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New South Wales Combined Colliery Proprietors' Association

Author: Colleen McEwen

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Introduction

The New South Wales Combined Colliery Proprietors' Association (NSWCCPA) was established in 1942, although tentative steps towards its formation were taken as early as 1922. Four major peak organisations were represented in the NSWCCPA, and the collection includes many of their papers. The first was the Northern Colliery Proprietors' Association, which emerged out of moves for employer unity in the 1860s, and represented collieries in the northern district of New South Wales other than those owned by BHP. The second, Northern Collieries Ltd., although a limited liability company, functioned as an industrial organisation representing those collieries in the northern district not covered by the Northern Association.

The Southern Colliery Proprietors' Association, the third organisation, was composed of all collieries, other than those owned by Australian Iron and Steel, which operated along the south coast of New South Wales including the Burraborang Valley. It grew out of the Southern Coal Owners Association formed in 1889. There was also a loose coalition between the Southern Colliery Proprietors' Association and the New South Wales Coke Proprietors' Association.

Finally, the Western Coal Association represented owners of collieries in the Lithgow area and the western district in general. In 1964 the NSWCCPA became the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Coal Association, a new, national peak association.

The Records

The records deal mainly with relations between these employer organisations and the main union, the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation, more commonly known as the Miners Federation.

As well as industrial files and the minutes of meetings, the collection includes the transcripts of arbitration cases before the Coal Industry Authority. There are also newspaper clippings and printed pamphlets.

The richness of the material can be conveyed by reading Chapter 8 of *Beyond Dependence: Companies, Labour Processes and Australian Mining* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986) by Kosmas Tsokhas. This chapter is based substantially on the records of the NSWCCPA and by skimming the footnotes one can get a good idea of the variety of documents.

The chapter shows that the records can shed some new light on the disturbances in the coalfields in the 1940s, and on the crucial strike in 1949. It is also clear that there is much data to be gathered on issues such as the mechanisation of coal mines, the use of time and motion studies and other tools of scientific management, on the changing patterns of authority in the workplace, on conflicts over discipline, and the drive by managers to boost labour productivity through the use of piece rates. There is also some statistical data that deals mainly with the number and causes of strikes.

The records contain material dealing with some of the main mining groups in the New South Wales industry. BHP and its subsidiary, Australian Iron and Steel, are there, even though both firms withdrew from the peak organisations in the 1950s. Among the colliery owners appearing regularly are: J. & A. Brown & Abermain Seaham Collieries, Hebburn Ltd, R.W. Miller and Co. and many others, so company history writers could find it useful to consult the list should they be studying a firm with interests in the New South Wales coal industry.

Labour historians researching the Miners' Federation and the foundations of modern unionism in New South Wales would find the records most useful. In addition, anyone with a concern to unravel the relationship between the Communist Party of Australia and the Miners Federation could find the NSWCCPA records of use. At the very least, important insights are provided into how employers perceived the militancy of the Miners' Federation and the role of Communists in it.

Tsokhas suggests that far from the Communist Party manipulating the miners towards revolutionary rebellion, Federation officials tended to lag behind their irascible, often self-mobilising members. Despite, or perhaps because of, their ideology the Communist officials retained a commitment to orderly collective bargaining, especially during the Second World War, and even in the late 1940s. On this Tsokhas is suggestive and has not told the full story, but more of the answer could be found in these records.