

A History of Union Organisation of Laundry Work
in Western Australia 1912 - 1975

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Philosophy
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

The laundry industry in Western Australia has divided into two major sectors: the private commercial and the government hospital laundries. This labour intensive service industry has relied on a labour market structured to provide a workforce of women to satisfy its demand for cheap labour. The many analyses of workplace practices place strong emphasis on both the broad gender division of labour and gender segregation on the factory floor. This thesis does not dispute the realities of these forces which place women in jobs deemed unskilled and unworthy. The introduction of new technologies further deskilled and divided the female workforce in all laundries. Unity of action to improve their conditions and wages was difficult. External forces provided the impetus.

Unions as key institutions of organised labour have been the vehicle for reform. Many studies state that the very essence of unionism, its maleness, has been reflected in the failure of the union movement to assist women. This thesis supports that conclusion but also argues that the success of unionism for laundry workers was restricted by the structure of the industry. Private sector managements' willingness to consider reform was determined by competition. This limitation did not arise in the government sector where managements accepted greater responsibility towards workers.

An analysis of the work of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union and the Hospital Employees' Union over the sixty three year period of this study shows that the success of the unionisation of the laundry workers depended primarily on the

structure of the industry as well as the nature of the work, the role of technology and the quality of union leadership. Underlying all these factors was society's fundamental assumption that laundry work was women's work.

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Abbreviations

ALF	Australian Labor Federation
ALP	Australian Labor Party
Clothing Trades Union	South West Clothing Trades Union
Council	Metropolitan District Council of Australian Labor Party
Court	West Australian Arbitration Court
HEU	Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers
MLEU	Metropolitan Laundry Employees Industrial Union of Workers
<i>WAAR</i>	West Australian Arbitration Report
WA IAC	West Australian Industrial Arbitration Commission
<i>WAIG</i>	West Australian Arbitration Gazette
WA IRC	West Australian Industrial Relations Commission

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Introduction

My primary interest is in labour history, particularly that of women in the paid workforce and their union activism. Whilst working on a previous research paper about the Kindergarten Teachers' Union of Western Australia I spent many hours at the archives of the Australian Liquor, Hospitality, Miscellaneous Workers' Union (WA Branch). Here were many files pertaining to the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union of Workers and the Hospital Employees' Union of Workers, both of which amalgamated with the larger union during the 1980s.¹ I recalled my list of unions with all female or mostly female membership. So many survived for only a year or two. Yet here were two unions that still existed. Why had they survived when others had not?

The Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union was an occupational union covering workers, mostly women, in the commercial laundry industry, whereas the Hospital Employees' Union was an industry-based union with both male and female members working in a wide variety of jobs within hospitals, including laundering. So, the motivation to examine both these unions centred on their long history, their female membership and the common thread of laundering.

Laundry work, a pink collar occupation, is a prime example of "women's work".²

Little research exists on this specific area of women's work, either paid or unpaid.

¹The Hospital Employees' Union of Workers amalgamated in 1982. The Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union of Workers amalgamated in 1987.

²'Pink collar' was a term devised by Howe to describe predominantly female occupations. LK Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work*, Putnams, New York, 1977.

Malcolmson's *English Laundresses: A Social History 1830-1930* (1987) has revealed the special world of English women who did laundry in their own homes or worked for others.³ She examined the past, the present and the future of the British laundry industry through its work practices, legislative framework, the unionisation of the workers and society's attitudes towards it and influences on it. Malcolmson argued that the study of laundresses, their lives and their work, revealed not just a microcosm of English life but also different perspective on both economic and feminist history. Laundry work was unique in having been transformed from a domestic economy to a large industry and then having the number of small specialised home based businesses increase again. Throughout these changes laundry work remained the prerogative of women.

Mohun, writing about the United States laundry industry between 1880 and 1930, identified a change in the process and ethos of laundering when male proprietors and managers took control.⁴ They formed trade associations, published journals and used carefully worded marketing to reconstruct the feminine concept of laundry work to raise their masculine managerial status and improve business profits. They successfully transformed the washing of dirty articles from a domestic task to a manufacturing process, rendering the essential female workforce invisible in the process.

³PE Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History 1830-1930*, University of Illinois, 1986.

⁴AP Mohun, 'Laundrymen Construct Their World: Gender and the Transformation of a Domestic Task to an Industrial Process' *Technology and Culture: Gender Analysis and the History of Technology*, Vol 38, No 1, January, 1997, pp 97-120.

No research similar to these writings exists for the laundry industry in Australia.

Ryan's small article on the laundry workers' strike in Sydney in 1906 has provided an insight into one incident in the unionisation of laundry workers in Sydney. They defended their rights to recognition as workers as much as their rights for better wages.⁵ Another strike, in the laundry industry in Western Australia in 1982, started over a claim for increased wages and better conditions but developed into an issue of female identity within the broader trade union movement. Greenwood's analysis revealed that the women working in the government's central hospital laundry were marginalised by a male dominated union movement and therefore the strike failed.⁶ Gender was the fundamental issue.

My thesis examines work in the laundry industry in Western Australia where that work was unionised. I found that the structure of the industry - the differences between government and private sectors, and the nature of competition in the private sector - exerted a major influence on the formation and success of the unionisation of workers. Underlying this influence however, was society's fundamental assumption that laundry work is women's work. The transposition of the gendered domestic tasks to the workplace maintained the constant definition of women's work.

The study of Australian women in unpaid and paid work has changed over the last thirty years. In 1975, Kingston examined, for the first time, the experiences and value

⁵E Ryan, 'Proving a Dispute: Laundry workers in Sydney in 1906', *Labour History*, No 40, May, 1981, pp 98-106.

⁶Janet Greenwood, 'Besides our size it's because we are women. The strike by the laundry workers union 15 January-5 February 1982' in *All Her Labours: Working it out*, Women and Labour Publications Collective, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, pp 58-69.

to society of women working in their own homes.⁷ *Women at Work*, a project by a collective of writers, examined individuals and groups of women in their endeavours to succeed in leadership and at work. They placed women in a broad context of work in both the private and public spheres.⁸ In the same year, Ryan and Conlon focused their research on women in the paid workforce. They challenged other researchers to follow them and explore the position of working women. They wrote, ‘This book may be regarded as a primer which we hope will inspire others to enlarge upon and to dig deeper into the vast territory left to be explored.’⁹ They succeeded. Since then, the body of literature written on women and work has expanded greatly. Gender must always be at the core of all debate on the role of women in society because, as Game and Pringle (1983) explained, ‘Gender is fundamental to the way work is organised’.¹⁰

In 1982, the contributors to *Worth her salt* broadened the scope of studies and recognised that social change shaped women’s position in society within the parameters of the gender division of labour.¹¹ Pringle (1988) showed how the gender division of labour was accentuated by computers and information technology.¹² Yet O’Donnell and Hall (1988) and then Probert (1989) argued that, despite being better

⁷B Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Anne: Women and Work in Australia*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975.

⁸A Curthoys, S Eade and P Spearritt (ed), *Women at Work*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1975.

⁹E Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work 1788-1974*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975, p ix.

¹⁰A Game and R Pringle, *Gender at Work*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p 14.

¹¹This publication contains papers presented at the 1980 Women and Labour Conference at La Trobe University. M Bevege, M James and C Shute (ed) *Worth her salt: Women at work in Australia*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982.

¹²R Pringle, *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, Power and Work*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

educated, with wider employment opportunities and greater economic freedom, women were still trapped in the world of economic, political and sexual inequality.¹³

Alongside the general analyses of women and work have been critiques of specific influences. Many writers have criticised the system of arbitration and unions because they have failed to protect the lowest paid - female - workers. The arbitration system's reinforcement of the 'male breadwinner' concept in wage indexations has been held responsible for inequalities in the labour market, and the lack of female protection and women's subsequent hardship.¹⁴ Gill failed to address the gender inequity of the basic wage when he defended the arbitration court's indexation of the basic wage movement to inflation and consumer prices.¹⁵ A gendered society has controlled decisions and actions at all levels.

The masculine bias of unionism has received significant criticism for its marginalisation of women. Pocock's statement that, 'Australian unions had been no friends to women on many occasions in history,' best sums up the general findings of the analyses.¹⁶ Ryan and Prendergast in their study of unionism found that historically

¹³C O'Donnell and P Hall, *Getting Equal*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988. B Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australia*, McPhee and Gribble, Melbourne, 1989.

¹⁴P Ryan and T Rowse, 'Women, Arbitration and the Family', in A Curthoys, S Eade and P Spearritt (ed) *Women at Work*, pp 15-30. B Thiele, 'Women workers in Western Australia: Their unions, industrial awards and arbitration', in M Bevege, M James and C Shute (ed) *Worth her salt*, pp 385-367. Laura Bennett, 'Legal Intervention and the Female Workforce: The Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Court 1907-1921', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, Vol 12, 1984, pp 23-36.

B Dabscheck, 'The "Typical Mother of the White Race" and the Origins of Female Wage Determination', *Hecate*, Vol 12, No 2, 1985, pp 147-151. Laura Bennett, 'The Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Court in the Late 1920s', *Labour History*, No 57, November, 1989, pp 44-60. B Thorpe, 'Arbitration, Labour History and the State', in C Williams and T Thorpe, *Beyond Industrial Sociology: The work of men and women*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp 20-247.

¹⁵F Gill, 'Inequality and the arbitration of wages in Australia: an historical perspective', *Australian Quarterly*, Vol 59, No 2, 1987, p 218.

¹⁶B Pocock (ed), *Strife: Sex and Politics in Labour Unions*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p 9.

women have had little power because of the male domination in unions. This domination restricted women's participation and therefore their unions' success.¹⁷ Charles and Donaldson added that the masculinity of union leaders re-inforced male opinions and practices at grassroots level which in turn inhibited female participation and recognition of women's issues.¹⁸

This conclusion is the essence of the problem with unionism as exposed by Pocock in her most recent book *Strife: Sex and Politics in the Labour Unions*.¹⁹ Focussing on the strength of male domination in Australian society Pocock argued that this power permeated every aspect of union culture from the leadership to the creation of award classifications. Franzway, in the same book, exposed this hidden masculinity of unionism for its failure to meet the needs of women.²⁰ The course of justice had been subverted too often by the assumption that all that pertains to unions is male. Despite this enormous failing which must be overcome for any resounding achievements for women, Pocock does admit that: 'the overall effect of unions for women . . . has been positive: industrial awards have been the mechanism for passing on the wins of the strong and protecting minimum conditions.'²¹

Rodan, Bessant and Strachan confirmed the value of unions for women and noted the benefits of female organised unions removed from male domination.²² Each writer

¹⁷E Ryan and H Prendergast, 'Union Are for Women Too', in K Cole (ed), *Power, Conflict and Control in Australian Trade Unions*, Pelican, Victoria, 1982, pp 261-278.

¹⁸N Charles, 'Women and Trade Unions in the Workplace', *Feminist Review*, No 15, 1983, pp 3-21. M Donaldson, 'Working in the Union Movement: Organisation, Representation and Segregation', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, No 28, September, 1991, pp 131-147.

¹⁹B Pocock (ed), *Strife: Sex and Politics in the Labour Unions*.

²⁰S Franzway, 'Sexual Politics in Trade Unions', *ibid*, pp 128-148.

²¹B Pocock, 'Gender, Strife and Unions', *ibid*, p 9.

argued that women, like the clerical staff at tertiary institutions and nurses, were active members of their predominantly female unions. They willingly took on leadership roles and used their unions to improve their professional status as well as wages and conditions. Rodan demonstrated that the higher the salary of a female worker the more militant was her attitude. This would help to explain why other pink collar workers, like the tailoresses and laundry workers, who were less successful.²³

The need to earn a wage, no matter how small, was essential for survival.

Thornthwaite identified another issue which pertained to the change in the female workforce and unionism.²⁴ From the early 1970s, the increased employment of married women who expected long term employment with good wages meant a growth in women's participation in unionism. However, the gender division in unions remained.

Technology is the other single most influential factor identified in contemporary texts as accentuating the gender divide. It created the opportunity for owners and managers to streamline the entire factory process, including the laundry. Taylorism was the major process by which production was increased and the work process, especially for

²²P Rodan, 'Women and Unionism: the Case of the Victorian College Staff Association', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol 32, No 2, 1990, pp 386-403. J Bessant, 'Good women and Good Nurses. Conflicting Identities in the Victorian Nurses' Strikes, 1985-1986', *Labour History*, No 63, November, 1992, pp 155-173. G Strachan, *Labour of Love: The History of the Nurses Association in Queensland. 1960-1950*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996.

²³Many strikes failed as women were unable to maintain their stance on economic grounds or to gain wider union movement support. E Ryan, 'Proving a Dispute'. R Brookes, 'The Melbourne Tailoresses' Strike 1882-1883: An Assessment', *Labour History*, No 44, May, 1983, pp 155-174. W Brady, 'Serfs of the Sodden Scone? Women Workers in the Western Australian Hotel and Catering industry. 1900-1925', *Studies in Western Australian History*, No 7, 1987, pp 33-46.

²⁴Unionisation of Queensland's telephonists increased from 64.9% to 96.2% from 1972-1978. L Thornthwaite, 'Union Growth, Recruitment Strategy and Women: Queensland Telephonist in the 1970s', *Labour and Industry*, Vol 7, No 1, 1996, pp 87-112.

women, was altered.²⁵ Men used technology to re-inforce their power, argued Cockburn (1987) and then later Wajcman.²⁶ Men maintained the gender segregation in the workplace as technology further fragmented work, redefining skill.²⁷ Skilled jobs, like ironing, became repetitive tasks requiring speed and accuracy. These jobs then required different skills which equated even less with skill as defined by a craftsman. The ideology of skill as defined by Bennett (1984,1986) was the core of all union and arbitration court formulation of award classifications and margins.²⁸ Frances tested this theory in her research and discovered that women doing similar work to men in the printing industry received smaller margins.²⁹ Gender, not skill, was the central ingredient again.

To build an accurate picture of women's paid work an analysis of all aspects of an occupation is essential. The undue concentration of debates on individual issues ignores the wider spectrum of influences. Ellem (1989) and Frances (1993) both endeavoured to redress this imbalance.³⁰ They examined the clothing, printing, and boot making industries which employed large numbers of women. Their analyses of the role of gender, the nature of work, union structure and politics, and the increased

²⁵C Wright, 'Taylorism Reconsidered: The Impact of Scientific Management within the Australian Workplace', *Labour History*, No 64, May, 1993, pp 33-53.

²⁶C Cockburn, *Machinery of Dominance. Men and Women and Technological Know How*, Pluto Press, London, 1987. J Wajcman, 'The Masculine Mystique: A Feminist analysis of science and technology', in B Probert and R Wilson (ed), *Pink Collar Blues: Work, Gender and Technology*, Melbourne University Press, 1993, pp 20-40.

²⁷B Probert and R Wilson, 'Gendered work', in B Probert and R Wilson, (ed), *Pink Collar Blues*, pp 1-20.

²⁸L Bennett, 'The Construction of Skill: Craft Unions, Women Workers and the Conciliation and Arbitration Court', *Law in Context*, Vol 2, 1984, pp 118-132. L Bennett, *Job Classification and Women Workers: Institutional Practices, Technological change and the Conciliation and Arbitration Systems. 1902-72*, *Labour History*, Vol 51, 1986, pp 22-23.

²⁹R Frances, 'Marginal Matters: Gender, Skill, Unions and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court - A Case Study of the Australian Printing Industry', 1925-1937, *Labour History*, November, No 61,1991, pp 17-29.

³⁰B Ellem, *In Women's Hands? A History of Clothing Trades Unionism*, NSWU Press, Sydney, 1989. R Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria. 1880-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993.

use of technology provide a broad insight into the different industries. However, Ellem did not include an in-depth analysis of the structure of the industry which governed both employer and employee attitudes and influenced union officials' behaviour. Frances, on the other hand, argued that work was shaped by the basic tenets of capitalism, the state and technology within the 'shifting parameters of product and labour markets and the less flexible dictates of the gender order.'³¹ No one factor should be considered in isolation.

In acknowledgment of the accuracy of this statement I have developed an historical analysis of the Western Australian laundry industry, as a predominantly female occupation, and the unionisation of its workers. The structure of the bi-lateral industry emerged as a major influence on women's work experience and the unions' activities. Most of my research work required the use of arbitration court transcripts and other records as union documents were either fragmentary or non-existent.

My thesis contains five chapters. The first chapter establishes laundry work as a female occupation. An examination of the industry in Perth and Fremantle in the early twentieth century outlines the structure of the industry and the nature of the work. Chapter two focuses on the private commercial laundry sector and impact of the product market through competition from the charitable institutions, in particular. The formation of the union provided a tool for workers and employers. Chapter three provides insight into government hospital organisation where the laundry workers held a key role as they maintained the flow of clean linen. Their new union worked

³¹*ibid*, p 192.

effectively to improve conditions and wages. Chapter four is a comparative study of the successes and failures of the two unions and their secretaries to maintain standards through the depression of the 1930s and the world war. Chapter five extends the comparison from the post war period to the mid 1970s. During this period of rapid change the entire industry, from management to workers and their unions, had to adapt. The opening of a government central hospital laundry created the need for further restructuring. Despite all these modifications and adaptations, the laundry industry remained feminised.

This thesis makes a small contribution to filling the void in Australian and State labour history which Kingston recognised and has never been satisfactorily addressed. She wrote, 'The proper, thorough, industry by industry, state by state study of female participation in the industrial workforce has still to be done'.³²

³²B Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Anne*, p 5.

Chapter 1

LAUNDRY WORK . . . A SOAP AND WATER TRADE.¹

Laundering has been a quintessential service industry. 'The soap and water trade' has created employment for many workers whose task was to wash other people's dirty linen and clothes. Most were low paid employees in privately owned commercial laundries, large and small, or in government institutions such as hospitals. Others were unpaid workers in commercial laundries in the charitable institutions where they lived. Laundering, like most service industries, was labour intensive and vulnerable to the vagaries of fashion and market forces. While advancements in technology and mechanisation in laundering increased efficiency, the key element of cheap labour has remained. The structure of the labour market has provided a workforce of women to satisfy this demand for cheap labour.

Women's position in society has been maintained by the social construction of the gender order.² Women's fields of labour and their very existence belong in the private sphere. Tasks associated with domesticity have not been classed as 'work' and so remain under-valued. The extension of this concept into the workplace has devalued women's work. Women in the workforce remain segregated into areas requiring little recognised expertise and so they have earned low wages. Laundry work, as an extension of domesticity, is a prime example of women's work. The work is dirty, monotonous, repetitive, perceived as unskilled and so poorly paid. The almost entirely female workforce in the laundry industry allowed owners and managers to

¹P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History 1830-1930*, University of Illinois, 1986, p 130.

²JJ Matthews, *Good and Mad Women, The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1992, p 23.

concentrate on the other aspects of business development and profitability and the provision of other services in hospitals and government institutions.

Women's employment prospects depended on the viability of the industry. The survival of commercial laundries, large or small, was conditional on the procuring and maintenance of contracts.³ Competition in the early twentieth century was complex because of the structure of the laundry industry. There were five categories of laundries operating in Perth and Fremantle. The commercial laundries varied in size. The largest operations used steam and later electric driven machinery while the smaller businesses used hand power only. All employed more women than men. In the small home-based hand laundry a woman took in work to supplement her husband's income or to support the family entirely. Her services featured the personal touch. The Chinese or Asiatic laundries, located throughout Perth and Fremantle, offered similar personal and cheap services. In addition, the charitable institutions ran laundries that provided work for the inmates whilst earning money for the institutions themselves. The largest of these, the Home of the Good Shepherd in Leederville, owned by a religious Sisterhood, was a home for destitute women and girls.⁴ The Salvation Army ran a small Rescue Home for girls at 79 Lincoln Street, Highgate Hill, Perth. A group of philanthropic ladies formed the management committee for the House of Mercy at 55 Lincoln Street, Highgate Hill, Perth.⁵ All of these institutions ran commercial laundries. Most government institutions, such as hospitals, gaols,

³Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 1757 File 4/1919, p 36.

⁴The Order of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers known as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, *Annals of Good Shepherd Convent, Leederville*, p 1, in J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', Hons, UWA, 1985, p 20.

⁵Application for Enforcement of Award, WA IAC, AN195/4 Acc 1106 File 66/1924.

orphanages and old people's homes also had laundries that catered only for the inmates' washing. They were outside the commercial scene and were never competitors.

The workers in these various types of laundries performed the same type of work but the working conditions varied enormously. Concerns over these working conditions and public health heightened with the appearance of the social and urban reform movements which swept the industrial world. The 1903 Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly appointed to Inquire into the 'Factories' Bill' expressed political and public concern that all factories, including laundries, needed greater controls.⁶ At this time laundering was classed as a 'noxious trade' under the *Public Health Act 24/1898*.⁷ This classification required registration with the Local Board of Health and a licence fee of 2 pounds. These laundries were then subject to inspections by local health inspectors. However, the inspections proved ineffective. The problems, including an appalling lack of hygiene, ventilation and sanitation, insufficient protection for workers, long hours of labour and irregularities in the ages of employees, worsened. Specific problems within the laundry industry included the disposal of waste water,⁸ and the combination of heat, steam and unpleasant smells as well as the rapid growth of Chinese laundries.⁹ The Chinese laundries were one of the

⁶Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly appointed to Inquire into the 'Factories Bill', *WAVP* 1904.

⁷*Public Health Act 24/1898*, *WAVP* 1898.

⁸At Fisher's Bendigo Laundry (employing a man, his wife and another woman) 'The man threw all over the place the water in which the clothes had been washed. One had to go over one's boot tops in slush and filth in order to get to the premises. . . complaints of stench from stagnant water', FD Lockwood, Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly appointed to Inquire into the 'Factories' Bill', *WAVP* 1904, p 70.

⁹In 1900 32 Chinese laundries operated in Perth; by 1905 at least 50 existed, A Atkinson, 'Chinese Labour and Capital in Western Australia, 1847-1947', PhD, Murdoch University, 1991, p 174.

chief concerns of the law makers. They were alleged to be unhygienic and so became a primary target for reform.

The resultant *Factory Act 22/1904* provided the necessary regulations to improve the standards of all factories, including laundries. Factory reform had commenced in Western Australia. All factories that employed six or more workers or used mechanical power had to register. The registration fee of between five shillings and two pounds ten shillings depended on the number of employees. All Asiatic or Chinese businesses had to register and pay a fee of five pounds. The legislation incorporated the mandatory factory inspections into the function of the Central Board of Health. The Chief Inspector of Factories, who was also the Chief Health Inspector, had jurisdiction over these inspections. The main problems reported were poor ventilation, the disposal of waste water, lack of toilets (closets) and privacy, and the need for impervious floors in washhouses.¹⁰ After these thorough inspections, many owners needed to upgrade their facilities before receiving factory registration. Some closed. The hardest hit were the Chinese or Asiatic laundries.¹¹ By the end of 1905, there were seven commercial laundries recorded on the Factory Register, including a steam laundry in Kalgoorlie. See **Table 1:1**. Women owned two of the smaller laundries while all the laundries employed more women than men. The two largest were the City Steam Laundry in Leederville, which employed 32 women and 4 men, and Fremantle Steam Laundry, which employed 21 women and 6 men.

¹⁰Factory Register, WA Department of Labour and Industry, An 25/3 Acc 400 File 1/1905.

¹¹ Between 1905 and 1908 32% of registered laundries closed down. By 1920 58% had closed, A Atkinson, 'Chinese Labour and Capital in Western Australia', p 179.

TABLE 1:1Laundries (not Asiatic) registered in 1905 under the *Factory Act 22/1904*¹²

Name	Address	Occupier	Reg Date	Women	Men
London	657 Hay St Perth	William Mackay	1/3/05	7	0
City Steam	Newcastle St Leederville	GW Telfer	20/3/05	32	4
Fremantle Steam	Swan St Nth Fremantle	AH Scott & J Price	25/4/05	21	6
Waverley	213 Beaufort St Perth	Miss K Hitchcock	15/5/05	7	0
Model	Tower St Leederville	Joseph A Dix	31/5/05	7	2
Sheen	Charles St Nth Perth	Emily E Draper	22/6/05	5	1
Kalgoorlie Steam	44 Egan St Kalgoorlie	Frank Buxton	20/9/05	7	4

Although compulsory registration existed the three charitable institutions that ran commercial laundries to supplement their incomes from donations and government subsidies were exempted under the *Factory Act*. Nevertheless two of these organisations, the Salvation Army Rescue Home, which employed eight women and girls under the supervision of their own officers and the House of Mercy, which employed up to six girls, applied for registration. Inspections revealed that both laundries complied with the regulations. The third, the Home of the Good Shepherd, which in 1905 employed 90 women and girls¹³ did not apply for registration and therefore did not undergo an inspection.¹⁴ These charitable institutions held a key position in the commercial laundry industry and provided a level of competition considered by the private owners as unfair.

¹²Factory Register, File 1/1905.

¹³*Record*, 22 December 1905, p 35, quoted from J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 35.

¹⁴Factory Register, File 1/1905.

The laundries in the various government institutions provided no competition in the commercial market place as they catered solely for clothes and linen from within their own institutions. A different government department controlled each institution. The orphanages and the Old Women's Homes were under the jurisdiction of the State Children's Department and the Superintendent of Public Charities respectively. The Colonial Secretary's Office controlled both Fremantle Gaol and the Fremantle Asylum whilst the hospitals belonged to the Department of Health. No laundries in the government institutions appeared on any Factory Register between 1905 and 1921. Therefore they escaped the compulsory inspections. So, the standards and working conditions in these laundries varied from place to place and from department to department. In 1909 the laundry at Fremantle Hospital needed renovations. Garrick and Jeffreys explained why:

The huge coppers had settled unevenly and the phenyl barrel was leaking. . . . The ironing stand was broken on one side where the hot iron stood on the stove, and the mangle wheel caught at the cover, making it difficult to turn. The drying room was out of order and when washing was hung outside it flapped noisily against the windows of the operating theatre.¹⁵

Even after the building of a new laundry there was little improvement in the working conditions and few new items of equipment, and staff turnover was high.¹⁶ The women at Fremantle Prison worked in even worse conditions but their situation was not reviewed until 1911. A newspaper's report of the findings of the Royal Commission included a recommendation for improving the type of laundry work the women performed;

Instead of being employed to wash the heavy moleskin clothes of male prisoners, which work seems unnecessarily arduous and degrading, the women should be given clean work, such as laundering.¹⁷

¹⁵P Garrick and C Jeffrey, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History to 1987*, Fremantle Hospital, 1987, p 116.

¹⁶*ibid.*

¹⁷CEDF Pennefather headed the Royal Commission into the administration of Fremantle Prison in 1911, *West Australian*, 10 May 1911, p 4.

There was a need to improve the working conditions in all the government institutions' laundries.

However, the Chief Inspector of Factories, in his first Report, disregarded conditions in the government run laundries because they fell outside his sphere of duty. He outlined the success of the *Factory Act* in improving factory conditions generally, but he was critical of the extent of health problems in the Chinese laundries.¹⁸ He also expressed concern at the many small hand laundries that failed to classify as factories because of the small number of employees. Hence they avoided the inspections. Standards were low. Many workers experienced social problems. These laundries had an unfair advantage in the market place. 'Every laundry should be counted as a factory. They are able to compete unfairly with those registered laundries employing just sufficient hands to bring them under the *Factory Act*,' he advised.¹⁹ The variations in registration requirements that existed under the *Factory Act* accentuated differences among laundries in the metropolitan area. It created stratification within the industry that allowed unfair competition.

Women working in the larger commercial laundries benefited from the regulations and inspections. The legal requirements for higher standards within the workrooms, the reduction in working hours and improved working conditions heralded a new era in factory work.²⁰ Despite those changes, life for the laundresses and ironers, who

¹⁸Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories of Department of Labour, *WAVP* 1905.

¹⁹*ibid*, pp 5-6.

²⁰Section 20 - 48 hour week excluding meal breaks; 8 3/4 hours per day; no more than 5 hours without a break; not to work between 6 pm - 8 am; Section 24 - meal break in separate room; no work for 4 weeks after confinement; Section 34 - no female allowed to clean machinery while in motion; Section 41 - no woman under 21 to control lifts or elevators. *Factory Act 22/1904*, *WAVP* 1904.

were mostly women, was far from pleasant. The work was hard and monotonous and the financial rewards were low. Even so, laundry work remained popular. It was an occupation to which many women turned as unskilled teenagers and continued working in for years, often for a lifetime.

The daily routine was the same, whether in a large commercial enterprise, a hospital or a small business of one or two people. The day usually began at 8 am. Men mostly collected the laundry but the sorting and marking, which required speed and accuracy, was women's work. The smell of people's dirty laundry must have been very unpleasant. Those working in the washhouses of the hand laundries were exposed to heat, suds and water as clothes were slogged and rotated around by copper sticks or 'dollies' in the fire-heated coppers or tubs of hot water. Once washed, women (or occasionally men) manually lifted the clothes out of the copper or tubs causing sudsy water to pour over the floor. Skirts, legs and feet were constantly wet. Tuberculosis, leg ulcers, and pneumonia were problems regularly experienced by these workers.²¹

Working conditions in the steam laundries were no better and there were the added dangers associated with machinery and steam. These laundries contained steam heated and driven washing machines, mangles and hydro-extractors and pressers. The washing machines were based on the rotary principle of cage revolving which caused

The clothes [to be] brought into contact with the water and cleansing materials in the container, and by means of ingenious contrivances in the machine the linen is subjected to constant rubbing and is lifted in and out of the soapy water. During the process the cylinder is alternately filled with steam and changes of hot water, after which, without the cylinder being opened, the clothes are rinsed by successive changes of clean cold water.²²

²¹P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 93.

²²*ibid*, p 141.

Mostly, men controlled these machines. In addition, men maintained the boilers because wood had to be carted, chopped and fed into the fires. Women, on the other hand, always hand washed, rinsed and starched the more delicate items. Sex segregation in the washhouse existed.

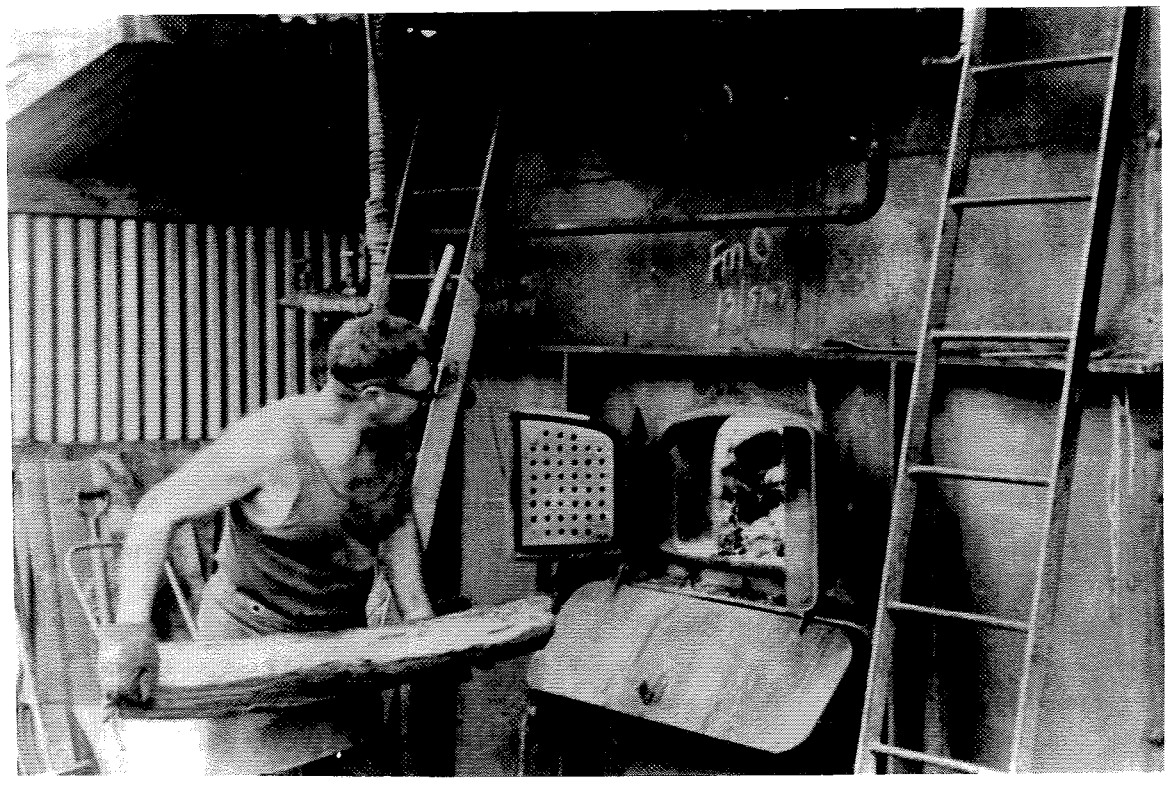
The steamy, wet articles, once rinsed either in the machines or by hand, then moved onto either mangles or hydro extractors to remove the excess water. The mangles, mostly young girls, had to be strong enough to lift the heavy, wet clothes, including large sheets. The articles required untwisting or shaking, folding and feeding between the rollers. Hand-turned mangles needed further strength to turn the handles. Steam-heated and driven mangles required extra skill and care not to crush fingers or arms in the rollers. Accidents were frequent despite the requirement for guards over the machines.²³ Hydro extractors used powerful centrifugal force to partially dry the articles.²⁴ Again, men rather than women operated these machines. Steam filled the air. So this section of the laundry required good ventilation for a healthy working environment but it was not always adequate.

The next stage in the process was the starching. Usually young women did this work and accepted it as a promotion from mangling.²⁵ The articles were dipped into the hot, thick starch solution either by hand or machine. The detachable collars required extra skill as each collar needed to be perfectly starched and smoothed so as not to

²³E Beardsley Butler, *Women and the Trades: Pittsburgh 1907-1908*, University of Pittsburgh, 1984. (Originally published 1909), p 171

²⁴P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 141.

²⁵E Beardsley Butler, *Women and the Trades*, p 175.



Bill Mullins, stoker at Fremantle Steam Laundry
The wood fired boiler was in use at least until 1968
Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2360.

chafe the wearer's neck. With the washing process now completed, the dry articles were ready for ironing.

In the separate, well lit ironing rooms, women performed the most skilled tasks in the laundry. Flat workers or calender girls required skill, speed and efficiency. They were usually the youngest of the women in the ironing room. They fed the linen

Between a series of steam heated padded rollers and a heated bed. Laundered items emerged from the calender dried, ironed and, in some cases, given a certain polish.²⁶

The high level of productivity of the operators of these machines gave the large steam laundries an advantage over smaller laundries. The clothes' ironers developed precision. They were the specialists. The collars and cuffs, the sleeves, the body of the shirt or skirt and the frills or lace all required different shaped and sized irons or pressing machines. The fire-heated or steam heated irons were heavy and hot. Burns were frequent as the heavy hot irons or small 'gopher' irons used for the frills and lace slipped onto the skin. The steam powered pressing machines required skill to place the articles in position and strength to press the treadles which in turn activated the steam rollers.²⁷ The atmosphere was always steamy and damp. The work was strenuous and physical exhaustion was common. Notwithstanding these adversities, ironing continued to be the prestigious work in the laundry because of the experience and skill required.

The final stage of the laundry process was the checking, repairing and folding of the articles ready for delivery. The need for speed and accuracy and the monotony of this process made it the prerogative of women. With the cycle completed, the men who

²⁶P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 143.

²⁷E Beardsley Butler, *Women and the Trades*, pp 180-182.

made the collections did the deliveries. The exhausting working day in the commercial laundry finished around six in the evening. The women returned home to fulfil their household duties which included their own families' laundry.

This close correlation between a woman's work and her home responsibilities in married life added value to learning the skills of laundering.²⁸ For this reason, many parents encouraged their young daughters to work in laundries despite the long hours, the back-breaking nature of the work and the occupational hazards. Once married, a woman could not only do her own household laundry with skill and experience but could take in extra washing and ironing to supplement her husband's income or, if necessary, to support her family as the sole breadwinner. The turn-of-the-century house had a washhouse located separate from the rest of the house for safety reasons. Here were the basic tools for laundering - a wood-fired copper to boil the clothes, a concrete trough and hand operated wringer or mangle. Inside, the kitchen wood stove kept the heavy cast iron irons hot. Other laundering items included bars of homemade soap, blue bags for rinsing, starch, buckets, outdoor clothes' lines and also portable clothes-horses for airing still damp clothes inside. These were easily procurable. Small businesses in the home flourished because they required only a small financial outlay and lots of hard work that could be fitted in around the routine of family life. Often the children helped their mother. One person who recalled working in her parents' home-based laundry at Cannington in 1906 was Maria Harris:

Six washer women were employed. . . We used to drive the horse and cart to the railway station with all the clean laundry and pick up all the dirty laundry because we had the government contract [for the railways]. . . Mum had a mangle, she used to put those [table linen, bed linen and towels] through. They were packed all firmly and folded and packed in these bags - grey

²⁸By 1908 laundering was a compulsory subject in the Household Management curriculum, Education Report, *WAVP* 1908.

mail bags. They did other washing then because I remember us girls had to go out after school and deliver it.²⁹

This area of women's work outside the factory or workshop situation was so popular that the 1906 Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly to Inquire into the Alleged Existence of Sweating in Western Australia included home-based laundries in its investigations. However, the Report concluded that this type of work was a legitimate form of employment. 'Women take work into their homes to supplement husband's income - for a small fee. That's not sweating.'³⁰ So, these family or home-based laundries continued to operate unimpeded by regulations and inspections.³¹ No statistics are available to show the extent of home-based laundries in the metropolitan area. Their existence provided important competition for the larger commercial laundries not only because of their numbers but also because many people preferred their laundry to be hand washed.

The other group of laundries that offered the luxury of hand washed clothes and linen at competitive prices were the Chinese or Asiatic laundries. These laundries had thrived in the once unregulated market of Perth and Fremantle. Their customers, who delivered and collected their own laundry, were mainly 'bank managers, doctors and businessmen - and other white collar workers who required starched collars and shirts.'³² However, these laundries also laundered all types of clothing and linen in their small premises. The facilities used by the Chinese launderers were similar to any

²⁹The Debnam family laundry started in Cottesloe in 1899 and moved to Cannington in 1902. Mrs Maria Harris, (maiden name Maria Debnam) interviewed by Chris Jeffrey in February 1976 for Battye Library, Oral History Section, Transcript pp 7-8.

³⁰Report of the Select Committee of Legislative Assembly to Inquire into the Alleged Existence of Sweating in WA Industry, 3 December 1906, *WAVP* 1906.

³¹Exemption is granted for those businesses employing less than 6 people and who are members of a family and dwell on the premises. Section 2, *Factory Act 22/1904*, *WAVP* 1904.

³²A Atkinson, 'Chinese Labour and Capital in Western Australia', p 177.

small home-based laundry business except that they often adapted disused workrooms or shops. The all male staff usually slept on the premises in the stove rooms or ironing rooms.

This practice concerned the inspectors who demanded structural modifications to improve the hygiene and health standards. For example, the small, two-roomed Suig Cheong Laundry in Perth was one such place that needed alterations to the design of the premises because the men slept in the workrooms. The inspector reported that the stoveroom must become a bedroom only, with all laundering tasks to be performed in the modified ironing room.³³ Another, the larger Soon Lee Laundry in Hay Street, Perth was originally a shop and needed similar changes. The four workmen had to live on the top floor and work in the laundry workrooms on the ground floor.³⁴ In both cases the report indicated that the main problem requiring attention was the general cleanliness and hygiene of the businesses. Most Chinese laundries required improvements to flooring, drainage and ventilation, the addition of flues for the stoves, and toilet cleanliness before gaining registration. Anne Atkinson argued that the *Factory Act 22/1904*, which required these extensive and expensive alterations, contributed significantly to the closure of Chinese laundries.³⁵ Their gradual decline in numbers meant their clientele sought alternative laundry services. Many would have turned to the home-based laundries or the larger commercial operations.

³³Registration No 205, File 1/1905.

³⁴Registration No 108, *ibid*, from A Atkinson 'Chinese Labour and Capital in Western Australia', p 175.

³⁵*ibid*, p 179.

These large steam and electric laundries offered quick, efficient and cheap services and eventually forced many smaller home based laundries to close. Competition affected one such business that held the Government Railway's laundry contract from 1899 till 1908. Maria Harris, one of the daughters, recalled, 'We lost the government contract. Someone with steam power got it - a cheaper price.'³⁶ Many contracts changed hands as competition grew. The marketplace began to alter. Gradually, as more laundries introduced the modern technology dependent on motive power, so the commercial laundry industry began to change and expand.

By 1912 there were 5 steam and 4 electric motor powered private commercial laundries in the State - as can be seen in **Table 1:2**. Just one woman registered as the single occupier of a laundry and she employed all women. Another woman was in partnership with her husband. The largest employers remained those laundries with steam power. Women employees continued to out-number men except in Albany where both laundries employed men only. AE Spargo also ran an unusual laundry business because he employed Chinese men as well as a European man and two women. His reduced wages' bill and therefore cheaper prices gave him an advantage in the marketplace despite a higher registration fee of five pounds.

³⁶Maria Harris, Oral History Transcript p 8.

TABLE 1:2Laundries (not Asiatic) registered by 1912 under the *Factory Act 22/1904*³⁷

Name	Address	Occupier	Reg Date	Women	Men
Kalgoorlie Steam	44 Egan St Kalgoorlie	Sayers & Hankin	2/12/08	11	4
Fremantle Steam	Hick St Nth Fremantle.	L White & WR Kronberger	1/4/09	26	7
The Geraldton Steam	Francis St Geraldton	E Wood & J Akeiston	3/11/10	1	2
The Monarch Steam	Havelock & Railway Pde W Perth	The Monarch Laundry Co	10/12/10	56	1
IXL	235 Perth St	JS & ME Hankin	19/2/11	8	1
The Hygienic Laundry Co. Electric	Taman St East Perth	C Sheridan	16/10/11	2	4
The English Electric	Fremantle Rd South Perth	AE Spargo	6/12/11	1 plus an Asiatic	2
Minnie Renouf Electric	Victoria Ave Nth Fremantle	Minnie Renouf	19/4/12	6	0
McLellan	Ulster St Albany	WA McLellan	23/7/12	0	7
Albany Sanitary Steam	York St Albany	EG McKenzie	26/9/12	0	14
Marian Electric	Marian St Leederville	W&R Cubbage	30/10/12	2	4
Bondi	44 Beaufort St Perth	J Sayer	23/12/12	8	1

The growth of the laundry industry proved advantageous to women as opportunities for employment increased. The Monarch Laundry Company bought the City Steam Laundry in December 1910 but the factory burnt down in 1911.³⁸ The building of new premises provided an opportunity to extend and modernise the business. No plans exist to show that the laundry was a two storey building but in 1919 the workers described their work-areas as being downstairs and upstairs.³⁹ The new concept of

³⁷Factory Registers, Files 1-5/1905-13.

³⁸Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 574 File 3/1913, p 27.

³⁹By 1919 descriptions of Monarch Laundry show that the ground floor level housed the washhouse, drying and starching rooms whilst the upper floor was the ironing department, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 1757 File 4/1919, p 27.

promotion and prestige that developed with the opportunity of moving upstairs to work created further divisions in the workplace. At Monarch Laundry building design added to sex segregation and job hierarchy to further divide the employees.

Synonymous with industry growth was increased competition. Advertisements and articles promoting the virtues of the modern steam laundry proliferated in newspapers. In 1912, Fremantle Steam Laundry and Kalgoorlie Steam Laundry used the newspapers to entice customers. Both promoted modernisation and efficiency as the keys to their good service.

<p>Fremantle Steam Laundry, North Fremantle. The quickest and most modern plant and methods in the State, treating something like 20,000 pieces weekly. Launderers to the whole of the Shipping Co., the leading hotels and cafes, etc.⁴⁰</p>	<p>Kalgoorlie Steam Laundry An up to date laundry Ironing, polishing and washing machines do away with a lot of old fashioned methods. Hydro-extractor, in place of the usual wringer, takes all the water out of the clothes. The whole plant is driven by a 5 hp motor and a 9 hp steam engine. The system adopted in marking, classing and sorting the clothes makes it impossible for mistakes to occur. Only white people are engaged in this industry and a large number of both sexes are engaged under white conditions. Hand laundry is available if customers wish.⁴¹</p>
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The inclusion of 'white' in the Kalgoorlie Steam Laundry advertisement reflects the large number of Japanese laundries on the Goldfields and the widespread antagonism towards their presence. Although such indications of ill-feeling did not appear in Perth advertisements at this time the dislike, even hatred, of the Chinese who ran laundries is evident in primary sources. Alfred Chick, the manager of Monarch Laundry, insisted that, 'They [Chinese] are the people who are our worst enemies.'⁴²

⁴⁰*The Golden Gate*, 2 August 1912, p 7.

⁴¹*Westralian Worker*, 12 January 1912, p 5.

⁴²Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 22.

The commercial laundry owners also felt strong antagonism towards another section of the industry: the charitable institutions. Throughout the period this section of the commercial laundry industry commanded a substantial share of the market and was also, according to the churches, 'engaged in practical philanthropy of the highest value to the State'.⁴³ The House of Mercy, the Salvation Army Rescue Home and The Home of the Good Shepherd all existed for one avowed purpose - 'to help young girls [and women] who have gone astray'.⁴⁴ The police, clergy, or families brought girls to the institutions. Others were sent by the courts or came voluntarily. All were institutionalised and received care and protection. The cost of this care was met by the resources of the organising bodies, donations and profits from the laundries in which the women worked.⁴⁵ Solicitors J and R Maxwell for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd outlined the financial value of the work:

Resources of the Sisterhood and proceeds of such sales together with gifts of the charitable are both barely sufficient to maintain the Institution. It is only the gift of their work by the present inmates that enables the Institution to remain open and available for their spiritual and temporal needs and also the rescue of those who are still living in the ways of sin.⁴⁶

The other values attributed to laundry work by the institutions were its reforming and instructional nature. First was a 'recognition of the salutary effects of wholesome work as a reforming agent . . . full occupation to keep bodies and minds employed,' according to the *Catholic Record*.⁴⁷ Second, the skills learnt were useful to the girls and women once they were back in the community. All institutions held the same view on these matters and none paid its employees.

⁴³*Record*, 11 August 1906, p 20.

⁴⁴Mr Davy representing Alexandra Home (the House of Mercy) in the Arbitration Commission, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 66/1924.

⁴⁵The charitable institutions received reductions in water rates and were exempt from paying Council rates. They also received government subsidies and were exempt from various licences, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 34.

⁴⁶Solicitors J and R Maxwell, Admitted Facts, The Home of the Good Shepherd, Application for Enforcement of Award, WA IAC, AN195/4 Acc 1106 File 65/1924.

⁴⁷*Record*, 11 August 1906, p 20.

A group of 'elite' women who believed in the value of social reform and its adjunct philanthropy established the first of these charitable institutions, The House of Mercy, for 'fallen' women and their babies. The girls came

Three months before their babies [were] born and they stay[ed] at least six months afterwards. They sign[ed] a contract which amongst other things [bound] them to forfeiting any money they receive[d] whilst living in the Home.⁴⁸

They worked in the laundry as an occupation and as an opportunity to earn money for the institution. The annual income from the laundry reached 330 pounds five shillings and six pence in 1906.⁴⁹ This indicated the success of the venture. In the same year, the President of the Management Committee expressed her concern that 'the Commercial Spirit [of the laundry] should never be allowed to dominate the Spirit of Humanity.'⁵⁰ Her remarks foreshadowed the criticism of Mrs Downes who resigned from the Committee two years later. Her resignation was from anger and disgust at the treatment of the girls who worked in the laundry; and the failure of the Committee to fulfil its promises. Mabel Downes wrote:

To me it seems a dreadful thing that women in a delicate state of health should be asked to do the work required of the girls at the Home. We were told that two independent women who had been engaged to assist in the laundry refused to engage again on the score that the work is too hard. These women were, I presume, in ordinary health and moreover used to laundry work. How much harder is it then for these poor girls, many of whom have never done this class of work and who are going through the most trying time of a women's (sic) life? Of course the girls have erred, but I suppose there is no sin that brings its own punishment more surely than theirs. In any case, I take it, it is not the function or the wish to the Committee to add to their suffering, but rather with kindness and tenderness to help them to rise to better things.⁵¹

There was a review of the hours worked shortly after this outburst.⁵² The shorter working day did not hinder the growth of the laundry service. It continued to attract

⁴⁸Mr Davy, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 65/1924, p 15.

⁴⁹Treasurer's Report, Annual General Meeting, 1906, J Lang, *The Open Door. A Home of Loving Care for Families; House of Mercy, Alexandra Home, Ngala. 1890-1980*, Ngala, Perth 1980, p 28.

⁵⁰President's Report, Minutes, Annual General Meeting, 1906, T Davies, 'The House of Mercy', unpublished paper, Murdoch, 1995, p 11.

⁵¹Letter Mabel Downes to Mrs Lukin, 21 December 1908, Correspondence, House of Mercy, Alexandra Home, Ngala Mothercraft Centre Inc, Unprocessed material, MMS 163 File 10, given to author by T Davies.

⁵²J Lang, *The Open Door*, p 30

large contracts. By 1912, the quantity of laundry work required the engagement of outside labour.⁵³ This enterprise proved both useful and profitable.

In 1896 the Salvation Army established a Rescue Home for all women who needed help, care and rehabilitation. The police brought some women from the courts as an alternative to gaol or they arrived voluntarily. Once in care, they received food and clothing. A small commercial hand laundry provided revenue for the Home.⁵⁴ Army officers, who were paid rates according to their rank, together with any of the women residents who volunteered shared, all the work. The washing came from businesses such as the Turf Club (not hotels) and from private individuals. No records exist for this institution so it is impossible to ascertain the size of the Home or the value of the laundry. But, its very existence was a challenge to the commercial laundries as they vied for contracts, large and small.

The Home of the Good Shepherd in Leederville operated the largest and most successful commercial laundry of all those owned by the charitable institutions. The Home opened on 21 September 1904 to provide care and moral rehabilitation through hard work and religious teaching for those girls and women who had transgressed the standards of society. The rule of life for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd was 'to rescue "fallen women" and to protect those in [moral] danger'.⁵⁵ The girls were usually sent to the Home by the Children's Court or the State Welfare Department⁵⁶ whilst the women were often widowed or deserted wives or displayed deviant

⁵³R Jull Papers, MN 41 Acc 827.

⁵⁴ Application for Enforcement of Award, File 66/1924.

⁵⁵Annals of The Good Shepherd Convent, Leederville, p 1, in J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 20.

⁵⁶*ibid*, p 35.

behaviour including drunkenness.⁵⁷ Occasionally, they admitted themselves or their families sent them, in disgrace. The inmates or 'children', as the Sisters referred to them, worked without pay at domestic tasks to help maintain the viability of the Home and to learn skills that they could use later in life as good wives and mothers.⁵⁸ Monk argued that another feature attributed to laundry work was its cleansing nature that reformed the "fallen women" 'into spotless white package[s] to be represented to society.'⁵⁹ The women, during their time with the Sisters, worked hard to redeem themselves financially and spiritually.

This laundry's reputation spread throughout the Metropolitan area with hotels, cafes and families forming the main clientele. The Home built a new laundry in 1906 to meet the demand. The *Record* reported that the new laundry was 'about 200 feet long by about 25 feet wide and is a lofty and well lighted and ventilated structure. It is divided into four compartments. These include washing-room, mangling room, ironing room and packing room.'⁶⁰ It contained 2000 pounds worth of laundry machinery including a large coal-fired boiler for the supply of hot water and steam.⁶¹ All the machines were steam driven, except the irons. In the ironing room was a huge brick stove 'not unlike a vault in appearance' which heated a large number of irons.⁶² Sisters and 'auxiliaries' supervised the operation of the machines and closely scrutinised the efforts of the workers.⁶³ Different groups of 'children' worked in the

⁵⁷*ibid*, p 41.

⁵⁸This was the policy of benevolent maternalism or infantilisation which kept inmates at the status of children for reform and re-socialisation. It was social control. *ibid*, p49.

⁵⁹J Monk, 'Cleansing their Souls: Laundries in Institutions for Fallen Women', *Lillith a Feminist History Journal*, No 6, Autumn, 1996, p 30.

⁶⁰*Record*, 11 August 1906, p 20.

⁶¹*ibid*.

⁶²*ibid*.

⁶³"Auxiliaries" were women who were encouraged to stay in order to remain free from their deviant

various areas where 'each one was a master of a special portion of her craft, so that the best result was achieved in the most methodical way.'⁶⁴ Speed, quality and reliability were the keys to the operation of the business. The goal of becoming self-sufficient through the proceeds of the laundry must have been quickly realised. It was noted by one reporter that, in 1907, 80 - 90 inmates worked solely in the laundry on a daily basis.⁶⁵ This number of workers placed the Good Shepherd laundry clearly ahead of all other commercial laundries in Western Australia.

The competition for work in a market as small as Perth and Fremantle was fierce. The charitable institutions certainly were in an advantageous financial position to offer cheap rates. They had no wages' bills, reduced Council rates, cheap water rates, government subsidies and no restrictions in hours or standards under the *Factory Act*.⁶⁶ The Home of the Good Shepherd could afford large advertisements like this one to promote its services.⁶⁷

<p>PHONE 1185</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The SISTERS of the GOOD SHEPHERD HAVING NOW OPENED THEIR NEW LAUNDRY AT LEEDERVILLE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">And, having there the LATEST and IMPROVED ADDITIONS are fully equipped to carry on business in a more extensive manner.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SPECIAL REDUCTIONS ARE MADE FOR HOTELS AND COFFEE PALACES. Government, Railway, and Ship Washings Tendered For.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Laundry Vans will run to Fremantle calling at all the intermediate Suburbs.</p>

past. They took certain vows, provided a good example to the new comers and helped run the Convent. Many lived out their whole lives within the Convent walls, J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 51.

⁶⁴*Record*, 15 June 1907, p 13.

⁶⁵*ibid*.

⁶⁶Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 34.

⁶⁷*Record*, 4 February 1905, p 13.

For the private commercial launderers who received no such benefits it was particularly irksome that their major competitors remained outside the regulatory framework. The chance for tougher regulations failed to occur with the abolition of the Central Board of Health in 1911 when all the factory inspectors came under the Department of Labour and Industry. The gradual introduction of modern laundry technology improved efficiency of production but failed to improve the working conditions. The predominantly female workforce continued to work long hours for low wages while their employers worried about their profit margins and the markets. Opportunities for employment in laundries grew as both the commercial laundries and the government institutions developed and expanded. However, in this service industry, the working cycle for all laundry workers continued without change.

Chapter 2

THE LAUNDRY GIRLS' LOT¹

The Formation of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union

Society considered laundering an appropriate work for women, young and old. One woman described the laundry work as a trade which

Should be a most satisfactory and beautiful trade for women, given the right conditions. Older women can continue it long after they would not be considered suitable for other work. It is a trade that more women go back to . . . as piece workers or daily workers.²

Women who worked in commercial laundries needed the money to support themselves or their families. For this reason they tolerated their poor working conditions and low wages. They accepted the patriarchal attitudes of their employers. They adapted to the gradual mechanisation of their workplaces and bowed to the pressures for improved productivity for no extra financial gain. The system of daily hiring and their need to work left the laundry workers powerless to improve their position. The surprise formation of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Industrial Union of Workers in 1912 provided a power base for gaining improved wages and shorter hours, although successes were minimal. The major beneficiaries were the employers who used both their employees and the labour movement to control the competition from the charitable institutions.

Life for the women working in the laundries was tough. They often had to juggle long hours of work with domestic and family duties. The casualisation of the industry created erratic employment and no guarantee of a stable income. All employment depended on the number and size of contracts their employers procured.

¹*West Australian*, 8 December 1919, p 8.

²A comment by a member of the British National Federation of Women Workers reported in the *Weekly Digest*, 10 June 1917, in P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses: A Social History 1830-1930*, University of Illinois, 1986, p 118.

Competition was fierce. The major commercial employers, the Monarch Laundry Company in Leederville and the Fremantle Steam Company in North Fremantle tolerated and often outbid the smaller commercial laundries. However, they resented the very existence of the charitable institutions and the Chinese laundries which undercut prices. The Monarch Laundry Company took action in 1912. The secretary, C Wright, wrote asking the Metropolitan District Council of the Australian Labor Federation [the Council] to protest against the charitable institutions tendering for government laundry contracts.³

Members of the Council heard this unusual request when they attended their regular meeting on 25 March 1912. An employer needed their help. The Council advised the company that, 'the best plan would be to have a union amongst the employees who would voice the disabilities of the industry to the Council.'⁴ The proposal met with a positive response from the Monarch Laundry. Management agreed 'to assist [in] the formation of the union.'⁵ The specific purpose of the proposed union positioned it outside the conventional reasons for establishing unions. The employers planned to use the workers in the laundry industry, through a union, to provide support against perceived unfair competition and so bolster profits. The value of a union to the workers, who were mostly women, did not appear to be the primary concern. No evidence exists to show either initial involvement or consultation of the workers. The Registrar of Friendly Societies received an

³Minutes, 25 March 1912, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 1/1910.

⁴*Westralian Worker*, 19 April 1912, p 5.

⁵*ibid.*

application to register the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Industrial Union of Workers [MLEU] on 29 July 1912.⁶

The initial success of any union lies in its enrolment of members. Thirty workers attended the inaugural union meeting, held on 21 August 1912. 90% of the small attendance were women. They accepted the leadership of men and voted in a male president and secretary. The office bearers from within the laundry industry were the Chair, Walter Peebles Jones; Vice-chairman, Mrs Paull; Treasurer Mrs Parrott but the Secretary, Walter Leonard (Ben) Jones, was a bootmaker and active Council member.⁷

Although the majority of members were women, the influence of the male executives was evident from the beginning. Their first task was to improve wages, hours and working conditions. The log of claims drawn up listed more classifications for male workers than females.⁸ The male classifications were leading hand, assistant hand, leading hand with engine driver's certificate required to drive an engine, and age categories from 14 years to 21 years. The women's classifications were age categories from 14 years to over 21 years and just one other classification recognising experience and skill - 'All fancy shirt and collar ironers, machinists, packers and sorters (irrespective of age)'.⁹ This wider recognition of male skill and experience allowed men to earn more and advance with experience. There was no attempt to improve working conditions in factories, and no attempt to

⁶MLEU Registration File, WA IAC, AN 191/41 Acc 3159 File 1333/1912 Vol 1.

⁷*ibid.*

⁸Register of Disputes and Awards, WA IAC, AN 195/8 Acc 1489 File 17/1912.

⁹Log of Claims, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 574 File 3/1913.

address occupational health and safety problems. The male Union officials neglected to reform the workplace environment of the laundries, seeing it as an appropriate extension of home duties.

Despite the lack of workplace reform the women welcomed the log of claims as they were eager to receive more pay and shorter working hours. Their newly registered union now provided them with an avenue for demanding change.¹⁰ Many signed petitions admitting dissatisfaction with their wages.¹¹ The Union secretary sent the petitions, copies of the log of claims and an ultimatum to each of the employers. There was no response. An industrial dispute existed. The first and only recorded discussion on this industrial dispute took place at a special Union meeting in Trades Hall on 23 November 1912. The result of the secret ballot indicated the members' desire for further action and so authorised the secretary to lodge a reference of an industrial dispute with the Court.¹²

The women's enthusiasm for their union extended beyond industrial matters and they organised socials as either fun-get-togethers or fund-raisers. The first coincided with the registration of the Union on 16 September 1912.¹³ Another, a Benefit Fund in the form of a picture-show evening, raised money for Mrs Paull who had suffered financial hardship. Participation in the Eight Hour Day Procession proved a popular annual event. In 1915 the Union held position No 55 in the long procession of floats, marchers and bands.¹⁴ It is surprising that members had the time or energy to go to

¹⁰Registered on 16 September 1912, Registration No 189, MLEU Registration File, File 1333/1912 Vol 1.

¹¹Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913.

¹²Lodged on 12 April 1913, *ibid*.

¹³Minutes, 10 September 1912, Metropolitan District Council, Book 1/1910.

¹⁴*Westralian Worker*, 20 October 1915, p 2.

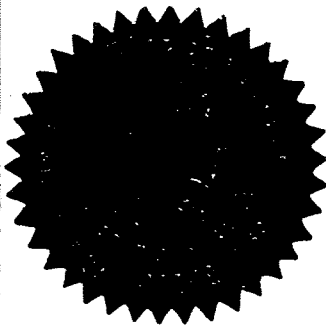
Certificate of Registry and Incorporation.

I hereby certify that the society called the...METROPOLITAN LAUNDRY...

EMPLOYEES' INDUSTRIAL UNION OF WORKERS -----

situated in ----- P E R T H -----, is duly registered and
incorporated as an industrial union of workers under "The Industrial Conciliation
and Arbitration Act, 1902."

Given under my hand this 16th day of September, 1912.



Bennett

Registrar of Friendly Societies.

Certificate of Registration for Metropolitan Laundry Employees'
Industrial Union of Workers
Source: WA Industrial Arbitration Commission, Acc 1095,
WA Public Records Office.

socials as their home duties started immediately after work. All women, whether young or old, married or single, had family responsibilities of cleaning, cooking and caring for children. The list included the family laundry as their work made them 'experts'. Yet despite these extra burdens there was still time for fun and friendship.

The Union's social activities proved popular and offered an alternative form of entertainment and solidarity to the annual work picnics. Firms organised these special days to create company loyalty and bonding between employees. The inaugural Monarch Laundry picnic day on a hot Sunday in February 1911, was one such day full of 'fun and festivity, which scarcely ceased.'¹⁵ A reporter summed up the whole river trip and picnic at Point Walter:

Altogether, the outing was a big success and resulted not only in the bringing about a splendid spirit of comradeship amongst the employees themselves, but acted as a close personal introduction between the workers and the head of the firm, of whose generosity and courtesy one cannot speak too highly. Long may the Monarch Laundry thrive!¹⁶

The Company always came first.

However, solidarity amongst Union members grew whilst loyalty to the firm and the boss remained strong. The employers' patriarchal attitudes continued to manipulate their employees' attitudes. The women turned to their employers for support and leadership. They accepted their positions on the factory floor. Complaints were rare. As Rudolph Kronberger, part owner of Fremantle Steam Laundry, explained, 'The girls never said to me that they were dissatisfied.'¹⁷ Certainly the assertive American, Lewis McGrew, who was the original manager of the Monarch Laundry,

¹⁵*Sunday Times*, 26 February 1911, p 17.

¹⁶*ibid.*

¹⁷Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 15.



Laundresses at Leisure--A Frolicsome Day--At Point Walter

Monarch Laundry Company's first annual picnic
Source: *Sunday Times* 26 February 1911, p 17.

believed in his own abilities as a boss. He explained his philosophy: 'If you want to secure good results, treat your employees well. And, so far as I am concerned the best is not a bit too good for the people under my control.'¹⁸ So the arrival of the petitions of discontent and the log of claims took them by surprise. Kronberger expressed his amazement: 'Not one [employee] ever came to me and asked for a rise.'¹⁹ He saw himself as a fair and caring employer. He stated, 'I don't pay by age. I pay by ability.'²⁰ His claims about his attitude towards his staff are questionable in light of one word in parentheses in a *Daily News* report about his testimony before the Arbitration Court. In answer to a question on the ages and rates of pay for the fancy ironers he was reported as saying,

I don't know. I pay them the rates I have told you. Some of them in my employ may be 50 or 60 years of age for all I know. (laughter).²¹

The laughter mocked his expressions of concern for his staff and challenged his knowledge of his women workers. Neither employer believed there was an industrial dispute.²²

The workers at these two large laundries faced new demands from their bosses. Larger businesses at this time began to restructure and introduce a new level of management to increase production and profit. These modern bosses brought additional controls and problems for the workers. Alfred Chick, the second manager at Monarch Laundry, was one of this new breed of factory supervisor. He saw himself as the boss 'on the factory floor' to whom all were answerable. His

¹⁸*Sunday Times*, 26 February 1911, p 6.

¹⁹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 15.

²⁰*ibid*, pp 13-15.

²¹*Daily News*, 23 September 1913.

²²Answer to notification of industrial dispute, *WAAR*, Vol XII 1913, p 80.

supervisory skills set him apart from the workers and countered his lack of experience in laundering. He believed that the work he controlled was easy, hygienic and safe.²³ Speed, efficiency and duty to work were the keys to his ideal of workshop culture. Lifting profits through efficiency could have been his motto. He expected increased productivity.

The workers' attitudes changed too. They now had a union. Membership rose from 76 in December 1912 to 101 by December 1913.²⁴ This was almost 100% membership at Monarch Laundry and Fremantle Steam Laundry. The women gathered courage and several agreed to appear as Union witnesses to tell their stories at the dispute hearing. The Court provided them with protection in a semi-public forum and the new Union secretary, WE Clarke, gave them support. The hearing, before the Full Bench of the Court of Arbitration, commenced on 23 September 1913. It was exactly twelve months after those women first admitted discontent by signing the petitions.²⁵ The women's evidence provided a clear picture of their hot, hard, monotonous and often dangerous work. All believed their conditions of work needed considerable improvement. None felt her wages matched her efforts.²⁶

Annie Weatherall, the first woman to give evidence, was a shirt starcher at Monarch Laundry. She worked from 8 am to 5.30 pm, with a short lunch break, for 4/6 per

²³Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 17, p 22.

²⁴*WAAR* Vol X1 1912 and Vol X11 1913.

²⁵The Full Bench consisted of the President, Mr Justice Burnside, and Messrs W Somerville and H Daglish Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913.

²⁶In Sydney, in 1906, the women in the laundry industry and their Union had to argue before the Court that a dispute actually existed. Despite providing evidence of wages keeping them on the poverty line, the tough nature of the work and that management had conspired against Union members the Court ruled against the women by ruling there was no evidence of a dispute. E Ryan, 'Proving a Dispute: Laundry Workers in Sydney in 1906,' *Labour History*, No 40, May 1981, pp 98-106.

day which seemed unfair to her. The work was hard, hand labour that included mixing and carrying six buckets of starch from the washhouse to the starch room. Although the job required no recognised skill she maintained it was a skilled job. She explained why experience and skill were synonymous.

Experience was necessary to know how to treat the shirts or to starch them. One simply dips a shirt into the starch and brings it out and not rub it properly [sic] and then send it on to the machines. . . If not done properly it spoils the article and dirties the machines.²⁷

Alice Drew, Mary Birchall and Francis Parrott were ironers at the same factory.²⁸

Their work was hot and tiring. The new gas irons used for finishing off shirts added to the heat problem. Ironing required care and precision as customers were fussy.

They believed their skills and effort needed greater reward than between 5/6 and 7/- per day with no overtime. They were all breadwinners and their wages were insufficient for their families' needs. Alice, one of the original union members, was an English woman in her early thirties. She originally had to work to support herself and her sick husband.²⁹ By the time of the hearing she was a widow with no other means of support. She earned the flat rate of 6/- per day and paid 7/- per week for a room in Leederville. She ironed all the white shirts and some of the new shirts. It took her years to learn the job. Mary was in a similar position. She supported a sick husband and child. She explained how she had worked all her life in laundries, including in Canada. Despite her experience she received the lowest pay of the three. Francis, too, worked because of necessity. She had a child to support and found life financially difficult working only four days a week. She was in arrears with her rent. When SJ McGibbon, the advocate for Monarch Laundry, cross-

²⁷Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 5.

²⁸*ibid*, pp 6-9.

²⁹Alice Wilde (Drew) commenced work at Monarch Laundry soon arriving in Perth from England. She worked there for over 20 years. Letter, 19 September 1997, to author from Ian R Hooper of Swanview.

examined her about her work, she replied, 'I am a specialist.'³⁰ She was proud of her expertise which she had attained over seven years. Experience and skill went unrecognised by the laundry proprietor and his representative but the work performed by the women needed both.

The two youngest witnesses were Kathleen Williams, aged 22 years, and her assistant Beatrice May Smith, aged 15 years, who worked together feeding the flat linen and all the starched articles into the calender. Kathleen described this machine as

A huge steam mangle and if you are not very careful you are likely to get your fingers caught in the machine. It is the hottest job in the laundry because the rollers are heated. . . It is placed in the middle of a large room.³¹

She recalled an accident where 'A girl had her fingers squeezed very badly, but they had not to be taken off.'³² Beatrice insisted that feeding the machine was difficult to learn, yet girls as young as fourteen often did the job.³³ Both worked eight and three quarter hours a day and earned 17/6 and 11/- per week respectively. Kathleen had left once because of the low wages but had returned with the promise of a pay increase. But still their wages were insufficient.

The two most senior workers at Monarch Laundry were Mary Ann Paull, a forewoman, and Walter Peebles Jones. Mary was the forewoman responsible for quality control of the ironing and packing of the freshly laundered articles. She regarded herself an expert, having first served her apprenticeship in the laundry trade

³⁰Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 9.

³¹*ibid*, p 10.

³²*ibid*.

³³*ibid*, p 11.

in London and then continued to work on her arrival in Perth.³⁴ She was the only witness who had no complaints or criticisms. Walter, a wash-house man with 15 years experience, considered his work both demanding and skilful. His expertise lay in his ability 'to differentiate between what would be the proper [washing] method for one class of goods compared to another [flannel, silk or cotton].'³⁵ The job of sorting soiled linen was unpleasant with risk of infection; the machinery he used was dangerous; and the conditions of work were far from ideal. He explained that 'We are wet half way up the legs through handling wet clothes. I suffer from rheumatism and most wash-house men do.'³⁶ Walter had left Monarch Laundry and felt happier working in a completely different type of work. This opportunity for betterment was not an option available to most laundry women. They either worked until marriage or returned to support their families during a period of financial crisis. They had to tolerate the working conditions.

The evidence of all the workers provided a clear picture of unpleasant often dangerous working conditions, low wages and unreliable hours. Their skills and expertise gained through experience were not acknowledged by management who considered the work 'unskilled' women's work. McGibbon constantly demeaned the women by highlighting their errors and emphasising the simple nature of their tasks. He gave no credit for their skills, efforts, reliability or commitment to the firm. He challenged them all on their marital status and their need to work. Chick duplicated all these viewpoints in his evidence.³⁷ He showed no concern for the feelings or

³⁴*ibid.*

³⁵*ibid.*, p 2.

³⁶*ibid.*, pp 2-4.

³⁷*ibid.*, pp 16-24.

complaints of the women; he just implied that any discontented employees should leave. In his opinion there were plenty of women looking for work who, with training, could quickly fill those occupations deemed unskilled. For Chick, training did not equate with skill although both produced competence. He explained that skill was ‘what a lad [learned as] . . . an apprentice.’³⁸ The craft unions controlled skill by the apprenticeship system. As Laura Bennett has argued, skill was a male attribute, a social construct designed to create barriers and controls in the workplace and to empower male workers.³⁹ This ideology of skill offered no ‘skilled’ place for women; their work remained defined as unskilled and highly specialised.⁴⁰ Laundry work was women’s work under the control of male supervisors and managers who prided themselves in their ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ to bolster their level of power. The women’s evidence challenged this ideology.

The skill of laundry work was only one facet of the debate for the employers. The other was competition. Business’ inability to absorb the extra expenditure on wage increases because of the level of competition constituted the thrust of the arguments presented by both Kronberger and Wright. Chick on behalf of management explained:

It is not competition, it is undercutting us in every way. We cannot afford to pay anything near the rates asked for if we have to compete with work at about one third our prices. Other competition [besides the Home of the Good Shepherd] is from the Salvation Army, the Chinese and white people as well.⁴¹

³⁸Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 1757 File 4/1919, p 39.

³⁹L Bennett, ‘The Construction of Skill: Craft Unions, Women Workers and the Conciliation and Arbitration Court’, *Law in Context*, Vol 2, 1984, pp 118-132.

⁴⁰*ibid*, p 131.

⁴¹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 21.

The men produced evidence detailing the number of laundries in each of the ten municipalities, together with a list of the 'Asiatic' laundries and their employees, obtained from the Chief Inspector of Factories.⁴² The marketplace was well served. The 'white' laundries were small, so they created little real competition. But certainly the Chinese laundries did even though the number was reducing annually.⁴³ Wright explained that: 'They [the Chinese prices] are cheaper than ours. I would not say decidedly cheaper. They are under us all the time.'⁴⁴ Kronberger, from his experience in Fremantle, illustrated another aspect of the Chinese laundry problem. 'In some cases the Chinese charge more than I do but they get the work just the same. People will patronise them,' he said.⁴⁵ So perhaps prices were not the only issue. The actual problem for these managers was the very existence of the Chinese laundries. Chick best summed up the viewpoint, 'They [Chinese] are the people who are our worst enemies.'⁴⁶

Still stronger animosity existed towards the presence in the industry of the charitable institutions. By 1913 the Home of the Good Shepherd had the single biggest commercial laundry in Perth with the majority of its 88 residents working there under supervisory staff.⁴⁷ The Monarch Laundry Company which owned two businesses, a laundry in Railway Parade, West Perth, and a dyeing works in Hay St,

⁴²There were 21 white laundries and 31 'alien' laundries between Midland Junction and Fremantle with 10 white and 21 'alien' actually in Perth, *ibid*.

⁴³20 Chinese laundries closed between 1905-1912, Factory Register 1905, Department of Labour from A Atkinson, 'The Socio Economic Experience of Chinese Sojourners in Perth 1900-1920', Hons Thesis Murdoch University 1994, p 90. In 1912 the 31 existing Chinese laundries employed 144 workers. Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 30.

⁴⁴*ibid*, p 25.

⁴⁵*ibid*, p 13.

⁴⁶*ibid*, p 22.

⁴⁷Report by Inspector Riley, 1 May 1913, Leederville Home of the Good Shepherd, WA Department of Health, AN 120/4 Acc 1003 File 1680/1913.

Perth, employed a total 50 staff.⁴⁸ The Fremantle Steam Laundry employed 46 staff.⁴⁹ Perth's seven largest hand laundries employed no more than ten workers each and were not involved in this hearing but were an important part of the commercial scene.⁵⁰ Size was an important indicator of the amount of work done. Fierce competition existed. The employers' claim that the charitable institutions provided unfair competition was valid. Not only were these institutions entitled to government subsidies and reduced rates but they also had no labour costs because the inmates worked as part of their rehabilitation and contribution towards their upkeep.⁵¹ These laundries offered cheaper rates and claimed a large proportion of the contracts. This marketplace advantage impacted on all laundry businesses not only on profits but also on employment.

The laundry workers, because of the daily hiring system, depended on their employers to win of contracts. A successful business meant plenty of regular work. Both steam laundry managers related their own bitter experiences to the Court. Kronberger explained, 'The biggest competitor is the Home of the Good Shepherd. They [tendered] against me and I lost a Shipping Company work [through] that convent tendering one half penny less than I did.'⁵² He struggled to keep his factory open because of a decline in trade. For the previous six months it had been operating on a four day week. Monarch Laundry encountered similar problems but suffered less. The 600 customers on its books guaranteed sufficient income for a full-time

⁴⁸Evidence, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913.

⁴⁹Evidence, *ibid*.

⁵⁰List supplied as evidence, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, *ibid*. Employee numbers, Factory Registers, WA Department of Labour and Industry, An 25/3 Acc 400, Files 1-5/1905-1913.

⁵¹J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 31

⁵²Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913, p 13

secretary who could seek business personally and organise expensive advertising. An elaborate 12 page glossy brochure *Where Laundering is an Art* expounded the benefits of the Monarch Laundry's quality laundering and invited both trial orders and private inspection of the factory.⁵³ An amended price-list on the back cover indicated a further attempt to entice trade. Wright argued that, despite these efforts, his business still lost trade. As he explained,

I have lost a considerable amount of trade through competition with these charitable institutions. I have been endeavouring to get the Perth Club work for a considerable time. Since I have been secretary of the Company I have left no stone unturned to get these and various other clubs back, and I was offered the work provided I could do it at the same price as the Home of The Good Shepherd.⁵⁴

He illustrated his point by producing a comparative price list of hotel items that demonstrated the price differences.

TABLE 2:1

Price lists for hotel contracts in 1913⁵⁵

Linen per dozen	Monarch Laundry	Home of the Good Shepherd
White tablecloths	2/6	1/-
Sheets	1/-	1/-
Towels	1/-	2/-
Serviettes	1/-	6d.
Bar/Lavatory towels	6d.	3d.
White coats	6d.	6d.

Kronberger pointed out an added restraint against increasing his prices to offset any increase in wages: the shipping companies, which comprised the major part of his business, continually threatened to return dirty linen to Adelaide.⁵⁶ Wright added that the price increases to cover the wage claims would jeopardise the company's position in the marketplace. He estimated the new wages would remove another

⁵³Presented as evidence, *ibid*.

⁵⁴*ibid*, p 25.

⁵⁵*ibid*

⁵⁶*ibid*, p 15.

The proper "getting-up" of fine goods depends mainly upon three things, viz. :-

PLANT—SKILL—CARE

We have the first

Our staff the second

The third is a constant study
with us

Our customers have the result
of the blending of the three.

Trial orders are solicited, whether
large or small



Where Laundering is an Art, p 3.

Source: WA Industrial Arbitration Commission, Acc 1095,
WA Public Records Office.

25% from the turnover.⁵⁷ His company could not afford this loss.⁵⁸ Dismissals were inevitable.

The evidence of the launderers rather than that of the women workers created a major response in the media. The editor of the *West Australian* commented on the popular opinion of the time.

There is a popular impression that the competition of the charitable organisations is in many instances unfair to citizens endeavouring to earn a living on a business basis. . . It is an arrangement which will not appeal to the Australian community to say, in effect, that funds for sweet charity must be obtained even though the effort inflicts wrong upon workers striving to live without the pale of benevolent effort.⁵⁹

The editor queried the values and motives of the charitable institutions. His comparison of charitable institutions, prisons and Asian businesses inflicted the deepest of insults. The call for worker protest on this basis added to the slur. He wrote:

The question is an economic one and the workers who protest against prison labour and Asiatic labour should not overlook the labour of the inmates of charitable institutions if the product of their labours is to be sold at less than fair rates.⁶⁰

Finally, he challenged the charitable institutions themselves:

Immediate steps should be taken to prevent an undoubted evil spreading. The most effective course would be for the offending institutions, if they exist, willingly to renounce their sins.⁶¹

The editorial caused discussion and debate.

The Council responded to the editorial. The existence of a union in the industry allowed the fulfilment of the employers' initial request. A discussion of the laundry industry's problems, particularly 'the charitable institutions which compete with

⁵⁷*ibid*, p 29.

⁵⁸1 October 1912 to 30 August 1913, Monarch Laundry Co. turnover was 7241 pounds, 14 shillings and 10 pence. The wages bill of 3888 pounds 10 shillings was 53.7% of the turnover. *ibid*, p 31.

⁵⁹*West Australian*, 25 September 1913, p 6.

⁶⁰*ibid*.

⁶¹*ibid*.

private establishments,' resulted in two motions being put.⁶² The first, 'That unions again be circularised requesting that some action be taken to prevent members trading with Asiatic laundries,' was passed. The second, a request to change legislation to prevent competition [from charitable institutions], was lost. The Council's commitment to eliminate all Asian traders whilst accepting the valuable role of the charitable institutions in society indicated the members' values. The Council appointed a special committee to examine the situation. This further emphasised the plight of employers.⁶³ None of the problems and issues raised by the women who gave evidence caused any comment or action.

Not until early December 1913 did an organisation take up the cause of the female laundry workers. The Metropolitan Women's Labor League requested the Council to press for factory reform. They presented two policies: first, that 'All charitable institutions . . . be brought under the Factory Act' and second: that 'The Government be requested to pass a minimum wages' bill for women workers.'⁶⁴ No record of comment or discussion appeared in Council Minutes. The men on the Council had other business.

On 13 January 1914 the Full Bench reconvened. The employers' advocate, McGibbon, requested that no award be made because the problem with the Chinese and charitable institutions had not been addressed. He claimed that industry could

⁶²Item 36 , Minutes, 23 September 1913, Metropolitan District Council, Book 1/1910.

⁶³The committee comprised Messrs Norman, Clarke, O'Dowd, O'Meara and Swebles, Item 36, Minutes, 23 September 1913, *ibid.*

⁶⁴Minutes, 2 December 1913, *ibid.*

not afford the wage increases and businesses would close. The *Daily News* reported him as saying that

He was instructed to make as emphatic a protest as possible against any award being published in this industry. The award would have the effect of closing up the white laundries and throwing the trade in to the hands of Asiatics and charitable institutions, upon whom the award could not be enforced.⁶⁵

He also requested a reduction in the washhouse man's wages from 9/ to 8/- per day and then attacked the President's referral to the Higgin's concept of the minimum wage. McGibbon challenged, 'Is Mr Justice Higgins to be taken as the highest authority for wages throughout the Commonwealth?' The President replied, 'I rather think that he is. . . The principle of the living wage is based on the fact that if an industry can't afford this then it shouldn't exist.'⁶⁶ The debate ended. The Court finally ratified the first Metropolitan Laundry Workers Award 3/1913, almost fifteen months after the Union had begun to prepare the case.

The new award covered workers at the steam laundries within a radius of fourteen miles of the General Post Office of the City of Perth. Despite the arguing and debating there were very few variations from the Union's log of claims. The Court did reduce the number of classifications in the Wages Clause. All workers, male and female between the ages of under 15 years and over 21 years received the same wages of 2/- to 5/- per day. In some cases this would have meant equal pay for equal work but not very often as most employees were women. Only the ironers and machinists over 21 years and the washhouse men gained separate classifications receiving the highest wages of 7/- and 9/- respectively. The Union secretary recognised but failed to rectify a problem with the single classification for the ironers

⁶⁵*Daily News*, 13 January 1914, p 8.

⁶⁶*ibid.*

and shirt and collar machinists 'over 21 years of age'. He suggested changing the age qualification to 'irrespective of age' to remove the older women from direct competition for employment with younger women whose wages were less.⁶⁷

Everyone earned more under the new Award so long as this anomaly was not exploited. The reduction of the working day to 8 hours allowed for the introduction of overtime and public holiday rates. Tighter controls over the employment and subsequent exploitation of old or infirm workers at below award rates were in place. The Union secretary gained limited access to Record Books to check hours and wages. The success of the secretary's first major initiative pleased everyone despite the lack of workplace reforms.

Monday 19 January 1914, the day the Award took effect, was the beginning of an exceptional chain of events in the laundry industry. Workers at the two steam laundries arrived at work eager to earn their new wages. However, those at the Monarch Laundry found their enthusiasm quickly dampened. At 8 am, the management sacked seventeen ironers over the age of 21 years in favour of employing younger women with no experience because of their cheaper rates of pay.⁶⁸ They utilised the very loophole in the Award that the Union secretary had tried to block. The *Westralian Worker* reported:

Before the ink on the recent award of the Laundry Workers had time to dry the fight commenced. . . the legal-clerical-medical directors of the Monarch Laundry . . . discharged ALL hands over 21, and thus avoided the payment of the Court award of 7/- per day.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Minutes of the Award, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 3/1913.

⁶⁸They were given one days' notice and paid the new rate for that day. Inspector E Flemming's Report to Chief Inspector of Factories, Strikes and Lockouts: Monarch Laundry, WA IAC, AN 195/3a Acc 1101 File 132/1914.

⁶⁹*Westralian Worker*, 23 January 1914, p 1.

Chick confirmed this fact when he rang the *West Australian*. The paper reported him as insisting that, ‘There was no way of getting away from the hard fact, they [Monarch Laundry] could not pay the rates under the award. They sacked the experienced hands to get young girls.’⁷⁰ A different explanation for the dismissals came from Chick five years later when he stated that the action was ‘not against the award issued by the Court. It was a protest.’⁷¹ He then claimed that the charitable institutions had broken a verbal contract which fixed prices for private work but not hotels. He said the agreement was,

That the Home of the Good Shepherd would fix their prices against the prices fixed by a meeting of the laundry proprietors, and they would stick to the exact prices, or not below the those prices.⁷²

Chick added that this contract was made with the employers and the solicitor for the Home of the Good Shepherd in front of the President Justice Burnside, and Alex McCallum from Trades Hall.⁷³ WW Alcock, the employers’ advocate, supported Chick’s 1919 statement by claiming that the charitable institutions withdrew from the arrangements.⁷⁴ As the institutions did not honour their undertaking Monarch Laundry management responded by dismissing the seventeen experienced ironers. Chick believed the sacked women understood the reason but this claim seems unlikely.

The stunned, angry women united in defiance. They did not accept the situation and rallied in force at Trades Hall that night. Mesdames Beadle, Green, and Dobson, Ben Jones, N O’Dowd and the Union secretary (WE Clarke) addressed the ‘crowded

⁷⁰*West Australian*, 20 January 1924, p 7.

⁷¹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 34.

⁷²*ibid*.

⁷³*ibid*, p 25.

⁷⁴*ibid*, p 6.

and historic' meeting.⁷⁵ Members voted unanimously to support their sacked colleagues by refusing to work until they were reinstated. Reporting of the early morning picket line varied. The *Westralian Worker* described the scene.

The whole of the employees were, however, assembled outside, and there was no wavering in the ranks, whatever may have been the temptation of some of the girls to go inside. Some had just been engaged to start that morning, but they too joined their comrades and loyally stuck to them throughout the day.⁷⁶

Later, Factory Inspector Flemming's official report indicated a different scene where only the 17 dismissed employees and a few union officials stood in the initial picket line.⁷⁷ The women remained resolute.

In the early afternoon, the women adjourned to Trades Hall where they were entertained by 'Miss Jolly Marle and Great Scott (of the Hotel Shaftesbury by courtesy of Mr A Shafto), Misses Parker, Garrett, Mrs Drew and others. Miss May Holman presided at the piano.'⁷⁸ Progress reports on the negotiations between the Union and Council officials and employers were interspersed throughout a musical program. The determination of all the women impressed the Factory Inspector. In a hand-written letter to the Chief Inspector, he revealed that even though some of the women had tried to prevent others from going to work he wanted to absolve them of any wrong-doing.

They are mostly all females and members of a young Union, also smarting under a grievance I think it would be a waste of time to subject them to interviews with the object of ascertaining to what extent any particular member was concerned in preventing any of their companions from accepting employment.⁷⁹

The *Westralian Worker* also admired the women's solidarity.

⁷⁵*Westralian Worker*, 23 January 1914, p 1.

⁷⁶*ibid.*

⁷⁷Inspector E Flemming's Report to Chief Inspector of Factories, Strikes and Lockouts: Monarch Laundry, File 132/1914.

⁷⁸*Westralian Worker*, 23 January 1914, p 1.

⁷⁹Hand written Letter, at the bottom of the Report, Inspector E Flemming to Chief Inspector of Factories, Strikes and Lockouts: Monarch Laundry, File 132/1914.

The women's stand had no effect on their employer. The Monarch Laundry Company's argument still hinged on industry's inability to absorb the pay rises because of competition in the market place. But the Union secretary pointed to the contradiction in such an argument because one laundry paid award wages and the other dismissed workers.⁸⁰ However, the pressure of competition from the charitable institutions' commercial laundries cannot be dismissed altogether. The Home of the Good Shepherd's thriving laundry business affected Monarch Laundry more than the Fremantle Steam Laundry because it competed in the same section of the market. This factor became the critical issue in negotiations which climaxed the next afternoon. A landmark decision resulted in an invitation to the Roman Catholic Archbishop Clune to mediate between the Union and the laundries.⁸¹ Examination of available newspaper reports fails to reveal exactly who took this unprecedented step. However, in 1919, in response to the question 'Did the Trades Hall in any way try to help you in getting the charitable institutions to fall in line?' Chick answered, 'To a certain extent they did.'⁸² From this admission, it is possible to deduce that Trades Hall played an important part in these negotiations, especially the Episcopal visit. The *Westralian Worker* reported the successful meeting,

He [Archbishop Clune] attended the Trades Hall to meet the deputation, where, with his assistance and that of the representative of the Monarch Laundry, a settlement was agreed to at about 10.15 pm.⁸³

Despite the lateness of the hour, the Union meeting reconvened. 'Exuberant cheers' from the members greeted the announcement of the settlement of the dispute.⁸⁴ All

⁸⁰*West Australian*, 20 January 1914, p 7.

⁸¹*Westralian Worker*, 23 January 1914, p 1.

⁸²Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 35.

⁸³*Westralian Worker*, 23 January 1914, p 1.

⁸⁴*ibid.*

were willing to return to work the next day. Their colleagues were reinstated on the new wage scale. They had won the strike.

The women and their few male colleagues received high praise from the labour press and union leaders. '**A Great Victory**' and '**Women Make History**' held centre place on page one of the *Westralian Worker*.⁸⁵ The report continued:

Loyalty to their comrades and fearlessness in their fight for justice have carried them through in their dispute with the Monarch Laundry. . . It is an event to be proud of. One of the youngest of the Metropolitan Unions, consisting of almost entirely women workers, had proved to the rest of the movement what solidarity can do.⁸⁶

McCallum agreed, adding that the 'solidarity of the women was a revelation, and an object lesson to many men in the Labour movement.'⁸⁷ The State Executive of the Australian Labor Federation also expressed pleasure at the success story and offered twenty pounds to the Union to offset any expenses incurred.⁸⁸ The laundry workers' solidarity had brought victory and praise. Their new Award ensured they received higher wages for their labours.

The workers shared their victory with their employers, especially Monarch Laundry. The *Sunday Times* reported the completion of the negotiations involving the Archbishop in one short sentence: 'Eventually it was decided between the parties to standardise prices.'⁸⁹ The ultimate victory was clear. The major private commercial launderers had skilfully orchestrated a campaign for price control over the charitable institutions. They manoeuvred the labour movement, especially the union movement, onto their side. This tactic involved negotiations with the Council, the

⁸⁵*ibid.*

⁸⁶*ibid.*

⁸⁷*ibid.*

⁸⁸*ibid.*

⁸⁹*Sunday Times*, 25 January 1914.

Court and a very small, young union. Ultimately the predominantly female workforce became the tool of both management and the male-dominated union movement.

Notwithstanding the women's position in this power game their wages did improve.

What follows is a comparison of female laundry workers' wages with those of women working in other fields of employment in the same period.

TABLE 2:2

Minimum wages established under Awards and Industrial Agreements up to December 1915⁹⁰

Category	Classification	Wages	Hours
Laundry			
	All 14-21 years	2/- to 5/- per day	8 hour day
	All over 21 years	6/- a day	8 hour day
	Iron shirt - collar machinist	7/- a day	8 hour day
Barmaid		65/- a week	54 hour week
Confectioner			
	Forewoman	30/- a week	45 1/2 hour week
	Labelling girl	17/6 a week	45 1/2 hour week
	Wafer girl (learner)	15/0 a week	45 1/2 hour week
Cook			
	Head Cook - woman	21/9 a week	58 hour week
	Second Cook - woman	20/7 a week	58 hour week
	Third Cook - woman	20/1 a week	58 hour week
Kitchenmaid			
	Hotel and Restaurant	20/- a week	58 hour week
	Tearooms In charge	20/4 a week	58 hour week
	under 18 years	14/- a week	58 hour week
	over 18 years	19/- a week	58 hour week
Pantrymaid		20/- a week	58 hour week
Shop Assistant		34/6 a week	58 hour week
	under 15	7/6 a week	58 hour week
	under 21	27/- a week	58 hour week
Tailoress			58 hour week
	Trouser - Vest maker	35/- a week	48 hour week
	Machinist - power	40/- a week	48 hour week
	Machinist - manual	45/- a week	48 hour week
	piece rates	9 to 11 1/2 pence	per hour
Waitress			
	Hotel Restaurant	22/6 a week	54 hour week
	Tearooms	21/- a week	54 hour week

⁹⁰Appendix V, WAAR, Vol 13 1914, pp 269-299.

There is a significant difference in the terms of employment for laundry workers. Their employment was on a daily basis. All other women workers had weekly wages except piece-workers whose wages were calculated hourly. Laundry workers' employment varied according to the requirements of the size and number of the contracts. Usually the women worked four and half to five days per week. The sorters and washhouse workers began on Monday when the articles arrived and usually finished work at midday on Friday. The starchers, ironers and packers worked from Tuesday till Saturday midday. Often they worked fewer days and so received less wages. So, in effect, all workers in the laundry industry were casual workers, thus relieving the employers of any extra burden of paying wages for the non-productive periods of the year.⁹¹ As laundry workers were day labourers they were not entitled to paid sick leave, paid gazetted public holidays or annual leave. This was an added financial benefit to employers. Malcolmson writing about the English laundresses argued that this daily recruitment or casualisation gave the employers the opportunity to manipulate regulations.⁹²

The Union secretary, powerless to alter the daily contracts, concentrated on membership numbers and recruitment. Growth in the number of employees at the hand and electric powered laundries produced an expanding group of Union members who were outside the Award. The Union, distracted by detailed arguments over unfair competition, had failed to include these workers in Award 3/1913. So, in March 1914, the Union secretary rectified the oversight by applying for an extension of the award 'to all employers engaged in the business of laundering within the area

⁹¹Information given by witnesses on 8 December 1919, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919.

⁹²P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 79.

specified in the award.⁹³ The Court granted the application extending the Award to cover all members. Still the Union failed to address workplace conditions.

The laundry workers' environment in the commercial laundries was checked by Health and Factory Inspectors who regularly visited the factories in order to maintain acceptable, although minimum, levels of hygiene and work safety. Laundry problems reported to Perth City Council included drainage, sanitation and sewerage problems. In 1913, Mrs Sweeney, operator but not owner of the West End Laundry, 1150 Hay Street, Perth, had her licence withheld until the waste water was disposed of properly and a new toilet facility was built. Forty persons, including employees of her laundry and lodgers at the adjoining Grand Coffee Palace, shared one closet described as:

In a shed one side of which is a picket fence with a few bags hanging down as a screen. The closet is composed of old packing cases; the closet portion is divided from the rest of the shed by a picket fence, this portion is used for feeding the ducks.⁹⁴

Eventually the problem was resolved with the completion of a sewerage link.

However, during the period of closure the out-of work laundry operator and her employees suffered financial hardship. Alternative work was becoming scarce.

In 1914, the Western Australian economy depended heavily on agriculture and had plummeted into a recession as drought impacted on farm production.

Unemployment rose as businesses closed. Even the goldfields offered fewer opportunities for work because the easily claimed alluvial gold had run out and mining was for big businesses only. Many women became key providers for their

⁹³WAAR Vol X11 1913, p 82.

⁹⁴The laundry and Coffee Palace were owned by Mrs Spence. Report by Acting Chief Inspector HE Sheldon to Town Clerk, Perth City Council, AN 20/5 Acc 3054 File 42/1913.

families as men searched for work in the city and rural areas. Many men chose to enlist at the outbreak of war in August 1914. Deaths and injury were high. Life for even more women changed rapidly as they took on the responsibilities of managing the financial affairs of their families.

The laundry workers felt a double impact of the depression and war. They, like other women, were in even greater need of employment than before. But, at the same time, laundry businesses declined as potential customers either enlisted or could not afford to pay for laundering. So, unemployment of laundry workers increased and membership in the Union dwindled to 38 by December 1914.⁹⁵ The newly appointed secretary, J Swebles, an active Council member and secretary of the Clerks' Union, failed to boost the Union membership in this hard economic climate. Funds dropped so low that the Council had to reduce its affiliation fee by 50% which helped the Union to survive.⁹⁶

The growing unemployment of women stimulated debate within the labour movement. Mrs Skene and Mrs Foxcroft of the Metropolitan Women's Labor League attended a Council meeting early in 1915 to appeal for assistance.⁹⁷ A subsequent report recommended that all unions with female members send two delegates to meet the Executive to discuss the question.⁹⁸ No minutes of this meeting exist so the outcomes are unclear but certainly no immediate action occurred. The Council continued discussing a wide range of other issues until

⁹⁵WAAR Vol X111 1914.

⁹⁶Minutes, 17 November 1914, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 2/1914.

⁹⁷Minutes, 25 March 1915, *ibid.*

⁹⁸Minutes, 20 April 1915, *ibid.*

September of the following year. Then two new problems arose: the influx of women into male fields of work because of the war, and the possibility of their exploitation in these jobs.⁹⁹ The Council believed the appointment of a Women's Organiser was the best solution and the State Executive of the ALP agreed to pay her wages for 26 weeks.¹⁰⁰ The labour movement's concern for women doing men's work may have been the primary motivation here. There did seem to be an expression of concern over women's exploitation because unions were sent letters relating to this matter. A committee convened to identify the areas of greatest need eventually appointed Mrs Casson as the first Women's Organiser. She started work on 30 January 1917.¹⁰¹ Her job description included encouraging women to join pre-existing unions in order to gain protection.

The presence of a Women's Organiser at Council meetings resulted in women's issues appearing on the agenda. The most obvious influence was on the Council's Industrial Committee recommendations for changes to the various *Factory Acts*. These changes included some specific benefits for women - better controls on outwork, provision of separate change rooms, seating in the factories and regulations against loose clothing.¹⁰² The other proposals there were general items of benefit to all - broadening the classification of factories, provision of lunchrooms, standardisation of hours of work and the introduction of a minimum wage for all factory employees. These proposals pointed to a better future but the immediate bleak circumstances continued.

⁹⁹Minutes, 17 October 1916, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁰Minutes, 19 November 1916, *ibid*.

¹⁰¹Committee comprised Misses Eccles and Boulter and Messrs Burgess, Tweedhall and McCallum, Minutes of Committee to deal with appointment of a Women's Organiser, 16 January 1917, *ibid*.

¹⁰²Minutes, 12 July 1917, *ibid*.

The hardship and poverty experienced by women and their families during the war years and the following depression contributed to a substantial rise in residents at the charitable institutions. Inspector Berry of the Health Department reported that in June 1915 the Home of the Good Shepherd had 140 inmates.¹⁰³ This was a 74% increase in residents in just two years. More workers meant an increase in the capacity of the laundry. Berry's report also mentioned that the clean and well-ventilated laundry discharged its waste water onto a 'large block of sandy soil sloping down to Mongers Lake.'¹⁰⁴ The Health Department and Perth City Council constantly monitored waste water disposal and irresponsible organisations always faced prosecutions for improper drainage. Surprisingly, the composition and volume of the Home's waste water was not classified as a health problem.¹⁰⁵ The Home of the Good Shepherd received a 'dispensation' and saved any expense. These benevolent attitudes of government and local government instrumentalities further antagonised the launderers.

Pressure of competition in a declining laundry market heightened. The *Westralian Worker* reported the concerns of Mrs Dobson, a Union member. She considered it unfair that, while many laundry women worked only three and half days a week, the charitable institutions operated full-time laundries with unpaid workers.¹⁰⁶ The Union was acutely aware of this situation. It requested the Council to send a combined deputation to 'wait upon the Government and urge that all charitable

¹⁰³Report Inspector Berry, 22 June 1915, Home of the Good Shepherd, File 1680/1913.

¹⁰⁴*ibid.*

¹⁰⁵In 1907 the House of Mercy and then in 1908 the Salvation Army's Women's Home were served with orders to improve the drainage for all their waste water, Perth City Council, AN 20/5 Acc 3054 File 146/1907 and File 3054/1908.

¹⁰⁶*Westralian Worker*, 29 October 1915, p 2.

institutions doing laundry work be made to observe the same industrial conditions as the law enjoins of other laundries.¹⁰⁷ No action resulted from the deputation by Mrs Rapley, Mrs Casson and Mr Cameron. The government valued the service provided to the community by the charitable institutions and it was thought that legislation interfered with their work. Malcolmson explained the reason when relating a similar situation in England twenty years earlier.

State interference. . . was prejudicial to discipline, that inmates would be needlessly upset, that any posting of workers' rights might cause subordination, and that their institutions regulated themselves. . . the mere suggestion that there was a useful role here for government was taken as slight on the good intentions of those who ran them [the charitable institutions].¹⁰⁸

The Union's failure brought a renewed attempt by some of the launderers to organise a form of control over the charitable institutions. They complained to the Health Department and the Perth City Council that noxious trade licence exemptions for charities placed them at an unfair advantage.¹⁰⁹ Monarch Laundry had had recent first-hand experience of the Health Department's strict inspections and controls on noxious trades when a Health Inspector demanded payment of a special licence for its soap making division.¹¹⁰ The secretary of the Monarch Laundry complained as the soap making was not fat rendering but a process of 'mixing Caustic Soda and pure tallow and boiling same for a day, this takes place approximately once every two months and is carried out in most laundries of any size in the world. . . without any License [sic]'.¹¹¹ He claimed the licence unfair, especially in the light of the exemptions to charities. The Perth City Council responded and the Town Clerk

¹⁰⁷Minutes, 19 October 1915, Metropolitan District Council, Book 2/1914.

¹⁰⁸P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 67.

¹⁰⁹Letter, 14 March 1916, to Town Clerk from WE Sheldon, Chief Health Inspector, Perth City Council, File 370/1913.

¹¹⁰Letter, 18 February 1915, to Town Clerk from Secretary of Monarch Laundry Company, *ibid*.

¹¹¹*ibid*.

notified the Salvation Army of the requirement to hold a noxious trades licence for the laundry at its Women's Home in Lincoln Street, Highgate. The Salvation Army Women's Social Department, as the controlling body of the Women's Home, pleaded for its exemption to continue because 'It is a charitable institution into which were received many destitute and deserving cases.'¹¹² The Perth City Council ignored the plea and demanded the two pound standard fee.¹¹³ This action was the first successful attempt to place any control on a charitable institution. Records fail to show a similar order for the Home of the Good Shepherd even though it operated the largest laundry. The power and influence of the Catholic Church and the value placed on its social work positioned it above all others.

Few businesses, large or small, received such licence exemptions. Proprietor, S Simon of 561 Beaufort Street, Perth, considered he did not need a licence for his small cleaning business. For seventeen years he had worked on his own with no motive plant and no licence. Chief Inspector Sheldon disagreed. 'This man must have a license [sic],' he scribbled on the side of Inspector SJ Sherman's report which stated that:

Mr Simon uses only the dry process of cleaning clothes ie. Naphtha, Benzine chloroform and petrol. Work done on a table in the yard at the back which is standing on grass. The table was very clean and no signs of dust underneath. He had 4 suits, 2 pants, 1 lady's coat which represented 4 days takings.¹¹⁴

Simon paid his fee. Two other people were also less fortunate than some charitable institutions. Anne Forseth operated a very small laundry in 13 Brisbane Street, Perth. She struggled to make a living because her business declined as men left for the war.

¹¹²Letter, 14 March 1916, to Town Clerk from Salvation Army's Women's Social Department, *ibid.*

¹¹³Letter, 23 March 1916, to Salvation Army's Women's Social Department from Town Clerk, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴Report Inspector SJ Sherman, *ibid.*

She could not compete with the low prices of all the large laundries. Anne wrote to the Town Clerk and explained,

I have not enough work to keep myself employed. My work is mostly ironing only . . . I have had to dispose of my pony having no work for it. Most of my customers have enlisted. I find I can't compete with the larger laundrys [sic] as they do the work so cheaply.¹¹⁵

Two weeks later a second woman, Mrs Dent, also asked for a licence exemption as she could not afford the fee. Her little laundry, Primrose Laundry at 326 Bulwer Street, Perth, had only two regular customers and she did all their washing in a 12 gallon copper. Her work was mainly starching and ironing for customers who did their own washing. 'My husband is an invalid. I am the "Man of the House" and breadwinner,' she wrote.¹¹⁶ The response to both requests was that washing required a licence but ironing did not.¹¹⁷ The choice was ultimately theirs. No leniency for hardship existed. Those with the greatest need were the least able to afford to defend themselves.

Whilst Mrs Dent and other small business felt the pressure of competition from the large laundries the battle to survive continued in other arenas. The Union maintained its vigilance towards Chinese and non-union laundries. The Council blacklisted Mrs Draper's Sheen Laundry in Charles Street, North Perth, and circularised unionists reminding them not to patronise non-union and Chinese laundries.¹¹⁸ When unionists supported unionists there was more work for all.

¹¹⁵Letter, 28 March 1917, to Town Clerk from AN Forseth, *ibid*.

¹¹⁶Letter, 14 April 1917, to Town Clerk from Mrs N Dent, *ibid*.

¹¹⁷In May 1917 the Town Clerk wrote to both women telling them what they had to do, *ibid*.

¹¹⁸Minutes, 13 June 1917 and 4 September 1917, Metropolitan District Council, Book 2/1914.

Activist Jean Beadle, who replaced Mrs Casson as Women's Organiser in January 1918, recognised this need for union movement solidarity.¹¹⁹ One of the first challenges for Jean Beadle was to revitalise the now unfinancial, almost defunct, MLEU.¹²⁰ She applied her motto of 'Educate, Organise, Agitate' to her work with women.¹²¹ She was elected secretary of the Union and held the position for eighteen months.¹²² Her enthusiasm and policies increased Union membership and raised the profile of the Union. The commitment and solidarity amongst the women returned as social events were organised and meetings became regular again. Beadle raised members' level of industrial and political knowledge by instigating discussions at Union meetings on topics including the value of the Arbitration Court and the principle of the Eight Hour Day.¹²³ She also introduced the idea of revising the award by collecting copies of awards and wage details from other States. The Union ordered three dozen Eight Hour Badges and donated to the Women's Organiser Fund.¹²⁴ Beadle also heightened members' social awareness causing the Union to lodge a protest with the Defence Department over inadequate Blind Pensions.¹²⁵ They nominated her as their representative on the Labor Recruiting team.¹²⁶ Jean Beadle was a remarkable leader who maintained active involvement in all aspects of labour life whilst secretary of the Union. Her work as Women's Organiser occurred at a critical time during the immediate postwar period when women's participation in the workforce again altered as soldiers returned from the front. Despite the value

¹¹⁹Jean Beadle was elected from a field of 15. Minutes, 22 January 1918, *ibid.*

¹²⁰Minutes, 5 March 1918, *ibid.*

¹²¹*Westralian Worker*, 21 March 1909, p 2.

¹²²At a meeting on 10 April 1918 Jean Beadle was elected secretary. MLEU Officers and Members, WA IAC, AN195/3a Acc 1101 File 290/1919 Vol 1.

¹²³Letter, 20 April 1919, to Acting Secretary of ALF from J Beadle, Metropolitan District Council Correspondence, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A File 32/1919.

¹²⁴Minutes, 1 October 1918, Metropolitan District Council, Book 2/1914.

¹²⁵Minutes, 1 October 1918, *ibid.*

of her work as Women's Organiser, Jean Beadle resigned on 1 November 1918.¹²⁷

The position failed to gain further financial support from the large male unions.

However, she remained secretary of the MLEU for several more months so the female members continued to benefit from her leadership and influence.¹²⁸

The advantage of a strong female secretary appeared in the revision of the award and the attitude of the Union's advocate. At the hearing in December 1919 AH Panton MLC, the Union advocate, demonstrated a complete change of thinking from the usual male-centred approach to issues. He argued that, 'We are dealing with it [the log of claims] from a woman's point of view.' He placed strong emphasis on the new role of women as independent workers in the changing world of postwar

Western Australia. In his opening address to the Court he explained that:

There is a totally different set of circumstances from those that existed in January 1914, not only from the difference in cost of living . . . but there is also this difference which I hope the Court will take notice of, and that is the difference in the position of women workers . . . the large number of men killed in this war and the number that have been disabled have left women in different and independent positions.¹²⁹

Panton pointed out that in 1914 women in their twenties expected to marry and be supported by their husbands but, in the changed circumstances of 1919, many women needed to support themselves or their families. He stated that the Court and the Union had a responsibility for the welfare of these women.¹³⁰ This was a progressive statement from a man of the labour movement of the time.

¹²⁶*ibid.*

¹²⁷Women's Organiser, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A File 211/1918.

¹²⁸98% of the workers were women, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 2.

¹²⁹*ibid*, p 3.

¹³⁰*ibid*, p 2.

The workers in the predominantly female occupation of laundering again gave evidence. This time women from non-steam laundries added their experiences to substantiate the claims for wage increases. The need for extra wages to cope with post-war inflation was the core of all the evidence at this hearing. A secondary issue was the women's desire for more regular and longer hours in order to improve their incomes.

Eileen Kenny, an electric machine ironer, was the first of three witnesses from the small Bondi Laundry. As a specialist she ironed approximately 400 collars and 2-3 dozen shirts per day. The strenuous work required her to stand all day, mostly 'on one foot, because [the other foot] is pedalling all the time.'¹³¹ Despite fourteen years' experience she received only 7/- per day which was insufficient to pay board and buy many clothes. As extra evidence Eileen submitted an itemised list of clothing and materials to indicate increases in prices since the last award.

TABLE 2:3

Eileen Kenny's comparative price list of clothing and materials¹³²

	1914	1919
Item	Shillings/Pence.	Shillings/Pence.
Stockings	1/6 pair	3/11 pair
Shoes	10/6 pair	25/- pair
Calico	6/6 per dozen yards	18/6 dozen yards
Cotton	2/1-2 pence per reel	9 pence per reel
Serge	10/6 per yard	30/- per yard
Tweed	3/11 per yard	12/6 per yard
Voile	1/6 per yard	3/11 per yard
Cambric	10 pence per yard	2/6 per yard
Singlets	1/11 each	3/6 each
Winter Coat	35/-	186/-
Gloves	3/6 pair	10/6 pair

¹³¹*ibid*, p 10.

¹³²Evidence, *ibid*.

The presentation of such information was common at this time. It emphasised the need to recognise working women not only as an integral and visible part of the workforce but also as society's principal shoppers.¹³³

Twenty year old Emily Harris, from Monarch Laundry, submitted her own list of clothing costs and insisted that she had a regular and expensive problem with shoe repairs.¹³⁴ She operated an ironing machine that required the use of both feet. All day she worked with both feet on pedals, one to let gas into the rollers and the other to press the rollers together; hence the wear and tear on her shoes. She believed her work was worth more than 5/- per day.

Elsie McMahon, from Bondi Laundry, considered her work as a hand-starch ironer specialising 'in tussore suits, hats, ladies' costumes and blouses,' to be 'the heaviest work a woman can undertake.'¹³⁵ She also stoked the coal stove which heated the heavy metal irons. The heat generated by the stove made working conditions so unpleasant that Elsie took a change of clothes to work as she was 'wringing wet' by the end of the day.¹³⁶

May Lamb probably needed a change of clothes too because she worked in the Bondi Laundry's washhouse doing all the washing by hand. Her problem was compounded because the drying took place inside, not in a separate drying room. 'Very often the water is dropping down on you,' she said.¹³⁷ The whole job was tiring, disagreeable

¹³³G Reekie, *Temptation: Sex, Selling and the Department Store*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

¹³⁴Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 10.

¹³⁵*ibid*, p 12.

¹³⁶*ibid*, p 13.

¹³⁷*ibid*, p 16.

and unhealthy. There were 'all sorts of clothes. . . some are not very nice,' she explained. Her wages of 7/- per day were not enough and often she went without commodities she believed to be necessities. Her work exemplified a new principle in the wage schedule in the Union's log of claims, the concept of equal pay for equal work within the classification of washhouse men and women. The President expressed concern over this point asking,

I notice you are putting washhouse men and women on the same plane. Is that a wise thing to do? . . . I do not say their work is not as valuable but is it a wise thing to put them in competition?¹³⁸

Bennett has argued that equal pay occurred only because women competed with men in the same area of work.¹³⁹ The Union members believed there was no competition just equal work; that a woman working at a wash-tub worked as hard as a man in the washhouse of a steam laundry and therefore deserved the same pay. Panton explained, 'They [the members] are claiming equal pay for the sexes in this washhouse business.'¹⁴⁰ He continued,

They [the members] are particularly anxious for that clause. As a matter of fact, they have decided right through their schedule of wages to work according to age and not differentiate according to machines, whether it may appear a little more skilled than otherwise. The union have thrashed this matter out time after time and they are asking that all employees should be paid according to their ages, irrespective of the work they are doing.¹⁴¹

This reflected the success of the single classification by age in the first award and demonstrated that the women believed in their abilities which developed with experience. They expected equal rights with male counterparts. This was an example of Jean Beadle's influence. She successfully negated the women's feelings of inadequacy or intimidation by men and their new machines. The women fought

¹³⁸*ibid*, p 5.

¹³⁹L Bennett, 'Job Classification and Women Workers: Institutional Practices, Technological change and the Conciliation and Arbitration Systems. 1902-72', *Labour History*, Vol 51, 1986, p 15.

¹⁴⁰Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 5.

¹⁴¹*ibid*.

against the ideology of skill and technology as masculine prerogatives. This was a fight difficult to win as the gender and power structures of society positioned women as technologically incompetent and unskilled.¹⁴²

As expected, the managers and overseers took a negative stand in the continuing debate. The Superintendent at Monarch Laundry, Ethel Hoskins, who had worked in laundries for sixteen years, provided a picture of laundry work as relatively uncomplicated and easy. 'I do not think any laundry work is too strenuous. They become accustomed to it,' she explained.¹⁴³ She contradicted herself about training and skill when referring to the value of juniors, who once trained, would move upstairs to the ironing department or onto other more complicated machinery.

Panton questioned her evidence by asking, 'I understand from what you talked about that there would be very little training necessary. What do you want to train them for if there is no skill?'¹⁴⁴ She replied that, 'There are certain little things you have got to learn. I would not class it as skill.'¹⁴⁵ Chick, who now owned the steam laundry Chick's Laundry Company, agreed with her. Skill was just 'commonsense' for these women workers.¹⁴⁶ Skill remained a gender issue.

Skill, redefined by management as 'learning little things' and 'commonsense', indicated the financial value of juniors to management. When challenged, the employers denied that they employed juniors because they were cheaper than adult

¹⁴²Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1993, pp 37-40.

¹⁴³Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 4/1919, p 31.

¹⁴⁴*ibid*, p 33.

¹⁴⁵*ibid*.

¹⁴⁶*ibid*, p 39.

workers, arguing that the work they received governed the number of juniors they employed who could not do seniors' work. They argued against the Union's request for a ratio of one junior to one senior and an increase in the minimum age of juniors from 'Under 15 years' to 'Under 16 years'. The employers believed the Union's claim would result in greater unemployment in the 14-15 years age group. This argument failed to address Union's complaint of exploitation of youth or influence the Court which raised the minimum age to Under 16 years.

This Union's victory was not repeated in its application for the reduction of the length of the working day to 7 hours including a short tea break and lunch-time, with a finishing time of 4.30 pm. Mr Darglish asked if this meant a 39 hour week.¹⁴⁷ In theory, this calculation was correct but in actuality the structure of the industry offered no guarantees of the length of a working day or week. Women worked from Monday morning to Friday night or Tuesday morning to Friday night or Saturday midday.¹⁴⁸ The employers would not accept any change, not even with the inclusion of flexible starting times at their discretion. They claimed business could not afford wage increases or a restructuring of hours and renewed their attacks on the charitable institutions. Interwoven throughout the debates came their accusations of 'monopoly', 'unfair competition' and 'undercutting of prices'. Panton successfully eliminated part of their argument by referring to his comparative price list that showed the charitable institutions' prices for household linen and clothing were now

¹⁴⁷*ibid*, p 3.

¹⁴⁸*ibid*.

equal to or higher than those of the Monarch Laundry.¹⁴⁹ Through close questioning

Panton endeavoured to clarify the situation.

Panton: You admit there is no competition with you in regard to prices [for household linen and clothes] from the Home of the Good Shepherd or the Salvation Army?

Chick: That is right.

Panton: The only people you are competing for are the hotels?

Chick: Yes.¹⁵⁰

Panton confirmed the revelation with one more question.

Panton: You are quite satisfied that outside of the hotels there is no unfair competition?

Chick: I am satisfied.¹⁵¹

The basis of the private launderers' antagonism was clear. No private launderer could break into the lucrative city hotel laundering market which was worth 30 000-40 000 pounds per year.¹⁵² The launderers provided a strong argument that convinced the Court. The status quo for working hours and overtime remained.

However the workers did receive increases in wages. The washhouse men, the breadwinners, obtained the highest wage increase of 70% whilst the women received smaller percentage wage increases of between 25%-60%. The Court did not accept the principle of equal pay for equal work in the washhouse but did inadvertently provide equal pay for juniors. An oversight by all parties had left a small group of boys unclassified and therefore under the girls' classification with lower wages. This prospect astonished Somerville, 'It means you are prepared to allow a scale which is drawn up exclusively for girls to apply to a male.'¹⁵³ It was too late to change. The Court ratified Award 4/1919.

¹⁴⁹*ibid*, p 40.

¹⁵⁰*ibid*, pp 40-41.

¹⁵¹*ibid*, p 41.

¹⁵²*ibid*, p 36.

¹⁵³*ibid*, p 45.

The Union armed with its new Award and a prestigious new secretary, AH Panton MLC, became a focus of attention.¹⁵⁴ The Council rechannelled a variety of queries and requests to the secretary. Walter Hayter who worked in the laundry at Perth Hospital asked to join the Union because he did not want to join the Hospital and Kindred Institutions Union.¹⁵⁵ Then four months later, the next secretary Elizabeth Clapham received another hospital-related request.¹⁵⁶ This time the Claremont Hospital for the Insane asked for assistance in appointing a woman to take charge of its laundry. These requests were outside the constitutional scope of the Union.

The new secretary of the MLEU, JW Clapham who succeeded his wife, Elizabeth, ignored the constraints of the Rules.¹⁵⁷ He was prepared to poach new members to increase union membership. This unethical practice of poaching members occurred because of the secretary's conflict of interests. Clapham was also secretary of the South West Clothing Trades Union. He drew a log of claims for the workers in the dyeing and cleaning businesses which included Monarch Laundry. He hoped to entice these workers including seamstresses and pressers to join the Clothing Trades Union.

There were many benefits to the women in this section of the trade. The promise of a full week's pay with 10 minute breaks every four hours without loss of pay or addition of time together with regular pay-days and appropriate wages for higher

¹⁵⁴Panton only held office for four months at the end of 1919. Elizabeth Clapham was elected on 21 January 1920, MLEU Officers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 1.

¹⁵⁵20 January 1920, Letter, to Secretary Panton from Secretary WA ALP, Metropolitan District Council Correspondence, File 32/1919.

¹⁵⁶20 January 1920, Letter, to Union Secretary Mrs E Clapham from Secretary of Metropolitan District Council, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁷Elected 28 September 1920, MLEU Officers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 1.

duties appealed. The prospect of regular visits by the secretary to collect dues and to chat to members provided much needed contact especially for the pressers in the laundry trade who often worked in isolation. Malcolmson described this work as:

Another form of smoothing that was found in some calendering rooms in the twentieth century was the press which closely resembled that used in modern tailoring and dry-cleaning establishments. Large surfaces were ironed on this machine by pressing the garment between a lower bed and a lid pulled down by the operator, which were locked together by means of a treadle. Overalls, aprons, surplices, chefs' coats, and the like were handled by this machine. It was unpopular with workers, which may account for the fact that it was not found as extensively as other laundry machinery. Workers complained of vibrations and other mechanical defects, but perhaps the greatest cause of the machine's unpopularity was that its operation was socially isolating. Where labour is relatively undemanding intellectually, its social dimensions tend to define its attractiveness.¹⁵⁸

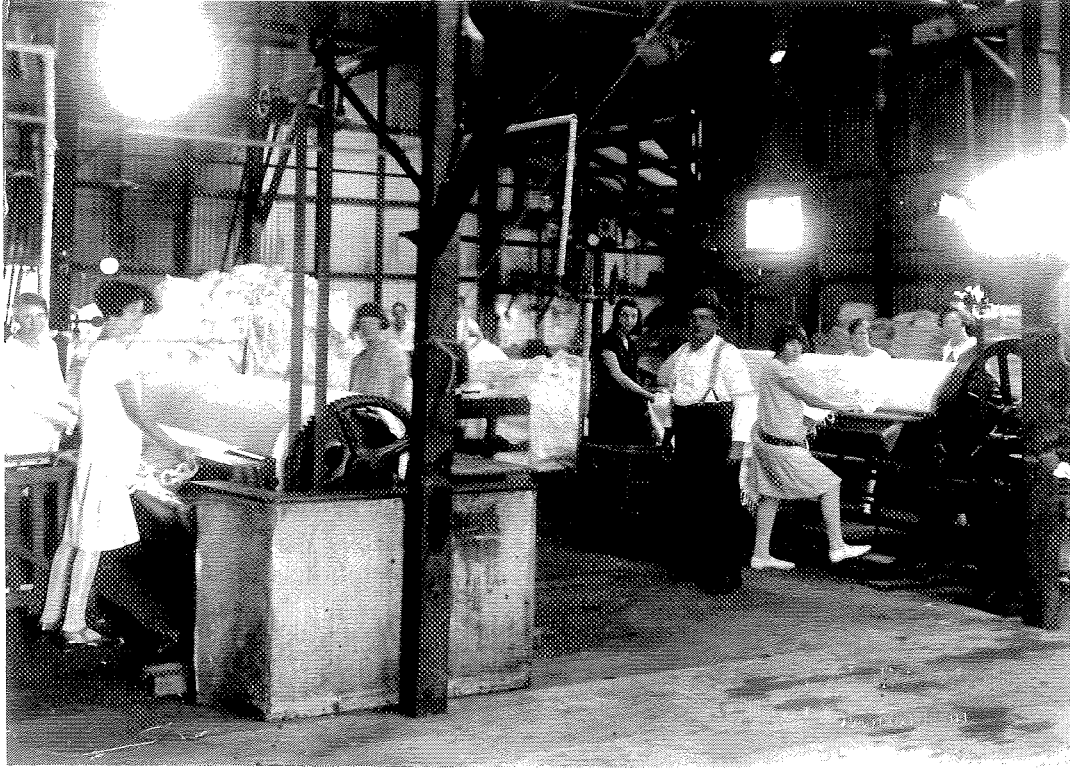
Seamstresses had plenty of contact with other workers but had no classification under the Award for laundry workers. The enticements appealed to many women workers. At a stopwork meeting on 20 July 1920, the women doing pressing, repairing, dyeing and cleaning at Monarch Laundry responded to these overtures from the Clothing Trades Union and Council representatives.¹⁵⁹ Clapham successfully recruited new members to his other union because of his dual secretarial roles. The Court registered an Industrial Agreement 55/1920 covering these workers in October 1920.¹⁶⁰

The MLEU had lost a section of its coverage at a time when membership began to decline again. The Union had successfully improved wages and some working conditions over the previous decade but it was powerless to withstand the effects of the economic downturn of the early 1920s. Unemployment steadily increased. By July 1921 unemployment stood at 40% of the 73 Union's members whilst only two

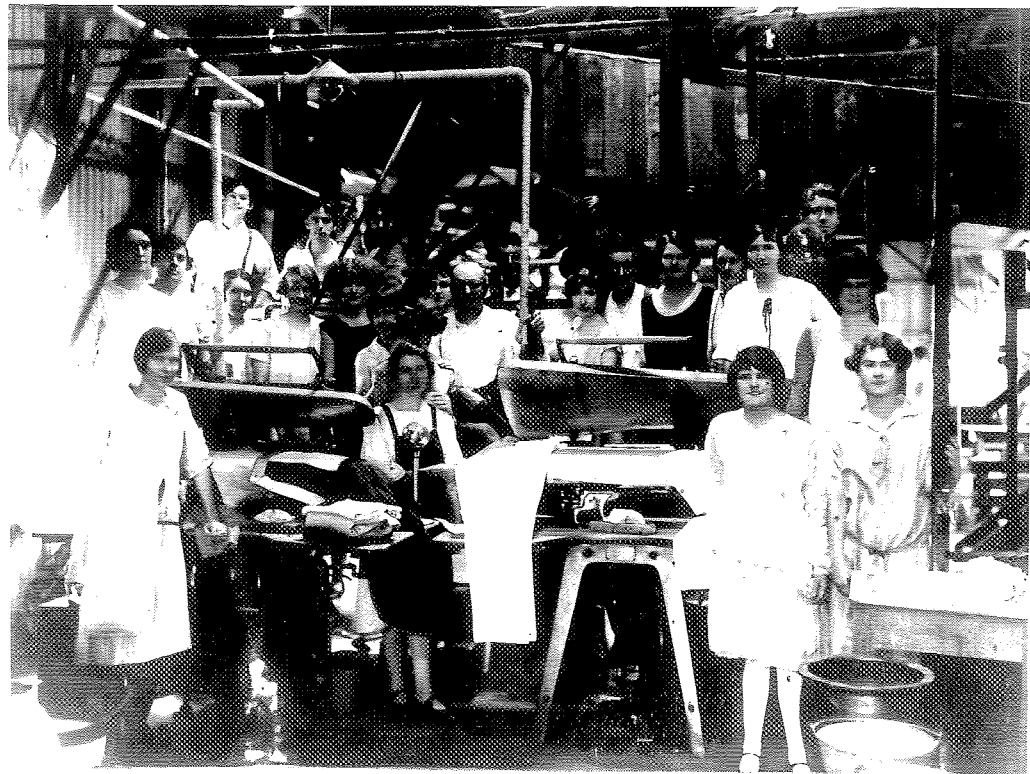
¹⁵⁸P Malcolmson, *English Laundresses*, p 144.

¹⁵⁹Minutes, 20 July 1920, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 3/1918.

¹⁶⁰The Agreement was later changed by Common Law to Award 55/1920 on 6 December 1920, Monarch Laundry, WA IAC, AN 195/7 Acc 1381 File 55/1920.



Girls on the calender presses at Fremantle Steam Laundry C1920
Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2364.



Installation of the first two pressing machines
Fremantle Steam Laundry 1927
Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2365.

thirds of the rest held full-time jobs. The secretary believed that the 21 Chinese laundries with their cheap prices exacerbated the situation.¹⁶¹ He complained to the Council that unionist patronage of such places was disloyal.¹⁶² The Council's solution lay in a Union organised co-operative laundry and another circular to unions encouraging 'white store' patronage.¹⁶³ These suggestions were token efforts to support a section of an ailing economy.

While community concern for male unemployment grew, the position for women took a different course. Women's health issues dominated the thinking of analysts who examined workplaces in relation to domestic life and child bearing. The Conference of Industrial Hygiene held in Melbourne in September 1922 considered all aspects of the workplace environment and drew up a comprehensive list for consideration by all States. Top of the list was the restriction on the employment of women before and after confinement. Other items included shorter working hours, protection from chemicals, adequate seating and facilities, restriction on the lifting of heavy weights, and the provision of female medical inspectors. The Director General of Health expected the States to amend their relevant Acts to incorporate these recommendations.¹⁶⁴ The Western Australian *Factories and Shops Act 1920* provided working women with adequate care and protection in almost all areas listed but the appointment of women medical inspectors needed inclusion.¹⁶⁵ As a result of

¹⁶¹A Atkinson, 'Chinese Labour and Capital in Western Australia', p 179.

¹⁶²Letter, 21 July 1921, to Secretary of Metropolitan District Council from Union secretary, Metropolitan District Council Correspondence, File 32/1919.

¹⁶³Letter, 25 July 1921, to Union secretary from Secretary of Metropolitan District Council, *ibid*.

¹⁶⁴Letter, 11 October 1922, to Commissioner of Public Health WA from Director General of Health Melbourne Employment of Females, WA Department of Labour and Industry, AN 25/1 Acc 749 File 4087/1922.

¹⁶⁵Letter, 27 October 1922, to Director General of Health Melbourne from the Acting Chief Inspector of Factories, *ibid*.

the Conference, a list of hazardous occupations was compiled and distributed to the States. The list concluded with laundry work, detailing 'dampness, repeated motion and shock, changes of temperature and communicable diseases' as its hazards.

Finally, it recommended the restriction of the occupation to girls over sixteen years.

The Laundry Employees' Award 4/1919 already included this condition.

The Union had shown insight but there was new work to be done. The laundry industry, already recognised as a noxious trade, now had the label of a hazardous occupation. The secretary had official sanction to press for occupational health and safety reforms but he became embroiled in the employers' renewed fight with the charitable institutions. Again the employers used the Union's log of claims lodged in June 1923 as a weapon to gain control over the charitable institutions. They made it clear that no inclusion of charitable institutions meant no acceptance for the wages' clause.¹⁶⁶ The experienced older women, with their new margin for skill of a 1/- per day, were to be the bait as all other wages remained unaltered.

The secretary accepted the challenge and by the time of the hearing was in full accord with the employers. United they stood in presenting the case. Together they placed the Court in the delicate position of having to rule on the position of charitable institutions in the labour market. LL Carter, for the employers, outlined in detail the object of the exercise:

For the sake of the industry to bring all these who are performing work for the public into line with the Union rate of wages and the general conditions of this proposed award. If this is done it would be possible for the industry to carry on an even keel.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 2048 File 5/1923, p 2.

¹⁶⁷*ibid*, p 3.

For the employers the fundamental issue was freeing the hotel and boarding house laundry contracts onto the open market. They argued that industry continued to suffer from unfair competition with many firms struggling to remain open. Carter provided this information on one business to illustrate the argument.

TABLE 2:4

A business in decline¹⁶⁸

Year	Workers	Annual Turnover	Annual Profit	Annual Loss
1916	61	11,000 pounds	1,312 pounds	nil
1923	31	200 pounds	nil	289 pounds

However, for the Union, the fundamental issue was the charitable institutions' employment of workers for no wages. Board and lodging did not constitute wages. The solicitors, J and R Maxwell, for the Home of the Good Shepherd wrote to the Court disputing their client's position in relation to the term 'worker' under Section 4 of the *Industrial Arbitration Act*. There was no 'Contract of Service' and work for 'hire' or 'reward' in their laundry. They were not employers and would not appear in court.¹⁶⁹ The President explained his dilemma,

In the Monarch Laundry the workers there work under the same domestic conditions as most industries, they are out workers. They go to their work, have their meals at home and sleep at home and are at liberty to use their hours at their pleasure. They are ordinary industrialists following their occupation . . . The Court is very powerful and is I hope an agency for good, but if we issue an award closing the Home of the Good Shepherd without further demur, it means that a large body of women are passed out onto the streets.¹⁷⁰

Undeterred by this argument the Union secretary responded,

If you do not issue an award it will mean casting a lot of our women out onto the streets. We have given the Home of the Good Shepherd an opportunity to come here and be heard.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸*ibid*, p 5.

¹⁶⁹*ibid*, p 1.

¹⁷⁰*ibid*, p 4.

¹⁷¹*ibid*.

At this point AJ McNeil, a member of the Bench, recognised the Union's position and proposed:

I do not see how we can get away from making an award. These people are all cited. You appear for the Union, Mr Carter is the only other one appearing here . . . You simply ask us to make an award by consent . . . There is nothing to dispute.¹⁷²

Clapham supported McNeil's view and said, 'The Union agreed to the employer's reply.'¹⁷³ The Court heard no more debate and ratified Award 5/1923 on 1 April 1924. The Scope Clause included the charitable institutions. Again, the employers had manipulated the Union officials against the perceived common enemy, the charitable institutions, using the senior women as pawns in the game.

The majority of workers gained nothing from the new award. The economy could not sustain any major wage increases. Only the senior women received extra wages because of the margin. High unemployment persisted. Union membership declined to 28.¹⁷⁴ Morale was low. The secretary needed to act to save his job and that of the many unemployed members. He turned on the issue of charitable institutions. By using Clause 7 of the Award, Clapham visited the institutions' laundries to check their Record Books of times and wages. When refused access Clapham immediately lodged an 'Application for the Enforcement of an Award' with the Court. The problem with the charitable institutions as employers climaxed. The Court had to adjudicate.

¹⁷²*ibid*, p 5.

¹⁷³*ibid*.

¹⁷⁴WAIG Vol 2 1923.

The hearing before the Full Bench commenced in October 1924.¹⁷⁵ The Union, the Salvation Army, the Alexandra Home (previously known as the House of Mercy) and the Home of the Good Shepherd were represented. Jackson, for the Union, opened the hearing with the statement that

The Salvation Army and other respondents here, carry on laundry work and this work is done for the public generally and charged for in the ordinary way. It has been for some time a very vexed question as to whether the Award does or does not apply to these institutions.¹⁷⁶

All the other representatives argued that their respective institutions were charities not employers and therefore outside the Award. The laundry work supplemented their incomes. Keenan, advocate for the Home of the Good Shepherd, explained that

It is only the gift of their work by the present inmates that enables the Institution to remain open and available for their spiritual and temporal needs and also the rescue of who are still living in the ways of sin.¹⁷⁷

The various institutions explained their situations. At the Salvation Army Women's Home, two 'inmates' and two Army Officers worked in the laundry. The small income was similar to that earned by the laundry at the Alexandra Home which usually earned a 'couple of pounds a week' except when it won a large contract like the large Forrest House.¹⁷⁸ Both institutions paid for outside labour if the work load was heavy. Keenan, the Home of the Good Shepherd's advocate, provided greater detail on its laundry operation:

They send their carter to call for orders at hotels and private homes upon such persons as desire to have their laundry work done by the Sisters and such orders are duly carried out and delivery is made accordingly. The work done is charged for on a commercial scale and the prices charged are approximately the same as those charged by others engaged in the Industry as a profit.¹⁷⁹

Herein lies the problem which the Sisters acknowledged in private:

¹⁷⁵The Full Bench consisted of Mr Justice Burnside (President), Messrs W Somerville and AJ McNeil, *WAIG* Vol 4 1924, P 174.

¹⁷⁶Transcript, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 66/1924, p 2.

¹⁷⁷Fact No 7, Admitted Facts. The Home of the Good Shepherd, Submitted by solicitors, J and R Maxwell, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 65/1924.

¹⁷⁸Transcript, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 66/1924, p 16.

¹⁷⁹Fact No 8, Admitted Facts. The Home of the Good Shepherd, Submitted by solicitors, J and R Maxwell, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 65/1924.

Our laundry is a source of annoyance to a few public laundries, the owners of which claim it is impossible to continue, as we, not having to pay our workers, can ride over all competition.¹⁸⁰

The payment of workers was the crux of the matter. They claimed the residents worked voluntarily.¹⁸¹ Refuge with board and lodgings was not an exchange for wages. The work did not constitute employment for 'hire' and 'reward'. Keenan debated this point in legalistic terms and disputed definitions of 'work', 'employer', 'employee', 'contract of service' and 'breach of the Award'. He argued that for a breach of the Laundry Employees' Award to occur there must be an employer and employees. As all the work was voluntary at the Home 'there is nothing which creates the relationship of employer and worker.'¹⁸² There was no need to keep a Record Book of hours, workers and wages. He argued that 'The mere performance of work created no right in any action for wages.'¹⁸³ The Union advocate totally disagreed. He argued that any laundry charging the public for work done was competing as a business and was part of the industry. Therefore the Award covered their employees.¹⁸⁴ Somerville from the Bench added that 'These institutions do an injury to those who are making a living in the industry if they are not subject to the award.'¹⁸⁵ Keenan expressed contempt, stating that 'If Monarch Laundry and the others believe competition from a charitable institution is unfair then that is a shame.'¹⁸⁶ No agreement seemed possible. The Court must decide.

¹⁸⁰Annals of Good Shepherd Convent, Leederville, p 272, in J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 59.

¹⁸¹This is questionable as many women lived at the Home of the Good Shepherd and worked as 'auxiliaries' for 40-50 years. Two women worked in the laundry for 21 years and 50 years respectively, *ibid*, p 51, pp 56-57.

¹⁸²Transcript, Application for Enforcement of Award, File 66/1924, p 28.

¹⁸³*ibid*, p 37.

¹⁸⁴*ibid*, p 49.

¹⁸⁵*ibid*, p 44.

¹⁸⁶*ibid*, p 34.

Burnside delivered his lengthy Decision concluding that the charitable institutions were not employers and the inmates were not workers.¹⁸⁷ The Award did not apply. All the charitable institutions survived the challenge. The marketplace remained divided and private industry employers had to accept the legal interpretation. The cry of unfair competition from the charitable institutions was no longer an acceptable reason for the employers failing to meet obligations as employers. The Union, too, had to change. The tool of the employers had to stand alone and fight for issues pertaining to the needs of its members with an agenda of women's issues.

¹⁸⁷ In 1919, the NSW Industrial Full Court in a similar case granted an exemption as the relation between employer and employee did not exist. *West Australian*, 10 October 1919, p 8.

Chapter 3

ANOTHER BUBBLE

The Formation of the Hospital Employees' Union

Whilst the fight for trade continued in the commercial laundry industry and the MLEU struggled to maintain its membership another battle bubbled in the laundries of the government hospitals. These hospitals operated free from the marketplace pressures of competition and profit margins. Demands for worker productivity increased and decreased with the rise and fall of patient numbers but not with the pressure of employers' profit margins. Full time employment on weekly wage contracts offered relative security and stability to all workers in hospitals. In the laundry, workers occasionally performed extra duties to fulfil their employment contracts when laundry demands fell, unlike workers in the commercial laundries where daily hiring matched the quantity of laundry received. However, this security of weekly employment brought with it a certain loss of personal freedom, including the opportunity to get away from the workplace. Most of the hospitals required all workers to live-in, including the laundry staff. These people needed a strong and active union to represent their interests and welfare. The formation of the Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers (HEU) provided a vehicle for regular reviews of wages and conditions.

Both Perth and Fremantle had large public hospitals controlled by the Minister for Health, through the Department of Health. They had Boards of Management and secretaries to make the daily operational decisions and provide the necessary supervision. The Colonial Secretary and his Department controlled the specialist

hospitals, namely the Hospital for the Insane in Claremont and the Wooroloo Sanatorium, 35 miles from Perth.

All these hospitals received funding through substantial government grants and small contributions from the public and patients. Most hospitals raised extra funds through charges for special services, like Xrays and post mortems.¹ In the 1920s, Perth Hospital also charged six pence per day for visitors, except on designated free days.² Fremantle Hospital had donation boxes screwed to the counters of hotels to collect contributions from patrons.³ The Lumpers' Union, Fremantle Labor Party and the Labor Women's Organisation made significant and regular contributions to the running of Fremantle Hospital.⁴ The Children's Hospital relied upon government funding to the extent of 50% of its budget whilst augmenting this with money raised from appeals, subscriptions and donations. No public hospitals charged fees but all used instead a system of voluntary contributions.⁵ None operated for profit.

The non profit basis of operation marked the fundamental difference between hospital laundries and commercial laundry enterprises. All the government hospitals strove to provide a service of affordable care to all. Part of this service dictated that hospitals function 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout the year. So their laundries worked all the year round without a break. The volume of work that passed through the laundry did not depend on contracts and advertising but on accidents, epidemics

¹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 2256 File 21/1922, p 177.

²*ibid*, p 195.

³*ibid*, p 242.

⁴P Garrick and C Jeffrey, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History to 1987*, Fremantle Hospital, 1987, p 184.

⁵Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 21/1922, p 246.

and population growth. The principle of service, removed from the marketplace of competition and profit, permeated all levels of hospital procedure. Management policies in these laundries, then, were quite different from those in the commercial laundry industry.

A further point of difference between public hospitals and privately owned workplaces was the higher level of employer control over all employees in the former instance. The larger hospitals in Perth and Fremantle and the Hospital for the Insane expected their employees to live-in; whilst the other hospitals required only their nurses and doctors to do so. Distance from the city compelled all employees at the Wooroloo Sanatorium to live within its boundaries. So the majority of employees, including the laundry staff, were bound by sets of regulations that did not exist in non-hospital workplace environments. As SJ McGibbon, the advocate for the hospitals, explained at an Arbitration Court hearing in 1922, 'It is necessary to have discipline if you are going to have a properly run hospital'.⁶ A code of behaviour extended to dress, regular inspections of rooms and the use of leave passes with a 10.30 pm curfew. Vernon G Eagleton, secretary of Perth Hospital, explained that the curfew: 'We do not want them [female employees] hanging around the main entrance laughing and joking with the orderly staff.'⁷ These controls and close supervision of the female staff, in particular, were strict and paternalistic. Such social control was indicative of society's attitude towards women. These restrictions added extra pressures in a workplace like

⁶*ibid*, p 172.

⁷*ibid*, p 200.

the laundry where physical demands often extended the women to their limits of endurance.

The hospital's code of ethics enhanced the power of the hospital secretary. He patrolled the various sections of the hospital maintaining staff and work standards and estimating productivity levels in relation to the demand for linen. The hospital laundry was an essential function of hospital operations. The necessity for a constant and regular supply of clean linen for the wards and sterilised linen for the theatres added a value to the work which did not exist in commercial laundries.

Much of the equipment used was similar to that in commercial laundries. The size of the laundry governed the modernity of the equipment and facilities. Perth Hospital, the principal government hospital in Western Australia, needed a large laundry to handle 9 000 - 10 000 pieces per week. It had 12 staff in 1922.⁸ Its machinery, like the major commercial laundries of Monarch and Fremantle Steam, included many steam-operated washing machines, mangles, calenders and presses and electric irons, polishing or finishing machines and collar and skirt machines. By comparison the much smaller laundry at the Children's Hospital, with a staff of six, laundered only 1000 pieces per week. It had one steam powered calender and washing machine with electric driven and gas heated machines for ironing and pressing.⁹ The facilities in the many private hospitals that existed throughout the metropolitan area varied with their

⁸*ibid*, p 209.

⁹*ibid*, pp 89-91.

size. The Home of Peace for the Incurables, Subiaco, and St John of God Hospital, Leederville, were the largest private hospitals and both had laundries on the premises.

The basic principles of laundering - namely washing, starching, drying and ironing - applied to all laundries. But there were significant differences in the nature of the work done in hospital and commercial laundries. The articles laundered in hospital laundries were more often than not covered in blood or excreta and carried infectious bacteria. So the risk of infection was constant and high. The unpleasantness and danger in performing these tasks exceeded anything experienced by other laundry workers in commercial laundries. Rudolph Wunderberg, head-washer at the Perth Hospital laundry, firmly believed that, 'An outside laundry would not accept the stuff we have to deal with.'¹⁰ He illustrated his comment by recounting two of his duties. The first he mentioned was the sorting of the linen from the operating theatre. He said, 'The special [theatre] linen arrives at 3 pm. . . It must be unrolled and separated. . . You have clotted blood and pieces of fingers or whatever.'¹¹ This work, although very disagreeable, was not as awful as another duty which he described in vivid detail. This was sorting of the very dirty articles

From the wards which is called special and is put into special tins. That linen is brought down and is put into this fouling machine and you want more than a gas mask on to get near it at times. It is closed all night long in these tins and when you open up these tins it nearly knocks you down.¹²

The handling of such smelly often infectious linen as he placed it in the specially constructed foul-linen machine or boiler categorised his work as hazardous. Neither

¹⁰*ibid*, p 77.

¹¹*ibid*, p 80.

¹²*ibid*, p 77.

this unpleasant work nor the machine used had any equivalent in the commercial laundry field.

Another machine used only by laundry workers in hospitals was the steam fumigator designed to clean and sterilise articles. It did little to minimise worker infection as the linen still required handling. Wunderberg described the machine as

A big cylinder which is a cradle. I place them [the dirty mattresses, rugs and pillows] in and shut the two doors which are attached to it. The infectious stuff goes into one door and after fumigation it goes out of the other. It is then kept separate and no germs can get to it.¹³

Always the handling of such dirty linen was by hand with minimum or no protection.

Occupational health and safety should have been premium issues in hospital laundries but were not.

Hospital laundry workers washed and ironed the staff's personal items of clothing as well as dealing with the hospital's special needs. All the regular skills of laundry work were required. They washed, starched and ironed the secretary's and doctors' shirts with their stiff collars and cuffs; the matron's and the nurses' uniforms, aprons and caps; the orderlies' white coats and trousers; and volumes of underclothing and household linen. Women ironed or pressed almost everything. So the quantity of articles for ironing placed a huge burden on the ironers. Individuals ironed up to 1 000 pieces per week.¹⁴ The skills required to perform these tasks with speed and perfection remained as unrecognised as it did with their counterparts in the commercial laundries. Their wages were not commensurate with these skills and strenuous hours worked or the dangers of the workplace.

¹³*ibid*, p 74.

¹⁴*ibid*, p 83.

The laundry workers, together with all the other hospital workers, expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of appreciation of their dedication to duty, their long hours and low wages. Laundry workers' wages were standard across all hospitals but the hours worked varied.

Table 3:1

Weekly Wages and Hours for Hospital Workers 1921/1922¹⁵

Category	Classification	Wages	Hours
Laundry	Boiler/wash houseman	50/-	52 hour week
	Head Washhouse man	45/-	45 hour week
	Head Laundress	45/-	45 hour week
	Laundress	42/-	45 hour week
	Ironer	42/-	45 hour week
Orderly	Head	50/- to 60/-	55-58 hour week
	Others	37/6 to 50/-	52-567 hour week
Porter		45/-	52 hour week
Maid		27/6	52-60 hour week
Kitchenhand	Male	53/-	52 hour week
	Female	45/6	52 hour week

All these wages included board and lodging which was deducted. Workers were left with very little money for clothes, transport or entertainment. The laundry workers' incomes, especially the women's, were well below other workers. **Table 3:2** offers a comparison of these wages with other workers in the community. The hospitals employed laundry workers on a weekly basis as opposed to the daily contracts in the commercial laundries. However, their hours were less than the majority of other workers who worked a 48 hour week. Their wages were well below the other workers even accounting for the shorter number of hours. All their complaints were justified.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

Table 3:2
Other Minimum wages under Awards and Agreements 1921/1922¹⁶

Industry	Classification	Wages	Hours
Laundry			
	Men	14/- a day	8 hour day
	Women	11/- a day	8 hour day
	Ironers- machinist	10/- a day	8 hour day
Tailoring			
	Foreman	110/- a week	
	Men Other	93/9 a week	48 hour week
	Women Pressers	100/- a week	48 hour week
	Women Machinists	62/6 a week	48 hour week
Vineyard & Orchard			
	Foreman	81/- a week	48 hour week
	Pruner	87/- a week	48 hour week
	Packer	84/8 a week	48 hour week
Dyeing & Cleaning			
	Assistants	80/- a week	44 hour week
	Pressers	80/- a week	44 hour week
	Other Females	55/- a week	44 hour week
Shop Assistant			
	Head storeman	87/- a week	48 hour week
	Men	85/- a week	48 hour week
	Women	55/- to 65/- a week	48 hour week
Cleaning			
	Men	80/- a week	48 hour week
	Women	26/-	25 hour week minimum

The first group of hospital workers to protest strongly about their conditions were the attendants, orderlies, gardeners, and the kitchen and laundry staff at Wooroloo Sanatorium. Here the workers lived and worked in a community separated from the

¹⁶WAIG Vol 1 1921 and Vol 2 1922.

rest of the workforce. There was little relief from the strain of working 70 hours per week. Lack of protection from disease meant that the fear of contracting tuberculosis was an integral part of workers' lives. Isolation and low wages meant that most recreation consisted of activities within the confines of the Sanatorium, except on two and half days leave per month.¹⁷ The workers had had enough. Their complaints led to appeals to their union for assistance in demanding workplace reform, particularly increased wages. Albert Richards, the Wooroloo branch secretary of the Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Industrial Union of Workers, corresponded regularly with the Union secretary, Hon F Baglin MLC.¹⁸ But no union support was forthcoming. The workers at Wooroloo continued to complain at meetings. So, in early 1921, Richards changed tactics and corresponded with the secretary of the State Executive of the ALP. Immediate promises of assistance buoyed workers' hopes. These hopes were soon dashed when the State Executive forwarded their complaints and requests for assistance to Baglin. This drew an angry response from Richards as he struggled to comprehend and explain the reasoning behind the broken promises. He had to maintain members' commitment to a union movement which they believed had failed them. He expressed his feelings in a four page letter to the secretary of the State Executive of the ALP. He wrote:

I have always understood that a wrong done to a unionist, was a wrong done to all, and surely the working conditions at this Institution are a gross wrong to many and a crying shame on the ALP. . . . We cannot understand why such a powerful organisation such as the ALP with all its resources, appears impotent when opposed by a Minister of the Crown.¹⁹

¹⁷Letter, 7 July 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union, State Executive Correspondence, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1688A File 128/1921, pp 3-4.

¹⁸The Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Industrial Union of Workers registered on 17 November 1911, *WAAR* Vol 10 1911.

¹⁹Letter, 14 April 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union, State Executive Correspondence, File 128/1921, pp 3-4.

The ALP State Executive acted on this criticism and investigated the working conditions and wages at Wooroloo. The Colonial Secretary, FT Browne, responded by explaining that generally the workers at Wooroloo were better off than in other hospitals because of their higher wages. He used as an example the laundryman, an orderly performing extra duties, who earned one hundred pounds per annum more than a laundress.²⁰ The State Executive accepted the example and referred the matter back to Richards hoping to end the issue there.

Again Richards and the workers at Wooroloo were unimpressed with this information. Richards pressed on with his campaign. Hopes again rose when the Colonial Secretary visited Wooroloo Sanatorium in July 1921. He spoke to the same laundryman, testing his knowledge of the work and ascertaining his attitude towards conditions and wages. The man felt pleased with the interview and proud to display his knowledge. He expected to get a pay rise but instead was sacked and replaced by a woman on a lower wage.²¹ Even this outcome drew no response from the Union secretary. Something had to be done. Richards again wrote to the State Executive stating:

So far as the wages question is concerned, we are of the opinion that there is only one standard to go by and that is, that we have a right to be paid for our labour, a decent living wage. . . The war we wage against dirt and filth [is] of the highest importance. It complements nursing.²²

The State Executive, unable to appease the branch secretary or co-ordinate co-operation between Baglin and Richards, suggested using Arbitration to resolve the

²⁰Letter, 25 June 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Colonial Secretary, *ibid*.

²¹Letter, 9 July 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union, *ibid*.

²²Letter, 7 July 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union, *ibid*.

problems. Richards responded with another strongly worded letter in which he argued that:

To go to Arbitration as the State Executive recommends turns back the clock two years. The Union secretary is not interested in the workers at Wooroloo. Members have no confidence in the Union secretary. We are considering unity with other hospitals to push for a better secretary. . . . Members are refusing to pay their dues as it is a waste of money.²³

Richard's pressure on the State Executive succeeded. His persistent communications combined with mounting discontent among other government hospital employees emphasised the need for a full investigation. So the State Executive organised a working party for the purpose of forming a new union.²⁴

Early in March 1922 the first official meeting of the new union was held. A group of 87 workers joined. Once again women enthusiastically supported the concept of unionism, outnumbering the men at the meeting by two to one. The members elected George W Dyer as the inaugural president and James W Burgess as secretary. In April 1922 the Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers was registered.²⁵

Membership extended to laundry and kitchen staff, various categories of maids, hall porters who worked at reception, all the orderlies, including ambulance drivers, and gardeners in hospitals within a radius of 35 miles of the GPO Perth.²⁶ However all those workers at the Hospital for the Insane in Claremont and several smaller centres remained outside this union.²⁷

²³Letter, 14 July 1921, to Secretary State Executive ALP from Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union, *ibid*.

²⁴Letter, 26 August, to Secretary Wooroloo Branch of Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Union from Secretary State Executive ALP, *ibid*.

²⁵HEU Registration No 295, Hospital Employees' Union Registration File, WA IAC, AN 195/3a Acc 1101 File 160/1922.

²⁶Membership covered all workers over 14 years of age [excluding doctors and nurses] in hospitals, *ibid*.

²⁷On 18 June 1923 the Hospital and Kindred Institutions' Industrial Union of Workers reregistered as the Mental Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers which allowed members at other hospitals to join the Hospital Employees' Union, JW Burgess was the secretary, *WAIG* Vol 3 1923.

Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912 (No. 57 of 1912).

I.

Certificate of Registration and Incorporation.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the Society called the.....

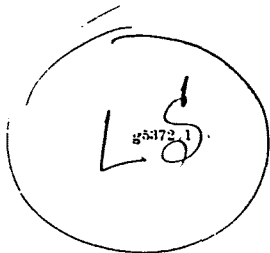
*Hospital Employees Industrial Union of
Workers, W.A. Coastal Branch*

situated in *Perth*.....

has this day been duly registered and incorporated as an Industrial Union of Workers

under "The Industrial Arbitration Act, 1912."

Given under my hand this *12th* day of *April*, 19*22*.



Frank W. [Signature] Registrar.

Certificate of Registration of the
Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers
Source: WA Industrial Arbitration Commission, Acc 1095,
WA Public Records Office.

The HEU, which formed through worker protest and pressure, now stood ready to provide the impetus for the much needed workplace reforms. Potential existed for the growth of a large and powerful union. Attendance at the regular meetings grew. No evidence of social events, like dances, picnics and card evenings, exists but most unions organised such activities to build solidarity and co-operation amongst its members. By the end of the first year membership reached 140 but unfortunately statistics do not indicate the percentages of either laundry workers or female members.²⁸

The first task required by the membership was the drawing up of a log of claims. The Metropolitan Laundry Workers' Award 4/1919 provided the basis for the clauses relevant to hospital laundry workers. The claim included improved wages, a shorter working week for all staff and paid annual leave. The request for boots and aprons for the washhouse employees not only indicated consultation with the appropriate members but also a recognition of the necessity for better occupational health and safety. This placed the HEU ahead of many other unions, including the MLEU.

The HEU secretary lodged the log of claims with the Arbitration Court in June 1922 and forwarded copies to the Boards of Management of the various metropolitan government hospitals and private hospitals.²⁹ Reactions varied as every clause in the log of claims had to be considered in relation to each specific workplace. Behind the broad similarities of the hospital environment there were considerable variations from

²⁸*ibid.*

²⁹Register of Disputes and Awards, WA IAC, AN 195/8 Acc 1489 File 21/1922.

hospital to hospital. These variations included the hospital's specific function, patient numbers, their gender and age, and staff numbers. Despite the differences, the Boards of Management of the various government hospitals presented a united front against all the clauses in the claim. They considered that there was no reason to change the hours, wages, or working conditions. Boots and aprons for laundry workers just added to the hospitals' financial burden. Certainly there was no need for the provision of change rooms offering privacy for female laundry workers and others. The largest private hospital, St John of God Hospital in Leederville, ignored the log of claims.³⁰ Agreement could not be reached so the Court must adjudicate.

The hearing commenced in November 1922.³¹ The large number of witnesses from the various sections of the hospital workforce reflected the diversity of membership and the complexity of the claim. Five laundry workers, including three women, gave evidence. Their testimonies revealed how the dangers of illness from contact with disease-ridden and infectious articles exacerbated the normal laundry work hazards. Some workers also performed particularly offensive tasks that set them apart from their counterparts in the commercial laundry industry.

The first of the laundry workers to testify was Jack Shiloney from Perth Hospital's Infectious Diseases' Branch in West Subiaco, the Victoria Hospital. This hospital cared for those patients with such diseases as scarlet fever, diphtheria, whooping

³⁰ Answer filed 7 July 1922 Perth Hospital and the Victoria Infectious Diseases Hospital, Fremantle Hospital, Children's Hospital, King Edward Memorial Hospital, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 21/1922.

³¹ Before the Full Bench comprising the President Mr Justice Draper and Messrs W Somerville and FD Good, *ibid*.

cough and venereal disease. Shiloney explained his job: 'I am called a boiler attendant but I am really doing a laundryman's work and attending the steam boiler as well.'³² He worked a longer than usual 52 hour week for which his wages were two pounds ten shillings per week plus keep.³³ At the time of the hearing, his weekly workload included the extra duties of driving the delivery horse and cart on Tuesday and orderly work on Sundays because of the lack of laundry work. His normal duties were cleaning the laundry premises, maintaining the machinery and stoking the boiler with wood every half an hour to sustain the hot water supply and the steam pressure.³⁴ In a hospital laundry, steam was an important sterilising agent. Shiloney's most dangerous and skilled job was operating the fumigator that used steam pressure 'up to 30 lbs' to clean the mattresses, rugs and pillows which he also had to collect.³⁵ His other duties involved the collection, sorting and washing of the infectious linen from the wards. He indicated an acceptance of his predicament by concluding that, 'All clothes are risk. I have to handle and sort them all.'³⁶ Later in the hearing, Vernon G Eagleton, secretary of Perth Hospital, contested the seriousness of the problem by suggesting that the infected linen could be handled with a stick.³⁷ Such a statement reflected managerial lack of concern for workers, even those in the most dangerous of work. The union needed to change this attitude.

Other hospital laundry workers did not work under the same constant threat of contact with highly contagious diseases and their workplaces were more comparable to other

³²*ibid*, p 72.

³³*ibid*.

³⁴*ibid*, pp 72-74.

³⁵*ibid*, p 74.

³⁶*ibid*, p 75.

³⁷*ibid*, p 191.

laundries. A hospital laundry worker, especially those in the washhouse, also needed a tolerance of filth and smells. But the laundry workers at Perth Hospital performed their duties in unpleasant surroundings. Wunderberg, the male head washer, explained his position and his working conditions. He was a sole parent with two children to support. He earned two pounds five shillings for a 45 hour week.³⁸ His main concerns were the risk of infection from the filthy linen and the unhealthy smell that emanated from both the dirty linen and the boiler in the laundry. Eagleton demonstrated a lack of sympathy and concern for the health and well being of his laundry employees. The HEU secretary revealed his attitude through cross examination.

Burgess: Is the boiler situated in the laundry?

Eagleton: Yes.

Burgess: Is all the refuse and swabs and limbs etc burnt there?

Eagleton: Yes, in the furnace.

Burgess: And all the smell and objectionable business goes to the laundry?

Eagleton: I have never noticed it, and I am frequently down there.

Burgess: The staff notice it?

Eagleton: I honestly have not noticed it, and I was surprised when the witness the other day said it interfered with him.³⁹

Eagleton blatantly ignored the situation. The other matter highlighted by Wunderberg was the condition of much of the linen which he had to sort and then launder.

Eagleton refuted his statement on the bits of body parts hidden in the theatre linen.

He explained that hospital policy prevented such an occurrence. He said:

They [the nurses] watch it [the linen] as carefully as they can. I do not say they treat it, except what comes from the theatre, and all theatre linen is soaked before it goes to the laundry. . . It is impossible [to have bits of fingers etc in the linen]. There are 2 pails alongside in the operating theatre, and a nurse would get the sack if she let a thing like that happen, because the surgeon performing the operation must view all the specimens after the operation is over before they are allowed to go out, and no operations are done in the ward. So bits of flesh and things would not come from the wards.⁴⁰

³⁸The Perth Hospital Board of Management implemented a policy of no annual leave for laundry workers following the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Award 4/1919, *ibid*, p 186.

³⁹*ibid*, p 214.

⁴⁰*ibid*, p 191.

Again the conflicting evidence suggests that hospital practice did not conform to policy.

The HEU endeavoured to influence another change in one hospital policy by requesting the provision of protective clothing, specifically aprons and top boots, to all washhouse workers. Of all the laundry employees in both commercial industry and government hospitals in the first years of the 1920s only those at Fremantle Hospital had aprons supplied for washing day.⁴¹ The laundry staff at the Children's Hospital bought their own overalls. Most other laundry workers took a change of clothes.⁴² Evidence provided a picture of water sloshed everywhere during the course of the day and workers standing on wet concrete floors for hours. Boots and uniforms were essential. But management did not consider workers getting wet a major problem. Burgess maintained that laundry women, in particular, needed uniforms or aprons. The debate heightened as each side argued over whether workers actually got wet whilst in a laundry. How it would be possible to remain dry throughout the day whilst handling wet or damp articles in steamy conditions defies explanation. However the employers and subsequently the Court remained resolute that these workers did not get wet. The President cited his one short visit to a hospital laundry as sufficient evidence. He insisted that boots were unnecessary and stated that:

From my personal observation I could see no necessity for boots. I do not know why they were claimed. . . If I ordered rubber boots I am perfectly satisfied that nobody would wear them.⁴³

⁴¹*ibid.*, p 92.

⁴²*ibid.*, p 89.

⁴³*ibid.*

The Court's logic appalled the Union secretary who debated the issue further with no success. The clause remained unchanged, leaving the decision to provide protective clothing in the hands of the hospital administrators.

Hospital administrations were responsible for providing workers with a healthy, safe working environment. Maud Storer, a laundress at Fremantle Hospital, performed her tasks in difficult surroundings. She prided herself in being multi-skilled and provided the Court with a detailed account of her weekly routine of work which she shared on a rotating roster with another woman.⁴⁴

TABLE 3:3

Maud Storer's weekly routine⁴⁵

Monday	Washing - All articles including the Secretary's, the Matron's, and all 8 doctors who have 40 shirts to be washed by hand OR Sorting the articles.
Tuesday	Ironing - 14 dozen aprons and body linen by machine very tiring as weight is on one leg
Wednesday	Ironing - Nurses' dresses, white coats and suits, sheets and ward linen by machine again
Thursday	Ironing - Matron's dresses, finish off the tops of the nurses' dresses by electric iron
Friday	Same as for Thursday.
Saturday	Finish any ironing left over, clean up till 11.45

Her wages were comparable with other hospital laundry staff. She received 25/- per week with full board and lodging, and two weeks' annual leave and leave on public holidays.⁴⁶ All hospitals offered free medical treatment for injuries received at work but not all paid sick leave if the accident occurred outside work. Storer remained fully covered for both accident and sick leave so she was better off than other hospital

⁴⁴*ibid*, p 93.

⁴⁵*ibid*.

⁴⁶*ibid*, p 92.

laundry workers. Only her working environment was poor. Garrick and Jeffrey's description of Fremantle Hospital laundry built in 1918 provides an insight into the conditions the staff tolerated.

Conditions in the laundry were far from ideal. It was years before a vent was built at the rear of the ironing machine where the temperature was unbearable for women at the irons. They shut their eyes and tried not to breathe deeply while washing the foul linen, a most disagreeable task . . . the hospital had no mechanical foul-linen washer, the principal medical officer considering it 'not an imperative necessity'.⁴⁷

The pressures on the laundry facility increased with up to 134 630 articles being laundered in 1921.⁴⁸ This workplace environment needed attention but the HEU was powerless to force any upgrading of machinery and seemed uninterested, at this time, in occupational health issues like ventilation.

The small laundry at the Children's Hospital presented a different problem which Burgess challenged. He considered the senior woman, May Drayton, should receive wages appropriate to her position as she was in-charge of the four females and one laundryman.⁴⁹ She fulfilled two roles. One was overseeing the smooth running of the laundry and the other was her normal routine of working in a hospital laundry. All the machine washing, the hand washing of the matron's clothes and the doctors' woollens, the manual starching and dampening down, and the ironing occurred on the premises.⁵⁰ However, the stiff fronted doctors' shirts and collars went out to IXL Laundry.⁵¹ This was an early indication of the possible co-operation between private and government enterprises.

⁴⁷P Garrick and C Jeffrey, *Fremantle Hospital*, pp 170-171.

⁴⁸*ibid*, p 170.

⁴⁹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 21/1922, p 88.

⁵⁰*ibid*, p 89.

⁵¹*ibid*, p 245.

Another level of co-operation existed between the hospital and commercial sectors as both sets of managements employed McGibbon as their Court advocate. Successful advocacy came from experience. McGibbon had gained plenty of experience over the years by representing employers in the commercial laundry industry. This time he used his skills to advantage for the government hospitals' Boards of Management. He challenged the women's claims of skill, as he had done in the original commercial sector laundry case. He claimed that laundry work was unskilled because skill related only to training not to experience or ability. He also argued against the witnesses' evidence that laundry work was monotonous and tiring because machines relieved the burden of the work. He failed to recognise that machines fragmented the work adding to stress by creating more repetition, and greater speed. Specialisation also increased the physical demands of standing for long hours at any one machine and lifting large quantities of wet linen. So stamina was a quality required of a laundry worker.

McGibbon stated:

The work, notwithstanding the witnesses for the union, is of a light nature. Everybody when describing her or his own work and attainments, is apt to exaggerate, perhaps unconsciously, and some do more than others.⁵²

Henry A Robinson, the secretary of Fremantle Hospital, expressed the typical employer attitude: 'I think the reason is that they [the workers] are getting what they are really worth.'⁵³ The administrators argued there was no justification for any increases or changes to laundry working conditions. The Hospital Boards admitted problems meeting their present wage commitments. This claim brought an immediate hostile rebuke from Burgess who argued that any industry, including hospitals, which

⁵²*ibid*, p 164.

⁵³*ibid*, p 239.

could not afford the present wages should not exist.⁵⁴ The administrators pointed out that their costs must be kept to a minimum because hospitals provided essential services.

Problems with hospital finances combined with the classification of ‘charitable institution’ were other issues in this hearing. The Home of Peace for the Incurables claimed both issues as reasons for its exclusion from the Award altogether.⁵⁵ McGibbon’s argument remained consistent with his statements in earlier Court appearances in the commercial sector hearings. He questioned the legality of the inclusion of charitable institutions in the Award coverage. He claimed that these institutions were outside the Court’s jurisdiction because they were non-profit making businesses and therefore not industries under the *Arbitration Act*. The Home of Peace for Incurables was one such institution. Burgess objected arguing that ‘none of these places [hospitals] are run for profit.’⁵⁶ The Court requested more information on the Home before it could rule. The Home of Peace would not send a representative to give evidence on the grounds that it was not cited in the claim. The situation was reminiscent of the charitable institutions’ issue in the original laundry award dispute in 1913, especially as St John of God Hospital, Leederville, took a similar stand. The matter was not pursued and the private hospitals remained outside the Award, leaving the employees vulnerable to exploitation without any representation.

⁵⁴*ibid*, p 242.

⁵⁵*ibid*, pp 62-64, pp 113-114, pp 157-161.

⁵⁶*ibid*, p 160.

The Union failed to gain entry into the hospital workplace so the workers lost the opportunity for direct contact with their union representatives. The idea alarmed the hospital officials even though the commercial launderers had accepted the clause in 1913. Hospital secretaries, Robinson and Eagleton, and the Resident Medical Officer at Perth Hospital, Donald S McKenzie, were adamant that union officials could not just walk into the hospital to collect union dues. McKenzie spoke for all: 'We certainly object to the union official walking around the hospital but there is no objection to the union official coming to the office to see myself or the Chief Clerk.'⁵⁷ Burgess accepted the parameters set by the Boards of Management and agreed to call at the office. After this verbal assurance the Court ratified the Award.⁵⁸

Secretary Burgess expressed his overall disappointment with the Award when he said, 'We [all the hospital workers] have not got very much out of it.'⁵⁹ Again, the Court had acknowledged the position of management by accepting many of the pre-existing conditions. However, the laundry workers fared more favourably than other sections of hospital staff. They worked a 44 hour week compared with the other workers under the Award who worked a 48 hour week. The presentation of hours and wages did not correlate because the hours were weekly and their wages daily. Their wages equalled their counterparts under the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Award. The washhouse men and women earned 14/- and 11/- per day respectively. The ironers and shirt and collar machinists earned 10/- per day whilst the age classification wages ranged from 4/6 to 9/- per day. Laundry workers, along with all hospital workers, had

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p 254.

⁵⁸ 12 December 1922, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, p 272.

holidays and two weeks annual leave on full pay plus a board and lodging allowance where it was relevant. The sick leave clause listed entitlements remained as offered by each hospital. The commercial laundry workers had no sick leave entitlements and no annual leave with fewer public holidays. The hospital had to provide restrooms and dressing rooms. Specific gains for other sections of the majority of hospital staff may not have reached expectations but certainly conditions for the workers in the hospitals' laundries were better than before the Award.

The greatest disappointment must have been for the members based at the Wooroloo Sanatorium which was outside the specified area of Award coverage. The Court had reduced the Scope Clause to government public hospitals within a radius of 14 miles, instead of 35 miles, of the GPO Perth. The workers whose persistent complaints and lobbying had influenced the formation of the Union had gained nothing. Burgess and the executive, aware of the situation, immediately moved to rectify the problem by drawing up an appropriate log of claims for that specific centre. The Colonial Secretary consented to the claims without any dispute. The Agreement 8/1923 registered in April 1923 improved conditions and wages.⁶⁰ It established a more flexible working week with the laundry staff working 44 hours on the basis of a five day week instead of five and half days. All workers received three weeks' paid annual leave over and above the four successive days off at the end of each 24 day straight work and three public holidays. There were three levels of wages in the laundry clause - head laundress, adult laundress and washhouse man. Only the washhouse man received an increase in wages. The laundresses' wages reduced because the

⁶⁰WAIG Vol 3 1923.

Award followed the Laundry Workers and other Hospital Award. Fortunately for the women, the Colonial Secretary agreed to continue paying the existing rates of ten pound and eight pound. The Agreement carried a clause to cover this situation. The Union had another victory, not with uniforms, but in the provision of a rest-room for the laundry workers. Burgess successfully improved the wages, hours and working conditions for all government hospital workers, except those working with the Hospitals for the Insane. Union membership rose to 191.⁶¹

The future for the HEU looked promising. In 1925, Burgess, whilst secretary of both the HEU and the Mental Hospital Employees' Unions, moved his office to the Fremantle Trades Hall.⁶² He then took on the extra secretarial duties of five small unions based in Fremantle.⁶³ However, he still continued to fulfil effectively his duties to the union members despite being busy with such a wide variety of responsibilities. He visited workplaces, organised social functions, and attended meetings of the Metropolitan District Council and he continued his primary duty of revising existing awards, bargaining for better wages and working conditions. Successful negotiations for wage increases for all employees in metropolitan government hospitals formed the bases for Agreements 35/1925 and 313/1926.⁶⁴ Corresponding wage increases occurred for the workers at the Wooroloo Sanatorium under Agreements 57/1925 and

⁶¹*ibid.*

⁶²JW Burgess was secretary of the Mental Hospital Employees' Union from its registration on 18 June 1923. Membership covered all employees including the male nurses and female nurses at mental institutions. Membership by December 1925 was 228. *WAIG* Vol 6 1926.

⁶³They were the Soap and Candle Manufacturers Employees' Union; the Sack, Bag and Textile Employees' Union; the Coastal Food Manufacturers and Warehouse Mixing and Packing Employees' Union; the Trade Hall Industrial Association of Workers. He had relinquished all these extra responsibilities by 1933.

⁶⁴*WAIG* Vol 4 1925 and *WAIG* Vol 6 1926.

37/1926.⁶⁵ Membership of the HEU grew steadily each year from 218 in December 1925 to 275 in December 1926.⁶⁶

The thoroughness with which Burgess carried out his duties earned him a vote of confidence from his colleagues at the Conference of Unions with Women Members held in Perth in May 1928.⁶⁷ The Conference declared the HEU so well organised that it did not need the assistance of Miss Hooton, the new women's organiser. Burgess proved the Report correct by reorganising his workload to the advantage of all his union members. In 1928, he engineered a split in the Mental Hospital Employees' Union separating the professional male and female nurses or attendants into their own union whilst incorporating the other staff into the HEU.⁶⁸ Now, for the first time all government hospital domestic and outdoor staff belonged to the one union. HEU membership stood at 355 by the end of 1928.⁶⁹ Strength came with numbers.

Burgess began to align working conditions and wages for all the members. The workers in the government mental hospitals and homes for the mentally ill reaped immediate benefit from transferring their membership. They worked in conditions quite different from other hospitals so they needed their own award. In October 1928, he filed a log of claims for shorter hours with longer annual leave, increased wages, a fairer disciplinary code, a supply of protective clothing and more staff especially in the

⁶⁵WAIG Vol 6 1926.

⁶⁶WAIG Vol 5 1925 and WAIG Vol 7 1927.

⁶⁷Minutes, 23 May 1928, State Executive, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1573 Book 4/1925.

⁶⁸31 August 1928, WAIG Vol 8 1928.

⁶⁹WAIG Vol 9 1929.

laundry.⁷⁰ The Chief Secretary disputed almost every clause which resulted in a hearing before the Full Bench of the Court of Arbitration in May 1929.⁷¹

Burgess endeavoured to modify the hospital authorities' control over employees. The staff at the Asylum, like those at the other large metropolitan public hospitals, lived on the premises and were subjected to regulations governing dress, hours and behaviour. However these Asylum workers experienced even greater controls than other hospital workers. The provision of uniforms, even for the laundry workers, caused standardisation and uniformity. Although no other laundry worker anywhere had the luxury of an annual issue of four print dresses, four pairs of cuffs as well as a sun hat and six aprons they were in this way made identical to every other female worker. This elimination of individuality re-inforced managerial control. Another constraint, the evening curfew that automatically became part of life for all women working in hospitals, served as another control. At the Asylum the curfew time of 10.45 pm was slightly later than that at the other hospitals and could be extended until midnight on two nights a week. Asylum female employees could also sleep off the premises on the night before their day off.⁷² However, the repercussions for breaking the curfew hour or any other regulations brought reprimands and punishments peculiar to asylums.

All Asylum employees, under the *Lunacy Act 1902-1920*, received severe disciplinary action for a misdemeanour.⁷³ These Regulations, as the major means of worker

⁷⁰ Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 4081 File 18/1928.

⁷¹ The Full Bench, comprising the President J Dwyer, and Messrs W Somerville and OL Bloxsome heard the case, *ibid*.

⁷² *ibid*, p 84.

⁷³ *ibid*, p 6.

control, were not experienced by any other government hospital worker, male or female, nor any commercial industry employee. The *Lunacy Act* outlined in detail the procedure for interrogation and then punishment. The accused, once reported by either a superior or another worker, received only 24 hours to notice to appear before the Inspector General in a quasi-court scenario. Burgess described an appearance in front of the Inspector General who had the power to pass sentence:

He is sitting there in his chair. The accusers are there in his room (in the case of a female it would be the matron and in the case of a male, the head attendant); and the accused person is standing there by himself [or herself]. He had no one to assist him when his case is being dealt with.⁷⁴

The HEU argued that every person had the right of representation with 56 hours to prepare his or her case. E Thomas, the advocate for the Colonial Secretary, insisted that such a change was unwarranted because the Inspector General conducted preliminary investigations only to establish innocence.⁷⁵ He argued that all workers had the right of appeal to a Board specifically established for the purpose. Burgess counter-claimed that the trauma created by both the threat and the application of this clause of the *Lunacy Act* placed severe pressure on the members. He believed that the entire procedure was far more than just an inquiry to establish innocence or guilt. It was social control of the workers on and off duty that caused unnecessary stress and anxiety. His sound argument failed to persuade the Court of the necessity to alter the existing situation. The new Award retained the requirements of the tough discipline under the *Lunacy Act*.

These same union members also experienced a further level of stress unfamiliar to fellow unionists. Mental hospital employees' level of responsibility and duty

⁷⁴*ibid*, p 64.

⁷⁵*ibid*, p 96.

extended beyond their normal tasks to include the supervising of patients assigned to the same work areas. Burgess explained that

In each case they have quite a number of people working under their direction. . . Some workers I represent have 12 and 14 workers perhaps 20, insane patients under their direction and that imposes a much greater strain on them than a person who has charge of the same number of sane people.⁷⁶

In 1929, Claremont Asylum, the largest of the mental institutions, had 1100 patients.⁷⁷

Some of them worked in the laundry as part of their rehabilitation and to contribute to the overall functioning of the place.⁷⁸ Ada Farrell, the head laundress at the Asylum, had a staff of five regular women, one relieving housemaid who worked there twice a week and 25 patients. She explained how the workload and the stress levels increased with patients as assistants:

Usually [they] just help us along. We tell them what to do and they help us. There is always a laundress with a set of patients. Some of them iron, some of them help us sort the clothes, and some help to fill the machines. . . They are changeable at times. Sometimes they will not work at all. They get abusive and we have to get out of their way to avoid a knock . . . We have to take them through [into the hospital] and count them, and hand them over to the nurses in each ward.⁷⁹

The Asylum's laundry, which did laundering for Heathcote, Lemnos and Greenplace Hospitals as well as its own, was twice the size of Perth Hospital's and more comparable to Fremantle Steam Laundry. The work and machinery were typical of any large laundry. There was always a shortage of paid staff. Laundresses performed every task, large or small, heavy or light. Men were not employed to operate the heavy machines, as they were elsewhere, because 'of the presence of female patients.'⁸⁰ The washhouse women were better off than most as the hospital's administrators recognised that standing on wet concrete floors was a health hazard. Unfortunately, there were insufficient boots for the washhouse staff and insufficient

⁷⁶*ibid*, p 5.

⁷⁷*ibid*, p 28.

⁷⁸*ibid*.

⁷⁹*ibid*, p 87.

⁸⁰*ibid*, p 88.

waterproof coats for everyone to wear when hanging out washing in the rain. Clause 10 in the new Award made provision for waterproof coats and boots but did not specify one for each staff member, only 'when required.'⁸¹ However, these workers were still better off than other laundry workers who had no protective clothing provided.

The second major area for reform was the leave provisions which left these workers at a distinct disadvantage compared with other hospital employees. Firstly, their monthly contracts specified only two Sundays off in every four weeks. Secondly, they had only five public holidays and in 1925 the Walsh Special Board reduced their annual leave from four weeks to two. Burgess argued for the re-instatement of their original leave entitlements because their responsibilities and stresses were similar to the nurses who had retained four weeks annual leave.⁸² His members had 'to listen to patients' delusions and chatter,' just like the nurses.⁸³ There was little opportunity for anyone to escape the stresses of being in an environment surrounded by mentally ill people. Therefore the general staff deserved longer annual leave. Burgess' argument was unsuccessful; the Award provided no extra public holidays and failed to return annual entitlements to the previous level. However, he successfully wove into his argument a claim for the reduction of working hours to a total of 176 hours per month which was considerably less than their previous hours of 192 per month. This calculation of hours allowed for an unusual breakdown of shifts working 46 hours in each of three weeks during the monthly period and 38 hours in the remaining week

⁸¹ *WAIG* Vol 19 1929, p 134.

⁸² *ibid.*, p 39.

⁸³ *ibid.*

which accommodated the old routine. The weekly wages for laundresses rose to 52/6 for the head laundress and 47/6 for others. These wages were well below those paid to laundry women in major government hospitals who earned between 57/7 and 63/1 per week. The skill of seamstresses entitled them to 63/6 per week which was comparable to the ironers' 63/1 per week.⁸⁴ Conditions for overtime payment appeared in the Award for the first time. Despite the shortfalls, the Mental Hospital Award 18/1929 did achieve some improvements for workers, especially the laundry workers.

Members working in other government hospitals pressed for improved benefits. So Burgess revised their award. For the first time the Home of Peace and the Old Women's Home, Fremantle, appeared in the list of workplaces. The Boards of Management and the Minister for Public Health consented to the claim and Agreement 18/1929 took effect from July 1929.⁸⁵ The classifications in the Wages' Clause for laundry workers changed. The substantial ten shillings per week increase gained for the washhouse women suggested an acknowledgment of the tough working conditions in this section of the laundry. Their new wages rose from three pounds and one penny to three pounds ten shillings and two pennies. Most other females working in the laundries received a rise of only one shilling and one penny per week. A new classification of head laundryman gave the authority for general laundry operation to a male laundry worker. No longer could a woman in this hospital laundry strive to be promoted to a position of authority within her chosen place of work.⁸⁶ This retrograde

⁸⁴Award Variation 313/1926, *WAIG* Vol 6 1926.

⁸⁵*WAIG* Vol 9 1929.

⁸⁶Only in the Claremont Asylum laundry was there a head laundress. There were no men working in this laundry. The Mental Hospital Award 18/1928 provided a classification for Head laundress, *WAIG* Vol 19 1929, p 135.

step for women provided the first sign that this union, like others, was concerned to preserve and reinforce male authority over female workers. The provision of boots for washhouse women was a major breakthrough. They were now better off than those in commercial employment. More importantly, this indicated a new level of acceptance by the employers of their role in occupational health. The inclusion of Clauses 6 and 7 brought the HEU position in line with most other unions. The former required the posting of weekly rosters detailing hours and duties whilst the latter concerned the keeping of a time book available for union inspection. The secretary now had access to the workplace and the opportunity to assess compliance with the Agreement and to meet workers in situ. The new Agreement benefited the workers and the Union.

After this success Burgess turned his attention to the active union group at the Wooroloo Sanatorium and drew up a log of claims based on the Mental Hospital Award. The log of claims filed with the Arbitration Court in October 1929 included the new district allowance payable over and above the basic wage. This allowance was '3/- above Perth rates because of the disability these people are placed under by working in this institution.'⁸⁷ Burgess applied for the transference of the hearing, set for August 1930, to Wooroloo to save the witnesses the expense and inconvenience of being absent from work for several days.⁸⁸ The Court accepted the request and in October 1930 the Court travelled to Wooroloo.⁸⁹ This temporary relocation allowed the members of the Bench to experience the isolation of the Sanatorium that was the central to all the claims.

⁸⁷Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc Folio 4411 File 18/1929, p 3.

⁸⁸Letter, 18 July 1930, to Clerk in Charge from secretary of HEU, *ibid*.

⁸⁹The Court consisted of the President, Justice Dwyer, and Messrs W Somerville and OL Bloxsome, *ibid*.

Life for the workers at Wooroloo was very different from that of the majority of other workers because of the isolation. All the employees lived on the premises in single persons' quarters or in houses within the hospital grounds. The married men lived in very small timber cottages that consisted of a kitchen, two bedrooms and a back verandah but no bathroom.⁹⁰ Burgess described the situation:

There is really no pleasure around here. You can not replenish your clothes or get a little recreation here or a little respite. There is nowhere to go. If you go down into the town, there is really no town or village. It is only one or two stores.⁹¹

The expense of travelling to and staying in Perth or Northam for recreation and business left most workers out of pocket, despite being paid an allowance of 11/- for meals not eaten at the institution.⁹² The workers needed extra money for their city visits. This debate focussed on this issue for quite some time. E Thomas, the employer's advocate, queried why these workers should leave with more money in their pockets, particularly as others working in the country did not have the same opportunities. He was sure they were in a better position than city workers and therefore needed no extra benefits.⁹³ The Court ruled against an extra allowance over and above the existing refund of board and lodging already given to workers when they went on their monthly leave. Burgess pointed out that the workers at Wooroloo worked 24 days straight before getting any leave. The issue of leave proved similar to that at the Claremont Asylum. The monthly rosters and the environments of these two specialist hospitals were similar. The workers spent their entire time in the depressing and stressful atmosphere created by the dying or the insane. Workers needed ample recreation and respite for their own good health so as to withstand the risk of

⁹⁰*ibid*, p 18.

⁹¹*ibid*, p 4.

⁹²*ibid*, p 6.

⁹³*ibid*, p 36.

contracting tuberculosis. Recreation at the Sanatorium consisted of pictures or concerts with the patients or an occasional dance. Bush walks and tennis provided some physical relief. So the days off away from the establishment were essential for rejuvenation, both physically and mentally.

The workers gained some support for their claims from the Superintendent, Dr RM Mitchell. As founder of the Sanatorium, he did not dispute the isolation of the establishment which was one of the selection criteria for the site at Wooroloo. He argued against any likelihood of infection. He considered the risk of a healthy person contracting tuberculosis from a patient was 'less than walking down Hay Street.'⁹⁴

This strange statement ignored the direct link between isolation from the rest of the community and the contagious nature of tuberculosis. The workers were at risk.

Despite this claim and the requirement for a high level of physical fitness, workers did contract the disease and many returned as patients and died in the Sanatorium.⁹⁵ The evidence contradicted the Superintendent's statements.

The workers' isolation and risk of infection and death failed to concern Thomas as he expounded the virtues of the working conditions and the environment. He argued that the workers lived next door to their workplace, many received uniforms (not the laundry workers) and had their washing done for them. The air was fresh and the scenery attractive. The lack of public holiday provision seemed of paltry concern and the monthly leave arrangements were adequate. Their three weeks' annual leave,

⁹⁴*ibid*, p 24.

⁹⁵*ibid*, pp 10-14.

compared with two weeks for other workers, plus long service leave, also were adequate

Laundryman, R Wunderberg, challenged Thomas' impressions of working at the Sanatorium. He supplied evidence to disprove they were better off than city workers. Wunderberg had experienced both lifestyles, having earlier worked as a laundryman at Perth Hospital while he now lived in one of the cottages with his wife and four children all under eleven years of age. The accommodation was cheap but the cost of living was a burden. The local store provided a fair service but meat was expensive and fresh milk difficult to obtain. Travel to Perth for provisions was difficult and expensive. He requested an extension of the service that offered cheaper produce to some of the medical staff. He suggested that the families could be part of these buying programmes and could handle the distribution of the stores. He added that if this happened the married men would waive the extra three shillings claim.⁹⁶ This whole idea removed one of the perks of the administrator, prompting Dr Mitchell to express fears of collusion between the storeman and staff.⁹⁷ The Union and workers disagreed.

The visit to Wooroloo influenced the President. Isolation was a problem. Neither Dr Mitchell nor the employer's advocate had fully convinced the Court of the pleasures of working at Wooroloo. The President indicated his desire for change. Early in the day he made a rather poetic statement: 'There is nothing static in the Arbitration Court

⁹⁶*ibid*, p 8.

⁹⁷*ibid*, p 24.

or else we might as well fold our wings and fly away.⁹⁸ So when the Court delivered the Award in October 1930 it included a clause granting married men the opportunity to purchase stores at the reduced rate. The President stated:

Where we find a self-centred industry such as this situated some distance from the source of supply of many of the necessaries of life, it is a very reasonable and proper provision that the married workers should be enabled to share in the benefits of community buying and thereby extend as far as possible the purchasing power of their wages by obtaining the supplies for their family requirements at the cheaper rate.⁹⁹

The new Award reduced the laundry workers' 44 hour week to Monday to Friday unless mutually agreed otherwise. Wages increased between one pound and two pounds per week and boots for laundrymen and washhouse women became a standard provision. All leave entitlements which included four successive days' leave in every four weeks, the annual leave and sick leave remained the same. Life at Wooroloo improved.

The HEU secretary's efforts had been rewarded. The unification of the government hospitals' non-medical workforce into one union established a powerful bargaining force. The gains made in this last award case provided a strong base for the future. Burgess gradually standardised and improved the wages and conditions of workers in all government hospitals. Women in the various hospital laundries had higher wages and superior working conditions to their counterparts in the commercial laundries. The future of the hospital laundry workers should have been promising. The work of their union secretary overrode the effects of the changing economic climate.

⁹⁸*ibid.*, p 26.

⁹⁹WAIG Vol 11 1931, p 238.

Unfortunately, the depression deepened. Union membership began to decline from its peak of 371 in 1929.¹⁰⁰

The HEU executive turned its effort to community issues and united with other union officials to try to tackle the pressing problems of the period. Unemployment rose steadily. Pressure on workers increased as employer expectations changed.

Employees conformed to different work practices or faced dismissal. Many workers broke awards to keep their jobs. A Conference of Union Officials in 1930 concluded that the introduction of the broken-time shift or part-time work offered an alternative to dismissal and removed the need for breaking awards.¹⁰¹ Always discussions and concern focussed on male unemployment. Unemployed married women and single girls also suffered hardship but they remained on the fringe of male leaders' concern.

In the beginning of 1931, the Mitchell Government extended sustenance payments of seven shillings to unemployed single females; a rate half that of the single male.¹⁰²

Still no assistance was forthcoming for unemployed women who struggled to support themselves and their families. Even a deputation representing these women failed to stimulate Government action.¹⁰³ But unemployment was not the only problem.

Employers, too, suffered as workers' buying capacity declined and markets shrank.

Profit margins correspondingly declined. The Employers' Federation offered one solution to benefit its members. Their suggestion to abolish the Arbitration Court and

¹⁰⁰WAIG Vol 9 1929.

¹⁰¹Minutes, 4 April 1930, Conference of Union Officials, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 5/1925.

¹⁰²Minutes, 7 February 1931, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 6/1930.

¹⁰³Minutes, 24 March 1931, *ibid.*

thereby suspend all awards created havoc and anger at a Metropolitan District Council meeting in October 1931.¹⁰⁴ The proposal spelt disaster for the labour movement but never progressed beyond being a proposal. However, the employers gained some benefit from the passing of the *Financial Emergency Act 1931*. Official sanction now existed for reductions in the wages. Many unions had their applications for wage variations cancelled. Workers' wages fell. In March 1932 the HEU members employed by the Home Of Peace and the Children's Hospital lost the small financial gains won a year earlier in the Agreement 2/1931.¹⁰⁵

By this time, Burgess had resigned leaving the new secretary, LG Severn, in the unenviable position of being powerless to prevent the implementation of this new law. Unbeknown to Severn all his members were under threat from a different source. All hospital laundries were under review. The escalating cost of wages, the maintenance of the laundry machinery and fuel came to the attention of a forward thinking public servant. In September 1930, the Principal Architect of the Public Works Department, JM Tait, proposed a radical plan for a central hospital laundry.¹⁰⁶

Tait envisaged the entire operation run on similar lines to a private sector laundry. As a business, it would make a profit through charges, savings through staff reduction and the elimination of obsolete plant and the introduction of modern machinery and lower overhead costs.¹⁰⁷ He suggested that the Medical Department control the laundry and

¹⁰⁴Minutes, 13 October 1931, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁵Amendments 17/1932, 18/1932, *WAIG* Vol 12 1932, p 21.

¹⁰⁶Memorandum, 19 September 1930, to Under Secretary for Works from JM Tait Principal Architect of Public Works Department, Establishment of a Central Laundry, WA Department of Public Health, AN 120/4 Acc 1003 File 1041/1930.

¹⁰⁷Memorandum, 19 September 1930, to Under Secretary for Works from JM Tait Principal Architect of

that a qualified laundryman be appointed to oversee the whole operation. The value of a man running the laundry was 'an advantage which cannot be economically obtained under present conditions on account of the cost.'¹⁰⁸ Tait ignored women's ability to supervise laundries. Male efficiency and leadership appeared preferable to female. Gender segregation and male dominance continued.

The position of laundry workers in this grand plan related directly to cost factors. Any opportunity for saving in the area of hospital management appealed to the government. This idea was new. So the proposal prompted great interest at a ministerial level. The concept met with approval and Tait received the necessary authorisation to conduct an investigation.¹⁰⁹ He ordered surveys of all the major hospitals. Tait acknowledged the use of laundry work as therapy by excluding the Hospital for the Insane.¹¹⁰ **Tables 3:4, 3:5, 3:6 and 3:7** provide a detailed picture of the staff and wages, patient intake, size of laundry services, and the laundry expenditure and maintenance costs in each of the public hospitals. All these facts indicated to Tait that a central laundry owned by the government seemed a viable proposition. He argued that savings, particularly in the area of maintenance and wages, would occur under his plan.

Public Works Department, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸*ibid.*

¹⁰⁹Memorandum, 11 October 1930, to Principal Architect from Minister for Works, *ibid.*

¹¹⁰Memoranda 11 December 1930 and 18 February 1931, to Secretary of Medical Department from JM Tait Principal Architect of Public Works Department, *ibid.*

Table 3:4
Staff levels at each hospital and annual wages (in Pounds) in 1930¹¹¹

Hospitals	Men	Women	Juniors	Annual Wages
Perth Public	3	3	10	32 04.0.0
Fremantle Public	1	1	3	6 981.0.0
Children's	1	3	3	1 155.11.0
King Edward	0	3	1	331.0.0

TABLE 3:5
Hospital patient numbers and amount of articles laundered in 1930¹¹²

Hospitals	Number of beds	Annual daily average	Pieces Laundered Annually	Pieces per bed per week
Perth Public	381	318.53	1 007 974	61
Fremantle Public	138	90	216 528	48
Children's	150	137.4	14 850	109
King Edward	58	58	487 444	162

TABLE 3:6
Annual expenditures (in Pounds) for hospital laundries in 1930¹¹³

Hospitals	Materials	Fuel	Electricity	Gas
Perth Public	356.0.0	750.0.0	180.0.0	24.0.0
Fremantle Public	118.14.1	933.4	20.0.0	15.0.0
Children's	110.10.1	288.13.0	101.17.0	nil
King Edward	34.0.0	52.0.0	57.1.2	nil

Table 3:7
Maintenance (in Pounds) of hospital laundries in 1930¹¹⁴

Hospitals	Maintenance
Perth Public	300 -500.0.0
Fremantle Public	66.15.3
Children's	81.12.2
King Edward	Not given

¹¹¹Information supplied by the hospitals to Principal Architect of Public Works Department, *ibid.*

¹¹²*ibid.*

¹¹³*ibid.*

¹¹⁴*ibid.*

However the proposal lapsed with the pending State election in early 1933. The newly elected Labor government led by P Collier faced the daunting task of re-establishing a confident society and a stable economy. The building of a capital intensive, centralised laundry to replace existing services lacked priority because of the initial high cost, which included new labour saving machinery and therefore substantial loss of jobs. The government could not afford to outlay the capital and add to the unemployment burden.

The shelving of the central laundry proposal saved the HEU from battles over loss of jobs and demarcation disputes. Membership reached an all time low by December 1933 with only 315 names on its books.¹¹⁵ The crisis in the State touched all workers and their families, employers and their businesses, and all Unions. Life was tough. Fortunately, the government's commitment to maintaining hospitals for the population guaranteed a level of employment for the hospital workers. Laundries continued to operate as every hospital required a constant supply of clean linen, uniforms and other articles.¹¹⁶ There was always work in hospital laundries. The gains made by the establishment of the HEU and the various awards of the previous decade held fast. So laundry workers in the hospitals did not suffer unemployment to the same extent as their counterparts in the commercial laundry industry.

¹¹⁵WAIG Vol 12 1932.

¹¹⁶P Garrick and C Jeffrey, *Fremantle Hospital*, p 115.

Chapter 4

THEIRS IS NOT TO REASON WHY. THEIRS IS JUST TO WASH AND DRY.¹

The unionisation of women working in the various sections of the laundry industry created the opportunity for an improvement in wages and conditions. Union secretaries provided the organisational and advocacy skills that the workers needed to instigate change. The secretaries of the HEU successfully worked for the members. Wages increased and working conditions improved for those women working in the hospital laundries. The women in the commercial laundries were not so fortunate. Successive secretaries of the MLEU failed to gain similar advances in workplace reform and improved wages. The strength of the commercial launderers combined with the pressures of competition in the marketplace forced these secretaries to negotiate smaller benefits and wage adjustments. The diverse nature of the industry dictated the unions' success in winning reforms.

The third and last female secretary of the MLEU, Annie Warren, struggled to bargain for increased wages and implement workplace reforms. Unfortunately, as secretary of the larger, more demanding South West Clothing Trades Union (Clothing Trades Union), she had little time for the smaller MLEU.² Yet, the commercial laundry workers needed a strong leader to offer stability as employment conditions changed. This uncertainty in the workforce reflected in a decline in membership as women could not afford their union dues. Warren expressed her concern about the casualisation of

¹LG Severn, Transcript, HEU Vs Board of Management Fremantle Hospital, WA IAC, An 195/4 Acc 1106 Folio 18889 File 156/1959, p 9.

²SW CTU had in 1035 members in 1925. The MLEU had 27 members in 1925, *WAIG* Vol 5 1925.

the industry at a Metropolitan District Council meeting in 1926.³ At the same meeting, a member's letter pointed out to the Council that the Monarch Laundry Company refused to pay its employees for public holidays.⁴ Warren and a factory inspector investigated. A month later she reported to the Council on the poor working conditions in the commercial laundries. She submitted a letter from the Inspector of Factories supporting her comments. The Inspector reported that he could not assist them in any claims because many of the workers were casuals or on daily hiring, and did not fall under the jurisdiction of the *Factories and Shops Act 1920*.⁵ Neither Warren nor the Factory Inspector resolved the problem. Nothing changed in Warren's one year in office. Membership plummeted to a record low of 19.⁶ Working as secretary of two unions proved too much for her.

In following year George Day became the tenth secretary of the MLEU and the third to combine his duties with that of secretary of the Clothing Trades Union. He, like his predecessors, could do little to improve the laundry workers' wages or working conditions. Amendment 120/1927 handed down by the Arbitration Court in March 1927 increased most wages by six pence per day but workers lost two paid public holidays.⁷ Public holidays were their only holidays or alternatively the opportunity to earn extra money. The employers benefited from another change which increased the ratio of junior females to seniors from 1:1 to 2:1. This allowed the employment of more girls at a cheaper rate. More juniors in the workforce and the increase in casualisation

³Minutes, 1 June 1926, Metropolitan District Council, Book 5/1925.

⁴Minutes, 18 May 1926, *ibid*.

⁵Minutes, 1 June 1926, *ibid*.

⁶G Day was Acting Secretary of the SW CTU for part of 1927, *WAIG* Vol 7 1927.

⁷*WAIG* Vol 7 1927.

made unionisation difficult. Yet, during Day's only year in office, membership rose to 82 by December 1927.⁸ Worker awareness of the value of unionism increased with widespread community discussion on the introduction of a 44 hour week and an increase in the basic wage. Women workers responded by paying their dues. Another boost to female unionism was the ALP State Executive's appointment of Miss E Hooton as women's organiser in May 1928.⁹ She would serve 'as a centre for all women workers' by heightening women's awareness of the value of union membership by emphasising the benefits of protection and better wages.¹⁰ Generally, female memberships of all unions rose under her influence. The MLEU membership peaked at 92 in December 1928, its highest membership since the Union's heyday of 1913.¹¹

The MLEU secretary's position changed again in 1928 with Leslie Pitcher maintaining the tradition of dual control with the Clothing Trades Union. A very small group of women to benefit from his appointment were the forgotten workers covered by the Dyeing and Cleaning Award 55/1920. Pitcher prepared Amendment 167/1929 which provided the adult workers with substantial 10% - 13% increases in wages bringing them in line with the new Basic Wage Variation.¹² A complicated system of six monthly increases for junior workers gave smaller pro rata rises to the younger workers under the Award. This was a welcome review as their wages had remained static for nine years.

⁸WAIG Vol 8 1928.

⁹Minutes, 23 May 1928, State Executive, Book 4/1925.

¹⁰Minutes, 23 May 1928, *ibid*.

¹¹WAIG Vol 9 1929.

¹²WAIG Vol 10 1930.

The laundry workers were not so fortunate. Pitcher, like those before him, became more involved with other issues. Clothing Trades Union business occupied more of his time than did that of the laundry workers' union. The demands of the far larger union, with its membership of over 1000, placed an uneven pressure on Pitcher.¹³ The laundry workers relied on the Factory Inspectors to investigate workers' complaints and challenge employers' actions. The earlier issue of the unpaid public holiday entitlements resurfaced, not at the Monarch Laundry, but at a small business in West Perth. Factory Inspector Cooke, not union secretary Pitcher, brought Josephine Sweeney, proprietor of the laundry, before the Arbitration Court.¹⁴ In 1913, Sweeney herself had suffered unemployment and hardship due to an uncaring proprietor who failed to meet health requirements and was forced to close. Now she was the unsympathetic owner who refused to pay Annie Moore for the Good Friday public holiday. Annie worked regularly from Tuesday to Friday. Yet her employer claimed that, although Annie's four day working week was regular and consistent, the daily hiring system placed her outside the Award. She was not permanent and nor was anyone else in Sweeney's employ. Every employee knew her conditions of work. Annie was not entitled to such pay. The employer's advocate explained that a sign prominently displayed in the laundry notified staff to the conditions of their employ.¹⁵

**All employees receive a day's notice
each day when starting work.**

¹³WAIG Vol 9 1929.

¹⁴Josephine Sweeney had been in trouble with Health Inspectors in 1913, *West Australian*, 23 August 1930, p 16.

¹⁵*ibid.*

Pitcher, as Union secretary, never questioned this sign nor pondered on its implications for the employees. But the Factory Inspector did express his concern and warned the Court of future problems if this situation remained unchecked. He argued that:

All laundry workers were daily workers, as the nature of the industry made it necessary that they should work only when work was available. If however, the principle of the placard was accepted by the Court, similar notices could be posted in other establishments and holidays could be wiped out. . . This placard was intended to evade the provisions of the award. . . We contend that paid [public] holidays are provided for in the award and that the hands are not casual workers but daily hands on a daily hiring. Consequently they are entitled to [public] holiday pay.¹⁶

The industrial magistrate ruled that the timebook showed that Annie had been in continuous employment and that: 'She worked continuously eight hours on Friday for months. There is a case to answer.'¹⁷ He convicted Josephine Sweeney and ordered her to pay costs but he did not impose a fine. Annie received her wages but not with any help from her union secretary. Pitcher failed to fulfil his role of protecting a member by enforcing the Award. The legality of the sign and its implications for workers were union business. Certainly the appearance of such sign in a hospital would have been challenged by Burgess, secretary of the HEU.

Pitcher, like others before him, experienced greater pressures as secretary of the larger Clothing Trades Union. However he managed to visit the large commercial laundries to collect the dues and talk to the managers who expressed their concern over the recurring problem of charitable institutions and their price cutting, and also paid public holidays. Pitcher acted upon both. The first appeared on the agenda of the Metropolitan District Council in April 1930. Pitcher, as secretary of the MLEU, appealed for Council assistance to have the *Factories and Shops Act* amended to bring all laundry workers

¹⁶*ibid.* Under Award 5/1923 no paid annual leave entitlement existed.

¹⁷*ibid.*

under the existing award.¹⁸ As before, discussion focussed on pricelists and the number of employees in the various laundries in the charitable institutions and in the large commercial businesses. Size indicated strength.

The position in the marketplace of the two smaller charitable institutions had declined over the years but the Home of the Good Shepherd still provided keen competition. The laundry facilities at Alexandra Home and the Salvation Army Home for Women both catered for their own needs. The Home of the Good Shepherd, whilst maintaining its competitive edge, experienced problems with a decline in the number of women and girls living there. The Reverend Mother wrote to the Child Welfare Department in 1929 expressing concern over smaller number of State Wards sent to the Home of the Good Shepherd. She requested more State Wards in order to maintain the special wing built to accommodate such children.¹⁹ The Child Welfare Department responded to the request by explaining that, 'It is difficult to forecast the possible trend of this [more boys than girls before the Courts] but recent events indicate that increased activity is possible.'²⁰ However, the number of female State Wards did not increase, thus creating a staffing problem in the laundry. Other methods were used to maintain the workforce. Miss F Boneham, a Probation Officer, reported that few of the girls 'could go home [be released] because circumstances at home were still not good.'²¹ The Home's ability to tender and win large laundry contracts depended on its free labour which guaranteed

¹⁸Minutes, 29 April 1930, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 6/1930.

¹⁹Letter, 16 November 1929, to Mr S Watson Child Welfare Department from Reverend Mother Home of the Good Shepherd, The Home of the Good Shepherd, WA Child Welfare Department, An 145/1 Acc 1031 File 849/1922 Vol 1.

²⁰Letter, 24 January 1930, to Reverend Mother Home of the Good Shepherd from Mr S Watson, WA Child Welfare Department, *ibid*.

²¹Inspector's Report by Miss F Boneham Probation Officer, *ibid*.

lower prices. The matter of price cutting connected to an unpaid labour force concerned the Council.²² No labour should be unpaid when the work done was for financial gain.

This serious situation necessitated further investigation. The Council called for more information on pricelists from all commercial laundry businesses and charitable institutions with commercial laundries. However, Monarch Laundry secretary replied requesting an interview with the secretary of the Council because the price list was too lengthy to enclose in a letter.²³ This was unusual because Monarch Laundry, like other commercial businesses, used printed pricelists as an integral part of business and advertising. Over the years, the owners of this firm prided themselves in their extensive, often attractively decorated pricelists which were always readily available to entice prospective customers. A pricelist could easily have been sent in an envelope. Not satisfied with the response, the Council pursued the matter by referring it to a special committee.

This Council Committee, established to recommend changes to the *Factories and Shops Act*, received instructions to 'examine Section 98 of the *Factories and Shops Act* to endeavour to have changes to include workers in laundry work covered by the Laundry Workers Award.'²⁴ The conclusion was to place two items on the agenda of the 1930 State ALP Congress. The first was a proposed alteration to Section 98 and the second was a call for a combined meeting over pricelists to try to achieve uniformity. Congress adopted both recommendations.²⁵ Once again, the employers appeared to have

²²Minutes, 29 April 1930, Metropolitan District Council, Book 6/1930.

²³Minutes, 15 May 1930, *ibid.*

²⁴*ibid.*

²⁵*Westralian Worker*, 2 May 1931, p 2.

succeeded in using the labour movement to manipulate the competitive market to their own advantage. However, the whole plan disintegrated when a report into laundry pricing stated that:

Price cutting is taking place by the [commercial] laundry employers and that no proof has been produced that the Home of the Good Shepherd, which is the only charitable institution mentioned, has done anything in that direction.²⁶

The subject closed. As other businesses had forwarded their pricelists on request it would seem that Monarch Laundry Company demonstrated, by not submitting a full printed pricelist, that it had something to hide. This employers' scheme failed.

Pitcher's reasons for bringing the issue to the Council were not clear. Certainly, he knew that competition through pricecutting affected the members' employment prospects and their hopes for higher wages. He also realised that the deepening depression compounded the problem for the employees and employers alike.

Pitcher's desire to co-operate with both parties meant careful planning. In the hard economic times of the depression the employers had the stronger voice and the greater influence. They argued that the principle of paid public holidays, enforced by the Court in the Sweeney case, added an intolerable financial strain. Pitcher, bending under the pressure and fearing retrenchments, bargained with the employers and agreed to make changes to Award 5/1923. These revolved around public holidays and paid annual leave. When the President of the Court handed down his decision in June 1932 he explained that, 'The employers voluntarily granted an increase of holidays from six to nine days with certain considerations made on both sides.'²⁷ The allowance of nine days paid annual leave in Amendment 398/1930 appeared generous. However, the

²⁶Minutes, 6 July 1931, State Executive, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1573A Book 5/1930.

²⁷WAIG Vol 12 1932, p 105.

reclassification of all the public holidays into annual leave meant the earning capacity of workers diminished. The laundry workers had to forfeit overtime wages for longer time for rest and recuperation. In contrast, hospital laundry workers' annual leave entitlements were over and above the public holidays and so they had the right to earn more on overtime rates. Other sub clauses covered the deduction of wages for public holidays if the establishment shut down and the payment of ordinary rates, instead of double time, for anyone working on a gazetted public holiday.²⁸ The employers obtained major benefits from this agreement, particularly as the Union secretary conceded to a reduction in wages as well. The women suffered the greatest financial losses. This was the price they had to pay in a deteriorating employment market due to the depression. The continuing growth in casual employment and introduction of broken shifts further weakened the workers' financial positions. Membership of the MLEU steadily declined, falling to 49 in 1932.²⁹

Troubles for the small MLEU escalated. 1933 proved a turning point when the Union president, Miss R Mort, discovered that Pitcher had drawn cheques on an empty account. She called on the secretary of the Council who immediately convened a meeting of Union members.³⁰ The Union Executive joined 23 members to hear the problems outlined. The Union's funds had disappeared and Pitcher continued to draw from the empty account. When Pitcher failed to appear to explain his position, the small number of members present at the meeting demanded action.³¹ The Secretary of the Council agreed to investigate. When he visited some of the commercial laundries he

²⁸*ibid*, p 106.

²⁹Membership of MLEU was only 54 in December 1929. *WAIG* Vol 1930.

³⁰Minutes, 3 January 1933, Executive of Metropolitan District Council, Book 6/1930.

³¹*ibid*.

found that most of the workers did not belong to their Union. Many workers thought the Union was defunct. This surprised him and worried him so he raised the matter with the Union executive. His probing revealed more than missing funds and illegal cheques. There was substantial ignorance about the existence and function of the MLEU.

At last, someone made an attempt to bolster the failing Union. Miss Mort asked for assistance 'to organise [or re-organise] the Union.'³² Another meeting was arranged and again members requested Pitcher to attend and submit the financial books for examination.³³ However, Pitcher was holidaying at Rottnest for a fortnight.³⁴ The Special meeting, held in Trades Hall on 10 January 1933, went ahead without Pitcher. Miss Mort reported this absence to the Council Executive and explained that Pitcher refused to attend as he believed that Council interference was unconstitutional.³⁵ Union members moved to request Pitcher to call a Union executive meeting and bring all the documents and books with him. Miss Mort invited officers of the Council to attend.³⁶ The presence of Mr Needham and the Secretary of the Council at the meeting brought a strong protest from Pitcher, but members overruled him. Needham appealed to 'Pitcher to either defend himself or throw himself on the mercy of those making the accusations.'³⁷ At this point Pitcher admitted that he had taken fourteen pounds from the MLEU and that he would make it right tomorrow morning and he would resign from the Union immediately if necessary.³⁸ The Union executive declined his offer and

³²*ibid.*

³³*ibid.*

³⁴Minutes, 5 January 1933, *ibid.*

³⁵Minutes, 17 January 1933, *ibid.*

³⁶*ibid.*

³⁷Minutes, 19 January 1933, *ibid.*

³⁸*ibid.*

called another special meeting to hear the auditor's report before they made a decision. The auditor, PT Trainer, checked the books of the Clothing Trades Union as well as the MLEU because Pitcher was secretary of both unions. His report revealed two financially troubled unions with the MLEU in the worse position.³⁹ The MLEU accounts were empty. The conclusion was that the Union needed a new secretary, assistance to rebalance its finances and guidance to reactivate worker enthusiasm for unionism. The decision to split the secretarial positions of the Clothing Trades Union and MLEU proved necessary for any prospect of success. A strong leader was necessary.

The appointment of ALP secretary, Thomas G Davies, as the next secretary of the MLEU heralded a new era.⁴⁰ His task was almost overwhelming. Wages and working conditions in the commercial laundry industry had changed little since the last award in 1923. The need to bolster union membership and funds, the forthcoming State elections and the continuing depression were the other major problems he faced.

The depression created problems for women as they struggled to maintain household standards and family life in a rapidly declining job market. Those women who re-entered or remained in the workforce in order to survive were confronted with the revival of an old issue. Many, particularly men in the labour movement, believed that women working in industry added to unemployment levels. The argument was that,

³⁹Minutes, 2 February 1933, *ibid*.

⁴⁰WAIG Vol 13 1933.

firstly, women kept jobs from men; secondly, they failed to join unions; and finally they should be at home.

Initially, the debate targeted women with working husbands.⁴¹ For instance, as early as 1929, Fremantle Hospital Board received complaints about the employment of Mrs Benbow, the head laundress whose husband also worked at the hospital. One complaint came from the Fremantle branch of the ALP which protested

About the employment of both a married woman and her husband on the hospital staff. Not wishing to lose Mrs Benbow's excellent service, the Board once more delayed finding a replacement.⁴²

Gradually the argument developed to include all women working in industry, married or single. A small committee comprising Miss H McEntyre and three men investigated the matter. Their report found that women, because of their lower wages, caused some displacement of men when work suited both sexes. However, it concluded that:

Females should be free to engaged [sic] in any avocation except those likely to impair her physical value as a mother. . . Finally it is considered that every effort should be made to secure equal pay for equal work.⁴³

Employment should be on merit not on gender.

The female laundry workers did not take jobs away from men. They did 'women's work' - sorting, starching, pressing, ironing and packing. Only eight men worked in the four major commercial laundries where they performed the heavy work in the washhouse combined with tending the boiler.⁴⁴ The percentage of male workers in

⁴¹Minutes, 5 June 1934, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 7/1933.

⁴²Phyl Garrick and Chris Jeffreys, *Fremantle Hospital: A Social History to 1987*, Fremantle Hospital, 1987, p 212.

⁴³Report of Committee appointed to deal with the Question of Employment of Females in Industry. 24 October 1933, WA ALP State Executive, Book 5/1930.

⁴⁴*Westralian Worker*, 23 September 1938, p 8.

laundries was small. Female laundry workers retained their jobs within the framework of the demands of a declining industry. But the pressure on the women to ignore unionism in order to hold onto their jobs grew as the depression widened.

Despite the restrictions of the depression, Davies conducted a membership drive that produced a 35% increase to 66 members in his first year of office. He failed to achieve the same high success rate in the following year.⁴⁵ He struggled against the forces of a declining industry, employer demands and increasing casualisation. The recruitment drives gradually increased membership to 78 in December 1934 and then 84 in 1936, thereby demonstrating the relative effectiveness of a strong secretary.⁴⁶

Members of the HEU, with the new secretary LG Severn at the helm, prepared the way for a strong future.⁴⁷ He embarked on the enormous task of obtaining an award to cover members working in the 56 private hospitals. He used the current agreement for the metropolitan government hospitals as the basis of this log of claims.⁴⁸ Severn believed that the private hospitals could afford to pay their employees similar wages. He argued:

These institutions cater for what might be termed the cream of the trade. . . The institutions concerned can well afford to pay for any increase in their overheads which may result from an award of this Court.⁴⁹

Severn concentrated on conditions not wages because there was little likelihood for major increases in wages. He was convinced that, as the 44 hour week already existed

⁴⁵WAIG Vol 14 1934.

⁴⁶WAIG Vol 15 1935 and Vol 16 1936.

⁴⁷Burgess retired and the members voted LG Severn the new secretary in July 1933. The Union made Burgess an Honorary Life Member on 5 December 1939, HEU Executive Minute Book 1938.

⁴⁸Agreement 2/1935 for metropolitan government hospital workers increased wages and introduced margins payable above the basic wage and a new clause to prevent a decline in real wages due to the decrease in the basic wage. The Court ratified the Agreement on 1 September 1934., WAIG Vol 15 1935, pp 41-43.

⁴⁹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 7066 File 18/1934, pp 7-8.

in all other hospital laundries, women like Gladys Campion employed by the Mt Lawley Hospital should have the same privilege.⁵⁰ Gladys worked 56 1/4 hours per week as a housemaid and laundress. The very nature of her work combined with the long hours was detrimental to her health.

Severn submitted two International Labour Organisation publications on occupational health and safety to support his argument for better conditions and shorter hours for all the female workers, particularly those in the laundries.⁵¹ He explained,

That [Booklet No 127 'Laundries'], I think, goes to assist our case in asking for 44 hours for laundry workers. It is pointed out here . . . That the long hours have a detrimental effect on workers in the laundry and other industries . . . The report goes on further to say, "It has been stated that the hard nature of the work in general causes the women especially to be worn out while still young" . . . The question of fatigue plays a big part in the occupation to women.⁵²

Severn continued arguing on behalf of the women. He stated:

The creation of . . . a system of occupational gynaecology is altogether desirable and is required in the interests of the ever increasing movement for the protection of women.⁵³

Women needed greater consideration and protection when it came to the number of hours worked, the type of work they performed and the expectations of the employers in fulfilling that work. The health of the women as mothers or potential mothers was of paramount importance to a nation.

Despite this international evidence and his rhetoric, Severn's first experience in the Arbitration Court proved difficult. Many of the owners of the private hospitals,

⁵⁰*ibid*, p 49.

⁵¹*Occupation and Health. Encyclopaedia to Hygiene, Pathology and Social Welfare Studied for the Point of View of Labour, Industry and Trades.* International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1928 Nos 123-128; *Occupation and Health. Encyclopaedia to Hygiene, Pathology and Social Welfare Studied for the Point of View of Labour, Industry and Trades.* International Labour Organisation, Geneva, 1932, Nos 280-289, *ibid*.

⁵²Transcript, *ibid*, p 29-30.

⁵³*ibid*, p 30.

including the major churches, were prominent and powerful members of Perth society, their positions and investments too valuable to tarnish. President Dwyer queried every detail in the log of claims and the Union's intentions. Severn's inexperience and lack of strong evidence gave GF Gill, the employers' representative, all he needed to attack the claims. Gill argued that convalescent homes, which provided strong competition to the private hospitals, should also be cited. Then he challenged the selection of witnesses because seven of the ten came from one hospital: 'I am saying that it is a vendetta against St John of God Hospital, Subiaco.'⁵⁴ He summed up his case stating that 'Issues were left untouched'.⁵⁵ The President agreed:

In many of the Union's claims no evidence at all has been given. . . the best course would be to adjourn. . . It is useless bringing claims before the Court unless we have some evidence in support of them and in this case there are only two institutions from which witnesses have been called.⁵⁶

During the adjournment, Severn collected more evidence and recruited several new witnesses, including some from the MCL Convalescent Home in Cottesloe.⁵⁷ His argument still lacked the necessary strength, particularly in relation to the laundresses, because in many private hospitals the matron or the nurses did the laundry. Some employed a woman for one day just to do the washing and one hospital actually sent out the laundry. For the first time, 'Laundress' was reclassified down to 'Unclassified woman' with the very low margin of 2/6 per week above the female basic wage. The lucky ones, like Gladys, combined duties to qualify for a margin of 6/-. Somerville, from his position on the Bench, acknowledged the unfortunate situation by stating, 'I

⁵⁴*ibid*, p 104.

⁵⁵*ibid*, p 105.

⁵⁶*ibid*.

⁵⁷The Ministering Children's League Convalescent Home, Cottesloe, was not a 'hospital nor a nursing home but simply a place for [women and men who needed] rest and recuperation [after an illness].' It was privately run and funded by donations and subscriptions, Annual Report, 1935, Evidence, *ibid*.

also desire to direct attention to the absence of any provision for laundresses. I think there should be provision, but up to the present we have not sufficient information.⁵⁸

That was a challenge for the future. The Court delivered the Award 18/1934 in November 1935.

By 1936 the State was beginning to recover from the depression. This proved to be a busy year for Severn and the HEU Executive. The growth of Government District Hospitals in the country presented the HEU with increased demand for representation and support. Severn applied to amend Rule 24 in order to offer membership to all eligible hospital workers throughout the whole State, except the Goldfields.⁵⁹ At the same time, the Executive had Rule 3 amended to establish a Provident Fund to assist members still in financial distress.⁶⁰ Severn proposed modifying the existing Agreement covering Metropolitan Government Hospitals. Unexpectedly, a group of members faced the threat of a decline in working conditions when two usually cooperative hospital administrations, the Home of Peace and the Children's Hospital, retired from negotiations.⁶¹ They argued that the log of claims placed too heavy a financial burden on their budgets. Severn negotiated unsuccessfully with the Boards of the two abstaining hospitals. He filed a Reference of an Industrial Dispute with the Court in December 1936 and, eighteen months later, the case came before a specially convened Industrial Board.⁶² The Hospital Boards believed that their institutions were different

⁵⁸WAIG Vol 15 1935, p 240.

⁵⁹Kalgoorlie workers were members of the Eastern Goldfields Hospital and Asylum Employees' Union. Registration of this change occurred on 26 August 1936, HEU Registration File, File 160/1922.

⁶⁰Registration of the Provident Fund occurred on 23 July 1937. *ibid.*

⁶¹This was the second time the Home of Peace had applied for special consideration. The first was in 1922.

⁶²Application for the Industrial Board to determine the case and make an award was accepted on 18 February 1938, the members of the Industrial Board were the President, Justice J Dwyer, Messrs F Copelin

from government hospitals and therefore required separate consideration. The employers' spokesperson explained the reasoning:

I should say they are in an industry of their own. . . governed as they are, by special Boards, unlike the Boards of the Government institutions and private hospitals. . . This application to segregate them into a separate industry is a point that has never been taken until today. . . They should fall in line more with private not government hospitals⁶³

The President did not agree and referred to the *Hospitals Act 1927* and the *Hospital Fund Act 1930* to clarify the distinction between public and private hospitals. He ruled that both hospitals were public hospitals because they received some government funding.⁶⁴ They must accept the Agreement 21/1936 for government metropolitan hospitals as the basis of a new award.⁶⁵ Following this ruling the parties reached an agreement. The Court ratified Award 42/1936 in May 1938.⁶⁶ The Wages' Clause presented a new order of classification that set a precedent. The male laundry workers, namely the boiler firemen and washhouse men, were repositioned with the orderlies. The laundry classification was only for females with the omission of 'Washhouse woman'. The staff at these two hospitals also traded public holidays for paid annual leave which increased to three weeks. Overall, the laundry workers, especially the women, made few gains. At least Severn had gained an award for these workers who otherwise would have been left unprotected in a highly competitive section of the industry although the employers maintained their control of the situation through the omission of a Preference Clause.

and PW Hughes as the Employees' representatives and Mr HJ Minors and Rabbi DI Freedman represented the Employers. Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 8183 File 42/1936.

⁶³*ibid*, pp 166-167.

⁶⁴Delivery of Minutes, Transcript, Reference to Dispute, *ibid*, pp 166-167.

⁶⁵The Court ratified Agreement 21/1936 on 1 June 1936. This new Agreement procured three weeks paid annual leave gained by the reduction public holidays and a Preference Clause. There were no increases in wages, *WAIG* Vol 16 1936.

⁶⁶*ibid*.



Doreen and 'The Gang' – the laundry staff at
Perth Hospital 1938
Source: Private collection of Doreen Wright.



Doreen and Lola in their laundry uniforms
Perth Hospital 1938
Source: Private collection of Doreen Wright.

Over the same period, Severn carried out other negotiations with the Minister for Health for a new agreement for Wooroloo Sanatorium workers. In this claim the conditions of work and wages also followed those set out in the Agreement 21/1936 with appropriate modifications to suit the unusual rostering and days-off schedules. By mutual consent Agreement 43/1936 commenced in February 1938. Although laundry workers lost entitlements to several consecutive days off, they could negotiate to work their 44 hour week between Monday and Friday inclusive. Every weekend free was a privilege the other workers did not have. Severn moved gradually towards bringing all the hospital employees' wages and conditions into an alignment acceptable within the functional variations among the hospitals.⁶⁷

Successive secretaries of the MLEU were less successful in introducing changes in wages and hours into the commercial laundry industry and encouraging union membership. The overt and covert power of the employers was the major reason. These employers openly bargained hard as they had profits to maintain. Their demand for employee loyalty presented further difficulties for the union secretary as he endeavoured to encourage new membership and union commitment. For years the workers at the largest of the commercial laundries, the Monarch Laundry, committed themselves to the employers who maintained a 'family' atmosphere. The Manager, H Sander and his wife, the factory supervisor, prided themselves in this friendly, caring environment. They continued the tradition of the annual workers' picnics established

⁶⁷Mental Hospital workers' wages increased and they had 3 weeks paid annual leave. They had improved sick leave entitlements and a Board of Reference to deal with future applications, *WAIG* Vol 18 1938.

during the foundation years of the company. They added other activities such as bus trips to the hills for picnics, sports days and large Christmas parties.⁶⁸

Employees at the Fremantle Steam Laundry probably had similar events but no evidence exists. Eunice Pluschke, an employee of the Fremantle Steam Laundry for 40 years, spoke of her 'pride and pleasure working for the Kronberger family [the owners].'⁶⁹ She explained that Harry Kronberger was 'Sort of family. . . You could always talk to Harry.'⁷⁰ The Company also provided a variety of social activities for their workers, many of whom belonged to the same families. The provision of these recreational activities not only created solidarity amongst the workers but also placed them in the position to reciprocate with an uncomplaining commitment to the firm. The female workers, like those in smaller laundries, accepted their working conditions either because they valued these 'extras' offered to them by their employers or they were grateful for the opportunity to work. The value of unionism seemed minor compared with that of the 'family', the job, and the friendship.

The majority of laundry women rarely pushed for wage rises and improvements in their working conditions. Lobbying was left to a few and the Union secretary. So, in 14 years, only two amendments to Award 5/1923 had increased wages. These were not comparable with those gained by their counterparts working in the hospital laundries.⁷¹

⁶⁸Brian Albert Baldock, Interviewed by Daphne Pyke in June 1988 for Battye Library Oral History Section, Transcript, p 2.

⁶⁹Eunice I Pluschke, employee of Fremantle Steam Laundry 1940-1946, 1951-1985, interviewed by Margaret Howroyd in April 1988 for Fremantle City Library Oral History Programme.

⁷⁰*ibid.*

⁷¹Amendment 120/1927, *WAIG* Vol 7 1927 and Variation 398/1930 which gave junior workers a percentage of the adult female wage, gave a margin to adults and both 9 days paid annual leave and 3 days public holiday, *WAIG* Vol 2 1932.

In 1937, Davies decided to rectify the situation. He presented a new log of claims at a general meeting of the Union.⁷² Those members present congratulated him on his work, particularly the radical plan for a 40 hour week based on eight hour days, Monday to Friday, with tea breaks. The *Westralian Worker* reported Davies as saying that laundry workers needed 'a longer weekend away from the atmosphere and environment of machinery,' in order to restore some of their 'misspent energy' used 'in attending the machines.'⁷³ He explained that very little of the washing was done by hand because

The tendency is to install expensive machinery which reduces manual labour to a minimum, but from which in its operation required from the laundress an even greater degree of concentration to handle these machines. It is largely because of the introduction of machinery that the union now bases its claim.⁷⁴

Davies submitted the log of claims to the employers and the Court. The employers refused to accept any necessity for changes to wages, hours, uniforms, leave and juniors. Protracted negotiations eventually brought some, but not full, consensus.

Union and employer deadlock required Arbitration Court intervention. The hearing occurred in July 1939. The problem centred on the inclusion in the Scope Clause of a new style of laundering business owned by James Lyons at 101 Cambridge St, Leederville. Lyons' business, the Perth Towel, Coat and Overall Supply Company, offered a hiring service to the business community. He bought, hired, laundered and rehired coats, towels and overalls.⁷⁵ Lyons employed seven women to wash, iron and pack these articles. The employers endeavoured to have this new form of business placed outside the award leaving the way open for the establishment of other modern

⁷²8 October 1937, General Meeting of MLEU, advertised in the *West Australian*, 7 October 1937, p 12.

⁷³*Westralian Worker*, 23 September 1938, p 8.

⁷⁴*ibid.*

⁷⁵Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 8960 File 28/1937, p 3.

variations of laundering. Immediately Davies challenged the move as he knew from experience that Lyons was a ruthless employer. In 1935, Davies had successfully complained to the Court over his failure to pay the correct wages, overtime and holiday pay and for not keeping a proper record book.⁷⁶ Davies argued for Lyons' inclusion. He explained, 'He is a launderer, and the hiring business is only incidental to it. He specialised in certain laundry work.'⁷⁷ Not so, argued the employers' representative, explaining that the females employed at this business did not perform work for the public.

They [the business] perform this work for themselves. They own their own coats, towels and overalls. That is one point and the other as to whether they would take towels from somebody else and wash them, I am told that they do not.⁷⁸

The President ruled in favour of the Union:

The particular respondent employs types of workers similar to those employed by other respondents, and all that can be said is that the operations of his establishment do not cover the laundering of as wide a range of articles as is the case with other respondents.⁷⁹

Lyons conducted a laundering business and therefore his business came under the Award 28/1937 which the Court ratified in August 1939.⁸⁰

All the commercial laundry workers had a new Award. It did not bring their wages and working conditions completely in line with those detailed in hospital laundry awards but there were many improvements. The opportunity for a paid extended period of rest and relaxation now existed with the granting of one week's paid annual leave. This was far below the three weeks provided for hospital workers but nevertheless was a significant gain. The re-instatement of six of the gazetted public holidays which, if worked,

⁷⁶WAIG Vol 15 1935, p 37, p 118.

⁷⁷Transcript, Reference to Dispute, File 28/1937, p 4.

⁷⁸*ibid*, p 4.

⁷⁹WAIG Vol 19 1939, p 311.

⁸⁰Transcript, Reference to Dispute, 28/1937.

received compensation of days in lieu or paid at the rate of double time was an added bonus. Another welcome addition was the availability of up to six days per year paid sick leave. The provision of boots for the washhouse workers and a Board of Reference to hear appeals and wage claims also brought the MLEU Award in line with the HEU Agreements and Awards. However, job security through weekly or fortnightly rostering failed to eventuate with daily hiring and firing remaining. The usual daily margins paid over and above the female basic wage were still below the HEU margins.

Table 4:1

A comparison of the margins paid to laundry workers
in the 1936 and 1937 Awards⁸¹

	MLEU	HEU
	Award 28/1937	Award 21/1936
Classifications	Per 8 hour day	Per week
Head laundryman		25/-
Washhouse man	1/9 9/11ths	6/-
Other men	0/5 5/11ths	
Washhouse woman	3/4 10/11ths	23/2
Other women	1/5 5/11ths	11/8
Ironers	2/2 5/11ths	17/2
Juniors	percentage of weekly basic wage	percentage of weekly basic wage

Other improvements included increased overtime rates of time and a half for the first three hours and then double time subsequently. The new meal money allowance for those working overtime and the five minute teabreak were privileges not available to hospital laundry workers. There were two major concessions to the employers. The lowering of the minimum age of female employment from 'Under 17 years' to 'Under 16 years' gave the employers considerable savings in wages. This overturned Amendment 398/1930 which raised the minimum age to 'Under 17' to comply with the thinking on health, juniors and employment. As well, the employers had the right to

⁸¹WAIG Vol 19 1939 and WAIG Vol 16 1936.

deduct wages in the event of machinery breakdown or unavoidable stoppage or strike. There was still no preference clause to enforce union membership but, even so, by the end of the year membership attained its highest level, of 111.⁸² Award 28/1937 upgraded working conditions to the highest point possible in the commercial laundry industry at this time.

On balance, it was a victory for members to celebrate and they organised a social evening of games, dancing, musical items and competitions to mark the occasion.⁸³ Their union, now revitalised under Davies, seemed set to move from strength to strength. His victory over employer Lyons gave him the confidence to maintain a growing vigilance over other employers who tried to operate outside the Award. Davies was proving to be the MLEU's most successful secretary since the inaugural secretary. He deserved the praise afforded him on the women's page of the *Westralian Worker*:

The Laundry Workers' Union is fortunate in having as its secretary one who is not only well qualified to build up the industrial side, but who is also an advanced thinker, interested most of all in the real emancipation of the workers throughout the world.⁸⁴

The members benefited from having a strong modernist secretary during this period of change.

The size and nature of the commercial laundry industry in Western Australia gradually altered. The growth in the number of large laundries, both steam and electric, from two in 1913 to nineteen in 1937, closely followed the demands of a larger metropolitan population.⁸⁵ The other notable development was a shift to specialisation. The first

⁸²WAIG Vol 19 1939.

⁸³Minutes, 8 August 1939, Metropolitan District Council, WA ALP, MN 300 Acc 1319A Book 8/1937.

⁸⁴*Westralian Worker*, 23 September 1938, p 8.

⁸⁵These numbers are based on the list of businesses cited in the log of claims for Award 3/1913 and

laundry hire firm, already mentioned, co-existed with the WA Collar Laundry Company and the Nuway Bagwash. A bagwash offered the service of washing and partially drying bags of clothes and linen. All these businesses indicated future trends.

Yet another change across this time was an acceptance, however reluctant, of the competition of the charitable institutions which earlier provided the major impetus for union formation and dispute over wage claims. Public demands for the cheap services of the Home of the Good Shepherd's laundry remained high. The laundry still functioned with its free live-in labour outside any controls of Acts, Agreements or Award. Gradually the Home mechanised its laundry to meet the demands.⁸⁶ Older female State Wards worked five hours per day during the week and two hours on Saturdays in the laundry when necessary.⁸⁷ Even the smaller children ironed for 5 hours for each of two days and another two hours on a half day per week. The Probation Officer reported:

Sister Antonia wishes they could iron 4 days per week as she says the children like ironing better than sewing, etc., but the introduction of machinery in the main laundry will not permit more work being sent over.⁸⁸

By late 1939, Miss Boneham reported that the laundry was rebuilt and refitted with electric washing machines, mangles and irons.⁸⁹ This major redevelopment further increased its efficiency and output.

Award 28/1937.

⁸⁶1 May 1934, Inspector's Report by Miss F Boneham Probation Officer, The Home of the Good Shepherd, File 849/1922 Vol 1.

⁸⁷Letter, 20 July 1936, to Departmental Secretary from Miss F Boneham Probation Officer, *ibid.*

⁸⁸*ibid.*

⁸⁹27 October 1939, Inspector's Report by Miss F Boneham Probation Officer, *ibid.*

Competition was never an issue within the government hospital laundry industry. The new Agreements 30/1938 for workers at government public hospitals outside the metropolitan area and 22/1939 for the goldfields region (excluding the Kalgoorlie region) gave members protection and security.⁹⁰ These Agreements provided many similar conditions to those in the metropolitan hospitals. However, a major variation for laundry workers occurred in the calculation of their wages. Bed occupancy set the index for the margins paid to these women. This unusual formula was unreliable as they could not rely on a fixed weekly income. The calculation of junior female wages as a percentage of the female cash wage made their take-home pay smaller than that of other laundry girls. Fortunately, all workers received a district allowance that counterbalanced the higher cost of living. Another variation was two weeks paid annual leave with ten days public holidays. By the end of the decade almost all the hospital laundry workers in the State had comparable wages and conditions.

The 1940s heralded higher membership numbers for both unions. In 1940 the HEU reached 620 and the MLEU topped 114.⁹¹ Both unions were now relatively strong. Social activities added another dimension to union membership. The HEU already had a successful choir and the Executive proposed to offer dramatic classes to interested members.⁹² However, life changed for a large percentage of the workers with the outbreak of war in 1939. Expectations of women changed. As men flocked to enlist married women were expected to re-enter the workforce. All industries were categorised as either essential or war priority. Women in the essential services, like the

⁹⁰Agreement 30/1938, *WAIG* Vol 19 1939. Agreement 22/1939, *WAIG* Vol 20 1940. The Kalgoorlie workers still belonged to the EG Hospital and Asylum Employees' Union.

⁹¹*WAIG* Vol 20 1940.

⁹²Minutes, 5 December 1939, HEU Executive, Book 1938.

clothing trades, nursing or teaching, remained in these jobs, working for the normal levels of pay. They were unable to change jobs. However, other female workers willingly moved into wartime industries, like munitions, for considerably more pay. This movement of staff created problems for employers and antagonism amongst women workers.

Laundry work was one industry that lost many of its young workers. Brian Baldock explained that: 'Laundry wasn't considered an essential trade although we were doing a lot of army work.'⁹³ He went on to explain that: 'A nucleus of people who would stay there. . . They were the mainstay of the whole concern. . . Married women who appreciated they had a job in those days.'⁹⁴ The situation at the Fremantle Steam Laundry differed with the return of women workers, now married, to replace this exodus of the young girls to the higher paid jobs.⁹⁵ Most of the workers lived in the north Fremantle area within close proximity to the laundry.

One young Fremantle girl who did start work at this difficult time was Eunice Pluschke.⁹⁶ She was 14 years of age when she began at the Fremantle Steam Laundry in 1940. She recalled that her first job was to carry the wet clothes outside to put on the rope lines and the wet towels went onto the picket fence. Although the work was heavy she enjoyed the cool and quietness outside the hot, noisy factory. Unlike most girls she had a variety of jobs. Her next job, at which she worked for three years, was sorting the

⁹³BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 12.

⁹⁴*ibid*, p 14.

⁹⁵Neville Kronberger, interviewed by Margaret Howroyd in September 1988 for Fremantle City Library Oral History Programme.

⁹⁶Eunice I Pluschke, Oral History Tape.



Female Staff at Fremantle Steam Laundry C 1942

Betty Flanagan, (?), Gwen Harman (calender)

Miss Mathews, Winnie Staples (shipping table), Rhonda Matthews (calender)

Norma Wych (calender), Rona Banks (calender), Mary Pickett (presses),

Jessie Hill (calender)

Eunice Hunt (later Eunice Pluschke), Jean Adams (calender),

Kath Dixon (calender), June Oakley (calender), Barbara (?).

Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2359.

dirty linen into different bins. Each article needed marking with the customers' special code. A good memory was essential for this job. Another part of this job included sorting the washed clothes. 'That's where the damp clothes go to be given out to the machines, the pressers and shirt machines.'⁹⁷ The third area where Eunice worked was in the packing room. There she packed the clean linen into brown paper parcels ready for delivery. 'Every parcel had to go out correct,' she said.⁹⁸ She tied the parcel with string and then broke it with her fingers. She explained, 'I had a ridge where I used to pull it [string] up over my finger. It went right in.'⁹⁹ Eunice found the work tiring but she enjoyed the companionship of the other women. The tea and lunch breaks were time to chat as talking on the job was forbidden. She told the story of how the young girls on the calenders relieved the monotony of the work and restriction on talking by eating lollies. These they threw to each other over the machine. Eunice recalled how one day one went through the rollers and squashed on the article. The machine had to be stopped which was something that never happened in a shift. The sticky object scraped off without leaving a stain. The girls got into trouble.¹⁰⁰ They were there to work and concentration meant safety and speed. That was the basis of their employment.

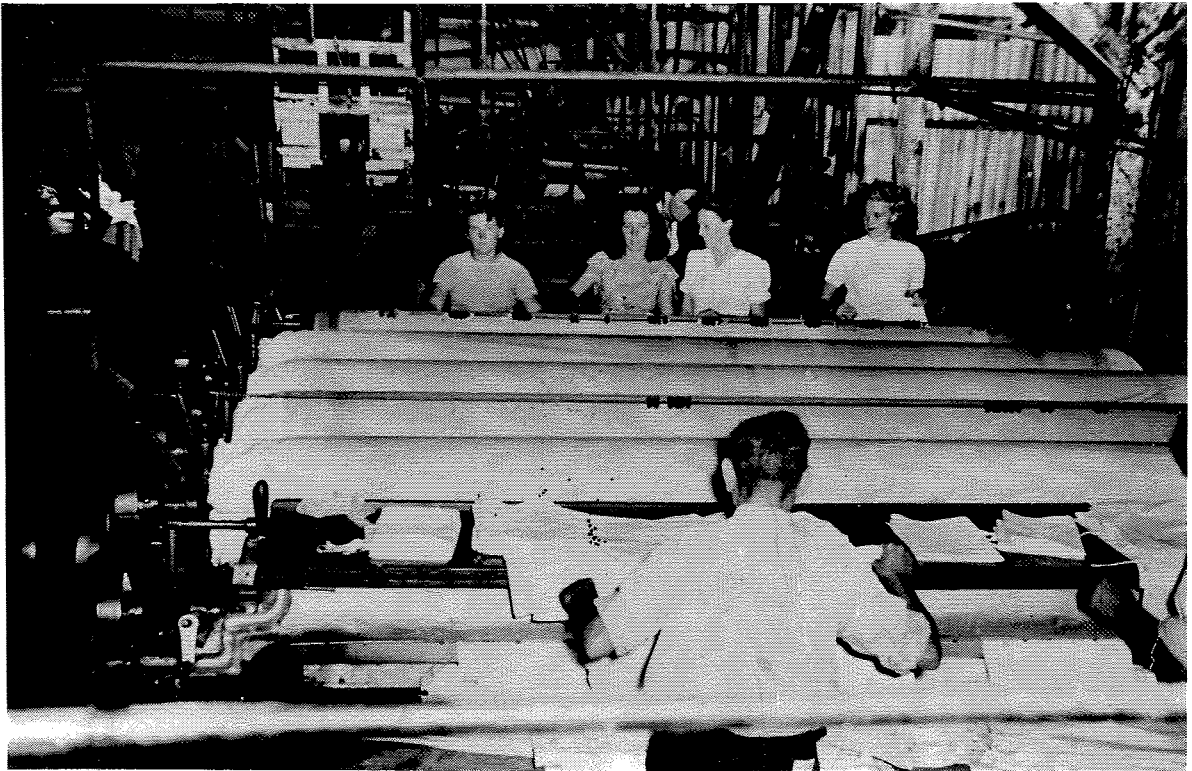
The war brought increased work for both of these large laundries as they received army and naval contracts. Brian Baldock, who became secretary of Monarch Laundry Company in 1946, recalled:

⁹⁷*ibid.*

⁹⁸*ibid.*

⁹⁹*ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*ibid.*



The folding machine at Fremantle Steam Laundry 1940s
Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2361.

I can remember people telling me that during the war there was a line of trucks outside the laundry right up as far as Loftus Street, waiting to come and dump army blankets and army gear and also to pick-up the clean stuff.¹⁰¹

A similar situation occurred at the Fremantle Steam Laundry except that the contracts came from the navy not the army. Eunice Pluschke remembered 'There was so much shipping [laundry] they had to stack it [dirty linen] outside. . . We worked nearly every night till 8 o'clock. We knocked off at 5 for an hour for tea. . . At night we got the breeze when it came in.'¹⁰² Their workload increased when employer, Harry Kronberger, offered to launder free of charge the linen from the Military Hospital and the servicemen's overnight hostels in Fremantle.¹⁰³ This was his contribution to the war effort. The women workers contributed long hours and much perspiration.

Later in the war period, the American navy stationed at Fremantle sent much of its laundry work to the Home of the Good Shepherd. The women, young and old, in this laundry also worked very long hours and had very little sleep as the pressure mounted for the work to be done.¹⁰⁴ The *Daily News* reported Senator Dorothy Tangney's visit to the Home of the Good Shepherd in January 1945. She found that the majority of the '180 "girls" at the Home, of ages ranging from 14 to 80' worked in the laundry which she described a 'modern', 'pleasant' and 'bright'.¹⁰⁵ This statistic provides an interesting comparison with the biggest commercial laundry, the Monarch Laundry, which employed 60 or 70 women in 1946.¹⁰⁶ The army contracts ensured Monarch Laundry Company employed this many women.

¹⁰¹BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 15.

¹⁰²Eunice I Pluschke, Oral History Tape.

¹⁰³Neville Kronberger, Oral History Tape.

¹⁰⁴J O'Brien, 'Societal Attitudes Towards and Expectations of Women in Turn-of-the Century Western Australia', p 58.

¹⁰⁵*Daily News*, 4 January 1945, p 5.

¹⁰⁶BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 6.

Everywhere else employment opportunities disappeared as the laundry industry declined. All suffered as 'materials became hard to obtain and priorities were directed to the war effort rather than the domestic effort.'¹⁰⁷ Many laundries closed as the war intensified competition for both contracts. Others diversified to survive. In 1943, the Snow White Towel and Overall Service became the second hire firm established in Perth. The business owned a wide variety of towels, including roller towels for washrooms and linen tea towels. All the towels were appropriately initialled and hired to major companies like Mills and Wares, Cuming Smith and Bairds. The Company also hired overalls. The dirty articles were collected in large wicker baskets and sent to Monarch Laundry for cleaning ready to be rehired.¹⁰⁸ A quick turn around of clean linen was essential. All employers expected increased output and greater co-operation from their employees, thus leaving the women battling to balance homelife with the demands of their jobs. They had little time for union affairs. Membership of the MLEU began a gradual decline. SF Schnaars, the new secretary of MLEU, could do little to prevent this decline in membership from 114 in 1939 to 86 in 1943.¹⁰⁹

The Clothing Trades Union, the other union covering the women in the much smaller dyeing and cleaning section of the industry, did help its members. The pressers, cleaners, repairers and steamers struggled to keep their jobs in this difficult time. The secretary used the new Agreement 13/1941 to partly resolve the problem by defining the conditions for reduced hours instead of stand-downs of workers.¹¹⁰ The Award, which

¹⁰⁷Walter Gordon Agar, Interviewed by Daphne Pyke June 1988 for Battye Library Oral History Section, Transcript, p 23.

¹⁰⁸*ibid*, p 14.

¹⁰⁹*WAIG* Vol 19 1939 and *WAIG* Vol 23 1943.

¹¹⁰The Court handed down Agreement 13/1941 on 14 July 1941, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 10864 File 13/1941.

mirrored the Laundry Employees' Award, also included increased wages, sick leave entitlements, meal allowances and the appointment of a Board of Reference. Other bonuses for these workers included three quarters of an hour's lunch break and a termination of employment clause that required a week's notice and the provision of *bona fide* reasons by the employer. Although these workers still had no paid annual leave entitlements they had ten public holidays or days in lieu and an extra day over the Christmas and New Year period which gave them a longer than usual break at this time. Later amendments to this Agreement increased the length of paid annual leave. The increases were to 12 days with 9 public holidays and three extra days over the festive season and then to two weeks paid leave and 9 public holidays.¹¹¹ After twenty years of neglect the women in this section of the industry had their wages and conditions made comparable with other workers in the commercial laundries but behind those in the hospital laundries.

By 1943 HEU membership peaked at 697.¹¹² The Preference Clauses in four of the six Awards and Agreement guaranteed this steady increase in membership. The Union provided a focus for action and activity. Social events like the dance held in the autumn of 1944 encouraged interaction and solidarity beyond the workplace.¹¹³ The secretary continued to initiate award changes to benefit the members. The washhouse women at the Mental Hospitals received financial compensation for 'handling offensive bedding and clothing.' Both the Court and the employer acknowledged an occupational hazard

¹¹¹Amendment 86/1944, *WAIG* Vol 24 1945, and Amendment 13/1946, *WAIG* Vol 16 1946.

¹¹²*WAIG* Vol 24 1944.

¹¹³Minutes, 4 April 1944, HEU Executive, Book 1938.

in laundry. This provided a benefit not yet available to any other laundry workers and therefore set a precedent for future bargaining.

Generally all hospital laundry workers worked in uncomfortable conditions. Almost all the hospitals needed new laundry buildings or new equipment or both.¹¹⁴ Hospital expansion allowed for increased patient intake that then added to the workload in hospital laundries. The mounting pressure took its toll on the machinery. At Fremantle Hospital the machinery regularly broke down which meant 'washing was hung to dry on fences, spread out on lawns and draped over verandahs.'¹¹⁵ The laundry workers at King Edward Memorial Hospital worked in an iron building which was small and hot.¹¹⁶ The worst laundry facilities were at Perth Hospital. The equipment was old and the building too small. In 1943 the Perth Hospital's Board, in an attempt to improve the situation, revived the concept of a central laundry.

WM Powell, the Hospital Manager, compiled a report based on information from overseas models and the Melbourne central laundry scheme.¹¹⁷ His report focussed on the economic benefits of reduced capital outlay by eliminating the duplication of buildings and machinery. The opportunity for the unifying of standards of laundering and the reduction in labour costs centred on the principles of scientific management through the use of assembly line techniques. The concept had appeal. So the Board

¹¹⁴Report with Appendices prepared by the Building Reference Committee, Establishment of a Central Laundry, File 1041/1930.

¹¹⁵Phyl Garrick and Chris Jeffreys, *Fremantle Hospital*, p 314.

¹¹⁶Report prepared by the Building Reference Committee, Establishment of a Central Laundry, File 1041/1930, p 8.

¹¹⁷Letter, 18 November 1943, to Chairman of Perth Hospital Board from WM Powell, *ibid*.

informed the Under Secretary of Health, PJ Heulin, of the idea.¹¹⁸ He referred the matter to the Public Works Department whose Principal Architect, DE Clare, compiled another report which recommended a central laundry to cater for the smaller hospitals but leaving the largest, Perth Hospital, with its own laundry.¹¹⁹ The idea needed further investigation.

The establishment of a Building Reference Committee, with RJ Dumas as Chairman, allowed an in-depth examination of the proposal. At the Committee's first meeting the Chairman pointed out the possible extension of the laundry service to other government departments. Dumas said, 'If a common laundry were established it would not be a hospital laundry.'¹²⁰ The necessity to collect data on the extent of laundry requirements from both hospitals and government departments became the responsibility of the Under Secretary for Health. Hospital demands, on a weekly basis, showed where the major needs existed.

TABLE 4:2

Number of articles in the major hospitals laundered weekly in 1944¹²¹

Hospital	Number of articles laundered weekly
Perth	32 000
Fremantle	8 000
Children's	17 700
KEMH	23 000

Additional data collected from the 41 government departments indicated a diversity of laundering needs catered for in variety of ways.¹²² Those departments with only a few

¹¹⁸Letter, 20 November 1943, to PJ Heulin, Under Secretary of Health from Chairman of Perth Hospital Board, *ibid.*

¹¹⁹20 March 1944, Report to Public Works Department from Principal Architect, AE Clare, *ibid.*

¹²⁰Minutes, 20 October 1944, Building Reference Committee, *ibid.*

¹²¹Memorandum, 20 October 1944, *ibid.*

¹²²Individual reports submitted to the Building Reference Committee during 1946, *ibid.*

hand towels and tea towels expected their cleaning ladies to wash them at home. Larger departments, like the Police, Mines, Water Sewerage and Drainage and the Public Works, contracted their work to the Silver Star Laundry. Parliament House sent its laundry to Monarch Laundry whilst the State Shipping Service contracted work to the Fremantle Steam Laundry. The prisoners did their own laundry at the Fremantle Gaol. There was clearly potential for a central laundry working to full capacity for all government departments.

The Building Reference Committee completed the feasibility study. An architect drew a detailed plan of the laundry for the East Perth site bounded by Royal, Plain and Jewell Streets near the steam pipeline to Perth Hospital. However, after a great deal of discussion, planning and reporting, the Treasurer rejected the proposal because of lack of funds.¹²³ Through all this, the HEU seemed unaware of the proposal which remained an interdepartmental matter.

The secretary continued monitoring the position of the members. His own workload required attention. Union business and the enforcement of eight awards and agreements provided Davies with administrative problems. Severn decided to simplify his job. In May 1945 he moved to standardise members' wages and conditions across the State by creating one award for all members in government hospitals. However, the Application was thwarted by wartime regulations. The President, as required under the National Security Regulations, referred the case to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court for

¹²³Letter, 15 September 1948, to Dumas Director of Works from A Reid Under Treasurer; and Letter, 8 March 1955, to Assistant Under Secretary of Health from the Assistant Under Secretary of Medical Department, *ibid.*

consideration. Finally, the Court ratified Award 1A/1945 in October 1947. When handing down his decision the President gave Severn an accolade for his persistence:

This award of course is quite a large document, and its ramifications are very wide. . . The HEU is one of the few unions which came to this Court during the strictest times of the application of the Economic Organisation Regulations, who did not get anything at all. Under two Presidents they tried and failed. For my part it was with regret. . . Now it seems with the relaxation of the regulations they have been able to get substantial increases, and yet the increases are reasonable.¹²⁴

After two and half years Severn had brought all workers in government funded and assisted hospitals, sanatoria and homes throughout the State under one award. This included the hospital workers in the Kalgoorlie region. The amalgamation of the Eastern Goldfields' Branch of the Hospital and Asylum Employees' Union with the HEU occurred in December 1946.¹²⁵ The Union required a change of name to indicate its statewide coverage. The Hospital Employees' Union of Workers WA was registered in January 1947.¹²⁶

Members of the renamed union were pleased with their secretary's work. The new Award's structure allowed for some individuality at each institution to dictate its own needs. Only two hospitals, the Home of Peace and the Children's Hospital, remained separate. Workers held a stop work meeting at the Home of Peace. A compulsory conference in July 1945 averted any strike action but failed to bring these hospitals under the same single award. A special Award 1B/1945 ratified in December 1947 gave the workers at both hospitals identical wages and conditions to those covered by the 'Metropolitan Area' section of the other award.

¹²⁴Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 11634 File 1/1945, p 8.

¹²⁵WAIG Vol 26 1946, p 415.

¹²⁶HEU Registration File, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 AN 195/3A Acc 1101 File 14/1946, Vol 2.

Those working in the private hospitals also benefited from Severn's work because he applied to update the Private Hospital Award. He again met with wartime restrictions and the Court could not ratify the Award 3/1945 until April 1948.¹²⁷ This award listed laundry workers under several classifications whereas before they were 'unclassified workers'. Therefore their wages rose to just slightly below those of the government hospital laundry workers. A forty hour week, the doubling of both paid annual leave and sick leave relieved the pressures of work and gave the women time to relax. Absenteeism was set to fall as a result of these changes. Other improvements in the Award included guidelines for the provision of accommodation and the provision of all necessary uniforms. Two new clauses that did not appear in other awards were a termination payout and a certificate of service detailing employment history. The new Award was vastly superior to the former one. The union amalgamation, all the new awards, the extension of both the 40 hour week and preference clauses caused the HEU membership to pass the 1000 mark, reaching 1238 in December 1947.¹²⁸ This Union worked for its members. Socials, picnics and participation in Labor Day marches continued to involve members. Government hospital laundry work and membership of the HEU became appealing options for women seeking financial independence and security.

The laundry women working in the commercial sector received little comfort from the end of the war. Many small business owners suffered continuing hardship with further shortages of materials and restrictions on petrol and electricity. Employees were

¹²⁷The parties to this Award reached agreement by consent. *WAIG* Vol 28 1948.

¹²⁸HEU Applications 60(80), 60(82), 60(83), 60(84)1947 provided members with the 40 hour week and membership numbers, *WAIG* Vol 27 1947.

expected to work longer hours per day in order to maintain the businesses' profits. The larger laundry owners circumvented the electricity problem by installing auxiliary generators and re-arranging shifts to allow for more night work. So, although the market diminished with the loss of the armed services' contracts, and many restrictions continued, these large business remained strong and viable. Those women who had jobs experienced increased pressure to work harder and longer.

Pressure came from another source. The labour market was changing. Men returned to the workforce and women released from the essential service industries either chose to stay at home or sought their old jobs back. Junior wages were less than the adult rates which enticed employers to give them jobs. Widows desperately needed jobs and took anything they could get. Unionism seemed even less relevant in this competitive labour market. Membership of the MLEU continued to decrease until 1946 when it numbered only 50.¹²⁹

The new secretary Martin Turner, also secretary of the Tally Clerks' Union in Fremantle, made every effort to reverse the situation.¹³⁰ He aimed to bring members' wages and conditions more in line with the other laundry workers when he presented a log of claims to employers and the Court in May 1948.¹³¹ The employers initially objected to almost every clause. By 19 November, when the Court heard the Reference to the Dispute, the parties had reached agreement. The Court ratified Award 33/1948 without any further debate.¹³²

¹²⁹WAIG Vol 26 1946.

¹³⁰MLEU Officers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 1.

¹³¹Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1095 Folio 13310 File 33/1948.

¹³²WAIG Vol 28 1948.

The workers' wages were the main point for dispute. The secretary allayed employers' fears by a small increase in the margin rates. RJ Darling, representing the employers, expressed relief stating that the 'Proposed new award does not exceed the rates paid elsewhere in Australia.'¹³³ Not only were the margins not as high as those in the eastern states but they were less than those paid to laundry workers in government hospitals. The alteration to the classification structure can be seen in **Table 4:3**. Recognition for skill and experience and specialisation disappeared with only one classification for both women and men. Many women received an increased margin payment whilst the more experienced earned less. The only consolation for those women was the clause preventing a reduction in pay. All prospects for advancement and financial reward for experience or loyalty to a business had gone.

Table 4:3

A comparison of the laundry workers' margins¹³⁴

	MLEU	HEU
	Award 33/1948	Award 1A/1945
Classifications	Weekly	Weekly
Head laundryman		25/-
Washhouse man	14/-	10/-
Other men	14/-	
Washhouse woman	19/-	23/2
Other women	19/-	11/8
Ironers	19/-	17/2
Juniors	percentage of weekly basic wage	percentage of weekly basic wage

The loss of status for the experienced women as ironers and washhouse workers was compounded by the removal of restriction on the number of juniors employed.

Employers had few reasons to employ older women. The remarkable Clause 5:2 added

¹³³*ibid*, p 1.

¹³⁴The reason for the women receiving higher margins than the men is unclear under Award 33/1948. *WAIG* Vol 28 1948 Award 1A/1945, *WAIG* Vol 27 1947.

to Amendment 60 (59) giving employers the right to impose unrestricted overtime remained in place. It stated:

No organisation, party to this Award or worker or workers covered by this Award, shall in any way, whether directly or indirectly, be a party to or concerned in any ban, limitation or restriction upon the working of overtime in accordance with the requirements of this subclause.¹³⁵

These clauses were the bargaining points which gave the added benefits of extra public holidays, two weeks consecutive annual leave and slightly increased sick leave entitlements. While these entitlements were still less than the three weeks leave for the hospital laundry sector they were better than under the old award.¹³⁶ Another welcome addition was the stipulation of a one hour meal break which meant the provision, wherever practicable, of a dining area with boiling water. Despite the alterations to the wages' clause the new award improved working conditions.

Turner had brought working conditions in the commercial laundries closer than ever before to those in hospital laundries. He even managed to improve the occupational safety standards with the provision of protective covering on cement or steel floors. At about the same time, the Monarch Laundry Company considered the environment of its factory and installed a sprinkler system on the roof which 'cut down the temperature by about ten to fifteen degrees.' Later Baldock 'had blowers installed in the Laundry so that the fresh air was circulating all the time, especially for the pressers.'¹³⁷ He recognised a problem and explained, 'I don't think you can say that the conditions were good for working in a laundry. It was fairly hot and uncomfortable especially during the

¹³⁵ *WAIG* Vol 28 1948.

¹³⁶ Amendment 60(59) granted the extension of the 40 hour week to the commercial laundry industry. This clause was added to balance the loss of hours to the employers, *WAIG* Vol 27 1947.

¹³⁷ BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 13.

summer months.¹³⁸ These women were very fortunate. Any improvements to working environments made conditions more tolerable.

This increased awareness of the importance of occupational health and safety by both union officials and employers mirrored the growing consciousness of others in society, especially in relation to the employment of females. Turner negotiated several issues in Award 33/1948. Clause 16 limited women to working five hourly periods without a break and Clause 20d restricted the amount of laundry handled at any one time. The wording of the clause was quite specific. It stated:

No female worker under the age of eighteen (18) years shall be required to lift weights in excess of 25 lb. No other female shall be required to lift weights in excess of 35 lb.¹³⁹

Both these clauses drew on the concept of 'Occupational gynaecology' which was becoming a force in the employment of women. They were the nations' mothers of the future. The changing emphasis on the role of women in the post war environment was a strong influence on those women who were in a position to leave the workforce. The majority of women who worked in laundries continued to work at what they knew best. The war changed many women's lives as husbands or fiances were killed. In other cases strained relationships, after years of separation, led to divorce. Work for these women was essential to support themselves or their families. Others enjoyed their financial independence.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸BA Baldock, Secretary of Monarch Laundry from 1946 to 1981, *ibid*, p 13.

¹³⁹Award 33/1948 and *WAIG* Vol 28 1948.

¹⁴⁰R White, 'War and Australian Society' in M McKernan and M Brown (ed), *Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial with Allen and Unwin, ACT, 1988, pp 410-416.

The MLEU and the HEU improved wages and working conditions and defended members' rights. The success of these unions varied. The economic conditions which fluctuated through depression and war combined with the changing social environment influenced the private commercial employers, the MLEU secretaries and members, especially the women. The MLEU with its tiny membership of 37 in 1949 seemed destined to become even weaker and more powerless or perhaps even deregister. In an attempt to survive, the MLEU extended its coverage to the South West Land Division.¹⁴¹ In contrast the HEU with its statewide coverage and preference clauses strengthened and grew to a membership of 1687 in 1949.¹⁴² The secretaries and members benefited working within the government sector of the industry. The future for all laundry workers was set with the structure and nature of the industry holding the keys.

¹⁴¹ *WAIG* Vol 28 1948.

¹⁴² *WAIG* Vol 29 1949.

Chapter 5

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The post war era was a time of great social change. The ideology of suburbia and the value of full time motherhood influenced women to leave the workforce to provide homes and families for the returning soldiers. Not all women reacted to the 'barrage of propaganda.'¹ Many women were reluctant to give up the freedom of financial independence. Others, as breadwinners, continued to work through necessity. Laundering, as it had always done, provided an avenue of work for women who lacked the perceived skills required for other types of work. The nature of the industry, particularly in the commercial laundry world, and the gender segregation within the workplace forced women into the lowest paid, least skilled section of the work. The female laundry workers struggled to maintain an equilibrium and financial stability. Only through the work of union secretaries did workers' wages and working conditions improve.

The entire post war laundry industry underwent dramatic structural alterations. The commercial production of synthetic fibres which produced new fabrics combined with new domestic laundry technologies significantly altered consumer needs and demands. These new products forced launderers to reassess their businesses. New strategies were implemented in a search for new markets. Workplace reforms occurred as production line techniques were refined and machinery needed fewer operators. Owners, workers and unions needed to adapt.

¹R White, 'War and Australian Society,' in M McKernan and M Brown (ed), *Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Australian War Memorial with Allen and Unwin, ACT, 1988, p 411.

The single most important development came with the mass production of synthetic fibres into various textiles which accelerated after World War Two. Rayon and nylon held limited positions in the market until the war when the demand for nylon increased, especially in the United States of America. By the 1950s the situation had changed.² Rayon had replaced silk and combined with other threads to produce a variety of blended textiles. Nylon woven into Tricot became the major lingerie fabric and, when mixed with cotton thread, produced material for clothing. Orlon, Acrilan and Dacron, also known as Terylene, were other new synthetic fibres. The production of Dacron or Terylene, in particular, revolutionised fabrics. The major properties of these new textiles were that they stained less easily, did not need boiling or bleaching, were wrinkle-free but had permanent pleat qualities. These easy care, drip dry articles required both minimum washing labour and little or no ironing. Soaps and washing powders and even soapless detergents provided the housewife with cleansing agents suited to these new fabrics.³ The domestic washing machine, promoted as both efficient and economical, made home laundering possible. Later, a combination of cotton and synthetic fibres made sheets and table cloths easier for housewives to launder. A rapid growth in the ownership of washing machines⁴ indicated the shift away from the dependence on commercial laundries to maintain a 'clean family'. The laundry industry was in crisis.

²H Cohen and GE Linton, *Chemistry and Textiles for the Laundry Industry*, Textile Books, New York, 1961, pp 323-351.

³E Henney and JD Byett, *Modern Home Laundry Work*, JM Dent, London, 1959, pp 157-158.

⁴Within a decade to 1962/63 78 per 100 Australian households owned washing machines. P Groenewegen, 'Consumer Capitalism' in J Playford and D Kirsner (ed), *Australian Capitalism: Towards a Socialist Critique*, Pelican, Victoria, 1973, p 93.

In order to survive, many commercial launderers diversified into hiring articles, offered specialist services or switched to drycleaning as the twin industry.⁵ The Snow White Towel and Overall Service, already well established by this time, had set the trend. The company remained small until the building of a steam laundry business in 1950.⁶ Local residents, one Australian and two Swiss women, were employed for 3-5 hours per day at this small steam laundry in Rivervale.⁷ Here was first indication of a shift towards employing migrant women in laundries. Gradually, Snow White expanded and extended its range of industrial articles for hire from towels and overalls to include dustcoats. The extra industrial products provided increased job opportunities for women to do sorting, washing, mending and packing; but not for ironers. This same group of experienced and skilled women failed to benefit from another profitable scheme implemented by the owners of Snow White. The laundry washed and dried tonnes of rags for the cotton traders who then sold them to various industries.⁸ The company survived and flourished. Other commercial enterprises followed as they reacted to the pressures of the market place.

Monarch Laundry outlasted others because of its size. However, B Baldock, the Monarch Laundry Company secretary, admitted the company could not remain immune for ever when he recalled,

A lot of our old customers had been customers for 20-30 years. They sort of kept on by tradition their stuff to us [sic]. But eventually you could see the trend going to the household washing machine taking over.⁹

⁵Walter Gordon Agar, Interviewed by Daphne Pyke June 1988 for Battye Library Oral History Section, Transcript, p 48.

⁶*ibid*, p 14.

⁷*ibid*, p 42.

⁸*ibid*, p 37.

⁹Brian Albert Baldock, Interviewed by Daphne Pyke in June 1988 for Battye Library Oral History Section, Transcript, p 15.

As usual this laundry's problems revolved around competition. It was not just the Home of the Good Shepherd and the Salvation Army Women's Home laundries which vied for work but also an increasing number of commercial laundry businesses.¹⁰ In May 1953, after 25 years, the Monarch Laundry lost the Railway Contract to a smaller laundry. Stewarts of Gosnells tendered a lower rate and therefore won the contract.¹¹ Retrenchments occurred at Monarch Laundry but some workers found alternative employment at the newer laundries. Baldock's attempt to regain the contract the following year also failed.¹² Monarch Laundry Company lost some contracts but it gained others. In 1954, the Company won a most prestigious contract during the first royal visit of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh. This contract was for the personal laundry of members of the Royal entourage. The Premier's Department met the costs.¹³ Baldock recalled that 'It caused quite an excitement amongst the staff.'¹⁴ Monarch Laundry staff proved their ability to provide the required quality of service and so the Company won subsequent royal visit contracts. The extra work available, through such short term contracts, provided employment for the many female laundry workers always seeking work.

The workforce had to adapt to the new technologies and industry's restructuring. Reduced hours and the loss of jobs were major issues for workers and their union.

¹⁰In 1946 68 European laundries and 10 Chinese laundries were registered; in 1949 the number changed from 96 European laundries and 5 Chinese laundries; in 1956 there were 117 laundries and no Chinese laundries, Annual Reports Labour and Factories, WA Department of Labour and Industry, AN 25/2 Acc 1211, Files 76/1944, 69/1949, 109/1957.

¹¹Memo to Hon Minister Industrial Development from D Temby Director of Industrial Development, Monarch Pty Ltd, WA Department of Industrial Development, AN 183/1 Acc 961 File 3/1951.

¹²Letter 11 June 1954, to Hon Minister for Industrial Development from B Baldock, *ibid*.

¹³BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 30.

¹⁴*ibid* p 31.

MLEU secretary, Turner addressed the problem. He refocussed the Union by revising the Rules. The Aims became those 'bread and butter' issues of wages and hours and mediation instead of the original issues of welfare, education and protection for members.¹⁵ Over the preceding decades, the Union secretaries had clearly demonstrated a lack of regard for the old Aims. But now, this revision provided future secretaries with new positive goals and the opportunity to work for the members. Turner showed that revision and review of a difficult industry were possible even in hard times. He resigned as secretary and Harold H Backshall, already secretary of the Hairdresser and Wigmakers Employees' Union and the Photographic Employees' Union, took over the position in 1955.¹⁶ Despite the revised Aims, the new secretary did not initiate any major claims for improvements to conditions, wages or hours. Award amendments and wage adjustments followed compulsory revisions by the Court. The first wage adjustment was the 1951 'Rise and Fall' Clause which removed or reduced female workers' margins in preparation for the increase in female basic wage from 54% to 65% of the male basic wage which followed immediately.¹⁷ The other major amendment of the 1950s occurred in 1958 when the Court extended long service leave to all workers, including laundry workers.¹⁸

¹⁵Rules amended 23 May 1953, MLEU Registration File, File 1333/1912, Vol 1.

¹⁶21 April 1955, *ibid.*

¹⁷Women workers covered by 142 different awards were affected by this decision of the Court which preceded the increase in their basic wage by two weeks. The Rise and Fall Clause, *WAIG* Vol 31, 1951, p 669. On 28 November 1951, LW Jackson President of the Court of Arbitration of WA reluctantly increased the female basic wage from 54% to 65% of the male basic wage, *WAIG* Vol 31 1951, p 497.

¹⁸Long Service Leave Amendment 219/1958, *WAIG* Vol 38, 1958, p 261.

HEU secretary Severn needed little prompting from the Court as he continued to regularly review the various awards under his control. He gradually incorporated the employers' new demands on workers into existing awards but at the same time he began to redefine the working week. The first of the awards to be reviewed in 1950 was that covering domestic workers in all the government hospitals. The laundry workers at Wooroloo gained a five day working week with penalty rates for any work performed on Saturday and Sunday.¹⁹ The Head Laundress at Claremont Mental Hospital gained recognition for her position with a separate margin of 35/-. The workers at the Home of Peace were next to be granted penalty rates.²⁰ In Hospital Government Workers' Award 5/1954 the shorter working week with penalty rates extended to the laundry workers at the Mental Hospitals following the Wooroloo pattern. The concept of the five day working week followed by a two day weekend became standard practice for all hospital domestic workers by 1958.²¹ This redefinition of a working week necessitated the provision of financial rewards for weekend and subsequently for shift work. Severn realised that the increasing use of shifts to increase productivity left workers exhausted. Clause 7 in Award 5/1954 defined the number of breaks within a shift and a spread of shifts to reduce the length between the signing off and signing on period in any one day.²² Four years later the 'Spread of Shift' clause reduced the time from eleven and a half hours to ten hours.²³ Another alteration to working practices was the increased use of part

¹⁹The calculation of the female basic wage increased from 54% to 65% of the male basic wage *WAIG* Vol 31 1951, p 497. Simultaneously margins rose or fell according to the Rise and Fall Clause, *ibid*.

²⁰Award 35/1951, *WAIG* Vol 31 1951. Not until 1956 were any laundresses employed at the hospital who could benefit from this clause, Award 27/1956, *WAIG* Vol 36 1956.

²¹Private Hospital Workers' Award 26/1956 and Home of Peace Workers' Award 27/1956, *WAIG* Vol 37 1957; Government Hospital Workers' Award 6/1958, *WAIG* Vol 38 1958.

²²*WAIG* Vol 35 1955.

²³Government Hospital Workers' Award 6/1958, *WAIG* Vol 38 1958.

time workers. Although unions disliked the practice a ban was not impractical, so regulations were needed to prevent exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Severn included a very detailed clause in the Award 6/1958 to protect employees. This award granted protection and financial reward to all members, especially the laundry workers.

The significance of the review for this award extended beyond the alteration to hours and conditions. Severn, in the log of claims, endeavoured to gain direct control over a charitable institution, the Alexandra Home, renamed the Ngal-a Mothercraft Centre.²⁴ Severn considered that Ngal-a, a government subsidised organisation, was now more like a hospital so its domestic workers needed union protection through an award.²⁵ ER Kelly, of the Employers' Federation, who represented Ngal-a Mothercraft Centre, successfully appealed for the removal of his client's name from the Scope Clause. He agreed that 'Whatever your [Court] finding would be in this case a separate document could be drawn up by consent which would embody your findings.'²⁶ So, twelve months later, the laundry workers based at the institution's new premises in Como, received their award.²⁷ However, those earlier assurances to the Court were not complied with because there were several major differences between their award and those covering other hospital laundry workers. Firstly, the 40 hour week could be worked Monday to Friday or in an 80 hour ten day fortnight at the discretion of the employer. Secondly, workers were granted a longer annual

²⁴In 1956 the Home extended its functions to include the training of Infant Health Sisters and was renamed Ngal-a Mothercraft Training Centre, Jean Lang, *The Open Door: A History of Loving Care for Families. House of Mercy-Alexandra Home-Ngal-a. 1890-1980*, Ngal-a, Perth, 1980, p 57.

²⁵Transcript, Reference to Dispute, WA IAC, AN 195/1 Acc 1631 Folio 18094 File 6A/1958, pp 2-3.

²⁶*ibid*, p 41.

²⁷Award 6A/1958, *WAIG* Vol 39 1959.

leave of four weeks but lost all public holiday entitlements. Other hospital workers had three weeks leave and public holidays. Thirdly there was no shift work loading. Despite these differences Severn had succeeded where both the union and the employers in the commercial laundry industry had failed. Workers at a charitable institution worked under an award.

None of the workers' entitlements extended to workers in the laundry at the Home of the Good Shepherd. Eventually this charitable institution encountered a different form of regulation: price control. Earlier attempts of price control and regulation of trade practices had largely failed. However, the formation of the Western Australian division of the Institute of Launderers in 1956 successfully enforced the commercial launderers' position. Over the succeeding years this organisation proved to be a powerful force for controlling business standards, prices and wages. The first president was H Kronberger of Fremantle Steam Laundry and the first secretary was B Baldock of Monarch Laundry Company.²⁸ The most notable achievement of this employer body was the inclusion of the Home of the Good Shepherd with Baldock appointed to represent the Sisters, his arch rivals. After decades of antagonism and politicking, the WA Institute of Launderers by means of regulated price lists now had control of the prices charged by this charitable institution. Finally conflict turned into co-operation. Baldock explained:

The Home of the Good Shepherd was a member of the Institute although they weren't a commercial laundry [an unusual statement as the Home still took on contract work] and they weren't bound by any awards. . . they appointed me their representative on the committee. . . The nuns didn't want to come along to any of the meetings. They had to abide by my decisions. We had a very amicable relationship in those days.²⁹

²⁸BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 34.

²⁹*ibid.*

Baldock continued, 'Eventually. . . it became an offence to have an association which set a price list.'³⁰ But a level of price control still existed because the employers could maintain close scrutiny over the Home of the Good Shepherd's position in the marketplace. Consequently, this monitoring of competition allowed contracts to be won. Profits increased and jobs were more secure. The commercial laundry industry prepared for a steady future.

The election of a Labor government led by ARG Hawke in 1953 inadvertently challenged this comfortable position. WA Department of Health reviews and Hospital Boards of Management complaints highlighted the outmoded laundry machinery and dilapidated premises in many of the hospitals. These factors combined with the growth of patient intakes placed a heavy demand on the existing hospital laundry units and laundry workers. Plans for new laundries at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Fremantle Hospital and Claremont Mental Hospital were drawn up and building began for the new Rehabilitation Hospital and Osborne Park Hospital. The expected financial outlay was high. So, the re-activation of the idea of a government central laundry provided a cheaper viable alternative.³¹ Once again, interdepartmental communications flowed as ideas, plans and meetings proceeded. This time the architects at the Department of Public Works drew up plans on a site at the Infectious Diseases Hospital land in Subiaco.³² Costings went ahead. The Under Secretary for Health even offered a suggestion to reduce wages by recruiting patients

³⁰*ibid.*

³¹Memo, 16 August 1955, Group Laundry for KEMH and Infectious Diseases Branch of RPH, WA Department of Health, An 120/21 Acc 1710 File 5357/1956.

³²*ibid.*

from the Claremont Mental Hospital to work in the central laundry.³³ He explained that some patients worked in the laundry sorting out the foul linen and doing the mending.³⁴ He emphasised the value of the workers' occupational therapy and also the economic savings as 40 patients performing tasks in the laundry equalled one paid worker. The proposal was not discussed or acted upon. The entire project was almost ready to commence by the time of the next election.

Initially, the new Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government elected in March 1959 offered no resistance to the plan. Baldock wrote to the Minister for Health pointing out that any loss of contracts from small government subsidised hospitals to the proposed central government laundry would affect his business. Baldock believed that security of investment of capital in plant and employment for his 90 staff would suffer.³⁵ He included in his letter a Monarch price list for sheets, blankets, uniforms and jackets. Further communications between Baldock and the Minister reinforced government policy affirming the place of private enterprise in the marketplace. By mid February 1960, the Government cancelled the proposal because of the lack of a suitable site³⁶ and a shortage of funds.³⁷ The *Daily News* reported:

A Government plan to build a 300 000 pound [central] laundry at Shenton Park has been dropped. . . Government circles say that a new Government enterprise working in competition with private laundries would be inconsistent with government policy.³⁸

³³Letter, 20 November 1956, to Principal Architect from Under Secretary of Health, *ibid*.

³⁴Since 1945 the Awards covering Mental Hospital laundry staff who sorted foul linen received a 'Foul Linen' Allowance. So employing patients to do this task was a cost cutting measure already in place.

³⁵Letter, 15 April 1959, to Minister for Health from B Baldock, Manager Monarch Laundry, *ibid*.

³⁶The government planned to swap a portion of the University of WA's Endowment Land in Shenton Park for the closure of University Ave for the building of the Medical Centre but the deal was not completed. Letter, 19 June 1959, to Administrator of RPH from Under Secretary of Health, *ibid*.

³⁷The government's application for extra State Grants funding from the Commonwealth Government failed. Letter, 15 June 1959, to Under Secretary of Health from Asst Under Secretary of Health, *ibid*.

³⁸*Daily News*, 12 February 1960, p 1.

In accordance with its policy, the government called for tenders for individual hospital laundry contracts with the closing date set at 26 April 1960.³⁹ Monarch and later Fremantle Steam Laundries benefited by gaining major contracts from King Edward Memorial Hospital and Fremantle Hospital. Employment level in these two companies was maintained. The government planned to continue tendering out hospital laundry work as the Director of the Trade Bureau confirmed:

It is my intention, as far as it is possible, to ensure in the future that when new hospitals are constructed in the city or country their laundry requirements will be handled by private enterprise where possible through the tender system.⁴⁰

The future for commercial laundries looked promising.

Meanwhile, the secretary of the HEU attended to personal cases as well as to other secretarial duties. Carol Zilko claimed unfair dismissal from the laundry at Fremantle Hospital in early October 1959. The charges were of unacceptable behaviour and failure to clean the amenities room upon request. Carol had no opportunity to answer the charges and lost both her regular and holiday pay. Her colleagues signed a petition of support and identified the act as victimisation.⁴¹ Initially, her Union failed to mediate on her behalf so the Department of Labour sent a representative to investigate the situation. Negotiations finally brought an admission of wrongful dismissal from the Hospital Board of Management. The Board then agreed to pay Carol two weeks' wages in lieu but would not re-instate her because the forewoman refused to have her back in the laundry. Her colleagues, not

³⁹Hospital Laundry Arrangements, WA Department of Health, AN 120/8 Acc 1538 File 5565/1958.

⁴⁰Letter, 14 April 1961, to LL Carter, Director WA Trade Bureau from Minister for Health R Hutchinson, *ibid.*

⁴¹Petition, 9 October 1959, HEU Vs Board of Management Fremantle Hospital, WA IAC An 195/4 Acc 1106 Folio 18889 File 156/1959.

satisfied, promptly staged a stop work meeting and voted not to return to work until 11 am the next day. In order to prevent an escalation of the problem the Court convened a compulsory hearing. Here victimisation became the central issue. Several of Carol's colleagues provided evidence that she was a conscientious fast worker and that the forewoman, Marion Gibson, seemed too critical. Carol claimed, in her own defence, that the forewoman's request came outside her rostered duties for the day but that she had done the task when asked. She claimed the door slammed shut because of the wind not her temper. Meanwhile, the forewoman's argument concerned Carol's impudent manner and temper, and her inability to carry out a simple order. The final piece of evidence on the wind direction and velocity convinced Commission SJ Schnaars of the overstatement of the event. He ordered Carol's immediate re-instatement with loss of pay for the period of her forced unemployment.⁴² Carol Zilko, the young 16 year old who worked to support her pensioner mother, won her case against a major employer.

Another member who benefited from union support was Thomas Iles. He worked, in 1957, as an orderly and washing machine attendant at Royal Perth Hospital but did not receive the correct margin for the 16 hours per week of laundry work.⁴³ A Court hearing convicted the Hospital Board of a Breach of the Award and ordered that Iles be paid the correct margin.⁴⁴ Both these cases demonstrated the value of union membership for support and representation in Court and the value of a good union secretary who worked effectively for the members.

⁴²Transcript, *ibid*, p 95.

⁴³Perth Hospital renamed Royal Perth Hospital in 1948, GF Bolton and P Joske, *History of Royal Perth Hospital*, UWA Press, Nedlands, 1982, p 136.

⁴⁴HEU Vs PMH, WA IAC, AN 195/5 Acc 1143 File 104/1957.

There is no evidence to show that the MLEU secretary worked for members in a similar way. It is possible that negotiations between management and the Union secretary settled members' complaints and problems amicably and therefore never reached the Court. Alternatively, the members saw their Union as ineffectual and uninterested in women's issues so they never sought assistance. An almost entirely male executive must have viewed women's issues and problems differently. A woman usually held the position of treasurer and occasionally there were female Trustees. But women had little spare time to devote to executive work. Violet Tulloch was treasurer from 1952 to 1959. In 1953, there were also two women trustees, but as usual, all the other office bearers were men.⁴⁵ In 1959, Isobel Jones replaced Violet Tulloch as MLEU Treasurer. She held this position for three years until elected to the Presidency and Ivy Prosser became next treasurer in 1961.⁴⁶ At the time of the election there were 64 female members and 9 men.⁴⁷ The imbalance in membership demanded a greater interest in women's issues.

A female in the Chair provided the opportunity for discussion of women's needs in the fast changing industry in which they worked. The alterations to employer demands and work left members overworked and more powerless as their award did not offer the protection it should. The secretary realised that a lapse of fifteen years warranted a review of the award. Backshall drew up a log of claims and then successfully negotiated the clauses with the employers. The consent Award 8/1963 covering the entire South West Land Division of WA improved the circumstances for

⁴⁵MLEU Officer Bearers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 1.

⁴⁶MLEU Office Bearers and Members, AN 195/41 Acc 3159 File 290/1919 Vol 2.

⁴⁷*ibid.*

members, employers and the union.⁴⁸ The wage classifications redefined adult females into laundry hands receiving a margin increase from 7/6 to 15/- and wash-house woman receiving a substantial margin increase from 7/6 to 10/-.⁴⁹ Ironers were deskilled even further than in the last award as they were 'laundry hands'.

During the fifty years of the Union's existence, ironers were deskilled from being the proudest, most skilled, highest paid workers to the least skilled and lowest paid. The other single male margin increased from 14/- to 30/- ensuring all men irrespective of job or level of skill received the same. Washhouse men only were to be provided with rubber aprons. New clauses which eased the pressures on female workers were two weeks paid annual leave, detailed sick leave, criteria for part time work employment, meal time hours and the reintroduction of a ratio of juniors to seniors. Advantages for the employers were non payment of wages at times of machinery breakdown or workers' strike action. The creation of a Special Board of Reference with extensive powers to settle disputes and query various entitlements circumvented the use of the Court which often ruled in favour of employees. The Union at last had the right of entry at any time to inspect time book and wages' records. The new preference clause guaranteed a growth in union membership and removed the element of competition between members and lower paid non-members over jobs. The considerable benefits for employees in commercial laundries made this type of

⁴⁸Award 8/1963, *WAIG* Vol 43 1963.

⁴⁹These increases overrode the Rise and Fall Clause of 1960 when again female margins were reduced or removed when the female basic rose from 65% to 75% of the male basic wage. Women covered by 110 awards and agreements had their margins reduced or removed. All female laundry workers were affected. Amendment (91-1100)77/1960, *WAIG* Vol 40 1960, p 61. Increase in the female basic wage. *ibid*, pp 96-98.

employment more enticing for women who had families or just themselves to support.

Backshall's review occurred at the same time the Arbitration Court was hearing the Reference to a Dispute resulting from Severn's comprehensive wages review instigated in 1961. Severn's introductory statements at the hearing demonstrated the qualities of a good union secretary. He acknowledged his role and explained:

[The members] are not perhaps very vocal in communicating their complaints about existing conditions. They get so used to the procedure as it is now applied and so the position remains. However, we are here to speak up for the members of the Union to obtain improvements in conditions.⁵⁰

Despite this statement he did persuade some workers, mostly men, to provide evidence of a shift in workplace practices. He again used statistics of eastern states' wages to re-inforce his claims. Western Australian hospital ironers, pressers and female laundry hands were the lowest paid in Australia.⁵¹ Severn argued for equal margins for female and male washing machine hands who performed the same tasks of loading and operating the large automatic and semi automatic washing machines. However, equal margins placed women in direct competition with men for the same washhouse jobs.

As strength and skill were not considered women's traits, a plan to oust the women from this work was possible. The men's evidence emphasised the size of the washing machines and the weight of the wet and dry linen. The first male witness, Reginald Higgins, had worked at the Royal Perth Hospital laundry for almost a

⁵⁰Transcript, Award 41/1961, Hospital Workers (Government) Award, File 1, p 14.

⁵¹*ibid*, p 51.

decade. He supervised the men who washed all the articles in the six washing machines which ranged in capacity from 100 lbs to 300 lbs.⁵² Other men operated the hydro-extractors that used centrifugal force to spin the excess water out of the articles ready for drying.⁵³ Thomas Iles performed similar duties at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.⁵⁴ He described the work and skill required to mix the soap and regulate its flow into the washing machines. He explained:

We would put in approximately eight inches of water in the machine. Then we would put in about 160 lbs of linen - say sheets. That machine would then be closed, and then started to wash - for about 5 minutes in cold water. Then that water would have to be released by pressing the pedal. That would be the first rinse of the water. When that water has gone you would open the valve and let in fresh hot water, at approximately 100F. You would start the machine revolving again - so many times one way and so many times back - so that the clothes do not tangle. You then turn on the steam and bring the clothes to boiling point. When the clothes reach boiling point you turn on the steam, and leave the clothes for about 15 minutes; then you let that water go and give the linen two cold rinses. The process takes approximately 35 minutes from the time of loading the machine to the time of emptying it.⁵⁵

Iles believed that the need for accuracy, concentration and strength made it skilled work. LE Boylan, representing the Minister for Health, referred to the work as a 'simple task.'⁵⁶ Iles disagreed, arguing that the skill required by a washing machine hand was to remember what articles were in each machine and the amount of soap and water and steam needed. Any lapse in memory meant rewashing the articles.⁵⁷ Men believed the skill of using machines as well as memory were their prerogative.

The evidence of these men and John Filings of the Mt Henry Hospital laundry did not result in equal pay. Instead, they convinced the Court to divide the classification

⁵²*ibid*, p 178.

⁵³*ibid*.

⁵⁴Children's Hospital renamed Princess Margaret Hospital for Children in 1949, J Marshall, *Starting with Threepence: The Story of Princess Margaret Hospital for Children*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996, p 95

⁵⁵*ibid*, p 151.

⁵⁶*ibid*, p 154.

⁵⁷*ibid*.

of male washing machine hand into male and female with a higher margin for the men. This result meant that employing women in this job would be cheaper than employing men but 'men's work' would remain distinct from 'women's work'. Overall, the various male classifications including foreman-laundryman received substantially greater increases in margins of between 13/- and 22/- whilst the women received between 2/6 to 4/6. All workers handling foul linen received a 'Foul Linen' allowance similar to that paid to workers in Mental Hospital laundries.⁵⁸ The women who received supervisory status under Award 6/1958, maintained their classifications with increases in margins of between 3/6 and 4/6. Severn failed in his attempt to reduce the differential between women's and men's earnings in the laundry sector but he had generally improved wages and working conditions throughout the government hospital system.

An almost forgotten group of women who worked as part of the laundry team but on the fringe or even in another room received particular attention at this hearing. The seamstresses who repaired, altered and made articles of linen and clothing had a witness speak for them the first time. Atheina Sideris had worked as a seamstress at Royal Perth Hospital for 23 months. She spent most of her day in the sewing room mending, patching and darning the hospital linen. When not needed in the sewing room she helped in the linen room sorting and placing the linen on trolleys ready for distribution to the wards and clinics. Atheina explained her job:

An ordinary seamstress has to do the mending for the entire hospital, that is the linen, bed linen, towels, sheets, bed covers, gowns that the patients and doctors and orderlies wear plus the nurses' linen.⁵⁹

⁵⁸The Court ratified Award 31/1961 on 30 April 1963, *ibid*.

⁵⁹*ibid*, p 221.

She said that some of the women altered the uniforms and made veils for the sisters. She described how the veils must be exact: 'They must have a one and half inch turning and they must be 36 inches wide or square.'⁶⁰ Other work done in the sewing room included darning, trimming, seaming and patching. One new machine steam pressed or vulcanised the patches thus improving the effectiveness of the patching process. The operators stood for hours performing this hot monotonous work.⁶¹ However, the worst task in the sewing room was making the mackintoshes or rubber fitted sheets that covered the mattresses. The rubber material was hard and dirty to handle, especially when lubricated with oil to facilitate its path through the sewing machines.⁶² All the sewing machines were heavy tailoring machines and required skill to operate. There were ten women working in the sewing room and all were members of the HEU. This situation differed markedly from the commercial laundry industry where there was no classification of seamstress in the MLEU award because the seamstresses belonged to the Clothing Trades Union. The reason for introducing a seamstress as a witness is unclear. The margins granted to seamstresses remained within the same band of increases as the other female workers and no extra considerations were requested or granted.

Overall, conditions and wages for those working in government hospital laundries remained far in excess of those in commercial laundries even though the Court ratified both awards in the same year. The comparison in margins paid over and above the basic wage can be seen in **Table 5:1**.

⁶⁰*ibid*, p 223.

⁶¹*ibid*, p 222.

⁶²*ibid*, p 224.

Table 5:1The laundry workers' weekly margins⁶³

Classifications	HEU	MLEU
	Award 46/1961	Award 8/1963
Foreman laundryman	62/6 to 101/-	35/-
Supervisors female	36/6 to 46/-	
Washing machine hand male	39/6	35/-
Washing machine hand female	34/6	
Washhouse woman	25/6 to 28/-	20/-
Laundress		
Ironers	25/6	15/-
Laundry hand	21/-	15/-
Seamstress	25/6 to 28/6	
Juniors	percentage of weekly basic wage	percentage of weekly basic wage

Gradually, Severn upgraded the other awards to ensure that all hospital workers had similar conditions.⁶⁴ The Secretary published all the gains achieved through industry reviews and amendments in the official organ of the HEU *The WA Hospital Worker*. This journal, initiated by Severn, began publication in 1960.⁶⁵ He used it to communicate to the members any Union news including social events and alterations to rules, regulations and workplace rights. Often new ideas and proposed policy changes were first promoted through editorial comment.

One issue discussed by the members was a review of the government policy whereby women must resign their positions on marriage. At a meeting in 1962, members also challenged the policy variation by which country hospitals could not employ

⁶³WAIG Vol 43 1963.

⁶⁴Also all awards were adjusted to decimal currency figures in 1965. Amendment 640/1965, WAIG Vol 46. 1966.

⁶⁵HEU Registration File, WA IAC, WAS 1237 Consignment 4793 File 014/1946 Vol 3.

husbands and wives in the same workplace.⁶⁶ Severn argued that natural attrition allowed vacancies to occur regularly enough for single women or supporting mothers to be employed as replacement staff. As a result, the government reviewed and altered the policy to allow married women to continue working in laundries until they left voluntarily.⁶⁷ Royal Perth Hospital was the first hospital to implement this new policy. In 1967, the government amended the Public Service Act to provide permanent employment for all married women. At last, young women working in one section of the workforce were guaranteed continuous employment after marriage. Married women who worked in government hospital laundries had more secure employment. This official change in policy did not affect the commercial laundry industry where married women could gain employment easily on a part-time or casual basis.

Many women preferred to work in commercial laundries, large or small, that were close to their homes. They accepted the hours and conditions of work for this convenience and the income. Often these women either chose not to belong to the MLEU or could not join because of the anti-union stance of their employers.

Membership of the Union remained at the low level of approximately 10% of the entire laundry workforce.⁶⁸ The Union needed a stronger executive to breakdown the workshop barriers and to encourage membership and to target female issues. In 1964, for the first time since 1941, women held the majority of positions on the

⁶⁶Letter, 8 May 1962, to Under Secretary of Medical Department from LG Severn, Policy Re: Employment of Married Women, WA Medical Department, WAS 445 Consignment 4562 File 5329/1982.

⁶⁷Notification of the variation of the policy announced in Curricular A 2006, to all Departmental Hospitals, *ibid.*

⁶⁸MLEU Office Bearers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 2 and Annual Report of Labour and Factories, File 84/1959.

Executive. Jessie Smith was the president. This female leadership combined with the new preference clause had the desired effect. Immediately, female membership rose to 98 and steadily increased to 106 in 1968.⁶⁹ Union membership itself peaked at 120 in 1969.⁷⁰ Many of the names on the annual membership lists reflected a shift in the composition of the workforce.

Postwar migration, which started with small numbers of refugees, gradually increased as the Commonwealth government's migration policy developed. The labour shortages and low status of laundry work made it available to an increasing number of non-English speaking migrant women who sought work to supplement their husbands' incomes. By the early 1950s Italian, Polish and Yugoslav women, in particular, worked in commercial laundries. Between 1966 and 1971 the shift was towards more Yugoslav women with their numbers doubling.⁷¹ Gradually Australian born and British migrant women left the laundry jobs and women of other ethnic backgrounds took them as they were the newcomers to Australia.⁷² Monarch Laundry employed many migrant women who proved to be valuable assets to the Company. Baldock recalled:

Always a few of them [migrant women] who could speak and understand English and they sort of interpreted for the rest. They had no problems communicating. They knew how much money they should have in the pay envelopes. And they were good workers. . . They became some of our backbone workers. . . They all sort of managed to put up with each other.⁷³

⁶⁹MLEU Office Bearers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 2.

⁷⁰WAIG Vol 49 1969.

⁷¹Constance Lever, 'Migrants in the Australian Workforce', *La Trobe Sociology Papers*, No 14, July, 1975, pp 33-39.

⁷²*ibid*, p 16 and pp 45-46.

⁷³BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 14.



Linen lady loves laundry life.

Olga Papkosma born in Greece, migrated to Australia in 1958.

She has worked in the hospital laundry at

Princess Margaret Hospital for Children since 26 September 1958.

She speaks seven languages and has often acted as interpreter for staff.

Source: *West Australian*, 17 April 1998, p 11.

The influx of migrants and workers from other states accelerated during the mining boom of the mid-1960s. The increased population and prosperity influenced the commercial laundry industry. Workers and employers alike increased their demands on each other as high employment and increasing profits gave them strength. New businesses opened whilst existing ones expanded. Two medium-sized commercial laundries, Snow White Towel and Overall Service and Johnson's Bagwash Pty Ltd, amalgamated to form a new company. Johnson's Launderers and Dry Cleaners then offered a wider variety of services including a bagwash and domestic laundry, a hire service and a drycleaners. WG Agar, one of the owners, explained how the bagwash operated:

We would call at a customer's home or whatever and pick up a bag of all-boilable laundry. No colours, or if there were colours, boilable colours. . . It was picked up in a bag which we supplied, a canvas bag, and that bag amongst hundreds of others would come back via our own trucks to the laundry. Our staff would search through it to check that there was no foreign elements like say, rubber in brassieres or not too much elastic. We would wash thin elastics like in P.T.U. underpants, but we would not wash broad band elastics. They would disintegrate in the laundry. So our staff would sift through the customer's laundry and put it into lots of about [5 lbs] five pounds into net bags. Now these net bags were about thirty inches square and the net was about half-inch squares, and we would do them up with very large safety pin (a safety pin about five inches long) and on the flat end of the safety pin would be engraved a number.⁷⁴

Alison Newark's first job at Johnsons was to weigh and sort the bagwash into the net bags ready for washing. She recalled that one regular customer's bag often contained bloodied and torn dresses which was very distressing.⁷⁵ Once washed, the clean damp contents of each bag were resorted. Some articles were dried and/or ironed whilst others, still damp, were returned to the canvas bags ready for delivery. Vans delivered the canvas bags back to the customers as ordered. The success of

⁷⁴WG Agar, Oral History Transcript, pp 51-52.

⁷⁵Alison Newark started work at Johnson's in January 1974. Alison Newark interviewed by author in Perth on 6 February 1998.

this style of business demanded larger modern premises and Johnson's opened a new two storey premises in Welshpool in 1968.

The expansion of the premises allowed for further diversification into other specialist services. The 'Johnson's Smart Shirt Service' proved popular as the pure white, perfectly ironed shirt remained a housewife's dream. Synthetic fabrics discoloured and damaged easily.⁷⁶ The launderer and his staff needed to be cautious and vigilant to minimise these problems but workers found it increasingly difficult to be cautious as employers demanded increased productivity. The expensive modern technology designed to increase speed and efficiency also increased the pressure.

Agar explained the operation of one of the more complicated new machines, a shirt ironing machine:

There were five parts [one for each section of a shirt] to this shirt finishing unit, and these five parts were located in a circle so that the two operators were inside the circle of the machines, and they were all basically pressers in that the damp shirt was first passed over the collar and cuff section of the unit, and that little press just did the collar and the cuffs. And then after I think it was about five or seven seconds the press head would rise and the operator would take that shirt off and place it over the sleeve section where the two vertical sleeve units would finish, or press and finish, the sleeves only of the shirt. So at that stage then we had a shirt which had the collars, cuffs and sleeves pressed. Then after the five or seven second delay to press the sleeves the operator would lift the shirt off that unit and place it on the body press, and this was like a window model or a dummy, and the shirt would be placed around this body, buttoned top and bottom, and once again the press aspect would close in on the shirt, and after five or seven second delay the presses would part again and the whole body of the shirt would be pressed, and the operator would then lift that off again and place it front down on a folding press and this, with a couple of flying arms, would bring in the sleeves and lay them down the back of the shirt, and fold up the tail of the shirt in two, and so the shirt would be fully pressed and folded and the operator would lift it off that machine and simply put it at the side of the machine to be slipped into a cellophane bag.⁷⁷

The complexities of this machine reduced the ironing tasks to simple movements of the hand. Speed became the essence of the ironers' skill, so, despite the loss of status in award classifications and on the floor, they still held some pride in

⁷⁶BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 24.

⁷⁷WG Agar, Oral History Transcript, p 57.

themselves. Unfortunately, many women lost their jobs as this machine performed five tasks with only two operators. Those few who kept their jobs were just machine operators.

Machines contributed to deskilling other women who moved into another successful scheme that required expensive and complex technology - the 'Johnson's Special Blanket Service'.⁷⁸ This unique blanket cleaning service was a winter special only. It involved the drycleaning and drying of blankets and then the use of a special 'teasel' machine which raised the nap of the blankets. This large machine was 10 to 12 feet wide and had two big rollers covered with over 200 wire brushes that turned separately over the blankets to make them thick and fluffy.⁷⁹ The sheer size of this machine indicates that men not women would have operated it. Women did the folding, the least skilled and least rewarding of all laundry tasks. Gender segregation spread in the laundries with the introduction of modern technology.

The new services provided by Johnsons required extra staff and the number rose from 80, including the directors, in 1965⁸⁰ to 140 in 1968.⁸¹ The Company provided this large staff with good facilities including a lunchroom, a rest room and an ablution block. The hot steamy atmosphere in the laundry was still a problem but this employer, at least, recognised this fact and provided some relief for workers after a long hot shift. Agar explained that the provision of showers was essential because 'The laundry factory atmosphere, particularly in the summertime, is one of a

⁷⁸*ibid*, p 55.

⁷⁹*ibid*.

⁸⁰Johnson's Bagwash, WA Department of Industrial Development, AN 183/9 Acc 961 File 274/1965.

⁸¹WG Agar, Oral History Transcript, p 60.

fair amount of heat'.⁸² A first aid room demonstrated an increasing awareness of the employer's role in occupational health and safety. Management demanded greater commitment to the company and higher performance output in return for these considerations.

Workers were expected to adapt and accept the new rosters of two shifts that kept the factory plant in continuous operation. They had to maintain their level of productivity in an oppressive atmosphere of control. Newark recalled that 'Olive, the supervisor, ran the place like a concentration camp. . . There was no talking or laughing on the floor. . . A woman working on the pressers could not leave to go to the toilet if it wasn't her turn.'⁸³ The environment was not a happy place to work in. Management compounded the unpleasant working environment by engineering and maintaining a distinction between the dry cleaning section and the laundry section. Newark explained that: 'The dry cleaning girls got more pay [than the laundry girls]. They had their own chairs in the lunchroom and we weren't allowed to talk to them at all. . . We were always told they were better than us. . . When work was short, the dry cleaning girls got the jobs ahead of us even if the job was in the laundry.'⁸⁴ There was no likelihood of the staff unifying to demand better wages. Staff turnover was very high and Johnsons had to advertise for women every afternoon in the *Daily News*. Newark recalled how: 'The regulars had bets on how long each new woman would last. . . I wondered if there was a union. I had never seen a union official.'⁸⁵

⁸² *ibid*, p 61.

⁸³ Alison Newark, interviewed in Perth.

⁸⁴ *ibid*.

⁸⁵ *ibid*.

The Union secretary, Backshall, did not visit this laundry which, like many others, was non-unionised. He was not welcome. However, there were unionised workplaces and there were union members, mostly women, who needed extra consideration as they faced a different employment market. The new technologies introduced into all laundries increased the size and complexity of the machinery. Women's work in the laundries was being redefined and reclassified. They steadily moved further away from the machinery into the sorting and packing areas of the laundry. Many women's jobs disappeared. Even the folding, once the prerogative of young girls, almost disappeared with the introduction of the folding machine. Baldock explained that this machine, 'folds the sheet into three and cross folds it and the [one] girl just takes it away and stacks it.'⁸⁶ The age old women's job of mixing of soap was now done in a mixing tank and automatically fed into the washing machines.⁸⁷ Another job, the mixing of the starch, once considered skilled women's work because of the judgement required to mix the perfect starch for each type of article, now belonged to men.⁸⁸ The loading and unloading of the large automatic washing machines became reclassified as men's work because the weight of the articles was too great for women and the machines too complicated.⁸⁹ Even the cleaning of these machines was part of the washhouse man's duties. Both hand washers and starchers lost their jobs. The semi automatic washing machines washed the 'delicates' beautifully.⁹⁰ Men aspired to be laundry supervisors, positions once the prerogative and goal of ambitious laundry women.⁹¹ Few women reached these

⁸⁶BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 37.

⁸⁷Transcript, Award 41/1961, File 1, p 153 and p 178.

⁸⁸*ibid.*, p 179.

⁸⁹*ibid.*, p 151, p 178 and p 182.

⁹⁰*ibid.*, p 179.

⁹¹*ibid.*, pp 245-246.

positions. The employment of men throughout all laundries increased steadily, leaving women either unemployed or at best relegated to performing tasks perceived as least skilled. Male employees at Monarch Laundry increased from 6 to 10 between 1961 to 1967 whilst at Fremantle Steam Laundry the number rose from 1 to 5. Over the same period female employment at Monarch rose from 57 to 70 and at the Fremantle laundry from 17 to 37.⁹² New technology modified all aspects of female employment patterns in laundries, reducing women's work to the simplest and lowest paid.

The employees at Monarch Laundry not only suffered from the introduction of the advanced technology of large washing machines and multi-function machinery but also experienced the problems associated with speed and diversification. No longer did the whole family wash arrive but just the articles too difficult for the housewife, like sheets, blankets and shirts; so the company extended its services. The staging of the Commonwealth Games in 1962 offered an opportunity for Monarch to establish a linen hiring business. There was a new market at the Games Village for competitors and the new hotels and motels for the many visitors. Baldock explained how Monarch Laundry adapted its services in order to capture this new market.

We [Monarch] were purely launderers doing other people's work, after 1962 we started this hire linen service. . . to motels and hotels. . . Over the years that [hire linen service] replaced the whole of the laundry from all hospitals.⁹³

The Travelodge was the first hotel to avail itself of the Monarch Linen hire service; whilst the Games Village linen supply contract also went to Monarch Laundry.⁹⁴

⁹²MLEU Office Bearers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 2.

⁹³BA Baldock, Oral History Transcript, p 27.

⁹⁴*ibid*, p 31.

The steady increase, over the decade, in other hotel contracts indicated a gradual decline in this work being done by Monarch's major competitor, the Home of the Good Shepherd. Increasingly the Home's laundry catered for parish work and institutions, such as schools and hospitals.⁹⁵

The other charitable institution, which re-entered as a competitor in the marketplace, was the Salvation Army's Graceville Centre in Lincoln Street, Highgate.⁹⁶ This laundry continued to operate successfully although its workers lacked modern facilities. The money raised supported the various sections of the Centre. At this time, the residents received pensions which paid for their care. Between 15 - 20 women of all ages, many intellectually disabled, worked long hours in the laundry. Some of the women had grown up in the Salvation Army Children's Home in Cottesloe and moved to Graceville. All the women received an allowance for their efforts which indicated a change of policy from the early days when all the work was entirely voluntary. Nevertheless they did not receive Award wages. Major Dorothy Argent, who supervised the laundry in 1968, always felt they should have received higher allowances because they often worked a twelve hour day in trying conditions. The laundry's contracts included other Salvation Army Homes, tennis and golf clubs, doctors' surgeries and some hospitals' staff uniforms and coats. Major Argent remembered the nurses' caps and belts needed special starching and ironing.⁹⁷ The laundry, although small, was successful.

⁹⁵The Home of the Good Shepherd's laundry closed in November 1984 just one month after the Sisters notified all clients. Information supplied by Sister Pat of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Leederville.

⁹⁶Originally the Salvation Army's Rescue Home. Information supplied by Major Dorothy Argent of Collie.

⁹⁷By the early 1970's this laundry closed its commercial side and concentrated on the Graceville Centre's work only. Major Dorothy Argent of Collie supplied all this information.

Competition remained the primary concern in the marketplace. The commercial launderers knew one potential competitor, a centralised hospital laundry service, would not materialise whilst a Liberal-National Party Coalition Government remained in power. Government policy of combining private enterprise and hospital laundering benefited both sides. The pursuit of private enterprise laundry contracts to save expenditure on new or renovated hospital laundries persisted. Monarch and Fremantle Steam Laundries remained the main beneficiaries under the plan although other laundries could tender. As a result a new laundry company, Western Linen and Laundry Supply Company under the directorship of G Margetts, tendered and proposed a privatised central laundry and linen service.⁹⁸ The concept appealed to the government because it offered competition on an open market. So the central hospital laundry plan revived under a different guise. The government ignored WA Department of Health statistics which indicated an increase in laundering costs if the facilities moved out of hospitals into the proposed privatised central laundry.⁹⁹ The policy remained; only the tendering specifications altered. In 1967 the tender requirements changed from a central hospital laundry and linen service in July to a central hospital laundry only in December. Western Linen tendered each time, simply altering its applications to suit the specifications. The government rejected both tenders on the grounds of insufficient capital for such a major project and

⁹⁸Letter, 6 November 1967, to Hon Minister for Health from Under Secretary for Health, Proposed Establishment of Central Laundry and Linen Service in Metropolitan Area by G Margetts, WA Department of Health, AN 120/7 Acc 1526 File 5801/1958.

⁹⁹Privatised laundering was more expensive. 'Laundry costs would increase if the tenderers' proposed charges were accepted. . . \$1 255.52 extra per week for RPH, SCG and PMH alone.' Letter, 5 January 1968, to Hon Minister from Industrial Development from Director of Health, *ibid*

costs.¹⁰⁰ No other suitable companies tendered. The Minister for Health persisted with the idea. He argued that

I believe that we should establish a Central Laundry and Linen Service. It would be my recommendation that this should be established as a company, the board of which should consist of a representative of each of the major hospitals and the Department.¹⁰¹

So the plan reverted to a laundry and linen service. In 1969, the government approached two international companies because no suitable tender existed in Perth.¹⁰² Before the advertisement for tenders appeared in the newspaper the Government changed again with the 1971 ALP State election victory.

With John Tonkin leading a Labor government the policy on the ownership of the Central Laundry and Linen Service reverted from private to government controlled. The project was to be built at the Lakes Hospital site at Ellis near the proposed Murdoch University.¹⁰³ The various departmental files re-opened for the seventh and final time. A management committee took responsibility to oversee the establishment of the service.¹⁰⁴ Finances were raised through ‘borrowings made by several hospitals, which in turn, are being loaned to the Honourable Minister for Health.’¹⁰⁵ Then the government appointed a consultant, T Spencer from South Australia, to advise and guide the Management Committee on decisions and

¹⁰⁰10 October 1967 and 30 April 1968, *ibid*.

¹⁰¹Letter, 23 July 1969, to Hon. Acting Premier from Minister for Health, Proposed Centralised Laundry Service, WA Department of Health, AN 120/21 Acc 1710 File 5550/1969.

¹⁰²Memo 23 July 1969, *ibid*.

¹⁰³Letter 24 May 1971, to Various Hospital Administrators from the Director of Administration of Health and Medical Services, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴*ibid*.

¹⁰⁵Letter, 5 December 1972, to Under Treasurer from Director of Administration Medical and Health Services, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service Buildings, WA Medical Department, WAS 455 Consignment 3919 File 5823/1972.

requirements.¹⁰⁶ Detailed lists of equipment, linen, washing solutions, staff requirements and floor plans gradually evolved from the myriads of pieces of collected information. Plans for the four million dollar project moved quickly with tenders called on 3 June 1972¹⁰⁷ and the earthworks commenced by January 1973.¹⁰⁸

The re-activation of a government controlled facility brought an immediate reaction through newspaper comments, letters and even a deputation from the WA Institute of Launderers.¹⁰⁹ The commercial launderers perceived that they had much to lose as the regular hospital contracts provided a lucrative and reliable income. Businesses, like Monarch Laundry and Fremantle Steam Laundry, had extended and improved their factory facilities to cater for the contracts from King Edward Memorial Hospital, and Fremantle, Osborne Park, Mt Hawthorn and Devonleigh Hospitals' laundries. Earlier, in 1967, the Fremantle Steam Laundry offered a 24 hour turn around service in order to win the Fremantle contract.¹¹⁰ The Laundry overcame staffing problems associated with the new service by sub-contracting staff from the Fremantle Hospital laundry. The scheme caused considerable unrest because these workers experienced a reduction in wages as they were under the MLEU award not the HEU award.¹¹¹ The new HEU secretary, Clarence Warner, appealed to the Hospital Board for a reconsideration but without success. A special meeting of 16

¹⁰⁶Letter, 10 January 1972, to TS Spencer Manager of the SA Group Laundry and Linen Service from JM Harry Chairman Management Committee Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, Centralised Laundry Service, WA Medical Department, WAS 455 Consignment 3919 File 5190/1972.

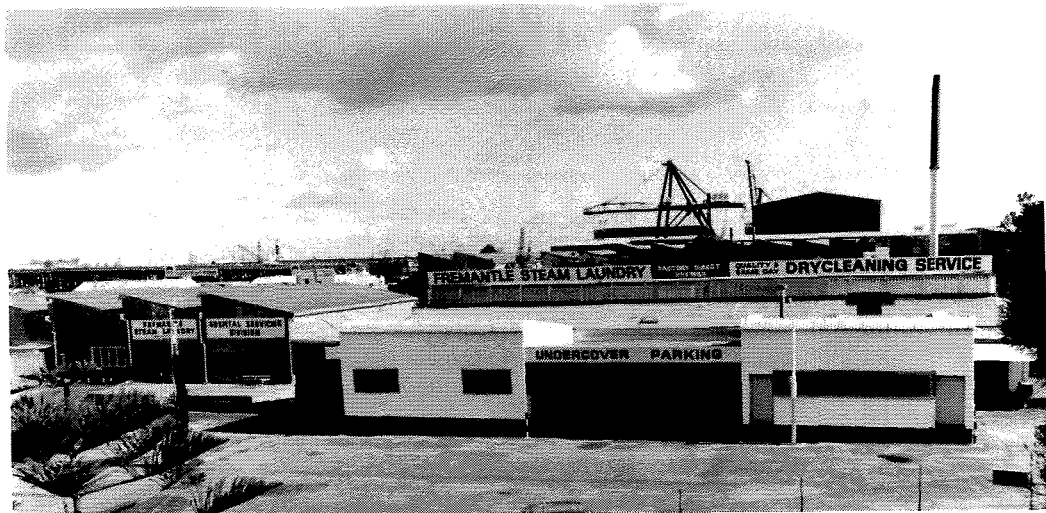
¹⁰⁷*West Australian*, 3 June 1972.

¹⁰⁸Hospital Laundry and Linen Service Buildings, File 5823/1972.

¹⁰⁹*West Australian*; 5 May 1972 and 31 May 1972; 25 July 1972, Deputation to the Minister for Health R Davies, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, WA Medical Department, WAS 455 Consignment 4562 File 5257/1979.

¹¹⁰N Kronberger, Oral History Tape.

¹¹¹Minutes, 28 February 1968, HEU Executive, Book 1966.



Fremantle Steam Laundry from Swan Street, North Fremantle
note: the separate hospital division on the left

Source: Fremantle Local History Collection, Fremantle City Library, 2326

women and 2 men asked the HEU to assist them in finding alternative employment as the laundry workers did not accept the situation.¹¹²

The subject of employment was one of the issues raised by the deputation of commercial launderers to the Minister for Health.¹¹³ Loss of contracts to a central laundry service meant retrenchments. Baldock estimated that about 50 of Monarch's staff would lose their jobs.¹¹⁴ The Minister acknowledged the need to avoid unemployment wherever possible. The government developed contingency plans to cover re-deployment and redundancy of hospital laundry staff and retrenchments in the commercial sector. Firstly, the transition from private contracts to the central laundry would be a gradual process over a twelve month period in order to avoid undue hardship on workers in the commercial industry. Secondly, the proposed staff of 270 would be drawn mostly from existing hospital laundry staff but other workers could apply. The Minister for Health explained:

The Hospital Laundry and Linen Service will do the work for the public hospitals including the Mental Hospitals but not the private hospitals. . . The planning for the new service provides that the work for the Osborne Park, Mt Hawthorn and King Edward Memorial Hospitals will be taken over in June 1974 and that for the Fremantle and Devonleigh Hospitals in March 1975. . . It is . . . our intention that staff working in existing hospitals will be offered positions in the new service. It is possible that persons displaced from private laundries may also be offered the opportunity to obtain positions with the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. . . [But] the extra distance of travel to and from work would be a discouraging factor. . . Persons seeking employment with the new service will be assessed as to their suitability and it would not be possible to guarantee a position in the new service to anyone displaced from another laundry, within a hospital or one being privately owned.¹¹⁵

The government considered all aspects of employment.

¹¹²Minutes, 11 March 1968, *ibid*.

¹¹³25 July 1972, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, File 5257/1979.

¹¹⁴*West Australian*, 5 May 1972.

¹¹⁵Letter, 8 August 1972, to Secretary WA Institute of Launderers from Minister Health, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, File 5257/1979.

A staffing issue already addressed by the government was that of appropriate union coverage for all workers. The Public Service Board called a meeting with representatives of the MLEU, HEU and Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union, WA Branch. At this meeting there was an unanimous decision that 'the new situation was an extension of the current laundry hospital relationship and the coverage should go to the HEU.'¹¹⁶ The HEU secretary immediately began to prepare a log of claims for the workers at the proposed laundry facility.¹¹⁷ The necessity for him to include clauses covering uniforms and staff facilities was unnecessary. The fitting out of all workers with appropriate uniforms, colour coded to designate their jobs, was already organised. So was a supply of protective clothing, including caps, gowns and boots for workers sorting the infectious linen. The floor plans showed a first class working environment with consideration for the occupational health and safety of the workers. The architects also incorporated into the plans good lighting, impervious flooring and special protection from the many infections carried by hospital linen. The provision of evaporative cooling on the workshop floor was not a good decision because of the humid, steamy conditions. Workers would have modern air-conditioned facilities including the ablution facilities, dining rooms and restrooms.

The building of the facility proceeded according to schedule although the cost escalated to five million dollars by the time of completion. The official opening on 22 February 1974 was an important government function.¹¹⁸ The facility was the

¹¹⁶Report Industrial Officer, 5 July 1972 Minutes, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

¹¹⁷Application 34/1973, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service (Government) Award File 1.

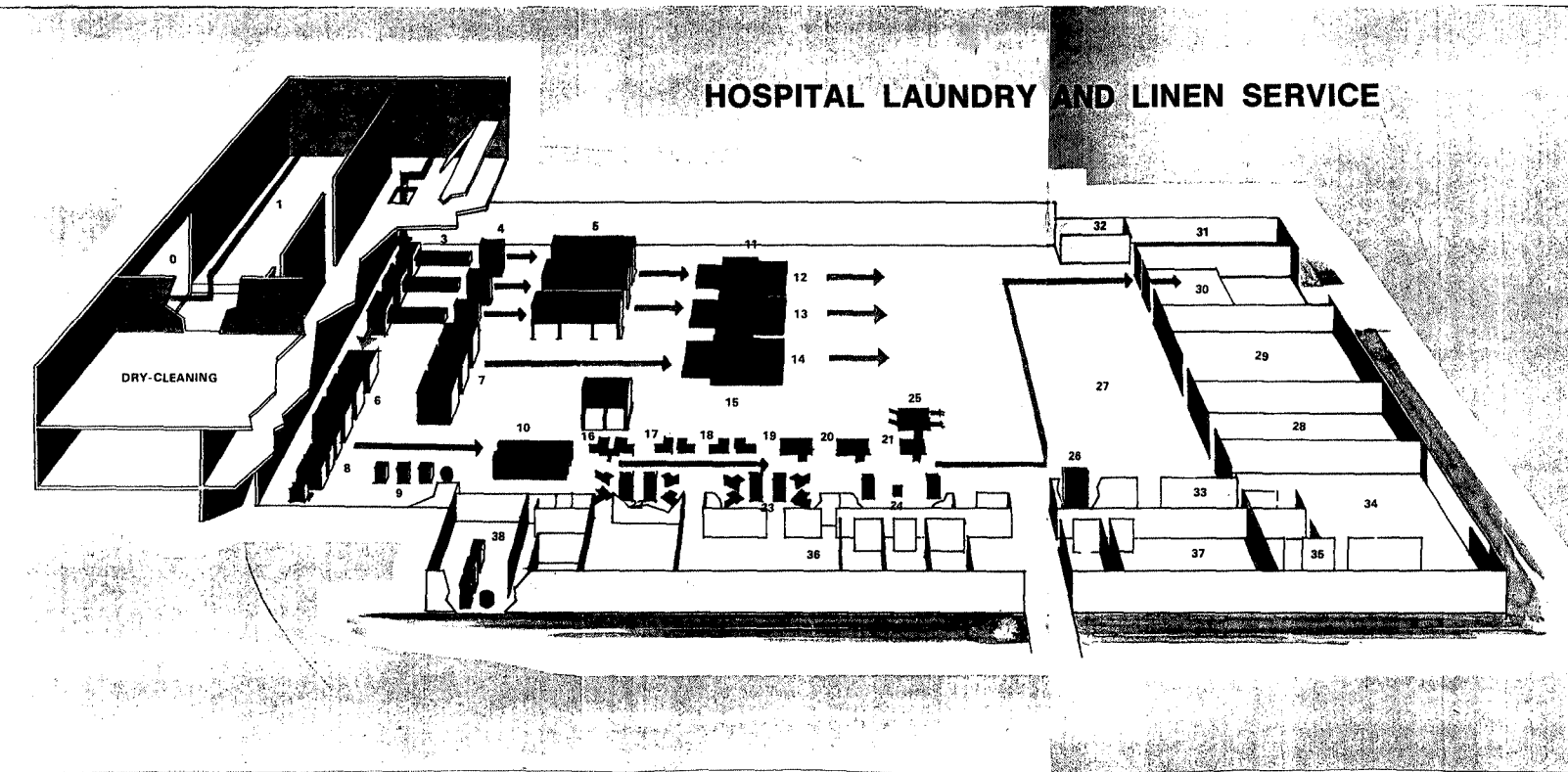
¹¹⁸Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, File 5257/1979.



Female staff at Hospital Laundry and Linen Service 1974.

The uniforms designated work areas pink - supervisors; pale blue - production floor, ironing, dry folding, sewing room, personal items from institutions, despatch hands; green and white check - sorting; white - canteen staff ; hats were not worn.

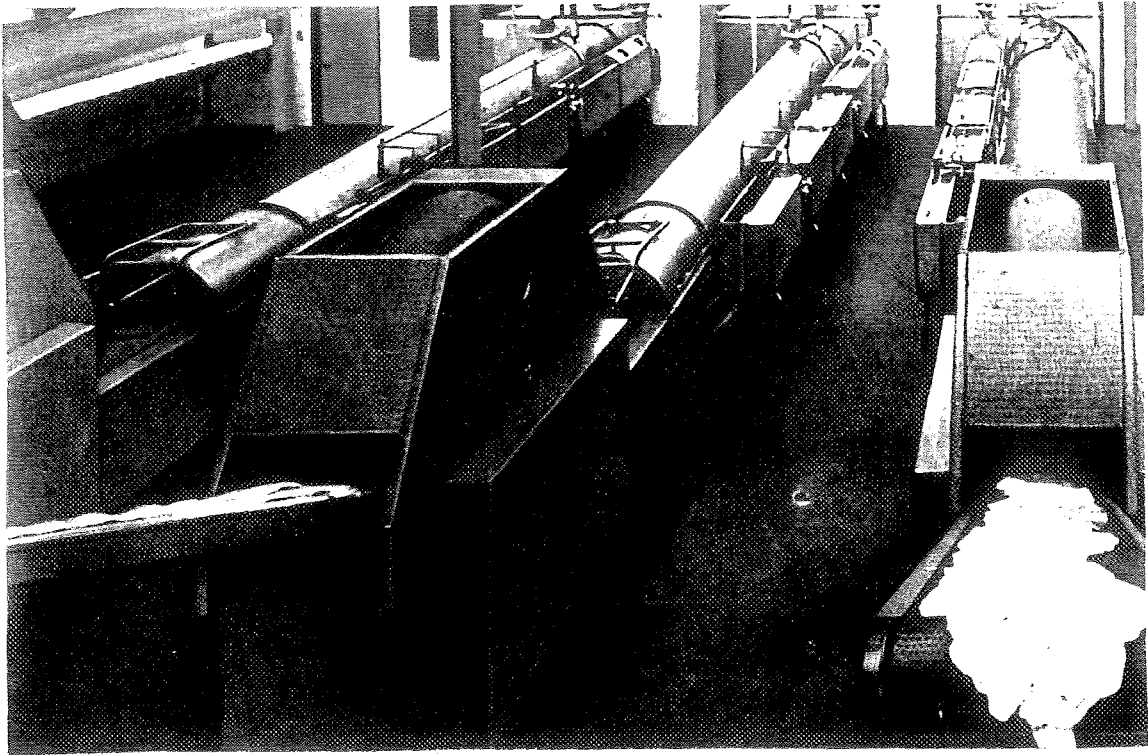
Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, Health Department Western Australia.



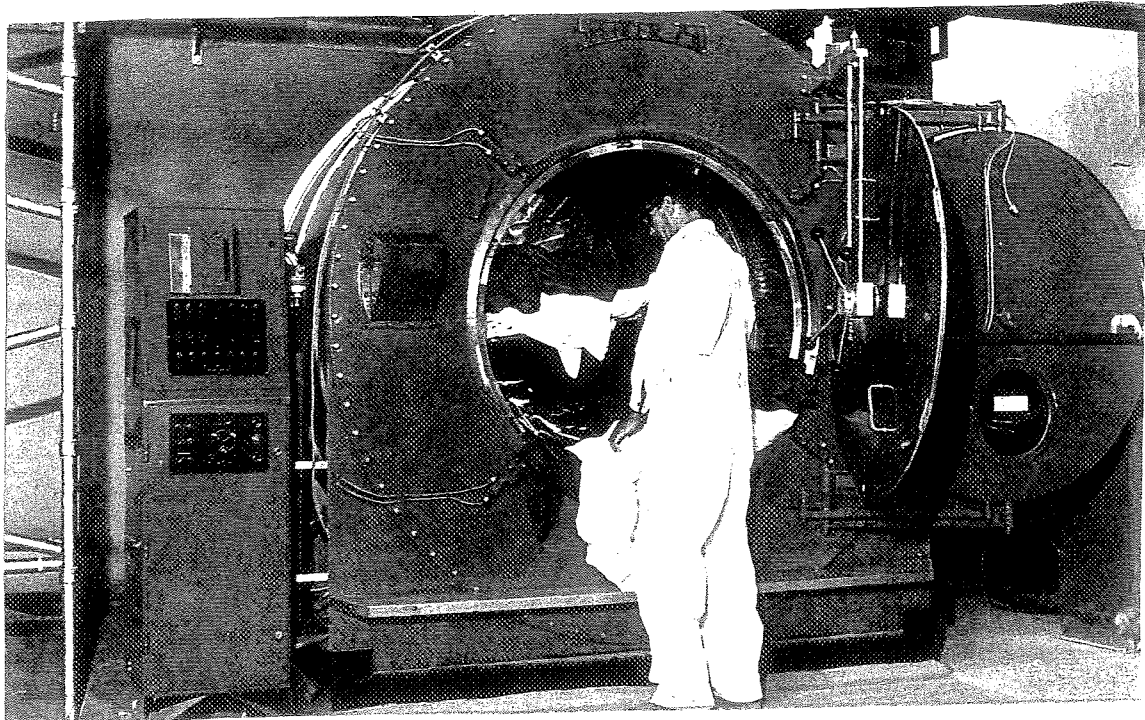
FLOW PATTERN OF LAUNDRY AND KEY TO EQUIPMENT

- 0 Soiled Linen Entry
- 1 Soiled Linen Storage
- 2 Soiled Linen Sorting
- 3 Poensgen Tunnel Washers
- 4 Squeeze Rollers
- 5 TKS Pre-conditioners
- 6 750 Washer Extractors
- 7 400 lb. Gas Heated Tumblers
- 8 250 Washer Extractors
- 9 40 lb. Washer Extractors
- 10 Uniform Finishers
- 11 4 Roll Ironer 120 in.
- 12 4 Roll Ironer 120 in.
- 13 4 Roll Ironer 120 in.
- 14 4 Roll Ironer 160 in.
- 15 4 Roll Ironer 120 in.
- 16 Press Units
- 17 Press Units
- 18 Press Units
- 19 Press Units
- 20 Press Units
- 21 Press Units
- 22 Airlay Uniforms Units
- 23 Airlay Uniform Units
- 24 Folding Units
- 25 Wishbone Folders
- 26 Curtain Finishing Unit
- 27 Despatch Area
- 28 Uniform Store
- 29 Linen Store
- 30 Loading Bay
- 31 Vehicle Sterilising
- 32 Trolley Wash
- 33 Uniform Repair
- 34 Sewing Room
- 35 Rag Store
- 36 Female Change Rooms
- 37 Male Change Rooms
- 38 Research

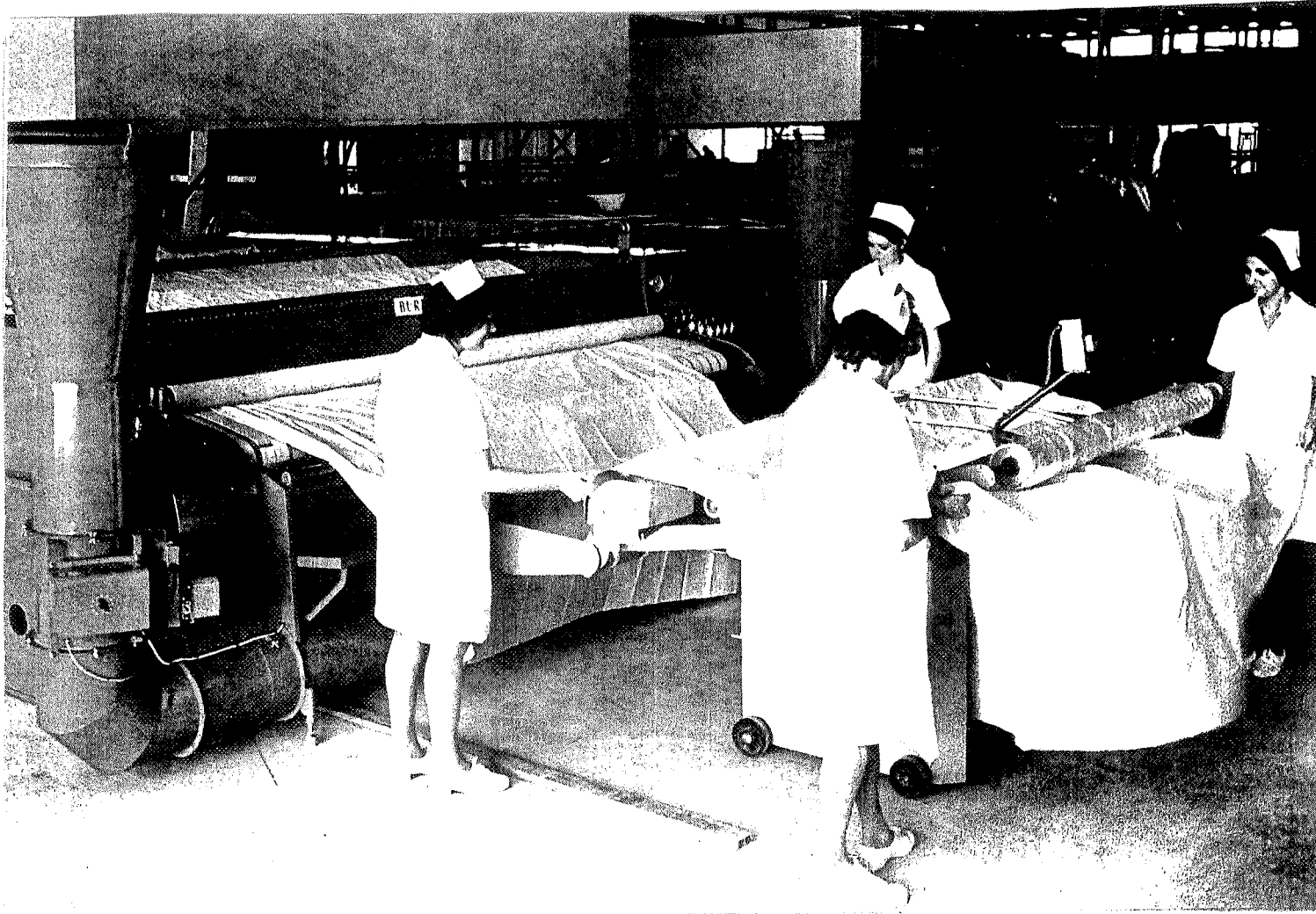
Floor Plan of Hospital Laundry and Linen Service built on the Lakes Hospital site at Murdoch. Opened in February 1974
 Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, Health Department Western Australia.



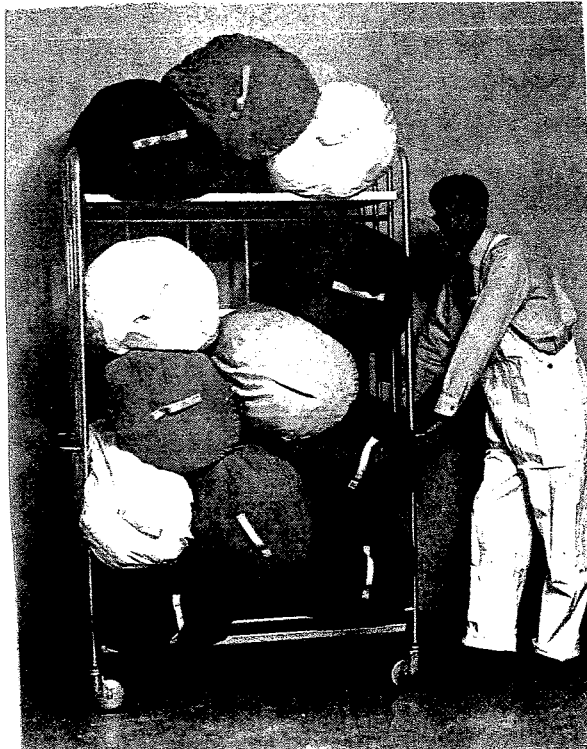
Tunnel washers and pre-conditioning units
Hospital Laundry and Linen Service
Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, p 5,
Health Department Western Australia.



One of the washer extractors - the alternate system to washing
Hospital Laundry and Linen Service
Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, p 5,
Health Department Western Australia.



Feeding sheets into the ironer and folder at Hospital Laundry and Linen Service
Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, Health Department Western Australia.



Special trolleys facilitate the handling of clean linen in the storage and despatch area of Hospital Laundry and Linen Service
Source: *Hospital Laundry and Linen Service*, p 9,
Health Department Western Australia.

culmination of seven attempts to establish a centralised hospital laundry service over a period of forty years. It was also part of 'the first stage of the development of the 230 acres on which the Lakes Hospital complex will be built.'¹¹⁹ The Hospital Laundry and Linen Service duties of service as printed in a brochure stated:

The Hospital Laundry and Linen Service owns linen and uniforms essential for the maintenance of a full service to hospitals and institutions in the metropolitan area. The Service will supply, collect, launder and deliver the requirements of the participants charging at a standard rate per kilo for all linen and uniforms supplied.¹²⁰

Within three months the laundry was fully operational and received the first load of laundry from Royal Perth Hospital on 6 May 1974.¹²¹ Everything went according to schedule; but for the 175 employees working at the new ultra modern laundry their employment situation was not as ideal as expected. The months ahead were to provide many battles and surprises for their union, the HEU, as it fought on behalf of this group of members.

Internal HEU problems including poor leadership started with Severn's retirement in 1967 when membership was 4007.¹²² The two subsequent secretaries, AR Wark and CR Warner, proved not as successful as their predecessor. The Union activity and dynamics diminished. Dissension amongst the Executive resulted in a mass resignation of office bearers in 1970. The subsequent election brought a new breed of pro-active leaders; namely Stan Hardie, the new president, and Merv Eaton, the

¹¹⁹*West Australian*, 23 February 1974, p 4.

¹²⁰*Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, Western Australia*, WA Government Print, Perth, 1974.

¹²¹Hospital Laundry and Linen Service, File 5257/1979.

¹²²HEU membership numbers were republished after 11 years, *WAIG* Vol 57 1967. LG Severn retired in December 1967 after 33 years of service to the HEU. He was presented with \$500 in a 'suitable (sic) inscribed wallet', Minutes, 14 December 1967. Severn was refused Life Membership, Minutes, 1 March 1967, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

new secretary.¹²³ Owen Salmon, the Industrial Officer, re-inforced an already strong team.¹²⁴ The revitalised Union was ready to take stronger action in the industrial scene. Recognition of the needs of female members was one of the first issues addressed. Initially the appointment of a female organiser seemed the best solution but this did not occur.

Owen Salmon became the spokesperson for the female members and led the Union's fight for equal pay for equal work through several stages. He tried to erode pay discrimination. He first concentrated on equalising the 10% supplementary payment scheme that the Industrial Commission introduced at the 1970 State Basic Wage case.¹²⁵ This payment for men only came over and above the basic wage and margins, and successfully cancelled any idea of equal pay for equal work for women.¹²⁶ Salmon's application failed.¹²⁷

During 1971, HEU discussions turned to bringing female and male margins closer together, and also a female minimum wage.¹²⁸ Salmon followed the members' instructions and in 1971 gained a \$3 increase for women which gave them a minimum margin of \$7.¹²⁹ Later in the same year, Salmon again unsuccessfully attempted to procure a female minimum wage.¹³⁰ In the same amendment all men

¹²³HEU Registration File, File 014/1946, Vol 3.

¹²⁴Special Meeting, 24 July 1969, Owen Salmon was elected Industrial Officer for a three year term. Following completion of this term Salmon was appointed Union Organiser, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

¹²⁵Applications 598/1970 and 981/1970, Hospital Workers (Government) Award File 1.

¹²⁶Amendments to the Arbitration Act in 1966 allowed unions to apply for award changes incorporating equal pay for equal work.

¹²⁷Amendment 981/1970, *WAIG* Vol 51 1971.

¹²⁸Minutes, 5 April 1971, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

¹²⁹Amendment 242/1971, *WAIG* Vol 51 1971.

¹³⁰Application 453/1971, *WAIG* Vol 51 1971. *West Australian* 5 October 1971.

working in laundries came under the classification of Foreman-Laundryman. They rose in status. Unperturbed, he moved the award closer to a minimum wage for men and women. He argued for and gained a single a base rate margin of \$15 for women.¹³¹ He also re-organised the classifications of the different types of hospital supervisors, including the few women who were linen room or laundry supervisors. They combined with the senior orderlies into five grades with margin payments of between \$24 and \$44. Theoretically, male and female supervisors earned the same wages but it is doubtful that any women were in the highest grade. The 317 laundry staff and 67 seamstresses members of the HEU benefited.¹³²

The pressure for equal pay increased. Only the Court's calculation of the basic wage and the extra payments including the Service Entitlement caused a differentiation.¹³³ The next step in the plan to equalise female pay was to extend these payments to women.¹³⁴ The extra payments placed male wages further above women's wages and consequently put women in competition with men for work. A committee of the Service Groups analysed the situation. The Submission prepared by this group for the Trades and Labor Council highlighted the problem and recommended that the Council argue for an extension of the payments to women. This would eliminate the position of the 'female [who] has the advantage . . . over her male counterpart economically of obtaining employment in these fields to the exclusion of the

¹³¹Amendment 824/1972, *WAIG* Vol 52/1972.

¹³²Memo, 18 October 1971, to Commonwealth Statistician from Director of Medical and Health Services, Hospital Domestics (Government) Awards, WA Medical Department, WAS 455 Consignment 3919 File 5660/1970.

¹³³Service Entitlements were paid to males based on years of service.

¹³⁴Special Meeting, Minutes, 20 November 1972, Attended by 200 members, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

male.¹³⁵ Salmon presented yet another application to the Court but negotiations with the government proved unacceptably slow, almost static. So the HEU called four stop work meetings to highlight its commitment and its anger at the government's tardiness in action.¹³⁶ Attendances of 400, 2000, 900 and 300 - of male and female members - indicated the growing male support for the HEU's policy of equal pay for equal work. The unjust, unequal wages created unequal employment opportunities in favour of women. Male members took up the cause in solidarity.

Buoyed on by the show of strength at these meetings the HEU's leadership did not waiver over the issue of equal pay for equal work. The National Wage decision of 1972 that set down new principles and guidelines for equal pay for work of equal value regardless of gender further empowered the Union. The task of following the new principles fell to Jim McGinty, the newly elected Industrial Officer, to prepare another strategy.¹³⁷ He re-arranged the classifications in the current award into 'occupational groups' which allowed 'work value comparisons without regard to sex of the employees'.¹³⁸ Each group offered a single rate of pay to any employee performing work within a particular group. McGinty drew up five groups each for the hospital workers and supervisors with wages ranging from \$65 to \$99.40 per

¹³⁵Submission of Service Group to Trades and Labour Council Officers: Re Female Wages, Hospital (Government) Award File 1.

¹³⁶Minutes, 30 November, 1 December, 4 December, 18 December 1972, HEU Executive, Book 1966.

¹³⁷21 May 1973, HEU Registration File, File 014/1946, Vol 3.

¹³⁸The New Principles of the National Wage Case, *The Australian Law Review*, Vol 14, No 34, December 1972, p 696.

week. McGinty prepared his case thoroughly and the Amendment 190/1973 took effect on 3 December 1973.¹³⁹

The Amendment appeared to have established equal pay for work of equal value in the government hospital system. Closer examination of the document revealed the re-classification of both the female laundry workers and most female supervisors into the lowest groups in their divisions. Only the washing machine hands, who were mostly men because of the size of the machines, were in the second group. There can be no true equating of work value in a gender segregated workforce as men and women do not perform the same tasks. Further fragmentation automatically ensured that women in the laundry industry remained the lowest paid and the lowest in status. Nevertheless, the Union's male leaders did demonstrate their genuine concern over the gendered wage structure. However, their commitment may have been tainted with the hope that equality in wages would remove the competition of cheap female labour and open up more jobs for men. Whatever the motives, the excellent achievement of the HEU executive improved women's pay packets.

The members of the MLEU were not so fortunate. Whilst the HEU fought for equal pay the commercial workers' laundry wages fell further behind. As before, award adjustments and amendments continued to follow the Court's decisions including a Female Minimum Wage Order in 1974.¹⁴⁰ This provided a guaranteed wage of

¹³⁹WAIG Vol 53 1973.

¹⁴⁰Section 127E, WAIG Vol 54 1974, p 419.

\$57.90 which, although invaluable, was well below the \$65 earned by women workers in the lowest group classification of the Government Workers Award.¹⁴¹

The higher level of pay was one of the benefits for the women who gained employment at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service at the Lakes Hospital site. The future looked bright. The modern facility provided excellent working conditions and the equal pay principle supplied the women with more money and a greater sense of pride in their work. Eaton, HEU secretary, prepared a log of claims in anticipation of the commencement of work at the facility. As planned, he lodged the log of claims with the Court a month after the official opening. Unexpectedly, the promising future for the workers at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service changed at the hearing of Application 34/1973 on 24 March 1974. The new secretary of the Clothing Trades Union, Ruth Geneff, objected to the HEU award application on the grounds that:

The work performed at Ellis did not fall within the constitutional rule of the Hospital Employees' Union.¹⁴²

Geneff's objection centred on the fact that HEU members must work at a hospital and that this facility was not part of a hospital. The Hospital Laundry and Linen Service serviced hospitals and other health institutions. The HEU constitution did not include workers engaged in providing a service to such bodies. The issue

¹⁴¹MLEU Office Bearers and Members, File 290/1919 Vol 2.

¹⁴²8 April 1974, Judgement, Reference of Industrial Dispute Preliminary Hearings - Objection to an Award being made, *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, p 337.

required more discussion and analysis. Commissioner DE Cort referred the matter to the Commission in Court Sessions.¹⁴³

The hearing the following month focussed on one question:

Whether a central laundry established to provide a laundry and linen service for some 50 general hospitals [and other health institutions] . . . is itself a hospital laundry within the meaning of the constitution rule of the Hospital Employees' Industrial Union of Workers, Western Australia.¹⁴⁴

The Commissioners, after deliberating on the facts presented, unanimously decided that: 'The laundry in question is not a hospital within the meaning of that constitution,' and that 'The Reference of Industrial Dispute before us will accordingly be dismissed.'¹⁴⁵

Immediately, Backshall, as secretary of the other union covering laundry workers, acted on the decision. He wrote to the Public Service Board offering to draw up a log of claims for these workers.¹⁴⁶ The Board rejected his offer because there was to be no transfer of members pending the HEU application to amend its constitutional rule. This hearing on 17 April 1974 was subjected to various interruptions, delays and debate over various words or phrases such as 'works in', 'hospital' and 'employed by'. It did not conclude until 26 November 1974. The Full Bench of Commissioners took some time to reach a decision but eventually ruled against the HEU's proposed constitutional amendment as it stood. The Court adjourned the hearing and gave specific instructions on how to redefine 'hospital'. One clause was

¹⁴³Commission in Session members were the Chief Industrial Commissioner BM O'Sullivan and Commissioners ER Kelly and GG Halliwell.

¹⁴⁴24 May 1974, Judgement, Reference of Industrial Dispute Preliminary Hearings - Objection to an Award being made, *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, p 1126.

¹⁴⁵*ibid.*

¹⁴⁶Letter, 12 June 1974, to H Backshall from LE Boylan, Chief Industrial Officer Public Service Board, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service (Government) Award File 1.

to include: 'All services and facilities . . . under the Hospitals' Act 1927 as amended, except Ellis Laundry.'¹⁴⁷ The HEU lost all right to cover the workers at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. The decision stunned the HEU executive and members, especially those working at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. Most of the facility's workers must join the small, ineffectual MLEU. The union that had supported the laundry workers so well for the past fifty years had been forced to turn away.

The HEU retaliated with an appeal against the original decision of the Commission in Court Session. McGinty represented his union before the WA Industrial Appeal Court which comprised three Judges with Mr Justice Burt as the President. The grounds for the appeal were that

The Commission erred in law in finding that workers employed in a hospital laundry, which is part of a proposed hospital complex, were not employed in a hospital for the purposes of the constitutional rule of the Appellant Union [HEU].¹⁴⁸

McGinty argued that the laundry was an isolated unit because the Lakes Hospital on the Ellis site was definitely going to be built. It was still part of the hospital industry.

He stated that:

Historically a laundry has been considered to be part of a hospital because it has existed as a necessary appendage to a hospital. . . We submit that it is part of a hospital where it is provided by the hospital on the hospital grounds and the workers are employed by that particular hospital [Board].¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷Application for Amendment of Rules 14/1974, 27 June 1975, *WAIG* Vol 56 1976, p 1482.

¹⁴⁸Appeal 8/1974 lodged 30 May 1974, WA Industrial Appeal Court.

¹⁴⁹Transcript, Appeal 8/1974, WA Industrial Appeal Court, WA IAC, p 16

McGinty's case did not convince the Appeal Court that any legal error was made.

Mr Justice Burt and his colleagues considered the laundry was 'self contained' and upheld the Commission's ruling that:

Persons employed in the laundry managed by the respondent [Lakes Hospital] Board were not employed in a hospital and hence were not eligible to join the appellant union.¹⁵⁰

Justice Burt added, as if to underline the decision, 'Unless well-known words have quite lost meaning, that is patently correct.'¹⁵¹ The Court dismissed the Appeal and awarded costs of \$150 against the Union.¹⁵² The final avenue of appeal had been used to no avail. The future looked bleak for the workers at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. In this one workplace, already divided by classifications and coloured uniforms, another division by union membership occurred. The HEU had demonstrated over the years that it cared for its female members and remained at the forefront of industrial reforms.

This fact was ignored by Geneff who targeted these laundry workers as part of a membership drive. When she became secretary in 1971 the Clothing Trades Union membership stood at a mere 23.¹⁵³ So the desire to strengthen her union would have been strong. However, at a later hearing, Geneff denied she ever pursued such practices as 'body-snatching'. She stated:

I am not a body snatcher but I don't want people left in the cold, and I don't want to be responsible for people getting no proper recognition for their skills.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰Judgement 18 July 1974, *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, p 781.

¹⁵¹*ibid*, p 781.

¹⁵²*ibid*, p 782.

¹⁵³*WAIG* Vol 51 1971. By 1973 membership was still only 32, *WAIG* Vol 53 1973.

¹⁵⁴Transcript R35/1978 Dry Cleaning, Linen Repairers and Laundry Award, WA IRC, pp 70-71.

This claim is open to question. The HEU had always supported its members and recognised their skills. Geneff failed to recognise the HEU's success. Her motives were clear when she lodged logs of claims 3/1974 and 4/1974 claiming coverage of specific workers in all laundries and cleaning establishments just prior to her 'Objection to an Award' opposing HEU coverage.¹⁵⁵ The Court declared that constitutionally only the MLEU covered the South West region.¹⁵⁶ Geneff revised the Scope clause of Application 3/1974 to read:

For the purposes of obtaining an award to cover wet and dry cleaners, pressers, machinists and table hands, cutter and others employed on the clothing and cleaning industry carried out in the Government laundries specifically the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service.¹⁵⁷

Once resubmitted, both the HEU and the MLEU filed Objections based on constitutional grounds. They united against the Clothing Trades Union claim. Before the hearing, the MLEU negotiated with Geneff that some 'classes of workers [were] eligible for membership of the Clothing Trades Union, namely seamstresses, press operators (dry cleaning area) and drycleaners.¹⁵⁸ By September 1975 the Court completed the hearing and granted the Clothing Trades Union permission to represent this small group of 22 women workers. Again these women had to change unions from the MLEU to the Clothing Trades Union.

Despite this small alteration to union membership all the workers at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service were covered by the same award. The new Award

¹⁵⁵ 15 March 1974 Geneff filed a reference to an industrial dispute 3/1974. Judgement *WAIG* Vol 55 1975 pp 325. On 20 March 1974 Geneff filed a reference to an industrial dispute 4/1974. Decision C50/1974, *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, pp 1097-1098. On 25 March 1974 Geneff lodged her Objection, Judgement *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, p 338.

¹⁵⁶ The Court ruled during Application 4/1974 that the Clothing Trades Union could not cover laundry workers in the South West Region as they were covered by the MLEU. Decision C50/1974, *WAIG* Vol 54 1974, pp 1097-1098.

¹⁵⁷ Judgement, 11 September 1975, *WAIG* Vol 55 1975, p 325.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid*, p 327. Only 22 of the 175 workers belonged to these classifications.

11/1975 was the culmination of negotiations and agreement among all five unions that had gained members as a result of the HEU losing its appeal and the Board of Management of the Lakes Hospital.¹⁵⁹ The award, ratified in July 1975, gave the laundry workers conditions comparable with those set out in the HEU Government Hospital Workers' Award 21/66 and Amendment 1043/1973. However, the wages were \$3.50 to \$6.80 less than they received in February 1975.¹⁶⁰ The demarcation disputes and industrial upheaval of the past year had boosted union memberships but did not benefit the workers. The bulk of these workers joined the MLEU which had a new secretary Don Lippiatt.¹⁶¹ He was committed to reform and growth. Immediately, he proposed amending the Rules, increasing the fees and affiliating with the Trades and Labor Council, the Australian Labor Party and the Trades and Labor Council Workers' Compensation. Lippiatt reviewed the MLEU Award 8/1963 deciding to improve holiday entitlements first. He successfully claimed an increase in annual leave to four weeks and the introduction of a 17 1/2% leave loading.¹⁶² Laundry workers' wages were the next issue to be tackled by Lippiatt. He explained to the Union executive that laundry workers were 'the worst paid workers in WA and were presently \$10 worse off than workers in some food manufacturing.'¹⁶³ Amendment 431/1975 increased wages to \$75.20 for men and either \$63.50 or

¹⁵⁹The unions were the MLEU, the Clothing and Allied Trades Union, the Cleaners Caretakers, Lift Attendants, Window Cleaners, Attendants and Watchmen's Union and the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union (WA Branch).

¹⁶⁰Rates of Pay at 20 February 1975, provided to D Lippiatt by Boylan Chief Industrial Officer for Public Service Board, Hospital Laundry and Linen Service (Government) Award File 1.

¹⁶¹Backshall tendered his resignation to the small group of 11 members at a Union meeting. DC Lippiatt was elected unopposed. Minutes, 25 September 1974, MLEU Executive, Book 1971.

¹⁶²Unfortunately all public holidays were sacrificed. Amendment 1443/1974 lodged on 11 November 1974 was eventually incorporated into Amendment 431/1975 which the Court ratified on 18 April 1975, *WAIG* Vol 55 1975.

¹⁶³Secretary's Report, Minutes, 19 March 1975, MLEU Executive, Book 1971.

\$71.50 for women and for the first time extended the contract of service to one week. The commercial laundry workers had a secretary prepared to work for them.

Integral to Lippiatt's reform package was the recruitment of an energetic woman, Alison Newark who worked at the Initial Laundry.¹⁶⁴ Newark was elected Vice President soon after her recruitment to the Union. The members elected five other women, including Ivy Russell as Treasurer, to the executive.¹⁶⁵ Some represented the workers at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. The Committee worked well together. Newark and Lippiatt visited all the laundries raising both employer and employee industrial awareness and recruiting members. Often entry into workplaces was difficult because of employer attitudes. Newark remembered that it was only after a change of ownership at her workplace that any contact with the Union occurred.

Problems with private sector management also confronted the HEU. In many of the private hospitals working conditions deteriorated and exploitation increased despite continual improvements to wages for the workers covered by the Home of Peace, the Private Hospitals and Ngal-a Workers' Awards.¹⁶⁶ Often, employers failed to adhere to hours and wages as set in the awards. Women members complained. The HEU adopted a new strategy by appointing Pat Giles as the Union's first women's

¹⁶⁴Initial Services Ltd, a London based laundry group took over Johnson's Laundry in late 1974. Alison Newark interviewed in Perth.

¹⁶⁵ Meeting, 31 December 1974, MLEU Officers and Members, File 290/1919, Vol 2.

¹⁶⁶All the awards included classifications of work and wages similar to those for government hospital workers. Amendment 1006/1974, Amendment 1007/1974 and Amendment 1191/1974, *WAIG* Vol 55 1975.

organiser.¹⁶⁷ Giles' work focussed on the women working in these private hospitals. Her early work required visiting and then revisiting to establish herself as a friend of the workers and to get to know the management practices of each employer.¹⁶⁸ Then Giles challenged these employers who were often owner/matrons over their breaches of the award. She recalled that: 'Some were quite belligerent. . . One even stated, "I only pay my workers at first year rates."' She ended up before the Commission.¹⁶⁹ Often, only through the arbitration process was Giles successful in gaining the correct wages for the women.¹⁶⁹ Giles also worked with Salmon, the HEU secretary, to improve wages. By the end of 1975 all the HEU awards had been reviewed twice and wages increased by \$14.30 across all classifications. Membership rose to a record level of 10 000.¹⁷⁰

By December 1975, Lippiatt, the MLEU secretary, had successfully negotiated the last of six amendments for the year.¹⁷¹ Amendment 2072/1975 finally gave the MLEU members' working conditions similar to those in the government hospitals and Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. They had higher wages and longer holidays as well as more sick leave entitlements, a bereavement clause and penalty rates. Employers were required to supply first aid equipment, to display awards and union notices and give union officials freer right of entry clause. Again the commercial employers argued against wage increases. So the final amendment for the year failed to place the wages at a comparable level with any of the HEU awards

¹⁶⁷Minutes, 1 May 1974, HEU Executive, Book 1971.

¹⁶⁸Pat Giles interviewed by author in February 1998 in Perth.

¹⁶⁹*ibid.*

¹⁷⁰WAIG Vol 55 1975.

¹⁷¹Order 431/1975, Order 755/1975, Order 1190/1975, Order 1140/1975, Order 1072/1975, *ibid.*

or even the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service Award. A comparison between the three awards in **Table 5:2** shows the difference between the wages earned by workers under the different awards. Wages for those working at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service fall between the commercial and government rates. Despite the discrepancies this was remarkable progress for one year and demonstrates how an efficient union secretary can achieve results.

Table 5:2

A comparison of the laundry workers' weekly wages for December 1975¹⁷²

	MLEU	HEU	MLEU
Classifications	Award 8/1963	Award 46/1961	Award 11/1975
	Amendment 2072/1975	Amendment 667/1975	Hospital Laundry & Linen Service
Foreman/Supervisor	\$101.00	\$130.40 to \$154.70	\$110.30 to \$136.80
Supervisors female		\$123.60 to \$126.90	
Washing machine hand male	\$101.00	\$113.60 to \$116.90	\$96.00 to \$98.70
Washing machine hand female	\$96.40	\$113.60 to \$116.90	\$94.20
Washhouse woman	\$96.40		\$94.20
Ironers	\$90.00	\$111.30 to \$114.60	\$95.30 to \$89.70
Laundry hand	\$90.00	\$111.30 to \$114.60	\$94.20
Juniors	percentage of weekly basic wage	percentage of weekly basic wage	percentage of weekly basic wage

Lippiatt and his colleague, Vice President Alison Newark, visited all the commercial laundries and talked to the workers. However these Union officials were not so welcome at the Hospital Laundry and Linen Service even though it was a unionised workshop. When the Liberal-National Coalition won government in March 1974 management's attitude towards unionisation changed. Newark recalled visiting the

¹⁷²*ibid.*

centre once in her 17 years in office.¹⁷³ The government sector workers were in a difficult position in the MLEU. They had different awards and different problems from other members. The Union executive itself comprised representatives from each faction and they never interfered in each others' affairs.¹⁷⁴ A definite division existed between the private and government sector members of the MLEU but the strength of the Union increased. Union membership increased rapidly from 130 in 1974 to 252 by December 1975.¹⁷⁵

The restructuring of this industry due to the invention of man-made fibres, mass production of domestic washing machines and heavy duty multi-function laundering technology provided the catalysts for change. The government's entry into the field of commercial laundering with the opening of its centralised hospital laundry service forced the MLEU and the HEU to reposition and renegotiate their places.

The female members of these unions had to accept the pressures of change. The further fragmentation of their work through technology created a greater emphasis on speed and repetition leaving them powerless to resist. They became more dependent on their union officials to represent them in this, now very different, and specialised service industry.

¹⁷³ Alison Newark interviewed in Perth.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *WAIG* Vol 54 1974 and *WAIG* Vol 55 1975. However, Union books record the membership at 498 during 1975, MLEU Office Bearers and Members, File 290/1919, Vol 2.

Conclusion

Laundry workers in Western Australia adapted to the many changes experienced by the commercial laundry industry over the sixty three years of this study. The industry originally comprised a variety of small hand laundries, larger steam laundries, Chinese laundries and laundries in government hospitals and other government institutions as well as laundries in three charitable institutions. Over time the industry evolved into a number of completely mechanised laundries, including one owned by the government. The Chinese laundries closed and the charitable institutions' laundries which originally held an important place in the competitive marketplace eventually concentrated on internal laundry services.

Competition in the private commercial laundry market placed pressure on the launderers to keep overheads, including wages, to a minimum. Daily hiring was an essential ingredient in controlling labour costs. The design of this hiring system combined with the categorisation of the work as 'women's work' ensured a regular and reliable female workforce. Women, as breadwinners for themselves or their families, accepted the working conditions through necessity. Young women were encouraged to learn the skills of laundering to equip themselves for married life. With the advent of new technology in the industry came the transformation of skilled laundresses and ironers into a deskilled industrialised workforce which pulled levers and pressed buttons. The restructured workforce still suffered in hot and steamy working environments of the mechanised workrooms, although the design of new buildings did offer more light and better ventilation. Unfortunately, management ignored the

increased dangers of the machines and only reluctantly adopted the modern principles of occupational health and safety.

The predominantly female workers were conscious of their exploitation and the growing hazards of the new technology but had little time to demand better working conditions or wages. Their loyalties were divided between the private and public spheres of their lives, and their commitment to their own families and to 'the family' of the often patriarchal managers. External forces provided the impetus for reform.

Trade unions were the key institutions for improving wages and working conditions.

The position of secretary was of primary importance when assessing the success of any union. Usually a male held this office. There were two unions covering workers in the laundry industry. The Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union was an occupational union for the private commercial laundry workers and the broader industry-based union, the Hospital Employees' Union, drew its membership from the domestic staff of the large government hospitals and the few smaller private hospitals.

The first of the unions, the MLEU, was established as a result of the private commercial launderers' fear of competition from the three charitable institutions which vied for laundry contracts. These three bodies were formidable competitors in a small marketplace. Their existence continually antagonised management, workers and union officials alike as they were seen as a threat to profits and jobs. Management constantly used this threat to control and modify union demands. The Union's secretaries too often bowed to the launderers' pressures because of either a genuine belief that they

were protecting jobs or a wish to ease their own workloads. However, Thomas Davies, Martin Turner and later Don Lippiatt demonstrated that well-planned, hard bargaining directly with employers or before the Commissioners of the Arbitration Court forced the necessary improvements in wages, working conditions and occupational health and safety. These male secretaries overrode the barriers of the structure of the industry to achieve reforms which most of the other secretaries did not.

The situation differed in the large government hospitals which operated away from the forces of the competitive marketplace. Hospital laundry work, still ranked as 'women's work', was important because the laundry formed an integral part of the smooth functioning of a hospital. The constant supply of dirty articles provided employment on a regular weekly basis for the majority of laundry workers. But the environment of heat and steam had the added risks associated with contact with infectious diseases. The workers faced different problems. The protests of the workers at Wooroloo Sanatorium and the government hospitals resulted in the formation of the HEU. From its inception, the secretaries of this union met with limited opposition to their claims from the Hospital Boards who were answerable to the Minister for Health. However, the women working in the few private hospital laundries were not so fortunate as the element of competition and profitability influenced employers' attitudes. Despite this, the Union secretaries slowly but successfully implemented relevant improvements. This union led the way in all laundry reforms.

The post war era brought a different focus to the entire laundry industry. The production of synthetic fibres modified customers' needs. Advances in technology

produced large multi-function machines. Small laundries, including the smallest of the charitable institutions, disappeared. Other larger laundries diversified and built workshops to accommodate the new services and machinery. Workrooms became streamlined and more efficient requiring a reduced workforce specialised in smaller tasks. This fragmentation of the already sex segregated workforce combined with the increase in casual and part-time work further disempowered women. They became even more reliant on their unions and the secretaries to work on their behalf. The HEU secretaries continued to gain the better wages and conditions whilst most MLEU secretaries achieved little.

Over a period of forty years the various governments attempted seven times to combine all the hospital laundries into a central laundry service. The cost saving idea eventually came to fruition in 1974 with the opening of Hospital Laundry and Linen Service. The government had created a new sector in the commercial laundry industry as its centralised operation charged linen hiring and laundering fees to hospitals. The private launderers had complained regularly and bitterly throughout the whole period as they stood to lose valuable hospital contracts. Some workers lost their jobs but most moved to the new facility. No one had anticipated the repercussion within the union movement. Demarcation disputes erupted. The basis of the challenges centred on union constitutional rights to worker coverage. The hearings before the Arbitration Court took several months. The HEU used all avenues of appeal and lost the right to represent this group of laundry workers.

The restructuring of the hospital laundry system provided the final catalyst in a long list of changes which altered employment, working conditions, union coverage and ultimately wages. The small MLEU, revitalised with an increased membership, divided between those working in the government sector at the new facility and those in private commercial sector. Historically, the workers in the government sector laundries had better wages and conditions than their counterparts in the private commercial sector. So the MLEU seemed doomed to divide and weaken. This did not happen. The women united behind Lippiatt, their dedicated secretary, who worked tirelessly throughout 1975 to bring wages and working conditions closer to those in the HEU awards. The future looked bright, especially for the women in the private commercial laundry sector, because the restructuring of the industry had given their Union power in numbers.

The HEU recovered from its defeat. It was a strong and viable union. The future for the remaining small but growing group of members who worked the laundries of private hospitals looked promising. Secretary O Salmon continued the tradition of vigilance and thoroughness set by his predecessors although management restrictions tempered his progress. The restructuring of the industry did not affect them as they belonged to a large industrial union.

Analysing the success of the unionisation of the laundry workers involved close examination of the structure of the industry as well as the nature of the work, the role of technology and union leadership. Underlying all these factors is the fundamental assumption that laundry work is women's work.

Appendix 1

Membership of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union

1912-1975¹

Year	No	Year	No	Year	No
1912	76	1934	78	1955	*
1913	101	1935	84	1956	*
1914	38	1936	86	1957	*
1915	*	1937	81	1958	*
1916	*	1938	111	1959	*
1917	*	1939	114	1960	*
1918	*	1940	105	1961	*
1919	*	1941	111	1962	*
1920	*	1942	86	1963	*
1921	73	1943	112	1964	*
1922	57	1944	94	1965	101
1923	28	1945	59	1966	88
1924	27	1946	50	1967	109
1925	27	1947	52	1968	107
1926	19	1948	46	1969	120
1927	82	1949	37	1970	136
1928	92	1950	80	1971	121
1929	57	1951	80	1972	166
1930	51	1952	77	1973	130
1931	49	1953	*	1974	130
1932	49	1954	*	1975	252
1933	66	1955	*		

* Statistics unavailable

¹WAAR and WAIG.

Appendix 2

Membership of the Hospital Employees' Union

1922-1975²

Year	No	Year	No	Year	No
1922	140	1940	655	1958	*
1923	191	1941	666	1959	*
1924	186	1942	656	1960	**
1925	218	1943	697	1961	*
1926	275	1944	663	1962	*
1927	293	1945	635	1963	*
1928	355	1946	770	1964	*
1929	371	1947	1 238	1965	3 982
1930	354	1948	1 576	1966	4 007
1931	333	1949	1 687	1967	4 955
1932	342	1950	1824	1968	5 830
1933	315	1951	1991	1969	5 927
1934	377	1952	2160	1970	6 021
1935	417	1953	*	1971	7 251
1936	494	1954	*	1972	7 220
1937	523	1955	*	1973	9 200
1938	597	1956	*	1974	10 000
1939	620	1957	*	1975	10 000

* Statistics unavailable

²WAIG.

Appendix 3

Secretaries of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union and their other Union Responsibilities.

1912-1975³

Year	Secretary	Also Secretary of other unions
1912	WL Jones	
1913	WE Clarke	
1914	J Swelblesses	Clerks' Union
1917	EL Driver	
1918	Jean Beadle	
1920	AH Panton MLC Elizabeth Clapham	SW Clothing Trades
1921	JW Clapham	SW Clothing Trades
1925	Annie Warren	SW Clothing Trades
1926	GE Day	SW Clothing Trades
1929	L Pitcher	SW Clothing Trades
1933	TG Davies	Secretary of ALP & Car, Coach & Rolling Stock Builders; Food Manufacturers & Wholesale Mixing & Packing Employees.
1940	SF Schnaars	Car, Coach & Rolling Stock Builders
1941	SF Schnaars	Minus Car, Coach & Rolling Stock Builders plus Merchant Service Guild (WA Branch)
1948	M Turner	
1949	M Turner	Tally Clerks Union Fremantle
1955	H A Backshall	WA Hairdressers & Wigmakers' Employees; Photographic Employees; WA Tobacco, Cigar & Cigarette Manufacturers Employees.
1973	H A Backshall	WA Hairdressers & Wigmakers' Employees
1974	D Lippiatt	Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union WA Branch

³WAIG.

Appendix 4

Secretaries of the Hospital Employees' Union and their other Union Responsibilities.

1922-1975⁴

Year	Secretary	Also Secretary of other unions
1922	JW Burgess	
1925	JW Burgess	Mental Hospital Employees; Trades Hall Industrial Association of Workers, Fremantle; Soap & Candle & Bag & Sack & Textile Manufacturers' Employees; Food Manufacturers & Wholesale Mixing & Packing Employees.
1926	JW Burgess	As above minus Soap & Candle Employees.
1929	JW Burgess	As above plus Rope & Twine Employees
1932	JW Burgess	As above minus Rope & Twine Employees plus Wool Scouring & Fellmongering Employees; Sugar Refinery Employees.
1933	LG Severn	
1967	AR Wark	
1968	CR Warner	
1970	MK Eaton	
1973	OK Salmon	

⁴WAIG

Appendix 5

Awards of the Metropolitan Laundry Employees' Union

1912-1975⁵

Award or Agreement	Coverage
3/1913	Perth & Fremantle
4/1919	Metropolitan Area
1/1921	Metropolitan Area
5/1923	Metropolitan Area
28/1937	Metropolitan Area
33/1948 1949	Metropolitan Area extended to South West District
8/1963	South West District
11/1975	Hospital Laundry & Linen Service

⁵WAIG.

Appendix 6

Awards of the Hospital Employees' Union

1922-1975⁶

Award or Agreement	Hospitals & Coverage
21/1922	Government Metropolitan
8/1923	Wooroloo
35/1925	Government Metropolitan
57/1925	Wooroloo
18/1928	Mental
18/1929	Government Metropolitan
19/1929	Wooroloo
18/1934	Private Metropolitan
2/1935	Government Metropolitan
21/1936	Government Metropolitan
42/1936	Children's & Home of Peace
43/1936	Wooroloo
447/1936	Mental
30/1938	Government Not Metropolitan
22/1939	Government Goldfields
1A/1945	All Government Metropolitan
1B/1945	Children's & Home of Peace
3/1945	Private Not Goldfields
30/1950	All Government Metropolitan
35/1951	Children's & Home of Peace
36/1951	Private Not Goldfields
87/1951	All Government Whole of State
5/1954	All Government Whole of State
26/1956	Private Whole of State
27/1956	Home of Peace
6/1958	All Government Whole of State
6A/1958	Ngal-a Mothercraft Centre
26/1960	Home of Peace
46/1961	All Government Whole of State
21/1966	All Government Whole of State
27/1971	Private Whole of State

⁶WAIG.

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WAS 1237 Consignment 4793

Western Australian Department of Public Health

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