractors in November 1991.²⁷⁸ During the early 1990s, the industrial action around contract labour was occurring within the context of outsourcing of functions and downsizing of the SECV which was significantly affecting both salaried and wages employees in its LV operations.²⁷⁹ It was agreed with the SECV in November 1991 that these contract labour procedures would be inserted into relevant awards.²⁸⁰ SECV maintenance workers went on strike when this had not occurred by April 1992, after a large dispute over the contracting out of overburden removal. The establishment of picket lines and support from non-maintenance unions at the SECV aided a resolution of the dispute after a few days when power supplies were threatened.²⁸¹ The SECV agreed that it would proceed with an application to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to have the 1986 Agreement inserted into SECV awards and the

²⁷⁶ Pullin and Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region'.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Evan pp. 2,16; also see for example GTLC Box 2, File K, VTHC to SECV, 3 November 1989; GTLC Box 69, File SECV – contracting out, VTHC circular to SECV unions, Contracting out in the SECV, 19 June 1991; J.A. Vines, *A history of Morwell Open Cut: its origins and development to June 1995*, Hazelwood Power Corporation, Morwell, Vic., 1996, p. 331.

²⁷⁸ *The Enfilade*, December 1991, p. 1.

²⁷⁹ See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 22 June 1989, p. 1, 30 July 1991, p. 2, 14 January 1993, p. 1, 29 July 1993, p. 1; GTLC, Box 59, File Disputes (2), MOA bans contract work, 9 August 1990; Pullin and Haidar, 'Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region'; Teicher, Van Gramberg and Holland, *Outsourcing in electricity generation and union responses*.

²⁸⁰ GTLC, Box 80, GTLC resolution re contract day labour, 7 April 1992.

²⁸¹ GTLC, Box 13, Australian Workers' Union Victoria Branch memo re S.E.C.V. strike, 8 April 1992; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 10 April 1992, p. 19; *Herald-Sun*, 9 April 1992, p. 3; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 10 April 1992, p. 1; *Herald-Sun*, 9 April 1992, p. 1; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1991/92*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, Vic., 1992.

men returned to work.²⁸² The proceedings that commenced in the AIRC on 14 April 1992 later resulted in a revised form of the 1986 Agreement being inserted into all SECV awards.²⁸³ Thus this contentious issue involving regulation of local labour had proceeded to an outcome which was acceptable to the unions, after a campaign coordinated by the CGTLC that lasted decades. It also demonstrated unity of movement, with all unions supporting the mobilisation and exchange processes in order to achieve the desired outcome.

As has been discussed in the previous two sections, the maintenance workers in 1977 were involved in a series of industrial issues. Some were longstanding and posed threats to the stability and even the existence of their jobs, as well as the type of work which would be performed. The very nature of union organisation at the SECV, the democratic operation of the shop committees and their dedicated stewards, and the use of the CGTLC to coordinate and oversee industrial mobilisation when necessary, meant that threats from the SECV were likely to be reacted to with firmness and unity. Going ‘out on the grass’ over an important issue was nothing new.

The foundations for the 1977 dispute were formed from the early 1920s, with the establishment and development of a state-owned electricity industry located in the LV. The industry was reliant on the brown coal from that area, and the technology was developed to use this source. The work at the new Yallourn site was hard and dirty, and living conditions were poor. This encouraged the local unions to take action to improve wages and conditions, and a willingness to take local action in support of local issues developed. The SECV had developed a paternalistic management style which reflected an enthusiasm for scientific management and an efficient workforce, encouraged by its founding chairmen Sir John Monash. It also developed a differential treatment of its

²⁸² GTLC, Box 13, SECV to VTHC, 9 April 1992

²⁸³ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria applications for variation* [1992] 4 CAR 219.

white and blue collar workforces, promoting a sense of grievance among its blue collar employees. All employees however were said to use their bargaining power to great effect to achieve high rates of pay and allowances as well as shorter working hours and a range of restrictive recruitment and manning practices.²⁸⁴ Local structures had developed as part of the establishment and growth of the SECV, the continuing intervention of the state government and the formation and growth of the Left-leaning Executive of the CGTLC.

The major LV unions in the SECV became more active during the 1960s, continuing their expectation that industrial action would result in gains, and that local action was appropriate to progress local issues. This was also the time when some of the constraints of the Groupers were removed from the operations of CGTLC, the local peak union body, thus permitting greater support for local activism. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a greater dissatisfaction with work, both its nature and the conditions under which it was undertaken,²⁸⁵ which encouraged industrial action.

The local industrial identity which had developed incorporated a sense of difference from 'outsiders'. This was reflected in both the unions and the SECV. The uneasy relationship which developed between the VTHC and the CGTLC reflected that between the local shop stewards and the Melbourne-based union officials, and the division of roles in the SECV between Melbourne managers and local operational employees.

Particular issues which came to the fore at the time of the 1977 dispute included the development of compressed and changing relativities both internally and externally. To this was added the existence of large wage differentials with local maintenance employees on SECV construction projects, exacerbating perceptions of poor treatment.

²⁸⁴ Birrell and Stanley, *Major employment and training issues in the Latrobe Valley: findings from initial community consultations*, pp. 49-50.

²⁸⁵ Derber, 'Changing union-management relations at the plant level in Australian metalworking'.

Two major issues related to a single award for electricity employees, and to the SECV use of contract labour. The latter two issues were longstanding among the maintenance employees and particularly for Sam Armstrong, senior AMWSU steward in the LV SECV. The issue of contract labour had resulted in ongoing bans and disputation over a lengthy period, most recently early in 1977. It would provide the trigger which turned a normal dispute involving the maintenance unions and their 1977 log of claims into a lengthy unauthorised strike.

The next chapter will continue to establish the context within which the 1977 dispute occurred. While the local context was important, the wider Australian and Victorian context also affected the dispute. The next chapter will examine the political, economic and industrial context at the federal and state scales at the time of the dispute. Three particular factors will be discussed. These are the economic context, the federal arbitration and wage setting context, and the industrial context.

Chapter Five: The wider (state and federal) context

The previous chapter has described the complex local industrial context at the time leading up to and during the 1977 dispute. The local context was very important and framed the items in the log of claims, as well as providing the ‘trigger’ issue for the strike. It has also placed the handling of the log of claims by the SECV within the constraints imposed on the latter by the state government.

This chapter will extend our understanding of the wider economic, political and industrial context within which the 1977 dispute must be located, together with its relationship to the progress of the dispute. The description of this wider context will cover three major factors. These are firstly, the poor state of the Australian economy during the mid to late 1970s, which was characterized by ‘stagflation’ - high inflation and high unemployment. At the same time, a levelling-off of growth in union membership and a change in the nature of the workforce was accompanying a decline in the number of strikes which had started at the beginning of the decade.

The second factor relates to the decisions made by the ACAC since its implementation of wage indexation. From 1975 the ACAC was determined to provide wage increases only through the established principles of wage indexation, and the government continued to intervene in NWCs in an attempt to minimise wage increases. This had the effect of compressing wage relativities, a significant factor in both the internal wage relativity issues in the SECV, and relativities between the maintenance unions and the LV construction workers on SECV projects.

The third factor to be discussed is the industrial context in 1977. It was a year of high profile industrial disputes which had a significant impact on both business and the public. One response from both the federal and state governments was to enact legislation. The poor economy provided the justification for the federal government’s

response to what it saw as attempts by a militant minority of unions to disrupt an economic recovery. In Victoria, delays in constructing the Newport D PS in Melbourne as a result of union black bans meant that there was a real risk of power shortages in the near future. A series of high profile industrial disputes also provided the issue which enabled Victorian Premier R.J. Hamer to divert public attention from a looming land deals scandal which was threatening the government's popular support. This was also to have a significant impact on the response of the Victorian government to the maintenance workers dispute.

The combination of these three factors made it an unwise time for a lengthy strike, especially one which appeared to challenge the authority of the government. Each of the above three factors will be discussed briefly in order to illustrate its relevance to the 1977 dispute.

The wider economic context 1977

Until the early 1970s, a rapidly expanding Australian economy as a result of the growth, differentiation and protection of manufacturing industry, strong consumer demand and low unemployment resulted in a seller's labour market. Real economic growth per person during the 1950s and 1960s averaged 3 per cent, and inflation was low at less than 3 per cent. Export of a wide range of commodities, particularly primary products, was relied on to maintain growth,¹ while domestic manufacturing as a sector was locally focused and internationally uncompetitive, protected as it was by a fixed currency and high tariff barriers. High local demand for goods and services was sustained by ongoing high employment rates and large scale immigration. Employers invested in plant and equipment in the expectation that prosperity was long term. Raw materials and fuel were plentiful, labour supplies adequate, innovative products and

¹ Boris Schedvin, 'Primary phases of Australian economic development in the twentieth century', *Australian Economic Review*, vol. 41, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 450-455.

processes were being developed and land transport had improved.² The booming economic environment and high employment gave unions greater leverage in wage negotiations, with employers encouraged to provide over award payments to retain labour and avoid stoppages.

However, once the federal Whitlam government cut tariffs significantly in July 1973 the economic boom slowed. In addition, high government expenditure on social services proved unsustainable once the oil crises hit in 1973/4 and 1978/9, prompting 'stagflation', the hitherto unusual combination of poor economic growth and high inflation.³

In an attempt to improve rates of economic growth, the Fraser federal government, which took office in 1975, attempted to improve economic growth by placing an increased emphasis on economic incentives and markets. The public sector in general and social expenditure in particular were seen as obstacles to the attainment of economic objectives. The key to political popularity became the promise of less, not more, government, and lower taxes, not more or higher benefits.⁴

The level of inflation remained high until about 1977, and after 1974 was combined with high unemployment occurring as a result of industrial restructuring rather than reduced production.⁵ There was a rapid change from an expanding economy with stable prices and full employment, to severe inflation, a slowing economy and high unemployment, and strike levels fell. Prices and then wages rose, leading to high inflation and unemployment. Consumer price inflation was 16 per cent in 1974-75, and remained at about ten per cent for the next eight years.

² Alan L. Loughheed, *Australia and the world economy*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Fitzroy, 1988, p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴ Peter Saunders, *Welfare and inequality: national and international perspectives on the Australian welfare state*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 128.

⁵ Waters, *Strikes in Australia: a sociological analysis of industrial conflict*, pp. 164-5.

One of the significant economic issues facing both the federal and state governments in 1977 was unemployment. This stood at 5.1 per cent of the Australian workforce in May 1977, grew to 6.2 per cent in 1978,⁶ and increased to a peak of ten per cent in 1983, the highest since the 1930s.⁷ The average unemployment rate in Victoria for the first half of the 1970s was 2.0 per cent of the labour force, with the rate in 1975 leaping to 4.5 per cent.⁸ This mirrored the trend nationally, and by 1978 the unemployment rate in Victoria was 5.8 per cent.⁹ However, the economic policies of the federal government appeared to be having limited success, and were accused of ‘ruining the [Victorian] economy and killing the building industry’.¹⁰

While the state of the economy was of concern to the Victorian government, of far more immediate concern was the increasing amount of negative publicity around an emerging ‘land deals scandal’. In 1976, the Liberal-Country Party coalition had won state government by its largest majority, and in its eighth consecutive election victory in the state. Yet only 12 months later, public support was waning following the publicity surrounding the ‘land deals scandal’: allegations of collusion between private developers, real estate agents and officials of the Victorian Housing Commission during 1973 and 1974. A public inquiry was held between August 1977 and January 1978 and the report, delivered in March 1978, included a recommendation of criminal proceedings against a real estate agent and the Senior Purchasing Officer of the Housing

⁶ National Archives of Australia, *The economy, budget and industrial relations*, Canberra, National Archives of Australia, 2007; Jim Stokes, *1977 Cabinet records - the historical context and issues of interest*, Canberra, National Archives of Australia, 2007.

⁷ Schedvin, 'Primary phases of Australian economic development in the twentieth century', p. 453.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1977*, Victorian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne, 1977, p. 310.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1980*, Victorian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 243-4.

¹⁰ Graham Hudson, 'The politics of high expectations: the 1979 Victorian state election', *Politics*, vol. 14, no. 2, November 1979, pp. 271-275, p. 271.

Commission.¹¹ The effect of the scandal was such that it resulted in the resignation of the Federal Treasurer, tainted by association, at the end of 1977.¹²

Thus in 1977, the state government was in search of an issue to divert public attention away from both increasing unemployment and the land deals scandal. While it could do little to affect the course of either of these issues, it could use the high profile industrial disputes as a diversion. Industrial action taken by unions was seen to be harming the state and its business reputation. When the maintenance strike caused significant disruption to business, industry and the public in Victoria later in 1977, Premier Hamer was able to seize this as an opportunity.

The Fraser federal government was committed to reducing both inflation and unemployment and was willing to blame industrial action, at least in part, for the poor performance of the economy. One of the government's strategies for reducing inflation was support for wage indexation. The government was adamant that wage increases were to be restricted to those awarded in NWCs conducted by the ACAC. It was also determined that the quantum of increase would be kept to a minimum. The result was that wage relativities were compressed and wages did not keep pace with inflation. The results of the decisions in NWCs were a factor in the wage relativity issues within the SECV which were reflected in the 1977 maintenance workers' log of claims. This factor will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Australian arbitration and wage-setting context

One of the significant factors relevant to the maintenance workers' dispute was the practical effect of the NWC decisions of the ACAC. This latter body was charged with, among other objectives, preventing and settling industrial disputes by conciliation

¹¹ Board of Inquiry into Certain Land Purchases by the Housing Commission, *Report of the Board of Inquiry into Certain Land Purchases by the Housing Commission and questions arising therefrom*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1978.

¹² Tom O'Lincoln, *Years of rage: social conflicts in the Fraser era*, Bookmarks Australia, Melbourne, 1993, p. 220.

in the first instance or by arbitration if that did not work. This system of compulsory conciliation and arbitration was introduced in Australia in 1904 and was retained for most of the twentieth century. It promoted a highly regulated and centralised approach to industrial relations, emphasising the role of tribunals, processes of arbitration and conciliation, legislative developments, employer groups and trade unions.¹³

In general the work of the ACAC covered the making and maintaining of industrial awards, and handling of ad hoc disputes. The serving of a log of claims by a union and the refusal of the employer to agree to them was sufficient to create an industrial dispute, and if the dispute extended beyond the limits of any one state then it became a matter for the ACAC. As well as intervening in industrial disputes to conciliate and/or arbitrate, it conducted regular hearings to determine the amount of any across the board wage increase for Australian workers on federal awards through NWCs, the decisions of which would usually flow on to state determinations.¹⁴

In Australia, responsibility for industrial matters is divided between the Commonwealth and the states, with the constitutional powers relating to industrial relations concurrent with those of the states. Each state legislated for its own industrial tribunals and in Victoria these took the form of wages boards. These were tripartite bodies based on standing tribunals of employers and employee representatives with an independent chairperson, and with an emphasis on volunteerism and conciliation. This was in contrast to the federal tribunals which had representation from registered bodies of unions and employer associations, and was associated with greater legalism. The states could also directly legislate for industrial conditions such as working hours and leave allowances. There is considerable interdependence between the two: federal award movements tend to flow on to state determinations; and standards in a number of

¹³ Lansbury and Michelson, 'Industrial relations in Australia'.

¹⁴ Dabscheck and Niland, *Industrial relations in Australia*, p. 305.

areas in state determinations have significantly influenced federal awards (for example in long service leave, annual leave, reduced working hours, and equal pay for males and females).¹⁵ However, this has resulted in inconsistencies between awards and determinations, and state-federal industrial legislation. As an example of the relative proportions of workers covered by federal and state conditions, in Victoria in May 1974, 50.8 per cent of workers were covered by federal awards and 35.6 per cent by state determinations. By contrast, in the same year, 41.7 per cent of employees in electricity, gas and water were covered by federal awards and 56.3 per cent by state awards.¹⁶

After World War II, the ACAC and its predecessors regulated wages through decisions on the 'basic wage' (the accepted wage for unskilled work) and 'margins' (a differential for skills) at the NWC hearings, based on submissions from the governments, unions and employers. Despite the rapid annual gains in the national wealth during the 1950s, the ACAC abolished quarterly cost of living allowances in 1953, resulting in the basic wage failing to increase in real value for almost all of the 1950s. The same occurred with the setting of margins. The ACAC attempted to control wages to give economic stability rather than industrial peace, at a time of sustained full employment, increasing capital intensity and technological interdependence, which encouraged unions to use their bargaining power.¹⁷

Continuing good economic conditions in the 1960s enabled unions to continue to negotiate over award payments with individual employers, using these for flow on of rates via the tribunals.¹⁸ From 1967, the ACAC changed to setting a 'total wage' against

¹⁵ Julian Teicher and J. Romeyn, 'The role of state and specialist tribunals', in G.W. Ford, J.M. Hearn and R.D. Lansbury (eds), *Australian labour relations: readings*, 4th ed., Sun, South Melbourne, 1987, pp. 147-178.

¹⁶ J.H. Portus, 'Aspects of the commonwealth and state division of the industrial power', in G.W. Ford, June M. Hearn and Russell D. Lansbury (eds), *Australian labour relations: readings*, 3rd ed., Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1980, pp. 395-408, pp. 402-3.

¹⁷ Howard, 'Australian trade unions in the context of union theory'.

¹⁸ Walker, 'The development of Australian industrial relations in international perspective'.

ACTU policy.¹⁹ This resulted in increases in wages applied to the whole wage rather than to a 'basic' wage, with an additional 'margin' for skill which was not indexed. In this way the greater needs of those on the lowest total wage could be assisted. It was also seen as the means of implementing equal pay for women.²⁰

During the 1970s, a move to directly negotiated registered agreements brought collective bargaining to predominance in the gaining of wage increases, with their likely flow-on effects.²¹ By 1973/74 the contribution of NWC increases to total wage increases had reduced to only 20 percent.²² At the same time a wages explosion resulted from unions making use of strike tactics, with days lost in 1974 three times the 1972 figure.²³ By this time, high inflation and increasing unemployment suggested that wage indexation of some form was necessary. In 1974, the Labor federal government, under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, asked the ACAC to introduce automatic cost-of-living adjustments tied to the CPI when it sat to hear the NWC.²⁴ Agreement was reached with the unions and the ACTU over the form of indexation in May 1975,²⁵ and the 'fragile'²⁶ wage indexation package was implemented in an attempt to avoid the wage instability of 1974 and minimise the rate of inflation.²⁷ Principles for wage determination established by the ACAC noted that wage increases would follow movement of the CPI and productivity gains. The only other grounds for increases would be changes in work

¹⁹ Jim Hagan, *The history of the A.C.T.U.*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1981, p. 268.

²⁰ d'Alpuget, *Mediator: a biography of Sir Richard Kirby*, p. 228.

²¹ J.E. Isaac, *Wage determination and economic policy*, ANZAAS, Melbourne, 1977, p. 14.

²² Howard, 'Australian trade unions in the context of union theory'; S. Petzall, N. Timo and K. Abbott, *Australian industrial relations: in a South East Asian context*, Eruditions Publishing, Melbourne, 2000, p. 215.

²³ Dabscheck, 'New right or old wrong? Ideology and industrial relations', p. 438.

²⁴ P.A. McGavin, *The introduction of wage indexation under the Whitlam government: a critical review*, Labour Studies Programme, University of Melbourne, Parkville, 1984.

²⁵ Jim Hagan, 'The Australian union movement: context and perspective, 1850-1987', in Bill Ford and David Plowman (eds), *Australian unions: an industrial relations perspective*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1989, pp. 18-48, p. 41.

²⁶ J.C. Moore, *Twentieth annual report of the President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission*, AGPS, Canberra, 1976, p. 5.

²⁷ J.C. Moore, *Nineteenth annual report of the President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975.

value, catch-up of community movements, and anomalies conferences, all of which had established procedures,²⁸ and were expected to be infrequent.

The Fraser Liberal federal government, in office from 1975 to 1983, was committed to reducing what it saw as excessive real wages at a time of deep recession, and intervened consistently to try to persuade the ACAC to award minimum increases in the quarterly NWC hearings. The view of the ACAC had been that its primary role was to prevent and settle industrial disputes, rather than to plan and implement economic policy.²⁹ In response, the government introduced the *Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act 1976* (Cth). This directed the ACAC to consider the state of the national economy and the likely impact of its decisions on inflation and employment levels. This direction was then used to support government arguments in favour of less than full wage indexation. This intervention in favour of the ‘general economy’ in practice meant in favour of employers rather than employees, thus altering the power relationship between unions and employers unevenly.³⁰

Both the government and the ACAC insisted on adherence to wage indexation. As a result, in 1976 and 1977 nearly all wage increases were the result of wage indexation.³¹ However, between 1976 and 1981 ACAC wage increases were regularly below the increases in the cost of living.³² This acted to help control inflation, but reversed the growth of real wages, especially for employees receiving over-award

²⁸ Bill O’Neil, Dave Jeffery, John Bleeker, George Milicic, Brian Rowan and Barry Joy, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*, Trade Union Training Authority, Wodonga, Vic., 1977. sections 2, 5.

²⁹ Steven Crawshaw, ‘The Arbitration Commission’s conflict of identity’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 18, no. 4, December 1976, pp. 400-410; Isaac, *Wage determination and economic policy*.

³⁰ Cribb, ‘Causes and catalysts of strikes’, p. 6; Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 169.

³¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1984*, Victorian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne, 1984, p. 196; Bob Carr, ‘Australian trade unionism in 1978’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 1, March 1979, pp. 97-101; Braham Dabscheck, ‘National Wage Case decisions in 1977: the Full Bench survives but yet another year’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 1978, pp. 67-71.

³² Bennett and Cole, ‘Industrial relations’; David Plowman, ‘National wage determination in 1978’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 1, March 1979, pp. 78-88.

payments which were not indexed³³ and led to the compression of relativities between workers. One unintended by-product was that flow ons which might have been expected to occur, and which would have retained relativities, were frozen.³⁴ This is an important context for the 1977 maintenance worker's dispute.

By 1978 a round of work value cases³⁵ commenced, and in the 2 years from May 1978 it was estimated that one-third of wage and salary earners had received a work value increase.³⁶ Within three years, 80 percent of the workforce had received such increases, and the proportion of award wage movement accounted for by NWC increases dropped steadily from 1979.³⁷

By 1981 the system of wage indexation had broken down, with industrial disputes increasing substantially between 1979 and 1981 when compared to the period 1975 to 1978.³⁸ Indexation was abandoned altogether in 1981 in favour of an industry-by-industry approach as a result of factors, including large wage increases negotiated by unions with some employers, the mining and resources boom further encouraging direct negotiation of wage increases, a campaign by unions in the metal trades for a thirty-five hour week, and the results of the work value increases. These all indicated a lack of cooperation with the ACACs determinations by either unions or employers.³⁹

The impact of the NWC decisions from 1975 was an important factor in the context of the 1977 dispute. The ACAC was seen to not be maintaining relativities, but rather to be exacerbating this issue. Partial indexation also meant that wages did not

³³ Clifford B. Donn, 'Employer matters in 1976: a comment', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 1977, pp. 201-203.

³⁴ *London Times*, 19 October 1977.

³⁵ These were an examination of changes in the nature of work, skills and responsibilities required or the conditions under which the work was performed in one or more classifications within an award.

³⁶ Jack Hutson, *Penal colony to penal powers*, Rev ed., Backyard Press, Prahran, Vic, 1983, p. 185.

³⁷ Dabscheck, *Australian industrial relations in the 1980s*, p. 29. Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1984*, p. 196.

³⁸ J.P. Nieuwenhuysen, 'The wage indexation experiment', in W.A. Howard (ed.), *Perspectives on Australian industrial relations: essays in honour of Kingsley Laffer*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 149-164.

³⁹ Dabscheck, *Australian industrial relations in the 1980s*, pp. 33-34.

keep up with inflation. This further reinforced the opinion of some unions that the ACAC was a 'bosses court'. It was viewed as a means of preserving managerial prerogative and accused of supporting increased mechanisation, subdivision of work and deskilling, so giving tacit approval if not support to the scientific management philosophy.⁴⁰

While the majority of wage increases from the mid- to late-1970s were the result of NWCs, there were still unions where the shop stewards, and perhaps officials where the unions were powerful, wanted direct action to improve their situation. As well, although the number of strikes declined after 1974, they were still part of the pattern of Australian industrial relations, and a part of union strategies to encourage employers to agree to wage or conditions improvements. Thus in the context of the 1977 dispute, the shop stewards at the SECV may have still expected, or at least hoped, that the strike would place pressure on the ACAC to make exceptions to the conditions for wage increases, especially if they could argue on the basis of relativities, and/or on the basis of flow ons which would have occurred had indexation not been introduced.

The third important factor in the wider context relevant to the 1977 dispute was the legislative response by both the federal and state governments to a series of high profile strikes during 1977. These had tested the patience and strengthened the resolve of the respective governments to reduce what they viewed as militant industrial activity. One way to do this was via the introduction of legislation designed to reduce the power and funds available to the unions. This reaction confirmed that late 1977 was not a good time for the unions to be seen to be challenging the federal government.

⁴⁰ Peter Cochrane, 'Company time: management, ideology and the labour process, 1940-60', *Labour History*, no. 48, May 1985, pp. 54-68; Sandra Cockfield, 'Arbitration, mass production and workplace relations: 'metal industry' developments in the 1920s', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 35, no. 1, March 1993, pp. 19-38; Sandra Cockfield, 'Arbitration and the workplace: a case study of Metters' Stovemakers, 1902-22', *Labour History*, no. 90, May 2006, pp. 43-60; Lumley, 'Control over the organisation and conduct of work: evidence from some Australian workplaces'; Quinlan, 'Managerial strategy and industrial relations in the Australian steel industry 1945-1975: a case study'.

The wider industrial context 1977

During 1977 there were a number of high profile strikes and work bans in place across Australia. These included the Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Federation (ABCE&BLF) bans on construction in Melbourne and Sydney, a strike of AWU workers on Bass Strait rigs, Seaman's Union bans which shut down coal exports by Utah Development Corporation, the Transport Workers' Union of Australia (TWU) owner-drivers strike in Western Australia and work bans affecting the export of uranium, merino rams, and live cattle and sheep. These disputes made the headlines and gave readers (or viewers) the impression that the country was in a state of industrial anarchy. However, despite the apparent increase in industrial disputes, 1977 had fewer strikes than 1976, which in turn had fewer than 1975.⁴¹ Industrial activity in the two previous years had been encouraged by high inflation,⁴² which by the end of 1977 was being consistently reduced. The overtaking influence became the continuing high unemployment rate which acted to reduce disputes.

Those strikes which were occurring were often high profile disputes. They affected Australia's export capacity, and impacted on business. The federal government was convinced that an out-of-control militant element in the trade union movement was deliberately seeking confrontation, and seeking to split the Australian community and/or to damage the Australian economy through loss of export contracts. As a result, the Federal government was considering the options available to ensure the 'continuance of community activities in the event of a major industrial confrontation'.⁴³ Powerful emergency legislation was seen as the way to ensure that industrial action could be

⁴¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1977*, p. 294; Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1979*, Victorian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne, 1979, p. 227.

⁴² Ian Spicer, 'Employer matters in 1976', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 19, no. 1, March 1977, pp. 87-92.

⁴³ NAA: A12909, 1498, p. 2.

halted immediately, with sanctions for unions including full compensation for loss or damage and the possibility of winding-up, not merely deregistration.

The government acted to strengthen relevant legislation, following up promises made in 1975 concerning 'an effective return to penal provisions ... and an elaborate framework for settling disputes that would make direct action virtually impossible'.⁴⁴ In early 1977 the government prepared a series of amendments to the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904* (Cth) which included the right of conscientious objection to compulsory union membership, and established an Industrial Relations Bureau (IRB) to investigate breaches of the Act, unfair labour practices and union administration practices. These amendments were described by Clyde Cameron, Member of the House of Representatives for Hindmarsh, as 'the most draconian measure ever prepared against the trade union movement.'⁴⁵

The attitude of the federal government was reflected in the determination of the Victorian Premier to reduce industrial disputes. During the early 1970s, Victoria was seen as the most militant state,⁴⁶ with high profile industrial disputes in the power, building and vehicle building industries. While the state governments of the 1970s and early 1980s had tried to legislate to reduce union power, they were largely unsuccessful.⁴⁷

In Victoria, high profile disputes in 1977 included strikes by pilots that grounded airlines. Petrol tanker drivers and aircraft refuellers stopped work on 15 April and members of the TWU did not return to work until 27 April. On the 26 April, the state government reacted by introducing legislation amending the ESA to give it the powers

⁴⁴ *Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union monthly journal*, March 1977, p. 14.

⁴⁵ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, letter from Clyde R. Cameron, 4 April 1977.

⁴⁶ O'Lincoln, *Years of rage: social conflicts in the Fraser era*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Jean Holmes, John Halligan and Peter Hay, 'Victoria', in Brian Galligan (ed.), *Australian state politics*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 25-50, p. 44.

necessary to ensure the production, distribution and sale of fuel in an emergency. This suggested that the Premier was willing to take on the unions responsible for high profile disputes when they impacted significantly on the Victorian workforce and thus its economy. Despite this, during August postal workers, transport unions, pub workers, the Gas and Fuel Corporation, Telecom and the state's high school teachers were all in disputes.⁴⁸ During September, there were disruptions to public transport services, and bans on Melbourne's construction sites. Newspaper headlines were giving the perception that Victoria was racked by industrial disputes and strikes.

Once the maintenance workers' strike came to the attention of the public in September via the media, this provided another opportunity for the Hamer government to demonstrate that it was prepared to take a firm stand against the unions. The Hamer government maintained the line that no wage raises could be granted outside the ACAC guidelines, and the SECV was directed not to award wage increases to its striking workers.⁴⁹

Linked by the media to the new series of disputes was the ongoing impact of one particular long running dispute. This was the black-ban on the construction of the SECV's Newport D PS. The emerging environmental lobby opposed plans to build the 1,000 MW gas-fired power station at Newport (Newport D) on Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne. Some unions, including the ABCE&BLF and FEDFA, had imposed work bans in November 1972, and the VTHC agreed to a total union ban in November 1974 resulting in a cessation of work on the project.⁵⁰

In response, the state government cancelled state projects for six months, and introduced, but did not invoke, the *Vital State Projects Act 1976* (Vic), which outlawed a

⁴⁸ O'Lincoln, *Years of rage: social conflicts in the Fraser era*, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Trethowan, 'Public enterprise'.

⁵⁰ Les Cupper and June M. Hearn, 'Australian union involvement in 'non-industrial' issues: the Newport dispute 1971-78', in G.W. Ford, June M. Hearn and Russell D. Lansbury (eds), *Australian labour relations: readings*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1980, pp. 50-75.

boycott of any State project or undertaking that had been declared as vital.⁵¹ This further willingness of the Victorian government to resolve industrial disputes through enacting legislation is significant for the maintenance dispute. By 1977 there was ongoing concern in the SECV about its ability in the short term to generate sufficient power to meet demand.⁵²

Despite the VTHC ban on the Newport PS, re-affirmed in May 1977, seven unions permitted their members to work at the site, defying public concern, pickets and rallies, with about 350 union members employed on the site in early 1978.⁵³ The bans were eventually lifted by the VTHC in October 1980 when it had become obvious that they were a hollow gesture and that the work was going ahead anyway.⁵⁴

The SECV and the state government fought a lengthy battle for the Newport PS, whose benefits were not merely in terms of power generation, but also in the fact that it would be almost completely automated, thus greatly reducing the ability of the LV workers to affect minimum generation requirements. In an emergency, the station could be operated by professional staff only.⁵⁵

At the same time, discussions were proceeding on the establishment of a national power grid which would impact on the monopoly state markets, and which further highlighted the higher production costs in Victoria relative to Queensland and NSW.⁵⁶ Such a grid would provide more options for obtaining interstate power in the event of a major dispute in the Victorian electricity industry, and another opportunity to further reduce the power of the electricity unions.

⁵¹ Hutson, *Penal colony to penal powers*, p. 327.

⁵² State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1976-1977*.

⁵³ *The Sun*, 20 April 1978, p. 15, *The Enfilade*, May 1978, p. 2.

⁵⁴ O'Lincoln, *Years of rage: social conflicts in the Fraser era*, p. 93.

⁵⁵ Hugh Saddler, *Energy in Australia: politics and economics*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p. 117.

⁵⁶ Ruschena, *The impact of competition and privatisation on change and workplace relations: a study of the Victorian electricity generation industry 1989-1997*, p. 11.

Premier Hamer was a man with a mission. He needed to be seen to be tough on the unions, given the public disruption that was occurring. The combination of high profile industrial disputes at the same time as the very public and embarrassing (and perhaps politically fatal) land scandal provided the opportunity to deflect attention and criticism from his party. The ESA had already been amended once in 1977 in response to a major industrial dispute. The mood of the state government reinforced the view of some union officials, who recognised that the political and economic climate did not favour industrial action other than in exceptional circumstances.⁵⁷ By September of 1977, it had become clear that the Premier had selected industrial disputes in general, and the maintenance dispute in particular, for an industrial confrontation and an opportunity to crush the SECV unions.

The industrial and economic issues which were prominent in Victoria leading up to 1977 had a significant impact on the nature and outcome of the 1977 dispute. The high profile strikes and the ongoing dispute over the construction of the Newport D PS provided the opportunity to divert public attention from the land scandals. The interventionist relationship between the state government and the SECV, and the willingness of the government to legislate to resolve industrial disputes, would be evidenced during the course of the 1977 maintenance dispute.

The industrial and economic issues which were a feature in Victoria reflected those at the wider Australian level. High inflation, increasing unemployment and a series of high profile disputes also produced a strong legislative response from the federal government.

This chapter has built on the earlier consideration of the complex local context. The wider context has been framed within a series of factors: the poor economic climate;

⁵⁷ Reid, 'The men who leave you powerless'.

the determination of the ACAC and the federal government to ensure wage increases remained within the indexation guidelines; a declining rate of strikes influenced by high inflation and increasing unemployment; a year of high profile industrial disputes which affected the public, businesses and Australia's export credibility; and the determination of the Fraser federal government and the Hamer state government to reduce the perceived power of the unions.

These factors added to and impacted on the relationships which formed during the development of the SECV and which were part of the local context. They determined how the local unions utilised the structures in place: the strong local shop steward organisation which favoured direct negotiation and if necessary local action over industrial issues; the perceived role of the CGTLC in coordinating local industrial activity; and local concerns over three issues, namely wage and conditions relativities, a single award, and the use of contract labour. They help to explain the reluctance of the stewards involved in the maintenance dispute to go to arbitration, preferring to attempt to negotiate directly with the SECV instead. These factors, together with the Melbourne-LV divide which operated in the unions, in the peak councils and in the SECV, all influenced the course and outcomes of the 1977 maintenance dispute.

The 1977 dispute itself becomes the subject of the next chapter. The dispute will be examined in three parts: the serving of the log of claims, covering the time period March to July 1977; the strike, between August and late October 1977; and the settlement and aftermath during the period between November 1977 and December 1979. The detailed narrative of the events within the dispute will include the associated actions of parties such as the federal and state governments, the ACAC, the VTHC, the ACTU, and the CGTLC. However, while the formal structures in place were important in shaping events, any discussion of the 'cause' and course of the dispute can only be

understood within the relationships which existed and the interactions which occurred.

The significance of the relationships between these groups, and their subsequent responses, provides a way of understanding why the dispute moved from being 'just another dispute' to become a lengthy confrontation.

Chapter Six: The dispute

The two previous chapters have described the major issues and relationships within the complex local and broader economic, political and industrial environment during 1977. The contexts at each of the local, state and federal scales were poised to intersect over a significant industrial dispute, which might be construed as a challenge to both the government and the SECV, and was thus unlikely to be tolerated.

So by early 1977, all the elements were in place for a confrontation. The federal government was concerned about high inflation and increasing unemployment, and an ongoing series of high profile industrial disputes. Some of these disputes were embarrassing internationally, since they were affecting the export of Australian products. In an attempt to curb such industrial disputation, the federal government had been implementing a legislative program since it came to office in 1975. The state government was concerned about its image during the 'land deals' scandal as well as about disputes in the essential services, and had already amended the ESA earlier in the year. The SECV had by early 1977 been involved in two major industrial disputes which had resulted in bans, threats to electricity supply, and restrictions on after-hours reconnection of power. It had shown its willingness on both occasions to hold firm to its negotiating position, and had implemented 'no work, no pay' stand down procedures during one of these disputes. The VTHC and the CGTLC had an uneasy relationship, with the VTHC firmly rejecting unauthorised industrial action taken by shop committees. A similar relationship was reflected between the local unions and their Melbourne officials, and a similar Melbourne-LV divide also appeared to operate within the SECV. The effect of the wage indexation guidelines had been to compress internal SECV wage relativities. The wages difference to that of contractors' employees was being exacerbated by the high inflation rate. As well, the maintenance unions had been

pursuing a single award for many years, and had ongoing issues regarding the use by the SECV of contract labour personnel on maintenance jobs. These trajectories collided in 1977 in a dispute where none of the parties was willing to compromise. The serving of the log of claims by the CGTLC, on behalf of the maintenance unions, may be viewed as the start of the 1977 dispute.

In order to appreciate the development and escalation of the dispute, its progress from the serving of the log of claims, the handing down of the Mansini work value decision almost 12 months later, and the making of two new awards relevant to the dispute by December 1979, will be discussed in detail. Three particular themes are identified during the course of the dispute. These are the control over the dispute by the rank and file, the high level of support from wives, families and the local community, and the Melbourne-LV divide. The shop steward organisation within the LV SECV was strong, with intra- and inter-union meetings of stewards taking place. The maintenance unions in particular had a history of taking combined action, perhaps partly because of the relativities enshrined in the SECV Appendix to the Metal Trades Award 1952, and partly because of the close nature of the work which they performed. While there was no initial expectation that the dispute would lead to a strike, and that the latter would be lengthy, the support of the local and wider community would become a key element in sustaining both the physical well being of the men and their families, and their morale. The divide between the locals and their Melbourne counterparts and the relationships between them also affected the dispute and its outcomes. At the start, the dispute remained with the local players, but the relationships which had developed within the industry resulted in the longer term in a movement of authority over the dispute to Melbourne and away from the locals – the LV rank and file, the CGTLC and the SECV management and industrial relations personnel in the LV.

On the 29 March 1977, a log of claims was sent by Franz Onger, Secretary of the CGTLC, to Bill De Campo, the AGM (O) in the SECV in the LV. This routine and seemingly innocuous act, occurring within the industrial, economic and political context previously described, was enough to trigger the chain of events which led to the dispute, the extent, length and bitterness of which no-one had foreseen.

Just another dispute: March – July 1977

In the early part of the dispute there was no hint that this was going to be unlike the majority of multi-union disputes that had previously taken place within the SECV. While it was true that the issues in the log were viewed as constituting a real grievance by the maintenance workers, it was not the first occasion during the 1970s on which these unions had waged a common campaign.¹ The serving of logs of claims on the SECV by the various unions was also not unusual, and there was no initial expectation on either side that this event would result in significant industrial action. When the log of claims was published in the local newspaper, the hope was expressed by the CGTLC that a negotiated agreement with the SECV would go to the ACAC for ratification or as an industry award.² However, the log was overshadowed in the early part of 1977 by the high-profile MOA shift work campaign, the ETU dispute with Coronet Modular Homes, and the ongoing contract labour disputes. The latter issue will be referred to briefly during the timelines of the dispute, since the ongoing impact of the contract labour disputes would be key in triggering the strike in August 1977.

MARCH 1977

A log of claims covering the maintenance unions at the SECV had been under discussion for several months. The log was intended to meet a number of objectives: to

¹ See for example *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1972) 144 CAR 794; *State Electricity Commission of Victoria v The Amalgamated Engineering Union and Another* (1973) 148 CAR 61; *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1974) 160 CAR 860.

² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 1 April 1977, p. 13.

even up the differences in salary at base tradesman level with those applying in other power authorities and with outside contractors; to obtain comparable conditions with the staff unions within the SECV; to even out the conditions which applied across the different awards of the maintenance unions; and to provide a means of retaining the internal relativities by the establishment of a single award for maintenance unions at the SECV. The issue of a common power industry award for 'workers who have common responsibilities, who have common obligations and who have common disabilities'³ was an important part of the log, a way of levelling conditions and sorting out the multitude of awards, determinations and regulations which affected the employees of the SECV, both white- and blue- collar. The initial points for the log were drawn up at a special executive meeting of the CGTLC in mid-February. It was agreed that the state branches of the unions involved, as well as the VTHC, would be circulated with the relevant information.⁴ The log was endorsed at a delegates meeting a week later, and it was resolved to take it to a mass meeting of LV SECV workers.⁵ This democratic unionism was one that was proudly followed within the AMWSU, and Sam Armstrong, the popular, industrially committed and well-spoken AMWSU shop steward, was an exponent. This also established the dispute from the beginning as one which had rank and file involvement at all times in the decision making.

The mass meeting was held on 25 March, and it was resolved that the eleven-point log should be directed to the attention of the SECV.⁶ The items in the log were to be divided into two parts. These were firstly those matters which were matters of regulation and over which the SECV was seen as having control (sick leave as per staff

³ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Report to S.E.C. shop stewards meeting, 17 March 1977.

⁴ GTLC, Box 7 (2nd), File Log of claims 1971, 1977, Circular to all ... , 16 February 1977.

⁵ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC Log of claims, 25 March 1977.

⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC To secretaries as addressed, 25 March 1977.

rates, accident pay on workers compensation to be made up to full pay, rostered days in lieu to be added to leave for work on Saturdays and Sundays, Retiring and Benefit Fund improved benefits, and all SECV personnel to be supplied with footwear). The second group of items consisted of those matters which were perceived as requiring discussions with the SECV before an agreed position was taken to the ACAC for ratification (wage increases to give base tradesman rate of \$218, Easter Tuesday as a public holiday, increased meal allowances for all overtime, wages incorporated into awards to allow full wage indexation, a 35-hour week, and all overtime at double time). The most prominent item in the log however was the claim for a \$40 per week wage increase.

Later, Sam Armstrong was to write that the log was formulated specifically to even up the wage relativities and working conditions, with a conscious decision made not to add superfluous claims which might attract the support of the staff and operations unions (MOA, FEDFA, and AIMPE).⁷ It was also focused on obtaining an industry award, which would then be able to maintain the relativities across the maintenance workers.

At the direction of the mass meeting, Franz Onger, Secretary of the CGTLC, sent the log of claims to the LV SECV in the person of Bill De Campo, the AGM (O), by letter on 30 March. This followed an unsuccessful attempt the previous day to serve it on him in person. At around the same time, the SECV was being served with other logs from various state or federal branches of unions or union bodies. At this stage, the maintenance log of claims was just another log, albeit served on the SECV in an unconventional manner.

This was not the first time that a log had been served directly on the SECV by the LV unions. However, the response on previous occasions during the 1970s had been

⁷ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, especially re 1977 dispute, I believe the most effective ... undated.

a consistent request for referral to the state branches of the unions via the VTHC. The decision not to include the operations unions (MOA and FEDFA) in formulating the log, while expedient in the short term, alienated these unions from the beginning of the dispute, since they had not been consulted.⁸ This was to prove critical later on when direct support from those unions may have had a major effect on the length and outcomes of the strike.

APRIL 1977

The SECV formally responded on the 6 April to the serving of the log of claims on it by the CGTLC.⁹ It refused to discuss the claim since it had not been served through what the SECV considered the correct channels. As the claim covered a wider range of SECV employees than just those employed in the LV, the SECV required it to be handled by the appropriate Federal or State officials of the relevant unions. In practice this meant a coordinated approach through the VTHC. The SECV verbally advised the VTHC and the OIRC on 13 April of both the log and its response.¹⁰ This was despite a suggestion from within the SECV that the SECV could make an offer advantageous to all parties in response.¹¹

The CGTLC convened a meeting of shop stewards for the evening of Wednesday 27 April to consider the matter.¹² By this time, responses were being sent to the VTHC from the state branches of some unions supporting the claims of the LV workers, prompting it to start taking some action on the log.¹³

⁸ Interview with Malcolm, p. 1.

⁹ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, letter 6.4.77.

¹⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C.

¹¹ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1977, Log of claims 1977, 31 March? 1977.

¹² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC to S.E.C.V. Latrobe Valley shop stewards, 20 April 1977.

¹³ UMA, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, ASE to VTHC, 6 April 1977.

Contract labour was again an issue at this time. The CGTLC had placed bans in March 1977 on contract labour jobs which were in dispute. An initial hearing in March before Commissioner Vosti of the ACAC and two more hearings in April (one of which was held in Morwell) resulted in an agreed position between the CGTLC and the SECV (the 'Vosti principles') which would guide further discussions directed at having the bans lifted.¹⁴

MAY 1977

The VTHC convened a meeting of unions with members in the SECV on 3 May to discuss the LV log of claims, and the authority to negotiate on the log was transferred to the VTHC. Sam Armstrong noted however that this did not mean that the SECV shop stewards or the men involved did not need to do anything further. Rather, workers would only get out of the claims what they were prepared to put in.¹⁵ It was agreed that the base rate amounts of \$223.30 for fitters and \$226.00 for carpenters would be the basis of the monetary claim, and an additional claim was added to the log, for long service leave payments to be pro rata if employees left the industry for reasons of ill health or other social reasons. The matter of the Retirement and Benefit Fund was to be the subject of another meeting by the VTHC and was treated separately. At this meeting, Sam Armstrong drew attention to the wish of the LV members to finalise the log as a power industry agreement, which required input from state and federal branches of the unions. He did concede however that the claims were more important than an award.¹⁶

The VTHC called a further meeting of representatives of unions in the SECV for Monday 16 May. This resulted in agreement that the log be served on the SECV, with

¹⁴ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 159, File 79/501, Contract work bans, 27 April 1977.

¹⁵ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 159, File 79/501, Report to S.E.C. L.V. shop stewards, 4 May 1977.

¹⁶ UMA, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, Minutes of meeting of S.E.C. unions, 3 May 1977.

the wage claim being an increase to the base rate metal trades award rate of \$25.70,¹⁷ and with other unions determining the rate for their tradesmen.¹⁸ When SECV representatives met with the CGTLC on 18 May to discuss the contract work, Sam Armstrong expressed surprise that they had not yet received the log from the VTHC.

The transfer of authority to negotiate on the items in the log to the VTHC resulted in it becoming a more complex undertaking. Because of the nature of the multi-union claim, not all unions were supportive. Delays in responding to the VTHC by state bodies, and the subsequent need to seek endorsement of federal bodies due to the wish to have an industry award, meant that the process was never going to be either quick, straight forward, or easy. However, while the VTHC was obliged to follow official procedures it appeared to have little enthusiasm for the log (perhaps because of its uneasy relationship with the CGTLC), not recognising that in this instance the LV shop stewards and rank and file had no intention of letting the claim be stalled by union officials and red tape. They had taken the initiative with the claim and were not prepared to take a back seat.

The perceived lack of progress by the VTHC on the log after four weeks prompted the Shop Stewards Committee (SSC) on 31 May to call a series of lunchtime meetings. Each lunchtime meeting was asked to vote on a recommendation from the stewards that a stop work meeting be held on the 15 June if the claims had not been submitted to the SECV by that date.¹⁹ The VTHC sent a notice to the unions with members in the SECV and to the CGTLC on 31 May, expressing the VTHC's concern about the expressed intention to move to a power industry agreement or award, together with the lack of clarity around the status of some organisations present at previous

¹⁷ The precise quantum of the wage claimed varied between \$25.70 and \$40.00 during the course of the dispute. While the latter was the ambit claim, the figure of \$25.70 which was also mentioned was the alleged lost relativity resulting from the deletion of the 'special payment' column in 1972.

¹⁸ VTHC, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, Minutes of meeting of union representatives, 16 May 1977.

¹⁹ GTLC, Box 7 (2nd), File Maintenance dispute 1977, Circular to all S.E.C. sections, 31 May 1977.

meetings to discuss the log. The VTHC wished to clarify both matters prior to serving the claims on the SECV.²⁰

During May, the SECV and the CGTLC continued discussions over the issue of bans on contract work. On 18 May Sam Armstrong on behalf of the CGTLC advised that the bans on the three jobs let to contract had been removed. Commissioner Vosti was formally advised of this result by the SECV.

Also during May the federal government was preparing to pass the legislation to create the IRB. There was significant concern in the union movement about the likely negative impact of the powers proposed for the IRB. The SSC called for the withdrawal of the proposed legislation, and sent telegrams to that effect to the Prime Minister, local Members of Parliament and the ACTU.²¹ Despite the widespread feeling against the IRB from a number of large unions including the AMWSU, BWIU and the Australian Railways Union, President of the ACTU Bob Hawke supported the proposal in principle, provided that penalties for industrial action were limited to those already in existence.²²

JUNE 1977

It was becoming apparent that the process of taking the log of claims via the VTHC was painfully slow, and that it was up to the state branches of the unions to take action on their own if they wanted the log to progress. In Sam Armstrong's words 'It lies with us to advance our own wages & conditions'.²³

A mass meeting of LV maintenance workers on the 15 June decided, by the slim margin of 420 in favour and 370 against, to impose overtime and availability bans

²⁰ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Circular re S.E.C. list of claims, 31 May 1977.

²¹ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 159, File 79/501, Report to S.E.C. L.V. shop stewards, 4 May 1977.

²² *The Sun*, 17 May 1977, p. 2.

²³ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Notes from meeting, 15 June 1977.

effective immediately.²⁴ This vote was so close that the strike which was to follow ‘nearly didn’t happen’.²⁵ The overtime bans were seen as a means of creating a dispute that the SECV could register with the ACAC.²⁶ It was also agreed that a negotiating committee should be formed, with equal representation from state officials and rank and file.²⁷ The mass meeting was critical of the VTHC for its slow handling of the log, and it agreed to serve the claims again on the SECV. The claim duly went back to the LV Industrial Relations Officer (IRO) on the 15 June. His apparent response at the time was that he was not going to do anything about it, and he followed this up in writing to the CGTLC and the VTHC.²⁸

The following day, 16 June, the SECV introduced restrictions on leave for the maintenance workers applying the overtime and availability bans,²⁹ but chose not to bring the matter before a Commissioner of the ACAC. This did not preclude the unions from notifying a dispute, although the preference of the CGTLC was to negotiate a settlement with the SECV. This decision by the SECV was important, since an application to the ACAC may have seen the issue resolved at this early stage in the dispute.

At the end of June, a meeting of the Victorian Branch of the Metal Trades Federation of Unions³⁰ (MTF) noted the concern of the unions over the delay in the

²⁴ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110, pt. 1, Log of claims, 16 June 1977

²⁵ Interview with Malcolm p. 2.

²⁶ UMA, 77/77, Interview with Col Baillie.

²⁷ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, S.E.C. Latrobe Valley shop stewards, 15 June 1977.

²⁸ PROV, VPRS 8916 /P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, letter 16.6.77; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Notes from meeting, 15 June 1977.

²⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C.

³⁰ The Metal Trades Federation of Unions in Victoria consisted of the AMWSU, FIA, FEDFA, Moulders’, and the Association of Architects, Engineers, Surveyors and Draughtsmen of Australia (AAESDA).

progress of the claim. It called a meeting on 8 July for ETU and AMWSU shop stewards, invited FIA, Moulders' and ASE stewards, and notified the FEDFA.³¹

The Fraser government amended the *Trade Practices Act 1974* (Cth) in June 1977. This introduced section 45D, outlawing secondary boycotts or action against a third party as a means of adding pressure to an employer in dispute. It also introduced significant penalties for non-compliance, including substantial fines as well as the awarding of damages against unions. It was used in a number of successful applications, and the issuing of a preliminary injunction by the Federal Court became generally effective in stopping secondary boycotts.³² This legislation thus joined the repertoire of legislation that the Fraser government was introducing to control what it saw as the militant actions of a minority of unions which threatened an economic recovery.

JULY 1977

The pressure on the backlog of maintenance within the SECV had increased. A mass meeting on Wednesday 6 July endorsed a complete ban on overtime in the LV, and added a ban on temporary shift work.³³ The vote on the bans however was not overwhelming, being 586 in favour, 434 against.³⁴ This demonstrated the continued ambivalence of the maintenance workers to industrial action over the log of claims.

When the Victorian Branch of the MTF met on Friday 8 July, it included delegates from the major building trade unions. The well-attended meeting agreed that the claims in the log should proceed in three parts, distributed respectively under the auspices of the ACTU (the 35-hour week), the VTHC (the conditions claims – sick

³¹ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Meeting of M.T.F. and unions (metal), 30 June 1977.

³² Richard Mitchell, 'Industrial relations under a conservative government: the coalition's labour law programme 1975 to 1978', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 4, December 1979, pp. 435-465; Rawson, *Unions and unionists in Australia*, p. 104.

³³ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, That a mass meeting ... , 6 July 1977.

³⁴ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, File 41/27, notes from 6 July 1977.

leave, accident pay, exchange days, safety footwear, extension of long service leave provisions, Easter Tuesday as a public holiday, increases in meal allowance, and the Retirement and Benefit Fund) and the ACAC (the \$40 wage increase claim, the creation of a total wage structure, double rates of overtime).³⁵ More of the claims on the log were to be negotiated under the auspices of the VTHC since they affected conditions over which the SECV nominally had control. The ACTU was brought into the log specifically to progress the thirty-five hour week issue. The proposal that the CGTLC and the SECV would negotiate and agree on the claims was supplanted by a recognition that a number of the claims would in fact need to go to the ACAC. This became a more realistic allocation of the claims and a reflection of the SECV's position that it required the unions, under the auspices of the VTHC, to become formally involved.

It appeared that, nearly two months after the VTHC had agreed to serve the log on the SECV, this had still not occurred. AMWSU state secretary John Halfpenny requested the federal organiser of his union to proceed with an application to vary the Metal Trades Award 1952, SECV appendix.³⁶ An LV SECV shop stewards meeting on 9 July, which was also attended by officials from the building trades unions, was advised that the Federal Offices of the AMWSU and the ETU had served the claims in the log on the ACAC.³⁷ What became of these applications is unclear, but it would not be for another month that the dispute would be registered with the ACAC by the ETU. The delay in action by the unions and the VTHC would be sufficient to alter the course and nature of the dispute.

³⁵ UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes of meeting 8 July 1977.

³⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, letter John Halfpenny to National Organiser AMWSU, 12 July 1977. Perhaps there was confusion between the log being promoted by the LV shop stewards, and the national log which was served on the SECV by the AMWSU on 29 July 1977, see PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 58, File 78/539, Letter of demand, 29 July 1977.

³⁷ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, Talk to the NTU, 12 April 1986.

The result of the imposition of the bans on temporary shift work, when added to the overtime bans, was an accumulation of required and scheduled maintenance. The condition of operating plant had run down.³⁸ The estimated effect of the overtime bans was a reduction of about 3300 man-hours per week, and the effect of the temporary shift work bans was of the same order. Overall, this resulted in a small reduction of daily power available by about 250-300 MW.³⁹

The SECV Commissioners were apprised of the dispute in mid-July, when the Chairman reported at a Commissioners meeting on the availability and overtime bans, and noted that their application appeared to be inconsistent, with some union members responding to emergency calls.⁴⁰ This was confirmed in notes kept at the time by Sam Armstrong, who wrote that while most unions were holding to the overtime ban, the FIA,⁴¹ TWU and ASE were not as committed, with their organisers telling members not to participate. The TWU organiser apparently went so far as to sack one of his shop stewards for participating.⁴² This appeared to be an early reflection of concern about unauthorised decisions being made about industrial action by stewards, rather than officially by union officials or the VTHC.

On 20 July, a further meeting of the Victorian Branch of the MTF invited officials of metal trade and building unions with members in the SECV to consider the details of any application to the ACAC to vary the SECV Appendix to the Metal Trades Award. The meeting concluded with the building trades' representatives needing to consider their position since they were not covered by this Award. LV stewards urged

³⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Report on effects of industrial action by LV maintenance personnel June/October 1977, 2 November 1977.

³⁹ GVR, Series MORS 0302 Box no C0002, File Industrial Strikes and stop work meetings, LV maintenance overtime and shift work bans, undated. probably July 1977.

⁴⁰ PROV, VPRS 9670/P1/Unit 59, Minutes of Commissioners' meeting, 14 July 1977.

⁴¹ A dispute had occurred in July involving FIA members. They took action over another 'no work, no pay' stand down involving riggers who objected to allegedly dirty conditions. This resulted in fellow FIA members taking industrial action in support during the last two weeks of July (PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 440, File 80/1094 pt 2, Strikes SEC, 23 July 1979).

⁴² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Notes, undated 1977.

those present to present a united front of both metals and building trades in the campaign for the log.⁴³ This was particularly important if one of the aims of the log was the granting of an award covering all power workers or even all maintenance workers. A show of unity would be the minimum required to achieve this aim.

On Friday 29 July, more than 40 SECV shop stewards (mainly from the AMWSU and ETU, but with some stewards from the building trades, and a few FIA stewards who attended despite their union instructing them not to do so) met with union officials to discuss implementing a resolution from an earlier shop stewards meeting to extend the overtime bans already in place in the LV. While some localities other than the LV had imposed bans, only the ETU had placed a state-wide ban at the request of mass meetings of their members. The AMWSU stewards present voted to request their State Council to impose a total overtime and promotion ban in Victoria in support of the claim.⁴⁴ Building trades' stewards present noted that they had an application before the ACAC listed for hearing on 5 August (C nos 56, 2533 and 2537 of 1977) for an award covering their SECV members, but that they would support a campaign for the LV log of claims. As a result, the former application came before the ACAC joined with the maintenance dispute, and would not resume separate hearings until May 1978. The meeting was also advised that the AMWSU had filed an ambit log with the ACAC in support of the LV claims, and the ETU had lodged the claim to vary the Metal Trades Award, SECV appendix,⁴⁵ although these applications had not yet come to the attention of either the ACAC or the SECV.

The SECV by this time was planning how to use the situation to its advantage, or to bring it to a head. It was felt that the continuing delay in action on the claim was reducing the support for the maintenance unions, and that if an application to vary the

⁴³ UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes of meeting 20 July 1977.

⁴⁴ UMA, 95/96, Box 103, Victorian State Council minutes, 1 August 1977.

⁴⁵ UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes of meeting 29 July 1977.

award was filed, the SECV could press to have the bans removed thus placing it in a stronger position. However, if the plant or industrial position deteriorated, consideration would be given to 'management-initiated action' and assessment of a range of possible alternatives had commenced.⁴⁶ The preferred options for action involved the use of contract labour or directives to commence temporary shift work in order to provoke further action which would result in a 'no work – no pay' response.⁴⁷

However, the ground was shifting under the feet of the maintenance workers. While they were taking action to obtain working conditions already applying to staff employees, those conditions were changing even as the dispute over the 1977 log proceeded. At the end of July 1977 the SECV and the MOA were proceeding with a reduction of working hours from 40 to 38 per week for all staff where this was practicable.⁴⁸ A by-product of this was to reduce the likelihood of support from the staff union, which would not wish to jeopardise its own negotiations. These would ensure the continuation of a differential between conditions of salaried and wages employees. This further demonstrated the lack of unity amongst the LV unions, and the preference of some unions to progress their own claims. The MOA supervised maintenance staff, including apprentices, and thus played a key role in placing repaired plant back into service.

Confrontation: August – October 1977

Until this time the SECV and the stewards had used a standard pattern of actions and reactions in the campaign over the log. The maintenance unions were committed to the log, but the SECV was standing firm, perhaps because of its success in resolving the high profile industrial disputes from earlier in the year. The MOA's log of claims for improved conditions for shift workers had been rejected by a Full Bench of the ACAC in

⁴⁶ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1977, Notes on discussion, 18 July 1977.

⁴⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, CGT&LC shop committee, 29 July 1977.

⁴⁸ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0016, File MOA, Notes of meeting held with MOA, 25 July 1977.

June. The dispute between the ETU and Coronet Homes which had led to bans on after-hours reconnections of power had also been resolved in June after discussions in the ACAC had led to lifting of the bans affecting the SECV.

The VTHC appeared disinterested in moving the log along, being content to let the state and federal branches of the unions involved respond at their own (slow) pace. This may have been influenced by the long-standing uneasy relationship between the VTHC and the CGTLC, and aided by the parochialism of the LV shop stewards and their rank and file, who had decided to handle this log of claims in their own way. The bans imposed by the maintenance workers, while inconvenient and starting to result in a backlog of maintenance, were not yet creating a critical situation in terms of ongoing power generation and supply. They were however, affecting operational capacity within the SECV despite public statements that all was well.

The handling of the dispute was about to move away from the locals. From being locally focused and managed, it would move to a greater Melbourne focus, and to being managed more by the Melbourne-based SECV, unions and the ACTU. This move brought into play a new set of relationships, which again changed the course of the dispute. The line had also been drawn between the maintenance unions and the operations unions, which had not been invited to be a part of the log or to support any action taken. There had been little publicity beyond the LV, but that was about to change with the involvement of the ACAC, the escalation of the dispute by the SECV, and the involvement of the state government and the ACTU.

AUGUST 1977

On August 5, the ETU registered the dispute with the ACAC. It became C no. 3601 of 1977 and requested variations in weekly wage rates, overtime rates, meal

allowances, and for Easter Tuesday as a public holiday.⁴⁹ The SECV discussed the effect of the bans with the MOA and the APEA, which both agreed that staff employees would continue to perform all normal duties, and would ensure as far as possible continuity of power for 'essential services'.⁵⁰ The SECV advised that there would be no major effect on electricity supplies, that 'the bans have been applied by a small group of blue collar workers who are seeking special benefits for themselves outside the normal trade union framework and outside the Arbitration Commission'.⁵¹ On the same day however, the ETU extended the availability and overtime bans by its members to the SECV in the rest of the state.⁵² This placed further pressure on both the maintenance of plant and reconnections after hours.

Three days later, on Monday 8 August, the SECV acted to bring the dispute to a head. Despite its earlier stated preference for using the filing of an award variation to press to remove the bans, SECV management decided to proceed with outsourcing repairs on three vehicles, using the excuse that maintenance work had fallen behind because of the overtime bans. This decision was taken without the customary discussions with union representatives about contract labour requirements.⁵³ It was also decided to inform nominated SECV tradesmen that they would be required to commence temporary shift work from that evening.⁵⁴ This decision to roster maintenance employees (fitters, riggers and trades assistants) to temporary shift work may be seen as an attempt to break the bans, and followed from the SECV's earlier consideration of taking action which would allow a 'no work, no pay' situation. That this was the case

⁴⁹ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute (3), Annexure A, undated 1977.

⁵⁰ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0004, File Metal Trades 1975/76/77, Latrobe Valley metal trades shop stewards' claims, 8 August 1977.

⁵¹ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 5 August 1977.

⁵² UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes, 29 July 1977.

⁵³ UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes, 19 August 1977; Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

⁵⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, CGT&LC - log of claims, 8 August 1977.

was supported by the attendance of an IRO, Bruce Lawn, at the Hazelwood PS at 11pm (such attendance by IROs not being the norm) to witness the start of the night shift, and to confirm the arrival of trades assistants and the non-arrival of fitters and riggers.

By 10.30am the next morning, all FIA riggers, most trades assistants, and all AMWSU boilermakers and fitters had ceased work.⁵⁵ What the SECV hoped to achieve was not clear. Did they expect that making such a move would lead to removal of the bans, or a back down by the men concerned? The precise motivation for, and expectation of, these actions of management are not available in surviving records. Based on previous disputes and the ongoing concerns of the rank and file over the contract labour issue, neither of these results was likely. The SECV actions directing repairs to outside labour, and instructing tradesmen to undertake temporary shift work, occurred at a time when the SECV was stating publicly that the dispute was not having any impact on electricity supply.⁵⁶ There would thus seem to be no perceived urgency for the men to return to work.

The two motor mechanics at Morwell transport workshop who refused to take the motor vehicles to a contractor for repair were stood down by the SECV.⁵⁷ This action seemed to contradict stated SECV guidelines for implementing the 'no work, no pay' process. These were put in place after a decision in the Industrial Commission of New South Wales (ICNSW), which clearly indicated that there should be no attempt to 'artificially schedule' black banned work to this end.⁵⁸ The SECV's actions around the contract labour issue were also in contravention of the procedures agreed with the

⁵⁵ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box no C0003, File Power generation 1976-77, Industrial relations report, 8 August 1977.

⁵⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Newsgram, 16 August 1977.

⁵⁷ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Newsgram, 10 August 1977.

⁵⁸ YPS, Series YAPS 0051, Box A0008, File Industrial disputes general, 'No work, no pay' principle, 6 October 1975; *Electricity Commission of New South Wales v The Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australasia (N.S.W.)* 1975 AR 504.

CGTLC for handling such matters. They were thus viewed as deliberate provocation,⁵⁹ given the historical depth of feeling within the maintenance unions on this issue. The action resulted in a walk off in support by 200 members of the other maintenance unions at the Morwell Workshops, Central Workshop and Hazelwood PS in support.⁶⁰ The effect of the SECV's actions was to escalate what had until then been a low-key dispute into a confrontation. However this spontaneous reaction to the SECV's actions also meant that any long term strategy of the SSC to progress the log of claims was in tatters. The rank and file had taken matters into their own hands. The stewards could only try to harness the outrage and bring some semblance of order back into the dispute.

The stewards called for a mass meeting at 11am on the following day, 9 August. The 1,200 to 1,400 men in attendance at this meeting decided to go on strike indefinitely in support of their stood-down colleagues, with only 6 dissenting.⁶¹ The attendance at this mass meeting was greater than the norm, and this became typical of those held during the dispute. The level of unity was surprisingly high. Members of the FIA had just returned from their two week period of industrial action over a 'no work no pay' scenario, and had little interest in starting another strike. The actions of the SECV directed the focus of the maintenance men to the log of claims. They had expected that bans would be sufficient to make their point, but perhaps felt that being on strike would have an even greater impact and would remind the SECV that the unions were prepared to act in unison over some issues.⁶²

⁵⁹ UMA, 77/77, File 1977 dispute material, Link, October 1977; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Resolution, 9 August 1977.

⁶⁰ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, 1977 log of claims dispute, probably 1 October 1977; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Summary of industrial scene at 1100 hours, 9 August 1977; Max Ogden, 'The La Trobe Valley power dispute: an interview with Max Ogden', *Australian Left Review*, no. 64, May 1978, pp. 10-17.

⁶¹ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, File 41/27, notes from 9 August 1977.

⁶² Lloyd Davies, 'Stepping across the brink', 1992, p. 30.

Despite the walkout occurring over the 'no work no pay' contract labour and bans issues, there seemed to be a lack of clarity on the part of the men over why a strike had been agreed to. The log with its claims for higher wages and parity of conditions was assumed to be the reason for the call for a strike.⁶³ Some attendees at the mass meeting had no idea of the issue,⁶⁴ but 'followed like lambs'.⁶⁵ Their supervisors in the MOA also assumed that the strike was over money.⁶⁶ However, the general expectation was that the strike would be short, as the majority were. The assumption of being out for two to three days was held not only by the men, but also by their supervisors as well as the local SECV industrial relations staff.⁶⁷ The managers in the LV similarly expected it to be 'just another dispute'.⁶⁸

At this time, the SECV verbally advised both the VTHC and the OIRC of the men's decision to strike indefinitely.⁶⁹ In the first of a series of paid advertisements in the news pages of the local newspaper, the *Latrobe Valley Express*, the AGM (O) wrote an open letter to the striking employees.⁷⁰ He attempted to clarify process matters such as the correct channels for serving logs of claims, and noted that an application to vary the award had been submitted to the ACAC. He concluded that it was pointless to continue the strike action, since a date had been set to hear the claims. He remonstrated with the men for striking, saying that at least some of their leaders were aware on 9 August that an application to vary the award had been submitted to the ACAC. He neglected however to point out that the SECV could also have waited on the result of the application before taking such provocative action, especially if power supplies were not

⁶³ Interviews with John E. p. 1; Gerry p. 1; Luke p. 3; Chris p. 2; Lyle pp. 2, 3, 12, 22; UMA, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, Extract from 3GI Gippsland news, 9 August 1977.

⁶⁴ Interview with Lindsay p. 5.

⁶⁵ Interview with Evan p. 4.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Terry p. 1; P p. 2.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Lindsey p. 3; Gerry p. 5; Lyle p. 5; P p. 9; Bruce p. 8.

⁶⁸ Interview with Jack pp. 3, 11.

⁶⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C.

⁷⁰ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 17 August 1977, p. 10.

at risk. A stronger view was expressed by the local Democratic Labor Party (DLP) Senate candidate, Les Hilton, who called it a 'campaign designed to divide the trade unions ... and to disrupt the community' by 'a minority of strategically placed communist and left wing union officials'.⁷¹

The SECV by this time was considering using apprentices to do the maintenance work (including temporary shift work) that would have been done by the men now out on strike. The Manager Industrial Relations pragmatically pointed out that while this might result in benefits in the short term, in the longer term it would probably work against the SECV as well as against individual apprentices.⁷² The MOA advised the SECV that apprentices would only be supervised by their members if that was part of the member's normal duties,⁷³ a small measure of support from this union which would have perhaps heartened the strikers.

The VTHC had already scheduled another meeting of the relevant SECV unions for Monday 15 August to discuss those matters in the log of claims with which it could proceed.⁷⁴ These items related to sick leave, accident pay, work on public holidays and weekends, footwear, Retirement and Benefits fund, and pro-rata payment of Long Service Leave on early retirement. They were then forwarded to the SECV by the Secretary of the VTHC on 22 August, a significant delay given that this process had already been agreed by the unions when they met in mid-May and again on 8 July. The expectation was that the VTHC Negotiating Committee and representatives of the SECV would meet to discuss the claim in the near future.⁷⁵ Replies had also been coming in

⁷¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 August 1977, p. 4.

⁷² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Apprentices, 10 August 1977.

⁷³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C.

⁷⁴ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, VTHC circular 219/1977, 5 August 1977.

⁷⁵ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, VTHC circular S.E.C. log of claims, 22 August 1977.

from the unions about the possibility of an industry award. Most of the unions responding agreed that negotiations on the general items in the log of claims should proceed, and were sending such letters of claim to the SECV.⁷⁶ However, some unions, including the Australian Timber Workers' Union (ATWU), the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia (ASC&J) and the BWIU, were not interested in proceeding on a power industry award. The building trades were already being heard on the matter of a separate award before Commissioner Vosti.⁷⁷ Other unions believed that the process would be too complex and time consuming, or they were satisfied with the current award arrangements.⁷⁸

The SECV had by now received a copy of the ETU application to the ACAC to vary the Metal Trades Award, and it advised the OIRC of the hearing before Commissioner Vosti scheduled for 23 August.⁷⁹ This continued the practice of the SECV of informing the OIRC about claims served on the SECV. The Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation of Australia (VBEFA), one of the maintenance unions whose members were on strike, advised the SECV that it was serving the log of claims on it, and that the union would be represented in the ACAC when hearings commenced.⁸⁰

A mass meeting of the strikers on the Tuesday 16 August at Yallourn resolved to continue the stoppage, and to schedule another mass meeting for the 24 August to hear a report on the proceedings before Commissioner Vosti. A meeting of SECV metal trades shop stewards was held on Friday 19 August at the Victorian Trades Hall building, and they were also advised that the metal unions' application was listed for hearing before

⁷⁶ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110, pt. 1, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 1 September 1977.

⁷⁷ *The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia and Others v The State Electricity Commission of Victoria and Others* (1977) 188 CAR 1054.

⁷⁸ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, File 41/28, notes from 15 August 1977; for example, UMA, 101/20, Box 163, File SEC claims union replies, 9 June 1977, 14 June 1977, 9 August 1977.

⁷⁹ GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0001, File Industrial General, Maintenance employees' dispute, 3 November 1977.

⁸⁰ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 3 1977 dispute (3), Telex VBEFA to Frank Sims, S.E.C.V., 19 August 1977.

Commissioner Vosti on Tuesday 23 August.⁸¹ This would cover the four award matters in the claim (salary increase, overtime rates, meal allowances, additional public holiday).

On the 23 August, the first day of the hearing,⁸² Commissioner Vosti made it clear that the application before him was to vary the relevant sections of the Metal Trades Award, and that representation from the VBEFA and the BWIU was not necessary. This was the first indication that of the eleven unions involved in the strike, six were not likely to be parties to a decision regarding the relevant items in the log of claims. The unions advised Commissioner Vosti that the strike was not in fact about the claims in the log, but rather arose over a contract labour dispute which had its origins in the SECV disregard for a ruling of the Commissioner's earlier in 1977, and a lack of consultation over the allocation of temporary shifts.

The importance of the dispute for the respective parties was reflected in the representation and attendance between the unions and the SECV. Mr Johnson, appearing for the AMWSU, advised Commissioner Vosti that a number of LV shop stewards were present in the gallery. He requested that if the matter went into conference that those stewards be allowed to attend as advisers to the unions. The attendance of the stewards at the ACAC hearings increased their credibility with the rank and file,⁸³ but much of the conduct of much of the dispute was also left in their hands, with a subsequent heavy commitment of their time.⁸⁴ The extensive attendance by LV shop stewards was also an indication that this case was viewed with great seriousness, and not as just another log of claims, by the maintenance workers. The stewards were not prepared to hand the claim over to the VTHC or their unions to follow through. This was quite a different scenario to the SECV, which at this stage saw the matter as just another dispute. It was

⁸¹ UMA, 95/96, Box 7, File Metal Trades Federation 1975-80, Minutes of meeting 19 August 1977.

⁸² The detail on the ACAC proceedings between 23 and 25 August 1977 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/111 unless otherwise indicated.

⁸³ Interview with John E. p. 24.

⁸⁴ Interviews with Lindsey p. 30; John H. p. 8.

represented by Mr Appersley, assisted by members of the Industrial Relations department, including the Manager (Messrs Sims, Raphael and Clinch).

Commissioner Vosti declined to proceed further with the hearing until all men on strike returned to work and the bans and limitations were removed. The 40 or so shop stewards who attended at the ACAC agreed to recommend a return to work.

Accordingly, on 24 August, a mass meeting was held to discuss that recommendation. The meeting was well attended and accepted the recommendation to return to work the next day, 25 August at 7.30am, and lift all bans from that time. Despite this, the stewards were concerned that the hearing might be delayed, or the SECV uncooperative, with the real possibility that the strike would resume.⁸⁵ This concern appeared vindicated when, at the meeting in the ACAC on the 25 August, the SECV announced that it wanted a further four days to consider the men's claims. That is, it could not reply before 1pm on 29 August about the claims which they were prepared to discuss (but not necessarily to make any offers),⁸⁶ despite the SECV having been aware of the claims since March.

The stewards met that evening and agreed to recommend that further industrial action wait until after the SECV's reply.⁸⁷ Shop stewards in the LV agreed with this recommendation, despite concerns at the lack of progress and the SECV's apparent inability to make any decisions.⁸⁸ Notices to this effect were placed in work areas, with a report back meeting to the men scheduled for Tuesday 30 August.⁸⁹ However, the men saw this decision on the part of the SECV as disrespectful, and about 2,100 men drifted off the job during the morning of Friday 26 August. The SECV declared that this showed that the stewards had lost control of the industrial action which they had

⁸⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Conversation ... comment on the strike situation, 24 August 1977.

⁸⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C.

⁸⁷ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, 1977 log of claims dispute, probably 1 October 1977.

⁸⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Latrobe Valley S.E.C. shop stewards, 25 August 1977.

⁸⁹ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute (3), Circular to all sections, 25 August 1977.

started,⁹⁰ without considering that the statement made by the SECV in the ACAC may have contributed to this result.

As a result of the walk out, a mass meeting was called at Yallourn for 1.30pm that afternoon. The meeting decided to stay out until 7.30am on 29 August, against the recommendation of the shop stewards, in the hope that a more positive proposal could be offered by the SECV. The meeting also decided that no overtime or shifts were to be worked over the weekend. This decision reminded the stewards that it was the men themselves who wished to decide how the dispute would be conducted. The men were determined to do all they could to have their claim negotiated on by the SECV, rather than in the ACAC or by the state branches of their unions and the VTHC. It was the rank and file who 'heard reports ... debated the issues ... and ... made the decisions'.⁹¹ Family members were often in attendance to support the strikers.

While the brief return to work on 25 August had enabled some minor plant defects to be repaired, by this time the power generating plant in the Latrobe Valley was, according to the CGTLC, in poor condition with some of it desperately requiring maintenance.⁹² At least two-thirds (2000 MW) of the plant was liable to fail at any time, resulting in state-wide blackouts and the need for extensive and time consuming repair work.⁹³ However, the SECV countered that availability of generating plant was very good – both Yallourn units, six of eight sets at Hazelwood, four out of five generators at Yallourn C and D, and four out of five at Morwell were in operation.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, 3GI News, 27 August 1977.

⁹¹ Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union, *The 1977 Latrobe Valley power strike*, Amalgamated Metal Workers & Shipwrights' Union, Victorian State Branch, East Melbourne, 1978, p. 6.

⁹² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Newsgram, 24 August 1977.

⁹³ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC S.E.C. log of claims dispute, 25 August 1977.

⁹⁴ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 1 September 1977.

Because of the ‘unscheduled industrial action’, the SECV cancelled the ACAC conference scheduled for Monday 29 August so that it could ‘consider its position’.⁹⁵ A private conference between the SECV and the unions went ahead but without Commissioner Vosti. They agreed that a meeting would be held on Tuesday 30 August if there had been a full return to normal work by 10am, with no bans or limitations imposed.⁹⁶ By this time, the VTHC had written to the SECV about the non-award claims,⁹⁷ so that a determination could be made on whether the SECV in fact had the power to act on them.

The men duly returned to work on Monday 29 August, and at the private conference in the ACAC on 30 August, the SECV indicated that it was prepared to discuss some of the claims – shift overtime, meal allowances and Easter Tuesday substitution. However it would not reply with offers or otherwise for another seven days, and then only if there were no more bans.⁹⁸ While the SECV considered this to be ‘meaningful progress toward resolving the claims’,⁹⁹ the men involved in the dispute interpreted it as indicating a lack of co-operation by the SECV.¹⁰⁰ Indeed. Perhaps the SECV, if it wished to avoid further prolonging the dispute, could have replied on the 30 August, given that it had had five months to consider a response to the matters in the log? It had previously indicated its ability to respond to the claims by the 29 August, so presumably its representatives in the ACAC proceedings already knew which claims it was prepared to discuss. The men had returned to work twice to allow discussions to proceed and it didn’t look as though the SECV was prepared to negotiate. After the

⁹⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Newsgram, 29 August 1977.

⁹⁶ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 1 September 1977.

⁹⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Newsgram, 29 August 1977.

⁹⁸ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 1 September 1977.

⁹⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 2 September 1977, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute, 3, Annotated list of claims for negotiation.

strike the SECV was to conclude that the offers should have been released and publicised earlier,¹⁰¹ which would have given greater appearance of cooperation.

The next day, 31 August, a meeting of about 1,000 of the men voted overwhelmingly to go out and stay out, citing the uncooperative attitude of the SECV. The pattern which had developed of an indefinite strike punctuated by brief returns to work became an obvious flaw in the stewards/CGTLC strategy. The returns to work resulted in plant being returned to service,¹⁰² and the dispute took on a 'life of its own',¹⁰³ and soon developed into a 'standoff'.¹⁰⁴ Whether there was in fact a strategy in place is moot, given the unplanned nature of the walkout and the subsequent decision to strike. Certainly those not involved in the strike did not see a clear strategy.¹⁰⁵ It was also suggested that the strikers were anticipating the participation of the FEDFA or the capitulation of the SECV/government.¹⁰⁶

Bill De Campo, AGM (O), quoted on a local radio station, described the strike as 'militancy at its worst', and 'irresponsible and illogical'.¹⁰⁷ He was later quoted as saying that the rank and file had been 'conned by the shop stewards' just at the stage when they were 'within site [sic] of achieving some positive response from the SEC'.¹⁰⁸ Given the decision of the SECV to bring events to a head, and their slowness to respond to the conditions claims in the ACAC, this seems either hypocritical or demonstrating a lack of knowledge of what was being said in the ACAC by the SECVs Melbourne management.

¹⁰¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1 File 2, Notes of 28/10/77 discussion ... with Chairman, ... , 27 January 1978.

¹⁰² Interviews with Evan p. 7; Jack pp. 9,10.

¹⁰³ Interview with Kevin pp. 7,11.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with John H. p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with Paul B. p. 3; P p. 5; Jack p. 2; John H. p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Evan p. 11; Lindsey p. 11; P p. 5; Frank p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, 3GI News, 31 August 1977.

¹⁰⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, 3TR News, 1 September 1977.

The second of the series of paid advertisements in the local newspaper advised the LV community of the major facts of the dispute. According to the SECV, the unions were ‘poised to achieve progress’,¹⁰⁹ but decided instead to go on strike, thus inflicting more hardship on themselves, their families and the local community. This type of communication to strikers, their families and the community was unusual. It became a more personal appeal rather than just another media release.¹¹⁰ However, invoking ‘commonsense’ and giving advice on how the unionists should act was probably unlikely at this stage of the dispute to be well received, when on its part the SECV had not appeared willing to consider a quick response to the non-wage claims in order to start settling the dispute.

The local community was by now feeling the effects of the strike. The town of Morwell, heavily dependent on the wages coming from the SECV, was suffering a loss of business that particularly affected smaller business places and those outside the essential food retail area.¹¹¹ Payments had been made from the CGTLC Distress Fund from the early weeks of the strike,¹¹² with the result that the Fund was soon in debt to the tune of about \$12,000, only alleviated when donations to the Fund were solicited and received in the later weeks of the strike.¹¹³

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The SECV proceeded to advertise tenders for maintenance and new works contracts on 1 September, despite the agreement reached with Commissioner Vosti earlier that year that such jobs would be discussed with the CGTLC prior to advertisement. The strike action by the unions was felt by the SECV to preclude ‘any

¹⁰⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 2 September 1977, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Kevin p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 24 August 1977, p. 1.

¹¹² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 21 September 1977, p. 1.

¹¹³ Trade Union Training Authority, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*, Trade Union Training Authority, Wodonga, 1977, p. 4.

logical or rational thinking’¹¹⁴ about contract work. VTHC Industrial Officer Ron Jordan apparently agreed with this condescending viewpoint, while Commissioner Vosti declined to comment. This action on the contract jobs was only likely to confirm the attitude of the men on strike that neither the SECV, the ACAC nor the VTHC could be trusted to look after their interests.

On Friday 2 September, the CGTLC called a Disputes Committee meeting of unions with members in the SECV LV to discuss the dispute and its effects on other unions.¹¹⁵ The CGTLC Disputes Committee was asking for reciprocation in industrial action from unions that it had claimed to have supported in the past – the Storemen & Packers, the Transport Workers, and the Miscellaneous Workers. The ETU sent an Industrial Officer to this meeting, and advised the SECV to this effect. This was part of the ongoing communication between the ETU and the SECV throughout the dispute, and this was noted in SECV records of the time.

The contentious issue of apprentices being used to do the work of strikers was recognised early in the dispute by various unions and the CGTLC.¹¹⁶ The MOA had issued firm instructions concerning the scope of work and competence of the apprentice and the need for appropriate supervision.¹¹⁷ The SECV after the dispute ended acknowledged the extensive assistance provided in maintaining and restoring plant by apprentices, generally by agreement between the MOA and the line manager, and on a job by job basis.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1977, Contract work, 5 September 1977.

¹¹⁵ GTLC, Box 7 (2nd), File Maintenance dispute 1977, Circular, 31 August 1977.

¹¹⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute 2, Apprentices and the log of claims, early August 1977; GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0009, File Coal production, Resolution passed by employees of the Morwell Open Cut, 26 August 1977.

¹¹⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Training of apprentices during current industrial dispute, 11 August 1977.

¹¹⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977.

The SECV informed the VTHC on 7 September that it was not prepared to meet until there was a full resumption of work with no bans or limitations.¹¹⁹ As a result, the meeting between the VTHC and the SECV scheduled for 6 September to discuss the non-wage claims was cancelled and the SECV withdrew its offer to discuss these matters.¹²⁰ While the SECV was still hoping to influence the VTHC to remove the dispute from the hands of the shop stewards, in private it was considering what offers it might be prepared to make around the conditions claims, subject to approval by the OIRC.¹²¹

The Victorian Branch of the AMWSU called a further meeting of SECV shop stewards on the 8 September to discuss the log of claims.¹²² This meeting called for a mass meeting of all SECV metropolitan maintenance and construction workers on Monday 12 September to consider a recommendation for a 48-hour stoppage on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 September in support of the log of claims.¹²³

On 9 September, the SECV, over the signature of Bill De Campo, AGM(O), sent out a letter to each of the strikers asking them to consider the lack of benefits or sense in continuing with the strike, since the SECV was not prepared to proceed with discussions on any aspect of the log until the threat of industrial action was removed.¹²⁴ The response of the strikers to this letter was minimal.¹²⁵

By the 6 September, the CGTLC was publicly stating that the power generating capacity was reducing due to equipment break downs and limits to existing coal winning

¹¹⁹ GVR, MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1977, SECV to VTHC, 7 September 1977.

¹²⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, During this phase ... , 2 September 1977.

¹²¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Metal Trades Award, 8 September 1977.

¹²² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, AMWSU circular to shop stewards State Electricity Commission of Victoria, 2 September 1977.

¹²³ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute (3), Resolution SEC shop stewards meeting, 8 September 1977.

¹²⁴ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, letter W De Campo to SB Armstrong, 9 September 1977.

¹²⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute, November 1977, p 2-9.

areas.¹²⁶ This was confirmed shortly afterwards. By 12 September the SECV noted that there were signs of deterioration within the power generating system, with Hazelwood down to four units and power shortages becoming a distinct possibility.¹²⁷ At this stage, the public was being reassured that power restrictions were not expected. The CGTLC however noted that with the reduced generating power available, and the MOA's decision to allow maintenance of operating plant but not its return to service, any significant plant failure would see restrictions 'as a matter of course.'¹²⁸ The dispute was starting to divide the local community, with letters from women decrying the strike, the continuing advertisements of 'the facts' by the SECV, and responses to both from various shop stewards.¹²⁹ The 'facts' from the union side were also presented, contrasting the paternalistic, top-down operation of the SECV with the bottom-up workings of the unions.

At the mass meeting on 12 September of SECV metropolitan maintenance and construction workers, 560 employees narrowly voted to hold a stoppage of 48 hours over the 13 and 14 September in support of the claims, and to impose a ban on availability duty and temporary staff appointments.¹³⁰ This fairly insignificant contribution to the dispute by metropolitan SECV maintenance employees served to further highlight the dominant role of the LV union rank and file. The log had been formulated in the LV, and that formed the core of supporters, despite the fact that any benefits would flow to all the SECV maintenance workforce.

The FEDFA SECV Staff sub-branch chose this time to serve a log of claims (via the State Branch of the union) on the SECV, including a claim for a 32 ½ hour week,

¹²⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, CGTLC, S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, 6 September 1977.

¹²⁷ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 12 September 1977.

¹²⁸ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 9 September 1977, p. 1.

¹²⁹ See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 9 September 1977, 14 September 1977, 16 September 1977.

¹³⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 15 September 1977; *The Battler*, 1 October 1977, p. 16.

and a conference was promptly arranged for later in September.¹³¹ The FEDFA recognised that the SECV did not want it to support the maintenance dispute and was therefore anxious to retain good industrial relations with the FEDFA. The other operations union, the MOA, also chose this time to serve another log of claims on the SECV. The claim was substantially the same as that rejected by both the SECV and the Full Bench of the ACAC several months earlier. While the MOA may have felt that the concerns about generating plant arising from the maintenance strike would persuade the SECV to consider the claim more favourably, this had not been the case.¹³²

The hearing on the dispute reconvened before Commissioner Vosti on 15 September.¹³³ The SECV confirmed that it had agreed to discuss some of the claims: shift overtime, meal allowances, and Easter Tuesday, and the OIRC had been advised of the SECV's proposed responses to those claims.¹³⁴ Commissioner Vosti confirmed that the unions were to convene a mass meeting for Monday 19 September in the LV, and if a return to work was decided, then the SECV was to give its replies on Tuesday 20 September and the remaining matters would come before him for arbitration on Friday 23 September. However, Commissioner Vosti had made it clear that he would not move on the application to vary the award while the 'troops' were on strike.

Commissioner Vosti by this time was appearing decidedly impatient with both the unions and the SECV, and issued a statement which began 'in the interests of industrial sanity'. The SECV arranged to have Commissioner Vosti's statement reprinted in the *Latrobe Valley Express* for the information of the men involved in the

¹³¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, letter from Secretary, FEDFA Victorian Branch to SECV, 15 September 1977.

¹³² PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 428, File 80/981, SECV to Secretary MOA, 17 October 1977.

¹³³ The detail on the ACAC proceedings of 15 September 1977 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/111 unless otherwise indicated.

¹³⁴ GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0001, File Industrial General, Maintenance employees' dispute, 3 November 1977.

dispute,¹³⁵ and in a possible attempt to influence a vote on 19 September for a return to work.

The mass meeting insisted on by Commissioner Vosti was duly held on 19 September at Morwell Oval, and was well attended by around 2000 men. An update of events since the last meeting was given, including information about the meetings of shop stewards and the CGTLC Disputes Committee. The feeling of the meeting was that a return to work would place the SECV at an advantage. Those matters on which the SECV would commit to giving responses, that is the claims relating to Easter Tuesday, double time for overtime shifts and increased meal allowances, were only minor parts of the log. While Sam Armstrong commented that ‘we all want to see the matter resolved’,¹³⁶ the shop stewards had framed a resolution recommending a continuation of the stoppage. The men overwhelmingly decided to remain in dispute and to meet again on Monday 26 September.¹³⁷ The rank and file continued to push for a settlement on their terms. This decision to stay out resulted in the cancellation of the meeting with the SECV tentatively scheduled for Tuesday 20 and the ACAC hearing scheduled for Friday 23 September.¹³⁸

A union deputation met with Commissioner Vosti on 23 September, and agreed to a series of propositions, which were also accepted by the SECV. A return to work would be recommended on a 40-hour week basis but with overtime worked in agreed emergency situations, and with the SECV reserving its rights to request a Full Bench hearing on any or all of the matters, as well as its right of appeal. The SECV agreed that while it would continue to brief counsel, it would not be represented by counsel at any

¹³⁵ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 16 September 1977, p. 5.

¹³⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Notes, 19 September 1977.

¹³⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1 File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 4 October 1977.

¹³⁸ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Newsgram, 21 September 1977.

initial hearing before Commissioner Vosti.¹³⁹ The elements of any return expected by the unions involved a timetable for the hearing of the wages and overtime claims, together with replies by the SECV on the other claims, and the SECV was also to withdraw a request for a reference bench.¹⁴⁰ If the propositions were agreed to, the dispute would be relisted for hearing on 27 September once a mass meeting on 26 September agreed to a qualified return to work that afternoon.¹⁴¹

This tentative agreement on a return to work arrangement, was however ‘overwhelmingly rejected’¹⁴² by the mass meeting on September 26. The meeting reaffirmed its request of 19 September for various assurances by the SECV. It also voted to establish picket lines against the road transport of coal from Yallourn to Morwell. The effect of no road transport of coal was to significantly reduce the capacity to produce briquettes, affecting hospitals and food processing plants as well as power generation.¹⁴³ The success of the pickets provided the strikers with a boost to morale,¹⁴⁴ as well as providing a collective activity. This was important in keeping the men personally involved in the strike and in maintaining camaraderie.¹⁴⁵

The mass meetings continued to be well attended, which had not always been the case during previous disputes.¹⁴⁶ This was perhaps the best indicator of the depth of feeling of the maintenance men and their commitment to the issues in the claim. This extended to their wives, who continued to show their support for the dispute by attending the mass meetings and forming a ‘Women’s Assistance Committee’, as well as

¹³⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2 File 4, Statement to union deputation made by Commissioner Vosti 23/9/77.

¹⁴⁰ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Statement on union proposals, 23 September 1977.

¹⁴¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1 File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 4 October 1977.

¹⁴² Benson, *Shop stewards in the Latrobe Valley*, p. 357.

¹⁴³ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 29 September 1977.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Luke p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Paul C. p. 13.

¹⁴⁶ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 1 September 1976, p. 44; *The Herald*, 26 August 1976, p. 1.

to the community generally.¹⁴⁷ Strikers and their families were receiving consideration from the local credit unions, which did not expect loan repayments while there was no income being received, and requests for financial assistance were being considered.¹⁴⁸ While not generous, these loans, together with the vouchers and food donations available from the Distress Fund, meant that the strikers were often slightly better off than the laid off workers in the Melbourne area, who had to rely on the resources of local welfare organisations which soon became exhausted.¹⁴⁹ As well as food vouchers, the stewards were able to advise after the mass meetings about food items available for collection, such as tinned food, oranges etc, which had been donated in bulk by various businesses and/or local farmers.

The suffering of the families of the strikers was laid, none too subtly by the local newspaper, at the feet of the FEDFA. Its support would have ensured that the strike would have been over in a few days, as Victoria was ‘plunged into darkness’.¹⁵⁰ While members of the FEDFA were said to be ‘sympathetic’¹⁵¹ to the strikers, their attitude was that they had a responsibility to guarantee a minimum power supply to cover emergency situations.¹⁵²

Electricity restrictions had been forecast when the men had made the ‘unexpected decision’¹⁵³ to continue the strike indefinitely on the 19 September. It thus came as no real surprise when from midnight on the 27 September, stringent electricity restrictions were imposed by the SECV. These restrictions, described as ‘unnecessary’

¹⁴⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-17.

¹⁴⁸ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 28 September 1977, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Victorian Council of Social Services, *Too little too late: a report of the emergency relief operation during the Victorian power restrictions, October 1977*, VCOSS, Collingwood, 1978.

¹⁵⁰ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 21 September 1977, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Chris pp. 2, 8.

¹⁵² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 23 September 1977, p. 1.

¹⁵³ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 21 September 1977, p. 1.

by the AMWSU, forced stand downs across the state in a variety of industries.¹⁵⁴ The restrictions included ‘no electricity for general industry, half power for business lighting and public transport, and rationing of briquette supplies’.¹⁵⁵ Large LV industries had to reduce production or even to close.¹⁵⁶ It was only at this point that coverage of the dispute in the news media, even in the LV, began in earnest. The restrictions were seen by newspapers of the Left as a means of turning public opinion against the strikers,¹⁵⁷ but were defended by the SECV as resulting from significant deterioration to plant for generating and coal winning.¹⁵⁸

The SECV Commissioners had noted that ‘the Cabinet Industrial Sub-Committee had been informed regularly of the Commission’s course of action and they had indicated their agreement’.¹⁵⁹ The SECV had also kept the Minister for Minerals and Energy fully informed during the course of the dispute, but it was only after electricity restrictions had been imposed that the Premier and Cabinet became concerned.¹⁶⁰ The Premier’s response was to meet with the Secretary of the VTHC Ken Stone on the 27 September to ask whether the VTHC and the ACTU could intervene in order to help settle the dispute. He (Stone) had been in contact with Bob Hawke, who agreed to raise the matter with his own officers.

¹⁵⁴ *Amalgamated News*, v. 3, no. 8, October 1977, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 26 September 1977.

¹⁵⁶ See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 28 September 1977; 30 September 1977; 27 January 1978, p. 7; 22 February 1978, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ *Tribune*, 12 October 1977, p.1

¹⁵⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Restrictions reasons, 23 September 1977; *The Age*, 27 September 1977, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ PROV, VPRS 9670/P1/Unit 59, Minutes of Commissioners’ meeting, 29 September 1977.

¹⁶⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977.

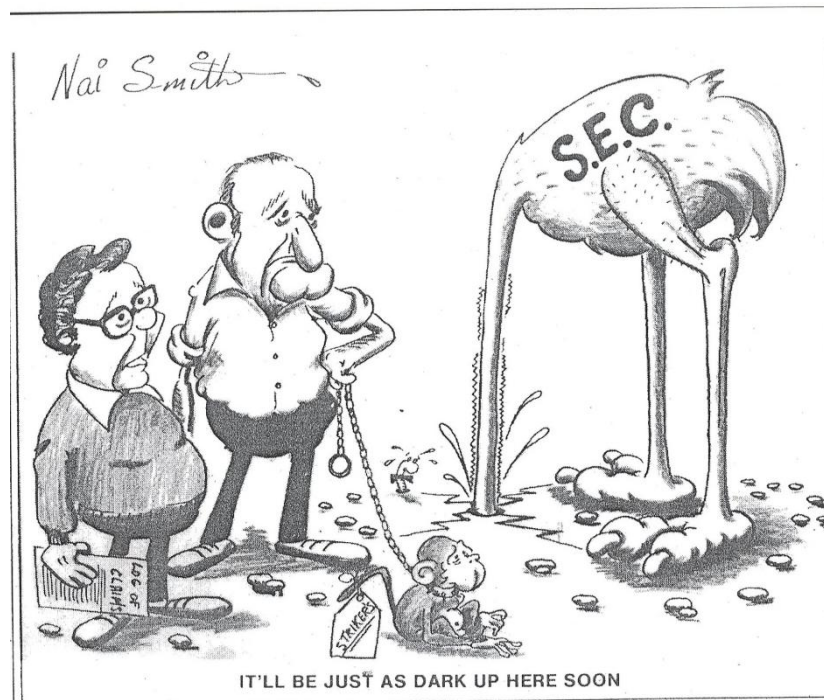


Figure 6.1. It'll be just as dark up here soon. *Latrobe Valley Express*, 23 September 1977, p. 4.

Commissioner Vosti recommenced hearings on the dispute on 27 September,¹⁶¹ despite the maintenance unions still being on strike. John Halfpenny announced his appearance for the AMWSU, suggesting that the dispute was now being taken more seriously by union state officials, who recognised the need to obtain a resolution. The SECV requested the matter be heard by a Full Bench as a matter of public interest because of the possible effect of granting any of the claims. This request was duly placed before Sir John Moore, President of the ACAC, who instructed Commissioner Vosti to continue hearing the case pending a decision. Commissioner Vosti acquiesced to the shop stewards present remaining as an audience but not as spokespeople, in any proceedings in conference.

By this stage, it was clear that the focus of the decision-making had been removed from the SECV in the LV to the Melbourne managers, the SECV Chairman

¹⁶¹ The detail on the ACAC proceedings between 27 September and 1 October 1977 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/111 unless otherwise indicated.

and the government, thus making it even less likely that negotiation and compromise would be utilised to end the dispute. Another advertisement in the *Latrobe Valley Express* placed over the signature of Bill De Campo (AGM (O)), blamed the maintenance workers for the electricity restrictions.¹⁶²

The following day, 28 September, Commissioner Vosti informed the parties that the unions were expected to commence detailed argument on the wages claim on 29 September and to call a mass meeting for no later than the morning of Friday 30 September with a recommendation for an immediate return to work. The SECV for its part was to complete its submissions on 30 September.¹⁶³ It was apparent that Commissioner Vosti was working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, although he made it clear that no decision would be handed down until there was a return to work. Commissioner Vosti threatened not to proceed if a union meeting was not arranged for Friday to consider a return to work.

The union arguments placed before Commissioner Vosti were that the SECV was a unique industry that should adequately recompense its employees to avoid disruption to supply; that there were relativity issues within the SECV; that there were anomalies relative to workers employed outside the SECV; and anomalies with wage rates paid to NSW electricity workers. An increase of \$20 minimum was proposed, although \$40 had been requested. The rebutting arguments of the SECV centred on the wage indexation guidelines and their lack of applicability to the case before the ACAC. Mention was also made of the 'more than generous' wage increase awarded by Commissioner Vosti in 1974 to the Metal Trades employees at the SECV, which placed these workers in a good position relative to other unions within the SECV, as well as flow ons from the Metal Industry Award, 1971. Commissioner Vosti was critical of both

¹⁶² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 28 September 1977, p. 6.

¹⁶³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 4 October 1977.

the unions and the SECV for their delaying tactics, particularly the unions which, he said, did not seem to want the matter resolved.¹⁶⁴

On 28 September, the public was apprised of the gravity of the situation with the announcement of the possibility of no television broadcast of the replay of the Victorian Football League (VFL) grand final on Saturday 1 October (the game the previous weekend had been a draw for only the second time in the VFL's history).¹⁶⁵ However, the SECV eased the power restrictions slightly due to reduced weekend demand, which allowed the grand final game to be telecast live.¹⁶⁶

A mass meeting of strikers at Morwell Oval on 30 September, after hearing reports of developments since the last meeting, confirmed that the strike would continue. The meeting demanded, in part, that the SECV withdraw its Section 34 request for a reference bench; that the SECV reply to non-wage claims by Monday 3 October; and that Commissioner Vosti hand down his decision by Thursday 6 October. If these conditions were met, then a further meeting on the 4 October would consider a resumption of work.¹⁶⁷ The SECV advised Commissioner Vosti that evening that 'subject to a resumption of work without bans and limitations, it would withdraw its application for a reference and that on a return to work, would make its offers available'.¹⁶⁸ The offers were known to those stewards and officials attending the hearing, but had not been able to be passed on to the strikers.

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By this time, not only the SECV and the strikers, but also Commissioner Vosti had taken a resolute stance. In an attempt to break the stalemate, at a private conference on 1 October Commissioner Vosti brokered a proposal for consideration by the parties.

¹⁶⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Hearing before Commissioner Vosti, 29 September 1977.

¹⁶⁵ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 28 September 1977.

¹⁶⁶ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 30 September 1977.

¹⁶⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Resolution from mass meeting ... , 30 September 1977.

¹⁶⁸ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/111, transcript 1 October 1977, p. 135.

Included in the proposal was the offer by the SECV to withdraw its Section 34 request for a Full Bench hearing. In addition, it would make its offers on the matters already considered available to the official conducting the mass meeting on 4 October if there was a decision to return to work immediately on a limited basis, and a full return without bans and limitations from Monday 10 October. The formal offer from Commissioner Vosti included timelines for argument and the handing down of a decision on 12 October, but made it clear that the basic step was an immediate return to work on the basis proposed on 23 September.

The LV SECV shop stewards met on 4 October to consider the Vosti proposals. They resolved to recommend to a mass meeting that they be rejected since they did not meet the guidelines established at the mass meeting held on the 30 September.¹⁶⁹ About 50 stewards attended the meeting, with only one dissenting vote, and Sam Armstrong apparently estimated that another fortnight would see the men achieve their aims.¹⁷⁰ The state government, aware of the recommendation to be put to the mass meeting, and perhaps feeling the need to be seen to be doing something, announced that it would invoke the ESA if the men didn't return to work. This was poor timing, since while this may have been directed to influencing the result of the vote,¹⁷¹ there was no indication that this happened, and it may in fact have had the opposite effect.

The stewards' recommendation was considered at the mass meeting held at Yallourn Oval later that day and was accepted. The strikers rejected the Vosti proposal by a margin of approx 1500 to 35 and made it clear that a return to work was unacceptable until progress had been made. This decision probably passed up the best opportunity for the strikers to achieve a positive result from their claims. Commissioner

¹⁶⁹ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGTLC Log of claims 1977 no 2, Message received by telephone from Mr C Faure, 4 October 1977.

¹⁷⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Our understanding of key comments at the meeting of shop stewards on 3 October 1977, 3? October 1977.

¹⁷¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-11.

Vosti was known for settling disputes ‘by increasing the quantum of money paid’.¹⁷² He had been inclined to do so again on this occasion,¹⁷³ since his style was to ‘send everyone away half happy’.¹⁷⁴ However, on this occasion, both sides were intransigent. Once the package offer was rejected, it gave the appearance that the unions were not prepared to negotiate. It signalled the end of Commissioner Vosti’s ability to resolve the situation. In addition, it confirmed the opinion of the state and federal governments that such militant unionism needed to be curbed. The state government, having introduced the possibility of using the ESA, was left with little choice but to proceed to do so.



Figure 6.2. It was just about right until he stuck his nose in. *Latrobe Valley Express*, 7 October 1977, p. 4.

Accordingly, on 4 October, the Premier rushed amendments to the ESA through the Victorian parliament. The amending Act (the *Essential Services (Right to Work) Act 1977 (Vic)*) gave the state government unprecedented power to outlaw strikes, and

¹⁷² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-2.

¹⁷³ Personal communication with Bruce.

¹⁷⁴ Personal communication with Allan Vosti.

empowered the Governor-in-Council to declare a state of emergency in relation to any essential service (as listed in the Act) under specified conditions. On 5 October, Premier Hamer invoked the ESA for the first time in Victoria and asked the Governor to declare a state of emergency.¹⁷⁵ The Hamer government was seen as ‘stirring the pot’¹⁷⁶, by not allowing the SECV to negotiate,¹⁷⁷ thus effectively leaving the latter no role in the dispute.¹⁷⁸

The declaration of a state of emergency had the effect of provoking the SECV operational unions, the FEDFA and the MOA, which had until then only given lip service to the strikers, to provide statements of outright support.¹⁷⁹ The Victorian Branch of the FEDFA issued a statement saying that it fully supported the LV maintenance workers claims, urging negotiation instead of punitive action, and advised that any machinery repaired by other than those in dispute would not be operated. The MOA SEC Branch issued a similar statement advising that members should refuse to perform the duties of striking workers or supervise ‘outsiders’ on the job. The smaller AIMPE advised its members to refuse to perform duties other than their own, including supervising ‘outsiders’.¹⁸⁰ Unity in the LV at last, with the CGTLC Acting Secretary commenting that ‘the FEDFA is right behind us now’ and that it had also made a significant contribution to the Distress Fund.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ *The Age*, 6 October 1977, p. 9; Robert Darroch and David Armstrong, ‘Anatomy of an industrial crisis’, *The Bulletin*, vol. 99, no. 5079, 15 October 1977a, pp. 16-21.

¹⁷⁶ Interviews with Ken p. 8; Chris p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Evan pp. 4, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Interviews with Paul C. p. 4; Terry p. 6; Luke p. 5; John E. p. 25.

¹⁷⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-11.

¹⁸⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, The essential services act, 6 October 1977; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2 File 4, That this meeting of the Executive of the Victorian Branch of the F.E.D.F.A. ... 6 October 1977; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Notice, 6 October 1977.

¹⁸¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 7 October 1977, p. 17; *The Age*, 6 October 1977, p. 4.

The APEA on the other hand had agreed to allow its members to supervise apprentices and restore plant once restrictions were imposed, as long as the SECV indemnified them for doing so.¹⁸²

It quickly became apparent that the declaration of a state of emergency and the threat to use the ESA had inflamed the situation in the LV. It united the major operations unions in their support for the maintenance workers. The Government had misread the likely reactions to its decisions and did not have any firm plan to ensure generation in the face of combined resistance from the operations unions. While the LV managers had been concerned about the reactions of other unions, there had been no real expectation that such a strong and united response would occur. Local industrial knowledge had been overruled perhaps by SECV Melbourne, where work was carried out in a far different industrial environment. The SECV noted after the dispute ended that had the ESA been used, a ‘confrontation of monumental proportions’¹⁸³ could have resulted. No one in Australia would have been happy,¹⁸⁴ the operations unions would have walked off the job, and the result may have been a general strike.¹⁸⁵

The Minister for Minerals and Energy, as the proclaimed minister to administer the ESA, had received advice from the SECV concerning likely reaction by the FEDFA and MOA to any implementation of the ESA. He had been informed that prospective union actions could result in a range of conditions, from a complete cessation of work resulting in the shutting down of the power system, to the acceptance of plant maintenance and restoration work that would result in the progressive return to normal supply. The most likely scenario was expected to be the maintenance of only a minimum

¹⁸² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Use of professional engineers to maintain essential supply, 1 May 1973; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-8.

¹⁸³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-11.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with John H. p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Ken p. 9.

level of generation with no further restoration of plant beyond that level.¹⁸⁶ State Cabinet was later to suggest that in the event of LV FEDFA and MOA members refusing to work with outside contractors, it should itself shut down all electricity supply to the State (an extraordinary suggestion, and perhaps unlikely to be understood by the good citizens). The SECV pointed out in response that this decision could only be made by Parliament.¹⁸⁷

Prime Minister Fraser was adamant that the men should get nothing.¹⁸⁸ In a decision calculated to cause maximum hardship to those workers laid off because of the power restrictions, the Fraser Cabinet agreed that unemployment benefits should be refused to those workers put out of work as a result of industrial action by others.¹⁸⁹ Cabinet noted however that if it decided to act in support of the Victorian government, it would be appropriate to 'publicly invite the intervention of the ACTU to settle the dispute.'¹⁹⁰

The effects of the strike on both a personal and community level were by now significant. LV businesses were laying off staff, including the working wives of strikers. It was estimated that Morwell traders alone had lost about \$2.5 million and that some businesses would never recover. Some families had been granted special hardship loans from the local credit unions (at normal interest rates) in order to purchase food and other essential items.¹⁹¹ Despite this, there was still public support forthcoming from the wives of strikers, although the local community and union movement was divided over the actions of the strikers, the possibility of bringing in the army, and the perceived role of

¹⁸⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Note on discussion with the Minister, 6 October 1977.

¹⁸⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977.

¹⁸⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Mr Quigley, Department of E&IR, 3 October 1977.

¹⁸⁹ NAA: A13075, 3996.

¹⁹⁰ NAA: A12933, 160.

¹⁹¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 October 1977, p. 1.

Communists in fomenting the industrial action.¹⁹² The ability of the men to maintain the strike was said to be due to the income from their working wives, and now that the local employers of women were laying off staff, there was speculation that this would influence the course of the dispute.¹⁹³

By this stage the pressure was also on the LV SECV management to determine what power generation could be expected should the strike continue. Continuing plant failure meant that there could be a sudden loss of any of the Yallourn W or Hazelwood PS units. The continued use of over-entitlement power from the SMHES would be threatened if there was ‘significant plant loss’ in NSW.¹⁹⁴ There were also additional concerns within the SECV about the FEDFA and MOA joining the dispute, leading to the possibility of a total system shut down with ‘dire consequences to the community’.¹⁹⁵ The SECV, in considering the options available to it, and the possibly strong responses of the FEDFA and the MOA to the use of the ESA, proposed the (in its mind) less confrontational action of sending letters to the strikers advising them to return or lose their jobs.¹⁹⁶

VTHC Secretary Ken Stone, despite his disapproval of the way in which the strike was being conducted, was adamant that the threat to use the ESA was ill-timed and provocative. It would not only make it more difficult to end the strike, but could cause it to be joined by other trade unions.¹⁹⁷ The VTHC held a special Executive meeting on the 5 October, noting that the Council had been unable to meet before then because of the power restrictions. John Halfpenny suggested that the VTHC should oppose use of the ESA, and urge the unions and the SECV to negotiate. Ken Stone noted

¹⁹² See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 October 1977 and 7 October 1977.

¹⁹³ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 7 October 1977, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Notes on current system situation, 5 October 1977.

¹⁹⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Note for Assistant General Manager (Ops), 5 October 1977.

¹⁹⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Action options, 4 October 1977.

¹⁹⁷ YPS, Series YAPS 0051, Box A0009, File Strikes and stop work meetings, News transcript, 3 October 1977, pp. 12-13.

in response to remarks from other members that ‘the present situation was conceived and engineered without going through the proper processes of the trade union movement’.¹⁹⁸

The Executive met again on the following evening, 6 October, to discuss the statement made by the Premier of Victoria the previous evening concerning his proclamation of a state of emergency. This, the Premier said, was aimed at protecting people’s right to work, restore power, get the strikers back to work, and settle the dispute through arbitration.¹⁹⁹

The Commonwealth government had suggested to the state government that it should ask the Full Bench to direct the strikers to return to work. The deferred provisions of the IRB legislation (the Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Bill (no.3) 1977 (Cth)) giving stronger ‘consequences’ for industrial action, were to be introduced to Federal parliament after the meeting of the National Labour Consultative Council (NLCC) on 12 October. Cabinet was of the opinion that the legislation should not be brought forward earlier than this date since a strong reaction from both unions and employers could be expected. It would also be difficult to justify, given the actions of the Victorian government in invoking the ESA, the proceedings in the ACAC, and the lack of any request from the State of Victoria to bring it forward.²⁰⁰

Once Commissioner Vosti’s proposal had been rejected by the strikers, Sir John Moore, President of the ACAC, considered the renewed application of the SECV for a Section 34 reference to a Full Bench. He concluded that the seriousness of the industrial situation meant that in the public interest it should be referred. A Bench comprising Mr Justice Ludeke, Mr Deputy President Isaac and Mr Commissioner Vosti was nominated to sit on 6 October.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC special Executive, 5 October 1977, p. 216.

¹⁹⁹ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC special Executive, 6 October 1977.

²⁰⁰ NAA: A12933, 162.

²⁰¹ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 328, File 80/116, Decision under section 34, 5 October 1977.

The Full Bench of the ACAC duly convened on 6 October.²⁰² As well as the unions and the SECV, representatives of the State of Victoria, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the National Employers Policy Committee (NEPC) sought leave to appear or to intervene. The Full Bench moved into private conference with representatives from the SECV and the various unions involved, including more than 20 LV shop stewards. Most of the discussion was around anomalies, wages and overtime and SIPS payments, with the bench trying to find a settlement acceptable to all parties.²⁰³ Members of the Bench, early in discussions considering the range of issues, had noted on several occasions that an across-the-board wage increase would do nothing to resolve the problems described to them. However it was also made clear that a lack of progress would not be acceptable to the state government and would result in ‘fearsome prospects’. Dr Jessup, counsel for the SECV, objected to the hearing proceeding while the strike was still in force, putting pressure and duress on all parties. The men by now apparently believed that they were close to winning their demands. They felt that the need for urgent maintenance gave them ‘the upper hand’, although the Bench suggested that was ‘a matter of opinion’. These types of statements may have had the effect of strengthening the resolve of all parties not to compromise their positions.

The suggestion was put forward by the Bench that given the crisis situation some flexibility by the SECV in making known its offers on the conditions claims could be the means of facilitating a return to work. However, the SECV was still only willing to disclose its offers as part of a recommendation by stewards and union officials to return to work. John Halfpenny proposed that an interim decision on the wages claim be handed down the following day, based on the evidence heard by Commissioner Vosti, and then a mass meeting would be convened to accept the interim decision and a return

²⁰² The detail on the ACAC proceedings between 6 and 10 October 1977 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 328, File 80/116 unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰³ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC special Executive, 6 October 1977.

to work. At that time, the SECV replies would be made known to the workers. This suggestion was rejected outright by Mr Justice Ludeke, since the Bench would not be the 'executioners of the principles of wage indexation'. He suggested that the two avenues available to the unions were, firstly, an approach to the ACTU to request an Anomalies Conference under the principles of wage indexation, or secondly, an application under the principle of changes in work value. Neither could be guaranteed to resolve the perceived problem to the satisfaction of the strikers.

The Full Bench met in conference again on the 7 October and confirmed that any demand for 'money in the hand' before a return to work would contravene the wage determination principles of the ACAC and would not be acceded to.

Mr Nolan, Secretary of the ACTU, appeared for the first time at the ACAC. His presence was part of the exploration by the unions of whether the ACTU would be prepared to request the President of the ACAC, as a matter of urgency, to convene an Anomalies Conference. Mr Nolan indicated that such an inquiry would be met with a positive response if made by the federal branches of the unions involved. The Bench noted that such a conference, if agreed to, was unlikely to be summonsed without a return to work. A recommendation by the Full Bench that the SECV offers on some of the claims be accepted and accompanied by a return to work was rejected. It was clear that the discussions had reached a stalemate, with the SECV not willing to disclose their offers, the Bench not willing to proceed without a return to work, and the unions, led by John Halfpenny, frustrated that their proposals were not considered. They were not willing to go to a mass meeting to recommend a return to work until there was something positive to offer on the progress of the wage claim.

On 10 October, the Full Bench considered fresh proposals from both the SECV and the unions for resolution of the dispute. Dr Jessup for the SECV, and supported by

the state government, proposed a four-step program to break the stand off. This would involve the unions recommending a return to work, the disclosure by the SECV of their offers, the requesting by the ACTU of an Anomalies Conference to commence at the same time as the resumption of work, and the resumption of the Full Bench hearing the day after the Anomalies Conference to ensure that the claims would be heard on their merits in the most expeditious manner.²⁰⁴

In response, John Halfpenny advised the Bench and the SECV of the strikers' complete rejection of the SECV proposal, as it contained nothing new and it would not be accepted by a mass meeting. Pulling 'rabbits out of a hat',²⁰⁵ John Halfpenny counter-offered that if Commissioner Vosti, as per his offer of 1 October, was able to hand down an interim wage decision, if the SECV conveyed to the unions its offers or replies on the three conditions claims, and if there was a timetable for hearing the wages claim and other matters involved in making an SECV maintenance award, then the workers would consider that proposal with regards to a return to work before 12 October. Commissioner Vosti responded that he was unable to comply with this request because his conditions laid down on 1 October (including a return to work by 4 October) had not been met and because he was now a member of the Reference Bench. In effect, the unions had probably lost their best chance of a positive result (in wages increase terms anyway) to the dispute when they chose not to accept the Vosti package deal of 1 October. Commissioner Vosti had settled previous disputes by increasing wage rates and it is not unreasonable to assume that he was likely to have done the same on this occasion.²⁰⁶ The apparent refusal of the unions to compromise on a return to work, as well as the SECV

²⁰⁴ Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), Legislative Assembly, 12 October 1977, p. 10223.

²⁰⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, HSV7 News, 9 October 1977.

²⁰⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-2; Personal communication with Bruce.

procrastination ('a pair of hopeless bastards'),²⁰⁷ may have contributed to a perception by the President of the ACAC and the public that there was no progress being made.

The Full Bench adjourned to allow a meeting called by the ACTU to proceed on 11 October. This signalled the entry of its high-profile President, Bob Hawke, into the dispute. Known as a dispute-settler rather than a dispute-winner, his presence was not generally welcomed by the LV stewards and rank and file, because of his perceived sell out in 1972 in the annual leave case.²⁰⁸ However, a sigh of relief seemed to come from the State government and the SECV once he applied himself in energetic fashion to brokering a compromise that all parties could agree to. He was seen as 'the white knight'²⁰⁹ who would negotiate an end to the dispute. This intervention was particularly noticeable in comparison to the VTHCs apparent lack of action.²¹⁰

By this time, in the words of AGM (O) Mr Bill De Campo, the situation was 'very grave'.²¹¹ The VTHC was still refusing to guarantee minimum power generation, and a generating unit at Yallourn W PS had failed. Tighter power restrictions came into effect from midnight on 9 October, mainly affecting domestic use of power: all heating was banned, and lighting was allowed in two rooms only. By this time, the SECV had used almost two-thirds of its annual power quota from the SMHES in only three months, and this probably contributed to the decision to tighten power restrictions.²¹² LV plant was said to be at about only 30% of installed capacity.²¹³

Premier Hamer had asked the Commonwealth government to initiate proceedings to deregister the unions involved in the dispute, but the latter declined to do for 'sound

²⁰⁷ Personal communication with Allan Vosti.

²⁰⁸ *The Battler*, 22 October 1977, p. 5; Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, p. 223.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Evan p. 15.

²¹⁰ Interview with Frank p. 13.

²¹¹ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 7 October 1977.

²¹² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Minister for Minerals and Energy, Question no. 2744, 6 October 1977.

²¹³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 1, Reputation [sic] of Halfpenny's claims on restrictions, 10 October 1977.

industrial relations reasons'.²¹⁴ So on 11 October, the State government applied to invoke the bans clauses already existing in various awards, through a Section 33 notification to the ACAC that could result in penal proceedings.²¹⁵ The Hamer government also applied to deregister four of the unions involved in the dispute.²¹⁶ The actions of the government were met by calls for a state-wide general strike and mass picketing to shut down the Victorian power industry.²¹⁷ The state was seen to be 'on the brink of disaster',²¹⁸ and the conference convened by Bob Hawke as the last chance for a peaceful settlement before the Premier took drastic action. This may have been a way of forcing the state branches of the unions, as well as the VTHC, to apply further pressure on the strikers to return to work.

The ACTU had called a meeting of representatives from the VTHC, state and federal branches of the unions involved, and the shop stewards, for the 11 October to discuss 'all aspects of the dispute.'²¹⁹ The SECV had apparently acknowledged that there were anomalies, and Hawke believed that the Bench would find for the maintenance men in terms of money, but how much was the question.²²⁰ There was a rumour that an increase of at least twelve dollars would be granted by the ACAC.²²¹ The ACTU President conferred during the day with the Victorian Premier and members of the ACAC including the President, Sir John Moore. Bob Hawke made it clear at the ACTU meeting that neither the ACAC, the state government nor the SECV would make or endorse any decision that would breach wage indexation guidelines, thus

²¹⁴ NAA: A13075, 4140.

²¹⁵ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 12 October 1977, p. 10222; GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0001, File Industrial General, Maintenance employees' dispute, 3 November 1977.

²¹⁶ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 12 October 1977, p. 10222.

²¹⁷ State Library of Victoria (SLV), Riley and Ephemera Collection (Riley), File Strikes, One out, all out, 19 October 1977.

²¹⁸ *The Age*, 11 October 1977, p. 9.

²¹⁹ UMA, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, ACTU circular no. 220/1977, 10 October 1977.

²²⁰ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, File 41/30, notes from 11 October 1977.

²²¹ Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, p. 223.

consideration of anomalies external to the SECV was not going to happen.²²² The only alternatives for the claim were either an Anomalies Conference or a work value case.²²³ There were no other options. The demand for ‘money in hand’, described as ‘selfish demands and bloody-minded stubbornness’,²²⁴ before a return to work, wasn’t going to happen. All that could be done now was to negotiate a return to work with the minimum loss of face.²²⁵ The promise of an anomalies hearing gave the stewards a way out of the impasse. It gave the appearance that the claim was progressing favourably, even though there were few options left for the strikers.

The LV shop stewards (‘surly but desperate’)²²⁶ met at Morwell at 9.30pm that evening to consider their options, and eventually agreed to recommend a return to work to allow an Anomalies Conference to proceed. It was proposed that President Moore would hear arguments on anomalies in the SECV. If he found for their existence, President Moore would then recall the Full Bench on Friday 14 October to coincide with the recommended return to work. If the Full Bench sat, it would hear the case through the weekend, and hand down a decision on the following Monday 17 October. The VTHC Executive agreed to have contingency plans in place to meet if the mass meeting should reject the recommendation to return to work, and to consider calling a meeting of the Council to enable a report and recommendations to go to the affiliated unions.²²⁷

Meanwhile, support within the community for the strikers continued to grow, and it increased with the amending of the ESA. Public events included rallies in the City Square in Melbourne in support of the strikers, such as those held on both Monday 11

²²² VTHC, 101/20, Box 163, Item 96b/1978, Notes from meeting 10 October 1977; UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC Executive, 12 October 1977.

²²³ Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union, *The 1977 Latrobe Valley power strike*, p. 8.

²²⁴ *The Age*, 11 October 1977, p. 9.

²²⁵ Joe Manton, 'Nine wasted, futile weeks', *The Bulletin*, 22 October 1977a, pp. 20-22.

²²⁶ Robert Darroch and David Armstrong, 'How Hawke worked to turn on the lights', *The Bulletin*, vol. 99, no. 5081, October 29 1977b, pp. 15-19, p. 17.

²²⁷ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC Executive, 12 October 1977.

October and Tuesday 12 October, organised by a group called the Committee in Solidarity with the Power Workers Strike.²²⁸ In the LV, the strike and its effects continued to be a major topic of debate, with letter writers arguing the pros and cons, the mishandling of the dispute and the threat to ‘the social and democratic way of life as we know it’.²²⁹ The spectre of Communist influence (referring to the known political affiliations of Sam Armstrong and John Halfpenny) and the unwillingness of the workers to think for themselves were still common themes. Both wives and families had a stake in the progress of the dispute, and the mass meetings were attended by women and children to show their support for whatever decision their men would make.²³⁰ Businesses asked their customers to let them know if they were on strike, so that they would not be pressed for payment of bills, but it is hard to imagine these proud workers doing that – taking a loan to pay bills would perhaps be seen as a more palatable option. The SECV continued to publicise its side of the dispute, with another advertisement placed in the *Latrobe Valley Express* advising its proposal for resolution, including its offer to advance all strikers one weeks pay on the day after work resumed.²³¹

The promised Anomalies Conference²³² took place on 12 October with major submissions presented by the ACTU, FIA, ETU and the SECV. While there was no agreement as to the existence of the alleged anomalies, President Moore decided that on the basis of factors within the SECV wage structure an arguable case existed. He duly referred the matter to an Anomalies Bench comprising the same members as the previous Section 34 Reference Bench.

²²⁸ SLV, Riley, File Strikes, Victory to the power strike! Demonstrate 11 October 1977, and, Victory to the power strike, Demonstrate 12 October 1977.

²²⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 12 October 1977, p. 14. See also other letters in the *Latrobe Valley Express*, 12 and 14 October 1977.

²³⁰ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 14 October 1977, p. 1.

²³¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 12 October 1977, p. 10.

²³² The detail on the ACAC Anomalies Conference and Anomalies Bench proceedings between 12 and 18 October 1977 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS8916/P1/Unit 328, File 80/117 pts 1 and 2 unless otherwise indicated.

The Anomalies Bench proceedings commenced later the same day. The process suggested was substantially the same as that proposed by the ACTU – a mass meeting on 13 October to consider the offers from the SECV and a recommendation to return to work on a 40-hour week basis from midnight that day, and normal working from day shift on the 17 October; anomalies proceedings on the 13 and 14 October with the decision to be handed down within three days of completion; a further mass meeting on 17 October to consider progress; and the dealing with outstanding matters (including unacceptable SECV offers) as soon as practicable thereafter by the Full Bench.²³³ Although the Bench would cooperate in the expeditious hearing of the matter, it could give no guarantee that the decision would be brought down on Monday 17 October. The ACAC was continuing to hold firm to its stance that there would be no action on the wage issue without a return to work.

The Anomalies Bench proceedings on 13 October commenced with the ACTU presenting submissions on behalf of the 11 unions involved. Mr Nolan spoke of the multitude of awards, determinations and classifications that operated, some paid rates and some minimum rates awards; as well as the SIPS/special payment (third column) issue; and the power industry as a key industry. He proposed looking at ten particular classifications as exemplars of the skills and responsibilities required for working in the SECV. The ACTU noted in addition that the metal tradesmen had lost their relative position when compared to non-tradesmen working under different awards. Three of the unions involved in the dispute which were not party to the Metal Trades Award, that is the ABCE&BLF, the ASC&J, and the BWIU, wished to maintain their existing relativities to tradesmen in the building trades, as well as to other SECV tradesmen. It was suggested that this could be done through the conjoint consideration of separate

²³³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 17 October 1977.

awards. This recognised that that the latter three unions had already been before Commissioner Vosti earlier in 1977 for consideration of a separate SECV award.

A mass meeting of the strikers went ahead on Thursday 13 October²³⁴ at the Morwell Football Oval, with John Halfpenny reporting on events over the previous week to the assembled workers: that the SECV initially refused to discuss the issues, with a 'no' response to everything and pressing for a return to work; a Full Bench sitting on Monday 10 October had not resulted in any further response to the claims; the meeting convened by the ACTU on the 11 October recommended a return to work to allow an anomalies hearing to proceed. John Halfpenny then advised that the SECV had now responded on some of the claims, with a proposal for an increase to meal allowances, the substitution of Easter Tuesday in lieu of Easter Saturday as a public holiday, and overtime for temporary shifts to be at double time. He suggested that this response from the SECV could be viewed as a sign of a willingness to now discuss the issues in full. John Halfpenny noted that an Anomalies Conference had been held the day before, 12 October, with representatives of the ACTU and VTHC.²³⁵ Sir John Moore had considered the three broad grounds presented to him: a comparison of rates within the SECV to those external to the SECV; the SIPS payments; and anomalies within the wage structure of the SECV, and ruled that the case should be argued on the basis of internal relativities only. In response, an Anomalies Bench was convened, and a timetable for the case established, with a decision to be handed down within three days, that is no later than the following Monday 17 October (although this was the soonest that a decision was likely to be handed down, as the statement from the Bench prior to the hearing had clarified). While much heckling greeted this announcement, John Halfpenny

²³⁴ The detail on the mass meeting is based on a tape recoding of this meeting lent to me by Lloyd Davies.

²³⁵ UMA, 95/96, Box 103, Victorian State Administrative Committee, 17 October 1977.

added that any decision from the Anomalies Bench would be effective from the date of a return to work. This statement was greeted with applause.

The stewards had been split on what recommendation was to be put to the mass meeting, but reluctantly agreed to put a recommendation to return to work. Questions and interjections from the rank and file showed concern over any appeal by the SECV, and about why the ACTU in the person of Bob Hawke had become involved. Speakers pointed out the ACTU's lack of movement on the 35-hour week, 'being sold down the drain', and predicted that this would happen again. Sam Armstrong put the motion for a return to work, but pointed out that if the vote was to stay out, the men would be used 'as the vehicle for the biggest political showdown this country has ever had'.

Subsequent speakers for the return to work emphasised that any decision to take on the Hamer government should wait until the decision from the ACAC. It was also pointed out that a return to work showed the willingness of the strikers to compromise. Speakers against a return to work viewed it as a defeat, since it would enable the SECV to have all the required maintenance performed, eliminating their bargaining power and putting the dispute back where it started. George Wragg reminded the men about all the support for the strike coming in from Australian workers, and that 'the eyes and the ears of every worker in Australia' would be waiting for their decision. An amendment to the motion, to delay a return to work until Monday 17th was discussed but received little support, since this would mean that the Anomalies Bench would not sit over the weekend.

Sam Armstrong urged the men to keep politics out of their decision, not to allow themselves to become 'a political football', but to make the decision which best served their interests as SECV workers. They needed to decide not through what the press said, 'making some statements that are not entirely true', but by what they knew from their

workmates and their stewards. The strikers voted overwhelmingly to return at midnight that day (13 October) on a 40-hour shift basis only, and with a full return from Monday 17 October with no restrictions, to await the decision of the ACAC.²³⁶ A further mass meeting was called for Monday 17 October. Obtaining agreement to return to work was a significant achievement by Sam Armstrong,²³⁷ given the reluctance of the men to believe that a fair decision would be obtained from the ACAC. Sam Armstrong was later to comment that some of the workers were against the return to work to such an extent that they never really started to work.²³⁸

A review of LV power plant prepared on 13 October for the SECV Chairman noted the continued deterioration of plant, low operational coal reserves and seriously depleted hydro reserves. Power generation at that time was barely meeting the demands of the more severe restrictions imposed on 9 October.²³⁹ However, as a result of the short return to work, a major generating unit at Hazelwood was restored to service, and output from Morwell PS was increased. This led to a slight easing of electricity restrictions over the weekend, allowing for increased television viewing and a partial start up of industry on the weekend.²⁴⁰ This was via the lifting of restrictions on industry on alternate days from October 15.²⁴¹ However, while some plant was returned to service, other systems and equipment continued to fail and could not be repaired until after the end of the strike.²⁴²

The Anomalies Bench continued its hearing on Friday 14 October with SECV submissions, as well as those from the Victorian government, Commonwealth

²³⁶ *The Sun*, 14 October 1977, p. 2; UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 1977 dispute (3), Recommendation to meeting, 13 October 1977.

²³⁷ 'Red scare in the unions'.

²³⁸ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, Talk to the NTU, 12 April 1986.

²³⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Review of system/plant demand, 13 October 1977.

²⁴⁰ *The Age*, 15 October 1977, p. 1; PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 14 October 1977.

²⁴¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Report on effects of industrial action by LV maintenance personnel June/October 1977, 2 November 1977.

²⁴² Vines, *A history of Morwell Open Cut: its origins and development to June 1995*, p. 248.

government and the NEPC. The Bench reminded the parties that it would bring down a decision within three days of the end of the hearing, which was scheduled for Saturday morning 15 October. The next day, Saturday 15 October, John Halfpenny and Mr Nolan replied for the unions, and the SECV responded to questions from the Bench, which then adjourned.

It was noteworthy that the VTHC was absent from the proceedings, particularly as it was a signatory to the SIPS agreement, one of the relativity issue factors. The ACAC members appeared to attach some significance to this absence.²⁴³ Was this the result of the agreement that the ACTU would lead the case or a reflection of the earlier VTHC non-support for the whole dispute and therefore a wish not to be involved at all? If the latter then could this have influenced the decision of the Bench? The VTHC appeared content to let the LV shops stewards work out how to resolve yet another unauthorised action initiated by the LV SECV stewards.²⁴⁴ The VTHC had not met as a Council since 8 September, partly as a result of the power restrictions. However, the lack of apparent involvement by the VTHC was noticeable and also commented on by those involved in the dispute. Comments concerning the VTHC included that it 'stopped at the tram tracks'²⁴⁵, was 'hopeless'²⁴⁶, and that it played no role in the dispute.²⁴⁷

The mass meeting held at Yallourn Oval on Monday 17 October²⁴⁸ to hear the result of the Anomalies Bench started, as had become the custom, with a report by John Halfpenny. He advised that the hearing had gone on for longer than scheduled, because the unions had found that they needed more time to present and argue their case than they had expected. The unions had proposed two solutions to the ACAC: that the

²⁴³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2 File 4, Memorandum, 19 October 1977.

²⁴⁴ Darroch and Armstrong, 'Anatomy of an industrial crisis'.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Peter p. 8.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Frank p. 13.

²⁴⁷ Interviews with Bruce p. 10; John E. p. 9; John H. pp. 5-6; Ken p. 7.

²⁴⁸ The detail on the mass meeting is based on a tape recoding of this meeting lent to me by Lloyd Davies.

‘special payment’ column of the award that was removed with the advent of SIPS be restored, or that the ACAC examine the internal relativities in the SECV using specific classifications (that is, something less than the original log of claims had requested). It was also suggested that about \$19-29 increase would be required to remove the anomalies. The chair of the meeting, Ted Turnbull, noted that a stewards meeting earlier that morning had a unanimous recommendation to put to the meeting. This was to adjourn until the following day to consider the decision of the ACAC. While there was much unrest at this suggestion, Sam Armstrong pointed out that the Full Bench would not continue with the matter while the men were out on strike. High profile shop steward George Wragg noted that while he had no faith in the Commission, that it was ‘a bosses court’, and ‘a tool of the establishment’, nonetheless it was necessary to ensure that a decision was given down before deciding what to do next, rather than trying to second guess what that decision might be. While there were bitter comments from another speaker that going back to work the previous week had been a poor decision, given the partial lifting of electricity restrictions that had resulted, the motion to reconvene at Morwell the following morning was carried unanimously.

At the same time, the SECV was considering its options in the event that the meeting on the 18 October decided not to return to work, or did return with bans in place. In the former case, the SECV’s preferred course of action was still to send dismissal letters and advertise vacancies, and to hope for a good response. This option was seen as the best way to keep the FEDFA and the MOA at work, although the response from these unions could not be predicted. If the men returned to work with bans on overtime and temporary shift work, the SECV would tolerate this situation until

plant was restored and electricity restrictions lifted, then consider what action would be taken.²⁴⁹

The Anomalies Bench, in a decision which was described by the SECV as showing ‘integrity and courage’ given the enormous pressure on it to give a monetary increase,²⁵⁰ concluded that the matters of the ‘special payment’ column in the Metal Trades Award and SIPS should be taken up by the unions with the VTHC; that the restoration of relativities in some classifications and across some awards would create new wage relativity issues in other areas; and that the Commission had not been given sufficient information to be able to decide on the precise nature and extent of the anomalies issue placed before it.²⁵¹ While the Bench did not appear unsympathetic to the claims of the men, it noted that the problems and issues predated wage indexation, and were due to the correct application of a multiplicity of awards and determinations, and the application of SIPS. All of these were matters which constrained any attempt by the ACAC to reconstruct the wages structure of the SECV. It was also later suggested that Bob Hawke’s comments on the amount of money that might be forthcoming had reached the ACAC and made the members of the Anomalies Bench unhappy.²⁵² So the men received nothing, a decision described by Bob Hawke as ‘totally wrong and absurd’²⁵³ and ‘the worst decision ever made by the Commission.’²⁵⁴

Later that morning, the mass meeting at Morwell Oval²⁵⁵ was greeted with the report from John Halfpenny (‘I get all the rotten jobs’) of the Anomalies Bench decision, that ‘we are unable to find any grounds which would justify granting the unions’ claim

²⁴⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Note for Minister for Minerals and Energy, 18 October 1977.

²⁵⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Memorandum, 19 October 1977.

²⁵¹ *Electrical Trades Union of Australia v State Electricity Commission of Victoria* (1977) 194 pt 2 CAR 654.

²⁵² Personal communication with Allan Vosti.

²⁵³ Darroch and Armstrong, ‘How Hawke worked to turn on the lights’, p. 17.

²⁵⁴ *The Amalgamated News*, v.3, no. 8, October 1977, p. 1.

²⁵⁵ The detail on the mass meeting is based on a tape recoding of this meeting lent to me by Lloyd Davies.

for a wage increase'. The announcement of the decision led to furious interjections about why there had been a return to work the previous week. Sam Armstrong noted that if the men chose to follow the recommendation of the stewards for an indefinite stoppage, then it would be a 'long hard battle'. Stewards would be asked to travel around Australia seeking support at the workshop level, and no-one who wasn't prepared to support the motion should put their hand up. It was essential that there be unity and a commitment on everyone's part. The senior stewards appeared united on the recommendation to strike. When George Wragg spoke for the motion, he called this moment the 'point of success', but that if there was no fight, then 'defeat is here and now'. He noted that the response of the ACAC was an insult, and not 'honourable treatment'. Any decision to stay out would inflict great hardship, but he believed that they should fight on, and 'force the issue to an acceptable and honourable result'. The decision rested with the group and each individual to continue the real fight, rather than the play acting of the Court. This will be 'the fight of your lives'.

There were speakers both for and against the motion. Speakers in favour talked about the ACAC being afraid of the state and federal governments. Speakers against noted that the strike could go on forever, people were at rock bottom now, and if the strike continued, they would still end up with nothing. In the end, the motion condemning the Arbitration Commission and agreeing to an indefinite strike was agreed to 'almost unanimously' by a vote of 2,000 votes to 20.²⁵⁶

The response of the Premier to this 'dangerous industrial crisis'²⁵⁷ was immediate. Premier Hamer instructed the SECV to send letters to all strikers that they should return to work by Friday 21 October or forfeit their jobs; he also proposed to resume the deregistration proceedings against four unions, and to ask the ACAC to

²⁵⁶ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 18 October 1977, p. 10407; *The Herald*, 18 October 1977, Final ed., p. 1.

²⁵⁷ Darroch and Armstrong, 'How Hawke worked to turn on the lights', p. 17.

invoke bans clauses.²⁵⁸ These latter two proceedings had been temporarily suspended while negotiations had been proceeding the previous week.

After this vote, the SECV issued notices of dismissal to the workers, the ‘termination letter’, effective from October 21 (later extended to 25 October), in a move which drew the unions closer together.²⁵⁹ The next morning, 19 October, newspaper advertisements appeared seeking maintenance workers for power installations.²⁶⁰ Transport to the LV and assistance in arranging accommodation were offered, with the SECV said to have reserved accommodation throughout the LV in anticipation of the response to the advertisement.²⁶¹ While this action had been threatened, following through with it appeared to be a continuation of the hard-line decision making of the SECV Melbourne administration, and was likely to inflame the situation further. It certainly could not be interpreted as a willingness to compromise or negotiate on the SECV’s part. The LV management, including Bill De Campo, the AGM (O), advised the Minister for Minerals and Energy that suitable external maintenance personnel were likely to be obtained.²⁶² LV management also pointed out that the personnel situation would be quite different if the MOA and the FEDFA took umbrage and joined the dispute. In that case, over 3,000 personnel would be required to safely operate the plant and there was no likelihood of being able to obtain such numbers. In that situation the possibility of a state-wide walkout of all SECV maintenance personnel also existed and had to be considered.²⁶³ While the SECV preference was to have some of the maintenance workers return to work, it was prepared to have maintenance contractors

²⁵⁸ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 18 October 1977, p. 10386.

²⁵⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 October 1977, p. 1; *Australian Financial Review*, 19 October 1977, p. 1; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, Talk to the NTU, 12 April 1986.

²⁶⁰ See for example *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 October 1977, p. 13.

²⁶¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 October 1977, p. 1.

²⁶² This was an optimistic miscalculation. Only 55 applications were received, mostly from residents of the Melbourne metropolitan area. Of these, only 18 were deemed suitable to employ, a minority of whom were tradesmen. Only a few of the strikers returned to work as a result of the letter, see PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review p. 4-2; also PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 332, File 80/128.

²⁶³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Note for Minister for Minerals and Energy, 18 October 1977.

come in (under the ESA) and had already made arrangements with firms such as International Combustion Australia Ltd, Simon Carves and Siemens to provide crews under this scenario.²⁶⁴

Advertising to replace the strikers was an emotive issue and one that was used to put more pressure on the strikers. However the chances of both recruiting sufficient new labour and retaining the non-striking workforce were slim and thus the advertising strategy was probably counter-productive.²⁶⁵ The SECV later conceded that such advertising had been an error of judgment and that had it not been done the dispute ‘would have progressed more favourably’.²⁶⁶

The sending of the termination letter provoked immediate reactions and united the striking maintenance unions and non-striking operations unions.²⁶⁷ The maintenance stewards advised the strikers to ignore the dismissal letter and not to return to work before a mass meeting was called.²⁶⁸ The MOA/ AIMPE in the LV SECV, and the FEDFA (staff sub-branch and Morwell and Yallourn sub-branches) threatened to blacken plant and withdraw labour if any of the striking maintenance workers were dismissed.²⁶⁹ Similar advice was received from the MOA and FEDFA Victorian Branches.²⁷⁰ This late support for the strikers was creating the potential for escalation of the dispute into the critical area of power generation, likely to turn the lights off across Victoria. The actions of the SECV and the state government had provoked the operations

²⁶⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977.

²⁶⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute, November 1977, p. 2-10.

²⁶⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Notes of 28/10/77 discussion with Chairman ... , 27 January 1978.

²⁶⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-9.

²⁶⁸ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 21 October 1977, p. 2; Darroch and Armstrong, 'How Hawke worked to turn on the lights'.

²⁶⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 19 October 1977, p. 1; *The Age*, 19 October 1977, p. 5; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, D. Galbraith, Resolution of meeting (FEDFA staff sub-branch), 19 October 1977; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Attitude to industrial dispute, 21 October 1977; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-9.

²⁷⁰ GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0001, File Industrial General, Maintenance employees' dispute, 3 November 1977.

unions into supporting the strikers. The LV unions were finally showing a united front.²⁷¹ This was morale-boosting for the strikers and the CGTLC, but potentially disastrous for the SECV and the people of Victoria.

This action by the SECV did serve however to move the spotlight away from the Victorian government, which still had no clear plan for how it would go about maintaining electricity supplies in the event of industrial action by the operations unions.²⁷² The alienation of the latter could have placed the remaining plant in jeopardy, and it brought home to the SECV that the MOA, while it represented only staff employees and was not affiliated with the ACTU, was not prepared to be seen as a strike breaker by other unions.²⁷³

The SECV was meeting electricity demand with difficulty,²⁷⁴ although the metropolitan plants were being run to their maximum extent. The amount of power which Victoria had been able to use from the SMHES because of favourable plant conditions in NSW was about 90 per cent of a full years' average entitlement and twice the budget estimate.²⁷⁵ The SECV was commencing discussions with officials of the APEA to have its members undertake essential work in 'emergency situations'.²⁷⁶ By 21 October, the MOA had agreed to a figure of 800 MW for minimum power generation, but only if there were no dismissals.²⁷⁷ This enabled the SECV to continue with their current level of power restrictions. Ironically, the agreement of a minimum generation

²⁷¹ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, Talk to the NTU, 12 April 1986.

²⁷² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Note for Minister for Minerals and Energy, 18 October 1977.

²⁷³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977.

²⁷⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977; PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statement, 21 October 1977.

²⁷⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers strike, 10 November 1977, p. 8.

²⁷⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, Appendix C, p. 19.

²⁷⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Attitude to industrial dispute, 21 October 1977.

level worked to reduce the (previously significant) amount of maintenance work undertaken by apprentices.²⁷⁸

A special meeting of the VTHC executive on 18 October was updated on the decision of the men to strike indefinitely, and there was concern that no new ways to end the dispute had been found. The actions that might follow from the federal or state governments were likely to impact on the whole of the trade union movement. There was a feeling that the maintenance men were so angry that directives of neither the ACTU nor the VTHC would influence them. Some members hoped that the meeting called by the ACTU for the next day, 19 October, would find a resolution. It was agreed that the VTHC would support any moves to settle the dispute, but if that failed then an ACTU Interstate Disputes Committee should be convened.²⁷⁹

The Council of the VTHC had not met since early September, partly due to electricity restrictions, and partly because the meeting scheduled for 13 October had been adjourned due to the controversy which the VTHC Executive felt would be generated by the dispute.²⁸⁰ This had allowed support for the dispute to build in Victorian trade unions. The regular meeting of the VTHC Council was held on Thursday 20 October, with the public gallery closed and 124 delegates in attendance. Secretary Stone gave the Council a lengthy report on the dispute and its history since March of that year, including the attempts to garner support for the dispute across the state through imposition of overtime bans. The Left showed solid support for the strikers, and Ken Stone was on the minority side. It was suggested that the VTHC should either support

²⁷⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Notes from Commissioners' meeting, 27 October 1977.

²⁷⁹ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC special Executive, 18 October 1977.

²⁸⁰ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC Executive, 12 October 1977.

the strikers or wash their hands of them. In the end, a resolution was passed agreeing to the claims of the strikers, but moves to give financial aid were defeated.²⁸¹

Bob Hawke acted quickly to retain his credibility with the strikers once the Anomalies Conference decision was handed down. At the same time he was attempting to negotiate a solution acceptable to all the parties. To this end, on the 19 October, a meeting of unions with members in the SECV was convened by the ACTU, and included the shop stewards involved in the strike, representatives from the ACTU and VTHC, and officials of affiliated federal unions and Victorian state branches of federal unions.²⁸² After six hours of discussion, it was agreed that Bob Hawke should approach Sir John Moore to appoint a Commissioner to conduct a work value study of work done by SECV maintenance workers. During this enquiry, the unions would seek a separate SECV maintenance award, as well as an interim wage decision.²⁸³ Bob Hawke had to use all his skills to convince the LV shop stewards that this, together with a resumption of work, was the way to go.²⁸⁴

The men were reluctant to return to work but were short of money, concerned about the public response to the power restrictions, the extensive stand downs of workers and the determination of the state and federal governments to make the strike a political issue.²⁸⁵ Some of those present said the meeting showed Hawke 'at his best'.²⁸⁶ He had the men 'in the palm of his hand'.²⁸⁷ There was an expectation that an early decision would be available, certainly before the end of the year, and this may have been a factor

²⁸¹ UMA, 105/33, VTHC minutes, 20 October 1977; Darroch and Armstrong, 'How Hawke worked to turn on the lights'.

²⁸² UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC special Executive, 18 October 1977.

²⁸³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Decision of the meeting with members employed in the SECV, 19 October 1977.

²⁸⁴ Darroch and Armstrong, 'How Hawke worked to turn on the lights'.

²⁸⁵ Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, pp. 223-4.

²⁸⁶ Interview with John E. p. 9.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Lindsey p. 30.

which influenced the stewards.²⁸⁸ The proposal was supported by both the SECV and the Victorian Government.²⁸⁹ The Premier had also indicated that if there was a return to work, he would withdraw the dismissal letters, as well as the deregistration proceedings against the unions.²⁹⁰ While Prime Minister Fraser was happy to exploit the strike as an election issue, he was also 'wary of going to the brink.'²⁹¹ The deferred provisions of the IRB legislation were being expedited by the federal government but without declaring it urgent, in case that would hinder options for a settlement of the dispute, and be seen as provocative.²⁹² The new Act was given assent on 21 October, and gave the IRB greater powers to invoke penalties against unions engaging in strikes or bans, and to intervene in and investigate union affairs. It also extended the protection given to individuals regarding union membership and participation in industrial action.²⁹³

The work value case was allocated by Sir John Moore to Commissioner Mansini, a decision that came as an unwelcome surprise to Commissioner Vosti who held the Metal Trades in the Electricity Industry portfolio within the ACAC.²⁹⁴ He had been involved with the dispute from its initial appearance in the ACAC in August, as well as being on the reference Full Bench in October. He was on holiday at the time, but still felt this was 'poaching on his turf'.²⁹⁵ Was Commissioner Vosti seen as too sympathetic to the unions? The infamous 1974 \$4+\$7 decision²⁹⁶ had been described by the Full Bench

²⁸⁸ Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

²⁸⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics Victorian Office, *Victorian Year Book 1978*, Victorian Office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Melbourne, 1978, p. 797.

²⁹⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Note to Manager, Area Administration, 20 October 1977.

²⁹¹ *The National Times*, October 24-29 1977, p. 4.

²⁹² NAA: A12933, 186.

²⁹³ Clifford B. Donn, 'Industrial relations under a conservative government: a comment', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 22, no. 3, September 1980, pp. 342-347; R.N. Herbert, 'Employer matters in 1977', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 1978, pp. 84-91; Hutson, *Penal colony to penal powers*, p. 307.

²⁹⁴ UMA, 106/59, Box 6, Item 7/1, 7 April 1975.

²⁹⁵ Personal communication with Allan Vosti.

²⁹⁶ *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1974) 160 CAR 860.

on appeal as 'generous'.²⁹⁷ Commissioner Vosti was said to have 'had his wrist slapped'²⁹⁸ by Sir John Moore, the President of the ACAC, as a result. Yet while his impatience with both sides in the earlier stages of the dispute was apparent, there could be no doubt that he sought to end the impasse if at all possible. It may have been simply that Commissioner Mansini was available to start straight away. He was also seen as independent, open and honest,²⁹⁹ thus giving his decision an impartiality and fresh perspective which would perhaps be less likely to be appealed.

On Thursday 20 October, Commissioner Mansini commenced hearing the review of work and pay at the SECV.³⁰⁰ He noted that the proceedings had been called by Sir John Moore at the request of Bob Hawke. That request was made following a statement by the Full Bench in the anomalies hearing that any relativity problems within the SECV 'require a comprehensive and systematic review of work and pay'. Bob Hawke appeared for the ACTU, and first apologised for any misinterpretation of his remarks after the handing down of the Full Bench anomalies decision as being directed personally to members of the Bench rather than to the scope of the decision. Hawke went on to note that in addition to wage increases, the unions were seeking a separate maintenance award for metal and building trades workers in the SECV; for the acceptance of the concept of an interim decision; and for the SECV not to proceed with deregistration proceedings and the attempts to recruit outside labour.

The SECV opposed the proposals for a separate award and an interim decision, but did agree to extend the effective date of the 'termination letter' if a decision to return to work was made. In like manner, the state government agreed not to continue with

²⁹⁷ *Her Majesty the Queen in right of the State of Victoria and Others v The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union and Others* (1975) 164 CAR 200, p. 206.

²⁹⁸ Personal communication with Bruce.

²⁹⁹ Interviews with Ron p. 3; Ken p. 8.

³⁰⁰ The detail on the ACAC proceedings between 20 October 1977 and 21 March 1978 inclusive has been taken from the transcripts in PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 328, File 80/119 pts 1 to 10 unless otherwise indicated.

deregistration and proceedings under Section 33 of the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904* (Cth) to invoke bans clauses, if there was a quick return to work. The Commonwealth government was adamant that there should be no hearing until the workers had either returned to work, or had agreed to return to work; that it opposed a general relativities review; and that any application for a new maintenance award should be heard by a Full Bench because of its implications for the general wage-fixing process as well as other areas of the SECV.³⁰¹ The SECV, supported by the state and Commonwealth governments, applied for referral to a Full Bench, which was refused by Sir John Moore on the 21 October. A date to continue the work value case was scheduled for Tuesday 25 October, assuming that a decision had been made by then to resume work.

Discussions between Bob Hawke and the shop stewards resulted in a proposal to return to work to allow the work value hearing, and that recommendation was put to the strikers on Monday 25 October. This recommendation from the stewards was heard in a hostile atmosphere, and it was only the influence of Sam Armstrong (described variously as using ‘the skill of a master tactician’³⁰² or ‘a man with common sense and guts’³⁰³) that changed this attitude. By this time the shop stewards were divided over whether they should stay out or return to work. This became public at the meeting when shop stewards from the ABCE&BLF, the Operative Painters’ and Decorators’ Union of Australia (OPDU) and ETU opposed the motion to return to work.³⁰⁴ While there was much debate about the merits of a return to work with nothing in hand and no promises made, it was viewed as the only solution by many of the shop stewards, now worn down

³⁰¹ NAA: A13075, 4158.

³⁰² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-6.

³⁰³ *Sunday Observer*, 16 October 1977, p. 6.

³⁰⁴ Interviews with John E. p. 18; Ron p. 7; Lloyd Davies, ‘Stepping across the brink’, 1992, p. 30.

and demoralised.³⁰⁵ The resolution recommending the return to work was couched in bitter terms, condemning the Hamer government and the Liberal Party, and reflected the awareness that there was no other option for the strikers. The only suggestion that the strikers could obtain something in the short term from the work value enquiry was a call for an interim decision. Those strikers who opposed the recommendation to end the strike felt that a promise of consideration of their claim in the ACAC was not good enough,³⁰⁶ and that avoiding a confrontation with the government should not have been a reason to return to work.³⁰⁷ Those in favour of a return believed that Bob Hawke had given a good reason for a return to work.³⁰⁸ It was still hard to return to work with their ‘tail between their legs’³⁰⁹ and their pride and self respect gone.³¹⁰ The resolution that was passed expressed gratitude to all the supporters of the dispute, and asked for continuing donations to assist in the alleviation of the personal and social problems being experienced.³¹¹ The mass meeting voted to return from afternoon shift that day, 25 October 1977, without bans, limitations or restrictions. Only about forty dissented.³¹² The men had been out on strike since 9 August apart from some brief returns to work.

The strike was over. The personal effect on many of the strikers had been severe. There was significant financial hardship, family tension, increased domestic violence and marital breakdowns.³¹³ Some of the strikers had been reluctant to accept the assistance available, while others had gone in search of employment.³¹⁴ The return to work, and the loss, ‘came as a shock’.³¹⁵ Not only the rank and file and their stewards,

³⁰⁵ *The Battler*, 12 November 1977, p. 5.

³⁰⁶ Interviews with Gerry p. 8; Lindsey p. 11; Chris p. 11.

³⁰⁷ *Sunday Observer*, 30 October 1977, p.7.

³⁰⁸ Interviews with Lyle p. 16; Evan p. 15.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Lyle pp. 7, 8.

³¹⁰ Interview with Lindsey p. 7.

³¹¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 25 October 1977.

³¹² *The Herald*, 25 October 1977, p. 1.

³¹³ Interviews with Luke pp. 15-17; Vaifoa p. 7; Lyle p. 13,14; Lindsey p. 9; Evan p. 14.

³¹⁴ Interviews with Lyle p. 9; P p. 11.

³¹⁵ Interview with Paul C. pp. 5, 12.

but the operations unions had also expected a win, especially once power restrictions were imposed.³¹⁶

Awareness that the suffering of families and businesses was going to continue for some time prompted a group of women in Morwell to form a 'women's committee' to help families through until Christmas. The committee organised the distribution of food, continuing lunches for primary school children and advice on medical and legal matters.³¹⁷ Donations of money and food to the CGTLC Distress Fund continued to be received after the end of the strike, and more than \$62,000 was distributed in the form of food vouchers. During the course of the strike, over \$221,000 was received in cash donations, together with donations of foodstuffs, toys, soft drinks, and the requirements for a workers picnic at the end of the strike. Local aid agencies such as St Vincent De Paul and the Salvation Army commented that they had been asked for little assistance locally, in contrast to the situation in Melbourne.³¹⁸ However this changed after the end of the strike with an increase in requests for assistance.³¹⁹

There had been every expectation by the SECV that the men would not return to work, and various courses of action had been considered. These options included not opposing a separate award, withdrawing the dismissal letters until Monday 31 October (the date of the deregistration hearing), or activating proceedings to invoke bans clauses under Section 33 of the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904* (Cth). The second option, deferring implementation of the dismissal letters, was preferred since it was deemed likely to prevent an MOA/FEDFA walkout, and would give the ACTU and federal unions more time to handle the strikers. It was also suggested that if the MOA/FEDFA operating personnel were adamant that a walk out would occur, then right wing unions

³¹⁶ Interviews with Chris p. 10; John E. p. 18; Luke p. 19; Malcolm p. 1; Paul B. p. 6; Bruce pp. 4, 5.

³¹⁷ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 26 October 1977, p. 1; *Tribune*, 2 November 1977, p. 12.

³¹⁸ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 26 October 1977; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 4 November 1977.

³¹⁹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 16 November 1977, p. 7.

such as the FIA and ASE (who had no love for the left controlled CGTLC) could be approached directly to initiate a return to work by their members.³²⁰

Now that the men had returned to work, proceedings resumed before Commissioner Mansini on the 25 October. The unions' solicitor, Mr Munro, started by going into 'considerable detail' about the nature of the SECV as a special and unique industry, to support the application for a separate award for maintenance employees,³²¹ and the expectation of the review of benchmark classifications to support a claim for an increase in wage rates. The request for an interim decision was not opposed by the Commissioner, who would consider it about four weeks into the hearing (initially expected to last for about 8 weeks). Unions would also be entitled to argue for a new and separate award within the SECV as part of their presentations before him.³²²

As well as lengthy evidence and submissions, an extensive program of inspections occurred at a number of locations throughout Victoria. Inspections of plant in the metropolitan area were held on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 October, with inspections scheduled for the LV area from Monday 7 November, and in other country centres from Monday 14 November. Both John Halfpenny and Sam Armstrong were involved in all inspections, so that maximum advantage could be taken of the important LV inspection period.³²³

On the 26 October, electricity restrictions were removed completely from 8pm, after 29 days. Restrictions on the availability of briquettes were also lifted, although the SECV stated that it would take weeks to restore plant to normal operating condition.³²⁴ Many LV workers had been stood down, with later estimates including most of the LM

³²⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Structure for Chairman advice to Cabinet, 24 October 1977.

³²¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Dispute C no 3601 of 1977, 25 October 1977.

³²² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, AMWSU circular, 26 October 1977.

³²³ UMA, 95/96, Box 103, State Administrative Committee minutes, 31 October 1977.

³²⁴ PROV, VPRS 9677 P1/Unit 3, Press statements, 25 October 1977, 26 October 1977.

Ericsson workforce (400 people), Diamond cut lingerie (200), Exacto Knitwear (70), and Yarragon Textile Mill (240).³²⁵ These businesses comprised a large part of the local manufacturing workforce for women, and so would have included wives, sisters and daughters of the strikers.

A hearing before the Full Bench proceeded on Monday 31 October in the matter of the Victorian government's application to deregister four of the unions involved in the dispute, namely the AMWSU, the ETU, the FIA and the ASE. When the government suggested that the matter should be adjourned, which would in effect allow it to bring the matter back to the Court in the event of future industrial action, the Full Bench ruled that since the matter of the dispute was before the ACAC, the deregistration application had to either be heard or withdrawn. After discussion, Counsel for the State of Victoria withdrew the application.³²⁶ The deregistration proceedings were originally seen by the state government as a means of involving and maintaining pressure on federal officials of the unions involved, but Justice Smithers of the Federal Court of Australia pointed out during the proceedings that it was 'undesirable' to use deregistration proceedings 'as a lever in particular industrial disputes'.³²⁷

The day after the dispute ended, Prime Minister Fraser called a federal election for 10 December. This was a full 12 months ahead of schedule. There had been a relatively low quarterly increase in the CPI, suggesting some success for the Fraser government's economic policies.³²⁸ To observers, calling an election indicated that the economy and unemployment were not likely to improve in the coming 12 months, and

³²⁵ Trade Union Training Authority, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*, p. 18.

³²⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance employees dispute, 13 December 1977.

³²⁷ VPD, Legislative Council, 8 November 1977, p. 10943.

³²⁸ Peter Samuel, 'Fraser hesitated right to the last possible moment', *The Bulletin*, vol. 99, no. 5082, 5 November 1977, pp. 16-19.

that the government would use the recently concluded maintenance workers' dispute to demonstrate that it could discipline unions.³²⁹

Settlement and aftermath: November 1977 – December 1979

While the strike may have been over, there was still a lengthy work value enquiry to be proceeded with. It would determine whether there were any increases in the value of the work since it was last examined in 1974 by Commissioner Vosti.

The work value enquiry was to take far longer than the unions expected, and it is possible that the return to work may not have been recommended by the shop stewards had they been aware of this. The union officials and the SECV, and probably even Bob Hawke, may have had some idea of the lengthy proceedings to follow, but this was certainly not communicated to the men. Such a lengthy delay in obtaining a decision would make it that much harder to take up the dispute again. The decision by Commissioner Mansini would not be handed down until March 1978. The series of hearings in the ACAC concerning the building trades unions, which followed as a result of his decision, would not be resolved until December 1979. In addition, over the next few months, the issue of contract labour would surface again. The result would be the placing of bans by the maintenance unions and another series of appearances in the ACAC. Despite the fact that the issue of contract labour had triggered the maintenance strike, the SECV still seemed reluctant to hold discussions on this matter with the CGTLC.

NOVEMBER 1977

On the 3 November, Ron Luckman of the ETU advised that the SECV's offers relating to the substitution of Easter Tuesday for Easter Saturday, double time for

³²⁹ *The Age*, 28 October 1977, p. 9.

overtime for non-continuous shift workers, and the increase in meal allowance to \$2.50 for all meals had been accepted by the unions.³³⁰

The following day, 4 November, the largest fire in its history began in the Morwell Open Cut.³³¹ This fire, which burnt for three days, was credited as the means by which industrial relations within the SECV returned to a more harmonious level. Two thirds of the exposed coal surface was on fire. Fire fighting involved some 1400 SECV personnel, as well as 350 others, including a contingent of 140 personnel from the nearby Sale Royal Australian Air Force base. The Country Fire Authority, the APM fire brigade, the State Emergency Service and local police were also involved. The SECV later acknowledged that it was only the combined efforts of its own workers and the community that averted 'a major catastrophe'.³³² Following the successful extinguishing of the fire, the SEC thanked its workers and the community by providing a BBQ on the Saturday and the Sunday, which over 3,500 men, women and children attended. The recognition by the SECV afterwards of the part played by its employees may have helped in settling relationships between workers at all levels.³³³ The open cut bushfire had provided a timely opportunity for both the men and the SECV to work in a cooperative fashion to meet a common enemy. The community, which had supported the strikers, rallied again to support the SECV when it was threatened.

The program of inspections by Commissioner Mansini continued in Melbourne over the 3 and 4 November and then visited LV sites. These included Yallourn sites, including Yallourn PS and Central Workshops, Electrical Workshops, Coal Production Maintenance, Painters Shop, Carpenters Shop and Yallourn E PS, between 7 and 11

³³⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit, File 2, Maintenance employees' dispute, 13 December 1977.

³³¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 18 November 1977, p. 10.

³³² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 9 November 1977, p. 7; State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1977-1978*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1978, p. 32.

³³³ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 16 November 1977, p. 10; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-18; Trade Union Training Authority, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*, pp. 9,17.

November. The following week, between 16 and 17 November, inspections continued in the LV at Hazelwood PS, Morwell Briquette Factory and PS, Transport Workshops and Civil Works (both at Yallourn), before returning to various Melbourne sites including other state government instrumentalities between 23 and 30 November.³³⁴ The inspections included areas involving the building trades, in order to demonstrate to the Commissioner the integral nature of these trades in the work of the SECV.³³⁵

DECEMBER

One important federal event for the trade union movement was the holding of the election on 10 December. The result was similar to that of 1975, with the Liberals retaining a comfortable majority in the lower house as well as control of the Senate. This gave the Fraser government a renewed mandate to continue its crusade against the unions and overt industrial disputation.

Inspections by Commissioner Mansini, unions and SECV continued in early December at Melbourne sites, until the program of inspections was completed on 9 December. SECV counsel had been instructed to oppose any wage increase, any argument that the SECV was a special industry and the making of a separate maintenance award. The Manager Area Administration suggested however that should Commissioner Mansini decide on changes to award wage rates, conditions or work practices in the maintenance areas, then the SECV should take the opportunity as part of the proceedings to argue for changes to award classifications, award provisions and work practices, to ensure a result satisfactory to the SECV. These changes could include any or all of dispute settling procedures, demarcation clauses, or contract labour clauses which might enable the bypassing of the CGTLC in this process; new and/or updated classifications which were more applicable to the electricity generating industry; and

³³⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit, File 2, Maintenance employees' dispute, 13 December 1977.

³³⁵ NBAC: BWIU, Z316/124, Suggested inspection sites to be put to the advocate on behalf of the building trades, 1977.

changed work practices to provide the SECV with greater flexibility in terms of manning.³³⁶ The SECV was dissuaded by Counsel however from raising these issues, since any suggestion that a wage rate increase might be acceptable could be viewed as a sign of compromise, and might result in a higher increase by the Commissioner than would otherwise be the case. Also, it was not seen as appropriate to create an environment where restrictive practices could be traded off. Counsel pointed out that the SECV, together with other parties, had submitted a paper which was ‘strongly critical’ of the concept of ‘productivity bargaining’ to the current wage fixing enquiry before the President of the ACAC.³³⁷

The 19 and 20 December were made available for the presenting of evidence to the ACAC, with a decision expected early in 1978.³³⁸ On 20 December, the SECV, supported by the state government, renewed its application for reference to a Full Bench.

By the end of 1977, the lack of maintenance had made itself felt. It was estimated that plant maintenance of about 200 man years had been lost, with a corresponding effect on plant reliability.³³⁹ As a result, on 6 December, the SECV approached the VTHC about what it described as an ‘excessive backlog of maintenance work’, and its wish to bring in contract labour. The VTHC, while requesting discussions on the list of non-award claims submitted during the dispute,³⁴⁰ was mindful of the agreement between the SECV and the CGTLC over the use of contract labour on maintenance work, and referred that matter to the CGTLC and the unions.³⁴¹

³³⁶ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGTLC Log of claims 1977 no 2, Metal trades work value inquiry, draft 9 December 1977.

³³⁷ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGTLC Log of claims 1977 no 2, Memorandum, 24 January 1978.

³³⁸ PROV, VPRS 9670/P1/Unit 59, Minutes of Commissioners’ meeting, 15 December 1977.

³³⁹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Report on effects of industrial action by LV maintenance personnel June/October 1977, 2 November 1977.

³⁴⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance employees dispute, 13 December 1977.

³⁴¹ UMA, 101/38, Box M13, File SEC contractors, VTHC to SECV, 20 December 1977.

The SECV and the CGTLC subsequently met on 22 December to discuss contracts for maintenance work. The SECV revealed at that meeting that it had already let contracts or advertised tenders. This was despite undertakings given by the SECV to Commissioner Vosti early in 1977 that in future the CGTLC would be involved in discussions about the allocation of work to day labour and contract employees.³⁴² In addition, contracts had been let despite the fact that the barely concluded maintenance strike had been triggered in large part over a lack of process with the CGTLC over this issue. As a result, the CGTLC delegates walked out of the meeting and placed a black ban on the relevant work.³⁴³

JANUARY 1978

The SECV's application for a reference under Section 34 was refused by the President of the ACAC on 10 January, so the work value case remained with Commissioner Mansini. He had formally joined the various logs of claims served on the SECV by the state or federal branches of the unions which had been involved in the strike, to C no. 3601 of 1977. The work value case recommenced on January 10, after the Christmas adjournment, with further evidence taken from the SECV witnesses. This was followed by the continuation of ACTU submissions on behalf of the unions until 19 January. On 20 January a submission was made on behalf of the Electricity Trust of South Australia (ETSA) which opposed both an increase in wage rates and an industry award.³⁴⁴

In their submissions, the unions reminded Commissioner Mansini that the claim involved the establishment of a new award covering metal trades, vehicle builders,

³⁴² PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 159, File 79/501, Contract work bans, 27 April 1977.

³⁴³ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGTLC 1977, Recently the S.E.C. made application ..., 22 December 1977, and, Meeting with CGT&LC on contract work, 22 December 1977.

³⁴⁴ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGT&LC Log of claims 1977 no 3, Work value case, 3 February 1978.

carpenters, painters and timber workers employed by the SECV, together with increased wage rates to ensure and retain internal coherence and relativities.³⁴⁵

FEBRUARY 1978

The work value hearings resumed on Tuesday 31 January with submissions commencing on behalf of the SECV. It was confident that it had been able to demonstrate little, if any, increase in work value since relevant presentations before the ACAC in the early 1970s.³⁴⁶ The SECV case continued until 14 February, with Dr Jessup considered by the SECV IRO attending the hearings to have presented an 'extremely polished case' which 'refuted all the union submissions'.³⁴⁷ After brief submissions on behalf of the Hydro-electric Commission of Tasmania (HECT) and the Victorian government, and the ACTU responses on 15 and 16 February, Commissioner Mansini finally adjourned the proceedings.³⁴⁸

The work value case had spread over 17 weeks, occupying 42 separate sitting days of hearings and inspections. On behalf of the unions, 107 exhibits were tendered in evidence and 20 witnesses were called, and a further 12 union members provided statements which were tendered as exhibits. The SECV presented 176 exhibits and called witnesses employed by the SECV or state instrumentalities. Brief submissions were made by the ETSA and the HECT, and the transcript ran to 1543 pages.³⁴⁹

The state government had earlier in the year determined that any increase in SIPS would not be contrary to the principles of wage indexation.³⁵⁰ This resulted in an offer to the VTHC, via the Chairman of the Ministerial Industrial Relations Committee, of

³⁴⁵ PROV, VPRS 8916 /P1/Unit 327, File 80/110 pt 3, Proceedings before Commissioner Mansini, 10 January 1978.

³⁴⁶ GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0002, File Trades Hall Council, Work value case, 13 February 1978.

³⁴⁷ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGT&LC Log of claims 1977 no 3, Work value case (b), 3 February 1978.

³⁴⁸ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGT&LC Log of claims 1977 no 3, Work value case, 20 February 1978.

³⁴⁹ NBAC: ACTU, N147/293, Dispute SECV, G. Edwards Solicitor to ACTU, 2 March 1978

³⁵⁰ GVR, Series MORS 0302, Box C0002, File Trades Hall Council, State Incremental Payments Scheme, 26 January 1978.

increases to SIPS payments of between \$1.80 and \$4.10 per week. These were accepted by the unions in February after the exclusion of a clause inserted by the government which was in effect a 'no-strike' clause.³⁵¹

MARCH 1978

In early March, the ACAC was notified of a dispute resulting from the imposition of bans on contractors by the CGTLC. Discussion on the maintenance bans and contracts were held before Commissioner Brown of the ACAC (C no 311 of 1978) on 7 and 8 March. After negotiations on the jobs that would be done by day labour, the CGTLC placed the relevant information to meetings in the LV. As a result, the bans were lifted on 10 March, and discussions around the jobs for allocation to contract/day labour resumed later that month.³⁵²

The significant event of the month however, which occurred on 21 March, was the handing down by Commissioner Mansini of his decision in the work value case. He advised that it was not appropriate for him to consider classifications not covered by Division IV of Part III of the Appendix to Part I of the Metal Trades Award 1952 (SECV Appendix), since this was the area which came before him in the 1974 SECV appeal,³⁵³ and which was the subject of the detailed inspections carried out during 1977. On the unions' application for a separate award for SECV metal, vehicle and building trade employees, Commissioner Mansini found that there was no case and dismissed the application. Commissioner Mansini also noted that the matter before him was not a determination of wage relativities between workers in the SECV and those employed by other enterprises, nor was it an avenue for examining work value within the SECV

³⁵¹ UMA, 101/20, Box 284, Item 154/1982, File SIPS general, Statement on behalf of the Victorian government, 15 February 1978; UMA, 95/96, Box 103, Victorian State Administrative Committee, 20 February 1978.

³⁵² GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0006, File CGT&LC 1978, S.E.C. contracts, 16 March 1978

³⁵³ *Her Majesty the Queen in right of State of Victoria and Others v The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union and Others* (1975) 164 CAR 200.

compared with other instrumentalities. Commissioner Mansini also noted that the basis of the work value study remained within the SECV roles, even though inspections of work done within other Victorian state government instrumentalities were carried out at the request of the SECV to support their argument that work of equal value was being performed in these work places.³⁵⁴

In his judgment, Commissioner Mansini found that factors relevant to changes in work value had been demonstrated in the submissions and inspections: evidence of additional job pressures, application of new techniques and a wide range of skills, more participation in job planning, and higher incidence of application of the more skilled tasks of a position. He further noted that the capacity for carrying out a wide range of duties was more evident, particularly for experienced employees, than was the case in the earlier work value cases of 1972 and 1974.³⁵⁵

He determined that the additional skills and responsibilities were not expected of employees without SECV experience and that therefore commencing rates should not be increased. Both skilled and semi-skilled employees should have wage rates adjusted after 2 years and 3 years experience. He awarded wage increases of between \$1.60 and \$5.50 per week to specific classifications of workers with two or more years of experience (said to be at least 60% of the strikers),³⁵⁶ which would be effective from the date of the return to work, Tuesday 25 October 1977. This was far from the demands of the original log proposing an increase in wages for all maintenance workers whether skilled or unskilled. It confirmed the earlier fears of the Womens' Assistance Committee that only some groups within the maintenance area would receive any benefit from the

³⁵⁴ *In the matter of an application by the Electrical Trades Union of Australia to vary the Metal Trades Award, 1952 re wage rates etc State Electricity Commission of Victoria* (1978) 202 CAR 312.

³⁵⁵ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria v The Amalgamated Engineering Union and Another* (1973) 148 CAR 61; *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1974) 160 CAR 860.

³⁵⁶ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGT&LC Log of claims 1977 no 3, 3LO newsreader, 29 March 1978; PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/111, Transcript, 30 September 1977, p. 111.

decision of the ACAC.³⁵⁷ As well as unskilled employees working under the Metal Trades Award, the members of the other maintenance unions on strike, that is the BWIU, ASC&J, ABCE&BLF, VBEFA, ATWU and OPDU, received nothing from the Mansini decision. The decision was viewed by the maintenance men as a betrayal by John Hawke and John Halfpenny.³⁵⁸

A stop work meeting was called for 21 March to consider the Mansini decision. There was considerable anger, and a return of the feeling that if there had not been a return to work there would have been a different decision, one closer to the original demand for '\$40 in hand'. Despite the urging of the ETU State Secretary, Charlie Faure, to oppose the decision,³⁵⁹ there was no action taken in terms of bans or walking off the job. This decision not to take industrial action was carried by an overwhelming majority of those present (being 374 for, 3 against).³⁶⁰

The lack of industrial action was in contrast to the extended period of dispute over the log during 1977. However, the rank and file were still united and they determined the course of action around the disappointing outcome from the work value case. This reaction may have been due to the length of time which had elapsed while the ACAC considered submissions and undertook inspections; the recognition on the part of the men and their shop stewards that they were still suffering financially because of the extended strike period of the previous year; or the realisation that this was the end of the line, that there would be nothing else offered if they went out again. In the event, the decision appeared to usher in a period of relative quiet on the dispute front within the SECV.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Worker's wives in support of the strike, October 25? 1977.

³⁵⁸ Interviews with Chris p. 2; Luke p. 12.

³⁵⁹ Purdham, *A century of struggle: a history of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, p. 140.

³⁶⁰ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, File 41/30, notes from 21 March 1978.

³⁶¹ Interviews with Terry p. 8; Bruce p. 24.

APRIL 1978 – DECEMBER 1979

The CGTLC met on 3 April 1978 to consider how to support those unions that received no benefit from the Mansini decision, and how to continue the quest for both a substantial wage increase and an industry award.³⁶² They recommended imposing bans on overtime after 7 days if the building workers employed by the SECV were not granted the same rises awarded to the metal trades workers.³⁶³ A meeting between the BWIU and the SECV was unsuccessful in having any flow on or increase awarded to members.³⁶⁴ A mass meeting held on 6 April resolved to follow up the claims for both a pay increase and an industry award, and noted that even the inadequate Mansini decision gave nothing to the building and vehicle trade workers involved in the dispute. It declined however to impose any bans, as recommended by the stewards.³⁶⁵

Because the decision on the work value case by Commissioner Mansini applied only to those unions working under the SECV Appendix to the Metal Trades Award, this meant that maintenance workers in those other unions which had been involved in the dispute (ASC&J, ABCE&BLF, BWIU, VBEFA, ATWU and OPDU) received nothing. The building trades were advised to seek an award for the SECV. As a result, representatives from the latter four unions met with the SECV on 30 March. They revisited the suggestion of Commissioner Vosti in May 1977 in his decision relating to an earlier dispute involving the ASC&J that an interim Carpenters and Painters (SECV) Award be established.³⁶⁶ This award had been in the process of being drawn up when it was overtaken by the maintenance dispute. The unions, when discussion on this interim

³⁶² *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 April 1978, pp. 1, 67; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Motion, 3 April 1978.

³⁶³ GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0005, File CGT&LC Log of claims 1977 no 3, 3GI news, 6 April 1978.

³⁶⁴ NBAC: BWIU, Z285/20, Victorian Management Committee, 3 April 1978.

³⁶⁵ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 7 April 1978, p. 16; *The Sun*, 7 April 1978, p. 17; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Motion for meeting, 6 April 1978.

³⁶⁶ *The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia and Others v The State Electricity Commission of Victoria and Others* (1977) 188 CAR 1054.

award recommenced in 1978, made it clear that they expected a wage increase without having to go through a work value exercise.

In May 1978, Commissioner Vosti proceeded with the interim SECV building trades award proceedings. Exhibits were tendered by both the unions and the SECV, and a series of comprehensive inspections, complementary to those undertaken during 1977 and 1978 by Commissioner Mansini related to the maintenance dispute was undertaken. Inspections between 4 and 6 July covered a range of carpentering and painting work both in progress and completed in the LV and metropolitan areas and representative of all SECV requirements. This eventually resulted in a decision by Commissioner Vosti in September 1978 which gave the ASC&J, BWIU and OPDU an industry award (The State Electricity Commission of Victoria Building Trades Award, 1978), as well as wage increases ranging from \$3.30 to \$9.15 backdated to April of that year.³⁶⁷ The decision was an improvement over the Mansini decision in the case of the metal trades workers, since it gave the carpenters and painters increases on commencement with the SECV, rather than on a service basis. The practical result was that the building trades commencement rate moved ahead of the metal trades commencement rate.³⁶⁸

This result was appealed by the Victorian government³⁶⁹ and the SECV, on the basis that it was outside the principles of wage determination, and that changes in work value had not been adequately established. The SECV considered that the result would lead to significant flow-on expectations by a number of other SECV unions, including the ABCE&BLF, FEDFA, metal trades and MOA. While the practical issues likely to result in the LV in the event of an appeal were acknowledged, it was decided to proceed.

³⁶⁷ *The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners of Australia and Others v The State Electricity Commission of Victoria and Others* (1978) 210 CAR 910.

³⁶⁸ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 109, File 79/139 pt 2, SECV Building Trades Award 1978, 19 October 1978.

³⁶⁹ GTLC, Box 31, That this meeting of unions condemns ... , 7 December 1978; GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), File Maintenance dispute 1977, Recommendation to mass meeting S.E.C. maintenance workers, 23 January 1979.

This was despite the recommendation from the SECV LV management, which saw any appeal as likely to worsen LV industrial relations generally, and lead to industrial action and perhaps loss of tradesmen who would be difficult to replace.³⁷⁰ This was another decision where the recommendations and expectations of the locals in the LV were overruled, with little apparent regard for the knowledge and experience of those who had to work with the affected employees. The LV maintenance employees saw the appeal as an attempt by the State government to provoke industrial action which would repeat the 1977 strike.³⁷¹

The first practical effect of the appeal in the LV of the appeal was the imposition on 7 December by the SECV carpenters and painters of bans on overtime, temporary shift positions and building trades contract work, and a call for the CGTLC to seek wider support via a Disputes Committee meeting.³⁷² In January 1979 the bans were extended by a decision of the maintenance unions to ban temporary staff promotions to support those unions which had supported them the previous year.³⁷³ The appeal was dismissed by a Full Bench in May 1979, giving effect to the new award and the pay increases associated with it.³⁷⁴ The retrospectivity of the wage increases granted by the original decision, which awarded increases of just over \$9³⁷⁵ per week in the lower paid classifications, to April 1978 was confirmed. The decision was hailed as a triumph for

³⁷⁰ PROV, VPRS 11222/R3/Unit 53, File Carpenters and Painters, State Electricity Commission Building Trades Award 1978, 20 October 1978; PROV, VPRS 11222/R3/Unit 53, File Carpenters and Painters, SEC Building Trades Award Appeal, 16 October 1978.

³⁷¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 23 January 1979, p. 3.

³⁷² GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0004, File Painters, At this meeting of S.E.C. carpenters and painters ... , 4 December 1978; GTLC, Box 27, Letter to Assistant Secretary AMWSU from S. Armstrong, 11 January 1979.

³⁷³ *The Enfilade*, February 1979, p. 3; GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0004, File Painters, Recommendation to mass meeting S.E.C. maintenance workers, 23 January 1979.

³⁷⁴ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria Building Trades Award, 1978 and in the matter of an appeal by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria against the above award made by Mr Commissioner Vosti on 17 November 1978* (1979) 221 CAR 464.

³⁷⁵ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 December 1978, p. 1.

union solidarity, and a just outcome to the maintenance dispute in which the building trades played a full role.³⁷⁶

The final outcome to be achieved was for the ABCE&BLF, which had been adamant that it sought a separate award with the SECV.³⁷⁷ This occurred in December 1979, when the State Electricity Commission of Victoria Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Award, 1979 was handed down by Mr Justice Alley.³⁷⁸

This chapter has described the events of the dispute from its formal beginning with the serving of the log of claims by officers of the CGTLC on the LV SECV management in March 1977. The combined effects of the complex local and broader environment, including the relationships which had developed within the LV, resulted in what was expected to be a normal industrial dispute within the LV SECV escalating into a major confrontation. A perceived lack of action by the VTHC on the log of claims led to the local maintenance employees imposing bans in mid-June. These resulted in a backlog of maintenance work. In early August, the SECV brought the dispute to a head by rostering temporary shifts, and by imposing a 'no work, no pay' situation. The latter arose because of a contract labour decision which had been made by the SECV without approval from, or discussion with, the CGTLC. This was the event which triggered a walk off of maintenance unions in support of their stood down colleagues. A mass meeting called for an indefinite stoppage, and the log of claims became the focal point of negotiations. The progress of the dispute was influenced significantly by the political, economic and industrial context at the time, at local, state and federal levels. Within each of these contexts, there had been indications since early that year that another high

³⁷⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 1, File 3, SECV/Hamer government appeal defeated, 11 May? 1979.

³⁷⁷ PROV, VPRS 11222/R3/Unit 53, File Building Trades, 3 April 1978.

³⁷⁸ *The Australian Building Construction Employees' and Builders Labourers' Federation v State Electricity Commission of Victoria and Others* (1979) 230 CAR 654.

profile dispute would not be tolerated. In the state context, this was demonstrated by the amending of the ESA to counter the effects of a major dispute early in 1977. In addition, the bans on the construction of the Newport PS, seen to complement the militancy of the LV power unions, had confirmed that the Hamer government was prepared to use legislation rather than negotiation to resolve industrial disputes.

In the federal context, the Fraser government had been in office since 1975 on a platform which included a campaign against what it viewed as militant and irresponsible unionism. A series of high profile disputes across Australia during 1977 was seen as justifying its legislative program against the unions and their industrial activity. This continued as one way of supporting the Hamer government when the maintenance dispute resulted in severe electricity restrictions across Victoria.

In the local context, during 1977 the maintenance unions and the CGTLC had continued their campaign against excessive use of contract labour and had placed bans in support of this. The SECV had demonstrated that it was willing to impose a 'no work, no pay' situation and had done so on several occasions during 1977. It had taken a firm stance on claims from other unions such as the MOA. In addition, it had in previous years advised the CGTLC that it would not consider claims served through other than the correct channels.

The relationships which had developed within the formal structures also affected the way the dispute unfolded. These may be seen through the three major themes of the dispute: the control by the rank and file, the high level of community support, and the Melbourne-LV divide. The VTHC had little sympathy for the LV shop stewards, who initiated local action as part of the local industrial identity. This occurred within a context of local management and local union branches and/or the CGTLC attempting to resolve issues locally. Larger disputes were handled from Melbourne, thus reinforcing

the Melbourne-LV divide which existed within the official union, peak council and SECV structures. This divide meant that there was a clear point in the dispute when the ACTU, the Melbourne union officials and the Melbourne SECV attempted to remove the control of the dispute from the LV. However, the shop stewards and the rank and file would not relinquish their control, and this continued to be a significant feature of the dispute.

The timelines of the dispute have also brought out the other theme mentioned, that of community support. This was evident from the beginning, when wives and families attended the mass meetings. Support from local businesses and other members of the community was significant, although not unanimous. The financial and in-kind support raised from unions and other groups around Australia was beyond the expectations of the strikers, and enabled them to continue the strike for as long as they did. The very fact of this support made the decision to return to work with nothing in hand from the ACAC even more difficult.

The dispute lasted from the 30 March 1977 when the log of claims was served, until the handing down of the new SECV Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Award on 4 December 1979. In the end, there was some positive outcome for most of the unions involved, although the process was a long drawn out one. The result however was far short of that hoped for by the maintenance unions initially: a large wages increase, improved conditions, and a new award covering all SECV maintenance employees.

The next chapter will draw out some of the significant features of the dispute through a discussion of three specific themes which have emerged from the narrative. These themes are the rank and file control over the dispute, the extensive community support, and the Melbourne-LV divide. In addition, the effect of the dispute on

relationships between the rank and file and the SECV, and between the unions which were on strike and the operations unions which remained at work, will also be discussed.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The previous chapter described the timeline of events which occurred during the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute. It began with the serving of a log of claims by the CGTLC on the SECV in the LV in March 1977. A perceived lack of inaction by the VTHC after several months led to the placing of bans which resulted in a backlog of maintenance work. As a result, the SECV set up a 'no work no pay' situation which triggered a walkout by the maintenance unions and a decision at the subsequent mass meeting to strike indefinitely. The subsequent course of the dispute was affected by the relationships which existed between the state government and the SECV; between the strikers and their officials; and between the CGTLC and the VTHC. Three themes in particular were highlighted within the dispute: the control of the rank and file over the course of the dispute; the extent of local and wider community support; and the Melbourne-LV divide. This chapter will explore these three themes in more detail.

The first theme to be discussed is the control over the dispute exerted by the rank and file. This was a feature from the initial discussions on the log of claims and was later exemplified by the attendance of the stewards at the ACAC hearings. Their unwillingness to relinquish control, and determination to achieve their desired outcomes, resulted in a standoff which presented a direct challenge to the Victorian government. In the federal sphere, the insistence of the rank and file on an outcome in the ACAC which gave them 'cash in hand' before a return to work was a threat to wage indexation and thus the economic policies of the federal government.

The second theme is that of the extensive support of the strikers and their cause by both the local and the wider community. An extensive range of organisations raised funds and provided moral support. So popular was the cause that when the state

government intervened in the dispute, moves began towards an escalation of the dispute, not only within the SECV, but also across the state.

The third theme from the dispute is around the Melbourne-LV divide. This divide within relationships developed during the history of the SECV, the CGTLC, and the local unions. The resulting interactions were intertwined with the development of the industrial identity of the maintenance workers and had been reinforced from the early years of both organisations by the preference for, and success of, local control of industrial action within the paternal environment of the SECV. Once the 1977 dispute went before the ACAC, it was accompanied by an overall move of control over the dispute to Melbourne. The decision making moved to the Melbourne SECV, the state union officials, and the ACTU (in the absence of activity by the VTHC). This move was not total, however, with the rank and file continuing to make important decisions during the dispute, as well as attending the ACAC hearings.

After discussion of these three themes, the final section in this chapter will consider the personal impact of the dispute. The ending of the dispute affected the relationships between the rank and file and the SECV, and between the maintenance unions and the operations unions, which had remained at work.

Control by the rank and file

The most significant and unusual feature of the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute was the control over its progress by the maintenance men themselves. The 60 or so stewards met and discussed the issues, and their recommendations for action went to the mass meetings. It became apparent quite early in the dispute that it would be the men who decided whether they would follow the recommended course of action. There was full participation in the meetings and the decision making, with a true spirit of union democracy. This maintained solidarity and collective support between stewards and their

members. Attendance at the meetings was high and there was strong support for Sam Armstrong.¹ John Halfpenny praised this example of rank and file participation, and was convinced that this contributed to the unity, strength and morale of the strikers.² Sam Armstrong's popularity and charisma were part of his leadership style – he was able to lead through persuasion and example, not coercion. The four stewards who became the public face of the dispute (Sam Armstrong, George Wragg, Ted Turnbull and Ross Miles), were leaders with a strong commitment to the wider union movement.³ They had all held a number of significant honorary positions within the LV union movement, and at the time of the 1977 dispute had an average of 25 years experience within the trade union movement.

The original intention was to negotiate the items in the log with the SECV, and then to take an agreed position to the ACAC. This would keep the dispute in local hands, avoiding as far as possible input from peak councils and union officials.⁴ It is with this determination of the rank and file to keep control of the dispute that the impact of the strong local industrial identity is seen. This made the rank and file reluctant to consider changing scale, that is, to consider how their relationships with the VTHC and the state branches of the unions could be taken advantage of to improve the chances of a successful outcome to their claims. The rank and file wished to retain the scale of action to the local, that is with the shop stewards and the CGTLC, on the basis of past success in a range of campaigns. However, the political, economic and industrial contexts within which their log was prepared and presented had undergone significant change, which they did not recognise, and thus subsequent action required a focus on a different set of relationships.

¹ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers' strike, 10 November 1977, p. 13.

² Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union, *The 1977 Latrobe Valley power strike*.

³ Benson, *Shop stewards in the Latrobe Valley*, p. 361.

⁴ Graham A. Devries, 'Negotiating a shorter working week in the State Electricity Commission of Victoria', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 1983, pp. 269-285.

The general feeling of the maintenance employees was that the ACAC was a 'bosses court' and that maintenance workers had historically not been given wage justice by its decisions.⁵ The SECV, however, may have seen its decisions as being sympathetic to SECV wages employees (for example in the Justice Aird \$2+\$2 case, which became under Commissioner Vosti the \$4+\$7 award).⁶

The expectation of the rank and file was that the dispute over the log would be carried on in a low key way, a war of attrition, with the bans demonstrating the determination of the maintenance men. The stewards could not be said to have acted in haste (although a little faster than the VTHC perhaps). It was, after all, over two months after the serving of the log of claims that bans were placed. The stewards then waited another month for the VTHC to serve the log on the SECV. It was two months after the placing of bans that the strike action occurred, and this was over the use of contract labour and temporary shifts rather than over the log itself. This delay between the presentation of a claim and mobilisation was a feature of the industrial activity at the SECV in the LV.⁷

The 'no work no pay' action can only be seen as deliberate provocation by the SECV. The annual discussions over use of contract labour had been in place for many years. The SECV was aware of how sensitive this issue was to the rank and file, the unions and the CGTLC. The feeling that the SECV had not been fair in its treatment of the strikers may have encouraged the stewards to be reluctant to accept any settlement which did not impact significantly on the SECV. This single event was viewed differently and ascribed different meanings by the SECV management and the rank and file, and this influenced their respective actions afterwards. The maintenance men were

⁵ Interview with Evan p. 16; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, esp re 1977 dispute, talk to NTU, 12 April 1986.

⁶ *State Electricity Commission of Victoria v The Amalgamated Engineering Union and Another* (1973) 148 CAR 61; *In the matter of The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1974) 160 CAR 860.

⁷ Holden and Iverson, *Industrial conflict: the Latrobe Valley S.E.C.V. 1960-1977*, p. 22.

compelled by their expectations of unity and reciprocal support to support the workers stood down over a relatively minor matter. The resultant strike was probably inevitable given the dispute over contract labour earlier that year. Sam Armstrong later suggested that if this response by the SECV had been thought about earlier, then consideration could have been given to making strike payments to the men stood down, forcing further stand downs by the SECV.⁸ This would have impacted on the amount of maintenance being done, but with minimal impact on the maintenance workforce.

The strike started as a struggle to maintain control over the contract labour process, but became confused with the war of attrition over the log of claims. The stewards needed to make it clearer to the men, the unions, the ACAC, the VTHC and the SECV that the strike resulted from the contract labour issue, not the log. The dispute may have played out differently if the SECV had been made to justify its breaking of the contract labour agreement. The VTHC and perhaps also the operations unions may then have provided greater support to the dispute from an earlier stage. It also encouraged a perception by the SECV, the government, and the wider community that the log of claims lay at the root of the strike. Neither the shop stewards nor the rank and file appeared to recognise that the strike changed their external relationships significantly. Once the men walked out, the political, economic and industrial context in 1977, both state and federal, impacted significantly on the dispute. The context was not conducive to industrial action which appeared to constitute a challenge to the government. The MOA in its dispute earlier in 1977 had recognised this and retreated.

The decision to strike indefinitely was not a good tactic, leaving as it did no room for the men to manoeuvre. It backed the stewards into a corner in terms of continuing the dispute in a meaningful way if the men returned to work, thus placing a 'major

⁸ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 2.

constraint'⁹ on both the members and the shop stewards. This lack of planned strategy may have resulted in the stewards, towards the end of the strike, being more concerned with saving face than accepting a compromise option, such as that offered by Commissioner Vosti on 1 October. The longer the strike lasted the more difficult it became to accept the losses which had been incurred, encouraging the hope that 'a few more days'¹⁰ would lead to a successful outcome.

Although the handling of the dispute commenced under the auspices of the CGTLC, not all the maintenance unions were affiliated. As a result, the SSC shared the day-to-day organisation of the dispute with the CGTLC.¹¹ The SSC comprised about 60 stewards, most of whom were said to be inexperienced.¹² It was suggested that having such a committee enabled Sam Armstrong to share the blame in the event of an unsuccessful campaign, but that in this case he was to lose control of the committee, which instead became influenced by George Wragg whose attitude was less conciliatory and more hard line. Despite some feeling to the contrary,¹³ the CGTLC was generally acknowledged to have been influential in coordinating the dispute.¹⁴ The SSC (seen by some to be the CGTLC under another name),¹⁵ was effective and well supported by the rank and file.¹⁶ The SECV was later to conclude that the dispute was handled by the stewards 'with sophistication and discipline'.¹⁷ This was despite the blame for the whole affair laid at the hands of left wing shop stewards,¹⁸ 'a group of recalcitrant, misguided,

⁹ Eric Batstone, Ian Boraston and Stephen Frenkel, *Shop stewards in action: the organization of workplace conflict and accommodation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1977, p. 92.

¹⁰ Interview with P p. 5.

¹¹ Benson, *Shop stewards in the Latrobe Valley*, p. 368.

¹² PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-1.

¹³ Interviews with Gerry, p. 1; John E. p. 7.

¹⁴ Interviews with Luke p. 6; Evan p. 7; P p. 11; Terry p. 2; John H. p. 7.

¹⁵ Interview with Bruce p. 10; Frank p. 5.

¹⁶ Interview with Harry p. 10.

¹⁷ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-6.

¹⁸ Joe Manton, 'The problems will remain', *The Bulletin*, 5 November 1977b, pp. 26-27.

ill-informed brigands', who had 'led the men by the nose on false promises'.¹⁹ Much was made of Sam Armstrong's membership of the Communist Party and his activities were seen as deliberately bringing chaos to the industrial scene in Australia, and disruption to the whole community, as the result of a Communist conspiracy.²⁰

A united approach to the dispute and the activities undertaken to maintain it such as publicity, picketing and collecting funds, assisted to achieve and retain high morale. This reinforced the strength of feeling for the local union branches and the leadership of the shop stewards. It also provided an opportunity for some of the younger stewards,²¹ and other rank and file²² to step forward and take a high profile role. This feeling of unity was increased by the dispute being run by and for the whole group of maintenance unions. The unity and solidarity of the strikers was described as having 'few parallels in the history of trade union struggle'²³ in Australia. This solidarity sustained the dispute, and it was only when the stewards were divided over whether the strike should continue that the strike was brought to an end.

Commissioner Vosti may have been of a mind to hand down a wages increase, but once his proposal for a return to work had been rejected, the ensuing standoff meant that compromise was no longer an option, only capitulation by one of the parties. This was the first significant turning point of the dispute. Had the men returned to work at Vosti's urging, the result would have been handed down without the side excursion to the Anomalies and work value hearings, reducing the consequent political and anti-union fallout²⁴, and the personal cost to the strikers.

¹⁹ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 18 October 1977, pp. 10412, 10415.

²⁰ Interviews with Harry, p. 6; Lindsey, p. 9; P p. 4; UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Facts behind the shop committee strike, October 1977.

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 October 1977, p. 2.

²² Interview with Luke.

²³ *AMWSU Newsletter*, 22/77, 31 October 1977, p. 2.

²⁴ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 2.

Once the men rejected the Vosti proposal, they set themselves up for a direct confrontation with the state and federal governments. In Victoria, Premier Hamer had threatened to use the ESA if the men did not return to work, and was thus committed to doing so. The amending of the ESA and the declaration of a state of emergency provided a focus for union and community protest. Proclaiming the ESA had the effect of moving the MOA and the FEDFA to give support to the strikers, replacing their previous lip service to the dispute. The SECV noted that it had been a mistake to take steps which united the LV unions rather than isolating the maintenance stewards. The effect of proclaiming the ESA, sending the abandonment of employment letter, and advertising for outside labour was the opposite of that hoped for. It united the unions thus threatening to jeopardise generating activities.

Premier Hamer did not invoke the powers available to him under the ESA. This may have been due to a reluctance to exacerbate the dispute, perhaps fearing a total walkout, or a preference to see whether there was still a possibility of a compromise with Bob Hawke's help. Alternatively it may have been because he had no practical plan for operating the LV power stations if the MOA and the FEDFA walked out. There was also a suggestion that the broader support across the Australian working community could move to a general strike if this should happen.²⁵ Trade union officials would have wanted to avoid this if at all possible. It is interesting to speculate whether increased support for such a move would have prompted a legislative backlash against the unions by the Victorian and federal governments, resulting in an outcome similar to that in Queensland during the SEQEB dispute seven years later. By now, it had become obvious that threats would not send the men back to work. Instead, Hamer asked Bob

²⁵ SLV, Riley, File Strikes, One out all out, 19 October 1977; SLV, Riley Collection, File Strikes State Electricity Commission 1977, Support the Vic power workers, early October 1977.

Hawke to intervene despite the ACTU lack of standing in the dispute.²⁶ Bob Hawke saw Hamer as more reasonable to deal with than Fraser and asked him to hold off on action while he sought an acceptable compromise.²⁷ This view was echoed by the CGTLC which felt that Hamer was ready to settle, but that Fraser wanted the strike to continue to justify his 'law and order' campaign.²⁸

When it became obvious that no easy or quick solution would be achieved, the length, timing and extensive publicity around the dispute gave both Hamer and Fraser a chance to show the electorate how they were prepared to deal with the unions. In addition, once the strike and the associated severe power restrictions became headline news, the possibility of any local settlement, under the eyes of the politicians and the public, was reduced.²⁹ Hamer and the OIRC were holding firm to the wage indexation stance of the federal government. The determination of the Victorian government to maintain a hard line in preference to settling with the unions was an exception to its normal pattern of industrial relations in the electricity industry. A wish for continuity of supply as a matter of political expediency had been used in the past (and would be in the future) to pressure the SECV to negotiate with the unions.³⁰ The refusal to compromise on this occasion fuelled speculation that the strike was being used for political purposes by both the Victorian and the Federal governments.³¹ This view appeared to be vindicated when the federal government called an election for early December 1977.

The Premier suggested after the men had returned to work that the government had been 'poorly advised by the State Electricity Commission'.³² He indicated that the

²⁶ Kenneth Randall, 'Fraser plays the politics of power', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 98, 21 October 1977, pp. 29-30.

²⁷ Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, p. 222.

²⁸ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Victorian power dispute 1977*, Sydney, A.B.C., 1977.

²⁹ Interview with Bruce p. 8.

³⁰ Teicher, Van Gramberg and Holland, *Outsourcing in Australia and the trade union response: electricity generation in Victoria*, p. 9.

³¹ Hurst, *Hawke: the definitive biography*, p. 222.

³² VPD, Legislative Council, 8 November 1977, p. 10945.

strike could have been resolved earlier ‘if the S.E.C. had informed the Government in the early stages’.³³ The SECV for its part noted that the OIRC and the Minister for Fuels and Energy had been kept fully informed during the strike.³⁴ The need to keep the OIRC (and thus the government) apprised of developments in the dispute added another level of complexity and delay to the negotiation process, and effectively bypassed any role for the SECV as immediate employer.

The wages claim and the refusal of the men to go back to work without cash ‘in hand’ to allow the ACAC to hear the dispute was viewed in some quarters as ‘attack on the entire system of wage indexation’.³⁵ The maintenance workers were seen to be supporting those groups of the Left, such as the Spartacist League and the Australian Independence Movement, which had seen the dispute as an opportunity to take on the wage indexation system. However, serious commentators saw neither the wage claim nor the strike as a serious attack on wage indexation. If so it would have been a shorter campaign mounted by a stronger group than the LV shop stewards.³⁶ The decision not to return to work did place the strikers as a threat to the determination of the federal government to restrain wage growth through strict adherence to the wage indexation guidelines. It was thus a direct attack on attempts to manage the federal economic situation. The poor monetary result of the work value case was seen as reinforcing the indexation guidelines.³⁷

The attendance by the stewards at all proceedings in the ACAC was a recognition by the union officials that it was this group who would need to convince the men to return to work. However, once the stewards became involved in the ACAC

³³ *The Herald*, 25 October 1977, Final ed., p. 1.

³⁴ Interview with Frank, p. 7; PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers’ strike, 10 November 1977, p. 9.

³⁵ *News Weekly*, 5 October 1977, p. 2.

³⁶ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Victorian power dispute 1977*.

³⁷ Interview with Bruce p. 25.

hearings this may have commenced the division amongst them. The stewards became less available to stay in touch with the mood of the strikers, and to hear their issues and concerns. There was a suggestion that shop stewards and officials dealing with the system themselves became part of the system.³⁸ The result was that the battle rather than the outcome became the focus of attention and concern. The act of participation resulted in a focus on process rather than on the result, and further delayed and bureaucratised the settlement of the claim.³⁹ Some stewards moved towards greater support for Bob Hawke and settling the dispute. On the other hand, many of the stewards and the rank and file became more involved with soliciting support for continuing the dispute from the community, including unions across the state. The constant soliciting of support from sympathisers resulted in a greater conviction that the strike should continue. The extent of this support was a key factor in maintaining the dispute and is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Community support

The support of their families and the local and wider community was key to sustaining the mobilisation of the maintenance men. The extent of support of the community such as farmers who donated produce, and shop keepers and businesses which made efforts to reduce financial hardship was remarkable. That such support would be given is not unusual in industrial disputes in Australia, since it may be seen as support for the town and a way of life as much as of the strikers.⁴⁰ The local businesses knew that once the strike was over they would be reliant on these same strikers to

³⁸ *Vanguard*, 27 October 1977, p. 12.

³⁹ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Cochrane, 'The Wonthaggi coal strike, 1934'; Connell and Irving, *Class structure in Australian history: documents, narrative and argument*, p. 193; Erik Eklund, *'Putting into port': society, identity and politics at Port Kembla, 1900 to 1940*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1994, pp. 240-1.

resume business with them on an ongoing basis. This was an important context for the dispute.

The strong industrial identity of the SECV maintenance workers included ties to the local community. The networks which had formed around employees, families, sporting groups, community events and activities provided local support structures which took on a special significance during the dispute. They were also the cause of friction, since some families had members on strike as well in the unions which stayed at work. In addition, while the wages of the strikers were important to the local community, the SECV itself supported community groups and events, and this meant that the fortunes of the latter were intertwined with the continued operation and profitability of the SECV. The community overall was heavily reliant on employment by the SECV and the money which this provided to local businesses. In a small community such as the LV, businesses needed to retain their customer support, and this influenced the extending of credit and support, at least nominally, for the strikers.

The escalating actions being made by the SECV and the Victorian government against the strikers: the carting of coal by road, the threats to invoke the ESA, the ‘termination’ letters, and the advertising for replacement labour, all acted to extend the support from the wider community.

The Distress Fund established and controlled by the CGTLC played a significant role. It provided monetary support to the strikers, and boosted their morale, reminding them of the support which was being received from all over the country.⁴¹ During the course of the strike, over \$221,000 was received in cash donations, together with donations of foodstuffs, toys, soft drinks, and the requirements for a workers picnic at the end of the strike. The list of donors included unions, political groups, student

⁴¹ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 2.

organisations, university departments, schools, trades and labour councils and many individuals.⁴²

Payments of almost \$82,000 were made from the Fund during 1977, mostly for food vouchers and toys. These were given not only to the strikers but also to other workers in the LV who had been stood down.⁴³ Support to workers continued until as late as April 1978, when most of the men had returned to work and had re-established their financial situation.⁴⁴

Other sources of assistance were also available to the strikers in the LV and those workers laid off throughout Victoria (and other states). Individual union funds included the 'S.E.C. Strike Fund', established by the Victorian State Office of the AMWSU on behalf of the CGTLC. This fund received over \$67,000 in donations from individuals and organisations across Australia.⁴⁵ This was in addition to the \$107,000 paid out directly by the AMWSU to its members as Dispute Benefit.⁴⁶ Other financial support initiatives included that of the VBEFA, which donated \$50,000 to the Salvation Army for assistance given to members affected by the strike, and made available a further \$30,000 for further assistance to members in extreme hardship circumstances. It also donated \$500 to the CGTLC Distress Fund as a practical show of support.⁴⁷ As well, the ABCE&BLF Victorian Branch gave \$3,500 to the CGTLC Distress Fund,⁴⁸ and the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association asked all members to contribute to a fund to be given to the Salvation Army for provision of relief, with an amount of \$2 per member suggested which would enable a total of \$20,000 to be collected.⁴⁹

⁴² GTLC, Box 85, CGTLC covering letter to audited statement of the Distress Fund, 1978.

⁴³ VPD, Legislative Assembly, 8 December 1978, p. 7604.

⁴⁴ GTLC, Box 58, Opinion in the matter of the GTLC Distress Fund, 7 May 1986.

⁴⁵ *Amalgamated Metal workers and Shipwrights' Union monthly journal*, June 1978, p. 19.

⁴⁶ UMA, 95/96, Box 103, State Conference, February 1978, p. 6.

⁴⁷ UMA, 101/37, Box V3, Victorian Branch meeting, 19 October 1977.

⁴⁸ NBAC: ABCE&BLF, Z398/33, Victorian Branch minutes, 5 October 1977, 19 October 1977.

⁴⁹ Letter reproduced in Trade Union Training Authority, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*.

The local credit unions minimised the effects on the families by suspending repayments and offering 'hardship' loans for the duration of the strike to meet house and rent payments, and later, for purchases of food for Christmas.⁵⁰ This was seen as an extension of their normal community activities, but was endorsed when at the end of the strike the general LV community increased membership numbers of at least one of the credit unions involved.⁵¹ By the end of the strike, one of the credit unions had lent around \$200,000 to the strikers.⁵²

Public opinion in the LV continued to be divided, with support for and against the strikers and their cause.⁵³ Women played a significant supporting role in the dispute. Initially unhappy and wanting the men to return to work, many changed their views to offer outright support for the strike. The strike could not have lasted as long as it did without this important support.⁵⁴ Women were visible at the mass meetings and stewards meetings, providing moral support, making phone calls, and helping to distribute food parcels.⁵⁵ They continued to offer support to strikers' families after the men had returned to work.

While the strikers and their families appeared united nonetheless it was the women and children who bore the brunt of the dispute. There were hints that more than normal domestic violence and marriage breakups were occurring. This was despite the greater part played in the dispute by the workers' wives than was usually the case.⁵⁶ Across the state, hundreds of thousands of other families and businesses also felt the impact of the dispute. The power restrictions which were imposed by the SECV were

⁵⁰ Ibid.; *The Australian*, 12 October 1977, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 30 May 1978, p. 5.

⁵² Ogden, 'The La Trobe Valley power dispute'.

⁵³ Interview with Paul C. p. 2.

⁵⁴ Interviews with John H. p. 3; Gerry p. 11; John E. p. 14; Chris p. 7.

⁵⁵ Interviews with Vaifoa pp. 6, 8; Chris p. 7.

⁵⁶ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-17.

described by the maintenance workers as ‘unnecessarily harsh’⁵⁷ and an attempt to turn the community against the strikers, since they extended the suffering to as many people as possible.

Despite the inconvenience being caused to many Victorians by the power restrictions, support for the strikers from around Australia was so strong that there was a point during the dispute when it seemed possible that it would escalate into a broader conflict. The MOA and FEDFA were likely to act in support of the strikers if the government used emergency powers, and a general strike was touted as a possibility. All that was needed was the key players such as John Halfpenny and Bob Hawke to encourage the greater union membership. However it appeared that they were moving to settle rather than win the dispute, over the ongoing opposition of those strikers who had seen at first hand how much support there was amongst the union community.

The men had been persuaded that they would not receive the backing of the trade union rank and file in a major confrontation with the government. Most of the men and their stewards had not personally experienced the overwhelming level of support received by personal appeals at job meetings and rallies.⁵⁸ There was also a feeling that continuing the strike would have ‘hurt other workers and caused division in their own ranks.’⁵⁹ However, some members of the AMWSU believed that the return to work had been encouraged by their State Secretary, John Halfpenny. This was seen as a sell-out of the rank and file of that union, as well as of the LV workers, by their own brothers.⁶⁰

The significant moral, financial and in-kind support received by the Valley strikers and the public unity that they displayed throughout the dispute meant that the decision to return, especially with cap in hand, was never going to be an easy one. The

⁵⁷ *AMWSU Newsletter*, 22/77, 31 October 1977, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *The Battler*, 12 November 1977, p. 12.

⁵⁹ *Tribune*, 2 November 1977, p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights’ Union monthly journal*, May 1978, pp. 11-12.

level of unity and solidarity displayed by the strikers was described as having ‘few parallels in the history of trade union struggle’⁶¹ in Australia. This made even more incomprehensible the apparent lack of support by their officials for a continuation of the stoppage. This was also the case more generally in the LV, where the level of community support for the strikers, and for each other, was high, and with businesses also sympathetic to those part of or affected by the strike.⁶²

The SECV near the end of the dispute considered the withdrawal of its opposition to a new award.⁶³ There was also greater awareness that with support forthcoming from the FEDFA, MOA and the AIMPE, the likelihood of the state being without electricity was increasing. It may well have been the case that the strikers were on the verge of ‘winning’. Whether this would have translated into a wages increase and a single award, or had the opposite effect of alienating the ACAC entirely will never be known. This was the second significant opportunity of the dispute, and not taking advantage of it sealed the fate of the maintenance workers. There were no incentives for the SECV, the government or the ACAC to find a settlement that would lead to a favourable outcome for the men involved. A return to work placed the SECV, the ACAC and the government in a stronger position.⁶⁴ Thus was ‘defeat snatched from the jaws of victory’.⁶⁵

This impact of the change of scale in the decision making process from the local to the state level illustrates the effect of the third theme to be discussed. This is the Melbourne-LV divide which was a key context of the dispute. It built on the historical

⁶¹ *Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights’ Union monthly journal*, December 1977, p. 10.

⁶² Trade Union Training Authority, *Report on social problems arising during and after the strike in the Latrobe Valley*.

⁶³ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, File 4, Possible further actions ... , 24 October 1977.

⁶⁴ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Industrial campaigns, 1977 dispute & aftermath, Stay out, October 1977.

⁶⁵ *The Battler*, 12 November 1977, p. 5.

context of the relationships which had developed within the unions, the peak councils, and the SECV.

The Melbourne-LV divide

Many of the interactions during the dispute crystallised around the Melbourne-LV divide which had developed from the specific industrial history of the unions, the CGTLC and the SECV in the LV. The ‘industrial identity’ of the maintenance men centred around a willingness to take local action around local issues. This arose from an early series of industrial campaigns initiated at the local level, and a perception that the Melbourne-based union officials and the VTHC were not sympathetic to them. Until the 1977 dispute moved into the ACAC it was handled on the local level. It was the rank and file, the CGTLC, and the LV SECV industrial relations staff who were involved. Even though the log had been working its way through the VTHC process of seeking input from the affected unions, the VTHC had appeared content to let this slow process take its course. The officials of the state and federal branches of some the unions were generally ignored by the rank and file, as the officials had appeared to ignore them and their particular issues in the past. The SECV metropolitan maintenance and construction workers had offered little support for the dispute other than a 48-hour stoppage in September.

However, once the dispute was registered with the ACAC, this commenced a formal process which resulted in less flexibility, and which required ‘ownership’ by the state or federal branches of the unions involved. The players then became the SECV Melbourne industrial relations staff, officials of the unions, and eventually the ACTU, in the absence of any leadership from the VTHC. Suggestions from the local SECV managers seemed to be bypassed and head office managers, closer perhaps to government structures and pressures, seemed more comfortable with formal processes,

and let the formal apparatus take over the dispute. A significant factor in drawing out the dispute would appear to be the early determination of the SECV not to disclose its position on the non-wage claims. It served to indicate to the LV maintenance workers that they were being treated with contempt by their Melbourne-based employer.

The distrust of the local men for the Melbourne-based union officials and the VTHC also ensured that any input from them was at the invitation of the LV men. This attitude extended to John Halfpenny, State Secretary of the AMWSU, although he became more prominent (as the bearer of bad news, as he said himself)⁶⁶ later in the dispute. The ACTU and John Halfpenny were viewed with suspicion and seen as wanting to settle rather than win the dispute.⁶⁷

The constraints imposed on the rank and file by their strong local industrial identity come to the fore when the division between Melbourne and the LV is considered. The retention of decision making at the local scale demonstrated an unwillingness, or inability, to consider alternative networks which could operate more effectively to bring the dispute to a successful conclusion. Part of this was a lack of awareness or acknowledgement of the changed context, both within the SECV and at the state and federal levels. This had the effect of reducing the power and relevance of a purely local response. In addition, once the government became involved, it was no longer possible to operate at a scale which could not provide a strong response. This could only be offered by a network of organisations and relationships which were comparable to the power, support and connections which were arrayed against the maintenance workers. However, the previous uneasy relationship between the CGTLC and the VTHC, and the initial expectation on the part of both the maintenance workers and the SECV that this would be another minor dispute, precluded any possible transfer

⁶⁶ See for example mass meeting, 18 October 1977.

⁶⁷ Interviews with John E. p. 8; Ken p. 7; Frank p. 9; Paul B. p. 4; *Vanguard*, 27 October 1977, p. 10; *The Battler*, 15 September 1984, p. 6.

of scale from occurring in a timely manner. By the time it became obvious that a stalemate was in operation, the SECV had moved its own response up to a broader scale. The Chairman, the Melbourne industrial relations staff, and the Premier all became involved. Action at such a scale on the SECVs part needed to be matched by an appropriate response on the part of the VTHC and the unions, which came too late, and only after the intervention of Bob Hawke.

In the early stages of the dispute neither the VTHC, the unions nor the ACTU appeared to take any interest. The VTHC did not appear to be taking any initiative to control the strike in its early days, despite it occurring without their approval, and it was apparently content to allow the local stewards to 'hang out to dry'.⁶⁸ The VTHC and the ACTU were both later criticised by the Leader of the National Party in Victoria for failing to intervene earlier in the dispute.⁶⁹ The extent of community and union support for the strikers near the end of the dispute may however have influenced the VTHC, even though the actions being taken by the state and federal governments were likely to have a profound effect on the rest of the union movement. The SECV was disappointed by the lack of positive action or response by the VTHC, and proposed that the SECV would be better served by encouraging the appointment of resident full time union officials in the LV who would ensure that correct procedures were followed in future disputes.⁷⁰

Bob Hawke, as President of the ACTU and President of the ALP, would have recognised that he needed long term support from all areas of the union and political movements. It would not help anyone if Fraser and Hamer were put offside, but would only hinder his options in future industrial negotiations. While the ACTU had the power

⁶⁸ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-8; Darroch and Armstrong, 'Anatomy of an industrial crisis', p. 21.

⁶⁹ VPD, Legislative Council, 8 November 1977, p. 10957.

⁷⁰ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 2, Review of the 1977 maintenance workers dispute November 1977, p. 2-3.

to establish a disputes committee and thus order unions to instruct their men to return to work,⁷¹ it had become obvious over the course of the dispute that this type of decision would only inflame, rather than ease, the situation.⁷² Hawke with his conciliatory approach and persuasive oratory managed to help end the dispute, something that the obstructionist attitude of the SECV, the confrontational attitude of the government, and the intransigence of the strikers hadn't been able to do.⁷³ The SECV had described his involvement as 'constructive and able',⁷⁴ but this view was certainly not shared by the strikers, either during or after the dispute. It merely served to confirm their opinion of Hawke as a settler, not a winner, of disputes. This attitude, also attributed to John Halfpenny, made them 'wolves in sheep's clothing',⁷⁵ to some of the strikers.

Bob Hawke was known as 'a conciliator, a consensus man',⁷⁶ and a settler of disputes (a claim also made during the 1972 SECV dispute).⁷⁷ His intervention signalled to those in the know that there would be no escalation or widening of the dispute. He ended the strike but did not resolve the underlying grievances, which the decisions by Commissioner Mansini concerning wages and a single award merely reinforced.

While the strike was a major event which affected many unions, their members and their activities, its impact on the state and federal branches of the unions involved varied widely. This was due to a number of factors, including the actual number of strikers involved from each union, which was mostly not large; the effect of the electricity restrictions, which for some unions was quite significant; the relative numbers

⁷¹ Manton, 'The problems will remain'.

⁷² See for example *Australian Financial Review*, 11 October 1977, p. 12.

⁷³ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 2.

⁷⁴ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers' strike, 10 November 1977, p. 15.

⁷⁵ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 16 November 1977, p. 18.

⁷⁶ Bob Carr, 'Australian trade unionism in 1977', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 20, no. 1, March 1978, pp. 77-83, p. 83.

⁷⁷ SLV, Riley, File Strikes, Power strike, 1972.

of members involved, which was minor; or the attitude of union officials who were generally not willing to support a wildcat strike.

For most of the eleven unions directly involved, there was little, if any, recognition of or interest in the dispute. Generally exceptions to this were because of the impact on their members resulting from the severe electricity restrictions. The effect on industry in Victoria, and thus on some unions, including the VBEFA and the ATWU, was substantial.

The VBEFA was one of the first unions affected by the electricity restrictions, with 2,700 members stood down from the Ford plant in Geelong alone.⁷⁸ Despite this, at a special meeting of the VBEFA Victorian Branch executive on Tuesday 11 October 1977, members in the LV were commended for their solidarity, and assured of the support of the union.⁷⁹

Similarly, the ATWU, which had only 2 members directly involved, commented in its *Federal* magazine that at some Victorian mills, members had been stood down as a result of the dispute. At Heyfield (Victoria), a shop stewards meeting was held with every Heyfield mill represented, and a committee was formed to set up a relief fund to assist local mill workers.⁸⁰

For some unions, including the ASE and the ETU, the dispute required a significant time commitment for officials in hearings, inspections and meetings.⁸¹

Coverage of the dispute was regular and sympathetic in the AMWSU State Branch committees. This may have been due to the active involvement of the State Secretary, John Halfpenny, in trying to settle the dispute during its later stages (Sam

⁷⁸ *Australian Financial Review*, 11 October 1977, p. 16.

⁷⁹ UMA, 101/37, Box V3, File Victorian Branch Executive, 11 October 1977.

⁸⁰ *The Timber Worker*, v. 3, no. 12, November 1977, p. 15.

⁸¹ UMA, 85/61, Box 180, Files 41/27, 41/28, 41/30, Notes 1977-1978; NBAC: Z422/5, Federal Council meeting minutes, March 1978.

Armstrong referred to him as the ‘lynch-pin’⁸² between the unions and the shop stewards), or may have been belated support for a well organised group of members who were quite clearly going to proceed along a certain path, with or without the formal backing of their officials. At the time, there were estimated to be almost 50,000 members in Victoria of the AMWSU, over 2,000 of whom were in the Latrobe sub branch.⁸³ There was a consistent reporting of the status of the strike and its aftermath, from August 1977 through until March 1978, often with comment on related issues such as SIPS, the actions of the state and federal governments and the Newport PS situation.⁸⁴ This extensive reporting carried through to the national publication, the *Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights’ Union monthly journal*, as well as the Victorian Branch newspaper, the *Amalgamated News*.

The official reporting on the dispute by the VTHC was variable. The Council did not meet after 8 September 1977 until 20 October 1977, when Secretary Ken Stone presented a lengthy report on the dispute.⁸⁵ This would appear to support the suspicion that the VTHC had no wish to be seen to be involved in the dispute, and was indeed hanging Sam Armstrong ‘out to dry’ There was certainly a perception by some of the strikers that the VTHC had a hatred and animosity toward the LV workers.⁸⁶

In contrast to this lack of public discussion of the dispute by the Council, the VTHC Executive meetings regularly reported in detail on the progress of the log of claims, including the lack of action by the unions when requested for information. Once the men were on strike, Secretary Ken Stone provided an update at every meeting, and the Executive called special meetings as necessary, to keep up with events. After the

⁸² UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, esp re 1977 dispute, talk to NTU, 12 April 1986.

⁸³ UMA, 95/96, Box 70, *AMWSU Quarterly report*, July-September 1977; *Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights’ Union Monthly Journal*, February 1978, inside front cover.

⁸⁴ UMA, 95/96, Box 103, reel 104, State Administrative Committee, State Council, 1977-1978.

⁸⁵ UMA, 105/33, Series no. 1/3, Council minutes 1977-1978.

⁸⁶ GTLC, Box 27 (2nd), Colin J. Baillie, The S.E.C. maintenance workers dispute, undated, p. 1.

strike ended, the Executive was kept apprised of the progress of the ACAC hearings, the SECV request to put some maintenance work out to tender, and the further negotiations with the SECV on those parts of the claim over which it had carriage.⁸⁷

Media interactions were both positive and negative. The SECV management felt that the unions had been able to unduly influence the reporting by offering reporters interviews and facilities. Others in the SECV felt that the unions were made out to be ‘the bad guys’.⁸⁸ In the LV, the SECV told its side of the story by paying for advertisements in the *Latrobe Valley Express*, so that they would be printed verbatim. The local rank and file saw the LV coverage as fair, while the Melbourne media were more interested in the personal impact of the dispute, rather than the issues behind it. While reporters were viewed as sympathetic, there was an understanding that the headlines and the editorials were done by Melbourne-based editors who had different perspectives.⁸⁹

The relationships which existed at the time of the dispute between Melbourne-based union officials, the VTHC and the SECV managers, and the LV rank and file, the CGTLC and the local SECV management, discussed earlier in this thesis, formed the basis for the interactions which occurred during the dispute. The VTHC regarded the CGTLC as a maverick operator, while the VTHC was seen as holding back the LV unions and not committed to direct action. The stewards and the rank and file supported each other, but union officials including John Halfpenny (who was perhaps involved because the AMWSU supported the virtues of direct negotiation, but who also wanted the dispute settled as negotiations for other logs were proceeding with the SECV) was regarded with suspicion. However some state union branches, such as the ETU and the

⁸⁷ UMA, 101/20, Box 138, Item 247/1977, VTHC Executive minutes 1977; UMA, 101/20, Box 144, Item 187/1978, VTHC Executive minutes 1978.

⁸⁸ Interview with Evan p. 18.

⁸⁹ Interviews with Kevin p. 6; John E. p. 28.

ABCE&BLF, provided support for continuing the strike.⁹⁰ Sometimes this support appeared to be given in opposition to local sub-branches perceived to be run by ‘Groupers’, such as the FIA.⁹¹ Despite these exceptions, the LV maintenance workers were the ones who controlled the course of the dispute until the later stages, when Bob Hawke and the ACAC became the focus.

The personal hardship resulting from the strike, and the disappointment over the end result of the work value case, were significant, and have been described in the previous chapter. The following section will consider the effect of the dispute on the inter-union relationships within the LV SECV, and between the maintenance employees and the SECV, after the return to work.

Impact of the dispute

The personal impact of the return to work, with nothing in hand, was a shock to the men, who had expected to win. In addition to this, there was a perceived change in the relationship between the maintenance unions and the operations unions which had remained at work, and in personal relations with the SECV.

An enduring legacy of the dispute in the LV is said to be the bitterness between members of the maintenance unions and those which had continued to work, particularly the FEDFA. This attitude also extended to the VTHC, and was referred to on future occasions when united industrial action was proposed.⁹² Despite the rhetoric of forgetting the past, the feeling of bitterness resulting from the dispute was a common theme in my interviews.⁹³ The length of time that this lasted was said to vary from months to years, or to the present day.⁹⁴ It has also been noted elsewhere that this ill

⁹⁰ Interviews with Lyle p. 5; Ron p. 2; Frank p. 11; Harry p. 3.

⁹¹ Interviews with Chris pp. 3-4; Lyle p. 2; Harry p. 4.

⁹² For example, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 4 September 1980, p. 22.

⁹³ Interviews with Peter p. 5; Luke p. 20; Chris p. 9; Lindsey p. 8; Evan p. 14; Paul C. p. 10.

⁹⁴ Interviews with Terry p. 9; Ron p. 5; Paul B. p. 3; Lindsey p. 8.

feeling remained a feature within the LV SECV.⁹⁵ The irony that a number of the unions involved in the dispute, together with the FEDFA, became part of the large Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union in the early 1990s, was not lost on several of the interviewees.

The members of the FEDFA (the 'machine-minders')⁹⁶ wielded considerable power. This was viewed to some extent by the maintenance tradesmen as an affront, since they were generally not tradesmen, but despite this had better pay and conditions. It was clear from my interviews that there was an expectation from the rank and file that the FEDFA should have supported the dispute – that it was the officials of this union, rather than the rank and file, which had made the decision not to be involved.⁹⁷ This expectation was perhaps understandable, since the FEDFA and the AMWSU were moving towards amalgamation at the federal and state levels and in the LV were sharing office accommodation. However, the LV FEDFA disapproved of unauthorised industrial action and was suspicious of the motives of Sam Armstrong, a Communist.⁹⁸ This resulted in poor relationships with both the AMWSU and the CGTLC, and provided another reason for the FEDFA to avoid involvement in the dispute if at all possible.

The MOA appeared to have disregarded jurisdictional boundaries when apprentices were used to perform maintenance which kept plant in service.⁹⁹ This further reinforced perceptions that the maintenance men had been treated without respect by both the SECV and other unions.

⁹⁵ Len Pullin, Ali Haidar and Gerry Griffin, 'Trade unions and industrial restructuring: a regional case study', in Gerard Griffin (ed.), *Trade unions 2000: retrospect and prospect*, National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Monash University, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 312-331, p. 327; Ruschena, *The impact of competition and privatisation on change and workplace relations: a study of the Victorian electricity generation industry 1989-1997*, p. 54; Teicher, Van Gramberg and Holland, *Outsourcing in Australia and the trade union response: electricity generation in Victoria*, p. 14.

⁹⁶ UMA, 77/77, Interview with Col Baillie.

⁹⁷ Interview with Chris pp. 2, 8.

⁹⁸ *News Weekly*, 19 October 1977, p. 7; *Enfilade*, July 1977, pp. 1-2; *Enfilade*, December 1991, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Teicher, Van Gramberg and Holland, *Outsourcing in Australia and the trade union response: electricity generation in Victoria*, p. 14.

A change of attitude also extended to the SECV as employer. A feeling of distrust and of tension between individuals resulted.¹⁰⁰ The ‘dismissal letter’ was said to have done away with loyalty and commitment of the maintenance employees to the SECV.¹⁰¹ There was also said to be more ‘casualisation’,¹⁰² and the SECV became more business-like.¹⁰³ However, in general the overall relationship between the SECV management and the rank and file was said to have improved after the strike. There was ‘more respect’,¹⁰⁴ better communication,¹⁰⁵ initiative was encouraged,¹⁰⁶ the SECV ‘took a softer line’,¹⁰⁷ and there was a positive attitude from managers ‘not to let it happen again’.¹⁰⁸ This perception was confirmed by Benson and Hince,¹⁰⁹ who noted that after 1977 the SECV became relatively stable industrially, perhaps indicating a new internal industrial relations climate in the LV.¹¹⁰ This suggested improvement in relations and attitudes may have been the result of activity on the part of the LV management and industrial relations personnel. These were the staff which had to live and work with the fallout from the dispute, including the Mansini decision.

The poor result of the dispute in the ACAC did not for the most part reduce the respect which the maintenance men had for Sam Armstrong and the other leaders.¹¹¹ The men felt that Sam had been poorly treated by union officials, who ‘should have stood with him’,¹¹² but retained his credibility because the loss was due to ‘the

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with John E. p. 21; John H. pp. 4, 5, 7; Lyle p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Peter p. 4.

¹⁰² Interview with John E. p. 20.

¹⁰³ Interview with Gerry p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Chris p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Interviews with Luke p. 18; John H. p. 10.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with Lindsey p. 21; John H. pp. 11, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Ron p. 5; Peter p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Evan p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Benson and Hince, *Determinants of industrial relations in coal winning, power generation and associated construction in the Latrobe Valley: a preliminary analysis*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Benson, Hince and Griffin, *Industrial relations policy: a case study of organisational change*, p. 17.

¹¹¹ Interviews with Luke p. 19; Lyle p. 19.

¹¹² Interview with Lindsey p. 11.

circumstances’,¹¹³ and this ‘strike was different’.¹¹⁴ The SECV itself suggested that Sam Armstrong came out of the dispute with a powerful reputation despite the loss.¹¹⁵

This chapter has drawn out some of the significant features of the 1977 dispute. In particular the three themes of control over the dispute by the rank and file, the significant level of community support, and the effect of the Melbourne-LV divide have been considered. These themes have shown the importance for this dispute of the impact of place and scale. The development of a strong local industrial identity as a result of the impact of the particular location was partly a result of the community relationships, and resulted in strong community support for the strikers. The particular industrial identity also meant a preference for local action on local issues, and resulted in a determination to retain local control of the dispute, even when the result was a deadlock between the maintenance employees, the ACAC, and the SECV. This in turn impacted on the choice of scale, since the uneasy relationship with the VTHC, a coalition state government unsympathetic to the strikers, and the insistence of the ACAC on upholding the principles of wage indexation, demonstrated a changed context which meant that action at the local scale would not succeed. The unwillingness or inability of the maintenance employees and their shop stewards early in the dispute to recognise the need for intervention by a more powerful set of networks reduced the probability of a successful outcome. Later, when the scale of response by the SECV had clearly moved away from the local, the result of their lack of familiarity with action at a broader scale may have meant that the rank and file and the CGTLC were unable to recognise that they were no longer able to read and control either the context or the events which were by then occurring.

¹¹³ Interview with Paul B. p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Terry p. 5.

¹¹⁵ PROV, VPRS 9822/P1/Unit 1, File 2, Maintenance workers’ strike, 10 November 1977, p. 13.

Despite the best intentions of the maintenance workers, once the dispute escalated after the triggering of the walkout, control was moved to a largely Melbourne focus. The rank and file also wished to negotiate with the SECV in preference to taking their claim to the ACAC, where they did not expect to obtain a fair result. When the men refused to return to work as proposed by Commissioner Vosti, they lost probably the best chance of resolving the dispute with a monetary win. Instead, they set themselves up for a confrontation with both the state and federal governments.

However, the ensuing standoff garnered increasing support from the wider community when the Victorian Premier amended the ESA. This action threatened to escalate the dispute into both the wider SECV and across the state, with a change in attitude to the dispute from the MOA, the AIMPE and the FEDFA, as well as the very public support offered by a range of fringe groups, individuals and work sites.

The third theme from the dispute was the Melbourne-LV divide. This operated across the unions, the peak councils and the SECV. It was the result of the relationships which had developed during the history of the SECV and the resultant local 'industrial identity' which had formed. These relationships included those between the rank and file and their union officials, between the CGTLC and the VTHC, and between the shop stewards and the SECV in a paternalistic organisation. These relationships influenced the events which comprised the dispute, and together with the unfavourable industrial context external to the SECV, affected both its course and its result.

The next chapter will consider the wider significance of the 1977 maintenance dispute. This will be done in two sections. The first will locate the dispute within the literature of lengthy disputes and in particular within Mobilisation Theory. A consideration of the reasons for the dispute lasting as long as it did will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Mobilisation Theory in the explanation of lengthy disputes.

Secondly, the 1977 dispute will be contrasted and compared with two other lengthy Australian disputes. These two disputes are the ECNSW 35 hour week campaign of 1973 and the SEQEB contract labour dispute of 1984-1986. These two disputes will be described briefly in order to permit a comparison with the 1977 maintenance dispute. This will enable a consideration of those factors which were unique to each dispute, as a means of providing further insights into both lengthy Australian disputes in general and the 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute in particular.

Chapter Eight: The wider significance of the dispute

The previous two chapters have discussed the particular features of the 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute. Chapter Six described the dispute in detail in order to clarify the sequence of events, the factors which impacted on them, and the relationships involved. The particular economic, political and industrial context which was operating at the time of this dispute was a key feature of the narrative. This narrative, detailing the beginning, sustaining and cessation of the dispute, has contributed to a greater understanding of the dispute and the effect of its context. Chapter Seven discussed the three significant themes which featured in the dispute, namely the control over the dispute by the rank and file, the extensive community support, and the LV-Melbourne divide which affected the unions, the peak councils, and the SECV. This has further added to our understanding of particular social relationships which were a feature of the local industrial identity, and which affected the 1977 dispute.

This chapter will discuss the wider significance of the 1977 SECV maintenance dispute. This will be done in two ways. Firstly, the dispute will be located within the relevant literature on strikes, in order to relate it to that literature. This discussion will focus on Mobilisation Theory and its applicability to the 1977 dispute, and in particular how it contributes to an explanation for the length of the latter. Secondly, a comparison of the 1977 dispute with two other major Australian disputes will be used to reinforce the importance of context (political, economic and industrial), the particular grievance, and mobilisation by both unions and the employer/government on the commencement and sustaining of lengthy disputes.

Two lengthy disputes -- the ECNSW 35-hour week dispute of 1973, and the SEQEB contract labour dispute of 1984-1986 -- have been selected for comparison. These two significant disputes occurred at around the same time as the 1977

maintenance dispute. They were both within state owned enterprises in the area of electricity supply to provide a 'like' comparison, and the employees involved were directly employed by the respective electricity authority, rather than via contractors.

While there were several other noteworthy lengthy strikes in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s, they have not been selected for comparative discussion for specific reasons. This is because they may have involved a particular elite group of employees (airline pilots strike, 1989), a predominantly female workforce (nurses strike, 1986), or private industry (Loy Yang strike, 1980). It was felt that the basic differences in the workforce and the context could preclude meaningful comparisons with the 1977 dispute. In addition, the disputes which occurred in a number of state-owned enterprises as the result of a decision to corporatise and/or privatise such bodies were not considered, since they provide a different range of reasons for disputes outside the 'typical' range of industrial disputation matters.

The two selected disputes are compared and contrasted with each other and the 1977 SECV dispute in order to highlight similarities and differences which may be useful in explaining both the length and the outcome of each dispute. The importance of the economic, political and industrial context of each dispute is of particular interest.

In the following sections of this chapter, the 1977 maintenance dispute will first be examined in the context of the literature on strikes. Following this, the two lengthy disputes which have been selected for comparison, the ECNSW 35-hour week dispute of 1973, and the SEQEB contract labour dispute of 1984-1986, will be briefly described. A comparative discussion will then draw out similarities and differences in the three disputes, and the factors which contributed to the different outcomes in each dispute. This serves two purposes: to contribute to the literature on lengthy disputes, and to

identify the similarities with, and differences from, the 1977 dispute, thus further aiding our understanding of this dispute.

The 1977 dispute within the relevant literature

The literature of strikes has suggested a number of reasons behind mobilisation. These include issues around control in the workplace, and the power relationships between the various players such as management and labour. Such issues around relationships were also noted by Benson and Goff¹ in the conclusion to their article on the 1977 dispute. They specifically suggested that the role of the state government, the difficulties of the ACAC in attempting to end the strike, and the relationships between the VTHC, CGTLC and the LV shop stewards warranted further study in order to more fully understand the length of the strike. These issues and relationships have been more fully articulated in this account of the dispute, possible partly because more material has become available since the end of the dispute. Mobilisation Theory is able to frame such issues, since it focuses on the social processes of industrial relations which occur both within and external to the workplace. This emphasis on social processes rather than on organisational structures is one of the strengths of Mobilisation Theory. It provides an opportunity for a broader consideration of disputes and may be of particular interest when framing lengthy disputes. This section will discuss the 1977 dispute specifically within the facets of Mobilisation Theory. This will assist not only with a greater understanding of why the dispute developed as it did, but will also indicate whether Mobilisation Theory can contribute to an explanation for the length of this dispute.

When framing the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute within Mobilisation Theory, three particular questions are of interest. Firstly, how did the individuals involved acquire a collective, as opposed to individual, sense of grievance? Secondly,

¹ Benson and Goff, 'The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers' strike'.

how and under what conditions did these individuals take collective action? Thirdly, what circumstances were required to maintain, and then to terminate, the collective action? These three questions will be discussed with reference to the particular circumstances and context within which the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute took place.

The first question relates to the acquisition of a collective grievance. Mobilisation Theory suggests that this will be aided by three processes: attribution of a grievance to a specific agency which then provides a specific focus for collective action, determined leadership which will focus individuals on a particular issue as well as promoting group cohesion and identity, and the social identification of individuals with a specific group which has particular interests and values.²

The log of claims formulated by the maintenance workers contained two significant claims. These were the wages increase and a common award. The wage claim was based on a relativity issue,³ and was a matter which was becoming of greater concern to the maintenance workers. This issue of relativity in wage rates with contractors on SECV building projects in the LV was a significant issue.⁴ The maintenance employees felt justified in asking for wages parity with workers performing similar, if not the same, work. The other significant item, the call for a common award, was one which was perhaps more confronting to SECV management,⁵ since it involved the formalising of relativities and applying common working conditions across a range of unions. It was seen by the maintenance employees in the LV as the only way to confirm and retain the complex set of internal relativities which existed in the SECV.

² Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*.

³ Cribb, 'Causes and catalysts of strikes'.

⁴ Interviews with Gerry p. 1; John H. p. 3.

⁵ Knowles, *Strikes: a study in industrial conflict, with special reference to British experience between 1911 and 1947*, p. 219.

Minor claims in the log related to the daily conditions of work,⁶ and may be seen as a reaction to the double standard operating within the SECV at the time, where there were different conditions for salaried and waged employees. The disparity in conditions between salaried and wages employees in the SECV was a source of irritation to the latter,⁷ despite the suggestion that such differentials in employment conditions were a ‘fact of industrial life’⁸ In Australia. It contributed to a perception by the maintenance employees that the SECV lacked respect for them as individuals and regarded them as only a source of labour.⁹ The nature of the grievance, both around the contract labour issue which triggered the strike, and the items in the log of claims, demonstrates the importance of previous experiences and relationships, within both the social and industrial contexts, in its development. The nature and length of mobilisation are therefore likely to be directly affected by the nature of the grievance and the history behind its development.

The firm stance taken by the SECV over this particular dispute may have been a response to the continuing conflicts with the CGTLC over the issue of contract labour. The resulting series of appearances in the ACAC, and the subsequent ‘Vosti principles’, (discussed in Chapter four) continued the perception of interference with management prerogative. The firm stance by the SECV also complemented its actions in other disputes earlier that year. In August it had implemented a ‘no work no pay’ scenario

⁶ Braverman, *Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*; Clegg, *The changing system of industrial relations in Great Britain*, p. 269; Edwards, *Contested terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century*, p. 13; Daniel Katz, 'Satisfactions and deprivations in industrial life', in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (eds), *Industrial conflict*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1954, pp. 86-106, p. 94.

⁷ Interviews with John E. p. 7; John H. pp. 2, 3; Gerry p. 1; Lyle p. 2.

⁸ Industrial Commission of New South Wales, *Report of the Inquiry into terms and conditions of employment in the electricity supply industry in New South Wales and into the hours of work of forty-hour workers in the industry*, Government Printer, New South Wales, Sydney, 1973b, p. 148.

⁹ Edwards, *Contested terrain: the transformation of the workplace in the twentieth century*, p. 12; Hyman, *Strikes*, pp. 98, 102-6.

during the FIA dispute, and earlier in 1977, it had refused to negotiate on the MOA claims which were later also rejected by the ACAC.

Yet while the log of claims provided the focus for a grievance, and this was able to be attributed to the SECV, this did not provide all the necessary preconditions for mobilisation according to Mobilisation Theory. Two more processes were required: union identification, and determined leadership. As regards the former, collective organisation and a tradition of common action in the workplace were a fact of life in the SECV maintenance unions. The closed shop had long been custom and practice, probably since the first LV SECV power station had commenced operations in 1922. The LV power stations had developed a long history of strong unionism which provided the foundations for mobilisation.¹⁰ They were well organised and ‘proud of it’¹¹, accustomed to industrial mobilisation, and identified with their union/s.¹² In addition, the LV stewards were willing to launch industrial action which was a ‘challenge from below’,¹³ with VTHC approval not always sought. The CGTLC also played an important role in providing a forum for industrial exchange, since it ‘tied the unions together’.¹⁴

The strong industrial identity which the maintenance workers had developed was also aided by the physical separation from Melbourne. This helped to foster a local sense of belonging, and a distinguishing of ‘outsiders’. A longstanding, uneasy relationship with the VTHC, and a distrust of union officials based in Melbourne, contributed to this local identification. The establishment of a ‘them and us’ attitude to management increased the likelihood that injustice would be attributed to management.¹⁵

¹⁰ Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, p. 37.

¹¹ Interview with Lindsey p. 3.

¹² Interviews with Gerry p. 3; Lindsey p. 3; Luke p. 5.

¹³ Darlington, ‘Workplace union militancy on Merseyside since the 1960s: extent, nature, causes, and decline’, p. 124.

¹⁴ Interview with Lyle p. 15.

¹⁵ Jasper, ‘The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements’.

The other factor in the formation of a collective grievance according to Mobilisation Theory is a determined leadership. The important role played by leaders is a factor which has been related to the strength and likelihood of collective organisation.¹⁶ The senior stewards, Sam Armstrong, George Wragg, Ted Turnbull and Ross Miles, played an important role. Their roles in the dispute were seen by some as due to their leadership of the GTLC, rather than as shop stewards.¹⁷ They assisted in the attribution of the grievance(s) to the SECV, the government and the ACAC, and they solicited support for the dispute via the mass media. They were seen as 'one of us',¹⁸ and were motivated by a sense of social justice and fairness.¹⁹ Sam Armstrong in particular was charismatic and a good communicator,²⁰ thus making it easier for him to encourage mobilisation.²¹ The former two stewards were also strongly associated with the political Left, which has been considered important in building workplace activism and understanding workplace union activity.²²

As a charismatic leader, Sam Armstrong was able to use emotions such as anger, loyalty and respect, to provide motivation and goals for action.²³ Self-action may generate emotions, for example through crowd response at a mass meeting, as do actions by others (for example, the SECV refusal to negotiate; the implementation of no-work, no pay; and the perceived lack of respect in the ACAC decision not to award a wage

¹⁶ Darlington, 'Union militancy and left-wing leadership on London Underground'; Greene, Black and Ackers, 'The union makes us strong?: a study of the dynamics of workplace union leadership at two UK manufacturing plants'; Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, pp. 49-51; Metochi, 'The influence of leadership and member attitudes in understanding the nature of union participation'.

¹⁷ Interview with Jack p. 7.

¹⁸ Interview with Lindsey p. 11.

¹⁹ Interviews with John E. p. 13; Gerry p. 3; Bruce p. 13; Paul C. p. 3.

²⁰ Interviews with Gerry p. 3; Evan pp. 7-10; Ken p. 3.

²¹ Johnson and Jarley, 'Justice and union participation: an extension and test of Mobilization Theory'; Kelly, 'The future of trade unionism: injustice, identity and attribution'; Nepstad and Bob, 'When do leaders matter?: hypotheses on leadership dynamics in social movements'; Shamir, House and Arthur, 'The motivational effects of charismatic leadership: a self-concept based theory'.

²² Darlington, 'Union militancy and left-wing leadership on London Underground'; Darlington, 'Agitator 'theory' of strikes re-evaluated'; Darlington, 'Leadership and union militancy: the case of the RMT'; Kelly and Heery, *Working for the union: British trade union officers*, p. 138.

²³ Jasper, 'The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements'.

increase), particularly if injustice can be invoked by the unfairness of wage or conditions differentials.²⁴

This combination of attribution of a grievance to the SECV through the strong local industrial identity which included union membership, a strong local shop floor leadership and a specific focus for collective grievance, provided the first requirement for mobilisation.

The second question framing the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute within Mobilisation Theory relates to how and under what conditions individuals take collective action. In the 1977 dispute, as we have seen, while the necessary pre conditions for mobilisation – collective grievance attributed to the SECV, a strong shop floor organisation and identification with the union, and leadership – were in place, there was no industrial action taken.

Frustration built up slowly over the perceived lack of interest in the log by the VTHC and the state branches of the unions.²⁵ The imposition of bans was a reaction to the apparent lack of action by the VTHC, and the perception that the SECV was showing its disdain for their wages employees by refusing to negotiate.²⁶ This was despite the fact that the shop stewards should have been aware that the SECV was obliged to handle industrial relations matters affecting award conditions via the OIRC.²⁷ The union officials certainly would have known.²⁸ The men were distrustful of the ACAC, but nonetheless the chances of the SECV negotiating on the log were slight. Even though the men were impatient, the beginning of the mobilisation activity was relatively mild, only involving the placing of bans on overtime.

²⁴ Gamson, *Talking politics*, p. 32.

²⁵ Interview with Chris pp. 3-4.

²⁶ Interview with Lyle p. 18.

²⁷ Interview with Frank p. 2.

²⁸ Interview with Evan p. 2.

The maintenance unions had a history of successful activism,²⁹ so that placing bans was viewed as a means of obtaining some action on the log. This is perhaps indicative of the routine nature of the dispute: the log was not perceived as anything exceptional or as requiring industrial action involving significant effort or commitment.³⁰ There was no intention to strike during the early stages of the dispute, but the SECV brought matters to a head with the 'no work, no pay' situation.

The walkout which followed the 'no work, no pay' action of the SECV on 8 August focused the men on a justified grievance: that the SECV had broken the rules.³¹ This then was seen as another example of 'unfair' or 'poor' treatment of the workforce and reason not to trust the SECV management. It served to coalesce attribution of a grievance to the SECV.³² It also occurred within the emotionally charged issue³³ of contract labour allocation which already featured in earlier disputes in 1977. The history of joint action across unions and the industrial heritage of the LV SECV unions made it likely that the men who had been stood down would be supported by the other maintenance unions. The walkout resulted in the resurrection of the log of claims whose progress had stalled. This was then mistakenly attributed as the reason for the strike.³⁴ This disjuncture between the trigger of the strike and the issues subsequently used in the bargaining process has been suggested as a factor in the length of disputes.³⁵ It can lead to a situation whereby 'each party had its own conception of what were the main issues, each also tended to refuse even to acknowledge the relevance of issues that were

²⁹ Kelly, 'Union militancy and social partnership'; Klandermans, 'How group identification helps to overcome the dilemma of collective action'.

³⁰ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³² Friedman and Meredeem, *The dynamics of industrial conflict: lessons from Ford*; Kelly, *Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves*, p. 126; Klandermans, *The social psychology of protest*, pp. 38-40.

³³ Gouldner, *Wildcat strike: a study in worker-management relationships*, p. 55; Jasper, 'The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements'.

³⁴ Atzeni, 'Searching for injustice and finding solidarity?: a contribution to the mobilisation theory debate'.

³⁵ Kelly and Nicholson, 'The causation of strikes: a review of theoretical approaches and the potential contribution of social psychology'.

considered important by the others.’³⁶ Such a situation results in a lack of clarity over the reason for the strike and the common goal being sought.

Mackay³⁷ has also suggested that the challenging of SECV management prerogative and authority which occurred by the walkout over the contract labour issue was likely to result in a lengthy dispute. However, in this dispute it is also likely that the confusion of the men over the reason for the strike, and the subsequent bargaining over the log of claims, had an impact on its length.

The strength of the emotion that caused the walkout over the contract labour issue was not given the opportunity to retreat before the mass meeting was held, and may thus have influenced the decision to strike indefinitely. The heated discussion at mass meetings, as well as the unusually high attendance and support from families, indicated the level of feeling over the issues.

The necessary preconditions for mobilisation were in place, according to Mobilisation Theory. A grievance incorporating an element of injustice was attributed to the employer, a strong local industrial identity included a charismatic and committed leadership, and a trigger for mobilisation over an emotive issue was provided. The result was a walkout and a call for an indefinite strike.

The third question framing the 1977 maintenance workers’ dispute within Mobilisation Theory relates to the circumstances required to sustain and then to terminate collective action. These are important when considering why lengthy disputes last for so long.

The dispute was sustained by a range of social interactions and relationships. There was significant support from families, the trade union community Australia-wide and a constant media presence. Such extensive support has been a feature of a number of

³⁶ Lane and Roberts, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, p. 236.

³⁷ Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*.

lengthy Australian disputes.³⁸ There is no doubt that it was critical in supporting the extended mobilisation of the maintenance workers, particularly through the use of strike funds.³⁹ However there was little, if any, support from either the VTHC or the ACTU, whose leaders wished to end the dispute rather than win it. The extent and nature of the support from the broader community has been discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, since it was a significant theme within the strike.

In addition, stewards and other rank and file were encouraged to participate in the range of activities necessary to maintain unity and focus during the strike – attending the various ACAC hearings, fund raising, liaising with the unions, attending mass meetings, and soliciting support at a range of workplaces. Such activities were important not only for the stewards but for all the strikers, maintaining cohesiveness, unity and camaraderie.

Another important factor which contributed to the length of the dispute was employer and government mobilisation.⁴⁰ The length of time since the bans were imposed allowed for mobilisation by both the SECV and the government, who were determined not to negotiate. The government was able to legislate changes to the ESA; to declare a state of emergency with the powers which that gave access to; and to commence union deregistration proceedings in the ACAC. The SECV was able to impose sanctions on its employees such as a refusal to approve leave, to consider the 'no work, no pay' scenario and how it might be implemented, to consider employment of outside labour, and to consider the opportunities which might be available if the dispute was brought to a head. Once the strike began, it was also able to impose sanctions on the

³⁸ Some significant disputes are discussed in Dargavel, 'Not easy work to starve their employees': the 1921-22 Tasmanian timber dispute'; Murray and Peetz, *Women of the coal rushes*; Reeves, *Up from the underworld: coalminers and community in Wonthaggi, 1909-1968*; Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*; Stewart, *Mt. Isa: in search of a culprit*.

³⁹ Gennard, *Financing strikers*.

⁴⁰ Franzosi, *The puzzle of strikes: class and state strategies in postwar Italy*, pp. 301-2; Offe and Wiesensthal, 'Two logics of collective action', pp. 191-4; Tilly, *From mobilization to revolution*, p. 101.

community, which included many members of the same unions which were in dispute with the SECV, in the form of harsh power restrictions. These were seen as an attempt to have the community and the union movement exert pressure on the men to return to work.

It is also timely at this point to note the range of relationships and interactions which were affecting the dispute. Lengthy mobilisations have been proposed to be related to power and power relationships, not only those within the workplace, but also those which may affect the workplace, such as those between employers, unions, peak union bodies and governments. The effects of the interactions within these relationships as they occurred during the dispute are important in understanding why they occurred and why the dispute lasted so long.⁴¹ Two of the significant relationships were those between the rank and file and their union officials, and between the GTLC and the VTHC.

The relationship of rank and file and the stewards with their union officials was one of distrust, since these officials, traditionally Melbourne-based, appeared loath to recognise the needs of the LV workers, who were after all usually only a small portion of the membership.⁴² In fact so little notice was taken of the dispute that the only official whose appearance in the LV was regularly noted was John Halfpenny from the AMWSU, who suggested that he was given 'all the rotten jobs'.⁴³ This was perhaps a means of deflecting the bad news and thus the disapproval of the rank and file from the local stewards.

⁴¹ Biggs, 'Strikes as sequences of interaction: the American strike wave of 1886'.

⁴² Interview with Bruce p. 9; Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. 21.

⁴³ For example, delivering the news of the decision on the wage claim to the mass meeting on 18 October 1977.

The perceived lack of action by the VTHC during the dispute⁴⁴ was generally attributed to the longstanding poor relationship between the GTLC and the VTHC. The VTHC was placed in the difficult position of condoning, if not supporting and leading the action, in order to retain a united front across the union movement.⁴⁵ The other option, of leaving the LV men to sink or swim on their own, was not really possible once support for the men became widespread both within and outside the union movement. However, both the VTHC and the ACTU were viewed as wanting a return to work under any circumstances.⁴⁶

I argue that the 1977 dispute can only be understood within the particular context (political, economic and industrial) of the time, since this had a major impact on both the course and the outcomes of that dispute.⁴⁷ This becomes even more important to take into account if it has changed significantly since a previous mobilisation.⁴⁸ This may create a much different likelihood of winning or losing a dispute and must be given careful consideration before mobilisation of any sort. In particular, a high rate of unemployment not only reduces the bargaining power of labour, but increases the likelihood of anti-union action on the part of the government.⁴⁹ 1977 was a time of increasing unemployment, and a federal election was on the horizon. This was not an auspicious time for a major strike, and Bob Hawke, President of the ACTU, made this

⁴⁴ Interviews with Ron p. 3; Ken p. 7; John E. p. 9; Frank p. 13; John H. p. 3; Kelly, *Trade unions and socialist politics*, pp. 149-53; Kelly and Heery, *Working for the union: British trade union officers*, pp. 149-50.

⁴⁵ Hyman, *Strikes*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Luke p. 6; Chris p. 2.

⁴⁷ Blackmur, *Strikes: causes, conduct & consequences*; Deery (ed.), *Labour in conflict: the 1949 coal strike*; Gardner and McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute'.

⁴⁸ Simon Blackwood, 'Doomsday for the Queensland labour movement? the SEQEB dispute and union strategy', *Politics*, vol. 24, no. 1, May 1989, pp. 68-76; Paul K. Edwards, 'The political economy of industrial conflict: Britain and the United States', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1983, pp. 461-500.

⁴⁹ Martin, 'Bureaucracy, power, and threat: unions and strikes in the United States, 1990-2001'.

point to the stewards and members involved in the strike.⁵⁰ The rank and file misread or ignored the context, not recognising that the governments were not going to accede to demands backed up by industrial action. The stewards had also not heeded the firm line being taken by the SECV during some industrial disputes earlier that year.

The immediate context is also impacted on by the ways in which the parties in the dispute have dealt with each other previously. The previous experience of labour management relations may be a guide to how the dispute can be expected to develop.⁵¹ The LV unions had a history of local action over local issues, and successes had reinforced this tendency. In the case of the maintenance workers, disputes during the 1960s and 1970s had often generated a successful outcome in terms of wages. The corollary to this of course is that management (and strikers) learn from the mistakes they made in previous disputes, and resolve not to repeat them. The dispute can only be fought based on the previous behaviour of both sides, which can then be used to predict its likely course.⁵² However the industrial context had changed significantly by 1977, providing the unions with little predictive ability from the result of previous mobilisations.

The other important factor I would argue is not the particular power relationships involved, but changes to, or potential changes to these relationships. These combined with the context at that time to signal a particular level of 'threat' to various parties which may not be seen as significant under other circumstances. The nature of the dispute in the 1977 case was no different to many other logs with which the SECV had been presented. Any challenge to employer authority is likely to be resisted, and will

⁵⁰ UMA, 101/20, Box 163, File SEC Latrobe Valley dispute, Item 96b/1978, notes from meeting 10 [ie 11] October 1977.

⁵¹ Fells, 'Industrial relationships at the plant level: a case study'; Gardner and McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute'; Martin, 'Bureaucracy, power, and threat: unions and strikes in the United States, 1990-2001'; Waddington, 'The Ansell's brewery dispute: a social-cognitive approach to the study of strikes'.

⁵² Crouch, *Trade unions*, pp. 81-2.

thus impact on the length of a dispute. However the context at this time was such that the log and the industrial mobilisation which it precipitated may have been viewed as a threat to the stability and ability of the SECV to carry out its expected functions. The SECV was in a situation where it was involved in a number of disputes threatening the supply of power (Newport), customer relations (Coronet), and matters of managerial prerogative (contract labour). The bans which were imposed after the serving of the log may have resulted in it feeling compelled to 'pull rank', not expecting that the reaction would be so extreme. However, it is also not unreasonable to conclude that the SECV should have expected a significant reaction given the strength of feeling within the maintenance shop stewards and the CGTLC over the contract labour issue at that time. For the state government, the perceived intransigence of the strikers was seen as further proof of the militancy of the power unions in general, and the LV shop stewards in particular. When added to the dispute over Newport PS, it provided a credible means of deflecting attention from the developing land scandal. In the federal sphere, the economic climate was such that the maintenance dispute was viewed by the federal government as a threat to its management of unemployment and inflation. It became another high profile dispute which helped to convince the federal government that legislative action was required, and that industrial disputation provided the grounds for an election.

If each of the five elements identified in Mobilisation Theory is required for the commencement of some form of industrial mobilisation, then the corollary to this is that if one of the elements ceases to exist then mobilisation, regardless of its form, will end. A change occurred in the nature of the grievance, which reverted from the trigger issue back to the log of claims. In addition, once the dispute moved into the ACAC, the attribution of the grievance (that is, the ability to do something about it) moved also to

the ACAC. The focus of the dispute on the log, rather than on the 'breaking of the rules' by the SECV, meant that the stewards were able to convince the men to return to work to allow arbitration to proceed. It had become obvious that neither Commissioner Vosti nor the Full Bench was prepared to hand down a decision until the men had returned to work. The focus of the grievance then remained with the ACAC through the subsequent progress of the dispute. The exception was during the initial hearing before Commissioner Vosti, when the unwillingness of the SECV to provide details of the conditions claims on which it would negotiate was seen by the rank and file as disrespectful, ending a short return to work.

Why then did the men strike again when an unfavourable verdict was handed down by the ACAC on 18 October? Mobilisation Theory suggests that this decision may be viewed as renewing their sense of injustice, with the focus again on the ACAC, since the Full Bench's decision was seen as lacking respect for their situation. For the strikers, this confirmed their initial reluctance to have the dispute taken to the ACAC. A decision granting any wage increase, together with the negotiated improvements in conditions, may have been sufficient to end the dispute. The men would perhaps have considered the significant costs incurred by a renewal of the dispute, when weighed against the benefits, albeit small, in accepting a small 'money in hand' offer (together with the negotiated conditions improvements).⁵³

This dispute was sustained in part by the disjuncture between the trigger which resulted in a walkout by the men (the 'no work no pay' over the contract labour issue) and the issue which became the reason for negotiations (the log). This was added to by the insistence of the ACAC in a return to work which was matched by the reluctance of the men to return; by the unwillingness of the SECV to provide answers to the

⁵³ Klandermans, 'Mobilization and participation in trade union action: an expectancy-value approach'.

conditions claims; by the mobilisation of the government and its intervention in the dispute; and by the strength of the support for the dispute by the union movement and members of the community, wives and families. The dispute was ended only by the combined efforts of the State Secretary of the AMWSU John Halfpenny, the stewards led by Sam Armstrong, and by the President of the ACTU Bob Hawke who was able to broker a deal which enabled the men and the stewards to return to work with some dignity. This deal allowed the majority of stewards to persuade the rank and file that the benefits of ending the strike outweighed the costs of continuing it.

Strength of leadership had retained the cohesion of the men during the strike, but this was not used to resurrect or refocus the grievance five months later, when Commission Mansini handed down his work value judgment. A small wage increase had been won, negotiated conditions improvements had been accepted, and the length of time since the return to work had removed the impetus from the grievance. Also, there was no 'breaking of the rules' by the SECV (although there were still ongoing disputes over contract labour), the wage increase indicated some consideration of the maintenance workers' situation, and there was the reminder that the building unions had not received anything at all.

The dispute in the short term did not achieve its stated aims. For the strikers, on balance the result was not worth the dispute⁵⁴ and there were 'no good outcomes'.⁵⁵ While the 1977 dispute was fought 'to the bitter end',⁵⁶ 'no one was a winner',⁵⁷ and the only worse dispute 'was SEQEB'.⁵⁸ In the longer term, however, the items in the log, including the common award for maintenance workers, were generally achieved (see Appendix 7).

⁵⁴ Interviews with Lindsey p. 27; P p. 12.

⁵⁵ Interview with Jack p. 14.

⁵⁶ Interview with Gerry p. 6.

⁵⁷ Interview with John E. p. 20.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ron p. 9.

The duration of a strike has been suggested as having a positive effect on normal working time afterwards, that is, a reduced likelihood of another strike a short time later or during future negotiations.⁵⁹ This may thus have resulted in the restrained reaction to the Mansini decision. In addition, the open cut fire had provided a timely opportunity for both the men and the SECV to work in a cooperative fashion to meet a common enemy. The recognition afterwards by the SECV of the part paid by its employees allowed a faster smoothing of troubled waters.⁶⁰ Certainly the industrial activity by the maintenance employees was seen to be reduced afterwards.⁶¹

The 1977 dispute provides some support for Mackay's assertion that grievances 'that posed a broad challenge to management and had wider economic resonance made settlement harder.'⁶² However, she does not comment explicitly on context and its importance in the starting or resolution of particular lengthy disputes; nor does she discuss the possible impact of changes or potential changes in power relationships.

The strengths of Mobilisation Theory in the analysis of the 1977 dispute lie in its consideration of the complex series of relationships rather than the 'cause' per se, offering a new means of considering lengthy disputes. The attributes of Mobilisation Theory when applied to the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute demonstrate firstly, the existence of a grievance in terms of the frustration which had built up over the lengthy delay in action over the log of claims. Secondly, the grievance was able to be attributed to the SECV, as another instance in which it was perceived to treat its wages employees without respect. Thirdly, the maintenance employees had a long history of identification

⁵⁹ Kimberly Chaulk and Trevor C. Brown, 'An assessment of worker reaction to their union and employer post-strike', *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, vol. 63, no. 2, Spring 2008, pp. 223-245; Hyman, *Industrial relations: a Marxist introduction*, p. 191; John F. Schnell and Cynthia L. Gramm, 'Learning by striking: estimates of the teetotaler effect', *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 5, no. 2, April 1987, pp. 221-241; Toni M. Somers, Yash P. Gupta and Arthur W. Smith, 'Lengthy strikes: do they influence the duration of peace in the future?', *Employee Relations*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1991, pp. 29-32.

⁶⁰ Interview with John E. p. 20; *Latrobe Valley Express*, 9 November 1977, p. 7, 16 November 1977, p. 10.

⁶¹ Interviews with P p. 12; Terry p. 8; Bruce p. 24.

⁶² Mackay, *The unfolding of long strikes*, p. i.

with their unions, and those unions had a tradition of industrial activity. This factor is important, since it allows for the inclusion of the industrial identity which had evolved as part of the LV SECV history. Fourthly, as a group they had excellent leadership from the shop floor in the form of stewards who were respected and committed to listening to the concerns of the rank and file.

These factors though did not result in strike action. It was only when the nature of the grievance changed dramatically that a strike ensued. The issue then became one of maintaining or backing down from strike action. The decision to maintain the strike rested on two factors. These were the perception that the SECV had 'broken the rules', and the determination of the group that this demanded a cohesive response. This, together with the lack of action by the VTHC and the unions on the log, the confrontational actions of the state and federal governments, and the delaying tactics of the SECV, served not so much to ensure the continuation of the strike as they did to harden the resolve of the men not to return to work. The positive influence of the intense media activity and the overwhelming level of support from both the LV and the wider community assisted to convince the men that their reaction was justified. In the end, leadership which was such a key element in maintaining the dispute also played a major role in ending it. The stewards were divided, but it was Sam Armstrong who persuaded the men to follow his recommendation for a return to work.

While the individual elements of Mobilisation Theory can provide a rationale for the occurrence and cessation of the dispute, they appear to be less adequate in explaining its length. To explain this, it is necessary to examine the dispute in relation to the overall context at the time. When considering the length of a dispute, the specific context and relationships at a particular time appear to play a very significant role. The context includes the local industrial identity, as well as a history of how disputes have previously

been conducted and for what reasons. In the case of the 1977 dispute, the contested issue of contract labour, rather than the log of claims, became the trigger for the strike. The expectation of a 'normal' dispute was based on a lack of recognition or a misreading of the changed wider economic and political context by the LV rank and file. There was also a lack of recognition of the SECV's reaction to some disputes earlier in 1977, which should have alerted the stewards to the poor timing for a strike.

The dispute was sustained by involvement of the strikers in activities which supported its continuation (including picketing, attending rallies, and participation in the ACAC hearings). In addition, the extensive support offered by families and by both the local and communities was critical, since it provided both funding and food to allow the strike to continue.

The social interactions which determined the reason for the strike and its length were related to the specific industrial identity which had developed since the 1920s. Such factors around maintaining a dispute are not well articulated within Mobilisation Theory. In addition, the context at local, state and federal scales, while relevant to the framing of the claims in the log, also provided the basis for the interactions which affected the length of the dispute and the extent of support for it. The contexts and their intersection, together with the resulting interactions and responses, provide a better explanation for the length of the dispute than does Mobilisation Theory.

The rest of this chapter will consider the 1977 maintenance workers' dispute in relation to two other lengthy disputes within the Australian electricity industry. These two particular lengthy disputes also contained long periods of strike activity, but with significant differences to the 1977 dispute. In one dispute, after an initial all-out strike, the strikes operated on a rolling basis over a five-month period, with only a few workers at a time being involved. This reduced the cost to the workers and the union, but resulted

in significant inconvenience to the employer. In the second dispute, while the men had officially been dismissed while on strike, they considered that they were continuing to withdraw their labour until their demands on the issue under dispute were met. Nine months later, they refused to accept an offer of reinstatement.

These two disputes will be briefly summarised and then they will be compared to and contrasted with the 1977 SECV maintenance dispute. This comparison will be framed in terms of elements of Mobilisation Theory, that is, grievance, union mobilisation, and government/employer mobilisation. The context and the outcomes of each dispute will also be also compared and contrasted. This comparative approach will enable consideration of similarities with, and differences from, the 1977 SECV dispute. The first dispute to be described is that over the 35-hour week within the ECNSW during 1973. This will be followed by a description of the SEQEB contract labour dispute of 1984-1986.

ECNSW 35-hour week campaign, 1973⁶³

The ECNSW was established in 1950 as the generating and bulk transmission authority for that state. It gradually took over the operations of existing power stations under a new award which gave higher wages but with the loss of some conditions. In 1971 the ECNSW employed around 8,000 persons, almost evenly divided between salaried and wages divisions. Most employees were covered by one of the five awards specific to the ECNSW, one of which covered wages staff. Over 70 percent of salaried division staff worked a 35-hour week⁶⁴ and generally enjoyed superior conditions of employment, leading to resentment on the part of wages employees.

⁶³ Unless otherwise noted, the detail on this campaign is from Patrick George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, Unpublished Bachelor of Arts (Honours) thesis, Department of Government, Sydney University, 1975.

⁶⁴ Industrial Commission of New South Wales, *Report of the Inquiry into terms and conditions of employment in the electricity supply industry in New South Wales and into the hours of work of forty-hour workers in the industry*, p. 141.

The ACTU had been encouraging the adoption of the 35-hour week since 1957 although with little direct action. It looked to the electricity industry where substantial gains in productivity provided the best opportunity for implementation. The 35-hour week campaign in the power industry was revitalised by the 1969 ACTU Congress and taken up by the Electricity Commission Combined Unions Delegates Organisation (ECCUDO). A power workers conference in 1970 organised by the Labor Council of New South Wales (LCNSW) was presented with ECCUDO's proposals for a 'vigorous and militant campaign',⁶⁵ including a series of rolling strikes, hit and run stoppages and an overtime ban. However this tactic did not work, with both the ECNSW and the state government refusing to grant a 35-hour week. As a result, in early 1971 the LCNSW decided to commence a militant campaign.

Premier Askin referred the dispute to the ICNSW, and a proposed indefinite stoppage was cancelled.⁶⁶ The main argument relied on by the LCNSW, whose organiser led the negotiations,⁶⁷ was that technological developments had increased productivity significantly and that this should be shared with the workers in that industry. In addition, this would grant the same working hours already enjoyed by a large proportion of the salaried staff in the ECNSW.

The subsequent twenty month long inquiry by the ICNSW covered employees of both the ECNSW and the electricity councils. It concluded in February 1973 that the benefits from increased productivity and efficiency should be available to the community as a whole, not merely the section of it which happened to be employed in

⁶⁵ George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 14 June 1971, p. 1;

⁶⁷ Raymond Markey, *In case of oppression: the life and times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt, 1994, p. 466.

the electricity industry.⁶⁸ The ICNSW also pointed out that a differentiation in working conditions between salaried and wages staff was a fact of industrial life in Australia.

This decision moved the claim out of arbitration and into direct action.

Maintenance and operating bans were imposed, which 40-hour week salaried operators also participated in; and one or two key men were made unavailable so that maximum disruption occurred. Lack of availability of a few maintenance men prevented essential repair work, leading to shutdowns and power restrictions.⁶⁹ This maximised pressure on the ECNSW while minimising the financial burden on the power workers and the unions involved.

The campaign initially involved a series of strike actions (over 300 between February and July 1973),⁷⁰ mainly in the state's major thermal power stations. The result was a progressive increase in the amount of maintenance and repair work not being completed, resulting in a reduction of available generating capacity.

The campaign intensified between the 4 and 19 June 1973, and was marked by confrontation with salaried engineers attempting to restore and operate plant. These engineers faced violent intimidation, and became unwilling to do the work of maintenance employees.⁷¹ During this period, power plant operators also became more actively involved in the dispute, with a series of stoppages or threatened stoppages at short notice. These occurred on some 50 occasions at various power stations, resulting in chaos. In order to avoid alienating the public, it was decided that power generation would be a little less than normal demand, so that the ECNSW could maintain normal supply by accessing power from the SMHES. In order to enable this, some bans were

⁶⁸ Industrial Commission of New South Wales, *Report of the Inquiry into terms and conditions of employment in the electricity supply industry in New South Wales and into the hours of work of forty-hour workers in the industry*, p. 147.

⁶⁹ 'Campaign for a 35-hour week - electricity industry', *The Employers' Review*, vol. 45, July 1973, pp. 128-30.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *The Bulletin*, 28 July 1973, pp. 11-12.

lifted and repairs undertaken. The government however was able to continue the power restrictions, since the ECNSW did not control supply to consumers. Selective zone blackouts resulted in mass stand downs. The electricity workers' response was to lift electricity output to a level that would meet industry requirements, thus calling the governments bluff, and shortly thereafter the electricity restrictions were lifted.

Once the amount of maintenance work able to be carried out by salaried engineers was reduced, the third stage of the campaign commenced. Some power stations were shut down, including Munmorah PS, the second largest in the state, and two out of three units at the large Liddell PS were restricted in output.⁷² Similar restrictions and shutdowns at other power stations led to more power restrictions from Monday 25 June. This included significant restrictions on industrial power use, seen as unnecessary by the unions,⁷³ and at one stage 500,000 workers were stood down.⁷⁴

The dispute was at a stalemate until Premier Askin, the unions and the LCNSW held a series of meetings. The matter of the reduced working week was referred back to the ICNSW, but with the terms of reference narrowed to the ECNSW only. As a result all power generating limitations were lifted by 10 August 1973. However the new inquiry reached the same conclusion as the earlier inquiry, that is, that no case for a reduction in ordinary working hours from a 40-hour week had been made.⁷⁵

As a result, on 20 September power workers decided to reduce power output, with supply only guaranteed for essential services, until they were granted the 35-hour week. However, all bans and limitations on output were lifted on 18 October so that the ACTU could take the dispute to the ACAC with an application for a 35-hour week for

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ CPA Power Branch, 'Power workers struggle for a 35-hour week', *Australian Left Review*, no. 42, December 1973, pp. 10-14.

⁷⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1973, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Industrial Commission of New South Wales, *Report of inquiry concerning hours of work of forty-hour workers employed by the Electricity Commission of New South Wales*, Government Printer, New South Wales, Sydney, 1973a.

power workers in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.⁷⁶ It was expected that if the shorter week was granted, there would be a flow-on effect to the power industry in NSW. This effectively signalled defeat on the issue after almost three years of campaigning. The NSW state government emerged victorious,⁷⁷ continuing to oppose the 35-hour week claim, and imposing blackouts intermittently. The Premier was accused of using the dispute for political ends, and this view was supported when he called a state election for early October on a theme of industrial law and order, around a campaign that focused on the power workers.

This dispute has illustrated a different type of lengthy industrial campaign to that of the 1977 SECV dispute. In order to provide a further example for comparison, the 1984-1986 SEQEB dispute over contract labour will be described next.

SEQEB contract labour dispute, 1984-1986⁷⁸

In Queensland, Premier Bjelke-Petersen had long wished to stop strikes in essential services. In 1978, an Essential Services Bill with far-reaching powers was prepared and made law. Despite this, the new legislation was not used during the 35-hour week campaign by Queensland power workers in 1980 which resulted in three major state-wide blackouts and significant power rationing. Cabinet declared a state of emergency, but when negotiations on the issue commenced, power was quickly restored.⁷⁹ It was agreed that working hours would be reduced to 37.25 in 1980 and to 36.25 in 1981, in return for the unions (including the ETU) agreeing to concessions

⁷⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 1973, p. 3; Markey, *In case of oppression: the life and times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*, p. 467.

⁷⁷ Philip Bentley, 'Australian trade unionism 1973-74', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 16, no. 4, December 1974, pp. 374-387.

⁷⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the detail on this campaign is from Paul McCarthy, 'Power without glory: the Queensland electricity dispute', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 27, no. 3, September 1985, pp. 364-82; Paul McCarthy, *The Queensland electricity dispute: a chronology, the legislation and its ramifications*, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, 1986.

⁷⁹ *Rydge's*, November 1980, pp. 20, 32, 98.

including the use of contractors. These concessions were rejected by mass meetings of ETU members in 1980,⁸⁰ and so were not implemented.

The ETU members in SEQEB had been vigorously opposed to the use of contract labour since SEQEB's formation in 1977. However, the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer brought renewed interest in saving costs through the use of contract labour, and in 1983, SEQEB set out a policy on the use of contract labour for peak seasonal work. This was a departure from past practice which had been to use day labour exclusively. The new policy had been negotiated with the ETU, but was then rejected by the ETU State Council. In January 1984 SEQEB advised that work at a new estate would be done under contract. A ban on the work by local ETU members, followed by threats of further industrial action, resulted in the contractor ceasing work. Over the next few months, discussions between SEQEB and the ETU attempted to develop a formal agreement on the use of contract labour, but without result. In July 1984 after discussions with the ETU, SEQEB advertised for expressions of interest by contractors to construct transmission lines, and in October, it announced the building of a new substation by contract labour.

The ETU placed bans on all work associated with overhead transmission lines if they were constructed by contract labour. In December 1984, workers were placed in a 'no work, no pay' situation and the dispute spread when other ETU members went on strike in support. The state Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ICAC), which regulated the state's electricity industry, recommended that contractors should not commence until a later date, and that when the strikers returned to work SEQEB and the ETU should meet to agree on current and future contracts. Despite a series of meetings,

⁸⁰ Blackwood, 'Doomsday for the Queensland labour movement? the SEQEB dispute and union strategy'; Wayne L. Gilbert, 'The Queensland power dispute', in H.R. Nicholls Society (ed.), *Arbitration in contempt: the proceedings of the inaugural seminar of the HR Nicholls Society*, H.R. Nicholls Society, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 29-68, p. 30.

by January 1985 a contract labour proposal acceptable to the ETU had not been agreed. Over the next two months, a series of stop work meetings, bans on overtime, and strikes occurred, and the number of consumers without power on a regular basis increased. In early February 1985, ETU members at most SEQEB depots supported a call to strike indefinitely, and when the ICAC issued orders to return to work and to continue discussions, the ETU announced that it would not comply.

In response, the Queensland government declared a month-long state of emergency on 7 February 1985. It issued Orders in Council including an order to SEQEB employees to return to work or be dismissed. On 8 February, letters to that effect were sent to the strikers, and on 11 February confirmation of dismissal letters were sent to approximately 900 (of about 1500) staff in Brisbane who had not returned to work as directed.⁸¹ The ICAC called a compulsory conference in February. It recommended that the dismissal notices and dismissals be withdrawn, and that deregistration proceedings be halted, provided that ETU members lifted all bans and limitations and returned to work. The government and SEQEB accepted the recommendations, but they were rejected by the ETU members unless there was a compromise by SEQEB on the contract jobs. SEQEB then advertised for staff to replace the dismissed employees, offering poorer conditions such as a longer working week (losing the 36 ¼ hour, 9-day fortnight), no union preference and a no-strike clause in the contract of employment.

At that time bans by MOA members in the Queensland Electricity Commission (QEC) to support the ETU dispute resulted in severe power restrictions. This led to another Order in Council relating to maintaining the supply of electricity. Staff in power stations and handling coal were directed to return to work, and the Trades and Labor

⁸¹ *Electrical Trades Union of Australia v Queensland Electricity Commission and Others* [1986] 16 IR 292.

Council of Queensland (TLCQ) recommended the restoration of power rather than risk loss of unity.⁸² When the state of emergency ended early in March, the government legislated to confirm the contract conditions of newly appointed SEQEB workers, to establish a new tribunal to manage industrial matters in the electricity supply industry, and to strengthen police arrest powers after alleged harassment of SEQEB workers. This effectively prevented any reversal of its actions taken during the period of the state of emergency.

The ACTU planned a national campaign to isolate Queensland, and in April 1985, action was taken across Australia by transport unions to blockade Queensland in protest. Another blockade in May affected air, rail and road freight, but this action halted after moves to transfer Queensland power workers to a federal award commenced.

Neither the ACTU nor the TLCQ could resolve the dispute satisfactorily, and 'despite blockades, protest marches, mass rallies, attempted intervention by the federal government, picketing and other methods of protest',⁸³ the legislation was used, and the sacked workers remained sacked. Talks with the government late in 1985 over reinstatement of 120 workers without their previous entitlements were rejected by the SEQEB workers who refused to compromise.⁸⁴

The SEQEB dispute provides a significant contrast with both the ECNSW and the SECV lengthy disputes. The similarities and differences in the three disputes will be examined in the following section. This will be done by using some of the facets of Mobilisation Theory to compare and contrast specific areas across each of the three disputes. These facets are grievance, union mobilisation, and government/employer mobilisation. In addition, the specific wider contexts within which the three disputes occurred will be compared, as well as the specific outcomes of each dispute. This will

⁸² Blackwood, 'Doomsday for the Queensland labour movement? the SEQEB dispute and union strategy'.

⁸³ McCarthy, *The Queensland electricity dispute: a chronology, the legislation and its ramifications*, p. 3.

⁸⁴ *Workers News*, 24 February 1987, pp. 8-9.

enable a consideration of the significant similarities and differences, and provide some insights into the unique features of the SECV dispute.

Comparative discussion of the three lengthy disputes

The previous two sections have provided brief descriptions of two lengthy disputes in the Australian electricity industry. The key features of each dispute will next be examined in a sequence arranged by the key attributes proposed by Mobilisation Theory for mobilisation. In this way we can examine the impact of grievance, and mobilisation by union/s, employer and government. Following this, the specific economic, political and industrial contexts within which each dispute occurred will be discussed, and the final outcomes, successful or otherwise, compared.

Grievance

The issues involved in the ECNSW and SEQEB disputes posed a significant challenge to managements and, since these were statutory authorities, their governments. The use of contract labour was a long standing and contentious issue in Queensland public sector employment and the electricity industry in particular.⁸⁵ The contract labour issue had rankled with the ETU for many years and provided a significant collective grievance, justifying in the members' minds the need to take strong industrial action over an issue which threatened jobs and would dilute the strength of the ETU. The initial stances taken by both the SEQEB and the ETU left little room for negotiation, and SEQEB had no incentives to offer the ETU members for compliance.

In NSW, the ACTU saw the power workers as the best hope for obtaining the 35-hour week. The increase of productivity evident in the industry provided the basis for and justification of the collective grievance, together with the fact that a majority of salaried ECNSW employees already worked a thirty-five hour week. This promoted

⁸⁵ Douglas Blackmur, 'Industrial conflict in the public sector: the origins and nature of the 1985 Queensland electricity dispute', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 48, no. 2, June 1989, pp. 163-176.

dissatisfaction among the wages staff of the ECNSW, who perceived that they were being treated unfairly.

In the SECV dispute, the trigger for the strike was the contract labour issue and the 'no work, no pay' stand downs. The use of contract labour was a longstanding and emotive issue for the LV maintenance unions which had been fighting to regulate it for many years.⁸⁶ This issue however later became subordinate to the slow-moving log of claims, which became dominant in the reporting of the dispute and its negotiation in the ACAC.

In all three disputes the grievance was initially attributed by the union/s to the employer as the authority able to provide a satisfactory resolution of the issue. However, the significance of the grievance for the employees, their employer and the government, together with the uncompromising stance taken by all sides, meant that these disputes were likely to be hard fought and thus lengthy.

Mobilisation by union/s

There were significant differences between the three disputes in the way initial mobilisation was organised and by whom, the role of the state peak union body, and support from the wider community including union officials. However, in all three cases, there was no expectation, at least on the union side, that this would be anything other than a 'normal' dispute.

The disputes in both the ECNSW and the SECV involved multiple unions (22 in NSW, 11 in Victoria) in a fully unionised industry.⁸⁷ The unions were well organised with a tradition of industrial action. The Queensland dispute was conducted by, and

⁸⁶ Steel, 'The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council and industrial agency in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria'.

⁸⁷ George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 1.

mostly affected, the ETU. The ETU within SEQEB was a well organised and militant body used to taking industrial action.⁸⁸

The ETU seemed convinced that it could repeat its victory in the 1980 35-hour week campaign, and did not wish to be constrained by less militant unions.⁸⁹ It appeared to have no clear strategy in place to handle the dispute, or any interest initially in working with the TLCQ or the ACTU.⁹⁰ There was no expectation by the ETU that the sacked workers would not be reinstated⁹¹ and the state of emergency rescinded, as had happened in previous disputes. The workers considered that they were continuing to withdraw their labour, and nine months later refused an offer of reinstatement because their demands on the contract labour issue had not been met.

This was not the view of the TLCQ which concluded that in a major confrontation the union movement could come out the loser and that greater militancy was to be avoided.⁹² The rank and file were not prepared to compromise, initially on the contract labour issue, and later in the dispute, on the issue of reinstatement. This put them at odds with both their own officials in the ETU, as well as with the TLCQ.

The TLCQ was said to have been bypassed in this dispute until the later stages,⁹³ and was seen as supporting compromise.⁹⁴ The TLCQ was also blamed for directing power station operators to cease load shedding before the case for injunctions was heard, against the wishes of the operators and their union.⁹⁵ Once the limitations on power supply were lifted on 21 February 1985, the strength of the industrial action was lost. This was similar to the situation in Victoria, where the VTHC was not asked to offer

⁸⁸ David Barnett, 'Union power waning: Joh shows how militancy can be broken', *The Bulletin*, 10 September 1985, pp. 28-32; Gardner and McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute', p. 61.

⁸⁹ Blackwood, 'Doomsday for the Queensland labour movement? the SEQEB dispute and union strategy'.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Gardner and McQueen, 'Law and order: the Queensland power dispute', p. 67.

⁹² Blackwood, 'Doomsday for the Queensland labour movement? the SEQEB dispute and union strategy'.

⁹³ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, p. 18.

⁹⁴ *Workers News*, 24 February 1987, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁵ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, pp. 42, 44.

support to the dispute until late in the process. As in Victoria, there had been little consultation with state officials or VTHC involvement until the strike reached crisis point. In both states, the peak council had also to weigh up costs and benefits to the rest of the labour movement in that state. The TLCQ looked at the relative numbers involved - 1,000 dismissed out of a membership of 250,000 in Queensland - and decided that the needs of the majority were more important. The sacked men were viewed as able 'to be sacrificed'.⁹⁶ While the TLCQ wanted to isolate and end the dispute, the workers involved felt that they were sacrificed for the sake of the ALP and union officials because of the forthcoming election, in direct opposition to the wishes of the union rank and file. Despite support from a range of unions and the rank and file for an escalation of industrial action across Australia or the state, the TLCQ would not do so.⁹⁷ This was similar to the SECV 1977 dispute which also had significant rank and file support in some unions, especially the AMWSU, to escalate action state or nationwide.

In NSW, union organisation was seen as generally highly centralised with continued reliance on the LCNSW to negotiate on significant issues.⁹⁸ In addition, the LCNSW was more closely involved with public sector industrial relations when a Labor government was in office.⁹⁹ However, the LCNSW appeared to be reluctant to authorise industrial action to advance the claims of the electricity workers. This was similar to Victoria, which emphasised negotiation by VTHC officials in multi-union disputes. However when it came to local action in the LV power stations, the CGTLC expected to play a significant local role in industrial mobilisation and exchange. ECCUDO, acting as

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Duncan Macdonald and Mark Bray, 'Preparing for the national electricity market: the NSW electricity industry', in Peter Fairbrother, Michael Paddon and Julian Teicher (eds), *Privatisation, globalisation and labour: studies from Australia*, Federation Press, Annandale, 2002, pp. 78-101.

⁹⁹ Markey, *In case of oppression: the life and times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*, p. 468.

a de facto 'peak union', was likewise available to the power station employees, and was driven by the rank and file.

In NSW and Victoria, the willingness of shop committees at individual power stations, or in the LV in the case of Victoria, to take industrial action without the support of the official union movement was established well before these disputes.¹⁰⁰ In the ECNSW dispute, the rank and file generated their own tactics independent of their officials or the LCNSW.¹⁰¹ However, the nature of the tactics meant that little cohesion of the power workers was required after the initial two-week strike. The absence of only a few key workers in the extended series of rolling strikes frustrated attempts to repair equipment and plant, and once the professional engineers were intimidated into refraining from performing maintenance functions, then little maintenance was done. However, the result was that the dispute then lost momentum because it was being run on an event-by-event basis. This may be attributed to a failure of leadership in maintaining cohesion and focus among the strikers. The lifting of power restrictions by the government at the end of 1973, the distancing of the salaried operators from the campaign and ECCUDO, and the decision by the LCNSW and the unions to place the 35-hour week campaign in the hands of the ACTU, removed the focus of the grievance from the ECNSW, further reduced the cohesion of the group, and took the leadership initiative away from ECCUDO.

There was no long term improvement of relations between ECCUDO and the LCNSW, resulting eventually in a perceived lack of support from the LCNSW, and opposition from the community and the trade union movement. ECCUDO was seen as attempting to replace the authority of the LCNSW in the electricity industry by drawing up logs of claims, deciding on industrial campaign tactics and by attempting direct

¹⁰⁰ See for example George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 11; Serle, *John Monash: a biography*, p. 456.

¹⁰¹ CPA Power Branch, 'Power workers struggle for a 35-hour week'.

negotiations with the ECNSW. ECCUDO continued to press for full recognition by the LCNSW; it also had the problem of not being recognized by many of the unions, apart from the FEDFA and AMWU.

In the NSW dispute, the LCNSW had encouraged participation in the second inquiry since it saw a successful outcome as likely, even though some parts of the rank and file were against it.¹⁰² Reference to arbitration on two occasions influenced tactics and resulted in extending the campaign timelines and softening the determination of the workers to continue the dispute. The 35-hour week campaign effectively collapsed when the LCNSW handed it over to the ACTU.

In Victoria, the industrial action including the strike was organised by the rank and file without approval from the state officials of the unions involved. This, together with the VTHC's uneasy relationship with the CGTLC, made the VTHC unwilling to support the strikers. Because the senior stewards also had roles within the CGTLC, that body was again seen as usurping the industrial authority and decision-making rights of the VTHC. However, unlike ECCUDO, the CGTLC was a formal off shoot of the VTHC, and most of the LV SECV wages unions were affiliated with it.

A significant feature of both the SEQEB¹⁰³ and SECV disputes was the extensive support of both other unions and the community in general Australia wide. Strike funds to assist the strikers were set up by the ETU, TLCQ and the ACTU during the Queensland dispute, and by the CGTLC and AMWSU in Victoria. However, in south-east Queensland, the general public had been significantly affected by blackouts and delays in reconnecting power, and were probably more inclined to support the state government actions.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 62.

¹⁰³ *Workers News*, 24 February 1987, pp. 8-9; Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁴ Simon Blackwood and Doug Hunt, 'Strikes: limits to industrial action?', in Bradley Bowden, Simon Blackwood, Cath Rafferty and Cameron Allan (eds), *Work and strife in paradise: the history of labour*

The support provided by the Women's Committee was a significant feature of the SEQEB dispute. The Committee was formed to obtain media coverage of the dispute and to lobby. It also supported the men on strike, with members attending union meetings and involved in discussions and decisions, assisting on picket lines, visiting job sites, and soliciting financial and moral support from all over Australia.¹⁰⁵ While there was still a feeling after the dispute that the women could have done more,¹⁰⁶ the actions which they undertook were truly outstanding in this particular dispute. During the SECV dispute, while there was greater support from the family members of the LV strikers than in previous disputes, it was not as extensive as that provided by the SEQEB families.

There was little support from the union movement and the community in NSW however. This may have been because the militant campaign led by the power workers left them 'isolated and opposed'¹⁰⁷ within the trade union movement. While there was some support during the latter part of the campaign by salaried ECNSW officers, they declined to become part of ECCUDO, instead preferring to form their own rank and file delegates association. This organisation was granted recognition by the majority of unions and permitted to negotiate directly with the ECNSW, thus leading to further resentment from wages employees.

The three disputes have illustrated both similarities and differences in the type of mobilisation, who provided the initial mobilisation, the role of the peak council and the extent of wider support, including that from officials of the unions involved. These similarities and differences will also be shown in the following section, which will

relations in Queensland 1859-2009, Federation Press, Annandale, 2009, pp. 183-201; John Wanna and Tracey Arklay, *The ayes have it: the history of the Queensland parliament, 1957-1989*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2010, p. 563.

¹⁰⁵ Gwyneth Evans, 'Queensland women join strike: an interview', *Scarlet Woman*, no. 20, 1985, pp. 8-9; Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁷ George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 67.

discuss the mobilisation by the employer and/or the state government which occurred during each dispute.

Mobilisation by government/employer

In the three disputes, the campaign became political rather than focused on the industrial issues. This was not altogether surprising given that the disputes were occurring in state-owned enterprises providing an essential service. The government influenced both the employer attitude and the tactics used during the disputes. In both Victoria and NSW, an additional complication was the spectre of flow on to other statutory authorities. In NSW and Queensland, the electricity systems separated generation and distribution. In NSW, distribution occurred through 40 separate authorities, while Queensland had seven distributors including SEQEB. This meant that while the total power output may have been determined by participants in the dispute, power restrictions and their severity remained out of their control and could be used to turn public opinion against the strikers. In Queensland, the shutdowns and power restrictions had a strong negative effect on a general public already upset by delays in reconnecting power after outages. The state government was able to capitalise on this to justify its actions. In NSW, the extended and extensive power restrictions which were put in place affected industry, commerce and the general community.

During the SEQEB dispute, the government used the fact that the dispute was in an essential service, and that negotiations appeared deadlocked, to transform it into a 'law and order' issue. This move to intervene was not unusual in Queensland, where governments had a history of direct intervention in industrial relations.¹⁰⁸ Control over the dispute moved to the government rather than the employer once the state of emergency was declared. This meant that a greater range of sanctions was available, and

¹⁰⁸ Howard Guille, *Queensland industrial relations: control versus co-operation*, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Kedron, 1987, p. 4.

they gave strategic advantage to the government. The dispute provided the Queensland government with an excuse to introduce sweeping legislation controlling and curbing the activities of unionists and the union movement. The ICAC, which had been ignored at times by both sides, was replaced with a new body deemed more suitable to deal with the power industry. Six new statutes were passed, some with 'indecent haste.'¹⁰⁹ They went far beyond the bounds of the actual dispute and granted wide powers to direct work related to the electricity industry and not only during emergency situations.¹¹⁰

This dispute effectively ended with the issuing of the Orders in Council from the Queensland government which stopped the supporting industrial mobilisation by the power station operators. Once the opportunities for negotiating acceptance of a minimum level of use of contract labour and for reinstatement passed quite early in the dispute, the government was determined not to offer them again. This may be seen as a direct result of the refusal of the ETU members to negotiate around the contract labour issue in 1980.

There was also legislative activity by the Victorian government during the 1977 dispute. The ESA was amended for the second time that year. The Victorian Premier declared a state of emergency and invoked the ESA, although agreeing to withhold further action while a further hearing occurred in the ACAC.¹¹¹ The Victorian government was not prepared to manage the dispute via a series of Orders in Council. The Victorian government, although it started deregistration proceedings, recognised the possibility of the dispute escalating state wide. It was prepared to hold back on issuing Orders in Council forcing a return to work in the hope that the proceedings in the ACAC, and the intervention by Bon Hawke, would effect a return to work.

¹⁰⁹ McCarthy, 'Power without glory: the Queensland electricity dispute', p. 364.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Hince and Griffin, 'Co-ordination and public sector industrial relations'.

In NSW, there was no similar legislative reaction by the state government. Instead it used power restrictions as a means of applying public pressure to the power station workers. In addition, it kept a firm stance against negotiating on the 35-hour week issue, instead preferring to allow the ICNSW to retain jurisdiction over the matter, despite its significance.

In addition to these different reactions from the respective state governments, the wider political and economic context in each of the three states was different. The federal political and economic context at the time of each dispute was also different and impacted on the conduct and outcome of the disputes. These respective contexts will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Context

The particular major issues involved in the three disputes, that is the contract labour issue, a significant pay rise and a common award (SECV), a 35-hour week (ECNSW), and the refusal to compromise on the use of contract labour (SEQEB), were all issues which leading to higher wage costs for the employing organisations.

At the start of the SEQEB dispute in 1984, the Australian economy was still in recession following the resources bust of 1982. Inflation rose to over ten per cent, as did unemployment.¹¹² This affected the economic performance of Queensland, due to its reliance on primary industries. A state recession was developing and unemployment in Queensland was amongst the highest in the country.¹¹³ In addition, the ETU did not take into account the anti-union attitude of the government, and its resentment over the previous rebuff on the contract labour issue.

The political context had also changed significantly since 1980. In 1983, a split in the Liberal Party/National Party coalition in government since 1957 resulted in the

¹¹² O'Lincoln, *Years of rage: social conflicts in the Fraser era*, p. 220.

¹¹³ Wanna and Arklay, *The ayes have it: the history of the Queensland parliament, 1957-1989*, p. 538.

National Party governing in its own right. This removed the limits to the authority of the Premier since 1968, Joh Bjelke-Petersen.¹¹⁴ The state branch of the ALP believed that any escalation of the dispute would cost it votes in the forthcoming Queensland state election, but that industrial peace would help its chances at the polls.¹¹⁵ The TLCQ did not want to harm the ALPs electoral chances and so wanted the dispute resolved. There was also pressure on the cost of electricity, driving down demand.¹¹⁶

In the federal sphere, the ACTU did not want the strike to threaten its wages Accord with the Federal (ALP) government, or jeopardise the chances of re-election of the Hawke Labor government. This suggested that the ACTU chose not to support the strikers with mass industrial action, thus limiting the amount of support it and the other unions were prepared to offer, especially over a cause which appeared to be lost.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Bob Hawke was seen as encouraging a compromise return to work,¹¹⁸ as he had been accused of doing with the 1977 strikers in Victoria.

In Victoria, the delays in building new power stations were likely to lead to power restrictions, since demand was increasing and was likely to outstrip supply. The government was facing the land scandal issue, and was able to use the SECV dispute as a diversion. Despite Premier Hamer having a strong Liberal Party majority in the Legislative Assembly, he appeared reluctant to take action under the ESA which would escalate the dispute. He was more inclined to provide every opportunity for settlement, especially when Bob Hawke arrived on the scene. At that time, federal wage indexation principles were being firmly adhered to when considering disputes over wage issues, and

¹¹⁴ Roger Scott, Peter Coaldrake, Brian Head and Paul Reynolds, 'Queensland', in Brian Galligan (ed.), *Australian state politics*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 51-73.

¹¹⁵ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, pp. 14, 175.

¹¹⁶ Blackmur, 'Industrial conflict in the public sector'.

¹¹⁷ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, pp. 13, 188.

¹¹⁸ *Workers News*, 24 February 1987, pp. 8-9.

the SECV and the Hamer government were not going to be seen to support any wage or conditions increases which went against these principles.

In NSW, the decision to build new power stations on coal fields rather than transport coal to city-based power stations had resulted in large modern plants with increased productivity. Sir Robert Askin had been re-elected at the state election in February 1971 and again in 1973, leading the Liberal-Country Party (later the National Party) coalition which had governed the state since 1965. The unfavourable state government political climate at the time of the 1973 ECNSW dispute, that is a Liberal coalition, meant that legislation for a reduced working week would not be a possibility. This had occurred in 1947 when the NSW Parliament legislated the 40-hour week as standard, in advance of a federal decision on that matter. In addition, the period around 1973-74 was one of high inflation and increasing unemployment, making the state government less likely to agree to improved working conditions which would come at a significant cost to the government and thus the consumer. However, in the same vein as Premier Hamer in Victoria, while Askin had been given a mandate by voters in 1973 to legislate against disruptions to essential services,¹¹⁹ he preferred to use the ICNSW and a firm stand to manage the 35-hour dispute. It was not until 1976 that an ALP state government led by Neville Wran was elected with a slim majority.

It can be seen that the state contexts in all three disputes were unlikely to support a positive outcome on the issue in contention. The respective governments took a firm line, which was also a response to the economic and political conditions at both state and federal level, and thus these contexts contributed to the outcome of each dispute. These outcomes will be discussed in the next section.

¹¹⁹ George, *Power politics: a study of industrial conflict in the N.S.W. power industry*, p. 76.

Outcome

In each of the three disputes described, control over the electricity generating process was used to exert pressure on the employer to negotiate. However, any continued production of power was likely to reduce the possibility of a successful outcome for the unions. The SECV while producing minimum power was able to rely on the government and the public to apply pressure to the strikers; the ECNSW seemed poised to shut down the state but generation was increased and restrictions removed which resulted in a situation where the unions had given up their bargaining power; and in Queensland, the government ordered the power station operators back to work, leaving the ETU members without leverage. Such a situation is likely to result in significant tension between the strikers, who see a lack of results from their mobilisation, and their leaders, who may have encouraged or recommended the mobilisation and would lose face if they acknowledge that they have miscalculated.

The 1977 dispute is different as regards the reasons for mobilisation. The rank and file went out in support of their colleagues over an issue which was peripheral to the log, but which had brought tensions to a head. The perceived leaders among the shop stewards needed to regain control and put some order into the walkout, perhaps hoping that this would increase pressure on the SECV for a negotiated settlement. They did this by taking the opportunity to focus the men back onto the log of claims and return cohesion to the maintenance group. This decision was supported when the rest of the maintenance men voted to join the strike. However, this meant that the issue became one which was less likely to receive support from the VTHC and the ACAC.

In the 1977 SECV dispute, the short term gain was a small wages increase, and some move toward parity of conditions between wages and salaried employees of the SECV; in the longer term the maintenance workers achieved almost all of the claims in

the 1977 log, whether via the ACAC or by negotiation with the SECV (see Appendix 7 for more detail).

In Queensland, the ETU was apparently taken by surprise by the force and extent of the reaction by the Bjelke-Petersen government and may have operated differently with hindsight. However, past experience had given it no reason to expect that the government would not agree to a compromise,¹²⁰ and that the dismissed workers would eventually be reinstated. At the time, the ETU thought that it needed to take a stand on the contract labour issue, without perhaps seeing that a stand on ETU membership would have done more to protect the jobs of its members and to retain employment conditions.

The government used the dispute to deflect blame for the state's poor economic performance onto the unions. The government's victory over the SEQEB workers resulted in a renewed campaign to defeat and penalise unions in a number of industries in Queensland.¹²¹ The effect of this was to move the Queensland arbitration system away from resolving industrial disputes to the control of unions and the actions of their members.¹²²

As a result of the dispute, the level of contracting out in SEQEB increased far beyond what was planned. In 1985, contract labour was performing about 30 per cent of outdoor work, with plans to increase this to 40 per cent.¹²³

The ECNSW maintenance employees were unsuccessful in obtaining a 35-hour week from their 1973 campaign. However, by 1980, the 37 ½ week was being worked by NSW power workers, and by 1982, the ECNSW workers had their 35-hour week and

¹²⁰ Andrew Stewart, 'Two cheers from business as Bjelke hobbles the unions', *Business Review Weekly*, 29 March 1985b, pp. 10-14.

¹²¹ Sherry, *Sellout: the story of the SEQEB strike*, p. 171.

¹²² Guille, *Queensland industrial relations: control versus co-operation*, p. 20.

¹²³ Gilbert, 'The Queensland power dispute', p. 30; Andrew Stewart, 'Queensland's real union tamer', *Business Review Weekly*, 18 October 1985a, pp. 14-19.

9-day fortnight.¹²⁴ This success accompanied a similar pattern in the power industry in other states: the employees of ETSA were granted the 37 ½ hour week on 17 November 1977, and SECV workers were granted a 37 ½ hour week in January 1981.

Conclusion

The three disputes which have been discussed have provided different perspectives on the impact of grievance, types of mobilisation, support of peak union councils, the legacy effect of particular industrial histories and the wider political and economic context, on the outcomes of lengthy disputes. Factors such as the nature of the grievance and its potential to impact significantly on the employer; the continuation of production during mobilisation; the various power relationships which have developed and social interactions which occur; and employer actions including procrastination or refusal to bargain, may affect the length of a dispute. If the nature of the grievance is also perceived as a threat, for example affecting costs, government/customer relations or even the potential viability of an organisation, or as an issue which may alter the perceived balance of power between employee and employer, then this will also affect the opportunities for a successful and thus speedy end to the dispute, because of the extreme positions which may be taken by participants.

Three lengthy disputes in the power industry in Australia, each containing a lengthy strike component, have been described. This enables the comparison and contrasting of factors which differentiated the three disputes and which contributed to the lengthy period before a resolution.

In Victoria, there was a significant disjuncture between the trigger and the grievance which was negotiated on during the strike and this affected the perception of the reason for the strike; in NSW the 35-hour week remained constant as the aim and

¹²⁴ Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights' Union, *Addresses, reports and decisions of the 1982 biennial national conference*, p. 38; Bob Carr, 'Unions face an uphill fight for 35-hour week', *The Bulletin*, 29 April 1980, pp. 24-25.

grievance of the men; in Queensland, the ETU was slow to realize that the issue was no longer about contract labour but about saving the jobs of its members.

In two of the disputes, the industrial mobilisation was started by the rank and file, supported in NSW by ECCUDO and the LCNSW, and in Victoria by the CGTLC. In Queensland, the mobilisation was under the direction of the ETU. There were marked differences in local support and union support. In Queensland, while families of the dismissed workers mobilised successfully, support from other unions appeared greater interstate. In NSW, the actions of the rank and file saw them alienated, with ECCUDO not generally being recognised or supported by the official union movement. In Victoria, both community support and support from the wider trade union movement was significant and ongoing.

The extent of mobilisation for each dispute also differed. In Queensland, bans and strikes by ETU members at one depot were joined by a strike of ETU members across SEQEB. In NSW, mobilisation took the form of rolling strikes and absences of key maintenance personnel. In Victoria, the dispute commenced with bans and escalated to a walkout which became an indefinite strike in the LV.

The extent of support from state peak councils was also different. In Queensland, the TLCQ did not want to be involved in a major dispute. In NSW, the LCNSW did not recognize ECCUDO as a bargaining agent for the power industry, but was supportive of the push for a 35-hour week. In Victoria, the VTHC was reluctant to support a wildcat strike until it was forced to do so by the extensive positive response of many of its affiliates. In NSW and Victoria, peak council support was probably influenced by the poor relationships between ECCUDO and the LCNSW, and the CGTLC and the VTHC respectively.

One significant difference was in the mobilisation by the respective governments. In Queensland the government acted swiftly and backed up its actions by legislation and a new industrial tribunal. In Victoria the action was less extreme, although a state of emergency was declared and options for manning the power stations if the strike spread were considered. In NSW the government took a firm stand, but handed the issue over to the ICNSW.

In the short term, none of the three disputes could be said to have had a successful outcome for the unions involved.

In all three cases, the political, economic and industrial environment had undergone major change in the recent few years, becoming less conducive to support for a campaign for a significant improvement in working conditions. The other allied factor was the threat to the employer-employee balance of power posed by the nature of the grievance and the type of mobilisation implemented. The three disputes confirm that it is important to identify the specific context, and recent changes to it, since this is a major factor in the success or otherwise of a campaign.

The description, comparison and analysis of the significant factors present in each of three significant disputes within the state-owned electricity industry in Australia has enhanced our understanding of lengthy strikes and disputes. In conjunction with the more detailed context, narrative and analysis of the 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute which has been provided in this thesis, this comparison of three lengthy disputes has also provided further insights into the distinguishing features of that dispute.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The 1977 maintenance workers' dispute lasted from March 1977 to December 1979, with the most high profile and contentious part of the dispute being an 11-week strike between 9 August and 25 October 1977. During that period, the Victorian Premier amended the *Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic) and had a state of emergency declared, and the maintenance workers were sent letters dismissing them from the SECV.

Two sets of research questions were posed at the beginning of this thesis. The first set of questions asked why the strike occurred, given the insistence by the SECV during the 1970s on referring claims to arbitration? Moreover, what event or events precipitated the decision to strike? The second set of research questions include, why did the strike last for such a long period? What factors encouraged its continuation? These were important questions, because the literature in general has not distinguished short strikes from protracted battles, despite the cost of the latter to participants, employers and often, to other workers.

In answering the first set of questions, the expectation when the log of claims was drawn up and presented to the SECV early in 1977 was that it would be a low key dispute. The maintenance workers did not rush into industrial action, which in the first instance took the form of bans. The strike was not planned but was ignited by the deliberate actions of the SECV, which implemented a 'no work, no pay' situation over the issue of contract labour. This caused a walkout. Frustration over the perceived lack of action on the log of claims by the VTHC and the state and federal branches of the relevant unions confirmed the decision to strike. The items in the log were revived when hearings began in the ACAC, giving the false impression that the strike began over the claims.

In answering the second set of questions, a combination of factors was involved in maintaining the dispute. These included the involvement of the rank and file in picketing, rallies, fundraising and the mass meetings. These all helped to retain the cohesion and morale of the strikers. The support offered by the community and families was also important. These provided social activities and structures which assisted to sustain the mobilisation. The continued presence of the media assisted the retention of a united front, with attacks on the group (for example in the infamous *This Day Tonight* broadcast) strengthening the feeling of 'them and us'. The media reporting of such lengthy disputes may make them too public to settle, providing another factor which serves to sustain them. The use of John Halfpenny to deliver the 'bad news' at mass meetings served to further enhance group solidarity by enabling the deflection of such bad news away from the local shop stewards. In the later stages of the strike, the moral support from the operations unions over the threats to use the ESA and to dismiss the strikers was also relevant. The effect of the local industrial identity, and its related range of relationships, was therefore important in maintaining the dispute.

In addition, continuing the strike may have become a matter of saving face and gaining concessions rather than backing down empty handed. Thus the proceedings in the ACAC became a circular process, with the SECV refusing to give answers on some of the claims, Commissioner Vosti refusing to hand down a decision, and the men refusing to go back to work without something 'in hand'. The dispute was brought to an end only with the intervention of Bob Hawke, supported by the persuasion of Sam Armstrong at the final mass meeting. Leadership figures at the local level which had been key in sustaining the dispute, became the means by which it was brought to an end.

The 1977 dispute was analysed using the facets of Mobilisation Theory, which is based on social processes rather than institutions to explain industrial mobilisation. In

the case of the 1977 dispute, I conclude that its strength lies in explaining the beginning and ending of the dispute. The social and power relationships, both in the workplace and outside it, which had been important in establishing the context of the dispute, were also important in sustaining it. These relationships included those between the rank and file and the local community, between the LV members and their officials, between the CGTLC and the VTHC, and within the SECV. In this dispute, it was the rank and file who were proactive. The SECV, the government, the ACTU and the VTHC reacted to their decisions until the very end of the dispute. The detailed account of the dispute has demonstrated the importance of the leadership of the local shop stewards, who played strong roles in both sustaining and terminating the dispute. This supports the emphasis on leadership within Mobilisation Theory.

I have argued that the context is a critical factor which may be overlooked in examining the causes of strikes and the reasons for lengthy disputes in particular. While Mobilisation Theory contributes to an explanation of why industrial mobilisation is maintained, in this instance, an examination of the context at the time provides a better identification of the factors which prolonged the dispute. The critical factors in both the local and the wider context intersected once the men commenced the strike, creating a situation wherein the men, the state government and the SECV were unwilling to compromise. This was a battle which the LV maintenance men were not going to win, especially when it involved an unsanctioned, wildcat strike run by a group of shop stewards, and without the support of either the ACTU or the VTHC.

The local context, which forms an important element of the dispute, has demonstrated the importance of place in forming the local industrial identity, and the tensions which resulted between action at the local and state scales. Within the local identity, distinctions between salaried and wages workers, and between those based

locally and elsewhere, were also important. The industrial culture of the LV unions, and the nature of the interactions between management, unions and peak councils set the tone for industrial relations within the SECV.

A fundamental change was required in the climate at work, which was such that it encouraged conflict. This was not only because of the SECV and its approach to work and industrial relations, but also because of the demarcations and union differences which had developed over many years in an effort to protect jobs and union territory.

The analysis of the dispute in this thesis has called on literature from outside the traditional industrial relations discipline. The combination of the literature around economic and human geography with that derived from social movement theory in the form of Mobilisation Theory has demonstrated the usefulness of going beyond traditional analysis of industrial disputes. The examination of the local industrial identity which developed within the local industrial history based in a particular place, together with the impact this identity had on the determination of the scale of action during the dispute, and the reaction to the counter-mobilisation which resulted, has confirmed the relevance of this literature to the analysis of lengthy disputes. The emphasis in Mobilisation Theory on the roles of networks and relationships complements the important roles played by place and scale as they influence the actions and responses around industrial mobilisation. It has allowed a more informed understanding of the social and power relationships and the events which were involved; provides a better understanding of the interactions which occur; and thus offers a greater opportunity to explain why lengthy disputes occur and how they are sustained.

The restrictions on time and length inherent in completing a thesis meant that there were a number of limitations on the research. It was often difficult to trace participants, since after 30 years, many were deceased or had moved away from the LV.

In addition, it was generally not possible to do other than infer the role of the government, since access to the papers of the Victorian Cabinet for that period was unavailable.

The narrative and analysis of the dispute has highlighted a number of areas which would benefit from further research. These include the role of families and particularly women in supporting the dispute, and the effect this support had on the family unit. This support was acknowledged to be more extensive during this dispute than in previous disputes of the SECV maintenance workers. It would also be of interest to have input from a wider range of people and organisations affected by the dispute, for example local councils, and the local Members of Parliament, if they are still able to be contacted.

Another area which would provide data of interest is an examination of the relationship between the reporting of the dispute by the various media, and its effect on community opinion about, and support or otherwise for, the dispute. In addition, the differences in attitude, if any, between residents of the LV, Melbourne, and other rural Victorian communities would be of interest. Research to ascertain the role of the state government in the management of the dispute would be facilitated when the papers of the Victorian Cabinet become available to the public from 2013.

The use of the oral testimonies from those involved in the dispute has enhanced both the narrative of the dispute and its analysis. They added a subjective and less formal view compared to the accounts available in documentary sources. In addition, they provided an important element in examining the social relationships which existed at the time, in setting the local context, and in assessing the impact of the dispute.

This thesis has provided the opportunity to hear the voices of the participants in the dispute. These were the rank and file, the shop stewards, the union officials and the

supervisors and managers in the SECV. They have had a chance to express their feelings and hopes, their disappointments, and to reflect on the dispute and its aftermath in both personal terms and in its impact on their community. The bitterness which remains a legacy of the dispute is not between the SECV and the rank and file, but rather between the rank and file who went out on the grass and their fellow workers from the staff unions, the MOA and the FEDFA, who did not support them.

The rank and file involved in the strike recognised in the end that they were not just fighting the SEC, but also the federal and state governments, the ACAC, the ACTU and their own unions. None of these had any intention of backing down.

Was there a 'winner'? The state government was made to look weak by threatening to use the ESA and then backing down in favour of letting Bob Hawke settle the dispute. The SECV was said to have lost the trust of its employees. Certainly the maintenance employees, who fought 'to the bitter end', and who returned to work defeated, were not the winners. Perhaps the only winner was the Federal government which had shown that it expected adherence to the wage indexation guidelines. These were supported by the decision of the ACAC in the work value case. This dispute has illustrated that a determined government is not likely to be defeated by a small group of workers, no matter how committed. It was left to the maintenance workers to wear the results and to pick their work and family lives again.

The 1977 SECV maintenance workers' dispute was an important regional labour dispute in the industrial history of the Latrobe Valley and the SECV. Yet despite this, there has been a lack of attention in the academic literature to this dispute. This thesis, through the narrative and analysis of this dispute, has informed regional industrial relations as well as adding to the literature of lengthy disputes. It has enriched local social and corporate history, and offered new insights into labour history practice. The

use of Mobilisation Theory in the analysis of the dispute has demonstrated the usefulness and applicability of this new paradigm in industrial relations. This thesis has contributed to the discipline of industrial relations by an extension to Mobilisation Theory on the importance of context, not only in the workplace but also within the wider community.

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Appendix 1: Key personalities involved in the 1977 dispute

ARMSTRONG, Sam (1927-1989): Sam Armstrong was a Scottish immigrant who took up employment at the SECV as a metal worker in 1957. He was a firm believer in shop floor organising, and was an acknowledged communist in Australia. He was also active in LV community matters, becoming a member of the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education Council. He travelled to Russia twice in his life, once as a union representative and once in retirement. Sam was a shop steward for the AMWSU from 1957-85, Secretary of the SSC and Secretary of the Combined SECV Shop Committees (Victoria) 1959-1983, Secretary of the LV branch of the AMWSU 1957-84, State Councillor and State Conference delegate AMWSU 1970-84 and President of the CGTLC 1975-1985. At the time of the dispute, Sam was AMWSU shop steward, Secretary of the LV Branch of the AMWSU, Secretary of the SSC, and President of the CGTLC. He retired from the SECV in 1984.

DE CAMPO, William (Bill) (-1978): He joined the SECV as a laboratory assistant in 1945 and became a cadet engineer the following year. He became Manager of the Electricity Development Department in 1968 and Assistant General Manager (Administration) in 1971. In 1974 he was appointed Assistant General Manager (Operations) with the SECV, which included responsibility for LV operations. In this role he coordinated the establishment of the four LV departments and two Head Office departments into an Operations Group and led this group. During the 1977 dispute, he was 'indefatigable in his personal efforts to resolve the most serious industrial confrontation the Commission has experienced.'¹ He died in March 1978 after several months of illness.

FRASER, Malcolm AC (1930-): Malcolm Fraser was elected Liberal member for Wannon in Western Victoria in 1955. He gained his first Cabinet post as Minister for the Army in 1966 and later became Minister for Education and Science (1968-1969 and 1971-1972) and Minister for Defence (1969-1971). He became leader of the Liberal Party in March 1975, and on 11 November was appointed caretaker Prime Minister after Governor-General Sir John Kerr dismissed Gough Whitlam's Labor government. The Fraser Coalition government was returned a month later with the largest landslide of any federal election, and Fraser served as Prime Minister until 1983. Malcolm Fraser was said to seek the middle ground of politics through flexibility and compromise.²

HALFPENNY, John (1935-2003): John Halfpenny was an active member of the Eureka Youth League and a member of the Communist Party of Australia until 1979, spending a year in Russia in the early 1960s. He joined the ALP in 1983 and stood as a Senate candidate in 1986. He served as Secretary of the VTHC from 1987 to 1995 and was an Executive member of the ACTU. Halfpenny was Victorian State Secretary of the AMWSU from 1970 to 1988.

HAMER, Sir Rupert (Dick) (1916-2004): He served in Europe during World War II, and was elected Liberal Member of the Legislative Council for East Yarra province in 1958. He went on to become member for Kew in the Legislative Assembly and Deputy

¹ PROV, VPRS 9670/P1/Unit 60, Commissioners' meeting, 13 April 1978.

² Samuel, 'Fraser hesitated right to the last possible moment'.

Premier in 1971. After Sir Henry Bolte's retirement in 1972, he became Premier of Victoria and the first person in Australia to hold the official title of Minister for the Arts. In the State election of 1973, the Liberal Party retained power with its largest percentage of the vote in 50 years, giving it a secure majority in its own right.³ Although Hamer was a respected and popular parliamentarian, he resigned as Premier in 1981 after party discord.⁴

HAWKE, R.J.L. (Bob) AC (1929-): Bob Hawke joined the ACTU as Research Officer in 1958, and gained a reputation as an industrial advocate. He was elected ACTU President between 1969 and 1980. In 1973 he was also elected president of the ALP for a five-year term. He was blamed for the soaring increases in wages during the Whitlam federal government years of the early 1980s, 'an industrial firebrand fighting tooth and nail for workers' rights and conditions'.⁵ Yet he was also an important link between the Fraser government and the unions, and became known for his ability to negotiate settlements in high-profile, difficult disputes. During 1977 he was seen to dominate discussion of industrial matters, led negotiations on disputes, shaped a variety of important ACTU policies, and through a high profile as a conciliator and mediator came to be seen by some as the real opposition to the federal Fraser government.⁶ In September 1980 he announced that he would contest pre-selection for the federal seat of Wills, and he went on to win the seat the following month. He was elected as Leader of the Opposition in February 1983 and he became Prime Minister at the Federal election in March 1983. With eight years in office, Bob Hawke was Australia's longest-serving Labor Prime Minister. His political style was characterised as based on 'negotiation and accord'.⁷

MANSINI, Norman AM: In 1963 he was appointed Chairman of the Coal Reference Boards under the four coal mining industry awards operating only in Queensland. He continued in this role after his appointment as a Conciliator in 1970, and then as a Commissioner to the ACAC in August 1972. He was a member of the panel which included responsibility for stevedoring, the oil industry, clerks (with some exceptions), clothing trades, and textiles. He continued as a Commissioner until 1989.

MILES, Ross: Ross was employed by the SECV in the LV and was a shop steward for the BWIU. At the time of the dispute, Ross was immediate past President of the SSC, and area secretary, BWIU.

MOORE, Sir John AC (1915-1998): He was an Australian jurist appointed to the ACAC in August 1959. In 1973 he became the presiding judge of the ACAC and remained in this capacity until 1985. He was knighted in 1976, and appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia in 1986.

ONGER, Franz (1926-2001): A member of the touring Vienna Boys Choir, he was stranded in Australia when World War II was declared in September 1939. He came to

³ Jean Holmes, *The government of Victoria*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Qld., 1976, p. 126.

⁴ John Arnold and Deirdre Morris (eds), *Monash biographical dictionary of 20th century Australia*, Reed Reference Publishing, Port Melbourne, Vic., 1994, p. 230.

⁵ Peter Manning, *1977- a journalist's perspective*, Canberra, National Archives of Australia, 2008.

⁶ Carr, 'Australian trade unionism in 1977'.

⁷ Graham Little, 'Leadership styles: Fraser and Hawke', in Brian Head and Allan Patience (eds), *From Fraser to Hawke*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 9-36, p. 23.

the LV in 1949. Franz became an organiser for the Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees' Union. He was Secretary of the CGTLC between 1966 and 1983.

STONE, Ken AO (1926-2006): He was elected as Secretary of the VTHC in July 1969, having previously been Assistant Secretary, and guided the Victorian union movement through 16 years until July 1985. He led the VTHC through some tumultuous years which included the suspension of 27 unions, mostly left-wing, between 1967 and 1973 over the issue of representation on the VTHC (the 'split'), and the bans on the building of Newport PS. He was seen by some unions as being on the Right politically.⁸

TRETHOWAN, Charles AM (1926-): He commenced with the SECV in 1941 as a junior clerk at Ballarat. After serving in the RAAF during World War II, he completed a Bachelor of Commerce and moved to the SECV at Yallourn. He was promoted through a number of commercial roles before being appointed Deputy General Manager in 1971, with responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the SECV. He was appointed Chairman and General Manager in December 1974, the youngest Chairman ever appointed and the first with a commercial background.⁹ The roles of Chairman and General Manager were separated in 1983, with Trethowan continuing as part-time Chairman from March 1983 until his retirement in November 1987.

TURNBULL, Ted: At the time of the dispute, Ted was ETU steward, Secretary of the ETU LV sub-Branch, President of the SSC and Vice President of the CGTLC. He was LV regional organiser for the ETU between 1979 and 1989, when he resigned to take up a human relations position with the SECV.¹⁰

VOSTI, Allan AM (1915-2007): He served in the Australian Armed Forces during World War II. He joined the Department of Supply, becoming Director of Industrial Relations. He served as a Commissioner to the ACAC from November 1972 to 1980, servicing the building and construction industry, the metal trades in the electricity industry of Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, the oil industry, and municipal officers in the electricity generating authorities. He was the inaugural Chairman of the Victorian Building Industry Disputes Board between 1981 and 1988. From 1989 he was involved in private arbitrations related to the ACAC.

WRAGG, George (1927-2000): He trained as a millwright in the Royal Ordnance Factory and served in the Royal Navy during World War II before emigrating to Australia. He was employed by the SECV for 30 years (1956-1986), and was variously Secretary 1960-64, President 1965-71, and then Senior Vice President of the CGTLC. At the time of the dispute, George was a shop steward for the AMWSU, President of the LV Branch of the AMWSU, Executive Committee member of the CGTLC, and a member of the CGTLC Disputes Committee.

⁸ Purdham, *A century of struggle: a history of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, p. 106.

⁹ State Electricity Commission of Victoria, *Annual report 1987-88*, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1988, p. 10.

¹⁰ Purdham, *A century of struggle: a history of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia Victorian Branch*, p. 171.

Appendix 2: Timeline of events in the 1977 dispute

1977

MONTH	DATE	EVENT
March	25	Mass meeting approves the 1977 log of claims
	30	List of claims sent to AGM (O) by F. Onger, Secretary of the CGTLC
April	6	Reply to log of claims from AGM (O) that the log should be served through the proper channels
	13	VTHC and OIRC advised of log of claims and SEC reply
May	3	VTHC meeting with unions to discuss log of claims. Authority to negotiate transferred to the VTHC
	16	VTHC meeting with unions to discuss the log agreed that it should be served on the SECV.
	31	VTHC asks unions to clarify agreement over Power Industry Award
	31	Series of lunchtime mass meetings called over the delay in VTHC action on the log
June	15	Availability and overtime bans imposed by maintenance employees at mass meeting which criticised inaction by VTHC
	16	Leave restrictions introduced by SECV for maintenance employees applying overtime and availability bans
	30	MTF unions meeting expresses concern over delay in progress over the claims
July	6	Ban on temporary shift work imposed by maintenance employees at mass meeting
	8	MTF unions meeting endorses the claims and divided them into 3 categories – 35 hour week to be processed by ACTU; award items to be covered by application to vary the Metal Trades Award; and remaining conditions claims processed via VTHC
	9	SSC advised that the ETU and AMWSU have notified the ACAC of the claims
August	5	Availability and overtime bans by the ETU extended to the rest of the state
	5	Application by the ETU to vary the Metal Trades Award (SECV Appendix)
	8	No work, no pay action by SECV over contract labour issue and refusal by maintenance employees to work temporary shifts
	9	Indefinite stoppage commenced by maintenance employees after mass meeting
	15	VTHC meeting of unions to discuss the log

	16	Mass meeting decides to continue the strike
	22	VTHC forwards conditions claims to SECV
	23	ETU application to vary the Metal Trades Award, 1952 listed for hearing before Commissioner Vosti
	24	Mass meeting decides to lift bans and return to work at 7.30am on 25 August
	25	Return to work
	25	Hearing before Commissioner Vosti. The SECV announced that it required four more days to consider the claims
	26	Men walk off the job. Mass meeting resolves not to resume work until 7.30am on 29 August
	29	Return to work
	30	Private conference SECV and unions at ACAC. SECV announces that it will consider some of the claims but not make offers for another seven days
	31	Mass meeting decides to strike again and calls on the CGTLC to convene a Disputes Committee
September	1	SECV advertises tenders for maintenance and new works contracts without prior discussion with the CGTLC
	1	SECV advises VTHC that it is not prepared to discuss the remaining claims until there is a full resumption of work
	2	CGTLC Disputes Committee meeting
	13 & 14	SECV maintenance employees in the metropolitan area undertake 48-hour stoppage
	15	Hearing before Commissioner Vosti, and private meeting SECV/unions. SECV offers to be advised on 20 September, if the mass meeting to be held on 19 September agrees to a return to work
	19	Shop stewards' meeting recommends continuation of strike. Supported overwhelmingly by mass meeting
	26	Mass meeting rejects proposals agreed to by Commissioner Vosti/SECV/shop stewards. Decision to continue strike and establish picket lines against road transport of coal from Yallourn to Morwell
	27	Hearing on dispute re-commenced before Commissioner Vosti
	27	Electricity restrictions and restrictions on briquette supply imposed
	28	SECV requests a Full Bench hearing
	29 & 30	Commissioner Vosti continues hearing case
	30	Mass meeting confirms continuation of strike
October	1	Commissioner Vosti hands down proposal for return to work
	3	Announcement by state government that it will invoke the Essential Services Act if the men do not return to work on 4 October
	4	Shop stewards agree to recommend to mass meeting that the Vosti proposal be rejected. Mass meeting endorses the stewards

		recommendation and continues the stoppage
	5	Hearing referred to a Full Bench
	5	Victorian government proclaims a state of emergency
	6	Full Bench hearing commences
	9	Power restrictions tightened from midnight
	11	Victorian government applies to invoke the bans clauses in awards, and to deregister four of the unions involved
	11	ACTU calls a meeting of federal and state officials, VTHC, shop stewards
	12	Anomalies conference held and issue referred to an Anomalies Bench
	13	Mass meeting agrees to the recommendation to return to work from midnight that day on a 40-hour shift basis. Meeting also agreed to return to work without restrictions from Monday 17 October
	13-15	Anomalies proceedings commence
	14	Return to work
	17	Mass meeting decides to resume normal work, and to reconvene on 18 October
	18	Anomalies Bench decision that no wage increased was justified
	18	Mass meeting votes to strike indefinitely
	18	AGM (O) letter sent to strikers advising them to return to work by 21 October or be dismissed
	19	SECV advertises for maintenance tradesmen
	19-21	FEDFA, MOA and AIMPE resolve not to work with outside labour or to operate plant repaired by outside labour
	19	ACTU calls meeting of unions, shop stewards and VTHC to propose a work value study
	20	SECV applies for referral to a Full Bench
	20	Commissioner Mansini commences hearing work value case
	25	Mass meeting agrees to return to work from afternoon shift without bans, limitations or restrictions
	25	Work value proceedings resume before Commissioner Mansini
	26	Electricity restrictions removed from 8 pm, after 29 days
	31	Victorian government withdraws de-registration application
November	3	Unions accept SECV conditions offers
December	20	SECV applies for a Full Bench hearing

1978

MONTH	DATE	EVENT
February	16	Work value case concludes
March	21	Work value case decision handed down by Commissioner Mansini. Decision applies only to unions working under the Metal Trades Award, 1952
April	6	Stop work meeting to consider the work value case decision. Maintenance unions vote against industrial action
May	23	Commissioner Vosti proceeds with interim SECV building trades award hearing
September	8	Commissioner Vosti hands down The SECV Building Trades Award, 1978
December		SECV appeals against The SECV Building Trades Award, 1978

1979

May	11	SECV appeal against The SECV Building Trades Award, 1978 dismissed
December	4	Justice Alley hands down The SECV Building Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Award, 1979

Appendix 3: List of interviewees by affiliation

1. SECV

Manager (2)
Industrial Relations Manager/Officer (3)
Public Relations Manager (1) TOTAL = 6

2. Maintenance union members

AMWSU member
AMWSU steward
FIA member
FIA steward
OPDU steward
ETU steward TOTAL = 6

3. Union officials

ABCE&BLF organiser
ETU official TOTAL = 2

4. Non-maintenance union members

FEDFA organiser
MOA supervisor x 2
MOA steward
MOA organiser TOTAL = 5

5. Family members

Son
Wife TOTAL = 2

6. Others

GTLC executive member
Commissioner Vosti TOTAL = 2

Appendix 4: List of interviewees by participant category¹

Date of interview	Participant	Affiliation	Age at time of dispute	Location of interview
29 August 2007	A	Family member	27	GTLC office
3 September 2007	B	Union	27	GTLC office
4 September 2007	C	SECV	41	Home
5 September 2007	D	SECV	34	Home
5 September 2007	E	SECV	53	Home
6 September 2007	F	SECV	35	Home
18 September 2007	G	Union	26	Monash University
18 September 2007	H	Union	23	Home
19 September 2007	J	SECV	37	Home
24 September 2007	K	Union	30	Home
25 September 2007	L	Union	Early 40s	Home
27 September 2007	M	SECV	55	Home
29 September 2007	N	Union	54	Home
1 October 2007	O	Union	45	Telephone
1 October 2007	P	SECV	46	Home
10 October 2007	R	Union	49	Monash University
10 October 2007	S	Family member	25-30	Monash University
11 October/23 November 2007 ²	T	SECV	38	Home
16 October 2007	V	Union	30?	Work
16 October 2007	W	Union	21	Monash University
23 October 2007	X	Union	25ish	Monash University
23 & 24 October 2007	Y	Commissioner	62	Telephone
25 October 2007	Z	Union	31	Work

¹ This table provides further information on the interviewees while still de-identifying them

² The initial recording ceased after 20 minutes and the interview was rescheduled.

Appendix 5: Interview rates by category of 1977 dispute participants (as at November 2007)

	Names (no.)	Deceased	Contacted By researcher	Responded After contact	Agreed to be Interviewed
SECV Manager	16	4	10	7	6
Union member- FEDFA	8	2	3	0	0
Union member- MOA	6	2	4	4	3
Maintenance union member	36	12	18	9	6
Industrial officer/organiser (all unions)	7	1	4	3	3
Union official (all unions)	7	4	1	1	1
Name only, no affiliation known	14	Unknown	1	0	0
GTLC involvement	2	1	1	1	1
Family member	3		2	2	2
Other	1		1	1	1
	100	26+	45	27	23

Appendix 6: Unions, awards and employees involved in the 1977 strike¹

Award/Determination	Union/s covered	Nos in SECV	Nos in LV SECV	Nos on strike
Metal Trades Award 1952	AMWSU, ETU, ASE, Moulders', FIA	6042	2795	2139
Building and Construction Employees and Builders' Labourers' Award 1973	ABCE&BLF	100	83	82
Carpenters and Joiners' Award 1967	ASC&J, BWIU	165	87	66
Timber Industry Consolidated Award 1974	ATWU	29	2	2
Vehicle Industry (Roping-in no.1) Award 1974	VBEFA	37	9	9
Painters Wages Board Determination	OPDU	183	110	97
Other wages awards/determinations	See below ²	1505	584	
Municipal Officers' Association of Australia (SECV) Award 1975	MOA, AIMPE, ETU, FEDFA, AAESDA	7088	1671	
Professional Engineers (SECV) Award 1965	APEA	1230	160	
Engine Drivers & Firemens' (SECV) Award 1975	FEDFA	1993	1900	
TOTAL		18,372	7401	2395

¹ The numbers of employees said to work within the SECV and the numbers said to be on strike varied according to the date and the source. The figures given are the most consistent or best estimate which could be made from the data available

² Australian Workers' Union, Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union, Transport Workers' Union, Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees' Union, Federated Storemen and Packers' Union, Plumbers and Gasfitters' Employees' Union, Victorian Operative Bricklayers' Society, Victorian Plasterers' Society

Sources: PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 326, File 80/110 pt 1, Latrobe Valley employees on strike from 10.30 am, 9 August 1977.
PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 327, File 80/110 pt 3, Numbers of employees and unions involved in Latrobe Valley stoppage, 27 September 1977.
PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 328, File 80/118, Federal awards and state determinations, 1977.
PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 332, File 80/123 pt 2, Federal award coverage in the SECV, 1977.
PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 332, File 80/123 pt 3, SECV regional distribution of blue collar employees, 1977.
GVR, Series MORS 0347, Box C0006, File Central Gippsland Trades & Labour Council 1978, Latrobe Valley unions, 6 November 1978.

Appendix 7: Progress of the items in the 1977 log of claims

The VTHC Negotiating Committee and the SECV met on 21 December 1977 to discuss those issues in the 1977 log of claims which were not wages related (the latter remained with the ACAC) and which had not already been agreed on. A number of the claims were related to the achievement of parity with SECV white-collar employees, and these were generally considered sympathetically.

A meeting with the OIRC chair and representatives of other government instrumentalities followed on 13 February 1978. The SECV's proposal was further discussed at a meeting between the SECV, VTHC and union representatives on 21 February 1978. Further correspondence between the SECV and the VTHC resulted in the offer of a 'package deal', which was accepted by the relevant unions and the CGTLC at a meeting on 4 May 1978.¹

The 1978 outcome² on the items in the log of claims which was presented to the SECV on 30 March 1977 and then slightly amended on 4 May 1977 was:

1. **Wage increase:** Between \$1.60 and \$5.50 per week to skilled and semi-skilled employees with 2 or more years experience
2. **Easter Tuesday as a public holiday:** This would be substituted for Easter Saturday via an exchange of letters from the unions
3. **Sick leave of 12 days on starting, 12 days after 6 months service, 12 days after 2 years, and 12 days per annum thereafter and to be taken without production of a doctor's certificate or statutory declaration:** Increased entitlements after 1st and 2nd years of service gave parity with staff employees, although wages employees were credited with fewer days on appointment than staff (5 days for wages, 12 for staff). Evidence of illness: same provision as staff employees
4. **Meal allowance during overtime of \$2.80 for the first meal and \$1.70 for subsequent meals:** \$2.50 for each meal
5. **Workers compensation accident pay on full pay:** No change
6. **Wages incorporated into awards to allow application of full indexation:** No
7. **Exchange days (5 days per annum) for work on public holidays and overtime on Saturdays and Sundays:** Provision for time off in lieu of payment giving parity with FEDFA and staff employees
8. **35-hour week:** Remained with the ACTU
9. **All overtime at double time:** Granted for all shift workers
10. **Safety footwear for all SECV personnel:** An offer was made by the SECV on 13 July 1977, and accepted by the VTHC on 3 August 1977. After a review of internal safety schemes a subsequent offer was made on 13 July 1978

¹ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 480, File 80/1439, pt 1, VTHC to SECV, 4 May 1978

² *In the matter of an application by the Electrical Trades Union of Australia to vary The Metal Trades Award, 1952* (1978) 199 CAR 652; *In the matter of an application by the Electrical Trades Union of Australia to vary the Metal Trades Award, 1952 and in the notification of disputes between Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia and Others v Electricity Trust of South Australia and Others* (1978) 202 CAR 312; GTLC, Box F12, File SECV contracts, Safety footwear, 24 August 1978; UMA, 96/92, Box 1, 1977 dispute file 2, VTHC list of claims 1977 – SEC reply, 20 February 1978; PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 480, File 80/1439 pt 1, List of claims 1977, 13 July 1978; PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 480, File 80/1439 pt 1, VTHC list of claims 1977, 25 January 1978

11. **Long Service Leave payments to be pro rata on retirement for ill health or other social reasons:** Regulations were amended to provide the same pro rata payments for disability retirement as for other terminations of service, that is, after 3 years
12. **Retirement and Benefits Scheme improved benefits:** Amended provisions were introduced from 22 August 1977 after correspondence from the VTHC

The non-conditions claims were to be the basis of an agreement or award for the industry. This was rejected.³ In April 1978, Sam Armstrong commented that continuing to settle disputes involving the relevant unions by individual package deals would retain the basis of the 1977 dispute – the shifting relativities between the various maintenance and building trades classifications.⁴

In addition:⁵

1. **Incidental expense allowance:** Same provisions as for staff employees, implemented via an exchange of letters between the SECV and the ETU and the FEDFA. This was a flow on from a recently arbitrated MOA claim
2. **Increases in travelling and underground allowances:** Offered by the SECV
3. **Increased SIPS loading:** between \$1.80 and \$4.10 per week after negotiations between the VTHC and the state government

Items in the log of claims, progress during the 1980s:⁶

1. Further reductions in the disparity of sick leave entitlements between wages and staff employees were made, so that by 1983, staff employees were credited with 12 days leave on appointment, and wages employees with eight, and thereafter rates of accumulation were identical.
2. By 1986, sick leave entitlements, meal allowance, accident make-up pay, day in lieu and exchange days operated as per staff conditions; wages and allowances were subject to indexation; and a 37 ½ hour week operating as a 9-day fortnight was being worked, with the SECV willing to negotiate on a 36-hour week.
3. **Power Industry Award:** The matter of an industry award was still outstanding, with the unions deciding on an 'industry approach' rather than an industry award, since agreement could not be reached by all unions over award matters. This was despite the final draft of an industrial agreement for SECV workers having been presented to the unions for consideration via the VTHC in 1983.

³ *In the matter of an application by the Electrical Trades Union of Australia to vary the Metal Trades Award, 1952 and in the notification of disputes between Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia and Others v Electricity Trust of South Australia and Others* (1978) 202 CAR 312

⁴ *Latrobe Valley Express*, 5 April 1978, p. 1

⁵ PROV, VPRS 8916/P1/Unit 480, File 80/1439 pt 1, Victorian Trades Hall Council list of claims 1977, 12 May 1978; UMA, 95/96, Box 103, File Victorian Administrative Committee, 20 February 1978

⁶ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, esp re 1977 dispute, NTU, 12 April 1986; UMA, 96/92, Box 21, File Correspondence & writings of S. Armstrong, Letter to the Editor LV Express, 30 September 1983; Teicher, *Breakaway unions in the Australian industrial relations system: Victorian power station operators*, p. 11.

By 1983, Sammy Armstrong was able to assert that wage rates within the SECV were generally comparable to those in other industries and in other power generating authorities. He went on to say that over 50 per cent of the claims from the 1977 log had been won, and they were close to a full victory.⁷

In 1986, Sam Armstrong noted that the ‘proof of the pudding is in the eating’ and that the maintenance unions were now enjoying the end (favourable) result of the strike.⁸

⁷ UMA, 96/92, Box 21, File Correspondence & writings of S. Armstrong, Letter to the Editor LV Express, 30 September 1983

⁸ UMA, 96/92, Box 4, File Speeches, esp re 1977 dispute, NTU, 12 April 1986