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Cecilia M Shelley: Western Australian Labour Activist

1893-1986

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Murdoch University

1992
### Abbreviations

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<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>Award</td>
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<td>Court</td>
<td>The Court of Arbitration in Western Australia</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia</td>
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<td>DLP</td>
<td>Democratic Labor Party</td>
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<td>HCCTREU</td>
<td>Hotel Club, Caterers, Tearoom, and Restaurant Employees' Industrial Union of Workers, Perth.</td>
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<td>IAC</td>
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<td>Trades and Labour Council</td>
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Western Australia, as a western nation, experienced a growth in industrialisation and service industries, albeit gradually, during the twentieth century. The consequent division of labour and deskillng of the workforce increased management control. This was tempered by the growth of union power. Union leadership, worker unity and the market economy governed the degree of success of worker demands. Until the late twentieth century union leadership rose from the ranks of the male union members.

Cecilia Moore Shelley was the exception to this rule. She was the first paid female secretary in Australia of a Union with a membership from both sexes. (1920-1922 and 1929-1967) She believed there was a desperate need for change in the working conditions of the predominantly women workers in the hotel and catering industry and did something about it. She also believed that she could facilitate these changes. Her dedication to leadership and fighting the bosses spread over 48 years. Many times she demonstrated she had 'the moral pluck to organise and to struggle for what [was] necessary.' Her life, once she joined the workforce falls easily into the decades. Significant world, national and state events influenced her thinking and behaviour, whilst several key people influenced the development of her personal philosophy.

Cecilia Moore Shelley was born in Adelaide on 3 January 1893 into a working class family with a militant labour background. Her father, Francis Peter Sheehy, was a brewery worker who protested about his wages and working conditions. He subsequently lost his job. With no prospects of work, the family left in 1897 for Esperance and then moved on to Kalgoorlie, then a gold boom town. Her father, whose surname was changed at some time from the Irish 'Sheehy' to the English 'Shelley', went into business there, as a cordial maker. However the business failed and he sought work in a brewery once again. Her mother, Honora, came to Australia under an Irish girl immigrant scheme. She worked hard providing as best she could on her husband's meagre income. The family lived in a four bedroom house in Boulder. Honora was very strict and maintained high standards for the large family of nine (two boys and seven girls). She endeavoured to protect them from the seamier side of the goldfields life. The family's rules, the constant poverty, the lack of water (before the pipeline) and the red sand were important parts of Cecilia's memories of her childhood. She recalled the value of the pipeline to Kalgoorlie.

1Coastal Hotel and Restaurant Employees Industrial Union was registered in 1901 Subsequently HCCTREU of Perth registered on 8 January 1912. IAC. AN 195/3A, Acc1101, file 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
2 Commissioner Dr Sally Kennedy, interview, Perth,, 12 March 1993.
3 Westralian Worker, 8 July 1921.
5 Goldfields of Western Australia, Oral History Tape, tr 985, Battye Library.
We used to buy water; 2/6 for a kerosene tin of water from the mines. It was hot. We let it cool down. The pipeline made a difference. People had gardens and water tanks but we still shared baths.\(^6\)

With both parents of Irish descent it is not surprising that Cecilia and her brothers and sisters were educated at Boulder Convent School. From an early age it seems that Cecilia refused to accept an inferior position.

I sat next to a girl who said she could read and she could. I couldn't. I went home and asked my mother to let me buy a book - a brown tuppenny one. She gave me tuppence, I bought my first book and now I too could read.\(^7\)

She recalled late in life that lack of books did not deter her from learning. Being keen to learn Cecilia left school able to read, write and do mental arithmetic. This showed an ability to think quickly. She used her mind to outsmart employers - often in verbal combat. However she could not write compositions which may account for her later failure to keep diaries and records in her union work.

'There was no high school in Boulder but I would have had to go to work anyway' Cecilia remembered.\(^8\) So having reached the end of her schooling at 13 or 14 (the date is not certain) Cecilia started work. Employment for females in West Australia was limited. The hotel and catering industry offered 'unskilled' women the opportunity to work, particularly on the goldfields.\(^9\) So her first job was as a kitchen maid in a boarding house near her home.\(^10\) She earned 15/- per week washing dishes, peeling potatoes, scrubbing floors. She recalled that she enjoyed her time there.

There is conflicting evidence as to whether she came to Perth at sixteen or eighteen years of age but certainly her first metropolitan job was as a live-in maid for the Harper family in Havelock Street, Perth. It was a seven-days a week job. Her small room with a candle and a wash dish was her refuge after long days of cleaning, cooking and washing up. There was no time off. One day she rebelled and gave notice. Her angry employer refused to pay her. So, with the encouragement of her mother, Cecilia went to a lawyer. Her right to be paid was asserted in a letter to her employer but otherwise little sympathy was expressed for the 'servant girl'.\(^11\) She soon found another job in a boarding house where she had half a day off per week. 'It was heavenly to have a little bit of time to yourself' But still it was a 14-hour day and

\(^6\)Oral History Tape, tr 985.  
\(^7\)Cecilia Shelley', Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1: Side 1, Battye Library.  
\(^8\)ibid.  
\(^9\)Western Australian Census and Statistics Report, 1901, Murdoch University.  
\(^10\)J Carter, Nothing to Spare, p 94.  
\(^11\)J Carter, Nothing to Spare, p95.
she slept in a room crawling with cockroaches. For these reasons Cecilia changed jobs frequently. She recalled

When you were leaving a job, you never regret it, because you had nothing to lose. You'd get something as bad, or perhaps worse, or a little bit better perhaps.

She was learning first-hand that many employers were loathe to treat staff fairly, particularly the small business proprietors and restauranteurs whose success was dependent on cheap labour. 'Suppression of increased labour demands was therefore essential to their aims,' Brady argues. There was an Award [12/12] which regulated the hours and conditions of work at two levels - the hotels and restaurants which opened seven days a week and the tearooms which closed on Sundays. But little notice was taken of it and the Union secretary, Mr E Tweedhall, must have been fairly ineffectual because low wages, long hours, no provision of lunch and poor living quarters were common. Cecilia constantly referred to these problems and his ineptitude as she recalled her early days working in Perth.

She worked in many hotels, tearooms, cafes and dining room in the country and city. One of her best jobs was at the United Service Hotel in St. Georges Terrace, Perth. There the staff were given three good meals a day and a clean bed. She was able to help one of her sisters with some money as her own needs were met. In contrast, her work at the Albany Bell tearooms was far from pleasant: again long hours, 7-30am till dark, very low wages, and no lunch unless it was stolen and eaten 'on the run'. As a kitchen hand she earned 14/- a week for a six day week. Even the head girls were paid only 21/6 per week. The whole workplace environment, including Albany Bell's attitude, had a great impact on her thinking. Here too, she experienced, perhaps for the first time, praise from and the respect of other workers which was to contribute to her success as a union leader.

Another experience of significance in her early working life involved using a very direct method of dealing with a situation which occurred in a tearooms and coffee shop in Central Hay Street. Cecilia was working there as a waitress. She started work at 7-45 am, often without any breakfast because she could not afford to pay for her room and to eat. The hours were long, often till midnight as there was no spread of shift and workers could be called back at any time. 'It was work or be

12ibid, p 96.
13ibid.
14W Brady, Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry 1900-1925, BA Honours thesis, Murdoch University, p 15.
15Western Australian Arbitration Reports, 1912, Vol X1, Battye Library.
16Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1:1.
17ibid.
sacked', she recollected. Lunch was provided but nothing else. 'We were starved.'

Someone decided to take a stand,

Lil said, "We're going to stop at eleven for a cup of tea, will you join us?" 'I said, I'll be in it, Lil.' So at 11 o'clock, Lil got a cup of tea ready. We stood there trembling from head to foot and had this cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter.

Success! From then on they had a short break at 11 o'clock. Cecilia had now experienced the effectiveness of direct action.

She recounted light-heartedly her popularity with the boys. As a young woman with fiery red hair and a dainty figure she had many boyfriends. She even went to work in the Federal Hotel in Katanning to escape one secret admirer and his red roses. However it was the loss of a particular sweetheart, Allen, whom she met whilst working in Meekatharra that made her think deeply about meaning of World War One. This was one of two major events which raised Cecilia's political consciousness. The first was World War One: the reasons for, and the futility of the war worried her. She was concerned for the number of young men who went off to the front. She was upset for the mothers and sisters whose boys were killed. She was amused at the Women in Khaki who held meetings to encourage men to enlist and was angry at the government campaign for conscription led by Prime Minister Billy Hughes. At a pro-conscription public meeting in the Perth Town Hall she defiantly remained seated while the meeting rose to welcome the Prime Minister Billy Hughes as he arrived. She was surprised at the lack of opposition to conscription at the meeting.

The second major world event which influenced Cecilia, was the Russian Revolution. 'I was walking on air'. 'I attended meetings on the Esplanade and even collected money for the Russian people', Sally Kennedy remembers Cecilia saying that the Russian Revolution showed clearly that workers could rise up with a real force. This realisation made an impact on Cecilia.

At about the same time, although the exact dates are unclear, Cecilia was at one of the Albany Bell tearooms. She complained to her father about her working conditions. He suggested she go to a union meeting. Her fifteen year old sister Lena, whose work as a maid at a boarding house included chopping wood and killing

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18 ibid.
20 ibid.
21 *Oral History Tapes*, tr 171, Tape 1:1.
22 *Oral History Tapes*, tr 171, Tape 1:2.
23 ibid.
24 Commissioner Dr Sally Kennedy, interview, Perth, 12 March 1993.
chooks, went with her. At the meeting the secretary E Tweedhall asked for volunteers to go before the Arbitration Court, so Cecilia and Lena volunteered. They were not frightened of getting the sack.\textsuperscript{25} Thus Cecilia's union life began.

Up till this time little had been achieved by going through the Arbitration Court. Conditions had not improved greatly. The union meetings were packed with women, particularly from Albany Bell tearooms. At one meeting Cecilia defended a group of girls against male abuse and ridicule.\textsuperscript{26} 'I immediately became a hero.'\textsuperscript{27} Cecilia continued to speak out at meetings and quickly gained support. She was elected the Union organiser in the same year, 1919.\textsuperscript{28}

This period in Cecilia's life was punctuated by significant events and meeting people who influenced her thinking and behaviour. Following a Labor Party election rally on the Esplanade when Cecilia and her brothers volunteered their services, she met one such person. Alex McCallum who was Secretary of Trades Hall became a close friend and adviser. It was during one of her early conversations with McCallum that she told of the appalling work conditions within the industry. In her old age she remembered clearly what he said. 'He advised me what to do. "Keep away from the Arbitration Court," he said.'\textsuperscript{29} This advice accompanied lessons about Trades Hall, the Disputes Committee, the role of the State Executive and Labor Party principles generally.

Armed with this knowledge Cecilia, in her capacity as union organiser, threatened to withdraw her workers in order to force the employers to accept the new wage agreement.\textsuperscript{30} This pre-Christmas hotel workers' strike of 1919 was averted when employers accepted the demands believing that the agreement could be ignored. A new Agreement was drawn up to replace the 1916 Award [6/16]. As well as improving all the conditions of work and pay it separated the hotel house staff by putting them under their own Award whilst they remained members of the HCCTREU. But the situation deteriorated when the hoteliers refused to accept the changes. An ultimatum of 'sign the agreement or be black listed' was published by McCallum in the \textit{West Australian}.\textsuperscript{31} Next day, in the same paper, a list was published showing which hotels had signed the agreement. This gave the employees who read the paper a guide as to who should go to work and who should not. The strike was on. Cecilia, proudly recalled how she rushed from one premises to the next calling to

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1:1.}
\textsuperscript{26} W Brady, \textit{Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, p 61.}
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1:2.}
\textsuperscript{28} W Brady, \textit{Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, p 61}
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1:1.}
\textsuperscript{30} W Brady, \textit{Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, p 63.}
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{West Australian, 4 May 1920.}
the girls "Out! All out!" because she knew not many girls read the paper.\textsuperscript{32} However the strike was cancelled as the hoteliers, fearful of the loss of trade, quickly agreed to sign the agreement. The \textit{West Australian} reported: 'The shortest strike in the record of the State was declared off yesterday morning within a couple of hours of its commencement.'\textsuperscript{33} The hotel and public house Award [22/20] and also the catering Award [29/20] were ratified by the Court.

These agreements did not cover Kalgoorlie where the women also went on strike. Cecilia was asked to help prepare a case for them. The value of Cecilia's organising skills were already being recognised with the State Executive not only paying for her to go to Kalgoorlie but also half the cost of her wages whilst there.\textsuperscript{34} Cecilia organised the women themselves to tell their stories to the Court. The application for increased wages through a new Eastern Goldfields Award was upheld. 'She had experienced first hand the effectiveness of women, united in a stand to improve their working lives' Brady argues.\textsuperscript{35}

Flushed with the success of her work with the Eastern Goldfields union Cecilia determined to improve the metropolitan workers' awards. Through her dedication and belief in the value of personal contact the union membership increased by 100\% from 554 to 1014 in just twelve months. The members of the union, particularly the women, realised they had a voice. Cecilia was elected union secretary in November 1920, thus becoming the first paid female union secretary in Australia of a union with membership from both sexes. This union, HCCTREU, included waitresses, stewards, chefs, cooks, kitchenhands, yardmen and housemaids. At this stage they were covered by three awards - 22/20 for the restaurants, coffee palaces and tearooms employees; 27/20 for the hotels and public houses employees; and 12/20 for Club employees.

Cecilia was fired with enthusiasm and, with the Disputes Committee behind her, she issued the threat of another pre-Christmas strike over a new set of wages' demands for hotel and catering employees similar to those in the Goldfield's Award. But this time it was met with a more organised challenge by the major employers ULVA and Restaurant Employers who were still smarting at the earlier wage increases. A strike was avoided by the employers' threat of using lock-out methods to counter any strike action. Finally both parties agreed to put the negotiations before a private arbitrator. Magistrate Canning presided at the meetings. Brady argues that Cecilia's talent as a negotiator and advocate was demonstrated at these meetings.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32}Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 1:2.  
\textsuperscript{33}West Australian, 6 May 1920.  
\textsuperscript{34}Minutes, 6, 8 June 1920, \textit{ALP State Executive}, MN 300, Acc 1573A Vol. 3/20.(WAA).  
\textsuperscript{35}W Brady, \textit{Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry}, pp 62-63.  
\textsuperscript{36}ibid.
Drawing on her own work experiences, her Kalgoorlie experience and her knowledge of eastern states' awards she successfully demolished the employers' arguments, even those of the skilful Albany Bell. Using tactics highlighting society's attitudes to women's work and the need for protection of women she convinced Canning of the need for improved conditions in relation to hours, spread of shifts, holidays and wages. The Canning Agreement was accepted early in 1921. This private agreement provided wage increases ranging from 10% to 28% for all hotel staff and cooks, waitress and kitchenhands in other catering establishments. Even though a lower paid category of junior worker was introduced as a compromise, the whole set of negotiations was immediately seen as a victory for Cecilia.37

Hardly had this been achieved than Cecilia was involved in another confrontation in March 1921, this time over the dismissal of a waitress who was sacked for collecting union dues whilst employed by the Esplanade Hotel. As this action was seen as victimisation of a union member, the Union felt obliged to take action. A strike was organised by Cecilia but without the Dispute Committee's authorisation. The twenty two week long strike met with hostility not only from the employers but also the public. Fear was mounting as the growth and strength of unions was seen as a threat to the stability of society. Not just the long Seamen's strike but the strikes by the Kalgoorlie miners, the civil servants and rail workers were all very clear in everyone's memories.38 Reports in the Westralian Worker revealed the level of employer anxiety. Deputations and submissions to the Government asked for firm action to be taken against the strikers.39 The police arrested Cecilia as 'the prime trouble maker' whilst she was in the picket line outside the Esplanade.40

Apart from such expressions of concern, little support was given to the women by the men, other unions or the Disputes Committee. However, when the focus of the dispute changed from a sacked woman worker to the issue of Asian employment, the involvement spread. Chinese labour used as strike breakers at the Esplanade Hotel went against all union principles, including that of preference. The Disputes Committee took control.42 Contributions to the strike fund increased. Picket lines

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37ibid, pp 64-68.
38West Australian, 28 January 1921.
39Westralian Worker, 25 March 1921.
40ibid, 8 July 1921.
41Minutes, 7 July 1921, ALP State Executive, MN 300, Acc 1573A, Vol 3/20.(WAA).
42W Brady, Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel Catering Industry, pp 70-71.
and rally numbers grew. At one rally, where John Curtin spoke, 7000 people were reported to have attended. But the protracted negotiations combined with the employers' ability to withstand the financial strain meant that ultimately the strike failed. The women needed to return to work; the union could not offer sufficient financial support. Despite this, the women had 'showed their willingness to support their fellow workers by remaining on strike for twenty two weeks' Brady argues. Cecilia, too, reaffirmed her conviction in the strength of women's unity and demonstrated her ability to mobilise the women in her Union, an ability which she would use later.

Another person to influence her life in those years was George Ryce, 'the most brilliant young man in the working class movement in the West . . . militant to the core and a shrewd tactician in strike struggles', according to Justina Williams. Through her involvement with him, both on a deeply personal level and political level, Cecilia's life was enhanced and her horizons broadened. At his encouragement she attended the Labor Study Circle which was partly organised by him. This group offered education and discussion in Marxist and Leninist theories. She believed this new political outlook provided her with a vision of hope. However her personal commitment to Ryce and the political principles he taught were part of the circumstances which ultimately led to her expulsion from the ALP on 23 November 1925.

In the years preceding to that event her boundless energy was evident. Not only was she an ordinary member of the ALP but she was a member of the Metropolitan District Council. She was nominated for ALP Senate pre-selection in October 1924 and for Vice-president of the State Executive in November of that same year. But she failed to achieve either position. She also was a very active member of the Labor Women's Organisation and held the position of secretary in 1923. But the right wing of this organisation led by May Holman organised a move against her membership by calling for an examination and overhaul of functions in the Organisation. This led to her expulsion in 1925.

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43 Minutes, 3,4 July 1921, ALP State Executive, MN300, Acc 1573A, Vol 3/20.(WAA)
44 ibid, 18 July 1921.
45 W Brady, Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, p 73.
46 J Williams, The First Furrow, Willagee, p 89.
47 Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, 24 March 1993.
48 J Williams, The First Furrow, pp 89-93.
50Minutes, 1 July, 3 November 1924, ALP State Executive, MN 300, Acc 1753A, Vol 3/20,(WAA).
51 WA Organisation of Labour Women, Metropolitan District Council, MN300, Acc 1319A, File 194/22.(WAA).
52 J Williams, The First Furrow, p 156.
It seems that the request by two senior women box factory workers for Cecilia to organise the Stone's box factory strike in 1923 and the subsequent formation of a union for those girls combined with her strong stand beside Ryce in the 1925 British Seamen's strike contributed to the push against her within the ALP. Her association with other members of the CPA placed her too far left for many to accept her. One of her dearest friends with whom she worked on many projects to help the working class, especially women, was Katharine Susannah Prichard. Comrade Katharine, as she preferred to be called, was one of the foundation members of CPA.

Cecilia's personal development and commitment to a better future for the world and for women must be in part attributed to her relationship with Katharine Susannah Prichard. Their friendship was strong, with Cecilia often staying with Katharine over the years. Cecilia's understanding of Marxism and involvement in the practical application of the basic concepts were through Katharine Susannah Prichard. Cecilia admired her. 'There was no other real intellectual in the branch of the CPA.' She was prepared to follow her leadership in the struggle for better conditions and for peace.

Following the Esplanade strike George Ryce held the office of HCCTREU secretary from 1922 to 1929 and Cecilia returned to her previous position of union organiser. Her union work was again concentrated on the personal recruitment of members, as membership had dropped by 20% to 800 after the failed strike in 1921, the establishing better conditions and formulating new awards for the growing country towns. Four new awards were handed down, extending the Union's jurisdiction to include Bunbury [6/24], Collie [25/24], Northam [28/24] and State Hotels [19/24]. The first three were similar to the Metropolitan Award [3/24] which covered hotels, restaurants, coffee palaces and tearooms. A preference clause was included in this award which required first preference of employment to be given to unionists, but if not then preference was to be given to members of the white race.

The level of resentment against Asian labour was clear. It was no mean feat to have all these awards ratified because the Arbitration Court did not have a permanent president so the Court process was slow.

As the eastern goldfields declined in the 1910s-1920s, the development of a State award and the amalgamation of the Eastern Goldfields and Metropolitan

54 J Williams, *The First Furrow*, p 92.
55 ibid, p 85.
56 Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
57 *Oral History Tapes*, tr 171, Tape 4:1.
58 *WAIG*, 1924.
59 W Brady, *Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry*, p 73.
HCCTER Unions with the Head Office in Perth was an increasingly popular concept that could benefit everyone because it promised stronger bargaining power. Convinced of this, George Ryce and Cecilia attended special meetings of the Eastern Goldfields Union to discuss the benefits and encourage acceptance of their idea. On 3 October 1924 the Eastern Goldfields Union agreed that the Head Office should be in Perth. Although the Union would be registered there it wanted to keep its financial independence. It would have been at this time Cecilia became secretary of the Eastern Goldfields union although the exact date and length of time she held this position are unclear.

With the election of the Collier ALP Government in 1924 there was a general belief that the workers' cause would be protected by their political representatives. This was often not the case. The period was marked by the consolidation of conservatism and the acceptance of ruling class values which influenced feeling against militancy.

The post war mini boom was over. The recession meant rising unemployment, and static wages. Women needed to work. Their conditions began to deteriorate again. Cecilia could not be silenced for long. By early 1925 she started negotiations for a 44 hour week, in line with the Factory Act of 1920, a general wages increase of 5/- per week and a complete union preference clause. The demands were rejected by the employers as 'totally unreasonable.'

Cecilia's conviction and her enthusiasm for action resulted in the members of her union, particularly the women, attending stopwork meetings and rallies. The Barmaids and Barmen's Union and the Brewery Workers Union gave their full support. Although some concessions were offered by the employers, they would not accept the preference clause. Everyone, especially Cecilia, remained adamant that all the clauses had to be accepted. Strike action was necessary. Within a month a letter from PJ Mooney, Secretary of the Greater Metropolitan Disputes Committee, was sent to all unions requesting donations from other unions to provide a strike fund for the 2000 strikers, mostly young women. Support was overwhelming, at least from the union movement if not the press. The conservative papers took pleasure in criticising the unwomanly behaviour of the strikers as they marched through the streets, picketed...
shops and disrupted business. Slogans such as 'Amazons on the Warpath', a 'petticoat government' and 'Shelley's Army' were some of the newspapers' slights. Cecilia revelled in all this publicity and used it as ammunition to fire up more demonstrations. Threats of violence and the occasional bucket of water tipped over the protesters made her more determined. Cecilia, herself, was often the target of the abuse both in the press and in the street.

"I can see Madame de Farge doing her knitting while the heads were falling!" shouted Mrs Thomas of Gordon's Hotel. "We're hoping to cut off your business not your head!" was the quick reply, probably from Cecilia.67

Whilst outcry in the press continued, the employers led by Albany Bell closed their ranks even more tightly by trying to deregister the union.68 This attempt was unsuccessful. They then opened their own canteen in the city which was well-patronised. Public attitudes for these 'unruly' women were polarising. The employers once again seemed to have the upper hand. But through protracted and patient negotiations led by the Disputes Committee, including a suggestion to call in a private arbitrator69 an agreement was reached and the strike was ended. The new Award [31/25] granting the 44 hour week plus 4 hours overtime with increased wages was finally accepted. A victimisation clause ensuring employment after a strike and the right to belong to a union was included but no changes were made to the preference clause.70

Cecilia had skilfully led the women through the strike under the pressure of hardship and public criticism. Many women lost their jobs but gains were made. This was the last strike which Cecilia led although she worked in the Union for another 42 years. Why was this so? Perhaps she came to see the sacrifices as too great or perhaps it was the death of her friend, co-organiser and partner George Ryce a few years later. His militancy and anti-Arbitration Court attitude probably influenced Cecilia.71 Without his support she may have accepted the more conventional use of the Arbitration Court system to gain benefits for her union members.

However her image in the eyes of the ALP hierarchy had been tarnished further by accusations concerning the theft of Trades Hall strike funds. 'I used it for the strikers,' she insisted72 She recalled being advised by her friend Kathleen McIntyre of a special meeting called to discuss the issue. All the power-brokers of the ALP

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67West Australian, 11 May 1925.
68ibid, 16 May 1925.
69Westralian Worker, 22 May 1925.
70WAIG, 1925.
72Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 3:1.
including JJ Kenneally 'were downstairs waiting for me to be sacked as a union official.' But Cecilia's skill at oratory and debate meant she rode out the storm. 'Everyone [at the meeting] supported me,' she proudly remembered. However, her radical behaviour was not what the ALP wanted from its members. 'The ALP executive increasingly used powers of control and punished those who spoke out publicly against it,' argues Oliver of the mid-1920s period. So militants like Ryce and Shelley were suppressed by expulsion within months of each other.

Her final act of defiance came when she defended Ryce during the British Seamen's Strike of 1925 and against his expulsion from the Party. She publicly announced that she would not vote Labor again and made accusations about fake selection ballots. After failing to answer a request to appear before the ALP State Executive, she was expelled on 25 November 1925 by a show of hands, 22 for and 5 against.

During the years immediately following the strikes and her expulsion from the ALP, Cecilia remained union organiser and dedicated herself to her union work. She recruited new members and policed the adherence to awards as well as drafting new ones. The Court ratified these awards to cover country workers in Merriden [16/26], Collie [5/27] and Pemberton, [14/27]. The protracted negotiations for the Club Employees Award [12/20] meant it was not ratified until 1926. She also ensured that all awards covering her members were granted the basic wage adjustments of 1927 and 1929. It is significant that the Metropolitan Catering Award [15/28] included a clause of no victimisation of union members.

Cecilia was re-elected secretary in 1929, a position she was to hold with unrivalled power until 1968 when she was dismissed. Her commitment to her 'girls' and the fear which she engendered in their employers can be seen in Rosa Townsend's story of her first encounter with Cecilia who acted as Rosa's union representative against an unjust employer.

I was sixteen years old at the time. I worked for Mrs Raphael in her milkbar in Fremantle from 8.30am till 9pm. My wages were 15/- a week. I wore a white uniform with big green buttons and white shoes. I was not paid for two weeks and when I asked for my pay I was told to leave. My mother (Betty Foster) took me to town to see Cecilia Shelley and told her my story. We all went by train down to the Fremantle. As we marched into the milkbar Cecilia asked "Do you know this girl?" Mrs Raphael went white! "Yes, I sacked her because she was no good." "For two weeks she was no good?" "Yes!" was the answer. Cecilia then

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73 ibid.
74B Oliver, War and Peace in Australia, p 367.
75J Williams, The First Furrow, p 96.
77HCCTREU Officers and Membership Returns, IAC, Consignment No 4793, File 254/17 Vol 4.(WAA).
demanded my pay plus a week's pay in lieu of being sacked plus a uniform allowance, all of which I received then and there.\textsuperscript{78}

By the end of 1929 Cecilia had applied for re-admission to the ALP. The impetus for this move came from the Eastern Goldfields Union, the Goldfields Labor Women's Organisation and the Midland District Council of the ALP. She received a letter, from the General Secretary EH Barker stating that 'I have to inform you that a resolution was carried that your request for re-admission to the Party should be refused'\textsuperscript{79} The explanation given to all District Councils was that because of her former behaviour her readmission would be of no benefit to the Labor movement.\textsuperscript{80}

Despite this ruling, Cecilia, as an affiliated Union's representative automatically was a member of the ALP State Executive. This must have made her a real 'thorn in the side' of the conservative members of the ALP particularly as they had got rid of her in 1925. Late in the 1930s or early 1940s she had to abide by a new ruling in order to maintain this position. The ruling stated that no members of other political parties could be members of the ALP Executive. Therefore she could not be a member of the CPA.\textsuperscript{81}

The Depression heralded a new set of problems. One which she ignored for as long as possible was the across the board 10% reduction in wages. This cut was one of the principles of Sir Otto Neimeyer's plan to promote recovery. In fact the effect was the opposite with the national average unemployment figure rising to 28% by 1931\textsuperscript{82} Cecilia proudly recalled how she was always too busy to attend employer meetings to discuss this reduction in wages for her Union members. 'The Bootmakers' Union was the first to have lower wages but the HCCTREU was the last' she claimed.\textsuperscript{83}

Another problem which she acted on more quickly related to society's changing attitude towards women in paid work. As the depression deepened this attitude became more antagonistic. Within the union movement, also, it was felt that first priority for jobs should be to males. 'The campaign for work for boys could be seen as one against women in work.' Kennedy argues.\textsuperscript{84} Conversely employers saw women as a source of cheap labour and therefore used them to advantage. The number of

\textsuperscript{78}Rosa Townsend, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
\textsuperscript{79}Letter, 22 January 1930, Miscellaneous S, \textit{ALP State Executive Correspondence}, MN300, Acc 1688A, File 483/30.(WAA).
\textsuperscript{80}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{81}Duncan Cameron, interview, Perth, 24 March 1993.
\textsuperscript{82}Macquarie Book of Events, Sydney, 1983, p 223.
\textsuperscript{83}Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 2:1.
\textsuperscript{84}S Kennedy, 'Segregation for Integration: Women and Work in Factories and Shops in Western Australia during the Great Depression,' in \textit{Studies in Western Australian History}, December 1982, p40.
women, as a percentage of all sole breadwinners, grew as high as 21.8% by 1933.85 They were prepared to do any work they could get as their families' dependence on their incomes increased. Also girls, whose wages were lower than boys found employment more easily, thus helping their families to survive.86

As a result the number of breaches of award and general complaints with which Cecilia had to deal rose dramatically.87 Personal confrontation similar to that in Rosa Townsend's story, if not successful, was followed by threats of court action. Increasingly, Cecilia herself took on the role of advocate in these cases before the Arbitration Court. Although she found the work hard she did it because she believed her lawyer was more interested in the bosses than the girls.88 Apart from this time-consuming work and that of trying to maintain membership almost all other Union work must have ceased because during this period no adjustments to the relevant awards were made. The sole exception was a new Award [16/31], covering the Union workers in privately run lodging houses, boarding houses and service flats which was ratified in 1931. This cleared up an anomaly discovered by Cecilia. Prior to 1925, the workers in these institutions were considered to be in domestic service and therefore not covered by any award but, with the redefinition of 'worker' in the Industrial Arbitration Act Amendment Act of 1925, Cecilia applied for this new award.89 The unregulated nature of the industry and the variation in fees and services offered by boarding houses was taken into consideration when the Court framed the Award.

By 1932 the State unemployment figure had reached over 30% which was slightly above the national average.90 Yet another problem which confronted Cecilia was the resultant depth of poverty in the community. This too, she acted upon to the best of her ability. 'Cecilia had a genuine concern for the oppressed,' Annette Cameron, a friend in the period recalled.91 She expressed this concern and despair for the plight of the unemployed men at the Blackboy Hill camp by attending demonstrations. She also enthusiastically backed the Frankland River workers when in August-September 1932 they came by train to Perth to protest at their poor conditions.92 She helped Katharine Susannah Prichard and others organise shelter for the men in a hall in East Perth and provide them with some food and minimum

85ibid, p 42.
87**WAIG**, 1929-1934.
88*Oral History Tapes*, tr 171, Tape 3:1.
89**WAIG**, 1931, p 235.
91Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
comforts. An anecdote which is an example of her involvement was one Cecilia told Sally Kennedy. 'I remember how one day I ran along collecting cabbages as they fell off the back of a truck, to give to the hungry women to cook.'93 Perhaps this latter story not only reflects her level of concern but also her anger at the unwillingness of the government to help those in need. This anger can be heard at times in her voice in her oral history tapes, especially as she recalls a particular meeting on the Esplanade organised by the ALP.

'Collier, Kenneally and others were on a platform. The men who attended expected to be told what to do and where to look for work. But they were given nothing . . . not even a soup kitchen for food. No relief at all! Labor could have done something. People were hungry.94

She firmly believed that the Labor government, elected in 1933, was in a position to do something in the face of the people's anger.

She went on to recall the Sixpenny Restaurants where good meals could be obtained with a meal ticket. 'One of them was started up in Hay Street, by a Communist Party woman. The politicians didn't like her. Some of them tried to persuade me to check her out. But I wouldn't. I believed it was necessary . . . The men queued for ages for a good meal.'95 It would seem that those who did not approve of Cecilia's behaviour were prepared to use her when it suited them.

Cecilia's concern for women was not forgotten in all the furore of meetings and demonstrations. One of her dreams was for a Working Girls' Club. It was to be a shelter for any working girls, including English girls, who were in domestic service. A property in Irwin Street, Perth was to be used. 'I had big plans,' Cecilia reminisced.96 Facilities for meeting and relaxing with friends as well as accommodation were in her plans; so was a labour exchange through which country girls could find work in the city.97 Raffles were held and donations were requested. However the Depression put a stop to the whole concept and the property (possibly 25 Irwin St where the Union office was located at that time) was lost.98 However the idea developed into another project when she joined forces with Katharine Susannah Prichard and the YWCA in 1930. In July 1932, the Unemployed Girls and Womens' Defence Committee was set up as a watch-dog of the flourishing private employment registry industry.99 This growth industry of the Depression years organised girls into

93Commissioner Dr Sally Kennedy, interview, Perth, 12 March 1993.
94Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 2:2.
95ibid.
96ibid, Tape 2:1.
98Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 2:2.
a cheap labour force usually in country areas. If the girls left their employment because of exploitation or abuse they were defenceless, penniless and could be jailed.\textsuperscript{100} So this new organisation offered individual girls and women support, including the payment of rents \textsuperscript{101} and accommodation through the YWCA.\textsuperscript{102}

The Depression created opportunity for worker unity in their struggle to survive. But their achievements were few not only because of their disorganisation and the conservative position of the State Labor Government and the larger unions, like the AWU, meant that displays of militancy were discouraged and branded 'Communist.'\textsuperscript{103}

In the 1930s a new international problem loomed which caused concern to many, including Cecilia. Although the union was the centre of her life, she always had time to follow her other leftist interests, by belonging to clubs and going to meetings.\textsuperscript{104} She was involved with Katharine Susannah Prichard in the early days of the establishment of the WA Movement Against War and Fascism. Cecilia was billed as one of the keynote speakers at a rally in the Rechabite Hall in Perth on 1 August 1934. 300 people attended.\textsuperscript{105} However her commitment had to be restricted to the level of donations as she had to change her image to remain on the ALP Executive. 'She couldn't be branded a communist or rabble rouser because she wanted to keep her job and do good for her girls', commented her friend Annette Cameron.\textsuperscript{106}

This was likely to happen since, in 1932, the CPA was charged with being an unlawful association under the Crimes Act.\textsuperscript{107} Already the police had raided the CPA headquarters, private homes and offices including the HCCTREU. Literature, private papers and union papers were removed.\textsuperscript{108}

When in 1938 Katharine Susannah Prichard established the Modern Women's Club in response to a conservative ALP dictum banning its women members from joining the Movement Against War and Fascism,\textsuperscript{109} Cecilia and many other Perth women (like the three I interviewed: Annette Cameron, Bernice Ranford and Joan Williams) joined. As a forum for debate and consciousness-raising this Club holds a significant place in the women's movement in Western Australia.

\textsuperscript{100}Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 2:2.
\textsuperscript{101}J Damousi, 'Marching to Different Drums,' p 372.
\textsuperscript{103}D Black, 'The era of Labor ascending', pp 432-433.
\textsuperscript{104}Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, 24 March 1993.
\textsuperscript{105}\textit{Red Star}, 3 August 1934
\textsuperscript{106}Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, 24 March 1993.
\textsuperscript{107}J Williams, \textit{The First Furrow}, p 138.
\textsuperscript{108}\textit{Red Star}, 30 September 1932.
Another organisation in which the two women worked together was International Women's Day. Here Cecilia was able to express her belief in a better world for women. The first International Women's Day was held on 13 March 1936 in the Arundle Hall, Perth.\textsuperscript{110} Having just one main event each year the themes were topical for the year. Fascism and war, peace, freedom, unity, understanding, equal rights for women, equality for women and men, the value of mothers and women were some of the themes. But always the underlying principle of women's strength through unity and co-operation was there. Although not a member of many committees Cecilia was prepared to be on this one and was secretary in 1950.\textsuperscript{111} It might be that she was on the 1960 organising committee for the 50th anniversary of International Women's Day in Australia because she was photographed with the guest speaker.\textsuperscript{112}

Maintaining her Union was her love and work. With the improvement in the economy in the late 1930s, her attention again turned towards increasing membership and dealing with complaints. Her marriage to Robert J Boniface on 17 April 1935 meant she now had someone with whom to share her Union work.\textsuperscript{113} In 1935 Boniface held the office of secretary, and Cecilia was president and union organiser again. The couple reversed their roles in the following year and this arrangement remained unchanged from 1936 till 1951, except for 1942 when Gloria Marshall was president.\textsuperscript{114}

Together they constituted the Union's administrative staff, sharing the paperwork and facing difficulties together although it seems likely that the major decisions were made by Cecilia. The 1928 Award for the Metropolitan hotels and the different sections of the catering industry was adjusted to meet new demands which included an improved spread of shifts which extended over an entire week and a reduced length of daily shift hours.\textsuperscript{115} These substantial improvements in working hours for the workers in those establishments in the city in 1939, were granted because the Union applied to the Court. Also in this same year the hotels and the hostels and coffee palaces were granted separate awards.[Award 5/39, and Award 5a/39]

However an unusual situation developed in that same year when, as the result of an industrial dispute, an employer instead of a union made application to the Court. The hotel keepers of Wiluna took the HCCTREU to the Court because they considered that the threat of a black ban by workers had caused an unfair imposition.

\textsuperscript{110}Red Star, 13 March 1936.
\textsuperscript{111}Irene Greenwood Collection, Murdoch University.
\textsuperscript{112}W Brady, 'International Women's Day,' in Studies in Western Australian History, April, 1989,p 88.
\textsuperscript{113}W Brady, Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, Appendix 5.
\textsuperscript{114}WAIG, 1935-1951.
\textsuperscript{115}WAIG, 1939.
of an industrial agreement in August 1938. So the employers filed their own claim of wages and conditions to the Court to which Cecilia was expected to reply. This she failed to do. Hence her appearance in Court on 8 August 1940. Her failure to file an answer even after the second request puzzled the Court and certainly did nothing to assist her workers. The new Award [14/39] allowed the deduction of payment for board from the wages, the decision to reduce the significance of the record book as evidence of hours worked and the 48 hour week benefited the employers.\footnote{WAIG, 1940, pp 334-335.} Somerville, in his summing up of the application before the Court, stated that

> With regard to the hours in this Award; on these minutes it is impossible for me to agree to any Award providing for a 48-hour week, particularly in an industry such as this in which women are so largely employed, and in a climate such as Wiluna. But the failure of the union to make any attempt, or put up any case on behalf of the workers leaves me no option but to simply register my objection to that particular clause.\footnote{WAIG, p 335.}

There must be more to this case. Cecilia acted out of character in not supporting the women at Wiluna. However lack of documentary evidence leaves the reason for her inaction a mystery.

Once again with men overseas at war women were called into the work force. The steady rise in Union membership was sustained, reaching a record high of 1722 in 1940. But registration of complaints had decreased as any employment was gratefully taken. By 1945 numbers had dropped again to 756 possibly because many women were staying at home now the war was over and the men had returned home.

The end of the war meant a more prosperous economy in Australia. But the pre-war division of labour was re-established with women being encouraged to stay at home.\footnote{C Fox, Working Australia, p 138.} Yet many were choosing to return to work as soon as possible or taking on part-time work.\footnote{ibid, p 146.} Although the variety of work available to women had increased, for many 'unskilled' work in hotels and restaurant was the only choice. So again union membership rose steadily to 1648. Post-war migrants also entered employment in occupations covered by the HCCTREU. This must have provided a new challenge for Cecilia as she endeavoured to communicate to them the value of union membership.

State development meant growth. Ten new Awards [1,3,5,6/41, 22-26/41] for hotels, hostels and coffee palaces in various towns in the south west and one for Yanchep in the State Gardens [11/41], were drawn up and ratified. In 1947, reflecting the general prosperity of the State, all Awards, on application, were automatically
granted the 40-hour week, two weeks annual leave and paid standard public holidays. At this time the Wiluna hotels Award [4/39] was extended to include hotels, hostels and coffee palaces in the rest of the State [Award 27/47]. All the hotel and catering awards for establishments in the Metropolitan area were changed to improve hours and wages. During this period Cecilia handled approximately twenty Awards covering her Union members. This was an enormous task.

The increase in Court advocacy was shared by Cecilia and her husband, although she preferred to tackle the complaints herself. One such complaint brought before the Court in 1945 is typical. 'Mrs Stewart worked for a friend doing household chores, gardening and tearooms work from 7.30am till 4.30pm five days a week and half a day on Saturday. The rest of the time she was given off. She was paid in cash and kind.' Industrial Magistrate FMI Redd, in his summing up, said:

> The purpose of the Award is to see that the workers in the industry are paid according to the scale provided in it and not for something less or nothing at all. There can be nothing savoury at all on contracting outside the provisions of the Award.

This was Cecilia's opinion exactly as she went from business to business checking record books of wages and hours and rosters. Complaints of exploitation and failure to comply with Award regulations were always dealt with by her. As Duncan Cameron said, 'Her quick fiery questions came first. She thought later.' She was always held in high regard by her Union members, especially the women. Her success in Award restructuring and dealing with bosses meant the Union continued to grow. Membership by 1950 was 2040. The ratio of women to men was 3:1 - a level held throughout the 1950s.

1951 again was a year of Award amendments. State hotel domestics, under Award [64/51] were granted an 8-hour day and a preference clause was added. The hotels of the South West region were covered by a new Award [67/51]. All other Award amendments concentrated on hours of work. The weekly spread of shift hours, meaning 'the actual time which elapses from the worker's actual starting time to the worker's actual finishing time for the day or shift' was now 60-75 hours, whilst the daily spread of shifts, meaning 'the aggregate number of hours contained in the daily shifts for a week' was 11-12 1/2 hours depending on the establishment. The longest hours were in the Coffee Palaces whilst the shortest were in the restaurants and tearooms. The Metropolitan Catering Award [40/51] had a new clause covering the

\[120\textit{WAIG}, \ 1945, \ pp \ 314-315.\]
\[121\textit{ibid}, \ p \ 315.\]
\[122\text{Duncan Cameron, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.}\]
\[123\textit{WAIG}, \ 1950-1959.\]
\[124\textit{WAIG}, \ 1951, \ p \ 526.\]
part-time worker working between 15-40 hours per week, a change indicative of women's changing work patterns. Award [59/51] for Metropolitan hotels also had a no victimisation clause added again. The inclusion of a district allowance and overtime rates of pay clauses in the Rest of the State Hotels Award [8/52], showed that Cecilia was consistently striving towards bettering workers' conditions and was aware of some of the problems of living in remote towns. These Awards were always by consent. Even the Metropolitan Hotel Workers Award [2/56], which involved twelve months of employer-union discussions and several Court meetings, was eventually agreed to by consent. But it was not ratified until three years later. The points of contention this time appear to have been the inclusion of long service leave, sick leave, a reduction in hours, increases in rates of pay and accommodation costs. This award provided another example of Cecilia's concern for the welfare and safety of 'her girls' - the 'last bus facility' clause meant employers had to provide free accommodation if the last bus had left before work finished.

During this period there were still fifteen Awards within the Union's coverage. They covered female and male employees in a wide variety of occupations in hotels, hostels, coffee palaces, tearooms, cafes, restaurants, and boardings houses throughout the State excluding the goldfields. Union membership remained static at 1792 from 1951-1954 and then there were no published figures, in the WAIG, from 1955-1963.

Cecilia's energies in the 1950s must have concentrated around planning and negotiating the numerous awards and personally collecting the membership fees. 'Her office in Trades Hall was always muddled yet ordered,' Duncan Cameron recalled. Cecilia did the union business and Court advocacy work herself. 'I really hated Court cases. You really had to be on the ball,' she recalled. She had been on her own since her husband, from whom she was divorced in December 1957, had finished with the union in 1951. Although official Union letters were signed under her married name, advertisements of meetings during the 1950s were authorised by Cecilia Shelley. This suggests the value of her 'Miss Shelley' reputation. Rosa Townsend said this is how the women referred to her. 'It was Miss Shelley's Union'.

In 1957 Cecilia received a letter from the Industrial Registrar warning her of 'necessity to bring the Union election rules up to date'. Cecilia made the

\[125\] WAIG, 1959.
\[126\] Duncan Cameron, interview, Perth, 24 March, 1993.
\[127\] Oral History Tapes, tr 171, Tape 3:1.
\[128\] W. Brady, Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering Industry, Appendix 5.
\[129\] Rosa Townsend, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
amendments and they became effective in June the following year.\textsuperscript{131} In hindsight the subject of this letter was an omen for what lay ahead.

1959 heralded increased leave-loadings in all awards, a redefinition of hours of work, the granting of a 30\% special loading for Club employees and the addition of a preference clause - Metropolitan Club Award [4/59]. There was also formulated the South West Club Award [15/59]. An amalgamation of all hostels in the of the South West region under Award [36/59] was successful. But an application to replace the Metropolitan Catering Award [40/51] in 1961 was not obtained so easily. A dispute erupted and the case went before the Arbitration Court. On 15 June 1962 Conciliation Commissioner Schnaars issued a seven page statement altering, defining and clarifying the terms which were the major causes of differences between the parties. He also noted that, surprisingly, all Catering Awards since 1912 had been by consent.\textsuperscript{132} Ultimately this dispute over Award [7/61] was resolved in the same way. Other Court appearances for Cecilia in the early 1960s involved obtaining leave-loadings for all employees, wage increases for Metropolitan and South West hotel employees under their Awards [25/62 and 27/62 respectively] and the amalgamations of all Coffee Palace Awards[1-6/41, 22-26/41, 18/47] under one South West Award [63/61]. As well she was always busy keeping track of all the members of her union, collecting their dues and checking their complaints and queries. The level of her commitment is evident in this comment she made in a newspaper interview:

\begin{quote}
You take this job to bed with you. I waked in the middle of the night, recently, wondering if part-time workers were entitled to long-service leave. I had to get up then and there and look up the award.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

Equal Pay for equal work was of importance to Cecilia in the struggle for recognition of equity for women in the workforce. The fact that in Western Australia from 1926 the female basic wage was calculated as 54\% of the male basic wage and that "All State Awards and industrial agreements affecting females were based on that fact"\textsuperscript{134} was seen by Cecilia as an injustice needing to be righted. Therefore she was a foundation member of the equal pay and equal opportunity campaign.\textsuperscript{135} She maintained her involvement over the years and placed her union as one of the corporate sponsors behind the campaign which culminated in a deputation to Premier

\textsuperscript{132}WAIG, 1962, pp 95-102.
\textsuperscript{133}West Australian, 6 February 1964.
\textsuperscript{135}West Australian, 12 May 1986.
Brand on 28 April 1960. As a predominantly women's union the backing of the HCCTREU was significant. The struggle for equal pay has been a long one. However by 1960, the female basic wage rose to 75% of the male basic wage.

The 1960s heralded a new era in Cecilia's life, one which would test her strength and skill at survival in the male-dominated union world to a greater extent than ever before. As ever she used guile, her powers of persuasion and even her relatives in the battles for her position and her union.

Changes started in the early 1960s with men such as John Paranthoine, Michael Yakich (or Jakich) and later Colin Ford being elected as office-bearers in the HCCTREU. John Paranthoine was president and union organiser, especially for country areas, from 1961 to mid 1963. He worked well with Cecilia in the beginning but gradually the friendship faded. He often complained of the problems which existed between them and in the running of the Union. 'His popularity with the members would have been seen by Cecilia as a threat,' Duncan Camreon reflected.

Cecilia was possibly jealous and suspicious, probably with some justification as Paranthoine, for one, organised a petition requesting the Court's supervision of the November elections in 1963. He collected 317 signatures but as the majority were not financial members the Court ruled the petition invalid. Parallel to this petition were two applications to the Industrial Registrar by Konstantine Kopcuik stating that neither Paranthoine nor Cecilia was eligible to stand for secretary, Paranthoine because he was not a union member (which was not the case as under Rule 3 an official was automatically a member) and Cecilia because she was not doing her job of notifying unfinancial members. As a result, guide-lines for the election were set by the Court and an order was made for the Secretary to notify unfinancial members. These were the first of many challenges to Cecilia's authority and position in the Union.

As a result of the resignation of Paranthoine as organiser on 3 August 1963 Cecilia was to find an ally and a long lasting friend. A woman who worked in Foy and Gibsons' cafeteria stood for election as the union organiser. Rosa Townsend recalled how her colleagues at work backed her at the general meeting which Cecilia

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136 Annette Cameron, Private papers.
138 HCCTREU Officials and Membership Returns, IAC, Consignment No 4793, File 254/17 Vol 4.(WAA)
139 Duncan Cameron, interview, Perth, 6 April, 1993.
141 Rule 3 of the HCCTREU constitution was changed on 19 September 1962, HCCTREU Registration, IAC, AN 195/3A, Acc 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
143 HCCTREU Officials and Membership Returns, IAC, Consignment 4793, File 254/17, Vol 4.(WAA).
had stacked in favour of her niece. 'But I won by 28 votes,' Rosa remarked triumphantly.  

She didn't like me very much at all and for about three months she gave me a hard time. But one day as we were walking over Horseshoe Bridge she suddenly asked me "Are you a DLP plant?" I explained I was Betty Foster's daughter. She looked so relieved. From then on we were the best of friends. "Don't leave me. I need your help" she used to say all the time.  

The support and friendship Rosa gave Cecilia was invaluable. Cecilia would need all the support she could get including that from her friend of long-standing, Annette Cameron.  

Unbeknown to Cecilia, Rosa had already been approached by someone within the Federated Clerks' Union to stand against her in the 1963 election of office bearers. "I wouldn't do that!" Rosa said. But the new president of the HCCTREU, and major threat to Cecilia, was Michael Yakich, a chef at the Shaftesbury Hotel. He was to be a thorn in Cecilia's side for several years. Proof of Yakich's links to the National Civic Council are not conclusive but possible. Apart from strong allegations from people involved in industrial activity at the time there are two letters, written by Yakich, referring to 'Comrade Shelley' and 'a challenge to democracy and freedom'. One was published in Sloga and the other in the Catholic Record on 2 February 1967. The letter published in Sloga in English and Yugoslav is important to consider because the DLP (WA) was linked to the NCC through its Migrant Council.  

The year when Yakich held office as President was a turbulent one with challenges to the role of the auditors, and allegations of perjury and of improper conduct by Cecilia as Secretary. Complaints against Yakich were made as well, including a request from SC Badham to the Industrial Registrar to have him removed from office. In July when Paranthoine was refused membership of the HCCTREU he appealed for the Industrial Registrar's ruling on the matter. Cecilia's answer to the Industrial Registrar Bowyer's request for more information was a terse letter stating

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145Rosa Townsend, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.  
146Ibid.  
147National Civic Council of WA was the industrial arm of the DLP. 'The aim was to have an NCC group or cell organised in any trade union which seemed to be in danger of falling into radical or Communist hands.' F G Clarke, The Democratic Labour Party in Western Australia, MA thesis, UWA 1969, pp 131-132.  
148Copies of these letters are in Appendix 4, HCCTREU Registration, IAC, AN 195/3A, Acc 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).  
149The Migrant Council was a member, with many Eastern European migrant groups, of an anti Russian/Communist organisation known as the Anti Bolshevik Bloc of Nations.(International) FG Clarke, The Democratic Labor Party in W A, pp 133-134.  
150Letter, 17 August 1964, HCCTREU Registration, IAC, AN 195/3A, Acc1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA)
that she was capable of making her own requests for rulings but she appreciated that both sides needed to be heard. She also admitted that there were problems within the Union. 'There's much more to it than what appears on the surface.'\textsuperscript{151}

Two months later Cecilia wrote again to the Industrial Registrar, this time complaining about some improper election procedures and lack of union funds (only 11-9-5 in its bank account) to pay for another election.\textsuperscript{152} As well a petition requesting Court-controlled elections was presented to the Court by Yakich. He and T McGillick, who was not a union man, had collected 372 signatures. This petition was later ruled invalid by the Industrial Registrar because Cecilia had successfully proven misrepresentation by providing five declarations stating that certain signatories thought they were applying for postal votes.\textsuperscript{153} Furthermore a report by the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer and Returning officer, JE McIntyre showed that Yakich had filled the membership roll with unfinancial members.\textsuperscript{154} Consequently on 17 September 1964 the Court ruled that it would control the elections through its own officers or the Chief Electoral Officer.\textsuperscript{155} Postal voting was to be used. The election held on 18 November 1964 resulted in Yakich losing the position of President to Gloria Ryan (Cecilia's niece) by 236 votes to 176. Cecilia was elected Secretary-Treasurer, with 235 of the 396 valid votes.\textsuperscript{156}

This loss of his position prompted Yakich to write several letters to the Industrial Registrar including one full of muddled facts and a tirade of accusations and derogatory statements. The Acting Industrial Registrar who could not get the gist of his complaints wrote to Yakich suggesting that perhaps he could get legal advice.\textsuperscript{157} The war of words led by Yakich continued both at meetings and through letters to the Industrial Registrar. In his letters he always signed himself 'past President' and printed Cecilia's name in bold. He complained of being ignored or thrown out of meetings, and of the improper conduct of those same meetings. He was attempting to undermine Cecilia's authority at every opportunity. He even challenged her appointment in 1963 as a permanent delegate to the TLC.\textsuperscript{158} The power struggle was now a personal vendetta.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151}Letter, 20 July 1964, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc1101, File 216/22, Vol 1(WAA).
\item \textsuperscript{152}Letter, 8 September 1964, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
\item \textsuperscript{153}Letter, 8 October 1964, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
\item \textsuperscript{154}Report, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
\item \textsuperscript{155}WAIG, 1964, p 662.
\item \textsuperscript{156}Report, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA).
\item \textsuperscript{157}Letter, 26 March 1965, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA)
\item \textsuperscript{158}Letter, 16 August 1965, HCCTREU Registration, \textit{IAC}, AN 195/3A, Acc1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA)
\end{itemize}
The third man to enter the scene in the mid-1960s was Colin Ford, one time Miscellaneous Workers' Union organiser who was sent by that union to help Cecilia and carry on the work started by Paranthoine.\textsuperscript{159} There were two reasons for these actions, according to Bill Latter. Firstly, the workers' conditions had deteriorated and the membership was losing confidence in the union so it was felt that Cecilia could do with some assistance. Secondly, Cecilia's co-operation was needed to allow increases in wages for Miscellaneous Workers' Union members employed in high school hostels and university colleges, because equivalent workers in other institutions were under HCCTREU awards.\textsuperscript{160}

In April 1966 Cecilia, who had been re-elected Secretary unopposed, the new President Colin Ford and the ten members of the committee of management were summonsed to appear before Mr Justice Hale as respondents to yet another application by Yakich listing eight complaints against the Secretary and six against the Executive of the Union. The complaints against Cecilia were to do with her conduct at meetings, including not taking minutes and the lack of balance sheets, correspondence files and attendance records.\textsuperscript{161}

In his judgement, after four days of hearings, Mr Justice Hale ordered certain changes to Executive behaviour in regard to future meetings and ordered that regular minutes were to be taken by the Secretary. He stated:

\begin{quote}
Miss Shelley's attitude to the records of Union business is reflected in her apparent unconcern at the fact that no minutes of any kind are now producable for any meetings prior to the 2 February 1964. The Secretary must comply to Rule 13 by taking and recording proper minutes at all meetings.\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

The use of phrases such as 'personal vendetta', 'overestimated the importance of the office of President', 'to cope with the entrenched position of Miss Shelley', 'lack of evidence' and 'his ability to disparage the opposition' showed that Mr Justice Hale recognised Yakich's unreasonable attitude.\textsuperscript{163} Cecilia's appearances day after day would have been exhausting for anyone, especially someone then in her early seventies. This whole experience of having her lifelong commitment to the Union questioned was an ordeal for Cecilia.

Whilst this infighting was going on, Rosa was there to give Cecilia courage and to do much of the Union business and collect the membership dues. 'No dues no wages,' recalls Rosa Townsend. There were no pay-roll deductions or application

\textsuperscript{159}Bill Latter, interview, Fremantle, 18 March 1993.
\textsuperscript{160}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{161}WAIG, 1966/2, p 1012.
\textsuperscript{162}WAIG, 1966/2, p 1016.
\textsuperscript{163}WAIG, 1966/2, p 1013.
forms. It was very disorganised and Rosa found physically impossible to get to every place.164 By 1966 there were 2600 members of whom about 80% were women.165 But the Union finances remained scarce. Rosa recalled:

I would always go to places like Coles where there were plenty of members. I'd set up a table in the Staffroom and call out "Union lady!" The fees were 13/- a quarter. When I returned to the office Cecilia's first question always was, "What have you collected today?" We were always paid out of membership dues as I collected them. Bev the typist was paid first, then me, then the country rep. and what was left went to Cecilia. Often Cecilia and I got nothing'.166

The strain was telling. Cecilia was becoming more fearful, cantankerous and conspiratorial.167 Her appearances as Union Advocate were decreasing and only concerned the applications for automatic adjustments to leave-loadings and basic wage increases in 1963, 1965 and 1966. 'Cecilia was too tired. You couldn't police all the awards. It was just running around getting money and listening to complaints, being a sort of Dorothy Dix.' Rosa Townsend explained.168 Cecilia admitted herself, 'It is about the hardest job in Perth'.169 So when in 1966 Eugene Fry joined Rosa as a union organiser he was welcomed. Immediately he increased the dues which improved the financial position of the Union but Cecilia did not approve of this move.170

Another addition to the staff was Bill Latter who became the Union's Advocate in 1967. Cecilia's workload was being reduced but she clung tenaciously to her position as secretary. As the result of a general meeting's decision to change Rule 10 of the Constitution the application for the registration of these changes were granted on 18 August 1967.171 There were several changes related to nominations and definition of membership but Cecilia's shrewdest move must have been the change to a triennial election for position of secretary whilst all other positions remained an annual elections.

The elections on 9 November 1967 were supervised by JW Coleman, Secretary of TLC. This was when he reported to the Court that there were several irregularities.

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165HCCTREU Officers and Members Returns, IAC, Consignment No 4793, File 254/17, Vol 4.(WAA).
166Rosa Townsend, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
167Words used by some of those interviewed.
168Rosa Townsend Story, Part 1', p36.
170Rosa Townsend Story, Part 1,' p 40.
171HCCTREU Registration, IAC, Consignment 4793, File 216/22 Vol 2.(WAA).
It was after this election that the position of secretary-treasurer was the subject of an inquiry. There was found to be serious irregularities in connection with the voting therefore the ballot was not completed and declared invalid.\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^2\)

A re-election on 12 March 1968 resulted in Michael Yakich's victory over Cecilia by only 11 votes. 'It broke her heart,' Rosa recalled.\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^3\) The gloating tone of his letter to the Industrial Register informing him of the victory reflected his pleasure in success at last.\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^4\) However this glory was short-lived. At a general meeting on 1 May 1968 a no confidence motion in the Secretary was passed 63 to 31. One of the supporters of the motion was Cecilia at what was probably her last Union meeting. A series of acting secretaries - namely Eugene Fry, John Skidmore and Rosa Townsend - held office for varying lengths of time until eventually in November 1970 Eugene Fry was officially elected secretary.\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^5\) This is how Rosa remembers these troubled times:

> We fought hard to keep Yakich out. Even after he sacked Fry and myself, which he legally couldn't do, we fought. Extra ordinary meetings were held in Trades Hall. Even after a no confidence motion was passed Yakich refused to leave. We changed the lock on the office door. Eugene had the key. Finally we took him to the Supreme Court. Yakich lost. Eugene Fry was made Acting secretary.\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^6\)

The management of the HCCTREU returned to its normal duties.

Through all of this turmoil, Cecilia retired quietly but broken-hearted to her flat in Lincoln Flats near Hyde Park. After dedicating 48 years of her life to the members of the HCCTREU as either organiser or secretary, she spent her time reading, keeping up with politics, often complaining about being poor but always enjoying the visits of old union friends and her nieces and nephews. Bill Latter, Rosa Townsend and Annette Cameron were amongst these regular visitors. In 1979 Cecilia was honoured for her union work by being made a Life Member of the TLC, an award which she had certainly earned. She eventually moved to live with her niece and then into the Warwick Nursing Home. She died on 6 May 1986. This grand old lady of the union movement, the 'Tigress of Trades Hall,'\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^7\) was laid to rest at a private funeral. Her parting was recognised by her relatives and the Union in the death notices of the *West Australian*, 9 and 10 May 1968, in several small newspaper articles and in a couple of union papers.

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\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^2\)*WAIG*, 1968/1, p 52.
\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^3\)Rosa Townsend, interview, 6 April 1993.
\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^6\)Rosa Townsend, interview, Perth, 6 April 1993.
\(^1\)\(^7\)\(^7\)*Sunday Times*, 13 March 1966.
Cecilia Shelley, probably because of her own family's struggles to survive, always felt sympathy for people who were down-trodden or exploited.178 This was particularly evident in her attitude to the destitute in the Depression, the bereaved of the two World Wars and the many workers, especially women, who were exploited. She gained her strength from the example of the Russian Revolution and the teachings of Marx and Lenin. She endeavoured to follow their beliefs in practical ways in her own small world of the HCCTREU. By attending meetings and rallies for anti-fascism, world peace, equal pay and International Women's Day she extended her commitment for a better world beyond her Union.

Her charismatic, dynamic personality gave her the opportunity to put into practice much of what she believed. Her dedication was boundless. Her successes were numerous. Her battles were tough. But whether they were on the street during strikes, in the Court or workplace confronting wrongful employers she relished the verbal sparring and devious out-maneuvering. Eventually her own personal battle for her position within her Union, 'Miss Shelley's Union', against her own aging as well as against the forces of male domination and extreme conservatism meant her energies were rechannelled. But to the end she strove to keep faith with the needs of the workers.

As a feminist and Labour activist Cecilia Shelley must be given recognition and acknowledgement for her enormous contribution not only to the betterment of conditions of women workers in the HCCTREU but to the union movement generally and to Western Australian history.

178 Annette Cameron, interview, Perth, April 1993.
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HCCTREU Disputes File 63/25  
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CPA File 31  
Hotels File 105/49

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Labour Women's conference File 341/24  
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Rosa Townsend, Perth, 6 April 1993.
Joan Williams, Perth, 28 April 1993.
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**Theses**


**Journals**


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Books


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Appendix 2.

Information relevant to the Membership of the Hotel, Clubs, Caterers, Tearooms, and Restaurant Employees' Industrial Union of Workers.

1901 Union registered, Reg. No. 65.
C Shelley elected Union Organiser in 1919.

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* indicates no record available.

From WAA/G
HCCTREU, Officials and Membership Returns, Consignment No 4793, File 44/17, Vol 4. (WAA).

Appendix 4
The Record, 2 February 1967.
HCCTREU Registration, IAC, AN 195/3A, Acc. 1101, File 216/22, Vol 1.(WAA)
The Tigress
of Trades Hall

Cecilia Shelley [1923]
Battye Library, 2749B

Cecilia Shelley [1966]
Sunday Times, 13 March 1966