

CHAPTER 6 - THE RELIEF WORKERS' MOVEMENT - 1933-1936.

If depression studies have largely neglected the unemployed movement in the early Thirties, they have completely ignored the organisation and struggles of the relief workers in the later years. I noted in Chapter I that economists, politicians and journalists of the Thirties dated 'recovery' at about late 1932 to 1933; from that time they lauded the 'return of prosperity'. As the very existence of unemployed workers seemed to cast doubts on the nation's recovery, politicians and journalists, after this time, tried, even more than formerly, to ignore their presence.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately historians, even those most sympathetic to the problems of the unemployed, appear to have come under the sway of this view. The existence of unemployed workers after this time has been, by many, disregarded; where their existence has been noted, there has been no attempt to discuss their position.

It should be difficult not to take note of the continuation of heavy unemployment in the middle and even late Thirties. The

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1. e.g. much less press space was devoted to large protests; often the beginning of a relief work strike was noted, but the press did not bother to follow it through to its conclusion. In the Homebush Bay strike (outlined later) it will be shown that after the press declared this struggle over, a few thousand relief workers stayed out for more than another week.

figures outlined in Chapter I speak for themselves. To reiterate: according to the trade union estimates, about a quarter of the State's workforce was unemployed in 1934, about a fifth in 1935, about 15% in 1936; about one man in ten was still out of work in 1938 and 1939.<sup>2</sup>

Not only did unemployment continue, but the conditions of the unemployed workers remained terrible. At the New South Wales A.L.P.'s 1934 Conference, the President declared that "the year [Conference] is reviewing has been the worst of the depression for the unfortunate unemployed."<sup>3</sup> I have already mentioned that, when studying the experience of the unemployed over different years, comparison is pretty meaningless, as well as impossible; but certainly, the resurgence of certain economic sectors did not make the lives of those who remained unemployed any better.

I also noted, in the first chapter, that those who remained out of work in the later years met the claims that the nation had 'turned the corner' with cynicism, or increased despair. There were also more positive reactions. The unemployed organisations and, increasingly, the union movement, produced a number of fact-

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2. c.f. Trade Union unemployment table, Chapter 1.

3. L.D., 31/3/34, p. 5.

filled pamphlets disproving such claims<sup>4</sup> as well as publicly deriding the so-called prosperity. Many unemployed and relief workers refuted the claims by agitation; by protests and by organisation they resisted efforts to hide them, skeleton-wise, in a dark and crowded cupboard.

In the years after the depression had supposedly ended, the New South Wales unemployed built an even larger and more solid organisation than they had when unemployment was at its height.

In 1936 there was a huge and widely representative conference, attended by delegates from unemployed organisations, relief work jobs, unions, Labor Councils, and even some clergymen and aldermen.<sup>5</sup>

Though the main impetus behind the unemployed movement probably began to weaken in about 1937 or '38, agitations and protest continued, like unemployment itself, right up to the end

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4. e.g. - W. MacKenzie and Matt Hade, The Premiers' Plan In Action, issued by the Research Bureau, State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council of N.S.W., with approval of the Trades and Labor Council, Sydney, no date, (around March, 1935. c.f. R.L., 6/3/35, p. 5). (The spelling of MacKenzie's name was inconsistent; I will continue to call him W.H. McKenzie in the text);  
J.B. Miles, Prosperity For Whom, (Wright and Baker, printers) no date (before the 1935 elections).  
W.H. MacKenzie and Matt Hade, The New Permissible Incomes Regulations and Instructions in Relation to Emergency Relief Work, issued by The State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council, N.S.W., no date, (after May, 1934).
5. c.f. State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council of N.S.W., Report of Annual Conference, June 27-29th, 1936 (hereafter, S.U. & R.W.C. Report of Annual Conference, 1936).



of the decade and into the next. In 1940 a group called the Unemployed Workers' Union was distributing a paper among the unemployed of Glebe, Paddington and other metropolitan areas.<sup>6</sup> A four-page paper with a wide distribution was published weekly by the North Sydney Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers right up to mid 1941.<sup>7</sup>

While carping at others for not continuing studies of the unemployed up to the end of the decade, I also am forced, by reasons of space, to cut this study short at 1936. This is a logical break-off point, for in that year the Government began to curtail relief work, and after then the majority of unemployed workers went back onto the dole. Though the picture given here is attenuated, it should give a fairly comprehensive representation of the issues and methods of protest of the relief workers' movement.

I have also omitted accounts of protests made by unemployed workers who were not on relief work, though their demands are given in the various platforms of the State Council. This omission was made partly because the rest of this study has concentrated on doleys, but largely because the whole bias of the unemployed movement in the period 1933-1936 was to the

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6. The Voice of the Jobless, 7/3/1940.

7. Progress. (First issue held by Mitchell Library is for 28/3/41. This is Vol. 5, No. 242. By September 1941 it was appearing under the auspices of the N.S.W. A.L.P.)



demands and protests of the relief workers. There was still a considerable amount of anti-eviction propaganda and protest,<sup>8</sup> and the unemployed organisations continued to demand 100% dole increase, a rent allowance, extra issues of vegetables, clothing and fuel, the abolition of the P.I.R., etcetera, but the main activity centred around relief work - so much so, indeed, that in late 1934 the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was worried that it was neglecting the unemployed who were on the dole and those who were not eligible for any relief.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas in the earlier period the unemployed movement tended to concentrate on one issue for a time, and then focus on another - for example, the eviction issue in mid '31 and the dole issue in late '32 - in the later period relief work anomalies were continually the main concern. The particular grievances about relief work can be fairly easily divided into four main areas of concern, so in this Chapter I will deal with the protests thematically rather than chronologically. It must be stressed that the number of strikes or protests detailed here is but a fraction of the amount of activity that took place - I am simply

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8. e.g., W.W., 21/7/33; 4/8/33; 8/9/33; 20/10/33; 20/7/34; The Tocsin, 28/4/33; 5/5/33; 20/5/33; S.U. & R.W.C., Report of Annual Conference, 1936, p. 21, has a platform of 9 demands related to unemployed housing; the fight against evictions was still vital - L.D., 3/4/34, p. 6, noted that in the last 14 months there had been 8,000 evictions in Sydney alone.

9. Tom Payne, How We Fight, Authorised by the State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council of New South Wales, no date (shortly after August 1934 Conference), p. 7.

choosing a few to amplify each of the main issues. There was in the period 1933-1936 a continuing agitation widely dispersed through the metropolitan area, the south coast and northern fields and at times some country areas; though the amount of protest decreased after 1936, protests continued.

It is understandable that the relief workers' agitations have been overlooked, for unlike the more sensational earlier struggle, these protests were usually limited to a small area and involved a much smaller number of unemployed: many involved only fifty odd relief workers, others a couple of hundred. In some struggles a few thousand workers from a number of different jobs would unite, but the relief workers' movement was essentially manifested not in huge, state-wide agitations, but in continuing local struggles. Judging from the unemployed newspapers and the Communist (and to a lesser extent, the establishment) press, there would have been, at any given time in the period 1933-36, a couple or more protests ranging from strikes over pay to deputations over sanitary conditions.



THE EMERGENCY RELIEF WORK SCHEME.

As we have seen, the Stevens Government had from its inception aimed to replace sustenance relief with relief work, and had, immediately after its election, introduced a fairly extensive public works scheme. In September 1934 Dunningham described the Government's unemployment policy when it gained power in 1932 thus:

"Firstly, relief works would be started immediately to ease the unemployment problem. Secondly, more workers would be absorbed in private industries following on a revival of public confidence and the stimulation and encouragement of private industry. Thirdly, the aim of the Government would be to give men work in preference to food relief."<sup>10</sup>

The 'Emergency Relief Work' scheme introduced in May 1933 was the culmination of this policy of the extension of relief works; it gave a sudden, great boost to the amount of relief works provided. Though the sort of works undertaken under Emergency Relief Works (or 'E.R.W.', as the scheme was often known) were similar to those of the earlier 'ordinary' relief works, the organisation of the new scheme was different. ('Ordinary' public works still continued, though to a lesser extent.)

The Government had provided the full cost of the ordinary

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10. S.M.H., 10/9/34, p. 9.

relief works and had supervised them through bodies such as the Public Works Department. Peter writes that:

"work on ordinary relief works was sometimes continuous, but the work was often rotated between local unemployed or else the time at work was rationed. The unemployed were generally eligible for ordinary relief works, irrespective of family income but, on many of the works, family responsibilities were taken into account in determining preference. Need was still a yardstick. Wages were usually paid on an hourly basis at the rate of the current living wage fixed by the Industrial Commission, with a small bonus for skilled workers."<sup>11</sup>

It would seem that this system at times resulted in a haphazard distribution of work among different areas, and among the unemployed of a particular area. Payment was not uniform, nor was the system uniformly administered and regulated.

The Emergency Relief Work Scheme aimed to systematise relief work as well as to extend it; it also aimed to reduce the cost of the work upon the Government, and to reduce the Government's burden of administration.

On April 1st, 1933, the Government introduced a new relief work scheme at Sutherland (referred to in the unemployed press as the 'Sutherland Scheme'<sup>12</sup>). This, it would seem, was a pilot scheme to test the viability of a new relief work system. It was to continue for three months.

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11. P. Peter, op. cit., p. 81.

12. The E.R.W. Scheme was also sometimes called 'The Sutherland Scheme'.



By May 1st, however, the Government had decided to introduce the new system, though with considerably lower payments than had been given to the Sutherland relief workers. (The Sutherland workers protested strongly against the sudden reduction in their wages, and forced the Government to pay the original rates for three months.) The scheme was quickly introduced in the Leichhardt, Manly, Warringah, Dundas and Kogarah municipalities, and in the Wollongong area.<sup>13</sup> It soon was instituted throughout the state, though certain areas (in particular under-developed areas with a need for roads, sewerage, etcetera) received more work than others.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Emergency Relief Work Scheme, municipal councils played a much greater part: the Government provided the wages<sup>15</sup> and the councils the equipment and supervision. Councils suggested necessary local works, which had to be approved by the Government. Bland noted that "the Councils had to undertake not to displace regular employees." (We shall see that this was not always adhered to.) He added that the works had to be those

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13. R.L., 19/4/33, p. 1; 26/4/33, p. 8; 3/5/33, pp. 1, 8; 10/5/33, pp. 4, 8. c.f. also W.H. McKenzie and M. Hade, The Premiers' Plan In Action, pp. 8-9.

14. c.f. discussion of 1936 survey of the employment experience of unemployed workers registered at the Labour Exchange, at end of Chapter I.

15. Wage costs were paid with money from the Wage Tax on employed workers, still a bone of contention in the labor movement.

"which would not normally have been carried out from ordinary municipal revenues. Furthermore, to enable the men to be paid at the special rates calculated according to the Basic Wage, and not according to the Arbitration Court awards for municipal employees, the works had to be proclaimed as Relief Works under the Act for the prevention and relief of unemployment, 1930."<sup>16</sup>

The number of hours worked each week varied according to the applicant's family classification (i.e. the number of his dependents). The hourly payments were at the rate of the current state basic wage.

The registration requirements were similar to the dole registration requirements, and the applicant's income had to be below the prescribed Permissible Income level, though in March 1935 the income limit was removed.<sup>17</sup> Bland described the way the registration system worked:

"To be considered for employment, an applicant must be over 21 years, must have been unemployed for at least two weeks prior to making his application, must have been registered at a Labour Exchange for at least seven days, and must have been enrolled in an electoral district in New South Wales for 12 months, and have been resident in the locality where he is applying for work for at least 3 months. The Labour

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16. F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia", International Labour Review, July 1934, p. 46.
  17. J. Mackinolty, op. cit., p. 77; P. Peter, op. cit., p. 81. c.f. N.S.W.I.G., 31/3/35, p. 850.

It seems, however, that the P.I.R. may have been briefly re-implemented. S.M.H., 19/11/35, p. 9, notes that some time ago Stevens had reimposed the P.I.R. in regard to relief work, but as this had caused some hardship Cabinet was discussing whether the P.I.R. limit should be relaxed.



Exchanges or, where there are no Exchanges, the police obtain signed declarations upon prescribed forms from applicants, and then notify the Councils of the period of employment to which each person is entitled each week. These notifications are issued fortnightly, although where applicants are remote from the police stations, four-weekly certificates may be issued.

The men are called up by the Municipal Councils, and their employment continues week by week according to their family classification while work and funds last."<sup>18</sup>

Mackinolty's account of how the scheme worked in Lidcombe further explicates how the system worked in practice. When the scheme was announced the Lidcombe Council asked the Government to put it into operation in the municipality. 616 men were employed on Wyatt Park and various roads in 1933, and 679 in 1934. The Council's report noted that the men

"are divided into approximately 20 classifications, according to their responsibilities, with a different number of hours allotted to each classification; we have to adopt a roster system to correspond with the tools and plant available for the men..... Under this scheme the Department provides the wages to pay the men, grant small margins in the way of bonuses to skilled tradesmen, and in addition pay to Council a bonus of 10 per cent. on the wages paid to assist us in defraying administrative costs, insurances, transport and the like, Council undertaking to provide materials and do such other things as are necessary to keep the men employed ..... The clerical work is done by men selected from among the relief workers under the direction of the Town Clerk.....whilst the gangs are controlled by gangers also taken from among the Emergency Relief Workers under the superintendence of the Engineer."<sup>19</sup>

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18. F.A. Bland, op. cit., p. 47.

19. Municipality of Lidcombe, Triennial Report, 1932-3-4, pp. 24-26, cited by J. Mackinolty, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

The Stevens Government maintained that the scheme was aimed at raising both the living standard and the morale of the workless:

"The Government had before it the main objective not so much of providing work for the sake of the work that was there or could be created, but to transfer men from a state of desperation to one that was more hopeful."<sup>20</sup>

Apologists for the scheme stressed its value in giving an above-dole level of subsistence to the unemployed. Bland's comment is typical: "The advantage to the men .... is that they receive in wages more than the value of ordinary food relief orders, and their physical efficiency is better maintained."<sup>21</sup>

Yet relief workers continually complained that the payment was far too low, that often the relief worker received no more than the doley, and at times even less. The relief worker was expected to 'pay his way'. Landlords expected that rent, and back rent, would now be paid. The relief worker had to pay fares to work - which were often high. Because they were engaged in arduous physical labour the relief workers needed more, and better quality, food than doleys. They needed stronger clothes, better boots. Moreover, many of the extra benefits given to doleys were denied relief workers - they were less likely to receive free handouts of vegetables, clothes and blankets. It seems that in certain cases the special food orders to nursing

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20. N.S.W.P.D., Vol. 145.

21. F.A. Bland, op. cit., p. 49.



and expectant mothers and sick children were withheld from the families of relief workers.

The relief workers' claims that the pay was too low were justified. Though the amount of money received was more than the dole, it was very much less than the basic wage. That 'respectable' organisations such as churches and municipal councils agreed that the pay was too low supports the relief workers' claims of impoverishment. For example, the Lidcombe Council

"criticised the payment as a mere palliative and sought support from other councils in a request to the government to provide for an extra day's work for men engaged on relief work. They commented: 'We believe in the principle of "work for the dole", but at the same time we are forced to the conclusion that the amount of money received by the men is not sufficient to keep them in a reasonable condition and supply them with the necessities of life, other than perhaps food'."<sup>22</sup>

Though the wages were slightly increased, probably as a result of protest over them, relief workers often declared that the increase meant no ultimate improvement. For example, the hourly pay was increased by twopence an hour in March 1935. The Workers' Weekly cynically pointed out that this "immediately preceeded the elections", and claimed that the rise "offers but little consolation", and that it "means nothing in the final analysis". In many cases the rise was

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22. J. Mackinolty, op. cit., pp. 78-79 (cites Municipality of Lidcombe, Triennial Report, 1932-3-4, p. 31.

"an ultimate worsening - for Stevens gives these small concessions on the one hand, and takes away such items as special food orders, child welfare money, Chief Secretary's allowances, together with instructing the Court in matters of tenancy to reduce the period allowed for suspension of eviction warrants to impoverished tenants on the other.....

Then this move has as its inherent purpose that of endeavouring to create divisions in the ranks of the workers. It is intended as a 'sop' to the relief worker, with the object of allaying manifest unrest preceding the election and at a period when the workers remaining in industry are becoming alarmed at the inroads relief work is making to industry generally, with the consequent smashing of award wages and conditions."<sup>23</sup>

The justification for the complaints about the payments is best shown by the payments themselves. The following table shows the fortnightly value of both food relief orders and Emergency Relief Work wages (with the number of hours the relief worker worked each fortnight). The second table gives the state basic wage. In comparing them, one must keep in mind that the basic wage was paid weekly, and also that it was meant to provide the minimum necessary for a man, wife and one child. So in August 1933, when the basic wage was £3-8-6, a relief worker had to have a wife and six children to receive this amount, and this sum had to provide for two weeks, not one.

The maximum extra income allowed per fortnight is also shown in the table. The Labour Reports do not make it quite clear whether this limit applied to relief workers as well as dolors before May 1934, though it seems that it did. After May 1934 the

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23. W.W., 15/3/35, p. 5.



Family Unit	Permissible Income Per Fortnight		Value of Food Orders Per Fortnight				Fortnightly Payment for Emergency Relief Work				
	To May 1934 (a)	From May 1934 (b)	At Sept. 1933 (a)	From May 3, 1934 (b)	At end of 1936 (d)	May 1933 Hours	Wages(a)	From May 3, 1934 Hours	Wages(b)	From March 4, 1935 Wages(c)	
	1934 (a)	1934 (b)	1933 (a)	1934 (b)	1936 (d)	Hours	Wages(a)	Hours	Wages(b)	Hours	
Single Man or Woman	£1. 0.0.	£1. 5.0.	11.0.	13.0.	15.0.	12	18.10.	14	£1. 1.10.	14	£1. 3.11.
Married Couple	£2. 0.0.	£2. 0.0.	19.0.	£1. 1.6.	£1. 8.0.	20	£1.11.2.	24	£1.17.5.	24	£2. 1.0.
Married Couple + 1 child	£2. 0.0.	£2.10.0.	£1. 8.0.	£1.13.6.	£1.18.0.	26	£2. 0.6.	30	£2. 6.9.	30	£2.11.3.
Married Couple + 2 children	£2.10.0.	£3. 0.0.	£1.13.0.	£1.19.6.	£1.19.6.	28	£2. 3.8.	32	£2. 9.10.	32	£2.14.8.
Married Couple + 3 children	£2.10.0.	£3. 5.0.	£1.18.0.	£2. 5.6.	£2. 5.6.	32	£2. 9.10.	36	£2.16.1.	36	£3. 1.6.
Married Couple + 4 children	£3. 0.0.	£3.10.0.	£2. 3.0.	£2.11.6.	£2.11.6.	36	£2.16.2.	40	£3. 2.4.	40	£3. 8.4.
Married Couple + 5 children	£3.10.0.	£3.15.0.	£2. 8.0.	£2.17.6.	£2.17.6.	40	£3. 2.4.	44	£3. 8.6.	44	£3.15.2.
Married Couple + 6 children	£4. 0.0.	£4. 5.0.	£2.13.0.	£3. 3.6.	£3. 3.6.	44	£3. 8.6.	48	£3.14.9.	48	£4. 2.0.
Married Couple + 7 children	£4.10.0.	£4.15.0.	£2.18.0.	£3. 9.6.	£3. 9.6.	48	£3.14.10.	52	£4. 1.0.	52	£4. 8.10.
Married Couple + 8 children	£5. 0.0.		£3. 3.0.			52	£4. 1.0.				
Married Couple + 9 children	£5.10.0.		£3. 8.0.			56	£4. 7.4.				

Footnotes on following page.

## FOOTNOTE FROM PREVIOUS PAGE:

24. (a) Commonwealth Labour Report, 1932, p. 104.
- (b) C.L.R., 1933, p. 107. For each additional family unit after 7 children, an extra 10/- per fortnight was allowed in the income limit; an extra 6/- per fortnight was allowed in food relief; an extra 4 hours working time was allowed on E.R.W., at a value of 6/3. It was noted that "where there are unemployed children between the ages of 15 and 20 years in a family the parents' working time may be extended by eight hours per fortnight.
- (c) C.L.R., 1934, p. 109. For each additional family unit after 7 children an extra 4 hours working time was allowed per fortnight at a value of 6/10. The same provisions regarding children between 15 and 20 applied.
- (d) C.L.R., 1937, p. 120. (Still in force August 1938. C.L.R., 1938.)

The values given for food relief orders are only an approximate value for orders given in the metropolitan area; values sometimes differed because of varying food costs in non-metropolitan areas.

New South Wales Basic Wage <sup>25</sup>		
	Males	Females
August, 1933	£3. 8. 6.	£1.17. 0.
May, 1934	£3. 7. 6.	£1.17. 0.
December, 1935	£3. 8. 6.	£1.17. 0.
November, 1936	£3.10. 0.	£1.18. 0.
April, 1937	£3.11. 6.	£1.18. 6.

25. Commonwealth Labour Reports for respective years.



same limit did apply to both. After March 1935, as already noted, the P.I.R. was apparently dropped in regard to relief workers, but it continued to apply to those receiving sustenance relief.<sup>26</sup>

From 1936 Emergency Relief Works began to be curtailed, for the Government then declared that its aim was to put men back into full, ordinary employment. The result was that both the number and the proportion of dolors increased, as is shown in the following table. The number of food relief recipients and dependents is also given.

	June 1933	June 1934	June 1935	June 1936	June 1937	March 1938
Relief Workers - Part Time	34,229	75,648	72,373	55,770	24,976	19,943
Food Relief Recipients	83,151	28,759	25,531	24,988	30,135	30,811
Food Relief Recipients + Dependents	192,777	62,341	54,802	58,680	71,615	74,255

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This table also shows, of course, how the number of relief

26. c.f. Commonwealth Labour Report, 1937, p. 120, for a criticism of the P.I.R. after the increase in the income limit in May '34. c.f. W.H. McKenzie and Matt Hade, The New Permissible Income Regulations and Instructions In Relation to Emergency Relief Work, compiled for the State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council, N.S.W. This quotes in full the regulations and instructions to Labour Exchange offices, pointing out in detail how the P.I.R. caused much injustice.

27. N.S.W.Y.B., 1936-37, p. 167.

workers had increased dramatically after the introduction of Emergency Relief Work.

As this study ends at 1936, the relief work rates of the succeeding years need not be given. The average fortnightly earnings were a little higher than the rates introduced in March 1935, and men were employed for a number of weeks, instead of hours, in proportion to their family size.<sup>28</sup>

#### HOW RELIEF WORKERS SAW THE WORK.

To understand the protests mounted by the relief workers' movement it is necessary to see how the relief workers viewed the work.

When relief work was introduced on a wide scale many unemployed workers had been on the dole for years;<sup>29</sup> to them, the introduction of the work must have appeared relief in the full sense of the word. To receive government assistance in cash in return for work seemed much less degrading than receiving hand-outs and coupons. The relief worker could decide for himself

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28. c.f. Commonwealth Labour Report, 1937, p. 121. e.g. married men worked for 2 weeks in 7.

29. c.f. Census material in Chapter I re the duration of unemployment.



what food he required; he could exercise more control over his economic and social situation than could the doley.

As this study is of the relief workers' grievances and protests, it must necessarily concentrate on the anomalies, rather than the virtues, of the way the system was implemented. (It should be noted, however, that there seems to have been many more of the former than the latter.) Partly to obviate this necessary bias I will begin with an enthusiastic, laudatory account given by a relief worker employed by Willoughby Council on the public golf links.

He wrote: "Today the first 9 holes are rapidly approaching completion, each day's work being increasingly apparent ...."

The supervisor

"is possessed of an essential qualification for the handling of men with such diverse talents and experience...."

Many of his most useful workers are men drafted from other sections of relief work in the municipality as misfits. Here latent talents are recognised and given opportunity for expression. Interesting work, essentially constructive, and with scope for initiative, removed from the embarrassment caused by curious passers-by, has resulted in a more happy acceptance of the lot that existing conditions have forced upon men who resented the 'charity' of the dole. A sense of inferiority is being overcome by the pleasant surroundings, harmony and useful effort, while the healthy discontent with the existing chaos of the industrial world remains."<sup>30</sup>

This man was extremely fortunate, both in the job he was

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30. S.M.H., 11/7/34, p. 12.

sent to and in his supervisor. A great number - perhaps the majority - of relief workers were engaged on distinctly unpleasant tasks; supervisors were often tactless, even vindictive; "latent talents" and "initiative" were usually not encouraged.

On the whole, most of the unemployed did prefer the principle of relief work to the dole. Peter refers to a ballot taken by ten municipal councils, in which 90% of the unemployed voted for the work.<sup>31</sup> There are, however, a number of reports of unemployed workers voting against the work.<sup>32</sup>

Though the majority preferred relief work to the dole in principle, it would be wrong to assume that they accepted the way that the system and the work was implemented.

Radicals who opposed the work on principle were forced to concede that a campaign of complete opposition to the work could have little success. The Tocsin commented:

"DO THE WORKERS WANT THIS SORT OF WORK?"

Unfortunately this question must be answered in the affirmative. Yes, they do. That is to say, the majority of them do, and if the majority wants one thing then the feelings of the minority don't matter much at all. Of course, this desire on the part of the majority for relief work does not mean that the majority is right. As a matter of fact it seldom is! But it does mean that those opposed to

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31. P. Peter, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

32. e.g. R.L., 24/5/33, p. 4; 31/5/33, p. 6. Also reference in last Chapter to men not attending relief work call-ups. This can be taken as a vote against the work. Most unemployed were not invited to vote for or against the scheme.



relief work on principle, that is, the minority, cannot take up an attitude of 'splendid isolation'.

No, all the militant minority can do under the circumstances is to try at all times to influence the majority against this particular form of exploitation. They must go on to the jobs with the others and unceasingly urge the necessity of fighting for better conditions. The whole task of the minority is to show their fellow workers how relief work can be turned into permanent work, by organised effort."<sup>33</sup>

Though most relief workers felt the work to be preferable to the dole, the principle and the conditions of the work were still degrading. Peter notes:

"Relief work .... was not like ordinary work. When he applied for it and when he was on it, an unemployed man could still know that this work was not his own. What satisfaction could there be in levelling sandhills he knew would have remained standing if he and his fellows were not without work, especially if he were a man accustomed to a job of skill? .... He returned to the dole when the work was finished. Relief work was still closer to charity than to true employment."<sup>34</sup>

Bishop Burgmann in 1933 argued that relief work would not suffice, and that the state must find real work for the unemployed.<sup>35</sup>

This feeling that the work was not real work was yet another aspect of the alienation of the unemployed worker, and is amply demonstrated in the unemployed press. One paper closed with

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33. The Tocsin, 14/2/35, p. 3.

34. P. Peter, op. cit., p. 83.

35. Morpeth Review, July, 1933.

this 'hymn':

"We are but little children meek  
On pick and shovel all the week;  
The more we do the more we may  
It makes no difference to our pay.  
Ah Hell!"<sup>36</sup>

The feeling that the work was 'work for the dole' - that is, charity work - as well as the bad conditions, the minimal pay and derision at the politicians' promises of prosperity are shown in the following poem. (The irony of the very title highlights the feeling that the work was just a different form of dole.)

"Different Jobs.

Prosperity's round the corner does the Premier say  
There's plenty of work, though very small pay.  
It's work for the dole and nothing to spare,  
And we're just as hungry as ever we were.

Now the Premier won't work, though, strange to say,  
He and his class get plenty of pay.  
They do nothing but guzzle from morning till night,  
Which shows those that work that something's not right.

We should be contented to work, I'm sure,  
For prosperity's in sight and profits secure;  
Though why we're so foolish I really can't say,  
To me there's no difference between dole and our pay.

If you're not contented, don't let anyone know  
Or there's a place I know of you're sure to go.  
They'll say you're a Communist though I can't say  
That it makes any difference in the size of your pay.

At the place you'll be sent, if contented you're not,  
There's plenty of space and snags quite a lot.  
And a very hard task to make anything rhyme  
With the smell of the 'Sanitary Dump'.<sup>37</sup>

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36. Redlight! n.d. (April 1935); this was the organ of the Balmain Branch of the Relief Workers' Union, and grew out of The Tocsin.

37. The Torch, Official Organ No. 6 District Council, Unemployed and Relief Workers, Nov. 24, 1933, p. 3. (Agitators were often sent to jobs in afforestation camps etc. with vile conditions.)



The feeling that the work was unnecessary or ridiculous emphasised that it was not real work. Redlight! published a column entitled "Things We Very Much Want To Know". One week one of the questions was - "Have we made much of an improvement to Fraser St?"<sup>38</sup>

As the work was unnecessary, the workers could be dismissed at the whim of the Council. This lack of security, and lack of bargaining force, again showed the workers that they were only 'working for the dole'. When a number of Cabramatta relief workers engaged on creating a pansy bed were summarily dismissed for addressing a meeting the local unemployed paper noted:

"There is no doubt that the brass plate on the pansy bed<sup>39</sup> will be a wonderful asset to dismissed relief workers, as when the children ask for something to eat, they will be able to take them along and let them fill up with reverence and awe."

In the 'Answers to Correspondence' column it added:

"To Botanist. Yes! Pansies mean thoughts. No! That's right, not much thought was given to the children of the victimised workers."<sup>40</sup>

Another feature of the work prominent in the relief workers' attitude to it was that it was forced work - the worker had no choice of job nor even any choice whether he would accept it. If he refused, he lost the dole. (For example, when some Five Dock

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38. Redlight!, 16/9/35, p. 3.

39. (Stating it had been made by relief workers.)

40. Cabra-Vale Review, Official Organ of the Employed and Unemployed Workers' Association of Cabra-Vale, 22 Sep., 1933, pp. 2 and 4.

and Drummoyne unemployed refused to work in the country they were cut off the dole.<sup>41)</sup> As the State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council pointed out, "the intense poverty and misery surrounding those on the dole played their part in inducing the workers to accept" relief work.<sup>42</sup>

One unemployed paper compared the relief work gangs with the chain gangs of the convicts and rhetorically asked why steel chains such as were used on the convicts were not necessary now. It answered: "We are chained to the job with invisible chains. It is work or starve."<sup>43</sup>

A striking relief worker declared at a meeting: "The Emergency Relief Scheme had never been a job. It was simply asking men to work for blood money."<sup>44</sup>

The same feeling is expressed in the following poem, to which the epigraph was: "'These bastards ought to be made to work for the dole' - Any gathering of Business Men."

"Now work for the dole, you bastards,  
Take that gleam of hope from your eye.  
Just work for the dole, you bastards,  
Or watch your children die.

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41. The Tocsin, 22/11/34, p. 2. (Many similar instances could be given.)
42. W. McKenzie and M. Hade, The Premiers' Plan In Action, n.d. (1935 or after), p. 8.
43. The Torch, 24/11/33, p. 1.
44. N.M.H., 12/7/35, p. 11.



Don't expect help from us, you bastards,  
We wish to God you were dead.  
You've no more rights, you bastards,  
You'll work for your keep instead.

So dig out the sewers, you bastards,  
Up to your knees in slime.  
Some day we know you'll resist us,  
But we'll keep you down for a time.

Some day you'll revolt, you bastards,  
And put the boss under a sod.  
But you'll have to fight hard, you bastards,  
You won't catch us on the nod.

We've got batons and bullets, you bastards,  
We'll see that you all toe the line.  
But we'd keep you down much better,  
If it weren't for those Communist swine.

So don't talk to those swine, you bastards,  
Don't you ask them how or why.  
Just work for the dole, you bastards,  
Or watch your children die."<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the work was forced showed even the most acquiescent relief worker that this was just dole-work, and not work. The relief worker still had "no more rights" than the doley, according to the system.

As the relief workers' movement grew, however, the workers were to assert their rights and to hold them as such - in a number of protests over many areas the relief workers presented their demands as rights. They began to see themselves as part of the organised labor movement and entitled to the concessions and conditions won by years of union struggle.

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45. Workers' Art Magazine, April 1933, p. 17.

ORGANISATION : FACILITIES AND DIFFICULTIES.

While New South Wales relief workers did not mount any protest as large as the October '32 Dole Struggle<sup>46</sup> they did build a larger and more sustained movement than the earlier unemployed workers were able to achieve. As it may seem paradoxical that while the numbers of unemployed fell, the number of organised unemployed grew, the reasons for this increased involvement of the unemployed in the struggle to improve their conditions must be looked at.

While the improved organisation was helped by a number of factors, these all basically come down to the very fact of relief work itself. It was simply easier for relief workers to organise themselves than it was for the unemployed on the dole.

Firstly, the relief workers had a more definite, semi-permanent focus for organisation in the relief work gang. One of the difficulties of organising the unemployed in the pre-relief-work period was the lack of any continual common meeting place. There was only the ration bureau, visited once a week, and even on dole day not all the unemployed of an area would attend at the

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46. (There was a large relief workers' strike in Melbourne. c.f. W.W., 21/7/33, p. 4; 28/7/33, p. 1; 4/8/33; 11/8/33, p. 1; 25/8/33, p. 1. The strike lasted for four weeks and reportedly only 10% of relief workers stayed at work. The concessions won included a great improvement in relief work rates.)



same time. The relief workers, on the other hand, met together week after week, or at least every fortnight, for at least a good few hours at a time while the job lasted. Though some workers - for instance, single men and married men with no children - would only be working one or two days a week, a sense of continuity and permanency would be sustained by the workers with large families who worked a few days each week. They could tell the more intermittent workers what had happened in their absence. Regular lunch-hour discussions could be held, and as the work was often boring as well as unpleasant the workers could relieve the tedium by complaining about the conditions while on the job. Finally, if the Centennial Park relief worker's letter (given later) is any indication, some workers would spend their off-days agitating at the job.

The very fact of being together over some time would give a gang of workers a feeling of solidity and cohesion whereas doleys would largely suffer their fate in isolation. The cohesiveness would boost the morale of the relief workers and their sense of solidarity would also encourage them to protest about grievances discussed on the job.

Moreover, the doleys had little in common but their unemployment and poverty, whilst a group of relief workers suffered a number of identifiable, positive grievances together: if a job was isolated they all had to walk a long way to it, if lavatories were bad they all suffered. Also, the sort of grievances felt

by the relief workers, the fact that they were often small and obvious, encouraged protest to remedy them. The anomalies<sup>a</sup> in the dole system were so huge and often so intangible it was difficult to incite the unemployed to defy them; it was much easier for a group of relief workers to decide to fight for a shelter shed or the reinstatement of a few dismissed workers than for the unemployed as a whole to decide to fight against the P.I.R.

Furthermore, the enemy as well as the wrong was more immediate, more approachable. Relief workers' conditions were usually set by the local Council, so they could put their demands to the Gangers or lead a march on the Mayor's office. We have seen that the city demonstrations and marches to Parliament were often reduced because only inner-city workers could get in to them. The instigator (or believed instigator) of the relief workers' dissatisfaction was at hand, and they could approach him while the issue was still fresh in their minds.<sup>47</sup> Some earlier dole agitations had failed because by the time a big protest was organised the immediacy had gone out of the grievance and militancy had dulled. The smallness of the enemy as well as of the issue encouraged protest: it is psychologically much easier to decide to confront a Mayor or engineer than to resolve to take on not only the whole Government, but the whole unemployment

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47. e.g. c.f. a number of the protests about dismissals (outlined later). As soon as workers were dismissed the rest of the gang would often down tools and march to the ganger, engineer or mayor, demanding their reinstatement. They were often successful.



relief system.

Another reason for improved organisation growing out of the very fact of relief work was the increased support given by the unions and the Labor Council, for the organised labor movement finally realised the threat relief work posed to workers' conditions in general and very belatedly accepted the need for a strong alliance between the employed and unemployed. However, solid support was not really given until 1935, and the relief workers had largely to rely on their own organising efforts and the strength of their own protest, for while the Labor Council and unions increasingly endorsed the relief workers' movement, they often did little to help the actual agitations.

Despite these improved opportunities, organisation was still not easy. Gangers or works supervisors often tried to weed out any workers who tried to arouse protest, or even discussion, over job grievances. Many relief workers had an initial fear of, or antipathy towards, organisation. The following letter from a rank and file relief worker shows both these factors, and also how they could be overcome by careful, steady and rather courageous effort. This worker had been engaged on ordinary relief work; the job had closed the Friday before he wrote the letter, and it was rumoured that it would be put under the E.R.W. scheme. He wrote:

"Last August, when called up to do relief work at Centennial Park, my whole body revolted at forced labor and for a couple of days I was too bitter to talk.

In the finish I was compelled to explain to the men around me the need for a job committee, but was soon stopped by the ganger and told to 'work, not talk'.

This did not stop me and one day the men tackled me from every direction. A few took my part, but the majority were very hostile. I noticed one worker in particular doing good work till the ganger rushed us again and stopped all talk.

I resolved that, if the gangers stopped free speech, we must organise against them, so I got in touch with a few good men and suggested we should start a job paper.

We borrowed 5/- from the Redfern Unemployed Council for paper, ink and stencils, and set to work. We gave out 150 job papers, which got a mixed reaction, many refusing to read them.

We sent for speakers and held meetings without making much headway; our first collection for the paper only brought 6d.

Two of us then decided to spend our lunch hour going among the men, and, getting their feelings, soon decided to get out petition forms demanding more work.

After constant work we got about 90% of the names, but had a hard job to get anyone to go on the deputation to the Minister for Labour and Industry, Dunningham, so one other worker and I went ourselves.

The Minister gave many promises, and these were typed out and pasted up at all the gangs.

From this time onward we gained the confidence and support of most of the workers. Job news started to come in for the bulletin, and our collections rose to 6/- per week.

We constantly pointed out that we were de-unionised - not wanted by our old unions - so must organise among ourselves, and always kept the discussion on the everyday needs of the men on the job.

Men fired questions at us from all directions, but by using much tact we kept party politics out of our answers and so gained more confidence. We showed at all times we were sincere in our efforts to gain the men better conditions.

Three of us were placed in isolation one day, but at lunch-time we went over and addressed the men. Again, some weeks later, we were sent away to another job by ourselves, but this move did not stop us, for



we spent our off weeks back amongst the men.

By this time we could discuss politics, Russia, or anything, and get a good hearing; the job paper was looked forward to eagerly by the men.

Altogether we gave out 2,226 papers and collected over £3. ....

Remember this, fellow workers, personal contact and a correct lead will do more than getting out speakers in the setting up of a job committee."<sup>48</sup>

There were also factors inherent in relief work that severely reduced the potentiality for organisation and protest; proof of this perhaps is the absence of any State-wide strike.

Relief work was not introduced wholesale throughout the state: at any time only a certain proportion of the unemployed would be on the work so the possible number who could strike was limited.

The jobs were geographically isolated, especially as so much of the work involved undeveloped areas. So it was hard for a protest to spread from centre to centre as did, say, the coal-fields 1932 struggle.

The nature of the work was often very dissimilar, so workers on different jobs would tend to have different grievances. (City sewer workers, for example, might want boots whereas country camp workers might want tents.) These differences were increased by the fact that the jobs were conducted by separate local authorities

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48. W.W., 31/1/34, p. 12. (W.W. emphasis.)

who imposed different conditions. (Some Councils would instruct Gangers to speed up the work whereas in other places a more lackadaisical approach was adopted; so a protest against speed-up tactics could not be uniformly made.) Moreover, sometimes differences were imposed on relief workers by the authorities in a kind of mini Divide-and-Rule policy: preference would be given to married men or returned soldiers; single men would be sent to the country.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most important difficulty was the intermittency of the work. While the jobs gave the workers a regular meeting place and common grievances instilled a sense of cohesion, the jobs might only last a few weeks, at the end of which the workers would go back on the dole and might well not see each other again.<sup>50</sup> So a job committee and organisation carefully built up during a few weeks' work could dissolve when that job was finished. A new gang of workers would be recruited for the next job in the area; they might have to build their own committee, and might quite likely have to fight the same battle for conditions won by previous groups of relief workers.

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49. e.g. - A relief worker at Ganmain wrote: "Local single men are debarred from local dole work, but travelling married men are allowed to work at Ganmain. This is an attempt to divide the ranks of the married and single workers". W.W., 1/6/34, p. 5; c.f. also S.M.H., 22/1/35.

50. e.g. Balmain unemployed were sent to work at Lane Cove. At the end of the job they went back on the dole, which they received at Balmain. So they no longer saw their Lane Cove former colleagues.



Because of this the District Councils of Unemployed and Relief Workers had to fulfil the difficult task of sustaining the organisation despite rapid turnovers in the work gangs.

(This turnover did perhaps carry one benefit, for a relief worker who had taken part in organisation and protest on one job might use his experience in the next job he was sent to. After a strike at Bellambi the Secretary of the Strike Committee noted that "quite a number of men have revealed organising and speaking ability of no mean order. The Bellambi men and their comrades throughout the district have learned much from this struggle, and face the future with a confidence greatly strengthened."<sup>51</sup>)

I have said that the fact of relief workers working together boosted their morale; this was also increased by the simple fact of working, for though relief work conditions were bad, though the unemployed saw it as dole-work and not real work, the situation was at least familiar. They were, after all, working. And so they could make use of the traditional protest methods of workers. One of the main difficulties of the unemployed in the earlier period was that they could not enforce their demands, they literally had nothing to withhold. They could march and demonstrate, and be beaten by police if they were militant enough; or they could burn their dole forms and starve. They had had to devise new methods of protest (for example the anti-eviction sieges) to meet

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51. W.W., 20/7/34, p. 1.

the new conditions. It was hard to devise new protest methods, even harder to devise viable ones, and extremely difficult to convince the unemployed that they might be viable.

Relief workers had no more bargaining strength on paper, as it were, than doleys: the work had only been instituted to get them off the dole, and the government and community, let alone business, would not really suffer from a prolonged strike.<sup>52</sup>

The Workers' Weekly, in an editorial discussing how the "introduction of dole work by the Stevens Government has only served to stimulate the activity of the unemployed", warned:

"Strikes of unemployed workers have certain characteristics which make victory more difficult than strikes of workers in industry. In the latter case the profits of the employers cease, and an essential industry is held up. Both the employers and the government, in addition to the workers, are interested in the restarting of the industry.

In the case of unemployed strikes, as a rule, this does not apply. The relief works shut down, and the workers who refuse work are struck off the dole.

From this it follows that only after very careful consideration should strikes of unemployed dole workers be declared, and then never on the basis of the abstract demand of against all dole work in general.....

Strikes of the unemployed must be carefully prepared and reveal great activity on the part of the unemployed. Demonstrations and protests must

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52. (Occasionally a large strike of all local relief workers could harass the local Council if the Council had invested a large amount of money in equipment and materials and it appeared that the job would be left half-finished; but often other unemployed workers who had remained on the dole could be drafted to the work by the threat of losing their dole.)



be widely developed, and the progress of the struggle must be accompanied by the drawing in of new masses..... Of vital importance is the organising of relief."

(Committees should be organised to maintain unemployed struck off the dole.)

"Finally, very much depends on the support of the workers from industry."

(They must actively join.)<sup>53</sup>

However, despite the fact that relief workers had no real economic strength, the fact that they were working enabled them to use the familiar strike method of bargaining, and the relief workers in reality enforced both their right to strike and their ability to win concessions by strike pressure. This is all the more surprising because of the large reserve army of unemployed that the government could try to use as strike breakers, and especially because the provisions of relief work, by putting the work outside the Arbitration Courts, officially divorced the relief workers from the Australian traditions of labor organisation

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53. W.W., 14/7/33, p. 2.

THE RELIEF WORKERS' MOVEMENT : ORGANISATION AND GROWTH.

It seems that in June 1932 the national membership of the U.W.M. was around 30,000; I have suggested that at this time the New South Wales membership was some 17,000.<sup>54</sup> The conference held by the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers in January 1934 claimed to represent 60,000 unemployed and relief workers.<sup>55</sup> Payne stated that this organisation's conference in August 1934 was attended by 204 delegates "from all over New South Wales, and representative of 68,000 workers."<sup>56</sup> At the State Council's 1936 Annual Conference there were 301 delegates. At this the Secretary (Tom Payne) declared:

"Two or three years ago, we, as a State Council, were a small sect, isolated from the great army of unemployed. To-day, however, the State Council has become a leadership that has won the respect of an ever-increasing number of workers, both unemployed and within the Trade Union movement..... The organised unemployed are no longer a sect. We are today an integral and powerful part of the Labor movement."<sup>57</sup>

While the figure of 68,000 may be an exaggeration, Payne's account of the growth of the organisation, both in support and

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54. c.f. discussion in previous Chapter.

55. R.L., 31/1/34, p. 1.

56. T. Payne, How We Fight, p. 1.

57. S.U. & R.W.C., Report of Annual Conference, 1936, p. 3.



stature, is not. (As to the figure: it may seem over-large when it is considered that in June 1934 there were 28,759 on the dole and 75,648 on relief work in the state.<sup>58</sup> However, the organisation saw itself as representing the wives and dependents of the unemployed as well as the workers themselves, so it may have represented this number.<sup>59</sup>) The State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was by 1934-5 the centre of a large and viable organisation, having the endorsement of the Labor Council as well as individual unions, certain church groups and some municipal councils.

As well as the State Council organisation there was by late '34-'35 at least one other organisation uniting the relief workers of different areas: this was the Unemployed and Relief Workers' Union, founded by the Sylvester group and the old Balmain U.W.M. There were also local groups not connected with other groups or any central body.

As both the press and the groups themselves retained the cavalier attitude to names noticed previously, it should be pointed out that the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was the final development of the State Council of the United Front Council organisation, the foundation of which was noted at the end of the last Chapter. In June 1933 a Dole Workers'

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58. N.S.W. Year Book, 1936-37, p. 167. (Table earlier in this Chapter.)

59. The validity of this figure will be further scrutinised later.

Council was formed: this was part of the same organisation also, and its members clearly quickly joined the State Council, if they were not on it from the beginning. The State Council was sometimes called the State Council of Unemployed and Dole Workers', the Central Council of the same, the State Dole Workers' and Unemployed Council, just the State Dole Workers' Council, and other combinations of these words. As the proliferation of names can be confusing I will here use 'the State Council', or 'the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers' when I refer to the organisation. The important point is that this Council was the direct development of the United Front Council movement. The district United Front Councils also continued, though their support was broadened when relief work job committees joined them. They sometimes continued to call themselves United Front Councils, but more often would be called the X District Council, Unemployed and Relief Workers, or simply the Number Y District Council.

#### The Growth of the Organisation - 1933.

There was a quickening of support for the unemployed movement, mainly centering on the State Council, from the inception of Emergency Relief Work. By April-May 1933 the State Council was increasingly urging that the unemployed build their District and local Councils and, most particularly, their relief work job



committees.<sup>60</sup> At this stage the State Council's immediate demands regarding relief work were for

- 1) an increase of one day's work per week on all scales
- 2) full award wage rates and conditions
- 3) payment of wages on the job at the completion of the week
- 4) local demands in line with local grievances.<sup>61</sup>

The ultimate demand, of course, was for permanent, proper work at full pay.

As soon as the 'Sutherland Scheme' was introduced, relief workers in that area began to set up job committees.<sup>62</sup>

In the south coast area there was also an immediate growth of the movement.

On May 5th Wollongong unemployed were suddenly called up for "reclassification" and six hundred were put onto street or park gangs.<sup>63</sup> A couple of weeks later the Workers' Weekly declared there was "a general spirit of revolt" among relief workers in Wollongong-Port Kembla. "In spite of an attempt at intimidation

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60. e.g. R.L., 26/4/33, p. 8; 3/5/33, p. 1; 10/5/33, p. 4.

61. Ibid., 10/5/33, p. 4.

62. Ibid., 19/4/33, p. 1 (Miranda job committee); 26/4/33, p. 8 (other Sutherland committees).

63. R.L., 10/5/33, p. 8; W.W., 12/5/33, p. 1.

by the Council's engineer", all gangs held meetings on the job and appointed delegates to interview the Deputy Mayor. A mass meeting of three to four hundred relief workers was held, chaired by the District Secretary of the Miners' Federation who promised the support of every miner in the district. A.L.P., C.P.A. and non-party workers spoke. Resolutions demanded 100% increase in the time worked; award wage rates; the payment of an extra week's dole which the unemployed lost when they began work; no speed-up on the jobs (because many men were in bad condition); payment on the job instead of at the labour bureau; the satisfaction of other local anomalies. These demands clearly followed those of the State Council. A further deputation to the Municipal Council was organised, and petition forms were drawn up to raise local support. The committee of the recently-formed Employed and Unemployed Association resolved to continue the struggle.<sup>64</sup>

By late May there was also reportedly "solid support" against the work scheme at the Bulli-Woonoona ration depot, and a united front was being formed. The Red Leader claimed that "the largest demonstration of workers ever seen in Bulli" occurred when the Shire Council resumed its debate on the scheme. Over five hundred workers presented the Council with a petition signed by fifteen hundred local employed and unemployed workers opposing the scheme.

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64. W.W., 19/5/33, p. 1, p. 4.



The Council agreed to send the petition to the Government and implied its opposition to the scheme; but after the demonstration left it agreed to it by six votes to two. A meeting of employed and unemployed at the Miners' Hall called on all workers to strike if the scheme was introduced. Delegates were appointed to agitate among the miners' lodges.<sup>65</sup>

The united front was consolidated and petitions and meetings were organised. The Workers' Weekly claimed that in the Bulli shire there was a "United Front of all workers, irrespective of political or other diverse opinions" against the introduction of Work for the Dole.<sup>66</sup>

Such meetings, even if the support is overstated, show that there was not the general and easy acceptance of the work reported in some sources.

By June, both Communist papers were praising the increased activity of the unemployed. Their main stress was on the need for cooperation between employed and unemployed. A Red Leader headline stated: "Unemployed Give Fighting Lead. Not 'Potential Scabs' but Allies of Employed Workers." At this time the campaign was double-sided: For the Double Dole and Against Work for the Dole. The paper claimed that now was the time for organised mass

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65. R.L., 24/5/33, p. 4; 31/5/33, p. 6.

66. W.W., 14/7/33, p. 4.

struggle against forced labour and for the double dole. "The coalfields are again in the vanguard of action in New South Wales." On the South Coast there was a growing mass movement against the work, in the Newcastle area there was a growth of Double Dole Committees.<sup>67</sup> The western coalfields had also taken up the struggle and the movement was becoming rejuvenated in the metropolitan area; in all, the united front was "growing apace".

"All these evidences of rapidly growing activity point to the development of mass struggles in the coming winter. In all centres the new movement is characterised by a greater unity and mutual support between the unemployed and the workers in industry."<sup>68</sup>

The Workers' Weekly repeated that there was a growth of activity, especially on the northern and southern coalfields, in Lithgow, Paddington and other metropolitan centres.

The Red Leader also claimed at this time that "the hated militant workers have at last forced recognition of the plight of the unemployed workers and their dependents,"<sup>69</sup> and that "excellent progress is being made on all relief jobs. Job committees are

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67. (On May 20th there was a Double Dole Conference at the Newcastle Trades Hall attended by delegates from 7 churches, 4 shire councils, 6 trade unions, 11 miners' lodges, 26 unemployed organisations, 3 relief groups, 6 A.L.P. groups, plus the W.I.R., F.O.S.U., I.L.D. and C.P.A. It was convened by the District Council of Employed and Unemployed; a committee of 19 was elected to organise Double Dole committees throughout the area. W.W., 9/6/33, p. 1; R.L., 31/5/33, p. 8.)

68. R.L., 7/6/33, p. 1, p. 4.

69. R.L., 21/6/33, p. 1.



formed, or are in the process of formation."<sup>70</sup>

Though such claims had been made before - and had come at times to little - they are borne out by the reports of local organisation, by the protests mounted, and particularly by the local unemployed papers of late '33. There may well be exaggeration - intended perhaps to boost the morale of the unemployed - but there was greatly increased organisation.

In June, as I have said, the Metropolitan Dole Workers' Council was founded. It is unclear why there was established a special relief workers' council separate from the State Council of Unemployed. In March 1933 the New South Wales State Committee of the M.M.M. had declared against any separate Union of relief workers:

"It is essential to point out that such an organisation could not be of a permanent character because of the lack of even a semblance of continuity of employment.

With the present system of relief work in New South Wales, the majority are only employed at varying intervals for short periods, after which they again become part of the permanent unemployed army.

Experiences with the Relief Workers' Organisation in Queensland are a warning against any attempt to float a permanent, 'cast-iron' organisation.

Some form of organisation, however, is necessary to take up the demands of the relief workers on the job.

This can be accomplished by the establishment of relief job committees, to deal with the everyday problems on the job, while, on the question of general policy, a central committee, composed of delegates from

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70. Ibid., 28/6/33, p. 8.

delegates from all the jobs, must operate in order to coordinate and to direct the activities of the various job committees.

These committees will then in their turn cooperate with the Unemployed Councils in putting forward the demands of the relief workers and also those of the general unemployed."<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from this that it was intended that any organisation of dole workers should be an integral part of the already-established unemployed movement. It would seem that, despite these strictures against forming an organisation of dole workers, it was felt necessary, at this early stage of widespread relief work, to give an especial boost to the relief workers' organisation by encouraging them to establish their own Council. In any case, the Dole Workers' Council was from the beginning linked to the State Council, and by July there were references to the 'New South Wales Unemployed and Dole Workers' Council'.<sup>72</sup> This was clearly an amalgam of the two Councils.

The calls for the establishment of relief job committees in April-May had urged the groups to send representatives to the 'central rank and file committee' of relief workers. It would seem that this was the sort of 'central committee' suggested in the above article, and also that this became formally known as the Dole Workers' Council.

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71. R.L., 29/3/33, p. 8.

72. e.g. Ibid., 12/7/33, p. 8.



It is clear that it was connected with the State Council: the account of the conference at which it was formed is written by Moran, speaking for the New South Wales State Council of Unemployed; the conference was held at the State Council's rooms. It was attended by forty-nine delegates from job committees and unemployed associations. The Dole Workers' Council accepted representation from any local unemployed councils and any separate job committees: it stressed both its openness and its rank and file nature.

The primary demand formulated at this conference was for award rates and conditions for all dole workers, plus continuity of employment. This amounted to a demand for permanent work at full pay.

The 'immediate demands' were:

- 1) one extra day's work a week.
- 2) payment on the job.
- 3) work for all registered unemployed (i.e. none should be left on the dole).
- 4) abolition of the P.I.R. and the 32-point Questionnaire.
- 5) transport to and from the job.
- 6) workers be allowed to make up time lost (presumably, through wet weather, etcetera).
- 7) restoration of A-scale rations to children over 14 years.

- 8) restoration of the special food orders.
- 9) provision of boots and clothing, and a rent allowance.<sup>73</sup>

Demands (1) and (2) had been included in the State Council's May demands regarding relief work. Though the Dole Workers' Council demanded relief work for all, this did not show approval of the current relief work system; rather, it was demanded that all should receive relief work under an improved system.

It seems that the Council met, or tried to meet, every Sunday, and intended to have a continual and immediate contact with the relief jobs.

Its second meeting was reportedly "very successful". Further affiliations were accepted from Blacktown relief workers, Barton A.L.P. Electorate Council and the Wallerawang Unemployed Council; correspondence was received from the Lithgow United Front Council. A member - but obviously not a supporter - of the Labor Council's A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee reported that the rank and file were betrayed by that Committee. "It was generally agreed that the A.C.T.U. was only capitalising the unemployed struggle for propaganda against the Stevens Government."<sup>74</sup> Though this report is clearly biased, it is true both that the A.C.T.U. Committee did little to activate protest and that the unemployed largely

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73. W.W., 16/6/33, pp. 1-4.

74. R.L., 28/6/33, p. 8.



preferred the organisation fostered by the State Council.

Though the Workers' Weekly and Red Leader might exaggerate the strength of the movement, they would not completely invent accounts of activity in local areas. Apart from large conferences, there are in these two papers accounts of some organisation of relief workers in the following localities between May and December 1933: Cessnock<sup>75</sup>; Sutherland<sup>76</sup>; Mount Kembla-Kembla Heights<sup>77</sup>; Holroyd area<sup>78</sup>; Merrylands<sup>79</sup>; Leichhardt<sup>80</sup>; Wollongong area<sup>81</sup>; Pelaw Main<sup>82</sup>; Parramatta<sup>83</sup>; Maitland<sup>84</sup>; Manly<sup>85</sup>; Ryde<sup>86</sup>; North Sydney<sup>87</sup>; Rockdale<sup>88</sup>; Bilpin<sup>89</sup>;

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75. R.L., 26/4/33, p. 8; 26/7/33, p. 8.
76. References already noted plus R.L., 7/6/33, p. 8 (Caringbah); 28/6/33, p. 8; 12/7/33, p. 8; W.W., 30/6/33, p. 1.
77. R.L., 17/5/33, p. 6; 23/8/33, p. 2.
78. R.L., 21/6/33, p. 8; 28/6/33, p. 7; 13/9/33, p. 1; W.W., 14/7/33, p. 4; 29/9/33, p. 4.
79. R.L., 7/7/33, p. 5, p. 6; W.W., 1/9/33, p. 1.
80. R.L., 12/7/33, p. 8.
81. Refs. already noted plus R.L., 19/7/33, p. 8; 25/10/33, p. 12.
82. R.L., 26/7/33, p. 8; W.W., 18/8/33, p. 4.
83. R.L., 16/8/33, p. 5; W.W., 15/9/33, p. 1 (70 delegates at a unity conference); 3/11/33, p. 1.
84. R.L., 30/8/33, p. 3; 25/10/33, p. 3.
85. R.L., 6/9/33, p. 12; 4/10/33, p. 12.
86. R.L., 13/9/33, p. 1; 4/10/33, p. 8; W.W., 13/10/33, p. 4; 20/10/33, p. 3.
87. R.L., 6/9/33, p. 12; 4/10/33, p. 12.
88. R.L., 4/10/33, p. 12.
89. R.L., 4/10/33, p. 12.

Centennial Park<sup>90</sup>; Granville<sup>91</sup>.

The list could easily be lengthened.

In addition to other local groups, there are a number of reports of large conferences and activity in the Lithgow and western districts, and in the Newcastle area.

In mid-May the Lithgow unemployed, acting on the initiative of the U.W.M., set up a United Front Committee to organise amongst the employed workers against relief work. There had been in late '32-early '33 continual skirmishing between the U.W.M. and the Lithgow District Unemployed Association (an A.L.P. group) but at this meeting the rank and file of the L.D.U.A. reportedly attended, and a joint committee of fifteen was elected.<sup>92</sup> At a mass meeting held in Lithgow in late May, resolutions against work for the dole were passed, and a section of the employed declared their solidarity with the United Front Committee.<sup>93</sup> A later report noted that the United Front in Lithgow was being rapidly broadened, and that on the Committee of fifteen there were representatives from the A.R.U., the A.F.U.L.E., the Miners, and the Municipal Employees. The L.D.U.A. had representation equal to that of the U.W.M.<sup>94</sup>

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90. W.W., 1/9/33, p. 1; 20/10/33, p. 4.

91. R.L., 16/8/33, p. 5; W.W., 20/10/33, p. 4.

92. R.L., 17/5/33, p. 6.

93. Ibid., 31/5/33, p. 6; W.W., 2/6/33, p. 4.

94. R.L., 7/6/33, p. 8.

The Lithgow U.W.M. was at pains to stress that it was not trying to dominate the committee; indeed, its extension of equal representation to the L.D.U.A. shows a sincere attempt to prevent sectarianism.

In late June a conference of the unemployed organisations of Western New South Wales was held at Portland. The delegates came from the organisations of Sunny Corner, Cullen Bullen, Portland and Lithgow (L.D.U.A. and U.W.M.); Bathurst and Angus Place also promised support. The delegates decided to work towards the establishment of a District Council and elected an executive of six to send a deputation to the Premier.<sup>95</sup> There are reports of further organisation and good meetings at Portland.<sup>96</sup>

The aim of unity between employed and unemployed workers was at least partly fulfilled in the Newcastle area; there was also here strong feeling against the work scheme.

In June the ratepayers of Pelaw Main, Spion Kop and Stanford Merthyr joined the unemployed in declaring against the scheme; they instructed their local councillors to press for its rejection at the next meeting of the Tarro Shire Council.<sup>97</sup>

There was held in late May a Newcastle and Coalfields

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95. Ibid., 2/8/33, p. 8.

96. Ibid., 16/8/33, p. 5; 13/9/33, p. 1.

97. Ibid., 14/6/33, p. 7.



Unemployment Conference. A committee of thirty-five was elected to publicise the demands - essentially against work for the dole and for double dole - and to organise and unite the unemployed and employed workers. It was to publish a bulletin and distribute badges labelled 'For Unity' as well as holding meetings. That there was already some consolidation between the unions and the workless is shown by the fact that the A.E.U. representative was elected secretary.<sup>98</sup> This Committee was evidently known as the 'Against Work For The Dole Committee'. There are further reports of it helping local job committees and supervising the linking up of these into area committees. In parts of the district where the work was not yet introduced it agitated against it.<sup>99</sup>

The links with the employed workers grew: in October, for example, an unemployed and miners' conference decided to allow the unemployed representation on the lodge committees, despite opposition from Kellock and other miners' union officials.<sup>100</sup> (After 1934, when the M.M.M. won the leadership of the Miners' Federation in both the Central Executive and the Northern District,<sup>101</sup> the alliance between the unemployed and the miners grew, and the miners gave the unemployed struggles considerable support.)

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98. Ibid., 14/6/33, p. 8.

99. Ibid., 26/7/33, p. 7 (Cessnock and Pelaw Main organise in conjunction with the committee); W.W., 11/8/33, p. 1.

100. R.L., 4/10/33, p. 12.

101. c.f. E. Ross, op. cit., pp. 354-356.

One sign of the better organisation of the unemployed movement in this period is the fact that a number of district councils and even some suburban groups regularly produced their own papers. These would increase the contact between the unemployed, as well as publicising the main platform of demands. In mid 1934 the Communist Party claimed it had "developed an unemployed press with a circulation of 60,000 fortnightly."<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, only a handful of these papers still exist and these are from November 1933.<sup>103</sup> The papers still extant do show, however, that by this time there had developed a fairly solid organisation throughout the metropolitan area; the wideness of their circulation suggests that, if the drive towards establishing local papers had continued, the unemployed press could have reached 60,000 by mid 1934. And if this is so, the claim that at the August 1934 Conference 68,000 unemployed were represented does not seem too implausible.

As well as the papers produced by District Councils and suburban locals, a number of jobs produced their own little pamphlet-type bulletins, dealing with the grievances on the particular job. These would especially foster a sense of cohesion between the workers on a job, and would awaken them to the needs for organisation - we have already noted the effect that the job bulletin produced by the Centennial Park worker had. Unfortunately,

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102. W.W., 15/6/34, p. 4.

103. (One paper, The Torch, has one issue from September as well as from November.)

I have been unable to find any job bulletins.

Though I have found only a handful of newspapers, there are references to a number of others. For example, in July 1933 Leichhardt unemployed and relief workers were producing a bulletin called Action, and the Sutherland Central Council was organising the production of weekly job bulletins.<sup>104</sup> In the next month the Parramatta Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council was establishing a weekly bulletin.<sup>105</sup> In January 1934 there was a Sefton Park paper, entitled The Liberator.<sup>106</sup> In July of that year there was a reference to the Holroyd relief workers' paper.<sup>107</sup> In early 1935, Concord unemployed and relief workers were putting out a paper called Vanguard.<sup>108</sup>

Of the papers I have found - The Torch was the fortnightly organ of 'No. 6 District Council, Unemployed and Relief Workers', that is, the St. George district. It covered the suburbs of Mortdale, Hurstville, Como, Kogarah, Bexley and Rockdale and claimed a circulation of 5,000.<sup>109</sup>

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104. R.L., 12/7/33, p. 8.

105. Ibid., 16/8/33, p. 5.

106. Ibid., 17/1/34, p. 12.

107. W.W., 13/7/34, p. 6.

108. Ibid., 22/2/35, p. 5.

109. The Torch, 29/9/33; 24/11/33 (Vol. 1, No. 11; Vol. 1, No.15).



The Vanguard was the organ of 'No. 3 District Unemployed Council' which was comprised of Camperdown, Newtown, Darlington, Erskineville, St. Peters and Marrickville.<sup>110</sup>

The Clarion was the 'official organ of the Employed and Unemployed of Five Dock and Drummoyne'.<sup>111</sup>

The Beacon Light was issued by the 'Randwick District Council of Unemployed'.<sup>112</sup>

The Mattock was the 'official organ of Lidcombe Emergency Relief Workers'.<sup>113</sup>

These papers were all clearly linked with the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers: they publicise its demands and refer to it by name. There are even closer links between these papers: The Vanguard, Beacon Light and The Clarion share the same printer, though have different publishers; The Clarion, The Torch (November) and The Beacon Light run an identical article about dole cuts and demands which clearly originated from the State Council, and The Vanguard and The Beacon Light both reproduce the State Council's Weekly Report.

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110. The Vanguard, 25/11/33 (Vol. 1, No. 4).

111. The Clarion, 24/11/33 (Vol. 1, No. 5).

112. The Beacon Light, 25/11/33.

113. The Mattock, 23/11/33 (Vol. 1, No. 16).

Two final points about these papers should be noted. They had only begun recently,<sup>114</sup> which again shows that there had been an upsurge of organisation in the latter half of 1933. Also, they were not shoddy little pamphlets: The Torch was a six-page paper, the rest four-page; their printing was well set, well proof-read, clearly done on a good machine (The Tocsin and Redlight!, by comparison, were obviously done on an uneven old roneo or such). These evidences of careful preparation and rather sophisticated approach suggest that these were not just flash-in-the-pan efforts, that the organisation for this press had been planned and would continue.

(... Moscow gold???)

(The papers were distributed free, and were financed by local advertisements - some carried over two dozen ads for local shops.)<sup>115</sup>

As well as confirming the extent of the unemployed organisation by their very existence, these papers detail a number of activities of unemployed and relief workers, both in their own districts and in other areas.

The report of one of the State Council's regular weekly meetings, for example, notes more job committees established in Manly-Warringah with some skill margin rates won; agitation against the eviction of Clontarf campers and better shelter

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114. c.f. volume numbers.

115. (The Torch charged 1/6 to 2/- per advertisement.)

organised; in the Cumberland district, public meetings for the State Council's demands and for free speech; the reorganisation of the Mortdale branch; in Rockdale a deputation for first aid kits; a free speech fight at Kogarah; at Sutherland, a deputation over the State Council's demands and a public meeting debate; in the Balmain-Rozelle area a United Front Council of seven organisations working smoothly and organising meetings over the State Council's demands; good job-committees being organised at Canterbury-Bankstown; at Punchbowl the winning of the reinstatement of 46 men; at the Showground job a committee elected; at Newtown, the committee operating well; and meetings at Lidcombe.<sup>116</sup>

The Torch reports activity at Holroyd, Ryde (led by the Ryde Dole Workers' Council), the Cook Park Camp, Hurstville and Como, and advertises the regular meeting times and places of the branches at Rockdale, Hurstville, Kogarah, Mortdale, Bexley, and of the Women's Unity League.

More examples could be given from the other papers; those already stated, however, surely confirm the extent of local organisation under way by late 1933.

These papers refer to the campaign around the State Council's eleven demands. These, evidently recently formed, were:

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116. The Vanguard, 25/11/33, p. 2.



- (1) Four continuous weeks' work on full award rates and conditions before Xmas for all relief workers and unemployed.
- (2) Payment on job at cessation of work.
- (3) Free transport facilities to and from work.
- (4) Full compensation rights to all relief workers on the basis of full award rates and conditions at full-time rates of employment.
- (5) Full relief sustenance during stand-off periods.
- (6) No Saturday work at any time.
- (7) 100 per cent. increase in food relief, to be provided out of the £3,000,000 surplus of the Unemployed Tax, taking the form of an open order on all shopkeepers.
- (8) No eviction of unemployed or relief workers, and a rent allowance to be provided by the Government.
- (9) Extra work at award rates of pay, or money to purchase an adequate supply of boots and clothing, for relief workers, unemployed and their dependants.
- (10) Non-seizure of goods and chattels of unemployed or relief workers by bailiffs or moneylenders.
- (11) Total abolition of Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act (P.R.U. Act), the P.I.R., and 32 Questionnaire.<sup>117</sup>

Demands (2), (3) and (11) had been part of the platform set forth by the Dole Workers' Council June Conference.

Most of these eleven demands were moderate and all were easily comprehensible: they were obviously directed towards the immediate grievances of unemployed and relief workers. Many - the double dole and eviction demands, for example - had been part of the platform of the unemployed movement for a long time. The articles accompanying the platform were clear and specific. They urged the need for unity and activity:

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<sup>117</sup>. The Clarion, 24/11/33, p. 1.

"For the fulfillment of these demands every unemployed and relief worker must become an active worker. Begin activity and discussion of demands on every job. Organise public meetings in every centre. Make every bulletin a medium for publicity. Strengthen the chain of organisation, coordinate our forces and in one mighty campaign march forward to a realisation of the above demands."<sup>118</sup>

What is noticeable here is the openness and simplicity of the propaganda: there is not the old vilification of Social Fascists, the language is not revolutionary jargon and the approach does not end with the call - frightening to many - to join the forces of world revolution.

The moderate approach obviously played a large part in the building of a wide support among rank and file unemployed; it also helped foster better relations with A.L.P. members and with the union movement.

THE A.L.P.'S ATTITUDE TO THE STATE COUNCIL OF UNEMPLOYED AND RELIEF WORKERS.

The leadership of the A.L.P. remained, in 1933 and the following years, as firmly set against any organisation tinged with Communist colour as before. Members were still threatened with expulsion if they defied the edict against joining any

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118. Ibid.

'fraternal', and the State Council was regarded as such. However, an increasing number of rank and file members and local leagues became willing to work with the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers and its District Councils. Especially after union leaders and the Labor Council began to endorse the State Council, many A.L.P. members can have seen little barrier to solidarity.

In mid '33 the Workers' Weekly complained that the fact that the A.L.P. had not replied to Communist united front proposals had "created dissatisfaction among Labor Party members and several local leagues", who had joined United Front Councils or who worked in a united front over matters such as free speech or the 'No' campaign for the referendum.<sup>119</sup>

There are a number of reports of leagues or members defying the ban; while most of these reports are from the Communist press it is understandable that A.L.P. members should join the fight against work for the dole.

It seems that many did. For example, the Randwick A.L.P. Leagues offered the Randwick Unemployed District Council help in opposing the scheme.<sup>120</sup> We have already seen how the Lithgow Unemployed Association joined the United Front. The Newcastle U.L.W. declared its support for the Against Work for the Dole

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119. W.W., 12/5/33, p. 4. A.L.P. members in Five Dock, Annandale, Balmain, Paddington, Parramatta and Illawarra are specifically mentioned here.

120. R.L., 12/7/33, p. 8.



Committee and joined with it in demanding the reinstatement of some dismissed relief workers.<sup>121</sup>

In many areas A.L.P. members or leagues would work with committees linked with the State Council for extra relief or against eviction. For example, on the committee of the Balgownie-Fairy Meadow Employed and Unemployed Association there were representatives from the A.L.P. leagues as well as the North Illawarra Council, the Women's Guild, religious bodies and the unemployed organisations. The Association worked against evictions and tried to secure extra food, blankets, clothing, etcetera from the Government.<sup>122</sup> That this respectable and moderate group was connected with the State Council shows how far the Council had moved from the revolutionary and rather isolated position of the early U.W.M.

At a well attended meeting at Newtown, chaired by Payne and obviously initiated by the State Council, a broad committee of eighteen was elected to organise on the immediate demands of Double Dole, clothing, boots, blankets, etcetera, and against evictions. It was attended by the Newtown East A.L.P. League, the Mayor's Relief Committee, the Industrial Socialisation Unit and many rank and file Labor Party members.<sup>123</sup>

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121. R.L., 4/10/33, p. 11.

122. W.W., 11/8/33, p. 4, and R.L., 9/8/33, p. 6.

123. W.W., 25/8/33, p. 4; R.L., 30/8/33, p. 8.

The Paddington Anti-Eviction committee won the support of even top-ranking Labor Party members. There was already a working Anti-Eviction Committee linked with the District Unemployed Council when, in early July '33, the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee convened a public meeting at Paddington to organise against evictions. King, the Labor Council organiser, moved that a committee of nine be elected, consisting of three church representatives, three representatives of local business, and three unemployed delegates. A member of the Anti-Eviction Committee successfully moved that the meeting support instead the rank and file Anti-Eviction Committee and the Unemployed Council.<sup>124</sup>

A couple of weeks later an anti-eviction conference at Paddington was attended by forty delegates from anti-eviction committees, unemployed councils, returned soliders and sailors clubs, the A.L.P., C.P.A. and W.D.C.<sup>125</sup> At a public meeting in Paddington the speakers included Donald Grant, Eddie Ward, Labor aldermen, church leaders, Payne (for the C.P.A.) and McKenzie (for the Unemployed Councils).<sup>126</sup> At the anti-eviction march and rally organised by the Paddington Anti-Eviction Committee the speakers were Ward, O'Sullivan M.L.A., Corbett (for the C.P.A.) and Bateman (I.L.D.).<sup>127</sup>

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124. R.L., 12/7/33, p. 8.

125. W.W., 28/7/33, p. 1.

126. R.L., 2/8/33, p. 8. (W.H. McKenzie had been restored to favour and was one of the main figures again in the State Council of Unemployed.)

127. W.W., 18/8/33, p. 4. (Corbett was one of the 'Bankstown boys' and had recently been released.)



In the years 1934-36, individual Labor Party members and some leagues increasingly worked with, or joined, the State Council and its network of affiliated organisations. The Workers' Weekly stated, probably truthfully, that the vast majority of the 60,000 unemployed and relief workers represented at the State Council's January 1934 Conference were members of the Labor Party.<sup>128</sup> In January 1935 the Sydney Morning Herald noted that: "Among the unemployed, particularly on the coalfields, the Communists have established permanent organisations which have occasioned much perturbation to rival A.L.P. bodies",<sup>129</sup> for A.L.P. members were working with the organisations.

The A.L.P. hierarchy continued its former opposition tactics. For example, A.L.P. members were instructed by the executive not to attend an unemployed meeting at Camperdown at which Payne and Brechin spoke.<sup>130</sup> When the South Coast section of the C.P.A. wrote to the Wollongong A.L.P. about working together against Work for the Dole the letter was not read at the league meeting.<sup>131</sup>

The following incident, though it concerns the anti-war, and not the unemployed, movement, illustrates both the unabated

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128. Ibid., 6/4/34, p. 6.

129. S.M.H., 7/1/35, p. 9.

130. W.W., 4/8/33, p. 4.

131. Ibid., 4/8/33, p. 3. (However, when a conference was called on the south coast to organise against evictions there were representatives of the A.L.P. league and the A.L.P. Central relief committee, as well as churches, relief workers, the C.P.A., the Miners, Ironworkers and Waterside Workers. W.W., 9/3/34, p. 5.



opposition of the A.L.P. to fraternal, and the growing resistance to edicts against the fraternal: the New South Wales A.L.P. instructed its members that they could not attend the 'Anti-War Congress' convened by the 'N.S.W. State Council Against War' (a Communist anti-war fraternal). This threw the rank and file of the A.L.P. "into confusion". Despite the ban, more than 50 unions (most affiliated with the New South Wales A.L.P.) signed a petition for the Town Hall to be let to the Congress, and about 60 Labor Leagues decided to support the conference.<sup>132</sup>

The A.L.P. continued to try to establish counter organisations. The Workers' Weekly complained that the Inner Group was attempting to set up anti-eviction committees organised from Returned Soldiers clubs and Labor clubs to counter the growing number of anti-eviction committees established by the Unemployed Councils.<sup>133</sup>

The main opposition was through the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee, the U.L.W. and the Dole Workers' Union. Though these caused some concern to the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers the great majority of active unemployed workers were connected with the State Council network. These three organisations existed more in name than in reality, or rather, central committees of these organisations existed but they made little attempt to set up local committees and win supporters, and even the few

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132. S.M.H., 30/8/33, p. 11.

133. W.W., 8/9/33, p. 4.

attempts they did make were pretty unsuccessful.<sup>134</sup>

In July 1933 the Workers' Weekly stated that "the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee has failed miserably to carry out the most elementary tasks in connection with the organisation of the unemployed." It had only called a few meetings in various municipalities and had elected a deputation of 9 to ask the government for clothes and fuel. This deputation had mentioned nothing about Double Dole. The A.C.T.U. Committee was "defeated everywhere, with one or two exceptions.".....

"The A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee, like its predecessors the U.W.U. and U.W.C. was brought into existence by the officialdom of the Trades Hall for the purpose of attempting to chain the unemployed to the Trades Hall domination and to stifle their activity."

It had failed because "Labor Party workers are now in the unemployed and dole workers' councils."<sup>135</sup> Although the Workers' Weekly clearly had every reason to vilify and deride this Committee, its statement of both its purpose and its position was accurate.

The U.L.W., the Dole Workers' Union, and this A.C.T.U. Committee were connected with the Labor Council as well as the A.L.P. As the Labor Council increasingly dropped its opposition to the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers, these

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134. c.f. R.L., 30/8/33, p. 3. Cessnock A.L.P. calls a meeting to form U.L.W. Only 13 attend; W.W., 19/1/34, p. 5. A.L.P. calls a meeting of relief workers at Canterbury to form branch of D.W.U. The relief workers turn down proposal.

135. W.W., 21/7/33, p. 3.

organisations lost any real rationale for existence, as well as losing their union backing. Gradually, references to them peter out as more and more the unemployed movement is subsumed by the State Council.

THE REASONS FOR THE UNION MOVEMENT'S INCREASING SUPPORT FOR THE RELIEF WORKERS AND FOR THE STATE COUNCIL.

It is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the Labor Council decided wholeheartedly to support the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. The growth of amity and finally unity between the two bodies developed gradually over the period mid 1933 to early '35, with occasional returns to the earlier opposition and vilification on both sides. From mid 1933 Labor Council delegates became increasingly willing to join meetings and deputations organised by the State Council, and to allow State Council representatives to join Union Conferences on unemployment. As late as August 1934, however, there was a controversy between the two organisations in regard to the State Council's Conference: it was claimed that Labor Council officials were trying to "sabotage" the conference.<sup>136</sup>

However, by early 1935 there was apparently complete accord between the two groups. For example, King, then Secretary of the

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136. R.L., 29/8/34, p. 12.



Labor Council, wrote the introduction to a pamphlet produced by the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. This was issued "with the approval of the Trades and Labor Council." The Labor Council in this introduction called a conference to formulate a fighting policy to prevent the extension of relief work and to formulate a platform of relief work demands.<sup>137</sup> Delegates from all unions and from unemployed councils affiliated with the State Council were invited. A number of such conferences were held at this time, at which a solid basis for unity was established.

At the State Council's 1935 Conference, McAlpine, then Labor Council President, apologised for the union movement's earlier neglect of the unemployed:

"The time has come when you will no longer have to withstand alone the attacks that are being made on the working class.

The unemployed and relief workers have had to carry the responsibility too long. There is a tendency in the trade union movement that when a man becomes unemployed the less they see of him the better."<sup>138</sup>

At the 1936 Annual Conference of the State Council both the Newcastle and Sydney Labor Councils sent delegates; the State Council organisation had by this time representation on the Labor Councils of Sydney, Newcastle, the Western Districts and the South Coast. Pullen, the President of the Sydney Labor Council, exhorted

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137. W. MacKenzie and M. Hade, *The Premiers' Plan In Action*, Research Bureau, S.C. of U. & R.W., N.S.W., no date (about February-March 1935. c.f. *R.L.*, 6/3/35, p. 5.)

138. *R.L.*, 12/6/35, p. 9.

the unemployed to make full use of the Labor Council's facilities and support, as did McAlpine, the Assistant Secretary.

(Interestingly, both these speakers harangued the A.L.P. for causing the disintegration of the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committees and for failing to help coordinate and organise the unemployed.)<sup>139</sup>

This solidarity was a far cry from, say, Garden's attack on the United Front Council leaders in late 1932.

It is easy to see why the union movement and its top hierarchy, the Labor Councils, decided to support the unemployed movement at this somewhat belated stage: relief work posed a threat to all workers - as unemployed organisers had been stating for years. It was only, however, the great increase of the work after May 1933, and the actual undermining of employed workers' jobs, that woke the organised industrial labor movement to the need for united action with the unemployed. (This self-interest of the union movement in its desire for an alliance with the unemployed is shown in McAlpine's statement to the 1935 State Council Conference: "The trade union movement has at last realised that it is necessary to have a united front of the whole working class if we are going to stem the attacks which are being made on us."<sup>140</sup>)

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139. S.U. & R.W.C., Report of Annual Conference, 1936, pp. 3, 13-15.

140. R.L., 12/6/35, p. 9.

But why should the Labor Council and its affiliated unions decide to give this support to an organisation that had grown ultimately out of the U.W.M., and which had Communists such as Payne, Moran and McKenzie among its top organisers?

The main reason would appear to be the lack of any alternative group to compare with the size, support and organisation of the State Council network. All the opposition groups mounted by the A.L.P. and the Labor Council had failed to win wide support, whereas the State Council had seized the initiative of building the relief workers' movement. So when the need for mounting an agitation against relief work was realised, the Labor Council's best hope of success was to join with the existing organisation of relief workers.

There were clearly other factors connected with the shifting alliances within the New South Wales Labor Party and the growth of the group in opposition to Lang. By this time Lang no longer dominated the Labor Council, and he and Garden had fallen out.<sup>141</sup> Also, the increased support of the M.M.M. by 1934-35, shown both in the leadership of various unions and in its growing influence

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141. c.f. J.T. Lang, The Turbulent Years, Chapter 25.



on the Sydney Labor Council,<sup>142</sup> would have made the political climate much more favourable to a working arrangement with the State Council.

I have already mentioned the labor movement's fears regarding relief work, but as the issue became so prominent at this time, as so many articles and pamphlets appeared attacking the system, the fears, both real and imagined, should be briefly reiterated. (Though some of the labor movement's worst fears about the work were not fulfilled, this did not make the dangers believed in any less important in shaping the attitudes of union leaders.)

The Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act, introduced by Bavin in 1930, contained two particular clauses (left unchanged by Lang's revised Act) objected to by the labor movement. I have already dealt with the objections to Section 9 - that on notification in the Government Gazette that a job was relief work

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142. c.f. A. Davidson, op. cit., pp. 59-60; J.T. Lang, op. cit., p. 181, writing of the growth of the power of the M.M.M. adds: "Seeing how the time was running, many of the officials of other /i.e., non-M.M.M.-led/ unions in the Trades Hall, fearing for their own jobs, listened to the threats and blandishments of the Communist bosses." S.M.H., 9/1/34, p. 8, stated: "While in point of numbers the Communist Party may still be small in relation to the entire population of this country, its gradually growing following must be occasioning concern to those in authority in touch with developments...../There is/ hardly a single industry of any size which is without its M.M. group.....These groups are always very active. Most trade unions and lodges are controlled by sections of the M.M."

"all wages, hours and mode, terms and conditions of employment of any person employed upon such work shall be such as the Minister may from time to time direct...notwithstanding the conditions..... of any award or industrial agreement."

The labor movement's opposition to the Act and the relief work scheme was, however, not just its attack on the bastion of union policy that awards set by the Arbitration Court must not be undermined. While it saw the cutting of relief workers' wages both as deprivation for the dole workers and as an attack on union principle, it feared that this was the thin edge of a wedge that would be used to cut employed workers' standards. Such fears were increased by Section 6 of the Act.

This Section provided that the Unemployment Relief Council

"shall consider means for the prevention and relief of unemployment and may -

- a) formulate schemes for the absorption in any public works or private enterprises of persons out of employment
- b) investigate and, if thought fit, approve of schemes for the relief of unemployment, including the distribution of work among employees in any industry .....
- e) do any other work or exercise any other power relating to the prevention or relief of unemployment that is prescribed."<sup>143</sup>

This provision gave the Unemployment Relief Council a carte blanche to introduce relief work anywhere, be it in government services or in private industry. The unions feared that it would do so:

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143. W. MacKenzie and M. Hade, The Premiers' Plan In Action, p. 7. My emphasis.



"No worker, be he in governmental, semi-governmental, or in private employment is immune from the attacks that can be made on his wages or conditions, once agreement has been reached between the Council and the employer. As the Government finds it necessary, so will the conditions of all workers.....be reduced to that of the relief worker."<sup>144</sup>

The unions feared that regular employees in private industry and government jobs would be dismissed and replaced by relief workers; that the work of regular employees would be rationed between them and relief workers; that relief workers could be forced to work in industries where the regular employees were on strike; that the country work camps would be used to undermine the standards of rural workers.<sup>145</sup> In short, the unions' attitude to the system is summed up by the highly emotive term often used by the labor press to describe the system - 'Economic Conscription'.

These threats had long been voiced by the unemployed leaders: they had been pointed out, for example, by the unemployed conference in June 1932. When Emergency Relief Work was introduced the Red Leader had stated:

"Obviously it is the intention to attempt to transform Government and municipal works into relief works, and to introduce 'rationing' or 'sharing of work' on a broader basis. If then this scheme is a success it means the general attack on the wages and conditions of all workers."<sup>146</sup>

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144. Ibid.

145. e.g. the Public Service Association declared that relief work schemes "were an insidious undermining of living standards".  
S.M.H., 23/3/34, p. 11.

146. R.L., 3/5/33, p. 1.



These fears were fulfilled when municipal employees and regular workers on other jobs akin to relief jobs - such as Water Board and Railway jobs - found themselves dismissed and replaced by relief workers, or their pay downgraded to relief work levels.

For example, in June 1933 permanent municipal employees in the Holroyd district were dismissed and their jobs given to relief workers. This was quickly repeated at Warringah and probably Kogarah.<sup>147</sup> In September 1933 twenty-five permanent gangers employed in the Manly and Warringah Shires were replaced by relief workers - this meant a saving for the Councils of £75 per week.<sup>148</sup>

In early 1935 the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers reported that since the inception of Stevens' relief work

"despite the promises that no permanent hands would be dismissed or rationed to permit of relief workers being employed, we witness today tens of thousands of workers rationed and sacked to permit of the introduction of the lower relief work rates of pay into governmental and semi-governmental work.

Municipal and shire employees, Main Roads Board employees, Water and Sewerage Board employees, Public Works Department employees, rockchoppers, sewer miners, enginedrivers, cranedrivers, bricklayers, carpenters and other skilled tradesmen have all been reduced to a wage based on a basic hourly rate, plus margins from 1d. to 3d. per hour."<sup>149</sup>

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147. R.L., 28/6/33, p. 7; W.W., 22/9/33, p. 4; T.L.C.M., 24/8/33. Some of these men had been working for the council for between 5 and 15 years (R.L., 30/8/33, p. 5.)

148. R.L., 6/9/33, p. 12.

149. W. McKenzie and M. Hade, op. cit., p. 9; c.f. also R. Cramm, "The Menace of Relief Work", Communist Review, April, 1935, p. 54.

The right of the Government to nominate any work as relief work was upheld by the Arbitration Court. McKenzie and Hade's account of the case highlights the earlier blase attitude of the Union movement to relief work:

"Among the unions there was held the opinion that the Act would only apply to unemployed who were employed subsequent to the passing of the Act. Such an opinion led to an attitude of indifference on the part of the union leaders and the workers in industry to the conditions upon which the unemployed were conscripted to relief work.

However, disillusionment soon came when a worker named Kirby, a member of the Water and Sewerage Board Employees' Union and for some time in the employ of the Water and Sewerage Board at award rates, suddenly found his pay envelope light. When he asked the reason, he was informed that the work he was employed on had now been declared 'relief work', and he could be paid 'relief work rates'.

On the matter being reported to the union, it was decided to summons the Board for the difference between the 'relief work rates' and the award."

The Full Court of the Arbitration Court subsequently ruled that "once any work was declared 'relief work', then the award no longer applied."<sup>150</sup>

Despite this judgement, Union leaders - or at least some of them - held to the belief that only State Awards could be set aside by the P.R.U. Act. This too proved false when in late '34-1935 the Government extended relief work to the railway and tramway services, which were covered by Federal Awards. Judge Drake-Brockman agreed to an application by the New South Wales

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150. W. MacKenzie and M. Hade, op. cit., p. 9.



Railways Commissioner for a variation of the A.R.U. Federal Award allowing the employment of relief workers on the railways.<sup>151</sup>

It is no coincidence that the consolidation of the Labor Council's support for the relief workers' movement in general, and the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers in particular, occurred in early 1935, for the possibility of the introduction of relief work into the railways and tramways was the final threat needed to arouse the labor movement to action. It was this that caused the spate of joint conferences in early '35.

It is important to grasp both the extent of these particular fears, and the justification for them.

Railway and tramway workers had already been subject both to large scale dismissals and a wide rationing scheme under which temporary or casual employees were put on instead of permanents. A pamphlet put out before the May 1935 State elections announced that the average number of railway staff in the year ending June '31 was 40,620; in 1934 it was 38,174.

"For 2,446 railway employees, therefore, Stevens' 'prosperity' has meant loss of employment. With the introduction of relief workers....many more thousands of permanent employees will suffer the same fate. If the Stevens-Bruxner Government is returned the Railways and Tramways will be called upon to meet relief work conditions."<sup>152</sup>

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151. R. Cramm, op. cit., p. 55; W.W. 8/3/35, p. 6.

152. Politics and the Railways and Tramways, April 1935, pp. 2-4.



By as late as 1937 the situation for railway workers was still grim. A 'Balance Sheet of the Depression and Recovery' in Railroad traced the history of the rationing of railway work, concluding:

"Already suffering wage-reduction, as well as wage tax (to relieve unemployment), and then pooling (to carry their own unemployed) they (railwaymen) were neither in full time jobs nor without them.

The railwayman, under pooling, had all the obligations of the employed man; all the disabilities of an unemployed man - but none of his rights (such as they were); and yet their conditions were progressively degraded all the time.

Remember, the Bond-holders didn't have to go on short-time....."153

Another pamphlet gave case histories of a number of casual workers:

"A common method is to sign on a man at 4.40 a.m., work him until 8 a.m., book him off, and bring him back at 6 p.m., work him until 10 p.m. or later, and back next morning at 3 or 4 a.m. ... These men usually get from 20 to 25 hours work weekly at 1/8 per hour. The time expended in waiting could be averaged at 100 hours weekly for this paltry return."154

Given the inroads on railway workers' conditions already made by dismissals and rationing, it is not surprising that the idea of relief workers joining the service aroused tremendous fears.

In fact the Government proved hesitant to put large numbers

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153. Railroad, 14/12/37.

154. Lloyd Ross, Railway Workers Who Are Buffeted About at the Whim of the Department, n.d. (around 1936), pp. 1-2.

of relief workers onto these jobs; the State Council's claim that this was because of the agitation mounted by the unions and unemployed is unprovable, but does seem quite probable, given the weight of union backing lent to the campaign. However, although a mass of railway and tramway men were not replaced by relief workers, the fact that some jobs were reclassified<sup>155</sup> and the knowledge that legally all the jobs could be reclassified was enough to stir the union movement into consolidating an alliance with unemployed and relief workers.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LABOR COUNCIL AND STATE COUNCIL  
OF UNEMPLOYED AND RELIEF WORKERS IN 1933.

Though the relationship between these two bodies in 1933 was somewhat ambivalent, there was a significant increase, on the part of the Labor Council, of interest in the affairs of the unemployed and of support for the State Council. Support for the State Council was often not unanimous and some delegates generally opposed resolutions proposed by Moran and Payne or other State Council delegates. The Trades Hall Association worked against

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155. For example c.f. N.S.W. Government Gazette No. 198, 31/10/34; No. 209, 20/11/34; No. 15, 15/1/35 (relief work on tramway tracks); also W.W., 8/3/35, p. 2 (8 Lithgow relief workers do railway work).

the State Council in what appear to have been petty and rather spiteful ways - for example, it refused to allow the Council to rent a room in the Trades Hall<sup>156</sup> and refused to allow unemployed organisations a place in the Six Hour Day Procession.<sup>157</sup>

McAlpine and Pullen, the President and Vice President, generally opposed State Council proposals, sometimes charging the State Council with disrupting the A.C.T.U. Unemployment Committee. (The State Council replied that Pullen was trying to disrupt the United Front of Unemployed.)<sup>158</sup> But even these two opponents gave enough support to the State Council not to make their appearance at the later conferences of the State Council seem a complete reversal. For example, when the I.L.D. and the Sylvester group were pressing the Labor Council for the endorsement of their rival Eatock Defence groups, Pullen supported Moran's plea for support of the I.L.D. one.<sup>159</sup>

Garden and King (still Labor Council organiser) often tended towards support for the State Council, though Garden's attitude was fairly variable. He would sometimes support the State Council

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156. R.L., 28/6/33, p. 8. After some controversy the Labor Council asked the Trades Hall Association to allow them a room.  
T.L.C.M., 22/6/33.

157. W.W., 6/10/33, p. 1.

158. c.f. W.W., 21/7/33, p. 3.

159. c.f. T.L.C.M.; 18/5/33 and R.L., 14/6/33, p. 4. (The Council ruled in favour of the I.L.D. group.)



completely,<sup>160</sup> sometimes accept the partial intent of a proposal of the State Council but replace it with a moderating motion;<sup>161</sup> sometimes Moran (or other State Council delegates) and Garden were in complete opposition.<sup>162</sup> It is clear from the Labor Council minutes that Garden's support was often the crucial factor in the acceptance or refusal of a State Council of Unemployed motion. Garden was to continue to give some support to the State Council in 1934, and also after his resignation from the Labor Council in September of that year.

Garden and King also quite often joined deputations organised by the State Council and spoke at job meetings organised by that body. Such actions would of course increase the importance of the State Council in the eyes of the relief workers, and would give a much greater bargaining power to the deputations.

Perhaps the most important united action between the Labor Council and State Council of Unemployed in 1933 was over the case of the municipal employees dismissed by the Holroyd Council. That this was the first time the two organisations really worked together highlights the fact that the union movement was only

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160. e.g. T.L.C.M., 27/4/33. Garden supports a State Council deputation over relief work conditions; T.L.C.M., 22/6/33; T.L.C.M., 18/5/33, Garden wins back the dole for Bateman; T.L.C.M., 22/6/33.

161. e.g. T.L.C.M., 20/7/33; 17/8/33.

162. e.g. T.L.C.M., 25/5/33; R.L., 23/8/33, p. 8.

really galvanised into action about relief work when regular union members were threatened.

Holroyd relief workers set up job committees, with help from the State Council, virtually as soon as the work started. Regular mass meetings were held.<sup>163</sup> At one of these early meetings the relief workers demanded the reinstatement of the permanent municipal employees. (This action shows that the relief workers put union principles before their own increased relief.) Before this meeting the police warned Moran and the chairman that it was an illegal assembly under the terms of the Crimes Act, and generally did their best to dissuade the protestors. Nevertheless, the meeting decided to send a deputation to Dunningham and to mount further protest.

At the next Labor Council meeting, Moran reported on this matter and moved that the Labor Council send two delegates together with State Council delegates to address the Holroyd relief workers. This was to be a show of strength against the interference with free speech and assembly, as well as agitating over the dismissals. Garden made an addendum "that Council protest strongly against the practice introduced at Holroyd of undermining trade union rates and conditions, and calls on all workers to support this protest." Motion and addendum were carried, and Garden and King were appointed Labor Council delegates.<sup>164</sup>

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163. R.L., 21/6/33, p. 8.

164. R.L., 28/6/33, p. 7; T.L.C.M., 22/6/33.

The Holroyd mass meeting on June 29th was reportedly very successful. Garden, Payne and Moran spoke, and a deputation was made on the Holroyd Council. This amity was furthered at that night's Labor Council meeting. Moran seconded Garden's report of the meeting, stating:

"We have often spoken about the united front, but, for the first time in my experience, we had a united front today. The local A.L.P. league president, representatives of the Communist Party, Garden, Payne, King and myself spoke at Holroyd and it was a wonderfully enthusiastic meeting."

There were still, however, limits to the Labor Council's acceptance of any Communist-connected body. At the end of this meeting Moran moved that seven delegates of both the Labor Council and the M.M.M. should confer regarding unity. McAlpine replied: "Your submissions will be sent to the A.C.T.U. Committee. Next business please."<sup>165</sup>

Protest over the dismissals was conveyed to Dunningham.<sup>166</sup> When he replied (in August) the Holroyd matter was raised on Labor Council again. This time the opposition between the State Council delegates and Pullen; Garden's mediating role; and the ultimate (though narrowly-won) support for the State Council can be seen.

In July, Moran had failed to win the Labor Council's agreement

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165. R.L., 7/7/33, p. 5; T.L.C.M., 29/6/33. The T.L.C.M. gives the briefest reference to this - my account is mainly from R.L. The T.L.C.M. suggests there was some skirmish between Moran and Pullen.



to a combined union-unemployed conference to plan opposition to relief work.<sup>166</sup>

On August 17th Payne moved that a conference of trade union and relief job delegates be called to deal with a policy regarding relief work wages and conditions.<sup>167</sup> Pullen opposed him, saying this was "an insidious attempt to make further propaganda against the A.L.P. and the labor movement." He stated that the motion was not what it appeared on the surface<sup>168</sup> - obviously implying that it was a Communist trick. Garden moved an amendment that the next meeting of the Labor Council "be devoted to determining a practical policy to assist the permanent workers dismissed by the Holroyd and Warringah Shire Councils and replaced by relief workers", and that two delegates from Holroyd and Warringah be invited. The amendment was carried.<sup>169</sup> (The Red Leader gives the voting figures for the amendment as 49 - 7.)

This paper also reports a heated argument between Payne and Garden. The difference between their motions points up the differing preconceptions in the attitude of these two organisations to the unemployed: the State Council wanted to consolidate an alliance between unionists and the relief job committees, and

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166. T.L.C.M., 20/7/33.

167. Ibid., 17/8/33; R.L., 23/8/33, p. 8.

168. R.L., 23/8/33, p. 8.

169. T.L.C.M., 17/8/33.

wanted a policy to formulate general opposition to the whole relief work system, whereas Garden referred only to a policy to cover dismissed permanent workers, that is, he was primarily concerned with unionists rather than unemployed.

At the next Labor Council meeting Holroyd and Warringah Council ex-employees spoke. Payne then proposed a motion dealing with the fate of dismissed workers rather than with relief workers themselves; an important emphasis of the motion was the necessity of consolidating an alliance between employed workers, unions and unemployed, and on mounting protest action rather than simply voicing support. He moved that the Labor Council support the following steps to force the reinstatement of Holroyd and Warringah workers, and to prevent other Councils from dismissing employees for relief workers:

- "1) Call mass meetings of Holroyd and Warringah Councils, dole workers and Municipal Employees to elect a committee to visit the Councils to demand the reinstatement of the dismissed employees and payment of full award rates and conditions for this work. This deputation to be backed up by a mass demonstration of unemployed and employed workers in the district.
- 2) In the event of the Council refusing to reinstate the men, further mass meeting to be called with a view to organising resistance.
- 3) That, as the action of the Holroyd and Warringah Municipal Councils jeopardises the wages and conditions of the workers in industry, the Labor Council place the facts before affiliated and unaffiliated Unions for them to forward resolutions of protest to the Government and Municipal Councils.
- 4) That a mass deputation consisting of representatives from Unions, Shop Committees, Dole Workers and Council employees wait upon the Government and demand that it takes steps to prevent municipal

Councils from using the relief money in a manner that will break down existing award rates and conditions as the Holroyd and Warringah Councils have done."<sup>170</sup>

The Labor Council Minutes only report that the motion was carried. The Red Leader, however, adds that Pullen opposed Payne's motion and put an amendment that the matter be referred to the Municipal Employees Union, and that that Union hold a conference with the Labor Council on the issue. This was clearly an attempt to prevent any alliance between doleworkers' delegates and union leaders. The Red Leader states that Pullen "tried to make the matter one of party line-up and division", but that Payne's motion was accepted by 29 votes to 23.<sup>171</sup>

The Red Leader's account must, I think, be accepted - if it was lying, it would surely have claimed much more support for Payne.

The significance of this matter is that it shows that towards the end of 1933 the Labor Council could support a Communist against its own Vice-President on the matter of linking up in a campaign with State Council members, if the matter concerned the fate of regular employed unionists.

Though the Labor Council's interest in relief workers was to remain very much a matter of self-interest (or rather, of the

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170. T.L.C.M., 24/8/33.

171. R.L., 30/8/33, p. 5.



interest of regularly employed unionists), this concern was to spread into wider support for the grievances of the relief workers themselves. The Labor Council began to give moral and some financial support to relief workers' protests and strikes, and finally, as we have seen, was to declare its full support for their state-wide organisation.

THE STATE COUNCIL OF UNEMPLOYED AND RELIEF WORKERS :

CONFERENCES AND ORGANISATION 1934-1936.

January, 1934.

The growing support and the improved organisation of the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers is reflected in the conference reports. As the workings of the organisation at rank and file and local level will be shown in the strike studies later in this Chapter, only the top-level deliberations will be discussed here.

An interesting feature of these conferences is the evidence of growing support from church groups as well as from the unions. The State Council became increasingly 'respectable', and the slur campaign about its insidious Communist affiliations was gradually dropped. It also won the support of some shire and municipal councils. At the 1936 Annual Conference there were fraternal

delegates from the Social Credit Movement, the Methodist Church, the Congregational Church, Christ Church St. Lawrence, the Old Age and Invalid Pensioners; Shire and Municipal Councils sent seven fraternal delegates. Cordial greetings were sent by Archbishop Kelly, Howard Sydney (writing from Bishopscourt, Sydney), Bishop Burgmann and the Reverend Roy S. Lee (from St. John's College, Morpeth). The Mayors of Wallsend and Ryde spoke, as did Father Bradley of Christ Church and the Reverend Mr. Coleman, a Methodist Minister.<sup>172</sup>

The first major conference of the New South Wales State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was held in late January 1934. Advertisements urged all unemployed organisations, job committees and employed workers to send delegates. Pre-conference publicity was particularly directed at awakening the employed workers to the need for unity with the unemployed. One of the main arguments used was the injustice of workers' being forced to pay the wage tax for unemployment relief while their wages were threatened by relief work and while Stevens was using the Unemployment Relief Fund to pay for social services. The State Council charged that Stevens had used three and a half million pounds of the Fund for social service payments.<sup>173</sup> This argument was close to the hearts of the employed workers. In

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172. S.U. & R.W.C., Report of Annual Conference, 1936.

173. R.L., 10/1/34, p. 12; 24/1/34, p. 6.

September 1933 the Labor Council had decided to launch a state wide petition against the Government's withholding of this sum from the unemployed, and to urge "aggressive statewide agitation to force release of the money."<sup>174</sup>

The Conference was reportedly "the best ever". There were 149 delegates from 145 unemployed organisations and relief jobs - "one hundred per cent improvement on the last conference". The delegates were elected by the rank and file on the jobs and organisations. As already noted, the State Council claimed that 60,000 unemployed were "no doubt" represented by the conference. A couple of days after the conference, the credentials committee was still checking the figures given by delegates regarding the number they represented. The verified figures at this stage showed 42,630 unemployed were represented, but the figures for the North Shore line, Randwick, Newtown, Camperdown, Marrickville, St. Peters, Ryde-Gladesville, East Sydney and Griffith had not yet been added in.

The Northern Coalfields delegates reported "good results" in their area. These delegates alone were said to represent 15,000 unemployed and relief workers - which amounted to 90-95% of that district's unemployed. The Western District and Lithgow delegates reported a "growing mass movement". The south coast area was "rapidly consolidating its forces" and the metropolitan area was

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174. T.L.C.M., 14/9/33.



"rapidly coming into line".<sup>175</sup>

I have stated before that it is really impossible to verify such figures. The term "representing 60,000 unemployed" must probably be accepted in its loosest sense - that is, that there were not 60,000 signed up members and that sometimes the families of the unemployed may have been included in the figure.

However, it may not be vastly exaggerated. This figure means that each delegate represented, on average, 400 unemployed and relief workers. The reports of local groups show that in many areas 400 unemployed would be loosely affiliated to the local unemployed council, would be 'members' in the sense that they attended mass meetings and regularly received the local bulletin. And in some areas the number was much higher. For example, The Torch aired the views of unemployed and relief workers in six suburbs; its circulation of 5,000 means that an average of 830 odd unemployed workers were reached regularly in each of these suburbs. Very large mass meetings were regularly held in the Merrylands-Holroyd-Parramatta area and a unity conference of the unemployed organisations of that area was attended by 70 delegates.<sup>176</sup> If these delegates represented only 200 workers each, it would mean that 14,000 workers were connected with the State Council in that area alone. Similarly, the figure of 15,000 for the coalfields area is quite feasible given the numbers who had been involved in

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175. R.L., 31/1/34, p. 1; 14/2/34, p. 9.

176. W.W., 15/9/33, p. 1.

the Questionnaire struggle in 1932, and the strong campaign conducted by the Against-Work-For-The-Dole Committee.<sup>177</sup>

Again, the turn-over of relief workers must be considered. The individual delegates may in some cases only have been elected by, say, 150 workers - by the workers on three local jobs on the day that the election was held. Because only a proportion of the relief workers of an area would be working on any particular day, it is probable that even in the highly-organised areas far from all the relief workers would have had a chance to elect job delegates to the conference. However, the local delegate would, with justification, see himself as representing these workers as well, and also the workers who were frequently reached at meetings and even at socials, and by the job bulletins. Furthermore, in certain cases delegates might see themselves - again with considerable justification - as representing not only the current batch of relief workers in their area, but also the previous batch that had recently been laid off.

It is most likely that local organisers would have had a pretty fair idea of how many unemployed were part of the movement in their local areas, for the organisation functioned at the local level through a very personal and direct approach. Again, the semi-permanent focus for organisation provided by the institution

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177. Consider also the S.M.H., 7/1/35, report of the wide establishment of permanent unemployed committees in the coalfields. As the Herald represented these as being led by Communists, it is clear that they were connected with the State Council.

of relief work would mean that delegates would know how support was going on the local jobs.

Finally, the fact that the Credentials Committee gave its early report as a specific number - 42,630 - instead of as a rounded number suggests that the delegates had given in detailed numbers of the workers they represented, or believed themselves to represent, and that the Credentials Committee was exercising care over the total.

The Conference formulated a platform of five major demands which, as they differ slightly from the earlier programme of 'Eleven Demands' are given below:

- "1) 100% increase in present dole allowance with open order on all shopkeepers and relief to all unemployed irrespective of the P.I.R.
- 2) Immediate issue of clothing, boots and blankets to all unemployed and relief workers.
- 3) No evictions, foreclosures or seizures of goods of chattels of the unemployed, small farmers or relief workers; a rent allowance to be provided by the government.
- 4) Award rates and conditions on all jobs; extra work to be provided to enable relief workers to provide for shelter, clothing, boots and blankets; no dismissal or rationing of 'permanent' employees; food relief for relief workers during stand-off period.
- 5) Minimum compensation payments to injured or incapacitated relief workers of £3 per week. 178

There are two main differences between the two platforms.



This one is equally aimed towards the dolors and the relief workers, whereas the emphasis of the Eleven Demands was towards relief workers. Also, this one is less specific and even more moderate: the earlier one had called for the total abolition of the P.R.U. Act, the P.I.R. and the 32-point Questionnaire, and had included specific demands such as no Saturday work, free transport, and extra Christmas work. It would seem that the demands were streamlined in order to make them both comprehensible and memorable and were intended to appeal to the widest possible audience.

The Conference report also stressed that the organisation must be open and geared to immediate griveances:

"A two day discussion emphasised the willingness of the workers to struggle around these demands. The discussion also demonstrated the fact that the workers are ready to unite under the scheme of organisation laid down in the organisational report endorsed by conference. Such a scheme inflicts no red-tape or rigid methods of control of the rank and file, but affords each and every worker an opportunity to unite upon common ground - namely, food, clothing and shelter - free from party bias and sectarianism."<sup>179</sup>

The Conference decided that delegates must report back to their groups and that more workers should be recruited to the sub-committees. For immediate attention it was decided

"That conference instruct State Council to arrange a deputation to parliament to place before it the demands of conference. That conference advises all areas, local unemployed organisations and district councils to immediately commence a campaign, by mass

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179. Ibid.

meetings on the jobs and in all localities, among all sections of the workers, employed and unemployed, in support of the demands and in support of the deputation. That we recommend stop work meetings on all jobs on the day the deputation proceeds to Parliament, and that a continued mass campaign of agitation be carried on until the demands are conceded by the government."<sup>180</sup>

I have found no account of any large one-day relief work stoppage or of a mass deputation at this time, though it is clear that the demands were put to Dunningham.

The intended special day of action over these demands was probably eclipsed and superseded by the big relief workers' agitation that erupted in March, mainly centring on the Homebush Bay-Concord West area but winning support from a large number of workers on many other jobs. As this struggle provides a useful reference point for the strength of the relief workers' movement at this time and its limitations, I will outline this strike here rather than in the later strike studies.

#### The Homebush Bay-Concord West Strike.

The various reports of this agitation conflict over every possible issue - the reasons for the protest, the number of participants, and when the struggle ended. However, it is possible to gain a fairly clear idea of the four most important features of

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180. Ibid., 31/1/34, p. 1.

this struggle - firstly, the numbers: a few thousand relief workers were involved, and many of their wives strongly supported the struggle; secondly, the strikers' anger and determination; thirdly, the forced return to work because of the starvation of the strikers' families; fourthly, the level of organisation: though this was good, it was not strong enough to sustain a drawn-out struggle, possibly because of the moderation or neglect of the A.L.P. and Labor Council leaders in the early stages, and conflict between the A.L.P. and the Communists at the end. The question of the success of the struggle is even more problematical.

It seems that relief workers' discontent had been building up to breaking point for some time. Payne later noted that "at the time, general discontent prevailed among relief workers throughout the state."<sup>181</sup> The Labor Daily during the struggle declared:

"In New South Wales during the last few months 'strikes' of relief workers have occurred at more than twenty centres, involving 14,000 men who, obviously, must be labouring under some sense of grave injustice to risk their dole sustenance to register the only form of protest that is open to them."<sup>182</sup>

As with so many relief work strikes, the protest resulted from a general feeling of grievance about the work, plus the more specific grievance of the intolerable working conditions on this particular job, but was sparked off by what might seem a trivial

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181. R.L., 5/6/35, p. 11.

182. L.D., 22/3/34, p. 1.



complaint.

A large number of men - about 2,500, it would seem<sup>183</sup> - had been engaged for some time on reclamation work on the Homebush Bay-Concord West swamp. The majority of them came from the Redfern-Newtown area, so the main organisation of the strike was originally based in the inner city. It was filthy work, marshy and stinking; the men worked in slimy trenches that contained the most revolting refuse - the swamp had been a nightsoil depot for many years, and was also full of drainage refuse from the Homebush Abattoirs.<sup>184</sup>

These conditions highlighted for the relief workers what they believed to be a general and deliberate degradation of relief workers:

"The Stevens Government has thrown down a definite challenge to the whole of the relief workers and seeks to impose its work for dole policy in the most brutal manner possible."<sup>185</sup>

That a great number of relief workers from other areas struck in support of the Homebush Bay workers shows that this job was seen as a symbol of general brutalisation. At the height of the agitation the Labor Daily noted that the Sydney relief workers were

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183. N.M.H., 21/3/34, p. 8. No other source states how many, but L.D. and W.W. seem to suggest there were more than a couple of thousand on this job.

184. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1; c.f. also L.D., 19/3/34, p. 6. - Concord West strikers address A.R.U. meeting - point out how slimy and stinking the work is.

185. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

"in rebellion against the grotesque conditions under which they are being forced to work for sustenance allowance."<sup>186</sup>

With this background of discontent over both general conditions and the vile conditions on the swamp, the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back was the refusal of morning tea time. The men were told to drink their tea in the trenches. The men were emphatic however that the agitation was not just over morning tea, and claimed that the capitalist press sought to discredit the struggle by asserting that it was, and ignoring the other issues,<sup>187</sup> and also by claiming that it was "indiscriminately" called by Communists.<sup>188</sup> The Workers' Weekly stated:

"As a matter of fact it was a lockout. The hundreds of relief workers refused to drink their morning tea in the disease-infested swamp and to a man returned to the bank for ten minutes for tea. Because of this they were locked out."<sup>189</sup>

The strikers' demands made it clear that they were making a general protest - even the Herald noted that they wanted, as well as the provision of morning tea and time off for morning tea, the "recognition by the government of the principle of job control by

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186. L.D., 22/3/34, p. 1.

187. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1. (N.M.H., 17/3/34, p. 9, declared the strike occurred because of the refusal of morning tea time.)

188. c.f. S.M.H., 19/3/34, p. 9. Dunningham states that the strike was "engineered by a few Communists".

189. W.W., 6/4/34, p. 6.

the men."<sup>190</sup> They also demanded an extra day's work at award rates, the immediate issue of boots and clothing, double dole, and a rent allowance for unemployed and relief workers.<sup>191</sup> In the course of the agitation more specific demands were added. As workers from other jobs joined in, they added their own grievances to the demands.

The press reports do not make it clear when the strike (or lockout) actually began, but it would seem to have started on Tuesday March 13th or the next day.<sup>192</sup> It is clear that all, or virtually all, the two and a half thousand odd workers on the Homebush Bay job downed tools immediately. Meetings were held, a strike committee elected, and the strikers began to publicise and organise their struggle.

Workers from other areas immediately decided to support them. It is interesting that though many had their own grievances, their main demand was that the Homebush Bay workers' demands be granted. In this we see the relief workers' solidarity; we also see how particularly vile the conditions at Homebush Bay must have been.

On Thursday 15th trouble arose at Shea's Creek Canal, at Alexandria. Men who had done the initial slush work resented

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190. S.M.H., 16/3/34, p. 9.

191. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

192. From reports on Friday 16th, it is clear the agitation had been in progress for a couple or so days.



being put off to allow others to take on the lighter job of top-dressing. A stop work meeting of the relief workers, who had been drafted from Waterloo and Mascot as well as Alexandria, was held. The men who had been given the lighter job downed tools and joined the meeting. A resolution was unanimously passed "that the men of Waterloo, Alexandria and Mascot will not return to work on these relief jobs until the men at the Homebush Bay reclamation have been conceded their rights."<sup>193</sup> (It is significant that they refer to the demands as "rights".) Though there is no mention of how many workers had been engaged on Shea's Creek Canal, it would seem that they numbered at least five hundred.<sup>194</sup> It is again significant that they decided unanimously to strike.

On Thursday night 900 relief workers who worked at Mascot decided, at a meeting at Alexandria, not to work until the Homebush Bay workers were satisfied. Redfern and Waterloo workers "also decided to cooperate" with the strike.<sup>195</sup>

By Friday 16th, the Newcastle Morning Herald was referring to "the strike of relief workers at Homebush, Alexandria and Mascot."<sup>196</sup> The Herald stated that 700 were on strike at Mascot and Alexandria,<sup>197</sup> but this certainly seems an under-estimate.

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193. L.D., 16/3/34, p. 8.

194. c.f. Ibid., 28/3/34, p. 11. There were 500 Shea's Creek men still out then; there may have been more in the beginning.

195. L.D., 16/3/34, p. 8.

196. N.M.H., 17/3/34, p. 9. (Dateline 16th.)

197. S.M.H., 16/3/34, p. 9.

In one small respect at least the strikers won a swift victory. Dunningham had declared, at the outset, that no food relief or special food orders would be given to strikers or their wives and families. On Thursday 15th there was a "distressing scene" at Newtown Town Hall, when the wives and children of the strikers who were sick and usually received special food orders were denied them. Strong protests were made by the strikers, the women, and some Labor M.L.A.s and "as a result of widespread public indignation" the Government was forced to issue the special food orders the next day.<sup>198</sup>

During the week of March 19th to 23rd, frequent meetings were held in a number of areas. It seems that more and more relief workers joined the struggle. Though many relief workers from Newtown were already on strike, 800 more relief workers who worked at Hollis Park, Newtown, joined the strike, probably on Thursday 22nd.<sup>199</sup>

On that day the Labor Daily declared that almost 4,000 relief workers were, in all, involved.<sup>200</sup> At the same time the Workers' Weekly stated that 5,000 were on strike.<sup>201</sup> Payne later claimed that 6,000 had been involved.<sup>202</sup> It is impossible to discover

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198. L.D., 16/3/34, p. 8; 21/3/34, p. 7.

199. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

200. L.D., 22/3/34, p. 1.

201. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

202. Ibid., 20/4/34, p. 1; Payne even later simply said "some thousands" had been involved. R.L., 5/6/35, p. 11.

how many really were involved, though it would seem that, on the 22nd, the figure would have been closer to 5,000 than to 4,000; certainly it could not have been less than 4,000.<sup>203</sup> As to Payne's claim, this could be fairly accurate as to the total number who at some stage were involved in the strike; we shall see that more workers joined the strike after it had died in some areas, and after the press had officially declared the strike finished.

It is perhaps irrelevant to quibble over the exact number: what is important is that some thousands of relief workers from a number of areas joined the struggle.

Equally important is the strikers' determination. Though the struggle finally crumbled because of the hunger of the strikers' dependents, the men did hold out for some time under great difficulty. Coupled with the determination was the anger of the men. The Labor Daily headlines on Thursday 22nd declared: "Smouldering Fires of Rebellion. Relief Work Crises in Sydney, Broken Hill and Melbourne. Intolerable Slave Conditions. Governments Must Act At Once. Grim Warning." The paper declared that there had developed "an alarming position that will need

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203. 2,500 from Homebush Bay + 900 at Mascot + 800 at Hollis Park + 500 at Shea's Creek + perhaps more from Redfern and Waterloo.



most careful handling if serious results are to be avoided."<sup>204</sup>

The strikers held firm through the week of March 19th to 23rd. On Tuesday 20th the Homebush strikers reaffirmed that they would not resume work until morning tea time was granted. On Wednesday 21st only 10 out of the former 2,500 men were working at Homebush Bay.<sup>205</sup> A large squad of police were stationed near the job on Wednesday and "removed" several agitators "said to be Communists" who attempted to address a mass meeting of strikers gathered at the job. The strikers made no attempt to "molest" those who worked.<sup>206</sup> The strikers were to claim that the police, during the strike, "used intimidatory tactics to force them to return" to work.<sup>207</sup>

On Wednesday 300 relief workers at a meeting at Alexandria Park reaffirmed the decision to continue the strike at Homebush Bay "and virtually declared the job 'black'."<sup>208</sup>

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204. L.D., 22/3/34, p. 1. (Workers and citizens of Broken Hill were indignant over the denial of pensions to, it seems, widows of unemployed workers. At this time there was a huge relief workers' strike in Melbourne.)

205. N.M.H., 21/3/34, p. 8.

206. N.M.H., 21/3/34, p. 8; Sun, 21/3/34, p. 15. (N.M.H., 17/3/34, p. 9 noted that it had been "reported to Dunningham that men who did not desire to cease work had been threatened with assault." There is no evidence that any violence was shown to blacklegs.)

207. L.D., 24/3/34, p. 5; W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.

208. Sun, 23/3/34, p. 23.

On Thursday 22nd there was another terrible scene at Newtown Town Hall, as two thousand hungry women and children waited in vain from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. for food relief. Several women collapsed in the heat, and children and babies cried through the day.<sup>209</sup>

The Labor Daily clearly expressed the valid opinion that the Government was using the starvation of the strikers' families as a strikebreaking weapon. The front-page headlines proclaimed: "Women and Children Cry For Food. Despairing Men Driven Back to Homebush Swamp. Scenes of Anguish at Newtown. Economic Conscription Introduced." It went on:

"Holding to ransom the dole rations of two thousand hungry and despairing women and children as the price of surrender on the part of their protesting fathers, husbands and brothers, the Government, according to an official claim, succeeded yesterday in driving back to the Homebush swamp 500 of the men who had stopped work as a protest against the intolerable conditions of the relief job."

It added that the majority of strikers were still holding out "but the ruthless weapon of starvation is being used without discrimination, and exerted through half-frantic women and ill-nourished and bewildered Australian youngsters."<sup>210</sup>

500 of the strikers did notify the Department of Labour that they would return to work on Friday; however, that 180 of them

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209. For a terrible description c.f. L.D., 23/3/34, p. 7. (Photo of the women and children, p. 1.)

210. L.D., 23/3/34, p. 1.

did not in fact return but remained on strike shows how determined the strikers were.<sup>211</sup>

There was still only a handful of men working at Homebush Bay on Thursday. The Sun noted that 97 unemployed workers from Redfern and Newtown started work on Thursday. It added that 50 strikers watched their departure for work but did not "interfere". 50 police guarded the Homebush Bay site, but all was quiet.<sup>212</sup> However, this may not show that these men reneged on the strike, as the Newcastle Morning Herald noted that 100 "additional" relief workers began work on Thursday.<sup>213</sup> It is quite likely that the Government brought in some men who had formerly been on the dole to break the strike.

A notable feature of this agitation is the good support given by the wives of the strikers; it would seem that, despite the plight of their children, the majority of wives did not pressure their husbands to return to work, and were just as angry as the strikers themselves. Indeed, towards evening on the Thursday 22nd there was "an ominous surge through the ranks of the dispirited women [at Newtown] towards direct action, and threats were made that if food was not provided it would be taken." However, they

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211. Ibid., 24/3/34, p. 5; N.M.H., 23/3/34, p. 10.

212. Sun, 22/3/34, p. 23.

213. N.M.H., 23/3/34, p. 10.



eventually returned home quietly.<sup>214</sup>

Also remarkable was the support given by ordinary citizens, business people and the Redfern and Newtown Councils. On the Thursday, Newtown shopkeepers gave buns to the women and children.<sup>215</sup> The Workers' Weekly noted that many shop-keepers gave credit to the strikers.<sup>216</sup> On Thursday night the Redfern Mayor collected £50 worth of goods and cash from sympathetic shopkeepers and residents. When this was distributed on Friday at Redfern Park there was yet another anguished scene. Over 2,000 women and children who had tramped from Waterloo, Newtown and Redfern, thronged the park, but there was only enough food for about 200 families and the Mayor had to declare that it would only be given to Redfern families.<sup>217</sup> The Workers' Weekly claimed that "by means of mass agitation the Mayors of Newtown and Redfern respectively were forced to supply" food.<sup>218</sup> However, it would seem that the help was offered fairly spontaneously.

It is in regard to the end of the strike that the evidence is particularly sketchy and contradictory. While the establishment

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214. L.D., 23/3/34, p. 1; also Sun, 22/3/34, p. 35.

215. Sun, 22/3/34, p. 35.

216. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

217. L.D., 24/3/34, p. 5; Sun, 23/3/34, p. 12.

218. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.

press was at pains to declare the strike over on Friday 23rd - and did not report on it further - it is clear that the agitation continued, still with great support, into the first few days of April. It must be realised that, if it was in the interests of the Communist press to exaggerate support for the strike in order to raise morale and show that the relief workers were fighting, it was equally in line with the policy of the establishment press to declare the strike broken and to neglect to report further developments in order to demoralise the strikers, and to ignore this proof that prosperity had not returned for all.

On Saturday 24th, the Sydney Morning Herald noted "the failure of the relief workers' strike."<sup>219</sup> The Newcastle Morning Herald stated that "the strike of relief workers having been called off, work was resumed" on Friday. It added that 400 men worked on that day.<sup>220</sup> This suggests that the strike had been officially called off by the strikers. However, there is no account of any meetings held on Thursday to discuss the continuation or end of the strike, let alone any account of any decision to call it off.

It is likely that 400 men had been forced, by hunger, to resume work.<sup>221</sup> But that 400 out of two and a half thousand odd workers returned hardly shows that the men suddenly lost their

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219. S.M.H., 24/3/34, p. 15.

220. N.M.H., 24/3/34, p. 10.

221. A large number of them were no doubt those who had notified the Department on Thursday of their decision to return.

determination, or that the strike ended; it would rather seem to prove the contrary. It is notable that the press does not note, either here or later, a massive return to work.

It is true, however, that by Friday the pressure of hunger had caused a bit of a downswing in the relief workers' enthusiasm. A demonstration in the city on Friday night was a failure. The plan had been for relief workers to go to the main shopping centres on Friday night to publicise their cause and to call for solidarity from employed workers.<sup>222</sup> (The Herald stated that the aim had been to walk around the department stores and "inspect" the merchandise,<sup>223</sup> presumably threatening direct action to take food.) 250 police were stationed to repel the demonstrators,<sup>224</sup> but the police presence alone deterred them. The Workers' Weekly noted that the demonstrators had not been "sufficiently concentrated".<sup>225</sup>

On the same day, an attempt to call out a group of relief workers at Botany failed, the workers "overwhelmingly" deciding against a motion to declare the works black.<sup>226</sup> However, this was only an attempt to get even further support from workers of

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222. W.W., 23/3/34, p. 1.

223. S.M.H., 24/3/34, p. 15.

224. Ibid.

225. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.

226. N.M.H., 24/3/34, p. 10.



this area, for a number of workers from the Botany-Mascot area were still on strike, and would remain out for more than another week.<sup>227</sup>

These two failures and the fact that work had resumed at Homebush Bay would have demoralised the strikers; however, they stayed out, and even more workers joined the strike.

The Workers' Weekly on March 30th declared that "despite press reports that the strike at Homebush Bay and Concord West is finished, we are able to say quite definitely that the men, numbering approximately 3,000, are still determined." In the same report it was noted that of the total of over 4,000 relief workers who had struck, only 203 were working on Monday 26th.<sup>228</sup>

It is hard to know what to make of these figures, as they contradict both each other, and earlier reports in this paper as to the number of strikers.

However, it does seem that in the working week of March 26th to Thursday 29th (-Friday 30th was Good Friday-) there were at least 3,000 men on strike, and possibly 4,000. It is hard to tell, as though there are reports of more groups of workers joining the strike, one cannot tell if some of the workers from jobs other than Homebush Bay went back.

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227. c.f. L.D., 28/3/34, p. 11; 2/4/34, p. 5; 3/4/34, p. 6.

228. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.

During this week a number of meetings were held. They were addressed by delegates from unemployed organisations from northern and southern New South Wales; A.R.U. delegates promised moral and financial support, as did representatives from the Basil Workers' Union.<sup>229</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the strikers who had formerly worked at Homebush Bay, it seems that the Hollis Park workers (numbering, at least at the beginning, 800) stayed out.<sup>230</sup>

On Tuesday 27th workers at Perry Street, Matraville, joined the strike, "as a protest against the general conditions and in sympathy with those involved in the Homebush Bay hold-up."<sup>231</sup>

The latter phrase confirms that the Homebush Bay men were still very much on strike. The Labor Daily gives the number of strikers from the Perry Street job as approximately 1,000; the Workers' Weekly as 700.<sup>232</sup>

On the same day, workers from jobs at Fitzgerald Street

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229. Ibid.

230. Hollis Park workers planned a mass meeting to take place on April 7th. (W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.) They would be unlikely to do this if they had lost heart in the strike. Nearby workers joined the strike on the 27th; the most probable assumption is that they were stirred to action by the example of the Hollis Park workers.

231. L.D., 28/3/34, p. 11. (Trouble began when the men were informed that they would have to make up, without pay, time lost while they sheltered from the rain.)

232. Ibid.; W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.

(Newtown, near Hollis Park), Snape Park (Maroubra) and Payne Street joined the strike. The Workers' Weekly stated that the total number who joined from these three jobs and the Perry Street job was around 2,000.<sup>233</sup>

On Wednesday 28th, the Shea's Creek Canal workers were still out. Heffron claimed that there were 500 families without sustenance in this section of the dispute alone.<sup>234</sup>

On this day, 500 strikers held a meeting at Daceyville.<sup>235</sup>

Also, at some time during this week, relief workers from Cabra-Vale joined the strike.<sup>236</sup>

So, in the week before Easter, the third week since Homebush Bay workers had walked off the job, there could well have been close to 3,000 strikers who had left jobs other than that at Homebush Bay; it would seem that there could hardly have been many less than 2,000.

It is harder to tell how many of the original Homebush Bay

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233. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1. (I could not discover where Payne Street was.)

234. L.D., 28/3/34, p. 11.

235. Ibid., 29/3/34, p. 8. (These may have been a new group of men who had joined the strike, or may have been some of the Botany strikers.)

236. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.



men were still out, but it would seem that the number who resumed work remained at around 400-500, and that the vast majority stayed out.<sup>237</sup> On Easter Monday, the Labor Daily stated that "hundreds of families in Mascot, Redfern, Newtown and Waterloo experienced the blackest Easter of their lives." Last-minute appeals to the Government for an issue of food relief had failed, so the strikers and their families remained without food. The Mayor of Redfern estimated that about 600 single and 600 married men were affected in his district alone.<sup>238</sup> This, and certain statements by Heffron, would seem to confirm that the majority had stayed out.

On Sunday April 1st, striking relief workers held a series of meetings, and decided to resume work. On Tuesday 3rd, the Department of Labour and Industry was told that the men had presented themselves for work on all jobs.<sup>239</sup> Most did not start work immediately, however, for they had now to go back on the Labour Exchange list and wait for their call-up.<sup>240</sup>

Clearly, the pressure of hunger had been the main cause of

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237. On Monday 26th, and probably on other days, there was mass picketing at Redfern and Newtown, to dissuade locals who worked at Homebush Bay from returning. W.W., 30/4/34, p. 1.

238. L.D., 2/4/34, p. 5.

239. L.D., 4/4/34, p. 7.

240. Ibid., 10/4/34, p. 5.

the demise of the strike - the strikers' hunger over the Easter weekend had been the final straw. However, other factors had been involved in the final disintegration.

There were defects in the organisation of the strike.

At the State Council's 1935 Conference Payne noted, in regard to this struggle, that "a powerful strike committee was elected, mass meetings were held daily, deputations arranged, tremendous sympathy aroused in all parts of the state..." However, "we failed to draw the tremendous energy of the strikers into active participation for the raising of relief, mass picketing, active demonstration etc. The very nature of unemployment, whereby our struggles are directed against the well-organised forces of the government, calls for a broader and more intense activity on the part of the strikers." Among the "lessons learnt from this strike" were the need for "the election of broad strike committees, the closer connection of the strike committee with mass meetings of the strikers, activising not only the strikers but also their wives and families" and a greater exposure of Government and other propaganda aimed at disorganising the strikers. (We shall see, in the 1935 West Wallsend strike, proof that these lessons had been well learnt.)

Payne also stated that "due to serious financial limitations, organisation was not sufficiently widespread to enable us to direct this discontent into a state-wide strike."<sup>241</sup> The lack of

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241. R.L., 5/6/35, p. 11.

funds was, indeed, one of the immediate causes of the strike's end, for this lack prevented the strikers from organising their own relief and thus breaking the Government's main weapon.

It would seem, furthermore, that not enough help, either financial or organisational, was given by the Labor Council.

The Workers' Weekly claimed that "the Labor Council refused to give any assistance at the commencement of the struggle. It was not until a fortnight had passed, which sapped much of the fighting energy of the workers, that the Labor Council made a belated gesture."<sup>242</sup> On Thursday, March 22nd, the Labor Council had decided to protest against the Government's refusal of relief to the families of strikers.<sup>243</sup> However, there is no record of it doing anything to enforce this decision, or, indeed, to press the strikers' demands.

Though the Workers' Weekly did note that some funds had been given by the Labor Council and unions,<sup>244</sup> not much could have been contributed, considering the impoverishment of the strike fund. (A number of small local unemployed and W.I.R. groups did

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242. W.W., 6/4/34, p. 6.

243. N.M.H., 24/3/34, p. 5.

244. W.W., 30/3/34, p. 1.



contribute to the fund;<sup>245</sup> this again shows how wide the support for the agitation was.)

Finally, there was, in the last stage of the struggle at least and possibly throughout, conflict between the C.P.A. and A.L.P.; this would have further confounded the organisation of the strike, and would have divided the strikers.

The A.L.P. leaders, like the Labor Council, did not involve themselves much in the strike until towards the end. True, Heffron and other parliamentarians had urged the Government to give relief to the starving strikers and their families, but the Labor Party made no attempt to offer strong support until the strikers were almost completely demoralised.

When the A.L.P. did finally declare its solidarity with the strikers, the Workers' Weekly replied that the

"New South Wales Social Fascists [were] making a desperate effort to respond to the mass unrest and strikes of the relief workers. Conscious that they have little influence in the organisations of the unemployed and relief workers, and that in struggle they become further discredited, the recent widespread strikes forced these agents of capital to try and capitalise the movement."<sup>246</sup>

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245. c.f. Ibid., 13/4/34, p. 6. Donations - Balmain W.I.R. 8/3; East Maitland W.I.R. 11/5½; Merrylands W.I.R. 12/6; Northern District W.I.R. £1.0.0.; Balmain Unemployed Association 2/9; Punchbowl Unemployed Association 10/-; Griffith Unemployed and Relief Workers' Movement £1.5.0.; unspecified sums from Stockton Relief Workers and Paddington Unemployed Council (third donation); Scarborough Miners' Lodge £2.0.0.

246. W.W., 13/4/34, p. 6.

This statement, though biased, had a considerable element of truth. The strike showed how dissatisfied the relief workers were, so the A.L.P. had to proclaim its sympathy with relief workers' problems, or risk being discredited. The strike further showed that the State Council could muster good support from relief workers, and that relief workers were willing to follow militant and Communist leadership. This forced the A.L.P. to make a further desperate effort to win the leadership of the unemployed away from the State Council. To do this, the A.L.P. followed its usual tactics of vilification, and tried again to establish the moribund U.L.W. Finally, the grievances of the relief workers, so well-publicised during the strike, provided the A.L.P. with a weapon with which to attack the policy of the Stevens Government.<sup>247</sup>

At the Daceyville meeting on March 28th, Heffron

"made a slashing attack on Communists for indiscriminately inducing men to strike, and then failing to achieve anything for them because they are drawn off the jobs without any plan and merely kept in futile idleness."<sup>248</sup>

These charges were unfair - the Homebush Bay strikers were not Communist dupes, but had decided themselves to down-tools until morning tea time was granted. While the strike organisation was

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247. The Labor Daily, which had recently said little in regard to the government's unemployment policy, came out at this time with a number of slashing attacks on the Government's policy. e.g. L.D., 6/4/34, p. 1 - Front page headlines and article; 7/4/34, p. 6.

248. L.D., 29/3/34, p. 8.



by no means perfect, it had done a large amount of planning. The Workers' Weekly replied to this that "a lock-out committee was democratically elected and very many Labor Party workers were on same. It really organised the strike."<sup>249</sup> This was probably true. Though some of the strike committee were no doubt Communists, it would seem that they were on strike themselves and not top-level organisers sent out from State Council headquarters.<sup>250</sup>

At the Daceyville meeting on March 28th, Heffron urged the men to form a district branch of the U.L.W., declaring that they would only accomplish anything by organising as part of that body.<sup>251</sup> This claim appears ludicrous when one compares the respective improvements won for the unemployed by the State Council and the U.L.W.

The end of the strike coincided with the A.L.P. Easter Conference. This gave the A.L.P. leaders a nice opportunity to avow publicly their sympathy with unemployed and relief workers. A Labor Daily editorial effusively praised the Conference's stand, and in highly emotive terms<sup>252</sup> depicted the plight of the relief

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249. W.W., 6/4/34, p. 6.

250. In no account is there any mention of strikers being addressed by any of the well-known Communist leaders.

251. L.D., 29/3/34, p. 8.

252. e.g. it described the relief work scheme as "the New Serfdom" and "Gold Coast barbarism" and referred to the Government's "administrative sadism".



workers. It attacked the Communists for exploiting the unemployed for their own party ends (- a case of the pot calling the kettle black?)

Conference "expressed itself wholeheartedly behind the men who have rebelled in their struggle, and invited them to accept the organisation of the entire movement to fight for them" (- a grandiose gesture that would require no action to fulfill it, as the struggle was obviously at its end).

Conference set up a committee (of Labor parliamentarians) that would supposedly place "the entire weight of both the industrial and political organisations...at the disposal of relief workers on and off the job." "Labor has taken up the challenge on behalf of the unemployed..... The future of their fight for better conditions must be planned. Labor calls to the relief workers to lend a hand in planning it."<sup>253</sup> (It is significant that the unemployed were only invited to 'lend a hand', and not to organise the fight themselves.)

On the night of April 2nd - after the strike was officially over! - Heffron made a radio broadcast, showing how the demands of the strikers had been justified and declaring the A.L.P.'s support for them. If a few broadcasts of this type had been made during the strike, much more support, both active and financial, would undoubtedly have been forthcoming. It would also have

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253. L.D., 31/3/34, p. 4.

boosted the strikers' morale greatly.

Not surprisingly, Heffron, in the broadcast, made an "emphatic appeal to all relief workers to build the U.L.W."<sup>254</sup>

The Workers' Weekly claimed that the A.L.P. leaders had tried to "split the strikers".<sup>255</sup> This was justified, considering the way Heffron tried to turn the strikers against the Communists, and the way the A.L.P. decided to try to take over the leadership of the struggle.

This paper also claimed that the A.L.P. leaders "profess to take up the case of the unemployed and relief workers to stifle struggle" and that "Heffron and the Labor Daily .... caused the demoralised drift back to work."<sup>256</sup>

It does seem that, when the A.L.P. leaders finally decided to organise and lead the strikers, their main advice to the strikers was to give in, to end the strike; they promised to put the strikers' case to the Government through deputations, declaring the benefit of legal action through top-level, institutionalised channels, rather than through struggle. Granted, by the time these appeals were made to the strikers, the strikers had had enough of

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254. L.D., 3/4/34, p. 6.

255. W.W., 6/4/34, p. 6.

256. Ibid.; 13/4/34, p. 6.

hunger and had lost considerable determination. But it is quite possible that the A.L.P. spokesmen were responsible for the final decision to resume work.<sup>257</sup>

After the strike finished, Labor parliamentarians from the A.L.P.'s new committee did present deputations to the Government.

Heffron introduced some men from the Perry Street job, who complained that some three hundred men who had been on strike had been refused permission by the ganger to start work. Dunningham agreed to set up a committee of inquiry into alleged unsympathetic actions of those in control of the job.

McKell, M.L.A., introduced a deputation from unemployed organisations.<sup>258</sup> They asked for an extra day's work a week at award rates, shelter sheds, ten minutes' morning tea time, the reinstatement of two dismissed gangers, and for gumboots to be properly disinfected and numbered. On behalf of the Homebush Bay men, they asked for proper first aid equipment and that a system

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257. Though the Labor Daily report of the meetings at which this decision was made (L.D., 4/4/34, p. 7) noted that these were "addressed by strike committee members" it would seem that it really meant that they were addressed by the special committee set up by the A.L.P. Conference. (A report of this committee appears immediately above the account of the meetings. Also, given the attacks the L.D. was currently making on Communist leaders of the strike, it would have been most unlikely to report anything done by militant members of the strike committee without an adverse comment.)

258. It is not stated which these were, but presumably they would not have been connected with the State Council.



of spraying the mosquitoes on the swamp be initiated.

Dunningham replied that there was no hope of granting an extra day's work because of lack of funds, and that a committee would be appointed immediately to inquire into the conditions on all the large jobs.<sup>259</sup>

I have said that the question of the success of this strike is problematical. This is because the State Council attributed to this struggle a most important change, which, though it may well have resulted from the determined stand taken by the strikers and from the support aroused, cannot be proved to have done so.

The State Council claimed that the Government's May increase in the value of food relief and in the amount of relief work was caused by this struggle:

"The outcome of the struggle was a 20% increase in food relief to unemployed and a 20% increase in relief work, which the Minister stated publicly, had cost the Government £ 800,000."<sup>260</sup>

This is supported by the timing of the increase - I have found no report to the effect that the Government had been planning to increase the value of relief. The Government had indeed been

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259. L.D., 4/4/34, p. 7.

260. W. MacKenzie and M. Hade, The Premiers' Plan In Action, p. 31; c.f. also W.W., 4/5/34, p. 6; 11/5/34, pp. 1, 6; 22/2/35, p. 5 (this claims that the dispute cost the Government an extra £270,000 a year in relief); R.L., 5/6/35, p. 11.

perturbed by the strike.

The strikers definitely won a number of small, local demands.<sup>261</sup>

Finally, whether or not the strikers did force the Government relief increase, the strike was successful in publicising the relief workers' movement and demands, and showed the Government and other, inactive relief workers how strongly the relief workers could make their presence felt. It almost certainly aroused further support for the movement.

Conferences in July-August 1934.

Whether or not the State Council's claims of inaction by the Labor Council in this strike were fully justified, this attack in itself shows that unity between these two bodies was, at this time, far from complete. That Payne, in his discussion of this strike at the State Council's 1935 Conference, noted that "very material support" was given by the Labor Council<sup>262</sup> shows how by then there

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261. W.W., 6/4/34, p. 1; 13/9/34, p. 1. (Workers on the Ascot race course won demands in regard to gumboots, shelter sheds, reinstatement of 4 workers, permission to make up time lost through the strike.)

262. R.L., 5/6/35, p. 11.

was a glowing amicability between the organisations.

That there was conflict around this time between the Labor Council and State Council over the organisation of the unemployed and relief workers is shown again in accounts of the July and August, 1934, Conferences. Unfortunately, the sources do not completely clarify this controversy.

It seems that the Labor Council briefly flirted with the idea of setting up a new relief workers' union and that while some Labor Council delegates quickly returned to an equivocal support for the State Council, others actively worked against the State Council. The conflict is made all the more obscure by some evidence that the long-standing quarrel between the Communist Party and the Sylvester group was somehow involved.

In April 1934 Stewart, a Labor Council delegate, had moved that the Labor Council "convene a conference of delegates working on all relief jobs in order to set up a relief workers' movement."

The State Council opposed this on principle, believing that a separate relief workers movement would be impractical and too narrow; it would also obviously oppose any attempt to set up an alternative relief workers' organisation.

Payne put this amendment:

"That in order to wage a successful struggle against the menace of work for the dole, the utmost unity in the ranks of the workers, the closest cooperation between employed and unemployed is the



need of the hour. The [Labor] Council, therefore, will assist to organise joint struggles, strikes, demonstrations, etc. with the unemployed. .... To build a real fighting united front on this issue, to carry on a wide agitation throughout the trade union movement .... and to collect funds for the struggle from the Trade Union movement, the Council will cooperate with the State Council of the Unemployed to call a conference of all unemployed organisations, relief job committees, etc., at which the policy, tactics and organisation forms can be determined by the rank and file and a representative leadership elected to guide the struggles of the unemployed and relief workers in the coming stormy period."

Payne's amendment was lost by 38 votes to 19 and Stewart's motion accepted by 32 votes to 23.<sup>263</sup>

Nothing much was apparently done about calling this conference until late June-July. According to the Red Leader personal invitations to attend were sent to individuals, "the rank and file were not properly represented at this conference and, after discussion, it adjourned till the following week."<sup>264</sup> At this adjourned conference, according to the Workers' Weekly, a motion was carried

"that this conference, representative of all the metropolitan relief jobs and unemployed organisations, calls upon the chairman to dissolve the present conference forthwith and we request the State Unemployed and Dole Workers' Council to convene a state-wide all-in conference to allow the unemployed dole workers to decide what form of organisation they will have; further, we call upon the N.S.W. Labor Council to fall in line with the State Council in convening the Conference."

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263. T.L.C.M., 19/4/34.

264. R.L., 21/9/34, p. 4.

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Delegates were elected to meet the Labor Council. The Workers' Weekly added that the only opposition came from "a few Sylvesterites, who realising that the relief workers were solidly against them, fled ignominiously from the conference."<sup>265</sup>

At this Labor Council meeting Garden reported on the 'Conference of Unemployed and Relief Workers'. His report agreed with the State Council line that the delegates had been wrongly chosen: "various associations had sent in unauthorised delegates ..... and (thus) nullified the work of Conference." However, he moved that a further conference be convened "presided over by officers of the [Labor] Council and composed exclusively of men elected from the relief jobs." The State Council opposed the Labor Council's assertion that it should lead the conference. The Labor Council's opposition to the State Council at this time is shown by the fact that an amendment "that Council cooperate with the State Council of Unemployed in the matter" was ruled out of order.<sup>266</sup>

By the next Labor Council meeting the Labor Council and State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers were cooperating over the organisation of the conference. By this time any plan of the Labor Council's founding a new a separate relief workers' union had

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265. W.W., 6/7/34, p. 1.

266. T.L.C.M., 5/7/34. (R.L., 21/9/34, p. 4, gives a fairly lengthy account of the controversy, but does not mention this particular disagreement.)



apparently dissolved. Payne seconded Garden's report of the work done by the Committee set up to draw up the details of representation for the conference. (Representation was to be on the basis of one delegate for each organisation or job up to one hundred members and an additional delegate for each additional one hundred members or workers.) A committee consisting of Garden, King, Pickford (another Labor Council delegate) and Payne and Whitten (for the State Council) was appointed to prepare the conference. Stewart tried to have this earlier motion reendorsed, but Garden's report was endorsed.<sup>267</sup>

It seems that by this time Sylvester's supporters had been excluded completely from the organisation of the conference.

The unanimity between the State Council and Labor Council over this conference was shortlived.

Payne, in his report to the conference (which finally took place in August), charged the Labor Council with not responding to pleas for help in speeding up the organisation of conference:

"Right up to the Tuesday preceding conference attempts were being made to have the Labor Council do its part in the work, but without avail; then, without any meeting of the committee, without the matter being referred to the Labor Council, a couple of officials took it upon themselves to say that the conference would not be held."

Payne added that Labor Council Officials were "deliberately

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267. T.L.C.M., 12/7/34; R.L., 21/9/34, p. 4.



sabotaging the conference". (For example, "a delegate reported how he had met McNamara, official of the United Labourers Union, and how this individual, after a telephone conversation with King, of the Labor Council, had condemned the unemployed conference as 'bogus and Communist' and advised him not to attend.")

Payne claimed that when the State Council decided to go ahead with the conference after the Labor Council called it off, the State Council was charged with packing the conference.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the bias of this source, it is quite likely that certain Labor Council officials had done their best to interfere with the conference, and that the Labor Council had been apathetic about the organisation of the conference. The Labor Council's attitude to the State Council was still very changeable, and its attitude to the unemployed still sometimes reflected the earlier neglect and vacillation. Moreover, certain delegates were rabidly anti-Communist.

Payne answered the charge of "packing" the conference by declaring that the attendance of 204 delegates, representing 68,000 unemployed, was a

"fitting reply to those who say that the conference is packed, or that it tails at the end of any political party. We have in every instance insisted that the delegates ..... should be elected on the job and in

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268. R.L., 29/8/34, p. 12; 21/9/34, p. 4.

the organisations by vote of the rank and file."<sup>269</sup>

He added that

"the conference unanimously supported the State Council in its organisational policy as opposed to the proposals for a 'union'. A motion was unanimously carried against the splitters and recognising this conference as the true representation of the unemployed and dole workers of New South Wales."<sup>270</sup>

Of course, such motions of support for the State Council lose much of their value if the conference was indeed 'packed'. There is, unfortunately, no way of examining this charge. It is most likely that delegates connected with Sylvester were excluded, but it is also probable that rank and file delegates not connected with the State Council network were admitted, for the State Council was very determinedly trying to win as wide a support as possible.

The Conference formulated a seven-point platform of demands connected with the rent and eviction problems. At about this time the State Council was demanding that evictions, foreclosures, etcetera, should not be made against small farmers as well as unemployed. It also demanded that a 12/- weekly rent allowance be given to all unemployed.<sup>271</sup> This was to become one of the major demands of the organisation.

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269. Ibid., 21/9/34, p. 4. It seems that the early proposal that each delegate should represent only 100 workers had been dropped when the Labor Council withdrew from the organisation of the conference. Though such representation would be ideal, the finances of the movement were not really up to covering the travelling expenses of so many delegates.

270. Ibid., 29/8/34, p. 12.

271. Ibid., 12/9/34, p. 12.