

## Intercolonial Trade Union Congresses

The Intercolonial Trades Union Congresses were a means for Australian labour organisations to collectively organise themselves and to discuss issues of concern to all unions in all states. The first Congress met in Sydney in 1879. The Congress report states that 'it was established that the labour organisations of Australasia were practically unanimous in holding certain opinions in social politics'. Political reform remained high on the agenda of subsequent Congresses.

There were eight Congresses: 1879 (Sydney), 1884 (Melbourne), 1885 (Sydney), 1886 (Adelaide), 1888 (Brisbane), 1889 (Hobart), 1891 (Ballarat) and 1898 (Adelaide). No records have been located for the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress in Adelaide.

Between 1879 and 1898, topics regularly discussed included legislation of trade unions, organisation of labour, abolition of 'Chinese and coolie immigration', Compulsory Court of Arbitration, Employers Liability Act, legalisation of the 8 hours system, land nationalisation, manhood suffrage, direct representation of labour in Parliament, appointment of working men on technical and other boards, free compulsory and secular education by the state and regulation of apprentices. Among the resolutions passed were those concerning the

Commonwealth Draft Bill, assisted immigration, payment to Members of Parliament, single tax, paid union organisers, minimum wage and industrial federation.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Congress in Ballarat was held after the defeat of the Great Maritime Strike in 1890, and concern over the effectiveness of labour bargaining power is reflected in the papers of the Congress. Issues relating to the political organisation of the labour movement and of restructuring trade union organisation under the Australasian Federation of Labour were of major importance.

The items listed in this guide come from the following collections:

- Victorian Operative Bricklayers Society (T8)
- Tom McDonald Papers (P20)
- Ballarat Trades and Labour Council (E97)
- Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia, Port Adelaide Branch (P92)
- Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia, NSW Branch (T39)
- Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia, Queensland Branch (T51).

### First Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (Sydney, 1879)

T8/7/3	<i>Letterbook</i>	Correspondence between the Victorian Operative Bricklayers Society and the Trades and Labour Council of NSW (W Roylance) discussing the proposal to hold an Intercolonial Trades Union Congress in Sydney. <i>23 May 1879-22 September 1879</i>
T8/7/3	<i>Proposed Programme (printed)</i>	Printed circular from the Trades and Labour Council of NSW (W J Harris) concerning the draft programme of the Intercolonial Trade Congress to be held in Sydney during the International Exhibition. Circular lists subjects proposed by the Council for discussion at the Congress. <i>9 May 1879</i> . (Covering letter dated <i>23 May 1879</i> ).
T8/7/3	<i>Final Programme</i>	Printed circular from the Trades and Labour Council of NSW (W Roylance) detailing the final programme of the Intercolonial Trades Union Congress to be held at the Sydney

- Mechanical School of Arts, Oct 7<sup>th</sup> 1879. The list of subject for discussion was expanded, from the draft programme, to include immigration, mercantile marine, workers compensation and the encouragement of native industries. *13 September 1879.*
- T8/7/3      *Circular Advertisement*      Printed circular from the Trades and Labour Council of NSW (W Roylance) advertising the publication of a special report of proceedings of the Intercolonial Trades Union Congress of 1879.
- T8/7/3      *Letter*      Invitation from the Melbourne Progressive Society of Carpenters and Joiners, Trades Hall to assist with the formation of a second Intercolonial Trades Union Congress to be held in Melbourne. *7 February 1880.*
- T8/7/4      *Circular*      Invitation from the Victorian Saddlers Society (R Hayes) to co-operate with other unions in the proposed scheme to federate trade unions in all of the colonies and the formation of a Victorian Labour League. *July 1880.*
- T8/7/4      *Circular*      Printed circular from Trades Hall, Melbourne (William E Murphy) informing the Victorian Operative Bricklayers Society of a resolution adopted by the Trades Hall Committee that a second Intercolonial Trades Union Congress be held in Melbourne in 1884. *27 December 1883.*
- T8/7/4      *Circular*      Printed circular from the second Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, Parliamentary Committee, Trades Hall (Melbourne). The circular refers to bills before the Victorian Parliament (Legalisation of Trade Unions, Factories & Workshop Amendment Act, courts of conciliation and Employers Liability Bill) and requests a donation to help support the work of the Committee in the Victorian Parliament. *7<sup>th</sup> July 1884.*

### **Second Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (Melbourne, 1884)**

*History of Labour and Machinery.*

*The history of capital and labour in all lands and ages: their past conditions, present relation, and outlook for the future...together with an encyclopaedia of Australasian and foreign statistics....*

Includes chapters on Trade Union Congresses and a detailed report of the Second Trade Union Congress. Sydney, Oceanic Publishing, 1888.

### **Third Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (Sydney, 1885)**

P92/20      *Letterbook*

Presscopy letters of the Trades Union Parliamentary Committee (Victoria) appointed by the Intercolonial Trades Union Congress. Contains names of Victorian societies and their delegates to the Congress, a report of meetings between delegates and the Committee and list of subjects recommended by the Committee for discussion at the Congress. Volume includes correspondence with parliamentarians re political issues of interest to the labour movement (ie Trade Union Act, Factories and Workshop Amendment Bill, 'sweating system', apprentices).

**Fifth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (Brisbane, 1888)**

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|----------------------|-------------------|--|
| E97/7                | <i>Letter</i>     | Covering letter from Trades Hall Council, Melbourne (J G Barnett) to Mr Hurdsfield discussing the draft of Scheme Intercolonial Labor Federation as agreed at the recent conference in Brisbane. <i>30 May 1889.</i> |
| K3802<br>(T39/74/17) | <i>Photograph</i> | Group photograph of attendees of the Fifth Intercolonial Trades Congress, held at Brisbane. <i>March 1888.</i>   |

**Sixth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress (Hobart, 1889)**

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|-------|----------------------------|---|
| E97/7 | <i>Circular Invitation</i> | Printed invitation and attachment from the Trades and Labour Council, Hobart to the Trades and Labour Council, Ballarat informing them of the Sixth Intercolonial Trades and Labour Union Congress, 5 <sup>th</sup> February 1889. Attached to the circular is a list of subjects for debate. A covering letter from the Trades and Labour Council, Hobart is also attached. <i>27<sup>th</sup> October 1888.</i> |
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**Seventh Intercolonial Trades Union Congress of Australasia (Ballarat, 1891)**

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|-----------|--|---|
| E97/18/9  | <i>Circular Invitation</i>                   | Printed invitation and attachment from the Congress Committee, Ballarat Trades and Labour Council to Ironmoulders Society informing them of the Seventh Intercolonial Trades Union Congress. Attached to the Circular is a list of subjects recommended by the "Trades' and Labor bodies throughout Australasia...for debate".  |
| E97/18/11 | <i>Printed Circular</i>                      | Circular from Melbourne Trades Hall Council requesting financial assistance from affiliates for the Ballarat Council expenses in relation to the Congress, 1891. Signed by David Bennet, Secretary. <i>1891</i>   |
| E97/18/12 | <i>Reports of Standing Orders Committee</i>  | Report recording the proposals adopted by the Congress, amendments made to clauses, standing order for the next meeting and order of business. Copies of the report include handwritten amendments noting which items were carried. <i>April 1891.</i>  |
| E97/18/13 | <i>Trade Mark Committee Report</i>           | Report of the Trade Mark Committee with recommendations to Congress. Handwritten amendments note that all motions were carried. <i>1891.</i>  |
| E97/18/14 | <i>Report of the Committee on Federation</i> | Report of the Committee appointed by the Seventh Intercolonial Trades and Labour Congress to draft a scheme for the federation of the labour unions throughout Australasia. See item E97/18/15 for the draft scheme presented to the Congress. <i>1891.</i>   |
| E97/18/15 | <i>Draft Scheme of Federation</i>            | Draft of proposal advocating federation of labour unions prepared for and presented to the Congress. Submitted by the Seventh Intercolonial Trades and Labour Congress to the Labor Councils and Labour Unions of Australasia. Sections of the report include: preamble, name, constitutions, objects, payments, organization, general council, general executive, special general executive meetings, provinces, provincial councils, provincial executives, organization of districts, district council and action of disturbances. Handwritten |

- amendments note which items were carried and amendments made. *April 1891.*
- E97/18/16      *Draft Scheme of Federation*      This draft scheme arose from an intercolonial conference of delegates held in Sydney and convened by the Australian Labour Federation (Queensland) to prepare a scheme for the creation of an 'Australasian Federation of Labour' to be presented to the Seventh Trades and Labour Congress. *February 1891.*
- E97/19      *Minute Book*      Minutes of the Congress Committee appointed by the Ballarat Trades and Labor Council to arrange preliminaries of the Congress. Includes a list of the members of the Committee. *June 1890 - May 1891.*
- E97/20      *Report of the Proceedings of the Congress*      Includes introduction by John Willson, the Secretary of the Congress, names of officer and committee, societies represented at the Congress with names of delegates, names of societies in Australasia and their secretaries, list of subjects submitted to the Congress, official report of the proceedings of the Congress and Parliamentary Committees' reports. *1891.*
- E97/21      *Report*      Printed report of the Committee on Political Reform appointed by the Seventh Intercolonial Trades and Labor Congress to draft a scheme for political reform. Report includes title (the National Political Reform League), preamble, rules and platform. *1891.*
- E97/7      *Press Cutting*      Newspaper cutting from Ballarat Courier. Letter to the editor discussing the Industrial Labor League and its aims and objects. Refers to the "Labor Congress to be held in a few days".
- K2209-K2319      *Photographs*      Individual photographs of delegates to the Congress set in an illuminated board. *April 1891.*

**Eighth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress of Australasia (Adelaide, 1898)**

- E97/7      *Circular*      Printed circular, from Trades Hall Council, Melbourne (J G Barnett), suggesting a meeting in Adelaide and requesting unions to send delegates to "conference of labor bodies and kindred associations" to be held at Trades Hall, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1898. Refers to previous Intercolonial Trades Union Congresses and that no congress had taken place for a significant period of time. *7 March 1898.*
- E97/7      *Invitation*      Printed invitation to Ballarat Trades Council titled "Adelaide Labor Conference. September 1898". Refers to Labor conference held in Melbourne in April 1897 and its decision to held a similar 'gathering' in Adelaide. Outlines the subjects discussed at the 1897 Melbourne conference and notes those items recommended to the Parliament Committees and resolutions carried. *1898.*
- M14 Reel 1      *Minute Book*      Report by the President of the Trades Hall Council referring to the Conference and to a subsequent Conference in Brisbane in May, 1899. *9 September 1898.*

### Related records

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|------------|---------------------------|---|
| T51/24/1   | <i>Photograph</i>         | Photograph of the Intercolonial Printers' Conference, Trades Hall, Melbourne. <i>November 1888</i>  |
| M54 Reel 8 | <i>Shearing Agreement</i> | Microfilm copy of Shearing Agreement and Agreement for employees engaged during shearing adopted by Intercolonial Conferences held in Melbourne and Sydney. <i>1890</i> |

### Published sources

Murphy, D J (ed), *Labor in politics. The state Labor parties in Australia, 1880-1920*, University of Queensland Press, 1975

*International Free Trade Congress. Report of the Proceedings of the International Free Trade Congress London August 1908*. Westminster, Caxton House, [1908]

Partington, Geoffrey in: H R Nicholls Society. Seminar (1st:1986: Melbourne, Vic.) *Arbitration in contempt: the proceedings of the inaugural seminar of the HR Nicholls Society held in Melbourne, 28 February-2 March, 1986*. Melbourne: H R Nicholls Society, c1986

### More information

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