# ABLative No.9, Autumn 1989

# Railway Rambles.

**Short notices on sources in the Archives relating to railways and railworkers, provided by staff.**

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**Australian Council of Trade Unions**

Information on railways can be found scattered throughout the ACTU collection. Key issues are usually reported in the minutes of the Emergency and Executive Committees which cover the years 1927 to 1979. For example the Queensland rail strike of 1948 was discussed at Emergency Committee meetings from March to August with supporting documents being found in a file entitled 'Railway Strike, Queensland' in the Secretary's subject file series.

Congress papers held for the years 1927 to 1985 are another likely source. In 1957 a Conference of Unions was convened by the ACTU to consider the co-ordination of transport in Australia. This issue was discussed in the Executive Report presented to Congress in 1957. Further consideration was given to the idea by the Executive and can be followed in the minutes for 1957 and 1958.

Particular disputes were often considered by specially convened meetings and the record of these discussions are located in the minutes files.

After the establishment of the Industry Groups in 1957 key issues affecting railways were directed to the Transport Group for deliberation. Railway unions were represented on the Group. Copies of mintues of Group meetings are held in the Secretary's subject files for the years 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1973.

Other relevant files can be found in various Industrial Officers' records for the 1970s and 1980s, and in the Legal Officer's records a file can be found which deals with the XPT Manning Dispute. (Deposit Nos. N21, N58, N8, Z144 and Z282).

**Association of Railway professional officers in Australia**

The Association of Railway Professional Officers of Australia was formed in 1919 and registered in July 1921. It covers railway employees who have professional qualifications such as engineers, doctors, nurses, architects, surveyors etc.

The Archvies holds four metres of records from the Federal office and New South Wales Branch. This small collection presents a very narrow picture of this union's activities with the most comprehensive record being the minutes of Annual General Meetings and Council Meetings of the NSW Branch for the years 1933 to 1970. Other Branch records include correspondnence files covering the year 1960 to 1973, arbitration records 1959-1973, and promotion appeals files 1968 to 1978.

Federal Office records comprise copies of Federal Council and Federal Committee of Management meeting minutes for the years 1963 to 1972 and seven files of the General Secretary containing correspondence with the Treasurer and Branches dating from 1967 to 1978 (Deposit Nos. E233 and N1).

**National Union of Rail workers photographs**

About 200 photographs are part of two National Union of Railworkers collections held. Dates are uncertain for many but they generally cover 1900-1935. They are fragile but the clarity is excellent. Train accidents are graphically brought to life in a series of pictures for Colo Vale 1900, Blandford nd, Murrurundi 1908, Sunshine c1925, Stanwell Park 1907 and 1908, Sydenham 1901 and Aberdeen 1926.

Special railway tools of trade, equipment, workers' tents, workshops, loco sheds, barracks (at Harden), the contents of an ambulance box, a scene showing how railway takings were paid into the bank in 1900 and the inevitable engines at their best - special trains, and worst - when long out of service, all help to provide an interesting look at a pre-war rail workers' world.

Among the outstanding pictures are several interiors of the Railway Institute gymnasium and staged gymnastic displays. men and women posed or poised in flight, demonstrate suitable exercise activities in 1906. (Deposits E163 and N7).

**Photograph of an 'aerotrain'**

A propelled driven locomotive powered by an aeroplane engine, shown at a Moscow railway station with a crowd of people on the platform.

The photograph was taken before the locomotive crashed on 23 July 1921 on the Kursk line while taking delegates attending the 3rd Congress of the Communist International on an excursion. Several passengers were killed in the accident, including Tom Sergaev, Russian Minister for Mines, and Paul Freeman, an Australian Socialist Party delegate to the Congress. Sergaev is photographed leaning on his elbow in the cabin. Freeman and Paddy Lamb, anotoher Australian who rode on the aerotrain, may be among the crowd on the platform, but they have not been identified. (Deposit P126/69).

According to John Playford's\* notes (P128/158), the aerotrain was invented by an Australian engineer called Brennan. The print was obtained from Sergaev's son Major-General Artyom Feodrovich Sergaev, by Mr Eric Fried of the Department of Russian at Queensland University.

\*For further writings of John Playford See also ABLative No.8, Spring 1988

**Everleigh Loco Workshop Shop Committee**

In 1926 the Labor Council of New South Wales drafted the original Constitution for Shop Committees in railway workshops. Shop Committees were formed in Eveleigh, Chullora and Enfield. A Council of Railway shop Committees was formed in 1927.

The delegates to the Eveleigh Loco Workshop Shop Committee were elected by each Section of the Workshop. As well as industrial issues, the minutes of the Shop Committee, 1940-1965, deal in detail with health and safety issues, amenities, and social and political activities at the Workshop and elsewhere. The minutes give an elaborate picture of everyday life in the Workshop.

There is an interesting nexus between shop committees and trade unions which is evident in some of the minutes. For example in the early 1950s a conciliation matter which the Shop Committee had pursued at length was no longelrll making headway, and it was therefore resolved 'to hand this matter over to the Shop Stewards to enable them to have Union action taken' (Z305/Box 1, 29 August 1950).

A letter from the Tool Room Sectional Committee, tabled at the same meeting illustrates the more problematical aspects of the relationship between the shop committee and trade unions:

To the Hon Secretary Central Shop Committee

Dear Sir

In view of a statement made by a Delegate on Central Shop Committee suggesting that Delegates who are members of the AEU may be withdrawn from the Committee if they vote in favour of the explusion of Delegates who continue to work for Central Council of Railway Shop Committees, I have by direction of the Tool Room Section Committee to inform you that prior to the vote being taken on this question by your Committee last month, a plebiscite was taken throughout the Tool and Jig room.

The plebiscite resulted as follows:-

54 in favour, 19 against. Our Delegate Bro Kirkman is therefore instructed by the majority of the rank and file in the Tool room to vote for the expulsion of Delegates who do not abide byt he decision which was made by your Committee.

Yours fraternally

JP Williams, Hon.ASec.Tool Room

For many years the Shop Committee and, the trade union based, Combined Unions Shop Stewards Committee operated side by side in the Loco Workshop. Records of both organisations are held in the Archives at Z305.

According to AEU organiser, Alan Wilson, the demise of the Railway Shop Committees was effected by a restrcitive 'Charter fir Shop Committees' adopted by the 1961 ACTU Congress (Modern Unionist, June 1971). The 'Charter' determined that each union shall elect to the Shop Committee representatives (preferably shop stewards) from their members in the establishment. (Deposit No Z305).

**Railway Journals**

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre keeps a reference set of all serials produced by depositing organisations. Good runs, with some gaps, exist for state branches of the Australian Railways Union and the National Union of Railworkers (NSW). In addition we catalogue isolated publications found in the various collections sot aht occasional overseas railway publications are found, as are short lived special issues produced for particular local events such as strike committee bulletins.

Often the union journal is the only source when original records are unavailable. This is so for minutes of committees found in Branch journals. Sometimes also the routine format of the journal makes it an easy reference point for published decisions of State Council, Conference reports, award changes and current wage rates.

The journals provide information on union concerns and services to members. Articles, reports, comics - a full page in The Railroad of the 1930s - details of scholarships, income tax advice, provident fund details and obituaries, are just a few items noted. Details of social acitivities offered to members and information on railway women's committees are best found in the journals.

The Archives holds a set, with some gaps, of The Railway and Tramway Review, first published in April 1888.

**Sugar Trains**

Some details of the information on locomotives and the narrow gauge railways in the CSR Limited collection can be found in ABLative No.6 .One particular series in that collection contains two photograph albums entitled Rolling Stock Nos. 1 & 2 (Z109 Boxes 110, 111). Covering 1899-1957 the pictures show cane, sugar and coal trucks, locomotives, quadricycles, first and second class passenger cars, drivers, passengers and workmen. Details include dates, where used, cost, manufacturer, plan-numbers and indications of improvements or modifications made. Several pictures are included of the early motor tricycles used on the NSW Government railways. The original was said to be made by Bennett & Wood in 1913.

**Railway Engineers**

The files of the No.2 Queensland Division of the Amalgamated Engineering Union reflect the Union's strong membership base in railway workshops.

For example, detailed records of an 11 week strike in the North Queensland railways from June to October 1914 are held (E220/16). The dispute began over claims for improved rates and conditions for engineering mechanics in the Townsville Railway Workshops and spread to affect Charters Towers, Hughenden, Cloncurry, Bowen and Innisfail.

Interrupted by the war crisis, the men on strike offered to return to work, but the Department replied that they could only be reinstated by making individual applications for work as new hands.

The terms of reinstatement thus became the main issue in dispute. According to the Divisional Organiser, Robert Carroll, the men's display of solidarity won not only reasonable conditions for a joint return to work, but also healthy rerspect for a Union not previously known for its militancy.

Some of the most comprehensive material of this sort is held with the records of the AEU's Ipswich District Committee and Ipswich Branches. A Branch of the, then, Amalgamated Society of Engineers was opened at Ipswich in 1865.

Minutes of the Branch are held from 1885. Ipswich District Committee minutes are held from 1934 to 1968 and its filing systems which are in extraordinarily good order, document its operations from 1930-1967. Jack Devereux, who alter became National President of the AMWU, was Fivisional Organiser and Secretary of the Ipswich District Committee for many years.

As the Ipswich railway engineers have been centrally involved in a number of disputes, the records are very valuable. for example, the minutes of the District Committee meetings in 1948, not only include details of debate and resolutions regarding the railwlay strike which lasted from February to April, but also written reports by Jack Deveraux of the conference with the Premier on 4 March and of the AEU conference held on 31 March and 1 April. Further records relating to this particular dispute are held in Seamen's Union and Waterside Workers' Federation deposits. (AMWU Queensland deposits E220 and Z240).

**Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen**

The AFULE archives are vast. They consist of records of the Federal office; South Austrail, New South Wales, Tasmanian and Queensland Divisions; and many of the branches within the Divisions. NSW Divisional records alone are in excess of 60 shelf metres, and include mintues of general and executive meetings from 1883.

The AFULE archives include one of the treasures of the Australian Labor Movement; the minute book of the Bathurst Branch of the Union which documents JB Chifley's activities in the Branch from 1919 to 1931.

The contents are not sensational, but they do demonstrate Chifley's deep involvement in the every day issues of his trade union. See facsimile.

Alan Wilson, who was Secretary of the Council of Railway Shop Committees, worked as a railway fitter in Bathurst from 1924 to 1927 and relates that Ben Chiflaey was known as a good bloke.

One, who when bringing his engine back, would book only a minimum of repairs to be effected, but they would be essential and need to be attended to. (Z102/Box 200).

A slip of paper in the minute book quotes from Chifley's last speech at the NSW Conference of the ALP, June 1951:

After the long association I have had with the Labor Movement, knowing all its faults and its difficulties, and all the things people do and say, I have such an affection for the Labor Movement that it overrides any other consideration for me. I can no longer be called a young radical, but if I think a thing is worth fighting for, no matter what the penalty is I will fight for the right, and truth and justice will always prevail.

**The Railway Hotel**

In the Tooth & Co. collection held by the Archives, files and hotel cards exist for many of the hotels called "the Railway" built at the turn of the century. A person could travel the state from George Stree Sydney to country centres such as Orange, Dubbo, Parkes and Wagga on to smaller townships such as Mumbil, Brereza, Spring Hill and Koorawatha staying in a Railway Hotel at every destination.

The hotels followed the expansion of rail. Between 1870 and 1930 the railways moved hundreds of people at a time over great distances dominating the transport scene. Wayside inns virtually disappeared but at the fortunate junctions where passengers transferred from one train to another new hotels with large numbers of bedrooms were built.

At the ends of the lines in the citites three or four storey hotels sprawled adjacent to the railway stations. Amost universally they were christened the Railway or the Commercial. A few were daringly named the Terminus or the Junction but beyond that the imagination boggled.

In these buildings the public bar was minor and ancillary. The ground floor was given over to writing rooms, smoking rooms, a billiard room and a large dining room. The vast majority of these hotels were substantial establishments.

Clientele came primarily from the business sector. Growth of businesses from small, intimate family concerns into large coorporations with interests throughout the nation resulted in an increased coming and going. Fares on the inter-colonial railways were far dearer than those on the intercolonial ships which had been plying for decades so that, while the railways encouraged people to travel, passengers came from the wealthier section of the community.

This presented hotels with a whole new and expanded horizon. grand htoels close to stations arose to take advantage of the situation.

Another consequence of the expansion of rail combined with the changes in the nature of the business community was the increase in the number of commercial travellers who swarmed out of the city. They became an important and reliable source of hotel custom. It was largely due to the commercial travellers that general standards in hotels were raised and maintained.

Publicans who ignored their demands did so at their own risk. To achieve the approval of the Commercial Travellers' Association was the most sought after of accolades for every hotel outside Sydney.

From the Tooth & Co. collection whicih has photographs and information on NSW hotels 1920-1970, it is clear that nearly every major country centre and many smaller townships had a Railway Hotel. They were built to cater for the new accommodation demands instigated by the expansion of the railways and reflected a huge change in societal behaviour brought about by that expansion (Deposit N60).

Ref: JM Freeland. The Australian Pub. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1977

**'P' Collections**

The collections identified by the prefix 'P' include publications, pamphlets and records of individual persons. Some include references to railwlay matters. Of these, the most significant deposit is that of Lloyd Ross, formerly NSW State Secretary of the Australian Railways Union. The material includes minutes of the executive and council meetings (1912-1919) of the NSW Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Service Association, predecesssor of the ARU in New South Wales. Minutes of some sub-branch meetings of the ARU are also included, though these are not extensive. As well, in this deposit there are some important runs of official publications of NSW railway unions, especially for the periods 1911-1917 abd 1930-1969 (P103).

**Abedare Railway Co.**

Continental Australia was the scene of enormous railway activity in the second half of last century and the early years of this one. Although we tend to think of railways as being government enterprises (and thoroughly unprofitable ones at that) much of this early activity was initiated by private railway companies even though by 1900 most of these had been taken over by the State.

The survival rate of the records of the private operators of railwayss is, in general, no better than that of the companies. The Noel Butlin Archives Centre, however, has a few interesting records relating to railwlay operations by companies.

The principal group of these and the only actual rlailway company deposit is that of the Abedare Railway Company (Deposit 25).

Strictly speaking this was hardly a company in any real sense, being initially a joint venture between the Aberdare Collieries of NSW Ltd and the Australian Agricultural Company Ltd and run by a board of control of two.

In was formed in 1901 and operated from 1903 until 1914 carrying passengers and freight from Cessnock to Maitland where it connected with another private line belonging to the East Greta Coal Mining Company ltd and thence to the main line railway. In 1906 the railway became the sole property of the Australian Agricultural Company.

In 1913 the Australian Agricultural Company offered to sell to Huddart Parker Ltd its Hebburn Colliery and the Aberdare Railway. In that year the railway returned a net profit of over £20,000. No clear valuation of the railway appears from the records relating to the sale but there are indications that the Company placed a value on the business of approximately £200,000. The sale was completed and took effect from 1 July 1914, after which it passes beyond the ken of the Archives.

Records include a complete set of cash books, journals and ledgers 1903-14; mintues and correspondence of the board of control 1903-1906; statements (audited fortnightly) of receipts for goods and passenger traffic 1904-14; fortnightly pay sheets 1909-14; and correspondence covering the negotiations for the sale of the colliery and railway 1913-1914.

In particular, the papers relating to the sale represent a fascinating vignette of pre-World War 1 commercial practice and deserve closer attention, perhaps as an essay topic or the subject of an article.

**The Australian Agricultural Company**

In addition to the discrete records of the Aberdare Railway Company, the Australian Agricultural Company records can throw light on many of the mroe mundane aspects of railway operation such as importation of rails, locomotives and rolling stock, tract and bridge constlruction costs, relations with government and so on.

Involvement by the company in reilways came about partly in connection with the Aberdare Railway Company and partly as a necessary concomitant of moving coal from its own mines to the waterfront.

Much of this material is to be found in the despatches from the Superintenedent to the Court of Directors and the despatches from London to Australia (Deposits 1 and 78).