CHAPTER 20

PORT KEMBLA WORKERS

PETER COCHRANE, WINIFRED MITCHELL
AND GEOFFREY SHERINGTON

This is one of the most resentful years of my life. They had what they called 'the Hill' which you had to go on to seek employment and you stood there, hundreds of men stood on the Hill waiting to be selected ... the employment officer, he used to come out with a pipe in his mouth and then he'd point his pipe, after a good inspection ... he made you feel as though you were cattle. I was never so resentful of anything in my life.

Dave Bowen, Port Kembla steelworker

Open hearth, Port Kembla steelworks. Rigger slinging an 85-ton girder. Photograph by T.S. Fisher, July 1938.
AIS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

EVERY DAY 'the Hill' outside the Australian Iron and Steel (AIS) plant at Port Kembla in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, was the scene of a cruel ritual. Before the sun came up men would gather there in hundreds, hoping to be chosen for that day's work. They resented it bitterly. One wrote angrily to the steelworks' manager:

Dear Sir

I am on the hill for a good while and I don't think it is fare go to me that a boy gets a job as a fitters Laber and I am married man and a wife and family to look after, and there is a Boy Eighteen years of ages and gets full man wages he drinks it and gamble it as I find out his number and name is 2757 and his name is Higgens,

Yours Sinserly,

from the hill.

Such rivalry undermined the efforts of trade unions to end such indignities as the Hill. The union movement was recovering from the depression. The Federated Ironworkers' Association, for example, had gained a communist leadership in 1936, and was growing in militancy and expanding in membership—the Port Kembla branch increased by 300 per cent between 1936 and 1938. Loyalty to the union

was an integral part of Port Kembla working-class culture: wives supported husbands and shopkeepers gave credit during strikes. The mining villages that had grown up between the Illawarra mountains and the sea formed closely knit, self-reliant communities. But jobs were scarce, 8.7 per cent of the workforce was unemployed, and it was a struggle simply to make a living.

AIS was by far the region's largest employer, employing 4473 people, compared with 3970 in all the district's collieries combined. Moreover, it was owned by BHP, which also owned half the collieries, so what AIS did affected the entire Illawarra area. BHP could not meet the demand for steel in the 1930s and was therefore expanding AIS as rapidly as it could, building new furnaces, coke-making ovens, rolling mills, soaking pits, wharf facilities and a large by-product plant. AIS output trebled between 1934 and 1939.

The frantic pace put AIS workers under great stress. Overtime, annual leave and the right to take it, weekend work, continuous process work and 'speed-up', or increasing the work rate, all became major industrial issues. In February, for example, the Federated Ironworkers' Association was refused time off for its Picnic Day because the company did not want work stopped, and throughout the year plant shutdowns were minimised so that construction and production teams could be pressed to the limit. As the *BHP review* put it, 'much ingenuity was shown by the construction department in proceeding with the work without stopping the mill'. Overtime and holiday and Sunday work became an unwritten obligation. Overtime for outside staff men, for example, averaged 14.7 hours in the fortnight ended 22 January and 13.6 hours in the fortnight ending 28 May. In January, E. Dainton worked 72 hours overtime in the power house, and in May E. Sargent, a foreman in the 10-inch mill, worked 42 hours overtime. Some contract fitters worked 20 hours straight constructing coke ovens.

M. Rogan, an industrial worker at Australian Iron and Steel. The company, referred to by workers as the 'slaughterhouse', placed responsibility for safety on the men themselves. Rogan suffered a fatal accident in 1939.

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This relentless activity was pursued at the expense of much needed improvements in workers' amenities. In March the AIS industrial officer reported that

> in practically all the departments where the men have hot, laborious and dirty work to do, there are no suitable change room facilities. Many of these employees live long distances from the works and it means they have to remain an undesirable period of time in a damp, perspiring condition.

The coke ovens had a modern change house, and the 10–13-inch mill had facilities described as adequate. But at the soaking pits the men

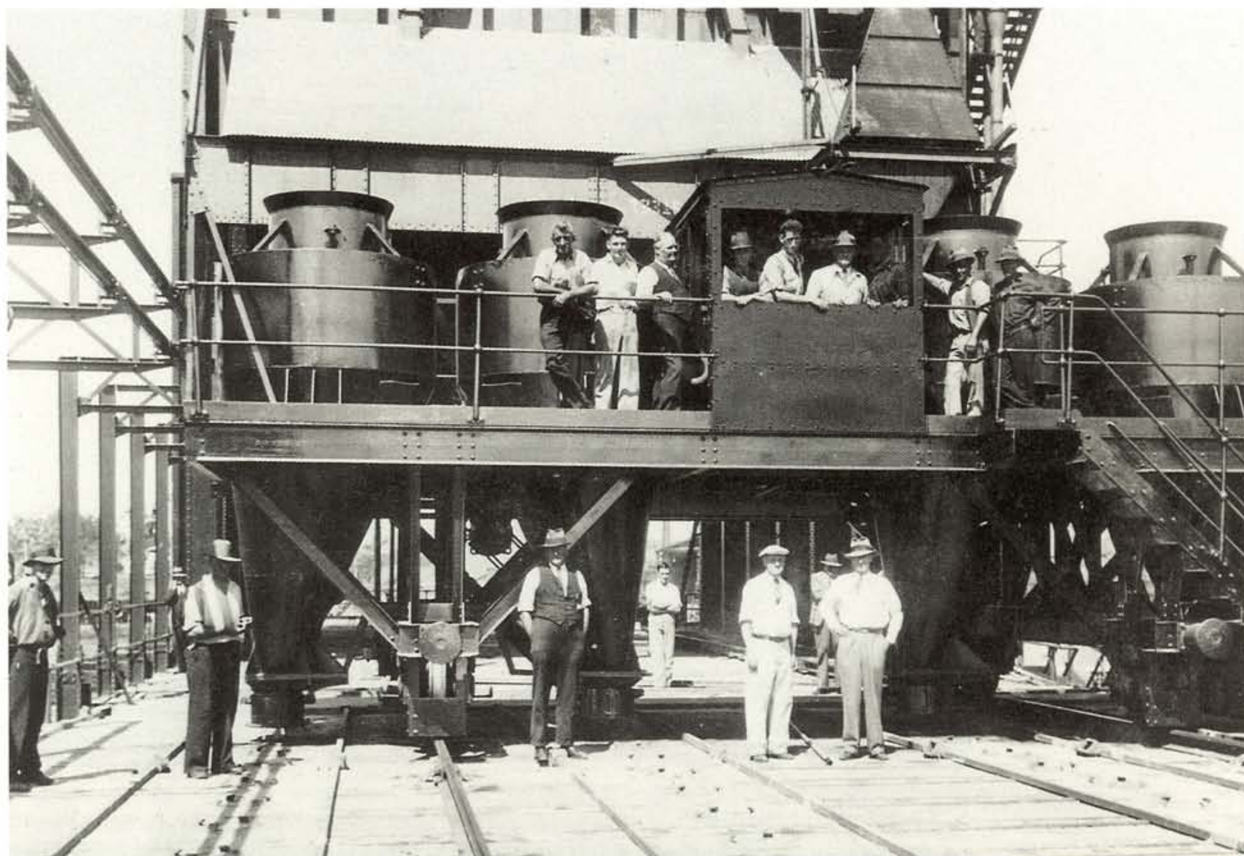
> erected 3 showers in their own time with old material secured from somewhere. In order to make the place a bit more presentable a slab of concrete was put down for a floor. This place can only be described as deplorable and most unfit for employees to shower in. Naturally it looks unclean and unsanitary.

At the 36-inch mill

> 2 showers with hot and cold water have been erected by the men themselves. To get to the spot one has to go under the run-out table in a stooping position. The showers are in a remote spot which could only be discovered by accident. This is another deplorable condition, and is the only facility these men have to wash.

At the open hearth furnaces 226 men shared four showers; at the power house perhaps 200 men shared two showers. Such conditions were typical.

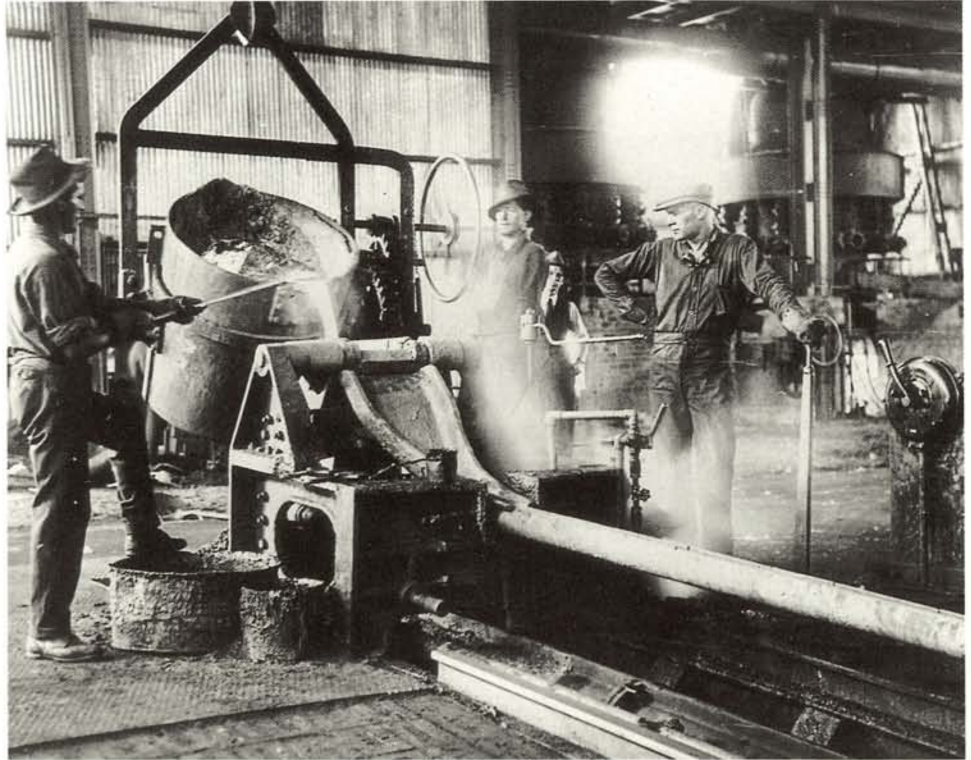
The work was arduous, noisy, hazardous and hot. The workers toiled in a maze of towering chimneys, giant furnaces, coal and scrap iron mountains, overhead skip cars, mobile cranes, conveyors, rail lines and steam locomotives. Noxious gases,



The first 'charge' of the new coke ovens at Australian Iron and Steel, 4 January 1938.
AIS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

billowing mushrooms of steam, crashing metal, searing heat, flames, clouds of grit and coal dust bombarded their senses ceaselessly. 'Every section of the plant', the blast furnace superintendent reported, 'is inundated by thick layers of dust'; so was the tea-water that men boiled in open kerosene tins around the plant. Casual workers in the pattern-making shop, the raw coal pits and the hammer mill (where coal was pulverised), spat up coal dust for days afterwards. In some departments a caged canary was kept to warn of gas, but elsewhere men cursed pungent fumes that no-one could overlook. A breakdown on top of the coke oven, for example, forced teams to make repairs in dense clouds of green gas shimmering with heat. Gas was a regular danger at the blast furnaces, while at the tar precipitators maintenance men periodically spent hours inside chambers charged with naphthalene, surrounded by walls coated with tar and a substance which turned their skins dark brown.

The heat was terrible. The ovens, furnaces and soaking pits ran at over 1300° Celsius. Men wore felt shirts to soak up sweat and changed with 'relief men' to escape the heat for a while. There was little protection. In the mills men used bars and giant metal tongs to buffet red hot ingots on their way; at the furnaces no protective footwear was provided and workers tied ironbark or thick strips of rubber to their thin soles for protection. Gloves were available to select men and shared over three shifts—the rest used hessian bagging if it was available. Blistered hands, blistered feet and burns from sparks and splashes of molten metal or liquid slag were common. Occasionally men were caught in big spills of molten metal and their screams as their feet disintegrated seared the memories of their workmates.



Dangerous work: pouring molten metal from a ladle before casting. Gloves were the only concession to safety; shoes were of an ordinary make and faces were unprotected. Flannel shirts soaked up the sweat.
AIS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

Some men called AIS 'the slaughterhouse'. Serious injuries were frequent, and of a workforce of roughly 4500 at least six men were killed in 1937–38. The company conceded that there were 809 accidents at the works from July 1937 to June 1938, including 396 compensation cases and between 35 and 89 injured men off work on compensation. Even so, the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council believed that men were sometimes compelled or persuaded to return to work to avoid compensation payments, and cases were cited of men coming to work on crutches or being carried to and from the steelworks.

The rapidly growing rail network was also dangerous. Its safety record demonstrated the consequences of rapid and chaotic expansion. The rail system operated around the clock with ten train crews working seven-hour shifts, an additional twenty minutes for a meal, and forty minutes to take in coal and water. Fifteen rail accidents were recorded between January and November, most of them derailments or collisions.

It was company policy where possible to employ men permanently incapacitated by accidents. Jim Shepherd worked on with an artificial leg. David Charlesworth, a pit labourer, lost the use of his foot and was off work for 23 weeks after being hit by a crane. He wore a 'curative apparatus' and was employed as a painter. Bill Dallas was seriously injured but stayed on at the furnace on lighter duties. 'It is difficult to find employment for cripples who are injured in the Works', the production superintendent, W.H. Mortlock, observed, 'and we have many of them from whom we get a doubtful return'. These men were a reminder both of a considerate company policy and of the fact that much more than coking coal, iron ore and limestone went into building Australia's steel industry.

Compared with steelworkers, miners were at least well paid. Dave Bowen received 16s 3d a day for casual labour at the steelworks, but when he began work in the Wongawilli coalmine he was paid £12 for an eleven-day 86-hour fortnight with a 'back' Saturday off. Miners worked on contract and were paid on the coal they 'cut' and 'filled'. The mines were primitive and usually dangerous. At Wongawilli miners sometimes had to carry their kit, powder tin, picks, water bottle and tucker tin up to five kilometres to the coalface, there to sweat at a narrow seam where gas and explosions were a constant menace, and dust ever present. Dust killed, and this was increasingly a grievance amongst miners. Compensation was available but rarely awarded. Only 47 of 239 'dusted' Illawarra miners who applied for compensation between 1926 and 1939 received it; another 45 died. The 'dusted' miner faced a grim future, a sufferer told the *South Coast Times* in August:

> His happy domestic life is suddenly shattered overnight when he discovers that he has a racking cough that shakes his entire frame. In the morning when he arises he finds that his cough produces a sputum of bluish-grey colour. He is also beginning to lose weight; he can feel and hear the percussion note resonate all over his lungs whenever he coughs. He visits his local doctor, who in turn warns him of the bad state of his lungs and names the complaint as pneumonocociosis, and orders him out of the mines. How is he going to live, and what of his dependants if any? And what will be the use of money? After a few weeks elapse he goes to Sydney for examination. After he is x-rayed and sounded he returns home to await the medical report, which will follow in a day or two. All this time his income is nil. He is waiting for the medical report and hopes it will favour him, but the majority of reports I have seen—my own included reads thus—'There is no evidence of pneumonocociosis or tuberculosis. He is suffering from chronic bronchitis in all probability an infection not caused by his work but aggravated thereby. I consider he is fit for work.'

The doctors were company men.

Most coal left Illawarra by sea and a select band of waterside workers operated the district's jetties and wharves. They worked hard. Twenty-four-hour shifts, known as 'dark-uns', were common. Work went on in all weather, the only toilet was a hole in the wharf, and the men had to provide their own meals and clothing and even the shovels to shift the coal. 'We were required to go below on this particular ship', one recalls:

> she had a big trunk like hatch, and after she'd been run up as we called it, coal was tipped till it was full to the bottom of the trunk way. We used to be ordered below then, on this great pyramid of coal, with just enough room to squeeze through under the combings. We'd go down with our plate and our shovel, told to stand clear and the shoot would commence tipping again and great quantities of coal would be tipped on top of us, on top of the existing pyramid. And we'd find that there would be several hundreds of tons ... tipped in this way above us with no possible chance of getting out until it was dug away with the shovels.

But work on the wharves was highly prized, because the pay was good—£2 11s could be earned for shovelling coal for 24 hours. The major grievance was that men were employed on a daily basis. The employers, the stevedoring companies, used stevedores to pick the men for work and stevedores used the 'bull' system,

picking their favourites, or 'bulls', for the most work and the best jobs. A notice went up, an old worker recalls, announcing that

> such-and-such a stevedoring company requires 50 men at 8 am in the morning. All the men used to go down to the post office and get picked up. And the boss who picked you up used to stand up on the seat and he'd pick 'em out, you, you, you and you—all the favourites. Well then, if you wasn't in favour with 'im you didn't get a job . . . I used to get a job. And they'd have a rest period while all the people on the outer would do the hard work . . . The 'bulls' used to drive winches and be hatchmen and they'd be hurrying up all the time and men down doing the hard work would be trying to hold them up so as it wouldn't be so hard.

But increasing exports were challenging the 'bull' system, which relied on confining work to a small pool of labour. As elsewhere, the expanding industrial base of the region was changing traditional relations and working conditions.

Women and girls wanting work in Illawarra had to find it in shops, tearooms, hotels or domestic service. Girls might start working as house servants at thirteen, and not surprisingly Illawarra working girls married young. In 1933 almost two-thirds of those over fifteen were married, compared to just over half of those in New South Wales as a whole.

Muriel Owen became a 'home help' on leaving school. She objected most to 'eating amongst the pots; you had no table or anything where you could eat. You just ate amongst the dirty pots'. Later she chose to be a hotel waitress where the hours were better. She had a 7 am start, then an hour or so off before she prepared lunch, and a couple of hours off after lunch. She then returned to prepare dinner. She was paid £1 9s a week. She met her future husband, Clive, a widower with three children, while working at Tattersall's Hotel. She was helping out in the bar and he came in after working a shift at AIS. Their courtship was brief because of the needs of Clive's three children. 'In those days there was no help . . . So I suppose the cheapest way out was to get married.' They lived at the Kembla Estate, close to the steelworks, so Clive could walk to work. 'I used to take his lunch down and sit on the bank. We were lovers, you know. And I used to watch the fires in the pits because you could get close those days; it was interesting.'

With a building society loan the Owens began building a home. Muriel had to budget very carefully. She did all the family's sewing and knitting, and had a standard fortnightly grocery order of 25 pounds of flour and rice, golden syrup and 'all the cheaper things', from which she made scones, steamed puddings, dampers and doughboys 'to fill them up'. Once, after taking her baby in arms by bus to Wollongong to pay in a cheque, she discovered that she had forgotten the 5d duty on the cheque. So she used her return fare and had to walk eight kilometres home, carrying the baby. She had also to walk to pay the rates at the Unanderra Council Chambers, six kilometres away.

Fred and Edna Kirkwood lived in the house in which Fred had been born in the coalmining village of Mount Kembla. They had two children, both born at home with a midwife. The house had a rainwater tank, a fuel stove, an ice chest and (a rare luxury) an electric iron bought from the Illawarra County Council. A doctor from Wollongong visited the village three nights a week. The Kirkwoods were grateful:

> There was a place in the middle of the town, the doctor's rooms, where you left your name, then you would put a red flag outside your house and the doctor

THE MARCH OF THE NATION

NEW STEELOPOLIS OF AUSTRALIA

Port Kembla, already third manufacturing centre of New South Wales, may become the third city. In four years the population has doubled. It is now more than 5000. In 10 years, local authorities estimate, it will be 40,000.

More than £3,000,000 has been expended on the Australian Iron and Steel Company's works at Kembla. They employ 6000 men —double the number of two years ago. Kembla industries keep 13 collieries busy.

Defence authorities are pleased with the decentralisation of Australian steel industry. Plants situated so widely apart as Broken Hill, Newcastle and Port Kembla lessen risk of a shattering blow being struck at our most vital industry should this country be attacked.

Norman Orchard, above, is a typical Australian steel worker. He is one of 6000 workmen at the Australian Iron and Steel industry at Port Kembla. Their wages' cheque totals £30,000 a week. Average wage is £5.

Like many other Kembla workmen, Orchard has his home in Wollongong. It is difficult to obtain accommodation in Port Kembla. Population of Wollongong has doubled in past 10 years. It is now 16,000.

Pix, *5 Mar 1938.*

would call at your home. He was on call seven days a week. The surgery was open on Saturday night. You had no worries. For 2s 9d a fortnight you had a doctor 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Fred worked a day shift at the mine and spent time after work in his garden. He was a Church of England lay preacher, and the family went to church regularly and enjoyed church socials. There was no dancing, but there were games and supper. At home they never had cards because both their fathers had disapproved of them, but they took the children to picnics, to visit grandparents and to swim at Port Kembla. They had 'an old Chev', the same car Fred had had when they were courting. Fred also believed in unionism, in particular the Miners' Federation. 'The miners laid the foundation for every condition you've got in Australia today', he said. He cared more for his union than he did for Labor politics or politicians, though naturally he voted Labor.

The AIS plant and surrounding countryside. Nick Branney, a rigger, 'loved it up on the high stacks . . . the coast looked absolutely beautiful up there. There was no smoke. Unspoilt. Lots of little farms'. Caption N. Branney.
AIS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

Nick and Nell Branney were also staunch unionists. Nick claimed he was 'the first Pom on the foundations of No.1 blast furnace at the steelworks in 1927', and as a rigger in 1936 he campaigned to get his fellow workers to join the Federated Ironworkers. He got 60 members and was promptly dismissed and blacklisted until 1938. He and his wife cultivated their garden and earned a living by selling vegetables. In 1938 he was on 'the Hill' with five or six hundred others, but they were short of riggers and he got a job again.

The Owens, Kirkwoods and Branneys were all long-time Illawarra residents, but many newcomers to the district were seeking work and a home, so accommodation was scarce. In central Wollongong twelve wharfies and their families shared six two-bedroom flats, each let for almost half their weekly wage of around £5. Many new arrivals simply set up tents. In April there were an estimated 407 tent camps in the Port Kembla district housing 1079 people, of whom 443 were children. Most camps were on low marshy ground with bad drainage and sanitation. The worst was at Flinders Street; it was in a 'disgusting and dirty' condition, with blocked drains and garbage strewn around.

Neither the local councils nor AIS sympathised with campers, and both tried to control camps in various ways. Councils required landowners on whose property camps were located to supply water and toilet facilities, and in July levied a charge of 2s 6d a week on all camps in the district. The company evicted campers from its land. But there were simply no houses, and at last in mid-year the state government, which for so long had encouraged industrial expansion at Port Kembla, accepted some responsibility for the shortage. It announced that it would build at Port Kembla a 'workmen's temporary settlement' for 600 people: 20 huts with cubicles for 320 single men, and 65 married men's quarters each containing three to four rooms. The result was 'Spoonerville', a new settlement built half of timber and half of canvas, and named facetiously after the responsible state minister.

'Spoonerville' typified a general inadequacy. In almost every respect workers' living and working conditions had not kept pace with the economic expansion of the region. The unions had long resented this. In 1937 and 1938 the Miners' Federation lodged a log of claims with the mine owners, which led to a national miners' strike in September.

The Illawarra miners prepared for the strike carefully, hoping to minimise hardship. They established women's auxiliaries, thereby formalising the work

women had done in past strikes and lockouts—raising money, caring for needy children and organising social functions. The miners also established committees to maintain community morale and sent out working parties to collect donations of money and food. The Trades Protective Association, representing Illawarra shopkeepers, agreed to accept miners' strike relief coupons, allowing mining families to buy bread and meat; bakers and butchers collected their money from the Miners' Federation. Business people also contributed to the Wollongong Mines Area Committee funds. During September and October the *South Coast Times* reported donations from Marcus Clark's, the Black and White milk bar, Green's newsagency, the Self Help stores, Foster's Shoes, the Harp and Commercial hotels and many other businesses. Miners went on fishing and rabbit-catching excursions. 'Rabbits', said Fred Kirkwood,

> were the ones who fought for all the miners' conditions. If you were on strike you could get a loaf of bread for threepence, get rabbits, have them baked, stewed or curried . . . you wouldn't have been able to survive without.

The strike lasted six weeks, then was brought before the Commonwealth Arbitration Court where the state government promised to introduce legislation to improve safety conditions and compensate dusted miners. The Illawarra miners returned to work somewhat sceptically, but the government did improve conditions. Fred Kirkwood considered the strike a watershed: the miners 'brought up the working conditions not only of miners but of the whole of Australia because the miners were the first to get long service leave and sick leave'.

On 15 November another strike began when Port Kembla waterside workers refused to load the ship *Dalfram* with pig iron for Japan. The pig iron strike was bitterly fought, with the commonwealth government applying the Transport Workers' Act—the 'dog collar' act—in an attempt to compel wharfies to work and AIS laying off 4000 steelworkers in the week before Christmas. But no more pig iron was shipped to Japan.

May Day procession in Crown Street, Wollongong.
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG ARCHIVES

Again the small communities rallied to support the strikers and their families. Women's auxiliaries and women's church committees organised socials, picnics and family outings. Waterside workers organised teams to maintain basic supplies through hunting and fishing, and sent concert parties around the holiday camps which sprang up along district beaches as Christmas approached. Wollongong's Rest Park became a place for public meetings, the New Theatre came from Sydney to produce skits about the dispute and the wharfies produced their own skits, both at the Rest Park and on the beach. Unemployed steelworkers made Christmas toys with tools loaned by other workers and placed them on a big tree in the centre of the town. The same business people who had aided the coal miners helped again, and co-op stores gave member customers generous credit. Brotherhood, self-help and sharing mattered to Illawarra workers. Life was hard for them and their families, but they and their communities were strong.

Reg Mahoney in 1938.

THE PIG IRON STRIKE

Reg Mahoney was born in Grabben Gullen, near Crookwell, New South Wales. In the early 1930s he began working on the* Goulburn Post *and in 1938 he went to Wollongong to report for the* Illawarra Star. *Here, Reg recalls the events surrounding the pig iron strike at Port Kembla.

ON 15 NOVEMBER I made an early morning call to the waterfront and saw the *Dalfram* taking on pig iron from the blast furnaces at the steelworks. 'She's going to Singapore,' a stevedore told me, so I was ready to forget the ship, but a mate of mine, Bill Hogan, who worked in the Port Kembla Stevedoring Office, spotted me and made some excuse to cross my tracks out of sight of anyone.

'Bullshit Reggie,' he told me. 'She's not going to Singapore. She's going to Japan.' I argued with him. We were blasting Japan in the press for its horrors, bombings, murders and rapes in China, and there were rumblings about Japan's march south towards Indo-China and its threat to Australia. We wouldn't be sending pig iron to Japan unless we were crackers, I said. 'Well, we must be crackers,' replied Hogan, 'I've seen the ship's manifest and she's going to Japan all right.'

I raced back to the printery with a scoop front page spinning in my mind. But Jack Bridges had made up the front page, and when Jack was happy with a layout it was too much of a bore to change it, so close to deadline. 'We'll stick a single column in here,' he said, marking out about twenty centimetres of a story already set and proofed on page one. 'Pig Iron For Japan', said the heading. In relatively small type it was not a screamer, but it fired a bolt which rattled the industrial and political scene from Darwin to Canberra.

The *Star* hit the streets just before the morning shift came off the wharves and the afternoon shift went on. Wharfies, who liked a regular pint to guard against waterfront thirst, thumbed the story in hotel bars. Phones buzzed. Bridges was quizzed about the basis for the story. The office of the Waterside Workers' Federation swung into action, red-ragger assistant secretary, Ted Roach, headed for the jetty, and the afternoon shift declared *Dalfram* black.

So the ship sat at the jetty like a lame duck. The morning shift had loaded 200 tons into her holds and as a partly loaded ship she could not just cast off. But the export trade in coal, coke, pig iron and steel was crucial to Port Kembla's development and Australia's industrial recovery, and the Lyons government in Canberra declared that she must load. Bob Menzies, the attorney-general, was charged with making sure that happened. He took the extreme measure of

proclaiming Port Kembla a licensed port under the Transport Workers' Act, thus giving anyone the right to work the wharves.

The unions called this act the 'dog collar act' and the proclamation inflamed other unions into supporting the wharfies. With the south coast in turmoil, industries threatened with closure and businesses facing the wall, the government made another dramatic move. It despatched Menzies to Wollongong to address a public meeting in front of the council chambers, on the corner of Crown Street. 'We'll lynch the bastard', was the threat among the mob as they waited for the big man to arrive. Hundreds had gathered around—shopkeepers, businessmen, unionists, strikers and angry housewives.

For Menzies it was no silver-tongued debate on the parliamentary floor, but he relished the confrontation. Police were everywhere, but to everyone's amazement Menzies left his car up the street and walked as though alone straight for the mob. He was a big man and a stately figure in dark blue double-breasted suit and hat to match. White-faced, he ignored the boos and shouts from the crowd and walked straight on. The crowd parted for him. Climbing onto the back of the waiting parked truck, he removed his hat and began, 'Ladies and gentlemen . . .'

The crowd was not to be diverted. 'Pig Iron Bob!' the cry went up. But Menzies persisted, and succeeded in gaining some personal respect despite the intense ill-feeling among most of the crowd.

The strike went on for nine weeks. The story boiled and fizzed but anything on *Dalfram* was always news. The ship was moved from the jetty and anchored out in the harbour, which frustrated some of the contacts we had, but by now I was on good terms with Ted Roach and we collaborated on angles to keep the story hot. Although *Dalfram*'s officers were unco-operative we had the friendly confidence of some Indian seamen aboard, so one dark night a rowboat pulled alongside *Dalfram* and two shadowy figures crept up the gangway and along the deck to the forward quarters. A couple of Indians were shanghaied into the boat without a murmur, and told their story as we rowed them ashore. Next morning there was a great hue and cry: Indian seamen had deserted *Dalfram* and refused to sail with pig iron for Japan. So the *Star* had an exclusive scoop and Roach had a couple of Indians living it up with a shadowy family of unionists. Other Indians were quick to desert, and so the struggle went on.

Meanwhile the port was under siege. Shipping stopped, mills closed and breadwinners were put out of work. Still the wharfies stuck to their strike. There was no gain in it for them either of wages or conditions. Their action was purely on principle—potential war materials should not go to an aggressor who might become a threat to Australia. In the end the *Dalfram* did sail with 800 tons of pig iron for Japan but, as the *Star* reported, 'Not until the Government agreed to review the export of iron to Japan and lift the Transport Workers' Act at Port Kembla, were the men willing to return to work. . .'

Pix, *5 March 1938.*

In 1938 the Board of Directors of Hygienic Containers Pty Ltd voted to engage a professional photographer to document the company's activities after fifteen years in the business of manufacturing paper products. The factory, in the inner Sydney suburb of Alexandria, opened in 1923 with ten employees; by 1938 it boasted 200 employees. These photographs of the boardroom and shopfloor appeared in the commemorative album. Photograph by Milton Kent, 1938.
BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS