

Thursday, 27th October:

On Thursday the support of the employed coalfields workers for the unemployed struggle weakened further.

The Herald claimed that the militants were "losing ground" and that there was "apathy among the unemployed to the form-burning proposal."³⁵⁹

It does appear that the peak excitement level had now been passed, but the Herald was over-eager to declare the protest dead. Indeed, the Herald's reports continually play down the importance of the protest actions. The dispute lasted for five more days, during which unemployed meetings continued to declare their determination to burn the forms, and more forms were burnt.

As with all the unemployed protests studied here the major impediment again to occur was the difficulty of sustaining a protest for more than a few days. It was hard to organise the unemployed to attend meetings day after day. Once there was any sign of a weakening of support, of some unemployed workers yielding, that would cause further irresoluteness. Most importantly, the economic difficulties were virtually insuperable. Although food depots were set up, they could not feed all the unemployed workers and their families who had lost the dole because of their refusal to complete the forms. By

359. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

Thursday hundreds of coalfields unemployed had received no dole for a week. What the Herald discerned as apathy was probably hunger and dejection. The difficulties I noted in regard to the boycott of the dole by the South Coast unemployed in 1931 are just as valid in this case: by burning their forms the unemployed were committing themselves and their families to hunger, for an unknown period of time. To refuse the dole is essentially a negative act, and after the few moments while the bonfire blazed there was nothing much for the protestors to do but wait.

That they should wait so long is what is important, not that they gave in in the end. It is also important that the demoralisation of the coalfields unemployed was largely caused by the withdrawal of support of the employed workers, rather than by the backsliding of the unemployed themselves.

On Thursday all the Cessnock collieries were again idle³⁶⁰ but on Thursday night a number of lodges decided to return to work on Friday.³⁶¹ The Newcastle Morning Herald reported that this was "expected to have the effect of settling the opposition to the relief Questionnaire on the coalfields."³⁶² It is not quite clear which lodges remained on strike. The Herald noted that on Thursday night only two lodges - Hebburn No. 1 and

360. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

361. Ibid., p. 1; S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10, says "the majority of miners" decided to resume work.

362. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 1.

Cessnock No. 2 - were still allied with the dole strikers;³⁶³ but both the Herald and the Newcastle Morning Herald reported that on Friday Abermain No. 2, Bellbird, and Stanford Main No. 1 were idle.³⁶⁴

However, though a handful of lodges supported the strike to the end of the week the backbone of support given by the employed workers was broken. Aberdare Extended also remained idle on Friday, but only because militants managed to reverse an earlier decision after the moderates left. The Herald noted that the original decision of the Aberdare lodge was "peculiarly significant, as the Aberdare Extended mine is the nearest to Cessnock" of the striking lodges.³⁶⁵

During the day, three hundred Cessnock unemployed attended a meeting called by the Committee of Struggle. "Very little business was transacted."³⁶⁶ They decided to try to stop work at the collieries.

An attempt to stage a boycott against visiting police by withdrawing domestics from hotels failed.³⁶⁷ This must be compared with the determined boycott after Rothbury and police-

363. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

364. Ibid., 29/10/32, p. 13; N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

365. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

366. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

367. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

picket clashes in January 1930. Then

"The men, women and children of the coalfields did their best to respond in kind to the police: the townspeople of Cessnock and Weston boycotted any hotel which served beer to police or non-unionists; women pickets kept watch all day outside the premises of shopkeepers suspected of serving police or non-unionists."³⁶⁸

The Committee of Struggle was not demoralised. On Thursday night it deliberated in camera for four hours. Progress reports from the various centres were said to be favourable. Delegates were elected to go to Newcastle and contact the Miners' Executive.³⁶⁹

At Cessnock and at Newcastle the Department of Labour and Industry officials issued new questionnaire forms, returnable at a later date, to the unemployed on Thursday. This was a clever move to weaken the unemployed workers' determination, for those who had already burnt their forms were now forced to reconsider, and the militants had to begin all over again the agitation for destruction of the forms. The Cessnock relief officer announced that those who handed in their forms would receive the dole retrospective from Monday. This, he said, was "a concession which parents and large families might consider."³⁷⁰

368. M. Dixon, op. cit., p. 25.

369. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

370. Ibid.; S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

At Newcastle unemployed organisers waited inside the bureau, to collect the forms from the unemployed. According to the Herald they "were only moderately successful. About two-thirds of the men who received the forms retained them with the idea of filling them in and returning them." The Herald would be likely to exaggerate support for the forms, but even if this figure is accurate the fact that a third of the men were still willing to destroy the forms shows that the unemployed were not "apathetic" about the form-burning.

That few forms were actually burnt at Newcastle does not show that there was no intent: the unemployed leaders simply did not have the forms -

"Men who were collecting the forms had an unexpected setback /On Thursday afternoon/. Sergeant Stubbs walked up to a man who held 190 forms collected during the day, and, stating that the forms were Government property, took hold of them and handed them over to officers of the Labour and Industry Department."³⁷¹

The number of resolute meetings at small coalfields centres on this and successive days again shows that the unemployed were far from apathetic.

At a meeting on Thursday at East Greta, Heatherill (a local U.W.M. organiser) announced that 90% of the Greta unemployed had handed their forms in to be burnt. Though Howarth, M.L.A., told the unemployed not to burn their forms

371. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

the meeting made a bonfire of them.³⁷²

At Maitland a meeting of women decided to canvass the unemployed to hand in outstanding forms to a general unemployed meeting.

Kurri U.W.M. held a meeting at which Booth and Cameron, M.L.A.s, were condemned for advising the Cardiff and Wallsend unemployed not to burn the forms. The Kurri unemployed said that the police were harassing them - for example, unemployed men playing dominoes in a hotel had been removed.³⁷³

The 'United Front Movement of Employed and Unemployed' called a mass meeting at Stockton; 170 men and women attended. With only two dissentients the meeting expressed its approval of burning the forms and a large number of forms were handed in. A Committee of Action was formed to canvass more support, and to organise a meeting on Sunday.

Three hundred unemployed at Boolaroo decided to leave the burning in abeyance for the moment, but elected a Committee of 12 to organise a meeting on Sunday.³⁷⁴

(This report of the Boolaroo meeting shows how a newspaper can selectively structure the picture it wishes to present.

372. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10 and p. 1.

373. Ibid., p. 10.

374. Ibid.

The Herald does not note the successful local meetings, but in line with its 'growing apathy' line, simply states:

"So few people attended a meeting at Adamstown to discuss the proposal that proceedings were abandoned. Boolaroo unemployed reached no decision,³⁷⁵ and West Wallsend unemployed adjourned to tomorrow."

The Boolaroo unemployed did not 'reach no decision': they decided to organise further.)

On Thursday there was another short but serious fight at Glebe.

The I.L.D. had called a meeting at the Glebe Town Hall, to protest against the denial of free speech and the police attacks on Tuesday. (It was in regard to this meeting that the Workers' Party was later to charge the C.F.A. leaders with defective leadership and betrayal; however, here we are only concerned with what actually happened at the meeting.)

The Herald reported that the crowd numbered four hundred, including "many well-known Communists". Again a policeman ordered the speaker to "move on" as soon as he began.³⁷⁶ (The Newcastle Morning Herald noted: "The trouble started when Sergeant Dunn ordered a crowd at a Communist meeting to move on.")³⁷⁷

The Herald continued:

375. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10.

376. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 1. There cannot have been very many Communists, as the Party had told many members that the meeting was cancelled; L.D., 28/10/32, p. 1, says 500 in crowd.

377. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9.

"The crowd was angry, and the policeman was hooted and hissed. Other policemen, who were on duty on the outskirts of the crowd quickly found themselves surrounded by a hostile throng, and an outbreak of violence seemed imminent. The crowd, urged on by angry insulting voices from the rear, pressed around the police. Blows were struck, and in a few minutes the street was a seething mass of struggling forms.

In the meantime, police reinforcements had been summoned, and two lorry-loads of constables were rushed to the scene. In self-defence, many of the police were compelled to draw their batons. The police quickly gained the upper hand, and the crowd scattered in all directions. Five minutes later the street was cleared. Women and children were flung aside in the wild scatter for safety, and several alleged that they had been trampled upon."³⁷⁸

As with the Tuesday Glebe demonstration, the Herald is at pains to stress the violence of the crowd and tactfully only mentions that the police drew their batons, and not how they used them. Again the Communist press blames the violence on the police. It noted that the meeting was

"suddenly attacked by 200 police, smelling strongly of rum, and obviously given a free hand by Stevens to terrorise the populace. They batoned indiscriminately - aged, women and children, passers-by."³⁷⁹

"In Rothbury fashion, the police rushed off the lorries, batons drawn, hitting out madly at anyone - man, woman or child - whoever they could reach."³⁸⁰

This view is supported by the statement of one of the participants to the Labor Council meeting that night:

378. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9. This also described the affray as a "serious riot".

379. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1.

380. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8.

"Without warning, four lorryloads of police drove straight into the crowd, scattering them in all directions. Police then leapt from the lorries and commenced bashing with batons all within reach."³⁸¹

That the Labor Daily, which was no more 'soft' on Communists than the establishment press, should so vehemently support this view is a strong argument for its validity. It stated:

"Assembled by Communist speakers at the Glebe Town Hall, a crowd of about five hundred unemployed were suddenly set upon by a hidden body of police without warning or provocation, and scattered in all directions by a vicious baton charge.

The attack by the police was designed, apparently, as a demonstration against the rioters who on Tuesday fought and injured three police officers."³⁸²

Sylvester was one of the speakers arrested. He said in court that he was 'knocked off his box and struck on the head with a baton.'³⁸³ Wyner told me that Sylvester was badly beaten up.³⁸⁴

Although the establishment and Communist press reports of the two Glebe demonstrations apparently conflict, that is no reason for discounting the latter. Both are equally emotional; the difference simply arises from the stance of the reporter.

381. Sun, 28/10/32, p. 9.

382. L.D., 28/10/32, p. 1.

383. N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 1.

384. Interview in 1970.

There is again no point served by here apportioning blame for the initiation of the violence. To do so would be to detract from the issue of the violence itself. For what is of importance is the great anger of the crowd. These Glebe demonstrations were two of the most violent police-citizen confrontations of the period. Of course, they did not nearly equal the bloodiness of the eviction struggles, but in those the men who fought the police were self chosen militants, they were prepared for police attack, and for retaliation. The men and women who met at Glebe were, by and large, just ordinary citizens.

It is important to establish how much of the crowd took an active part in the fighting. Maybe those who kicked and beat the police were the "well-known Communists" the press noted were present. Certainly the men arrested on Tuesday and at least some of those arrested on Thursday were Communists. But by both direct statement and implication the press reports show that the whole crowd approved of, and largely participated in, the two fights. To reiterate: "The crowd gathered around the constable and commenced to kick at his body."³⁸⁵ The Sergeant fared badly "at the hands of an infuriated mob."³⁸⁶ "The crowd was angry [It] pressed around the police."³⁸⁷

385. Sun, 25/10/32, p. 9.

386. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

387. Ibid., 28/10/32, p. 9.

The action was obviously not confined to a few militants. The violence shown the police by these hundreds of citizens shows that the grievance against the forms was widely and deeply felt: this was no mere 'political' agitation instigated by militants far to the left of the ordinary feelings of the unemployed. These people were willing to act in defence of themselves, they were militant.

As with the crowd at the Paddington demonstration, there was a clear limit to the militancy of these people, beyond which they would not go. Yet within this limit - a limit defined by fears of wholesale arrests and bashings, and police bullets - they were determined to resist. The emphasis of the establishment press reports is on the cowardly nature of these demonstrations: they would fight a handful of police, but not lorryloads of baton-swinging police. It was not cowardice so much as a proper realisation of the strength of the police that "sobered" the crowd when Constable Ellis pulled his revolver, and when large squads of police began batoning them.

Given the general low level of any revolutionary fervour in the consciousness of Australian workers of this time, it is not surprising that the Glebe crowd was not willing to take on large forces of armed police. What is surprising is that they should even fight a few.

It is important to see the action they took as a deliberate,

determined protest rather than simply a blind, irrational, impulsive lashing out at a few captive authority-figures. True, many may have simply fought back in spontaneous anger when the police started moving them on. But there is something quietly determined, something purposeful, deliberate, about the way the crowd reassembled and resisted the efforts to remove them for as long as possible.

The emotiveness of the references in the Sun and the Herald to the "infuriated mob" gives the impression that these crowds were simply blind mobs led by a few insidious agitators. The reporters may truly have seen these people as a mob; however, the term enabled the press to ignore the grievance these people were protesting, to rule out the significance of their action while highlighting its violence.

While the frames of reference are totally different, and the Glebe protest was obviously not even a pale reflection of the French Revolution, it is interesting in this context to remember Rudé's detailed differentiation between 'the mob' and 'the revolutionary crowd'. Rudé shows how historians over the centuries had obscured the sense of purpose that many of the Parisian rioters had had - and hence obscured their political consciousness and decision to act - by describing them simply as a mob. The term is dismissive, as well as perjorative. Rudé instead described them as a 'revolutionary crowd'. He points out that the crowd was "violent, impulsive, easily

stirred by rumour and quick to panic", but that it was not "peculiarly irrational" that it did not act just in a blind, spontaneous outburst of rage but, to some extent, in conscious, deliberate protest against formulated grievances.³⁸⁸

By describing the Glebe crowds as 'mobs', the press was able to dismiss their determination, their political consciousness, and any consideration of the justice of their case against the forms.

Five men and two women were arrested at the Thursday Glebe demonstration and several people went to hospital.³⁸⁹ When the cases came before the Glebe Police Court the next Tuesday, "police took special precautions to prevent a demonstration." Despite this, two hundred gathered outside. The sentences in this instance were fairly light:

Sylvester - fined £2 and 6 months bond.

Michael Paull (21, labourer) - 12 months bond.

Arthur Grosvenor (56, labourer) - 12 months bond.

Lucy Eatock (59) - 12 months bond.

Hugh Brennan (43, labourer) - £2 fine.

Southee was remanded on a charge of assaulting

Constable Ellis (presumably on the Tuesday demonstration).³⁹⁰

388. c.f. G. Rudé, The Crowd in History, New York, 1964, p. 257; The Crowd in the French Revolution, Oxford, 1959, Chapter XV. (He has further explored this analysis with English crowds.)

389. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9.

390. Ibid., 2/11/32, p. 5. (No mention of second woman.)

Of those who went to hospital, the Labor Daily specifically mentions three who suffered severe head wounds and contusions.³⁹¹

Friday, 28th October:

Friday was the day set down for mass demonstrations at the coalfields, metropolitan and south coast centres. The Sydney Morning Herald again reported "apathetic demonstrations": "Support for the agitation against the Government's food relief policy is gradually dwindling. The militants' plans for simultaneous mass demonstrations had only mild results."³⁹²

It is true that the response did not equal the militants' dreams, but it was much better than the Herald would have had its readers believe. Many unemployed workers were still determined to burn their forms and the organisers still believed that the protest could be a success. A much more encouraging account of the Friday's activities is given by the Newcastle Morning Herald; as its reporters were stationed in the main action centre it is reasonable to believe that its account is the more accurate.

At Newcastle "some hundreds of men" marched through the

391. L.D., 28/10/32, p. 1. (S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9, states that three of the arrested men were treated for "slight head injuries.")

392. S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13.

streets, yelling that they would burn the forms.³⁹³ (The Labor Daily estimated that a thousand marched; many more watched.)³⁹⁴ Then a large crowd attended a meeting. Both the Sydney Morning Herald and the Newcastle Morning Herald reported that the demonstration was orderly; this was not because the crowd was apathetic, but because the organisers advised such behaviour. At the meeting Gregory told the men to continue in an orderly fashion. He said he believed the movement had the sympathy of the people of the whole Commonwealth and that "they wished to do nothing to alienate that sympathy and support." Instead of marching between the tram-lines as had been earlier decided, the march followed a route decided by the Mayor and the unemployed leaders because "they did not want a clash with the law."³⁹⁵ The Newcastle Sun noted that "the demonstration lost nothing in effectiveness because of its orderliness."³⁹⁶

The meeting unanimously agreed to Gregory's proposal against signing the form, and his request that the forms be handed in was "liberally responded to." The forms were to be burnt at Islington Park on Sunday. After two hours the meeting

393. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

394. L.D., 29/10/32, p. 6.

395. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

396. The Newcastle Sun, 29/10/32, p. 3.

slowly and quietly broke up.³⁹⁷

Of the situation in Cessnock the Sydney Morning Herald reports: "Cessnock was quiet. There was a big falling off in the attendance of the unemployed meeting, only about 200 being present." The response to the planned demonstration "was so poor that it had to be abandoned."³⁹⁸

That the Cessnock response was less than usual was thanks to Mayor Shakespeare.

Shakespeare had already obstructed the attempts of the unemployed to unify the struggle. He had refused to allow the A.L.P.-Citizens Relief Committee (which was giving aid to those who had lost the dole because of the struggle) to work with the W.I.R. (which was also giving aid.)³⁹⁹ (Ironically, this seems only to have hampered the A.L.P. relief group: on Friday the W.I.R. opened a relief depot at Aberdare and another one at Cessnock, whilst the A.L.P. had to close one depot because of lack of funds.)⁴⁰⁰

On this occasion he refused the unemployed permission to hold their procession. News of his decision spread rapidly

397. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10. (This report confuses the vote, saying the crowd voted for the forms; but it is clear from Gregory's jokes and the rest of the report that the men voted against signing.) S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13 simply notes "an apathetic procession" and that the police had no need to interfere.

398. S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13.

399. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10. (c.f. also Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11.) Shakespeare was also the President of the Cessnock A.L.P. League.

400. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

through the town and many assumed that the meeting was cancelled. So only two hundred initially turned up; several hundred more were later attracted when the band started playing.

The Committee of Struggle still had faith in the protest. The unemployed meeting on Friday morning was small because a large number of men were picketing the working pits (to no avail) or attending lodge meetings. Scanlon reported that the engine drivers were in sympathy, and another delegate said he was confident that all the Kurri miners would be out next week.

The organisers at Cessnock, as at Newcastle, did not want the unemployed to be sidetracked by scimmages with the police. During this meeting, a delegate told the unemployed "not to do anything silly in the streets and come into conflict with the police."⁴⁰¹

The Sydney Morning Herald does not mention the successful meetings held at other coalfields centres on Friday. Though these were not as determined as some earlier in the week, they were far from apathetic.

At West Maitland about five hundred unemployed workers and other citizens assembled outside the Trocadero Theatre. Though the meeting was orderly, few moved off the roadway when

401. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8, notes that Shakespeare forbade processions.

speakers asked them to. No decision was asked for regarding the burning of the forms, but this is no proof of quelled determination, for at West Maitland, as at Newcastle, the police had managed to take the collected forms from the unemployed organiser.

An East Maitland meeting confirmed the decision to burn the forms, but by a narrow vote the action was deferred till Sunday.

At Mayfield five hundred declared they would stand solidly with the coalfields unemployed and refuse to sign the forms.

A large number of unemployed assembled at Abermain and marched to Weston where a meeting was held. Later a procession of over one thousand, headed by the Abermain and Weston pipe bands, marched back to Abermain, where over two thousand attended another meeting and elected a Committee of Struggle to organise further protest.

There was also a large meeting at West Wallsend, which protested against the preference system on relief work and Social Service cuts as well as the Questionnaire.

At Kurri one hundred unemployed held a march.⁴⁰²

Though the original plan of the Newcastle unemployed on

Wednesday had been to try to arrange demonstrations throughout the state on Friday, the activity was centred on the coalfields. The failure of any wide campaign was possibly partly due to bad organisation by the Communist Party, as the Workers' Party was to claim. However, there had also been only one day to organise the campaign.

There was however a militant meeting of South Coast unemployed. Men from Scarborough, Coledale, Austinmer, Thirroul, Bulli and Woonoona met at Slacky Flat and burnt "hundreds" of forms. The police confiscated an effigy of Stevens which they were going to hang.⁴⁰³ A motion was carried (reportedly by a majority of one) demanding a 200% dole increase and calling on all workers to cease work as a protest against the dole cut and the Questionnaire.⁴⁰⁴

Whether or not the Workers' Party is right in blaming the C.P.A. leaders for the weakness of the Friday meeting at Glebe - and it probably was correct - this meeting was pretty quiet. A large crowd (estimates vary between 1,200 and 2,000) met outside the Town Hall and protested against the forms and police brutality. However no resistance was offered (it seems on the advice of Communist speakers) when the police moved them down to the Post Office, a few hundred yards away. The

403. Ibid.; S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13, only says "a number of forms burnt."

404. S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13.

crowd was quiet, but not cowed. Though the Sydney Morning Herald stressed their passivity (presenting this as proof of their defeat by the police) it is clear from the Newcastle Morning Herald that the police had feared trouble.⁴⁰⁵

The Workers' Weekly presented the episode as a victory: that the "police terror" on Thursday "failed miserably" was shown by the great attendance on the Friday. "This was too much for the cops, who, beyond shifting the meeting one hundred yards, kept the peace."⁴⁰⁶

It is true that the "police terror" failed to cow the Glebe unemployed; it seems however to have worried the C.P.A. leaders. The yielding to police pressure to move the crowd was a downswing from the determined resistance shown on Tuesday and Thursday.

Saturday, 29th October:

A conference of delegates from the coalfields unemployed organisations and militant groups met at Cardiff to consider their plans. They were obviously still confident, and believed the struggle could be extended. Most delegates reported that the unemployed in their districts were in favour of burning the forms. This must be taken as their true appraisal of the

405. S.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 13; N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.
(W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1, says 2,000 in crowd.)

406. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1.

situation (though of course they may have involuntarily over-praised the position). Speakers at a mass meeting might express confidence they did not feel, in order to build up the morale of the crowd, but at a meeting called for analysis and policy-making it would be against the interests of the organisers to present a situation which they did not believe to be true, for wrong plans could only result.

The conference decided to call meetings in all areas around Cardiff and set up action committees to collect forms.

It also decided unanimously to set up a central governing body, of delegates from each action committee, to create a United Front of Unemployed and Employed, shopkeepers and small farmers. This was to be formed in the coming week.⁴⁰⁷

Sunday, 30th October:

On the coalfields, Sunday was a day of unemployed meetings and Union and A.L.P. Conferences.

At Islington Park, Newcastle, a large crowd - 2,500, according to the Herald - cheered and sang the 'Red Flag' (with hats removed) as a hundred forms were burnt. (It must be remembered that the police had already confiscated many collected forms.) A large committee was elected to carry on the

407. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 6.

dispute.⁴⁰⁸

W. Jeffries, a Communist, advocated meeting police violence with violence, to the cheers of the crowd:

"Your opponents don't come to meet you with feather pillows or icecreams. We have got to organise in the same way as they do. Lenin told you you must meet your opponents as intelligently and scientifically equipped as they are, and that is what I am going to do when I get in one of these fights.' (Applause).

A voice: 'Plenty of lead.' 'There are hundreds of you men who have had military training' ...⁴⁰⁹

At Wallsend three hundred met, and decided it would be futile to send a deputation to Parliament. By a three to one majority the meeting decided to burn the forms the next Wednesday. This meeting is an interesting comment on press reports of dwindling determination, for the Wallsend unemployed had decided not to burn their forms on the previous Sunday.

The Stockton mass meeting had a good attendance and was watched over by a strong force of police. A speaker said that the canvass of Stockton unemployed not to sign the form had been satisfactory.

The West Maitland unemployed met, but had been thwarted

408. N.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 7; S.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 9. (The S.M.H. again says the meeting not very successful and most of the crowd there through curiosity, which is invalidated by its own report of support for Jeffries.)

409. S.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 9.

by the police taking their forms.

East Maitlanders, however, held a successful meeting, and a large number of forms were thrown in the fire. It was said that 50% of the forms from the area had been burnt. Again the unemployed leaders did not attempt to coerce the unemployed. A speaker announced that he had 150 forms, and that anyone who wanted his form back could have it. A few did ask for their forms, but threw them back into the fire later.⁴¹⁰

A large meeting at Merewether declared its solidarity with the Cessnock unemployed. The chairman stated that 75% of the local unemployed had handed their forms to the committee and a large number of forms were handed in at the meeting.

That a number of meetings deferred the actual burning does not show that they had reneged on the decision to burn the forms. A Maitland delegate at Merewether said the Maitland unemployed were "solid to a man" but "were just marking time till those in the lower districts became better organised."⁴¹¹

The Sydney Morning Herald reported a "dispirited" meeting of 150 at Whitebridge, representing the unemployed of Charlestown, Dudley, Redhead and Kahibah as well. However,

410. N.M.H., 31/10/32, pp. 7-8; S.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 9.

411. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5.

forms were burnt so those who turned up must have been enthusiastic. One speaker reportedly said that the agitation was receiving little support in the large centres of Adamstown, Lambton, Waratah, Georgetown and Broadmeadow. The lack of agitation in Broadmeadow is strange, for the Broadmeadow U.W.M. was frequently mentioned in the Workers' Weekly.

This meeting also demanded adequate food and clothing for schoolchildren and called on the employed workers to join the struggle.⁴¹²

The Pelaw Main, Richmond Main and Stanford Main No. 1 lodges had called for a combined meeting of their members at Kurri on Sunday. Kellock and Hoare were invited, and only bona fide Miners' Federation members were allowed to attend.⁴¹³ This ruling makes it clear that the lodge officials who called the meeting did not want the vote to support the unemployed struggle (for many unemployed miners would have become unfinancial union members). We have already noted that the Herald had predicted that the weekend miners' conferences would not favour any prolonged strike.

As well as Hoare and Kellock, Scanlon and Reed (of the

412. S.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 9; N.M.H., 31/10/32, p. 7, reports that forms were burnt at Whitebridge. A Lambton meeting on Monday decided not to burn the forms by 43 to 21, N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5.

413. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

Kurri unemployed) addressed this meeting. After six hours debate on the attitude to be adopted to the struggle, the meeting decided by 287 votes to 63 that the Miners' Federation Board of Management be called together on Monday (the 31st) and that aggregate meetings of miners be held on Tuesday to discuss the matter. It decided that all miners should work on Monday; a motion that work should cease immediately and until the unemployed demand was granted was lost.

An aggregate meeting of Cessnock miners on Sunday did not so definitely withdraw support from the unemployed, but it really gave little ground for optimism. This meeting rejected a proposal to return to work on Monday, but decided to hold another aggregate meeting on Tuesday.⁴¹⁴ The Cessnock miners were obviously keeping a close eye on the support given by other lodges and - quite naturally - did not want to be the only group risking their jobs.

The halfheartedness of the support of the employed workers appears to have been fairly general. The Cessnock sub-branch of the Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association agreed to send two delegates to the Cessnock Committee of Struggle, but each member declined to be a delegate.⁴¹⁵

Earlier in the week the A.L.P. had decided to hold a

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

415. Ibid.

conference of the coalfields branches at Kurri on Sunday.⁴¹⁶
This reportedly was to aim "to take a lead in the matter of food relief" and "to concentrate upon the question of unemployment."⁴¹⁷

This meeting, which also lasted six hours, was attended by James, M.H.R., and Booth and Baddeley, M.L.A.s. The meeting finally resolved:

"that this conference views with disgust the policy adopted by the Stevens Government in reducing the dole allowance by 20%. Having regard to the fight being presented by the unemployed in this district this conference endorses the action adopted in resisting intrusion upon their rights and privileges, and for the purpose of defining a fighting policy we demand the A.L.P. executive to arrange a conference of all trade unions to combat the onslaught on the working class forthwith. We recommend to the unemployed not to sign the questionnaire. That the delegates go back to their various branches and advise that where no relief body is in existence that one be set up immediately."⁴¹⁸

On first reading this is determinedly militant. On closer study most of the proposals are in line with general A.L.P. policy and organisational forms: the meeting called on the A.L.P. Executive and the unions to lead the fight, rather than endorsing the militant committees already established by the unemployed. The branches were given no lead to join in the organisation of the struggle, but were simply to run A.L.P. relief centres.

416. Ibid., 27/10/32, p. 7.

417. Ibid., 28/10/32, p. 10.

418. Ibid., 31/10/32, p. 7.

But the resolution did advise the unemployed not to sign the questionnaire. This contradicted the earlier advice given by Labor parliamentarians to unemployed meetings and went against the efforts of the Labor leaders to have the whole protest delayed or quietened.

(On the same day the Swansea A.L.P. Relief Committee had convened an unemployed meeting; Hughes, a local Labor leader, had advised the unemployed to fill in the forms. There was no United Front speaker at the meeting because, Hughes said, the Relief Committee "was not connected with any other body." It seems clear from a couple of interjections that United Front speakers would not have been allowed to put their case.)⁴¹⁹

Why the change of position? The only explanation can be that while the Parliamentarians and other Labor leaders, such as Shakespeare, opposed the protest, a large number of A.L.P. members and delegates to this conference supported the agitation. The Workers' Weekly, when noting that the Northern A.L.P. branches had pledged support for the struggle, added that many A.L.P. locals had been militantly involved in the agitation.⁴²⁰

419. Ibid., 1/11/32, p. 6. There were 100 at the meeting; it voted not to burn the forms by 48 to 19. (Hughes stated that the politicians were divided whether the forms should be burnt. I have been able to find no evidence of any supporting the burning of forms.)

420. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 4.

Monday, 31st October:

Cessnock was quiet on Monday, but the strike still continued, though tentatively. All the collieries in the area except for Abermain No. 2 were idle.⁴²¹

All the Kurri pits worked.⁴²²

The Miners' Board of Management met at Newcastle Trades Hall (in accordance with the decision of the Sunday Kurri meeting) and decided the advice to be given to aggregate meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday. "The policy decided upon was kept a secret, but it is believed that the men will be strongly advised not to engage in a losing fight," the Sydney Morning Herald reported.⁴²³

The Herald deserves no prize for perspicacity. The attitude of the top Miners' Federation officials had been clear from the outset. It was only the rank and file miners and some lodge officials who had ever supported the agitation. In the first few days the protestors, both employed and unemployed, had been able to reject the Union officials' attempts to control and stop, the agitation. But as soon as those lodge officials who opposed united action reasserted their control, the strike

421. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5.

422. S.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 9; (The N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5, only names 3 working pits at Kurri.)

423. S.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 9.

had weakened. When the Kurri lodges called in the Board of Management, the end was clearly in sight.

The only reported action on Monday was at Kurri. By 8.00 a.m. between two and three hundred unemployed had gathered outside the dole office at the Court House. When two men went in and collected the dole the crowd protested strongly, but no action was finally taken against the men. While this might seem to invalidate earlier evidence that the unemployed were not coerced into rejecting the dole, it seems that these men were strangers. It was claimed that one was a cavilled-out Lithgow miner. Speakers "explained that such persons were sent to the district to endeavour to break down the morale of the unemployed."⁴²⁴

The police moved the crowd away because "it was growing and becoming rowdy."⁴²⁵ Pickets remained and at 2.30 p.m. a detachment of police in two cars and one bus came from Cessnock, removed the pickets and stationed police at the Court House.⁴²⁶ Obviously the unemployed were still militant enough to worry the authorities.

The Kurri unemployed later sent a deputation to the local shopkeepers, who promised not to cash dole dockets until

424. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5.

425. S.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 9.

426. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 5.

Tuesday. 427

Tuesday, 1st November:

The Herald's predictions as to the advice of the Miners' Board of Management proved only too true. On Tuesday the miners' meetings voted against the strike; the unemployed leaders, accepting the fait accompli, advised the unemployed to sign.

On Tuesday the collieries in the South Maitland section of the northern field were idle, in order that aggregate meetings of miners could be held. Meetings took place at Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Abermain, Paxton and Bellbird.

Although there were at times rowdy interruptions, the Board of Management official speakers ultimately dominated the meetings. Their main argument was that the workers were too disorganised and isolated; they appealed to the self-interest of the miners: why should they stick their necks out, when other workers would not follow, and the times were so severe?

Hoare was the main speaker at the Cessnock meeting. Though there were only six hundred present at the beginning, the crowd quickly swelled. At this and the other meetings the miners were asked to vote on the resolution of the Board of

Management, which went:

"Realising that organisation is the imperative need of the times and that same should supplant hysteria and enthusiasm we are firmly of the opinion that the employed members should continue to operate until a policy has been formulated that will interfere with the economic life of the country by involving all workers."⁴²⁸

Hoare added that he fully supported the resolution. He reviewed the report of the A.C.T.U. on the need for Trade Union bodies to educate the workers towards better organisation, before any action could take place. The whole gist of his argument was that any action must be delayed. (Ross notes of Hoare:

"He was never as effective in solving problems arising out of disputes as in putting them in their class setting - which he did almost invariably, and impressively, in extenso. He was the propagandist par excellence, but that's where his activity tended to finish."⁴²⁹

Biggers, of the Miners' Federation Executive,

"said he was very sorry that the miners had been drawn into the fight, but they would have to get out of the trouble the best way they could He would agree to the mines stopping if anyone could show him how the people were going to be fed. The organisation could not assist them."

Evans and Scanlon, on behalf of the Unemployed Committee, appealed to the miners to vote against the resolution, while stressing that they were not trying to coerce the miners.

428. This and the subsequent account of the Tuesday miners' meetings from N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 5.

429. E. Ross, op. cit., p. 327.

Scanlon said "he would never line up to pull men off the job if they thought they should be on it."

Scanlon added:

"This is the eighth day that the unemployed have been without food. If the unemployed can put up a marathon strike, surely the employed can back us up. We do not advocate force; but I do say that the majority of the papers have been burned."

Scanlon admitted that a number of the papers had been signed, but not sufficient to warrant a retreat at this juncture.⁴³⁰ He appealed to the members to repudiate the resolution, and to carry on as a rank and file organisation."

However, after a general discussion, an "overwhelming majority" agreed to the Miners' Board of Management resolution. There is no evidence whether unemployed miners participated in the vote - Hoare had said that they were entitled to, but as the unemployed boycotted the vote at a number of other centres it is likely that they also did not vote at Cessnock.

The aggregate meeting at Kurri was

"one of the largest held in that centre, in which there /were/ five of the largest lodges. The proceedings were at times so stormy that the speakers had to resume their seats until order was restored."

The chief speakers were Kellock, and Mowbray (from the Board of Management).

The chairman ruled that there could be no amendments

430. A number of signed forms were handed in to the Cessnock dole office on Tuesday. N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 7.

proposed to the resolution.

Though Scanlon had been allowed to speak at Cessnock, it was clear that the Federation officials were not really willing to consider the point of view of the unemployed spokesmen. Kellock said of the Board of Management meeting:

"The position was gone into from every conceivable angle. The Board had a request that the unemployed should be permitted to address them. That was unnecessary. . . . He had said . . . that there would be no representation, as far as the unemployed were concerned, to the Board of Management. . . ."

Kellock also spoke to the Kurri meeting of the primary need for careful organisation, and of how the northern miners could not take action before consulting the other branches of the Federation. At this one member interjected "It is too slow," and throughout there were interjections and calls to "speed up the machinery." Kellock replied:

"'Keep your heads. I am one who is able to keep his head in a crisis. I am not easily carried away by hysteria or mass hypnotism.' (Interruption)."

This reference to hysteria and the reference in the resolution to hysteria and enthusiasm, was clearly an attack on the actions and appeals of the militant leaders.

Kellock finally worked on the economic fears of the miners: "They might yet all be looking for a feed."

Both Mowbray and Kellock took pains to reiterate how much they, and everyone, cared for the plight of the unemployed.

"Do not throw away that which you have got for something which you have not got. If you throw away the dole, where are you going to get food?"

The meeting went into uproar when Mowbray stated that he had signed a Questionnaire form, and could see nothing wrong with it. There was a motion that he be no longer heard, but the Chairman, obviously determined that the resolution should be passed, refused to accept it.

The Secretary of the Stanford Merthyr lodge also advised the Kurri miners to accept the resolution. It was finally passed by 464 votes to 186. It was stated that none of the unemployed members voted.

This decision raises two interesting, and fairly inexplicable, issues.

Firstly, why did the unemployed not vote? At at least one of the later miners' meetings the unemployed were able to swing the vote against the resolution. There is no reason given for this seemingly silly tactic of not voting. The possible explanation reflects great credit on the unemployed, and supports Scanlon's statement that they were not trying to coerce the employed workers: that is, that the unemployed felt that they had no right to vote on something that would affect the employed workers.⁴³¹

431. This explanation is likely, for at the Tuesday 25th meeting at Cessnock the unemployed had not voted on the strike proposals for this reason.

Secondly, it is somewhat odd that there was more opposition, both in vocal and voting terms, to the resolution at Kurri than at Cessnock, for the Kurri workers had returned to the pits whilst the Cessnock miners stayed on strike.

At Abermain about six hundred miners met. The resolution was carried with only about twenty-five dissentients; again a number of unemployed declined to vote.

At Paxton and Bellbird the resolution was carried by big majorities.

There was a further blow to the hopes of the unemployed leaders on Tuesday. At the Broadmeadow relief depot, 1,150 of the 1,400 who were entitled to draw rations handed in completed Questionnaire forms and received their dole. There was a "mild demonstration" by those who still did not agree to the forms, and some forms were burnt.

The Newcastle Morning Herald noted:

"A number of the people who handed in forms were said to have destroyed the original forms and then to have obtained fresh ones, while the majority who held out were said to be single men."⁴³²

The Government's tactic of offering replacement forms had obviously paid off. It is natural that it was the men with families who, after eight or so days without the dole, succumbed to the very strong pressure to yield. Though this

432. N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 5.

action was in turn to make the final break in the resoluteness of all the coalfields unemployed, it is most likely that the surrender of the Broadmeadow men was largely determined by the withdrawal of the miners. Whilst the miners' meetings were still being held when the Broadmeadow unemployed gave in their forms, they can have been in very little doubt as to the outcome.

On Tuesday night the Questionnaire struggle came to an "abrupt ending".

A deputation of Cessnock unemployed met Hales, the officer in charge of the Cessnock relief depot and asked what the position would be if they signed. He stated that relief orders would be made retrospective from the previous Monday, but unless forms were handed in on the next day (Wednesday 2nd) there would be no relief until November 10th.

Then the Committee of Struggle met with the Cessnock unemployed. The Committee stated:

"It is with regret that we, the members of the Committee of Struggle, have to advise the Cessnock unemployed at this stage of the fight to sign the callous and iniquitous questionnaire imposed by the Stevens Government. This action we attribute to the callous and deliberate sabotage of the employed and the northern executive and their lackeys, who exerted every effort to belittle these workers who initiated the fight in the early stage of the dispute. We are firmly of the opinion that had the employed workers been given a lead by the above-mentioned leaders (traitors) they would have stood behind the unemployed. We regret that those employed workers still have the trade-union legalist outlook."⁴³³

433. Ibid., p. 7.

The unemployed accepted the recommendation.

The Sydney Morning Herald noted that three things were responsible for the sudden decision: Hale's announcement, the withdrawal of the miners, and the signing of the forms at Broadmeadow.⁴³⁴

A large unemployed meeting at Kurri on Tuesday night also decided to sign the forms. The Kurri unemployed had remained solid until this time: on Tuesday only a very few had handed in the forms.⁴³⁵

Wednesday, 2nd November:

Although the struggle was really over, miners' aggregate meetings were held in the lower district collieries, which were idle on Wednesday.

At Swansea, Hoare and Mowbray put the same arguments about the need for time for organisation. At this meeting the officials' formerly implicit attacks on the unemployed leaders were openly stated. Hoare spoke of the original unemployed meeting which had decided to protest, and of how the U.W.M. had misled the unemployed:

"The poor, unfortunate unemployed were being used and misled. The methods adopted were unscientific The leaders of the effort were only fooling

434. S.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 13.

435. N.M.H., 2/11/32; p. 7.

He criticised the actions of the President of the U.W.M. (Mr. Scanlon) and vigorously denounced some of the latter's followers in their policy of intimidation and their adoption of petty practices to appeal to the unthinking."⁴³⁶

The history of the protest shows that Hoare's statement was untrue - and treacherously so. The unemployed clearly were not 'being used': they were fully cognizant of the implications of their actions and at meeting after meeting had every opportunity to make their decisions felt. The leaders were certainly not 'fooling': they took great pains to set up a solid basis of organisation; after the brief endorsement of direct action they exhorted the unemployed not to provoke their own victimisation by senseless confrontations; their final decision to call off the struggle when they realised that those who did not comply with the regulations would suffer intolerable need shows the sincerity of their desire to help the unemployed rather than to continue the protest for any political aim. Finally, one of the most noticeable features of the protest was the marked lack of intimidation.

Hoare had been careful in picking his audience for the attack. At Cessnock on Sunday night and Tuesday he had "eulogised Mr. Scanlon for the fight he was putting up for the unemployed."⁴³⁷ Obviously Hoare knew that he would only damage

436. Ibid., 3/11/32, p. 5.

437. Ibid., 2/11/32, p. 5.

his own case by attacking Scanlon in front of Scanlon's Cessnock supporters. As Hoare's statements conflict, he was clearly wilfully lying on one of these occasions. Ross notes that Hoare "proved incapable of putting forward a consistent line."⁴³⁸

The Swansea meeting agreed unanimously to the Board of Management resolution. The meeting at Adamstown accepted it by a large majority.

The Speers Point meeting, though small, was disorderly. Here the unemployed men swung the vote against the resolution, the figures being 49 against, 38 for. The West Wallsend meeting also rejected the proposal, by 58 votes to 50.⁴³⁹

Although these meetings were very small, it is significant that they should declare against the resolution when they must have known that there could be no hope of extending the dispute.

After the Tuesday's decision only a few unemployed workers continued to hold out; that they should do so again shows how determined the protest had been. At Cessnock there was a rush at the dole office on Wednesday. At Labmtun 528 out of 560 relief recipients registered filled in the forms. At Wallsend 228 out of 240 did so. Because of the collapse of the fight the Wallsend unemployed did not burn their forms on

438. E. Ross, op. cit., p. 327.

439. N.M.H., 3/11/32, p. 5.

Wednesday as they had decided to.

On Wednesday night at Newcastle the Central Committee of the United Front held a meeting in conjunction with delegates from Cardiff, Whitebridge, Merewether, Wickham, Mayfield-Waratah, Adamstown and Wallsend districts. The meeting resolved that, in view of the developments at Kurri and Cessnock, it recommended Newcastle workers to sign the forms.

"At the same time efforts must be redoubled to maintain the fighting order of the workers in order to be able to successfully combat the victimisation of the unemployed due to the questionnaire, which will take place on a large scale."⁴⁴⁰

The Questionnaire Agitation - Observations:

The conclusions to be drawn from this agitation should be fairly self-evident, given the detail of the study. However, it is worthwhile reiterating a few points.

Firstly, the extent of the protest both in area and time, and its determination and militancy, are incontrovertable evidence of the outrage felt against this new form. That so many unemployed workers should feel so deeply against this new imposition,⁴⁴¹ that thousands of rank and file unemployed

440. Ibid., p. 6.

441. The Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator, ('Organ of the United Unemployed'. Address - Workers' Institute, Belmore), 11/11/32, stated that "not one [unemployed worker] signed [the form] who did not do so under protest."

workers should join a militant protest against the forms, provides yet another contradiction of the view that the unemployed passively accepted their fate during the Depression.

The Red Leader, noting the "tremendous wave of revolt" against the forms, stated: "Never has there been such keen feeling against the ruling class."⁴⁴² Though this is an exaggeration, this paper rightly points to the depth of feeling against the form, a feeling that obviously went beyond just the unemployed. Although the miners only briefly supported the dispute, in this agitation the employed workers gave more support to the unemployed than in any other unemployed protest over the dole in New South Wales, and probably in Australia.

I would stress that what is important in this struggle is the determination as well as the militancy. In fact, the militancy took different forms: that of the Glebe workers, who resisted when the police would not allow them to meet against the forms; the act of burning the forms; the continual declarations of opposition to the forms; the threat to sieze the dole; the attempts to close the mines. The point is that some of the militancy took cogent form in action; some of it may be less noticeable because it did not come to fruition - for example, the fact that in a number of areas the unemployed decided to burn the forms, or even gave them to the unemployed

442. R.L., 2/11/32, pp. 1, 8.

collectors, but did not eventually burn them.

When I first studied this struggle what mainly struck me were the fights at Glebe, and the form bonfires. Now I think that the most significant feature of the whole issue was the quiet determination of the coalfields unemployed, the fact that for more than a week many hundreds of them went without the dole, again and again voicing their resistance to the Government and the whole raison d'etre of the relief system.

This is by no means to deny the force of the actions that did take place: indeed, in terms of events, much more happened in this dole protest than in any other. There is unfortunately no evidence exactly how many forms were burnt, but in all the unemployed from more than a dozen centres burnt their forms: Cessnock, Weston, Kurri, Telarah, Greta, Newcastle, East Maitland, Whitebridge, Charlestown, Dudley, Redhead, Kahibah, and (on the south coast) Scarborough, Coledale, Austinmer, Thirroul, Bulli and Woonoona. Well over a dozen pits were idle at different times, some for a few days. Then there were, all told, forty odd reported meetings, and no doubt a number more not mentioned by the press.

It is partly the regularity of these meetings that expresses the determination of the unemployed; their resoluteness is also shown by the number who, though not burning their forms, did not complete them until it was obvious

that resistance was hopeless. These include, for example, the West Maitlanders (whose forms were confiscated by the police) and the Wallsend unemployed and others who had been waiting till the majority of forms were collected. There is, of course, no way of proving that they would have burnt their forms, but I believe that if the miners had not withdrawn, the unemployed in many more centres would have destroyed them. In other words, we must see the militancy not just in the events, but in the whole basis of opposition and determination.

What is important about this militancy is that it obviously represented the feelings of the rank and file unemployed. While Scanlon, the Glebe leaders and probably a number of the other organisers were Communists, it is simply impossible to hold, with Hoare, that the whole protest was the work of misleading agitators and misled dupes.

The second point to be reiterated is the reason for the sudden collapse of the coalfields struggle, and the even shorter life of the protest in other areas.

The failure of the agitation to gain much impetus in the metropolitan area, apart from Glebe, must largely be attributed to bad organisation by the unemployed leaders, especially, it would seem, to the weakness and unwillingness for militant struggle on the part of the C.P.A. elite. This of course reveals another factor involved in the failure - the general

dependence of the rank and file unemployed workers on others to give the militant lead.

(It is most likely, however, that there were a number of metropolitan meetings not reported by the press because no militant outrage occurred. The Red Leader later noted, for example, that the fight against the forms in the Canterbury-Bankstown area had "taken concrete form" though no forms had been burnt. Thousands of leaflets had been distributed, strong committees had been built to organise future action and a United Front conference, and the support of the local shopkeepers had been won.)⁴⁴³

We must here look more closely at the Workers' Party's allegations about the defects in the C.P.A.'s work in this agitation.

It claimed that "the campaign was not planned, and the sporadic outbreaks which occurred in several districts were not co-ordinated." This does seem valid. We have noted that the organisational groundwork done before October 21st was seriously lacking.

The next charge was even graver:

"At the height of the campaign, when there was an opportunity of extending it, the Party vacillated,

443. Ibid., 9/11/32, p. 5. c.f. also Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator, 11/11/32.

and the enthusiasm of the unemployed for the struggle was allowed to abate. A plan of campaign put forward by a lower Party organ⁴⁴⁴ advocating the organising of a series of synchronised meetings throughout the Metropolitan Area in order to break down police concentration, was termed 'adventurous' by the leadership of the Party, and those who put it forward were dubbed 'anarchists'.⁴⁴⁵

It further expounded the errors of the Party leaders in regard to the Glebe struggle:

"When, following a 'left' lead, the Glebe agitation against the Questionnaire developed unexpected mass support, everything that could be done to sabotage the struggle was done by the Party leadership. Contrary directives were sent out. Calls to support the Thursday night meeting (Oct. 27th) were made and cancelled at the last moment by the D.C. Secretariat, who apparently vacillated when faced with concrete struggle, and attempted to prevent the meeting being held.

It was obvious that the best way to call off the meeting (if they realised that the meeting was an incorrect move) was to come to the place of assembly and cancel it. This they failed to do, but adopted the opportunistic tactic of attempting to alienate mass support by notifying units and sections at the last moment of the cancellation. However, this belated change of front did not succeed in preventing the workers from rallying, and so the Party members (now in opposition) who were present, knowing nothing of the last minute decision, carried on until the meeting was smashed up by the police. On the following night (Oct. 28th) a mass meeting assembled at the Glebe Town Hall. This meeting, which was much larger than that of the previous night, was resentful of the terrorist tactics of the police, and could have been utilised to raise the struggle to a higher plane. Once more,

444. This is almost certainly a reference to The Tocsin. (Unfortunately issues from the relevant weeks are missing.) That the C.P.A. leaders declared this policy "adventuresome" shows it was put forward by the Left Opposition.

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

however, the Party leadership vacillated, and when told to move on by the police, led the retreat to the Post Office corner and held a 'tolerated' meeting, from which, disgusted with the timidity of the leaders, the workers soon drifted away. Thus, what should have been a mere incident in the struggle, terminated in an inglorious climax."⁴⁴⁶

This is quite probably accurate. After the arrests of Moran and Payne on Tuesday the leadership of the unemployed in the Glebe area would have fallen upon the Sylvester-Eatock group, who opposed the C.P.A. leadership from the left. The C.P.A. leaders were willing to see the unemployed movement suffer a setback rather than see it get into what they believed to be the wrong hands.⁴⁴⁷ It would be in line with their actions for them to prefer, and work towards, the disorganisation of the struggle if it was being led by leftists.

But probably more important than this personal, factional intrigue was the increasing moderation of the C.P.A.'s line, its increasing distrust of flamboyant, militant activism. I noted that the original endorsement of the agitation contradicted the Party's earlier strictures against 'leftist' dole-boycott tactics. It would seem that by Thursday 27th, possibly as a result of the arrests at Glebe and the threats of direct action at Cessnock on Tuesday, the Party leaders had reverted to their

446. Ibid., pp. 28-29.

447. For example the decision to replace the U.W.M. with the United Front of Unemployed when dissidents gained too much power in the U.W.M. Executive.

distrust of militant protests. Certainly, the Party quickly renewed its denunciations of 'leftism' in general, and began to assert that the winning of a large mass base around a petition or such was now the tactic to be followed instead of defiant protests. The Workers' Party was to argue that this showed a lack of faith in the workers' ability to struggle, and a renunciation of the organisational and leadership tasks of the revolutionary vanguard.

As to the specific charges about the Party's work in the Glebe struggle, the Workers' Party, though obviously biased, was probably right, though the term 'sabotage' possibly exaggerates the events. If the Party did at the last minute notify some groups that the Thursday meeting was cancelled, this would have caused confusion and would have undermined the amount of support for the meeting; this could only have facilitated the police attack. The Friday meeting seems clearly to have been badly led, and the charge that the workers' enthusiasm waned and that they drifted away from the struggle because of the vacillation and timidity of the leadership is again probably correct. As we have seen, the crowds at Glebe on Tuesday and Thursday were willing for action. Their behaviour was such that one would have expected their enthusiasm to continue. That the leadership disappointed them and turned them away from the struggle is the most cogent explanation of why, after the rapid build-up of excitement in Glebe, there was a sudden return to passivity.

Not all the blame for the poor response to the agitation in the metropolitan area can be ascribed to vacillation or even betrayal by the C.P.A. officials; the district unemployed organisers clearly did not properly prepare the unemployed for the struggle.

On the coalfields the leaders obviously organised the protest better; but there was also an advantage, compared with the Glebe situation, in that the leaders were not taken out of the struggle by arrests (and also, if the C.P.A. did deliberately undermine the Glebe struggle, in that the C.P.A. leaders were not on the scene).

However, despite this better organisation and the much greater support, the coalfields struggle suddenly collapsed. The history of the struggle clearly points to the two main reasons for its collapse: the general cause was the growing economic need of the unemployed; the specific deed that forced the climax was the withdrawal of the miners.

The first needs little recapitulation; the editorial of the Newcastle Morning Herald on the day after the Cessnock and Kurri miners' aggregate meetings is interesting in this regard:

"The overwhelming vote on the northern coalfield yesterday against any stoppage convinced the men out of work that they were fighting a hopeless fight. That feeling was expressed in the decision of the unemployed committee at Cessnock last night to recommend their followers to sign the questionnaire today. The Government still stands for its peculiar ideas of the feelings of workers denied the hope of employment, but the point is that while it takes this attitude all the

bonfires and fiery speeches will not produce food for those who need it. Even if the miners had elected to attempt to bring pressure upon the Government by closing the collieries, what hope could there have been of success?"⁴⁴⁸

The last question this editorial raises is really unanswerable. A week before, an editorial in the same paper had asked:

"Would it be too much for the unemployed to hope for the support from the workers in employment? If the employed and unemployed gave a striking exhibition of solidarity in defence of a principle which they considered to be vital, the effect would be incalculable."⁴⁴⁹

The paper at this stage had supported a strike.

Given the still-depressed state of the mining industry⁴⁵⁰ - many mines were working slack - it is probable that a strike would not have inconvenienced employers and the Government enough to force the withdrawal of the forms. Given the history - or rather, the lack of history - of strike action in the Depression it is unlikely that the strike would have been a success. It is clear that with the miners, as well as with the unemployed, economic need militated against action.

Any answer must however remain hypothetical. The fact

448. N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 6.

449. Ibid., 27/10/32, p. 6.

450. c.f. C.B. Schedvin, op. cit., p. 291. In detailing the form recovery took in 1932-1933 Schedvin notes "mining played a negligible part in the early stages of recovery."

that unions did not strike during the Depression seems to prove the Union leaders' view that they could not; but the lack of attempted strikes prevents us from knowing what results a strike may have had.

What is clear about this protest is that a number of rank and file miners for once supported strike action in the early stages of the dispute, and that it was their later change to opposition to the strike that killed the protest. In this protest the unemployed had relied much more than usual on the solidarity of the employed. It is arguable that if they had not put so much faith on the support of the employed workers, if they had, as was usual with dole protests, from the first relied on their own strength and concentrated on their own organisation, the protest would have lasted longer. Whether it would have had more success is again problematical. Once they had committed such a major share of the action to the miners, any hope of continuing on their own action alone was hopeless. The advice of the unemployed organisers to sign the forms, after the Tuesday miners' meetings, was undoubtedly the only course to be taken.

The change of heart of the miners was in large part due to the lead given by the Miners' Federation officials, as well as their fear of their own distress; indeed, the officials worked upon their fears of unemployment and distress.

The Workers' Weekly wrote that the coalfields unemployed workers' decision to fill in their forms was

"made necessary largely due to the action of sabotaging union officials led by Bondy Hoare So the Communist Party initiated the move for signing the Questionnaires to prevent the Government from starving the unemployed into submission."⁴⁵¹

The Kurri correspondent to the Red Leader already mentioned also charged that the struggle was "betrayed" by the officials, who were followed by many workers "imbued with Trade Union legalism."⁴⁵²

The emotiveness of the terms "sabotage" and "betrayal" probably only confuses the issue. The union officials no doubt genuinely felt that a strike would only hurt their employed members, and as has been noted both here and in Louis' study the union leaders in the Depression concentrated almost solely on their still-employed members. It is also clear however that the union leaders were partly acting with an eye to their own power, and their decision became part of the faction fight between Communists and non-Communists in the Union. Scanlon and his colleagues may also have been hoping to advance their own political sway but the actions of the unemployed organisers seem clearly to have genuinely and primarily aimed at improving the position of the unemployed.

451. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1.

452. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 8.

As far as the rank and file miners are concerned, their withdrawal of support is quite understandable. As to the actions of the leaders of the labor movement, both industrial and political, the militants' claims that they had been betrayed are also understandable. Hoare's attack on the unemployed leaders was a piece of political back-stabbing. That parliamentarians and union officials continually advised the unemployed to sign the forms undermined the campaign of opposition.

The Red Leader later pointed to the Questionnaire struggle as the highlight of 1932, adding:

"Had it not been for the treacherous actions of the reactionary trade union officials and the Labor Party politicians, who advocated the filling in of the forms, the fight against the Questionnaire would have been everywhere successful."⁴⁵³

This exaggerates: the campaign in the metropolitan area at least would still no doubt have failed and any ultimate success was dependent on solid, determined action from unemployed workers all over the state. But if the labor movement leaders in the coalfields area had simply taken no stand, had not advised the unemployed to sign, there would have been more chance of success.

One of the main interests of this protest is obviously

453. Ibid., 4/1/33, p. 1.

the workings of the alliance between employed and unemployed. The Communist Party had since the beginning of the Depression asserted the necessity of such solidarity; the achievement of such unity was one rationale behind the United Front Councils. This protest re-emphasised how difficult it was to effect this alliance.

Interestingly, the Communist Party felt that the unemployed organisers had erred in not showing the employed workers the benefit of unity. The Red Leader commented on the Kurri correspondent's analysis of the errors of the struggle:

"While /this report/ correctly lays the blame for the defeat of the struggle on the coalfields on the conscious treachery of the miners' 'leaders', the Committee of Struggle and the coalfield militants generally were seriously at fault in failing to link this fight with the immediate grievances of the employed miners, such as the seniority issue at Aberdare Extended. Mere solidarity appeals to employed workers were not enough."⁴⁵⁴

(The Bellbird miners, who gave comparatively good support, had complained that the dispute was badly organised.)⁴⁵⁵

The Red Leader later added that another defect of the organisation of the agitation was the failure to immediately set up a means of quick communication between the areas; hence in Kurri and Cessnock different approaches were made to the

454. Ibid., 9/11/32, p. 8.

455. N.M.H., 29/10/32, p. 10.

employed workers.

"This led to the feeling of the workers of Kurri (fostered by enemies of the M.M.) that we had 'put something over' them.

We made the next serious mistake when the mass picket, sent out to the two mines - Richmond and Pelaw Main - in an attempt to get the men to return home, abused the workers instead of putting the case for the unemployed.

The most serious mistake was in allowing the struggle to be diverted into the channels of trade union legalism.

Delegates from Cessnock and Kurri committees of struggle, and from unemployed organisations, agreed to the calling of a conference of lodge officials, who immediately diverted the question into the constitutional channels of the Miners' Federation. This was the beginning of the end; this was simply playing for time, and was right into the hands of Hoare and Co. The rest was easy; the unemployed were getting sick of the delay and enthusiasm began to wane."456

While the coalfields agitation was much better organised than most dole protests, the organisers may have fallen down vis a vis the needs of the employed workers. But given the stand of the union officials, and the hecticness of the few days when organisation could have been furthered, it is difficult to believe that the organisers could have done much more.

Finally, what success did the protest have? In terms of the aim of the protest this was non-existent: the forms were not withdrawn. The protest was, however, worthwhile. It showed

irrevocably, then as now, that the unemployed could and would act against attempts to impoverish and dehumanise them.

At the Speers' Point miners' meeting on Wednesday 2nd one militant urged a stoppage, stating that "although they would be defeated, by such defeats the working class would win their ultimate way to victory."⁴⁵⁷

It is in these terms that the importance of the protest must be seen. It was part of the long struggle by the unemployed throughout the Depression to assert that, even if no advancement was made, even if in fact serious setbacks were continually suffered, at least the right to fight was retained. Whether this appears merely negative or not depends on one's preconceptions of success.

The fight also had a more tangible achievement: it raised the morale of the workless and helped future organisation. The Red Leader noted:

"The fight against the dole questionnaire has laid a basis, in Sydney and on the coalfields, for a more solid unemployed organisation, and has raised the prestige of the M.M. and the United Front Councils of Unemployed in the eyes of thousands of workers"⁴⁵⁸

The Kurri correspondent declared:

457. N.M.H., 3/11/32, p. 5.

458. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 8.

"The gallant fight of the unemployed against the starvation questionnaire is betrayed and lost, but our ranks are more solid, our movement is strengthened and steeled. The real fruit of these battles lies, not in the immediate results, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers."⁴⁵⁹

The meeting at Newcastle on Wednesday 2nd of the Central Committee of the United Front and local delegates also claimed: "To retreat at this stage from the stand taken, of burning the Questionnaire, does not mean that the unemployed have been defeated, but that a change in tactics is necessary." It called on all workers to continue the fight and to build up the United Front organisation and the unity of employed and unemployed.⁴⁶⁰

The general lesson learnt from the agitation seems to have been the necessity of extending the organisation of the unemployed, in particular the alliance of organisations in the United Front.

The Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator expressed a common feeling:

"Never was the need for unity more exemplified than on the occasion of the introduction of the recent questionnaire

["All opposed it."] And yet what do we find? We are organised into this and that organisation, each having its own line and policy to follow, with

459. Ibid.

460. N.M.H., 3/11/32, p. 6.

not a connecting link between.

Nothing at all to keep us from pulling in all directions, and no way of arriving at any decision as to a common line of action. Imagine what an effective protest we could have raised against the dole form, had we been organised along correct lines.

No one will dispute the fact that to remain in our present disorganised state is making the task of the Government easy in whittling away the dole.

All are agreed that unity is essential. The question then is how is it to be obtained.

This is not for any one individual or any one organisation to decide but must be the outcome of the collective efforts of the whole of the unemployed.

The first step towards unity is obviously the closer co-operation between the existing unemployed organisations."

The paper then invited delegates from local unemployed organisations and also small shopkeepers to a unity conference.⁴⁶¹

The Newcastle United Front Central Committee had called for new tactics as well as a widened alliance. The Communist Party suggested new tactics:

"The immediate task now is to combat the action of the government in depriving a large percentage of the unemployed of food relief as a result of the filling in of the questionnaire.

461. Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator, 11/11/32. (The shopkeepers were warned that "there is every indication that they will be seriously affected by the operation of the recent questionnaire." From about this time the United Front Councils made increased efforts to win the support of shopkeepers. It was clearly to the advantage of the unemployed during a dole protest to have the local shopkeepers on side, for they could provide food on credit and hopefully could be urged to boycott the dole.)

To assist this, steps should be taken at once to raise an agitation for representatives of the unemployed to sit at the table while relief is being given out, such representatives to have official recognition and to take up with officials the question of all unemployed who are struck off the dole."⁴⁶²

Also, a monster signature campaign against the forms should be started, combined with continual mass meetings and deputations.⁴⁶³

The signature campaign began immediately, the protest opened anew in Lithgow and Broken Hill and the growing organisation of the United Front Councils in 1933 must partly be attributed to the climactic bang that the Questionnaire fight gave to the end of 1932.

Whether or not the action on the charges that the A.L.P. leaders had betrayed the Questionnaire protest, it is clear that they did nothing to help it and that they

462. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 8.

463. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 1.

THE NOVEMBER A.L.P. UNEMPLOYED CONFERENCE: GARDEN'S
ATTACK ON THE UNITED FRONT COUNCIL LEADERS.

The Questionnaire struggle was to produce unforeseen ramifications. Within a few days of the death of the coalfields dispute^y issues raised by the struggle were to widen even further the breach between the A.L.P.-Labor Council leaders and the United Front Council leaders. A short time later issues raised by the Glebe agitation, in particular disagreement over who should lead the mass defence group in support of Nobby Eatock, were to bring to a head the differences between the C.P.A. leaders and the left oppositionists in the Party. This led to the expulsion of Sylvester and others, the founding of a new unemployed and relief workers' organisation, and, ultimately, to the establishment of what was probably the first Trotskyist organisation in Australia.⁴⁶⁴

Whether or not one accepts the charges that the A.L.P. leaders treacherously betrayed the Questionnaire protest, it is clear that they did nothing to help it and that they opposed the United Front Councils and militant unemployed activity.

⁴⁶⁴. This is dealt with in the next chapter.

Immediately after the coalfields protest the Central Executive of the A.L.P., with strong support from the hierarchy of the Labor Council, called a conference aimed at setting up yet another new A.L.P. unemployed organisation. Though the A.L.P. may have done this even if there had been no militant protest - with Lang now in opposition the A.L.P. may have wanted a bit more than just charity groups - it is obvious that the protest had given a stimulus to the A.L.P.'s desire to reorganise the unemployed, for the protest had shown the size and strength of the United Front Council organisation. The Labor Daily noted before the conference that it would "give special consideration to the serious position that has arisen over the iniquitous dole questionnaire."⁴⁶⁵ This would suggest that the A.L.P. felt that the unemployed had found its activity over the Questionnaire sadly lacking, and was afraid that the lead given by the United Front Council movement had greatly increased its following among the unemployed.

A report in the Sunday Sun and Guardian about the rivalry over the allegiance of the unemployed is significant in this respect. Though a couple of details are slightly garbled, the account is essentially accurate. It stated:

"By persuading unemployed to make bonfires of their dole forms on the coalfields and at Paddington, the United Front of Unemployed, controlled by the Communists, secured a 'victory' over the Lang A.L.P. and the Labor Council.

465. L.D., 24/10/32, p. 5.

The Communists at the Trades Hall have been carrying on an intense campaign for the support of the unemployed for months and the Communists appear to be securing more members for their Unemployed Workers' Movement.

Next Sunday, however, the Lang forces will make an attempt to regain some of the lost ground by holding a conference of unemployed to define a fighting policy.

Communists are also using the unemployed as a backdoor entrance to the Lang A.L.P.

They are urging support for the socialisation movement, and have succeeded in having resolutions of censure carried against the Lang executive.

So strongly entrenched are the Red forces that it would not surprise if they captured the Lang A.L.P. unemployed conference next Sunday."⁴⁶⁶

This account confirms that the A.L.P. intended this conference to be a move against the United Front Councils. (Indeed, the Herald notes that "the conference decided to establish a body in opposition to the Unemployed Workers' Movement.")⁴⁶⁷ It is also interesting that this account confirms the recent growth of the United Front movement, and the alliance between Socialisation Unit members and the United Front.

Despite the hint that the 'Red forces' might capture the conference, there proved to be no possibility of this for delegates were rigorously vetted.

466. The Sunday Sun and Guardian, 23/10/32, p. 2. (The Conference was actually held two Sundays hence; there does not seem to have been any form-burning at Paddington.)

467. S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9. (The Herald regularly referred to the United Front Council movement as the U.W.M.)

In pre-conference publicity the Labor Daily had stated that metropolitan A.L.P. branches were urged to send two delegates. Though it was "desired that as far as practicable those who have taken an active interest in unemployed relief should be selected," where there was no time to appoint delegates the branches should send executive officers.⁴⁶⁸ As this invitation was made only a fortnight before the conference many branches may have had to send executive officers, who would have been likely to support the A.L.P. leaders. It is notable that there was no suggestion that unemployed workers might be the most suitable representatives of the unemployed.

The Conference, which was held at the Trades Hall on Sunday, November 6th, was attended by two hundred and seventy delegates.⁴⁶⁹ Some of these had been sent as delegates from a Newcastle A.L.P. Conference held the day before.⁴⁷⁰

The lengths to which the Conference organisers went to ensure that no opposition interlopers should attend seem almost farcical:

"The strictest secrecy was observed with regard to the conference Every delegate was questioned at the entrance to the Trades Hall, his credentials were examined, and a door-keeper was stationed in Goulburn Street with instructions to allow only delegates to enter the building."⁴⁷¹

468. L.D., 24/10/32, p. 5.

469. Ibid., 7/11/32, p. 6.

470. N.M.H., 5/11/32, p. 8.

471. S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9.

The Red Leader claimed that forty or fifty police guarded the Trades Hall.⁴⁷² This may be true, as Garden had formerly stationed police outside Labor Council meetings when he feared the intrusion of militant unemployed.

The Tocsin gives a scathing account:

"At a carefully prepared conference ... Jock, the Pale Pink alderman, gave a private exhibition in political acrobatics. It was very difficult to gain admittance to the exhibition, as any ordinary looking person had to fill in a special form before being allowed to enter. This form looked like one of Stevens 52 questions, and made you state definitely that you had no connection with the Communist Party and all its works. Only the truly Blue could enter, and if you had the slightest touch of Red in your make-up you were emptied out on your ear.

Having made sure that all those present were good and faithful followers of the A.L.P. Executive, and that no nasty tempered members of the W.D.C. had sneaked in, Jock gave orders for the key holes to be plugged and got down to business."⁴⁷³

Given all this care, it is not surprising that the Conference was "a sweeping victory for the Lang forces" and that "the Lang faction was in complete control." One Socialisation Unit member stated that "the conference was packed."⁴⁷⁴ Garden made the obligatory speech about "the courageous fight put up by the Lang Government on behalf of the people of New South Wales"; his avowal that "Mr. Lang stood out as the greatest leader the Labor Party ever had" was

472. R.L., 16/11/32, p. 8.

473. The Tocsin, 11/11/32, p. 1.

474. S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9.

met by "prolonged cheers."⁴⁷⁵

Word
The Conference was dominated by Garden and the A.L.P. Executive. Beasley, Ward, Rosevear, Gander, Dunn and Rae, the Federal Lang supporters, sat on the platform, and Graves, Martin and the other Inner Group members were prominent.⁴⁷⁶

Any attempted opposition to the Executive's lead was quickly crushed. A delegate from the Gordon A.L.P. and Socialisation Unit moved that the ban on the United Front of Employed and Unemployed be lifted. This was "emphatically rejected" by an "overwhelming majority".⁴⁷⁷ A Glebe delegate moved a similar motion designed to admit the representatives of the United Front to the Conference, but Keller (the Chairman) ruled this out of order "amid the cheers of the other delegates."⁴⁷⁸

The Herald reported another motion moved by the socialisation supporters that the A.L.P. should officially recognise the United Front Against Fascism and that all unemployed bodies, Communist and otherwise, should be brought into one organisation under the control of the State A.L.P. Executive." It added that Keller ruled this out of order, and

475. L.D., 7/11/32, p. 6. (It is significant that only the Labor Daily reports this.)

476. Ibid. (S.M.H. says Garden "took a prominent part".)

477. Ibid.; S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9; N.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 7. (The S.M.H. reports this as a motion that the ban on all auxiliaries be lifted.)

478. N.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 7.

that there was a motion of dissent from the Chairman's ruling which was defeated by a large majority.⁴⁷⁹ This motion looks garbled: it was no doubt the United Front of Unemployed that was mentioned, and the opposition would hardly call for the A.L.P. Executive to control the unemployed organisations. This account does however support a report given only in the Red Leader of a motion of dissent when Keller ruled a proposal of unity out of order; the Red Leader stated that eighty-two delegates supported the motion of dissent, with one hundred and fifty-seven against it.⁴⁸⁰ Given the careful selection of delegates this opposition to Keller and support for united action, if accurately reported, points to the wide acceptance among lower-level A.L.P. members of the desirability of working with the banned organisations.

It is not surprising that it was the Socialisation Unit supporters who proposed these motions, nor that one came from the Glebe A.L.P.

These opposition motions are not mentioned in the official report of the Conference. This report shows, much more than any Communist attacks could, the determination of the A.L.P. Executive that the unemployed organisation should only comprise true A.L.P. members and that it should be dominated by the

479. S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9.

480. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 1.

Executive and subject to the control, at all levels, of A.L.P. officials.

The Report laid down:

- "1. Name
Unemployed Labor Workers.
2. Objective.
To organise all unemployed workers under the auspices of the Australian Labor Party, State of New South Wales, to carry out the general policy on unemployment, as determined by the Unemployed Conference convened by the A.L.P.
3. Membership.
All unemployed or employed workers who loyally support the objective, policy, and platform of the A.L.P., State of New South Wales, shall be entitled to membership in the U.L.W.
4. Constitution.
The U.L.W. shall comprise:-
 - (a) Local Committees
 - (b) District Committees
 - (c) Central Council
 - (d) General Conference.
5. Local Committees.
These shall consist of unemployed or employed workers organised on the basis of local A.L.P. Branches Local Committee officers must be members of the respective A.L.P. branch"

(These restrictions to ensure membership support for the A.L.P. are particularly interesting in the light of A.L.P. charges against the despotic domination by Communists of their auxiliaries: at least the C.P.A. never required U.W.M. or United Front members to support the Party nor ruled that Committee members had to be Communists.)

The work of these Local Committees included:

- "(a) The propagation of the policy of the General Unemployed Conference.
- (b) The collection of donations.
- (c) Arrangement of concerts and socials, etc., to provide food, fruit, vegetables, and clothing for the unemployed.
- (d) The establishment of clubs and reading rooms; to provide education through lectures and debates; recreation, amusement and reading for the unemployed."

(There is no suggestion that the Local Committees should organise any action. The functions laid down are just an extension of the economic and social relief functions of the earlier A.L.P. Relief Groups.)

The Local Committee was to report at least once a month to the local A.L.P. Branch and to the District Council.

6. The District Committees were to consist of two delegates from each Local Committee; the Districts corresponded to the State Electorate Councils. The District Committees were to propagate the policy of the General Unemployed Conference, to "organise the establishment and functioning" of the Locals and coordinate their activities, and to "assist in the organising of collective local functions in aid of the unemployed." They were to report to each Central Council meeting, and to the State Council of the A.L.P.

(By requiring that the Locals report frequently to the District Committees, and these in turn to the top hierarchy

of the U.L.W. and the A.L.P., the A.L.P. leaders were clearly determined that no branches should get out of hand, ally themselves with the United Front or undertake action disapproved of by the A.L.P. leadership. There was again no suggestion that the District Committees should initiate any political action, nor that they should formulate a special policy based on local grievances.)

"7. The Central Council shall consist of one delegate from each Local Committee, together with the Organising Committee of the Central Executive of the A.L.P., and shall meet quarterly. Central Council officers must be members of the respective A.L.P. branches."

(So the A.L.P. leaders could double-check the U.L.W.'s activities - through the Organising Committee of the A.L.P. Executive as well as through the A.L.P. State Council. It is hard to imagine the Organising Committee of the Executive not dominating the Central Council of the U.L.W. The A.L.P. Executive was given even more power:)

"

CONFERENCE

8. General Unemployed Conference shall be called by the Central Executive of the A.L.P.

The Central Council shall exercise control over the carrying out of the policy determined by General Conference.

The Central Council shall supervise the establishment and organisation of the various District Committees, and shall deal with all reports from the District Committees.

The Central Council shall report each quarter to the Central Executive of the A.L.P., State of New South Wales.

No alteration of the Constitution of Policy of the U.L.W. shall take place unless agreed upon by General Conference of the U.L.W."

(As the A.L.P. Executive alone could convene Conferences, it would largely be able to determine the issues debated, and thus the whole policy of the U.L.W. The A.L.P. Executive now provided a third check on the U.L.W.'s activities: the District Councils had to report to the A.L.P. State Council, the Central Council contained the A.L.P. Executive Organising Committee, and, in case it still got out of control, the Central Council had to report to the A.L.P. Executive.)

The Preamble of the Report declared that:

"the problem of adequately feeding, clothing and housing its unemployed workers is primarily the duty of those Governments, organisations and individuals who, by upholding capitalism, create that very army of unemployed."

The influence of the Socialisation Unit supporters can be seen in a call on unemployed workers "to assist in the early achievement of Socialisation." The preamble, perhaps unwittingly, confirmed that the U.L.W. was just another name for the A.L.P. charity relief groups:

"Pending that early achievement, we now call on all unemployed workers to rally unitedly round the banner of the Labor Party, and to link up with the A.L.P. Unemployed Relief organisations to be set up in association with every A.L.P. Branch."⁴⁸¹

481. Australian Labor Party, State of New South Wales, Report of Unemployed Conference, held Trades Hall, Sydney, November 6, 1932. (Australian National Library.)

The Labor Daily stated that the Conference "regimented the whole of the unemployed behind a solid A.C.T.U. policy."⁴⁸² The policy contained, word for word, the unemployment policy adopted by the September A.C.T.U. Congress, as already dealt with. There were, however, a few minor additions.

To the main policy that full work or sustenance should be provided for all unemployed it added that "regulations which debar deserted wives, and those whose husbands are invalids, from obtaining relief" should be abolished, and that "Soldier, Invalid or Old Age Pensions [should] not be included in permissible income."

To the list of free facilities that should be given to the unemployed until the basic wage sustenance was granted it added:

"Vegetables and fruit.

Milk.

That a permanent clinic nurse be appointed in necessary centres, and a travelling nurse in country areas for the purpose of issuing certificates to mothers in connection with special orders on the Relief Department.

That books be given to pupils of all schools, irrespective of denomination, whose parents are unemployed.

Bathing facilities in municipal and other bathing reserves.

To visit patients in all hospitals."

482. L.D., 7/11/32, p. 1.

(The last clause is rather peculiar.)

It also added that "Endowment be paid for the first and each additional child."

With the demand that all legislation requiring unemployed to perform work for sustenance "except where a full week's work is provided at award rates of pay" be repealed, it also demanded that "sustenance shall not be affected by employment except during the period of such employment."

It included some stipulations on unions vis a vis relief workers:

"Relief workers shall not be obliged to pay union fees unless full union membership rights are enjoyed.

Unemployed members who were financial with their organisations at the commencing date of their unemployment shall be classed as financial unionists until re-employment."

It called for the abolition of overtime.

The Policy included the A.C.T.U.'s scheme for National Unemployment Insurance.⁴⁸³

It finally resolved that A.L.P. branches should set up sub-committees to advise tenants faced with evictions, and

483. As this is very lengthy, and was never implemented, I have not included it here or in the A.C.T.U. Congress discussion. It can be found in this Report and the A.C.T.U. Congress Report, however.

called on the Government "to remove the present obnoxious questionnaire form."⁴⁸⁴

There were also several motions on the agenda paper that were not dealt with at all. These included more motions in favour of united action, a proposal that unemployed workers should be admitted free to the A.L.P., and a proposal that the unemployed be allowed representation on the A.L.P. Central Executive though with power only to take part in matters relating to unemployment.⁴⁸⁵ It is not surprising that the Executive would not even discuss the representation of unemployed on the Executive. The enforcement of membership dues on unemployed workers not only seems unjustly harsh: it might also ensure that the committee members of the U.L.W. were employed workers, as many unemployed would not be able to join the A.L.P. and U.L.W. committee members had to be A.L.P. members. So even at the lowest level the possibility of unemployed workers running the U.L.W. was discriminated against.

The final comment to be made on this Conference and the U.L.W. is that it simply did not work. I have discussed the policy and organisational format at some length for the light they shed on A.L.P. policy towards the unemployed. But the

484. A.L.P., State of N.S.W., Report of Unemployed Conference, held Trades Hall, Sydney, Nov. 6, 1932.

485. N.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 7.

U.L.W. cannot be considered a significant unemployed organisation in terms of the aspects under discussion in this thesis. The organisation itself barely existed, and its political activities were negligible. It may have helped a number of unemployed workers with handouts, but this help had already been instituted by the A.L.P. Relief Groups. I have found few references to U.L.W. locals, and none to any further General Conferences or leadership by the Central Council. There may of course have been more activity than is evident: as I have mentioned before in regard to the A.L.P. Relief groups, the press would be likely to ignore the activities of charity-distress groups because they were not as sensational as demonstrations. It is most significant, however, that the U.L.W. never had any delegates to the Labor Council - never even approached the Council for permission to send delegates. The majority of Labor Council members would clearly have supported the U.L.W. in preference to the United Front delegates: at the Conference Garden stressed that the A.L.P. and Labor Council were working closely together over the unemployed issue.⁴⁸⁶ That the U.L.W. never sought representation confirms the evidence that the organisation never really got off the ground.

What did develop from the Conference, however, was a lengthy and vicious fight between Garden and the United Front

486. L.D., 7/11/32, p. 6.

Council leaders. The issue tended to be sidetracked by escalating recriminations but it clearly originated in a deliberate and well-aimed move by Garden to discredit the United Front leaders, and hence the organisation itself, in the eyes of the unemployed. This in turn was clearly part of the Inner Group's renewed fervour to win the unemployed away from any Communist-tinged organisation.

Before discussing Garden's attack I must recount an action of Garden's during the Questionnaire protest, which does not seem to fit in with his later attack.

Participants in the Thursday 27th Glebe struggle attended the Labor Council meeting that night. The Council agreed to two motions put by Moran for full support of the questionnaire struggle, though not without some attempt to divert the protest and some opposition.

Moran initially moved:

"That this Council endorses the fight being waged by the unemployed against the Stevens Questionnaire on the coalfields, Glebe and elsewhere, and calls upon the workers to solidly support this fight and for the unemployed to continue their daily demonstrations and meetings at their respective ration dumps until the form is withdrawn."

The right wing of the Labor Council suggested instead "that the Full Executive of all unions be convened to define a policy regarding the situation." This was clearly a move to take the leadership of the protest away from the United Front Council.

Garden supported Moran, suggesting that the unions should urge their unemployed members to attend the demonstrations, and Moran's motion was passed.

The second motion, put after Bateman had spoken to Council about the Glebe arrests, condemned the Government "and their agents the Police for their attacks on the unemployed." It continued that Council "calls upon all the [union] movement to elect speakers to address the unemployed and decides to co-operate with the I.L.D. in defence of the unemployed."

As this urged the Council to co-operate with an organisation banned by the A.L.P. it is not surprising that Garden opposed it. That despite this opposition the motion was passed⁴⁸⁷ shows how strongly the police attacks had affected the union delegates.⁴⁸⁸ (I would refer back to the willingness of the Labor Council to censure the police for their actions in the 1931 eviction battles, while refusing to censure Lang.)

Garden's support for the first motion may seem to invalidate earlier evidence and the Communist Party's claims that Garden deliberately worked against the United Front of

487. T.L.C.M., 27/10/32. Warner and Moran were delegated to speak for the Council at the I.L.D. meeting at Glebe.

488. (The Sun, 28/10/32, p. 9, says of this meeting that the majority of delegates adopted "an attitude as if indifferent to the unemployed and their problems." This is belied by their support for the motions, and later resolutions of protests by unions against the Glebe bashings.)

Unemployed and any militant unemployed action. However, ample evidence of his opposition was to be provided again at the November 6th Conference.

But why did Garden even briefly support Moran? There is no clear answer, but some suggestions can be made.

It must first be pointed out that Moran's first motion did not mention the United Front Councils: support was to be given simply to "the unemployed". It also did not present any specific action that the Council or the unions should take to support the struggle. So the motion could be agreed to without any real commitment - unlike the second motion.

The Tocsin, rather cynically but probably with some accuracy, pointed out regarding Garden's about-face: "Of course, he knows his onions and picks his audience." (This article about Garden's support at the Labor Council meeting and 'treachery' at the A.L.P. Conference begins:

"Trades Hall Kid Stakes - 5 Furlongs!

Results

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Jock Garden | 1 |
| Judas Iscariot | 2 |
| Annaiias | 3 |

Baron Munchausen also ran.")⁴⁸⁹

489. The Tocsin, 11/11/32, p. 1.

In the face of the Labor Council delegates' obvious support for the unemployed protest Garden could hardly oppose it outright. He could afford to wait until the A.L.P. re-established its own unemployed group before reviling the existing organisation.

Garden's actions are also open to a more favourable explanation.

Jock Garden, in many ways a figure central to this study, was a man of apparent contradictions and paradoxes, a man whose political sympathies and alliances changed so often and so radically that his motives are often virtually impossible to define. In less than two decades he was to move through the I.W.W., the C.P.A., the left wing of the New South Wales A.L.P., the right wing of that body, and then he was to oppose Lang again; moreover, in all these alliances he was one of the leaders. His motives can often be seen to have sprung from his desire for personal advancement and his own political ambition. He began, however, as an idealist and as a militant fighter, and this militancy and idealism seem sometimes to have recurred unexpectedly, in contradiction to his overt political line at a certain time.

So his support for this unemployed struggle may have been sincere (though his opposition to the second motion suggests he did not want to act out his sincerity). It is also possible

that he genuinely believed his later charges against the unemployed leaders, though this is less likely given his subsequent prevarication, his changing of the charges and his refusal to support his allegations to unemployed meetings. The man needs a study this size to himself.

Garden's allegations were widely reported by the press - for of course the press was as willing as the A.L.P. leaders to slur the United Front Councils. Indeed, the wide reportage was one of the most galling aspects of the whole incident for the United Front movement organisers, for they could only reply in the much less widely read Communist press.

The Newcastle Morning Herald reported:

"The feature of the (night-time) session of the conference was a trenchant attack on the United Front of Employed and Unemployed delivered by J.S. Garden.

In the course of a fiery speech, Mr. Garden declared that the United Front was endeavouring to seduce the unemployed away from the ranks of the Labor Party. He referred to what he termed the 'treacherous action' of seven of the leaders, whom he named, in advising the unemployed to refuse to sign the dole questionnaire forms and at the same time applied (sic) for food relief themselves.

Mr. Garden said that he could name two hundred others who had applied for food relief and yet advised the unemployed to burn their own forms and go without the dole. It was possible to discover how many of the leaders had done this in the City areas and there was not much doubt that others had done the same thing on the coalfields."⁴⁹⁰

490. N.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 7.

The Sydney Morning Herald stated that Garden had named seven "Communist leaders" who, he said:

"had advised the unemployed to burn the questionnaire forms and had then applied for relief themselves. 'I have their names and they come from Glebe, Granville, Balmain, Newtown and Bondi,' he said amidst uproar. 'It is the most treacherous act in the history of the Labor party. If this has happened in the metropolitan area, what has happened on the coalfields?'"⁴⁹¹

The Labor Daily repeated the charge that the United Front was trying to "seduce" the unemployed, the charge against seven named United Front leaders and Garden's claim that he could name two hundred more. Garden said:

"The men I have named are the leaders in the United Front, who told the unemployed to burn their dole forms. They did not care what might become of the starving women and children, but made sure they would be fed themselves."⁴⁹²

(The Labor Daily the same day headlined its report of the Newcastle A.L.P. Conference (on November 5th): "Communists Condemned By The Workers".⁴⁹³ There was no mention of any censure of Communists in its report of the discussions of this conference.)

The men named were Moran, Sylvester, Bateman, Stokes, Knight, Kavanagh and McFadden. Though the press did not name them, no doubt because of fear of libel action, the allegations

491. S.M.H., 7/11/32, p. 9.

492. L.D., 7/11/32, p. 6.

493. Ibid.

made clear most of those intended. (The Labor Daily repeated the suburbs mentioned by the Herald; it would be quite widely known among the unemployed who the leaders in these suburbs were. The Labor Daily added that some of the named had spoken at the Thursday Glebe meeting - which was as good as naming Sylvester and Moran.)

The Glebe unemployed immediately challenged Garden to address them and substantiate his charges against the Glebe leaders.⁴⁹⁴ This challenge was repeated by a number of unemployed groups and even some union branches.

The men named, the Communist press and the unemployed in a number of the suburbs named continually denied that the men had advocated the burning of forms while complying themselves with the regulations. They proved correct.

The Workers' Weekly rightly described Garden's allegations as a 'frame-up'. It pointed out that all of the leaders handed in their own forms to be burnt, and that no forms were even burnt in the metropolitan area as the number handed in did not justify burning; so the metropolitan unemployed leaders had not even advised the unemployed not to sign the forms after the first couple of meetings.⁴⁹⁵

494. R.L., 16/11/32, p. 8. The challenge was made by the Glebe Unemployed and Employed Workers' Association and the local United Front Council.

495. W.W., 11/11/32, p. 1.

At the Labor Council meeting on Thursday November 10th Moran moved "that Comrade Garden be instructed to attend mass meetings of the unemployed in Glebe, Balmain and Newtown in order to explain his statements to the A.L.P. Unemployed Conference." Garden confirmed his remarks and stated he was already addressing the unemployed and would continue to do so. (There is no report of him attending any unemployed meeting on this subject.)

An amendment was proposed that a committee consisting of Garden, Voigt (a Garden supporter) and Moran investigate the issue. Garden supported this, and suggested that Warner and Dodd join the committee. This again is an apparently odd action by Garden, as Warner and Dodd had supported Moran's motion and were indeed opponents of Garden. It may well be that Garden believed that the amendment would not be passed if the committee could transparently be dominated by himself and Voigt, and was more willing to meet a hostile committee than hostile meetings of the unemployed. The amendment (with the two additional committee members) was carried and Moran's motion lost.⁴⁹⁶

At this Labor Council meeting Moran evidently showed that the allegations against him were untrue, and Garden

496. T.L.C.M., 10/11/32.

withdrew the charge against Moran.⁴⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the minutes of this Labor Council meeting simply state that Garden confirmed his remarks, but not what Garden actually stated that his remarks had been. This is important, for at about this stage Garden changed his allegations, though maintaining that they were the same.

At the next Labor Council meeting - 17th November - the Committee of Five produced two conflicting reports.

The Majority Report was given by Moran, Warner and Dodd. It stated that the Committee had met at 10.00 a.m. on Monday 14th, despite the absence of Garden and Voigt; McFadden was also absent, but the five other men charged attended. In the Minority Report Garden and Voigt stated that they had not been informed of the time and place of the meeting. Garden claimed he had said on the 10th that it was impossible to meet on the 14th, that he had endeavoured since Tuesday (15th) to contact Moran, but had been told he was sick.⁴⁹⁸

It is impossible to tell if the Moran group had deliberately excluded Garden and Voigt, or if Garden had not

497. R.L., 16/11/32, p. 8. (I found no mention of this in the Labor Council minutes but they were always very elliptical. It is clear though that Garden quickly withdrew charges against one man, for after this only 6 are charged and all the evidence points to the seventh man originally named as being Moran.)

498. T.L.C.M., 17/11/32.

attended so he could claim treachery and thus win more support for his Minority Report. The Workers' Weekly complained that Garden's statement that he had not been notified was untrue.⁴⁹⁹ The Red Leader stated that Garden later said he had been unable to get in to the Trades Hall on the Monday, but had been seen there a few minutes before the meeting.⁵⁰⁰ Though the Communist press might lie to make Garden appear even blacker, the second proposition, that Garden avoided the meeting, does seem more likely. The unemployed leaders completely believed their innocence and had the evidence of unemployed supporters for their defence, whereas Garden's evidence was more sketchy. Most importantly, there was no need for Moran to 'stack' the committee by excluding Garden and Voigt, for the committee was already 'stacked' in his favour. It would seem that after the Labor Council meeting Garden had had second thoughts about answering the committee.

That Garden's evidence was tenuous is supported by his quick withdrawal of the charge against Moran, and his later withdrawal of the charges against Sylvester and McFadden. It is virtually confirmed by the change he made in the allegations themselves.

499. W.W., 25/11/32, p. 1.

500. R.L., 16/11/32, p. 8.

The Majority Report began by re-stating the allegation under investigation. This was said to be the allegation Garden had confirmed at the Labor Council meeting:

"That while advising unfortunate unemployed to burn the Questionnaire form ... they themselves had previously filled in their forms, and had obtained food relief, which I say is an act of base treachery to the unemployed."⁵⁰¹

This is essentially the same as the charges made at the A.L.P. Conference, as reported so widely in the press.

In the Minority Report, however, Garden produced a totally different account of his allegations; he said it was this that the Committee was to investigate:

"That while the official organs of the Communist Party and the U.W.M. had advocated the burning of the Dole Questionnaire, prominent leaders of both these organisations including Comrade Bateman, Secretary of the I.L.D., Knight, Secretary of the M.M.M., Kavanagh, McFadden and Sylvester of the C.P. and Stokes of the U.W.M. had all handed in to the authorities their dole questionnaires duly filled in."⁵⁰²

The difference in the allegations is easily apparent. In the second Garden does not say that the men named had themselves advised the unemployed not to sign or to burn the forms.

It is impossible to believe that this was the original allegation: so many journalists could not have been so mistaken; the Labor Daily especially would not have mis-reported

501. T.L.C.M., 17/11/32. "They" were Kavanagh, Sylvester, Stokes, Knight, Bateman and McFadden.

502. Ibid.

Garden. He clearly changed the charge, and changed it to fit in with what he could hope to prove.

Not surprisingly, as Moran, Warner and Dodd were investigating a different charge from Garden and Voigt, both sides proved the justice of their positions.

The Majority Report presented three and a half pages of detailed interviews with the five men who appeared. In summary, Bateman, Stokes and Knight stated that they had not addressed any meetings over the Questionnaire issue. There is indeed no account of these men addressing the meetings, though Bateman had attended the Glebe Thursday meeting. Kavanagh stated that he had spoken at meetings on the 20th, 21st and 23rd of October, but that he had not advocated burning the forms at all, for he had followed the ruling of the United Front that meetings of less than a thousand were not large enough to burn the forms and all these meetings had been too small. He had not filled in his own form until the general decision to comply with the forms had been made. Sylvester stated that he had addressed meetings on the 14th, 19th and 21st,⁵⁰³ but that these meetings had also been too small, so he had not advocated the forms be burnt.⁵⁰⁴ He had only handed in his form on November 2nd.

503. (Though Sylvester spoke at the Thursday Glebe meeting this was in protest against the Tuesday police brutality.)

504. This was supported by a Balmain delegate at a later Labor Council meeting (R.L., 30/11/32, p. 5.)

The Committee found that the United Front policy (regarding the need for large meetings before any forms were burnt) was correct and concluded:

"We are forced to the conclusion that Comrade Garden made statements that were totally erroneous, and contrary to facts. In view of the character of the meeting, at which these statements were first made by him, it is our opinion that it was done for the purpose of preventing the unity of the Unemployed, and of rendering them helpless in the face of the attack by the Stevens Government.

This has been borne out by the statement of Mr. Dunningham,⁵⁰⁵ who repeated almost verbatim the remarks made by J.S. Garden. The accusations are of a distinctly disruptive character, and intended to split the ranks of the Unemployed and to retard the growing organisation of those engaged in Relief Work."

The Committee added that "at no place, with the exception of Glebe, were the Questionnaires collected,⁵⁰⁶ or was any meeting held in connection [with the protest] advised to destroy the forms."⁵⁰⁷ The Committee recommended that Garden appear at mass meetings at Granville, Glebe, Newtown, Balmain and Annandale within fourteen days, and that the 'greatest publicity' should be given to the Majority Report. They also added (with a venom that probably only prejudiced Labor Council delegates against their report) that if Garden failed to justify his

505. (In the Legislative Assembly on Monday 7th November.)

506. The forms collected at Glebe were quickly handed back to the owners, as not enough had been collected. W.W., 11/11/32, p. 1.

507. They are, of course, only referring to metropolitan meetings.

position "we recommend he be removed from his office as Secretary."⁵⁰⁸

Even though this Committee was clearly biased, it is indisputable that the men charged had not advocated that others destroy or not sign their forms while themselves complying and receiving relief. Even Garden accepted that these men had handed in their forms on November 2nd or just before; after October 25th at the latest no leaders in the metropolitan area were advocating non-compliance with the forms.

Garden, by changing his charge, avoided this proof that his original allegation was unfounded. He claimed that the fact that these men handed in their forms on or just before November 2nd proved his charge "for the Communist Party organs up to and including the Red Leader on the 2nd November continued to urge the unemployed to burn their forms." Even if he could prove this it would really show no personal treachery by the men named. But his evidence from the Communist press was also not conclusive. He quoted the Workers' Weekly of October 28th - a date well before the charged men complied with the forms! - as saying: "The struggle has commenced. Already the unemployed have responded and with a speeding up of the campaign, we can force the withdrawal of the forms." This indeed does not mention that forms should be burnt. (The Workers' Weekly

508. T.L.C.M., 17/11/32.

rightly claimed that Garden had quoted out of context.)⁵⁰⁹
Also, the Red Leader of November 2nd does not call for the
burning of forms, and the articles in it about the struggle
are dated October 29th.⁵¹⁰

Despite the fact that he did not fully prove even his
second, different allegation, let alone his original charge,
Garden asserted that his allegation of treachery was proved.
(It is notable that his original claim that he could name two
hundred more unemployed leaders who had advised the unemployed
not to sign while themselves complying was immediately dropped.
This was patently a lie, as there were not two hundred men
who held a position of power in the unemployed movement in the
whole state.)

And despite the fact that the treachery was not proved
the Labor Council on November 24th, according to the Council
Minutes, accepted Garden's Minority Report by 40 votes to 29.
At this meeting Garden withdrew the charge against Sylvester.⁵¹¹
The Red Leader, however, maintained that this meeting rejected
both reports "as the unemployed themselves are most competent
to take any action."⁵¹²

509. W.W., 25/11/32, p. 1.

510. R.L., 2/11/32, p. 8.

511. T.L.C.M., 24/11/32.

512. R.L., 30/11/32, p. 5; c.f. also W.W., 2/12/32.

The Labor Council probably did accept Garden's account, for the Council was dominated by Garden.

Garden continued to be censured by unemployed groups and challenged to support his charges, which he declined to do.⁵¹³

The City Branch of the Carpenters' Union (of which McFadden was the chairman) asked Garden to substantiate his charges against McFadden,⁵¹⁴ which Garden neglected to do. Three months after the first allegations Garden blithely reported McFadden's innocence.⁵¹⁵ By this time the retraction of the charge would have been fairly irrelevant: McFadden's reputation, and with it that of the Communist Party and the United Front, were sufficiently slandered. (The Red Leader claims that when Garden finally appeared before the Carpenters' Union over McFadden's charges he said he had only charged Knight because "Knight attacked me on the steps of the Trades Hall; I felt incensed and made the charge."⁵¹⁶ Whether this is true or not it reveals the feeling that personal animosity was an important part of the whole issue.)

513. e.g. R.L., 21/12/32, p. 6. Stockton U.W.M. denounces Garden's claim that he had been proved correct; 4/1/33, p. 6, Corrimal U.W.M. censures Garden; 15/3/33, p. 3, United Labourers' Protective Society censures Garden - he had refused to attend a Society meeting to justify his allegations, though he had been present at the Trades Hall during the meeting.

514. R.L., 30/11/32, p. 5; T.L.C.M., 1/12/32.

515. T.L.C.M., 2/2/33.

516. R.L., 1/3/33, p. 4.

The Central Rank and File Organising Committee also asked Garden to substantiate the charges against McFadden; this letter was ruled out of order by the Labor Council.⁵¹⁷ This Committee also investigated the charges, and found the men innocent; Garden refused to attend this meeting.⁵¹⁸ Though the Committee was no doubt biased - McFadden, as well as Warner and Dodd, was a member - its conclusions overwhelmingly appear to have been accurate.

It was after - and no doubt partly due to - this that the Labor Council began to oust the Rank and File Organising Committee.

The main point about these charges is not so much that they were untrue, but that they were a deliberate smear campaign against the United Front movement, similar to the mid 1931 smear campaign against the U.W.M. Garden perhaps fully believed them when he initially made them - but he clearly had not checked his case and to make such important allegations without doing so was a grave fault. That his later actions were full of change, retraction and prevarication shows his determination to maintain the treachery of the unemployed leaders even when his error was apparent. It finally did not really matter whether the men had been treacherous or not: it

517. T.L.C.M., 1/12/32.

518. R.L., 21/12/32, p. 6; W.W., 16/12/32, p. 1.

took me quite an amount of delving to sort out the changes in Garden's story, and the drawn-out retractions, and most of the people whom the attack was meant to influence would not have followed the whole debate, would have heard only that some treachery was proved against the United Front leaders. ^{complete} So a proof was to a large extent irrelevant. It was the original charges that received very wide publicity, and, despite their inaccuracy, a certain amount of mud would stick.

FURTHER PROTEST AGAINST DOLE CUTS.

The coalfields agitation was over. But the coalfields/Glebe/South Coast protest was by no means the whole story. If the determination of this struggle was generally to raise the morale and increase the organisation of the unemployed, it also immediately strengthened the protest movement. Over the last week of October and into November there was a militant protest by the Broken Hill unemployed; the Lithgow unemployed also quickly took up where the coalfields men had left off.

These two protests did not originally spring from the Questionnaire; that the Questionnaire form rapidly became a

new issue in the demands in these agitations shows again both how in the course of an agitation the grievances would escalate, and how protest in one district would quickly be picked up by the unemployed of another area.

The initial cause was the reduction in the dole of the unemployed in these areas.

I have stated that in August the Stevens Government reduced the dole. The Government in fact continually denied this. In October Hawkins stated in the Legislative Assembly that "there had been no reduction in the quantity or quality of food relief since the Government took office":⁵¹⁹ Chaffey, the Chief Secretary, repeated this.⁵²⁰

The Government did however reduce the value of the dole, as the following figures show:

Value of Food Relief Orders per Fortnight.⁵²¹

| | <u>At June 1931</u> | <u>At August 1932</u> |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| A. (Single person) | 11/8 | 11/5 |
| B. (Married couple) | 18/10 | 17/4 |
| C. (Married couple + 1 child) | 28/- | 28/- |
| D. (Married couple + 2 or 3 children) | 39/4 | 37/11 |
| E. (Married couple + 4 or 5 children) | 46/9 | 44/10 |
| F. (Married couple + 6 or 7 children) | 55/5 | 53/3 |

519. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 9.

520. N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 5.

521. Figures for June 1931 from F.A. Bland, "A Note Upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales". Figures for August 1932 from Commonwealth Labour Report, 1931.

(It should be remembered that the value in country areas was sometimes different.)

What the Government did in fact was to reduce the value of food relief - that is, the amount it paid shopkeepers for providing the goods stipulated on the coupon - while maintaining that shopkeepers should supply the same amount of goods. Thus it could claim it had not reduced the amount. What happened, however, was that a large number of shopkeepers would not or could not give the same amount of food for the lower price, so the unemployed worker's dole bag was lighter. I have already referred to the cut in the amount of meat received by the Cessnock unemployed because the Government would only pay 4½d. for 6d. worth of meat. The same thing occurred in many areas over a number of food items.

The Government admitted that this happened:

"The difficulty is that the Government cuts down the price /of food relief/ to the storekeeper, and the storekeeper cuts down the quantity supplied to the unemployed, and the quality also."⁵²²

Chaffey also admitted the de facto reduction, but absolved the Government from any blame:

"The trouble was that the prices which the Government was being asked to pay were excessive. In some instances suppliers of food relief had issued short measure so as to enable them to show the same

522. N.S.W.P.D., Vol. 135, 24/11/32, p. 2292.

profit as hitherto, on the lower prices which the Government insisted on them accepting. This lessened the quantity of the food rations, but was no fault of the Government."523

For the large number of unemployed who brought home less food, the sophistries of who had made the cut were irrelevant. It was the Government to whom they looked for relief, and who they blamed for its lack.

As well as reducing the value of the dole, the Stevens Government made other adjustments in the regulations which reduced the amount received by some unemployed workers and some of their family members.

The Newcastle Morning Herald produced the following comparison of the relief system under Lang and Stevens:

"Lang Government.

All applicants over the age of 15 years received A scale coupon.

Males and females over the age of 21 received food relief irrespective of parents' income.

Widows and child welfare cases where children reached the age of 14 years, and receive no pension, received food relief for that unit of the family irrespective of the income into the home.

Wife receiving welfare payments for her children also received A scale ration.

Intermittent workers received food relief on a monthly declaration.

Special foods for wife and children, milk, etc., allowed during pregnancy.

Straight-out roster, whether married or single; all received the same treatment.

Preference to unionists.

Right of union officials to attend all calls for labour.

Award rates and conditions on relief work and 35 hours per week.

Margins for different trades honoured as to their rates of payment.

When dislocation of employment took place, food relief was allowed.

Stevens Government.

All children up to the age of 21 now placed on parents' scale of relief.

No food relief for any adult or child unless declaration can be signed. All income taken into account.

No food relief for any widows, children or welfare case, after the pension has been stopped by the departments.

No food relief for wife who receives welfare payments.

No provision for intermittent worker.

Up to the present time, special foods allowed for children only.

The /seniority/ roster abolished. Preference to married men with large families; no employment for single men.

Preference to unionists abolished.

Union official privilege discontinued.

The /relief/ working hours are now 40 hours a week, with less payment. No award or conditions

are recognised, or marginal difference for trades. No food relief for periods when employment dislocated."524

The Agitation at Broken Hill:

Bruxner, Chaffey and other Government members were at pains to point out that the trouble at Broken Hill arose not from the Questionnaire, nor from any Government reduction, but from the refusal of shopkeepers to provide the dole at Government prices.⁵²⁵

Business people at Broken Hill said they could not give the same quantity of goods for 6/0½, the present value of the single men's coupon, as for 7/5, the value before the cut. They said that "lines have been cut so fine ... that they would lose on the coupons if they met them as the Government wanted them to do."⁵²⁶

No matter who technically was to blame, the Hill unemployed faced the alternatives of considerably less food for their coupons, or no dole at all if the shopkeepers boycotted the dole. They decided to refuse the dole, but to force the Government to support them.

Their campaign is interesting not only for its

524. Ibid., 28/10/32, p. 10.

525. e.g. Sun, 26/10/32, p. 11; N.M.H., 2/11/32, p. 5.

526. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11.

determination, its temporary success, and the escalation of the demands, but for the light it sheds on the outlook of the unemployed, the way they regarded their position in society. We have seen that one of the main aims of the unemployed movement was to raise the morale and political consciousness of the unemployed, to show them that they should regard relief not as charity but as their right. Though the unemployed throughout our period of study demanded work or full maintenance, I think there was a growing self confidence in this assertion, a growing belief that it was the duty of governments to provide.

The plan of action was decided at a meeting: again it seems to have originated with the rank and file unemployed, rather than with any organisers.⁵²⁷ From the numbers arrested it is clear that a large number approved the plan. The plan was that single men should refuse the dole, get themselves arrested, and force the Government to feed and shelter them in prison; married couples should keep their children away from school until relief was restored.⁵²⁸ They were to force their arrest by trespassing, and remaining, on Government property - trains, buses, trams, etcetera.

There is no evidence whether the second provision was

527. Again there is no call for action by the Broken Hill unemployed in the R.L. or W.W., or any record of their activities until after the main protest was over.

528. R.L., 4/1/33, p. 8.

carried out. The wives of the unemployed may have objected.⁵²⁹ However a large number of married men were to follow the first proposal, and force their arrest.

Some of the men who took part may have been track travellers passing through the town - the bagmen were regularly arrested on trains and thrown in gaol for the night. The practice for many apparently became an accustomed - though obviously not enjoyable - way of life. The bagmen almost always accepted the short prison sentence instead of the fine.⁵³⁰ This practice was obviously well in mind when the Hill unemployed made their plans.

Most of the protesters, however, were clearly local unemployed, and the protest had the support and approval of most of the community. At the beginning the shopkeepers were allied with the unemployed. Huelin notes how close-knit the Broken Hill community was, and also notes the big-heartedness of the Hillites: "There was a camaraderie among them that extended to itinerants such as us. Biting was easy, knock-backs were few."⁵³¹ If the Hillites helped the itinerants -

529. (Such a proposal had been made at the Wednesday 26th Cessnock meeting. The women were strongly against it and it was defeated by 191 votes to 135. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p.9.

530. c.f. F. Huelin, op. cit., especially p. 49 (on the railway police); p. 85 (on being gaoled for 48 hours at Dubbo for train riding); p. 118 (on being shot at by a railway detective); p. 127 (police catch him again in a carriage); p. 138 (caught again - near Broken Hill).

531. Ibid., pp. 137, 141.

who were usually regarded almost as plague-carriers - how much more must they have supported the protest of the local unemployed.

During this agitation the Labor Daily reported that Broken Hill was "agog ... in protest against the treatment of the unemployed."⁵³² The strength and determination of this and other protests in Broken Hill must largely be attributed to this sense of solidarity. The number of men arrested shows how solid was the support of the unemployed for this agitation; the usual press claims that only outside Communist agitators were involved were simply untenable in this case.

The protest began virtually simultaneously with the first Questionnaire meetings in Sydney and the coalfields; this suggests that the news that a fight was coming had spread. On Saturday October 22nd, the day after the first form bonfires, the Labor Daily reported that the workless at Broken Hill were "seething"; there had been "ugly rumours" of possible action against the dole cut on Friday 21st.⁵³³

(It is interesting to speculate whether this sense of excitement and the sort of ricochet-stimulus of agitation and action I have noted among the New South Wales unemployed in late October did not bear some influence from a far-distant

532. L.D., 26/10/32, p. 5.

533. Ibid., 22/10/32; p. 9.

spark of unemployed struggle. In late October 1932 there were huge and bloody battles between the unemployed and police in London, which were widely reported in the Australian press, usually with front-page headlines.)⁵³⁴

By the beginning of the next week Broken Hill shopkeepers were definitely refusing to supply the dole at Government prices.⁵³⁵

On Monday 24th October twenty-six single men were arrested at Broken Hill for "trespassing on railway property." In this case the Court refused to comply with their plans to force the government to feed them: when they appeared on Tuesday the first offenders were sentenced to prison until the rising of the court, and four or five with previous convictions were gaoled for two hours.⁵³⁶ But they had at least had a couple of meals and one night's shelter.

On Tuesday night thirty-one more single men were arrested for refusing to leave a train. This time their plan succeeded: they were sentenced to a £2 fine, in default four days imprisonment. The magistrate, playing right into their hands, warned that the sentences would increase.⁵³⁷

534. e.g. Ibid., 29/10/32, p. 1, (an account of a fight between 5,000 baton-wielding police and 20,000 Hunger Marchers).

535. Ibid., 25/10/32, p. 5.

536. S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11; L.D., 26/10/32, p. 5.

537. S.M.H., 27/10/32, pp. 9-10. (S.M.H., 26/10/32, p. 11 and L.D., 26/10/32, p. 5, state 29 arrested, but there were 31 before the court on Wednesday.)

On Wednesday afternoon a large protest meeting assembled outside the police station. Thirty-six men were arrested in a bus. They were offered 6 month good behaviour bonds, with a £10 surety, or 7 days' prison. They chose the latter.⁵³⁸ Even if they had not wanted imprisonment, they would have had little alternative, for few unemployed men could find £10.

The police appear to have belatedly realised the men's aim. When thirty-four took over a goods truck on Thursday and refused to leave the police refused to arrest them, stating that they had committed no offence.⁵³⁹ At this stage there was still a "state of tension" at Broken Hill. Additional police were drafted to the town,⁵⁴⁰ and on Thursday a departmental committee left Sydney to investigate the whole question of prices in the town. (According to the Herald, the unemployed meeting on Wednesday had decided to postpone the protest when this was announced,⁵⁴¹ but this was clearly not the case.)

On Friday the police were forced to arrest thirty-five men in a carriage of the Adelaide Express. They also accepted

538. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 10; 28/10/32, p. 10. (The first report seems to imply that two batches of men took over buses on Wednesday - one group of 31 men and one of 36 men. But the second report and the report in N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9, implies only one group of 36.)

539. S.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 10; N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9.

540. N.M.H., 28/10/32, p. 9.

541. S.M.H., 27/10/32, p. 10.

7 days' gaol rather than bonds.⁵⁴²

The Friday, it will be remembered, was the day set down by the Newcastle unemployed for protest against the Questionnaire in all centres. The Broken Hill unemployed took up the challenge and about one thousand unemployed marched and held a meeting, singing 'The Red Flag' and 'Solidarity Forever'. They now demanded the abolition of the Questionnaire, as well as the restoration of the old relief scales.

On Friday and Saturday representatives of the unemployed met with the inquiry committee from the Department of Labour and Industry.⁵⁴³

On Monday 31st Questionnaire forms were burnt; according to the Newcastle Morning Herald three hundred forms were burnt, and another bonfire was planned for Thursday.⁵⁴⁴ (The Sydney Morning Herald, with its usual under-playing of unemployed protest, noted that "some men burnt some forms.")⁵⁴⁵

It is impossible to tell how many more forms were burnt, or how many more men forced their arrest. The Newcastle Morning Herald added that more men were expected to have

542. Ibid., 29/10/32, p. 13 and 31/10/32, p. 9. (The former report says 34 men.)

543. Ibid., 29/10/32, p. 13.

544. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 6.

545. S.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 9.

themselves arrested.⁵⁴⁶ Unfortunately at this stage reports of the agitation were dropped by the daily press, but it is clear that the campaign continued. On Friday November 4th the Workers' Weekly reported that there had been many demonstrations of a thousand unemployed over the last week.⁵⁴⁷ A week later the Red Leader stated that nineteen more men had been gaoled.⁵⁴⁸

At this stage this paper claimed that because of the agitation the dole had been issued at the Hill despite the fact that the forms had been burnt, and that the old dole level had been temporarily restored, "pending negotiations".⁵⁴⁹ In early 1933, in an article reviewing the highlights of the past year, the paper repeated that Stevens had been forced to withdraw the Questionnaire form at Broken Hill, adding that "some hundreds" of forms had been burnt there. It also stated that the prisoners had been released unconditionally. It was forced to admit however that the shopkeepers had later cut the dole by complying with Government prices; it blamed this on the failure of the unemployed to consolidate their alliance with the shopkeepers.⁵⁵⁰

546. N.M.H., 1/11/32, p. 6.

547. W.W., 4/11/32, p. 4.

548. R.L., 9/11/32, p. 1.

549. Ibid.

550. Ibid., 4/1/33, pp. 4 and 8.

It would seem that the campaign continued in some form for another five months, though agitation in this later period was more desultory. In March the Red Leader noted the halt in the campaign of the Broken Hill unemployed for more dole, because mass demonstrations has raised insufficient numbers. It added that the unemployed had decided to carry on the tactic of forceful imprisonment, but the unemployed committee had wrongly doubted their enthusiasm so had postponed action. This delay had confused the men and made them pessimistic, so they had not responded when the committee did call for demonstrations.⁵⁵¹ Again we see how a constant state of agitation and organisation had to be maintained if an unemployed struggle was to be decisive.

As with the coalfields Questionnaire agitation, it is not the demise but the determination of this protest that is important. This determination was shown in the length of the agitation, and in the number of men who were willing to suffer gaol to force their point. The full number arrested is indeterminable, but probably reached well over two hundred by the end. In January the Red Leader stated that eighty-eight single men and fifty-nine married men had been arrested,⁵⁵² but this is probably an understatement. On the five days of

551. Ibid., 22/3/33, p. 6; S.M.H., 4/3/33, p. 14, notes Broken Hill men occupied the library to force their arrest, but "tactful handling prevented a clash."

552. R.L., 4/1/33, p. 8.

October 24th to 28th alone, one hundred and sixty-two men offered themselves for prison, of whom one hundred and twenty-eight were arrested.

The determination was also shown, of course, in the very fact of forced arrests. Even if the alternative to gaol is hunger, prison is for few an acceptable place; it is a radical act to force your imprisonment.

During the Depression years there were a number of reports of men throwing bricks through windows in order to get arrested, always giving as their reason their hunger, and the fact that they would at least get a meal and shelter in gaol.⁵⁵³ But this is the only instance I have discovered of dozens of men forcing their arrests together, and intending their imprisonment as a deliberate political protest. The first type of case - that of a man by himself hurling a brick - represents essentially a blind lashing-out at the society that has caused his hunger, and is also a tactic to ensure that his present, immediate needs be satisfied. The action of the Broken Hill men was qualitatively as well as quantitatively different: these men were not asking to be fed, but were asserting that the society had a duty to feed them, that the alleviation of their hunger was their right; their action was not aimed at a meal now for themselves, but at meals always, for all unemployed.

553. e.g. S.M.H., 1/3/30, p. 21; Cabra-Vale Review, 22/9/33, p. 3.

The Agitation at Lithgow:

There is room here only briefly to mention the Lithgow agitation.

When the Government cut the payment to shopkeepers, Lithgow shopkeepers resolved to refuse the new payments and thus to refuse to issue the dole. This was not simply done out of self interest - they asserted that "the forcing-down of food prices would increase the misery of the unemployed"⁵⁵⁴ (presumably because the shopkeepers would be forced to reduce the quantity). A tentative alliance was formed between the shopkeepers and the unemployed (who were led by the Lithgow U.W.M.), and a dole boycott was decided upon.

Soon after this the unemployed decided also to protest against the Questionnaire; it seems that when they decided upon this the protest in the Cessnock area had pretty much died down. So when dole coupons were issued to married unemployed workers on Tuesday, November 8th, only one hundred and sixty, instead of the usual five hundred, presented themselves to receive them. The rest had refused to fill in the Questionnaire.⁵⁵⁵ On Friday, November 11th, when the ration bureau again was issuing coupons, only forty-one men had applied

554. S.M.H., 11/11/32, p. 10.

555. Ibid., 10/11/32, p. 11.

for them by 2.00 p.m. This represented less than 5% of the number usually issued.⁵⁵⁶

On Tuesday the unemployed had decided not to negotiate their coupons with anyone but the regular shopkeepers. So when the Government sent in a private contractor to issue the rations at Government prices on Thursday 10th, the great majority of the unemployed refused to deal with him.

The Government had sent in police from Bathurst, and in addition thirty-four plainclothes policemen.⁵⁵⁷ (One of these was a Constable Dennis - most probably the same man who had figured so spectacularly in the Bankstown eviction fight.)⁵⁵⁸ From the Sydney Morning Herald's account it appears that the police initiated, rather than prevented, any subsequent disorder.

The private contractor and food arrived in a lorry at 9.30 a.m.

"The driver and four assistants began unloading the lorry, being watched by a crowd of two hundred.

The arrest of eighteen men followed. Some of them were prominent members of the U.W.M. Headed by Sergeant Lucas, a body of local police walked across Bridge Street to the Union Theatre opposite, and asked a number of men near the office of the U.W.M. to accompany them to the station. The arrests were affected without disturbance.

About an hour later it was decided to clear Bridge Street of groups located at various points,

556. Ibid., 12/11/32, p. 13.

557. Ibid., 10/11/32, p. 11; 11/11/32, p. 10.

558. He was not a Lithgow policeman, and the same men were often detailed to unemployment protest work.

and eight more arrests were made of persons who, it was alleged, refused to obey a command to move on.

It was reported that the police visited the homes of some of the arrested men, and certain literature was siezed."⁵⁵⁹

These men were not attempting to prevent the unloading of the lorry, they were not speaking against it, they were not holding a proper meeting against it, they were not even particularly near the lorry. They went like the proverbial lambs to the slaughter.

Not surprisingly, there was a bloody battle the next day. This time there was a meeting to protest against the opening of the ration depot. The police ordered the speaker to stop; he did so; then Constable Dennis reportedly was "struck over an eye with a piece of iron." (If this was the same Dennis, then he seems to have had a peculiar facility for attracting strange injuries from the unemployed. His final sufferings were "injured thumb, nose and eye.")

The police then made a "concerted" baton charge upon the unemployed, "and for a moment there was severe fighting. Within five minutes, however, the police has restored order." Nine of the demonstrators were so severely injured that they had to be taken to hospital. One, suffering from head injuries and concussion, was in a serious condition. All suffered from

⁵⁵⁹. Ibid., 11/11/32, p. 10.

head or facial injuries, and two more had concussion. The same number of police were injured; these were mainly sprains and abrasions, and none needed to go to hospital.⁵⁶⁰

The protest was to continue for about a month. There were further conflicts between the unemployed and police, and the final injury and arrest account on the side of the unemployed was high.⁵⁶¹ As these protests are fairly similar to the Friday 11th demonstration, and also to the mid '31 South Coast dole protest they will not be further detailed here.⁵⁶²

Perhaps the most significant thing about the Lithgow and Broken Hill agitations is that they show that, even after the collapse of the Questionnaire struggle proper, the unemployed were still not willing to give in without a fight.

560. Ibid., 12/11/32, p. 13.

561. c.f. P.T. Thorne, op. cit., p. 8. In all, 38 were arrested; the charges ranged from assault, being armed with weapons, resisting arrest, malicious damage and other offences. During the first trial 23 were released. This shows that many of the charges were trumped-up. 5 more were released on bond, the remainder were given gaol sentences from 14 days to 6 months. The I.L.D. forced the reduction of the 6 month sentence to 3 months.

562. For more information c.f. R.L., 2/11/32; 16/11/32; 30/11/32; 7/12/32; 14/12/32.

ACTIVITY AND ORGANISATION FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE STRUGGLE
TO APRIL 1933.

October 1932 was undoubtedly the emotional as well as
the political highpoint of the unemployed movement in the
period 1932-mid 1933. The next six months - November to April -
were largely spent in consolidating the organisation that had
already developed. Compared with the recent events, a
chronicle of this period is fairly dull - there were a
considerable number of conferences, both at state and district
level, and more and more relief jobs set up committees. The
United Front of Unemployed kept up the same demands against
evictions, the P.I.R. and the Questionnaire; the demands were
centred on two main rallying calls: for the Double Dole and
Against Work for the Dole. There were a couple of state-wide
protests, but most of the activity in this period was conducted
by local groups on local issues. Because these protests were
often limited in time, area and numbers it is easy to neglect
them: the establishment press largely did so, for example.
But these protests should not be neglected or despised. From
this time on the unemployed movement in general made its
presence felt more in continual small-scale protest over short-
term, specific anomalies than in sensational demonstrations.

In almost every week's issue of the Communist press at this time there is mention of a couple of relief job committees, sometimes with reference to a short protest they had made to win payment on the job or a skill margin for example.⁵⁶³ As the next chapter is devoted to such activity after the great increase in the amount of relief work I will not detail the protests in early 1933. It must be realised, however, that while the relief workers' movement 'took off' after May '33, it had been building up from the beginnings of Stevens' extension of relief work.

I concluded my study of the Questionnaire struggle by suggesting that it gave a strong stimulus to both the morale of the unemployed and to their organisation. By and large, the outlook for the unemployed movement at the turn of the year was fairly favourable.

The Communist Party appears to have thought so, though its commendations at times make obeisance to Bolshevik self-criticism.

The first Workers' Weekly editorial in the New Year noted that 1932 had been a year of "revolutionary events":

"In Australia we witness the beginnings of a new and determined strike movement, a new upsurge

563. e.g. R.L., 23/11/32, p. 8 (Maroubra Junction; Chullora; South Kensington; Granville); 11/1/33 (Corrimal and other south coast areas); 19/4/33, p. 8 (Miranda); 26/4/33, p. 8 (a number of Sutherland groups; Rockdale; Cessnock); W.W., 20/1/33, p. 1.

of the movement of the unemployed, and a further disintegration of Social Fascism and the growth and consolidation of the Communist Party. 1933 will witness tremendous events, gigantic struggles, the approach to the 'decisive hour' in the war of the classes in many countries."⁵⁶⁴

The C.P.A. still maintained as firmly as before that the world crisis was deepening. In 1933 it was to increase its campaign against the war between the Soviet Union and the Fascist and other imperialist countries (especially Britain and America) which it believed to be imminent.⁵⁶⁵

(The Tocsin saw the prospects as fairly rosy also. Its New Year editorial declared:

"The old year, a year that will go down in history as one of heroic struggle on the part of the working class, is past, and the new, pregnant with struggle, is here."⁵⁶⁶

Both the C.P.A. and the Comintern continued to stress the vital importance of unemployed work, not simply for the unemployed workers' own benefit, but for the working class unity necessary for the fight against Fascism and war and for the coming class struggle.

In late 1932 the twelfth Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern directed:

564. W.W., 6/1/33, p. 2.

565. c.f. e.g. R.L., 19/4/33, p. 1 (Manifesto of the National Bureau of the M.M.M.); W.W., 21/4/33, p. 1 (Statement of the E.C.C.I.).

566. The Tocsin, 6/1/33.

"the special attention of all sections of the Comintern to the tremendous and ever growing political significance of the unemployed movement. The Communist Parties and the revolutionary Trade Union organisations have not succeeded in organising serious mass activity by the employed workers in defence of the interests of the unemployed.

The most serious shortcoming in the mass work of the Communist Parties among the unemployed has been that insufficient attention has been paid to the organisation of the struggle for the partial demands of the unemployed.

. The decisions of the XI Plenum and of the Prague Conference have not been carried out, and the unemployed movement has been left without proper revolutionary leadership

The Communist Parties, while systematically explaining to the working masses that unemployment is an inevitable accompaniment of the capitalist system and can only be abolished by the dictatorship of the proletariat, must devote special attention to the wide mobilisation and organisation of the broad masses of the unemployed for a struggle for their everyday demands and social insurance"567

Although this directive was aimed at all Communist Parties, and, as Davidson has extensively noted, the Comintern usually failed to take local peculiarities into account,⁵⁶⁸ this critique does apply strongly to one major defect in the organisation of the Australian unemployed movement - namely the employed workers' general isolation from and apparant disregard towards the unemployed struggles.

567. W.W., 2/12/32, p. 3.

568. A. Davidson, op. cit., pp. 72-73.
c.f. also P. Peter, op. cit., p. 385.

It is also significant that the Comintern stressed that more attention should be paid to the unemployed workers' immediate demands, instead of concentrating on long-range revolutionary plans, and that a broad mass of support must be won. This, it will be remembered, had also been the emphasis of the Prague Conference and of the C.P.A.'s long debate over unemployed work in late 1931.

Though there was comparatively little criticism of unemployed work in the Communist press in late '32-early '33, two defects were noted. These were the recurrence of some sectarianism (a criticism referring largely to the activities of the 'Left Oppositionists'), and the failure to properly carry out and extend mass work.

In November the Workers' Weekly noted that there had been failures because Party members had under-estimated the great importance of mass demonstrations and that sectarianism in regard to mass work in general and demonstrations in particular must be eliminated.⁵⁶⁹ In December the Red Leader noted that "many distortions of United Front tactics have been demonstrated in the recent past, and the danger of Left Sectarianism must be eliminated."⁵⁷⁰ This was clearly a reference to the Sylvester group.

569. W.W., 28/11/32, p. 2.

570. R.L., 14/12/32, p. 5.

In January 1933 the Metropolitan United Front Council declared:

"During 1932, the unemployed workers' movement⁵⁷¹ in New South Wales declined, due to narrow sectarianism and incorrect approach, nevertheless that has been gradually overcome by the correct application of the united front on a broad basis. The influence of the United Front is spreading rapidly.

Various campaigns were launched [in 1932], some have had excellent results, others not so good, due to our lack of real mass work such as canvassing etc. and doing the real day-to-day work amongst the unemployed; if this work is not carried out then it leads to isolation."⁵⁷²

At this time the C.P.A. was emphasising that the extension of mass work was a primary necessity.

However, although some tendency towards sectarianism and isolation still remained among Communist unemployed organisers, and too among non-Communist militant cadres, the position was a great improvement upon that at the end of 1931. The United Front Councils in 1932 had won support from a much wider base, and the practice of vilifying possible converts because of their posited social fascism or moderation had greatly diminished. In 1933 this broader outlook was to increase. More and more the policies of the organisation were attuned to the immediate grievances of the unemployed, moderate and A.L.P.-affiliated

571. Though it appears thus uncapitalised and unabbreviated it seems clear that it is the U.W.M. that is meant here and not the unemployed movement in general. This would seem to be yet another attack on the old U.W.M. leaders.

572. W.W., 13/1/33, p. 1.

groups were welcomed, and short-term goals that could feasibly be gained were substituted for sweeping, long-range, revolutionary aims. Mass campaigns were favoured instead of defiant protests.

(Davidson states that:

"the U.W.M. suffered a temporary decline in 1932-33 because of its excessive hostility toward A.L.P. members. But in 1934 it again grew It had adopted by then a policy of working with other unemployed organisations."⁵⁷³

I really disagree. Davidson's analysis here suffers from his failure to take into account the change in emphasis away from the U.W.M. and onto the United Front Council form of organisation, which he does not even mention. The U.W.M. per se did decline somewhat in 1932, partly because the C.P.A. deliberately neglected it in favour of the United Front Councils, and partly because it was largely subsumed under these Councils. In discussing the unemployed movement after about mid 1932 it is fairly meaningless to discuss the U.W.M. in isolation, to regard it as the C.P.A.'s main work among the unemployed or the main unemployed organisation. Davidson errs again in dating the U.W.M.'s "excessive hostility" to A.L.P. members at 1932-33. It was in 1931 that this hostility reached its peak. Granted, the hostility was both excessive and the cause of a decline in the U.W.M. But the whole point of the change to the United Front Councils was to obviate this hostility and isolationism.

573. A. Davidson, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

And, as we have seen, the Councils not only tried but succeeded in winning support from A.L.P. members; it was the hostility that suffered a decline in 1932-33. It is true that in 1934 the unemployed movement - not the U.W.M., which as a co-ordinated body had by then ceased to exist - did grow considerably, but this was really an extension of the increasing support and organisation that had been building up for some time and not a new upsurge. Davidson is right in stating that this growth was connected with the policy of working with other unemployed groups, but again wrong in dating the change to this policy, for this change was embodied in the rationale of the United Front Councils from their very beginning in early 1932. Also, the growth in 1934 was due as much to the change in the unemployed relief system to widespread relief work, for this made organisation much easier.)

This change to a more moderate policy and organisational form was, as we have seen, partly the outcome of the deliberate change in emphasis formulated by the Comintern and accepted by the C.P.A. in late 1931. It was also partly directed by the exigencies of Australian conditions - by the unemployed workers' fairly low level of political consciousness and their unwillingness to take part in revolutionary action.

A change in Comintern policy in 1933 was to strengthen the trend towards moderation in the Party's unemployed work.

I mentioned in my discussion of the origin of the idea

of the United Front Councils that in 1933 a new and general United Front policy was formulated by the Comintern and adopted by the C.P.A.

Davidson notes: "In 1933 the Comintern temporarily abandoned the policy of attacking 'social-fascists'."⁵⁷⁴ The Comintern now directed its members to establish united fronts with the social-democratic labor parties and unions. This reversal was caused by the Comintern's growing fear of the rise of Fascism in Europe (particularly Germany) and the collapse of the German Communist Party. It believed that a broad alliance was necessary to fight Fascism and war.

The C.P.A. adopted the new line, and began to call upon the A.L.P. for a United Front and the dropping of the ban on the 'auxiliaries'.

At the New South Wales A.L.P. Metropolitan Conference in February, 1933, which was numerically dominated by the Socialisation Units,⁵⁷⁵ there was again heated discussion on the ban on the auxiliaries. The vote on a motion to lift the ban was finally a tie, and the ruling against the fraternal organisations was only upheld on the chairman - Keller's - casting vote.⁵⁷⁶

574. A. Davidson, op. cit., p. 59.

575. c.f. R. Cooksey, op. cit., p. 74.

576. S.M.H., 21/2/33, p. 10; 22/2/33, p. 12.

By the time of New South Wales A.L.P. Easter Conference, however, the Inner Group had rounded up its supporters, and was able to dominate the conference.⁵⁷⁷

At the time of the opening of this conference the Workers' Weekly editorial appealed to A.L.P. members for "Unity in the struggle for Socialism", and proposed a United Front for a "common fight".⁵⁷⁸ Though this editorial included a denunciation of the Inner Group and the A.L.P. bureaucrats and politicians, a week later the C.P.A. published an open letter to the Executive Committee and all members of the New South Wales A.L.P. proposing a United Front.⁵⁷⁹ This appeal stated that in view of the present critical position of the working class the C.P.A. and A.L.P. should immediately organise for the protection of workers' meetings, strikes and demonstrations and against every reduction of wages, pensions and unemployed allowances, and against dismissals in industry. The basis for unity was to be the struggle against the introduction of the 48 hour week, for 100% dole increase, and against the New Guard and the forthcoming referendum.⁵⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, the A.L.P.

577. c.f. R. Cooksey, op. cit., pp. 76-80. (At this conference the Socialisation Units were finally crushed.)

578. W.W., 14/4/33, p. 2.

579. Ibid., 21/4/33, pp. 1 and 2.

580. S.M.H., 20/4/33, p. 9.

did not respond to this appeal; there does not even seem to have been any debate on it.⁵⁸¹

(The Workers' Party (Left Opposition), which opposed the C.P.A.'s appeal as right opportunist and liquidationist, succinctly summed up the A.L.P.'s position: "The leaders of the A.L.P. have more to fear from the assistance of the C.P. than from its opposition.")⁵⁸²

The C.P.A. continued to appeal to the A.L.P. for a United Front;⁵⁸³ the A.L.P. leaders continued to ignore these appeals. In 1935 the Comintern was more firmly to instruct its members to establish the United Front.⁵⁸⁴

Though the C.P.A.'s United Front policy had no success at the official level of the A.L.P., the adoption of this policy increased the Party's attitude of openness, non-sectarianism and moderation in regard to unemployed work, and hence enabled it to win many rank and file A.L.P. members to the unemployed movement; by 1935 there was a solid alliance between the United Front of Unemployed and the Labor Council and trade

581. There is no mention of it in the Herald's fairly lengthy report of the conference; A. Davidson, op. cit., p. 64, notes the appeal "met with stony silence."

582. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., p. 36.

583. There was a brief reversal to the earlier position of opposing the social democratic parties in early 1934 after the Austrian uprising; but both the Comintern and the C.P.A. quickly returned to the United Front policy. A. Davidson, op. cit., p. 71.

584. A. Davidson, op. cit., p. 74.

union movement.

Peter notes that after 1933 "a more moderate programme was laid down [by the C.P.A.] for the unemployed organisations." 585
In all, she is right. It must be realised, however, that this trend to moderation had begun well before the Comintern had called for the United Front.

This moderation of the Party's programme of unemployed demands, and the emphasis on building a wide alliance with a great mass base, was accompanied by an increasingly moderate policy in regard to the way protest should be conducted.

I have noted that the C.P.A. at this time criticised the failures in day-to-day mass work and declared that the mass base must be extended; I also noted, in discussing the apparant unenthusiasm of the C.P.A. leaders for the militant form taken by the Questionnaire agitation, that the Party at this time disavowed militant, defiant, head-on collisions between the unemployed and the forces of authority. It turned to the raising of huge petitions and deputations representative of a large number of organisations as the most suitable way of winning demands. Thus the Party decided upon a moderation of the tactics, as well as of the policy and organisational form, that the movement should follow.

585. P. Peter, op. cit., p. 408.

The Party believed that it was absolutely necessary that there should be a huge mass support behind any protest mounted. While it had, of course, always maintained this, the election of the Stevens Government had strengthened the belief of the Party leaders that careful tactics should be pursued in order to avoid heavy reprisals against the militants.⁵⁸⁶ It was Communist orthodoxy that Fascism was rapidly growing; the election of Stevens was seen as a further step in this world trend. Hence the Party leaders believed that wide-scale reprisals would be made against radicals, in a repetition of the repression their European comrades were suffering. The actions of the police at Tighe's Hill, at the August 1st demonstration,⁵⁸⁷ at Glebe, Lithgow and Broken Hill, the uncompromising stand taken by the Government in regard to the Questionnaire agitation, the large number of arrests in 1932,⁵⁸⁸

586. Hence the requirement, in regard to the Questionnaire Agitation, that the good majority of a meeting of 1,000 or more unemployed had to be in favour of burning the forms before the forms were burnt.

587. This was an anti-war demonstration. 3,000 marched. The whole affair was evidently badly organised and the police charged and batoned the demonstrators. 36 were arrested, and received heavy sentences. (8 were gaoled for 40 days each; 22 were gaoled for 518 days between them.) W.W., 5/8/32, p. 1; 19/8/32, p. 4; c.f. also Kavanagh's Diary, 1/8/32.

588. R.L., 21/12/32, p. 1, gave the following figures in regard to political arrests in N.S.W. in 1932: "In the struggle for bread - 190; in resistance to evictions - 64; in the fight for free speech - 56; and in other working class struggles - 28. Sixty years hard labour have been handed out to working class fighters." Though these figures are fairly amazing, they are clearly an under-estimate, considering the number arrested at Broken Hill alone.

all seemed proof of this. All seemed to show that defiant protests only resulted in the crushing of the militants, and that they had little effect.

Hence in November '32 the Workers' Weekly stated:

"A general prohibition of mass demonstrations with brutal police attacks, has imposed on the Party the task of altering the old method of preparation and organisation of demonstrations, in accordance with the changed conditions."⁵⁸⁹

Three things must be noted about this moderation of the fighting policy laid down by the C.P.A.

Firstly, that this was not a new line suddenly adopted in the late '32-early '33. As with the moderation of the demands, this turning away from open confrontation tactics had been evident for some time - as shown by the April edict against 'leftist' tactics. Throughout 1932 the Party leaders had been unenthusiastic about militant protests. It is just that at the end of the year they more openly and clearly stated their position.

Secondly, that this increased emphasis on moderate tactics that could win wide support because they did not involve the supporters in risks of bashings and arrests was not solely dictated by the fear, and the reality, of increased reprisals against radicals under Stevens. The new emphasis was

⁵⁸⁹. W.W., 18/11/32, p. 2.

ultimately the result of Comintern directives that the broadest possible mass United Front should be established; it reflects the moderation of the Comintern's line in regard to the role of Communist Parties. This was connected with the Comintern's change to the promotion of 'Socialism in One Country' instead of promoting world wide revolution. Above all, now, the Soviet Union must be protected from the war that the imperialist and fascist countries wished to pursue against it; to prevent this war, Communist Parties around the world must build an alliance with all possible allies; Communist Parties must give up the promotion of independent revolution in their particular countries and moderate their line to make this alliance possible. (It was this of course that was at the heart of the controversy between the C.P.A. leaders and the Left Oppositionists.)

Thirdly, it must be questioned whether the emphasis on moderation, in programme, tactics and organisation, was the best policy to follow, as far as the unemployed movement was concerned. Certainly, it did have advantages; in many ways it was sensible and successful. It had, after all, increased the amount of support for the unemployed movement; this support was to grow even further in the next three or four years, partly as a result of the moderation of the approach. In the old, defiant confrontations there had been needless arrests and bashings. Unemployed workers had been rather afraid to join in such protests. They were more willing to sign petitions,

to endorse a protest that would not result in their losing their dole or their freedom.

However, although the moderation of the C.P.A.'s line in regard to unemployed work did facilitate the winning of a large number of unemployed workers to the movement, there is some validity to the arguments of the Workers' Party against this moderation.⁵⁹⁰ By weakening its policy in order to appeal to the lowest common denominator, the C.P.A. did renounce the proper radicalising and propagandist role of the revolutionary vanguard. Instead of aiming to give a clear, independent lead that showed that the Communist Party was different from the social democratic organisations, that showed that the demands of the working class could only ultimately be won by struggle and not by parliamentary concessions, the C.P.A. tried to look similar to the social democratic organisations.

The Workers' Party argued that the C.P.A. leaders underestimated the workers' willingness and ability to struggle, that they were defeatist. There is some truth in this. We have seen that the C.P.A. leaders' attitude to the Questionnaire agitation was defeatist, that they quickly decided that it would be a failure and, instead of increasing their efforts to turn failure to success, they rather withdrew from the struggle.

590. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., This is the main argument running through the whole pamphlet.

It does seem that after their fervent belief in the rapid radicalisation and imminent revolutionary upsurge of the Australian workers, expressed in 1930-31, had proved wrong, the Party leaders swung too far to the opposite pole, and over-emphasised the weakness and passivity of the workers.

I am not, of course, maintaining that Australian workers, or Australian unemployed, were straining at the leash for a struggle. The critique given by Kavanagh in late '31 was still valid: they still, by and large, wished to steer clear of confrontation, there was still little rank and file initiative for activism.

Yet, I think, the true position apropos the willingness and ability of the unemployed workers, at least, to engage in forceful protests fell somewhere in between the two poles of Communist opinion; they were not nearly so revolutionary as had been maintained in 1930, but they were not so completely tame as the C.P.A. now maintained. Some of the militant protests had attracted a good mass following, had shown that many ordinary unemployed workers were willing to resist. One has only to look at the defiance of the Glebe and Broken Hill unemployed, at the determination of the coalfields unemployed in the Questionnaire struggle.

It is both impossible and out of place for me to say what line the C.P.A. should have followed; I have not faced the daily difficulties of organising the unemployed. However,

I feel that the best tactical policy would have been a combination of the mass petition and deputation campaign and the defiant show of resistance around certain issues. After all, the most flamboyant of the confrontations - the mid '31 eviction struggle - had won success; petitions and deputations did not frighten the Government.

The Double Dole campaign was conducted in accordance with this new emphasis on mass work. I have already mentioned that at the conclusion of the coalfields struggle the Communist Party press had called for a mass signature campaign against the forms; this campaign quickly gained a positive focus as well - the demand for the Double Dole. This campaign was to involve the unemployed organisations in the local canvassing that was repeatedly called for by the Metropolitan United Front Council.

By the end of November the Petition forms were ready⁵⁹¹ and the Metropolitan United Front Council recommended that all unemployed organisations make a specific demand for a fortnight's Double Dole over the Christmas period, and holiday pay for relief workers.⁵⁹² This demand would obviously appeal to all, and was a viable short-term objective. It also called on all unemployed to accompany a demonstration to the Minister.

591. W.W., 25/11/32, p. 1.

592. R.L., 30/11/32, p. 8.

for Labour and Industry, and for outlying districts to hold local demonstrations.⁵⁹³ (The Labor Council refused to support a call for payment for relief workers for the Christmas holidays and for a mass demonstration.)⁵⁹⁴

The campaign evidently had a wide response, raising nearly forty thousand signatures.⁵⁹⁵ The Minister for Labour and Industry "ultimately promised" the deputation "that double dole will be granted the unemployed for Christmas week, that unemployed engaged on Christmas relief work will receive one week's dole, and that men engaged on Christmas relief work for two or three weeks will receive the dole one week after completing the job." Dunningham also promised to investigate a number of specific cases of distress, in particular of workers cut off the dole because of the new (Questionnaire form) regulations. A deputation of women demanded "that married women be given A scale rations instead of the present miserable 2/9 per week."⁵⁹⁶

Though there was no reported response on the last issue, the Metropolitan United Front Council rightly proclaimed the campaign a success.⁵⁹⁷ It added that the campaign against the

593. Ibid.

594. Ibid., and T.L.C.M., 24/11/32.

595. W.W., 16/12/32, p. 4, says 39,000 signatures;
R.L., 14/12/32, p. 1, says 37,000 signatures.

596. R.L., 14/12/32, p. 1.

597. Ibid., and W.W., 16/12/32, p. 4.

P.I.R. and the Questionnaire would continue, as would protest against specific hardship resulting from the Questionnaire form.

This latter provision was most urgent. There are no official records of the numbers who lost the dole because of the new regulations, but the great decrease in dolors after Stevens' election suggests it was many. The Tocsin claimed that in the first issue of the dole under the new regulations eight thousand were cut off relief.⁵⁹⁸ By March there were reportedly over fourteen thousand unemployed workers and their dependents excluded from relief because of the Questionnaire.⁵⁹⁹

The Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator gave these two cases:

"At Mona Vale a worker with five children who was on 'E' scale and who in addition received £1 per week in endowment. When re-applying for relief he was informed that all children for whom endowment was paid were debarred from the dole. He was forthwith reduced to 'B' scale. Family income is now Dole 8/8½, Child Endowment £1, or a total of £1.8.8½."

The other case showed difficulties created by the question 'Have you at any time declined employment?'

A young unemployed girl accepted a job at 10/- a week. On the third day the employer stated he could only pay her 5/-. The girl could not accept this, as she had to pay fares to work. "The girl left and on applying for food relief was refused on

598. The Tocsin, 6/1/33, p. 1.

599. R.L., 29/3/33, p. 2.

the grounds that she had declined employment."

The paper concluded: "This case is not singular but is part of an organised plan."⁶⁰⁰

In early 1933 the Metropolitan United Front Council increased its calls for a massive signature campaign, for the Double Dole; these calls were linked with the call to rally the unemployed together for International Unemployed Day. This day was intended to be not only a focal day of protest, but it was hoped that the preparations for the protest would build up the unemployed organisation.

The organisational groundwork for International Unemployed Day was much better planned and carried out than in 1932. There were repeated advertisements for it in the Communist press,⁶⁰¹ and it would appear that local unemployed bulletins also popularised the I.U.D. platform.⁶⁰²

The Metropolitan United Front Council also tried to draw a wide number of unemployed groups into the planning of the day, the formulation of demands, etcetera. It invited all working

600. Canterbury-Bankstown Liberator, 11/11/32, p. 1.

601. e.g. R.L., 4/1/33, p. 1; 11/1/33, p. 8; 18/1/33, p. 5; 1/2/33, p. 8; 8/2/33, p. 8; 15/2/33, p. 8; 22/2/33, p. 8; W.W., 27/1/33, p. 1.

602. The Tocsin is the only paper I have been able to find for this time, but it has a large amount of I.U.D. publicity. c.f. The Tocsin, 21/1/33; 2/2/33; 11/2/33; 18/2/33; 25/2/33. This includes a couple of good cartoons.

class organisations to send three delegates to a conference to prepare for I.U.D.; it stressed that all organisations were invited, whether allied with the United Front Councils or not. It also suggested that unemployed organisations should hold local conferences to mobilise the unemployed.⁶⁰³

This conference was attended by about ninety delegates from over fifty organisations.⁶⁰⁴ It decided that Monday February 27th should be I.U.D. and it called on all organisations to prepare a massive petition. (The Tocsin noted that it was hoped to present 250,000 signatures on the day.)⁶⁰⁵

The Conference also drew up the following platform of demands:

1. Withdrawal of the 32 point Questionnaire and the P.I.R.
2. 100% increase in the dole for all scales, with an open order coupon negotiable with any shop.
3. Every unemployed worker to be eligible for the dole, irrespective of family income.
4. No eviction of the unemployed for non payment of rent, and no seizure of furniture.
5. That free boots, clothing, fuel, medicine, etc., be provided.

603. R.L., 11/1/33, p. 8.

604. Ibid., 18/1/33, p. 5, says 92 delegates from 53 organisations.
W.W., 20/1/33, p. 1, says 90 delegates from 52 organisations.

605. The Tocsin, 21/1/33.

6. Free transport.
7. Award wages for relief workers, and no rationing of work.
8. Withdrawal of the charges against the Glebe fighters.⁶⁰⁶

The organisational plans decided upon were:

1. All localities organise a mass petition drive.
2. The petition to be presented to the Minister for Labour and Industry by Conference delegates and delegates from the outlying districts.
3. Organisers should canvass for support for the major city demonstration in the inner city suburbs and the Waverley-Bondi-Randwick-Mascot area; more outlying districts should hold local demonstrations.
4. The Conference recommended that Relief Workers' Councils should send delegates from all jobs and call a one day strike on I.U.D.
5. Conference should appoint a Committee to organise the campaign.⁶⁰⁷

A Committee of twenty was elected by the conference; this held subsequent campaign meetings.⁶⁰⁸ Quite a number of local

606. R.L., 18/1/33, p. 5. (The demands are sometimes phrased differently or put in a different order; sometimes one is missed from the list, especially demand no. 7. e.g. W.W., 24/2/33, p. 1.)

607. R.L., 18/1/33, p. 5.

608. W.W., 27/1/33, p. 1.

groups followed this lead. For example, the St. George district United Front Council called a conference of thirty-six delegates from local trade union, A.L.P., Socialisation Unit, unemployed and W.I.R. groups to prepare for I.U.D. Thousands of signatures were reportedly collected; the St. George District Unemployed Association was distributing leaflets, and had set up committees at the depots to hear complaints.⁶⁰⁹

These I.U.D. conferences apparently were successful in restimulating interest in the unemployed problem and raised issues beyond the I.U.D. platform. At the Wollongong United Front conference for I.U.D., for example, the agenda included a general discussion on United Front tactics and unemployed work, the need for more contact with the employed workers, the need for the organisation of women and youths and relief workers. This conference was attended by thirty-two delegates from the South Coast towns, and included five women delegates (three representing the unemployed and two from the Cooperative Women's Guild); one weakness was that there were only four representatives of the employed workers.

It decided to call a women's conference. It agreed to call an I.U.D. demonstration at Wollongong and to send a delegation to Sydney for I.U.D. It also planned to ask employed workers to strike on I.U.D. and to join the Sydney delegation.

609. R.L., 15/2/33, p. 8.

It recommended that the unemployed attend union meetings to stir up the interest of the employed. Finally, a district organising committee was elected, to work with the local Unity Council.⁶¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Broken Hill unemployed decided to support I.U.D. and canvassed support for the petition - receiving "great support from the townsfolk."⁶¹¹

About a fortnight after the planning conference for I.U.D., the Workers' Weekly reported that two area committees had been set up at Balmain, that one thousand signatures against the P.I.R. and Questionnaire had already been collected there, and mass meetings were under way.⁶¹² In February Balmain was still heading the signature campaign. By now there were reportedly thousands of signatures collected from all over the state.⁶¹³

As luckily the Balmain U.W.M.'s paper for this period still exists, we can see the sort of arguments that were aimed at winning the unemployed to the I.U.D. demands, and to the movement in general. (It should however be mentioned that the level of journalism in this paper was much better than average -

610. W.W., 3/2/33, p. 3.

611. Ibid., 3/2/33, p. 4.

612. Ibid., 27/1/33, p. 1. (700 signatures were collected already at Surry Hills.)

613. W.W., 10/2/33, p. 1. (Annandale unemployed had also collected a large number of signatures.)

as is witnessed perhaps by the better-than-average success of the campaign in Balmain.) These articles also shed an interesting light on the outlook of many unemployed - on their inclination to leave the unemployed struggle to others, and their tendency to absorption in escapism.

The former attitude is referred to in The Tocsin's first I.U.D. article:

"The majority of unemployed are agreed that /the I.U.D./ demands are fair and just, and only desire convincing that the methods we advocate will achieve success. If all the unemployed who are opposed to the Permissible Income Regulations and the Questionnaire Form only decided to give a trial to the methods of the United Front, we should be SURE OF SUCCESS! What government in the world could resist such pressure? On all sides we hear individuals murmuring such words as 'Why don't they do something' and expressing their disapproval at OUR inactivity. By 'they' we presume that those disgruntled elements mean the leaders and active members of the United Front. May we gently point out that working class struggles are only won by the mass activity of ALL, and not by the sacrifice of the few. We are all pretty well fed up with our present conditions, and have no illusions about the future, so what about making it an 'All in go' on February 27th and try what a real mass pressure will achieve. In the meantime, what about assisting us in the spade work of organising the necessary committees for the collection of signatures etc. Come along to the next meeting of the U.W.M. at the Market, Loyalty Square on Wednesday night and hear how we intend to set about this work. OUR SIGNATURE CANVASSERS ARE OUT, AND WILL CALL ON YOU IN THE NEAR FUTURE."614

Though this does have a certain hectoring note, it is fairly low-key and chatty (slightly reminiscent of a chummy

614. The Tocsin, 21/1/33.

evangelical approach, perhaps ?) and appeals directly to the experience and understanding of the unemployed and not to a presumed political consciousness. It is very different from advertisements for demonstrations in the Communist press in, say, 1930, which regularly concluded with a denunciation of social fascism and a call to unite in the imminent class revolution. It is also not elitist, the unemployed are invited to join the committees and the main emphasis is that it is the mass, not the leaders, who make a struggle.

Finally, its claim that the mass of unemployed opposed the dole regulations is probably accurate. It has been part of the aim of this thesis to reach the feelings of the mass of the unemployed through the aspirations and activities of the low-level groups representing the unemployed and I think here The Tocsin is speaking for, as well as to, the workless.

Another Tocsin I.U.D. article brilliantly derides the escapism not just of the unemployed but of the whole society that was able to be preoccupied with trivia while men starved. (One could of course argue with some justification that sport provided a valuable outlet from the despair of daily existence; but there is also valid scope for cynicism in a national engrossment in bread and circuses, minus the bread.) As this article is, I believe, one of the cleverest pieces of political journalism of the period, I will quote it in full. The cartoon of Stevens opposite was in the centre of the text.



'OWZAT?
FOR
FEB. 27TH.

A REAL TEST!

"BODY-LINE BOWLING.

Miles of paper and gallons of ink have been used during the past few weeks in an endeavour to boost up the international cricket test match and so make bigger and better profits for those concerned.

For the time being, the 'Leg Theory' has superseded the 'Douglas Credit Theory' and the 'Body-line' argument has assumed much more importance than the question of body lining. Truly we are a wonderful people! Will we win the next Test? concerns us more than Will we pass the Means Test?, and the so-called 'basher gang' tactic of the supercilious M.C.C. hurts us more, apparantly, than the concrete 'basher gang' of the sanctimonious B.S.B. While we are engrossed in a study of 'square leg', we forget all about a square meal, and the antics of 'silly point' would lose their point if we realised who was silliest.

While we barrack for a few runs we forget to barrack for a few buns, and we are more worried about the wearing of the pitch than an Irishman is about the 'Wearin' O the Green'. While we study the scoreboard we lose sight of the state of the bread board, and the fine cuts of Bradman interest us more than the wage-cuts and dole-cuts of the government.

Let us make a few comparisons.

We will liken ourselves to the wicket, standing isolated in a barren field. All around us are our enemies awaiting every opportunity to cast us down. With the speed of ten Larwoods, the government hurls volley after volley in our direction, and more often than not disrupts and shatters our organisation. The slightest slip on the part of our defending forces is taken advantage of by the re-actionaries who surround us. Our only defence is the bat, and if we allow the opposing bowlers to smash our best batsmen without attempting to help them, we are lost indeed!

Our victory depends on the safety of our batsmen. Let us then form a UNITED FRONT with them in defence of our position, so that in the near future we also will

be able to attack and wipe off a few old scores.

REMEMBER!

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR STRUGGLE!

WE CAN WIN!"⁶¹⁵

The Tocsin's other I.U.D. articles concentrated less allegorically on the demands and the need for struggle. These articles too avoided propagandist catch-phrases and clearly and succinctly stressed the need for action. ("A little action is worth a lot of talk, and is better than taking 'Kruschens'.")⁶¹⁶ Another cartoon portrayed a superbly galline Stevens hatching eggs labelled 'Relief Scheme', 'Work For Dole', 'Dole', etcetera and clucking 'Hark! Methinks I hear the rumblings of nascent life'; he has been cuckolded with an egg labelled 'Feb. 27', to which is attached a sizzling fuse. The caption (of course) 'Counting his chickens too soon!'⁶¹⁷

All the calls to rally on I.U.D. had stressed that all workers were needed in the struggle. Though the I.U.D. Committee was obviously fostered by the Metropolitan United Front Council the preparations for the day, at both top and local levels, were open to representation from all unemployed, and there

615. Ibid., 11/2/33.

616. Ibid., 25/2/33.

617. Ibid., 18/2/33. (Unfortunately this is a bit blurry for reproduction.)

clearly was a genuine attempt to set aside factional and political barriers for this protest. (An outstanding example of this is the enthusiasm of the Balmain U.W.M. for the day, for the Communist Party and Sylvester were in the process of splitting.)

The Labor Council, however, maintained its attitude of opposition and isolation, though it did show some initial amity. The Metropolitan United Front Council asked the Labor Council to appoint delegates to the united committee that was organising I.U.D., and also that the United Front Committee be allowed to have full delegate rights on Council.⁶¹⁸ The Council agreed to appoint two delegates to the I.U.D. committee and that "the request for delegates rights on Council be taken as a notice of motion for the rescission of Council motion on this matter." The delegates chosen were Moran and Mutch, a conservative. Mutch's political allegiance, plus an addendum slipped in by Garden that the delegates should report back to Council⁶¹⁹ were to lead to the revocation of any support for I.U.D.

A few days before February 27th the United Front Council of Unemployed asked the Labor Council to support the

618. (Though Moran took an active part in this meeting it seems that the unemployed delegates were not allowed representation at this time (c.f. T.L.C.M., 19/1/33) or that at most they were only allowed to speak on certain matters.)

619. T.L.C.M., 19/1/33. (c.f. also W.W., 27/1/33, p. 1.)

demonstration, and also the demands that the Glebe fighters be freed and the dole be restored to victimised South Coast fighters. Mutch reported on the I.U.D. Conference⁶²⁰ he attended, evidently unfavourably. Pullen⁶²¹ said that the only effective work Council could do was carry out the A.C.T.U. policy. Garden stated that the convenors of the demonstration had done no organisation work - which was clearly wrong. After such a dampener from the Labor Council elite, it is not surprising that instead of the motion endorsing support, Pullen's amendment "that the Council confirms its former resolution to deal with the matter in the terms of the A.C.T.U. Conference decisions" was passed by 37 votes to 21.⁶²²

As I have shown, Council had done virtually nothing to popularise or organise around these A.C.T.U. plans - apart from endorsing the U.L.W. and occasionally producing more reports on Combined Conferences and A.C.T.U. decisions.⁶²³ By February 1933 the Labor Council had clearly reverted to its temporising role.

(The Labor Council's boycott of I.U.D., as well as opposition upon opposition shown by the Labor Council to the U.W.M. and United Front Councils makes ludicrous Peters'

620. (Called in the minutes the 'Unemployed Conference'.)

621. (The new Vice President.)

622. T.L.C.M., 23/2/33. (c.f. also W.W., 3/3/33, p. 1.)

623. e.g. T.L.C.M., 2/3/33 and 16/3/33.

statement that "The Communist Party would allow the U.W.M. to have nothing to do with the Trades and Labor Council sponsored unemployed organisations - the Unemployed Workers' Union in 1930 and the Dole Workers' Union in 1933.")⁶²⁴

Despite the good organisational work done for International Unemployed Day it would seem that the Day was not an overwhelming success, though the reports of the Day are so contradictory that the success is hard to evaluate.

The Red Leader claimed that "contrary to the lying reports in the capitalist press, the I.U.D. demonstration in Sydney was a success."⁶²⁵

The Herald's report is indeed one of disinterest and disorganisation. It numbers the crowd at "several hundred". Its report does show, however, that the demonstrators were not easily cowed, and that they re-grouped and refused to be dispersed in a similar manner to the Glebe crowds in the October demonstrations. It states that while a deputation presented a petition to the Minister for Labour four hundred men gathered in Phillip Street, but were "kept on the move" by the police.

"Several attempts were made to hold gatherings on the pavements, but these were stopped.

624. P. Peter, op. cit., p. 413.

625. R.L., 8/3/33, p. 8.

The crowd split into sections and wandered around the city. Men crowded about the street corners, and, where they had an excuse to remain, as at tram stopping places, they blocked the footpaths.

The police were not able to shift the men, who resisted any order. Reinforcements arrived and there was a scuffle when the police were defied."

At about 1.00 p.m. the police arrested a speaker near the Strand Arcade; at this stage the crowd was blocking the roadway. There were further scuffles and arrests at this stage, and a stone was thrown through a shop window. Many of the demonstrators hung around the city for the rest of the day.

Though the Herald states that "most of the crowd appeared to treat the speech and actions of the demonstrators as a joke", this is invalidated by its own report of the defiance of the crowd and its report that large numbers of police were drafted to guard shops and prevent any further gathering.⁶²⁶

Though it is likely that the number of demonstrators was larger than the Herald estimate - as the crowd was apparently scattered into groups it must in any case have been difficult to count - the Communist reports are wildly different. The Red Leader claims that between three and four thousand gathered initially; the Workers' Weekly reports one and a half

626. S.M.H., 28/2/33, p. 9. Moran and Fred Wills were two of the arrested men. Finally, seven were arrested but received light sentences because of the fight mounted by the I.L.D. c.f. P.T. Thorne, op. cit., p. 9.

thousand.⁶²⁷

Unfortunately, only the Workers' Weekly gives the final number of petition signatures: fifty thousand, it claimed. This figure is quite probable given the number collected in Balmain and the wideness of the collection campaign. If accurate it shows that the United Front Councils were by now able to reach a wide number of people, that they were not an isolated sect branded with a Communist stigma.

The Communist Party admitted that there had been weaknesses on I.U.D. "Undoubtedly, the organising work and strategy used in this demonstration were excellent, but the failure of the deputation to send members to report at the arranged time must be criticised."⁶²⁸ It would seem that the crowd was unsure what was happening, what it was supposed to do. (Again we see the dependence on the leadership of a few.)

Despite the numbers who had signed the petition it would seem that the only thing gained by the deputation was the fact that they again presented the case of the unemployed.⁶²⁹ Apart from stating that the Government did not intend to extend relief work to private enterprise, Dunningham simply replied that the

627. R.L., 8/3/33, p. 8; W.W., 3/3/33, p. 1.

628. R.L., 8/3/33, p. 8. W.W. also stated "some failings".

629. For a criticism of this I.U.D. and the whole tactic of deputations c.f. The Workers' Party (Left Opposition) of Australia, op. cit., p. 27.

present relief system was the only feasible one.⁶³⁰

Though the Communist press reported several successful suburban I.U.D. demonstrations and a Kurri meeting, the Herald claimed that the Newcastle and South Coast demonstrations were failures.

While the day did not show the support to be expected from the amount of preparation, the day was probably by no means a total failure, for the campaign leading up to the day had widely advertised the platform of the United Front Councils, and had probably reached unemployed workers formerly unaware that the organisation existed. The delegate conferences held to plan the day had built up contact between the local unemployed organisations, and had publicised the necessity for united action.

The most significant outcome of I.U.D. passed unnoticed in the establishment press, and received only a brief mention in the Communist press. A state-wide conference of unemployed organisations was held in Sydney over the last couple of days of February and the beginning of March. This was attended by eighty-two delegates, representing fifty-five unemployed organisations; country as well as metropolitan organisations were represented, among them Lithgow, Kurri Kurri, Cessnock, Aberdare, Wollongong and Corrimal. At this conference both

630. S.M.H., 28/2/33, p. 9.

the platform and organisation of the unemployed movement were discussed and reformulated. The most important change decided upon by conference was the establishment of a State Council of Unemployed, to act as the coordinating and directing Council of Unemployed organisations through the state. This decision arose out of a report given by the Metropolitan United Front Council. The new State Council was to have fifteen delegates.⁶³¹

Little was immediately heard of the new State Council; the unemployed movement as a whole was fairly quiet over March and April. After the introduction of Emergency Relief Work in May 1933, however, there was a resurgence of the movement, and within a couple of months the State Council - by then the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers - was at the centre of a vital and rapidly growing movement. It was to continue to coordinate the movement for at least the next three years.

631. R.L., 8/3/33, p. 6.