CHAPTER 2: THE BEGINNING OF THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT. 1925-29.

The unemployed movement of the Thirties was not a new and original phenomenon, but rather a more solid and vital manifestation of earlier spasmodic and fairly unsuccessful organisations. While earlier groups of unemployed workers had been able to exert pressure to bring some improvement in the economic situation of the unemployed, they had not been able to build up an organisation that was fairly viable in terms of size and permanency, or that won much public recognition of the rights and position of the unemployed.

At times of depression in the nineteenth centyry unemployed workers, in Sydney and Melbourne at least, had organised protests which caused some immediate amelioration of their situation.

In the 1857-72 period of unemployment (which peaked in 1866) the unemployed demanded public works and the cessation of assisted immigration. Gollan notes: "Deputations waited on the governments, public works gave temporary relief, benevolent societies set up soup kitchens ".[1] We will consider later the implications of attitudes to immigration and protection that appeared at this time and were mirrored in labour analyses of unemployment

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1. R. Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics, A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1960, pp.76-77.

in the Great Depression. It is relevant here to note that by the end of this period of unemployment "the belief that governments should provide relief work for the unemployed was generally held by both organised and unorganised workers".[2]

In 1892-93 unemployment rose again and in 1893 Sydney unemployed were regularly demonstrating in the streets, holding meetings in Queen's Square followed by deputations to parliament.[3]

S. A. Rosa, a member of the Social Democratic League and one of the leaders of the Melbourne unemployed at this time, has written an account of the Melbourne agitation which shows interesting parallels with, as well as significant differences from, the unemployed movement of the Depression.

Like the unemployed of the Twenties and Thirties, these Melbourne unemployed workers did not want charity and objected to being sent for help to the Salvation Army. They asked for enough public works "to tide them over" - for example, half a day's work each day at standard rates. (Rosa claimed that the agitation compelled the Government to provide employment for a thousand men, and that many private employers engaged more men.)

As with the later demonstrations, police tried (and often successfully) to cow the unemployed and prevent them from protesting their

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2. ibid., p.78.

3. ibid., pp.138-139.

grievances. Rosa charged that the police provoked the demonstrators and that the Government would be responsible for any rioting. (Rosa himself opposed "disorder" and broke up inflammatory meetings. This drive towards moderation on the part of a leader was repeated by some union and A.L.P. leaders in the Twenties and Thirties; indeed, in both periods the unemployed castigated the Trades Hall Council for ignoring the unemployed.[4]

There were, however, large and militant meetings. It would seem that the regular size of demonstrations was between two hundred and eighteen hundred, though eight thousand supported the burning of an effigy of the Minister of Public Works and seven thousand excitedly watched an effigy of the Premier burn.

But militancy was expressed more in rhetoric than in action. Some speakers talked of arming with mustkets, of looting rich shops and of five thousand unemployed marching through the streets. Some advised the unemployed to form revolutionary organisations.[5] Such proposals were to be repeated in the Thirties and though looting and armed protest did not eventuate, much more determined resistance was offered. (However, even then such proposals were usually most unrealistic.)

To understand the unemployed movement of the Thirties - its grievances, its analysis of the situation, its demands and to some extent the form both organisation and protests took - we have to look beyond

4. cf. also R. Gollan, op.cit., p.140, re the Melbourne T.H.C.'s lack of help at this time.

5. S.A. Rosa, The Truth About the Unemployed Agitation of 1890.

the specific context of the 1930's Depression. We must look at ideas entrenched in the ethos of the Australian labor movement — and of Australian society. In particular, the organisation, actions and outlook of the unemployed in the Twenties must be studied.

Though this thesis is concerned with the politics of the unemployed rather than with their way of life, it will be necessary in this chapter to study the operations of the relief system in the Twenties and the conditions of the unemployed then, as this has not been dealt with in other studies of the unemployed.

There was (as would be expected) a certain amount of continuity, or similarity, between the unemployed movements of the Twenties and Thirties. What is perhaps surprising is that there was so much difference, and not just in the organisation or militancy, or in the nature of the demands, all of which could be expected to grow as unemployment increased. The great difference lies in what could be called the theoretical or analytical outlook of the unemployed: whilst the main demand - for work or full maintenance - remained, there were changes in the apportioning of the blame for the crisis - hence changes in the unemployed workers' analysis of what the crisis was, and important changes in their ideas of the role of unemployment in society and their own position in the social pattern.

If the political organisation and protests of the unemployed in the Thirties have been neglected, the unemployed movement of the Twenties

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6. A. B. Davidson, op.cit., p.60.

has been completely ignored. Davidson describes the U.W.M., formed in April 1930, as "the first organisation to work for the unemployed".[6] Louis, dealing with the Victorian situation, also dates the beginning of unemployed organisation at 1930.[7] This view of the lack of organisation may be valid regarding the unemployed of Australia as a whole, but does not hold true for New South Wales.

I do not mean to overstate the extent or strength of this movement: the New South Wales unemployed in the Twenties did not achieve a large and successful movement. However, the attempts made are important in themselves, for they show that at a time when the society was as yet generally unaware of crisis, both actual and impending, some of the unemployed not only realised the threat, but were prepared to act against it. Furthermore, in order to understand the difficulties and comparative successes of the unemployed movement in the Thirties, we must set them in the context of the problems and failures of the Twenties.

As unemployment mounted in the latter half of the Twenties, the unemployed began tentative moves towards organisation. (Indeed, it seems that even in the 'Boom years' of the early Twenties, unemployment was enough of a problem to arouse protest from some of the more radical strands of the labor movement.[8])

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6. A. Davidson, op.cit., p.60.
7. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.159. (He notes that there had been marches etc. in 1929, but no serious attempts at organisation).
8. The C.P.A. began to produce Out of Work. The Voice of the Unemployed, in June 1922. The paper aimed to help organise the unemployed and publicise their grievances and demands.

While this movement could not be strictly described as a 'grass roots' organisation - the leaders were relatively practised political activists - the movement was an independent organisation of the unemployed and was not mounted by trade union officials as a kind of puppet political protest movement. It was, in fact, neglected by the organised labor leaders. It represented an attempt by the unemployed to act for themselves. It was both quicker to grasp the threat of unemployment and the need for organisation, and more forthright in its demands about unemployment, than the organised labor movement.

The point is important, for the unemployed movement is usually seen as something organised 'from above', and representing the more sophisticated analysis and political activism of the left-wing labor elite, rather than the grievances of ordinary unemployed workers and their families.

In studying the unemployed movement from 1925-30, a fairly clear dividing line can be drawn between the periods 1925 to late 1927, and from then till the end of 1929, in regard to the activity and organisational form of themovement. Basic grievances and demands were fairly constant, but assumptions regarding the nature and cause of the crisis changed in emphasis. As it is hard precisely to date the changes in outlook, I will deal with the growth and activities of the movement before discussing the unemployed workers' approach to the crisis.

DIFFICULTIES OF ORGANISATION

A major recurring theme throughout this thesis will be the difficulties involved in any attempt at unemployed organisation. Louis, dealing with this issue, mentions the union officials' neglect of the unemployed, the inexperience of any union tradition among numbers of unemployed, the isolation of the workless, and their (often demoralised) outlook.[9] If these and other factors were to hamper unemployed organisation in the Thirties, they posed an even greater problem in the Twenties.

Firstly, the unemployed were scattered and had no focal point for organisation. In 1927 the Sydney Labour Bureau was at Millers Point (probably with the object of keeping the men out of the city centre). The Workers' Weeklyasked for the Bureau to be "shifted up near the Trades Hall", for the unemployed "are off the map and it is impossible to force themselves on the notice of the Trade Union Movement". One unemployed worker complained that "there are thousands of unemployed living or existing in the outlying suburbs without the means to enable them to pay their fares to Sydney" to search for work or press their demands.[10] The leaders of the unemployed organisations found it hard simply to contact the unemployed in order to urge them to join the organisation and to attend protest rallies.

Later, local unemployed groups could try to organise or contact unemployed workers at the local ration offices, but in this period there were no dole offices in most suburbs; and anyway, at this time a large

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9. L.J. Louis, op.cit. pp.160-161.

10. Workers' Weekly (hereafter, W.W.), 30/9/27, p.5.

proportion of the unemployed were not on the dole.

The organisers' main hope of contact was through the trade union movement. However, the fact that the organisers had continually to urge union leaders to notify their unemployed members about the assistance and activities of the organisations[11] suggests that they received little help in this regard.

Secondly, there was the problem of the morale of the workless. Already feelings of helplessness had begun to permeate the unemployed. In 1928 the Sydney Morning Herald noted:

> It is painful, deplorable, to see a man hungry, but, after all, you can feed him ... It is the sickness of the spirit which will affect you (if you study the unemployed) - the fatal sickness of hope too long deferred and of minds beaten out of shape by too long and too close acquaintance of distress and ugliness. [12]

Whilst unemployment gave rise to feelings of degradation and inferiority in the Thirties, those who were unemployed in this pre-Depression period and alsothose who remained unemployed after about 1934) possibly felt even more strongly a sense of shame and personal hopelessness. When one in three workers were unemployed, when unemployment was seen as part of a 'crisis' that affected the whole society, the sense of personal responsibility or blame for being unemployed was lessened. Before 1929, however, 'the Depression' could not be blamed as a kind of unjust deus ex machina which arbitrarily threw men out of work. The more politically conscious of the

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11. e.g. N.S.W. Trades and Labor Council, Minutes (hereafter T.L.C.M.)(14/3/29, p.507; 23/2/28, p.364. (Note: These include minutes of weekly meetings, of some Executive meetings, plus special reports of special union conferences The book of minutes covering 18/12/24 to 17/9/31 has consecutively numbered pages, which are given here.)

12. Sydney Morning Herald (hereafter S.M.H.) 23/6/28, p.14.

unemployed blamed the problem onto some cause such as immigration or the 'capitalist offensive', but many probably strongly felt some wrong in themselves as well as resentment at their unkind fate.

There were claims that those workers who were permanently unemployed and were "compelled to resort to charity and relief organisations" became "pauperised".[13] This lack of morale tended to be circular and self-reinforcing: because the unemployed felt isolated and helpless they did not organise themselves, and then the lack of organisation led to increased feelings of hopelessness and disintegration.

Another weakness was the movement's failure to formulate a specific, positive, coherent fighting platform. Later successes of the movement were partly due to the movement's ability to rally unemployed workers to a consistent and comprehensible programme; in this early period issues were often presented piecemeal and little attempt was made to build up a solid and permanent ideological basis. Proposals made were often vague or general, sometimes almost millenarial. For example, when the One Big Union of Unemployed presented an Unemployed Manifesto to the Labor Council, they were advised "to put practical proposals before the forthcoming Unemployment Conference."[14]

The main difficulty confronting the unemployed movement at this time however, was the lack of any unity and organisational cohesion between employed and unemployed workers; this was also one of the main factors

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13. W.W., 11/11/27, p.1.

14. T.L.C.M., 5/4/28, p.384. (There is no record of the manifesto's provisions).

working against the successful organisation of the unemployed in the later period.

A major reason for the weakness of the unemployed movement in the twenties was the lack of support given by the organised labor movement - unions, Labor Council, and both the Labor and Communist Parties. One unemployed worker complained that "as individuals (the unemployed) are generally members of various unions, but immediately they lose their jobs, they are dropped by their union officials". These officials "should make it part of their business to help the unemployed members back to work. They should be the ones to advise the unemployed. They should be the leaders".[15]

Organisation was also hindered by the rank and file unemployed workers' almost complete dependence on some official leadership - as is shown in this worker's complaint. The structure and traditions of Australian unionism worked against the development of initiative and independence of the rank and file. The unions, even the militant ones, functioned as an elite bureaucracy, a tendency increased by the union movement's devotion to the principle of Arbitration.

Louis points out that "the arbitration policy of the unions tended to create a caste of officials who did not function as agitators and organisers but as Arbitration Court lawyers." "During the years of prosperity, little more was required of the unionist than that he pay his dues and then sit back while officials attempted to win concessions before some Arbitration tribunal. He regarded his union as a slot machine, for he paid his dues at one end and conditions dropped out at the other.

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15. W.W., 21/10/27, p.2.

Thus the 'ticket unionist' was not accustomed to assert his initiative or to participate actively in the affairs of his union."[16]

Policy was decided by union leaders, usually in conjunction with the Labor Council, workers were told what their grievances were, and what form protest should take, and followed the official directives. Men who were thrown out of work were suddenly cut off from the security of the union movement. They were unused to the problems of organisation, unused to methods of public agitation, even unused to deciding what their demands and grievances were. They were used to direction by the recognised Labor officials, so they waited to be led.[17]

Moreover, not only were the unemployed thrust suddenly out from the protection of the union movement; they were cut off from the traditions of the Arbitration system. It is possible that the union leaders, so firmly embedded as they were in the practices of this system, simply could not see how workers could organise outside it.

Rather than being "the leaders", union officials seem actually to have been rather loathe to help with the organisation of the unemployed; whilst sometimes protesting about the 'Unemployment Problem' or even about specific grievances of unemployed workers, they seem largely to have regarded the organisation of the unemployed as something which the unemployed should work for themselves. And the unemployed

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16. L.J. Louis, op.cit., pp.8,11.

17. cf. J.E. Henry, "Communist Strategy in Australia", 1920-1957, Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 4, p.57. "The Australian worker ... will accept the direction of his union leaders without bothering much about their political affiliations... He is largely apathetic about union matters a and cannot easily be induced to attend meetings or accept office."

simply did not have the facilities for successful organisation. An unemployed delegate at the February 1930 All Australian Trade Union Congress "appealed to the Congress to take up the fight on behalf of the unemployed". He said: "The Congress had some power, the unemployed were unorganised and disorganised and had no power".[18]

The New South Wales Labor Council was primarily concerned with the problems of the already - organised workers - that is, with the employed. (Louis notes: Union officials, "largely preoccupied with the onerous task of attempting to check the disintegration of their own organisations, felt that they had a primary duty to financial members".[19]) A major concern of the Council during the late Twenties was the reorganisation of the unions into industrial groups. In 1927 it was busy with the organisation of the A.C.T.U., in 1928 with the maritime dispute, and by 1929 was putting most of its energies into the miners' and timber workers' strikes.

There was also relatively little initiative towards unemployed organisation offered by the Communist Party at this time; this may seem somewhat surprising considering the Party's great attention to this issue after 1930. The C.P.A. did direct "that the unemployed must be organised wherever they exist, and the trade union movement must be forced to take up their case",[20] but it did not offer any militant lead and did not officially offer any organisational help. For example,

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18. All Australian Trade Union Congress, Minutes, 4th Session held in Trades Hall, Melbourne, Wed. 26th Feb., 1930, p.2.

19. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.160.

20. W.W., 24/6/27, p.4.

the Workers' Weekly devoted little space to specific problems of the unemployed or to their organisation (apart from a brief spate of publicity when the Nationalists took office in late 1927). In 1927 the paper seemed more troubled by the prospect of imminent war than of imminent unemployment.

The Party's Militant Minority Movement[21] avowed support for the unemployed, but was much more interested in the employed workers. In mid 1929, when more than one in ten New South Wales workers were jobless, the "Fighting Programme" of the M.M.M. contained the following lukewarm and vacillating note: "A resolution on organising the unemployed provided a good and interesting discussion and finally it was decided that the question should be referred to the Executive for the purpose of having a suitable statement drafted on organising the unemployed."[22]

Before 1930 the C.P.A. was certainly sympathetic to the problems of the unemployed, and Communists joined their protests and organisations, but the Party mounted no great drive for unemployment organisation.

To understand this change in attitude and emphasis one must take into account the nature of the leadership, organisation and theoretical outlook of the Party at the end of the Twenties, as well as the obvious fact that by 1930 unemployment was seen by all to be much more of a problem than it was in the late Twenties.

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21. The M.M.M. was the C.P.A.'s front aimed at radicalising and winning control in the unions (cf. A. . Davidson, op.cit., pp.56-58.)

22. W.W., 26/7/29, p.1.

In the last two years of the Twenties the C.P.A. was caught in a rift of internal dissension.

The old leadership, under Jack Kavanagh, believed that in the existing Australian political circumstances the working class was not ready for a head-on collision with capitalism; they held that independent political action by the C.P.A. would be useless and hence the Party should support the A.L.P. at the federal elections of 1928 and 1929. Kavanagh and his supporters were opposed at the Party's Christmas Conference of 1928 by Moxon, Sharkey and Miles,who demanded that the militant 'New Line' directed by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 be adopted without compromise.

They did not succeed in ousting the Kavanagh leadership however, until Christmas 1929.[23]

Hence the C.P.A. of the Twenties was a more moderate body than the Party of the Thirties, willing to work with and through other labor organisations.

Although Kavanagh had formally established the M.M.M. (in accordance with Comintern instructions) in March 1928, he preferred to direct Communist policy regarding the unions through the Labor Council.[24] He seems also to have been willing to direct Communist policy towards unemployed organisation through the unemployed groups affiliated to the Labor Council. So the C.P.A.'s unemployed policy at this time tended to

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23. cf. A. . Davidson, op.cit., pp.48-51.

24. ibid., p.56.

follow the general position of the Labor Council.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

In early 1925 an Unemployed Union was inaugurated.[25] Unfortunately the main source for the study of this group is the Labor Council Minutes, which are usually quite elliptical.[26] It is not clear who founded it, or how it began, but it would seem that a small group of organisers from outside the Labor Council initiated it, and then applied to the Council for affiliation. This Union had some representation on the Labor Council though this was changeable: the delegates of this and later groups were sometimes given voting powers, but at times were only allowed to present reports or deputations to the Council, and even then were often given scant attention. It seems significant that the first appearance at the Labor Council of the U.U. delegate after the Union's inauguration he asked "what had become of the unemployed resolution".[27]

Whilst Garden and the left-wing delegates to Council were usually at least verbally sympathetic to the U.U. delegates, some union representatives seem to have been almost hostile, regarding the unemployed delegates as outsiders. On one occasion, the delegate from the Sheet Metal Workers' Union "explained that they did not object to the unemployed delegates but they believed that the unemployed delegates should deal with matters that

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25. First mentioned, T.L.C.M., 29/1/25, p.7. The usual abbreviation of U.U. will be used here.

26. e.g. the Minutes will state that the Unemployed Secretary gave his report, but will not detail the report.

27. T.L.C.M., 12/2/25, p.11.

affected the unemployed" rather than voting on Council policy.[28] Such attitudes were to be repeated as late as 1932.

The politically conscious unemployed argued that unity between the employed and unemployed was necessary, not just for the protection of the unemployed but for the retention of trade union standards in general. The U.U. in 1927 sought "to awaken the trade union movement to the need for helping the workless to fight their battles, on the principle that an unorganised army of workless is a danger to the men in work".[29] In 1928 it was addressing unions on the threat posed by unorganised unemployed in the event of industrial troubles.[30] However, the union movement in the Twenties was slow in grasping the implications of this danger, and even when it was acknowledged in the early Thirties this did not spur the movement to united action. (It was really not until about 1934 when relief work provisions began to undermine the conditions of employed workers that the New South Wales union movement gave solid support to the unemployment movement).

In 1926 when the U.U. asked for moral and financial support, and for Council to appoint an organiser, it was told that the Council could not comply "at present".[31]

Although the U.U. does not seem to have been very active at this time[32] it did try to win relief measures from the Lang Labor Government by

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28. ibid., 20/8/25.
29. W.W. , 11/11/27, p.1.
30. ibid., 20/1/28, p.1.
31. T.L.C.M., 22/7/26, p.150.
32. It receives little mention in the T.L.C.M. in 1926 and most of 1927.

sending deputations to parliament.

In June 1925 it was successful in obtaining an unemployed shelter from the City Council, which was serving over two hundred meals a day, and in gaining blankets, fuel and cooking appliances from the Government.[33] The primary important demand, however, for relief work at award rates or sustenance relief for the unemployed equal to the basic wage,[34] bore no result. Another deputation to Lang won a promise of work for four hundred and fifty men[35] but this obviously would have barely touched the problem of the lack of jobs.

Already there were complaints about the methods of relief distribution - single men, for example, felt discriminated against by the government's policy of preference to married men,[36] and the Labor Council agreed to "try to obtain from the Premier board and lodging for single men.[37]

At the end of 1927 the unemployed were reorganised on a more militant and broad-based level; from this time the militancy and activity of the unemployed increased.

In November 1927, a meeting of the U.U. in the Trades Hall decided to form the One Big Union of Unemployed, which was intended to be an Australia-wide amalgamation of the U.U. with other unemployed

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33. T.L.C.M., 11/6/25, p.41
34. ibid., 9/7/25, p.47
35. ibid., 22/4/26, p.121.
36. e.g. ibid., 22/4/26, p.121; 15/7/26, p.148.
37. ibid., 22/7/26, p.150.

organisations.[38] The sources somewhat confuse the issue by continuing to refer to the U.U. as a separate body.[39] In late 1927, the Labor Council minutes refer to the U.U., the O.B.U.U. and an Unemployed Workers' Union (which may have been the same as the U.U.). The minutes also confuse the names of delegates and their organisations. However, at this stage four main names stand out. Fred Spillman had represented the U.U. on the Labor Council from 1925; at the end of 1927, J.B. Millar[40] was also representing the U.U., and was the U.U. Secretary. In late 1927, Spillman moved that Mrs. Matthias and W. Laidlaw be accepted as U.W.U. delegates. The fact that these four delegates worked together in the O.B.U.U. indicates that some amalgamation did occur; also, the fact that Millar became Secretary of the O.B.U.U. on its inception suggests that the cadres of the U.U. merged straight into the leadership of the O.B.U.U. In other words, the O.B.U.U. was apparently a re-formation of the U.U., though with a more specific policy and organisational programme, and with a more general appeal.

The constitution of the new body provided for a Federal Committee; membership was to be open to "bona fide trade unionists who want to work".

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38. S.M.H., 9/11/27, p.17.

39. e.g. ibid., 10/9/29, p.12; W.W. in 1928 refers to U.U. plus the O.B.U.U.

40. His name is often spelled 'Miller'.

The preamble declared:

> Unemployment is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, To be unemployed is a man's misfortune, not his fault. Unorganised unemployed are a hindrance and a menace to the organised forces of the working class. This organisation aims to make clear the actual relation of employed and unemployed by a union of these two forces, A definite step is taken towards the emancipation of the working class.

The objects were:

1. Employment at full trade union rates.
2. In the meantime maintenance at a standard no lower than the basic wage.
3. Recognition by any Trade Union of financial status while unemployed.
4. To combine with other Trade Unions in maintaining a united front against reductions and scabbery.
5. Education of members to a realisation of their economic dependency under capitalism, and the need for unified action for the emancipation of their class. [41]

These objects emphasise that the organisation saw itself as a trade union of unemployed. In conception anyway, the O.B.U.U. seems to have been organised more along the lines of regular trade unions than was common for unemployed organisations. The O.B.U.U. proposed to issue pence cards recognised by the unions.[42] Considering the continual complaints of indigency from the organisers to the Labor Council, it would seem that this plan was not very successful. The unemployed movement was continually

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41. S.M.H., 5/9/28, p.16.

42. W.W., 11/11/27, p.1.

hampered by insolvency, for its members simply could not support it. While the unemployed organisations of the Thirties conducted fund raising drives - socials, concerts, whist drives etc. - the movement of the Twenties relied upon donations from unions and membership contributions, both of which amounted to a pittance.[43]

The name of the new organisation is itself most suggestive. One can see why the One Big Union idea should appeal to unemployed workers. The I.W.W.'s appeal in America was initially to the very lowest strata of the working class, to the impoverished migratory workers, to those who were unorganised for more or less the same reasons as the unemployed were unorganised: they were a shifting force with no place in the existing craft-oriented union bureaucracy. Also, the beautiful simplicity of the Wobbly ideal should be attractive to those who suddenly find themselves in a new and disorienting experience, to those who understand little political theory. Finally, the methods of Industrial Unionism - of direct action rather than of legalistic political representation - should be of interest to those who have not the power to lobby their demands through Parliament or through that other Parliament, the Arbitration Court.

The interesting question of the amount of I.W.W. influence - if any - on the O.B.U.U. cannot really be answered. The link may be in name

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43. When the O.B.U.U. on one occasion asked for a £2 donation from Council for a demonstration Council vacillated and referred the matter to the Executive; the money probably was not given. cf. T.L.C.M., 8/8/29, p.547; and 13/8/29, p.549.

only: the One Big Union of Unemployed is a grandiloquent and optimistic title to give to a new struggling organisation. Yet the very fact that this emotive name was chosen suggests that the I.W.W. ideas did have some appeal. Also, the organisation's insistence that it was a union, and the strong denunciations of scabbery, may reflect I.W.W. influence. There were also some personal links with the old Australian I.W.W.

Louis finds that "Victorian unions by this time retained few traces of I.W.W. influence, though during the Depression there was some interest in the One Big Union idea".[44] It would be reasonable to expect that the I.W.W. tradition should continue more strongly in Sydney, where the movement had been more active (and had received sensational publicity). Garden, Grant and other original Wobblies were now in positions of power in the New South Wales Labor Movement, and traces of I.W.W. ideals often appear in the rhetoric, if not in the policy, of the Labor Council.[45]

In May 1928, Direct Action, the I.W.W. paper, was re-established in Adelaide and a certain amount of propagandising was carried on in Sydney. Charlie Reeve, one of the I.W.W. Twelve,[46] returned at that time

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44. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.9.

45. e.g. Council's programme for A.C.T.U. Conference, 1928, - "To consolidate the ranks of the working class by organising them on the principle of One Industry - One Union" (T.L.C.M. 5/7/28, p.419).

46. cf. Ian Turner, Sydney's Burning, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1967.

to Sydney; there was soon reportedly "a goodly bunch of militants" and Reeve spoke to crowds of thousands in the Domain.[47]

By January 1929 Reeve was a delegate to the Labor Council and by February was a member of the Executive Committee and often supported the O.B.U.U. delegates.[48]

Perhaps an even stronger personal link between the old I.W.W. and the O.B.U.U. was in the figure of Betsy Matthias, who had been responsible for the formation of the Industrial Labor Party and had published Solidarity.[49]

It would seem then that there was a certain I.W.W. influence on the O.B.U.U., but that this was expressed in the movement's rhetoric rather than in its policy or actions. It gave them a militant banner to rally around, and gave them some roots in the labor movement of the past. However, Industrial Unionism, like most labor ideology, could not be really relevant to the unemployed: they could engage in direct action in the streets, but not at the point of production where their actions would carry most weight. Wobblyism could not really help them cut through their alienation and powerlessness.

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47. Direct Action, Official Organ of the Australian Administration of the I.W.W., published by E.A. Dickinson, Adelaide, 20/5/28, p.4.; 21/7/28, p.4; 17/11/28, p.4; 22/5/29, p.4 (5,000 at 1 meeting, 4,000 at another); cf. also S.M.H., 27/1/30, p.9 - 1,000 at I.W.W. platform in Domain; when Reeve and 4 others arrested 4,000 join scuffle with the police.

48. e.g. T.L.C.M., 14/2/29, p.498 (Reeve moves that two O.B.U.U. delegates be seated on Council and that Council give O.B.U.U. a room).

49. Ian Turner, op.cit., p.XIV.

It is impossible to determine the size of the O.B.U.U., for there is no way of checking the reliability of the reported membership figures. In November 1927, the U.U. claimed to have seven thousand unemployed on its books.[50] In February 1928, the secretary of the O.B.U.U. claimed, during a heated argument with the New South Wales Minister for Labour, that there were twenty-nine thousand unemployed registered on the books of the O.B.U.U.[51] (It would seem he meant the national membership). At the same time the Workers' Weekly claimed that the O.B.U.U. was progressing well. It stated that it was an Australia-wide organisation with eight branches and twenty-five thousand members, that it had a delegate on the Sydney Labor Council and recognition and assistance from the A.L.P. It added that "apathy is steadily being overcome by continual street meetings."[52]

It is not within the scope of this study to determine how far it had organised outside New South Wales. It would seem that its main strength lay in this state — the national leaders were in fact the Sydney leaders - but there was at least a branch in Perth.[53] In New South Wales in 1928 there were branches in Lithgow, Cessnock, Newcastle, West Maitland and Wollongong at least.[54]

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50. S.M.H., 24/11/27, p.12.
51. ibid., 22/2/28, p.15.
52. W.W., 24/2/28, p.3; W.W. 27/1/28, p.4, reports O.B.U.U. street meetings every night in Sydney.
53. S.M.H., 13/7/28, p.13.
54. ibid., 5/9/28, p.16; W.W., 24/2/28, p.3, 27/1/28, p.4. The Lithgow branch reported 170 members in January.

The validity of these claims of strong support are thrown into question by complaints by the unemployed leaders of the lack of help by union officials and the apathy or disorganisation of the unemployed.[55] Also, the Unemployed Workers' Movement was only to claim a national membership of thirty thousand in mid 1932, and the U.W.M. had then been conducting a concerted organisational campaign for two years.

However, it is possible that the O.B.U.U. could have had a large book membership. It had asked union officials to transfer the names of their unemployed members to the union, so it could thus have collected a large list of names (the A.E.U., the Painters' Union and the United Labourers' Union at least complied with this request.[56]) Also, there is some suggestion that workers signed up just 'on spec'. An alderman of a suburban council reported on an O.B.U.U. meeting held in the local council chambers and organised, it would seem, by Millar. "Not six of the men present were genuinely unemployed. Officials of the O.B.U.U. were handing round membership cards and I saw men who had never been out of work in their lives accepting them. I asked several why they took the tickets and they replied that they 'might be out of work some day'."[57]

In any case, whatever the book membership, active supporters who attended meetings and demonstrations could be numbered in hundreds.

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55. e.g. T.L.C.M., 23/2/28, p.364; 14/3/29, p.507.
56. W.W., 20/1/28, p.1.
57. S.M.H., 28/6/28, p.12.

For example, the O.B.U.U. called a mass meeting outside Parliament in January 1928, to support a delegation to the Government. The Herald had announced that "it will be representative of most of the trade unions whose members are out of work and there will be a good representation from Lithgow".[58] Two hundred actually attended.[59]

Before considering the grievances and actions of the unemployed movement after 1927, it is worthwhile pausing to trace the organisational form of the movement over the next two years. Lulls and peaks of activity were related not only to changes in the position of the unemployed, but reflected internal changes within the unemployed organisation, which at times became so involved in factional dissension that little leadership was given to the unemployed.

This dissension, though able to undermine the movement, was never as absolute, as full of personal as well as ideological opposition, as the faction fighting between unemployed groups in the Thirties. Ousted leaders slipped quietly back into their old positions after a few months of exclusion. It is hard even to discern the standard Communist versus non-Communist line-up that is usually so noticeable in conflicts within the Australian labor movement.

It seems that some form of conflict occurred immediately after the O.B.U.U. was formed. In December 1927 the Workers' Weekly noted that there was a pause in the public agitation of the unemployed because

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58. ibid., 31/1/28, p.12.

59. ibid., 1/2/28, p.18.

of this dissension. It claimed that the 'late secretary', Millar, was "in favour of turning the union into a charity outfit", that he had been defeated on a proposal to use the union's fighting fund to pay the rent of evicted workers, and so had resigned.[60]

There was, then, already a disagreement about the aim of the organisation. The C.P.A., together with the Labor Council, maintained that the movement's funds should be used for organisational purposes only, and that it was the duty of the government to give adequate relief. They believed that the unemployed should fight, not beg, and that if the organisation concentrated on charity rather than militancy the unemployed workers' morale would further decrease. This conflict over the comparative roles of charity work and militancy was to become even stronger in the Thirties, causing controversy within the U.W.M. in late 1931 and creating continual strife between the Communist and A.L.P. unemployed organisations.

A fortnight after this report, however, the Workers' Weekly claimed that the organisation was "going strong",[61] and in February the paper carried an article by Millar, writing as secretary.[62] At this time, as we have noted, it also detailed the good progress of the O.B.U.U.

This optimism would appear to have been rather ill-founded, for although the organisation engaged in a number of protests in 1927 and 1928, the organisation itself was rather shaky.

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60. W.W., 9/12/27, p.4.
61. ibid., 23/12/27, p.1.
62. ibid., 17/2/28, p.2.

The rather uneasy relationship between the unemployed movement and the trade union movement continued though more help was offered by trade union officials than in the earlier period.[63] It is hard to determine the exact position of the O.B.U.U. apropos the Labor Council. Up until May 1928, at least, the O.B.U.U. was allowed a delegate to Council, though the delegate's power was limited to presenting occasional reports or motions which were dealt with cursorily. There was a proposal that the administration of the O.B.U.U. be put under the jurisdiction of the Labor Council,[64] but it seems that this did not occur.

After the foundation of the O.B.U.U. the unemployed began to demand more recognition and activity from the Labor Council, and attacked the officials for their apathy; yet the apathy of the trade union bureaucracy was often matched by the disinterest - or perhaps merely the dislocation - of the unemployed themselves.

The situation was self-perpetuating. When unemployed workers attacked the Labor Council for not doing enough to relieve unemployment, Garden, in a "spirited reply", charged the unemployed with being an unorganised band and told them they could not expect any improvement until they were better organised.[65]

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63. e.g. T.L.C.M., 2/2/28, p.362 - to be a trade union and unemployed conference on unemployment.

64. ibid., 5/4/28, p.384.

65. S.M.H., 2/11/27, p.19.

The unemployed organisers were forced to blame the unemployed as well as the officials, but the union officials were unwilling to accept their share of the blame. In mid 1928 an unemployed delegate moved "that this Council regrets the apathy shown re the unemployed procession by many of the union secretaries and officials, also the unemployed who instead of helping to make it a greater success did nothing to swell the numbers in the procession". This was amended however by a union official: "This Council points out to the unemployed that while they are prepared to hide their position by failing to demonstrate in such processions, there will be no attempt on the part of the Government to relieve the unemployed situation." This was passed instead of the original motion.[66]

Trouble recurred in mid 1928, and it seems that the Sydney O.B.U.U. was rather disorganised for the rest of the year. In January 1929, the Workers' Weekly noted that the O.B.U.U. had been revived "after a period of inactivity" due to the fact that "the union had degenerated into a charity-hunting institution instead of carrying on its correct work - the organisation of the unemployed".[67]

In the Labor Council Minutes for July 1928 there are references to "allegations" regarding the O.B.U.U. and the Labor Council Executive made recommendations for regulating the Union's finances which were adopted by the Council despite the opposition of Millar and Spillman.[68]

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66. T.L.C.M., 24/5/28, p.407.
67. W.W., 25/1/29, p.3.
68. T.L.C.M., 12/7/28, p.243; 26/7/28, p.431.

Spillman and Millar may have dropped out of the unemployed movement at this time, for their names do not appear in the Labor Council minutes after this time.

When the O.B.U.U. was revived in January 1929 the constitution was changed "to prevent domination by individuals" and to prevent the Union from conducting charity appeals.[69]

During this period of inactivity the O.B.U.U. had lost what little power it had had on the Labor Council - it was forced to re-apply for affilitation to the Council, which Council was rather loathe to grant: "It is not considered necessary that the O.B.U.U. be affiliated to the Council". The matter was again introduced and referred to the Executive: "When the matter is being considered the O.B.U.U. will be notified". Finally Garden recommended that the O.B.U.U. be granted one delegate and that "all moneys collected by the O.B.U.U. to be used for organisational purposes only, under the direction of the Labor Council".[70]

Laidlaw, now secretary of the O.B.U.U.[71] was the delegate appointed. By September, a new name had appeared in connection with these two positions - that of S.R. Brown.[72] Laidlaw's name fades out after this,

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69. W.W., 25/1/29, p.3.
70. T.L.C.M., 17/1/29, p.488; 22/1/29, p.489; 14/2/29, p.498; 5/3/29, p.504.
71. S.M.H., 13/4/29, p.17.
72. ibid., 10/9/29, p.12.

and Brown remained in control until the following March.[73]

In November 1929, the O.B.U.U. asked the Labor Council to pay Brown the basic wage as the organiser for the unemployed. The Council agreed to ask the unions to provide a fund for Brown, "while he carries out the policy of the council in relation to the unemployed".[74]

By this time, the Labor Council had become increasingly determined that the O.B.U.U.'s policy should coincide with that of Council. It seems that they kept a check that the finances of the movement were used for "organisational purposes only", and hence could direct what form protest action and organisation took. As the unions provided the main financial backing for the O.B.U.U., the Labor Council no doubt considered that it should call the tune.

Though the Labor Council expressed greater interest in the unemployed as the decade drew to a close, this support was still fairly minimal. While the Council insisted that the O.B.U.U. should implement its policy, the Council took little pains to develop a comprehensive policy and continued mainly to leave the unemployed to organise themselves and fight their own battles.

MILITANCY AND PROTESTS

In November 1927 the Workers Weekly claimed that "the temper of the unemployed is breaking".[75] Unfortunately, this was profoundly over-optimistic; the failures of the unemployed movement of the Depression

73. T.L.C.M., 20/3/30, p.16.
74. ibid., 28/11/29, pp.583-4.
75. W.W., 18/11/27, p.1.

can essentially be attributed to the even temper of the unemployed as a whole. Yet there was a sudden upsurge of militancy at the end of that year. There were frequent marches and demonstrations, and deputations representing the unemployed waited on members of parliament almost daily. The pattern of confrontation between the police and unemployed, the incipient violence and arrests, which were so much a feature of the movement of the Thirties, began at this time. Speeches became more inflammatory, and the unemployed began to demand work or relief as their right.

We noted in the last chapter that there was a considerable recession in 1927-28 and that the contraction in manufacturing began at about this time. (Greenwood writes: "The country from 1927 onwards was beginning to feel the impact of declining prosperity".[76])

It was also noted that, according to the trade union estimates, New South Wales unemployment rose sharply in the fourth quarter of 1927 and rose even higher in the first quarter of the new year, remaining at 10 percent or 11 per cent through 1928.[77] The estimates of unemployment in the New South Wales Industrial Gazette, though probably numerically inaccurate, support this trend. These give the average estimated unemployment for the third quarter of 1927 as 8,500 unemployed; for the fourth quarter

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75. W.W., 18/11/27, p.1.

76. G. Greenwood, "Development in the Twenties", Australia, A Social and Political History, ed. G. Greenwood, Sydney, 1955, p.319.

77. The average for the first three quarters of 1927 was about 6.4 per cent; in the last quarter it was 9.1 per cent. In 1928 it averaged at 11.3 per cent. See full table chapter 1.

it is 10,500, despite a great reduction in December due to the introduction of Christmas relief work, and the seasonal boom connected with Christmas. By the first quarter of 1928, the unemployed are numbered, on average, at 14,000.[78]

The fairly sudden change in the organisation and militancy of the unemployed at the end of 1927 cannot, however, solely be attributed to the more rapid deterioration of the economic situation after mid 1927.

Certainly, the increased determination of the unemployed was in part the result of this worsening of the 'objective' economic situation, but, as is so often the case in the history of the unemployed movement, factors other than purely economic ones had a powerful effect on the consciousness and actions of the unemployed.

The increase both in the number and the militancy of protests waged by the New South Wales unemployed from late 1927 must be largely attributed to the outcome of the October state elections, when Bavin's Nationalist Government succeeded Lang.

These protests were directed not so much against increasing unemployment (though the labor movement believed that unemployment would increase under the Nationalists) as against what the unemployed believed to be the rapid deterioration of unemployment relief provisions under Bavin. There were claims that the government was putting men off relief works and

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78. Averages calculated from monthly figures in N.S.W. I.G., 31/1/30, p.19.

starting no new works, that rations for single men had been cut out and rations for married men reduced by 25 per cent.[79]

It is probable, however, that it was apprehension about future privation under the Nationalists rather than these actual grievances that caused the temper of at least some of the unemployed to wear thin.

Australian workers are generally more willing to accept privation from a Labor Government.[80] While relief provisions were hardly munificent under Lang, the unemployed movement of the Twenties was largely oriented towards the Labor Council and the A.L.P., and the unemployed mostly seemed to accept that Lang was doing his best. The feeling was that "Lang had, after all, introduced the Child Endowment and Widows Pension; Lang was on the side of the basic wage."

Whereas - the argument went - from the Nationalists the working class could expect at worst a general onslaught, at best little sympathy. It was the fear of what was to come when both federal and state governments were controlled by the Nationalists, as well as the immediate grievances, that sparked off the upsurge of protest in late 1927.

The Bavin Government maintained that unemployment was the product of Lang's 'socialistic' legislation, the result of high charges on employers (such as Child Endowment and Workers' Compensation Payments)

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79. e.g. W.W., 11/11/27, p.1; S.M.H., 9/11/27, p.15; N.S.W. Parliamentary Debates (hereafter, N.S.W.P.D.), vol.112, 8/11/27, p.80; 9/11/27, p.125, 18/11/27, p.416.

80. cf. for example, the unions' acceptance of Lang's increase in the wage tax to 1/0 in the £ in 1930.

and the curbing of the ability of industry to expand.[81]

This analysis was strongly supported by the business community and the conservative section of the society. In May 1928, a Herald editorial claimed unemployment existed because "industry has been coddled and shackled".[80] Also (the argument ran) workers demanded wages that were higher than industry could bear; employers, struggling against import competition, had to reduce production costs, especially wage costs; so employers were forced to dismiss employees because unions would not agree to reduced wages. This latter argument was to become increasingly voiced by the Nationalists, and was to culminate in the Bruce Government's major battle over Arbitration in 1929.

To vindicate the claim that unemployment was caused by Labor policy, and to justify the new Government's policy of encouraging employers despite possible detriment to workers' conditions, the Bavin Government had to maintain that unemployment was decreasing, or was at least not increasing, under its administration.

So the Bavin Government's attitude to unemployment often appears to have been a mixture of blindness and optimism: if you do not look at the problem, or if you believe it does not exist, it will go away. In early 1928 Buttenshaw admitted that there was a large number of unemployed, but said he did not think it was much greater than in other years[83]. In

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81. e.g. statement by Bavin, S.M.H., 1/8/28, p.15.
82. ibid., 26/10/28, p.13 (cf. also Editorial 10/11/27, p.10).
83. S.M.H., 24/1/28, p.12.

May, Stevens, the Treasurer, stated in his budget speech that "the proportion of workers unemployed is less than 3%". (He admitted it could be 5%).[84]

One can discern in the increase of attention given to the unemployed in late 1927 a hint of political machination. If Bavin had good reason to try to bury unemployment as an issue, Lang's political need was equally strong to bring it to the foreground, to show wage-earners tha the Nationalist policy would lose them their jobs and that the workless would suffer.

Unemployment was not one of the major election issues used by Lang;[85] in fact before the Labor Government's defeat unemployment was a touchy issue for the A.L.P., to be pushed into the background if possible. Lang's campaign relied mainly on an appeal to consider his record - especially regarding the introduction of Child Endowment, Widows' Pensions etc. - and to consider the attack that Nationalists would make upon workers' conditions. When forced to consider unemployment he claimed that the situation had improved under his administration: "Unemployment today has been reduced to one half of what it was when the last Nationalist Government left office". In the last two years 72,000 men had been placed in employment through the Labour Exchange, Lang claimed,

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84. ibid., 9/5/28, p. 17.

85. e.g. Lang's speech at a major election rally makes no mention of unemployment. Labor Daily (hereafter L.D.), 7/9/27, p.1.

compared with 59,000 in the last two years of the previous Nationalist Government[86]. He added: "And the men placed during the last two years were given lasting employment". He had, he said, advanced £ 23,344 through the Labour Exchange compared with £12,433 given by the Nationalists." He had reduced the number of unemployed from 12,500 to 6,500.[87]

Unemployment had, of course, risen during Lang's premiership but his many loyal supporters would accept his arguments.

Immediately after the elections unemployment became one of the main hammers with which Lang bludgeoned the new Government.

It is illuminating to compare the number of questions about unemployment asked in the last session of Lang's Government and in the first session of Bavin's Government. In the index to the three volumes of Parliamentary Debates which cover the Labor Government's last session (from 20/12/26 to 24/3/27) there is no specific subject-heading for unemployment and there were eighteen questions asked on the subject. In the one volume of the first session of parliament under Bavin, which lasted a third of the time (3/11/27 to 18/12/27) 'unemployment' warrants a new category in the subject index and there are about seventy references to questions on unemployment - virtually all raised by Labor members.

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86. cf. also the figures given by Baddeley (Lang's Minister for Labour), N.S.W.P.D., 9/11/27, p.131.

87. L.D., 20/8/27, p.5.

Although the unemployed organisation received little official help or recognition from the organised labor movement, both industrial andpolitical, even after Lang's defeat, it seems it was regarded with a new tacit approval. It is most probable that during Lang's Premiership efforts were made by the A.L.P. and the Labor Council to keep the unemployed quiet and their organisation rather tame, lest the Labor Government be embarrassed. This was definitely to occur in Lang's 1930-32 ministry, when the A.L.P. and Labor Council directly fought the U.W.M. and also tried to filter off dissatisfaction by hand-outs from A.L.P. relief groups and by a system of skilful patronage in the distribution of jobs.[88]

Though patronage was not so organised during the earlier ministry, it seems that jobs on public works were given with a view to allieviating specific discontent. In September 1927 an unemployed worker complained of the neglect of the unemployed by the Government and the unions: "It is quite apparent that the subject of unemployment is most unpopular . . . The fact of unemployment has made the Labor movement servile ... As soon as two or three unemployed militants gather a few men together and send a deputation to the Minister for Labour, the Minister finds work for the deputation and a few others, thereby destroying any real organisational work which would be of benefit."[89]

When unemployed workers demonstrated during Lang's Premiership, the Government urbanely avoided the issue. On one occasion when a large

88. cf. later discussion in this thesis; also I.E. Young, The Impact of J.T. Lang on the N.S.W. Labor Party, 1929-1943, unpub. M.A. thesis, pp.67-68.

89. W.W., 30/9/27, p.5.

number gathered outside Parliament Lang was "surprised". "My colleague, Mr. Baddeley, informed me ... that the men were highly satisfied ... I shall look into the matter."[90] After the election of Bavin, Labor members seem to have found demonstrations outside Parliament positively enchanting.

The first such protest occurred on November 8th, five days after the opening of the new parliament. At 3.15 p.m. the public gallery was stormed by more than a hundred unemployed (amongst whom, the outraged Herald noted, there was a woman and a girl and at least two "conspicuous" foreigners). "Pandemonium reigned" and "Labor members increased the noise".

The Herald's vivid account expresses the tone of the incident:

> A man in the public gallery jumped to his feet, and in stenorian tones began 'We of the unemployed want work ...'
>
> Mr. Fitzpatrick (Nat.): 'Well go and get it. I wont stop you!' (laughter)
>
> The stranger: 'We don't get any free meals like all youse. We want work. We want all youse to understand that there are thousands of unemployed men walking the streets of Sydney. We want work. We want work! '
>
> At this stage the police began to hurry the riotous visitors from the gallery. Opposition members: 'Where are your election promises now?'
>
> The Speaker: 'It must be apparent to honourable members that I cannot allow this disturbance to continue in the House and that .... '
>
> Renewed chorus, louder than ever: 'We want work, work, work, work! There are thousands starving. We want work. There are thousands walking the streets. Unemployed, Starving, streets, work, work, work! '
>
> Mr. Davies (Lab.): 'You have been putting off men. Why don't you find work for these men?'
>
> Mr. Fitzpatrick: "Rot! It is only a put-up job ..."[91]

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90. cf. N.S.W.P.D., vol.III, 8/3/27, p.2071; 9/3/27, p.2154.

91. S.M.H. , 9/11/27, p.15.

This claim that the demonstration was not a spontaneous outbreak of 'genuine' protest, but a deliberate piece of politicking was repeated by Bavin: "It was evidently carefully organised" he said.[92] Indeed, it was this as much as the "disgracefulness" of the behaviour that enraged the Government and the establishment press.

A Herald editorial raged: "In part it was probably activated by sincere concern for those who need work as a means of living and cannot get it; for the rest it looks like an elaborate effort to embarrass the new administration."[93]

Less than a week later there was another demonstration "hardly less disgraceful". "It began with one slow march through the streets and ended with another. Traffic was interrupted by it."

Banners proclaimed: "We demand work or basic wage maintenance", "Wake up unemployed and fight." "We demand the right to live."[94]

The new government was preparing to debate a new Supply Bill and the demonstration was intended to pressure the Government to allocate money to new reproductive works or to provide maintenance over the period of recess.[95]

One hundred and twenty demonstrators gathered outside the Treasury. When a deputation was refused permission to see Bavin they made

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92. ibid.
93. ibid., 10/11/27, p.10 (another editorial on same theme 15/11/27,p.10).
94. ibid., 15/11/27, pp.10.-11.
95. W.W., 18/11/27, p.1.

a rush for the door. Fighting broke out between baton-wielding police and unemployed, during which one demonstrator was knocked unconscious. Thirty broke through the police barriers to discover that Bavin was absent. After the struggle the unemployed marched back to the Trades Hall. Laidlaw declared that "this was the last constitutional effort they would make to secure work or relief, and if they were unsuccessful the rank and file could take what action they liked".[96]

Again the government charged that the demonstration was a "put up job": it was referred to in parliament as "the framed-up deputation or organised bit of ruffianism".[97]

The Nationalists, accustomed to the rather unplanned ineffectual demonstrations of the unemployed, found something sinister, something in the way of Machiavellian cunning, in this new well-organised militancy.

Certainly, the unemployed workers' organisation did suddenly improve. It is clearly no coincidence that the O.B.U.U. was founded in late 1927. However, though the leaders may have been A.L.P. members,[98] it was clearly not organised under direction of either the A.L.P. or the Labor Council. After the Treasury demonstration several speakers attacked the Labor Daily[99] and themovement continued to charge the Labor Council with not giving the unemployed enough help.[100] Indeed, on one occasion a large body of unemployed stormed the Trades Hall

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96. W.W., op.cit., and S.M.H., op.cit. The W.W. claimed Bavin was at a garden party.

97. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 112, 15/11/27, p.261.

98. It seems fairly certain that Spillman, Millar and Mrs. Matthias were not Communists. Mrs. Matthias was later a prominent A.L.P. member.

99. S.M.H., 15/11/27, p.11.

100. e.g. ibid., 2/11/27, p.19.

and took over a room for a meeting despite "expostulations" from officials.[101]

It would finally seem, then, that the new organisation, the new militancy and determination, did represent a genuine flare-up of apprehension about the position of unemployed workers under a Nationalist government. The A.L.P. did not officially involve itself in the organisation of the unemployed; however, after the election Labor parliamentarians were much more willing to voice the grievances of the unemployed - in a strictly constitutional manner.

Apart from better organisation, the other really noticeable feature of these two demonstrations is the greatly increased militancy. The Herald declared of the Treasury demonstration: "The plain desire was for some sort of violence". It referred to the demonstrators as a "mob". The mood of the crowd, the whole tone of these two demonstrations, shows a much greater willingness on the part of the unemployed to engage in physical confrontation. This "desire for violence" was a sudden, sponteneous outburst of anger, frustration and fear. No matter how 'stage-managed' the establishment believed these demonstrations to be, there was nothing ungenuine about the anger of the unemployed.

It was, however, only a small proportion of the unemployed who were willing to confront the establishment so militantly. An odd feature of the demonstrations of this period is that the larger the crowd, the more orderly it tended to be[102]. Ten days before the

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101. ibid., 24/11/27, p.12.

102. This tendency can also be seen in the Thirties, but there were then also large militant demonstrations (e.g. the October 1932 dole struggle).

Treasury invasion nine hundred unemployed marched from Central Square to the Treasury to demand relief. They remained "orderly", despite the fact that "inflammatory speeches" were made[103]. In February 1928 Garden and other union leaders led a thousand men to the Public Works Department; this demonstration also was very orderly. Garden stated that it was "one of the best organised and most successful of the past few years".[104] The fact that Labor Council officials preferred orderly demonstrations[105] and pressure applied by Trade Union deputations rather than violent confrontation reinforces the idea that the militancy that did occur was organised by the unemployed themselves.

In December 1929 several hundred demonstrated outside Parliament and demanded to see the Minister for Railways. (This demonstration arose because the number called up for a certain Council job was more than was required). The men were "mostly orderly, and did not heed the remarks of a few agitators who attempted to stir up trouble". They did not follow theleader who told them to disobey the police who were removing them from the Parliament House enclosure. Later a deputation representing the Labor Council, building and other unions and unemployed waited on Bavin to demand work.[106]

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103. S.M.H., 4/11/27, p.17.

104. ibid., 28/2/28, p.11.

105. The union movement in general preferred the unemployed to be moderate. When unemployed delegates presented their case to the All Australian Trade Union Congress in February 1930, the President "complimented them on the moderation ... of their requests". All Aust. Trade Union Congress, Minutes, 4th Session, 26/2/30/ p.1.

106. S.M.H., 6/12/29, p.10.

As we have seen, the U.U. and the O.B.U.U. added to the traditional demand of nineteenth century unemployed for public relief by demanding award payments for relief workers works/ ^or basic wage maintenance for the unemployed. They also asserted much more strongly that this was their right, because unemployment was seen as the fault of causes outside the workers' control, and in particular the fault of conservative government policies and the capitalist system. An unemployed delegate to the February 1930 Union Congress summed up this claim: " 'Work or maintenance' should be the battle cry of the working class movement. The unemployed did not ask for charity but asked merely for the right to live."[107]

Just how realistic the unemployed at this stage believed they were in demanding the full wage is hard to determine. Certainly, the belief in the right of the worker to the basic wage was firmly embedded in the ethos of the Australian labor movement by this time, and the leaders of the unemployed saw the acceptance of below-award conditions as a form of forced "scabbery".[108] The unemployed organisers feared both that the unemployed might be forced to scab in strikes, and that they might be regarded as scabs . (In 1929 the Sydney O.B.U.U. decided to ally with the striking timber workers under the slogan "We want work but not as scabs".[109]) The unemployed were probably most sincere in claiming the full wage as their right, but the demand was probably also used as a good propagandist slogan, made with the idea that if you demanded a loaf you migh receive a half.

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107. All Australian Trade Union Congress, Minutes, 4th Session, Held Trades Hall, Melbourne, Wed. 26/2/30.

108. cf. the protest against below award work in the O.B.U.U.'s objects as 'scabbery'.

109. W.W. , 25/1/29, p.3.

The O.B.U.U. and politically conscious unemployed opposed under-award relief work because they feared that if relief workers accepted low rates, permanent employees would be dismissed and replaced by them.

There were, of course, many unemployed so desperate that they would accept work on any terms. One employed worker told the Minister for Labour that "he favoured the abolition of the Arbitration Court so that the unemployed could find their own level."[110] What is important is that some did continue to assert their rights as Australian unionists to the living wage, despite the demoralising effects of unemployment and the isolation of the unemployed from the union movement.

Most of the demonstrations and deputations of the Twenties were concerned with the demand for work, and many demanded full pay.

Despite the opinions of many of the more affluent and conservative members of the society that the unemployed were idlers who preferred the dole,[111] the sincerity of their desire for work is indubitable.

Consider, for example, the desparate insistance of the men in the demonstration in the public gallery.

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110. S.M.H., 6/9/28, p.13. cf. also ibid 2/10/28, p.4.

111. e.g. Farrer (Minister for Labour and Industry) told a union deputation: "There are a large number of men today who would rather live on the dole than do work". S.M.H., 16/2/29, p.1.

Consider also the regularity of the deputations demanding work. Although numbers of deputations are recorded[112], these no doubt represent only a fraction of those made.

It was not only the militant members of the O.B.U.U. who held deputations demanding work. One group claiming "we are not red-raggers . . . we are the moderate section" told /Buttenshaw: "We are level-headed citizens, willing to work, and willing to go anywhere to work".[113]

The militants however, despised such compliance.

The Communist Party described this deputation as "a few crawlers". and described their proposals as a "practical offer to scab".[114]

In 1929, a group of church charity organisations decided to establish a "Central Odd Jobs Office" where workers could get short casual jobs. Brown declared odd jobs to be "bunk" and said that they would not solve the problem. He hinted that the reason behind the idea was to lower wages. Laidlaw stated his fear that married men who took odd jobs would be deprived of rations by the Labour Exchange - a reasonable fear, as the income from a couple of days work could exclude a man from eligibility, and so he would have to completely re-register for relief (and comply with the waiting period).

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112. e.g., in Sydney alone: S.M.H. 31/1/28 - mass meeting of O.B.U.U. demands work; 22/2/28, p.15, O.B.U.U. deputation demands definite works programme; 9/3/29, p.18, Laidlaw etc. deputation in Parliament; 13/4/29, p.17, O.B.U.U. deputation to governor; 21/11/29 O.B.U.U. deputation to Minister for Labour; W.W. 27/1/28, p.4.

113. S.M.H., 6/1/28, p.12.

114. W.W., 13/1/28. It claims the 'moderates' were trying to set up a rival to the O.B.U.U.; if they did so nothing is recorded of it.

The scheme was endorsed by a meeting of "citizens" (rather than unemployed) held by the City Commissioner; Brown and Laidlaw refused to sit on the committee.[115]

(This refusal is typical of the 'purist" line of the unemployed leaders which perhaps was one of the reasons for the limitation of the movement . By refusing to associate with 'charity-mongers' the militant elite cut themselves off from large sections of the non-politically conscious workers who turned first to relief rather than political groups).

THE RELIEF SYSTEM AND THE CONDITIONS OF THE UNEMPLOYED.

It has been noted that the unemployed claimed that the Nationalists had cut relief, both work and rations, on gaining office; demonstrations demanding work included the amelioration of these specific grievances in their demands: for example, they demanded that rations be restored to single men, that the 25 per cent ration decrease be annulled.

The number of detailed charges after Bavin's election that men were being thrown off relief certainly suggests there was some basis for the allegations other than the apprehension of the unemployed or the desire of the Labor Party to embarrass the Government.

The Labor Party in Parliament charged that the 3/- extra a week allowed to Broken Hill unemployed who had very large families had been discontinued;[116] that the ration scale of a couple with five children

115. S.M.H., 10/9/29, p.12.

116. N.S.W.P.D., vol.112, 8/11/27, p.80.

had been reduced;[117] that rations to single men in the Newcastle area had been stopped;[118] that many other single men had been thrown off relief;[119] that family endowment benefits were refused to the families of certain unemployed men who applied for rations.[120]

The Government continually denied , both to Labor members and the unemployed deputations, that the rations had been cut out or reduced. Bruntnell, the Chief Secretary, repeatedly claimed that the ration scale was the same as had been operating for two-and-a-half-years under Lang and that the apparent 25 per cent decrease was due to the fact that rations had been increased by that amount for the winter months, and that the increase was due to be cut in October[121] . He maintained that "the distribution as now given is a very liberal distribution and meets the present needs of the case".[122]

Labor also charged that the Railway Commissioners and other government departments were dismissing men;[123] that "a large number of men (had) been put off from railway and tramway construction work;"[124]

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117. ibid., 9/11/27, pp.124-5.
118. ibid., 9/11/27, p.125.
119. ibid., 29/11/27, p.744; 2/12/27, p.952; 6/12/27, p.1016 (Sometimes specific names were given).
120. ibid., vol. 113, 2/5/28, p.255.
121. ibid., vol. 112, 9/11/27, pp.124-125; 8/11/27, p.80.
122. ibid., 18/11/27, p.416.
123. ibid., 23/11/27, pp.552-553.
124. ibid., 7/12/27, p.1125.

that country unemployment had increased because the railway sleeper depots had been closed.[125] One Labor member expressed a fairly general belief of the labor movement when he asked "if it is a fact that the wholesale dismissals which are taking place is part of a concerted move by employers to create a large army of unemployed as a preliminary to a general attack on wages, conditions and hours? It it a fact that the government is acting in collusion with employers in order to reward them for their liberal financial support during the recent elections?"[126] To these charges Bavin replied that if men were being dismissed it was because the work was completed or the money exhausted.

Though the number of men employed on state works decreased by only forty-three between September and December 1927, both the charges and the fears aroused by dismissals can be understood. The number of men employed by the Railway Commissioners dropped by 1,129 men (nearly 16 per cent) between September and December.[127]

The figures for state works employment do not include relief workers however. One almost incredible feature of the relief system operating in the late Twenties in New South Wales is that it was so disorganised that one cannot determine now how much relief was given (in works or dole), so the unemployed workers' claims that relief

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125. ibid., 29/5/28, p.995 .

126. ibid., 25/11/27, p.682.

127. N.S.W.I.G., 31/1/28, p.24. It dropped from 7,165 to 6,036.

suddenly diminished under Bavin cannot be substantiated or disproved.[128]

It was not until the introduction of the Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act in mid 1930 that there was any statutory framework for relief measures in the state. Before this there was no specific policy to prevent unemployment or to alleviate the poverty it created, and relief was given unsystematically.

Schedvin points out that "prior to the Depression, relief work was very largely in the hands of charitable organisations subsidised by state governments". He adds that even in the Depression proper "as there was no administrative machinery to control the various types of relief, it was split up between several departments with the result that co-ordination and planning were seriously impaired".[129]

There was even more confusion in the Twenties because money for relief, whether for sustenance or work, was provided by different sections of State Revenue and was disbursed through different agencies. (The P.R.U. Act of 1930 was to establish a special Unemployment Relief Fund for dole and works). Money for unemployment relief came partly from Consolidated Revenue, and partly from loan funds. A certain amount of Consolidated Revenue was regularly devoted to charitable relief - to mental hospitals, aborigines etc. - and through this money was allotted

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128. I have studied the Labour Reports, the N.S.W. Industrial Gazette and Year Books, F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia", International Labour Review, July 1934, and F.A. Bland, "A Note Upon Unemployment Relief in N.S.W.", Economic Record, May 1932 plus some material in the Bland Collection. Good estimates could probably be made by studying a large amount of archive materials, but this would require a thesis in itself. Whilst the N.S.W. Year Book provides accounts of money expended on relief work and food relief after mid 1930, plus the value of the work or rations, there is no full account of the position in the Twenties.

129. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit, p.319.

 How did people apply for relief? q p119

to charitable organisations, in particular, the Benevolent Society, for food relief.[130] The government noted that as well as money provided for "eleemosynary relief" , it had "provided moneys from time to time for relief works for the unemployed. Such moneys were expended partly from Consolidated Revenue and partly from loan funds until July 1930".[131] Relief works were allotted through the Labour Exchanges. This relief work was an extension of the system of general public works (though workers were usually engaged intermittently and for a short time only) so it is hard to discover what were 'ordinary' public works and what was special relief work.

The disorganisation of the relief system resulted in hardship for the unemployed and was seen by them as a pernicious attack. However, though governments were not very sympathetic to the problems of the unemployed, this unconcern partly arose from confusion about unemployment. That the relief system had no overall plan or conception, that money was allotted haphazardly as needs seemed to arise,was partly caused by the governments' - both Labor and Nationalist - failure to realise that they were facing a long-term depression which would need a regulated and consistent relief policy. Unemployment relief, whether work or dole, was before

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130. The amount allotted to 'Charitable Relief, Medical Services etc.' rose dramatically, so presumably food relief money was given through this section:

1926-27: £ 139,996
1927-28: £ 190,950
1928-29: £ 542,592
1929-30: £ 714,460
1930-31: £ 88,518 (the Fund now established).

N.S.W.Y.B., 1929-30, p.421 (cf. N.S.W.Y.B., 1930-31, p.363, figure for 1928-29 given as £481,038.)

131. ibid., 1930-31, p.363.

mid 1930 seen more or less as a stop-gap measure to tide the unemployed over until the economy picked up.[132]

Schedvin claims that in the Twenties state treasuries were sensitive to the effects of public works expenditure on employment but that "they believed there was little that they could do about (the unemployment problem) and the electorate did not hold them responsible". "Occasionally it was argued that government expenditure should expand in times of depression to take up theslack left by private enterprise, and then recede as recovery got under way. In practice, however, this remained a dead letter as governments were rarely in a strong enough financial position to expand at such times (remembering that credit creation would not have been contemplated) and private enterprise feared that if such expansion did take place there might not be the necessary withdrawal during recovery".[133]

The New South Wales Treasurer's outline of government policy (regarding the bad economic situation), given in mid 1928, mirrors Schedvin's statement. Stevens concluded: "The function of the government must be directed mainly to an attempt to rehabilitate the industries of the state, to remove burdens which press heavily upon them and thus make it possible for those industries to expand."[134] This was the general conservative line that workers' claims on employers were so high that employers had to reduce wages costs by dismissals; ~~and~~ the greater productivity and general economising which would supposedly result would cure unemployment.

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132. cf. J. Mackinolty, op.cit., p.210.

133. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.89-90.

134. S.M.H., 9/5/28, p.17.

NB - 2 pp missing from ms.

Another reason for the inadequacy of the relief system in the Twenties was that neither governments nor the society in general believed that society was obliged to support men thrown out of work through no personal fault. This idea was largely a consequence of the Depression[135] (and, arguably, a consequence of the strength of the protests by unemployed workers about this obligation). In the Twenties there were numerous attacks on the invidiousness of providing relief. One such criticism ran: "Today instead of telling the people that every individual must work out his own salvation or go under, we are giving encouragement to everyone to lean against the Government, thereby destroying the spirit of self-reliance and responsibility".[136]

As well as denying that it had cut relief, the Bavin Government continually claimed that it was doing all that it could to provide relief, given the money available. It also stated that its policy was to give work rather than sustenance, and work to married men as far as possible.[137]

In December 1927, the government claimed that all married men registered at the Labor Exchanges had been reabsorbed in temporary employment.[138]

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135. cf. P.Peter, op.cit., p.69.

136. S.M.H., 11/4/28, p.19 (letter).

137. e.g. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 116, 6/12/28, p.2566; S.M.H. 24/5/28, p.11/6/1/28/ p.12

138. S.M.H., 24/12/27, p.11. It would seem that this was only short Christmas relief work (c.f. ibid., 24/5/28, p.11.)

In mid 1928, replying to criticism of the Budget, the government stated that the Treasury was providing over one million pounds for work for some nine thousand men.[139] In another vindication of its concern it stated that the amount of government relief distributed through the Benevolent Society had risen thus:

March 1927:	£2,258
November 1927:	£3,110
March 1928:	£6,043

It added that the Lang Government in 1926-27 had distributed £88,954 (or £7,413 per month) through cash allowances, food relief and other methods, whereas in addition to relief work money the Bavin Government had so far expended £9,574 per month and the total expenditure for the financial year would be £114,891.[140]

Such arguments, however, both cannot be validated here, nor would they have seemed to the unemployed a proof of concern. No matter how much the government was providing, the relief the unemployed received was most inadequate.

The basic wage (purportedly the "living wage" for a man, wife and one child) for Sydney workers in 1926-27 was £4.4.0[141]. Wage rates in Broken Hill were higher, yet in 1927 unemployed single men at Broken Hill received rations worth 11/7 per week, married couples 17/10, a man, wife and child £1.6.3½. (A couple with ten children received a little more than the

139. ibid., 9/5/28, p.17.

140. ibid., 21/ /28, p.10.

141. from M.P. Brown, "State Capital Differences in the Basic Wage:, Economic Record, March 1960, p.83.

basic wage - £4.6.7½.[142] Different ration scales were given in different areas. The rates in South Maitland were better, but even there a married couple with a child received £2.0.0.[143]

To add insult to poverty, the unemployed were given neither the cash nor coupons (which were later introduced) but received the goods in a lump. Bruntnell, the Colonial Secretary, stated that the rations for a man, wife and five children were ten loaves of bread, nine pounds of meat, two pounds of butter and five pounds of sugar.[144]

That the unemployed saw this as a particular indignity, and also an inconvenience, is shown by the people's ready memories of the Benevolent Society ration centre at Circular Quay. A few of the people I interviewed vividly recounted going down to the Quay with a sugar bag and watching while the rations were dumped on the table. One man said: "They slapped food down on the counter".[145]

Judith Mackinolty's informants also remembered the experience. She quotes one as saying: "It was necessary to find newspapers and a sugar bag which could be bought down at the market for 3d., then proceed to Quay Street where an area was arranged with little stores all around to issue bread, meat, vegetables, groceries etc. The butcher would cut off a chunk of meat and toss it on a ledge and he would tear off

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142. S.M.H., 8/10/27, p.18.

143. ibid., 13/10/28, p.14

144. 144. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 112, 9/11/27, pp.124-5.

145. Interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Dixon (Palmer St. Balmain) and Mr. Louis Gerrard (Cove St., Balmain), and with Mr. I. Wyner.

some tickets from your roll and all the other purveyors would do likewise and those who had not provided themselves with paper to wrap their allowances in and and a bag to carry them were in a sorry plight."[146]

Mackinolty adds: "There is a sense ... of the thoughtlessly casual attitude of those administering the system. The recipient was often left in no doubt that this was charity, not a right...'A man was receiving his meat rations and he requested if he could get a leg instead of the neck chops etc. that he had been receiving in the past and the butcher replied 'Take what you are getting do you think it's a centipede.' " [147]

Also, the distribution of relief was somewhat restrictive and negative in intent.

Unemployed workers could register at the Labour Exchanges at Sydney, Newcastle and Broken Hill and some other country centres. Applicants for whom no work could be found signed a statement that they had not had more than three days work or received more than £2.10.0 in the preceding fortnight; each time they applied they had to renew the declaration. Those whose credentials were accepted were given an order on the Benevolent Society.[148]

It was difficult for many to travel to the Exchanges, both because of the distances involved and because many unemployed had no money for fares.

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146. J. Mackinolty, op.cit., pp 176-177 (P. Culbert).

147. ibid., pp.177-8 (quote from R. Johnson)

148. S.M.H., 27/11/27, p.10.

The Communist Party claimed that Labour Bureau officials obstructed the unemployed workers' applications where possible, especially in the case of single men.[149] Certainly, wide discretionary powers were given to these officials, who could refuse the dole to workers whose cases they did not believe to be 'genuine', or whom they simply disliked.

Passivity was the basic mark of a 'genuine' unemployed, and the officials boasted of their acumen in separating the sheep from the 'professional' goats. One official stated: "There is always the problem of the 'professional' out of work, for whom neither the government nor the relief organisations have any time. The 'professional' is fond of marching in processions, and in other ways making himself prominent. Officials of the relief organisations are emphatic that the genuine unemployed do not, as a general rule, parade their misfortune."[150] Both at this time and later the politically conscious unemployed were often denied relief.

It does not seem unduly cynical to suggest that it was in the political interests of the Bavin Government to tighten up the relief regulations, for if the number on relief decreased it could be claimed that the number unemployed had decreased, thus proving that Lang's "socialistic" restrictions on industry had caused unemployment and that the Bavin Government was successfully controlling the problem.

It would seem that this did occur.

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149. W.W., 9/12/27, p.4.

150. S.M.H., 2/11/27, p.10.

In August 1928, the Minister for Labour claimed a "further improvement" in the unemployment situation had occurred. His proof was that when 2000 registered men were called up for work only 118 responded. The remaining men were cut off the register.[151]

The immediate presumption that these 1882 men had found other work was hardly justified. Many would simply not have known of the call up, or would not have been able to get to it. A Labor member pointed out: "Advertisements are inserted in the morning papers calling upon certain men to appear at the Bureau at 7.30 a.m. [that morning], and owing to many of these men having been out of work for so long they are unable to purchase newspapers in the early morning and have to wait until later on for an opportunity to see the daily papers in some public place. As a result they cannot attend at the Bureau at 7.30 a.m. and if they arrive later on they have to wait for a further call."[152]

It is interesting to compare the numbers registering at the state Labour Exchanges with the trade union and Industrial Gazette estimates of unemployment. The average number of registrations for the third quarter of 1927 is 5,662; the average for the fourth quarter of that year is 3,708.[153] Considering the considerable rise in unemployment shown by the estimates for the last quarter, the claims that many unemployed were excluded from registration do seem credible.

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151. ibid., 2/8/28, p.11.

152. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 116, 6/12/28, p/2567. cf. also J. Mackinolty, op.cit., pp.70-71, re inability to buy papers and the crowds that would gather outside the newspaper offices.

153. figures calculated from N.S.W.I.G., 31/1/28, p.25.

It may simply be the case that the relief system momentarily collapsed because of the difficulties involved in a change of administration. When Bavin assumed office the money provided by Lang for relief work was almost finished.[154] Schedvin points out that State Treasuries in the Twenties financed works through a complicated system of overseas borrowing.[155] Money was often provided by issuing a new Supply Bill when resources were finished. It may then have been administrative disorganisation and lack of immediate funds that caused added hardships in late 1927.

However, whether or not men were thrown off the dole (and it does seem they were) the unemployed believed the situation to be worse, which was enough justification for protest. The Chief Secretary's reminder that the 25 per cent ration cut was not a decrease but simply the annulment of an increase would have seemed mere sophistry to those whose stomachs were suddenly 25 per cent emptier.

It certainly seems that the government's policy of preference to married men resulted in a serious deterioration in the position of single men. (The government was quite open about its attitude that single men had no definite claims to relief. In 1928 Bruntnell said: "I have previously stated, ... in view of the financial position, that the government will very soon have to decide whether it can continue giving rations to single men".[156])

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154. S.M.H., 25/10/27, p.12.

155. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.90.

156. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 116, 28/11/28, p/2230.

The plight of the single men was not merely a short-term problem of late 1927; complaints continued through 1928 and 1929 - indeed, it was not until the election of the Lang Government in 1930 that Labour Bureau officials were instructed to greatly extend the provision of rations to single men.

In November 1928 an unemployed worker complained: "There has been no call for single men [for work through the Labour Exchange] for months, and as married men get an absolute preference it is practically useless ... for a single man to register with any hope of getting employment. Many single men have dependents, and others are destitute and have no relations or friends in Sydney."[157]

Apart from the virtual impossibility of getting work, single men were often refused rations. The Labor Party claimed that "when[single men] apply they are subjected to third degree methods of examination as to their means and whether they are seeking work."[158]

The government attempted to justify itself by claiming that there were "difficulties" involved in providing for single men.[159] It

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157. S.M.H., 20/11/28, p.12. (At this time an A.L.P. member claimed that Labour Exchange officers had been instructed not to provide any relief work for single men before Christmas. The government agreed that the preference was for married men. N.S.W.P.D., vol.116, 29/11/28, p.2307).

158. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 112, 7/12/27, p.1122.

159. eg ibid., vol.112, 7/12/27, p.1122.

charged that "in some cases it can be proved that single men obtained rations ... and have been known to sell them afterwards." (A Labor member expostulated "You are not going to starve everybody because of that!"[160])

These "difficulties" arose mainly from the method of dole distribution: because goods, not cash, were given many single men living in hotels or boarding houses were unable to cook the food given. The O.B.U.U. was successful in agitating for the provision of rations to single men who had cooking facilities,[161] but the situation was little improved. After this single men were "required to show not only that they [were] necessitious but also that they [had] the means of keeping and preparing any food issued to them."[162] Whilst some would have had gas rings, few would have had ice-chests.

In any case, the onus of proof of these facilities was on the unemployed and it was up to the Bureau officials to decide if they were adequate. A Labor Council deputation charged that rations were withheld from men unable to prove that they had a stove or gas ring;[163] short of inviting a Bureau official home for tea, it's hard to see how incontrovertible evidence could be given.

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160. ibid., vol.112, 2/12/27, p.952.
161. W.W., 9/12/27, p.4.
162. Statement by Bruntnell, N.S.W.P.D., vol. 116, 6/12/28, p.2566.
163. S.M.H., 20/1/28, p.11.

It is of course impossible to prove how many were refused, as only the numbers of unemployed allowed to register was kept. The Workers' Weekly claimed that eighty per cent of single men applying to the Sydney ration bureau were refused because they could not prove they had cooking facilities.[164]

One blatant case of discrimination shows the difficulties faced by those who protested against their circumstances as well as by single men in general.

In late 1927 Spillman and Laidlaw set up a single men's shelter in Campbell Street, Surry Hills, in a deserted school hall lent them by the City Council. The shelter usually housed about twenty men; in a short period of time after its opening it had served as a refuge to about two hundred men. Through no fault of the men it was an awful hovel - "with every window broken, the roof leaking, and the walls greasy and foul-smelling, the building no bigger than a large room" . Yet it was probably better than the streets.

Soon after its inception the Government decided to cut off food supplies to the men living there, because there were "a number of undesirables" among them, and it was "said to be a Communist centre".[165]

Spillman denied (probably quite truthfully)[166] that the men were Communists and claimed that all the men searched for work every day.

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164. W.W., 27/1/28, p.4.

165. S.M.H., 10/12/27, p.18, 16/11/27, p.15.

166. It would seem that Spillman at least was not, for he receives no publicity in the W.W.

The place was certainly not the sort that a "professional bludger" would seek out for a life of ease. Perhaps the most significant factor in favour of the men is that the Herald reports their case most sympathetically and does not question Spillman's claims.

This case bring out the terrible Catch-22 type of irony facing the unemployed: it was, per se , undesirable to be unemployed, but you had to be desirable to receive relief.

The hardship caused by the refusal of rations to single men was not limited to the men themselves.

Relief was "not given in cases where single men [were] boarding and [wanted] relief given to the boarding house keeper in part payment for their board."[167] Labor members charged that "in many cases where single men ... have been boarding relief has been refused to them on the ground that the persons ... whom they are boarding with should be prepared to supply them with food while they are out of work";[168] Also that those living with their families "are not receiving the ordinary food allowances but are being treated as if they are members of the family and under the age of 14."[169]

To overcome the difficulties regarding cooking facilities Labor members suggested the Government negotiate meal orders on restaurant for one meal a day for these men.[170]

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167. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 116, 6/12/28, p.2566 (statement by Bruntnell).
168. ibid., vol. 115, 20/11/28, p.1885.
169. ibid., vol.116, 28/11/28, p.2230.
170. ibid., vol. 112, 7/12/27, p.1122; vol.116, 6/12/28, p.2566.

The Government continued to do nothing, so the unemployed took the matter into their own hands.

Seven unemployed men marched into a city cafe, ordered a meal, ate it, and when presented with the bill declared: "We belong to the One Big Union of Unemployed. Just charge this up to Mr. Bavin!" They were arrested.[171]

When one of the men was subsequently sentenced to seven days imprisonment more than a hundred members of the O.B.U.U. demonstrated at Central Police Station and marched through the streets. The rank and file were more militant than the unemployed leaders: many wanted to demand to be locked up, but the "more tactful" organisers asked for the provision of food and shelter. (The police "noted the request".)[172]

The O.B.U.U. successfully pressured the Labor Council to provide bail and legal advice for the jailed men, and to appoint a deputation from the Council, the O.B.U.U. and the State and Federal Labor Parties to protest against the "savage sentences".[173]

The government's discrimination against single men should not be taken to mean that married men lived in charity bliss. Whilst what work was going was assigned to them, the work was usually intermittent and of short duration.

One worker complained in October 1928: "I registered for work at the Labor Bureau in May and in September I got a fortnight's work at Maroubra, then had to re-register to have a chance of a job at Christmas

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171. S.M.H., 2/4/29, p.11.
172. ibid., 1/5/29, p.18.
173. T.L.C.M., 2/5/29, p.517. (This notes 10 men arrested).

time. I attended the Bureau every time men were called up ... with the exception of a few men for Bombala, Kyogle and Wiseman's Ferry and a few jobs where local residents only were required. The only other work was the fortnight's relief work at Maroubra. When the Bureau publishes, and politicians will quote its report, it will state that it found work for many thousands of unemployed men, but as 75 per cent of the work found has been a fortnight's work at Maroubra it will be misleading. If some member of parliament would call for a report of the cost of the Labour Bureau and the number of unemployed found work (apart from the Maroubra relief work) the taxpayers would see what a useless institution it is."[174]

UNEMPLOYED ORGANISATION OUTSIDE SYDNEY

I have only dealt so far with the problems and protests of the Sydney unemployed. Though most unemployment was centred in the metropolitan area, there was considerable unemployment in other parts of the state,[175] so there developed unemployed organisations in the non-metropolitan area which agitated for work and over specific local grievances.

Though in the Thirties unemployed workers in country towns formed organisations, in the Twenties unemployed protest was largely limited to Broken Hill and the northern coalfields area, and, on a lesser

174. S.M.H., 20/10/28, p.11. A Labor parliamentarian also complained: "A large number of married men registered at the Bureau have not received more than 5 or 6 weeks work during the last twelve months. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 112, 6/12/28, p.2567.

175. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 113, 29/5/28, p. 995, a Labor member states that "most country towns have numbers of unemployed"; cf. also N.S.W.I.G. 31/1/30, p.19, for estimates of country unemployment. This shows country unemployment in 1927-28 as above 4,000 on average, but rural unemployment tended to be disguised and was hard to measure because

scale, to Lithgow and the South Coast. Country unemployed were particularly difficult to organise because of their isolation, and in the Twenties rural unemployment was not high enough to spur the workless in the smaller country towns to fight.

It is no accident that it was in the mining towns that most of the strong country organisations were formed.

The organisation of the unemployed was generally most successful in areas where there was a tradition of unionism and labor militancy, and where the working population was largely involved in the same industry. In these areas there was a certain solidarity between employed and unemployed workers, which helped both the actual organisation of the unemployed and helped them publicise and press their demands; it also tended to strengthen the morale of the workless. Both the solidarity and the militancy of mining workers are so commonly cited that they are virtually automatic.[176]

Just as important, of course, was the very high level of unemployment in the mining areas; long before the 1929 lockout threw thousands of workers on the northern fields out of work, the mining industry was suffering from difficulties. In mid 1928, there was a reference in parliament to "the very serious position in regard to unemployment in the large coal mining centres and in the Broken Hill district."[177]

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176. cf. Edgar Ross, A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia, The Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, Sydney, 1970, P.326 . Dr. Mauldon (in a study of the coal industry) pointed out at this time that the Australian coal industry, for its size, was "more effectively unionised than that of any other country".

177. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 113, 15/5/28, p.604.

Edgar Ross points out that "The Australian coal industry entered the period of the great world economic crisis in a condition of acute over-capacity, which was reflected in an increase of inter-mittency and, as moves for adjustment were made, large scale unemployment. By 1928, the average number of days worked by mineworkers had fallen from 200 in 1922 (and 274 in earlier years), to 168 ... In 1927, there were 24,500 mineworkers employed in N.S.W. In the following year the number dropped to 21,400 and by 1929, it had reached 14,600.[178]

In January 1928, Garden claimed that there were four thousand unemployed in Newcastle[179]; in March there were six hundred and eighty men registered at the Cessnock Labour Exchange alone.[180] In Mid 1928, the Herald noted acute distress on the coalfields, and estimated unemployment at eight to ten thousand including skilled workers.[181]

In December 1927, the Industrial Gazette had noted bad unemployment in the northern districts and the Newcastle coalfields area in particular. Three collieries at Kurri Kurri and three of the largest collieries at Cessnock had closed, as well as a number of mines around West Maitland. Not only the mines were affected: a number of Newcastle works had closed, including the steelworks.[182] The Gazette continued

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178. E. Ross, op.cit., pp.325-326.
179. S.M.H., 21/1/28, p.17.
180. ibid., 2/3/28, p.12.
181. ibid., 14/5/28, p.12.
182. N.S.W.I.G., 31/1/28, p.27.

this gloomy picture through 1928, the only decreases in unemployment occurring when large relief works were undertaken.

Mineworkers at Broken Hill suffered depressed conditions after the collapse of the metal market in 1926; 2,200 men were thrown out of work when B.H.P. closed its mines.[183] The following table dramatically illustrates the situation at the Hill. It represents the number of people at Broken Hill employed in the mines, the Umberumberka Waterworks, tramways, municipal works, shop assistants, hotels etc., wholesale employees and others:

31 May, 1927:	7,788	employed
31 Dec. 1927:	6,111	"
31 May, 1928:	5,775	"
31 Dec., 1928:	5,548	" (184)

In October 1927, there were nine hundred unemployed registered at the Broken Hill Labour Exchange, seven hundred and fifty of them from the mines, and men were still registering.[185]

Of course, references to the extreme distress caused by unemployment in these areas are legion. In the New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, volumes 114-117, there are over fifty questions asked about the position on the northern fields.[186] In August 1929, Kenneth Slessor

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183. E. Ross, op.cit., pp.330, 338.

184. N.S.W.I.G.

185. S.M.H., 3/10/27, p.17.

186. Also many references in vol. 113, e.g. N.S.W.P.D., vol.113, 18/4/28, p.21 (re West Wallsend and Kurri); 15/5/28, pp.603, 664 (Newcastle); 17/5/28, p.730 (Kurri and Cessnock); 24/5/28, p.918 (S. Maitland; 1/5/28, p.201, 23/5/28, p.863, 26/4/28, p.151 (Broken Hill).

wrote about 'Starvation Town' - Cessnock: "Cessnock starves. There is no metaphor about this. It is starvation, simple, plain and elemental...

Many families have had no income but the police dole for two and a half years."[187]

The position was also very bad in the Lithgow area.[188] The Secretary of the U.U. and Garden claimed that there were two thousand unemployed there in early 1928.[189]

In these three mining centres, the unemployed began to organise well before any wide public realisation of the economic and unemployment problems.

In early 1928, the Sydney O.B.U.U. leaders sent delegates to Lithgow to help organise the unemployed[190], and the Lithgow unemployed formed a branch of the organisation, with union support, which had a founding membership of one hundred and seventy.[191] Even before this stimulus to organisation the Lithgow unemployed had organised a deputation to press Bavin for better conditions.[192]

It appears that the relief situation was particularly bad at Lithgow: the Sydney Labor Council, under direction from the U.U., charged that the two thousand Lithgow unemployed were receiving no government help and demanded immediate relief,[193] and in May 1928 sent another

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187. Smith's Weekly, 24/8/29, p.9.
188. cf. S.M.H., 5/12/27, and W.W., 27/1/28, p.4.
189. ibid., 19/1/28, p.13; 21/1/28, p.17.
190. W.W., 20/1/28, p.1.
191. ibid., 27/1/28, p.4.
192. S.M.H., 5/12/27, p.11.
193. ibid., 19/1/28, p.13.

deputation to Stevens demanding a relief work grant.[194]

Edgar Ross (who was a member of the M.M.M. at Broken Hill in the late Twenties) notes that the Unemployed Movement at the Hill in the Thirties was particularly strong.[195] Broken Hill was one of the first places to have a militant unemployed organisation in the Twenties.

The Barrier Unemployed Union[196] was holding meetings and deputations from at least the end of 1927. The organisation, under the control of Gully, a virulent 'anti-foreign' campaigner, mounted a particularly vicious anti-immigrant campaign at this time [197] but in August 1928, the movement was reorganised (coming , it would seem, more under the control of the M.M.M.), and the emphasis on opposing and blaming foreigners was dropped.[198]

The organisation was numerically fairly representative of the unemployed of the district: in September 1929, when there were eight hundred men registered at the Labour Exchange, the organisation had a membership of five hundred and sixty three.[199]

The Broken Hill unemployed held regular meetings demanding work;[200] this campaign was comparatively successful. It seems that more

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194. ibid., 29/5/28, p.12.

195. E. Ross, op.cit., p.345.

196. This appears to have been its name, though thepress often refers simply to the 'Broken Hill unemployed organisation".

197. Dealt with later in this chapter.

198. W.W., 17/8/28, p.3, 31/8/28, p.3.

199. S.M.H., 6/9/29, p.18.

200. e.g. S.M.H., 7/10/27, p.14 (200 at meeting); 8/10/27, p.16 (150 demand work); W.W., 17/8/28,(demand work or full maintenance).

relief works and a greater number of rations were given at Broken Hill than, for example, in the northern coalfields. Of seven hundred men registered in October 1927, four hundred were on relief work and two hundred on government rations. At this time the government was reportedly trying to provide public works at the Hill.[201] The relief work was alternated, two hundred being employed each week and the men were paid the basic wage[202], which again was probably the result of the militancy of these unemployed. They also won their demand that rail passes be given to those who wished to leave in search of work[203] - a request refused to other unemployed groups.

This relative success owed much to the support given by the Barrier Industrial Council. The Council decided, after complaints by the unemployed, to police the local relief works to ensure that only financial unionists were employed.[204] The Miners' Union at Broken Hill instituted a levy of 2½ per cent on its members for the relief of local unemployment caused by mine closures.[205] Such relief payment was most rare.

The Broken Hill unemployed also instituted a campaign against unemployed workers being forced to pay rent.[206] This was later to become one of the main demands of the unemployed movement. They had

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201. S.M.H., 8/10/27, p.16, 26/10/27, p.16.
202. ibid., 5/10/27, p.16.
203. ibid.
204. ibid., 8/10/27, p.16.
205. E. Ross, op.cit., p.338.
206. e.g. S.M.H., 7/10/27, p.14; 8/10/27, p.16.

some success over this issue: for example, they prevented a landlady from taking the furniture (in lieu of rent) from a women "in a distressed condition whose baby had died recently and whose husband was going to a mental hospital".[207]

In studying the unemployed movement of the northern coalfields some distinction must be drawn between the men unemployed because of the general deterioration of the mining industry and the thousands of miners suddenly thrown out of work in March 1929, due to the lockout. It was the former whowere really concerned with the unemployed movement

When the Sydney O.B.U.U. was formed it decided that the first group of unemployed to be asked to amalgamate would be the unemployed of Newcastle.[208] By at least May 1928 there was an active branch at Cessnock as well[209], and in September a branch was formed at West Maitland[210]. The unemployed at Kurri Kurri, Greta and other coalfields towns also had organisations (which may have been linked to the O.B.U.U.)[211]

Numerous rallies and deputations were organised to demand work[212]. The sense of unity and solidarity between the employed and unemployed workers gave added weight to the demands of the workers; indeed, it was not only

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207. ibid., 19/10/28, p.14.
208. S.M.H., 9/11/27, p.17.
209. W.W., 25/5/28, p.2.
210. S.M.H., 5/9/28, p.16.
211. e.g. ibid., 1/2/28, 2/5/28.
212. e.g. W.W., 17/2/28 (Cessnock rally demands work); 1/2/29, p.4; S.M.H., 7/2/28, p.11. (coalfields unemployed demand work, not dole); 13/2/28, p.12 (Cessnock urge road work); 7/11/28, p.16 (West Maitland O.B.U.U. want road work).

the unions that supported the protests of the unemployed. Local councils, clergymen and citizens committees, as well as Labor members of State Parliament, backed up their demands. In early 1928, a deputation of representatives of the Kearsley Shire Council and industrialists petitioned for relief work rather than the dole.[213] A deputation of Maitland and Cessnock unemployed to Bavin was introduced by a member of the Legislative Assembly[214]. Representatives of the miners' union and the Greta Municipal Council urged the Minister for Labour to introduce a work grant. (The Minister recommended a £5,000 loan).[215] In May 1928, Stevens visited the fields and received deputations representing the unemployed, local councils, miners' lodges and doctors, clergymen and teachers. The unemployed told Stevens that "they have a certain amount of pride and it hurt them to have to apply for relief".[216] In July 1928, a conference was held in Cessnock to discuss the employment situation. Clergymen, aldermen and "the whole of the mining organisation" joined with the unemployed to demand work.[217]

Labor members in Parliament charged that the amount of relief work provided in the district was completely disproportionate to the amount of unemployment. They charged that very few Newcastle men were being placed through the Labour Exchange, although unemployment was

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213. S.M.H., 1/2/28, p.19.
214. ibid., 2/3/28, p.12.
215. ibid., 2/5/28, p.15.
216. ibid., 12/5/28, p.18; 14/5/28, p.12.
217. ibid., 30/7/28, p.10.

rising, and that the thousand workless in the Kurri Kurri electorate were not being given their fair share of the work. The government protested that it was "endeavouring to be fair to every town in the state".[218] In April 1928, it was claimed that no West Maitland or Kurri unemployed worker had been given work in the last six months[219], and that no West Wallsend men had been placed by the Labour Bureau since August.[220]

The Government's policy to single unemployed living in the country appears to have been to force them to leave their home town and start tramping through the state in search of work. The Colonial Secretary, after studying the operation of food relief in Newcastle, made recommendations to the Labour Bureau about the single men living in hostels: "I suggested, ... in order to discourage such single men from becoming dependent on the Government for food relief, that they should be informed that one week's provision of food relief would be given to them, and that if they could not secure employment at Newcastle within that time they should look elsewhere".[221]

The assumption was that single men had no homes, family ties, friendships, or sense of permanence that would be disrupted by homeless tramping.

This assumption was particularly pernicious in regard to men of the coalfields, for there was a great sense of community in these areas.

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218. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 113, 1/5/28, p.201.
219. ibid., 26/4/28, p.151.
220. ibid. , 18/4/28, p.21.
221. ibid., vol. 112, 6/12/27, p.1022.

Also, the workers of these areas were simply not rural workers, accustomed to seasonal migration in search of work. They were skilled at a particular industrial job, and were no more suited to farmwork than were metropolitan workers.

In the previous chapter I noted the sudden severe unemployment that occurred in early 1929, as a result of the timber workers' strike and the coalfields lockout. To recapitulate: there were probably about twelve thousand miners on the northern fields unemployed in March 1929 and the figure was to remain high, possibly around the nine thousand level, into 1930; there were three to four thousand unemployed timber workers in the metropolitan area in March 1929, which rose to about five thousand, and there were still two thousand unemployed in January 1930 though the dispute ended in November 1929.

These two disputes were to absorb the attention of the organised labor movement in 1929; the violence, arrests and gaolings arising from the timberworkers' picketing of non-union labour distracted the attention of both the union movement and the public from the unemployed in the first part of the year, as did the upsurge of protest over the Rothbury incident in December.

It may seem strange that the unemployed movement did not gain a great impetus in terms of organisation and militancy from the sudden swelling of the ranks of the unemployed by thousands of organised, militant miners and timberworkers. There tended to be, however, differences in nature between what could be termed the regular unemployed and the new unemployed.

The timberworkers and miners were unemployed for a particular reason. They saw themselves as on strike (or locked out) rather than as unemployed. Although the coalfields men demanded relief and relief work, the main demand of the miners and timberworkers was for their old jobs back at their old conditions. Also, the organisation needed to protest their grievances already existed in their unions, and was much stronger and more sophisticated than the unemployed organisation.

No doubt unemployed timber workers did join in the marches of the unemployed in Sydney; I have already noted that the O.B.U.U. supported the timberworkers. The locked-out miners did join in the protests of the coalfields unemployed. However, they were strikers first and unemployed second; they had a grievance stronger than the simple fact of unemployment. They still saw themselves as miners and timberworkers, and as members of their respective unions; the support given them by their unions and the labor movement reinforced such ideas.[222] The fact that locked out miners received some relief pay from their union[223] placed them in a different position from the other unemployed.

One concomitant of this industrial unrest, however, which was to affect the unemployed was the change that occurred in public attitudes to unemployment and the unemployed.

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222. M.Dixon op.cit. points out that the miners' officials "probably never had any stomach" for the dispute, that the miners were largely left to their own devices for the early months and that the officials only really became determined after the Rothbury incident. However, despite this weakness the rank and file largely continued to support, and nominally to be supported by, the Federation.)

223. cf. E. Ross, op.cit., p.337. A 12½ per cent levy was struck on Federation members. Relief pay was 8/- for single men, 15/- for married men and 3/- for each child.

The labor movement in general received 'bad press' in the non-labor papers in 1929; strikers were epitomised as a violent, communistic, irresponsible rabble willing to bring the country to its knees in the furtherance of their selfish desires. Before 1929, the unemployed were often presented as unfortunates (led by a bunch of immoderate 'wont-works'). In 1929, they tended to be tarred with the same brush as the 'communist' strikers.

I have noted the view of the Nationalists and conservative interests that excessive wage costs caused the nation's economic crisis by forcing up production costs. This belief that the unrealistic demands of selfish unions - and, by extension, their members - caused the crisis grew to the neglect of other analyses. The maritime dispute of 1928, and the bitter strikes of 1929, were incontravertable evidence of this selfishness to those who already believed it. And the unemployed suffered by analogy.

While before 1929 there were protests made by the affluent about the iniquity of giving the dole to the indolent unemployed, public opposition to relief became much more strident when stirred by the idea of relief being given to unemployed strikers.

The Herald editorial (already noted) which attributed unemployment to the coddling and shackling of industry also blamed its existence onto "the attack (on industry) of political propagandists with evil dispositions". The paper fulminated against the payment of unemployment relief to men involved in the maritime dispute:"In the provision of relief discrimination is not exercised between those who are destitute because of circumstances they could not control and those who have wantonly brought about not only their own distress but that of others. Is it desirable , is it sane,

for the State to lift from the shoulders of men their personal responsibility as breadwinners for themselves and their families?"[224]

Bavin joined the attack: "While the Government was urged to find employment , men were actually going out on strike. ... Men who caused distress and misery by refusing work found for them would not receive financial assistance from the government".[225]

By mid 1929, the Herald's attitude had widened to include the unemployed in general: "The resort to this (unemployment) relief is said to be so profitable that ... the dole becomes a premium on idleness. Stories reach us of wives of workless men who protest that they are getting too much in the way of government rations, and of their husbands who do not see why they should ever work so long as the stream of government food issues and child endowment do not dry up". This editorial went on to attack arbitration.[226]

A fortnight later another editorial thundered against "subsidising the strike".[227]

Herald readers took up the argument. One (signing himself 'Unemployed Worker') wrote that "it seems strange that the government can find money for dole payments to miners, who have thrown thousands out of work by their stubbornness in refusing to accept a wage that gives them twice the amount received by most other trades".[228]

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224. S.M.H., 25/5/28, p.12.
225. ibid., 26/10/28, p.13.
226. S.M.H., 30/5/29, p.10.
227. ibid., 13/6/29, p.10.
228. ibid., 4/3/30, p.8. (The miners' wage was not twice the basic wage).

Another reader wrote that "destitution on the coalfields is more advertised than real ... The will to work is rapidly declining while the desire to subsist upon the labour of other people is becoming the absorbing and all-important aim".[229]

Bavin was not loathe to bow to public opinion when that opinion coincided with his own views.

The payment of relief to miners was reduced in the latter months of 1929[230] and the government ruled that "any man who is associated with, or participates in any demonstrations which may lead to a breach of the peace, or who takes part in massed picketing, or unauthorised drilling, or insulting or obstructing the police, will have his name removed at once from the list of those eligible for assistance."[231] It instructed police not to issue food relief in cases where miners lodges had introduced black bans.[232]

Two hundred Kurri men were refused the dole because there had been mass picketing.[233]

These strict regulations were extended to apply to all unemployed: Chaffey stated that over the whole state the dole would only be given to law-abiders.[234]

This attitude that the workers were very much to blame for the crisis and hence for their own unemployment, because they would not

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229. ibid., 10/1/30, p.7; cf. also 2/1/30, p.7.
230. ibid., 10/1/30, p.7.
231. ibid., 14/1/30.
232. ibid., 31/1/30, p.1.
233. ibid., 17/1/30, p.14.
234. ibid., 15/1/30, p.16.

accept the 'sacrifices' which the society demanded, was to become more prevalent in the early Thirties. This attitude affected not only the affluent and those with conservative political and economic interests, but also the supposed instigators of the crisis. I have already cited one letter from an unemployed worker who held this view. One reason why the unemployed were so hard to organise was their acceptance , if not of the whole and specific blame for the crisis, at least of some blame and hence some social stigma. The hegemony of current conservative analysis of the crisis undermined their moral strength, as did the unquestioned power of the work ethic. Many came to believe that they were unemployables and hence virtual social pariahs. That such views did gain acceptance highlights the importance of those who attempted to struggle against this fate, and the importance of the alternate analyses of unemployment and the role of the unemployed that were developed.

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION

To understand the protests and grievances of the unemployed we must attempt to grasp how they saw unemployment, what they believed to be its cause. For naturally, the solutions they posited depended on what they believed the crisis to be, not what we with historical and economic hindsight can quantify as the "causes".

Louis points out the difficulties facing the historian who tries to present a consistent and coherent picture of the trade union leaders' analysis of the crisis: "A medley of theories, solutions,

nostrums and panaceas were advocated in increasing confusion."[235]

However, he also notes the "inconsistencies may at times have been more apparent than real".[236] The major apparent contradiction to concern us is that while unemployment was presented as something inherent in the capitalist system, it was also seen as the result of the temporary breakdown of capitalism and yet again as a weapon deliberately forged by the employers and their political allies to break down workers' conditions.

As unemployed workers came from a variety of different industrial, political and social backgrounds, it is natural that they should hold a wide range of beliefs. Trade union officials themselves included political opportunists, socialists and communists with fairly solid theoretical beliefs, sincere 'socialists' who really had no idea of what socialism was, and conservatives intent on assuring comfortable existences for their members under capitalism. Most of the unemployed were innocent of any deep knowledge of socialist theory, and had not been encouraged by the labor movement leaders to analyse their economic problems. The fact that sections of the labor movement held totally opposing theories about the crisis does not mean that these theories were not often internally consistent.

There is method in the apparent madness.

Also, the apparent inconsistencies often result from the combining of overall theory with short-term goals.

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235. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.21.

236. ibid., p.24.

It is rational to believe unemployment to be inherent in capitalism and to believe it to be particularly inherent, as it were, at the moment; as it is sane to fight for wage or dole increases under capitalism while ultimately believing that the system must, and will, be overthrown. Militants cannot expect their supporters to sit back and starve until The Revolution.

One must agree with Louis that "the labor movement was, on any test, ill-equipped to cope with the ideological challenges thrust on it by the depression. It had no accepted corpus of economic or socialist thought, and it is a truism among historians that its inclination towards working out coherent theory had traditionally been weak".[237]

The labor movement's failure to cope with the deepening crisis was increased by its slow acceptance of the reality of the crisis.

In this failure to realise the gravity of the situation, it was not alone; indeed most of the society - apart from the unemployed - did not foresee any catastrophe or try to come to grips with it even in 1929, and those who did grasp the deterioration of Australia's economic position were usually concerned more with the general crisis (of industry, government indebtedness etc.) than with the unemployment problem.

We have already discussed the union movement's tendency to neglect both the problem of unemployment and those actually unemployed, and the Bavin Government's somewhat blind optimism and its belief that unemployment

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237. ibid., p.205.

was only a short-term immediate problem.

The Nationalist Federal Government also underestimated the unemployment situation. When the Federal Labor Party moved a censure motion against the Government on the unemployment issue in 1928, Bruce replied that Australian unemployment was lower than that of other countries, adding that: "the present position gives no cause for pessimism ... Our difficulties are only temporary ... There is every indication that the existing depression will soon some to an end ... The people in Australia should not get the impression that the country is heading towards inevitable disaster".[238]

Though both the Federal Government and the organised labor leaders paid more attention to the situation in 1929, both concentrated on believed rather than real causes, and indeed the labor movement was very unwilling to accept that there was a genuine economic crisis (as opposed to a political one).

Louis writes that even towards the end of 1929 the Victorian trade unions "along with the rest of the community ... were unaware of the impending crisis"[239] and that trade unions generally even in early 1930, "did not realise that Australia was soon to be engulfed in castrophe ... For some time there was a general inclination to regard the country's difficulties as merely temporary, and some spokesmen condemned 'panic talk' of depression as detrimental to

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238. quoted by L.J. Louis and I. Turner, op.cit., p.24.

239. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.13.

workers .... As the year progressed and prosperity was not restored some of the optimism vanished, but there was still no realisation that the nation was entering a prolonged and unprecedented crisis, and unions usually did not diagnose the trouble as anything much more serious than a temporary recession which unscrupulous employers were turning to their own advantage."[240]

This description of the attitudes of Victorian union officials holds fairly true for New South Wales at the same time, and, if there was little realisation of the implications of the crisis in 1930, how much less was there in the late Twenties? The organised unemployed had to fight to impress their grievances upon the labor movement, let alone upon conservative governments.

If the politicians and trade union leaders were slow to face up to the crisis, it would seem that the mass of Australians generally ignored it more. Schedvin, writing of the 'drift into Depression' in 1929, notes that "it was the outlook rather than the immediate situation that was the source of anxiety, and although the Government spoke of grave economic difficulties this meant little to the average man whose income and job were not yet threatened".[241]

Though the society was unwilling to accept that there was a crisis in 1929-30, it was clear to many that something was out of joint; despite little attempt to analyse the real causes of the deterioration in both industrial income and employment, there were a number

240. ibid., pp.19-20.

241. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.112.

of reasons posited. The blame was often laid on some sort of conspiracy plotted by one's political opponents.

When crisis conditions occur, when events begin to move too fast for comprehension, when the established order changes in a way that does not cohere with your accepted beliefs, it is far easier - and more common - to change the facts to fit your traditional mode of thinking than to make the great ideological leap of reworking your theory and outlook to assimilate the facts. It is particularly easy - and again common - to blame change involving something you do not like or understand onto a conspiracy.

Conspiracy theories abounded during the Depression, particularly in theearly years.

Workers discerned a capitalist - Nationalist conspiracy to attack their hard-won economic standards; employers and Nationalists saw the strikes of the late Twenties as a conspiracy of agitators (often foreign) to cripple industry; the New Guard believed in a Lang-Communist conspiracy; Communists and Langites believed just as strongly in the New Guard conspiracy; the New South Wales Labor Party and Labor Council saw the Unemployed Workers' Movement as a Communist conspiracy to undermine the Lang Government and A.L.P. support. Perhaps the most famous and popular conspiracy theory in New South Wales was Lang's theory of the conspiracy of British and Jewish Banking interests, represented by Niemeyer, aimed at bleeding Australian workers. The support given to this view shows not only the sway Lang held over popular opinion, but also the ready acceptance given to an easily comprehensible and easily assimilable conspiracy theory.

The words "easily assimilable" should be stressed. The conspiracy theories that did gain credence were those that cohered with the traditional beliefs and prejudices of the groups that adopted them.

Conspiracy theories are particularly attractive during a period of economic disruption, for not only do they place the blame squarely on the shoulders of men (rather than on ill-defined or incomprehensible economic factors) but they often attach the blame to men who are outsiders, and thus who are anyway the subject of distrust.[242].

By 1929-30, the labor movement was to blame the bosses and their henchmen, the conservative politicians , for the deterioration of workers' conditions, but earlier the blame was placed on a large group that was as much a traditional anathema to Australian workers as the bosses - foreigners.

The anti-foreign campaign of the Twenties has received little attention from historians. This campaign was, however, particularly strong and particularly virulent for a couple of years in sections of the labor movement. Edgar Ross, speaking of the situation at Broken Hill (where anti-foreign feeling was perhaps strongest) writes: "the union was split by a 'classic' anti-foreign agitation and ... came perilously close to precipitating riots like those which had occurred in the

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242. The anti-Neimeyer campaign appealed to workers' hatred of 'Fat' and Banks, to resentment against Australia's sacrifices for a war that was not her own, and also to anti-Semitic as well as anti-British feeling.

Western Australian gold-mining centre of Kalgoorlie, and a shut-down of the industry".[243]

In describing this movement as a "classic' anti-foreign agitation Ross quite rightly links it with earlier outbreaks of popular feeling against foreigners in Australia's history. True, the foreigners opposed in the earlier agitations were often (but not always) non-white; in this campaign it was largely Southern Europeans who were opposed (though all migrants, including British ones, were sometimes included). Yet certain similarities to earlier campaigns and the virulence of the outbursts suggest that Australian racism is not limited to those with black or yellow complexions; or it could be that Southern Europeans are seen as Honorary Blacks. ← cf page 161

It would be simplistic just to attribute the Twenties movement to plain racism. It was partly the result of realistic fears of cheap labour competition, and was also an expression of Australian xenophobia. The movement did oppose assisted British immigration as well as the arrival of 'foreigners' (Southern Europeans) but the fact that the rhetoric and feeling of the campaign was directed against the latter rather than the former, despite the much greater number of British immigrants, shows that the campaign was anti-foreign, rather than anti-immigrant. Though it was immigration per se that was the possible threat, it was the Southern Europeans who were mainly blamed.

McQueen's analysis of Australian racism is considered provocative, exaggerated or simply wrong by many critics. He claims that "racism

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243. E. Ross, op.cit., p.330.

is the most important single component of Australian nationalism" and traces its development from Australian workers' fears of economic competition to a feeling that became embedded in both Australian radicalism and Australian nationalism and hence in the ethos of the society.[244]

Whether or not one agrees that racism is part of our national psyche, its origins are generally seen in the nineteenth century workers' fears of competition. McQueen writes that in the early nineteenth century it was Australia's chronic labour shortage "which produced the high wages, independence and prospects for all-round advancement for the colonists, whether convict or free. This led in turn to their opposition to all schemes of assisted migration, especially transportation, the struggle for the cessation of which was carried over into the fight against indentured hindus, coolies and kanakas in the 1840's.[245]

Australian workers initially, then, were jealous of opportunities granted to white competitors as well as coloured; this opposition strengthened whenever workers felt their economic conditions threatened. "The depression of the 1840's sharpened working class opposition to a further move by pastoralists to indenture still more workers from India"[246] and opposition to assisted immigration in general heightened.

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244. H. McQueen, A New Britannia, Penguin, 1970, p.42. and especially Chapter 2. It is odd perhaps to find some support for McQueen in Hancock, who wrote in 1930 that the idea of White Australia was "the natural fruit of Australia's mid-nineteenth century radicalism". W.K. Hancock, Australia, Jacaranda Press (republished) 1961, p.63.

245. H. McQueen, op.cit., p.43.

246. ibid., p.44.

It is interesting that from this time the labor movement coupled immigration with unemployment. Gollan notes that "from the eighteen-forties onward, unemployment, downward pressure on wages and working conditions, and assisted immigration (to a lesser extent, unassisted immigration) were considered by the working class to be sides of the same coin" and he stresses the hostility to immigration during periods of unemployment.[247] I have already noted that in the period of unemployment in the late 1850's and the 1860's, the unemployed demanded the cessation of assisted immigration; they in fact had some effect on government policy. Gollan states that "the long-term effect of these conditions was that the persistent working class attitude of opposition to immigration became in due course a more or less settled policy written into union programmes".[248]

In 1930, Hancock noted: "It is true that Australian opinion on immigration is divided; that the moneyed classes have on the whole an ill-reasoned enthusiasm for it, and that the labouring classes tend to view it with an ill-reasoned suspicion".[249] As well as fearing immigrants' competition for jobs, the labor movement believed the Nationalist Government's immigration policy was a deliberate weapon to break down Australian working conditions (Louis notes: "for many this suspicion had grown into a certainty when they noted the nationality of many of the "scabs" during the 1928 waterside strike".[250])

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247. R. Gollan, op.cit., p.76.

248. ibid., p.77.

249. W.K. Hancock, op.cit., p.128.

250. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.2.

So the feelings against immigration were fanned into flame by a conspiracy theory that involved both capitalist attacks and foreign encroachment.

The issues of unemployment and immigration became so inextricably linked and so emotionally charged that rational attempt to understand the problems of either became difficult. A delegate at the 1929 A.L.P. provincial conference proclaimed that "the whole social system was wrong. Unless something was done to deal with unemployment . . . it would mean the extermination of the white race".[251]

This concentration by the unemployed and the unions on immigration is not surprising considering the importance assigned to immigration in government deliberations of the Twenties.

Greenwood writes of the Twenties that "the hard core of the (Federal) Government's policy was development and migration". The Bruce-Page Government adopted a policy of land settlement and assisted immigration to fill the 'wide open spaces' for national protection as well as development. The emphasis was on British immigrants ; the Empire Settlement Act of 1922, and the £34 million agreement of 1925 provided for the British and Commonwealth Governments to share the costs of transporting and absorbing the immigrants. "Between 1921 and 1929, 212,098 assisted immigrants were brought to Australia. The peak year was 1926, when 31,260 arrived; the numbers tapered off as

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251. S.M.H., 26/1/29, p.15.

fears for the economy grew.[252] Assisted passages fell into two categories: migrants nominated by relatives or friends in Australia, for whom the sponsors were responsible and on whom there were no restrictions regarding occupation; and "persons (usually rural or household workers) selected from among applicants" by the State Governments and for whom the Governments were responsible.[253]

The Federal Government stressed the importance of development rather than immigration for its own sake,[254] and loans were made to the states for developmental works to employ the immigrants - land settlement and public works programmes.[255] That immigrants were employed on public works of course further enraged the unemployed, as the Government was not instituting enough public works to absorb all the unemployed.

Greenwood writes that from the outset of these schemes "a cleavage in outlook and emphasis was apparent between Labour and non-Labour parties. This was to broaden and deepen as each year passed, until Labour spokesmen took up an attitude of outright hostility to assisted immigration." "From 1927 on", he adds "the tone of comment was becoming more vehement, and the Government in meeting criticism was displaying an increasing unease about the general economic situation

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252. G. Greenwood, op.cit., pp.314, 319.

253. N.S.W.Y.B., 1929-30, p.279.

254. cf. Bruce's statement on the foundation of the Development and Migration Commission, W.K. Hancock, op.cit., pp.125-126.

255. cf. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.62.

. . . The Government was becoming ever more anxious to deny that there was any connexion between unemployment and migration".[256]

Despite attempts to divorce the issues,[257] by 1927 "debates which were becoming more and more nominally about migration were discussions upon unemployment"[258], with Labor Parliamentarians hammering the issue.

Greenwood believes that "the more responsible leaders, men like Charlton, Scullin and Fenton" were not really opposed to immigration" but their outlook was always heavily conditioned by an eye to the views of the unions and particularly by the existence of unemployment".[259]

It is important to note here that it was not just the union officials who pressed their hostility to immigration upon the Labor Party. Indeed, it would seem that they themselves were initially pressured by the unemployed to protest against the importation of competitive labour. Protests against immigration in New South Wales were mounted firstly by unemployed workers, often in the face of disinterest by the union officials.

From 1925 onwards, the U.U. was pressing the Labor Council to mount an active protest against immigration but it was only after about 1927 that the union leaders began to rail against the threat. This

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256. G. Greenwood, op.cit., pp.315, 318.

257. e.g. S.M.H.17/11/27, p.10 editorial opposes" the hardy suspicion" that "migration necessarily leads to unemployment"; 20/6/28,p.15. Report on Development and Migration Commission rejects coupling of the issues.

258. G. Greenwood, op.cit. , p.318.

259. ibid., p.315.

again shows that the unemployed organisation was an independent group, and that the unemployed were ahead of the labor movement in the realisation of the problems threatening labor. Also, the importance assigned to immigration by the unemployed is seen if their hostility over this issue is contrasted with the general weakness of the unemployed movement's policy and action over the 1925-27 period.

From the beginning the protest movement tended to muddle opposition to the assisted immigration scheme with opposition to all immigration; it is probable that many workers did not understand that 'Bruce's Immigration Scheme ' so railed against by orators applied only to British workers. Many no doubt believed that the Government was paying 'foreigners' (i.e. Southern Europeans) to come and take their jobs; this, indeed, is the impression given by the protest propaganda.

The first action the U.U. took on the Labor Council was to push through a motion "that in view of the widespread unemployment, also the large influx of British and other immigrants continually arriving, with more to follow, the Council to instruct the Executive to go into this lying Australian and British Imperialistic Immigration Policy of flooding Australia with cheap labor, with a view of finding out the best this Council can do to combat this very important and serious position."[260]

The wording of this motion is interesting. The U.U. believed there was "widespread unemployment", though the labor movement and

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260. T.L.C.M., 5/2/25, p.9.

and the society in general at this time barely saw it as a problem. The U.U. also stressed the enormity and continuity of the influx, and did not differentiate between large numbers of assisted British immigrants and the smaller number of unassisted 'others'. The reference to the "lying ... Imperialistic ... Policy" suggests the U.U. saw it as a deliberate plot. Finally, the phrase "flooding Australia with cheap labour" harks right back to nineteenth century rhetoric against Hindus, Chinese and Kanakas, and shows the highly emotional fear-level on which the protest was founded.

A month later the U.U. initiated a motion that "all Australian Labor Councils should hold meetings regarding immigration and that delegates should bring the matter up before their unions".[261]

Although the Labor Council was willing to accept the U.U.'s motions about immigration, the union leaders were not willing to do much to add their voices to the unemployed workers' protests. A motion requesting a special demonstration and procession "to bring forcibly before the people the grave menace to the industrial movement arising from the great influx of immigrants "was defeated; the union official who spoke against the motion stated that "unless the unemployed are willing to do something themselves it would be useless for the council to do anything" regarding the demonstration.[262]

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261. ibid., 5/3/25, p.18.

262. ibid., 26/3/25, p.21. I have already recorded a similar answer from Council to a complaint about union officials' neglect of a demonstration in 1928.

It seems that at this stage union leaders did not feel that immigration really threatened the industrial movement, only those already unemployed (who, by being outside industry and the unions were hence outside the concern of the union officials).

Before considering the development of the agitation it is important to see how justified the fear of job competition was.

Whilst the number of assisted immigrants that arrived was less than the initial plan had hoped for, the numbers do seem to justify the unemployed workers' claims of a "large influx".

The following table shows the number of assisted immigrants who migrated to New South Wales between 1923 and 1929 and their manner of selection:

NUMBER OF ASSISTED IMMIGRANTS TO N.S.W. [263]

Year	Selected	Nominated	Adults and Children over 12 years of age		Total Adults	Total Children under 12 yrs. of age	Total
			Male	Female			
1923	984	4,058	2,134	1,841	3,975	1,067	5,042
1924	1,499	4,714	2,575	2,334	4,909	1,304	6,213
1925	2,239	6,548	3,812	2,993	6,805	1,982	8,787
1926	1,572	11,257	4,082	4,539	9,621	3,208	12,829
1927	1,542	8,718	3,593	4,174	7,767	2,493	10,260
1928	1,628	7,104	3,190	3,726	6,916	1,816	8,732
1929	1,008	4,418	2,004	2,342	4,346	1,080	5,426
Grand Total All Years	10,472	46,817	22,390	21,949	44,339	12,950	57,381

263. Figures calculated from N.S.W.Y.B., 1929-30, p.279.

The number of adults represents the maximum number of immigrants who could immediately compete for jobs, though the children could of course provide future competition. The statistics do not show how many of the females were dependent wives who did not desire to enter the workforce, but the fact that more females than males arrived in 1927-29 suggests that many females did come independently.

While these figures may not seem enormous, some idea of the grievance of the unemployed can be gained from comparing these figures with the unemployment estimated in the Industrial Gazette. The average estimated for 1926 was about 6,500 and for 1927 about 8,300.[264] The number of adult assisted immigrants arriving in these two years would be large enough to fan the flames of latent hostility to immigration.

The great preponderance of nominated over selected immigrants should be noted. Although all states seem to have been rather unenthusiastic about selecting migrants[265] the drop in the numbers requisitioned by New South Wales in 1926 and 1927 may have been the result of workers' pressure on Lang. An important feature of this preponderance is that these migrants, the nominated, unlike those put onto special works by the government, would have been competing directly for all sorts of jobs. It seems, for example, that many miners applied to come here, at a time

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264. Figures calculated from N.S.W.I.G., 31/1/30, p.19.

265. cf. W.K. Hancock, op.cit., p.129. Figures for all Australia show that between 1923 and 1927 the number of nominated migrants more than doubled, while the number selected fell by more than a half.

when Australian miners were struggling. It is not surprising that the miners' union vigorously opposed immigration.

Whether or not these British migrants did take Australian jobs, the threat they posed was enough to raise opposition, which makes the concentration of hostility on 'foreign' rather than British assisted immigration even more striking. By 1927, the hostility was mainly directed against the Southern Europeans.

When a question was raised about immigration in early 1927, Premier Lang objected: "New South Wales is receiving today more of our own folk from overseas than are all the Australian states put together. I regret to notice .... that a large number of people from Southern Europe are coming here. Unquestionably it is a pity that they are not our own people rather than Southern Europeans".[266] Lang, then, did not oppose immigration per se; he was proud of his government's record of importing "our own folk" and only abhorred Southern Europeans. It would be hard to ascribe this to anything other than racism.

The society in general agreed with Lang's feelings.

The 1928 report of Great Britain's Industrial Transference Board caused a storm of protest by Australians. The report imputed Australian goodwill in regard to British immigration: "It seemed that the Dominions were accused of showing an unnatural preference for immigrants of foreign blood".

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266. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 110, 9/2/27, p.1049.

Hancock's account is particularly illuminating because it was written at the time. He writes that Australians felt these charges to be "monstrously untrue": "At this very time the sentiment of racial exclusiveness was elaborating a new interpretation of White Australia according to which all the peoples of Southern Europe were a 'semi-coloured race'. Newspaper demagogues were preaching this original doctrine under headlines so offensive and so crude that it would be indecent and injudicious to quote them".[267]

The numerical smallness of Southern European immigration shows that the hostility it aroused was based, if not on racism, at least on disproportionate and illogical fears.

Hancock points out that when Italian immigration was highest it was only one-twelfth of the volume of British immigration.[268]

There are not exact figures for the amount of Southern European immigration. An approximation can be gained however from the following table. It shows the excess of arrivals over departures of persons arriving at New South Wales ports according to nationality. These included immigrants, visitors, and Australian residents travelling abroad. It must be emphasised that not all those arriving intended to settle in the state: "the particulars ... relate to persons arriving ...

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267. W.K. Hancock, op.cit., p.126. (The notion was not so original. In the 1901 debate over the Immigration Restriction Act some speakers doubted "whether some European nations, such as the Italians" were "civilised in the ordinary Australian sense' . ibid., p.59).

268. ibid., p.127.

at New South Wales ports irrespective of which state is their ultimate destination. The majority of travellers between Australia and other countries embark or disembark at ports in New South Wales".[269]

EXCESS ARRIVALS AT N.S.W. PORTS 1927-29

Nationality	1927	1928	1929
British	15,670	9,818	3,363
French	(-) 20	6	(-) 63
German	214	104	(-) 6
Italian	1,550	580	165
Jugo Slavs	201	80	(-) 36
Russians	73	73	(-) 27
United States	166	173	126
Other European	1,575	1,006	68
Total European	19,429	11,840	3,590
Total Non Europeans	51	406	42
Grand Total	19,480	12,246	3,632

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269. N.S.W.Y.B., 1929-30, p.297.

270. cf. N.S.W.Y.B., 1929-30, p.279. This has the numbers of arrivals and departures. (-) denotes excess of departures.

The excess arrivals of Italians in these years is a fraction of the excess arrivals of all Europeans and is very small compared to the excess of British arrivals. Even if we add 'Other Europeans' to Italians the excess is small: 3,125 in 1927, 1,586 in 1928, 158 in 1929. That the figure in 1927 was much higher than in the later years shows why the extreme hostility was asserted in 1927; however, it did not die down in 1928 in proportion to the reduced number of Italian or 'Other European' immigrants.

Unemployed workers' opposition to immigration had, then, a rational basis considering the amounts of both immigration and unemployment but the form the hostility took/relied upon was traditional fears and the traditional scapegoat.

Broken Hill was seemingly the only place to have a pressure group specifically devoted to agitating against foreigners. This Anti-Foreign Campaign, led by Richard Gully, had considerable support and power in the unions and in the unemployed organisation until at least August 1928. Meetings denouncing foreigners were regularly held.

In some vindication of the extremity of anti-foreign feeling at Broken Hill, it certainly seems that a disproportionate number of Southern Europeans came to the town at a time when local workers were being laid off. Labor members stated in early 1927 that there was "a continuous flow of Southern Europeans to Broken Hill, while metalliferous mineworkers in Australia are out of employment"[271], and

271. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 110, 9/2/27, p.1049.

that "in many cases [they] are displacing local labour".[272] One member charged that "as many as thirty foreigners have come into that town on one day. Forty per cent of men who are medically examined on application for employment in the mines are foreigners".[273] They pressed Lang to request the Federal Government to regulate, if not cease, the flow.

When Gully charged on one occasion that eight Australian mullockers had been replaced by foreigners the mine manager said that "that sort of thing happened day after day". He did claim that he "gave preference to Australians and kept them on when their work was satisfactory" [274], but obviously he found foreigners more satisfactory. Broken Hill miners have a tradition of militancy, and it was no doubt easier for mine owners to control and exploit foreign workers who did not have much experience of unionism, who were used to low wages, inferior conditions and high work pressure, and who were in addition disoriented and alienated in a strange land.

Workers' opposition to foreigners strengthened the newcomers' alienation and hence the likelihood of their working below the award. Gully at a meeting advocated that union books be closed against foreigners.[275]

The appeal of the campaign can be easily seen. At one unemployed

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272. ibid., vol. 111, 4/3/27, p.1918.
273. ibid., 9/3/27, p. 215 .
274. S.M.H., 19/11/27, p.21.
275. ibid., 3/10/27, p.13.

meeting a speaker advocated the exclusion of foreigners altogether from Broken Hill.[276] Hostility could be easily inflamed in an isolated and fairly homogenous community such as the Hill: the arrival of foreigners would be conspicuous. (It is possible that anti-foreign feeling at Broken Hill was increased by memories of the peculiar attack on the Oddfellows picnic in 1915 by Asiatics in an icecream truck that flew the Turkish Flag; there were three picnickers killed and six wounded. That the German Club and the Afghan camel drivers camp were attacked in retaliation[277] suggests that, at that time at least, all foreigners were seen to be the same and were equally an anathema).

One result of this hostility was that by the end of 1927 numbers of foreigners were leaving the area[278]. Other results were a serious faction fight within the Miners' Federation and a threatened shut-down of the industry.[279]

The fact that Gully's opponents in both the union and unemployed movements finally won sheds a more redeeming light on the anti-foreign campaign at Broken Hill; however, the intensity of the support given to the campaign shows how readily those suffering or fearing loss of work could be inspired to blame their misfortunes onto the outsiders rather than onto the mine-owners who were dismissing them.

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276. ibid., 7/10/27, p.14.

277. cf. E. Scott, Official History of Australia, in the War, 1914-1918, Vol. XI, Sydney, 1936, p.111.

278. S.M.H., 17/10/27, p.12; 26/10/27, p.16 (200 Southern Europeans leave).

279. cf. E. Ross, op.cit., p.330.

It was not only Broken Hill miners who took up the cry.

Ross notes that "as the unemployment position worsened, opposition by the Central Council (of the Miners' Federation) to flooding the country with overseas workers on the ground that its purpose was to lower the standard of living, became an attack on 'the foreign element' and then on 'the employment of Italians in preference to our own unemployed members".[280]

Unemployed Lithgow workers complained of an influx of Southern Europeans into the town (as well as Australians from other States).[281]

The A.W.U. was, of all unions, most firmly wedded to White Australia principles, so its concentration on the foreign issue is hardly surprising. The A.W.U. organiser at Leeton claimed that two hundred men were unemployed because fruitfarmers preferred to employ Italians.[282] The A.W.U. delegate to the joint Government-Employer-Employee Unemployment Conference in 1928 stated that "the first essential is that there should be a restriction placed upon immigration to this country".[283] A.W.U. opposition was still high in 1931 when the foreign issue had been almost completely dropped by other unions. In the report of the 1931 Annual Conference of the union anti-foreign feeling is strong: foreigners are blamed for taking Australian jobs and dragging down living standards.[284]

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280. ibid., (Central Council resolution, August 1927)
281. S.M.H., 5/12/27, p.11.
282. ibid., 18/1/28, p.20.
283. ibid., 5/4/28, p.13.
284. The Australian Worker (usually called The Worker) 25/2/31, p.17.

By 1927-28, the Labor Council had taken up the issue, pressed upon it for so long by the unemployed. In January, Garden led a deputation to the State Government, complaining that "Southern Europeans and other foreigners were allowed to enter Australia by the Federal Government" and that "a large portion of the existing unemployment was due to this influx".[285]

The following rather convoluted statement by the Council shows the labor movement's belief that the immigration policy was part of a capitalist plot: "Owing to the great economic crisis in European countries, which has every tendency to be permanent, we have the capitalist Governments of those countries, owing to the mass unemployment, which is on the increase, confronting them, making frantic efforts to have mass emigration to countries such as Canada and Australia." The discussion on this centred around the thousands of unemployed workers in Australia. Council called on the State (Labor) Government to cancel Bruce's "Mass Immigration Scheme" and resolved to send propaganda to the British Trade Union movement to inform officials there of Australian workers' adverse situation.[286]

An interesting feature of this discussion is that fear was expressed that the immigrants would be used as strike-breakers - it was perhaps this as much as any concern for the unemployed that caused the union leaders' opposition to the immigration.

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285. S.M.H., 20/1/28, p.11.

286. T.L.C.M., 23/6/27, (p.267).

Opposition to the competition of foreign goods was added to hostility to competition from foreign workers. This too reflects feelings expressed during periods of depression in the nineteenth century. Gollan writes that during the 1860's recession, the labor movement's belief in fiscal protection to help local manufacturing and to restrict competition from overseas goods strengthened. By the end of the decade "protection had become a settled policy in Victoria and had some adherents amongst working-men in New South Wales".[287]

Louis notes that most union officials were "ardent advocates of high protection", believing there was an "intimate connection between tariff policy and the standard of living". High tariff barriers would encourage local industry and hence provide employment, and the protection they offered would boost the profitability of industry, which would ensure a high standard of living for workers.[288] This belief in the efficacy of a high tariff wall was endorsed by many Labor politicians as well, and their beliefs plus strong union pressure were to result in the sharp and rapid tariff raising of the Scullin Government in 1930[289] which, as we noted in Chapter I, did not immediately produce the desired results.

This clamour for protection would appear not to have begun before about 1929, and even in that year did not receive much prominence in Labor Council discussions - or, at least, not in the Council's

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287. R. Gollan, op.cit., pp.77-78.
288. L.S. Louis, op.cit., pp.20, 26.
289. cf. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.140-145.

minutes and reports. The unemployed delegates on Council did not give nearly as much attention to this issue as they did to immigration, though as early as 1925, they were complaining that local industries were not being sufficiently fostered by the Government.[290]

(An interesting facet of this fear of foreign goods and foreign workers is that at the same time the opposite pole of the political spectrum also retreated at times into xenophobia and blamed its dislikes onto another foreign scapegoat: conservative politicians and middle class and business interests blamed industrial troubles onto foreign agitators who were insinuating their noxious, un-Australian doctrines onto good but gullible Australian workers. Newspaper editorials and politicians (and, to a lesser extent, churchmen) fulminated frequently about these outside agitators, and foreign theories and foreign methods of agitation were reviled as much as the agitators themselves. The Herald, for example, noted that "imported methods" were used in the timberworkers' strike.[291] It described a gathering in the Communist Hall thus: "Foreigners of both sexes abounded. There were Russians, Chinese, Japanese, Yugo Slavs, Germans and other foreigners, but very few Australians".[292]. This idea that the C.P.A. was dominated by foreigners was another fallacious conspiracy theory. A list of Communists drawn up by the Government showed that of the fifty people

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290. e.g. T.L.C.M., 26/3/25 (p.22) - protest against anti-working class "action of the Government in having construction (presumably of ships) done abroad ; Also 7/5/25, (p.29).

291. S.M.H., 23/3/29, p.17.

292. ibid., 4/6/29, p.11/ cf. also 6/2/30, p.10 (letter - Communists are "a mostly foreign element").

given as members of the Central Committee of the C.P.A. in New South Wales, thirty-three were natives of Australia, eight came from Great Britain, four from an unknown place of birth, one was Russian, one German, one Patagonian, one a new Zealander, and one (Moore, an American) was 'believed Russian'. Of the ninety-nine people described as militant Communists, fifty nine were Australian and eighteen came from Great Britain.[293.])

The campaign against foreign immigrants had begun to die down by the end of 1928. Instead of being regarded as largely responsible for unemployment, immigration became to be seen as one of a number of causes, and by 1930 had virtually dropped out of thelist of causes altogether. (For example, at the 1930 A.C.T.U. Conference, there was a Committee on Unemployment and Immigration, but its main discussion was on the former and delegates were not concerned with the anti-foreign argument per se.[294])

The reasons for the diminishing popularity of the issue are complex.

Firstly, the number of immigrants dropped. By 1929, the number of British assisted immigrants to this State was back to the 1923 level, and the excess number of European arrivals over departures was tiny.[295]

In support of my claim that the agitation was primarily against 'foreigners' rather than immigrants in general, it should be noted that although the number of British migrants was still relatively high in 1928 (8,732 persons) the sharp drop in the number of non-British

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293. New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, 1930-31-32, vol.V, pp.465-467.
294. All Australian Trade Union Congress, Minutes, 13th Session, 4/3/30,p.2.
295. cf. tables earlier.

immigrants was enough to decrease the heat of the campaign.

The decrease of 'foreign' immigrants was not accidental. The Commonwealth Government made arrangements with the Government of Italy and other Southern European countries to limit the number of persons emigrating from those countries. (The Italian quota for 1928 was 3,000).[296]

Finally, the new Scullin Ministry suspended assisted immigration completely in November 1929.

More important, probably, than the obvious decrease in the number of possible job-competitors, was the fact that as unemployment continued to rise it could not so easily be attributed to a single cause. And as the need for alternative objects of blame arose in 1928 and the succeeding years, new issues presented themselves which pointed to other instigators of crisis, and other scapegoats.

The labor movement's belief that the capitalists and the Nationalist Government were uniting to import floods of foreign workers to secure cheap labour was supplanted by the belief that the bosses and the Nationalists were preparing an all-out attack on wages and conditions to cheapen Australian labour; that they were purposefully creating unemployment to force workers to accept lower standards and to establish a reserve labour force to act as strikebreakers; that whatever 'crisis' there was had been artificially produced, and that

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296. W.K. Hancock, op.cit., p.129.

the politicians' and economists' discussions of the dire fate awaiting the economy were lies intended to panic workers into accepting reductions.

By mid 1928, the leaders of the New South Wales union movement were propounding the view that the capitalist countries were over-producing; that the concomitant increase in competition (because the amount produced had grown while the market had not) had resulted in industry trying to retain its former profit margins while reducing the cost of products by cutting labour costs.

A special meeting of the New South Wales Union Executivesand Labor Council delegates expounded this analysis, adding:"In Australia, the Piece Work, Bonus and so-called Gratuity systems are used to speed up the workers, intensify production, and provide the conditions in which the living standards of the workers can be broken down ..... At the same time that the employers are increasing the production there is occurring a continual decrease in the market for the things produced owing to the fall of the purchasing power of the vast majority of the people. This brings about an increase in the number of those unemployed and a consequent greater competition for jobs. This in turn compels those still in industry to submit to greater exploitation."

The conference decided to step up the campaign to organise workers for "the employers are preparing for the attack upon the workers, and it is our duty to prepare for that attack".[297]

This over-production - under-consumption analysis was to be the main thread of the unions' argument against deflationary policies during the Depression. The unions were to argue that an increase in the purchasing

297. T.L.C.M. 17/5/28, pp. 404 - 405

power of the community was necessary so that the glut of products could be bought - and hence they were to argue for the creation of credit and the maintenance of high wages.[298]

When Labor Council representatives to Bavin's joint Government - employer-employee Unemployment Conference in 1928 withdrew because of their disagreement with the intentions of the Government-employer delegates, they declaréd that "stability ... will only be achieved by higher wages, elimination of overtime, and lowering of hours."[299] The unions were to uphold the shorter working week (without pay reduction) as a solution to unemployment and some unions in the Twenties as well as the later period, were to ban overtime.[300] (The O.B.U.U. had pressed the Labor Council to demand that all unions stop overtime as early as 1927, but the Council decided to "ask them to refrain from working overtime").[301]

By mid 1928, 'the Capitalist Offensive' was a common topic of Labor Council discussion. The programme drawn up by the Council for the A.C.T.U. in 1928 proclaimed:

> The class struggle in Australia has entered into an acute stage. The organised forces of the capitalist class, as represented by the Employers' organisations and by the capitalist State, have been mobilised and set into action in a general offensive directed against the Australian working class and their Trade Unions.

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298. cf. L.J. Louis, op.cit., pp.21-23.
299. S.M.H., 5/4/28, p.12.
300. cf. ibid., 18/1/28, p.20; 25/1/28,p.15.
301. T.L.C.M., 8/12/27, p.349.

> The Courts of Capitalist Justice, the Police, the existing anti-working class laws, the Press, the Parliamentary machine, and the dictatorial powers of those agents of the ruling class who happen at the moment to be at the helm of the State -- all of these weapons are now directed against the workers and their Trade Union organisations, in an attempt to break their resistance to the general capitalist offensive which has been in preparation for some time, and which has now been openly launched. 302

It is interesting that in the subsequent list of 'anti-laboracts' given as evidence of the capitalist offensive, growing unemployment is not mentioned; nor is the organisation of the unemployed included in recommendations as to how the unions should attempt to resist the onslaught. The emphasis is on breaking down craft barriers and strengthening the Labor Councils and the A.C.T.U. 303

The unions' claims of the capitalist offensive and the attack on workers had been sparked off by inroads on workers' conditions in 1928, and especially the 1928 Maritime Strike. In 1929, they were given more than sufficient evidence for this belief - for how else could they interpret the Lukin award, the coal lock-out and Bruce's endeavours to change the Arbitration system than as deliberate attacks?

In 1929, the Nationalists' arguments that unjustifiably high wages were making it impossible for industry to compete and hence were undermining the country's prosperity increased. Bruce maintained that "the basic cause of all the economic troubles of Australia today is the high cost of production", i.e. largely wage-costs, and that a fall in

302. ibid., 5/7/28, pp.419-421.

303. In May 1929, the Labor Council Executive decided on the agenda for a conference of Council and affiliated and unaffiliated unions to discuss "the present capitalist offensive"; unemployment and the unemployed were not on this agenda. T.L.C.M. 21/5/29, (p.522).

in wage costs would be the major solution to the economy's troubles and to unemployment. Bruce attacked wastage caused by the duplication of industrial legislation which was in turn caused by the overlapping of State and Commonwealth Arbitration systems. But his real belief was that Arbitration in general was responsible for over-high wage costs and that the Arbitration system should be weakened.[304] The Maritime Industries Bill, by which Bruce hoped to place all Arbitration, apart from that relating to the waterfront, in the hands of the states, was seen by the labor movement as an attack on the principles of Arbitration (and hence on Australian unionism itself).

The bitter and protracted timber and coal disputes were seen by conservative and business interests as proof of the anomolies of Arbitration and of the wilful destructiveness of the union movement - just as for the labor movement they vindicated the belief in the all-out attack on the standard of living.

Bruce's attitude to Arbitration, as well as these disputes, strengthened the unions' belief that the election of a Labor Government would preserve Arbitration, stop the attack on workers' conditions and return the country to prosperity and full employment; the union movements belief that the crisis was largely artificial and that talk of it was intended to panic workers into accepting cuts was also emphasised by the Labor politicians before the Federal Elections. The A.L.P. gave overwhelming promises of a return to good employment levels and the retention of

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304. cf. C. B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp .108-109.

the standard of living, and leading Party speakers denied the reality of the crisis.[305] As the Nationalist election speeches warned of gloomy prospects and offered thrift and reduction, it is small wonder that the Scullin-Theodore team won a resounding victory at the polls.

It is somewhat ironic that all the controversy sparked off by the impending crisis in 1929 - arguments over whether it existed, who was to blame, what should be done, what should be aimed for - tended to district attention from those who probably suffered most from the crisis - the unemployed.

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305. cf. L.J. Louis, op.cit., pp.13-15.