

VISION PURPOSE DEDICATION

Building Victoria's first
industry wide union



Frank Hyett

1882 - 1919



Who the hell was Frank Hyett?

Frank Hyett was a tribune and fighter for the workingclass, as much as he was a product of it. Hard-working, visionary and totally dedicated to the cause of labour, his union leadership was instrumental in the coming together of Victoria's disparate railway unions to give birth to the Victorian Railways Union in 1911, the first industry-wide railway union in Australian history.

A staunch believer in the cause of socialism, peace, and solidarity between all working people, Hyett threw himself into the labour movement's ultimately victorious struggle against conscription during the First World War, taking a leading role in the Trades Hall Council's Anti-Conscription Campaign Committee.

Contributing enormously to the later formation of the nationwide Australian Railways Union in 1920, he did not live to see the final fruits of his labour, tragically being struck down by Spanish influenza in 1919, aged only 37.





Frank Hyett was born on 9 February, 1882 in Bolwarra near Ballarat in Victoria. His father, William, a sawmill labourer, died of pneumonia only a few weeks after Frank's first birthday, leaving his mother, Annie, to raise Frank and his younger sister alone. They soon moved to Brunswick in search of cheap housing with Hyett leaving school at 13 for work to support his family. He became a grocer's boy and clerk in short succession. His experience of this reality, poignant yet typical for so many of his generation of the working class, soon lead Frank to become a convinced trade unionist and socialist.

He rapidly digested books on politics, economics and technical disciplines, attesting to a lucid mind coupled with a desire to change the injustices of his world, all while establishing himself as a successful cricketer and avid footballer with active involvement through the Carlton Football Club Committee. By 1906, he was a member and office-bearer of the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP), an early party of radical socialists and militants in Australia's working class movement who stood to the left of the Australian Labor Party. Aged 24, he was gaoled for 14 weeks for protesting local councils' discriminatory laws banning public political gatherings. In 1910, Frank married Ethel Gunner, a fellow VSP militant. The pair would remain together for life.



**Frank Hyett,
sportsman
& cricketer**

Hyett's talents and zeal lead him to be appointed an Organiser of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Employees in February, 1910. An energetic and totally dedicated Organiser, he was often away from home for days and weeks on end visiting and recruiting new members across the state. His dedication led to him becoming the Railway Society's General Secretary just two months later. At the time, public transport Unions across Victoria and Australia were divided on crafts lines that left their members separated from each other on poor and deteriorating rates and declining conditions. They were often at the mercy of arrogant employers, be they state or private.



Hyett grasped that it was vital that all railway workers combine into a single, industry-wide Union to advance their wages and conditions collectively. By 1911, Hyett's persistence for an industry-wide Union had impressed the many grades of railway workers. They voted by an overwhelming majority to amalgamate their respective associations into one big union, hence forth forming the Victorian Railways Union (VRU) in July 1911. The VRU was both the first industrial union in Victoria and first



industrial railway Union in Australian history that prefigured the Australian Railways Union which was later formed in 1920.

Frank Hyett's legacy continues to impart wisdom for our era: that working people can only stand up and defend their most basic interests and humanity if they join together and struggle as one as a conscious and independent force in our society. Divided, the working class is exploited, dehumanised and abused; united, we are strong, agile, resilient and powerful force for progress and change. We learn that the politics of the labour movement can never be separated from the politics of the world in which we struggle and organise.



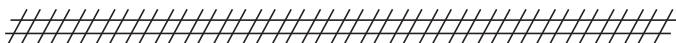
**Unity Hall, VRU Headquarters
Bourke Street, Melbourne**



VICTORIAN RAILWAYS UNION

The courage, energy and humanity of Frank Hyett's life and struggle is captured rather fittingly in the folk song, 'Should I ever be a Soldier', a song popularised by anti-war agitators against the First World War during Hyett's lifetime:

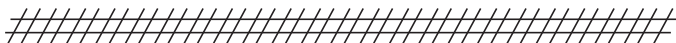
*Should I ever be a soldier,
'Neath the Red Flag I would fight
Should the gun I ever shoulder
'Tis to crush the tyrant's might
Join the army of the toilers
Men and women, fall in line
Wage-slaves of the world, arouse,
Do your duty for the cause
For land and liberty!*



The Buried Cheif (an excerpt)

*He scaled the summit while the sun
Yet shone upon his conquer'd track;
Nor falter'd till the goal was won,
Nor struggling upward, once look'd back.*

-H. Parkes



RTBU

V I C T O R I A

*Commemorating 100 years since
Frank Hyett's influential life.*

In Union his legacy lives on.

United we stand, divided we fall.