

THE UNEMPLOYED WHO KICKED:

A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL STRUGGLES AND ORGANISATIONS OF
THE NEW SOUTH WALES UNEMPLOYED IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

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"Come then, companions. This is the spring of blood,
heart's hey-day, movement of masses, beginning of good."

Rex Warner, Hymn, 1933

"History to the defeated
May say alas but cannot help or pardon."

W. H. Auden, Spain, c. 1937.

"excessive tyranny each day prevails."

Anon. A Convict's Lament on the
Death of Captain Logan. c 1830.

This thesis is dedicated

to the unemployed workers, then and now, those who struggled
and those who could not;

to the memory of Jack Sylvester: the love still borne him
by his friends, and the continuing enmity of his old political
opponents, sparked my initial interest in the unemployed
movement;

and to Martin.

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A.C.U. Australian Council of Unions

A.E.U. Amalgamated Engineering Union

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I.L.O. International Labour Office

I.W.O. Industrial Workers of the World

M.A.P. Movement Against War and Fascism

N.S.F. (or N.S.) National Students Federation

U.S.A. United States of America

U.S.C. United States Council of Unemployed

U.S.L. United States Labor League

U.S.W. United States Workers' Union

U.S.W. United States Workers' Union

ABBREVIATIONS

In Text

A.C.T.U.	Australian Council of Trade Unions
A.E.U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union
A.L.P.	Australian Labor Party
A.R.U.	Australian Railways' Union
A.W.U.	Australian Workers' Union
B.H.P.	Broken Hill Proprietary Co. . Ltd.
C.C.	Central Committee
Comintern	Communist International
C.P.A.	Communist Party of Australia
C.P.S.U.	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
E.C.C.I.	Executive Committee of the Communist International
F.E.D.F.A.	Federated Engine Drivers' and Fireman's Association
F.O.S.U.	Friends of the Soviet Union
I.C.W.P.A.	International Class War Prisoners' Aid
I.L.D.	International Labor Defence
I.W.W.	Industrial Workers of the World
M.A.W.A.F.	Movement Against War and Fascism
M.M.M. (or M.M.)	Militant Minority Movement
O.B.U.	One Big Union
O.B.U.U.	One Big Union of Unemployed
R.I.L.U.	Red International of Labor Unions
State Council	State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers
U.A.P.	United Australia Party

U.F.E.U. United Front of Employed and Unemployed
U.L.W. Unemployed Labor Workers
U.U. Unemployed Union
U.W.M. Unemployed Workers Movement
U.W.U. Unemployed Workers Union
W.D.C. Workers Defence Corps
W.I.C. Workers International Relief

In Footnotes

L.D. Labor Daily
N.M.H. Newcastle Morning Herald
N.S.W.I.G. New South Wales Industrial Gazette
N.S.W.P.D. New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
N.S.W.Y.B. New South Wales Official Year Book
R.L. Red Leader
S.C.U.R.W. State Council of Unemployed & Relief Workers
S.M.H. Sydney Morning Herald
T.L.C.M. Minutes of the Labor Council of N.S.W.
W.W. Workers' Weekly

S Y N O P S I S

The unemployed workers of the Australian Depression have usually been portrayed as a dispirited, disorganised mass, making few political attempts to resist the poverty and degradation brought about by unemployment and heightened by the inadequacies of government relief and the form taken by its administration.

The question, 'Why did the unemployed not fight back?', is often asked; oddly, perhaps, few historians have simply asked: 'Did they fight back?'

This thesis tries to answer the second question, and denies the assumption behind the first.

In fact, over the years 1930 to 1935 (and, to a lesser extent, in the periods 1927 or so until 1930, and from 1936 up to the war) thousands of unemployed workers in New South Wales alone actively resisted their fate in an organised and often militant manner. Small political organisations of unemployed workers proliferated in local areas. While a number were independent of any political party or wider organisational network, ^{most} many were affiliated to, and some were initiated by, the various central unemployed organisations founded by the Communist Party. Others were inaugurated by the Labor Party.

In regard to both the organisation and the activism of these political groups, success alternated with setbacks. While the latter were at times almost crushing, this does not detract from the very real successes of the movement: firstly, unemployed workers won a number of concrete improvements in their economic and social position; secondly -- and probably more importantly -- by the very act of organising and demonstrating, by demanding to be treated as workers rather than as rightless objects of charity, they resisted at least some of the degradation caused by their inability to provide for their own and their families' needs.

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INTRODUCTION.

We shall come, the unemployed, the disinherited of the earth,
We shall come into your temples and your marble halls of mirth;
We shall come as you have made us, ragged, lousy, pale and gaunt --
You, the House of Have, shall listen to us, the House of Want.
We are sickened of your "charity", our God-appointed lot --
We are wondering why us thousands in your slums and prisons rot;
We are measuring the chaingangs that stretch from coast to coast--
We shall come up, us the rightless, us the God-forsaken host.
We shall come in all the madness born of hunger, pain and strife,
On our lips the cry of vengeance, in our souls the lust of life;
We shall swarm as swarmed the locusts that on Pharoah's
kingdom fell,
And shall swing your damned detectives and your gunmen into hell!

Covington Hall.
Direct Action 2/7/28

We may hate to be a kicker, and always long for peace,
But the wheel that does the squeaking is the wheel that gets
the grease.
We may hate to be a kicker -- it seems rotten, don't yer know,
But the kicker in the chorus is the one that gets the dough.
The art of "take things quiet" is an art that mostly fails
But the guy that wields the hammer is the one that drives the
nails.
We'd regret to put a notion that was harmful in your head,
But the baby that keeps yelling is the baby that gets fed.

Ruby M. Kingswell
Working Woman 1/5/31

This thesis deals with those unemployed workers who "kicked" -
who organised, agitated and fought, and were, in turn, deprived of
relief, gaoled, bashed, and , occasionally , shot at. It is concerned with
those of the "disinherited" who threw off the shackles of demoralisation
forged by dependency and despair, and who did rise up in anger against
the "House of Have", against governments, the relief system, and,

ultimately, capitalism itself. They did not, perhaps, "swarm as swarmed the locusts" - yet they were many. If they did not manage to swing the armed police sent to crush their struggles "into Hell", they certainly sent a good few to hospital. In battles such as the 'South Coast Dole Riots' and the eviction battles of mid-31, they showed that they were willing to meet the forces of the state head-on, that they were willing to suffer severe personal injury in order to press their point. In the drawn-out struggles such as the October '32 agitation against the dole questionnaire they showed that they had a large reserve of determination, that they could not easily be quelled by the threat of starvation. In agitations such as the West Wallsend relief work strike of 1935 they showed that they would take issue on matters of union principle, that they were willing to fight not only for the improvement of their own situation, but in defence of working class rights. Their determination and resilience was further shown in the less sensational activity of building and rebuilding the small local political organisations, in the continual struggle to hold meetings to publicise and protest over their demands, in the fight to show other non-political unemployed that they were not rightless bums, but workers with a right to an adequate economic existence and to a spiritual dignity.

In short, this thesis is concerned not only with those unemployed workers who struggled, but with those who saw struggle as their right.

This portrayal of the fighting unemployed may seem surprising, for the unemployed workers of the Depression are usually presented as a grey army of helplessness, of hopelessness; most accounts portray their response to the situation as one of despair, apathy, escapism or bitter cynicism, mingled with the optimism - necessary to their spiritual survival - that something would turn up tomorrow.

It is, in any case, impossible as well as wrong to generalise the 'depression experience' of the unemployed. With so many unemployed workers, coming from such varied backgrounds, there must necessarily have been wide differences in personal responses to the situation of unemployment and to the crisis in general.

It is wrong to think of 'the unemployed' as a stable, homogenous group with a uniform experience. I show in Chapter I how the metaphor of the army of unemployed has tended to obscure the differences between unemployed workers. It also tends to dull our responses to their plight, for, by summoning up a standardised image of the misery of anonymous, faceless hundreds of thousands, it blinds us to any individual picture of starvation, homelessness, or cold; by presenting an image of interminable dole queues, of thousands tramping miles for work, it prevents us from understanding how it must have felt to stand in a particular queue, or to wear out one's own shoe leather looking for a non-existent job.

While the standardised image of the 'spirit of the unemployed' is rejected here, I am by no means denying that a spirit of apathy,

despair or impotence in the face of an incomprehensible crisis existed, nor that many unemployed fell into escapism, cynicism or easy optimism. It is simply, however, that this was not the full response. Judah Waten captures some of the diversity and contradictions in the 'depression experience'. After outlining various opposing moods, prevalent in the thirties - confrontation between left and right, bitterness, escapism, disappointment with traditional institutions, inertia, torpidity, stubborn resistance to change - he concludes that "the whole spirit of the age seems to be expressed in this conflict between a desire for change and a colossal inertia".¹ I would agree. Though the unemployed were often, as far as they can be seen as a bloc, apparently immersed in a clogging feeling of inertia, there was a reserve of radicalism, and of plain resentment, that at times would flare into the open. So, this study does not deny the inertia; it is only concerned, however, with those who broke out of it.

Also, not only were the feelings of despair, apathy, escapism etcetera not the full response, but such feelings were not mutually exclusive of a spirit of resistance. An unemployed worker of the Thirties would have been a fool if he never despaired, so bleak was the situation; he would have needed a soul of iron never to put aside his grim realisation of the lack of work and to escape for a while, into sport or social activities or simply into a private dream

1. Judah Waten, The Depression Years, 1929-1939. (in series Australia Since the Camera), Cheshire, Melbourne, 1971.

of the job that was awaiting him round the corner. Such feelings were themselves not mutually exclusive. And, just as the feelings of complete despondency and unrealistic hope could alternate or even co-exist, so could both responses at times give way to or go hand in hand with a surge of anger at the system and the society that could be blamed for one's unemployment. Such anger could develop into a determination to organise in order to fight back against the very fact of unemployment, or against the inadequacies and anomalies of the government relief system. So, while both despairing of the possibility of any real improvement of the economic situation, and continually forcing himself to buoy up his spirits with hope, an unemployed worker could also attend protest meetings aimed either at long-range, complete revolutionary change of the social, political and economic system, or simply at the immediate improvement of his own economic situation.

Noel Counihan's contemporary painting "At the Meeting"² illustrates this. The eyes of the people at the meeting are glazed; it is the blankness of confusion and of hope long-unfulfilled. Yet it is no catatonic stare. These are no sightless 'Hollow Men'. There is still a dignity, a spirit of resiliency in their stance. Of the couple who sit at the front, the woman's shoulders are humped, her mouth set in a long-accustomed down-turned moon of despair. She has perhaps been beaten. Yet one can still see her joining the crowd at an eviction fight,

2. reproduced in J. Waten, op.cit.

battling with police, especially if her man were involved. The man's jaw is grimly resolute, his back thrust hard and straight against the seat, his left fist huge, and, one feels, ready for a fight should one eventuate. Behind them, the faces, though wearing the scars of poverty and misery, press forward eagerly, mouths and chins set in determination, if not defiance.

While the spirit of resistance and even defiance of the unemployed workers has been largely ignored, it indubitably existed. There were, during the Depression, literally countless protests and agitations raised by the unemployed of New South Wales alone, ranging from lengthy agitations against major impositions attracting the support of thousands of workless from all over the state, to small short local protests centering around specific local grievances. Whilst a few hundred campaigns are outlined here, I have by no means discussed all the protests I discovered, nor did I discover all the press accounts of agitations of the period. And many hundreds of protests must have gone unrecorded. As well as mounting a protest campaign massive in terms of the number of protests and overall number of participants and supporters involved, the unemployed were able to build solid, viable organisations at both the local and the state level.

The difficulty with any attempt to correct an imbalance in an historical account is that the scales tend to plummet too sharply on the other side. I do not wish to suggest that all the New South Wales unemployed organised politically against their fate, or that

those who did see the need for political action spent most of their time attending meetings and demonstrating. A large number of unemployed workers were probably unaware that there was any unemployed movement. Many who did know directly of it probably only attended a few meetings. Very many unemployed workers remained unorganised.

It is impossible to determine how many unemployed workers belonged to the organisations at any given time, or how many supported the struggles. Membership figures of organisations and attendance numbers at demonstrations give some indication, but one cannot say how many were regular, committed participants, and how many were part of an irregular and fluctuating following. In many local organisations and in most local demonstrations there was a great turnover in the ranks of the supporters. This shows how, for many unemployed workers, resistance was just one of a series of responses to the crisis, that it was not a consistent response. Yet the very fact of this turnover shows that a great number of unemployed were, at some time or other, inspired to resist even if, on the whole, they were too busy searching for work or eking out an existence on the dole, too worn down by misery, to devote all their energies to the struggle.

The way in which local organisations propagated their message further shows that very many unemployed workers must have come at some time into contact with the movement. Meetings were held regularly at the ration depots on dole distribution day, and at shopping centres on Friday late-shopping nights. Crowds often

numbered a thousand or more. Again, the attendance was not static: people would come and go, some however staying to hear all the speeches.

Finally, while many were loath to risk the bashings and arrests that activism often entailed, or were unable or unwilling to spend their time attending regular meetings, many endorsed the actions of militants not by giving organised support, but in a manner that showed their sympathy with those who did act, and hence their own feelings of resistance. At the eviction struggles, for example, the hundreds of locals who gathered would cheer the eviction fighters and hoot and jeer at the police.

One must not generalise, either, about the nature of the political response of those who did organise. Even among the politically conscious there were great differences in the type of change desired: while some wanted socialist revolution, and saw the dole struggles as the first of a series of confrontations that would culminate in the all-out class struggle, for others - for most - the dole struggles were an end in themselves, simply and specifically a means of improving their existence.

The primary reason - indeed justification - for this study is simply the fact of the struggle waged by these unemployed workers, independently of any success it achieved.

E.P. Thompson, in his study of the making of the English working class, seeks to "rescue" forgotten reformers, idealists, and revolutionaries

of the time of the Industrial Revolution from "the enormous condescension of posterity". He argues against the common historical criterion of 'success', which judges the importance of dissidents or a protest movement by the way in which their "aspirations anticipated subsequent evolution", by their appearance according to our predilections; he proclaims that the importance of these people, their belief and their actions lies in the very fact of their revolt. "They lived through these times of acute social disturbance and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience".³

A similar criterion will be used here.

Both the organisations and the campaigns of the unemployed workers suffered numerous set-backs, had many failures. This is not surprising, given the difficulties inherent in trying to struggle from a position of the utmost weakness. What is significant is not that organisations sometimes floundered, not that struggles were often broken, but that the unemployed workers organised and struggled in the first place, and that they continued to do so despite the set-backs.

In fact, given the difficulties facing it, the unemployed movement did have surprising success, as defined by the usual historical standard. Many individual cases of hardship were relieved - for example, hundreds of evictions were prevented, either by legal defence or the threat of mass action; local authorities were forced to distribute extra goods and clothing; relief authorities were

3. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, Middlesex, 1968, especially, p.13.

forced to issue the dole to many single men, bagmen and other unemployed workers formerly denied it. Many relief work gangs won significant improvements in their job conditions, and some forced pay increases. Furthermore, some gains won were more generally applicable. It is certainly arguable that the big eviction battles were the major factor that forced Lang to improve the eviction legislation. Improvements in relief rates often occurred after a concerted campaign waged by the unemployed or, later, the relief workers.

Such victories would be reason enough in themselves for studying the unemployed movement. Yet its true significance lies in the fact that, by organising and protesting, the unemployed were attempting to control their own lives, and were asserting their right both to order their own existence and to achieve a decent existence befitting them as workers.

Louis points out that "by demonstrating, [an unemployed] man was given an opportunity to protest actively against his lot and to assert his determination to secure a better deal, thus countering the dangers of apathy and personal degradation".⁴

The very fact of struggle was a victory won over the demoralisation and degradation caused by unemployment and the reliance on relief; by organising and protesting the unemployed workers broke down some of their alienation.

4. L.J. Louis, Trade Unions and the Depression, A Study of Victoria, 1930-1932, A.N.U. Press, Canberra 1968, p.188.

In his exposition of alienation, Marx shows how the worker becomes estranged from both the product of his labour and from himself - from "his own active functions, his life activity" - because in his work "he does not affirm himself, but denies himself", because his work is "not his own, but someone else's".⁵

The alienation of the unemployed worker has received little study. Yet in some ways, alienation worked upon the unemployed worker of the Depression in the same manner as upon the regular worker, only more so.

The worker who is thrown out of work through no fault of his own - except the fact of his being a worker at a time when there are too many; who is thrown out of work by forces outside his control and his comprehension, becomes estranged not just from the product of his labour, but from his whole society, for that society is founded upon the work ethic. Suddenly, there is no place for him in his society. Suddenly, he is not allowed to fulfil his role as worker.

As well as suffering a complete dislocation of his role, of his rationale for existence in a work-oriented society, the loss of work caused the unemployed worker of the Depression to suffer an immediate and extensive - sometimes complete - disruption of his accustomed daily activity. Work no longer filled his days. He was forced to sit at home, or to tramp the city streets or countryside in search of the elusive job. The areas of his search were often unfamiliar. Often he had to leave his family behind.

5. K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Moscow, 1959. especially pp.66-71.

If the worker becomes estranged from his natural relationship with the functions that satisfy his essential needs, if his physical needs and the manner in which they can be fulfilled are divorced, the unemployed worker is even further alienated, for he is forced to rely upon others for his most basic physical requirements. His role as provider as well as his role as worker is destroyed.

In the Depression, the economic deprivation and spiritual dislocation caused by the loss of work was turned to degradation and humiliation by the reliance on charity, be it government relief, handouts from charitable organisations or simply assistance from family or friends. The self-reliance of the unemployed was destroyed, and with it, much self assurance. The unemployed were forced to be bums.

The fact that the assistance given by government or charitable relief agencies was vastly inadequate further degraded the unemployed worker, for even after selling his dignity and suffering the dislocation of his accustomed and morally necessary roles as worker and provider, he was still unable to satisfy his own hunger or that of his family, he and his family were still ill-clothed, and such clothes as were given them bore the unmistakable 'hand-out' label. Moreover, the lack of any provision for rent in the relief system jeopardised the very roof over his and his family's heads.

The way in which relief was given also increased the degradation and alienation of the unemployed worker, for it emphasised his inability to provide, it denied him the right to decide and regulate the manner of his own, or his family's, physical existence. The unemployed, ^{rightly}resented

~~the unemployed~~ being told how much soap, oatmeal, treacle or whatever, they should need in a week. One of the main demands of the unemployed movement was that doleys be given the value of relief in cash, or in a completely free open-order system. They also resented the attitudes of the relief issuing officers, and the power that these officials had over their lives. Another common demand of the unemployed movement was that the distribution of relief be placed in the hands of committees of unemployed workers, elected by unemployed workers. There is also clear evidence, in the protests of the unemployed, that they resented the excessive regimentation and bureaucratisation of the relief system, that they saw the large number of highly personal questions asked of relief applicants, and the whole system of dockets, cards and numbers, as an attempt to dehumanise them.

A final factor in the estrangement of the unemployed was the perplexing nature and apparent irrationality of the crisis itself. The whole socio-economic system seemed out of joint. Long-accepted beliefs as well as long-accustomed roles were just not appropriate any longer. It was not only a time of disorder, but the disorder was such that one's sense of the right order was thrown into confusion. This air of confusion is one of the most noticeable features of ordinary people's accounts of the time - confusion about what had happened, how it had happened, why it had happened, what - if anything - could be done about it. That so many analyses and solutions were offered only added to the confusion.

For the poor and the workless perhaps the most confusing feature of the crisis was the paradox of want in the midst of plenty. The

following poem ironically captures this perplexity, and the bitter sense of injustice of those who suffered from the 'want':

Have you ever been to Crazy Land,
Down on the Loony Pike?
They are the queerest people there
You never saw the like!
The ones who do the useful work
Are poor as poor can be
And those who do no useful work
All live in luxury!

They raise so much in Crazy Land
Of food and clothes and such,
That those who work don't have enough
Because they make too much.
They're wrong side up in Crazy Land
They're upside down with care -
They walk around upon their heads
With feet up in the air! (6)

'Crazy Land' is an apt description of Australia - of the world - in the Thirties.

So those unemployed workers who organised and struggled were trying, in the face of a seemingly incomprehensible crisis, in a time of topsy-turvy craziness, to set some pattern on the disorder at least as it affected their own lives; they were refusing to accept the crisis as their ineluctable fate.

Their struggle appears even more remarkable when the difficulties of organisation are realised. The physical and spiritual dislocation caused by unemployment severely hampered organisation. Not only did unemployed workers have no economic bargaining power - for, not selling their labour, they had nothing to withhold - but the fact of

of unemployment broke their ties with workers' traditional pressure groups - the unions. The constant search for work not only took so much time and energy that there was little left for political activities, but scattered the unemployed geographically. Unlike workers on the job, the unemployed did not have a regular daily meeting place. The moral humiliation caused by unemployment made many want to hide their shame at home, rather than proclaim their need in demonstrations; and, of course, the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and too, of insuperable optimism, induced a feeling that nothing could be gained by struggle. Finally, the unions, the Labor Council and the A.L.P. by and large turned their backs upon the unemployed and gave very little real help to their organisation or struggles.⁷ At times they, ^{even} deliberately hindered the unemployment ^{ed} movement, for when Lang was in power the labor leaders did not want a solid, active unemployed protest movement.

A further justification for studying the organisations and agitations of the unemployed is that their movement has been neglected. While many wonder why resentment and dissatisfaction, to say nothing of sheer rebellion, were not expressed more strongly, or even at all, in the Depression,⁸ a large, vociferous, politically conscious protest movement has been ignored.

7. The Labor Council and unions did finally decide to assist the relief workers' movement in 1935 and 1936. cf. Chapter 6.

8. cf. P. Peter, "Social Aspects of the Depression in N.S.W., 1930-1934", unpub. Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1964, p.430.

I have myself often heard this question asked, in seminars etc.

This sin of omission, ^{must} be expunged not simply because these men and women who fought, and suffered so much from their struggle, deserve to be remembered by 'History', but also because until responses such as theirs are recognised, there can be no true or full understanding of the history of the Depression.

It is always hard to reach at the history of 'the masses', to write, 'history from below', for the 'ordinary people' tend, almost by definition, not only to be inarticulate, but to go unrecorded. One approach is through large scale demographic-type studies of the statistical records - birth, marriage and death records - over a long period of time. Another method - used by Terkel in his study of the American Depression and Mackinolty in her account of the effect of the Depression on Sydney workers⁹ - is to collect first-hand reminiscences from a large number of ordinary people. A third way - favoured, for example, by E. P. Thompson - is to reach at the experience of the mass by studying the feelings and actions of the articulate minorities, of those small groups who broke through their inarticulacy and expressed some of the resentment felt by 'the masses'

It is this third approach that provides part of the rationale for this study. By looking at the feelings, the responses, of the articulate unemployed, we can reach towards an understanding of the feelings of those who were inarticulate, those who were too ground

9. Judith Mackinolty "Sugar Bag Days. Sydney Workers and the Challenge of the 1930's Depression". M.A. Thesis, Macquarie University, 1972.

Studs Terkel, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression, Allen Lane, London, 1970.

down by despair, too confused and disoriented, or simply too busy searching for work or eking out an existence on the dole to leave any mark upon 'History'. By studying the political responses of the organised unemployed we can better understand the social as well as the political effects of the crisis on the mass of ordinary unemployed workers.

There is unquestionably a need for many more studies on the effects of the economic crisis on Australian society, particularly its effects upon ordinary citizens.

In 1968, Louis and Turner wrote that "although the depression was ... one of the great traumatic experiences of Australian history, it has yet attracted little attention from Australian historians". They added that "there have been ... very few investigations of social conditions, and there is no study of the unemployed workers' organisations".¹⁰ In the same year Gollan wrote that "so far there has been very little serious study of the impact of the Depression on Australian society", and expressed the hope that studies similar to Louis' account of the impact of the crisis on Victorian unions would be made.¹¹ In 1970, Cooksey wrote that no "definitive study" of the Depression era can be made until there are more monograph-type studies of people's experience of that time. "Most of all we need research on living in the Depression of all significant social groups".¹²

10. L.J. Louis and Ian Turner, The Depression of the 1930s, Cassell, Melbourne, 1968, pp.1 and 234.

11. Robin Gollan, introduction to L.J. Louis, op.cit.

12. Robert Cooksey, editorial to The Great Depression in Australia, Labour History No. 17, 1970.

In the eight years since Louis and Turner's collection of depression documents was published, there has been quite an upsurge of interest in the history of the Depression. Theses and books have been produced, and the topic is now given greater emphasis in university courses.

However, there are still few detailed studies on 'living in the Depression'. The emphasis tends to be on the effect of the crisis on Australian society in general, or on the political ramifications of the crisis at the topmost level, or on the responses and actions of the large, well-organised, articulate groups (that clearly exerted a powerful force upon the political, economic and social structure) rather than on specific responses and experiences of ordinary people.¹³ The studies made by 'labour historians' usually concentrate on the effects of the crisis on, and the activities of, the A.C.T.U., the unions, Labor Councils, and the A.L.P. - especially on the internal wrangling in the Federal Labor Party, or on dissension within the New South Wales Labor Party and the challenge of the Socialisation Units.

Other accounts discuss the crisis in relation to the churches and organisations as diverse as the Communist Party and the returned servicemen.¹⁴ The growth and activities of right-wing fringe political movements such as the New Guard, Hardy's Riverina Movement, and the A.F.A., have presented an irresistible challenge to many historians,

13. J. Mackinolty's study is an exception.

14. cf. P. Peter, *op.cit.*

as has the whole phenomenon of Langism, but there still has not been, to my knowledge, any account of the political organisations and struggles of the unemployed.¹⁵

I have found no reference to, let alone any attempt to give an account of, the organisations and protests of the unemployed of the Twenties. Yet, though the unemployed movement of the Twenties was small and fairly insignificant compared to that of the Thirties, though it experienced much more failure than success, it certainly was able at times to make its presence felt. Its significance is that it shows that some unemployed were, from the very beginning of rising unemployment, determined to resist the fate - and fact - of worklessness, and to claim the provision of work or adequate relief as their right. Also, in order to realise both the difficulties and the successes of the unemployed movement of the Depression proper, we must look at it in the context of the attempts to organise in the Twenties.

Any references in Depression studies to the unemployed movement of the Thirties have been so cursory that they seem to dismiss the movement entirely, and are ^{in places inaccurate as well as} misleading. None give any real indication of the size of the movement, and both the number and the militancy of the struggles are drastically underestimated. Where the existence of an organisation has been noted, there has been no attempt to show how it functioned at the local level, how the rank and file unemployed were involved. I have found no mention

15. It is possible that some very recent theses deal with this.

at all of the New South Wales relief workers' movement that began in 1933; yet their main organisation, the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers, was a large, strong force up till 1936, and even later.

A brief indication of the sort of neglect and distortion that has occurred must be given.

Peter, for example, devotes four paragraphs to the Communist Party's unemployed work. She is concerned simply with the ideological and organisational deliberations of the C.P.A. hierarchy in regard to the unemployed, and not at all with how the movement worked at a rank and file level. She gives no indication of the strength of the movement, or of how long it continued. She completely dismisses the importance of the protests and struggles - speaking of the District Councils of unemployed and relief workers, which in fact won many improvements in the conditions of the unemployed, she writes: "What little success they had was greatly magnified by the Party".¹⁶

Davidson's account¹⁷ is also curtly dismissive. He does note that the Unemployed Workers' Movement (- the U.W.M., the C.P.A.'s initial unemployed 'fraternal' -) was a "rapid success", and gives official membership figures, but he too is not concerned with the mass base, or with the local protests made and gains won by the

16. P. Peter, op.cit., p.400, pp.412-414

17. A. Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, A Short History. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969, esp. p.60.

unemployed. He does not even mention the United Front of Employed and Unemployed (which replaced the U.W.M. in 1932, the C.P.A. leaders having decided to dissolve the top level of that body; U.W.M. local branches however continued). In this organisation, U.W.M. branches and independent local unemployed organisations were linked in a network of District United Front Councils.

Nor does he mention its successor, the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers in which the District Councils further linked up relief work job committees.¹⁸

Though Davidson is writing a history of the C.P.A. rather than of the Depression, these organisations should have been noted if only because of their connections with the Party.

Because of this omission, his account is misleading. In noting that the U.W.M. "again grew" in 1934 he is half right - there was a resurgence of the unemployed movement in that year, in New South Wales at least, but the main impetus of this renewed activity was from relief work job committees, affiliated to the District Councils, and not from the long-defunct U.W.M. This is not simply a pedantic point about nomenclature. The U.W.M. and the Councils of Unemployed and Relief Workers were very different in aim, organisational form and protest methods. They drew their support from different sections of the unemployed and played different roles vis-a-vis the union movement as well as the unemployed.

18. As in all the discussion here, I speak only of the situation in N.S.W. and the N.S.W. State Council. Davidson is, of course, discussing the Communist Party in Australia as a whole. However, the disestablishment of the U.W.M. and the change to District United Front Council networks was general C.P.A. policy and not limited to N.S.W.

While Davidson does note perhaps the most sensational of the unemployed protests - the eviction fights - his tone here is also unfortunately dismissive: "In these affrays, dignified by some such name as 'Battle of Bankstown' or 'Battle of Newtown', gunfire was sometimes exchanged and the U.W.M. ringleaders invariably went to jail". This suggests nothing of the bravery of the eviction fighters, of the bloodiness of the struggles, or of the lengths to which the government, police and court system went to crush them. Gunfire was not exactly 'exchanged': the guns were all in the hands of the police. And it was not merely 'exchanged': in these two fights two men were shot. The eviction fighters not only went to jail, but were incarcerated for long periods of time - a man shot at Bankstown was also sentenced to eighteen months. Finally, these affrays did not have to be blown up or 'dignified' by the names given them - they were battles.

In Gollan's just published Revolutionaries and Reformists, it is again only the U.W.M. which is mentioned, and the U.W.M. receives, if anything, even shorter shrift. Its main usefulness, from Gollan's account, would seem to have been as a vehicle for the dissemination of C.P.A. ideology, and as a platform on which certain Communists could build their reputations as fighters, and thus, later, win influential union positions. A sentence is devoted to the way "militant minority members made common cause with the unemployed".¹⁹

19. Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists. Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1975, pp.30-31; 70.

Louis' account of the demonstrations and organisation of the unemployed²⁰ is by far the most sympathetic and comprehensive. He clearly depicts both the difficulties of organisation, and the lack of assistance given by the union movement. However, as his study only covers the years 1930 to 1932, he must leave out any account of the beginnings of the movement and of its continuation well into the mid Thirties. As he has space only for one short chapter on the unemployed, he cannot discuss how the organisations functioned at the local level.

As there has been no real attempt to study the unemployed movement, this thesis must take the form of a narrative social history: the history of the organisations and struggles must be detailed before there can be any attempt at the interpretation of the significance of the movement. This is one reason for the length of this study.

Another reason for its size stems directly from the fact of the neglect of the movement and my objection to common opinions about the unemployed and the radicals of the Thirties.

I have so often heard, in seminars or discussions, the statement that the unemployed sat out the Depression in apathy or despair. I have so often heard student radicals of my generation cast aspersions on the spirit of the unemployed of the Depression, rhetorically asking 'Why was there no Revolution during the Depression?' and declaring, by implication, that if seasoned

20. L. J. Louis, op.cit., chapter 7.

Anti-Vietnam protestors such as themselves had been around at the time, governments and the capitalist system would not have escaped so lightly.²¹ Another common attitude is to deride those who were avowedly radical - namely the communists - because they were gullible enough to be "Stalinists." Jack Blake was prompted by this common New Left criticism to make a justified plea that the Australian Communists of that period be looked at in the context of their own time, their own society, and their knowledge both factual and theoretical.²²

My continual irritation at all these attitudes determined me to produce a veritable blockbuster, in the hope that, by the sheer mass of the material presented, these critics would be forced to admit the existence of the unemployed movement, the amazing resistance shown by many unemployed, and the genuine radicalism that did exist.

The size of the study was also considerably determined by the size and diversity of the unemployed movement. Not only were there great differences in aim and outlook among the politically conscious unemployed, but the unemployed organised around a variety of issues and used a number of protest methods. Also, the movement underwent a number of organisational changes. In order to show this variety and complexity it was necessary to outline hundreds of campaigns. The spread of the movement geographically and the fact that there were considerable differences in the nature of the movement from area to area required

21. As Humphrey McQueen points out, even to ask this question "betrays the leprous curse of economic determinism", for it denies the importance of the totality of experience, c.f. "The Great Depression in Australian Scholarship", The Old Mole, no. 4, 20/7/70, p.7.

22. Jack Blake, "The Early Thirties", Arena, no. 25, 1971.

me to study the locals in some detail. Also, in order to see how the 'ordinary' unemployed workers felt and acted it was necessary to study the movement, as far as possible, at its grass roots, rank and file level.

Finally, the study had to cover a long period of time - roughly from about 1927 to 1936 - in order to show the growth of and changes in the movement. Even then, I should probably have continued right up until the war, but was prevented by considerations of space.

The question - or rather double question - could be asked: 'Why New South Wales?' and 'Why only New South Wales?'

A partial answer to the first is that my choice was decided by the availability of material. However, the size of the unemployed movement in New South Wales and the militancy of a number of the protests also influenced my choice. The answer to the second is that, given the lack of research done on the movement, I felt it better to study it in one state in close detail, rather than give a general account of the movement all over Australia.

This history of the unemployed movement in New South Wales is not intended as a study of the 'typical' experience of the unemployed movement, and any conclusions I draw are not necessarily applicable to the organisation of the unemployed in other states.

There were, ^{indeed} certain differences in the unemployed movement from state to state. Such differences were to some extent determined by differences in the relief systems. For example, the value of the dole varied between states, and different methods of

distribution were employed, so the unemployed in one state might have greater reason to protest against the inadequacy or form of the dole, or against the dole regulations, than those in another. Similarly, relief work was not introduced or extended at the same time in all states, so relief work agitations in other states did not necessarily coincide chronologically with those of New South Wales.

Also, political differences and changes at the state government level threw different complexions on the unemployed movement in the various states.

The fact that the economic crisis did not have uniform effects in all states, as well as basic differences in the economic character of the states, also obviously caused differences in the nature of the unemployed movement.

The unemployed movement in New South Wales was, in terms of absolute numbers, probably larger than that of Victoria and definitely larger than that of any other state. This was obviously the result of New South Wales' greater population, in the first place, and of the higher proportion of unemployment and greater absolute number of unemployed in this state in the second.

It is also likely (though again with the possible exception of Victoria) that the unemployed movement in this state was relatively larger - i.e., a greater proportion of the unemployed workers were involved in some way or at some time in the movement.

The probable reasons for this are geographical, economic, political

and, possibly, historical. Because New South Wales was more highly urbanised, unemployed workers were less scattered geographically - great numbers of them were concentrated in the Sydney area and the northern- and south coast mining districts. Thus organisation was probably easier, as it was amongst the country unemployed that organisation was most difficult. The value of relief was less in New South Wales than in a number of other states, so the unemployed here had more reason to organise. The fact that unemployment was proportionately higher would have tended to make the New South Wales unemployed more conscious of the fact of unemployment and so more aware of the need to organise. That the C.P.A. had its headquarters in this state, and that its two main weekly papers were published here (and hence often carried more news of New South Wales unemployed than of those of other states) also provided a greater impetus for organisation. Finally, New South Wales workers had perhaps a longer and stronger tradition of radical protest than workers of the other states, apart from Victoria. The strong tradition of militancy and solidarity in the northern coalfields certainly facilitated the organisation of the unemployed movement there, and gave it a distinctive flavour.

The nature of the movement in New South Wales was also coloured by other factors peculiar to this state - the phenomenon of Langism, the relationship between Lang and the New South Wales Labor Council, the nature of the Labor Council itself, the ideology and growth of the Socialisation Units, the opposition of the New Guard.

However, despite the fact that the history of the unemployed movement in New South Wales was not 'typical' - for the movement in each

state had its own particular character - the concerns of the movement, the types of grievances expressed, were fairly representative of the concerns of the unemployed workers in general.

lacks!
Critics could point to various gaps, omissions and neglected areas in this study. For example, greater mention should perhaps have been made of unemployed women, of the bagmen, and of country unemployed in general. If these issues have been given less attention than they deserve, the omission has been caused partly by limitations of space - these topics, especially the first, require separate, detailed study. Also, in regard to the last two, the sources are limited - travelling men leave few written records, though their mark remains in songs and the oral tradition; newspapers are always more preoccupied with city rather than country news. However, if these areas have been neglected, this is mainly because they fell outside the basic subject matter of this study. I have noted protests made by unemployed women and the wives of unemployed men where they occurred; similarly, I have noted country organisations and some protests made by bagmen. However, the main strength of the unemployed movement was dependent on male unemployed workers of the metropolitan and northern and southern mining areas, and the Broken Hill and Lithgow areas, and so it is on these that this study must concentrate.

There is also little discussion of the social or self-help activities of the local unemployed organisations - of the dances, swimming carnivals, boxing tournaments, picnics and sports days that were arranged, and of the efforts to collect and distribute food and clothing,

to establish boot repair depots, barber services etcetera²³ This omission should not be taken to imply any denial of the importance of these activities: indeed, they provided a most important outlet for the frustration and despair of the unemployed workers and their families and they enabled the unemployed to take an active part in running their own lives. It was much less degrading to receive extra food handouts from fellow unemployed workers than from charity organisations, as it was better to attend a social function that one could help organise oneself.

These activities have been excluded because this study is concerned only with the directly political responses of the unemployed; a separate study of the organised social responses of the unemployed should be made.

Though the sources used in this thesis are largely discussed in the course of the argument, as problems of bias or interpretation arise, a brief review of the source material and its difficulties is necessary here.

Perhaps the main reason for the neglect of the unemployed movement and also for the fact that the experience of the unemployed workers in general has not received study proportionate to the importance

23. In "The Responses of a Community to the Great Depression: Social and Political Activity in Balmain 1929-1935" (History IV thesis, University of Sydney, 1970), I show in some detail how the Balmain unemployed organised social activities, ran their own hostel, collected and distributed food, etc.

of the problem of unemployment, is the limitation or supposed limitation of source material. I have already noted that it is hard to write the history of inarticulate, ordinary people because their responses and their lives tend to go unrecorded.

Many who have studied the Australian Depression appear to have been thrown into disarray by the lack of obvious evidence about the experience of the common man. For example, Peter in her account of "Social Aspects" of the Depression asks two main questions: "In what ways did the depression affect people's lives that it left them so many sharp memories?" and "Irrespective of their views in retrospect, how did they look at the depression at that time, and how did they respond to the events of those years?" She notes: "My attempt to answer the first question has been partly frustrated by a dearth of source material. In seeking answers to the second, I have found a regrettable absence of first-hand evidence on 'folk attitudes'".²⁴

There definitely are certain limitations to the evidence about how ordinary people responded to the Depression, and such limitations hampered this study. It is not easy to trace the history of the unemployed organisations, and there must obviously be some significant areas of experience not mentioned here because of lack of information.

The difficulties of researching the unemployed movement are caused partly by its nature. Many of the local groups were small, and groups

24. P. Peter, op.cit., introduction.

were scattered all over the state. A considerable number of local organisations were ephemeral, or suffered periods of almost complete decline. So many local organisations - especially the completely independent ones which were not affiliated with any 'umbrella' organisation - must have gone unrecorded. In the case of many which did receive some press mention, there are only one or two brief accounts of their actions at a specific time, whereas the organisations may have kept up a continual small-scale struggle over a number of years. Some branches of the C.P.A.-sponsored organisations received fairly regular coverage in the Communist press, but even in regard to these the information is full of gaps, and it is hard to see how a given branch functioned on a day-to-day level over a long period.

Furthermore, both the press and the organisations themselves had a rather cavalier attitude to nomenclature, and names and acronyms were changed and interchanged with a complete disregard for later historians.

However,

The main reason for the lack of evidence in regard to both the desperate daily experience of the unemployed and their organisations and struggles arises from what would seem to have been a deliberate press policy at the time. The establishment papers of the Thirties appear to have had a fairly extensive 'D notice' on stories of suffering²⁵ or of protest. A study of the photographs in these papers would not lead an intelligent but completely ignorant observer to believe that much had been wrong. Papers such as the Sydney Morning Herald almost solely featured

15. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.175, notes that the Victorian press had few accounts of the life of the unemployed.

STILL CHEERFUL



Passing the hours with a home-made
banjo at the unemployed camp, L
Perouse.

Labor Daily, 1/6/31, p.5.

pictures of politicians and sportsmen and scenic views of families enjoying themselves at the beach, the races of wherever. Publications such as Smith's Weekly and the Sun preferred the faces of murderers and other miscreants and their victims. There was very occasionally a shot of a violent eviction fight or large demonstration, but this tended to be exceptional and there were ^{few} depictions of the poor housing, poor clothing or general poverty of the unemployed. Where unemployed workers were shown, the examples chosen were usually of the 'battlers', of those who kept on smiling under grey skies. The photograph opposite is typical - the man is well and neatly dressed, he looks very perky, and what can be seen of his dwelling looks solid. Yet most of the homes in such camps were little more than frail humpies made of bags, boxes and scrounged palings and galvanised iron, and most of the campers lived in abject poverty. This photograph is included here not only because it was representative, but because it appeared in the Labor Daily. Even this supposedly working man's paper, shied away from the harsh realities of the situation.

The tone of the news-stories was similar to that of the illustration. There were accounts of beggars, starvation and homelessness, but the number of such reports was completely unrepresentative of the extent of poverty and suffering. There were accounts of the more sensational protests, but many struggles received short shrift, if they were even reported at all, and accounts of conferences of the unemployed organisations received little mention. There was usually little attempt to present the issues behind the agitations, and unemployed workers who protested were shown as a violent, irrational, ungrateful band of professional

communist agitators.

The reasons for this blanketing of information are fairly easily ascertainable. Firstly, daily reports of what was in newspaper terms small-scale suffering by insignificant individuals or small local protests were not ^{considered} particularly newsworthy - especially as the Depression quickly promised to be not a nine days wonder but a protracted experience.

More importantly, newspaper proprietors and editors consciously saw the smothering of such information as necessary to the recovery programme. Part of the conservative analysis of the crisis, held by the business community and politicians of the right, was that the Depression was the result of widespread loss of confidence: thus a return of confidence was necessary to bring about recovery. Daily stories of despair would do little to encourage consumers or small investors, and stories of protest would suggest that, if the grievances of the unemployed were strong enough to be expressed in such a fashion, the unemployed must surely have some justified cause for complaint. On the other hand, promises, hints and later avowals of recovery would hopefully restore the nation's morale and its finances. Also, the image, carefully fostered by conservatives, of the 'Equality of Sacrifice' might be impaired by depictions of individual misery and details of unequal sacrifice. The lower income earners and the unemployed had to be convinced that 'all were in the same boat', cabin boy, crew and captain alike', and that all must 'pull together' to reach the shores of recovery.

In and after about 1933, the press concentrated even more on praising the return of prosperity, and those who remained unemployed suffered even more editorial neglect.

Neglect of the day-to-day problems and the protests of the unemployed was not limited to the establishment press. I have already noted that the Labor Daily was also an offender - particularly when Lang was Premier and any stories of misery would reflect ill upon his image. Also, as Louis notes, "the [trade union] journals for the most part ignored the unemployed themselves and did not report on the wretched lives of their former members".²⁶ Over most of the period under review, the unions by and large opposed militant protest by the unemployed, so union journals, pamphlets, minute books etcetera reflect little of the struggles of the unemployed.

Added to the historical difficulties caused by contemporary neglect, is the fact that by far the majority of the pamphlets and weekly papers put out by the unemployed organisations have by now disappeared.

However, despite all these limitations, source material does exist and its discovery is not really the Heraclean labor that the absence of attempts in that direction would suggest. Or, on second thoughts, perhaps the labours of Heracles are an apt analogy: the challenge initially seems insoluble, but ways can be found around it. The solution to this particular problem often lies in the way one approaches the sources.

In the first place, the establishment newspapers can be sifted for all the snippets of information which they grudgingly give. When reading

27. L.J. Louis, op.cit., p.157.

these accounts one must continually keep in mind the political predilections of the paper itself, which are ^{sometimes} manifested in subtle and unobvious ways.²⁷

Also, only by reading a number of accounts of a specific struggle does anything like the full picture emerge.

Secondly, the Communist papers have been unduly ignored because of their obvious bias; it is less often remembered that the respectable press just as single-mindedly presented the facts according to the interests of its owners. The Communist press cannot be shunned, for it is often the only available source. Also, Communist press reports of struggles were usually written by participants or eyewitnesses, whereas the journalists of the establishment press often did not actually attend demonstrations, and derived their information from the police. It is quite easy to take the Communist bias into account, to sift out factual matter from exaggerations and theoretical analysis. While Communist analyses of the importance of certain struggles or descriptions of the size and state of the movement were often tailored to fit current Comintern orthodoxy, the Communist papers would be unlikely to invent details - about the existence of a local in a particular suburb, or of a specific meeting or campaign. Also, the Communist bias did not always cause an over-estimation of the movement - the excesses of Bolshevik Self Criticism sometimes caused the C.P.A. leaders to disparage the size and strength of the movement.

Thirdly, though a lot of the pamphlets and local unemployed newspapers have been lost, a good number still exist. The difficulty with these is that they are generally hidden in boxes of uncatalogued

29. e.g. The less vocal participants in a demonstration were often described as 'spectators'; this obscures the fact that they were supporters.

documents. At times such publications creep onto bibliographies, but they are rarely used to show how the unemployed actually felt. This study has tried to use such sources as far as possible.

A fourth way of approaching the unemployed workers' feelings about both the crisis in general and their own plight is through the cartoon, jokes, poems etcetera in their papers, and through their songs. This approach has also been shunned by most historians.²⁸ Such sources are used here to show the day-to-day grievances of the unemployed, their feelings of injustice, their resentment at the administration of the relief system, and their bitter rejection of claims that prosperity returned in about 1932 or 1933.

Finally, I have used some first-hand reminiscences of people who took part in the unemployed struggles, and my attitudes have also been partly shaped by interviews undertaken in 1970 with a number of Balmain residents who lived through the Depression in that suburb.²⁹ As these Balmain residents were mostly not involved in the unemployed movement, these talks helped me to understand why many unemployed did not join the struggles, and helped me to compare the feelings and experience of those who struggled and those who did not.

For the most part, I have used this oral history only as background, to give me some understanding of the way unemployed workers lived, and

28. H. McQueen, *op.cit.* criticises the contribution to The Great Depression in Australia, Labour History, No. 17, 1970, for completely ignoring such sources.

J. Mackinolty (*op.cit.*) makes a good collection of Depression songs and poems.

29. 26 people were interviewed about matters such as their social and political activities during the Depression, what they believed had caused the crisis, how they made do on little money etc. These interviews were submitted to the examiners of my History IV thesis.

have used such material only occasionally in the text to fill out information obtained from newspaper sources. The relatively small explicit use of this material does not imply any derogation of the importance and usefulness of oral history. I would have preferred, ~~however~~ ^{indeed}, to have collected and included many more personal testimonies, but felt that, given the predilections of many historians, the historical neglect of the unemployed movement could perhaps be better refuted by the amassing of incontrovertible 'facts' taken from written records.

George Johnston, by George Johnston

In this study of the political implications of the unemployed... of the general experience of unemployed workers, there is no place here for a full-scale statistical study of the unemployed and unemployment. However, some attention must be given to the subject of unemployment and its distribution on particular sections of the population... of the unemployed and its distribution on particular sections of the population... of the unemployed and its distribution on particular sections of the population...

CHAPTER 1

UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE UNEMPLOYED -
WHO, WHERE AND WHY

"A witty statesman said, 'You might prove anything by figures'. "

Carlyle, Essay on Chartism

"It was like a great river flooding or changing its course, the way the Depression came - the insidious creeping movement of dark, strong, unpredictable forces, the flow of hidden currents, a clod falling and dissolving, a slide of earth, the cave-in of an entire bank, a sudden eddy swirling around a snag, tilting it over, sweeping it off into a black oblivion."

George Johnston, My Brother Jack.

As this is a study of the political organisations of the unemployed rather than of the phenomenon of unemployment in the Depression or of the general experience of unemployed workers, there is no place here for a full-scale statistical study of the unemployed and unemployment. However, some attention must be given to the amount of unemployment and to its concentration on particular sections of the workforce in relation to factors such as the industrial and geographical backgrounds of workers and to their age and sex. There is also no room here for a detailed study of the shape of contraction and recovery, nor of the various attempts of economists and politicians to change the course of the crisis. As this is a study of political organisations at the lowest level, the major political events of the time are only dealt with in terms of their effect upon the unemployed movement.

This chapter is simply concerned with providing some scrutiny of the statistics relating to the amount of unemployment, and with showing that serious unemployment both began before the date commonly given for the beginning of the Depression - 1929 - and continued well after the 1932-33 date of 'recovery'. To understand why the unemployed movement is important it is necessary to grasp the significance and pervasiveness of unemployment in Australian society in the late Twenties and Thirties; as the unemployed movement both developed before and continued after the years usually termed 'the Depression years' we must study the growth of unemployment before 1929 and its continuation after the turn of the economic crisis.

'The unemployed' is a group that, by its nature, defies precise definition, for the group is not stable, compact or homogenous. Unemployed workers in the Depression came from a variety of backgrounds and suffered a great number of different experiences. There were many who remained unemployed for years, while others moved in and out of the workforce. For some, recession had begun to undermine their jobs in 1927 - indeed, in 1925, unemployment was high enough to spur some unemployed to organise protests; others did not feel the crisis until 1930 or 1931. Some returned to work in 1933 or 1934, others lacked regular work until the war. It is hoped in this study to give some indication of the change and variety in Depression experience that is somehow cloaked by 'average' statistics and general pictures of the unemployed as an anonymous grey army of despair; in particular, of the experience of those unemployed who fought.

UNEMPLOYMENT - THE DIFFICULTIES OF MEASUREMENT

The 'witty statesman' noted in the epigraph to this chapter, does have some justification - virtually anything might be proved by the statistics relating to unemployment in the Depression. These statistics are, however, rather meagre in many respects, and it is hard to prove from them much that is incontrovertible.

Forster notes in a study of Australian unemployment that "American experience has shown that the difficulties of measuring unemployment in a definitive way are almost beyond solution".¹ Stevens, in a study of the problems of interpreting Australian unemployment statistics, succinctly states: "Unemployment is an elusive concept and its measurement is beset with pitfalls". He adds that "the reason for the elusive nature of unemployment statistics may be found as much in the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory definition of what unemployment is as in the varied and not always consistent methods used in measuring it".²

We are not so concerned here with the problem of definition as this mainly arises when a comparative study of unemployment over a period of time is undertaken. The general definition of an unemployed worker

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1. C. Forster, "Australian Unemployment, 1900-1940", The Economic Record, Sept. 1965, p. 426. cf. also Universities - National Bureau Committee for Economic Research, The Measurement and Behaviour of Unemployment, Princeton University Press, 1957. The papers presented at the conference reported here highlight the problems of measuring unemployment.
 2. S. P. Stevens, "Problems in the Interpretation of Australian Statistics of Unemployment", The Economic Record, June 1963, p.142.

used in this thesis follows Stevens' three criteria: "He has to be out of work and he must be willing and able to accept employment."³ Almost all those unemployed during the Depression fulfil these requirements. The 1933 Census showed that 92 per cent of Australian unemployed males and 82 per cent of unemployed females were unemployed because of the scarcity of work.⁴

The problem of measurement, however, is important. Unfortunately the statistics relating to unemployment in the depression have many deficiencies and the different measures used are often hard to correlate for comparative checks upon reliability. For example, the indices measuring unemployment according to industry have great differences in the definition of industrial categories, and hence different levels of unemployment are shown. Also, many statistics only cover the period when recovery had begun.⁵

3. ibid.

4. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, volume III pp.315-316 (Unless otherwise stated, all Census material used here is from Volume III); cf also Commonwealth Labour Report, 1933, p.104.

5. e.g. the 'Mining and Quarrying' category in the Census and Trade Union reports of unemployment by industry groups (for June 1933 and the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 1933) would appear to rely on different definitions, as the levels of unemployment recorded vary greatly; the N.S.W. Index of Employment in Retail Stores only begins in 1933.

UNEMPLOYMENT - THE TRADE UNION ESTIMATES

The measure of unemployment most commonly referred to is the quarterly estimates of unemployment returned to the Commonwealth statistician by trade union secretaries. As this index is used to suggest the trend in unemployment later in this thesis certain questions regarding its numerical reliability must be emphasised here.

From 1913, certain trade unions were required to return estimates of unemployment among their members for the last weeks of February, May, August, and November. A person was regarded as unemployed if he was out of work for three or more days in that particular week. Unemployment caused directly by industrial disputes was excluded, but unemployment in industries indirectly affected was included.

The table below shows these quarterly estimates for the years 1925 - 1939, in both New South Wales and Australia.

1925 1st Quarter	16.4	18.3	1928 1st Quarter	8.0	8.0
2nd "	18.5	21.0	2nd "	8.4	8.4
3rd "	20.5	23.3	3rd "	9.2	10.0
4th "	23.4	26.2	4th "	8.9	10.7
1926 1st Quarter	25.0	29.2	1929 1st Quarter	9.6	11.2
2nd "	27.6	30.7	2nd "	8.5	11.5
3rd "	30.3	31.6	3rd "	12.3	11.8
4th "	30.0	31.5	4th "	8.8	11.1
1927 1st Quarter	30.7	31.9			
2nd "	30.6	33.2			
3rd "	29.6	32.0			
4th "	31.1	31.9			

TRADE UNION QUARTERLY ESTIMATES OF UNEMPLOYMENT⁶
AUSTRALIA AND NEW SOUTH WALES, 1925-1939.

	<u>Aust.</u>	<u>N.S.W.</u>		<u>Aust.</u>	<u>N.S.W.</u>
1925 1st Quarter	9.3	13.2	1933 1st Quarter	26.5	30.2
2nd "	10.2	12.7	2nd "	25.7	29.6
3rd "	7.9	7.8	3rd "	25.1	28.8
4th "	8.1	10.1	4th "	23.0	27.0
1926 1st Quarter	8.2	8.4	1934 1st Quarter	21.9	25.8
2nd "	6.7	7.5	2nd "	20.9	25.0
3rd "	7.6	7.4	3rd "	20.4	24.5
4th "	5.7	6.2	4th "	18.8	23.5
1927 1st Quarter	5.9	7.0	1935 1st Quarter	18.6	23.6
2nd "	6.4	6.8	2nd "	17.8	22.7
3rd "	6.7	5.3	3rd "	15.9	19.1
4th "	8.9	9.1	4th "	13.7	17.0
1928 1st Quarter	10.7	11.8	1936 1st Quarter	13.4	17.2
2nd "	11.2	10.9	2nd "	12.8	16.2
3rd "	11.4	11.9	3rd "	12.0	14.8
4th "	9.9	10.6	4th "	10.7	13.3
1929 1st Quarter	9.3	9.7	1937 1st Quarter	9.9	11.8
2nd "	10.1	10.0	2nd "	9.7	11.4
3rd "	12.1	12.4	3rd "	9.3	10.5
4th "	13.1	13.8	4th "	8.2	10.1
1930 1st Quarter	14.6	16.3	1938 1st Quarter	8.0	9.6
2nd "	18.5	21.0	2nd "	8.6	9.8
3rd "	20.5	23.3	3rd "	9.2	10.0
4th "	23.4	26.3	4th "	8.9	10.1
1931 1st Quarter	25.8	29.2	1939 1st Quarter	9.6	10.6
2nd "	27.6	30.7	2nd "	9.5	10.6
3rd "	28.3	31.6	3rd "	10.2	11.6
4th "	28.0	31.5	4th "	9.3	11.1
1932 1st Quarter	28.3	31.8			
2nd "	30.0	33.2			
3rd "	29.6	33.0			
4th "	28.1	31.9			

6. From Commonwealth Labour Reports.

The value and accuracy of these estimates have been both criticised and defended by a number of economists: as early as 1936, this series had been "under dispute for many years".⁷

The confidence of the Bureau of Census and Statistics in the reliability of the figures diminished rather rapidly in the thirties. In 1927, it only "claimed" rather than "affirmed" (as it had done formerly) that "the percentage results based on trade union information fairly show the general trend of unemployment".⁸ In 1933, it still "believed" that the figures gave a "rough index of the percentage of workers unemployed".⁹ In 1937, the Bureau stated: "The value of (these) percentages is in the indication they give of the relative intensity of unemployment from time to time. It is believed that they can be taken as a rough index of the percentage of workers unemployed at any time."¹⁰ By 1939, it no longer attempted to apply the figures to the whole workforce, but restrained its claims to their application to unemployment among unionists; the change in emphasis is most important: "The value of the percentages ... is in the indication they give of the trend of unemployment amongst trade unionists as reported by the secretaries of trade unions."¹¹

7. E. R. Walker, Unemployment Policy with Special Reference to Australia, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p.64.

8. Commonwealth Labour Report, 1927, p.127.

9. ibid., 1933, p.100.

10. ibid., 1937, p.107.

11. ibid., 1939, p.103.

There is room here for only a brief outline of some of the conflicting opinions about the accuracy and representativeness of the returns.

The Bureau was always fairly confident about their accuracy:

Very few unions pay unemployment benefit, but the majority of the larger organisations have permanent secretaries and organisers who are in close touch with the members and with the state of trade in their particular industries. In many cases unemployment registers are kept .. 12

It would seem that the Bureau's optimism was rather ill-founded. Walker is somewhat scathing about these secretaries "who sometimes keep a register".¹³

A study of the union records of the thirties that still exist strongly suggests that union organisers had only a very generalised idea of their unemployment level.¹⁴

Butlin's study of unemployment in the engineering trades has rather alarming implications concerning the accuracy of the returns. The A.E.U. was one of the few unions to keep detailed records of membership and unemployment. Yet Butlin found that the rate of unemployment the A.E.U. returned to the Bureau between 1929 and 1943, was "substantially lower" than the level of unemployment shown in the Union records (according, evidently, to a misunderstanding).¹⁵

12. *ibid.*, 1937, p.106.

13. E.R. Walker, *op.cit.*, p.64.

14. e.g. Minute Books of the N.S.W. Branch of the Federated Ships' Painters and Dockers' Union (1929-1939) have no unemployment records.

15. N.G. Butlin "An Index of Engineering Unemployment, 1852-1943," *Economic Record*, Dec., 1946, p.253.

This discrepancy in the returns of a union with such detailed records would suggest that in unions organised more casually (as almost all of them were) the returns would have been most generalised and impressionistic. A study undertaken in Melbourne in 1937 of the methods whereby the secretaries compiled their estimates concluded that the unions' information about the unemployment of their members was in the majority of cases "approximate to very dubious".¹⁶

Certain New South Wales union officials giving evidence to the Royal Commission on National Insurance (in the late twenties) stated that this information was often withheld or deliberately falsified, in the belief that the information was used by employers against the workers. Garden (then Secretary of the New South Wales Labor Council) stated that "when a slack period is on things go against the workers, but when a good period is on they are to the advantage of the workers. Therefore, the figures are not correct". Forster remarks: "This sort of reasoning would presumably lead to understatement rather than overstatement of unemployment".¹⁷

If Garden's statement is true, then it would appear that during the "slack period" of the Depression, the figures in the union returns would have been understated.

In any case, whether the returns were deliberately falsified or not, it is certain that union secretaries had a less exact idea of the employment

16. C. Forster, *op.cit.*, p.444.

17. *ibid.*, p.445.

position of their members during the Depression than was normal. Union membership fell drastically¹⁸ and it would usually have been unemployed or part-time workers who let their membership lapse. So, many unemployed ex-unionists would not have been included in the returns. Moreover, because unemployment often fluctuated greatly between different trades covered by the one union, it would have been most difficult for secretaries to judge the level of unemployment with any accuracy.

Forster's study provides a detailed comparison of the trade union estimates with other indices of unemployment; he examines the relation of the estimates to "(1) unemployment among wage and salary earners generally, (2) unemployment among trade unionists generally, (3) unemployment in the industries covered by the returns and (4) unemployment in the unions making the returns".¹⁹ While pointing out the fairly close correlation between the estimates and Census returns, and the New South Wales index of unemployment calculated on the pay-roll tax after 1933, he notes certain limitations of the estimates that are largely connected with the sampling of unions that provided the estimates.

The sampling does indeed suggest an underestimate. Though the unions reporting represented about 60 per cent of Australian unionists in

18. The total union membership in N.S.W. in 1929, was 354,430; in 1931 it was 315,732; in 1933, 303,046; in 1936 only 316,747. (Commonwealth Labour Reports for the respective years).

19. C. Forster, op.cit., p.431.

the early thirties and some 25 per cent of all employees²⁰, the sample was biased towards the more skilled workers in industries that tended towards steady employment levels. Returns were "not collected from unions whose members are in permanent employment, such as railway and tramway employees, and public servants, or from unions whose members are casually employed (wharf labourers etc.)."²¹ The Bureau of Census and Statistics held that this exclusion of unions with "permanent" and "intermittent" employment meant that the sample gave an "average" picture, and that the two categories excluded would balance each other out. Forster notes: "Many objections can, of course, be raised to a sample based on this sort of balancing act. But it is probably worth emphasising that, even if there was a balance at a particular time, changing economic conditions, such as the depression of the 1930's especially, could upset the equilibrium."²²

Indeed, if unemployment was endemic in certain unstable trades, its level rose greatly in those trades in the Depression, for not only were there large scale dismissals in the waterside industries, for example, but there was feverish competition for any jobs available as men thrown out of their regular trades tried to obtain casual work.²³

20. ibid., pp.429-431. The figures for N.S.W. correspond to this. (cf. figures for Number of Unions reporting, Total Union Membership, Estimated Total Number of Employees in N.S.W. in Commonwealth Labour Reports).

21. Commonwealth Labour Report, 1937, p.106.

22. C. Forster, op.cit., p.441.

23. For the rife competition for casual and seasonal jobs cf. Tom Nelson, The Hungry Mile, Sydney, 1956, pp.72-76; Kylie Tennant, The Battlers, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965 (in particular the part set in the Riverina area during picking).

(The sample was also biased towards male workers - only a small proportion of female unionists were represented in the sample. However, Forster remarks that "since females made up only some 15-20 per cent of all employees, the bias may mean only a small distortion of the sample."²⁴)

The weighting of the sample towards certain industry groups - in particular, manufacturing - will be considered later in the discussion of the rate of unemployment in different industry groups.

While the trade union estimates then, probably underestimate unemployment, and must be used with caution, they remain the most complete coverage of unemployment in the Depression period and cannot be ^{dis}regarded. They were certainly regarded at the same time as the only viable source. In October 1935, the Commonwealth statistician admitted that they "may not exactly represent the proportion of total unemployment in Australia as a whole" but maintained that they gave "a picture of the development of the unemployment crisis in Australia and of the recovery there from which is not at present available from any other source".²⁵ The estimates will be used here mainly to suggest the trend of unemployment, though even in this respect a cautious attitude must be adopted towards them.

24. C. Forster, op.cit., p.431.

25. quoted by E. R. Walker, op.cit., p.65. (my emphasis)

UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE UNEMPLOYED - CENSUS MATERIAL

The 1933 Census provides detailed information about unemployment in relation to factors such as the age, sex, industry, usual occupation, income, conjugal condition and number of dependent children of the unemployed, as well as the cause and duration and geographical distribution of unemployment. The Census is probably the most accurate ^{single} source available, but should not be regarded as infallible. It is unfortunate that the Census was delayed until mid 1933, for the recovery which, by then, marked some sections of the economy makes it difficult to estimate the extent of unemployment at the height of the Depression. Whilst the Census shows a great deal about unemployment in June 1933, and was used as a basis for calculations of unemployment after the time, it is risky to read it backwards to infer from it data about unemployment in the early Depression years, both regarding the number of unemployed and their distribution through industrial and occupational groups.

Before discussing the data provided by the Census, it is interesting to check the trade union estimates with the census figures for unemployment. This is shown in the table below:

TRADE UNION ESTIMATES AND CENSUS FIGURES FOR UNEMPLOYMENT, 1933²⁶

	Unemployed as a percentage of wage-earning group		Trade Union Estimates	
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	June Quarter	September Quarter
N.S.W.	26.95	27.53	29.6	35.8
Aust.	22.89	24.17	25.17	25.1

26. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.304.

(Though the 'unadjusted' figure is the one usually referred to by the Statistician - and hence here in discussions of the Census material - the 'adjusted' figure more truly represents the situation, as this allows for "the inclusion among the unemployed of persons who stated themselves to be employed part time on sustenance or relief work".²⁷)

For both New South Wales and Australia, there is a fair similarity between the figures.²⁸ ^{-at least as far as the June Quarter is concerned.} This fairly close correlation confirmed the Statistician's belief that the trade union estimates gave "a rough indication of the trend of unemployment generally".²⁹ Indeed, as Forster remarks, "given the difficulties facing trade unions in estimating their unemployment in the middle of a depression ... the extraordinary fact is the closeness" of the figures.³⁰

On the surface, at least, the closeness would suggest confidence in the trade union figures: it appears that, far from underestimating unemployment, their error tended towards the other extreme. However, a scrutiny of the Census material suggests that the Census figures themselves may well understate unemployment.

Before showing the proportion of the workforce that was unemployed, it is necessary to see what proportion of the population was actually part of the workforce. The following table shows, for males and females respectively, the structure of the population of New South Wales and Australia

27. ibid.

28. There were fairly wide discrepancies in regard to other states.

29. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.303.

30. C. Forster, op.cit., p.433. (E.R. Walker op.cit., p.65 states however that "the correspondence is not close".)

according to the percentages in the various grades of occupation.

GRADE OF OCCUPATION OF MALES AND FEMALES, N.S.W. and AUSTRALIA, 1933.³³

<u>Grade of Occupation</u>	<u>N.S.W.</u>		<u>Australia</u>	
	<u>Males</u> %	<u>Females</u> %	<u>Males</u> %	<u>Females</u> %
Employer	4.36	0.45	5.57	0.64
Working on Own Account	9.02	1.47	9.50	1.55
<u>Wage or Salary Earning Group</u>				
Wage or Salary Earner	29.24	11.40	30.33	12.33
Apprenticed Wage Earner	0.64	0.16	0.61	0.18
Wage or Sal. Earner Part Time	3.84	0.80	4.29	0.82
Unemployed	14.39	2.56	12.04	2.32
Total Wage & Sal. Group:	48.11	14.92	47.27	15.65
Helper not receiving wage	1.05	0.15	1.21	0.16
Grade not applicable	37.46	83.01	36.45	82.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

This table shows the proportions both of bread-winners and wage and salary earners. The "Grade Not Applicable" category included "pensioners, persons of private means not in business, those engaged in home duties, scholars and other dependents".³² The inclusion of dependents and non-earners in this table tends to mask the importance of

31. From Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, pp.248-249. Note that the figures for "Grade Not Stated" have been distributed pro rata; also that unemployed workers on relief work are included in the figures for part time work.

32. ibid., p.246.

unemployment, the extent of which can only really be grasped if the unemployed are shown in relation to the wage and salary earning group. These figures for New South Wales and Australia are shown below.

NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED AS PERCENTAGE OF WAGE EARNING GROUP, 1933.³³

	M A L E S			F E M A L E S			T O T A L		
	<u>No. in</u> <u>wage</u> <u>earn-</u> <u>ing</u> <u>group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>	<u>No. in</u> <u>wage</u> <u>earn-</u> <u>ing</u> <u>group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>	<u>No. in</u> <u>wage</u> <u>earn-</u> <u>ing</u> <u>group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>un-</u> <u>employ-</u> <u>ed</u>
NSW	634,380	189,710	29.90	191,300	32,796	17.4	825,680	22,506	26.95
AUST.	1,591,580	405,432	25.47	510,499	75,817	14.85	2,102,079	481,249	22.89

The obvious severity of unemployment revealed in these figures requires little explication. It should be noted, however, that unemployment was higher in New South Wales for both males and females than in Australia as a whole. New South Wales at this time had a higher level of unemployment than the other states: the next highest were South Australia (24%) and Victoria (20%) and the other states were around the 18% - 19% level. This of course was because unemployment was centred in the urban, secondary industries, especially the capital goods industries which were an important part of the New South Wales economy.³⁴

33. *ibid.*, p.304. (Unemployed engaged on relief work are not included in the figures for unemployed but are included in the wage earning group).

34. *cf.* M. Tew, *Work and Welfare in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 1951, pp.76-77.

The fact that nearly 30 per cent of male wage earners were unemployed in New South Wales in mid 1933, when by other indicators we can see that economic recovery had begun, would suggest that the trade union estimate of 33 per cent New South Wales unemployment for the middle of 1932 may well have been an underestimation.

-as we have noted previously-

And in any case, the Census figures may themselves understate the situation.

There is firstly, of course, the problem of the accuracy of the returns. The Statistician notes that "it is not precisely known how persons on public relief works recorded themselves in Census schedules". It is known that some recorded themselves as employed part time rather than as unemployed. (Hence the 'adjusted' unemployment figure in the table comparing trade union and census figures). It is possible however, that more relief workers stated themselves as part time workers than is known. The Statistician felt that unemployed persons would not declare themselves employed through reasons of pride and that the "net effect of the mis-statements may be negligible".³⁵ It is possible that some unemployed persons, particularly women or the aged, may have regarded themselves as having withdrawn from the workforce rather than as being unemployed.³⁶

There was also the problem, admitted by the Statistician, of "youths without occupation and not recorded in the wage earning group".³⁷

35. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.247.

36. cf. L.J. Louis and I. Turner, op.cit., p.89.

37. Census of Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.305.

In the explanation of the tables relating to Grades of Occupation, the Statistician pointed out that there were "strong indications that there were a considerable number of (males and females) aged fourteen and onwards who might reasonably be transferred from the column 'Not Applicable' to the unemployed on the ground that, but for the Depression, they would have been recorded as unemployed wage and salary earners".³⁸ In other words, a number of youths who had not been able to find work since leaving school were described as dependants rather than as unemployed.

It is impossible to know just how many of these there were, but it does seem that the number was considerable. In the Labour Report of 1940, the Census figures for unemployment have been adjusted to allow for "a number of youths and girls who would normally have been wage and salary earners but who, on account of the economic depression, having never been employed, were not classed as wage and salary earners". The figures below show the difference between the Census figures for Australia and the adjusted figures.

38. ibid., pp.276 (males), 277 (females).

	Wage and Salary Earners Unemployed			Proportion of Wage and Salary Earners Unemployed			39
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
From Census	405,432	75,817	481,249	25.47	14.85	22.89	
L.R. Adjusted Figure in Thousands	460.3	103.1	563.4	27.9	19.1	25.8	

The inclusion of these youths raises the level of unemployment in Australia by nearly 3 per cent above the Census figure. The difference between the two measures is most marked in regard to female unemployment.

Unfortunately, the adjustment is made for Australia only, and there is no indication of how much adjustment should be made in regard to New South Wales. It is risky to tinker with the figures, but if the same adjustment is made for the state it raises the level of unemployment to about 30 per cent.

Another problem is whether we should include part-time workers, or at least some part-time workers, in an account of the unemployment level.

The Statistician pointed out that "part-time employment may or may not, according to the nature of the occupation concerned and the earnings of the persons so employed be regarded as under-employment".⁴⁰ He drew a distinction between part-time employment which he regarded as 'normal' employment and that which is 'under-employment'. The returns do not show whether part-time employment was "due to the nature of the person's usual industry or trade (e.g., an industry or trade normally requiring casual or seasonal supplies of labour) or to other factors making for intermittency"⁴¹

39. Commonwealth Labour Report, 1940, p.88.

40. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.305.

41. *ibid.*, p. 323.

such as the Depression. They also do not show how much of this part-time employment was accepted as part of the nature of the job and was adequately remunerative, and how much was enforced rationing.

The Statistician does indicate (in his carefully-veiled manner) that the figures for part-time employment should be regarded in conjunction with unemployment. He places both sets of figures together in a table "by way of suggesting that in appraising the employment situation in Australia in 1933, account should be taken of the existence of under-employment in the field of part-time employment."⁴²

The following table shows the proportion of the New South Wales wage earning group that was unemployed and employed only part time. (The part-time figures include some relief workers).

UNEMPLOYMENT AND PART TIME EMPLOYMENT IN RELATION TO THE WAGE EARNING GROUP, N.S.W. 43

M A L E S			F E M A L E S			T O T A L		
<u>No. in</u> <u>Wage</u> <u>Earning</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>	<u>No. in</u> <u>Wage</u> <u>Earning</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>	<u>No. in</u> <u>Wage</u> <u>Earning</u> <u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Unempl-</u> <u>oyed</u>
	189,710	29.90		32,796	17.14		222,506	26.95
634,380			191,300			825,680		
	<u>No.</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>		<u>No.</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>		<u>No.</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Part-</u> <u>Time</u>
	50,638	7.98		10,310	5.39		60,948	7.38

42. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.305.

43. ibid., pp.304 and 323.

Though any addition of unemployment and possible unemployment figures can only be an academic exercise, it is interesting to do so. Thus if we were to add the part-time employment and unemployment figures it would seem that about 38 per cent of New South Wales male wage earners, 22 per cent of female wage earners and 34 per cent of the total wage-earners suffered some lack of work. (If we further included the youths without occupation, the figure would be even higher).

Certainly, some cognizance of the fact of part-time work should be taken in discussing unemployment in the Depression. While some part-time workers would have chosen this form of work, most part-time employment in the Depression was involuntary, or even if agreed to by the workers, was under-employment. Many employers during the Depression 'rationed' the available work between their employees, thus cutting down their wages bill. Many workers preferred to work one week in two (or whatever) to being completely laid off. The amount of rationing is impossible to determine. Schedvin notes that "Nothing is reliably known about the incidence of part-time work" and that it is not "possible to make a satisfactory allowance for work rationing".⁴⁴

The Census figures may well not show the full extent of rationing⁴⁵ for many who were, for example, laid off for two weeks in five or for one day a week would probably still have thought of themselves as full-time employees and would have stated themselves as such. Part-time workers may

44. C. B. Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1970, pp.211-212.

45. ibid., p.212 notes the 8 per cent part-time employment recorded in the "is probably an underestimate".

also have deliberately misrepresented themselves as full-time employees out of fear. Peter notes that employers threatened employees with dismissal if they complained of receiving less pay.⁴⁶ Some workers were also afraid that trade union officials would discover that they were accepting below-award conditions. The unemployed had a dislike of and apprehension about forms, and part-time workers may also have regarded some Census questions with suspicion.

The practice of rationing was definitely widespread.⁴⁷ Schedvin notes that it was "particularly prevalent in the service industries".⁴⁸ The New South Wales Industrial Commissioners admitted its extent (although they did not take it into account when declaring the 1932 Basic Wage);

Rationing has become a common practice both in the Public Transport and other Public Services, and in many private industries. Sometimes employees are required to absent themselves from work without pay for one week in every four, sometimes for one week in every five, six, seven, eight, nine or ten. The result of such rationing is that during the course of a year an employee is unemployed and not in receipt of wages for a certain number of weeks.

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The Census shows, then, that, at the very least, more than a quarter of New South Wales wage earners were unemployed and that it is likely that a third, or even more, suffered some degree of under-employment.

46. P. Peter, op.cit., p.47.

47. ^{cf.} W.J. Mackinolty, op.cit., p. 62 notes: "The frequency with which it is mentioned points to it being a widespread practice".

48. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.212.

49. N.S.W. Industrial Gazette, (hereafter N.S.W.I.G.) ,31/8/32, p. 263.

The tables already included show that unemployment fell much more severely on male than on female workers. Indeed, the ratio of the total Australian female wage earning group to the male wage earning group was 1:3.11; the ratio of unemployed females to unemployed males was 1:5.35.⁵⁰ Tew points out that women suffered less unemployment because they were generally employed in the less-severely-affected light consumer industries and that the employers might tend to keep them on because they were cheaper and were more likely to accept wage reductions, being less unionized.⁵¹ Some women who had formerly stayed at home went to work in the Depression when the male breadwinners of their families lost their jobs.

This preponderance of unemployment among males is reflected in the sexual composition of the political organisations of the unemployed, though, of course, purely social factors were equally important. Unemployed organisers made determined efforts to draw women into the organisations, but though there were notable exceptions, they had comparatively little success. It would seem that the women who did join the movement tended to be the wives of unemployed members, rather than women who fought against their own unemployment. There are clear indications that working class women in the Thirties were generally more conservative than the men, that they accepted the status quo more readily, that they were somewhat suspicious of militancy and political activism,⁵² and even if they endorsed activism, they rather regarded it as men's

50. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.322.

51. M. Tew, op.cit., p.77

52. e.g. many letters written by miners' wives during the 1929 lockout to the Newcastle Morning Herald, maintained that the dispute was foolish.

business. (It is also true, of course, that the men often reinforced these ideas: women who joined both the Communist and A.L.P. unemployed organisations were usually given the 'female' tasks of collecting and distributing food and clothing). However, when considering the comparative lack of militancy and organisation among unemployed women, it must be kept in mind that the number who could have organised was relatively small.

Unemployment was also concentrated much more heavily on the urban areas of the state: about three quarters of New South Wales unemployed males lived in the urban area, and about three-fifths of them lived in the metropolitan area; more than four-fifths of the unemployed females lived in the urban area and about two-thirds lived in the metropolitan area.⁵³

Unemployment was relatively low in the agricultural areas because agricultural output tends to remain fairly constant, even in times of Depression - Depression for farmers spells less income rather than fewer jobs. (Tew suggests that unemployment was probably only as high as it was in Agriculture because workers thrown out of other industries sought jobs in agricultural industries.)⁵⁴

Schedvin points out that "rural employment was well maintained throughout the Depression". Yet, he adds, the unemployment figures "make no allowance for disguised rural unemployment, which must have amounted to a substantial proportion of the total".⁵⁵ This disguised unemployment included, for example, small farm owners who usually supplemented their income by taking seasonal jobs and now had to depend on the farm income.

53. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, pp.305-306.

54. M. Tew, op.cit., p.76.

55. C. B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.211-212.

Despite the relatively small effect of the crisis on the rural industries, however, unemployment in the country areas should not be neglected. The Industrial Gazette monthly reports show that there was a fair amount of rural unemployment in the early years of the Depression. From about mid 1932 prospects became brighter, as the relief work schemes were strongly concentrated on country development work, but in 1930 and 1931 there were large numbers of unemployed in certain country towns.

As would be expected, the level of unemployment in the various rural areas depended largely on seasonal factors: unemployment would drop in the north coast area during cane-cutting and in the Riverina during fruitpicking. Unemployed rural workers moved through the State, following the peak seasons in the various industries, and they were joined by unemployed workers from the urban secondary industries. (It is indeed surprising that so many urban workers should try their hands at skilled rural work. While the elementary methods of picking can be grasped quite easily, shearing is a particularly skilled task. Yet in mid 1929, shearing absorbed a number of metropolitan workers - in June and August the number of unemployed in the metropolitan area decreased "owing to the absorption of labour in the shearing season".⁵⁶)

As well as following the peak seasons in the rural industries, unemployed workers (both from the country and city) tramped through the State in the wake of, or even in advance of, proposed public works schemes. They would congregate in a town where there was some rumour of work, waiting for months sometimes until their hopes gave out, and then move on and recongregate in

56. N.S.W.I.G. 31/7/29, p.21; 31/8/29, p.167; 30/9/29, p.340. In the 1931 shearing season there was again "an exodus from the city". ibid., 31/7/31.

another likely area. For example, in January 1929, many unemployed from all over the State (and Queensland as well) were travelling through the northern part of the State, attracted by the roadwork between Walcha and Wauchope. In February a considerable number gathered at Tamworth, where sewerage work had begun. Many left when told there were no prospects of work and two hundred gathered at Tenterfield in the hope of sewerage work. In March "a serious influx of workers" returned to Tamworth, though there was still no real prospect of work there.⁵⁷

The number of bagmen and the amount of migration around the State is impossible to determine; however, both literary and other evidence suggest that thousands of men at some time during the Depression left home to tramp the country for work.⁵⁸

So, though there was a considerable number of unemployed workers in the country districts, they were mainly itinerants, and many country towns would only have had a couple of hundred unemployed workers permanently living there. This impermanence made it very difficult for country unemployed to organise, and this difficulty was increased by the isolation of many of the towns. In the early years of the Depression there were few country unemployed organisations, but by about 1932, more groups were forming and this increased with the great extension of relief work in 1933. Sometimes

57. *ibid.*, 28/2/29, p.233; 31/3/29, p.368.

cf. *ibid.*, 31/7/29, pp.22-23; 31/8/29; pp.168-9; 30/9/29, p.341, for similar movement around the Guyra-Dorrigo-Casino railway work.

58. The main literary evidence is Kylie Tennant's *The Battlers*, and Frank Huelin, *Keep Moving*. Also songs (cf J. Mackinalty, *op.cit.*, (last chapter); the *Sydney Morning Herald* in these years has an enormous number of reports of bagmen being arrested for 'jumping the rattler'.

these organisations were fairly permanent, independent alliances of the unemployed residents of a town; sometimes these would link up with a city-based network of organisations. At times the organisation was an ephemeral alliance of the bagmen camped in a town, who would demand better camping facilities.

Though the unemployed movement was primarily based in the Sydney area and the Northern and Southern coalfields, it is perhaps surprising, considering the comparative smallness of rural unemployment and the difficulties involved in organising in the country, that the movement spread as far as it did.

Though unemployment was most severe in the Sydney metropolitan area, the level of unemployment varied greatly from suburb to suburb. In Balmain, for example, 14.1 per cent of the population was unemployed, whereas the level in the Kuringai municipality (which had a similar population) was only 4.1 per cent.⁵⁹ It was generally the inner suburban areas on which unemployment was concentrated, because the population of these suburbs was usually working class, and factories and other industries were often situated in these suburbs.⁶⁰

59. cf. J. Mackinolty, *op.cit.*, p.36, for a comparison of a number of municipalities; cf. N. Wheatley, The Responses of a Community to the Great Depression: Social and Political Activity in Balmain, 1929-1935. Unpub. B.A. thesis, Syd. Uni., 1970, Chapter 1 for a detailed study of unemployment in Balmain. The Balmain situation was typical of many inner industrial suburbs.

60. cf. J. Mackinolty, *op.cit.*, 17.1 per cent of the Darlington population was unemployed, 17.0 per cent of the Erskineville population and 15.0 per cent of the Alexandria population.

Not surprisingly, the greatest strength of the unemployed movement was in these inner suburbs - in particular, Balmain, Glebe, Surry Hills, and Redfern. Organisations developed in the more outlying suburbs, but these areas too, tended to be working class suburbs with high unemployment rates - in Bankstown, for example, where about 25 per cent of the population was unemployed.⁶¹

(After the great increase of relief work in 1933, the movement spread much further throughout the metropolitan area, for relief workers would be sent to the outlying, under-populated areas to build roads etc. The unemployed were then organised according to where they worked, rather than where they lived.)

The Census shows that unemployment among both males and females under thirty years of age was relatively more severe than among the over-thirty age group when the proportion of the under-thirty group in the wage earning group is considered.⁶² This preponderance of unemployment among young workers, however, does not seem to have been particularly reflected in the ages of unemployed workers who joined political organisations. In the demonstrations discussed later the ages of men arrested will be included, where available; these often include middle-aged unemployed workers. Though, perhaps, more are in their late twenties or early thirties, this probably only shows that the more agile unemployed were more likely to do something militant enough to warrant arrest; also, the younger unemployed may have been more hot-headed.

61. cf. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, vol. I, for the population and unemployment in each local government area.

62. cf. ibid., (vol. III), pp.311-313. 43.83 per cent of unemployed males and 72.99 per cent of unemployed females were under 30.

As the demands of the unemployed movement were concerned with the condition of the families of the workless, as well as with those actually unemployed, the number dependent upon the unemployed must be considered. If the small number of widowers is subtracted from the number of married unemployed males, it appears that about 45 per cent of Australian males unemployed had wives to support;⁶³ though some of these wives may have themselves worked, the number of wives dependent upon unemployed workers would still have been high.

As well as the added economic difficulties, this would cause an increased feeling of moral humiliation - Australian society in the thirties held firmly to the idea that it was the man's role to provide, and that the woman's place was in the home.

There were also 131,397 children under sixteen years of age dependent upon unemployed workers in New South Wales. About 35 per cent of the males unemployed in the state had dependent children, though only 4 per cent of unemployed females had dependent children. (The average number of dependent children per unemployed person with dependent children was 2.27.)⁶⁴

It was not only the unemployed workers, then, who suffered, but also a large number of women and children. In fact, the number who depended upon unemployed workers was even higher than these figures suggest, for in many

63. Figures calculated from *ibid.*, p.312. Figures for N.S.W. are not given but the situation was probably most similar.

64. Figures calculated from *ibid.*, p.321.

families children over sixteen would be unable to find work.

The major grievance of the workless, apart from the very fact of unemployment, was obviously their poverty. The unemployed movement maintained that work or sustenance relief at greatly increased rates than was given was not only the right of the unemployed, but a dire necessity. In order to understand the importance of the dole to the unemployed, and hence their protests over its inadequacy, it is necessary to grasp just how impoverished the unemployed were.

At the time of the Census, 51.3 per cent of New South Wales unemployed males were in receipt of no income and 33.8 per cent had an income of under £52 per year. Of New South Wales unemployed females, 59.3 per cent had no income and 31.7 per cent received less than £52 a year.⁶⁵ To grasp the significance of these figures it must be remembered that the basic wage in August 1933 was £3-8-6 for males, and £1-17-0 for females.

(The income figures for part-time workers suggest that much part-time work was under-employment, for many part-time workers did not receive adequate remuneration: "Whereas 42.13 per cent of males employed part-time and 65.46 per cent of females employed part-time had received under £52, the corresponding proportion for wage or salary earners employed full time was males 18.19 per cent and females 36.14 percent".⁶⁶)

65. Figures calculated from *ibid.*, p.320. (The Census question had reference to money income and did not ask about other sources of maintenance such as savings, credit, charitable gifts.)

66. *ibid.*, p.330 (The figures are for Australia).

Though the main discussion of how different industries were affected by unemployment is dealt with in the discussion of contraction and recovery, it is useful to give here the Census breakdown of unemployment according to 'Industry Orders'. The Census classification of industry orders is unfortunately so broad in regard to the 'Industrial' category - which contained both the greatest number of wage earners and the highest rate of unemployment - that it gives little elucidation about how unemployment was spread through the various manufacturing and heavy industries.⁶⁷

The following table shows, for New South Wales and Australia, the number of unemployed males and females respectively in relation to the male and female wage earning group respectively, classified according to industry orders:

Industry	18.77	21.43		
Transport and Communication	16.20	17.46	3.97	31.51
Public Administration and Professional	13.98	12.88	13.31	18.21
Education, Sport and Recreation	26.01	22.35	19.05	17.12
Personal and Domestic Services	24.11	20.21	15.78	13.28
Industry	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Employer's under 21 years but previous unemployed not stated.				
TOTAL	20.90	25.07	17.14	24.85

67. The full returns are included, of course, in vol. II, but these in turn are too detailed for our purposes.)

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (68)

	MALES		FEMALES	
	N.S.W. %	Aust. %	N.S.W. %	Aust. %
<u>Industry Order</u>				
Fishing and trapping	20.07	12.57	-	-
Agricultural, Pastoral and Dairying	16.94	15.73	1.48	2.96
Forestry	18.37	13.43	-	-
Mining and Quarrying	41.77	33.18	-	-
Total Primary Producers	23.69	18.55	1.34	2.71
Industrial	40.75	36.12	19.44	17.05
Transport and Communication	16.28	13.46	3.97	3.58
Commerce and Finance	19.85	16.69	12.46	10.94
Public Administration and Professional	13.95	12.88	13.31	12.21
Entertainment, Sport and Recreation	26.03	22.39	19.05	17.13
Personal and Domestic Service	24.11	20.22	15.76	13.86
No Industry (unemployed under 21 years but previous occupation not stated.)	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
TOTAL:	29.90	25.47	17.14	14.85

The Statistician notes, apropos these figures, that the high rate of male unemployment in the secondary industries was "predominantly in

68. ibid., pp.307-309 (Unemployment rate is the number unemployed in each industrial group expressed as a percentage of the number of wage or salary earners (including unemployed) in each industrial group).

the construction and repair of buildings, roads, railways, earthworks etc"; female unemployment in the secondary industries was "predominantly in the manufacture of articles of dress".⁶⁹

In New South Wales the highest percentages of unemployment among male wage earners were in building, 60 per cent; construction and repair of roads, railways, etc., 53 per cent; and mining, 41 per cent. The percentages were lowest in land transport, 14 per cent; administrative and professional, 15 per cent, and rural industries, 16 per cent.⁷⁰

CONTRACTION: INDUSTRIES AFFECTED BY UNEMPLOYMENT.

Whilst traditionally the crisis in the Australian economy in the Thirties has been seen as the result of the world-wide economic crash of 1929, and hence of forces outside Australia's control,⁷¹ current economic opinion (epitomised in Schedvin's analysis) also stresses the way special difficulties associated with the changing basis of the Australian economy in the first three decades of this century shaped the nature and severity of contraction in Australia. Schedvin points out that whereas the twenties are generally depicted as years of prosperity and even boom, the Australian economy began to stagnate in the middle of the decade and was facing considerable difficulties in 1927-28.

69. *ibid.*, p.310.

70. *N.S.W.I.G.*, 28/2/37, p.359.

71. *cf.* C. B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, pp.1-2.

This new emphasis on the economic problems of the twenties is of particular relevance in this study, because the existence of unemployment in the twenties is often ignored: it is often depicted as something that developed after the abrupt downswing of the economy in late 1929-30, rather than as something that was a problem even before the posited 'crash'. This neglect of the twenties' unemployment in studies of the crisis reflects the general unconcern about the problem at the time.

In the next chapter the attitudes of various sections of society - politicians, businessmen, the Labor Movement - to the growing crisis in the twenties will be discussed; though the fact of unemployment was in part used by all to exemplify or justify their varying analyses of what was occurring the attention paid to unemployment was greatly disproportionate to the level of unemployment, and even when unemployment was not neglected there was very little attention given to the unemployed. At least until 1928-29, and even in those years, it was largely left to the unemployed to worry about the problem.

As the major detailed study of the early years of contraction, ~~and~~ of the economic history of the Depression generally, is Schedvin's study, the following account must necessarily rely heavily on his analysis.

From about the turn of the century the structure of the Australian economy began to lean towards the growing manufacturing and tertiary sectors which were centred in the urban areas. This shift was accompanied by a lowering of average productivity,⁷² for it took the

72. ibid., p.50.

new industries some time to 'take off'. Industrialisation gave rise to a high demand for public capital formation: roads, electricity, etc. were needed for industry and there was a demand for government service facilities for sewerage, telegraph installations and so on for the growing urban community. This enlarged government commitment, financed as it was largely by overseas borrowing, "was the most important feature of development in the twenties to impinge on the character of the subsequent Depression experience".⁷³

The precarious dependence of the economy on overseas loans and the continual struggle to meet the balance of payments and avoid default shaped the formulation of government policy during the Depression, especially before the adoption of the Premiers' Plan in June 1931. New South Wales had been the worst offender in overborrowing, which placed added strain upon the resources of the State (and gave added importance to Lang's threats to default).

From 1925, the rapid expansion in both manufacturing output and employment which had begun at the end of the war began to slow down. Despite the steady raising of Australian tariff barriers, wide sections of the domestic manufacturing industry suffered a profit squeeze which steadily intensified in the latter half of the decade, as manufacturers became less able to compete with import prices owing to

73. *ibid.*, pp.68-69; "In the period 1921-9 £276 m. was added to public indebtedness and of this 73 per cent was due in London and New York". p.71.

to the increasing divergence between Australian and overseas price levels. After 1925, the growth rate of manufacturing output and employment fell, the proportion of factory workers unemployed rose, and industrial capital investment sharply declined.⁷⁴

Import competition was felt earlier in the textile industry than in the other manufacturing industries. By the end of 1923, the textile industry was in "serious difficulty", and unemployment in the industry reached 11 per cent in the last quarter of 1924. This decline heralded the general contraction in manufacturing, which by 1928, was suffering what was then described as "a severe business depression".⁷⁵

By mid-decade, Schedvin notes, unemployment was "stubbornly high at 8%", and was to remain high.⁷⁶ By 1928, New South Wales unemployment was around 11 per cent, and the figure for Australia was only slightly lower.⁷⁷

As the decade drew to a close, signs of imminent crisis became increasingly marked (though many sections of society ignored them). 1927-28 "was a year of marked recession",⁷⁸ and despite a measure of recovery

74. *ibid.*, pp.50-60. ("Between 1921-2 and 1927-8 import prices fell by 24% whereas prices of home manufactures rose 5% - a divergence of 29%. It is hardly surprising ... that the average rise of 15% in the tariff over the same period afforded only temporary relief", p.60)

75. *ibid.*, pp.59-60.

76. *ibid.*, p.59

77. Trade union estimates.

78. *ibid.*, p.74.

in late 1928 - early 1929⁷⁹ the continued rise in unemployment in the latter half of 1929 showed that the recession that had begun in mid 1927 would become even more protracted. The trade union unemployment estimates show a slight lowering of the unemployment rate in both New South Wales and Australia in the last quarter of 1928 and the first quarter of 1929, but by the end of 1929 unemployment was rising again. At this stage the figures for New South Wales and Australia are very close; it was in 1930 that the New South Wales rate was to climb above the Australian average.

1929 was a turning point in the political, as well as the economic, sphere.

In early February, the Timber Workers' Union called out its members in protest against the Lukin Award which had decreed a forty-eight hour week for timber workers in place of the forty-four hour week in force since 1920. This was quite justifiably regarded by the whole union movement as an attack on their hard-won standard of living.⁸⁰

By March 1929, it was estimated that between three and four thousand timber workers in the Sydney metropolitan area were unemployed as a direct result of the dispute.⁸¹

79. There were hopes for an early recovery in early 1929, based on the improved condition of the balance of payments and a fall in imports (*ibid.*, pp.110-111)

80. cf. L.J. Louis and I. Turner, *op.cit.*, pp.26-27; also discussion in Chapter 2, this thesis.

81. *N.S.W.I.G.*, 30/4/29, p.533.

The building, sawmilling, furnishing and other trades suffered increased unemployment as an indirect result of the dispute.⁸² Those affected included timberyard employees, mill workers, crane drivers, engineers, cabinetmakers, coachmakers and other woodworkers as well as many clerks, carters, storemen and others.⁸³

The dispute extended in April, and it was then estimated that about five thousand in the metropolitan area were affected;⁸⁴ the Industrial Gazette reports continue to give this estimate in the succeeding months. Although the dispute was settled in November, there were still two thousand timber workers unemployed in January 1930: the Industrial Gazette noted that "these men have not yet been able to obtain employment and ... the number of workers in the timber industry has seriously contracted (since the beginning of the dispute)."⁸⁵

As the Industrial Gazette seems generally to have underestimated unemployment, the number thrown out of work by the dispute may well have been much higher; it would also have affected the building and wood trades in the non-metropolitan area.

On February 14th, 1929, the Northern Collieries Association (the alliance of the twenty owners of the forty largest mines on the northern fields) gave their nine thousand, seven hundred and fifty employees

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82. C. B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.112, notes the strike "at times crippled the building industries of Melbourne and Sydney".
83. N.S.W.I.G., 31/3/29, p.367.
84. ibid., 31/5/29, p.694.
85. ibid., 28/2/30, p.538.

a fortnight's notice to accept severe cuts in wages and conditions. The men refused, and the subsequent lockout which began on March 2nd was not to end until June 1930.⁸⁶ The Industrial Gazette estimated that the closing of the majority of Newcastle and Maitland mines threw about twelve thousand miners out of work⁸⁷ and though some got jobs in unassociated pits or other industries, or left the area, most remained unemployed.⁸⁸

Even before the dispute, unemployment was high in the coal-mining industry.⁸⁹

The effects of the dispute quickly spread - by April "many industries in the city and country "were affected. For example, by April five hundred railway workers had been dismissed because of the stoppage.⁹⁰ Unemployment in the northern coalfields area was very severe throughout the year, and it was not only the miners who were affected. In May, for example, the Industrial Gazette reported that employment of fitters, turners and electricians in the engineering industry generally was the same as in April, but there was increased unemployment in these trades in the Newcastle district.⁹¹ In June, the building trades in the area "were stagnant, and no improvement could be expected until the dispute was settled".⁹²

86. cf. M. Dixon, "Rothbury", The Great Depression in Australia, Labour History, no. 17, ed. R. Cooksey, p.15.

87. N.S.W.I.G., 31/3/29, p.367.

88. e.g. ibid., 30/4/29, p.533, states 9000 left unemployed; 28/2/30, p.539, estimates 9000 still unemployed.

89. cf. E.R. Walker, op.cit., p.77 and discussion in next chapter.

90. N.S.W.I.G., 31/5/29, p.694; cf. also ibid., 30/6/29, p.874, 31/7/29, p.21; 30/9/29, p.483; 31/12/29, p.847.

91. ibid., 30/6/29, p.874.

92. ibid., 31/7/29, p.22.

In February 1930, by which time the dispute was officially resolved (though it was to drag on until mid-year), "increased unemployment was reported at most (northern coalfields) centres owing to the depression following the coalmining dispute, and, secondly, to the general industrial depression"⁹³ The labor movement's bitterness over these two disputes, as well as over the 1928 Maritime Strike, gave added heat to the movement's opposition to Bruce's Arbitration policy; these feelings were reflected in the Labor Party's victory in the October 1929 Federal Election.

The economy generally had continued its decline in the early part of 1929, and by the end of the year the rate of contraction had sharpened considerably. Import competition continued to depress the economy, especially the manufacturing industries. In August-September contraction quickened. In the last part of the year private capital expenditure and employment dropped abruptly, stock market prices fell sharply and the knowledge that income and employment would fall still more in the new year increased the severe deflationary pressure. Schedvin points out that manufacturers, reacting to the prospect of a major fall in national income, "were in large part responsible ... for accelerating the rate of decline in late 1929 before the direct effects of lower export prices and capital inflow were felt". In addition, banks adopted a tight monetary

93. *ibid.*, 31/3/30, p.763. cf. also E.R. Walker, *op.cit.*, pp.77-78 for the lingering of unemployment after the dispute.

policy and purchases by the rural sector declined.⁹⁴

Contraction was as yet largely restricted to the private sector of the economy - governments were slow to curtail public works and the closure of the London money-market to long-term borrowing was met by the governments with the rapid accumulation of short-term loans. Though the repayment of these loans was to place great pressure on the economy in the following years and was instrumental in enforcing the tight budget-balancing policies of State and Federal Governments, the maintenance of public works expenditure and the slowness with which governments adjusted expenditure to the reduced level of receipts "cushioned the impact of international collapse on Australia until mid-1930".⁹⁵

Whilst in 1929 unemployment was most severe in the timber, mining, textile, and heavy manufacturing industries, the monthly reports on six industry groups⁹⁶ in the Industrial Gazette show that few trades were unaffected. These reports show considerable variation from month to month, and differences between trades, in the one industry.

1930 saw a sharp increase both in the rate of decline and in the society's awareness of the crisis. The unemployment rate increased more rapidly: New South Wales unemployment (according to the trade union estimates) rose from 16.3 per cent in the first quarter to 26.3 per cent in the last quarter.

94. C. B. Schedvin, op.cit., pp.128-129.

95. ibid., pp.106,129.

96. The Gazette provides monthly reports on the situation in building, engineering, manufacturing, waterfront trades, woodworking and clerks, shop assistants etc.

Though there was more awareness of the crisis, this was concentrated on the general economic problems rather than on unemployment. Economic policy was directed towards the maintenance of the nation's external and internal solvency.⁹⁷ Schedvin notes:

It is symptomatic of the state of mind of policy makers that this was accorded a higher order of priority than the prevention of mass unemployment. 98

The economy must be set in order first, and then the unemployment problem could be considered. This neglect or setting-aside of the unemployment problem was reflected in a certain indifference to the grievances of the unemployed. Though the New South Wales Nationalist Government formally re-organised the relief system in mid 1930, the measures did not cover many of the immediate difficulties of the workless and protests often fell on deaf ears.

The analysis of the crisis held by conservative politicians and most economists⁹⁹ was based on the rather rigid economic orthodoxy of the time -

97. In the first half of the year, the preoccupation was with the problem of external solvency - with the sterling payments crisis; although the problem of overseas payments recurred until mid 1931, from mid 1930 governments were increasingly concerned with internal solvency and internal financial problems. By mid year the Commonwealth, as well as the state, finances were in a serious condition and governments struggled against huge deficits.
cf. *ibid.*, chapter IX, especially pp.170, 178, 210.

98. *ibid.*, p.210.

99. Irvine was an exception. He argued that an extension of credit to government and industry was the first step towards the reabsorption of the unemployed. cf. B. McFarlane, Professor Irvine's Economics in Australian Labor History, Labor History Society, Canberra, 1966.

sound finance, deflation, terror of any credit-creating or inflationary measures, non-interference of governments in banking concerns. So the cures they offered were too rigid for the exigencies of the crisis - penny-pinching, pound-saving economies; an Etonian-honour-code attitude to public finance, credit-expansion and debt; a massive community belt-tightening programme (with Equality of Tightness, of course!) until Prosperity should pop out from behind the corner it had been lurking around and the heavens should disclose a silver lining of full employment and markets vying for our products.

(It is, of course, only too easy to be facetious about both the economic analysis and the language used to describe the crisis and cure in politicians' speeches and newspaper editorials of the time. It is hard now, when the working of the Multiplier and the salutary effect of 'pump-priming' in counteracting depression are accepted as axiomatic, to remember that Keynes was almost unknown in Australia in the thirties - and was opposed by most who had heard of him. Deflation and budget-balancing by means of reducing government expenditure (especially on public works) were believed to be the only cures for a crisis that was believed to have resulted from over-spending.)

In the first half of 1930 the decline of the previous year continued. The heavy adverse trade balance was the most urgent problem "for the growing trade deficit was primarily responsible for the deterioration in Australia's international credit rating," causing fears that the country would default on overseas interest payments.¹⁰⁰ The Federal Labor

100. C.B. Schedvin, op.cit., p.140.

Government attempted to reduce the overseas debt by heavily raising the tariff barriers (and even prohibiting and rationing certain imports) and by increasing exports.¹⁰¹ The protective tariff was also aimed at preventing any further increase in unemployment. Neither of these measures had any immediate effect: no significant diversion of demand to local manufactured goods was to occur until mid 1931,¹⁰² and later, and the attempt to raise exports failed.¹⁰³

In 1930 there was mounting pressure from both London and Australian banks for the reduction of costs and the adoption of a deflationary policy, which culminated in the acceptance by both Federal and State Governments of the Melbourne Agreement in August. This policy, which fulfilled Niemeyer's requirements of balanced budgets and a fall in the standard of living was to break open the split in the Federal Labor Party after Lang's election to the New South Wales Parliament in October 1930; on a policy of repudiation of the Melbourne Agreement.¹⁰⁴

The cessation of overseas borrowing affected New South Wales more than other states, and the Government had a large deficit in 1929-30.¹⁰⁵

101. *ibid.*, pp.140-145.

102. *ibid.*, p.302.

103. In particular, the Grow-more-Wheat Campaign had disastrous results.

104. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3.

105. cf. C. B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.176. The N.S.W. deficit of (£4.8 m.) represented 54 % of the aggregate States' deficit in 1929-30, whereas N.S.W. raised only 42% of the aggregate States' revenue.

Bavin's solution was to reduce the costs of both government and production, in particular the wage costs.

In the last quarter of 1930, financial conditions continued to deteriorate. The full impact of the fall in export prices and the curtailment of overseas loans was delayed until the latter part of the year. It was then that government works expenditure was reduced, causing much additional unemployment. Schedvin writes: "After July-August the full range of deflationary factors was let loose in quick succession. Taxation was rapidly increased; loan expenditure was reduced to one third of its pre-depression rate; wages were cut, rural incomes fell heavily as wheat prices joined the downward spiral of wool prices; and private fixed capital expenditure was cut to a fraction of its pre-depression level."

He points to the end of 1930, and early 1931, as "not only the period of maximum rate of decline in all economic indicators but also the community's psychological low point".¹⁰⁶

By the end of 1930 not only had the size of unemployment become most marked, but the pattern of the sectors of industry most affected by unemployment was well established. The greatest rate of decline was in building, construction and heavy manufacturing. Schedvin, working from figures of the rates of change in total employment and selected employment groups, notes that: "the heavy fall in building and construction not only reflects the almost complete cessation of new investment in residential and

106. ibid., pp.210-212.

commercial structures, but also the heavy fall in public works expenditure. Between them the construction and manufacturing industries account for the bulk of the recorded rise in unemployment between 1928-9 and 1930-1 ... The share of this rise nominally attributable to the decline in manufacturing employment amounted to 45 per cent, while the construction industries accounted for almost one-half of the rise."¹⁰⁷

This concentration of unemployment in the industrial and building sectors is, ^{shown} in both the Census material and the trade union estimates of unemployment according to industry groups.

The trade union estimates include separate estimates of unemployment in fourteen industry groups. However, as these are published, groups IX, XI, XII, and XIII (Railway and Tramway Services; Shipping, Wharf Labour etc.; Pastoral, Agricultural, rural Horticultural etc.; Domestic, Hotels, etc.) are combined with group XIV (Miscellaneous), because returns for these groups are very small and at times were not included at all.¹⁰⁸ The 'Miscellaneous' group normally comprises at least 80 per cent of the total of this combined group.¹⁰⁹

Forster notes that "the series is heavily weighted with manufacturing industries. Taking 1921 as an example, groups I to VI, the manufacturing industries, make up something over 50 per cent of the sample, Building 10 per cent, Mining 8 per cent". He adds that in these groups "there is some meaningful description and sample", for "in these groups

107. ibid., p.211.

108. cf. c. Forster, op.cit., p.442. In the 30 years he examines, there are only two returns for Groups XII; after 1927, there is no coverage of group IX.

109. ibid., p.441.

the returns cover a high proportion of the unionists employed. Making a rough generalisation for the whole period (1913-1940), the smallest sample is in III, food and Drink, of about half the unionists employed, and the others range from 60 to 100 per cent". Thus the estimates for groups I to VIII should give some indication of the trend, if not the amount, of unemployment of unionists in these industry groups which should in turn, suggest the trend of unemployment in the industries generally. However, "it is worth emphasising that the industry group classification is a very broad one, containing industries subject to very different economic influences". Forster concludes that "generalisations on the significance of industry group unemployment can only be made with circumspection".¹¹⁰

Whilst endorsing Forster's qualifications, the estimates are given here despite their faults, as they are one of the few continuous measures of industry unemployment over the period. ^{As with} ~~None~~ the total estimates, they are used here as an indication of the trend of unemployment rather than the amount. They also show how unemployment remained high in certain industries when the economy as a whole had declaredly "turned the corner".

The table below shows these estimates for Australia as a whole, and for New South Wales in 1932 and 1933 - the only years unfortunately for which the state breakdown is given.

	1913	1920	1927	1932	1933
Australia	14.8	27.2	22.8	12.4	12.4
I	26.4	21.2	17.0	9.7	8.8
II	17.0	15.5	17.5	14.3	17.0
III	17.4	11.0	11.7	10.7	10.4
IV	15.1	11.0	7.4	6.4	6.4
V	11.7	11.0	11.5	11.2	11.2
VI	11.7	11.0	11.5	11.2	11.2
VII	11.7	11.0	11.5	11.2	11.2
VIII	11.7	11.0	11.5	11.2	11.2

110. ibid., pp.441,443.

UNEMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY GROUPS, AUSTRALIA (111)

	<u>1927</u>	<u>1928</u>	<u>1929</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1932</u>
I Wood, Furniture Sawmill, Timberworkers etc.	4.4	9.3	12.4	24.1	33.3	38.5
II Engineering, Shipbuilding Smelting, metal Works etc.	5.7	12.8	12.3	21.1	30.1	32.4
III Food, Drink & Tobacco Mfg. & Distribution	8.6	8.7	10.3	13.9	19.9	18.9
IV Clothing, Hats, Boots, Textiles, Rope, Cordage etc.	4.3	10.1	10.7	18.2	25.9	21.1
V Books, Printing, Book Binding etc.	1.8	2.7	3.1	7.3	14.3	16.1
VI Other Manufacturing	11.3	16.9	18.6	32.0	43.5	41.7
VII Building	7.4	11.0	11.4	23.6	33.1	40.5
VIII Mining, Quarrying etc.	12.1	18.8	11.3	17.6	33.1	34.3
X Other land Transport	5.0	7.2	8.6	14.9	24.2	26.2
IX, XI, XII, XIII, XIV (a)	6.8	7.6	9.4	15.7	20.0	21.7
TOTAL	7.0	10.8	11.1	19.3	27.4	29.0
	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>
I	34.8	30.2	22.6	10.6	5.6	9.9
II	28.6	23.2	17.0	9.7	6.0	4.6
III	17.0	16.5	17.5	18.2	17.1	17.0
IV	17.4	13.4	11.7	12.7	11.4	12.4
V	15.1	11.0	7.4	6.4	4.4	3.7
VI	34.3	24.3	16.4	11.4	8.6	10.1
VII	35.7	27.1	19.1	12.2	10.2	7.9
VIII	28.8	29.0	29.1	21.9	15.2	12.5

	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1938</u>
X	25.1	20.6	15.5	13.6	11.8	9.2
IX, XI, XII, XIII	18.7	15.9	13.7	10.9	7.8	6.7
TOTAL	25.1	20.5	16.5	12.2	9.3	8.7

	<u>1939</u>	<u>1940</u>
I	15.9	5.1
II	7.7	6.7
III	17.3	16.2
IV	12.4	7.2
V	4.1	4.1
VI	9.6	7.0
VII	8.8	8.0
VIII	12.8	9.3
X	7.9	7.4
IX, XI, XII, XIII	7.3	7.8
TOTAL	9.7	8.0

New South Wales

	<u>1932</u>	<u>1933</u>
I	28.7	30.1
II	34.0	30.4
III	20.9	20.6
IV	32.4	26.4
V	19.7	21.3
VI	51.5	45.0
VII	37.2	32.9
VIII	34.6	29.0
X	35.6	32.0
IX, XI, XII, XIII, XIV	26.8	23.5
TOTAL	32.5	28.9

111. From Commonwealth Labour Reports (for the respective years).
- (a) IX - Railway and Tramway services
 - XI - Shipping, Wharf labour etc.
 - XII - Pastoral, Agricultural, Rural, Horticultural etc.
 - XIII - Domestic and Hotels etc.
 - XIV - Miscellaneous.

These estimates show a great range of experience both between different years in a particular industry, and between different industries in a particular year. The yearly averages rather than the quarterly estimates have been given here for reasons of conciseness; however, the quarterly estimates sometimes show a considerable difference in an industry during one year. For example, unemployment in Group II is given as 16.7 per cent in the first quarter of 1930, 20.5 per cent in the second, 21.9 per cent in the third, and 25.2 per cent in the fourth; unemployment in Group VI was 21.3 per cent in the first quarter of 1935, 19.7 per cent in the second 13.2 per cent in the third of 11.8 per cent in the fourth.

The estimates for New South Wales show that, however reliable this representation of unemployment by industry groups may be for Australia as a whole, it is not necessarily an accurate characterisation of New South Wales unemployment. There are glaring discrepancies between the levels of unemployment in Groups I and IV in 1932. In 1933, the figures are generally closer, but there is still often a wide divergence - notably in "Other Manufacturing". Obviously, New South Wales, with its economy grounded more on manufacturing rather than on light industry and the rural sector, had a rather different unemployment history in the Depression than the 'average' Australian experience.

The reasons for the contraction in the building and construction industry are obvious: the industry relied on large scale capital investment, and most work was done in response to orders. As public confidence fell and banks tightened the loan market, investors had little desire or ability to commit a large capital outlay on something which

they might not be able to complete, or on which they would probably not see results for some time. Thus building of both private homes and factory plant dropped sharply, in addition to the fall caused by the curtailment of public works.

Some idea of the drop in the amount of building work is shown by Mackinolty in her discussion of the number of permits for new buildings and alterations and the assessment of new buildings in the metropolitan area.¹¹² It is also apparent in the Industrial Gazette reports. These also show that it was mainly the unskilled and less skilled building workers who suffered most of the unemployment, though plasterers, plumbers and painters also suffered.

This relative severity of unemployment among the less skilled building workers was repeated in most industries.¹¹³ The unskilled workers were often the first dismissed; as unemployment spread to the skilled workers some of these obtained unskilled work, thus causing even more competition for these jobs.¹¹⁴

(This concentration of unemployment on the unskilled would seem to have been reflected in the backgrounds of unemployed workers who joined

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112. cf. J. Mackinolty, op.cit., pp.127-129. The tables she gives show an abrupt drop in both the number of new buildings, the money spent on buildings in 1930, a fall which increased in 1931 and was maintained in 1932 and 1933.
113. For example, the Industrial Gazette reports of unemployment in the engineering trades shows that it fell more heavily on ironworkers' assistants and fitters and turners than on electricians and boilermakers.
114. e.g. N.S.W.T.G., 31/7/30, p.26. "In the electrical trades unemployment was acute, and many of these workers were forced to accept unskilled work."

political organisations: when the occupations of men arrested in demonstrations are given, quite a number are usually labourers, though skilled workers such as butchers and carpenters are also often included.)

The severe unemployment in the woodworking industry according to the trade union estimates must be seen in conjunction with the contraction in building.¹¹⁵

While the high trade union estimates of unemployment in manufacturing support the evidence already given of the decline in this sector, the looseness of the category "Other Manufacturing" makes comment difficult; it would seem however, that this largely refers to heavy manufacturing. The estimates clearly show both the earliness of the decline in Group VI and the severity: by 1930, the unemployment level in this group was higher than the Australian average for the peak year of 1932, in 1931 unemployment in this category was higher than in any other group over the period. A comparison of the figures for New South Wales and Australia shows that the extraordinarily high level of unemployment in this group in New South Wales (- more than 50 per cent in 1932 -) was one of the main reasons why the level of unemployment was higher in the State than in the Commonwealth in 1932-33.

The trade union estimates of engineering unemployment are perhaps not as high as would be expected - they were only a little above the "average" figure.

Whilst the bulk of unemployment was centred on the building and manufacturing industries, virtually no trade was exempt.

115. This decline in woodworking is endorsed in the Industrial Gazette reports, e.g. N.S.W.I.G., 30/9/30, p.448; 28/2/31, p.259.

Schedvin states that "most of the service industries, with the exception of transport, were only mildly affected in terms of employment".¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, unemployment in shipping and railways services has been included in the conglomerate section in the trade union estimates, but the high level of unemployment in "Other Land Transport" suggests the decline in this area.

Even workers in occupations regarded as "safe" were affected. Despite a strong campaign against dismissals mounted by the Public Service Association,¹¹⁷ New South Wales employees of both Commonwealth and State Governments were reduced, "there being 24,525 fewer employees in June 1933 than in June 1929, i.e. a reduction of 19.2 per cent."¹¹⁸ Again it was the unskilled who suffered most. The number of teachers and hospital employees was slightly higher in 1934 than before the depression, but between 1928 and 1933, there was a 19.1 per cent decrease in the number of government employees in the railways and tramways.¹¹⁹ These reductions in rail and tram employees were to have important implications in the later history of the unemployed movement, for in late 1934 - 1935 there were quite well-grounded fears that more of these employees would be dismissed and their jobs given to relief workers at under-award pay.

116. C.B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.211.

117. cf. Ray Markey, N.S.W. Public Servants and the P.S.A. During the Great Depression, 1929-1937, unpub. B.A. Hons. thesis, Sydney University, 1971.

118. J. Mackinolty, *op.cit.*, p.31

119. *ibid.*, pp.31-32.

RECOVERY

If it hard to describe the shape taken by contraction in employment, it is perhaps, ^{even} harder to show the shape of recovery. We are not concerned here with the general economic recovery, but with the continuance of serious unemployment beyond mid-decade, when other indicators show the crisis well over, and indeed with the lingering of a considerable amount of unemployment right up to the war. Whilst this account of the political organisation of the unemployed ends at around 1936, it must be emphasised that many workers were unemployed in 1939.¹²⁰ The unemployment was enough of a problem even in 1940 for some of the workless to continue to organise.

One of the problems of discussing the Depression is that an anthropomorphic metaphor is often used to describe the economic and social condition of Australia in the thirties - the nation was sickening in the late twenties, disease plus accident struck in 1929; after a grave illness the nation began to recover in 1932, though a short convalescence was needed.¹²¹ Unfortunately, the illness was more complex than the metaphor. If we are to keep the analogy, it would be truer to say that certain parts - the trunk even - recovered in 1932-33, but certain limbs and organs continued to languish or recovered and fell ill again. The diagnosis all rather depends upon what

120. J. Mackinoly, op.cit., p.p.45-46 notes: "There is a tendency to see an end to the depression in the improving economic situation from the end of 1932 Nevertheless, for many people the depression lasted until 1939."

121. This view of Australia as sick patient was perhaps the most common metaphor used for the crisis during the Depression.

each doctor is looking for.

Certainly, recovery in major economic sectors did begin early, but if we measure recovery by unemployment we must postulate a much later date.

Schedvin notes: "In an aggregate sense the term 'recovery' can have a great many meanings depending on the indicators used".¹²²

Schedvin himself, using measures such as the growth of national product and industrial production, the growth of capital resources and the decrease of national debt, notes an early general recovery, while not, of course, claiming that recovery occurred uniformly. He states that "during most of 1931-2 there were frequent signs that recovery was imminent" and that "by the end of 1932 the signs of recovery were unmistakable".¹²³

He differentiates, however, between the unemployment problem and the problem of economic recovery. He writes that "the judgement that recovery was unusually slow in the 1930's has been based on the continuation of abnormally high unemployment throughout the decade ; but the rate of re-employment does not necessarily reflect the speed of recovery if measured in terms of the rise in national product". He sees the high level of unemployment in the latter part of the decade as "due as much to structural

122. C.B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.285.

123. *ibid.*, pp.287-288. (He notes a rise of employment in textiles in 1931-2 and some rise in clothing, chemicals and construction; strong upturn in the output of iron and steel in early 1932.)

and technical changes as to a deficiency in aggregate demand" and attributes part of the problem to the shift in the economy from the construction to the manufacturing sector, which had a higher demand for skilled labour. By the end of the decade, he states, "the question of absorbing the remaining unemployed was as much a social as an economic problem".¹²⁴

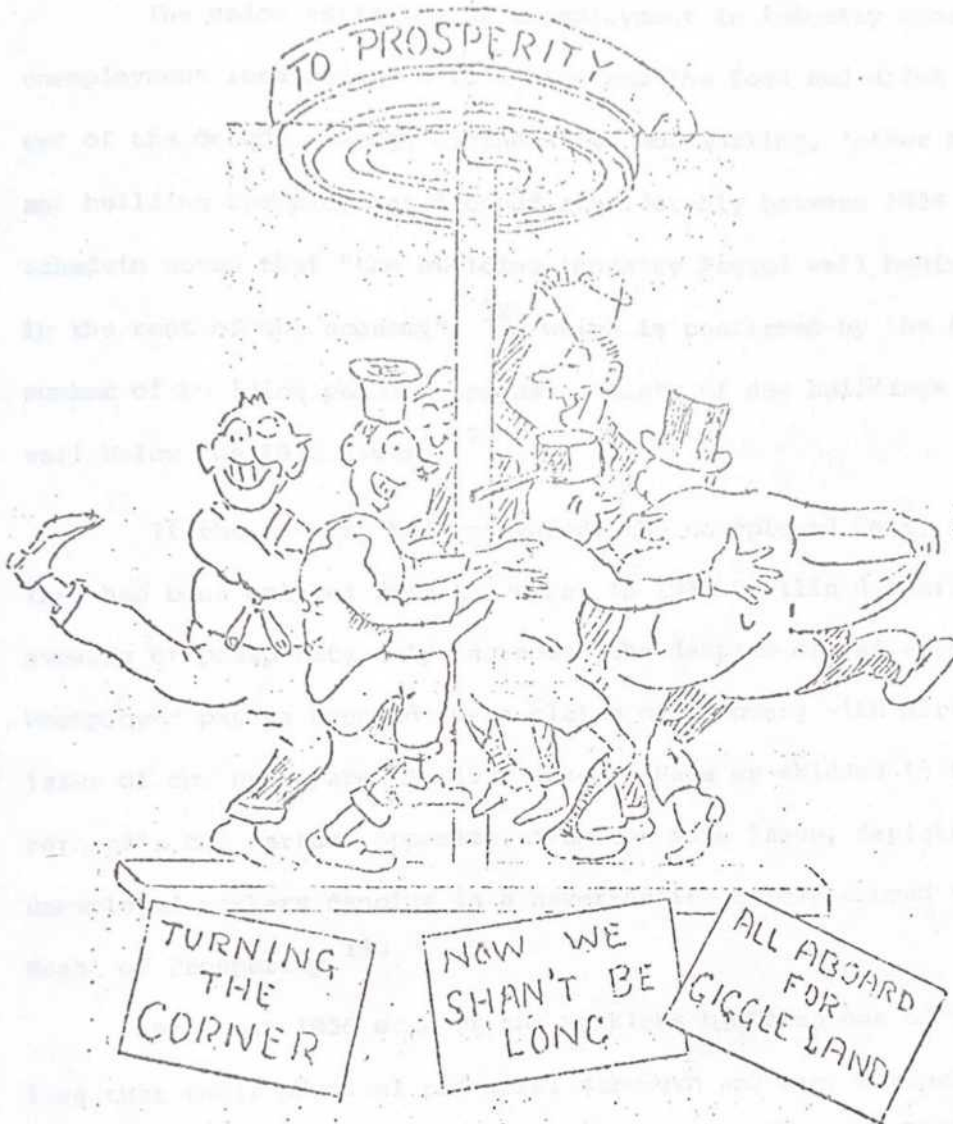
For those who did not have a job in the latter part of the decade, there no doubt seemed no difference between 'structural' and 'depression' unemployment.

Though Schedvin feels that recovery has been assigned a later date than is warranted because of undue emphasis on the unemployment problem, it would seem that during the thirties at least recovery was dated at about late 1932-33, and certainly by 1934. The problems of the unemployed after this time were often ignored. By 1933, politicians, economists and leaders of the business community were proclaiming that the nation was 'turning the corner'. These claims were greeted by the workless with cynicism or despair.

Certainly, many unemployed had not 'turned the corner' in 1933 or even 1935. In 1933, New South Wales unemployment was, as we have seen, around 30 per cent or higher (certainly higher if we include underemployment); in 1934, about a quarter of the State's workforce was unemployed according to the union estimates. In 1936, it was around 15 per cent and in 1938 and 1939 about one man in ten was still out of work.¹²⁵ There was a higher

124. ibid., pp.285, 309.

125. cf. T.U. Estimates given earlier.



1933
HERE WE GO ROUND THE RASPBERRY BUSH.

The Tocsin, 6 January, 1933.

level of unemployment at that time than in 1927-28 - "a year of marked recession".

The union estimates of unemployment in industry groups show that unemployment remained high in mining and the food and drink group up to the end of the decade, though engineering, woodworking, 'other manufacturing' and building unemployment dropped considerably between 1934 and 1935.¹²⁶ Schedvin notes that "the building industry lagged well behind recovery in the rest of the economy",¹²⁷ which is confirmed by the fact that the number of building permits and assessments of new buildings in 1933 was well below the 1930 figure.¹²⁸

If the country had recovered, the unemployed felt, then somehow they had been omitted from the cure. In 1934 Scullin declared that Lyons' avowals of prosperity only increased the despair of the workless.¹²⁹ Unemployed papers greeted these claims of recovery with derision. The first issue of one such paper in 1933 asked: "Have we skidded in turning the corner?"; the cartoon opposite, from the same issue, depicts a group of unemployed workers dancing in a never-ending circle around the 'Raspberry Bush' of Prosperity.¹³⁰

By about 1936 some of the workless had been out of jobs for so long that their physical and moral strength and been seriously

126. C.B. Schedvin, *op.cit.*, p.291 notes that the growth of the manufacturing sector "Absorbed a high proportion of the increase in employment".

127. *ibid.*, p.291

128. cf. J. Mackinoly, *op.cit.*, pp.127-129.

129. *S.M.H.*, 12/7/34, p.10.

130. *The Tocsin*, Official Organ Balmain U.W.M., 6/1/33.

impaired, rendering them unemployable; others must simply have believed themselves to be unemployable when they saw their former unemployed colleagues going back to work.

THE DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT

It has been emphasised here that unemployment was not a uniform experience for those affected by it, that 'the unemployed' was not a static group but that its membership changed as some men regained jobs and others lost them. The length of unemployment was not the same for all the workless: the period of unemployment varied according to the unemployed worker's usual occupation, his level of skill, his age, the area he lived in. It was also affected by factors such as his resourcefulness and his physical and moral hardiness, and even by his political militancy or acquiescence, for 'agitators' and demonstrators were sometimes denied government relief work, and in some cases had less chance of gaining private employment.

For some - the lucky ones - unemployment during the Depression was simply a case of several months 'slack' between two jobs. To understand the grievances of the unemployed, and why some fought so determinedly for the improvement of their situation, it must be realised that for most of the jobless, unemployment was not just an interruption, but more a way of life. Unemployment for many was the norm, the dismal status quo, and work was something that other people had - something to be dreamed of, hoped for, and sometimes to be fought for.

The Census asked unemployed persons to state the length of time since they were last regularly employed. The answers showed that a little more than a third of Australian unemployed males had been out of work for less than a year, that nearly two-thirds had been unemployed for a year or more and that nearly a third of the unemployed males had been unemployed for three years or more. Between ten and eleven of every one hundred unemployed males had not had regular work for four years or longer. Among males engaged in mining, clerical work, manufacturing and construction work, commerce and finance, transport and communication the proportion unemployed for more than a year was above average.¹³¹ The above-average duration of unemployment in the numerically important spheres of manufacturing and construction explains why the New South Wales figures for unemployment duration are even higher than those for Australia: in this State 71 per cent of unemployed males had been out of work for one year or more, and 35 per cent for three years or more.¹³²

The duration of unemployment was less for females than for males.¹³³ 42 per cent of Australian females unemployed had been out of work for one year or more and only 13 per cent for three years or more. Again, the New South Wales figures show that unemployed workers in this state suffered

131. Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.314.

132. N.S.W.Y.B., 1932-33, p.779.

133. This may reflect the tendency for females unemployed for some time to regard themselves as having withdrawn from the workforce.

above-average periods of unemployment; 51 per cent of New South Wales unemployed females had been unemployed for one year or more.¹³⁴

That unemployment lasted a considerable time for many unemployed, and that the problem continued to be serious after the general economic recovery, is shown by some surveys undertaken in 1936.

66,657 men registered at New South Wales Labour Exchanges, were asked how long it was since they had had regular work at their trade or calling, apart from relief work. The following table shows their experience of unemployment in yearly periods giving the percentage of men out of regular work for less than one year and the percentage who had been out of regular work for more than each successive period from one to eight years. (For example, 41 percent of the total had been unemployed for five years or longer, 26 per cent for six years or more.)

<u>Period of Unemployment</u>	<u>Per cent of Total</u>
Under 1 year	15.98
1 year and over	84.02
2 years and over	74.30
3 " " "	66.07
4 " " "	53.16
5 " " "	40.97
6 " " "	26.53
7 " " "	12.22
8 " " "	6.59
TOTAL:	100.00

(135)

134 N.S.W.Y.B., 1932-33, p.779; Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June, 1933, p.315.

135. N.S.W.I.G., 28/2/37, pp .338-339.

Whilst in 1933 a bit more than a third of the New South Wales male unemployed had been without regular work for three years or more, two-thirds of these men surveyed had been out of work for three years or more. There are of course important differences in the sample: it could be argued that only those who were suffering chronic unemployment would register at the Exchanges, while the Census covered all unemployed. However, this survey does suggest that those who were left behind when recovery occurred tended to remain unemployed.

The survey also studied the average employment experience during the last three years of 66,702 men registered at New South Wales Labour Exchanges or engaged on part-time relief works (including work under the Emergency Relief Work Scheme) by corporate bodies. Relief work was counted as unemployment in the study.

The average experience of the men over the 36 months was 29 months unemployment and only 7 months employment; during the 29 months unemployment, they received Government assistance for $24\frac{1}{2}$ months ($17\frac{3}{4}$ months relief work and $6\frac{3}{4}$ food relief) but the remaining $4\frac{1}{2}$ months were spent without relief. During the 7 months of employment they spent $5\frac{3}{4}$ months in private employment, the rest (about 5 weeks) on other Government work.

This was, however, only the average and there was great regional variation in the experience. The average period of unemployment was $3\frac{1}{2}$ months shorter in rural than in the metropolitan and industrial area. The time spent on government relief, and the relative time spent on work and food relief, also varied considerably. In the inner suburbs of the

metropolitan area an average of 14.4 months was spent on food relief and 10.8 months on relief work, in the northern suburbs, 2.3 months were spent on the dole and 21.9 months on relief work.¹³⁶ (Many of the inner suburbs, being the oldest suburbs, had little road or sewerage work to be done; the local councils in these suburbs were often poor, and could not afford to pay their part of the relief work scheme.¹³⁷)

The analysis of 66,556 men registered¹³⁸ according to their previous industry and usual occupation, confirms the view that unemployment fell most severely on the less skilled and unskilled (Schedvin's remarks that part of the unemployment problem of the years after recovery can be attributed to the shift to manufacturing with the concomitant shift of demand for skilled labour should be remembered here). Of these men, 36.2 per cent were classified as general labourers, to which should be added most of the 4.7 per cent who had been employed in the construction and repair of works. The survey noted that " about two thirds... have been classified according to occupations in which little or no skill is requisite ".

Of the other industry groups (apart from general labourers) 14.5 per cent came from manufacturing (5.2 per cent from metal and machinery works, 7.3 per cent from building, 7.2 per cent from land transport and 7.2 per cent from mining.¹³⁹

136. *ibid.*, pp. 339-341.

137. cf. N. Wheatley, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-62. --

138. (There is no explanation of why slightly different numbers of men appear in each separate part of the survey).

139. N.S.W.I.G., 28/2/37, pp. 346, 361.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY OF THE UNEMPLOYED

Considering the number of unemployed, their poverty, and the length of unemployment, it is no wonder that many of them saw the need to organise and fight for at least some improvement in their situation.

The unemployed movement of the thirties was not a new and original phenomenon, but rather a more active and vital continuation of earlier spontaneous and fairly successful organisations. These earlier groups of unemployed workers had been unable to carry programs of relief and improvement in the economic situation of the unemployed. They had not been able to make an impression that was clearly visible in terms of their own and possibly other workers' public opinion of the rights and position of the unemployed.

At times of depression in the nineteenth century unemployed workers, in London and elsewhere at least, had organized groups to care for their immediate necessities and to voice their protest against their situation.

In the 1837-42 period of unemployment which peaked in 1841 the unemployed organized public works and the provision of artificial "relief" in the form of "relief works" which were organized and carried out by the government. Public works were organized and carried out by the government. Public works were organized and carried out by the government. Public works were organized and carried out by the government.

1. See the report of the Committee on Unemployment, & Trade Unions, 1931, p. 10. The Committee on Unemployment, & Trade Unions, 1931, p. 10.