

CHAPTER 5 - THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT - 1932 TO APRIL 1933.

The obvious - and probably insurmountable - problem with any chronological account is that historical events do not usually divide themselves off into neat parcels of 'periods' corresponding to the calendar; they do not celebrate the New Year by starting off afresh. This creates difficulties for the historian, who has, at times almost arbitrarily, to divide his subject into chapters.

This case - the parcelling off of the period 1932 to April 1933 - is still rather manipulative, but does have considerable justification. At the beginning of 1932, and again in about May 1933, the organisational form and the orientation of the unemployed movement changed.

The movement's prospects at the end of 1931 were not particularly bright. As we have seen, the U.W.M. was passing through a hiatus. By this time the Labor Council had completely lost any initiative in organising the unemployed, and the A.L.P. had taken over the task of organising the opposition to the U.W.M.

There had been a number of good unemployed demonstrations in 1931, but there was still no sustained, consistent level of protest. The major victory was the dramatisation of the eviction problem which helped force anti-eviction legislation - but evictions still took place. The constant protest against the inadequacy of the dole had been instrumental in forcing Lang to increase relief, but this success was offset by the fact that the more stringent regulations had forced many off the dole.

In the federal elections of December '31, Scullin's Labor Government - or the remnants of it - was defeated by the new United Australia Party led by Lyons. This was greeted by the labor movement with fears of further attacks on wages and conditions, and with fears of general repression; the unemployed feared a further worsening of the relief position.

These fears were realistic. Marr, the new Minister for Health, expressed a common feeling of the new Government when he stated: "I am devoting my energies to getting rid of those two great menaces to Australia - Communism and Langism."<sup>1</sup> The Government subsequently added new provisions to the Crimes Act, aimed at crushing the Communist Party and other militant groups; this was, at least temporarily, to hamper

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1. S.M.H., 12/1/32, p. 11.

organisational work among the unemployed.

Fears of further attacks on workers' and unemployed workers' economic standards were also justified. Schedvin notes: "The basis of the Lyons Government's economic policy was strict observance of the principles of the Premiers' Plan."<sup>2</sup> Deflation and the reduction of budget expenditure and of production costs (through cutting wages) were the lynch-pins of the Government's policy. It believed that unemployment could only be remedied after the rest of the economy was set in order; in the meantime, little could be done to provide work and relief could only be minimal.

And - to complete the climate of unpleasantness - unemployment was still rising. In the first quarter of 1931 the trade union unemployment estimate for New South Wales had been 29.2%; by the last quarter it was 31.5%, and was to rise to 33% by mid 1932. By the second quarter of 1933, however, when this chapter ends, it was down again to the 29% level.

However, the position of the unemployed movement was to improve. In early 1932 the nature and aim of the movement changed with the introduction of the United Front Councils. This new form and direction was consolidated in the latter half of the year, so that by the end of the year the movement

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2. C.B. Schedvin, op. cit., p. 311.

had recovered from the inertia of late '31. The aims of the movement were by then more moderate than those of the early U.W.M., and the organisation was more open and had a wider base of support; however, some of the demonstrations were as determined and as militant as any before. In October there occurred one of the most remarkable agitations of the period.

In mid 1933 the unemployed movement was to change its form of organisation and aim again, for with the widespread introduction of relief work in Stevens' Emergency Relief Work scheme in May, the unemployed organisation became centred around the relief jobs rather than the ration depots and concentrated on the fight for award conditions on relief jobs rather than on anomalies of the dole.

THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS: THE IDEA.

I have shown that for reasons practical, theoretical and intra-Party political the Communist Party decided in late '31 to change the organisation of the unemployed movement, and to change it in a way that would broaden its mass appeal and bring it into line with the demands and political consciousness of the unemployed.

In early 1932 a new stimulus was given to the C.P.A.'s decision to change its unemployed work: in January, Keller, the President of the A.L.P., named the U.W.M. as well as other auxiliary groups as offshoots of the Communist Party, and ruled that no A.L.P. member could belong to these groups.<sup>3</sup> It was obviously useful for the C.P.A. to launch a new organisation, not named in the edict, that A.L.P. members could join. The C.P.A. leaders undoubtedly saw this move coming, for in late '31, as we have noted, the A.L.P. Executive was trying to discredit and oust the U.W.M.

So there was obviously every reason for change; but why decide upon United Front Councils? I mention the problem because it is easy to become confused with Communist terminology, and the change to United Front Councils should not be confused with the United Front policy later instituted by the Comintern in 1933 and reformulated in 1935.

The confusion is not helped by the fact that Australian Communists themselves seem often to have been unclear about what the words 'united front' implied. However, while the United Front policy of 1935 was a genuine attempt to form an alliance with non-Communist labor organisations, the Australian Communists who instituted the 'United Front Councils' in 1932

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3. R. Cooksey, op. cit., p. 59; the A.L.P. also sent circulars to affiliated unions declaring the ban, adding that members of these organisations were not eligible to act as delegates to any A.C.T.U. Conference of Federated Ships' Painters & Dockers' Union, N.S.W. Branch, Minutes, 1/2/32, p. 1.

were using the united front as a tactic to build mass support.<sup>4</sup> This was not a change in policy, nor was it a rejection of the 'Third Period' analysis or the 'New Line' strategy adopted by the Comintern in 1928 and instituted by the C.P.A. in 1929. This line, it will be remembered, instructed Communists to establish a united front of workers from below (organising through workshops and fraternals) in order to win the masses away from the reformist trade union leaders and the social fascist politicians.

The Communist press continued to attack Lang and the 'social fascist Labor Party' in 1932;<sup>5</sup> however, there were less of these attacks, though those that did appear were just as forthright.<sup>6</sup>

We have seen that in the criticism of the U.W.M. in late '31 there was a realisation that constant condemnation of everything that was not Communist only turned the workers away. In 1932 it was further stressed that sectarianism

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4. c.f. A. Davidson, *op. cit.*, Chapter II for a discussion of the first 'United Front' policy instituted by the Comintern in 1921. This united front was also intended as a tactic - Communist Parties should work with the labor parties in order to steal away their support and destroy them.
  5. e.g. *W.W.*, 19/2/32, p. 1.; 6/5/32, p. 1.
  6. e.g. The Party still stated that there was no difference between fascism and social fascism. c.f. *ibid.*, 15/4/32, p. 3.

should be crushed and that Party workers must "understand that the mass organisations are not the Party and should embrace workers who are opposed, through their illusions, to us, but are willing to fight for the everyday demands."<sup>7</sup>

So the Party began to moderate its theoretical line as well as moderating its demands to specific grievances rather than all-embracing revolutionary issues.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that the Party reneged on revolution, nor that it became reconciled to the 'social fascists'. It simply maintained that, at that time, the task of mass work was more important than political manoeuvring against Garden or Lang.

For example, in April the Workers' Weekly noted, in regard to the "question of the Communist Party's approach to the workers":

"The tendency of Party members to concentrate all their attention to the Lang-Lyons sham fight, is a bad method. For us the important point to drive home to the workers, whilst exposing the manoeuvres of the various politicians, is our policy, our lead to the workers in this situation!

We have, although a number of Party speakers are apt to forget, a constructive policy (sic) to propagate before the workers as well as a criticism aimed at destroying the prestige of the workers' misleaders! .....

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7. Ibid., 15/4/32, p. 3.

8. c.f. P. Peter, op. cit., p. 402-403. "A study of the Party's propaganda, its industrial and political policy, and its policy towards the unemployed reveals a gradual swing from the left to the right after 1931 - or, it might be more accurately said, a swing from extreme and wordy militancy to something more nearly approaching moderation."

Shouting social fascist at Lang will not solve the problem of winning the independent leadership of the masses.

We can only emerge from the struggle with increased strength by showing that we have the only programme that can bring success."<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear exactly when or how the idea of United Front councils originated. There had always been references to the need to 'build a united front of employed and unemployed'; by the end of 1931 these demands were more frequent and the initial letters were usually capitalised, showing that the 'united front' was now meant as an organisation.

The first reference I have found to a United Front Committee is from the end of November '31. The Workers' Weekly congratulated the 'United Front Committee' for its organisation of the November 24 demonstration to Parliament.<sup>10</sup> As the leaders of the demonstration were McKenzie and Sylvester, it would seem that the name had been conferred upon the U.W.M. Executive. After this there is constant reference to the United Front Council idea; the articles about the U.W.M. in December ended with the call to link up the unemployed organisations in the various districts into United Front Councils.

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9. W.W., 22/4/32, p. 2.

10. Ibid., 27/11/31, p. 1.



It is quite possible that the idea of uniting the different unemployed organisations into a broad alliance was partly modelled on the united Free Speech committees, which, as we have seen, often had on them representatives of the A.L.P. leagues and socialisation Units who were willing to work with the C.P.A. and U.W.M. etcetera over this specific issue.<sup>11</sup>

However the idea developed, it was at the end of '31 and throughout 1932 given wide publicity in the Communist press. The Red Leader in December '31 set out the rationale for the building of the United Front of Unemployed (later to be sometimes called the United Front of Employed and Unemployed):

"It is becoming more apparent day by day that nothing can be achieved by the various unemployed organisations in the way of obtaining more work or food or clothing until absolute unity between all bodies is accomplished. ....

What is the cause of this sectarianism and consequent isolation among the unemployed bodies? When carefully investigated it will be found to be based upon a general misunderstanding between all parties concerned. In the first place the primary objective of all organisations has been to obtain work on better conditions for their members. While the objective has been similar in all cases, nevertheless the various methods put forward to obtain that objective have been the cause of much disagreement and hostility.

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11. e.g. In September 1931 a Free Speech Conference of a number of working class bodies decided to hold meetings on a United Front platform with speakers from A.L.P.-based and C.P.A.-linked groups. R.L., 11/9/31, p. 8.

Party politics have been allowed to creep in and wide gaps have been created in the ranks of the unemployed.

These organisations that have confined their activities to the alleviation of distress only have been referred to disparagingly by the more militant section as 'bumming outfits' etc., quite regardless of the fact that they are doing good work in their particular sphere. On the other hand these organisations have designated all militants as 'Reds' and Communists, and thus have laid the basis for a vicious party propaganda fight . . . . Today, the existing organisations are so weak that they are powerless to prevent a réduction in the dole, much less better conditions!

In the meantime, conditions have grown infinitely worse! . . . .

BARRIERS MUST BE BROKEN DOWN. . . . The necessity for unity is so great, the difference of opinions is so slight, that it seems perfectly amazing that we should be divided in the face of the tragedy of our economic insecurity. . . . We call upon all organisations to sink their petty differences . . . and form one vast United Front of the unemployed organisations. . . . .

As a preliminary to this desired unity, we advocate the immediate setting up of UNITED COUNCILS OF UNEMPLOYED in all districts. The object of these Councils must be the uniting of all represented organisations on a programme of immediate demands and a co-ordination in the methods adopted to obtain these demands.

We do not suggest that any organisation should sink its identity or abandon any of its existing functions, but merely co-operate, per medium of the Council, in mutual activities."<sup>12</sup>

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12. R.L., 11/12/31, p. 8.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS IN THE  
FIRST HALF OF 1932.

It is obvious that a large part of the failure of the unemployed to win any improvement in their situation was the disunity in their ranks. The Red Leader's moderate proposals for an alliance were therefore eminently sensible; they were also, by stressing that organisations should keep their old identity, apparently very just and democratic. Statements of the aims of the United Front Councils were at pains to point out that the organisation was not just another Communist front, and not just a re-grouping of the U.W.M. under another name, but a democratic alliance of the many organisations of the rank and file of the unemployed.

In studying the establishment of the United Front of Unemployed, both in district councils and the linking up of these into a State body, I shall try to show to what extent it was a representative, genuine rank and file alliance, and to what extent it was manoeuvred by the Communist Party. Briefly, both democracy and Communist control seem to have worked in much the same way as they did in the U.W.M., except that the ruling clique of the C.P.A. exercised a stronger control over the topmost echelon of the new organisation.

At the January 1932 conference of the M.M.M. the National Secretary of the M.M.M. made it clear that militants must lead the unemployed, though they should not repeat the sectarian domination of the past:

"Under the direction of our M.M. groups in the unemployed organisations, an intensification of the campaign for the establishment of unity committees of the unemployed must be undertaken as soon as possible. The fight for the leadership will be won by those who fight most consistently for the daily needs of the unemployed, and the M.M. can and must win the leadership on this basis."<sup>13</sup>

As the U.W.M. was officially the unemployed section of the M.M.M., it is clear that the U.W.M. branches in a United Front Council were to take the lead in instituting demands, organising protests and linking up local work with the broad demands.

U.W.M. branches retained their old identity and their regular aims and demands, but from early 1932 their primary task was to call local unity conferences which would elect a United Front Council for their particular district, to publicise the platform of the United Front of Employed and Unemployed, and to give leadership and organisational help where this was necessary.

(It should be noted that from about this time, and especially after about mid 1932, the use of the term 'U.W.M.'

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13. R.L., 22/1/32, p. 5.

becomes a bit confusing. The U.W.M. was more and more subsumed by the United Front Councils, and while U.W.M. locals continued as before the U.W.M. was not a major, co-ordinated body. There was technically a U.W.M. State Executive until about August, but its members worked to foster the United Front of Unemployed rather than the U.W.M. per se. By the end of the year there are no more references to this executive, and it had clearly gone into abeyance, its tasks taken over by the Metropolitan United Front Council. The press, including the Communist press, sometimes referred to the U.W.M. when it was the United Front that was really meant.)

In many districts the U.W.M. was prominent on the Councils, but this does not mean that the councils were unrepresentative or undemocratic: U.W.M. officials would be elected to organisational positions on the Councils because they had proved their diligence and organisational skill. And, as I have shown, the U.W.M. branches themselves were in many cases not dominated by the C.P.A.

The state-wide conferences also show a fair representation of non-U.W.M. delegates. It does seem, however, that the Communist Party dominated the executive, especially in the figure of Stan Moran who was part of the Miles-Sharkey group and who achieved more and more the role of spokesman for the United Front Councils in 1932 and '33. The names of other Executive members are rarely given.

I think we must differentiate between 'democratic' and 'representative'. At the topmost level and in the beginning the United Front organisation was apparently not democratic, and was a vehicle for the Communist Party's demands for the unemployed. The organisation itself was very much the brain-child of the C.P.A., and the initial moves to establish the councils did not spring from the desires of the rank-and-file for united groups, but were set in process by militants in the C.P.A. and U.W.M. groups. However, as successes of the United Front Councils became apparent, local unemployed groups previously unaffiliated with the U.W.M., including relief groups, saw the advantages of joining a large alliance; after about the middle of the year the decision to form a District Council was usually made by a conference of delegates from a number of different unemployed groups of a particular area, and was not arbitrarily made by a few militants. Moreover, as the organisation grew it became more open and more democratic; rank and file delegates were increasingly invited to top-level planning conferences.

Despite the fact that the small number of organisers at the top of the movement were Communists, I think that both the demands and the methods of protest adopted were representative of the aspirations of the unemployed. They had to be, for if the demands were too militant the unemployed would simply not respond to them.

but what  
about  
sell-outs?

As with the U.W.M., the United Front Councils in many areas worked very much on local initiative, and though the hierarchy would designate demands or particular days of protest, achievements depended upon the support of the unemployed, not on the activities of the leaders.

As already noted, in 1933 the Sylvester group produced a scathing criticism of the way the C.P.A. had allegedly instituted the United Front Councils; although it may be unfair to give the criticism first, I will repeat it here to give a sort of reference standpoint. It must be remembered that Sylvester and Co. had every reason to denounce the C.P.A., both because they had been slanderously expelled and because in their own work among the unemployed they had found the C.P.A.'s leadership defective.

The pamphlet stated:

"When the sectarianism of the Party had so impregnated the U.W.M. that most of the social democratic members had been driven away in disgust, and the A.L.P. leadership had taken the opportunity of declaring it a 'banned' organisation, the Party decided to abolish it and set about building a loose form or organisation on the line of the united front as then conceived by the C.C.<sup>14</sup> The way in which this was carried out is another instance of the arrant stupidity with which they [the C.P.A. leaders] approach all problems concerning the rank and file of the fraternal. Despite the fact that the U.W.M. was widely advertised as a 'non-party' organisation under rank and file control, the decision to abolish it

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14. (The Central Committee of the C.P.A.)

came from ABOVE - FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY! No attempt was made to call a national conference of the U.W.M. to decide the matter - no attempt was even made to acquaint the remaining branches of this decision. Instead, the executive committee of the U.W.M. was deliberately sabotaged by the C.C. and put out of existence, while the leadership of the unemployed was mechanically transferred to the 'United Front of Employed and Unemployed' set up under the guidance of S. Moran at 107 George Street West. ...."

Instead of building on the existing organisation the united front was set up "as a parallel organisation to the U.W.M. ...."

"Regardless of the fact that the theory at the time was for a United Front from Below, national committee, state and district councils were set up from ABOVE, without any concrete mass work being done among the workers to gain support for the new organisational form. The consequence was that various Councils, etc., were set up representing only a very small section of the unemployed, and the organisation was more sectarian than ever.

Later, it was suddenly discovered that the 'united front' was a 'tactic', and much rationalising was indulged in regarding the incorrect application of the united front from below; but instead of abolishing the so-called State committee of the U.F. of E. & U. and getting down to the concrete work of forming unemployed committees around the ration dumps, etc., (building from below) they once more mechanically changed the name of the organisation to the State Unemployed Council, and carried on as before - building from above."<sup>15</sup>

Sylvester is right in ascribing the decision to form the United Front to the C.P.A. leaders, and also in describing

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15. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., pp. 23-24.



how the organisation was formed from above. The point I wish to make about Sylvester's attack is that I think it fairly true, as far as it is a description of how the organisation was initially instituted: I agree that the U.W.M. Executive was "deliberately sabotaged by the C.C. and put out of existence" (though it was to take some months for this to be fully achieved) because opponents of the C.P.A. officials were powerful in the U.W.M.

However, I believe that the District United Front Councils themselves were not puppet groups, and, as already stated, I do think that the movement improved in the directions of democracy and representativeness. I think that by the time the State Unemployed Council was founded, and by the time that this pamphlet was written, there was good mass work being done and the United Front of Unemployed and Employed did represent the grievances and aspirations of a large number of unemployed workers.

Despite Sylvester's claim that there was no attempt to call a national conference of the U.W.M. to discuss the desirability of a change in unemployed organisation there was officially a meeting of the "full State Executive of the U.W.M.", with visiting delegates from Victoria, Queensland and New Zealand on January 3rd. This meeting had

"before it the proposal for a united front of the employed and unemployed, the object being to kill the sectarian attitude so prevalent in the past, and to get down to the immediate demands of the

unemployed by attempting some measure of relief for the most destitute cases and the provision of Kitchens to provide a hot meal for children of the unemployed at least once a day. ...."

The United Front proposals were accepted.

This may refute Sylvester's claim. However, the State Executive was probably already largely cleansed of dissidents. The main point of his criticism remains valid: the decision was certainly not made by a public conference of U.W.M. branch delegates.

This meeting affirmed that

"this united front is to be achieved on a strictly non-Party basis, in which no organisation will sink its identity"

and that

"all decisions respecting the immediate demands of the unemployed must come from the rank and file. There must be no overlording by the various committees."

It also made it clear that

"the chief tasks at the present time of all district committees /of the U.W.M./ are to organise the United Front and establish mass action in respect to the demands of the unemployed."

It added that

"district organisers are to be appointed who will be responsible for coordinating the work of the various branches and committees of the U.W.M. and reporting to the centre regularly."<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether these organisers were

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16. R.L., 15/1/32, p. 8.

to be appointed by the leaders of the movement or by the unemployed of the respective districts. They probably were appointed by the leaders at this time; later, however, the district organisers were elected by United Front conferences.

If one of the defects of the organisation of the U.W.M. in the latter half of 1931 was that little indication was given about how to organise, there was a determined attempt to overcome this at the beginning of 1932. One call to build the United Front ended:

"Every branch and district committee, by means of propaganda, literature, street meetings, not in one isolated spot, but in every 'block' within the suburb or locality, and door canvassing must rally the masses. . . . . Form block committees, map out your areas and get to work. Simultaneous demonstrations must be held in the North, South and West."<sup>17</sup>

Though reports were probably exaggerated in order to revive the morale of the unemployed movement, it seems that a number of U.W.M. branches quickly responded to the barrage of United Front propaganda now appearing. For example, one January issue of the Red Leader published a 'branch directory' of meeting times and places of fifteen branches - City, Annandale, Bankstown, Balmain, Cessnock, Granville, Liverpool, Lakemba, Marrickville, Ryde, Rockdale, Redfern, Sutherland, St. Peters, Wollongong. Almost all had their own premises. The very fact that meetings were being advertised shows a vast improvement in organisation.

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17. Ibid., 22/1/32, p. 8.

The same issue claimed there were seventy-one more branches that still had not sent in reports. As the implication is that these are New South Wales branches, we must infer that the late 1931 drift was definitely overstated, this report is exaggerated, or both; the last inference is probably closest to the truth.

*Paddo*  
It also reported that Granville U.W.M. and U.W.U. had held a mass meeting at which the rank and file elected a unified committee. A mass meeting at Paddington had established a United Front Committee. (It also "threw out the fakers in its ranks who refused to hand over the property of the new committee." So much for non-Sectarianism?). Newtown had organised a United Front Conference; the Redfern branch had revived; Marrickville, Camperdown and St. Peters were busy organising a United Front. The City branch was holding successful rallies and organising relief kitchens. *City*  
There was even a good United Front at Bathurst; Cobar, Bourke and Cowra were busy.<sup>18</sup>

Though this might all sound too frenetic to be true, the number and affiliations of delegates at the first United Front conference in mid February show that organisers had been extremely busy.

The calls to build the United Front were usually coupled

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18. Ibid., 22/1/31, p. 8.

with calls to demonstrate on International Unemployed Day and to attend the 'conference of employed and unemployed' (or the 'Unemployed United Front Conference' or the 'Unity Conference') on February 14th. This was declared to be "open to all working class bodies", two delegates from each being permitted. It was convened by the State Executive of the U.W.M.<sup>19</sup>

Despite an A.L.P. ban on the conference and the short time spent advertising it, seventy-one delegates attended from the following organisations:

"State Executive Amalgamated Society Carpenters & Joiners; Granville and Ryde Branches of same Union; Seamens Union; Tramway Employees Union; Amalgamated Engineers Union (Granville Branch) and Metal Trades Group M.M.

Unemployed Workers Movement: Paddington, Annandale, Redfern, Ryde, Glebe, Lakemba, Camperdown, Bondi, Newtown, Sutherland, St. Peters, City, Balmain, Parramatta, Auburn, Westmead, Liverpool, and a delegate sent by unemployed from the Northern Coal-fields to appeal for unity.

SUBURBAN UNEMPLOYED ORGANISATIONS OTHER THAN U.W.M.: Cabramatta United Front Unemployed (9 organisations); Cook Park Unemployed Camp, Rockdale Unemployed Association, Concord Unemployed Workers Union, Lidcombe Unemployed Workers Union, Randwick Unemployed League, St. George District Unemployed Relief Association, Bexley & Rockdale Branches, Mascot Unemployed Association, and Punchbowl Unemployed & Distress Association.

AUBURN, A.L.P. Socialisation Unit, Glebe A.L.P. (Mrs. Davis) as well as other delegates members of

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19. Ibid., 2/5/32, p. 1; W.W., 5/2/32, p. 4; 12/2/32, p. 4.

A.L.P. Branches in various areas, Sydney Branch  
I.W.W. Workers International Relief, C.P. of A.,  
I.C.W.P.A., and F.O.S.U."<sup>20</sup>

A sign of the good intentions of the organisers is that though some delegates had not sent in their credentials, they were allowed to take part, in the interests of unity. The keynote of the whole conference was unity and moderation.

Clifford, an executive member of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was elected Chairman. Though this was probably intended to show that the U.W.M. was not dominating the Conference, the U.W.M. Executive apparently took a leading role. After the Conference was opened McKenzie (described in the conference report as 'organising secretary' of the conference, and in Red Leader still as State Secretary of the U.W.M.) read a long report on the position of the unemployed, and a series of motions submitted to the Conference. These motions were probably decided upon beforehand by the U.W.M. Executive, as they are in line with the U.W.M.'s platform of that time.

McKenzie's report, which covers five-and-a-half close-

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20. This and the rest of the discussion of the conference taken from a 7 page pamphlet: Report of Proceedings at Conference of Employed and Unemployed Held F.O.S.U. Hall, 114 Liverpool Street, Sydney, Sunday, 14th February, 1932, n.d., no publisher. Also reports in R.L., 19/2/32, p. 8; W.W., 19/2/32, p. 1. The list of organisations given in R.L. is slightly different.

typed foolscap pages, was for the most part an exemplary discussion of the relief system, relying on statistics from Government departments rather than emotional attacks.

It began with the customary analysis of the insoluble world capitalist crisis (pointing out that the Soviet Union was improving workers' standards) and made a side-swipe at the sabotage undertaken by the A.L.P. Social Fascists. However it claimed "it is better that we should expose them by their actions past and present rather than indulge in a tirade of abuse."

It quickly got down to the real business at hand:

"Primarily this conference will have to deal with the immediate demands of the workers unemployed, and it is proposed that the conference should formulate these demands in the light of the present situation and in accord with the desires and wishes of the unemployed mass which conference represents. Conference should also appoint the Deputation to wait upon the State and Federal Governments in relation to the demands upon each, and also consider what steps should be taken to carry on an intensive campaign throughout the State for the building up of a mass organisation on a United Front basis of the employed and unemployed."

The report pointed out anomalies in the dole scales, illustrating these with a comparison of the scales for two single people with those of a married couple.

It then compared the money collected through the wage tax for the Unemployment Relief Fund from July 1930 to June 1931 with the amount spent, pointing out that the employers had contributed £472,142 less than they should have and that

the Government had lent more than £726,000 to Government departments out of the relief funds.

The report dealt with other grievances such as the P.I.R., the need for unemployment insurance, the coupon system, evictions, the need for shelter and the unfairness of relief work schemes. It then presented the following resolutions for discussion and to be voted on:

- "1. That the present system of food relief coupons be abolished, and a cheque, similar to the child endowment cheque, be issued negotiable at any store. The monetary value of the cheque to be on the following basis:-
  - (A) Single man or woman .....12/6d. per week
  - (B) Married couple .....25/- per week
  - (C) Married couple with family...an additional sum of 1/- per day per child up to the age of 14 years. On reaching the age of 14 years the child (or children) to come under (A) scale.
- That where one or more members of a family are working their wages are not to be taken into account, and must not prevent any other member of the family from receiving the full scale of rations, who is unemployed.
2. That the Government make available buildings to be fitted up as hostels suitable for single men and women who will live rent free therein. These hostels to be under the control of the unemployed committees on a voluntary basis, in order to eliminate overhead charges.
3. That the Government supply sufficient boots and clothing for the unemployed for the coming winter, and in order to raise the necessary money for the purpose we suggest that they run a State Lottery or a series of Lotteries.
4. That conference expresses its determined opposition to all forms of economic conscription of labour such as working for the dole, or relief work at less



than the basic wage rate of pay, and submits the following demands:-

- (a) That all relief work be paid for at not less than the existing basic wage of £4/2/6 with full wage compensation for skilled work.
  - (b) No relief worker to be deprived of his rations for any period during which he receives less than the basic wage.
  - (c) That all work shall be allocated on a pro-rata basis to the number of unemployed in each municipality, and that this work be distributed on a rotary system by a joint committee of the municipal officials and the unemployed committees.
  - (d) That all fares to or from relief work be paid by the Government.
  - (e) That all relief workers be paid full weekly wage if worked a short week through no fault of their own.
5. No evictions of the unemployed from their homes for non-payment of rent.
  6. No selling or seizure of the goods or chattels of the unemployed for rent.
  7. That provision be made by the government for supplying ample and nourishing food, clothing and technical equipment to children of the unemployed or partly employed attending school in order that they be properly fitted to absorb their studies.
  8. That the government make provision for light and fuel for the unemployed.
  9. That free medical attention, nursing and medicine with nourishing foods be provided by the government for women in pregnancy, and for the mother and child for a period of two months thereafter.
  10. That the struggle be based upon the following chief demands for the employed and unemployed:-
    - (a) Introduction of obligatory unemployment insurance at the cost of the employers and of the capitalist State. Administration of this insurance by organs elected by the workers.
    - (b) The unemployed to receive benefit equal to full wages during the whole period of unemployment.
    - (c) Payment of full wages for workers on short time.

- (d) Seven hour day and five day week, and 6 hour day for young workers, miners, and for all workers engaged in work injurious to their health, with full wage compensation.
- (e) Fight against compulsory work and task work for the unemployed, State Labor Exchange run by organs elected by the workers.

- 11. Resolution against Fascism.
- 12. Resolution against Imperialist war.
- 13. Resolution demanding release of class-war prisoners.
- 14. Resolution on building up the United Front of Employed & Unemployed."

The Conference discussion of these resolutions apparently stopped at Resolution 9.<sup>21</sup> Time was probably running short - the conference adjourned at 5.45. It may be however that the chairman felt that the 10th resolution was too extreme and would not be accepted, for its provisions for full wage benefit for the unemployed apparently contradicted the first demand for a small increase.

After discussion, motions 3, 4, 5 and 6 were carried unanimously and the others were also adopted as immediate demands. The discussion on Motion 1 shows that the militants were determined to agree to a lowest common denominator of demands:

"Though it was considered that the amount stated was insufficient, it was deemed advisable to go for that within reach rather than make the demands appear utopian, or impossible of achievement, which would result in our failing to rally a vast number of employed and unemployed at this period."

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21. No report of further discussion in R.L., Conference Report, or W.W.

The Conference pledged itself to "carry on the agitational and organisational work to make [International Unemployed Day] the greatest fighting demonstration in our history." It agreed that mass action was the primary necessity "for all governments were more concerned with the weight of numbers behind a deputation rather than the merits of the matter." It resolved "to appoint a committee consisting of the seven members of the State Working Bureau of the U.W.M. along with one delegate from each of the other fifteen unemployed organisations at conference" to organise the demonstration and to build up the United Front throughout the State.

This again shows that the U.W.M. - officially at least - was not dominating the alliance. Of course, the seven U.W.M. executive members would probably be better organised, and would vote as a block, but technically they could be overridden. And as the U.W.M. had replied to the Labor Council's criticisms of Communist domination of earlier U.W.M. Conferences: if the A.L.P. and Labor Council had accepted the invitations to attend, and had proved their own ability to lead, they could easily have swamped the conference.

Finally, the Conference resolved on the following method of organisation for the building of the united front:

1. That in all districts, United Front Committees be set up comprising delegates elected by the rank and file of all the employed and unemployed.

2. The duties of this United Front Committee to be to unify the activities of the various organisations comprising it, arrange district demonstrations around the immediate demands of the unemployed in that area; to supervise the functioning of all relief committees in order to prevent over-lapping; and arrange the geographical boundaries of each relief organisation or committee.

3. That a central United Front committee be established comprising an equal number of delegates from all districts U.F. Committees. This committee to meet at least once per month for the purpose of reviewing the work of districts and co-ordinating same on the basis of conference decisions.

It must be perfectly understood that no organisation must be called upon to sink its identity in that of any other organisation unless such be the desire of the majority of the members of that organisation expressed at a special meeting called for that purpose.

4. That at a date to be decided a United Front Conference be called for the purpose of reviewing the situation and correcting, if necessary, the decisions of this conference."

The organisation decided upon was, then, to be pyramidal in structure, with the rank and file of any organisation appointing delegates to a district committee which appointed delegates to the central committee. Despite all the talk of rank and file decision making, the machinery would seem structured to centre ultimate decision-making power at the top. There is also no mention in this description of what was to become of the twenty-two-member organising committee appointed by the February Conference: was it to dissolve when the districts were organised enough to appoint representatives, or was it to remain part of the central

committee? It is hard to imagine the U.W.M. State Working Bureau (a name commonly given now to the small group of leaders at the top of the U.W.M.) giving up all power to an elected central committee.

In fact, no central committee was established, and I have found no record of regular monthly representative planning conferences at this time. Nor have I found any account of further activity undertaken by the organising committee appointed by this conference, though this does not necessarily mean that none occurred. It seems clear that the organisation of councils and delegates really only functioned up to the district council level at this stage. It is also clear that McKenzie continued as the spokesman of the movement until he was ousted in August, by which time Moran's leadership was firmly established. It appears from this that whatever central leadership was given in the next few months - and such leadership was neither good nor extensive - was undertaken by the leading cadres of the U.W.M.

In June a Metropolitan United Front Council was to be established; this was to take on some of the functions of the central committee. The regular, representative planning conferences were not set in motion until the end of the year, and there was no State Council until the February of the next year.

There clearly had been a resurgence of the unemployed

movement right at the beginning of the year. However, it seems that after this conference there was a lull, or even perhaps a setback, in the moves to organise the United Front Councils, for there is little reference to the building of the Councils in the Communist press of the next three months. It would seem that the process of building the Councils was fairly gradual, and organisers had continually to consolidate support. Councils would sometimes founder after the first couple of conferences. These defects were probably caused by confusion over the aims and role of the Councils. By June the new form of organisation was still barely under way. However, by the end of the year there were a number of solid Councils functioning.

In the first half of the year the U.W.M. branches continued to lead the action in local protests. Though the United Front Councils are barely mentioned, however, it is possible that the U.W.M. was given credit for protests actually mounted by joint action. In the second half of the year the District Councils initiated and organised most of the action.

It was really only on the northern coalfields that the United Front Councils got under way in the first half of the year. Unity was established there not only between unemployed groups, but with employed workers as well.

Apart from the tradition of militancy of the area it is no wonder that coalfields unemployed led the action. The

distress was still appalling. In mid 1932, of the 4,197 citizens of West Wallsend, only 90 were employed - and that included teachers, police and other public servants.<sup>22</sup>

Representatives of the Australian Women's Guild of Empire who toured the Northern fields in April reported that "the Communists, who regard the unemployed as revolutionary material, are fast gaining an ascendancy over the minds of the people, whose vitality and energy are being sapped by idleness and hopelessness."<sup>23</sup>

In January there was a meeting at West Maitland of unemployed organisations from the coalfields and Maitland districts. They decided to unite and join the fight for the double dole, open orders and the provision of fruit, vegetables and clothes; also to ask shopkeepers to refuse to contract for the dole and to refuse to apply for registration under the new regulations. The conference appealed for the support of employed workers, especially to refuse to deal with shopkeepers who contracted for the dole.<sup>24</sup>

The Newcastle Trades Hall Council had already decided to demand the double dole and open orders.<sup>25</sup> By March at

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22. S.M.H., 22/7/32, p. 9.

23. Ibid., 15/4/32, p. 13.

24. Ibid., 16/1/32, p. 11.

25. Ibid., 15/1/32, p. 9.

least some mining union officials were enrolling their unemployed members in the U.W.M.<sup>26</sup>

In April there was a United Front Conference at Newcastle, convened by the U.W.M. District Committee and attended by delegates from trade unions, relief committees, municipal councils, miners' lodges, A.L.P. Leagues, the M.M.M. and U.W.M., and even the Returned Soldiers and the Parents' and Citizens' Associations. A provisional committee with representatives from these groups was elected to prepare for another conference to be held in a month. The conference demanded the double dole, the abolition of the P.I.R. and money for relief work and "laid the basis for mass protest against the P.I.R., evictions" etc.<sup>27</sup>

The decision of this conference to call yet another conference to discuss the establishment of the alliance is typical of United Front Council work, and would seem to have been at times a drawback of the movement. An immense amount of time appears to have been devoted to the election of delegates and calling of conferences - time that might better have been spent canvassing support from unaffiliated unemployed. Though the January Conference of the U.W.M. Executive, in laying down policy, had stated "there must be no overlording by the various committees", committees and bureaucracy seem

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26. Ibid., 31/3/32, p. 9.

27. R.L., 15/4/31, p. 8.



to have in many cases burgeoned at such a rate that they would necessarily become divorced from the rank and file.

The Mayfield-Waratah U.W.M.'s proud report of its half-yearly election of officers is a somewhat amusing case in point. The branch, of 243 members elected: one President; two Vice Presidents; one Secretary; one Treasurer; two Auditors; one Literary Secretary; two delegates to the District Committee; one delegate to the 'Central Sports Body'; three 'Sports Selectors'; eight members of the Executive Committee; seven members of the Social Committee; three members of the Press Committee; an Anti-Eviction Committee.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the encouraging response to the February Conference, it seems that few of the delegates carried out the preparations for I.U.D. (February 26th) laid down by the conference.

The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) later claimed that "weak tactics were employed" on this day.

"Two thousand responded to the call for a demonstration, and speeches were made to them in the Sydney Domain whilst a deputation waited on the Government. The Government refused to see the deputation, and the workers, when this was reported to them, desired to demonstrate before Parliament House. No lead was given them, however, by the leading Party members present, they merely advised the workers to go back to their respective districts and organise."<sup>29</sup>

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28. Ibid., 29/1/32, p. 8.

29. Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., p. 28.

Whether or not the C.P.A. leaders were responsible, the demonstration was certainly passive.

The Workers' Weekly sought to make a virtue of this passivity. (The Red Leader does not report the demonstration at all, perhaps not wishing to publicise a failure). The Workers' Weekly reported that "upwards of a thousand" marched to the Domain, where two thousand more were gathered and that there were a number of local demonstrations (which it does not name). It claimed it was quiet because "past experiences of batoning demonstrations have quieted the Lang Government."<sup>30</sup>

It does seem true that Lang was concerned not to provoke an incident: for the first time in the history of unemployed demonstrations the police issued a permit to march before the day of the event - eighteen days before, in fact.<sup>31</sup>

The whole day was somewhat of a disaster: when Baddeley refused to see more than three members of the deputation it gave up.

The Workers' Weekly rightly concluded:

"The Day showed the immense amount of work the U.W.M. has before it to activate and enthuse the vast mass of the unemployed around the immediate programme."

The weakness of the demonstration was symptomatic of the lull that occurred after the initial flurry of organising

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30. W.W., 11/3/32, p. 3.

31. Report of Proceedings at Conference of Employed and Unemployed Held F.O.S.U. Hall. Sun, 14 Feb., 1932, p. 3.

activity in the first few weeks of the year. However, despite this hiatus, local groups of unemployed workers, either led by the U.W.M. or acting independently, continued to fight against specific grievances. I will only cite a few of these demonstrations, to suggest the issues raised rather than the extent of protest.

UNEMPLOYED PROTESTS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1932.

While the middle of the year provides a fairly definable point of change as far as the organisation of the unemployed movement is concerned, there is not so definite a change in the concerns and activities of the unemployed. However, it is convenient to discuss the activity of the unemployed organisation in two parts, as the election of the Stevens government brought a change in unemployed relief policy which somewhat changed the orientation of protest activity.

The major point of the various platforms of demands put up by the U.W.M., the United Front Councils and unaffiliated organisations was still the inadequacy of the dole. Demands ranged from the full basic wage to the small

increase demanded by the February United Front Conference. As we have seen, International Unemployed Day was ineffective and no other mass dole protests were called in the first half of the year - surely a defect in leadership.

The protests that did occur were initiated by the unemployed at the branch level, and were dependent upon local organisation and support.

Lithgow U.W.M. was particularly active - not surprisingly, considering the number unemployed in the area. In one week in March 1,140 dole orders were issued.<sup>32</sup>

Officers at the Lithgow ration centre announced that, owing to new regulations, rations for single men would be issued on a different day; this meant that a number of men would be without rations for four days. The U.W.M. called a large protest meeting immediately; half way through the meeting their demand for a half-week's ration for the men was granted.<sup>33</sup> Though such achievements may seem trivial, they were of the utmost importance to men who faced a few days with no relief.

Another protest in Lithgow in late March/early April shows how a particular issue could spark off a protest that

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32. S.M.H., 21/3/32, p. 16.

33. Ibid., 21/1/32, p. 10; R.L., 5/2/32, p. 1.

quickly adopted larger aims.

The protest began again over the problems of single men, and especially track travellers, who were particularly unfairly treated by the relief system, being forced from town to town and ever at the mercy of the police.

Five bagmen had been charged - and acquitted - of having stolen mutton in their possession. They were refused dole orders, but after representations to the Chief Secretary they were given relief on condition that they left town. They did not leave, and when they next applied for relief they were refused (on March 31st). There was immediately a peaceful demonstration at the police station, apparently led by the U.W.M. The meeting pledged its support for the men, declared the dole black and decided to try to find food for the men. Later the unemployed decided to accept the dole.<sup>34</sup>

On April 4th the U.W.M. held a march headed by the local pipe band. The demonstration condemned the State Government for reducing food relief by means of the contract system, demanded increase in the dole to 12/6 a week for single men and 25/- for married couples with 7/- a week for each child,<sup>35</sup> demanded payment of the dole by cheque, the abolition of the P.I.R., provision of clothes and blankets, the use of certain

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34. S.M.H., 1/4/32, p. 13.

35. These were the demands of the February 14th Conference.

houses owned by the Federal Government for hostels, and the removal of the ban on working class literature.<sup>36</sup>

On the next dole-issue day (April 7th) the dole for single men was reduced from 7/5½ to 6/10 for single men. The next day the unemployed held another demonstration, again led by the pipe band at which the member for Hartley (Mr. Knight) spoke. As well as the other demands the demonstration again pledged support for the five bagmen, who were being looked after by the W.I.R.<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately there is no record of what happened in the end. A month later the Lithgow U.W.M. was mounting a new agitation: a meeting decided that if the Government did not provide sufficient clothing for the children of the unemployed they would be kept away from school.<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting in this context of unemployed militancy in Lithgow to note a self-criticism article by the Lithgow branch of the C.P.A. It bewailed its extreme weakness, its failures in fraternal work, its inactivity, inefficiency and incorrect work.<sup>39</sup> It would thus seem that the activity of

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36. S.M.H., 5/4/32, p. 9.

37. W.W., 15/4/32, p. 4.

38. S.M.H., 17/5/32, p. 10.

39. W.W., 6/5/32, p. 2.

the Lithgow U.W.M. was not simply manipulated or dominated by Communists.

In May some track travellers in Newcastle were denied rations. They asked the local U.W.M. for help, and about a hundred made a deputation to the ration officers and occupied the depot. They asked for the rations for the travellers and also for milk for a nursing mother with malnutrition who had been refused it. The police tactfully arranged for the officer in charge to reverse his decision not to hear the deputation, and the requests were finally granted.<sup>40</sup>

Both these protests show a genuine strand of radicalism in the unemployed movement - for one side of radicalism is surely the willingness to fight for the grievances of others, and not just for the improvement of one's own position. (Another example of this is a protest by Dubbo unemployed against a new regulation which put aborigines back on dry rations, which reduced their rations by 50%. A meeting demanded full rations "for our aboriginal fellow workers.")<sup>41</sup>

As well as demanding that the P.I.R. be abolished the unemployed fought against the application of the 'means test' in specific cases. In March there was at Scarborough a return

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40. R.L., 25/5/32, p. 8; S.M.H., 13/5/32, p. 9.

41. W.W., 1/7/32, p. 4.

to the militancy and methods of the mid '31 'South Coast Dole Riots'.

The Herald reported:

"A riot developed at Scarborough this morning (Monday, March 13) over the issue of the dole. A policeman and two Government relief officers were jostled by an excited crowd of 200 men. Blows were struck and only reinforcements of police from Wollongong . . . . . prevented more serious developments.

The trouble had been brewing for some time.<sup>42</sup> A large crowd of men gathered outside the small hall where the dole is issued and discussed the position of several men who had been refused relief because the officials stated they had more than the maximum income.

Two men were eventually sent into the hall, where Mr. Hyles and Mr. Brassall, of the Department of Labour and Industry, and Constable Bleechmore were waiting. The two men demanded relief and were refused.

There was an immediate rush by the 200 men outside the hall. They overflowed the small building, and the Government officials and the constable were jammed against the tables. Blows were aimed at Hyles and books were seized from the tables. There was much pushing and struggling in the small hall, and efforts were made to snatch all the books. Constable Bleechmore prevented this by leaping over a table and bundling the books into a bag. He forced his way to the police station, although the crowd swore and shouted, 'Don't let him get away.'

The situation was very ugly by this time and the policeman telephoned for help. In the meantime the crowd gathered in front of the police station and made threats against the police and more especially the dole officers.

When Inspector Keith arrived in charge of a squad of police, two men were arrested and charged with

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42. The W.W., 1/4/32, p. 4, reported "a rising wave of discontent" on the South Coast.



having stolen the books from the hall. It is alleged that they had them in their possession.

A mass meeting of the men was held and it was decided that the dole would be declared 'black' until redress was made and the prisoners were discharged. It was also decided to march to Thirroul and Bulli to-morrow and call upon dole recipients to refuse relief.

A local shopkeeper is supplying food until the matter is settled.

The intervention of the Premier has been asked by the president of the local Labour League."<sup>43</sup>

What is notable here is not so much the level of militancy itself, but the fact that the whole crowd was involved in the fight rather than a small group of ringleaders, and that support included a shopkeeper and the A.L.P. Though there is no record of subsequent demonstrations, the fight was successful in its immediate aim for the two men excluded from relief were soon given the dole.<sup>44</sup>

Though, again, it may seem a trivial success to force the authorities to set aside the P.I.R. in two cases, it is the principle that is important: the protest highlighted the iniquity of the P.I.R. and, more importantly, asserted the right and ability of the unemployed to fight against the means test.

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43. S.M.H., 15/3/32, p. 9.

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

The relief system was not applied equally in all areas: differences depended on the decisions of the local officers who were subject to the influence of the actions of the unemployed of their respective areas. Because the United Front at Kurri Kurri put up a determined opposition to the P.I.R. and were able to threaten that the miners would strike if the regulations were applied, by May '32 the regulations still had not been properly enforced in that area.<sup>45</sup>

*CPA  
moderation*

At the time of the Scarborough riot there were other demonstrations at which the dole was pronounced black. In April the Communist Party denounced the tactic, claiming that though

"in a couple of cases successful pressure has been instituted by this, the tactic is usually detrimental.

It is a mere leftist gesture that is used as a substitute for a definite concrete platform of action that would show the unemployed a means whereby their grievances could be rectified."

The Party pointed out that the unemployed were faced with starvation if they refused the dole, and that "the backward elements" could not be rallied with this slogan. The Party should formulate "elastic tactics in relation to conditions in each case" and each small fight taken up must have a specific detailed programme that would lead to success.<sup>46</sup>

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45. Ibid., 27/5/32, p. 4.

46. Ibid., 8/4/32, p. 2.

This denunciation is in line with the swing to a more moderate policy and action in order to win the masses that was instituted in late '31; it is also in accord with the denunciation of the militant anti-eviction tactics.

The fight against evictions continued, though the emphasis was on winning victories in the courts rather than in the streets. The unemployed were instructed to build the anti-eviction committees<sup>47</sup> but the policy was generally that mass action was only to be used when court action had failed. This policy was apparently instituted by McKenzie, who was a lawyer; by August the C.P.A. was to decide that concentration on the courts was a wrong tactic and that demonstrations (though not the Bankstown/Newtown siege-picketing variety) should be the main point of eviction protest. The U.W.M. won a number of eviction cases by both methods, but apart from one isolated case at Tighe's Hill in June, the militancy of the 1931 eviction struggles was not repeated.

McKenzie was both extremely active and successful in fighting for a stay of the ejection warrant in the Petty Sessions Courts. In April he won 46 out of 48 cases;<sup>48</sup> in one week in May he won five cases. The demand was so great that the 'legal department' of the U.W.M. decided to set up

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47. e.g. *Ibid.*, 15/4/32, p. 1.

48. *Ibid.*, 6/5/32, p. 4.

a class to train comrades to fight eviction cases.<sup>49</sup>

However, despite the hard work that was done, the U.W.M. could not deal with more than a fraction of eviction cases, and in any case court victories only delayed the eviction for three months or so. Finally, the possibility of any court victory was in doubt because landlords could take out a 'Default Summons' for possession in the Supreme Court, which, as pointed out in the last chapter, had ruled that it could not give tenants the benefit of the Ejectments Postponement Act.

When the U.W.M. tried to discuss this loophole with the Government it was given promises that the Minister for Justice would consider it,<sup>50</sup> but nothing was done to improve the legislation.

Mass action was successful in a case at Surrey Hills in May. A crowd of several hundred gathered outside the house of an unemployed man who was to be evicted. The police showed considerably more restraint than they had a year earlier - perhaps there was a deliberate policy not to provoke unrest. The police inspector promised to arrange alternative accommodation and that the tenant would not be evicted till some was found. The U.W.M. continued to rally

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49. Ibid., 20/5/32, p. 1.

50. Ibid.

support for the case and within a week or so the man had been given a relief job and was still in possession of the house.<sup>51</sup>

In March and April a spate of prosecutions were brought by landlords on the south coast. The Wollongong U.W.M. rallied 200 supporters to picket one case, and others were fought in the courts.<sup>52</sup> - In another successful case at Wollongong a series of mass meetings and deputations won a four-week stay of the eviction order, then money was collected and new premises found for the tenant.<sup>53</sup>

In line with the United Front policy the U.W.M. stressed that it was the law, and not the small landlords, that it was fighting. It wanted to "unite the unemployed workers and small landlords in a fight to force the Government to recognise the right of the unemployed to shelter by paying the rent to the small landlords."<sup>54</sup>

Even before the Tighe's Hill struggle the eviction fight on the northern coalfields attracted wide support.

When eviction orders were taken out against five colliery

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51. Ibid., 13/5/32, p. 1 and 27/5/32, p. 4.

52. Ibid., 25/3/32, p. 1 and 22/4/32, p. 4.

53. R.L., 8/6/32, p. 8.

54. Ibid., 8/6/32, p. 8.

employees at Kurri Kurri the U.W.M. anti eviction committee threatened drastic measures if the government did not order the withdrawal of the warrants and a rent payment. It urged the unions to give support, even to the extent of calling a strike of all miners on the South-Maitland fields. Individual union meetings discussed the matter, mass meetings were called and a black ban on the houses was threatened. According to the Herald "the eviction committee is representative of practically all unions in the mining industry so this decision is regarded as serious." The threats were evidently successful.<sup>55</sup>

There was by this time a growing political consciousness among groups of unemployed not connected with the U.W.M. Whereas formerly country unemployed had sometimes organised around a specific demand, now their demands were being extended and revealed an influence from the platforms outlined by the U.W.M.

For example, in April Mudgee unemployed presented the following list of demands to the local Labour Agent:

1. 'A' scale dole to all unemployed and their children irrespective of income.
2. 'A' scale dole to married women; 100% increase

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55. S.M.H., 14/3/32, p. 9; W.W., 25/3/32, p. 1; There was a determined eviction protest over an eviction at Waratah in February (S.M.H., 10/2/32, p. 13); 300 pickets prevented an eviction of a woman at Wickham in March (W.W., 25/3/32, p. 1).

- for pregnant and nursing mothers.
3. No evictions; government to pay rent of unemployed.
  4. Dole to be negotiated with any shop.
  5. Relief workers to be allowed to make up time lost through no fault of their own.
  6. Free school equipment and train allowance for all school children.
  7. Free lighting.
  8. Cancellation of rates on homes of unemployed; shortage to be made up by increasing the rates of the wealthy.
  9. Free medical and dental care; provision of baby health clinics.
  10. Free new boots, clothing and blankets.
  11. Dole to be removed from the hands of the police and be placed in the hands of a local council on which the unemployed should be represented.
  12. Abolition of the 1/- in the pound wage tax on workers; all money expended on war equipment should be spent on the unemployed.
  13. The conditions extended to the unemployed should be given also to necessitous farmers.<sup>56</sup>

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56. S.M.H., 1/4/32, p; 9.

(When in July the Mayor of Mudgee called a meeting to elect a committee of four representing business, industry, the employed and unemployed to deal with unemployment, there was reportedly a disorderly attempt by Communists to take over the meeting. The Mayor left, and the Mudgee unemployed elected a Communist - Terry - as their representative.)<sup>57</sup>

Unemployed campers at Griffith refused to move and demanded housing and sanitation.<sup>58</sup>

Soldier settlers at Forbes, Tarcutta, Grenfell and some Riverina areas supported by local Returned Soldiers' branches denounced evictions.<sup>59</sup>

This growing consciousness and activism was to increase as the United Front Councils extended further.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE A.L.P. AND LABOR COUNCIL TO UNEMPLOYED ORGANISATION IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1932.

The A.L.P. can have viewed the moves to establish the United Front Councils with nothing other than dismay. Its

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57. Ibid., 25/7/32, p. 9.

58. Ibid., 18/1/32, p. 9; 22/1/32, p. 12; 13/2/34, p. 14; 20/2/32, p. 13.

59. Smiths' Weekly, 12/3/32, p. 10.



attempts to ban and slander the U.W.M. would be to no avail if the U.W.M. changed itself into a new organisation. As the United Front Councils aimed to incorporate relief organisations the A.L.P. relief groups could be subsumed and converted to activism rather than amelioration.

It has already been noted that there was opposition to the ban, both at an official level, at A.L.P. Conferences, and within the branches; that many A.L.P. members did not comply with it; and that the ruling was not enforced until after the dissolution of the Socialisation Units.

Cooksey writes that the ban was "the most contentious question at the Easter Conference [of 1932], involving a confrontation of the combined democratic and revolutionary socialist groups<sup>60</sup> with the Inner Group." At the Metropolitan Conference in February a committee had been appointed to examine Keller's ruling. At the Easter Conference two reports were submitted: a majority report presented by J. Stewart of the Inner Group endorsing the ruling and a minority report spoken for by both democratic and revolutionary socialists rejecting it. The ban was upheld by 73 votes to 42, which, although it was not close, shows a large disagreement within

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60. After the Payne Report was produced there was a split in the Socialisation Units in late '31 between the democratic socialists (comprised of the old Inner Unit) and the revolutionary socialists (led by Payne).  
c.f. R. Cooksey, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-54.

the Party regarding the ban.<sup>61</sup>

Tom Payne and S. Lewis invited A.L.P. members to a special Rank and File Conference on April 16th to oppose the ban. Both the Labor Daily and the new Socialisation Committee instructed A.L.P. members not to attend and declared that A.L.P. unity must be retained.<sup>62</sup> The Red Leader maintained that the A.L.P. tried to sabotage the conference by calling a large number of meetings that day, and even arranged "a special picnic - to keep the militant women away."<sup>63</sup>

Cooksey writes:

"The conference was a fiasco: no socialisation unit was represented, nor was any union or Labor party branch; it was not even attended by any prominent member of the revolutionary socialist group, other than Payne and Lewis themselves."<sup>64</sup>

This is probably largely accurate, despite the Red Leader's claim that the conference was a success, being attended by eighty-one delegates comprised of A.L.P. members as well as a large gallery of U.W.M. and M.M.M. members. The ban was "unanimously repudiated" and a committee of twenty was appointed "to carry on a campaign of enlightenment as to the

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61. R. Cooksey, op. cit., pp. 57-59.

62. L.D., 1/4/32 (Editorial); 7/4/32.

63. R.L., 22/4/32, p. 8.

64. R. Cooksey, op. cit., p. 60.

role of each of the banned organisations."<sup>65</sup>

There was indeed a 'Rank and File Unity Committee' which produced a 26-page pamphlet (already referred to in this thesis) outlining the nature and tasks of the fraternalists and exhorting workers to join them.<sup>66</sup> This seems to have been its only activity. There is no further reference to it, and as Payne, who was obviously the prime instigator, now rejoined the C.P.A., the main organiser of opposition within the A.L.P. was no longer a member of that party.

The A.L.P. obviously still aimed, as far as the unemployed movement was concerned, to prevent criticism of Lang's unemployment relief, and of the increase in unemployment during Lang's ministry.

The A.L.P. (New South Wales) Annual General Report for 1931-1932 barely mentioned the problems of the unemployed workers. There was a brief mention of the establishment of hostels, and the activity of the Women's Organising Committee in forming A.L.P. Unemployed Relief Committees within each electorate was favourably noted. Apart from this there was no reference to the unemployed relief groups' activities.<sup>67</sup>

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65. R.L., 22/4/32, p. 8.

66. Why This Ban?, issued by the A.L.P. Rank and File Unity Committee, N.S.W., by T. Payne, S. Gard, S. Lewis (for the committee), n.d.

67. A.L.P. (N.S.W.) Annual General Report for 1931 and 1932. (J. Normington-Rawling Collection).

At the New South Wales A.L.P.'s 1932 Annual General Conference<sup>68</sup> the Unemployment Committee gave a polite and vacillating report, the main gist of which was to reiterate policies such as the shorter working week which were already part of Labor's platform, and to place most of the blame for inadequate relief onto the Loan Council and Federal Government's obstruction:

"It is necessary to draw Delegates' attention to the fact that with the exception of minor revenue resources open to the State Authority, the entire means of securing revenue are in the hands of the Commonwealth Government, and, notwithstanding this position, we find that whilst the Commonwealth Government controls the majority of the revenue resources, they make no contribution whatsoever to the cost of meeting sustenance charges of the unemployed. ....

While the control of the currency remains in the hands of the Federal Government, and they continue to display their callous disregard of the suffering and privation of the unemployed masses, your Government is compelled to rely on its only other limited source of income, that is revenue."

The Committee was in favour of a relief scheme in which the cost was borne equally by the Commonwealth, State and Municipal Authorities. It favoured a large scheme of relief works (suggesting, among other works, that the construction of the Eastern Suburbs railway could be begun!).

As the Conference had decided that the wage tax should be repealed "at the first available opportunity", the Committee proposed a number of new or increased taxes to raise State

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68. [i.e., the Easter Conference]

revenue for relief. It also seized the opportunity of applauding Lang's repudiation measures:

"In order to conserve the revenue available from the existing sources, and the sources above suggested, your Committee is unanimously of the opinion that the Government should continue its present policy of refusing to transfer any money in liquidation to overseas interest until such time as unemployment is brought to the irreducible minimum."

Its analysis of the economic crisis was the usual Labor over-production/under-consumption one, and it proposed a 35 hour week and a 25% wage increase.

It also proposed that blankets, boots and clothing be distributed to registered unemployed and outlined an Unemployment Insurance scheme. Though this contained admirable provisions (such as basic wage benefits for all unemployed workers) it was simply too late to introduce this insurance - as I have noted with earlier attempts to introduce such legislation.

The only provision that even slightly mirrored the demands of the unemployed was a recommendation that social service payments, such as Child Endowment, should not be calculated as income when computing the unemployed worker's income. The Committee also was "of the opinion that the Anti-Eviction Act is not being as sympathetically administered as it should be". It asked the Government to "consider the immediate introduction of an amendment to preclude the eviction of any unemployed worker."

The report ended:

"It is the opinion of the Committee that the time has arrived for an intensive Interstate Campaign to be launched by the political and industrial Movement, particularly the Unions represented at this Conference which are of a Federal character, with the object of enforcing the reforms outlined in this report and to demonstrate to the workers in the other States."<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the fact that it is not at all clear what is meant by the last clause (- to demonstrate what to other States? -) it is obvious that the Committee wanted any campaign to be run by the main officials of the A.L.P., and not by the workers or unemployed themselves. There is no suggestion that the unemployed should be mobilised even in support of the Committee's demands.

Not surprisingly, the Conference accepted the Committee's Report. The Herald noted that "the Garden-Graves faction was in complete charge of the proceedings."<sup>70</sup>

There was however some opposition: Baddeley was met by hoots as well as cheers. J. Holt (of the A.R.U.) won loud applause from the public gallery when he said that the unemployed would soon have to take the position into their

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69. A.L.P. (N.S.W.), Annual General Conference, 25/3/1932. Report. Unemployed Committee's Report. (pp. 8-12). (J. Normington-Rawling Collection).

70. S.M.H., 26/3/32, p. 11.

own hands. "It is a disgrace to the Labor Government that the unemployed should be starving," he declared.

The general attitude of most of the industrial labor movement towards action, and the common defence given for lack of action, was well expressed by Maloney (of the boot trades). He supported the report and said he agreed that the present system should be overthrown and that when an attempt was made he would participate. "'At the same time I am not prepared to have my head smashed for nothing. This is no time to organise for the overthrow of the system. Winter is coming on. There is not likely to be a revolution before winter, so let us find work for the unemployed.'"<sup>71</sup>

That A.L.P. members, and even some leagues as a whole, continued to work with the U.W.M. and United Front Councils is shown by the delegate list of the February 14th United Front Conference; the A.L.P. had specifically instructed leagues and Socialisation Units not to attend.<sup>72</sup> The ban was sometimes covertly defied: at this conference there were also six A.L.P. members who attended "in an unofficial capacity" because of the ban.<sup>73</sup>

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71. Ibid.

72. W.W., 12/2/32, p. 4; 19/2/32, p. 1; S.M.H., 7/4/32, p.10.

73. Report of Proceedings at Conference of Employed and Unemployed. Sydney, Sunday 14th February, 1932, p. 1.

Some unions also rejected the ruling. The Painters' and Dockers' Union declared: "This organisation reserves to itself the right to affiliate with whatever working class body they wish."<sup>74</sup>

The A.L.P. did not limit its opposition to bans; though the Communist press may at times seem paranoiac it is clear that the charges that the A.L.P. was trying to "sabotage" unemployed work were justified in a number of cases.

In January the Red Leader denounced the "traitors" (i.e., the A.L.P. leaders) for forbidding united front work to A.L.P. members; its tactic against this was more sensible than earlier tactics of simple vilification: "Where our efforts are sabotaged by these fake leaders, ignore them, and go to the rank and file."<sup>75</sup>

I mentioned in the last chapter how A.L.P. members would sometimes attend an unemployed meeting en masse and try to vote the U.W.M. out of existence or vote a change in its policies. This continued in 1932. (For example, a member of the Port Kembla A.L.P. voted that the W.I.R.'s summer camp which was providing free holidays for the children of unemployed workers be broken up "because it was a

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74. Federated Ships' Painters' and Dockers' Union, N.S.W. Branch, Minutes, 1/2/32, p. 1. (Sylvester was a member of the Union and sometimes was able to influence meetings. However, the Union later accepted the ban.)

75. R.L., 22/1/32, p. 8.



Communist organisation."<sup>76)</sup>

The A.L.P. continued to purge its branches of members who also belonged to fraternals. In January, Davies, Lang's Minister for Education, addressed the Wollongong A.L.P. about the ban, adding "the Communist Party is like a man who goes crook - he's got to change his name every time he's found out." Though the branch endorsed the ban fourteen members who also belonged to the W.I.R. preferred expulsion to rejecting the W.I.R.<sup>77</sup> Soon after this the Bulli-Woronora U.W.M. denounced Davis' statement that the W.I.R. and U.W.M. were branches of the C.P., and A.L.P. members in the U.W.M. stated they would stand by the U.W.M. despite the ban.<sup>78</sup> The expelled Wollongong A.L.P. members stated that none of them were members of the C.P.A., and that they had given many years faithful service to the A.L.P.<sup>79</sup>

If the Communist Party attacked the A.L.P. for deliberate sabotage of the unemployed organisations, it also berated the Labor Council for desertion of the unemployed. It attacked Garden and the Council for their 'Leave it to Lang' policy:

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76. W.W., 5/2/32, p. 4.

77. Ibid., 8/1/32, p. 1; S.M.H., 7/1/32, p. 3.

78. W.W., 29/1/32, p. 1.

79. S.M.H., 9/1/32, p. 12.

"The Labor Council ..... whilst pointing out the danger of vicious wage-cuts and slave labor, completely evades the fundamental question of how to organise so that the industrial workers and the unemployed will be able to defeat the capitalist attack."<sup>80</sup>

These charges also seem quite justified, for after the disintegration of the Labor Council's would-be unemployed organisation it had done little to help the unemployed movement. The minutes of the Trades and Labor Council of this time are practically devoid of references to the unemployed.

When Moran moved that Council send delegates to the February 14th United Front Conference, Garden carefully avoided the issue, cleverly reaffirming support for Lang and a show of concern for the unemployed. He moved an amendment:

"that the policy of the Council is to stand solidly by the Premier and fighting for (sic) the maintenance of the unemployed and against any reduction in the wages and conditions of workers."

An addendum suggested that this resolution should be sent to every union in New South Wales, to all Labor Councils and the A.L.P. Garden's amendment and the addendum were carried.<sup>81</sup> Obviously neither proposal had any power, and carefully rejected any activism.

The Council did continue to oppose evictions,<sup>82</sup> but

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80. R.L., 22/4/32, p. 1.

81. T.L.C.M., 4/2/32.

82. e.g. Ibid., 7/1/32.

refused to force the Government's hand on the issue. Council decided that the Ejectments Postponement Act should be altered to prevent evictions, but rejected Moran's amendment to "call upon the Government not to issue any warrants for evictions by the State forces."<sup>83</sup>

Even when the Council passed a strong demand it did not take any action to enforce it. It resolved that "as the policy of the Council is full sustenance for the unemployed, our immediate demand be that the A-scale of rations be granted to children leaving school."<sup>84</sup> It also protested against the dismissals of men from Government works, demanded their reinstatement and "called upon the Labor Government to put into operation the Council's policy, viz:- the 35 hour week and 25% increase (in wages), also the dismissed Union representatives be reinstated."<sup>85</sup>

But no action was taken and no gain was achieved. There was not even any suggestion of action in the form of deputations, let alone mass protests, to publicise and enforce the demands.

With no lead given, either for organisation or for action, by the industrial movement or the A.L.P., the unemployed had

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83. Ibid., 11/2/32.

84. Ibid., 28/1/32.

85. Ibid., 31/3/32.

to rely upon their own organisation and their own deeds, and upon the leadership and organisation given by the United Front Councils and U.W.M. branches.

THE POSITION MID YEAR I : THE ELECTION OF THE STEVENS GOVERNMENT.

In May 1932 Lang was dismissed from office; in the June state election the U.A.P. and Country Party won 66 seats and the Labor Party only 24. The election platform of the U.A.P. had centred around adherence to the deflationary policies of the Premier's Plan; that of the Labor Party around the retention of the standard of living. With such a mandate Stevens, the new Premier, could immediately embark on a policy of reducing both the basic wage and unemployment relief.

The labor movement naturally envisaged an increased attack on wages and conditions. Though the Communist Party had continually reiterated that Lang was only an agent of the capitalist class it clearly understood that there was more to fear from the Stevens government; this fear was brought into the open by the Premiers' Conference in June:

"The decisions of the Premiers' Conference indicate that a further drive is to be made against

the conditions of the workers in the shape of wage-cuts, rationing, and attacks on the unemployed. This is bringing in its train protests from the workers."

The Communist Party warned that although the A.C.T.U. was meeting to discuss the threat, the A.C.T.U. would divert any resistance "into channels which will be harmless to the boss class."<sup>86</sup>

As had occurred after the election of the Bavin Government in 1927, the New South Wales labor movement now feared what would come when both state and federal governments were in non-Labor hands.

The emphasis of the Premiers' Conferences of January, April and June was on strict adherence to the Premiers' Plan. At the April Premiers' Conference a committee of economists and businessmen prepared a detailed unemployment policy which again endorsed the Plan and reiterated that the only permanent solution to unemployment was to effect a better relationship between costs and prices.

Schedvin notes that the Lyons Government "rejected the desirability of an extensive public works programme. Sustenance and some relief works would, it was conceded, have to be provided until a rise in export prices stimulated revival, but the cost of this relief was to be kept as low

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86. R.L., 22/6/32, p. 4.

as possible." Great stress was put upon increasing exports.  
The Government

"ignored the important fact that an even greater cause of unemployment than the fall in export prices was the virtual cessation of public works expenditure. . . . . The Government had no clear idea of possible employment alternatives. It simply assumed that all would be well following a rise in export prices. . . . . The importance of assisting the expansion of the manufacturing industries to provide an alternative means of employment was overlooked."

The committee advising on unemployment policy at the April Premiers' Conference paid "little attention . . . . to the short-term unemployment problem." It

"saw no prospect of governments assisting effectively the reabsorption of the unemployed until costs of production had been reduced. It advised that public works expenditure should not be embarked upon, until it had been shown that such works were capable of earning service charges, and it did not think there were many works in this category while current wage rates persisted. Even for such works, finance would be difficult . . . . . The committee concluded . . . . that there were no 'latent' financial resources available which the governments could tap."<sup>87</sup>

The fears of the labor movement were soon justified. In August the New South Wales basic wage was cut from £4.2.6 to £3.10.0 (for males) and from £2.4.6 to £1.18.0 (for females). (It was to be reduced again in August 1933 and May 1934, and though slowly restored after this, was still only £3.11.6 and £1.18.6 for males and females respectively in April 1937.)<sup>88</sup>

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87. C.B. Schedvin, op. cit., pp. 312-318.

88. Commonwealth Labour Reports, for respective years.

In August the dole was also cut. Although the reduction was only about a shilling or two a week this was a real reduction when the original amount was minimal anyway. Moreover, reaction to the cut cannot be gauged simply in terms of the amount: as with the dole decrease of the Nationalist Government in 1927 the reduction was felt to be symbolic of a new regime of attacks on the conditions and economic position of the unemployed.

The unemployed feared also that the government would try to exclude many from relief, and would institute under-award relief work for the dole.

Again their fears proved true. Although Stevens did not introduce the Emergency Relief Work Scheme (which greatly increased the amount of relief work) until May 1933, from the inception of the new Government a wide variety of schemes were initiated. As these abrogated award wages and conditions they were opposed by many unemployed.

The total amount of relief given also decreased. Bland notes:

"Food relief reached its peak in New South Wales for the four weeks ending 11 June 1932, when 413,171 food orders were issued. For the period July 1931 to June 1932, the cost of food relief was £5,070,732. For the four weeks ending 9 July 1932, 412,038 food orders were issued, valued at £374,528. A year later, for the four weeks ending 8 July 1933, the orders numbered 179,785, and cost £151,339, or an improvement of 56.3% and 59.5% respectively. Food relief for the year ended 30 June 1933 had been reduced to £3,510,193 and registered unemployed at

the Labour Exchanges had fallen from 200,000 on 1 July 1932 to 125,000 on 30 June 1933."<sup>89</sup>

While Bland approves these reductions, regarding them as proof of the improved employment situation under Stevens, it is clear from the protests of the unemployed that part of the reduction in registered unemployed was brought about by tightening up the regulations<sup>90</sup> to prevent many needy unemployed from being entitled to the dole.

THE POSITION MID YEAR II : REORGANISATION OF THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS.

Although the Communist Party saw the substitution of Stevens for Lang as an omen of further attacks upon the working class, it was generally fairly optimistic about the prospect for militant struggle in mid 1932. It maintained that the strength of the support for Lang showed the radicalism of the albeit-illusioned workers. The two hundred thousand odd who massed at Moore Park in support of Lang

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89. F.A. Bland, 'Unemployment Relief in Australia', International Labour Review, July 1934, p. 45.

90. In particular, the introduction of the 32 point Questionnaire.



"showed that there is a mass movement arising, although at the present time it is lined up behind the treacherous social fascists who place themselves at the head of the mass movement in order to betray it. .... These masses will find the correct methods of struggle, aided by the revolutionary vanguard."

It predicted that class struggle would be increased after the election.<sup>91</sup>

In May McKenzie had stated that "the most favourable opportunity now presents itself" in regard to building the United Front Councils.<sup>92</sup> After the elections the Communist Party (which had polled quite well) noted:

"The conditions of toilers, the evident radicalisation, strikes, eviction fights, and support for Lang demagoguery - all point to the very favourable situation for the growth of Communism among the masses."<sup>93</sup>

The task was clear: renewed efforts must be made to develop the political consciousness and activity of the masses, in particular by extending the organisation of the unemployed.

In the middle of 1932 the C.P.A. renewed its criticism of the lack of fruitful organisation being done among the unemployed.

By this time the Party had more than this to worry about:

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91. W.W., 10/6/32, p. 1.

92. Ibid., 20/5/32, p. 1.

93. Ibid., 24/6/32, p. 2.

the election of the U.A.P. Federal Government had brought action that threatened the Party's very existence, in the new provisions of the Crimes Act that sought to ban the Communist Party (and hopefully its allied organisations) as "illegal associations".<sup>94</sup>

It was no idle threat: the Workers' Weekly was banned from distribution through the post and literature was sometimes siezed at meetings.<sup>95</sup>

In October, Devanney, the editor of the Workers' Weekly, was convicted in the first case under the new Crimes Act regulations: the charge was that the July issue of the paper solicited contributions for an unlawful association - the Communist Party.<sup>96</sup>

In another manoeuvre to obstruct the Communist Party the Commonwealth Deputy Crown Solicitor advised landlords who leased buildings to Communist organisations that the tenants must be ordered to quit; landlords faced a fine of £100 or six months gaol if they did not comply. The Communist Hall, the United Front of Unemployed premises (at 107 George Street, Sydney) and the L.A.I. Hall were specifically named.<sup>97</sup>

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94. c.f., ibid., 25/3/32, p. 1.

95. Ibid., 26/2/32, p. 1.

96. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 8; S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 12.

97. Sun, 2/9/32, p. 11.

This threat of severe reprisals against Communists also hampered organisational work among the unemployed. In June the U.W.M. State Executive reported that some U.W.M. branches were considering liquidation because of the Act; and if U.W.M. branches were afraid, moderate relief groups would have been even more hesitant to attend unity conferences at which Communists were present. The Executive pointed out that the U.W.M. was not named as an illegal organisation,<sup>98</sup> but some fear would have persisted.

The Party leaders' criticisms at this time concerned all mass work, but appear to have had particular reference to unemployed work.

The weakness of the Party's mass work was blamed on bad organisation by Party members. The critique claimed that even where well-attended initial united front conferences were held, there was a failure to develop a successful mass campaign - usually the campaign fell down at the second or third conference. The delegates who fell off were not only from the A.L.P. but from Trade Union fractions or fraternal with Party members. When A.L.P. delegates dropped off they

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98. W.W., 3/6/32, p. 4. (The C.P.A. did however itself fear that the fraternal would be declared illegal. The M.M. invited unions to a conference on May 21st to organise against the threat to declare the M.M., U.W.M., L.A.I., F.O.S.U., W.D.C., W.I.R., I.C.W.P.A. and U.F.A.F. illegal. c.f. Federated Ships' Painters' and Dockers' Union, N.S.W. Branch, Minutes, 9/5/32, p. 2.)

were not canvassed to see why. The Party units lacked initiative and drive, failed to function efficiently in normal mass work and "went to pieces" under the strain of a special mass campaign.<sup>99</sup>

The No. 1 District Secretariat's criticism confirms that there had been little improvement in unemployed organisation since the beginning of the year:

"Our attempts to put into practice the Prague Conference decisions and the directions of our C.C. in regard to the unemployed movement have not yet resulted in the required broadening of this sphere of our mass work. In many instances our work has been futile because of the narrow sectarian approach of our members to this work. We have been unable to mobilise broad sections of the unemployed on the basis of immediate demands. The immediate need for improvement in our work among the unemployed is the elimination of sectarianism, the enlightenment of our members on the correct methods of work and the organisation of our fractions for work in the unemployed movement."<sup>100</sup>

In July three issues of the Workers' Weekly carried the most intensive critique of the need for and methods of unemployed organisation since the December '31 debate.

It began by referring back to the Prague Conference and the past sectarianism of the U.W.M., then to the further encroachments upon the working class and the unemployed expected to result from the Premiers' Conference then sitting.

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99. W.W., 3/6/32, p. 3. For similar criticism c.f. ibid., 22/7/32, p. 2.

100. Ibid., 17/6/32, p. 3.

"Day by day the attack against the unemployed continues in one form or another. There is a general tightening up and a rigid enforcement of the dole regulations.

In order to offer effective resistance against this attack, the whole of our work among the unemployed should be overhauled and definite concerted efforts made to bring the great majority of the unemployed under the influence of the revolutionary leadership.

The reason why the U.W.M. has failed to mobilise and organise the great majority of the unemployed is due to its hide-bound rules, its activities being confined mainly to working among those unemployed who are members of branches, while broad united front work among the mass of the unemployed who do not belong to the U.W.M. is not being performed.

The rigid rules of the U.W.M. make it very similar to a trade union, instead of its being a very flexible organisation that will attract to it the most backward categories of the unemployed and part-time workers. Rules which specify that only members have the right to vote and make decisions, hamper our work in attracting to the meetings those unemployed workers who are not members of the U.W.M. These and other sectarian organisational defects must be liquidated, and the unemployed must be organised in such a way that the great mass of the unemployed who are not members of the U.W.M. will become interested, will take part in the deliberations of the meetings, and participate in the various activities.

The alliance between the unemployed and the workers in industry is still very weak. .... The employed workers must also include demands for the unemployed in their programme of general and immediate demands. ...."

The "fighting demands" set out were more militant than those established at the February United Front Conference - more extreme than the 'double dole' demands being put by most of the U.W.M. branches; however, it was emphasised that local, partial demands must also be concentrated on in order to win the support of the moderate and unorganised unemployed.

The demands were:

back to  
more militant  
demands

"(1) Introduction of obligatory unemployed insurance at the cost of the employers and of the capitalist State. Administration of this insurance by organs elected by the workers.

(2) The unemployed to receive benefit equal to full wages during the whole period of unemployment.

(3) Payment of full wages for workers on short time. ....

(5) Fight against compulsory work and task work for the unemployed. State Labor Exchange run by organs elected by the workers.

These national demands must be supplemented by local partial demands. Special attention must be paid to the unemployed who are denied relief due to 'permissible income' and other regulations. While it is important to formulate the correct demands for the unemployed, it must be understood that it is only in persistently conducting day-to-day work among the broad masses of the unemployed and organising and struggling for their every need that it will be possible to win over the tens of thousands of unemployed. The influence and membership of the Party and the M.M. will be strengthened if the closest attention is paid to the struggle for the partial demands, as every victory obtained arouses enthusiasm and increases the confidence of the unemployed in the revolutionary leadership."<sup>101</sup>

The next week the Workers' Weekly again stressed that the structure of the unemployed movement must be changed, must be more open. That the structure suggested was that of the United Front Councils again confirms that after the initial organisational drive the United Front Council work had not been consolidated. It was also stressed that the links with the employed workers should be strengthened.

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101. Ibid., 12/7/32, p. 4.

"Special preparatory committees, after thoroughly preparing the ground, must take the initiative in convening mass meetings at the ration bureaux or, if this is not practicable in the areas where the unemployed reside, when real united front committees will be elected, quite regardless of sex, race, party, trade union and whether they are members of the U.W.M. or not. The unemployed committee must not be small numerically. . . . . The local Unemployed Council is a delegate body and will consist of representatives from unemployed committees, trade union branches and enterprises in the area. A district Unemployed Council will be elected from a conference of local unemployed councils in the district. In order to coordinate the activities of the unemployed throughout the State, a State Council will be elected.

Trade Union Unemployed Committees.

Rank and file committees will be elected in each union branch which will mobilise the unemployed members for struggle on the basis of a programme of demands, which will be made upon the employers covering the industry. . . . . It will be the task of the union branch unemployed committee to fight for the demands of the workers in the industry at union meetings, and expose and isolate the trade union bureaucrats, as well as rally the unemployed and employed members of the union in the general activities of the unemployed. . . . .

All these committees from the bottom to the top will be connected with the workers in industry, by having delegates on each of them from the factories, mines, wharves and workshops."

After this long explication of the way the organisation should function there was a short statement of the tasks of the committees. These were to register all the unemployed (although they should not force the unemployed to register) and set up auxiliary committees.<sup>102</sup>

The function of some of these auxiliary committees was

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102. Ibid., 22/7/32, p. 4.

suggested. For example:

1. Legal advice and defence committees.
2. Anti-Eviction Committees.
3. Relief Committees. ("The Unemployed Relief Committee will take the initiative in establishing kitchens with the co-operation of the W.I.R. We must make it clear that this relief is in no way a substitute for the .... necessity of waging campaigns and demonstrations.")
4. Picket Committees (to help employed workers picket during strikes).
5. Control Committees ("to link the unemployed and employed for common struggle for their demands." e.g. to mobilise the unemployed to demonstrate at factories where overtime was worked).
6. Trade Union Committees (to solicit support from unions, expose bureaucrats).
7. Self-Defence Committees (to organise workers' defence groups).

There were also to be Youth Committees, Women's Committees, educational, cultural and organisational committees.<sup>103</sup>

The two main points of this whole critique were the need to broaden the appeal and support of the unemployed movement by destroying the continuing isolation and

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103. Ibid., 29/7/32, p. 4.



sectarianism,<sup>104</sup> and to build up the organisational structure of the movement. These were essentially the same issues that had been stressed again and again. By the middle of 1932 the C.P.A. leaders were even more decided than they had been at the beginning of the year that the U.W.M. form of organisation had to be replaced by the United Front Council form of organisation.

It is difficult to determine the strength of the U.W.M. at this time; it would seem, however, that it was not very much advanced upon the position in mid 1931, when there were 70 odd branches in New South Wales with a possible state membership of 14,000.

As we have seen, there were evidently about 85 branches in January 1932; if the average branch membership of 200 had remained the same,<sup>105</sup> this would mean a state membership of 17,000 - not at all a negligible figure. However, the reliable, active membership was obviously still much lower.

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104. The tendency towards criticising potential supporters and driving them away was evidently still strong. Professor Anderson attacked this sectarian attitude: "'Support can only be alienated if every approach is met by the complaint 'But this is not Leninism!'" W.W., 13/5/32, p. 2.

105. The average probably was about the same; however, it could have been higher. Mayfield and Waratah were very small towns and the Mayfield-Waratah branch had nearly 250 members; Concord U.W.M. had 400 members. (W.W., 10/6/32, p. 4.)

In June 1932 it was claimed that the U.W.M. had a membership of 30,000 "without affiliations".<sup>106</sup> It will be remembered that McKenzie had given this figure in December 1930; it seems that in 1932, as then, this referred to the national membership.

If it is impossible now to posit the membership figures, it is obvious that it was extremely difficult even then for the leaders to count their members. That the number '30,000' recurs suggests that, once decided upon, this estimate was accepted without much re-examination. However, whether or not the figure itself is accurate, its recurrence suggests that the leaders felt the membership was about the same.

After mid 1932 there was considerably more success in building up both the organisational structure and mass support of the unemployed movement.

A number of reasons for this renewed activity can be indicated - the election of the Stevens Government gave the unemployed a positive enemy to fight and quelled the hesitancy about demonstrating of some of the Lang-supporting unemployed; dole cuts and the introduction of relief work provided positive issues to rally around; relief work provided the unemployed with a base for organisation in the traditional structure of workers' organisations. These issues were important separately

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106. W.W., 3/6/32, p. 4.

and specifically, and also together contributed a general atmosphere in which organisation became easier. Another reason for the change must surely be attributed - though it is probably 'unhistorical' to do so, as there is no documentable evidence - to the vagaries of the unemployed movement: it did function in fits and starts often not specifically attributable to any immediate cause. Activity often developed in a sort of ricochet movement from area to area: a number of protests and meetings in one area would spark off an urge to organise in another area. By the time the impetus was picked up by a third and fourth district all sign of determination in the original area might have disappeared.

However the conglomeration of causes of renewed activity after mid 1932 worked, it seems clear that the initial moves to further the organisation came from the Communist Party, working through the top echelons of the U.W.M. and United Front Council organisation.

On June 1st representatives of the unemployed of Liverpool, Fairfield, Canley Vale and Cabramatta, accompanied by the State Secretary of the U.W.M., presented Bellemore<sup>107</sup> with a petition signed by 14,000 residents of that area demanding a hundred per cent dole increase, abolition of the P.I.R., the provision of clothing and shelter and other issues. The

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107. Undersecretary to the Minister for Labour and Industry.

collection of 14,000 signatures was no mean feat, for in 1932 this area was a low-populated, outer-suburban area. The reply, as usual, was that nothing could be done because of the lack of funds.<sup>108</sup>

This rejection apparently brought to a head the feeling that something must immediately be done about unemployed organisation. That week's issue of Red Leader advertised on the front page for all unemployed organisations to send delegates to a conference on June 19th; a fortnight later there was another invitation to unemployed groups to send two delegates each, to discuss the interview with Bellemore.<sup>109</sup>

Delegates were sent from 145 organisations; that another 42 organisations were unable to send representatives because of lack of funds pinpoints another of the obstacles to the organisation of the unemployed.

Micklewright, the Manly Unemployed Committee delegate, was elected chairman; the U.W.M. leaders were obviously trying to make it clear that they were not dominating the organisation, for Micklewright was apparently simply a rank and file delegate.<sup>110</sup>

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108. R.L., 8/6/32, p. 1.

109. Ibid., 8/6/32, p. 1; 15/6/32, p. 8.

110. His name does not appear before or after this in connection with the unemployed movement.

However, McKenzie again gave the main address, thus setting the form that the conference issues would take. He dealt mainly with Stevens' plans for work for the dole, pointing out that Bellemore had made it clear that this would be introduced in New South Wales. Bellemore had also stated that the Government would consider subsidising industry to help employers employ more workers. If this were done, McKenzie stated, it would be at the expense of the workers already employed:

"A scheme of rationing could be applied whereby those in employment would work a shorter week with less pay or on a 'week-on, week-off' basis, and thus halve the work. This scheme would simply mean that two families would live on one man's pay, while the bosses would have the benefit of the extra reserve labor power expended by a worker working the shorter week. It would only intensify unemployment, on account of reduced purchasing power on the one hand and greater production on the other."

As far as relief work went, he continued, the scheme would not be at award conditions, and in many cases the unemployed worker would be worse off. The rate would be 16/- for one day's work for a single man, with married rates in proportion.

"The 16/- will be a bait, and possibly a very effective bait to entice the unemployed to accept work for the dole proposals. Take a family of, say, a man, wife and three children. The man might receive 16/- a day for 3 days work, but the permissible incomes Regulations would immediately come into operation, and the members of his family would be refused food relief."

The relief worker would also have to pay 'occupation rent'.

The conference discussed evictions, the P.I.R., the dole

and organisational plans. That the most specific demands decided upon related to relief work was an indication of the future orientation of the movement. The relief work demands were:

1. That all preference be abolished in the allocation of relief work and that work be allotted on the roster system with registration on the Labour Exchange.
2. Representation at the Labour Exchanges to see that relief work is allotted by the roster system.
3. Right to establish unemployed committees at the Labour Exchanges to ensure that unemployed are not victimised under the P.I.R.
4. Full week's work at full week's pay for relief workers, and the dole to be continued when relief work is of shorter duration than one month.
5. That the travelling unemployed be allowed to stay in any town and draw food relief for such period as they choose, and that camps be provided for them at government expense.
6. That a deputation be arranged to the Minister for Labour and Industry to ascertain the intentions of the government.

The Conference also demanded that women's committees be recognised at the ration depots and that a weekly rent allowance be paid to unemployed women.

Probably the most important decision was that a

'Provisional Metropolitan Council' be set up, with one delegate from each organisation participating in the Conference, to hold another meeting on June 26th to elect a permanent Metropolitan Council.<sup>111</sup> This Council was intended to link up the District Councils of the Metropolitan area.

There is no record of this second meeting, but the Council was clearly formed, for after this time most of the articles about unemployed organisation appearing in the Red Leader are signed by the 'Metropolitan United Front Council, of Employed and Unemployed' or the 'Metropolitan Council of the Unemployed' or similar titles. (Titles used in the United Front Council movement were often inconsistent.) There is also no reference to the members of this Council apart from Stan Moran.

As we have seen, the February 14th Conference had decided that a 'central United Front Committee' of delegates from the district United Front Committees should be established; the C.P.A. directed in July that the District United Front Councils should elect delegates to a State Council. However, as nothing was done about this in 1932, the Metropolitan United Front Council functioned as the top organising body of the United Front movement. It outlined demands and issued calls for state wide demonstrations; unemployed organisations and

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111. R.L., 29/6/32, p. 1.

United Front Councils in the country and coalfields areas as well as Sydney referred to it for help and advice; when a group of organisations decided to unite they wrote to the Metropolitan Council for affiliation.

Though this Council probably had non-Communist members it was dominated by the C.P.A. and probably had on it those of the old U.W.M. leaders who had not fallen foul of the C.P.A. leaders. Its power was however limited by the fact that most activity depended on the leadership of the District Councils. This was to be shown, for example, in the October agitation in the coalfields.

Up to this time the U.W.M. still nominally maintained a separate organisation; there was still a State Executive, although its power was greatly diminished. This Executive appears to have gone into abeyance after August, when McKenzie was ousted from the State Secretaryship.

(It seems that he was not also expelled from the C.P.A.. McKenzie was to expiate his sins, for he later became one of the leading organisers of the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. The Party possibly found his legal knowledge indispensable.)

McKenzie's fall from grace was officially because of his approach to anti-eviction work (for which he had been congratulated earlier); the disagreement over this was



probably only part of a larger area of opposition between McKenzie and the C.P.A. leaders.

In late July, McKenzie published a circular in the name of the State Committee, United Front of Employed and Unemployed,<sup>112</sup> based on his experience with eviction work. He maintained that because judges were overruling the Ejectments Postponement Act it was "vitally necessary" to have a test case before the Full Court of the Supreme Court - a very expensive business.

The C.P.A. No. 1 District denounced both McKenzie and this tactic:

"There is a decided drift towards a Right Opportunist approach by Comrade McKenzie in the matter of the relation between legal work and the mass struggle; by substituting of (sic) legal defence in the bosses' courts for the mass struggle of the working class, instead of making the legal defence subsidiary to the struggle. ...."

The workers' struggles are a secondary consideration to the decisions of the bosses' Court to Comrade McKenzie, which is a complete denial of the class struggle. ...."

The Secretariat asked if McKenzie was sincere in his belief that an approach to the Full Court was necessary "or is it an attempt to win the support of the workers by trickery? ...."<sup>113</sup>

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112. I have found no other references to any 'State Committee' of the U.F.E.U. It would seem this title was simply used to make the pamphlet seem more official and important.

113. W.W., 12/8/32, p. 4.

This last sentence suggests that the C.P.A. was fearful of the independent support and popularity that McKenzie was arousing. Kavanagh noted in his diary that this was a "mild criticism",<sup>114</sup> which also suggests that the issues were larger.<sup>115</sup>

That four days after the Secretariat's criticism the U.W.M. State Executive decided "to remove" McKenzie from the Working Bureau and State Executive of the U.W.M. shows that the U.W.M. leadership was at this time dominated by supporters of the C.P.A. officials. The reasons given were: the circular; "that McKenzie was deliberately using the U.W.M. for the purpose of building a private legal practice"; "improper" use of money - McKenzie "had drawn excessive tram and train fares"; "A serious neglect of secretarial duties."

These reasons are comparatively trivial. No evidence of McKenzie's neglect of duty was given. Communist denunciations usually included a mass of great and detailed errors; that this was not done here suggests that the Party

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114. Kavanagh's Diary, 12/8/32.

115. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., pp. 14-15, in noting the errors laid at McKenzie's door, stated that "when it becomes absolutely necessary for mistakes to be admitted" by the C.P.A. leaders "they are fastened on to individual members", thus absolving the Party leadership from blame and obviating any thorough soul-searching criticism about the Party's line and activity as a whole. This was probably true.

had no grave matters with which to charge McKenzie, but was determined to get him out of the way.

The U.W.M. State Executive Working Bureau elected an acting secretary, and decided to delay the forthcoming Annual Conference of the U.W.M.<sup>116</sup> After this there is no mention in the Communist Press of any U.W.M. State Executive or U.W.M. State Secretary. The U.W.M. Conference seems never to have been held. U.W.M. locals continued as ever, but after this the top level of the organisation was completely subsumed into the United Front Council organisation.

It would seem that this whole manoeuvre was the culmination of the C.P.A. officials' policy to abolish the U.W.M. Executive because it contained members not approved by the C.P.A. officials and to transfer the leadership of the unemployed movement to the Party's approved cadres at the head of the United Front of Unemployed. McKenzie's real error was probably that he wanted the U.W.M. Executive to continue.

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116. R.L., 2/9/32, p. 4. This article concluded with a request to direct correspondence to a K. McCann. He may have been the new acting secretary. I have found no further mention of him.

THE GROWTH AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS :

I. COUNCILS' GROWTH AND A.L.P. OPPOSITION.

By August the United Front Council organisation was reportedly, "making steady progress".<sup>117</sup> It is impossible to study the growth of these councils without also studying the activities of the unemployed, for in most cases a local Council would be formed after an agitation had developed interest and support. This was a marked improvement on the position earlier in the year, when U.W.M. branches would call for a local conference without there being a popular focal point for organisation. It also meant that the Councils were more representative, that they expressed the desire of the rank and file for organisation rather than the decision of a few U.W.M. cadres.

Rather than elaborate the history of all the district Councils I will simply try to give some impression of the extent of the organisation and the difficulties they faced because of A.L.P. opposition. How the Councils actually functioned will be shown in the study of the October agitation.

Briefly, United Front Councils were established in most

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117. W.W., 5/8/32, p. 4.

metropolitan districts and on the northern and southern coal fields. Country towns were usually too isolated from each other for any alliance of organisations to be viable.

On August 2nd, five hundred unemployed workers attended a meeting at the Trades Hall under the auspices of the United Front, and endorsed the United Front. The meeting called on the trade union movement to support the unemployed in the fight against work for the dole. The delegate from the Randwick Unemployed League - himself an A.L.P. member - said the United Front was making good progress in his area. Good progress was also reported in Newtown, Kensington and other areas, and every unemployed organisation in the Paddington district had linked up with a provisional unity committee.<sup>118</sup>

In the months July-August-September there were reports of United Front Conferences in the following districts: Lithgow (a council of action of miners and unemployed delegates elected);<sup>119</sup> Abermain (many miners' lodges', U.W.M. and W.I.R. branches' and municipal employees' representatives attended);<sup>120</sup> Corrimal;<sup>121</sup> Bondi (24 delegates from all working class

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118. Ibid., p. 5.

119. R.L., 20/7/32, p. 8.

120. Ibid., Second Conference, 17/8/32, p. 8.

121. Ibid., 27/7/32, p. 6.

organisations in the Eastern Suburbs, including the A.L.P., two relief organisations and the Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Labor Club); Mosman; Hurstville;<sup>122</sup> Annandale; Balmain-Rozelle (weekly meetings held);<sup>123</sup> Wollongong (an Area Unity Committee of Employed and Unemployed elected by a meeting of 350-400 representatives of the unemployed miners and citizens);<sup>124</sup> Glebe; Concord;<sup>125</sup> Kurri Kurri.<sup>126</sup>

The election of a United Front Council was only a beginning, and in a number of cases enthusiasm and organisation waxed and waned.

For example, although the Lithgow Council of Action elected at a mass meeting was successful at first, a month later it had "accomplished nothing". Only twenty-five attended one mass meeting, and the Council was reported to be "nothing more or less than a delegate branch of the official miners' machine."<sup>127</sup>

The Councils faced considerable opposition. One of the shire councils in the northern coalfields district, alarmed

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122. Ibid., 3/8/32, p. 8.

123. Ibid., 31/8/32, p. 8.

124. W.W., 26/8/32, p. 3.

125. Ibid., 30/9/32, p. 3.

126. R.L., 14/9/32, p. 6.

127. Ibid., 20/7/32, p. 8; 17/8/32, p. 3.

at the opposition to relief work aroused by the United Front, formed its own Unemployed Association.<sup>128</sup>

Much more important was the opposition of the A.L.P. and many top officials of the union movement.

Now that Lang could not be blamed for unemployment or the relief system, one would expect that the leaders of the labor movement, both industrial and political, would view unemployed protest more favourably, might even welcome it in fact. However, while Labor politicians tried to make political capital out of deriding Stevens' unemployment policy,<sup>129</sup> and were sometimes willing to introduce moderate deputations, they would only countenance protest made through official channels and organised by the official labor leaders. They remained opposed to the organisation of, and protests mounted by, the unemployed; they had no desire that the unemployed movement should be determined and militant. Opposition to any group at all associated with the C.P.A. remained unabated.

The United Front of Employed and Unemployed was at this time more strongly opposed by the A.L.P. than by the trade union leaders; indeed, there was an uneasy detente between the Labor Council and United Front Councils in August-

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128. Ibid., 17/8/32, p. 8.

129. e.g., N.S.W.P.D., Vol. 134, 20/10/32, p. 1390; Vol. 135, 24/11/32, p. 2294; L.D., 24/10/32, p. 4. (editorial).

September-October. However, by November Garden was the main spokesman for the fight against the United Front, and the Labor Council followed his lead.

In August the A.L.P. extended its ban to include the United Front of Employed and Unemployed and the International Labor Defence. The Communist Party again complained:

"Certainly, Communists are active and influential in these organisations, but only because they convince delegates of their zeal in the working class cause.

The (A.L.P.) Executive asserts that the U.F.E.U. is simply the U.W.M. in another name, adopted on account of the previous A.L.P. ban. This, too, is a lie. The U.F.E.U. is what its name implies, and is broader in its appeal than the U.W.M., which still carries on its own work."<sup>130</sup>

Their objections had considerable justification. The United Front Council organisation was much broader than the U.W.M.; it was to attain both greater numbers of supporters and a wider representativeness. When the Sun alleged that the United Front was Communist<sup>131</sup> the Party again justly pointed out: "If any section of the working class were excluded from membership then the organisation would not be a United Front," so of course the C.P. was included in it.<sup>132</sup>

The Red Leader claimed that "in the majority of cases"

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130. R.L., 31/8/32, p. 4. (editorial).

131. Sun, 2/9/32, p. 11.

132. R.L., 14/9/32, p. 8.



the A.L.P. leagues were ignoring the ban "and are rallying to the United Front in larger numbers than ever." It also pointed out the treachery of the A.L.P.: "By placing this ban on the United Front the A.L.P. has also paved the way for Lyons to place into operation (sic) the Crimes Act."<sup>133</sup>

Certainly, a number of leagues and even more individual members rejected the ruling. I have already mentioned a number of A.L.P. representatives at Unity Conferences. In October the Glebe A.L.P. League - the largest league in the state - affiliated with the United Front.<sup>134</sup> The A.L.P. Executive expelled some of the members of the Glebe A.L.P.; Although the Glebe Labor aldermen supported the Executive most of the branch members condemned the ruling.<sup>135</sup>

A number of A.L.P. members were elected to the United Front Councils; obviously a certain amount of the old sectarianism had disappeared. The Red Leader noted approvingly that at two successful United Front Conferences at Auburn an A.L.P. member had presided and another was elected Secretary.<sup>136</sup>

However, some sectarianism and some tendency to attack

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133. Ibid., 14/9/32, p. 8. This complaint was justified. When the Sun discussed communist organisations it adopted the list put out by the A.L.P. Sun, 2/9/32, p. 11.

134. Ibid., 26/10/32, p. 8.

135. Ibid., 14/12/32, p. 5.

136. Ibid., 12/10/32, p. 8.

A.L.P. members evidently did still continue. In December the unemployed organisers were again instructed that:

"It is possible to build organisation on the basis of the united front from below with workers who still remain in the A.L.P. and are to a certain extent still under the influence of the social fascists.

We cannot win these workers by abuse or ridicule. ...."<sup>137</sup>

The A.L.P. continued to establish local relief centres: Martin (organising secretary of the A.L.P.) took steps to organise relief Committees in country districts in October;<sup>138</sup> we shall later see how the A.L.P. set up relief centres during a militant dole dispute on the coalfields, probably partly with the intention of undermining the militancy.

The A.L.P. did not restrict its opposition to the banning of the United Front and the establishment of counter organisations, but continued to try to upset the active unemployed organisations. (In July, Kavanagh noted in his diary in regard to an unemployed meeting he had attended: "The A.L.P. elements are now trying to break the organisation as they no longer control it."<sup>139</sup>)

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For example, in September the Paddington A.L.P. (which

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137. Ibid., 14/12/32, p. 5.

138. L.D., 20/10/32, p. 6.

139. Kavanagh's Diary, 11/7/32.

opposed the ban) called for a citizens' meeting to discuss the organisation of a United Front. The organising committee had decided that only rank and file delegates from organisations could speak. The State A.L.P. Executive ordered that only A.L.P. members could speak, and the Labor mayor enforced the ruling. (The meeting was held in the Town Hall.) Eddie Ward and Keller spoke in favour of some moderate form of organisation. When Fleming (a Communist) read an amendment that a United Front Council be organised the chairman refused to put it. The Red Leader claimed the A.L.P.'s resolution was defeated by a majority of the meeting.<sup>140</sup> Whether this was so or not,<sup>141</sup> the whole attitude of the A.L.P. leaders was obviously highly dictatorial.

In November the A.L.P. was to try again to set up its own unemployed organisation to undermine the United Front of Employed and Unemployed.

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140. R.L., 14/9/32.

141. It probably was true, as the Paddington unemployed were very militant, the Paddington United Front Council winning good support in the October Dole Struggle. In December the Paddington A.L.P. was again reported to be in revolt against the ban. R.L., 14/12/32, p. 5.

THE GROWTH AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS :

II. EXTENSION INTO RELIEF WORKERS' ACTIVITIES; THE  
POLICY OF THE LABOR COUNCIL AND THE A.C.T.U.

As already noted, the Stevens Government from its inception extended the amount of relief work.

In response to this increase the unemployed movement became increasingly involved with the anomalies and problems of the relief work system. This was not a real change in direction: as we have seen the unemployed movement from the late Twenties onwards had continually opposed any policy of working for relief at under-award wages and conditions. In most of the lists of demands promulgated by unemployed conferences there were some that covered relief work, and the demands remained fairly consistent. It was simply a change in the emphasis and extent of protest about relief work. Protest grew in late '32 - early '33<sup>142</sup> and more and more the organisation of the unemployed became centred in the relief work jobs. After mid 1933 this became even more pronounced.

Although the press throughout the Depression was zealous

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142. As soon as Stevens was elected the Communist press increased its attacks on relief work. e.g. R.L., 6/7/32; 13/7/32.

in reporting the number of instances when unemployed workers asked to be allowed to perform some work to repay the Government for the dole, it is clear that a large number of unemployed workers - and not just the militants - opposed any system of working for under-award rates. The agitation against relief work was not just the result of propaganda fostered by the United Front Councils and taken up by the unemployed: it represented the genuine grievances of many of the rank and file unemployed. This is shown by the fact that the movement against relief work grew so large, raising much more support than attempts to organise the unemployed around dole grievances. Also, the desire for organisation was often ahead of moves by the unions or the United Front Councils to organise relief workers. In many cases workers on a job would join together to protest over some specific grievance, and after the protest would appeal to the local or central United Front Council for support or affiliation.

As early as July '32, when little had been done to publicise the campaign against relief work, fifty per cent of the F-scale unemployed called up for relief work refused to attend. Two days later a large number of these men reported at the depots but stated that they would not accept relief work and preferred the dole. They accepted the work the next day, after the Minister for Labour and Industry had threatened them.<sup>143</sup>

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143. S.M.H., 26/7/32, p. 9; 27/7/32, p. 11.

A few days later forty Randwick relief workers struck for full award wages; eighteen men from the adjoining job struck when they heard of the action. They also capitulated when the Government directed that their places be filled and the strikers be cut off the dole.<sup>144</sup>

These incidents show both the spontaneity and strength of opposition to relief work, and the urgent need for organisation to instil a sense of solidarity which would render such threats meaningless.

The first determined opposition to relief work after Stevens' election occurred in the Northern Coalfields area.

When Cessnock unemployed learnt that the Labour Exchange was to allocate work by preference rather than length of registration a special meeting unanimously rejected the preference scheme, elected a committee of action and asked the miners for support. At a number of pit meetings miners pledged moral and financial aid, though some lodge officials offered little help. As a result of this show of solidarity the municipal council told the Labour Exchange to engage men by seniority and threatened to set up its own bureau; the Kearsley Shire Council also agreed to the seniority system.<sup>145</sup>

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144. Ibid., 6/8/32, p. 13.

145. R.L., 27/7/32, p. 8.

The preference in this case was to be given to returned soldiers and men with large families. Though it might seem just that these men be given work first, the unemployed in this and many other cases complained that any preference system cut across principles of unionism, providing the thin edge of a wedge that might be used to give work only to the politically quiescent or to favourites of bureau officials.

West Maitland relief workers in late July to August maintained a strike for about a month when the Council gave preference to men with large families. The unemployed argued that as well as contravening trade union principles of seniority this was intended to split the unemployed movement by setting single men against men with large families, and also that by employing men with large families the government saved on dole money.

When a deputation from a mass meeting put the case to the relief workers two of the three jobs stopped; a deputation to the Council was unsuccessful. A mass meeting pledged that if the strikers were refused the dole all unemployed would refuse to accept work as they were called up. A relief committee supported by local tradespeople was set up, for the strikers were threatened with being cut off the dole. Indeed, forty odd families did lose their dole.<sup>146</sup>

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146. Ibid., 3/8/32, p. 8; 24/8/32, p. 8; S.M.H., 15/7/32, p. 12.

The strike was well supported for such an early relief work agitation. The Herald reports that after a couple of weeks eleven out of thirty-one men called up as replacements worked in defiance of the black ban,<sup>147</sup> but even this shows that most of the unemployed opposed the work. A week later another demonstration was held, and the unemployed pledged to continue the fight.<sup>148</sup>

The strike shows how protest over one issue would increase the level of struggle generally. On August 7th twenty-nine delegates (from six miners' lodges, seven U.W.M. branches, the W.I.R. and the Anti-Crimes Act Committee) held a United Front Conference at Abermain to discuss the West Maitland strike. The protests now were also against the wage tax and in favour of a separate meat docket as well as against the preference scheme.<sup>149</sup> The delegates decided to organise a mass meeting to publicise the fight and sent an ultimatum to the Council and the Government that the miners would take action if the claims were not granted.<sup>150</sup> Three to four hundred attended a mass protest meeting at Kurri on August 11th.

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147. S.M.H., 23/7/32.

148. Ibid., 29/7/32, p. 10.

149. There were now further complaints about the system of preference - some single men were being called up and the meeting claimed that the officials were picking favourites.

150. R.L., 17/8/32, p. 8.



The Red Leader claims that at this time "the workers of West Maitland were as solid in the struggle as ever," and that the capitalist press was lying about it.<sup>151</sup> Unfortunately, there is no record of how the fight ended. What is more important at this stage, however, than whether the men won or not is simply the amount of resistance shown.

Stevens' wage cut and the threat of further attacks on the workers aroused the anger of the industrial labor movement and the introduction of relief work caused the Labor Council and union leaders briefly to take more interest in the organisation of the unemployed. This new concern for the unemployed was not as strong as might be expected: though the Labor Council protested against the work it was not to take much determined action until relief work was even more widespread and the threat to the employed workers was more apparent.

The actions of Garden, the Labor Council and certain union leaders in the latter half of '32 were somewhat inconsistent: at times they supported the United Front of Unemployed and at times they attacked it and tried to curb the protests of the unemployed.

This opposition to unemployed struggle was partly the

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151. Ibid., 24/8/32, p. 8. (This also stated that the A.L.P. "had kept well in the background.")

result of the general defeatism of the union leaders: they often claimed that the economic and political situation made militant opposition fruitless, that if the unemployed took a defiant stand they would only suffer more.<sup>152</sup> It also reflected the general opposition, noted throughout this thesis, of the leaders of the labor movement, both political and industrial, to any movement of the unemployed that they themselves did not control.

The Metropolitan United Front Council and other unemployed leaders were just as determined that the relief workers' agitations should not be led by the union officials, whom they believed to be too moderate. There were rapprochments followed by power struggles, with both sides claiming that the power should be held by the rank and file relief workers but differing as to who was the true spokesman of this rank and file.

On the whole, the United Front Council organisation rather than the Union officials won the allegiance of the relief workers. Though the Labor Council made some efforts to organise the relief workers in August - the time of the short detente between the unemployed leaders and the council - the initiative was siezed by the United Front Councils and the Labor Council soon concentrated again on the attacks being made on the employed workers. By November the rift between

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152. c.f. The statement of Maloney at the 1932 A.L.P. Annual General Conference, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Garden and the unemployed leaders was wide open again, following illadvised slanders Garden made on certain unemployed leaders.

By August relief workers on a number of jobs had set up committees. These were very definitely rank and file committees, for the jobs were generally small<sup>153</sup> and as the workers were picked by the Labour Exchange there was not the situation where militant cadres could infiltrate a job and stir the workers to action by clever 'fraction work'.

Trade Union officials had also already voiced some protest against relief work. The Central Council of the Miners' Federation organised a protest deputation about the allocation of relief work in July.<sup>154</sup> As so many of the relief jobs involved drainage and sewerage jobs the Water and Sewerage Employees' Union was naturally one of the first to protest about relief work: there was a very real fear that if award conditions were abrogated on relief jobs regular workers might suffer the same attack on standards.

The unemployed leaders and many rank and file relief workers opposed the organisational attempts of officials of this union, maintaining, with probable justification, that the

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153. 20-40 workers seems to have been the average on a particular job, though of course a number of job groups might be engaged on the same project.

154. S.M.H., 16/7/32; p. 17.

officials were not really concerned about the relief workers. The Labor Council supported the attempts of these union officials to control the jobs. When Moran moved that the Labor Council "determines to set up committees of action on the jobs to combat the (relief work) proposals" the Labor Council rejected the suggestion and passed instead an amendment "that Council stands solidly behind the Water and Sewerage Employees in demanding full award rates for their members."<sup>155</sup>

The Water and Sewerage Employees' Union quickly began to try to coerce the relief workers into the Union - with a union due of 3d. a week which seems quite unjustified considering the starvation rates of pay. The Red Leader complained that "this is purely a ticket union, without the faintest semblance of rank and file control."<sup>156</sup> A relief worker from the Chullora job wrote that the relief workers realised that the Union would not help them in their fight for better conditions.<sup>157</sup> Another Chullora relief worker (signing himself 'Ex Water Board Unionist') stated that an official from the Union had addressed two shifts, both of which had refused to be associated with the Union.<sup>158</sup>

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155. T.L.C.M., 21/7/32.

156. R.L., 31/8/32, p. 8; 14/9/32, p. 8.

157. Ibid., 21/9/32, p. 8.

158. Ibid., 28/9/32, p. 8.

Proposals for a relief workers' conference on Wednesday August 17th evoked some more dissension between Labor Council and United Front Council leaders, but, for once, hostility was shelved in the interests of united action.

The Labor Council meeting of August 11th was almost solely concerned with the issue of relief work. The Labor Council Minutes and the Red Leader report are in some conflict over what actually happened, the latter being determined to detract credit from the for-once quite forthright stand of the Labor Council.

Garden moved:

"That Council endorse the action of the unemployed on the E. & F. Scale who have been protesting against the action of the State Government in depriving them of unemployed relief during the time that they are out of work.

Council supports the unemployed in their demands upon the Government as follows:-

1. That full Award rates be paid.
2. That the full dole scale of relief be given to the unemployed during the periods between the working weeks.
3. That a mass meeting of the men on E. & F. scale be convened next Wednesday<sup>159</sup> at 10.30 a.m. at the Trades Hall for the purpose of defining a policy of action."<sup>160</sup>

The Red Leader maintained that it was the unemployed

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159. i.e., Wednesday, August 17th.

160. T.L.C.M., 11/8/32.

delegates who proposed the resolution that the unions endorse the relief workers' struggles and the proposal for full union rates and dole for periods off work. They did propose this, but after Garden had already done so.

The Red Leader added that "Garden indulged in his usual abuse of the unemployed delegates, and made a lying slanderous statement that they were absent from the August 1st demonstration."<sup>161</sup> That Garden did act thus is quite likely, given the base attack he would make on the unemployed leaders in a few months; if he did make this accusation it was a lie, for Moran was prominent in the August 1st protest.<sup>162</sup> That Garden should attack the unemployed delegates while making quite determined proposals for unemployed organisation shows that the Labor Council at this time saw relief work as enough of a threat to warrant united action with their opponents; it also shows that the basis of the amity established at the August 17th conference was very shaky.

Garden also proposed that:

"Council is definitely opposed to the principle of forced labor in place of sustenance for the unemployed, and the unemployed must be mobilised for the struggle against the Premiers' Plan and a unified policy of resistance outlined by the Council and the rank and file of the unemployed.

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161. R.L., 24/8/32, p. 8. (August 1st was a day of Anti-War protest; it was somewhat of a fiasco, but not because of the cowardice of the unemployed leaders.)

162. Kavanagh mentions Moran climbing on a window sill to speak (Diary, 1/8/32); Moran described to me in graphic detail how he was forcibly dragged off the window sill (Interview in 1970).

Policy.

1. That the whole of the Trades Unions be called upon to rally their unemployed to consider the reply of the Government to the demands made by the unemployed<sup>163</sup> and to determine the line of action that will be taken in regard thereto.
2. That the A.L.P. and all working class organisations be lined up in support of the policy decided upon by the rank and file of the unemployed."

This was seconded by McAlpine, one of the Labor Council hierarchy.<sup>164</sup>

The amendment of the unemployed delegates was superficially very similar:

"This Council is strongly opposed to the Premiers' Plan of forced labour and work for the dole and will do all in its power to organise the unemployed to defeat the slave proposals.

On Relief jobs we will set up rank and file committees of action in preparation of strike struggles to force the following demands.

1. Trade Union rates and conditions for relief workers.
2. Dole to be granted during the whole period of unemployment.

Further we hold mass meetings of the whole of the unemployed to mobilise them for support."<sup>165</sup>

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163. There is no indication as to which particular set of demands or deputation presenting them is referred to here; it is possible that the June 1st deputation and petition of the Liverpool, Fairfield, etc. unemployed is meant.

164. He was to be elected President in 1933.

165. Amendment proposed by Docker (a Communist) and seconded by Moran.

Both the resolution and the amendment stressed the importance of rank and file decisions, but where the Labor Council wished the Trade Unions to rally the unemployed and policy to be decided by the Labor Council and the unemployed, the amendment sought actually to build rank and file committees on the jobs to begin strike action; in other words, Garden wanted a policy outlined and the unemployed delegates wanted action.

Not surprisingly, Garden's proposals were accepted and the amendment defeated.

*sup. 650 rows of 204*

A few days before the proposed August 17th meeting the Metropolitan United Front Council called its own meeting of relief workers. Two delegates represented each of the nine job committees at Drummoyne, Gladesville, Ryde and Lane Cove, and advised the Metropolitan United Front Council of relief workers' demands. This meeting was probably called to drum up support for the United Front Council before the Labor Council's Conference. Moran noted: "The men on the jobs are very discontented and desire to wage their own struggle under a rank and file leadership, having fully realised the treachery of the trade union officials."<sup>166</sup> Though Moran seized any opportunity to attack the trade union leaders,

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166. W.W., 26/8/32, p. 4. (The demands were the usual ones for award wages and conditions, etc.)



the subsequent history of the relief workers' movement shows that the relief workers did, by and large, want to keep the struggle in their own hands and did have a certain suspicion of Union officials.

At the meeting on Wednesday August 17th the relief workers accepted the leadership of the United Front Councils. The United Front issued leaflets recommending the setting up of committees on all jobs. The meeting unanimously carried the following resolutions:

- "1. That the Labor Council cooperate with the United Front for the purpose of setting up a rank and file committee of action on every job.
2. That demands be made on the Government for full award rates of pay and conditions on all relief works, and for the dole to be granted during full period of unemployment, including breaks in relief work.
3. A solidarity committee be established in every locality with the unemployed."

The meeting decided that the demands would be presented to the Government and that speakers would address every relief job on Monday 22nd.<sup>167</sup>

Garden's report on this Conference to the Labor Council was essentially the same as this Red Leader report; he added that the unions were called upon to mobilise their unemployed members. In a rare moment of amity Moran seconded Garden's report.<sup>168</sup>

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167. R.L., 24/8/32, p. 8.

168. T.L.C.M., 18/8/32.

The Red Leader warned, however, that the Labor Council was still not to be trusted. McAlpine submitted an addendum that all organisations affiliated to the Labor Council be asked to supply speakers for the job meetings<sup>169</sup> - obviously a manoeuvre to ensure that the United Front leaders did not monopolise the relief workers' agitation. This was apparently not adopted:

"The attempt to sabotage the relief workers, by taking the fight out of their hands and diverting it along reformist lines by the trade union officials, failed, but the tactics of Garden and of the bureaucracy of supporting the struggle at this juncture must be very carefully watched.

The relief workers must carry on their own struggles on the job."<sup>170</sup>

The establishment obviously took this conference seriously. The Herald reported that "extremists are continuing their efforts to induce the men not to accept rates below those provided in their awards .... (and) are openly advocating a general stoppage."<sup>171</sup> Dunningham<sup>172</sup> referred to the organisation of job committees as a "Soviet Plan": "This is an attempt on the part of the Communists to control the actions of the citizens employed on these works."<sup>173</sup>

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169. Ibid.

170. R.L., 24/8/32, p. 8.

171. S.M.H., 20/8/32, p. 13.

172. Minister for Labour and Industry.

173. S.M.H., 22/8/32, p. 9.

After this conference the number of relief job committees grew. The nine committees in the Drummoyne-Gladesville-Ryde area represented about four hundred and fifty relief workers.<sup>174</sup> Also affiliated with the Metropolitan United Front Council were two job committees at Flemington and Lidcombe, set up after representatives of the Lidcombe Unemployed Workers' Union addressed the workers.<sup>175</sup> At the end of September the Red Leader claimed that "there is ... a favourable situation for the extension of the United Front amongst relief workers in New South Wales." Speakers from the United Front were then addressing relief workers at St. Peters, Glebe, Manly, Ryde, Drummoyne, Leichhardt, Rozelle and Balmain.<sup>176</sup> In early October the Red Leader claimed that 75% of relief work jobs had set up rank and file committees of action.<sup>177</sup>

From August onwards the Metropolitan United Front Council held a meeting every Sunday of rank and file delegates from any relief job that wished to participate. These meetings discussed conditions and policy, and aimed to establish a working council of action.<sup>178</sup> These conferences were apparently

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174. R.L., 24/8/32, p. 8.

175. Ibid., 31/8/32, p. 8.

176. Ibid., 28/9/32, p. 8.

177. Ibid., 5/10/32, p. 8.

178. Ibid., 24/8/32, p. 8; invitation repeated 5/10/32, p. 8.

very open - a welcome change from the sectarianism of the past and from the exclusionist approach the A.L.P. was adopting in regard to its unemployed conference in November.

The meeting on Sunday August 28th, attended by delegates from relief jobs, unemployed organisations and some unions, adopted the following organisational policy:

- "1. That a council of representatives from the rank and file committees of the unemployed organisations, from trade unions, and twenty from conference, with power to co-opt, be set up with the Metropolitan United Front Council.
2. That the United Front locals form solidarity committees with the relief workers in every area.
3. That all men employed on relief work be asked to contribute 1d. per week, and also appeal to all working class organisations for financial assistance in this struggle."<sup>179</sup>

It also adopted a programme of demands (which is unfortunately missing from the Red Leader files.)<sup>180</sup>

A conference on Saturday September 10th, reportedly attended by delegates from the majority of relief jobs, endorsed the United Front Council programme and condemned the Labor Council "for its failure to carry out its own resolutions to help the relief workers."<sup>181</sup>

This criticism was probably justified, for I could find no account of any attempt by the Labor Council to carry out

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179. Ibid., 14/9/32, p. 8.

180. The issue of 7/9/32 missing from Mitchell Library.

181. W.W., 16/9/32.

the organisational policy laid down by the August 17th conference. By September the Labor Council was concentrating again on issues that concerned it more immediately than the problems of relief workers - in particular, with the attack on the wages of employed workers, and with preparations for the A.C.T.U. Conference.

For a few days in September there was a renewed, though limited, upsurge of militancy in some sections of the union movement: the Central Council of the Miners' Federation called a conference of union, shop and Labor Council delegates for September 15th to discuss proposals for a general strike.<sup>182</sup> (The Communist Press was also calling for a general strike at this time.)<sup>183</sup> That there was little hope for the proposal was shown on the 14th when a ballot was taken among Miners' Federation members on the issue of a general strike in the mining industry: Cessnock miners agreed to it but Kurri and Abermain miners rejected the proposal by a large majority when the Federation admitted it had no funds and the miners would have to fend for themselves.<sup>184</sup>

The Red Leader claimed that at this conference on September 15th: "an attempt was made to prevent representatives of relief workers participating. Many were turned

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182. Sun, 12/9/32, p. 1.

183. e.g. R.L., 21/9/32; W.W., 16/9/32, p. 1.

184. Sun, 14/9/32, p. 3.

away.

However, after strenuous resistance to this by the United Front delegates, the few who remained were admitted. The workers assembled outside were refused admission to the gallery.

Representatives of the United Front succeeded in placing forward the demands of the relief workers, which were unanimously adopted.

All relief workers present were elected to a rank and file committee for the purpose of putting into practice the decisions of the conference.<sup>185</sup>

Whether or not the organisers tried to exclude relief workers' delegates, the agenda prepared before the conference had intended to demand a dole increase and award relief work rates,<sup>186</sup> and 'relief workers' delegates' are mentioned in the title of the conference in the Labor Council minutes.

The conference protested against the reduction of the basic wage, of public servants' wages and of pensions; it demanded a thirty-hour-five-day week, a 25% wage increase with a minimum basic wage of £ 5.10.0; it resolved that the A.C.T.U. be recommended to organise the workers to secure increased Sustenance rates and the establishment of the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Insurance Scheme. Further demands in regard to the unemployed were:

"Full award rates and conditions on all relief works. Dole to be granted for the period between relief work and for all periods stood off including

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185. R.L., 28/9/32, p. 8.

186. Sun, 12/9/32, p. 1.

starting week and until first pay. Abolition of the 1/- in the £ tax on relief workers. Full payment for wet weather. All work to be allocated as near as possible to the vicinity where the employee resides. Rubber boots to be provided for all employees working in damp or wet places. All tram and train fares to be paid in advance. Full workers compensation to be paid where a relief worker is injured or becomes ill as a result of the work. All necessary accommodation to be provided such as change sheds, pure drinking water, also provision to be made for washing and showers .....

Garden, who moved the motion to adopt these demands, accepted an addendum "that the conference support the relief workers in any action they take to improve their conditions." This was also passed.<sup>187</sup>

These demands were certainly forthright; they mirrored the demands decided upon by United Front conferences. The acceptance of the addendum avowing support for "any action" relief workers took to improve their position was one of the most resolute stands taken by Garden and the Labor Council. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether, as the Red Leader maintained, these demands were forced upon the conference by the unemployed delegates or whether they were initiated by Garden and the moderate union leaders. The Red Leader may be right, for this list of demands was added in a discussion (not reported in the official minutes) so was apparently not part of the original agenda.

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187. T.L.C.M., Combined Meeting Union Representatives, Shop Delegates, Labor Council Delegates and Relief Workers Delegates, Town Hall, 15th September 1932.

However, whether or not the demands were raised by the United Front delegates, the conference, by the Red Leader's own account, accepted them unanimously; this again shows that the union movement was, briefly, amenable to the United Front of Unemployed and the unemployed movement in general.

There is no account in the official minutes of any debate over the general strike proposal; however, according to the Sun, the proposal was "definitely dead" after the conference. The Sun added: "The rejection of the strike proposal has widened the breach between the Lang forces and the 'Reds' who are now bitterly attacking the Trades Hall."<sup>188</sup>

The conference did however call upon the A.C.T.U. "to set up a general strike committee for the purpose of consolidating the ranks of the trade union movement in order that mass action against the employing class may be effectively carried out."

It also resolved:

"That this combined conference also determines that factory and job struggle committees shall be set up for the purpose of preparing the organised workers in this State for mass resistance against these attacks of the employing class and that a committee of 30 from this meeting be elected to carry out the

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188. Sun, 16/9/32, p. 11. It stated that A.C. Willis was largely responsible for the rank and file turning down the strike proposal.



organisational work, and that this conference meet in one month to report on the work that has been done."<sup>189</sup>

In July the A.C.T.U. Executive had decided to hold a Special Congress of all Federal and State unions in Melbourne on September 20th.<sup>190</sup> There is no room here to more than outline the Conference's policy regarding unemployment, let alone the general policy. The Conference minutes do suggest that more attention was paid to the unemployed workers' problems than at the 1930 or 1931 Conferences, and that the A.C.T.U. was more willing to encourage that unemployed workers be represented at union conferences and be urged to join in the struggle against the general attack on workers' wages and conditions. This increased interest in the unemployed was no doubt sparked off by the extension of relief work: the Australian Railways Union, which stood to suffer from the competition of relief workers as the unemployed were often put on railway jobs, called upon the relief workers to refuse to work under the award.<sup>191</sup>

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189. T.L.C.M., Combined Meeting of Union Representatives, Shop Delegates, Labor Council Delegates and Relief Work Delegates, Town Hall, 15th September, 1932.

190. Letter to all Unions, Federal and State, 9/7/32, signed by C. Crofts (A.C.T.U. Secretary). (In collection with A.C.T.U. Conference Reports for September 20th Congress, Mitchell Library Q331.8806/9. These records are not complete and are disorganised.)

191. All-Australian Trade Union Congress, September 10th 1932, Matters submitted by Unions for Agenda Paper (bundle of papers labelled 'C'), Unemployment, p. 1.

In the discussion of and amendments to the unemployment proposals it was suggested that Rank and File Councils of Action be set up to organise strike action against wage attacks and that "unemployed and employed united Councils (sic)" be organised according to areas to support the struggle.<sup>192</sup> Another amendment suggested that each Labor Council set up a Committee of 12 including three representatives "from the recognised Unemployed Workers' Movements in the respective districts" to organise publicity about the A.C.T.U. policy and the socialisation of industry. Garden proposed that each State should hold a congress of shop stewards, shop delegates and unemployed delegates to elect a rank and file Committee of 30 to organise combined action.<sup>193</sup>

These suggestions were embodied in the Report of the Unemployment Committee, on which Garden, Kilburn and Hoare (the Miners' leader) sat, and again in the Congress policy on unemployment.

This policy began with the usual statement that unemployment could not be solved under capitalism, and called upon unions to unite to establish the "Social Ownership of

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192. This moved by delegates Bodsworth and Scanlon. This was probably the H. Scanlon who was President of the Cessnock U.W.M. and who was to take a leading role in the October Dole Struggle.

193. All-Australian Trade Union Congress, September 20th, 1932, Motions and Amendments Discussed by Congress (bundle of papers labelled 'D'), pp. 1 and 2.

the means of life".

"Realising that unemployment is intensified by wage reductions and consequent lower purchasing power of the community, that excessive machine production displaces human labor ... this Congress ... declares that a halt must be called in the Reduction of Wages policy ....., demands the restoration of all wage reductions, and with a view to utilising in industry as many as possible of the unemployed, a 30 hour week of 6 hours per day and a 25% increase in wages."

The main points of the policy for 'work and/or sustenance' were:

"That full work or sustenance should be provided for every unemployed worker, including single men and women;

That the present sustenance rates operating in the different States of the Commonwealth should be progressively increased until such time as the full Basic Wage is paid to every unemployed worker either in the form of work or sustenance; .....

That the present Western Australian provision of 1/- per day per unit, be instituted in all States of the Commonwealth, with an immediate increase of 100% in order to achieve a closer approach to the objective set out in Clause 1. hereof.

Until the full basic wage is paid to unemployed workers, we demand that the Government make available FREE to the unemployed and their families:-

- (a) an immediate supply of new boots, clothing and blankets;
- (b) 2 hundred-weight of fuel per week;
- (c) Lighting - to include gas and electricity;
- (d) Adequate medical attention;
- (e) Free transportation of the sick to public and other hospitals;
- (f) Free Maternity;
- (g) Supply of Infants' Food and Milk.

That sustenance shall be distributed by Committees upon which the unemployed shall have adequate representation.

That every State Government in the Commonwealth shall institute a complete moratorium protecting tenants, mortgagors, and home purchasers from -

- (a) Eviction from their homes and the seizure of furniture and worldly goods by Bailiffs, in satisfaction of rent due by the tenant, mortgager, or home purchaser;
- (b) Goods being re-possessed under the Time Payment system because of failure to maintain payments owing to unemployment.

[Conference] demands the repeal of any legislation existing in the Commonwealth calling upon the unemployed to perform work in return for sustenance, except where a full week's work is provided at Award rates of pay.

That full award rates of pay and conditions shall be observed on all works provided for the relief of unemployment. ....

That Congress calls upon the Executives and individual members of Trades Unions in every State to take a more prominent and active part in organising and assisting the unemployed to achieve the objective of full work or sustenance at Award rates of pay.

That Congress calls upon the Unemployed organisations in each centre to take an active part in inducing unemployed unionists to accept facilities offered by their Trades Unions and to regularly report to and attend the meetings of their Unions."

Though this Committee is simply called the 'Unemployed Committee' in the original minutes, it is clear that this was the 'Committee for the Unemployed'.

The Congress also resolved that the Federal Government should immediately introduce a National Insurance Scheme against unemployment and recommended a scheme to be run by representatives of employers and employees. Insurance benefits were to be paid out of consolidated revenue, and were to be paid to all unemployed workers.

In the 'Ways and Means' set down for effecting A.C.T.U. policy the Congress decided that unions in each state, on a

group basis or according to A.C.T.U. branches, should set up a Committee of 12 plus "two delegates from the recognised group of the unemployed" to propagandise for action. This Committee was to call a conference of union and unemployed delegates to elect a rank and file Committee of 30 to organise action to give effect to A.C.T.U. policy.<sup>194</sup> This proposal allowed for more participation in union matters by unemployed representatives than was formerly agreed to by the A.C.T.U.

This proposal is similar to the decision of the New South Wales union delegates at the September 15th Conference to set up a Committee of 30.

The September 15th combined conference had indeed elected an Organising Committee which reported to another combined conference of union, shop and Labor Council representatives on October 13th, and suggested various proposals for action. Though this Committee is simply called the 'Organising Committee' in the official minutes, it is clear that this was the 'Central Rank and File Organising Committee'.

This Committee was to the left of the Labor Council leaders: F. Warner, the secretary, and Dodd, who presented the report at the October 13th Conference, were soon to support

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194. All-Australian Trade Union Congress, 20 September-24 September, 1932. Policy Drafted by Congress. (Bundle of papers labelled 'G'), pp. 1-4.

Moran against Garden when Garden attacked the unemployed leaders.

The Committee's aim was to "carry on persistent agitation among the employed and unemployed workers to prepare them for struggle against the offensive of the employing class." It sought "to develop the closest fraternal contact with the workers on relief jobs and various unemployed organisations so as to get the organised assistance of the unemployed workers against the bosses." In opposition to the A.L.P. ban it would "accept the assistance of any working class organisation."

It recommended "that a deputation be appointed from [the October 13th] conference in conjunction with a deputation from the United Front Council of Unemployed" to present the Government with a number of relief workers' demands. It also recommended that "all unions represented at this conference be asked to affiliate with the United Front."<sup>195</sup>

The United Front Council leaders had clearly been working with the 'Organising Committee' in the preparations for this conference. Just before this conference the Red Leader reported that a recent meeting of relief workers, attended by thirty job delegates, had decided to call a mass meeting of all relief workers on October 13th to discuss a one day

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195. T.L.C.M., Combined Conference of Shop Delegates, Union Representatives and Labor Council Delegates, 13th October, 1932, Statement of the Organising Committee and Recommendations.

relief work strike, a mass demonstration and a deputation to Parliament, and an all-out stoppage of relief work until the demands were granted.<sup>196</sup> That the relief workers' mass meeting was on the same day as the union conference was obviously intended to pressure the union delegates into accepting the Organising Committee's recommendations in favour of allying with the United Front Councils and supporting the unemployed and relief workers.

Rather surprisingly, given the Labor Council's usual antipathy to the unemployed leaders, the Organising Committee's recommendations were accepted by the Conference. Sixteen more delegates were elected to the Committee (which had originally had nineteen, not thirty members). Moran was the unemployed delegate to the Committee. The relief workers' representative was one Johnson; his name does not appear again in connection with the relief work movement.

The Labor Council and the union movement, then, by endorsing the Rank and File Organising Committee, also endorsed the United Front Councils of Unemployed. This was the culmination of the growing amity - or rather, perhaps, the decreasing hostility - between the union and unemployed leaders in August-September-October; it was a radical change from the opposition of the past.

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196. R.L., 5/10/32, p. 8.

However, in less than a month the Labor Council reverted to its former attitude of opposition to the United Front Councils. In the next six months it did almost nothing to support either the movement or activities of the unemployed and relief workers.

By December the Labor Council was moving against the Central Rank and File Organising Committee. It decided to establish a Committee of 12 and a Committee of 30. Skirmishing over the Rank and File Organising Committee continued for some months, though the Labor Council had really broken with it in December.<sup>197</sup> By breaking with this committee the Labor Council clearly severed its links with the United Front of Unemployed.

THE GROWTH AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED FRONT COUNCILS :

III. PROTESTS - THE OCTOBER QUESTIONNAIRE STRUGGLE.

If, after the <sup>? May</sup> June elections, the unemployed adopted a new 'tough' policy towards the Government, the new Government

197. c.f. T.L.C.M., 15/12/32; 12/1/33; 9/2/33; R.L., 4/1/33, p. 6; 18/1/33, p. 1. (Garden and A.L.P. trying to break up Committee); 15/3/33, p. 3. (Committee continuing its work despite Garden's "sabotage"); 10/5/33, p. 3. (claims Rank and File Organising Committee "gathering strength". This would seem exaggerated).



reciprocated: the Stevens Government was determined to tighten up the relief system and clamp down on protest.

As early as three days after the election this new determination from both sides took concrete form in the eviction battle at Tighe's Hill, Newcastle, reminiscent of the 1931 eviction fights. (Kavanagh noted in his diary: "A repetition of the Newtown-Bankstown cases.")<sup>198</sup>

As the fight did follow the pattern of these earlier fights it is only necessary here to note a few details.

As we have seen, eviction resistance after the mid '31 outburst mainly took the form of legal defence, with mass action as a subsidiary defence. In the Tighe's Hill case, however, the resistance was wholly in the form of mass action.

The Tighe's Hill fight was no spontaneous outburst, but had been planned in the same way as the Bankstown-Newtown protests: a large number of men had been in the house since the previous week, the house was barricaded and support meetings were organised.<sup>199</sup> This readoption of the old militant tactics displays a new determination to force a show of strength on the eviction issue. It is interesting that the house was occupied before the elections. Either the Tighe's Hill

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198. Kavanagh's Diary, 15/6/32.

199. S.M.H., 15/6/32, p. 11.

unemployed believed that Stevens would win and needed an immediate demonstration that they would oppose any deterioration in anti-eviction legislation; or they were so disgusted with the continuation of evictions that they were simply decided to fight this case. Whichever was the case it is most likely that the election of Stevens added to their determination, and to the support given by spectators; it is also most probable that under Lang the fight would not have reached the point it did, for after the mid '31 clashes the Lang Government was reluctant to call in large squads of police.

The number of pickets was much larger than in the Sydney fights - probably about one hundred and fifty.<sup>200</sup> Also, a number of women were reportedly in the house, and the crowd outside numbered about fifteen hundred.<sup>201</sup> The Herald reported that forty police took part in the first advance; it also reported that "as a precaution against violence Inspector Brydon, of Newcastle, had ordered between forty and fifty detectives and uniformed sergeants and constables to the spot." It is unclear whether the same batch of police is referred to twice, or whether this report means that eighty to ninety police were there all told. The latter seems most likely, as the Red Leader mentions "about eighty or ninety" police and

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200. Ibid., variously notes "more than 100" and also "about 150 or 200"; R.L., 6/7/32, p. 8. notes about 150 as does W.W., 24/6/32, p. 1.

201. S.M.H., 15/6/32, p. 11.

the Workers' Weekly "nearly one hundred".<sup>202</sup> Also, the injuries sustained by the pickets would be unlikely if the pickets had outnumbered the police by two to one. Twelve police and seventeen pickets were later admitted to hospital.

The Workers' Weekly noted that when the police arrived at about 2.00 p.m.

"they took up their positions at both back and front of the house. At this stage one or two comrades spoke to the men, telling them that the police were there in large numbers, but all decided to stand fast.

Negotiations were opened with the police, but during this time the police mixed freely with the crowd before the house. At a given signal, they drew their batons, and the attack started. Batons were laid on with great gusto, and many onlookers fled, holding sore heads, etc. The police then rushed the gate and attacked the men on the verandah, only a few of whom were left. These few received a terrible bashing. Our comrades fought well. ....

Some cases of extreme brutality are worth mentioning. The comrade who was negotiating with the police was knocked down and brutally batoned without the slightest provocation. Another comrade put up a good fight but was knocked into semi-insensibility, and while in this state he was chased across the street by a policeman, who hit him repeatedly with the baton. At the back of the house, a comrade in a semi-conscious state asked a policeman for a drink of water, but instead of water the policeman gave him a knock over the head, saying: 'Take that, you -----.'

Such cases are plentiful, and had it not been for the large crowd congregated, there would have been many more.

At the back of the house the defenders received even a more severe handling than those at the front."<sup>203</sup>

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202. Ibid.; R.L., 6/7/32, p. 8; W.W., 24/6/32, p. 1.

203. W.W., 24/6/32, p. 1.

The Red Leader account is very similar; it mentions how whilst negotiations were going on the police suddenly "drew their batons and attacked the crowd."

It adds: "Several shots were fired, but the capitalist press denies this."<sup>204</sup>

The Workers' Weekly had prefaced its account by stating "in view of the reports given by the capitalist press, we take this opportunity of giving a first-hand account." The Herald's report indeed presents the completely opposite view as to the source of violence:

"The struggle began when more than one hundred pickets, armed with a variety of weapons, charged from the front verandah against the advancing police."

The Herald also mentions that the men initially tried to negotiate with the police for a stay of the warrant, and that the Inspector in charge made the usual reply that he was only doing his duty. It does seem that the police must have received orders from the new Government to act forcefully on such cases, for the police 'duty' was the same under the Lang regime, but after mid '31 they sought ways to evade it. The Herald statement that the Inspector ordered such a huge force of police in "as a precaution against any violence" is risible: the experience of the earlier eviction fights had shown unequivocally that the way to provoke violence was

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204. R.L., 6/7/32, p. 8.

to mass the police against the pickets.

The Herald account of pickets 'charging' from the verandah is slightly tempered by its later statement that the police by this stage had moved into the front yard; the Herald account also shows that the police advance into the yard occurred while "parleying" between police and unemployed leaders was still in progress.

A few seconds after the fighting at the front began a band of police centred on the back of the house; as police broke through the fence they were "met by showers of bricks."

"About this time, according to some accounts, a revolver was fired three times in the air. This, it is said, was a warning to those [police] on the other side of the building ... that the fight had begun in another quarter. The police, however, deny that there was any firing."

That the Herald should mention, even though so tentatively, this shooting incident suggests that the Red Leader's account of guns was probably correct. Kavanagh notes in his diary: "Police used guns and batons."<sup>205</sup> He notes this the day after the fight, before the Communist press had reported it, so he must have heard of the guns through the Communist grapevine. Presumably Newcastle Communists would have telephoned Sydney members. The point is that Kavanagh must have heard an account of the fight very quickly, and so from sources close to it; that he should note the guns in a private

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205. Kavanagh's Diary, 15/6/32.

diary shows that he believed the account was accurate.

From the Herald report it seems the fight was quite short, though it also bears witness to the determination of the pickets. It states that weapons found in the house included "razors with the blades tied back, sticks which had been turned into batons by the addition of lead loadings, and a clothes prop to the end of which a garden fork had been tied."

Not only were women in the house in this case, but they also took an active part in the fight. When the police arrested some of the pickets "several women picked up staves which had been dropped by the men and waved them threateningly at the police."

Injuries on both sides were severe, but more so among the unemployed forces: many suffered from concussion as well as lacerated heads, whereas none of the police suffered concussion.<sup>206</sup> Despite the somewhat lurid description of the weapons found in the house, police batons were obviously more effective. One of the pickets admitted to hospital in a serious condition had a probable skull fracture.

The Herald names twenty-one men who were charged with armed riot; four of them were also charged with assault.

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206. The Herald presents a complete list of the injuries of those admitted to hospital.

More men were arrested later: at the end of June the Workers' Weekly reported that twenty-nine had been arrested so far "but workers are still being arrested." Two were still then in hospital.<sup>207</sup> Finally, thirty were charged.<sup>208</sup> The Red Leader claimed that "many of the arrests are open frame-ups"; for example, one comrade "who was nowhere near the place" was charged. James Oliver was one of the men charged with assault as well as riot.

"Comrade Oliver, whilst negotiating with the police, was knocked down without any provocation, and when down was batoned brutally by two policemen. . . . Oliver, with nothing in his hands, was knocked insensible and now is charged with assault."<sup>209</sup>

The Tighe's Hill court cases, like the other big eviction cases, was to drag on for months. A large protest movement was mounted against police brutality and the arrests.<sup>210</sup> The feelings of most coalfields residents were clearly with the pickets. The Police Association complained that in the light of the fact that the police took "grave risks" to protect citizens in the case "we wonder why it is that so few citizens have come forward to applaud the Newcastle police action."<sup>211</sup>

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207. W.W., 24/6/32, p. 1.

208. P.T. Thorne, 'Three Years of Defence Struggles', The Australian Labor Defender, June-July, 1935, p. 8.

209. R.L., 6/7/32, p. 8.

210. e.g. Meeting at Newcastle. W.W., 24/6/32, p. 1.

211. N.S.W. Police News, 16/7/32, p. 3. (editorial).

There were constant complaints that the courts were trying to prejudice the case against the arrested. The Riot charge was later changed to Assault charges. The Workers' Weekly claimed there was more chance of convictions under the lesser charge;<sup>212</sup> the Newtown case had shown that a charge of Riot raised considerable legal difficulties.

That the I.L.D.'s defence was eventually successful suggests that the Herald's view of the outrages perpetrated by the pickets was over-coloured. The I.L.D.'s paper noted:

"A series of trials, lasting well into 1933, resulted in twenty-two being released.

During the trials evidence of a startling nature was produced, showing the extreme brutality of the police, who were seen by impartial witnesses from the street, batoning and kicking bleeding workers, even after they were unconscious.

After twenty-two of the men had been acquitted, the sympathy was so widespread the Attorney General was forced to drop the charges against the remaining eight men."<sup>213</sup>

As well as continuing protest against evictions, the unemployed in the latter half of 1932 also mounted a number of protests against reductions in both the amount of dole, and in the number of people eligible for the dole.

One of the main issues the new Government concentrated

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212. W.W., 19/8/32, p. 4.

213. P.T. Thorne, op. cit., p. 8.



on was the allegedly large number of dole frauds. The Government was determined to reduce the number on relief by simple subtraction as well as by providing or encouraging employment. Soon after its election it called large musters of dole recipients, at which cards were checked.<sup>214</sup>

How much deliberate fraud existed is impossible to determine; reports vary widely, depending on the reporter's political opinions. Booth, the Labor member for Kurri Kurri, stated in Parliament that in a recent call-up of five thousand dolors only six frauds were found.<sup>215</sup> Just as biased in the opposite direction was a statement by the Herald that in a general muster of all dolors six thousand imposters were found.<sup>216</sup> In another report it was stated that a departmental investigation into nine thousand dolors showed that fourteen hundred were not entitled to relief.<sup>217</sup>

It is clear that a certain amount of fraud was going on, but in most cases it was not a particularly heinous imposition; as noted in the last chapter, the temptation was largely created by the stringency of the regulations and the fact that the extra income permitted was very low.

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214. e.g. S.M.H., 23/7/32, p. 1; on page 16 a photograph of some of the 11,000 at the muster.

215. L.D., 20/11/32, p. 6.

216. S.M.H., 23/7/32, p. 17.

217. S.M.H., 24/8/32, p. 11.

As well as checking relief recipients en masse, the government decided to investigate more fully each particular application, to find new loopholes whereby an applicant could be excluded from relief.

Already by August there was a "remarkable drop" in the number of relief applicants because of more rigorous checks. The Herald noted: "The fear of being detected under the new system has caused many former applicants to refrain from applying for relief."<sup>218</sup> Many of those who were now too afraid to apply were still in need of relief, but because of some circumstance - a son living at home perhaps, or a few shillings too much income - were unable to receive it.

In October the Government produced a new thirty-two point Questionnaire aimed "to give full details of [applicants]' past history."<sup>219</sup>

The Government continually reiterated that the regulations had barely changed, and that most of them had been issued by the Lang Government. Hawkins, the Assistant Minister for Labour and Industry, stated:

"About 18 months ago the then Minister for Labour (Baddeley) approved of an issue of an application form for relief which was brought into use throughout the metropolitan area.

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218. Ibid.

219. Ibid.

He also introduced it on the South Coast .... but withdrew it under pressure, and did not apparently have the courage to issue it on the northern fields.

The new form did not in essence materially differ from the original form. Of the thirty-two questions, only seven were new, and they could not be regarded as otherwise than reasonable."<sup>220</sup>

Bruxner, the acting-Premier, added that the Government was pledged to relieve distress, but was also pledged "to a policy which would root out the imposter." "I wish to make it clear to the unemployed," he added, "that this application form is designed to make it possible for the department not only to prevent imposition, but also to gather the necessary data to enable us to avoid missing anybody entitled to relief who may not be getting it."<sup>221</sup>

Despite his protest that the form could benefit them, the unemployed feared and hated the new form. (The Herald mildly noted: "Recent additions to the list of questions .... have proved far from popular.")<sup>222</sup> One speaker at a protest meeting against the form stated: "Are they giving you these forms because they love you? No: it's because they want to take a few more bob off you."<sup>223</sup>

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220. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 7. c.f. also S.M.H., 22/10/32, p. 13. (Hawkins was obviously referring to Lang's reorganisation of the relief system and the introduction of the P.I.R.)

221. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9; c.f. also Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

222. S.M.H., 22/10/32, p. 13.

223. Ibid., 24/10/32, p. 9.

And despite the Government's claims, the new questions were very different, were much more probing and personal.

The old questions had mainly just asked the applicant's name, his electoral roll number, whether he owned his own home and other questions similar to those asked in the Census.

In place of the question 'Are wife and children residing at above [i.e. the applicant's] address?' the applicant was now asked: 'Are you residing with your wife? If not, state the reasons and give whereabouts of wife.'

The completely new questions included:

'If not born in Australia, give name of ship on which you arrived in Australia, date and place of disembarcation.'

✓ 'If single, give names and addresses of parents, and reasons why they cannot support you.'

'State amount withdrawn from bank during last 12 months by members of household.'

'What endeavours are you making to support yourself and your family?'

'Do you possess any livestock?'

✓ 'Is it possible for you to assist yourself by growing any vegetables or other food on the property on which you reside? If not, furnish reasons.'<sup>224</sup>

As evidence of the hostility of the unemployed to the new form there broke out in October the most widespread, longest and most militant dole protest to occur in New South

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224. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 12.

Wales in the Depression. The protest drew more supporters and spread over a much wider area than the earlier South Coast Dole Struggle and other protests. For a couple of days newspaper headlines and editorials blazed threats of riot.<sup>225</sup> That the highpoint of struggle only lasted a few days was due partly to the inability of the unemployed to face the prospect of no relief; it was also due to withdrawal of support by union leaders, employed workers, A.L.P. officials and even, apparently, sections of the Communist Party. The main significance of the fight is that even for a short time such a threat was mounted.

It is not hard to see why the Questionnaire raised the ire of the unemployed.

Bruxner stated that the agitation was "90 per cent political", pointing out that such fervour had not been directed against Lang's form.<sup>226</sup> Leaving aside the fact that the new form was more offensive, this was partly true. As I have pointed out before the unemployed were much more willing to demonstrate against a non-Labor government, though Hawkins' statements make it clear that the coalfields unemployed would not accept such a form even from Lang. (At one of the meetings against the questionnaire a speaker joked "Mr. Stevens is the

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225. e.g. Sun editorial, 24/10/32, p. 6; L.D., 25/10/32, p. 1; 26/10/32, p. 1.

226. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9 and L.D., 27/10/32, p. 5.

best organiser the working class ever had.")<sup>227</sup>

The unemployed objected to the personal nature of the questions asked; to ask for government help was degrading enough without having to describe one's matrimonial harmony or lack of such. (Dunningham and Bruxner claimed the questions were not insulting.)<sup>228</sup> At one meeting against the form an old man shouted: "Tell the Government to mind its own business."<sup>229</sup> An editorial in the Newcastle Morning Herald stated: "We hold that whatever justification there may be for reasonable precautions against impositions, some of the questions are a wrongful invasion of private rights and feelings."<sup>230</sup>

One correspondent to that paper stated: "I find people everywhere trembling with indignity (sic) and rage with the insults that are heaped upon them by this unmerciful government."<sup>231</sup>

Another wrote: "The unemployed in their present plight have more than their share of misery without being compelled to disclose the tragedies of their personal life .... The dole

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227. Newcastle Morning Herald (hereafter N.M.H.), 2/11/32, p. 5.

228. L.D., 20/10/32, p. 8; S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.

229. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

230. Ibid., p. 6.

231. Ibid., 28/10/32, p. 13.

questionnaire is reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition."<sup>232</sup>

The new form emphasized the feeling that the dole was charity, and not the right of men who could not find work. A Labor Daily editorial stated: "The individual has the right to benefit from the relief system without being harassed to his grave by thirty-two questions which lay bare his soul."<sup>233</sup>

The unemployed also objected to the extra regimentation caused by the forms; the dole system was already dehumanising, and now the unemployed were even more to be docketed, labelled, systematised. The Newcastle Morning Herald advised the unemployed that if they filled in the forms they should only do so under protest; for example, one should state the whereabouts of one's wife, if separated, but refuse to give any reasons for the separation.<sup>234</sup>

The Balmain U.W.M. paper, The Tocsin, at this time expressed the generalised resentment against the whole bureaucratic mass of registration. It joked: "As this is the time for dog registration, have we to register the wolf at the door?"<sup>235</sup>

But the main opposition to the forms was more basic,

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232. Ibid., 31/10/32, p. 5.

233. L.D., 24/10/32, p. 4.

234. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 6.

235. The Tocsin, 8/10/32, p. 2.

was specifically economic. The unemployed feared - with justification - that the new forms would cause many to lose the dole.

The Tocsin noted:

"It will be remembered that the Lang Govt. took great pains to see that we should not eat more than was provided on the back of the ration coupon, and to this end issued questionnaire forms and invaded our homes with a valiant army of Dole Detectives etc. The object of this, of course, was to get as many off the dole as possible in order to relieve the capitalistic State from the burden of feeding the women and children. The small opposition given to these measures by the unemployed has encouraged the present Govt. to place more impositions upon the workless, and following the good capitalist precedent set by the Lang Govt., they are now issuing in many centres another questionnaire form calculated to cause misery in many more unemployed homes.

GROW YOUR OWN VEGETABLES

is the new slogan of the saintly Stevens disciples. The new form wants to know why, considering the vast open spaces at the unemployed's disposal, they do not grow their own vegetables. It also wants to know why the vegetables will not grow. The answering of this question opens great possibilities for those with a knowledge of market gardening, and we suggest that it be answered with great detail.

It appears that if you are in a position to grow 15/- of vegetables a week, you are considered no longer entitled to the dole. The inference is, of course, that you must be satisfied with a menu of boiled beef and carrots without the beef.

We suppose that if we continue to give the Govt. encouragement by not fighting against these impositions, the next step will be to declare grass a vegetable, and we shall be turned out to graze like other more useful animals."<sup>236</sup>

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236. The Tocsin, 8/10/32, p. 1.



(On the same question about vegetable growing a speaker at one meeting declared: "You are called upon to enter into competition with the already impoverished farmer. You have to spade your own garden up and compete with him.")<sup>237</sup>

The Tocsin article finished with a call for resistance: "The answer to all this still rests with US! While we remain quiet and peaceful we shall continue to be imposed upon. .... ABANDON YOUR WEAKNESS -- UNITY IS STRENGTH."

Within less than a fortnight calls for resistance were echoing around the northern and southern coalfields and the metropolitan area.

It is clear that the initial call for protest was made by the Metropolitan United Front Council. However, the way the agitation was conducted in the different areas depended almost totally on the local situation, local initiative, local leadership and local participation. While the main spokesmen were predominantly Communists, they included Communists who were in opposition to the C.P.A. leaders, and they were local Communists, not agitators from outside the area sent in by the C.P.A. leaders. There is no record of the Party leaders themselves addressing meetings. In some areas the protest was conducted so vehemently by rank and file militants that the C.P.A. leaders opposed the methods; the organisation of the whole campaign was very much conducted by mass meetings of the rank and file and the C.P.A. per se did little to

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237. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

further it.

Indeed, the Workers' Party (Left Opposition) later claimed that "the organisational weakness of the Party was never more apparant than during the Questionnaire Struggle."<sup>238</sup> The Workers' Party charged that, not only had the C.P.A. leaders failed to plan and coordinate the struggle, not only had they offered weak and vacillating leadership that had undermined the enthusiasm of the workers for the struggle, but that they had actually sabotaged the struggle at Glebe.

Certainly, the Communist press did nothing to advertise for demonstrations against the Questionnaire before the struggle had actually started; in fact, before the protest there was little discussion of the new form in the Workers' Weekly or Red Leader.<sup>239</sup>

However, directives were <sup>apparently</sup> ~~ardently~~ sent out by the Metropolitan United Front Council to the District Councils about the agitation. The policy of the Metropolitan United Front Council in regard to the agitation (which was not published until later) was:

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238. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., p. 12.

239. No call for a protest in W.W., 7/10/32; 14/10/32; 21/10/32; R.L., 5/10/32, p. 8, says unemployed should organise and protest against the form, but no lead given as to how and when this should be done; no further mention 12/10/32; 19/10/32.

"That meetings be held right throughout the metropolitan area, as a means of rallying all unemployed to attend a mass meeting at every ration dump on Friday October 21, and, if the majority of the unemployed responded to the agitation, to destroy the forms at these meetings on the 21st.

Any meeting held on the 21st which did not consist of one thousand or more, would not be accepted as sufficient authority to destroy the forms."240

Though this only mentions the metropolitan area the directives were obviously also sent at least to the northern coalfields.

It will be noted that the policy to destroy the forms contradicted the Communist Party's edict of April against the 'leftist gesture' of declaring the dole black. Why the change?

It is possible that the Party officials from the beginning opposed the tactic; in support of this can be given the fact that Sylvester, Kavanagh and others who opposed the Party leadership were among the leaders of the agitation, the Workers' Party's claims of weakness and betrayal and the lack of pre-publicity in the Communist press. However, against this is the fact that the Metropolitan United Front Council, and in particular Moran who was favoured by the Party officials, initiated the action; so it would seem to have been originally approved of by the C.P.A.

*But we only have their letter word for word don't we?*

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240. R.L., 21/12/32, p. 6. This policy also declared by certain unemployed organisers to a Committee appointed by the Labor Council, c.f., T.L.C.M., 17/11/32.

It would seem that the reversal must be explained by the provision for 'elastic tactics' in the original statement: whereas in April the Communist Party distrusted the support for a revolutionary gesture it now felt the situation was suitable. However, it does seem that within a few days the C.P.A. dropped most of its enthusiasm both for the tactic and for the agitation.

The requirement in the directives that the destruction of forms should only occur with the sanction of a large majority of large meetings was a sensible provision to ensure that a few militants could not be victimised for the action.

The new forms had already been given out. Accounts of when the unemployed were required to bring back the signed form are contradictory. It seems that most dolors had to return them on Friday October 21st,<sup>241</sup> but it appears that for some the stipulation was that the forms had to be returned no later than November 2nd or 3rd. (Certainly, those who burnt them on October 21st received no dole for the coming week.) So between October 21st and November 3rd there were twelve days in which to agitate for non-compliance with the forms.

The period from October 21st to November 3rd provides a compact case-study of unemployed protest, showing both how

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241. L.D., 18/10/32, p. 6, implies forms had to be returned by the 21st.

quickly an agitation could spread, and how quickly it could burn out. Because this struggle raises all the major points of unemployed protest at this time, I will give a detailed account of this rather than mention all the other smaller dole protests of the late '32-early '33 period. I will give a day-by-day account of this agitation; mentioning every meeting of which I have found any record. (There were, however, no doubt many meetings and activities which were not reported). As with the anti-eviction struggle of mid 1931, we can only hope to understand the feeling of the protesters by grasping the sense of excitement, of increasing momentum, that occurred. We can only understand the sudden demise of the agitation by seeing the first small betrayals, the first feelings of weakness and defeat. And we can only empathise with the sadness of the protesters when the struggle was finally broken if we have to a small extent ourselves participated in their earlier elation and spirited resistance.

Some meetings were held before Friday 21st,<sup>242</sup> though the fact that they received virtually no press coverage suggests they were fairly minimal. This lack of pre-publicity was undoubtedly a weakness in organisation: the call to destroy the forms was suddenly made, out of the blue, on Friday 21st, before almost anything had been done to popularise the protest.

*Was this  
though,  
& necessary  
security  
measure?*

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242. T.L.C.M., 17/11/32, Sylvester gives evidence that he addressed meetings on Oct. 14th and 19th; Kavanagh spoke on the 20th; L.D., 18/10/32, p. 6, Cessnock U.W.M. calls meeting.

As we have seen with the eviction struggles, a lot of agitational groundwork had to be done before the unemployed would respond to a call for action.

The suddenness of this call is fairly typical of the agitation methods of militants at this time, a defect which no doubt grew out of their fervent belief in the growing radicalisation of the masses. Though the Communist Party stressed the primary need for organisation, Communists continually neglected this need. The militant propaganda seems often to have functioned in a very hit or miss way: issue a call for struggle, if no one responds put it down to the fact that the masses are not quite radical enough yet (or to sabotage), wait for a while (maybe filling in the time analysing errors or building new organisations) and then call again. The fish might bite this time.

The lack of preparation for the Friday 21st demonstrations is shown by the fact that only in a handful of centres did anything occur on that day. Instead of Friday 21st being the culmination of numerous protest meetings, it was only the beginning of the struggle.

However, the fact that protest did occur, without preparation, shows how deeply the unemployed felt about the issue.

Friday, 21st October:

Once again, it was the coalfields unemployed, in particular those of Cessnock, who led the revolt. Feelings were already inflamed in the area: apart from the Tighe's Hill fight, there had been in September a drawn-out protest over the reduction of dole caused by the Government reducing prices paid to shopkeepers. Efforts were made to call out the miners, and for a week or so the unemployed were unable to get any relief, for the shopkeepers would not supply food at the government's prices.<sup>243</sup>

Coupled with this was the distress in the area anyway. The Labor member for Newcastle stated that the number of unemployed was increasing daily.<sup>244</sup> In Cessnock alone there were about 1,200 on the dole<sup>245</sup> - so any protest could hope to raise hundreds of supporters.

On Monday October 17th the Cessnock unemployed at a meeting called by the U.W.M. had decided to meet at the ration depot on Friday 21st, and to burn the new Questionnaire forms.<sup>246</sup>

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243. c.f. Sun, 2/9/32, p. 9; 11/9/32, p. 11; 12/9/32, p. 7; 13/9/32, p. 11. (The Government would, for example, only reimburse butchers 4½d. for a pound of topside, whereas the butchers' price was 6d. So the unemployed received only 4½d. worth of meat, or nothing.)

244. N.S.W.P.D., Vol. 134, 21/10/32.

245. Sun, 13/9/32, p. 11.

246. L.D., 18/10/32, p. 6.

On Thursday 20th a "hurried conference" of ten unemployed organisations at Weston had decided that if two-thirds of the unemployed supported the action the new forms would be burnt.<sup>247</sup>

On the night of the 21st representative meetings of local unemployed organisations were held in a number of coalfields centres. The Labor Daily stated that each local "voted overwhelmingly" in favour of burning the forms; the Sydney Morning Herald gives the following voting figures:

|                |          |                           |
|----------------|----------|---------------------------|
| "Weston:       | for 202; | against 123               |
| Kurri Kurri:   | for 331; | against 2                 |
| Cessnock:      | for 207; | against 129               |
| West Maitland: | for 60;  | against 0                 |
| East Greta:    | for 68;  | against 2                 |
| Homeville:     | for 64;  | against 3                 |
| Neath:         | for 10;  | against 9" <sup>248</sup> |

If the Herald's figures are accurate (and this paper would be likely to overstate opposition to militancy) there was certainly a good majority in favour of burning the forms. Indeed, of the 1,200 odd votes cast altogether, more than two-thirds agreed to the proposal.

The decision was made without threats and interference against those who wanted to fill in the forms: when about ten unemployed workers decided they wanted their forms back,

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247. Ibid., 22/10/32, p. 5.

248. S.M.H., 22/10/32, p. 13.



Henry Scanlon, the Cessnock U.W.M. President, returned them.<sup>249</sup>

After these meetings bonfires were made of the forms at Cessnock, Kurri and Weston. The Red Leader reported that 90% of the unemployed in these centres destroyed their forms.<sup>250</sup> The Labor Daily (which would not exaggerate support, for the A.L.P. and Labor Daily were to oppose the agitation) reported that the unemployed were "wrathful" and "determined not to submit to the questionnaire". "Huge crowds stood by and cheered as the papers were consumed by the flames. In Cessnock the unemployed sang 'Lead Thou Me On' around the fire."<sup>251</sup>

*What  
with  
never  
reference?* ←

This last touch seems somehow symbolic of the nature of protest in Australia at this time, of the nature of the political consciousness of the working class. The act itself was defiant: these men risked the loss of their only livelihood. Yet the words they chose to sing were those of a hymn. European workers would surely have chosen the 'Internationale', or the 'Red Flag'. Moreover, the words request leadership, instead

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249. L.D., 22/10/32, p. 5. Scanlon was a Communist and had taken a prominent part in the Rothbury demonstration. In 1934 he became Vice President of the northern district of the Miners' Federation (on a M.M.M. ticket), a position he held until 1948. c.f. M. Dixon, op. cit., p. 18, and E. Ross, op. cit., pp. 356, 419. Ross (p. 419) describes him thus: "A tall, straight, physically tough 'typical' miner, Scanlon was a capable organiser and effective speaker."

250. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

251. L.D., 22/10/32, p. 5.

of asserting might. One is reminded of Kavanagh's statement that "the mass psychology is one of pathetic dependence on some official or leader."

Though the unemployed in the Cessnock-Kurri-Weston area were inflamed, and though there was strong protest in some small coalfields towns,<sup>252</sup> there was no protest at this stage in East Maitland and Newcastle.

There was also apparently little protest in the south coast area on the Friday, and though there was some action in the metropolitan area the protest was small given the number of United Front Councils in that area.

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The Workers' Weekly reported successful meetings at Balmain, Leichhardt, Paddington, Bankstown and Glebe,<sup>253</sup> and the Red Leader noted protest in Auburn and Randwick as well,<sup>254</sup> but in none of these centres was there enough support to warrant the burning of the forms.<sup>255</sup>

The protest at Paddington was the most militant: according to the Herald it "at one time threatened to develop into a regular riot."<sup>256</sup> Though the police did not interfere

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252. e.g. There was a "strong protest" at Kandos. L.D., 22/10/32, p. 5.

253. W.W., 28/10/32, p. 1.

254. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

255. Sunday Sun & Guardian, 23/10/32, p. 2, states forms were burnt at Paddington, but no other report mentions this.

256. S.M.H., 22/10/32, p. 13.

in the coalfields meetings they promptly broke up the metropolitan meetings.

At 2.00 p.m. a large crowd of unemployed met at the Paddington Town Hall relief depot. When speakers (allegedly Communists) tried to address the crowd they were ordered to stop; "murmurings" began.

"It was then decided by the police to get the crowd into motion. Further attempts were made ..... to address the crowd, which was rapidly gaining accessions to its ranks ..... Singling out the most troublesome of the orators, the police went towards them, but were met with volleys of insult and abuse from all sides."

Police reinforcements arrived and the crowd "melted with surprising rapidity." Four men were arrested.<sup>257</sup>

The Red Leader noted that these four speakers were arrested immediately the meeting began, that "the workers were pushed and jostled by the police and the meeting was broken up as there were no more speakers left."<sup>258</sup>

As a similar pattern occurred at later Glebe demonstrations it is worthwhile studying some of the implications of these reports.

Firstly, the police were obviously determined that the unemployed should not even hear the case against the Questionnaire. The rights of free speech and free assembly

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257. Ibid. This puts the size of the crowd initially at 200-300.

258. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

were denied.

Secondly, though the unemployed present were not militant enough to burn the forms, they were not completely passive: they did abuse the police and obviously jostled and initially refused to move. But as soon as many more police arrived they left.

The militancy and determination of the crowd had a well defined limit, but within this limit the crowd was willing to act. It is clear that they were not just acting blindly, that their jostling and abuse represented their grievance with the form. This is pointed up by comparing their actions with the actions of the crowds at local free speech meetings of about the same size, or even larger. At the free speech fights in Balmain<sup>259</sup> the crowds passively looked on while police dragged off the speakers. They were not willing to resist when it was simply the free speech right of a few Communists that was at stake. But when the speakers were dragged off at this meeting, and at Glebe meetings the next Tuesday and Thursday, the crowd resisted: this time the issue that the speakers were involved in affected them, this time it was their rights that were being abrogated.

The third point to be noted about these reports is the

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259. c.f., N. Wheatley, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

Red Leader's comment that "the meeting was broken up, as there were no speakers left." Again we have the "pathetic dependence" upon leadership, which was to undermine the whole struggle. In so many of the demonstrations the protest folded as soon as the speakers were arrested. The Communists followed a practice of replacing each arrested speaker immediately with another;<sup>260</sup> but there were always only about four Communists at a meeting, and the rank and file unemployed did not continue to replace the speakers.

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A protest meeting of several hundred was held at Paddington later that night. Fleming, out on bail from his arrest at the earlier meeting, was arrested again. But, according to the Red Leader "further attempts to smash the meeting were unsuccessful."<sup>261</sup>

In all, nine men were arrested at Paddington; the sentences imposed were comparatively very light.<sup>262</sup>

At Glebe several hundred unemployed at a meeting decided to hand their forms to one of the unemployed organisers to be burnt if enough were collected; a mass meeting on the Friday

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260. c.f. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 9, re the Paddington meeting. As soon as McAnulty was arrested, Fleming took his place. (Police evidence in the subsequent court case.)

261. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

262. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 9. Those arrested were: G. Fleming, C. McAnulty, R. McLean, J. McKeown, J. Connolly, A. Faddy, A. Currie, W. Dunn, A. Pitstock; five were fined 10/- or 24 hours gaol; 1 fined £3 or 6 days; 1 given a 6 month bond; 2 (including Fleming) given 6 month bond or 7 days gaol.

night was reported to be "the largest roll-up of unemployed ever seen in the locality." An active committee was elected, and it was decided to hold mass meetings daily. When local shopkeepers were canvassed to support the unemployment <sup>ed</sup> ~~ment~~ if they were denied relief, all but four agreed.<sup>263</sup>

As only three hundred attended the meeting at the Balmain ration depot, Sylvester instructed them that the numbers did not warrant the burning of the forms.<sup>264</sup>

The Randwick district United Front Council called mass meetings. Kensington unemployed resolved to fight the forms; 25% of the La Perouse unemployed (from the camp, presumably) did likewise. A committee was elected to collect the forms and to continue the campaign.

At Auburn the United Front Council decided to call mass meetings.

At Leichhardt-Annandale, Wills and two other men were arrested for speaking.<sup>265</sup>

During the weekend more meetings were called to consolidate and extend support.

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263. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

264. T.L.C.M., 17/11/32.

265. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

Saturday, 22nd October:

The 'Newcastle United Front movement' recommended that all the unemployed in the Newcastle and Lake Shire areas burn the forms.<sup>266</sup>

A conference of unemployed at Cardiff decided to recommend that forms be burnt at Speers Point the next Sunday (November 6th).<sup>267</sup>

At one coalfields meeting on Saturday night the unemployed decided to "lay siege" to the dole depots on Monday (24th) if rations were refused because of the form bonfires. They announced that they would camp on the doorsteps of the depots with their families until the Government submitted.

By Saturday the Government was reacting to the agitation. It declared itself still as determined on a policy of 'no forms, no rations', and police were closely watching the situation on the coalfields.<sup>268</sup>

Sunday, 23rd October:

The coalfields agitation suffered a set-back on the Sunday. The Herald reported that "indifferent success" met attempts to extend the struggle.<sup>269</sup>

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266. S.M.H., 24/10/32, p. 9; Sunday Sun & Guardian, 23/10/32, p. 2.

267. S.M.H., 24/10/32, p. 9.

268. Sunday Sun & Guardian, 23/10/32, p. 2.

269. S.M.H., 24/10/32, p. 9.

The Weston unemployed had decided to call a "monster meeting" at Wallsend on the Sunday, to which Booth and Baddeley were invited.<sup>270</sup> The Herald reported that the unemployed at this meeting rejected a proposal to burn the forms "by a four to one majority" and instead appointed a deputation to wait on the Minister for Labour and Industry.

"Messrs. George Booth, M.L.A., and R. Cameron, M.L.A., both approved this course of action. The meeting also adopted a resolution setting up a committee 'to organise the unemployed of Wallsend' to resist 'attacks of the capitalist class'. The opposition of the Wallsend meeting to the burning of forms was believed to have invalidated the Saturday decision to destroy the forms at Speers Point."<sup>271</sup>

There is no obvious reason why some coalfields unemployed should overwhelmingly support the destruction of the forms while the unemployed in other areas opposed it. Dixon, writing about the Rothbury fight, notes: "East Maitland miners were and are quieter than those from Cessnock or Kurri Kurri."<sup>272</sup> This of course raises the question of why this should be so, and the answer seems to be circular: because miners in the Cessnock and Kurri area were more militant they established a tradition of militancy which caused further militancy. Whatever the general reasons, there is one clear fact that must partially explain the greater moderation at the Wallsend meeting: the presence of the Labor politicians.

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270. L.D., 22/10/32, p. 5; Sunday Sun & Guardian, 23/10/32, p. 2. (Booth and Baddeley were two of the local Labor M.L.A.s.)

271. S.M.H., 24/10/32, p. 9.

272. M. Dixon, op. cit., p. 16.



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Though the Labor Party leaders spoke against the forms,<sup>273</sup> they clearly did not want any militant demonstrations. The Red Leader charged that the Labor Party offered no lead apart from asking the government to postpone the issue of the forms "which could serve only to let the agitation die down."<sup>274</sup> The allegation is correct: the A.L.P. leaders would only endorse deputations, and the Labor Daily was to print nasty insinuations that the unemployed were being made the dupes of Communist adventurers.

It even seems that Labor politicians may have deliberately tried to weaken opposition by lying to the unemployed: at a meeting at Cessnock on the Sunday, Baddeley stated that the Government had withdrawn the questionnaire - to the "general satisfaction" of the meeting. This would obviously have undercut any proposals militants intended putting to the meeting, and the unemployed would have returned home believing there was no need to organise further. The Department of Labour and Industry later declared that the forms had not been cancelled.<sup>275</sup>

Despite the call for resistance by the Newcastle United Front, Newcastle unemployed at a meeting on the Sunday were

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273. e.g. L.D., 20/10/32, p. 8. (Debate in Parliament); S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8. (J.B. Martin protests in Legislative Council debate.)

274. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 1.

275. L.D., 24/10/32, p. 6.

also unimpassioned. The Herald noted:

"It was admitted that the militancy of the South Maitland unemployed was likely to have only a subdued echo in the Newcastle district, and a speaker who urged that the time had come either to fight or starve contented himself with an appeal for the organisation of a strong minority in favour of burning the forms."<sup>276</sup>

Monday, 24th October:

By Monday the confrontation was clearly in the open. Hawkins was stating even more forcefully that all who destroyed the questionnaire form would be denied relief.<sup>277</sup> In the hope of winning back the unemployed who had already burnt their forms, the Government announced that forms would be replaced.<sup>278</sup>

The press clearly realised that the situation was more threatening than was usual with dole protests. The Sun editorial proclaimed:

"The methods of political agitators are apparent again, and most unhappily, in the proposition put to thousands of men in the coalfields who are told that by allowing these agitators to burn their dole forms, they will be helping themselves to better conditions. The only result will be an interruption of that relief for which the taxpayers are being so heavily burdened.

One speaker is reported to have said: 'The only way to get out of it is to organise. I don't know any peaceful way. It may cost your life or mine.' If it

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276. S.M.H., 24/10/32, p. 9.

277. L.D., 25/10/32, p. 1; Sun, 24/10/32, p. 7.

278. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 7.

came to that, one might guess whose life it would be, but commonsense demands no lives, nor even bonfires."279

The official A.L.P. line was that Nationalists and Communists were both deliberately fomenting trouble:

"The issue of this impertinent document, for the obvious purpose of eliminating as many people as possible from the dole, was a direct incitement to resistance. The Communist party has siezed on this resentment to try and use the unemployed, despite the hardship resulting, to advance its own political propaganda.

The Government's stubbornness suggests that it is working in collusion with somebody to stampede the unemployed into the position of refusing food relief and participating in food riots and looting so that they can be cowed into submission by police action."280

Militant protest on Monday was apparantly limited to Cessnock, though it seems that meetings were also held on the south coast. On Monday Cessnock was "simmering with excitement."281

At 6.30 a.m. the unemployed marched en masse to the Hill End Colliery relief job and picketed it: the protest had already spread beyond the questionnaire issue. Here the problem was that the relief workers had not been assigned

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279. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 6.

280. L.D., 25/10/32, p. 1.

281. Ibid.; The Sun, 24/10/32, p. 7, noted that "An under-current of excitement prevails and the situation is tense."

work according to seniority. The five workers who had been wrongly chosen voluntarily withdrew from the job.<sup>282</sup>

The authorities obviously knew that Cessnock would be the trouble centre:<sup>283</sup> on Monday police were sent in from other towns.<sup>284</sup>

At 9.00 a.m. a

"large band of unemployed attended the dole office at the /Cessnock/ police station and refused the dole, but several of the number, in defiance of their comrades, applied for it.

Following a mass meeting held in the police station yard, a cordon of pickets was thrown around the yard while another batch of about one hundred was detailed off to picket every shop in town.

There was an ugly scene in the police yard at about 9.15 a.m. A large body of men were standing outside in the main street when the president of the U.W.M. (Mr. H. Scanlon) entered the yard."

When the police forcefully ejected him some trouble broke out, so the police dispersed the crowd.

Scanlon then exhorted the crowd to picket every shop in town, and to 'call out' the shop assistants to prevent anyone in town from receiving the dole.<sup>285</sup>

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282. L.D., 25/10/32, p. 1.

283. M. Dixon, op. cit., notes that Harry Cockerell, one-time vice president of the miners federation, told her that the militancy of the Cessnock/Kurri area was well known at this time.

284. L.D., 25/10/32, p. 5.

285. Sun, 24/10/32, p. 7.

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Tuesday, 25th October:

On Tuesday the Labor Daily headline blared: "Dole Questionnaire Must Be Lifted. Riots And Bloodshed Appear Imminent. Another Rothbury In Sight."<sup>286</sup> Another Sun editorial called for commonsense from the unemployed and strong action by the Government to quell the meetings:

"When freedom of speech conflicts with the safety of the State, .... then it is time for any strong Government to take proper constitutional steps for the preservation of the authority necessary to the conduct of the community's affairs."<sup>287</sup>

On Tuesday militancy in the Cessnock area reached a highpoint.

The unemployed leaders fully realised that their best policy for victory was to win the support of the employed workers; though the employed workers as a whole failed to unite with the struggle there was some support given in the early stages of the agitation.

On Monday night Kurri unemployed had decided to stop the pits from working. On Tuesday morning a band of unemployed workers picketed the miners on their way to work, and were able to persuade enough men to stay away to force

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286. L.D., 25/10/32, p. 1.

287. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 8.

a closure of some collieries.<sup>288</sup> These miners joined the unemployed meetings.

Then unemployed workers and miners marched from Kurri to Cessnock, picking up supporters from Weston, Abermain and Veath and arriving at Cessnock at mid-day. The marchers " bivouaced " on a vacant block next to the police station and court house. " Fires were soon going and huge coppers of water boiled to make tea. " The W.I.R. supplied food.<sup>289</sup>

The marchers were soon joined by a contingent of Cessnock unemployed. A meeting was held in the Court House yard, then a march through the streets of Cessnock; in the early evening there was a meeting in the Strand Theatre which moved to a meeting place outside the Railway Hotel; there was a final meeting outside the police station at mid-night.

Reports of the number of demonstrators vary. The number of marchers from Kurri etcetera is given variously as 700, 2,000 and 2,500.<sup>290</sup> It would seem that the final size of

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288. Reports conflict as to which mines stopped. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9, states 2 Kurri mines idle, but Pelaw Main working; S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11, reports Hebburn No. 1, Stanford Main No. 1 and Richmond Main idle on Tuesday, but the Cessnock collieries and Abermain No. 3 and Pelaw Main working; R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8, states work stopped at Pelaw Main and Abermain No. 3.

289. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9.

290. S.M.H., 26/10/32, says 700; Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9, says 2,000; W.W., 4/11/32, says 2,500.

the crowd, at the Court House and subsequent meetings, was about 5,000.<sup>291</sup> The photograph opposite of the crowd outside the Court House certainly shows great support. The crowd was huge, given the size of the population. At the time of the 1933 Census the population of the Cessnock municipality was 7,381; there were then 1,586 males and 175 females unemployed.<sup>292</sup>

The size and militancy of the crowd obviously caused the Government considerable concern: fifty Newcastle police were sent to Cessnock and sixty Sydney policemen were sent to Newcastle, to proceed to Cessnock.<sup>293</sup> The Red Leader reported that "police swarmed in the town" on Tuesday,<sup>294</sup> and the Sun noted that "the town was virtually under a guard of fifty police."<sup>295</sup> The comparison with Rothbury was not just newspaper rhetoric.

While the demonstrators all clearly opposed the forms, and most favoured a policy of non-compliance with the regulations, there arose a serious dispute as to what tactics

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291. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8; N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8; Sun, 26/10/32 p. 12, gives the number as 5,000; S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11, states 4,000 outside the Railway Hotel.

292. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Vol. I, pp. 5 and 136.

293. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

294. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8.

295. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

should be adopted to force the government to withdraw the forms. Three broad streams of feeling can be discerned, though the issue was obviously far more complex and varied. Some favoured direct action, including looting, to secure food; some believed industrial action - a strike of all local workers - would be most effective; most of the union officials and the A.L.P. leaders wanted no action beyond, at most, deputations.

The call for direct action was made at the initial meeting. Scanlon told the marchers outside the Court House that they had "demonstrated quite sufficiently, and if the dole is not given us we must take it." Mr. Easton of Kurri said:

"Our women and children are on the verge of starvation, and it is up to us to provide food for them. If the dole is not issued to us within the next few hours it is up to us to take it."

The meeting decided to give the authorities four hours to withdraw the questionnaire and issue the dole. In the event of a refusal they decided to take the food, by looting if necessary.<sup>296</sup>

It is somewhat strange to find Scanlon endorsing this form of direct action, for Communist policy was against such actions, branding them as 'leftist', 'adventurist' or

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296. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9; S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11, also briefly notes this 4 hour ultimatum and the threat of direct action.



'anarchist'. Certainly the Communist press did not mention this ultimatum and threat, which suggests that the C.P.A. leaders disapproved of it. This would seem to confirm that the agitation was not dominated by the C.P.A. leaders, and depended on the initiative and militancy of the rank and file; it would also confirm the Workers' Party's contention that the struggle quickly moved to the left of the C.P.A.

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The call for direct action is also rather strange in itself, for in no other dole protest did the New South Wales unemployed call for the actual taking of the dole; indeed, I have not found evidence of any Australian unemployed group doing so (though there was a brief outbreak of looting in New Zealand). From the tone of the Sun's report<sup>297</sup> it is clear that the threat was quite definite and that it was endorsed by a large number of demonstrators - indeed, it would seem, by a majority of the crowd outside the Court House - and was not just a piece of militant demagoguery. That such a threat was made pinpoints the extremity of feeling in Cessnock against the form. That a seasoned Communist like Scanlon should support such a tactic suggests that he too was carried away by the temper of the crowd.

After the meeting at the Court House-Police Station complex there was a march through the town (see photograph opposite) and another protest meeting. Then there was another

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297. On 26/10/32 as well as 25/10/32.

meeting at the Strand Theatre, which was adjourned to the square outside the railway, as the crowd was far too large for the theatre.

It was at this extended, night-time meeting that the debate raged. According to the Sun, "nothing has ever occurred in the town to parallel last night's amazing scenes" - which, given the turbulent history of Cessnock, is quite a statement.

"In a state of nervy suspense, Cessnock waited five hours .... while a battle raged between the extreme element who demanded the looting of shops to secure food, and the more moderate section, which advocated a complete industrial hold-up."<sup>298</sup>

Both 'extremists' and 'moderates' opposed the union officials.

Kellock, the vice president of the northern branch of the Miners' Federation, was abused by most of the crowd when he opposed industrial action and advocated deferring action indefinitely, ostensibly on the grounds of perfecting the organisation first. "He was greeted with cries of 'Twister' and after having been heckled from beginning to end he was counted out by the crowd."<sup>299</sup> "He was not allowed to speak more than a single sentence without interruption. Finally, a motion that he should no longer be heard was carried, amidst acclamation."<sup>300</sup>

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298. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

299. Ibid., p. 12.

300. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

A Kurri correspondent to the Red Leader later noted that while some Cessnock miners' lodge officials supported the struggle, the Kurri officials followed the Miners' Federation Executive leaders, who "belittled the importance of the Questionnaire" and "talked about the lack of finance." "The unemployed, they said, had flung away their only means of support, and the workers, if they stopped work, would be without sustenance." Kellock stated that "it would be foolish to lead you [the workers] up a blind alley at this stage." The Kurri correspondent added that the officials were "afraid of independent leadership within the union", and so "tried with some success, to make the workers believe that the militants wanted control of the Miners' Federation, instead of control of the [Questionnaire] struggle."<sup>301</sup>

To understand the actions of the Miners' Federation officials it is necessary to realise that the M.M.M. was at this time waging a strong, and increasingly successful, drive to win the control of the Federation; indeed, by 1934 Communists were to win control of the Central Executive of the Federation, in the persons of Orr and Nelson, and James Jack and Scanlon became President and Vice-President respectively of the northern district.<sup>302</sup> So Kellock, Hoare and the other miners' officials obviously believed that the militants were using the dole struggle to increase their influence amongst

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301. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 8.

302. E. Ross, op. cit., pp. 355-356. Jack replaced Hoare, but Hoare re-won the position at the next election.

the miners, and were committed to opposing anything they proposed, and to doing everything possible to retain their own control.

Hoare,<sup>303</sup> in a statement opposing the campaign not to sign the forms, showed how delicately the officials had pursued their opportunism: Hoare,

"in a carefully worded statement condemned the tactics of the unemployed leaders on the coalfields who advocated violence .....

The advocacy of a general strike policy means general starvation within a short time, and the armed forces of the State will stand between the hungry army and the food; /he said/. He realised fully his position. He would be criticised for not getting in with them, and if he joined in and failure resulted, he would still be criticised for having had anything to do with the project."<sup>304</sup>

The meeting outside the Railway Station sent a deputation to the Labour and Industry Department officials and the police at the police station. It was informed that the government would not back down and the police would "see that law and order were maintained."<sup>305</sup>

When the deputation reported back some of the crowd claimed that the four hour ultimatum was up.

"'What's the good of all this talk?' yelled somebody from the crowd, and a suggestion /was made/ for rank and file committees to organise the fight.

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303. President of the northern miners.

304. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

305. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

'Let us do something!' yelled another. 'What about the 4 hour ultimatum? ... Let us get busy!' and this appeal was greeted with cheers from a section of the crowd.<sup>306</sup>

Despite the popularity of the call for action it is clear that the crowd wished, if possible, to avoid any clashes with the police, though at times it looked as though trouble would break out. The Herald noted that

"the meeting in its earlier stages showed a decidedly violent temper. Stretched across the roadway, it made a most strenuous demonstration when a motor bus attempted to force a passage. Dozens of young men gathered in front of the vehicle and pushed it back onto an alternate route."<sup>307</sup>

The Sun reported:

"Despite moments of panic in the early parts of the evening ... the night passed off without serious trouble. There were moments, however, when excitement reached danger point ... but on each occasion, just when a 'boil over' seemed inevitable, heated passions subsided."<sup>308</sup>

*When it came to the point of enforcing the ultimatum*  
Most of the crowd preferred widespread industrial action to direct action. The meeting decided to instruct all workers to withdraw from the collieries and other local industries; the stoppage was to begin the next day. As the meeting had decided that only employed workers should vote on this proposal, the support for the stoppage is a clear indication that many employed workers opposed the official union line, and were

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306. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 12.

307. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

308. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

willing to link up with the unemployed. Scanlon then ruled that the strike would also extend to tradespeople.

Despite this enthusiasm, the prospect of a general stoppage was really not so likely. The Herald correctly noted:

"Considerable doubt is already expressed whether business people generally or even the majority of miners will act on the decision. It was noticeable that the various miners' lodge officials, who ... were careful to identify themselves with the cause of the unemployed, had been most reluctant to commit their lodges to action. If ever the miners are to come out on strike, it will probably be as a result of a minority of militants forcing a stoppage by refusing to perform essential duties."<sup>309</sup>

While there was still no action in Newcastle itself, unemployed workers at Charlestown and Whitebridge, two small centres on the southern outskirts of Newcastle, decided on Tuesday to burn their forms, but decided to complete the arrangements for their demonstration at a meeting the next Sunday.<sup>310</sup> The Dudley United Front Council held a protest meeting against the forms.<sup>311</sup> The Redhead unemployed endorsed the burning of the forms by the Cessnock unemployed and pledged to follow their example; they decided to attend the Whitebridge meeting on Sunday.<sup>312</sup>

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309. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

310. Ibid.

311. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

312. Ibid., 28/10/32, p. 10.

The lack of protest in Newcastle may have been because the union officials exerted a stronger influence there.

It is clear that the A.L.P. leaders also were trying to defuse the issue. On Tuesday Baddeley and Shakespeare<sup>313</sup> met the Acting Premier, Bruxner, and "expressed the fear that if the food relief questionnaire was not withdrawn serious trouble would follow on the northern coalfields." They urged that the offensive questions be dropped from the forms. In an obvious attempt to delay the issue until tempers had cooled they asked that the Government "refrain from demanding that the forms should be filled in this week."

Bruxner, not surprisingly, repeated that "the Government would not submit to dictation," and added: "The Government had no desire to take notice of the recent burning of the forms."<sup>314</sup>

By Tuesday the agitation had spread to the south coast. Large meetings were held in a number of centres, all but one deciding that the forms should be burnt at large central demonstrations to be held at Bulli on Friday 28th and at Wollongong on Friday November 4th.<sup>315</sup>

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313. (The Labor Mayor of Cessnock.)

314. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

315. Ibid.

There was also a near-riot at Glebe.<sup>316</sup>

At about 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday a crowd gathered outside the Glebe Town Hall; descriptions of its size range from 300 to 500 to 800 to 1,000.<sup>317</sup> As it is clear that the crowd quickly swelled these estimates could all accurately describe the size of the crowd at different times. The descriptions of the fight would suggest that more than 300 were present. All the press reports note that there were many women present.

As with the Paddington demonstration, the police immediately acted to prevent any speakers from addressing the crowd.

The Sun noted:

"The nucleus of a meeting of protest had assembled on the steps of the Town Hall, but was told by the police to disperse. Then an effort was made to engage a room in the Town Hall, according to some of those present, but this, it was said, was refused, and the men calmly walked away, as though they intended to leave the vicinity altogether.

Instead, however, they crossed a narrow street beside the Town Hall and the leader sat up on an adjacent hotel window ledge.

A number of his companions formed a bodyguard around him and he commenced to address the crowd which

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316. L.D., 26/10/32, p. 1, described it as a "serious riot".

317. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11: 300; Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9: 500; W.W., 28/10/32, p. 1: 1,000; Mr. Issy Wyner in Interview in 1970: 1,000; Stan Moran in interview in 1970: 800.



had rapidly grown to 500, and included many women. The two sergeants and Constable Cross advanced on the bodyguard which, eye-witnesses said, stood shoulder to shoulder and resisted the police.

'Sergeant Howard drew his baton', declared a man who had seen the whole disturbance, 'but as he raised it above his shoulder a man behind him plucked the baton from his grasp and struck him a terrific blow on the top of the head.

He reeled about the roadway and endeavoured to draw his revolver. Meanwhile the attack was being concentrated on Sergeant Ellis and Constable Cross.

Constable Cross was having a desperate time. A man who took part in the disturbance stated that a rioter stooped, put his shoulder under Cross, and lifted him from behind, hurling him face downward on the road.

Then the crowd gathered around the fallen constable and commenced to kick at his body. They shrieked 'Get his gun! .....

Cross however got to his feet and drew his revolver, which according to an onlooker had the effect of immediately quietening the mob.

The battle was waged for 20 minutes across the roadway, and batons, fists and boots were used mercilessly on the three plucky officers."<sup>318</sup>

The Herald report confirms that the police allowed no opportunity for the unemployed simply to discuss their grievances;<sup>319</sup> it also records the violence of the crowd. By its report, when a man attempted to address the crowd the three policemen "ordered the speaker to desist and the crowd to disperse." "The crowd moved but at once reformed. These tactics were repeated." Then the crowd began to attack back

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318. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9.

319. c.f. also L.D., 26/10/32, p. 1.

against police efforts to disperse them: Sergeant Ellis suffered a fractured nose, and two severe blows to the head, and was kicked to the ground.

"Meanwhile, Sergeant Howard was faring badly at the hands of an infuriated mob. He had drawn his baton, but it was taken away from him from behind. He then received a blow on the head, which split his scalp. Blinded with the blood that flowed from his injury, and dazed with the force of the blows, he was unable to defend himself further. He and Ellis were completely at the mercy of their assailants for a time. Constable Cross defended the sergeants. He fought his way into the centre of the mob and drew his revolver. That action had a sobering effect on the crowd, which promptly began to disperse.

Almost simultaneously, strong reinforcements of police arrived and the crowd disappeared."<sup>320</sup>

Communist reports blame the violence on the police. When Stan Moran began to speak "the police immediately rushed for him and dragged him by the legs from the platform. They then set about breaking up the crowd, swinging their batons freely and threatening with their revolvers."<sup>321</sup>

"The unemployed present became so incensed at this brutal treatment that they rallied to the defence and severely handled the police responsible. Eye-witnesses are all emphatic that the action of the police was absolutely unwarranted and brutal in the extreme."<sup>322</sup>

Apart from the differing apportionment of the blame for the 'brutality', the establishment and Communist press reports

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320. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

321. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8.

322. W.W., 28/10/32, p. 1.

obviously differ completely as to how many police were present: the former concentrate on the early part of the struggle when only three police were there, whereas it is clear that the latter are reporting the actions of the large body of police reinforcements.

The difference is partly just one of different time. There is no positive evidence as to how long the three police fought before reinforcements arrived, but it would seem that this was only a brief time. The Glebe Police Station is less than a quarter of a mile from the Town Hall, so reinforcements could have come in a few minutes. Issy Wyner and Stan Moran, who were present, confirmed that the reinforcements arrived rapidly and though their participation might imply bias, they both described the police arrival so vividly that their descriptions ring true. Wyner told me that about six carloads of police arrived almost immediately the demonstration started and started laying into the crowd. They chased him all the way to Harold Park.<sup>323</sup> Moran remembered "hundreds of police" coming up the hill with batons.<sup>324</sup>

The Herald reported that detectives immediately began to make enquiries and arrested three men. These were Moran, Tom Payne and Sharpe. They later arrested Noel ('Nobby') Eatock as well.

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323. Interview in 1970. Harold Park is close to a mile from the scene.

324. Interview in 1970.

Payne and Moran were charged with assaulting Ellis, Sharpe with 'inflicting grievous bodily harm' on Sergeant Howard. Eatock was charged with maliciously inflicting grievous bodily harm on Howard and with assaulting Ellis. The bail set shows that from the outset the case was regarded seriously: bail for Moran and Payne was £50 each and for the other two £100 each.<sup>325</sup>

Nobby had been arrested at the Redfern eviction fight and was Richard Eatock's brother. He was to claim throughout his case that he had not been present - which Wyner also stated to be the case. The partial records of the court case available suggest he was innocent.<sup>326</sup> Sharpe was not convicted, but Eatock was to serve two and a half years hard labour - the largest sentence given to a political prisoner since the I.W.W. case.

The Sun's note that a room in the Town Hall was denied the demonstrators is interesting vis-a-vis the attitude of the A.L.P. The Sun added: "One of the men involved stated that Mr. Keegan, M.L.A., had promised to attend their meeting this morning, but had failed to do so, and it was then that they had decided to take their own initiative, hold a meeting, and appoint speakers."<sup>327</sup> It would seem indubitable that if

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325. Sun, 27/10/32.

326. e.g. W.W., 10/3/33, p. 3.

327. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9.

the unemployed had been allowed to meet in a room no violence would have occurred.

A Workers' Weekly article reviewing the whole Glebe struggle, which was to stretch out till the weekend, noted that throughout

"the Social Fascists carried on their usual sabotage. Keegan, M.L.A., came to one meeting and advised filling in the forms. He was instructed to attend the following meetings but failed to appear. The Labor Mayor evaded giving the Town Hall for meetings by the device of keeping out of the way. After the police attack [presumably on the Tuesday] the Lang-controlled Council sent for police reinforcements."<sup>328</sup>

It is interesting that it was on October 21st that the majority of the Glebe A.L.P. branch decided to affiliate with the United Front, in opposition to the Labor aldermen.<sup>329</sup>

The Glebe A.L.P. branch also asked Beasley to address an unemployed meeting dealing with the Questionnaire. He replied that he "had more important work to do." The Red Leader sarcastically noted: "Who says the Left-wing Labor Party leaders are not organising the unemployed?"<sup>330</sup>

Wednesday, 26th October:

On Wednesday there was not the same tension and threat of extreme action at Cessnock, but feeling against the form

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328. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1; R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8, noted that the Labor aldermen refused "repeated requests to use the Town Hall."

329. R.L., 26/10/32, p. 8.

330. Ibid., 2/11/32, p. 8.

was as high as ever and the organisation of the agitation was consolidated.

Though the hoped-for complete stoppage did not occur there was a serious industrial hold-up. Whilst the press plays this down<sup>331</sup> and stresses the defeat of the 'all-out' plans, what is important is that so many workers did stop work, losing wages for at least a day and risking recriminations by the employers.

On Wednesday municipal employees and workers on the big sewerage job at Cessnock struck. More importantly, all the pits in the Cessnock district were idle.<sup>332</sup>

Though only a minority of lodges struck, and they only for a few days, the action was a significant gesture considering the almost complete absence of any strikes during the depression. At a time when workers would not strike over their own grievances the brief strike of the Kurri and Cessnock miners points to both the good united front work done in the area and the extremity of feeling against the form.

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331. The Herald particularly played down the importance of the action taken and claimed the defeat of the agitation when in fact it continued. e.g. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9, "no significance is attached to the stoppage of work at the Cessnock district collieries. They would, in any event, be working slack time."

332. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11; S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9; N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 1.

Though the complete stoppage did not occur, it must be remembered that the miners had recently voted against such an action when the issue was the basic wage reduction and other matters directly affecting them. (Significantly, the Cessnock miners had been the only ones to agree to a general miners' strike.) As the Newcastle Morning Herald, which favoured the united action of employed and unemployed against the form, noted: "The men in employment are having a gruelling time."<sup>333</sup>

To the shock and disheartenment of the protest leaders the collieries at the Kurri Kurri end of the South Maitland field which were idle on Tuesday resumed work on Wednesday. Some South Maitland pits did strike, however - notably Abermain No. 3 and Hebburn No. 1.<sup>334</sup>

That shops and business houses continued business as usual added a further blow, but no attempt was made to picket the shops.<sup>335</sup>

By now, calls for looting and direct action to take the dole had subsided; the unemployed now agreed that the tactic to be followed was to win over the employed workers to a strike, and to inspire more groups of unemployed to burn

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333. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 6.

334. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9. (N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 1, notes Kurri mines resumed work on Wednesday.)

335. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

their forms.

A meeting of about 500 Cessnock unemployed (including several women) decided against direct action at the present stage and against any action to close the shops.<sup>336</sup>

Amidst applause, Scanlon called on all his followers to keep their heads.

"'You recognise the position,' he declared. 'I am not one who will lead workers to catastrophe. Our greatest punch is through industry. If you went down the road and broke into the shops you would meet terrific trouble. There is every indication of other industries coming out, and we don't play with revolution or insurrection. There is a lot of loose talk going around that needs to be curbed.' He added, 'it was perhaps necessary to consider whether the resolutions had been wise in demanding that the shops should close.'<sup>337</sup>

The meeting elected a "Committee of Struggle" of thirty unemployed to extend the protest throughout the coalfields. The Committee arranged for each miners' lodge to add two delegates to the Committee.<sup>338</sup>

Though the unemployed now rejected the forceful taking of the dole, they were by no means cowed. At the meeting a large number of men made a "concerted rush" out to the street when a band of police walked past. They abused the police, but took no action.<sup>339</sup>

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336. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9; N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7.

337. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.

338. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9; N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7;  
R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8.

339. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.



By now the town must have resembled a garrison. The Herald noted that now there were about 120 police in the town, but this may well be an understatement. The Sun stated that "Cessnock awoke this morning (Wednesday) to find the town literally alive with police."<sup>340</sup> A Cessnock delegate to a Newcastle meeting on Wednesday night said that between two and three hundred police were parading through the town in twos and threes, fifteen yards apart.<sup>341</sup>

The Labor Daily on Wednesday stated:

"Action that, in the light of the inflamed attitude of the northern unemployed, can be considered only provocative was the Government's despatch of a contingent of over 200 police from the city to the coalfields last night."<sup>342</sup>

While the Government could claim that the threatening situation required this massing of police in the area, the action was arguably provocative. Anti-police feeling in the area still ran high: Rothbury was no distant memory, and several of the police drafted from Sydney had been present at Rothbury. On reflection it seems surprising that there did not break out a spontaneous and bloody fight between the Cessnock unemployed and the police. That there did not must be largely attributed to the actions of the unemployed leaders, who advised the unemployed not to lose their heads, but to

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340. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.

341. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

342. L.D., 26/10/32, p. 1.

concentrate on the protest issue rather than senseless confrontations. This shows a highly developed political consciousness.

Despite the resumption of work by the Kurri miners the Cessnock unemployed leaders were not demoralised. Over fifty delegates at the Cessnock Committee of Struggle meeting on Wednesday night "expressed confidence that the trouble would be extended and become state wide." They decided to build up the relief distribution activities of the W.I.R.<sup>343</sup>

As only thirty of the delegates were to be from the unemployed it appears that more than ten miners' lodges must have sent representatives to this meeting. The lodge delegates present declared their support for the struggle; though it is unclear whether this was to be moral support or full action, it seems the latter was meant.<sup>344</sup>

On Wednesday night a meeting of Newcastle unemployed declared that they would "stand solidly with the South Maitland men." J. Gregory, described as the District Secretary of the U.W.M., chaired the meeting.<sup>345</sup> About a thousand unemployed,

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343. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7.

344. Ibid., implies full support; S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9, says Cessnock miners' lodges did not disclose their decision, but delegates to the Committee of Struggle declared they would give moral support.

345. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

described by the Herald as "militant", decided to try to organise mass demonstrations throughout the State's industrial centres on Friday (28th) night. It appointed a delegate to go to Sydney to meet with metropolitan unemployed representatives and secured promises from Kurri and Cessnock delegates that meetings would be held in the South Maitland area. It arranged also to contact the South Coast unemployed.

The Newcastle demonstration would march through the city; a proposal to march between the tram lines to disrupt traffic was met with applause.<sup>346</sup>

Speakers attacked Kellock and the inaction of the union leaders.

The meeting elected a Committee of Thirty to collect the questionnaire forms from the unemployed, with a view to burning.<sup>347</sup>

West Maitland unemployed also held a mass meeting on Wednesday morning and reaffirmed their determination to burn the forms. Between 150 and 170 forms had already been handed in to an unemployed organiser, to be burnt when enough were secured.<sup>348</sup>

87 forms had been handed in at East Maitland,<sup>349</sup> a

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346. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.

347. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 8.

348. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7; S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 10.

349. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7.

delegate from that town who had been collecting forms stated he had only had five refusals.<sup>350</sup>

At East Greta most of the unemployed had handed in their forms to the unemployed organiser<sup>351</sup> and at Telarah most of the forms had already been burnt.<sup>352</sup>

When new forms were given to the unemployed at the Weston relief depot on Wednesday the U.W.M. Secretary collected them again at the gate as the men went out.<sup>353</sup>

At Lambton 150 unemployed met to protest against the forms.<sup>354</sup>

Also on Wednesday, miners' lodges in various parts of the South Maitland fields met to consider whether to support the general stoppage. Some lodges decided to work for the rest of the week, but to hold a combined conference over the weekend to decide future policy. The Herald noted: "It is expected that the conference will not favour any prolonged strike."<sup>355</sup>

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350. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 10.

351. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7.

352. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 10.

353. N.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 7.

354. Ibid.

355. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.

This procrastination was to weaken the whole struggle. It is likely that this delaying of any decision was a shrewd and somewhat cynical move of the union officials, who could gamble that by the weekend the unemployed workers' protest would have died down enough not to justify strike action by the employed.

Though these lodges were declaredly only working pro tem their action would weaken the resolution of the miners who were on strike. The balance between support for and opposition to strike action was so delicate that the sight of some collieries resuming work made the remaining strikers fear for their positions. The sewer workers, for example, decided to resume work if the miners did.<sup>356</sup> A delegate to one meeting of the Cessnock Committee of Struggle told how he picketed and spoke to the miners working at Stanford Main No. 2:

"We would have stopped the pit, but when the resolution was about to be put a man arrived on a bicycle and said 'Bellbird is going to start tomorrow.' You can imagine what effect that had on the meeting."<sup>357</sup>

Though they are not reported in the press, meetings were probably held in various metropolitan centres and on the South Coast on Wednesday. It seems that at Glebe at least a meeting was held.<sup>358</sup>

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356. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

357. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

358. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1. (A very obscure reference.)