

TIM MORONEY 1890-1944

A Staunch Fighter for the People

When Father Boland invited me to address a Catholic Historical group about my Father's life, I must admit I was slightly perplexed. That my Father was a life-long practising Catholic cannot be disputed. For certain reasons, unknown to me, he honoured his Catholic faith, and, in many respects, his life-time pursuit of a particular cause reflects the best in Christian Endeavour. Yet, his story is one of secular devotion seeking the achievement of a "workers' paradise" here on earth, a cause, which through a gargantuan effort of energy, compassion and tenacity brought about his early demise. Father Boland, however, assured me that in our Bi-Centenary year, he desired a discussion about a Catholic worklife and interests which were not directly connected to the Church, and to this end my father's history should meet his requirements.

If tonight's talk appears to revolve around the history of one union, i.e. the Australian Railways Union, I make no apologies, since my father's life was irretrievably immersed in its operations which, in the ultimate sense, would provide the means for the introduction of a new, societal order. Hopefully, throughout the talk, I will be able to illustrate the environment, events and forces which shaped not only my father's life but also the Queensland Labor movement from the 1890's up until 1944.

Tim Moroney was born at Nundah on 15 November, 1890, the son of Thomas Moroney and Bridget O'Dea. Both his father and mother had arrived in Brisbane with their respective families from Co. Clare, Ireland, in the early 1880's. The Moroneys came from Ballyvaughan and from my own research it appears that Thomas's mother, Mary Moroney, was widowed and had brought out the entire family - four sons (including Thomas) and four daughters to make a new life in Queensland. The O'Deas came from Lisdoonvarna, a village famous for its mineral springs, and located not far from Ballyvaughan. Both villages are situated near the Burren region of Co. Clare -

a barren, limestone plateau which inspired one of Cromwell's Generals to remark, "There is not enough water to drown a man, wood enough to hang him, nor earth enough to bury him". Thus, the descriptions of Queensland, promoted to lure immigrants to its shores, must have appealed as a lush, diverse alternative.

Whether both families, the Moroneys and the O'Deas, knew each other before embarking is unknown, but certainly they arrived in Brisbane at the same time and quickly settled at Nundah. During this period, as many of you would be aware, Nundah was known as German Station, because of its links with the first German Missionary settlement at Zion Hill in 1837, and, as the grave stones in the Nundah Historical Society testify, many German families settled in the area. However by the 1880's, groups of Irish families had begun to settle around the Rode Road area, and I have seen reference to the term "Irishtown" used as a description for settlement in this later period. Life in the new country was tough and according to the family, the early Moroneys lived in tents on their selected property until a residence could be built. Mary Moroney is described in the Post Office Directory as a laundress. Others in the family, and also the O'Deas, gained jobs in the railway service. In February 1890, Thomas Moroney (aged 24) and Bridget O'Dea (aged 19) were married at St Stephen's Cathedral by Father Denis Fouhy. Tim Moroney was born ten months later, to be followed by, at intervals of two years, three other children, a girl and two boys - Ellen Josephine (Joey), Thomas and Reginald. Tim was educated at German Station School, and later at a school in the Brisbane area.

In 1900, however, at the tender age of ten, tragedy struck my father's family when Thomas Moroney, who was described as a blacksmith, died of the bubonic plague. The plague first appeared in Brisbane in that year, apparently transported by ships from the Rocks area of Sydney, and Thomas was unfortunately, one of its earliest victims. I have read a report concerning the infestation and its effects upon Brisbane life. Stringent health regulations were enforced and Brisbane was required to undergo a thorough sanitary clean up. Thanks to Dr. Ross Patrick, who was researching the epidemic for his book on Health In Queensland, I was able to gain an account of the tragic events surrounding my Grandfather's death.

Apparently he fell ill on the weekend, and as the attending doctor's suspicions were aroused as to his possible condition, he was transported by train from Nundah to Brunswick Street Station, where he was transferred to a cab to be taken to the Brisbane General Hospital. He unfortunately died en route, and after examination at the morgue, the plague was confirmed. He was immediately taken to Gibson Island for burial. Elaborate precautions were set in place and the cab, the train carriage and the house at Nundah were isolated and disinfected. Thomas' relatives and contacts were isolated and transported to Lytton for quarantine purposes. During the journey to

Lytton, would you believe, tragedy struck again when the horse bolted at Albion, overturning the carriage, so that my Great-Grandfather, John O'Dea, sustained a broken arm. Anyone journeying to Lytton had to endure the most stringent forms of disinfection, both travelling in and out. After a week, all the Moroney contacts were pronounced free of infection and allowed to go home.

The effect of Thomas' death on the family was dramatic. My father, as a ten year old, had to take on the additional burden of extra work as well as schooling, while his mother established herself as a laundress. The stigma of death by the plague affected the family deeply, and it was hidden under the subterfuge of death by pneumonia. It was not until a decade ago, that I discovered the truth after researching the family history. At the age of fifteen, Tim Moroney joined the Queensland Railway Service as a Lad Porter. There had been hopes that his bright scholastic achievements would allow him entry into the legal profession, but the necessity to support the family meant gaining steady employment. The historian, Docherty, in his study of the development of Trade Unionism within the Australian Railway Service, makes the point that the railways provided the first form of permanent employment for a diversity of skilled and unskilled employees. Thus, jobs in the service were readily sought. A railway line had already connected Brisbane to Sandgate in 1882 and members of the Moroney and O'Dea families had been employed at different periods as railway labourers. It was probably the most logical destination for a young person with only a Primary School education seeking a permanent career.

It is at this point I wish to elaborate upon the type of Railway Trade Unionism and socialist philosophy which dominated my father's life as a trade union leader. As mentioned, the Railway Service covered a vast range of callings, and by the 1890's was the largest employer of labour in the colony of Queensland. Such a diversity of employment created difficulties for unified Trade Unionism. The locomotive staff, i.e. Engine Drivers, Firemen and Cleaners, were the first group to organise their own Trade Union which was particularistic in style to their own elite standing within the service. Other railway sections also attempted to organise their own unions, but the scattered nature of the railway workforce, as well as the obdurate opposition to Trade Unionism by Colonial Governments, saw these attempts short-lived. Following an example in Britain, an "all grades" movement, i.e. one single Railway Union covering all railway employees began in Australia, and, in 1886, the Queensland Railway Employees' Association (Q.R.E.A.) was formed. By the early 1890's, it was the largest Trade Union in the colony, with its own journal the *Queensland Railway Times*, and a permanent secretary, James Wilkinson, who later politically represented the area of Ipswich both at the State and Federal levels.

Like other unions, the Q.R.E.A. suffered a loss of membership during the Depression

and the Shearers' strikes of the 1890's, and after a slow process of rebuilding became the Queensland United Railway Employees' Association in 1910. It is from this period that a link was forged with the socialist philosophy of Anarcho-Syndicalism. To digress, the two major socialist philosophies which emerged in the nineteenth century were communism as espoused by Marx and anarchism as espoused by Bakunin. The latter philosophy was more suited to the rural, peasant populations of Spain and Italy since it favoured a devolved form of Government. However, its basic theory did not suit the emerging, industrial societies, and by the 1890s elements of Anarchism were absorbed by the French Syndicats, i.e. Trade Unions - hence the term Syndicalism. The philosophy was adopted by the Socialist Labour Party of America, and a breakaway Chicago school, headed by Eugene Debs, formed the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) better known as the "Wobblies" (or those who opposed to its ideals as "I won't work"), and it is this form which had a direct influence on the Australian Trade Union Movement from the earlier part of the twentieth century.

The basis of Anarcho-Syndicalism was the Industrial Union in contrast to the old style Craft Unions which were viewed as self-seeking entities, and thus perpetuating a Divided Labour Front against Capitalism. Syndicalist Unionism was suspicious of Parliamentarianism and the Arbitration process, preferring instead the use of direct action in order to gain their demands. All unions in a particular field, e.g. Transport, would link together under a single, industrial banner as a class identity. Its eventual form would be the "One Big Union" (O.B.U.), which one day would organise the "General Strike", bring Capitalism to its knees and thus allowing a total takeover of the means of production by the Trade Union Movement. Instead of the usual Pyramidal arrangement of government, the industrial unions would control society by a devolved commonwealth of workers with the working class represented by their unions at the top of a Rainbow Arch. It was a militant and combative philosophy, which, in, essence, admirably suited a union committed to the "all grades" concept.

On the other side of the coin, other labour groups, especially the Craft Unions, sought changes to the old order via constitutional means. Therefore the Labor Party, which had developed in the 1890's, out of former Liberal tendencies, concentrated on the election of members to parliament. This is not to say that strident, socialist voices were not heard within the labor institutions and conferences, but in the main, the Australian Labor Party was reformist in character, preferring a taming of capitalist excesses rather than a complete overthrow of the system. At the same time, a large general union, the Australian Workers Union, covering miners, shearers, sugar cane workers, labourers, etc., had been forged in Queensland by Ted Theodore and William McCormack - both later to become Queensland Labor Premiers. This massive union became inextricably linked with the Political Party, and eventually controlled all

aspects of its organisational and parliamentary wings. The A.W.U., basically moderate in its attitudes, saw itself as the natural inheritor of the O.B.U. mantle, and insisted that the other unions should be absorbed into its organisation. Thus, areas of conflict emerged between the A.R.U. and a Labor Party under the auspices of the A.W.U. in basic philosophies, governmental policies, industrial tactics and membership coverage. Added to this scenario was a group of Railway Unions, Known as the "Sectionals", i.e. covering different sections of the railway workforce, such as Locomotive Personnel, Guards, Shunters, Signal Men, Station Masters, Salaried Officers, who also retained their own individual union identity, and, who, in moments of strike activity, usually sided with Traditional Labour against the A.R.U.'s policies.

In 1912, the Q.R.E.A. joined with other labour unions in a general strike against a Tramway Company, run by a gentleman named 'Boss' Badger, who refused to allow his employees to wear badges at work. The Denham Liberal Government invoked emergency measures, used police volunteers and after several weeks defeated the strikers. Possibly, many of you will have heard of the extraordinary events that beset Brisbane during this period - all services brought to a standstill; the Port of Brisbane isolated by Southern Unions; spontaneous demonstrations and marches by workers; armed guards and police patrolling the streets, which culminated in a massed charge by police and volunteers on horseback through a demonstration held in King George Square, and thus branding that day with the opprobrium "Black Friday". As the historian, Turner has pointed out, however, no strike can survive against the combined forces of a government with access to Legislative powers and a united employer class supporting government action.

Tim Moroney first came to prominence during this period after an impassioned speech in the old Trades' Hall in Turbot Street, at the meeting which voted to take strike action. He was elected to the Railway Strike Committee, which ironically was headed by Ned Hanlon, who, later as Premier, invoked emergency powers and anti-picketing legislation during the 1948 Railway Strike. Back in 1912, however, it was realized that Syndicalist tactics would not achieve government for the labour movement, so more attention was devoted to political methods, and this occurred in 1915, with the election of the T.J. Ryan Labor Government. My Father, like other strikers, was sacked from the railways, and did not regain his position until the next year, after the Commissioner had interviewed all applicants for reinstatement. Despite his sins, he was promoted to the position of clerk in the traffic branch.

During the First World War period, Tim Moroney honed his trade union experiences, which, in 1917, eventually saw him elected as the full-time State Secretary of the Union - a position he held unchallenged until his death in 1944. After the 1912 defeat, the Q.U.R.E.A. became the Queensland Railways Union in 1913, and in 1921 the

Queensland Branch of the Australian Railways Union (A.R.U.) - a step viewed as essential for the Syndicalist program. His activities during the war period reflected the volatility of the era - participation in the Anti-Conscription and Anti-War debates; support for the I.W.W. prisoners in Sydney; support for the Irish Easter Rebellion, which in 1923 was to place him in an opposite camp to his Archbishop in support for the Irish Republican delegates visiting Australia; and, of course, support for the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. In the same year, he engineered a railway strike against the Ryan Labor Government over the issue of Dirt Money. The strike was a premonition of the growing tensions between the A.R.U., as the leading proponent of Left-Wing Militancy and the Queensland Labor Governments backed by the A.W.U.

During the Ryan period, 1915-1919, the A.R.U. was reasonably happy with the reforms introduced, i.e. an Industrial Arbitration System which provided for the legal recognition of trade unions; a Workers' Compensation Scheme and the establishment of various State Enterprises. However, the left-wing Industrial Unions retained a degree of cynicism, since, to them, these policies did not represent true socialism. The left-wing industrial unions were suspicious of the corrupting influences of power, and desired that the conferences and the administration should be controlled by the industrial wing. The parliamentarians, on other hand, argued that their responsibilities extended to all persons in the state, and they strongly resented this form of control.

Relations between the A.R.U. and the A.L.P. worsened when e.g. Theodore assumed the Premiership in 1919. During an economic recession in the early 1920's, the government persuaded the Industrial Court to reduce Crown employees' wages by 5 percent. To the A.R.U., this policy appeared as a traitorous attack on working class values and standards, and the union, through Moroney and Rymer, maintained a constant criticism of the Theodore Government, both in its journal - *The Advocate*, and at Labor meetings and conferences. In 1925, after Theodore had resigned to seek his political fortunes in the Federal area, W.N. Gillies was elected Premier. A strike over the sacking of a railway ganger was converted into a "Cause Célèbre" aimed at the reinstatement of the previously denied 5 percent. Gillies, who proved to be a weak and ineffectual leader, caved in to the A.R.U.'s demands, and ignoring the Industrial Court's previous rulings, restored the 5 percent through a vote in the parliament.

The A.R.U., under Moroney's leadership, had reached the pinnacle of its power within the Queensland Labor Movement. However, waiting in the wings was Theodore's mate, "Big Bill" McCormack, who had been elected Premier after Gillies' hasty retreat to the Arbitration Bench. McCormack detested the A.R.U. and planned the end of its influence. At the Southport 'Labor-in-politics' conference, in 1926, by the use of A.W.U. numbers McCormack was able to exclude the A.R.U. delegates - Moroney and Rymer - from the meeting over the signing of an Anti-Communist

Pledge. Not that Moroney and Rymer were members of the communist party, but they objected to its introduction on constitutional grounds. After repeated attempts over the next few months, to have its representatives recognised, the A.R.U. finally withdrew its affiliation from the Labor Party. (A good example of the strained relationships can be perceived by the letter from my father to Lewis McDonald, Secretary of the A.L.P. executive.)

Smarting over its exclusion, the A.R.U., in 1927, seized an opportunity to embarrass the government, by engaging in strike activity, in support of Northern sugar mill workers, who were also members of the A.W.U.

McCormack, who had just returned from an overseas loans' trip, did not waste any time. He took over personal control of the Railway Department, and after a modicum of negotiations, stood down all striking railway workers. Confronted with such purposeful action, Moroney ordered the strikers back to work on the government's terms. In two years, the A.R.U. had lost its prestigious position within the labour movement, unable to directly participate within or influence the policies of the political party. The union also suffered a decline in membership, as many members, either frightened by its strident militancy or at odds with its attitude to the political wing, left its ranks to join other sectional unions.

In the aftermath, Moroney maintained a constant criticism of the Queensland Labor Government, which ironically contributed to the defeat of the A.L.P. both in the State and Federal arenas. These events aided the Queensland Party in the long term, but led to a split in the Federal ranks keeping the party out of office until the Second World War. In 1929, Queensland Railway Workers helped defeat the McCormack Government, which had allowed the election of the Moore Country-National Government. However, the onslaught of the Depression and the draconian economic and industrial policies instituted by Moore saw that government lose office in 1932, paving the way for the long, years of Forgan Smith's rule, and culminating in complete control of the political party by the A.W.U.

In the Federal sphere, Moroney's "Bête-Noir", Theodore, was appointed Treasurer in the Scullin Labor Government, which also was elected in 1929. Previously, the Railway Advocate had hinted at corrupt practices in share-dealing by two prominent Labor ministers with regard to the Mungana and Chillago Smelters - namely Theodore and McCormack. These allegations provided enough ammunition for the Moore government to establish a Royal Commission which found the pair guilty of fraud. (A subsequent Civil Litigation absolved both persons). Theodore had been obligated to stand down as Treasurer to answer the charges, during a crucial period when his economic talents were required to counter the effects of the Depression. His reinstatement

ment as Treasurer caused Internal Party Dissension, while the forced premiers' plan exacerbated the Depression's effects, and, in 1931, after Lyons left to form the U.A.P., the Scullin Government was defeated at the Polls.

The 1930's Depression, of course, was hailed by the left as the long-awaited and long-predicted collapse of capitalism. Yet, in reality, the A.R.U., like most trade unions, struggled for survival. Although the union was relatively quiet on the industrial front (apart from a minor skirmish in 1931), the period demonstrated my father's boundless energy and enthusiasm for the cause of socialism and his support for the underdog. At a representative level, he became General President for the A.R.U. in 1935, which, besides his onerous duties of administration and travelling within his own state, meant additional journeys to southern executive meetings and conferences. Previously, he had participated in the founding of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (A.C.T.U.), an institution he viewed necessary for the total unification of the industrial movement, and was elected to the position of Vice-President in 1942.

My father has been described as an Internationalist. Thus, his perception of a socialist order was a far-reaching one which embraced the whole world. (At one stage, he even chose to learn Esperanto, in the hope that a universal form of communication would emerge.) *The Railway Advocate*, of which he was the editor, reflected his international spirit. Besides local news which included both State and Commonwealth industrial and political material, the journal also contained reports of the socialist struggles throughout the world. As part of the union's educative role, he had assembled a large, lending library (many of the books being his own) containing publications on socialism, economics, philosophy and industrial matters. He also engaged a professional academic to conduct classes in socialist and Economic studies. In fact, Father Boland, in his wonderful study of James Duhig, recounts a clash between my father and the Archbishop over the possible "Indoctrination of young men into Communism", a charge defended by my father in a letter to the *Catholic Leader*, which triggered a gracious apology from the Archbishop.

That type of clash, however, was indicative of Tim Moroney's readiness to oppose Church authority, if he felt it was siding with forces opposed to socialism. The turbulent events in Europe during the 1930's launched him into the forefront of the crusade against facism. *The Advocate* constantly featured articles warning its readers of the growing menace in Europe, which, if ignored, could overwhelm the whole world. While the Labor Party adopted an isolationist approach, being mindful of the degree of Catholic support for Mussolini in Italy, Tim Moroney became a leading spokesman for the movement against war and facism, and during the Spanish Civil War, not only helped organise relief for the Spanish Republic, but also published in the *Advocate* articles and news bulletins sneaked into the country by left-wing sources.

On the domestic front, he was always prepared to lend assistance in publicising the plight of the unemployed or homeless. An interview conducted by historian, Brian Costar, with Mick Healey, the proprietor of the Anvil Bookshop, demonstrated this readiness - according to Healey-

I would say, in my opinion, that the only outstanding Union that I can remember was the Australian Railways Union and that was under the influence of Mr Tim Moroney. He was a wonderful man. He would fight for every cause that was worthwhile....

And later -

Tim Moroney was one man on whom you could always depend on any cause, on unemployment, against war for collective security, against facism, anything at all.....

Although opposed philosophically to Arbitration, he proved to be a brilliant advocate for his union; which usually meant, much to his chagrin, the other, sectional railway unions benefiting under a common Railway Award. One story told to me concerned an uneducated official from a minor union, who used to pop into my father's office just to have him peruse his notes for a pending Arbitration case - usually resulting in my father writing up the case for this union official's presentation.

With regards to his family, he had married Norah Ruane in 1915 who bore him three children - Glynn, Aileen and Miles - the last dying in early childhood. His first wife suffered from ill health throughout the marriage, and she died in 1936. He remarried, in 1938 - Kathleen Scully, who was his secretary at the A.R.U. The marriage produced two children - myself and my brother Laurence. Within the family, there existed a form of hero-worship, which bordered on idolatry. He was the successful one, whose talents could have been channelled into any professional or commercial pursuit, but instead chose a life devoted to championing the cause of the battler. His younger brother, Reg, with whose children I grew up, treated him as the father he lost when only two years of age. Like the chieftain of old, at a young age he had been required to take charge of the family reins, and guide its future destiny. One story from my half-brother in Sydney concerns an accident to one of my cousins late at night. Immediately my father was summoned to drive from his abode in Newmarket over to Nundah, to take charge of the affair and provide the necessary instructions. It was as if the whole family could not make a decision without consulting him first.

At the outbreak of World War Two, Tim Moroney was extremely critical of the Forgan Smith Government's endorsement of the Public Safety Bill, which followed the

Federal Government's National Security Act giving the State wide powers of control. He saw the bill as a danger to personal liberties, and thus he could be described as a civil libertarian long before the present-day popularity of such a cause. I also came across a speech of his which he delivered outside the City Hall urging the populace not to support the war effort, since both Britain and Germany were imperialist nations. This type of speech demonstrated the dilemma confronting the left during the early war time period - especially after Germany and the Soviet Union signed a Non-Aggression Pact, which allowed the latter to march into Finland. Thus, the events of June 1941, when Hitler's forces attacked Russia, must have proved a blessed relief, since the Soviet Union had now joined with the allied forces against the previously, identified enemy. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour reinforced the Left's commitment. My father, the former Pacifist, joined the Voluntary Defence Corps and trained as an Anti-Aircraft gunner.

During the war years, his workload increased immensely. Besides the monthly *Advocate*, he also produced weekly broadsheets on a vast range of topics. He gained a pilot's licence with a view of quicker travel for his many journeys both intra and interstate, which normally involved lengthy train trips. One of his former union officials, Frank Campell, informed me that the A.R.U. office was open on Saturdays until 1.00 pm. He has vivid memories of my father scurrying down the Trades Hall steps after 1.00 pm with a large, bundle of papers under one arm and an cumbersome dictaphone machine under the other, so that, on Monday morning, the typists could commence immediately on the work he had dictated over the remainder of the weekend.

Of course, the pace had to tell. Despite warnings by colleagues to slow down, he ignored their pleas and paid the ultimate penalty. On the 10 September 1944, after a short illness, he died in Genazzano Hospital, Brisbane, of a massive heart attack. Tributes flowed in from all over Australia, including a telegram from the Prime Minister, John Curtin, who the next year was to suffer the same fate. Archbishop Duhig presided over the Requiem Mass held in his honour at St Stephen's Cathedral. In his panegyric, the Archbishop stated that -

I am glad to be associated with the congregation in honouring the memory of a simple, upright man who esteemed his fellow men and died in the friendship of the Redeemer, who gave dignity to labour by himself working at the carpenter's bench. All regretted the ultimately death of Tim Moroney, for he could be ill spared by his family or the union of his workmates. Tim would be remembered as a straight forward, honest man, who gave of his best to the cause of the wage-earner, and who served the cause faithfully and efficiently, without ever shrinking

from a difficulty or resorting to a dishonourable act. His was a fine record crowned by a death worthy of a large-hearted Christian.

A large cortege comprising Ministers of the Crown, Parliamentarians, Union Officials, Representatives of the Railway Department and citizens from all walks of life attended his burial at Nudgee Cemetery.

In summation, one can identify a man who was driven by a vision of a fair and equitable world; a man who sensed and despised injustice in any form; and a man with great compassion for his fellow human beings, especially the underdog. Yet any investigation of a great man can always reveal certain enigmas.

For example, one question which always intrigued me was -

Why did my father cling to his Catholic faith when he so passionately embraced a secular philosophy, which in many cases, led to a rejection of religion and a belief in atheism?

My own feelings on the matter relate to his Irish background, which helped him identify with a persecuted Church that had provided the necessary sustenance of faith for a persecuted race of people.

Some of the other enigmas include -

- * An ardent pacifist whose favourite musical pastime was listening to stirring military marches. (Maybe his vision encompassed the workers of the world marching in unity for once!)
- * His great belief in the Brotherhood of Man as against his isolation of the A.R.U. from the Labor Party and many sections of the Trade Union Movement.;
- * His philosophic rejection of arbitration compared with his skilful performance within the system;
- * His intelligent leadership of his Union which pushed it to the forefront of the militant movement compared with his inability to counter the numbers' trap set by McCormack and the A.W.U. at the 1926 Southport conference;

- * His reluctance to come to terms with a reformist Labor Party which obviously a majority of Labor supporters felt comfortable with, compared with the type of revolutionary government he constantly championed which in reality enjoyed a minority support;

His life, however, was a fine example of dedication to a cause, and I am proud to say - "That was Tim Moroney, my father!"

(Tim Moroney Jn is a younger son of the subject of this paper. He is at present a Parliamentary Librarian.)