

Chapter Three:

THE PEOPLE'S GAME

Since its humble beginnings in 1858, Melbourne's indigenous code of football has been central to the development of various manifestations of community consciousness, initially in the metropolitan area of Melbourne and later throughout Australia. It has thrived on the strength of its ability to attract ongoing support from a 'football public' drawn from a wide cross-section of Melbourne, Victorian and Australian society. Changes observable in the composition of football's public in the closing decade of the twentieth century were a reflection of a wider society that tolerated increasing inequality between its richest and poorest constituents.

It has been suggested in the preceding chapters that football's disaffected non-corporate barrackers, increasingly excluded from privileges once taken for granted, have been engaged in a process of mourning the loss of their sense of ownership of the Game. Belief in popular ownership was encouraged by the cheapness and availability of football to all people in Melbourne. In an article in the Herald in 1931, the journalist T.Kelynach, alias 'Kickero', declared football to be 'the cheapest sport in the world, giving the people, the real people, a magnificent spectacle for ninepence.'¹ Kelynach's definition of 'the real people' would, by implication, embrace all persons who could afford this amount.

¹ Cited in V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1931, pages not numbered.

In order to form any worthwhile conclusions regarding the affordability of football from one era to another it is necessary to measure changes to admission prices over time against a standard that will take account of changes to the real value of the currency. Football admission prices in any era vary according to the degree of comfort and exclusivity demanded by the consumer. Reserved seating costs more than general admission and prices can vary from one enclosure to another. In Kickero's era, and for most of the V.F.L.'s history as a suburban competition, admission to the Grandstand enclosure was more expensive than entry to the Outer. The 'ninepence' to which Kickero referred was the Adult general admission price to the Outer in 1931. When Kickero wrote his article unemployment was causing severe hardship for many working class families. No doubt, many of the unemployed would have found even so nominal a price as ninepence unaffordable. It would seem a fair assumption that, by 'real people', Kickero meant Melbourne's lowest paid employed workers.

Arising from a decision, in 1907, by the president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, Mr. Justice Higgins, the concept of the 'Basic Wage' was used as a computation of the minimum amount necessary for the average family breadwinner to support his family in a manner considered appropriate to Australian standards.² Until the concept was abandoned at the 1967 National Wage Case, the Basic Wage provided a useful measure of the lowest wage normally payable to unskilled Australian

² Victorian Year Book, No.78, 1964, Melbourne, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Victorian Office, 1964, p.489.

male workers employed full-time. The court recognised that the cost of living varied from city to country and from State to State and therefore set rates of pay specific to each capital city and major regional centre.

It is proposed that an effective measure of the affordability of League football to the 'real people' from the time of Kickero's comment until 1967, would be based on the Adult general admission price to the Outer for home-and-away matches, expressed as a percentage of the Basic Wage for Melbourne-based workers. From 1922 to 1953 the Basic Wage was adjusted quarterly. After 1953, adjustments were made at irregular intervals and times of the year. Home-and-away admission prices were set on a season-by-season basis. For the sake of consistency it is suggested that the Basic Wage against which each season's admission price should be measured is the one applicable in May of the season under consideration. Where an adjustment to the Basic Wage was made in May, the newer rate should be the one used for the calculation. Football admission prices, from time to time, were subject to an Entertainment Tax. This tax, when applicable, should be included in the price.

In May 1931 the Basic Wage in Melbourne was £3/8/5.³ The 9d admission price was 1.0962% of this amount. For most of the period between 1931 and 1967 the percentage fluctuated between 0.8696% in 1948 and the 1956 figure of 1.2931%.⁴ Only in 1962 did it pass 1.3% for the first time, trending upwards in the last

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. (for Basic Wage figures). V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1948, p.18. (for 1948 admission prices) V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1956, p.6. (for 1956 admission prices)

few years of the Basic Wage system to reach 1.8349% in 1967.⁵ Despite this demonstrable upward trend over time, a price of less than 2% of one's income for a Saturday afternoon's entertainment would have been regarded by most as a peppercorn figure. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, however, rises in the cost of attending the football would outstrip inflation by roughly two to one.

After the abandonment of the Basic Wage system, the direct comparison made above between football prices and the wages of Melbourne's lowest paid workers is no longer possible. However, some indication of the extent of the rising cost, in real terms, of attending football can be gleaned from a comparison between movements in the general admission price over time and changes in award rates for various occupations over the same period. For the purposes of this comparison, I have opted to use minimum pay rates for occupations at the lower end of the pay spectrum. This policy has been adopted deliberately in order to examine the way that football prices have impacted specifically on the poorest sections of the public. I have also considered movements in average weekly earnings over the same period, but I use this figure with some caution. I am not so much concerned here with the affordability of football for the 'average' person as I am for that of people at the bottom end of the economic scale.

⁵ Victorian Year Book, No.84, 1970, Melbourne, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Victorian Office, 1970, p.189. (for Basic Wage figures) V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1962, p.12. (for 1962 admission prices) V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1967, p.10. (for 1967 admission prices)

In 1967, the Adult Outer admission price set by the V.F.L. was 60 cents.⁶ By 1997, the A.F.L. was charging \$12.50,⁷ a rise of 2,083.33%. Over the same period, the average weekly total earnings for employed males in Australia rose from \$60.70⁸ to \$686.30.⁹ This increase (1,130.64%) covered barely half the increase in the football admission prices, but it was still significantly higher than the percentage wage increases awarded to many of the lower paid sections of the workforce. Using the weighted average minimum weekly rates payable for a full week's work, excluding overtime, as published in official federal government statistics over the period in question, it can be shown that workers in the textiles, clothing and footwear industry, the retail trade industry and the community services industry were significantly worse off in their ability to absorb the price increases for football than those receiving average weekly earnings.

Official statistics for 1967, show the weighted average minimum rate for the textiles, clothing and footwear industry as \$42.40. The corresponding figure for retail trade workers was \$44.78 while, for those employed in public authorities and community and business services, the figure was \$45.49.¹⁰ By 1997, the weighted averages had risen to \$422.48, \$447.30 and \$418.43 respectively.¹¹ Pay rates in textiles,

⁶ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1967, p.10.

⁷ Sunday Herald Sun, 30 March 1997, p.5.

⁸ Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No.54, 1968, Canberra, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, p.287.

⁹ Year Book, Australia, No.80, 1998, Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics, p.203.

¹⁰ Commonwealth Year Book, 1968, p.281.

¹¹ Year Book, Australia, 1998, p.202. The figures shown in this source are expressed as index numbers based on the corresponding wage rates applicable in

clothing and footwear were 996.42% of what they had been 30 years earlier. For retail workers the figure was 998.88%, while people employed in community services were getting 919.82% of their 1967 figure.

These figures, however, almost certainly understate the extent of the increase in the monetary burden placed on poorer members of society wishing to attend A.F.L. matches. The earlier figures apply to a time when Australia was experiencing close to full employment. Not only did the intervening years produce a significant increase in levels of unemployment, but there was also a trend away from full time employment in favour of casual and part-time employment. These changes complicate any measurement of the affordability of league football over time because of the absence of a consistent measure of low-income wage rates.

Another factor not taken into account in this analysis is the effect of a growing need for reserved seating and pre-booking of tickets to A.F.L. matches. Where reserved seating had once been the luxury of those who could afford it, the A.F.L.'s policy of allocating matches to venues barely big enough to hold the expected crowd has put increasing pressure on fans to ensure their admission by booking reserved seating in advance. This entails not only paying the additional cost applicable to reserved seating, but also the booking fee payable to the agent handling the transaction.

1985. The 1985 figures had been indexed against the figures for 1976, which was the last year for which these rates were shown as actual dollar amounts. The rates I have given have been calculated from the official figures.

In 1964, however, admission costs were still low enough for football to be widely seen as a birthright for Melburnians. Although the Adult Outer admission price of 5/- represented a relatively steep 1.7422% of the Basic Wage of £14/7/-, compared to what it had been up to the end of the 1950s, it is fair to suggest that football fans of the mid-1960s would have still been operating on an inherited assumption that the Game belonged to them.

The V.F.L. competition had experienced four decades of stability. With the exception of the war years, the same eleven Melbourne-based clubs, plus Geelong, had competed since 1925. All clubs were named after localities and located at or near those localities. A sense of community based on local social systems had grown out of strong connections between football clubs, local councils and other local sporting clubs, particularly cricket clubs. Any person born after 1925 could have been excused for assuming that the twelve-team suburban V.F.L. competition had always existed and would always exist. Although an undue amount of control by cricket clubs over their football counterparts produced some injustices for football clubs and their supporters, this residual anachronism was a 'tradition' grudgingly accepted by virtue of its having always existed. A perception of continuity with the past ensured no sense of loss.

There were, however, developments undermining the public ownership assumption in the period between Kickero's comment and the V.F.L.'s controversial period of suburban expansion in the 1960s. Although these developments had been well advanced in broader society since World War 2, football was very slow to embrace changes that would challenge its sense of

tradition. Early indications of the poor health of barracker sovereignty were easily denied on the strength of football's continuing turnstile sufficiency, which still afforded the consumer a measure of control over the market. Football clubs in mid-1960s derived 95% of their income from spectators' admission revenue. Sponsorship and merchandising at the club level were virtually non-existent.¹²

Radical changes to the nature of Australian society since World War 2 were presenting a challenge to football administrators. The arrival of large numbers of eastern and southern European migrants had challenged Australia's ethnic and cultural homogeneity. At the same time, the economic prosperity of the 'Long Boom' had promoted a lifestyle of consumerism and home ownership. As the population became more suburbanised the private car came to be seen as an increasingly essential item. A more affluent, mobile and culturally diverse population, with more leisure time in which to live an increasingly flexible lifestyle, would not automatically assimilate into the football communities.¹³ Faced with growing competition from these new cultural influences the League was forced to court its public, to an extent, by providing better facilities. Moves by football clubs and the League itself to outer suburbs in the 1960s was, in some ways, an attempt to woo a changing demographic. Under these conditions barrackers could vote with their feet and the League would take notice. However, the

¹² Andrews, Ian, 'The transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League. Part Two: Redrawing "community" boundaries in the post-war A.F.L.' in Football Studies, Vol.2, No.1, 1999.

¹³ Ibid.

dynamics of the relationship between football authorities and fans had been changing since the 1930s in ways not obvious to a 1960s football public blissfully unaware of the potential weakness of its position.

This chapter tells the story of how precedents were gradually established to undermine the football public's erroneous assumption that it owned the Game. Innovations, invariably presented as being in the cause of providing a better deal for the paying customer came inevitably at a price. Although the changes were barely perceptible in the thirty or so years after Kickero, subtle increments in admission prices in the name of an economic necessity wrought by the Game's growing administrative complexity would provide the groundwork for a more savage exploitation in later years.

To an increasingly affluent Melbourne population in the early 1960s, the spartan facilities at most V.F.L. grounds had begun to appear inadequate for the presentation of an elite sporting competition. As most V.F.L. venues were located on Crown lands, it had become the practice for disputes between football clubs and ground managers to be referred to the Minister of Lands. A series of landmark rulings, identified by reference to the particular minister responsible at the time, apportioned rights of access and revenue between football clubs, their respective ground managers and other sporting clubs sharing venues with them. Grounds managed by cricket clubs were an especially fruitful source of conflict. Contentious issues included the priority given to one sport over the other in the use of the ground,

particularly during the changeover period between the football and cricket seasons, and the rights of cricket club members to utilise their clubs' facilities on football match days. Other problems general to the relationship between football clubs and ground managers included the way in which the proceeds from football matches were distributed and the method of raising funds for ground improvements.

The period between the two world wars was one in which the dominant expression of community in football was fiercely territorial. A League football club represented a clearly definable geographical locale. Notwithstanding the possibility of players being imported from country areas or from other states, or the occasional practice of a club clearing a player to play for another club, the electoral player recruitment system bound metropolitan-based players to the club representing the area in which they lived. By providing a recreational outlet for players and entertainment for spectators, the football club was part of a local social system. Its activities were not wholly confined to its respective geographical locale, required as it was to visit the locale of another club every second week of the home-and-away season. Its commanding presence at home, however, made it a pillar of the local community and a rallying point for the development of a communion that thrived in the face of opposition from clubs representing other localities.

The capacity crowds that crammed into suburban grounds during the inter-war period provide the most immediately convincing evidence of the degree to which communities embraced football clubs. The reciprocity of the relationship is examinable in the degree to which football could comfortably coexist with councils

and other sporting clubs representing the same locale. As the body charged with the administration of the Game's elite competition, the V.F.L.'s interests did not always coincide with those of its individual clubs. However, in the following account of the long battle for rights and revenues between the Ground Managers Association (G.M.A.) and the V.F.L., fought under the jurisdiction of the Department of Lands, the League's role should be seen as being representative of the interests of the twelve clubs. The League's decision making process during this period was based on the collective opinion of delegates from each club. Observations pertaining to the League's attitude towards the community that supported it and, by implication, the clubs' attitudes towards the communities that supported them, are drawn primarily from V.F.L. annual reports between 1930 and the watershed year of 1964.

A ministerial ruling effective from the beginning of the 1931 football season was greeted enthusiastically by the V.F.L. The Bailey Award allocated the use of grounds to football clubs for 25 weeks of each year. Football finals were to be completed not later than the second Saturday in October. In return for the right of their members to attend football matches at their ground, cricket clubs were required to make an annual payment to the appropriate football club of £20 for every 100 members.¹⁴

Acceptance of the Bailey Award, however, barely concealed the League's resentful recognition that other bodies were thriving on its exertions. The

League did not begrudge its contribution to employment in the difficult economic circumstances that prevailed during the 1931 season. Nor did it appear to mind that its patrons were making a significant contribution to railway and tramway revenue. Neither did the League regret its decision to 'tax' its own income by providing 'substantial annual donations' to charities, though it must be noted that the League felt the need to devote some space in its 1931 Annual Report to trumpeting its own philanthropy.¹⁵ However, the self-congratulation with which the League documented its role in the upkeep of grounds came somewhat at the expense of the councils and the cricket clubs.

Ground managers must acknowledge that without revenue from football the people would not enjoy the use of such splendidly equipped grounds. With the exception of the Melbourne ground, football profits provide practically the whole of the finance needed for ground improvements and maintenance.¹⁶

Football was, apparently, happy to reciprocate the support bestowed upon it by the community, but its attitude of benevolent superiority betrayed aloofness. Football was something above community and it was important that community recognised the fact. During the 1930s the V.F.L.'s style of altruism was one in which its left hand was abundantly aware of what its right hand was doing. Its public relations policy was

¹⁴ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1930, p.4.

¹⁵ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1931, pages not numbered.

to ensure that the public was similarly aware. Faced with an Entertainment Tax in 1932, the League opted to bear the additional expense without increasing admission charges. The Annual Report for that season bragged that football was the only form of entertainment that did not pass the expense on to its customers, but ruefully recorded that the League's generosity had cost it £118 on one match alone.¹⁷

The League's relationship with cricket authorities showed that a capacity for cooperation existed despite the ongoing strains. When 'vagaries of the calendar' in 1934 would have resulted in football being allotted one less Saturday than usual, the Victorian Cricket Association (V.C.A.) agreed to change its program of matches to give the V.F.L. its correct number of Saturdays. However, wet weather during the cricket finals required the extension of the cricket season to 21 April. The V.F.L., in turn, cooperated with the V.C.A.'s request for an extension.¹⁸ This spirit of cooperation was formalised in 1936 with the formation of a standing committee, consisting of three representatives from the V.C.A. and three from the V.F.L., to confer on match programming, occupancy of grounds and any other 'matters of mutual interest'.¹⁹ The following year, the League reported that the V.C.A./V.F.L. Standing Committee was working effectively and amicably.²⁰

In 1939, the League and the various ground management committees agreed to form a similar standing committee to confer on matters relating to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1932, p.11.

¹⁸ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1934, p.18.

¹⁹ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1936, p.20.

²⁰ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1937, p.23.

ground management. Utilising the same model as that employed by the V.C.A./V.F.L. Standing Committee, this body would consist of three representatives from the V.F.L. and three from the ground managers.²¹

It is unlikely that the increase in the Outer admission price to 1/- in 1939 would have changed Kickero's opinion as to the value which football provided for its paying customers. At 1.2658% of the Basic Wage,²² the new price was unlikely to have had any impact on the public's sense of ownership of the Game. Closer examination of the rationale behind the 3d increase, however, reveals a subtle shift in the League's thinking. One penny represented a tax component. For the first time the League was openly requiring the paying public to foot the bill for a government impost. The expensive lessons of the past had taught the League that altruism must have its limits. Its position as an organisation responsible for delivering the Game to the public at an affordable price needed to be tempered by a 'user pays' philosophy. The remaining 2d of the increase was to be paid into the newly created Outer Ground Improvement and Maintenance Account. This would indicate the beginning of a vision for providing a greater level of comfort for the spectator. Again, the 'user pays' ethos decreed that any such improvement would have to be directly paid for by the customer. The League and the ground managers agreed that each club and its respective ground management committee should form another committee to oversee an ongoing program of improvements to the Outer ground areas of League

²¹ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1939, p.23.

²² Victorian Year Book, 1964, p.494. (for Basic Wage figures) V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1939, p.23.

football venues. The program would be financed by the aforementioned account.²³ Although the outbreak of World War 2 delayed the implementation of the program, this apparent mania for creating committees was an indication that football administration was becoming more complex.

The 1946 Annual Report noted that, with the end of war-time conditions, football was about to settle back 'into its natural groove, but with increased patronage and administrative responsibilities'.²⁴ Among the new initiatives further complicating the task of administering the sport was a retirement benefit scheme for players. It was initially intended that the proceeds of one round of matches each season would be set aside for this Provident Fund.²⁵ However, in 1949 the system was changed to allow a small deduction to be made from the Adult admission fee each week rather than the complete allocation of one week's proceeds.²⁶

By 1947 the relationship between the V.F.L. and the G.M.A. was showing signs of strain and the Minister of Lands was called upon to arbitrate. The fund for Outer ground improvements was proving inadequate for the purpose and increased administration costs for the League required a new approach to the way in which revenue was distributed. A series of conferences between the ground managers and the League failed to reach agreement.²⁷

On 9 March 1948 J.G.B.McDonald, Minister of Lands, in response to submissions from the V.F.L. and

(for admission prices)

²³ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1939, p.23.

²⁴ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1946, p.20.

²⁵ Ibid., p.18.

²⁶ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1949, p.18.

²⁷ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1947, p.17.

the G.M.A., delivered a new set of occupancy conditions, binding for ten years. In an apparent attempt to uphold a populist position which would not preclude the possibility of exploiting the Game's popularity for taxation revenue, the Minister took a stand that favoured the Outer fan at the expense of the League's ability to maximise its own revenues. The McDonald Award was formulated with a view to keeping admission prices as low as possible. The Minister's report expressed the view that any increases to pre-tax admission prices would be 'unduly severe' on the Outer patrons, in view of a new 3d amusement tax. He was not quite so protective of the interests of the patrons of the Grandstand enclosure, allowing a price increase from 2/5 to 3/-. These prices included a tax component of 9d. Inevitable though taxes may have been, and notwithstanding the Minister's stated opinion that increased charges were 'inevitable in view of the substantial rise in costs brought about by post-war conditions', the Outer patrons' hardships would be minimised by forcing the largest part of the burden on to the presumably wealthier Grandstand patrons.²⁸

The League's opposition to the McDonald ruling on admission prices, stated in its 1948 report, could be taken as a suggestion that the crack that divided its interests from those of its customers was getting wider. Alternatively, one could eschew the notion of conflict of interest by seeing the relationship between the V.F.L. and the football public as something akin to Tönnies's concept of '*gemeinschaft* between master and servant'. Importantly, under this

²⁸ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1948, p.18.

model, the League is 'master' rather than 'servant'. As Tönnies himself put it:

A superior power which is exercised to the benefit of the subordinate and which, because in accordance with his will, is accepted by him, I call dignity or authority - *gemeinschaft* between master and servant.²⁹

While the League's role is thus 'dignified' as that of a benevolent dictator serving the interests of its subjects, its executive authority as the initiator of policy indicated that it ruled rather than served. Full-blown conflict of interest, as in the market relationship between buyer and seller, may not have been present in the immediate post-World War 2 football environment. However, a precedent for later conflict had already been well established in the demonstrable attitude of enlightened superiority that football administrators had been adopting in their dealings with the public as early as 1930.

The League, in 1948, argued that football was a much cheaper form of entertainment than theatre, racing, trotting or boxing. It regarded its charges as 'ridiculously' low by world standards. As noted earlier, the 1948 figure was low even by League football's standards. If grounds were to receive much needed improvements, the League argued that admission prices would have to be increased. Since the war, 2d from daily Adult Outer admission receipts and 1/- from

²⁹ Tönnies, Ferdinand, Community and association (*Gemeinschaft und gesellschaft*), translated and supplemented by Charles P. Loomis, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1955, p.47.

each season ticket had been paid into the Outer Ground Improvement and Maintenance Account.³⁰

Commendable though the League's concern for the comfort of its Outer patrons may have appeared, the McDonald Award had addressed the issue of ground improvements by placing an increased burden on season ticket holders. This involved a substantial increase in the cost of season tickets to include a pooled component to be shared between all ground managers and football clubs, as a way of reimbursing the home club and its ground manager for the attendance of visiting season ticket holders. Prior to this provision, clubs with small memberships and, more to the point, their ground managers were disadvantaged by having to provide for a relatively large number of visiting members without monetary compensation. The Minister directed that the ground managers' share of the new pool be paid into the Outer Ground Improvement and Maintenance Account.³¹

While the League acknowledged that the McDonald Award would now provide additional revenue for ground improvements, the tone of its report suggested that still more money was needed and that it would need to come from a broader base than that indicated in the award. A post-war boom in the popularity of the Game was tempting the League to exploit that popularity, albeit for demonstrably altruistic reasons. Any tampering with the admission price would undermine the very basis of the public's sense of ownership of the Game. The Government had cleverly positioned itself as the champion of the common people and the League was left fuming. During the ten years' currency of the

³⁰ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1948, p.20.

³¹ Ibid., p.18.

award, ground managers and governments would inhibit any V.F.L. agenda to exploit, for whatever reasons, its own popularity.

The McDonald Award was not all bad news for the V.F.L., however. It provided for a significant increase to what had been the scandalously low price for which cricket club members and associates could attend football matches. Under the Bailey Award, a payment of 4/- per cricket member entitled that member and two ladies to attend all League football matches played at that cricket club's ground for one season. The new award required the cricket club to pay the football club 3/6 for each person to whom a ticket entitling football admission was issued. Thus, the 'member and two ladies' package, previously costing the cricket club 4/-, would now cost it 10/6.³²

Although the McDonald Award represented a government intervention in an ongoing conflict between ground managers and football administrators, there was a provision for the involved parties to formulate their own decisions if agreement could be reached. Despite the Minister's reluctance in 1948 to see Outer admission charges increased to 1/3, that figure became the admission charge in 1949, despite the removal of Entertainment Tax. A breakdown of the new charges reflected the growing complexity of post-war football administration. From the new charge, 4d went to the ground manager, 1d to the players' Provident Fund, 2d to the Outer Ground Improvement and Maintenance Account and 1d to an Australian National Football Council (A.N.F.C.) levy for the national propagation of the Game. The remaining 7d was divided between the

³² Ibid.

competing clubs.³³ Although the League itself was not a profit-making organisation and given that football remained, even at the new price, a relatively inexpensive form of popular entertainment, it was clear that it was the V.F.L.'s intention to make the public pay for the League's administrative initiatives.

In 1951 a new spirit of cooperation between the League and the ground managers was apparent. The latter agreed to the League's request that the Outer Ground Improvement and Maintenance Account not be allowed to accumulate for the purpose of providing major works, but rather be used progressively to provide improved comfort and safety for Outer patrons.³⁴ The 1951 season also saw steep increases in all admission charges over and above the reimposition of Entertainment Tax, with no sign of apology, remorse or attempted justification in the V.F.L. Annual Report. The new charge of 2/- included 4d tax. It represented 1.1299% of the Basic Wage (£8/17/-), up from 0.9124% in 1950, when the basic wage was exactly £2 less. The new Grandstand price of 4/- included 8d tax. Members tickets increased by 5/- to 18/6, from which 3/- went into the special pool instituted in 1948. Cricket clubs would now be charged 5/- per season for each member or associate to attend football.³⁵ The late 1940s and early 1950s was a period of high inflation in Australia, with the Basic Wage more than doubling from 1948 to 1953.³⁶ While price increases were to be expected, the League's 1951

³³ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1949, pp.19-20.

³⁴ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1950, p.15; Season 1951, p.15.

³⁵ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1951, p.15.

³⁶ Victorian Year Book, 1964, p.494.

increase suggested that it could, and would, charge whatever it liked as long as the G.M.A. agreed. The 1952 season saw further increases in both tax and basic charges. Outer patrons who had paid 0.8696% of the Basic Wage to attend football in 1948 were expected to pay 2/6, or 1.1792% in 1952, including 5d tax.³⁷

The paying customers were given a brief respite in 1954 when the Entertainment Tax was again removed, but only because of a resumption in hostilities between the League and the ground managers. An attempt by the League to increase its prices by the amount of the removed tax was refused by the State Government after details of the League's plans were leaked to the Government by the ground managers. The League regarded the leak as a breach of faith and the matter caused a rift within the V.F.L./G.M.A. Standing Committee.³⁸ As a result, the League dissolved the committee and ordered that future negotiations be conducted between representatives of all League clubs and all individual ground managers. The League was also forced to wait another year for the opportunity to pocket the proceeds of the removal of the tax. In December 1954, a conference of all clubs and ground managers belatedly gave the League approval to redirect the benefit of the removal of the tax from their customers to themselves.³⁹

That the League regarded the McDonald Award as a nuisance was made clear in its 1955 Annual Report, in which the League revealed that it was making approaches to the State Government to have the

³⁷ Ibid. and V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1952, p.16.

³⁸ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1954, p.4.

³⁹ Ibid., p.5.

'outdated' award replaced. Because the League and the G.M.A. had, on occasions, failed to 'reach agreement on numerous matters affecting grounds occupancy' the League considered that 'the avenue of negotiation on general matters [had] been exhausted'.⁴⁰ The report revealed that G.M.A. correspondence with the League, dated 27 September 1955, had said, 'Until such time as the V.F.L. is prepared to help itself we as ground managers are not prepared to consider any proposals from the V.F.L.'⁴¹

It seems the 'outdated' nature of the award could not stop the rise in prices. Within the framework of the award, the League and the G.M.A. agreed to further price increases for the 1956 season, pushing Adult Outer admission prices to an unprecedented 1.2931% of the Basic Wage.⁴² The relationship was volatile, however, and as the award approached its expiry date the League sought a surer path to economic self-determination. Its proposals to the State Government prior to the determination of the new award included a request for the League to have the sole right to fix admission charges for home and away matches.⁴³

Outer patrons escaped any price increase in the 1957 season. Grandstand prices increased by 6d, partly to accommodate a 2d increase in Entertainment Tax. The League endeavoured to use 1d of the net increase of 4d to create a Provident Fund for umpires, the remaining 3d to be distributed equally between the two competing clubs and the ground manager. Inexplicably the G.M.A. opposed the creation of an umpires' fund but allowed

⁴⁰ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1955, p.4.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Victorian Year Book, 1964, p.494 and V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1955, p.4.

⁴³ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1957, p.9.

the penny in question to be paid into the players' Provident Fund. The ground managers' veto further convinced the League of the need for a complete revision of the award.⁴⁴ In addition to autonomy over pricing and a complete revision of the method of distribution of receipts, the League sought to make cricket club members and associates pay full Outer admission prices to watch football, albeit from the comfort of the Members' enclosure. It also recommended that the maintenance of Outer ground areas, as distinct from improvements, become the responsibility of each individual ground management committee and, therefore, be financed from the ground manager's share of gate receipts, rather than from the account. Accordingly, it recommended that the name of this fund be changed to the 'Outer Ground Improvement Account'.⁴⁵ Faced with the advent of television, the League sought also to ensure that competing clubs each receive a third of all television and broadcasting rights, with the remaining third going to the ground manager. The League wanted full control over the granting of these rights and the terms and conditions applicable to them.⁴⁶

The new award, announced by the Minister of Lands, Keith Turnbull, on 11 April 1958, simplified the process by which the ground manager's share of gate receipts was determined. Instead of separate deductions from Outer and Grandstand admissions, the amount was calculated as 26% of the remainder from all admissions, after deductions for tax, match expenses and the Outer Ground Improvement Account.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Contributions to the account continued to be calculated as a deduction from Outer ground admissions but were now expressed as a percentage thereof. The rate was determined at 15%. The Turnbull Award acceded to the League's request in regard to television and broadcasting rights. It accommodated, also, the League's request that Outer maintenance, as distinct from improvements, be paid for by the ground managers out of their 26% share of net takings, rather than from the account. Admission charges for home-and-away matches were to be determined by the League but the G.M.A. could appeal to the Minister of Lands if aggrieved. The League, however, received no joy in its bid to make cricket club members pay full price. Turnbull ruled that cricket club members and associates would be charged one third of the cost of a football club membership ticket for their football viewing rights.⁴⁷

At Victoria Park the Turnbull Award impacted more severely on the cricket club than at other grounds. Although the football club was the principal tenant at the ground, Cr.Seddon, a municipal official with strong pro-cricket sympathies, had been a thorn in the football club's side in its dealings with council since assuming the presidency of the Collingwood Cricket Club in 1939. Through Seddon's influence a long-term occupancy agreement at the ground had included provision for cricket club subscriptions to entitle members to football admission. In return, a mere 25% of cricket membership revenue would be paid back to the football club. The Turnbull Award overrode this agreement, raising the prospect of a sharp increase in the price of cricket membership. After

⁴⁷ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1958, pp.13-14.

declining the football club's offer to amalgamate the two bodies, the cricket club opted to amend its rules so as to remove football admission entitlements, other than the right to purchase specially endorsed football season tickets. Its decision resulted in an immediate halving of cricket club membership figures and precipitated a further gradual decline in cricket membership and patronage.⁴⁸

The Turnbull Award, which was to be effective for five years, carefully delineated the periods in the year during which grounds were available for cricket and football. Football's home-and-away season would extend from the third Saturday in April to the last Saturday in August. Clubs involved in the finals would have full and unrestricted use of their respective grounds for training until eliminated. The League expressed its satisfaction at this ruling.⁴⁹

An absence of negative comments on conditions of ground occupancy in V.F.L. annual reports from 1959 to 1962 indicate that the League was reasonably satisfied with the Turnbull Award, but the ground managers, who had suffered under Turnbull eagerly awaited a new opportunity to redress the balance. As the five years drew to a close, the rift emerged anew and this time it would be the ground managers who would get the better of the deal.

A new award, effective from the beginning of the 1963 season, provided an impetus for revolt. Its perceived injustices would prompt the League and its clubs to adopt a far more assertive approach in its dealings with the ground managers than had previously been attempted. The V.F.L. reported that discussions

⁴⁸ Stremski, *op.cit.*, p.188.

⁴⁹ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1958, pp.13-14.

prior to the determination had been 'almost fruitless'.⁵⁰

The ensuing award, in addressing a common perception that more funds were needed for Outer expenditure, opted to place the additional burden on to the League by increasing the percentage of Outer admissions allocated for this purpose from 15% to 25%. At the same time it eased the burden on ground managers by once again allowing expenditure on maintenance to be drawn from the account.⁵¹ While both the League and the ground managers agreed that conditions for Outer patrons needed to be improved, the League's proposal to address the issue suggested that it had much more ambitious plans for the comfort for patrons than the G.M.A. It wanted the Minister to approve the creation of trusts for each venue, with the power to borrow money for major works. It argued that 'revenue alone' would not provide the facilities needed and that, therefore, the allocation of an increased proportion of receipts to the account would eat unnecessarily into football club funds without achieving anything worthwhile.⁵² This could be interpreted either as a grandiose vision on the League's part or as a fiscal irresponsibility bordering on stupidity, depending on how charitable one wants to be to the League. The League's report neglected to indicate which source, other than 'revenue alone' could be drawn upon to repay any monies borrowed. In fairness, perhaps, it should be noted that new forms of income were becoming available. Television coverage, though still in its

⁵⁰ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1963, p.9.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

infancy, was beginning to provide a source of funding which was blurring older understandings of the term 'revenue' and making it possible for the League to think in bigger terms than ever before.

A perception that ground managers were receiving a very generous share of football revenue at the expense of the clubs was understandable. Their 26% share of gate receipts was calculated after the deduction of sundry items listed as 'match expenses'. Included in these expenses were the wages of ground staff, gatekeepers and ticket sellers and the hire of coats for coated officials, expenses that could reasonably be expected to be met by the ground managers. This double-dipping did not pass unnoticed in the V.F.L. report.⁵³ The new award had relieved the ground managers of the financial burden of maintenance, this cost being met from an increased contribution to the account which was coming from the clubs' share of takings rather than the ground managers' share. Although the account itself did not constitute revenue for the ground managers, tied as it was to a specific purpose, this fact was often lost in the rhetoric of popular press reports, which were inclined to portray ground managers as parasites.

The press, in its simplistic populism, had no need to be overly analytical in its interpretation of the dispute. It was easily demonstrable that the 25% Outer ground deduction was money that the football clubs did not receive. Neither did the clubs receive the amounts set aside for the players' Provident Fund, the A.N.F.C. levy for the propagation of the code or a new levy set aside for the League's most grandiose vision to date, the development of a new stadium at

be seen to act in a manner that would keep football in the public domain. The perceived existence of a public domain was, however, illusory. By the early 1960s, full employment and a strong union movement, operating in a context of conservative government at both the State and Federal level, had delivered affluence to ordinary Melburnians. Australia and Victoria had embraced a consumerism firmly rooted in capitalism. Belief in the public ownership of football constituted a denial of the nature of private enterprise. At the peak of the Long Boom such denial was understandable, but changing economic conditions would, in time, shatter the myth on which it was based.

The V.F.L. in the early 1960s was only an embryonic version of what would become an all-devouring A.F.L. Even football administrators gave lip service to vague notions of popular sovereignty over the Game. An A.N.F.C. booklet containing the laws of Australian Rules football, distributed by the V.F.L. circa 1964, displayed the maxim, '*populo ludus populi*', a Latin phrase meaning 'the game of the people for the people' on its back cover.⁵⁵ This presented a completely different message to the impression given by an official A.F.L. promotional booklet published for the 1999 season. The latter booklet, claiming to be 'the essential guide to understanding Australian Football', was called A.F.L.:

⁵⁵ 'Laws of the Australian national game of football', booklet published by the Australian National Football Council and distributed by the V.F.L., c.1964, cited in Sunday Herald Sun, 23 April 2000, Sport p.2. Exact year of publication not given in newspaper article. I am relying, for the approximate publication date, on my own memory of having possessed a copy of this booklet as a child.

the great Australian game.⁵⁶ The title implied that the Game's foremost controlling body had transcended a mere usurpation of ownership of the one-time '*populo ludus populi*'. By confusing its own name with that of the Game itself, the A.F.L. was erroneously and arrogantly claiming to be the Game, as distinct from merely owning or controlling it.

The precedent for such arrogance had been set as early as the 1930s, when the League's rhetoric showed that, despite its benevolence, it considered itself above community. Since then its penny-pinching battles with ground managers had been fought on a consistent assumption that it was the League's role to wrench as much from the public as its adversaries or the arbitrators would allow it to. Its justification, then as later, was the ever-increasing cost of accommodating a vision of providing an improved product for its customers. An improved product, however, is usually a more expensive one and therefore affordable to fewer people than the inferior product. The end of the Long Boom would reveal the illusory nature of Australia's affluent egalitarianism. By the end of the century an increasing number of people on the wrong side of the growing chasm between the rich and the poor would be excluded from the League's vision. While the product may have improved in many ways, its exponentially increasing price meant that only a diminishing elite could afford to consume it.

The ground managers, for the most part, inhibited the League in its empire building ambitions. While their arguably parasitical relationship with football made them an easy target for populist scorn, the

⁵⁶ 'A.F.L.: the great Australian game'. Promotional booklet, A.F.L., 1999.

councils and cricket clubs were, in many ways, representing localised social communities determined to put the V.F.L. in its place. An unsatisfactory outcome to the ministerial determination in 1963 made the V.F.L. hungry for a fight and war was about to erupt. St.Kilda, Moorabbin, North Melbourne and Coburg in particular were about to become theatres in a war that would have major ramifications for understandings of community in football.