

CHAPTER 3:

THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT
IN 1930.

It is only in the light of this apathy and neglect towards - and even the denial of - the problem of unemployment and the unemployed during the late Twenties that the significance of those unemployed workers who did organise and fight in the Twenties can be grasped. Their main significance lies simply in the fact of their organisation, independently of their successes and notwithstanding their failures. With the labor movement as well as the conservative politicians tending to turn a blind or blindfolded eye towards them, the unemployed had to assert not only their right to an adequate economic existence but that they existed at all.

It is easy to point to their failures, the most obvious and important of which was their inability to build a widespread, viable organisation that was in contact with a large number of unemployed, that had a strong, appealing fighting policy and a good number of activists ready to fight for its demands. By and large both the tactics and the organisation of the unemployed workers of the Twenties were inadequate for the struggle necessary for the improvement of their position; even their analyses of the situation were limited and limiting, and so the solutions they put forward were often unsuitable.

Because the movement was inadequate in terms of its programme and its size, it is hard to see beyond this to its significance which I see in the very fact of the existence of the movement.

Firstly, the unemployed movement of the Twenties provided a foundation, however weak, on which the unemployed movement of the Thirties could build. The primary demand of the movement - that of full work or full maintenance - was a radical departure from earlier groups of unemployed workers' demands for just some amelioration of their situation; this primary demand was to be the basis of the policy of the unemployed movement of the Thirties.

Secondly, the very weaknesses and failures of the movement of the Twenties helped unemployed organisers of the Thirties to avoid making some of the same mistakes: it seems clear that the C.P.A.'s initial plans for the U.W.M. were drawn up with a consideration of the weaknesses of the O.B.U.U. in mind. Hence the C.P.A. stressed that there must be a much stronger consolidation between the ranks of the employed and the unemployed workers, that the unemployed movement must be based in local centres where the rank and file unemployed could be regularly and easily contacted, rather than being centred at the Trades Hall and reliant upon union officials directing their unemployed members to join it.

The movement of the Twenties also succeeded in forcing the organised labor movement to pay more attention to the plight of the unemployed and to press certain issues more forcefully. It is most probable, for example, that the union movement would not have complained so strongly about the position of the unemployed single men without the unemployed delegates' continual raising of this issue on the Labor Council. The unemployed were pressing for the cessation of immigration

long before the union movement began to pressure the Labor party on this issue. Also, the concentration of New South Wales Labor parliamentarians, after Bavin's election, on issues such as the plight of single men and the inadequacy of public works, though of course, good A.L.P. propaganda, was probably strengthened by the insistence of the unemployed demonstrations.

On a practical level the movement did, I think, force some improvement in the economic position of the unemployed. Although this improvement was only slight, the relief provisions for the unemployed in the Twenties were so vastly inadequate that even the slightest improvement constituted a gain. Though it is impossible to prove that these improvements resulted from pressure from the unemployed workers I think it most likely that some of the relief works were instituted in response to the insistence of the demands for work.

The unemployed of the Twenties were essentially fighting a defensive, rearguard battle against the undermining of their economic and social position. They made a few desperate sorties upon the forces which they saw as their oppressors - the storming of State Parliament, for example - but the protests as well as the organisation itself were, though determined, not consistent enough.

In the Thirties the unemployed movement increasingly went on to the offensive; in some protests the opposing forces - governments, Police, the relief system - were confronted head-on. After the turn of the decade, as more and more men were thrown out of work and as prospects of their speedy re-employment dwindled, as the realisation

of the extent and severity of the economic crisis heightened, the unemployed movement became much more effectively organised, more radical in its analysis of the situation and its demands, and more militant in its efforts to enforce those demands.

In 1930, the Unemployed Workers' Movement was founded. Though the U.W.M. was to suffer failures and periods of decay and disorganisation, it, and its later offshoots - the United Front Councils and the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers - were to constitute the largest and most militant unemployed organisation and were to force governments and relief authorities to improve the position of the unemployed and the unions and the A.L.P. to pay more attention to the unemployed. As well as the unsuccessful Unemployed Workers' Union founded by the Labor Council, a number of small and independent local organisations of unemployed were founded in 1930.

Probably the most important difference in the organisational forms of the unemployment movement in the Twenties and Thirties was the concentration on suburban groups after the turn of the decade. These locals organised small demonstrations in their own centres over specific local grievances as well as joining in the large combined protests. Thus the movement in the Thirties was much more a grass roots movement, and depended to a considerable degree on rank and file initiative and action in protests such as eviction fights and demonstrations over local impositions of the relief system.

After the turn of the decade the protests, as well as the organisation of the movement, became more sustained. Regular weekly street meetings were held in many centres, and deputations and

demonstrations, at both the local and central level, were regular activities.

There was a change in the spirit as well as in the amount of resistance offered, compared with the Twenties. The unemployed more forthrightly asserted that relief was their right, that if the economic system threw them out of work then it was the duty of governments - the upholders of that system - to support them. As more and more men lost their jobs, the view that they had lost them because of their own ineptitude became untenable. The claims of Communists and radical A.L.P. members that capitalism was not only a wrong, but also an unviable system gained greater credence.

An early indication of this change occurred in February 1930: when six vacancies at a city factory were advertised, six hundred youths and men presented themselves. They "stormed the premises and abused the production manager ... who was interviewing applicants and raised such a commotion that police had to be called". They fought the police on the stairs.¹ Five days later, one hundred men answered a small advertisement for a "useful man". Again the rejected applicants refused to leave, and were only ejected by the police with difficulty.²

The interesting feature of these two incidents is their spontaneity: the men were not members of any organisation, they were not exhorted to resist the police or fight for work, they had not gone there with any intention to protest. It was the grievance they themselves felt, it was their own desperation, that drove them to fight.

1. S.M.H., 7/2/30, p.11
2. ibid., 12/2/30, p.10.

The unemployed movement aimed to organise this spirit of desperate resistance, of blind hitting-out at the immediate enemy, into a sustained and united fight for recognition and positive improvement.

COMMUNIST POLICY TOWARDS THE UNEMPLOYED

The Unemployed Workers' Movement was founded by the C.P.A. as one of its 'fraternal organisations' (or, perjoratively, 'fronts'). While most of its members were not Communists, the Party often initiated its general policy and a number of its demonstrations were initiated by the Party. While the branches often had considerable local autonomy, the key positions in the U.W.M. Executive were held by Communists and Communists often held key positions in the branches. In order to understand the history of the U.W.M. the policy and organisation of the C.P.A. of the Thirties must be studied.

In the previous chapter it was noted that although ideological struggles, involving the policy and organisation of the C.P.A. as well as personality conflicts, began in 1928, the old moderate leadership under Kavanagh remained in power until the end of 1929.

Davidson points to the early Thirties as the time when the Australian Communist Party broke finally with traditional Australian socialist policy and organisation and became completely committed to Comintern policies and the Bolshevik democratic centralist system of organisation.³ The policy of the U.W.M. also reflected Comintern policy

3. A. Davidson, op.cit., p.65; also P. Peter, op.cit., p.385.

for the U.W.M. was initially conceived of as part of the M.M.M., which in turn was under the aegis of the Red International of Labor Unions (R.I.L.U.).

At its Sixth Congress in 1928, the Comintern has proclaimed that the world was entering the third phase in the development of post-war capitalism. The temporary stability attained by capitalism after the war was breaking down; over-production was outstripping market capacity and contradictions in imperialism were increasing. Capitalism's attempts to overcome this breakdown by rationalisation would lead to massive unemployment and would not solve the problems of capitalism. The Comintern predicted a series of huge economic slumps which would in turn give rise to a new period of proletarian revolutions and unprecedented class struggle. There would also be a new phase of imperialist wars.⁴

The Comintern also formulated a new strategy - the New Line - to exploit the posited breakdown of capitalism and growing radicalisation of the masses to a revolutionary end:

The New Line is formulated and applied in the period of capitalist rationalisation - in the period when capitalism is tottering, when millions of proletarians are turned upon the street as unemployed, in the period of the revolutionary upsurge of the masses - near the final struggle against capitalism. (5)

With revolution and the end of capitalism on the horizon, Communist Parties should take every opportunity to develop the coming

4. cf. Resolution of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, quoted in E.W. Campbell, History of The Australian Labor Movement: A Marxist Interpretation, Sydney, 1945, p.125.

5. W.W., 28/3/30, p.2.

class struggle by bringing it into the open.

Reformist social democratic parties and labor parties were no longer believed to be simply useless; they were now the chief enemies of the working class for they would work to maintain the capitalist system. They were dubbed "social-fascist". The social fascist parties, which had the support of the majority of the working class, would prevent the early outbreak of revolution, and thus would be supported by the openly capitalist parties. Communist parties must break with the social-fascist parties and show the workers that their true interests lay in revolution.

A central part of Comintern belief was the growing radicalisation of the masses; Communist Parties must utilise this radicalism by establishing a united front from below, organising the masses through factory workshops, mines and fraternal organisations, and thus win the masses (whose essential purity was never doubted) away from reformist trade union leaders and labor politicians.⁶

Although these instructions were delivered to the C.P.A. Christmas Conference in 1928, Kavanagh, believing independent Communist action and opposition to the A.L.P. to be inappropriate in Australia, did not institute them. Pressure from both the Comintern and Australian supporters of the new policy - led by Sharkey and Moxon - grew. At the 1929 Christmas Conference Kavanagh's group lost control of the

6. cf. almost any W.W. editorial of 1930-32; also C.P.A. Central Committee Plenum Theses, June 28-29, 1930, Australia's Part in World Revolution; also C.P.A., The Futility of Reformism. Workers' Revolutionary Road to Freedom, Sydney, 1932.

Party to Moxon, Sharkey and Miles, who were soon joined by Herbert Moore, a Soviet emissary sent out to reorganise the Party in line with Comintern theory.⁷

At its ninth conference (Christmas 1929) the C.P.A. rejected its former 'exceptionalist' policy and resolved: Australian capitalism reflects in all its main aspects the general situation of world capitalism in the present period" - i.e. increasing contradictions and an intensification of the class struggle.

More important perhaps than the change in policy was the adoption of the New Line of organisation and strategy. War was declared on the reformist Labor Party which was an "instrument of the ruling class against the working class". The C.P.A. policy was to strengthen its connections with the masses through the united front from below, to work through factory groups (especially using the M.M.M.) to encourage rank and file working class dissent against the A.L.P. and the trade union bureaucracy. The unions, like the A.L.P., had "become interlocked with the bourgeois state apparatus, with which they function as the initiators of repressive measures against the working class paving the way for fascism."⁸

A letter from the Comintern exhorted: "The main task now is the penetration into the masses and the initiative and organisation of the Party's independent revolutionary leadership in the counter

7. cf. A. Davidson, op.cit., pp.50.51.

8. W.W., 10/1/30, pp.2-3, Resolution of the Ninth Annual Conference, C.P.A.

offensive of the working class. A consistent, clear bolshevik policy guarantees the development of a mass Party and will give the Communist Party the leadership of the working classes".

The C.P.A. entered the new year with optimism and determination. Conference declared that 1930 "promises to be a turning point for the Party. The Federal Labor Government's exposure of the rottenness of reformism, the ruthless capitalist offensive, the international crisis - these produce a situation extraordinarily favourable for the Party's growth". The Party leaders were determined to push the Party back on the revolutionary road and to take full advantage of the radical fervour of the masses which they believed to be growing.⁹

One of the first major tasks the Party set itself was the organisation of the unemployed. In June 1930, the Central Committee stated that unemployment was the "central problem in the present crisis".¹⁰ The existence of severe unemployment was for the Party a key argument to be used against capitalism, and also an incontrovertible sign that capitalism was breaking down.¹¹ The Party saw the organisation of the unemployed not as a transitory measure to help the workless until the economy resurged but as a permanent and revolutionary task under capitalism, for the Party believed that there would be a "permanent army of unemployed" in Australia while capitalism lasted.¹² The Party

9. ibid.

10. C.P.A., C.C. Forum, June 28-29, 1930, Australia's Part in World Revolution, p.35.

11. W.W., 14/2/30, p.2. The issue of Unemployment was "second only to imperialist war as a count in the impeachment of capitalism".

12. ibid., 31/1/30, p.4.

must organise the unemployed to prevent them being used to break down the conditions of employed workers,¹³ and to use them as a revolutionary tool to widen the breach in capitalism.

The preconceptions behind the formation of the U.W.M. were different from those behind other unemployed organisations. Because the C.P.A. believed that unemployment would be permanent under capitalism, it was both necessary and worthwhile to expend a great deal of effort setting up a permanent unemployed organisation. The U.W.M. was also originally intended as a key battalion of the revolutionary army in the class struggle, whereas other unemployed groups were conceived of as some sort of social bandaid.

The Central Executive Committee resolved: "Under the conditions resulting from the growing economic crisis and the increasing leftwing swing of the workers, the demonstrations of the unemployed together with the strike movements will become the starting point for huge class struggles ... Unemployment is not only one of the most striking characteristics of capitalism, but also a powerful factor in intensifying the process of capitalist decline."¹⁴

Central to the C.P.A.'s policy for the organisation of the unemployed was the belief that the employed and unemployed workers should be united for the class struggle, that the capitalists and politicians should not be able to use unemployment to divide the working class and thus to rule it. It was the duty of the C.P.A. to give the unemployed

13. ibid., 14/2/30, p.2. - fear that unemployed will be used as scabs or recruited to the army or police.

14. ibid., 2/3/30, p.2.

movement a "genuine class basis", by uniting the employed and unemployed; to "develop the struggle" by rallying the unemployed; and to "head the struggle", taking it out of the hands of the reformist social fascist A.L.P. and union leaders. The Party rather fulsomely proclaimed: "Only the Communist Party can lead the struggle for the unemployed demands. Only the Communist Party can unite in this fight both the employed and the unemployed The workers of Australia cannot afford to ignore the call of the Communist Party".¹⁵ The Party also stated : " Only the Communist Party offers any permanent solution to unemployment - Revolution!"¹⁶

One of the main theoretical strengths of the U.W.M. was this insistence that the unemployed and employed must be united - though it was extremely difficult to forge this alliance.

As early as February 1930, the Communist Party declared that its "immediate task" was the organisation of a National Unemployed Workers' Movement.¹⁷ The Party's original conception of the unemployed organisation was of a body closely linked with the employed members of the working class. It should be financed by the union movement and "composed of unemployed workers regardless of craft or skill"; it should have "on its councils and committees direct representatives from every factory or workshop."¹⁸

These directives were completely in accordance with the instructions of the R.I.L.U.

15. ibid., 7/3/30, p.2 (editorial).

16. ibid., 21/2/30, p.1.

17. ibid., 14/2/30, p.2.

18. ibid., 31/1/30, p.4.

The R.I.L.U. proclaimed that because of the "tremendous growth of mass unemployment" and the "huge increase in the reserve of cheap labour" the revolutionary trade union movement must make "a drastic change in the tempo, methods and forms of activity among the unemployed", for the unemployed could be used by fascism against the working class.

Sound leadership of economic struggles ... involves the question of getting the unemployed to participate in these struggles in the fight against blacklegging. The supporters of the R.I.L.U. must get to the work of organising the unemployed, linking them up with the men on the jobs, and utilising the period of preparation of economic struggles for laying the basis of solidarity of action.

The unemployed must be drawn into the strike committees and into all commissions formed by the latter. ... On the other hand, the struggle for unemployment relief must become the business of all workers on the job. Most dangerous is a split between the workers in jobs and the workers out of jobs and the pitting of today's unemployed against the unemployed of tomorrow ...

The whole proletariat must be roused to fight for the Seven hour day and for the maintenance of the unemployed at the expense of the employers and the State. Thus the most important tasks of the R.I.L.U. adherents in connection with the rapid growth of mass unemployment and the sharpening of the class struggle are: - To rally the unemployed on the basis of a class programme; the welding of the unemployed with the men on the job; the constant defence of the interests of the unemployed, and the winning of the unemployed for active participation in economic and political struggles. 19

Davidson shows how, by complete adherence to Comintern policy, the C.P.A.'s line tended to become divorced from the reality of the

19. ibid., 18/4/30, p.2 (From a series of R.I.L.U. articles 'World Economic Crisis Maturing. New Line in Workers' Struggles').

Australian situation and thus failed to accomplish the very aims of mass support that the Party was striving for.

The R.I.L.U.'s directives, and hence the C.P.A.'s initial plans, for unemployed organisation were fairly unrealistic, given the nature of the Australian working class and the Australian situation.²⁰

The emphasis of the C.P.A.'s original plan for the U.W.M. was strongly weighted to the protection of the employed workers; the primary aim was to prevent scabbery by the unemployed rather than to fight for the workless. The factory representatives were obviously intended to be a powerful in the unemployed committees.

This emphasis was largely based on the Comintern's premise that a new wave of strikes was imminent - hence the necessity to prevent the unemployed from scabbing during employed workers' struggles. This was in fact virtually irrelevant in Australia, for during the Depression industrial militancy waned. So the organisation of the unemployed onto workers' committees was not seen to be necessary by the employed. As in the Twenties, most workers lucky enough to have a job did not bother much with the unemployed movement.

However, from its inception the U.W.M. reoriented itself more and more into an organisation aimed at the improvement of the position of the unemployed, instead of being the unemployed wing of the workers' revolutionary army. Though the initial change of direction occurred virtually immediately it was formed, the process of reorientation

20. (e.g. The article just quoted included R.I.L.U. instructions about capitalism's transference of unemployed to the colonies).

was gradual and somewhat fluctuating. At certain times and in certain areas U.W.M. leaders tried to use the U.W.M. as a propagandising and active revolutionary force, but the unemployed were usually unmoved by calls for revolutionary fervour, and indeed such calls often lost support. So the U.W.M. increasingly concentrated on the immediate needs of the unemployed, and on winning the rank and file unemployed to a fighting programme that suited their grievances and their level of political consciousness. By the time of ^{the} foundation of the United Front Councils in 1932 this reorientation of the unemployed movement was fairly complete. Although the unemployed movement remained in the conception of C.P.A. stalwarts and some U.W.M. members a potential revolutionary tool, it was for most of its supporters simply the most militant political self-help organisation of the unemployed.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT'S POLICY IN REGARD TO UNEMPLOYMENT
AND THE UNEMPLOYED IN EARLY 1930.

In early 1930 the C.P.A. continually complained that Australian workers were unaware of the importance of growing unemployment and that no strong organisation of the unemployed had been established²¹. It added that the trade unions had given a certain amount of assistance through the Labor Council but "in the main it can definitely be said that the barriers of craft prejudice have been deliberately fostered, thus actually sabotaging the unemployed movement. Each craft union tries to keep its unemployed members apart from other unemployed workers." 22

21. e.g. W.W., 31/1/30, p.4.

22. ibid., 7/2/30, p.1.

This analysis of the unemployed movement of the Twenties would, on the evidence presented in the last chapter, appear to have some justification. The O.B.U.U. suffered from apathy and division; though at times it was able to mount decisive protests it never really achieved a viable organisational base. At the end of 1929 the N.S.W. O.B.U.U. had branches in Sydney and the mining areas but there were no local organisations. The movement was dominated by the leaders and there was little grass roots participation; moreover, the organisation was firmly under the control of the trade union elite, working through the Labor Councils. In January and February 1930 the O.B.U.U. was still represented on the Labor Council by Brown, whose organisers' pay was dependent upon him carrying out the Council policy.

The C.P.A.'s claims that Australian workers and the union movement were not aware enough of the gravity of the situation were also fairly accurate, for the labor movement generally believed that what problems did exist could be speedily remedied by the Labor Government.

New South Wales trade union leaders were perhaps less optimistic that Scullin would find a solution than were the Victorian officials Louis deals with, and they did in early 1930 increasingly talk of crisis, though this was still mainly of the artificial crisis caused by belligerent and greedy employers. The New South Wales union movement had been given an immediate cause to doubt the power of the Labor Government, for Theodore's promise that Labor would promptly open the mines had not been fulfilled: indeed, it was after Labor's election that Norman Brown had been killed at Rothbury. Also, the New South Wales

Labor Council was, officially at least, to the left of the general union line. It was still affiliated to the R.I.L.U. through the Pan Pacific Secretariat of Trade Unions,²³ though it was soon to drop this connection. There was a Communist fraction of some twenty delegates on Labor Council;²⁴ the Communist delegates called themselves the Vigilance Committee.

(Despite these certain left wing influences on Council, the Council was strongly aligned with the Inner Group of the New South Wales A.L.P. and Lang could count on its support.)

So the Labor Council at times mouthed, even if it did not fully endorse, the belief that there was an insoluble world capitalist crisis.

The Labor Council continued to assert that unemployment and privation were caused by employers' efforts to rationalise industry by a general attack on wages, hours and living conditions:

The present conspiracy of the capitalist class and its politicians is aimed at the rationalisation of industry, thereby creating a huge army of unemployed and starving workers, with the aid of which the employing class aim to beat down the wages and conditions of the worker in employment. 25

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23. At the 1930 A.C.T.U. Congress, N.S.W. union leaders unsuccessfully pressed the A.C.T.U. to affiliate with the Pan Pacific Secretariat (S.M.H., 28/2/30, p.11; 5/3/30, p.16).
24. P. Peter, op.cit., p.411.
25. Combined Meeting of Trade Union Executives and Labor Council Delegates, T.L.C.M., 3/4/30, p.623.

Despite this fear of the threat posed by unemployment, the attitude and policy of the Labor Council towards the unemployed in early 1930 was quite inadequate and unrealistic considering that at least 15% of trade union members were unemployed,²⁶ with the proportion increasing rapidly.

In January 1930, the Labor Council drew up a lengthy Draft Scheme of Unemployment Insurance to be submitted to other Labor Councils for endorsement. The preamble declared:

Unemployment is an ever-present and ever-increasing risk of industry under the present competitive system. Unassisted unemployment and unregulated employment are an outrage of humanity, a denial of man's right to live ... Since unemployment is an essential feature of industrial conditions in capitalist industry, it is the duty of the government to recognise the fact and make due provision for unemployment.

It pointed out that "the payment of unemployment benefit mitigates the worst effects of unemployment, but does not touch the causes".

The scheme provided for a Joint Industrial Council to compile information and plans regarding unemployment, an unemployment insurance fund to provide the benefits on the basis of the basic wage, and a plan for the institution of public works. The scheme was comprehensive and well formulated; it was to be representative of the government and employers as well as the employed.²⁷

26. cf. Trade Union Estimates, Chapter 1.

27. T.L.C.M., 9/1/30, p.594.

Throughout the Depression the labor movement was to draw up and press for a comprehensive national unemployment scheme.²⁸

In the current situation, however, with State Governments and employers calling for economy, with unemployment soaring, it was simply too late to ensure workers against unemployment, and the elaboration of plans for insurance often diverted energy and time that could have been better spent organising the unemployed. It is interesting that the original suggestion that the Sydney Labor Council draw up an insurance plan was put forward by Garden as an alternative when the O.B.U.U. asked the Council to call an unemployment conference in conjunction with the A.C.T.U.²⁹

The Labor Council, even when admitting the severity of the crisis, was firmly wedded to the belief that insurance benefits for the workless should be its major fighting policy regarding unemployment.

In Australia, we are gripped in the throes of an unemployment crisis worse than anything in the memory of most living people. This is allied to a financial crisis ...

With the curtailment of loan expenditure and the 'economy' campaign by State and Federal Governments, the unemployment crisis will become more and more acute. Every pound of pressure of which the trade union movement is capable should be put upon the Federal Government to secure due provision being made for the unemployed masses in the form of an adequate measure of unemployment insurance, along the lines submitted by this Council to the A.C.T.U. 30

28. e.g. Both the Newcastle Trades Hall Council and the Barrier Industrial Council in early 1930 pressed the Federal Government to introduce immediately a system of unemployment insurance cf. Newcastle Morning Herald, 14/2/30, p.2.

29. T.L.C.M., 17/10/29, p.571.

30. Labor Council Bulletin, No. 66, 27/2/30, p.1.

The A.C.T.U. also provided little stimulus for organisation adequate to the situation. Louis and Turner write that/ the onset of the crisis the A.C.T.U.'s "immediate concern was the relief of unemployment"³¹ at Yet the A.C.T.U. gave little active support to the unemployed themselves. Indeed, at the A.C.T.U. Conference held in Melbourne in February-March 1930 there were signs that the militant unemployed found the A.C.T.U. too moderate and vacillating.

A 'provisional committee' of unemployed called a meeting of unemployed to wait on Congress on February 26th. The A.C.T.U. President stated "it had been suggested that the meeting was arranged to make a hostile demonstration against the Congress, but steps would be taken to prevent the business being interfered with".³² Several hundred unemployed marched to the Trades Hall, to find it guarded by a "strong force of police". Congress only agreed to hear a delegation of five unemployed after some debate and many delegates left the chamber when the delegation was accepted.³³ One delegate stated that "the Congress was pinning its faith on politicians and ... politicians would not achieve anything. The emancipation of the workers must be brought about by the workers themselves." He and another delegate complained about the A.C.T.U.'s failure to invite the unemployed to the conference and asked the Congress to take up the fight for the unemployed.³⁴

31. L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, *op.cit.*, p.38.

32. *S.M.H.*, 26/2/30, p.16.

33. *ibid.*, 27/2/30, p.15.

34. *All Australian Trade Union Congress*, Fourth Session held in Trades Hall, Melbourne, Wednesday, 26th February, 1930, pp.1-2.

The A.C.T.U. accepted the report of the Unemployment and Immigration Committee (headed by Garden) which proclaimed that "unemployment arises from and is inherent in the Capitalist system, which is based on production for profit and not on human needs. Only the socialisation of industry ... can remove the cause of unemployment ... The primary duty of the Australian Governments, Federal and State, is the provision of adequate food, clothing and shelter in default of remunerative employment for any unit of the community able and willing for work".³⁵

The A.C.T.U. endorsed a scheme of national unemployment insurance;³⁶ it proposed that the Federal Government strongly protect Australian industries and begin a public works programme.³⁷ and requested the Government "to immediately proceed to use the credit of the Commonwealth for the purpose of finding work or sustenance for all who are willing to but unable to find work".³⁸ It resolved that Labor Councils should devote special attention to the organisation and welfare of the unemployed but no actual strategy was suggested for the implementation of these resolutions. The A.C.T.U. leaders did indeed "pin their faith upon politicians" rather than on the organised strength of the unemployed.

35. quoted by L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, op.cit., p.43 (Report delivered 27th February. Minutes for this day missing from Mitchell Library Q331.8806-9).

36. ibid., 12th Session.

37. L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, op.cit., p.43.

38. All Australian Trade Union Congress, 13th Session, 4/3/30, p.2.

THE BEGINNING OF MILITANCY - INTERNATIONAL
UNEMPLOYED DAY

The first important display of the organised militancy of the unemployed in 1930 occurred on International Unemployed Day³⁹ - February 26th.

This demonstration requires detailed analysis because it highlights the different attitudes to the unemployed movement of the Labor Council and the Communist Party, it shows the unemployed workers' organisational weakness as well as their determination and it shows the new no-nonsense attitude of the police and the Bavin Government.

The Comintern had declared February 26th to be 'International Unemployed Day' - a day when employed and unemployed workers around the world should demonstrate their solidarity and protest against unemployment.⁴⁰ The C.P.A. called for mass rallies. In Sydney there was to be a march at 3.0 p.m. and another rally and a torchlight procession at 7.30 p.m.; both demonstrations were to assemble outside the Trades Hall.⁴¹

The labor Council was also concerned with the organisation of the demonstrations⁴² though took, it would seem, very little active part, especially in the second demonstration. The Labor Council's actions seem to have been directed towards maintaining a peaceful and legal

39. The usual abbreviation of I.U.D. will be used here.

40. W.W., 7/2/30, p.1.

41. ibid., 21/2/30, p.1.

42. S.M.H., 27/2/30, p.11, inaccurately described the demonstrations as "organised by the Labor Council"

protest. When the Labor Council's request for permission to hold the processions was refused, the Labor Council left the leadership of the processions to the Communists, and contented itself with sending a prestigious deputation of union leaders (including the President and Secretary of the Council) to Parliament House.⁴³

By 2.0 p.m. on the afternoon of Wednesday, 26th, six hundred unemployed had gathered outside the Trades Hall. Communist speakers told them that they could wait there for the return of a parliamentary deputation or could defy the law and march. The crowd decided to march. It broke through a police cordon and marched uneventfully along the footpath to Parliament House.⁴⁴ Here, according to the Workers Weekly, "the police distinguished themselves by provocative behaviour". The charge would seem fairly justified. When the Labor Council deputation tried to interview Bavin the police refused to allow them into the precincts of the House and allegedly assaulted them.⁴⁵ When the crowd "failed to disband" the police, despite the demonstrators' previous peacefulness "charged them. There was a wild scamper during which two arrests were made". The crowd later reassembled in the Domain where it was addressed by Communists; one man was arrested there for indecent language.⁴⁶

At 7.30 that night a crowd of a thousand met outside the Trades Hall, where "a well-known Communist in a fiery speech informed the meeting that there would be trouble if they marched. It is up to you to decide boys, but if you march I march too .

43. S.M.H., 27/2/30, p.11.

44. S.M.H., 27/2/30, p.11, and W.W., 7/3/30, p.1. The S.M.H. does not mention the police cordon.

45. W.W., 7/3/30, p.1.

46. S.M.H., 27/2/30, p.11

A voice from the crowd shouted Good!

"Strong reinforcements" of police assembled at the corner of Sussex and Goulburn Streets as the men began to line up, singing the Red Flag.

As the procession started to move off towards George Street the police, at an order from their officers, charged at them with batons drawn. Most of the demonstrators scattered in all directions. A number however, came into contact with the police and blows were exchanged. Blue metal was thrown at the police and five of their number were injured. In one case it was alleged that a 'knuckleduster' was used on a policeman.

Yet more reinforcements of police arrived and the crowd dispersed.⁴⁷

Six people, including some Communists (one of whom was a woman) were arrested and variously charged with indecent language, riotous behaviour, taking part in an unauthorised procession and inflicting grievous bodily harm. One of the arrested had to be sent to hospital.

Probably the most salient feature of the demonstrations - and especially the night-time one - was the new determination of the police that unemployed demonstrations should be firmly controlled, or, if possible, prevented. It is hard to see this new 'tough' police policy as arising from anything other than directives from the Bavin Government.

When Bavin sent the police into the coalfields in December 1929 he allocated to them a new offensive role - that of the armed executive of Bavin Government policy. When Lang succeeded Bavin he continued to use

47. ibid., W.W., 7/3/30, p.1. gives essentially the same report.

the police in this way to squash protest by the unemployed.

The C.P.A. claimed: "the acute anxiety of the ruling classes is shown in the violently repressive measures of the State forces ... The governing class are forced at all costs to prevent agitation, organisation and demonstration by and for the workers".⁴⁸

(Towards the end of the decade the Communist Party traced "the long campaign of bashing, intimidation and provocation of the working class" by the Police Force since 1929 when McKay, Fergusson and Lynch, who had helped crush the I.W.W., were promoted. "The revolver and the baton have become an insignia of office". The Party claimed that the police force was not neutral, that its policy was that of the Government⁴⁹. Though this view is clearly biased, events such as the 1931 eviction battles are evidence in its favour).

Although police charged at demonstrators in the Twenties - the fight outside the Treasury in November 1927 was similar to the fight outside Parliament on I.U.D., 1930 - such action tended to be exceptional. After early 1930 it became the general rule.

The Herald report of I.U.D. (which surely cannot be accused of left-wing bias) shows that the police attacked the evening demonstrators without provocation. The Sydney Trades Hall is situated only a few yards down Goulburn Street from the Sussex Street corner so the march could not have really started when the police broke it up at this corner.

48. W.W., 7/3/30, p.1.

49. R. McWilliams, Our Police Force, published by Sydney District Committee, C.P.A., Sydney, no date (about 1937?) especially pp.15 and 18.

This is supported by court evidence. One of the arrested claimed that "the conduct of the police caused a panic among the crowd and led to any disturbance that occurred ... At the Trades Hall he was arrested following a baton charge by the police".⁵⁰

Another defendant charged with "taking part in an unauthorised procession" maintained that there was no such procession. The magistrate appears to have agreed, for he found the defendant guilty instead of having gone to the Trades Hall "in anticipation of the holding of the procession".⁵¹

Another man faced with the same charge said that he went to the Trades Hall to take part in a procession "but there was no procession and I'm only sorry there was not".⁵²

(Police questioning during these cases was provcatively aimed at alienating the defendants from the magistrate. For example:

Sergeant Hart: 'Are you a Communist'?
Defendant: 'Yes'.
'Do you believe in the Almighty'?
"No".
'Do you believe in law and order'?
'Not this sort of law and order'.
'Well what do you term this'?
'More law than order'.

The magistrate "deplored the fact that a young man ... should express" such opinions. "The courts were founded" , he said, "on the best traditions of British justice".⁵³)

50. S.M.H., 28/2/30, p.8.
51. ibid., 14/3/30, p.7., Fined £2 or 4 days.
52. ibid., 21/3/30, p.7., fined £2 or 7 days.
53. ibid., 14/3/30, p.7; cf. also 21/3/30, p.7 - Defendant and witnesses asked if they believed in the Almighty and law and order, and if they were born in Australia.

Another noticeable feature of the day was the ready participation of the unemployed workers. Both demonstrations were, by standards set in the Twenties, very large.

There were also demonstrations in other parts of the State. Successful rallies led by Communist speakers were held at Paxton, Bellbird, Cessnock, Weston and Kurri Kurri.⁵⁴ Rallies were also held in other States.

The C.P.A. saw the I.U.D. demonstrations around Australia as confirmation of the correctness of the Party's analysis of the intensifying struggle between workers and capitalists.⁵⁵ The demonstrations marked "a further stage in the development of the class struggle and of the rousing of the masses to political consciousness". They showed "that the masses will respond to the Party's call ... The beginning of mass resistance, which, with proper organisation, can be further developed and turned to the offensive, is demonstrated".⁵⁶

While these Communist claims were, even judging from the events of the day and without exercising historical hindsight, rather over-euphoric, the demonstrators did respond to the militant call of the Communists rather than to the legalistic action of the Labor Council. They did decide to march despite the ban on the procession. And some resisted when attacked.

Despite these signs of determination, however, the I.U.D. demonstrations pointed up the typical weaknesses of the unemployed movement.

54. W.W., 7/3/30, p.1.

55. ibid., 2/3/30, p.2.

56. ibid., 7/3/30, p.1.

The crowd was not well organised and was not militant enough to confront the police when attacked. At both demonstrations the crowd panicked and scattered when charged and was easily dispersed by the police. The pattern established in this demonstration was to be repeated again and again: there was a definite level of militancy beyond which the crowd would not go. The number of demonstrators well exceeded that of the police, but the superior organisation and weapons of the police, together with the weight of authority they represented, were sufficient to intimidate most of the crowd.

The C.P.A. admitted that there were "certain unsatisfactory features" in the demonstrations.⁵⁷ Because of its belief in the growing radicalisation and the inherent ideological rightness of the working class the Party attributed the errors to the incorrect line of the demonstrations' leaders - both its own members and the union officials.

The Central Executive Committee complained that the Party's organisational preparations for I.U.D. had been "at a poor level". Indeed its complaints are quite damning: "Although preparations were being made everywhere ... none were completely in conformity with the Party line." The C.E.C.'s instructions to form permanent committees of employed and unemployed workers had not been carried out. "No committee had been formed in Sydney". Leaflets were badly distributed, not enough advertisements were chalked up. Only one factory meeting was held in Sydney after the 24th, though some were held before. The ideological preparation had been "equally poor".

57. ibid.

The conduct of the Sydney demonstration was signalled out for special criticism: here "serious 'Right Wing' errors" were revealed. "Reliance on the trade union bureaucracy was a salient feature of the party activity in Sydney, in spite of the fact that the bureaucracy ... was actively sabotaging the Party's activity."⁵⁸

(This accusation was clearly a veiled attack by the Party's new leaders on Kavanagh and his supporters among whose errors was 'Right Opportunism'. Kavanagh and some of his followers still had considerable power, for they had been elected to the Sydney and New South Wales committees of the Party; their influential position worried the new leaders.⁵⁹)

This charge of reliance on the union leaders seems largely unjustified: Communists were to the fore in both demonstrations.

The C.E.C. concluded its analysis of I.U.D. by re-emphasising that the Party's most important task was to win the masses.

To this end, there began a concerted drive to organise the unemployed.

By April a vigorous campaign to organise the Sydney unemployed into local district committees was under way and the Party was claiming to have a greater say in the policies of the unemployed. "In the working class suburbs meetings are arranged in three or four of the most convenient spots". Communists would chalk up advertisements for the meetings. "At these

58. *ibid.*, 2/2/30, p.2. The Labor Council had called a march on the Wednesday before I.U.D., allegedly in an attempt to undermine the I.U.D. march by winning the unemployed to the Labor Council; the Council had also banned the use of torches in the planned torchlight procession.

59. cf. A. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.51.

meetings local unemployed volunteers are called for to form a district committee".⁶⁰ By the end of April there were a few committees in Sydney and others at Port Kembla, Wollongong, Lithgow and Broken Hill at least".⁶¹

The Party directed that the following slogans be popularised:

- (1) Against capitalist rationalisation; against dismissals, for a forty hour week.
- (2) Unemployment benefit, equivalent to full wages, for all unemployed working men and women during the whole period of unemployment
- (3) Full pay for workers on short time.

"These slogans must be supplemented by concrete demands which have special importance for each state and locality, and which pay sufficient regard to the various strata - women, young workers and agricultural workers".⁶²

To further the mass organisation of the unemployed a conference was held in Sydney on April 26th. It was at this conference that the U.W.M. was officially launched. *Am*

COMMUNIST PARTY 'FRONT' POLICY

Before describing this conference and the subsequent organisation of the U.W.M., Communist policy regarding 'fraternals' should be studied.

60. W.W. , 11/4/30, p.4.
61. ibid. , 25/4/30, p.4.
62. ibid. , 18/4/30, p.3.

Comintern policy regarding the function of the 'fronts', 'fraternals', or 'non-Party mass organisations' as they were variously called was quite specific. They were to be "nominally independent but controlled by the Party to serve as a bridge to the masses".⁶³

Davidson explains:

As a front was always supposed to be the result of spontaneous popular pressure for such an organisation, the communists were to keep their role as initiators carefully hidden. When a front had acquired a sufficient number of members, the communist 'fraction' in the organisation would pick out potential recruits for the party and enrol them. It would also ensure that the front organisation supported policies which the communist movement supported

... Prominent persons from outside the Party would be recruited onto the Executive.

Although communists were usually in a minority on the executive, they managed to keep control of the fronts in nearly all cases without resorting to underhand methods and to work 'democratically'. Since the members of the executive were sympathetic with the aims of the movement, there was a general consensus about policy between communists and others from the outset. The key full time positions, such as secretary and treasurer, were usually in communist hands. At meetings of the executive, the party 'fraction' was nearly always present, often forming a majority, while the others only appeared occasionally. The communists worked as a disciplined body and prepared their proposals beforehand; therefore, their proposals were seldom rejected. 64

The description already given of the forming of the first unemployed committees shows these tactics: Communists arranged the meetings

63. H. Pelling, The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile, London, 1958, p.38. Cited by A. . Davidson, op.cit., p.55.

64. A. . Davidson, op.cit., pp.55-56.

and called for local volunteers to form a committee, onto which a Party member, or a few members, were usually elected because they would have been prominent speakers at the meetings.

Whilst this sounds highly manipulative, the Communist leaders specifically directed that the organisations should be democratic and not part of the Communist Party. A private directive to the C.P.A.'s departments and nuclei regarding the formation of the U.W.M. and other fraternals concluded:

It is important to note that none of these organisations are Communist. Each has a specific role to fulfil; each has to be made into a broad non-party mass organisation. Party members work inside each as fractions - we do not aim to and repudiate attempts at mechanical control, i.e. Party members capturing all executive positions and 'dictating' the policy of the organisation. We must win the confidence of the members by being the best, most intelligent and persistent workers within. If our members are elected to office on this basis then we endorse it - otherwise they must continue and (sic) 65 rank and file members working to guide the organisation along the channels of the class struggle. ... 66

Davidson's description of how a front functioned is not completely applicable to the U.W.M. The U.W.M. did not have a 'window-dressed' central executive; its top hierarchy was indeed rather anonymous and shadowy. Names of National and State Secretaries appear (and often change) but the names of other executive members are rarely given. Those whose

65. obviously 'as'.

66. To the Departments and Nuclei of No. (?) District. (Title of pamphlet is partly obliterated), no date. (Clearly very early in Thirties because of the names of the fronts mentioned.)

names are mentioned seem, almost without exception, to be Communists. The U.W.M. was also different in having such a widespread active local branch organisation. It was here rather than at the top that both membership democracy and Party fraction work functioned.

One of the most important questions that must be asked about the U.W.M. (and the subsequent United Front Council movement and the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers) is to what extent it was a Communist - dominated 'front', and to what extent it was a democratic rank and file mass organisation expressing the genuine grievances and conscious demands of the unemployed.

Because this thesis hopes to reach towards the history of the inarticulate majority of unemployed workers by studying the beliefs and actions of the articulate or active minority, it is vital to determine to what extent this minority was simply the blind puppet of a tiny Communist elite, and to what extent its own consciousness directed its actions.

No simple answer can be given.

The C.P.A. certainly always aimed to use the organisation to win mass support, to radicalise the workers and guide them towards class struggle.

However, the Party's control over the U.W.M. was far from absolute.

The U.W.M. had so many local branches that complete control could not be effected. There were not enough Party members with enough time to devote to "fraction work" - i.e. to working as active unobtrusive ginger

groups controlling the locals.⁶⁷ So a number of branches, especially country branches, did function without much Party direction. This led to defections, breakaways, and the changing of the Party's line. The fact that the Party leaders continually complained that Party members were not active enough in directing the U.W.M. and that the unemployed movement was getting out of the hands of the Party shows that a considerable amount of independence existed in the organisation.

Not only were there differences in the amount of Party leadership in different areas, but the Party's influence over the U.W.M. changed at different times. Davidson points out that Communists sometimes lost control of a front.⁶⁸ While the Party never lost complete control of the U.W.M. - its domination of the central hierarchy was always fairly strong - it did suffer losses and reversals at the branch level. The nature of the C.P.A.'s unemployed organisation changed considerably between 1930 and 1933; this change was mainly directed by attempts to bring the organisation more into line with what the unemployed wanted and needed, for the Party realised that if the U.W.M. did not satisfy the unemployed the Party would lose all power in the unemployed movement.

67. There is evidence of this in Kavanagh's Diary. e.g. 16/6/32 re unemployed meeting at Kogarah: "Very few Party members were present many of them having gone to the pictures"; 27/6/32. "Fraction work is very slack. Fraction work in the unemployed meeting this afternoon was very bad"; cf. also 22/6/32; 7/7/32; 18/7/32; 25/7/32; 5/8/32.

68. A. . Davidson, op.cit., p.56.

I will try to show the changes in the nature and extent of Communist control and influence over the U.W.M. as its history unfolds, rather than attempting here an absolute answer to the question of Communist control.

I would emphasise that the fact of Communist influence or even domination does not mean that the movement was not genuinely representative of the grievances of unemployed workers. The term "Communist front" is strongly perjorative; it suggests, among other things, that the non-Communist supporters of the "front" are blind dupes of cunning Soviet agitators and provocateurs who press demands that the supporters do not really endorse.

The establishment press and Nationalist (and often Labor) politicians in the Thirties portrayed the unemployed who participated in U.W.M. or other militant protests as such dupes.⁶⁹ This is yet another expression of the comfort of a conspiracy theory in a time of crisis: Australian workers do not endorse extreme radicalism (the argument goes); it is simply that the agitators put words into their mouths. To admit that the unemployed really meant their militant protests would have been to admit that they must have had deep and genuine grievances; and that might force an admission that there was something wrong with the society.

I cannot believe that the thousands who joined the U.W.M. were all gullible and stupid, that they did not know that Communists were

69. e.g. The Red Invasion (pamphlet reprinted from a series of articles in The Argus, May 16-22, 1933) especially p.1. The Bulletin, 22/1/30, pp.8-9; Newcastle Morning Herald, 10/2/30, p.4.

the initiators of their movement.⁷⁰ The U.W.M. programme in fact rallied the unemployed to fight against their daily grievances rather than for revolution. The unemployed's interests coincided with the policy of the Communist Party; the C.P.A. was the only body to offer firm and militant leadership to the unemployed. So the unemployed willingly followed the Party's lead. To believe that they were dupes is to subscribe to the elitist view of history, to see the inarticulate, the powerless, as a 'mass', with no ability to think or act for themselves. Given the dependance of Australian workers on the initiative of leaders, and the demoralisation caused by unemployment, it is not surprising that the unemployed allowed their platform of demands to be formulated by a politically educated organised elite such as the Communist Party. This does not mean that the rank and file who supported that platform did not understand it or feel those grievances themselves.

There was, finally, a powerful restraint upon the C.P.A.'s ability to promulgate its own demands rather than those of the rank and file of the U.W.M.; this check lay in the desires of the unemployed themselves. The Party increasingly realised that it could not go far to the left of the unemployed without losing their support. The Party had to moderate its policy to express what the unemployed, rather than the Party leaders, desired: for example, because most of the unemployed wanted relief work, the Party had to drop its complete opposition to 'Work for the Dole' and organise against specific injustices of the relief work system.

70. Communists at this time were very open about their Party membership as the open proclamation of membership was believed to be a radicalising force.

The relationship between the C.P.A. and the U.W.M. was, then, one of reciprocal influence; while the Party stirred the unemployed to greater activism and to more radical demands, the unemployed forced the party to moderate its policy towards unemployment to fit in with their desires.

THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1930

There was little publicity given to the April 26th Unemployed Conference and there is no record of how many delegates attended, which organisations they represented or who were elected to all the executive positions in the U.W.M.⁷¹ It is probable that the conference was fairly small and was attended only by delegates of the unemployed committees that had been set up after I.U.D. Herbert Moore later stated that the conference "was of tremendous importance for the working class, not because of the numbers participating, but because of its break with the past".⁷²

The C.P.A.'s Central Executive Committee reported that the conference "rejected the unsound O.B.U.U. controlled by the Brown-Millar faction connected with the Trades Hall right wing leadership, inasmuch as the O.B.U. functioned only to isolate the unemployed from the employed." It also "recognised the specific role of the Scullin Labor Government, and with irrefutable facts pointed out that unemployment had increased at a tremendous rate since the Scullin Government took office".⁷³

71. e.g. No advertisements for it in W.W., 11/4/30, 18/4/30, or 25/4/30; no report on it in W.W. 2/5/30/ no mention in L.D., 28/4/30 or in T.L.C.M.

72. W.W., 25/7/30, p.2.

73. ibid, 9/5/30, p.3.

This denunciation of the 'social fascists' shows that there was a strong Communist influence over the Conference, as do the names of Executive members mentioned - J. Ryan, N. Jeffery, J. Sylvester, W. Beverley, F. Wills and C. Monson.⁷⁴

The Party's C.E.C., however, complained that there were a number of serious "shortcomings" regarding the conference; these show that the Party did not dominate the conference - at least, not to its own satisfaction:

The gravest of these is the failure to stress the achievements of the U.S.S.R. in overcoming the unemployment problem, and the world-wide capitalist offensive against the workers' and peasants' government of the Soviet Union

Also, the conference "did not deal at all with the specific problems of the women and youths in industry".

"These shortcomings must frankly be attributed to the failure of the Communist fraction within the conference to function properly. These defects were primarily organisational though this in turn was due to still lingering right tendencies, primarily due to an under-estimation of the willingness of the masses to struggle and to respond to revolutionary leadership."⁷⁵

These 'right tendencies' would no doubt have been manifested by J. Ryan, Kavanagh's 'lieutenant'. An interesting example of the Party's

74. *ibid.*, 11/7/30, p.4. Monson was here described as State Secretary, U.W.M. These men were all members of the C.P.A., except for the recently-expelled Ryan. A Mrs. S. Morrison was also on the Executive. J. Ryan should not be confused with M. (Mick) Ryan, who was also one of the Communist leaders of the U.W.M.

75. *ibid.*, 9/5/30, p.3.

lack of complete control over the U.W.M, is that J. Ryan was elected to its Executive although he had been expelled by the Party early in the year.⁷⁶

(Indeed, the U.W.M. was to continue to have among its leaders Communists who opposed the official Party line.)

The U.W.M. claimed to have "liquidated" the "Brown-Millar-controlled O.B.U.U.". This organisation had been reorganised drastically (and, it would seem, fairly democratically) about a month before the U.W.M. Conference and Brown had temporarily lost his privileged position. It would seem that the Communist unemployed leaders were strongly involved in this reorganisation, and that this may be what was meant by the "liquidation". It is probable that the Labor Council wanted the O.B.U.U. to be reorganised in order to forestall and undermine the April 26th conference.⁷⁷

It is rather hard to follow the history of the Labor Council's unemployed organisation, especially to discern the behind-the-scene political affiliation and manipulation of the organisation. The Labor Council records still tend to be elliptical. The Communist press was so determined to fulminate against the sabotage of the social fascists that its information regarding the O.B.U.U. is distorted and sometimes completely false. While Garden and the majority of Council delegates ultimately supported the Council's unemployed organisation against the U.W.M., the U.W.M. was at times allowed representation on Council and on

76. cf. A. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.51.

77. In July, the Council again called an unemployed conference just before the U.W.M. Conference in order to forestall it.

Committees, and sometimes won over the majority of Council members in support of its demands.

In March 1930, the Labor Council Executive recommended "that a mass meeting of all unemployed workers be held to elect a President, Vice President, and Executive Committee, and one delegate to Council, and that a set of rules be drafted for the unemployed".

Despite this new democratic method of organisation, Council was obviously determined to continue to control the organisation through control of the movement's most important functionary

"The organiser shall continue to be appointed by Council and to act as Secretary of the Unemployed and he shall furnish a weekly report to the Secretary of Council. Further that the present Organiser, Comrade Brown, shall continue to act conditional on the following:

- 1) that the money is available
- 2) that he continues to carry out the policy of the Council
- 3) that his period of office shall be no longer than the end of the current financial year, unless re-elected by Council."

When the recommendation was presented to Council for ratification Jeffery and Oliver (two Communist delegates) moved an amendment that the Secretary-Organiser should also be elected by the mass meeting. Council decided, however, by 62 votes to 22, against the amendment, and Garden's plan was upheld.⁷⁸

(No sign of disruption appears in the Council minutes, but the argument became so heated that a "hand-to-hand fight" erupted when "youths interjected and abused the President". The Council decided that in future

78. T.L.C.M., 13/3/30, p.613.

only members of affiliated unions be allowed to attend meetings.⁷⁹)

Despite Council's support for Brown something strange happened at the next meeting, held one day after the O.B.U.U. mass meeting. The mass meeting had appointed Comrade Monson as delegate to Council ; when Brown asked the Labor Council if he was still an officer and delegate to Council the Chairman ruled that his office had ceased when Council funds became unavailable, and hence he could not sit as a delegate.⁸⁰

(The Herald claimed that Brown had been expelled from the U.U. for "inactivity".⁸¹ ; by May, however, Brown was again presenting motions to Council as, it would seem, one of the two unemployed delegates.⁸²)

It seems then that the C.P.A.'s claim that by April it had a greater say in the policies of the unemployed were true, for the Party appears to have established some control over the O.B.U.U. in the figure of Monson,⁸³ as well as establishing the U.W.M. It would seem that between March and July 1930 the C.P.A. was trying to use its position in the O.B.U.U. to achieve a merging of that organisation into the U.W.M., and in the process to have the U.W.M. established as the recognised unemployed organisation on Council.

79. Newcastle Morning Herald, 14/3/30, p.8.

80. T.L.C.M., 20/3/30, p.616

81. S.M.H., 25/3/30, p.12. (Obviously the O.B.U.U. is meant).

82. e.g. T.L.C.M., 22/5/30, p.639; 29/5/30, p.641.

83. Monson was clearly a Communist - he voted with the Communists on Council and was approved of by the W.W. He was described in May as General Secretary of the U.W.M. as well as State Secretary. However, his name does not appear again after July 1930, either in the T.L.C.M. or W.W.

It had a small and temporary success. For example, when Brown called on Council to form a committee to organise a free speech campaign - Bavin had been preventing street meetings - Jeffery amended that the Committee be composed of delegates from the Labor Council, the C.P.A. and the U.W.M. The amendment was carried 46 votes to 36.⁸⁴

In a more open bid for power a letter was sent by the unemployed "withdrawing S.R. Brown as a delegate^{and} submitting the name of S. Sylvester". Monson supported this against the claim of Brown and his supporters that Brown had not been withdrawn by the unemployed rank and file.⁸⁵ The matter was referred to the Executive which resolved that Brown and Monson should continue as delegates from the O.B.U.U. "until a scheme is drawn up in conformity with the policy of the A.C.T.U.", to establish a new unemployed organisation. Garden was obviously determined by now to reassert control over the unemployed movement: the draftsmen of the new unemployed organisation were to be King and Voigt, both part of the Council hierarchy and opposed to the Communists on Council, as well as himself.⁸⁶

When the Executive's recommendation was presented to Council, Monson, supported by Oliver, Jeffery and Ryan, opposed it and proposed that the U.W.M. be accepted as an affiliated organisation. Brown supported Garden. After an obviously heated debate (during which Communist amendments were ruled out of order) the Executive's plan was finally adopted.⁸⁷

84. T.L.C.M., 29/5/30, p.641.

85. ibid., 5/6/30, p.642 (S. Sylvester clearly a misprint for J. Sylvester of the U.W.M. Executive).

86. ibid., 11/6/30, p.643. Minutes of Executive Meeting.

87. ibid., Minutes of Labor Council Meeting.

At the next meeting the rejected U.W.M. protested against the Council's ruling. There was "an organised attempt in the gallery to disrupt the business of Council" and some Council members moved that the public gallery close for six months.

A large part of the U.W.M.'s activities between April and July were concentrated on this fight with the Labor Council. Indeed, Herbert Moore complained in July that the movement had not sufficiently increased its mass base because "the work has been too much confined to routine work among those already in the movement. Too much time was spent upon such people as Brown and Millar after they had been completely eliminated and had to rely solely upon the Trades Hall encouragement they received".

Yet, he admitted, "no one would dare charge that sincere and determined mass work was not carried on".⁸⁸

At the end of May the U.W.M. claimed to be "making rapid progress" in New South Wales. Meetings were regularly held, local supporters recruited and committees were being formed "everywhere".⁸⁹

While these claims of mass recruitment were undoubtedly overstated, the U.W.M.'s work and mass support compared favourably with that of the O.B.U.U., which made little or no attempt to build up a mass base and functioned almost solely as a mouthpiece on Labor Council. Whilst O.B.U.U. branches in Lithgow and Newcastle did have support, this was mainly on the basis of the organisational work done in the late Twenties.

88. W.W., 25/7/30, p.2.

89. ibid., 30/5/30, p.2.

The activity of the unemployed in the first half of 1930, though not nearly as strong as was to occur later, shows that there was a growing desire for organisation, a growing determination to fight for their rights and against the degradation of the dole system.

The U.W.M. branch at Wollongong was particularly active and was able to rely on considerable support from the Illawarra Labor Council and local unions: as in the Twenties, it was in the mining areas that employed and unemployed workers recognised their unity of interests.

(The Wollongong U.W.M. is an interesting case of how branches were formed. There had been an active branch of the O.B.U.U. there, and Bob Shayler was its leader. By the end of April, Shayler was described by some sources as head of the U.U., by others, as head of the U.W.M.⁹⁰ Clearly the old organisation linked up with the U.W.M. and changed its name. Spillman, another of the O.B.U.U. cadres, was by May one of the leaders of the Wollongong U.W.M.⁹¹ It would seem that this kind of reorganisation and reaffiliation often occurred.)

Early in April, Shayler told a local Council-Citizens Committee that the unemployed would not accept relief work that was to be financed by money subscribed by workers, and that any relief work would have to be paid at award rates.⁹² On April 27th, a deputation from the U.W.M.

90. e.g. S.M.H., 30/4/30, p.13. Shayler described as head of Wollongong U.U. and W.W., 9/5/30, p.4, as head of U.W.M.

91. W.W., 9/5/30, p.4.

92. S.M.H., 5/4/30, p.11.

and the Illawarra Trades and Labor Council reasserted this to the Municipal Council, The U.W.M. told the Municipal Employees' Union that it would not jeopardise Council workers' pay by accepting below-award relief work. On April 29th, one-hundred-and-fifty unemployed, led by Shayler, marched to the Town Hall and demanded work or maintenance at award rates; no evictions; all rent arrears of the unemployed to be paid by the government and the provision of shelter for the unemployed.⁹³

This belief that the Government should pay for relief and not rely on workers' contributions was upheld by the unemployed even before the Wage Tax was introduced.

When the Lithgow Citizens' Committee proposed that a sixpence per week levy should be struck on local workers for unemployed relief the Lithgow O.B.U.U. declined assistance collected in this way.⁹⁴ The Lithgow O.B.U.U. was determined that relief be seen as a right and refused to accept handouts with humble gratitude. It objected to the fact that clergymen were in charge of investigating the claims of unemployed workers for relief⁹⁵ and complained that the food provided by the Citizens' Committee was "unfit for human consumption and would not make good pig food". They objected that the thirty free tickets given for the local cinema were for bad seats which would cause eye trouble.

93. ibid., 30/4/30, p.13; W.W., 9/5/30, p.4.

94. S.M.H., 3/5/30, p.16, 10/5/30, p.15.

95. ibid., 10/5/30, p.15.

The Citizens' Committee in turn complained that members of the O.B.U.U. "had adopted a most contemptible attitude and were ungrateful in the extreme". They charged the O.B.U.U. with "base ingratitude".⁹⁶

The differing attitudes of the Lithgow citizens and the Lithgow unemployed, resulted from varying premises about relief and about unemployment itself. These unemployed workers refused to see their unemployment as proof of their defects, and thus a cause of shame; hence they refused to be degraded by accepting inferior goods for which they were expected to abase their pride even further in the form of heart-moving gratitude. Their complaints, tactlessly worded perhaps, show that they still regarded themselves as workers with a right to a proper economic existence which they themselves controlled. They asked that the distribution of relief should be put under their own control.⁹⁷

By the middle of the year there was growing feeling in sections of the labor movement that the Scullin Government was not doing enough about unemployment. The Conference of the N.S.W. A.L.P. criticised the Federal Government for its failure to extend¹⁰ credits to solve unemployment.⁹⁸

At the Labor Women's Interstate Conference, the Committee appointed to study unemployment also criticised the Labor Government, stating that it was the first duty of a Labor Government to provide work, and, failing work, sustenance, for all unemployed.⁹⁹

96. *ibid.*, 23/5/30, p.12; 24/5/30, p.16.

97. *ibid.*, 24/5/30, p.16.

98. *ibid.*, 23/4/30, p.13.

99. *ibid.*, 24/5/30, p.15.

By the middle of the year the unemployed also were asserting that it was time something definite was done. More than two hundred Canberra unemployed marched to Parliament House to demand work.¹⁰⁰ Port Kembla unemployed protested against Scullin's departure for England before he had taken definite steps to solve unemployment, and demanded work or maintenance at union rates and federal aid for food and shelter.¹⁰¹ A large number of relief workers at Wagga struck for higher wages.¹⁰² In early July a large meeting of unemployed gathered at the Sydney Trades Hall and marched to the Minister for Labour and Industry to demand work or maintenance at award rates. The march was intercepted by the police and 10 were arrested. When the I.C.W.P.A. went to bail them out the police placed a heavy bail of £10 per man and refused to accept the I.C.W.P.A. bondsman.¹⁰³ (The Herald reported that there were "remarkable scenes" when the police broke up this demonstration. The police "seized as many men as possible from the front ranks".¹⁰⁴) By mid 1930, the first eviction protests had also occurred.¹⁰⁵

100. ibid., 9/5/30, p.12.

101. ibid., 2/5/30.

102. ibid., 9/6/30, p.9.

103. W.W., 18/7/30, p.4 (I.C.W.P.A. was the International Class War Prisoners Aid - a legal defence fraternal of the C.P.A.).

104. S.M.H., 3/7/30, p.11.

105. e.g., W.W., 6/6/30, p.2.

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT RELIEF POLICY - MID 1930

By mid 1930, the labor movement had even more arguments to show that an all-out attack was being made on workers, for by this time the Bavin Government's deflationary policy was well under way and the Government was striving to reduce internal solvency problems by strict budget-balancing.

In line with its policy of reducing wage costs the Government had restored the 48 hour working week, reversing the 44 hour week instituted by Lang. The Public Services (Salaries Reduction) Act reduced public servants' salaries by $8\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.¹⁰⁶

In the second half of 1930, the economists' demands that State Governments run finances according to 'Good Housewife' principles of thrift and parsimonious reduction, heightened. In June 1930 there appeared the first 'Economists' Manifesto' which called for concentrated effort in reducing production costs, and balancing budgets. These demands for thrift were to culminate to Niemeyer's statements to the Premiers' Conference in August, and in the 'Melbourne Agreement' that the Premiers signed at that Conference.¹⁰⁷

In line with these renewed efforts to regulate and systematise Government expenditure was Bavin's reorganisation of the State's unemployed relief system in June 1930. Three new acts which were to formulate the guidelines of relief policy for the succeeding Depression years were passed.

106. cf. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.177-178.

107. cf. Allan G.B. Fisher, "Crisis and Readjustment in Australia", Journal of Political Economy, Dec. 1934, quoted by L.J. Louis & Ian Turner, op.cit., pp.48-50.

The Relief Administration Act (Number 24) sought to co-ordinate and regulate relief activities of charitable and Government agencies. Little was done to implement this act.

The Unemployment Relief (Tax) Act (Number 25) imposed a tax of threepence in the pound on wages above 30/- a week and on incomes in excess of £80 per annum to provide a fund for unemployment relief.

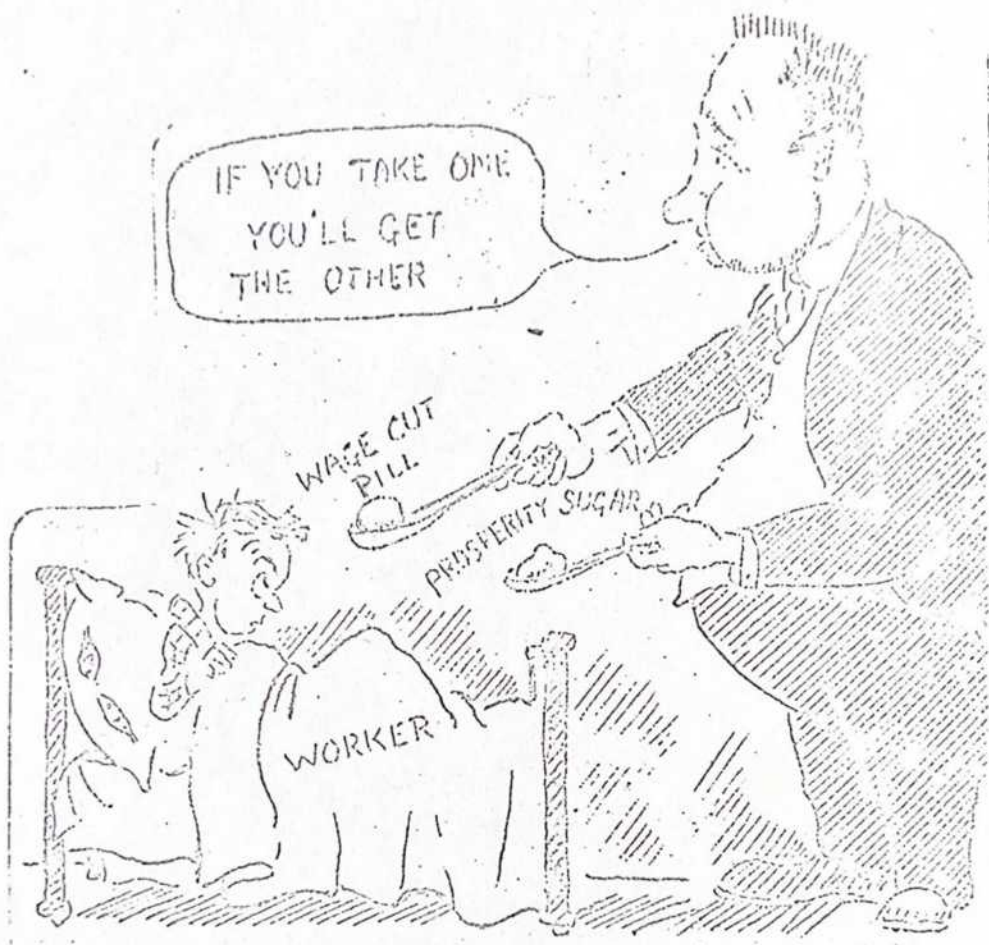
The Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act (Number 34) (known as the P.R.U. Act) established an Unemployment Relief Council intended to distribute work among persons temporarily unemployed, to absorb them in public or private employment and to re-train workers for new occupations. It was also to rely on trade advisory committees to study conditions in trade and industry, in order to increase both productivity and efficiency. The Council was to consist of three state ministers, and five persons appointed by the Governor including two employers' representatives and two employees' representatives.

This Act also established an Unemployment Relief Fund, comprising the proceeds of the Unemployment Relief Tax, sums specially appropriated by Parliament and advances from the Treasury.

From this Fund, food relief and relief works were to be financed.

Though the regular public works programme had by now been curtailed, the Government decided on a new programme of short term relief works to be maintained at a much cheaper rate than the old works.

The most controversial aspect of the Bavin Government's unemployment relief policy was the provision in the P.R.U. Act that "on



THE DOPE DOCTOR.

The Tocsin, 21/1/32.



EQUALITY OF SACRIFICE!

notification in the Government Gazette by the Governor on the advice of the Unemployment Relief Council that a particular work was a 'relief work', then, notwithstanding wages awards and industrial agreements to the contrary, the Ministry for Labour and Industry might fix the wages, hours and conditions of employment of any person engaged on such work".¹⁰⁸

Underlying Bavin's reorganisation of relief were two assumptions symptomatic of the attitudes of the Nationalist Party and the employers that were to raise the ire of the ^{labor} labor movement.

Business and conservative interests believed that the economic crisis should be, as it were, democratised: that there should be "Equality of Sacrifice". This meant that workers' wages should be reduced so that capital could reduce its production costs; it now meant also that employed workers should subsidise the relief of their unemployed brothers through the Wage Tax.

The labor movement was derisive about what it saw as the true meaning of Equality of Sacrifice. While politicians, economists and businessmen could claim that the crisis affected all groups, basic wage workers and the unemployed felt that they were already carrying the heaviest burden. Labor papers carried numerous cartoons of fat, top-hatted capitalists and miserable workers unevenly holding the weight of the crisis. Two such cartons from the Balmain U.W.M. are given here.

108. F.A. Bland, "A Note Upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", The Economic Record, May 1932, pp.94-95.

The other policy change - the emphasis on relief being given in the form of work rather than as dole - was in itself completely acceptable to the labor movement. Church-leaders, businessmen, community leaders newspaper owners and other disciples of the Protestant Ethic proclaimed that the dole sapped the Christian fibre, perverted the Anzac spirit and destroyed the backbone of the community. Just as loud were the demands of the unemployed for work.

The Bavin relief work provisions, however, cut at the basis of the most sacrosanct principle of the Australian Trade Union Movement: that of the award wage and award conditions determined by the Arbitration Court.

Until the Bavin Government's office expired in October 1930, a large number of works were gazetted as relief works,¹⁰⁹ and the workers were assigned hours and wages by the Minister for Labour and Industry without regard to the award provisions for that type of work.

The value of sustenance relief was also decided by the Government and still was much less than the basic wage level.

The system of registration for relief was basically the same as that operating in the Twenties.

To obtain relief an applicant had to have been registered at the State Labour Exchange for at least seven days and to have been unemployed for at least fourteen days. The possession of any realisable property except a house excluded him from relief.

109. F.A. Bland, op.cit., p.95.

The family (including all members under 21) was taken as the basis of relief and the amount of relief provided was in accordance with family size. 110

The following table shows the approximate value of food relief then given.

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Definition of Scale</u>	<u>Approximate Value</u> 111 <u>of Rations Per Week.</u>
A	Single person	4/8
B	Man and wife	7/6½
C	Man and wife plus 1 child	11/9
D	Man and wife plus 2 or 3 children	15/9
E	Man and wife plus 4 or 5 children	18/9
F	Man and wife plus 6 or 7 children.	22/2

The distribution of food relief was in the hands of the Department of Labour and Industry and the Chief Secretary's Department. In the metropolitan area, at Newcastle and in the northern and southern coalfields areas it was distributed through the Labor Exchanges (under the auspices

110. ibid., p.96.

111. This is very much an approximation, and is intended simply to give an idea of the value of the food given. I could not find any record of what the actual scale was. This is calculated from the figures given in F.A. Bland, op.cit., p.100; the scale given by Bland is the new scale that came into operation in June 1931, which represented a 25% increase in the old scale.

of the Department of Labour and Industry). In the country areas it was distributed by the police.

By September, a new ration system had been introduced (though scales remained the same). Instead of being given the goods the unemployed were given food coupons (one for meat, one for groceries, one for bread) which they could present to local tradesmen. Both the amount and type of food to be ordered was set down¹¹².

The U.W.M. claimed this change as a "partial victory" for the U.W.M.; they believed it had been granted as a result of their pressure for the unemployed to be allowed an open order on shopkeepers.¹¹³

The U.W.M. may well have forced this change, for their campaign for an open order system had been strong, and Bavin, with elections due, may have seen the potential popularity of a change that would satisfy an immediate grievance of the unemployed without requiring more expenditure.

One result of Bavin's systemisation of the relief administration (a result obviously unintended) was that it gave the leaders of the unemployed specific, consistent, and easily demonstrable grievances around which to organise the unemployed. The diversity of the relief experience of the unemployed in different areas had made it difficult for unemployed leaders to formulate a clear, uniform fighting programme. It had been hard for militants to expose the inadequacy and iniquities of Government policy when that policy was not definitely formulated in

112. S.M.H., 12/9/30, p.12.

113. W.W., 31/7/31, p.4.

legislation. Now, however, they could cite the enemy's policy as proof.

Moreover, the destruction of award wages and conditions and the imposition of the wages tax gave the unemployed a new basis for appealing to the rest of the labor movement - on the need for unity for the protection of employed workers' interests.

JULY 1930 - THE REORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT

In July, both the Labor Council and the C.P.A. undertook some reorganisation of the unemployed movement with the intention of strengthening both the support and the policy of the movement. This reorganisation was partly a response to the reformulation of the relief system, as well as to increasing unemployment and the growing restlessness of the unemployed. By the third quarter of 1930 the trade union estimates showed that nearly one in four New South Wales workers were unemployed. In an advertisement for the U.W.M.'s July conference the Workers' Weekly claimed that "all over New South Wales there are indications of a growing unrest and revolt among the huge army of unemployed".¹¹⁴ Though 'revolt' was an overstatement there was certainly a spirit of unrest.

By the middle of the year the Labor Council had become increasingly determined to mount a viable unemployed organisation of its own in opposition to the U.W.M. On July 17th, Garden presented for Council ratification his proposed constitution for the Council's new unemployed

114. W.W., 11/7/30, p.4.

organisation. The constitution is given below in full:

1. NAME

Unemployed Workers' Group.

2. OBJECTIVES

The immediate objective shall be to secure work for the unemployed at trade union rates and conditions, or alternatively to secure maintenance at the full basic wage rate.

3. MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the U.W.G. shall be open to all unemployed workers.

4. ORGANISATION

The Group shall be organised into one City Branch and District Branches according to areas that shall be determined by the Central Executive from time to time. *strong top of pyramid*

5. The function of the Branches shall be mainly for the purpose of demanding local work or relief for unemployed members.

6. Each Branch shall elect an Executive of not less than five members at a Special General Meeting convened for the purpose.

7. The Central Executive shall consist of one Delegate from each Branch and in addition one Delegate from each Industrial Group of the Labor Council of N.S.W. to be *non-voting dele*

signe that this never got off ground.

elected annually by the Group.

- 8. Each Union represented on the U.W.G. shall pay the following affiliation fees:

1000 and over members \$1.0.0 per annum
 Under 100 members 10.0 " "

REPRESENTATION ON LABOR COUNCIL

- 9. The U.W.G. shall be entitled to elect two Delegates to the Labor Council of N.S.W. - one Delegate to be elected by annual general Conference and the other to be elected by the Combined Industrial Groups of the Labor Council.

union del

FUNDS

- 10. The funds of the U.W.G. shall be versed in a Trust Account under the control of the Central Executive.

to be controlled by union

MEMBERSHIP CARDS

- 11. Membership Cards shall be obtained from the Central Executive.

EXPULSION

- 12. Any member expelled from any Group or otherwise expelled shall have the right to appeal to the Central Executive. and failing satisfaction to Annual or any other General Conference.

DEMANDS

1. That the Unemployed be provided with work at Trade Union rates and under Trade conditions.
2. That, failing the provision of such work, the unemployed be maintained at the basic wage prevailing in the locality where such workers are domiciled.
3. The abolition of the system of working for rations and the substitution of Trade Union rates of pay for all work performed.
4. The establishment of an Unemployment Bureau at the Trades Hall and Labour Exchange in local centres.
5. The cost of all Unemployment Insurance Schemes, Relief, etc. to be paid out of consolidated revenue.
6. That until such time as the Unemployed are provided with maintenance at the Basic Wage rate:
 - (a) All rent to be paid by the Government.
 - (b) Provision of open orders, negotiable on local trades people, in place of rations.
 - (c) The receipt of child endowment not to be a disqualification for the receipt of relief.
 - (d) Adequate relief to be issued to all workers, whether married or single.

FIGHTING POLICY

did they mean this?

1. To organise Mass demonstrations and exert pressure from all angles to force Governments and public authorities to grant the demands setforth.
2. To co-operate with every section of the working-class movement for the attainment of its objects and demands.
3. To co-operate with the Trade Unions for the maintenance and improvement of working-class conditions.
4. To organise local demonstrations for the purpose of securing work under Trade Union conditions or adequate relief along the lines setforth from local bodies. 115

The most striking feature of the organisational form of the new group is the large amount of control to be exercised from the top.

The Central Executive was to determine when and where branches were to be formed, rather than locals being formed by groups of unemployed workers who felt the need for organisation. The branches were to organise over immediate local grievances, while the central hierarchy was to initiate the major fighting policy.

And the Central Executive was to be to a certain extent dominated by the Labor Council delegates. Of course, if the number of Branch

115. T.L.C.M., 17/7/30, p.651.

delegates was larger than the number of Industrial Group delegates, the organisation could be controlled by the representatives of the rank and file. But, as with the O.B.U.U., the funds were to come from the union movement, and so the union leaders would be able to call the tune. Also, because the constitution was devised by the Labor Council Executive and accepted for the unemployed by Council delegates rather than by a mass meeting or representative meeting of the unemployed, the organisation was from the outset very tied up with Labor Council policy.

The demands and fighting policy were fairly similar to those of the U.W.M. The difference that was to arise between the two organisations was the lack of militant intent in the Labor Council organisation to carry out the stated programme and the new organisation's failure to build up mass support at branch level.

When the Constitution was presented to the Labor Council, Communist delegates moved an amendment "That in view of the fact that the Unemployed Workers' Movement have adopted a similar constitution and have convened a Conference on July 23, that the Council give recognition to that constitution and Conference." The amendment was lost 37 to 25; the voting figures show that the U.W.M. did have a fair body of support on Council, though the Garden faction ultimately ruled the Council. 116

116. ibid., p.653, 24/7/30, p.654.

(The C.P.A. claimed , probably with some justification, that the constitution for the new organisation had been "rushed through" before the U.W.M. conference to draw away support from the U.W.M.¹¹⁷)

Council accepted the proposed Constitution, but the name of the organisation was changed to the Unemployed Workers' Union (U.W.U.)

The second conference of the U.W.M. was held from Saturday to Monday, July 26-28. It was at this conference that the organisation, policy and tactics of the U.W.M. were properly established; this conference marks the real birth of the U.W.M. as a mass organisation.

Despite concerted efforts, the U.W.M. had still not, prior to this, built up an effective mass base. Herbert Moore wrote:

In spite of the fact that the objective situation is extremely favorable for the development of the U.W.M. ... there are serious organisational shortcomings. There is a vast disproportion between the influence of the U.W.M. ideologically and the actual organisational strength of the movement. The ideological influence is due to the correct program of demands and to considerable agitation on the part of the U.W.M., as well as by the C.P., the Vigilance Committee of N.S.W. Labor Council, and other sections of the revolutionary opposition.

The fact that the U.W.M. does have widespread influence makes all the more reprehensible its failure to enlist huge masses in the active struggle. 118

The C.P.A.'s Central Committee complained (in regard to the Party's unemployed work) that

"While we have a number of successes to record, the results are far from satisfactory. In many places we have broken through capitalist legality and engaged in pitched battles in the streets with the police. But we have been weak organisationally in mobilising the unemployed into a consolidated fighting force.

117. W.W., 1/8/30, p.6.

118. W.W., 25/7/30, p.2.

Our organisational policy of creating joint councils of action of employed and unemployed has not been carried out with sufficient energy."

There had not been organised demonstrations at the relief bureaus, and the unemployed had not been organised onto strike committees.

The Party's unemployed fraction had not been sufficiently active; this has been partly due to an underestimation of the importance of work among the unemployed by the Party.

The Central Committee directed that from now on work among the unemployed must be increased.¹¹⁹

Advertisements for the U.W.M. Conference invited "all working class organisations" to attend.¹²⁰ The State Executive of the U.W.M. specifically invited A.L.P. branches, trade unions, factory committees and U.W.M. branches to send two delegates each. One hundred and eight credentialled delegates actually attended, representing the A.R.U., the A.E.U., the Painters Union, the Seamen's Union and the Carpenters, the Building Trades Group on the Labor Council, a few A.L.P. branches, the Labor Council itself and twenty five New South Wales branches of the U.W.M.¹²¹ There were a number of women present.¹²² King and Richards represented the Labor Council; they were both Garden supporters and part of the Council hierarchy.¹²³ Also present were sixty two Hunger Marchers

119. C.P.A., Central Committee Plenum Theses June 28-29, Australia's Part in World Revolution, pp.35-36.

120. W.W., 11/7/30, p.4.

121. ibid., 1/8/30, p.6.

122. The Working Woman, Organ of the Central Women's Department, C.P.A. (monthly) 15 August 1930, p.2.

123. T.L.C.M., 24/7/30, p.654, King was the Labor Council's Organiser.

who had arrived on the 25th, after several days on the road. Twenty-two of the marchers were from Lithgow, thirty-two from the South Coast, and eight from Cessnock.

King immediately tried to discredit the Conference on the basis of its representation. He claimed that the C.P.A. had packed the Assembly.¹²⁴ He also claimed that the Communists "were organising the unemployed for their own advantage" and that they were "deliberately fomenting unrest in the ranks of the unemployed".¹²⁵

King's charges appear unjustified on the basis of the C.P.A.'s intentions at least. As the Party pointed out, the A.L.P. and the unions could have flooded the Conference with non-Communists if all the invitations had been accepted. As it was, a fair proportion of delegates came from non-Party organisations.

The C.P.A.'s claim that Party members were in a minority¹²⁶ cannot be proved. The Conference's resolutions suggest that the Conference was led by militant Communists,¹²⁷ but this leadership would seem to have arisen from the abilities of these Communists (in accordance with Party front policy) rather than from mechanical, undemocratic manipulation.

King himself left after the first session, showing again that it was hard for Communists not to dominate the Conference if their opponents would not themselves give any lead.

124. W.W., 1/8/30, p.6.

125. S.M.H., 28/7/30, p.9.

126. W.W., 1/8/30, p.6.

127. M. Ryan, a Communist, was the Chairman.

In any case, the Conference was much more representative of the unemployed movement than the group that had passed the U.W.U. Constitution.

The Conference Chairman answered King's charges by pointing out it was the unemployed, not the 'ownership' of the movement, that mattered - a point often forgotten by leaders of the movement, both Communists and their opponents.

Ryan continued:

... it was not a question of who would effect a mechanical control of the unemployed movement, as had been suggested at Trades Hall. Whatever party, individual or group sought to lead successfully, must be ideologically sound. The program of the movement would be either reformist or revolutionary. It must be revolutionary to correspond with the present situation, because the unemployed became a more and more revolutionary factor in the system. They had to view their tasks from the angle that the unemployed worker had no rights under capitalism whatever.

128

Ryan touched the very heart of the problem of the unemployed worker when he stated that "the unemployed worker had no rights under capitalism whatever". Before they could present their demands as rights rather than as pleas for more charity, the unemployed had, by their organised militancy, to force the society to concede that they were workers with a right to a reasonable social and economic existence.

As the constitution and demands formulated at this conference provided the basis for the subsequent action and organisation of the movement they are given below in full:

Constitution?

NAME

1. The name shall be the UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' MOVEMENT.

OBJECT

2. The object of the U.W.M. is to unite the employed and unemployed workers into a militant organisation on the basis of individual membership and affiliated organisations, putting forth definite working class demands for the unemployed and waging determined campaigns to attain our demands.

DEMANDS

1. Work or wages. The Government guarantee every worker, regardless of race, creed, color, or sex, a job at a living wage, or if unemployed, insurance compensation equal to full wages. Workers partially unemployed shall receive from the unemployed fund, sufficient to bring wages up to the full rate, and this fund to be a charge upon industry and non-contributory by the workers. This unemployed insurance shall not be administered by Government bureaucrats or charity fakirs, but by Committees elected directly by the workers in the shops and the unemployed, through the unemployed workers movement.
2. Emergency Unemployment Relief. Until the unemployment insurance is operative, the government shall make an emergency appropriation for emergency relief equal to insurance of full wages to be administered as aforesaid.

3. Housing. All evictions of unemployed and seizures of furniture and belongings for failure to pay rent must be prohibited. In every city, public buildings must be made available for the shelter of homeless unemployed; this to be administered by committees as in section 1. A special fund for the building of workers' houses must be set aside by every municipality and construction begun at once. Preference to be given unemployed homeless in the use of such houses.

4. Seven Hour Day, Five Day Week. The 7-hour day and 5-day week must be established in every industry without reduction of wages, and in those places suffering from wage cuts the higher wage must be restored. In the mining fields and other hazardous occupations, the 6-hour day, 5-day week shall prevail.

5. The 6-hour day, 5-day week and two fifteen minutes' rest periods for all young workers.

6. No night work for women and young workers.

7. Free Employment Agencies, established under control of workers' committees and unemployment councils. Abolition of private employment agencies and employers compelled to apply only to workers and unemployed committees for workers.
8. Abolition of all wage taxes below £400 a year.
9. Equal pay for equal work for all workers.
10. Free lunches in schools for all school children and government maintenance for children of the unemployed.
11. The right to strike and picket.
12. Abolition of child labor.
13. Abolition of Arbitration Courts.
14. Abolition of use of police against strikes, unemployed and other working class demonstrations; and of the power to arrest unemployed and other workers for vagrancy.
15. Representation of unemployed in workers' defence corps.
16. Social insurance against sickness, accidents, invalidity, and old age.

17. Resistance to attempts to transport soldiers, arms, munitions, or any other provisions to British imperialist forces in India, Egypt, or any other part of the world.
18. Immediate release of all workers in prison for strike or other working class activities.
19. Abolition of system of working for rations. Full wages for all work performed.

METHODS

1. Organise and lead mass demonstrations in all districts for the purpose of compelling the granting of the above demands.
2. Each committee must put forward special demands and wage special campaigns based upon local conditions.
3. Form joint committees of action with employed workers, through the committees of action in industries, where existing, the strike committees in strikes and the factory committees. Unemployed to be represented in turn on all such committees engaged in strike or other action against the employers or the State.
4. An intense agitation in the form of mass demonstrations and campaigns against the restrictive and bureaucratic control

of State Labor Bureaux and against the existence of private employment agencies. Fight against victimisation of unemployed workers for participating in mass demonstrations of any nature.

5. Organise vigilance committees in neighbourhoods to patrol working class districts and resist by mass action the eviction of unemployed workers from their houses, or attempts on the part of bailiffs to remove furniture, or gas men to shut off the gas supply.

6. Mobilise the unemployed to participate in class demonstrations of a political character, such as "Hands off India", May Day, August 1st, Unemployed Day, etc.

7. Wage a relentless fight against the social fascist governments, expose the reactionary trade union bureaucracy that tries to aid the capitalist offensive against labor by upholding compulsory arbitration, industrial peace and other forms of class collaboration.

8. Organise boycotts against all members of organisations such as British Preference League, Masonic and all other anti-working class organisations.

9. Mobilise children at school and other members of working class families against members of the police force who participate in attacks against workers or working class demonstrations.

10. In every way aid the development of the counter-offensive against capitalism for the purpose of strengthening the power of the working class in preparation for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. (129)

The Conference also resolved to organise a women's section of the U.W.M. in order to bring women into the movement.¹³⁰

The demands adopted were essentially based on the R.I.L.U.'s unemployed programme, adopted to Australian conditions.¹³¹ Because of this, the demands were not solely concerned with the problems of the unemployed. (cf demands nos. 4,5,6,9,11,13,17). In practice, it was only the demands specifically referring to unemployment that formed the basis of the U.W.M.'s action policy

The Constitution set forth a viable organisational form, a clear programme of demands and a militant protest strategy to achieve these demands. This conference provided the basis for the mass work of the unemployed movement over the next few years.

The Conference, in a move that was indubitably led by Communist delegates, (though all but one delegate agreed) repudiated the programme and policy of the U.W.U., claiming its formation was "a deliberate attempt to smash the U.W.M. and to sidetrack and betray the struggles of the unemployed workers". The C.P.A./had been formed to place the unemployed under the control of the trade union bureaucracy in order to suppress their struggle and isolate the unemployed from the employed workers. This belief was based on the 'social-fascism'

130. cf. The Working Woman, August 1930, p.2., for details of proposed women's section.

131. Herbert Moore stated this, W.W., 8/8/30, p.2.

analysis: "Garden and his lackeys" were "agents of the capitalist class" working with the Scullin Government to bolster up capitalism.¹³²

The claims were not really tenable. Perhaps the main drawback of the social fascist theory was its simplistness; this made its exponents appear ludicrous, it forced them into rigid attacks onto everyone who did not completely agree with them (thus themselves splitting the working class movement) and it prevented them from understanding the true situation. (The other side was just as quick to denounce the Communists in demigratory terms. During one heated Labor Council debate on unemployed organisation the Vice President yelled at the Communists: "You are not Social Fascists; you are social fat-heads".¹³³)

*but what will
religion
be at
the stage?*

The controlling group on the Sydney Labor Council supported Lang, not Scullin, and it is most unlikely that they wished to control the unemployed movement in order to prevent it from embarrassing Scullin (though they did later exert their power to prevent the unemployed from embarrassing Lang).

It is certainly true however, that the Garden group on Council wanted the unemployed to be under its control, and they definitely did not want the C.P.A. to have a power base among the

132. W.W., 1/8/30, p.6.

133. S.M.H., 8/8/30, p.12.

unemployed. The U.W.U. probably was set up mainly to draw away support from the U.W.M., but the reasons why Garden wished to control the unemployed movement were not as simplistic as the Communists maintained. *but what were they?*

Two events that occurred during the U.W.M. Conference highlighted the new spirit of resistance of the unemployed and the increasing determination of the police to break this resistance.

On Friday the 25th, as the Hunger Marchers from the North, accompanied by some local unemployed, marched along Parramatta Road, Camperdown, the police broke up the march and arrested fifteen of the men. They were charged with taking part in an unauthorised procession and a heavy bail of £20 each was set.¹³⁴ The number of marchers altogether was probably no larger than forty or fifty. Objection to the march could not then have been the normal one that it would disrupt traffic; the prevention of the march before it reached town must have resulted from the Government's fear of the embarrassing spectacle of Hunger Marchers proclaiming their poverty to the city crowds.

When the case came before the courts, the men were sentenced to 10/- fine or 24 hours gaol. They accepted the gaol sentence.^{136.}

134. ibid.; L.D., 26/7/30; S.M.H., 26/7/30, p.15.

135. Only ~~40~~ marchers came from the North and all accounts give the impression that the march was small and very low-key, and that only a handful of locals joined the march.

136. S.M.H., 14/8/30, p.6.

Although the sentences were light, the manoeuvre prevented what would have been a striking exhibition of the plight of the unemployed and weakened the morale of the movement. The Herald pointed out that the arrests were "regarded by local Communists and unemployed as a depressing end to what was expected to be a triumphant march through the city".¹³⁷

THE CLOVELLY FRAME-UP.

The other event was much more serious. This was the first really militant eviction protest in New South Wales, dubbed 'The Clovelly Outrage' by the Herald, and 'The Clovelly Frame-Up' by the Workers' Weekly.

It is impossible to determine exactly what happened or who indeed was involved. The police did not witness the event, nor were independent onlookers of the scene called to court.¹³⁸ The event appears to have been an excuse for the police to drag into court any arbitrary Communist, in an attempt to kill the militancy of the unemployed movement by sending the leaders to gaol, and to frighten potential supporters of the U.W.M. away from militant activity through the threat of heavy gaol sentences.

137. ibid., 26/7/30, p.15.

138. The main report of the event comes from the S.M.H. But the Herald did not have reporters at the scene and a large amount of its evidence comes from the police report and the case presented by the police in court.

No one was charged at the scene of the crime, a number of men convicted for the crime were not charged until weeks after it occurred, and some of the men convicted had reputable alibis. The main evidence against the 'Clovelly Boys' (as the twenty-three prisoners were called in the Communist press) was given by two policemen who had been spying on the unemployed conference, one of whom, Constable Cook, had joined the Communist Party under orders to pick out the militants and the other, Constable Neville, had been watching the Communist Party and its members for months - again on orders to pick out the militants.¹³⁹

The defendants and their witnesses were questioned in court about their religious beliefs, their country of birth and even about their sexual morality.¹⁴⁰ The atmosphere of the court was clearly intended to predispose the jury against the men. It was as if it were Communism that was on trial rather than a charge of malicious damage to a house.

On the morning of Monday, 28th July, an unemployed musician, his wife and eight children were evicted from a house in Clovelly. The musician and his two adult daughters (also musicians) had been unable to find work for several months, and the family owned £8 rent.

139. cf. court evidence given by Cook and Neville e.g. S.M.H., 20/8/30, p.16. ; 8/1/31, p.4.

140. Grace Peebles when giving evidence was asked if she was legally married to her de facto husband. S.M.H., 20/8/30, p.16.

A bailiff took possession of their meagre furniture and auctioned it.¹⁴¹

At the Unemployed Conference at the Trades Hall, Bob Shayler was handed a note telling him of the eviction. He then told the meeting and asked them what they intended doing about it.

We will beat up the bailiff!
We will stop the eviction

and similar replies came from the hall.¹⁴²

Then, according to Neville, Shayler said, "I want twenty men who are not afraid of the police to go out and stop the sale, and if the sale is over to smash the house so they won't do it again".¹⁴³ Shayler denied that he had made any such call.¹⁴⁴

According to the police, a number of men then left for the Communist Hall to decide what action to take.

At about 2.0 p.m. the 'raiding party' caught a tram to Clovelly. According to the Herald, neighbours stated that the number who arrived at Clovelly "was nearer 40 than 20". However, as neighbours had no idea of what was happening at the time - "no one ... realised the seriousness of the situation until the raiders were running away from the house" - the number involved may well be exaggerated. The police evidence makes no attempt to suggest how many were involved.

no
community
support

141. S.M.H., 29/7/30, p.9.

142. ibid., 20/8/30, p.16.

143. ibid., 13/8/30, p.10.

144. ibid., 20/8/30, p.16.

The men allegedly threw stones through the front windows of the empty house, rushed into the house, broke every door and window, shattered mantelpieces and light fittings and finally destroyed the gas stove.

After a "remarkably brief time" they rushed away again and caught another tram back to the city.

It was only then that neighbours rang the police, who "endeavoured to overtake them". "The men were not seen by these police, but information was obtained that a party of men had been seen entering the Communist Hall shortly before the police arrived." Detectives then investigated the matter and "obtained information concerning the earlier meeting and the ringleaders of the raid" - presumably from constables Cook and Neville.

They waited till teatime, and then six policemen crept up the stairs into the Communist Hall.

There was "pandemonium" when the Communists noticed the intruders. Women screamed, one woman fainted and "within a few seconds of their arrival the police found themselves surrounded by about 60 men, some fighting, some preparing to fight and others shouting abuse. The police stood toe to toe with their attackers, and a wild melee was in progress when they were told that they had permission to draw their batons". This "had a sobering effect".

The police "selected the men whom they had come to arrest", and, amidst another struggle, more outcry, and a spirited rendering

of the Red Flag and other songs eleven men were taken away.

(Moxon, General Secretary of the C.P.A., said the police had threatened them with revolvers and had batoned two men, one of whom was insensible.¹⁴⁵)

There are three salient points about this account - taken largely from the police report.

Most importantly, the police had no evidence of who participated in the raid. They had at most Constables Cook and Neville's evidence of who left the unemployed meeting after the eviction matter was raised.

Secondly, it is distinctly strange that Cook and Neville, if they heard the plans, did not inform the police so that the raid could be intercepted. One of the witnesses for the defence later stated that Cook had left the Trades Hall before the eviction matter was raised.¹⁴⁶ It is possible that the Constables' later description of the unemployed meeting was largely fabricated.

Thirdly, the delay between the return of the Communist raiders and the police raid on the Communist Hall is odd if the police did have any evidence. It would seem ^{possible that} the police spent the interim deciding who they would arrest, on the basis ^{perhaps} of known militancy.

145. This account of the raid from ibid, 29/7/30, p.9.

146. ibid., 20/8/30, p.16.

The eleven men were charged with malicious damage to property to the value of £40¹⁴⁷ and were remanded.

A fortnight later when the case first came up, seven more men as well as ten of these eleven were committed for trial at Quarter Sessions on the malicious damage charge.¹⁴⁸

A week later two more men, Shayler and Huggett, were charged with inciting the others to commit malicious damage. The incitement charge centred around Shayler's alleged call for twenty volunteers to stop the eviction, which he denied. Why Huggett was also charged seems inexplicable - apart from the fact that he was a leading unemployed organiser. In none of the earlier police evidence was Huggett's name mentioned and there is no mention of how Huggett incited the men in the report of the court case. Huggett produced three witnesses who stated he had not been at the unemployed meeting when Shayler announced that there had been an eviction, and an alibi who stated he was cutting lunches with her in the Communist Hall.

147. The eleven men were: Sydney Huxter, 27, Labourer; James Fairfax, 22, labourer; Robert Williams, 26, seaman; Wilfred Mountjoy, 29, brickmaker; Frank Bailey, 22, Labourer; Benjamin Watts, 25, labourer; Nelson Long, 19, labourer; Joseph Carr, 19, labourer; George Nesbit, 21, labourer, Percy Joshua, 28, labourer; Timothy Fenton, 23, seaman. Only Joshua and Mountjoy were well-known Communists. The youth and the labouring background of most should be noted.

148. ibid., 13/8/30, p.10.

Benjamin Watts was not charged this time; there is no explanation given of why the case against him was dropped. The new men were: Arthur Davey, 19, labourer; Clarence Dawes, 26, labourer; Cecil Phillips, 22, boilermaker; Walter Rawson, 35, labourer; Joseph Collins, 43, bricklayer; William Roer, 25, cook; Augustus Trump, 37, baker. It is interesting that this group included three older men.

Nevertheless, Huggett, as well as Shayler, were sentenced to six months hard labour.¹⁴⁹

Soon four more men were charged with having committed malicious damage at Covelly. One of these was Jack Sylvester.¹⁵⁰

So, when the case finally came up at Quarter Sessions in November, the number of men charged with malicious damage had risen to 21.

The Workers' Weekly stated that "the defendents were on trial for the crime or being active militant fighters in the class struggle The whole case reeked of perjury and lying evidence ... The police pimps, Cook and Neville, were determined to "frame-up" those workers whom they knew to be active workers, and having decided on the number and names of those to be charged, built up the evidence to fit in with their report."¹⁵¹

The jury decided that the men were guilty, and the Judge sentenced Rawson and Mountjoy to eight months gaol and the rest to six months or a two year good behaviour bond. Mountjoy clearly suffered worse not because the crime attributed to him was worse than that of the others, but because he was a Communist leader. In imposing the extra two months on Mountjoy, the Judge remarked that 'he was an agitator and it would

149. S.M.H., 20/8/30, p.16.

150. S.M.H., 11/9/30, p.7. This actually states that five more were charged - John Silvester (sic), 37; Ellis Maurer (actually Maurier) 28; Harry Crawford, 30; William Rogers, 36; Benjamin Watts, 28. But it seems there was a mistake about Watts (who had previously been charged and then not charged). At the Quarter Sessions trial Watts was not present.

151. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1.

keep him quiet'." ¹⁵² Ten of the men elected to go to gaol; the other eleven accepted the bonds though one (Williams) soon went to gaol instead also. ¹⁵³ Shaylor and Huggett were already in gaol.

It was Communist policy to refuse good behaviour bonds as the Party believed that these bonds were an attempt to silence militants' activities, to force workers "to forego their class convictions and desert the working class movement". ¹⁵⁴ Also, the Party believed that the acceptance of gaol by the leaders was an unequivocal avowal of militancy, that it showed the more timid members of the working class that their leaders were acting in good faith. Thus it was intended to inspire the working class to have the courage of its convictions; it was to be a radicalising force. A protest movement could be rallied around the prisoners, thus further exposing the class attack being waged by the government. This was particularly useful in the case of the Clovelly Boys, as though they had been arrested under the Bavin Government, Lang was Premier by the time they were convicted - so their imprisonment could be used to prove the 'social fascism' of the Lang Government.

(As the C.P.A. strictly enforced the ruling that Party members could not accept bonds it is a reasonable assumption that at least some

152. ibid.

153. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1; 12/12/30, p.1. Those who went to gaol were: Sylvester, Mountjoy, Fairfax, Bailey, Long, Nesbit, Joshua, Fenton, Daves, Rawson; and later Williams.

154. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1.

of the men who accepted bonds were not Communists. This in turn shows that it was not only Party members who were willing to engage in very militant activity.¹⁵⁵⁾

As soon as the sentence was delivered, an agitation for the prisoners' release was mounted by the I.C.W.P.A. Workers were called upon to pressure the Government by mass protest to free the prisoners.

To highlight their plight, the prisoners decided to go on a hunger strike. This enabled the C.P.A. to proclaim that "their blood is upon the shoulders of Lang, Gosling, Lamaro and Co."¹⁵⁶ When the strike was finally called off by the Party (which feared that the men might die) ten had been twenty . . . or twenty-one days without food and the other three more than two weeks.¹⁵⁷

The agitation was not without effect. Williams was released after about two weeks,¹⁵⁸ and by January, the protest from many quarters had grown so strong that Lang was forced to open a commission of enquiry on the case.¹⁵⁹

The inquiry showed that some of the police evidence, at least, had been based on malice rather than fact.

Senator Rae stated that he had been with Mountjoy when the house was damaged. The prosecution grilled Rae, in an attempt to discredit his evidence by presenting him as a militant Communist.¹⁶⁰

155. cf. S.M.H., p.7. 11/9/30, Cook said he did not think Rogers and Crawford were Communists.

156. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1.

157. ibid., 12/12/30, p.1. (The 13 included Shayler and Huggett).

158. ibid., 19/12/30, p.1.

159. S.M.H., 1/1/31, Enquiry opens.

160. ibid., 6/1/31, p.9.

The Commission turned the issue of the inquiry into the question of police perjury - which made it much harder for the men to assert their innocence, for they had to prove that the police were lying.

Rae was asked: "'Do you say that the police, knowing that they were lying, have deliberately put that charge against Mountjoy?' "

Rae answered: " 'In my opinion' ".

A woman witnessed that Sylvester had been working in her garden all afternoon; this was confirmed by another witness.¹⁶¹ (When Neville was asked why, if Sylvester was at Clovelly, it had taken him six weeks to arrest him, Neville lamely replied: "'I was on other duties' ".¹⁶²)

Yet another prisoner had two independent witnesses, one a journalist, who stated he had not been at Clovelly.¹⁶³

It seems indeed that the majority of the men had not taken part.

follow this up → A member of parliament pointed out in the House that the Daily Guardian - by no means a radical paper - stated that there were affidavits showing that thirteen of the prisoners had not been in the vicinity of the crime.¹⁶⁴

Neville and Cook's evidence centred around the fact that they had been watching Communist militants in the past months, and that they knew these men to be militants, rather than any evidence that they had been at Clovelly. For example, part of Neville's evidence was that he had been watching Mountjoy between May and July and that he had also seen Sylvester around the Trades Hall.¹⁶⁵

161. ibid., 7/1/31, p.9.

162. ibid., 8/1/31, p.4.

163. ibid., 7/1/31, p.9.

164. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 9/12/30, pp.320-321.

165. ibid., 8/1/31, p.4.

Sylvester

The evidence in favour of Mountjoy and Sylvester was so incontrovertible that they were released.¹⁶⁶ They had, however, already served eight weeks gaol (three of them without food) for nothing other than their political beliefs.

I could find no record of the final decision of the commission, but the other ten were still in gaol at the end of January.¹⁶⁷ Probably a few were later released, but it is likely that some served out their sentences.

To conclude: obviously the house was damaged, though to what extent it cannot be said; there was no eyewitness evidence of who did it, nor was there clear evidence that the activists had been incited to perform the act. Probably some of the men convicted had taken part; obviously some had not. The arrests and the court proceedings were largely an attempt to kill the unemployed movement by dispensing with its leaders and its militant activists, and by frightening the unemployed away from activism. That the authorities should so strongly oppose the U.W.M. is in itself evidence of its growing power, and evidence of the authorities' fear of growing unrest among the unemployed. The manoeuvre did not succeed, though the U.W.M. was clearly hampered by the absence of some of the leaders; the Clovelly case may indeed have been good publicity for the movement.

The Clovelly case was the first blatant example in New South Wales at this time of the way the police and the court system were used to break up the unemployed movement. The pattern of unjustified arrests, police

166. W.W., 16/1/31, p.6.

167. W.W., 23/1/31, p.1.

raids, perjured evidence and heavy sentences was to be repeated as the unemployed movement became more of a threat.

AN EARLY RELIEF WORK STRUGGLE

As the constitution of both the U.W.U. and the U.W.M. demanded that the unemployed be given work at trade union rates and conditions, and as this was also the stated policy of the union movement in regard to the unemployed, it is not surprising that, when Bavin introduced a large number of relief works under the new provisions of the P.R.U. Act, opposition quickly arose.

Indeed, when the U.W.M. Conference was being held the first significant attempt at a strike by relief workers was already under way.

Although these strikers completely failed to win their demands the strike does show a willingness to fight on the part of some of the unemployed. More importantly, it points up the immense difficulties that unemployed leaders were to face in their attempts to agitate among relief workers at this time.

By the end of July, about a thousand unemployed workers were engaged on relief work at Bunnerong, Daceyville, Maroubra, Randwick and Tempe.¹⁶⁸

168. It would seem that the number was 1000 because 1000 men were later called up to replace them. It seems that only about 50 were at Tempe and the rest in the Randwick-Maroubra - Bunnerong area. There were a number of different jobs in this area and the Herald report of the strike does not differentiate properly between the jobs, so the numbers of workers given does not always tally.

The men were signed up to work a 32-hour week for which they would receive about £3.6.0 and would be given their fares in excess of 2/6. At lunchtime on Tuesday, July 22nd, they were suddenly informed that they were now to work a 40-hour week for £3.8.9, with no fare allowance. Though the change may seem slight, the fare allowance was vitally important to many of the workers, for a large number had to travel long distances and, having been unemployed, they had no cash saved for the fares. One man working at Maroubra came from Newport; another stated that he had to walk from Hornsby for the job. A number stated they were spending as much as £1 a week in fares.¹⁶⁹

The workers at Bunnerong immediately went on strike, demanding the reinstatement of the system for which they had signed on. At a mass meeting of seven hundred Maroubra workers (on Tuesday) there was a call for a general stoppage of work. However, the moderate section of the meeting prevailed and the men decided to send a deputation to Farrar (Minister for Labour and Industry) and to continue work pending the satisfactory settlement of their demands for a return to the old system. Elaborate plans for a strike were mooted and a strike committee of twenty was elected.¹⁷⁰

Both of these meetings appear to have occurred spontaneously without any attempt by Communists or other unemployed organisers to agitate amongst the men. Farrar stated that the strike was the work of Communist Party agitators, but the Communist Party would not have known of the change until after the relief workers were told of it, so it seems

169. S.M.H., 24/7/30, p.11.

170. ibid., 23/7/30, p.13., p.15.

clear that the strike was the spontaneous decision of rank and file relief workers. Indeed, the C.P.A.'s statement that "the workers on the jobs came directly to the Communist Party and asked for leadership in the struggle"¹⁷¹ reinforces the suggestion that the initial meetings were held without Communist help.

On the Tuesday night, strikers met at the Trades Hall, and "fiery speeches" were made. The U.W.M. was active at this meeting and pressed that all relief works be declared black.¹⁷²

The meeting with Farrar was unsuccessful; Farrar obviously believed the unemployed should be grateful for small mercies: "It was quite evident to me that the Communists have caused this dispute with the object of propagating their Communistic doctrines," he said. "It seems most remarkable that men who have been out of work for so long should organise a strike 24 hours after work has been found for them."

On Wednesday lunchtime, about four hundred Maroubra workers decided to down tools as their demands had not been met. The meeting decided to send pickets to other relief jobs to persuade other relief workers to strike, and deputed representatives to go to the Labour Bureau to persuade men called up that afternoon not to sign on.¹⁷³

It is hard to determine just how many of the workers were in favour of the strike, as the only detailed report is in the Herald,

171. W.W., 8/8/30, p.2.

172. S.M.H., 23/7/30, p.13.

173. ibid., 24/7/30, p.11.

which agreed with Farrar's interpretation that "the majority of the men want work, but are being intimidated" by Communist agitators.

An anonymous relief worker told the Herald representative that at the Maroubra meeting "two thirds of the men were absent. Communists gained control of the meeting, and worked the men into such a fervour that they, or the majority of them voted for a strike". Then, "the extremists decided to hold another meeting among absentees" who were on a job about a mile and a half away. "Between eighty and ninety per cent of these men were in favour of a return to work". He added that between three hundred and three hundred and fifty men continued to work after lunch at Maroubra, and that about half that number went on strike.¹⁷⁴

These numbers do not tally with the previously given number of seven hundred workers at the Tuesday Maroubra meeting. It would seem that there were two jobs at Maroubra and that one, with about four hundred workers, was in favour of the strike and that the three hundred workers at the other job opposed it. As this man obviously opposed the strike, his evidence as to the number who stopped is not really tenable.

In any case whether or not the Communists' feverous speeches finally decided the men, it is clear that a few hundred men did support the strike.

On the Wednesday afternoon, Farrar, in a clever tactical move, countered this outburst of militancy by closing all the jobs at Maroubra, Bunnerong, Randwick and Daceyville (though not the Tempe job).

174. ibid.

He announced that the works would be reopened the next Monday with a new batch of workers. He added that men who refused work would not be given food rations and threatened that they were liable to be deprived of further relief work.

In the face of such threats, it is not surprising that the attempt to picket the Labour Bureau on Wednesday afternoon to persuade the new 'call-up' of unemployed not to sign on failed. Indeed, though one thousand men were called up, another five hundred gathered at the Labour Bureau hoping to replace any absentees. When three agitators attempted to exhort the men they were "rudely interrupted" by police and were thrown out. Later, when one began to explain the conditions at Maroubra he was, according to the Herald, abused, kicked and shoved by some of the workers.¹⁷⁵

The threat of cutting off the rations of dissidents was perhaps the most powerful and successful weapon consistently used by governments to quell the unemployed movement. It was no idle threat: militant minders' rations had been cut early in the year and unemployed organisers were quite often refused rations from time to time.¹⁷⁶

The threat placed the unemployed in an impossible position; it pinpointed their lack of bargaining power. Even if the men were willing to starve themselves, it required a particularly acute class consciousness to be willing to gamble one's family's starvation.

175. ibid.

176. e.g. The Working Woman, 15/9/30, p.3. Grace Peebles, a Communist and a Womens' Representative on the U.W.M. has her rations cut off after disrupting a meeting at the Town Hall; The Worker, 16/7/30, p.11. Unemployed at Broken Hill denied relief because they had refused to accept work at wages greatly under the award.

There was another large meeting of unemployed at the Trades Hall on Wednesday. This meeting declared the Labour Bureau 'black' and decided to picket the Bureau on Thursday morning. Another twenty men were elected onto the strike committee.¹⁷⁷

On Thursday morning about one hundred strikers and other unemployed workers, both men and women, packed the Trades Hall Assembly Hall. Despite a small section of opposition, the meeting supported the election of the Communist Mick Ryan to the Chair.

Ryan suggested that there should be mass picketing and demonstrations led by the strike committee elected on the jobs: "By holding up the works at Maroubra you are not causing the Government any extra cost". His speech was greeted with cheers. It was agreed that the strike committee elected on Tuesday and Wednesday, together with one delegate from each branch of the U.W.M. should take charge of the strike. Ryan exhorted the strikers to bring their wives into the struggle.

When it was announced that about fifty men were still working at Tempe the meeting decided to re-gather there that afternoon.

At this Tempe meeting, only six workers joined the strike. When police tried to remove the pickets^s there was a "violent scuffle" during which a policeman drew his baton. Five men were arrested.

On Thursday, there was another indication that the strike was virtually broken: three hundred men turned up for work at Bunnerong

177. S.M.H., 24/7/30, p.11.

despite the black ban and the fact that the Government had closed the works.¹⁷⁸ Yet some strikers and unemployed workers still supported the strike.

On Thursday night, the Labor Council congratulated the strikers on their stand and on the election of the rank and file strike committee; the Council pledged its solidarity and moral and financial supports.¹⁷⁹

On Friday 25th, there was yet another enthusiastic meeting of one hundred unemployed workers and strikers at the Trades Hall (again chaired by Ryan). Representatives were sent to rouse support among union officials. Twenty men picketed the Labour Bureau but left when ordered by the police to do so. It is some token of the success of the agitation that only twenty-three of the fifty men called up for relief work on Friday presented themselves at the Labour Bureau.¹⁸⁰

The strikers naturally received great support from the U.W.M. Conference held that weekend. The Conference appointed a committee of nine to assist the strikers to boycott all jobs where there were non-award conditions. "It was emphasised during discussion that this spontaneous strike was but the beginning of a series of wage struggles transferred from the normal field"; that the Government was attempting by successively lowering the rates for relief jobs to bring about "a quick and complete demoralisation" of workers, both regular workers and relief workers.¹⁸¹

178. ibid., 25/6/30, p.11.

179. T.L.C.M., 24/7/30, p.655.

180. S.M.H., 26/7/30, p.15.

181. W.W., 1/8/30, p.6.

Despite Labor Council and U.W.M. support, despite the determination of some of the strikers, the struggle had already failed.

Work was resumed on Monday by the newly called-up workers.

When the 'Rank and File Committee of Action' appealed to 700 Bunnerong workers only half a dozen refused to work. "Judging by the remarks among the men, Communists would have received a rough handling if they had interfered" with the work. It is symptomatic of the urgency of the men's desperation for work that they would not countenance the idea of the strike although there was still "general complaint" about the Government's refusal to pay fares.¹⁸²

The abrupt ending of this strike¹⁸³ after all the feverish activity of meetings and the Strike Committee, mocked the U.W.M.'s belief that a new series of relief work struggles was beginning. The failure of the proposed black ban can be attributed to nothing other than the desperation of the unemployed and the Government's power to impose its terms on the relief that was given. Perhaps the most surprising fact is that there was so much support for the strike at such an early stage of the unemployed movement. Although the U.W.M. took a leading role in the strike it began as a spontaneous rank and file protest and those who supported the strike at all appear to have supported the Communist leadership. That the U.W.M.'s lead was accepted in preference to that of the moderates shows the growing support and power of the U.W.M.

182. S.M.H., 29/7/30, p.9.

183. W.W., 8/8/30, p.2., says it is still going on, but I have been able to find no proof.

Although the Labor Council had declared its support for the relief work strikers it had done little to actually help the agitation. Indeed, the Labor Council and the New South Wales union movement had up to this time been rather vacillatory in general. Little had been done to oppose the threats on wages and conditions and the attack on the 44-hour week, beyond the calling of conferences to denounce such actions. This laxity is understandable, given the weakening of the union movement by membership losses and the undermining of the unions' bargaining power through the desperation of the competition for available jobs. It is hard to hypothesise about what the unions could have done, and there is no intent here to blame the union movement for its inaction. It is possible, however, that if the organised labor movement had responded more to the unemployed workers' calls for unity, and had really set itself to organise the unemployed, there would have been less reason to fear that unemployed workers would undermine any industrial action.

The signing of the Melbourne Agreement in mid-August by State Premiers and the Federal Labor Government provoked the Labor Council into taking a more forthright stance apropos the Parliamentary Labor Party's attitude to wage rates and unemployment relief.

FROM THE MELBOURNE AGREEMENT TO LANG'S
ELECTION

The Melbourne Agreement signed at the Premiers' Conference followed Niemeyer's prescription of economising by budget-balancing and the reduction of the standard of living. The Scullin Government's

acceptance of the principle of the reduction of living standards provoked massive opposition from the labor movement, especially in New South Wales where state elections were due.

Neimeyer's proposals had been largely directed towards the repayment of Australia's debts in London, including war debts. The labor movement's arguments against this ran: 'Why should a British (and Jewish) capitalist, here for only a month, force Australian workers to tighten their belts in order to pay the foreign bondholders debts incurred by Australian workers who had fought and died in a war that had nothing to do with them?',¹⁸⁴

Even before the Melbourne Agreement was announced, the Labor Council appears to have decided to revise its policy on unemployment relief, and had arranged conferences with the Parliamentary Labor Party and the New South Wales A.L.P.

On August 14th, a conference of union officials discussed the Council's unemployment policy, especially in regard to the payment of award wages for relief work, and decided to hold a conference on the 21st of union representatives, and representatives of the Federal and State Parliamentary Labor Parties and the New South Wales A.L.P. Executive.¹⁸⁵

On the afternoon of the 14th, the two employee representatives on Bavin's Unemployment Relief Council resigned in accordance with

184. Almost every Labor Daily at this time expresses this argument e.g. L.D., 18/10/30, p.1. Cartoon of a man and his son looking at a War Memorial. Son: "Is that for the last war we had?" Father: "Australia doesn't have any wars, son. England has them but Australia fights for her and then pays for them".

185. S.M.H., 15/8/30, p.11; T.L.C.M., 14/8/30, p.660.

the decisions of the conference. They resigned in protest against the Government's policy of declaring certain public works as relief works. They complained that the Government had the power to declare any work a relief work and to prescribe wages, hours and conditions and that "such power (should) be used only in extreme cases and not as a general policy of the Government".¹⁸⁶ "We feel that the scheme is being used by the Government, not only to reduce the standard of living and the purchasing power of the community, but as a pretext to reduce wages generally."¹⁸⁷

At the conferences between the political and industrial wings of the Labor Movement in late August, Garden introduced his proposals for the repudiation of debt. (Lang writes: "Jock Garden threw a spanner in the works with his customary flair for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time by issuing a statement that Australia should 'repudiate everything'." ¹⁸⁸)

The repudiation policy had been sanctioned by the Labor Council¹⁸⁹ and appears to have been drawn up by the Executive of the Council¹⁹⁰ or perhaps by Garden and representatives of forty-seven unions and Unemployed Committees.¹⁹¹

186. *ibid.*, 16/8/30, p.16. (The employed representatives were to the right of the union movement. They were Bryant, Secretary of the Australian Society of Engineers and Industrial Officer to Labor Council, and Buckland, General Secretary A.W.U.).

187. *The Worker*, 20/8/30, p.8.

188. J.T. Lang, *The Turbulent Years*, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1970, p.68.

189. *Evening News*, 27/8/30, p.7 (cited by I.E. Young, *op.cit.*, p.57)

190. cf. *T.L.C.M.*, 14/8/30, p.660 - Executive to draw up statement to submit to the conference of unions and A.L.P. representatives.

191. I.E. Young, *op.cit.* (Young cites the *Daily Telegraph Pictorial*, 2/9/30, p.8.)

The proposal immediately caused dissension within the Labor Party. Lang feared that if the Central Executive of the New South Wales A.L.P. accepted the policy the A.L.P.'s chances in the forthcoming elections would be jeopardised. Though the Garden group initially prevailed at the conferences¹⁹² Lang successfully pressured the Central Executive and at its meeting on August 29th, the repudiation was defeated (though the Executive confirmed its opposition to the Melbourne Agreement and promised that the standard of living would not be reduced).¹⁹³

While Lang was embarrassed by the radicalism of the Labor Council's proposal the Council was having problems curbing the militancy of its Communist delegates. While these conferences were in progress Communists were actively organising among the unions to have all relief works declared 'black' in protest against the non-payment of the award. Communists attempted to call a general strike on all relief work. The majority of opinion at the Trades Hall opposed a stoppage, believing that a strike would be futile while so many were unemployed, and the proposal was rejected.¹⁹⁴

In the last two months of the Bavin Government, the unemployed movement was fairly quiet. The U.W.M. seems to have concentrated on establishing new branches and strengthening existing ones. There were by now good locals in Balmain, Glebe, Rozelle, and other inner city suburbs as well as at Lithgow and the northern and southern coalfields.

192. cf. S.M.H., 27/8/30, L.D., 27/8/30. The Political and Industrial Committee agreed on a policy to be submitted to the N.S.W. A.L.P. Executive which included the cancellation of war debts, The rejection of the Melbourne Agreement and the mobilisation of credit to provide for the unemployed.

193. S.M.H., 30/8/30, L.D., 30/8/30.

194. S.M.H., 21/8/30, p.9; 26/8/30, p.9.

It also worked towards the establishment of local sub-committees -
against evictions, for women etc.

There were however, some militant confrontations.

For example, at one Friday night meeting called by the Balmain U.W.M., a huge crowd - possibly two thousand people - gathered outside the Town Hall. When policemen dragged the speaker away they "were surrounded by a crowd of hooting, menacing men and women. Some of the wilder element ... pressed towards the constables and began to punch and kick them". The police drew revolvers and batons and arrested sixteen men.¹⁹⁵ The crowd followed to the police station and continued the demonstration.¹⁹⁶ Obviously the crowd were quite determined.

Unemployed women disrupted a meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Unemployment Relief Fund convened to discuss provisions for unemployed women. The demonstrators, who opposed the proposals mooted, drowned out the speaker by singing the Red Flag.¹⁹⁷

(It is no wonder the militancy of these women was aroused. One solution to the problem of unemployed women was to employ them as scavengers. "Many hundreds of women, girls and youths might, it is thought, be profitably employed salvaging household goods now sent to rubbish tips, and the Committee for the Employment of Girls and Women is about to introduce a general salvaging scheme.")^{197a}

195. ibid., 30/8/30, p.15.

196. W.W., 5/9/30, p.1.

197. The Working Women, 15/9/30, p.3;

197a. S.M.H., 11/9/30, p.10.

U.W.U. immediately
inactive

The Labor Council's U.W.U. appears to have done nothing at this time either to build its organisation or to stage protests.

In September the A.C.T.U. convened a conference of 'key unions' and State Labor Councils to discuss the Melbourne Agreement. The conference called upon Labor Governments to repudiate the Agreement and suggested State Labor Parties 'deal with' Labor members of Parliament who failed to uphold trade union policy on wages and conditions. It also decided that the A.C.T.U. was "empowered to call together all unions to take action to demonstrate that a crisis exists" if the Federal Government failed to alleviate the crisis. The A.C.T.U. recommended that the Federal Government find £20 million for the provision of work as the first step in "freeing the credit resources of the community".¹⁹⁸ This was in accordance with the belief of the left wing of the labor movement that banks should 'release' the credit of the nation to maintain wages and provide work for the unemployed so that the spending power of the community would be increased.

The Sydney Labor Council accepted the report of this conference (despite moves from Communists on Council to withdraw from the A.C.T.U.¹⁹⁹)

No action to implement the decisions of this conference was taken, either by the A.C.T.U. or the Scullin Government.²⁰⁰

198. cf. L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, op.cit., p.90, and C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.191.

199. T.L.C.M., 17/9/30, p.672.

200. L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, op.cit., p.90.

There are signs that by this time some of the unemployed were becoming increasingly restless at the inaction of the Federal Government and the A.C.T.U.

In October, West Maitland unemployed demanded that the A.C.T.U. put into effect the decisions of this conference "so the standard of living, already at starvation point, might be raised." They also demanded that the Federal Government be forced "either to carry out the mandate given to it by the huge majority of electors to protest their standards of living, or to go over to the forces of reaction which were determined to drive Australia down to the coolie level".²⁰¹ The Broken Hill unemployed passed a resolution stating that they believed that "no money was likely to be made available to the unemployed by the Federal Government".²⁰²

The comparative quietness of the unemployed movement in September and October was probably due to a resurgence of belief on the part of the labor movement that a Labor victory would set all to rights again. This belief was epitomised in the display on the prizewinning float in the 8 Hour Day Procession: "Two cottage scenes on a large motor lorry excited the pleasurable anticipation of Labor supporters. In one, a delapidated home, almost bare of furnishings, dressed in tatters and rags a man, his wife and his family of young children sat in despair eating bread and jam. That represented conditions under the Bavin

201. S.M.H., 11/10/30, p.14.

202. ibid., 13/8/30, p.13.

Government. Beside it was the home under a Labor Government, in which the worker and his wife and family were enjoying all the luxuries of life".²⁰³

The Melbourne Agreement was the major issue of the October State election.²⁰⁴ Though Lang denounced any policy of repudiation²⁰⁵ he accepted the directives of the Labor Movement regarding the rejection of the Melbourne Agreement. He promised the maintenance of the standard of living, the restoration of the 44-hour week and social service payment cuts, and the provision of adequate public works to relieve unemployment. The Nationalist policy promised balanced budgets and careful economising to correct past over-spending and to settle overseas debts, in line with the Melbourne Agreement.

The Workers' Weekly had cynically pointed out in August that now that elections were due Garden was interested again in the unemployed.²⁰⁶ In the election campaign the unemployed were wooed with promises of an immediately rosy future under Labor. A typical advertisement showed a drawing of a man bowed down with unemployment bearing the caption 'Gloom Today Under the Bavin Nationalist-Country Party Government'. Next to this was a beaming man with a sign saying 'Work and Wages' and the caption 'Joy Tomorrow - Joy if you vote for the Lang Labor Government'.²⁰⁷

203. ibid., 7/10/30, p.9.

204. cf. J.T. Lang, op.cit., p.69: "In my policy speech I concentrated my attack on Sir Otto Niemeyer and the Melbourne Agreement".

205. cf. L.D., 23/9/30, "The Labor Party sets its face against all repudiation".

206. W.W., 22/8/30, p.5.

207. L.D., 3/10/30, p.7.

Though there was no mention of how these promises were suddenly to be accomplished, the optimism was appealing to those who had little else to place their faith in. Lang continued to maintain that unemployment had been artificially produced by the "calamity howlers": "By its incompetence in finance, its policy of shrieking from the housetops that the country is bankrupt, the Government has created an army of one hundred thousand unemployed".²⁰⁸

Another popular catchcry of the Lang campaign was the attack on Bavin's relief system. Lang fulminated against the "mockery of the State Unemployment Council"²⁰⁹. J.J. Graves, President of the N.S.W. A.L.P., wrote an article for the Labor Daily explaining how relief workers and unemployed were robbed of relief under the "inhuman legislation" of Bavin's Relief Acts. He pointed out that because of fares and because of the loss of rations for three weeks after the conclusion of relief work the relief worker "in reality received no recompense for his week's work". He complained that "the number to whom the present Government has given employment does not comprise a fraction of the number it is openly stating it has relieved."²¹⁰

Given such appeals, it is no wonder that unemployed and rationed workers and workers who had suffered wage cuts and lengthened hours eagerly accepted Lang's promises of a return to the old

208. ibid., 17/10/30, p.5.

209. ibid., 11/10/30, p.5.

210. ibid., 18/10/30, p.8. (cf. S.M.H., 13/10/30, p.9 for the Nationalists' reply that they were providing a large amount of work.

standard of living and the old employment level.

The result of the polls on October 25th was a landslide victory for Lang: Labor won fifty five seats, the Opposition thirty five.²¹¹

RENEWED DEMANDS BY THE UNEMPLOYED

Naturally enough, as soon as Lang was elected unemployed organisations and the unions began pressing for the immediate implementation of Lang's election promises.

Union demands were centred around the reinstatement of the 44 hour week and the abolition of rationing.²¹² The unions also took some action to press the demands of the unemployed: a group of unions drafted a submission to the Government that relief workers be paid the full basic wage of £4.2.6 for a 44 hour week instead of the existing £3.8.9 for a 30 hour week. They asked that the Government insist on compulsory unionism at all relief works.²¹³

The unions leaders appear, however, to have been once again much more concerned with the conditions of their employed members than with the unemployed, and whilst the unions were preoccupied with the 44 hour week the unemployed were largely left to press their own demands.

The U.W.M. led the clamour for improved conditions for the unemployed, though it is important to note that it was not only the

211. J.T. Lang, op.cit., p.69.

212. e.g. S.M.H., 10/12/30, p.14, 16/12/30, p.11; The Worker, 17/12/30, p.8.

213. S.M.H., 6/11/30, p.15; 11/11/30, p.9.

UWM- affiliated unemployed groups that immediately demanded a better deal.

A mass meeting of Newcastle unemployed requested an immediate 25 per cent increase in all ration scales and the revision of the relief distribution system which gave separate coupons for various tradespeople. (They claimed that the prices fixed were so low that they were unable to get goods from some tradespeople.)²¹⁴ They also called for full relief rations for all single men. Though they requested the support of the Newcastle Trades Hall Council and the local A.L.P. leagues²¹⁵ there is no sign that any help was forthcoming.

A deputation representing the Newtown Unemployed Committee asked the Minister for Justice to take immediate steps to stop evictions of unemployed workers and to stop foreclosures on their property. They stressed that at Newtown evictions were a daily occurrence. One member of the deputation stated that "he had been evicted last May, again early in this month, and expected to be evicted again".²¹⁶

The U.W.M.'s demands were those defined at the July Conference: mainly, relief work at full award rates or maintenance of all unemployed (including women and single men) at basic wage rates, and the complete prevention of evictions.

The C.P.A., in line with its 'Social-fascist' theory, believed that conditions would only deteriorate under a Labor Government: "Lang's

214. ibid., 31/10/30, p.11; also 29/10/30, p.17.

215. ibid., 4/11/30, p.10.

216. ibid., 21/11/30, p.16.

election means a more ruthless drive against the working class".²¹⁷
It was the duty of the Party (and hence of the Communist leaders of the U.W.M.) to expose the traitorous 'Labor fakirs' to the working class. This was to be done by intensive agitation to publicise the shallowness of Labor's promises, and also by provoking the social fascists into showing their true colours. Communists proclaimed that a Labor Government would be just as quick as a Nationalist Government to break up workers' demonstrations, and to baton workers. Proof was rapidly produced.

On the 7th November ten people were arrested in what was evidently a very quiet street procession celebrating the Russian Revolution.²¹⁸

A week later, four women and eight men were arrested amidst a violent scuffle during a demonstration of unemployed women.

On this day (Friday, November 14th) between two hundred and two hundred and fifty people, mainly women, attended a meeting at the Town Hall called by the Women's Department of the C.P.A. The platform of protests and demand was:

- 1) "that rations be renewed to all girls and women who had been deprived of them.
- 2) work on full wage rates, or full maintenance while unemployed, to be provided for all.
- 3) protest against the incivility of officials at the Labour Bureau

217. W.W., 31/10/30, p.2.

218. S.M.H., 8/11/30, p.13. In court case (S.M.H. 27/11/30, p.8) all the witnesses said there was no procession, only a crowd of people walking not marching. It seems the event was very quiet: the W.W. condemned the "pacifism preached by leading Party members" (W.W., 21/11/30, p.1.)

- 4) Action be taken to do away with all (employment) agencies ... charging fees.
- 5) That the practice of sending girls to the country at wages of 10/- per week be stopped ...
- 6) Coupons be supplied forrent to provide shelter for unemployed girls and women.
- 7) Transport charges to be paid to and from the Labour Bureau. "

The meeting appointed a vigilance committee and decided to march with it to present their demands to the Chief Secretary.²¹⁹

When the march (which the Herald estimated to be one hundred strong) turned from Park Street into Castlereagh Street, it was met by a cordon of police and was told to stop. Whether, as the Workers' Weekly claims, the marchers then moved onto the footpath, or whether they "went to press on" (as the Herald has it) was of little importance, for the police immediately rushed into the crowd and arrested "those whom they regarded as the leaders".²²⁰

As those arrested fought to escape a large crowd of onlookers as well as the marchers crowded around the police and joined the fight. Police reinforcements arrived and after some difficulty the captives were finally secured.²²¹

The police were threatened that "Jack Lang would fix them" and that "Jack Lang would protect the workers from the bashers."

219. W.W., 21/11/30, p.1.

220. S.M.H., 15/11/30, p.15.

221. ibid, and W.W., 21/11/30, p.1.

Far from "fixing then", the Lang Government tended to the Herald's view that the police were quite justified in preventing a Communist-led demonstration. Gosling, the Chief Secretary, stated that "reports from the police were to the effect that those who participated in the march had deliberately obstructed the traffic ... I have great sympathy for the unemployed and for the principle of freedom of speech, but I will not permit any interference with the traffic. I regret that these people have been misled"

Denford, the Communist Secretary of the Ironworkers' Association, after the police had obstructed his attempt to bail out the arrested, charged that "it was quite evident that the police force under a Labor Chief Secretary did the same things as they did under a Nationalist Chief Secretary".²²²

This was amply confirmed a week later.

The U.W.M. called a demonstration for Tuesday, November 25th, the opening day of Lang's new parliament, to demand maintenance or work at full award rates and the release of Shayler and Huggett and the Clovelly prisoners.²²³ Banners adjured the unemployed to fight or starve, and to organise mass action for the release of the prisoners.²²⁴ The march was obviously intended to embarrass the Lang Government, just as the unemployed demonstrations at the inception of Bavin's Government in 1927 had been aimed at drawing public attention to Bavin's

222. S.M.H., op.cit.

223. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1.

224. S.M.H., 26/11/30, p.15.

weakness in dealing with unemployment. Though Lang had enjoyed the 1927 demonstrations, unemployed agitation was quite a different matter now that he was in power. His deep-seated hatred of Communists added to his determination to oppose the active unemployed movement. By arguing that unemployed protest was simply the work of Communist agitators and their few misled supporters²²⁵ he could ignore the real grievances of the unemployed and maintain that the unemployed were satisfied with what he was doing for them. His anti-Communism was indeed so strong that he possibly believed his own rhetoric; in any case, dragging out the Communist bogey was a good way to discredit the unemployed movement, and also emphasised that he was not (as his conservative critics maintained) in league with Moscow.

On the 25th, about three hundred unemployed men and women, singing and chanting and carrying red flags and banners, marched peacefully from the Trades Hall towards Parliament House. When they arrived at Queen's Square they found Macquarie Street cordoned off by a strong force of police. This "evidently upset their plans, for everyone was asking everyone else 'What shall we do now?' " A suggestion that they should charge the police was ignored, and the march "straggled" round the back of Sydney Hospital to the other end of Macquarie Street. Here the police met them again so the marchers assembled near the entrance to the Botanic Gardens and listened to speeches.

225. cf. The only mention to unemployed protest in J.T. Lang's The Turbulent Years is a reference to "the Communist - organised M.M.M. which had become active in stirring up the unemployed against the Government". (p.74).

A deputation was sent to Parliament House to interview Lang. It returned to say that Lang had refused to see them.

Up to this stage the demonstration had been peaceful to the point of passivity. Lang's refusal, interpreted as a deliberate display of contempt; was enough to stir the crowd into militancy. The meeting immediately and unanimously decided that " 'If he won't see a few of us, he'll soon see hundreds' ".²²⁶

Lang's action must be seen as a deliberate refusal to have anything to do with the U.W.M., and possibly as a deliberate provocation as well. The order to mass so many police in Macquarie Street to prevent the unemployed from nearing Parliament House must have come from the Government; and Lang probably knew that his refusal would spark off some violence in which Communists would be arrested.²²⁷ It suited Lang just as much as it had suited the Nationalists to have the unemployed leaders gaoled and out of the way. This refusal and lang's subsequent refusals to meet any unemployed deputation associated with the U.W.M. show up the real intentions of the Labor Council vis-a-vis the unemployed movement when Labor was in power. On the 20th, Garden had been asked to organise the deputation to Lang on the 25th, but had refused, "stating that he would not embarrass Lang". But when Lang and Baddeley later wrote to the U.W.M. refusing to see further deputations, their stated grounds for refusal were that

226. S.M.H., 26/11/30, p.15.

227. Lang would certainly have known a deputation was planned, as this was known by the Labor Council. (cf. W.W., 19/12/30, p.4.)

all deputations must be arranged through the unions.²²⁸

If Lang did intend to provoke a scene on the 25th, he can hardly have been disappointed. The marchers pressed forward towards Parliament House and fighting broke out between the opposing ranks of demonstrators and police. The Herald claimed the initial violence came from the demonstrators: "The demonstrators attacked the police and precipitated a riot". Then, "The mob, urged on by the women who had worked themselves into hysteria, surged forward, and the situation became ugly. The demonstrators tore the stakes from their banners and wielded them brutally ... from the rear came a shower of stones. The police finally drew their batons and made repeated charges.

Four policemen, who had become separated from the main body, were almost overpowered when they were pinned in a corner with everyone around them attempting to strike and disable them." Police and rioters were swept to the ground.

The police finally reasserted their strength and the demonstrators were repulsed. Ten men and two women were arrested, and a number of police and demonstrators were treated for injuries. (One demonstrator was admitted to Sydney Hospital with head wounds from the batoning).²²⁹

228. W.W., 19/12/30, p.4.

229. S.M.H., 26/11/30, p.15.

The Workers' Weekly account also emphasises the violence of this struggle though blaming the police for the initiation and the main violence of the fight. "Many workers, mercilessly beaten, with blood streaming from their faces, were ... hounded away from the demonstration by a hail of baton blows."²³⁰

Whoever initiated the violence, this demonstration clearly showed two things: that the unemployed were becoming increasingly willing to fight back against the police, and that unemployed protesters received a no more sympathetic treatment from a Labor Government than from a Nationalist one.

If the U.W.M. intended to force into the open the hostility of Lang and his supporters to the active unemployed movement, it could not have been more successful. It is possible that this and other police attacks on the U.W.M. helped the organisation's recruitment drive.²³¹ This demonstration was to bring to a head the conflict between the U.W.M. and the Labor Council.

The Labor Council's opposition to the demonstration was not limited to the refusal to help; union officials criticised both the demonstration and the demonstrators in the capitalist press: "Union officials at the Trades Hall ... expressed disapproval of the actions of the Communists to organise the demonstration. Union secretaries

230. W.W., 28/11/30, p.1.

231 e.g. ibid. West Maitland unemployed meeting (apparently not affiliated to the U.W.M.) protested against police brutality on the 25th and invited a Communist speaker to explain the Constitution of the U.W.M. at the next meeting.

pointed out that the procession was not sanctioned by the Labor Council. They contended that the Communists had set out to embarrass the Government and had 'looked for trouble'.²³²

It is hardly surprising that those who had suffered police batoning were enraged at this attack from what was supposedly their own side. At the Labor Council meeting on the 27th, Communists retaliated.

The Labor Council opened hostilities by refusing to accept the credentials of the U.W.M. delegates, stating that Council did not recognise the U.W.M.

Jack Ryan countered by moving that "the Labor Council of New South Wales strongly condemns the Lang Government for the fascist attack by the police upon the unemployed demonstration near Parliament House on November 25, when men and women were brutally batoned into insensibility and thrown into gaol".²³³

When Garden, King, Brown (of the U.W.U.), Hooke (the Chairman) and others opposed this and defended the Government they were howled down and "assailed with volleys of jeers and protests" by a large number of Communists who had packed the public gallery, as well as the Communist delegates.

After about an hour of disorder the Chairman declared the motion defeated, which raised further uproar. A division was called for, and while delegates were taking their places the Communists broke onto the

232. S.M.H., 26/11/30, p.15.

233 T.L.C.M., 27/11/30, p.690.

floor of the hall, barricaded the doors shut with broken chairs to prevent delegates from leaving, and took over the meeting. A general free-for-all began, with chairs, tables and punches flying. "Within a few seconds nearly every delegate showed marks of the fight. There were many cut noses and bruised faces, and several delegates had their spectacles smashed ... Only the fact that such a large crowd was crammed into a small space prevented serious injury to many. The Communists, because of the congestion, got in their own way and actually punched one another in the melee".

The Communists evidently won the fight for they took over the meeting. They announced Ryan's motion carried, then allowed the doors to be opened, celebrating their victory by singing the Red Flag. By the time a large number of police arrived the affray had subsided.²³⁴

The next day Garden declared that in future the public gallery would be closed during Council meetings and that only delegates would be permitted to attend. The damage was estimated at £20.²³⁵

At the time of the Labor Council's next meeting (December 4) Communists and unemployed workers marched to the Trades Hall but found the doors barred by police - further argument for the Communists of the fascism of the union leaders. A silent protest meeting was held outside.²³⁶

234. cf. S.M.H., 28/11/30, p.11; W.W., 5/12/30, p.3.; The Worker 3/12/30, p.14 (The accounts support each other. Quotation from S.M.H.)

235. S.M.H., 29/11/30, p.3; The Worker, 3/12/30, p.14.

236. S.M.H., 5/12/30, p.11; W.W., 12/12/30, p.4.

A strange ambivalence in Garden's attitude emerged at this meeting. He urged that the Council set up a sub-committee to urge the release of the men gaoled on November 25th.²³⁷ It would seem that while he did not want Lang to be embarrassed by demonstrations, his long commitment to working class principles (and perhaps memories of his own arrests and imprisonment) coupled with his deep-seated bitterness towards the police prevented him from countenancing the gaoling of workers. Or it may just have been a wise, tactical move, for the batoning and arrests had aroused strong opposition in the labor movement²³⁸ and the Communists did have considerable support among Council delegates on this issue: when Ryan's motion was put again a week later, it was lost by only five votes.²³⁹

THE LANG GOVERNMENT'S UNEMPLOYMENT POLICY

Lang's election promises committed him to providing jobs for the workless and to restoring the standard of living. He had not mentioned how this was to be done; it seems likely that he had no clear plan himself.

Once in power, the Labor party appears to have found difficulty in deciding on a comprehensive and effective unemployment policy, in regard to both the reduction of unemployment and the provision of relief.

237. T.L.C.M., 4/12/30, p.691.

238. e.g. W.W., 12/12/30, p.6 - Large demonstration at Cessnock unanimously demands release of the prisoners; 2000 at Kurri demonstration demand their release.

239. T.L.C.M., 11/12/30, p.692 (32 in favour, 37 against).

Ely, the Assistant Minister for Labour and Industry, expressed the Government's negative attitude to the existing relief system: The Labor Government "considered everything done by the Bavin Government was wrong. The present Government would undo everything the Bavin Government had done".²⁴⁰

The Government's main problem was the virtual bankruptcy of the Treasury. Signs that the election promises might not be fulfilled appeared early. A Labor member speaking in reply to the Governor's speech at the opening of the new Parliament said: "Our outlook, our visions, must accommodate itself to the new conditions".²⁴¹ These "new conditions" were the enormity of the economic problem. The Lang Government's unemployment policy resolved itself into a series of short-term measures, rather negatively intended to stave off the absolute poverty of the unemployed, rather than any positive remedy for the situation or any adequate provision of relief.

The Lang Government adopted at times an attitude of blindness to the unemployment problem similar to that of the Bavin Government on its accession in 1927. The union movement's theory that the crisis was artificially created by 'panic talk' was used, though by this time the labor movement was generally more accepting of the gravity of the situation. It is almost incredible that at the end of 1930 Ely could state that "he was one of the optimists who believed that the present depression was primarily a mental one".²⁴²

240. S.M.H., 2/12/30, p.9.

241. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 26/11/30, p.29.

242. S.M.H., 24/12/30, p.9.

The actions of the Lang Government during Labor's nineteen months of office were to a large extent directed towards either partly fulfilling or appearing to fulfil the election promises in the face of the insolvency and limitations of the Treasury.

It would seem that as it became increasingly obvious to Lang that he could not prevent rising unemployment or cure the economic situation he became more and more involved in flamboyant tactics aimed at distracting the labor movement from his failures, especially in regard to unemployment; hence the concentration on the fight against the Legislative Council, the fights with the Federal A.L.P., the banks, the Loan Council, and finally, the provocation of his dismissal.

Cooksey writes that "no understanding of Lang is possible unless he is regarded as above all a hard-boiled politician, with as his first priority the security of his power base: control of the Party through his domination of the Inner Group and through his reputation for militancy with the rank and file".^{243.}

In his earlier Premiership he had fought hard to establish himself as the Workers' Friend, the politician who helped widows, introduced child endowment, reduced the working week. In the 1930 campaign he had set himself up as the Labor politician who was to the left of the weak and vacillating Scullin Government, the Labor man who would have nothing to do with the deflationary, budget-balancing policy which led to wage cuts. Primarily, he had presented himself

243. Robert Cooksey, Lang and Socialism, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1971, p.x.i.

as the man who would act - and who would act in a radical manner. Now, with little budget that even could have been balanced, he had to live up to the image he had created.

Although he had told the Scullin Government when it failed to solve the coal crisis: "Act now and worry about the Constitution later";²⁴⁴ although he finally did flout the Constitution himself, Lang was firmly committed to the forms of parliamentary democracy. He was no revolutionary socialist; indeed, one of Lang's major pre-occupations of this time was the fight against the socialists in his own party. Yet he had continually to proclaim his radicalism, his militancy, to the rank and file, and so he found himself caught between his militant avowals and all-embracing promises on the one hand and his inability to take the militant action that would have been necessary for the fulfilment of his promises on the other.

It is not within the concerns of this thesis to probe Lang's sincerity, to argue his motives for provoking the split with the Federal A.L.P., to determine whether he acted through commitment to Labor belief, or whether through corrupt, opportunistic, demagogic power-seeking.²⁴⁵ We are concerned here only with the actions of his Government in connection with the unemployed. However, to understand the actions of the Lang Government in this respect it is necessary to pay some attention to Lang the man, and to the state of the New South Wales A.L.P.

244. J.T. Lang, op.cit., p.63.

245. For the most extreme statement of the latter view cf. I.E. Young, op.cit.

at this time.

Theodore wrote of Lang that "circumstances had built around him a curious psychology".²⁴⁶ The years since his defeat have, if anything, only added to this aura that surrounds him. The name of Lang has become inextricably linked in the public mind with the depression, while the names of Scullin, Theodore, ~~and~~ Lyons, ^{and} Garden, have been blurred or been forgotten.²⁴⁷ Whether one saw him as a Red Extremist or a Social Fascist demagogue, it was the figure of Lang that dominated the public image of New South Wales politics in the depression.

Because of this aura it is hard to see 'the Big Feller' as being perhaps not wholly his own boss, as being subject to pressures from sections of the labor movement or even from men outside it whom he was forced to placate by political or other means.

It is perhaps impossible to cut through the shadowy web of political intrigue, manipulation and shifting alliances that was at the core of the New South Wales Labor Party at this time.

Both Cooksey and Young have uncovered some of the history of the 'Inner Group' - the small band of men who dominated A.L.P. policy and organisation through control of the party 'machine'. Because it had no official place in the labor movement - indeed, its existence and actions abrogated the stated democratic organisation of the A.L.P. - its

246. Theodore in a letter to Curtin cited by I.E. Young, *op.cit.*, p.56.

247. This was strongly brought home to me during interviews with Balmain residents in 1970. Both Labor and anti-Labor voters instantly spoke of Lang.

deliberations were naturally made behind the scenes and were not recorded in minute books or reported in the press. Any investigation of it must depend largely on the biased and often contradictory memories of those associated with it.

Cooksey writes that the " 'Inner Group' was the name generally applied to that group of Party members who managed the Party and had the numbers on its governing bodies, the Easter Conference and the Executive. It was composed of some branch and electorate council officers, the majority of officials of affiliated unions, and Lang and his entourage. It had captured control of the Party and reorganised it in 1925-27". ... "By the 1931 Easter Conference, Lang was supreme in the Inner Group, undisputed boss of the Party machine" "As a result of Lang's supremacy in the Inner Group he and his entourage made all significant decisions".²⁴⁸

It was this small 'entourage' that constitute the real Inner Group.²⁴⁹ In this band were included the two McCauley brothers, Paddison, Keller (President of the New South Wales A.L.P.), Graves (Secretary of the New South Wales A.L.P.), Martin (Organising Secretary), O'Regan (general Returning Officer), Garden, and Schrieber (President of the Union Secretaries Association).²⁵⁰

248. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.12-15.

249. I.E. Young, op.cit., includes only this tiny inner core in his description of the Inner Group.

250. cf. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.15-16, for fuller description of these men. Sometimes not all these names are included in the Group.

All these men held key power positions within the labor movement. Of Garden and Schrieber (the two most important for our purposes because they were most connected with the unemployed movement)

Cooksey writes:

Garden was an efficient organiser expert at getting out the numbers and a good orator, who could sense the feel of a crowd. He was able to maintain control of the Labor Council and the militant unions. Schrieber, a more self-effacing organiser, was leader of the moderate unions. Although both Garden and Schrieber had access to Lang, their usual connection was through Harold McCauley, with whom they had a weekly conference and from whom they received their political , as distinct from industrial, directions. 251

Opinion differs as to whether it was Harold McCauley or Lang *himself* who dominated the Inner Group²⁵²; in any case, McCauley devised the strategy and tactics of the Inner Group, and wrote most of Lang's speeches.²⁵³ What is important for our purposes is the amount of control exercised by the Inner Group over the Labor Council and the trade union movement, for this was to affect the Labor Council's attitude to the unemployed movement.

We saw in the last chapter how Garden's interest in the unemployed movement in the Twenties seemed almost solely political; how he tacitly supported their embarrassment of the new Government after Lang's defeat in 1927, having previously discouraged activism. He was to adopt his pacificatory attitude towards unemployed protest after Lang's election

251. R. Cooksey, *op.cit.*, p.16.

252. Garden later maintained that H. McCauley was "Lang's boss" (I.E. Young, *op.cit.*, p.66) and that he "dominated and manipulated Lang". (R. Cooksey, *op.cit.*, p.15). Cooksey would seem to incline to the view that Lang was supreme, but sees the Lang-McCauley relationship as a political partnership. Young, possibly swayed by the intensity of his dislike for Lang, tends also to see Lang as the boss but sometimes contradicts this view.

in 1930. In the light of the power of the Inner Group over the Labor Council, and Lang and McCauley's power over Garden and Schrieber, it is hard to interpret these actions as being other than deliberate moves by Lang to prevent embarrassment when he failed to fulfil his promises to the unemployed. The Communist Party's charges that the union movement was the henchman of Lang and that the Labor Council was intent on sabotaging the militancy of the unemployed movement and taking the movement over for their own political purposes were overstated, perhaps, but were not just so much unjustified rhetoric.

There were further ways in which the industrial labor movement could be manipulated or coaxed by Lang into accepting with little or no protest actions of Lang's that in fact abrogated his election promises or were in opposition to Labor policy. Lang's policy seems to have been to placate the union leaders and to rely on them to stifle opposition from their members. In this he was acute. As has been pointed out previously unionists were generally willing to be led; while they might criticise amongst themselves, they waited for their leaders to initiate any overt, active opposition. These placatory measures included patronage - elevating unionists to Government boards or jobs for example²⁵⁴ and almost certainly outright graft. P.E. Coleman (President

253. R. Cooksey, op.cit., p.15.

254. cf. I.E. Young, op.cit. pp.67-68: "In the nineteen months of (Lang's) last ministry more than 300 appointments were made - Legislative Council, Meat Board, Transport Board, Milk Board, Western Lands' Board, Factory Inspectors and Industrial Inspectors"; in Chapter 4 it will be shown that the Dole Inspectors were recipients of Lang's patronage.

of the New South Wales Federal Labor Party from 1931 to 1934) stated that Langism was "smellsome with largesses of graft, patronage and corruption".²⁵⁵ Schrieber later told Young that Lang fed party funds into the salaries of many union secretaries. A forged circular (purported to have been issued by Schrieber) in 1937 claimed that Government grants of up to £5000 had been paid to some union secretaries to relieve unemployment in their unions,²⁵⁶ and thus to placate the unemployed. While these charges of corruption could be part of a political slur - campaign, there are so many charges that something would seem to smell; and against serious newspaper allegations Lang, not usually a man to avoid a fight, would take no libel action.

It does seem that benefits given to union officials were passed on to selected unemployed members. There were also a number of complaints that unemployed workers were allocated work through the union offices rather than through the Labour Exchanges according to the length of their registration. A report read at a meeting of the Painters' and Dockers' Union stated that a number of men were getting work through organisations such as the Timber Workers' Union, the F.E.D.F.A. and the Coal Lumpers' Union, and practically none were getting work through the Labour Bureau. The Painters' and Dockers' Union decided to try to get forty of its own members placed on relief work per month.²⁵⁷ Certain aldermen on the Balmain Council complained that unemployed workers "who were fortunate enough to obtain a letter of recommendation from the

255. quoted by L.F. Crisp, Ben Chifley, London, 1960, p.90.

256. I.E. Young, op.cit., p.68.

257. Federated Ships' Painters' and Dockers' Union, New South Wales Branch, Minutes, 14/3/32, p.3.

local M.L.A. had a distinct advantage "in obtaining relief work; when the Department of Labour and Industry claimed it had no knowledge of any preferential treatment several aldermen offered to give evidence for their claim.²⁵⁸

Despite Lang's great power over the union movement I think that the relationship between the influential union leaders and Lang must be seen as a two-way political partnership, though with Lang as the senior partner. Pressure was also exerted on Lang by the union movement and Lang could not simply rely on nepotism or graft to hold the allegiance of union officials. The union officials knew that they were ultimately dependent on the support of their members, and so had to go some way towards implementing their members' wishes and opposing inroads on their members' conditions. Lang, in turn, had to go some way towards implementing or appearing to implement the demands of the union officials. His alliance with Garden, the Labor Council and the union movement was his main power base in the party²⁵⁹ and although by 1930 his independent power was great,²⁶⁰ he could not afford to underestimate Garden's strength or flout the Labor Council completely. His victory at the August conferences over Garden's repudiation policy had not been easily won and was not a complete

258. Balmain Council Minutes, 6/1/31, p.450; 20/1/31, p.451.

259. cf. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.12-14 for a description of how the method of organisation of the A.L.P. was strongly weighted towards the unions rather than the branches and how the Inner Group's strength was spread widely among the unions.

260. It would seem that before 1930 Garden exercised considerable power over Lang but that after the Easter Conference of 1931 Lang's position strengthened greatly. cf I.E. Young "J.T. Lang and the Depression", Labour History, November 1963, p.4 Garden claimed to Young that between 1926 and 1930 he and Willis "never gave Lang much of a chance" to deviate from their desires.

victory²⁶¹. Indeed, Lang finally endorsed the union' repudiation policy.

The actions of the Lang Government often appear to have been middle-way reconciliations between what the unions wanted and what Lang thought was economically feasible or politically wise. So, for example, the 44 hour week was restored but the wage tax was raised to 1/- in the pound; the explosive issue of the payment of award wages to relief workers was avoided by the curtailment of relief works.

Though the most strident protest by the unemployed against the Lang Government was led by Communists who were committed to criticising the Labor Party, these protests do represent a more general dissatisfaction with the failure of the Labor Government to effect an immediate and sweeping change in the relief system. Lang's election rhetoric had given the workless belief that an almost millenar'ial change would occur with his election. Yet the position of most of the unemployed remained the same - though the number of workless rose.

In mid December, Lithgow unemployed workers complained that "the Government was playing a contemptible game" with the unemployed and that "the Government's attitude was not what one would expect of a Labor administration".²⁶² Newcastle unemployed declared Baddeley (Minister for Mines and Minister for Labour and Industry) "a defender of capitalism

261. Immediately after the Central Executive Committee of the A.L.P. rejected the repudiation of debts proposal the Labor Council continued to recommend it. cf. S.M.H., 8/9/30, p.10, (Meeting of Labor Council and unions).

262. S.M.H., 16/12/30, p.12.

and opposed to the needs of the working class he claims to represent" because there had been no dole increase.²⁶³

To complaints of inaction, Government members, both inside and outside Parliament, replied that they needed a little time and a large amount of money. The shortage of funds was the most common cry. It was also no idle excuse. The Unemployment Relief Fund was unable to meet the needs of the unemployed.

Bland points out that many of the relief works declared in the Government Gazette during Bavin administration had been "approved in anticipation of the receipt of funds by the Council, a policy which was roundly condemned by the new Ministers, for they found the income of the Unemployed Relief Fund pledged for the works gazetted and were consequently unable to meet demands from certain groups of unemployed that the 'sustenance scales' should be increased".²⁶⁴

Lang later wrote that, on his gaining the Premiership he found that "The Treasury was broke to the wide wide world".²⁶⁵

The Government openly stated that it would not increase the rations. Baddeley told a deputation representing the Lithgow miners, unemployed and municipal council that "owing to the many economic considerations" he could not grant their request of maintenance equal to the award wage.²⁶⁶

263. ibid., 5/12/30, p.12.

264. F.A. Bland, op.cit., pp.95-96.

265. J.T. Lang, op.cit., p.69.

266. S.M.H., 25/11/30, p.9.

Gosling, the Chief Secretary, told a deputation from the Woonoona Cooperative society that was pressing for increased rations that "the Government was in such a difficult position that the expenditure of every penny had to be considered."²⁶⁷ The Government continued, however, to hold out promises - Baddeley told a deputation from the Illawarra Labor Council which asked for 100 per cent ration increase that "a statement would shortly be made that would please them all in regard to the issue of rations".²⁶⁸

To demands for more relief work the Government promised that any work given would be at award rates and that the Government would do something in the new year.²⁶⁹

The Government no doubt realised that its electors would not continue to be satisfied by promises and excuses; by the end of November some government members were already hinting that unorthodox financial measures might be taken if the shortage of funds continued to hamper the Government. Ely stated -

"There was no doubt that Mr. Lang would be able to get all the finance he needed to carry out his programme." 270

Wills, speaking on the unemployment fund in the Reply to the Supply Bill stated:

"There is reason to believe that whatever funds are reasonably necessary for New South Wales can be raised and will be raised. That will be done in spite of obstacles placed in the way by the Loan Council, if it persists." 271.

267. ibid., 17/12/30, p.13.

268. ibid., 15/12/30, p.9.

269. ibid.

270. ibid., 25/11/30, p.10.

271. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 27/11/30, p.38.

When Parliament opened, Labor claimed it had "already taken some effective steps to relieve the position obtaining throughout the State with regard to hunger and want".²⁷² The only real measure that had been taken was the issuing of rations to single men.²⁷³ (As if in evidence of how much this was needed, one man at Newcastle collapsed in the crowd when the first single men's rations were introduced.²⁷⁴)

In the pre-Christmas session of Parliament Lang introduced three bills concerned with improving the position of the unemployed.²⁷⁵

The Landlord and Tenant Amendment (Distress Abolition) Bill²⁷⁶ was Lang's first attempt to reorganise the relationship between landlords and tenants. It was a fairly moderate revision, limited in scope, and was not aimed at preventing evictions - Lang himself said it was not an attempt to review the whole Landlord and Tenant Act²⁷⁷. It altered the law in regard to distraint for rent - the power under which the landlords could, under certain processes, enter into possession of the tenant's goods and after a certain time sell the furniture for the rent owed.

272. ibid., 26/11/30, p.28.

273. ibid.; S.M.H., 11/11/30, p.10.

274. S.M.H., 11/11/30, p.10.

275. In the same session the Moratorium Bill was introduced. This aimed to protect debtors who had fallen into arrears with their payments. This no doubt helped many unemployed workers, but as it was not aimed specifically at their relief it will not be discussed here.

276. cf. N.S.W.P.D. vol. 124, 11/12/30, pp.458-461; 17/12/30, pp.534-546; Assent recorded 20/1/31 p.769.

277. ibid., 11/12/30, p.461.

The bailiff's actions brought great misery.²⁷⁸ The Methodist Minister of Balmain, the Reverend McKibbon declared: "There are good landlords and bad landlords, and the bad ones sometimes appear to have little realisation of the hardships and sufferings of some of their unfortunate tenants. When a tenant gets behind with his rent, the process of recovering the debt is automatically set in motion. Dealers descend on the house and seize the furniture". (On this occasion McKibbon told the bailiffs that if they wanted a certain tenant's goods they would have to arrest him; they left.²⁷⁹)

Lang, despite his own estate-agent and landlord background, avowed his hatred of bailiffs - "those dirty, drunken, beastly things", he later called them.²⁸⁰ (Interestingly, in October 1930 Smith's Weekly ran an article entitled 'Land Agent J.T. Lang evicts an out-of-work man'.²⁸¹)

The new legislation would not abolish the landlord's right to recover owed rent, but required him to sue for the recovery of the debt through the ordinary legal channels, rather than simply siezing the goods. The Act also provided that magistrates hearing ejection proceedings could exercise more discretion in setting the time for ejection; it did not extend the ejection time, nor did it legislate against evictions.

The other two bills amended the Bavin Government's Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act and the Unemployment Relief (Tax) Act.

278. cf. J. Mackinolty, op.cit., pp.143-144 for two accounts.

279. S.M.H., 27/6/30, p.11.

280. Jack Lang in A.B.C. Radio Programme, This Man Lang, 22/4/69 (cited by J. Mackinolty, op.cit., p.143).

281. Smith's Weekly, 18/10/30, p.1.

The first of these bills²⁸² restricted the membership of the Unemployment Relief Council to the three ministerial members. It also provided for payment from the Unemployment Relief Fund to the Consolidated Revenue Fund of any amounts expended from the latter on unemployed relief.

It also aimed "to make further provision for the assessment and collection of the Unemployment Relief Tax"; these changes were embodied in the amendments to the Relief (Tax) Act,²⁸³ which raised the Wage Tax to 1/- in the pound on wages in excess of 40/- weekly and on incomes in excess of £100 per annum.

This naturally provoked some opposition from the unions, for Lang had strongly attacked Bavin's threepenny tax and the labor movement had expected the Government to drop the tax. The opposition, was, however, comparatively slight²⁸⁴ and Lang's victory on this matter is indicative of his bargaining skill as well as of the great power he could exert on the Labor Council.

282. The Prevention and Relief of Unemployment (Amendment) Bill N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 16/12/30, pp.485-490; 17/12/30, pp.630-643; Assent recorded 20/1/31, p.769.

283. Unemployment Relief (Tax) Amendment Bill. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 17/12/30, pp.643-650; 18/12/30, p.651; Assent 20/1/31, p.769.

284. There is barely a mention of the matter in the T.L.C.M. when the Union Secretaries Association met, a proposal that the Government be censured was defeated and a committee (weighted with Inner Group members) was sent instead to interview Lang. cf. S.M.H., 16/12/30, p.11; cf. ibid., 22/12/30, p.9. for Baddeley's persuasion over the Newcastle Trades Hall Council.

Lang promised the unions that the extra money raised would be used to give award rates to relief workers, and that the tax would only be levied for six months. Lang argued that Bavin had used the tax money to break down the standard of living; it was necessary to impose a short-term hardship on the industrial movement in order to restore living standards. He stated: "From the day that the tax proposed ... becomes operative the nominal standard of living will be restored. By using the money derived from this tax to place unemployed members of the community at work under award conditions we shall hasten the restoration of not merely the nominal but the effective standard of living. The Government believes that it will take not more than six months to do this, probably less, and when that effective standard of living is restored the necessity for this form of taxation will disappear." He claimed that if the wage earners were apportioned their share of the hardships first, it was so that they would be more quickly relieved of it.²⁸⁵

Though Lang had reorganised the Unemployment Relief Council and the Unemployment Relief Fund, his acts actually made little change regarding the position of the unemployed.

Most importantly, Lang did not cut out Section 9 of Bavin's P.R.U. Act which gave the Government the right to ignore the awards relating to wages and conditions on any work declared to be relief work. Lang's failure to declare in the amended Act that awards must be maintained on relief work delighted the Nationalists at this time and arguably later facilitated their introduction of under-award relief work on a large scale. (Of course, if Lang had not retained this provision, the 1932 Nationalist Government

285. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 17/12/30, p.631.

could have reintroduced it, but Lang did make the matter that much more easy for them.)

When Lang's amended Act was under debate Stevens congratulated "the Government on retaining the power to pay less than award rates on unemployment relief works ... At the present time no government can afford to ignore the principle embodied in Section 9". He added that "it would have been easy for the Government immediately it assumed office to have nullified the effect of section 9 by a mere notification in the Gazette setting out that the rates which were being paid were cancelled, and full rates would have operated almost immediately".²⁸⁶

Lang's failure to provide for award relief rates, though it contravened Labor policy, seems to have escaped the notice of the industrial labor movement. (Stevens indeed noted that Lang had "not told the House or the country that he is retaining that provision".) No doubt the Inner Group was able to stifle opposition in regard to this as well as to the increased wage tax.

In criticising Lang's changes of the relief system, Bavin claimed that "far fewer men will be employed and more men will be getting rations than will be getting work."²⁸⁷ This in fact was the main change in relief policy under Lang, for, as already noted, Lang evaded the sensitive issue of the payment or non-payment of award wages on relief work by cutting out most of such work. The notification of relief works ceased; there

286. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 124, 17/12/30, p.635.

287. ibid., 16/12/30, p.488.

was thus no distinction between relief works and other public works. As the employment of casual labour in rotating gangs was enormously expensive, food relief became the principle means of providing for the unemployed.²⁸⁸ In 1930-31 the expenditure on food relief was £1,837,886 and the expenditure on relief works was £2,373,030. In 1931-32 food relief expenditure had risen to £ 5,070,732 and relief work expenditure had fallen to £766,613.²⁸⁹ Because of this the unemployed movement during Lang's ministry concentrated on the anomalies and inadequacy of the dole; there was very little protest about relief work until the re-election of the Nationalists.

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There had been five main occurrences of significance to the unemployed movement in 1930. Firstly the election of the Lang Government, though the benefits of this were more believed in than real; secondly, the reorganisation and systematisation of relief policy and the way relief was given; thirdly, the birth of the U.W.M.; fourthly, the increase in the unemployed workers' determination to fight for the improvement of their position or against attacks on their position; and finally, the reciprocal increase in the determination of Governments, acting through the police, to prevent unemployed protest.

288. cf. F.A. Bland, op.cit., p.96.

289. N.S.W.Y.B., 1936-37, p.682.

The I.U.D. demonstrations, the attack on the Hunger Marchers, the Clovelly case, the relief workers' struggle, police interference with the unemployed women's march, the clash outside Parliament on November 25th - all showed increased determination, better organisation and more readiness for physical confrontation from both sides; yet in a sense these were only a dress rehearsal for the clashes of 1931 and 1932. Hostility between the U.W.M. and the A.L.P. and Labor Council leaders was also to increase in 1931. Similarly, although the organisation of the unemployed movement improved considerably in 1930 - especially after the foundation of the U.W.M. - this too, was to be further consolidated in the coming year.