CHAPTER 4
Australian Labor Party,
New South Wales Branch
Annual Conference, 6 – 15 June 1920

Report in *The Australian Worker*

If 1916 had been a stormy and momentous year for the NSW ALP, 1920 was in some ways even more chaotic. There had been one notable success; at the State election on 20 March Labor had won the narrowest of election victories, gaining office with the support of one Socialist Labor MP and the willingness of one of the Nationalists, Daniel Levy, to act as Speaker. This was a remarkable achievement after the comprehensive split in the party over conscription less than four years before. However, in the extra-parliamentary parts of the Labor Party and the wider trade union movement new splits were opening up.

The factional machine put in place in 1915 had become almost completely unworkable, as it was split between the leaders of the AWU and a group of more radical industrial trade unionists and branch members associated with the syndicalist IWW or soon-to-be members of the new Communist Party (founded in 1920 in Australia). The documents reproduced below give some of the flavour of the collapse of the Industrial Vigilance Council which had controlled the Executive, and its replacement by direct factional control by the AWU. Many of the radicals left the party to join other organisations on the left of the ALP.

With the extremists effectively purged after the collapse of the IVC, the AWU had reasserted control in the State Executive elected at the 1919 Conference, with the result that the business of this 1920 Conference was completed within a week, and in relative harmony. The main arguments were over the question of whether the party should support the new electoral system of Proportional Representation or prefer a return to a system of single electorates. There were meetings on Monday and Tuesday of the following week, but a complete lack of interest meant that there was no quorum to make decisions. The Executive would make any significant decisions anyway.

The State Executive still maintained its suspicion of the politicians in the Storey and Dooley Governments (1920-22). One particular target of their anger was the Treasurer, JT Lang, who was condemned for his
refusal to pass on the full basic wage rises to public servants. The Executive threatened to block his preselection in Parramatta for the next election. Under faction boss John Bailey, the AWU and the Executive became heavily involved in preselection rorts over the next couple of years, but it is doubtful that they could have unseated Lang in his own electorate without a very bitter fight.

Executive Report of NSW ALP for 1919

(Mitchell Library Manuscripts, Molesworth Papers: 71, Box 5)

[Editor’s Note: I have not been able to find a copy of the Executive Report for 1919. It is missing from the otherwise fairly comprehensive manuscript collections in the National Library (329.9944 AUS) and the Mitchell Library (ML MSS 329.3106/3). I could find no mention of an Executive Report in the Australian Worker or the Sydney Morning Herald, although it is mentioned very briefly on the floor of the Conference for Saturday, 12 June where it was “carried without discussion”. There is a reference in the Executive Report of 1920 to an “interim report” presented to this Conference. There is a likelihood that it was not published but presented in a roneoed form to the Conference. That would not be surprising, since 1919 was a chaotic year for the Executive, resulting in a split that saw the more militant unions break away to support a new Socialist Party (and eventually a Communist Party). The same year saw the collapse of the authoritarian faction known originally as ‘The Industrial Section’ – later renamed ‘The Industrial Vigilance Council’. There exists in the Molesworth Papers in Mitchell Library an Executive Report from the IVC for 1919, but it contains little detail other than a report on a disciplinary matter involving two members of the Tramways Union. In effect, the Executives of both the ALP and its IVC faction were completely immobilised by the factional showdown. In the absence of an Executive Report the view of the AWU fraction can be appreciated in the Presidential Address to Conference by WH Lambert, which took up much of the first day of this Conference. Meanwhile, it is worthwhile reproducing here from the Molesworth Papers the official report of the IVC on its own winding up, drafted by IVC Secretary, Voltaire Molesworth.]
Final Report. Issued by Instruction of Industrial Vigilance Committee

How IVC Was Disbanded

Owing to the fact that a number of the Executive officers of the IVC had joined a “bogus industrial section”, the President and Secretary decided to act according to Rule II of the constitution, which provides that: “Meetings of the Council will be held on the first Friday in each month, at 8 pm”.

Accordingly, acting under the rule, which says: “Meetings of the Council shall be called by advertisement in The Australian Worker”, the meeting was set down for Friday, August 1, and advertised in The Worker. As complaints had been made that persons other than delegates were participating in the Council’s business, the Executive had decided that only delegates representing financial unions and ALP branches should be admitted on presentation of badge.

Attempt to Pack Meeting

Steps were taken to ensure that only accredited delegates should attend the meeting, and events proved the wisdom of so acting, as about fifty of the disruptionists who were not delegates attempted to gain admittance. The Secretary (Mr Bartle) acted as guardian, and as delegates entered their names were checked in the official roll. No accredited delegate was refused admission. Messrs Graves, McPherson, Devlin, and other recognised members of the “bogus section” which had been meeting at the Social Democratic Hall, attended and participated in the business of the evening. About fifty of their “hangers on” also came along, and were annoyed to find that the rules were being strictly adhered to. Alternate delegates, where delegates were absent, were admitted, and, in the case of the Ironworkers’ Assistants’ Union, through the lamentable death of the former delegate (Mr J Burns), an authorised substitute (Mr Geo King) was admitted.

Owing to Mr Bartle acting as guardian, nominations were called for a minute secretary, there being two nominated – Messrs A McPherson and Vol Molesworth. The latter was appointed by 42 votes to 22. After the annual report and balance sheet (as printed elsewhere) were read by the minute secretary, it was adopted by 43 votes to 24. The report was criticised by Messrs G Howie, J Graves, and other “white anters” prior to its adoption.

“All Out, Boys”

At this stage Mr G Howie moved that those outside the meeting be permitted to attend the meeting if they could be vouched for. The chairman said he would put the motion to the meeting, though acting
strictly under the rules none but duly accredited delegates had a right to participate in the meeting. At this Mr Howie said he did not want favors from the chairman who then said he would have to rule against the admission of non-delegates, following the constitution of the IVC.

At this Messrs McPherson, Graves and Rosa, who evidently had their plans cut and dried, jumped to their feet, one of them calling, “All out, boys”, thus repeating their tactics at the recent Labor Conference, and about fifteen of their followers left the meeting.

“Served Its Purpose”

On the motion of Mr Tyrrell (Municipal Employees’ Union) it was decided that the report and balance sheet should be printed together with a resume of the night’s business. It was further decided to follow the custom adopted at each annual meeting and authorise the presentation of some small token to the honorary secretary for the year’s work.

At this stage Mr C Last moved – “That this section of the ALP, known as the Industrial Vigilance Council, now disband”.

As one of the foundation members of the IVC, he said that it had long since done the work for which it was brought into being. It had purified the Labor Movement of Messrs Holman, Hughes, Hall and others, but of late had developed into a hunting-ground for place-seekers and would-be politicians of the Rosa type. The recent Conference had elected a good Industrial Executive, that could well be expected to give effect to those high principles for which the Labor Party stood.

The motion was seconded by Alderman Bramston.

After the question had been fully discussed, the motion was carried by 46 votes to 4.

Geo H Buckland, President
Thos S Bartle, Secretary
Annual Conference of NSW ALP, 1920
(The Worker, 10, 17 & 24 June 1920)

Day 1, Saturday, 5 June 1920

NSW Labor Conference. The President Reviews the Situation

Two hundred and fifty delegates were present at the Sydney Trades Hall last Saturday afternoon (June 5) when Mr WH Lambert, President of the Australian Labor Party (State of New South Wales), declared the Annual Conference open for business. The representatives from the trade unions and the various State leagues were about evenly divided.

It was apparent from the outset that the hostility which marred the proceedings of the last Conference was absent. Though at times there was plenty of noise, the proceedings generally were of a good-tempered character. The agenda paper placed before Conference was considerably smaller than in former years – consisting of 148 motions, with a couple of eleventh-hour additions. Generally speaking, the Conference now in session promises to be the most business-like that has taken place for several years.

Nearly a couple of hours were taken up with the purely machinery matters incidental to the Conference. Mr C Last was appointed Minute Secretary; Messrs AE O’Brien, J Power, J Andrews, T Arthur and Mrs E Seery were elected as an Agenda Committee; and Messrs Whitaker and Culvert acted as Timekeepers.

Daily Press Excluded from Conference

There was a lengthy debate on the question of the admission of the press. Mr AE O’Brien moved, and Mr F Dwyer seconded, that “the press, other than The Worker and the Labor News be not admitted to Conference”. Mr McGarry opposed the motion and was subjected to considerable opposition from delegates during the course of his remarks. He claimed that generally speaking the press had given them a fair deal at past Conferences. (Laughter) The Labor press was only issued weekly, and the only way a big section of the people had of knowing what was done was by reading the daily press. Conference had nothing to fear from the press, and they should be invited to attend. Everything was done fair and above board, and they should let the people know it through the medium of the daily press. He was opposed to anything being done by the Conference that had an underhand appearance.

Mr McGuinness (Clerks) said he was prepared to allow the press to attend if the press was prepared to allow them an opportunity to reply to
any of the misrepresentations made. If the press wasn’t prepared to do that, then let them be kept outside. (Cheers) It was not the reporters who did not give them a fair deal – the reporters were workers like themselves, and took accurate reports of the proceedings – but those who employed the reporters. The reports were hacked about and misconstrued in the editorial offices of the newspapers. If the press was not prepared to give them the same amount of publicity to reply to misrepresentations then they should be debarred from attending.

Mr A Blakeley, MHR, opposed the admission of the daily press. The Labor Movement would live without the assistance of the daily press. He would admit them if they printed all that was wanted, but they only printed what suited them. At one time he favoured the presence of the press, but he had since changed his mind. The daily press only printed what it thought would discredit them in the eyes of the public. If the public wanted a true and accurate report of the proceedings let them get it from The Worker and the Labor News.

A country delegate opposed the motion on the ground that everybody didn’t get the Labor papers, but depended on the daily press for their news.

Mr C Last said that in the past they had to remove reporters because the press misrepresented their proceedings. The reporters themselves might be fair to them, but the editors blue-pencilled the proceedings, and only allowed so much to go forth as suited them. He had consistently opposed the admission of the press.

Mr Steyne suggested that somebody be elected to draw up a report of their proceedings, and give it to the press. Then they would get a true reflection of the proceedings of Conference.

Mr O’Brien said there was no need for the suggestion, as a resume would be supplied to the press by the Secretary. The resolution only precluded admission of the press to misrepresent their ideas, not to preclude the giving of a resume of the business of the press.

The motion to exclude the daily press was carried by an overwhelming majority.

“Strangers” Not Admitted

Mr O’Brien then moved that nobody be admitted to Conference except those provided for under the rules, or by permission of the President. He objected to people being admitted out of curiosity or opposition to the Movement.

Mr G Sutherland supported the motion. He said that many people came to Conference who were antagonistic to the Labor Movement. This was a business Conference and the curious should not be admitted.
Mr Mills (Wharf Laborers) opposed the motion. Mr Singleton said that the rank and file had a right to know their business. He favoured an amendment to admit those vouched for by delegates.

Mr TJ Swiney moved a further amendment, that the public be admitted on production of their Labor League ticket. Mr F Lagelow seconded. Captain Toombs asked if the mover meant the rank and file of the Movement, while Mr Baker favoured the amendment moved by Mr Singleton.

Mr TJ Smith (Fire Brigades’ Union) said that if the motion was carried it would mean that visitors would be smuggled in on the quiet by their friends. He was opposed to that. He favoured Mr Singleton’s amendment.

The amendment was carried by a large majority.

**President Lambert’s Address**

The President then officially declared the Conference open, and welcomed delegates. In the course of his remarks, he said:

I am pleased to be able to say that, notwithstanding the many disabilities and adverse circumstances that arose from time to time, we have fought two strenuous but successful election campaigns – the Federal and State elections in New South Wales.

During both campaigns the Movement, as usual, had the unanimous and bitter opposition of the capitalistic press, and many new shibboleths were created, and all kinds of fictitious issues raised. Practically every speech delivered by Labor candidates and Labor speakers was the subject of biased misrepresentation calculated to mislead the electors.

**Old War Whoops Exploded**

The press and enemies of Labor were hard pressed, for the most part, for a new war whoop. Bolshevism and IWW-ism, and most of the other old gags had already finished. However, as a result of the good work and enthusiastic support and co-operation of the rank and file of Labor men and women and ALP branch officers, and a large majority of the trade unions, we now have the satisfaction of having a Labor Government in power in the State and I feel convinced that we will find the Storey Government is the first genuine Labor Government in New South Wales.

**Party’s Programme and Urgent Reforms**

Although the majority of the NSW Labor Government is but a very narrow one, they no doubt will be able to give effect to many urgent reforms, and, I trust that the Government will be in a position to carry
out the programme of Labor. At the same time, taking into consideration
the slender majority, it would be well not to expect too much from the
present Government for the time being. Nevertheless, it will be necessary
for the Party to concentrate on the twelve planks laid down as the
objective of the Labor Party, and it will not do for them to mark time too
long. If it is found that the programme of the Movement cannot be given
affect to, another appeal for further power must be made to the people in
due course.

There are many reforms which the Government of this State should
be able to give effect to even with their slender majority at an early date,
and one of the most important of these is the amendment of the State
Industrial Arbitration Act and the Board of Trade. As the Arbitration Act
stands at the present time it is useless, to a great extent, to the workers. It
should be amended, and its operations extended to all workers, and the
disabilities placed upon unions under the Act, prohibiting them from
financially assisting the political Labor organisation, should be remedied
without loss of time.

Arbitration, for some years past, and up to the present time, has
stood as the policy of the Political Labor Movement, supported by the
trades unions. That being the case, the workers are entitled to an Arbitra-
tion Act which will allow of their conditions, wages, etc., being dealt
with expeditiously, fairly, and justly. The Government should see that
the Arbitration laws of this State are administered in a just and
sympathetic manner, and they certainly should not allow the Arbitration
Court to be used in the interests of employers and in a biased manner to
the workers, as has been the case to a great extent hitherto.

Justice for Victimised Men

The Government should lose no time in rehabilitating victimised union-
ists and deregistered trades unions to their former status as prior to 1917,
and also to reinstate all the victimised workers to their former positions,
with proper seniority as regards Government service.

Government Labor Exchanges, or Bureaus, under the so-called
National Holman Government, have developed into a serious menace so
far as the trades unions are concerned. It seems to have been the chief
function of these bureaus during the last three or four years to supply
non-union labour at less than award or union policy rates to employers
throughout the country, while carefully boycotting the members of bona-
fide unions who apply for work at these places.

The conditions on the waterside concerning the wharf labourers and
coal lumpers must be finally and thoroughly cleared up. The coal
lumpers should certainly have their union re-registered, and the scab
bureaus around the waterside abolished, while the Coal Lumpers’ Insti-
tute and Model Lodging House, which were confiscated by the Holman
Government from these bodies, must be immediately returned. It will be remembered that these institutions were taken from the waterside workers and the coal lumpers by the Holman Government after the 1917 strike for the purpose of housing non-unionists and strike-breakers and members of bogus unions. This state of affairs cannot be tolerated any longer by the trade union movement. The vile and malicious victimisation of the wharf labourers and coal lumpers by the Holman Government must be knocked on the head straight away.

Land Monopoly

The Conference should give serious consideration to the matter of land monopoly in New South Wales with a view of inducing the Government to take the necessary steps to see that all available land is opened up for closer settlement. At the present time there are thousands of land seekers, who are unable to obtain a living area of land. Most of these are expert farmers and have all the necessary knowledge required by men to make a living on the land. At the present time there is over eighty million acres in the western lands division, and there is at least eight million acres of this suitable for immediate closer settlement. This land is in the hands of about 25 large companies or financial institutions. This land belongs to the Crown, but was leased to the present holders for a period of 40 years, the lease to terminate on the 3rd June, 1943. These lands have been leased at the notorious low rate of from ¼d to 2d per acre per annum. The western lands division comprises some of the finest land in New South Wales, and is suitable for closer settlement in areas of about eight thousand acres, whereas some of the financial institutions named have a million acres under their control. The Government should certainly make full inquiry into this matter with a view of revoking those leases and throwing the land open for closer settlement without delay.

The Wheat Bungle

The late Holman Government is deserving of the severest condemnation for its absolute failure to properly handle the people’s wheat. As a result of their inaction and stupidity in this matter, tens of thousands of tons of wheat have been ruined and wasted at a great loss to the country. Unscrupulous speculators and boodlers have been allowed to manipulate the wheat [market] under very suspicious circumstances, and have made huge profits at the expense of the country out of this commodity. When the Hughes National Government, in obedience to Imperial instructions, sold one million five hundred thousand tons of Australian wheat for the preposterous price of 5/6 per bushel, for delivery in 1920, the Labor Party denounced the transaction as a mad gamble in futures at
the expense of the Australian people. There was no surplus grain in Australia even then. There is no surplus grain now.

When in obedience to the bidding of some unknown authority, the Holman Government sold seven hundred and fifty thousand bushels of wheat at 4/4½ per bushel to the Georgeson gang, they knew that this wheat was urgently required to feed the people of the State and to keep the poultry and other industries going. The Royal Commission inquiring into this matter, so far as it has gone, has proved most objectionable and suspicious practices. Today, as a result of this muddle, there is not sufficient wheat in Australia to supply the people's wants for either bread or fodder, and, as a result of this, millions of pounds worth of valuable stock are dying because a few avaricious, unscrupulous, and dishonest people were allowed to make hundreds of thousands of pounds at the expense of Australia, acting on inside information. If the wheat that we have on hand at the present time is delivered to the Imperial Government to carry out the contract made by Hughes without the authority of Parliament or the people, the people of Australia will have to buy it back at from 25/- to 30/- per bushel. This means that the people will have to pay anything from 1/6 to 2/- for a 2lb loaf of bread.

The Labor Party in this State, and in each State of the Commonwealth, and in the Federal Parliament, should use every possible action in their power to prevent the exportation of the people's wheat to foreign countries and to Great Britain. Not another grain should be allowed to leave Australia until we know where we stand.

Need of a Graduated Wealth and Profits Tax

When the Labor Government assumed office in this State they found that practically the whole of the Departments had been overdrawn to the extent of hundreds of thousands of pounds, and the Treasury empty. As a result of this, they have been placed in a not very enviable position so far as the finances are concerned at the present juncture. There is a way out of this, however, and that way out is by the imposition of a graduated wealth and profits tax. The Party should take into serious consideration the necessity of the imposition of a tax of this kind. The tax should start on profits of over £500 or £600 per year on a very low scale, gradually rising until it reaches a confiscatory point of large fortunes and large profits.

A tax of this kind would also act as a deterrent and a check on profiteers, because the more they profiteer the less they would make, and there would be then no incentive for the large business people to rob the workers.
Electoral System

The Holman Government, in its dying hours, introduced a new electoral system, which they called proportional representation. This system was introduced with a view of hoodwinking electors and obtaining a further lease of power for that discredited Administration. Notwithstanding all of the disabilities placed in the way of electors at the last State election under this system, Labor has obtained a slight majority. The Conference should give this matter careful and proper consideration, as it is obvious, as the Act stands, the electors cannot get a square deal. It seems to me that the Act should be amended and simplified, or the old system of single electorates should be reverted to. The whole thing was worked as a fraud during the recent elections, and, as a result, there was an enormous number of informal votes recorded. If these votes were allowed they would have been sufficient to give the Labor Party an overwhelming majority.

The IWW Prisoners

The Labor Government is pledged and has received a mandate from the electors to make a further and exhaustive inquiry into the trial and conviction of the twelve IWW prisoners, and if it is found that any of these men are not guilty they will be released, and should be compensated if it is found that any of these men are not guilty of any of the three charges against them. I think that the sentences should be reduced, and part of them remitted, as they appear to be altogether too severe. I understand that the Government has already taken the initial steps to bring this inquiry about.

Attempt to Smash the Labor Party

A few hours before the conclusion of the last annual Conference of the Australian Labor Party, I regret to say that a determined attempt was made to shatter the organisation of the Labor Movement.

Unfortunately, I was absent from the last two or three sittings of the Conference owing to influenza. At the last sitting of that Conference twenty or thirty delegates, who had signed the pledge in common with all other delegates to abide by the decisions of the Conference and the policy of the Movement as laid down, left the hall and held a meeting and carried resolutions to form a new political party in opposition to the Australian Labor party. These people afterwards called two or three conferences from a number of branches of the ALP and trades unions in the metropolitan area, mostly from minorities of those branches and unions, and carried resolutions to form a new party.
Eventually this new party was launched, and in the first place was given the name of the Revolutionary Socialist Party. Later a conference was called by these minority rulers between themselves and the Socialist and nondescript bodies opposed to Labor existing in the State, and eventually a fusion was effected. This body ran candidates against the Australian Labor Party both at the Federal and State elections, and generally opposed Labor candidates wherever possible.

It is gratifying, however, to know that although these people may have done a certain amount of harm, and perhaps were responsible for the defeat of odd Labor candidates and letting a follower of the Holman and Hughes Nationalist Parties in, the whole of the candidates that they put forward in the metropolitan area combined (including that unfortunate man, Mr Judd) received not more than about one thousand votes. This shows the infinitesimal backing which they had.

**Action of the Executive**

The arguments put forward by these people were that if the Conference did not adopt the Russian Soviet system of Government, and the preamble and objective of the so-called OBU, it was no good to them, and they had no time for it, and unless the Conference bowed to the will of this significant minority they would form a new party. As a result of this the Executive found it necessary to expel the leaders of this move from the Labor Movement. If the preamble and objective referred to had been adopted and tacked on to the Australian Labor Party’s Constitution, it would have been the end of the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales.

The Executive found it necessary to take a determined stand in this matter, and as a result the efforts of the disruptionists did not accomplish the purposes at which they were aiming, and the Movement has proved its solidarity by remaining loyal to the decisions of the Conference and of the governing body, the Executive, elected by the Conference. All members of the Movement no doubt recognise that it is absolutely essential to have a governing head or Executive for all movements; without that no organisation would stand, but would fall to pieces within twenty-four hours.

Delegates no doubt fully recognise the absolute necessity to stand solidly behind the decisions of the Conference and of the Executive, which are given from time to time as contingencies arise.

**Labor Party in Sydney Municipal Council**

At the present moment the Labor Party has the same number of members in the Sydney City Council as the Nationalists, there being thirteen on each side. Since the last municipal elections the Party has been giving
effect to the Labor programme in the Council as far as possible, and many big reforms have been brought about and the conditions of the workers employed by the Council very much improved.

The Party has established their own insurance scheme, under which the Council now insures its own property, saving the ratepayers somewhere like £10,000 per year. This amount, prior to the establishment of the scheme, went into the pockets of the big insurance companies. The Party have also laid down a minimum rate of wages of £4/2/6 per week throughout its services, and has increased the holidays of the workers employed, together with extending their annual holidays and increasing their sick pay. The policy of day labor is also strictly adhered to, and it is found much cheaper and more economical than the contract system. The policy of preference to unionists is also strictly enforced.

The Party now has under consideration the matter of the purchase of a coal mine and metal quarries for the Council’s own requirements, and intends to establish an electric power house at the mine wherever obtained in due course; this will largely reduce the cost of electricity to the people of Sydney and the metropolitan areas.

When the Labor Party were returned to the Council at the last city elections it was found that the previous Council had sadly neglected the city electric scheme, with the result that hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of new machinery was immediately ordered, and when this arrives in the near future city electric supply will be about doubled. The Council will be seeking powers to control the whole of the fish supply and other necessary commodities and foodstuffs, and will consult with the Parliamentary Labor Party in regard to those powers as early a date as can be arranged. The municipal authorities are also anxious to see the Greater Sydney scheme given effect to in the near future.

The President was loudly cheered as he resumed his seat.

At this stage several “strangers” were noticed in the gallery and were ordered to leave.

Mr F Dwyer moved that the President’s report be adopted. Captain Toombs seconded.

Workers’ Share in Control of Industry

Mr M Considine, MHR, said he regretted that not enough attention had been paid to the industrial section of the Movement. He thought the time had come for the control of industry by the workers. When they found workers in other parts of the world establishing control in industry, they should take some steps in the same direction in Australia. They should incorporate in their policy the workers’ right to a share in the industry. The Labor Government of the future should incorporate this in its platform and tell the people that in all industries controlled by the Government the workers would be given 50 per cent of the control.
Mr J Dooley, MLA, (Chief Secretary): It is already in the Labor platform and will be carried out within a month. (Cheers)

Mr Considine, referring to Broken Hill, said that no mention had been made in the President’s speech about the strike there. He thought something should have been said. He traversed the position regarding the split in the League at the Barrier. Although he had been ordered to support the Labor candidates, he refused point blank to speak in opposition to Brookfield – (cheers) – because he was not prepared to do an injustice to Brookfield, whom he considered to be as good a Labor man as any of them. (Cheers) He referred to a forged telegram sent from the Haymarket Post Office.

At this stage Mr Considine was ruled out of order, and the report was adopted.

**Chief Secretary Dooley Speaks**

Mr J Dooley, MLA (Chief Secretary), who was received with cheers, then addressed the Conference. He said he was glad to see some noise because it showed that the Conference was as hale and hearty as ever.

When he took up the position of Chief Secretary, he took up the stand that he would keep a close eye on all matters in his department. He had been amply rewarded by what he had discovered. Regarding unemployment, he gave instructions that no man was to be refused work, and while work was being found no man was to go without food. “It is part of our policy that no man should starve,” he added, amid cheers. “I have tried to tackle this problem as best I could, and I think I have done something to relieve the unemployment.”

Referring to the State Fisheries, he said he was going to reorganise the industry on the lines of the Labor platform, giving joint control to the workers in the industry. This would be in operation within a month. (Cheers) “You can bet that the workers in the industry will make a better fist of the business than the former management. At any rate, they could no do any worse. I have taken the drastic step of dismissing the manager, because I considered him incapable. I am going to take the stand that where I find an incompetent man he will have to go. (Cheers) The employees will elect their own representatives on the Board of management. All we want is your co-operation, assistance and advice. If you give us that, all will be well.

“We may fail in what we are doing, but if we do we shall fail doing our best. We have been elected on a definite policy, and intend to go right ahead with it. But if we cannot carry out Labor’s policy we will not remain on the Treasury benches but will come back to the people and ask for increased support.” Mr Dooley concluded by asking all Labor supporters to put their shoulder to the wheel and help do the things that Labor was destined to do.
Mr Cann and Unemployment

Mr Geo Cann, MLA, (Minister for Works), who was also received with cheers, said he was there to carry out the policy and platform of Labor, and he had the hardest job of the whole lot. He detailed what had been done with unemployment. No man would be allowed to go hungry under the Labor Government even if he could not get work at once. They had a hard job trying to place men in work, but they were succeeding. The unionists had had the life belted out of them during the last three years, and he didn’t blame them for being impatient. But he was going as fast as he could. They couldn’t do everything at once.

They should recognise that while much was not being done in legislation, they could do a great deal by administration, which, after all, was more important. They wanted to reinstate the 1917 victimised men and restore the seniority to men in the railways who had lost it in the strike. Regarding the men on the waterfront, they were in a most deplorable condition industrially, and they had to get the position back to where it was prior to the 1917 strike. The unionists must be given a chance.

“Well, here is what we’ve done so far,” said Mr Cann. “We’ve given the shipping companies a fortnight’s notice to quit the Coal Lumpers’ Institute. We’ve given the Coal Lumpers notice to move into their old premises next week. (Cheers.) As regards the Model Lodging House and Vinegar-lane, there are still a few little details to fix up, but the position there will be remedied within a short space of time.

“We are not moving as fast as I would like, because of our small majority. But if we cannot make proper progress we will not stay there any longer than necessary. I am quite prepared to sacrifice my £1000 a year job for the benefit of the workers. But give us a chance and I think we will be able to deliver the goods.” (Cheers)

NSW Labor Conference. Policy Speeches and the Platform.
Dealing with the Legislative Council.

Support for Broken Hill Men

After tea on June 5 the standing orders as passed by the last Conference were agreed to with slight amendments, including a new rule moved by Senator Gardiner, that the business paper be called over each day and matters declared to be formal passed on the voices of the delegates. In that way a great deal of time would be saved.

A letter was read from Mr G McCarthy, of the Telephone Construction Union, regarding his expulsion from the Movement, and asking that the matter be re-opened and considered by Conference. After a short debate a motion was carried that Mr McCarthy be allowed to state his case before delegates at a later stage.
Mr D Clyne moved – “That the Australian Labor Party appreciates the fight being put up by the Broken Hill miners for a six-hour day and gives them all moral support”. He thought delegates should be given an opportunity of showing their appreciation. The Broken Hill men were entitled to a six-hour day, considering the unhealthy nature of their work.

Mr M Davidson, MLA, seconded the motion, though he would rather have seen it worded differently. He thought they should go further and give the Broken Hill men financial as well as moral support.

Mr Clyne said he would accept that as an addendum to his motion.

Direct Action Justified

Mr Davidson pointed out that the Broken Hill men had tried all they could to get their grievances righted by arbitration, and had been forced to resort to direct action. They should be supported because the six-hour day was part of the Labor platform. The women and children were being starved at the dictates of the Broken Hill mine magnates, who were reaping huge profits out of their shares on the Stock Exchange, and were not prepared to come to terms with the men.

Could they blame the men for resorting to direct action when they found Judge Rolin the other day awarding miners £3/14/- a week, notwithstanding that the Board of Trade had declared £3/17/- to be the minimum living wage? He thought the Government should see what could be done in the way of revoking the Broken Hill leases, since the present mine owners had refused to work them.

Mr Huckle (Broken Hill) moved an amendment that the motion should include all unionists besides the miners who were fighting for a six-hour day. The amendment was supported by another Broken Hill delegate, who thought that the Labor Government should take some stand in the matter. If the Government threatened to resume the leases, the mine-owners would soon set about working them. The mines belonged to the people, and the Government should say how many hours should be worked in the industry.

Mr Considine, MHR, said the AMA and the Engine Drivers and Firemen were the only two unions on strike for the six-hour day. The others might be in favour of it, but they were not putting up a fight for it. He supported the original motion, because the miners were putting up the real fight. There was never another fight in the industrial history of the Commonwealth to be compared to the valiant fight they were putting up.

The amendment was carried unanimously.
Coal Lumpers and Conference

Mr Mills (Wharf Laborers) drew attention to the Coal Lumpers not being represented at Conference. They had not sent delegates because they had been told that unless they paid their dues they would not be represented. Other unions in like circumstances had been accommodated in the past.

The General Secretary (Mr Carey) explained that the Coal Lumpers had not paid any dues since 1917. The Executive had decided that all fees must be paid before delegates could take their seats. That, however, did not debar them putting their case before the Credentials Committee, where possibly the union would receive favourable consideration.

Labor’s Fighting Platform

Consideration of the agenda paper was then entered upon. Mr O’Brien moved, and Mr Steyne seconded – (1) “That the platform as adopted after collaboration between the Executive and members of the Parliamentary parties, be endorsed as the fighting platform, and be embodied in the rule book”; (2) “That the Mudgee and Balmain policy speeches of the Leader of the State Labor Party be adopted by Conference.”

Senator Grant said that if they carried the motion it would mean that all motions on the agenda paper dealing with the platform would go by the board. He questioned whether that would be a fair thing. He favoured debating the matter clause by clause. He moved an amendment in that direction, but it was defeated.

Mr Catts, MHR, hoped the Conference would adopt the platform as it stood. Mr Flannery, MLA, supported the motion.

Should Labor’s Objective Be Altered?

Mr Stuart Robertson, MLA, moved an amendment to strike the words “by the collective ownership of monopolies” out of the objective. He considered the words a snare, and said they meant nothing at all, except that it gave their opponents material with which to frighten small shopkeepers.

Mr J Power considered that the objective was a Federal matter, and Conference should not waste time discussing it. The objective should be the same in all States, and the phrasing of it should be left to the Interstate Conference. For the time being he thought it should remain as it was.

Mr W Hutchinson said he hoped the policy would be adopted as it stood, as it was the policy on which the Party was returned to power. If it was now altered it would give their opponents room to talk. Captain Toombs also took up the same attitude. Surely they were not going to go back on what Mr Storey, their Leader, had said. The capitalist
press had stated that the Labor policy announced by Mr Storey would only stand till the Conference met, when it would be altered. Were they going to do the very thing the capitalist press said they would? They should back up Mr Storey’s policy speech, to which the Party had been pledged before the country.

At this stage Mr T Arthur drew attention to the fact that a well-known Nationalist organiser was in the audience. For a few minutes excitement reigned, but the ‘stranger’ eventually left the hall.

The Conference adjourned at 10.30 pm till Monday evening (June 7).

**Day 2, Monday, 7 June 1920**

**Fighting Platform Adopted**

Discussion on the question, “That the platform, as adopted after collaboration between the Executive and members of the Parliamentary Parties, be endorsed as the fighting platform, and be embodied in the rule book,” was resumed on Monday evening (June 7).

After the President (Mr WH Lambert) had expressed as his opinion that the Interstate Conference should be the proper body to deal with any alteration of the objective, in order to prevent the possibility of the various States having different objectives, the amendment was defeated, and the platform (as printed) was adopted.

**Mr Storey’s Policy Speech**

On the motion, “That the Mudgee and Balmain policy speeches of the Leader of the State Labor Party be adopted by Conference”, Senator Gardiner raised an objection. He did not think it wise to put the vote of approval on every Leader’s speech. It was a bad precedent, and he didn’t think there was anything to be gained by it. There were always statements made on the eve of an election which were all very well at that time, but which would not suit them in the future. While he was wholeheartedly behind Mr Storey in his policy speech, he was opposed to putting the strength of the Conference behind the speech of any man, unless it was taken line by line and very carefully analysed. Probably, if Mr Storey himself had to contest an election at the present time, he would make a different speech.

Mr J Andrews said that if Conference didn’t endorse the Leader’s speech the opponents of Labor would ask how could they believe in what Labor was saying on the hustings when the Labor Conference refused to endorse what was said. He hoped Conference would endorse it.
Mr Mills said he was not in favour of endorsing the Leader’s policy speech because there were things absent from it which should have been in it. If Mr Storey wanted his policy speech endorsed why was he not at Conference to advocate its endorsement? There were many things in it that delegates were not familiar with, and they should not be asked to endorse it unless they saw what it was.

Mr McGarry considered that it was their duty to endorse it. Mr Storey’s speech was the platform on which they were elected, and in adopting it they were only backing up what Mr Storey had told the electors.

**Endorsed by Conference**

Mr Flannery, MLA, claimed that Mr Storey’s speech was an elaboration of Labor’s policy, with the addition of one or two matters considered necessary at the time. If they adopted it they approved of it as a policy. He favoured its adoption because there might be an election in the near future, and if they turned it down it would provide ammunition for their political opponents.

Mr Bramston also said that Mr Storey’s speech was in accordance with the Labor platform. They should endorse it, and keep the Parliamentarians up to what they said.

Mr J Power also urged its adoption. While there were passages in it open to improvement, if they turned it down that fact could be used against them by their opponents. At this critical time it would be injurious not to adopt it. Their opponents were saying that the pre-election speeches were of no value, and could be altered by Conference, and if Conference rejected the motion, it would play right into the hands of their opponents.

Mr Catts characterised it as really a vote of confidence in Mr Storey as Leader of the Party, and they should give his speech their endorsement.

The motion was carried on the voices.

Mr R W McKinnon was appointed returning officer and Messrs Gilligan and Easam scrutineers for the election of the new Executive.

**State Ministers Present**

The President (Mr WH Lambert) announced that Messrs Kavanagh, McKell, Dunn, Sproule, McGirr and G Cann, members of the State Ministry, were present, and would address the delegates.

Mr Dunn (Minister for Agriculture) thanked the delegates for the cordial welcome given to him, but he thought that members of the Party should thank the delegates for their work in Conference and in the State at large, which had been carried out without fee or reward. He hoped
that after he had been administering his department for 12 or 18 months they would receive him in the same cordial manner, because then he would know that he was doing his duty. He invited any man or woman in the rank and file of the Movement to call on him at any time. His office was always open to them, and he hoped they would come along with any suggestions they might have. It was not possible for a Minister to know what those under him were doing all the time, and he appealed to delegates that if they saw anything being done which was not in accordance with Labor’s policy to inform him and he would see that the right thing was done.

Mr McKell (Minister for Justice) said that up to date general satisfaction had been given by the Labor Government. The fate of the Party depended, in a large measure, on the deliberations of Conference, and he hoped the present Conference would be able to do much good for the Movement.

The Upper House Question

Mr Kavanagh (Vice-President of the Executive Council) said that he came to Conference to see if he could get volunteers for the Upper House. (Laughter and cries of “We’ll all go!”) He would want some men to make the great sacrifice of coming to help him in the Upper Chamber. (Laughter) He thought that the whole matter of the constitution of the Upper House should be investigated in order that they may see where they stood. Previously they had been told that the Lower House couldn’t abolish the Upper House, but there was no reason why they should not get fresh advice. He suggested the formation of a committee to get the highest constitutional advice as to what was the best method of abolishing the Upper House. If it could not be abolished without a referendum to the people, that course should be taken early. They should be prepared to carry out No 1 plank of the Labor platform, or wipe it out of the platform altogether.

Mr R Sproule (Solicitor-General) intimated that something would be done regarding the Upper House during the coming session, but he didn’t know whether they could carry out what they wished. However, he hoped to be able to come to the next Conference and tell them that No.1 plank of the platform was carried out. He concluded by saying that he was devoting a great deal of time to the rent question, and hoped to bring much matter affecting the workers before the next session of Parliament for discussion.

A Subsidy for Mothers

Mr McGirr (Minister for Health and Motherhood) said that the day of womanhood in the country was fast coming. Woman, after all, was the
greatest factor in the community, because she was responsible for the next community. There was a world-wide campaign going on for the advancement of woman’s status in life. He was asking the Government to agree to a subsidy of 7/6 for every child over the number of two in a family. This was not charity, but the State’s gratitude to mothers for doing their duty to the State. By carrying out this scheme the Labor Government would be doing something that would write its name on the annals of history the world over.

The question involved in the endowment of motherhood was a question which was going to revolutionise the politics of the world. It was not the final solution, but a step in the right direction. The money for the scheme would be taken from those who at the present time nursed poodle dogs instead of children, and from the capitalists who had made fortunes out of the blood and tears of the workers. If the Upper House threw out the bill they could go to the country on it, and he felt sure they would have the great majority of the people behind him in the fight for the mothers. The only people who could really object to it were the childless mothers of Potts Point and the capitalists who would have to foot the bill. He knew he would become unpopular with those folk, but if he was given the support of Labor he would go right ahead. He asked delegates to stand behind him and he would do his duty by standing by the mothers of the State.

Mr McGirr also made the announcement that the Government had set aside a sum of money to help children and expectant mothers during the winter. “If you know any little child who is without food or clothing during this bitter winter; if you know any mother about to bear a child who has not the necessities at hand for the babe coming into the world, let me know and I will see that they are provided for,” said Mr McGirr amid cheers. He went on to say that provision would be made for clothing, food, blankets, shawls, medicines, and so on.

A collection taken up on behalf of the wives and children of the Broken Hill miners totalled £12/0/6.

**Mr G McCarthy’s Case**

Following on a decision of Conference on the previous Saturday, Mr G McCarthy (Telephone Construction Union) addressed the Conference on the matter of his expulsion from the Movement, claiming that he had been unjustly dealt with. He denied that he was a disruptionist, or that he had done anything to further the breakaway from the Labor Movement last year. It was true that he attended the Industrial Conference last year, but so did many other delegates and secretaries of unions. But while he had been unjustly dealt with, others were not interfered with. As a matter of fact, several who took a prominent part in the discussions
of the Industrial Conference had run as endorsed Labor candidates for Parliament.

After a lengthy discussion, Senator Gardiner moved – “That this Conference, while approving of the able manner in which the Executive dealt with the breakaway section, and while censuring Mr McCarthy for attending a meeting against the instructions of the Executive, and having heard Mr McCarthy’s explanation, is willing to restore him to membership in the Party.” The motion was carried by 138 votes to 75. Conference then adjourned till Tuesday (June 8).

Day 3, Tuesday, 8 June 1920

Applications for Reinstatement

While the Conference resumed business on June 8 the President (Mr WH Lambert) read several letters received from persons who were expelled from the Movement as a result of their association with the breakaway party last year, and who now sought re-admission to the Movement. It was pointed out that probably there would be about 30 such applications to be dealt with. Delegates took exception to the time of the Conference being wasted on such matters when there was an agenda paper to be dealt with.

After a somewhat protracted debate, it was decided, on the motion of Mr Swiney, MLA, to refer all such applications to the incoming Executive for consideration. At the same time the President made it quite clear that the only applications that would be considered would be those where there was reason to believe that some error had been made. Under no consideration would active participants in the breakaway movement receive attention.

Protest Against Deportations

Securing a suspension of the standing orders, Mr G Sutherland moved a motion protesting against the proposed deportation of Father Jerger and the action of the Federal Government in deporting Mr FW Meyer, ex-Secretary of the Taxi-Cab Drivers’ Union. He charged the Federal Government with deporting working-class men, while wealthy Germans were allowed to remain in the country.

Mr Bell, who seconded the motion, claimed that many of the internees were hounded down and deported for political reasons.

Mr Lazzarini moved an amendment – “That the Conference protests against the deportation of Father Jerger and any other person from Australia without first giving them a trial in open court”.

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Senator Gardiner said there was another aspect to be considered. He wanted to put the case of the Germans who lived in German territory - at Rabaul - and who were interned for the safety of the country. But internment was not supposed to mean that they would be dealt with unfairly. British justice laid it down that no man should be punished without trial. Did they believe in capturing the country, taking the German non-combatants prisoners, and now robbing them of their private possessions? He was against deporting any man without a fair trial. He did not believe in punishing one internee and favouring another, as had been done by the Federal Government. He was no pro-German, but if they believed in justice they should grant justice to all - be they Germans or anybody else. He believed in a fair trial in open court for every man.

After further debate the amendment moved by Mr Lazzarini was carried.

**Dealing with the Profiteer**

The Lord Mayor of Sydney (Alderman Fitzgerald) was introduced to delegates, and delivered a short address on municipal matters. Mr McTiernan (Attorney-General) also addressed Conference. Referring to the work of the Necessary Commodities Control Commission, he said that Labor had got into power mainly on the question of anti-profiteering, and it was one of the first duties of the Government to do something regarding that question.

When he took control of the Attorney-General’s Department he found that the matter of price-fixing was merely a sideshow, and that no serious attempt was made to deal with high prices. He found a small staff with two inspectors, whose duty it was to try and stop profiteering. He wasn’t there long before he put on six inspectors, but more were required. But here was a new difficulty confronting the Government. The present Act was imperfect and only permitted of one Commission sitting for the whole State. As a matter of fact, there should be half-a-dozen Commissions at work dealing with different matters. On account of the limited power, the inspectors were able to send up more work than the Court could deal with, and the result was that the Court became clogged. That defect would have to be altered, while at the same time the proceedings would have to be more summary. Another serious defect was that every prosecution had to take place in Sydney. If there was a complaint from Broken Hill it had to be heard in Sydney. Power would have to be given to magistrates in different parts of the country to deal with charges of profiteering.

Mr Davoren moved a motion, “That the wheat contracts with the Imperial Government be suspended till August next”. He protested against the exporting of wheat from the country until all local
requirements had been satisfied. They should see where they stood in the matter of wheat supplies. Mr Barker seconded. The motion was carried on the voices.

The Upper House

Mr O’Brien moved, on behalf of the Executive, “That a sufficient number of Labor men and women be appointed to the Upper House to provide the Government with a majority in that Chamber”.

Mr Flannery, MLA, drew attention to the fact that no mention had been made in the motion regarding the abolition of the Upper House. He thought an attempt should be made to wipe it out. It had been said that Holman had gone into the question of abolishing the Upper House and found difficulties in the way. He was of the opinion that Holman didn’t really intend to deal with the matter, and that his nominees were put there to help perpetuate the nominee chamber. He suggested that the Government should first test the matter on the floor of the House, and, if they failed, make the abolition of the Upper House an issue before the electors. Then when they came back again they should swamp the nominee chamber. He moved the following amendment: “That Conference instruct the Government to make an attempt to abolish the Upper House, and failing that, a sufficient number of Labor men and women be appointed to the Upper House to provide the Government with a majority in the chamber.”

Mr Mills (Wharf Laborers) supported the motion. In Queensland the Government had taken the matter to the electors and had been turned down. The people might do the same here. He thought the motion was the best way of dealing with the Upper House difficulty.

The Constitutional Aspect

Mr TJ Smith (Fire Brigades’ Union) said that when he went into Parliament three years ago he believed they could abolish the Upper House but his opinions had been changed by experience. He discovered that it was impossible to abolish the Upper House, and constitutional law supported him. There was a way, however, that they could deal with the problem. It should be dealt with in the same way as the British Government dealt with the House of Lords in 1910, by limitation of power. He moved a further amendment: “That a committee be appointed, consisting of three Parliamentarians and three delegates from Conference, to inquire into and report to the incoming Executive on the question of (1) the abolition of the Legislative Chamber, and (2) limitation of powers and functions on the lines of the English Parliamentary Act of 1910.”

Mr J Power said the Government should make an attempt to abolish the Council by constitutional methods already provided for. He
understood that the only way to get rid of the Upper House was by a vote of both Houses and the consent of the Imperial Parliament. They need not worry about the Imperial Parliament, as it would hardly refuse its consent if they carried out their part of the work here. They should make it plain what they intended to do in the matter. The rank and file of the Movement wanted to know what was being done. Then they wanted to know whether, if sufficient men and women could not be appointed to swamp the House, any would be appointed at all. That had to be made clear. Then again, if the Governor refused to make any appointments, what did they propose to do? That also had to be made clear.

Labor Within Its Rights

Mrs Seery supported the motion. She thought they would have a sufficient number of men and women in the Upper House to carry the Government’s measures. The Government had received a mandate from the people and were quite within their rights in demanding a majority in the Upper House.

Mr S Toombs favoured Mr Smith’s amendment. He said that while the constitution implied that they could make an elective chamber of it, they could not abolish it. They had to tackle the problem as they found it, and if there was no way of abolishing it, the next best thing to do was to draw its poison fangs.

Mr Bell thought it should be made quite clear that they were appointing Labor men and women to the Upper House with the one object of bringing about its abolition.

Senator Gardiner thought it was a fallacy to assume that they could not abolish the Upper House. Any self-governing country had inherent rights, even if not so written. If the Government recommended swamp-ing the Upper House and the Governor refused to make the appointments, they could do as Seddon had done in New Zealand – cut him off the salary list. That would bring the matter to a crisis. He claimed that a Government constituted by the will of the people was supreme. Let them make the recommendations, and if they were refused, go to the country and on the issue make it a people’s fight for freedom. Unless they were prepared to do something it was no use wasting time to talk.

The original motion moved by Mr O’Brien, was carried on the voices.

Nominations to be Called

Mr O’Brien then moved, on behalf of the Executive: “That the Executive call for nominations in the usual way, and, after endorsement, refer the total number so endorsed to the Parliamentary Labor Party for their selection of the number required”. This motion was carried after a short discussion.
The Electoral Act

Mr O’Brien moved on behalf of the Executive: “That the Government amend the Electoral Act to provide for single electorates”.

Mr T Carmody, in seconding the motion, said the present system was too cumbersome and had caused no end of friction among the Labor candidates themselves. It had also caused a great deal of trouble and dissatisfaction to the electors, and should be done away with.

A country delegate opposed the motion, claiming that it was better than the old system. It had given them a majority in Parliament and had secured them representation in electorates where they would never have gained a seat under the old system.

Mr Farrell supported the motion. The new system would rend the Movement apart if it was continued. Men were at one another’s throats during the last campaign, and they should step in, nip the scheme in the bud, and restore the old system under which they at least had unanimity in their own ranks. He pointed out that in the city where the big industrial vote was they had been beaten, and it was only the country that saved them.

Mr Webster claimed that the Labor Government would make no progress under the new electoral majority. Another point worth noting was that under the new system it cost much money to contest an election, and only wealthy men would be able to nominate. Had they had the old system at the last election they might have secured between 50 and 60 seats, instead of having to depend on independents to keep them in power.

Mr O’Dea opposed the motion, claiming that under the new system they had secured representation in new places, such as Byron, for the first time.

The Conference adjourned till the following evening.

Day 4, Wednesday, 9 June 1920

Reversion to Single Electorates. Revocation of Western Leases

Mr Storey Addresses Conference

On Wednesday evening (June 9) Mr J Storey, MLA, Labor Premier, was introduced to delegates and received a warm welcome. He said that although he had been in office only eight weeks, the responsibilities of the office had made it appear like eight years. This was the first opportunity he had of coming to the rank and file of the Movement and thanking them for their help at the last elections. He reminded them that only a year ago it seemed as if the Labor Movement was rent in twain,
yet today they were more solid than ever. Holman had said some time ago that there would never be a Labor Government in power in the State for a generation, since the brains had left the Party. But apparently Holman had made a miscalculation. The party was in power, and the brains had not left the Movement, despite what Holman and his friends had said.

He took no particular credit to himself for winning the election. It didn’t matter who was leading the Movement – so long as they were doing the right thing, they would win. Their opponents used to say that when they got to the Cabinet room they would not know what to do. It wasn’t that they didn’t know what to do – the trouble was that they didn’t know what to do first.

**Government Not Wasting Time**

The Premier said he had a good working team of men, and hoped to do something. In fact, they had done a lot of things already. He was not like Holman who would have come to the Conference, make a lot of promises, bid them goodnight and then disappear till next Conference. He would not make any promises to them – he believed in doing the work and then coming to tell them what had been done.

Some supporters had claimed that they were not moving fast enough. He had to tell those critics that if they weren’t legislating they were at least administering, and that was an important factor. For one thing, they could rest assured that the bosses wouldn’t be running to the Government and prompting it to jail men as they could do in Holman’s time. At the same time, he had to say that if they couldn’t carry out Labor’s policy they would not remain in power, but would go to the country and ask for increased support.

Referring to the Broken Hill trouble, he reminded them that he was doing more for the Barrier men than some of them were prepared to do for him when the elections were on. It wasn’t the fault of the Government that the recent negotiations had failed. But the Government wasn’t forgetting the men on strike, and would do all it could to bring an end to the present trouble. Mr Storey concluded by referring to the many difficulties facing the Government at the present time.

**Mr Mutch Speaks**

Mr Mutch (Minister for Education) also addressed delegates. He said it was amazing that some people were expecting them to do everything in five minutes. The Government was doing all it could for the workers, but delegates should remember that it had to go slowly – having to depend on three Independents for support. If delegates did not think the
Government was moving fast enough, let them carry a motion that it resign, and they could have his resignation at once.

There had been a great deal of talk the previous night about abolishing the Upper House, but he suspected that many of them were in favour of perpetuating it. Why was it that so many delegates were trying to get into the Upper House? Were they sincere in their intentions to abolish it? The Government would make sure of the men it would appoint there, and if it wasn’t assured that they would do the duty for which they were appointed, none would be appointed.

He said he had been elected to carry out a definite policy, and he wasn’t going to budge from it one inch. If they didn’t agree with him, let them say so, and he would resign. Labor couldn’t get everything for nothing, and he wasn’t going to humbug them by promising them everything in five minutes. He confessed that his present job was the most difficult he had ever undertaken. He referred to the work of the Education Department and the necessity for building new schools and improving the old school buildings.

**Debate on Electoral System**

Discussion was then resumed on the motion “That the Government amend the Electoral Act to provide for single electorates”.

Senator Grant favoured the restoration of the single electorates. Many people thought that proportional representation would work out alright for the Labor Movement, but it had not. He hoped that it would be knocked out and the old system restored.

Mr McGarry said he had carefully analysed the position, and came to the conclusion that proportional representation was the best for the people. If they had another election they would secure a bigger majority under it. They could hold the present seats and gain at least eight more. The main objection was not to the system itself but to its working. He moved the following amendment: “That Conference send a recommendation to the Parliamentary Labor Party to amend the electoral law, that voters be not asked to sign their names to the roll, that steps be taken to simplify the system, and that the incoming Executive take the necessary steps to prevent candidates acting in a manner likely to cause dissension amongst themselves”.

**Old System Better**

Mr Catts, MHR, said that both the Parliamentary Party and the Executive had recommended a return to the single electorate system, and he thought that Conference should endorse their action. He claimed that the present system was a prostitution of the electoral law. It created new factions and new parties against existing forms of government. It was all
a gamble, and under it it was impossible to work out the organisation to bring proper results. Had the last election been fought on single electorates they would have had about 55 seats. The Progressive Party had admitted that it got into Parliament because of it, and if it had not existed the Labor Party would have won more seats. He claimed it was associated with intrigue, disruption, and dissension.

Mr W Hutchinson was against the motion. He had spent two years as a member of the Disputes Committee, and had seen just as much intrigue in the selections under the old Act as under the present system. He had contested seats under both systems and stood for the present one.

Mr W Young (Rozelle) favoured single electorates. The proportional representation system did not do away with selection ballots, so they would still have dissension, while in addition there was dissension in the electorates. Rather than go through another campaign under proportional representation they would do well to get back to the single electorate system. Under the new system they were weaker in the metropolitan area than formerly, whereas they looked to the metropolitan area to give them the biggest support.

Mr Storey’s Opinion

Mr J Storey (Premier) said that it appeared to him that some were saying “I’m alright in my pocket borough, and to Hell with everybody else”. The party had come to the decision to revert to single electorates during his absence in Melbourne. It was all very well to say that they could have won 55 seats under the old system. Well, they gained 15 seats under proportional representation. How many seats would they have got at North Sydney, Byron, and other places under the old system? Would they have beaten Holman under the old system? They should not knock it out, but try and better it. They were doing the wrong thing by taking a leap in the dark to satisfy the men with a pocket borough who were just as safe under the old system.

He suggested that the matter be referred to a committee to go carefully into the scheme with all the figures before them. Then they could come to a practical decision. Holman, who was the biggest political thimble-rigger this country had seen, was personally opposed to it. Wasn’t that the very best reason why they should be in favour of it? They should not forget that it had provided them with a Government, and if they returned to the old system then they relied on a fluke to return them. He had studied the system, had won under it, and if they took his advice they would stick to it.

Mr Stuart-Robertson, MLA, favoured the single electorate system. He was also of the opinion that they could have won about 55 seats under the old system. Then, again, the new system was more expensive than the old system, because of the enlarged size of the electorates. He didn’t
wish to go through another election under proportional representation. It lent itself to corruption, and disrupted the whole of the Movement at the last election. Then they should remember that at the last election they were on the hustings condemning it. Were they forgetting that point? He claimed that under it the man with money had an advantage over the candidate with no money.

Fighting for Number One Votes

Mr Blakeley also favoured the motion. Mr Storey had said that the new system had given them a majority but his opinion was that Labor had won despite proportional representation. He referred to the personal vilification that took place at the last election and the intriguing amongst candidates to get number one votes. They had only to look on some of the hoardings of the city to see how one candidate had plastered his name over others in order to try and score over his fellow candidates. Under the present system corruption was rampant. While they had men fighting amongst themselves as to who should have the number one vote, how could they have solidarity in the Movement?

Mr S Toombs said that he had suffered under both systems. What they should do was to try and remedy the defects in the present system. He showed how, under the old system, men elected to city electorates had huge majorities which were lost, but which under proportional representation went to help their comrades in the fight.

Mr McTiernan (Attorney-General) favoured proportional representation. If there had been such huge dissension in the Party at the last election how was it that the Party was so solid today? They should remember that under the new system they had done a great deal of propaganda work in the enemy’s camp. They had won seats in the country which, if they returned to the single electorates system, they would lose. The opponents to proportional representation based their arguments on theory, but the fact remained that the Government was in power because of the system.

Mr Keniry (Kensington) favoured a return to the old system, because under the smaller electorates they could better consolidate their organisation. He claimed that the present system was a negation of democratic government.

Mr JE Hoad claimed that 25 per cent of the delegates did not understand the system. He suggested that it be referred to the incoming Executive to be dealt with.

Honest Candidates Penalised

Mr Mutch (Minister for Education) supported the motion. The present system had been responsible for the greatest amount of unscrupulousness
that he had ever known. No electoral system could be justified unless it registered the clear will of the electors, and how could this be done when they were asked to discriminate first between the Labor candidates, and then between their opponents? How could they decide whether one Labor man was better than another? The present system placed unscrupulous men at an advantage over the men who wished to be honest. At first it was intended to leave all the voting cards blank but when they found that unscrupulous men were marking them for themselves they all had to do it. Did that make for solidarity in the Party – one man fighting against another for the number one vote? The proportional representation system did not smash the political machine – on the other hand, it strengthened it, and those who were best able to manipulate it got into Parliament. He predicted that at future elections new parties would get in at the expense of the Labor vote. The Labor Party didn’t win because of unrest, the high cost of living, and the various scandals. The new electorates were far too big to look after, and he hoped they would get back to the old system.

**Mr Swiney’s Suggestion**

Mr Swiney, MLA, moved, as an amendment: “That a committee of 15 be appointed – seven from the Parliamentary Party and seven from the incoming Executive, with the President of the Conference as chairman – to go thoroughly into figures and investigate the possibilities and potentialities of the new system for the purpose of furthering the interests of the Movement and report to Conference next year”. He said he hadn’t heard one argument that would induce him to return to the old system. Under proportional representation there was cleaner fighting.

Senator Gardiner opposed the new system, which he said was not real proportional representation. He had acted as a scrutineer and found it to be undemocratic. It did not do what it claimed to do. He did not dwell too much on the ill-feeling that had been created, because their opponents had that in their ranks as well. But the system lent itself to intrigue. Although they had won the elections under it, they should remember that they had the best chance of getting a huge majority because of the wheat and other scandals. He didn’t think that the new system had helped them into power. It was his deliberate opinion that Governments throughout the world, realising the rising tide of democracy, had introduced the system in order to ensure small majorities which they could buy up at any time.

The Conference adjourned till the following evening (June 10).
Day 5, Thursday, 10 June 1920

Not True Proportional Representation

The discussion was resumed on the following evening (June 10). Mr Mills (Wharf Labourers) said that most of the speakers gave their experiences under the new system, but the system itself had not been thoroughly dealt with. He favoured true proportional representation, but he would not support the kind that Holman had placed on the statute book.

Mr Burke (Petersham) pointed out that at the last elections candidates were working against each other. He favoured the motion.

Mrs Fowler favoured single electorates. She said that they could have got two seats in Namoi, and another two in Goulburn had they been contested on the single electorate basis. Thousands of electors were disfranchised because they did not understand the new system.

Mr Lazzarini, MLA, said that while proportional representation suited him alright, he favoured single electorates because the smaller electorates enabled candidates to get a better grasp of things. Under the new system they could not go out and help weaker candidates in the country, because if they did they had one of their own candidates stabbing them in the back in trying to sneak their number one votes.

Mr Mostyn (Electrical Trades) favoured the motion, and expressed the opinion that they lost seats under the new system that could have been won under the old system.

Mr Steyne favoured Mr Swiney’s amendment. He pointed out that delegates had spoken around the matter without any technical knowledge. The matter should be gone into scientifically. There was no immediate hurry to come to a decision on the matter.

New System Would Help Opponents

Mr G McGirr (Minister for Health) said it didn’t matter to him personally what system was in operation. But for the benefit of the Movement he hoped the motion to revert to single electorates would be carried. It was generally the man with the most money who could win under the present system, while it lent itself to more corruption than any other system he knew. He pointed out that in any country that had it for any time Labor never managed to get a big majority, if a majority at all. He instanced Tasmania and Belgium. Then they should remember from whom the measure emanated. It came from Messrs Huie and Ley, and was really a measure to put the Progressive Party into Parliament. Were the Progressives the friends of Labor? They represented greater interests than the Nationalists did, and were only marking time till the next election when, if the present system wasn’t altered, they would win more
seats at the expense of the Labor Party. Had the single electorate system been in force at the last election they would have had a majority of about ten instead of having to depend on Independents at the present time. He claimed they could win 15 new seats at the next election, if they reverted to the old system.

**Scheme Defeated**

Mr Davidson, MLA, referred to Mr Storey’s statement that he had always been an ardent supporter of proportional representation, and quoted from “Hansard” of November 27, 1918, to show that Mr Storey had voted against it along with himself when it was first introduced by Mr Ball (Nationalist). He didn’t say this out of any hostility to Mr Storey, but in order to put right with the Conference. As for the scheme itself, practical experience had convinced him that it was useless. He represented half the State, and was only able to touch the fringe of his electorate during the campaign.

Mr A McClelland, MLA, stood for it with amendments. He had won under it, and had lost under the old system. He thought, too, that under the new system Laborites had better representation throughout the State. What representation would they have had in Namoi, Northern Tablelands, or Byron under the old system?

On the matter going to a vote, all the amendments were defeated, and the original motion was carried unanimously.

**Mr Ryan Addresses Conference**

The President (Mr WH Lambert) introduced Mr TJ Ryan, MHR, who was received with loud cheers.

Mr Ryan, in addressing delegates, said he wanted to take an early opportunity of replying to a persistent rumour that he intended to take a high judicial position. He gave it an emphatic denial. He had no intention of leaving the political movement, but wanted to help Labor all he could on the political field. He attributed their non-success in the last Federal elections mainly to the lack of organisation and funds. They also had a hostile press against them. The way in which the Federal elections were conducted convinced him of the necessity of altering the law by which the capitalist press could be dealt with for libelling Labor candidates. It would be a very important amendment in the interests of Labor, and he hoped they wouldn’t forget to make a change in the method of trying libel actions. The manner in which they were attacked during the last Federal elections was simply scandalous, and there should be some means by which they could deal with the capitalist press.

He was glad Conference had passed a resolution on the question of deportations, though to his mind it did not go far enough. He considered
it a mistake to centre the discussion around individuals instead of dealing with the principle of the thing. He believed no person should be deported, and if any man was charged with wrongdoing, he should be given a trial in open court and punished in this country. But the Government deported the men without even giving them a trial. He hoped that they would be fully alive to this damnable system and not stand for such a thing. A few soldiers, who didn't by any means represent the great body of the returned men, were holding meetings, and even threatening violence. They should see to it that a few “brass hats” should not be allowed to make it believed that they spoke for all the returned men.

**Imperial Federation Menace**

A distinct attempt was being made to bring about Imperial Federation – not openly, but under the lap. Mr Watt was making proposals for the consolidating of the Empire debts. That meant Imperial Federation without the consent of the people. The next thing would be that there would be one taxing body for the Empire. He hoped they would be alive to this new menace. The present financial situation of the Empire provided a good opportunity for Imperial Federation, but they should make it plain that the financial business of this country would be managed in the country. He drew attention to the fact, too, that capitalists in London were commencing to dictate as to legislation, and were even threatening Governments that, if they passed this or that legislation, finances would be cut off.

He congratulated delegates on having a Labor Government in New South Wales, and it was the dawn of better days for the State. The Upper House was a problem that could be dealt with, although a very slow one. There was said to be something in the Constitution that no matters affecting the Upper House should emanate in the Lower Chamber, but if that was so, then they had to alter the law.

He urged the maintaining of solidarity in the Movement, and hinted at the possibility of an early Federal election. He hoped they would be ready for all emergencies. Above all, Labor must be a solid body. The Federal Government had proposed a convention to discuss alterations to the Constitution. It was necessary that Labor should have some definite policy on the matter. The State and Interstate bodies should lay down some common policy so that when the time came they could pull together on the question.

**Members to Sign Platform Pledge**

The Berrigan Branch of the ALP moved – “That all members and future members of the ALP be compelled to sign the platform pledge; also that
the General Secretary be instructed to issue books of tickets with place for signatures.” The motion was carried without discussion.

Enmore Branch moved – “That Rule 46 be amended to provide: ‘No Labor candidate shall sign any pledge or undertaking of any other group, organisation, or party.’” This was also carried without discussion. A motion from Gilgandra Branch – “That all married men have the same right to land tenure as any other individual in New South Wales” – was ruled out of order, the President pointing out that all men, married or single, had equal rights under the law. A motion from Albury Branch – “That where land has been taken up under improvement lease, the occupier be not allowed to convert it into CP unless he has not otherwise a living area” – was also ruled out of order on the ground that it was already in the platform.

**Extension of Fair Rents Court**

Mr J Power moved, on behalf of Paddington Branch: “That Local Governments be clothed with powers of the Fair Rents Courts”. He said the measure was very necessary. The workers had their wages fixed, and should have some protection by the fixing of rents from the boodling landlords. It was impossible for one Fair Rents Court to deal with all the business coming before it.

Senator Grant said that the root of the evil was the land question. They would have to find some means to cheapen land in order that homes might be built. While the present scarcity of houses existed the rents would continue to be high. The motion was carried on the voices.

Sans Souci Branch moved: “That the Executive call an Annual Conference of pledged Labor aldermen and councillors in the State to discuss matters of mutual interest and local government generally”. The motion was carried.

Mrs Stewart moved: “That the Sydney City Council be requested to provide, without further delay, conveniences in the city for women and girls, with toilet and other articles pertaining to hygiene, and that these be on sale at such places”. The President pointed out that this was already part of the Municipal Party policy, and provision was being made for carrying it into effect. The motion was carried.

Enmore Branch sought to move a motion: “That provision be made in the ALP rules for the appointment of a treasurer, who shall control all administrative and fighting funds of the ALP,” but the President ruled it out as being superfluous, since a Finance Committee was already provided for under Rule 29.

Mr Binder moved on behalf of Sans Souci Branch: “That all members of the Central Executive, including the General Secretary, shall be ineligible for selection unless resigning from the Executive six months
previous to elections taking place”. The motion was ruled out as an encroachment on the rights and privileges of members.

Conference adjourned till the following evening (June 11).

Day 6, Friday, 11 June 1920

Land For Closer Settlement

On Friday, June 11, Conference discussed motions of which notice had been given. Owing to the unavoidable absence of the President, Mr AE O’Brien (Vice-President) was in the chair.

Senator Gardiner moved a motion for the appointment of a committee to prepare resolutions for submission to the Convention which will be called to deal with alterations to the Commonwealth Constitution. The motion was carried and Messrs Bailey, Catts, Ryan, Arthur, Power and Grant appointed to the Committee.

Mr C Last moved: “That Conference urges upon the government the immediate necessity of revoking the leases now held by the large land companies in the eastern portion of the Western Land Division, and make same available to bona fide seekers in 8000 acre blocks under a leasehold tenure.” He said they should burst up the locked lands in the West and make them available for closer settlement. He showed how the squatters got the land on long leases at nominal rentals, and claimed that these leases should be revoked even if they had to pay compensation. If they didn’t find land for the bona fide settlers there was going to be trouble in the near future.

Mr Flannery, MLA, suggested that the Parliamentary Party should be consulted on the matter. He didn’t think it wise for the Conference to carry a resolution which practically amounted to a demand on the Party.

Mr Burke (Petersham) said it was impracticable as it stood. To make it workable they would have to deal with the State as a whole.

66,000 Farmers Without Land

Mr Catts, MHR, was opposed to the wording of the motion. To revoke the leases would mean that they would have to pay heavy compensation. Before fixing 8000 acres as a living area they should get some idea as to what really was a living area. Settlement on land was a most important matter just now. There were 16,000 returned men and 50,000 farmers who could not get on the land because there was no land for them.

Mr T Arthur moved an amendment that the matter be referred to the incoming Executive to discuss it with the Parliamentary Party with a view of bringing about the declared policy of the Labor Party. He
thought that the matter could very well be left in the hands of the Parliamentary Party.

The motion was carried by 83 to 44 votes.

**Regarding Election Funds**

Mr McAuley moved a motion having for its purpose that contributions for the election expenses of individual candidates should be paid into the general funds, so that they could be controlled for the use of the Movement rather than for the use of the individual. He said there was an impression that at the last election individuals were financed by individuals who were not concerned with the advancement of Labor. His motion would give some idea as to where the funds came from and what they were. The motion was lost.

Mr J Farrell moved, and Senator Grant seconded: “That Conference urges upon the Government to include in its programme as one of the first measures a bill to amend the Metropolitan Board of Water and Sewerage Act and the Hunter River Water Supply and Sewerage Act to provide that the water and sewerage rates be imposed on land values only”. The motion was carried unanimously.

**Returned Soldiers and Employment**

Mr WA Gibbs sought to move a motion to repeal the Returned Soldiers and Sailors’ Employment Act in view of the fact that the Government was committed to a Right to Work Bill. Mr Catts moved an amendment: “That in view of the fact that the employment columns of the daily press prove that employers generally publiclly flout the Returned Soldiers and Sailors’ Preference Act, and that the principle of the Act is iniquitous and impracticable, the Government should repeal the measure”. The amendment was carried by 68 to 48 votes.

Mr Kelly (Ryde) moved: “That Conference take into consideration the advisability of forming a committee to go into the matter of a daily newspaper”. There was no discussion, and the motion was carried.

A motion moved by Mr Keniry (Kensington), providing for a State-owned woollen mills with a view to cheapening the cost of clothing, was also carried.

Mr T Arthur moved a motion that consultation sweeps be run on the lines of the Queensland Golden Casket sweeps for the benefit of the Labor Movement. The motion was carried.

**Lunacy Act Amendment**

Mr H Lockhard (Canterbury) moved: “That the Government amend the Lunacy Act”. He pointed out that at present when a man became insane
the first charge on his estate was for his upkeep. He thought that the first charge should be for the welfare of his wife, children, or any other dependents. It wasn’t right for the Master in Lunacy to seize everything.

Mr Mitchell (Hospital Employees’ Union) seconded the motion, and said that the matter had already been referred to the Government, and that action was being taken. The fault lay with those administering the Act and not with the Act itself. They had asked for administration by the Public Trustee and not by the Master in Lunacy, whose office should be abolished.

The motion was carried and Conference adjourned till the following day.

**Day 7, Saturday, 12 June 1920**

**Case of Mr Scott Campbell**

When Conference met on Saturday afternoon (June 12) Senator Gardiner moved the suspension of the standing orders to deal with the case of Mr Scott Campbell, whose candidature for Eastern Suburbs was withdrawn by the Executive during the recent State elections. He said he wished to appeal against that decision. The Waverley League had also appealed to the Executive on the matter.

Mr T Arthur thought that the Conference had carried a resolution that all such matters be referred to the incoming Executive for consideration. The President (Mr WH Lambert) ruled that the only cases referred to the incoming Executive were those associated with the breakaway movement last year.

Senator Gardiner said he had no desire to censure the Executive in the matter and he didn’t think the matter would take long to consider if delegates were prepared to hear the facts. Delegates, however, by a majority, decided not to hear Senator Gardiner.

At that Senator Gardiner moved towards the door, stating that as he had been denied an appeal by the Conference he would state his case in the public press and endeavour to call a special conference on the matter.

The President said he took it that the matter would still be considered by the incoming Executive. Senator Gardiner was heard to shout as he was leaving the Conference, that if he could not get a special conference to deal with Mr Scott Campbell’s case he would resign from the Movement and also from the Senate. He would not sit amongst men and women who were not prepared to hear an appeal for justice.
**Constitutional Amendments**

Mr Catts presented the report of the Committee appointed to go into the matter of the proposed Federal Convention to deal with amendments to the Commonwealth Constitution. The motion, which was signed by Mr Catts (chairman), Messrs TJ Ryan, J Grant, J Bailey, J Power and T Arthur (members of the Committee), was as follows:

“That this Conference, representative of the Australian Labor Party of New South Wales, protests against the proposal of the Commonwealth Government to constitute a Federal Convention of specially selected interests to advise upon amendments to the Commonwealth Constitution. Should any such convention be set up, however, we insist that it shall be elected by the people of Australia themselves.

“We regard the proposed convention as a useless waste of public money, inasmuch as it can only report in an advisory capacity to the Federal Parliament, and cannot possibly act of itself.

“In our opinion the Federal Parliament elected by the people and charged under the Constitution with the responsibility for submitting proposed amendments to the people by referendum, is the proper body to consider and decide what constitutional alterations are necessary.

“That this determination be referred to the Central Executive of the Australian Labor Party in each State, and also to the Federal Executive, asking their concurrence.”

The report was moved by Mr Catts, and seconded by Senator J Grant and carried on the voices.

**The Victimised Men**

Mr Whitaker moved that the Government be recommended to put into effect the railway and tramway policy regarding the 1917 victimised men. The President stated that the Government had already outlined its policy, and that action was being taken. Mr Whittaker claimed that this was not so. He wanted the men to get back their old rates of pay, positions, and privileges. The men who were going back were being put into lower positions. He wanted them back in their old jobs and the “scabs” booted out of the service.

Mr AE O’Brien detailed what had been done in consultation with the Unions on the matter. As a result there was an understanding that the men were going back into their old jobs, or into positions equivalent to what they had prior to the strike. The Government was doing its utmost in getting the matter fixed up.

Mr Bailey, MLA, moved as an amendment, that the matter be dealt with by the incoming Executive. The Railway Commissioner had agreed to meet the Cabinet and discuss the matter. The view taken by the Party was that if the men were not reinstated either the Railway Commissioner or the Cabinet would have to go. He was sure the Ministry would do its
duty to the men, no matter what Mr Fraser thought about it. If Mr Fraser didn’t put the men back then the Party would want to know something about it.

Mrs Kirwin seconded the amendment. Her son had been victimised, and though he had been put back he could only get temporary employment. She knew another man who applied for reinstatement who had been told by the Department that the victimised men were “dead men” as far as getting their old jobs back was concerned. She also pointed out that the “loyalists” did not have to go through eyesight and medical tests, as the unionists had.

“The Men Must Go Back”

Mr Mooney claimed that it was all talk about reinstating the men. He was a victimised man. The Commissioner was the ruling authority, not the Party or the Premier. He wasn’t satisfied with the attitude of the Government on the matter. It wasn’t moving fast enough. No doubt they were very sincere, but that wasn’t getting the men back. It had been a hot question at the last election, and they had received a mandate from the people, and the re-employment of the men should be carried out at once. He thought they should have a Royal Commission to deal with the matter.

Mr F Burke, MLA, thought the Conference could carry the motion and still leave it to the Executive for action to be taken. He said that many members of the Party were acutely interested in the matter, and the names were being collected, and the Commissioner would be asked to put them back. If he refused, Cabinet would come to the Party to see what could be done. He had no hesitation in saying that if the Commissioner refused to obey the mandate of the people he would have to go. There was a clause in the Railway Act whereby he could be dealt with. They had told Johnson in 1910 that if he did not put the victimised tramway men back he would be sacked, and he lost no time in coming down off his high pedestal. They were not concerned with Fraser’s dignity, but they could make it plain that if he did not put the victimised 1917 men back he, too, would have to go.

A Newcastle delegate pointed out that the high officials who victimised the men were mostly over the age of 60, and it was up to the Government to dismiss them. He instanced several of the Cabinet should be instructed to take that action.

Messrs T Arthur and S Toombs both expressed the opinion that it should be referred to the incoming Executive.

The amendment was carried.
Discussion on Rule 27

A motion moved by Mr Bell, and seconded by Mr Kelly, that an organiser for the Party be secured and employed in country districts, was, after considerable discussion, turned down. Another motion, that Mr PJ Minahan be allowed to take his seat as a member of the Parliamentary Party, was referred to the incoming Executive for consideration.

There was a lengthy discussion on a motion to delete Section 4 of Rule 27, but it was defeated by a large majority. On the motion of Mr Bourke (Petersham) Section 3 of Rule 27 was amended to read: “And that 30 alternate delegates shall be elected in rotation from the runners-up in the list of candidates for election as Executive Committee.”

Mr Finn (Manly) moved that the office of General Secretary be held for three years. The Secretary was the principal officer of the organisation, and his position should be made as continuous as possible. The present condition of employment made him a mere casual, and wasn’t at all suitable. It was in the best interests of the Movement to grant some degree of permanency to a good man. Mr Martin seconded the motion, which was carried by 94 to 19 votes.

The annual balance-sheet and Executive report were carried without discussion.

Danger of Imperial Federation

Mr Catts, MHR, moved: “That this Conference, representing the ALP for the State of New South Wales, views with alarm the Imperial Federation emanating from various quarters from overseas.

“Especially are we concerned at the cabled reports that the Secretary of State for the Colonies proposes to receive a deputation from disgruntled legislators who are challenging legislature passed by the Parliament of Queensland, which in principle challenges Australia’s self-governing power. Any such interference may lead to widespread resentment and be followed by grave consequences.

“That the Premier of New South Wales forward this resolution to the Secretary for the Colonies, and on receiving a reply a copy be handed to the Secretary of the ALP for record purposes”.

He said the very fact that Lord Milner was receiving the delegation headed by Sir Robert Philp was in itself a direct challenge to the legislation of the Queensland Labor Government. The property interests had already appealed to the Courts, and the Privy Council had declared in favour of the Queensland Government, and that being so, Lord Milner should not have received the delegation. He stated that the moment he saw their self-governing rights interfered with he would resign from Parliament and go out hot-footed and organise for an Australian republic. The time had come for them to speak their minds on
these matters, and he for one wasn’t going to remain quiet when their self-governing rights were being challenged. He hoped that the Queensland Conference which was meeting at the end of the month would speak in no uncertain voice on the matter.

The motion was carried on the voices.

Mr Bell (Albury) moved: “New rule:- That compulsory voting be introduced for both Federal and State elections, with compulsory enrolment for the State as well as the Federal”. The motion was carried.

An amended resolution providing that all members of affiliated unions or leagues 18 years of age or over shall have the right to vote in selection of candidates was carried.

**Regarding Apprentices**

Mrs Gray (Bathurst) moved – “That a Compulsory Apprenticeship Act be brought into being with the object of producing more skilled workers”. She said that what Australia wanted was skilled workers.

Mr Mills opposed the motion on the grounds that when there was an industrial dispute apprentices were called upon to do the “scabbing”. It wasn’t in the best interests of the unions to have that. He thought they should leave the matter to the unions for consideration, as they were best fitted to deal with a motion of that character.

Mr TJ Smith supported the motion. He wanted to see skilled trade education part of the curriculum for boys at schools. It was necessary in the life of a young country like Australia to have skilled men. He favoured legislation on the lines of the German system – an encouragement by bonus to parents to put their boys to some skilled trade so that their calling would fit them for the control of industry in the future.

Mr Campbell moved an amendment that the matter be adjourned with a view to referring it at some future Trade Union Conference. They should be careful in what they did lest they were assisting the boss with cheap labour.

Mr Sturgess (Vice-Chairman) supported the motion. He pointed out that the Nationalist Government last year wanted to do something along these lines, but the Employers’ Federation objected to it, and it was dropped. Thus it was up to them to support the measure. The whole system of apprenticeship should be considered. The smartest brains of the community were being wasted because there was no proper Apprentice Act.

Mr Magrath (Printing Trades) opposed the motion, claiming that it would give the employers an overplus of labour to be used in case of a strike. It was rather a matter for the unions to deal with.

Mr O’Dea also opposed the motion.

The amendment proposed by Mr Campbell was carried.
Holman Government Appointments

A motion providing for adult suffrage in municipal and shire council elections was carried on the voices without debate. It was decided to recommend to the Federal Executive: “That employees have representation on all boards of management in Government departments”. It was already on the State platform, and should be included in the Federal platform.

Mrs Fowler moved: “That all appointments made to the Public Service during the term of the Holman-Fuller Government be reviewed if a Labor Government is returned, and where it is found positions have been secured by political patronage or by unfair methods the appointments be cancelled”. The motion was carried, and Conference adjourned until Monday (June 14).

Days 8 & 9, Monday & Tuesday, 14 & 15 June 1920

Concluding Session

When Conference met on Monday evening (June 14) there were not sufficient delegates present to form a quorum, and the session was abandoned. On the following evening there were a mere handful of delegates present when the President opened the session, though it increased in numbers as the evening wore on. But at no time was there the statutory majority necessary to make alterations in the policy, and whatever motions were carried had little more effect than pious resolutions.

Mr Keniry moved: “That the Government take over the control of all banking and insurance business”. Mr N McPhee took the point that there were not a hundred delegates present, and the matter could not be discussed. However, a motion was carried, though it was without effect.

Mr Finucane moved: “That a principle of the Australian Labor Party be compulsory preference to unionists”. Mr Donovan seconded. Mr Magrath pointed out that the matter was already part of the policy. The President ruled the motion out of order.

Mr Finucane moved – “That all secretaries and organisers of unions be appointed as honorary inspectors under the Industrial Arbitration Act”. This was seconded by Mr O’Dea, who drew attention to the incompetency of some of the inspectors at the present time.

Arbitration or Direct Action

Mr Magrath wanted to see an amendment providing for inspectors as laid down under the Commonwealth and Queensland State Arbitration
Acts. He claimed that a motion framed on those lines, if placed before Parliament, would have more success than the motion outlined by Mr Finucane.

Mr Lazzarini favoured the motion. He thought there should be expert inspectors for the various classes of shops. In many cases that was not so today. He also touched on the matter of arbitration generally. He said the workers would have to decide in the near future whether they would have arbitration or not. They either had to accept it and be prepared to give it a fair trial or throw it overboard and get what they wanted by direct action. They could not use it up to a certain point and then reject it, and at the same time expect the employer to stand by it all the time.

The motion was carried, though the President announced that it could have no force owing to the insufficiency of delegates.

Several motions were moved that the Conference adjourn sine die, but they were defeated.

**The High Rent Evil**

Mr Keniry moved – “That legislation be enacted to provide that landlords, agents, or other persons engaged in the selling, leasing or renting of houses, or real estate be registered and licensed, and that the receiving or accepting of a bonus commission, emolument, or payment of any kind other than the fixed legal charge be treated as an offence punishable by disqualification and fine”. The motion was carried.

A lengthy discussion took place on a motion moved by Mr Huckle (Broken Hill), and seconded by Mr McMahon, as follows: “That houses of ill-fame and houses of accommodation be licensed, and that prostitutes be registered and medically examined at least once in each and every week”. After a number of delegates had spoken, the motion was defeated.

At 9.40 pm a motion was moved that the Conference adjourn sine die, and this was carried by an overwhelming vote. A few remarks by the President, in which he thanked delegates for their help and attention, and a motion of thanks to the President by delegates concluded the business of Conference.