

# “Ain’t I a bastard, well I received my training in Aussie”: The life of Frank Maybank, an Australian trade unionist in Central Africa

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the working life of Frank Maybank (1901-94), a self-described Australian trade unionist on the Central African Copperbelt. Maybank was in many ways a worker of the world, he lived and worked in several countries and did all manner of jobs. The job he held the longest was General Secretary of the whites-only mineworkers’ union on the Copperbelt, where his militancy was closely informed by his experiences in, and contacts with, the Australian labour movement. This article uses Maybank’s biography both to show the transnational connections that existed and to argue that the relative weakness of those connections allowed information about different places to be misrepresented. What this article terms “strategic misunderstandings” allowed distant events and movements to be misrepresented to suit domestic audiences and concerns in Australia and on the Copperbelt. In addition, this paper reflects on how the practice of writing transnational history and how the uneven nature of digitised sources may shape the development of this sub-field.

## **Introduction**

During 1953, almost 140,000 Coronation Medals were issued to commemorate the ascension of Elizabeth II to the British throne and distributed to notables across the British Empire. When one of these found its way to Kitwe in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) addressed to Frank Maybank, General Secretary of the Northern Rhodesia Mine Workers’ Union (NRMWU), it

was returned promptly by him with a curt reply: “Australian union and labour representatives do not accept such things.”<sup>1</sup>

This was a curious statement. Maybank was not born in Australia, had spent only eleven of his 52 years there, and had left Australia for Northern Rhodesia fourteen years previously. Maybank was, in many ways, a worker of the world. He worked in at least four different countries, as well as at sea, and turned his hand to any job available: he stoked ships, clerked, forged steel, harvested corn, drove cattle, sheared sheep, built pylons, mined coal, copper and gold, prospected for the same, sold cars and insurance, salvaged sunken ships, poured pints, ran a hotel, and drove delivery trucks. The job he held for longest though was General Secretary of the militant, whites-only NRMWU, an organisation of some 4,100 mineworkers employed at the vast underground copper mines strung out along the border between the British colony of Northern Rhodesia and Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), a region known as the Copperbelt.<sup>2</sup>

This article traces the working life of Frank Maybank and uses this to make an argument about connections and disconnections, both between geographical places and between radical labour politics and racism. Maybank’s own migration and work underpinned connections between sections of the labour movement and, for him, the Australian labour movement represented an ideal. This ideal was bound-up with the image he crafted for himself, as he explained his own militancy in relation to this: “ain’t I a Bastard, well I received my training in Aussie you know.”<sup>3</sup> His strategy during his 11-year tenure as NRMWU General Secretary were closely informed by his experience in and contacts with the Australian labour movement. Drawing on the approaches of historical biography and global microhistory, this article shows how the world was interconnected and tries to imagine the world as it was seen by Maybank as he lived, travelled, and worked across it.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, I offer some

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Maybank, “The Story of the Life of a Man”. Unpublished notes in author’s possession.

<sup>2</sup> Annual return for a registered trade union, 31 December 1953, MLSS1/26/68, National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka [hereafter NAZ].

<sup>3</sup> Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 27 January 1957, 644/10, Welensky Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford [hereafter WP].

<sup>4</sup> Amy Stanley, “Maidservants’ Tales: Narrating Domestic and Global History in Eurasia, 1600–1900,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 2, (2016): 347.

methodological reflections about how the uneven nature of digitised sources shapes the field of transnational history and privileges the study of certain kinds of connections.

This article is also about a lack of connections and how information flowing between places was misinterpreted and misrepresented, perhaps deliberately, to suit domestic audiences and concerns. These misrepresentations can usefully be termed ‘strategic misunderstandings’.<sup>5</sup> Transnational connections that existed were often weak enough to allow these misunderstandings to go unnoticed or unchallenged. Maybank’s ideal of the Australian labour movement was at odds with reality. For one thing, around 11,500 Coronation Medals were issued to people in Australia, and there are plenty of trade unionists on the list of recipients.<sup>6</sup> In the same way, as will be seen, Maybank was not the figure that his supporters in Australia portrayed him to be.

There is a well-established literature about the role of migrant white labour activists and their networks in spreading radical ideas between the settler colonies of the British Empire and the United States, along with ideas of racial segregation.<sup>7</sup> In this, Australia provided a powerful example of “an ideological and material structure of labour rights based on high wages and Asiatic exclusion” to white workers in other parts of the empire and Australian trade unionists helped transmit these ideas to other places.<sup>8</sup> Much of this literature is about the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period that saw, as Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds put it, the “emergence of a transnational community of white men in the globalised world” and the imposition of a “global colour line.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to the peer review who suggested this phrase.

<sup>6</sup> “List of Coronation Medals Awards,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 1953.

<sup>7</sup> Kornel Chang, “Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880 –1910”, *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009): 678-701; Jonathan Hyslop, “The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself ‘White’: White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 12, no. 4 (1999): 398-421; Mae M. Ngai, “The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics, 1849–1910,” in *A Global History of Gold Rushes*, eds. Benjamin Mountford and Stephen Tuffnell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 109-136; Steven Parfitt, “Completing the Order’s History Down Under: The Knights of Labor in Australia,” *Labour History*, no. 110 (2016): 1-18; Jimmy Yan, “Revolutionary Ireland and Transnational Labour Solidarity on the Victorian Railways: The Case of Alex Morrison and Tom Watson, 1921-22,” *Labour History*, no. 114 (2018): 17-36.

<sup>8</sup> Mae M. Ngai, “Trouble on the Rand: The Chinese Question in South Africa and the Apogee of White Settlerism,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 91 (2017): 71

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White men's countries and the international challenge of racial equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-4.

Maybank's own travels took place once the self-described 'white man's countries' of the settler colonial world were already well-established, in the aftermath of what James Belich termed "the settler revolution."<sup>10</sup> He was a worker of an imperial world, and he began his working life in a world where 'worker' was taken as being synonymous with white male worker.<sup>11</sup> This white settler world shaped Maybank's mobility and connections, yet his life and travels also spanned the disintegration of this world and a great shift in world politics as white supremacy came under greater and more effective attack, especially from newly independent nations.<sup>12</sup> By 1948, as Reynolds and Lake argued, "segregation had been stripped of its progressive gloss."<sup>13</sup> The combination of anti-capitalism and white supremacy pursued by previous generations of white trade unionists was increasingly untenable from the 1940s, and this had consequences for the transnational connections Maybank forged in the international labour movement.

### **Archives and Sources: Digital and Non-Digital**

Maybank was born at the beginning of the twentieth century in England and died towards the end of that century in Australia. In between, he worked in New Zealand and then New South Wales in the 1920s, in Western Australia for most of the 1930s, spent time in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s and again in 1973, lived in Northern Rhodesia from 1939 to 1956, and then from 1956 until his death in 1994 he was in Western Australia. Usually, his mobility was related to his own agency, though in 1942, in one of the more dramatic episodes in his life, he was arrested by the army and deported to Britain for three years.

Maybank habitually crossed national boundaries during his life and consequently often crossed over the limits of nationally bound archives. In the context of the early twenty-first century, this meant he crossed boundaries between digitised and non-digitised material. This has wider consequences for how historians can write these kinds of transnational or global

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<sup>10</sup> James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Maybank spent his life in a labour movement where the predominant definition of class was "offered as a universal category even though it depended on a masculine construction." Joan Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, 344-49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

historical biographies, which have become a popular way of exploring and understanding the consequences of global connections.<sup>14</sup>

Writing these kinds of biographies is a much less formidable task than previously. Over a decade ago, Linda Colley, in her biography of an eighteenth-century woman who travelled the world but left little conventional written sources, noted that the explosion of online sources has made it “far easier than it used to be to track down a life of this sort, which repeatedly crossed over different geographical and political boundaries.”<sup>15</sup> Since then, it has only become easier, as Lara Putnam argued, “the transnational turn is accelerating simultaneously with the digital turn.” Putnam, however, strikes a note of caution, and notes that burgeoning online sources may not be an unalloyed blessing. It could, she argues, enable a kind of “drive-by transnationalism” with the ease of remote access disincentivising historians from immersing themselves in the sources and historiography of a particular locality.<sup>16</sup> Here, I want to draw attention to a different potential problem: that the proliferation of easily-accessible online resources will privilege the study of certain kinds of connections, i.e. between those societies that can afford to create such resources.

This article draws heavily on similar kinds of sources – primarily newspaper articles and archival documents – scattered across Australia, Britain, the United States, South Africa, and Zambia. While the sources were themselves similar, their form and the process by which I discovered them were very different in different places. This is not a problem relating to the survival or continued preservation of historical documents. Both the National Archives of Zambia and the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines archive function efficiently and are easy places in which to work productively, considerably easier, in fact, than the National Archives of Australia, from which I failed to extract much in terms of physical documents. Instead, the problem is related to discoverability and accessibility. Most archival documents and newspaper articles relating to Maybank’s time in Australia were digitised and accessed online, and even when I consulted a physical copy, I had found the document in an online catalogue

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Drayton and David Motadel, “Discussion: The future of global history,” *Journal of Global History*, no. 13 (2018): 11-12. Historical biographies have been “used as keyholes through which to view the worlds in which they lived” or to show how the world was interconnected in different historical periods. John-Paul Ghobrial, “The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory,” *Past & Present*, no. 222 (2014): 57.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A woman in world history* (London: HarperPress, 2007), xxviii.

<sup>16</sup> Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitised Sources and the Shadows They Cast,” *The American Historical Review* 121, 2, (2016): 377-402.

and ordered it in advance of my visit. Similarly, almost all the material of Maybank's early life and family in Britain had been digitised and made available, for a fee, on the Ancestry website.

In contrast, none of the sources I consulted in archives in Zambia or South Africa were digitised, nor was there any practical way of discovering what documents a repository contained before visiting it.<sup>17</sup> The sources from these archives were largely uncovered as a by-product of my doctoral research about the history of the Copperbelt. It was, for the purposes of this article, highly fortuitous that I had already accumulated most of the relevant material on Maybank's life in Central Africa before researching his time in Australia. It would have been much more difficult to do it the other way around. The contrast between a quick, fruitful search for 'Maybank' in the Trove database of text-searchable digitised Australian newspapers, and the laborious search page-by-page search of physical newspapers in South African libraries could not be greater.<sup>18</sup> There is a danger that historians looking at potential transnational topics, with less time to conduct research and pressured to publish, will make the entirely understandable decision to select topics that examine connections between societies which have been able to digitise large amounts of newspapers, archival documents, photographs, census data, etc., to the neglect of other connections.

One reason why this article has necessitated a search far and wide for sources is the absence of the conventional source for biographies: personal papers. Only a handful of Maybank's own papers have survived, a threadbare overview of his life which he left to his children, entitled 'The Story of a Life of a Man' and consisting primarily of photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, along with a small number of personal documents. Searching for these papers brought me into contact with his two children and interviews with them provided invaluable details of Maybank's later years in Australia. The surviving documents tend to emphasise Maybank's Australian connections – a record of his reply refusing the Coronation Medal is among the few documents he kept – and contains elements of a story he wanted to present about himself. This article primarily draws on documents about Maybank, rather than by him, and, in any case, Maybank was more a man of action than a man of letters.

### **Life in Britain, New Zealand and Australia and Digital Sources**

The earliest years of Maybank's life are among the best documented as records from the 1901 and 1911 censuses have been digitised and made available through the website

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<sup>17</sup> The National Archives of South Africa now has an online search function.

<sup>18</sup> *Trove Newspapers & Gazettes*, accessed 4 October 2021, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>. I am grateful to Steve Howell at the State Library of Western Australia for first drawing Trove to my attention.

ancestry.com. Relatively little effort is required to discover that Frank Stanley Maybank was born on 22 July 1901 at home, home being 18 Mount Ararat Road in Richmond, and to glean an outline of his family's circumstances through the digitised will of Maybank's father, who died in 1903 aged 39, leaving effects worth only £70.<sup>19</sup> Digitised records allow us to follow the family's move from Richmond to Hove on the south coast of England after his mother remarried in 1910, and offer a glimpse into the grim poverty into which the family plunged in the interim years when Frank Maybank and his three siblings were sent to orphanages.<sup>20</sup>

The family lived more comfortably in Hove, and this modest upward mobility was bolstered by imperial connection as Frank's eldest brother John went to Malaya to become a planter. John sent back money to support Frank's education at Brighton Grammar School. This prosperity, however, was precarious. In 1915, Frank's stepfather died and the following year John Maybank, who had returned to Britain and enlisted, was killed on the Western Front.<sup>21</sup> John's wristwatch was returned to the family and Frank wore it for the rest of his life, an expression of his lifelong opposition to war.<sup>22</sup> These deaths abruptly brought Frank's schooling to an end, and he began a lifetime of work, first in a factory manufacturing sea mines, and then moving to London to take up a job at Lloyds of London as a clerk.

Family connections and imperial politics shaped the next major juncture in Maybank's life. In January 1922, he emigrated to New Zealand, the digitised passenger list providing his last UK address (in south-west London) and his occupation (clerk). Frank's elder brother Leo had already moved to New Zealand as the New Zealand Government actively sought migrants from Britain after World War I and established an assisted-passage scheme in 1922.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, white migrants were sought, and other would-be migrants faced greater obstacles after the adoption of the White New Zealand policy with the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920. Hostility to non-white migrants prompted this Act and it explicitly stated

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<sup>19</sup> John Dewdney Maybank, 21 November 1903 *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*, accessed 5 March 2018, <https://search.ancestry.co.uk/search/db.aspx?dbid=1904>

<sup>20</sup> Marjery A. Maybank, 1911 *England Census*, and Frank Stanley Maybank, 1911 *England Census*, accessed 5 March 2018, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/cs/uk1911census>

<sup>21</sup> Maybank, John Gunter, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 11 November 2019, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/171042/maybank,-john-gunter>

<sup>22</sup> Maybank's daughter still has the watch. Cheryl Mather, personal interview with author, 17 September 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.

that “‘Aboriginal Natives’ of any part of the Empire except New Zealand were not to be regarded as British for the purposes of the act.”<sup>24</sup>

Maybank soon secured worked as a coal miner at Denniston, a small settlement on a rocky plateau situated high above the coast on the South Island. Living and working conditions were harsh and the coalfield was simmering with industrial unrest.<sup>25</sup> One of the few remarks Maybank included in the outline of his life was about the mine: “I died every shift for the first two months.”<sup>26</sup> The lack of other information in these papers – Maybank did not even note the years he was in New Zealand – again made digitised sources crucial. I conducted no archival research in New Zealand, but the digitisation of newspaper articles and passenger lists ensured I was able to find traces of the life of an itinerant labourer who had passed through the South Island a century ago with relative ease. Discovering that Maybank was relieved of £10 of his savings by a petty thief in northern Canterbury and later in the decade was the best man at a wedding in Christchurch would have required a phenomenal amount of work without digitised and text-searchable material.<sup>27</sup>

Maybank moved to Australia in 1926 – the ease of his move again facilitated by race and imperial citizenship<sup>28</sup> – and spent three years in various parts of New South Wales and Victoria before moving to Western Australia.<sup>29</sup> Photographs in his surviving personal papers indicate that the jobs he did in these years in New Zealand and eastern Australia were what

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<sup>24</sup> P.S. O’Connor, “Keeping New Zealand White, 1908-1920,” in *The Shaping of History: Essays from the New Zealand Journal of History*, ed. Judith Binney (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001), 300. Lake and Reynolds, *Global Colour Line*, 315-16.

<sup>25</sup> Len Richardson, *The Denniston Miners’ Union: A Centennial History* (Westport: Denniston Miners’ Union Centennial Committee, 1984), 48.

<sup>26</sup> “The Story of the Life of a Man”.

<sup>27</sup> “The Courts,” *The Press* (Canterbury), 4 January 1923; “Weddings,” *The Press* (Canterbury), 4 October 1927.

<sup>28</sup> In 1920, Australia adopted the 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens that granted British nationality to all persons born in Britain and the Dominions. M. Page Baldin, “Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act,” *The Journal of British Studies* 40 no. 4 (2001): 527

<sup>29</sup> Application for Naturalization or Registration: Frank Stanley Maybank (British), PP256/1, W1961/4144, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA]. “Shipping,” *The West Australian*, 19 September 1929.

James Belich described as 'crew' work, mostly agricultural labour and construction work as well as a short unsuccessful stint prospecting when he joined the Larkinville gold rush.<sup>30</sup>

It was in Western Australia where Maybank first became actively involved in the labour movement, though there was a well-established miners' union at Denniston, and he was likely involved in a strike that took place at Denniston in 1922.<sup>31</sup> Maybank found work as a miner at Sons of Gwalia Mine and there joined the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), and he appears on AWU membership rolls for successive years.<sup>32</sup> Membership rolls are archived in hardcopy at the Australian National University, but an outline of Maybank's involvement in the branch can be established from digitised newspapers. He was involved in several disputes, became a shop steward, then acting branch chairman and was elected branch president in February 1934, though his term in office was brief.<sup>33</sup> Two weeks later, the branch executive declared that Maybank was ineligible to stand and appointed his defeated opponent, a longstanding employee and union member, as president.<sup>34</sup> His removal was acrimonious and Maybank assaulted a local AWU official, and then resigned from the mine and left Australia.<sup>35</sup>

Maybank returned to Britain for almost a year and during this time visited the Soviet Union. Here, the nature of the sources changes. When Maybank's travels took him outside the ambit of digitised collections the picture of his life becomes much less clear. I found virtually no information about what he did in Britain during this time or even the exact dates he visited the Soviet Union. Archival research in Russia may reveal more, but this would be a major undertaking. Sheila Fitzpatrick compiled a list of Australians who visited the Soviet Union based upon archival research in Russia, though Maybank does not appear on this list.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Penguin, 1996), 429-30.

<sup>31</sup> Richardson, *Denniston Miners' Union*, 54. "Denniston Miners' Idle," *Evening Post* (Wellington), 23 September 1922.

<sup>32</sup> Western Australian Branch Membership Roll 1930-31, Australian Workers' Union, N117/1125, Noel Butlin Archive Centre, Australian National University [hereafter NBAC].

<sup>33</sup> "Leonora," *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 12 February 1934.

<sup>34</sup> "Country News," *The West Australian*, 26 February 1934.

<sup>35</sup> "Leonora-Gwalia Notes," *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 19 March 1934.

<sup>36</sup> Fitzpatrick notes that some Australian travellers who arrived from London, as Maybank did, might be omitted because they were identified as British by the Soviet authorities. Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Australian visitors to the Soviet Union. The view from the Soviet side," in *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1940s*, eds. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 27-31.

Details about his trip come from an interview with him in an Australian newspaper, which is available online, and from his surviving photographs.

The Soviet Union was, to put it mildly, not a common tourist destination. Fitzpatrick estimated that fewer than 200 Australians travelled there during the 1930s, and even among this small number Maybank was unusual. Fitzpatrick's list indicates that most Australian visitors were professionals. During 1934-35 their numbers included at least five politicians from various state governments, four teachers, two students, two journalists, an economist and an agricultural scientist, but only two men described as workers.<sup>37</sup> However, later in 1934, the Sons of Gwalia AWU branch did send a delegate to the Soviet Union, and it may have been discussions around this that encouraged Maybank to visit the place himself.<sup>38</sup>

Maybank's surviving photographs suggest that the format of his trip was similar to most foreign visitors, concentrating on social welfare institutions in health and education and cultural venues – he retained pictures of himself outside the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.<sup>39</sup> It also incorporated his more particular interests: mining. Pictures from his five-week trip in September 1934 show sights in Kharkov, Leningrad and Moscow – where he met Tom Mann and apparently discussed their mutual experiences of the Australian labour movement – but of greatest interest was the Donbass coalfield, where he claimed he was a guest of the General Mineworkers' Union. Maybank took careful note of housing, changing facilities, underground working conditions and machinery as he was, in his own words, "interested in industrial conditions the world over."<sup>40</sup>

Like many other visitors to the Soviet Union in that period, Maybank was impressed with what he saw.<sup>41</sup> He joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) when he returned to Western Australia in early 1935 and embarked on a speaking tour and addressed union branches about his experiences.<sup>42</sup> Interviewed by a Perth newspaper on his return, he praised the Soviet Union as a place where "there was work available for everyone, both men and women, married or single" and that "the standard of living had improved to an enormous extent." He also praised how easy it had been for him to visit. Since he was able to travel from

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> "Delegation to Soviet Union," *The Australian Worker*, 24 October 1934.

<sup>39</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Australian visitors," 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> "A Perth Man's Impressions of Russia," *Sunday Times* (Perth), 7 July 1935.

<sup>41</sup> Fitzpatrick, "Australian visitors," 10. See "May Day Delegates Returning," *Tribune*, 26 July 1935 for claims from an Australian miner's delegate about the apparently enviable living standards and working conditions of Soviet miners.

<sup>42</sup> "Personal Items," *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 28 March 1935.

London and had access to British currency, he could avail himself of the services of Intourist, who organised his whole trip. Still, despite all he had seen, he remained convinced that “Australia is still the best place in the world for the worker.”<sup>43</sup>

Maybank resumed his itinerant life on his return to Western Australia, which he faced no problems re-entering. Again, digitised records allow us to trace the outlines of his life and, as already mentioned, some of his political activities. Electoral records place him at Mount Jackson, where there were small-scale gold mines, in 1937 and newspaper records indicate he was in Perth in 1938, and even allow us to recover incidental details about his life, such as his making enough money to afford to buy a new Chevrolet sedan.<sup>44</sup> The outlines of his life can be followed digitally until mid-1939, when he left Australia bound for the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia.

### **Life in Central Africa and the Physical Archive**

It is unclear where Maybank heard about employment opportunities in Central Africa.<sup>45</sup> Northern Rhodesia was certainly off the beaten track in terms of the circuits of white migrants in the Empire, who passed mainly between settler colonies, with one small exception: the Copperbelt. Copper mining had transformed the fortunes of the colony in the late 1920s. The territory had initially been seized in 1889 by a private company, the British South Africa Company, on behalf of the British Crown. The Company had hoped to find great mineral wealth in the region but this piece of “gigantic speculation” was a failure and the territory was taken over by the British Government in 1924 as a protectorate with few prospects.<sup>46</sup> Thereafter, it was governed through the Colonial Office with a governor and local administration appointed from London.

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<sup>43</sup> “A Perth Man’s Impressions of Russia,” *Sunday Times* (Perth), 7 July 1935.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Stanley Maybank, Yilgarn, 1937, *Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980*, accessed 8 March 2018, <https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/1207/>. “Registrations,” *The West Australian*, 19 May 1938.

<sup>45</sup> There were occasional stories in the Australian press about Copperbelt developments and reports from people coming to Australia after working there. “Co. to develop huge copper mine in Northern Rhodesia,” *News* (Adelaide), 20 May 1937; “Mining Engineers Return,” *The West Australian*, 13 July 1937; “Mining Boom in Northern Rhodesia,” *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 22 July 1937.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Vickery, *Black and White in Southern Zambia: The Tonga Plateau Economy and British Imperialism, 1890–1939* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 39-41.

The territory's fortunes changed dramatically with the discovery of vast copper deposits in 1926, triggering a mining boom. Underground mines, smelters and refineries were quickly established, and copper production soared. During the 1930s, these mines produced almost 10 per cent of world copper output.<sup>47</sup> By the time Maybank arrived in August 1939, the Copperbelt mines were large industrial enterprises employing many thousands of people. Mufulira Mine, where he found work as an underground timberman, employed around 5,350 African mineworkers alongside about 650 whites in 1939.<sup>48</sup> Maybank's industrial skills and experience working underground were in demand as many of the jobs performed by white workers on the Copperbelt mines were the same as those they undertook in other mining centres – Sons of Gwalia employed ten underground timbermen, for instance.<sup>49</sup>

Demand for labour was shaped by race and gender as the mining workforce was racially segregated from the outset. African men constituted the large majority of the workforce and performed work graded as unskilled, while white men performed technical and supervisory work.<sup>50</sup> This 'colour bar' – which included racially segregated company towns around the mines – was not enforced by government legislation, but was at the discretion of the mining companies. The mining companies had considerable latitude to organise things as they saw fit as the colonial state was heavily dependent on tax revenues from copper production.<sup>51</sup> Northern Rhodesia's colonial administration did not encourage white settlement and there was nothing approximating the state-sponsored white settlement schemes that brought huge numbers of white migrants to Australia and New Zealand. Nevertheless, there were few formal barriers to entry for whites.

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<sup>47</sup> Calculated from Christopher Schmitz, "The Changing Structure of the World Copper Market, 1870-1939," *Journal of European Economic History* 26, no 2 (1997): 301.

<sup>48</sup> N. Cook, Rhokana Corporation to Manager, Roan Antelope, 3 August 1939, 16.2.7F, Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Archive, Ndola [hereafter ZCCM].

<sup>49</sup> Record of Labour Underground, 1935, Sons of Gwalia, series MN270, file 1614A/147, State Library of Western Australia.

<sup>50</sup> Duncan Money, "The World of European Labour on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, 1940-1945," *International Review of Social History* 60, no. 2 (2015): 229-31.

Many prospective mineworkers from Australia would have known this. One contemporary account of Copperbelt life written by a former resident of Broken Hill specifically noted the racial division of labour, see Natalie Carey, "Some Glimpses of Africa During Christmas Season," *Barrier Miner*, 9 December 1939.

<sup>51</sup> Larry Butler, *Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930-64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 23-34, 301.

Most of the white workforce supported the racial division of labour and sought to collectively defend their monopoly on skilled work against efforts by the companies to steadily increase the number of African workers who performed skilled jobs. Transnational experiences were important here. There were two whites-only trade unions on the mines when Maybank arrived, and both were headed by Australians. This may be why, as someone with experience in the Australian labour movement, Maybank was quickly encouraged by his new white workmates at Mufulira to take an active role in the larger union, the NRMWU.<sup>52</sup>

Maybank quickly began a central figure among the white workforce, many of whom had the same kind of continent-hopping career that he had. Within a few months, Maybank helped instigate wildcat strikes by white mineworkers and in the aftermath became General Secretary of the NRMWU, a position he then held for the next twelve years. The nature of sources for this period of Maybank's life is very different though. Even though Maybank was a much more prominent figure in these years – his role in industrial unrest on the Copperbelt was reported internationally and discussed by the British War Cabinet – sources on his life are not as readily available. The extensive collections of the National Archives of Zambia and the ZCCM archives, which houses the records of the mining companies, have neither online catalogue nor digitised documents, yet they are replete with information on transnational connections.

The demands of white mineworkers, and how to achieve these demands, were shaped by their transnational experiences and connections. Maybank was closely involved in this, drawing upon his experiences in Australia. A police report on a strike meeting in 1940 noted that when some white workers at the meeting claimed they had enviable standards of living on the Copperbelt "Maybank then interjected and stated that the best living conditions were in Broken Hill, Australia," and others at the meeting agreed.<sup>53</sup> During a subsequent strike by white artisans in 1946, their wage demands were shaped by wage rates at mines in Broken Hill, furnished by Maybank's contacts there.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, demands for higher wages were for white workers only, and here too the influence of the Australian labour movement – in which "concern for the purity of the race was a persistent theme"<sup>55</sup> – was important.

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<sup>52</sup> The other smaller union merged with the NRMWU in 1941.

<sup>53</sup> Notes on a meeting held at Luanshya Hotel on 22/3/40, ZCCM 15.1.6E.

<sup>54</sup> Arbitration Proceedings, Verbatim Record of Proceedings Volume I, CO 537/1515, The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA]. Maybank assiduously kept up these contacts and spent around six weeks visiting various industrial centres in Australia and New Zealand in 1951, including Broken Hill.

<sup>55</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds. The Communist Party of Australia from origins to illegality* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 126.

Maybank was a highly effective agitator and negotiator who often inspired something akin to panic among the mining companies. “He is out for vengeance,” warned one company executive in 1946, “and we are all of the opinion that he will stop at nothing.”<sup>56</sup> His agitation was at the service of white mineworkers, and he fought ceaselessly on their behalf, continually reminding this constituency that whatever benefits they were enjoying were secured through collective struggle, informing one protest meeting “don’t forget we fought for these conditions – nothing was given for nothing.”<sup>57</sup> He was no remorseless militant though and was adept at maintaining personal connections with his members. During a 1951 trip to Australia, for instance, he made a point of visiting cricketer Donald Bradman and obtained from him a short note for a cricket-mad Australian union member back on the Copperbelt, which he made sure to present him with in front of the cricket team at his mine.<sup>58</sup>

Repeated strikes during World War II secured white mineworkers higher wages, a closed shop for skilled jobs and a firmer colour bar. Racist ideas that the very presence of non-white workers constituted a threat to the wages and working conditions of white workers had animated white labour movements across the British Empire from the late nineteenth century, and the Copperbelt’s white mineworkers were typical of this movement. Yet, this labour movement was changing, especially the more radical end with which Maybank had connections, and he found himself regularly trying to explain to trade unionists elsewhere why racial segregation on the job was justified. He obliquely acknowledged the growing tensions between radical labour politics and racial segregation. The union’s whites-only membership clause “immediately catches the eye of overseas organisations,” explained Maybank but it had to be retained because “it is the mining companies’ intention to push out Europeans.”<sup>59</sup>

I could find no record of Maybank making racist comments about Africans – unlike virtually all other white trade unionists in Northern Rhodesia – yet he was at best equivocal about the colour bar. An official from Britain’s Ministry of Labour found it impossible to get a straight answer from Maybank about the colour bar and found that he “takes the view that the African worker as a whole is underpaid,” but nevertheless “he was not prepared to allow the Companies to take advantage of cheap labour at the expense of the European.”<sup>60</sup> Maybank

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<sup>56</sup> Ronald Prain to Harold Hochschild, 19 August 1946, Box 1, File 1, Ronald Prain Papers, American Heritage Center, Wyoming [hereafter RP].

<sup>57</sup> “Nkana Meeting Protests Housing Situation,” *The Northern News*, 21 April 1949.

<sup>58</sup> “The Sporting World,” *Rhokana Review*, March 1952.

<sup>59</sup> “NR European Miners ‘are safeguarded’,” *Rhodesia Herald*, 31 October 1947.

<sup>60</sup> Notes of discussion, with Mr F. Maybank on the subject of giving further opportunities to the African worker, 20 May 1946, Box 22, File 3, Arthur Creech Jones Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

made no substantive comments at all about African workers, even after African mineworkers embarked on major wildcat strikes in 1940. It appears that he did not regard Africans as a legitimate part of the working class, which was properly composed of white men performing industrial work and organised in trade unions. In 1946, when urging white artisans to strike, Maybank declared “I do not say we will win, we may lose... The companies may drive us back to work and if we are driven back to work we can ensure that full production is not effected.”<sup>61</sup> The implication here is that whites, not Africans, were the ones who performed productive work on the mines.

### **‘Strategic Misunderstandings’ and Wartime Deportation**

Maybank’s race, gender and industrial skills had made his entry to Northern Rhodesia, like other parts of the British Empire, an uneventful process. These, however, were not sufficient to outweigh the impact of his politics during wartime, when he was forcibly removed from Northern Rhodesia. The immediate trigger was Maybank’s role in escalating industrial unrest in mid-1942 when he tried to co-ordinate strikes with white workers at copper mines in neighbouring Belgian Congo, and allegedly warned a senior colonial official that “a strike on the Copperbelt is not an ordinary strike” as “men there are armed.”<sup>62</sup>

The prospect of disruption to crucial wartime copper supplies sounded alarm bells at the highest levels, and hundreds of soldiers were deployed on the Copperbelt in October 1942. Maybank and another union leader Chris Meyer, a South African miner, were arrested and imprisoned, pending deportation. An international campaign soon sprang up to demand Maybank’s release and Australian trade unions were an important part of this. I have written elsewhere on this campaign and want to focus here on the limits of transnational information flows and what can be termed ‘strategic misunderstandings’.<sup>63</sup>

News on Maybank’s detention reached Australia in December 1942. The two unions that took greatest interest in Maybank’s case were the Miners’ Federation and the Federated Ironworkers’ Association – the latter tipped off by one of Maybank’s old comrades who noted Maybank was “well known in W.A. industrial circles”<sup>64</sup> – and both unions were closely

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<sup>61</sup> “Artisans Reject Arbitration,” *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 8 August 1946.

<sup>62</sup> R.O. Sinclair to Resident Magistrate, Ndola, 24 October 1942, CO 795/122/13, TNA.

<sup>63</sup> Money, “The World of European Labour”.

<sup>64</sup> “South Africa Interns a Militant,” *The Ironworker*, December 1942.

influenced by the CPA.<sup>65</sup> The CPA itself called Maybank's arrest "a filthy bit of victimisation" and demanded "The Australian labour movement must utter a mass protest."<sup>66</sup> The Victoria branch of the Ironworkers' Association urged the Australia's Labor Government to secure his release, while the Miner's Federation requested the government help establish an "Australia-wide campaign to demand that the Rhodesian Government allow Maybank and Meyer to carry on their union activities."<sup>67</sup>

The Federation's resolve to assist Maybank was reiterated a meeting of the union's leadership in February.<sup>68</sup> Here, elements of commonality may have encouraged an affinity with Maybank. Both men who moved the motion to support him were CPA members, and the banning of the party and imprisonment of several party members in 1940 would have been fresh in their memories.<sup>69</sup> One of the men, Jim Comerford, had direct experience of repression of trade unionism, as he had been present at the march on Rothbury in 1929 when police opened fire on protesting miners.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, many militants in the Miners' Federation had, like Maybank, left Britain in the 1920s and the influence of this generation of radical British miners "was at its height" in the 1940s.<sup>71</sup>

Certain details of the situation on the Copperbelt were not clear, however. It may have been the weakness of transnational connections and a lack of information that caused some parts of Maybank's politics and position to be misrepresented, but it is revealing that the ways Maybank was misrepresented in Australia suited the CPA's shifting politics. The CPA had an equivocal position on the White Australia policy in the interwar years – when Maybank had

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Murray and Kate White, *The Ironworkers: A History of the Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1982), 92-96. Edgar Ross, *A history of the Miners' Federation of Australia* (Paramatta: Macarthur Press, 1984), 345-56.

<sup>66</sup> "South Africa Interns a Militant," *Tribune*, 6 January 1943. This was mostly a reprint from *The Ironworker*.

<sup>67</sup> Victorian Branch Management Committee, Federated Ironworkers' of Australia, 6 January 1943, E175-11-2, NBAC. "Miners Seek Federal Aid," *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 6 January 1943.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of Annual Central Council Meeting, 1-5 February 1943, Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Union, N144/5/5, NBAC.

<sup>69</sup> Macintyre, *The Reds*, 396-99.

<sup>70</sup> Ross, *Miners' Federation*, 341. I am grateful to Phoebe Kelloway for drawing my attention to this event.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Reeves, "'Damned Scotsmen': British migrants and the Australian coal industry, 1919-49," in *Common Cause: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History*, ed. Eric Fry (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 105.

been a member – and its anti-racist rhetoric did not “translate into practical political activism,” but during the Second World War the party moved to more forthright opposition and openly attacked the policy for the first time.<sup>72</sup>

Maybank was the head of a whites-only union which enforced a colour bar but was presented as a supporter of African workers in what can be plausibly seen as a ‘strategic misunderstanding’. The Miners’ Federation, for instance, claimed that Maybank’s supposed “crime” was “attempting to organise the coloured workers who are working in the mining industry in Rhodesia.”<sup>73</sup> His imprisonment therefore “had the effect of alienating the support of the native people.”<sup>74</sup> This was untrue, and statements distributed by the NRMWU to the “Labour Movements of the Democratic Countries,” made no reference at all to African workers, except specifically to deny the allegation that Maybank had been involved in organising them.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the CPA highlighted the achievement of the closed shop and the passage of a workmen’s compensation act that would be “a big improvement on the Western Australian act,” but did not disclose fact that both were for white workers only.<sup>76</sup> These ‘misunderstandings’ persisted. In 1945, the CPA again claimed that Maybank, then back on the Copperbelt, “at the union’s first meeting, he stressed the need for white workers to help native Africans to organise.”<sup>77</sup>

Arguably, this kind of strategic misunderstanding was reciprocal. Maybank explained his own militant strategy in relation to his experience in the Australian labour movement, but his image of this movement – where, as he put it, the “tradition of struggle” had “so hardened the rank and file” in the unions – was more militant and radical than the reality.<sup>78</sup> For instance, Maybank often urged his members to reject arbitration in industrial disputes, and they often did, yet arbitration was the norm in Australian industrial relations in this period.<sup>79</sup> Western Australia, where Maybank had been active in the labour movement, had adopted a system of

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<sup>72</sup> Jon Piccini and Evan Smith, “The “White Australia” policy must go’: The Communist Party of Australia and immigration restriction” in *The Far Left in Australia since 1945*, eds. Jon Piccini, Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (Routledge: Abingdon, 2019), 80, 84-86.

<sup>73</sup> H. Wells to J. Curtin, 5 January 1943, 1943/241/1, A989, NAA.

<sup>74</sup> “Miners Seek Federal Aid,” *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*, 6 January 1943.

<sup>75</sup> Resume of Events Leading up to and Including the Arrests of the Trade Union Leaders, Dc12.20, AH 646, HPA.

<sup>76</sup> ‘South Africa Interns a Militant’, *Tribune*, 6 January 1943.

<sup>77</sup> “Maybank, Exiled 3 Years, Leads Again,” *Tribune*, 5 October 1945.

<sup>78</sup> Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 12 December 1957, 644/10, WP.

<sup>79</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Richard Mitchell, *Foundations of Arbitration: The origins and effects of state compulsory arbitration, 1890-1914* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991).

compulsory arbitration in 1900. In contrast, the usual procedure on the Copperbelt was to strike first and only then proceed to conciliation efforts, and there were wildcat strikes by white mineworkers almost every year between 1940 and 1953.

The campaign to have Maybank released failed and he was deported to Britain, the authorities having worked out Maybank was lying when he claimed to have been born in New Zealand. There are considerable archival records on Maybank's life in these years because his activities were monitored closely by the British Government and because, throughout his life, Maybank displayed a knack for meeting and ingratiating himself with prominent figures in the labour movement. This makes him clearly visible in archival collections – there is even a file in the National Archives in London with the catalogue entry “WAR: MAYBANK, Frank Stanley”<sup>80</sup> – and information in these files provided clear indications about where further information could be found, namely the archives of British trade unions.

Maybank arrived in Liverpool on 2 March 1943, and only a month later was in London presenting his case to Walter Citrine, the long-serving General Secretary of Britain's Trade Union Congress (TUC). Maybank persuaded Citrine and then the TUC's General Council that he was a victimised trade unionist, and they took up cudgels on his behalf with the British Government.<sup>81</sup> At a TUC General Council meeting, Maybank met Will Lawther, then President of the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain, who invited him to address the union's executive, members of which became some of Maybank's firmest supporters.<sup>82</sup> The Mineworkers' Federation subsequently arranged for Maybank to tour Britain's coalfields to state his case, and subsequently reported that he had “made an excellent impression on all the District Officers of the Miners' Union.”<sup>83</sup>

Other trade unions provided Maybank with occasional work as an organiser and speechwriter, clearly seeing his trade union work among white mineworkers as relevant experience, but he had no regular employment and pressed the government to allow him to return to mining. He had connections on the South Wales coalfield and attempted to get a job

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<sup>80</sup> HO 45/25112, TNA.

<sup>81</sup> Walter Citrine to Oliver Stanley, 9 April 1943, CO 795/122/13, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 8 April 1943, National Union of Mineworkers archive, Barnsley.

<sup>83</sup> Notes of a meeting held in the Secretary of State's room, 7 December 1943, CO 795/122/13, TNA. Durham Miners' Association Committee Minutes, 21 June 1943, 01/11/38, D/DMA, Durham County Records Office, Durham

there, although he feared he had gone “soft” and could no longer do underground work.<sup>84</sup> The British Government had absolutely no intention of allowing Maybank anywhere near Britain’s coal industry, which was also hit by industrial unrest. Instead Maybank took up work as a ship’s storekeeper for a salvage firm on the Isle of Wight, in which role MI5 kept him under discreet surveillance.<sup>85</sup> He remained active as a trade unionist and assiduously kept up membership of the Transport and General Workers’ Union, and his branch passed a resolution of thanks for his work when he left.<sup>86</sup>

Maybank had no intention of staying in Britain. The connections he had with the British trade union movement proved very useful in this respect, as he was invited to the inaugural meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions in London in February 1945. Here, Maybank got himself elected to the new body’s General Council and raised his case with other delegates.<sup>87</sup> Delegations of trade union leaders lobbied the British Government on Maybank’s behalf and, reluctantly, the government acquiesced, allowing Maybank to return to the Copperbelt after the end of hostilities in Europe, the matter decided by the War Cabinet.<sup>88</sup> Immediately on his return, he was re-installed as NRMWU General Secretary.

Maybank’s newly prominent position and connections mean that his return to Northern Rhodesia in 1945 does not place him beyond the bounds of online catalogues and digitised collections. Maybank is relatively easy to find in well-catalogued collections at Britain’s National Archives as well as the personal papers of several prominent political and trade union figures, and his activities were occasionally reported in digitised British newspapers, though unlike Trove these are not freely accessible. Most information, however, is again in files at the National Archives of Zambia and ZCCM. Interestingly, there are other digitised sources available for this period, but these are misleading and point to a risk of privileging digital sources. Several British electoral registers have been digitised and are available on the

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<sup>84</sup> Notes on an interview with Frank Stanley Maybank, 16 May 1944, CO 795/128/6, TNA. How exactly Maybank had contacts on the South Wales coalfield is unclear, though it may have been through the NRMWU. The union’s vice-president had worked at a colliery in South Wales before coming to the Copperbelt.

<sup>85</sup> L.S. Brass to H.H. Duncan, 31 January 1945, CO 795/128/5, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> W.O. Maxted, TGWU to Frank Maybank, 28 May 1945, in author’s possession.

<sup>87</sup> Report of the Committee on Nominations to the General Council, Box 10, World Federation of Trade Unions, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam.

<sup>88</sup> Conclusions of War Cabinet, 26 March 1945, CAB 65/49/36, TNA.

Ancestry website, but both the 1946 and 1948 electoral register list Maybank as resident in London.<sup>89</sup>

### **Back to Australia and Digital Sources**

Back on the Copperbelt, it seemed that Maybank might abandon his peripatetic life and settle in Northern Rhodesia, then undergoing another mining boom. In 1947 he married Cecil Powell, a much younger woman from the mining town of Kimberley, South Africa. They had two children, both born on the Copperbelt, and around the same time Maybank secured a job on the mines for his nephew from New Zealand.<sup>90</sup> Maybank was an uncompromising patriarch and accorded Cecil little respect according to his children, and often treated her cruelly. He could be emotionally distant from his children but made a point of introducing them to labour leaders who called upon him when they visited Northern Rhodesia, among them Clement Attlee, then leader of the British Labour Party.<sup>91</sup>

While he may have intended to settle, events conspired against him, and soon he was on the move again. Maybank's politics were increasingly out of step with those he represented. The copper boom brought thousands of new white migrants to the Copperbelt mines, who had little knowledge of the strikes of the 1940s and Maybank's role in them. White workers' earnings were directly linked to the copper price and with high prices in the early 1950s there was little incentive to strike. Moreover, the appeal of Soviet Communism was especially fleeting in this part of the world. Maybank's politics were no secret, yet other leading union members were far more politically conservative. Most, for instance, played a prominent role in the public celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, with coronation medals pinned to their jackets.<sup>92</sup> In July 1953, he was ousted from his position as General Secretary and from the union, and when he took his case to union branches no branch voted in support of him.<sup>93</sup> Ironically, the closed shop, which he had helped secure, meant that he could not get another job on the mines once he was out of the union.

Consequently, Maybank and his family left the Copperbelt soon afterwards. He spent the next two years as the manager of a haulage contractor in Lusaka, the colony's capital,

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<sup>89</sup> Frank Stanley Maybank, *London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965*, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1795/>, accessed 8 March 2018

<sup>90</sup> John Maybank, telephone interview with author, 31 March 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Mather, interview. Attlee visited Northern Rhodesia in 1952 after the Labour Party had lost power.

<sup>92</sup> "Mufulira rejoices as Elizabeth is crowned," *Mufulira Mirror*, July 1953.

<sup>93</sup> "Mufulira, Nchanga Branches Support Executive Decision," *Northern News*, 4 August 1953.

while his wife and children went to stay with family in South Africa for a period as they struggled to find housing in Lusaka.<sup>94</sup> Roy Welensky, a prominent settler politician, was convinced that Maybank was waiting for the mining companies to crackdown on the union, so that mineworkers would see the error of their ways and ask him to return.<sup>95</sup> Instead, Maybank was preparing to move with his family to Australia as he could not find “a suitable job here.”<sup>96</sup>

As in the 1920s, there were no difficulties with this move and the Maybank family disembarked at Fremantle, Western Australia on 9 May 1956. This effectively marked the end of Frank Maybank’s life as a mobile political and labour activist, and he would spend the rest of his life in Western Australia, as he intended.<sup>97</sup> Maybank was an older man by then of course, and in his mid-50s was perhaps less willing and able to live the kind of itinerant lifestyle doing manual jobs as he had done in his 20s and 30s. However, the wider context that had allowed him to move relatively freely was also changing. Maybank was soon obliged to take out Australian citizenship, a legal category that did not even exist during his previous stint in the country.

This change was the rapid disintegration of the British Empire. Within a decade, Northern Rhodesia had become an independent state, Zambia. Maybank himself could see the changes coming, and upon Zambian independence in 1964 wrote to Welensky perceptively anticipating the end of white rule elsewhere in Southern Africa: “I think I see a better perspective [sic] of African events from here... what hope for [Ian] Smith to hold SR [Southern Rhodesia] if France could not hold Algeria.”<sup>98</sup> Two years previously, France had conceded the independence of Algeria after a protracted war and in 1965 Southern Rhodesia’s Prime Minister Ian Smith declared independence under white minority rule, sparking another protracted conflict that ended in defeat for the white minority regime in 1980.

Maybank became the proprietor of the Royal Hotel in Kojonup, where he set about establishing himself on a firmer footing in Australia. This meant rejecting temptations to return to the Copperbelt. In early 1958, the NRMWU leadership, then preparing for a major showdown with the mining companies, offered him his old job of General Secretary back. Despite spending 14 years in Northern Rhodesia, and only 18 months back in Australia, he

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<sup>94</sup> Interview, Mather.

<sup>95</sup> Roy Welensky to Ronald Prain, 5 August 1953, Box 3, RP.

<sup>96</sup> Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 28 November 1955, 644/10, WP.

<sup>97</sup> Before departing, Maybank told Welensky that they “expect to settle” in Australia. Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 5 January 1956, 644/10, WP.

<sup>98</sup> Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 7 October 1964, 785/4, WP.

ruled it out: “no Rhodesia for me I am to [sic] much Australian.”<sup>99</sup> In 1961, he successfully applied for Australian citizenship, noting that he had lost whatever passport he had previously held. His application is now digitised, done at my expense several years ago, and contains hints that Maybank’s politics continued to shape his mobility, as part of the file was withheld as it contains the details of an ASIO officer or employee. Still, whatever official suspicions lingered over his politics did not block a British-born, white former resident of Australia from receiving citizenship.<sup>100</sup>

The hotel in Kojonup was not a success and in the early 1960s the family moved to Cottesloe, near Perth, to a house where Maybank spent the rest of his life, as suggested by successive entries in digitised census records.<sup>101</sup> In 1962, he became the manager of the Buffalo Club in Fremantle and later drove delivery trucks for a car plant. Maybank lived a more subdued life in Western Australia, though old associates from the labour movement continued to visit him and he remained politically active.<sup>102</sup>

His wanderlust, however, had not quite diminished. In 1973 he bluntly informed his wife Cecil that he was going to visit the Soviet Union again, his passage on a tramp steamer smoothed by a letter from the Seaman’s Union of Australia, the author of which noted he had known Maybank personally since 1949.<sup>103</sup> He attempted to work his passage as a deck hand until the other crew, to their astonishment, found that he was in his 70s.<sup>104</sup> I could find no records of this later trip to the Soviet Union, though there may be archival records in Russia, or the date when he returned to Australia. Most current digitised passenger lists cease in the 1960s and, in any case, Maybank travelled on a commercial vessel and tried to work his passage. One reason Maybank visited the Soviet Union is that in his later years he revisited almost everywhere he had previously been in his life, though it is worth noting that he never returned to Zambia, or any other part of Africa.

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<sup>99</sup> Frank Maybank to Roy Welensky, 5 February 1958, 644/10, WP.

<sup>100</sup> Application for Naturalization or Registration: Frank Stanley Maybank (British), PP256/1, W1961/4144, NAA.

<sup>101</sup> Frank Stanley Maybank, *Australia, Electoral Rolls, 1903-1980*, accessed 8 March 2018, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1207/>

<sup>102</sup> For instance, he joined demonstrations against Australia’s participation in the Vietnam War. This provided one of the only occasions when his children recalled him involving the family in his political life, when he ordered Cecil to attend a demonstration to support members of the anti-war group Save Our Sons, who were being prosecuted. Interview, Mather.

<sup>103</sup> Statement from E.V. Elliott, Seaman’s Union of Australia, 9 May 1973, in author’s possession.

<sup>104</sup> Interview, Mather.

## Conclusion

Frank Maybank lived and worked in an imperial world, where the boundaries of empire and race structured his mobility, connections, and networks. He was a determined and successful creator of networks in the international labour movement, networks that he drew inspiration and support from, and that he was able to form due to his own mobility. These kinds of connections are the hallmarks of global and transnational history.<sup>105</sup> This article has emphasised these kinds of connections between the labour movement in Australia and on the Copperbelt, personified by Maybank himself who was involved in both.

Additionally, this article has emphasised how these connections that facilitated the flow of information were often weak enough to allow for strategic misunderstandings by different historical actors. Assessing the strength of these kinds of connections is as important as demonstrating their existence. From the 1940s, the relationship between labour radicalism and racism, espoused historically by much of the labour movement of which Maybank was part, was increasingly unacceptable, and this encouraged misinterpretation of his role. In Australia, Maybank could be presented as an organiser of African workers, when in reality he had negotiated a harder racial division of labour on the mines. On the Copperbelt, Maybank could justify his own militancy and politics in relation to his claimed Australian antecedents, although his representation of Australia's labour movement was more radical than the reality.

Mobility was a central feature of Maybank's life, yet he did not adopt or affirm any kind of transnational sense of identity. During his life, he encountered several different forms of emerging national identity that he could plausibly have claimed as his own: British, New Zealand, Australian, Rhodesian, and he even at one stage acquired a passport falsely stating that he had been born in New Zealand.<sup>106</sup> However, he decided that being Australian suited him best, and it was easy for him to become Australian. He was already described as a "Perth man" in the press in 1935 even though, at that time, he had spent about as much time in the Soviet Union as he had in Perth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Global connections are the second paradigm of global history identified by Sebastian Conrad and termed one of the "signature methods of global history as a genre" by Richard Drayton and David Motadel. Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 9. Drayton and Motadel, "Discussion," 8.

<sup>106</sup> Immigration Officer's Report, Port of Liverpool, 2 March 1943, HO 45/25112, TNA.

<sup>107</sup> "A Perth Man's Impressions of Russia," *Sunday Times* (Perth), 7 July 1935.

Despite his self-representation as an Australian trade unionist, Maybank was an itinerant figure for much of his life. Tracing the boundaries of such individuals has often resulted in methodological problems when working from archives whose contents are often circumscribed by the boundaries of the nation-state and this “source-anchoring reinforced the nation-state bias” in the historical discipline.<sup>108</sup> The huge expansion of online sources in recent years has reduced these challenges in some ways, but uneven patterns of digitization and accessibility of online material creates new potential problems. Rather than privileging the nation-state, this unevenness encourages historians to examine topics connecting places – say, Australia, Britain and the United States<sup>109</sup> – that have digitised and easily accessibly online sources and neglect connections between places which have not.

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<sup>108</sup> Putnam, “Transnational and Text-Searchable,” 381.

<sup>109</sup> This would replicate the pattern identified by Raymond Markey in comparative history whereby Australian labour history is usually compared with that of former settler colonies. Raymond Markey, “The Australian Place in Comparative Labour History,” *Labour History*, no. 100 (2011): 168.