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LABOR, POLITICS AND UNEMPLOYMENT:  
QUEENSLAND DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the impact of the economic depression of the 1930s on the State of Queensland. It is primarily concerned with the politics of the period but economic and social factors are not ignored. As a political study, the thesis is concerned with the behaviour of Governments, political parties and interest groups. The formulation of public policies directed towards the alleviation of unemployment are also investigated. The central focus of the thesis is the Queensland Labor movement, which is defined broadly to include those individuals and groups that claimed to belong to a political/industrial movement that was concerned to advance and defend the interests of employed and unemployed workers.

The central arguments of the thesis are: that the medium and longterm effects of the depression have been exaggerated; and that, in certain respects, Queensland's response to the depression was different from that in some other States. These arguments are explained and expanded in the Introduction. The remainder of the thesis is divided into two sections. Section One includes Chapters One to Seven and deals mainly with general political developments. Chapter One seeks to explain why Queensland appears to have been less affected by the economic collapse than the other States. Attention is drawn to the fact that the Queensland economy experienced a severe, locally-induced recession in the late 1920s that was unrelated to the world-wide depression that occurred after 1929. Chapter Two surveys the major Queensland political events of the twenties that were to remain relevant for the depression period and argues that the Australian Labor Party lost the 1929 State election not because of internal disharmony but because of the condition of the State's economy.

In Chapter Three an assessment is provided of the Country Progressive National Party Government, led by Arthur Moore, that was elected in 1929. The purpose of the chapter is to show how the policies and performance of the Moore administration assisted the re-unification of the Labor party. The details of Labor's

reconstruction are outlined and explained in Chapter Four. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the majority of State branches of the ALP in the 1930s was intensive and debilitating factionalism. Chapter Five explains why Queensland did not share this experience and shows how the ALP coped successfully with the challenges of rival groups such as Lang Labor, Douglas Credit, the Communist Party of Australia and the Protestant Labour Party. Chapter Six examines the impact of the depression on the internal affairs of a selection of Queensland trade unions. It argues that the depression weakened the unions but did not alter substantially either their ideology or their organisational structures. Chapter Seven argues that the defeat of the trade unions in two major strikes early in the depression oriented most of the members of the industrial Labor movement towards working for the re-election of a Labor Government in 1932.

Section Two of the thesis contains Chapters Eight to Eleven and concentrates on the issue of unemployment. In Chapter Eight the ameliorative measures that both the CPNP and Labor Governments devised to provide relief for those out of work are examined. Chapter Nine attempts to assess the effectiveness of the Forgan Smith Government's expansion of the public works programme after 1932 and investigates why the Labor Government was so keen to seek rural solutions to the problem of unemployment. Chapter Ten details the failure of the trade unions to develop effective policies to cope with unemployment among their members. The chapter also includes an examination of relations between the unions and the newly-established organisations of unemployed. Chapter Eleven continues this theme and details the structure, behaviour and political affiliations of the unemployed groups. It argues that only a minority of the unemployed joined such bodies and that they were relatively non-violent in their methods and generally unsuccessful in the pursuit of their objectives.

The thesis concludes with a brief examination of the notion of a 'depression generation' and assesses the impact of the economic crisis on the electoral behaviour of Queenslanders and the consequent effect on the political party system.

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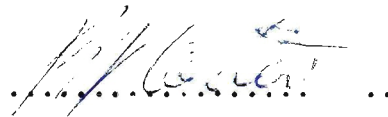
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This thesis has not been submitted previously for an award at Queensland or any other university. The primary research reported herein was carried out solely by the undersigned according to the rules and regulations of the University of Queensland.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. J. Costar", written over a dotted line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Brian J Costar

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Thanks are also due to Jan Fraser who drew the electoral maps, Barbara Hannay who prepared the graphs and especially to Joan Buzzard of Melbourne who typed the thesis.

I would like to dedicate the thesis to my grandfathers - Frederick George Costar (1884-1962) and James Joseph Connell (1870-1946).

ABBREVIATIONS

ABTEF	Australian Boot Trade Employees Federation
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEHR	Australian Economic History Review
AFAL	All for Australia League
AFULE	Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen
AJPH	Australian Journal of Politics and History
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMIEU	Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union
ANZAAS	Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science
APWU	Amalgamated Postal Workers Union
ARTWU	Australian Road Transport Workers Union
ARU	Australian Railways Union
AWU	Australian Workers Union
CDA	Catholic Daughters of Australia
CEMS	Church of England Men's Society
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CPNP	Country Progressive National Party
CPP	Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers
CRL	Civic Reform League
ER	Economic Record
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
FCA	Federated Coopers Association
FML	Fryer Memorial Library
HSANZ	Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand
ILR	International Labour Review
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JRAHS	Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
LH	Labour History
MMM	Militant Minority Movement
OBU	One Big Union
OML	Oxley Memorial Library
PIEU	Printing Industries Employees Union



PWIU	Pastoral Workers Industrial Union
QCE	Queensland Central Executive of the ALP
QCEU	Queensland Colliery Employees Union
QGG	Queensland Government Gazette
QPD	Queensland Parliamentary Debates
QPLP	Queensland Parliamentary Labor Party
QPP	Queensland Parliamentary Papers
QRTEU	Queensland Railway Transport Employees Union
QSA	Queensland State Archives
QSSL	Queensland Social Service League
QTU	Queensland Teachers' Union
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
RSSSA ANU	Research School of Social Sciences Archives / Australian National University
SSU	State Service Union
TLC	Trades and Labor Council (Queensland)
UAP	United Australia Party
UGA	United Graziers Association (Queensland)
UWM	Unemployed Workers Movement
WWF	Waterside Workers Federation

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a political study of the impact of the great depression on Queensland. Its central arguments are two: that the medium and longterm effects of the depression on Australia and Queensland have been exaggerated; and that, in important respects, Queensland's response to the depression was different from that in other States, notably New South Wales and Victoria. The primary emphasis of the thesis is on what can broadly be defined as the Labor movement, that is, those organisations that belonged to a political/industrial movement which was oriented towards the preservation and advancement of the interests of employed and unemployed workers.

Historians generally have been unable to resist the temptation to exaggerate the medium and longterm consequences of the economic depression of the 1930s. A recent study of unemployment in Adelaide during the depression concludes with the statement that:

The depression clearly had a discernible longterm effect on the later lives of those who were unemployed. However, its impact extended to the entire working class. The depression profoundly influenced the consciousness and behaviour of a whole generation of Australian workers. There can be no doubt that the experience of the depression generation will remain a significant influence on the future development of Australian society. (1)

• Broomhill has placed himself firmly within the consensus of depression historiography which has chosen to liken the economic crisis to one of the Biblical plagues of Egypt. Arnold Toynbee set the tone for much future writing on the depression when, in 1932, he drew a parallel between the economic collapse and the break-up of the Roman Empire.<sup>(2)</sup> He commented that:

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1. Ray Broomhill, Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide, Brisbane, 1979, p 184.
  2. Arnold Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1931-32, Oxford, 1932, pp 5 and 16.

In 1931, the members of this great and ancient and hitherto triumphant society were asking themselves whether the secular process of Western life and growth might conceivably be coming to an end in their day. (3)

Australian historians have been prominent amongst those who have argued that the depression wrought deep and lasting changes on the people and societies it touched.<sup>(4)</sup> This interpretation has held particular appeal not only because Australia was one of the nations most affected by the crisis<sup>(5)</sup> but also because, according to Russell Ward, 'the depression made a deeper and certainly a more lasting impact on Australians than other people...' because the gap between normal living standards and those of the early thirties was so marked.<sup>(6)</sup> A nagging difficulty with such theories is the paucity of evidence presented in their defence. David Potts has taken Ray Broomhill to task for his conclusion that the depression has had, and will continue to have, extensive influence on the pattern of Australian life. Potts' comment that 'it (Broomhill's conclusion) goes well beyond any evidence or even discussion in the main text,...'<sup>(7)</sup> can be applied to much of the writing about the depression in Australia. The following analysis of the depression in one Australian State provides few data to support the view that the economic collapse produced major longterm political, economic or social changes in Queensland.

Before proceeding to analyse the Queensland data it is necessary to make some comment on why historians have been so eager to credit

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3. ibid., p 1.

4. For example: LJ Louis and Ian Turner (eds), The Depression of the 1930s, Melbourne, 1968, pp 1 and 5-6; H Anderson, Australia in the Depression, Melbourne, 1972, p 8; Russell Ward, A Nation for a Continent: The History of Australia, 1901-1975, Melbourne, 1977, p 165; R Mendelsohn, The Condition of the People: Social Welfare in Australia, 1900-1975, Sydney, 1979, p 100; LJ Louis, Trade Unions in the Depression, Canberra, 1968, p vi; R Gollan, 'Some Consequences of the Depression', Labour History, 17, November, 1970, p 182f.

5. CB Schedvin, 'The Long and Short of Depression Origins', Labour History, 17, November 1970, p 3.

6. Russell Ward, op.cit., p 165.

7. David Potts, 'Unemployed Workers in Adelaide: Assessing the Impact of the 1930s Depression', HSANZ, 19;74, April, 1980, p 131.

the depression with producing such sweeping effects. In his essay on the economic consequences of the depression in the United Kingdom HW Richardson provides a clue when he observes that:

To regard the post-1929 depression as a key turning point in the development of the British economy is in keeping with the historian's innate preference for sudden and dramatic changes. But drama and economic significance are not identical. (8)

It is not surprising that the most severe economic crisis of modern times encouraged historians to interpret subsequent developments as depression consequences. Changes were highlighted, and often exaggerated, while the underlying continuity of events tended to be overlooked.

The great depression was not an economic watershed as far as Queensland was concerned. Its most important contribution was to intensify ruralist trends that were in evidence before 1929. Economic historians are agreed that for Australia as a whole the depression had the effect of encouraging the development of manufacturing industry. Manufacturing production rose forty percent in the period 1929 to 1937, and by 1938/9 accounted for forty-two percent of the total value of Australian production.<sup>(9)</sup> This growth was stimulated by a number of factors including currency depreciation, tariff reductions, cheaper Australian coal and, as Schedvin explains, because the level of imports fell more heavily than did national expenditure.<sup>(10)</sup> For reasons outlined in Chapter 9, Queensland did not participate in this expansion which was centred in New South Wales and Victoria and, to a lesser extent, in South Australia. Over the period 1933 to 1947 the percentage of the Australian workforce directly employed in primary industry fell by thirty percent, while the decline for Queensland was only

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8. HW Richardson, 'The Economic Significance of the Depression in Britain, Journal of Contemporary History, 4;4, October 1969, p 19.

9. AGL Shaw, Economic Development of Australia, 5th ed, Melbourne, 1966, p 155.

10. CB Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney, 1970, p372

twenty percent. Because of the depression, manufacturing became an important component in the South Australian economy and in Western Australia gold mining replaced wheat as the leading sector in the economy.<sup>(11)</sup> No such changes occurred in Queensland where added faith and resources were placed in the State's pastoral and agricultural industries. In fact the number of workers employed in manufacturing industry declined by nine percent over the decade 1925 to 1935. One effect of this intensified reliance on primary industry was to confirm Queensland as one of the poorest States in the federation.

Similarly, the depression did not produce major changes in the political fabric of Queensland. The machinery of Government was virtually untouched by the course of economic events. Secessionist moves that were mooted in 1931 failed to attract anything like the support engendered in Western Australia. Attempts by the Moore Government to reintroduce the Legislative Council and to extend the life of the parliament to five years were unsuccessful. Queensland in the 1930s witnessed nothing akin to the proliferation of ministries, agencies and departments that characterised the New Deal in the United States. The only major administrative innovation occurred in 1932 when the Bureau of Economics and Statistics was re-structured as the Bureau of Industry. This was followed in 1938 by the establishment of the Co-ordinator General's Department which was designed to assist the Bureau in the regulation of the public works programme. At the Commonwealth level and in the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia the 1930s was a decade of disaster for the Australian Labor Party. The opposite was the case for the party in Queensland because it was fortunate to be out of office during the worst years of the depression. This aided the party electorally and organisationally because it was relieved of the responsibility of having to take unpopular economic decisions, particularly in relation to the Premiers' Plan, that proved so divisive for the labor movement in some other States. The extra-parliamentary labor movement became convinced of the need to re-elect

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11. G Snooks, Depression and Recovery in Western Australia, Perth, 1974, p 6.

the ALP at the State election of 1932 because of the anti-union activities of the Moore Government, and because the unions' defeat in two strikes that occurred in 1930 and 1931 illustrated the futility of industrial militancy under depression conditions.

Labor nevertheless had to contend with challenges from the Communist party, Lang Labor, Social Credit and the Protestant Labour party. While the number of adversaries was formidable their long-term impact was minimal, with the result that Labor emerged from the worst years of the depression organisationally strong and electorally successful. The most important internal effect of the depression on the ALP was to consolidate the authority of the Australian Workers Union. The strength of the AWU provided the stability upon which William Forgan Smith was able to base his successful premiership. Ideologically the ALP altered little because of the depression and the Forgan Smith Governments were cautious restorers rather than innovative reformers. When questioned on the topic, Frank Waters, the member for Kelvin Grove from 1932 to 1938 and later secretary of the Amalgamated Postal Workers Union, who was, admittedly, no admirer of Forgan Smith, said that 'it's pretty hard in retrospect to measure any outstanding event or characteristic of the Government'.<sup>(12)</sup> Labor cabinets after 1932 were keen to return Queensland to a state of pre-depression normalcy by reducing unemployment through public works and by restoring the industrial conditions that had been eroded during the Moore period. Labor's vision of the preferred future for Queensland had been formulated during its fourteen years in Government before 1929. This vision was essentially a ruralist one and it was confirmed by the experience of the depression.

While the depression and immediate post-depression years were ones of consolidation and growth for Labor, the opposite was true for Queensland's conservative parties. In 1929 the future looked bright for the non-Labor parties. The Country Progressive National Party, which had been formed in 1925, had just won a convincing electoral

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12. Interview with Frank Waters, 17 June, 1975, Transcript, p 6.

victory over a divided and dispirited Labor party. The onset of the depression was to cut short the hegemony of the CPNP. Moore's defeat in 1932 allowed Labor to claim credit for leading the State out of the depression; a fact that was revealed in 1935 when the Government was confirmed in office by an electoral victory that crushed the Opposition. CPNP representation was slashed to sixteen members in a parliament of sixty-two. This defeat activated the centripetal forces that were a constant feature of non-Labor politics in Queensland,<sup>(13)</sup> and in 1936 the CPNP was dissolved. Moore lost his position as Opposition leader and Queensland party politics reverted to its pre-1925 alignment of a Labor party opposed by independent country and urban anti-Labor groupings. Another feature of Queensland electoral politics after 1935 was the regular appearance of a large number of minor party candidates and independents. The division of the non-Labor forces was to persist until the coalition agreement of 1957, and, of course, contributed to the quarter century of unbroken Labor rule.

Outside parliament the trade unions were the political organisations which bore the brunt of the economic collapse. What is perhaps surprising is how little the depression altered the essential fabric of the Australian and Queensland trade union movements. Les Louis, in his study of Victorian unions, has argued that 'it would be difficult to overestimate the significance of the depression for the Australian labour movement,...'<sup>(14)</sup> Yet, beyond the rather vague assertion that 'the Communist party was to become a real force in trade union life',<sup>(15)</sup> he provides scant evidence to validate this judgment. The vast majority of Queensland unions and unionists refused to endorse or follow the CPA's industrial or political programme in the 1930s and the dominant ideological complexion of the movement remained a rather mild form of democratic socialism.

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13. BJ Costar, 'Arthur Edward Moore:Odd Man In', in Murphy, DJ and Joyce, RB, (eds ), Queensland Political Portraits, Brisbane, 1978, pp 378f.

14. Louis, op.cit., p viii.

15. ibid.



Louis' broader statement about the impact of the great depression on the union movement is also difficult to accept. The effect of the economic collapse on the unions was, in the shortterm, dramatic - the rapid decline in membership and the low level of industrial action have been well documented - but there is little evidence of, for example, longterm structural change within the union movement.

Peak councils, such as the Queensland Trades and Labor Council (TLC), were weakened by forced disaffiliations and the cause of union federalism was similarly retarded. Yet, these were temporary impediments and the growth in employment after 1932 brought with it a recovery of union membership and strength. By 1936 Queensland's trade unions had surpassed their pre-depression membership figures. Depression conditions did nothing to encourage moves towards union amalgamation and there were as many unions in Queensland after as before the economic crisis. The pattern of inter-union politics in Queensland was also little affected by the depression. Multi-unionism continued to produce industrial and political hostilities and the Australian Railways Union (ARU), though much weakened since the mid-1920s, maintained its warring relationship with the Australian Workers Union (AWU). The latter, however, remained the dominant industrial organisation in the State. AWU hegemony was confirmed and expanded by the direction taken by the Queensland economy after 1932. Had primary industry been displaced by an expanded secondary industry sector this would perhaps have produced manufacturing industry unions sufficient in strength to rival the AWU on both the political and industrial fronts.

As far as the internal structures of individual unions were concerned, Tom Sheridan's assessment of the Australian Engineering Union (AEU) is applicable to Queensland unions as a whole:

Although the depression imposed unparalleled hardship on engineers its impact on the internal politics and machinery of the AEU were relatively slight. (16)

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16. T Sheridan, Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia, 1920-1972, Cambridge, 1975, p 115.

Depression conditions were not productive of organisational innovations within individual unions; simple survival was a more pressing objective. The Australian and Queensland experiences were somewhat different from that in the United States where, because of New Deal initiatives and the passage of the Wagner Act, the 1930s was a decade of major growth and development for the trade unions. Union membership in the USA rose 181 percent between 1932 and 1940 and in 1935 a major new organisation, the Congress of Industrial Organisations, was formed in competition with the more conservative American Federation of Labor.

Extensive unemployment, especially among unskilled and semi-skilled workers, was the most distinctive feature of the depression years. The assumed effects of this unprecedented unemployment are at the base of most generalisations about both the impact and longterm consequences of the depression.

The unemployed did not become the instrument of major social or political changes in either Australia or Queensland during the great depression. Many contemporaries believed that the experience of widespread unemployment would lead inexorably to violence, social disorder and even revolution. For example, the insurance firm of Lloyds' of London reported that during the winter of 1930/31 they sold an unusually large amount of riot and civil commotion cover to American clients.<sup>(17)</sup> Such fears were unfounded and prolonged unemployment produced apathy and feelings of powerlessness rather than political militancy amongst its victims.<sup>(18)</sup> Very few of those out of work chose to join unemployed unions or associations and these were consequently fragile and ineffective. Political demonstrations of unemployed workers occurred in Queensland as in other States but these were neither as frequent nor as well attended as some have assumed. Occasionally these protests would lead to violence, such as the 'Cairns Riot' of 1932 (See Chapter 11), but widespread disorder was rare.

17. D Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941, New York, 1948, p 16.

18. SW Ginsburg, 'What Unemployment Does to People', American Journal of Psychiatry, 1942, p 439f

Frances Piven and Richard Cloward<sup>(19)</sup> have argued that in the United States the authorities instituted relief work measures as a method of forestalling mass protest movements by the unemployed. Other studies<sup>(20)</sup> suggest that if this was the case then it was probably unnecessary because the boredom that worklessness induced was itself sufficient to sap the political energies of the majority of the chronically unemployed. [Queensland was unique among the Australian States in that it operated an unemployment relief scheme prior to the onset of the depression. This took the form of an unemployment insurance system that had been established in 1922. Its intended purpose was to alleviate the effects of short-term seasonal unemployment mainly among shearers and sugar workers, and it proved incapable of dealing with depression level unemployment. When the inadequacies of the system became apparent in 1930 the Moore Government introduced an income tax based unemployment relief fund to finance intermittent relief work. Those who could not work or for whom work was not available were eligible to receive ration coupons. Dole payments were never a feature of Queensland's unemployment relief programme because both the CPNP and ALP Governments had economic and moral objections to giving cash handouts to the unemployed. When it returned to office in 1932, the Labor party continued Moore's relief scheme with only minor amendments. In contrast with most other States, however, the Queensland Labor Government promoted an extensive programme of public works to provide permanent, full-time jobs for the unemployed. This policy was a qualified success and in 1938 Queensland was one of the first States to be in a position to abolish its special unemployment relief schemes.

One effect of the prolonged unemployment of the depression was to drive a wedge between those out of work and those who managed to retain their jobs.<sup>(21)</sup> This occurred at both the personal and organisational levels. With only a few notable exceptions, relations

19. FF Piven and RA Cloward, Regulating the Poor, New York, 1971, Chapter 1.

20. See Chapter 8.

21. Wecter, op.cit., p 30; Broomhill, op.cit., p 57.

between the unemployed organisations and Queensland's trade unions were spasmodic and often hostile. On an ideological level many moderate trade union officials disapproved of the militant, often Communist, leadership and tactics of the unemployed groups. Also during the depression most unions were preoccupied with their own financial plight and were unable to devote the time, energy and resources that were required to organise the unemployed. Consequently there was little political or industrial co-operation between employed and unemployed unionists in Queensland during the 1930s.

The depression, then, did not promote major social or economic changes in Queensland. In the political sphere there did occur important but relatively unspectacular developments. The chief among these was the restoration of the ALP to a position of parliamentary dominance. Labor itself was transformed little by the depression: admittedly the militants were routed and the moderating influence of the AWU was confirmed but evidence of both phenomena can be found in the history of the late twenties. The Labor party dominated Queensland politics for a quarter of a century after 1932 partly because the experience of the depression prevented the CPNP from capitalising on its 1929 electoral gains. Chance played a part here, for had Labor won in 1929 it is likely that the party would have suffered the fate of the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian and Federal branches; all of which were to spend many years in the political wilderness as punishment for the misfortune of having to govern during a period of acute economic dislocation.

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER 1

THE QUEENSLAND ECONOMY

Queensland's economy suffered less from the great depression than did those of the other Australian States. One group of economists has explained this phenomenon in the following terms:

Its (Queensland's) unemployment level was lower because the manufacturing sector was relatively small, because it had not had the same expansion of public works and buildings as other States in the 1920's and because the Labour Government (which was elected in June 1932) refused to follow the deflationary Premier's Plan fully. (1)

To this list must be added the important role played by the sugar industry in shielding the State from the full impact of the depression. Concentration on the 1930s as the depression decade, however, has obscured the fact that Queensland experienced a severe recession during the years 1926 to 1929. The Australian economy as a whole underwent an economic downturn in 1927/8, but this was of short duration and was relatively mild compared with the recession in Queensland which was both prolonged and intense.<sup>(2)</sup> The primary deflationary impulse of this recession was drought which produced a severe downturn in the pastoral industry. The State's economy rallied in early 1929 and did not feel the full blast of the world-wide depression until the third quarter of 1930.

The economy of Queensland in the 1920s and 1930s was particularly vulnerable to climatic variations because it was the most rurally oriented of the mainland States. Primary industries, particularly wool, sugar and cattle, were the leading sector of the local economy. The development of secondary industries, in contrast, had failed to keep pace with the other States.

In the census year of 1933 Queensland was the least metropolitanised of the States with only 31.6 percent of its population residing

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1. Marion Gough et al, Queensland: Industrial Enigma, Melbourne, 1964, p 10.
  2. EA Boehm, 'Australia's Economic Depression of the 1930s', Economic Record, December, 1973, p 613.

in Brisbane. It had, on the other hand, the largest percentage of its workforce engaged in primary industries, 32.5 percent compared with a national average of 24.1 percent.<sup>(3)</sup>

The reasons for the predominance of the rural sector in the Queensland economy can be summarised as follows : the State's industrial sector was retarded initially by the late establishment of the colony; this was aggravated by the State's small population, the decentralised settlement pattern and the geographic location of the State capital. Government policy, particularly after 1915, reflected a ruralistic bias and gave a low priority to the encouragement of manufacturing.<sup>(4)</sup> During the 1880s there was an upsurge of secondary and tertiary industries as a result of the linkage effects of the primary sector. Queensland manufacturing industries suffered a severe setback as a consequence of the 1890s depression and the federation of the colonies in 1901. The latter probably had the more devastating effect because it exposed Queensland's manufacturers to competition from the better established producers of New South Wales and Victoria who benefited from the free trade provisions of Section 92 of the Federal Constitution and a protective Commonwealth tariff.<sup>(5)</sup>

Queensland became a market for southern produced goods and indigenous secondary industry was concentrated in food processing. As a consequence CA Bernays, the early chronicler of Queensland's history, was able to write in 1920: 'our manufacturing industries are well nigh beneath contempt.'<sup>(6)</sup>

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3. Gough, op.cit., p 24; Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1933, Parts I, II and III.
  4. JR Lavery, 'The Queensland Economy, 1860 to 1915', in DJ Murphy et al (eds.), Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885-1915, Brisbane, 1970, p 32; KW Wiltshire, 'Portuguese Navy': The Establishment of the Queensland Department of Industrial Development, Brisbane, 1973, pp 6-9.
  5. H Hughes, Federation and Industrial Development, ANZASS, 1964, pp 18-20.
  6. CA Bernays, Queensland Politics during Sixty (1859-1919) Years, Brisbane, 1920, p 383.



TABLE 1:1

Numbers Engaged in Factories per Thousand of Population  
by States, 1901-1939.

Year	N.S.W.	Vic.	Qld.	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Aust.
1901	49	56	53	54	68	45	52
1911	65	85	61	68	55	54	69
1921	69	89	56	62	53	48	71
1929	73	88	48	65	50	48	70
1939	84	108	57	74	53	60	82

Source: H Hughes : Federation and Industrial Development, ANZASS, 1964, p 18, table iii.

Table 1:1 shows that during the next decade there was a further decline in factory employment. In common with the United States of America, Australian economic growth in the twenties was based largely on secondary industries and Queensland failed to share fully in the resultant prosperity because of its underdeveloped industrial sector.<sup>(7)</sup> Helen Hughes argues that the stagnation of manufacturing industry contributed to the progressive impoverishment of Queensland and that by the late 1920s it was one of the poorest States in the Commonwealth.<sup>(8)</sup> Table 1:2 shows that real income per head of population was below that of the Australian average in the late 1920s:

TABLE 1:2  
Real Income Per Head

Year ending 30 June	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932
Australia	106	104	101	86	78	78
Queensland	90	96	90	87	82	81

Source: Economic News, 9 June 1932, p 10.

7. G Lewis, *The Ports of Queensland 1859-1939: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, Ph D, Queensland, 1971, p 470.
8. H Hughes, 'Federalism and Industrial Development in Australia', AJPH, 10;3, 1964, p 332.

The Queensland Bureau of Economics and Statistics explained that this occurred because New South Wales and Victoria had 'a larger proportion of the higher incomes from centrally controlled business and investments.'<sup>(9)</sup> This phenomenon is partly reflected in the fact that while Queensland had one of the lowest taxable capacities of all the States during the twenties, its actual rate of State taxation was the highest in the Commonwealth. LF Giblin calculated that in 1928/9 the severity of taxation index number for Queensland was 164 compared with 96 for New South Wales and 69 for Victoria.<sup>(10)</sup> These high levels of taxation were a further disincentive to the establishment of secondary industries in Queensland, a complaint regularly made by the non-Labor Opposition.<sup>(11)</sup>

The relative weakness of secondary industry, however, produced an accidental benefit for Queensland when the great depression struck. Table 1:2 indicates that real income per head was maintained at a higher level than for the nation as a whole. Unemployment rates reveal a similar picture:

TABLE 1:3  
Percentage of Registered Trade Union Members Unemployed  
1929-1937

State	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
NSW	11.5	21.7	30.8	32.5	28.9	24.7	20.6	15.4	10.9
Vic	11.1	18.3	25.8	26.5	22.3	17.4	14.0	10.7	9.0
Queensland	7.1	10.7	16.1	18.8	15.3	11.7	8.7	7.8	7.3
SA	15.7	25.3	32.5	34.0	29.9	25.6	17.6	10.8	8.2
WA	9.9	19.2	27.3	29.5	24.8	17.8	13.4	8.1	5.6
Tas	13.9	19.1	27.4	26.4	17.1	17.9	15.9	12.7	9.8
Australia	11.1	19.3	27.4	29.0	25.1	20.5	16.5	12.2	9.5

Source: Commonwealth Year Books, and Queensland Year Book, 2, 1938.

9. Economic News, 9 June, 1932, p 14.

10. LF Giblin, 'A Note on Taxable Capacity', Economic Record, 5;9, 1929, p 345.

11. QPD, clxv, 25 September, 1925, p 730.

The lower incidence of unemployment in Queensland during the great depression is partly explained by the fact that the State had a relatively low percentage of its workforce engaged in manufacturing industry. An analysis of the 1933 census returns shows that unemployment was highest in that sector termed Industrial, which accounted for 52 percent of all breadwinners unemployed. Unemployment was relatively light in the Agricultural, Dairying and Pastoral sector which accounted for only 7.4 percent of those out of work.<sup>(12)</sup> The secondary industries of Victoria and New South Wales, which together accounted for approximately 75 percent of Australia's total factory employment,<sup>(13)</sup> were hard hit by the credit contraction that accompanied the depression and unemployment was correspondingly higher in those States.

While Queensland may have suffered less from the depression of the 1930s than the other States, it experienced its own 'mini-depression' in the late twenties. The major cause of Queensland's premature depression was a decline in the condition of the pastoral industry which was precipitated by a severe drought. Drought conditions prevailed in wide areas of the northern and western regions of the State throughout 1926, 1927, 1928 and the early months of 1929.<sup>(14)</sup> The pastoral industry bore the brunt of the drought, and sheep and cattle numbers dropped alarmingly. The value of wool exports, Queensland's major export earner, declined from £12.9m in 1925/6 to £8.5m in 1926/7 as a result of lack of rainfall in the wool growing areas.<sup>(15)</sup> When the drought finally lifted in late 1928 the wool industry was faced with a drop in export prices which retarded recovery. The strong linkage effects of the pastoral industry brought about a decline in economic activity not only in the country areas but also in the coastal ports whose viability rested on the economic well-being of their hinterland. For instance, value of new

12. Census, 1933, Part xxvi, Unemployment, Tables 25 and 26.

13. C Forster, Industrial Development in Australia, 1920-30, Canberra, 1964, p 8.

14. See the Governor's speech to Parliament, QPD, cxlvii, 28 July, 1926, p 5; CXLIX 14 August, 1927, p 2; and Department of Agricultural and Stock Reports, QPP, V 2, 1926, pp 401 and 409; V 2, 1927; V 2 1928, p 295; and V 2 1929, p 581; AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Western District Report, Brisbane, January, 1928, p 17.

15. Queensland Year Book, 2, 1938.

buildings approved in the Brisbane metropolitan area declined from £18m in 1926 to £9.5m in 1929. This fall off in economic activity in such key industries led to an increase in unemployment. While recorded unemployment in Queensland was generally lower than the national average during the 1920s, it reached 8.4 percent of registered trade unionists unemployed in 1926 and increased from 6.4 percent in the last quarter of 1928 to 7.6 percent by May 1929. The national increase for the same period was only 0.1 percent; from 9.9 percent to 10 percent.<sup>(16)</sup> The drought also placed pressure on the public finances of the State. The Treasurer had to cope with unanticipated deficits in 1925/6 and 1926/7 partly because of lost railway revenue occasioned by the weakened condition of the pastoral industry.

Because of local climatic conditions, Queensland diverged from the trend of the national economy after 1926. The State actually experienced an economic recovery in 1929 and did not feel the full impact of the depression until the third quarter of 1930.<sup>(17)</sup> The recession of the late 1920s revealed the extent to which the well-being of Queensland depended on her primary industries. Rural industry accounted for 60 percent of the State's net value of production in 1929, whereas manufacturing accounted for only 30 percent.<sup>(18)</sup> Wool, beef and dairy cattle, and sugar were the leading sectors of the economy. Minerals were relatively unimportant in the 1920s as was wheat. The Australian wheat industry was a major casualty of the depression and Queensland was fortunate that it was a wheat importer rather than an exporter in the twenties and thirties. Wheat was a slow growth industry in Queensland because most of the best land on the western Darling Downs remained tied up in pastoral leases until the second world war. It remained a slow growth industry because of transport difficulties not being solved until road haulage became common; and because the wet Queensland summers caused initial problems with grain germination.<sup>(19)</sup>

16. Labour Report, 20, 1929, p 5.

17. Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, Queensland Letter, 54;12, 21 November, 1930.

18. Wiltshire, op.cit., Appendix 0.

19. Information received from Mr. I McIntyre, wheat grower of Jondaryn.

Successive Labor Governments after 1915 were committed to developing Queensland as a rural rather than as an industrial economy. Yet those Governments were committed to agricultural rather than pastoral development. Closer settlement was the declared policy of the Government and it was summed up by the Premier, EG Theodore in 1922 when he said that: 'Agricultural development alone can bring about closer settlement on which the safety and wellbeing of Australia must depend.'<sup>(20)</sup> Such a view was at odds with the wool growers who operated in a high capital industry which required the use of large tracts of grazing land. Labor possessed ideological objections to 'squatterdom' and woolgrowers were encouraged to break up their large estates by the impositions of a supertax on freehold land.<sup>(21)</sup> The British Economic Mission that visited Australia in 1928 was particularly critical of the Government's closer settlement policies as they applied to the wool industry. The Mission argued that small holdings were uneconomical and produced inferior wool.<sup>(22)</sup> Surprisingly the Premier, William McCormack, had admitted many of these objections in a speech to the parliament in 1927 :

If we were only considering the wool industry. a good case could be made for the keeping of the big areas for the more profitable working of the industry - I do not deny that. In that respect, the State loses by closer settlement. It could be worked more profitably as a big sheep undertaking than it can by small selectors. But would anybody tell me that progress lies in that direction? We have a duty to the country - a duty to all sections of the public, who tell us they are willing and anxious to develop that land in smaller areas; and the duty of a Government is to give them the opportunity. (23)

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20. Quoted in D Blackmur, *The Primary Industries of Queensland, 1919-29*, unpublished B Econ Queensland, 1965, p 2.

21. *ibid.*, p 88.

22. Report of British Economic Mission, CPP, 2, 1929, Appendix E, pp 35-6.

23. QPD, c1, 2 December, 1927, p 1515.

In its 1938 report, the Commonwealth Grants Commission argued that it was 'the varied character of Queensland's primary production' that protected it from the worst ravages of the depression.<sup>(24)</sup> Just as important, however, was the special position occupied by the State's premier agricultural product - sugar. The sugar industry was in a privileged position vis-a-vis other Australian primary products. Ninety-five percent of Australia's sugar was produced in Queensland; the industry was protected by a total embargo on foreign sugar; the bulk of the sugar produced was consumed within Australia at a price set by Government regulation; and the sugar that was exported, most of which went to the United Kingdom, benefited from a Commonwealth preference agreement. Because of these factors the sugar industry remained stable during the worst years of the depression and thereby buttressed the Queensland economy.

A major reason for the strength of sugar in the 1920s and 1930s was the high degree of Government regulation within the industry. In 1923 the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments concluded what was to become known as the Sugar Agreement. Under the scheme the import of foreign sugar was prohibited and the Queensland Government was to acquire all sugar produced and to distribute it at an agreed fixed price through two companies, Colonial Sugar Refining Ltd, and the Millaquin Sugar Company. In announcing the agreement the Prime Minister, SM Bruce, explained that a viable sugar industry in north Queensland was essential for defence reasons and to preserve 'our cherished White Australia Policy'<sup>(25)</sup> Bruce also argued that it was in the interests of the consumer to establish a stable industry so that Australia would not have to purchase expensive foreign sugar.<sup>(26)</sup> The industry took full advantage of its protected environment and the twenties was a decade of sustained growth during which sugar became a leading sector in the Queensland economy. Raw sugar accounted for 25 percent of the State's total income in the period 1925 to 1930 and in 1931 constituted almost 70 percent of

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24. Commonwealth Grants Commission, Fifth Report, 1938, p 30.

25. CPD (HR), 5 July, 1923, p 729.

26. ibid., pp 730-1.

Queensland's total interstate exports.<sup>(27)</sup> In 1930 the industry employed 28,000 men in the fields plus a further 7,000 in the mills and refineries. The annual wages bill was approximately £7m. The industry had very strong income multiplier effects and it was estimated that in 1930 it employed directly and indirectly approximately 100,000 workers, which, represented 25 percent of the State's total workforce.<sup>(28)</sup>

Because it was subject to such strict and comprehensive Government regulation, sugar managed to escape the fate that befell the wool, wheat and beef industries that were so vulnerable to international price fluctuations. Table 1:4 indicates that the sugar industry managed to weather the worst years of the depression relatively unscathed. It managed to achieve this however, only by successfully defending its privileged position against a number of challenges.

TABLE 1:4  
Sugar - Net Return, etc., for Crop, Australia

Year	Percentage exported  %	Net value of exports per ton £ s d	Average Price per ton for whole crop £ s d	Estimated total value of crop £
1928/29	35.70	10 10 0	20 17 11	11,002,000
1929/30	37.71	9 17 0	20 8 2	10,713,000
1930/31	39.23	8 5 0	19 12 11	10,196,500
1931/32	49.84	9 7 0	18 2 11	10,687,000
1932/33	36.80	8 5 9	18 17 9	10,413,000

Source: Commonwealth Year Book, 26, 1933 p 597.

27. Economic News, 9 June, 1932, pp 149 and 154.

28. Notes prepared by the Land Administration Board for the Governor's speech to Parliament, October 1930, item 32/3279, PRE/A 1007; QSA.

Prior to the 1923 agreement, Queensland exported overseas only about ten percent of its annual sugar crop. However, the protection afforded by the embargo together with an improved yield which was made possible by research carried out by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations allowed the industry to flourish.<sup>(29)</sup> Production rose from 289,272 tons in 1926/7 to a record 581,276 tons in 1931/32.<sup>(30)</sup> The Australian domestic market was unable to absorb this increase and the surplus sugar was exported. The United Kingdom provided the major market and Queensland sugar was favoured by a British duty against sugar imported from other countries. A crisis arose in July 1929 when the newly elected Labour Government of Ramsay McDonald announced that it intended to abolish duties against all imported foodstuffs in order to provide cheaper food for the British consumer. This meant that Australian producers would be required to compete on an open market with the more cheaply produced sugar of Cuba and Java. When news of this proposal reached Australia it produced panic within the sugar industry. The Queensland Government was bombarded with telegrams and letters from the sugar interests warning of the dire consequences if Britain went ahead with the decision. Premier Arthur Moore and the leader of the Opposition, William Forgan Smith, sent a jointly signed telegram to the Prime Minister, SM Bruce, urging the Federal Government to intercede with the United Kingdom on behalf of the industry.<sup>(31)</sup> Queensland also instructed its Agent General to make contact with the recently defeated Premier, William McCormack, who was on vacation in London, and to lobby the British Cabinet.<sup>(32)</sup> Initial reports were gloomy, but the McDonald Government then reconsidered its decision, not because of pressure from Queensland, but because the Treasury argued that the Government was in no position to forego the revenue produced by the duty.

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29. M Carter, *The Sugar Industry Since 1917*, BA Queensland, 1954, p 17.

30. Commonwealth Year Book, 25, 1932, p 656; Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, QPP, 2, 1933, p 525.

31. Moore and Smith to Bruce, 12 July, 1929, item 29/5274, PRE/A977, QSA.

32. Queensland Agent General to Secretary of State for the Dominions, 26 July, 1929, *ibid.*



Barely had the sugar industry emerged from the encounter when it had to defend itself from a serious challenge from within Australia. As the depression deepened, the privileged position of sugar came under attack from consumers, the fruit industry, and jam, chocolate and confectionery manufacturers. The Scullin Labor Government decided in 1930 to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the industry. While the Commission sat, a vigorous public debate raged between the industry and its political supporters and the Sugar Consumers Association which was established by the Victorian Town and Country Union.<sup>(33)</sup> The central issue at stake was whether the set domestic price of sugar should be reduced. When the Commission reported in March 1931 it was divided on this vexed question. A majority report recommended that the current price be retained for three years and the embargo for a further five years; the minority report urged a domestic price reduction of one farthing per pound.<sup>(34)</sup>

In April 1931 the Prime Minister announced that cabinet had decided to accept the majority report.<sup>(35)</sup> The debate that followed, however, revealed that those who demanded a cut in price were not placated by the Commission's findings. Senator Colebatch (Nationalist Western Australia) was the most unrestrained when he alleged in the Senate that 'Queensland is sucking the life blood of the other States'<sup>(36)</sup> Urged on by the split decision of the Commission, the Sugar Consumers Association stepped up its campaign and organised a number of conferences to protest against the favoured position of the sugar industry. One such gathering was held in Adelaide in July 1932 and drew the following impassioned response from the Brisbane Courier:

If the conference in Adelaide of black labour champions, free traders, economic cranks and political opportunists has had no other effect it has shown the Queensland people that unity on this point is essential for the preservation of the sugar industry. (37)

33. CPD (S), 129, 13 May, 1931, p 1813.

34. Reports, Sugar Inquiry Committee, CPP, 3, 1931.

35. CPD (HR), 128, 14 April, 1931, p 751.

36. CPD (S), 129, 13 May, 1931, p 1805.

37. Brisbane Courier, 30 July, 1932.

Unity, however, was not enough because the Lyons Government, which took office in January 1932, was not as sympathetic to the sugar interests as was its predecessor. After a series of confidential conferences, the industry was forced to agree to a reduction in price from four pence halfpenny per pound as from January 1933.<sup>(38)</sup>

TABLE 1:5  
Sugar - Prices, Australia

Date of Determination	Raw Sugar		Refined Sugar	
	Price to grower and miller Per Ton		Wholesale price Per Ton	Retail price Per lb.
1923 to 1925	26 0 0		37 11 4	4½
1925 to 1931	26 0 0		37 6 8	4½
1931 to 1933	26 0 0		37 6 8	4½
January 1933	23 0 0		33 4 0	4

Source: Commonwealth Year Book, 26, 1933, p 598.

In its 1934 report, the Department of Agriculture and Stock reflected the common Queensland opinion that the price reduction would be the ruination of both the industry and the economic well-being of the entire State.<sup>(39)</sup> This proved to be alarmist and an underestimation of the strength of the industry. Queensland was fortunate that it was able to defend its staple agricultural product until 1935 by which time the general economic recovery had commenced. As a consequence, the healthy state of the sugar industry nursed the Queensland economy through the worst years of the depression.

Boris Schedvin agrees with the ameliorative role played by sugar during the thirties, but he also argues that Queensland was more prudent in its loan expenditure in the twenties than some of the

38. Queensland Bureau of Economics and Statistics, The Story of Sugar, Brisbane, 1932, p 9.

39. Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, QPP, 2, 1934, p 424.

other States and that the accumulation of a £3m surplus in the loan account softened the impact of the economic collapse.<sup>(40)</sup> This prudence was fortuitous rather than the product of far-sighted economic appraisal. The drought induced recession brought about a slowing down in loan expenditure after 1925/6. Railways underwent a spectacular period of growth in Queensland after world war one and were a major consumer of loan money. In 1925/6 railways accounted for 56 percent of the State's total gross public capital formation.<sup>(41)</sup> The recession put a stop to growth in this sector as the Government cut expenditure in an attempt to balance the budget. Despite the exercise of restraint in the second half of the decade, Queensland generally followed the borrowing policies of the other States. Over the period 1922 to 1928 Queensland's public debt rose by forty percent which was average for the country as a whole.<sup>(42)</sup> Against the loan fund surplus of £3m that Schedvin speaks of, the State owed the Bank of England £6m in interest payments in the years 1928/9 and 1929/30.<sup>(43)</sup> The possible benefits derived from the loan surplus were mitigated by the over-cautious economic policy pursued by the Country Progressive National party Government which replaced the Labor administration in May 1929.

To state that Queensland suffered less during the depression than comparable States is not to say that the economic crisis left Queensland untouched. A commonly used indicator of the severity of the depression is the level of unemployment. On the basis of the data presented in Table 1:3, it can be seen that Queensland's unemployment level in the 1930s was consistently the lowest in Australia. Yet the statistics presented in Table 1:3 stand in need of amendment. The table does not reveal the percentage of the workforce unemployed, merely the percentage of registered trade unionists out of work. There has been much debate on the question

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40. CB Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney, 1970, p 105.

41. NG Butlin, Australian Domestic Product, Investment and Foreign Borrowing, 1861-1938/9, Cambridge, 1962, Table 240, p 394.

42. British Economic Mission, op.cit., p 5.

43. RS Gilbert, The Australian Loan Council in Federal Fiscal Adjustments, 1890-1965, Canberra, 1973, p 108.

of whether the trade union returns are an accurate reflection of the real level of unemployment or whether they exaggerate or underestimate it. Ray Broomhill has argued that for Adelaide at least the trade union figures 'quite severely understated the actual level of unemployment';<sup>(44)</sup> whereas David Potts suggests that the opposite may have been the case.<sup>(45)</sup> Potts has recently admonished those who, he claims, have sought to inflate unemployment rates for political purposes,<sup>(46)</sup> but it is difficult to fault Colin Forster's observation that, for the depression years, 'the Queensland trade union records do understate unemployment.'<sup>(47)</sup>

As far as Australia as a whole was concerned, it appears that the trade union returns were a reasonable guide to unemployment levels during the depression. The 1933 Census revealed that twenty-four percent of wage and salary earners were out of work, compared with the trade union returns which showed that twenty-five percent of their members were unemployed in the same year. Yet it is important to bear in mind the warning of the Commonwealth statistician in 1933 that the accuracy of the trade union figures for the smaller States was poor because the scope of the returns was too narrow.<sup>(48)</sup> In Queensland, for example, the statistics were compiled from information supplied by any forty-six of the State's 107 trade unions. Queensland's largest union, the AWU, was one of those who could not provide data to the statistician because of the physical dispersion of its members. This meant, of course, that unemployment in rural industry went largely unmeasured.

Professor JB Brigden, who was appointed as the Queensland Government statistician in 1930, was also aware of the weaknesses inherent in the trade union method, and in 1932 he developed a

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44. Broomhill, op.cit., p 11f.

45. Potts, op.cit., p 125f.

46. ibid., p 130.

47. C Forster, 'Australian Unemployment, 1900-1940', ER, 41;95, September, 1965, p 437.

48. Quoted in ibid., p 433.

formula for adjusting the trade union figures to account for 'unrecorded unemployment'. This formula was based on statistics drawn from the State Unemployment Insurance Scheme, census data and factory reports.<sup>(49)</sup> The Bureau of Economics and Statistics then produced the following revised table of unemployment levels:

TABLE 1:6  
Percentages Corrected for Unrecorded  
Unemployment

	Aust.	N.S.W.	Vic.	Qld.	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.
1929							
Recorded average	11.1	11.5	11.1	7.1	15.7	9.9	13.4
Unrecorded	0.9	1.2	0.7	3.9	1.5	0.8	2.0
Total	12.0	12.7	11.8	11.0	17.2	10.7	15.4
1931							
Recorded average	27.4	30.8	25.8	16.2	32.5	27.3	27.4
Unrecorded	10.4	11.0	9.5	13.9	12.1	10.7	11.2
Total	37.8	41.8	35.3	30.1	44.6	38.0	38.6
Increase in two years							
	9.5	9.8	8.8	10.0	10.6	9.9	9.2
Unrecorded total	25.8	29.1	23.5	19.1	27.4	27.3	23.2

Source: Economic News, 9 June 1932, p 67.

Brigden's figures show that in 1931 Queensland had the lowest rate of 'recorded' unemployment concurrent with the highest rate of 'unrecorded' unemployment. This was probably because the trade union method was most reliable in predominantly secondary industry States and was less effective in measuring unemployment in rural economies such as Queensland. Because it was so dominated by primary industry even Brigden's revised statistics failed to reveal fully the level of unemployment. Farmers and their families were not

49. Economic News, 9 June, 1932, p 60.

classified as unemployed unless they vacated their farms, regardless of their economic circumstances. Contemporary reports also suggest that some agricultural workers were retained in employment and were provided with board and lodgings but not wages. Needless to say, this 'underemployment' denied quantification.<sup>(50)</sup>

The stagnation of the Queensland economy in the late 1920s was to have adverse electoral consequences for the ruling Labor party. Labor had come to power in 1915 and governed the State continuously until 1929. The party won three elections in the 1920s, but in none of them did it achieve an absolute majority of the vote. Its success depended on a divided Opposition and a single-member electoral system that favoured the party that could win a plurality over each of its individual opponents. By 1929, however, the Queensland non-Labor groups had combined as the Country Progressive National Party and the ALP was beset with serious factional disputes. Labor had been able to overcome these problems at the 1926 election, but the serious deterioration of the local economy over the next three years was to prove decisive in the defeat of the Government of William McCormack in May 1929.

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50. For a discussion of the difficulties involved in defining unemployment see RA Gordon, 'Employment and Unemployment', International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, vol 5, p 52f.

CHAPTER 2

DISSENSION AND DEFEAT:  
QUEENSLAND LABOR IN THE 1920s

Queensland voters went to the polls on 11 May 1929 and rejected the Labor Government of William McCormack in favour of the Country Progressive National party (CPNP) led by Arthur Moore. The defeat came as a shock to the Labor party which had won five consecutive elections in Queensland since 1915. While none of its supporters were aware of it at the time, Labor was fortunate to lose in 1929 because it handed the responsibility of Government to the CPNP just as the world-wide depression was about to descend on Australia. A fortunate election defeat allowed the ALP to avoid the problems of governing during the financial crisis and to capitalise on the misfortunes of the Moore Government at the 1932 election.

The majority of contemporary observers singled out the internal condition of the Labor party as the major cause of the defeat of the McCormack Government. Sources as diverse as CA Bernays,<sup>(1)</sup> the Australian Railways Union (ARU)<sup>(2)</sup> and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE)<sup>(3)</sup> concurred that the Labor ministry in 1929 paid the electoral price of alienating key sections of its support among the more militant Queensland trade unions. These sentiments were echoed by three trade unionists who were involved in Labor politics in the late 1920s. Frank Waters, who at that time was an honorary official in the Amalgamated Postal Workers Union (APWU), viewed the Government's defeat as the result of trade union reaction to the cabinet's handling of the 1927 South Johnstone strike.<sup>(4)</sup> Bill Morrow,<sup>(5)</sup> then a regional organiser for the ARU, and Jack Read,<sup>(6)</sup> a rank and file unionist, were more specific in arguing that McCormack's treatment of the ARU led to his downfall. Academic investigations have endorsed the opinions of the contemporaries and few have quarrelled with Kett Kennedy's observation

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1. CA Bernays, Our Seventh Political Decade, 1920-1930, Sydney, 1931, p 55.
  2. Advocate, 15 June, 1929.
  3. Headlight, 5 July, 1929.
  4. Interview with Frank Waters, 17 June, 1975, transcript, p 1.
  5. Interview with Senator Bill Morrow, 21 August, 1974, transcript, p 1.
  6. Interview with Jack Read, 8 September, 1975, transcript, p 5.



that 'there is no doubt that several traditional ALP supporters cast their votes for CPN candidates, the one large block which was discernible being the militant trade unionists.'<sup>(7)</sup>

Despite its popularity, there is little statistical or other evidence to support this view. If one factor is to be singled out as the primary cause of Labor's defeat in 1929 then that factor was the state of the Queensland economy.

The 1920s was a contradictory decade for the Labor party in Queensland: on the one hand, the party enjoyed consistent electoral success; yet, at the same time, it was raked with serious internal divisions. The divisions were multi-dimensional. Disputes between the cabinet and sections of the trade union movement were paralleled by divisions among and within the unions themselves - notably involving the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Australian Railways Union. Because many of the unions involved were affiliated with the ALP, these factional disputes were reflected within both the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party.

From 1915 to 1919 relations between the trade unions and the Labor Government of TJ Ryan were generally cordial. The unions welcomed the Government's endeavours in the areas of social and industrial reform and the Queensland Labor movement escaped the divisiveness produced in other States by the conscription controversy

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7. K Kennedy, *The Public Life of William McCormack*, PhD, James Cook University, 1973, vol 1, p 384, and Kennedy, K, 'William McCormack:Forgotten Labor Leader', in DJ Murphy and RB Joyce (eds.), Queensland Political Portraits, 1859-1952, Brisbane, 1978, p 369. Others who have endorsed this opinion include: EM Higgins, 'Queensland Labor:Trade Unionists versus Premiers', HSANZ, 9;34, May, 1960, p 140; AA Morrison, 'Militant Labour in Queensland, 1912-1927', JRAHS, 38;5, 1952, p 234; RM Martin, Trade Unions in Australia, Melbourne, 1975, pp 9-10; G Lewis, 'Queensland Nationalism and Australian Capitalism', in EL Wheelwright and K Buckley (eds.), Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism, vol 2, Sydney, 1978, p 127

of 1916/17.<sup>(8)</sup> This harmony was ruptured by the onset of the post-World War One recession and the failure of Theodore's attempts to raise a loan in London in 1920.<sup>(9)</sup> In an attempt to offset the State's financial difficulties, the Government adopted a number of policies which brought it into conflict with the trade union movement. In 1922 the Arbitration Court, in response to a drop in the cost of living, reduced the basic wage by five shillings to four pounds per week and, as a further economy measure, the Government applied to the Court for a wage reduction for its own employees. When this was granted, the ARU spearheaded a public campaign against the cost-cutting policies of the cabinet.<sup>(10)</sup> The issue dominated the 1923 Labor-in-Politics convention and, while a motion to restore the wage cuts was defeated by two votes, convention instructed the Government to amend the Arbitration Act to provide for a forty-four hour week.<sup>(11)</sup> Theodore was opposed to such a move and refused to legislate on the matter. Intense lobbying of members during the Premier's absence in London in 1924 resulted in the parliamentary caucus overruling the Premier on the issues of wage reduction and the forty-four hour week. Theodore and the cabinet then resigned. This crisis was overcome by the caucus's inability to elect a new cabinet and Theodore's willingness to compromise on the question of the forty-four hour week issue, but the fact that the incident occurred highlighted the problems in the party.<sup>(12)</sup>

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8. The following discussion aims to identify the causes of factionalism in the Labor movement in the 1920s as a prelude to an examination of the ALP's defeat in 1929. It does not aim at a comprehensive history of the Labor movement in the 1920s, for such a history see: MNB Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict within the Labor movement in Qld. 1924-1929*, BA, Queensland, 1964; Higgins, *op.cit.*; Kennedy, *op.cit.*; Morrison, *op.cit.*; DJ Murphy, 'Edward Granville Theodore', in Murphy and Joyce, *op.cit.*
  9. For details of the rather unusual reasons for Theodore's failure see: Murphy, *op.cit.* p 317f and CB Schedvin, 'E. G. Theodore and the London Pastoral Lobby', *Politics*, 6;1, May 1971.
  10. See Cribb, *op.cit.*, p 11f.
  11. Official Report Eleventh Labor in Politics Convention, Emu Park, March 1923.
  12. For details see Murphy, *op.cit.*, p 328f; Morrison, *op.cit.*, p 223f

Throughout the 1920s the Labor cabinet found itself in regular conflict with a group of trade unions led by the ARU. ARU hostility to the Government sprang from two major sources. The chief officers of the union, President George Rymer and Secretary Tim Moroney, were ideologically opposed to the democratic socialism of the Labor leadership. Until 1926 both were members of the ALP but were attracted to the anarcho-syndicalist ideas that had found expression in the IWW movement during the first world war. The State Government and the ARU were in an employer-employee relationship and the fact that the union was prepared to use direct action to obtain its industrial objectives also produced conflict between the two. Ironically it was the policies of the Ryan and Theodore Governments that helped the ARU to become a powerful force in Labor politics in the 1920s. Theodore, first as Treasurer and later as Premier, promoted the expansion of the State's railway service in order to provide employment opportunities and to assist the Government's closer settlement policies. From 1915 to 1926 the number of kilometres of railway track in Queensland increased by 27 percent from 7,994 to 10,142. This expansion naturally produced a growth in the number of railway employees from 16,823 in 1920 to 22,036 in 1926. Because it was the major railway union, the ARU benefited from the growth and its membership increased by 46 percent from 9,037 to 13,790 over the same period.

Its increased numerical strength encouraged the ARU to embark on an ambitious industrial campaign to improve the conditions of its members. In 1925 the union led a strike against the Arbitration Court's decision not to restore the 1922 cuts in the basic wage. After a brief but intense campaign, Premier William Gillies acceded to the strikers' demands and legislated for a basic wage of £4/5/- per week.<sup>(13)</sup> Kennedy is correct in his observation that this victory marked the pinnacle of ARU influence in the 1920s,<sup>(14)</sup> but it also provoked a backlash within the ALP that was to have serious consequences for the entire Labor movement. William Gillies,

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13. Caucus Minutes, 31 August, 1925, p 245.

14. Kennedy in Murphy and Joyce, op.cit., p 359.

who had been Minister for Agriculture since 1919, was elected leader by twenty two votes to twenty one over William McCormack,<sup>(15)</sup> when Theodore vacated the Premiership in his unsuccessful bid to enter Federal politics in February 1925. The trade union movement welcomed the election of Gillies and ' .hoped that such appointment will be the means of achieving. .a better understanding between the industrial and political wings of the Labor movement.'<sup>(16)</sup> However, Gillies' capitulation to the ARU's demands in August 1925 confirmed the fears of many caucus members that he lacked the desire and ability to confront the militant and left-wing elements in the party. Gillies came to share this belief and after only eight months as Premier, he arranged for his appointment to the newly formed Board of Trade and Arbitration in October 1925.<sup>(17)</sup> The caucus then elected Gillies' deputy, William McCormack, as leader and Premier. McCormack was an ex-AWU official, with a reputation for toughness and with a record of anti-ARU actions.<sup>(18)</sup> It was precisely these qualities that endeared him to the caucus majority.<sup>(19)</sup>

McCormack, with the assistance of the AWU faction within the party, set out to neutralize the influence of the ARU within the ALP. On Theodore's initiative, the 1924 Federal Conference of the ALP had decided against any affiliation with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and henceforth required all ALP members to sign a pledge declaring that they were not members of the CPA. In July 1925 McCormack moved at a meeting of the Queensland Central Executive (QCE) of the ALP, that former CPA member, Fred Paterson, not be endorsed as the Labor candidate for the State seat of Port Curtis. This caused an uproar among the ARU delegates because Paterson was a paid official

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15. Caucus Minutes, 25 February, 1925, p 219. On the first ballot Gillies and McCormack each had nineteen votes, Forgan Smith had four and Alfred Jones one vote. The result for Gillies was achieved at the second ballot.

16. TLC Minutes, 25 February, 1925, p 98.

17. Caucus Minutes, 21 October, 1925, p 262.

18. It was McCormack who had urged a hard-line policy against striking ARU members in North Queensland in 1917, Murphy, op.cit., p 313.

19. Cribb, op.cit., p 56.

of that union.<sup>(20)</sup> At the November QCE meeting all delegates present were called upon to sign the anti-communist pledge. Tim Moroney and George Rymer of the ARU refused to sign on the grounds that the QCE did not have the authority to demand such an action. The President then ordered the two ARU delegates to withdraw from the meeting.<sup>(21)</sup> When the Labor-in-Politics convention opened at Southport in February 1926, it was obvious from McCormack's manner that he was prepared for a final showdown with the ARU. The ARU delegates (Moroney, Rymer, Hartley and Foley) had signed the pledge but had typed across it the following statement:

The QCE has no authority under the rules of the ALP (State of Queensland) to demand this pledge. It is therefore signed under protest and on instruction of the State Council of the ARU. (22)

The credentials committee declined to accept the pledge signed in this form and refused to seat the ARU delegates. A motion to permit the ARU members another opportunity to sign was defeated by the narrow margin of forty three votes to thirty eight. Protracted negotiations failed to secure the re-admission of the ARU delegates to the QCE.

A stalemate then developed in which the QCE would not accept ARU delegates who would not sign the pledge unconditionally and the ARU refused to choose alternative delegates. This meant that the ARU was effectively ~~de~~barred from the party and was to remain so until 1957. McCormack had now achieved one of his major objectives - to remove the ARU's influence from the ALP. His subsequent attempts to curb the industrial influence of the union were to be achieved at a much higher price.

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20. QCE Minutes, 31 July, 1925.

21. *ibid.*, 27 November, 1925.

22. Official Report of the Twelfth Labor in Politics Convention, Southport, February 1926, p 4; and K Kennedy, 'The Anti-Communist Pledge Crisis', in Murphy, DJ, Joyce, RB and Hughes, CA, Labor in Power, Brisbane, 1980, p 375.

McCormack led the Labor party to an electoral victory in May 1926 and his prestige was such that the caucus dispensed with the usual ballot and re-elected him leader unaminously.<sup>(23)</sup> With the parliamentary party united under him, the Premier was confirmed in his belief that the union militants could be defeated by a policy of firmness. He demonstrated this during a strike of Brisbane building workers in February 1927 when he declared that 'the Government takes the full responsibility of fighting the unions on the forty hour week dispute'<sup>(24)</sup> Later the same year a strike over preferential employment broke out at the South Johnstone sugar mill near Innisfail.<sup>(25)</sup> From a localized dispute, the affair rapidly spread into a major confrontation involving not only the AWU, which covered the workers directly involved, but also the ARU, AFULE and a number of other railway unions. McCormack arrived home from an overseas visit and chose to regard the strike as an attempt by the ARU to extend its influence throughout the entire railway service.<sup>(26)</sup> To prevent this McCormack was determined to terminate the dispute as quickly as possible. He did so by issuing an order of dismissal to all members of the railway service. The Premier then decreed that only those men who were prepared to sign a pledge to obey the rules of the Railway Department would be offered re-employment.

While the press and the Opposition hailed the Premier's action as a resolute stand against industrial anarchy, the union movement and many sections of the ALP combined to heap abuse upon him. The 1927 Trade Union Congress overwhelmingly passed a motion condemning McCormack and declared that 'this Government is not worthy of the confidence of the workers'<sup>(27)</sup> Such criticism was not restricted to the trade union movement. During a major parliamentary debate on

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23. Caucus Minutes, 17 June, 1926, p 269.

24. Worker, 23 February, 1927.

25. For details of the strike see: Kennedy in Murphy and Joyce, op.cit., p 363f; Higgins, op.cit., p 145f; Morrison, op.cit., p 230f; Cribb, op.cit., p60f.

26. Higgins, op.cit., p 143.

27. Official Report of Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, October 1927, p4.

the South Johnstone dispute no fewer than eleven Labor backbenchers openly castigated the Premier for his actions.<sup>(28)</sup> The outspoken criticism of these members gave rise to speculation that the parliamentary Labor party was about to experience a major schism. It was rumoured that between sixteen and twenty members were prepared to vote for a caucus resolution of no confidence in McCormack.<sup>(29)</sup> Yet, when the delayed caucus meeting was finally convened on 9 September all major opposition to the cabinet had been dissipated and a vote of confidence in McCormack was passed by thirty-eight votes to four.<sup>(30)</sup>

McCormack achieved this very favourable result by intimating to members that he would be prepared to hold an early election if the vote went against him.<sup>(31)</sup> The Premier employed a similar tactic in successfully covering the Central Executive of the ALP. When the QCE met on 23 September a motion sponsored by the Carpenters' Union calling for the expulsion from the party of McCormack and his cabinet lapsed for want of a seconder. The Executive Committee of the QCE then put forward a compromise motion which laid the blame for the affair on 'misunderstandings caused through lack of co-ordination between the industrial and political wings of the movement'<sup>(32)</sup> This motion was carried. While these decisions saved McCormack and staved off a formal split in the party, the South Johnstone dispute and the animosities it engendered were to beset the party for the next two years. The notice paper for the 1928 Labor-in-Politics convention contained so many 'anti-politician' motions that the President, WH Demaine, felt it necessary to comment on the fact in his Presidential address.<sup>(33)</sup> Unfortunately the President's expression of concern did not prevent the convention embarking on a long and recriminatory debate on the South Johnstone strike which did little to heal the rifts that still existed within the party.<sup>(34)</sup>

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28. QPD, clxix, 6 September, 1927, p 44f.

29. Bernays, op.cit., p 48: Brisbane Courier, 6 September, 1927.

30. Caucus Minutes, 9 September, 1927, p 326.

31. Cribb, op.cit., p 105.

32. QCE Minutes, 23 September, 1927.

33. Official Report of the Thirteenth Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1928, President's address, p 6.

34. ibid., p 37f.

The response to the South Johnstone dispute gave the misleading impression that the trade unions were united in their opposition to the Labor cabinet. While the AWU Branch Executive voted on 21 June 1927 to officially support the strike,<sup>(35)</sup> this action was adopted with a good deal of reluctance. As the AWU Secretary, Bill Riordan, said at the time 'the only way that we could confine it to the South Johnstone area was to make it an official strike'<sup>(36)</sup> This attitude on the part of the AWU was pilloried by the ARU which accused Riordan of being more concerned with the votes of the sugar farmers than he was with winning the strike.<sup>(37)</sup> Such rifts in the strikers' solidarity also extended to relationships between the ARU and the AFULE. The AFULE, despite its suspicions of ARU motives,<sup>(38)</sup> participated in the strike but its President, Theo Kissick, refused to appear in public with either Tim Moroney or George Rymer or to allow them to address members of the AFULE.<sup>(39)</sup> The ARU response to this action consisted of a trenchant denunciation of officials of both the AFULE and the Guards Association for allegedly 'selling out' to the Government.<sup>(40)</sup> This antagonism had its denouement when Kissick was expelled from the Trades and Labor Council because it was alleged that he had personally conspired with McCormack to undermine the strike.

Given the history of inter-union relationships in Queensland in the 1920s, it was not surprising that they would find it impossible to maintain even a modicum of unity and common purpose during a major industrial dispute. In fact the chief reason the ARU called off the strike was because of dissensions among the participants. The ARU, as an all grades union, was keen to establish a One Big Union within the railway industry but faced vigorous opposition from unions such

35. Worker, 24 June, 1927.

36. Advocate, 15 July, 1927

37. ARU South Eastern District Committee Minutes, 19 August, 1927, p 12. Held at ARU Office, Brisbane.

38. AFULE Executive Minutes, 7 August, 1927, p 2. E212/5 RSSSA/ANU.

39. Brisbane Courier, 27 August, 1927.

40. Advocate, 21 September, 1927.



as the AFULE who viewed the ARU proposals as a threat to their own independence. Differences over policy matters soon became confused with personality clashes and by the mid-1920s a state of open warfare existed between the ARU and the AFULE. Of even greater significance were the deep divisions that existed between the ARU and the AWU. The reasons for the conflict that existed between these two important unions were many and complex. While not strictly a railway union, the AWU covered many workers in various sections of the railway industry. Unfortunately demarcation lines were not always clearly defined and this led to frequent clashes between the AWU and ARU over the question of 'body snatching'. On the political plane, the ARU was influenced by radical syndicalist/socialist notions whereas the AWU espoused a moderate version of democratic socialism. Within the arena of ALP politics the AWU was in a dominant position, with the ARU cast in the role of an insurgent. Power in the Labor party depended on the membership size of affiliated unions because the number of delegates per union was related to the number of members in that union. The AWU viewed with concern the growth in ARU membership in the 1920s because it feared that a strong ARU would be in a position to lead a coalition of dissident unions, including the Meatworkers and Waterside Workers, in a direct challenge to its own political and industrial dominance within the Labor movement. The ARU, on the other hand, believed that the AWU was determined to destroy it. For instance, the ARU felt that one of the reasons the AWU purchased the controlling interest in the trade union owned newspaper, the Daily Standard, was to provide it with yet another forum to attack the ARU.<sup>(41)</sup>

Two incidents which occurred in 1926 indicate the extent of the animosity that existed between the two unions. In March of that year a group of ARU dissidents led by the south eastern divisional secretary, J Hayes, attempted a coup against Rymer and Moroney. The attempt failed and Hayes was expelled from the union.<sup>(42)</sup> Hayes had

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41. Report of ARU Secretary and President, 1926, Manuscript, Welsby, Papers, 40/A72, p 6, FML.

42. Kennedy, PhD, op.cit., p 291.

attracted the active support of the AWU in his endeavours and the Worker referred to the leadership of the ARU as 'an uncompromising, unreasoning, dictatorship' <sup>(43)</sup> In September 1926 the AWU stepped up its campaign against the ARU by establishing a 'railway section' in order to entice disenchanted railway employees away from the ARU. This was a provocative act which was denounced by Moroney as a blatant attempt at 'bodysnatching' The AWU hierarchy was shaken when its western district secretary, JM Durkin, wrote to the Worker and agreed with Moroney. <sup>(44)</sup> Durkin's action was supported in a strongly worded motion by the western district committee of the AWU. <sup>(45)</sup> The union executive was not prepared to brook such disloyalty and Durkin was dismissed summarily from his union position. He refused to accept this dismissal and instituted legal action against the AWU. <sup>(46)</sup> Despite the failure of his action, the court hearing provided ammunition for the ARU and further soured relations between it and the AWU. While the ARU may have gained some solace from the AWU's internecine problems, the combined effect of the AWU's action, their virtual expulsion from the ALP, the defeat of the South Johnstone strike, and retrenchments and unemployment in the railway industry rendered them impotent as an effective rival to the AWU.

Despite its internal difficulties, the ALP achieved consistent electoral success from 1915 until the 1929 defeat. The problems produced by factional disputes within the party were offset by the divided and debilitated state of the non-Labor parties. The defeat of the Denham Government in 1915 had plunged the non-Labor parties in Queensland into a period of acute dissension. Queensland's economic development determined that the urban non-Labor party, variously termed Liberal, Nationalist, United, was unable to secure ascendancy over the rural non-Labor elements that eventually were to form the Country party. The political birth of a united Country

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43. Worker, 11 March, 1926.

44. ibid., 6 October, 1926.

45. ibid., 13 October, 1926.

46. The Durkin Case, 1927, Hayes Collection, FML.

party in Queensland was also a rather torrid affair which was characterized by factionalism and bitterness. Partly as a consequence of its inter and intra-party disputes, the Opposition lacked a leader who could provide a match for either TJ Ryan or EG Theodore. In compiling a confidential report on the Nationalist party organization in Queensland in 1920, Archdale Parkhill, who was then Secretary of the Nationalist Association in New South Wales, enumerated one of the major problems facing the non-Labor forces:

Whilst the organization can be improved and built up on technical and systematic lines into an effective organising machine, still, it will clearly,...lack the enthusiasm and interest which lifts it out of a mere mechanical organisation into a big force and inspires it with life and vigour, which only a trusted and capable leader can effect. (47)

Denham himself was defeated in the electorate of Oxley in 1915, and his successors as leader (J Tolmie, EH McCartney, W Vowles, and CJ Taylor) did not prove themselves to be outstanding politicians. Their parties suffered four consecutive electoral defeats under their leadership.

The relatively poor performance (in terms of votes) of the ALP in the 1920 election contained lessons which at least some in the non-Labor parties were prepared to learn. Before the 1920 election these parties were beginning to exhibit symptoms of what might be called 'the perpetual opposition syndrome'. However, the troubles encountered by the Theodore Government gave them hope that a return to the Treasury benches was possible. Yet, those committed to unifying the non-Labor forces had a difficult task ahead of them. At both the 1920 and 1923 elections no fewer than three separate parties carried the anti-Labor banner. Moreover there existed deep mutual hostilities among these parties. A city-country antagonism was further complicated by fissures within the Country

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47. B Irving, and B Schedvin, 'A Confidential Report on Nationalist Party Organisation in Queensland, 1920', Queensland Heritage, 2;8, May, 1973, p 16.

parties that were as frequent as they were incurable. Regional differences, sectional differences, and policy differences combined with baser motives of personal hatred, jealousy, and ambition to ensure that non-Labor remained disunited and that Labor remained the Government.

The organisational structures of the various non-Labor parties were themselves an obstacle to unity. Nationalist organisation was extremely weak and the Nationalists, or United party as they were called at the 1923 election, were more a parliamentary faction than a mass political party. Lack of party discipline made it difficult to bind parliamentary members to specific proposals such as a decision to join with other parties in an electoral alliance. Theoretically the Country party was a more tightly structured organisation, but it was not until the late 1920s that a united Country party existed in Queensland. The fact that many groups such as the United Graziers Association tended to disaffiliate from country political organisations if particular policies or strategies offended them did nothing to encourage solidarity. In short, the fluidity and looseness of non-Labor party structures were an important obstacle to attempts to achieve unity of purpose among them. Despite these obstacles, a number of attempts at unity were made. In January 1923 there was an attempt at a conference held in Rockhampton to form a party called the Queensland United Party (Nationalist and Country Party). This was an ambitious venture that failed because only four of the twenty-one Country party State parliamentarians were prepared to join. One of the major reasons behind Country party reluctance to become committed to the organisation was the fear that it was really an attempt by the United party to swamp them.<sup>(48)</sup>

The first steps towards a lasting coalition between the non-Labor parties was not taken until 9 April, 1924. On that date

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48. BD Graham, The Formation of the Australian Country Parties, Canberra, 1966, p 180.

Arthur Edward Moore was elected leader of the Opposition. This decision was followed a year later by the merger of the CPP (Country Parliamentary Party) and the UPP (United Parliamentary Party) into a single Country Progressive Party with Moore as leader. In a lengthy statement the new party engaged in a good deal of soul-searching regarding the divisiveness of the past, declaring, in conclusion, that 'the party is not sectional, and being State-wide, is for the whole of the people' <sup>(49)</sup> This noble declaration was not, however, totally in accord with reality. Four United Party members (CJ Taylor, WH Barnes, W Kelso and GP Barnes) were not invited to join the new party because of their alleged disloyalty. This charge of disloyalty related to their refusal to accept an agreement entered into in January 1925 whereby the National Union <sup>(50)</sup> was to be the sole collection agency for the CPP and the UPP. While these dissidents eventually made their peace with the new party, they did not constitute the only problem the new CPP and its leader had to overcome. The birth of the party was greeted with hostility by Queensland's major newspaper, the Brisbane Courier. Precise motives are difficult to establish, but the Courier concentrated its criticism upon the CPP's links with the National Union. In a stinging editorial the paper claimed that:

Democracy is a futility, a howling farce in fact, if the electors are to be subservient to a coterie of representatives of the moneyed interests of Melbourne such as the National Union is. <sup>(51)</sup>

These attacks by the Brisbane Courier were accompanied by opposition from sections of the old CPP and UPP. Non-parliamentary members of the two parties were angry because the merger was enacted primarily by the politicians, and because they felt that there had been inadequate consultation with other sections of the parties.

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49. Brisbane Courier, 15 May, 1925.

50. For details on the National Union see; BD Graham, 'The Place of Finance Committees in Non-Labor Politics', 1910-1930, AJPH, 6, 1960.

51. Brisbane Courier, 15 May, 1925.

Because of the Courier's own antipathy, these dissidents had their views widely publicized in the paper's columns to such an extent that it appeared the party amalgamation would be aborted. However, skilful leadership combined with a display of solidarity by the politicians to ensure the successful birth of the new coalition party. In December 1925 the merger was completed and the name changed to Country Progressive National Party. The insertion of the word National was a concession to United party members.

Having successfully endured its birth traumas, the new party made important inroads into Labor party support at the 1926 election. While the state of the parties remained substantially unaffected by the election and while the swing to the CPNP was only 1.2%, the fact that the CPNP (49.12%) outpolled the ALP (47.96%) on primary votes provided Moore's party with a much needed psychological boost. This was the first occasion for many years that the Government had faced a united opposition. The result attained by the CPNP placed it in an ideal situation to capitalize on the numerous difficulties that befell the Labor administration in the three years prior to the 1929 election.

The 1929 poll was held on 11 May and produced the first of only two 'normal' changes of Government that were to occur in Queensland over the sixty-five year period between 1915 and 1980. Tables 2:1, 2:2 and 2:3 provide the data necessary to discuss the election result in greater detail.

TABLE 2:1

ELECTION RESULTS, QUEENSLAND 1929 (52)

Party	Percentage Votes	Seats	Percentage Seats
ALP	40.16	27	37.5
CPNP	54.23	43	59.7
Others	5.61	2	2.7

EXPLANATION

This result constituted a 'Nuffield'<sup>(53)</sup> swing of 6.9% to the CPNP and a 'Berrington'<sup>(54)</sup> swing of 8.1% based on the 1926 election result. A feature of the election was the uniformity of the swing, with only six of the seats contested deviating from the anti-Labor trend. Of the sixteen seats (Bulimba, Kelvin Grove, Maree, Merthyr, South Brisbane, Chillagoe, Cook, Eacham, Ipswich, Gympie, Fitzroy, Keppel, Port Curtis, Rockhampton, Rosewood and Toowoomba) which Labor lost to the CPNP only six can be classed as marginal.<sup>(55)</sup> All but five, Bulimba, Kelvin Grove, Merthyr, Port Curtis and Toowoomba, of the seats conceded to the CPNP in 1929 can be termed traditional Labor seats in that they consistently returned ALP members over a series of elections.

52. All election figures, unless otherwise stated, are from CA Hughes, and BD Graham, A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics, 1890-1964, Canberra, 1968; and CA Hughes and BD Graham, Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 1890-1964, Canberra, 1974.

53. 'Nuffield' - after the calculation of swing devised by Butler and Stokes of Nuffield College, Oxford; see, D Butler, and D Stokes, Political Change in Britain, London, 1969. The swing is calculated in the following manner:

$$\frac{(L_1 - L_2) + (C_2 - C_1)}{2}$$

where  $L_1$  = 1926 Labor vote  
 $L_2$  = 1929 Labor vote  
 $C_1$  = 1926 CPNP vote  
 $C_2$  = 1929 CPNP vote

TABLE 2:2

ALP ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE 1920-1929

Election	ALP votes %	Seats %
1920	47.7	38 (52)
1923	48.1	43 (60)
1926	47.9	43 (60)
1929	40.1	27 (37)

54. 'Berrington' - after Hugh Berrington; see, HB Berrington, 'The General Election of 1964', Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Vol.128, Series A, 1965, pp 17-66; and M Mackerras, Elections 1975, Sydney 1975, pp 300f. The Berrington swing is calculated in the following manner:

$$\frac{1/2(L_1 - L_2)}{L_1}$$

Berrington's method relates only to the vote of the party which is losing support. The advantage of Berrington's method for this study is that it relates the swing to the proportion of the original vote at risk. This is particularly important in establishing the proportion of those Labor voters who changed their votes in 'safe' as compared to 'marginal' seats.

55. In this study any seat won with less than 55% of the vote is classed as marginal in the succeeding election. All results cited are first preference votes unless otherwise stated.



TABLE 2:3

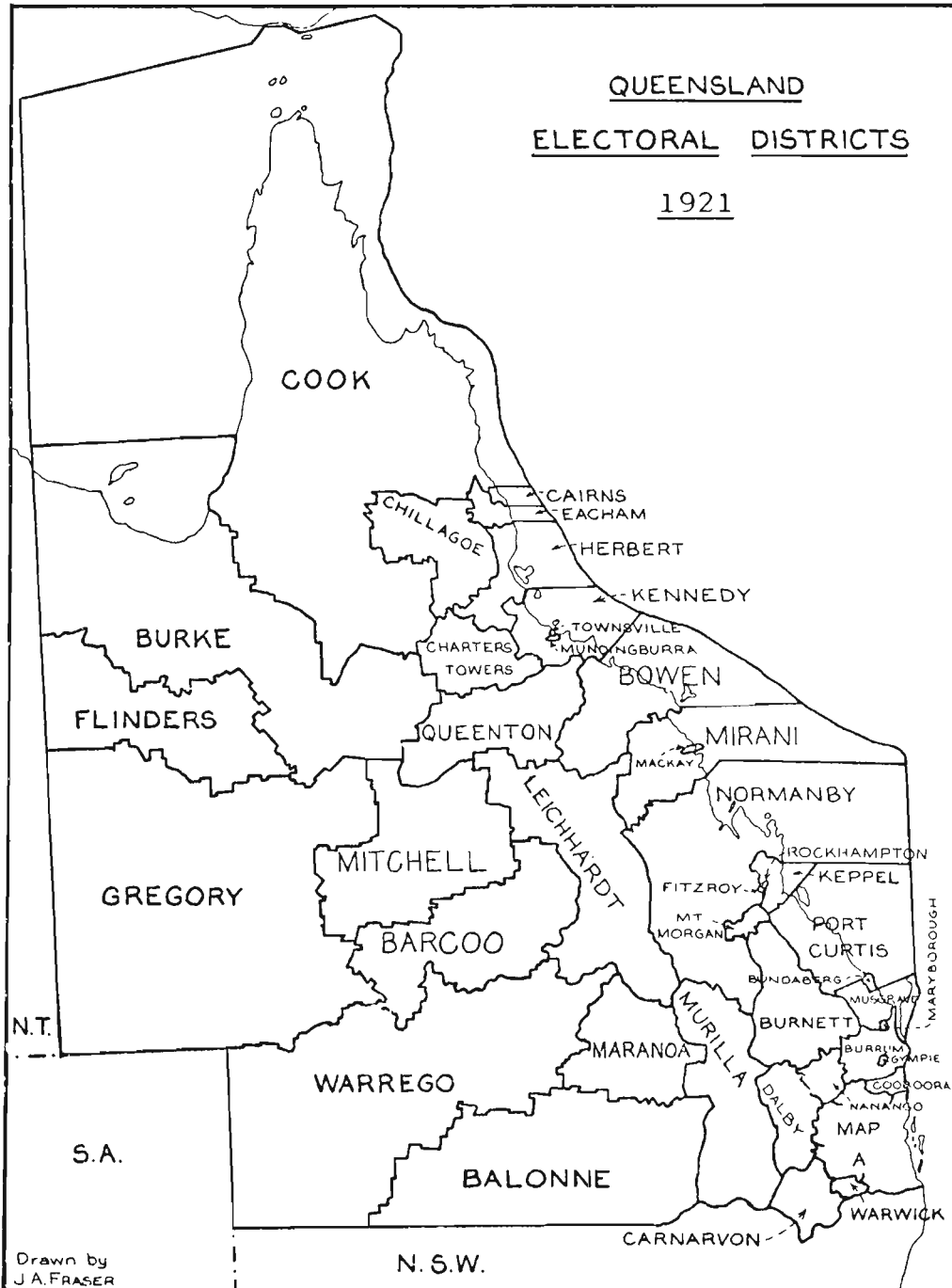
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SWING, 1929

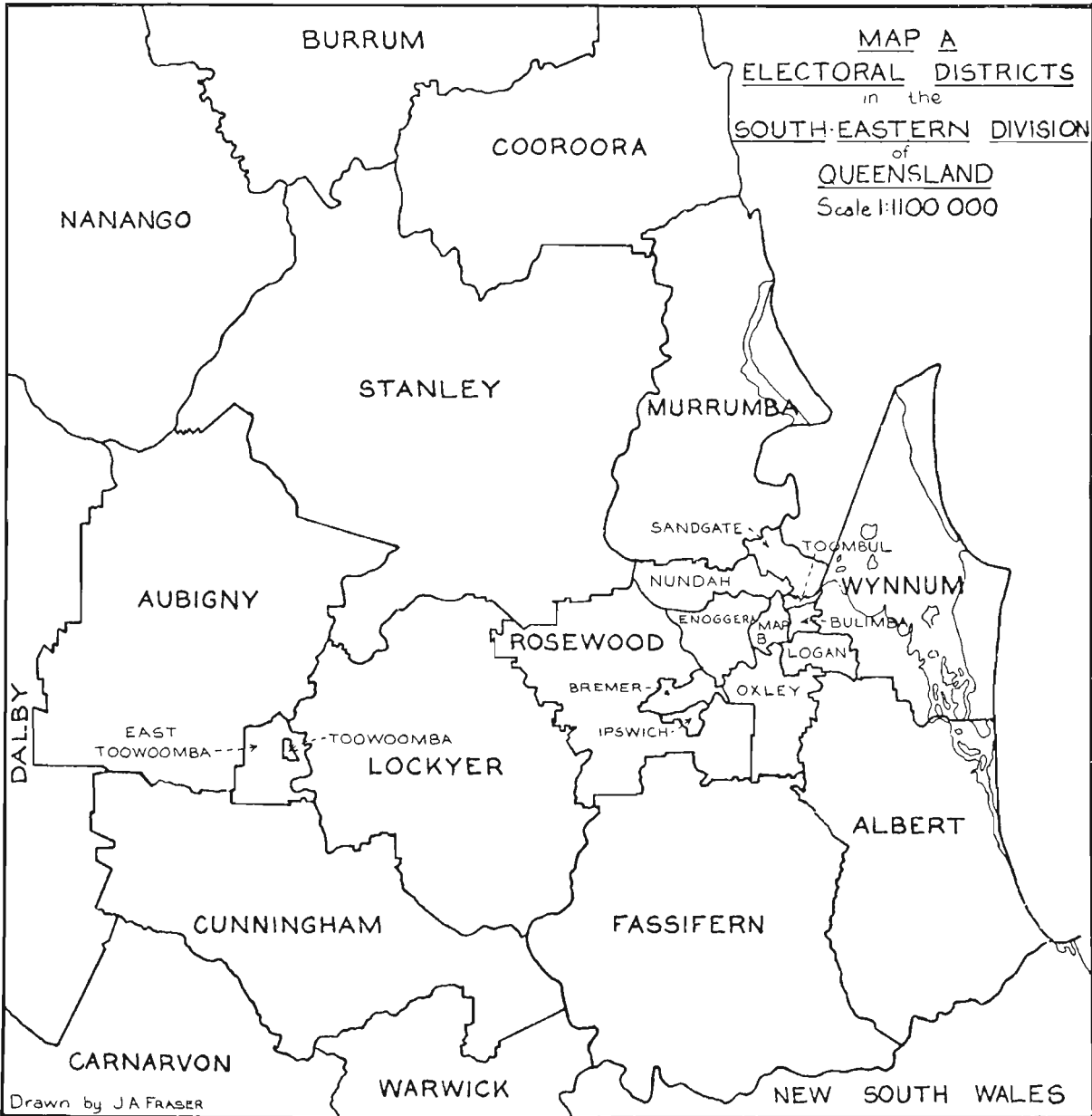
	<u>Nuffield Swing</u> %
<u>Brisbane</u> (includes electorates of Brisbane, <u>Bulimba</u> ,* Buranda, Enoggera, Fortitude Valley, Ithaca, <u>Kelvin Grove</u> , Kurilpa, <u>Maree</u> , <u>Merthyr</u> , Nundah, Paddington, Sandgate, <u>South Brisbane</u> , Toombul, Toowong, Windsor, Wynnum)	= 6.75 to CPNP
<u>Non Metropolitan South East Region</u> (includes electorates of Albert, Aubigny, Bremer, Burrum, Carnarvon, Cooroola, Cunningham, Dalby, East Toowoomba, Fassifern, <u>Gympie</u> , <u>Ipswich</u> , Lockyer, Logan, Murrumba, Manango, <u>Rosewood</u> , Stanley, <u>Toowoomba</u> , Warwick, Wide Bay)	= 8.26 to CPNP
<u>Central Coast Region</u> (includes electorates of Bundaberg, Burnett, <u>Fitzroy</u> , <u>Keppel</u> , Mackay, Maryborough, Mirani, Mount Morgan, Normanby, <u>Port Curtis</u> , <u>Rockhampton</u> )	= 8.77 to CPNP
<u>North Coast Region</u> (includes electorates of Bowen, Cairns, Charters Towers, <u>Chillagoe</u> , <u>Cook</u> , <u>Eacham</u> , Herbert, Kennedy, Mundingburra, Queenton, Townsville)	= 7.92 to CPNP
<u>Western Region</u> + (includes electorates of Balonne, Barcoo, Burke, Flinders, Gregory, Leichardt, Maranoa, Mitchell, Murilla, Warrego)	= 1.57 to CPNP

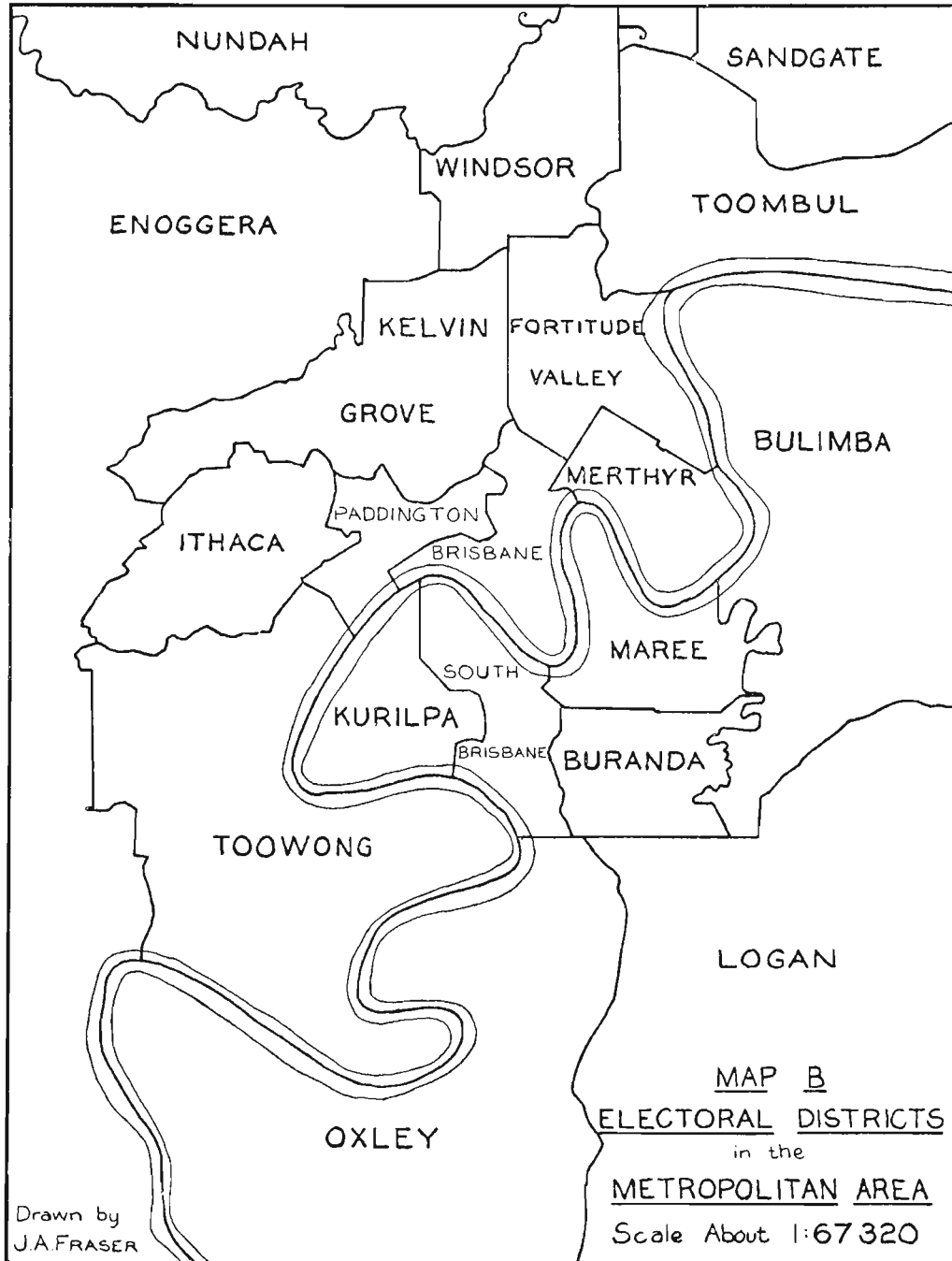
\* Seats underlined are those lost by Labor in 1929

+ In five of this region's ten seats the Labor candidate was returned unopposed.

See electoral maps for the geographic location of seats.







Contrary to popular opinion at the time, the ALP did not lose any seats in 1929 because of the intervention of dissident Labor parties. Such parties did contest a number of electorates but they had no influence on the result. It is not surprising that the intensity of the factionalism within the Labor movement in the late 1920s, together with dissatisfaction with the performance of the cabinet on the part of some unionists, would raise the issue of forming a trade union or industrial party to the left of the ALP. Simmering discontent over the question of the anti-communist pledge produced a number of meetings at the Brisbane Trades Hall at which a decision was taken in January 1926 to form an Industrial Labor Party.<sup>(56)</sup> Union support for such a move was far from unanimous. The AWU and the AFULE declared it 'bogus',<sup>(57)</sup> and the Printers' Union threatened to disaffiliate from the TLC unless that body declared itself against the party.<sup>(58)</sup> When the ARU executive decided not to encourage the development of a new party the initiative collapsed.

The approach of the 1929 election revived interest in such a party. An added stimulus was a change in policy on the part of the Communist party which decided to oppose the ALP in the election and was prepared to encourage other dissident groups to do the same.<sup>(59)</sup> In the six months prior to the State election a number of Left Wing Labor Electoral Committees were established with the intention of challenging sitting Labor members. Certain unions gave assistance to these committees by way of funds and organisational support. One such union was the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) which concentrated its efforts in the Paddington electorate.<sup>(60)</sup> QCE response to this move was swift and in February 1929 the WWF

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56. Brisbane Courier, 16 January, 1926.

57. Official Report AWU Thirteenth Annual Delegate Meeting, Brisbane, January, 1926, p 37 FML: AFULE Executive, Minutes, 3 October, 1926, E 212/5, p 2, RSSSA-ANU.

58. PIEUA Board of Management Minutes, 25 April, 1927.

59. See further chapter 5.

60. WWF Minutes, 6 February, 1929, pp 37-8, E213/9, RSSSA/ANU.

secretary (Andy Brown) was expelled from the ALP.<sup>(61)</sup> Despite the intervention of the Federal branch of the union, the WWF refused to support the ALP in the election and was subsequently excluded from the party for non-payment of affiliation fees.<sup>(62)</sup> The success of the left-wing movement depended on the support of the key dissident union - the ARU. The ARU's formal policy on the matter was debated at the union's State council in February 1929. At that meeting a formal motion was proposed that the ARU give full support to the left wing movement. This motion was supported by Mick O'Brien and Frank Nolan but faced strong and skilful opposition from Tim Moroney and George Rymer.<sup>(63)</sup> The discussion closed with the passage of a motion sponsored by Moroney and Rymer which had the effect of withholding ARU commitment to the left wing programme. While Moroney himself was a supporter of the left wing he did not regard it as politic for the ARU to be formally associated with the dissident party. Notwithstanding this setback, left wing candidates contested the electorates of Brisbane (JB Miles), Fortitude Valley (JM Durkin),<sup>(64)</sup> Mundingburra (E Tripp), Paddington (FW Paterson), and Townsville (DJ Morris).<sup>(65)</sup> These candidates managed to poll only 0.74% of the total valid votes cast and the ALP won the six seats they contested. The high vote the left wing candidates secured in Mundingburra (18.54%) and Paddington (28.36%) was partly the result of the failure of the CPNP to contest these seats. The entry of the Left Wing Movement into the election did not lead to the loss of any ALP seats because of vote splitting.

Some published accounts of the 1929 election give the mistaken impression that the Labor cabinet was faced with a unanimously hostile trade union movement. This ignores the reconciliations

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61. *ibid.*, 6 March, 1929, p 49 and QCE Minutes, 15 February, 1929.

62. WWF Minutes, 1 May, 1929, p 76; 26 June, 1929, p 112; and 22 August, 1929, E213/9 RSSSA/ANU.

63. Minutes ARU State Council, 7-10 February, 1929, p 134; Advocate, 15 April, 1929.

64. Durkin had stood unsuccessfully as an Industrial Candidate in the 1928 Mitchell by-election.

65. Miles, Tripp, Paterson and Morris stood as Communists.

that had taken place between the Government and many of the unions in the twelve months before the election. After the shock of the 1927 TUC, the QCE and the AWU made a concerted effort to restore unity within the party.<sup>(66)</sup> The AWU group was instrumental in defeating most of the anti-McCormack motions that came before the 1928 Labor-in-Politics convention. When the 1928 Trade Union Congress assembled in October a motion was put forward calling on all unions to support both the Federal and State Labor parties. After a lengthy debate this motion was lost twenty-six votes to twenty-four but was subsequently carried 22,000 to 18,000 when a card vote was demanded.<sup>(67)</sup> The margin of victory was narrow, yet the Trades and Labor Council at its March 1929 meeting carried a motion by forty-five votes to twenty, endorsing the congress decision.<sup>(68)</sup>

When faced with the choice of supporting the ALP or the CPNP, the majority of Queensland's unions agreed with the Printers' that 'the worst Labor Government is a long way better than the best Tory Government...'<sup>(69)</sup> Yet the defeat of the Speaker, W Bertram, in Maree together with the defeats of Railway Minister, Jim Larcombe, in Keppel and Labour Minister, DA Gledson, in Ipswich all occurred in centres of strong ARU influence; which suggests perhaps that the union rank and file did seek vengeance on the parliamentary party. An argument against the thesis that it was the militant unionists who put out the Government concerns the defeat of HL Hartley in the central coast seat of Fitzroy. Hartley was the doyen of the militants for it was he who had led the attack on Theodore's wage reduction policies at the 1923 Labor-in-Politics convention. More recently Hartley had been the most unrestrained in his denunciation of McCormack's handling of the South Johnstone strike, and was one

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66. QCE Minutes, 28 January, 1928.

67. Report of Queensland Trade Union Congress, October 1928, p 3f.

68. TLC Minutes, 6 March, 1929.

69. Printing Trades Journal, 9 April, 1929, p 71.

of the four who had voted against him in caucus. On the eve of the election Hartley publicly endorsed the Left Wing Programme. If the votes of militant unionists were as decisive in 1929 as some have claimed then Hartley should have had an easy victory. Yet he was defeated in a massive eighteen percent swing to the CPNP candidate. Further evidence against the view that Labor lost in 1929 because of the votes of alienated unionists is the uniformity of the swing that occurred. Such a uniformity suggests that Labor's defeat was not occasioned by an aggregation of localized grievances but was the result of a more general change of allegiance on the part of the electorate.

In the years subsequent to the election a series of myths grew up within the Labor movement regarding the 1929 defeat. One was that rather than express their dissatisfaction with McCormack's ministry by voting for the CPNP, a significant percentage of hitherto loyal Labor supporters abstained from voting and thus brought about the defeat of the Government. The facts disprove this thesis. The total percentage of the enrolled electorate voting in 1929 (89.15%) was higher than that of 1926 (88.73%) and 1923 (82.23%). While the average turnout in the seats Labor lost was slightly lower (89.02%) an analysis of the pattern of turnout in those sixteen seats reveals no evidence of a uniform low vote. A second myth which gained some currency in Labor circles was that although the disenchanted went to the polls they deliberately spoiled their ballot papers, thus ensuring the defeat of the Government. Again the facts undermine the credibility of this argument. The informal vote in 1929 (1.5%) was only slightly higher than that in 1926 (1.2%), and the informal vote in the sixteen seats lost by Labor (1.3%) was below that of the 1929 State average.

There certainly was a qualitative difference in the campaigns conducted by the ALP and the CPNP in 1929, but it is doubtful if this alone decided the result. The Government's campaign strategy was to stand on its record of sound management over the previous



fourteen years. When taxed on the growing unemployment problem which seemed to belie this argument, McCormack replied that it was caused by forces beyond the control of his administration.<sup>(70)</sup> Labor's campaign was apologetic and lack-lustre when compared with the progressive and vigorous campaign conducted by the CPNP. As Opposition leader, Moore travelled widely through all areas of the State speaking to crowds large and small. His central campaign theme was that fourteen years of Labor rule had reduced Queensland's economy to a ruinous state. When he came to deliver his policy speech in April 1929 Moore outlined a series of projected changes too numerous to itemize in full,<sup>(71)</sup> but which included promises such as the abolition of the rural award, tax relief, restoration of freehold tenure and stimulation of employment. In a rare moment of rhetorical flourish he appealed to the voters:

My party offers sound, progressive legislation and honest, efficient administration. It will undo the mischief of recent years, arrest the financial avalanche, plug leaking state losses, encourage instead of penalise enterprise; and, by reducing taxation and restoring confidence, will promote national and individual prosperity. I appeal not to your greed and cupidity, but to your intelligence and patriotism. (72)

During the campaign Moore directed particular attention to farmers and the urban working class. To the former he offered relief from Labor's allegedly restrictive rural legislation, and to the latter he offered security of employment via the raising of a special loan of £2m to finance projects to absorb the unemployed.

Moore's individual efforts were supported by an ably conducted and imaginative campaign on the part of the CPNP organisation. In addition to the normal media advertisements, the CPNP produced a

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70. Daily Mail, 16 April, 1929.

71. See ibid., 5 April, 1929; Bernays, op.cit., pp 60-64; and CPNP Speakers' Notes, 1929 Election, Brisbane, p 102, OML.

72. CPNP Election Leaflet, 1929, Queensland Political Pamphlets, Box 7, OML.

series of striking cartoon-style dodgers which pilloried the alleged ineptitude of successive Labor Governments in such areas as agricultural policy, employment and industrial development.<sup>(73)</sup> These dodgers were supported by a number of articles in the Telegraph newspaper which fulminated against the evils of 'socialism' and were collected in a twenty-four page CPNP propaganda manual.<sup>(74)</sup> The CPNP claimed great credit for its slogans 'Change the Government!' and 'Give the Boy a Chance!' in determining the outcome of the election. While their claims are supported by contemporary observers such as Bernays,<sup>(75)</sup> the impact of slogans in influencing voters should not be exaggerated. Similarly, the actual campaign period may not be as influential in determining electoral outcomes as has been imagined. David Butler and Donald Stokes concluded, in their seminal study of voting behaviour in the United Kingdom, that:

The voter's choice is not normally a sudden thing, but the product of months or years or even generations. Even those who change their votes are often reverting to some past pattern or reflecting some long established attitude rather than reacting to the specific stimulus of the campaign.. Over the last thirty years one of the primary contributions of studies of opinion change during campaigns has been to revise traditional judgements of the impact of campaigns. Time and again it has been shown that relatively few votes are changed and that these are largely in mutually cancelling directions. (76)

What then did bring about the defeat of Labor in 1929? Obviously, as in any election, there were a number of factors at work, but the depressed state of Queensland's economy deserves more attention than it has received. In Chapter 1 it was shown that the three years between 1926 and 1929 were ones of severe economic recession in Queensland. While agreeing with David Butler's

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73. CPNP Election Dodgers, Nos. 1-15, Fryer Memorial Library FML.

74. Change the Government, 24pp, pa/C18, FML.

75. Bernays, op.cit., p 57.

76. Butler and Stokes, op.cit., p 502.

contention that the manner in which an 'elector translates his economic circumstances into a voting intention is still largely a mystery',<sup>(77)</sup> it is nevertheless true that Australia's electoral history indicates that voters have in the main been quick to respond to variations in levels of employment. No Australian Government (except that in Tasmania in 1931) that went, or was forced, to the polls during the depression survived the ordeal. Since Queensland experienced an earlier depression, McCormack may have been as much a victim of economic circumstances as was Scullin, Lang, Hogan or Mitchell.

There are a number of reasons for preferring the economic explanation of Labor's defeat to the 'treachery of militant unionists' theory. The uniformity of the swing against Labor suggests that the electorate responded to a broad issue - such as the economy (See Table 2:3). If the actions of militants were decisive the swing would have been patchy because it would have varied in accordance with the geographic location of the allegedly disenchanted unionists. If internal dissension exerted such a negative influence on Labor's electoral support then this should have been evident at the 1926 election. Although the South Johnstone dispute lay in the future, there was significant union opposition to the McCormack Government in 1926. Yet Table 2:2 shows that the Labor vote remained stable in 1926. The new element that intervened to disrupt the stability of the Labor vote in the 1920s was the economic recession - the worst effects of which were not felt until after the 1926 election. Other elections held between 1926 and 1929 also reveal the impact of the recession on the Labor vote. At the 1928 Federal election Labor's senate vote in Queensland dropped by 5.5 percent on its 1925 result and at the 1928 Brisbane Mayoralty election the Labor candidate polled only 38.6% of the vote to the CPNP's 61.4%.

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77. D Butler, The Canberra Model, Canberra, 1974, p 89.

A fact that has been overlooked by many writers is that the state of the economy and the resultant unemployment were significant issues at the 1929 election. The trade unions had regularly petitioned the Government to act on the problem,<sup>(78)</sup> and the CPNP made unemployment a major plank in its electoral platform and highlighted it in much of its propaganda.<sup>(79)</sup> Table 2:4 shows that Labor performed worst in its safest seats:

TABLE 2:4

BERRINGTON SWING ACCORDING TO MARGINALITY

Marginal ALP	-	5.6%
Safe ALP	-	9.7%
Marginal CPNP	-	7.1%
Safe CPNP	-	6.8%

This could indicate support for the view that these seats contained a high proportion of militant unionists who deserted the Government. On the other hand, these seats also contained large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who were prone to unemployment and whose votes may have been influenced accordingly. A final shortcoming of the argument that Labor was voted out of office by trade union militants in 1929 concerns the composition of Labor's electoral support. Those who could be described as 'militant unionists' were statistically insignificant in terms of the electorate as a whole. Also, it is wrong to assume that the Labor vote was purely a trade union vote. Trade unionists were the core group but Labor in Queensland had traditionally attracted support from farmers and sections of the urban middle class, some of whom no doubt turned against the Government in 1929 because of the state of the economy and the high level of strike activity that had occurred in the late 1920s.

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78. Trades and Labor Council to Home Secretary, 15 November, 1927; Notes of Deputation of Waterside Workers Federation to Home Secretary, 7 December, 1927, item 47/1615 COL/300, QSA; and Report AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, January 1929, p26, OML.

79. Brisbane Courier, 6 May, 1929.

The 1929 election defeat meant that the Queensland branch of the ALP was to be absolved of the responsibility of Government during the worst years of the depression. Instead, the task of administering the affairs of the State was transferred to an inexperienced cabinet under the leadership of a Premier who had never before held ministerial office. Not suprisingly, the Moore Government performed poorly under the strain of economic stagnation. Its attempts to undo what it saw as fourteen years of 'socialist mismanagement' alienated large sections of the manual and non-manual trade union movement. At the same time many of its most fervent supporters became impatient with a Government that pleaded economic circumstance as an excuse for the curtailment of a promised policy of reform. The Federal election of December 1931 revealed that popular opinion in Queensland was swinging back to the ALP. Moore's Government proved unable to halt or reverse this electoral decline and in June 1932 Labor regained its mantle as the 'natural' Government of Queensland after only one term in Opposition.

CHAPTER 3

THE MOORE GOVERNMENT :

A NON-LABOR INTERREGNUM

The 1929 election provided Queensland with its only non-Labor Government in the forty-two years between 1915 and 1957. The CPNP Ministry<sup>(1)</sup> led by AE Moore was brought to office chiefly as a result of the depressed state of Queensland's economy in the late 1920s, and it was removed from office three years later by the world-wide depression. Because of the difficult economic circumstances, combined with its short term in office, the Moore Government did not make a significant impression on the course of Queensland's political or economic history. Perhaps the major, if ironical, consequence of the Moore Government was the reunification of the Queensland Labor movement. Because Labor was out of office during the worst years of the depression, it escaped the circumstances that split the party and destroyed the Labor Governments in the Commonwealth and in the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Furthermore, the poor performance of the Moore Government in the difficult economic situation provided a background conducive to the reconstruction of the ALP. Labor went out of office in May 1929 in a debilitated and divided condition. Yet by the time of the 1932 State election, the party was the most united and purposeful in the Commonwealth. The behaviour of the Moore administration antagonised large sections of the Labor movement and encouraged them largely to forget their differences and to combine against a common enemy. Simultaneously, the strains of being in power during the depression activated latent centrifugal forces within the non-Labor ranks which hampered the CPNP's campaign to retain office in 1932.

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1. The Moore ministry comprised the following:

Arthur Edward Moore	Premier, Chief Secretary, Vice-President of Executive Council
Reginald MacDonnell	Secretary for Public Instruction,
King	Secretary for Public Works
Walter Henry Barnes	Treasurer
James Christian Peterson	Home Secretary
Neil Francis Macgroarty	Attorney-General
William Arthur Deacon	Secretary for Public Lands
Harry Frederick Walker	Secretary for Agriculture and Stock
Godfrey Morgan	Secretary for Railways (until 28 Jan. 1932); Minister for Transport (from 28 Jan. 1932)
Hubert Ebenezer Sizer	Secretary for Labour and Industry
Ernest Albert Atherton	Secretary for Mines

The success of the CPNP at the polls in 1929 was greeted with extravagant enthusiasm by its supporters. Business, commercial, farming, and grazing interests had for years been opposed to what they regarded as Labor's socialist programmes, and viewed Moore's victory as something akin to the coming of the millenium. As extreme as it may appear, the reaction of the North Queensland Register was typical:

Grand is the news. A dawn of a new era, an era, let us hope of peace, prosperity, industrial development, when men will be given the right to live, when the backbone of the country - the man on the land - will be given an opportunity. (2)

After fourteen years of Labor rule, the first few months of the Moore Government were destined to be heady days. However, by mid-1930 Queensland was beginning to feel the shock waves of the economic depression. As the depression deepened the high expectations of the Government's supporters began to sour. The hard reality of governing during a period of economic stagnation determined that the Government would behave differently from what its supporters had expected. The economic climate forced Moore to break many of his election promises, including his grand plan for a £2 million employment loan. Barely twelve months after his election Moore was on the defensive, not only against the Labor movement but also against critics in his own party. His address to the 1930 CPNP conference clearly illustrates this:

Irrespective of the consequences to us as a party, we must meet the situation that exists today. I want you to recognise that anything the Government may do in the next 12 months which may be drastic and unpopular is being done, not because we like it, but because it is absolutely necessary for the welfare of the State that it shall be done. (3)

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2. North Queensland Register, 18 May, 1929, p 6.
  3. Brisbane Courier, 12 August, 1930.



As concerned as they no doubt were about 'the welfare of the State', Moore's supporters remained unconvinced by this logic. The sections of Queensland society which comprised the power base of the CPNP gradually became disillusioned with Moore, because they felt he did not live up to their naive expectations of him as a saviour from 'socialism'. By the 1932 election this disillusionment was manifesting itself in serious intra-party disharmony, and was a contributing factor to the Government's subsequent electoral defeat.

The commercial and rural interests that supported the CPNP firmly believed that Queensland's economic development was being retarded by the high cost of production of the State's major exports, and that these high costs were caused by the unrealistically generous industrial awards that had been instituted during Labor's tenure in office. Hence, one of the first tasks embarked upon by the Moore Government was the 'reform' of the State's Conciliation and Arbitration system. At its first meeting on 22 May, 1929, the new cabinet issued an Order-in-Council which abolished the industrial award covering rural industries. The current rural award had been introduced by the Board of Trade and Arbitration in March 1928 and it stipulated a forty-four hour week, preference to AWU members and a wage scale ranging from three pounds eighteen shillings to five pounds per week. Hubert Sizer, Minister for Labour and Industry, defended the abolition of the award on the grounds that it would allow hard pressed farmers to take on more workers and thereby reduce rural unemployment.<sup>(4)</sup> The unions saw the decision as a direct assault on the whole system of industrial awards and denounced the Government vigorously.<sup>(5)</sup> By abolishing the award the Government alienated the AWU which, over the next three years, directed its considerable strength and influence to the removal of Moore and his party.

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4. ibid., 23 May, 1929.

5. Worker, 18 December, 1929.

Following the suspension of the rural award, the Government introduced a new Conciliation and Arbitration Bill in November 1929. The new Bill replaced the Board of Trade and Arbitration with an Industrial Court; gave the Government power to remove employees from the ambit of the court; abolished preference to unionists; ended compulsory unionism in the public service and prohibited public service unions from affiliating with 'political' organisations.<sup>(6)</sup> The passage of this piece of legislation, which the AWU described as 'one of the most reactionary measures that has ever been introduced into any Parliament of Australia',<sup>(7)</sup> marked the declaration of a state of open warfare between the Moore ministry and the majority of the trade unions. Soon after his appointment Sizer had invited the unions to meet him in conference so that he might outline the Government's attitude on relevant industrial matters. At this conference Sizer adopted a conciliatory approach and attempted to allay any fears union officials might have harboured regarding the policies of the new ministry.<sup>(8)</sup> Sizer's groundwork was largely undermined by the indiscreet comment by the Attorney General, NF Macgroarty, that the Government was determined to 'ringbark the Arbitration Court at an early opportunity'.<sup>(9)</sup> Predictably, the union movement responded in a hostile manner to the changes introduced in the Bill. The Queensland Trades and Labor Council (TLC) denounced it as 'a vicious attack upon the workers and their union organisations...'<sup>(10)</sup> and organised public meetings and protests against the legislation.

The wages and hours clauses of the 1929 Arbitration Act<sup>(11)</sup> were the cause of bitter confrontation between the Government and the unions. Sections 6(i) and (ii) of the Bill excluded a large number of rural employees from the operations of the Act, and further provided that the Government by way of Orders-in-Council

6. QPD, cliv, 20 November, 1929, p 1725f.

7. Worker, 27 November, 1929.

8. Report of Conference between HE Sizer and Representatives of Industrial Unions, Brisbane, 14 June, 1929, AFULE Papers, E212, RSSSA/ANU.

9. Lack, op.cit., p 94.

10. TLC Minutes, 27 November, 1929.

11. 20<sup>o</sup> Georgii V. No. 28 Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1929, QGG, 169, 30 December, 1929.

could, in the future, exclude any category of workers from the protection of the Act. Moore's ministry made extensive use of this provision and by June 1931 more than fifty percent of the State's workforce was no longer covered by the Act.<sup>(12)</sup> The unions viewed these clauses as a direct repudiation of Sizer's earlier promise that the Government would stand by arbitration and had 'no intention of legislating against the basic wage'<sup>(13)</sup> Another section of the Act that antagonised the unions was 13(7) which stated that:

The (Industrial) Court shall, in the matter of making declarations in regard to the basic wage or standard hours, take into consideration in relation to the community in general and the probable economic effect thereof upon industry or any industry or industries concerned.

Because of the steadily declining economic situation, the unions argued that this clause virtually ensured that wages would be reduced. Furthermore, the unions were highly suspicious of the role played by the newly created Bureau of Economics and Statistics. While the Director, Professor JB Brigden, was keen to win the confidence of the unions by declaring that he came to the job 'with an absolutely open mind looking for facts',<sup>(14)</sup> many unions felt that his Bureau contributed to wage reductions by supplying the Court with gloomy reports on the State's economic situation. The AWU was blunt in its condemnation:

The State Government had imported Professor Brigden to find out how little the worker could live on and what that little would cost. <sup>(15)</sup>

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12. Cabinet Document, Persons Taken away from Arbitration Court by Moore Government, Larcombe Papers, M47, OML.
  13. Sizer Conference, op.cit., p 9.
  14. Queensland Industrial Gazette, 24 March, 1930, p 159.
  15. AWU, Report of Eighteenth Annual Delegate Meeting, Brisbane, January, 1931, np.

In 1930 a number of important wage cases came before the Industrial Court. During the first case in March 1930 the representative of the Crown made full use of Section 13(7) of the Act and laid stress on the economic circumstances in which the State found itself.<sup>(16)</sup> The union representatives argued that any wage reduction would lead to a further deepening of the depression because of the reduction in purchasing power that would result.<sup>(17)</sup> While the unions were successful in this case, two decisions of the court later in the year reduced the basic wage from four pounds five shillings (£4.5s) per week to three pounds seventeen shillings (£3.17s) per week. These were followed by a further reduction to three pounds fourteen shillings (£3.14s), in May 1931.

Section 13(4)B of the 1929 Arbitration Act deleted reference to the forty-four hour week and empowered the court to determine 'the maximum weekly hours to be worked, called the standard hours, in an industry or in respect of particular industries'. At the March 1930 case the unions had argued unsuccessfully for a reduction of hours from forty-four to forty per week in order to reduce unemployment.<sup>(18)</sup> In May 1930 the Government lodged a claim before the Industrial Court for an extension of hours to forty-eight per week for certain Crown employees and major sections of the railway service. The decision of the Court went against the unions. This decision incensed the railway unions,<sup>(19)</sup> and led the Trades and Labor Council Executive to lay the blame for the increased hours at the feet of the Moore Government because of its amendment of the Act.<sup>(20)</sup>

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16. Report Industrial Court of Queensland, 18 March, 1930, p 51f, Industrial Registrar's Office, Brisbane.

17. ibid., p 9.

18. Report Industrial Court, op.cit., p 16.

19. AFULE Minutes, 18 May, 1930, E212/7, RSSSA/ANU.

20. TLC Minutes, 12 May, 1930.

Moore further antagonised the unions by his 'arbitration by legislation' approach when, in 1931, the Government introduced the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Bill. This Bill consisted of a single substantive clause which provided that:

The Industrial Court or a Conciliation Board may vary an award where it is proved that similar awards in other States will operate in all things other than wages to the detriment of Queensland industry, in consequence of which Queensland industry cannot carry on and meet that competition. (21)

The Bill was introduced specifically to extend assistance to the Toowoomba Foundry which had applied unsuccessfully to the Industrial Court six times in the previous eighteen months for an award alteration. Sizer declared that it was the function of parliament to prevent Queensland industries going out of existence and, therefore, the Toowoomba Foundry was granted an extension of working hours to forty-eight, plus certain concessions regarding the conditions of the award. The ALP denounced the Bill as a vicious piece of legislation which attempted to lay down the principle that if 'sweated labour conditions' existed in any other State, then the workers of Queensland had to be brought down to that level.<sup>(22)</sup> The Government was adamant that Queensland industries, which provided the bulk of the State's employment, should not be jeopardized by unfair competition from other States, and the Bill was duly passed. The unions then commenced legal proceedings against the Act, but the ALP was re-elected to Government and repealed the legislation before the appeal was heard.

While many of Moore's economic and industrial initiatives angered the union movement as a whole, his Government's attitude

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21. Sizer, QPD, clx, 15 December, 1931, pp 2595-6.

22. Smith, ibid., 16 December, 1931, p 2631.

to its own employees brought it into direct conflict with the public service unions. The Government's conception of the role of the public service was bluntly stated in its 1932 election manifesto:

The Public Service is appointed solely for the purpose of facilitating the business and industries of the State. If it ever becomes a burden on, rather than a help to, such business or industry, it has so far failed in its functions, and conditions must be righted in such a way as to allow the life blood of industry once more to flow unfettered, at any rate, by internal conditions in the State which are amenable to political action. (23)

Soon after its election in 1929 the ministry abolished compulsory unionism in the public service and struck out the regulation that prevented any State employee benefitting from an industrial award unless he was a union member.<sup>(24)</sup> Furthermore, Section 83(3) of the 1929 Arbitration Act forbade public service unions to affiliate 'with any other union or federation of unions or political organisations whatsoever' In defending this clause, the minister reverted to nineteenth century notions when he argued that, as employees of the Crown, public servants should possess but one allegiance.<sup>(25)</sup> The Labor movement, on the other hand, viewed it as an attack on the right of a union to combine with kindred unions and organisations.<sup>(26)</sup>

Moore demonstrated that he was not prepared to countenance opposition to these measures by further tightening the public service regulations to provide that:

- (1) An officer shall not publicly comment upon any administrative action or upon the administration of any department of State.

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23. CPNP Speakers' Notes, 1932 State Election, OML, p 75.

24. Brisbane Courier, 23 May, 1929.

25. QPD, cliv, 20 November, 1929, p 1727.

26. QCE Minutes, 14 January, 1930.

- (2) An officer shall not directly or indirectly take any part in political affairs otherwise than by exercise of the franchise. (27)

This initiative was prompted by the actions of two public servants, W Copley and F Baker, who had publicly criticised aspects of the Government's public service regulations. Both were officials of the State Service Union (SSU) and Baker had twice stood as a candidate for the ALP. The fact that their outspokenness earned them disciplinary transfers provoked the Trades and Labor Council to denounce the Government for blatantly victimizing public servants who were Labor supporters.<sup>(28)</sup>

In addition to these new regulations, Moore took a number of rather drastic steps in order to achieve expenditure reduction in the public sector. In September 1930 all public servants, as defined under the 1922 Public Service Act, were removed from the jurisdiction of the Industrial Court. The Government then introduced a Salaries Act which reduced the salaries of State public servants by ten to fifteen percent depending on their classifications. When he presented the Bill, the Premier explained that since additional revenue could not be raised from the hard pressed private sector, it was necessary for the Government to prune its own expenditure. Moore also criticized the Industrial Court for failing to respond positively to previous Government requests to reduce the salaries of State employees.<sup>(29)</sup> The wage reduction was roundly condemned by the unions,<sup>(30)</sup> and the Leader of the Opposition, William Forgan Smith, accused Moore of deliberately attempting to intimidate the court and of destroying the arbitration system.<sup>(31)</sup> Despite these criticisms, Moore pushed ahead with his arguments that

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27. Mining Standard, 3 September, 1931.

28. TLC Minutes, 2 September, 1931.

29. QPD, clvi, 17 September, 1930, pp 1014-1015.

30. Secretary of Railway Salaried Officers' Union to Moore, 8 September, 1930, item 30/5547, PRE/A 1005, QSA.

31. QPD, clvi, 18 September, 1930, p 1055f.

drastic problems call for drastic solutions, and that, in this time of economic depression, public servants could not hope for favoured treatment.<sup>(32)</sup> Public service salaries were further reduced in 1931 as a consequence of the State Government's adoption of the Premiers' Plan. These reductions caused widespread dissatisfaction within the service and were the subject of a number of protest delegations to the Premier<sup>(33)</sup> at which the public service unions complained that they had been unfairly singled out for discriminatory treatment.<sup>(34)</sup>

There is little doubt that the CPNP Government handled relations with its own employees in a less than diplomatic manner. The ministry's thinly veiled hostility to the public service was the consequence of a number of influences. The Government service presented itself as a readily accessible area of expenditure reduction; and members of the Government possessed ideological objections to the public service. As a party which drew its major support from farmers and businessmen, it is understandable that the CPNP would be biased against the public sector and in favour of the private sector. A more practical consideration was also present. Soon after coming to office, Moore's earlier commitment to almost unfettered laissez faire economic principles was compromised by the exigencies of office. This drew criticism from his supporters and it is reasonable to assume that Moore's draconian approach to the public service was an attempt to prove to those supporters that he still believed in the efficacy of pure private enterprise. Whatever prompted Moore to adopt the approach that he did, the consequences for his Government were serious. His attitude encouraged the white collar and blue collar unions to unite against what they now saw as a common opponent. Despite the fact that the SSU was required to disaffiliate from the ALP, it, in

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32. ibid., 17 September, 1930, pp 1012-1016.

33. Queensland Teachers' Journal, 24 September, 1930, p 31;  
23 November, 1931, p 21.

34. ibid., 18 June, 1934, p 19; and Brisbane Courier, 19 May, 1932.



common with other white collar unions, worked to ensure the defeat of Moore at the 1932 election.

The decision to vary the wages and conditions of Government and non-Government employees was motivated by the orthodox economic thinking which guided the CPNP Government throughout its three years in office. Moore believed that the depression had been caused by extravagant public sector spending in the 1920s and that prosperity would be restored only when Governments curtailed their own expenditure and encouraged the revival of private enterprise. Moore and his Treasurer, WH Barnes, were enthusiastic deflationists in economic policy matters and believed that any attempts at credit expansion would lead inevitably to a total economic collapse. Moore's attitude to the proper role of Government in economic policy was revealed in his response to the Labor party's claim that the public sector should be expanded to permit a consumer led economic recovery; he said:

It is nonsense to talk about keeping up the purchasing power of the people. A Government cannot do that. All a Government should do is to give encouragement to private industry. (35)

The Moore Government found its economic theories reflected in the Premiers' Plan which was drawn up at a Premiers' Conference in May 1931.<sup>(36)</sup> This plan was inspired by the economic orthodoxy of the day and was designed to be deflationary. It involved a twenty percent reduction in Government expenditure; an increase in Commonwealth income and sales tax; and a reduction of private and public interest rates.<sup>(37)</sup> Queensland was one of the first States to put the plan into operation. In late June 1931 the Parliament was assembled for a three-day emergency session and passed the

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35. AE Moore, The Elector (Journal of the CPNP), 15 August, 1932.

36. See further, CB Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney, 1970, Chapters 10 and 11.

37. ibid.

Debt Conversion Agreement Bill and the Financial Emergency Bill which gave legislative effect to those sections of the plan which could not be implemented by executive initiative.<sup>(38)</sup> Henceforth, the Moore Government explained and defended its economic policies by arguing that the Premiers' Plan had been endorsed by all Australia's Governments and that they were duty bound to adhere to its contents. Moore went further and deliberately made the plan the central issue at the 1932 State election when he stated in his policy speech that 'the Government will stand or fall by the Premiers' Plan.'<sup>(39)</sup> The fact that the Government fell can, in part, be explained in terms of the electoral unpopularity of the Premiers' Plan in Queensland, an unpopularity which was skilfully exploited by the Labor party.<sup>(40)</sup>

The economic policies developed by the Moore Government to deal with the depression were anathema to the Labor movement because they involved the dismantling of industrial conditions which had taken the trade unions many years to achieve. In Victoria and South Australia State Labor Governments pursued similar policies which split the Labor movement into warring factions. The absence of a Labor Government in Queensland meant that the political and industrial wings were at one in their opposition to Moore. Yet it was not only the economic policies of the CPNP that promoted unity within the Labor movement. The cabinet also took a number of controversial decisions which at the same time provoked the ALP and the trade unions, caused disharmony among CPNP supporters, and produced little in the way of electoral rewards for the Government.

The first of these was a decision to carry out an investigation into rumours that previous Labor ministers had profited as a result of

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38. QPD, clvii, (Emergency Finance Session), 23-25 June, 1931.

39. Brisbane Courier, 30 April, 1932.

40. For details of the Queensland ALP's attitude to the Premiers' Plan see Chapter 4.

financial misdealings involving the State-owned mines in the Mungana-Chillagoe area. The CPNP had been calling for a Royal Commission into allegations relating to the Labor Government's purchase of mining leases in the Mungana area since the 1927 Auditor-General's report had drawn attention to certain irregularities regarding the purchase. However, on assuming Government Moore required some prodding from his party before he decided to institute a Royal Commission.<sup>(41)</sup> From this point onwards Moore took a series of decisions which convinced Labor supporters that his real aim was to embarrass the Federal Labor Government and its Treasurer, EG Theodore, rather than to pursue the cause of justice.

In his search for a commissioner, Moore passed over the entire Queensland Supreme Court Bench and appointed Mr Justice Campbell, a retired judge of New South Wales Supreme Court, as sole commissioner in October 1929. The Royal Commissioner brought down his report on 4 July, 1930, and in it he made serious allegations against Theodore, William McCormack and two others.<sup>(42)</sup> Theodore immediately resigned his Federal ministry, but not before he attacked Campbell, who, it was revealed, had a financial interest in private mining ventures in Queensland, and accused Moore of orchestrating a cheap political stunt.<sup>(43)</sup> The ex-Treasurer also demanded that the Queensland Government bring formal charges against him immediately so that he might clear his name and rejoin Scullin's cabinet. Despite Theodore's demands, the civil case against him did not commence until 22 July, 1931 - more than twelve months after the report had been presented. Moore was roundly criticised for this delay on the ground that he was deliberately stalling in order to cause as much trouble for the Federal Government as possible. While it would be naive to suggest that Moore was not keenly aware of the overtly political nature of the case, there did exist extenuating circumstances that can be cited to defend his dilatoriness.

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41. Brisbane Courier, 7 July, 1930.

42. Royal Commission, Mungana, 4 July, 1930, QPP, Vol 1, 1930, p 1372.

43. Sydney Morning Herald, 7 July, 1930.

The report of Justice Campbell was forwarded to the Queensland Crown Law office in July 1930 for a legal opinion. It appears that for technical reasons,<sup>(44)</sup> Crown Law was reluctant to recommend criminal proceedings against Theodore. Moreover, there existed certain legal impediments to civil action, which were only removed by Government amendments to the Crown Remedies Act.<sup>(45)</sup> Debate on the amending Bill was extremely vitriolic with the Labor Opposition alleging that Moore was changing the law merely to 'get' Theodore. While the Bill received Royal assent in late September 1930, Moore still dallied and it was suggested at the time that he hesitated because he did not wish to appear foolish if any legal action against Theodore proved unsuccessful.<sup>(46)</sup> The civil trial of Theodore, McCormack and the two others finally commenced on 22 July, 1931. The case for the prosecution was handled by the Attorney-General, NF Macgroarty and AD McGill, who also happened to be chairman of the CPNP organisation. The party affiliations of the Crown attorneys did little to convince Labor supporters that the proceedings were anything but a political vendetta.

Moore's fear of political embarrassment was confirmed when the jury of four returned a verdict of not guilty. Theodore's guilt or innocence is still disputed,<sup>(47)</sup> but there is no doubt that the affair undermined the Scullin Government by causing further dissension within an already faction-ridden cabinet and caucus. Within the Queensland political arena the affair had negative repercussions for the Moore Government. Macgroarty's tactless remark during the 1932 election campaign that:

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44. See the Attorney-General's explanation, QPD, clv, 26 August, 1930, p 589.

45. ibid.

46. Kennedy, PhD, op.cit., p 610.

47. See Irwin Young, Theodore: His Life and Times, Sydney, 1971, which is sympathetic to Theodore; and KH Kennedy, The Mungana Scandal: State Mining and Political Corruption in the 1920s, Brisbane, 1978, which is sceptical of Theodore's innocence; see also Murphy and Joyce, op.cit., chapters 11 and 12.

The Mungana case smashed the Labor Party in Australia almost beyond mending. Thousands of people throughout the Commonwealth consider I was worth what I was paid in that case, (48)

merely added another piece of evidence to the Labor party's assertions that Moore had attempted to frame Theodore. On the other hand, many non-Labor supporters were equally convinced of Theodore's guilt and were angry because Moore had bungled his prosecution.

In the midst of the Mungana affair, Hubert Sizer suddenly announced that he had placed before a Government party meeting proposals to extend the life of the current Parliament for two years and to reintroduce the Legislative Council.<sup>(49)</sup> The first of these announcements was quite unexpected and aroused strong passions in the community. The Labor party was outraged and launched a public campaign in opposition to the proposal. Such a reaction was, of course, to be expected, but the Government was visibly shaken by the hostile comments of the usually sympathetic Brisbane print media. The Daily Mail's reaction was perhaps the most harsh:

There is no argument for such a course that will stand a moment's examination. It would be undemocratic and autocratic in the extreme. Considered from the lowest plane of party expediency it would be suicidal. From the public point of view, it would be grievously wrong. (50)

At this point the Premier intervened and announced that the cabinet had decided not to proceed with the matter.

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48. Daily Mail and Daily Standard, 1 June, 1932.

49. Lack, op.cit., p 115.

50. Daily Mail, 30 September, 1930.

Moore experienced much greater difficulty in extricating himself from the problems that surrounded the possible re-establishment of the upper house. Labor had abolished the Legislative Council in 1922 and a succession of non-Labor leaders had pledged themselves to restore it. During the 1929 election campaign, Moore had promised that a CPNP Government would reintroduce the bicameral system to Queensland. Yet it soon became obvious that the parliamentary party was deeply divided on the issue. Some wished for reintroduction by legislation alone which others demanded that the question first be put to a referendum. Moore was sympathetic to the second method but, as the economic situation deteriorated, he became unwilling to put the issue to a plebiscite for fear that it would become a public test of his Government's electoral standing. The good result achieved by the Labor party at the Brisbane municipal elections in May 1931 confirmed him in this view. Others, however, placed a different interpretation on those results. Sectional groups opposed to the Labor party came to the realisation by mid-1931 that Moore was likely to lose the State election scheduled for the following year. They saw the reintroduction of the Legislative Council as an insurance policy against the likelihood of a Labor Government being elected in 1932.

In July 1931 the Brisbane Courier commenced a public campaign in favour of the establishment of a second chamber. The short-term goal of this campaign was to influence the CPNP conference, which was to be held in August, to direct the parliamentary party to act on the issue.<sup>(51)</sup> As it turned out, the conference adopted the following open-ended motion:

That this conference confirms the principles of the restoration of the Legislative Council, and that the matter of giving effect to the foregoing resolution be left to the judgement of the Government. If it is decided to hold a referendum this conference recommends that it be held before the end of the current year. (52)

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51. Brisbane Courier, 21, 28 July; 4 August, 1931.

52. ibid., 11 August, 1931.

By this stage opinions within the parliamentary party had hardened and there were rumours that at least twelve members were prepared to cross the floor if an attempt were made to reintroduce the Council without a referendum.<sup>(53)</sup> Moore responded to this deadlock with vacillation.

As the 1931 parliamentary year drew to a close and Moore appeared to do nothing, many CPNP supporters became openly critical of him. As before, the Brisbane Courier was eager to articulate the views of those demanding action, and displayed no hesitation in attacking Moore in its columns. The following editorial illustrates the degree of hysteria that was creeping into the debate:

Mr Moore is Premier of the State, and the people will blame him, and not half a dozen recalcitrants of his party, if he leaves Queensland open to attacks by a Socialist Government without the safeguard that he and his party were elected to provide. (54)

During the last few months of 1931 the parliamentary party held numerous discussions on the matter without reaching any concrete decision. By late November a draft Bill had been prepared, but no agreement could be reached upon it. The matter dragged on until the last scheduled party meeting of the year, at which many hoped for a final decision. However, the meeting lapsed because of the lack of a quorum. It was rumoured at the time that the lack of a quorum was arranged by some person who deliberately misled some members as to the exact venue of the meeting. Regardless of the truth of these rumours no decision was taken and the Government did not proceed with any legislation regarding the Legislative Council. This episode seriously damaged Moore's political career. His indecisiveness convinced many, both within

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53. ibid., 10 December, 1931.

54. ibid., 17 November, 1931.

and without the party, that he was a feeble leader. The following comment, which he made to the press in the midst of the affair, did nothing to discourage this opinion:

If, on the one hand, I decided not to go on with the project, one section would hotly criticise me, and if, on the other, I do, another section would condemn me. There is, however, one thing one must have before going on with a proposal of this kind. That thing is a majority. (55)

Another good example of the general difficulties encountered during the depression by the Moore Government can be found in a case study of its attempts to render assistance to the State's wool growers.

As a Country party Premier of a predominantly rural State, Arthur Moore was keenly aware of his responsibilities to the man on the land.<sup>(56)</sup> In January 1931 he recognised that the Queensland woollen industry, which contributed sixty percent of the State's export earnings, was in serious economic straits. The Government diagnosed the problem as being one of high production costs caused by interest payments on overdrafts. In order to improve the condition of the wool industry Moore suggested the following measures:

1. Sheep grazing selectors will received a 25 percent reduction in rent.
2. Sheep grazing selectors will receive a 7 years extension of lease.
3. Sheep grazing selectors and sheep pastoral lessees will have the interests on overdrafts reduced from an average of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  percent to 6 percent.
4. Sheep pastoral lessees will have an adjustment made in their leases as financial circumstances warrant. (57)

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55. ibid.

56. See Governor's speech, QPD, 153, 21 August, 1929, p 6.

57. Moore to Forgan Smith, n d , file 31/6403, PRE/A 1036, QSA.



Queensland wool growers were generally pleased with the Government's efforts on their behalf.<sup>(58)</sup> Yet, they demanded further concessions, which they presented to Moore in March 1931. These were:

1. a reduction in crown rents by 25 percent
2. an extension of leases
3. a granting of additional areas to small selectors
4. certain concessions to cattle holdings
5. a reduction in railway freights
6. the carrying forward of leases for taxation purposes
7. the abolition of land tax.

Moore pointed out that his Government intended to introduce reforms one to four, but added that he could not comply with the last three demands because of the decline in Government revenue that would result.<sup>(59)</sup>

Initially Moore enjoyed the support of the graziers' organisations for the Government's new scheme,<sup>(60)</sup> but he was soon to encounter strong opposition from certain financial institutions whose concurrence was essential for its success. Moore had argued from the outset that the programme was necessarily a joint venture involving the Government, the banks, and the pastoral companies. However, support from some of these financial institutions was not immediately forthcoming<sup>(61)</sup> and Moore was required to embark on a

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58. Secretary Selectors' Association to Moore, 21 February, 1931, *ibid.*; and Secretary United Graziers' Association of Queensland to Moore, 18 March, 1931, *ibid.*

59. Moore to United Graziers' Association of Queensland, 9 April, 1931, *ibid.*

60. Some graziers in the Winton area were not happy with Moore's proposals; Secretary Winton Chamber of Commerce to Moore 27 January, 1931, *ibid.*

61. Managing Director Queensland Primary Producers' Co-operative Association Limited, 10 March, 1931, *ibid.*

lengthy campaign to convince them of the efficacy of the scheme. The pastoral companies responded enthusiastically to Moore's proposals, and by April five leading wool firms and a number of private mortgagees had accepted the Government's plan and had cut their rates of interest on overdrafts to six percent. (62)

The trading banks were unresponsive to the Government's proposals. The general manager of the Bank of New South Wales, AP Davidson, told Moore quite unequivocally that his bank did not approve of the scheme. In a letter of four foolscap pages he lectured the Queensland Premier on the evils of Government meddling in economic affairs, and denounced the Queensland Land Courts' decision to reduce rentals as being 'a political dictation of prices', which ignored the economic laws of supply and demand. Davidson also expressed concern that the Government's measures would lead to an inflation of cheque currency. He concluded his letter with the following warning:

It is surely a lesson of our recent history that release from the present difficulties requires a diminution of political interference with economic adjustment rather than further essays in control, leading inevitably though insensibly in the direction of Communism. (63)

Moore reacted angrily to this letter and he accused the Bank of New South Wales of acting on 'erroneous impressions' and 'inaccurate premises' (64) Such exchanges did nothing to improve relations between Government and the banks, and Moore was required to push on with the scheme without their support.

In July 1931 the Premier sent a letter to those pastoral companies and banks which had not co-operated in the Government's

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62. Premier's Press Statement, 20 April, 1931, *ibid.*

63. Davidson, to Moore, 13 April, 1931, *ibid.*

64. Moore to Davidson, 29 April, 1931, *ibid.*

scheme, informing them that because of falling interest rates and the introduction of legislative protection for mortgagees, it was unlikely that interest for money lent on good security would exceed six percent in the near future. Consequently, the Government felt that its concessions to induce the cutting of interest rates for the wool industry were no longer necessary. Moore was aware that should the Government withdraw its offer this would discriminate against clients of those companies that did not co-operate with the Government in the first instance. Therefore the Government extended its offer for one month to allow the companies and banks to reconsider their position.<sup>(65)</sup> On this occasion the Premier received a somewhat more favourable response, with most of the financial institutions reducing overdraft interest rates to six percent for one year and also reducing interest rates on pastoral leases by  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 percent for one year.<sup>(66)</sup> Moore again encountered difficulties when he asked that these concessions be made retrospective to 1 January, 1931. On this issue the companies closed ranks and flatly refused to accede to Moore's request.<sup>(67)</sup> The result of this refusal was that the Government was forced to abandon that section of the scheme and accept reduction from July 1931.

The circumstances surrounding the wool relief scheme are interesting in that they exhibit the confluence and conflict of interests that existed among the Government, the wool growers, the

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65. Moore to New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Company, Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company Limited, Dalgety and Company, Bank of New South Wales, Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, and the Queensland National Bank, 14 July, 1931, *ibid.*

66. Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company Limited to Moore, New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company Limited and Queensland National Bank Limited to Moore, 6/11 August, 1931, *ibid.*

67. Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company Limited to Moore, 1 September, 1931, New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Company Moore, 2 September, 1931, New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company to Moore, 1 October, 1931, *ibid.*

banks, and the pastoral companies. A Country party Premier such as Moore was loath to allow the wool growers to be swamped by the economic depression, but scarcity of funds placed severe limitations on the assistance which could be given by the Government alone. As was mentioned before, Moore was unable to agree to some of the graziers' initial requests because of the adverse effect they would have had on Government revenue. Moore also intimated that he was most strongly opposed to introducing any discriminatory legislation regarding the granting of concessions, but also pointed out that to give assistance to all Crown tenants in the sheep industry would mean an annual loss in revenue of £100,000 per year, which the Government was unable to forego unless the financial institutions were also prepared to make some contribution.<sup>(68)</sup>

The financial institutions were reluctant to agree to the Government's proposals because of resultant decrease in their incomes. Most of the companies and banks involved had interests and commitments outside Queensland. On the other hand, many of them, for example Dalgety's and Winchcombe Carson's, had a substantial economic stake in the Queensland woollen industry, and did not wish to see it collapse. In such a period of economic depression, the financial institutions were also wary of endangering their own solvency and the solvency of their shareholders by granting over-generous concessions to any one industry.<sup>(69)</sup> This situation produced a virtual stalemate whereby the Government was being pressured into action by the wool growers, but dared not overstretch itself because of the possible economic consequences. Turning to the financial institutions for support, the Government found that these organisations were not prepared to anger their shareholders by reducing their margin of profit. The frustrations caused by this situation were made apparent by Moore in a letter to the Bank of New South Wales in which he declared that 'If all parties... insist on expecting their full rights under existing contracts from

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68. Moore to Bank of New South Wales, 14 July, 1931, *ibid.*

69. Queensland National Bank of Moore, 11 August, 1931, *ibid.*

the wool and other key industries, then bankruptcy and Communism await us.'<sup>(70)</sup>

The debate over the wool relief scheme also clearly exhibits the manner in which the depressed economic situation caused division and acrimony among groups which, in ordinary times, would have displayed a keen awareness of their common interests. Moreover, the circumstances that developed placed Moore in an invidious situation whereby he was forced to attempt to be all things to all men. Such situations occurred time and again during his Premiership, with the result that he constantly found himself in the position where his policy options were extremely limited. Perhaps a more skilful politician could have extricated himself from such situations with a greater degree of success. However, Moore seemed to possess a flair for antagonising important sections of his party's power base by adopting apparently indifferent attitudes to key client groups among the CPNP's supporters.

The Government's problems were magnified because of the administrative inexperience of the cabinet. Moore himself had never been in a Government before 1929 and the only minister who had been was the Treasurer, WH Barnes, who was seventy-one years old on his appointment. Talent was so scarce within the ranks of the CPNP that Moore was required to appoint as ministers two men who were first elected to parliament in 1929. These were: NF Macgroarty (Attorney General) and EA Atherton (Minister for Mines). After a year in office Moore became aware of the incompetence of a number of ministers but declined to effect a cabinet reshuffle because he was concerned about his own position as leader.<sup>(71)</sup> Leslie Wilson, who replaced John Goodwin as Governor of Queensland in June 1931, gave the secretary of the Dominions' Office an accurate picture when he wrote that 'the Moore Government, . . . , had a most inefficient collection of ministers.'<sup>(72)</sup>

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70. Moore to Bank of New South Wales, 29 April, 1931, *ibid.*

71. Daily Mail, 15 June, 1932.

72. Leslie Wilson to Dominions' Office, 5 June, 1933, Wilson Papers, unclassified, FML.

Some CPNP dissidents later claimed that Moore deliberately chose and retained incompetent National party members in many cabinet posts so as to ensure the overall dominance of Country party views. RM King (the Deputy Premier), Macgroarty and Sizer were named in this respect.<sup>(73)</sup> These rumours highlighted the divisions which existed between those in the CPNP who aligned themselves with the National party and those who had previously been associated with the Country party. The two parties had merged in 1925,<sup>(74)</sup> but they held separate meetings during their years in office and cabinet decisions were often taken by vote along 'party' lines.<sup>(75)</sup>

Some disillusioned non-Labor supporters decided to establish new political organisations in competition with the CPNP. The first of these to appear in Queensland was the Vigilants which was a mild replica of the New Guard and the All for Australia League (AFAL). A dramatic feature of the depression in New South Wales was the militant political activity of sections of the urban middle classes.<sup>(76)</sup> Organisations such as the New Guard and the AFAL came into being to combat what they saw as the extreme socialism of the Lang Government. Despite their alleged antipathy to all political parties, they, in fact, operated in the interests of the non-Labor parties, and a faction within the AFAL was instrumental in the formation of the United Australia Party in 1931.<sup>(77)</sup> The Moore Government derived

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73. TP Fry, 'State Elections - Queensland', Australian Quarterly, 26, June, 1935, p 89. Fry's father was the CPNP member for the Brisbane seat of Kurilpa and he clashed with Macgroarty over the changes made to the electorate by the 1931 redistribution.

74. See chapter 2 for details.

75. Forgan Smith to the Premier of Victoria, 20 September, 1933, item 33/552, PRE/A 1081, QSA.

76. See Keith Amos, The New Guard Movement, 1931-35, Melbourne, 1976; Eric Campbell, The Rallying Point, Melbourne, 1965; JRH James, 'The Guardsmen Are Born', Nation, 11 March, 1961, and 'Guardian of the Faith', Nation, 2 October, 1965; John McCarthy, 'All for Australia: Some Right Wing Responses to the Depression in New South Wales, 1929-32', JRAHS, 57;2, June, 1971; Trevor Matthews, 'The All for Australia League', Labour History, 17 October, 1970; and Phyllis Mitchell, 'Australian Patriots: A Study of the New Guard', AEHR, 9;2, September, 1969.

77. Matthews, op.cit., p 144f.

little direct or indirect benefit from the activities of the Vigilants, whose existence reflected the schismatic state of the anti-Labor forces in Queensland.

The Vigilants first appeared on the political scene in October 1930, when they led a deputation to Premier Moore to complain about high taxes and excessive cost of government. The Brisbane Courier described the organisation as 'an association of business and professional interests .. (which) has been formed to watch the trend of financial and economic conditions.'<sup>(78)</sup> The Daily Standard was more specific in its analysis of the composition of the Vigilants' deputation and pointed out that it contained representatives from the following bodies : Commonwealth Institute of Accountants, Queensland Institute of Architects, Master Builders' Association, Master Carriers' Association, Chamber of Commerce, Constitutional Club, Employers' Federation of Queensland, Fat Stock Brokers' Association, United Graziers' Association of Queensland, Queensland Chamber of Manufacturers, Meat Traders' Association of Queensland, Brisbane Merchants' Association, Motor Traders' Association, Master Printers' Association, Property Owner's Protection Association, Real Estate Institute of Queensland, Soft Goods Warehousemen, Australian Sugar Producers' Association, Taxpayers' Association of Queensland, Brisbane Timber Merchants' Association, Town Planning Association, Brisbane Wool Selling Association.<sup>(79)</sup> In other words, the Vigilants could claim to have the support of the most prominent business organisations in Brisbane. This breadth of support was short lived since many of the Vigilants' original members withdrew in the face of subsequent bad publicity.<sup>(80)</sup>

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78. Brisbane Courier, 8 October, 1930.

79. Daily Standard, 8 October, 1930.

80. QPD, clxv, 15 October, 1930, p 1604.

The Vigilants soon commenced an intensive propaganda campaign around the slogans 'Balance the Budget' and 'Taxes cause Unemployment'. They took a particular interest in advising the State Government on ways to reduce expenditure. For instance, they assailed the Main Roads Department for placing an advertisement in the press calling for tenders to shift a quantity of gravel on the grounds that the advertisement cost more than the job itself.<sup>(81)</sup> The Vigilants received lavish praise for their work from the Telegraph newspaper which told Moore that he should take particular notice of the Vigilants' criticism of the high level of taxation which existed in the State.<sup>(82)</sup> Moore did not take this advice and gave the Vigilants a decidedly cool reception when their representatives waited upon him in deputation.<sup>(83)</sup> The activities of the Vigilants soon drew strong criticism from the Labor movement. The Opposition launched an attack on them in parliament on 15 October, 1930 when Sam Brassington (Balonne) suggested that their stated aim of abolishing State and Federal Governments and replacing them with a national council was akin to the methods of the Italian fascist movement.<sup>(84)</sup> The Labor party also pointed out that a spokesman of the Vigilants, a Mr Herbert, was assistant manager of the Union Trustee Company, which had been fined in 1925 for attempted tax evasion.<sup>(85)</sup> Criticism of the Vigilants was not confined to parliament, and the president of the Trades and Labor Council designated them 'a fascist group'.<sup>(86)</sup> The Daily Standard endorsed this view and accused the Vigilants of promoting 'a socially degraded policy'.<sup>(87)</sup>

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81. Daily Standard, 8 October, 1930.

82. Telegraph, 15 October, 1930.

83. Queensland Teachers' Journal, 36;4, October, 1930, p 1.

84. QPD, clxv, 15 October, 1930, p 1604.

85. ibid.

86. Daily Standard, 1 November, 1930.

87. ibid., 15 August, 1930.



By mid-November 1930 the Vigilants had established an organisational structure and were conducting fortnightly meetings at Commerce House, which was also the address of the Chamber of Commerce. About this time it is possible to discern a shift of emphasis in the Vigilants' activities away from State Government issues towards matters related to the Brisbane City Council. The Vigilants displayed a particular interest in The City of Brisbane Amendment Act which was then being drafted for presentation to Parliament. On the 24th of November the Chairman of Vigilants' municipal sub-committee, AJ Thompson placed before the Home Secretary, JC Peterson, who was in charge of the legislation, the following demands : that there should be no more than ten aldermen; that salaries for aldermen should be abolished that the life of the council should be extended from three to five years; that a property owners' and occupiers' franchise be introduced; that a mayoral allowance of £2,000 be paid in lieu of a salary; and that the city should be administered by a manager. These demands had been formulated in a series of formal discussions between the Vigilants the Property Owners' Association, the Taxpayers' Association, the Chamber of Commerce and other similar groups.<sup>(88)</sup> A major aim of the Vigilants was to ensure the election of businessmen to the City Council in place of 'professional politicians' This desire is indicated in Thompson's statement to the Home Secretary that :

They (the Vigilants) were convinced that a system which provided a salary for aldermen just sufficient for a livelihood was not likely to attract those men best suited for the position. (89)

In the midst of the Vigilants' campaign regarding the City of Brisbane Amendment Act, there suddenly emerged yet another new group, calling itself the Civic Reform League (CRL). This group

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88. Brisbane Courier, 25 November, 1930.

89. ibid.

announced that it intended to hold a public meeting in the Brisbane City Hall on 27th November 'to protest against the action of the Government in blocking reform of the City Council' <sup>(90)</sup> At the meeting various 'leading citizens' expressed agreement with the Government's intentions to amend the City of Brisbane Act, but castigated the Premier for his timidity in not making more sweeping changes. <sup>(91)</sup> Moore stated that he had no intention of making any substantial alterations to the Bill, which had its first reading on the day of the CRL meeting. <sup>(92)</sup>

While the appearance of the CRL may have appeared to many a largely unheralded one, there is substantial evidence to suggest that it had close connections with the Vigilants. For instance, the personnel and programmes of the two groups were very similar. AJ Thompson, who was a prominent spokesman for the Vigilants, was also a major protagonist at the 27 November CRL meeting. The State Service Union explained at the time that the hostile criticism which the Vigilants attracted soon after their formation frightened off many supporters, and those that remained decided to change their name so as to be free of the bad public image of the 'Vigilants'. <sup>(93)</sup> While there may have been an element of truth in this analysis, the birth of the CRL was somewhat more complicated than the State Service Union realised. The real beginning of the events that culminated in the formation of the CRL and the Vigilants can be traced back to 1929.

Various sections of the Brisbane business community harboured objections to the constitution and operations of the Brisbane City Council throughout the 1920s. These criticisms were generally not well received by successive Labor Governments. The election of the

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90. ibid.

91. ibid., 28 November, 1930.

92. ibid., 27 November, 1930.

93. State Service, 15;4, April, 1931, p 1.

Moore Government gave encouragement to the business sector, who felt that the new administration would introduce long overdue reforms in the council. In November 1929 a deputation of business groups interested in the zoning of Brisbane, waited on the Home Secretary to make complaints regarding details of the zoning ordinances which had recently been approved by the City Council. The deputation insisted 'that the ordinance was a very serious menace to the rights of citizens, in that it gave the council power to require an established business to move within five years, without compensation, if it were situated outside its correct zone.'<sup>(94)</sup> An interesting feature of this deputation was that thirteen of the twenty-three organisations represented on it were also members of the Vigilants' deputation which waited on the Premier in October 1930. Also, the same organisations had taken an active interest in the zoning of Brisbane throughout 1929.<sup>(95)</sup> These groups were optimistic that Moore would reform the City Council, and they formed the Vigilants as a pressure group to make their opinions known to both the public and the Government. When it became clear that Moore was not prepared to accede to all their demands, they decided that it was necessary to have their own representatives elected to the City Council. To this end, they altered their role from that of a pressure group to that of a municipal party under the title Civic Reform League.

When the City of Brisbane Amendment Act was in its second reading stage, Peterson took the opportunity to explain why some of the CRL suggestions had been rejected. He defended the city's aldermen against the 'ill-advised, illogical and unfair' criticism levelled against them,<sup>(96)</sup> and argued that a mere reduction in the number of aldermen would not solve the problems besetting the City Council.<sup>(97)</sup>

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94. McInnes to Peterson, 15 November, 1929, item 29/3142, PRE/A997, QSA.

95. Brisbane City Council, Town Plan File, 16062,142/1 no. 29, 14 February, 1929. I am indebted to Professor John Laverty for this reference.

96. QPD, clvii, 2 December, 1930, p 2675.

97. Brisbane Courier, 27 November, 1930.

He was supported on this point by the Town Planning Association who argued that a council of only seven or ten aldermen would be 'Queen Street Council' and ratepayers in the outer Brisbane suburbs would be under-represented. The CRL had little success in enlisting support from metropolitan members of either party, and it was left to TA Dunlop (Independent, Rockhampton) to argue the case for a reduction in the numbers and pay of the city's aldermen.<sup>(98)</sup>

The CRL entered the May 1931 elections for the Brisbane City Council and ran a very active election campaign which stressed the twin issues of no pay for aldermen and a reduction in rate payments.<sup>(99)</sup> The CRL won seven wards, Labor eight, Progressives three and National Citizens two. The CRL's most important victory was in the ward of Toowong, where H Massey defeated the Lord Mayor. The new CRL aldermen were H Tait, company director; TG Paine, retired school teacher; MP Campbell, manufacturer; JB Vickers, civil engineer; A Faulkner, Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce; and a former mayor of South Brisbane, and H Massey.<sup>(100)</sup> The social background of these CRL aldermen bears out Greenwood and Lavery's observation that 'the Civic Reform League found its essential strength among prominent executives and businessmen.'<sup>(101)</sup> While the CRL did not offer a direct electoral challenge to the CPNP at the State level, it did displace the Nationalist-aligned parties as the major non-Labor group on the Brisbane City Council.

Prior to the 1932 election a split occurred in the CPNP and a new non-Labor party, the Queensland Party, was formed. The driving force behind the new party was the Young Nationalists Organisation who complained that Country party dominance within the Moore Government was not being effectively countered by the National

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98. QPD, clvii, 2 December, 1930, pp 2697-8.

99. ibid.

100. Brisbane Courier, 4 May, 1931.

101. Gordon Greenwood and John Lavery, Brisbane, 1859-1959: A History of Local Government, Brisbane, 1959, p 493.

members.<sup>(102)</sup> The new body shared the anti-political party sentiments of the Vigilants and had close connections with the Queensland Non-Party League which had been formed in June 1931.<sup>(103)</sup> The league was under the patronage of the Independent member for Fassifern, Arnold Weinholt, who was a regular speaker at their meetings.<sup>(104)</sup> Nevertheless, Weinholt declined to join the Queensland party and was elected unopposed in Fassifern in 1932 as an Independent. In the face of almost hysterical opposition from most of the Brisbane media, the Queensland party entered fifteen candidates in the State election. Their declared aim was '...to send free men and women to Parliament, representing no particular faction or class.., but Queensland as a whole.'<sup>(105)</sup> In fact, they failed to win a seat. The party received only 1.68 percent of the valid vote and fourteen of the fifteen candidates forfeited their deposits. While they did split the non-Labor vote in the seats they entered, the CPNP did not lose any seats because of this. The life-span of the Queensland party was brief and it collapsed soon after the election.

The Labor party won the 1932 election by a small margin and commenced a period in Government that was to last until 1957. Labor was successful in 1932 because the depression created insurmountable economic and political problems for the Moore Government. In this sense Queensland was no exception because no Australian State Government (except Tasmania in 1931) survived a depression election. Its three years in Opposition were constructive ones for the Labor party because they restored that sense of unity that had been shattered by the events of the late 1920s.

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102. Fry, op.cit., p 88.

103. Brisbane Courier, 10 June, 1931.

104. ibid., 30 October, 1931.

105. ibid., 21 May, 1932.

Labor was doubly fortunate in that it returned to power at a time when the economic situation began to improve. The first Forgan Smith Government was able to take the credit for this improvement and to win the 1935 election in a landslide which cost Arthur Moore his position as leader of the Opposition and which destroyed the CPNP which he had helped to create in 1925.

CHAPTER 4

LABOR RECONSTRUCTS, 1929-1932

The ALP's three years in opposition were ones of reconciliation and reconstruction for the Queensland Labor movement. Moore's industrial relations policies were a major unifying force and the experience of the depression re-oriented most of Queensland's unions towards parliamentary politics. The Labor Party was the chief beneficiary of this development because it was the only organisation capable of giving expression to the political aspirations and requirements of the Labor movement as a whole. When the initial shock of the 1929 defeat had passed, the ALP was faced with the problem of whether or not William McCormack was to remain as parliamentary leader. McCormack, who was in poor health,<sup>(1)</sup> solved this problem by tendering his resignation as leader on 27 May, 1929. In the subsequent ballot the deputy leader, William Forgan Smith, had an easy victory over the member for Maryborough, David Weir.<sup>(2)</sup> McCormack then departed for the United Kingdom where, in a speech to a group of Labour MPs, he attacked the Queensland railway unions for bringing about the defeat of his Government.<sup>(3)</sup> These remarks produced an outcry from the Brisbane trade unions, and his old adversaries on the TLC managed to pass a motion calling for McCormack's expulsion from the ALP.<sup>(4)</sup> McCormack's own actions again diffused the issue. On 21 February, on his return from the United Kingdom, he resigned his seat of Cairns and followed this with his resignation as a QCE delegate in March. It was fortunate for the internal stability of the Labor party that McCormack decided to withdraw from public life. A major dispute over his position in the ALP, following so closely on the 1929 defeat, would certainly have reopened the divisions of the previous four years and would have seriously hindered attempts to restore unity to the party.

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1. William Morrow, op.cit., p 1, stated that McCormack was suffering from cancer of the throat in 1929. The fact that he lived until 1947 throws some doubt on this diagnosis.
  2. Caucus Minutes, 27 May, 1929. The result of the ballot was: Forgan Smith twenty votes, Weir three votes. Weir died in September 1929.
  3. Worker, 11 September, 1929.
  4. TLC Minutes, 16 October, 1929.



When it had recovered from the initial shock of the 1929 defeat, the Labor party set about the task of regaining Government. In August 1930 the QCE established a 'Back to Power' campaign committee to encourage co-operation between the parliamentary party and the organisation, to raise finance, and to boost morale within the branches.<sup>(5)</sup> The primary task of the ALP during its three years in Opposition was to achieve a reconciliation between the parliamentary and industrial wings and to convince the latter of the necessity of returning Labor to power at the 1932 State election. The TLC made the first steps in this direction when it proposed that a Unity Conference be convened at which the unions, the QCE and the parliamentarians could talk out their differences.<sup>(6)</sup> The organisation of this conference was interrupted when Forgan Smith announced that he would not attend because of derogatory remarks made about the Parliamentary Labor party by trade union speakers at a public rally called to protest against the Moore Government's amendments to the Conciliation and Arbitration Act.<sup>(7)</sup> Fortunately, the situation was salvaged when the TLC and the QCE decided that their executives should meet in private discussion rather than in a semi-public forum. This gathering was a success and both leaders made public statements that all contentious matters between them had been resolved.<sup>(8)</sup> In retrospect, the decision not to hold an open conference was a wise one because the unifying influence of the Moore Government had not yet touched all segments of the Labor movement, and the discussion could easily have degenerated into a fruitless and debilitating slanging match.

Relationships among the unions, the QCE and the parliamentary party steadily improved as the depression deepened and the reality of a Government hostile to the Labor movement became apparent. Even

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5. QCE Minutes, 22 August, 1930.

6. *ibid.*, 2 December, 1929; TLC Minutes, 27 May, 1929.

7. QCE Minutes, 13 December, 1929.

8. *ibid.*, 13 May, 1930.

unions such as the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), which had been implacably opposed to the McCormack Government, became reconciled to the ALP. Relations between the Waterside workers and the QCE in the late 1920s had been marked by hatred and bitterness. The sources of this alienation were not removed solely by McCormack's replacement as leader, and it took almost four years for the union to return to the ALP. Being outside the party created problems for the union because it was denied representation at ALP conferences and its members were not permitted to vote in pre-selection ballots. The WWF gradually softened its attitude to the QCE and campaigned on behalf of the ALP at the 1931 Federal election.<sup>(9)</sup> In January 1932 the union's executive decided to seek re-affiliation with the party and appointed a committee to discuss with the QCE the questions of accumulated affiliation fees and the status of the union Secretary who had been expelled from the ALP because of his public criticism of McCormack.<sup>(10)</sup> The QCE did not immediately accept the union's offer to re-affiliate,<sup>(11)</sup> but in March 1933 they were finally readmitted.<sup>(12)</sup>

Neither the economic crisis nor the activities of the Moore Government could, however, effect a reconciliation between the ALP and the Australian Railways Union (ARU). The decision of the union to support the Federal party at the 1929 election gave some hope of a settlement, but this was short-lived.<sup>(13)</sup> In the State sphere, the ARU believed that the QCE was under the domination of an AWU-led clique that had engineered the union's expulsion in 1926. The ALP did make overtures to the ARU regarding the question of reaffiliation. This approach was part of the general strategy of the QCE to heal the breaches in the Labor movement in preparation for the 1932 election. The ARU executive received the overture coldly, and when the matter came before the 1930 State conference of the union a motion calling for reaffiliation was defeated fourteen votes to two after a very

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9. WWF Minutes, 8 December, 1931, p 79 E213/10 RSSSA/ANU.

10. *ibid.*, 6 January, 1932, p 95 and 10 February 1932, p 118.

11. *ibid.*, 2 March, 1932, p 141.

12. *ibid.*, 29 March, 1933, p 285.

13. ARU State Council Minutes, 26 September, 1929, p 121.

brief debate.<sup>(14)</sup> Major arguments put forward against the QCE were that the ARU had never voluntarily left the ALP, it had been expelled, and that the union was in no position to pay accumulated affiliation fees.<sup>(15)</sup> Despite the hostility of the union's executive officers, there developed within the ARU a rank and file movement in favour of rejoining the Labor party. At the February 1931 ARU State Council meeting one delegate moved that the union reaffiliate, but was ruled out of order by the President. A subsequent motion to force the issue to a plebiscite of members lapsed for want of a seconder.<sup>(16)</sup> The Cairns sub-branch of the union then applied to the QCE for separate affiliation. This was refused and the union members were advised to take up membership via their local ALP branches.<sup>(17)</sup> The steadfast refusal of the ARU executive to rejoin the ALP created some strain within the Labor movement, but the union had lost the capacity to offer a serious challenge to Labor's ruling elite.

An important, long-term effect of the depression in Queensland was to extend and consolidate the hegemony of the Australian Workers' Union within the Australian Labor party. The AWU had occupied a central place in Labor politics in Queensland for many years, but the experience of the depression made it the unassailable master of the party organisation for the next twenty years. Before the depression, the smaller unions were confident and powerful enough to challenge the AWU for control of the ALP. The economic collapse so weakened the industrial unions that they became incapable of checking the influence and authority of the AWU. AWU dominance was established at three, related levels of the ALP organisation: at the triennial Labor-in-Politics convention; on the party's

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14. Report ARU Twelfth Annual Conference, Brisbane, August, 1930, p 60.

15. Advocate, 16 March, 1931.

16. ARU State Council Minutes, February 1931, p 72; and 6 November, 1931, p 113.

17. QCE Minutes, 13 April, 1931.

Queensland Central Executive and its Executive Committee (the so-called 'inner-executive'); and within the State parliamentary caucus. The alliance between the AWU and the ALP was personified in the close political relationship that developed between the union's Secretary, Clarrie Fallon, and William Forgan Smith.

The AWU achieved its dominance within the ALP because of the preferential relationship that existed between the party and the trade unions. Most officials of the affiliated trade unions in the 1930s regarded the ALP as little more than a subsidiary branch of the industrial Labor movement. In their view the party was created by the unions to achieve objectives that could not be attained by traditional industrial means, and it was vital that the party remain under the control of the unions. The long-time President of the ALP, WH Demaine, stated the consensus bluntly during his address to the 1935 Labor-in-Politics convention:

Well, I want to say right here and now that the constitution of the ALP is the widest and most democratic in the world, and that every activity of the working-class movement is represented therein, and that to all intents and purposes it is controlled by organised industrial Labor. (18)

'Democracy' was defined and measured in terms of the level of formal trade union representation within the councils of the party. Predictably, the ALP's constitution in the 1930s reflected and preserved the preferential status of the unions. Membership of the party could be obtained in either of two ways: by direct membership of a local branch, or through membership of an affiliated trade union. In 1928 there were 4270 'branch' members and 97776 'union' members of the ALP in Queensland.<sup>(19)</sup> This meant that only four percent of the party's total membership were located in

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18. Daily Standard, 19 February, 1935.

19. Official Report Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1928, p 13.

branches. Union members had equal status with branch members and it was not until after the 1957 split that the party's rules were altered to require parliamentary candidates and convention delegates to be financial members of local branches.

Because of their numerical superiority, the unions were in a position to dominate the triennial Labor-in-Politics convention. The party's constitution provided that the branches and unionists within each State electorate were entitled to send one delegate to convention and that the affiliated unions were allocated delegates according to the following formula: those with a membership ranging between 1000 and 3000 were entitled to one delegate; unions with a membership in excess of 3000 were granted an additional delegate for each 3000 up to a maximum of ten; those unions with a membership less than 1000 were classified as 'small unions' and were granted one delegate. This arrangement produced a 1932 convention of seventy-three delegates, of whom twenty-five were direct representatives of the unions and forty-eight came from the electorates. At first glance this would seem to deny the proposition that the unions 'controlled' the convention. A number of factors, however, need to be considered. The electorate representatives were referred to as 'branch' delegates but this was a misnomer since very few of them were merely rank and file members of the party. When the list of 'branch' delegates is examined many of them are shown to be parliamentarians or trade union officials. Providing there was more than one candidate, all electorates chose their delegates by plebiscite in which members of affiliated trade unions had full voting rights. Because the party had only 3144 branch members in 1932 spread over 197 separate branches,<sup>(20)</sup> the unions were able to determine the outcome of most convention plebiscites.

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20. Headlight, 5 February, 1932.

TABLE 4:1

QUEENSLAND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP 1927-1935

Union	Membership 1927	Membership 1932	% $\pm$ 1927 - 32	Membership 1935	% $\pm$ 1932 - 35
Australian Workers Union	58,244	26,862	- 54	53,547	+136
Australian Railways Union	8,972	5,789	- 42	6,827	+ 18
Amalgamated Foodstuffs Union	5,664	2,382	- 58	3,120	+ 31
Shop Assistants Union	5,000	3,830	- 23	4,310	+ 13
Australian Engineering Union	4,503	2,924	- 35	3,910	+ 34
Queensland Teachers Union	4,400	4,227	- 4	3,677	- 15
Australasian Meat Industries Employees Union	4,286	3,415	- 20	4,847	+ 42
Amalgamated Carpenters & Joiners Union	4,090	2,680	- 34	5,232	+ 95
Australian Road Transport Workers Union	3,850	2,440	- 37	3,179	+ 30
Federated Clerks Union (Central & Southern Branches)	3,409	5,570	+ 63*	6,792	+ 22
Federated Engine Drivers & Firemens Association	2,734	2,792	+ 2	3,071	+ 10
State Services Union	2,661	2,782	+ 4	3,747	+ 35
Colliery Workers	2,502	2,006	- 20	2,268	+ 13
Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemmen	2,271	2,023	- 11	1,800	- 11
Federated Storeman & Packers Union	2,206	2,381	+ 8	2,499	+ 5
Builders Labourers Federation	2,194	859	- 61	1,160	+ 35
Printing & Kindred Industries Employees Union	2,157	2,005	- 7	2,070	+ 3
Coachmakers Union	1,944	1,639	- 16	1,690	+ 3.1
Electrical Trades Union	1,297	1,296	$\pm$ 0	1,587	+ 22
Tramways Union	1,200	921	- 23	1,023	11
Federated Ironworkers Association	1,164	1,355	+ 16	NA	
Others	13,408	22,560	+ 68*	12,422	- 45
TOTAL	154,781	108,285	- 30	154,025	+ 42

\*This growth was brought about by branch amalgamation.

\*The increase in 'others' 1927-32 was produced by a decline in the memberships of small unions which rendered them unworthy of individual listing.

The representation formula for convention was biased in favour of large unions in general and the State's largest union, the AWU, in particular. In 1932 there were sixty-one unions affiliated with the ALP, which represented fifty-seven percent of the State's unions, but only fourteen of these achieved individual representation at convention. This situation benefitted the AWU not only because it was the State's largest union but also because of the enormous membership gap that existed between it and the second largest union. In 1932 the AWU had 26862 financial members and the Australian Railways Union (ARU), which was in second place and not affiliated to the ALP, had only 5789 members or twenty-one percent of the AWU total. As Table 4:1 shows, almost all unions in Queensland experienced a heavy drop in membership during the depression. The AWU suffered more than most because it represented many unskilled workers who were vulnerable to unemployment and because the Moore Government abolished the industrial award which gave preference to the union in rural industries. Yet the massive percentage decline in its membership did not adversely affect the AWU's relative position of influence within the Labor party. This was because it still retained sufficient members to attract the full quota of delegates to convention and the QCE. In contrast, other unions suffered a decline in party representation because their smaller original memberships could not absorb even a minor percentage decline.

At the 1932 Labor-in-Politics convention only two unions were entitled to send more than one delegate, the Australasian Meat Industry Employee's Union (AMIEU) earned two delegates and the AWU the full quota of ten. The AWU delegation accounted for forty percent of the total union representation of twenty-five. The AWU's voting strength at convention was further enhanced by the addition of those 'branch' delegates who were members and officials of the union. The power of the AWU group was put to the test at the 1932 convention when an attempt was made to alter the balance of representation in favour of the smaller unions. Frank Waters, the delegate of the Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union (APWU), proposed that the convention rules be amended to allow union representation on the following basis:

250 to 500 members	.	.	..	one delegate
501 to 750 members			...	two delegates
751 to 1000 members			...	three delegates
1001 to 2000 members	.			four delegates

With an extra delegate for each additional 1000 members up to a maximum of sixteen for any one union. (21)

Waters defended this formula on the grounds that it provided more equitable representation for the smaller unions and was in accord with the practice adopted in other State branches of the ALP. The AWU realised that, despite a proposed increase in its total representation from ten to sixteen, Waters' scheme was designed to reduce its relative strength at convention. If Waters' formula was applied to the 1932 convention, the trade unions would have been entitled to over sixty delegates, only sixteen of whom would have been from the AWU.

In 1932 the AWU had 26862 financial members which equalled twenty-five percent of the total Queensland trade union membership. Under Waters' proposal the union would have been granted credit for only 14000 of these members while the other affiliated unions, most of whose memberships ranged from 1500 to 3500 would have been entitled to four, five or six delegates each. When the delegates of these 'small' unions were added together the AWU would have had only twenty-six percent of the total union representation. Since Waters did not advocate any alteration to the method of branch representation, the focus of power at convention would have been shifted away from the AWU group and in the direction of an alliance of the other unions. Waters' motion provoked a major debate at convention during which he was supported by the delegates from the Shop Assistants' Union, the Printing and Kindred Industries Employees' Union, the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen and the Electrical Trades Union. This support was

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21. Official Report Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1932, p 82.



countered by the vigorous opposition of the AWU delegates who argued that Waters' proposal was anti-democratic in that it disfranchised the larger unions and gave too much power to what AWU secretary, Clarrie Fallon, called 'the conglomerate of small unions operating with a purely craft outlook'.<sup>(22)</sup> When the motion was finally put only sixteen of the seventy-three delegates present voted in favour, which was a clear indication of the influence the AWU was able to wield within the party. The union quickly capitalised on its victory and easily convinced convention to increase the maximum delegates permitted for one union from ten to twelve. This, of course, further entrenched the dominant position of the AWU because it was the only union large enough to be entitled to send a full quota of delegates.

Control of the Labor-in-Politics convention helped pave the way to AWU dominance of the ALP State executive. The Queensland Central Executive (QCE) was charged with the general administration of the party between conventions. It comprised representatives elected from among the parliamentarians, convention and the affiliated trade unions. This method of representation was designed to produce a QCE that was dominated by the AWU. The 1932 convention elected eleven QCE delegates and eight of those were officials or members of the AWU. The Federal and State caucuses were entitled to send one delegate each to the QCE. Affiliated trade unions were directly represented according to the following formula:

2000 members	.....	...	one delegate
5000 members	....	..	two delegates
10000 members		..	three delegates
15000 members		..	four delegates
20000 members	....		five delegates
and above			(23)

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22. ibid., p 84.

23. Australian Labor Party - Queensland Branch, Constitution and Rules, Brisbane, 1935, p 9.

In 1932 only one affiliated union was eligible to send more than one delegate to the QCE, the AWU, which sent a full quota of five. When the post-1932 convention QCE assembled on 26 August, thirteen of the nineteen delegates present were aligned with the AWU faction. The major task of the meeting was to choose the Executive Committee. No ballot was required for any of the eight positions and of those elected only SJ Bryan, the President of the TLC, and RJ Carroll, the Secretary of the AEU, were not members of the AWU.<sup>(24)</sup> The AWU's position within the structure of the ALP was impregnable because the constitution and rules exaggerated its relative representation at convention and on the QCE while at the same time disfranchising the majority of the affiliated unions. Predictably, the AWU was able to rebut any attempt on the part of the other unions to redraft the rules regarding representation because it controlled the Labor-in-Politics convention which was the only body with the authority to alter the party's constitution. It was not until the split of the 1950s that the opportunity arose for the smaller unions to break the hold the AWU exercised over the decision making machinery of the party.

A similar pattern of AWU dominance was to be found in the composition of the first and subsequent Forgan Smith Governments. When the caucus completed its election for the nine man ministry in June 1932 only three successful candidates, Percy Pease, Ned Hanlon

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24. QCE Minutes, 26 August, 1932. The result of the ballot was:

President: WH Demaine, nominated by Messrs. W Forgan Smith and G Crooks - re-elected unopposed.

Vice President: WJ Riordan, nominated by Messrs. JC Lamont and E Rusling - re-elected unopposed.

Secretary: L McDonald, nominated by W Forgan Smith and RJ Carroll - re-elected unopposed.

Executive Committee: Messrs. EJ Carroll, SJ Bryan, W Forgan Smith, MP Hynes, JC Lamont, were nominated and re-elected unopposed.

The QCE meeting that was held subsequent to the 1935 Labor-in-Politics convention produced an identical executive committee. The only alteration had occurred in 1933 when Clarrie Fallon had been elected Vice-President to replace WJ Riordan when the latter accepted a position on the Industrial Court. QCE Minutes, 28 November, 1935.

and Frank Cooper, had not held official positions within the AWU.<sup>(25)</sup> This result reflected the influence the AWU had gained within the parliamentary party by its judicious use of the plebiscite system of candidate selection. The AWU was placed at a great advantage compared with the other unions because its large membership was widely distributed throughout the State whereas the other unions had relatively small memberships concentrated in Brisbane or the coastal towns. Despite its recruitment of urban relief workers, the AWU was primarily a rural union; a fact which aided its pre-selection strategy in a State where sixty-eight percent of the electorates in 1932 were located outside the Brisbane metropolitan area. In addition to these 'natural' advantages, the AWU benefited from the party rules which governed the conduct of plebiscites; rules, of course, which its convention delegates had drafted. The most significant of these was what was known as the 'facsimile ballot'. Prior to each ALP plebiscite a facsimile of the ballot

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25. The first Forgan Smith ministry was as follows:

William Forgan Smith	Premier, Chief Secretary, Vice President of Executive Council; Treasurer (until 12 April, 1938); Secretary for Public Instruction (8 December, 1941 to 9 February, 1942)
Percy Pease	Secretary for Public Lands (until 17 September, 1940)
John Mullan	Attorney-General (until 14 November, 1940)
Edward Michael Hanlon	Home Secretary (until 5 December, 1935); Secretary for Health and Home Affairs (from 5 December, 1935)
Maurice Patrick Hynes	Secretary for Labour and Industry (until 27 March, 1939)
John Dash	Minister for Transport (until 4 August, 1939)
James Stopford	Secretary for Mines (until 30 November, 1936)
Frank Arthur Cooper	Secretary for Public Instruction (until 12 April, 1938); Treasurer (from 12 April, 1938)
Frank William Bulcock	Secretary for Agriculture and Stock
Henry Adam Bruce	Secretary for Public Works; Secretary for Public Instruction (12 April, 1938 to 8 December, 1941)

paper was printed in the AWU journal, the Worker; a similar privilege was extended for a time to the AMIEU. AWU members who were entitled to vote but who could not attend a booth on polling day merely filled out the facsimile ballot paper, affixed one of the perforated 'right to vote' slips that were attached to all AWU union tickets and posted the vote to the returning officer. This voting procedure was a source of constant tension within the Queensland Labor party, and there were regular accusations of malpractice on the part of the AWU officials who were alleged to have filled in ballot papers for members who they knew would not vote in a particular plebiscite.

Pre-selection contests in Queensland during the 1930s regularly erupted into pitched battles between the AWU faction, which was keen to enhance its already dominant position within the State caucus, and the smaller unions who hoped, in vain, to curb the AWU's power. The tone was set by the events surrounding a plebiscite for the Brisbane metropolitan electorate of Fortitude Valley which occurred in mid-1933. Tom Wilson, who had held the seat for the Labor party since 1916, died in May 1933 and a by-election was scheduled for 15 July. Fortitude Valley was a safe Labor seat and there was no shortage of aspiring candidates. One of those who entered the pre-selection contest was ex-MLA Sam Brassington. Brassington's electorate of Balonne had been abolished in the 1931 redistribution and he had failed in an attempt to win Murilla at the 1932 election. He had been an AWU official and was a delegate to the QCE. It was widely known in ALP circles that the party hierarchy was anxious for him to re-enter parliament, and when he won the Valley plebiscite a number of the defeated candidates alleged malpractice on the part of the AWU and some party officials. Their complaints were that the QCE had rejected the nomination papers of a strong local candidate on dubious technical grounds;<sup>(26)</sup> and that on the day of the plebiscite union tickets had been used in an illegal manner in order to secure votes. Eleven of the defeated candidates attempted to

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26. QCE Minutes, 10 June, 1933; the 'strong local candidate' happened to be the author's maternal grandfather, James Connell.

protest to the full QCE about the conduct of plebiscite, but the inner executive would not permit this.<sup>(27)</sup> A meeting of ALP members was then convened in the electorate and the following resolution was carried:

As the plebiscite was corrupt and violated the true principles of Labor it was decided that the machine candidate be opposed. (28)

Two Independent Labor candidates stood against Brassington but he won the seat comfortably.

The animosities engendered by the Fortitude Valley plebiscite had barely subsided when they were rekindled by the pre-selection procedures adopted for the 1934 Federal elections. The QCE decided not to employ the plebiscite system but to constitute itself as an electoral college and to endorse candidates directly. It subsequently endorsed FP Byrne, RJ Carroll, and party secretary Lewis McDonald, as Senate candidates. The President of the AFULE, Theo Kissick, had put his name forward as a candidate and, when he heard that he had not gained a place on the ticket, announced that he intended to contest the election as an independent Labor candidate; whereupon he was expelled from the party. Some branches of his union were critical of his behaviour and he was called upon to explain his actions to the AFULE executive. Kissick argued that the party leadership had abandoned the plebiscite system in order to ensure the selection of candidates who were supporters of the 'inner circle'.<sup>(29)</sup> The debate that ensued was vitriolic and divisive and the central issue of Kissick's nomination became entangled with personal and factional rivalries among the members of the executive. Eventually a series of motions was carried which, while criticising the methods adopted by the QCE, condemned Kissick's decision to nominate against the endorsed Labor candidates.

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27. Brisbane Courier, 29 June, 1933.

28. Brisbane Courier, 1 July, 1933; Advocate, 15 July, 1933.

29. AFULE Executive Minutes, 9 September, 1934, E212/9, RSSSA/ANU, pp 1-10.

The AWU kept a close watch on the performance of those it put into parliament, and was not slow to rebuke any who failed to act in the interests of the union. One example of AWU disciplinary action involved the ALP member for the western electorate of Gregory, George Pollock. Pollock had been an AWU organiser prior to his entry into parliament in 1915 and in late 1929 he wrote a series of newspaper articles outlining the parlous state of the woollen industry in Queensland. Since the electorate of Gregory was dominated by pastoral activities, Pollock was necessarily concerned by the problems of that industry. His suggestion that the cause of these difficulties was the high cost of production provoked an outraged response from the AWU, who, at the time Pollock went into print, were involved in an arbitration case involving the question of wages and hours in the woollen industry.<sup>(30)</sup> Pollock was subsequently summoned before the annual delegates' meeting of the AWU and called upon to explain his actions.<sup>(31)</sup> The delegates were unimpressed with his explanations and they voted unanimously to cancel his membership in the union. Fortunately for Pollock's future political career he made his peace with the union and on the election of Labor in 1932 he was made Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, a post he held until his death in 1939.

One reason for the dominance of the AWU within the ALP was because the union provided the party with essential organisational and financial support to an extent not equalled by the other unions. The AWU was organised on a regional basis; south eastern, western, central and northern, and its branches, particularly in remote areas of the State, often served as the local branches of the ALP. During election campaigns, AWU officials acted as ALP officials, the AWU car became the ALP car, and canvassers, booth workers and candidates were drawn heavily from the ranks of the AWU. Because of its large

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30. Worker, 6 November, 1929.

31. Report Annual Delegates' Meeting AWU, Brisbane, January, 1930, p 24f, OML.

membership the AWU was in a position to make much larger financial contributions to the party than other affiliated unions. The AWU was Queensland's wealthiest trade union and in 1934 it possessed liquid assets in excess of £150,000.<sup>(32)</sup> In 1932 the union paid £671 in capitation fees to the ALP whereas the next largest affiliated union, the AMIEU, paid only £85; in 1935 these figures had risen to £1338 and £121 respectively. Furthermore, the AWU made regular contributions of between £500 and £2000 to Labor party campaign funds when most other unions could afford only £25 or £50.<sup>(33)</sup>

In return for its assistance the AWU expected, and received, heavy representation within the party organisation and in Labor ministries; favourable industrial awards, one of the first decisions of the Forgan Smith Government was to re-introduce the rural award; and the appointment of its officials to important boards and commissions, eg the AWU Secretary, WJ Riordan, was appointed to the re-constructed Industrial Court in December 1933. When the hegemony of the AWU was under attack in the Labor party in 1949 the Worker, in a frank editorial, stated the case for the union:

Whence, then, comes the power of the Labor Movement in Queensland? Where is the basic strength - the resiliency which has enabled Labor Governments to occupy the Treasury benches in this State ever since 1915 with the exception of three years 1929 to 1932 ... The answer is the AWU. The AWU provides the network of organisation, its secretaries and organisers, representatives and rank and file are everlastingly preaching the gospel of Labor in the places where votes count most... With few exceptions every one of the huge membership...is a disciple of Labor and where AWU members do not participate directly in ALP activities their union supplies much of the funds to fight political campaigns. (34)

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32. QPD, clxv, 2 October, 1934, p 422.

33. ARTWU Board of Control Minutes, 23 July, 1934, p 124.

34. Worker, 24 January, 1949.

This statement stressed, among other things, the importance to the AWU group of the Labor party being in Government in Queensland. In fact, the dominance of the AWU faction depended heavily on the electoral success of the ALP. Had Labor lost the 1932 election and thereby given the CPNP the opportunity to claim credit for the economic recovery that occurred after 1932, it is possible that the party may have turned in on itself and reverted to the bitter factionalism of the 1925-29 period.

The major reason why Labor won in 1932 was that the Moore Government was destroyed by the great depression. Forgan Smith was secure in the leadership and the parliamentary party was remarkably free of factional rivalry during Labor's three years in opposition. In the vexed area of economic policy, Forgan Smith skilfully chartered a course between the 'extremism' of Lang on the one hand and the ardent deflationists on the other. The essence of the Queensland ALP's economic policy was that consumer purchasing power should be stimulated by Government initiative. Opposition to wage reduction was based on the notion that this would lead to a reduction in spending and would thus prolong the depression.<sup>(35)</sup> This policy was, of course, at odds with the deflationary Premiers' Plan which was promulgated at a Premiers' Conference in July 1931. As leader of the Opposition, Forgan Smith played no official part in the development of the plan and his personal economic beliefs and a desire not to precipitate divisions in the party determined that he could not wholeheartedly support the plan. On the other hand, Smith knew that if he opposed the plan he could encounter difficulties with its Federal and State Government supporters should he become Premier. Shrewd compromise solved his dilemma. As soon as the contents of the Premiers' Plan were announced the QCE expressed total opposition to it.<sup>(36)</sup> The TLC went a step further and called on the Federal executive to expel any parliamentarian who supported the plan.<sup>(37)</sup>

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35. QPD, clxi, 18 October, 1932, p 965.

36. QCE Minutes, 12 June, 1931.

37. TLC Minutes, 10 June, 1931.



Forgan Smith then announced that the parliamentary party was opposed to the deflationary provisions of the Premiers' Plan and would, if elected in 1932, review the plan and develop a more balanced policy to deal with the economic situation.<sup>(38)</sup> The party indicated that it still favoured a controlled inflationary policy and argued that, while being successful in effecting a reduction in the cost of government, the Premiers' Plan was lacking in the measures necessary to restore industry and commerce by reviving the purchasing power of the people.<sup>(39)</sup> By adopting this policy, Smith placated the party and the trade unions, whose main objection to the Premiers' Plan was that it provided for the reduction of wages and social service benefits, and at the same time ensured that Queensland's subsequent economic policies were not placed out of step with the rest of Australia.

His handling of the delicate question of the Premiers' Plan aptly illustrated the political skills Forgan Smith brought to the office of Opposition leader and Premier. One reason for the contented internal condition of the parliamentary party during the years 1929-1932 was Forgan Smith's clear mastery over the Premier, Arthur Moore. Smith was more experienced in Government, and was a superior debater and parliamentary tactician than the CPNP leader. Throughout his ten year (1932-1942) reign as Premier, Forgan Smith's astute leadership proved invaluable in maintaining the AWU group at the pinnacle of party affairs. At the same time, the active support of the AWU was an important factor in maintaining Smith's own leadership position. Despite his close association with the AWU in the 1930s, the new Premier had never, unlike Theodore and McCormack, held any position in the union before he entered parliament. Forgan Smith became closely associated with the AWU during the 1920s through two avenues: his occupancy of the agriculture ministry brought him into regular contact with the union's officials; and his opposition to the 'radicals' within the party organisation led him to support the AWU group in the factional disputes that bedevilled the ALP in the

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38. QPD, clviii, 24 June, 1931, p 29f.

39. QPD, clxi, 16 August, 1932, p 4.

twenties. It was a tradition in Queensland Labor politics at the time for politicians who did not retain union membership to take out a ticket in the AWU; Smith did so when he became a minister.<sup>(40)</sup>

By 1932 Forgan Smith was established as the dominant personality in Queensland Labor politics. He had extensive ministerial experience, he was an accomplished parliamentary performer, and he derived additional authority from leading the party to an important electoral victory. He consolidated his parliamentary leadership with a position on the inner executive of the QCE and developed a close and effective working relationship with the secretary of the AWU, Clarrie Fallon. The Governor of Queensland, Leslie Wilson, was an astute and candid observer of Forgan Smith and he wrote to the Secretary of the Dominions Office in 1933 that:

Forgan Smith is a man of considerable ability - very clear minded and with a definite purpose. He will not accept dictation from his 'caucus' and is master of them. <sup>(41)</sup>

Smith's ability and his mastery of Queensland Labor politics did not escape the attention of others, and after his crushing defeat of the CPNP at the 1935 election he received many overtures to follow in the footsteps of TJ Ryan and EG Theodore and to assume a leadership position in the Federal party.<sup>(42)</sup> Smith declined these offers and consistently denied persistent rumours that he intended to enter Federal politics. Many reasons have been advanced to explain Smith's unwillingness to vacate the State arena,<sup>(43)</sup> but one that should be singled out is that the Premier realised that the foundation of his success in Queensland was the strength and consequent

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40. It was claimed that when Forgan Smith turned the first sod to commence work on the Story Bridge he reminded those present that '...I have a union ticket for this class of work'.

41. Leslie Wilson to Dominions Office, 5 June, 1933, Wilson papers FML, p 6.

42. Courier Mail, 14 May, 1935.

43. B Carroll, 'William Forgan Smith: Dictator or Democrat', in Murphy and Joyce, op.cit., p 423.

stabilising influence of the AWU within the ALP organisation. Smith was aware that the stability that was the hallmark of Queensland Labor in the thirties could not be transferred to the Federal arena merely by a change in leadership. The schisms of 1931 had left Federal Labor faction-ridden, demoralised and electorally weak. Forgan Smith was a man who enjoyed the exercise of power and preferred to remain as Premier and chief decision maker in Queensland rather than to occupy the relatively powerless office of leader of the Federal Opposition. Also the leadership was never formally offered to him in the way it had been to TJ Ryan and it was unlikely that Smith would have been prepared to risk an humiliating rebuff at the hands of the Federal caucus.

One of the primary objectives of Forgan Smith during his long term as Premier was to maintain the unity of Labor in Queensland and to guide the party along the path of moderate social reform. He believed that the ALP had lost Government in 1929 because of the disruptive activities of left-wing radicals and militants and he was determined that they should never again exercise influence within the party.<sup>(44)</sup> The traditional leader of the militants, the ARU, remained unaffiliated to the ALP and adopted the rather impotent role of opposition in exile. The union's officers, particularly Tim Moroney, remained hostile to the AWU and the Labor leadership in general but could do little more than criticise.<sup>(45)</sup> Other unions occasionally condemned Government policy on such economic matters as wages and hours but they remained reluctant to back these criticisms with militant industrial action.<sup>(46)</sup> The continuing high incidence of unemployment kept the level of industrial disputation low in Queensland throughout the 1930s. Even the ARU, which had a reputation for militancy, did not engage in a single, major industrial dispute in Queensland in the fifteen years between 1931 and 1946.

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44. ibid., p 421.

45. Report of State Secretary, Thirteenth Annual ARU State Conference, Rockhampton, October, 1934, pp 73-74.

46. WWF Minutes, 4 January, 1933, E213/10, RSSSA/ANU, p 247; Caucus Minutes, 8 November, 1932, p 37; Report Fourth Annual Conference ARTWU, August, 1936, p 19.

The ascendancy of the Forgan Smith/Fallon group and the general weakness of the 'left' is well illustrated by the latter's attempts at the 1932 and 1935 conventions to highlight the party's socialist objective. A major debate occurred at the 1932 convention on the socialisation objective. Some members of the party obviously had been impressed by the performance of the Socialisation Units within the New South Wales branch, and moved the following motions:

- (1) That a definite review be made of the fundamental plank of the party, viz, Socialisation of means of production, distribution and exchange. Either it is practicable to put same into operation or, alternatively, it is to be an instruction to the political party to evolve plans for its full operation within two years of gaining office.
- (2) That political candidates for election seek a mandate from the people for complete socialisation by definitely advocating same from all public platforms at next election.
- (3) That socialisation of industry be placed on the ALP fighting platform and that a Socialisation Committee be formed for educational purposes, and publication of literature, with power to circularise all ALP branches with same. (47)

These three motions were opposed vigorously by the AWU. Forgan Smith, in a major speech, argued that it was naive to think that there were a large number of dedicated socialists in Queensland and that Labor would attract little electoral support if it campaigned solely on the socialisation plank.<sup>(48)</sup> He suggested that the party should do more to educate the public in the tenets of socialism because 'before we can achieve Socialism we must have a majority of the people already converted to Socialism, capable of thinking as Socialists and understanding Socialist theory.'<sup>(49)</sup>

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47. Report Labpr-in-Politics, 1932, op.cit., p 8.

48. ibid., p 10.

49. Daily Standard, 12 January, 1932.

Clarrie Fallon then entered the debate and stated that the party was progressing steadily towards the attainment of socialism and that to attempt to hasten the process would invite disastrous electoral consequences. David Riordan, the Federal member for Kennedy and a prominent member of the AWU faction, reminded delegates that 'the Labor party is not a revolutionary party it is an evolutionary party.'<sup>(50)</sup> In the face of such determined opposition the motions were soundly defeated and convention adopted an amendment moved by Forgan Smith that the principles contained in the current objective be affirmed.

This debate was repeated at the 1935 convention and the 'radicals' were again routed.<sup>(51)</sup> Partly because the ALP was controlled by a union that was committed to moderate social and industrial reform through parliament and the conciliation and arbitration system, the depression had little impact on the party's ideology other than to confirm the belief in social democracy. The economic collapse did not lead to an upsurge of revolutionary thought or action within the Queensland Labor party. The trade union owned newspaper the Daily Standard occasionally engaged in flights of 'rhetorical socialism'. It believed, for instance, that the capitalist system had been shaken to its foundations,<sup>(52)</sup> and that the Australian people were turning inexorably to socialist solutions.<sup>(53)</sup> The paper remained contradictory on the issue of how to establish a socialist system. At times it appeared to condone open rebellion,<sup>(54)</sup> but on other occasions counselled against any attempt to stage a general strike to overthrow the capitalist system.<sup>(55)</sup> Such ideological uncertainty was a characteristic of many sections of the Labor movement and operated as an additional restraint to the development of avowedly socialist policies within the ALP.<sup>(56)</sup>

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50. ibid.

51. Daily Standard, 19 February, 1935; Courier Mail, 18 February, 1935.

52. Daily Standard, 1 January, 1932.

53. ibid., 9 September, 1931.

54. ibid., 3 May, 1930.

55. ibid., 14 September, 1932.

56. Louis, op.cit., p 30f; Healy, op.cit., p 27.

When Forgan Smith became Premier in 1932 he led a party whose ideological consensus favoured social and economic amelioration via established constitutional machinery. Not suprisingly, his own political views were in accord with this consensus. By all accounts, Forgan Smith was well read in the classics of political theory and political economy but he found Marx 'boring'.<sup>(57)</sup> He was a socialist in the sense that he believed in the necessity for a vigorous public sector operating within a predominantly capitalist economy. He did not believe that it was essential to abolish private property in order to achieve a socialist society. On the contrary, he believed that:

Socialism does not aim at the destruction of private property, but...demands that all men shall have an equal right to own property. Socialism does not aim to destroy profitable activity, and proposes that all engaged in useful human effort shall share equitably in the results of their industry. (58)

As Premier, he remained an unrelenting opponent of communism and political extremism and was ruthless in his determination to exclude the proponents of such ideas from the ALP. Political extremism remains, for many, a hallmark of the great depression. This is an exaggeration, but it is true that the Labor party in at least three States and the Commonwealth was destroyed in the early thirties partly as a consequence of battles between 'extremists' and 'moderates'. Queensland did not remain immune from the general ferment within Australian Labor politics, but the local party proved capable of containing and neutralising potentially dangerous challenges from Langites, Communists and Social Creditors. A major reason that party dissidents were unable to attract a large following within the Queensland ALP was because the parliamentary party was in

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57. MJ Thompson, *The Political Career of William Forgan Smith*, B Econ, Queensland, 1965, p 3; Carroll, *op.cit.*, p 401.

58. William Forgan Smith, *Socialism*, undated, late 1930s, typescript, Forgan Smith papers, FML, p 1.

Opposition during the crucial years of the depression. As a consequence, there was no possibility of a Labor cabinet provoking splits in the party by embracing controversial economic policies such as the Premiers' Plan.

CHAPTER 5

DISSIDENT LABOR



One of the most distinctive features of the depression in Queensland was that the local Labor party was not consumed by the factional disputes that ravaged the party at the Federal level and within the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. The relative peacefulness of internal Labor politics in Queensland in the early thirties was produced by a number of factors. Defeat at the 1929 State election effectively ended the factionalism that had characterised the ALP in the late twenties. It also meant that the parliamentary party was absolved from the responsibility of governing during the worst years of the crisis. This, combined with the performance of the Moore Government, encouraged most sections of the party to rally behind the leadership of William Forgan Smith with a view to winning power in 1932. The clear dominance of the Australian Workers Union within the organisational wing also encouraged unity. Dissent within political parties typically produces schisms only when there is some balance of power between the dominant and insurgent factions. In the 1930s the AWU was so powerful as the dominant group that dissenters were unable to marshal sufficient strength to offer a serious threat to the ruling elite. Challenges to the stability of the party were offered by the Communist party, Langites and Douglas Credit but these were rebuffed. At the end of the decade the party was required to cope with a novel electoral challenge in the form of the Protestant Labour Party.

By mid-1931 Labor Governments in the Commonwealth and in the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were raked by internal conflicts. Ostensibly the disputes concerned the relative merits of contending economic policies, but were characterised by power struggles and personality clashes of serious dimensions. The disputes reached a peak in June 1931 when New South Wales Labor Premier, Jack Lang, advanced his alternative to the Premiers' Plan. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the politics of the 'battle of plans',<sup>(1)</sup> but it must be noted that Lang's plan was the

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1. See CB Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney, 1970, Chapters X and XI.

product of his own political ambitions and hatreds, combined with the political situation within the New South Wales Labor movement. As Jim Hutchison has argued:

The Lang Plan was essentially proposed to maintain the support of the labor movement in order to preserve Lang's precarious basis for political primacy in NSW, and at the same time reduce the possibility of any threat to his position as leader of the NSW Labor Party. (2)

The influence of Langism soon spread beyond the boundaries of its originator's home State. Many disenchanted and dissident Labor members saw in the person of Lang the possibility of salvation from the depths of economic chaos.<sup>(3)</sup> 'Langism' meant more than an adherence to a particular economic programme; it represented an act of defiance of the authority of the Federal Executive of the ALP, and as such inevitably brought its supporters into open conflict with those State executives which remained loyal to Federal Labor. Fortunately for the unity of the Labor party, Langism never became a seriously disruptive force in Queensland. The State parliamentary party disowned the Lang plan and, after mid-1931, support for Langism was regarded as political heresy by the Labor party in Queensland.

Despite the disapproval of the party's leaders and officials, a Lang plan organisation was formed in Brisbane by a number of Australian Labor Party rank and file members. In mid-1931 a series of local branches passed motions expressing support for the Lang plan. The QCE in reply sent a circular to all party branches informing them that any motions passed in favour of Lang were to be rescinded forthwith.<sup>(4)</sup> The QCE threatened to dissolve any branch that did not comply with this directive. This attitude of the QCE

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2. J Hutchison, 'The Lang Plan and Its Origin', unpublished paper, Lang Seminar, Macquarie Univ, Sydney, 1976, p 13.
  3. For a discussion of Lang's charismatic qualities see M Dixon, Greater than Lenin?: Lang and Labor 1916-1932, Melbourne, 1976, Chapters 1 and 2.
  4. QCE Minutes, 8 June, 1931.

and the parliamentary party was quite predictable. At a time when the organisation was attempting to rebuild in preparation for the 1932 election it was in no mood to tolerate divisive and enervating factionalism. The AWU also determined that the party would adopt a hostile attitude to Lang and his proposals. When Lang first entered Labor politics in New South Wales soon after World War I he found the party's executive dominated by the State's largest union, the AWU. After 1923 Lang sought the active support of unions affiliated with the New South Wales Labor Council in an attempt to break the hold of the AWU. The clashes between the Lang/Labor Council faction and AWU faction rendered internal Labor politics in New South Wales in the early 1920s particularly torrid.<sup>(5)</sup> The final outcome was decided in Lang's favour, but the battles had embroiled both the ALP and AWU Federal Executives. Lang's political conflicts with EG Theodore also determined that the Queensland ALP would emerge as an opponent of his proposals. From the date of Theodore's entry into Federal politics via the New South Wales seat of Dalley, Lang had viewed him as a major rival. Theodore, of course, was closely associated with the AWU both in Queensland and New South Wales, and there is evidence to suggest that the New South Wales Premier was eager to destroy Theodore politically, and that his advocacy of the Lang plan was but a part of that campaign.<sup>(6)</sup>

Despite the strong stand taken by the Queensland ALP hierarchy, the QCE received reports in October 1931 indicating that at least four ALP branch members continued to be actively involved in a pro-Lang organisation.<sup>(7)</sup> As a consequence of further reports those members, VD Kearney, W Mitchell, E Pforr and J O'Leary, were dismissed from the executive positions they held in their respective branches. Kearney was a prominent ALP member, being Secretary of the Enoggera

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5. Dixon, *op.cit.*, p 69f; and J Hagan, 'JT Lang and the Trade Unions', unpublished paper, Lang Seminar, Macquarie Univ, Sydney, 1976, pp 1-3.

6. Hutchison, *op.cit.*, p 8f.

7. QCE Minutes, 7 October, 1931.

Electoral Executive Committee (EEC) and of the Lilley Federal Division Executive (FDE). The QCE was obviously concerned that a man who held such positions in the party, and who had stood as an ALP candidate in the 1926 State election, should so actively defy its rulings, and it instructed Kearney to hand over the books of both bodies to their respective Presidents. Kearney was reluctant to do so, and the QCE was eventually forced to employ a solicitor to recover the books. The QCE then took the step of again writing to all branches informing them that Kearney, Pforr, O'Leary together with two others, had been expelled from the party because of their continued support for the Lang plan. The QCE also took the opportunity to point out to the branches the party's official rejection of Langism.<sup>(8)</sup>

A number of branches defied the QCE directive and after the Christmas recess eleven of them were given fourteen days to rescind motions they had passed supporting Kearney, and to declare their loyalty to the party.<sup>(9)</sup> After the expiration of the fourteen day period, six of the branches indicated that they were willing to do so. The failure of the remainder to reply led to their closure and the formation of new branches in their areas.<sup>(10)</sup> In addition to Langite activities in Brisbane, the QCE found it necessary to take disciplinary action against members in South Johnstone and Toowoomba. The inner executive of the QCE alleged that such groups as the Lang planners were merely disruptionists attempting to effect Labor's defeat at the forthcoming election. The tone of the executive's statement reveals a determination that internal factionalism was not going to contribute to a Labor defeat in 1932.<sup>(11)</sup> However, the above events also indicated a degree of support amongst the ALP rank and file for the Lang plan.

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8. *ibid.*, 16 October, 1931.

9. *ibid.*, 4 February, 1932.

10. *ibid.*, 22 February, 1932.

11. McDonald to Secretary of Cairns ALP, 28 October, 1931, QCE Archives, Brisbane.

Langism held a certain attraction for some sections of the Queensland trade union movement. In March 1931 a motion was proposed, but defeated, that the TLC send a telegram to the New South Wales branch of the ALP expressing its support for Eddie Ward, who was contesting the East Sydney by-election on the platform of the New South Wales branch rather than that of the Federal party.<sup>(12)</sup> The initial meeting to form a rank and file organisation to support the economic policies of Jack Lang was held in the Brisbane Trades Hall. This meeting was the consequence of the enthusiasm engendered by Lang when he addressed a public meeting at the Brisbane stadium. After this initial meeting, further gatherings of the Lang group were held at the Trades Hall. On 23 May 1931 two New South Wales politicians, John Lamaro and Senator Arthur Rae, addressed a meeting on Lang's financial schemes. The Shop Assistants' Union was particularly active in calling and organising these meetings.<sup>(13)</sup> The WWF also invited John Beasley, the leader of the Lang faction in the Federal parliament, to address their union.<sup>(14)</sup> Some members of the ARU also expressed support for Langism. Frank Nolan, who was a member of the Union's State Council, chaired at least one pro-Lang gathering;<sup>(15)</sup> and Mick O'Brien, also a State Councillor, attempted unsuccessfully to censure the President of the TLC for his public support of Theodore's economic policies in preference to Lang's.<sup>(16)</sup> Despite its hostility to the ALP and the AWU, the ARU was never officially committed to Langism. Secretary Tim Moroney believed that the union would gain little by associating with a particular political party or faction. With these few exceptions, the Queensland trade unions remained loyal to the Federal and State executives of the ALP and the 1931 Trade Union Congress passed a resolution deploring the divisive effect the Lang plan was having on the Australian Labor movement.<sup>(17)</sup>

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12. TLC Minutes, 4 March, 1931.

13. Official Report of the Fourteenth Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1932, p 89.

14. WWF Minutes, 2 September 1931, E213/10, RSSSA/ANU.

15. F Nolan, You Pass This Way Only Once, Brisbane, 1974, p 67.

16. TLC Minutes, 10 June, 1931.

17. Official Report of the Eighth Queensland Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, 1931, p 12.

The dispute over the Lang plan flared again at the 1932 Labor-in-Politics Convention, where Kearney appealed against his expulsion from the party. While the debate on a motion to readmit Kearney was an extremely lengthy one, he received the support of only three branch delegates and two union officials. The unionists, Frank Waters of the APWU and Gordon Brown of the Shop Assistants, were rather lukewarm in their support and were careful not to appear as Langites.<sup>(18)</sup> Kearney's appeal was rejected by forty-four votes to twenty-two and his subsequent appeal to the Federal Executive was ruled inadmissible because he had not gained the permission of the QCE to appeal. By the time of the 1932 State election, Langism was a dead issue in Queensland and the two Lang candidates who stood both forfeited their deposits.

An important question is why Langism was unable to command popular, sustained support in Queensland during the depression? Langism persisted in the States of New South Wales and South Australia mainly because there were serious divisions affecting the Labor parties there prior to Lang announcing his economic plan in mid-1931. The events surrounding the split between the Federal Labor party and the New South Wales branch are too well known to need recounting here, but an examination of Lang Labor in South Australia is interesting because it illustrates why the Lang planners never gained a strong foothold in Queensland. Don Hopgood has shown that there was a high level of factionalism present in the Labor party in South Australia prior to 1931.<sup>(19)</sup> The deflationary policies of the Hill Labor Government, which was elected in April 1930, had provoked the anger of the trade unions and large sections of Labor's rank and file. Thus, when Lang announced his plan at the 1931 Premiers' Conference, there existed dissident factions in South Australia who were eager to make use of it in their struggle for control of the local Labor party. The situation in Queensland

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18. Labor-in-Politics, 1932, op.cit., pp 95 and 99.

19. D Hopgood, 'Lang Labor in South Australia', in R Cooksey (ed), 'The Great Depression in Australia', Labour History, 17, 1970.

was quite different. By June 1931 the Queensland Labor party was one of the most united in Australia. With no potential power base in the form of a strong, strategically placed group of party dissidents, Langism was destined to be short-lived in Queensland Labor politics. As well as being denied the preconditions for survival, the Lang planners had other difficulties to face in Queensland. The fact that the parliamentary party was out of office ensured that it could not antagonise any section of the Labor movement by legislative action. In States where Langism gained a foothold it did so partly because the dissidents in the party made political capital out of Labor's support for the deflationary Premiers' Plan. For example, the Premiers' Plan caused a serious split in the Labor party in Victoria, where the Premier, EJ Hogan, was expelled from the party for lending his support to it. In Queensland the leader of the parliamentary Labor party, William Forgan Smith, was sufficiently astute to express only guarded support for the Premiers' Plan, thereby depriving the Langites of the opportunity of accusing the parliamentary party of being 'friends of the money power'.<sup>(20)</sup>

Many of those Labor supporters who embraced Langism in the thirties did so because they saw it as a socialist alternative to the moderate reformism of the established Labor parties. Lang himself did not share this view and was unwilling to extend full support to Langite organisations in States other than New South Wales because he believed that many of their members were extremists and/or crypto-Communists. The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) regarded the Langites as 'left social fascist' opportunists and as enemies of the socialist revolution. During the depression years the Communist party attempted to establish itself as the vanguard party of the socialist revolution by mounting a concerted challenge to the Labor party's leadership of the working class movement. The CPA was encouraged in these

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20. See above Chapter 4.

attempts by their belief that the economic depression would produce an upsurge of socialist militancy among working people. Communist strategists reasoned that the social democratic parties and trade unions would prove incapable of accommodating or containing this radicalism and that the people would then reject reformism and embrace the scientific socialist solutions offered by the CPA. This 'destitution produces revolution' thesis was shown to be invalid during the depression, but it nevertheless attracted a wide range of adherents. The editor of the Brisbane Courier gave an illustration of the theory in 1929 when he wrote that: 'Just as bullrushes flourish best in a sodden undrained area, so Communism flourishes best in an atmosphere of depression and unemployment'.<sup>(21)</sup>

Many supporters and scholars of the Communist Party of Australia have shared this appraisal of the party's history during the depression years. There is an inherent attraction in the proposition that the political party which preached the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism should flourish at a time when capitalism was undergoing its most serious crisis. In 1932 the CPA claimed that, because of the economic circumstances, it had 'divested itself of its swaddling clothes and began to grow rapidly, strengthening its connections with the Australian masses in the process'.<sup>(22)</sup> Academic opinion has tended to agree. Les Louis and Ian Turner stated that, while revolution was never on the Australian political agenda, the CPA 'grew in strength and influence during the depression years'.<sup>(23)</sup> Robin Gollan explained that many people accepted the Communist message in the thirties because social democratic politicians and trade union officials failed to protect the living standards of the working class.<sup>(24)</sup> The historian of the

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21. Brisbane Courier, 29 July, 1929.

22. Workers' Weekly, 21 October, 1932. Similar views are expressed in EW Campbell, History of the Australian Labor Movement: A Marxist Interpretation, Sydney, 1945, p 138f.

23. Louis and Turner, op.cit., p 5.

24. Robin Gollan, 'Some Consequences of the Depression', Labour History, 17, October, 1970, p 185.



party, Alastair Davidson, expressed some misgivings with the above arguments, but nevertheless entitled his chapter on the depression 'The Party Grows',<sup>(25)</sup> Geoffrey Bolton was less circumspect when he asserted that 'Queensland during the 1930s became the home of the most widely supported communist movement in Australian history'.<sup>(26)</sup>

Any assessment of the influence of the depression on the CPA must be placed within a specific context. The CPA has always been a minority political party. Its best result in terms of votes won was at the 1943 Victorian State election when it obtained 4.51 percent of the valid vote. Fred Paterson, who was the member for the Queensland State seat of Bowen from 1944 to 1950, was the only communist ever to sit in an Australian parliament. The only arena in which the party has achieved a modicum of electoral success has been local government elections in northern Queensland and western New South Wales.<sup>(27)</sup> An examination of the party's fortunes within the trade union movement reveals a slightly different picture. Davidson estimated that in the period immediately after the second World War the party controlled unions which contained between twenty-five and forty percent of Australia's trade unionists.<sup>(28)</sup> This was certainly a significant achievement, but the word 'control' must not be interpreted literally. 'Communist control' generally indicated that a particular union had a number of CPA members among its officials. It does not connote that the union membership was committed to the full support of the CPA's political or industrial programme. Despite the party's influence within the trade unions, and despite the fact that it could boast a book membership of 23,000 in 1945,<sup>(29)</sup> the CPA has never posed a serious constitutional or unconstitutional threat to any Australian Government.

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25. Alastair Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, California, 1969, p 43.

26. GC Bolton, 'Unemployment and Politics in Western Australia', Labour History, 17, October, 1969, p 81.

27. Ian Moles, A Majority of One: Tom Aikens and Independent Politics in Townsville, Brisbane, 1979, p 58f.

28. Davidson, op.cit., p 126.

29. ibid., p 83.

If one considers Table 5:1, there are data for Queensland which seriously undermine the assertion that there existed a close, causal relationship between the state of the economy and support for the Communist party.

TABLE 5:1

State election (Queensland)	Percentage of Trade Unionists Unemployed	Percentage of votes for CPA in seats contested
1929	7.5	11.50
1932	18.0	1.96
1935	8.7	8.70
1938	6.4	11.80
1941	4.5	13.90
1944	0.7	28.20

Nineteen thirty two was the worst year of the depression in Queensland, yet seven CPA candidates, an increase of two on the 1929 election, could muster a combined total of only 1224 votes in the State election that was held that year. This suggests that variables other than the level of unemployment influenced the extent of support for the Communist party. Alternatively, it could be argued that election statistics are a misleading indicator of CPA support. However, during the period under review the CPA in Queensland placed great store on election campaigns as a method of building and maintaining working class consciousness;<sup>(30)</sup> and the CPA chose carefully those seats in which it fielded candidates. It required a minimum level of political commitment to cast a vote for a communist in a secret ballot, yet very few Queenslanders were prepared to display such a commitment.

30. Workers' Weekly, 26 April, 1935; Tribune, 20 April, 1944.

Australia's electoral history in the 1930s suggests that voters, while being intolerant of the incumbent Government, saw as the credible alternative not the CPA but the established Opposition party. During the worst years of the depression the CPA also failed to capitalise on a potentially favourable local situation by zealously embracing Comintern-inspired policies which were out of step with the realities of the Australian political climate. The mistaken belief that History was on their side, and that the total collapse of capitalism was at hand, encouraged the CPA to pursue adventurist and sectarian policies that resulted in its almost total isolation from the mainstream of the Australian Labor movement. Davidson has shown that the growth of the CPA in the early twenties was dependent on its close association with the ALP and the established trade union movement.<sup>(31)</sup> This relationship disintegrated after the 1924 Federal Conference of the ALP decided against formal affiliation with the CPA. The conference resolution led many State branches of the ALP, including Queensland, to declare the CPA a proscribed body.<sup>(32)</sup> Despite this adverse decision, the CPA continued to support the ALP both politically and industrially. In 1928 the Comintern directed all Communist parties to end their collaboration with bourgeois, social democratic parties and to assume their rightful places as vanguard parties of the socialist revolution. After a bitter power struggle which culminated in the expulsion of central committee member Jack Kavanagh, this directive was adopted by the Australian party.<sup>(33)</sup>

The new CPA policy was enshrined in the slogan 'Capitalism has two parties - fight both'. Communists now regarded all ALP leaders and trade union officials as 'social fascists', who consciously propped up capitalism by pursuing reformist policies. Those Labor

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31. Davidson, op.cit., p 24f.

32. See Chapter 2.

33. Davidson, op.cit., p 48f; Robin Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, op.cit., p 20f; R Dixon, 'The CPA in the Thirties', ALR, 49, 1979, pp 25-7

men who were commonly seen as 'left-wing' were more vigorously denounced as 'left social fascists' because, according to the CPA, they assumed left-wing postures only to divert the working class from correct revolutionary struggle. Australian Communists believed that the misery and deprivation brought by the depression had won the bulk of the working class to radical socialism, and all that remained to precipitate a revolutionary situation was to destroy the credibility of social fascism.<sup>(34)</sup> The CPA committed a serious error of judgement in adopting such an isolationist policy. Tactless and sometimes vitriolic attacks on traditional working class leaders served only to antagonise and to alienate potential CPA recruits. Both EW Campbell and Lance Sharkey later admitted that this negative and sectarian attitude prevented the party from taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by the depression.<sup>(35)</sup>

Queensland played an important role in the adoption of this new vanguardist stance. The 1929 Queensland State election provided the CPA with its first opportunity to mount a direct electoral challenge to the ALP. From its formation in 1920 until 1929 the CPA generally supported Labor's electoral candidates. This policy was departed from at the 1925 New South Wales State election, but the decision was so unsuccessful and produced such division within the party that it was not repeated.<sup>(36)</sup> The CPA reasoned that the chief enemies of the working class were the non-Labor parties, and that communists were likely to have more influence with a Labor Government than a non-Labor one. During the 1926 Queensland State election campaign the CPA issued the stern warning that 'any worker who votes anti-labour is a scab on his class'<sup>(37)</sup> In 1929 the party was expressing similar sentiments about workers who intended to vote for the ALP.

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34. CPA, Towards a Workers' Government, Sydney, 1929, P12/1/7, p 17, RSSSA/ANU.

35. Campbell, op.cit., p 140; LL Sharkey, An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party, Sydney, 1944, p 24.

36. Davidson, op.cit., p 33.

37. Workers' Weekly, 30 April, 1926.

The turbulent state of the Labor movement in Queensland after 1925 was conducive to the emergence of an organised left-wing political organisation that was prepared to offer a formal challenge to the McCormack Government.<sup>(38)</sup>

It was in this atmosphere of growing radical discontent with the State Labor Government that prominent CPA activists Norman Jeffrey and Jack Ryan compiled a document entitled the 'Queensland Resolution' in late 1928. This resolution embodied the essentials of the Comintern's instruction that the world's Communist parties must cease their collaboration with social democratic parties.<sup>(39)</sup> Rival interpretations of this document provided the focal point for the internal party dispute that led to the downfall of Jack Kavanagh and his supporters on the Central Committee. The Queensland branch of the party was a strong proponent of the new line, and a local party conference in January, 1929, declared that:

This conference...endorses the new tactic of the Communist Party to fight Labor and all other capitalist parties in the forthcoming State election by running of Communist and left wing candidates. (40)

The Labor party responded to the challenge by alleging that the CPA actively conspired with the Opposition in an attempt to defeat the McCormack Government, and that the CPA campaign was funded by the Country Progressive National party.<sup>(41)</sup> The CPA vigorously denied the charge and claimed that the letter which was cited as proof of collaboration was a blatant forgery.<sup>(42)</sup> On the eve of the election the CPA issued a final statement in which it said that it was '...not concerned whether the Nationalist Party or the ALP is returned to office; both are equally agents of capitalism'.<sup>(43)</sup>

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38. For details see Chapter 2.

39. Workers' Weekly, 24 August, 1928; Campbell, op.cit., p 125; Davidson, op.cit., p 48.

40. Workers' Weekly, 11 November, 1929.

41. Daily Standard, 24 January, 1929.

42. Workers' Weekly, 1 February, 1929.

43. ibid., 3 May, 1929.

Relations between the two parties were soured further when unions affiliated to the Labor party took steps to have the CPA expelled from the rooms it occupied in the Brisbane Trades Hall. Moderate unions such as the printers<sup>(44)</sup> and the postal workers<sup>(45)</sup> were keen to be rid of the communists, but had to contend with strong opposition from the Waterside Workers' Federation which had cancelled its ALP affiliation and had given support to the CPA's election campaign.<sup>(46)</sup> The issue produced many heated debates at TLC meetings, and the communists were not issued with a notice to quit until June 1929.<sup>(47)</sup>

At the 1929 election the CPA fielded candidates in five of the seventy-two electorates. These were: JB Miles (Brisbane), JM Durkin (Fortitude Valley), E Tripp (Mundingburra), FW Paterson (Paddington), and DJ Morris (Townsville). They polled a combined total of 3194 votes which represented 0.74 percent of the State vote and 11.5 percent of the votes cast in the five electorates contested. Individual performances ranged from a minimum of 2.5 percent in Townsville to a maximum of 25.6 percent in the Brisbane metropolitan seat of Paddington. Communist officials were elated with the results and the Workers' Weekly editorialised that:

The success with which the Communist Party met in this its first direct challenge to capitalist reformism. (sic) Communist meetings were invariably received with interest. Communist literature was distributed and eagerly read all over Queensland. Hundreds of willing workers popularized the Communist message. The Communist Party challenge gave new life and hope to rebels who had apparently despaired of the struggle. (48)

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44. Printing Trades Journal, 12 February, 1929, p 27.

45. Postal Advocate, 15 February, 1929, p 12.

46. WWF Minutes, 3 April, 1929, E213/9, p 68, RSSSA/ANU.

47. TLC Minutes, 23 January, 1929; 5 February, 1929; 20 May, 1929.

48. Workers' Weekly, 17 May, 1929.

A closer examination of the results suggests that the party exaggerated the significance of the election.

The CPA chose to regard itself as the major cause of the defeat of the McCormack Government. Such a claim had obvious propaganda value, but was not grounded in fact. The party contested only Labor held electorates, and all five were retained by the sitting member. Only in the most indirect and ironical sense could the CPA claim to have unseated a Labor member. Harold Hartley, the Labor member for Fitzroy, was a prominent critic of McCormack and chose to endorse the 'Left-Wing Programme' sponsored by the CPA. He subsequently lost his seat to the CPNP. The total CPA vote was inflated by the fact that in two of the seats contested their candidates were involved in a two-way contest with the sitting Labor member. These seats were Paddington where they polled 25.6 percent of the vote and Mundingburra where they obtained 17.16 percent. The strong showing in Mundingburra can be contrasted with the result in the contiguous electorate of Townsville where the CPA's candidate could manage only 2.5 percent in a four-way contest. Nevertheless, the party regarded the election as a victory and as a validation of their new, independent policy.<sup>(49)</sup> The fallacy of this assessment was to be illustrated at the 1932 State election when, despite an increase in the number of candidates to seven, the party received only 1224 votes or 1.96 percent of the total votes cast in the seats contested.

The Communist party believed that its relatively good performance at the 1929 election was the consequence of the extensive propaganda work that it had carried out in Queensland in the late twenties. Encouraged by the opportunities provided by the frequent industrial disputes experienced in the 1920s, the CPA regarded the State as a lucrative recruitment area. In 1925 the party sent its national organiser, Norman Jeffrey, on a tour of north Queensland. He was given the following instructions:

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49. Davidson, op.cit., p 50.

He will endeavour to link up the discontented elements into the revolutionary organisation - the Communist Party - to enable the advanced sections to make war on the social traitors in an organised way, to replace the policy of reformism by the active class struggle and to prepare the Queensland workers for the situation that capitalism is plunging headlong into - the period of the proletarian revolution. (50)

Jeffrey paid particular attention to organising among waterside workers, railwaymen and sugar workers.<sup>(51)</sup> The Workers' Weekly claimed that the tour was successful in building working class consciousness and that active branches of the CPA had been established at Townsville, Port Douglas and Cairns.<sup>(52)</sup> Despite the advances made in the north, much of the work was done in a spasmodic and uncoordinated manner. As a result, CPA influence waxed and waned according to a multitude of local conditions. Distance, isolation, and an itinerant workforce combined to hinder CPA attempts to channel the traditional militancy of the north along 'correct' paths.

The formation of the Militant Minority Movement (MMM) in 1928 was an attempt to place communist organisation on a more stable basis. The MMM was modelled on the British Minority Movement and was designed to operate as a 'front' group within the trade union movement. Its proclaimed aims and objectives were as follows:

The Militant Minority Movement shall consist of an unlimited number of members who are trade unionists and who are prepared to accept and work for the attainment of the objects of the organization.

(1) To increase the power and efficiency of organized labor by promoting class consciousness and a correct knowledge of the principles of the working class movement and by stimulating activity in the unions on all matters affecting their interests.

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50. Workers' Weekly, 18 September, 1925.

51. Norman Jeffrey, Organising in North Queensland, Typescript, 1960, Morrow Papers, FML, 4pp.

52. Workers' Weekly, 18 September, 1925.



- (2) To endeavour to bring about the closer organization of the workers by urging the adoption of the principles of the OBU, and, as a means to that end, favouring the amalgamation of the crafts on the basis of one union in each industry.
- (3) In times of industrial crisis to act as a vanguard in the workers' struggle and to expose those who attempt to betray the workers.
- (4) To develop amongst the workers a dependence upon their own collective strength as a means of forcing concessions from capital and as a means of defence against its attacks.
- (5) To work for the abolition of contract, piece work and bonus systems.
- (6) To organize for a short working day.
- (7) To bring into being a centralized industrial movement linked up with the Red International of Labour Unions.
- (8) To assist in the development of the working class movement for the overthrow of capitalism and the socialisation of industry. (53)

While the stated aim of the MMM was to win the broad mass of unionists to socialism, it also concerned itself with the more mundane intricacies of internal union politics. Attempts by MMM activists to win positions within individual Queensland unions did not meet with notable success in the early thirties. The MMM was organised in a semi-secretive fashion around the sale of the newspaper the Red Leader.<sup>(54)</sup> A rare insight into its operations was provided at an MMM conference held in Brisbane during 1931.

The conference attracted only twenty-seven delegates, and a report submitted by the executive complained that: 'The MMM owing to organisational weaknesses has so far failed to capture the effective leadership in a single struggle'.<sup>(55)</sup> As a solution

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53. ibid., 30 March, 1928: Campbell, op.cit., p 123.

54. Healy. op.cit., p 8.

55. Workers' Weekly, 17 April, 1931.

to this problem, the executive successfully urged the conference to adopt and implement the policy guidelines laid down by the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU),<sup>(56)</sup> at its 1930 conference. The essence of the RILU programme was that the unions should take advantage of the economic situation and embark on a militant strategy of direct action aimed at the final destruction of the capitalist state. The conference endorsed the RILU policy in the following resolution:

The results of the conference are to bring the Queensland MMM definitely in line with the RILU on policy and organisation; to liquidate the mistakes of the past and to bring Queensland into line with the nation-wide campaign for the building of a Minority Movement based on the broad masses of the workers and putting forward an active leadership of economic struggles which will launch the counter offensive against the triple alliance of the bosses, State and trade union bureaucrats, and to organise for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a Workers' government. (57)

The adoption of this super-militant policy in a time of unprecedented unemployment illustrated how out of touch the CPA had become with the Australian political situation. MMM support in Queensland consequently underwent a sharp decline in the months following the conference.<sup>(58)</sup>

By 1932 there were MMM cells operating in thirty Queensland unions,<sup>(59)</sup> but none had made any significant headway in realising its objectives. An ambitious attempt to have the Pastoral Workers' Industrial Union operate as an MMM cell within the AWU did not survive the collapse of the 1930-31 shearers' strike. (See Chapter 7)

The general weakness of the Minority Movement in Queensland in the early thirties is illustrated in a set of MMM State Executive minutes

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56. Frank Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australia, 1921-1932', HSANZ, 17;69, October, 1977, pp 441-458.

57. Workers' Weekly, 17 April, 1931.

58. Davidson, op.cit., p 69.

59. ibid., p 58.

that were leaked to the police in 1933.<sup>(60)</sup> They showed that the executive possessed the princely sum of eight shillings and two pence halfpenny with which to conduct revolutionary activity throughout the State. A summary of MMM activities in the major industrial centres of Queensland revealed a constant pattern of poor organisation, incompetent management and lost opportunities. Party functionary and trade unionist, Tom Wright, corroborated this interpretation when speaking of the Queensland situation in a Workers' Weekly article later the same year. He wrote that:

...it must be frankly acknowledged that revolutionary activity on the job, in the unions, and among the unemployed is weak, and that the party nuclei and MM groups function poorly and irregularly. <sup>(61)</sup>

The ARU was the only Queensland union in which the MMM exercised any real influence. Yet, poor tactics combined with skilful manoeuvring on the part of the incumbent Secretary, Tim Moroney, countered MMM attempts to gain control of the union. At the 1930 ARU State conference a motion was proposed that the union establish formal links with the Communist party. The main speaker against the motion, Mick O'Brien, drew on the syndicalist traditions of the union when he argued that a Communist Government would prove to be as incapable of solving the problems of the depression as a Labor one. He counselled the union to rely on its own industrial strength and to avoid the entanglements of political parties. The motion was defeated ten votes to six.<sup>(62)</sup> Such a close result encouraged the MMM to regroup its forces and raise the matter again at State Council level. At the June 1931 meeting Frank Nolan moved that the union support the CPA both organisationally and electorally. Speakers were divided evenly for and against the motion. Moroney then put

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60. Minutes of a Meeting of the MMM State Executive, 26 March, 1933, item 33/3266, PRE/A1074, QSA, 11pp; Police Report, 22 November, 1933, item 33/6621, PRE/A1085, QSA, 9pp.

61. Workers' Weekly, 15 December, 1933.

62. Report Twelfth ARU State Conference, August, 1930, p 56.

the view that while he supported the general policy direction of the CPA, he strongly disapproved of the actions of certain Communists, and that it was not in the long-term best interests of the union to become formally committed to any political party. Moroney prevailed and Nolan's motion was defeated by the very narrow margin of five votes to four.<sup>(63)</sup>

The CPA earlier had committed a serious tactical error in antagonising Moroney by labelling him a 'left social fascist' Moroney's considerable prestige at the Trades Hall and among the more militant unemployed could have proved a considerable asset to the CPA.<sup>(64)</sup> However, when the MMM faction in the ARU managed to topple George Rymer as President in 1930, (See Chapter 6), Moroney reasoned that he would be their next target. Nolan alleges that Moroney became so hostile to the CPA that he was even prepared to sabotage the 1931 Mt Oxide strike in order to discredit the MMM in the eyes of the union rank and file.<sup>(65)</sup> Moroney's tactics were nevertheless successful and he remained as Secretary of the union until his death in 1944.

Lack of notable success within the trade union movement was accompanied by an inability on the part of the CPA to attract members in Queensland during the early years of the thirties. At the national level, the CPA managed to boost its membership from 249 in 1928 to 1116 in 1931. But over the same period the Queensland membership grew from seventy-four to only 116.<sup>(66)</sup> The absence of a Labor Government in Queensland during the worst years of the depression restricted the capacity of the CPA to attract to its ranks Labor supporters who were disillusioned with the policies of their party. The CPA's hostile attitude to the ALP also cost it members. Until 1933 the party in Queensland was a

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63. Minutes ARU State Council, 26 June, 1931, pp 104-106.

64. Healy, *op.cit.*, p 10.

65. Frank Nolan, *op.cit.*, p 60.

66. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p 53.

zealous supporter of the social fascist line. An unsuccessful attempt by Fred Paterson in 1932 to moderate this policy almost led to his expulsion from the party.<sup>(67)</sup> CPA activists regularly referred to Labor leaders as 'parasites on the workers'.<sup>(68)</sup> For its part, the Queensland branch of the ALP had little sympathy with the philosophy and policy of the CPA. In 1926 the QCE had introduced an 'anti-communist pledge' for all ALP members, thereby declaring itself against any possible cooperation with the CPA. Throughout the depression the ALP held to the view that the CPA was a disruptionist element opposed to the best interests of the Labor movement.

The CPA lacked the political influence to force the Labor party into any form of alliance. On the contrary, it was the CPA that was compelled to trim its sails. In 1933 the Communist party in Australia eagerly embraced the latest Comintern directive to build a united front of the working class against the onslaught of fascism. In August 1933 the Queensland executive of the MMM communicated to all its branches a direction to cease their attacks on 'reformist' politicians and union officials and to direct all their energies to build a united front of the working class. The executive stated that:

.it agrees with the National Bureau and the NSW conference of the MMM that the workers, despite religious, party or craft union prejudices, whatever the attitude of the trade union leaders may have towards our proposals will manage to overcome all obstacles and with us realise a common unity in struggle against the capitalists. (69)

After 1933 the CPA made frequent requests to be permitted to affiliate with the ALP on the same terms and conditions as a trade union,<sup>(70)</sup>

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67. Andrew Jones, *Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland: A Study of FW Paterson's Victory in Bowen, 1944*, BA, Queensland, 1972, p 45.

68. Jeffrey, *op.cit.*, p 3.

69. Minutes MMM State Executive, 11 August, 1933, item 33/4505, PRE/A1085, QSA.

70. Workers' Weekly, 10 January, 1936; 14 July, 1936; 7 August, 1936.

but the Labor party consistently rejected these overtures.

On balance, the CPA in Queensland reaped few immediate political benefits from the depression. On a long term basis, however, the work done within the trade unions and among the unemployed paid some dividends within the more favourable political climate of the Second World War.<sup>(71)</sup> The depression in Queensland was a period of lost opportunities for the CPA. When the spontaneous radicalisation of the workers did not occur the party proved incapable of developing new and appropriate strategies to deal with the political situation. As a result of this failure, the CPA remained isolated and impotent. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of party functionaries, the CPA lacked the capacity to challenge seriously the ALP's position of dominance within the Labor movement.

Communism offered little threat to the unity of the Labor party in Queensland during the 1930s partly because the ALP had declared itself against any association with the CPA before the onset of the depression. Communists were regarded as pariahs by most Labor supporters in Queensland because of the mistaken belief that they had caused the downfall of the McCormack Government in 1929. Labor, however, possessed no such preconceived hostility to the Douglas Social Credit movement, which ironically posed a more serious threat to the unity and strength of the party. Today in Australia social credit ideology is usually associated with extreme right-wing organisations such as the League of Rights,<sup>(72)</sup> but during the depression there was, at least, a superficial similarity between their theories and policies and those of the ALP. Major Douglas' ideas on credit reform were readily endorsed by many Labor supporters, particularly after the problems the Scullin Federal Government encountered with the Commonwealth and private trading banks. On a

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71. Jones, *op.cit.*, p 190f.

72. See Andrew Campbell, The Australian League of Rights, Melbourne, 1979.

more general level, the ALP and Douglas Credit shared elements of a common ideology of populism that seemed to explain and offer a solution to the depression.<sup>(73)</sup> The Queensland AWU journal, the Worker, described the relationship in these terms:

Labor...does not accept the Douglas theory in its entirety. .(but) in the immediate aims of both in regard to financial and currency reform there is no divergence. (74)

From its formation in Queensland in late 1930 until 1934, the Douglas Credit movement operated as an educative and propaganda pressure group. It printed leaflets, wrote and distributed books, held discussion groups and arranged public meetings to expound the theories of Major Douglas.<sup>(75)</sup> Douglas Credit saw the Labor movement as an area of potential recruits and their speakers regularly addressed local ALP branch meetings.<sup>(76)</sup> The TLC made a room available free of charge for Douglas Credit, but stopped short of allowing Douglas Credit speakers to address the council.<sup>(77)</sup> The 1932 Labor-in-Politics rebuffed a similar approach from the Douglas Credit organisation. Both bodies refused permission not because of any enmity towards Douglas Credit, but because they did not wish to set a precedent for outside groups to address their meetings.<sup>(78)</sup> Some ALP branch members and affiliated trade unionists joined the Douglas Credit organisation, and in 1933 the QCE was asked to rule whether or not membership of Douglas Credit was compatible with membership of the ALP. The executive gave the cautious opinion that:

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73. Baiba Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', Labour History, 17, 1970, pp 148-160.

74. Worker, 1 February, 1933.

75. Brisbane Courier, 2 December, 1932; Some examples of Douglas Credit literature are housed in the Political Leaflet Collection, Box 5, OML.

76. Daily Standard, 8 October, 1932.

77. TLC Minutes, 19 August, 1931.

78. Official Report Labor-in-Politics Convention, Brisbane, 1932, p 25.

...providing that the Douglas Credit group does not run (electoral) candidates there can be no objection at present to an ALP member joining such a group, but the matter is being kept under review by the Executive. (79)

Cordial relations between Douglas Credit and the ALP in Queensland came to an abrupt end in 1934 when the Social Credit party was formed and endorsed candidates for the Federal election that was scheduled for later that year. In August 1934 the QCE declared the new party a proscribed organisation and forbade ALP members to associate with it. This decision did not produce any immediate disharmony within the party since by 1934 relatively few Labor party members remained associated with Douglas Credit. There was, however, lingering support for Douglas Credit within the ranks of the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE). Over the previous three years a strong Douglas Credit group had developed in the union under the leadership of the divisional Secretary, John Valentine. In September 1935 the State Council of the AFULE debated the Secretary's association with the Social Credit party. Motions from a number of local branches called on the council to forbid paid officials from joining anti-Labor bodies and wearing the badges of those bodies when engaged on union business. Labor party loyalists on the council launched a strong attack on Valentine and one of them warned that 'if we let Douglas Credit creep in we will be kicked out of the Labor party'. Valentine responded by defending the economic policies of Social Credit by asserting that they were substantially in accord with those of the Labor party. A long and sometimes vitriolic debate followed until the following motion was passed by five votes to three:

That as this union is affiliated with the Australian Labor Party. ,any member of our union who does not uphold the principles according to the Labor platform shall not hold office in this union, .. (80)

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79. QCE Minutes, 11 May, 1933.

80. AFULE Minutes, 8 September, 1935, E212/10, pp 4-6, RSSSA/ANU.



This was, in effect, an ultimatum to Valentine to choose between Social Credit and his job; he chose to retain his job.

Despite their lack of success within the Labor movement, Social Credit maintained a presence in Queensland politics throughout the 1930s. By 1934 Douglas Credit had developed an impressive infrastructure with sixty branches and over 1,000 members distributed throughout the State.<sup>(81)</sup> At the 1934 Federal election they contested five electorates and secured 6.9 percent of the votes cast in those seats. They improved their position at the 1935 State election by obtaining 19.8 percent of the vote in the nineteen electorates contested. Both these results are inflated somewhat because Social Credit candidates tended to perform best in seats that were not contested by both the major parties. Berzins' comment that they became the Labor party's 'chief rural rival'<sup>(82)</sup> in the 1930s exaggerates the party's strength in Queensland. However, they did benefit from the decline of the CPNP after 1935. Social Credit's best electoral effort in Queensland occurred at the 1937 Federal election in which its candidate polled, after the distribution of ALP preferences, 49.4 percent of the vote in the electorate of Wide Bay and almost defeated the sitting Country Party member. This represented the zenith of Social Credit's achievements in Queensland and, after a relatively poor showing at the 1938 State election, the party withdrew from the Queensland political scene.

Since Labor in Queensland survived intact the challenges offered by Langism, Communism and Social Credit, it was perhaps ironic that the only serious electoral threat to the ALP in the 1930s sprang from religious rather than ideological antagonisms. In December 1937 the formation of an organisation called the Protestant Labour party was announced. The historian of the party has explained its birth in terms of a Protestant reaction to Catholic agitation for State aid for church schools, an agitation which was intensified in Queensland in 1936 with the establishment of the Catholic Tax Payers'

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81. Report of the First State Conference of the Douglas Credit Party of Queensland, Brisbane, 1935, OML.

82. Berzins, op.cit., p 159.

Association.<sup>(83)</sup> While State aid was the catalyst that produced the new party, there were other issues involved. Sectarian animosities were never far below the surface of Queensland, or Australian, politics and were easily inflamed by official policies which appeared to discriminate against a particular denomination. Two decisions of the Moore Government were interpreted by many Catholics as being discriminatory: first, the cabinet decided that subsidised relief labour was not to be used to improve the grounds of denominational schools; and second, the Government, as an economy measure, reduced the number and value of secondary school scholarships in a way which appeared to disadvantage Catholic children. The Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, had campaigned against the Labor party at the 1929 election, allegedly because McCormack had refused to grant him freehold title to a piece of land for a church building.<sup>(84)</sup> Moore's unsympathetic attitude to the scholarship issue turned the Catholic hierarchy and press against him. During the 1932 election campaign the church endorsed the Labor party<sup>(85)</sup> after Forgan Smith promised to restore the scholarship system.<sup>(86)</sup>

When Labor was elected to Government in 1932, the two contentious decisions were reversed. A striking difference between the CPNP and ALP cabinets was that while nine of Moore's ten ministers were Protestants, seven of Forgan Smith's ten were Catholics. The Premier himself was a Presbyterian but had no sympathy with any form of militant Protestantism. For instance, in 1933 he turned down an invitation from the Loyal Orange Institute to be part of the official party at a function to celebrate the battle of the Boyne.<sup>(87)</sup>

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83. SK Young, *The Protestant Labour Party*, BA, Queensland, 1966, p 13f.

84. Brisbane Courier, 18 April, 1929.

85. Catholic Leader, 21 January, 1932; 28 January, 1932; 31 March, 1932.

86. William Forgan Smith, My Message to You, ALP Election Leaflet, 1932, FML.

87. Loyal Orange Institute of Queensland to Smith and Reply, 8 June, 1933, item 33/3348, PRE/A1074, QSA.

Isolated protests against the 'Catholicity' of the Queensland Labor party occurred throughout the 1930s. The Protestant Labour party repeated most of these in its initial manifesto where it alleged that the Government was insidiously pro-Catholic and that members of that faith received preferment within the party organisation as well as within the police force and public service.<sup>(88)</sup> None of these allegations was new; what was new was that those who made them claimed to be erstwhile Labor party members.

The Protestant Labour party entered the 1938 State election and its twenty-three candidates polled 8.75 percent of the valid vote. One of its candidates, GA Morris, defeated the sitting Labor member for the metropolitan seat of Kelvin Grove, FJ Waters. The party then consolidated this victory by winning two municipal by-elections. In 1939 their preferences almost brought about the defeat of the ALP candidate in a by-election for the Federal seat of Griffith. These results established the Protestant Labour party as a more serious electoral threat to Labor than either the Lang party or Douglas Credit. Fortunately for the ALP the Protestant Labour party proved to be more Protestant than Labor and its success, while brilliant, was short-lived. Those prominent in the party claimed that they were 'true Labor men' and that they aimed only to correct the sectarian bias that existed within the ALP. Yet, while the Protestant Labour party was able to make disturbing inroads into Labor's voting base at the 1938 election, it was unable to attract the support of any prominent members of the Labor party.<sup>(89)</sup> Some of the Protestant Labour party spokesmen and candidates were ex-ALP members but none had occupied any position of authority within the party. The Protestant Labour party attracted many who were motivated solely by anti-Catholicism and were not interested in reforming the ALP. Tensions between those who saw themselves as part of the Labor movement and those who did not eventually produced a split in the Protestant Labour Party in late 1939, after which the party went into rapid decline.

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88. Courier Mail, 9 December, 1937; QPD, clxxii, 24 August, 1938, p 114f.

89. Young, op.cit., p 65.

The outbreak of war in 1939 created an atmosphere that was not conducive to a political party that campaigned exclusively on a religious issue, and at the 1941 State election the party polled only 1.74 percent of the vote. Morris, who had enlisted in the navy in 1940, lost his seat to the ALP candidate. The Protestant Labour party never contested another election.

Labor in Queensland survived the depression organisationally intact. The challenges offered by a range of dissident groups were rebuffed without producing major factional disputes. Labor's depression experiences confirmed it as a moderate, democratic socialist party committed to meliorism and constitutionalism. The strength of the similarly inclined Australian Workers Union provided the stable foundation on which the Labor edifice was constructed. The other affiliated trade unions were so weakened by the depression that they were unable to muster the strength to challenge the dominance of the AWU until the early 1950s.

CHAPTER 6

THE IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION  
ON QUEENSLAND'S TRADE UNIONS

Prior to the onset of the depression the Queensland trade union movement was reformist in ideology and was committed to a political strategy which placed heavy emphasis on the Parliamentary Labor party. The confirmation of these beliefs was an important effect of the depression on the trade unions. The Queensland Labor movement's commitment to what Ralph Milliband has termed 'parliamentarism'<sup>(1)</sup> was largely due to the State Labor party's ability to win political power. During the years 1915 to 1926 the party won five consecutive elections. This set it apart from, for example, the ALP in Victoria which did not win a clear electoral majority until 1952.<sup>(2)</sup> A deeply ingrained abhorrence of revolutionary theory and methods, combined with a decline in union strength, meant that political and economic initiatives in the thirties rested with the opponents of the Labor movement. At the same time, the trade unions bore the brunt of the economic collapse. Unemployment sapped their membership and their financial resources. Depression conditions also hindered unity of action on the part of the unions. Peak councils, which some hoped would operate as the coordinators of union activity, were reduced to virtual impotence because of disaffiliation on the part of member organisations. Widespread unemployment discouraged even the most militant unions from using the strike weapon to press their demands.<sup>(3)</sup> The overall consequence of these conditions was that, rather than radically altering their political and industrial programme, the trade unions in Queensland emerged from the depression more deeply committed to moderate social democracy and constitutional methods than ever before.

The dominant ideological consensus within the Queensland Labor movement in the 1920s was a mild form of democratic socialism. More militant tendencies did manifest themselves from time to time. Yet they offered no serious challenge to the general orthodoxy after the

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1. R Milliband, Parliamentary Socialism, NY, 1964, p 13f.

2. H McQueen, 'Victoria', in D J Murphy, (ed), Labor in Politics, Brisbane, 1975, p 293.

3. See chapter 7.

removal of the ARU from the ALP in 1926.<sup>(4)</sup> Despite their moderate socialism and their practical approach to politics, many Queensland union leaders shared Marx and Engels' belief that 'what the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own gravediggers'.<sup>(5)</sup> They, like most socialists, were convinced that capitalism would eventually produce an economic crisis that would precipitate its own downfall. In the 1930s the trade unions were neither ideologically nor organisationally equipped to take advantage of such a crisis. Notwithstanding the dire predictions of some capitalists and the dire threats of some socialists, the existing property relationships in Australia emerged from the depression substantially unaltered. This was due not only to the strength and resilience of capitalism, but also to the weakness of the Labor movement.

Table 6:1 shows the decline in union membership that accompanied the depression in Queensland. The figures reveal that the number of registered unionists in Queensland declined by thirty percent in the period 1927 to 1932. This compares with a national decline of nineteen percent over the same period.

On the surface, these comparative figures appear contradictory. Queensland's rate of unemployment during the depression was consistently below the national average; yet the decline in trade union membership was much greater than that experienced by the nation as a whole. An important point to note is the rapidity with which Queensland unions recovered their membership after 1932. Between 1932 and 1935 union membership in Queensland increased by forty-two percent to a figure approximating the 1927 total. The Australian experience was quite different. In 1927 the number of registered trade unionists in Australia totalled 911,652.<sup>(6)</sup> By 1932 this figure had declined by nineteen percent to 740,821, and by 1935 had risen only seven percent to 790,830. The more violent fluc-

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4. See further chapter 2.

5. Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, NY, 1955, p 22

6. Commonwealth Year Book, 1930, p 130.

TABLE 6:1

QUEENSLAND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP 1927-1935

Union	Membership 1927	Membership 1932	% $\pm$ 1927 - 32	Membership 1935	% $\pm$ 1932 - 35
Australian Workers Union	58,244	26,862	- 54	53,547	+136
Australian Railways Union	8,972	5,789	- 42	6,827	+ 18
Amalgamated Foodstuffs Union	5,664	2,382	- 58	3,120	+ 31
Shop Assistants Union	5,000	3,830	- 23	4,310	+ 13
Australian Engineering Union	4,503	2,924	- 35	3,910	+ 34
Queensland Teachers Union	4,400	4,227	- 4	3,677	- 15
Australasian Meat Industries Employees Union	4,286	3,415	- 20	4,847	+ 42
Amalgamated Carpenters & Joiners Union	4,090	2,680	- 34	5,232	+ 95
Australian Road Transport Workers Union	3,850	2,440	- 37	3,179	+ 30
Federated Clerks Union (Central & Southern Branches)	3,409	5,570	+ 63*	6,792	+ 22
Federated Engine Drivers & Firemens Association	2,734	2,792	+ 2	3,071	+ 10
State Services Union	2,661	2,782	+ 4	3,747	+ 35
Colliery Workers	2,502	2,006	- 20	2,268	+ 13
Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemmen	2,271	2,023	- 11	1,800	- 11
Federated Storeman & Packers Union	2,206	2,381	+ 8	2,499	+ 5
Builders Labourers Federation	2,194	859	- 61	1,160	+ 35
Printing & Kindred Industries Employees Union	2,157	2,005	- 7	2,070	+ 3
Coachmakers Union	1,944	1,639	- 16	1,690	+ 3.1
Electrical Trades Union	1,297	1,296	$\pm$ 0	1,587	+ 22
Tramways Union	1,200	921	- 23	1,023	11
Federated Ironworkers Association	1,164	1,355	+ 16	NA	
Others	13,408	22,560	+ 68*	12,422	- 45
TOTAL	154,781	108,285	- 30	154,025	+ 42

\*This growth was brought about by branch amalgamation.

\*The increase in 'others' 1927-32 was produced by a decline in the memberships of small unions which rendered them unworthy of individual listing.



tuations of Queensland's trade union statistics can be explained in terms of the effect of specific Government policies. When Moore came to power he set about dismantling those clauses in industrial awards which provided for union preference in employment. For example, the fifty percent decline in AWU membership was very much the result of the suspension of the rural award in May 1929.<sup>(7)</sup> Similarly, the rapid growth experienced by Queensland's unions after 1932 can be related to the Forgan Smith Government's policies of restoring the industrial awards that had been amended or abolished by Moore. Such examples provide a necessary corrective to the notion that all changes experienced by the Labor movement in the 1930s were induced solely by economic circumstances.

The disastrous fall-off in membership rendered many Queensland unions politically and industrially impotent. Two unions which suffered particular difficulties in this regard were the ARU and the Australian Road Transport Workers Union (ARTWU). The Collinsville branch of the ARTWU was so affected by the problem of falling membership that it failed to meet at any time between 1930 and 1933. A visit from a union organiser in 1933 injected a breath of life into the branch, but it collapsed again in May 1934.<sup>(8)</sup> An even more serious situation arose in the ARU. Because it was a militant union influenced by syndicalist ideas, the ARU had always placed great stress on maintaining solidarity and morale within its ranks. When Tim Moroney came to deliver his Secretary's report to the 1934 State Conference of the ARU he apologised to the delegates present for the failure to hold a conference earlier. He explained that to do so would have been farcical because of the membership decline the union had suffered.<sup>(9)</sup> As Table 6:1 indicates, it was the manual and/or unskilled unions that suffered the greatest loss of membership during the depression. Whereas white collar or skilled unions such as the

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7. Report of the Nineteenth AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, 1932, p 8; Report Third Annual Conference of the ARTWU, Brisbane, 1933, p 2.

8. ARTWU Minutes, 1 October, 1933; and 3 May, 1934.

9. Report of the Twelfth ARU State Conference, Rockhampton, 1934, p 1.

Teachers' Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Printers fared much better. The Printers were particularly fortunate, and the annual reports of the union's Board of Management showed that the union was relatively lightly touched by the ravages of depression.<sup>(10)</sup> The union's historian, Jim Hagan, argues that the depression was a period of positive development for the PIEUA since in 1933 it ended its collusive arrangement with the Master Printers.<sup>(11)</sup> Under an agreement entered into in the 1920s the PIEUA and the Master Printers cooperated via a Joint Industrial Council. In current parlance it was a 'sweetheart agreement' under which the Master Printers provided significantly better conditions for Queensland printers than were specified under the Federal award. For their part, the union encouraged all employers to join the Master Printers Association (MPA). The decline in the business cycle during the early years of the depression prompted the MPA to attempt to have the Commonwealth Printing Award applied to Queensland, whereupon the PIEUA withdrew from the Joint Industrial Council. From this point the branch forsook its dual system of loyalties and became a fully fledged industrial organisation.

A general corollary of declining membership was a steady worsening of the state of union finances. Again the PIEUA was an exception,<sup>(12)</sup> as was the Colliery Employees Union who reported in 1933 that despite a heavy loss of members, sound investments and careful accounting practices left the union in a healthy financial state.<sup>(13)</sup> Partly because of its extensive property holdings, the AWU was also able to maintain its financial solvency during the depression.<sup>(14)</sup> Unions whose income was primarily dependent on annual membership fees soon

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10. Printing Trades Journal, 11 March, 1930, p 57; PIEUA Board of Management Report, 31 December, 1931, p 4.

11. J Hagan, Printers and Politics, Canberra, 1966, p 247.

12. PIEUA Board of Management Report, 31 December, 1932, p 3.

13. QCEU Annual Delegate Board Meeting, 29 April, 1933, E165/43/5, RSSSA-ANU.

14. See chapter 4 for details of the financial position of the AWU.

fell into severe financial difficulties. The ARU, which was Queensland's second largest union, collected in 1937 only £3,596 in membership fees compared with the £10,233 it had collected in 1927.<sup>(15)</sup> Because of such a decline in revenue, most unions were required to effect stringent economies. Annual picnics, reunions and May Day celebrations, which helped to maintain union solidarity, were the first to go. Yet these were mere trimmings and more drastic measures were soon contemplated.

One effect of the 1890s strikes in Australia was to encourage the growth of 'Labor' newspapers. Prior to the depression, most of Queensland's larger unions possessed their own journals which carried technical information, union news, and articles on current political and economic issues. A union journal was regarded by the leadership as an important avenue of communication with the rank and file. Yet low membership combined with a decline in paid advertisements placed most of these journals in jeopardy during the 1930s. In 1931 the ARU was required to reduce the size of the Advocate because it had become a drain on union funds.<sup>(16)</sup> During the same year the AFULE's Headlight fell into similar difficulties.<sup>(17)</sup> The Advocate survived its travails but the Headlight ceased publication in 1938. The depression also claimed as a victim Brisbane's only daily Labor newspaper, the Daily Standard. The Standard began publication as the bulletin of the 1912 Brisbane general strike committee, and was later expanded into a regular evening newspaper. Funds for the paper were provided by the trade unions who bought shares in the company that operated it. The Standard was never highly competitive, and by the late 1920s was sustained only by the injection of substantial funds on the part of the AWU. Depression conditions caused a marked decline in advertising which placed the paper in a precarious financial condition. Regular appeals for funds and a variation in the size of the paper proved unsuccessful,

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15. Report of the Biennial Meeting of the ARU Australian Council, March, 1931, p 6.

16. ARU State Council Minutes, 6 June, 1931, p 91.

17. AFULE Minutes, 21 March, 1931, E212/8, RSSS/ANU.

and the Standard ceased publication in July 1936.

From time to time most unions attempted to improve their financial position by pressuring unfinancial members to pay their dues. The AWU decided, in 1932, to refuse membership to any person who worked in the sugar industry during the preceeding season, but who had failed to take out a current union ticket.<sup>(18)</sup> Regular advertisements appeared in the Advocate exhorting ARU members to remain financial. It was pointed out to recalcitrant members that if they continually refused to pay their dues the union would not hesitate to initiate legal action to recover any outstanding debts.<sup>(19)</sup> The Postal Workers Union, in 1933, decided to adopt a similar attitude to its unfinancial members.<sup>(20)</sup> Such actions had a miniscule effect on the net income of the unions concerned, and more drastic economy measures had to be adopted. Unions which possessed honorary officials attempted to conserve funds by reducing the meeting fees paid to these officials. The next logical step was to reduce the wages of full time officials, or to abolish the positions altogether. Unions which displayed the courage to take such decisions often found that they engendered bitterness and rancour within the ranks of the membership. In January 1931 the Southern District Executive of the AWU reported that the decline in membership had necessitated the retrenchment of one of its four organisers.<sup>(21)</sup> This dismissal was regretted by the membership, but was accepted because it was motivated by purely economic considerations. When the ARU dispensed with one of its officials in 1930 it contributed to a major factional dispute within the union. When the State Council of the ARU assembled in March 1930 the editor of the Advocate and President of the union, George Rymer, was criticised vigorously for allegedly censoring a letter Frank Nolan, of the Central District

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18. Report of the Nineteenth AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, 1932, p 38, FML.

19. Advocate, 15 April, 1931.

20. Postal Advocate, 15 April, 1933.

21. Report of the Eighteenth AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, 1931, p 10, FML.

Committee, had written to be published in the paper.<sup>(22)</sup> The ensuing debate was extremely recriminatory with Rymer alleging that 'this is an unscrupulous attempt to discredit me'<sup>(23)</sup> Later in the meeting an apparently unrelated motion was moved that 'the dual position of paid President and editor of the Advocate be abolished' After some debate the motion was carried by seven votes to five. The major arguments advanced in favour of the motion were that the union could not afford the luxury of both a paid President and Secretary, and that the task of editing the journal could be fulfilled by the Secretary. Events at the August conference of the AWU tended to confirm Rymer's allegations that the cry of financial hardship was merely an excuse to remove him from the presidency.

The Maryborough branch of the union moved at conference that: 'The decision of the State Council to abolish the position of paid State President be repudiated and Comrade Rymer be reinstated in this position.'<sup>(24)</sup> During the course of the debate, delegate McDonnell of Rockhampton, who had moved the original dismissal motion at State Council, claimed that there was no plot on the part of the Central District Committee to sack Rymer. But he added that when he witnessed Rymer's 'behaviour' at the March Council meeting he decided that the president had to be replaced.<sup>(25)</sup> After lengthy discussion the motion was defeated ten votes to six. When questioned on the subject both Mick Healy<sup>(26)</sup> and Frank Waters<sup>(27)</sup> attested that Rymer was dismissed for purely economic reasons. A close study of the facts seems to suggest otherwise. By 1930 there had arisen within the ARU a group of members centred at Rockhampton, and led by Frank Nolan, whose sympathies lay with the Communist party and its industrial front group, the Militant Minority Movement (MMM). This group came to command significant support within the union, and a number of its members harboured leadership ambitions.

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22. ARU State Council Minutes, 27 March, 1930, p 9.

23. *ibid.*, p 23.

24. Report Twelfth ARU State Conference, Brisbane, August, 1930, p 29.

25. *ibid.*, p 32.

26. Healy Interview, *op.cit.*, p 26.

27. Waters Interview, *op.cit.*, p 3.

The difficulty facing the insurgent group was how to fracture the diumvirate which held control of the union. George Rymer was an experienced union official who, together with Secretary Tim Moroney, had been the guiding influence of the ARU for over a decade. Unfortunately for Rymer he was singled out for removal because Moroney proved to be a more formidable opponent for the dissidents. Both Rymer and Moroney were opposed to the intrusion of the CPA into the affairs of the union, but Moroney was astute enough to couch his opposition in careful language. Moroney had been a leading force in the Left Wing Movement that grew out of the divisions of the Labor movement in the late 1920s. Furthermore, Moroney was regarded in the union movement as one of the most effective union officials at the Trades Hall. Moroney's militancy was based on syndicalist rather than communist theory. When the MMM faction moved against Rymer they did so because he was in a more vulnerable ideological and strategic position than was Moroney. At both the State Council and State Conference meetings Rymer received Moroney's unqualified and vocal support. Moroney conceded that finance dictated that the combined position would have to be abolished, but argued that it should be done in a manner that did not reflect on Rymer.<sup>(28)</sup> Rumours at the State Conference suggested that the dissidents, having removed Rymer, were now prepared to challenge Moroney.<sup>(29)</sup> The Nolan faction seriously underestimated Moroney's tactical skill, and over the next few years he successfully marshalled his support within the union and out-maneuvred the MMM on both the political and industrial front.<sup>(30)</sup> Despite Nolan's election to the union vice-presidency in 1931, he did not succeed in becoming ARU Secretary until after Moroney's death in 1944. The dismissal of Rymer had a deleterious effect on the functioning of the union because it consumed energies that could have been more profitably deployed in guiding the ARU through one of the most difficult periods in its history.

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28. Report of the Twelfth ARU State Conference, op.cit., p 31.

29. ibid., pp 33-34.

30. See further chapter 4.

As well as promoting difficulties within individual unions, the depression also seriously hindered attempts to effect solidarity among Queensland's trade unions. Since its inception in 1922, the Queensland Trades and Labor Council (TLC) represented the chief force for unity within the Queensland trade union movement. The effectiveness of the TLC was dependent on the number of unions which were affiliated to it. During the depression years membership sank to a record low. Average union affiliation to the TLC over the period 1922 to 1967 was thirty-six. The peak year was 1925 when fifty unions were affiliated and the worst year was 1932 when only twenty-three out of a total of 111 Queensland unions were TLC affiliates. While inability to pay affiliation fees was the major cause of the decline, it was not the sole one. During the late 1920s a number of important unions left the TLC because they disapproved of its politics. The most significant of these was the AWU who left for one year in 1928 because they opposed the TLC's hostile policies towards the State Labor Government. Furthermore, the AWU stated that it would not rejoin until the TLC adopted the card system of voting at its meetings.<sup>(31)</sup> Because the TLC had strongly criticised its delegates for their behaviour during the South Johnstone strike, the AFULE decided to follow the example of the AWU.<sup>(32)</sup> While the AWU made its peace with the TLC and re-affiliated in 1929, the AFULE maintained its stand that the Council was a communist dominated body<sup>(33)</sup> and did not return until 1936.

The return of the AWU to the TLC proved to be a mixed blessing. While the affiliation of the State's largest union was essential to the success of the TLC, the introduction of the card system of voting caused many of the smaller unions to reconsider their membership. Once the card vote was introduced it was inevitable that the AWU would dominate the council. This method of voting remained a divisive

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31. Worker, 18 September, 1928.

32. AFULE Executive Minutes, 6 November, 1927, E212/5, p 3, RSSSA/ANU.

33. *ibid.*, 13 January, 1929; and 5 October, 1930.

influence in the union movement until it was finally abolished in 1939. Immediately the AWU returned to the TLC in 1929, the WWF raised misgivings regarding the operation of the card vote.<sup>(34)</sup> Events came to a head in 1930 when the TLC demanded that one of the WWF delegates be expelled because he referred to the AWU delegates as 'liars' and 'scab herders'. The union declined to replace the delegate and alleged that the whole affair was engineering by the AWU; whereupon the WWF was expelled from the TLC and did not return until 1935.<sup>(35)</sup> Constant clashes between the AWU and ARU delegates also culminated in the latter's decision to leave the TLC in 1933 for a period of three years.<sup>(36)</sup> While many of these decisions to disaffiliate were caused by political and personal antagonisms, the chronic state of finances kept the question of the affiliation constantly to the fore in union affairs. Small organisations such as the Boot Trades Federation and the Cooper's Union affiliated and disaffiliated as their finances fluctuated.<sup>(37)</sup> This had a deleterious effect on the functioning of the TLC because the unpredictability of its yearly income made effective planning impossible. The issue of affiliation also created difficulties for the industrial unions concerned because many hours of meetings were devoted to debating the question. These debates often engendered hostilities and rivalries that did little to further the cause of solidarity.<sup>(38)</sup>

The problems encountered by the TLC during the depression were shared by the Trade Union Congress (TUC). The TUC was a yearly conference convened to debate matters of general concern to the union movement. It lacked any formal legislative authority, but its decisions were referred to the TLC for endorsement and action. Despite its lack of formal powers, the TUC served a useful function as a

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34. WWF Minutes, 7 November, 1929, E213/9, p 86, RSSSA/ANU.

35. *ibid.*, 2 July, 1930.

36. ARU State Council Minutes, 27 January, 1933, p 151.

37. Coopers Union Minutes, 1 March, 1929, T56/1/2; ABTEF Minutes, 28 September, 1930 and 27 June, 1932, T49/1/9, p 21, RSSSA/ANU.

38. AFULE Executive Minutes, 2 November, 1930, E212/7 p 4, RSSSA/ANU.



forum for union opinion. Furthermore, some unions who declined to affiliate with the TLC nevertheless sent delegates or observers to the TUC. Like the TLC, the TUC ran into serious difficulties during the 1930s. Because it was such an informal body it lacked an infrastructure of its own, and was totally dependent on the cooperation and goodwill of its member unions. Economic circumstances dictated that such cooperation was not forthcoming during the depression. Attendances at TUCs declined steadily after 1928 and 'lack of interest' caused the abandonment of the 1933 congress.<sup>(39)</sup> The TUC was also bedevilled by the intrusion of the card vote controversy into its affairs, and a number of unions declined to attend because of alleged AWU dominance.<sup>(40)</sup> The impotence of Queensland's unions was well illustrated at the 1932 congress when the ARU delegates moved that the TUC authorise and finance a strike of unemployment relief workers if the Government refused to pay them award rates. Clarrie Fallon of the AWU opposed the move and stated that 'The unions are not in a position to finance anything. They cannot even finance their own domestic affairs, let alone handle thousands of men and their dependents.'<sup>(41)</sup> In the context of the time, such logic was beyond challenge and the TUC decided to do nothing.

While the majority of Queensland's unions chose to remain outside the ambit of the TLC, most were affiliated with their relevant Federal branch. Despite the Intercolonial Trade Union Congresses of the late nineteenth century,<sup>(42)</sup> and the later activities of the One Big Union movement,<sup>(43)</sup> Federal unionism was still in its infancy in Australia during the 1930s. The Australasian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU) was formed only in 1927, and did not begin to play a significant role in Australian industrial relations until the 1940s. One hundred years of separate colonial development was reflected in a deep sense of parochialism on the part of many unions, and the Federal organisations were often fragile and powerless bodies. The experience of

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39. Report Tenth Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, November, 1934, p 4.

40. WWF Minutes, 2 September, 1931, E213/10, pp 38-39, RSSSA/ANU.

41. Report Ninth Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, 1932, p 34.

42. RN Ebbels, (ed), The Australian Labor Movement, Melbourne, 1960, Chapter III.

43. I Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, Canberra, 1965, pp182-194.

the depression was to highlight this fragility by aggravating centrifugal forces within the Federal branches. A powerful force operating against union federalism in Queensland was that most (approximately 80 percent) unions operated under State rather than Federal industrial awards. Because of fourteen consecutive years of Labor rule, the State awards were more generous to the unions than were their Federal counterparts. Many unions in Queensland would join their Federal branch only if workers in their particular industry were covered by a Federal award.

Undoubtedly the chief point of contention between Federal unions and their State branches was the level of capitation fees levied on each State. In 1929 the AFULE in Queensland was seriously considering suspending payment of its Federal capitation fees. The fees were eventually paid because Queensland was threatened with exclusion from the union's Federal conference if the money was not forthcoming.<sup>(44)</sup> By 1931 the AFULE's financial situation was critical. Arguments about the solvency or insolvency of the union occupied many hours of executive meetings and produced much bitterness within the union.<sup>(45)</sup> In July 1931 the executive decided unanimously not to send a delegate to Federal conference because of the union's inability to meet the Federal capitation fees.<sup>(46)</sup> This was the first time since the formation of the Federal body in 1920 that Queensland had not been represented at conference. The membership of the Queensland branch was regarded as essential by the Federal executive, and in February 1932 the Federal President, AS Drakeford, came north to exhort the Queensland branch to remain financial. Drakeford appealed for solidarity in the face of hard times and was at pains to point out that the Federal executive did not waste the money of the State branches. Drakeford also appealed to the self interest of the branch by prophesying that 'the railways were heading for Commonwealth

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44. AFULE Executive Minutes, 5 July, 1931.

45. Financial Report, AFULE Minutes, 4 March, 1932, E212/8, RSSSA/ANU.

46. AFULE Executive Minutes, 5 July, 1931.

control', and that a Federal award would soon be in force in the Queensland service.<sup>(47)</sup> While his grasp of Federal-State financial relations proved to be deficient, Drakeford did manage to convince the AFULE that it should again become a financial member of the Federal branch.

The ARTWU was another union which the declining economic situation caused to review their Federal affiliation. At the 1927 State conference criticism was expressed at the high cost of Federal affiliation fees, but there was such strong support for the Federal body that the matter was not put to a vote.<sup>(48)</sup> The situation had altered substantially by 1933 and at that year's conference there was a debate on the union's relations with its Federal branch. The major arguments against remaining in the federation concerned money. Delegates from Gympie and Maryborough argued that since only Queensland and Tasmania were financial members, Queensland was paying over half the Federal union's annual operating expenses of £2000. Furthermore, the fact that only two States were financial rendered any attempts to hold a Federal convention farcical. Other delegates, including the State President, George Lawson, argued that the present difficulties were of a temporary nature and that for Queensland to withdraw would be a tactical error since they may, at some time in the future, require a Federal award for the industry. This argument held sway, and a motion to remain a member of the Federation was carried by thirteen votes to four.<sup>(49)</sup>

Some white collar associations also decided that under depression conditions affiliation with a Federal organisation was not justified. At their 1935 State conference the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) voted by thirty-four votes to twenty-three to withdraw from the Federated State School Teachers' Association.<sup>(50)</sup> Delegates argued that not only were affiliation fees proving onerous, but also that the

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47. *ibid.*, 3 January, 1932.

48. Report ARTWU State Conference, August, 1927, p 4.

49. Report ARTWU State Conference, August, 1933, pp 19-20.

50. Queensland Teachers' Journal, 16 September, 1935, p 28f.

constitutional arrangement whereby education was principally a State matter made Federal teachers' organisations superfluous. Because it was a public service association, the Q<sup>T</sup>U was affected in a different manner by the depression than most other unions. Table 6:1 indicates that the union suffered only a four percent decline in membership over the period 1927 to 1932. This was primarily because State public servants, with the exception of married women, could not be easily retrenched. However, they did have their salaries reduced by ten to fifteen percent, and this was translated into a decline in dues paid to the union. Table 6:1 also shows that during the years 1932 to 1935 the Q<sup>T</sup>U suffered a significant membership decline at a time when most unions were recouping their lost members. This situation came about because the State Government, as an economy measure, drastically reduced the number of scholarships offered to prospective teachers. Hence natural wastage through retirement, resignation etc was no longer counterbalanced by regular infusions of new teachers, and the union membership steadily declined. It was in response to these problems that the union took its 1935 decision to withdraw from the Federal body.

The negative influence exerted by the depression on union federalism was equally apparent in the movement towards union amalgamation. Multi-unionism had been a feature of Australian industrial relations for many years, and while the economic conditions reduced union membership it did not reduce the number of separate unions. In 1927 Australia possessed 369 industrial unions with 1641 branches.<sup>(51)</sup> By 1935 this figure stood at 354 unions with 1755 branches. Queensland followed the Australian pattern with an increase of five unions (104 to 109) and fourteen branches (367 to 381) over the same period. While it was official TUC and TLC policy to foster union amalgamations whenever possible,<sup>(52)</sup> they experienced little success in achieving this aim. The Queensland railways was

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51. Source: Commonwealth Year Books.

52. Report of the Twentieth AWU Annual Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, 1933, p 7, FML.

an industry that was plagued constantly by difficulties arising from multi-unionism. There were over thirty unions covering workers in the industry, and demarcation disputes were a regular occurrence. The ARU, as an all-grades union, possessed a long standing policy of uniting all the railway unions into a single industrial organisation.<sup>(53)</sup> This ambition was regarded with deep suspicion by the smaller railway unions, particularly the AFULE, who viewed it as a plot to absorb them into the ARU.<sup>(54)</sup> Constant denunciations of the evils of craft and sectional unions by the ARU antagonised the officials of the smaller unions and further retarded the cause of amalgamation.<sup>(55)</sup> In an attempt to coordinate industrial action some unions joined together to form the Railway Transport Council. Yet rivalries among its members culminated with the withdrawal of the AFULE in 1933.<sup>(56)</sup>

Queensland's trade unions were generally spared the major schisms that were a feature of the Labor movement in other States during the thirties. But the divisions and bitterness that had been engendered by the disputes of the 1920s were in no way obliterated by the experience of the depression. Conflicts concerning political and industrial policies combined with personal animosities to prevent the unions establishing a united front during the depression. The ARU and the AFULE were at loggerheads throughout the 1920s, and the major cause of their disputes centred around the vexed question of membership poaching. ARU officials modelled their union along the lines of the National Union of Railwaymen which had been formed in Britain as an all-grades union in 1913. The plethora of craft and sectional unions within the railway service vigorously resisted any amalgamation moves sponsored by the ARU. For their part the ARU officials argued that 'snobishness, stupid ignorance or foolish prejudice alone'<sup>(57)</sup> prevented the formation of a single railway union.

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53. ARU State Council Minutes, 26 September, 1929, p 116; 27 January, 1933, p 7, FML.

54. AFULE Executive Minutes, 6 November, 1927, E212/5, p 5, RSSSA/ANU.

55. Advocate, 5 January, 1929.

56. AFULE Executive Minutes, 7 January, 1934, E212/4, p 8, RSSSA/ANU.

57. MNB Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Dispute in the Queensland Labour Movement, 1915-1929*, BA Queensland, 1965, p 79.

AFULE officials constantly accused the ARU of attempting to steal its members,<sup>(58)</sup> and relations between the two bodies became so strained that an AFULE executive member was suspended from the union because he had 'collaborated' with the ARU during an industrial dispute in 1925.<sup>(59)</sup>

A major stumbling block to union amalgamation at any time has been the fear on the part of the officials of the smaller unions that they would forfeit their jobs on joining a larger organisation. The ARU regularly reassured such officials that they would be guaranteed employment in any amalgamated union that may be formed, but these reassurances fell on deaf ears.<sup>(60)</sup> The cause of factionalism was further advanced during the early thirties when the Queensland Railway Traffic Employees Union (QRTEU) made a concerted effort to oust the ARU as the chief all-grades union. Through a series of applications to the industrial court the QRTEU managed to have its list of registered callings expanded. The ARU took umbrage at this action and filed an application to the court either to restrain or to deregister the QRTEU. During the course of the hearing the commissioners identified the central cause of disharmony amongst the railway unions:

It is quite apparent from the evidence that railway unions generally have not strictly adhered to both their registered lists of callings and to their rules in their acceptance of and retention of members. This, to some extent, appears to be due to the fact that the Commissioner for Railways may transfer employees from one section to another or from one calling to another, and to compel individuals to change their union with each transfer or change of calling would create endless confusion. This does not mean, however, that any union is entitled to accept as members persons not covered either by its rules or list of callings. (61)

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58. AFULE Executive Minutes, 6 December, 1925, p 3; 5 November, 1926, p 5; 5 August, 1928, p 4, E212/5, RSSSA/ANU.

59. *ibid.*, 4 October, 1925, pp 1-3.

60. Cribb, *op.cit.*, p 80.

61. Queensland Industrial Gazette, 24 December, 1934, p 466.

The court ruled that QRTEU had not breached its terms of registration and dismissed the ARU's application for deregistration. Despite this decision, the QRTEU did not have the strength to displace the ARU from its position as the chief railway union. On the other hand, the ARU made little headway in its attempt to absorb the other unions. As a consequence, Queensland railway unionism emerged from the depression in much the same state as it had entered it. The railway service contained three types of unions: an industrial union, the ARU; a series of craft unions such as the AEU and the ETU; and a collection of sectional unions including the Guards and Shunters, the Stationmasters and Railways Officers.<sup>(62)</sup> This mixture of often competing organisations acted as a serious restraint on any attempts to establish industrial solidarity in the service as a whole.

The railway industry was not the only arena of competition between unions. While the ARU harboured ambitions to become the blanket union in the railways, the AWU often behaved as though it wished to supplant all other unions in the State. As the Commonwealth's largest union, the AWU displayed initial interest in the 'One Big Union' movement, but its enthusiasm dulled when it realised that it could not be the leader of that movement.<sup>(63)</sup> In Queensland the sugar and woollen industries were the bulwarks of AWU power. The union also covered workers in other primary industries as well as the mining and transport industries. As the AWU grew in strength and extended its horizons it was almost inevitable that it would come into conflict with the State's second largest industrial union - the ARU. Again the issue was the usual one of membership demarcation, which had come to a head in 1926 when the AWU formed a Railway Branch and openly encouraged ARU members to join.<sup>(64)</sup> The AWU was always keen to limit the power of the ARU and acted in 1926 because it believed that a number of ARU members were disenchanted with the militant policies of their leadership. Despite some vigorous campaigning on the part of the AWU, only 400 ARU members resigned to join the newly created Railway Branch.<sup>(65)</sup> The AWU-inspired

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62. Cribb, op.cit., p 80.

63. VG Childe, How Labour Governs, Melbourne, 1923/1964, Chapter 12.

64. Worker, 18 October, 1926.

65. Cribb, op.cit., p 254.

moves against the ARU at the 1926 Labor-in-Politics Convention confirmed a state of war between the two unions which the depression did nothing to abate. The ARU constantly denounced the AWU for the latter's alleged manipulation of the card vote system on the TUC,<sup>(66)</sup> and with the election of the Forgan Smith Government in 1932 relations between the two unions worsened. The ARU argued that the AWU was using its influence with the Government to grant itself favorable industrial awards which invariably involved the poaching of members from other unions.<sup>(67)</sup>

Similar charges of 'body snatching' were laid against the AWU by the Waterside Workers Federation. In 1928 the WWF was engaged in a major industrial dispute on the Brisbane Waterfront. During the dispute a group of wharf labourers applied for and received registration as a union before the industrial court. The WWF executive believed that this move had been sponsored by the AWU as part of an overall plan to displace the WWF from the waterfront,<sup>(68)</sup> and throughout the depression relations between the two unions were highly acrimonious. AWU expansion into the transport industry soon brought it into conflict with ARTWU. The 1933 ARTWU State conference instructed its officials to visit each sub-branch at least once a year in order to prevent attempts by the AWU to poach ARTWU members.<sup>(69)</sup> As the ARTWU expanded its operations beyond the Brisbane area it frequently clashed with the AWU regarding membership rights. Such encounters often ended in the Industrial Court,<sup>(70)</sup> and did little to foster unity in the transport industry as a whole.

Factionalism was a feature of Queensland unionism before, during and after the depression. While most unionists agreed in

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66. Advocate, 15 November, 1932 and 15 December, 1934.

67. Report ARU State Conference 1934, op.cit., p 34.

68. WWF Minutes, 7 August, 1929, p 124 and 22 August, 1929, p 146, E213/9, RSSSA/ANU.

69. Report of the Third ARTWU Conference, Brisbane, 1933, p 18f.

70. Report of the Fourth ARTWU Conference, Brisbane, 1933, p 41f.



principle with the AWU President Clarrie Fallon's statement that 'we must present a united front to the enemy on the industrial and political field',<sup>(71)</sup> few were prepared to set aside personal and political antagonisms and work for the establishment of such a united front. Periods of industrial discord or economic recession invariably place union officials under great stress. In the 1930s most Queensland union leaders responded to this stress by pursuing cautious policies. Furthermore, they were encouraged by economic circumstances to concentrate on the welfare of their own members, and to set aside broader questions of industrial and political cooperation with other unions. Practical considerations such as finance, membership and industrial awards dominated the business of Queensland's trade unions to the virtual exclusion of all else. A significant feature of the depression in Queensland was that it failed to produce any major ideological reassessment on the part of the unions. Union executives and State conferences were little concerned with discussing ideological problems posed by the depression. As Chapter 4 indicated, the main impact of the depression was to drive the unions closer to the ALP and its moderate, democratic socialist notions. The ARU, which before 1929 was the only union capable to posing an alternative to this social democratic consensus, was overcome by ideological atrophy during the thirties. Despite brave talk of socialism and syndicalism, the ARU's philosophy degenerated into a rather negative and sterile anti-parliamentarism which produced little that was original or helpful in confronting the depression. In organisational and philosophical terms the Queensland union movement in 1935 was much the same as it was in 1925.

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71. Report of the Twentieth Annual AWU Delegates Meeting, Brisbane, 1933, p 7.

CHAPTER 7

INDUSTRIAL MILITANCY  
DURING THE DEPRESSION

Les Louis, in his study of the depression in Victoria, has observed that 'the depression witnessed a steep general decline in strikes in Australia' <sup>(1)</sup> Unionists were unwilling to engage in militant industrial action during the 1930s because of the fear that employers and Governments would recruit volunteer labour from among the ranks of the unemployed to break strikes. Examination of the pattern of industrial disputes in western societies has generally concluded that the level of strike activity varies in inverse proportion to the trade cycle. <sup>(2)</sup> Ian Turner qualified this generalisation by pointing out that on the downturn of the economic cycle trade unions often find themselves engaged in 'defensive' industrial actions against employers' attempts to reduce wages and/or conditions. <sup>(3)</sup> Australian industrial relations experience in the late 1920s and early 1930s illustrated Turner's argument. In 1929, just prior to the onset of the world-wide economic collapse, there occurred a trilogy of major industrial disputes in the coal, timber and waterfront industries. <sup>(4)</sup> All were provoked by attempts to reduce wages or working conditions, and all resulted in defeats for the workers involved.

Queensland appears as an exception to this national pattern. This is because two substantial industrial disputes occurred in the State in late 1930 and late 1931, thereby apparently contradicting the theory that strikes do not occur during economic depressions. Closer examination reveals that Queensland unionists were not as deviant as might first appear. It must be remembered that Queensland entered the great depression later than most other States and that the

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1. Les Louis, Trade Unions and the Depression, Canberra, 1968, p 148.
  2. KGJC Knowles, Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict, Oxford, 1952, p 146; A Rees, 'Industrial Conflict and Business Fluctuations', in A Kornhauser et al (eds) Industrial Conflict, NY, 1954, p 218; R Hyman, Strikes, London, 1972, p 28.
  3. Ian Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, Canberra, 1965, p 82.
  4. See for details of the strikes: Miriam Dixson, 'The Timber Strike of 1929', HSANZ, 40;10 May 1963, pp 479-492; Miriam Dixson, 'Rothbury', Labour History, 17, November, 1970, pp 14-26; Brian Fitzpatrick, A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement, Melbourne, 1940/1968, Chapter 13.

full impact of the economic crisis did not begin to be felt until the third quarter of 1930. Many Queensland unionists saw themselves in much the same position in late 1930 as their southern comrades did in late 1929 - on the downturn but not yet at the trough of the economic cycle. Some, but not a majority, still clung to the belief that their living standards could be defended by militant industrial action.

The 1929 strikes revealed the folly of this belief to the Australian unionists but the lessons of those defeats went largely unheeded in Queensland because its unions were not major participants in the strikes. Queensland was totally immune from the timber strike because the relevant workers were covered by a local, State rather

TABLE 7:1

Australia and Queensland  
Industrial Disputes

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Disputes</u>		<u>Working Days Lost</u>		<u>Working days lost in Qld as a % of national working days lost</u>
	<u>Australia</u>	<u>Queensland</u>	<u>Australia</u>	<u>Queensland</u>	
1925	499	22	1,128,000	220,000	19.5
1926	360	29	1,310,000	30,000	2.3
1927	441	30	1,713,000	428,000	2.5
1928	287	12	777,000	71,000	9.1
1929	259	4	4,461,000	3,500	0.07
1930	183	10	1,511,000	10,000	0.6
1931	134	15	245,000	51,000	20.8
1932	127	10	212,000	21,000	9.9
1933	90	11	111,000	14,000	12.6
1934	155	7	370,000	30,000	8.1
1935	183	13	495,000	73,000	14.7
1936	235	12	497,000	15,000	3.0
1937	342	10	557,000	16,000	2.8

Source: Commonwealth Labour Reports.

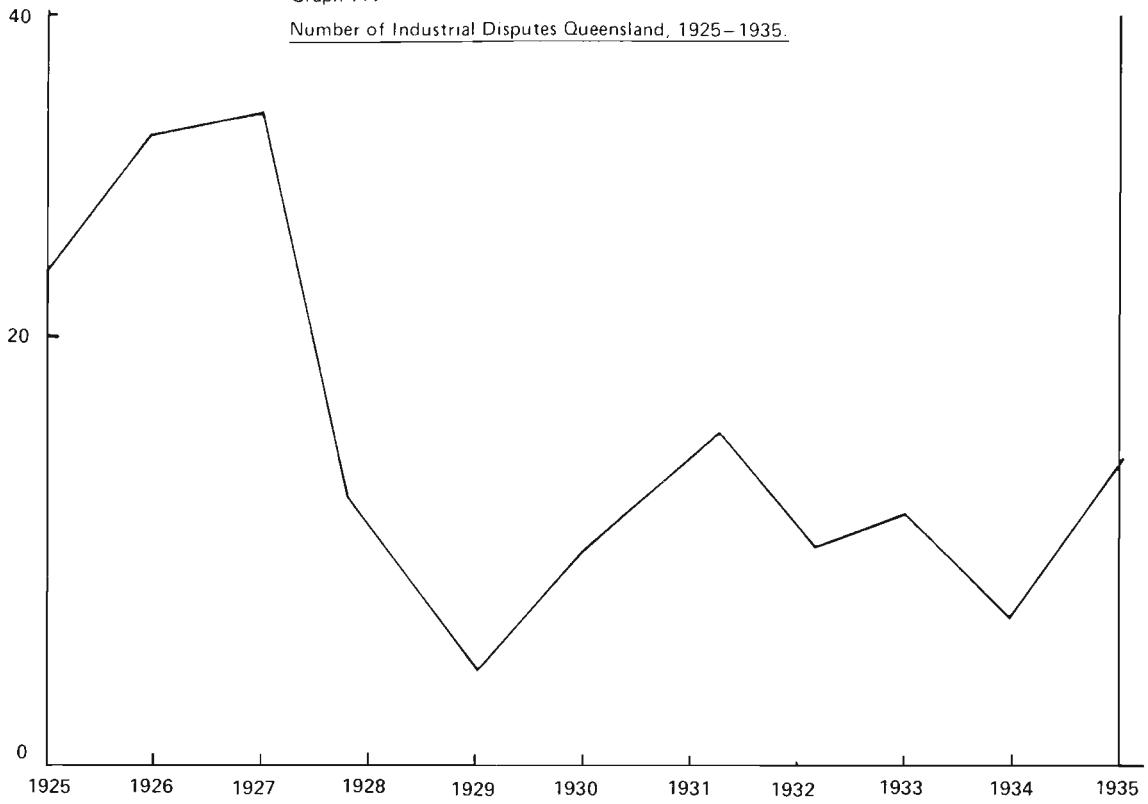
than by a Federal industrial award.<sup>(5)</sup> Similarly, the State's involvement in the 1929 coal strike was restricted to the participation of the mining unions in protest stoppages against the killing of New South Wales colliery worker, Norman Brown. When the Federal executive of the Waterside Workers' Federation called out its members in protest against the terms of the industrial award handed down by Justice Beeby in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in September 1928, the ports of Brisbane, Bowen and Townsville went on strike. Yet they were back at work in October and Queensland unionists took no further part in the dispute which was continued only in the port of Melbourne. Thus, the industrial disputation that so dominated the political life of Australia on the eve of the depression was centred primarily in New South Wales and Victoria; the Queensland unions entered the new decade relatively unscarred by recent industrial humiliation.

This state of innocence was soon to be shattered in two major strikes. The first involved shearers in western Queensland, which began as a defensive action against a wage reduction. The second commenced as a pay dispute amongst a small group of miners in a remote area of the State, but later spread to sections of the railway service in northern Queensland. Factionalism within and among the participant unions was an important feature of both disputes. The defeats inflicted on the strikers by the combined action of the State Government and the employers finally convinced even the most militant unions of the dangers of engaging in direct industrial action during a period of economic depression. This is revealed by the fact, that notwithstanding minor disputes involving meatworkers and brewery workers in 1935, Queensland's industrial history was devoid of major strikes between 1931 and 1946. The experience of the two depression strikes had a restraining influence on the Queensland trade unions and encouraged them to seek political solutions to their problems by returning Labor to power at the 1932 State election. It is however, of value to examine the two strikes in some detail to indicate that some workers were prepared to strike even in the most hazardous economic conditions.

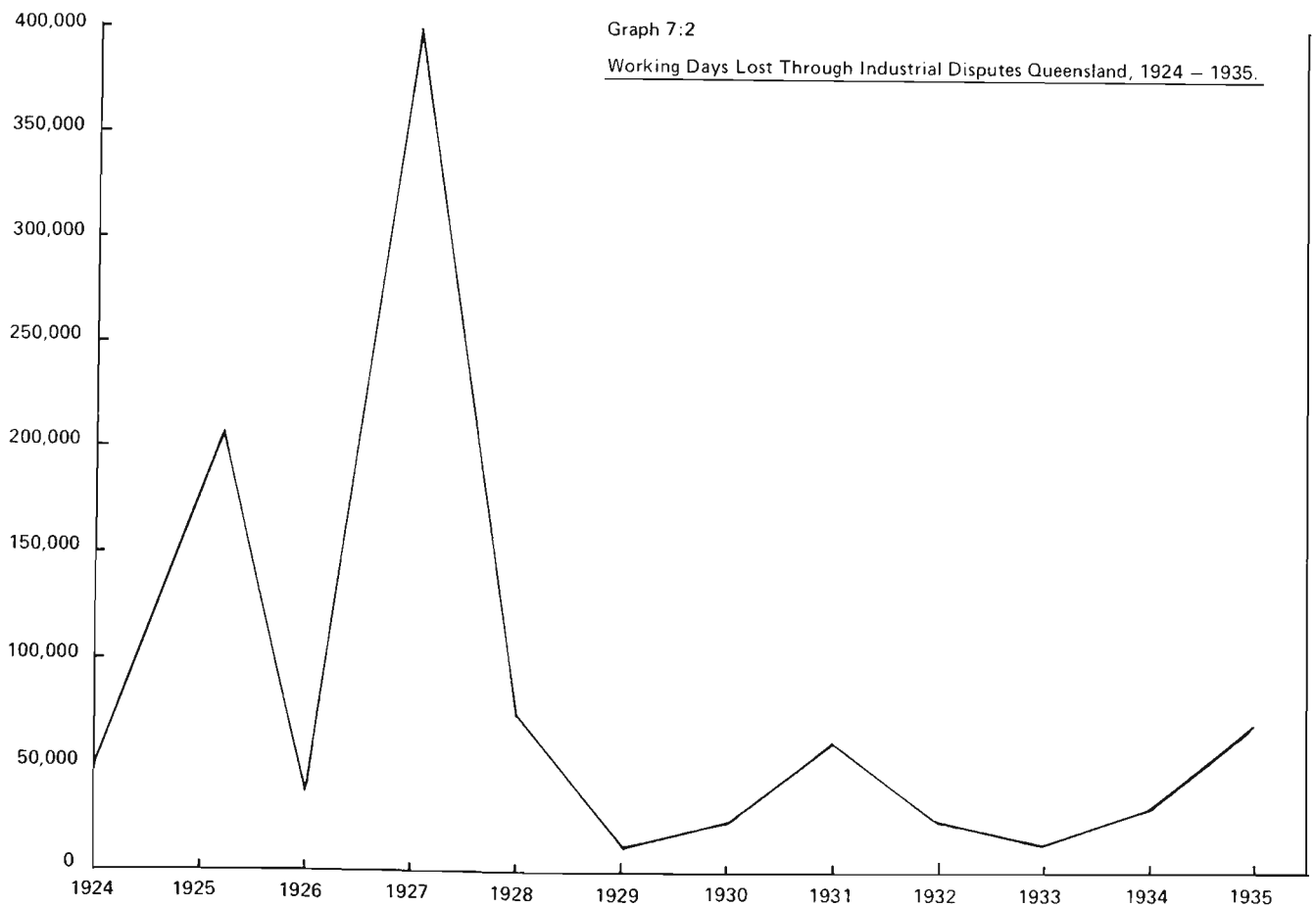
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5. Dixon, 'Timber Strike of 1929', op.cit., p 481.

Graph 7:1  
Number of Industrial Disputes Queensland, 1925 – 1935.



Graph 7:2  
Working Days Lost Through Industrial Disputes Queensland, 1924 – 1935.



In November 1930 the State Arbitration Court announced that a ten percent reduction in the pastoral award would take effect from 1 December, 1931. This constituted a cut in the shearing award from forty shillings per hundred sheep to thirty shillings per hundred. The AWU State executive soon received a number of urgent telegrams from sheds in western Queensland requesting advice regarding possible industrial action against the variations in the award. The executive counselled the shearers against strike action, and asked them to place their faith in the arbitration system. WJ Riordan, the AWU Secretary, defended the action of the executive by pointing out that under S87 of the State Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act strike action would result in automatic cancellation of the entire award and would '...involve the organisation (the AWU) in the heaviest penalties for their infringement of the law.'<sup>(6)</sup>

The shearers were not impressed by this logic, and by December many sheds in the Longreach, Barcaldine and Emerald areas were on strike.

The shearing dispute was to be characterized by internecine warfare within the AWU ranks. The diffuse and disparate industries and callings covered by the union, together with the decentralization of Queensland industry produced within the AWU conditions that were highly favourable to the emergence of an 'iron law of oligarchy' syndrome.<sup>(7)</sup> Robert Murray is perhaps a little harsh in his description of the AWU as a union run 'of officials, for officials and by officials'<sup>(8)</sup> but to many rank and file members the union hierarchy often appeared too willing to sacrifice internal democracy for industrial effectiveness. Over the years such disaffection gave rise to a number of militant, insurgent groups within the AWU, the most significant of which was the Committee for Membership Control (CMC) which played an important role in the Mt Isa disputes of the

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6. Worker, 21, January, 1931,

7. Roberto Michels, Political Parties, Illinois, 1915/1949, Chapter 11.

8. Robert Murray, The Split: Labor in the Fifties, Melbourne, 1971, p 134.

1960s. The CMC had its forebears in such organisations as the Bush Workers Propaganda Group, which was active in Queensland in the early twenties, and the more substantial Pastoral Workers Industrial Union (PWIU).

The PWIU was formed by disgruntled AWU members in New South Wales in 1930 as a consequence of the shearers' defeat in a strike at Moree. In conceding defeat, the unionists laid the blame on the New South Wales AWU officials, whom they accused of undermining the solidarity of the rank and file by issuing a statement which encouraged shearers to accept the wage-cutting Dethridge Award, which had been the initial cause of the dispute.<sup>(9)</sup> Despite organisational difficulties, the disenchantment felt by many New South Wales AWU members was institutionalized by the formation of the PWIU, whose aim was to attract members from the AWU by adopting militant policies to achieve a number of objectives: The principal ones were:

- (a) To organise the workers in the pastoral and related rural industries and those following the callings coming under the general heading bushwork, with the object of securing better wages and improved working conditions.
- (b) To equip all workers in the industries covered with a better knowledge of the class nature of the struggle that goes on in society.
- (c) To expose the Arbitration and Conciliation Courts and all forms of class collaboration as the instruments of the ruling class.
- (d) To fight all forms of class oppression and exploitation and to organise for the ultimate overthrow of capitalism and the introduction of a socialist state as the means of achieving freedom and justice.<sup>(10)</sup>

Because shearers were itinerant workers who moved freely across the New South Wales/Queensland border, the involvement of the PWIU in the 1931 Queensland dispute was virtually inevitable. The

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9. Advocate, 16 February, 1931.

10. Workers' Weekly, 25 November, 1930.



refusal of the AWU officials to endorse the strike provided the PWIU with an ideal opportunity to win support amongst the shearers. Since its formation, the dissident union, whose headquarters were at the Sydney Trades Hall, had issued a regular newsletter entitled the Rank and File Bulletin. With the commencement of the Queensland dispute, a local version of this publication was issued weekly, and served as a forum for attacks on the graziers, the State Government and the AWU hierarchy.<sup>(11)</sup> A regular feature of the newsletter was a list of shearers who, the PWIU alleged, were engaged in strike breaking activities. The following was a typical entry:

Paddy Hughes, shearer, well known as 'Galloping Paddy', or the 'Flinders Terror'. Married, living at Longreach. Height 5ft. 9 ins. Weight 10 st. 6 lbs. Age 42. Has lantern jaws. Complexion dark. Hungry haggard appearance. The 'Phar Lap' of all Jacks. (12)

The Queensland branch of the AWU attacked the activities of the PWIU, and throughout the strike both organisations joined in a vitriolic slanging match. Official AWU policy towards the PWIU was that it was a communist inspired group which was being orchestrated from Sydney with the sole aim of destroying the AWU and the unity of the Queensland Labor movement.<sup>(13)</sup> Riordan made much of the fact that many of the leaders of the PWIU were either communists or persons who had a history of disruption within the AWU. Thirty-five years later, a successor as AWU Secretary, Edgar Williams, continued the verbal war against the PWIU and wrote that it was nothing more than a communist front organisation bent on destroying the AWU.<sup>(14)</sup> While there was truth in the allegation that a number of the PWIU leaders were avowed communists, notably Norman Jeffrey, and that the CPA wanted the PWIU to operate as a Militant Minority Movement (MMM)

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11. An incomplete set of the Rank and File Bulletin is held in the Fryer Memorial Library, Brisbane.

12. ibid., 12 January, 1931; and Police Report nd, item 31/3178, PRE/A1025, QSA.

13. Worker, 28 January, 1931.

14. Edgar Williams, Yellow, Green and Red, Brisbane, 1957, p 8f.

cell in the AWU, much of the rhetoric of the militants was accepted by the rank and file shearers because the AWU officials allowed themselves to become identified with those who wished to break the strike. In January 1931 a number of the local pastoral disputes committees had cabled the central executive of the AWU appealing for financial assistance for the strikers. All received the same curt reply - 'there is no way of complying with your wishes.'<sup>(15)</sup>

This intransigent and unsympathetic attitude on the part of the AWU officialdom was encouraged by their belief that the PWIU leaders were keen to goad the shearers into strike action so that the pastoral award would be suspended, thereby providing the PWIU with the opportunity to apply for a new award and supplant the AWU as the major shearing union.<sup>(16)</sup> Whether this was the aim of the PWIU, or whether the AWU leaders refused to support the strike because they believed that to do so would be to play into the hands of the employers, is impossible to determine. Yet, the PWIU did win the allegiance of many shearers because of its militant stand against the graziers and the AWU officials.<sup>(17)</sup> Reports in the CPA paper, the Workers' Weekly,<sup>(18)</sup> that the majority of shearers in the Toowoomba, Hughenden, Charleville, Cunnamulla, Blackall, Longreach, St George and Goondiwindi districts had resigned from the AWU and joined the PWIU were partly corroborated by regular police reports to the State Premier.<sup>(19)</sup>

Despite the growing strength of the PWIU, the lack of union solidarity weakened the position of the strikers. Because of its political complexion and because of the importance of the woollen industry to the Queensland economy, the Moore Government did all in its power to ensure that shearing proceeded as normally as possible.

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15. Worker, 21, January, 1931.

16. Official Report Eighteenth Annual Delegates Meeting, AWU, Brisbane, January, 1931, pp 6-7, OML.

17. Worker, 28 January, 1931.

18. Workers' Weekly, 16 January, 1931.

19. Police Report, 2 March, 1931, item 31/6975, PRE/A1025, QSA.

The tactic adopted by the Government was to rail strikebreakers under police escort into western Queensland from other parts of the State and from New South Wales. Because they were eager to stem the growing influence of the PWIU, the AWU agreed to assist the Government in recruiting 'volunteer' labour.<sup>(20)</sup> Such an action provided the PWIU with the opportunity to denounce the AWU as 'the greatest scab agency in Australia.'<sup>(21)</sup> Also implicated, in the eyes of the strikers, was the New South Wales Lang Labor Government which provided police protection for a trainload of 'volunteers' who had been recruited in Victoria and New South Wales.<sup>(22)</sup> The arrival of these trains in the west was occasioned by a good deal of resistance on the part of the strikers. In Emerald, a pitched battle was waged between the shearers and the police which resulted in a number of the former being jailed. Despite the actions of the strikers, many sheds were able to complete shearing by employing these 'volunteer' workers under heavy police guard.<sup>(23)</sup> By February 1931 the combined actions of the graziers, the Government and the AWU had begun to break the strike. The only hope the shearers now had was the possibility that the major transport unions would come to their aid by declaring non-union wool 'black' and refusing to carry it to the ports.

This was not to occur. The Australian Railways Union readily gave moral and financial assistance to the strikers<sup>(24)</sup> but was unwilling to involve itself directly without an assurance that it would receive the support of the other railway unions. John Valentine, the AFULE Secretary, ended any possibility of a concerted railway union involvement by issuing a directive to AFULE members that they should avoid becoming embroiled in the dispute. The AFULE statement, while expressing sympathy for the cause of the shearers, noted that

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20. E Jensen, *The Effect of the Depression on the Trade Unions in Queensland, 1929-31*, BA, Queensland, 1971, p 93.

21. *Workers' Weekly*, 21 January, 1931.

22. *ibid.*, 6 February, 1931.

23. Police Report, 4 December, 1930, item 30/7489, PRE/A1025, QSA.

24. *Advocate*, 15 April, 1931.

its own members had suffered a wage reduction without resorting to strike action, and commented unfavourably on the violent actions of some of the shearers.<sup>(25)</sup> By April 1931 these factors had combined to bring about the total capitulation of the strikers, whereupon the United Graziers Association heartily thanked the Premier for providing police protection for the non-unionists and for helping to 'defeat the forces of anarchy,' that were arrayed against the wool-growers.<sup>(26)</sup>

The second major industrial dispute to occur in Queensland during the depression also began as a union protest against wage reductions. By an Order-in-Council dated 3 September, 1931, the Moore Government removed all gold and metalliferous miners from the ambit of the Industrial Court. The owners of the Dobbyn, Orphan and Mt Oxide mines, which were situated approximately 100Km north west of Cloncurry, took advantage of this decision and reduced the wages of their employees. The mines were small-scale enterprises, and were adversely affected by the low level of economic activity that accompanied the depression. Their isolation, Cloncurry is 2113 Km by rail from Brisbane, and their out-of-date equipment helped render the mines uneconomic. In November 1931 the mines' owners, a partnership of AE Powell and J Peterson, reported a net loss for each month since April.<sup>(27)</sup> From the point of view of the employees, the Mt Oxide area was an unpleasant place to work. In addition to the normal hazards and discomforts of underground mining, the workers were required to endure a harsh climate, isolation and loneliness. There were also pecuniary disadvantages involved in living at Mt Oxide. At the time of the strike, the basic wage in Townsville, the nearest provincial city, was £4,11 shillings, but Mt Oxide workers received only £4,2shillings 6d. Because of the isolation,

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25. Statement on Shearers' Strike, 3 February, 1931, AFULE Records, E212/8, RSSSA/ANU.

26. United Graziers Association to Moore, 28 May, 1931, item 31/3178, PRE/A1025, QSA.

27. Telegram, Mining Warden to Moore, 22 November, 1931, item 31/7541, PRE/A1089, pp 1-2, QSA.

the cost of living at Mt Oxide was fifty percent higher than Townsville's and twenty-five percent higher than Cloncurry's. The workers also regularly complained that the mine store engaged in profiteering and other questionable practices.<sup>(28)</sup>

In October 1931 the owners announced that the falling price of copper demanded a reduction in production costs, and announced a wage cut from 18 shillings a day to 16 shillings.<sup>(29)</sup> Negotiations between the men and the company broke down, and on 2 October sixty miners began a strike that was to last six months, and was to involve a large section of the north Queensland workforce. The early days of the strike were uneventful and gave no hint of the conflicts that were to follow. The strikers lacked any formal organisation, and only one of their number was a union member. The AWU was the union that nominally covered the industry.<sup>(30)</sup> Soon after the declaration of the strike most of the men left the mine sites and established themselves in and around the Dobbyn hotel. Dobbyn was the nearest town, and served as the railhead from which ore was transported to the State-owned smelters at Chillagoe.

A surprising feature of the early days of the strike was the attitude of the AWU. In sharp contrast to their response to the shearers' dispute, the union extended its full support to the miners.<sup>(31)</sup> Circumstances dictated this change in attitude. The AWU's main objection to the shearers' strike was that, in ignoring the arbitration system, the shearers had endangered the livelihood of all pastoral workers. The AWU could not put this argument to the Mt Oxide miners because the State Government had, by its Order-in-Council, denied them access to the normal machinery of arbitration.

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28. Commissioner of Prices to AE Jones (MLA), 13 November, 1931, top number, 34/345, QSA; AWU to Moore, 6 November, 1931; Minutes of Conciliation Conference, Dobbyn, 21-22 November, 1931, item 31/7682, PRE/A1089, QSA.

29. Police Report, 13 October, 1931, item 31/6870, *ibid.*

30. Police Report, 6 November, 1931, *ibid.*, p 3.

31. See June 1931 issues of Worker.

In early November, the AWU attempted to bring the dispute before the Industrial Court by requesting Premier Moore to repeal the Order-in-Council. Moore refused the request.<sup>(32)</sup> The AWU officials also were determined to avoid a repetition of the shearers' dispute, from which they emerged with a reputation as strike-breakers. This determination encouraged the union to aid the embattled miners. From October 1931 until April 1932 the AWU provided the strikers with food, clothing and a small amount of strike pay.<sup>(33)</sup>

The miners soon realised that their only hope of winning the strike lay in preventing the removal of ore from the mines to the railway yards at Dobbyn. Powell and Peterson devised a number of stratagems to outwit the strikers. One such plan involved hiring a camel train and a team of Afghan drivers to transport the ore. This was eventually abandoned in favour of a motor lorry. On 29 October a lorry laden with ore managed to avoid a picket line and departed for Dobbyn. The strikers quickly procured a lorry of their own and set off in pursuit. However, the owners' lorry arrived safely and unloaded its ore at the railway yards under the watchful eye of the local police. As the police were returning to their station, the strikers' lorry appeared in the main street. The two constables immediately challenged the strikers, who responded by attacking them and stealing their revolvers. During the fracas, the manager of the Orphan mine, a Mr Pshedpelsky, appeared. One of the strikers, John McCormack, brandished the recently stolen pistols and threatened: 'Here is the Russian bastard, we will give him his share too. .I will shoot you, you Russian bastard.' Fortunately for Pshedpelsky, McCormack was clamed by his colleagues. The strikers then adjourned to the railway yards and held a public meeting to air their grievances against the company and the Government.<sup>(34)</sup>

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32. State Executive AWU to Moore and Reply, 2 November, 1931, top number 34/345, PRE/A1089, QSA.

33. Police Report, 27 November, 1931, item 31/38076, *ibid.*

34. Details from Police Report, 26 November, 1931, pp 1-3, *ibid.*

This incident marked a turning point in the strike. McCormack was convicted of assault and sentenced to two months detention in Stewart Creek jail. The strikers now realised that they lacked the industrial strength to win the dispute alone; so they called on the railway unions for assistance. The latter responded positively, and on 19 November all ore from the Dobbyn mines was declared 'black'. Support for the miners spread rapidly. Their action was endorsed by the Brisbane Trades and Labor Council.<sup>(35)</sup> The Queensland Trades Union Congress, which was then meeting in Brisbane, unanimously carried the following resolution:

That this Trade Union Congress declares its support of the miners in the Cloncurry district who are resisting wage reductions and price-exploitation for commodities, by direct action; and strongly recommends to the executives of all unions concerned, or those whose practical assistance to the striking miners is necessary, to help them win, that ore from the mines affected by the strike which is produced or loaded by scab labor, should be immediately declared 'black' (36)

The success or failure of the strike now depended on the solidarity of the railway unions.

When the miners first issued their call for support, Riordan of the AWU and Moroney of the ARU spoke to Valentine, the AFULE Secretary, to arrange a co-ordinated strike effort. Valentine declared himself in favour of the strike, but insisted that the matter would have to be decided by the AFULE executive. Valentine also made it clear to Riordan and Moroney that they could expect opposition from the President of the AFULE, Fred Hughes. Despite Valentine's declaration of support, the AFULE adopted a policy of vacillation to avoid becoming embroiled in the dispute. The union parried a direct call for support

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35. TLC Minutes, 23 November, 1931.

36. Advocate, 15 December, 1931.

from the miners by questioning the bona fides of the secretary of the strike committee. When the State executive finally met in mid-November, at the height of the strike, it failed to reach the agenda item dealing with the dispute, and issued no directive to its members. President Hughes then took the opportunity to issue a personal statement urging AFULE members not to become involved in the strike.<sup>(37)</sup> The AFULE journal, the Headlight, argued that, in the present economic climate, unionists who 'allowed themselves to be forced by a militant minority element into industrial troubles that got them nowhere' were playing into the hands of the Moore Government.<sup>(38)</sup>

In mid-November the solidarity of the unions was put to the test. When a trainload of 'black' ore arrived in Townsville from Cloncurry it was met by a large body of strikers who attempted to convince the railway shunters not to handle it. The shunters resisted and a melee ensued. As a consequence, the Railway Commissioner, JW Davidson, dismissed three ARU members on a charge of intimidating other railway employees. One of those dismissed was EP 'Pooger' O'Brien, who was later to become northern district Secretary of the ARU. When the commissioner rejected the union's demand that the men be reinstated, the ARU called a State-wide strike to commence on 27 November.<sup>(39)</sup> The dispute now developed into a pitched battle between the ARU and the State Government, with the Dobbyn miners relegated to the background. No mention of the miners was made when the Townsville strike committee issued its list of demands.<sup>(40)</sup>

Why, then, did a relatively minor dispute at a small and isolated mining camp develop into a major industrial conflict? An obvious

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37. Headlight, 4 December, 1931.

38. ibid.

39. Official Report Thirteenth State Conference, ARU, Rockhampton, October, 1934, p 7.

40. The major demands of the strikers were: reinstatement of the sacked men; a state minimum wage of £4 per week; a forty-four hour week; and increased pay and benefits for the unemployed. Townsville Strike Committee to Moore, 26 November, 1931, item 31/7539, PRE/A1089, QSA.



answer would be that the ARU reacted to the dismissal of its three members by calling for a show of sympathy and solidarity. Fred Paterson provided a more satisfactory answer when he told a public meeting in Brisbane that:

. the conditions of the railway workers for a long time has been such that the service was seething with discontent through bad conditions and loss of wages that a strike was pending long before the truck load of ore got to Townsville. (41)

North Queensland was a major centre of union militancy, and the frustrations of the early years of the depression created a local atmosphere conducive to industrial unrest. The passage of the 'black' ore provided the catalyst that ignited the latent discontent of the northern railway workers.

The indiscreet and sometimes provocative actions of the Moore Government and the Railway Department also helped to widen the dispute. Given the tense situation that had developed in Townsville, the department's summary dismissal of the three unionists was a tactless action. The intransigent attitude of the department during the dispute even brought it into conflict with the local police. On November 27 the regular Hughenden to Townsville train was in danger of being intercepted by a group of stone-throwing unionists. Sergeant Honan of the Hughenden police assessed the situation, and suggested to the Railway Department that, in order to avoid trouble, the departure of the train be delayed until the early hours of the next morning. When he received this advice, the General Manager of the Railway Department at Townsville immediately contacted Police Inspector GE Lock, and demanded to know by what authority Honan presumed to tell him how to run his department. Lock bowed to this pressure and instructed Honan not to meddle in railway departmental business. At 4.00 pm the train was fired-up and ready for departure. Before it

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41. Police Report, 26 November, 1931, item 31/7635, *ibid.*

could leave, it was attacked by a large body of strikers and the crew was assaulted. The train was then cancelled.<sup>(42)</sup>

The State Government claimed that the strike represented such a threat to law and order that it rushed through, in a single day's sitting, a Railway Strike and Public Safety Preservation Bill, which empowered the Governor-in-Council to proclaim a state of emergency whenever and wherever the public order was imperilled.<sup>(43)</sup> Section 6(i) of the Act provided that, in the event of a railway strike, any employee who joined the strike would automatically cease to be a member of the service, and would forfeit all the service credits due to him. The Government insisted that the sole aim of the Act was to end the rail strike as quickly as possible.<sup>(44)</sup> Both the Parliamentary Labor party<sup>(45)</sup> and the TLC denounced it as a vicious piece of anti-working class legislation.<sup>(46)</sup> A state of emergency was never declared at either Dobbryn or Townsville because of the sudden collapse of the strike.

Throughout the dispute, the Government consistently over-rated the strength and solidarity of the strikers. At one point the Premier insisted that the Public Service Commissioner's Department prepare alternative plans for the transport of essential goods in anticipation of a complete shutdown of the State's communication system.<sup>(47)</sup> This was a gross over-reaction. Despite the efforts of the unions, the strike was never effective outside Townsville. On the day after the strike was called the Railway Commissioner informed Moore that only the Cloncurry, Townsville, Hughenden and Innisfail centres were on strike, and that all other centres in the State were operating normally.<sup>(48)</sup> The strikers blamed the

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42. Police Report, 2 December, 1931, item 31/7635, *ibid.*

43. Queensland Industrial Gazette, 24 December, 1931, p 560f.

44. QPD, xlx, 25 November, 1931, p 2231f.

45. *ibid.*, p 2303.

46. TLC Minutes, 25 November, 1931.

47. Memo Public Service Commissioner's Department to Chief Secretary, 25 November, 1931, item 31/7518, PRE/A1089, QSA.

48. Police Commissioner to Moore, 26 November, 1931, top number 34/345, *ibid.*

Railway Transport Council (RTC) unions for the failure to extend the strike beyond the north.<sup>(49)</sup> The RTC was a loose affiliation of railway unions which did not include the ARU, and which was dominated by the AFULE. At the commencement of the dispute, the RTC pronounced itself sympathetic to the aims of the strikers, but would not endorse the tactic of direct action. Instead, the Council approached the Premier and asked him to use the emergency clauses of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act to allow the Industrial Court to settle the dispute.<sup>(50)</sup> Moore refused the request, and the strike committee then accused the RTC of collaborating with the Government to undermine the strike. Relations among the participants in the dispute were further damaged when the AFULE issued a statement claiming that the confrontationist tactics of the ARU had provided the Government with the excuse to introduce its anti-union legislation.<sup>(51)</sup>

While this squabbling among the unions lowered the morale of the strikers, it was events within the ARU which eventually broke the strike. The ARU led the strike in Townsville, but was unable to convince its members in the southern areas to join the dispute. On the day the strike was called, 26 November, 1931, a mass meeting of over 2000 railwaymen was held at the Roma Street yards in Brisbane. Kissick, Hughes and Valentine of the AFULE outmanoeuvred the ARU representatives and quickly moved a motion calling on the strikers and the Government to negotiate a settlement. When Moroney and ARU State executive member, Charlie Walbank, rose to speak against the motion they were howled down and counted out.<sup>(52)</sup> Somewhat chastened by this experience, the ARU held its own meeting at the Trades Hall later the same day, but attracted only fifty unionists. Moroney now realised that the prevailing economic conditions made it unlikely

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49. Leaflet issued by Railway Rank and File Committee, 25 November, 1931, item 31/7552, *ibid*.

50. Railway Transport Council to Moore, 24 November, 1931, 31/7540, *ibid*.

51. Headlight, 4 December, 1931.

52. Police Report, 26 November, 1931, item 31/7552, PRE/A1089, QSA.

that the Townsville strikers would receive support from their southern comrades. Moroney was also concerned at the increasing number of men in Brisbane who were resigning from the ARU in protest against the strike, and who were transferring their loyalties to other railway unions.<sup>(53)</sup> These events convinced him that the strike had little chance of success, and that he was endangering his own position as well as that of his union by allowing it to continue. The strike was called off on 29 November.<sup>(54)</sup>

Frank Nolan, who was at the time an ARU State executive member, provides a somewhat different interpretation of Moroney's motives in deciding to end the strike.<sup>(55)</sup> The most enthusiastic supporters of the strike were the Communist party/Militant Minority Movement (MMM) fraction of the ARU. Although he was a militant socialist, as well as a devout Roman Catholic, Moroney was a vigorous opponent of the MMM. Moroney believed that the dismissal of George Rymer as President of the union in 1930 was part of a broader strategy on the part of the MMM to replace him as Secretary with one of their number. He was determined to prevent this. Nolan implies that Moroney encouraged the MMM in their campaign of militancy when he knew that such tactics were doomed to failure. He further claims that Moroney then worked behind the scenes to bring the strike to a premature end so as to make the MMM appear reckless and misguided. Whichever interpretation is accurate does not detract from the fact that internal ARU politics determined the outcome of the strike.

The involvement of the northern railwaymen distracted attention from the catalyst of the dispute - the strike at the Mt Oxide mines. When the railway strike collapsed the miners decided to continue their struggle unaided. The withdrawal of the support of the railway unions revealed the basic weakness of the miners' position. They

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53. *ibid.*

54. *ibid.*

55. Frank Nolan, *op.cit.*, p 60.

were few in number; they were not unionised; there were no alternative jobs available; and they were opposed by a determined employer. Because the State Government had removed the possibility of a settlement through formal arbitration, the strike soon reached a stalemate. The local mining warden, S Wilson, made two unsuccessful attempts to settle the dispute by informal conciliation. On 17 October he arranged a meeting between Powell and the strike committee. This meeting was aborted by Powell, who, late on the night of the 16th sent a note to the committee in which he stated that he had decided not to attend 'as there was nothing to discuss, as they knew his terms which he did not intend to alter' <sup>(56)</sup> One month later, Premier Moore secretly asked Wilson to convene another conference. <sup>(57)</sup> Wilson succeeded, and a conference was held at Dobbyn on 21 and 22 November. Wilson examined the books of the company, and recommended that the daily wage rate be increased from 16 shillings to 17 shillings and fourpence. Powell agreed, but the miners would accept nothing less than 18 shillings and fourpence. No compromise could be reached, and the negotiations collapsed. <sup>(58)</sup>

When the dispute commenced, the owners believed that they would easily defeat the strikers by enlisting volunteer labour. Peterson and Powell travelled to Townsville on numerous occasions in an attempt to recruit workers: but, despite the high level of unemployment, they always returned empty-handed. <sup>(59)</sup> The Communist party was quick to argue that this was an example of working class solidarity. <sup>(60)</sup> More mundane factors which encouraged the unemployed to remain in Townsville were the low pay and poor working conditions at the mine sites. <sup>(61)</sup> The miners also served notice that any

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56. Police Report, 19 October, 1931, item 31/33794, PRE/A1089, QSA.

57. Telegram, Wilson to Moore, 22 November, 1931, item 31/7541, *ibid.*

58. Conciliation Conference Minutes, Dobbyn, 21-22 November, 1931, item 31/7682, *ibid.*

59. Police Report, 18 November, 1931, item 31/36955, *ibid.*

60. Speech by Sidney Jordan, Police Report, 22 November, 1931, item 31/7467, *ibid.*

61. Police Report, 23 November, 1931, item 31/7636, *ibid.*

volunteers who arrived in Dobbyn could expect to receive a warm reception.<sup>(62)</sup> Their inability to recruit alternative labour prevented the employers from exploiting the weakness of the strikers.

In early January Powell and Peterson dissolved their partnership and the latter left the area. Powell was determined to recoup some of his losses, and he began to pump out the Orphan Mine in preparation for a commencement of work. The strikers responded by sending a letter to Powell in which they moderated their pay demands, but insisted that no scab labour was to be engaged and that all the strikers were to be offered their previous jobs. Powell's evasive reply was regarded by the strike committee as a rejection of their offer to end the dispute.<sup>(63)</sup>

Late on the night of 20 March, 1932 a small railway bridge at Dobbyn was destroyed by explosives. The police immediately suspected sabotage on the part of the strikers. With the aid of an Aboriginal tracker, they followed a set of footprints into the camp of John McCormack, who had been released from prison, and had returned to Dobbyn to assume the leadership of the strikers. Despite his protestations of innocence, he was charged with the wilful destruction of public property, convicted and returned to jail.<sup>(64)</sup> This minor act of sabotage had a cathartic affect on the dispute. It broke the stalemate by convincing all the parties that the time had come to end the strike. The destruction of the bridge also centred public attention on Dobbyn, and provoked the direct intervention of the AWU. In early April the union's State President, Clarrie Fallon, visited the area and convened a conference which produced a set of wage scales acceptable to all the parties. The strike finally was called off on 3 April, 1932.<sup>(65)</sup>

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62. Police Report, 26 November, 1931, item 31/7039, *ibid.*

63. Police Report, 29 February, 1932, item 32/1272, *ibid.*

64. Police Report, 24 March, 1932, item 32/9558, *ibid.*

65. Police Report, 11 April, 1932, item 32/1856, *ibid.*

After a strike lasting six months the miners won a wage increase of two shillings per day. The railwaymen who supported them won nothing. Seven months after the strike ended over 100 members of the ARU in Townsville had not been re-admitted to the railway service.<sup>(66)</sup> The experiences of the shearers' and Dobbyn strikes were evidence that to engage in direct industrial action during a period of economic depression was to court disaster. In the years between 1931 and 1946 there was a low level of union militancy in Queensland. The strikes that did occur during those years were sporadic, short-lived, and usually resulted in the complete defeat of the strikers. Nevertheless, the depression strikes had one beneficial outcome for the Queensland Labor movement. The response of the State Government to the strikes further convinced the majority of the unions of the necessity to unite behind the Parliamentary Labor Party to oust Moore at the 1932 election. Paradoxically, the strikes themselves encouraged Queensland unionists to forsake industrial action in favour of political action.

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66. Advocate, 15 February, 1932; Legal Opinion, O'Sullivan and Ruddy to ARU, 14 July, 1933, top number 34/345, PRE/A1089, QSA.

SECTION TWO



CHAPTER 8

UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF POLICIES

Unemployment was the principal political issue of the 1930s in Australia. Its incidence and severity influenced the behaviour, priorities and longevity of Governments of all ideological complexions. During the depression years the relief of unemployment was primarily a problem for the States, and remained so until 1944. Before the onset of the economic collapse, Queensland was the only State to have instituted a Government operated unemployment relief system. This was the Unemployed Workers' Insurance scheme which commenced operation in 1923. The programme was designed to deal with seasonal unemployment and proved unable to cope with the prolonged unemployment that was a hallmark of the depression. When the Moore Government realised, in 1930, that the insurance scheme was incapable of dealing with the problem, it introduced a tax funded unemployment relief scheme which provided intermittent relief work for the unemployed. Neither the Moore nor the Forgan Smith Governments would countenance the dole system because they saw it as socially and personally undesirable for men to receive 'charity' in lieu of work.

Public sponsored relief measures operated simultaneously with more traditional forms of charity. Private unemployment relief in Queensland was almost exclusively the preserve of the Christian churches. The Roman Catholic and the Anglican denominations were the most active. The churches devoted most of their energies to providing food and shelter for the unemployed, particularly single men, and were unsuccessful in their limited attempts to operate as private labour exchanges. The impact of the depression revealed the financial and organisational weakness of Queensland's charitable bodies and the State Government was required to come to their assistance by establishing the Queensland Social Service League (QSSL) which was charged with the task of co-ordinating private relief activities.

Humanitarianism is the most popular explanation of why public and private authorities instituted unemployment relief schemes during

the depression. Frances Piven and Richard Cloward<sup>(1)</sup> have challenged this interpretation and have claimed that Governments introduced relief work schemes in order to prevent mass insurrection. They argue that work is the major instrument of social control in western societies and that the incidence of widespread, prolonged unemployment constitutes a potential threat to the stability of those societies. Hence, the authorities initiated work relief systems during the depression as 'surrogate systems of social control'<sup>(2)</sup> Piven and Cloward's thesis is based on an examination of the United States, but has some relevance for Australia. A cabinet minister in the Lang Government candidly informed a deputation of unemployed that he regarded the dole as an insurance against revolution.<sup>(3)</sup> Similarly, the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane argued in a public address in 1933 that 'it was the Queensland Social Service League which stood between (us) and turmoil in the community'.<sup>(4)</sup> As a general explanation of the motives of Governments during the depression, however, the Piven and Cloward thesis is defective. First, a number of countries preferred the dole to relief work, yet did not experience major social upheaval; the United Kingdom is but one example.<sup>(5)</sup> Second, Piven and Cloward's argument is predicated on the notion that prolonged lack of stable employment transforms normally law-abiding citizens into disaffected radicals. The experience of the depression suggests, on the contrary, that the chronically unemployed were alienated, anomic and politically inactive.<sup>(6)</sup> Finally, Piven and Cloward fail to take into account the mundane realities of democratic politics. The combination of compulsory voting and a relatively inclusive franchise encouraged

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1. FF Piven and RA Cloward, Regulating the Poor, NY, 1971, Chapters 1 and 2.
  2. ibid., p 8.
  3. Sydney Morning Herald, 19 February, 1932.
  4. Brisbane Courier, 2 July, 1933.
  5. FM Millar, 'The Unemployment Policy of the National Government, 1931-1936', The Historical Journal, 19;2, 1976.
  6. This argument is discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

Australian State politicians to take action on the unemployment problem. The volatility of the electorate in the thirties, particularly at the State level, was a further incentive for Governments to act.

Australia entered and emerged from the depression bereft of any systematic, Commonwealth sponsored unemployment relief scheme. This absence of Federal involvement was produced by a lack of commitment on the part of the Commonwealth combined with disagreements among the seven Australian Governments. Following the introduction of a system of unemployment insurance in the United Kingdom in 1911, the 1915 Premiers' Conference commissioned the Queensland Government to prepare a draft Bill along the lines of the British legislation.<sup>(7)</sup> Nothing came of this decision. Ten years later a Commonwealth initiated Royal Commission on National Insurance reported that:

The fundamental principle of unemployment insurance is that of mutual thrift by means of which provision is made to meet the financial disabilities under which members of the community suffer during periods of unemployment. (8)

The commission recommended that the Federal Government introduce such a scheme but noted that the quality of unemployment statistics first would have to be brought up to an acceptable standard.<sup>(9)</sup> The Commonwealth seized upon this proviso as an excuse to vacillate. During the 1928 election campaign the Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, announced that the Commonwealth had decided that unemployment insurance was properly a matter for the States.<sup>(10)</sup> The issue then lay dormant until 1937 when the Federal Government invited an officer of the British Labour department, Godfrey Ince, to come to Australia to advise on matters related to unemployment

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7. TH Kewley, Social Security in Australia, 1900-1972, Sydney, 2nd ed, 1973, p 150.

8. Second Progress Report of the Royal Commission on National Insurance; Unemployment, 1927, CPP, 1926-28, vol 4, p 1432.

9. ibid., pp 1431-3.

10. Quoted by Senator George Pearce, CPD (S), vol 120, 7 February, 1929, p 51.

relief.<sup>(11)</sup> In his report he argued that insurance was preferable to relief work on economic grounds and that Australia should adopt a modified version of the British system.<sup>(12)</sup> None of Ince's recommendations was acted upon because of disagreements between the Commonwealth and the States and because of the outbreak of war in 1939. Australia did not acquire a national unemployment scheme until the passage of the Unemployment and Sickness Benefits Act of 1944.<sup>(13)</sup>

Queensland was the only State before the depression prepared to fill the gap left by the Commonwealth in the area of unemployment insurance. The Labor Government of TJ Ryan first attempted to introduce a scheme in 1919, but it did not become operational until 1923. In August 1919 the Treasurer and Minister for Public Works, EG Theodore, introduced an Unemployed Workers' Bill into the Legislative Assembly.<sup>(14)</sup> Earlier in the same year the International Labour Organisation had urged its member states to introduce unemployment insurance schemes;<sup>(15)</sup> but this does not seem to have been the motivating factor behind the Queensland legislation. Theodore explained that the increase in unemployment which accompanied the cessation of hostilities in 1918 combined with the long-term, structural problem of seasonal unemployment in the woollen and sugar industries required the humane solution of an insurance scheme.<sup>(16)</sup> The contents of the Bill were wide-ranging and included, in addition to the insurance provisions: the establishment of an Employment Council; an expansion in the general public works programme; and the establishment of 'labour farms' for the chronically unemployed.

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11. GH Ince, Report on Unemployment Insurance in Australia, CPP, 1937, vol 5, p 2663.

12. ibid., pp 2661 and 2673.

13. See Kewley, op.cit., p 265f for details.

14. QPD (Assembly), clxxii, 26 August, 1919, p 348f.

15. NN Franklin, 'Employment and Unemployment: Views and Policies, 1919-1969, ILR, 99;3, March, 1969, p 295.

16. QPD, (Assembly), clxxxii, 2 September, 1919, p 96f

The Opposition gave the Bill a hostile reception. They claimed that it would: 'encourage the worst sentiments' in those who did not wish to work; 'sap our moral fibre instead of making us a virile race'; 'irritate, harass and penalise a large section of the Community'; and create 'a premium on laziness'. Theodore's claim that the Bill was modelled on the UK legislation was met with the retort that 'it is singularly un-British' <sup>(17)</sup> The Brisbane Courier derided the legislation as 'the Loafers' Paradise Bill' <sup>(18)</sup> Non-Labor members were particularly incensed at the powers given to the Employment Council to direct private industry. They also objected to the provision that, unlike the UK scheme which was funded by three-way contributions from employees, employers and Government, only employers would make a financial contribution to the Queensland insurance fund. <sup>(19)</sup> The Opposition did not vote against the second reading of the Bill in the Assembly but moved a series of amendments at the committee stage, all of which were rejected by the Government. The legislation was then defeated by the non-Labor controlled Legislative Council.

One of the first pieces of legislation to be brought forward after the abolition of the Legislative Council was a revised Unemployed Workers' Insurance Bill which was introduced by the Minister Without Portfolio, William Forgan Smith, on 19 December, 1922. <sup>(20)</sup> The new Bill differed significantly from that of 1919. First, its scope was confined almost exclusively to insurance matters. Second, the insurance fund was to be financed by three-way contributions along the lines of the British scheme. Third, the powers of the Employment Council were investigatory and advisory rather than directional. <sup>(21)</sup> These alterations did not satisfy the Opposition, but the absence of an upper house ensured the smooth passage of the legislation and the scheme commenced operation on 1 March, 1923.

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17. Comments gleaned from ibid.

18. A comment they repeated in 1922; see Brisbane Courier, 20 September, 1922.

19. For a full account of the Opposition's objections see QPD (Council), clxxxiii, 15 October, 1919, p 1397.

20. QPD, cxl, 19 September, 1922, p 1657, Forgan Smith became Minister for Public Works on 6 October, 1922.

21. See for details ibid., 20 September, 1922, p 1713f.

The scheme compulsorily insured all workers both male and female over the age of eighteen who were covered by State industrial awards. Employers, employees and the State Government made weekly payments of threepence (later sixpence) regardless of the salary of the individual contributor. The Government made its payment in a lump sum on a yearly basis. Unemployed persons who had continuously contributed to the fund for six months were entitled to receive a weekly payment for a maximum of fifteen weeks per calendar year. The rates of payment varied according to marital status, geographic location and the nature of the occupation usually engaged in. Persons who were recipients of pensions or workers' compensation, or were physically incapacitated, or who refused reasonable offers of work, or who were unemployed because of their participation in an industrial dispute were not entitled to benefit from the scheme. In 1926 the scheme had 150,000 contributors of whom about seventeen percent made at least one yearly claim. Manual workers in the sugar industry were the heaviest claimants.<sup>(22)</sup> The general administration of the fund was in the hands of the Employment Council which comprised the Minister for Labour, the Director of Labour, the Registrar of Friendly Societies, a representative of the trade unions and a representative of the employer organisations.

From 1923 to 1930 the scheme was not substantially amended and proved effective in dealing with short-term and seasonal unemployment.<sup>(23)</sup> It was much less effective, however, in coping with the prolonged unemployment that became a feature of the Queensland economy after 1930. The scheme was based on the premise that workers would be in employment for most of the year and would thereby accumulate credit with the scheme. Lengthy bouts of unemployment undermined this premise and once an unemployed worker exhausted the permissible fifteen week period payment ceased. The scheme was

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22. Royal Commission op.cit., Appendix, pp 1427-28.

23. Ince Report, op.cit., Appendix, pp 2718-19.

originally introduced to deal with seasonal unemployment; it was never designed to cope with a serious economic depression. In 1933 the Department of Labour reviewed the performance of the system over the previous three years:

As the industrial depression developed, and as unemployment intensified both as to members affected and as to the duration of unemployment it became obvious that the unemployment insurance scheme could not of itself handle the whole situation. (24)

By June 1930 the fund was heavily indebted to the Treasury. A year later the Moore Government announced substantial amendments to the scheme which included: a reduction of the allowable payment period to 13 weeks; a reduction of one shilling per week in the amount paid; and the application of a means test which excluded from the scheme all workers who received an annual income in excess of £220 pounds.<sup>(25)</sup> Table 8:1 illustrates the problems encountered by the scheme during the depression.

TABLE 8:1  
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FUND

<u>Year</u>	<u>Receipts</u>	<u>Payments</u>	<u>Excess of receipts over payments</u>
	£	£	£
1928/29	491,503	439,171	52,331
1929/30	490,568	517,781	-27,212
1930/31	453,439	517,293	-63,854
1931/32	411,867	385,105	26,762
1932/33	419,734	338,807	80,926
1933/34	419,545	336,000	83,545
1934/35	504,048	410,688	93,360
1935/36	570,552	479,658	50,894
1936/37	560,964	488,528	72,436

Source: Annual Reports, Queensland Department of Labour and Industry.

24. Tenth Annual Report on Operations under the Unemployed Workers Insurance Acts, 1922-30, QPP, vol 1, 1933, p 259.

25. Cabinet Memo, Unemployment Insurance Fund, 1941, Larcombe papers, M 47, p 1, OML.



The unprecedented shortage of employment in the early 1930s revealed unforeseen failings and anomalies of the insurance scheme. Long-term contributors were particularly disadvantaged because, regardless of their period of membership, they were entitled to payment for only fifteen (later thirteen) weeks in each calendar year. The depression crippled the scheme in two other ways: first, as the rate of displacement from the workforce accelerated after the second quarter of 1930, when the world-wide depression effectively took hold in Queensland, the rapid increase in the number of claims impoverished the fund; second, the surplus trading years of 1931/2, 1932/3 and 1933/4 provide a misleading picture of the operations of the scheme. The system stagnated in this period because unemployed members who had exhausted their entitlements were unable to draw on the money now effectively locked up in the fund. Hence the accumulated surplus was dead money, unable to be spent on those who most needed it. The Moore Government was required to break this log jam by temporarily transferring the assets of the insurance fund to the general unemployment relief fund.

The unemployment insurance scheme recovered as the general economic situation improved and it played a useful role as a first line of defence against 'normal' unemployment during the years of recovery.<sup>(26)</sup> In 1933 the Labor Government raised the means test to £300<sup>(27)</sup> and the continued buoyancy of the scheme permitted a number of liberalising amendments over the next five years.<sup>(28)</sup> The major contribution of the insurance scheme was that it provided a buffer period of at least fifteen weeks, the fifteen week provision was restored in 1935, before unemployed workers had to be absorbed into the relief work programme. Unfortunately it still provided assistance only to those able to obtain six months normal employment per year, but it did ease the very keen competition that existed for places on relief work projects.

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26. Tenth Annual Report, op.cit., pp 258-9.

27. QPD, clxiv, 24 November, 1933, p 1730.

28. Cabinet Memo, op.cit., p 2.

The insurance scheme also assisted seasonally unemployed women who were effectively excluded from most other unemployment relief programmes.<sup>(29)</sup> Despite the positive recommendations of the 1937 Ince report, Queensland remained the only Australian Government to maintain an unemployment insurance scheme. It was abolished in 1944 when the Commonwealth finally assumed responsibility for the payment of unemployment benefits.

Prior to the onset of the depression, Queensland, in common with most other State Governments, responded to periodic increases in unemployment by temporarily expanding the public works programme. Such expansions were usually restricted to the geographic areas of highest unemployment and were funded from consolidated revenue. By January 1930 there were 20,000 registered unemployed in Queensland and the Moore Government decided that new measures were needed to deal with the problem. The decline in Government revenue and the shortage of loan money meant that relief works on the scale required could not be financed in the normal way. The major aim of the Income (Unemployment Relief) Tax Act which commenced operation on 1 August, 1930 was to provide a special fund to finance relief projects. Under the terms of the Act a tax of threepence in the pound was levied on all income earners, the proceeds of which were paid into a trust fund separate from consolidated revenue. The unemployment relief fund was administered by the Department of Labour. In October 1931 the tax scales were altered to three pence in the pound for incomes below £104 per annum and sixpence in the pound for those in excess of £104.<sup>(30)</sup>

The Queensland Parliamentary Labor Party did not vote against the Bill, but nevertheless expressed strong opposition to certain of its provisions. Percy Pease, and the deputy leader, argued that the

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29. Tenth Annual Report, op.cit., p 259.

30. The taxation provisions of the scheme are set out in the 'Seventh Annual Report of the Department of Labour and Industry on the Operations and Proceedings under the Income (Unemployment Relief) Tax Acts 1930-35', QPP, vol 2, 1937.

whole scheme was unnecessary because the Government possessed a reserve of loan funds which they refused to spend.<sup>(31)</sup> Forgan Smith concentrated his attack on the allegedly regressive nature of the tax scales. He argued that 'this Bill...introduces the pernicious principle of the taxation of all in the community, irrespective of income.'<sup>(32)</sup> In addition to criticism from the Labor Party, Moore had also to cope with opposition to the legislation from among his own supporters. The CPNP had come to Government in 1929 on a policy of tax reduction. Yet after a little more than a year in office they were required to impose a new and substantial tax on income. The decision attracted vigorous opposition from such business organisations as the Taxpayers' Association and the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce.<sup>(33)</sup> Despite its earlier opposition, when Labor returned to power in June 1932 it retained the scheme but introduced a graduated tax scale and increased the average rate of sixpence in the pound.<sup>(34)</sup> Both the ALP and CPNP insisted that the tax was a temporary and undesirable measure,<sup>(35)</sup> but it was not repealed until 1938 when it was replaced by a State Development Tax.

The function of the relief tax was to finance the unemployment relief programme that was commenced in 1930. Intermittent relief work formed the basis of both the Moore and the Forgan Smith Governments' unemployment alleviation policies. Both administrations refused to distribute dole money to those out of work. This decision was based on the arguments that the dole was economically wasteful and that it was degrading to those who received it. Ration coupons, 'outdoor relief', were distributed to those for whom no relief work was available or who were physically incapable of heavy, manual labour.

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31. QPD, clv, 16 July, 1930, p 18f.

32. ibid., p 38.

33. T Thatcher, 'Unemployment Relief in Queensland', Australian Quarterly, September, 1931, p 56; Brisbane Courier, 22 July, 1932; and Brisbane Chamber of Commerce to Forgan Smith, 12 December, 1932, item 32/6781, PRE/A1063, QSA.

34. QPD, clxi, 28 September, 1932, p 585 f

35. ibid.

Relief work was generally organised on a rotational gang system and by March 1932 there were 13,742 men engaged in the construction of roads and channelling, laying drainage, flood prevention and land reclamation, forestry work, improving the condition of state school grounds and constructing playing fields in various parts of Brisbane. Similar work was carried out in the provincial towns.<sup>(36)</sup>

While the general principles of this system were supported by both major political parties, many of its specific provisions became objects of controversy. Its most contentious features were the eligibility, pay and conditions of intermittent relief workers. When the scheme was introduced HE Sizer, the Minister for Labour and Industry, announced that relief workers would be paid at less than basic wage rates. He argued that the Treasury lacked the necessary funds and that:

If we put relief work on the same basis as industry proper no man would have an incentive to reach a higher or a better position. It would draw everybody down to the same level, and would thereby defeat its own ends. Instead of providing more employment it would decrease it. (37)

Initially, married relief workers were paid sixty shillings per forty-four hour week and single men fifty shillings. The State basic wage at the time was sixty-seven shillings per week for an adult male. The spiralling numbers of unemployed, however, rendered this method too costly and from 1931 intermittent relief workers were employed and paid according to the following scale:

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36. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, Vol 2, 1932, p 25.

37. QPD, clv, 17 July, 1930, p 75.

Family Circumstances of	Work days allowed per week	Total pay (cash)
One person	1	11/-
Man and wife	1½	17/-
Man, wife and one child	2	21/6
Man, wife and two children	2	22/6
Man, wife and three children	2½	27/-
Man, wife and four children	3	32/-
Man, wife and five children	3	34/-
Man, wife and six children	3½	38/-
Man, wife and seven children	4	43/-
Man, wife and eight children	4	44/-

Source: Queensland Parliamentary Papers, 2, 1931, p 10.

The Department of Labour also issued a list of conditions to be observed on relief projects that fell far short of the minimum standards set by equivalent industrial awards. Preference was not accorded to unionists and the tenor of the directive was summed up in its concluding paragraph :

As good a standard of work as possible is required from each man. Willing men can be given two weeks in which to adapt themselves, after which they are expected to give of their best. Men refusing to work are to be dispensed with immediately. (38)

The Labor movement regarded the pay and conditions of relief workers as an assault on the State's industrial relations system.<sup>(39)</sup> When Labor returned to power in 1932 it placed all relief workers under the Local Authorities Award and thereby granted them the basic wage. While this decision was applauded by the unions, it did little to

38. Memo Department of Labour and Industry, Special Relief Works, 30 April, 1930, item 30/2938, PRE/A996, QSA.

39. QPD, clv, 16 July, 1930, pp 117 and 121; Maryborough ALP to Moore, 29 April, 1930, item 30/2709, PRE/A996, QSA.

improve the position of the average relief worker. This was because the Forgan Smith Government did not alter substantially the system of allocation of work days to the unemployed. Award wages were certainly paid for each day worked but very few unemployed were entitled to receive a full week's work. In 1936, the only year for which reliable statistics are available, over eighty percent of relief workers were employed for less than three days each week with the average being 2.18 days.<sup>(40)</sup> This meant that a man with a wife and one child earned approximately thirty-three shillings per week at a time when the male basic wage in Brisbane was sixty-seven shillings and the average Queensland wage was eighty-four shillings per week.

The relief work scheme discriminated in favour of married men. Not only were they paid more than single men but also they were given preference for relief work when it became available. One group of single unemployed complained to Premier Moore that there was a three to one employment ratio in favour of married men operating on relief projects in their area.<sup>(41)</sup> During the worst years of the depression, the demand for relief work always exceeded the supply and ration coupons were distributed to those who could not be placed in the work programme. Single men could not draw rations at the same centre on two successive weeks. The rationale behind this requirement was that the bona fide unemployed should be prepared to travel the State to show that they were serious in their search for employment. If they could not convince the local police sergeant, who usually was responsible for the distribution of rations, that they were genuinely 'on the move' they were refused their six shillings worth of coupons. The Labor Party criticised this policy on the grounds that it was economically unrealistic, that it broke up families and that it placed unreasonable pressures on the young.<sup>(42)</sup> In 1932

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40. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 2, 1937, pp 19-20.

41. Secretary Inglewood Unemployed to Moore, 29 May, 1929, item 29/3389, PRE/A965, QSA.

42. Paddington ALP to Moore, 5 October, 1931, item 31/63696, PRE/A1056, QSA.

the in-coming Labor Government was lobbied strongly by church and charitable bodies to amend the 'travelling' regulation. These approaches were successful, and after June 1932 single unemployed men were permitted to draw rations at their place of residence.<sup>(43)</sup> Nevertheless the other disabilities of the single unemployed remained. In 1933 a deputation of single, unemployed males placed a list of demands before the Minister for Labour and Industry, MP Hynes; The Minister stunned them with his reply:

..I cannot understand why, whenever people get into difficulties they rush to the Government. I again tell you single men that the best way to emancipate yourselves is to get married and thus become entitled to the privileges of the married men. (44)

Other groups in the community were also discriminated against under the scheme. Neither farmers nor their sons were eligible for relief work. Farmers were required to pay relief tax but could not be classified as being unemployed while they remained in possession of their farms. When the Labor Government liberalised the relief provisions relating to single men, the CPNP and a number of rural interest groups demanded an extension of the legislation to cover the under-employed sons of farmers. The Council of Agriculture went further and requested that financially depressed farmers be allowed to register as unemployed and to undertake relief work 'on their own or neighbouring farms' <sup>(45)</sup> The Government rejected these suggestions and the only concession granted was that necessitous farmers could register for rations, providing that they agreed to reimburse the Government when their economic situation improved.<sup>(46)</sup>

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43. QPD, clxi, 27 September, 1932, p 547.

44. Cairns Post, 13 January, 1933.

45. Report of the Council of Agriculture, Brisbane, 5-6 August, 1932, pp 78-79.

46. QPD, clxii, 3 October, 1933, p 606; clxv, 17 October, 1934, p 743; clxix, 1 October, 1936, p 684; Department of Labour and Industry to Pease, 30 March, 1937, item 37/2121, PRE/A1174, QSA.

Perhaps the group most discriminated against by the relief scheme was unemployed women. They were the hidden people of the depression. Because of inadequate statistics, the actual level of unemployment amongst women in Queensland can only be guessed. Mendelsohn estimates that fifteen percent of the female Australian workforce was unemployed in 1933.<sup>(47)</sup> The 1933 Commonwealth census revealed that the female workforce in Queensland totalled 81,714. If Mendelsohn's figure is accurate for Queensland, then over twelve thousand were out of work. Yet only 1,937 of that twelve thousand were registered as unemployed in 1933.<sup>(48)</sup> Women tended not to register as unemployed because there was little benefit in doing so. Relief work was designed for men only and women were largely ~~de~~barred. The 1930 relief tax legislation initially contained no provision for women other than an obligation to pay the tax. During the committee stage of the Bill the Labor Opposition managed to force two amendments: the first entitled unemployed females to draw rations of six shillings per week; and the second allowed unemployed women such as sisters and daughters to be counted in the family of a relief worker, which meant an increase in his allowance.<sup>(49)</sup> Women were entitled to receive rations only if they were prepared to submit to a detailed police investigation of their personal circumstances which many found distasteful.<sup>(50)</sup> Those who were prepared to fulfil this condition sometimes found themselves confronted by unforeseen difficulties. A private charity worker reported to the Premier that when a police officer called at a single woman's lodgings to arrange the distribution of rations, a neighbour misinformed the landlord that the premises were being used for prostitution; whereupon the woman found her<sup>(51)</sup>self evicted.

The formulation of specific policies to deal with female unemployment was hindered by negative societal attitudes towards working women. An increase in the female component of the workforce had been

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47. Mendelsohn, op.cit., p 125.

48. QPD, clxv, 6 September, 1934, p 157.

49. ibid., clv, 22 July, 1930, p 207.

50. Organiser, 21 May, 1936.

51. Steele to Moore, 9 May, 1931, item 31/3173, PRE/A1025, QSA.



tolerated between 1914 and 1918 as a war-time necessity, but the atmosphere of insecurity during the depression led to repeated demands that men be given total preference in employment. Letters-to-the-editor columns of the daily newspapers regularly received epistles which decried the selfishness of 'flappers' who stole the jobs of men. The following is a typical example:

When the war broke out I well remember how some smartly dressed girls and women distributed white feathers to any unfortunate males they met in civilian clothes. They did this because they understood their homes were in danger and to stave off disaster the men threw up their jobs and donned khaki. Then, under the guise of patriotism, these women proceeded to annex the jobs the men vacated.

Today quite as many homes are in danger. this is due to the vast army of unemployed heads of families and the unfortunate spectacle of thousands of youths facing a hopeless future. Meanwhile, the smart modern young lady merily <sup>plies</sup> her powder puff and draws her £4 to £6 per week, regardless of the consequences. Surely something can be done to bring home to these women their selfish disregard of their brothers' well-being.

Signed

Ex-Imperial. (52)

Such sentiments were not confined to isolated malcontents but were endorsed by many prominent community leaders. During a public meeting called to discuss the matter, Mrs Zina Cumbrae-Stewart of the National Council of Women and the Lady Mayoress of Brisbane, Mrs JW Greene, concurred that it was inimical to the public interest for women to be placed in jobs while men went workless. The Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, claimed that the entry of women into the workforce was humiliating to men and contributed to a low marriage rate. His suggested remedy was that the State Government should set an example to the rest of the community by employing only men.<sup>(53)</sup> The Public Service Commissioner defended the service

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52. Brisbane Courier, 4 September, 1932.

53. ibid., 14 July, 1931 and 30 August, 1933.

against this criticism by pointing out that, although females were employed, 'care is taken as far as possible that, even in the minor clerical sections, males are allotted the work which leads to the higher positions,'<sup>(54)</sup> Most of the trade unions were also opposed to the employment of married women,<sup>(55)</sup> although the 1935 Trades Union Congress called on the Government to extend to single women the conditions enjoyed by unemployed single men.<sup>(56)</sup>

Despite these prejudices, some intermittent relief work was made available for unemployed Brisbane women. The State Government was only indirectly involved because the organising agency was the women's committee of the Queensland Social Service League (QSSL). The committee established headquarters at the South Brisbane Town Hall where women were employed in the manufacture of garments to be distributed to unemployed families by the QSSL. All women employed were required to be registered with the Women's Employment Bureau and their wages of seven shillings and sixpence per six hour day were paid by the Department of Labour and Industry from the unemployment relief fund. The average size of the workforce at South Brisbane was thirty and between January 1930 and November 1931, 11,061 garments valued at £1,400 were produced. In 1931 the Government began a House Craft Training scheme which conducted classes in cooking, dressmaking and home nursing for approximately forty women each month.<sup>(57)</sup> Neither the Moore nor the Forgan Smith Governments developed a comprehensive plan to deal with unemployment amongst women. They shared the widespread belief that most women had husbands, fathers or brothers who would look after them and that the existing charities would deal with any particularly serious cases of hardship.

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54. Report of the Public Service Commissioner, QPP, vol 1, 1933, p 33.

55. ABTEF minutes, 30 November, 1931, T49/1/9, p 104, RSSSA/ANU; Report Annual Delegates Meeting, AWU, Brisbane, January, 1931, p 22, FML.

56. Report of the Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, 1935, p 31.

57. QSSL Report, 24 November, 1931, item 31/7477, PRE/A1039, QSA.

A final contentious feature of the unemployment relief scheme concerned its expenditure regulations. When the original legislation was before Parliament Forgan Smith alleged that 'because of political patronage, the relief fund would be used to develop the private property of some of the citizens of the State'.<sup>(58)</sup> Other members of the Opposition claimed that relief work such as road building and land clearance would unfairly benefit private individuals by improving the value of their rural properties. Sizer agreed that this could occur, but denied that there was conscious political patronage involved. He concluded:

..We can increase the productivity of the State, generally increase the wealth of the community and ultimately banish unemployment by the utilization of these funds, even though some benefit may go to a private individual, I think we are justified in doing it. (59)

The legislation permitted only State and Local Government authorities to spend money from the unemployment relief fund. Many business and primary industry groups criticised the Moore Government for adopting this 'socialist' policy, and advocated an alternative system whereby the Government made grants to employers on the proviso that they created work for a certain number of registered unemployed.<sup>(60)</sup>

This alternative scheme was actively promoted from within the State public service. Prior to the passage of the relief tax legislation, the Land Administration Board drew up a draft Bill which provided for low interest loans to be granted to landholders to create rural employment opportunities for those out of work. Sizer initially accepted this advice but later retreated from it in the face of public and private criticism. The Land Administration Board again offered the scheme to the cabinet when the legislation was

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58. QPD, clv, 16 July, 1930, pp 90-91.

59. QPD, clix, 30 September, 1930, p 1038.

60. Thatcher, op.cit., p 56.

being amended in 1931, but again it was rejected. Eventually the scheme was adopted in an amended form after 1932 when the Employment Council allocated some Commonwealth loan money in the manner suggested.<sup>(61)</sup>

Despite their earlier criticisms, Labor did not substantially alter the expenditure guidelines laid down by Sizer. Unemployed organisations occasionally accused the Government of using the relief fund to provide cheap labour for farmers,<sup>(62)</sup> but the only exception that Labor was prepared to make to the requirement that all relief workers be public employees was in regard to certain mining companies. This exception was made as a result of the widespread belief of the time that the discovery and exploitation of precious metals would alleviate the depression.<sup>(63)</sup> In 1933 the Director of the Bureau of Industry, Professor JB Brigden, public<sup>,</sup> advocated a major alteration in the method of disbursing relief funds. Brigden rejected the idea of conditional subsidies to selected employers on the ground that this would inevitably be discriminatory. He favoured a more universal form of subsidisation of industry.<sup>(64)</sup> Brigden's proposal was enthusiastically endorsed by the Queensland Employers' Federation, and the Minister for Labour and Industry, MP Hynes, pronounced himself to be 'interested' in the suggestion.<sup>(65)</sup> It was, however, a major departure from current policy and was successfully opposed at cabinet level.

Another difficulty which surrounded the relief scheme concerned the type of work upon which relief workers could be engaged. This problem was never satisfactorily resolved and was the source of frequent disputes between the State Government and local councils. Under the terms of the legislation, the bulk of the relief fund was

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61. Report of the Land Administration Board on Reproductive Works of Unemployment Relief, QPP, vol 2, 1933, pp 484-5.

62. Organiser, 11 August, 1938.

63. QPD, clxi, 29 September, 1932, p 633.

64. Economic News, 7 July, 1933, p 1.

65. Brisbane Courier, 22 June, 1933.

expended via local authorities. The Brisbane City Council was the largest single spender. Hence the majority of relief workers were officially Local Government employees. This system of dual responsibility inevitably produced conflict between the two tiers of Government. When the Local Councils became accustomed to the scheme, some of them began to use it as a lever to extract additional funds from the State Treasury. In 1933 the Brisbane City Council won an extra allocation of money from the State Government by threatening to sack fifty percent of its relief workers.<sup>(66)</sup> Some of the smaller councils were not so successful in their disputes with the State Government. For instance, the Nanango Shire Council applied to the Minister for Labour for permission to employ relief workers on general road maintenance. Hynes refused the request and warned the council not to regard the relief fund merely as another source of revenue.<sup>(67)</sup>

While it was clear that relief workers were to be employed only on public projects, the definition of the term 'public' remained debatable. Government policy on the matter tended to be somewhat contradictory. In 1937 Hynes interceded to prevent the Toowoomba City Council deploying relief workers to clear land for a golf course because the area was to be leased to a private club and would not be available to the general public.<sup>(68)</sup> Yet four years earlier the Brisbane City Council had been given permission to enter into an agreement with a private company to build a model suburb on the site of a disused saleyard at Newmarket. The council then made application to the State Government to use relief workers to clear the land. Hynes took the matter to cabinet which approved the request on condition that the council abide by a lengthy and complicated set of conditions.<sup>(69)</sup> Thus the prohibition on the use of relief labour

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66. *ibid.*, 4 August, 1933; 18 August, 1933; 19 August, 1933.

67. *ibid.*, 3 August, 1933.

68. Hynes to Forgan Smith, 28 October, 1937, item 37/6943, PRE/A1192, QSA.

69. Brisbane Courier, 10 May, 1933; 13 May, 1933.

for private or semi-private ventures was not absolute. Each application was considered on its merits and with regard to available funds, the current level of unemployment and whether the project would absorb a reasonable number of workers.

While successive State Governments wrestled with the problems of the intermittent relief workers scheme, the religious charities carried on a campaign against the personal distress caused by unemployment. Since their establishment in Queensland in the early 19th century, many of the Christian churches had been engaged in various forms of 'poor relief'. Church welfare services always operated on a rather ad hoc basis and on a shoe-string budget. They were neither designed nor equipped to deal with the extensive poverty which accompanied the great depression. Nevertheless, the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches greatly extended their charitable mission to the unemployed during the 1930s. An appreciation of the extent of this increase can be gained from the fact that during the 1929-30 Christmas week the Church of England Men's Society (CEMS) in Brisbane supplied 714 free meals to destitute men,<sup>(70)</sup> yet in the week ending 24 December, 1932 they supplied 2718 such meals.<sup>(71)</sup> The CEMS was the linchpin of the Anglican Church's activities in regard to unemployment. It operated out of St Luke's Hall, Fortitude Valley, and its main aim was to give unemployed men at least one substantial meal per day. Any man registered at the Labour Bureau or at the Returned Soldiers' Bureau was, on presentation of his unemployment registration card, able to receive a meal. This service proved to be immensely popular among the city's unemployed, and by July 1930, 300 men were receiving a hot midday meal each day of the week.<sup>(72)</sup> During 1931 the organisation provided 98,357<sup>(73)</sup> free meals, and from October 1929 to February 1932 it supplied a total of 197,000 meals at a weekly average of 1,850.<sup>(74)</sup>

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70. ibid., 4 January, 1930.

71. ibid., 31 December, 1932.

72. Report of the Executive Committee of CEMS, Church of England Year Book, Diocese of Brisbane, 1930, p 194.

73. Church Chronicle, 1 July, 1931.

74. ibid.

As well as providing food, the CEMS also distributed clothing to the unemployed and operated a boot repair service for those men who were 'on the move' searching for work. Shelter was another major need of the unemployed catered for by CEMS via two resident hostels. The most important of these was St Oswald's which was established at North Quay specifically to deal with the depression situation. Men staying in these hostels had a token rent deducted from their unemployment relief payments. The popularity of St Oswald's is clearly evident in the fact that as late as 1935 it provided 49,009 beds and 146,859 meals throughout the year. Additionally, 545 men made use of its boot repair service.<sup>(75)</sup>

These services of the CEMS catered mainly for single men, and the Co-adjutor Bishop of Brisbane correctly pointed to the plight of these men who he observed that 'the CEMS and kindred organisations doing social service had saved the situation as far as single unemployed men were concerned'<sup>(76)</sup> In carrying out their activities the CEMS was forced to make repeated appeals to parishes and the general public to come forward with donations.<sup>(77)</sup> The CEMS did receive donations in money and in kind, but the general economic situation placed severe limits on the capacity of people to donate to charity. Like the majority of voluntary charitable agencies, even in prosperous times, the demands on the CEMS always exceeded its resources.

The Central Methodist Mission carried on similar work to that of the CEMS, and faced similar demands on its services. For instance, in June 1930 the Mission was providing hot midday meals for 85 men daily,<sup>(78)</sup> but by the close of 1931 this number had risen to over 340.<sup>(79)</sup> During the eighteen months prior to November 1931 the

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75. CEMS Report, Church of England Year Book, 1935, p 239.

76. Church Chronicle, 18 June, 1932.

77. Brisbane Courier, 24 January, 1931; 31 January, 1931; 11 April, 1931.

78. ibid., 14 June, 1930.

79. QSSL Draft Report, 21 November, 1931, item 31/7477, PRE/A1039,QSA.

Mission supplied a total of 140,000 free meals to the unemployed of Brisbane.<sup>(80)</sup> The Mission spent £1276 during the 1930/31 financial year out of a total income of only £1295 which included a Government subsidy via the Queensland Social Service League.<sup>(81)</sup> Like the CEMS, the Mission engaged in the distribution of clothing to the unemployed and also operated a hostel at Spring Hill. The Mission attempted to aid the families of the unemployed by the distribution of food and clothing. The Methodist Church was assisted in these projects by farmers and business firms who donated produce and goods. The Queensland Railways Department also assisted by carting goods free of charge.<sup>(82)</sup> In addition, the Methodist Church in Brisbane took the rather imaginative action of writing to all its country clergymen asking them to enquire if any of their congregation were willing and able to employ casual labour. This list of potential employers was to be matched with a list of men out of work in the district. Unfortunately no evidence remains regarding the success of this scheme.

The Catholic Church also directed most of its activity towards alleviating unemployment amongst single men, and, in July 1930, a committee of Catholic laymen obtained a building to provide food and accommodation for about 100 men.<sup>(83)</sup> The major Catholic institution which gave aid to the unemployed was the Saint Vincent's Hostel for Unemployed in Brisbane, which was operated by the St Vincent de Paul Society. It provided 600 meals and 200 beds daily, and was financed by a dual system of appeals and art unions.<sup>(84)</sup> By 1931 the St Vincent de Paul Society had thirty-three branches in Brisbane and twenty-six throughout the remainder of the State with an active membership of about 400. During 1932 it spent over £3700 on relief to the poverty stricken of Queensland.<sup>(85)</sup> The Catholic

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80. *ibid.*

81. *ibid.*

82. Methodist Times, 17 April, 1930.

83. Brisbane Courier, 3 July, 1930.

84. Leaflet, 23 October, 1930, item 30/6508, PRE/A1008, QSA.

85. Information received from Mr PA Tunney, Welfare Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society, September, 1973.



Daughters' of Australia (CDA) catered more for single women and families, and gave 3,108 garments to 510 families during 1931. The food distribution facilities of the CDA were not as extensive as those of other groups mentioned, and in 1931 they served only 223 meals and could give food to only thirteen families.<sup>(86)</sup>

While these and other charitable organisations prevented many unemployed and their dependents from starving to death, they generally had little success in their limited attempts to find employment for those out of work. For example, the CEMS placed only sixteen men in permanent positions and 106 in temporary positions throughout the whole of 1931. Even by 1935, when economic conditions had improved markedly they could place only 177 men.<sup>(87)</sup> Similarly the CDA could find permanent employment for only eight girls in 1931.<sup>(88)</sup>

While the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches were deeply involved in charitable work among the unemployed, some other churches did very little in that direction. The centenary historian of the Presbyterian Church was not overstating his case in writing that:

Social Service, by which a helping hand is extended to the orphan and the aged, to men and women fallen by the Way,...has not been the 'forte' of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland. (89)

The Presbyterian Church was certainly aware of the extent of economic distress in Queensland and issued a number of statements expressing sympathy for the unemployed.<sup>(90)</sup> Yet, it was not until 1934 that the Presbyterian Assembly took the decision to establish a Committee on Unemployment. This committee failed to deliver a report in 1935

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86. QSSL Report, op.cit.

87. CEMS Report, op.cit., 1935.

88. QSSL Report, op.cit.

89. R Bardon, The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, Brisbane, 1949, p 175.

90. Report of the Eighty Third State Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, May, 1932, p 49; Presbyterian Outlook, 1 December, 1933.

and its 1936 report gave little indication of any practical work among the unemployed by Presbyterians.<sup>(91)</sup>

Such lack of action brought a sharp retort from a former Organising Secretary of the Queensland Protestant Federation, J Gillespie, who angrily declared to the editor of the Presbyterian Outlook:

Let me say, Sir. that while it is of utmost importance to preach the Gospel, and for people to believe its priceless messages, still they must have some measure of daily bread. The Master admitted this.<sup>(92)</sup>

The editor replied that he had been advised that there were very few cases of distress among Presbyterians. He also added that those who were unemployed needed to be given work not charity and that this exempted the church from any obligation to distribute charity amongst the unemployed.<sup>(93)</sup> It also appears that the Presbyterian Church had a great deal of difficulty in evoking a satisfactory response from its members whenever it made appeals for cash to be used for social welfare projects.<sup>(94)</sup> The Baptist Church also restricted most of its unemployment relief work to those of its own flock. Its Social Service Committee distributed blankets, and Christmas cakes amongst needy Baptists but there appeared to be little call on its services since it spent only £45 during the year 1930/31 and it suspended operations in 1933.<sup>(95)</sup> This reticence on the part of some Protestant churches to become deeply involved in unemployment relief was certainly related to their size and limited financial capacity. But there also were doctrinal issues involved.

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91. Report of the Eighty Eighth State Assembly, May, 1936, pp 56-7

92. Presbyterian Outlook, 1 April, 1929.

93. ibid., 1 February, 1930.

94. ibid., 1 October, 1933.

95. Annual Report of the Social Service Committee, Baptist Union of Queensland Year Book, 1931, p 39.

Calvinism had traditionally been suspicious of alms-giving and regarded it as a form of Popish bribery that interfered with man's personal responsibility to raise himself before God.<sup>(96)</sup>

The pressure of depression circumstances quickly revealed the inadequacies of private charity in Queensland. Wasteful duplication of services was a major problem and in October 1930 the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, John Dixon, approached Hubert Sizer and convinced him that an umbrella organisation was needed to co-ordinate the diverse groups that were engaged in charitable work amongst the unemployed.<sup>(97)</sup> Such a body was established at a public meeting, presided over by the Governor, in the Brisbane City Hall on 4 November 1930. In his key-note address Sizer explained that the aim of the Queensland Social Service League, as the organisation was called, was to relieve distress in the community by rationalising the activities of the major charities. The minister stressed that the QSSL was to be non-political in nature and was not to be under the direction of his department. The State Government agreed to subsidise the league on the basis of one pound for every two pounds collected up to a maximum of £5,000.<sup>(98)</sup>

The QSSL set itself two principal objectives:

1. To deal with the problems of distress resulting from financial depression and from unemployment.
2. To co-ordinate the work of all existing bodies who are endeavouring to alleviate distress. <sup>(99)</sup>

By 1931 there were twenty-seven metropolitan and thirty-one country branches of the QSSL. Branches were usually formed at public meetings but, because of their special nature, the Church of England Men's Society, the Central Methodist Mission and the Catholic

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96. RH Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, London, 1938, p 263.

97. Annual General Meeting, QSSL Minutes, 23 November, 1932, p 190.

98. Brisbane Courier, 5 November, 1930.

99. QSSL Constitution, 1930, p 1.

Daughters' of Australia were permitted to affiliate as branches.<sup>(100)</sup> The major function of the QSSL soon became a charitable rather than a co-ordinating one. Donations in cash and kind were received from individuals and business houses. A boot repair service was established for the unemployed and dances and card evenings were arranged to raise finance. The wife of the Governor, Lady Goodwin, organised a regular sewing circle to provide garments for needy families. A Social Service brass band was formed and a yearly fund raising ball was held at the Brisbane City Hall.<sup>(101)</sup>

Unfortunately the QSSL was unable to achieve its co-ordination objective and tended to duplicate the services provided by the existing charities. The churches and service clubs continued their operations without any real direction from the league. Some even expressed open hostility to the QSSL because they feared it would usurp their traditional functions.<sup>(102)</sup> The league would not become involved in controversy surrounding the Government's unemployment policies and was keen not to appear as a political pressure group. The QSSL was also hindered in its activities by internal sectarian conflicts. Soon after its inauguration, the league received the gift of an automobile from General Motors. A suggestion that the car be raffled to raise money was immediately opposed by representatives of the Methodists, Baptists and Salvationists who argued that 'gambling is an evil, and it cannot be called 'honest' just because the money raised is for the poor'<sup>(103)</sup> The issue caused strong animosity within the league's executive and almost led to the resignation of the organising secretary, Colonel Stansfield. It was not resolved until March 1931 when a motion was carried by thirteen votes to twelve to sell the vehicle.

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100. QSSL Report, op.cit., 1931, p 1.

101. *ibid.*, p 3.

102. QSSL Executive Minutes, 7 December, 1930, p 14; 20 August, 1931, p 128.

103. QSSL General Council Minutes, 21 September, 1932, pp 507-8.

The QSSL reached the peak of its operations in 1932 but thereafter encountered serious organisational difficulties. Paradoxically the league's initial success contributed to its decline. As its existence became more widely known the demands on its services became crippling. Soon after the change of Government in 1932 the league asked Forgan Smith if he wished it to continue in existence. The Premier was most enthusiastic that it do so and pledged his Government's assistance.<sup>(104)</sup> In 1933 the Government illustrated this support by sponsoring a major advertising campaign on behalf of the league. This had unanticipated results. At the league's general council meeting in August many branches pleaded with the chairman to ask the Government not to repeat the exercise because it had produced an overwhelming flood of applications for assistance.<sup>(105)</sup> After 1932 the QSSL's financial situation steadily deteriorated. Bishop Dixon explained that funds were difficult to raise because the novelty of the organisation had worn off and because of the general economic situation.<sup>(106)</sup> In an attempt to conserve funds, the league re-drafted its eligibility provisions to exclude all but the most deserving cases.<sup>(107)</sup> Activities outside Brisbane were curtailed and top priority was now accorded to families. These last two developments provoked criticism of the league from rural interest groups and the single unemployed.<sup>(108)</sup> The decline of the QSSL is clearly reflected in its branch membership figures. In 1932 there were sixty branches throughout the State. By 1935 this figure had declined to thirty-nine and in 1936 there were only fourteen branches in the Brisbane area and six in the remainder of the State.<sup>(109)</sup> The league managed to survive the depression, it is still in existence, but it failed to fulfil the co-ordination function for which it was established. Furthermore its ameliorative role was heavily constrained by an abundance of distress and a shortage of funds.

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104. QSSL AGM Minutes, 23 November, 1932, p 191.

105. QSSL General Council Minutes, 2 August, 1933, p 524-5.

106. *ibid.*, 2 May, 1933, p 517.

107. Set of Guidelines, QSSL Minutebook, 16 February, 1933, p 516.

108. QSSL Executive Minutes, 30 January, 1934; 20 February, 1934.

109. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, 1, 1936, p 60.

The effectiveness of the various public and private relief measures is difficult to establish because of the absence of the necessary social statistics. It was generally agreed that amelioration of unemployment via relief work and rations was undesirable and that a return to full-time employment was necessary. The non-Labor parties and the business community believed that such work could be provided only by a revived private enterprise sector and demanded policies that would facilitate a business recovery. Labor in Queensland was sceptical of the capacity of the private sector to lead the State out of the depression. When he came to the Premiership in mid-1932, Forgan Smith was determined to promote an expanded public works programme to stimulate the economy and remove men from the relief work rolls.

CHAPTER 9

PUBLIC WORKS AND RURAL VALUES:  
A SOLUTION TO UNEMPLOYMENT?

Not surprisingly most of the relief schemes initiated by the Australian State Governments during the depression were aimed at the symptoms rather than the root causes of unemployment. This was because Australian policymakers were ill-equipped to cope effectively with the unprecedented level of unemployment that accompanied the economic collapse. The ideas that provided the explicit or implicit foundation of the policies they devised were inappropriate and outmoded. Their response to the depression was to implement deflationary and contractionary measures and to reject suggestions of credit expansion or vigorous public works programmes. A later generation of economists has judged that these policies exacerbated rather than alleviated the situation. One has commented that:

On the whole domestic recovery measures were reactionary and inadequate. Governments tended to concentrate their attention on bolstering up and protecting established producers instead of adopting expansionary fiscal policies which would have imparted a stimulus to the economy and revived business confidence. (1)

In Australia such attitudes lay behind the Premiers' Plan which dictated the broad pattern of recovery after 1932. Some authors have argued that the improvement in the Australian economy after this date can be attributed to the success of the Premiers' Plan.<sup>(2)</sup> Schedvin is more convincing when he argues that Australia was merely responding to overseas developments. He goes on to criticise the emphasis policymakers placed on the need for expenditure reduction and their refusal to accept the fact that 'the virtual cessation of public works' had caused most of the unemployment in the first place.<sup>(3)</sup>

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1. DH Aldcroft, 'The Development of a Managed Economy before 1939', Journal of Contemporary History, 4;4, October, 1969, p 123.
  2. WR Maclaurin, Economic Planning in Australia, 1929-1936, London, 1937, p 98; and BU Ratchford, Public Expenditures in Australia, Durham, 1959, p 42.
  3. CB Schedvin, Australia and the Great Depression, Sydney, 1970, p 317.



Mendelsohn,<sup>(4)</sup> Kewley,<sup>(5)</sup> and Schedvin all allude to the low priority accorded to unemployment relief by the Commonwealth and most State Governments in the period 1931-35. The last concludes that:

Nothing illustrates more clearly the inadequacy of Australia's recovery policy than the attempt to formulate means for the relief of unemployment in the years 1932-35. (6)

Queensland again proved to be an exception to this national pattern. The Labor Government that was elected in June 1932 maintained the unemployment relief tax scheme, but differed from its predecessor in the conviction that Government activity could provide long-term solutions to the problem of unemployment. William Forgan Smith, the new Premier, did not believe in the efficacy of deflationary policies. He grudgingly accepted some of the expenditure-reducing provisions of the Premiers' Plan but was adamant that Governments should provide a stimulus to the economy. Soon after his election, he attended the 1932 Premiers' Conference and argued that 'a vigorous public works policy be adopted for the absorption of the unemployed'<sup>(7)</sup> He was not deterred by failure to win all his colleagues to this view and, over the next few years, initiated a wide range of public works projects in his own State. Partly as a consequence, Queensland experienced the second fastest recovery rate, measured in terms of the decline in unemployment, of all the States over the period 1932-35.

In comparison with other Australian Governments of the period, Forgan Smith's public works programme can be judged one of the few economic policy successes of the depression. Yet, in a related area, the Government's policies were misguided and counter-productive.

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4. R Mendelsohn, Social Security in the British Commonwealth, London, 1954, p 124.

5. TH Kewley, Social Security in Australia, second edition, Sydney, 1973, p 154.

6. Schedvin, op.cit., p 329.

7. ibid., p 330.

From 1932 to 1937 key Labor ministers held firmly to the view that the only long-term solution to unemployment was to settle the urban workless on the land. Hence, much time, money and effort was expended in devising schemes to establish the unemployed or their sons on small agricultural holdings. Despite the rural nature of Queensland's economy in the 1930s, these schemes were not successful. The major rural industries of the time were wool, sheep and sugar which were not organised on a small farm basis suitable for the resettlement of 'city stiffs' (8) Agriculture in Queensland simply lacked the capacity to absorb the unemployed in economically viable numbers. The Government's own statistics showed that the labour absorption rate of agriculture was poor when compared with areas of secondary industry. Yet ideological commitments to agrarianism determined that rural resettlement and re-training policies were pursued long after their limitations had been revealed.

During the worst years of the depression the Commonwealth Government was extremely reluctant to provide funds for public works projects. The United Australia Party administration of Joseph Lyons, which was elected in 1931 and which ruled throughout the thirties, after 1934 in coalition with the United Country Party, pursued a very orthodox economic policy and was unwilling to initiate national unemployment relief schemes. The Prime Minister explained the situation in a radio broadcast in 1933:

The Commonwealth Government has taken the view that there are definite limits to the capacity of Governments to provide full-time work, and further that unemployment cannot be permanently eased by a policy of relief schemes. The work provided would be largely of an unproductive and temporary nature, and at the conclusion of it those who had been so employed would again be relegated to the ranks of the unemployed. (9)

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8. Contemporary slang for an unemployed man who was unwilling to leave the city; Frank Huelin, Keep Moving, Sydney, 1973, p 178.

9. Quoted in Maclaurin, op.cit., p 177.

In 1932 the Federal Government had established an Employment Council with branches in each State in order to co-ordinate the expenditure of Commonwealth loan money that had been earmarked for unemployment relief.<sup>(10)</sup> The Queensland council was established in May 1932 under the chairmanship of the Minister for Labour and Industry. In the 1932/3 financial year Queensland received £310,000 from the Commonwealth for unemployment relief, fifty percent of which the Employment Council allocated to rural development works.<sup>(11)</sup> The operations of the councils were limited by the relatively small amounts of loan money that the Federal Government was prepared to make available to the States. The Commonwealth Bank was strongly opposed to the funding of extensive public works projects because it believed them to be unproductive. The bank's view held sway with the Commonwealth Government and on the Loan Council. The failure of an £8m public loan which was floated in November 1932 lent weight to the bank's case.

Not all the members of the Loan Council were prepared to accept the quiescent policies of the Federal Government. Maclaurin explains that from mid-1932 onwards the Commonwealth came under strong pressure from Forgan Smith and the UAP Premier of New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, to increase expenditure on public works.<sup>(12)</sup> Aided by a gradual improvement in the state of the economy and a shift in the balance of power on the Loan Council which was brought about by the election of Labor Governments in Western Australia in 1933 and in Tasmania in 1934, the two Premiers convinced the Commonwealth in 1934 to relax its hitherto restrictive loan policies. Yet by the time the Federal Government was prepared to become actively involved in the fight against unemployment the worst of the crisis had passed. The absence of Commonwealth involvement before 1934 meant that a

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10. Schedvin, op.cit., p 338.

11. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1933, pp 23-24.

12. Maclaurin, op.cit., pp 178-181.

national problem was confronted in a disjointed manner by six State Governments which pursued un-coordinated and sometimes contradictory policies.

In Queensland, the Moore and Forgan Smith Governments were sharply divided on the question of using public works to solve the unemployment crisis. The CPNP cabinet believed that only private enterprise possessed the capacity to effect an economic recovery and that the role of Government should be restricted to aiding industry and to temporarily shouldering the burden of the unemployed. Forgan Smith took the opposite view. He argued that unemployment could be ended only by Government initiated public works programmes designed to absorb relief workers into normal, full-time employment. The primary objective of Labor policy from 1932 to 1938 was to phase out the relief work scheme and replace it with normal public works. This they achieved in 1938 and became the first Australian Government to abolish its special unemployment relief programme.

In his policy speech for the 1932 State election, Forgan Smith promised to raise a £2.5m 'Queensland Revival Loan' to finance a public works programme.<sup>(13)</sup> The new Premier was to discover that there was strong opposition to his belief that Governments could spend their way out of the depression. Maclaurin explains that there were three major reasons for the opposition to heavy public sector expenditure in the 1930s: an adherence to outmoded economic theories; the business community's desire to contain public spending; and the fear that workers would become too dependent on the public sector and thereby create a labour shortage in private industry.<sup>(14)</sup> Such views dominated the thinking of the Lyons' Federal Government, the Commonwealth Bank Board the majority of the Loan Council. Two

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13. Brisbane Courier, 28 April, 1932.

14. Maclaurin, op.cit., pp 182-86. See also Arthur Moore, QPD, clxvii, 19 September, 1935, p 282 where he states that 'if the benefits are made too great for unemployment relief the farmers will not be able to secure labour'.

weeks after his election victory Forgan Smith attended a Premiers' Conference and Loan Council meeting in Canberra where he made an immediate impact by delivering a speech which criticised the Premiers' Plan. He argued, quoting Keynes in his defence, that '...Governments should give a lead. Governmental activity should be directed into channels which will increase employment and produce more wealth for the nation.'<sup>(15)</sup> Smith converted the non-Labor Premier of New South Wales, Bertram Stevens, to this view and they managed to amend a Commonwealth-sponsored resolution that expressed full support for the deflationary policies of the Premiers' Plan.

They also convinced a somewhat reluctant Commonwealth Government to float an £18m national recovery loan over the following three years, the proceeds of which were to be distributed to the States for public works projects.<sup>(16)</sup> The Queensland Premier was unable, however, to raise his promised £2.5m loan and received only £1m from the Federal Government in 1932/33. The Lyons Government, on advice from the Commonwealth Bank, resisted all attempts to force it to abandon the major principles of the Premiers' Plan and during the 1933 Premiers' Conference, Smith denounced the Loan Council as 'an extra-constitutional authority not responsible to any one parliament'.<sup>(17)</sup> The Queensland Labor Government was not deterred from its public works policy by what it saw as Commonwealth indifference. They augmented the funds they received from the Federal Government by utilising their own consolidated revenue and relief funds. Forgan Smith was also able to obtain loans for major works projects from private financial organisations such as the Australian Mutual Provident Society. Queensland's commitment to a vigorous public works programme in the face of Commonwealth indifference had two economically undesirable consequences. Because the State possessed a relatively small tax base, the need for funds to finance

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15. Forgan Smith to Larcombe and text of speech, 22 October, 1952, Larcombe Papers, M43, p 4, OML.

16. Schedvin, op.cit., p 330.

17. Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers, Canberra, June, 1933, p 15.

public works led to a steady rise in the rate of personal taxation. By 1934/5 Queensland had a tax rate per head of population of £6 13s.3d., which was the highest in Australia.<sup>(18)</sup> This high rate of taxation has been cited often as a cause of the low level of industrialisation in Queensland.<sup>(19)</sup> A second consequence of the heavy commitment of funds to public works projects was that other Queensland public services such as education and health tended to lag behind the national average.<sup>(20)</sup>

It is impossible to compute precisely and to compare the six States' expenditures on relief and public works during the depression because, as Ratchford observes, '...of the way in which the projects were handled and the accounts were kept'<sup>(21)</sup> Nevertheless the data that are available do confirm that Queensland was a high spender in this area. In 1934/5 Queensland had a net loan expenditure on works and services of £3.1m which was exceeded by only one other State, New South Wales. On a per capita basis only Western Australia (£5 18s 10d) significantly outstripped Queensland (£3 6s 0d) and both were well above the national average of £2 15s 9d.<sup>(22)</sup> In comparing these expenditure levels it should be remembered that Western Australia, together with Tasmania and South Australia, was a claimant State under the terms of the Grants Commission and therefore received special funds from the Commonwealth which were not available to Queensland.

The driving force behind the Queensland Government's public works programme was the Premier himself. Forgan Smith had first become convinced of the efficacy of public works during his occupancy of that portfolio during the period 1922 to 1925. When he was leader of the Opposition in 1929 he outlined his theory of public expenditure that was to guide him throughout his Premiership:

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18. Queensland Year Book, 1, 1937, p 263.

19. QPD, clxxii, 25 August, 1938, p 127.

20. Gough, op.cit., p 11.

21. Ratchford, op.cit., p 43.

22. Commonwealth Year Book, 29, 1936, pp 899 and 900.

What I consider to be the proper policy of public finance is that a Government. .should carry out public works to a greater extent during periods of depression than during periods of prosperity. (23)

On his return to Government in 1932, Smith was somewhat surprised to discover that the economic adviser bequeathed to him by Moore shared these views. Professor JB Brigden in a speech to a conference of engineers in 1933 argued that:

The popular thing is to intensify booms by increasing public capital works. Then, and because there has been extravagance in good times, it seems equally sound policy to intensify the slump by contractions no less extreme. The contrary policies are economically sound. (24)

This address heralded a major change in Brigden's economic thinking. He had been closely associated with the formulation of the Premiers' Plan but later began to articulate a recovery policy that involved the reduction of money wages combined with an increase in Government expenditure. While it is possible that his conversion to the second part of his policy was hastened by the change of Government in 1932, Brigden seems to have been successful in convincing Forgan Smith that wages had to be kept under control. Labor came to power in 1932 with a promise to restore the basic wage which had been cut heavily during the term of the Moore administration. Despite regular complaints from the trade unions, the basic wage remained at its depressed level until the 1937/8 financial year. (25)

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23. QPD, cliii, 22 August, 1929, p 29.

24. JB Brigden, 'The Need for Co-operation between the Engineer and the Economist in the Consideration of Development Projects', Journal of the Institute of Engineers, 5, 1933, p 214.

25. Colin Clark, 'JB Brigden', Economic News, 19;12, December, 1950, p 2.

Brigden and Forgan Smith shared a common belief in the need for long-term planning of public works ventures. In his address to the 1932 Premiers' Conference, Smith pointed out that haphazard and ill-planned public works were harmful rather than beneficial because their cessation merely returned men to the dole queue.<sup>(26)</sup> Early in its term the Labor Government decided to establish a co-ordinating authority to plan public works within the State. This initiative was to involve Brigden. Brigden had come to Queensland to take the position as Director of the Bureau of Economics and Statistics which was established under the Industries Assistance Act of 1929. In addition to collecting and processing economic data, the Bureau also had the task of advising the Industrial Court of the possible economic ramifications of its wage decisions. This second function brought the Bureau into disfavour with the trade unions who blamed Brigden for the substantial wage reductions handed down by the court in 1930 and 1931.<sup>(27)</sup> During the 1932 election campaign Forgan Smith referred to the Bureau as 'this irksome imposition on industry' and hinted that a Labor Government would abolish it.<sup>(28)</sup>

After the election Forgan Smith changed his mind and decided to give the restructured bureau an important place in the public works programme. In November 1932 legislation was introduced which transformed the Bureau of Economics and Statistics into the Bureau of Industry. This initiative involved major organisational and functional alterations. The old bureau had been a statutory commission with the director responsible to the Parliament rather than to any individual minister; the Bureau of Industry was established as a sub-department of the Treasury and thus was under the direct control of Forgan Smith. The new Bureau retained its statistical function and produced a monthly journal entitled

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26. Forgan Smith to Larcombe, op.cit., p 4; QPD, clxxii, 24 August, 1938, p 124; see Economic News, 2;7, July, 1933, p 1 for Brigden's endorsement of the policy of forward planning.

27. During the period of the Moore administration the State weekly basic wage for males declined from eighty-five shillings to seventy-four shillings.

28. Brisbane Courier, 29 April, 1932.



Economic News, but its advisory relationship with the Industrial Court was ended.<sup>(29)</sup> Brigden was retained as director and remained in the position until he was replaced by Colin Clark in 1938.

When he introduced the new legislation the Premier explained that:

One of the important purposes of the Bill is to provide a method of organised planning in the internal economy of the State.<sup>(30)</sup>

In its first report the Bureau pointed out that the State's unemployment relief scheme had been operating on such an ad hoc basis that substantial wastage of money and resources had occurred. The Bureau recommended that the long-term objective of the Government should be to transfer men from intermittent relief work projects to full time public works financed from loan money and the relief fund.<sup>(31)</sup> Initially the functions of the bureau were 'purely advisory',<sup>(32)</sup> but after twelve months of operation its powers and responsibilities were greatly expanded. The Moore Government had established an Industries Assistance Scheme in 1929 for the purpose of extending loans to Queensland secondary industries. Because of the sharp contraction of Government revenue, the legislation became virtually a dead letter and only one grant of £3,000 was made in the three years up to 1932. Under the terms of the 1929 legislation only secondary industries were eligible for assistance. In 1933 Labor amended the legislation to include any industry or works.<sup>(33)</sup> During the period 1932 to 1935 the State Government, acting on advice from the Bureau of Industry, provided loans totalling £767,000 to various manufacturing and construction companies.<sup>(34)</sup>

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29. BH Molesworth, 'The Bureau of Industry in Queensland', Economic Record, 9;16, June, 1933, p 106.

30. QPD, clxii, 17 November, 1932, p 1621.

31. Annual Report of the Bureau of Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1934, p 18.

32. Economic News, 2;7, July, 1933, p 1.

33. QPD, clxiv, 22 November, 1933, p 1609.

34. Annual Report of the Bureau of Industry, QPP, vol 2, 1936, p 9.

The 1933 amendments to the Industries Assistance Act also altered and expanded the powers of the Bureau of Industry which now became a constructing authority with power to borrow money, to issue debentures and to buy and sell land. The Premier claimed that these changes established in Queensland 'a system of the corporate control of industry', the overall objective of which was to marshall public and private expenditure in the war against unemployment.<sup>(35)</sup> The Opposition was not impressed with these initiatives and the former Minister for Labour and Industry, Hubert Sizer, argued that 'the Bill establishes an economic council, and it will have the effect of promoting Communism. It has been conceived in Russia.'<sup>(36)</sup> The legislation was, in fact, motivated by more mundane concerns. A decision had been taken by cabinet to proceed with the construction of a vehicular bridge across the Brisbane river at Kangaroo Point and the immediate purpose of the Bill was to establish the Bureau of Industry as the constructing authority. The original suggestion to build such a bridge emanated from Dorman, Long and Co who were the builders of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. They approached the Moore Government in October 1931 with an offer to build a bridge across the Brisbane river in return for a fifty-five year toll franchise. Negotiations were still in progress at the time of the 1932 election but the in-coming Labor Government broke them off. This action was taken because the cabinet was unwilling to grant a private company a toll franchise for such a long period. Nevertheless, the Premier was keen to build such a bridge. In June 1933 he received a deputation of local businessmen who urged an early start to construction.<sup>(37)</sup> Forgan Smith had already commissioned the Bureau of Industry to carry out an investigation into the proposal and in December 1933 was able to announce that the Loan Council had granted Queensland a £2m loan at three and three-quarter percent interest to construct the bridge.<sup>(38)</sup>

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35. QPD, clxiv, 22 January, 1933, p 1609.

36. ibid., p 1629.

37. Brisbane Courier, 1 June, 1933.

38. Sunday Truth, 19 November, 1933; Clem Lack, Three Decades of Queensland Political History, Brisbane, 1960, p 134.

This decision was criticised by the CPNP on the grounds that it was a waste of valuable loan money; that it was unfair to require the people of the State to pay for a Brisbane luxury; and that the predictable traffic flow did not justify such an expenditure.<sup>(39)</sup> The Premier replied to these objections and defended the economic viability of the project. He did concede that under normal circumstances the Government would have entrusted its construction to the Brisbane City Council.<sup>(40)</sup> There is no doubt that the Government saw the bridge as a major public work that would provide stable employment for a substantial number of workers over a lengthy period of time, and would have strong linkage and income multiplier effects within the Queensland economy.<sup>(41)</sup> The commemorative brochure published at the time of the bridge's opening in 1940 drew attention to these motives:

The history of the Story Bridge (it was named after the public service commissioner, JD Story) began when the Queensland Government, faced with the relief of unemployment...and with prospective traffic congestion decided to proceed with the construction of a bridge although it was thought to be some little time in advance of the actual need for its erection. (42)

The Story Bridge was the first of a succession of major capital works initiated or assisted by the State Government as part of its recovery policy. Others included: the construction of the Somerset Dam on the Stanley River which was to supply water for Brisbane, generate electricity and form part of a flood mitigation scheme. (This project was commenced in 1935 but the outbreak of war in 1939 delayed its completion until 1954); the granting of a £100,000 loan to MR Hornibrook Pty Ltd to permit them to complete a one and three quarter mile viaduct across Moreton Bay linking Sandgate and

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39. QPD, clxiv, 31 October, 1933, p 1085f.

40. ibid., p 1612.

41. Sunday Truth, 19 November, 1933.

42. The Story Bridge - A Commemorative Book, 6 July, 1940, pa/S61, p 2, FML.

Redcliffe; the construction of a deep water harbour at Mackay; and the re-siting of the University of Queensland at St Lucia. Forgan Smith rounded off his activities in this area by establishing the position of Co-ordinator of Public Works in 1938. The Bureau of Industry was unable to devote sufficient attention to the task of co-ordinating the public works programme because of its heavy commitments in the area of construction. This responsibility was transferred to the Co-ordinator General's department. The new department was directed specifically 'to marshall public works in Queensland with a view to getting the maximum public advantage from both' <sup>(43)</sup> The war prevented the immediate implementation of these ideals and the department did not commence to operate effectively until 1947.

The motivating force behind the Labor Government's recovery policy was the Premier's belief that well-planned public expenditure would solve the problem of unemployment. His almost single-minded dedication to a vigorous public works programme was not without its social costs. The high level of taxation, the slow recovery in wages and the diversion of funds from other public services were unfortunate by-products of the public works programme. Nevertheless the policy achieved what it set out to do. The projects undertaken were of lasting value to the State, in marked contrast to most of the intermittent relief work which tended to be unproductive. The real success of the policy can be seen in the fact that Queensland reduced its level of recorded unemployment by fifty-three percent in the period 1932 to 1935. This was ten percent better than the national average and was surpassed only by the claimant State of Western Australia (fifty-four percent)

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43. For a brief history of the Co-ordinator General's Department see Queensland Year Book, 33, 1973, p 60f.

One general impact of the depression was to promote industrialisation in the primary producing nations of the world.<sup>(44)</sup> Schedvin explains that 'because imports fell much more heavily than did national expenditure, the depression encouraged the shift of resources to the manufacturing sector; and it was on the basis of import replacement of manufactures that (Australia's) recovery was forged'<sup>(45)</sup> Queensland, together with Western Australia, again provided an exception.

TABLE 9:1

Numbers engaged in factories per  
1,000 of population, by States,  
1904-45

Year	NSW	V	Q	SA	WA	Tas	Aust
1904	47	66	40	51	55	47	54
1911	65	87	62	69	55	56	71
1921	67	92	50	61	49	44	69
1929	75	92	50	65	52	50	73
1939	84	108	57	74	53	60	82
1945	108	129	60	105	60	79	102

Source: Hughes, et al, Queensland: Industrial Enigma, p 21.

Table 9:1 reveals an actual decline in factory employment in Queensland between 1911 and 1939. While the decade 1929-1939 does reveal an increase this was achieved in food processing industries rather than in normal manufacturing concerns. Between 1925/6 and 1935/6 the number of persons employed in manufacturing industry in Queensland declined from 49,003 to 44,768.<sup>(46)</sup> One reason why

44. CH Lee, 'The Effects of the Depression on Primary Producing Countries', Journal of Contemporary History, 4:4, October, 1969, pp 148-49 lists the following as examples of this phenomenon: Chile, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Rumania, Greece, Hungary, China, Yugoslavia and Australia.

45. Schedvin, op.cit., p 372.

46. Queensland Year Book, 35, 1975, p 586.

Queensland deviated from the trend noted by Schedvin was that the continued buoyancy of the sugar industry protected Queensland's primary sector from the full blast of the depression (see Chapter 1). The Labor Government of Forgan Smith decided to capitalise on the apparent strength of the State's rural resources and attempted to alleviate urban unemployment by settling its victims on small agricultural holdings along the lines of the earlier soldier settlement schemes.

Delegates to the 1932 Labor-in-Politics convention were in general agreement that the rural sector of the economy contained the solution to unemployment.<sup>(47)</sup> In his 1932 election speech, Forgan Smith promised that a Labor Government would pursue 'a vigorous land settlement policy' as part of its anti-unemployment campaign.<sup>(48)</sup> The new minister for Labour and Industry, MP Hynes, translated this promise into the slogan 'One Thousand Farms for One Thousand Workers',<sup>(49)</sup> and argued that because secondary industry was unable to provide sufficient job opportunities, the Government had decided to settle as many unemployed families as possible on small farms.<sup>(50)</sup> This decision marked a major shift in policy from that pursued by the CPNP Government. Moore believed that people should not be settled on the land unless they possessed sufficient capital and technical knowledge of farming to have a reasonable chance of success.<sup>(51)</sup> Furthermore, country representatives of the CPNP were not enthusiastic supporters of rural settlement schemes that could upset the political allegiance of their electorates by importing large numbers of hitherto urban unemployed. CPNP rural policy in the period 1929 to 1932 was designed to encourage established farmers to employ labourers from urban areas or to use relief workers on rural projects. In one such venture twenty-six

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47. Official Report of the 1932 Labor-in-Politics Convention, Brisbane, 1932, pp 44-5; Murphy in Murphy, Joyce and Hughes, Labor in Power, op.cit., pp 194-5 emphasises this point.

48. Brisbane Courier, 29 April, 1932.

49. QPD, clxi, 28 September, 1932, p 549.

50. Brisbane Courier, 19 June, 1933.

51. QPD, clxi, 28 September, 1932, p 557f.

five acre blocks of land at Mareeba were cleared and prepared by local unemployment relief workers. The lots were then made available as tobacco farms, but on the proviso that occupants possess at least £300 realisable capital.<sup>(52)</sup> The high level of capital required precluded any unemployed worker from acquiring one of the farms.

The change in land policy after mid-1932 was brought about by political rather than bureaucratic inputs. Many who have commented on the pro-rural policies of successive Queensland Labor Governments in the 1930s and 1940s have argued that they were, at least in part, inspired by the ruralist and agrarian ideas of Colin Clark.<sup>(53)</sup> Clark was appointed director of the Bureau of Industry and chief economic adviser to the Government only on Brigden's resignation in 1938. He had, therefore, no opportunity to influence Labor's unemployment strategy which was firmly established by 1933. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that, in some respects, Clark was more influenced by Forgan Smith than vice versa. Jackson correctly observes that prior to taking up his Queensland appointment, Colin Clark's academic writings revealed little evidence of the ruralist views he was to expound so forcefully in the 1940s.<sup>(54)</sup> This suggests that perhaps Clark's views were altered by his changed position and environment. During the formative period of Labor's rural employment scheme Brigden was the Premier's chief economic adviser and he also had never revealed himself as a strong adherent of agrarianism prior to his Queensland appointment.

Two incidents reveal that it was the cabinet rather than the public service that determined both CPNP and ALP rural settlement

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52. ibid., 11 December, 1930, p 2966.

53. Gough, op.cit., p 14; WJ Jackson, The Government and Economic Growth in Queensland, BA, Queensland, 1968, p 108; KW Wiltshire, Portuguese Navy: The Establishment of the Department of Industrial Development in Queensland, Brisbane, 1973, p 13.

54. Jackson, op.cit., p 75.

policy. In 1930 the Land Administration Board advocated a system of Government subsidisation of rural employers from the unemployment relief fund. The board argued that the major advantage of this proposal was that it would help to move the unemployed out of the city and that:

Engaged in rural occupations many of the unemployed, or members of their families, would develop a rural sense, and become seekers after land from which in future they would derive their livelihood. (55)

Despite these recommendations, the Moore Government rejected the proposal on two separate occasions. Further evidence of the subservience of the bureaucracy on this policy issue can be found in an examination of two successive reports of the Department of Labour and Industry for the years 1931 and 1932.

In his 1931 report, the departmental under-secretary, WH Austin, gave lengthy consideration to the suggestion that the unemployed should be settled on the land. He pointed out that there existed three main obstacles to such a policy: first, the fact that most of the unemployed lacked the necessary capital to maintain a property; second, that most of them were innocent of basic farming methods; third, it would require prohibitively large expenditure on the part of the Government to overcome the first two problems. He concluded:

In the present state of markets for primary products, closer settlement of unemployed persons on land remote from means of communication could end in nothing but disaster, especially as such settlement would necessarily begin on the artificial basis of Government assistance for every preliminary requirement, as well as the provision of a food supply in each case for an extended period. (56)

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55. Report of the Land Administration Board, QPP, vol 2, 1933, p 484.

56. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry. QPP, vol 2, 1931, pp 18-9.



This statement stands in stark contrast to the opinion expressed by Austin in his next report where he said that:

I submit that, for the supplying of the needs of the greater number of these (unemployed) people, the outstanding prospect appears to be the lands of Queensland - with all their resources. (57)

The most plausible explanation for Austin's change in attitude is that he was responding to the policy pronouncements of the new Labor Government in general and wishes of his own minister, Hynes, in particular. After the change of Government the relevant public service departments expressed strong support for the cabinet's rural employment policies. The only dissenter was the Superintendent of Technical Education who argued in 1934 that Government attempts to place and retain people in primary industry had proved ineffective and that more assistance needed to be given to secondary industry.<sup>(58)</sup> Such views were, however, out of favour and he was ignored.

The Labor Government's land policies also received regular endorsement from the business community and the Christian churches. The Brisbane Chamber of Commerce was a consistent advocate of closer settlement during the tenure of both the Moore and Forgan Smith Governments.<sup>(59)</sup> In September 1932 the president of the Chamber and CPNP member for Hamilton, HM Russell, called for a 'Back to the Land' movement as a solution to the State's economic problems. He argued that the Roman Empire had collapsed because its people had deserted the countryside for the pleasures of the city. He concluded:

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57. ibid., 1932, p 40.

58. Report of the Department of Public Instruction, Appendix E, QPP, vol 2, 1936, p 72.

59. Brisbane Chamber of Commerce to Moore, 17 April, 1931, item 31/2151, PRE/A1022, QSA; Brisbane Chamber of Commerce Submission to State Employment Council, 19 May, 1932, SEM/1, QSA.

I do not believe that capitalism has failed..., but I do consider (that) our salvation lies in the settling of our lands by a sturdy yeomanry that can be trusted to resist the forces of disruption. (60)

Queensland in the 1930s lacked a strong organisation of manufacturers capable of providing a counter-balance to the Chamber of Commerce. The task of putting an alternative view was left to the Taxpayers' Association which regularly but vainly exhorted the Government to devote more attention to the development of secondary industry. (61)

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, was also an enthusiastic supporter of Labor's rural policies. Duhig was a devotee of the distributist ideas of Hilaire Belloc and GK Chesterton. He issued a pastoral letter in 1930 in which he advocated that available land should be alienated into small holdings and given to the unemployed. (62) Duhig later argued that the depression was, in at least one respect, beneficial because it had forced people to leave the city in search of work. He added that the Government should take advantage of this fortuitous event and do more to encourage the development of agriculture. (63) The Church of England shared these views and the 1933 Synod requested that the State Government give consideration to settling the unemployed on the land by way of chartered companies. (64)

The key figure in the Labor Government's rural settlement policy was the Premier. He received the strong backing of two Ministers: MP Hynes, the Minister for Labour and Industry, and FW Bulcock, the Minister for Agriculture. The Labor party's ruralistic policies were motivated by ideological as well as practical considerations.

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60. Journal of Commerce, 29 September, 1932, 14;4, p 7.

61. Taxpayers' Association to Smith, 9 September, 1937, item 37/5666, PRE/A1187, QSA.

62. Brisbane Courier, 3 March, 1930.

63. Catholic Leader, 4 August, 1932.

64. Anglican Diocesan Secretary to Smith, 30 June, 1933, item 33/3576, PRE/A1075, QSA.

The ideological considerations were well summed up in the Premier's oft-quoted remark that:

I take the view that, no matter how much secondary industries may be established in Queensland, this State will continue for all time to be a primary producing state. It is desirable that it should be so. Primary production is the natural occupation of mankind. No one would desire for this State the industrialized type of civilisation which exists in many countries today. (65)

It became an article of faith amongst Labor members that there was an inherent superiority in rural life and values. Yet it would be superficial to characterise the Government's policy as the product of mere mythmaking. The primary objective of the Labor party when it returned to office in 1932 was to promote some form of economic recovery. Forgan Smith reasoned that it was preferable to attempt to capitalise on the apparent strong points of the State's economy rather than attempt a major restructuring of that economy. In 1933 Queensland was one of the most rural States in the Commonwealth with 32.8 percent of its workforce engaged in primary industry compared with the national average of 24.1 percent.<sup>(66)</sup> Furthermore, it was widely accepted at the time that Queensland had been spared the worst of the depression because of the strength of its primary industries. The Premier explained the rationale behind the Government's policies to the Prime Minister in 1933:

Queensland depends largely for its economic well-being on the proceeds from its exports and being a relatively newly settled country it is considered that the best way in which to off-set the diminution in export prices is by an expansion of the volume of its primary production which would also have a large reflection on unemployment. (67)

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65. QPD, clxi, 23 November, 1932, p 1731.

66. Gough, op.cit., p 24.

67. Premier to Prime Minister, 15 August, 1933, item 33/4325, PRE/A1077, QSA.

Marion Gough and others have been critical of what they argue was the economically counter-productive rural bias of the Forgan Smith and subsequent Labor Governments.<sup>(68)</sup> Their contention that the persistent neglect of secondary industries led to the progressive impoverishment of Queensland in comparison to the other mainland States is difficult to refute. Less sound is their suggestion that Queensland could have followed the example of South Australia towards industrialisation. Under the influence of its Auditor-General, JW Wainwright, South Australia in 1935 adopted a policy of industrialisation as the basis of its programme of economic recovery.<sup>(69)</sup> Gough's suggestion that Queensland could have done the same overlooks some fundamental differences between the economies and demographics of the two States. Much of South Australia is desert or semi-desert and by 1935 most of the available fertile land had been occupied.<sup>(70)</sup> Table 9:2 shows that in the 1930s Queensland and South Australia experienced quite different patterns of population distribution. The lack of a concentrated market adjacent to the centre of production had long retarded the development of an indigenous manufacturing sector in Queensland.<sup>(71)</sup> South Australia, on the other hand, was in the opposite position. The point that Gough and others appear to have overlooked is that there were more impediments to the industrialisation of Queensland than mere Government indifference.

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68. Gough, op.cit., Chapter 1.

69. TJ Mitchell, 'JW Wainwright: The Industrialisation of South Australia, 1935-1940', AJPH, 8;1, May, 1962, p 27.

70. Gough, op.cit., p 11 acknowledges this point.

71. ibid., p 18 Jackson, op.cit., p 106; MJ Thompson, The Political Career of William Forgan Smith, B Econ, Queensland, 1965, p 13.

TABLE 9:2  
Percentage metropolitanisation Australia  
1920-1940

Year	Australia	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas
1920	43.1	42.8	50.0	27.8	51.6	47.0	24.5
1925	46.0	45.2	54.1	30.6	55.0	48.2	27.0
1930	49.0*	50.1	56.6	33.0	55.7	48.6	26.2
1935	46.8*	47.2	54.7	31.5	53.7	46.9	26.1
1940	47.3*	46.9	56.1	32.5	55.1	48.6	27.4

\* Includes Canberra

Source: Commonwealth Year Books.

The Forgan Smith Government did, however, miscalculate the capacity of primary industry to absorb the urban unemployed. Sugar, sheep and wool were the vibrant elements of Queensland's primary sector, but the Government did not attempt to utilise these industries to solve the unemployment problem. Rather they attempted to settle the unemployed in small-scale agriculture holdings. It was this policy that was summed up in Hynes' slogan 'One Thousand Farms for One Thousand Workers'. A major problem which faced the Government in its attempts to cope with unemployment was that the unemployed were disproportionately located within the Brisbane metropolitan area. In 1933 Brisbane accounted for thirty-one percent of the State's population but it contained within its boundaries almost fifty-five percent of all registered relief workers.<sup>(72)</sup> The Government was attracted to rural settlement schemes because they appeared to offer a solution to this problem.

72. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1934, p 12.

The 1932 Labor-in-Politics convention rejected a motion which called for the establishment of communal farms for the unemployed,<sup>(73)</sup> and all projects were organised on a share farming basis. Banana growing was given top priority and during 1933 600 acres were divided into six acre blocks for distribution to approved relief workers.<sup>(74)</sup> The launching of the scheme was accompanied by excessively optimistic prognostications on the part of Government officials. One relief worker was even moved to verse:

Farewell to the lights of the city, goodbye  
to the races, the pubs.

We're off to the mountains and valleys,  
the deeps of the vine tangled scrubs.

Goodbye to the beer, and the barmaids,  
though soothing they be to the soul.

And though there be hard times before us,  
farewell at last to the dole.

We are strong with the spirit of freedom,  
the spirit of pioneers.

Strong in the spirit of freedom, and  
faith in the future years.

Let the past despair and its failure all  
go to a definite hang.

We are off to grow great big bananas  
on the mountain slopes of Nerang. (75)

Unfortunately this enthusiasm was not matched by results. By 1936 the Government had sunk £52,000 into the banana settlement scheme but had managed to retain only fifty-nine of the original 100 settlers on their allotments.<sup>(76)</sup> Equally disheartening results were obtained from the Government-sponsored ventures into tobacco growing. In 1933 ninety families of relief workers were settled on tobacco farms in the Beerburrum area of the near north coast. Administrative problems delayed the planting of the crop which was totally destroyed

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73. 1932 Labor-in-Politics Convention, op.cit., p 107.

74. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1934, p 33.

75. Brisbane Courier, 20 June, 1933.

76. QPD, clxv, 18 September, 1934, pp 189-90.

by the then incurable disease known as blue mould. Most of the settlers then deserted the farms.<sup>(77)</sup> The rural unemployment scheme fell victim to the same problems that had earlier caused the collapse of the soldier settlement scheme.<sup>(78)</sup> The Government was embarrassed by the failure of the scheme and consistently refused to provide comprehensive statements as to its cost.<sup>(79)</sup> Apparently it proved very costly and absorbed only a small proportion of the registered unemployed. For these reasons the Premier announced in 1937 that the policy of settling the unemployed on the land had been abandoned.<sup>(80)</sup>

The placing of adult relief workers on small farms was only one aspect of the Labor Government's rurally orientated relief policy. Even greater priority was given to the task of coaxing the sons of the urban unemployed to forsake city life and embark upon careers as farmers. The employment problems of school leavers were highlighted as a political issue by Moore during the 1929 election when he promised to 'Give the Boy a Chance'<sup>(81)</sup> Labor strategists felt that this slogan had been particularly effective and that an appropriate response was required for the 1932 election.<sup>(82)</sup> The course of action decided upon was to develop agricultural training schemes to equip school leavers to gain satisfactory employment on the land. Here again the ideology of ruralism was to blind the Government and its advisers to the impracticality of the programme.

Approximately 8000 school leavers entered the labour market each year in Queensland during the 1930s. Soon after its election, the Labor cabinet decided that primary rather than secondary industry offered the best employment opportunities for these children.<sup>(83)</sup>

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77. Sunday Truth, 5 March, 1933; Department of Agriculture and Stock to Smith, 8 March, 1933, item 33/1185, PRE/A1087.

78. Gough, op.cit., p 19 estimates that by 1927 the soldier settlement scheme had accumulated losses in excess of £1m.

79. QPD, clxv, 18 September, 1934, pp 189-90.

80. Department of Labour and Industry to Smith, and reply, 5 April, 1937, item 37/2052, PRE/A1174, QSA.

81. See Chapter 2.

82. 1932 Labor-in-Politics Convention, op.cit., pp 44-5.

83. Department of Labour and Industry to Smith, 22 November, 1933, 33/6505, PRE/A1085, QSA.

One of the first initiatives taken by the Government was to establish a farm training school in the Brisbane suburb of St Lucia. The school provided a six-month residential course after which boys were placed with approved farmers at reduced rates of pay. Average attendance at the school was fifty, and 244 boys were placed in rural employment between 1933 and 1935. No accurate statistics are available on how many of these boys remained with their employers.<sup>(84)</sup> The Christian churches again gave strong support to the Government's endeavours and participated in a programme whereby boys who could not attend St Lucia were placed with farmers to learn on the job.<sup>(85)</sup>

In 1934 the Government expanded its rural education programme by instituting 200 farm scholarships for city boys who studied approved subjects at a secondary school and then underwent twelve months training on selected farms.<sup>(86)</sup> The major problem encountered by these various schemes was a shortage of willing participants. In 1934 only fifty applications were received for the 200 farm scholarships. Successive annual reports of the rural training programmes lamented the fact that so few boys were prepared to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by the Government. Parental opposition to their sons going onto the land was correctly identified as the cause of the scheme's unpopularity. The Government decided to mount an extensive propaganda campaign to convince parents of the value of the scheme. One of the chief ideologues in this campaign was the Public Service Commissioner, JD Story, whose annual reports were punctuated with florid exhortations in praise of rural values. The following is a typical example:

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84. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1936, p 66.

85. *ibid.*, QPP, vol 1, 1934, p 28; Methodist Times, 9 February, 1933, p 3; Presbyterian Outlook, 1 April, 1933, p 3; Brisbane Courier, 21 August, 1933; QSSL Conference on Unemployment Amongst Boys, 6 February, 1931, QSSL Minute Book, p 38.

86. Report of the Board of Juvenile Employment, QPP, vol 2, 1936, p 93.



Clearly, it is not possible at present to absorb into vocations peculiar to the towns all those lads who desire employment in such vocations...The concern is still further intensified by the disinclination of many boys to proceed to positions in the country and the reluctance of their parents to permit them to leave home. The allure of the city grows magically; entertainers vie with entertainers in providing super-attractions. The artificial pleasures of the town are not found in the country; ..; cream is not associated with doubloons, nor milk with pieces of eight. Yet the merino fleece, if not the pig, helps to pay the Australian rent. The towns depend largely on the country: if the country stagnates, the stagnation will react upon the cities.. (87)

City parents remained unmoved by this rhetoric and the education programmes remained under-populated.

The misdirected nature of the Government's rural youth policy was highlighted by the work of the Juvenile Labour Bureau which was established in 1935. The Bureau was divided into three sections: commercial, industrial and rural. It operated as a labour exchange by keeping a register of unemployed boys and girls and matching these with suitable job vacancies. In its first year of operation the Bureau found employment for fifty-three percent of its registrants.<sup>(88)</sup> A breakdown of this figure reveals an interesting pattern. During 1935/6 the commercial and industrial sections found jobs for 2469 persons whereas the rural section placed only 716.<sup>(89)</sup> And over the period 1935 to 1937 5000 were placed in secondary and tertiary industry but only 1000 in primary industry.<sup>(90)</sup> Despite these figures, the Forgan Smith Government consistently deprecated the ability of the secondary and tertiary sectors to provide employment for school leavers. Agrarian ideology exerted a strong influence

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87. Report of the Public Service Commissioner, QPP, vol 2, 1936, p 93.  
 88. Report of the Department of Public Instruction, Appendix H, QPP, vol 1, 1936, p 92.  
 89. Report of the Department of Labour and Industry, QPP, vol 1, 1936, p 63.  
 90. Forgan Smith in Brisbane Telegraph, 16 February, 1937.

within the departments of Labour and Industry and Agriculture and encouraged them to pursue fruitless and wasteful juvenile employment policies. The official statistics revealed that, although they were relatively underdeveloped, Queensland's secondary industries had a greater capacity than primary industry to absorb juvenile labour. Had the Government capitalised on this trend by directed greater resources in the direction of secondary industry instead of attempting unsuccessfully to coerce urban youths to take up farming they may have achieved better results.

CHAPTER 10

TRADE UNION RESPONSES TO UNEMPLOYMENT  
AND THE UNEMPLOYED

At no time during the depression did the Queensland trade unions formulate and articulate a coherent policy on unemployment around which both employed and unemployed unionists could unite. As a consequence, their influence on both Labor and non-Labor Governments was sporadic and slight. Trade union attitudes to the unemployed were produced not by callousness but by circumstance. The depression reduced the majority of unions to such a state of powerlessness that they lacked the capacity to protect even their employed members. Some of the unemployed were understandably intolerant of what they saw as official union indifference to their plight. Misunderstandings and ideological differences often combined to reduce trade union-unemployed relations to a condition of open hostility.

When the economic collapse came in 1929/30, Australia was devoid of an effective unemployment relief policy because of Government indifference, and Commonwealth-State squabbling.<sup>(1)</sup> The onset of the depression caught both Governments and unions unaware. As the financial crisis deepened, neither proved capable of developing suitable programmes or schemes for dealing with the growing army of unemployed. This is not to suggest that the unions were deliberately negligent in their dealings with the unemployed. Despite rapidly contracting budgets, most unions made a genuine effort to aid their out-of-work members. In 1928 the Queensland Trades and Labor Council (TLC) established an unemployment fund which was financed by regular donations from affiliated unions. From time to time, the fund's administrative committee made small cash advances to individual unions to distribute among their unemployed members.<sup>(2)</sup> During the 1930s all Queensland's major unions established unemployment relief funds. However, the amounts of money raised and distributed were too small to be of real significance. Some unions

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1. See above Chapter 8.

2. TLC Minutes, 28 February, 1928; AFULE Minutes, 4 March, 1928, E212/5 RSSSA/ANU; ARTWU Minutes, 15 December, 1933, p 20.

attempted to assist their unemployed by employing them as poll clerks and scrutineers at election time,<sup>(3)</sup> and the TLC occasionally engaged out-of-work carpenters and painters to renovate its offices.<sup>(4)</sup>

The unions and the TLC also ran art unions to raise money for the unemployed; organised picnics for their families; and Christmas trees for their children.<sup>(5)</sup>

The Queensland trade union which possessed the most elaborate unemployment scheme was the Printing Industries Employees Union of Australia (PIEUA). The PIEUA was advantaged in that it was a relatively wealthy union which covered a highly skilled group of workers. In 1931 the union declared its responsibilities to its unemployed members in the following terms:

Council urges the general adoption of unemployment payments by Branches, believing that until adequate legislation is secured to ensure the maintenance of the unemployed as a social obligation it is an important part of the work of trade unions to assist in the relief of the unemployed, and because by such means the members of the Union will maintain contact with and interest in the Union, thus enabling it to sustain its strength and effectiveness when representing employee interests and when maintaining and protecting awards and agreements; (6)

The union established an unemployment committee in 1927 which was charged with the task of administering a fund financed by a levy on each employed member.<sup>(7)</sup> This fund was augmented in 1930 by a further levy which required the payment of 6d per week by each male member earning a weekly salary in excess of £2. The impact of

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3. Worker, 2 December, 1930.

4. TLC Minutes, 8 April, 1925.

5. *ibid.*, 10 December, 1928, 18 January, 1933, 25 September, 1935; ARTWU Board of Control Minutes, 9 January, 1934, p 45.

6. Printing Trades Journal, 10 March, 1931.

7. PIEUA Board of Management Minutes, 16 March, 1927, p 12, 11 April, 1927, p 22, 26 September, 1927, p 70.

worsening economic circumstances was revealed in the narrow margin (448 votes to 373 votes) by which the membership approved this levy.<sup>(8)</sup> From 1930 to 1935 the PIEUA expended approximately £16,000 on relief payments to its unemployed members.<sup>(9)</sup> This expenditure became a serious drain on the union's finances. Because of heavy demands on the relief fund, the Brisbane branch's expenditure exceeded its income in 1930.<sup>(10)</sup> The imposition of the new levy temporarily alleviated the situation, but by 1931 the union was committed to a regular weekly payment to the unemployed of over £100. As a consequence, the Board of Management instructed the Secretary to prepare a list of members who drew heavily on the fund. The Executive then scrutinised this list and eliminated any undeserving cases.<sup>(11)</sup> The difficulties encountered by the PIEUA serve to highlight the plight of less fortunate unions. The printers suffered a membership decline of only three percent over the period 1927 to 1932, compared with the average for all Queensland unions of forty-two percent.<sup>(12)</sup> Consequently, their financial situation was much healthier than that of most unions. Because of the steep drop in membership subscriptions, the unions' main source of income, unions covering predominately unskilled and semi-skilled workers were unable to match the PIEUA's unemployment relief scheme.

The unions attempted to overcome this handicap by combining in co-operative ventures to provide some assistance to the unemployed. On the suggestion of Brisbane voluntary worker, Marion Steele, the Queensland branch of the Australian Boot Trade Employees Federation (ABTEF) marshalled their skills and resources to provide a boot repair service for the unemployed. The ABTEF engaged one of its out-of-work members to carry out repairs in a room provided free of charge by the TLC. In March 1930 the ABTEF Secretary wrote to thirty-nine unions

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8. Printing Trades Journal, 13 May, 1930, p 172.

9. Compiled from PIEUA records 1930-35.

10. Printing Trades Journal, 13 May, 1930, p 97.

11. PIEUA, Board of Management Minutes, 13 April, 1931, p 339.

12. See Chapter 5.

informing them of the scheme and inviting them to contribute 5/- per week to its maintenance.<sup>(13)</sup> Thirty-seven unions replied favourably, and over the period March to December 1930 £306 was subscribed and 2124 pairs of boots repaired.<sup>(14)</sup> A sound pair of boots was essential equipment for men required to traverse Queensland's vast distances in search of work, and the service proved so popular that branches were soon established in the major provincial centres.<sup>(15)</sup>

The prolonged and widespread unemployment that was a feature of the depression presented the trade unions with unforeseen administrative problems. Because most unions collected dues on a yearly or half-yearly basis, short-term unemployment rarely rendered a member unfinancial. The depression, however, raised the vexed question of the status of unemployed unionists who fell behind in their payment of fees. The 1929 Trades Union Congress (TUC) urged all unions to keep their unemployed financial so that they would not be disadvantaged in their search for work by preference clauses in awards.<sup>(16)</sup> Unfortunately, the TUC recommendation was ratified by only a handful of unions. The Colliery Employees (QCEU) was perhaps the most progressive union in this regard. Unemployed QCEU members were permitted to retain their financial status throughout the depression. Furthermore, members who managed to obtain temporary employment outside the industry were permitted to retain their QCEU ticket, provided they kept the Secretary informed of their activities. To preserve their privileges under the union's sickness and funeral funds out-of-work members were required to make a weekly payment of 1/-.<sup>(17)</sup> The Coopers' Union also managed to keep most of its unemployed financial by levying the employed members 1/- per week to pay the necessary dues.<sup>(18)</sup>

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13. Letter, 13 March, 1930, ABTEF Records, T49/5, RSSSA/ANU.

14. Balance Sheet Boot Repair Service, 23 April, 1931, ABTEF, T49/5, RSSSA/ANU.

15. Ipswich Unemployed Committee to ABTEF, 8 July, 1930, *ibid.*

16. Workers' Weekly, 11 January, 1929.

17. QCEU Minutes, 12 April, 1930 and 21 April, 1934, E165/43/5, RSSSA/ANU.

18. Federated Coopers of Australia (FCA) Minutes, 19 March, 1931, T50/1/2, RSSSA/ANU.

These two unions were unique in their attitude to their unemployed members. The Australian Road Transport Workers' Union (ARTWU) held a lengthy debate on the issue at its 1933 State Conference. A motion was moved to permit members who were unfinancial because of unemployment to stand for office and to vote at union elections. The motion was supported by the union President, but provoked strong opposition from a group of delegates who argued that the union would hold itself up to public ridicule if it allowed unfinancial persons to participate in its affairs. George Lawson, the union's Secretary, proposed, as a compromise, that unfinancial members should be granted speaking rights at union meetings, but should be denied the right to vote. While some members continued to oppose any such concession, Lawson's motion was eventually carried by eleven votes to six.<sup>(19)</sup> The issue of unemployed members' rights also caused much bitterness within the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE). The AFULE's 1931 presidential election was declared invalid because a number of unemployed, unfinancial members voted.<sup>(20)</sup> A somewhat contradictory situation arose in 1932 when the union came into conflict with the State executive of the Labor Party (QCE). The cause of the dispute was the union's insistence that both financial and unfinancial members should have the right to vote in ALP plebiscites. This demand was based on the claim that the union paid capitation fees to the party on its total, not its financial membership. The QCE had decided, in 1930, that branch members forfeited all rights if they failed to pay their subscriptions in accordance with the rules.<sup>(21)</sup> The party was not prepared to make any exceptions for the unemployed, and the AFULE was advised accordingly.<sup>(22)</sup>

As well as presenting the trade unions with internal administrative problems, the depression gave rise to a new element in working class politics, the various unemployed organisations.<sup>(23)</sup> A major shortcoming of the Queensland (and Australian) trade union movement during the depression was its failure to integrate the unemployed structurally with the Labor movement as a whole. With a number of

19. Official Report, Third State Conference ARTWU, August, 1933, p15f.

20. Headlight, 1 May, 1931.

21. QCE Executive Committee Minutes, 10 November, 1930, p 2.

22. AFULE Minutes, 6 March, 1932, E212/8, RSSSA/ANU, pp 21-2.

23. See Chapter 11.



notable exceptions, relations between the trade unions and the organised unemployed were less than cordial. Some of the more conservative unions, notably the AWU, believed that groups such as the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM) were dominated by communists whose only aim was the 'white-anting' of the union movement. Many of the unemployed regarded the unions as being self-centred and not interested in the welfare of those who had been forced out of the movement by unemployment.<sup>(24)</sup> In 1938 the Queensland Unemployed and Relief Workers' State Council complained of 'the shabby attitude of indifference to unemployed organisation that had been prevalent in certain trade union circles'<sup>(25)</sup> Many trade union officials saw the unemployed as a potential threat to award wages and conditions. Direct industrial action was rendered inappropriate because of the widespread fear in union circles that the unemployed would be recruited as strike breakers. Both the 1931 shearers' strike and a strike at the Brisbane breweries in 1935 were undermined by the recruitment of volunteer labour from among the ranks of the unemployed. One brewery worker who was involved in the 1935 dispute recalled the moral dilemma that faced those out of work:

It's a hard thing to call a man a scab in those days when he's got four or five kids and can't get a job. He's got nothing and there's a job offering at £4 or £5 a week. You've got to look at the personal side of it. (26)

The gradual expansion of the Government's relief work system also served to drive a wedge between the unions and the unemployed. Hard-pressed local authorities were eager to carry out projects under the unemployment relief scheme rather than as normal public works, because of the monetary advantages that the former offered.

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24. Transcript of Interview with Jack Read, 8 September, 1975, p 4.

25. Organiser, 2 June, 1938.

26. Read, op.cit., p 7.

The unions believed that many local government bodies were taking unfair advantage of the scheme, and were getting jobs done 'on the cheap' by employing relief workers at under award rates and conditions. Unions in the building industry regularly complained to the State Government that their members were being denied full-time employment by relief workers.<sup>(27)</sup> The unemployed often interpreted these actions as clear evidence that the unions were attempting to deprive them of their meagre income.

A continuing source of conflict between the trade unions and the unemployed bodies concerned the latter's attempts to gain formal representation on the TLC. Throughout the 1920s groups of unemployed workers were regularly granted permission to address the TLC on a variety of subjects.<sup>(28)</sup> On one such occasion in 1928 the unemployed suggested that two of their number be admitted to the TLC as fully credentialled delegates. They received a sympathetic hearing, and a motion was foreshadowed to amend the rules to permit unemployed representation.<sup>(29)</sup> Partisan political considerations significantly influenced relations between the TLC and the trade unions in the late 1920s. The One Big Union of Unemployed, at that time the major unemployed organisation, shared the TLC's hostility to the McCormack Government, and the unions were keen to exploit the unemployment issue at the expense of the Labor Government.<sup>(30)</sup> The defeat of the McCormack Government combined with the return of the AWU to the TLC significantly altered the latter's attitude to the affiliation of the unemployed. The foreshadowed motion to admit the unemployed was put before the May 1929 TLC and was soundly defeated by forty-two votes to eleven.<sup>(31)</sup>

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27. TLC Minutes, 9 May, 1934; 24 August, 1936; 7 September, 1937; 9 September, 1936; Brisbane Courier, 21 April, 1933.

28. TLC Minutes, 13 August, 1924; 11 February, 1925.

29. *ibid.*, 22 February, 1928.

30. See Chapter 2.

31. TLC Minutes, 15 May, 1929.

During the next eight years the unemployed made frequent but unsuccessful attempts to gain formal affiliation on the TLC. In July 1930 a member of the Unemployed Workers Movement was in the process of addressing the TLC when a group of his supporters forced their way into the meeting and refused to leave until the Council agreed to their demands. The TLC President, SJ Bryan, responded to this challenge by calling the police to clear the hall.<sup>(32)</sup> This incident further poisoned relations between the two groups, and the unemployed were directed by the TLC executive to vacate the rooms they occupied free of charge in the Trades Hall. The unemployed then set up offices in the rooms of the Waterside Workers' Federation.<sup>(33)</sup> While the majority of unions endorsed the actions of the executive, a dissident minority under the leadership of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) Secretary, Tim Moroney, continued to press the claims of the unemployed. Matters came to a head in March 1931 when the unemployed were refused the use of a meeting room in the Trades Hall because they would not pay the rental fee. Despite this decision, the unemployed served notice that they intended to defy the executive and hold the meeting.<sup>(34)</sup> Bryan regarded this threat as a challenge to the authority of the TLC and informed the police commissioner that the unemployed were not to be granted access to the Trades Hall.<sup>(35)</sup> On the afternoon of 18 March the unemployed managed to hold their meeting, at which they decided to move in a body to the Government offices and seek an interview with the Minister for Labour and Industry. Subsequent to the interview, the unemployed attempted to conduct a street meeting which was broken up by the police.<sup>(36)</sup> At 7 pm on the same day 400 members of the unemployed assembled outside the Trades Hall and attempted to gain admittance to the TLC meeting that was currently in progress. Bryan instructed the police to deny them entry, and in the conflict that followed a number of prominent unemployed activists were arrested.

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32. *ibid.*, 23 July, 1930; 4 August, 1930.

33. WWF Minutes, 4 June, 1930, p 260; 27 August, 1930, p 282, E213/9, RSSSA/ANU.

34. Police Report, 18 March, 1931, item 31/8818, PRE/A1085, QSA.

35. Police Report, 19 March, 1931, item 31/8993, *ibid.*, p 1.

36. *ibid.*

The events of 19 March produced yet another confrontation on the TLC, and the previous decision not to allow the unemployed free use of meeting rooms was rescinded.<sup>(37)</sup> This victory encouraged the ARU again to move that the unemployed be granted two delegates on the TLC and the permanent use of Trades Hall offices. The executive lobbied strongly against the ARU and both motions were defeated.<sup>(38)</sup> Further difficulties arose in the form of factionalism within the UWM. That body's executive was keen to acquire direct representation on the TLC, but a rank and file meeting rejected the executive's advice on the grounds that affiliation with the TLC would restrict the freedom of action of the unemployed.<sup>(39)</sup>

Divisions among and within the unemployed groups were continually cited by union officials as reasons why none of them could be given representation on the TLC. Similar arguments were used to deny the unemployed representation at the 1934 Trade Union Congress.<sup>(40)</sup> By 1938 this argument was no longer relevant since the Unemployed and Relief Workers State Council was the only such group still functioning. Between 1931 and 1938 the issue of unemployed affiliation was regularly debated on the TLC, but with negative results.<sup>(41)</sup> When the matter was again raised at the June 1938 meeting the President, as he had done on all previous occasions, ruled it out of order on the grounds that only unions could join the TLC. The ARU delegates immediately moved a motion of dissent from the President's ruling, which was defeated by forty-three votes to forty-two. A formal division was then demanded and the dissent motion was carried by forty-five votes to forty-two. The motion

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37. TLC Minutes, 18 March, 1931.

38. *ibid.*, 29 April, 1931.

39. Workers' Weekly, 27 March, 1931.

40. Official Report, Tenth TUC, November, 1934, pp 6-7 The motion was defeated by forty votes to twelve.

41. TLC Minutes, 1 April, 1932; 27 April, 1932; 22 June, 1932; 25 July, 1932, 7 December, 1932; 15 January, 1936; 20 April, 1937

to grant affiliation was then carried by the same margin.<sup>(42)</sup> The voting figures reveal that the unions were anything but unanimous in their support for unemployed representation. Furthermore, during the eight years since the unemployed first became an issue in TLC politics the level of unemployment had declined significantly. By 1938 the bonding of the TLC and the unemployed was of little consequence. With the outbreak of war in September 1939 the last vestiges of unemployment were removed and the URWSC ceased to function in 1940.

While the TLC executive opposed formal representation for the unemployed, it regularly urged individual unions to organise their own unemployed.<sup>(43)</sup> Unionists and officials were particularly concerned that prolonged bouts of unemployment would bring about the complete alienation of workers from their unions. During a debate on the question at the 1934 TUC a delegate warned of 'the detrimental effect the unorganised workers have on the organised'.<sup>(44)</sup> Despite these sentiments, attempts by the union movement to organise the unemployed failed. In 1931 the TUC established a committee and charged it with the task of developing schemes to prevent the unemployed drifting beyond the ambit of the trade union movement.<sup>(45)</sup> When the committee reported to the 1932 TUC it was revealed that all convened meetings had lapsed for want of a quorum. The committee was then disbanded.<sup>(46)</sup> Some unions attempted to fill this gap by organising their own unemployed members. The ARU, in 1931, helped form a body called the Unemployed Railway Men as a means of keeping in communication with its out-of-work members. Again, the most progressive union in this regard was the PIEUA, which altered its constitution to allow two unemployed members to sit as full delegates on the Board of Management.<sup>(47)</sup> From time to time some other unions

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42. *ibid.*, 8 June, 1938.

43. Tenth TUC, *op.cit.*, p 7.

44. *ibid.*, p 13.

45. Official Report Eighth TUC, November, 1931, p 19.

46. Official Report Ninth TUC, November, 1932, p 4.

47. PIEUA Board of Management Minutes, 2 October, 1930.

formed coordinating committees to aid their unemployed. The itinerant habits of many of the unemployed combined with the poor financial state of the unions to render such committees impotent.

Much of the suspicion and mistrust that existed between the union movement and the unemployed movement was a product of the latter's relations with the Australian Workers Union (AWU). As earlier chapters have explained, the AWU suffered a heavy membership decline during the early years of the depression. The union experienced an equally dramatic increase in membership between 1932 and 1935. The reasons for this were twofold: the Labor Government of William Forgan Smith restored the rural awards that had been abolished by Moore and required that unemployed relief workers operate under industrial awards. This meant that, since most awards contained a union preference clause, relief workers were required to join a union before they could commence a job. The union that covered the unskilled type of work engaged in by the unemployed was the AWU. The AWU was quick to take advantage of the rotational gang system which operated on most relief projects. Regardless of the duration of the project, gangs were regularly rotated on a six or eight week basis in order to spread the available work as widely as possible. As each new gang joined a project an AWU organiser would be on hand to sell the men a full year ticket for 25/-. As a result of this system, the AWU was in a position to sell three or four times the normal number of tickets for a single job.

While this scheme greatly boosted the book membership of the AWU, it engendered intense bitterness within both the unemployed and trade union movements. Many relief workers found it impossible to outlay 25/- for a union ticket at the commencement of their employment. Yet if a ticket was not purchased the award permitted the dismissal of the men. At a relief project in Coolangatta in 1934 the entire gang refused to purchase AWU tickets and were promptly dismissed.<sup>(48)</sup> Strictly speaking the award provided that

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48. QPD, clxvi, 28 November, 1934, pp 1780-1.

workers had up to one month from the commencement of the job to join a union. However, some over-zealous AWU organisers, who were paid a commission for the number of tickets they sold, chose to ignore this provision and demanded payment on the first day of a job. This attitude brought its inevitable conflict. A major relief project in Brisbane during the depression involved the widening of Breakfast Creek. When an AWU organiser attempted to sell tickets to a gang in 1936 he was pelted with mud and thrown into the creek.<sup>(49)</sup> There were 150 men employed on the job and 136 of them emphatically refused to join the AWU and were dismissed.<sup>(50)</sup> The unemployed organisations and a number of trade unions immediately demanded that the men be reinstated.

The AWU, in reply, denounced the campaign as 'communistic' and the President, JC Lamont, said: 'We are determined to fight the issue: there will be no back down'<sup>(51)</sup> In this and similar conflicts, the union was aided by the policy of the State Government which was outlined by the Minister for Labour and Industry, MP Hynes (who was also a Vice-President of the AWU) in 1935:

It was made clear to constructing authorities carrying out rotational relief work that full award rates and conditions were to be observed, and as preference clauses constitute conditions of awards, they should be automatically observed by constructing authorities.<sup>(52)</sup>

In the face of this opposition, the campaign against the AWU collapsed and relief workers were required to be financial members of a trade union until the relief scheme was terminated in 1938.

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49. Read, *op.cit.*, p 1.

50. Worker, 28 July, 1936.

51. ibid.

52. QPD, clxviii, 6 November, 1935, p 1076.

Opposition to the AWU's recruiting policies was not restricted to the unemployed organisations. Other trade unions regularly complained that the AWU manipulated the unemployment relief scheme in order to poach their members.<sup>(53)</sup> A dissident faction within the AWU itself alleged that the union's officials cynically exploited the unemployed members to maintain their own positions. The dissidents claimed that the officials used the ticket number of those unemployed who were unlikely to vote to rig the union's elections.<sup>(54)</sup> The AWU also used its considerable influence within the ALP to have the Unemployed and Relief Workers State Council declared a proscribed body by the QCE.<sup>(55)</sup> Despite regular invitations, the ALP consistently refused to send delegates to unemployed conferences because it claimed these were dominated by communists.<sup>(56)</sup> The alienation of the unemployed from the traditional working class organisations was not unique to Queensland. Nadia Wheatley, for instance, discovered a similar pattern in New South Wales.<sup>(57)</sup> The basic structure of the Australian Labor movement was firmly established prior to the onset of the depression and that structure did not provide for the establishment of semi-independent organisations of unemployed unionists. The existence of such bodies during the 1930s had no lasting impact on the structure of either the trade unions or the Labor Party.

As well as failing to form any lasting alliance with the unemployed, neither the Australian nor the Queensland trade union movements succeeded in developing credible unemployment policies. The common union response to the problem was either to restrict itself to

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53. WWF Minutes, 4 July, 1934, E213/10, RSSSA/ANU, p 461; Official Report Fourth State Conference, ARTWU, August, 1936, p 13.

54. Provisional Membership Rights Committee, Ballot Dodging in Queensland: The Case for a Democratic Ballot in the AWU, Innisfail, 1936, pa/A111, FML, p 4.

55. QCE Secretary to C Kelly, 15 December, 1936, ALP Archives, Brisbane.

56. Organiser, 14 March, 1940.

57. Nadia Wheatley, 'New South Wales Relief Workers' Struggles, 1933-36', ALR, vol 42, December, 1973, p 36.



criticisms of the administrative aspects of Government relief schemes or to invoke impractical panaceas. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the unions petitioned successive Queensland Governments on a host of matters concerning unemployment.<sup>(58)</sup> On some issues, such as the securing of a discount on Brisbane City Council rate payment for those who were in arrears because of unemployment, the unions achieved a measure of success.<sup>(59)</sup> But in the majority of cases they were rebuffed by the authorities. The unions also attempted to improve job opportunities by cooperating with local manufacturers to exclude from Queensland goods produced in other States.<sup>(60)</sup> The depression also encouraged the unions to accelerate their long-standing opposition to assisted immigration. Both the 1928 and 1929 TUCs declared strongly against State-aided migration when unemployment was in excess of two percent of registered trade unionists.<sup>(61)</sup> In 1933 the TLC unsuccessfully attempted to sponsor a major public campaign against all assisted immigration.<sup>(62)</sup>

Despite the intensity of these activities, the union movement lacked suitable policies to cope with unemployment on a State-wide basis. In 1924 the TLC convened a special meeting to develop some form of unemployment policy. The programme that emerged called for the reduction of working hours, the abolition of overtime, the payment of the basic wage to the unemployed, and the imposition of a super-tax of 15/- in the £1 on all profits in excess of ten percent.<sup>(63)</sup> The unions failed to have any of these policies accepted by the Government. In the six years between 1924 and 1930 no further

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58. TLC Minutes, 16 November, 1927; 11 December, 1931; 29 January, 1936; 8 March, 1937; 15 June, 1938; 21 September, 1938; 2 August, 1939; Official Report Twentieth Annual Delegates Meeting AWU, Brisbane, January, 1933, p 39, FML.

59. TLC Minutes, 26 February, 1936.

60. *ibid.*, 19 May, 1926, ABTEF Minutes, 5 October, 1931, T49/1/9, RSSSA/ANU, p 100.

61. Official Report Fifth TUC, November, 1928, p 3; Official Report Sixth TUC, November, 1929, p 6.

62. TLC Minutes, 31 July, 1933.

63. *ibid.*, 20 August, 1924.

attempts were made to develop appropriate unemployment policies. The CPNP Government of Arthur Moore rejected totally union arguments that a reduction in work hours would create jobs, and increased weekly hours from forty-four to forty-eight. When Labor returned to office in 1932 it promised to restore the forty-four hour week. The TLC was not content with this promise, and filed a claim before the Industrial Court calling for a thirty hour week without any reduction in pay. The Court recognised the unions' argument that a world-wide reduction in hours would create employment opportunities, but stated that for Queensland to embark on such a policy independently would ruin her major industries. In dismissing the application, the Court intimated that the 'experienced advocates for the combined unions' did not believe that a thirty hour week was economically feasible, and that the case was brought as a tactical move to ensure some reduction in hours 'however slight',<sup>(64)</sup>

The following two case studies illustrate that the trade unions generally achieved a low level of effectiveness in their attempts to influence Government policy in the area of unemployment. The case studies involve: a prolonged dispute in the railway service over the issue of work pooling; and the 1938 decision of the Forgan Smith Government to abolish the relief work scheme.

In 1929, Queensland's railway industry was suffering the effects of a shortage of loan money. The AFULE executive met with the CPNP Minister for Railways, Godfrey Morgan, and the Minister for Labour and Industry, Hubert Sizer, in September in an attempt to clarify the employment situation within the service. They assembled amidst persistent rumours that widespread retrenchment of railway staff was imminent. The two ministers were keen to allay such fears, and expressed the view that the problem of labour surplus could be solved by not replacing staff who retired or resigned.<sup>(65)</sup> These

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64. Queensland Industrial Gazette, 24 June, 1933, p 212.

65. AFULE Minutes, 8 September, 1929, E212/7, RSSSA/ANU, pp 9-10.

views proved to be optimistic, as, by 1930, a large number of sackings had occurred. The Railway Department in late 1929 had introduced a system of work rationing into its workshops in an attempt to forestall further dismissals. Needless to say, the railway unions displayed an intense interest in this new policy. However, as on so many other issues of consequence, the AFULE and the ARU were at loggerheads over the question of work pooling. The ARU opposed all rationing on principle,<sup>(66)</sup> while the AFULE saw it as a preferable alternative to dismissals.<sup>(67)</sup>

The Moore Government justified the work pooling system on 'equality of sacrifice' arguments. It provoked opposition from the railway workers because it operated in an inequitable fashion. Because of the differing needs of the department, it was introduced in some sections but not in others.<sup>(68)</sup> Some single men on short time worked only four days per fortnight, which netted them a total pay less than that of an unemployed relief worker. A further cause of dissatisfaction was that men on reduced hours received only pro rata leave and were disadvantaged as far as promotions were concerned. The major argument against work pooling was that it failed to achieve its stated aim of preventing retrenchments. Despite extensive rationing, no fewer than 250 workers were laid off at the Ipswich railway workshops during 1931.<sup>(69)</sup> In the boom years of the mid-1920s the workshop employed 2,400 men, yet by March 1933 this had slumped to 1,300.<sup>(70)</sup> This situation led the ARU executive to approach the AFULE with a proposal that the two unions combine in a campaign against the work rationing system. The AFULE replied that while it was aware of the abuses that had crept into the scheme, it felt that any alternative would inevitably involve heavier retrenchments.<sup>(71)</sup>

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66. ARU State Council, Minutes, 26 September, 1929, p 119.

67. AFULE Minutes, 6 July, 1930, E212/7, RSSSA/ANU, pp 9-10.

68. Minutes of Deputation of Railway Workers to Deputy Premier, 14 March, 1933, item 33/1264, PRE/A1068, QSA, pp 2-4.

69. Memo from Railway Department to Premier, 15 October, 1931, item 31/6657, PRE/A1037, QSA.

70. Deputation of Railway Workers, op.cit., p 2.

71. AFULE Minutes, 7 December, 1930, E212/7, RSSSA/ANU, p 10.

The confusion and divisions that existed within the trade union movement were clearly illustrated during a debate on work rationing at the 1932 Labor-in-Politics convention. Participants in the debate were divided into three groups: those who believed that the system was working as well as could be expected; those who believed that the system was necessary, but in need of major amendments to remove abuses: and those who regarded the scheme as an attack on the concept of the basic wage, and who wanted it abolished forthwith. During the course of the debate, four separate resolutions were moved but, because of the lack of agreement amongst the union delegates, all failed to pass. This meant that the Labor party emerged from convention without a clear policy on this most important issue. The leader of the parliamentary party, William Forgan Smith, told the convention that he supported moves to regulate the rationing system, but that he did not support its abolition because to do so would aggravate the unemployment problem.<sup>(72)</sup> The election of the Labor Government encouraged unionists to expect a change in the work pooling scheme. A deputation of Ipswich workshop employees met the Minister for Transport, Jack Dash, and requested that work rationing be abolished.<sup>(73)</sup> Dash declared himself to be sympathetic to the request, but the cabinet subsequently decided that, since no further funds could be advanced to the Railway Department, work pooling was the only practical alternative to further dismissals.<sup>(74)</sup> The Ipswich railwaymen then decided to put their case before the Deputy Premier, Percy Pease. During a prolonged interview in March 1933 he accepted the men's arguments, and stated at the conclusion of the deputation that: 'No one wanted pooling and the sooner it could be avoided the better'.<sup>(75)</sup> Despite Pease's optimistic tone, the Cabinet and the Railway Department would not be swayed from their

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72. Official Report Fourteenth Labor-in-Politics Convention, January, 1932, pp 47-8.

73. Brisbane Courier, 6 March, 1933.

74. ibid., 8 March, 1933.

75. Deputation of Railway Workers, *op.cit.*, p 19; TLC Minutes, 12 September, 1934.

previous attitudes, and work rationing remained a feature of the service until the outbreak of World War Two.

The second case study concerns the unsuccessful attempts of the trade unions to reverse the Forgan Smith Government's decision to abolish the unemployment relief scheme. The Queensland Labor movement had been highly critical of the unemployment relief scheme since its inception in 1930. Trade union attempts to effect reforms in this area were severely restricted by the high level of unemployment and the political complexion of the Moore Government. The election of the Labor Government and the slow improvement in the employment situation encouraged the unions to play a more active role in unemployment policy. At the 1934 TUC a motion was carried which called for the abolition of both the unemployment relief tax and the relief work system.<sup>(76)</sup> The Government replied that while it agreed in principle with the motion, circumstances prevented its implementation. This reply did not satisfy the ARU, which attempted to launch a major campaign in 1935 for the immediate abolition of the relief tax. This campaign came to nothing because of opposition on the part of other unions.<sup>(77)</sup> But over the next two years the ARU position gradually won support in the union movement. Numerous attempts were made to convince the Government to replace the relief work scheme with an expanded public works programme which would employ men full-time at award rates. The unions argued, in support of these demands, that the relief system was a form of cheap labour which struck at the basic wage concept and which retarded the return of the economy to full productive capacity.<sup>(78)</sup> In the midst of their campaign for an expanded public works programme the unions committed a tactical blunder which severely damaged their credibility. The Government decided in 1932 to proceed

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76. Official Report Tenth TUC, November, 1934, p 31.

77. ARTWU Minutes, 10 September, 1935, p 326; AFULE Minutes, 3 November, 1935, E212/10, RSSSA/ANU, p 22.

78. TLC Minutes, 25 March, 1936; 31 May, 1937: Official Report Twelfth TUC, November, 1936, p 63; Official Report Thirteenth TUC, November, 1937, pp 11, 38 and 50.

with the construction of a road bridge across the Kangaroo Point reach of the Brisbane River. This was a major project which promised prolonged employment opportunities for a large number of men. Yet when the plans for the bridge were announced the TLC denounced them in the following terms:

...this council is absolutely opposed to the erection of a toll bridge across the river, believing that landowners contiguous to the proposed location are not concerned with employment, but the obtaining of unearned increment by increase of rents, and the exploitation of workers who will be compelled to cross the river. (79)

The Government regarded these objections as trivial and vexatious, and proceeded with the construction of the bridge.<sup>(80)</sup>

Despite Forgan Smith's expansion of the public works programme, opposition to the relief scheme continued to gain momentum. When the Labor-in-Politics convention assembled in February 1938 the Labor movement was united in the belief that the time had come to end relief work. In response to motions passed at the convention, Forgan Smith promised to abolish the relief system in the next session of the parliament. The Premier fulfilled his pledge with the passage of two pieces of legislation: the Income (State Development) Tax Act, and the Public Works Organisation Act. The former repealed the Income (Unemployment Relief) Tax Acts 1930 to 1935. It established a development tax on a lower scale than that which existed under the old Act. The special unemployment relief fund was abolished, and all monies collected as development tax were paid into the consolidated revenue fund. The second piece of legislation was enacted to provide a mechanism for coordinating the expanded public works programme. With the passage of these two acts, the trade unions

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79. TLC Minutes, 16 March, 1932.

80. See Clem Lack, op.cit., p 133f.

appeared to have achieved a significant victory. After six years of constant pressure the Government introduced a scheme that embodied the essentials of the unions' demands. However, instead of congratulating the Government on its action, the unions combined with the unemployed organisations to denounce the abolition of relief work.

This remarkable volte-face was the result of intense lobbying within the trade union movement by representatives of the unemployed organisations. The unemployed had, in the past, been highly critical of the relief work scheme,<sup>(81)</sup> but when major alterations were rumoured in 1938 they became more circumspect in their attitude:

Whilst we can agree to the abolition of the Relief Scheme, nevertheless we must first of all be sure that our conditions are safeguarded, even if it means the retaining of the scheme until such time as this is done. (82)

When the Government announced its new policy, the unemployed argued that the transitional arrangements would cause severe hardship to those of the 22,000 currently on relief work who did not immediately secure full-time employment. The Governor, Leslie Wilson, reported enthusiastically on the Government's initiatives in correspondence to the Dominions Office:

The Legislative Assembly has been getting through some good work, especially about abolishing so much useless "Relief" work. ., this was a very courageous effort on the part of a Labour Government, and the criticism from the unions was severe. The Government offered the men on "relief" work, who were capable of full time work, full time jobs at full award wages and most of the work was in the country. If any refused to go, they were taken off relief work altogether, and went on old age pension or rations.

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81. Organiser, 25 November, 1937.

82. ibid., 25 August, 1938.

The result has been most satisfactory. Many in the towns, who refused to go, have found work for themselves and the majority of those sent to do useful and reproductive work in the country are doing well, and I hope will adopt country life for good, for this centralization into towns is a real danger to Australia, (83)

The unemployed did not share Wilson's somewhat idealised sentiments, and the secretary of the URWSC, Tom Combey, wrote to all unions alleging that the new scheme would reduce the families of many relief workers to the level of 'coolies' (84)

In response to Combey's letter, the TLC decided to press the Government to retain the relief scheme until all the unemployed were absorbed into normal employment. The unions suggested that funds for public works could be raised by the imposition of a super tax on high income earners.<sup>(85)</sup> Forgan Smith declined to meet a trade union deputation on the matter, and referred all enquiries to the Minister for Labour and Industry. Hynes explained to the unions that the decision to abolish relief work was not taken lightly, and that the imposition of a super tax was out of the question because it would force important industries out of Queensland.<sup>(86)</sup> In the face of this rebuff the TLC joined the URWSC in a public campaign against the Government's policies. A number of meetings and demonstrations were held: but it soon became obvious that most unions were prepared to lend only verbal support. Only twelve of the forty-four unions affiliated to the TLC contributed to a fighting

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83. Wilson to Dominions Office, 25 October, 1938, Wilson Papers, unclassified FML, p 1.

84. Combey to AFULE, 30 August, 1938, AFULE Records, E212/275, 127, RSSSA/ANU.

85. TLC Minutes, 31 August, 1938; 7 September, 1938; Official Report Fourteenth TUC, November, 1938, p 50.

86. ibid., p 36.



fund, and only £32 was collected.<sup>(87)</sup> While complaints about the abolition of relief work persisted until 1940,<sup>(88)</sup> the Government remained unmoved and the unions simply had to accommodate themselves to this fact.

The failure of the trade unions to cope effectively with unemployment during the depression was understandable. Except for a few notable cases, the unions' financial positions meant that they could not implement and sustain adequate social welfare schemes for their unemployed members. In any case most unions had ceded their friendly society functions to Governments decades ago. The unions were restricted in their attempts to pressure the Government on the issue of unemployment by the fact that they could not agree among themselves on desirable policies and because their industrial weakness permitted Governments to ignore them with impunity. The organisations formed by the unemployed themselves fared no better in their attempts to influence the authorities.

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87. *ibid.*, p 37.

88. Official Report, Fifteenth TUC, November, 1939, pp 33 and 40; Official Report Sixteenth TUC, November, 1940, p 26.

CHAPTER 11

THE ORGANISED UNEMPLOYED

The spectacular growth in unemployment that accompanied the great depression brought with it the fear that the unemployed would constitute themselves into a revolutionary force dedicated to the overthrow of the existing social order. Proponents of this view were located at both ends of the political spectrum. Conservatives feared the collapse of the status quo at the hands of rioting 'sturdy beggars', while militant socialists were prepared to see in every unemployed march or demonstration the seeds of the coming revolution that would sweep capitalism into the dustbin of history. The experience of the depression in Australia disproved these hopes and fears. Given the extent of unemployment, there was remarkably little social disruption in Australia or Queensland during the 1930s. Furthermore, as the activities of the New Guard in New South Wales illustrated, not all the opponents of civil authority were unemployed.

Isolated riots and disturbances occurred in all States, but these generally were short-lived and limited in scope. Prolonged unemployment did not foster a spirit of militancy amongst the majority of those who experienced it. On the contrary, unemployment robbed its victims of the confidence and self-esteem necessary for concerted political action and participation. In 1953 a group of social scientists carried out a study of the effects of unemployment in an Austrian town and concluded that ' .prolonged unemployment leads to a state of apathy in which the victims do not utilise any longer the few opportunities left to them' <sup>(1)</sup> Queensland provided a further example of this phenomenon. Very few Queenslanders were prepared to become actively involved in the unemployed organisations that were formed. The authorities, in the form of the State Government and the police, kept the unemployed organisations under close surveillance and were quick to move against them if they engaged in militant political action. Unemployed activists were no match for the authorities.

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1. Marie Jahoda, Paul F Lazarsfeld and Hans Zeisel, Marienthal: The Sociography of an Unemployed Community, second edition, London, 1972.

Since they did not occupy a strategic position in the economic structure, the unemployed were unable to bring to bear any counter-vailing power, such as a strike, against the Government.<sup>(2)</sup> The only potential political resource available to the unemployed organisations were numbers and the induced apathy of the majority of the workless denied them access to this resource.

Married men were particularly reluctant to become involved in any form of militant behaviour. The Queensland intermittent relief work scheme advantaged married men in that it allowed them more work days than men without families. On the other hand, the loss of relief work was a more serious matter for married men because their responsibilities did not permit them to travel in search of alternative employment. Many gangers on relief work projects zealously weeded out 'malcontents' and sometimes victimised militants by writing on their relief cards 'Not wanted on this job again'<sup>(3)</sup>

The effect of such discrimination on the attitudes of married men is illustrated in an incident recalled by Frank Huelin in his autobiographical account of the depression. A Communist party activist was preaching the virtues of fighting the system to a married man when he was cut short by the following reply:

Christ mate! I've got a wife and kids to think about. What happens to 'em if I start fightin' back and get slung inside? Who'll look after 'em then, eh? No mate we're managin now an' stirrin' wouldn't help me missus an' kids. (4)

Family ties were not the only obstacle to the establishment of stable unemployed organisations. Queensland Government policy from 1929 until 1933 prohibited unemployed single men who were not engaged

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2. Ray Brownhill, Unemployed Workers, Brisbane, 1979, p 166f makes a similar point about South Australia.
  3. Interview with Jack Read, 1975, p 2.
  4. Frank Huelin, Keep Moving, Sydney, 1973, p 137: Interview with Mick Healy, 1975, pp 7, 29 and 30.

on relief work projects to draw rations at the same centre over successive weeks. Instead they were required to traverse the State to show that they were genuinely in search of employment. The Forgan Smith Government repealed this regulation in 1933, but many men persisted in their itinerant life style in the hope of finding stable work. Rumours of 'big jobs starting up' would produce an exodus of hopeful unemployed workers to distant parts of the State. Often these rumours proved to be unfounded and the disappointed men would then drift on to another town.<sup>(5)</sup> This migratory pattern was a serious obstacle to the establishment of viable unemployed organisations, many of which collapsed because their supporters had been forced to 'move on' <sup>(6)</sup>

A change in the composition of their membership could also radically alter the political complexion of unemployed organisations. This phenomenon was vividly illustrated when the Innisfail police received a deputation from the United Front Committee of the Unemployed Workers' Movement in 1933. This body had been operating in the area for some months and had gained a deserved reputation for militancy. Its officers made no secret of the fact that their sympathies lay with the Communist party. The sergeant of police was somewhat surprised, then, that the deputation was led by two local clergymen who quickly assured him that the committee '.. was not a militant body, had no intention of doing anything that would militate against the Government, and they were not in favour of strikes'.<sup>(7)</sup> This dramatic shift in political stance was brought about by the departure of 200 unemployed who had come to Innisfail at the commencement of the sugar crushing season in a vain search for work. They had established a camp in the town which at its peak housed over 400 men. From this base they organised a series of meetings and demonstrations to pressure the local council to give

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5. *ibid.*, p 30.

6. Organiser, 4 November, 1937; 3 March, 1938; 4 August, 1938; and 11 August, 1938.

7. Police Report, 18 August, 1933, item 33/4784, PRE/A1078, QSA, p 1.

them relief work. The men organised themselves into a committee and published a weekly newspaper called the Unemployed Voice.<sup>(8)</sup> The failure of many of the men to gain work in the sugar mills forced them to leave the area. The organisation they had founded was then taken over by a less radical faction.

Despite these obstacles, a large number of unemployed groups came into existence in Queensland during the depression years. The chief among these were: the One Big Union (OBU) of Unemployed, the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM), the Unemployed and Relief Workers' State Council of Action, the Unemployed Workers' Committee, the Committee of the State Relief Workers and Unemployed Movement, the Unemployed Club, the ALP Rank and File Committee and the United Front Committee. The membership of many of these groups overlapped, and some of them had only ephemeral existences. The OBU of Unemployed pre-dated the depression and had been particularly active in opposing the McCormack Government. It was primarily a propaganda group, and for a time was under the patronage of the ARU.<sup>(9)</sup> After 1929, the OBU was supplanted by the UWM as the vehicle of Communist party organisation amongst the unemployed.<sup>(10)</sup> The UWM claimed to have 31,000 members across Australia in 1931 and 68,000 in the three eastern States in 1934.<sup>(11)</sup> These figures were almost certainly exaggerated. Queensland's unemployed organisations persistently spoke in terms of 'supporters' rather than members. The unstable structure of the organisations precluded the establishment of large book memberships. Furthermore, membership implied the payment of fees and very few of those out of work could afford such luxuries.

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8. *ibid.*, p 2.

9. Advocate, 15 September, 1928.

10. Workers' Weekly, 17 July, 1931.

11. Alastair Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, California, 1969, p 60.

A major initiative in unemployed organisation in Queensland was taken in 1933 with the establishment of the Unemployed and Relief Workers' State Council of action.<sup>(12)</sup> The chronic instability of such bodies is illustrated by the fact that it changed its title three times over the next seven years: to the Committee of the State Relief Workers' and Unemployment Movement, to the Unemployed and Relief Workers' State Council, and finally to the Unemployed Workers' State Council. In 1934 the council established a modest weekly newspaper called the Organiser. It was first issued as a four page mimeographed newsletter and was expanded to a printed newspaper in 1936. This decision proved to be premature, and inexperience and poor organisation brought about the collapse of the paper in October 1936. It was revived in August 1937 and Tom Combey, who was Secretary of the Council, was appointed editor. The declared aim of the paper was to foster solidarity within the unemployed and with the trade unions.<sup>(13)</sup> It carried news of unemployed activities as well as more general reports of State and Federal politics. The Organiser was generally sympathetic to the Communist party, but was prepared to endorse the ALP at election time.<sup>(14)</sup> Despite the greater professionalism of the revived paper, it again ran into severe financial difficulties. The decline in unemployment brought about by the outbreak of the war caused the paper to cease publication in 1940.

From 1933 onwards the unemployed held annual conferences in the Brisbane Trades Hall. The main aim of these conferences was to bring together the disparate organisations that were involved in the unemployed movement and to formulate policies on issues of common concern. The 1937 conference was a rather ecumenical gathering with the following bodies being represented: the Combined Railways Union, the ARU, the Building Trades Group of Unions, the Moulders'

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12. Brisbane Courier, 26 July, 1933.

13. Organiser, 16 June, 1938.

14. ibid., 24 March, 1938.

Union, the Miners' Union, the Plasterers' and Painters' Union, the Seamen's Union, the Liquor Trades Union, the Sewerage Workers' Section of the AWU, the Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist and Congregational churches, the Peace Movement, the Temperance Union, the Society of Friends, the Communist party, and delegates from sixty groups and thirteen branches of the unemployed movement.<sup>(15)</sup> This was an impressive gathering; but it must be noted that the conference committee was not very strict on the question of credentials and many of the 'delegates' were self-appointed. The State Government's unemployment policies were the major topics of discussion at the various conferences.<sup>(16)</sup>

These conferences were the closest the unemployed came to establishing a single, representative organisation along the lines of the Federation of Unemployed Leagues of America that was founded in 1932.<sup>(17)</sup> The geographic dispersion of Queensland's unemployed was not the only factor impeding such a federation. There was a major schism within the unemployed movement between those who supported the ALP and its affiliated trade unions and those whose sympathies lay with the Communist party. Prior to 1933 the UWM endorsed the 'social fascist' line of the CPA and was openly contemptuous of the Labor party. After 1933 their policy mellowed, but the ALP and its affiliated unions remained suspicious of the communist connections of some of the office bearers of the unemployed groups. The ALP consistently refused invitations to send delegates to unemployed conferences because it claimed that they were communist dominated.<sup>(18)</sup>

A factor that was both a cause and an effect of the weakness of unemployed organisations in Queensland was the failure of the movement to produce a set of acknowledged leaders. Tim Moroney of the ARU

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15. ibid., 11 November, 1937.

16. ibid., 4 April, 1940.

17. Frances F Piven and Richard A Cloward, Regulating the Poor, New York, 1972, p 107.

18. Healy, op.cit., p 7.



and CPA barrister Fred Paterson were both highly regarded by the unemployed,<sup>(19)</sup> but they had loyalties and responsibilities beyond the confines of the unemployed movement. At no time during the depression did the unemployed produce a leader or leaders from within their own ranks who could claim to speak with authority on behalf of the whole movement. Local orators and organisers rose to prominence during specific disputes and campaigns, but none was capable of establishing a State-wide following or reputation. Had the various unemployed groups been federated into a peak council the elected elite of that body may have produced such leaders. The absence of a federation meant that local activists were isolated from each other and unknown to most of the unemployed. This situation illustrated and confirmed the fragmentary nature of the unemployed movement.

While most of the unemployed did not join formal political organisations, necessity forced many of them into a communal and co-operative lifestyle in one of the numerous unemployed camps that were established throughout Queensland during the depression. The large number of men travelling the State in search of work created an unprecedented accommodation problem which neither the Government nor the charitable institutions could solve. The unemployed soon took the situation into their own hands and spontaneously established semi-permanent camps in Brisbane and the major provincial towns. Most towns had at least one park taken over by the itinerant unemployed. Brisbane had seven out-door camps at Victoria Park, Dutton Park, Mayne Junction, the Grammar School Reserve, Kelvin Grove, Moorooka, and Tarragindi. The unemployed also occupied an old gymnasium in Turbot St. and a disused tobacco factory in South Brisbane which came to be known as the Crystal Palace.<sup>(20)</sup> The occupants were predominantly single men and at times numbered up to 200 per camp. Each

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19. *ibid.*, pp 15 and 25; Read, *op.cit.*, p 4.

20. The bulk of the factual material regarding the camps is taken from the Healy and Read interviews.

camp elected a governing committee which organised the bulk buying of food, the cleaning of the camp and the expulsion of undesirables. Some camps also had a disciplinary committee which arbitrated disputes between inmates and, if necessary, meted out appropriate punishments to offenders. Drunks and petty criminals were excluded from the camps because they tended to attract the attention of the police. Many of the campers prided themselves on their ingenuity and flair for organisation. Shelters were constructed from old tarpaulins, waste wood, flattened kerosene tins and any other material available. The camp committee organised lending libraries, card evenings and cricket matches to keep the men occupied. Political activity and discussion do not appear to have played a major part in the life of the camps.

Despite the good order that prevailed in most camps, successive State Governments viewed them with misgivings. In the last months of the McCormack Government the police sergeant at the town of Inglewood wrote to the Premier to seek guidance as to the attitude he should adopt to a group of unemployed who were encamped in the town awaiting the commencement of a railway project. In reply the under secretary, George Watson, advised that: 'I recommend that every effort be made to prevent the formation of a camp of unemployed'.<sup>(21)</sup> The in-coming Moore ministry endorsed this policy but found it very difficult to enforce.<sup>(22)</sup> Both CPNP and ALP Governments claimed that the camps were breeding grounds for crime and adversely affected the reputation of the localities in which they were situated.<sup>(23)</sup>

Queensland's Government was not alone in its fears concerning the disruptive potential of the single unemployed, but it is ironic to

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21. Premier to Inglewood police, 11 February, 1929, item 29/368, PRE/A980, QSA.

22. Moore to UWM, 7 April, 1931, 31/1524, PRE/A1020, QSA.

23. Courier Mail, 14 May, 1936.

note, in contrast, that the Canadian Government felt that the problem could best be handled by concentrating such men in camps to discourage them traversing the country in organised bands.<sup>(24)</sup>

In 1937, a group of Brisbane residents suggested to the Government that all the existing camps be closed and that the unemployed be removed to some remote area of the city such as Mt Cootha Park.<sup>(25)</sup> The police department consistently vetoed such suggestions on the grounds that:

If all the unemployed were housed together in Mt. Cootha Park there would be a grave danger of their becoming so well organised that they would be able to hold demonstrations on such a large scale that they would seriously inconvenience the Government and possibly become unmanageable with the few police in the area. (26)

The high level of unemployment in the early thirties meant that the Government was forced to turn a blind eye to the illegality of the camps. However, the authorities were always on the look out for an opportunity to close down 'undesirable' camps.

As early as 1932 the Crystal Palace hostel had attracted the attention of the police because, it was alleged, it had become a haven for criminals and that an illicit still was being operated on the premises.<sup>(27)</sup> The hostel was operated under the jurisdiction of the Ann St Presbyterian church, but its effective management had been delegated to a committee elected from among the inmates.<sup>(28)</sup>

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24. M Horn (ed), The Dirty Thirties; Canadians in the Great Depression, Canada, 1972, pp 306f and 320f

25. Sunday Truth, 11 July, 1937.

26. Courier Mail, 14 May, 1936.

27. Sunday Truth, 11 July, 1937.

28. Memo Home Secretary's Department, 5 August, 1935, item 35/8495, HS0/A3780, QSA.

This committee interviewed the Mayor of Brisbane and vehemently denied the charges laid against the hostel. The committee argued that the allegations of criminal behaviour were a red herring and that the State Government and the police wished to retaliate against the hostel because some of its members had spoken out in support of a group of relief workers who were on strike for better conditions.<sup>(29)</sup> After further investigations, the Town Clerk informed the hostel committee that they must henceforth maintain a register of all occupants, and must facilitate any police investigations that might be deemed necessary. Failure to observe these conditions would result in the closure of the shelter under the City Council by-laws.<sup>(30)</sup>

A state of uneasy peace prevailed between the hostel and the authorities for the next three years. The issue flared again in 1935 when the secretary of the hostel complained to the Home Secretary, EM Hanlon, that police persistently accosted men outside the hostel and searched them for stolen goods.<sup>(31)</sup> Hanlon forwarded the complaint to the police department whose officers took the opportunity to prepare a lengthy and extremely unfavourable report on the hostel. They alleged inter alia that, contrary to the Town Clerk's directive, the inmates refused to cooperate with the police; that a shooting had occurred on the premises; that the hostel had become a haven for local and interstate criminals; and finally, that the secretary and his committee were 'notorious communists'. An inspector of the Brisbane CIB attached a note to the report in which he said that:

. .a section of the underworld, communists and the like, appear to have taken control of this benevolent institution and...are constituting themselves into a band of lawless dictators.. (32)

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29. Advocate, 16 May, 1932.

30. Town Clerk to Secretary Crystal Palace, 23 April, 1932, item 35/4142, HSO/A3780, QSA.

31. Secretary CPA to Hanlon, 3 July, 1935, item 35/8493, *ibid.*

32. Police Report, 24 July, 1935, item 35/4142, *ibid.*

The Government and the City Council decided to act on this report and, despite a series of protest demonstrations by the unemployed, closed the hostel.

The Government failed in a later attempt to close the Victoria Park camp. In 1937 the Rotary Club of Brisbane suggested to the Government, as part of a city beautification scheme, that the unemployed be removed from the park and resettled outside the city limits.<sup>(33)</sup> The eighty men who were resident in the park showed no willingness to move. Instead they formed a committee which began to organise an anti-eviction campaign. The campers won support from the unemployed groups, the trade unions and some religious bodies.<sup>(34)</sup> They were aided by the fact that the authorities could not agree on an alternate camp site, and after a month the Government decided to leave the men where they were.

The unemployed camps were tolerated by most of the surrounding residents and relations between the two were generally harmonious.<sup>(35)</sup> The same could not be said for relations between the unemployed and some local councils. The itinerant unemployed were often critical of what they regarded as the indifference to their plight of local authorities.<sup>(36)</sup> In the northern coastal city of Cairns in 1932 mutual animosities erupted into open warfare. At that time there were approximately 150 unemployed men camped at Parramatta Park near the centre of the town. Bad feeling had existed between the campers and the Cairns' City Council for some months. Matters came to a head as the date for the annual agricultural show approached. The Show Committee wanted the park cleared of all campers as soon as possible. The unemployed agreed to move on the condition that the Cairns Council construct a permanent shelter for them in another part of the town. In June the Cairns Council

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33. Courier Mail, 6 July, 1937.

34. Organiser, 9 June, 1938.

35. Healy, op.cit., p 9.

36. Huelin, op.cit., p 66f.

contacted the State Government and indicated that it was willing to build such a structure providing that the Government render some financial assistance. Forgan Smith, who had only recently been elected Premier, replied that in other centres such structures had been financed by voluntary subscriptions and that Cairns should do the same.<sup>(57)</sup> The Council then offered to build a temporary shelter, but, despite a conference presided over by the mayor, the campers refused to move to temporary accommodation.<sup>(38)</sup>

Various Cairns' community groups then commenced to pressure the Government to evict the unemployed.<sup>(39)</sup> The following telegram, which was sent by the local branch of the CPNP, accurately portrays the mood of the Cairns' business community:

CPNP Party urge Government take immediate action remove Communist element..who are defying constitutional authority...This matter not political. It represents organised attempt by enemies of society to foment strife which if unchecked will have serious consequences here and embarrass Government. (40)

The Government remained unmoved by these calls and would not instruct the police to disperse the campers. Forgan Smith appeared to adopt the view that the Council was over-reacting and that the situation would sort itself out. Subsequent events revealed that this optimism was misplaced. In response to the Government's inactivity the mayor Ald Collins convened a public meeting 'to ascertain what can be done to ensure the success of the show, free of all interference'<sup>(41)</sup> The campers stated that they would not

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37. Cairns City Council to Smith and Reply, 16-27 June, 1932, item 32/3106, PRE/A1046, QSA.

38. Cairns Post, 1 July, 1932.

39. Cairns Chamber of Commerce to Smith, 13 July, 1932, item 32/3106, *ibid.*; Cairns Sporting Groups to Smith, 13 July, 1932, item 32/3547, *ibid.*

40. Cairns CPNP to Smith, 13 July, 1932, item 32/3548, *ibid.*

41. Cairns Post, 11 July, 1932.

be intimidated that they would stand their ground until the Council met their demands.<sup>(42)</sup> Violence now loomed as a distinct possibility.

On Sunday 17 July, two days before the show was due to commence, the issue was resolved in a manner described by the editor of the Cairns Post in the following words:

The patience and forbearance that the citizens of Cairns had exhibited towards the large number of roving persons masquerading as 'unemployed' reached their (sic) limit yesterday forenoon, and a well and properly constituted contingent, supported by legal authority, proceeded to Parramatta Park, and issued to the malingerers a final notice to quit. (43)

Early that morning a vigilante committee of 500 citizens had been assembled under the combined leadership of the mayor, the aldermen and a number of prominent businessmen.<sup>(44)</sup> This group marched to the park where they were confronted by about 100 unemployed men. The thirty-four police present were under instructions to keep the peace. Once the two groups came into contact this proved impossible, and a general melee ensued. Many of the antagonists were armed with pieces of wood, iron bars and cane knives and displayed no hesitation in using these. At one stage a home-made gelignite bomb was thrown but failed to detonate. The brawl, which lasted for over two hours, ended in a victory for the citizenry and the unemployed retreated into the surrounding scrub. One hundred people were injured, seventeen of whom required hospitalisation. The police made a number of arrests and four of the campers later were sentenced to four months in jail. One of those jailed was the leader of the unemployed, John McCormack, who had been jailed for his part in the Dobbyn strike in 1931.

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42. Read, op.cit., p 3; Healy, op.cit., p 9.

43. Cairns Post, 18 July, 1932.

44. The following account has been compiled from: ibid.; Brisbane Courier, 18 July, 1932; Organiser, 28 April, 1938; the Healy and Read interviews; and Police Report, 11 July, 1932, item 32/5599, PRE/A1060, QSA.

The 'Cairns Riot', as it came to be known, was one of the few instances of violent confrontation between the unemployed and the authorities in Queensland during the depression. In this case the 'authorities' were largely self-appointed, and were able to act with such impunity because the restraining hand of the State Government was over 1000 miles away. The tone of their reports indicated that the local police were in favour of the direct action inspired by the council.<sup>(45)</sup> In September 1932 the Cairns' branch of the ALP wrote to the parliamentary party and complained about the Government's mishandling of the affair. Their complaint was noted, but neither the cabinet nor the caucus were prepared to initiate an inquiry into the incident.<sup>(46)</sup>

The level of violence involved in the Cairns' affair made it unique; but, in other respects it was symptomatic of the tensions that existed between the itinerant unemployed, the State Government and the local authorities. The abolition of the 'move on' clause in 1933 had the effect of slowing down the movement of the single unemployed. Some local councils did not welcome this change since it allowed the unemployed to remain in the same town for an indefinite period. The State Government often received complaints from the unemployed organisations that local councils were ignoring the change in the law and were attempting to enforce the old 'move on' clause.<sup>(47)</sup> The refusal of the Mackay City Council to endorse the spirit of the new regulation almost produced a repetition of the 'Cairns Riot'

In December 1932 the Mackay Council introduced new by-laws to regulate the town's unemployed shelter. The 100 occupants were required to register for relief work and to permit the free access of the police to the camp at any time. The council also declared that a man could remain an occupant of the camp for a maximum of

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45. *ibid.*

46. Caucus Minutes, 6 September, 1932, p 16.

47. Travelling Unemployed Association to Smith, 13 December, 1932, item 32/6856, PRE/A1064, QSA.



fourteen days only. The unemployed were served notice that failure to abide by the new regulations would result in the demolition of the shed.<sup>(48)</sup> In response to this decision, the unemployed wrote to the Premier warning him that if he failed to take action to restrain the Council he would almost certainly have another 'Cairns Riot' on his hands.<sup>(49)</sup> The unemployed managed to enlist the support of the local trade union movement in a public campaign for the repeal of the by-laws.<sup>(50)</sup>

Faced with the refusal of the occupants to accept the new terms or to vacate the shelter, the Council decided to force the men out by withdrawing amenities from the shed. Hitherto, the council had provided a truck and a driver to supply the unemployed with firewood; this was discontinued. The next evening the Council garage was broken into and a truck damaged. The police believed that 'there is little doubt but (sic) this offence was committed by one or more of the Communists or UWM, ..., as a reprisal, ..'.<sup>(51)</sup> However, the police could not gather sufficient evidence to lay a charge. A few days later a local store was burgled of three revolvers and a quantity of ammunition.<sup>(52)</sup> This was followed by reports that the home of the captain of the Citizens Force Rifle Club had been entered in an attempt to steal the club's cache of firearms. The intruders were unsuccessful because the guns were not stored at the residence of the captain.<sup>(53)</sup>

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48. Police Report, 19 January, 1933, item 33/6648, PRE/A1068, QSA; Mackay Mercury, 19 January, 1933.

49. Mackay UWM to Smith, 21 January, 1933, item 33/6648, PRE/A1068; Townsville UWM to Smith, 23 December, 1932, item 32/54 HS0/A3616, QSA.

50. Police Report, 27 January, 1933, item 33/514, PRE/A1068, QSA.

51. Police Report, 15 February, 1933, item 33/4787, *ibid*.

52. Statement by CP Dunne, 2 February, 1933, item 33/3732, *ibid*.

53. Police Report, 27 January, 1933, item 33/430, *ibid*.

Rumours then began to circulate in Mackay that the unemployed were engaged in military style drilling within the camp and were prepared to resist with force any attempt to dislodge them.<sup>(54)</sup> The unemployed denied these charges,<sup>(55)</sup> but the police decided that the time had come to take the matter out of the hands of the council and to settle it themselves. First, they arranged, through the Home Secretary, for the local army installation to take charge of the rifle club's armory until the situation returned to normal.<sup>(56)</sup> Next, the police took steps to dissolve the Mackay unemployed organisation. They singled out the 'ringleaders' of the shelter shed and terminated both their work cards and their right to draw rations in Mackay. In his report the sub-inspector explained that this would compel the militants 'to travel to other centres for their work cards and rations issue, this would be in the best interests of public peace and good conduct of the unemployed here'.<sup>(57)</sup> This action had the desired effect and the campaign in favour of the retention of the shed collapsed.

From the outset the unemployed believed that the ultimate aim of the Mackay Council was not to regulate the shed but to demolish it. Their regular correspondence with the Premier expressed this fear, and called on him to protect them from the council.<sup>(58)</sup> The Commissioner of Police, W Ryan, informed the Government that such statements were a tissue of lies and that they were made with the sole aim of eliciting undeserved sympathy for the unemployed.<sup>(59)</sup> Subsequent events confirmed the fears of the unemployed. Early in March 1933 the Mackay police forwarded a detailed report on the shelter to the Home Secretary. The tone of the report was

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54. Police Report, 1 February, 1933, item 33/329, *ibid.*

55. Police Report, 27 January, 1933, item 33/3213, *ibid.*

56. Brigadier EM Ralph to Home Secretary, 17 February, 1933, item 33/858, HSO/A3616, QSA.

57. Police Report, 1 February, 1933, item 33/329, PRE/A1068, QSA.

58. Police Report, 27 January, 1933, item 33/3213, *ibid.*

59. Memo Ryan to Hanlon, 1 February, 1933, item 33/8526, HSO/A3616.

condemnatory and, as in the dossier on the Crystal Palace, alleged that the shed had become a haven for criminals and communists. The report drew attention to the collapse of the unemployed organisation and noted that the shed was now occupied by only forty men. It continued 'the existence of the shelter shed at Mackay is a menace..., and the time is now opportune for its demolition without further notice to the occupants'. When the report reached the commissioner of police he added the comment that 'the demolition of the shelter-shed is entirely a matter for the Mackay authorities'.<sup>(60)</sup> Meanwhile the Mackay authorities, in the persons of the Mayor and the Town Clerk, had visited Brisbane to discuss the future of the shed with the Home Secretary. Hanlon agreed with the opinions of the police and the Mayor that the time was opportune to demolish the shed.<sup>(61)</sup> This task was accomplished by the carpenters of the council without opposition from the unemployed.

Such incidents as the above encouraged the notion among some that the unemployed were a lawless group who were eager to confront the forces of law and order and to overturn constitutional authority. This was not the case in Queensland during the depression. The unemployed expressed their grievances through traditional channels and their irregular clashes with the police were provoked by frustration and anger over specific and localised grievances; these clashes were not part of any co-ordinated, revolutionary programme to overthrow the Government. Printed propaganda, not physical force, was the most popular method used by the unemployed to air their grievances. Newsletters and leaflets were distributed at centres where the unemployed tended to congregate such as the Labor Exchange and police stations. Lack of finance restricted the quantity and quality of the printed material produced by the unemployed. Mick Healy recalls that when the UWM could not afford to purchase roneo

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60. Police Report, 2 March, 1933, item 33/2016, HS0/A3622, QSA.

61. Gall to Hanlon, 13 March, 1933, item 33/2016, HS0/A3622, QSA.

paper for their leaflets they would collect scrap paper from printing firms and trim each sheet to the correct size with a razor blade.<sup>(62)</sup>

The unemployed made regular attempts to interview cabinet ministers to present their grievances.<sup>(63)</sup> They invariably wished to see the Premier, but Forgan Smith refused to entertain such deputations and referred them to the Minister for Labor and Industry (MP Hynes).<sup>(64)</sup> The more militant unemployed saw this as evidence of Smith's callous disregard for their plight. Many of the clashes between the unemployed and the police were the result of the former's marches to and from the Premier's office.<sup>(65)</sup> Hynes was generally willing to listen to the unemployed, but he warned one deputation that if they persisted in demonstrating outside his office he would refuse all further requests.<sup>(66)</sup> Street marches were the main venue for conflict between the unemployed and the police. Such marches were not as commonplace in Brisbane during the 1930s as in some other capitals because Brisbane did not have such a high concentration of the State's unemployed. The favourite dates selected for demonstrations were May Day and International Unemployed Day which fell on 27 February. The Moore Government in 1930 placed a blanket ban on street marches in the metropolitan area.<sup>(67)</sup> Demonstrations that were held in defiance of this regulation were invariably broken up by the police.<sup>(68)</sup> The Labor Government replaced this general prohibition with a permit system in 1932. This change did little to minimize the possibility of conflict during demonstrations. In order to conduct a legal procession the unemployed were required to apply to the police for a permit

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62. Healy, *op.cit.*, p 9.

63. Petition, July, 1936, item 36/4498, PRE/A1151, QSA.

64. Unemployed and Relief Workers State Council to Smith, 6 August, 1937, item 37/5576, PRE/A1187, QSA.

65. Brisbane Telegraph, 5 August, 1937.

66. Minutes of a Deputation of Unemployed to Hynes, 6 June, 1933, item 33/4631, HS0/A3639, QSA.

67. TLC to Moore, 20 February, 1930, item 30/1146, PRE/A989, QSA.

68. Daily Standard, 18 March, 1931.

fourteen days in advance. This was regarded as being unnecessarily restrictive and some unemployed groups held marches without bothering to apply for permission. The police invariably responded by stopping the march and arrested the 'ringleaders'.<sup>(69)</sup>

The Labor Government generally was unwilling to grant permits for unemployed marches because they disapproved of the left-wing sympathies of those who organised them. In 1933 the Merthyr Relief Worker's Welfare Association, which was a charitable body and was not connected with the militant unemployed organisations, applied for permission to hold a torchlight procession to raise funds for the suburb's unemployed.<sup>(70)</sup> The under secretary of the Premier's Department, George Watson, contacted the QSSL to check the credentials of the association. The Secretary of the QSSL spoke highly of the group but added that he did not think it advisable to allow relief workers to march in the street.<sup>(71)</sup> Watson subsequently advised the Premier to refuse the request. He did this on two grounds: if a permit was given to one group the department would be inundated with requests; and that it 'would be almost impossible to keep Communist propaganda out of such processions'.<sup>(72)</sup> The association appealed against this decision and was eventually granted a permit on the proviso that the march be restricted to a small brass band and six collectors.<sup>(73)</sup>

The largest unemployed demonstration in Queensland occurred in 1938 when 2000 marched through Brisbane to demand an increase in relief work pay.<sup>(74)</sup> The average attendance at most other marches was less than 100. Most of the chronic unemployed did not participate in protest demonstrations. Jack Read recalled that

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69. Healy, op.cit., p 8.

70. Anderson to Smith, 11 November, 1933, item 33/6266, PRE/A1084, QSA.

71. Memo Premier's Department, 3 October, 1933, ibid.

72. ibid.

73. ibid.

74. Organiser, 12 August, 1938.

he and his friends soon fell into a pattern of life that they retained throughout their unemployed years:

We used to get up in the morning, get dressed and go down to the Labor Exchange in Edward Street. 'Is there any call? No' We'd come up Queen Street and go into Coles for a cup of tea and two biscuits - a penny. Then we'd go up the public library and read the papers. We'd come home about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. (75)

The Marienthal study showed that the unemployed did not utilize their newly acquired spare time in political activity. On the contrary, '...the workers of Marienthal lost the material and moral incentives to make use of their time' (76) A similar phenomenon appeared among the unemployed of Queensland. Conservatives feared that thousands of idle and destitute men would spontaneously seek violent solutions to their problems. In fact, the boredom of unemployed life engendered a political quiescence which precluded the development of any mass, revolutionary movement.

While the majority of the unemployed did not countenance any general onslaught against the capitalist state, some were prepared to break the law when circumstances required it. Government policy and financial necessity forced many single unemployed to travel in search of work. Queensland's size meant that the distances between towns often precluded walking as a regular means of transport. The unemployed solved this problem by travelling as non-paying passengers on the State's goods trains. The narrow gauge track used in Queensland was a great help to the unemployed because the slow moving trains were easier to board than those in the southern States. Some of the more adventurous unemployed stowed away on the coastal freighters that were a major part of

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75. Read, *op.cit.*, p 9.

76. Jahoda et alia, *op.cit.*, p 66.

Queensland's transport system in the 1930s.<sup>(77)</sup> 'Jumping the rattler' was a common practice during the depression, but it was a criminal offence under Section 34 of the Vagrancy, Gaming and Other Offences Act. In the early 1930s approximately 3000 people annually were convicted of illegally travelling on trains.<sup>(78)</sup> In 1933 the unemployed organisations asked the Government to decriminalise the offence or to provide an extra truck on all trains for the exclusive use of the unemployed. Both requests were refused.<sup>(79)</sup>

The Queensland Commissioner for Railways drew attention to the growing problem of illegal train travellers in his 1933 report to State parliament. He stated that those convicted represented only a small proportion of illegal travellers and that the railway department was suffering heavy financial losses through pilferage and damage to goods in transit. He also drew attention to the fact that five men had been killed in the previous year when attempting to board or alight from moving trains. The Commissioner's main complaint was directed towards magistrates who, influenced by the necessitous circumstances of those convicted, refused to impose the maximum sentence of a £20 fine or six months imprisonment. He concluded:

Unfortunately, such penalties do not serve their object in acting as a deterrent, and, although every endeavour is being made by the Railway Department, in co-operation with the police, to minimize the practice, these endeavours to a large extent are rendered futile by the leniency shown by some magistrates when dealing with offenders. (80)

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77. Healy, op.cit., p 12.

78. QPD, clxiii, 20 August, 1933, p 188.

79. North Queensland UWM to Hanlon, 23 February, 1933, item 33/1760, HSO/A3620; Minutes of an Unemployed Deputation to Hynes, 6 June, 1933, item 33/4631, HSO/A3639, QSA.

80. Under Secretary, Department of Railways Annual Report, QPP, vol.ii, 1933, pp 26-27.

In an attempt to provide the necessary deterrent, the Queensland Railway Department, in line with other States, hired its own security officers to keep the unemployed off the trains. The tactics of some of these officers gained them a reputation as 'basher gangs' and they were universally loathed by the travelling unemployed.<sup>(81)</sup>

One of the few examples of organised civil disobedience on the part of the unemployed in Queensland involved the issue of illegal train travel. Throughout 1932 and 1933 many unemployed workers drifted to the north-western mining town of Mt Isa in search of stable employment. A slump in mineral prices forced the closure of a major section of the mine in late 1933 and a large number of employees were laid off. Mt Isa was a single industry town and the displaced workers had no alternative but to move elsewhere. During November and December a steady stream of non-paying passengers made the train journey from Mt Isa to Townsville. On 13 and 14 December police arrested a total of 112 men, one woman and one child and charged them under Section 34 of the Vagrancy Act.<sup>(82)</sup> The local press hailed the arrest as the largest single 'bag' of illegal train travellers in Australia's history.<sup>(83)</sup> In their reports the police explained that such offenders usually were not apprehended because the small number of officers at isolated stations could not successfully effect arrests. On this occasion the police made no premature attempts to halt the train. Instead they marshalled their forces at the train's destination and arrested the offenders on the outskirts of Townsville.<sup>(84)</sup>

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81. Read, *op.cit.*, p 2; and Huelin, *op.cit.*, p 34f

82. Police Report, 23 November, 1933, item 33/9116, HS0/A3662, QSA.

83. Townsville Daily Bulletin, 14 November, 1933.

84. Police Report, 16 November, 1933, item 33/210, HS0/A3662, QSA.



When confronted, the unemployed offered no resistance and did not attempt to escape.<sup>(85)</sup> The train had made a scheduled stop at Charters Towers and the local police inspector advised the unemployed that they were committing an offence. Their spokesman replied that:

We are quite aware that we can be arrested, but this matter has been fully organised, and it is our intention of travelling to Townsville,...We intend to stick together. We have not caused any trouble along the line and we do not want any, but we intend to stick together until we reach Townsville. (86)

The inspector made no attempt to arrest them but wired ahead to Townsville and warned of their imminent arrival.<sup>(87)</sup> When the police met the train they offered the unemployed the opportunity to pay their fares. Only one man took advantage of this offer. The remainder said: 'No, we don't want it. One in all in'.<sup>(88)</sup> It appears that the unemployed held a number of informal meetings in Mt Isa and decided that the only solution to their predicament was to 'jump the rattler'. They correctly reasoned that if they maintained their solidarity they had a good chance of reaching their destination, even if that meant spending some time in Stewart's Creek jail.

Those charged appeared before a local magistrate, GA Cameron. Cameron was not influenced by the earlier call by the Railway Department to 'get tough' with offenders and he adopted a sympathetic attitude to those before him. He conceded that 'the department viewed this travelling in a rather serious light', but said that 'he was not going to read a lecture or homily to them, because he realized their position. .'.<sup>(89)</sup> He did, however, remonstrate with one man who admitted that he had lost all his

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85. Townsville Daily Bulletin, 14 November, 1933.

86. Police Report, 16 November, 1933, item 33/773, *ibid.*

87. Police Report, 16 November, 1933, item 33/9116, *ibid.*

88. Townsville Daily Bulletin, 14 November, 1933.

89. *ibid.*

money in a two-up game in Mt Isa.<sup>(90)</sup> The woman and child were discharged and the men were given the relatively light sentence of a £1 fine or fourteen days in jail.

There is no evidence that the action of these unemployed workers had any overt political objective. They did not claim to represent any political group or persuasion. Their act of civil disobedience was not designed as a protest against the Government's unemployment policy. The unemployed decided on a collective solution to their personal predicament of being stranded in an isolated town with no prospect of work. They had little doubt that they would be arrested on arrival in Townsville, but they accepted this in a spirit of determined resignation. Their attitude was summed up by the young man who, when he was sentenced, said 'we will get a feed and a bath for fourteen days' <sup>(91)</sup>

The Townsville train jumping incident revealed the relationship between the police and the unemployed in a positive light. Frank Huelin, in his memoirs of the depression, examines the 'all-Johns-are-bastards' theory and decides that it was not a true description of the attitudes of most police officers towards the unemployed.<sup>(92)</sup> The circumstances of the depression brought the police and the unemployed into regular contact. At an individual level the nature of these contacts depended on the personalities involved. However, when the unemployed engaged in political activity and when the police were fulfilling their function as agents of the State Government the relationship between the two was invariably taut. Under Queensland's unemployment relief scheme police stations served as distribution points for ration coupons and as pay offices for intermittent relief workers. In the Brisbane

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90. *ibid.*, 15 November, 1933.

91. *ibid.*; and Police Report, 16 November, 1933, item 33/9116, *op.cit.*

92. Huelin, *op.cit.*, pp 18,24,149,155 and 170.

metropolitan area an officer of the Department of Labor and Industry was usually on hand to render clerical assistance to the police. But in the country towns the local police sergeant had sole responsibility for relief administration. The eligibility provisions of the relief regulations gave the police extensive discretionary powers. The Maryborough shelter shed dispute showed that the police were sometimes prepared to exercise these powers in a punitive way against unemployed militants. Some of the unemployed also took advantage of the relief provisions by assuming three or four names, culled from the electoral role or from gravestones, in order to draw extra rations.<sup>(93)</sup> Overworked police officers often reacted impatiently to the unemployed and the Home Secretary received a regular stream of complaints from men who claimed that they had been abused, assaulted or wrongly denied relief by officious policemen.<sup>(94)</sup> Most of these complaints were dismissed on the grounds that they were vexatious and/or emanated from communists.<sup>(95)</sup>

It appears that not all the unemployed were dissatisfied with the treatment they received from the police. In 1934 the Home Secretary received a petition signed by ninety-two relief workers of Clayfield attesting to the humane treatment afforded them by the local police sergeant. They were lavish in their praise;

Acting Sergeant...has at all times treated us unfortunates who have had to appeal to his and the Government's assistance. His treatment and attention, assistance and consideration and civility has at all times been that of a man who understands the unemployed's plight...<sup>(96)</sup>

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93. Healy, *op.cit.*, p 12.

94. Paull to Hanlon, 20 February, 1933, item 33/1562, HS0/A3619;  
Sharpe to Hanlon, 7 February, 1933, item 33/1941, HS0/A3621;  
and Police Report, 18 May, 1934, item 34/29005, HS0/A3692, QSA.

95. Ryan to Hanlon, 28 March, 1933, item 33/2014, HS0/A3600, QSA.

96. Petition to Hanlon, 24 February, 1934, item 34/1574,  
HS0/A3600, QSA.

The unemployed wrote in this tone because they had heard rumours that the sergeant was to be transferred to a country posting. They concluded their petition by imploring the minister not to victimise the sergeant in this manner. Unfortunately the authenticity of the petition was undermined by the fact that it was typed with the distinctive ribbon and on official paper usually reserved for police reports. The Police Department believed that the sergeant had played a rather too active role in the preparation of the petition and he was duly transferred.

Members of the police force strongly objected to the requirement that they act as agents of the Department of Labor and Industry in the administration of the relief programme. In August 1932 the Police Union asked the Home Secretary to relieve the force of these responsibilities and to transfer them to the local government authorities. The union argued that the large increase in the level of unemployment meant that many officers devoted more time to relief administration than they did to their normal duties. This adversely affected the morale and efficiency of the force as a crime fighting unit. Hanlon explained to the union that the Government faced a difficult financial situation and could not afford to engage additional staff to administer the relief programme; nevertheless, he promised to raise the matter with the Premier.<sup>(97)</sup> Forgan Smith reacted angrily to the proposal. He told Hanlon in a confidential memo that 'the contact of the police with the unemployed,..., should make them count their blessings, in being so much more fortunate'<sup>(98)</sup> The police retained their responsibilities in regard to unemployment relief.

Supervision of the unemployed gave rise to other clashes between the police and the Government. Both the Moore and Forgan Smith Governments expected to be kept fully informed of the activities of the militant unemployed organisations. Police

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97. Deputation from Police Union to Hanlon, 1 August, 1932, item 32/8113, HSO/A3600, QSA.

98. Smith to Hanlon, 27 October, 1932, item 32/8118, *ibid.*

officers regularly attended unemployed meetings and twice a day visited the Labor Exchange, the Trades Hall and the CPA offices in order to obtain advance warning of planned marches and demonstrations. In the early hours of 16 December, 1932 a constable confronted two CPA and unemployed activists on their way home from a bill posting expedition. There was strong circumstantial evidence, both were carrying posters and pots of glue, that an illegal act had been committed, but the constable did not actually observe these acts and no arrest was made.<sup>(99)</sup> One of the suspects subsequently lodged a complaint with the Police Department in which he alleged that the constable had called him 'a communist bastard' and was constantly harrassing him.<sup>(100)</sup> The police commissioner initiated an internal inquiry and the constable was formally charged with misconduct. He appeared before a departmental tribunal in February 1933. Both the complainant and his colleague submitted written statements and appeared before the hearing to give oral testimony. However, after the first morning's session they both declined to testify further. The inquiry then found in favour of the constable.

Some months later the secretary of the Police Union, HP Talty, wrote to the Home Secretary and complained that the department had behaved negligently in the affair. He argued that the police had been issued with a clear directive from their 'superiors' to 'do all in their power to suppress the activities of those who play a prominent part in the Communist Party's activities', but that when a specific case arose the department was prepared to believe the 'Communists' rather than one of its own officers.<sup>(101)</sup> The Government did not accept this criticism gracefully and Hanlon wrote across the letter: 'I am getting the impression that the secretary of the union is a communist' Talty had, in fact, stood as a Lang Plan candidate at the 1931 Federal election.

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99. Police Report, 16 December, 1932, item 32/1004, HS0/A3640, QSA.

100. Hurworth to Hanlon, 18 December, 1932, item 32/1020, *ibid.*

101. Talty to Hanlon, 15 June, 1933, item 33/4859, *ibid.*

A regular cause of conflict between the authorities and the unemployed was the inconsistent policies and guidelines related to the granting of permits for street marches. Within the Brisbane metropolitan area the police had authority under the Traffic Act to grant such permits. In the non-metropolitan area the power rested with the local councils; the police merely 'assisted' the councils in the enforcement of the act. In practice the police played a dominant role and would not grant a permit to a 'questionable' group without referring the matter to the Home Secretary. Unemployed organisations fell into the 'questionable' category because the police regarded their activities as being communist inspired. In May 1932 the Rockhampton Unemployed Union lodged an application to hold a street meeting. The local police inspector informed them that he was not prepared to accept responsibility for issuing a permit and that he would contact Brisbane.<sup>(102)</sup> He communicated with the Home Secretary and informed him that, although the site applied for was available, those organising the protest were communists and 'as no useful purpose will be served by the holding of the meeting, I recommend that the application be not approved'<sup>(103)</sup> Hanlon endorsed this decision without further investigation.

The uncertainty that existed over who had the ultimate authority to issue permits produced inconsistent decisions and policies that frustrated and alienated the unemployed organisations. In 1934 the local Communist Party branch and a number of unemployed groups complained that Fred Paterson had wrongly been denied permission to hold an election meeting by the Gladstone City Council. The under secretary of the Home Office advised the complainants that: 'The control of traffic...is under the Gladstone Town Council. The police only assist the council in the administration of the Traffic Act'<sup>(104)</sup> This pronouncement did little to clarify the situation

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102. Rockhampton Unemployed Union to Hanlon, 25 May, 1933, item 33/4041 HS0/A3655, QSA.

103. Police Report, 9 May, 1933, item 33/3871, *ibid.*

104. Gall to Healy, 17 October, 1934, item 34/7476, HS0/A3711, QSA.

because it did not spell out a distinct sphere of responsibility between the councils and the police. Furthermore, it made no reference to the important de facto role of the Home Secretary. An incident that occurred in Bowen in 1935 illustrated the complications that could arise in the area of permits for street marches. The Mayor of Bowen, Alderman Russell, was elected as a Labor candidate but was faced with an anti-Labor majority on the council.

The local unemployed organisation approached the mayor with a request to hold an open air meeting. He granted a permit and the meeting went ahead without incident. At the next meeting of council he was roundly criticised and a motion was passed restraining him from granting any further permits to 'communist' speakers. Russell gave notice that he had no intention of abiding by such a resolution. A few weeks later an unemployed organiser asked the town clerk for a permit and was refused. Nevertheless the meeting was held and was interrupted by a council employee who demanded to know by what authority the unemployed were occupying council property whereupon the speaker produced a letter of authority signed by the mayor. This infuriated the other councillors and an emergency meeting was convened and the mayor censured. The meeting also directed the Town Clerk to inform the Home Secretary of the details of the incident.<sup>(105)</sup> Hanlon decided that the matter was sufficiently complex to require investigation by the Government's legal offices. The Crown Law office advised that the mayor had exceeded his authority and that he was bound to abide by and implement the resolutions of the council.<sup>(106)</sup>

The rapid expansion of the intermittent relief work scheme after 1930 introduced a new element into the pattern of industrial relations in Queensland - strikes by relief workers. Sub-standard working

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105. Bowen Town Council to Hanlon, 30 January, 1934, item 34/947, HS0/A3675; and Memo, 13 February, 1934, item 34/1191, QSA.

106. Hanlon to Russell, 27 February, 1934, item 34/947, *ibid.*

working conditions and low rates of pay were the major causes of these disputes. The work itself was arduous and unrewarding and many of the men were undernourished and/or unused to heavy physical labour. Petty harassment by officious gangers often produced outbursts of violence. One ganger in Brisbane gained notoriety by his practice of throwing stones at slow workers. This proved too much for one man who, armed with a trench shovel, chased the ganger from a job site.<sup>(107)</sup> Most relief strikes ended in defeat for the workers because they did not possess the industrial resources that were normally available to employed unionists. Relief workers were not engaged by private employers who stood to lose financially from a prolonged dispute. Instead, they were employed by the State Government and local councils on non-essential projects for which a specific amount of money was allocated. Relief work was a form of charity, and if some chose to reject that charity by going on strike there was no shortage of men willing to take their places.

Minor disputes were sometimes settled in favour of the workers by a system of informal conciliation and arbitration.<sup>(108)</sup> Relief workers never succeeded in winning a strike against the combined power of the State Government, the local authorities and the police. In 1933 a gang of relief workers in the Bulimba area declared a strike in favour of better pay and working conditions. The Government and the Brisbane City Council steadfastly refused to concede their demands and when a deputation met the Minister of Labor and Industry he told them that: 'I refuse to be intimidated by a few communists, who have led a lot of decent men into an agitation against the Government and its policy'.<sup>(109)</sup> Hynes carried on the policy laid down by his CPNP predecessor, HE Sizer, who had made it clear at the commencement of the relief work programme in 1930 that 'those who cause trouble (among relief workers) are to be dismissed immediately,

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107. Read, op.cit., p 2.

108. Police Report, 5 January, 1933, item 33/238, HSO/A3612; and Police Report, 12 September, 1933, 33/8228, HSO/A3654, QSA.

109. Brisbane Courier, 13 September, 1933.



and will be debarred from getting rations'.<sup>(110)</sup> When workers on a relief project at Breakfast Creek refused to purchase yearly tickets in the AWU the Labor Government dismissed 136 of them.<sup>(111)</sup> On this occasion the unemployed took the novel step of asking the State Governor, Leslie Wilson, to intercede on their behalf.<sup>(112)</sup> Wilson informed them that his constitutional responsibilities did not permit him to take any independent action on the issue, but that he would convey their grievances to the Premier. Forgan Smith remained unmoved and insisted that if the men wished to be re-employed they would have to purchase union tickets.<sup>(113)</sup>

Most relief work was organised on a rotational gang method. This was designed to distribute the available work as evenly as possible, but it also made effective strike activity extremely difficult.<sup>(114)</sup> Major relief projects would involve three or four separate gangs attending on different days of the week. This meant, of course, that the completion of the project did not depend on the regular attendance of any one gang. In order to exert any real influence a striking gang had to win the active support of all other gangs on the project. The police broke relief strikes at Wynnum in 1933 and at Maryborough in 1934 by placing a guard on those gangs still at work and by preventing the strike leaders entering the job site.<sup>(115)</sup> The lessons of these defeats were not lost on other relief workers and relatively few such strikes occurred in Queensland during the depression.

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110. Queensland Industrial Gazette, 24 May, 1930, p 285.

111. See chapter 10 for details.

112. Masters to Wilson and Reply, 24 August, 1936, item 36/5738, PRE/A1157, QSA.

113. Smith to Wilson, 15 September, 1936, item 36/5738, *ibid.*

114. Police Report, 25 October, 1933, item 33/9120, HS0/A3658, QSA.

115. Police Report, 19 October, 1933, item 33/1187, *ibid.*; and Police Report, 2 January, 1934, item 34/173, HS0/A3670, QSA.

The failure of the strikes by relief workers was symptomatic of the general impotence of unemployed organisations in Queensland during the depression. While they were able occasionally to win local victories, such as anti-eviction campaigns, they were easily out-maneuvred by the authorities on issues of consequence. It is perhaps surprising that frustrations engendered by constant political defeat did not drive the unemployed to adopt more violent tactics. Yet rebellion is born of the belief that things can be changed and the general psychological effect of chronic unemployment was to sap the confidence of the workless that their situation could be improved. Instead, they accepted their lot with resignation and waited patiently for 'things' to return to normal.

CHAPTER 12  
CONCLUSION

THE 'DEPRESSION GENERATION'  
AND THE  
QUEENSLAND PARTY SYSTEM

The widespread unemployment and consequent impoverishment that were the hallmarks of the depression are often claimed to have exerted a deep and lasting influence on the people who lived through that era.

Robin Gollan's comment that

It has become a truism that one of the clearest lines dividing the generations of people living today is the line which separates those who lived through, and those who were born after, the great depression (1)

has been eagerly endorsed by depression commentators. The central concerns of this thesis have been the effect of the depression on groups, institutions and policies rather than directly on individuals. Yet the post-depression electoral behaviour of Queenslanders and its impact on the party system require some discussion.

The commonly used expression 'the depression generation' was coined by Angus Campbell and his associates in their study of American electoral behaviour to refer to that group 'who were in their twenties and thirties during the depths of the Great Depression, a generation long assumed to have been strongly influenced by economic events'.<sup>(2)</sup> Popular portraits see this generation as being excessively cautious and security-obsessed because of its experience of the depression years. Campbell was specifically concerned with the generation's political allegiances, and he reports that as late as the mid-1950s the depression had a greater impact on voters who came of age in the early thirties than did World War Two or the Korean war.<sup>(3)</sup> Moreover, people who cast their first vote during the depression displayed a greater preference for the Democrats than did the electorate as a whole:

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1. R Gollan, The Coal Miners of New South Wales, Melbourne, 1963, p 177.
  2. Angus Campbell et alia, The American Voter, New York, 1960, p 197.
  3. ibid., p 21.

the Great Depression swung a heavy proportion of the young electors towards the Democratic party and gave that party a hold on that generation, which it has never fully relinquished. (4)

The research of Campbell and others has relied heavily on an extensive pool of opinion poll data that generally is not available for Australia. However, in 1970 Don Aitkin, Michael Kahan and Sue Barnes drew on a sample of the Australian electorate to provide a brief glimpse of the depression generation in this country. They found that 'the people of the depression generation do not appear today to be distinctively different from those of other generations in their broad outlook on politics and society'.<sup>(5)</sup> But in the narrower field of party preference they discovered that those who had first voted in Federal elections between 1931 and 1937 tended to support the ALP in much the same way as young Americans had supported the Democrats.<sup>(6)</sup>

When applying these findings to Queensland electoral behaviour after 1932, it is helpful to relate them to the theory of electoral fluctuations developed by V O Key and the Michigan Survey Research Center. In 1955 Key published his 'theory of critical elections' to explain the major realignment from Republican to Democrat that occurred with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election to the American Presidency in 1932.<sup>(7)</sup> Key and others<sup>(8)</sup> have argued that this 'sharp and durable' realignment took place because new voters were impressed with Democratic policies to deal with the depression and unemployment. Their research produced a classification of elections

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4. ibid., p 155.

5. Don Aitkin, Michael Kahan and Sue Barnes, 'What Happened to the Depression Generation?' Labour History, 17 November, 1970, p 179.

6. ibid., p 176: Don Aitkin, Stability and Change in Australian Politics, Canberra, 1977, p 95f.

7. V O Key, 'A Theory of Critical Elections', Journal of Politics, 17, 1955, p 11.

8. V O Key, The Responsible Electorate, New York, 1966, p 18f.

that can be applied to Queensland's post-depression electoral patterns. They are summarised and expanded by Neil Blewett as follows:

1. maintaining, in which the prevailing pattern of partisan attachments persists and the hegemonic party is successful;
2. deviating, in which the prevailing pattern of partisan attachments persists but temporary defections cause the defeat of the hegemonic party;
3. realigning, in which the partisan attachments of some segments change and a new hegemonic party is created;
4. converting, in which the basic partisan attachments change but reinforce the position of the hegemonic party;
5. inflating, in which the prevailing pattern of attachments persists but short term defections inflate the victory of the hegemonic party (Blewett).<sup>(9)</sup>

Blewett has chosen to use seats rather than votes in his application of these categories to Australian elections. Such a practice is not appropriate to a study of Queensland post-depression electoral behaviour because of the distorting effect of electoral systems. In addition to problems of malapportionment,<sup>(10)</sup> parliaments drawn from single-member, geographically located constituencies produce exaggerated majorities in the legislature - the so-called cube rule.<sup>(11)</sup> An example of the 'winner's bonus' was the 1935 State election where Labor won 75 percent of the seats

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9. Neil Blewett, 'A Classification of Australian Elections: Preliminary Notes', Politics, 6;1., May, 1971, p 87; See also G Vaughan, 'The 1977 Election: Maintaining the 1974 Realignment' in MB Cribb and P Boyce (eds), Politics in Queensland: 1977 and Beyond, Brisbane, 1980.
  10. Serious malapportionment was not a feature of Queensland's electoral system in the 1930s and the Dauer/Kelsay index never fell below 45 percent.
  11. See Douglas W Rae, The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, revised edition, New Haven, 1971, p 27. The cube rule states that in single-member electoral systems the relationship of seats between two parties will be not less than the cube of the ratio of their votes. It thus draws attention to the 'winner's bonus' phenomenon.

in the Legislative Assembly on 53 percent of the primary vote. Finally, in order to estimate the impact of the depression on people's electoral behaviour aggregate votes not seats must be measured.

In terms of the above classifications Queensland's 'depression elections' were as follows:

1. 1929      DEVIATING
2. 1932      REALIGNING
3. 1935      CONVERTING
4. 1938      MAINTAINING

The central issues at stake in elections 1 to 3 were economic, with the last two favouring the ALP. In this Queensland duplicated the US pattern whereby the Government in power during the worst years of the crisis suffered electoral opprobrium as the 'depression party'. Queensland's longterm electoral alignment was, at the same time, significantly different from that analysed by Key and his associates. American Federal electoral history was divided into two neat segments by FDR's 1932 victory. The years 1921 to 1932 were dominated by a succession of Republican presidents and those from 1932 to 1952 by Democrats. In Queensland two lengthy periods of Labor ascendancy were separated by a non-Labor interregnum of three years.

The important question is what effect, if any, did the depression years have on the subsequent electoral history of Queensland? Answers to this question depend, at least in part, on whether one concentrates on votes won in the constituencies or on seats obtained in the parliament. If the second perspective is preferred, the depression made an important contribution to the restoration and confirmation of Labor as the dominant political party at State level. At the 1935 poll Labor converted its relatively narrow 1932 majority of four seats into a massive thirty seat advantage over the CPNP. Nineteen thirty-five was the election that firmly established Labor as the Government and which produced the fracture of the anti-Labor parties that was to persist until 1957. The 1932 election was, in another sense, just as important because it was then that the ALP managed to recover the electoral support it had lost in 1929 and to regain the Treasury benches.

As the 1930s progressed, the ALP benefitted from the electoral and organisational fragmentation of the non-Labor groups. This disintegration of the anti-Labor parties is reflected in the growth of the Rae electoral index after 1935 (See Table 12:1).<sup>(12)</sup> This drift towards a multi-party system in the electorates was not reflected in the parliament where the Rae legislative index reflected an essentially dual-party alignment, but with occasional leanings towards a one-party dominant system. Labor remained the most successful legislative group because the single-member, non-proportional voting system advantaged whichever party was able to establish a simple majority over its several rivals. Only in 1938 did the ALP suffer slightly from the effects of electoral multi-partyism when the Protestant Labour Party secured 8.75 percent of the vote and took a seat from the Government.

A perusal of Table 12:1 and Graphs 12:1 and 12:2 illustrates these points. Labor experienced a quite dramatic electoral recovery between 1929 and 1935. Thereafter the party's electoral performance reverted to its pre-depression pattern. In the six elections that were held between 1915 and 1929 the ALP averaged 48 percent of the primary vote; and in the six elections between 1932 and 1947 its average share was also 48 percent. Throughout the forty years 1915 to 1956 the ALP was regularly the single most popular party in Queensland, but this electoral popularity exceeded 50 percent at only half the number of State elections held over that period.

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12. The Rae fractionalisation index is a measure of party competitiveness. It is discovered by summing the square of each party's decimal share of the votes (or seats) and subtracting this amount from 1.00. It ranges from a one-party system (0.00) through a pure two-party system (0.50) to a multi-party system (1.00). See *ibid.*, Chapter 3.

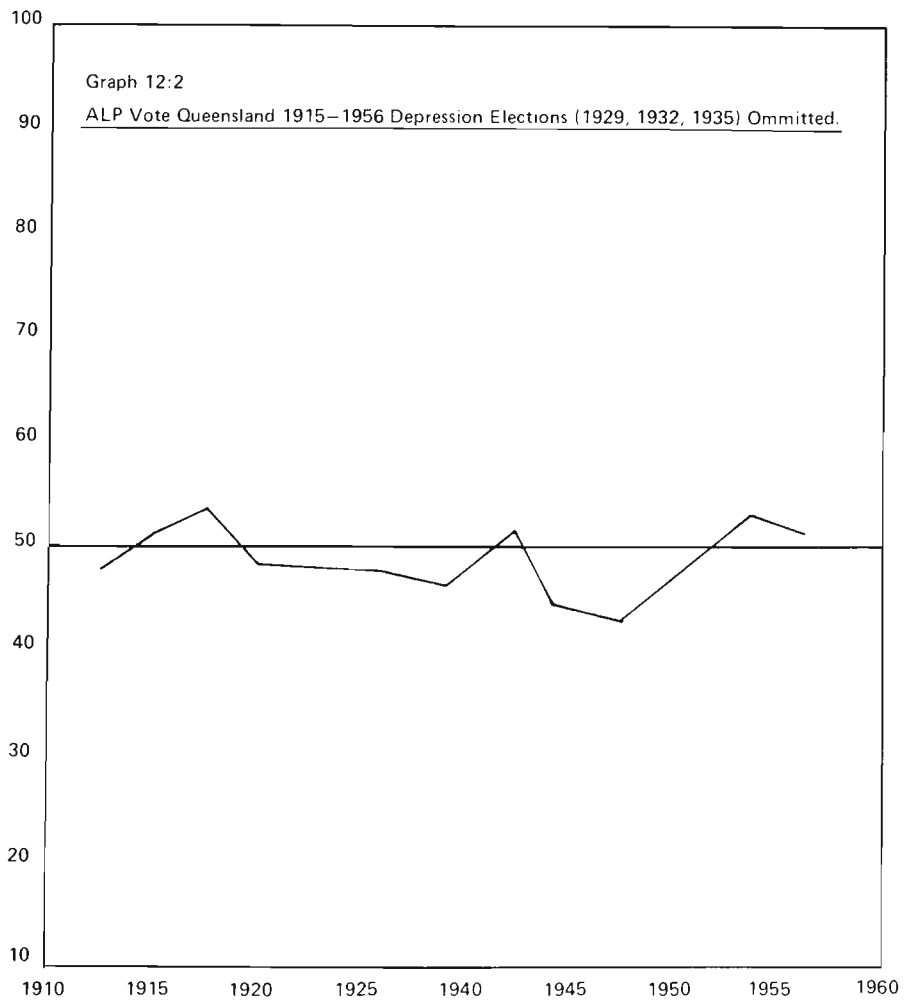
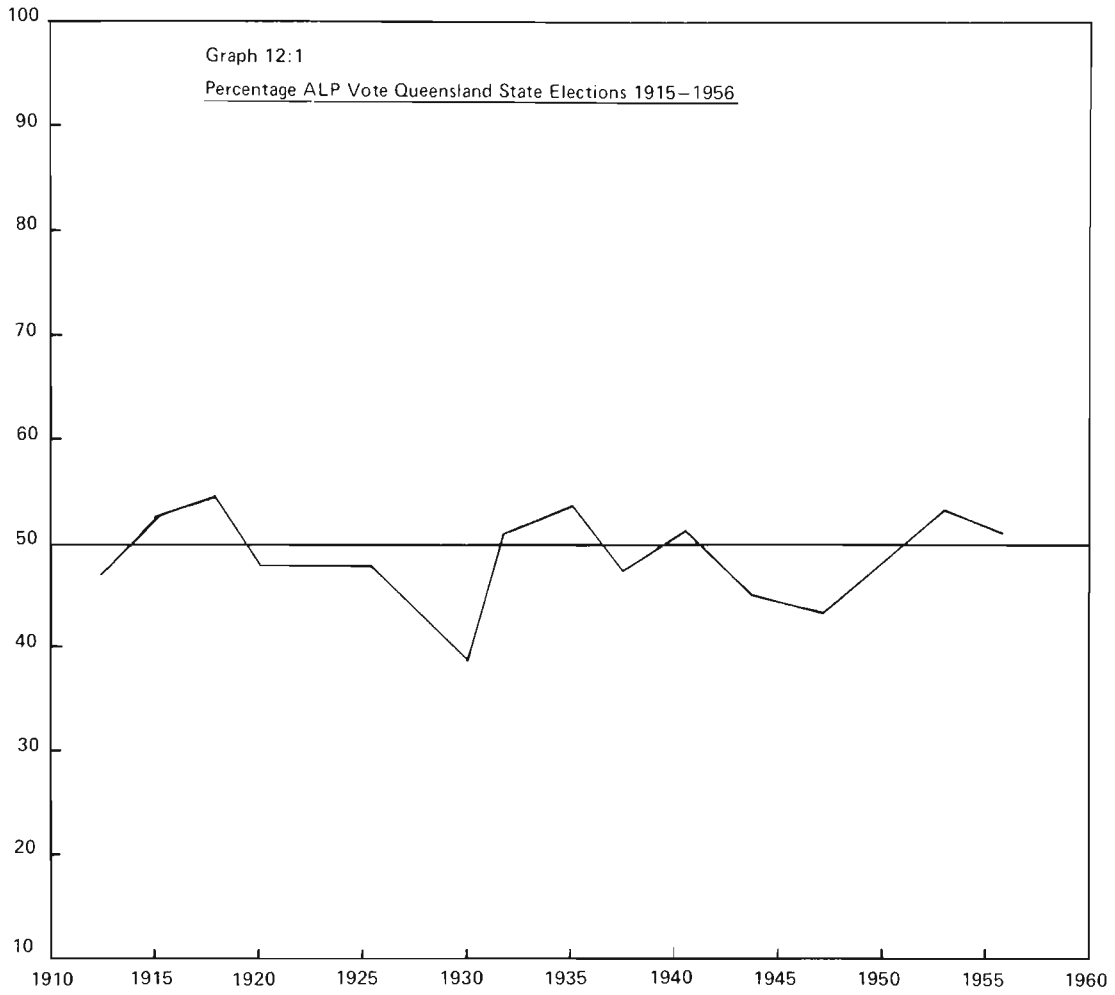


TABLE 12:1

QUEENSLAND PARTY SYSTEM 1915-1956

ELECTION	ALP % VOTES	ALP % SEATS	RAE ELECTORAL INDEX	RAE LEGISLATIVE INDEX
1915	52	62	0.55	0.52
1918	54	66	0.51	0.47
1920	48	52	0.66	0.62
1923	48	60	0.62	0.56
1926	48	60	0.53	0.51
1929	40	37	0.54	0.51
1932	50	57	0.56	0.47
1935	53	74	0.59	0.38
1938	47	70	0.70	0.46
1941	51	66	0.68	0.49
1944	45	60	0.71	0.59
1947	43	56	0.71	0.62
1950	47	58	0.65	0.57
1953	53	70	0.64	0.46
1956	51	68	0.64	0.48

Table 12:1 shows why Labor remained the hegemonic party after 1932. The single member electoral system meant that simple and narrow absolute majorities of votes were translated into disproportionate legislative majorities. A comparison of the electoral and legislative indices reveals that while there was evidence of multi-partyism in the constituencies, this trend was not paralleled in the parliament.



The specific contribution of the depression to Labor's subsequent electoral success was that it accelerated the recovery of the electoral support that had been lost in 1929. Labor's narrow victory in 1932 placed the party in a position to reap the benefits of the quite substantial improvement that occurred in the economy between 1932 and 1935. The ALP, like the Democrats in the USA, became associated in the electorate's mind as the party of recovery, whereas the CPNP suffered the fate of the Republicans. The depression in Queensland did recruit voters to the Labor party, but not in the proportions that are sometimes imagined. Graphs 12:1 and 12:2 illustrate that while the depression elections (1929, 1932 and 1935) exhibited a high level of electoral volatility, they had little effect on longterm voting patterns in Queensland. Don Aitkin has provided an important corrective to a common misconception about Australian electoral behaviour:

Governments may be slaughtered in depression elections, but such results follow from movements in electoral support that are only slightly greater than usual. (13)

In the United States these electoral movements took place mainly among 'new voters', that is, persons who came of age in time to cast their first vote in 1928, 1932 or 1936 or who had come of age before 1928 but had not previously chosen to vote. (14)

Phillip Converse has argued that these 'markedly Democrat' new voters provided the New Deal majorities and that Republican converts were relatively insignificant. (15)

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13. Aitkin, Stability and Change, p 13.

14. Campbell, op.cit., p 153; Norman H Nie et alia, The Changing American Voter, Harvard, 1976, p 94; Key, The Responsible Electorate, p 18-21.

15. Phillip E Converse, 'Public Opinion and Voting Behaviour', in Polsby, N and Greenstein, F, (eds), Handbook of Political Science, vol 4, Massachusetts, 1975, p 141.

VO Key has underlined the importance of new voters in determining electoral outcomes,<sup>(16)</sup> and it is interesting to view Queensland electoral behaviour in the 1930s from this perspective.

A popular view of Australian electoral behaviour is that the fate of Governments is determined by a group of 'swinging voters' who possess weak party identification and who are prone to switch their allegiance from party to party at regular intervals. There are a number of difficulties with this contention. First, the concept of electoral 'swing' itself is controversial and methodologically hazy.<sup>(17)</sup> Second, attempts to locate and describe the swinging voter have not been very successful. Finally, proponents of the swinging voter notion often overlook the fact that an electorate can undergo a substantial alteration in personnel from one polling date to the next. This occurs because existing electors die or emigrate from the electorate to be replaced by voters who have come of age since the last election plus immigrants. Because of the phenomenon known as 'generational voting',<sup>(18)</sup> these changes can produce an illusion of 'swing' without any voters actually changing their allegiance from party to party.

Unfortunately it is not possible to identify precisely the number and party affiliations of new voters in Queensland in the late twenties and early thirties.<sup>(19)</sup> Yet certain conclusions can be drawn from what data do exist. There is no reason to assume that the voting pattern of the 'depression generation' identified by Aitkin, Kahan and Barnes is not valid for Queensland and that they favoured the ALP in the ratio of 3:2. Because of the existence of compulsory voting and enrolment, it is possible to estimate approximately the number of new voters at each election by utilising the growth in enrolment and the adult death rate.

By using this method it appears that approximately 5 percent of the

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16. Key, The Responsible Electorate, p 22.

17. M Mackerras, Elections 1975, Sydney, 1975, Appendix A.

18. Aitkin, Stability and Change, p 95f.; Richard E Zody, 'Generations and the Development of Political Behaviour', Politics, 5;1, May, 1970, pp 18-29.

19. Principal Electoral Officer (Queensland) to Author, 21 April, 1980.

enrolled electorate in 1929, 1932 and 1935 were 'new voters'. It is immediately apparent that this group alone cannot account for the 32.5 percent growth (or 13 point improvement) in the ALP vote that occurred between 1929 and 1935. Clearly Labor won in 1932 and again in 1935 because it was also able to recruit converts from among the ranks of CPNP supporters.

It seems that Labor assembled electoral majorities in 1932 and after because the depression prevented the new supporters that the CPNP won in 1929 becoming set in their electoral habits. The years between 1926 and 1932 were exceptional because of the substantial movements that occurred in electoral support for the ALP in Queensland. Before and after this period the Labor vote remained relatively stable. Yet from 1926 to 1929 Labor's vote dropped 8 points from 48 percent to 40 percent, only to recover 10 points to 50 percent in 1932. This uncharacteristic volatility of the electorate was depression induced and allowed Labor to recoup its 1929 losses in only one election. It was argued in Chapter 1 that economic factors were crucial in explaining the movement away from the ALP in 1929, and it is likely that had the world depression not occurred the CPNP would have proved much more difficult to displace as the State Government. The most important longterm political effect on the great depression in Queensland was the restoration and confirmation of the Labor party as the State Government. The years of economic crisis did not produce durable, new political creeds, practices or organisations to rival those of the 1920s. Labor returned to power as a moderate social democratic party committed to restoring the State to prosperity. In doing so it promoted few bold economic schemes and preferred to rely on traditional Labor notions of state intervention through public works and organised marketing--albeit with an agrarian slant. The 'left' in the party had lost ground during the depression and authority lay with a conservative coalition of senior parliamentarians and AWU officials. In a political sense, Queensland was back to normal in 1932 and was to remain so until the defeat of the ALP in 1957.

Queensland politics in the 1930s were less urgent and less dramatic than those of the Commonwealth or the States of New South Wales and Victoria. Queensland's period of drama and political change had occurred in the second half of the 1920s. Those years were characterised by economic stagnation, the fragmentation of the Labor movement and the resurgence of the non-Labor parties. The year 1929 was something of a turning point in Queensland political history - but not for the reasons that many contemporaries imagined. Labor's electoral defeat did not herald a stable realignment in the State's politics because the Moore administration was consumed by the world economic collapse, thereby allowing Labor to regroup and to return to Government after only one term in Opposition.

APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

APPENDIXBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES\*

- WH AUSTIN Undersecretary Queensland Department of Labor and Industry 1926-1934.
- WH BARNES MLA Bulimba 1901-1915, 1918-23, Wynnum 1923-1933, Treasurer in the Moore Government; died 1933.
- SAM BRASSINGTON MLA Balonne 1927-1932, Fortitude Valley 1933-1950; Speaker of the Legislative Assembly 1944-1950; AWU official.
- JB BRIGDEN Director Bureau of Economics and Statistics 1929-1932; Director of Bureau of Industry 1932-1938; Financial adviser to Queensland Government 1932-1938; University professor.
- ANDREW BROWN Secretary Brisbane branch WWF 1926-1929; expelled ALP 1929.
- SJ BRYAN Secretary Electrical Trades Union 1918-1944; President TLC 1929-1937; QCE member 1923-1957; Secretary ALP 1940-1952.
- FRANK BULCOCK MLA Barcoo 1919-1942; Minister Agriculture and Stock 1932-1942; AWU official.
- JL CAMPBELL Retired judge of the NSW supreme court; selected by Moore Government to conduct Mungana royal commission.
- RJ CARROLL Secretary ASE/AEU 1913-1935; QCE member 1917-1940; Secretary ALP 1936-1940.
- TOM COMBEY Secretary Unemployed and Relief Workers' State Council 1936-1940.
- JACK DASH MLA Mundingburra 1920-1940; Minister for Transport 1932-1939; AWU official.

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\* The purpose of these notes is to help the reader to identify persons mentioned in the text. They are not intended to provide comprehensive biographies.



JW DAVIDSON Queensland Commissioner for Railways 1918-1938.

WH DEMAINE President ALP 1916-1938; QCE member 1901-1938; editor Maryborough Alert.

JAMES DUHIG Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane.

JM DURKIN AWU western district Secretary; expelled AWU and ALP 1926; Left wing candidate State election 1929.

CLARRIE FALLON Secretary AWU 1933-1950; Vice-President ALP 1933-1938; President 1938-1950; QCE member 1928-1950.

WILLIAM GILLIES MLA Eacham 1912-1925; Premier February to October 1925; appointed Board of Trade 1925; died 1928.

JOHN GOODWIN Governor of Queensland 1927-1932.

EM 'NED' HANLON MLA Ithaca 1926-1952; Home Secretary 1935-1944; Premier 1946-1952.

HAROLD HARTLEY MLA Fitzroy 1915-1929; ARU official.

MICK HEALY Active in Communist party and unemployed organisations in the 1930s; Secretary TLC 1946-1952.

FRED HUGHES AFULE President in the 1930s; succeeded by T Kissick.

MP 'MOSSY' HYNES MLA Townsville 1923-1939; Minister for Labour and Industry 1932-1939; QCE member 1926-1939; retained Vice-Presidency of AWU during his parliamentary career; died 1939.

VD KEARNEY ALP branch official and parliamentary candidate; expelled from ALP 1932 as a Lang Planner.

RM KING MLA Logan 1920-1935; Deputy Premier 1929-1932.

THEO KISSICK President AFULE in 1930s ; joined Social Credit party; expelled from ALP 1934; later became a member of the CPA.

JC LAMONT AWU official; QCE member 1928-1941.

JIM LARCOMBE MLA Keppel 1912-1929, Rockhampton 1932-1956; held various portfolios in the 1920s but did not return to cabinet until 1939.

GEORGE LAWSON MHR Brisbane 1931-1961; Secretary ARTWU 1907-1933; QCE member 1916-1932.

- JOHN McCORMACK Unofficial leader of Dobbryn strikers (1931),  
jailed for sabotage; prominent in 'Cairns Riot'  
1932, jailed for assault.
- WILLIAM McCORMACK MLA Cairns 1912-1930; Premier 1925-1929; resigned  
from Parliament 1930; QCE member 1918-1930;  
AWU official.
- LEWIS McDONALD Secretary ALP 1910-1936.
- AD McGILL Barrister; Chairman CPNP; appeared for Crown in  
Mungana Case.
- NF MACROARTY MLA South Brisbane 1929-1932; Attorney-General 1929-  
1932; defeated in South Brisbane 1932 by VC Gair.
- EB 'TED' MAHER MLA Rosewood 1929-1932, Moreton 1932-1949;  
Senator for Queensland 1949-1965; replaced AE Moore  
as Leader of Opposition 1936.
- ARTHUR EDWARD MOORE MLA Aubigny 1915-1941; Leader of Opposition  
1924-1929, 1932-1936; Premier 1929-1932.
- GODFREY MORGAN MLA Murilla 1909-1935, Dalby 1935-1938;  
Minister for Railways 1929-1932.
- TIM MORONEY Secretary ARU 1918-1944; 'expelled' from ALP 1926  
over anti-communist pledge issue.
- GA MORRIS MLA Kelvin Grove 1938-1941; member of Protestant  
Labour Party.
- FRANK NOLAN Central Queensland representative on ARU State  
Council; succeeded Tim Moroney as Secretary ARU 1944.
- MICK O'BRIEN Brisbane representative on ARU State Council;  
President ARU 1930-1952.
- EP 'POOGER' O'BRIEN North Queensland representative on ARU State  
Council; Townsville district Secretary of ARU in  
the 1930s; later joined the CPA and North Queensland  
Labor Party; readmitted to ALP 1957.
- FRED PATERSON MLA Bowen 1944-1950; briefly member of ALP in  
mid-1920s; prominent member of CPA; regular  
parliamentary candidate until election 1944;  
sometime salaried employee of ARU.

- JC PETERSON MLA Normanby 1915-1932, Fitzroy 1932-1935; Home Secretary 1929-1932; left ALP 1921 to join Country party.
- GEORGE POLLOCK MLA Gregory 1915-1939; Speaker of the Legislative Assembly 1932-1939; QCE member 1932-1939; AWU official; expelled AWU 1930 readmitted 1932.
- DAVID RIORDAN MLA Burke 1918-1929; MHR Kennedy 1929-1936; QCE member 1928-1936; AWU official.
- WJ 'BILL' RIORDAN AWU Secretary 1925-1933; QCE member 1919-1933; Vice-President ALP 1923-1933; member Queensland Industrial Court 1933-1953; brother of David.
- HM RUSSELL MLA Toombul 1926-1932, Hamilton 1932-1941; President Queensland Chamber of Commerce 1931-1933; Deputy Leader Opposition 1935; Leader of parliamentary UAP 1936-1941.
- GEORGE RYMER President of ARU 1921-1930; deposed as President 1930.
- WILLIAM FORGAN SMITH MLA Mackay 1915-1942; minister in the Theodore, Gillies and McCormack Governments; Leader of Opposition 1929-1932; Premier 1932-1942; appointed Chairman Sugar Cane Prices Board 1942.
- MARION STEELE Private charity worker Brisbane; she was particularly concerned with unemployment among women.
- JD STORY Queensland Public Service Commissioner 1920-1939.
- HUBERT SIZER MLA Nundah 1918-1923, Sandgate 1923-1935; Minister for Labour and Industry 1929-1932.
- HP TALTY Police Union Secretary; unsuccessful Lang Plan candidate for Brisbane 1931 Federal election.
- EG THEODORE MLA Woothakata 1909-1912, Chillagoe 1912-1925; MHR Dalley (NSW) 1927-1931; Premier 1919-1925; Treasurer in the Scullin Federal Government 1929-1931.
- JOHN VALENTINE AFULE Secretary in the 1930s.
- FRANK WATERS MLA Kelvin Grove 1932-1938; member APWU executive 1926-1932; Secretary APWU 1946-1972; expelled ALP 1941 readmitted 1957.

GEORGE WATSON Undersecretary Premier's Department 1928-1941.  
DAVID WEIR MLA Maryborough 1917-1929; unsuccessfully contested  
leadership QPLP 1929; died later the same year.  
LESLIE WILSON Governor of Queensland 1932-1946; Unionist MP (UK)  
1913-1922.

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