

HAWKINS

I was standing on the balcony listening to the speakers. I noticed a big Bus come around the corner of the hotel into the street. When he had got around the corner into the street the police jumped out. They had batons in one hand and revolvers in the other. I went inside and went downstairs to tell the others "the police are here" Just as I did a volley of shots came through the back door. I was standing between the backdoor and the door to the front room. A bullet hit the wall close to my head and the plaster spurted out and hit me in the face. Just then I saw one of the men climb over the stair rail and drop to the floor. As he was going towards the front room I heard him say "I'm shot in the arm". Just then the police managed to get in through the back door. They still kept firing When I looked around the room I saw Emmerton, Riley and Murphy on the floor and being batoned and kicked by the police. As I went towards them a policeman hit me and knocked me into the front room. When I got up the police in the front room were trampling over the men and batoning them. I was hit on the head with a baton by one of the police. The baton split. Another policeman then hit me and his baton split also. I was knocked down. They said "fancy breaking good weapons over a bastard like you" I was handcuffed. As I was being taken into the yard the handcuffs fell off. As I passed through the short passage leading to the back yard policemen who were standing there kicked and punched me as I went along. When I reached the backyard they knocked me down and one said "Put the

bracelets on this Russian Bastard". They then handcuffed me to Emmerton. We walked out to the patrol wagon and were taken to the police station. As we got out of the patrol the police were lined up from the patrol to the door of the charge room. As I got out of the patrol the police struck at me. When I reached the door of the charge room one policeman hit me in the face, blackened my eyes and cut my lip. They then set about Emmerton. They knocked him down and kicked him. I called to Garbett to help me pull him into the charge room. We dragged him into a corner of the room. As the policeman took the handcuffs off another policeman hit me as soon as I stood up. When I got to the counter to give my name, the police man behind the counter hit me on the hands with a ruler and said "don't stain this counter with blood, you Russian Bastard" I was taken to hospital and X rayed for fracture of the skull. I was brought back to the police station at Newton and put in the cells.

These reports do present a weighty piece of evidence that the police behaved with unrestrained hostility. Whilst descriptions of the fight differ the accounts support each other in significant details.

Firstly, they all state that the police began firing as soon as they jumped out of the bus, that the pickets only then began to hurl stones in self defence, and that there was not the initial police retreat and consultation in which the police were ordered to fire (mentioned by the Herald).

This is supported by four witnesses from the roadway in statements to Miss Jollie Smith, one of whom added that Farley had no warrant paper in his hand when he arrived and did not declare any warning to the men in the house.²⁸⁶ Though one of these witnesses was arrested himself and two were presumably related to the Hawkins who was arrested, eight witnesses gave evidence in court that Farley had carried no warrant and that the police immediately started firing as they alighted from the bus, before any stones were thrown.²⁸⁷ One such witness was one Albert Clifton, a manufacturer and a Justice of the Peace. He stated that the police "stampeded" and started to fire revolvers on the house; ^{and that} up to that time no missiles had been thrown at the police.²⁸⁸

286. Rex vs Chapman, evidence given to C. Jollie Smith and Co. by William Ernest Hawkins, Edward Mills, Mrs. Dessailly, Henry Haley. (E. Mills was the son-in-law of W.E. Hawkins.)

287. W.W., 12/9/31, p.4.

288. S.M.H., 10/9/31, p.4.

Farley later claimed in court that he did "wave" the warrant at the men and tell them he had a warrant.²⁸⁹ It is noteworthy that neither the Sun nor the Herald made any mention of Farley warning the men or producing the warrant. Even if Farley did "wave" and "read" one can hardly accept that this would have constituted a proper warning: the narrow street was packed with a crowd of hundreds, a large squad of police plus the police vehicles so it is hard to imagine anyone could have noticed either a piece of paper or one policeman's voice, especially if they were behind a wall of barricades one floor above the ground.

Against this evidence that the police began the attack, we have the police and press reports that the pickets were the initiators and the police fired in self-defence.

It seems impossible to prove who the initial assailant was: obviously both sides were immediately ready for the fray. The discrepancy may not arise from deliberate falsehood - from all accounts the fight broke out very quickly and the participants on both sides may not have known exactly what happened.

Certainly, the police statements in court about the shooting were very confused.

Inspector Farley's evidence strongly suggests that some of the police got carried away and fired on their own initiative. He denied

289. Rex vs Chapman, Quarter Sessions, 4 Aug., 1931, Depositions, p.4 ... (Farley's evidence)

that he gave any order to shoot. (The Sun, it will be remembered, declared that he did, and the Herald made it clear that the order to shoot came from the officers in charge). Farley stated that the pickets showered rocks at the police when they approached. "A few minutes after (the police arrival) I heard shots fired by the police. I saw some of the constables with revolvers in their hands ... It was difficult to distinguish shots from the din and row ... Stones were thrown from five to seven minutes before the shots were fired. Some of the police were throwing stones back during that time ... I gave them instructions before going there what their job was. I did not tell them to use their revolvers or not to. They carried out my instructions."²⁹⁰

Farley's last statement blithely covers all possibilities.

A large deal seems to have occurred in the first 'five to seven minutes'. It is possible that witnesses later confused the rocks thrown by the police with the bullets.

It is unlikely that the police all arrived at exactly the same time - forty odd police is a large number to organise in a narrow street. So it is quite possible that some only alighted from the bus when the firing had begun, and so came out shooting to help their colleagues.

290. Rex vs Chapman
Quarter Sessions, 4 Aug. 1931, Depositions, pp.3-6.

The second significant feature of the pickets' accounts is the amount of evidence that the police at the back of the house shot into the house. Garbett mentions police shooting into the upstairs back room through the window, and shooting up the stairs. Clark saw police with revolvers outside the back window. Dare reports nearly being hit by a bullet fired into the back room and Hawkins describes "a volley of shots" through the back door, and the police shooting as they entered. Stace is the only one who does not mention the bullets downstairs - but he was in the front room.

These statements are given added credibility by the Sun report of bullets in the stairwell.

Finally, although the police were at such pains in their court evidence to deny any knowledge of shooting, one sergeant implied that there was at least one shot fired in the back room. He described his entry into the room and under questioning by Miss Smith said: "I can't say the name of one Constable who drew or fired his revolver. I heard what sounded like a revolver shot but I would not swear that it was."²⁹¹ (Though the first sentence is ambiguous, it does seem that the specific meaning is intended - that there was a particular constable whom he cannot name.)

If the police did fire into the dark and crowded house - and the evidence would suggest that at least a couple of bullets were shot

291. Rex vs Chapman
Quarter Sessions 4 Aug. 1931, Depositions, p.11 (evidence of Sergeant George Phillips).

inside - it was recklessly brutal, to say the least. It is a wonder that no one was killed as it was.²⁹²

We have, too, only the pickets' word for the alleged brutal bashings after the men were arrested. These accounts are so specific, however, and correlate so well that they do seem true.

The accounts of the police abuse, their calling the pickets "Russian Bs" etcetera, suggests the police were in a bloody frame of mind, which, of course, one can understand. Their side had suffered injuries and insults also. I am not intending to vilify the police, though it would seem some of them acted irresponsibly during the fight. The police, according to their own rationale, were justified in using force to protect property.

However, once the men were arrested, they were completely powerless, they posed no threat to the police but were, it would seem, attacked in revenge.

All but Stace mention the police wielding rulers at the men in the station.

Garbett, Stace, Dare and Hawkins specifically mention the police line from the station gate to the charge room, which bashed the men methodically as they went past; Clark mentions bashings at the door of the chargerroom.

In the court case Farley, under questioning from Clive Evatt,

292. Though the Workers' Weekly claims (26/6/31, p.1) that Murphy was also shot - in the scalp - he may only have been batoned.

the defence barrister, admitted that upon arrival at the station the gates were closed and that the police were formed up in two lines. "He said the men were handcuffed but did not receive kicks or punches ... The prisoners were not handled with kid gloves. It was necessary to 'handle' them to stop them from continuing their attacks on the police.²⁹³ (According to the Workers' Weekly "he grinned as if enjoying the joke at this point, and upon Mr. Evatt objecting, the Judge remarked ... 'Let him laugh if he wants to, it doesn't matter' ."²⁹⁴)

Perhaps the most important allegations of bashings refer to Emmerton and Goldberg. Only Hawkins does not state that Goldberg was bashed on the jaw as he entered the charge room - and Hawkins was already in the room and busy defending Emmerton, so probably could not have seen this.

Garbett, Clark and Hawkins describe the police kicking Emmerton while he was on the floor; the evidence of Garbett and Hawkins is particularly corroborative.

(Is it too corroborative? I do not think so. There is no word-for-word similarity in the accounts and it is notable that though Clark describes Emmerton's beating he does not know Emmerton's name: Surely if the claims were fabricated there would have been no doubt about the name?)

The battle inside the house was by no means the full story.

293. W.W., 1/9/31, p.1.

294. ibid.

Many thousands in crowd

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In the street outside there was a crowd "hostile to the police, numbering many thousands. They filled the street for a quarter of a mile on each side of the house."²⁹⁵ This was a much larger crowd than had gathered at any earlier eviction fight. As the clash occurred on a work day, it is a reasonable assumption that most of the men present were unemployed workers.

The police cleared a space of about one hundred yards either side of the house. Again many officers acted with unnecessary force.

"I saw a constable ^{showing} the people along the street. I was on one side and was hit on the head by a constable who was swinging his baton My head was still bad the following Wednesday."²⁹⁶

"Police were clearing people in the street and knocking them out of the road."²⁹⁷

As well as the pickets a man called Henry Haley was arrested: "Police moved me down street one of the police made a swing at me with a baton. I dodged it and ran up street and he missed and I picked up brick or pieces of metal ... Then I was hit with a baton on head. Blood over clothes. Struggled. Then five or six Johns took me up to car and drove away."²⁹⁸

Although the Herald and the police neglected to mention the fact, many of the police who patrolled the crowd had drawn revolvers. (See photograph opposite.) This again would appear to have been irresponsible

295. S.M.H., 20/6/31, p.13.

296. Rex vs Chapman, Evidence given to C. Jollie Smith & Co. by William Hawkins.

297. ibid., Evidence of Edward Mills.

298. ibid., Evidence of Henry Haley (slightly punctuated).

over-reaction; it is also a measure of the belligerence of the crowd, or at least of the police fear of this belligerence.

There was no doubt where the sympathies of the crowd lay: "At times the huge crowd threatened to become out of hand. It was definitely antagonistic to the police. When constables emerged from the back of the building with their faces covered in blood, the crowd hooted and shouted insulting remarks. When the defenders were led out they were cheered. When one patrol wagon containing prisoners was being driven away, people standing well back in the crowd hurled stones at the police driver."²⁹⁹

Perhaps the most striking indication of the excitement of the crowd and of the crush that resulted when police pushed them back is that one woman fainted and a forty-year-old man ~~had~~ died of a seizure.³⁰⁰

That so many thousands should support the pickets in this battle was indubitably one of the U.W.M.'s greatest shows of strength.

The court case was also a moral victory for the U.W.M.

299. S.M.H., 20/6/31, p.13; The Sun, 19/6/31, p.1, also noted the crowd's hostility to the police.

300. S.M.H., 20/6/31, Sun, 19/6/31, p.1. Little attempt is made to explain this death. There was only a small bruise under his chin. It would seem that he collapsed in the crush.

The eighteen pickets³⁰¹ and Haley were charged with causing a riot and unlawful assembly. Clive Evatt pointed out that this was the first time a charge under the Common Law Riot had been made in Australia; he claimed that 'Riot' under the Act, had to be in a public place and in view of the public whereas what had occurred in the house was not seen by the public. There had never been in English law a proven case where the alleged riot had occurred on private property.³⁰²

As Evatt pointed out, charges of assault could have been used instead; it would seem that the police decided to 'throw the book' at them.

The case was heard in an atmosphere inimical to the defendants. Judge Coyle stated: "I consider that revolvers are not much of a weapon. I'd sooner face them than a barrage of stones".³⁰³

On the second day of the trial the Police Prosecutor announced that he would call a number of new witnesses. Evatt objected that this

301. The full list (with ages) was: Robert Chapman (26); Frank Dorman (26); Leslie Bernstein (28); Arthur Chant (34); Maurice Gavin (27); John Stace (27); James Miller (25); Reginald Hawkins (33); Raymond Dare (26); Robert Clarke (27); Joseph Garbett (37); Patrick Storen (26); Percy Riley (33); Bruno Urbanski (59); Leslie Goldberg (31) Percy Joshua (29); John Murphy (39); Leonard Emmerton (39). From S.M.H., 16/7/31, p.6). It should be noted that most of the men were in their mid-twenties to late-thirty age group. *Average age* 31

302. W.W., 18/9/31, p.4.

303. ibid., 11/9/31, p.1.

(Arvid Redfern)

was improper, and that he was unable to discuss this new evidence with his clients because they were "herded together like cattle."³⁰⁴ The Judge reminded Evatt that the Police Prosecutor had won a V.C. so "I will not allow you to say he has acted in any way improperly."³⁰⁵

As I have already dealt with some of the police evidence it only remains to stress the determination of the police to deny any knowledge of shooting. At the preliminary Quarter Sessions hearing five policemen as well as Farley gave evidence. Only one, Phillips, "heard what sounded like a revolver shot"; the rest made no mention of shooting and one stated, "I did not hear any shots fired at all". There was at least one obvious lie; one policemen said "Halley (obviously Haley) was in the front room and doing his share of fighting".³⁰⁶ Yet Haley was never in the house.

Evatt in summing up the case maintained that the police had exceeded the limits of their duty and that they had come "with malice aforethought."³⁰⁷

The Judge attacked the defence case in his speech to the jury,³⁰⁸ his speech claimed it was impossible for anyone to imagine that the police had been lying.³⁰⁹

That the Jury, in spite of this, were^a able to bring in ~~the~~ verdict suggests that the police evidence must have been inconsistent in the

304. ibid.

305. L.D., 9/9/31, p.5.

306. Rex vs. Chapman, Quarter Sessions, 4 Aug. 1931, Depositions, pp.6-16. Last statement from Gibbons (p.12).

307. W.W., 18/9/31, p.4.

308. ibid

309. S.M.H., 11/9/31, p.5.

extreme. The men were discharged on a reduced bail and remanded indefinitely for re-trial. In the end pressure was brought to bear upon the Government and by October the charges were dropped.³¹⁰

do you want to elaborate this?

The day after the Newtown fight, Garden addressed a meeting in support of his candidature for the Cook pre-selection ballot. He announced that there would be no more evictions, and that the Government would soon introduce anti-eviction legislation.³¹¹ He could hardly say otherwise, with votes to be won.

at this announcement of end of evictions?

There were, of course, more evictions, right up to the end of the decade.³¹² There were, however, no more big fights at this stage.

This was not due to any change of policy on the part of the police. Whether or not it was due to a sudden dwindling courage on the part of the anti-evictionists is open to question, though I think it was not.

The saga of the eviction struggles concluded with two spectacular non-events, and a small successful fight.

On Monday, June 29th, there was a "secret raid" at dawn by more than fifty police on a house at Bridge Road, Glebe. The police were incredibly well prepared. One group of police arrived and hid in neighbouring backyards, then reinforcements of police were brought. The house had been occupied for several weeks by the Glebe U.W.M. but on this morning there was only one man on duty, probably because of the early hour.

310. ibid., 24/10/31, p.13; also Notes on Cases for I.C.W.P.A. (in Phil Thorne Collection with rest of material relating to Rex vs Chapman.)

311. S.M.H., 22/6/31, p.9. *check LD too*

312. In 1940 the member for Balmain protested against the great number of evictions taking place each week (N.S.W.P.D., vol.161, 1/5/1940, p.8216.)

The pickets had not been lax in the matter of barricades; there were even booby traps: the floor boards were completely removed in the front room. "The door, reinforced by three layers of timber and held in position by powerful stays was supported by a great beam of timber extending across to the opposite wall. Similar barricades had been erected around the window. In the kitchen similar supports had been erected around the doors and windows, while in an upstairs room a hole had been cut in the ceiling and the iron roof lifted sufficiently to give a clear view of the yard..."

"In the front upstairs room a glass door leading to the verandah was protected by sheets of wood and iron, braced by a beam of wood extending to the opposite wall. It would have been impossible for the attacking police to have reached this door by the verandah, which overhangs the footpath, for here the woodwork had been sawn through in many places, weakening it to such an extent that any weight placed upon it would have brought it crashing fifteen feet to the ground."³¹³

The tenant of the house was Henry Gee, aged 37, an unemployed carpenter with a family. He had fought at Gallipoli. He was about £5 in arrears when the landlady, who owned thirty-three houses, told him to leave. Gee and Robert Brechin, 38, unemployed butcher of Glebe were subsequently charged with maliciously damaging "certain real property" to

313. Sun, 29/6/31, p.7.

the extent of £50. Brechin had also fought in the war, in the Royal
Scotch Fusiliers. 314

Brechin gives an interesting account which gives some idea of how
it felt to be on picket duty:

"I went down to this address about 11 p.m. Sunday night. It
was the first night I had been there. (I had been there during the day ...
When I went down there on Sunday night ... there were a few men in the
yard ... They left.) I was to be there until the next morning. I was
in the kitchen the whole time - reading - Did not sleep. Before day break
I heard knocking at the back gate. Went down, Called out 'Who's there.'
Answer 'Its alright'. I said, 'Who is it'. He said, 'Harry,' I said
'Harry who'. He said, 'Its alright, remember I was talking to you on
^{picket line??} (illegible) yesterday.' I said, 'Thats funny I wasn't on the (illegible) 315
yesterday.' Then I got up on the fence and looked over, and saw
a crowd of men apparently plain clothes police, about 30 there. They
said nothing. I got down and went back into the kitchen. About
half an hour later went out into the lane same way with my hat and book.
Police were there and arrested me. Charged later When I was taken back
to the house I said I knew nothing about it. I saw police break windows...
Robson made a hit at me. * Mackay pushed him aside. Plainclothes policemen
then threw me against barricaded door. Door didn't give way. Police

314. Brechin and Gee vs Police. This is C. Jollie Smith & Co's file on this
case (also from Phil Thorne collection). Contains statements by
Brechin and Gee to Smith re arrests, charge sheets, court depositions
(evidence of 3 police, estate agent), letters from owner of house,
Court jottings of Miss Smith and her notes on the Depositions etc.
(It is also wrongly labelled Brechin and Gee vs Regina). Brechin
was a leading activist in the Glebe U.W.M. (W.W., 20/2/31, p.4.).

315. (Door) is crossed out.

* 15 this the Police Commissioner or whatever he was

got axe and chopped door down ... I was pushed through house first and up stairway and tried to get me out on front verandah."³¹⁶ (which the police knew would break).

After Brechin was arrested Gee, his wife and a small boy arrived outside the house and Gee was pushed into a police car and later charged with the damage.

The police evidence was contradictory³¹⁷ and so tenuous that the jury acquitted the men. The Workers' Weekly pointed out: "The judge in his summing up stated very definitely that either the police or the workers were lying, so their acquittal is a strong indictment by a jury of police perjury."³¹⁸ Christian Jollie Smith's jottings sum up the case for the defence: "Police suspicious re house on hearsay. Believed them guilty when turned up. No evidence to prove Brechin and Gee did it. 'If reasonable doubt must acquit' ... Defence is that accused men not concerned in actual damage. Nothing more than case of suspicion. Mere presence on the scene is not enough."³¹⁹

316. Brechin and Gee vs. Police. Brechin's statement to C. Jollie Smith & Co.

317. e.g. Sergeant Coombes said Brechin helped him smash the door down; Constable Cook said Coombes alone smashed it; the police disagreed over what Brechin and Gee said cf. Brechin and Gee vs Police, court depositions of police evidence.

318. W.W., 4/9/31, p.4.. (The case came before Quarter Sessions on August 4th.).

319. Brechin and Gee vs Police.

The pattern of anti-climax after weeks of preparation was repeated in a house in Bolton Street Guildford, though in this case the outcome was ignominious.

The house had been well picketed by Granville, Liverpool and Bankstown U.W.M. members for weeks.³²⁰ The tenant was George Bateman,* leader of the Granville U.W.M. so the strength of the support is not surprising. All the doors and windows were barricaded, there were barbed wire and sapling reinforcements, and large quantities of blue metal were stored inside. Across the front was written "Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the houses after the revolution."

Good local support was raised. On June 18th (the day after the Bankstown fight) a crowd of four to five hundred assembled because they thought the eviction was about to take place³²¹ and on June 29th nearly one thousand people lined the street because of another rumour that the fight was due. By this stage police traps had been made in the house.³²²

When the police made their raid, on Thursday July 2nd, the house was empty except for two men who were scrubbing the floor. On Wednesday night the pickets, thinking that the warrant had expired, had held a victory concert. The strength of the barricades can be gauged from the fact that it took thirty to forty pickets four hours to remove them. There was little damage to the house.³²³

320. S.M.H., 21/5/31, p.10, says "pickets" still guarding" the house.

321. ibid, 19/6/31, p.9.

322. ibid., 30/6/31, p.13 (There were rumours, denied by the pickets, that the pickets had sulphuric acid.)

323. ibid., 3/7/31, p.11.

Though the police claimed that the anti-evictionists had decided that discretion was the better part of valour, I find it unlikely that the pickets had backed out. As we have seen, the U.W.M. branches in that area were very militant, and had had a fine record of eviction fighting. If they were to lose courage, surely this would have happened immediately after the Bankstown/Newtown fights; moreover, Bateman would surely not have agreed to a withdrawal.

To add insult to injury, Bateman was charged - and convicted - of "having in his possession on July 2 a quantity of barbed wire reasonably suspected of having been stolen". He said in court that he had believed that the police warrant to take possession of the premises had expired on July 1. He denied that the house was vacated because members were afraid of the police, and admitted saying that "the police would have to march over his dead body before they would gain entrance to the place."³²⁴

As it would have been in Bateman's interest to say he had backed down, I think his claims must be accepted. As to the Glebe case, the absence of pickets was due to negligence and the earliness of the police raid, rather than a withdrawal from the struggle.

> was the rally resurgent given that police didn't enter before 9 1/2

Both these cases point up the fact that while the police became increasingly more organised and more cunning in the eviction struggle, the unemployed never really learnt that they had to be ready in large numbers at all times. While their barricade methods improved, while their commitment did not waver, they were just not well organised enough to take on an efficient disciplined opponent such as the police force.

324. ibid., 9/7/31, p.6, 16/7/31, p.6.

It is significant that the only recorded successful eviction fight at this time happened outside the area controlled by the Sydney police, happened indeed at Broken Hill where the police knew that they could easily be numerically outweighed. On June 24th, a thousand workers massed at the Broken Hill Trades Hall and marched to a barricaded house where they were addressed by the I.C.W.P.A. National Secretary about the Sydney shootings. Resolutions condemning Lang and the police were passed, and the Broken Hill police put pressure on the landlord to withdraw the eviction order.

but Globe was successful

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Not surprisingly, the reaction of the labor movement, apart from its parliamentary representatives, was stridently opposed to police enforcement of evictions and in particular to the police bashings and shootings.

As for the Labor Party M.Ps, they were embarrassed into trying to cover up the issue entirely, or into ^{trying to} set ~~the~~ public sympathy against the anti-evictionists. The Newtown case was not mentioned in Parliament. The Labor Daily reported without comment, let alone criticism, Gosling's statement that the police action regarding evictions "is most distasteful ... but they have no choice but to do it" and that in the Redfern case "they were justified". The paper also tried to take the sting out of evictions by pointing out that the Government and local bodies "were cooperating to ensure that no one was homeless over winter."³²⁶

325. W.W., 10/7/31, p.4.

326. L.D., 3/6/31, p.1.

The Labor Daily also tried to circumvent the labor movement's opposition to eviction enforcement by under-stating the violence of the clashes. The account of the Bankstown fight is brief and gives no idea of the dimensions of the fight, whilst the Newtown battle is not even mentioned.

Gosling in a later statement again claimed that the tenants at Redfern and Leichhardt would take no advantage of an offer to move their furniture and that they "had placed the matters in the hands of a body of people who seem more concerned about causing a disturbance than with providing or assisting to provide shelter for the people whom they profess to help. With regard to the Bankstown and Newtown cases, the tenants were not in possession of the property, and the police removed groups of men who had apparently evicted the tenants previously."³²⁷ This, as we have seen, was a lie, at least in regard to the Bankstown case.³²⁸

Another of Lang's colleagues told a U.W.M. meeting that "he objected to the batoning of 'genuine' unemployed, but he did not object to the batoning of the 'rough' element"³²⁹. We are back to the paradox that the 'genuine' ones, i.e. those who did not demonstrate, did not get batoned anyway.

327. S.M.H., 22/6/31, p.1.

328. The reports do not show who the tenant was in the Newtown case, but the Workers' Weekly states that he was present at the fight.

329. W.W., 17/7/31, p.4.

The links between Lang and the Labor Council officials were not strong enough to prevent the Council's public condemnation of the police action - though it was careful to disassociate Lang from these actions.

As well as providing bail money the Council agreed to send delegates to an I.C.W.P.A. meeting regarding the prisoners; it endorsed a U.W.M. letter protesting against the police actions; and Garden agreed to speak at a U.W.M./I.C.W.P.A. demonstration of support for the prisoners. It also carried a motion expressing "detestation and condemnation of the action of the police in shooting and bashing workers who were defending unemployed workers' houses" and demanded "that the Government immediately institute an enquiry into the police actions, unconditionally release the arrested workers and introduce legislation to prevent the eviction of impoverished workers".³³⁰

It was, as already pointed out, not hard to induce the Labor Council to vote against the police. And in the face of unionists' feelings about the evictions a resolution of protest was politically advisable.

The protest against police brutality did not in any way mean that the Labor Council hierarchy had forgiven the Communists for the recent confrontation in Council, nor that the Council endorsed the action of the anti-evictionists.

As McQueen points out about the nineteenth century gold-diggers' attitudes vis-a-vis police and bushrangers: "Diggers did not sympathise with the men who stole their gold, rather they lacked sympathy with the police who were supposed to protect it. But opposition to the police

³³⁰.
T.L.C.M., 25/6/31; 9/7/31; 16/7/31; 13/8/31.

does not mean support for thieves."³³¹ Similarly, the Labor Council's opposition to the police did not mean support for Communists, or militant demonstrators who embarrassed Lang.

Indeed, Communist delegates who proposed a motion of protest against police batonings got a nasty surprise when the Labor Council passed an addendum protesting against Communist batonings of Labor Council delegates!³³²

The Newcastle Trades Hall Council took a more determined stand. It asked the State Government to provide legal assistance for eviction prisoners.³³³ It also unanimously carried the following resolutions after being addressed by Bella Weiner, who was a member of the New South Wales U.W.M. Executive.

- "1) This Council urges all affiliated and non-affiliated unions to withdraw all support from the 'Labor Daily' and declare it black, owing to its anti-working class character.
- 2) This Council urges all trade unions to organise demonstrations on the job, in the factories and pits to protest against police interference in evictions. "
- 3) That a levy be struck to raise money for the prisoners and their families. "That the Council stands solidly behind the U.W.M. in all their struggles for better conditions."³³⁴

331. H. McQueen, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

332. *S.M.H.*, 26/6/31, p.12.

333. *ibid.*, 20/6/31, p.13.

334. *W.W.*, 26/6/31, p.1.

The first motion is an implicit criticism of Lang.

The Wollongong Trades and Labor Council also protested against Lang's sending the police in upon unemployed workers.³³⁵

Various union sections also joined the protest. The Cullen Bullen and Zig Zag Miners Lodges (of Lithgow) refused to pay their Labor Daily levy as a protest against the bashings.³³⁶

The Rockdale branch of the A.E.U. recommended that the Union withdraw from the A.L.P. and condemned the "outrages" at Bankstown and Newtown.³³⁷

The Clerks' Union protested against the bashings and demanded the release of the prisoners and the provision of anti-eviction legislation.³³⁸

The Executive of the A.E.U. condemned the action of the Labor Government over the bashings and demanded the release of the men and the disarming of the police,³³⁹ and the Burwood and Bondi branches and the A.E.U. District Committee requested the Central Council to ask the Government to release the prisoners. (The Central Council refused).³⁴⁰

In the individual unions there seems often to have been the same reluctance of the leaders to condemn Lang for the bashings as in the Labor Council. At a meeting of the New South Wales branch of the Painters and Dockers a motion was proposed protesting police brutality and

335. S.M.H., 6/7/31, p.10.

336. W.W., 24/7/31, p.4.

337. ibid., 10/7/31, p.4.

338. S.M.H., 15/7/31, p.9.

339. ibid., 17/7/31, p.2.

340. ibid., 14/8/31, p.4.

condemning "the action of the social fascist Labor Government in allowing their police thugs being used against members of the working class". Union leaders changed the motion to one protesting against evictions in general.³⁴¹

There was some protest from the rank and file of the A.L.P. The Croydon Labor league supported the I.C.W.P.A.'s efforts to help the prisoners.³⁴² At a meeting of the Newtown Socialisation Committee resolutions of protest demanded the immediate release of the prisoners and a committee of four A.L.P. members and four U.W.M. members was elected to interview the Government to demand anti-eviction legislation. A mass protest meeting was arranged. At the meeting called by the Socialisation Committee the hall was packed and hundreds crowded outside.³⁴³

Of course, resolutions of protest flooded in from U.W.M. branches and other C.P.A. fraternal - for example, the Queensland State Executive of the U.W.M., the Resdale (Brisbane) U.W.M., the Darwin, C.P., the Adelaide, U.W.M., to name just a few.³⁴⁴

There were also a number of mass protest meetings; though these were often well attended they were not as militant as some Communists had hoped.

(Some Communist and other militant speakers had called for "armed revolt" in response to the police shootings. "Force must be met

341. Federated Ships' Painters and Dockers' Union, N.S.W. Branch, Minutes, 22/6/31.

342. W.W., 7/8/31, p.3.

343. ibid., 26/6/31, p.1. *check another source.*

344. ibid.: 10/7/31, p.4, 17/7/31, p.1.

with force", one declared. "You have to get busy and build up your workers' battalions."³⁴⁵)

On the night of the Newtown affray Communists arranged a demonstration at Central; they announced that they would carry out reprisals against the police. Several hundreds gathered and, according to the Herald, there was a crowd of a thousand or more "sightseers". (The Herald often made such a distinction, in order to show that actual support for a demonstration was not so strong. How the Herald distinguished between those who gathered and those who watched is in many cases beyond me; in regard to this demonstration we can take it, I think, that most of the crowd were in sympathy.)

The demonstration was not very successful. It had been intended to march to the Communist Hall but the police were "so numerous" that the plan was dropped, and speeches were made instead. An attempt to block the traffic was frustrated and one man with an iron bar who shouted "Forward" was arrested. This "had a sobering effect", though someone did hit a sergeant with a stone.³⁴⁶

A mass protest meeting of unemployed at Newtown Stadium demanded the release of the prisoners and condemned the "use of Reverend Chandler as an intelligence officer for the Chief Secretary's Department."³⁴⁷

345. S.M.H., 22/6/31, p.1. (Jeffrey speaking at Newcastle).

346. ibid., 20/6/31, p.13.

347. W.W., 17/7/31, p.4.

In the face of all this pressure, what could Lang do but try to reassert his standing as the Workers' Friend and forestall further police action by bringing in anti-eviction legislation?

This indeed he did as quickly as possible, and though the new legislation did not satisfy U.W.M. militants, though it did fall short on many grounds, it must have offered some relief or some postponement of misery to many. The U.W.M. claimed Lang's eviction postponement legislation as the direct outcome of the Bankstown and Newtown fights.³⁴⁸ The claim certainly had considerable justification.

On June 26th Lamaro, the New South Wales Attorney General, put before Parliament a 'Fair Rents and Lessees' Relief Bill', intended, he said, to re-enact the old Labor law regarding Fair Rents, which the Bavin Government had made a "dead letter".³⁴⁹ It is clear from his first speech that it was the eviction problem, rather than the rent problem that had spurred the Government to introduce the bill: "Evicting people from their homes appears now to be a matter which largely depends upon the whim of the estate agent, and a law is necessary to bring about some standard in regard to the matter."³⁵⁰

The Nationalists opposed the bill, objecting particularly to Clause 19, Section 5, which was "a provision ... that when application is made for an order of eviction the magistrate may suspend it for a period of not more than three months if he is satisfied that the person

348. Crimes Against the Unemployed, issued by the U.W.M., N.S.W. State Executive, Sydney, no date (seems to have been written just after the 1932 N.S.W. elections), p.12. *cf p 486*

349. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 127, 26/6/31, p.3656; 2/7/31, p.3923. First reading of the bill was on 1/7/31, and 2nd reading 2/7/31.

350. *ibid.*, 26/6/31, p.3656.

is in impoverished circumstances"³⁵¹ and to Section 6 which allowed the Court to suspend the execution of an eviction warrant "for any period which seems in the circumstances of the case just and reasonable".³⁵²

The U.W.M. objected that it did too little: "The sum total of the ... act from a legal point of view is to leave the unemployed tenant in precisely the same position as he was before - at the mercy of a magistrate with the added indignity of police supervision of his domestic affairs".³⁵³

A month later this bill was withdrawn.³⁵⁴ The U.W.M. claimed it was withdrawn "due to the hostility of the unemployed as it was a sheer attempt at bluff".³⁵⁵ There may have been pressure for the introduction of much more forthright measures, exerted probably through the Labor Council, though there is no record of this. Lamaro stated the bill was withdrawn because the Government decided it would be more sensible to separate the issues of lessees' relief and eviction.³⁵⁶

So in early August, Lamaro introduced the Ejectments Postponement Bill. Again it is evident that the Government wanted to get something done immediately to stop evictions. Lamaro said he considered this "the most important bill" of the series of bills related to rent.³⁵⁷ This Bill

351. ibid.

352. ibid., 2/7/31, p.3935.

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

354. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 128, 21/7/31, p.4461.

355. W.W., 28/8/31, p.4.

356. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 128, 21/7/31, p.4461; 4/8/31, p.4973.

357. ibid., 4/8/31, p.4973.

aimed to postpone the evictions of tenants who paid less than £3 a week under certain circumstances.

If the Nationalists disliked Clause 19 in the earlier bill, they hated the new bill. Clause 4 provided that "if an occupier is in impoverished circumstances the court, in considering an application for ejection, may stay the eviction for a period of at least three months".³⁵⁸

The Nationalists fell back upon the argument that relief sapped the moral fibre of the unemployed and, by extension, of the whole society; they also, quite irrelevantly, used the discussion to air their view that the reduction of the wages bill would cure virtually anything: "Men are now being taught to accept charity and live on the dole and to get into houses without paying any rent, with the result that we are creating a race of idlers.... Legislation of this kind is getting unemployed people into a condition in which they will not want to work We must suspend the operation of the Industrial Arbitration Act for 2 or 3 years and let industry just pay as much as it can afford".³⁵⁹

The U.W.M. was also dissatisfied with the Act. It agreed that "a partial measure of relief has been afforded to the unemployed, insofar as evictions are concerned", but in a pamphlet produced at least ten months after the introduction of the bill pointed out that experience had shown that the legislation had significant drawbacks.

358. ibid., 5/8/31, p.5030, My emphasis.

359. ibid., 4/8/31, p.4972 (statement by Walker).

Section 4 Clause 4 provided that: " Any stay or suspension of execution or postponement of possession made by the Court may be made subject to the payment by the occupier of such sum (if any) by way of compensation for his occupancy of the dwelling house as is fixed by the court ..."

In other words, the magistrate could decide only to stay the warrant if an 'occupation payment', which was tantamount to rent, was paid. And the whole reason for the evictions in the first place was that the unemployed did not have any money for rent.

The U.W.M. pointed out: "Under this Section tenants are induced to pay occupation rent out of child endowment money with the result that children are denied proper food, nourishment and clothing Any monies earned by the unemployed on ... relief works in excess of the dole will be ordered to be paid as 'occupation rent' ."

Also, the eligibility of the tenant was left to the magistrate's discretion.

The tenant had to establish that "his failure to obtain sufficient employment has been through no fault of his own". The magistrate had to decide where the fault lay.

The U.W.M. gave this case as an example of the unfairness of this in practice: a worker engaged by a market gardener at £4. a week ^{check} rented a cottage from his employer. The employer decided to reduce the wages

to £3 so the worker quit. He could not find another job, was unable to pay rent, and his former employer tried to evict him. The magistrate would not postpone the ejection order because the tenant had refused the reduced wage, and he was evicted.

Whilst £3 might sound better than nothing, the worker had even in the beginning been working for less than the basic wage.

Finally, the U.W.M. argued that if a landlord proceeded for an ejection through the Supreme Court (rather than through a Magistrate's court) the tenant could be evicted in fourteen days. "On Monday, 2nd May, 1932 in a case before the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Halse Rodgers pointed out that he had shortly after the passing of the Ejectments Postponement Act ruled that the Supreme Court could not give any tenant the benefit of the Act, owing to the faulty drafting of the Act itself. He further stated that the matter had been brought under the notice of the Minister for Justice and that the Government had done nothing to remedy the fault."³⁶⁰

Another fact not mentioned by the U.W.M. is the provision in Clause 5 that "the Court shall not grant any stay ... if it is satisfied that the owner would thereby suffer undue hardship."³⁶¹ Again, it was up to the magistrate to decide this.

The fact that evictions continued shows that the U.W.M.'s complaints were justified, and were not just a critical reflex action against anything the Lang Government did.

360. Crimes Against the Unemployed, pp.12-14.

361. N.S.W.P.D., vol. 128, 5/8/31, p.5034.

* of WL p 91-92 The only bit of legit Lang talks of is the rent moratorium - he obviously sees it as crucial.

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In October 1931 the Lang Government passed the Reduction of Rents Act which provided for a general 22½ per cent reduction of rents except where the landlord obtained a court order permitting a higher rent. There were certain provisions that if a landlord had already reduced his rent since June 30, 1930 this would be taken into account. Lessors were prevented from charging a higher rental on future leases than the existing rental, so that landlords would not be able to get rid of an old tenant and charge a higher rental to a new tenant.³⁶²

When the Act expired in December 1932 the reduction was extended to December 1936 by the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act, 1932-35.³⁶³

* The Reduction of Rents Act was one of the most forthright and helpful Acts passed by the Lang Government. Again, the reduction would not have helped those who had absolutely no money to pay rent, but to those of the unemployed who could scrape together a small income it must have been a great boon.

Although the U.W.M.'s struggles in June had been specifically aimed at the eviction rather than the rent problem the clashes had dramatically highlighted the whole issue of unemployed workers' housing problems. I think we must see Lang's 22½ per cent rent reduction as largely the product of the U.W.M.'s fight, for this bill developed out of the Fair Rents and Lessees' Relief Bill which the Government introduced with such alacrity only a week after the Newtown skirmish. Certainly, the

362. ibid., vol. 130, 29/9/31, pp.6833-6851 (1st, 2nd and 3rd Readings. Assent granted 24/11/31, p.7041.

363. N.S.W.Y.B., 1934-35, p.738.

U.W.M. deserves the major credit for the introduction of anti-eviction legislation.

Up to this time the Labor Council and the trade union movement had done nothing about the eviction problem. Indeed, as soon as Lang was elected it had decided not to carry out the Unemployed Workers' Union's policy of opposing evictions.³⁶⁴ The police bashings of U.W.M. members provoked such concern in the union movement that in early July the Labor Council asked the Government to stop the evictions of the unemployed.³⁶⁵ If the U.W.M. had not acted it is most unlikely that the union movement would have pressured Lang over this issue.

Similarly, the U.W.M.'s actions forced the hand of the parliamentary Labor Party.

On the same day as the Newtown battle the N.S.W. Labor Caucus called for an amendment of the Fair Rents Act "without delay" and for legislation to protect the unemployed against eviction. Although Lamaro pointed out to them that the Government had been considering such legislation "for some time"³⁶⁶ there had been no attempt to do anything until the U.W.M. forced the situation. Even if it could be argued that the Lang Government would have passed the legislation anyway, the U.W.M. was responsible for it being passed quickly and at that time. And for unemployed workers who could not pay high rents or who faced eviction it was vital that such legislation should be passed as quickly as possible.

364. T.L.C.M., 18/12/1930, p.694.

365. S.M.H., 3/7/31, p.12.

366. ibid., 20/6/31, p.13.

By showing its determination to fight against evictions even in the face of severe bashings, shootings and long terms of imprisonment, by bringing the eviction situation to the attention of the whole society through the press publicity of the fights, and by winning strong local mass support around the struggles, the U.W.M. caused the Labor Government such embarrassment that it had to take some action to alleviate the rent and accommodation problem.

Though evictions continued, though the unemployed still had no rent allowance, though many workers had been injured and imprisoned, the outcome of the U.W.M.'s protest against evictions caused a significant improvement in the situation of the unemployed.

The eviction struggle was probably the most successful protest organised by the U.W.M.

THE POSITION MID-YEAR: I - THE A.L.P. JOINS THE
DRIVE TO ORGANISE THE UNEMPLOYED.

The eviction struggles had shown just how militant, popular and powerful the U.W.M. could be. They were a glowing tribute to the great membership drive of the first half of 1931.

In mid-1931 the leaders of the New South Wales A.L.P. finally realised the dangers of their laxity in organising the unemployed .

While Lang was too shrewd a politician, too aware of the nature of the Australian labor movement, to believe that the U.W.M. and its supporters constituted a revolutionary threat in terms of the Sun's article, the popularity and activism of the U.W.M. was a cause of grave concern for Lang.

Firstly, of course, Lang wanted the unemployed to be neither heard nor seen. The dissatisfaction of the unemployed discredited his image.

Secondly, the U.W.M. was a mass group with considerable support, well to the left of Lang; and Lang regarded the left wing of the labor movement as his particular province. He had not felt threatened unduly by the Communists in this regard for the C.P.A. did not have a mass following and was a small fairly isolated band of agitators. If the U.W.M. continued to win more support, however, it could rival Lang's claims of radicalism.

The threat of growing working class support for the leftist activism of the U.W.M. came at a particularly bad time for the Inner Group of the New South Wales A.L.P. In the fight with the Federal Labor Party, Lang needed all the support he could muster. In this fight Lang projected himself as a leftist, so he did not want a body to the left of him making him appear a moderate.

Moreover, the Inner Group already had enough of a fight on its hands combatting the radicalism of the Socialisation Units. Lang had suffered momentary defeat and a powerful threat to his position at the Metropolitan

Conference in March³⁶⁷ and by the middle of 1931 the Socialisation Units were growing increasingly impatient for the introduction of socialism. In August a sub-committee of the Socialisation Committee was to produce the Payne Report, which called for the "complete expropriation of the capitalist class" and a "dictatorship of the working class". Cooksey writes: "The essence of the Payne Report was that the take-over of political power by the working class was not dependent on the collapse of capitalism, that it could come only through seizure by revolutionary violence, that it could come now; once in power, the working class itself could destroy capitalism and initiate the social revolution. And to attain its Socialisation Objective, the Labor Party should lead the working class."³⁶⁸

So Lang felt his popularity and his left wing reputation threatened by the Socialisation Units and by the U.W.M.; he also believed that these organisations were working together to oppose him.

There were^{in fact} definite links between the units and the U.W.M. though any alliance seems to have worked in a de facto manner at branch level, (certain people being members of both organisations) rather than being a deliberate policy of the leaders of either body.

367. cf. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.36-37

368. ibid., pp.49-55. The Report was adopted by an Aggregate Meeting of the Units on 8th August, but the leaders of the Socialisation Committee opposed its assertions regarding the necessity of violence and a more moderate 'Declaration of Policy' was adopted in the last quarter of the year by a narrow vote. At this point the 'Socialism In Our Time' a group split into the Revolutionary Socialists (led by Payne) and the Democratic Socialist group (comprised of the main leaders of the Socialisation Committee who continued to dominate aggregate meetings of the Units).

The Workers' Weekly was as vitriolic in its attacks upon the Units as it was upon anything else connected with the A.L.P. 369

It is possible that Tom Payne, who, as we have seen, tried to push the Socialisation Units (and hence the A.L.P.) to the left, was an under-cover member of the C.P.A.; he had earlier been a member and rejoined the C.P.A. in 1932, after the A.L.P. trenchantly outlawed all Communist "auxiliaries".³⁷⁰ After this he became a leading unemployed organiser. In 1932 Payne, acting as the leader of the A.L.P. Rank and File Unity Committee, published a glowing account of the U.W.M. which ended with a call to join it.³⁷¹ If Payne was a secret Communist 'white-
anter' he would have worked to foster the U.W.M.; however, as Cooksey points out, there is no evidence either way about Payne's true affiliations³⁷² and it is just as likely that he was simply a revolutionary A.L.P. member.

The Herald claimed that certain leaders of the Socialisation movement were linked with Communists;³⁷³ this may simply have been an attempt to discredit the Units.

However, some Socialisation Units worked with the U.W.M. (and also the C.P.A.) over special issues. The Herald noted that the Newtown Unit cooperated with the U.W.M. in the eviction struggles.³⁷⁴ Members

369. e.g. W.W., 17/4/31, p.1. attack on Units as a "grotesque travesty of Communism". The Units were often described as an attempt to sabotage the true socialist cause.

370. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.61 - 62.

371. 'Why This Ban?', issued by the A.L.P. Rank and File Unity Committee, N.S.W. (by T. Payne, S. Gard and S. Lewis for the Committee), no date. (Apparently just after the unsuccessful Rank and File Unity Conference on 16th April 1932), pp.22-26.

372. R. Cooksey, op.cit., p.61.

373. S.M.H., 17/8/31, p.9.

374. ibid.

of the Glebe A.L.P. League and the Glebe Socialisation Unit worked with the C.P.A. and U.W.M. in the Free Speech Campaign; Payne himself was the delegate from the Glebe A.L.P.³⁷⁵. In the Canterbury-Bankstown area representatives of the C.P.A., the A.L.P., the Socialisation Units, the U.W.M., W.I.R., and M.M.M. worked together in the Free Speech fight.³⁷⁶

Cooksey writes that when the A.L.P. Executive banned A.L.P. members from belonging to Communist 'auxiliary' bodies - in particular the U.W.M. and the F.O.S.U. - in January 1932 this "caused considerable consternation in the Socialisation Units: many members and associate members, both democratic and revolutionary socialists, were also members of one or more auxiliary bodies, which they saw as independent of the Communist Party and/or necessary for 'united working class action' for specific desirable purposes". Because of the strength of this opposition to the ban "the ruling ... was not enforced before the dissolution of the Socialisation Units" (in 1933).³⁷⁷

Although the A.L.P. waited until early 1932 to ban the 'auxiliaries' the A.L.P. mounted a strong offensive against the U.W.M. in June 1931. This campaign took two forms: vilification of the U.W.M. and the establishment of a counter unemployed organisation. Two interesting points to emerge from the A.L.P. attacks (waged through the Labor Daily) are the strength the U.W.M. had attained, and the fact that a side-thrust of the

375. W.W., 18/9/31, p.1; 24/9/31, p.4. At the Glebe Free Speech Conference Brechin represented the U.W.M. and Gould the Socialisation Unit.

376. ibid., 9/10/31, p.2.

377. R. Cooksey, op.cit., pp.58-59.

campaign was an attack on the Socialisation movement.

Another interesting feature is the speed of the escalation of hatred between the A.L.P. and the C.P.A. in June. The eviction struggles made the A.L.P. realise that it had to act quickly against the U.W.M.; they also heightened Communist hostility to Lang and the Labor Council.

Although it seems that the A.L.P. and the trade union leaders had for some time been pondering a move against the U.W.M., the suggestion that their action was sparked off by the eviction movement is supported by the fact that the first of the really vitriolic Labor Daily attacks appeared a couple of days after the Redfern clash. It thundered "Unemployed at Mercy of Agitators. A.L.P.'s Duty to Fill the Breach. Insidious Moves in the Branches. U.W.M. Tactics.

"There is an ever-growing desire in the trades union movement that the A.L.P. should officially take over the organising and care of the unemployed. These unfortunate people have become the prey of agitators of the worst type - agitators who do not hesitate to make the misery of their victims the more acute so that the desired objective for which the hustlers are striving may be accomplished.

The aim of the advocates for revolution is to smash down all forms of organisation which tend to keep the people - the workers - in some degree of contentment, however small.

It was with this object in view that the U.W.M., which is the stool pigeon of the alleged Communists of New South Wales was created ...

Politically the members of this U.W.M. are working in the A.L.P. branches, disrupting them everywhere.

Their political method is quietly to enter a branch then to form a faction. When the disturbing nature of this faction's activities becomes too apparant, the factionists break away to form a branch of the U.W.M.

Always, however, they leave a few members in the branch to carry on disruptive work. The movement has a "flying squad" which bolts hither and thither to meetings. It may attend three or four in one night. There are about twenty in the 'squad', rabid, noisy, violent.

They try to capture control of committees, and do not stop at arming themselves with sticks with which to threaten enforcement of their demands.

Efforts have been made to revive the old U.W.U. but these are too slow.

It is the duty of the A.L.P., if it be sincere in its attitude against the whiteanters, to step into the breach, as it did in the timberworkers' strike.

There is a mountain of good now to be accomplished, and the time to do it is right now, while at the same time confounding the damnable tactics of the would-be Communist revolution worshippers."³⁷⁸

The Communist attack on the Labor Council two days later, on Thursday, June 4th, was no doubt partly a retaliation to this denunciation, as well

378. L.D., 2/6/31, p.6. (L.D.'s emphasis).

as expressing resentment over the police attack on eviction fighters.

After a letter was received from the Painters' and Dockers' Union calling for Council action regarding evictors Garden moved:

"that the Council demand that the Government instruct the police not to take any part in evictions of unemployed ... We demand that the Government give immediate effect to its promise to bring in a bill against evictions. Further, that the men imprisoned for resisting evictions be released. Council shall take action to protect any workers from being evicted."

Moran, seconded by Sharkey, put this amendment: "That the Council condemn the Lang Government for its action in supplying police to aid the landlords to evict workers from their homes and batoning unemployed workers ... at Redfern. Such actions brand the Government as a fascist government of capitalism. Further, this Council pledges support to the U.W.M. in its attempts to prevent evictions by mass actions".³⁷⁹

On the face of it, the original motion was more concrete, more useful in that it aimed to do something to stop police attacks, whereas Moran's motion appears a provocative piece of rhetoric. However, as already noted, the Communists believed Lang to be responsible for the attacks. Also, in the light of the Labor Council's usual unwillingness to force the demands of the unemployed upon Lang, and its failure to do

379. T.L.C.M., 4/6/31.

P503 of Cable
Kelly

anything to prevent evictions up to this time, the Communists' cynicism about the eventuality and outcome of any Labor Council protest had considerable justification.

It appears that the conflict on June 4th had been brewing for a few weeks.

The Sun claimed that there had been disruption from the public gallery "for some weeks"; it certainly seems that the Communists were well organised on the 4th.³⁸⁰ There may have been as many as three hundred Communists and sympathisers present,³⁸¹ though the Labor Daily estimate of one hundred ^{so-called} "larrikins"³⁸² seems more likely.

There was a heated debate over the motion and amendment. When Kelly, a doorkeeper, tried to stop an interjector there was a rush from the gallery into the main body of the hall and Communist reinforcements came in from the stairs.

The attackers wielded the by-now-usual iron bars; the delegates "were not slow in defending themselves" with broken chairs and tables. Glass doors were smashed, delegates were knocked over and a chair was thrown at Garden. Kelly was felled in the first charge and later was treated at hospital for a lacerated scalp.³⁸³ The number of delegates injured was probably as high as forty. (It seems this includes injuries to the Communist forces as well.)³⁸⁴

380. Sun, 5/6/31, p.7. Notes that Communists had taken most of the seating; L.D., 5/6/31 says the attack was "deliberately organised".

381. Sun, 5/6/31, p.7; S.M.H., 5/6/31, p.11.

382. L.D., 5/6/31.

383. Account from S.M.H., 5/6/31, p.11.

384. L.D., 5/6/31 - 40 injuries; S.M.H., 5/6/31, p.11 (4-dozens of injuries).

After about twenty minutes of general fighting most of the delegates escaped to other rooms in the Trades Hall. When police arrived Communists dropped their weapons and fled.³⁸⁵

(The photograph opposite shows the room after the fight; it seems to show less damage than might be expected, so accounts of the violence damage may be exaggerated.)

While all this evidence clearly puts the Communists in the role of deliberate thugs, there is some evidence that they were physically provoked and that some of their opponents were also prepared and willing for the fight.

At the next meeting of the Labor Council Sharkey claimed that the attack had been "organised by the dole inspectors. They were here to see that the militants were stifled".³⁸⁶

In late May the Lang Government had appointed ninety Dole Inspectors to investigate unemployed workers' relief applications to check for fraud. This job made them invidious in the eyes of many workers,³⁸⁷ apart from other allegations about them. They received £5 a week plus expenses (sometimes earning £10 or £11 a week) and there were rumours that each Labor M.L.A. was allowed to appoint one.³⁸⁸ These rumours of nepotism

385. Sun, 5/6/31, p.7; S.M.H., 5/6/31, p.11.

386. L.D., 12/6/31, p.5.

387. e.g. The Clerks' Union refused to admit them (Sun, 30/5/31, p.5).

388. Sun, 25/5/31, p.9.

immediately caused a controversy in Parliament, and the following list of inspectors shows there was some basis for the charges in fact:

J. Paton (Garden's nephew)

Short (J.J. Graves' son-in-law)

Stuart-Robertson (relation of the member for Annandale).

J. Casham (President, Rozelle-East A.L.P.) *of 518*

L. Webster (Surry Hills A.L.P.)

P. Clancy (ex-Mayor of Bankstown)³⁸⁹

The Communists maintained that "these degenerates have appointed themselves a bodyguard to Garden and Co. at the Labor Council meetings ... [The inspectors] resolved on this 'as Mr. Garden, their benefactor, was being attacked by a section of the Labor Council.'"³⁹⁰ Though this was published on June 5th, it refers to events earlier than June 4th (for the Workers' Weekly was always set up before the publishing date). So it seems that Communists had already ^{had} 'run-ins' with the Dole Inspectors before the big attack on Council.

Whether or not the Dole Inspectors were intended to have a subsidiary function as Lang's answer to the W.D.C., they were certainly appointed on the basis of their loyalty to Lang³⁹¹ - they all had to sign a loyalty pledge to the Lang Plan.³⁹² They also were quick to act as Garden's 'bodyguard' on June 4th. It would not be uncharacteristic of

389. L.D., 27/5/31, p.6.

390. W.W., 5/6/31, p.4.

391. cf. I.E. Young, op.cit., p.68, and 'J.T. Lang and the Depression', Labour History, Nov. 1963, p.9.

392. Sun, 30/5/31, p.5.

Lang to commission a fighting gang. Schrieber told Young that "Lang's agents had hired prize fighters to be present at the Trades Hall and any political meetings to deal with those who criticised Lang or the methods of the proceedings".³⁹³

The anti Communist forces were prepared for the attack on June 4th.

The Sun notes that among those in the public gallery that night "was a large number of dole inspectors". As soon as the 'Reds' rushed towards Garden "those among the Dole Inspectors in the gallery hopped the barrier, many pulling lead pipes, rubber piping, wooden stakes or iron bars from hip pockets."³⁹⁴ Moreover, of the three fighters on the Labor Council's side named by the Herald, two were Dole Inspectors.³⁹⁵ U.W.M. members in Glebe told a Sun reporter the name of one of the pro-Garden faction on June 4th who was wearing "a rubber glove, inset with safety razor blades, so fashioned that when the hand was closed the blades protruded between the fingers".³⁹⁶

So although the Communists' hands were dirty, it would seem that the hands of the Garden faction at least were not unarmed.

The A.L.P. - Labor Council hierarchy retaliated by denouncing the C.P.A. and the U.W.M. even more fulsomely, and in the establishment press as well as the Labor Daily.

393. I.E. Young, op. cit., (thesis) p.69.

394. Sun, 5/6/31, p.7.

395. S.M.H., 5/6/31, p.11. Dole Inspector Cables was the second doorkeeper, Dole Inspector Middleton rushed to Garden's aid.

396. Sun, 5/6/31, p.1.

It should be noted that while the attack on the Labor Council was probably made by Communists and in particular the W.D.C., it was the U.W.M. that Garden blamed for the attack.

Garden's press statement to the Herald was a long diatribe against the "thug element" which, he claimed, was deluding the poor duped unemployed in the U.W.M. He also made much of the fact that the Labor Council delegates were "defenceless".³⁹⁷

Whatever one's feelings about the violence of the W.D.C., it seems quite clear that it was a small band with no particular power base of support, and with almost no influence apart from the short disruptions it waged. The support won by the U.W.M. branches arose from their position as local organisations working over a long period, and a visiting band of agitators would cause only a momentary ripple.

In the Labor Daily the charges against the U.W.M. were increased from thuggery to financial corruption and the 'fat-cat' lifestyles of the leaders. The headlines blared:

"Communist Terrorists Living on Funds Levied for the
Workless.

Astounding Disclosures Follow Riot at Trades Hall ...

Have Even Gone to Lengths of Highway Robbery!" ...

The article also went on to exploit the anti-Communism of the
Labor movement:

397. S.M.H., 6/6/31, p.13.

"The association of these various corps and organisations has been clearly established. The I.C.W.P.A., the W.D.C., the U.W.M. the F.O.S.U., are all controlled by the Communist Secretariat, and are all more or less disguised Communist organisations."³⁹⁸

(Strangely enough, the attack took a neat intellectual turn, by alleging that the present C.P.A. leaders were not 'real' Communists, they were "parasites who have dragged the name of genuine Communism into the sewers of Sydney." Later attacks reiterated that the 'old' C.P. was genuine and the present one degenerate and had expelled all the 'decent' Communists.³⁹⁹ There are two explanations for this equivocal anti-communism. Garden had been a member of the early Communist Party and obviously would not want to condemn himself by a blanket attack on the Party. Also, outright condemnation would seem to put Lang into the same camp as the establishment, it would work against his rhetoric of radical socialism.)

The article continued:

"Who among the workers will stand for the actions of a clique which is, in these frightful days, living handsomely by levying a heavy toll upon the charity funds of the unemployed and destitute?"

This is what the U.W.M. is established for.

The rank and file of the movement are gulled into being the poor dupes while a herd of officials of the self-styled Communist Movement live comfortably upon stolen charity.

398. L.D., 6/6/31, p.5. (L.D. emphasis)

399. ibid., 8/6/31, p.5.

Do the workers of New South Wales know that of all the funds collected by the U.W.M. 20% goes to "organisation", that is, is handled by a few while the remaining 80% is distributed among the starving masses.

This is a positive fact...."

Then the article reiterated the call of the June 2nd article by demanding increased A.L.P. activity (in a charity or 'relief' function) among the unemployed :

"It is quite likely that during the coming week the A.L.P. will reorganise the local relief depots which did such splendid work during the Timberworkers and Miners' crises ... The A.L.P. must fill the breach and do the job straight away."⁴⁰⁰

The allegations of financial corruption and the luxurious lifestyles of the U.W.M. leaders can only be seen as a deliberate and vile slander; it was the sort of slander unfortunately, however, that appeals to people's imaginations. And while the Labor Daily had a wide circulation among workers, the U.W.M. had to rely on the small Workers' Weekly to refute the slanders. The allegations were probably helped by the anonymity of the U.W.M. leaders - the unemployed could believe slanders more easily of 'faceless' men than they could of Jock Garden, whose face was always before them.

Samuel, the Treasurer of the New South Wales U.W.M., replied that all the finances were booked and audited, and that it was incorrect that 20 per cent of branch funds were sent to Head Office. Only 20 per cent of the net income (after expenses and debts) were required "and so far

400. ibid., 6/6/31, p.5. (L.D. emphasis)

very few of them have forwarded anything as percentages." In the last three months Headquarters had received only £1.17.6 in affiliation fees and £7.16.11 in percentages - and with this they had to produce pamphlets etcetera and keep in touch with the branches.⁴⁰¹

Below is a balance sheet audited by Denford (official of the Ironworkers' Union) and Chapman (official of the A.R.U.):

UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' MOVEMENT BALANCE SHEET

PERIOD: MAY 16th to JUNE 30th, 1931, inclusive.

CREDIT			DEBIT		
Received from:	£	s. d.	To		
Brought forward	3	9 8	Printing	5	2 0
Percentage fees	9	5 8	Fares	5	10 2
Affiliation fees		7 9	Buttons	4	15 0
Donations	6	5 0	Stationary, rent		
Membership cards	6	12 11	office material	4	15 2
"Workers' Weekly"	1	4 0	Stamps	1	11 8
Buttons	1	19 4	"Workers' Weekly"	1	4 0
Returned fares		3 5	Telegr., telephone, etc.	6	1
			Total	£ 23	4 1
Total:	£ 29	7 6	BALANCE	£ 6	8 5

AUDITORS' STATEMENT

PERIOD: MARCH 10th, 1931, to JUNE 30th, 1931, inclusive.

INCOME		£	s.	d.
March 10, 1931 -				
By Bank Balance	£ 9	18	4	
By Cash in hand	17	11	1	
By income from all sources	57	2	8	
Total:	£ 67	18	8	
June 30th, 1931 -				
By Expend. as per vouchers	61	15	6	
By cash in hand	4	3	5	
By Bank Balance	2	0	0	
Total	£ 67	18	11	

401. W.W., 19/6/31, p.4. (That the branches contributed little is also shown by the July donations: while Wallsend U.W.M. sent in £2, four other branches sent on only 10/- between them. ibid., 3/7/31, p.3.)

402. ibid., 10/7/31, p.4.

At the July 1931 Conference of the U.W.M. Mrs. Eatock "drew attention to the plight of the Executive in relation to finance," and Sylvester stated, "members seemed to think we could live on air, and forgot about rent, cost of materials, speakers' fares etc. and thus did not send in any finance to headquarters. If they sent in the 20 per cent according to the rules much more work could be accomplished."⁴⁰³

Finally, if the lifestyle of Jack Sylvester is any indication, the U.W.M. leaders lived in poverty as bad as that of any unemployed worker, and probably worse than many, for any spare cash went on leaflets and fares to meetings, rather than on small luxuries.

Sylvester lived in a dilapidated house in Balmain; a back room was used for the printing of leaflets and there was a constant stream of hard-up young men staying there. Security men and police often made raids on his home. Any 'robbery' indulged in was of the Robin Hood rather than of the Alexander Barton variety. Albert Robbie, a friend of Sylvesters and one of his U.W.M. colleagues told me: "There were rows and rows of empty houses. I used to go round with a young bloke - Danny Carlin ... Danny and I and some of the others, if we needed something for the [U.W.M.] Hostel or for ourselves, used to go up to the houses, and take it. I always believed in the efficacy of prayer. I would pray, 'Lord I want a duck'. But just to make the sure the prayer was answered Danny and I would go out at night with a gun. And sure enough, we often came home with a duck, or even two. We only took from the rich. We used to pull down fences to get firewood. We did what the capitalists did - stole -

403. ibid., 31/7/31, p.4.

asserted our might. What was good enough for them was good enough for us."⁴⁰⁴

The Labor Daily attacks on the U.W.M. in June were relentless. On Monday June 8th there was another long article again calling for the A.L.P. to "expel every disrupting element" and again stressing how deeply the U.W.M. had "whiteanted" the labor movement:

"Into every union, into every A.L.P. branch, these madmen have driven their unenlightened tools".

It alleged - quite wrongly, as we have seen - that "the thug crowd" had done nothing to oppose the Nationalist Government and "only reared its ugly head when it thought its sins would be cloaked by a tolerant Labor Government".

It also claimed that by attacking Lang and the Labor Government the U.W.M. was biting the hand that fed it. It claimed (again wrongly) that the Labor Council "actually gave (the U.W.M.) birth". "It was the Labor Council which allowed the U.W.M. a public voice by dismissing the U.W.U. delegates allowing them to be replaced by the industrial sweepings of a big city."⁴⁰⁵ This was in direct contradiction to its own statement a week earlier that the U.W.M. "whiteanted the activities of the U.W.U., even to the extent of supplanting its delegates on Council."⁴⁰⁶

404. Interview with Albert Robbie in 1970. Issy Wyner and Laurie Short also told me about how Sylvester lived.

405. L.D., 8/6/31, p.5.

406. ibid., 2/6/31, p.6.

Two days later the U.W.M. were attacked as "burglars"⁴⁰⁷

The Labor Daily brought up a charge of cowardice and desertion, claiming that Communists "lead from the rear", exhorting "their dupes" to violence, and then not fighting themselves.⁴⁰⁸ This is belied by the number of arrests, convictions, gaol sentences and bashings accumulated by the C.P.A. and U.W.M. leaders.

Also, the Labor Daily abhorred the fact that the U.W.M. eviction fighters destroyed property - so much for Lang's supposed militant radicalism and his antagonism to capitalism; but then, Lang was a property owner himself.

Then again, the A.L.P. found the U.W.M. 'dirty' in their personal habits as well as their political methods. The Labor Daily complained of "the filthy use to which the baths in the (eviction) houses are put, uses that can only be described as bestial in the extreme".⁴⁰⁹ Even the Herald did not sink this low.

This final attack, on the eviction fighters, was a particularly nasty piece of political backstabbing. The Labor Daily also claimed that the terribleness of evictions had been overrated, that the tenant was given about three months to find alternate accommodation, that the charitable organisations secured shelter for evictees, and that sometimes

407. ibid., 10/6/31, p.5.

408. ibid., 8/6/31, p.5.; 29/6/31, p.1.

409. ibid., 29/6/31, p.1. (After the 4th June raid the L.D. wrote that the Labor Council meeting room "resembled the Communist Hall by its dirty, disordered appearance. 5/6/31, p.7).

the shelter was refused because of the "terrorisation of self-styled Communists"⁴¹⁰ The motives of the eviction fighters were reviled: "All the U.W.M. wants with the evictions is to get propaganda", said Garden.⁴¹¹ It did want propaganda - to build support to stop evictions and other attacks upon the unemployed. It is surely inconceivable that men would spend weeks guarding a house, then suffer shooting, bashings and heavy gaol sentences for some petty reason.

Another tactic of the Garden group was to isolate its opponents by excluding them from Labor Council meetings; though this was against the supposedly open and representative nature of the Labor Council it is more excusable given the fight on June 4th.

The Executive of the Labor Council decided that the public gallery should be closed for some time. At the Council's meeting on June 11th the doors were closed to all but the delegates, and the Executive's ruling was upheld after a long debate by 53 votes to 29.⁴¹² The Labor Council had asked the police protection and a "large posse of police and detectives" guarded the doors of the Trades Hall on June 11th.⁴¹³ This of course confirmed for many the belief that the Lang Government supported police action against workers.

410. ibid., 29/6/31, p.1.

411. ibid., 12/6/31, p.5. (Repeated 29/6/31, p.1.)

412. T.L.C.M., 10/6/31 (Executive Meeting); 11/6/31

413. Sun, 11/6/31, p.1.

The U.W.M. and C.P.A. called a demonstration against the exclusion of the rank and file by the Labor Council outside the Trades Hall while this meeting was in progress. There was a good response.

The Herald noted that "two thousand spectators anticipating trouble" listened to speeches until they "discovered that the only attraction was to listen to a condemnation of everything Australian and a eulogy of everything Russian by individuals with foreign accents"; and so the crowd "slowly dwindled away".⁴¹⁴

As this report was so clearly biased, and as the rest of the press (especially the Labor Daily) did not mention the demonstration the Workers' Weekly account must be accorded some attention.

It described the protest as "probably the most significant workers' demonstration yet held in Sydney We had a splendid demonstration of five thousand militant workers ... The demonstration was fiery in its enthusiasm; the points made by the speakers interspersed with the singing of the International and the Red Flag.

... For the information of the Herald liar, we might say that all (speakers) were born in Australia except one comrade who had the audacity to be born in England

The demonstration carried the following motions by five thousand votes to nil:

'That this meeting condemns the acts of J.S. Garden and those associated with him in hiring thugs to intimidate the militant delegate of the Vigilance Committee of the Council, among which are those of the U.W.M., and the attempt last Thursday evening to use the dole inspectors

414. S.M.H., 12/6/31, p.11.

(ration pimps) to beat up the militant delegates. We demand the dismissal of the strong-arm men and the opening of the gallery to the working class.' "

The motion pledged support for the U.W.M., called upon workers to resist the attacks of the Melbourne Conference, condemned the Lang Government for calling the police in to evictions. It condemned the Labor Daily for its "cowardly slandering of the U.W.M. and (pointed) out that this (was) done in order to assist Mr. Gosling in his effort to smash the anti-eviction campaign in the interests of the landlords and estate agents...."415

Even if it was only two thousand who were present the fact of their presence shows support - and even the Herald which describes them as unenthusiastic 'spectators' says they were 'anticipating trouble'. The fact that the U.W.M. could muster two to five thousand workers to protest against the Labor Council shows how wide was its support and how offensive the Labor Daily attacks were to many workers, for it would be difficult to persuade workers imbued with the traditions of unionism to oppose the prestigious council of union delegates.

As further evidence that the Labor Daily did not receive the unequivocal support of the Labor movement there are the decisions of various union groups to stop paying the Labor Daily levy, mentioned previously.

415. W.W., 19/6/31, p.1.

The A.L.P. leaders quickly set in motion their plans to win the unemployed away from the U.W.M. the form their organisation took was determined by political expediency, clever counter-tactics and traditional methods of the A.L.P.

The A.L.P. decided to direct the new organisation through the political wing of the party, rather than, as formerly, through the industrial wing. It accepted the failure of the Labor Council to build an effective U.W.U. The C.P.A. had more power in the Labor Council (through the Communist delegates) than it did in the A.L.P. branches so there should be less chance of the C.P. 'whiteanting' or taking over an unemployed organisation centred in the local A.L.P. Leagues and branches. It was a clever strategy for the A.L.P. to decide upon an organisation very different in aim and appeal from the U.W.M., rather than to set up a similar but paler imitation, as the U.W.U. had been.

So the impetus of the A.L.P. unemployed movement was to set up a charity or relief organisation. From its first attack on the U.W.M. in June, the Labor Daily had called for a re-establishment of the old relief committees that had distributed food and funds in the strikes. This fitted in with the traditional methods of the organised labor movement.

It was also politically desirable for the Labor Government. Lang wanted politics taken out of the unemployed movement; he wanted a quiescent unnoticeable body of unemployed. If the A.L.P. branches set up local depots that distributed food and clothing the unemployed would be grateful to the A.L.P. and would not believe U.W.M. claims that the A.L.P. was doing nothing for them. Also, if their immediate

economic situation was a little ameliorated, they would not listen so readily to cries for action. The U.W.U. had never worked among the unemployed at a personal and local level as the U.W.M. had done; the A.L.P. relief committees were to provide a regular and personal local service to the unemployed.

As soon as the Labor Daily called for firm action by the A.L.P. branches in the organisation of the unemployed there was a sudden spurt of feverish activity in this direction.⁴¹⁶

At a meeting on June 26th the Central Executive of the New South Wales A.L.P. decided after "strenuous debate" to "take an active part in looking after the interests of the unemployed. The necessity of getting the unemployed back into the A.L.P. was emphasised." This statement shows that many unemployed workers had indeed turned away from the A.L.P.

The report of this meeting between the Executive and the A.L.P.'s Unemployment Committee is not quite clear, but it shows that the Executive was unhappy with the existing Unemployment Committee which had been set up by A.L.P. Conference; there is a suggestion that this Committee had some connections with the Socialisation Units (and hence was suspect, from the viewpoint of the Inner Group-controlled Executive).

416. cf. L.D., 8/6/31, p.5.

The meeting endorsed various schemes aimed at small immediate improvements for the unemployed - for example, the establishment of a new relief depot at Daceyville and a ration delivery at the three Happy Valley Camps.

Keller, the A.L.P. President, "complained that at the moment the Party was being charged with laxity in the interests of the unemployed". He said that the Unemployment Committee's report was "not comprehensive,"

Matthews, a member of the Unemployment Committee, moved that three members of the A.L.P. Executive be appointed to work with the Unemployment Committee. He also said that "the U.W.M. was undermining the A.L.P. in every district" and that "the action of the police in evictions had not been satisfactory to him."

Such a statement obviously would not please the A.L.P. Executive. Graves, the A.L.P.'s General Secretary and a member of the Inner Group, suggested that the Executive act in addition to the Unemployment Committee and appealed for the establishment of more local committees to help with relief.

There was then an amendment that a separate Executive Committee be set up to organise the unemployed. It would seem that the Executive wanted to make sure this time that the leadership of the unemployed remained in its hands. The seconder of this amendment said "it was the duty of the executive to supplement the activities of the Government" - thus leaving no room for doubt that the new unemployed organisation should work for, not against, Lang.

The old Unemployment Committee opposed this amendment; if a separate Executive Committee was set up, it would obviously take precedence and the Unemployment Committee would become redundant. Matthews complained that the Unemployment Committee "only wanted a little cooperation by the Executive in an organisational direction; a vote against (his) motion would be a censure on the Committee". Nevertheless the amendment was carried and a new Committee of six plus the three Executive officers was elected.

In this debate Martin (organising secretary and Inner Group member) stated: "the Socialisation Committee was responsible for much of the troubles in the party The Socialisation Committee was bringing in members of the C.P."

The main emphasis of the whole debate was the necessity of getting the unemployed into the A.L.P. and especially of winning them away from the U.W.M.⁴¹⁷

In the ensuing months the A.L.P. had a definite success in this regard. Local relief committees were set up by a number of branches. (Some branches already had taken on some relief work, such as establishing soup kitchens.) These committees had a propensity for working under a number of different names⁴¹⁸ - for example Relief Committees, Distress Committees, Unemployed Distress Committees, simply Unemployed Committees; in suburbs where the local council was controlled by Labor aldermen the Mayor's Distress Group or the Lady Mayoress's Sewing Circle would often

417. For report of this meeting c.f. L.D., 27/6/31, p.7.

418. There was apparently no overall name for the A.L.P. relief movement.

be part of the A.L.P.'s relief plan. Sometimes the A.L.P. would be credited with the initiation of the organisation (for example the Glebe A.L.P. Relief Committee); sometimes the A.L.P. would modestly omit its name from the credits. (It would be clear to the recipients of relief, however, that the A.L.P. was their benefactor. For example the secretary of the Balmain-Rozelle Distress Fund was Cashman, a Labor Alderman - ^{the dole} and later Mayor - whose political affiliations were widely known.⁴¹⁹) This confusing variety of nomenclature makes it rather hard to study these groups; also, because they quietly dispensed relief rather than protesting they were neglected by the press of the day.

As these organisations were non-political, charity organisations, and as they were definitely organised from above and did not intend to be representative of the unemployed, they are per se outside the limits of this study. However, some attention must be paid to them because of the effect they had upon the U.W.M.

THE POSITION MID-YEAR II: THE LANG GOVERNMENT AND THE PREMIERS' PLAN: THE LANG GOVERNMENT'S NEW RELIEF PROVISIONS.

The U.W.M.'s calls for more action in the middle of the year were directed not only towards combating evictions and pressing for a dole increase, but were also aimed at organising the employed as well as the unemployed workers to "prepare a struggle against the villainous attack upon the wages, pensions and salaries of the working class, the 20 per cent cut agreed to by the Melbourne Conference".⁴²⁰

419. cf. Balmain Council Minutes for many reports of this group's activities.

420. W.W., 19/6/31, p.1.

On May 25th a conference of State Premiers, the Commonwealth Government and representatives of the Loan Council and the banks had opened in Melbourne; at this conference was hammered out the 'Premiers' Plan', which was adopted on June 10th.

Schedvin writes that "the prevention of external default was ... the basic if unstated premise of the premiers' plan"⁴²¹. "The pivot of the whole conference was the proposal for the reduction of internal interest rates (implying reduction of external rates at a later date.) Previous plans had failed because the trading banks had insisted that interest rates could only come down after budget equilibrium had been achieved, and governments had insisted that the reduction in interest was a pre-requisite for the restoration of equilibrium. For the first time, simultaneous, and not conditional, action was proposed; and in response labor governments agreed to reduce their adjustable income by 20 per cent compared with 1929-30 if the banks would fall into line by supporting the conversion loan and by reducing interests on deposits and advances."⁴²²

421. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.251.

422. Ibid., p.247. For text of resolutions adopted by the Conference c.f. E.O.G. Shann and D.B. Copland, The Battle of the Plans, Sydney, 1931, pp.126-136. The main provisions of the plan were (1) 20% reduction of adjustable government expenditure (including wages, salaries and pensions; but old-age pensions were only to be reduced by 12½%). (2) Increases in Commonwealth income and sales tax, and primate duties. (3) Conversion of the internal debts of Governments on the basis of a 12½% reduction of interest. (4) Reduction of bank interest rates and also private interest rates including mortgages. (Reduction of private interest rates was to conform to the 20% standard).

Advocates of the Plan stressed again the necessity for 'equality of sacrifice'. The Official Report drew attention to the imminence of public default and the effect this would have on the society, and declared:

"The Conference has adopted a plan which combines all possible remedies in such a way that the burden falls as equally as possible on everyone and no considerable section of the people is left in a privileged position."⁴²³

There was considerable feeling in the labor movement, especially on the part of the unions, that the workers had already been forced into bearing more than their share of the burden.

Schedvin points out that "in post-Keynesian terms the premiers' plan was unambiguously deflationary, for it involved a sharp fall in government expenditure and hence in aggregate demand".⁴²⁴ The union movement had continually protested that deflation would not cure the Depression; now Labor Governments had decided to cut wages and expenditure.

The Labor leaders' acceptance of the Plan provoked opposition from the Labor movement. However, Scullin was able to win the agreement of Federal Caucus and the A.L.P. Federal Executive by arguing that a Labor Government would administer the Plan (which he stressed was inevitable) less harshly than a non-Labor Government.⁴²⁵

The State Executives of the A.L.P. in Victoria and South Australia more forthrightly opposed the Plan. Lang however, avoided opposition

423. quoted in The Battle of the Plans.

424. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.252.

425. c.f. ibid., p.267, i.e. 1.5. Louis, op.cit., pp.115-116. Caucus accepted the plan by 26 votezs to 13.

to the plan from the New South Wales A.L.P. through his power over the party machine and because of his ambiguous and changing acceptance of the Plan. (Schedvin writes that Lang avoided "the essence of the plan").⁴²⁶ There is so little reference to the Plan in the Labor Council Minutes, given its importance, that there would seem to have been a deliberate policy on the part of the Council leaders to cloak the issue.

Although the Lang Government remained obstinate about the plan, continued not to meet its interest payments and did not achieve the budget reduction required by the Plan, Lang did sign it and did go some way towards implementing it.⁴²⁷

By the end of June the Lang Government was in serious financial difficulties and at a Loan Council meeting in early August Lang "agreed to resume responsibility for payment of interest on the state's debt, to rejoin the (Loan) Council, and to introduce legislation giving effect to the decisions of the Premiers' Conference" in return for necessary funds.⁴²⁸

In line with the Plan's requirements that Governments reduce their wages bill New South Wales public servants' salaries were reduced. Reductions were on a graduated scale ranging from $8\frac{1}{3}\%$ on lowest-income

426. C.B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.268.

427. I.E. Young, *op.cit.*, p.61, writes that when Lang signed it H. McCauley "lashed him verbally" and that Lang "rejected the Plan almost immediately". However, as Schedvin points out (p.271) Lang did partly comply with the Plan. In regard to the conference Schedvin notes (p. 246) that "even Lang was in a conciliatory mood", though at one stage he threatened not to sign it unless the conversion was made compulsory (p. 248).

428. C.B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.270.

workers to 27½% on the highest brackets.⁴²⁹

The State budget for 1931-2 (produced in August) "was also an attempt to comply with the decisions of the premiers' conference, "and "thereafter Lang continued more or less in compliance with the terms of the premiers' plan".⁴³⁰

Schedvin writes that "although the state's deficit finally amounted to a mammoth £14.2m., this was not primarily due to failure to effect the stipulated economies". Though Lang did delay and soften the economy measures so that "the larger part of the excess in the state's deficit was due to the efforts of the Lang ministry to impede the progress of the plan," the deficit was increased by the failure to collect all due tax revenue and the sharp increase in necessary expenditure on unemployment relief. This rose from £4.4 m. in 1930-1 to £6.1 m. in 1931-2.⁴³¹

Part of this rise in unemployment relief expenditure was due to the 25 per cent increase in the value of the rations which Lang finally granted, after months of promises and continual pressure by the U.W.M., in June. The granting of this increase must, I think, be seen as a response to the mounting militancy of the unemployed in May and June, as an attempt to de-fuse the enthusiasm of the agitation. It had a considerable effect in this respect, for the dissatisfaction of many unemployed was lulled by the small amelioration of their economic situation.

429. c.f. Public Servants' Salaries Reduction Act (no. 2), N.S.W.P.D., vol. 128, 5/8/31-7/8/31 especially pp.5005, 5023, 5137-5139; c.f. R. Markey, op.cit., pp.66-71 for the reaction of the Public Servants. The P.S.A. shared the attitude of 'better a bad Labor Government than any Nationalist one'.

430. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.271-272.

431. ibid., pp.272-274.

Though an increase of 25 per cent may seem large, the original value of the scales was so low that the unemployed were still only receiving a pittance.

The weekly value of the new ration scales and the amount of food received are given below:

Food Item	Unit	VALUE PER WEEK					
		Ration A	Ration B	Ration C	Ration D	Ration E	Ration F
		$\frac{5}{10}$	$\frac{9}{5}$	$\frac{14}{8}$	$\frac{19}{8}$	$\frac{23}{4\frac{1}{2}}$	$\frac{27}{8\frac{1}{2}}$
Bread	Loaves	3	4	7	9	10	13
Meat	lbs.	4	$4\frac{1}{2}$	5	8	9	9
Tea	oz.	4	$6\frac{2}{2}$	8	10	16	16
Sugar	lbs.	1	2	4	4	5	7
Jam	oz.	12	24	36	48	48	60
Cond. Milk	lbs.	1	1	2	3	3	4
Butter (NSW)	lbs.	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$2\frac{1}{2}$	$2\frac{3}{4}$
Soap (NSW)	bar	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	1	1
Cheese	lbs.	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$
Flour (NSW)	"	-	-	2	3	4	4
Golden Syrup	"	-	-	2	2	2	2
Rice best (NSW)	"	-	$3\frac{1}{2}$	1	1	2	2
Milk	pints	-	3	7	7	7	$10\frac{1}{2}$
Potatoes	lbs	-	1	7	7	7	7
Onions	"	-	1	2	2	2	2
Prunes	"	-	1	1	1	1	1
Oatmeal	"	-	1	2	2	4	4

432. from F.A. Bland, *op.cit.*, p.100. Note - Ration A - Single Person; B- man and wife; C - married couple with 1 child; D - couple with 2 or 3 children; E - couple with 4 or 5 children, Ration B plus Ration F. Family of 8 or 9 children, Ration D, plus Ration F. Substitute items: Powdered milk, dripping, honey, barley, cocoa, coffee, eggs, salt, baking powder, treacle, pumpkin, Swede turnips, self-raising flour, dried peas or lentils, currants, sultanas, raisins, and vegetable seeds, with Lactogen or Glaxo (for infants or nursing or expectant mothers).

To understand how inadequate the new dole scale was it must be remembered that the New South Wales Basic Wage was still £4.2.6.

(It should be noted that this table is not an exact and uniform representation of the value of the dole, for the value of the rations sometimes varied slightly because price changes, and prices differed in some parts of the state. Because of this, different ration scale values appear in other sources. The U.W.M. would sometimes claim that there had been a reduction in a certain scale, or in certain food items; such claims should not be discounted because there had been no official ration decrease, for at certain times and in certain areas the unemployed did suddenly receive less rations.)

The U.W.M. was to argue - with certain justification, given the fact that the new scales were still so low - that the increase was virtually no improvement. An even greater bone of contention was the imposition of new regulations which strictly enforced the requirement that the unemployed had to be extremely needy before they were allowed the dole, and which inquired into the prospective dole's situation in a manner that many felt to be overly inquisitive and degrading.

These were the Permissible Income Regulations (known as the P.I.R.); they were to become one of the major subjects of the unemployed movement's propaganda, and the repeal of the P.I.R. was to become one of the main immediate demands of the U.W.M.

On June 15th the Chief Secretary's Department issued a pamphlet of "Instructions to Issuing Officers" to the ration distribution centres. Before this, need had still been the chief qualification for relief and prospective dolors had had to prove such need, but the system had not been so formalised; there had not been a specific means test. The P.I.R. provided such a test.

Regulation 13 of the "Instructions" stated that "All income from all sources (individual earnings, gifts of money, Family Endowment, Government Charitable Allowances except when paid in rent (receipts to be furnished), rents from property, 25 per cent of amounts paid by boarders, value of food relief issued,⁴³³ Military and Invalid pensions (but excluding Old Age Pensions) of all members of the family within the preceding fourteen days (of the dole issue) would be taken into account in respect to each applicant". It was, then, not only the applicant's means but the means of the whole household that were tested. The family's income had to be below the following scale, outlined in Regulation 12. This Regulation provided that "any amount in excess of (this scale) received by a family from any source would debar the applicants from receiving food relief."

433. F.A. Bland, *op.cit.*, p.97, has the same income-source list, except that he states "four-fifths of food relief issued".

Income Rate (per fortnight) in Respect of Each Scale of Relief

<u>Scale of Relief</u>	<u>Class of Applicant</u>	<u>Income Rate</u>
A	For single man	20/-
B-C	For man and wife, with or without one child	40/-
D	For man and wife, with two or three children	50/-
E	For man and wife with four children	60/-
E	For man and wife with five children	70/-
F	For man and wife with six children	80/-
F	For man and wife with seven children	90/-

(10/- per fortnight per head of the household in the case of four or more children) 434

The introduction of the P.I.R. at the same time as the 25% increase was seen by the U.W.M., and by some other sections of the labor movement as a case of giving with one hand while taking away with the other. This view had considerable justification, for many former dolors were now denied relief, though they were still very needy. The U.W.M. claimed that in July 1931 there was an average of 106, 377 food

434. For the Regulations of U.W.M., N.S.W. State Executive, Crimes Against the Unemployed, Sydney, no date (probably just after the 1932 state elections) pp.5-6.

relief orders issued at an average weekly cost of £100,118 and that this had dropped to 98,046 orders at an average weekly cost of £91,281 by December 1931 because many unemployed had been excluded from the dole through the P.I.R.⁴³⁵

This tightening up of the relief regulations was in line with Lang's drive against fraud, shown in the imposition of police checks on the south coast and epitomised by the institution of Dole Inspectors. It must also be seen as part of his adherence to the budget-reducing requirements of the Premiers' Plan.

The Government was of course justified in trying to eliminate wilful impositions; but, as was discussed earlier, the dole was so low and requirements so strict that many unemployed found it necessary to make some misrepresentation in order to get their due. The enforcement of the P.I.R. probably caused even further misrepresentation - by those canny enough to do so. Others were forced to adjust their circumstances so that the requirements could be met. For example, if the young daughter of an unemployed worker was working, the rest of the family might be disallowed relief and forced to live on her wages; so the daughter might be forced to leave home. The following joke satirises the sort of adjustments forced on families by the P.I.R.:

Two women are talking:

" 'I see as 'ow your daughter 'as gone and married that good-for-nothing widower,' said Mrs. O'Brien to Mrs. O'Reilly.
'Yes, ' replied Mrs. O'Reilly, ' and she's verry happy with 'is kids too; She certainly got a good match.'

435. ibid., pp.4-5.

'Good match, do you call 'im?' taunted Mrs. O'Brien.

'Why, 'e ain't done a tap of work for years. I dunno 'ow you can say he's a good match'.

'Oh, don't yer?' haughtily replied Mrs. O'Reilly. 'He gets

'F' scale on the dole, don't he?' " 436.

However much justification there was for some form of tightening of the dole regulations, the P.I.R. had at least two grave faults: the level of income allowed was too low, and the way they were enforced increased the degradation of the unemployed.

To this the radical unemployed added a further ultimate fault: the very existence of a means test. And as they continually stressed, this means test was systematised by a Labor Government.

THE POSITION MID-YEAR: III - HOW THE U.W.M. STOOD

At the end of July the New South Wales U.W.M. held its second annual conference. Sylvester's lengthy report of the conference discussions and decisions ⁴³⁷ hints at many of the weak points of the movement that were, by the end of the year, to undermine some of the support won in the ^early months.

The overwhelming impression gained from the delegates' criticisms of the organisation is that the two major problems were the confusion on the part of both rank and file members and branch leaders about the

436. The Tocsin, 28/12/32, p.2.

437. The following account of conference is from W.W., 31/7/31, p.4.

nature and aims of the U.W.M. and its relationship with other fraternal, and the lack of cohesion and organisational unity between the branches. (This again suggests that the U.W.M. Executive did not exercise authoritarian control over the movement.)

Sylvester seems to sum up the U.W.M.'s situation when he writes: "The history of the past twelve months is composed of a series of victories and reverses". The report is one of fluctuation, of success tempered with setbacks.

As far as the actual organisational form of the movement was concerned Sylvester seems to have been reasonably pleased: "The U.W.M. is growing, and particularly from an organisational point of view are we becoming strengthened. Whilst as yet there is still too much reliance upon individuals, fifty four branches have been set up since the last conference."

We have already noted that there were at this stage about seventy functioning branches in New South Wales, with a probable average membership of two hundred each. The U.W.M. only had seven country branches⁴³⁸; this was seen as disquieting, especially as Hardy's Riverina Movement was working to enlist the unemployed.

Because the U.W.M.'s membership fluctuated, it is hard to know the numerical strength of the movement, and hence how representative it was of the State's unemployed workers. If there were fourteen thousand enrolled members - and this figure does seem quite possible - the membership was certainly significant. Against this, though, we must set the fact that the number who were regularly active was considerably smaller.

438. The branches at Dubbo and Moree were named.

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20 branches
sp 3/3-4*

However, no matter what its actual membership was, the U.W.M. could, as we have seen with the eviction demonstrations, over some issues draw a much wider support than simply that of its formally enrolled members; this would suggest that it was fairly representative.

Sylvester believed that the membership should be judged on its quality as well as its quantity: "Our membership fluctuates according to circumstances, but we are definitely organising the better sections of the unemployed. The new elements we are attracting are the very pick of the unemployed."

Sylvester added that the loss of members in some branches, despite growing membership in others, was in many cases caused by the gaoling of the leaders and in others by A.L.P. 'sabotage'.⁴³⁹

"The organisational scheme as laid down at the previous converences has been adopted with minor variations by all branches, and practically every branch now has its own sub-committees for sport, social, anti-eviction, W.I.R., I.C.W.P.A., W.D.C., etc., in existence."

"The result of setting up District Committees was seen in the sudden activity that took place in the movement. Street meetings became an established fact in every locality ... The State Executive, which had undergone varied changes owing to many of its original members being gaoled, was not sufficiently well organised to cope with the situation. This necessitated immediate action, and other members were co-opted on to the State Ex.(sic) in place of those who were in gaol and those who

439. A.L.P. 'sabotage' in Glebe was specifically noted; the loss of leadership through gaolings was particularly evident on the South Coast.

had resigned.⁴⁴⁰ The addition of new members and the setting up of monthly full executive meetings, whereat each metropolitan district was represented, solved the difficulty, and today the central body is working more or less smoothly."

(While the 'co-opting' rather than election of new Executive members does not sound democratic, the system of district representation at monthly meetings does.)

The Executive's report to the conference contained a lengthy review of the main protests of the past year. The report pointed to some gains won; however, it added that these did not come up to the movement's expectations.

One weakness pointed out was the failure until recently to make any real attempt to hold regular meetings and protests at the local ration depots. That the south coast struggle to establish U.W.M. committees at the ration depots was only a "temporary victory" was attributed to the U.W.M.'s failure to extend the 'dole black' declaration to other areas.

The report also pointed to the unsatisfactory nature of the 25 per cent dole increase and the anti-eviction legislation.

A major worry of the Executive, stressed also by the delegates, was the fact that the links between the U.W.M. and the M.M. had not been strengthened in accordance with R.I.C.U. policy; this was because

440. Unfortunately it is not stated who left the Executive and who joined it. Shayler and Huggett would seem to have left it.

previous conferences had not clarified their relationships, and the idea had developed that the U.W.M. was "a separate political movement of the working class". The Executive explained: "The M.M. - the Australian section of the R.I.L.U. - is the militant rank and file movement of the workers in industry. The U.W.M., being the unemployed section of the workers, is naturally an integral part of the M.M. and as such forms part of the revolutionary movement as a whole".

Nevertheless, the U.W.M. had shown its solidarity with the employed workers by joining action committees and declaring its solidarity when the Water and Sewerage Employees and the Seamen's Union M.M. proposed strikes;⁴⁴¹ the Broken Hill U.W.M. helped the success of a local Hotel employees strike.

There had been confusion about the working of the various sub-committees but this was now, Sylvester stated, mostly clarified. Unfortunately it seems he was over-optimistic⁴⁴² as the role and function of the W.I.R. especially was to be a problem in the later months.

The W.I.R. and the problem of the 'charity' issue was stressed at the conference, and was to become increasingly important as the A.L.P. relief groups got under way.

The issue had already caused divisions: "In the early stages (since last conference) an intensive fight was waged throughout the

441. Neither of these strikes eventuated.

442. Indeed, one delegate stated that "the organisational confusion as to the different function of the various (fraternal) bodies must be cleared up."

branches against the reactionary elements who desired to confine their activities to seeking charity and who evinced no desire to adopt the fighting policy of the U.W.M. Where these struggles were carefully handled, easy victories were gained, but in other cases, where the attack was made too abruptly, and the comrades concerned lacked the necessary knowledge and experience, they developed into bitter sectarian issues and led to the splitting of the unemployed into two camps. Friction of this kind was deliberately fostered by ... Garden, the Labor Daily, and the Labor Party."

Although the U.W.M.'s destruction of the U.W.U. was praised, delegates were well aware of the danger of the A.L.P.'s new move. One stated "the problem of relief must be tackled, and the latest social fascist move to disrupt the U.W.M. combated". Another stated that "the present attack of the A.L.P. through relief could be defeated if the U.W.M. and W.I.R. adopt correct tactics; ... (we) must not repeat previous isolation mistakes".

The danger of the U.W.M.'s tendency to 'isolation' (that is, its estrangement from the immediate concerns of the unemployed because of its radicalism and its denunciations of many moderate members, and the tendency for militants to dominate activism so that the rank and file were left behind) was stressed by the delegates.

Comrade M.^(?)
Ryan stated: "our membership has increased, and also activity, but the leadership is too narrow, the tendency everywhere being to rely on a few leading elements, and not draw the membership into the work; thus new cadres must be developed ... The active elements often leapt too far ahead, and were not sufficiently responsive to the

opinions of the rank and file."

The discussion reasserted the necessity of concentrating on the platform of "Immediate Demands" rather than on long-term, general radical aims. By this time the U.W.M. was, in fact, more issue-oriented and its policy was more in line with the day-to-day grievances of the unemployed, but it still did, apparently, present a radical rhetoric that struck little response from the unemployed. Guest speakers would lecture U.W.M. meetings about the Russian Revolution or the glories of contemporary life in Russia; while the Workers' Weekly always noted that such talks were "well received" they must have seemed boring, incomprehensible or irrelevant to those who simply wanted a job or a bit more to eat.

*Guests
don't just
believe
them.*

The delegate who stressed getting the rank and file organised on the Immediate Demands also called for "a more ruthless exposure of the trade union officialdom and the Labor Governments". This 'exposure' (or attack, depending on one's agreement with the analysis of social fascism) created a divisiveness that worked against the unification and organisation of the rank and file. The numerous U.W.M. members who also belonged to the A.L.P. must often have felt themselves under attack. We shall later see that this trenchant opposition to anything or anybody connected with the A.L.P. or the union leadership - and this encompassed a large part of the organised labor movement - forced the U.W.M. into isolationism that worked against the U.W.M. In this way was the U.W.M. its own gravedigger; or rather, the Comintern dug the grave into which the U.W.M. fell.

The final emphasis of the Conference was on drawing women and youth into the movement; this was felt to be so important that it warranted a separate article.

Although Sylvester stated that "a short time back there were practically no women in the U.W.M., but now they are active everywhere", M. Ryan stated that "the role of women was under-estimated". Bateman "urged the necessity of taking the U.W.M. into the homes of the workers and over-coming the hostility of many women towards their menfolk participating in activity; a campaign must be waged amongst the women folk and their political level raised".

The Conference decided that "greater attention must be paid to the struggle on behalf of the women. Bad as is the struggle of the male unemployed, infinitely worse is that of the women." A special list of demands for women was drawn up, including the payment of full basic wage rates to unemployed women; free medicine; day nurseries, milk and lunches for the children of unemployed women.

The growing activism of the women and their participation in the anti-eviction struggles and demonstrations was applauded.

Youths were to be encouraged to join the recently formed Workers' Sports Federation and the U.W.M. resolved to set up special youth sections "to study the special problems of the younger elements".

The whole tone of the conference report is fairly optimistic; and, on the face of it, the U.W.M. had every reason to believe that its success and support would grow. It had just made a determined show in the

*Helen Smith?
Bateman?*

south coast and eviction struggles, and in the latter had massed great popular support and had won some legislative victory. Yet by the end of the year the U.W.M.'s support was allegedly severely undermined, it having suffered a great drift of membership away from it to the non-political charity organisations.

The reports of this drift raise two main questions:

- 1) How much action and organisation did occur in the latter half of the year? Are reports of the drift exaggerated?
- 2) Even if the amount of drift was exaggerated, the U.W.M.'s strength did suffer a decline. Were there causes for this other than the counter attractions of charity groups?

THE U.W.M. IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1931 - ACTIVISM AND ORGANISATION

As to the amount of organisation and activism promulgated by the U.W.M. in the latter half of the year, it is clear that much less went on compared to that of the first half of 1931.

The change was not only in the amount of activism, but also in its quality: there was simply nothing to equal the militancy of many earlier demonstrations, let alone the eviction battles. Not only were protests smaller in terms of the number of active participants, but they also failed to draw large numbers of supporting onlookers.

But this does not mean that the U.W.M.'s activity suddenly stopped in mid year, that there were no protests in the latter months, that all the unemployed rejected political organisations for charity handouts.

As I will later contend that the descriptions of the drift away from the U.W.M. were somewhat exaggerated, it is necessary to review some of the activity that did go on.

Firstly, as far as the branch organisation was concerned, dozens of branches remained in existence, and even some new ones were formed. While it is probable that some of the less active branches folded, the ones which had already made their mark in protests continued. These are, for example, references to the activities of the branches at Bondi⁴⁴³, Auburn, Lithgow⁴⁴⁴, Dubbo, Sutherland,⁴⁴⁵ a new branch at Binnaway⁴⁴⁶, Bourke, Yass, Abermain⁴⁴⁷, Homeville, Attunga, Broken Hill⁴⁴⁸, Mayfield-Waratah, Port Kembla, Leeton⁴⁴⁹, Glebe⁴⁵⁰, Canterbury-Bankstown area⁴⁵¹, Kurri Kurri⁴⁵², Cabra-Vale⁴⁵³, Guildford, Newtown, Marrickville, St. Peters, Camperdown, Erskineville⁴⁵⁴, Griffith⁴⁵⁵, Balmain⁴⁵⁶ and Liverpool.⁴⁵⁷

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443. Red Leader, official Organ of the Minority Movement, Sydney, (hereafter, R.L.), 11/9/31, p.8. W.W., 30/10/31, p.4.
444. R.L., 18/9/31, p.8; Lithgow also W.W., 14/11/31, p.5; 14/8/31, p.4.
445. R.L., 2/10/31, p.8.
446. ibid., 30/10/31, p.8.
447. ibid., 31/8/31, p.8.
448. ibid., 28/8/31, p.7.
449. ibid., 4/9/31.
450. W.W., 24/9/31, p.4.
451. ibid., 9/10/31, p.2.
452. ibid., 21/8/31, p.4.
453. S.M.H., 24/10/31, p.17.
454. R.L., 11/9/31, p.8.
455. ibid., 4/9/31, p.8.
456. ibid., 28/8/31, p.4.
457. ibid., 9/10/31, p.4.

Given the difficulty of organising country branches, it is notable that in this time of decreasing support a few country branches still existed. It was not only the mobility of the unemployed that made country organisation so difficult; organisers had to surmount the extreme conservatism of country people.

The C.P.A. had a membership drive in the country in late 1931, and tried to form new U.W.M. branches as well as winning Party converts.

If what happened at Dubbo is any indication of the general attitude to Communists of country people - and there is evidence that it was - it is a wonder there were any country branches at all.

In November there were reportedly fifty communists at Dubbo - though it seems the term is here used synonymously with 'undesirables' - and the citizens were "strongly opposed" to them.⁴⁵⁸ A meeting of Dubbo unemployed, addressed by Communists, decided to form a U.W.M. branch. The Municipal Council declared its sympathy with the 'citizens movement against Communism' and the U.W.M. (and even the local Lang group!) was refused permission to speak in the park.⁴⁵⁹ An anti-communist 'Vigilance Committee' a thousand strong was formed and carloads of people from the neighbouring towns arrived to run the Reds out of town. At this stage in the press reports it emerges that there were only four Communists there.⁴⁶⁰

458. S.M.H., 18/11/31, p.12.

459. ibid., 23/11/31, p.10.

460. ibid., 24/11/31, p.9.

At Binnaway (where another new U.W.M. branch was formed) five hundred citizens were addressed by two ministers of religion and three New Guardsmen, and marched on the shop of an alleged Communist. (He denied being a Communist but admitted to atheism and republicanism, which no doubt seemed just as heinous.) In a plagiarism of almost any Hollywood Western, they ordered him to sell his property and be out of town by the next Saturday.⁴⁶¹

Another difficulty in establishing country branches was country people's traditional distrust of city politics. A correspondent from the Yass U.W.M. wrote: "It is noticeable here, as in all country areas, that the local unemployed eye askance any organisation that has its origin in the city."⁴⁶²

The activities of the U.W.M. branches continued in much the same way as before, branches protesting for the major demands of the U.W.M. and over local grievances.

Struggles against evictions continued, though at a more subdued level. Mayfield-Waratah U.W.M. forced the local M.L.A. to take action over an eviction by mounting a deputation to him⁴⁶³ and Kurri Kurri U.W.M. held a public meeting with the landlord over a proposed eviction.⁴⁶⁴ The Bondi U.W.M. also kept up some resistance against evictions⁴⁶⁵. There was still a rhetoric of action, even if little eventuated: the Kurri

461. ibid., 30/11/31, p.10.

462. R.L., 4/9/31, p.8.

463. W.W., 2/10/31, p.4.

464. ibid., 21/8/31, p.4.

465. ibid., 30/10/31, p.4.

unemployed declared they were "prepared to fight, even against the armed forces" if the eviction took place.⁴⁶⁶

Six hundred Broken Hill unemployed, after their regular Tuesday meeting, marched on the Town Hall singing the Red Flag (and also carrying one); they condemned the Labor aldermen for convicting one of their comrades for writing on the footpath.⁴⁶⁷

Lithgow unemployed demonstrated at the time of dole issue at the police station because two comrades had been convicted of stealing coal.⁴⁶⁸ They later sent letters of protest to Lang, Gosling and Lamaro demanding increased ration scales, open orders on shops, boots and clothes, single rations for children over school age, and the release of one comrade Baker "for having coal which was suspected of being stolen". (For this crime Baker served fourteen days). Gosling refused all requests.⁴⁶⁹

The two main issues the U.W.M. concentrated on at this time were the inadequacy of Lang's 25 per cent dole increase and the imposition of the new dole regulations; and opposition to any scheme of relief work that did not fulfil award conditions.

The first charge against Lang's much-vaunted 25 per cent dole increase was that it made little or no difference in many cases to the

466. S.M.H., 18/8/31, p.13.

467. ibid., 19/8/31, p.12.

468. ibid., 8/9/31, p.10.

469. ibid., 19/10/31, p.10.

amount of relief received. The arguments used were that a rise in food prices negated some of the benefit; that changes in the scales had brought a decrease to some categories of unemployed; and that the new dole regulations with the Permissible Income Regulations and the new application forms were intended to, and did, force former dolers off the dole.

The U.W.M.'s case was well argued, with a good use of fact and statistics. Even if attempts to protest against the new dole system were largely fruitless at least the U.W.M. kept up a constant barrage of propaganda, which may have been one of the main pressures that caused the Labor Council to call for better relief.

The U.W.M. claimed: "While the majority of the unemployed are sitting tight deluding themselves with the idea that they have gained something by the 25 per cent increase in rations, individual cases of victimisation are increasing rapidly."⁴⁷⁰

It pointed to a particularly "vicious" application of the Permissible Income Regulations in country areas, where unemployed were completely at the mercy of the police: "Unemployed men are pouring in and out of the country gaols convicted by class-biased magistrates of 'fraud'.

In many places the 'regulation' that allows a single man to earn £1 per fortnight is entirely disregarded, and, if a man applies for rations and has any money on him, he is immediately charged with 'fraud'."⁴⁷¹

470. R.L., 28/8/31, p.3.

471. ibid., 23/10/31, p.8.

There seems to have been considerable justification for complaint against the new regulations and their manner of enforcement. In the first court case brought under them an unemployed cook was charged with "having falsely declared ... that he was in receipt of no money and was without means of support", and so received coupons worth 14/4½. He said he had received a loan of 30/- and free lodging and board, but "honestly believed he was entitled to the dole, as he was receiving no money". The magistrate declared: "This is a barefaced fraud ... This is a grave matter" and sentenced him to seven days gaol plus the repayment of the sum or another 24 hours gaol.⁴⁷²

In another case, a Balmain man was ordered to make restitution of £14.17.0 for a "dole offence". His crime was that his son's earnings brought the total family income to 6d a fortnight beyond the Permissible Income level; his son did not live at home.⁴⁷³

In the light of this the following poem from a Relief Workers' paper does not seem exaggerated:

Old Mrs. Thoreau
Went to the Bureau
Her children nourishment needed,
But when she got there
All she got was a glare;
'Permissible Income exceeded'.⁴⁷⁴

472. The Sun, 3/6/31, p.11.

473. R.L., 16/10/31, p.8.

474. Red Light! (official organ of the Unemployed and Relief Workers' Union; published by the former Balmain U.W.M. - Sylvester's group) 30/9/35.

The U.W.M. particularly fulminated against the way the government balanced out its increases by making cuts in other areas. In mid September the amount of groceries allowed to certain scales was cut, while the allowance to single men was increased.⁴⁷⁵

It also charged that two single men 'baching' together were being classified as a married couple, for the rates for a man and wife were well below those for two single persons.⁴⁷⁶

Following on from this, it attacked the 'slave system' whereby wives were regarded as inferior and thus not entitled to the same amount as a single person.

"By subtracting the A Scale (for a single person) from the B Scale (for a man and wife) you will arrive at the amount that a wife is supposed to exist on in this land flowing with milk and honey!" The following table was given:

475. W.W., 18/9/31, p.1.

476. ibid., R.L., 9/10/31, p.8; 16/10/31, p.8.

	<u>"A" SCALE</u> <u>Single person</u> <u>per fortnight</u>	<u>"B" SCALE</u> <u>Married couple</u> <u>per fortnight</u>
Groceries	7 6 $\frac{1}{4}$	10 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
Bread	2 0	2 8
Meat	2 8	3 0
Milk	-	1 9
Total	<u>12 2 $\frac{1}{4}$</u>	<u>18 2 $\frac{3}{4}$</u>

DIFFERENCE

Groceries 3 3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Bread 0 8
Meat 0 4
Milk 1 9
Total	<u>..... 6 0 $\frac{1}{2}$</u>

A married women, then is entitled to the lordly sum of 3/0 $\frac{1}{4}$ per week, or approcimately 5d. per day! Five whole pennies per day to sustain Australian womanhood! And now they are even insinuating that they should work for it!

)477)

In protesting against the new dole regulations the U.W.M. campaigned against the intrusion made into unemployed workers' lives by the questions on the application forms, against the fact that unemployed workers had to find someone to vouch for their predicament, and against the excessive regimentation the bureaucracy of the labour office forced upon their lives. As well as this, of course, was the plain economic fear of

477. R.L., 9/10/31, p.8. (Note that the value of the rations given here is different from Bland's table given earlier in this chapter. As already mentioned, no exact, uniform value can be given because of price variations. If Bland's figures are used, the married women was expected to live on 7/2 per fortnight, while a single person was allowed 11/8 per fortnight.)

losing the dole under the new requirements.

In the protest against the regulations there was an attempt to revert to the militancy of the South Coast Dole Struggle. Though the Campaign was severely limited in area and support (and had little effect) it does show that there was still a fighting spirit among some unemployed.

It is not surprising that the protest began on the south coast. It apparently developed out of local initiative.

In August the Workers' Weekly reported "increased activity" on the part of the south coast U.W.M. branches at meetings at the local relief depots. Instead of the four relief dockets (for groceries, meat, bread and milk) they wanted an open order system that could be exchanged anywhere for any article - thus demanding their right to organise their own needs and requirements. They also demanded hot meals for the school children of unemployed parents.⁴⁷⁸

At the same time Scarborough dolors declared the dole black when two unemployed workers were denied relief.⁴⁷⁹

The unity between the U.W.M. and the unions on the south coast was still good. In early August the U.W.M. had asked to have four instead of two delegates on the Illawarra Trades and Labor Council, to which the Council had agreed.⁴⁸⁰

In early September an aggregate meeting of Wollongong miners and unemployed condemned the Government for the new dole regulations, advised

478. W.W., 21/8/31, p.4.

479. S.M.H., 18/8/31, p.9.

480. W.W., 21/8/31, p.4.

the unemployed not to sign the new application forms and decided to hold a mass demonstration of employed and unemployed.⁴⁸¹ The Wollongong Labor Council declared the Lang Government 'anti-working class' for the regulations.⁴⁸²

Despite this union support it was hard to lead the unemployed into an action which would result in the loss of any livelihood. When Port Kembla unemployed applied for their next dole they said they had burnt their new application forms, but when food was refused them they eventually presented signed orders.⁴⁸³ However, Balgownie dolors refused to sign the forms.⁴⁸⁴

Though the protest was minimal it evidently caused some concern to the authorities, for the manager of the State Labour Exchange was forced to give some explanation of the reason for the regulations to unemployed representatives. The matter of particular concern was the provision that if the applicant was not Australian he had to declare which ship he had arrived on and his date and place of embarkation; the unemployed feared the regulations were aimed at deportation.⁴⁸⁵

Though the unemployed representatives were supposedly satisfied, a week or so later the 'Campaign Committee of the Combined Anti-Fascist and Food Relief Conference' (representing miners, unemployed and other south coast unions) declared at Wollongong that there would be a one-day strike on September 30th in protest against the new food relief

481. S.M.H., 7/9/31, p.10. The meeting was supported by S. Best (Secretary Illawarra Labor Council), Lowden (Southern Miners' representative) and Reid (U.W.M. representative)

482. *ibid.*, 8/9/31, p.10.

483. *ibid.*, 10/9/31, p.13.

484. *ibid.*, 11/9/31, p.10.

485. *ibid.*, 12/9/31, p.12.

regulations.⁴⁸⁶ The strike was also a disappointment: the Herald described it as "a very poor affair". Mt.Keira miners worked, and there was a protest meeting.⁴⁸⁷ On another occasion at this time speakers tried to induce dolors at Bulli to protest against the new dole regulation, but the men refused to acquiesce.⁴⁸⁸

There was evidently a more determined U.W.M. protest against the dole forms in late October, but again only a few areas put up any show of strength, and any hope of real success was thwarted by the lack of wide support. Again the protest came from areas that had already proved their militancy.

The Red Leader continually exposed inequities of the dole system and called for demonstrations on October 30th "against further impositions and for an open order for rations negotiable at any shop or store."⁴⁸⁹ The call for action in this case came from the U.W.M. Executive.

According to the Red Leader there were "mass demonstrations ... in many districts" on October 30, and while this is probably an exaggeration it is obvious that some occurred. "Despite the fact that most of the central branches are active on the waterfront in support of the (Seamen's) strike ,successful demonstrations were held at Balmain, Enmore Park, Bondi and Hurstville".

486. ibid., 26/9/31, p.14.

487. ibid., 1/10/31, p.9.

488. ibid., 17/9/31, p.10.

489. R.L., 16/10/31, p.8.

"At Balmain, 500 of the local unemployed demonstrated at the ration dump, and publicly burned a large number of the new 'regulation' forms ... Great antagonism was expressed at the attitude of the 'Labor' Government in attempting to force the unemployed to sign these forms. As one speaker pointed out: - "Because we are unemployed it is presumed that our morality has sunk so low that our word cannot be accepted, and we are compelled to get a parson or policeman to verify our statements." The 'Balmain Bonfire' was greeted with enthusiasm."⁴⁹⁰

The Balmain demonstration showed that if a militant determination was displayed, there was no great fear of repercussions: despite the statement of Labour Exchange officials that unemployed who burnt their forms would go without rations, Balmain and Rozelle workers who burnt their forms were given rations.⁴⁹¹

This was however the only victory; the U.W.M. had no success in securing a change in the regulations.

An interesting comparison with the Government's indifference to these protests is the alacrity with which the Lang Government would jump at a determined effort made by the Labor Council. By September-October the Labor Council also was expressing dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of unemployment relief and the stringency with which the new regulations were applied. In September it urged a more liberal distribution of relief, and a revision of the regulations including the raising of the scale of permissible income. (Gosling replied that he

490. ibid, 6/11/31, p.8.

491. ibid., 13/11/31, p.8.

had already introduced many improvements).⁴⁹² A U.W.M. request that ration orders should be made negotiable on any shop was endorsed.⁴⁹³

The Labor Council was particularly concerned with the provision that the new forms (introduced in late September) had to be signed by an alderman, minister of religion, sergeant of police, town clerk or postmaster, whereas formerly union secretaries and members of parliament could vouch for applicants. The Herald noted: "Up to the present union officers have been able to bestow benefit on unemployed members by signing their applications for relief, and thus providing them with speedy assistance. In this way they have been able to pacify the clamorous demands of their members for relief from their benefit funds, which, in most cases, have reached exhaustion point.

It is realised that the tightening up of the regulations will expose union officers to the attacks of their unemployed members, and will strengthen the position of the Communists who have been encouraging the unemployed to hold union officers responsible for their plight. Easy facilities for securing the dole, according to the experience of union officials, have helped to allay the agitation for work."⁴⁹⁴

The day after this report Baddeley announced that Government policy on the forms had altered, and that union secretaries could now sign them.⁴⁹⁵

492. S.M.H., 9/9/31, p.11.

493. T.L.C.M., 24/9/31.

494. S.M.H., 7/10/31, p.11.

495. ibid., 8/10/31, p.9.

One reason for the apparent inertia in the U.W.M. in the latter half of the year may be that the U.W.M. Executive seems to have done little to give the unemployed a guide for action. Apart from the August 30 form-burning protest the only other real attempt to call a demonstration was for November 24th. This is very different from the earlier practice of calling a city demonstration about once a month.

It is likely that the inertia was self-perpetuating: leaders stopped calling demonstrations because there was little support, then the support for any posited demonstration would become even more elusive.

One thing that seems clear about the task of organising the unemployed is that a constant effort had to be maintained. If there were not regular street meetings and a continual attempt to propagandise and organise, those workers already attracted would drift off.

Part of the trouble with the protests - or lack of them - in late 1931 arose from the bad organisational methods, the lack of unity and cohesion, discussed at the July conference. Publications such as the Red Leader would call for signature canvassing for petitions, for local meetings and protests, but would give little indication of how the campaign was to be run. In many cases the U.W.M. leaders seem to have forgotten that many of the members of the U.W.M. had had no training in public speaking and agitation.

The poor demonstrations for the eviction fight prisoners are a case in point. For weeks, the Workers' Weekly had called for petitions and protests leading up to mass demonstrations outside the courts. But these usually neglected even to say where and when the court case was on, and the demonstrations obviously bore the marks of ~~lead~~^{bad} organisation. This was particularly remiss, as it should surely have been possible, for example, to mobilise a large number of the Newtown residents who had so supported the fight when it occurred.

Several hundred U.W.M. members gathered around Darlinghurst Court in early September when the 'Newtown Boys' were on trial. Though the crowd was large enough to disrupt traffic no one tried to withstand the police when they "discouraged the crowd". One man was later charged with being armed with a bludgeon.⁴⁹⁶

In November several hundred men gathered outside the court where the Bankstown Boys were charged. The Herald stated that the demonstration passed "tamely", there were no leaders, and the men moved around aimlessly. There was a "half-hearted attempt" by a man on a soapbox to persuade the crowd to sing the Red Flag, but not more than a score of men and women joined in. When a man was arrested a small group of women rushed to defend him. Mrs. Eatock, the mother of Richard and Noel, and Jane Mountjoy, their sister, were arrested

496. S.M.H., 8/9/31, p.10.

as well as one Harold Fletcher⁴⁹⁷.

Though the U.W.M. offered itself congratulations, the march on November 24th appears also to have been rather a failure .

When the October 30th deputation to Lang failed, the U.W.M. called on branches to hold a mass demonstration at the reopening of Parliament on November 24th.⁴⁹⁸ Though there were repeated calls to organise for the demonstration⁴⁹⁹ no explicit instructions were given and it is likely that little preparation was carried out by the branches.

The demands included "work, or an immediate 100 per cent increase in the dole"; an open order system; "the abolition of all ration pimps"; "the cessation of police practice of searching the unemployed on the track when applying for rations"; the repeal of the Transport Coordination Act, "the disarming and disbanding of the New Guard and other Fascist organisations".⁵⁰⁰

The U.W.M. asked the Labor Council to cooperate with the demonstration. After a heated debate it finally agreed to all the demands except for the repeal of the Transport Act;⁵⁰¹ however, the Council does not appear to have helped by organisation or participation.

497. ibid., 10/11/31, p.6. (Smith's Weekly 21/11/31, says Jane Mountjoy the daughter of Lucy Eatock).

498. R.L., 6/11/31, p.8.

499. e.g. W.W., 13/11/31, p.1, p.4; R.L., 20/11/31, p.8

500. R.L., 20/11/31, p.8.

501. T.L.C.M., 12/11/31, 19/11/31.

The Workers' Weekly reported of the demonstration that "the United Front Committee has reason to congratulate itself upon the demonstration, as according to the capitalist press 1500 marched in procession to the Domain from Central Railway Square, and the number swelled to 3,000 by the time the speakers' stand was reached.

That hundreds of unemployed did not take part in the procession instead of using the sidewalks, can be attributed to the fact that the police, ten minutes before the appointed hour of the start of the procession and in full view of the thousands assembled, arrested Comrade M. Ryan and took him off to the police station.

This action, it can safely be asserted, was designed to provoke a riot on the spot and break up the procession; but the comrades kept their heads and the attempted coup of the police failed to materialise.

At the mass meeting Comrade McKenzie acted as chairman, and submitted the resolution instructing the deputation to lay the seven demands compiled by the United Front Committee, before the Government."

Then Sylvester, the deputation's leader, spoke on the demands to the "tumultuous applause" of the crowd and the deputation of eleven proceeded to Parliament where Baddeley would only see three of them.⁵⁰²

502. W.W., 27/11/31, p.1.

The Herald report is much less glowing. It claims only 500 men, women and children marched quietly to Parliament House, where the police diverted them into the Domain. It claims Ryan was arrested for possessing a bludgeon and deserting his wife.⁵⁰³ The latter was probably a pure piece of scurilousness: Ryan was only charged with possessing a bludgeon; even regarding that, Ryan and his witnesses claimed it had been taken from an opponent (no doubt meaning a New Guardsman) at a Guildford meeting and he was carrying it to show to Lang. Nevertheless he received a two-month prison sentence.⁵⁰⁴

Baddley's replies to the deputation were as usual evasive. he stated Cabinet was giving the unemployment problem "serious consideration". A large part of the conversation seems to have been concerned with Baddeley's charges that the deputation were Communists.⁵⁰⁵

Whether the Herald's figure of 500 or the Workers' Weekly figure of 1500-3000 is correct really makes little difference: it was the spirit of the crowd that was so disappointing, for the arrest of Ryan cowed it completely. Compare this spirit for example with that of the demonstrators on International Unemployed Day 1930, who when warned that if they tried to march they would face trouble decided to march anyway.

503. S.M.H., 25/11/31, p.11.

504. ibid., 5/12/31, p.10.

505. ibid., 25/11/31, p.11.

(There evidently was still a spirit of resistance on the northern coalfields area as well as the southern. On November 23rd the U.W.M.'s double dole demonstration was a good show of strength, due partly to the fact that the employed workers joined with the U.W.M. and held a one-day work stoppage. Three thousand workers, accompanied by two pipe bands, marched to Weston Park where a meeting was held.)⁵⁰⁶

The other preoccupation of the U.W.M. at this time was to prevent any system of relief work at dole rates rather than at full award conditions. This also concerned the unions, which, while they did not protest as forthrightly as might have been expected, did add the force of their complaints against the system.

Although the Lang Government relied on dole relief much more than on any relief work system it is not true that no attempts were made by Lang to put the unemployed to work. It is rather hard to work out the exact position regarding relief work, as different measures were tried by the Government and also by local councils, as well as work carried out under Federal grants. But it is clear that relief work did go on under Lang, and did in many instances provoke protest from the relief workers themselves as well as the industrial labor movement.

The most publicised relief work scheme introduced by the Lang Government was the so-called 'Moss Vale Scheme'.

506. W.W., 27/11/31, p.1.

This was introduced as an experiment at Moss Vale in the first half of the year. The scheme provided for unemployed to work for the value of their dole rations - at award wages, surely, but not for a full wage as only a day or so a week were worked. "The Moss Vale scheme ... provides for recipients of the dole being employed for one or more days a week, according to the scale under which they are graded for dole purposes, the pay in each case being a slight increase on the dole. The Government finds three quarters of the cost of the work and the local council one quarter".⁵⁰⁷

From the outset there was protest. Seventy Berrima workers turned down the scheme, declaring it undermined the principles of Labor, and that they needed at least one week's work in four.⁵⁰⁸ The Trades Hall Central Unemployment Committee rejected any proposals to give work instead of sustenance.⁵⁰⁹ Three hundred West Maitland unemployed declared that "for no consideration will we entertain the idea of working for the dole".⁵¹⁰

Sutherland unemployed also declared its "disgust" at the "anti working class" scheme "whereby the unemployed shall work for the equivalent of the dole".⁵¹¹ The Newcastle Trades Hall Council declared Baddeley 'black' because 'he had consistently side-stepped the issue of conditions prevailing on relief works'. He was to be 'black' until full trade union rates and conditions applied on these works.⁵¹²

507. Sun, 7/5/31, p.22.

508. ibid.

509. S.M.H., 18/8/31, p.9.

510. ibid., 2/9/31, p.12.

511. ibid., 29/9/31, p.9.

512. ibid., 6/11/31, p.9.

(A month later this was rescinded after a heated debate in which the U.W.M. held to the original position.⁵¹³

As well as their verbal protests there were some cases in which relief workers downed tools.

In July, Lithgow relief workers twice refused to begin work because rations had been refused to about 100 men whose two days' earnings in the previous week had placed their income scale beyond that allowed for the dole.⁵¹⁴ This was one of the continual criticisms of the scheme: a man would work for a day or two, then would not be rostered again for work for a month or more perhaps; the fact that he had earned disallowed him from the dole and he had to go through the application and waiting requirements again. (In the Lithgow case the relief workers action caused the Chief Secretary to telegram that rations should be allowed.)

Twelve painters employed on relief work at Broken Hill stopped work when they were not paid the full rates,⁵¹⁵ and relief workers on the Jenolan Caves Road job struck for two days because the food provided at the work camp was insufficient. Their demands were granted.⁵¹⁶

Probably as a result of the agitation against the Moss Vale work-for-the-dole scheme, the scheme was closed down in October.⁵¹⁷ The U.W.M. in 1932 claimed that "last year the combined efforts of the U.W.M.

513. ibid., 5/12/31, p.13.

514. ibid., 16/7/31, p.10.

515. ibid., 4/12/31, p.10.

516. ibid., 15/12/31, p.14.

517. ibid., 22/10/31, p.10.

Illawarra Trades and Labor Council and miners on the South Coast compelled Lang to stop Work-for-the-Dole at Moss Vale."⁵¹⁸ It was probably right. However, though this scheme was closed, other systems continued and were to provide the basis of more agitation in 1932.

There was, then, still good organising, protest, and propogandising being carried on by the U.W.M. in the second half of 1931, though the activity was below the level established in April-May-June.

Reports of the drift away from the U.W.M. cannot, however, be discounted. The main reason for this dwindling of support was the establishment of the A.L.P. Relief Centres. Not only did these draw away the U.W.M. supporters, but they caused division and confusion within the U.W.M. over the issue of how to deal with them.

I have already stated that it is difficult to trace just how many relief groups the A.L.P. set up, as they were not sensational enough to raise much press coverage. However, the accounts available plus the evidence of the trouble they caused the U.W.M. shows that they were spread widely over the metropolitan area and the coalfields. There seems to have been little attempt to found them in the country districts.⁵¹⁹ The U.W.M. had comparatively little hold there anyway, the A.L.P. itself did not have a strong country base, and the country unemployed were either too busy travelling to agitate much, or were too isolated

518. W.W., 8/4/32, p.1.

519. Though one was founded in Taree (W.W., 7/7/31, p.4.)

for their protests to be an embarrassment.

In late May, a U.W.M. correspondent to the Workers' Weekly noted: "The reactionary elements are again trying to weaken the movement of the unemployed by trying to split them up on the promise of a bit of stale fish or a decayed cabbage. This is particularly pronounced in Marrickville ... where the discarded officialdom of the unemployed are trying to revive the U.W.U. This move is also being followed in Annandale, and in Newtown we have the depot on Cambridge Street which gives a handout occasionally. This move is being taken ... in order to find backing among the unemployed for the various discredited job seekers in the Labor Party or parties

An attempt has been made on a couple of occasions to break up meetings by elements who have, no doubt, been inspired by the parliamentary hangers-on."⁵²⁰

A week later the Workers' Weekly proclaimed :
Comrades, an election is in sight, and the capitalist parties, both Labor and Nationalist, are vieing with one another in the ancient occupation of vote catching.

True to their opportunist principles, the Labor politicians are taking advantage of a golden opportunity of consolidating their forces.

520. W.W., 29/5/31, p.4.

The golden opportunity is the fact that there are thousands of Capitalism's unemployed congregating at the various soup kitchens in the hope of quaffing an occasional bowl of "surplus value soup".

"God bless the soup kitchens" murmur these vote-catching hypocrites, "with a little bit of organising and personal contact (but not too personal) we can get those goats to swallow the Lang Plan along with the soup. They won't taste it that way!"

And so they got to work. All over the metropolitan area there has been a sudden revival of charity seeking outfits, soup dispensers, and old clo' cliques, and politicians and would be politicians are waddling around well in the limelight.⁵²¹

By the end of July there were three charity organisations vying with the U.W.M. in No. 3 district.⁵²²

Sometimes the A.L.P. used the "whiteanting" policy which they so abhorred when Communists used it. Instead of setting up a charity counter-group they bored within the U.W.M. branches and tried to convert them. Their main propaganda attacks seem to have been founded on the Labor Daily's corruption allegations.

521. ibid., 5/6/31, p.1.

522. ibid., 31/7/31, p.4. (The U.W.M. claimed to be coping with the problem.)

In mid July the Lithgow U.W.M. voted to "disaffiliate with the State Executive of the U.W.M. until such a time as the executive is reorganised and ceases to use the movement for party propaganda." The Workers' Weekly noted "This 'stunt' of the reactionary element was based entirely upon the scurrulous articles that have recently appeared in the Labor Daily". However the withdrawal was made temporarily until Lithgow delegates reported back from the July Conference⁵²³, after which the branch reaffiliated.⁵²⁴

A similar attempt was made at Cessnock, where the Labor Mayor (the felicitously named Joe Shakespeare) tried to take over a U.W.M. meeting. He improved on the Labor Daily by charging that 80 per cent of the branch income went to headquarters. This bid for control failed when a local businessman who audited the books showed that only 9/- had been sent.⁵²⁵ (So elated was the branch with his failure that it immediately sent £3/3/- to headquarters "with revolutionary greetings"!)⁵²⁶

Though the Workers' Weekly, naturally enough, does not record the A.L.P.'s successes in winning over the U.W.M. branches, it is more than likely, given the concerted effort of the A.L.P., that some success was had.

The A.L.P. also decided to clean up its own branches by purging them of suspected Communists or U.W.M. members.

523. ibid., 10/7/31, p.4.

524. ibid., 14/8/31, p.4.

525. ibid., 14/8/31, p.4.

526. ibid., 28/8/31, p.4.

Nielson, a member of the U.W.M. of Lakemba and the Lakemba A.L.P. was expelled (and threatened with bodily expulsion) from his A.L.P. branch because of his U.W.M. membership. The previous week the A.L.P. branch had passed militant resolutions against the eviction bashings, the Labor Daily and the A.L.P. state machine. So at the next meeting one of Lang's supporters "attended with his car packed with followers ready to vote upon every measure put forward by him," and the earlier motions were overruled. It is interesting that eight Socialisation Unit members were among Nielson's supporters and the Workers' Weekly noted: "The Socialisation Unit has since passed some interesting resolutions that are likely to cause a split ... If this occurs, the Unit will, without doubt, throw itself behind the U.W.M. as the only logical conclusion".⁵²⁷

The U.W.M., as we have seen from the July Conference decisions, was determined to defeat the A.L.P.'s 'charity drive', and had a small success in propagandising against the relief depots themselves.

For example, a new soup kitchen under the auspices of the Glebe Labor aldermen was opened at the Glebe Town Hall. The A.L.P.'s determination to win popularity through the soup distribution can be seen by the fact that Beasley, J.B. Martin and Lamaro spoke to the opening crowd. They also found, however, the embarrassing spectacle of a rival meeting of unemployed, obviously organised by the U.W.M.

527. ibid., 14/8/31, p.4.

protesting against government inactivity.⁵²⁸ That this meeting was not negligible is shown opposite.

However, the U.W.M. was continually to find that the unemployed often preferred a bowl of soup now to action intended to bring a full dole allowance later. Six weeks later the Glebe Relief Depot was distributing a hundred gallons of soup daily.⁵²⁹

Though the U.W.M. verbally attacked the A.L.P. charity relief depots, it is unlikely that many protests or boycotts of the depots got off the ground. The Glebe protest was probably exceptional; the Glebe U.W.M. was one of the most militant locals and there had already been a long-standing battle between the branch and the local Labor Party and Labor Aldermen which would have given a stimulus to the confrontation.

To understand the U.W.M.'s opposition to the relief depots one must take into account much more than the political struggle going on between the Communists and the A.L.P., though this would provide reason enough for the U.W.M.'s hostility.

It was also the whole issue of charity that was controversial. The U.W.M.'s opposition to the concentration on relief by unemployed organisations was similar to the O.B.U.U.'s objections to charity in the Twenties.

528. Sun, 1/6/31, p.7.

529. L.D., 16/7/31, p.5.

The U.W.M. maintained that all workers had a right to a full basic wage even if the capitalist system could not find jobs for them, and charity was no substitute for this right. Not only did the unemployed get far less in charity than the basic wage, but the very fact that it was charity was believed to be dehumanising. In this they were undoubtedly right. In every first hand account about living on charity (or on the dole, which was thought of as government charity) I have read or heard the demoralising and degrading nature of the experience is described.

The U.W.M. opposed charity because it simply dehumanised workers and, further, because it degraded them into the belief that they had no rights, that they should be thankful for what they got. The acceptance of charity worked against the unemployed workers' willingness to protest not only because it gave them a little more food so there was less impetus to demand more, but also because it psychologically undermined their belief in their right, as human beings and as workers, to an adequate living.

Finally, the U.W.M. was against the idea of employed workers paying for the relief of unemployed workers by means of donations and levies for soup kitchens etcetera in the same way as it opposed the Wage Tax.

The U.W.M. understood the attractions of charity handouts to the unemployed and tried to counter the A.L.P.'s charity centres by increasing the work of the W.I.R. But the W.I.R. was never a great success, and misconceptions and disputes about its function were to

weaken the U.W.M. and bring to a head factionalism in the C.P.A.

The W.I.R. was another of the fraternals which the Comintern had directed its members to establish. One description of its function stated:

"The W.I.R. organises the unemployed on the basis of the struggle against demoralisation, and the onslaught of the Capitalism (sic) upon the working class. By sympathetic understanding and treatment it seeks to build the morale and strengthen the fighting spirit of the workers."⁵³⁰

As with all the measures initiated by the Comintern, the premise behind the W.I.R. was that the capitalist system was about to be overthrown by revolution. Hence the workers would need to organise their own relief in the mighty struggles that preceded the crash.⁵³¹

The W.I.R. in Australia could never really adapt its role according to Comintern policy to the practicalities of the Australian situation: as there were not the strikes and strike committees envisaged by the Comintern the W.I.R. could not function actively in the workers' struggle.

530. Why this Ban? issued by the A.L.P. Rank and File Unity Committee, N.S.W. (T. Payne etc.), n.d., p.20.

531. e.g. message from the Central Committee of the W.I.R. in Moscow: "The W.I.R. becomes more important in view of the general crises in capitalism, and with the sharpening of class contradictions in the capitalist countries".

The W.I.R. had been established well before the A.L.P. began to concentrate upon the charity issue, but it seems to have been pretty inactive. When an eviction struggle was on local W.I.R. members would collect food for the pickets, but that was about as far as its semi-political activity went. (It also engaged in activities such as organising summer camps for children.)

When the C.P. realised the need to counter the A.L.P.'s charity centres, it naturally turned to the W.I.R., and from mid 1931 the W.I.R.'s activities were expanded to include the distribution of charitable relief to the unemployed.

At the July conference of the W.I.R. in Sydney, attended by twenty-four N.S.W. delegates as well as some from interstate, "the expansion of W.I.R. activities to include the establishment of depots for the distribution of food, clothing etc." was emphasised, as was the need to recruit more members "in order to carry out our function as the relief organisation of the fighting workers".⁵³²

The W.I.R.'s attempts to distribute relief were fairly minimal, limited no doubt by the lack of funds. The A.L.P.'s charity groups were in a much more fortunate position. The A.L.P. was obviously more respectable than a tiny organisation with Communist tendencies, so shopkeepers etc. would be more likely to contribute goods to the A.L.P. groups. The A.L.P. groups could count on Labor aldermen to lend them

532. W.W., 10/7/31, p.4.

Council facilities for charity drives, (and even, in some cases, to help them oppose the U.W.M. by refusing it Council facilities).

The W.I.R.'s activities took the form of both tangible and moral relief - as well as distributing food, branches held 'socials' to raise the spirits of the unemployed.

For example, by August the South Coast W.I.R. was reputedly on a sure and firm foundation, "and was distributing coal to the unemployed and soup to schoolchildren." (The local Mayor and citizens relief committee originally forbade it the use of the streets).⁵³³ The Corrimal W.I.R. ran weekly socials to raise money and boost the morale of the unemployed.⁵³⁴

An advertisement in the Workers' Weekly gives a further idea of the social activities conducted:

-
- * Gala Social and Dance *
 - * BOXING NIGHT *
 - * Communist Hall *
 - * Novelty Dances, Balloon Dances, Chocolate Waltz *
 - * and Monte Carlo *
 - * Good Prizes .. Good Fun *
 - * Admission 6d. *
 - * DON'T MISS THE FUN *
-

533. ibid., 14/8/31, p.4.
 534. ibid., 20/11/31, p.4.
 535. ibid., 18/12/31, p.4.

Such activities may appear somewhat odd for a bunch of revolutionaries to be running: it is hard to imagine Herbert Moore, the Comintern emissary, doing balloon dance or a chocolate waltz (whatever they may be).

Such scruples were felt by some of the comrades themselves, and the change in U.W.M. policy towards relief was not smoothly introduced. While many branches willingly and quickly set about the establishment of relief centres, and began to collect and distribute old clothes and vegetables, and raise funds by weekly socials, others believed that the U.W.M. should be solely a militant propagandising and fighting organisation.

Before studying the divisions that arose from this difference of opinion, and the debate on the role and nature of the U.W.M. that took place at the end of the year, I will briefly comment on the second question posed at the end of the last section: was the drift from the U.W.M. also attributable to causes other than the counter attractions of the charity groups?

I think it was.

Three most important points emerge from the critical debate on the U.W.M.: the unwillingness of ~~the~~ Australian workers to indulge *question this?* in illegal, militant actions; the sectarianism of the U.W.M. that caused it to become isolated from the rank and file (for example its continual denunciation of the A.L.P. and union leaders that many workers trusted and supported); the further isolation caused by the fact that Communist speakers tended to talk over the heads of U.W.M. members,

proclaiming the intricacies of Marxist economics when most unemployed simply wanted to know bread-and-butter facts. All these tendencies boil down to the same thing: sections of the U.W.M. had apparently become divorced from many of the ordinary unemployed; the U.W.M.'s theory and revolutionariness was too advanced for the present consciousness of many unemployed, and their consciousness was not developed enough for the U.W.M. militants. *I don't know that I believe this*

This of course takes us back to the problem that is continually appearing in this account of the unemployed political organisations: the immense difficulties seemingly inherent in any attempt to organise a huge, amorphous, largely dispirited group of men in a situation where traditional methods of organisation and protest were inapplicable.

There are a couple of other factors which may have made the task of organising more difficult at this time.

Lang's introduction of the new eviction legislation and the dole increase would seem in large part to have fulfilled his aims of subduing the resentment and potential militancy of the unemployed. Lang had re-asserted his position as the battler's friend, and of course the A.L.P.'s relief distribution would increase the belief that the Labor Party was doing its best. It is obvious from the U.W.M.'s propaganda against the increase that many of the unemployed did see it as a positive improvement; the 25 per cent increase would lead many unemployed to believe that little by little the dole would be improved without any need for action on their part.

Another possible reason for the downswing in militancy is much less tangible or open to proof in quantitative terms. There was, I think, a heightened feeling of anti-Communism expressed in the press and in the statements and actions of various organisations in the latter half of 1931.

The New Guard had been formed in February 1931. Peter writes that "after October 1931 New Guardsmen and Campbell in particular grew ever more outspoken in their attacks on J.T. Lang and the New South Wales Labor Government."⁵³⁶ Anti-communism was, of course, the main point of the New Guard's creed, and the breaking up of Communist meetings (which meant U.W.M. meetings and free speech meetings as well as plain Communist meetings) was the favourite activity of the New Guard. Peter also notes that "Campbell's hints of action began towards the end of 1931. In November he demanded that all Communists, native or alien, be deported The next month he hinted that if the new Lyon's Government did not fulfil its electoral promise to rid Australia of the Communists the New Guard would proceed with its 'plan for that purpose'."⁵³⁷

The New Guard was of course, not alone in its determination to stamp out any vestige of Communism - and under this term were included a wide spectrum of non-conservative political stances, ranging from palest pink to scarlet. The Farmers' and Settlers' Association demanded that Communists should be disenfranchised and deported; it stated that citizens should go out and fight Communists, that passing

536. P.Peter, *op.cit.*, p.354.

537. *ibid.*, p.361.

resolutions had no effect⁵³⁸. In September the Sane Democracy League, the Nationalist Women and other women's organisations held a Women's Demonstration Against Communism in a meeting at the Town Hall.⁵³⁹ And it was not only these expectedly conservative bodies who so virulently opposed Communism. We have already seen the opposition of country citizens. Certain workers were just as opposed. When Communists attempted to address two hundred women at Arnotts biscuit factory on the subject of labour conditions they were attacked with fruit skins and insults, and forced to flee.⁵⁴⁰

If this posited increase of anti Communism did occur, it would work against the U.W.M.'s support in two ways: Firstly, workers would be more wary of joining in the activities of an organisation with reputed Communist tendencies because of fear of or opposition to Communism. Secondly, those who did not themselves worry about the Communist sympathies of the U.W.M. would be afraid of possible repercussions: of bashings by the New Guard or of the possibility of dole officers and potential employers being prejudiced against them.

Having now studied some of the background to the debate on the U.W.M. in late 1931, it is easier to evaluate the criticisms.

538. S.M.H., 6/8/31, p.7.

539. ibid., 9/9/31, p.12. Two Communist women were arrested for demonstrating against the meeting (ibid., 19/9/31, p.10)

540. ibid., 10/8/31, .

THE U.W.M. CONTROVERSY AT THE END OF 1931

As already stated, there was at the end of 1931 a lengthy and heated debate (- it ran through six issues of the Workers' Weekly -) over the role and aim of the U.W.M. Ostensibly the argument was about the line the U.W.M. should adopt to charity work.

Certain C.P.A. leaders - in particular Miles, the editorial board of the Workers' Weekly, Shayler and unnamed others - maintained that the U.W.M. should distribute handouts to prevent workers from turning away from the U.W.M., that theory and radicalising propaganda could be distributed with the vegetables, as it were. Kavanagh, J. Kitchen and again-unnamed others believed that any hand-outs only set back the revolutionary movement.

I shall set out the debate in some detail, as the discussion is a valuable account of the strengths and weaknesses of the U.W.M. after nearly two years' organisation.

Though the main discussion centred on the relief question, there were deeper grievances, both personal and theoretical, at stake, which I will discuss after noting the form the controversy took.

When the charity issue was raised in mid 1931, C.P. leaders found cause for complaint in the attitude of some U.W.M. members:

The militant U.W.M. has developed the habit of passing these 'handouts' by on the other side, and of late seems to be slipping back into that sectarian attitude which, had it been continued with in the past, would have led to

the development of a super sect of non-eating, unclothed, unshod proletarians.

This attitude is, of course, reducing the position to one of absurdity and the members must realise that it is necessary both to eat and be warmly clothed if they wish to remain good fighters. 541

After that, as we have seen, the U.W.M. and W.I.R. did further its charitable work, but sectarianism apparently continued in the branches and the drift away from the U.W.M. continued. The sectarianism was not limited to the opposition to charity groups, but was also apparent in the attitude of militant members, whose extreme radicalism and concentration on Marxist theory isolated them from the rank and file workers.

The key-word of the whole controversy is 'Sectarianism'.

Miles began the debate with a summary of recent discussions of the Organisation Department of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau of the C.P.A. The article was entitled: "Sectarianism ... Our Approach to Masses is Incorrect":

The Party grows but not in proportion to the favourable conditions created by the crisis of capitalism and the consequent struggle of our class. The Fraternal

organisations do not grow; it is questionable if any of them is on the whole larger than the Party.

Some months ago we found that the U.W.M. had become sectarian on the question of relief action. Having rightly set its face against the organisation of the unemployed for charity relief purposes, the U.W.M. succeeded in many areas in mobilising large numbers of workers in the struggle against evictions, and for the immediate interests of the unemployed and their dependants.

However, we had to realise that the organisation had become divorced from large numbers who had been compelled, through sheer poverty, to rally to the charity organisations. An attempt was made to correct this sectarian isolation. It was pointed out that the provision of food and clothing, rendered necessary by the duration of the crisis, need not lead to opportunism.

Opportunism is evasion of the struggle, and it is also evasion of the hard work involved in winning the masses for the struggle.

WRONG APPROACH

Reports indicate that the question of relief has been cleared up in the Party fractions and in the U.W.M. branches, but the turn has not been taken. Where the U.W.M. is not stagnant, large organisations of unemployed it is decaying. Where there are/other than the U.W.M. the party membership and the U.W.M. do not everywhere succeed in working with them.

In other areas we find that the most active members of the unemployed committee have joined the Party, and the Committee has dwindled to a small communist sect, calling itself a branch of the U.W.M. This is a direct result of incorrect work. The comrades are using time and energy carrying out work which ought to be done by the Party. They overlook, or have never learned the role of the U.W.M. They do not approach the unemployed and the employed on the basis of the concrete problems of the jobless.....

A report , from a non-party worker, is that he went to a U.W.M. propaganda meeting and wondered, along with others with him, why they had to listen to speeches on Communism. If the U.W.M. has a meeting room and invites a Party lecturer, good work can be done, but the U.W.M. propaganda must deal chiefly with the programme and the concrete problems of the unemployed, linking these with the problems of the employed, and, only when suitable, skilfully drawing in the wider political questions. 542

542. W.W., 20/11/31, p.3.

In summary, Miles was calling for a moderation of the U.W.M.'s line, both in theory and action; this was the culmination of a gradual policy of reorientation of the U.W.M. away from a direct revolutionary task - and into a body based on a specific, achievable programme that we have noticed appearing almost from the inception of the U.W.M.

It was not just the U.W.M., but all the fraternal and the C.P.A. itself that were apparently in a morass in late 1931. The report of the Party's No. 1 District (Sydney etc.) Conference was entitled "Bad Organisation loses Hundreds of Recruits". The failure to build the fraternal into mass organisations was "due partly to lack of organising ability on the part of comrades in charge of these organisations, failure to understand and carry out correct fraction work, and lack of coordination with the Party.... The main factor however, has been our sectarian approach to the problems of the workers."⁵⁴³

Both Shayler and W. H. MacKenzie (N.S.W. Secretary of the U.W.M.) agreed with Miles' criticisms on the basis of their organisational experience in the U.W.M.

Shayler wrote:

"What is the cause of the weakness in the fraternal organisations? Are our statements that the workers are willing to struggle so much moonshine?"

(His ^{implied} answer to this, of course, is 'No'.)

Then he asked, why the fraternal were becoming weakened?

they are too left wing for the masses, this is diff from being...

"The reason can be found in analysing our approach to the workers. We have attempted to win over the workers for struggle on the basis⁵⁴⁴ of the 'Overthrow of Capitalism and the Establishment of the Proletarian Dictatorship' instead of on the basis of the demands around which the mass of workers are willing to struggle. The platforms of the U.W.M. and the M.M. have been used by practically all our speakers and propagandists for the purpose of airing their knowledge of Marxism and Revolutionary Theory, and not for the purpose of winning the mass of the workers for struggle on the concrete day-to-day demands.

Also the fraternal had made little contact with women and youth.

..."We must drop the 'Leftist' tendency that has been adopted in most districts of the Party, and learn the fundamentals of forming the united front from below on the demands around which the workers will struggle..."

"Again, too, often our speakers forget why they are speaking to the workers; and their statements often develop into a tirade against union officials, politicians etc...."

..."In the past it has been the neglect of such ... matters that has led to the position of the fraternal organisations developing

544. Shayler later wrote that this should have read "only on the basis" ibid., 18/12/31, p.2.

into 'Branches of the Communist Party' instead of the mass organisations that they should be."⁵⁴⁵

McKenzie also stressed that the U.W.M. must concentrate on the immediate demands rather than airy theory. His article was entitled:

"Kill Sectarianism. Mobilise Unemployed Masses Around U.W.M. Demands"

"The U.W.M. has been torn asunder by the rank sectarianism prevalent not only in the branch meetings but also on the public highways". (sic!) Though important "to instil into the minds of the workers a conception of their class position" it is "a more important duty to study the psychology of the mass of unemployed and design methods of approach to them..."

"We must realise that the vast mass of the unemployed today have no political conception of the crisis. They desire work or immediate relief. They are prepared to assist in the work of the movement in getting relief, be the 'hand-out' ever so small. They will attend your meetings for that purpose and co-incidentally with that they are prepared to listen and assist you in the organisational work - even demonstrating on the streets."

In our approach to the workers "street meetings are primarily our first step". Speakers must speak on the immediate demands, not on political, Communist matters, which is the function of the C.P.

545. ibid., 27/11/31, p.2. Shayler had apparently been organising the U.W.M. in Melbourne, where it was obviously undergoing the same problems as the N.S.W. organisation.

I think the
C.P.A. was
wrong
here.

"The U.W.M. is non-party and non-sectarian and speakers asserting otherwise are doing the movement an injury".

"The bulletins of the U.W.M. will have to be more carefully edited in order that sectarianism is eliminated there

The bulletins lack information about branch activity...

"The meetings of the U.W.M. branches will have to be made more interesting". Meetings tend to be boring and repetitious with long readings of "superfluous" correspondence ...

"The unemployed man who walks into one of our branch meetings should be made to feel that he is part of an organisation that is dealing with the immediate relief of the unemployed and their demands... The first business of all U.W.M. branches must be the consideration of the immediate demands of the movement, the question of obtaining relief for the worst cases in their midst. While relief committees render this assistance it should be made clear that the U.W.M. does not subscribe to the doctrine of charity or bunning of food or old clothes for the unemployed.

We only do this relief work pending the organising of the masses of unemployed for the greater demands and final objective of the movement. Time itself will make relief work impossible as the conditions harden on those now in employment.

Meetings can be made attractive in many ways. Inter-branch debates, euchre parties ... concert programmes ... community singing."⁵⁴⁶

546. ibid., 4/12/31, p.2.

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It seems undeniable that the U.W.M. speakers did often fail to strike a responsive^{ive} chord in their audience. This may well have particularly developed as a result of the eviction victories which were believed by many agitators to be proof positive of the coming revolution.

It is interesting to read a criticism made by a member of the Camperdown U.W.M. who was very aware of the approach that had to be adopted vis-a-vis Australian workers:

"Regarding the propoganda given out at unemployed meetings from speakers belonging to the C.P. and U.W.M., some of them seem to be talking over the heads of those who are anxious to know the cause of the present position.

If you are dealing with the unemployed question, the cause and the cure, don't start to give them Marx and Engels all the time, because the average worker is not cognisant on political economy ...

The bread and butter argument is what hungry men and women want to listen to.

... Another thing, foul language and abuse by young speakers gets you nowhere; the general expression is this: looking for limelight ... There are three stages in public speaking in the revolutionary movement: the bonehead stage, the militant bonehead stage, and the thinking and tactful stage." 547

547. ibid., 11/12/31, p.4.

Hitchen opposed any moderation of the theoretical line, attacking Shayler particularly for Right Opportunism (which was the error of distrusting the revolutionary drive of the workers and adopting a moderate line). Hitchen wrote:

"There is an entire lack of revolutionary statement - a denial of the revolutionary role of the Party ...

"Why such revulsion (from revolutionary teaching) in favour of immediate demands? ... To reject the propaganda of overthrow and dictatorship within the fraternal organisations because of a lower degree of political consciousness in the mass, is to replace "Left" sectarianism by "Right" opportunism. The theory of ... the setting up of a proletarian dictatorship must be taught in all fraternal organisations ... Revolutionary theory and a presentation of immediate demands, in the process of struggle, are ... correlated questions, complementary to the issues at stake."⁵⁴⁸

Hitchen's argument seems partly to have arisen from a misinterpretation of Shayler who was not denying the need for revolution based on Marxist theory. But both sides of the debate tended to blindness and an over-quickness to jump at hints of deviation.

Shayler just as dogmatically replied that Hitchen was a "leftist":

"This comrade has not yet come down from his isolated pedestal and understood the methods by which we will win the majority of the toiling masses for the revolutionary destruction of capitalism.

548. ibid., 11/12/31, p.4.

... "We are not forgetting that there may be a tendency to swing from left sectarianism to right opportunism which must be guarded against, but can we guard against it by continuing our policy of neglecting the everyday struggles of the masses, as Comrade Hitchen seems to suggest?

Once again I repeat, our neglect of the everyday struggles of the workers has led to the position of the fraternal organisations becoming 'branches of the C.P.', which position can only be overcome by dropping our sectarian attitude, and proving to the workers that we are capable and willing to lead them in their everyday demands as the struggles develop."⁵⁴⁹

Finally, Kavanagh joined the debate. Though his article was entitled 'Should the U.W.M. be a Relief Organisation?'⁵⁵⁰ it raised other controversial issues within the U.W.M. (notably the independence of the branches) and provided a good analysis of the outlook of the Australian working class vis-a-vis Revolution. Because of this I will quote it at some length. Kavanagh raised the question of the theory that lay behind the adoption of relief work by the U.W.M. Though his conclusion of absolute opposition to charity is presented logically, the problem with the whole debate is the extent to which the relief question was just an excuse for the airing of general differences.

Kavanagh began by referring to Miles and McKenzie's statements that the sectarianism of the U.W.M. in regard to relief drove many unemployed to the charity groups.

549. ibid., 18/12/31, p.2.

550. ibid., 25/12/31, p.4.

"This implies, on the face of it, that the U.W.M. should reverse its policy and become a relief organisation ... What is the theory that lies behind a statement of this character from a revolutionary organisation? The theory that we are in a state of economic collapse, and that therefore the unemployed organisation must organise their own relief.

This theory, which is totally unsound in respect to this country, was put forward at the W.I.R. conference, when we were told that: "The collapse of an economic system and an economic collapse were one and the same thing."⁵⁵¹

There is no shortage of the means of life in Australia. No dislocation of the transport system. Nothing to prevent production from being carried on other than the contradictions of capitalism itself. Under these conditions to undertake the relieving of distress by the supplementing of the dole, is worse than opportunist, it is reactionary."

Certainly, Kavanagh's scepticism about the economic collapse in Australia was justified. This indeed had been the basis of his arguments against the new Comintern directives in 1929, but whereas then he had argued that this meant the Communist Party should not go out on a limb by presenting a revolutionary political challenge, he now claimed that it should.

Kavanagh then questioned the validity of the Miles group's contention that "the U.W.M. has become divorced from large numbers

551. Kavanagh had argued against this at the July W.I.R. Conference (ibid, 17/7/31, p.3.)

who have "been compelled ... to rally to the charity organisations":
"Is it not a fact that within the last nine months entire branches of unemployed organisations, of relief character, have become over (sic) in a body to the U.W.M. That many have broken away and have gone back to new relief organisations arises from more than one cause.

We have to consider the tradition of the workers in this country in order to realise why they have, in many instances, gone to the charity outfits after being in the U.W.M.

Before doing so it is necessary to point out that the mass of the unemployed do not belong to any organisation at all.

The workers of this country have a tradition of arbitration in industrial affairs. They have been accustomed to vesting all power in the hands of union secretaries ... The mass psychology is one of pathetic dependence on some official or leader."

Again Kavanagh's analysis of the Australian working class seems more justified than the Communist faith in the workers' rapid and willing radicalisation. It is perhaps paradoxical that the Communist leaders who believed in the revolutionariness of the Australian workers were urging a more moderate approach to them, whereas Kavanagh held that a revolutionary approach was necessary to jolt them out of their dependence:

"Under these conditions it is necessary that they be trained to fight for improvement in the allowance received while unemployed. Those who collect, and give out, charity do so to keep down the antagonism that arises between the fed and unfed during a period of crisis.

The giving of supplementary relief by a revolutionary organisation has exactly the same effect, irrespective of the propaganda that may be handed out.

So long as the added dole can be achieved without action on their part just so long will they remain dormant.

The U.W.M. grew because it was waging a successful fight against the landlords, so long as that was going on the number of members increased. After the Bankstown and Newtown cases the inrush commenced to fall off. Evictions were no longer being stopped. Then the Amended Rent Act was brought in. The A.L.P. at once took the credit ... and the unemployed commenced to go where they could get the results, as they thought, without any action on their part.

Another factor that has played a part in the cooling off towards the Party and the U.W.M. has been the demonstrations. There has been a steady falling off in attendance ever since the August 1st Demonstration. ... This does show that the psychology of the mass, as yet, is in favor of demonstrations only when they are perfectly legal. In our meetings, District 3, we found that when taking a vote as to who would turn out in the demonstration all hands went up, but not more than 20 per cent turned out ...

It is this inertia that has to be dissipated."

Kavanagh argued that it could not be done by giving handouts, by talking of local matters rather than Marxist theory.

but what about
SW - fight

His next criticism is in fact in agreement with the views of Shayler and McKenzie etc. - that the Party members used U.W.M. meetings as an excuse to slate the Labor, Party and to recruit Party members.

The last criticism is quite brief, but is perhaps at the heart of the conflict:

"One other matter that is worthy of mention is the forgetfulness of members of the State Committee of the U.W.M. in that they forget that the U.W.M. is a voluntary organisation and that the State Committee cannot INSTRUCT the branches as to what they must do."

This is the first hint that the issue of Party domination versus branch independence was troubling the U.W.M.

I think, however, that the main issue of the whole debate was ~~about~~ how the U.W.M. should be organised, and who should lead it.

Most of the evidence for this does not appear at this time: when I first wrote this section I accepted most of the controversy at face value, though realising that the conflict was wider than the relief issue. However, later conflict over unemployed organisation, and in particular a pamphlet produced by Sylvester or one of his supporters in 1933⁵⁵² strongly suggests that in late 1931-early 1932 the leading Communist cadres deliberately restructured the unemployed organisation in order to reassert control. This was done partly in accordance with Comintern directives, partly because of intra-Party intrigues and

552. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, The Need for a Revolutionary Leadership, no date (after May 1933), no publisher. Other pamphlets from this group give the name of George Reynolds and a Rozelle Box No. The Workers' Party was founded as a Trotskyist organisation by expelled or disaffected Communists, notably Sylvester. The printing of the pamphlet is the same as of Sylvester's paper The Tocsin.

faction fighting. More laudable motives must also be taken into account: The Party leaders - at this stage mainly Miles, Sharkey and Moore⁵⁵³ - no doubt genuinely believed that the method of organisation that they favoured would best benefit both the unemployed and the revolutionary movement.

In the next chapter I will deal fully with the abrupt change that occurred in the organisation of the unemployed in early 1932. Briefly, the change was this: U.W.M. branches continued in many areas, but the U.W.M. as such was not given the role of leading the unemployed. The urge was to establish 'United Front Councils of Employed and Unemployed' in geographical districts, uniting charity and other unemployed groups with the U.W.M. on these councils. These councils were linked, on a pyramid structure, with a Metropolitan Council and later a State Council which was dominated by the C.P.A. (However, many District Councils retained a considerable degree of independence, and the C.P.A. did not dominate the local groups that comprised the District Councils).

In August 1931 an international conference of representatives of the R.I.L.U. and Communist Parties at Prague had examined Party work among the unemployed and issued "a number of important decisions, which the Party and the M.M. must take steps to immediately place into operation." The discussions showed "conclusively that the forms of organisation

353. (Moxon was expelled from the position of General Secretary at the 1931 Party Conference, P.Peter, op.cit., p.402. He soon drifted out of the Party.

adopted were entirely too narrow and unsuitable to bring within their scope the vast bulk of the unemployed."⁵⁵⁴

The new way in which the Australian C.P. set about organising the unemployed in early 1932 was in accordance with this edict to broaden the mass base. Strangely, however, the Prague Conference received little mention in the Communist Press at this time, though it was used later to justify the change in unemployed work.

There is a more specific and obvious reason, again linked with Comintern policy, why the Communist leaders should at this time determine to put the leadership of the unemployed movement under more rigid control.

Davidson notes that after April 1931,⁵⁵⁵ Herbert Moore, the Comintern agent sent out to reorganise the Party, enthusiastically set about his task. He introduced a new constitution at the 1931 Party Congress which was aimed at 'bolshewising' the C.P.A. "This meant introducing democratic centralism. Whereas earlier constitutions had emphasised the rights of party members, the new one emphasised their duties. Their main duty was to carry out the instructions of the higher party organs."

Davidson also notes that "under democratic centralism formal control could become real control only if the right men were placed in

554. W.W., 12/7/32, p.4.

555. i.e. after the expulsion of Kavanagh, which Davidson dates at this time.

the right positions in the Party. The Party Secretary was most important, but the secretary of each committee down to nucleus level was also important."⁵⁵⁶

It would be quite in line with this policy for the C.P.A. Central Committee to determine to purge the U.W.M. leadership of Communists who did not follow Comintern orthodoxy and, if it were necessary for the fulfilment of this policy, to formulate a new organisational form for unemployed work even if this should cause a temporary set-back in the U.W.M.

By the end of 1931, I think, the leaders of the Communist Party distrusted some of the leading members of the U.W.M., and were possibly fearful that the success and popularity of these men among the unemployed could increase their position as an opposition group within the Party.

Kavanagh is, of course the obvious example, and in part this conflict must be seen as part of the continuing struggle waged between Kavanagh and the new leaders since 1928/29. Although the C.P.A. determinedly tried to oust Kavanagh in 1931⁵⁵⁷ (having, of course, been attempting this since 1929) Kavanagh was a leading figure in No. 3 district of the U.W.M. through the year. In June there was

556. A. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.52-53. Davidson also points out that it took the Party three years to put the new constitution into practice and "even in 1935 party organisation was still regarded as inefficient".

557. P. Peter, *op.cit.*, pp.398-401 says Kavanagh was expelled in January 1931, was readmitted on probation in September and was finally expelled in 1934. A. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.52 says he was expelled in April, 1931. It seems from his diary that he was still in the Party after April, though only on sufferance.

an attempt to discredit Kavanagh within the U.W.M.: at a U.W.M. demonstration Communists distributed pamphlets attacking Kavanagh and J. Ryan, as well as Gosling and the dole inspectors.⁵⁵⁸

Because the names of the members of the U.W.M. Executive and of the soon-to-be-introduced Metropolitan United Front Council are, with a couple of exceptions, not mentioned, it is impossible to determine who else may have fallen foul of the Communist leaders at this time.

McKenzie was obviously on Miles' side in this debate; but little good it did him, for in eight months he was purged.

It is hard to tell how Sylvester's fortunes ran at this stage. This is a most important question as Sylvester was to be expelled for 'left oppositionism' in 1933, and was associated with Hitchen in his conflict with the party.⁵⁵⁹ Later he was allied with Kavanagh in the Trotskyist movement.⁵⁶⁰

^{publically} Sylvester did not enter the late 1931 debate. ^{This is odd in itself.} He evidently still had some position in the U.W.M. at this time. In August he was still referred to as the National Secretary of the U.W.M.⁵⁶¹ More significantly, Sylvester led the unemployed deputation at the November demonstration.⁵⁶²

558. The Sun, 11/6/31, p.1.

559. W.W., 22/9/33, p.2.

560. Sylvester was announcing his support for Trotsky by 1933/34; but Kavanagh was not ~~so~~ formally accept Trotskyism till 1940. (J. Normington - Rawling, "End of a Revolutionary" Nation, 22 August, 1964, p.7).

561. R.L., 21/8/31, p.1.

562. W.W., 27/11/31, p.1.

It is also unlikely that Sylvester would have supported Kavanagh's line on the distribution of relief, for his own Balmain U.W.M. group was in 1932 and 1933 very busy organising relief for the unemployed.⁵⁶³

There is no positive evidence that Sylvester's opposition began this early. However, when the final break between him and the Party occurred it was clear that hostility had been brewing for some time; although Sylvester probably agreed with the Party leaders on the relief question he did ^{later openly} differ from them as to how the unemployed movement should be run. It is ^(possible?) probable that the moves to oust Sylvester began at this time.

Sylvester was to be barely mentioned in the Communist press after this time, though formerly his name had appeared regularly. There is no mention of how, when, or why he lost the position of National Secretary of the U.W.M.: this title simply no longer appeared after his name. The pamphlet produced by the Sylvester group which attacked the reorganisation of the unemployed movement at this time noted: "Well-known members of the Party were placed in control and changed whenever the Party thought fit." It attacked the Party for dropping the U.W.M. and instituting the United Front Councils.⁵⁶⁴

It does seem, then, that there was opposition to the orthodox Communist line within the U.W.M., and the C.P.A. leaders would have to, in line with Democratic Centralism, 'Bolshevise' it and bring it under control.

563. c.f. N. Wheatley, op.cit. pp.94-95.

564. Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op.cit.

Here we get back to Kavanagh's last complaint, that U.W.M. branches should not be instructed how to act. This suggests that there was an attempt at this time to bring the branches into line.

Most of the evidence already given about the U.W.M. struggles shows that many U.W.M. branches and branch leaders did have a good deal of local autonomy and did often work on their own initiative, especially the best and most active locals - those involved in the south coast dole struggles and the eviction fights, for example.

I have suggested that the leading Party cadres, and the orthodox Communists on the U.W.M. Executive, did not agree with the anti-eviction methods at their inception and were further troubled at their militant and largely victorious conclusion.

It may well have been the eviction struggles, coming as they did just as the drive towards Democratic Centralism was begun, that determined the Party leaders to exercise greater control on the U.W.M. It is significant that many of the militant anti-eviction cases - particularly the Newtown clash - occurred in Kavanagh's U.W.M. District, and, as already noted, the Party condemned the prevalence of Left Sectarianism at Bankstown. Indeed, Richard Eatock was soon to be expelled from the Party.⁵⁶⁵

In order to assert the necessity of a change in the structure and task of unemployed organisation, and to justify a change in its control, the Communist leaders would need to discredit the old methods

565. Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op.cit., p.13.

and old leadership. Were, then, the descriptions of the drift away from the U.W.M. - its stagnancy and decay - exaggerated for this purpose? Kavanagh thought so.

Certainly, as we have seen, there still were a large number of branches in existence (though their membership may in some cases have been depleted) and more activity did occur in the last months of 1931 than is suggested by Miles' criticisms. Whilst the Workers' Weekly has little mention of branches in November-/December 1931, the Communist press notes a number of branches in early 1932, after the formal change to the new form of organisation had been decided upon, but before there could have been much new activity. At least 17 well-established U.W.M. branches are noted in January Red Leaders alone. These could not have suddenly arisen Phoenix-like in so short a time, so presumably they - and the general state of the U.W.M. - were not so moribund in late 1931.

This is not to deny that the counter-attraction of charity had not undermined U.W.M. support, nor that there was not laxity and inertia in the U.W.M. by the end of the year. It does seem however, that the picture was painted blacker than it was in reality - and the main reason for this could have been to discredit old methods and old officials. (Another reason for the over-statement of problems could be connected with the exercise in Bolshevik Self-Criticism that occurred at the end of every year. Self-Criticism seems at times to have functioned almost like the purifying purgative of the Catholic Confessional: sins were exaggerated, and if no sins were apparent, they had to be invented.)⁵⁶⁶

566. c.f. for example, almost any personal exercise in Bolshevik Self-Criticism undertaken by an expelled member who wanted to rejoin.

It seems clear that the move to reorganise the U.W.M. was part of the personal and political struggle within the C.P.A. However, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the struggle for power in the Party was based on theoretical differences, so intertwined have political and personal intrigues become. (Kavanagh wrote: "It was inevitable that personal differences should arise from the rhetorical differences expressed at the (1929) Conference, or, to word it differently, the theoretical differences took on a personal character."⁵⁶⁷)

No?
The C.P.A. leaders no doubt genuinely believed that the Party's unemployed work should be reorganised. There obviously were grave errors in the U.W.M.: it was too sectarian, too isolated from much of the rank and file, too 'left' for many Australian workers both in its theory and its militancy. One can understand Kavanagh's fears that the U.W.M. would lose any revolutionary aim; one can also see the danger of it becoming a super-radical, elite sect of already politically-conscious unemployed.

It is not our place to pontificate on the rights and wrongs of the opponents in the controversy, nor to say how the U.W.M. should have been run. Historical hindsight shows us the errors in the methods of organisation adopted; it also distances us from the problems involved.

Though the organisation of the unemployed movement was changed in early 1932, some of the same problems - including sectarianism - remained.

567. W.W., 4/9/31, p.2.

However, sectarianism and the tendency to radical isolation lessened, and a much wider mass base was established as the movement concentrated increasingly on moderate, short-term goals and as links with relief groups and moderate unemployed organisations were developed.