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BADGES OF THE NSW GENERAL STRIKE 1917

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Ill. 1. Amalgamated Rail & Tramways Service Association.
Brass enamelled blue. Height 28mm. Width 23mm.
Maker: Amor.

In July 1917, while Australians were embroiled in the conflict in the trenches in France, a conflict of a different sort occurred in NSW that ultimately caused approximately 70,000 workers to strike. The origin of this industrial trouble was the introduction of a time card system in the railway and tramway workshops at Randwick and Everleigh. This system was based on an American idea that entailed foremen and leading hands maintaining a record of the time spent by workers on given tasks. Workers protested on the 24th July as this system had been suggested earlier in the war as a means of increasing productivity but had been discarded following discussions between the unions and the New South Wales Railways Commissioners.

The reintroduction of the system and subsequent discussions, which failed to reach a solution, resulted in 5780 workers in the Randwick tramway and Everleigh railway workshops ceasing work as from 9am on the 2nd of August 1917. The main union involved was the Amalgamated Rail and Tramways Service Association (ill. 1) which had formed in March 1886. Following discussions with other railway unions, a strike defence committee was established which passed a resolution on the 3rd of August, calling on all unions whose

members worked for the New South Wales Railways to cease work from the 6th of August 1917. The strike quickly spread to other workers outside the railways who went on strike in sympathy, before their unions were officially involved.

The Trolley Draymen and Carters Union entered the strike on the 10th of August and the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia stopped work on the same day. Other unions involved included the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation, usually known as the Miners Federation and the Seamens Union of Australasia.

The New South Wales Government considered the strike a challenge to its prestige and reacted accordingly by arresting the leading members of the Strike Defence Committee. The authorities also raised a volunteer labour force of over 7,000 who were recruited with the inducement of 12/- a day wages. These men were mainly from country areas and were used to replace strikers in essential industries. They supplemented the workers who remained on the job throughout the strike and were known as Loyalists and the unionists who returned to work before the strike ended were called "Earlybirds". Between them they maintained a skeleton railway service throughout



Ill. 2. Lilywhite Association.
Silver. Height 28mm. Width 22mm. Maker: William Trantum.

the duration of the strike. On the 23rd of August the Amalgamated Rail and Tramway Service Association and three other railway unions were deregistered. In all over twenty unions were deregistered as a result of their involvement in this strike. This cleared the way for pro-government loyalists unions to be established in the railways and on the waterfront. The strike could not be sustained beyond the beginning of September and the unions were defeated mainly due to the desperate financial situation of most of the railwaymen. Negotiations were held between the Strike Defence Committee and the under-secretary of the New South Wales Department

of Labor and Industry, which resulted in the implementation of the card for a trial period. Work was resumed on the 11th of September 1917 with the understanding that the strikers would not be penalised. The government failed to keep this promise and the strikers lost their seniority and were rehired in jobs below their previous positions while over 3,000 men were refused jobs at all.

The unionists who remained on strike to the end formed an association known as the Lilywhites. This was a secret organisation and very little is known on its organisation. The future Prime Minister of Australia J. B. (Ben) Chifley was known to have been a member. They issued a badge (ill. 2) sometime after August



Ill. 3. Loyal Workers Industrial Crisis 1917
Copper painted red, white, blue. Height 29mm. Width 26mm.
Maker: Unknown.



Ill. 4. Trolley Draymen & Carters Union Loyal Member 1917 Strike
 Brass enamelled blue, white. Height 31mm. Width 26mm.
 Maker: Simes Sydney.

1918. The manufacturer was William Trantum a jeweller from the Sydney suburb of Newtown. Friction between the Loyalists and Lilywhites occurred in the workshops with some incidents resulting in Loyalists being physically assaulted. The Loyalists and volunteers were considered scabs by unionists and many others in the community. Their lives were affected for many years, for example some publicans would not allow them into their hotels. The badge given to the Loyalists by the authorities (ill. 3) is very rare. As no

man would have dared wear this badge in public without experiencing verbal or physical abuse it is reasonable to assume that their rarity is due to most being discarded shortly after issue. The badge has no makers name probably due to the manufacturer preferring to remain anonymous than risk provoking their own industrial troubles.

The Trolley Draymen and Carters Union issued a Loyal Badge (ill. 4) to its members who remained on strike until the end. This union issued a badge each year as evidence of



Ill. 5. The Carters & Drivers Industrial Union of Australia in commemoration of industrial trouble
 Brass enamelled blue. Height 22mm. Width 27mm.
 Maker: Bridgland & King.

membership but this was the only one ever enamelled. The Victorian based Federated Carters and Drivers Industrial Union of Australia struck a badge (ill. 5) in support of the strike. These two unions amalgamated in 1928 to form the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers Union of Australia which became the Transport Workers Union of Australia in 1943. The deregistered Amalgamated Rail and

Tramways Service Association was unable to offer effective resistance to the expansion of the Loyalists Unions until it was registered in February 1921. As the Australian Railways Union (ill. 6). The bitterness and ill feeling resulting from this strike lasted with the unionists for the rest of their lives and would effect industrial relations within the railways for generations.



Ill. 6. Australian Railways Union 1921
Brass enamelled red, blue, white. Height 32mm.
Width 24mm. Maker: Podger & Simpson