

N.H. CONNOLLY

(ca. 1877-) Theatre caretaker, mechanist, scenic artist, lighting operator, theatre lessee/producer unionist, alderman, mayor, association president.

Nicholas Connolly started out his association with the theatre industry in the late-1800s, being employed in various back stage areas. He was associated with J.C. Bain for some 10 years beginning in Hobart in 1904 and continuing through until 1914 at the Princess Theatre, Sydney. In the 1910s he became heavily involved with both the Labor Party and unionism, and went on to serve as president of the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association. He was an alderman with the Paddington Council, Sydney, for almost a decade, and mayor for one term. Connolly was perhaps best known, however, for being the President of the United Licensed Victuallers Association for 26 years.

Best known during the 1910s as the President of the Australian Theatrical and Amusements Employees Association, Nicholas Harry Connolly's association with the theatre industry is believed to have begun in the late-nineteenth century when he was employed as the caretaker of the Gaiety Theatre in Zeehan, Tasmania. He served in this position between ca. 1898 and 1904, while also being responsible on numerous occasions for lighting, operating the mechanical effects and even providing scenic art. His name is first identified in relation to theatrical matters in an advertisement for an amateur production of *The Pirates of Penzance* in August 1898.¹ In 1901 Connolly was also appointed as a special police constable in Zeehan. He left the region in February 1904 for Hobart and is believed to have begun his ten year association with [J.C. Bain](#) around this time. He was reportedly employed as a mechanist for much of this time.

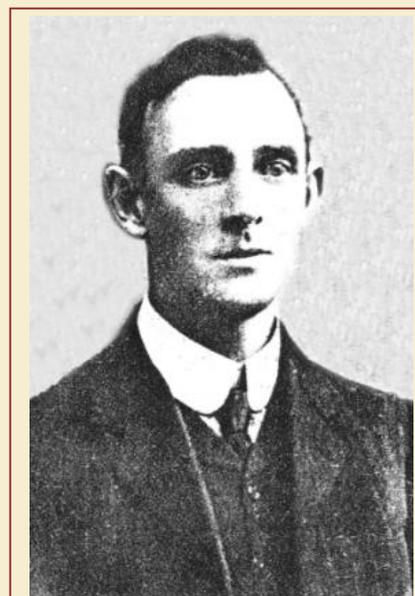
Connolly's involvement with the union movement appears to have begun during his early years with Bain, and become more serious by the turn of the decade, by which time he was a leading member of the theatrical employees' body. This affiliation led to him being closely associated with the Labor movement for the rest of his life. In 1914 he was described in *Australian Variety* as an "ardent unionist" and a "fluent and forceful speaker" who also demonstrated "effective powers of reasoning."²

Elected to the top position in the national union body after the various state branches merged in 1910, Connolly oversaw several changes in its name, these initially being the Australian Federated Stage Employees' Association (A.F.S.E.A.), followed by the Australian Federated Theatrical Employees' Association (1912) and then briefly to the Federated Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association (ca. 1913/1914) and finally the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association (T.A.E.A.) in 1914, and under which name it continued to be known for almost 80 years.

In reporting on his re-election in 1914, *Australian Variety* records that Connolly had overseen considerable growth in the union over the previous four years. "Since taking over the presidential chair," writes the magazine's journalist, "the membership of the association has increased from three hundred to over seven hundred members in this state [New South Wales] alone, and the Federation, at the present time, is over three thousand strong."³ At the time Connolly was still with J.C. Bain (as stage mechanist at Sydney's [Princess Theatre](#)).

Connolly returned to Tasmania in 1915 to become proprietor of Howard's Hotel on the corner of Argyle and Morrison streets, Hobart. In mid-1917 he also became lessee and director of the Grand Theatre, then operating as a picture house. One of his first undertakings was to arrange with Fullers Theatres to provide a regular contingent of vaudeville performers to complement the film programme. Under his management, too, the theatre was renamed the National Theatre.⁴ Connolly reopened the venue on 7 July with a line-up featuring [Lily Vockler](#), the [Delavale Brothers](#), the Le Groh Trio, Laurant ("The Mental Miracle"), and Pearl Livingstone. By 1918, however, he had returned to Sydney in order to become more involved with the union movement.

One of Connolly's more significant actions in 1918 was to take [J.C. Williamson's Ltd](#) and others to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court on behalf of the T.A.E.A.⁵ That same year he was also heavily involved in



Australian Variety (Sydney) 8 July 1914, n. pag.

¹ *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (Tas) 17 Aug. 1898, 3. [Advert.](#)

² *Australian Variety* (Sydney) 8 July 1914, n. pag.

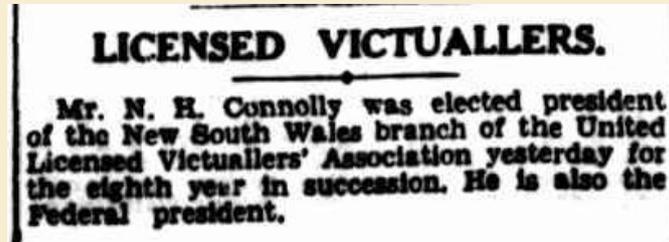
³ *ibid.*, n. pag.

⁴ "[The National \(Late the Grand\)](#)." *Mercury* (Hobart) 30 June 1917, 5.

⁵ "[Industrial](#)." *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 16 Apr. 1918, 7.

replacing the Federated Licensed Victuallers' Association with the United Licensed Victuallers' Association of the Commonwealth of Australia (U.L.V.A.).⁶

While little else is currently known of Connolly's activities in relation to the Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association, it appears that in 1929 he was elected to the position of president of the New South Wales branch of the United Licensed Victuallers Association. By 1935 he was also the Federal President. In 1953 his contribution to the trade union movement was acknowledged when he was one of 11,500 Australians to be awarded a Coronation medal.⁷ Connolly resigned from the U.L.V.A the following year after 26 continuous years as the New South Wales president.⁸ He was 77 years old at the time.



Sydney Morning Herald 17 Mar. 1937, 11.

Connolly was also an alderman on Paddington Council in Sydney between 1923 and 1931, serving as mayor between 1929 and 1930.

SEE ALSO

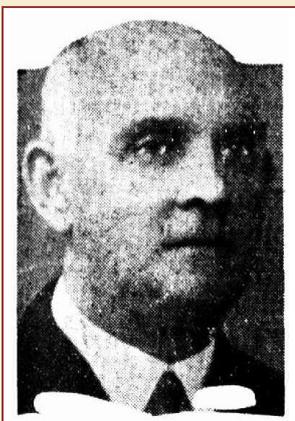
- [Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association](#)

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. In March 1897 a young labour by the name Nicholas Harry Connelly was charged in the Hobart Police Court with the carnal assault of a child under thirteen years of age (the girl's age was reported as being nine). Connolly was given bail and appeared before the court in May. The jury was unable to agree on a verdict, and the prisoner was subsequently given further bail until the next session. No report of a conviction has yet been located.⁹

There is also no evidence to suggest that the Nicholas Connolly charged with the above crime was the same person as the subject of this biography (N.H. Connolly). The fact that N.H. Connolly was appointed a special police constable in Zeehan in 1901 and that the Tasmanian Attorney General agreed to speak at his complimentary farewell concert¹⁰ in 1904 suggests that there were no concerns about his character.

2. J.C. Bain had been presenting his Gaiety Entertainers in Launceston from 26 December 1903 and moved his operations to Hobart ([Temperance Hall](#)) in mid-February - the same time that Connolly left Zeehan.



FURTHER REFERENCE

"Controlled Hotels: Present Conditions favoured." *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 Dec. 1936, 10.

"Licensed Victuallers." *Sydney Morning Herald* 17 Mar. 1937, 11.

"Liquor Laws: Anti-Prohibition Campaign. Address by N.H. Connolly." *Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer* (NSW) 10 Aug. 1928, 2.

"Substantial Beer Price Move Likely." *Sydney Morning Herald* 25 Aug. 1951, 1.

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 3 Apr. 1935, 9.

⁶ "U.L.V.A. of Australia: Strong Federal Body Formed. Conference in Sydney." *Vigilante* (Melbourne) 1 July 1918, 2.

⁷ "List of Coronation Medal Awards." *Sydney Morning Herald* 2 June 1953, 6.

⁸ "U.L.V.A. President Resigns." *Sydney Morning Herald* 11 Aug. 1954, 12.

⁹ See for example: "Supreme Court. Wednesday May 19, 1897." *Mercury* (Hobart) 20 May 1897, 3.

¹⁰ "Zeehan & Dundas Herald Wednesday, February 10, 1904." *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (Tas) 10 Feb. 1904, 2.