

# 100 Years of Building Union Achievement

Since this is the last issue of *Hard Hat* of this century, we thought readers might be interested to look back on some of the great achievements fought for and won by building and construction workers over the past 100 years. You'll be surprised how early some things — like the 8-hour day — came in and how late others — like the dangerous practice of 'riding the crane hook' — were still around.

The list, compiled by Paul True (NSW Branch), is not complete. It does not include any wage campaigns. *Hard Hat* will be glad to hear from members about any important omissions we may have overlooked.

(Note: when two dates are cited for a particular item, the earlier date refers to the first victory, through to when the improvements was generalised.)

**1855–EARLY 1900s: EIGHT HOUR DAY (48 HOUR WEEK).** The achievement of the Eight Hour Day by stonemasons on two Sydney building sites in 1855 was a world first. One of the buildings — the Garrison Church in Argyle Place near the Rocks — is still in existence.

In 1856 the Eight Hour campaign was taken up by Melbourne building workers where it achieved widespread success, and in the following decades flowed on to every worker in Australia.

**1904: FARES & TRAVELLING ALLOWANCE** in first NSW building award

**1935–1943: 1 WEEK ANNUAL LEAVE**

**1935–1947: 40 HOUR WEEK.**

Queensland painters started campaigning for the 40 hour week in 1912. In 1920 Melbourne building workers unsuccessfully took strike action in support of the claim. In 1927 the Queensland Carpenters, Builders Labourers, Bricklayers and Painters unions were deregistered over the



**1875–1920: 44 HOUR WEEK.**

Bricklayers played a prominent role

**1897: FIRST WORKERS COMPENSATION** legislation in Australia

**1902–1980s: AMENITIES CAMPAIGNS**



Bosses were still trying to get away with dunnies like this on building sites in the 1980s.

**1902: FIRST BUILDING INDUSTRY SAFETY LEGISLATION** in NSW. The *Scaffolding & Lifts Act*, and government safety inspectors introduced after years of union campaigning

**1904: PENALTY RATES FOR OVERTIME** in first NSW building industry award

**1904: WAITING TIME** for late payment of wages

issue. They finally won it in 1935.

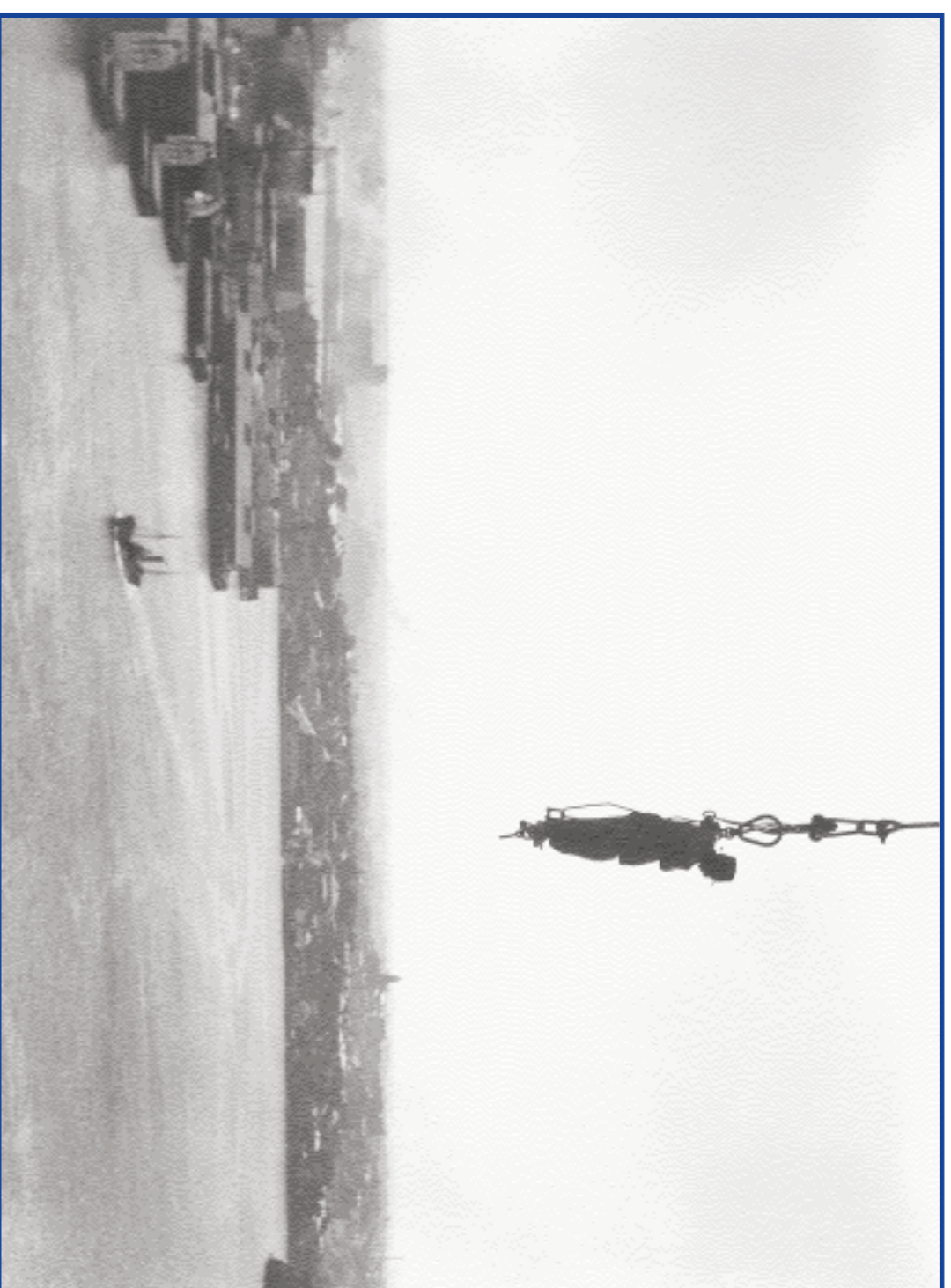


The Sydney Morning Herald headline (Feb 4, 1927) when Queensland workers refused to vote on returning to work in support of strike action for a 40-hour week. The 'wild scenes' in court amounted to singing the 'Prisoners Song' and 'Red Flag' and cheering during breaks in the proceedings, according to the report.

**1938–1956: 1 WEEK SICK LEAVE.**

**1938–1944: 2 WEEKS ANNUAL LEAVE.**

Until the mid 1940s workers who had annual leave in their awards were not entitled to sick leave, and those who had sick leave were not entitled to annual leave.



The practice of 'riding the hook' was eventually banned in NSW — the last State to do so — in 1983 after decades of campaigning. Photo: Henri Mallard, Riding the Crane, c1930? silver gelatin photograph. Courtesy of The Henri Mallard Collection, The Australian Centre for Photography.

**1942: PAID SMOKO IN AWARD.** The custom of "smoko" was first recorded on the building of Melbourne's Princes Bridge in the late 1840s. It took 100 years to get into the award.

**1942–1956: WET WEATHER PAY**

**1944–1945: BRICK HOD BANNED.** A builders labourer's strike in Melbourne in 1910 had demanded that "No builder's labourer shall carry more than 12 bricks in a hod, or wheel more than 40 bricks in a barrow." It took another 35 years for the hod to be banned.

**1944–1960: DAYLIGHT TRAINING FOR APPRENTICES**



BWU member Harry Rosenthal (right) and builders' labourer Fred Rello in the latest safety headgear, Aug 1957. Employers were obliged to provide protective 'hard hats' for building workers in July 1957.

**1947–1969: PAID PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

**1951–1974: LONG SERVICE LEAVE**

**1958–1963: 3 WEEKS ANNUAL LEAVE**

**1981: 38 HOUR WEEK** (beginning of Rostered Days Off — RDOs)

Picnic days have been a feature of the union movement but only a paid day since 1969. Pictured: the Federated Building Trade Picnic Committee, National Park, South Australia Nov 30, 1907.



**1960: INDUSTRY ALLOWANCE**

**1961: LOFTY CRANE DRIVERS AGREEMENT**

**1962–1974: 4 WEEKS ANNUAL LEAVE**

**1974: 17.5% LEAVE LOADING**

**1963–1969: PAID PICNIC DAY**

**1971: ACCIDENT PAY (FULL PAY ON COMPO).** Prior to this building workers only received a percentage of weekly pay when off injured. Won following a three week general strike of the NSW building industry led by the BWU and starting on the Sydney Opera House site. Then flowed on to all other Australian workers.

**1971–1974: ORIGINAL BLF GREEN BANS** save significant areas of Sydney. Environmental action, to varying degrees, also taken up in other States.

**1972: FIRST FULL-TIME JOB SAFETY OFFICERS**

**1972: BANNING OF OVERHAND BRICKWORK**

**1975: PAID RATES AWARD**

**1975: TEN DAYS PAID SICK LEAVE**

**1975: DAILY HIRE REPLACES HOURLY HIRE**

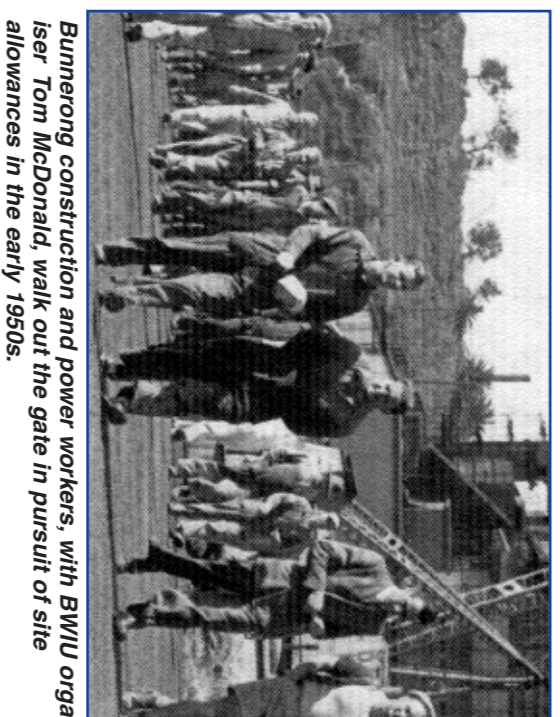
**LATE 1970S–EARLY 1980s: ASBESTOS BANNED**

**1980: BLF VIC SHOPPING CENTRE AGREEMENT** on 36 hour week.

**1956: BANNING OF LEAD PAINT (QLD)**

**1956: MULTI-STORY ALLOWANCE**

**1957: COMPULSORY SAFETY HELMETS**



Bunnroong construction and power workers, with BWU organiser Tom McDonald, walk out the gate in pursuit of site allowances in the early 1950s.

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Migrants have played a key role in the Australian construction industry. Pictured: 20 men from 15 nations sign the unions' Peace Appeal in 1962 with BLF delegate Jack Munday & BWU delegate Stan Sharkey.



Safety remains a major issue in today's construction industry.

**1991: PAID LEAVE FOR UNION DELEGATES**

**1989: REDUNDANCY PAY** (as an Award right)

**1988: TOP-UP WORKERS COMPENSATION INSURANCE**

**1984: INDUSTRY SUPERANNUATION** plus Mortality and Disablement Insurance

**1983: 'RIDING THE HOOK' BANNED** in NSW — the last State to do so — after decades of campaigning

**1994: 24-HOUR UNION INSURANCE** introduced.

**1995: NATIONAL REDUNDANCY SCHEME**

**1995: UNION TRAINING LEVY** achieved in WA, initially at \$11 per week per employee, paid by employers into the Education & Training Fund. The levy rises to \$13 under the next EBA round.

**1995: LOW INTEREST HOUSING LOANS** through C+BUS.

**1997: PORTABLE SICK LEAVE** achieved in Victoria. Untaken sick leave is credited to the Portable Scheme on termination and may be used by the worker in his/her next job.



Defending 100 years of achievement against current Federal Government attacks. Victorian building workers demonstrate September 1998.