

CONCLUSION

It is indeed almost incredible that six hundred and fifty men could win such a victory; it could perhaps be reckoned even more amazing that workers such as these, with no established rights, should fight at all. But the grasping of strength out of weakness has been the continuing theme of the struggles outlined in this study.

We have seen the unemployed movement grow from the rather pitiful attempts at organisation in the Twenties to the somewhat flamboyant militancy of the U.W.M., and in turn to the solid strength of the State Council network of relief work job committees and District Councils. We have seen the unemployed workers' refusal passively to accept unemployment, poverty and degradation as their fate expressed both in huge militant struggles and in continual, determined attempts to organise. We have seen setbacks to the movement itself, and many failures to win demands; the movement failed to achieve its primary demand of full work or maintenance. On the other hand, the unemployed and relief workers won considerable improvement of their daily lot and, if the movement suffered periodic setbacks, it also often achieved a great and unified strength.

But, as I have stressed throughout this study, probably

the most significant achievement of the unemployed movement was its very existence; its main victory lay in the fact of organisation and struggle.

The unemployed kicked, and continued to kick; pushed, as far as possible, out of sight by Governments, shunned, for the most part, by the unions and the A.L.P., the unemployed realised that only by their own struggle could they hope to win an adequate physical existence. In the words of the first poem quoted in the Introduction, they knew - and showed - that "the kicker in the chorus is the one that gets the dough". Moreover, they did not ask for "the dough", they did not ask to be maintained at state expense, but demanded as their right that the social and economic system which could not use their skills as workers should provide for them. They asserted too their right to struggle, their right to dignity, their right to be treated as workers, not bums.

It is an oft-quoted fact that when recruiting for the war began, the great majority of the first flood of volunteers were unemployed workers. This is oddly appropriate. The unemployed had already been fighting for over a decade.

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Note -- a library catalogue number has been given in square brackets  
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used are:

- A. N. L. -- Australian National Library.  
H. C. C. -- A. N. U. Archives, held in H. C. Coombs Building,  
A. N. U.  
J. N. R. -- J. Normington Rawling Collection, Menzies Library,  
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M. L. -- Mitchell Library.  
coll'n -- collection.

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