



Deposit Z692 – Federated Gas Employees’ Industrial Union New South Wales Branch deposit

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A GUIDE TO THE MINUTES OF THE 'GAS STOKERS PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION'
THE GAS EMPLOYEES UNION AND THE FEDERATED GAS EMPLOYEES INDUSTRIAL
UNION (N.S.W.) BRANCH.

by Gordon Newlyn

"An assignment submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Diploma
in Information Management - Archives Administration
in the University of New South Wales."

An introductory administrative history:

The Gas Stokers Protective Association registered with the Industrial Registrar under the Trade Union Act in 1885.

The Mortlake Branch was formed on June 22, 1888. The name was changed to the 'Gas Employees Union' on February 18, 1902 under the Arbitration Act. The Mortlake and Sydney branches of the (G.S.P.A.) registered under the new name. The Federated Gas Employees Industrial Union (N.S.W. Branch) became the official title on January 22, 1918 and has retained that name since.

The Lamplighters Union (N.S.W.) formerly registered under the Arbitration Act in 1903 and became a branch of the Gas Employees Union on July 31, 1908. In April and May of that same year the North Shore Branch was formed and the Sydney branch of the (G.E.U.), commonly known as the Kent Street branch, changed its name to the 'Out door Branch'. On April 22, 1910 the Gas Fitters Assistants Union was formed and almost immediately became a branch of the (G.E.U.). In 1911 two more branches were formed and titled the 'Gas Fitters Branch' and the 'Australian Gas Light and Meter Readers Union'. From July 1, 1916 the Gas Fitters Assistants and the Meter Readers held their meetings conjointly and referred to themselves as the 'Meter Readers and Assistants Branch'. For a brief period in the early 1920's the 'Salaried Officers' also became affiliated with the (F.G.E.I.U.).

The (G.E.U.) held 'Council Meetings' between December 6, 1916 and August 15, 1924. A 'Picnic Committee' was formed on January 20, 1927 and continued till the end of the Second World War.

A 'Federal Management Committee' was formed on June 8, 1921 and appears to continue until the winter of 1943, but there is a gap of seven and a half years from the beginning of the Depression till 1937.

The Minutes cover the period from 1888 to 1972.

A discriptive component:

Initially, Australian trade unions were modelled on their British counterparts with membership restricted to skilled workers in a particular trade but as economic conditions improved and new technologies made crafts redundant, another type of trade union began to emerge. Membership of the Gas Stokers Protective Association was not confined to those skilled in a particular craft, nor was it geographically restricted. The members believed that all workers in the gas industry should unite in a trade union and that all of these workers had a common interest. The (G.S.P.A.) formed at a time when unemployment was low, but before too long the situation reversed and the union became embroiled in great industrial unrest. Socialist ideas from Europe, in conjunction with a traditional radicalism, instilled a belief among the workers that an irreconcilable conflict existed between the interests of capital and labour.

Throughout the period of the 'Great Strikes' (1890-93) the (G.S.P.A.) supported the relief funds of the Illawarra Miners, the Queensland Shearers, the Broken Hill Miners, and the Seamen's Union. They also supported the Australian Workman's newspaper. By 1892 the effects of the depression were evident and the Minutes record that one of their members "is in a semi-state of starvation."¹ A year later the employers began reducing the wages of the workers. The (G.S.P.A.) attempted to organize the employees of the A.G.L. Co. that had no union of their own (Lamplighters, Plumbers etc.) into a force to beat the reductions. But by 1893 the employers had won the day and the (G.S.P.A.) agreed to a reduction in their wages² and as a result the union membership declined.³ After 1895 the worst of the depression seemed to be over and the union set about regaining their fallen status.

Prior to the crippling strikes of the 1890's trade unions were almost unanimously opposed to arbitration by industrial tribunals. However, following these strikes which virtually demolished the organized labour movement, this opposition gradually dissipated as the unions began to look upon arbitration as a means of forcing employers to acknowledge the rights of unions and as a means of securing fair wages. By 1901 the Australian Gas Light Co. still had not raised the wages to the old rate and in their opinion "the wages now paid are already too high and under the circumstances a further conference with my Board will be unnecessary."⁴ In 1902 the union changed its name to the 'Gas Employees Union' under the Arbitration Act and sought "a fair days wage for a fair days work" through the courts. The solicitor's fees were high yet the union was confident of a bright future.

The legislation which created these arbitration tribunals was instrumental in contributing to the growth and viability of trade unions in Australia. It enabled the (G.E.U.) to obtain awards, thus forcing upon the employer the obligation to recognize the union as a bargaining agent for their members. The achievement of legal recognition encouraged more employees to form trade unions, which shortly became branches of the (G.E.U.), thus significantly strengthening the union. By 1907 the union had regained its previous status and the management of the (A.G.L. Co.) were 'pleased' to meet the representative from the (G.E.U.)⁵ The union believed "that it is essential for the common good and mutual protection of every section of Gas Employees that they should unite together as one union."⁶ From 1908 till the end of the First World War the membership increased markedly.

The existence of Federal legislation encouraged the union to arrange interstate amalgamation and federation so as to bring them under the jurisdiction of the Federal Court. In 1918 they became the Federated Gas Employees Industrial Union (N.S.W. Branch). It was at this time that the ideological struggles within the union came to the forefront. The 1920's were a time of relative prosperity but the union's strength was weakened by the fact that there was a plentiful supply of labour, coupled with a persistent inflation. The new leadership saw the trade union movement as an instrument for enlarging the class struggle and for promoting policies based on a socialist philosophy.

The depressed economic situation, having reached crisis proportions by the early 1930's, had a disastrous effect on the strength of the union. Gas consumption declined and the work was rationed. Membership in the union also declined as the (A.G.L. Co.) eventually 'put-off' most of the members.⁷ By 1936 the N.S.W. Industrial Commission declared their intention to increase the basic wage by one shilling a week which infuriated the union. In a letter to the Premier the union suggested that the "declared wage is totally inadequate to meet the rapidly increasing cost of commodities and rents..."⁸ With the approach of World War Two a 'man-power' shortage became evident and the (A.G.L. Co.) agreed to an across the board increase for the gas workers.⁹ A decade later the union was embroiled in a dispute between the Federal government and the miners, when troops were sent into the mines, all coal arriving at the gas works was declared 'black'.¹⁰

A continued shortage of 'man-power' during the post-war years saw the employment of 'displaced persons' from Europe being employed by the (A.G.L. Co.) In line with other unions the (F.G.E.I.U.) demanded and the company agreed, that no 'displaced person' should be employed whenever Australian labour was available.¹¹ Since the war and up until the mid-1970's successive Federal governments pursued with conspicuous success a policy of full employment and the nation achieved a considerable period of unparalled economic growth. As a result labour was, in the main, in short supply; the position of the union improved markedly. Women were becoming members for the first time in the history of the union.¹²

APPENDICES

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Minutes (G.S.P.A.) October 21, 1892.
- 2 Minutes (G.S.P.A.) November 3, 1893.
- 3 Minutes (G.S.P.A.) July 12, 1895.
- 4 Minutes (G.E.U.) August 19, 1902.
- 5 Minutes (G.E.U.) December 14, 1907.
- 6 Minutes (G.E.U.) June 5, 1908.
- 7 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) May 6, 1931.
- 8 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) October 28, 1936.
- 9 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) February 15, 1939.
- 10 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) July 15, 1949.
- 11 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) March 30, 1949.
- 12 Minutes (F.G.E.I.U.) May 27, 1966.

President

Secretary

J. Smith

December 6, 1916 — February 7, 1917

Secretary not named

A.J. Camery

February 7, 1917 — January 23, 1918

J.T. Cunningham

January 23, 1918 — August 6, 1923

R. Burges

August 6, 1923 — August 15, 1924

J. Slattery

August 15, 1924 —

F.G.E.I.U. — Federal Management Committee

C.J. Lucas

June 8, 1921 — July 2, 1925

No Secretary named

S. Rawlin

July 2, 1925 — still serving June 14, 1929.

There appears to be a gap of seven and a half years
in the Minutes

G.E. Callin

January 29, 1937 — still serving July 12, 1943.

Gas Employees Union — Sydney Branch

President

Secretary

Thomas Tracey
December 21, 1903 — May 16, 1908

John Griffin
December 21, 1903 — May 16, 1908

J. Dunningham
May 16, 1908 — December 30, 1910

J. Kerr
May 16, 1908 — January 2, 1913

F. Lands
December 30, 1910 — September 27, 1911

J. Smith
September 27, 1911 — February 6, 1912

W. Farrell
January 2, 1913 — February 14, 1916

S. Rawlin
January 2, 1913 —

J. Smith
February 14, 1916 —

Smith and Rawlin still serving December 6, 1916

Federated Gas Employees Union — Out-door workers sub-branch

President

Secretary

C. Hutt

J.C. West

September 13, 1946 — June 13, 1947

September 13, 1946 —

K.T. Smith

June 13, 1947 — August 21, 1948

W. Jones

August 21, 1948 — September 9, 1949

K.T. Smith

September 9, 1949 — October 13, 1950

E. Burdon

October 13, 1950 —

Burdon and West still serving in 1951

Salaried Officers of the Australian Gas Light Company

. Sayle

W.M. Carson

February 26, 1920 — December 11, 1922

January 26, 1920 — December 11,
1922

President

L. Piper

31 July 1908 — May 23, 1910

no Secretary

A.M. Porter

May 23, 1910 — January 20, 1911

W. Mc.Leunan

January 20, 1911 — December 20, 1912

C.J. Lucas

December 20, 1912 — December 14, 1925

W.H. Gardener

December 14, 1925 — October 11, 1926

The Australian Gas Light and Meter Readers Union

President

Secretary

J.H. Thompson
January 17, 1911 — January 30, 1912

W. Farrell
January 17, 1911 — December 15,
1915

C. Craigie
January 30, 1912 — August 27, 1912

H. Mc.Gowan
August 27, 1912 — December 15, 1915

W. Mc.Carthy
December 15, 1915 — July 11, 1916

The Fitters Assistants from here on held their meetings
with the Meter Readers conjointly

A.R. Munro
July 11, 1916 — January 10, 1919

C. Larter
January 10, 1919 — July 2, 1923

W. Roach
October 14, 1924 —

E. Cavill
July 2, 1923 — July 2, 1928

Referred to as the F.G.E.I.U. Meter Readers sub-branch

P. Smith
July 2, 1928 — July 7, 1930

J. Ayres
July 7, 1930 — June 1, 1931

. Lenehan
June 1, 1931 —

Gas Employees Union — North Shore Branch

President

Secretary

W. Bowen

S. West

May 7, 1908 — December 16, 1912

May 7, 1908 —

G. Barnes

December 16, 1912 —

re-elected January 28, 1914

Gas Employees Union — Gasfitters Branch

President

Secretary

H. Kemp

July 12, 1911 — December 13, 1911

There appears no Secretary

A.B. Cohen

December 13, 1911 — December 18, 1912

F. Hall

December 18, 1912 — December 12, 1913

J.E. Withers

December 12, 1913 — January 13, 1915

J.W. Sheldon

January 13, 1915 — December 8, 1915

D. Mc.Donald

December 8, 1915 — January 9, 1919

Turner

January 9, 1919 — January 13, 1920

A.B. Hook

January 13, 1920 — February 8, 1921

H.A. Marshall

February 8, 1921 — June 12, 1923

Y. Puffett

June 12, 1923 — July 4, 1924

J. Kellerman

July 4, 1924 — December 7, 1927

E. Adlard

December 7, 1927 —

Federated Gas Employees Union — Picnic Committee

President

M. Slattery

January 20, 1927 — December 2, 1927

G. Callin

December 2, 1927 — December 7, 1928

W. Burges

December 7, 1928 — February 15, 1929

A.E. De.Jersey

February 15, 1929 January 17, 1930

G.E. Callin

January 17, 1930 — January 13, 1933

J. Slattery

January 13, 1933 — December 6, 1935

A.E. Kemp

December 6, 1935 — December 2, 1938

K. Smith

December 2, 1938 — October 12, 1945

T. Burdon

October 12, 1945 —

Secretary

W. Burges

January 20, 1927 — December 7, 192

Dufty

December 7, 1928 — December 6,
1935

W. Roache

December 6, 1935 — January 14,
1935

W. James

December 2, 1938 — October 12,
1945

L.H. Thompson

October 12, 1945 —

President

Secretary

Richard Smythe
January 31, 1889 — June 6, 1889

J. Osborne
June 6, 1889 — January 16, 1890

J. Sykes
January 16, 1890 — November 20, 1890

F. Bracey
November 20, 1890 — June 22, 1891

J. Adams
June 22, 1891 — November 16, 1894

W.A. Read
November 16, 1894 — January 24, 1896

J. Doyle
January 24, 1896 — June 12, 1896

W. Masson
June 12, 1896 — May 28, 1897

J. Manghan
May 28, 1897 — September 16, 1898

Frederick Lawrence
September 16, 1898 — January 8, 1908

P. Ryan
March 3, 1890 — June 22, 1891

A. Mole
June 22, 1891 — November 16, 1894

W. Hausden
November 16, 1894 — May 28, 1897

C. Wilson
May 28, 1897 — June 24, 1898

J. Jenks
June 24, 1898 — April 14, 1899

From April 14, 1899 till June 7, 1901 the Trustees handled the administration of the union.

B. Muldoon
June 7, 1901 — January 6, 1903

A. Mole
January 6, 1903 — January 10, 1913

Gas Employees Union — Mortlake Branch

President

Secretary

S. Rawlin

January 8, 1908 — January 7, 1910

J. Smith

January 7, 1910 — February 7, 1912

J.M. Crowe

February 7, 1912 — January 10, 1913

S. Rawlin

January 10, 1913 —

J. Smith

January 10, 1913 — December 22, 1916

J. Crowe

December 22, 1916 — January 4, 1918

P. Mc.Cabe

January 4, 1918 —

Mc.Cabe and Rawlin still serving in December 1923

Federated Gas Employees Industrial Union — N.S.W. Branch
(Management Committee)

President

Secretary

T. Cunningham
January 28, 1918 — June 8, 1920

S. Rawlin
January 28, 1918 — July 27, 1932

R. Burges
June 8, 1920 — April 11, 1923

A.O. Gorman
April 11, 1923 — August 15, 1923

R. Burges
August 15, 1923 — August 27, 1924

J.K. Slattery
August 27, 1924 — August 24, 1927

G. Callin
August 24, 1927 — August 22, 1928

R. Burges
August 22, 1928 — March 21, 1929

G. Callin
March 21, 1929 — July 27, 1932

J.K. Slattery
July 27, 1932 — August 16, 1935

G. Callin
July 27, 1932 — July 12, 1943

A.E. Kemp
August 16, 1935 — August 10, 1938

K.T. Smith
August 10, 1938 — October 8, 1947

K.T. Smith acts as a Secretary in a temporary capacity from July 12, 1943 and the Presidents position is filled by the Vice-Presidents

Len Thompson
October 8, 1947 — March 26, 1969

J.C. West
September 29, 1943 — July 21, 1965

Federated Gas Employees Industrial Union — N.S.W. Branch
(Management Committee)

President

Secretary

T.F. Ross

July 21, 1965 — August 26, 1966

dies August 26, 1966 and replaced
by Acting Secretary J. Trimble —

made permanent secretary from
March 1, 1967 and from February 12,
1969 he became known as Secretary/
Treasurer

S. Hewett

March 26, 1969 — April 15, 1970

R. Mc.Donald

April 15, 1970 — March 17, 1971

P. Cassidy

March 17, 1971 — September 27, 1972

W. Conder

September 27, 1972 —

Conder and Trimble still serving at the end of 1972

ITEM INVENTORY

PROVENANCE

Federated Gas Employees Industrial Union (NSW Branch)

SERIES

Minutes of Board Meetings

BOX No	ITEM	ITEM DESCRIPTION	size	QUANTITY
	1	Minutes of Meetings 22/6/1888-3/10/1891	28x5 cms	1 vol
	2	Minutes of Meetings 23/10/1891-26/9/1908	29x7 cms	1 vol
	3	Minutes of Meetings 21/12/1903-14/8/1917	28x4 cms	1 vol
	4	Minutes of Meetings 7/5/1908-22/6/1914	28x3 cms	1 vol
	5	Minutes of Meetings 31/7/1908-18/5/1909	28x3 cms	1 vol
	6	Minutes of Meetings 23/4/1908-28/3/1916	27x2 cms	1 vol
	7	Minutes of Meetings 16/10/1908-2/1/1923	28x5 cms	1 vol
	8	Minutes of Meetings 22/4/1910-29/11/1915	26x2 cms	1 vol
	9	Minutes of Meetings 17/1/1911-8/6/1916	25x1 cms	1 vol
	10	Minutes of Meetings 12/7/1911-12/6/1928	29x4 cms	1 vol
	11	Minutes of Meetings 27/9/1911-6/12/1916	29x5 cms	1 vol
	12	Minutes of Meetings 7/7/1914-11/10/1926	28x3 cms	1 vol
	13	Minutes of Meetings 6/12/1916-23/2/1926	28x5 cms	1 vol
	14	Minutes of Meetings 11/7/1916-1/9/1924	28x3 cms	1 vol
	15	Minutes of Meetings 22/10/1919-28/3/1926	28x6 cms	1 vol
	16	Minutes of Meetings 22/1/1918-4/2/1920	27x3 cms	1 vol
	17	Minutes of Meetings 26/2/1920-11/12/1922	28x3 cms	1 vol
	18	Minutes of Meetings 6/6/1921-31/10/1929	28x3 cms	1 vol
	19	Minutes of Meetings 6/2/1923-12/6/1928	28x3 cms	1 vol
	20	Minutes of Meetings 7/11/1923-16/12/1925	28x3 cms	1 vol
	21	Minutes of Meetings 11/4/1923-17/3/1926	28x6 cms	1 vol
	22	Minutes of Meetings 14/10/1924-1/6/1931	28x3 cms	1 vol
	23	Minutes of Meetings 24/3/1926-27/12/1934	27x18 cms	1 vol
	24	Minutes of Meetings 20/1/1927-25/5/1945	28x4 cms	1 vol
	25	Minutes of Meetings 9/1/1935-20/12/1939	27x12 cms	1 vol
	26	Minutes of Meetings 29/1/1937-11/6/1941	28x3 cms	1 vol
	27	Minutes of Meetings 6/1/1943-16/1/1946	27x7 cms	1 vol
	28	Minutes of Meetings 3/1/1940-30/12/1942	27x7 cms	1 vol
	29	Minutes of Meetings 13/9/1946-13/4/1951	26x2 cms	1 vol
	30	Minutes of Meetings 30/1/1946-21/12/1949	27x6 cms	1 vol
	31	Minutes of Meetings 11/1/1950-23/12/1953	27x5 cms	1 vol
	32	Minutes of Meetings 6/1/1954-16/12/1959	27x6 cms	1 vol
	33	Minutes of Meetings 13/1/1960-22/12/1965	27x6 cms	1 vol
	34	Minutes of Meetings 20/1/1966-29/8/1979	27x8 cms	1 vol