Steve Cooper sat at a table looking across at a group of Chilean men. They were in a factory called Madeco, a metalworking establishment that Cooper had first visited a year before. The difference was that now Chile, and its workers, had been under military rule for six months. He observed the men closely, and noted that there were several newly appointed ‘union representatives’, and only one of the old committee.

Cooper asked only one question: ‘When you have an industrial disagreement with the boss and you get no satisfaction after exhausting negotiation—what practical action can you take?’

It was a loaded question.

From the tense silence that followed, Cooper surmised:

1. that the position here was the same as they had already been told elsewhere: ‘a strike would be suicide’
2. that there was an informer present.

To ease the tension and reduce the potential danger to the workers, they cut the conversation short, and toured the factory: ‘On leaving the plant, we took some photos. I conveyed to them that we were aware of the true situation and they seemed rather pleased, but relieved, when I left.’

Cooper had returned to Chile as part of a joint trade union delegation. This chapter describes the lead-up to the delegation, including the factional jockeying between unions and how one resource-rich organisation could exert its political will. It describes the activities of the delegates while travelling in Chile, and the information they discovered. Delegations such as these fulfilled a unique part of the repertoire of action of trade unions in the Chile movement. They were created by unionists for unionists. Significantly, of all solidarity activities, delegations were the least opportunistic and involved the most organisation and commitment. Interestingly, what the delegates did and found in Chile are not the most important aspects. It was what they could do previous to and post visit that made the delegation significant to the solidarity movement.

This chapter reveals that the size of the union was imperative to its adoption of external political issues: a threshold must be passed for the resources to be available for such an undertaking. The organisation of the delegation further

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underlines the importance of strategic individuals in developing external political action within labour unions. It provides several more examples of such individuals at work, including Henry McCarthy and James Baird. Finally, this chapter elucidates the politics of delegate selection and indicates that the use of international social movement delegations as a weapon in local factional disputes was a dangerous strategy.

The arrangement of the delegation was prompted by a throwaway remark during a visit to Australia by the president of the Chilean national airline, Lan Chile. In November 1973, General Germán Stuardos, newly appointed president of Lan Chile, became the first Chilean Government official to enter Australia after the coup. Stuardos was a ‘debonair’ man, who ‘muster[ed] all what urbanity he could to defend the regime and its odious doings, already well known’. According to Derry Hogue in *The Australian*, Stuardos had been a general in the Chilean Air Force during Allende’s Government, but had resigned shortly before the coup as a protest against Allende’s policies. G. A. Grimshaw, NSW Branch Secretary of the Transport Workers Union of Australia, was more straightforward. He said Stuardos was ‘a big shot in the Chilean Government’. Stuardos was visiting Australia acting in the interest of the military junta: petitioning for Lan Chile landing rights and justifying the Chilean military’s actions because of the so-called extreme policies that Allende’s Government had pursued.

Still, as John Kane has noted in his book *Moral Capital*: ‘any attempted legitimation is always potentially vulnerable to someone else’s delegitimation.’ The junta’s efforts to legitimise their rule in the eyes of the world could be undermined by the moral capital of a few if those few were suitably armed. What sort of arms would you need to dent the shiny exterior of a new military government?

In 1973 Lan Chile still flew commercially only to Tahiti, forcing passengers to connect with other airlines in order to travel on to Australia. They were keen to alter this situation. A press conference was to be held for Stuardos and it would inevitably expose him to questioning about what was occurring in Chile. In the days previous to it, AMWU publicity officer Henry McCarthy and Steve Cooper had agreed that journalists should be encouraged to question Stuardos about the abuse of trade union rights. Stuardos’s offhand response to one such question produced the opportunity. He said ‘we will be lucky if union officials from your country come to Chile and see what has happened and how much happier the

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2 Derry Hogue, ‘Lan Chile Query’, email to author, 7 March 2005, copies in possession of author.
people are now’. Cooper and McCarthy discussed the possibility of a delegation and decided it was a viable option. McCarthy then drew the attention of his union colleague Jim Baird to the opportunity.

Seizing the opportunity, Steve Cooper, who was working at the Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (MWU), McCarthy and Baird, national organiser of the AMWU, banded together to become the Committee on the Delegation to Chile. McCarthy rang the regional manager of Lan Chile in Australia. He demanded that a delegation of unionists be able to see fellow unionists and jails in Chile in order to assess the ‘happiness’ of the Chilean people as stipulated in Stuardos’s invitation. The invitation was formally extended to the AMWU and five other unions as selected by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). It was reported in the Herald that the unionists would be able to ‘go anywhere’ and ‘see anyone’ while in Chile. Lan Chile agreed to pay for return flights from Tahiti to Chile for the unionists and 17 January 1974 was set for their departure. Who were these men who swiftly forced the hand of the airline and what was their union like?

The AMWU consisted of 167 445 members in 1971. It was known as a progressive union and was affiliated to the ACTU, State trades councils and to the ALP in every State. New South Wales had 36 per cent of members. Politically, nine national-level and 30 NSW State-level full-time officials were ALP left or CPA, but there was also an organised opposition within union ranks.

The AMWU was the union in which the Sydney Committee of Solidarity with the Chilean People was most firmly embedded, even in those first months. The involvement did not stem directly from the encouragement or efforts of the CSCP, but from a combination of reforms and amalgamations with a mix of new ideology. The AMWU had high membership growth in the very early 1970s, emerging in 1972 as an even larger organisation due to amalgamations. As with other unions in Australia, the AMWU benefited from the ACTU Congress’s decision to set union fees at 1 per cent of weekly earnings, which meant a
substantial windfall for unions with the large wage rises of 1973–74.\textsuperscript{17} The AMWU had only recently shed its ties to the Amalgamated Engineers Union in the United Kingdom, and then it amalgamated with the Shipwrights and Ship Constructors Union in 1976 to become the Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights Union (AMWSU).\textsuperscript{18} This resulted in its status as Australia’s largest union in 1978. The union was consequently still in metamorphosis in 1973–74 at the time of the Chile delegation.

Jim Baird had cut his teeth in the more militant Menzies years. ‘In the old days’, he recalled in the 1970s, a shop steward ‘was often successful by the loudness of his voice and the size of his fist. But that’s changed. Now the membership want logical arguments.’\textsuperscript{19} The union and its members may have been becoming more sophisticated and the union was definitely becoming more complex. The growing awareness of members described by Baird had caused the union to become progressively more organised. It emerged from its amalgamation with a bulky and rather complicated structure. Its policymaking body was a biannual conference, the participants of which were elected by the rank and file. Sitting below the policy body was a national committee which was made up of 22 members and which met three times a year. Underneath that was the nine-man executive, which dealt with the day-to-day running of the union. As noted, it was dominated by men who were CPA and ALP members, though all CPA members on the executive strenuously denied any interference by the party in union affairs.\textsuperscript{20} The AMWU assistant national secretary, Laurie Carmichael was the president of the CPA and secretary, John Halfpenny, was also a member. The union was affiliated to the ALP in every State, but for the CSCP it was perhaps the CPA links that were more operative. The connection and sympathy of the AMWU leadership for the CPA created a reservoir of resources and goodwill for the Chile campaign.

The large AMWU membership provided a generous budget, which allowed for a broad array of committees. These were divided into two types: industrial committees (17) and subcommittees (12). One of the latter was an international committee convened by a national officer. In the early 1970s George Aitkins held this position.\textsuperscript{21} There was also an established research office at the union, which had a coordinator and four full-time research officers.\textsuperscript{22} It has been noted that a union’s research and education capabilities directly affect the type of activism the union undertakes. Given that unions at this time in Australia were

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Hagan, ‘The Australian Trade Union Movement’, 51.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Bray, ‘Democracy from the Inside’, 85.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Pat Huntley, \textit{Inside Australia’s Largest Union} (Northbridge, NSW: Ian Huntley, 1978), 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Aitkins was also a WFTU representative. Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Huntley, \textit{Inside Australia’s Largest Union}, v–viii. Cooper would later take up a paid research position at the AMWU (after the delegation returned).
\end{itemize}
extending their staff capability it is reasonable to hypothesise that the type, scope or method of activism was changing too. In 1973 the AMWU was entering a period of relative prosperity, with a new building being constructed in Sydney and the creation of various new professional administrative positions. These positions provided more man-hours for the union, which not only allowed for adequate attention to the industrial issues but also an overflow of advocacy into social justice issues, such as the Chile movement.

The multiplication of members, officials, employees and funds for the AMWU in the 1970s meant that the representatives of the union attended many more international conferences. Without the membership growth’s subsequent multiplication of structure, time, organising and research hours, the delegation would never have gone ahead. The AMWU’s action was, in this case, directly related to its size.

If prosperity provided the means, it was the impact of the ideas of the new left that encouraged unions such as the AMWU to take on new causes—some of them social, others international. The extension of union activity into social activism was also driven by key individuals. The AMWU’s involvement in the Chile issue, in particular, reflected the influence of several fundamental people in the union—notably, James Baird and Henry McCarthy.

Baird was a boilermaker by trade, whose apprenticeship at Morts Docks in Balmain in Sydney exposed him to an education by the radical left. It was the international nature of the work at Morts Docks and the high concentration of workers with radical left politics that pushed Baird towards the trade union movement. By the 1970s Baird was immensely respected and later in his career became a commissioner of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. In the 1970s, he was also convenor of the AMWU publications committee, and before being elected to the national organiser position in 1973 he had been head of the research centre for nine years. Along with Baird’s long-term membership of the CPA, this meant he was well aware of the Chilean situation before the coup. He was present at the first meetings of the CSCP

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24 Commonwealth secretary J. D. Garland said this came down to the far-sighted policies the union undertook in the 1940s and 1950s. Pat Huntley and Ian Huntley, Inside Australia’s Top 100 Trade Unions—Are they Wrecking Australia? (Northbridge, NSW: Ian Huntley, 1976), 326.
26 Rhiannon Lee, ‘Death of the Honourable Roy Frederick Turner, AM, A Former Member of the Legislative Council’, in NSW Parliament Legislative Council (29 June 2004), 10438.
and was a member of its executive and steering committees. 29 His prominent position in the AMWU ensured that Chile received constant coverage in the AMWU publications.

In this he had an ally in Henry McCarthy, the national publicity officer of the AMWU in the early 1970s, who was a strategic actor of high importance in the early years of the Chile movement. For example, he endorsed the production of 15,000 leaflets for the demonstration on the first anniversary of the coup. 30 In 1973 Baird gained strategic importance after his election (a promotion) to national organiser, but he lost the ability to dedicate time and make on-the-run decisions due to the increase in his union responsibilities. McCarthy could be a little more flexible in his role and the position of head of publishing was by nature influential.

The committee organising the delegation to Chile (McCarthy and Baird, together with Steve Cooper, who was starting to take on a substantial amount of work at the CSPC in Sydney) sought guarantees from the Chilean Government for the safety not only of the delegation's members but also of the Chileans with whom they hoped to meet. The official press statement from the AMWU outlined the guarantees sought, including access to prison areas and freedom to interview people without surveillance from authorities. 31 The Miners Federation also expressed interest, and ABC Television's 4 Corners program was to send a crew; however, it all soon ground to a halt.

Although the Chilean Government was willing to give all manner of assurances verbally, the Australian office of Lan Chile received a cable from the Chilean Government stating that it 'did not consider it appropriate to give written confirmation of the guarantee[s]'. 32 It was little wonder. The letter sent seeking the assurances had rather cheekily noted that there was a substantial level of resentment of the 'current undemocratic military government in Chile' among trade unions in Australia. 33 A lack of written assurance for this group of unionists implied that the danger to others was very real indeed. The Australians refused to move without the papers and Lan Chile and the Chilean authorities refused to accede to the demands.

As January 1974 came and went, McCarthy, Baird and Cooper began to mobilise the support of trade unionists and the wider community. The AMWU distributed a press statement (thanks to McCarthy's strategic role as publicity officer) titled

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29 NSW Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean People.
30 The demonstration was to be organised by the CSPC. Circular. AMWU Commonwealth Council, August 16 1974, PGEUA: Federal Office, N133/158, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
31 Press Statement of the AMWU—7/2/74: What is the Chilean Junta Up To?
33 Press Statement of the AMWU—7/2/74: What is the Chilean Junta Up To?
‘What is the Chilean Junta up to?’ It outlined the fight to get to Chile, and some of the occurrences within Chile that the delegation proposed to investigate. While it may have been Baird and McCarthy pushing AMWU action on Chile, the official AMWU face of international issues was George Aitkins (as head of the International Subcommittee). Aitkins was not a lightweight in the union; he was a WFTU representative and a national organiser with extensive negotiating experience. His position and knowledge would come into play for the Chile cause sooner than anyone expected.

The Chilean Government officially deferred the delegation on 6 February; the AMWU press statement explaining the situation was released on 7 February. The final sentences of the document called for support of the WFTU solidarity with Chile Day on 12 February, and urged the Australian Government to refuse Lan Chile’s landing rights. As it turned out, Australian action pre-empted the international boycott plans, but despite their efforts until that point, the metal workers were not the ones who struck the first blow.

At 6 am on Saturday, 9 February 1974, a Lan Chile flight was black banned at Kingsford Smith Airport in Sydney. ‘When the plane landed in Sydney on Saturday morning’, said Grimshaw, secretary of the NSW branch of the Transport Workers’ Union of Australia, ‘we decided to take industrial action to show them we were fair dinkum’. The Transport Workers’ Union, with support from the AMWU, WWFA, SUA and other unions, refused to touch the plane. It remained unfuelled and unloaded and was parked off to the side of the airport, in an area under air force control. The passengers, and their families waiting in the terminal, resented the union action. George Aitkins noted the irony:

> The 138 passengers refused to leave the aircraft for 3 1/2 hours unless their baggage was unloaded. Some 300 relatives and friends demonstrated outside the Custom Hall by slow clapping and chanting ‘chasalga’ (‘let them free’) referring of course to the passengers but ironically the protest of the transport workers was to get the Junta to ‘let the Chilean trade union and political prisoners free’.

The black ban was hailed as ‘possibly the first direct action taken in defence of Chileans by workers in another country’. Australian workers had sensed an

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid. Grimshaw was later listed as a member of the delegation; however, he did not travel. AMWU Commonwealth Council re: Chile Fact Finding Mission, February 22 1974, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
38 Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
39 AMWU Commonwealth Council re: Chile Fact Finding Mission.
40 Chilean Junta Airliner Grounded, 1974, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
opportunity and moved rapidly and conclusively. While the plane lay idle on
the tarmac, Lan Chile and AMWU representatives Henry McCarthy and George
Aitkins met to negotiate its servicing. They used the black ban to highlight
their opposition to the military government of Chile, and also as leverage to get
the Chilean Government to grant their demands for the delegation. The thickly
moustached Aitkins was quite deaf and, so the story goes, he just turned off his
hearing aid so he could not hear what the Lan Chile representatives were saying,
let alone grant any concessions.\textsuperscript{41} The unionist’s negotiating experience won
out, and the two AMWU organisers were successful: the Chileans were forced to
accede to the demands of the trade union delegation. After a delay of 22 hours,
the aircraft left Sydney on 10 February 1974.\textsuperscript{42}

The Transport Workers’ Union action was pivotal in this story. Without it, the
delegation may never have travelled. Luis Figueroa and Luis Meneses, Chilean
trade unionists who later visited Australia, phrased it explicitly in a special
message for the Transport Workers’ members of Mascott Airport: ‘without your
action which banned the Lan Chile Aircraft in 1974, it is possible that we may
not be alive.’\textsuperscript{43} On an earlier occasion, Figueroa had said ‘when that plane was
grounded in Sydney the news swept through Chile and from that moment, lives
began to be saved in Chile’.\textsuperscript{44}

What was essentially an opportunistic, symbolic and short-term action had
deep consequences.

Following the blacking of the plane, flushed with success, 13 unions presented
a united front against the military junta of Chile. They endorsed a pamphlet that
focused on the black ban of the aircraft and the abuse of workers’ rights in Chile.
The flyer’s title was an open declaration of solidarity with ‘oppressed people’,
but the text was focused on trade union rights. This was a textbook case of the
manifestation of the socialist ideal of a worldwide working class: ‘Oppressed
people across the world with a yearning for freedom will take courage from the
stand of the airport workers.’\textsuperscript{45} The delegation was hardly mentioned, as it was

\textsuperscript{41} I have not been able to find why AMWU went in to negotiate instead of TWU organisers. Cooper et al.
\textsuperscript{42} Chilean Junta Airliner Grounded, 1974. James Baird claimed the plane was boycotted for a month. Baird,
‘After the Coup’, 7. This copy was given to the author by Steve Cooper, who believes it was written as part
of Baird’s memoirs before his death. Steve Cooper remembers the boycott as lasting about a week. Cooper
Interview, 2005. The Australian reported that Australian and Chilean journalists were aboard when it left,
and if they were, they were not linked to the delegation as implied in the article. ‘Unions Free Plane after
Chilean Note’.
\textsuperscript{43} J. Baird to G. Grimshaw, October 1 1975 and attached letter for Transport Workers’ Union Strikers from
CUT, September 19 1975, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\textsuperscript{44} Maritime Worker, 14 May 1977, 7.
\textsuperscript{45} Chilean Junta Airliner Grounded, 1974.
too controversial for all unions to agree. The exclusion of the delegation from the pamphlet was a concession to the SUA, WWFA and AFULE, who all opposed the trip, but supported the boycott of the plane.

Despite the veneer of unified purpose and ideology, soon the cracks were showing in the fragile unity of the plane blacking. Those who objected generally did so on the grounds that taking up the invitation of the military junta implied complicity with fascism, imperialism and capitalism. The AFULE, who had sent a delegate to the Chilean multinational conference before the coup, was firmly against sending a delegation of unionists as guests of the military junta. The Building Workers’ Industrial Union (BWIU) also felt that the acceptance of the invitation might lend respectability to the junta. The maritime unions’ opposition was based on their belief that the delegation would necessarily have to work with the Chilean military in order to express solidarity. They held the view that working within the framework set by the capitalist world only added to its legitimacy. In the words of CSCP activist Mavis Robertson, members of the SPA believed that the delegates would be suborned by the military rulers of Chile, or as Cooper phrased it, ‘duchessed’. The SPA affiliates also believed that the military regime would take the delegation ‘around like circus ponies’, showing them only the places where everything was unaffected by the coup. Their objection was not due purely to their doubts about the usefulness of the delegation, but also to a nuanced ideological difference. Individuals in opposition to the delegation were generally anti-revisionist, pro-Soviet and in the SPA, or unions in which this view predominated.

The SUA’s opposition to the delegation was particularly vehement. The Federal Office of the SUA sent a letter to the AMWU stating that ‘any acceptance by Australian workers’ representatives of the hospitality of the fascist military Junta in Chile is an indictment of our class consciousness’. The SUA sent representatives to every meeting discussing the delegation, and consistently raised their opposition to it. Some members of the AMWU National Council also opposed the delegation at first; however, it was agreed that if the international labour movement organisations supported it, a consensus for support would be reached. According to Baird, ‘Henry McCarthy … got to work and through his international contacts was able to secure the support of the’ ICFTU, WFTU and the Catholic International of Trade Unions (CITU). The international

48 AMWU Commonwealth Council re: Chile Fact Finding Mission.
50 Cooper Interview, 2005.
51 Robertson Interview, 2009.
52 ‘Seamen Reject Invitation for Fascist Chile General’.
53 Baird, ‘After the Coup’.

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organisations telexed their support within an hour of the requests.\textsuperscript{54} The WFTU reportedly said that the delegation would ‘greatly help the international solidarity campaign’.\textsuperscript{55}

WFTU approval was not long lasting.\textsuperscript{56} Believing them to be misled, the SUA sent information concerning the organisation and conditions of the delegation to the WFTU on 15 February.\textsuperscript{57} In response, the WFTU did not withdraw support from the delegation, but strongly questioned if the delegation would be allowed to make independent inquiries when in Chile. Yet, in the same letter to the AMWU, they also gave further information on the current union situation in Chile.\textsuperscript{58} As both the SUA and the AMWU were affiliates, it appears the WFTU was unwilling to take sides. The opposition to the delegation was a manifestation of local political divisions and probably not important enough for the WFTU to bother with. ‘Chile’ was being used as a tool for political point scoring and assertion of identity. Mavis Robertson reflected on this, saying, ‘well, there is no doubt in my mind that the split in the [CPA] was being played out in international things’.\textsuperscript{59} But going out against the delegation was a dangerous stance. If the delegation succeeded they would return heroic. Furthermore, not all the unionists, branches or unions played into the factional disputes.

Despite the federal officers (Elliot, Geraghty, Nolan, Webster and Brennan) all unanimously voting against the delegation, the structure of the SUA allowed branches to have their say, and it was not as simple as branches following national office orders. At a stop-work meeting on 25 February 1974, the Victorian Branch of the SUA discussed the proposal. Members were confused. Comrade Wilson questioned why the SUA national office at first asked for motions in support of the delegation, then in opposition to it. He said: ‘Earlier, quite properly, the Federal Office suggests stop work meetings carry resolutions calling for a fact finding commission, comprising members of Parliament and Trade union representatives. To present this as fundamentally different from a fact finding Trade Union group is nonsense.’\textsuperscript{60} Whatever the status of those who travelled to Chile, they would need visas, he argued, and thus would have to make contact with the ruling junta. At the Queensland branch stop-work meeting, the motion was put to the assembled unionists. There was a speaker against the motion (that is, for the delegation), and only five ended up voting to endorse the federal

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} ‘Australian Mission may Visit Chile’, SPA, March 1974.
\textsuperscript{56} ‘Seam en Reject Invitation for Fascist Chile General’.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Robertson Interview, 2009.
\textsuperscript{60} SUA (Victorian Branch) Minutes of Stop Work Meeting held Unity Hall Tuesday, 25th February, 1974, 5, Seamen’s Union of Australia [hereinafter SUA]: Federal Office, N38/639, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
office’s stance.61 The Fremantle branch, however, unanimously carried their resolution endorsing the federal office’s position. The West Australian, Port Kembla, Sydney, Newcastle and South Australian branches all carried to support the national office,62 but internal SUA dissent and even unified opposition to the action would be little more than a scratch on the history of the delegation.

Leaving behind the disagreement between the unions and the machinations of political factions, the delegation set off for Chile via Tahiti on 23 March 1974. They were almost the only passengers aboard.63 The delegates were Jim Baird (the official AMWU representative), Steve Cooper (endorsed by the MWA), Ron Masterson (Plumbers and Gasfitters Union, Newcastle Branch), Brian McMahon (Transport Workers’ Union, Victorian organiser),64 Henry McCarthy (travelling as a journalist) and Carmen Bull (translator and Argentinean-born wife of prominent CPA member and WWFA organiser Tas Bull).65 Not surprisingly, not one delegate was a member of the SPA.66 Many of the delegates were not paid their union wages for the period they were away, but the unions invested funds in the trip and expected results.67 Their activities in Chile were to include a meeting with the Minister for the Interior, a visit to a detention centre and multiple factories, and meetings with the ex-minister of labour as well as underground and stranded trade unionists.68

Steve Cooper described their arrival in Chile in his notes:

Night. Santiago patterned with lights as we land, full of forebodings.

The rest of the passengers leave. The plane is well out in the airport. We descend the stairs and cluster at the bottom. It is very dark with a thin, swirling mist.

He continued:

61 ‘Seamen Reject Invitation for Fascist Chile General’.
62 SUA (WA Branch) minutes of stop work meeting held in Waterside Workers’ Federation Hall—Fremantle—Tuesday, 26th, February, 1974, SUA: Federal Office, N38/639, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; ‘Seamen Reject Invitation for Fascist Chile General’.
63 Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
64 McMahon was a lawyer. The Commission of Enquiry, 1974.
65 The AMWU Commonwealth Council: Re: Chile Fact-Finding Mission.
66 Against political exclusionism: For a United Front Against the Repression in Chile—Spartacist League.
67 Henry McCarthy received 10 days’ leave without pay to travel on this delegation. Several unions contributed to his airfare. Mission to Chile (minutes of CAC Meeting, 18-2-74), Papers of GMM; AMWU Commonwealth Council re: Chile Fact Finding Mission.
68 The delegation also saw General Schneider’s daughters, a bishop who was key to getting interviews with workers and students and so on, interviewed between 30 and 40 people, and took a pocket camera to try to catch images without being noticed by the military. They possibly visited a women’s prison, found that soldiers from the south had been sent to the north and vice versa in order to make soldiers more likely to follow orders and Carmen went out after the curfew in attempts to make contacts. They visited the towns of Valparaiso, Santiago, Antofagasta, Tocopilla, Maria-Elena and Chuquicamata. They met with representatives of the CUT, Metal Workers, Textile workers, CEPCH, Railway workers, Sugar Workers, Dockers, Copper Workers, Hospital Employees and Lan Chile’s Union. Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’; The Commission of Enquiry, 1974.
Out of the mist some soldiers emerge, walking towards us. One is dapper with a moustache. Major Figueroa. But he smiles and politely asks about our trip, and we can relax. We sense he is ‘O.K.’ given that the city is otherwise crawling with psychotic killers in uniform.

So far, so good.69

Relying on gut instinct was a must, as the delegate’s grasp of Spanish was, in general, rudimentary.

The highest-profile meeting with the junta was with Oscar Bonilla Bradanovic, an army general and co-conspirator with Pinochet, who later met his death in a suspicious helicopter accident in 1975.70 He was minister of the interior and he met the Australian unionists dressed in perfect, crisp military uniform. He greeted the Australian unionists by saying, ‘you have come from a paradise, and I have just left hell’.71 Bonilla’s idea of hell was the three years of government under Allende, which had represented such hope for the Australian unionists. This poorly disguised, combative mockery must have heightened the tension in the room, a hypothesis that was supported by the language of the report written by David McIntyre, a South American affairs expert from the Australian Embassy in Argentina.72 Led by James Baird, the Australians tried their best to extract information about the ‘hell’ they had come to investigate.73

The general followed his confrontational opening with a claim that there was 80 per cent popular support for the military government. He then made remarks emphasising the freedom of Australians to form their own opinion on what was happening in Chile. The interview was opened to questions and the Australians began to probe intensely. They sought answers regarding the detention of unionists, the conditions at the Dawson Island prison camp in Tierra del Fuego and confirmation that torture had taken place.74 At this time Bonilla was still supporting the general facade of the military government: that it was a

69 Major Figueroa was not related to the labour leader also named Figueroa. Cooper, ‘Journey to Chile. 1974’, notes transcribed to one copy on return to Australia, copy in possession of author.
71 Conversation with General Oscar Bonilla (Minister of the Interior) and Trade Union Delegation, 25 March 1974, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
73 Baird acted as the main negotiator with Bonilla. He was chosen possibly because he was the only delegate with a national organiser position, and was thus the highest in rank. Baird’s aim was getting people back to Australia. Gustavo Martin Montenegro’s family came to Australia because of Baird’s work. Judy Lyons, ‘Chilean Refugee “Tortured, Threatened with Death”’, AMWU Monthly Journal (1974); Cooper et al. Conversation, 2007.
74 Press Statement of the AMWU—7/2/74: What is the Chilean Junta Up To?
benevolent dictatorship forced to act because of the serious Marxist threat to the people of Chile and the world. Bonilla insisted that ‘the objectives of the government [were] to reinstate democracy and normalcy’.75

Figure 7.1 Australian trade unionists speak with General Oscar Bonilla.

Source: From left: Jim Baird [unconfirmed], Steve Cooper, unknown member of the Australian diplomatic core [possibly Jim Lindsay or David Macintyre], General Bonilla. ‘La Patria’, Martes 26 de Marzo de 1974, AMWU: National Office, Z112 box 7, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.

A photograph of some of the delegation in the interview with General Bonilla appeared on the front page of La Patria, a Chilean newspaper in print at the time. It was part of the strategy of the military government to appear open and transparent to foreign visitors. The caption below the photograph tells the

75 Conversation with General Oscar Bonilla (Minister of the Interior) and Trade Union Delegation, 25 March 1974, 3.
reader that the visit of the Australian trade unionists was not of a ‘political character’ and that they did not want to visit Dawson Island Detention Centre. In the extensive files of the AMWU, a cut-out of the article appears. It is circled various times in ink, with the following words scribbled by an unknown hand: ‘this is a complete lie. Thats what we went for.’

Although the delegates did not visit Dawson Island as they had hoped, they did win a small victory when they were granted permission to enter the Chacabuco Detention Centre. The visit was perhaps the most important aspect of the delegation to Chile, however confused the Australians were about the spelling of its name. Writing Spanish words and names down as they sounded resulted in distinctively Australianised versions of words being used throughout the whole Chile solidarity movement. In this case, the Chacabuco centre was ‘Chakabooka’, ‘Chacabouka’ in a report and ‘Chacavuco’ in a union newspaper, resulting from the Chilean accent, which often leads to confusion of the sounds of ‘b’ and ‘v’.

Despite some uncertainty over the most basic information, the intense feeling of solidarity and the determination of delegates Jim Baird, Carmen Bull and Ron Masterson were obvious as they travelled deep into the Atacama Desert to the detention centre. Chacabuco was a nitrate-mining ghost town, deserted in the 1930s. In 1974 it was surrounded by layers of fencing with wooden guard towers. The buildings were very old and dusty, but rust and decay-free as a result of the dry climate in which they were situated. The freshly painted signs on the outside of the area indicated ‘Minas’: mines.

The delegation members procured a taxi to travel the 260 km from Tocopilla in the north of Chile. The detention centre guards carried machine guns and peered cautiously into the vehicle that had appeared out of the desert. They forced the Australians to hand over their passports and then the letter from Minister Bonilla, which ‘caused a small stir’. A guard, still carrying his gun, squashed into the car with the delegates as they drove into the camp. Since their arrival in Chile, the list of detained men the delegates hoped to speak to had grown to include academics, metal workers and a number of other unionists and non-unionists; however, only 20 inmates were led out into an enclosed garden area where some small plants struggled against the elements. They sat in a rotunda.

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76 Sindicalistas Australianos, 1974, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. Baird later spoke to an aide of the Minister for the Interior, who told him the minister was ‘furious that the delegation was doing what it wanted’. Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.

77 Chacabuco was one of the places pointed out by the WFTU as a potential place to visit. Press Statement of the AMWU—7/2/74: What is the Chilean Junta Up To?


79 Chacabooka, 1974; The AMWU Commonwealth Council: Re: Chile Fact-Finding Mission.

80 Baird, ‘After the Coup’.
The inmates looked worn out, but clean. They stated that they had received relatively good treatment at Chacabuco, where they were allowed to receive censored letters and visitors too if they had the means to travel all the way into the desert. Although they were all held without charges, the men were relatively happy to be at that particular centre. They thought it was the best camp, used by the junta purposely to mislead foreigners investigating human rights abuses. Jim Baird wrote in a report: ‘It was a moving situation at the end, as we decided after 1½ hours to leave. They embraced us and gave us an emotional farewell.’

The Australians walked with the men towards their barracks behind a fence. Furtively, a metalworker pressed a piece of paper into the hand of a delegation member.

They then halted, all trying to talk to Carmen [the only delegate present with fluent Spanish]. I think to try and convey some last minute thoughts. We bid them farewell and stood and waved as they walked back towards the wire enclosure accompanied by the group of armed guards who shepherded them through a wire gate about 12 ft. wide and 8 ft. high. They stood and continued to wave until at last they were moved towards the huts which were in rows behind the wire.81

Later, when the Australian read the note, it said ‘we expect a lot of you comrade. We look to you to tell the Australian workers of what has happened.’82 The delegates were anxious to leave the oppressive and intense environment, and refused the commanding officers’ invitation to dine.83 They drove back into the desert, heading towards the sea and away from ‘what can only be described, with all its emotive force, as a concentration camp’.84

To make the most of their time in Chile, the Australians had split into smaller groups. Despite this, the chaperones succeeded in taking up chunks of time by insisting on sightseeing and picnics. Still, the delegates succeeded in visiting Luis Figueroa, who was under the protection an embassy in Santiago.85 Figueroa had been Allende’s minister for labour and the president of the CUT, the peak union body in Chile. He spoke at length to the Australian unionists about the crimes of the junta and the present trade union conditions in Chile, reporting that the CUT had been dissolved and its assets confiscated. Trade unionists who remained in office, said Figueroa, were Christian democrats or members of the

81 Chacabooka.
82 Discussion with Metal Workers and Building Industry Leaders. Tuesday, 2nd April, 1974, PGEUA: Federal Office, N133/203, NBAC, ANU, Canberra, 1974, 7.
83 He was an air force officer, trained in the United States. He was eager for company, as he disliked the prison and the desert. Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
84 12 Days in Chile, 1974.
85 The delegates made their way there accompanied by Australian Embassy officials (possibly including Jim Lindsay). Cooper et al. Conversation, 2007; Minutes of CAC meeting, 27-5-74, Papers of GMM.
right. Despite what was happening in Chile, it was the failure of workers of the world to develop international action against multinationals that primarily concerned Figueroa. Steve Cooper, hearing this after attending the conference on multinationals the year before in Chile, must have been filled with dismay. Still, Figueroa said ‘the fact that this Delegation can talk to the unions and to the people in gaols has created a great lift in morale among the Chilean trade unionist[s]’. He also proposed ‘a toast to the delegation and to international trade union unity’.86

Delegates met two members of the Confederación de Empleados Particulares de Chile (CEPCH: the Chilean Employees’ Confederation) with the aid of the Australian Embassy. Both were Christian democrats and they described the dire situation of workers in Chile, including the blacklisting of UP supporters by employers. Now the mere accusation of political activity could lead to instant dismissal.87 The report of the conversation described the emerging economic conditions of the workers and the speculation over numbers of dead and missing. It continued: ‘Now, to deal with the main problem. Most of the union officials are dead, gaoled or have lost their jobs, therefore cannot be organised.’88

The military government had no respect for the organised labour movement, and the military chiefs in each town were given almost unlimited power.89 For unionists in Chile, the report related that ‘the objectives to-day are to survive, to defend our friends, and to achieve freedom for the unions and end the state of war’.90

As well as the Madeco factory visit detailed at the beginning of this chapter, Steve Cooper also visited Indumet, a ‘small but modern’ sawmill equipment manufacturer in the suburb of San Miguel, only 6 km from the centre of Santiago.91 The factory had been under workers’ control until the day of the coup. On that day, a tank and soldiers had broken into the factory and at least 14 workers had been killed. Another version of the story was that carabineros attacked the factory and, following CUT orders, the workers offered armed resistance. Three of the policemen died and later the army retaliated. Sixteen workers were disappeared.92

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86 The AMWU Commonwealth Council: Re: Chile Fact-Finding Mission.
87 Ibid.
88 Interview with a Member of CEPCH.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Cooper remembered the workers he had met a year earlier had all ‘seemed to me cordial, intelligent and conscientious ordinary trade unionists doing their best to implement industrial democracy’. Not one of them was left working at the factory when Cooper returned in 1974.

Cooper also met with some surviving members of the Textile Workers’ Union of Chile. That union’s membership had been predominantly socialist and communist and consequently had suffered heavy losses in the initial repression of the regime. The men sitting across from Cooper shared some of the shocking and painful stories of the terror of life under the dictatorship. Workers had been executed in their workplaces and military personnel killed families and burnt houses if their search for arms was resisted. The men said ‘there was a lot of torture. At the national stadium some … were shot. They pulled out fingernails. They castrated men. They violated and raped women and pushed pisco bottles into their vaginas.’

The confronting stories together with the constant tension of being under armed guard must have put immense strain on the delegates. But it also drew them together. ‘Saturday night. Shared a room with Ron Masterson’, wrote Cooper in his notes. They ‘chatted away until shut up by rifle fire nearby. (Silly Ron tries to stick his head out to see what’s going on). If the place was bugged, they got our life stories.’

The room may or may not have been bugged, but there were definitely guards. Jim Baird found this out when a cleaner took him aside and gestured towards another room. In it were armed guards. Baird also recalled that on the way to a mine visit, they stopped to admire the scenery and as a result arrived 20 minutes late. The carabinero at the gate proceeded to beat the driver for this transgression. The ‘interpreter’ swiftly pulled out his identification card, and the policeman stopped beating the man, and saluted. People were not who they seemed and not everyone could be trusted. The interpreter was clearly more than a clerk.

In their report in the CPA organ Tribune, Baird, McCarthy and Bull wrote that ‘the delegation worked tirelessly and with an average of four hours sleep a night to see as much as possible of life in Chile’. They visited the shantytown El Carmen, and Cooper articulated the experience of returning to where he had

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93 The AMWU Commonwealth Council: Re: Chile Fact-Finding Mission.
94 2.4.74—Textile workers Union of Chile interview, April 2 1974, AMWU: National Office, z122 Box 7, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
95 Baird, ‘After the Coup’.
96 Cooper, ‘Journey to Chile. 1974’.
97 Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
98 Ibid.
been welcomed a year earlier: ‘I walked on into the settlement and asked a worker about Sergio, Vincente and the twelve others I knew, and he told me they had all been shot. It just felt like the end of everything.’

The delegates were taken to the river where the bodies had been dumped.

Almost 10 days in Chile had passed before the delegation was contacted by any of the banned, underground unions. On 2 April 1974, a secret meeting was set up with representatives of the Chilean underground resistance to the dictatorship. A trusted interpreter accompanied Masterson, Cooper and Baird. One of these men wrote:

After passing through a number of back streets in Santiago, we came to an old two-storey building, part of a row of buildings, we were ushered into the front room through a hallway to meet two Chileans in their 30s or 40s. A careful exchange of information followed as to our connections and they volunteered that they were among the remaining free leaders who had been the national leadership of the metal workers.

The Australians learned that many unionists had been detained and murdered. The unionists could still use the building, because the Metal Workers’ Union had given it to the Archbishop of Santiago, thus preventing the military from confiscating it as they had done with other unions’ property. The men had not been home since the coup of 11 September 1973 and were in danger of being detained. They believed that if they returned home, they would not only be captured, but also their families would be persecuted. The unnamed, nervous men proceeded to outline the limited nature of organised opposition to the junta; but after some minutes, they were interrupted: ‘we were joined by a very impressive man in his 40s who was introduced to us as a leader of the Building Trades Workers. From the onset, he commanded the discussion with the delegation.’

The building worker was heavily involved in the resistance to the military government. He accused the Chileans who had already left the country of ‘running away’ and was strongly focused on unifying the forces of the political left and the general populace to fight the military government. The Australian unionists expressed their desire to help the resistance in Chile, but the charismatic man replied that he was looking to political parties for support, not

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100 Cooper, ‘Journey to Chile. 1974’.
101 Roe, ‘Notes for Speech’.
102 Discussion with Metal Workers and Building Industry Leaders. Tuesday, 2nd April, 1974.
103 Ibid.
trade unionists. The Australians replied: organised resistance could come ‘from the militant trade unionists in Australia, who would be able to look for political support from the working class parties’.104

The statement seemed to win the trust of the Chilean men. The interpreter present said that the conversation he heard was ‘the most open and frank’ discussion since the unions had been forced underground months earlier. The Australians wanted to offer the men some form of immediate assistance, so rifled in their pockets to produce all the cash they had to give to the underground unionists. It totalled $100. The Chileans reciprocated by presenting the Australians with three albums of Victor Jara’s recordings as the meeting ended emotionally.

The final paragraph of the report places the meeting in an international context and underlines the responsibility that the Australians felt for the Chilean workers and their situation. ‘This meeting, taking place as it did in the back streets of Santiago in the bare surroundings of an empty house, for me, was a most moving experience’, recalled a delegation member:

It leaves one with a deep appreciation of the dedication and sacrifices made by these workers in the struggle against the Chilean fascists and the need of those who are free to help them in their life and death struggle, cannot be over emphasised as a part of the world movement for Freedom and Democracy.105

The Australians felt their efforts had not been wasted as the underground unionists expressed their very deep appreciation of the delegation’s visit. They felt that as a result, many trade unionists were alive or free because of the fear by the Junta of adverse international publicity about their anti union actions. They said that in the few weeks prior to us arriving, there had been considerable publicity in the press and progressives everywhere were hoping that we would go back and tell the story of what was happening in Chile.106

The story was told.

The delegation returned home from Chile on 4 April 1974 and shortly after produced a four-page broadsheet newspaper entitled 12 Days in Chile, which was published in seven languages around the world. The paper outlined the activities, findings and successes of the Australian trade union representatives, as well as relaying the message from Chilean trade unionists to take action

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
against the military junta.\textsuperscript{107} The paper showed some photos of the delegation in Chile, Chilean children and acts of repression such as book burning. The articles described to the reader the tyranny of the military government, giving accounts of talks with Luis Figueroa and the underground members and visits to shantytowns and factories. They also published a letter to Bob Hawke (at the time the president of the ACTU) from Figueroa and called for more protests by Australian unions. In a brief description of the delegation’s achievements, they included the petitioning for the release of political prisoners Olivares and Enríquez (which occurred in the weeks after the return of the delegations). They also listed the retrieval of information and discussions with everyday Chileans as ‘solid achievements, going beyond what was possible for representatives of previous delegations’.\textsuperscript{108}

They also produced a report that went out to WFTU-aligned unions, even those which opposed the delegation. In it, the delegates reported the broad range of opinions they had encountered, such as one Chilean saying that ‘Chileans who have left Chile should not lose touch with those who remain’,\textsuperscript{109} and another who said that Chileans in exile had ‘run away’ and were not of any help.\textsuperscript{110}

Despite this openness, Robertson recalls:

\begin{quote}
When they came back, and the people from the Seamen’s union in particular attacked them … [the AMWU] were the biggest union in the country at the time and … I think their attitude was to say that ‘I don’t think we’re going to have people telling us that we’ve done the wrong thing and we didn’t achieve anything, when we have!’\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

Luis Figueroa, ex-minister in Allende’s Government, said of the delegation’s visit: ‘because it reached the Chilean people, [the delegation] is of great international importance and gives great support to the Chileans fighting against oppression, we recognise that their concern is an expression of international solidarity.’\textsuperscript{112}

Words such as these must have been tough to swallow by those who had vehemently opposed the delegation. The action was a significant marker in the history of Australian trade union internationalism. It was a product of the size of the AMWU and strategic individuals within it. Without the resources inherent in the membership boom or the individuals connected through politics and common internationalist sentiment, the delegation would not have happened.

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\textsuperscript{107} Baird, ‘After the Coup’.
\textsuperscript{108} 12 Days in Chile.
\textsuperscript{109} Press Statement of the AMWU—7/2/74: What is the Chilean Junta Up To?
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Robertson Interview, 2009.
\textsuperscript{112} 12 Days in Chile.
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But it wasn’t without social movement links: Steve Cooper, an example of a modern-day faddist, was involved in the union and deep within the CSCP. It made him a unique and driven participant in the delegation and the activities that followed. His involvement also exposes a slight flaw in this otherwise seamless classification of the delegation as solidarity by unionists for unionists. He was clearly linked to the solidarity committee in more than just name. Consequently, the rigidity of the theoretical classification is put to the test when trying to file the delegation as an action of social movement or industrial national unionism. It is true the delegation remained relatively clear of the social movement, but its contribution was relied upon in more than one way by trade unions and the movement.

It is hard to determine the exact depth of reaction or influence of the delegation as it formed part of a broad web of solidarity actions that took place across the world. It is certain that the authority, rhetoric and symbolism of such an indirect action was enhanced by the fact that this delegation was one of the only types of action that was created by the trade unions, rather than being an opportunistic expression of internationalism.

Mavis Robertson recalled that the delegation ‘got fantastic results, I mean, they got unbelievable results when you think about it’. They acted on the ideal of an international working class that was drawn from their own political ideals. The efforts of these men ‘resulted in a world-wide exposure of the suppression and victimisation of the labour movement’. Locally, they were able to use their experiences in Chile to raise awareness and accumulate support for the initial wave of the Chile movement.

113 Robertson Interview, 2009.
114 Statement by L. Figueroa and L. Meneses to the Delegates of the ACTU Congress, September 17 1975.
115 Baird, ‘After the Coup’; 12 Days in Chile.
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