8. ‘Not one pound of wheat will go’: Words and actions

The *Holstein Express* was crewed by Indonesian seamen, but it sailed under a Liberian flag. Its Australian agents, Dalgety and Patricks, had been charged with the shipment of 600 dairy cows to Chile. In the week of 4 December 1978, the ship attempted to dock in Newcastle to load but was black banned by Australian workers. Union members would not assist with loading the cargoes. They simply refused. After discussion between the workers’ representatives and the agents, it was agreed that the ship could anchor outside the harbour in Stockton Bight and receive water and stores. It remained off Newcastle for two weeks.

In stop-work meetings on 19 December 1978, the Sydney, Port Kembla, Port Adelaide and Victorian branches of the SUA all passed motions of support for the actions of their Newcastle branch. And shortly thereafter a white flag was raised by the owners in the form of a communiqué shown to the maritime unions that the ship would depart for New Zealand without cattle if it was able to refuel. The maritime unions allowed the ship to dock and refuel and it set off on 22 December 1978, apparently without cows and apparently for New Zealand. The company was in the middle of a goosestep that spanned the State.

The next day, Don Henderson, secretary of the Firemen and Deckhands’ Union, was urgently advised that the ship was in fact at the southern NSW town of Eden loading hay and cattle. The union delegate at Eden was contacted and subsequently the local fishermen who had been hired to load the cattle stopped work. The ship’s crew and the vendors were forced to load the cattle themselves and the vessel departed for New Zealand on Sunday, 24 December 1978. Don Henderson immediately sent a telegram to the Morgan Lighthouse in New Zealand to ensure that the unions there would boycott the vessel. In response to the agent’s deceptive attempt to circumvent the black bans, the maritime unions of New South Wales placed a blanket ban on all Dalgety and Patricks’
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ships. This remained until 4 January 1979 when the agents produced written confirmation that they would not act for any ships trading with Chile.\(^8\) The WWFA chose to believe them.

That year, three classes of livestock worth $570 000 made it to Chile, including 1348 bovine animals and one horse. As this represents many more animals than was reported in the *Seamen’s Journal* (only 600), it is possible there was another ship during that year, the *Journal* was misinformed or the *Journal* deliberately played down the size of the shipment.\(^9\) Regardless, the total live animal export to Chile constituted less than 10 per cent of the total $7.6 million exports that made it to Chile in that financial year. So why was this short, ultimately unsuccessful boycott hailed as ‘Unions’ Chile Solidarity Victory’?\(^10\)

This chapter reconstructs and explains the intricacies of a trade boycott used for political purposes. It delves further into union size, tactical positioning of union labour, strategic individuals and internationalist rhetoric. It explains the influence of these factors on industrial action for external political purposes. While declarations of black ban and boycott action were imperative to some unions’ internationalist identity, ultimately jobs were more important than any distant political gain. Consequently, the size of the shipment to be boycotted played a role in the decision-making of a union, where ultimately industrial protection was paramount. Like the engineers in East Kilbride and shipbuilders on the Clyde from past chapters, the key issue in the final instance was jobs—jobs the unions were constituted to protect.

Australian workers in the SUA and WWFA were employed in internationalist professions.\(^11\) The products they dealt with were transnational, and the conditions on the job exposed workers to people of many cultures. Furthermore, in the case of seamen, the cramped conditions on board obliged them to be tolerant. On the ship there was the opportunity to read and on land previous generations of radicals gave new lads their political education.\(^12\) Wharves and ships were radical spaces in the 1970s, but more than that, seamen and wharfies conceived of themselves as radicals. Seamen Paddy Crumlin said of his union: ‘The industrial work was complemented by the political work, our identity was with social issues.’ \(^13\) The boycott of the Chilean regime was not only a political statement, but also an assertion of identity, and for that reason it was consistently represented as ‘successful’ by the left press and trade unionists both at the time and subsequently.

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\(^8\) ‘Unions’ Chile Solidarity Victory’, *Socialist*, 17 January 1979.
\(^9\) ‘Blow for Solidarity’.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Ibid., 181.
\(^13\) Ibid., 413.
Boycotting, for both the Seamen’s Union and the Waterside Workers’ in Australia, embodied their internationalism: it was a representation of their socialist and humanitarian identities. As John Healy (WWFA) said, ‘the fight of the Chilean people cannot be viewed as their fight alone’.14 The same rhetoric in support of boycotting was also repeated by Chileans in exile who consistently called for the action against the junta by trade unions.15 For example, visiting the UP in exile, representative Hugo Miranda said, ‘I must say that we think the most important way to fight against the military Junta is the way that you have elected; that is to say, the trade union bans, the boycott’.16

The seamen and the waterside workers had used boycott action as a political statement before. As recently as December 1972 the Sydney Waterside Workers had banned US shipping in protest against the bombing of North Vietnam. In the same year, the SUA had boycotted the Spanish ship Pedro de Alvarado in protest against the antidemocratic policies of the Franco Government.17 Stretching back into the 1930s, the waterside workers had black banned shipping for a number of causes including anti-Japanese imperialism, anti-Dutch imperialism and anti-apartheid.18 The anti-Japan actions protested the invasion of China and were known as the Pig Iron Bans, after the main export boycotted. The Pig Iron Bans led to large-scale layoffs in Port Kembla.19 The name ‘the Black Armada’ refers to the actions, including boycotts and mutinies, that maritime workers took in the 1940s to support Indonesia’s independence from the Netherlands.20 During the 1960s and early 1970s, there was no shortage of international issues to act upon including the Greek military junta, apartheid in South Africa and of course the Vietnam War. Historian Rupert Lockwood wrote in 1975 that his colleagues of the future would find that during this period, ‘the conscience of the Australian people found expression more often on the waterfront than in the nation’s legislatures’.21 Nevertheless, much of the wharfies’ internationalism in the 1970s was around ‘bread and butter’ issues, especially after they joined the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) in 1971. The organisers spent a great deal of their time sorting out pay disputes and safety issues for foreign seamen.22

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14 Healy, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
15 For example, see: ‘Aid to Chile Struggle’, 7. The same rhetoric was used by the ILO: ‘ILO Call to Fight Chile Torturers’, *Maritime Worker*, 2 September 1975, 7.
16 ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
17 ‘Maritime Action on Franco Ship’, *SPA*, September 1972. This is not mentioned in the *Sweeney Report*, which cites a WWFA pay dispute due to arsenic spills on this ship. This could have been a later voyage. This possibly indicates that the ban was a one-off. John Bernard Sweeney, *Royal Commission into Alleged Payments to Maritime Unions* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1976), 134.
20 Lockwood, *Black Armada*.
21 Ibid., 253.
For Chile, however, the WWFA policy was internationalism pure and simple: ‘that no Chilean ships and no cargoes to or from Chile will be handled on the Australian waterfront.’

Using the boycott as a political tactic against the Chilean dictatorship had the potential to be effective in various ways. First, there was economic loss as a motivator for change in the junta. Second, the boycott could serve to lift the morale of leftist forces in Chile or at the very least, individuals imprisoned there as well as Chileans in exile. Enacting a boycott was a concrete gesture of worldwide working-class solidarity. Anner notes that left-wing unions are more likely to pursue an internationalist agenda, especially internationalism in its more confrontational forms. This tendency must have been further exacerbated by the fact that the impact of the coup in Chile was first felt in the left and therefore was a ‘socialist’ issue. No-one was surprised that the SUA and WWFA took action, as they had the reputation of being among the most radical unions in Australia. In fact, Stephen Deery wrote in 1983 that political stoppages in Australia are very few, and mostly from stevedoring, maritime, building and metal industries.

In more than one sense, Australian maritime unionists held a ‘unique position in the workforce’. Not only was their identity internationalist but also their physical location was strategic, with a high percentage of primary products and manufactured goods passing through their jurisdiction. This was intensified by Australia’s geographic isolation and the topographical distance between cities, which necessitated reliance on sea transport. The maritime unions expressed solidarity through telegrams and letters, as was normal for progressive unions, but the difference between them and other unions was that almost all of their work was a potential direct action on an international issue.

Historian Diane Kirkby has proposed that the internationalism of the SUA was an identification with other individuals: a person-to-person commitment that overcame the difficulties of action. Activist Mavis Robertson remembered:

There is a cultural history in Australia, perhaps because it is a continent that ... is bound by sea ... that those kind of bans have been more
prevalent in Australia than in some other countries. It doesn’t mean that we are more solidarity conscious, it means … that it is a cultural right thing to do.30

Both of these conclusions are true in part, but, in the case of the Chile campaign, internationalism was also an assertion of political identity. SUA member John King said, ‘because that’s what we are, we endeavour to help the underdog’.31

The SUA, as outlined above, has a proud history of international action. In fact, their pride was the cause of an exceptionalist attitude within the union. The union’s record of international actions was mentioned almost every time their representatives spoke at a function as if they were bastions of true internationalist action. That projection of identity was a simplification of the SUA’s actions within the broader union movement. For example, members had declined the invitation to crew the Boonaroo, which was shipping supplies and troops to Vietnam for the war.32 After threats of disciplinary action from the ACTU and a compulsory conference at the Arbitration Court, the SUA allowed members to crew the ship.33 The choice to lift a ban on the Boonaroo showed that however hard-line their leaders were, the SUA was not impervious to pressure from the rest of the labour movement.34

In her history of the SUA, Diane Kirkby notes that the seamen had a reputation for being a communist-led union. While many members were politically aware and active, very few were actually card carriers of the CPA or SPA.35 Leaders, Kirkby asserts, were not elected because of their political affiliation, but because they were good unionists. The SUA was a democratic and collectivist union: democracy was built into the union’s procedures and organisation.36 It was not unusual to have resolutions and letters forwarded from ships, as the SUA was an organisation on the move, literally, and no-one was to be left out.

In 1971 the SUA had approximately 4500 members, though given the mobile nature of their working life, it was impossible to gather every member into a single meeting. The union was affiliated to the ACTU, and State labour councils and to the ALP in all States except the Northern Territory and Tasmania.37 But the SUA was known to be more radical than those affiliations suggest. The reputation was due in part to its secretary, Eliot V. Elliott, who, as Don

30 Robertson Interview, 2009.
31 Kirkby, Voices from the Ships, 86.
33 Ibid.
34 Kirkby, Voices from the Ships, 51, 52.
36 Officials were elected by ballot; port representatives and seamen were elected at stop-work meetings. Ibid., 141.
37 Rawson, A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees’ Associations, 84.
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Henderson quipped in 1972, had been in the SUA for ‘more years than I even want to think about’. 38 Elliott had been a founding member of the SPA, and before that, a Communist Party member since 1941. He was a Leninist and a supporter of socialist countries until his death in 1984. 39 Elliott was still a trim and fit man in the 1970s, with a carefully tended moustache. 40 Elliott was known to be a straight talker, straight up and down and sometimes humourless, and Don Henderson told Kirkby he was a ‘very dogged fighter for human rights, the rights of people everywhere’. 41 He was persuasive and intimidating, and believed SUA members had the opportunity to spread internationalist ideology around the world. Of Chile, Elliott wrote: ‘The struggle of the Chilean people is, in our opinion, the struggle of the Australian people, for the struggle of the people everywhere in the world under bourgeois democracy is a common struggle.’ 42

Elliott took a personal interest in the maintenance of the Chile boycott—for example, attending the Sydney branch stop-work meeting to explain the Holstein Express dispute. 43

Stop-work meetings were in fact essential to the functioning of the SUA and to their expression of Chile solidarity. Federal office reports were distributed to branches and then discussed at the monthly meetings, resulting in branches that were very well informed of official union business at the national level. 44 Mick Carr, SUA member, said ‘all good trade unionists went to the stop work meetings’. 45 Stop-work meetings were effectively paid for by shipowners, as everyone in port at that time received half a day’s paid leave. 46 In these circumstances it was easy to be good. In theory, a deck boy could propose a motion at a meeting that could flow back into union policy, although it was not that often that the rank and file went against the union leadership’s recommendations. 47 Similarly at elections, officials were almost always retained. Even so, the discussion at meetings demonstrated consistent strength in anti-Chile dictatorship feeling. By comparison, British seamen were also generally compliant with their

38 ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
40 Kirkby, Voices from the Ships, 17.
41 Ibid., 19, 20.
42 Elliott, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
44 For example, the SUA Queensland branch called for the national office to continue discussions with the ACTU on the Chile issue so that the ACTU support of the boycott would be reimposed. Extract SWM minutes held Queensland Branch Tuesday May 2nd 1978 ref. 1422, SUA: Federal Office, N38/299, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
45 Kirkby, Voices from the Ships, 145.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 147–8.
leadership’s orders; however, they were exposed to much more Chilean trade and consequently the prospective loss of more jobs, which influenced decision-making on the ground.

Members of the SUA were kept informed through the *Seamen’s Journal*, which often reported on Chile. Elliott’s wife, Kondelia, was in charge of the federal office and the *Seamen’s Journal*. Given the control of the administrative hub of the union, the true democratic practice in the union was possibly less robust than has been previously put forward. It was the sort of democracy that Lenin, and Elliott, favoured: democratic centralism. One thing is certain, however, the *Journal* and the stop-work meetings were the main expressions of Chile solidarity within the SUA. Almeyda, executive secretary of the UP in exile, sent a long letter to the SUA that was republished and it served to motivate sailors. He wrote that the solidarity of the SUA saved lives and freed people from concentration camps. Almeyda put it simply: ‘the boycott holds back Pinochet’s plans to arrest the trade union leaders and make them disappear.’

When the Chilean musical group Inti Illimani attended the Melbourne branch’s monthly meeting in April 1977, they spoke about the boycott of wheat and sang two songs. In response, the SUA branch produced and passed a strong resolution; however, the band did not perform for the WWFA Melbourne branch, even though it represented a greater number of unionists with perhaps more strategic power. That branch was dominated by Maoists at the time, who did not like the sound of the Marxist–Leninist singers.

Of the two main unions which enacted the boycott on Chilean goods, the WWFA was far greater in size, industrial power and perhaps also in political influence. The WWFA held the most privileged position from which to implement a boycott action. Not only was stevedoring an unavoidable part in the trade between Australia and Chile, but there was also a law that stated that no member of a foreign crew may be engaged in the stevedoring of a ship. In addition, their membership was larger and more spread out over the continent. For these reasons they had more opportunities to put their boycott into action than the SUA: where Australian-crewed ships were only a small percentage of all that sailed, almost every ship that came into Australia would be touched in some way by WWFA members. In contrast with the SUA, the organisation did not widely publicise its threatened Chile action in its journal despite, or perhaps because of, its actions’ potential greater efficacy.

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48 Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships*, 149, 154.
50 Report on the Tour of Inti Illimani (Melbourne 5.4.77). Papers of GMM.
51 Hewett Interview, 2005.
In 1976, the WWFA had members in every Australian port working in stevedoring. The union was affiliated to the ACTU (at State and national levels) and the ALP in all States. Between 1965 and 1975, the WWFA membership had fallen from 23,000 to just more than 13,000 due to new technologies on the wharf. Ironically, considering the dramatic loss of members, the 1973 elections started a period of organisational stability for the national WWFA. At the next four elections, Leo Lenane, Tas Bull, Charlie Fitzgibbon and Neil Docker were all re-elected at the national level.

Though the WWFA was often presented as the epitome of the ‘communist menace’ union, this was not necessarily the case. Card-carrying communists were in fact a minority throughout the WWFA. Margo Beasley noted in her history of the union that although the fact that ‘there was a strong ideological base to the WWF’s industrial strategy is unquestionably true … it was much broader than purely communist in inspiration’. Traditional militancy came out of bad working conditions rather than any advanced class consciousness. In fact, the union was a politically diverse organisation. Mavis Robertson remembered that the WWFA at the national level ‘was a mixed group of people, and as long as Tas [Bull] was there … you had a rational kind of leadership, not an irrational one. (They weren’t vying for positions to go to Moscow, the last thing they would want to do probably).’

There was also diversity at the lower levels. The Port Melbourne branch was dominated by Maoists and five of its members travelled on a 1975 delegation to China. By contrast, the Sydney branch in particular was not completely dominated by any one party, though there were many CPA and SPA-influenced members. Among the most vocal were probably those affiliated to the SPA.

Stephen Deery commented that of all Australian unions, the WWFA ‘has perhaps shown the most persistent level of industrial activity in socio-political issues’, and this fact drew criticism from within the union movement. The wharfies were seen as possibly challenging the constitutional government by using industrial tactics to try to influence parliamentary proceedings or foreign policy. In actuality, despite the perception of consistent militant political
action by the WWFA, most of the disputes the union was involved in were industrial in nature (for example, for safety or wet weather gear) and the union did not always take up the call to boycott.\(^{62}\)

Even with its strong tradition of internationalist sentiment, the WWFA joined the ITF only in 1971. When they did so, Charlie Fitzgibbon, general secretary, was immediately appointed to its executive council.\(^{63}\) It was through the ITF that the WWFA took up a highly publicised flags-of-convenience shipping campaign, which was an economic, industrial and human rights issue. The international movement seemed to benefit from Australia’s involvement in general, as Australians (especially in the maritime unions) were willing to act. Australia’s geographic position also gave credence to the claim of worldwide support.

About the same time as the union joined the ITF, Tas Bull became federal organiser of the WWFA.\(^{64}\) Bull had a strong international bent. You could say that internationalism was one of his passions—which was apt considering his first name (Tasnor) was a conglomerate of Tasmania and Norway, the birthplaces of his parents.\(^{65}\) He was a long-term maritime worker and he spent some of his youth abroad as a seaman. Bull had been a member of the CPA until 1956 and joined the ALP in 1974.\(^{66}\) He was, at one stage, chair of the Hunters Hill ALP.\(^{67}\) Bull was a well-known trade union figure in the 1970s and 1980s, and also worked himself into prominence in the ACTU. His complex web of political connections, strong commitment to internationalism of all types and personal affinity with Latin America made him prominent and useful in the Chile solidarity movement in Australia.\(^{68}\) The affinity was due, at least in part, to his wife, Carmen, who was Argentinean.

Tas Bull and his wife travelled to Chile in 1971 for the first anniversary of the election of Allende. They celebrated alongside Chileans in the National Stadium, which later became a concentration camp in the first days of the military regime.\(^{69}\)

At meetings in Sydney in September 1973, Bull drew on those brief experiences. Yet despite his personal feelings, he remained aloof from the organisational side of the movement. He was not a member of the CSCP and he did not attend

\(^{62}\) Tom Bramble has noted the conservative industrial practice of some CPA union leaders and furthermore lists examples of the WWFA’s non-support of other strikes such as by the Mt Isa Copper Miners in 1964. Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 21, 34.

\(^{63}\) Bull, *Tas Bull, An Autobiography*, 131; Fitzgibbon (WWFA) to McGahen (CSCP), March 21, 1977, Papers of GMM.

\(^{64}\) Bull was federal organiser of the WWFA from 1971 to 1983. Rowan Cahill, ‘Obituary: Tas Bull (31.01.1932–29.05.2003)’, *Labour History*, no. 85 (2003).

\(^{65}\) Ibid.


\(^{68}\) Bull was director of the Cuban Children’s Fund until his death, and spent his seventieth birthday in that country. Bull, *Tas Bull, An Autobiography*.

committee meetings regularly, if at all. Mavis Robertson remembered that he ‘felt things with his heart’ about Latin America, but the Chile issue ‘was not the centre of his life’.70 He was sensible in terms of deploying his own, and his union’s, resources.

In more than one sense, maritime unions cooperated amongst themselves and took initiative in expressing Chile solidarity. They shared some of the public relations burden of the boycott. Sometimes, they acted under a unified banner called the Water Transport Group of Unions, which also included the Firemen and Deckhands Union of New South Wales (FDU).71 For example, the group held a buffet lunch in honour of the visit of Chilean Hugo Miranda in July 1977. Miranda had been a senator for eight years and a member of the UP Government. He survived two years as a political prisoner in Dawson Island and after his release resided as an exile in Mexico.72 As a guest of the CSCP Sydney, Miranda was treated to lunch and spoke to the group along with Benson (SUA Sydney), Elliott, John Healy73 and Henderson.

Don Henderson verbosely welcomed Miranda:

Comrade Hugo Miranda is here to acquaint us, if we need to be acquainted, with the problems that are today confronting the progressive forces of Chile and have confronted those people since September 11, 1973.

I remember that day for two reasons: because of the destruction of democracy in that country and the brutal murder of Allende and some of the other people; and because it happens to be my birthday.74

Henderson was the secretary of the FDU, a small NSW-based union, whose 670 members (in 1971) mainly worked on the Sydney ferries. While it was affiliated to the NSW Labour Council, the union was not an affiliate of the NSW ALP.75 Henderson did not attend all meetings of the CSCP, but went to many. He was most active, it seemed, in the international-level solidarity scene, as described in Chapter Six. He was often sent to represent the maritime unions at international conferences, and the influence he had within the WWFA and SUA was due to his network of SPA contacts.

70 Robertson Interview, 2009.
71 The FDU was described as a ‘kindred union’ of the WWFA Sydney branch. Waterside Workers’ Federation, Branch News, 23 February 1973.
72 ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
73 John Healy, son of Jim Healy, legendary waterside leader and CPA member. ‘Jim Healy’s Cargo Hook’, Maritime Worker, 4 November 1975, 5; Bramble, Trade Unionism in Australia, 21.
74 ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
75 Rawson, A Handbook of Australian Trade Unions and Employees’ Associations, 55.
Henderson had joined the SUA as a deck boy in 1940, and prominent SPA member Eliot Elliott acted as his political mentor.\(^{76}\) His experiences as a deck boy on a hospital ship during World War II influenced his anti-war stance.\(^{77}\) By 1947, with the birth of his first child, he had started work on tugs and moved over to the FDU. Henderson joined his local ALP branch at one stage, trying to infiltrate them and spread SPA sympathy, but when the plot was discovered, he was expelled along with 16 other branch members.\(^{78}\)

Henderson’s commitment to Chile and his SPA membership made him an important figure in the first years of the campaign in Sydney. The combination of his political affiliation and the relatively small size of his union allowed him the time and gave him the drive to devote himself to the Chile cause. Henderson occasionally spoke for a more substantial amount of workers and the Australian solidarity movement than his union position actually warranted. To those involved in the SPA faction of the Australian left, Henderson ‘was a very important player’ in Chile solidarity.\(^{79}\) To those in the CPA stream, he ‘strutted around’ on the world stage due to the maritime union and SPA support. His union position was not as fixed or as broadly representative as, for example, Jim Baird of the AMWU, yet he keenly participated in the kind of ‘prolier than thou’ attitude described by Burgmann.\(^{80}\) In reality, however, it was the small size of his union that was key in the high level of his involvement: he had time on his hands.

Though his political affiliation meant he probably helped more resident Chilean Communist Party members than people from other groups, activists reminisced that he did try to bridge both the political gap and the gap between union and CSCP.\(^{81}\) He was ‘a nice man’, recalled Mavis Robertson, and Ferguson remembered his dedication to the cause.\(^{82}\)

Well before the Chilean coup, in August 1972, the Waterside Workers’ Federation of Australia sent a letter to Salvador Allende. They expressed their admiration for the UP and the Chilean people and their attempts to implement a progressive socialist program. They wrote: ‘We are conscious that there are many powerful forces throughout the world and particularly in the North American continent who will do everything within their power to frustrate your efforts to build a new people’s democratic society in Chile.’

More than just anti-imperialist sentiment, the Waterside Workers expressed particular sympathy with Chile. The letter continued: ‘Our interest is

\(^{76}\) Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships*, 19.
\(^{77}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{79}\) Ferguson Interview, 2009.
\(^{80}\) Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union*, 54.
\(^{81}\) Robertson Interview, 2009.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.; Ferguson Interview, 2009.
particularly related to the fact that this is the first such effort to build a new society in the Southern Hemisphere and in particular in our own region—the South Pacific area.'83

With this support of the UP Government and the general hypersensitivity of the Australian left to capitalist imperialism, it was no surprise that immediately after the coup the WWFA Federal Council released a press statement stating its abhorrence to the happenings in Chile.

But it did not call for a boycott.84

At the All Ports Conference on 19 September 1973, the motion was carried with an addendum initiated by the Sydney WWFA branch: that all branches take industrial action against the military government in Chile.85 This bears close similarity to the manner in which the rank and file from Rolls Royce East Kilbride forced a revision of the original executive’s Chile decision in Britain as described in Chapter Four. The WWFA All Ports Conference also declared that the coup proved there had been CIA interference in Chile, and called upon the Australian Government to raise the matter at the United Nations.

Similarly, the National Secretariat of the SUA immediately condemned the coup publicly by publishing a denunciation in the *Seamen’s Journal* in September 1973.86 In the first stop-work meeting after the coup, Sydney seamen urged the federal office to place a boycott on Chilean trade and soon the boycott was official SUA policy. 87 The Committee of Management decision did not directly call for a boycott, but for members to participate in mobilisation against the Chilean Government.88

It would be months before any industrial action was taken on ships trading with Chile and the main export affected would be wheat.

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83 Letter to President Salvador Allende from WWF of Australia, 4 August 1972.
85 Interestingly, the Federal Council passed a resolution that did not call for industrial action, or the mention of it was not published in the Sydney Branch Waterside Workers’ Federation Branch News. The All Ports Conference is the first official mention of industrial action. All Ports Conference—extract 26, September 19 1973, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; Maritime Worker, 23 October 1973, 4; ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
87 This call for boycott was repeated in the Tribune: ‘Australian union should also urgently consider a boycott of all Chilean goods imported into Australia and the cutting of communications and other links, with thousands of Chilean workers dead, being tortured and bombed in the factories run previously under workers’ control and which they are now so heroically defending, the duty of unions here is clear. Words of solidarity are valuable, but become somewhat hollow if not backed with deeds.’ ‘Chile Cargo Ban’, Tribune [Australia], 2–8 October 1973.
88 1973, National C.O.M Meeting (SUA), Papers of GMM. In fact, the first published SUA call for the direct boycott of Chilean trade was after Don Henderson attended the Mexico City International Commission of Enquiry into the Crimes of the Military Junta in Chile. T. A Curphey, ‘Need Stressed for More Union Action against Chile Junta’, *Seamen’s Journal* (May 1975).
8. 'Not one pound of wheat will go': Words and actions

The first substantial sale of wheat to Chile in many years occurred in 1966 and remained relatively steady until a significant increase in the early 1970s. This was in part due to an amplification of the area sown to wheat and in the yield per acre, which placed pressure on the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) to find extra markets for the bumper crops. Transport strikes in Chile had caused many local crops to be spoiled and made Chile an ideal customer for Australian wheat.

In 1972 Dr Pedro Bosch, representing the Chilean grain-buying authority Empresa de Comercio Agrícola, visited Australia and negotiated the third sale of wheat to Chile for the 1972 season. He was undoubtedly shown a very good time while he was here, as all business the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) undertook was ‘highly personalised’. A total of 600,000 t of wheat was sold to Chile in that year. The contracts secured Chile 7 per cent of the total Australian wheat exports and earned it the ranking of Australia’s fourth-largest wheat customer for 1972. In July 1973 Dr Bosch and the AWB negotiated large sales to Chile while the Allende Government was still in power. The wheat was to be shipped early in 1974 but the coup occurred before this could take place.

Wheat was by far the biggest commodity exported to Chile prior to the coup; but even with the large wheat contracts, Chile never reached 0.01 (one hundredth of 1 per cent) of total Australian exports. Other items that consistently exited Australia labelled for Chile included grass seeds of various types, agricultural products such as canned fruits, machinery parts and safety equipment. There were also miscellaneous items such as four breeding sheep in the 1968–69 financial year and artificial limbs in the 1969–70 financial year. The major imports from Chile were marine products both for human consumption (hake fillets) and in the form of meal to be fed to animals or used as fertilisers.

Wheat is an important product to Australia and Australians, not only because of its monetary value, but also because it is an integral part of Australia’s psyche. The golden wheatfields, ‘boundless plains’ and ‘nature’s gifts’, as well as the salt-of-the-earth farmers who ‘toil with hearts and hands’ were integral to Australia’s identity and history (as demonstrated in the national anthem). The first wheat in Australia was sown by convicts on the government farm where the

89 The 1966 season is not included on the graph because the amount is only included in bushels (not tonnes). Australian Wheat Board [hereinafter AWB], *Wheat Australia Annual Report* (Melbourne: AWB, various years).
90 Seasons are measured from 1 December of the previous year to 30 November of the year listed. The area sown to wheat was up by 21 per cent in 1974. AWB, *Wheat Australia Annual Report* (1974).
92 ‘Chile Buys Again’, *Wheat Australia* 5, no. 4 (1972).
93 The highest percentage was 0.006790475 per cent in 1972–73: Australian Bureau of Statistics [hereinafter ABS], *Australian Exports, Country by Commodity*, ABS 5414.0 (Canberra: ABS, 1973–74).
Sydney botanic gardens are now located. The iconic image of the great Aussie battler was played on by the AWB in its self-congratulatory 1967 publication when it said that the wheat industry started from a ‘humble beginning’ and from that ‘a great primary industry has developed’. In the 1960s wheat made up as much as 15 per cent of the total national income from exports and it continued to be a vital part of the Australian economy.

By the 1970s, Australia was the third-largest wheat exporter in the world. Economic historian Greg Whitwell characterised the period 1974–89 as ‘the drive for greater efficiency’ in the wheat industry in Australia. In 1978, 70 per cent of all wheat grown in Australia was sold for export, explaining the preoccupation of the AWB with external markets. Chile, especially after the contracts of the Allende years, had become an important wheat customer.

The AWB was a government-controlled authority that had a monopoly on the acquisition and sale of wheat in domestic and international markets. The main objective of the AWB was to raise and stabilise the incomes of Australian wheat growers. While a single desk, State-run enterprise might not maximise profits per se, it does aim to make money secure and regular for its suppliers.

The Wheat Board’s composition was shaped by the domestic politics of the era. Four of the board members were selected by the Minister for Primary Industry and the federal acts provided that the minister could ‘direct’ the board. This rarely happened, and it was more often that Canberra reacted to the AWB’s decisions rather than ordering a course of action. There were two published interventions, one in 1967 and one in the early 1970s. Neither had anything to do with Chile. Given the Whitlam Government’s insistence that credit be offered to Egypt in the 1970s, and the previous use of the AWB in 1967 as a

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96 Ibid., 4.
98 Whitwell, Sydenham and AWB, A Shared Harvest, 191.
100 I contacted the AWB various times to ask for information or interviews about the boycotts. The AWB did not reply.
103 Ibid., 235.
104 Ibid., 236.
105 Ibid.
‘tool of foreign policy’, it is not a stretch of the imagination to envisage that the contracts entered into with the Allende Government may have had some political element.106 But it was not necessarily so.

Rather than the elected and selected board members, it was actually the management of the AWB that ran the everyday negotiations of the organisation. They applied their substantial weight to decisions within the organisation. The general manager until 1977 was L. H. Dorman, who had previous experience in international grain companies and had worked at the AWB since 1939, seeing the board through many political decisions. He would turn up at an ACTU meeting in the near future.107

The board’s attitude to the maritime bans on Chile was that they were ‘pointless (as well as being costly and inconvenient)’.108 If there was a hole in the market, they argued, someone else would simply fill it. Caroline Overington, writing about the AWB scandal in Iraq in 2007, wrote that AWB executives ‘were not callous, but, in the course of doing business abroad, Australian executives are routinely forced to deal with all manner of dictators, thugs and murderers … AWB’s only interest was trade—specifically, trade that would benefit Australia’s … wheat farmers’.109

Though written more than 30 years after the wheat trade with Chile’s dictatorship started, the words still ring true.

The first direct action taken to enforce the trade union boycott was in May 1974 on two vessels owned by Indomar Limited (Bahamas): Jag Shanti and Star Lily. This was almost certainly not the first Chilean trade to enter or exit Australia since the coup, but perhaps it was the first time when the balance between ideology, economics and opportunity was perfect. The ships were contracted to load wheat for Chile but were boycotted by the maritime unions in Fremantle.110 At first the SUA refused to tug the vessels ashore. After prompting by the ACTU, the vessels were tugged, but not loaded.

The Wheat Board organised a meeting with the ACTU, who were significantly less politically radical than the maritime unions. The AWB hoped that this would make them more receptive to capitalist reasoning and that maritime unions would in turn be receptive to the authority of the ACTU. The AWB argued that the wheat to be loaded was covered by the previous contracts signed with

106 Ibid., 235.
107 Ibid., 237.
108 Ibid., 236.
No Truck with the Chilean Junta!

the Allende Government. They informed the ACTU that the vessels were under the charter of the AWB, and consequently any delay to them was costing the Australian Government. The AWB also argued that Chile could easily acquire wheat from the United States at a cheaper price, reducing the effect of any boycott as a method of punishing the military government.\(^\text{111}\) A very similar argument was put to the WWFA in the 1960s when the AWB feared the loss of the East Indies market due to the action the wharfies were taking to aid Indonesian independence.\(^\text{112}\)

Hetherington Kingsbury, agents for Maritime Chartering Services Incorporated of Connecticut, who were, in turn, agents for Indomar Limited, pressured the WWFA directly to lift the boycott. The agents said that while they were mindful of the union’s aims in holding a boycott, Indomar had ‘no involvement in any ideological/political conflict’.\(^\text{113}\) Though the WWFA was responsible for the greater part of the wheat boycott, wheat for Chile only made it into the pages of the *Maritime Worker* once.\(^\text{114}\) This fits with the general reporting pattern of political action against Chile by the WWFA: very minimal.

The WWFA contacted the Wheat Board because they were concerned about the contractual obligations the board had with the previous Government of Chile. The AWB had, in fact, just signed a new contract with the representative of the new military regime in February 1974 and four more shipments of wheat were set to sail in June of that year. Two vessels had been chartered for this purpose. The WWFA, considerate of the Wheat Board’s contractual obligations and the financial consequences that breaking them would have on the Australian Government, offered to load the remaining vessels on the condition that no further contracts were entered into with the dictatorship. The AWB reluctantly agreed to these terms, happy to meet their current contractual obligations, but wounded at the loss of their recently engaged fourth-largest customer.

The maritime boycott was not restricted to ships loading wheat. When the *Esmeralda*, a Chilean naval sailing ship used in the first days of the coup as a torture centre, attempted to visit Sydney in 1974 she was blocked by the WWFA.\(^\text{115}\) A year later, in September 1975, Melbourne rank-and-file tug men

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\(^{111}\) \textit{Memo re: Shipping—Wheat Shipments to Chile, June 3 1974}, WWFA: Federal Office, N144/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\(^{112}\) \textit{Lockwood, Black Armada}, 228.
\(^{113}\) \textit{Hetherington Kingsbury Pty. Ltd to T. Bull (WWFA) re: Proposed Ban Chilean Cargoes}. Minter, Simpson and Co (Solicitors and Notaries), later contacted the WWFA for information on the boycott of 23–29 May 1974. Indomar tried to sue the AWB for losses. \textit{Minter, Simpson and Co to Fitzgibbon (WWFA), November 11 1974}, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. Baird recalled that ‘Chilean leaders said that the Junta was very anxious to placate Australia, because it desperately needed our wheat’. Baird, ‘Chilean Junta on Trial before I.L.O.’.
\(^{114}\) \textit{Maritime Worker}, 4 March 1975, 2.
(SUA) refused to tug another ship, *Austral Entente* (USA), in protest of the United States’ involvement in the coup in Chile.116 This was an entirely opportunistic action on the anniversary of the coup. The Chilean registered *Viña del Mar* was boycotted in Dampier, Western Australia, by the SUA at the end of the 1980s. It was attempting to load 100 000 t of iron ore for Western Europe. It sailed with no cargo nine days after arriving.117 Conversely, all through the early 1980s shipments of rutile (TiO₂—found mainly in the Murray Basin of Victoria and New South Wales) were successfully sent to Chile. Australia holds 44 per cent of the world’s known rutile deposits and thus a substantial portion of the world’s market, but this was not a target of union harassment. Boycotting trade with Chile was not without risks for the workers. Section 30K of the *Commonwealth Crimes Act* (1914) outlawed interference with overseas or interstate trade, and the workers doing so could be arrested and potentially jailed. In 1978, the SUA and individuals within the union were summoned in Western Australia over their bans on Indonesian-flagged ships. The person who initiated action under the *Crimes Act* was a representative of West Farmers.118

Section 45D of the *Trades Practices Act 1974* also prohibited secondary boycott, ban or strike action that occurred within Australian workplaces.119 The individual, the union representative and the union could all be held responsible if this did occur. Interestingly, Section 45DD allowed for boycotts with the purpose of environmental protection, and Section 88(7) stated that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) could grant permission for a secondary boycott—that is, an industrial action with a non-industrial objective. Without that permission, however, the boycott against Chile was illegal. John Garrett of the SUA recalled the danger of refusing to tug Chilean ships: the *NSW Crimes Act* was still in force and the NSW Liberal Government (1965–75) was active in oppressing any political activity that was not in the national interest.120 Margo Beasley noted that in the 1950s when Jim Healy of the WWFA was arrested due to political actions on the wharves, it was only due to the fact that those campaigns were ‘major and effective interventions

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116  ‘Chile Venceremos’, *Tribune* [Australia], 16 September 1975; Carr (Co-Convenor, Australian CSCP) to the President (Continuing Liaison Council World Congress of Peace Forces) 27.10.75, Papers of Barry Carr.
119 Primary boycotts are actions taken with the purpose of protesting industrial concerns in that place of work. Secondary boycotts are with aims that do not fall into that category. Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 104.
120 Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships*, 105.
in international affairs’. She was referring to the Dutch shipping ban, which also put substantial pressure on the AWB. If this is true, perhaps the relatively small amount of trade with Chile protected the workers to some extent.

The law was not the only negative pressure on maritime unions. There was considerable insistence that they drop their black ban on trade with Chile in a number of forums, not just with the Wheat Board and shipping agents. Don Henderson reported that there were ‘verbal conflicts with farmers’ organisations, reactionary politicians and their supporters’ on various occasions. Resistance to the boycott came with two main arguments: concern about the boycott’s humanitarian impact and anxiety about its effect on Australian business. It soon became clear that support for the boycott of Chilean trade was not a given even among unionists.

In the first instance, the ACTU’s attitude had been to support the boycott; but by 22 January 1975, representatives of the Storemen and Packers, Marine Stewards, Federated Shipwrights, the WWFA and the SUA, plus Bob Hawke and Harold Souter of the ACTU, met with three representatives of the AWB. Hawke had called the meeting immediately upon receipt of a letter from the then chairman of the AWB, Jack Cass, requesting it. The ACTU representatives, in a slightly ambiguous position, tried to mediate between the unionists and the Wheat Board representatives. The AWB maintained that wheat was the only product that was exported to Chile in any substantial amount (see Figure 8.1). AWB general manager Dorman argued that cutting off the supply of wheat because of the boycotts could harm the long-term export market for Australian wheat. Wilson of the SUA, Tas Bull of the WWFA and Campbell of the Federated Shipwrights (soon to amalgamate with the AMWU) stood firm. There would be no wheat shipments to Chile, despite the supposed humanitarian and business concerns.

The shipments already negotiated were sent, and no wheat was thereafter contracted to Chile, as demonstrated in Figure 8.1. With the exclusion of wheat from the export list, the total value of exports to Chile dropped to an all time low

121 Beasley, Wharfies, 152.
124 Sir John Cass, NSW wheat grower, was selected as chairman by outgoing Minister for Primary Industry and Country Party leader, Ian Sinclair, against the previous chairman’s wishes. Cass was the first chairman who took an active interest in the day-to-day running of the AWB. Whitwell, Sydenham and AWB, A Shared Harvest, 239.
125 Minutes of Meeting of Unions with Representatives of the AWB to Chile held in the ACTU Board Room on Wednesday, 22nd January, 1975, commencing at 2.15pm, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; ‘General Secretary’, February 7 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
of only $157,000 in 1976. The reduction was dramatic, but the WWFA was aware that a small amount of trade was slipping through, and in the *Maritime Worker* asked all branches to redouble their efforts.

![Wheat vs total exports to Chile](image)

**Figure 8.1** Wheat Percentage of Total Exports to Chile, 1968–69 to 1977–78.


Some of the goods may have been exported by being transhipped—that is, labelled for another place before being sent to Chile. In 1977 John Healy reminded the maritime workers to be on the lookout: ‘At a couple of terminals they tried to sneak containers that had been shipped via Europe. Some of our boys have been very alert and they noticed Chilean copper and we said, “that goes back on the ship and goes back where it came from”.’

Despite transhipping, the efficiency of the maritime unions’ stranglehold on trade led to the intensification of pressure aimed at them. Stewart A. Anderson, president of the Bendigo Trades Hall Council, a trade unionist and the ALP candidate for Bendigo in the heart of Victoria’s golden triangle, sent a concerned letter to the AMWU detailing his apprehension about the moral and political

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127 ‘Firmer Chile Junta Bans’.
129 Healy, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
implications of a ban on wheat shipments to Chile. Acknowledging that a guarantee could not be given that the wheat would reach the needy, he still wondered: how could the democratic situation in Chile improve with no bread?\textsuperscript{130} The accusation that denying wheat to Chile was in fact starving the Chilean people was rebutted by the AMWSU Commonwealth Council in a standard letter. In it the union argued that the ILO and the UP in exile had requested boycotts on basic materials to Chile, and that the military government had not restored subsidies for low-income earners to purchase grain, therefore little would get through to the workers.\textsuperscript{131} In information circulated in 1977 by the CSCP, it was noted that the wheat sold to Chile was used for fodder. That is, it would be eaten by animals, not humans, and ‘it will fatten up meat for the tables of the wealthy’.\textsuperscript{132} The AMWSU, WWFA and SUA stood by the assertion that bans on trade to Chile were a valid method of putting pressure on the military government and the humanitarian repercussions of the boycotts were non-existent.

A similar response was given to the Continental Overseas Corporation (USA) on 28 October 1974. Buyers in Chile had approached the company to import Australian meat. The 1972–73 financial year had seen a substantial amount of meat ($5.1 million) exported to Chile.\textsuperscript{133} Australian exporters therefore backed the 1974 proposal of approximately 1000 tonnes of frozen meat (approximately one-fifth of the 1972–73 meat export to Chile), and the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union supported the sale, but the WWFA was defiant.\textsuperscript{134} The Continental Overseas Corporation telexed the Department of Agriculture seeking advice, which wrote to the Department of Labour and Immigration, which in turn wrote to the WWFA.\textsuperscript{135} The Continental Overseas Corporation had expressed common concerns over the boycotts: that it was damaging their business, Australia’s reputation and her long-term export prospects.

Putting forward a similar argument in a separate union and business alliance, a representative of the Federated Cold Storage and Meat Preserving Employees Union of Australia wrote to the ACTU enclosing a letter from the general

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Stewart Anderson to Fitzgibbon (WWFA), January 20 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\item \textsuperscript{131} AMWU Commonwealth Council to S. Anderson, Branch Secretary, Bendigo RE: Chilean Grain Boycott, February 6 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N113/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\item \textsuperscript{132} The trade Boycott of Wheat Sales to Chile, March 1977, Papers of GMM. This fact is backed up by the statistics that note that only unmilled wheat went to Chile. This is considered unfit for human consumption. ABS, \textit{Australian Exports, Country by Commodity} (1974–75 – 1988–89).
\item \textsuperscript{133} ABS, \textit{Australian Exports, Country by Commodity} (1972–73).
\item \textsuperscript{134} This is even though their representatives had signed petitions for the release of political prisoners in Chile: Clodomiro Almeida, Anselmo Sule, Pedro Felipe Ramirez and Luis Corvalan. Sule later visited the WWFA offices in Sydney. Letter to Cardinal Monsignor Silva Henriquez, May 15 1974, WWFA: Federal Office, N113/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; ‘Chilean Terror’, \textit{Maritime Worker}, 27 May 1975, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{135} From Department of Agriculture, Canberra. to M. Ryan, Department of Labour and Immigration, Melbourne, RE: Meat to Chile, October 28 1974, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\end{itemize}
manager of Murray Goulburn Cooperative Company, about exports to Chile. The general manager recalled that before the dictatorship, Australia had been exporting dairy products to Chile, and this had all but come to a stop due to the WWFA ban (which he specifically mentioned rather than ‘maritime’, unwittingly leaving a tantalising hint as to the effective player in this action).136 This trade had topped $605 805 in 1972–73 from a low of $3000 in 1968–69.137 In 1980, Chile would import 21 000 tonnes of dairy product from the European Economic Community. It was argued that up to 40 per cent of that could be replaced with Australian product owing to the decreased transport costs across the southern hemisphere. The Cold Storage and Meat Preservers did not see a point in denying Chileans’ food or Australian workers’ opportunities.138 It was a familiar refrain: external political gain outweighed concerns for employment.

ACTU president, Bob Hawke, told the SUA in 1979 that trade was being diverted around the boycott to other countries to our detriment.139 He tried to assure the SUA that the international labour movement would act eventually against the Pinochet regime.140 He argued that continued pressure from the SUA would reduce the influence of the forthcoming two-day international boycott to be organised by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Elliott, however, was already on the record as saying that ‘the Chile wheat ban is a matter of principle before earning’.141 Similarly, Henderson of the Firemen and Deckhands believed government and business put profit before people, and ‘it is one thing to pay lip service to freedom and democracy, it is another thing if you are talking through your pocket’.142 The AMWU published a pamphlet that declared: ‘nothing exported to Chile is for [the workers], it is for the elite minority who live in luxury while millions are persecuted and starved.’143

Peter Nolan, secretary of the ACTU, was explicit in a circular to the 15 unions involved in sea transport in 1978. Not only was the boycott detrimental to workers in Australia, but also there had been a threat of legal action from farmers’ associations. He questioned why boycotts had not been placed on other regimes and attempted to weaken the moral position of the maritime unions. For example, why was there a blanket ban on Chile and only a partial ban on Indonesia? The final point Nolan made was that although international

136 Gallagher (Secretary Federated Cold Storage and Meat Preserving Employees Union of Australia Vic/Tas Branch) to Nolan (Secretary ACTU), 19 August 1980, ACTU, N147/285 ‘Bans on Chile, 1978–1979’, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
138 Gallagher (Secretary Federated Cold Storage and Meat Preserving Employees Union of Australia Vic/Tas Branch) to Nolan (Secretary ACTU), 19 August 1980.
139 Hawke had also had some sort of confrontation with Henderson in early 1978 over the Chile boycott issue. Extract SWM Minutes Victorian Branch 31.1.78 Ref. 628, 31 January 1978.
140 ‘Hawke Opens Conference’, Seamen’s Journal 34, no. 3 (March–April 1979), 54.
142 Henderson, ‘The military coup in Chile in September 1973 had little effect on the thinking…’, 1993.
143 Amalgamated Metalworkers and Shipwrights Union (Australia), Chile!
organisations condemned the regime, why were Australia and New Zealand the only ones holding a boycott? Even Eastern-bloc countries had continued to trade with Chile.144 Despite the increased pressure, the maritime unions refused to lift their blanket boycott on trade with Chile and this stance had grassroots support within the unions.145

Defiance in the face of the ACTU, which had gained huge membership in this period due to the incorporation of white-collar unions, was not unusual. Despite a union membership rate sitting at 58 per cent of Australian workers in 1975, the ACTU was ‘a federation without the institutional capacity to direct and coordinate a structurally decentralised union movement’.146 For example, in 1966 the SUA had ignored the ACTU ruling that there was to be no union interference with ships carrying goods to Vietnam.147 It was a case of history repeating itself as after a brief period of encouragement, the ACTU released a statement that it supported ‘the aims and not the methods’ of the boycott.148 The ACTU was pressured by its own more right-wing affiliates, as well as business and political interests.149 Furthermore, the ACTU was, in general, not willing to go against the Government, because losing a Labor government was believed to be detrimental to all Australian workers.150 In 1975 the congress heard Chilean trade unionists Luis Figueroa and Luis Meneses speak, but it had little effect: it seems the confederation stayed neutral from late 1975 to early 1977.151 Soon, however, the ACTU’s attitude changed and it began to try to have the boycott lifted.

By the ACTU Executive Meeting of February 1977, the consistent pressure finally provoked a debate.152 The delegates from the AMWSU and BWIU voted against the lifting of the boycott; importantly, Charlie Fitzgibbon (WWFA) was not present at the meeting. Fitzgibbon was the unionist who originally proposed the motion to support the boycott in 1973–74. In his absence, the

145 ‘Committee No. IV’, Seamen’s Journal 34, no. 3 (March–April 1979), 75.
147 Beasley, Wharfies, 218.
148 Kirkby, Voices from the Ships, 53.
149 The ACTU was capable of providing leadership on some political issues, such as the uranium debates of the 1970s. See, for example, the WWFAs decision to ship uranium: ‘Unions’ Policy’, Maritime Worker, 29 March 1977, 9; Hagan, ‘The Australian Trade Union Movement’, 52–3.
150 It was ‘too big a price to pay’. Hagan, ‘The Australian Trade Union Movement’, 52.
152 The trade boycott of Wheat Sales to Chile, March 1977. An example of a letter pressuring the ACTU to drop the boycott can be found at: D. Eather (Vice President, Queensland Grain Growers Association) to Hawke (ACTU), 29 July 1977, National Farmers Federation: Australian Primary Producers Union, N18/779, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; AWB to Hawke RE: Chile, January 20 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; AMWU Commonwealth Council re: Chile, January 22 1975, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; Australian Metal Workers’ Union Commonwealth Council, RE: Chile, January 28 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
majority supported lifting the ban, adding that the decision would not be put to the congress. With that, the boycott was no longer sanctioned by the ACTU. The ACTU had decided that the only people who were being harmed by the boycott were Australian workers, and the ban was ineffectual because it was being carried out only by Australia and New Zealand.

The council’s about-face caused waves of defiance throughout the SUA, the BWIU and the AMWSU. John Healy responded bitterly, arguing that the ACTU had tried to ‘smash the ban, to lift the ban, to allow trade with Chile’ even though international protests against the Pinochet regime and industrial action around the world were on the increase, including those by the ICFTU with which the ACTU was affiliated. Between February and the next meeting of the ACTU in December, the CSCP lobbied trade unionists with detailed arguments about why the boycott should remain. Steve Cooper wrote that the boycott was supported by the CUT, WFTU, ICFTU, World Confederation of Labour (WCL), ITF and the ILO. Further, Bob Hawke, president of the ACTU, was also the federal president of the ALP, whose conference supported the ban on trade.

At stop-work meetings members of the SUA made statements demonstrating the high level of idealism and ideology among its members. The Sydney branch, for example, said: ‘Australia’s trade with Chile never was important or vital to any section of our people, and our continued boycott will enhance the overseas and national democratic principles of the Australian people.’

For some SUA members international brotherhood took a higher priority than the tension between Australian unions, which was exacerbated by their boycott. At an SUA Sydney branch stop-work meeting, Pat Sweetensen (SPA) admitted that the seamen did not want to be isolated from the Australian trade union movement, but ‘we also have international responsibilities to our suppressed comrades’. The SUA reserved the right to continue it because the repression continued in Chile.

John Healy, leader of the WWFA Sydney branch, echoed SUA sentiments. He said, ‘as far as the W.W.F. is concerned, [wheat] will never be handled until

153 Minutes of the ACTU executive meeting held in the ACTU boardroom, Melbourne, from Monday, 12th December, 1977 to Friday, 16th December, 1977 commencing at 2:15pm: Second Session, Fourth Session and Resolutions, ACTU, N147/622, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
155 Healy, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
156 Extract SWM Minutes Sydney Branch 31/1/78, SUA: Federal Office, N38/299, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
democracy is restored in Chile'. Leo Lenane, federal organiser, repeated that attitude in July 1977: ‘the way to remove the trade bans in Chile is through restoration of democracy in that country.’ In the Maritime Worker of 27 September 1977 and the Seamen’s Journal of February 1978, it was reiterated that the ban was still in place.

What seems like a cut-and-dried story is, however, much more complicated: inconsistencies exist in this narrative that only appear with very close examination of all sources. First, the ACTU Executive Meeting minutes of 20 March 1978 note that Fitzgibbon of the WWFA voted along with the other members to lift the ban. Second, late in 1978 the ACTU received notice from shipping agents of barley being shipped to Chile. The content of the letter suggests previous communication. Letters started to flow, seeking confirmation of the WWFA’s position. Further, Gethin, of the Farmers’ Union of Western Australia, wrote to the ACTU stating that his members were worried about the WWFA reinstating the ban on Chile. The last mention in the Maritime Worker of the ban being policy was in mid October 1977, but the mention was one sentence only, and relegated to the corner of a page.

So, was the boycott still in place?

The WWFA was going through a general weakening in the 1970s. The organisers had other things on their minds such as containerisation, job layoffs, contracts, amalgamations and the stagflation of 1974–75, which led to increased employer pressure in all industries. Margo Beasley wrote:

The Australian waterfront was widely regarded as a shambles by 1976. The cost of surplus labour had reached record levels and no matter how

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159 Heal y, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’. 160 Lenane (WWFA) to CSCP, 7th July, 1977, Papers of GMM. 161 ‘International Aid’, Maritime Worker, 27 September 1977, 3; ‘Indonesia, Chile Bans’, Maritime Worker, 18 October 1977, 4; ‘Seamen Continue Boycott on Trade with Chile’, Seamen’s Journal 33, no. 2 (February 1978), 35. 162 Minutes of the ACTU Executive meeting held in ACTU board room, Melbourne from Monday, 20th March, 1978 to Wednesday 22nd March 1978, commencing at 9.30am, ACTU, N147/623, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; Nolan (ACTU) to ACTU Officers and Secretaries of all Affiliated Unions, April 18 1978, SUA: Federal Office, N38/299, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. 163 Erhard Schwazrock, Coarse Grains Manager, Continental Overseas Corporation to Nolan ACTU, 6 December 1978, ACTU, N147/285, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. 164 For example: Gallagher (Secretary Federated Cold Storage and Meat Preserving Employees Union of Australia Vic/Tas Branch) to Nolan (Secretary ACTU), 19 August 1980. CONAUST wrote to the SUA noting the WWFA’s lifting of the boycott, and seeking the SUA policy: CONAUST to Federal Secretary SUA, Re: Chilean Flag Vessels, May 12 1978, SUA: Federal Office, N38/299, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. 165 P. J. Gethin, Director of Industrial Relations (The Farmers’ Union of WA Inc) to Nolan (ACTU), 197(9), ACTU, N147/285, NBAC: ANU, Canberra. 166 ‘Indonesia, Chile Bans’. 167 Bramble, Trade Unionism in Australia, 75.
quickly the stevedoring industry shed employees, there were always either too many left for the work available, or those that were left were inefficiently used because of the way the industry was structured.\textsuperscript{168}

The \textit{Seamen’s Journal} does not mention the WWFA lifting the boycott. Neither does it mention it holding the boycott in place. The mentions of waterside boycott after the wheat incidents are left to non-specific sweeping statements except for the case of the \textit{Holstein Express}. For example, the Sydney Waterside Workers reinforced the rhetoric of the ban after Humberto Elgueta spoke to their meeting on 10 October 1979, but the promotion of the WWFA boycott faded.\textsuperscript{169} According to trade statistics, so did the WWFA’s stranglehold on trade to and from Chile.

There was a lull in both import and export activity with Chile from the 1975–76 to the 1977–78 financial years caused by the WWFA boycott, and the ACTU’s support of it. These three years, after the existing wheat contracts were filled by the AWB, were when the WWFA and ACTU advertised their Chile boycott. Interestingly, the small amount of trade that did get through was primarily scientific and allied health machinery. These were shipped in relatively equal amounts before, during and after the WWFA boycott. The SUA may have stopped at least one shipment of iron ore in 1980, but shipments of grass seed made it through the ports every year of the dictatorship (except one). Trade with Chile never ceased, despite the best efforts of radicals. The total exports to Chile dropped from a high of $42 million in 1972–73 to a low of $157 000 in 1976–77. This reduced the rate of trade to pre-Allende levels.\textsuperscript{170} Imports also hit a low in 1976–77, but the variation in those figures was not as marked (see Figure 8.2).

With the change in stance of the ACTU and the weakening of the WWFA’s boycott in practice in 1977 and 1978, exports rose sharply. Major exports to Chile now included coking coal, malting barley and, in 1982–83, wheat. In addition, imports rose, with the highest being in the 1980–81 financial year, with $6.5 million worth of goods arriving in Australia.\textsuperscript{171} The traditional imports of fish, fertilisers and fishmeal were entering and also on one occasion parts for arms in 1976–77. Despite this, trade with Pinochet’s Chile never again reached the zenith of the early 1970s, though it did experience a spike due to a particularly good malting barley shipment year in 1979–80.

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\textsuperscript{168} Beasley, \textit{Wharfies}, 237. \\
\textsuperscript{169} It is unlikely, however, any substantial amount of Chile–Australia trade travelled through Sydney. ‘Chile Bans Stay’, \textit{Tribune} [Australia], 10 October 1979. \\
\textsuperscript{170} In 1963–64 it was $142 000. \\
\textsuperscript{171} Import statistics and descriptions compiled from ABS, \textit{Australian Imports, Country by Commodity} (1965–84).
\end{flushright}
While the Wheat Board agreed not to ship wheat, the Australian Barley Board (ABB) had made no such commitment. The ABB was a government statutory authority that had been established under the *National Security Act* of 1939. Similar to the Wheat Board, it was a legislative requirement that all growers sell their barley to the ABB.\(^{172}\) Barley had been grown in Australia since the first European settlement. In the 1960s, bulk handling had become the norm for Australian wheat and barley and had contributed to the loss of jobs on the waterfront.

In January 1973 Britain entered the European Common Market and this created a problem for the ABB, as it no longer enjoyed the benefits of trading with Britain without import taxes.\(^{173}\) This was also coupled with an increase in barley production and a bumper crop in the USSR in 1976–77.\(^{174}\) As a result, the Barley Board was searching for new markets. The 1978–79 season was a

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\(^{172}\) The first chairman, Herbert Tomlinson, had a long career, working previously with Dalgety & Company, the same company which would test the maritime boycott in 1978 attempting to export cattle. Pauline Payne and Peter Donovan, *The Australian Barley Board: Making the Right Moves, 1939–1999* (Adelaide: Australian Barley Board, 1999), 97; also 17.

\(^{173}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{174}\) Ibid., 94.
bumper crop in Australia and this was reflected in the largest shipment of barley to Chile, in the 1979–80 financial year.175 Due to the bumper season, the ABB sold 136 505 t to South American countries, and the export records say that in the 1979–80 financial year all of it went to Chile.176 In 1978, barley had the highest international selling price of all coarse grains.177 Most of Australia’s barley crop was grown in South Australia and Victoria. As the major brewers of Melbourne bought most of the barley from their own State, it was likely the barley shipments to Chile were exiting via one of the South Australian ports where the ABB had facilities.178

![The flow of trade to Chile: specific exports](image)

**Figure 8.3 Specific Exports to Chile, 1968–85.**


From Figures 8.2 and 8.3 (assembled from trade information collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics), it is obvious that the WWFA, not the SUA, had real power when it came to boycotts. The rhetoric of internationalism may have been stronger, or at least more vocal, in the SUA, but the strategic position of the WWFA allowed it to be much more effective. Its larger membership had

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178 Port Lincoln, Wallaroo, Port Giles, Port Adelaide or Ardrossan.
more contact with Chilean trade than Australian-crewed ships ever could. But this strategic position also exposed the WWFA to more pressure than the SUA experienced.

Other than the odd burst of rhetoric, such as from the Sydney branch president, John Healy—‘[t]here will not be one pound of wheat go, there will not be one point of cargo come in’—the WWFA did not publicise their Chile commitment. They kept their members informed of events in Chile and petitions via the *Maritime Worker* and circulars, but there was no dramatic call to arms as in the Seamen’s Union.

The WWFA was carrying many campaigns at the time, including anti-apartheid and contra the Greek junta. The WWFA was also under constant pressure to take up campaigns due to their efficiency in boycotting. Mavis Robertson recalled one occasion when Tas Bull said to her: ‘Listen Mavis, if someone else comes through this door and asks me to put a ban on something else, whether it’s this or that … none of my members will ever get a day’s work, and sometimes we just have to do things symbolically.’

This was a significant admission. The wheat boycott was the main action, allowing the WWFA to claim the moral high ground. It was a powerful symbolic action. After that, jobs came first.

Despite its limitations, the boycott was, many times over, heralded as the cause for freedom of Chilean political prisoners. It was appreciated by many throughout the world such as the CUT in exile, which sent thankful telegrams. Luis Corvalan, on his release from Dawson Island, said the maritime workers’ boycott was ‘an inspiration to the people of Chile’. A world away from Chile, in Wollongong, Doreen Borrow of the local Chile Solidarity Committee wrote: ‘We live with the certainty that the Chilean People will one day live in dignity and with full human rights. That day will come because of the united actions of the working class throughout the world. Included among these are our honoured comrades in the S.U.A.’

Kirkby called it ‘shared humanity’, and this sentiment is an echo of E. V. Elliott’s insistence that the Chilean and Australian workers were ‘brothers in struggle’.

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179 Published in an SUA publication.
180 Healy, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
181 Robertson Interview, 2009.
182 Original text reads: ‘agradecemos y felicitamos por boicot contrat el transitoria debe condicionarse a liberación de los prisioneros políticos y sindicales [sic].’ Telegram from CUT to WWFA, January 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
183 Relayed via Frida Brown, an SPA member who was in Moscow, ‘Luis Corvalan Thanks SUA for Solidarity with Chile Workers’, *Seamen’s Journal* 32, no. 2 (February 1977).
184 ‘Restore Democracy in Chile’, *Seamen’s Journal* 38, no. 8 (September 1983), 233.
185 Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships*, 16; Elliott, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
But it was easy for Elliott to say ‘solidarity has no national or geographical boundaries’,\(^{186}\) or for Henderson to state that ‘we believe by isolating the Junta we will help the people of Chile to restore the democratic freedoms that Comrade Allende and many thousands of his countrymen have given their lives for’.\(^{187}\)

The FDU and the SUA’s real influence on trade with Chile was negligible, and thus their members’ exposure to criticism or potential jail was also far less. The SUA could enjoy using Chile as a ‘feather in their internationalist cap’ from the relative safety of their position, when it was unlikely that Australian-crewed ships would sail to Chile. The most contact they were likely to have was through tugboats.\(^{188}\) When trade did pass through, perhaps tug men turned a blind eye, just as many other unionists in Australia must have.

For example, wheat was transported by truck to regional silos. As soon as it arrived at the silo the wheat was the property of the AWB. From those regional silos it was transported in stages by train to ports. There were 17 wheat export ports in Australia.\(^{189}\) Given that hides, coal, meat, wool, dairy products, clothing, manufactured goods, minerals, canned foodstuffs and cars were sent to Chile, the TWU,\(^{190}\) AFULE,\(^{191}\) ARU,\(^{192}\) AMWSU, Amalgamated Engineering Union, Miners Federation, Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation, Food Preservers’ Union of Australia, Wool Brokers’ Staffs Association, Australasian Meat Industries Employees Union, the Federated Cold Storage and Meat Preserving Employees and Australian Textile Workers Union, to list just a few, all may have had workers who mined, moved or manufactured goods bound for Chile.

In other words, the majority of Australian workers did not take a stand.

Given this inconsistency between rhetoric and reality in the activities of the Australian labour movement, and the fractured nature of the branch structure of the WWFA, the fact that the ‘ban stayed on so long, was a miracle’, to use

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\(^{186}\) E. V. Elliot, ‘On Course!’, *Seamen’s Journal* (May 1974).

\(^{187}\) ‘Wider Union Bans on Chile Junta’.

\(^{188}\) Tug ‘seamen’ were congratulated as members of the SUA, but were actually in the main members of the FDU. For example, John Garrett, who incidentally was also the official SPA representative to the CSC. Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships*, 105.

\(^{189}\) AWB, *Wheat Growing*, 11, 12, 14.

\(^{190}\) The TWU did boycott at Mascott Airport as described in Chapter Seven. *J. Baird to G. Grimshaw, October 1 1975 and attached letter for Transport Workers’ Union Strikers from CUT, September 19 1975*.

\(^{191}\) AFULE expressed their solidarity through getting Chilean enginemen jobs. They also supported Chileans in coming to Australia. *Australian Metal Workers’ Union Commonwealth Council, Re: Chile, 30/1/75 and attachments dates 6/1/75 and 3/1/75, January 30 1975, AMWSU, E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; Mr Sergio Marambio—age 32, 1974, Australian Federated Union of Enginemen, 8/3/38 Box 136, Melbourne University Archives; Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen Collection, Melbourne; Memo re: Appeal from ALP for finance to bring ex-Senator Sule to Australia, April 9 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra*.

\(^{192}\) In 1975 the ARU offered ‘practical support’ to the Chile cause. *Programme Results—Chilean Trade Union Delegation to Australia, 11–20 September 1975*. 

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the words of Mavis Robertson.193 It was a ban chiefly in name, but the symbolic nature of the boycott does not imply it was useless. Rhetoric, especially from the WWFA and ACTU, scared shipping companies from attempting to trade Chilean goods.

The so-called miracle continued in 1978, when the live-cattle shipment on the Holstein Express was boycotted by determined maritime unionists. Was this really a ‘union victory’, as hailed by the SPA organ?

The 1978–79 financial year was the start of the upward swing of trade with Chile. The SUA’s harassment of this one vessel in a wave of trade may seem relatively futile or a gesture and little else. Yet, the Holstein Express incident was symbolic of so much more for the SUA: it was support for the Chilean people, but more than anything, it was a self-affirming action by the seamen whose identity rested on their radical internationalist ideology. Henderson argued, speaking of the SUA: ‘In fact, we see ourselves—quite rightly, I believe—as among the most progressive sections of the trade union movement of this country. We also see ourselves as internationalists and we involve ourselves in all issues of economic and industrial matters.’194

For the waterside workers, it was slightly different: 1978 had been a hard year. The negotiations for the contract of 1978–80 had stalled. In April of that year there had been a nationwide stoppage on the waterfront over the use of non-union labour to load ships.195 ‘Scabs’ had crossed a picket line set up by the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU), who had supported the sale of frozen meat to Chile in 1974. They were protesting live export of animals from Australia, as it resulted in the loss of their members’ jobs. The WWFA respected their picket lines, even though the AMIEU had questioned the Chile ban in 1974, even supposing it meant less work.

Tensions were high in the WWFA, and anti-solidarity scabs were on the top of the blacklist. The WWFA official organ framed the Holstein Express incident as typifying the deception of the companies and the non-union labour involved. The article noted that $1000 in compensation had been received by the watersiders of Port Kembla for the work to load the cattle that should have been undertaken by union labour.196 Should the workers have accepted the money in light of their boycott on Chile? For the WWFA, it wasn’t about Chile anymore.

The WWFA Sydney branch saw the Holstein Express episode in terms of anti-scabbing and national-unity rhetoric rather than one centred on Chile solidarity.

193 Robertson Interview, 2009.
194 ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta’.
195 ‘No Non-Union Wharf Labour!’, Maritime Worker, 18 April 1978, 1.
or an internationalist identity. This was a clear case of a union using the Chile issue as a tool for their own more pressing political and industrial objectives. The relaxation of the overall ban pointed to a resource rationalisation by the union. The boycotts became a risk inordinately larger than the benefit of maintaining the blacking activities.

The SUA, on the other hand, whose communist identity and rhetoric were consistently advocated in relation to the Chile boycott, had no trouble maintaining their stance. In fact, they used the boycott to express their exceptionalist political identity: ‘principle before earning’, Elliott had said. Because of a small membership, however, and those members’ lack of contact with Chilean trade, the Seamen’s boycott, for all its political zeal, was anticlimactic.

The WWFA was in the right industrial position and had the right leadership to give a base to the boycott; however, over time, the international socialist rhetoric that had formed the base of the black ban faded and industrial conditions required more imperative, strategic and political attention. As the boycott took a low and sinking profile in the union and the ACTU, so the grip on trade to Chile loosened. When Hugo Miranda noted ‘Australian watersiders prefer action’, he did not know how true those words were: they undeniably preferred their jobs.

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