Of Violence and Chivalry: A Case Study of Divided and Oppositional Masculinities in Industrial Conflict

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In May and June 1991, a picket line, staffed mainly by men, initiated a two-week dispute against a fisheries employer in George Town, Tasmania. The picketers made several demands for the benefit of women workers at the fisheries plant, including, among other things, the cessation of the sexual harassment of women workers. This paper examines the myriad of causes of the dispute and the complex range of motives behind the men's decisions to establish and sustain the picketing. In particular, the paper considers the extent to which the men's demands for the cessation of sexual harassment transcended all other demands as the picketing progressed into its second week. The picketers' actions demonstrate important lessons for the union movement, such as the capacity of unionised men to oppose violent forms of masculinity against women.

INTRODUCTION

Masculinities are shaped and expressed in a myriad of ways, including in the styles of dress and fashion; in the manners of speech and behaviour; especially in relation to women, gays and effeminate men (Winchester, 1999: 82); and in the ways in which men in paid work contest the class
arena during strikes and lockouts. Masculinities are produced in the workplace as much as in the home (Fulop and Lin­
stead, 1999: 73). They are, by definition, multi-layered – ex­
is the dominant and most culturally approved form of mascu­
linity and is linked closely to heterosexuality.

Hegemonic masculinity is often expressed through vio­
lence against women, gays and effeminate heterosexual men
(Connell, 1995, 77-78; Hatty, 2000, 181-182). Violence in the
workplace is a seemingly worsening problem (Braverman,
1999; Flannery, 1996). The vast majority of people in con­
temporary industrialised countries have either witnessed epi­
sodes of violence at work or heard about them from among
their colleagues, peers and friends (Mantell and Albrecht,
1994, 4). In Australia and abroad, one of the most common
expressions of workplace violence is sexual harassment
(Spry, 1998, 232) which, in the vast majority of cases, is per­
petrated by male employers and employees against women
workers. Sexual harassment at work, as everywhere else, is
typically a display of power over women and is designed to
isolate, undermine and degrade the victims (Pattinson, 1991,
11). As an expression of violent masculinity, sexual harass­
ment constitutes a grave occupational health and safety
problem. Moreover, sexual harassment intensifies the occu­
pational and industrial segregation of the labour market by
gender in that it discourages women from entering tradition­
ally male jobs (Mezey, 1994, 93; McDermott, 1995, 496,
498).

There is abundant evidence of trade union inaction in
respect of sexual harassment. British trade unions, for in­
stance, have sometimes opposed complaints about sexual
harassment and disrupted disciplinary procedures in alleged
cases (Halford, 1992, 175). In Australia, women are often re­
luctant to alert male officials and shop stewards to their griev­
ances because of the fear of being ignored or ridiculed
(McDermott, 1995, 502-505). In Australia, the Western Aus­
Australian branch of the Metals and Engineering Workers' Union in 1994 – one of the forerunners of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union – was unwilling to support demands for the removal of pornographic material at a specific work site for fear that this might provoke strike action by the male members.

As stated earlier, masculinities operate within a complex hierarchy. This hierarchy comprises those which are oppositional to hegemonic masculinity but not aggressive in defence of patriarchy (Connell, 2001, 31; Connell, 2001a, 40-41). Nonetheless, they enable men to expropriate the patriarchal dividend, in the form of greater prestige and privilege, among other things (Ibid). In the labour market, multiple and diverse masculinities pervade different occupations and locations of work (Collinson and Hearn, 1996, 66). Masculinist cultures are as multitudinous and differentiated in the trade unions as they are in occupations and workplaces (Bradley, 1999, 173-174).

Atkin (1991, 26) has shown, in relation to the early post-war history of the Australasian Meat Workers Union, that “a man’s lack of involvement with his union could be interpreted as evidence that he was not a real man.” In contemporary Australian trade unions men are still in control, which is the reason many unions are governed by cultures of masculinism (Pocock, 1997, 10-11). As Pocock (1997a, 3) states:

In the discourses of unionism, ‘worker’ often has meant, in fact, ‘male worker’, ‘member’ has stood for ‘male member’ and identities like ‘shop steward’ have become saturated with masculinity.

It is also the reason why trade unions have not done enough to overcome sexual harassment and why they sometimes defend its perpetrators.

In relation to class struggles, the efforts of rank and file trade union men to win better wages and conditions have generated picket lines of “masculine heroics”, negating women’s participation (Cockburn, 1991, 120). Evidence abounds of men insulting and harassing women on picket lines, as a means of obviating the latter’s efforts to become
involved (Campbell, 1985, 30).

At the other end of the spectrum, picket lines have been known to actively encourage women’s participation and to create non-violent and creative forms of anti-misogynist action. A case in point was the picket line established throughout the long Associated Pulp and Paper Mills dispute in Burnie 1992, in which female spouses of men on strike, together with various trade union officials, established mechanisms to minimise the possibility of escalating domestic violence throughout and beyond the dispute (Tierney, 1999).

Masculinities in the workplaces, trade unions, as elsewhere, are not only multitudinous and differentiated but also processes in flux, constantly being negotiated, modified and challenged. Although heterosexual masculinity is hegemonic within the union movement, the very existence of multiple and shifting masculinities in potential or authentic opposition to the repression of and violence against working women is, in itself, a force for significant change, in the workplace and elsewhere (Franzway, 2001, 46).

Chivalry, as a form of masculinity, embraces a multitude of demeanours. While chivalric conduct in the workplace can assume a benign façade, both employers and working men can transform codes of gentlemanly honour into violent and “stern machismo” when women begin to flout long-standing expectations of industrial quiescence and servitude (Hunt and Ana-Gatbonton, 2000, 5). However, chivalry can have the opposite effect. In November 2001 at the Carter Holt Harvey factory in Lansvale, Western Australia, some eighty male immigrants and members of the Printing division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union threatened to strike for five days in opposition to their employer’s decision not to extend a 14 per cent wage rise to the relatively small cohort of female employees. Both men and women working at the plant shared the militancy and the company reversed its decision shortly after the threat of the week-long stoppage was announced. The Printing division’s State Secretary,
Amanda Perkins, praised the event as an important "victory for industrial chivalry" (Workers Online, 2001). Though masculinist, pro-union sister chivalry has the potential to be a liberating force for working women.

This paper is a study of an important, though little known industrial dispute, occurring in the small industrial locality of George Town in northern Tasmania, over a two-week period between late May and early June 1991. The dispute was significant because it occasioned a militant, combined-union opposition, led by the Food Preservers' Union, to the exploitation of, and violence against, women workers at a fisheries plant. This union action took the form of a picket line staffed mainly by male shop stewards from a plethora of unions in Tasmania. The factors which motivated the men to join the picket line were numerous, comprising, among other things, the support for the Food Preservers' Union's efforts to re-establish a closed shop, the willingness to punish an anti-union employer, and the desire to end violence, such as sexual assault, against the women employed at the plant. Significantly, in the second week of the dispute, the picketers' commitment to end the sexual harassment transcended the commitment to all other demands. For long ignorant of the problems of violence against women workers, these men became militant in their demands for the cessation of this violence and for the sacking of the perpetrators. The picketing men established a campaign that was steeped in chivalry, confronting an extremely aggressive group of misogynists. The picket line itself was a struggle for the recognition of honour—recognition of the honour of the women whose rights were denied and recognition of the honour of the men who would fight on the women's behalf. The men's sense of masculinity was enriched by this struggle for honour. The picket line was enriched, too, by the presence of the women who sought the unionists' assistance. By participating in the picket line, the women alerted the picketing men to the problem of sexual harassment while discovering a sense of place in industrial struggle.
It is not the purpose of this paper to idealise and lionise any of the people responsible for the militancy, though the point should be made that the events in the dispute do offer a glimmer of optimism, countering despairing and fatalistic perspectives about the capacity and willingness of trade union men to contest violence against women workers. Nor does this paper intend to romanticise masculinist chivalry, expressed and carried out in class struggle. Chivalry in workers’ struggles is limited in its capacity to be a liberating force for working women if women do not participate in these struggles. The key purpose of this paper is to draw lessons from the dispute; lessons from which the union movement can set in place strategems to overcome workplace situations in which women are systematically harassed and bullied.

The research was derived partly, from letters to the author, arbitration tribunal transcripts and local government archives. The main source of primary data was the interviews conducted, on and off, between 1995 and 2004, with some thirty people involved in the picket line and with two women and one man formerly working at the fisheries plant. One of these women attended the picket line. It was not possible to interview all of those involved in the dispute. Nor was it necessary to cite the comments of all interviewees, given the constraints of space in the paper. Eleven interviewees have been cited.

(The author has given pseudonyms to the interviewees cited in this study. One participant’s name – Bruce Roberts – has been mentioned, unavoidably. The participant’s name is referenced on the basis of a poem which he wrote about and during the dispute, subsequently published in a book of prose (Roberts, 1992)).

Though memory provides a rich aid to the accretion of the historical research of particular events, institutions and places, oral history is beset with potential methodological problems. A key problem in this study was the unwillingness of some interviewees to re-visit a terrible time in their past. In conducting interviews, the author was concerned about the
possibility that some respondents might idealise their own participation in the event or reassemble memories, according to their perceptions – accurate or otherwise – of the author's own values. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse, at length, the uses and limits of memory in oral history. In any case, this has been done elsewhere (Watson 1994; Debouzy, 1986). The challenge to any author utilising oral history is to provide an adequately triangulated study, interviewing as many people as possible, interrogating evidence that can be both corroborative and contradictory.

Problems of triangulation were encountered from the outset of this study. The author experienced few problems with finding picketing men to interview but had much less success interviewing the women who worked at the factory – as already stated only two acceded to be interviewed. Several women could not be contacted. They relocated themselves elsewhere shortly after the plant closed down in mid to late 1991, without leaving details of their intended whereabouts. Some, who remained in George Town, declined to be interviewed, stating that they were trying to forget their experiences at the plant. Attempts to interview the perpetrators of the violence would have produced a more sophisticated, triangulated case study, no doubt. However, this was not practicable under the circumstances. The perpetrators would have been hostile to the study. Very early in the piece, a number of persons heavily involved in the picketing advised the author that he would face violent threats, or worse, if these people were approached for interviews.

The following sections examine the depressed employment conditions pervading the George Town municipality at the time of the dispute; the wages and conditions under which both men and women worked at the fisheries factory; the workplace health and safety problems; the sexual division of labour in the plant; and the multiple causes of the dispute. The article subsequently deals with the Food Preservers’ Union’s intervention in the dispute, the threat of violence extending to the picket line and the element of chivalry among the
picketers. This chivalric element, though masculinist, existed in opposition to the violent masculinity pervading the fisheries factory. The penultimate section considers the complex nature of the motives for the picketing men's involvement in the dispute, together with the increasing importance that most of the picketing men attached to overcoming the sexual harassment problem, as the dispute took its fascinating and bizarre course.

GEORGE TOWN AND THE WORKPLACE

George Town is a small industrial town in northern Tasmania, a small distance from the port of Bell Bay on the Tamar River and approximately 50 kilometres from Launceston. It was the major township of the George Town municipality, which had a population of some 5,100 people in the early 1990s. In June 1991, unemployment was 9.6% nationally and 11.3% in Tasmania—the state that typically suffers the highest unemployment rate (ABS, 1991, 9,11). The unemployment rate in the George Town municipality was considerably higher (13.7%) in mid 1991 than the Tasmanian average (ABS, 1991a, 18). Underemployment was also high in the town itself, with many families relying on part-time and casualised work in farming, construction and food processing. In the early to mid 1990s, some 30% of the municipality's families were earning incomes of between $12,001 and $25,000 (George Town Municipal Council, 1996, 4). George Town had a high proportion of public housing—some 25 per cent of the aggregate, which, as the Local Council points out, was an additional index of a "lower socio-economic status than the Tasmanian average" (Ibid, 3). In 1994, 37.8% of the municipality's residents were under the age of 15 years, compared with 29.8% for Tasmania as a whole. Around 76 per cent of the town's youths had completed their schooling by the age of 16 years, with few opportunities to gain labour market skills. This created considerable concern for the Council as there were huge problems of "catering for the needs of so many young [unemployed] people" (Ibid).
The shedding of labour at two nearby smelting plants – Tasmanian Electro Metallurgical Company (Temco) and Comalco – contributed substantially to the municipality’s growing unemployment and social problems. Temco’s labour force fell from 458 in June 1981 to 399 in June 1991 (correspondence Suzanne Pels, Personnel Officer Temco, to the author, 8 June 1999), largely as a result of the introduction of labour saving technologies on the plant’s furnace lines. The Comalco plant at Bell Bay — long regarded as the “oldest and least efficient smelter” in Australia (The Launceston Examiner, 1993, 4) — suffered from globally depressed aluminium prices, that reached a “record low” in the early to mid 1990s. Rumours persisted of either massive lay-offs at the aluminium smelter (some 200 employees) or complete closure (The Examiner, 1991, 1). It seemed that the only prospect for long-term employment growth in George Town was the continued expansion of the seafood processing plant York Cove Fisheries, which specialised in the processing of deep sea trawl, fin-fish and orange-roughy for foreign export markets. York Cove took pride in its best-practice management and in its policy of employing only local people from the town (York Cove was not the company in which the dispute took place).

George Town’s economic and social problems created a growing resentment among welfare-dependent families towards “affluent”, double-income households – those in which both husbands and wives were employed. Several people interviewed for this study have commented on the intense community pressure imposed on women in double-income families to forfeit their jobs to unemployed male breadwinners. Matthew (interview, 1 August 1995), one of the most prominent picketers in the dispute, then representing the Federated Engine Drivers’ and Firemen’s Association, states that those who tended to be particularly vociferous in their disapproval were other women – specifically those who had been house-keepers since marriage and whose husbands were unemployed. This pressure was applied to the double-income families for the benefit of totally welfare-dependent
families and for the benefit of the "greater good" of the township itself. The women at the factory felt this hostility. It was common knowledge that there were unemployed men residing in George Town, trained and experienced in the work which the women performed, and members of trade unions (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 7). When some of the women at the factory described their plight to people of welfare-dependent households, the latter's responses tended to be far from sympathetic. It is obvious that most people in George Town were privy to much of the violence at the fisheries plant in which the dispute took place. Yet Matthew referred to anecdotal accounts of incidents of verbal abuse in the shopping centre against the women fisheries workers by other George Town women (interview, 1 August 1995).

Reinforcing this hostility to "affluent" double-income families was the fear — no doubt a consequence of rumours flowing from the manager of the fisheries factory — that the plant could close down if a section of the employees embarked on industrial action. Moreover, the manager knew the art of divide and conquer. From time to time he attempted to portray himself as a compassionate source of welfare by providing gifts to the locality, especially to families which lacked breadwinners. As one former employee of the fisheries plant contends, the manager and his male Geelong employees "sort of bought their way in [to George Town]. They promised good work for hard-working people and gave away free fish" (interview, Alan, 6 August 1995). In an economically depressed town like this, the manager's gifts were immensely appreciated. In the minds of many George Town residents, the manager and his loyalists were not viewed as "outsiders from the mainland" but rather as charitable people who were always welcome in the community.

The author could not obtain information about the existence or otherwise of local women's groups in George Town at the time of the dispute. However, it is evident that the town's community organisations took little or no interest in helping the women at the plant, as indicated by the inability of
the picketers to persuade the community groups to exert pressure on the factory manager. According to picket activist Bernard, also representing the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association (interview, 31 March 2004), "one of the activists from the Food Preservers' Union went and spoke to the local community organisations, though I forget which ones. He returned empty-handed and didn't try again."

The town's apparently worsening economic problems, combined with its deep-seated resentment towards double income families, effectively closed the door on the women's needs. Perceptions of the manager's "altruism", combined with the fear that the town could lose yet another employer, contributed to the community organisations' silence.

The factory, in which the dispute occurred, specialised in the processing and packaging of orange-roughy fish for the Tasmanian and mainland markets. A Greek-Australian family, which also owned a fisheries plant in Geelong Victoria, purchased the company in early 1990. The management of the orange-roughy processing factory was the responsibility of a man in his early thirties, and heir to his father's Geelong plant.

Employment at the fisheries plant was casualised because of the seasonal migration patterns of, and Tasmanian government quotas on, orange-roughy. The workforce ranged up to 35 staff at peak production, of whom around 20 were women (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). At the time of the dispute itself, there were an estimated 20 to 25 staff, with a roughly equal number of male and female employees (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 4).

A rigid sexual division of labour overlapped with gender-based wage discrimination. The dozen or so women – all residents of George Town, with the exception of one from Geelong – were employed on grading operations (sorting the fish according to size), as skinners, on trimming (removal of the internal organs and rough fillet edges), and on packaging the fillets (interview, Alan, former production superintendent, 11 August 1995). There were some six or seven men – from
George Town but unrelated to the women workers – engaged on packing and fork-lift driving.³ The remaining men worked on filleting operations. They comprised two Anglo-Australians, two-second generation Greek-Australians, a first generation Macedonian, and one New Zealander. Close friends to the manager, the filleters were transient employees closely associated with the manager’s family: in the orange-roughy season they worked at George Town, in the off-seasons they were employed at the sibling fisheries plant in Geelong (Ibid). Throughout most of the 1990 orange-roughy season, the women (and the male superintendent) were paid time-wages of ten dollars per hour, irrespective of the number of hours they worked or of the times of day that they performed their tasks (Ibid, 13). In other words, they were not paid overtime penalty rates, which was in breach of the Tasmanian Poultry, Game and Marine Products Award 1989. At peak production times they were required to work as much as 15 hours per day, six or seven days per week (Ibid, 7, 17; interview, Neil, 11 July 1995).⁴ On some days, they were required to wait up to two hours without pay before they were advised of work. If there was little or no grading, skinning or trimming work to undertake, they were either sent home or directed to cleaning operations on the super-exploitative rate of $5.00 per hour. The payment of this immensely low rate was made on the condition that they did not complain if the payment of the backlog of wages was postponed until the Christmas period (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 15, 26-27). In the aftermath of the superintendent’s resignation from the company and his complaint to the Department of Industry and Labour about the underpayment of wages, the women were transferred to the piece-rate of 80c per box (Ibid, 13); the same rate paid to the male workers from George Town. However they were not given the back-pay that was extended to the superintendent until the aftermath of union action – a matter which will be discussed presently.

The male filleters from Geelong were employed on the piece-rate of 35 cents per kilogram while the men from
George Town employed on packing and fork-lift operations earned the piece-rate of 80 cents per packaged box (Ibid). Both rates accorded with those established under the above-mentioned state award. The weekly earnings of the male employees depended entirely on how much they produced (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 11-14). If their productivity was high, then their piece-wages would comfortably exceed wages paid to the filleters and packers employed elsewhere under time wages. As Neil (interview, 11 July 1995) states, the male workers "could earn pretty good money if they worked for long hours."

The factory was labour intensive with outdated equipment, sourced from the family’s plant in Geelong. Most of the machines were purchased in the 1960s: "they were so old they often broke down (Ibid)." The work processes and machinery were dangerous. The fork-lift drivers did not possess licences to operate such vehicles. The skinning machines, on which women alone were assigned, lacked protective guards to prevent cuts to the hands and fingers. The absence of guards on the pulleys driving the conveyor belts made work extremely hazardous if sections of clothing were caught in the pulley drags. The women workers were denied access to various workplace safety provisions that were available to the male workers, such as boots, aprons, hats, and hairnets (Ibid). From time to time, the manager and male employees from Geelong would engage in drunken parties on work premises during working hours, which culminated in fish-throwing games: the targets were almost invariably the female employees (Ibid).

The women explained to the Food Preservers' Union in May 1991 that they were not previously aware of the award rates to which they were entitled (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 15). However superintendent Alan (interview, 6 August 1995) disputes this, claiming that the women would not report their grievances to the Department for fear of being sacked and harassed long after the cessation of employment at the factory. The underpayment of wages was one of many
factors behind Alan's decision to resign in late 1990, despite the absence of jobs elsewhere in George Town. The manager allegedly made a number of telephone threats to his superintendent shortly after the latter had announced his intention to complain to the Department of Labour and Industry (Ibid, 27). Cathy, the superintendent's wife continued to work at the plant. One Saturday morning in late 1990, shortly after the superintendent had resigned, Alan, Cathy and their son found a horse's head on the doorstep of their home (Ibid, 27): shades of the Corleone retribution in the movie The Godfather. They were convinced that the manager purchased the head from an abattoir and conveyed it to an employee with clear instructions — Alan even mentioned the suspected employee's name to the author.

Hegemonic masculinity is the apex in the hierarchy of masculinities. Like all hierarchies of power, violence is required to sustain dominance of the apex. The sinister eeriness of the event, combined with its image of organised and merciless gangsterism, effectively amplified this violence.

Long before the horse's head incident, the manager attempted to keep the women employees subdued and to control their lives at both work and home. He instructed the women to go home directly from work and not to socialise on the pretext that late evenings would reduce their productivity the following day (Ibid, 22). As stated by one former employee — Sally (interview, 1 December 1995) — "we were told we couldn't go out at night because it was supposed to affect our work." Even a minor transgression of the company's dictatorial rules would lead to the debasement of the women and the manager was known to call his female staff "the dregs of George Town" (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 8). A number of the production men, including two from the local community, were allegedly willing partners in the process. They would insult the women by referring to them as "a pack of bitches, a pack of moles, a pack of whores." (Ibid, 24) They would throw fish, the fillets of fish or the guts of fish at the women while they were working, particularly during the
on-site booze parties. Sometimes they would soak the women with water squirted from high-pressure industrial hoses (*Ibid*, 20, 22). One female employee told the Tasmanian Industrial Commission that:

> it was nothing unusual for some of the males to flash brown eyes, pull their undies down and flash their bottoms ... On one occasion a penis was flashed ... It was nothing unusual to have your bum pinched or something like that. You'd get called abusive names, sworn at, told to get fucked and things like that ... Moles you know, bitches, stuff like that. Mainly the filleters and [the manager] himself (*Ibid*, 19).

Whenever a woman went to the toilet, she had to pass through the men's shower-room, hoping that nobody was undressed (*Ibid*, 19-20). Allegedly, some men expected the women to provide sex in appreciation of their jobs, though none acceded to this. One woman states that "when we said no to sex, there was the suspicion that we would lose our jobs" (interview, Sally, 1 December 1995). It was alleged further that one female employee was nearly gang-raped by some of the employees after the workplace Christmas party in 1990 (interview, Alan, 3 December 1995).

The social and economic bases of the systematic harassment were complex. An atmosphere of fear sustained the economic exploitation of the women. The women's objectification and humiliation engendered a deep and eroticised sense of power for several of the men. All but one of the male workers from Victoria, together with a couple of the fork-lift drivers/packers from the local community, were willing to support the manager's efforts to keep the female employees in a perpetual state of terror.

For decades, the highly casualised nature of the workforce in food processing in Australia has posed severe obstacles to the recruitment of members by the trade unions associated with this industry. Labour casualisation has affected union density in Tasmania's food processing industry as much as that of the mainland states. This was in spite of the preference clause for union members in the Tasmanian Poultry, Game and Marine Products Award 1989. A further frus-
tration, from the standpoint of the Food Preservers' Union, has been the tendency of many employers to arrange closed shop agreements with the rival Australian Workers' Union, once the employees begin to pursue union membership. The employers have preferred to deal with a tame cat union than with the Preservers' Union (interview, Neil, representing the Food Preservers' Union, 31 May 1999).

In the late 1980s, the Food Preservers' Union established a closed shop agreement with the then owner of the fisheries factory. However, in 1990, the new owners of the plant elected to hire non-unionised labour from George Town and Geelong. The manager was opposed to any of his workers joining a trade union as this ultimately would lead, among other things, to union pressure to invest in new and safer machinery and equipment, to cease the workplace violence, and to pay the backlog of wages that were owed. When a representative of the Food Preservers' Union visited the plant in early 1991, the manager told all of his employees that they should "stick with him ... [and] he would cut them a deal" (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 10). The sole woman recruited from the Geelong establishment was alleged to have told her female colleagues that if they joined the Food Preservers' Union, the manager "would just pack it up and go back to Victoria" (Ibid, 18).

The Food Preservers' Union official, Jane, visited the plant on three occasions in February 1991, in an attempt to ascertain the reason/s why the company had not engaged the unemployed men who were employed by the previous owner of the plant and who still possessed union tickets. She discussed the benefits of union membership to those who had been hired in their place (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 7; interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). Jane's efforts, at the time, met with limited success as only two people — both women — joined the union, unbeknownst to their employer (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 8-9). The manager was aware of the Food Preservers' Union's reputation for perseverance, and accordingly made an agreement with the
Australian Workers' Union, encouraging his “union-minded” employees to join that union. This resulted in the Australian Workers' Union's brief recruitment of some three to five male employees (interview, Neil, 31 May 1999).6

At the time, the Food Preservers’ Union was one of the principal unions in the struggle for women's rights, even though it has always been a male dominated union in terms of membership. Data are elusive in respect of the union’s membership in Tasmania at the time of the dispute. In July 1995 there were 6,506 members of the Food and Confectionery division of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union – the successor to the Food Preserver’s Union – in Tasmania (personal correspondence, Jane to the author, 1 July 1995). Of these members, 5,611 were men and 895 were women (Ibid). Despite this gender imbalance in membership, the Preserver’s Union and its successor have been prepared to encourage as much female participation as possible in the formal structures of the union: in the mid 1990s, some 15 of the 48 shop stewards, in the Tasmanian branch, were women (Ibid; interview, Neil, 11 July 1995).7

Hearing disturbing rumours about the factory, the Preservers’ Union attempted to recruit the female workers. Officials, Neil and Jane, visited their homes shortly before the inception of the winter orange-roughy season in 1991 (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). It was during these visits that the manager informed the union that he had not re-hired women from George Town, at that stage. The women had been hoping to return to their jobs in the forthcoming orange roughy season, but were afraid that the manager would overlook them if he discovered that they had become unionised. After discussing their grievances about the underpayment of award rates, the backlog of wages owed to them, the unsafe working conditions and the systematic and routine violence, all but one woman joined the Preservers' Union. Even though they had valid reasons to fear their employer, they joined the union out of desperation. As one of the unionised production workers states, "we were desperate and had had
enough” (interview, Cathy, 22 April 2004). The women emphasised that the sexual harassment was their greatest concern and urged the Preservers’ Union to give the highest priority to the resolution of this problem (Ibid).

The union officials explained to the women that they had the power to take legal action against their employer. They outlined the role and powers of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission but the women showed little interest in becoming involved in a protracted battle in a quasi-judicial body against men who might be prepared to take violent reprisals against them. As stated by Neil (interview, 6 May 1996):

The women were not the slightest bit interested in going to the Human Rights Commission. It would have taken too long and they would have been forced to recount painful memories. [Initially] most of them were not even interested in giving evidence to the Industrial Commission because they were frightened of the men and they worried about losing their jobs. The disadvantage of legal proceedings [referring to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission] is that they drag on far too long. They get adjourned and adjourned again... We [the Food Preservers’ Union] wanted it sorted out as quickly as possible.

The women wanted the union to embark on industrial action on their behalf (interview, Jane, 17 November 1995). At the outset, the Preserver’s Union officials felt that it might not be in the interest of the women to join the picket line (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). The women themselves made it clear that they were worried about one of the manager’s loyal employees hurting them on the picket line. To a lesser extent, they were anxious about their already troubled reputation in George Town if they were seen to be “union trouble-makers.” As former Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association official Bernard (interview, 28 March 2004) claims:

Some women working at [the factory] attended the picket line but some didn’t. They feared for their jobs and safety. They told me they were also worried about negative slurs from the town-people. There were a lot of onlookers who
drove past and saw the whole thing as some kind of circus in town. So they were uncomfortable about how some people in the town might regard them if they were regularly on the picket line. And there was one dangerous onlooker who created fear.... He often came to the picket line and yelled insults and threats at us. Threats like – 'Don't go to sleep tonight 'cos I'll soon wake you up with something.' Nothing happened and there was no physical violence from him even though we were all worried that he might pay us a visit while we were asleep.

The picket line was established on 20 May 1991 (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 1). The union's strategy, initially, was to build a picket line comprising sympathetic people, not employed at the plant. However, a few days after the line was formed, the union invited the working women to participate in the picket, but not under dangerous circumstances. The women concurred – as will be discussed presently. The picket line made the following demands on the company: the abolition of all forms of violence, the sacking of the perpetrators of workplace violence, the payment of the back log of wages owed to the women, and the continuing employment of the women in the orange-roughy seasons, without victimisation. The union was also devoted to securing the re-employment of the men who previously worked at the plant, displacing those loyal to the manager and possessing a proclivity for aggression (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995).

Immediately after union action, the company sought the assistance of its employer association, the Tasmanian Confederation of Industries. The Confederation placed the matter into the hands of the Tasmanian Industrial Commission, demanding that the picketing cease on the grounds that it threatened a loss of between $750,000 and $1 million in company revenue (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 2; interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). The Food Preservers' Union was prepared to let the Industrial Commission resolve the matter but had no intention of removing the picket line until its demands were satisfied. The picketers allowed the trucks bringing the orange-roughy cargo into the plant to proceed – thereby enabling the women to work. However they halted
the outward transport of the processed, packaged fish to the nearby Bell Bay wharves.

During the standard working week, the picket line often comprised 25 to 30 participants, falling to an average of 5 or 6 members after dark. At its lowest, there was only one (always Preservers’ Union representative Neil on the midnight to dawn shift). On week-ends, the day-time picket line often rose well above 30 people (interview, Neil, 18 May 1996). Many of the picketers used their rostered days-off, together with liberal quantities of sick leave, to attend the picket line. Others attended outside working hours.

Most of the picketers were men: shop stewards and full-time officials of several unions. The largest single picketing contingent – ranging between 12 and 20 shop stewards of the Federated Engine Drivers’ and Firemen’s Association – was sourced mostly from the nearby Temco plant at Bell Bay (interview, Bernard, 31 May 1995). The remainder were from Launceston, Devonport, Burnie and Hobart. The Transport Workers’ Union, from the outset, supported the picket by refusing to carry any packaged seafood to the Bell Bay waterfront.

Four or five women who worked at the factory were involved in picketing, attending the line several times, three to five hours each time (interview, Bernard, 28 March 2004). Another brought food and conversed with the picketers for much shorter periods. (Jane, representing the Food Preservers’ Union, attended very often. She was the only full-time female official of the Preservers’ Union at the time. The union attempted to involve women employed by the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council as well as female shop stewards of the Preservers’ Union working at Launceston, but they were unavailable).

The women working at the fisheries plant were cautious in the ways they participated in the picketing. One of the picketers, representing the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association, states:

The women only came after dark. This was when they were confident enough to walk around and talk to the
picketers without being seen by [hostile] George Town people and without worrying about the boss finding out they were with us. He had already made threats to the women about sacking them if they joined the union and got involved in direct action. After work they would go home and have dinner and come back after dark. There were about five, maybe four. The other women did not join us but were sympathetic to the picket line. I think they were too intimidated to show up and do anything on the picket. The women who came to the picket made it clear to us that if anything threatened them they would have to go. We told them that was okay, fine. Nobody wanted anyone to get hurt. If any of the women had been hurt, then the unions would have lost their trust....The employer would sometimes drive past the picket line at night to see who was on it and to make sure that we weren't trying to break into his factory and sabotage it. On other occasions some of his [loyal] employees would drive past and yell insults etc. These drives past us were done under the influence of alcohol, too drunk to do anything except insult us. There was nothing systematic about their surveillance. When they drove past, the women would simply hide behind the bushes. I don't think they ever found out they were with us (interview, Bernard, 28 March 2004).

This was how the women's safety concerns were dealt with: someone would always be posted to alert the others of an approaching motor vehicle. As soon as one approached, the women hid from view – simple but effective enough.

The picketing men regarded themselves as a permanent assemblage of like-minded activists, with a long history of helping each other in class struggle, often travelling substantial distances across Tasmania to demonstrate their commitment to trade unionism. (They were heavily involved, for instance, in the picket lines formed at the long Associated Pulp and Paper Mills dispute of April to June 1992). Initially, a small handful of men were motivated to attend the fisheries picket for days on end, mainly, if not entirely, to re-affirm their allegiance to this permanent assemblage and to socialise with long-term union comrades.  

There was not one single interest or motive that governed participation in the picket line. Instead, there was a
wide coalition of interests and motives, and initially all of these motives were regarded as laudable. From the standpoint of the Food Preservers' Union, the picket line served a useful recruitment function. The picketers entered the dispute to punish the manager because of his antagonism towards trade unions – except the Australian Workers' Union. They exploited the dispute to remind other anti-union employers in central and northern Tasmania that the union movement would resist attempts to drive organised labour out of the workplace, by direct action, if necessary. In particular, the picketers were determined to re-impose the closed shop arrangement at the factory for the benefit of the Food Preservers' Union that was the status quo under the previous management. The importance of the picketers' demand for the re-establishment of the closed shop is illustrated in an extract from a poem written during and about the dispute by one of the picketers – Bruce Roberts (1992, 17):

> Around the fire we're drumming up the heat on last week's fish catch in the cold store; the picket makes its point across the street as fillets fill the freezer, ceiling to the floor. Day to night the members stand with mates and comrades at the picket, shoulder to shoulder, the one demand - to work you need a ticket!

Many of the residents of George Town regarded the manager and his loyal employees from Geelong as benevolent new inhabitants, even though their residency was confined to the orange roughy seasons. They no doubt hoped that the Geelong people would stay for many decades to come. The picketers, conversely, regarded the manager and his Geelong-based employees with antipathy. They shared the belief that the manager and his loyalists were malicious "intruders" from mainland Australia. Anthony P. Cohen (1987, 24, 27), in his ethnographic study of community values and politics in the British Shetland Islands, has demonstrated that people living in an island state or province, separated from the more prosperous mainland, can often regard the latter as outside sources of "unpropitious influences" that are "inferior
in terms of local values and ... peripheral to local interests." The author of this study has observed that Tasmanians can regard mainland Australians as "other Australians", possessing peculiar, almost alien values and lifestyles. For instance, during interviews the picketing men occasionally referred to the relationship between Tasmanians and mainland Australians as "us Tasmanians" and "you mainlanders". Such comments were always made in jest, as somewhat affectionate attempts to tease the author – a mainland Australian. Numerous picketing interviewees frequently commented along the lines that the male employees from Geelong "might have thought they could get away with it over there but there was no way we would let them do it here [in Tasmania]." From the standpoint of the picketers, the Geelong-based men represented the worst kind of "outsiders": a pernicious intrusion into the lives of the people of this otherwise "peaceful", though troubled, Tasmanian town-ship. They behaved abominably towards the factory women and the superintendent. They influenced some of the local men at the plant to behave in a similar manner. They were violent men, to be detested and feared. And they were anti-union.

Although the male picketers were motivated by a coalition of interests, the participants' efforts to stop the sexual harassment of the women workers gained ascendancy over all other interests in the second week of the picket line. This transformation in the motives for attending the picket line is significant and will be discussed presently.

THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE

In the evenings, the Geelong-based employees were relatively prudent in their efforts to intimidate the picketers – even though the loyalists were under the influence of alcohol. But during the working day, they were significantly more threatening. The loyalists threw bottles at the picket line, particularly when attendance was low, and vandalised a Preservers' Union official's motor car tyres (interview, Alan, 17 November 1995). They allegedly placed a tanker loaded with highly toxic, and rancid fish-waste (concentrated plant fertil-
iser) in close proximity to the company gate (interview, Mark, then representing the Building Workers' Industrial Union, 4 December 1995). Consequently, fears emerged that the company loyalists would shower the picket line with the toxic substance. The picketers were privy to the fact that this would cause severe burning of the skin and extensive damage to the eyes, perhaps permanent blindness (Ibid). Hence they broke into the driver's cabin, jump-started the vehicle, moved it to a safe distance from the line, and dismantled the pump and hose (interview, Lionel, then representing the Metals and Engineering Union - Tasmanian branch, 21 August 1995). It has been alleged that at one highly emotionally charged moment, a company loyalist, situated behind the plant, fired a gunshot into the air (Ibid).

Without the threat of violence, the picket line would have been smaller. Clearly, several picketers were disturbed and frightened by the actions of those whom they regarded as "enemies." Prior to the alleged gunshot, the male picketers were from George Town and Launceston. None expected or even imagined fatalities. However, immediately after, a message was sent to Hobart, Devonport and Burnie, requesting additional picketing support. Protection was the sole purpose behind the decision made by the two officials and three shop stewards of the Building Workers' Industrial Union and the Builders Labourers' Federation, for instance, to make the journey from Hobart to George Town.11

Alan (interview, 21 April 2004) contended that, in the aftermath of the gunshot, one of the new arrivals brought a gun to the picket line. However, the other interviewees either vigorously contested this claim or simply expressed doubt about its authenticity: "if a gun was there, it was strange that I didn't hear anything about it" was a typical response. If Alan's claim were true, then the unionists' denials may well have emanated from an unwillingness to acknowledge that one of their union brothers was injudicious and violent enough to bring such a dangerous weapon. However, none of the unionists interviewed for this study attempted to refute the claim
relating to the baseball bat. The owner of the baseball bat thought it was sound practice to use the bat as a disincentive to violence against the picket line. However, the picket organisers instructed the baseball bat owner to leave it in the boot of his car (interview, Neil, 6 April 1995). The presence of any violent weapon would have compromised the efforts of the line’s main organisers, Neil and Jane, to avoid violence. The author frequently asked the picketers to imagine their reactions to efforts by the loyalists to break up the picket line by violent means. Would someone have used the baseball bat, for instance? From time to time the responses were along the lines of—"I’m not sure." More often, the response was akin to—"I would have wanted everyone to leave immediately and head straight to the police." Several picketers regarded the baseball bat as an unwise safety measure and incompatible with a struggle opposing workplace violence.

The picketing men were concerned about their own safety, needless to say. They were also concerned about the deeply negative repercussions flowing from a violent confrontation. As already alluded to, an open display of violence between the loyalists and the picketers was likely to intensify the women’s already woeful experiences of intimidation and demoralisation, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the unions’ efforts to support them. Fortunately, a violent clash did not take place and the baseball bat never left the boot of the car.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

According to Jane (interview, 4 July 1995), the picketers gradually became aware of what was happening in "their own backyard". By the term, "backyard", she refers to the workplace generally. Jane elaborates:

Initially the men’s involvement was guided by the principle of union solidarity – union helping union. But ... when the men were on the picket line – I think they gradually gained a greater understanding of the specific circumstances involved in that particular workplace. After a while, the men got a better understanding of what was happening basically in their own backyard (ibid).
Mark, of the Building Workers' Industrial Union (interview, 4 December 1995), adds:

They [the picketers] were there for a collection of reasons. Initially they didn't like the others being threatened and they wanted to be there in case things got ugly. Secondly, when they found out about what was going on, they became pretty supportive of the women. From time to time some of the women would come and talk to us on the picket line and we all got talking to them. We learned some things we didn't already know.

The Preservers' Union representatives emphasised to their colleagues that the experiences of sexual harassment constituted the women workers' greatest concern, prevailing over all other grievances. Mark (Ibid) contends: "Once the blokes found out what was going on [about sexual harassment], they said to each other - "we don't agree with that". Moreover, the picket organisers frequently initiated discussions of the widespread nature of workplace sexual harassment, emphasising that it involved a myriad of exploitative and oppressive forms of misconduct (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). Ron (then representing the Railways Union) states that "there was a growing sympathy among the men to end sexual harassment" (interview, 8 August 1995).

In contrast, some picketing men seemed to take little or no interest - at any stage in the dispute - in the women's accounts of their harassment. David, then a self-employed truck driver, went to the line several times, only because it represented a "good opportunity to catch up with old friends and to wave the union [Transport Workers' Union] flag" (interview, David, 8 February 1996). He was motivated largely, if not entirely, by the desire to socialise with former union comrades and to remind them - somewhat ironically - that his efforts to become a successful small businessman had not diminished his belief in union solidarity. Though he could remember the event clearly, David knew little about the women's grievances. This was reflected in his inability to recall, during an interview some five years after the event, anything about the origins of the dispute. (He did remember, however, the importance of the Food Preservers' Unions efforts to re-establish
Fisheries production worker, Cathy, visited the picket line several times, bringing food to demonstrate her gratitude. She claims that "some of the men didn't seem to be interested in the stories [of sexual harassment], when I was there anyway" (Cathy, interview, 21 April 2004). Cathy did not participate in the picket line as frequently as some of the other women working at the plant because she remained frightened by the experience of the horse's head on her doorstep. It is not known whether or not the apparent lack of interest among some of the men was extended to the other fisheries factory women participating in the picket line. (Jane, representing the Food Preservers' Union, was not aware of any indifference among the male picketers towards the women's sexual harassment problems, however she was absent form the picket line most evenings.)

There was an element of chivalry on the picket line: courageous men putting their safety at risk to help "downtrodden" women. Chivalry, is by definition, a masculinist demeanour. The picketing men fought to protect the rights of a specific cohort of working women and in doing so, the former were the recipients of honour. The picket line itself was a struggle for the recognition of honour — the honour of the women whose rights were violated and recognition of the honour of those who would fight on the women's behalf. The men's sense of masculinity was enriched by this struggle for honour. In the minds of the men who picketed, the manager and his loyalists were dishonourable and therefore loathsome. On many occasions the picketing men expressed words akin to: "real men don't behave like that to women. They respect women." From their standpoint, their "enemies" were dishonourable and this dishonour debased manhood. The picketers' masculinity was a chivalrous masculinity, embodying a liberationist dimension for the victims of the workplace violence. It was in vigorous opposition to the violent hegemonic masculinist practices within the fisheries plant.

This chivalric, pro-union sister masculinity, was in itself...
differentiated. Some believed that violence should be met with violence and that the line should protect itself with as much aggression as necessary. This was surely the mindset that occasioned the presence of the base-ball bat. (The author is not prepared to dismiss, out of hand, Alan's claim that one of the picketers brought a gun to the line.) This attitude was counterposed to the idea that the most effective way for unions to campaign for the women's rights was to organise a peaceful line and to allow the police to intervene should bloodshed threaten. The latter form of chivalry prevailed.

The women's discussions with the picketers addressed the wide range of problems which confronted them daily. But they stressed that the violence, particularly the sexual harassment, imposed a greater burden of trauma and unhappiness on their lives than any of the company's other transgressions. These discussions with the picketers were valuable to the women in that they gained a greater sense of being part of the struggle. The discussions were also important to the picketers themselves, who otherwise might have reflected on the line's purpose as a routine struggle for wage justice or as yet another fight to establish a closed shop. Even though the Preservers' Union officials addressed the question of why unions should be active against sexual harassment, it was the fisheries women's accounts of their own experiences that made most of the picketing men take notice of the problem. As Bernard (interview, 28 March 2004) contends:

> When I first got involved I was concerned mainly about the low wages and the intimidation and bad working conditions generally. But when the women started talking about their lives and their stories about sexual harassment, I and everyone else got extremely concerned. I had once worked in a factory and heard about women being treated badly by men: sexual harassment. But I didn't hear of anything like the experiences these women spoke about. They did open my eyes further to the problem and how violent it can be. Everyone [on the picket] learned how ignorant they had been up to that point and how people are ignorant about it generally. None of us ever previously imagined it.
Neil (interview, 11 July 1995) claims that it was around the beginning of the second week of the picketing that most of the men began to regard sexual harassment as the company's worst violation of workers' rights. The picketers gradually raised the tempo of their protests against sexual harassment by telling passers-by that the manager not only paid below award wages and expected his employees to labour under unsafe conditions but also, in conjunction with a number of his male employees, systematically and brutally violated the women at the plant. Neil often commented - in a tone of voice indicating amusement, a touch of hyperbole and a measure of pride - that the picketing men became "women's liberationists in a sense" (Ibid).

The manager visited the line on one occasion, attempting to discredit the Preservers' Union's representation of the company and asking the picketers to leave once and for all. As Metal and Engineering Union activist Lionel (interview, 21 August 1995) states:

The amazing thing about the bloke was how much he hated his [female] employees. He loathed them. He told us [the picket] that the women were "the dregs." [He said] they wouldn't have any work if it weren't for him. It wasn't simply the case that they were economic units to be exploited - they were also objects of his hatred.

This study interviewed neither the manager nor his loyalists, for reasons already explained. The absence of such interviews made it difficult to ascertain precisely why the manager treated the picketers in this manner. He was no doubt concerned that if the women and picketers were to win the struggle, then he would be forced into a costly corner: investing in safe plant and equipment, paying award wages etc. One could reasonably conjecture that an additional reason was his anxiety to preserve violent masculine practices, which he deemed to be central to the notion of "honourable manhood." If a cohort of trade unionists - including union-minded female employees - were to succeed in compromising his management style, then his honour would fall. His aspirations to inherit his father's business would also falter be-
cause he had failed in his duty to preserve the honour of the social class into which he was born. What “real man”, aspiring to be a member of the ruling class, would surrender to the trade unions?

In relation to the manager’s ideas about the women workers, articulated to the picket line, Lionel (interview, 21 August 1995) comments that: “One cannot learn about these things and not be troubled by them. The more we listened [to the manager] and learned, the more we were determined to stop it.” One could add, in a dialectical sense, that the longer the men picketed, the greater the opportunities arose for listening to, and learning from, the factory women.

It should be reiterated that the factory women’s experiences of picketing – or at least conversing with picketers – had a profound effect on the ways in which they viewed themselves. Cathy (interview, 21 April 2004) states:

[The manager] just pushed us around. It was about time we all stood up to him. It made me feel stronger talking to the picketers about what a bad lot [the manager] and his boys were. It also made me feel strong going to the Tasmanian Industrial Commission, complaining about them. I think the other women who went to the picket line also felt they gained a lot of courage too.

The factory women on the picket line were not passive and voiceless victims but active agents in the struggle against their oppressors. Through the women’s involvement, many of the picketing men became familiar with the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace. The women’s participation undermined their erstwhile self-perceptions as “voiceless and helpless” victims. To be sure, the women did not become as actively involved as they would have liked because of the fears of violent retribution and, of course, the sack. Nonetheless, they participated in the picket line as much as circumstances permitted. Moreover, their insistence that the line be peaceful contributed to the submergence of the chivalric element that advocated the idea that violence should be met with violence. Neither the male picketers nor Jane, representing the Preservers’ Union, felt that the women employed at the fisheries plant should have contributed
The women and the picket line met with both success and failure. The women workers who got involved with the picket line found a sense of self-confidence and power to which they were unaccustomed in their workplace. They obtained the company's verbal assurance that it would meet most of the union's demands. The Food Preservers' Union agreed to lift the picket line following the company's agreement to pay the women workers the backlog of wages owed to them and to negotiate a code of managerial conduct with the union (Tasmanian Industrial Commission, 1991, 35-36). This code of conduct was to include the abolition of the harassment of the women workers and provisions for a safe work environment (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995). However, none of the male employees guilty of perpetrating the violence, was sacked (Ibid). The women working at the plant, together with the people who picketed outside the gates of the factory, were bitterly disappointed with this outcome (interview, Bernard, 28 March 2004). Consequently, the women again had to face those whom they detested and the Food Preservers' Union was denied the opportunity to arrange for the re-hiring of its male members who worked under the previous management. A further blow dealt to the women was that the manager closed the factory within two months of the cessation of the dispute (Ibid). Though he provided no explanation, the motives underpinning the decision were obvious. He was troubled by the cost of paying the backlog of wages to the women and by the thought of investing in new and safer machinery and equipment. He was dissatisfied with the prospects of recognising the dignity of workers he regarded as the "dregs" of George Town and of being locked into negotiating with a trade union that he so despised.

CONCLUSION

Initially the men did not attend the picket line for the exclusive purpose of ending the sexual harassment and other
forms of violence. Even though they were aware of and appalled by the violence, their picketing was motivated by a myriad of considerations. These included the intimidation of an anti-union company, the defence of the Food Preservers’ Union’s efforts to re-establish a closed shop, the desire to sustain the “fire in the hearts” of the assemblage of like-minded militants, and so forth. There was not one interest governing the picketing but rather a coalition of interests. However, in the second half of the two-week dispute, the commitment to end sexual harassment transcended all other considerations. One of the more interesting elements of this dispute was that the masculinities embodying the behaviour of the picket line were strongly oppositional to the hegemonic masculinity practiced so violently by the employer and his loyal brothers.

Men have often been active in the struggle against hegemonic masculinity. Chivalric struggles by trade unionists may emerge and develop in opposition to hegemonic masculinity in the workplace, on the basis that violence against working women breaches “manhood” and “male-honour.” Class conflict, embracing an element of chivalry, can be a liberating force for working women, especially when the victims of violence are encouraged to participate effectively.

This was an important dispute because it demonstrated an alternate and potentially effective union action against workplace violence against women and for the politicization of men who otherwise would have remained ignorant of the scope and magnitude of this widespread and everyday violence. It was also important because it signalled an element of optimism and hope in an otherwise gloomy setting of union inaction in respect of countering sexual harassment.

If trade unions are to survive and regenerate in the sustained environment of efforts by the state and capital to dissolve union legitimacy and collective bargaining power, then the unions themselves will need to undergo substantial changes. These changes include the creation of effective recruitment, training and anti-misogynist strategems, de-
signed to generate the confidence and activism of women in the workforce, among other marginalised groups (Sudaria, 1997, 155-166). This case study has outlined one potentially effective way in which unions can engage women's activism.

The Howard government's industrial and trade practices reforms (Workplace Relations and Other Amendments Act 1996 and the anti-secondary boycott provisions of the Trade Practices Act 1974) have, among other things, prohibited closed shop arrangements and imposed severe penalties on unions embarking on industrial action in solidarity with other workers. If such anti-union measures had been in existence at the time of the George Town dispute, then the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council may have recommended an entirely different course of action to the Food Preservers' Union – litigation through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. It is difficult to speculate how the Preservers' Union would have responded to such advice. The victims of the violence and exploitation, as already stated, were anxious to avoid intervention by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

In spite of recent efforts by the capitalist state to constrain working class militancy in Australia, trade unions have continued to embark on militant action, though largely of a defensive kind. Irrespective of the nature of contemporary industrial laws, it would be both pessimistic and fatalistic to assume that the measures enacted by the Tasmanian unions against the fisheries company were not appropriate for other unions to follow. However such forms of direct action would not be practicable unless militancy was writ large. This, of course, would require a significant upturn in the class struggle throughout the country. The sooner the better!

NOTES
1. The local residents once believed that private investment in the proposed Fast Catamaran service between Bell Bay and Melbourne would provide substantial job opportunities for the unemployed, however by 1990 it became clear that the investors had lost interest (George Town Municipal Council, 1996, 11). There were several small-scale manufactur-
ing plants in the municipality, involved in the production of automotive
wheels, footwear, fibreboard and in the processing of fruit, vegetables
and seafood.
2. In early 1990, York Cove employed some forty permanent, full-time
staff (Sunday Tasmanian, 1990, 14). The company hired long term unem­
ployed men from the local community, providing – in conjunction with the
Commonwealth Employment Service and the Tasmanian Fishing Industry
Authority – a three-week training course to equip new recruits with the
required skills. According to the Fishing Authority, this was “unusual” in
the state’s fish processing industry (Ibid).
3. Packing entailed weighing the fish, feeding them to the filetlers and
manually conveying the filets in forty-kilogram containers on pallet jacks
to the female production.
4. The Food Preservers Union calculated that because of this non­
payment of overtime, one female employee was underpaid by $131.54c
in a particular working week that extended to 69 hours and 15 minutes
5. For instance, in Mildura and the wider Murray Valley region, the Food
Preservers’ officials consistently experienced poaching by the Australian
Workers’ Union (AWU), in collusion with the fruit and vegetable process­
ing employers. Neil, who worked as a Preservers’ Union organis­er in the
Murray Valley in the mid 1970s, claims that he “used to work the [Murray
Valley] factories to get right of entry. It was frustrating but I eventually
succeeded. Then the bosses would invite the AWU in to recruit all em­
ployees – closed shop arrangements – to force the Food Preservers’ Un­
ion out. The AWU were consistently parasitical on ... my recruitment
drives. I was the best organiser the AWU ever had in the Murray Valley”
(interview, Neil, 31 May 1999). The rivalry between the two organisa­
tions tended to be less severe in Tasmania’s food processing industry.
The AWU made little effort to recruit members in fruit and vegetable proc­
essing, leaving the task to the Preservers’ Union, and there tended to be
a mutual respect of the each other’s territories in relation to seafood. The
Poultry, Game and Marine Products Award privileged the AWU by permit­
ing sole coverage of Tasmania’s aquiculture workforce: no other indus­
trial tribunal at the time had given the AWU such exclusive coverage pow­
ers in aquiculture. In response, the Tasmanian branch of the Food Pre­
servers’ Union targeted the seafood processing factories in its recruitment
drives, even though its Constitution always permitted it to do so. In the
aftermath of the 1989 award, the Tasmanian Secretaries of the Preserv­
ers’ Union and the Australian Workers’ Union established an unwritten
agreement, whereby the latter would refrain from intervening in the for­
mer’s attempts to set up closed shops in workplaces specialising in sea­
food processing. The Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council supported
the arrangement (interview, Neil, 31 May 1999).
6. In response, the Food Preservers’ Union lodged a protest to the Trades
and Labour Council Executive which, in turn, directed the Australian Workers Union to refrain from recruiting additional members at the workplace and from intervening in any future dispute that may evolve between the company and the Food Preservers' Union.

7. While working as a cook at HJ Heinz in Dandenong Melbourne between 1970 and early 1974, Neil was a Food Preservers' Union shop steward who became increasingly sympathetic to a wide range of women's issues – the plant employed some 300 women – and he was often required to deal with problems flowing from the sexual harassment of women workers (interview, Neil, 11 July 1995).

8. The unions were the Food Preservers' Union, the Metal Workers' Union, the Australian Railways Union, the Operative Plaster and Plaster Workers' Federation, the Building Workers' Industrial Union, the Builders' Labourers' Federation, the Unemployed Workers' Union, and the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association.

9. For instance, David, the self-employed truck driver did so because it represented a "good opportunity to catch up with old friends and to wave the union [Transport Workers' Union] flag" (interview, David, 8 February 1996). He was motivated largely, if not entirely, by the desire to socialise with former union comrades and to remind them – somewhat ironically – that his efforts to become a successful small businessman had not diminished his belief in union solidarity. His indifference to the women workers' grievances was indicated by his inability to recall anything about the origins of the dispute, some five years after the event.

10. The militant stance against the company constituted an opportunity to justify the recent recruitment of the women workers at the fisheries plant and to demonstrate to the non-unionised male employees who were not involved in the women's harassment that the union would also look after their interests. As Neil (interview, 11 July 1995) states: "When you're on a [membership] recruitment drive, you've got to show that you're a good and effective union." All of the picketers were convinced that a successful, combined-union campaign against the company could reinforce the legitimacy of trade unions in George Town and strengthen the unions' capacity to recruit new members. As Matthew (interview, 1 August 1995) explains: "We wanted all of George Town to see what we were doing."

11. As stated by one of them, we wanted to be there "in case things got ugly" (interview, Mark, 4 December 1995). This is indicative of the commonly shared view that the safety of the picket line was more likely to be sustained once the level of participation grew.

12. These included Neil and Jane representing the Food Preservers' Union, Matthew and Bernard (Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association), and a couple of the Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association shop stewards employed at Temco, who initially alerted Matthew and Bernard to the problem at the fisheries plant (interview, Bernard, 5 May 1995).
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The Advertiser, 13 May 1998, p.32.


PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE
Letter from Suzanne Pels (Personnel Officer, Temco), to the author, 8 June 1999.
Letter from June to the author, 1 July 1995.

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS
Alan, then Production Superintendent at the factory, 17 November 1995, 6 August 1996, 3 December 1996.
Cathy, then a production worker at the factory, 21 April 2004.
David, then self-employed truck-driver and prior to this a shop steward of the Tasmanian branch of the Transport Workers' Union.
Jane, then representing the Tasmanian branch of the Food Preservers' Union, 4 July 1995.
Lionel, then representing the Tasmanian branch of the Metals and Engineering Union, 21 August 1995.
Mark, then representing the Tasmanian branch of the Building Workers' Industrial Union, 4 December 1995.
Matthew, then representing the Tasmanian branch the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association, 1 August 1995.
Ron, then representing the Australian Railways Union, 8 August 1995.
Sally, former production worker at the factory, 1 December 1995.