REPORT

on the

ARMADALE CASE.

p.10 on BSL relation to Church.
At 6.30 a.m. on Tuesday, 7th November 1944, Mrs. Eva Guthrie of 24 St.James Road, Armadale, was met at the end of St.James Road while she was proceeding to catch the train on her way to work, and told that the verandah of her home would be occupied by members of the Brotherhood of St.Lawrence until Mrs. Guthrie vacated the premises. Mrs. Guthrie was silent and went on her way to work. The members of the Brotherhood who had met her proceeded to her house and took up their position on the verandah. They sent immediately to advise Mr. C. E. Armstrong of Glenferrie Road, Malvern, that they had taken this action.

Mrs. Guthrie was the wife of an airman serving in Britain and was herself employed at a munitions annexe. She was legally entitled to the possession of the property at 24 St.James Road. There could be no doubt as to the legal situation because the matter had been before a court three times during the previous twelve months. Her rent was paid. She had kept the property in good order and condition.

What right had the Brotherhood to turn such a person out of her home? The house at 24 St.James Road, Armadale, is subdivided into two flats; flat No. 2 does not enter into this matter except in a minor way which will be shown below. Flat No. 1 containing five rooms fully furnished was let at £2. 5. - per week to Mr. C. E. Armstrong for one year when the owner, Mrs. H. E. Armstrong went to hospital. Mrs. Thomson entered into a lease with Mr. Armstrong and the lease stated that the property should not be sub-let. Mr. Armstrong installed Mrs. Guthrie as the occupier of the five-roomed flat. He himself never lived there. When Mrs. Thomson came out of hospital she asked for the return of her home, but was refused. She took legal action which dragged on for twelve months, but the Court three times ruled against her and upheld the occupancy of Mrs. Guthrie. Mrs. Thomson sought the help of the Federal Member of Parliament for her district, Harold Holt, Esq., M.H.R. who was also her solicitor. Despite the strenuous endeavours of Mr. Holt to bring about an amendment to the regulations to enable a person in Mrs. Thomson's situation to be provided for, no action resulted.

Under ordinary circumstances, Mrs. Thomson might have been expected to accept the legal and political position and find herself without accommodation until the housing situation was eased.

Mrs. Thomson approached the Brotherhood of St.Lawrence at the end of 1943 and asked if they could help her to recover possession of her home. The Brotherhood carried out its own investigation and advised Mrs. Thomson that the legal proceedings then under way would probably restore her to her home. When in October 1944 Mrs. Thomson was still out of her home, the Brotherhood decided that it could no longer stand by and see her suffering the hardship she was under.

Mrs. Thomson is a widow aged 84 years, has only one leg and suffers poor health. The only accommodation she had been able to secure since leaving hospital was in rooms in apartment houses. Owing to her disabilities and age and the limited extent of her financial resources she could not but suffer great hardship in such accommodation.
Her home was fully furnished and its comforts would make a very great difference to her welfare. Prior to leaving her home to go to hospital, she had lived there for thirty years and it had been the efforts of herself and her husband over many years that had secured this comfort.

Mrs. Guthrie kept the five roomed house to herself. She was a young active woman. Mrs. Thomson had provided alternative accommodation, but Mrs. Guthrie had declined it. Mrs. Thomson had offered to allow Mrs. Guthrie to stay in two rooms as a lodger if Mrs. Guthrie would hand over the tenancy to Mrs. Thomson. This had been refused. Mrs. Thomson had asked to be allowed to occupy two rooms in her own home as a sub-tenant of Mrs. Guthrie. This had been refused.

Mrs. Thomson had asked Mr. Armstrong to take action to let her have her home. He had stated that he was not responsible and that Mrs. Thomson would have to deal with Mrs. Guthrie. Mr. Armstrong persisted in the statement that he was not the lessee, but had signed the lease only as a guarantor for Mrs. Guthrie.

The Brotherhood's Action.

On Monday September 6th, the Brotherhood asked Mr. Harold Holt, the Federal Member for the district whether there was any hope of legal or political action procuring Mrs. Thomson's home for her. Mr. Holt stated that there was no legal possibility and that, politically, there was no ground for hoping that new regulations would be brought into being. Mr. Holt knew every detail of Mrs. Thomson's situation because he had been her legal and political representative for some years.

Mr. Holt's opinion set the seal on the Brotherhood's plans.

The Brotherhood was convinced that the people of Australia did not stand for an elderly person like Mrs. Thomson being kept out of her own private home by a young person like Mrs. Guthrie exploiting the law. The Brotherhood had waited until everything possible had been done by legal and political means. When legal and political processes had come to an end, the Brotherhood had entered into personal negotiation with Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie. On Saturday November 4th, members of the Brotherhood visited Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie at 24 St. James Road, and after checking the inventory tried to persuade Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie to forgo their legal rights and allow Mrs. Thomson to have her home. When they refused this, the Brotherhood asked if they would hand over the possession of the home on condition that Mrs. Guthrie was allowed to remain in the house as a lodger. When this was refused, they asked if Mrs. Thomson could come into the house with a friend and occupy two rooms as lodgers. This was refused. The Brotherhood then told Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie that it would like them to take a day to think the matter over, and stated that they would come seeking a final answer on Monday morning. When Father Coaldrake interviewed Mr. Armstrong on Monday morning, he was told that it was intended to remain in possession of the home according to their legal rights. Thereupon Father Coaldrake interviewed Mr. Harold Holt and asked his opinion as to the possibility of regaining the home by legal or political means. Mr. Holt's opinion made it clear that all avenues of orthodox procedure were closed. The Brotherhood then made its plans to adopt an unorthodox method, namely, to make a peaceful siege upon the occupants of the house until they handed over the possession to the aged owner.
The Rev. G. X. Tucker, Superior of the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence, stated when he led the members of the Brotherhood on to the verandah at Armadale: "We have taken action after much thought. Mrs. Thomson appealed to me. Legal and political action has failed to help her. What else could I as a Priest of the Church do?"

"I want to know whether the Prime Minister, the Premier, our Members of Parliament and the people of Australia think that an aged and ailing woman should lodge in one room while a young able bodied woman without dependants occupies the old lady's home".

The Brotherhood's request was for two things:

1. The return of Mrs. Thomson to her home,
2. A new order in housing for the people of Australia.

It was known that Mrs. Thomson's situation was typical of many others. It was hoped that, by bringing her trouble before the public that public opinion would move the Government to amend the regulations and provide for herself and others like her.

As the Brotherhood faced the necessity of doing something to help Mrs. Thomson when the legal, political and personal negotiation had failed, they had the choice of several alternatives

(a) To take an axe and break down the door during the absence of the occupier, instal Mrs. Thomson and then keep Mrs. Guthrie out,
(b) Force an entry, instal Mrs. Thomson in part of the house and allow Mrs. Guthrie in to share the house,
(c) Barricade the house from the outside and patrol the barricades so that nobody could use the house,
(d) Occupy the verandah and focus public attention upon the situation, staying there until either removed by police action or allowed into the house. If removed by police action, then to continue the siege on the footpath or continue a protest while under police control.
   During this siege, free access without comment or hindrance to be allowed to Mrs. Guthrie and Mr. Armstrong.
(e) To picket the property from the street, erecting signs and calling public meetings.
(f) To picket the place of business of Mr. C. E. Armstrong at Glenferrie Road, Malvern. (This was ruled out immediately on account of the hurt that would be done to mourners coming to his funeral parlour).
Of these possibilities, it was eventually decided to choose that one which seemed most likely to be effective in focussing public attention upon the situation while at the same time demonstrating the hardship being imposed upon Mrs. Thomson and also at the same time involving a minimum infringement of law.

Knowing that the great number of people who are suffering hardships under the present housing shortage throughout Australia are growing more and more exasperated by the failure of the Government to improve the situation, the Brotherhood was anxious to avoid any action which might lead to riots. At the same time it wished to make clear to the authorities and to the general public at large that rightful demands for amelioration of hardship and injustice ought to be made, and that if they are not made, then people cannot be expected to remain law abiding.

The Brotherhood faced the prospect of a wilful infringement of law with a sense of grave responsibility, knowing that a body in its position should normally set an example to law abiding action. At the same time, it felt the time had come when to be law abiding was to fail in its duty as members of the Christian Church. There have been times in the history of the past when it has been a Christian's duty to cease to be law abiding in order to become law making. The situation in which the Brotherhood found itself on November 8th seemed to be just such another instance.

In the preparations for the siege, very great care was taken to provide Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie with every possible opportunity of entering into personal negotiation for the accommodation of Mrs. Thomson in her own home. Mr. Armstrong's decision to remain in possession in accordance with his legal rights was received by the Brotherhood with great sorrow. He was informed that we could not accept his decision and would take further steps to regain Mrs. Thomson's home for her.

When the Brotherhood went to the verandah on the morning of November 8th, they went prepared to stay for months or leave within a few minutes, according to whether or not Mr. Armstrong would agree to hand over the house. At the same time, they had made provision for alternative accommodation of a suitable nature for Mrs. Guthrie. For a week a double room was kept in readiness for her in the near neighbourhood. The Brotherhood paid the rent of the room and was prepared to hand over the tenancy to Mrs. Guthrie immediately she moved out of Mrs. Thomson's home. Alternatively, Mrs. Thomson was prepared to have Mrs. Guthrie remain in the house sharing the accommodation with her. A completed agreement to give effect to this had been prepared and was offered to Mrs. Guthrie and required only her signature to ensure it. That offer in the terms of the agreement was in force throughout the time of the Brotherhood's siege. Mrs. Guthrie was reminded of it frequently. She constantly declined to accept it.

It was not the Brotherhood's intention to put Mrs. Guthrie on the street without accommodation, but Mrs. Guthrie apparently had elsewhere to stay, because from the day the Brotherhood members took up their position on the verandah, Mrs. Guthrie stayed away from the property. She apparently lived elsewhere and came back on four occasions to collect small quantities of her personal effects.
Documents.

1. Statement by Superior of the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence

2. Time Table

3. Proposal for the consideration of Mr. C. E. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie, delivered to them on November 4th.

4. Leaflet for general public, setting out the request of the Brotherhood. "We Want".

5. Statement of the facts:
   (a) The situation of the parties in the case
   (b) Legal action
   (c) Political action
   (d) The Brotherhood's demand
   (e) The general situation
   (f) Alternative accommodation made available for Mrs. Guthrie on and after November 8th
   (g) Final explanation to Mr. Armstrong delivered to him on verandah at 7 a.m. on November 8th.
   (h) Telegrams despatched at 7 a.m. November 8th to the Prime Minister, the Premier, The Federal Opposition Leader, State Opposition Leader, and the Federal Member for the District.
   (i) Form of agreement to allow Mrs. Guthrie to remain in occupation of part of the premises at 24 St. James St.
   (j) The position of Mrs. Thomson as a property owner.

The Brotherhood arrived in Armadale at 6.30 a.m. expecting to find Mrs. Guthrie at home. As they approached the house they met her on her way to the Railway as stated above. She was advised of the Brotherhood's intentions and given copies of documents (b) and (h) above. The Brotherhood proceeded to the verandah. Shortly afterwards Mrs. Thomson's personal effects were brought and placed on the verandah. The rest of her furnishings were already inside the house. At 7.30 a.m. Mr. Armstrong arrived. The Brotherhood had notified him of their intentions as they came to the property. Mr. Armstrong had brought a police constable with him. He ordered the members of the Brotherhood to remove. The Superior stated the Brotherhood's intentions and asked him again whether he would allow Mrs. Thomson to have vacant possession of her home, or at least to share it with Mrs. Guthrie. Mr. Armstrong became very excited and refused to discuss the matter, again ordering the members of the Brotherhood to leave. The police constable made a move to help the members of the Brotherhood off, so they sat down. The constable asked the Superior if he knew the legal position and that if he was asked by Mr. Armstrong to leave the property he should do so, otherwise Mr. Armstrong could summons him for trespass. He also reminded the members of the Brotherhood that Mr. Armstrong was entitled to use what force was necessary to remove trespassers who refused to leave when requested. The Superior replied that he was aware of the situation, but had no intention of leaving. Mr. Armstrong ordered the members of the Brotherhood to leave, then seemed to desire the constable to take charge of them, but shortly afterwards Mr. Armstrong and the constable left.

The members of the Brotherhood remained there and continued in possession for 56 weeks, until, on the 14th December, Mr. Armstrong, and Mrs. Guthrie, gave an undertaking that they would vacate the premises on the 19th of December.

During their occupation of the verandah, the Brotherhood simply camped temporarily with a minimum of personal effects. Many offers of furnishings and facilities were declined because it was not intended that the verandah should be occupied for a
moment longer than it was necessary. It was also intended that the hardships being suffered by Mrs. Thomson and countless other people in the present housing situation should be in a sense demonstrated by the conditions under which the members of the Brotherhood camped. The work of the Brotherhood had to be carried on, and a good deal was done by correspondence and interviewing on the verandah. Much other work was kept going by voluntary assistance from friends.

Much time was spent while on the verandah interviewing persons from all over Melbourne who came seeking the Brotherhood's advice and help in their own particular housing problem. The Brotherhood's statement that Mrs. Thomson's situation was typical of many others was more than vindicated by the persons who came to the verandah seeking help in their own case. When a Commonwealth official was invited to send an officer to make a record of the cases being reported at the verandah, he refused to do so, stating that "we already know about more of these cases than you can possibly imagine".

Reactions.

1. Press.

The Press immediately took an interest in the Brotherhood's siege and placed it before the public. Judging by public views and comments at the time, the Brotherhood reached the conclusion that the press reports succeeded in focussing public attention upon the spectacular side of the incident but failed to make the somewhat complex issues clear. The general impression left by press reports for the first fortnight was that members of the Brotherhood were sticking to the job they had undertaken, that they seemed to be wanting publicity for something, that what they were after was not very easy to find out and that, therefore, probably they wanted the publicity for themselves. After a fortnight of constant reporting of events in the press, the Brotherhood decided to make no more statements and give no more interviews to the press until the matter was over. On December 14th the press was advised that Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie had given the undertaking to vacate the premises, and on December 19th they were advised that Mrs. Thomson was now in possession of her home.

2. Public.

In the immediate neighbourhood, most people expressed support of the Brotherhood's aim. Some objected strongly to the method throughout the period of the siege, persons came from near and far to express their support of the Brotherhood and find out the details of the matter or to ask the Brotherhood's help in their own situation. Letters and telegrams came from all parts of the Commonwealth. Visitors from country areas came down specially to visit the verandah. Public support for the two requests of the Brotherhood was slow in developing, nor did it reach any very great proportion. Many people who approved were unwilling to express their approval for fear of repercussions to themselves.

3. Political.

The State Government ignored the Brotherhood's request. The Brotherhood heard that the State Member for the district, Mr. F. Thoneman, M.L.A. was making statements about the Brotherhood and the situation of Mrs. Thomson. The statements as reported were inaccurate, so a member of the Brotherhood called on Mr. Thoneman at Parliament House and suggested that he should either possess himself of the facts or make no comments. Subsequently, Mr. Thoneman, while passing the property, paused for a
conversation on the situation. He made a very strong suggestion that the Brotherhood should vacate the premises without comment or statement. He added that in the event of that happening and the Brotherhood advising him that it was doing so, he could assure the Brotherhood that Mrs. Thomson would be back in her house fortnight later. The Brotherhood told Mr. Thomson that it would not be a party to under-the-lap negotiation, that such an arrangement through him with Mr. Armstrong would be a deception of the public, and that if Mr. Armstrong wished to negotiate in the matter, he knew the terms the Brotherhood required, and knew where to find the members of the Brotherhood.

Mr. A. A. Hughes, State Member for Caulfield, gave public support to the Brotherhood in its undertaking.

The Brotherhood's request that the Commonwealth National Security (Landlord and Tenant) Regulations, and the Commonwealth National Security (War Service Moratorium) Regulations be amended to provide for persons such as Mrs. Thomson was received by the Commonwealth authorities and given some consideration. Officials from the Commonwealth Prices Branch, the body which administers Landlord and Tenant Regulations, visited the verandah on Wednesday November 8th to ask for the Brotherhood's suggestions in more detail. The proposals in detail were eventually forwarded to the Department. The Prices Branch officer asked the Brotherhood if they were aware that they were breaking the law by trespassing. The Brotherhood stated that they were. The officer then asked if the Brotherhood knew that they were breaking a National Security Regulation by disturbing the peaceful tenancy of the property. The Brotherhood stated that they had not been aware of that fact. The officer asked what difference it made that the Brotherhood now knew that fact. The Brotherhood answered that it regretted the fact but intended to remain. The next step, if any, must lie with the Commonwealth authorities.

An officer from the Commonwealth Investigation Branch visited the verandah on Wednesday November 8th. He introduced himself as "the officer responsible for investigating strikes, lockouts and the like". He asked: "What is your game?" "What are you up to?" He was shown the documents in the matter and left to form his own conclusions.

At 9 p.m. on Wednesday November 8th, three soldiers in uniform, one a sergeant, arrived at 24 St. James Road and asked for Mrs. Guthrie. They knocked on the door, walked around the property, then went away.

The Commonwealth Investigation Branch officer had been commended by the Brotherhood for coming to seek the facts openly instead of snooping. He had stated that he already knew more facts than we realised, and that he knew one fact about Mrs. Guthrie that we were not aware of. The Brotherhood asked whether that was the fact which the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department had refused to make available to Mr. Holt. (See Appendix).

On Thursday November 9th, the Brotherhood learnt that Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie had paid a visit to the office of the Commonwealth Prices Branch and that it was probable that a
member of the Brotherhood would shortly be invited to meet them there in order to negotiate a settlement. A little later, the Brotherhood was advised that a Canberra official had forbidden the meeting of the parties in the Prices Commission office, and that Mr. Armstrong would be coming personally to the verandah.

Later, on Wednesday November 8th, Mr. Armstrong wrote offering to vacate the premises under certain conditions. The conditions were such that the Brotherhood had no certainty that Mrs. Thomson would be back in her home if they accepted the offer, so they had no alternative but to refuse. They repeated the conditions of their offer to Mr. Armstrong. Negotiations continued during the next day, but Mr. Armstrong seemed to be unwilling to make a clean break in the matter, and the Brotherhood had no alternative but to continue its siege.

On 12th December, the Brotherhood advised Mr. Armstrong that the conditions they had offered when they came to the verandah on November 6th would cease to operate for them after December 15th. The reason for this was that Mrs. Thomson's situation was becoming desperately urgent, and it was felt that Mr. Armstrong ought to be pressed to make up his mind.

For 5½ weeks Mrs. Thomson's home had been empty, unoccupied by anyone except for the members of the Brotherhood on the verandah. Mrs. Thomson herself had, in the meantime, moved from one apartment house to another and was in a room which had been made available to her only until December 20th. The Brotherhood's new approach to Mr. Armstrong included the statement that after December 15th the Brotherhood would regard themselves as free to take whatever steps and with whatever notification to the public that might be thought advisable.

Further Documents:

Letters from C. E. Armstrong; A, B & C: 9 - 11 November 1944
Letters to C.E. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie; D: 12 December 1944
Letter from C.E. Armstrong "E" - 14 December 1944
Letter to C.E. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie "F" - 14 December 1944
Leaflets - 1. Why I am Breaking the Law.
2. The Armadale Verandah Vigil
3. We Want
4. The Brotherhood of St. Lawrence Vigil
5. Letter to Trade Union Secretaries
6. Letter to C.E.M.S. Secretaries
7. Statement by the Rev. C. K. Tucker after Mrs. Thomson was in her home
8. Letter from Rev. C. K. Tucker to the Lord Mayor
9. Letter from F.W.C. to Australian Inter Collegian
10. Domestic arrangements for verandah.

List of cases prepared for submission to meeting of Metropolitan Mayors and Town Clerks called by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne.

Letter from Mrs. Thomson stating her wish that the Brotherhood should take action to recover her house for her.

Correspondence with the Archbishop of Melbourne and the Editorial Board of the Journal of the Law Institute of Victoria.
**Final Negotiation with Mr. Armstrong.**

The approach to Mr. Armstrong of 12th December was made by personal visit by F.W.C. It was explained to Mr. Armstrong that the situation could not remain static because of Mrs. Thompson's situation. The Brotherhood therefore intended to fulfill its undertaking to Mrs. Thompson and restore her to her house in the near future. In the event of Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie not handing over possession, steps would have to be taken by himself which had so far been avoided. Mr. Armstrong persisted, in the initial stages of the interview, in claiming that he and Mrs. Guthrie were legally within their rights. He implied that certain bodies, such as the Returned Soldiers' League, Malvern Branch, had wanted his approval of violent action to remove the Brotherhood from the verandah, but that he had restrained them. He also argued that the action was a strange one for a religious body to take, and that, from his knowledge of the Bible, which he admitted had been meagre and in the distant past, there was nothing in the Good Book to suggest that the Brotherhood should be doing what it was doing according to her own mind, and that he was not likely to be in touch with her, and that he could not give the Brotherhood her address. When at length it seemed impossible to persuade him to hand over possession of the house under the existing conditions, F.W.C. told him that the Brotherhood was thereby giving notice that, after the 15th December, all previous undertakings would be at an end, with the exception that the offer from Mrs. Thompson to take Mrs. Guthrie in as a lodger would still hold. Apart from that, the Brotherhood would count itself free to take whatever steps it might think necessary and advisable to secure possession of the house. Mr. Armstrong asked what the Brotherhood intended to do. F.W.C. told him that there were four or five possible alternative means but that it was not intended to inform Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie what means would be used. Mr. Armstrong suggested that the Brotherhood would break the door down. F.W.C. stated that that was only one of the four means. He then asked if the Brotherhood were intending to bring pressure to bear upon Mrs. Guthrie by further publicity. F.W.C. stated that this had not been in mind, but it was an interesting possibility which would be considered. F.W.C. then started to leave the premises, and Mr. Armstrong called him back and said - "If you were to give me a letter to Mrs. Guthrie stating these things that you have told me, I could probably get it to her tomorrow". The discussion was then re-opened on a new basis, Mr. Armstrong saying that he thought that Mrs. Guthrie would probably agree to hand over the premises a month after the date on which the Brotherhood left the verandah. F.W.C. stated that that condition would not be considered by the Brotherhood for two reasons; one, Mrs. Thompson's home must be restored to her in the very near future, and, two, there must be no room for doubt that once the Brotherhood left the verandah Mrs. Thompson would be installed. F.W.C. left after repeating the notice that after 15th December the Brotherhood would act. He made it clear that if Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie intended to comply with the Brotherhood's request or wished to suggest some alternative which might be acceptable to the Brotherhood, they should notify the Brotherhood members on the verandah by noon the following day.

At 2 p.m. on the following day a letter was received at the verandah by a messenger from Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong and Mrs. Guthrie offered to hand over the premises to Mrs. Thompson on the following Tuesday if the Brotherhood would immediately to allow time for Mrs. Guthrie to take her belongings and clean the house. Mrs. Thompson was consulted as soon as she could be found. She agreed to the proposal and the members of the Brotherhood vacated the verandah at 11 p.m. that night. At 10 a.m. on the following Tuesday, Mr. Armstrong met F.W.C. at the house, checked the inventory, paid the balance of rent owed, handed over the keys and left. At 2 p.m. that day Mrs. Thompson was in the house and given possession.
Mr. Guthrie.

During Court proceedings there was always some mystery about Mr. Guthrie. He was stated to be a member of the R.A.A.F. serving in Britain. Mrs. Guthrie claimed to be receiving an allotment from him. Allotment certificate was never produced in Court, nor was the number of the certificate ever stated. The Court seems to have been satisfied that Mrs. Guthrie's statements about Mr. Guthrie were true in spite of the queries of the opposition.

Early in January 1945, after Mrs. Thompson had settled into her home, she was visited by a Mr. Guthrie who asked if Mrs. Guthrie were in. When told that Mrs. Guthrie was no longer living there he was surprised. He stated that he had been in England with the R.A.A.F. and had just returned. He was in uniform. When he asked for Mrs. Guthrie's present address and Mrs. Thompson told him that she did not know but that he should ask Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Guthrie had never heard of Mr. Armstrong and did not know where to find him. Mr. Guthrie left Mrs. Thompson's house and no more was heard of him.

Relation of the Brotherhood to the Church of England during the Armadale Action.

On the day that members of the Brotherhood occupied the verandah of the Armadale house, the Superior wrote to the Archbishop of Melbourne explaining the action taken and the reasons for it and enclosing relevant documents. On the following day a telegram was sent to the Archbishop of Melbourne, as to the Heads of the other Churches, hoping that he would express his approval of the aim of the Brotherhood even though he might have to express disapproval of the methods being used. On the same day the Archbishop was interviewed by a reporter from Truth. He had, at that time, not received either the telegram or the letter, and he was reported in Truth, 11/11/44 as saying that, as his information at present was confined to newspaper reports, he was not in a position to make any statement.

Truth report continued - "It was learnt subsequently, however, that the matter has been referred to the Social Services Committee of the Melbourne Diocese. The position is somewhat complicated however by the fact that the Brotherhood is not an official organisation of the Diocese." It had been the Brotherhood's intention that the Archbishop should be possessed of the facts by direct communication from the Brotherhood before being approached in this manner. It was an unfortunate hold up in secretarial work caused by the working conditions on the verandah which upset this plan.

After the Brotherhood had been on the verandah for about a fortnight questions began to be asked by visitors as to whether or not the Brotherhood was really a part of the Church of England, whether the Archbishop and Church authorities approved of the action being taken, and why the Archbishop did not make a statement in support of the Brotherhood's action or condemn it (the question varying according to the views of the questioner). A short time later, an old friend of the Brotherhood who had written to the Archbishop of Melbourne asking whether he could not commend the action of the Brotherhood received a reply in which the Archbishop stated, inter alia, that the Brotherhood of St. Laurence was not an official organisation of the Church of England. The Brotherhood friend then asked the Superior why the Brotherhood called itself Church of England, and asked whether the Brotherhood was not gaining support and funds under false pretences.
During the period on the verandah, a few priests of the church visited the Brotherhood in order to express their support and encouragement. They were The Very Rev. the Dean of Melbourne, the Revs. C.R. Tidmarsh, W.B. Montgomerie, John Drought, and the Vicar of a country parish ( ). Bishop Steven made two visits at cost of great effort to himself and was most helpful.

Members of the Brotherhood were asked to address meetings at some Churches not Anglican, explaining the reason for the Armadale action. In response to a request from the Brotherhood they were given the chance to speak to the congregation at St. Paul's Malvern and St. Peter's Eastern Hill. On both occasions they were well received and an intelligent interest was shown. The visit to St. Peter's resulted in a very searching examination of the case by Canon Maynard and the Bishop of Rockhampton, both of whom subsequently expressed themselves publicly in support, and both afforded very much appreciated advice and help. The Dean of Melbourne included in an address at the Cathedral a commendation of the Brotherhood's action.

The Priest of the Parish of Holy Advent Malvern, within which Mrs. Thompson's house was situated, and of which church she was a parishioner, was invited to call on the Brotherhood at the verandah, but asked to be excused from doing so. Prior to the occupation of the verandah, the Brotherhood had consulted him on the problem of accommodation for Mrs. Thompson, and he had welcomed the Brotherhood's interest in her welfare. After the verandah was occupied, no further communication was received from him, and no offer of help was made. Towards the end of the occupation, F.W.C., in private conversation with him at the Church after a week day service was told that he had met Armstrong several times at the Returned Soldiers' Club and that Armstrong did not intend to hurry the matter but that his business as an undertaker had suffered a serious setback. He also stated that Armstrong was declaring that the Brotherhood were not a member of the Church of England and that there was no need to worry about what the Church of England might do.

When Mr. F. Tonemann, M.L.A., State Member for the District, was discussing matters with F.W.C. at the end of December, he asked several questions about the Brotherhood's position in the Church of England. He expressed the doubt that the Brotherhood was part of the Church of England, but when informed that the Priest and Members were licensed by the Archbishop to parish work in the normal way and that the Rev. O.K. Tucker held the Archbishop's Licence as the Superior of the Brotherhood, he admitted that we were obviously members of the Church of England. He declared himself to be a member of the Vestry at St. John's, Toorak, and offered to do what he could to help us in that position if at any time we got in touch with him.

As a result of the growing number of persons inferring that the Brotherhood was not Church of England and had no right to be calling itself a Church of England Organisation, it was decided to advise the Archbishop for a clarification of his statement in the letter to the Brotherhood friend. It was also decided to advise him of the Brotherhood's intention to terminate its undertaking to Mr. Armstrong on December 15th and to advise him that action which the Brotherhood would be compelled to take would be likely to cause a strong movement of public feeling for and against the Brotherhood. Before completing its plans for action on the 15th December, the Superior and F.W.C. discussed the situation with Father Maynard, Father Drought and the Dean. The purpose was not to seek their approval, but to have their help in seeing the
full significance of the situation and what was proposed. The discussion was of very great help in clearing the issues. Eventually, an appointment was made for the Superior to interview the Archbishop, but owing to illness he was unable to attend, and F.W.C. went in his place.

Interview with the Archbishop.

The Archbishop met F.W.C. in the presence of the Registrar of the Diocese, stating that he would not see F.W.C. except in the presence of the Registrar. F.W.C. stated the two reasons for seeking the interview. He explained briefly the events up to the present and pointed out that in order to help Mrs. Thompson it had become necessary to plan action of a different nature, that the Brotherhood's plans for subsequent steps were complete and that the action would be far more drastic than anything which had been done so far. It was anticipated that there would be a good deal of outcry as a result of the action. The Brotherhood did not wish to ask the Archbishop's opinion or comment or approval. It wished only to advise him of what was proposed, and would keep him posted with developments so that he could have first hand information and not have to rely on press reports. The Archbishop listened without comment.

F.W.C. then asked the Archbishop to clarify the position of the Brotherhood in relation to the Church of England and the Diocese of Melbourne. He pointed out the statements in the private letter and in Truth, and reported several of the conversations that had occurred in recent weeks. He asked the Archbishop whether he regarded the Brotherhood as not being an official organization of the Church of England. The Archbishop stated that that was so, because the Brotherhood was not responsible to Synod or the Archbishop in Council for its action or policy, and that it was not linked with the financial organisation of the Diocese. F.W.C. then pointed out that, although it might be true to describe the Brotherhood as not an official organization in that sense, nevertheless the bald statement to members of the general public did not convey that impression, but the very regrettable impression that the Brotherhood had no right to claim to be a Church of England Organization, and that it was getting support, financial and otherwise, and enjoying prestige under false pretences. The Archbishop, after discussion, admitted that this could be so. F.W.C. then asked the Archbishop if some other formula could be fixed on to describe the Brotherhood accurately without unfairly damaging it in the eyes of the public. In the discussion that followed, F.W.C. reminded the Archbishop that the Rev. G.K. Tucker holds the License of the Archbishop of Melbourne as Superior of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence as well as Incumbent of the Parish of St. Clement's. The Archbishop was violently surprised at this information, doubted its accuracy and asked to see the document. F.W.C. undertook to ask G.K. Tucker to send a copy of the document (The Superior subsequently sent a copy of the document to the Registrar). At the end of the discussion, F.W.C. suggested that the Archbishop's views might be best expressed in the formula "The Brotherhood of St. Laurence is an illegal association of legal priests". The Archbishop demurred from assenting to such a bald statement. He asked for a few days to think out a statement of his views.

In the course of the discussion, the Archbishop suggested that the letter he had received from the Brotherhood friend had been written at the instigation of the Brotherhood. F.W.C. stated in reply that this was not so, that, in fact, many people coming to
the verandah had asked why the Archbishop did not express either his commendation or condemnation of the Brotherhood's action. There seemed to be a widespread expectation that the Archbishop should break his silence on the matter. The Archbishop stated "that, of course, is where you do us an injury".

At the end of the interview, while tea was being served, the Archbishop, in conversation with F.W.C. said "I hope, Frank, you will be able to leave the verandah very soon without much more trouble. Many of us have been thinking of you out there during these hot blistering days".

Documents:

Correspondence with the Archbishop
Copy of the Licence held by the Superior of the Brotherhood of S. Laurence.