Mass unemployment and unemployment relief policies in New South Wales during the 1930's Great Depression

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MASS UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF POLICIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES DURING THE 1930'S GREAT DEPRESSION

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to any substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the University or other Institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

Signed.....

Damian John Gleeson Date 20 August 1994

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABTEF	Australian Boot Trades Employees Federation
AEB	Australian Employment Bureau
AEEB	Australian Executive Employment Bureau
APR	Aboriginal Protection Reserves
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ALP	Australian Labor Party
BHMC	Broken Hill Municipal Council
BTEF	Baking Trades Employees Federation (Sydney Branch)
CBCS	Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics
CRB	Central Relief Bureau/Central Recording Bureau
CSD	Chief Secretary's Department
CORS	Charity Organisation and Relief Society
COS	Charity Organisation Society
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
DLI	NSW Department of Labour and Industry
EC	Employment Council
ERC	Employment Research Committee
ERW	Emergency Relief Workers
ERWS	Emergency Relief Works Scheme
FRD	Food Relief Depot
FRR	Food Relief Recipient (s)
FTS	Furniture Trades Society
ILO	International Labor Organisation
LD	Labor Daily
LR	Labour Review
LTU	Long term unemployed/ment
MM	Minority Movement
MMM	Militant Minority Movement of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
NSWBS	Benevolent Society of New South Wales
NSWIG	New South Wales Industrial Gazette
NSWPD	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates
OPW	Ordinary Public Works
PIEU	Printing Industry Employees Union
PSB	Public Service Board of NSW
PIR	Permissible Income Regulations
RL	Red Leader
RRW	Rationed Relief Works
SA	Salvation Army
SCIYE	Select Committee Inquiry into Youth Unemployment
SLB	State Labour Bureau
SLE	State Labour Exchange (s)
SMWU	Sheet Metal Workers Union (NSW)
SURWC	State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council
SVdP	St. Vincent de Paul Society
TLC	Trades and Labor Council (NSW)
TLR	The Labour Review

UA	United Action
UAW	United Association of Women
UAP	United Australia Party
UCP	United Country Party
UFC	United Front Committee
UI	Unemployment Insurance
UIS	Unemployment Insurance Scheme
URC	Unemployment Relief Council
URT	Unemployment Relief Tax
UWM	Unemployed Workers Movement
VGB	Vocational Guidance Bureau
WDC	Workers Defence Corps

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ARCHIVAL REPOSITORIES

AAC	Australian Archives (Canberra Office)
ABL	Noel Butlin Archives incorporating the Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University
ABSC	Australian Bureau of Statistics (Canberra Office)
AONSWC	Archives Office of New South Wales (City Repository)
AONSWK	Archives Office of New South Wales (Kingswood Repository)
ASVdP	Archives of St. Vincent de Paul Society Archives, Lewisham
MLNSW	Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
NLA	National Library of Australia
SLV	State Library of Victoria

INTRODUCTION:

Australia's most populated State, New South Wales (NSW), recorded the highest levels of unemployment in Australia during the Great Depression of the 1930s. This experience evoked a series of government policies that aimed to assist the unemployed and reduce their number. As unemployment relief was largely the domain of State governments in the 1930s this thesis focuses on the four State governments - Thomas Bavin, Nationalist, October 1927- November 1930; Jack Lang, Labor, November 1930 to May 1932; Bertram Stevens, Nationalist (1) May 1932 to July 1939; and Alexander Mair, August 1939 to May 1941, (United Australia Party).

Mass unemployment forced the State to take a direct role in relieving the unemployed. But the State's intervention was insufficient and inadequate. Unemployment relief policies were poorly planned, often harshly implemented and limited by the amount of aid or work provided. The failure of these policies created unprecedented levels of poverty, suffering and desperation and was reflected in the extensive travelling of thousands of people throughout NSW in search of employment. The severity of the Depression caused many people to seek assistance for the first time from government and non-government organisations. For example, women received the

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1. The Nationalist party was the predecessor to the United Australia Party. Stevens was in Coalition with the United Country Party, led by Colonel Bruxner.

dole on behalf of their husbands. The issue of women working, and particularly married women, became a point of debate. And youth, unable to obtain regular employment or apprenticeships, were encouraged to further their education by remaining at school or by attending special youth training farms or technical colleges. Overall the 1930s resulted in a legacy of untold suffering for a generation of people.

During the 1930s the NSW economy experienced a severe slump, partial signs of recovery, before entering a second slump. The most apparent characteristic of these conditions was mass unemployment, and with it came the onset of new terms associated with permanent employment such as the "constant employed" and "steady work", as distinct from part-time workers who worked "short time".

Despite a clear need exemplified by mass unemployment the State did not keep accurate records of the number of unemployed. The major limitation of contemporary statistics of the NSW labour force (persons working and those seeking work) was to consistently understate the true level of unemployment. At the depression's trough the extant statistics indicate that at least one-third of adult males in NSW were out of work. But these figures excluded thousands of workers employed on a rationed basis, track travellers and the majority of unemployed women and young people. Moreover, conservative politicians such as Stevens deliberately disguised unemployment by disseminating misleading statistics.

By 1938 it was evident that the mild economic recovery which had began in the mid 1930s was unsustainable. The economy's performance post 1937 was poor. (2) Vital economic indicators such as in manufacturing were again on the decline and the male unemployment rate had risen to 15.4 per cent. (3) No economy could have fully recovered within a few years. However, the evidence indicates that NSW (and probably the rest of Australia) had entered a second major phase of the depression in the later years of the decade. (4) In real terms average earnings in manufacturing in 1938-39 were just above their 1929-30 level. (5)

During the decade a number of official bodies were established, such as the Employment Research Committee (1932-1935), Employment Council (1937-1939) and a Select Committee Inquiry into Youth Unemployment (1939-1940). Despite considerable research and interviews with government, industry and trade union leaders, no inquiry was able to come to terms with the severity of unemployment or recommend policies that had a significant impact on youth and long term unemployment.

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2. B. Dyster, D. Meredith, *Australia in the International Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Sydney, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 146.
3. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *The National Register, 1939, Interim Statistical Summary* (Canberra, 1939), 30.
4. According to some economic historians, Australia experienced a severe economic downturn in 1930-3 and 1937-38. See P. Groenewegen, P. McFarlane, *A History of Australian Economic Thought* (London, Routledge, 1990), 118.
5. B. Dyster, D. Meredith, *op. cit.*, 145.

Historiography has largely focused on the social aspects of the Depression, particularly the experience of the unemployed in the early years of the decade (6) and the political intrigue surrounding Lang's dispute over the Premiers' Plan and his subsequent dismissal by the NSW Governor. (7) By contrast, there has been little focus on government relief policies, statistics of the period and the extent of relief provided by private charitable organisations.

Contemporary economists were largely sympathetic to the policies of the Stevens Government, which was in power for the large part of the 1930s. (8) There have been few

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6. P. Peter, "Social Aspects of the Unemployed in NSW, 1930-1934", PhD, Australian National University, 1964; N. Wheatley, "The Unemployed Who Kicked", MA, Macquarie University, 1976; G.R.F. Spenceley, *The Depression Decade: commentary and documents* (Melbourne, Nelson, 1981); G.R.F. Spenceley, *A Bad Smash: Australia in the Depression of the 1930s* (South Yarra, McPhee Gribble, 1990); W. Lowenstein (ed)., *Wevils in the flour: an oral record of the 1930s Depression in Australia* (South Yarra, Hyland House, 1978); R. Broomhill, *Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide* (St. Lucia, Queensland University Press, 1978; S.R. Gray, "Social Aspects of the Depression in Newcastle, 1929-1934", MA, University of Newcastle, 1981; S.R. Gray, *Newcastle in the Great Depression*, Newcastle History Monographs No. 11 (Newcastle, Council of the City of Newcastle, 1989); J. MacKinolty, "Sugar Bag Days: Sydney Workers and the challenge of the 1930s Depression", MA. Macquarie University, 1972; J.McCarthy, "The Stevens-Bruxner Government, 1932-1937", MA Thesis, University of NSW, 1967.
7. D. Clark, "Was Lang Right" in H. Radi, P Spearitt (eds)., *Jack Lang* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1977); G. Freundberg, *Cause for Power: the official History of the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Labor Party* (Leichardt, NSW, Pluto Press, 1991).
8. F.A. Bland, "A Note upon unemployment relief in New South Wales", *Economic Record*, Vol. V111 (May 1932); F.A. Bland, "The financial and economic policy of the Stevens Government", *Economic Record*, Vol. IX, No. 16 (June 1933).

economic histories of the Depression, though Schedvin's book stands out as a detailed economic analysis of government strategies in the first half of the 1930s. (9) To date there has been no economic history of the Depression in NSW, although there have been several studies of regional cities in NSW, and other capital cities. (10) The existing secondary material and theses fail to place mass unemployment within an inter-war perspective. By contrast, this thesis places emphasis on rising unemployment and structural changes which occurred in NSW in the decade or so prior to the 1930s. It will show that mass unemployment in the 1930s cannot be fully explained without reference to the 1920s when the State failed to check the growth in "industrial" and "structural" unemployment. According to some economic historians the economy had found its way into recession well before the Wall Street crash. (11) Whereas Australian historiography of the 1930s has virtually given little emphasis to rising unemployment in the 1920s, British historians have increasingly viewed the depression as a study of the inter-

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9. B. Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression: A study of economic development and public policy in the 1920s and the 1930s* (Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1970).
10. S.R. Gray, *op. cit.*, A. Walker, *Coaltown: A Social Survey of Cessnock, NSW* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1945; R. Watts, "Aspects of Unemployment Relief in Greater Melbourne, 1929-1932", MA Thesis, La Trobe University, 1974); C. Fox, "Unemployment and the Politics of the Unemployed: Victoria and the Depression 1930/37", PhD. Melbourne. 1984.
11. B.Dyster, D. Meredith., *op. cit.*, 116.

war period. (12) This thesis principally aims to show the inadequacy of government relief policies and programs during the 1930s decade of mass unemployment. The State's response to mass unemployment was slow, inadequate and insufficient. It failed. Proof of the State's failure is evident from a close examination of the rarely quoted though extensive collection of the correspondence to the NSW Chief Secretary, which is held at the Archives Office of NSW. (13)

An important reason for the State's failure was the division in contemporary attitudes about the extent to which the State should provide for the unemployed. A further reason why government policy was inadequate was the sudden and overwhelming nature of unemployment caused by the world slump but exacerbated by excessive spending on public works in the 1920s. An analogy will be drawn between such government expenditure on public works in the 1880s and the 1920s.

One of the most effective policies that successive NSW governments refused to introduce was Unemployment Insurance (UI). Their failure to do so left ad hoc relief measures which did not adequately address the problem. The reasons for this fundamental flaw in government relief policy are

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12. T.J. Hatton, "Unemployment in the Labor Market in the Inter-War Period", Paper to be presented at a Conference at Cambridge on 2-4 April 1991.
13. The records of the NSW Chief Secretary have been carefully analysed and form a core part of this thesis. Robin Walker is one historian who has examined some of the NSW Chief Secretary's correspondence. See R. Walker, "Mr Lang's Dole: The Administration of food relief in New South Wales, 1930-1932", *Labour History,* Vol. 51 (1986).

central to the theme of this thesis. Most NSW workers entered the 1930s without any form of insurance, and despite the sheer volume of unemployment neither the Commonwealth nor the NSW Government had the courage to introduce UI during the Depression Decade.

Unemployment was not a short term problem. It developed in the 1920s; got much worse in the slump; persisted at high levels to the late 1930s and was getting worse when World War Two broke out. Governments failed to address these two problems and therefore their relief policies were inadequate.

Not only did relief policies fail, but those of the Stevens Government made unemployment worse and prolonged the suffering of many unemployed and their dependants. The NSW Labor Party, which was in Opposition for most of the 1930s also failed to put forward significant policy initiatives to reduce unemployment. Charities, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP), provided sustenance, clothing, shelter and to a lesser extent facilitated employment, and thereby made up for some of the State's shortfall.

Within the space of half a century, 1890-1940, attitudes towards the unemployed had shifted from condescending and emphasising an individual's failure to the important role the State had in providing relief to its citizens.

This thesis is broken up into eight chapters. Chapter One provides an historical overview of unemployment by drawing on international attitudes to the unemployed and

experiences of the unemployed in Britain and the United States. Also examined are attitudes to the unemployed and unemployment relief between the 1890s Depression and the start of the Great Depression. During this period private charitable organisations played an important role in providing relief. The uninsured characteristic of most NSW workers is highlighted in the context of the meagre and slow response by the Bavin Government to rising unemployment in 1928 and 1929.

Chapter Two examines the public finances of NSW in the 1930s. Mass unemployment and a largely uninsured labour force forced the State to provide for the unemployed and their dependants. This chapter introduces the different financial policies of the NSW governments of the period. Of chief concern is the failure of the Stevens Government to distribute all of the revenue raised from special unemployment taxes to the unemployed.

Chapter Three examines the range of statistics for identifying unemployment in NSW. Trade union unemployment records receive particular attention with new evidence being presented to support the general accuracy of union statistics as an indicator of unemployment. The limitations of official statistics, such as the exclusion of many unemployed women is highlighted. Other measures of unemployment such as the number of food relief recipients and registrations at State Labour Exchanges are examined.

Chapter Four dissects the unemployed in terms of demographics, type of skills and location. Although inadequate and incomplete statistics hamper the quest for

accuracy this chapter identifies those people who were most vulnerable to unemployment and long term unemployment in the 1930s.

Governments' initial response to unemployment and resulting hunger was food relief. Chapter Five provides an insight into the operation and nature of this state-wide system. With the benefit of a large collection of correspondence relating to the Stevens' Government, the plight of the unemployed and their dependants is a major focus. Attempts to downscale food relief are analysed against a backdrop of attitudes which favoured the unemployed working for the dole. The severity and prolonged economic crisis forced governments to look at other ways of assisting the unemployed. Chapter Six details the public works programs of the 1930s, with particular emphasis on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) and Rationed Relief Works (RRW). But neither the dole nor public works could prevent the growth in long term unemployment (LTU) and the critical issue of youth unemployment remained at the forefront until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Chapter Seven outlines non-government sources of relief, with emphasis on the activities of Christian organisations. Several trade unions provided financial aid to their unemployed members, but generally speaking the union movement provided only moral support. Other non-government organisations, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Salvation Army, were more active in providing material relief and support. Yet the activities of these bodies remained insular and unco-ordinated and

were not able to be closely controlled or monitored by the state authorities. For this reason, charities in New South Wales are much less easily cast in the role of "social controllers" than their counterparts in Victoria, as Spenceley's work has shown. (14) Militant political groups, principally the Communist Party of Australia, tried to organise the unemployed as part of their political activity, though not with a great deal of success, but like the trade unions, these organisations did not provide much in the way of material relief, leaving the Christian charities to shoulder the main burden of filling the gap left by the inadequacies of the State's relief measures and policies.

Chapter Eight explores the consequences of rising unemployment in the later years of the 1930s. The NSW economy had slid back into recession by 1939, leaving policy makers unsure of how to reduce long term unemployment among the unskilled and how to combat the unacceptably high level of youth unemployment. In these circumstances it is possible to describe the 1930s as a lost decade for the people who experienced unemployment and poverty. In another respect, the lack of courage by governments (State and federal) to introduce an

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14. Social control in this context refers to the social, religious and authoritan implications of charity dispensed by non-government agencies. For a discussion of several different definitions of social control, particularly in regard to charities in Melbourne in the Great Depression see G.R.F. Spenceley, "Social Control: The Charity Organisation Society and the evolution of Unemployment Relief Policy in Melbourne during the Great Depression of the 1930s", *Historical Studies*, 22, No. 87 (1986).

unemployment insurance scheme rendered the '30s a decade of lost opportunities. Recovery seemed more the result of exogenous factors than of direct government intervention.

A note on primary records:

In general there is no set of detailed records which pertains to the 1930s. As such several archival repositories were used to uncover unpublished and previously unquoted material relevant to the period under review. They included the Archives Office of New South Wales' repositories at Sydney (AONSWC) and Kingswood (AONSWK), Sydney's Mitchell Library (MLNSW), the Australian National University Archives of Business and Labour (now called the Noel Butlin Archives) (ABL). A smaller collection of records held at the St. Vincent de Paul Society's NSW headquarters at Lewisham, were also consulted.

The largest extant series of correspondence is that pertaining to the office of the NSW Chief Secretary (located at both AONSW repositories). These papers, numbering more than 300,000 letters and files were extensively consulted. They provide an invaluable insight into the operations of the food relief system, various public works programs, the policies of the Bavin, Lang and Stevens Governments and the attitudes of authorities, such as the NSW Police, in the dispensing of relief. Unfortunately, most of the files of the New South Wales Unemployment Relief Council and the Department of Labour and Industry, have not survived.

Another feature of this thesis has been the use of trade union records to test the accuracy of union unemployment records and to show that some individual

unions went to great lengths to provide relief to members. Trade union records were consulted in the Mitchell Library and at the ABL.

Notwithstanding, there are probably more accessible records relating to Australia's convict era than there are extant government records on the unemployed of the 1930s. This raises some important questions about archival procedures in the 1930s, and though they cannot be pursued here it is interesting to quote from the Public Service Board of NSW:

> It is the practice in most government departments to cleanse their records periodically by the withdrawal or destruction, of papers which it is unnecessary to retain. There remain, however, vast accumulations of files relating to matters of which a complete record must necessarily be kept, in protection of the interests of the Government or the public, or for their historical value.
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> These are being added to increasingly, and with the passage of years their suitable storage becomes a serious problem. (15)

The loss of many inter-war records has been attributed to the perceived threat of invasion during the second World War.

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15. *Fortieth Annual Report of the Public Service Board* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1936), 25-26.

> ...the ample record rooms of the Department of Land sufficed until almost the 1939-45 War, while records of the Chief Secretary other than those transferred to the Mitchell Library in 1935 and 1939, remained unperturbed until the threat of invasion in 1942 required it for other purposes. (16)

Unfortunately, NSW Cabinet papers from 1927-June 1935 have been misplaced. Jack Lang's personal papers are nowhere to be found, although references to his administration are sprinkled throughout many different series of records.

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16. R.F. Doust, "The Administration of Official Archives in New South Wales, 1870-1960", M.Lib., University of New South Wales, 1969, 107.

CHAPTER ONE: UNEMPLOYMENT IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 Evolution of the term unemployment:

This chapter explores the concept of unemployment from an international and Australian perspective and examines various unemployment relief measures in the half century before the Great Depression. It begins with an historical overview of the origins of the term unemployment and explains how contemporary attitudes influenced the State's meagre unemployment relief efforts.

For most of the 19th century many British and American social commentators were reluctant to use the term unemployment. The term's limited use reflected low levels of unemployment and a view that those unable to find regular employment came from the wage-earning classes. People unable to obtain regular work were described as in a state of "involuntary idleness" or "want of employment". (1) The unemployed of Victorian Britain were labelled as paupers, vagrants or destitutes. (2) The concept of unemployment was influenced by the emerging schools of

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1. J.A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* (New York, Harper and Row, 1987), 4.
2. B. Eichengreen and T. Hatton, *Interwar Unemployment in an International Perspective* (The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic, 1988), 3.

economic thought in the nineteenth century. Classical and neoclassical economists believed the marketplace would correct any imbalances in employment. Ricardo, a classical economist, postulated that members of the labour force had two options: work or starve, and that employers would hire all who applied for jobs. (3) Essentially Ricardo and his followers placed a great deal of trust in the economic system to deliver jobs to the people. In addition, there was an overriding conviction that material wealth was a necessary prerequisite of social and cultural welfare. (4) Despite the introduction of machinery, technological unemployment was not considered a possibility in Ricardo's first two editions of the *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. (5) Full employment was the normal operating level of an economy, and any departures from it were minor aberrations according to neoclassical economists. (6) They argued that these aberrations were the result of several rigidities within the economic system. First, the inflexibility of wages resulted from trade union interference. A reduction in wages would create more employment and lower the rate of unemployment. (7) Second, some businesses had departed from the standards of perfect competition. (8)

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3. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 71.
4. A.W. Coats, "The Classical Economists, Industrialisation and Poverty", in *The Long Debate on Poverty* (London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1974), 151.
5. *ibid.*, 152.
6. W.J. Barber, *A History of Economic Thought* (London, Penguin, 1987), 223.
7. *loc. cit.*,
8. *loc. cit.*,

Some neo-classical economists such as Pigou argued that unemployment was wholly caused by the maladjustment between wage-rates and demand. (9) In terms of social structure, Pigou said that unemployment related only to the "wage-earning class" and thus excluded members of the professional, employer or salaried classes. (10)

Involuntary unemployment implied that the supply of labour exceeded demand. As a result, employment or work was rationed with some workers not able to find employment. (11) The growing complexity of the labour market and an awareness of industrial relations led to the recognition that unemployment could be considered a separate entity from poverty. (12) Following this recognition economists early this century began to question the causes of unemployment. Such investigations revealed the inadequacy of classical and neoclassical views about the perfect functioning of an economy. No longer was the "defects of particular workmen" (13) a suitable explanation for so many people being without regular employment.

Also, economists and political commentators began to contemplate the natural and minimum levels of unemployment. Some unemployment was accepted as inevitable, particularly among unskilled and seasonal workers. An unemployment rate

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9. A.C. Pigou, *Unemployment* (London, Williams and Norgate, 1913), 51.
10. *ibid.*, 13-14.
11. E. Malinvaud, *The Theory of Unemployment Reconsidered,* Yrjo Jahnasson Lectures (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 2nd edition, 1985), 1.
12. B. Eichengreen and T. Hatton, *op. cit.*, 3.
13. S & B Webb., *The Prevention of Destitution* (London, Longmans, Green and Co. 1911), 111.

of between three and five per cent was considered "natural" early in the twentieth century.

The adoption of the term unemployment in the United States followed a similar path to Britain. Up until the start of the twentieth century unemployed Americans were described as out of work, idle, loafing or jobless wage earners. (14) From 1913 governments in the United States officially used the term "unemployment".

In Australia unemployment was also seen as a subset of poverty or destitution. (15) Despite being in frequent contact with the unemployed, benevolent organisations rarely described them as unemployed before the 1890s. (16) The 1891 Census of NSW formally recognised unemployment but limited the definition to people who had previously been in permanent employment. (17) In the following decades the definition was expanded to include any person unemployed, regardless of the reason, just prior to a census. Nevertheless, the State's official publication *The New South Wales Year Book* first referred to unemployment in 1909, while the Commonwealth Parliament's official publication first referred to unemployment in 1905. (18) The term was not widely used until after World War One

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14. B. Eichengreen, T. Hatton, *op. cit.*, 4.
15. T. Endres, M. Cook, "Concepts in Australian Unemployment Statistics to 1940", *Australian Economic Papers*, Vol. 22, No. 40 (1983), 70.
16. For example the 1898 *Annual Report* of the New South Wales Benevolent Society.
17. T. Endres, M. Cook., *op. cit.*, 70.
18. Commonwealth of Australia, "Unemployed Persons: Particulars re: numbers in various states", *Parliamentary Papers* (Melbourne, Government Printer) Paper No. 56, Vol. 11, (1905).

(WW1) because it did not relate to a cross section of the NSW labour force.

As governments and economists came to use the term unemployment on a more regular basis this helped shape their attitudes as to the provision of relief.

1.2 International attitudes towards the unemployed:

Prior to the 1890s depression governments accepted little legal or moral responsibility to provide unemployment relief, because unemployment was a problem for individuals who were members of the labouring and lower classes. Nor did the community see itself responsible for the unemployed. (19) In the late 19th century there was no detailed understanding of the causes or effects of unemployment. Neoclassical economic thought dominated community attitudes. Pigou and other writers placed emphasis on real wages, believing that "workpeople" unemployed for long periods or whose incomes were consistently below minimum requirements, should receive assistance such as subsidies for insurance funds, carefully controlled relief or special training under disciplinary conditions. (20)

Yet, a direct connection between demand and supply of labour and unemployment was not widely considered. Rather, highly inefficient workers reflected the make up of

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19. E.H. Burgmann, "The fight against poverty", *Morpeth Review* Vol. 11, No. 21 (1932), 6.
20. A.C. Pigou, *op. cit.*, 229.

society. (21) Lack of work was perceived to be the fault of the individual which was not related to the wider issue of poverty or the level of economic activity. (22) For most of the 19th century British governments held a laissez faire view as to the amount the State should provide unemployment relief. The State's role was limited because unemployment was an individual's responsibility and a certain amount of unemployment was regarded as good for strengthening the character of people. (23) Moreover the State confined itself to traditional economic and protective functions. (24) Such attitudes did not prevent charitably minded individuals from assisting the unemployed through privately funded benevolent organisation and church-based groups.

The 1890s depression had a significant but not overriding influence on attitudes towards the unemployed. Widespread unemployment began to influence governments that unemployment was governed by more than a person's failure or social class. (25) From the community's perspective unemployment was no longer confined to the unskilled and vagrants. A large number of people including skilled craftsmen and artisans went without regular employment in the 1890s, eclipsing similar levels of unemployment first experienced in Britain in the 1830s. Economic factors during the 1890s situation paved the way for the recognition that unemployment had an economic base and was

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21. *ibid.*, 247.
22. *loc. cit.*,
23. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 121.
24. *ibid.*, 125.
25. C.A. McCurdy, *Protection or Common Sense: A Radical Programme for Unemployment* (London, Hodder and Stroughton, 1923), 23.

a "problem of industry." (26) But a gulf remain between the attitudes of some politicians and community thinking. Public opinion remained ignorant of the causes and spread of unemployment amongst different occupations and had sufficient backing to dissuade governments from implementing well developed relief programs.

Prior to Britain's Unemployment Insurance Scheme the unemployed relied on the antiquated Poor Law Relief, assistance from charitable bodies and in a minority of cases help from trade unions. British writers Sydney and Beatrice Webb understood that cyclical and international depressions of trade accounted for "a great mass of unemployment." (27) But they argued that governments who provided food relief to the unemployed were succumbing to the "fatal attraction of the easy policy..." (28)

Community attitudes also had a strong influence on American public policy. Early this century many Americans unable to find jobs were considered a failure. Moreover, such attitudes flowed through to the families of the unemployed, who strongly criticised their unemployed breadwinner. (29) The notion of the State providing relief grew slowly in acceptance. But between 1905 and 1915 it was felt that the unemployed in the United States should not receive government assistance without contributing some labour in return. (30) In coming to terms with unemployment

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26. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 121.
27. S. & B. Webb, *op. cit.*, 111.
28. *loc. cit.*,
29. NSW, Mines Department, Special Bundle, "1931 Unemployment Report from the Minister for Agriculture to Minister for Mines", 19/2550.
30. *loc. cit.*,

many contemporary writers had to first grapple with the causes of unemployment.

The prosperous '20s in the United States reinforced community attitudes that unemployment was a personal responsibility. (31) In contrast, British attitudes towards the unemployed were modified in the inter-war period, largely due to nationalistic sentiment. The State sought to recompense British men and women who had served in World War One by including them in an extended unemployment insurance scheme (UIS) after the war. (32) Unemployment Insurance (UI) was not introduced in the USA, but its adoption in the UK had a large bearing on debates about UI in NSW and other Australian States.

The growth in inter-war unemployment caught many governments by surprise. Increasingly the State relied on non-government organisations to provide relief to those not eligible for government assistance. But the spread of charities and the extension of social services caused alarm. The United States Government accused American charities of encouraging dependency and undermining the spirit of self-reliance. (33) A condescending and moralistic view of unemployment prevailed:

> ..a minimum of the amount of assistance should be spent on actual relief and the maximum in service, eg. help the widow, rather than deed and clothe them. (34)

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31. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 166.
32. C.A. McCurdy, *op. cit.*, 13.
33. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 166.
34. NSW, Mines Department, *op. cit.*

The rise in the female participation rate in the labour force also impinged on attitudes towards the unemployed. In the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century, society frowned upon women, particularly married women, who were gainfully employed. By occupying positions that had traditionally been the domain of men, women were accused of creating higher unemployment. In Britain and to a lesser extent in America, women were discouraged or debarred from registering for unemployment. For example, one clause of the 1925 British Unemployment Insurance Act excluded married women from receiving unemployment insurance. (35) Reflecting the belief that women occupied male positions, British social science surveys of the 1920s and 1930s overlooked research into female unemployment. (36)

A greater understanding of the nature of unemployment helped to dissipate 19th century views of individual responsibility for unemployment. The impact of technological change on industry although a factor causing unemployment in the 19th century, was not widely recognised until after WW1. Economists, however, differentiated between intermittent, structural and depression

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35. Labour White Paper No. 17, *Governing by Starvation: The Government and the Unemployed* (Labour Research Department, London, 1925), 11.
36. J. Hurstfield, "Women's Unemployment in the 1930s: Some Comparisons with the 1980s" in S. Allan (ed), *The Experience of Unemployment* (Hampshire, MacMillan, 1986), 34.

unemployment before WW1. (37) But their notion of depression unemployment, linked to cyclical theories of highs and troughs, did not anticipate the mass unemployment which would occur in the 1930s. Some British industries experienced "structural" unemployment after WWI as a result of technological improvements or a fall off in demand associated with peace time.

1.3 Community and Government attitudes towards the unemployed in Australia before 1930:

The decades leading up the Depression marked the beginning of a very slow change in attitudes by the Commonwealth Government and States towards the unemployed. State aid to the unemployed, while not a right, became an issue for debate. Yet, reflecting contemporary opinions governments delayed introducing large scale unemployment relief until mass unemployment struck in the 1930s.

To a certain extent changing attitudes in Britain and to a lesser extent America shaped debate in Australia. The question of introducing UI in NSW was debated in the 1920s, although there was not the passion or conviction that had led to its introduction in Britain. The State was just one player. Community attitudes in the early part of the 1920s reinforced the late 19th century view that the unemployed were responsible for their situation. But the international

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37. E.R. Walker, *Unemployment Policy: With Special Reference to Australia* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1936), 3.

view that unemployment was due to a defect in a person's character was not as widely held in Australia. (38)

Within this framework of community attitudes, politicians in the colony (later State) of NSW, did not have the conviction to propose detailed unemployment policies. Unemployment was viewed as an aberration which would diminish when periods of prosperous economic activity returned. (39) Although employment and good economic conditions were inextricably linked, contemporary thought did not associate poor economic activity with a rise in unemployment.

Accordingly, government relief was meagre and considered a last resort (40). The attitude of the State was that unemployment was a matter for the individual who might on occasions require private charitable assistance. (41) But the number of people seeking charitable aid rose. Benevolent societies which traditionally had catered for the sick, impoverished and elderly were called upon in the last quarter of the 19th century to relieve the unemployed. Reflecting contemporary opinion many charities only assisted unemployed men who were unable or unsuitable for any form of employment. (42) Benevolent organisations also

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38. T.H. Kewley, *Social Security in Australia, 1900-1972* (Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1973), 20.
39. *loc. cit.*,
40. C. Black, "The origins of unemployment insurance in Queensland, 1919-1922", *Labour History*, Vol. 60 (May 1991), 35.
41. G. Turner, *Unemployment Insurance*, NSW Board of Trade (Sydney, Government Printer, 1921), 7.
42. New South Wales Benevolent Society, *Annual Report 1889* (Sydney, 1889), 11.

held a moralistic view. In 1889 the Benevolent Society of New South Wales reported:

> Your directors have learned by experience that what is known as "charitable work" if not carefully supervised, would soon become a positive evil to the community. (43)

Another prominent Sydney-based charity in the late nineteenth century was the Charity Organisation and Relief Society (CORS). Its principal objectives were to prevent indiscriminate and wasteful charity and to give assistance to the "really deserving poor" after enquiring into each applicant's position. (44) Questions were asked to gauge the legitimacy of applicants. In 1898 the CORS investigated 865 cases and found 203 to be "undeserving". (45) While there is no evidence of organised corruption in respect to applicants claiming from a number of charities, this did little to dissipate the belief that fraud was rampant in NSW on the eve of the 20th century:

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43. *loc. cit.,*
44. Charity Organisation and Relief Society, *Twentieth Annual Report, 1898* (Sydney, 1889), 1. The CORS was also known as the Charity Organisation Society.
45. *loc. cit.,*

> In investigating claims for aid the Society's officers are frequently met by the difficulty of ascertaining whether the applicants are in receipt of relief from other benevolent sources, which it is not unusual for them to unscrupulously conceal. (46)

In the 1880s and the 1890s the NSW colonial Government provided relief to the unemployed, primarily through public works. Rising unemployment prompted governments to change the purpose of public works from one of providing facilities to benefit the community to a policy of providing emergency employment. Despite increasing numbers of unemployed, one government official claimed that there were too many charities providing assistance. (47) The unemployed were often referred to in disparaging terms and idleness was the true "mother of mischief." (48)

The 1890s depression led to a greater focus on the role of the State. But, by and large political responses remained unchanged, despite the persistent nature of unemployment in the thirty years before the Great Depression. While governments recognised that unemployment was a "most serious social ill", none, except Queensland, dealt with it before the 1930s. (49)

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46. Charity Organisation Society, *Annual Report, 1889*, (Sydney, 1889), 4.
47. S. Maxted, "Charitable Work in NSW", in *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity*, November 1891 (Melbourne, Government Printer, 1891), 50.
48. *ibid.*, 52.
49. E.G. Theodore, *Unemployment and its remedy* (Brisbane, Worker Newspaper Proprietary, 1930), 3.

Contemporary attitudes were also forged by the shortage of labour in rural areas for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. (50) Government call-ups of unemployed single men were not always well received with some unemployed preferring to remain in Sydney.

In the first quarter of the 20th century many Australians considered the unemployed to be lazy and inefficient workers who were unable to fit into the economic framework of NSW. (51) Although unemployment in Australia and other countries eased in the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a greater consciousness of it and its effects than at any previous time.

An early advocate for the unemployed, John Dwyer, stirred social conscience and attempted to make unemployment a leading issue of the day. Dwyer's interest stemmed from 1893 when he had opened a shelter for homeless and necessitous persons in Sydney. (52) In 1902 he set up the League of the Unemployed of NSW, (53) a group of citizens who attempted to change public opinion by insisting that the State play a more compassionate and active role as a provider of unemployment relief. Dwyer argued that unemployment should be placed "at the forefront of questions demanding immediate social and political action, locally and nationally". (54) His central plank was

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50. T.H. Kewley, *op. cit.*, 23.
51. A.G. Colley, "Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No. 2 (June 1939), 87.
52. Citizens Committee on Unemployment, "Executive Minutes", 17 August 1905, MSS 2184/7/3.
53. This original name was quickly superseded by the Citizen's Committee on Unemployment.
54. Citizen's Committee on Unemployment, "Executive Minutes", 17 August 1905, MSS 2184/7/3.

that the State had a duty to employ on public works all who sought employment. However, the NSW Premier, J. Carruthers opposed such suggestions. (55)

Again, community attitudes as to who comprised the ranks of the unemployed was an obstacle to Dwyer's utopian principles. In 1905 there were thousands of unskilled unemployed workers but only several hundred unemployed skilled workers. (56) For a six year period the Citizens Committee on Unemployment applied pressure on municipal bodies and the State government. But without the backing of any major political party, Dwyer's calls went unheeded and the topical issue of unemployment was put to one side. While Dwyer succeeded in increasing public awareness as to the nature and effects of unemployment, he was unable to convince the NSW Government to establish a Royal Commission into unemployment.

Unemployment continued to be seen by influential members of the community in the early years of the twentieth century as unrelated to market forces. In 1910 unemployment in NSW was put down to three factors: 1). a person's disability to work, eg. old age; 2). inability to find employment, eg. people with a mental or physical deficiency or 3). compulsory cessation of work due to industrial disputes. (57) In essence, the focus was on the supply of labour and individual's incapacity to maintain permanent employment. As Table 1.1 illustrates, unskilled

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55. *loc. cit.,*
56. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1908-1909,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1909), 486.
57. *ibid.,* 487.

labourers represented half the registrations at State Labour Exchanges (SLE) in 1909.

Table 1.1: Registrations at State Labour Exchanges, 1909 (58)

Category	**Number**	**Percentage**
Professional and clerical	203	2.4
Skilled labourers and artisans	4,042	47.6
Unskilled labourers	4,261	50.0
TOTAL	*8,506*	*100%*

The steady growth in unemployment between the end of the First World War and the commencement of the Great Depression did little to change community attitudes. Some charities complained that many unemployed were penniless because "they had no concept of the value of thrift" and through wasting their earnings had caused their own destitution. (59) This reinforced the view that State aid was a charitable act and not a right. (60)

Before the coal industry's slump in 1927 and the flow on effects to other industries, NSW had not experienced widespread unemployment. The rise in unemployment in 1928 and 1929 across many occupations had a bearing on attitudes. The Labor Council of NSW summed up contemporary views:

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58. New South Wales, Benevolent Society, *Annual Report, 1921* (Sydney, 1921), 17.
59. R. Broomhill, "Unemployment in Adelaide during the Great Depression", *Labour History*, Vol. 1, No. 27 (1978), 5.
60. C. Black, *op. cit.*, 35.

> No longer can unemployment properly be ascribed to the lack of initiative, energy or skill of the workers. The unemployed's ranks comprise all classes of workers. (61)

Among the ranks of unskilled males large scale and long term unemployment surfaced in the late 20s. (62) The unemployed were blamed for their lack of skills. Such moralistic attitudes prevailed for many years. (63) As unskilled men formed the bulk of the unemployed, society regarded the unemployed as inefficient members.

The prolonged nature of unemployment in the 1920s paved the way for a change in government attitudes when mass unemployment struck in the 1930s. A government report recognised the costs of allowing involuntary idleness to remain unchecked and accepted a degree of responsibility for the unemployed:

> Unemployment enfeebles the present, poisons the future and breeds poverty, disease and demolishes the community. (64)

While the nature of government relief - sustenance or public works - was a source of ongoing contention in the

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61. Labor Council of NSW, *Yearly Report and Balance Sheet for year ending September 31st 1929* (Sydney, Tomalin and Wigmore Printers, 1929), 33.
62.. New South Wales Benevolent Society, *Annual Report, 1925* (Sydney, 1925), 3.
63. *loc. cit.*,
64. G. Turner, *op. cit.*, 17.

late '20s, a sense of government responsibility for the unemployed began to emerge in this period. Exactly how, and by what means, the State would provide for the unemployed was largely unknown. Prior to the 1930s public works were frowned upon because they were costly and provided few skills to manual labourers. Question arose as to who would finance public works for the unemployed. Some municipal councils rejected loans from the NSW Government. In other instances Councils did not embark on extensive public works programs because they feared a backlash from ratepayers. (65) Interestingly, while negative attitudes towards the unemployed took a long time to ease, conservative politicians faced with the overwhelming nature of unemployment embraced public works as the most suitable policy to reduce mass unemployment in the short term.

Unabating unemployment in the 1920s began the transition in thought between 19th century attitudes of indifference and individual responsibility for unemployment, to a view by 1945 that the State should provide for the unemployed. Mass unemployment in the 1930s forced governments to accept greater responsibility for unemployment relief. In some quarters there was an expectation that governments should bear responsibility:

> Since unemployment is an essential feature of industrial conditions in capitalist industry, it is the duty of the Government to recognise the fact and

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65. S.R. Gray, *op. cit.*, 60.

make due provision for unemployment as a normal risk of industry. (66)

Furthermore, the concept of "full employment" was placed on the agenda as a key objective of public policy. Some contemporaries argued that society should put the interests of the individual before property:

We cannot indefinitely wait for private enterprise to employ people. The State must find employment for the rest. (67)

Burgmann also argued that capitalism must accept its responsibility and make adequate provision for its citizens. (68) While this attitude represented a sharp turnaround in less than half a century, it was insufficient to cause the State to introduce UI in the 1930s.

The Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, told delegates to an Economic Conference in 1922 that:

The community must keep these people, whether they are employed or not: that is a sacred obligation and one that cannot be avoided. (69)

But not all States accepted these comments. Some viewed unemployment as neither a priority nor a

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66. Labor Council of NSW, *op. cit.*, 30.
67. E.H. Burgmann, "Unemployment", *Morpeth Review*, Vol. 2, No 24 (July 1938),8.
68. *loc. cit.*,
69. *ibid.*, 11.

responsibility. NSW recognised its responsibility but was reluctant to implement policies such as a UIS. Because government attitudes were not universally shared by the community in the 1920s, the State was reluctant to lead public opinion on the question of the extent of government aid to the unemployed. Moreover, economists of the period were more interested in defining the tariff and exploring its effects on standards of living. (70) Many in the community thought high levels of unemployment would pass with the depression and there was little need for detailed planning or implementation of relief policies. (71) Because skilled workers often found employment fairly quickly the community tended to regard unemployment as a short term phenomenon.

Unskilled workers had a harder time finding employment and experienced prejudice from some employers. This prejudice flowed through to Government-controlled Labour Bureaux (or exchanges) which had many unskilled on their registers. (72) At least 55 per cent of unemployed males in the 1920s were labourers or unskilled. (73)

Demand from employers to hire workers by other means, led to a large rise in the number of private employment bureaux in the second half of the 1920s. (74) These

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70. P. Groenewegen, B. McFarlane, *op. cit.*, 118.
71. W.S. Kent Hughes, "Unemployment Relief Administration in Victoria", *Australian Rhodes Review*, No. 2 (1936), 96.
72. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *Report on Unemployment and Business Stability in Australia* (Commonwealth Government Printer, 1928), 55.
73. E.G. Theodore, *op. cit.*, 7.
74. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1933-34* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1934), 620.

attitudes deepened divisions between skilled and unskilled workers. In the belief that employment could be found more quickly, some skilled trade unionists by-passed the SLE and registered at private employment bureaux, which often facilitated their employment. (75)

Skilled tradesmen were considered the answer to high unemployment. The *Bulletin* urged all States and the Federal Government to assess their purchases of products which used skilled labour and to try and produce such products within Australia. (76)

Although realising the difficulties faced by unskilled persons, NSW Governments in the 1920s did little to redress the situation. Manual or unskilled labourers remained "the biggest battalion of the unemployed army" during the 1920s. (77)

Governments were blamed for rising unemployment. *The Bulletin* proclaimed in April 1930:

> Nations don't borrow money. They borrow the services money will buy, and if they are foolish enough to borrow services they could equally well perform for themselves they are seeking idleness and ensuring it. (78)

The *Bulletin* went on to castigate the Scullin Federal Government for encouraging unemployment.

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75. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, 55.
76. *The Bulletin*, 28 May 1930, 9.
77. *loc. cit.*,
78. *ibid.*, 30 April 1930.

> The hungry can't be fed with tax money. They must be set to work and the artificial barriers that stand between them and work must go. (79)

The community's general attitude towards the unemployed filtered through to the unemployed themselves. In particular, middle class families attached shame to the unemployed and there was a deep reluctance to accept charity or relief. (80) Of equal concern was the false optimism of the NSW Premier, Thomas Bavin, who in 1928 "...hoped that within a very short time a large number of those who are now unemployed will be absorbed." (81) By the early 1930s attitudes towards the unemployed had eased due to the sheer number unemployed and the pivotal role played by organised charities in relieving distress. (82)

While Australian economists occupied a more influential role in public policy making in the 1930s, their contribution in the 1920s was of importance. Ronald Walker, for instance, expanded on the definitions of intermittent, structural and depression unemployment. He coined the term intermittent to include seasonal and casual unemployment and argued that when different industries had slack periods unemployment was the natural result. (83)

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79. *loc. cit.,*
80. S. Macintyre, "Australian Responses to Unemployment in the last Depression", in J. Roe (ed)., *Are there lessons from history?* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1985), 26.
81. NSW, Colonial Secretary, *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 114, 716.
82. NSW, Mines Department, *op. cit.,*
83. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.,* 4-6.

Depressional unemployment was so called because it related to nearly all sections of industry. (84)

1.4 Unemployment relief in NSW before the 1930s:

The NSW Colonial Government provided limited relief to the unemployed when it set up a Casual Labor Board and State Soup Kitchen in 1885. (85) But the intensity of the 1890s depression and increasing protests by the unemployed prompted the colonial government to create an expanded body, the State Labour Bureau (SLB) in 1892. The SLBs role was to provide casual employment for unskilled and skilled workers for up to three months duration in return for lodgings, food and a small amount of money and to promote the internal migration of unemployed men from city to rural areas. (86)

In 1900 the NSW Government extended its unemployment relief by establishing a Labor Depot at Randwick which provided temporary shelter and assistance. Destitute men unable to maintain themselves were given food, lodgings and a small monetary allowance in exchange for labour. (87) However the Government placed a maximum period of three months stay at Randwick. The SLB was also responsible for a Training Farm at Pitt Town, where unemployed young males received training in all aspects of horticulture.

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84. *ibid.*, 22.
85. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, (August 1915).
86. J. Carpenter, "Relief of Unemployment in NSW 1885-1976" unpublished manuscript (Sydney, Department of Labour and Industry, 1977), 1.
87. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1909-1910*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1910), 532.

One economist of the 1890s claimed that the employment of men on public works coupled with high rates of pay was detrimental to the economic order.

> The rapid expansion of loan funds has led to the employment of an undue proportion of labour on Government works, and it has discouraged the spade and the plough. (88)

Henderson further argued that a labourer could earn eight to ten shillings a day on public works, compared to between four and five shillings on a farm. (89) The effect was to discourage private employment and land settlement in favour of government sponsored public works.

Official figures in the decades preceding the 1890s confirm contemporary sentiments of the excessive outlay on public works. Expenditure on public works from overseas loans nearly tripled between 1873-1882 (£12,639,289) and 1883-1892 (£30,173,742). (90)

Between 1887 and 1889 the NSW Government expended more than £250,000 on public works to relieve the unemployed. By 1889 42,7000 persons in NSW were annually in receipt of outdoor relief. (91) Because government works could not absorb all the surplus labour, the State turned to food relief as an important policy to sustain many unemployed

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88. J. Henderson, "Land and Finance", *The Australian Economist* Vol. 3, No. 8 (September 1893), 347.
89. *loc. cit.*,
90. J. Henderson, *op. cit.*, 457.
91. H.L. Harris, "The financial crisis of 1893 in New South Wales", *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. X111 Part V1, (1927), 322.

workers during the 1890s depression. Nevertheless, the State maintained its high moral stance and reminded delegations of unemployed workers about the virtues of thrift and independence. (92)

Despite the large growth in unemployment in the early 1890s the State could not continue to borrow huge sums from Britain to finance ordinary and relief public works. Yet any decrease in expenditure culminated in higher unemployment. When expenditure on NSW public works plunged from £5.2m to £2.1m between 1885 and 1889, 15,000 men lost their jobs. (93) Ironically, public works, designed to reduced the effects of the 1890s depression, were the cause of large scale unemployment in NSW in the years immediately preceding the 1890s because:

> Men who may have found employment in primary industries were kept busy upon public works and more workers were attracted than the country could absorb. (94)

Unable to meet the demands of the unemployed the State turned to the services of private charitable organisations such as the NSWBS, local Benevolent Societies and the SVdP to provide essential items.

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92. C. Fox, B. Scates, "The Beat of Weary Feet" in V. Burgmann, J. Lee, (eds) *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia Since 1788* (Victoria, McPhee Gribble, 1988), 134.
93. H.L. Harris, *op. cit.*, 321.
94. *ibid.*, 320.

Another suggestion for reducing unemployment in the 1890s was to restrict entry into particular occupations:

> ....when an avenue of employment is full, and employs as many workers as can be.....access to the avenue should be closed. (95)

Between the 1890s and the mid 1920s Colonial and State Governments avoided introducing social service legislation. Widows' Pensions were first paid in 1926 and in mid 1927 Family Endowment was introduced. (96) During the 1920s an unemployed person in NSW received an initial charitable allowance for one month. (97)

The seasonal nature of unemployment coincided with the end of the harvest season. Unemployment relief in the form of public works remained sporadic and often the result of non-violent agitation by the unemployed in the form of processions to Parliament House. (98) But relief works were inadequate and provided only a temporary palliative. (99) Although public works employed large numbers, they did little to improve the skills of workers. Moreover, the

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95. A. De Lissa, "The Labour Problem", *The Australian Economist* (May 1891), 122.
96. A.H. Charties, "Family Endowment in NSW, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy and Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1927) reprinted in J. Roe (ed)., *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives, 1901-1975* (Sydney, Cassell, 1976), 154-161; F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia", *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX, No. 1 (July 1934), 24.
97. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Payment of Charitable Allowances, 1921-1928", A27/6405 5/5238.1.
98. C. Fox, B. Scates, *op. cit.*, 132.
99. C.E. Martin, "Unemployment: Some recent suggestions", *Economic Record*, Vol. V (May 1929), 122.

reliance on public works to employ unskilled labour in prosperous periods left the State with insufficient finance when depression conditions demanded that a far greater number of men be employed on public works. Shann summed up contemporary thought:

> Public works are excellent things, but only so long as the balance is preserved between capital and earning power, between equipment and its use in furthering production. Overset that balance and they become a burden as voracious as the grasshopper. (100)

Many trade unions regarded unemployment as no greater evil than accident, sickness or loss of tools of trade. (101) But a small number of financially secure unions provided unemployment benefits during the 1890s Depression. (102) By the second and third decades of the 20th century the trade union movement recognised that an increasing number of members had experienced chronic unemployment and that neither the State nor Friendly Societies provided adequate benefits.

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100. E.O.G. Shann, *The Boom of 1890 - And Now* (Sydney, Cornstalk Publishing, 1927,) 30.
101. R.M. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia* (Ringwood, Victoria, Penguin, Reprint, 1978), 96. Martin lists these "eventualities" as receiving cheap insurance cover by Australian unions in the nineteenth century.
102. N.G. Butlin, A. Barnard, J.J. Pincus (eds), *Government and Capitalism: Public and Private Choice in the Twentieth Century Australia* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1982), 154. The Amalgamated Engineering Union was one of several unions that provided cash assistance to unemployed members.

In 1918 the NSW Furniture Trades Society (FTS) set up an Unemployment Relief Fund. Foremost in the Union's mind was the pessimistic prediction that "... unemployment will come to all in time." (103) Members were urged to vote for an Unemployment Fund because unemployment is a "natural event in the career of every man" and no Friendly Society or other style of organisation insures a man to provide him with out-of-work benefit. (104)

Several trade unions provided assistance to unemployed members in times of high unemployment in particular trades or when members took strike action. For example, 19 trade unions provided finance totalling £1283 to the Illawarra Colliery Employees Association in 1919. The money was welcome relief to the wives and children of striking miners. (105) In the Newcastle Region the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Boilermakers' Society and the Miners Federation provided limited financial support to unemployed members. But rising unemployment, a declining membership and the escalating cost of granting aid forced unions to abandon relief to unemployed members in the second half of the 1920s. (106)

Bureaucrats expressed alarm at the NSW Government's rising outlays on unemployment relief. In early 1925 the Nationalist Government tried to convince the Broken Hill Municipal Council (BHMC) of the virtue of borrowing £20,000

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103. *Furniture Trades Journal* VI, No. 1 (January 1918).
104. *loc. cit.*,
105. Australian Coal and Shale Employees Federation, Northern District (NSW), "Minutes, Financial and General Records" E165/15/3.
106. S.R. Gray, *op. cit.*, 60.

for unemployment relief. (107) Despite high and unabating unemployment in the region, the BHMC rejected the suggestion and held the State Government responsible for financing unemployment relief.

High unemployment in late 1925 forced the NSW Government to give police the temporary authority to issue food relief in some country districts. By July 1926 the Department of Labour and Industry had extended its control of the distribution of food relief to the Newcastle region, thereby replacing the police. These acts represented a major change from the previous policy of restricting unemployment relief to Sydney and large industrial centres. (108) Unemployment relief comprised cash assistance, food relief, fares, blankets, baby outfits and Christmas Cheer. However, it came under the collective title of Relief of Distress. The mid 1920s marked a large rise in demand for such assistance. On the NSW coalfields special food relief rose from £3,093 to £36,603 between 1926/26 and 1926/27. (109) The distribution of relief was placed in the hands of committees comprising police and trade union representatives. (110)

Both in government and opposition Thomas Bavin was hopelessly ill-equipped to deal with rising unemployment. His detailed policy speech before the 1927 NSW election omitted the critical issue of unemployment, except to say that the NSW Nationalist Party awaited a decision from the

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107. *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 117, 3610.
108. New South Wales, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle "Achievements of the Government, 1925-1932", 5/9213.
109. *loc. cit.*,
110. *loc. cit.*,

Federal Government about the possible introduction of unemployment insurance. (111) After gaining power, Bavin called a special conference of employers and employees but it failed to formulate a comprehensive and agreeable policy on unemployment. (112) Bavin conceded:

> My government has done all it can possibly do, but it is unable to provide sufficient work for all those who need it. (113)

High regional unemployment was exacerbated by internal migration. The Bavin Government extended employment schemes which provided work for unemployed city men in country areas. (114) This prompted the internal migration of several hundred single unemployed young men to areas where employment was being offered. (115) The SLE and its agencies were discouraged from registering interstate unemployed people.

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111. T.R. Bavin, *The National Policy: Speech delivered at Chatswood Town Hall for NSW Elections of October 8, 1927,* (Sydney, Penfold, September 1927), 28.
112. J. McCarthy, "The Stevens-Bruxner Government, 1932-1937", MA Thesis, University of NSW, 1967, 120.
113. Quoted in H.E. Boote, "Unemployment Conference 1928 - Proposals by the Australian Workers Union", (Sydney, 1928), 1.
114. *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 113 (17 April 1928),8.
115. *loc. cit.,*

1.5 Charitable Organisations and Friendly Societies:

In the half century before the Great Depression charities played an important role in relieving distress. During the 1890s depression the New South Wales Benevolent Society (NSWBS) distributed food to about 500 persons each week, mainly women. (116) Other charities that provided relief during the 1890s Depression included the Charity Organisation and Relief Society (CORS), the City Night Refuge and Soup Kitchen and the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP). (117)

Table 1.2: Persons assisted by the Charity Organisation and Relief Society, 1881-1898 ([118])

Year	Total persons assisted
1881	1,396
1882	1,522
1883	1,454
1884	2,624
1885	2,457
1886	2,893
1887	2,946
1888	2,353
1889	2,969
1890	3,101
1891	2,368
1892	3,141
1893	3,339
1894	3,223
1895	2,179
1896	2,592
1897	3,357
1898	2,102

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116. S. Fitzgerald, *Rising Damp: Sydney 1870-90* (South Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1987), 215.
117. A. Mayne, "Sydney Sojourns", *Australia 1888 Bulletin* No. 8 (1981).
118. Charity organisation Relief Society, *Twentieth Annual Report, 1898* (Sydney, 1898)

Table 1.2 illustrates the sharp rise in demand on the Charity Organisation and Relief Society (CORS) in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The SVdP's metropolitan branches also made a strong contribution to aiding the unemployed. (119

The NSWBS operated in close consultation with the government of the day. Its role in this regard originated during the 1920's Marine Engineers Strike which caused much hardship to the families of the strikers. The NSW Government appointed the NSWBS to distribute relief on its behalf to these families, a role that became on-going because of the rising level of unemployment in the 1920s. (120) Under this arrangement the Government reimbursed the NSWBS for the cost of providing food relief. But government payments were often late and added financial burden to the NSWBS. An applicant acquired a Docket from a State Labour Exchange (SLE) and presented it at the Food Relief Depot (FRD) run by the NSWBS. (121) Members of parliament, clergymen and prominent civic leaders frequently recommended that necessitous families receive assistance.

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119. F.S. Egan, *Society of St. Vincent de Paul: 100 Years* (Westmead, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, New South Wales State Council, 1981), 5.7. The SVdPs first Branch was established at Church Hill, Sydney in May 1881. At the height of the 1890s Depression 200 members of the SVdP visited the unemployed each week in Sydney's central business district, on behalf of the Sydney Town hall Committee. See P. Ford, *Cardinal Moran and the A.L.P: A Study in the encounter between Moran and Socialism, 1890-1907* Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1966), 117.
120. NSW Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Benevolent Society: Unemployment Relief, 1920-1921", 5/5345.1.
121. NSW Chief Secretary, "Payment of Charitable Allowances, 1921-1928", A28/1211 5/5238.1.

The following table illustrates the demand on the NSWBS in the 1920s, particularly the peak periods at the start and close of the decade.

Table 1.3: Number of people receiving food relief provided by the New South Wales Benevolent Society, 1920-1929 (122)

Year	**Men**	**Women**	**Children**	**Total**
1920	13,992	25,828	38,727	64,555
1921	9,874	9,646	31,526	51,046
1922	5,379	4,773	14,869	25,021
1923	3,535	3,302	10,539	17,376
1924	3,643	3,016	7,176	13,835
1925	5,625	3,752	8,638	18,018
1926	6,852	5,478	11,572	23,902
1927	7,984	5,530	11,169	24,683
1928	13,341	11,003	21,445	45,789
1929	15,196	12,129	25,355	52,680
TOTALS	**85,421**	**84,457**	**181,016**	**350,894**

In contrast, the SVdP visited the poor and unemployed in their homes, parks or hospitals and provided them with blankets, clothing, boots and on occasions small amounts of cash. Like many other non-government organisations, the SVdP relied on private donations to finance its charitable activities. Although the SVdP's official policy was not to accept government aid, onerous levels of demand forced some rural branches to ask the State for blankets and Christmas grants. (123)

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122. New South Wales Benevolent Society, *Annual Reports*.
123. NSW, CSIL, A37/1371 9/2328.

Prior to the 1930s charities obtained a small amount of funding from the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD). The NSW Government maintained that aid should only be granted through the NSWBS or local benevolent organisations. (124) Moreover the State's policy was only to support one benevolent or charitable organisation in any area. (125)

In the second half of the 1920s Government funding to benevolent organisations rose, as reflected in the following table.

Table 1.4: Government funding to benevolent organisations, 1926-1930 (126)

Year	**Amount** £
1926/27	88,954
1927/28	143,989
1928/29	243,096
1929/30	358,698

But increased government funding did not meet the soaring level of demand and was of little consequence to charities such as the SVdP who did not receive government funding. The SVdP, the State's largest charity, found it increasingly difficult in the late 1920s to assist everyone seeking aid. Indicative of rising demand, its inner-city Annandale branch assisted 221 people in 1928 and 707 people

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124. For example in 1921 the Government committed £35 Christmas Cheer to the Lithgow district, on the priviso it would be distributed by the local Benevolent Society. As no such organisation existed the money was given to the local SVdP branch, the charity which had originally applied for the money; see, NSW Chief Secretary, Special Bundle "Christmas Cheer Papers: Grants to the Benevolent Society", A26/5239 5/5388.2.
125. *ibid.*, A26/7981.
126. NSW Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, Achievements of the Government, 1925-1932", 5/9213.

in 1930. (127) In the Sydney metropolitan area the SVdP assisted 26,274 persons in 1929, a 34 per cent increase on 1928. (128) Articles of clothing and meals for destitute men doubled during this period. Across NSW the SVdP provided assistance to 50,347 people in 1930, a record number. (129)

Friendly Societies and Trade Unions had a similar characteristic in that they provided benefits upon a member taking ill, such as the costs of a doctor's attendance and medicine as well as sick pay for the member. Friendly Societies provided funeral benefits which ranged from £10 to £40 upon the death of a member, to £10 to £15 upon the death of a wife. During the late 1920s funeral benefits averaged about 10 per cent of payments, with sick pay, medical attendance and medicines constituting some 70 per cent. (130)

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127. Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP), *Annandale Branch Annual Reports, 1928-1930* (Westmead, Sydney).
128. SVdP, Particular Council of Sydney, *Annual Reports, 1928, 1929* located at NSW, CSIL, B38/3941 9/2422.
129. *loc. cit.*,
130. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1932-33,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1933), 390.

Table 1.5: Membership of Friendly Societies, 1921-1939

(131)

Year	***Members***	***Percentage of the population***
1921	199,688	9.5
1922	209,133	9.7
1923	214,663	9.8
1924	219,026	9.8
1925	226,576	10.0
1926	234,699	10.1
1927	238,527	10.0
1928	242,199	10.0
1929	247,730	9.9
1930	242,344	10.0
1931	242,331	9.5
1932	225,331	8.7
1933	211,567	8.2
1934	205,053	7.8
1935	204,626	7.7
1936	206,857	7.8
1937	208,979	7.8
1938	212,136	7.8
1939	211,170	7.6

A failure by Friendly Societies to respond to the steady rise in unemployment in the 1920s led to a 15-20 per cent fall in their membership by the early 1930s. National membership of Friendly Societies represented about 30 per cent of wage earners in 1927. (132) One the eve of the depression males represented more than 80 per cent of members in New South Wales. (133) In early 1931 a nationalist politician proposed that the Friendly Societies

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131. *loc. cit.*,
132. *ibid.*, 391.
133. *Commonwealth Year Book, 1929*, (Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1929), 423.

Act be amended so that unfinancial members could be exempt from payments. (134) However, the NSW Premier Jack Lang replied that no such amendment was necessary as the Constitution of many Friendly Societies allowed them to protect unfinancial members and to direct surplus funds to unemployed members. (135) Realistically, Friendly Societies provided few benefits to unemployed members and did not modify their philosophy in the face of mass unemployment. Yet they were alarmed by suggestions of Unemployment Insurance, which they thought would destroy their spirit of thrift and independent nature. (136) Certainly, Friendly Societies did not encourage a welfare mentality. The strict rules governing charities made it difficult for people to get away with fraud. Moreover, there is no evidence of charities encouraging a "welfare mentality".

1.6 Unemployment insurance:

Mass unemployment in the 1930s exposed the State's liability in not having a co-ordinated social security system. But as this section will highlight, proposals for Unemployment Insurance (UI) date from before the Depression, and governments were frequently advised in the inter-war period to adopt such schemes.

UI involved the deduction of a regular sum of money from a worker's wages as compensation against the loss of

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134. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1935-36,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer), 248.
135. *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 124, (11 February 1931)
136. *loc. cit.,*

wages resulting from involuntary unemployment due to a lack of work. (137) In essence UI or social insurance introduced a joint sense of responsibility for unemployment. The individual contributed towards their future while the Government administered a scheme that promised financial benefits to the unempland eased the burden on the State to provide unemployment relief. As a result the unemployed did not have to wait until they were destitute before public aid was forthcoming. (138) With deductions made in both prosperous and recessed periods, UI afforded a degree of permanency to unemployment relief policies. (139) UI also reflected a change in attitudes about the unemployed, namely that unemployment could no longer be considered an aberration.

In 1911 Britain became the first country to introduce an UIS. Several countries introduced social insurance schemes during the depression decade, including Sweden (1934), the United States (1935) and New Zealand (1938). Queensland established an unemployment insurance scheme in 1923, and it remained the only one operating in Australia during the 1930s. Some contemporary critics of the Queensland insurance scheme described it as "The Loafer's Paradise Bill". (140) Every worker above the age of 18 contributed a set amount which was matched by an equal

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137. T.H. Kewely, *op. cit.*, 147.
138. J.R. Cohen, *Insurance against Unemployment* (London, P.S. King, 1921), 67.
139. E.M. Burns, *British Unemployment Programs, 1920-1938: A Report Prepared for the Committee of Social Security* (Washington, Social Services Research Council, 1941), xiv.
140. *loc. cit.*,

amount from their employer and the Government. Originally aimed at assisting the unemployed seasonal worker, the Queensland scheme was adapted to the needs of a far larger proportion of the population in the 1930s. (141) Concern that high unemployment might re-occur ensured that many workers kept up their payments to the scheme, such that by the late 1930s the official evasion rate was 5.9 per cent. (142)

Other States did not adopt the Queensland scheme, despite an overriding need to introduce a more comprehensive system of unemployment relief. In NSW, successive governments early this century lacked the courage to proceed with UI. At the fifth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party in 1912 only three of the 32 delegates voted in favour of a national and compulsory insurance scheme. (143) The NSW Industrial Arbitration (Admendment) Act of 1918 included provision for the Government to subsidise an unemployment insurance fund, which could receive contributions from employers and employees. However, no such fund was instituted. (144)

Rising unemployment in the 1920s generated more support for UI. Yet, various proposals rarely made it past

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141. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 240.
142. B. Costar, "Was Queensland Different", in N. Wheatley (ed)., *The Wasted Years: Australia's Great Depression* (North Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981), 162. Another feature of UI was that it impelled the unemployed to register so that they could qualify for benefits. The impact was that the Queensland Government was better able to come to terms with the number of unemployed and important characteristics such as age, sex and locality.
143. *Economic News* Vol. 8, No. 11 (November 1939).
144. C. Black, *op. cit.*, 36.

the conceptual stage. The 1922 Economic Conference called by Prime Minister Billy Hughes was told by the employers' representative that:

> ...a right for all unemployed who are willing but unable to secure work [should be] the provision of adequate unemployment insurance to be borne by industry as a legitimate business risk... (145)

In the same year the NSW Labour Research and Information Bureau proposed a social welfare scheme, including an Unemployment Fund which would cover every worker whose wages were fixed by award or industrial agreement. The government, employers and employees would contribute equal amounts under the scheme. (146) But the trade union movement did not have sufficient passion or foresight. Delegates to the Sydney Trades and Labour Council could not agree on the value of payments to the unemployed, despite endorsing the general principles of an UIS. (147) Resolutions by trade unions in the 1920s overlooked UI. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) which represented 15,000 members, proposed Land Settlement, Water Conservation and Reafforestation, an export duty on all products except scoured wool and the equalisation of wage standards between country and city as measures to create

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145. J. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, 2.
146. C.E. Martin, *op. cit.*, 128.The NSW Labour Research and Information Bureau was funded by the Trades and Labour Council.
147. *ibid.*, 127.

employment and reduce unemployment. (148) But there was no mention of UI as the AWU believed government sponsored works would dramatically improve the State's economic position and create new opportunities for enterprise and labour. (149)

Although a key recommendation of the 1926 Royal Commission on National Insurance, the Federal Government delayed committing resources to UI. In NSW, the first Lang administration (1925-1927) was very sympathetic to a UIS, but it lost office before introducing it. A prime motivation for not committing resources to UI was the view that high unemployment was an aberration. This view was evident in the late '20s when the Development and Migration Commission's detailed study of unemployment and migration, concluded in part, that high unemployment would not be a permanent feature of the Australian economy. (150) It would take mass unemployment in the '30s and the demands of unemployed associations to force the State to again examine UI. (151)

While unions held an ambivalent attitude towards an UIS, industry reacted with hostility to the proposal which could increase their total costs. (152) As a relief policy UI had limitations. Not all workers were covered, benefits were not immediately paid upon loss of employment and the

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148. H.E. Boote, *op. cit.*, 2.
149. *loc. cit.*,
150. *Round Table* (December 1928), 197. Further proposals for an UIS in 1928 were short lived because neither the Bavin Government nor the Federal Government would make a decision.
151. United Front Committee of Employed and Unemployed, *Report*, (14 February 1932).
152. E.G. Theodore, *op. cit.*, 3.

amount of benefit did not always equate to the person's weekly wages. (153) Nevertheless, in the context of NSW and most other Australian States, no systematic system of unemployment relief had been implemented by the 1930s, leaving workers uninsured at the onset of the State's worst economic crisis.

1.7 Causes of Unemployment in NSW in the 1920s:

The steady rise in unemployment after WW1 was a catalyst for high unemployment by the late 1920s. Unemployment among NSW union members averaged 8.5 per cent for most of the 1920s, though it broke through the 10 per cent barrier on several occasions. Moreover, NSW levels of unemployment in the 1920s were consistently higher than the national average. (154)

The relatively high rates of unemployment among trade union members reflected an across the board difficulty in securing permanent employment. Between 1917 and 1929 the average unemployment rate in NSW rose from six to eight per cent, peaking at 12 per cent in 1921, a level well above the "normal rate" or optimum level of unemployment.

High unemployment rates in the early 1930s were as much a reflection on the international depression as they were of the NSW (and Australian) economies in the 1920s. (155) In the two decades before 1930 there was a sharp rise

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153. E.M. Burns, *op. cit.*, xiv-xv.
154. *New South Wales Industrial Gazette, 1920s* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer).
155. E.R. Walker, "Some Aspects of Unemployment", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. (1930), 29.

in the number of unemployed men. Many unemployed single men left Sydney in search of employment. They travelled to industrial cities such as Newcastle where their numbers increased unemployment in the later years of the 1920s. (156) These figures inflated the "normal rate" of employment to a point where double-digit unemployment had become accepted by 1929. In the first quarter of 1925 the average unemployment rate was 13.2 per cent, with the engineering and metal works industries experiencing 22.3 per cent. (157) When unemployment averaged about eight per cent there were still marked labour shortages in particular occupations. (158) Indeed the normal rate of unemployment was first questioned in the decade before the Depression, with the Federal Government as late as 1927 considering seven per cent a "normal" rate of unemployment. (159)

While accounts of the Great Depression have correctly identified the staggering rise in unemployment caused by the enormous slump in aggregate demand between 1929 and 1933, few have highlighted other factors which contributed to mass unemployment. The 1920s ushered in seasonal unemployment and the pre-conditions for mass unemployment. After harvest times many farm labourers were dismissed and drifted to cities in search of employment. (160)

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156. *loc. cit.*,
157. S.R. Gray, "An evil long endured" in N. Wheately, (ed)., *op. cit.*, 58.
158. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, Appendix C2.
159. C. Forster, "Australian Unemployment 1900-1940", *Economic Record*, Vol. 41. (1965), 449.
160. Royal Commission on National Insurance, *Second Progress Report*, 1926.

Another factor was the extensive loan expenditure of the 1920s which led to the employment of "an abnormal number of men." (161) But when loan expenditure sharply declined in 1929 a large number of predominantly unskilled men lost their jobs. (162) This was because overseas loans for capital works had the effect of disguising the underlying level of unemployment.

Expenditure on public works was irregular, poorly planned and badly budgeted. In good economic times the NSW Government borrowed heavily from overseas to finance public works. However, in lean times governments significantly reduced public works, causing a large rise in unemployment. Expenditure on public works was lowest at the beginning and at the end of financial years, forcing many to seek alternative employment in the cold winter months. (163)

Foreign borrowings by the States and the Federal Governments provided labour-intensive employment and also enabled governments in NSW to disguise the true level of unemployment. (164) The decade ending 1929 saw the overseas public debt of Australia increase from £261.1m or £50 per head to £478.5m or £75 per head. (165)

Nevertheless, not all contemporary economists saw the

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161. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, 14.
162. B.S.B. Stevens, "Financial and Economic Outlook", *Australian Quarterly*, No 5. (1930), 25.
163. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *Report Upon Employment and Unemployment in New South Wales*, Issued by the Hon. H.M. Dunningham, MLA, Minister for Labour and Industry, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1937), 16.
164. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, 15.
165. R.C. Mills, "The Australian Situation", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. X1, No. 1 (October 1932), 218.

link between public works and unemployment. Mills recognised the impact of fluctuations in loans and the effects on public works, but did not focus on the issue of public works employing such a large body of unskilled labourers in the first place. By contrast, Benham offered the opinion that:

> ...but for the large numbers of such [unskilled] workers employed by Governments and local authorities, unemployment in their ranks would have been much higher, given the basic wages awarded. (166)

Because of the nature of public works few men gained sufficient skills to find alternative or permanent employment. A considerable body of "very slightly skilled labourers" emerged in the 1920s. (167) In June 1927 approximately two-thirds of Australia's foreign debt arose from Federal and State authorities borrowing primarily for the purpose of economic development by means of public works. (168) At this time Australia was the largest borrower of any country in the British empire. In addition, public works did little to enhance private economic activity. Their spasmodic and unplanned nature was unsatisfactory in itself and it also increased the

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166. R.C. Mills, "Australian Loan Policy" in Campbell, P.C., Mills R.C., Portus, G.V. (eds) *Studies in Australian Affairs*: Issued by the Institute of Pacific Relations NSW Branch (Melbourne, MacMillan, 1928), 218.
167. F.C. Benham, *The Prosperity of Australia: An economic analysis* (London, P.S. King and Son 1930), 210.
168. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, 26.

instability of secondary employment created by the demand on those employed on the works. (169) Because public works were tied to overseas borrowings and subject to the whim of politicians, irregularity in borrowings lead to fluctuation in industry and resulted in unemployment. (170) The short-term benefit of public works in the 1920s was negated by the instability that such employment created.

The notion of the 20s being a prosperous period was questioned by some contemporaries. Bland says the prosperity of NSW was based upon "extravagant borrowings." (171) Between 1919 and 1928 the State's expenditure doubled, taxation trebled and public debt increased by 75 per cent. (172) The budget was balanced on only four occasions during this period, 1919, 1923, 1924 and 1927.

Up until the late 20s there was little discussion of the upward trend in unemployment, or the direct effect of employing unskilled workers on government funded public works programs which disguised the real level of unemployment and added to Australia's increasing overseas debt. Contemporaries warned of the dangers of excessive levels of public works and inefficient government spending. Copland argued that public works programs should be subject to a long range plan. (173) Schedvin's view was that:

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169. R.C. Mills, *op. cit.*, 105.
170. E.R. Walker, "The Unemployment Problem in Australia:, *Journal of Political Economy* Vol. XL, (1932), 222.
171. F.A. Bland, "Government and Finance", *Morpeth Review* Vol. 11, No. 7 (September 1931), 35.
172. *loc. cit.*,
173. D.B. Copland, *The Australian Economy* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1931), 21.

> As in the 1880s, the bulk of public investment [in the 1930s] was undertaken without reference to short term market considerations. The nature of public investment and the scale of overseas borrowings combined to render the economy extremely sensitive to international disturbances in the 1920s. (174)

Australian Governments also contributed to unemployment in the '20s through other policies designed to create employment, such as tariff protection. Ironically, tariff protection facilitated the organisation of certain industries along lines that reduced the probability of permanent employment for the average worker. This was due to tariffs increasing the costs of production which added to the cost of goods and led to an increase in the cost of living, borne by the public paying higher prices. (175)

Supply side factors that influenced the level of skills of members of the labour force included the effects of technological change and the impact of WW1. Many returned soldiers joined the ranks of the jobless because they had not succeeded in their new careers due to poor planning and their general lack of skills and unsuitability for positions. (176) As one third of men enlisted for the

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174. B. Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression: a study of economic development and public policy in the 1920s and 1930s* (Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1970), 9.
175. L.F. Giblin, *Australia 1930* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1931). Giblin's view is supported by F.G. Clarke, *Australia: A Concise political and social history* (Marrickville, NSW, Harcourt Brace Jovanich Group, 1982), 220.
176. E.R. Walker, (1932), *op. cit.*, 223.

war had been under the age of 22, the war created a large pool of unskilled workers. (177) Their overseas duties had prevented the opportunity to undertake apprenticeships or vocational study. Moreover the effects of psychological adjustment impacted for more than a decade. (178) Such analysis also shows the signs of a growing number of unskilled members of the labour force, predominantly men.

Unemployment in NSW during the 20s was also caused by the introduction of machinery and the associated improvements in productivity. (179) Better equipment and the failure of countries such as Australia to secure markets for their goods led to increasing numbers of long term and permanent unemployed persons. (180) Productivity improvements in the coal industry, for example, led to 3,000 surplus workers by 1927. (181)

During the 1920s Australia placed itself in a vulnerable economic position and it would not have required an international depression to initiate a major decline in Australia. (182) Some contemporary economists argued that mass unemployment was a symptom of too high real wages, (183) while others thought the link between wages and

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177. E.R. Walker, "Some Aspects of Unemployment", *Australian Quarterly*, No. 6 (June 1930), 36.
178. E.R. Walker (1936), *op. cit.*, 66.
179. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1931-1932*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer), 786-787.
180. *loc. cit.*,
181. E.R.Walker, (1936), *op. cit.*, 77.
182. A.G.B. Fisher, "Crisis and Re-Adjustment in Australia", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. XL11, No.6 (December 1934), 755.
183. G. Anderson, "Unemployment and its Amelioration", in D.B. Copland, *An economic survey of Australia* (1931), 176.

unemployment was more complex than traditional demand-supply theory. (184)

Immigration was blamed for rising unemployment. In 1929 the Boilermaker's Society in Australia and Great Britain expressed concern that artisans were migrating to Australia and swelling the ranks of the unemployed. (185) An official report by a British Economic Mission that toured Australia in 1929 concluded that there was a "sensible decline" in assisted immigrants in the second half of the 1920s. (186) But Pope's detailed studies of the Australian economy, using econometric analysis, concluded that in the inter-war period there were no signs that migration led to an increase in unemployment. (187)

1.8 Onset of the Great Depression:

The 1921 recession in NSW was eclipsed by the sharp rise in unemployment in August and September 1927. Industries such as iron, steel, metal products and engineering industries were particularly hard hit and experienced high unemployment rates in 1927 and 1928. (188) Sydney and other State capitals witnessed marches of the

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184. E.R. Walker (1936), *op. cit.*, 61.
185. Boilermakers Society of Australia, *Quarterly Reports*, (April 1929). *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1931-1932*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1932), 787.
186. HMSO, *Report of the British Economic Mission to Australia, 7 January 1929*, 15.
187. D. Pope, G. Withers, "Immigration and Unemployment: a long run perspective" *Working Paper in Economic History, No. 61* (Canberra, Australian National University, 1985), D. Pope, "Contours of Australian Immigration, 1901-1930", *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. XX1, No. 1 (March 1985)
188. *New South Wales Official Year Book 1934-35* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 799-802.

unemployed in 1928. (189) The Militant Minority Movement (MMM) claimed that up to 25 per cent of Australian miners experienced intermittent employment in the 1920s. (190)

With the exception of the mining industry, the NSW economy did not have sufficient inherent weaknesses to explain the growth in unemployment in mid 1927. Rather, psychological factors may have had a bearing. An adverse season in 1927 caused uncertainty and apprehension of a long drought and instilled a degree of pessimism which influenced some businesses to retrench staff and curtail expansion. (191)

Primary industries also fared poorly in the last years of the 1920s. A decline of about 30 per cent in the returns from wool and a decline in the wheat yield, cost Australia, of which NSW made up a significant slice, about £20m in 1929/30 in reduced export earnings. (192) In 1930 a group of economists warned of the dislocating effects of rapidly reducing public works. (193)

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189. *Round Table* Vol. 19, (December 1928), 196.
190. Militant Minority Movement, *The Coal Crisis: The Miner's Next Step* (Trades Hall, Sydney, 1928, 7.
191. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1934-1935,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 800.
192. B.S.B. Stevens, "Financial and Economic Outlook" *Australian Quarterly* No. 5 (March 1930), 7. B.S.B. Stevens, *Employment and Relief of Unemployment* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1932), 17.
193. Statement by Economists, Brisbane, June 1930, cited in E.G.O. Shann, *The crisis in Australian Finance, 1929-1931: Documents of budgetary and economic policy* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1933), 18.

Between February 1928 and February 1930 the incidence of unemployment among NSW trade unionists rose from 11.8 per cent to 16.3 per cent. (194)

> A large amount of this unemployment is inevitable because no industrial system is elastic enough to adapt itself immediately to such a sudden and drastic change. (195)

On the eve of the Depression, several contemporary economists argued that high real wages caused high unemployment. Copland argued that a 10 per cent reduction in wages would not add to unemployment, but would allow employers new opportunities to expand their businesses and employ extra labour. (196)

> The steady upward trend of unemployment up to 1929 must be regarded as the development of wages rates somewhat beyond the capacity of industry. (197)

Copland's view was also adopted by Benham who advocated that a lowering of average wages accompanied by an increase in the value production per workers would cause unemployment to fall:

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194. Commonwealth of Australia, *Preliminary Survey of the Economic Problem* (Bruce Report, Melbourne, Government Printer 1932), 20.
195. J.B. Bridgen, *op. cit.*, 9.
196. As paraphrased in P. Groenegewen, B. MacFarlane, *op. cit.*, 139.
197. D.B.Copland, *Australia in The World Crisis, 1929-1932*. The Alfred Marshall Lectures (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1934), 18.

> It is futile to blame "bad seasons" or "trade depressions" for a long-continued high percentage of unemployment... after time unemployment can be quickly removed, or at least diminished if average money wages are lowered. (198)

However, the sheer scale of unemployment in 1929/30 diminished the significance of these views. (199) "Depressional" factors were the overriding cause of mass unemployment in 1929 and for the duration of the 1930s. High unemployment in the 1920s affected a large number of major economies.

Rising unemployment across NSW generated spontaneous responses and petitions to the State. In March 1929 the One Big Union of Unemployed petitioned for SLEs to repay the cost of fares to unemployed who had gained temporary work. The Union also advocated for a decentralisation in food relief depots to make it easier for the unemployed to gain the dole. (200) By the third quarter of 1929, 25 per cent of members of the Baking Trades Union were either unemployed or had lost contact with their Union. (201) While unemployment affected most classes and occupations, the unskilled comprised the larger proportion. More than 80 per cent of men registered at SLEs in 1929 and 1930 sought

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198. F.C. Benham, *op. cit.*, 211.
199 .Non-economic forces played a role, such as pessimism.
200. NSW Legislative Assembly, "The Unemployed" *NSW Parliamentary Papers, 1928-29,* Vol.1 (7 March 1929).
201. Baking Trades Union, *Minutes of Executive Meeting* 1 October 1929, T13/3/2.

employment as labourers. (202) In October 1929, 3,500 residents of the Sydney electorates of Canterbury, Lakemba and Bankstown petitioned the NSW Legislative Assembly to approve public works for the unemployed such as the completion of the Tempe-East Hills Railway, dredging of the Cooks River, roads and other bridges. (203) Unemployed workers covered by a large number of industrial awards made strong complaints in March 1930 about the operation of the SLE. And a petition from 18 trade unions claimed their average unemployment rate was 30 to 40 per cent and as high as 70 to 80 per cent in some trades. (204) The petitioners also requested that relief workers be paid on the basis of standard industrial awards. (205)

Indicative of the deteriorating labour market, male employment in factories fell by 31.55 per cent between 1928 and 1932. The recession impacted on the labour force quite dramatically with total registrations at SLEs doubling to 20,710 in May 1930. By December 1930 monthly registrations exceeded 30,000. (206) The total number of unemployed was 55,000 in the metropolitan areas and 25,000 in the rural areas. (207) Indicative of the large number of unskilled

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202. This trend can be seen in the returns published in the *NSW Industrial Gazette* during 1929 and 1930.
203. NSW Legislative Assembly, "Public Works for the relief of the unemployed", *NSW Parliamentary Papers* (October 1929).
204. NSW Legislative Assembly, "The Question of Unemployment, *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 1 No 2, (1929-30).
205. *loc. cit.*,
206. *NSW Industrial Gazette* (31 January 1931), 26.
207. *loc. cit.*,

men, more than 80 per cent of the unemployed were labourers. (208)

Recognition of unacceptably high unemployment by non-Labor politicians in NSW dates from the 1929 Budget Speech. This confirms the failure of the NSW Government to recognise the build-up in unemployment in the 1920s, particularly in the later years of that decade. (209)

1.9 Conclusions:

NSW and most other States in Australia were ill-prepared to deal with mass unemployment when it initially struck in 1929/30. (210) Despite ample warnings of the need to introduce UI, successive NSW Governments avoided implementing any comprehensive form of unemployment relief. This led to the majority of NSW workers being uninsured and unprotected at a time of unprecedented economic crisis. The State lacked courage. Community attitudes which laid blame for unemployment at the feet of the unemployed also had an influence on government opinions.

During the 1920s a large increase in foreign debt hung over Australia. During the decade ending 30 June 1929, the overseas public debt of Australia increased from £261m or

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208. *loc. cit.*,
209. L. Richardson, *The bitter years: Wollongong during the Great Depression* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1984), 61.
210. On the eve of the Depression, NSW Premier Bavin thought that the existing system of labour exchanges was adequate. NSW Premier's Department, *New South Wales, the land of sunshine and opportunity: a handbook of information for investors, traders and producers and other*. Issued by the authority of the Hon. T.R. Bavin, Premier and Treasurer of NSW (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1928), 12.

£50m per head to £478m or £75m per head. Interest on the external debt rose from 9.5 per cent of export earnings in 1913 to 19.5 per cent in 1928. (211) NSW, as the largest State, amassed the largest loans. A comparison between the 1880s and the 1920s reveals a close similarity in the policy of governments to outlay excessive sums on poorly planned public works programs. Initially public works were a mechanism by which expansion and future prosperity of an economy could be achieved. But colonial and State governments borrowed too heavily during these periods, leaving themselves short of reserves and policies when economic slumps occurred. Moreover, the excessive amount of loans in the 1920s were not channelled into public works which provided benefits to the workers. The ad hoc nature of public works reflected a policy of providing employment, but not necessarily in an ordered fashion or in a manner that increased the skills of the labour force.

During economic recessions, the underlying principle of public works changed to be an unemployment relief policy, but there was little constructive thought about how to implement this strategy so as to best benefit the economy and skills base of each person employed on public works.

High real wages also accompanied public works, thereby causing a disparity in wages levels between the public and private sectors. Another factor holding back governments

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211. R.C. Mills, "The Australian Situation", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. X1. No. 1 (October 1932), 218.

was the optimistic belief that unemployment would fall sharply fall as the century progressed.

Attitudinal factors played a large role in influencing the small amount of State aid to the unemployed in the decades prior to the Great Depression. Despite unemployment being a serious problem in the 1920s no political party implemented significant improvements to the system of unemployment relief, which essentially was based on occasional public works and sustenance administered by the NSWBS and other benevolent organisations.

With some exceptions the unemployed before the 1930s were perceived to be unskilled and lazy members of society. It was not until late 1929 that politicians and policy makers in NSW recognised the chronic nature of unemployment. But political recognition did not bring about well developed relief policies. While the State maintained the view that unemployment relief was the domain of non-government groups, its response was to finance and delegate authority for food relief to the NSWBS during the 1920s.

Unfortunately it took the tragedy of mass unemployment in the 1930s to prompt the State to more meaningfully respond.

CHAPTER TWO: NSW PUBLIC FINANCE, 1929-1939

2.1 The burden of unemployment on public finances:

Mass unemployment in the 1930s forced governments to increase drastically allocations for unemployment relief and other social services. As public finances contained no provisions to counter mass unemployment, the State first introduced a tax to fund unemployment relief in 1930. Indicative of the ongoing need to finance unemployment relief programs, successive NSW governments retained taxes to fund unemployment relief during the Depression decade.

The State faced the insurmountable problem of deficit budgets and a need to cut public expenditure at a time when the prolonged economic crisis dictated they spend unprecedented amounts on unemployment relief. The four governments of the period reflected different philosophies and policies in regard to public expenditure. Buoyed by introducing a special Unemployment Relief Tax (URT) in 1930 the Bavin Government allocated substantial sums of money to public works, while at the same time increasing expenditure on food relief. The Lang Labor Government used this tax as the basis for extending charitable relief in the form of the dole to provincial and country areas of NSW. Between November 1930 and his dismissal in May 1932 Lang expended

more than £7.5m on sustenance. (1) The impact of Lang's policies on public finances was to severely restrict the State's capacity to borrow abroad and repay existing debts.

On taking office in May 1932 the United Australia Party (UAP) led by Stevens embarked on a radical plan to minimise public sector expenditure by imposing stricter eligibility conditions on dole applicants. Stevens' philosophy carried over to the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS). And, as this chapter will highlight, the Stevens Government did not distribute to the unemployed all the proceeds of the special unemployment relief tax. In the last six months of the decade, the conservative Mair Government attempted to ease the plight of the unemployed in the face of rising unemployment and the prospect of a second depression.

Rising unemployment in the late 1920s placed added pressure on the State's public finances. In 1929 the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) reported that its budget increase in charitable relief was predominantly due to a rise in unemployment on the northern coalfields and the deteriorating employment situation in Sydney. (2) Other government departments felt the squeeze on the public purse. For example, the Inspector General of Mental Hospitals reported that "to reduce the expenditure in this direction would necessitate a lowering of the standard of such services..." (3)

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1. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1933-34* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1934), 624.
2. NSW Treasury Department, Correspondence - General Series, 29/5547 10/22240.
3. *ibid.*, 29/5920.

But unemployment relief was a small percentage of government expenditure in the 1920s, a decade in which most Australian States borrowed excessively. Apart from South Australia no State government made significant attempts to cut public expenditure before 1930. In NSW the average annual loan expenditure between 1926 and 1929 was £14.3m. With international and domestic economic conditions on the decline, the Bavin Government initially responded by reducing loan expenditure to £12.5m per annum before further reducing it to £10m. (4)

It was commonly believed that Australian governments during the 1930s could not borrow abroad because of the sharp downturn in the prices of primary products. However, in the early 1930s States such as NSW could not borrow abroad because of their underlying poor financial State. Bland argued that even if the depression had not occurred, NSW would have been unable to borrow to any large extent. (5)

2.2 Unemployment Relief Taxes:

Without the special levies on the employed, the unemployed of the 1930s would have received less State aid and would have been in a far worse predicament. Bavin introduced the Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act

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4. D.B. Copland, *Australia in the World Crisis, 1929-1932: The Alfred Marshall Lectures (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1934), 36.* B.S.B. Stevens, *Employment and Relief of Unemployment* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 19.
5. F.A. Bland, "Government and Finance", *Morpeth Review*, Vol. 11, No. 17, (September 1931), 35.

which established the NSW Unemployment Relief Council (URC) to administer an Unemployment Relief Tax (URT). A special levy of 3d in the £1 was imposed on salaries, wages and other income from employment from 1 July 1930. It was a regressive tax in that it hit the rich and poor alike. Lang increased the levy to 1s in the £1 on earnings and income (ie. five per cent).

The URC authorised expenditures on public works from the Unemployment Relief Fund (URF). Through the URC the Bavin Government gave approval for large amounts of relief expenditure. Bavin allocated more funds for relief works than the income collected from the URT. Rural areas of NSW received the highest share and a disproportionate amount. (6) By the end of August 1930 the URC had authorised expenditure totalling £1,538,475. Bavin encouraged the URC to provide extra funds for relief programs "..as it is essential that as much employment as possible should be provided between the present time (August) and November when the full benefit of harvesting and shearing would become apparent." (7)

Bavin's response to the growing army of unemployed was to increase the number of government-run food relief depots (FRD) and to transform ordinary public works (OPW) into relief works for the unemployed. When Bavin was defeated in November 1930 he left the URT in a deficit. The surge in spending under Bavin had major repercussions for the Lang

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6. New South Wales, Unemployment Relief Council (URC), "Copies of Minutes, Meetings and Papers", 28 August 1930. 2/8176. Country areas received £1m, metropolitan £760,000 and Newcastle/Maitland £163,000.
7. *ibid.*, 21 August 1930.

Government. The strain on resources was evident and in June 1931 the URC withdrew unexpended balances on completed works and amounts approved but not accepted by local councils. (8)

While the name of the unemployment levy changed during the 1930s there was no change from the original intention to raise a substantial sum of additional revenue so that the State could fund unemployment relief programs. From July 1932 the URF was merged into consolidated revenue and became subject to parliamentary appropriation. (9) Stevens changed the system of funding unemployment relief (food and public works) by instituting a wages tax on income and a special income tax on other income from 1 December 1933. Under Stevens the URT became a progressive tax as levies ranged from 6d in the £1 on the first £2 to a maximum of 10d in the £1. (10) On 1 October 1939, the Mair Government replaced these taxes with a combined Unemployment Relief and Social Services Tax.

Income from unemployment relief taxes represented more than one-third of NSW government revenue for the greater part of the 1930s. (11) The amount of revenue raised is listed in the following table:

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8. *ibid.*, 30 June 1931.
9. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1936-37*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1937), 690.
10. United Australia Party, *From Chaos to Order, Being a Summary of the Achievements of the Stevens-Bruxner Government, May 13 1932 to May 11, 1935* (Published under the authority of B.S.B. Stevens and M.F. Bruxner, circa 1935), 15.
11. *Official Year Books of NSW*, selected issues.

Table 2.1: Revenue collected from various unemployment relief taxes, 1930-1940 (12)

Year	**URT Special Income Tax and Wages Tax £**
1930-31	4,375,803
1931-32	5,799,519
1932-33	6,702,439
1933-34	5,248,287
1934-35	5,262,621
1935-36	6,190,292
1936-37	6,801,889
1937-38	6,949,284
1938-39	6,363,935
1939-40	8,252,321
Total	**61,946,390**

According to Table 2.1 the URT amassed £61.9m between 1930 and 1938. To analyse how much revenue from the URT was used for its intended purpose it is necessary to identify the components of unemployment relief, ie. cash charitable assistance, food relief and expenditure on public works programs. Expenditure on unemployment relief during this period comprised food relief (£16,323,045), cash payments,

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12. *loc. cit*; *Financial Statement: Budget Speech, B.S.B. Stevens, 1937, 2; 1938*, 4; *Report*, 1937, 24) There is a large discrepancy between Table 2.1 and the amounts recorded in *Report of the Commissioner for Taxation*, 1938-1939; *Report on working of PRUA, 1930-1932; 1939, 3; and Special Income and Wages Tax (Management) Act, 1936*, NSW Parliamentary Papers) which were:

Year Ended	**Collected £**	**Outstanding £**	**Costs £**
30/06/31	1,648,329	472,142	37,520
30/06/32	1,792,520	654,080	31,023
30/06/33	3,025,630	740,139	39,135
30/06/34	2,144,777	587,397	48,784
30/06/35	2,206,003	498,790	49,639
30/06/36	2,882,112	436,091	53,425
30/06/37	3,316,354	426,115	55,985
30/07/38	3,643,161	374,326	64,805

clothing and medical services (£1,065,906) and relief works (£6,832,638). (13) The relief works total includes loans for relief works.

During the 1930s governments allocated approximately £20m in food relief. (14) In Stevens' first year in office income from the URT and Family Endowment Tax totalled £8,981,555, but only £6,931,414 was spent on various social services. (15) The remaining £1,795,681 or 20 per cent was spent on administration unrelated to unemployment relief. (16)

Excluding expenditure from loans and sums allocated as grants for unemployment relief, the total expenditure by the NSW and Federal Governments on charitable relief amounted to £14,440,848 in 1931-32 and £13,020,306 in 1932-33. (17)

The Stevens Government was widely criticised by the unemployed and their associations, church officials, womens' and community groups and the opposition Labor Party for failing to distribute all the proceeds of the special wages and income tax. In September 1933 a number of municipal and shire councils passed resolutions which urged the Stevens Government to spend all of the proceeds of the URT on the unemployed. (18) An alderman from Mascot Council

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13. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1940-41,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 558.
14. *ibid.,* 559. £19,534,103 was spent on food relief between July 1930 and June 1939.
15. *Report of the Auditor General,* (Sydney, Government Printer 1933), 33.
16. *loc. cit.,*
17. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1932-33,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1933), 631.
18. New South Wales, Chief Secretary, Main Series of Inward Letters (hereafter abbreviated to NSW, CSIL),

said that Stevens was "...robbing the poor...which is the greatest sin of humanity today." (19) Representatives of the Concord Citizens Committee asked Stevens to "...spend the whole of the money contributed by the employed for the unemployed." (20) Lang claimed that Stevens distorted the figures by including family endowments payments and charitable relief payments under the total of unemployment relief. (21) It cannot be precisely said how much revenue Stevens failed to distribute in unemployment relief. During his term of office he raised £43,518,747 from unemployment relief. On the basis of the amount he failed to distribute in his first year in office, some 20 per cent, and in light of frequently expressed anecdotes, it can be estimated that about 20 per cent or more than £8m was not expended on relief for the unemployed. The annual conference of the NSW Labor Council in 1936 "deplored the fact that the wages tax paid by workers is being misused for the purposes of balancing the budget..." (22) The Unity Committee of West Wallsend accused Stevens of robbing £3m annually from unemployment relief funds. (23)

In 1933 the Balmain Unemployed Workers Union urged the Stevens Government to distribute to benevolent

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A33/7738 5/9111. The conservative Country Women's Association requested Stevens to return to each country district 80 per cent of the income gathered under the URT. See NSW CSIL, 32/11939 Box 10/22298.

19. NSW, CSIL, "Notes of Deputation from representatives of the Trades and Labor Council to the NSW Minister for Social Services, Hawkins regarding food relief and clothing to the unemployed," A33/7091 A33/7090.
20. *loc. cit.,*
21. "Policy Speech, J.T. Lang." April 1935. Box 10 (144) NSW Labor Council Records.
22. *loc. cit.,*
23. *loc. cit.,*

organisations and workers groups the £1m from the URT which had been sidetracked into consolidated revenue. (24) One writer said: "There can be little doubt that revenue raised for unemployment relief and loan funds was used to show a reduced deficit." (25) In the second half of the 1930s Stevens retained the URT and other taxes despite the fall in unemployment and the downscaling of government expenditure on unemployment relief. It was not until unemployment had fallen to about four per cent in July 1941 that the Unemployment Relief and Social Services tax was abolished.

2.3 The cost of government relief:

The food relief system was a large burden on the budgets of NSW governments during the Depression, particularly on the Lang Government. By January 1932 expenditure on food relief exceeded £400,000 per month, a significant rise from £140,000 in January 1931. Lang's Chief Secretary, Thomas Baddley expressed concern that "the cost of our food relief is altogether too great. Moreover its incidence is a tremendous burden on the community financially..." (26)

Between July 1931 and November 1932 the Lang Government expended £6.6m on food relief. (27) This large

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24. NSW, CSIL, A33/7095 5/9109.
25. J. McCarthy, "The Stevens-Bruxner Government, 1932-1937" MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1967, 136.
26. NSW, CSIL, B31/108/664.
27. New South Wales, Treasury, Special Bundles, *Unemployment Relief Fund Ledgers*, 7/15035, 481; 7/15036, 275; 7/15037, 186.

scale expenditure was necessary to meet the spectacular rise in unemployment from about 10 to 30 per cent. Lang's critics claimed that this £6.6m was allocated without reference to Parliament or Budget papers. (28)

After taking office Stevens conceded that mass unemployment was crippling NSW and reluctantly endorsed Lang's policy of sustenance:

> Unfortunately for the country during the period so great was the drift that it became financially impossible for the government of the day to provide any funds, excepting those necessary to give food relief to many thousands of unemployed men and their dependants. (29)

Public expenditure on relief programs in the ensuing years was largely governed by the degree of co-operation between local councils and the State Government. Table 2.2 illustrates the average monthly number of adult men receiving food relief and expenditure between 1931 and 1939. It shows three significant factors. First, expenditure on food relief was highest during the Lang Government (November 1930-May 1932). Second, a large fall in food relief expenditure occurred after Stevens came to

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28. F.A. Bland, "The financial and economic policy of the Stevens Government", *Economic Record* Vol. IX, No. 16 (June 1933), 30. B.S.B. Stevens, (1935), *op. cit.*, 4. By contrast, the Stevens Government gathered receipts from taxes of Family Endowment and Unemployment Relief and recorded them as Consolidated Revenue and Expenditure, before Parliament voted on their allocation.
29. B.S.B. Stevens, (1935), *op. cit.*, 4.

office. And, third, a rise in unemployment in the final years of the decade forced the conservative Governments of Stevens and Mair to increase allocations of food relief.

***Table 2.2: Average number of men receiving food relief on a monthly basis, and annual expenditure on food relief, 1930-1939* (30)**

Year June	**Average Monthly Number**	**Annual Expenditure £**
1930	N/A	355,989
1931	205,465	1,837,886
1932	151,167	5,070,732
1933	80,804	3,510,194
1934	28,676	1,467,953
1935	25,525	1,076,670
1936	24,539	980,759
1937	28,609	1,114,950
1938	31,713	1,263,901
1939	35,404	1,419,836

2.4 Stevens reduces relief expenditure:

An instrumental part of the policy of the Stevens administration was to employ men on relief works and to reduce the volume and cost of food relief and medical assistance. Stevens claimed that between July 1932 and June 1935, £14,528,864 was expended on relief works, but as

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30. Abstracted from Tables 473 and 474, *Official Year Book of NSW, 1940-41* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1943), 558; *New South Wales Industrial Gazette* Vol. 50 (30 November 1936), 1221-1222. NSW Treasury, Special Bundles, Unemployment Relief Ledgers. The Expenditure column includes food relief issued to women, travellers and children. No Government of the period kept a break-up of the relative amounts.

Table 2.3 shows, expenditure during the period totalled £11.5m. (31)

Table 2.3: Expenditure on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme, 1933-34 to 1937-38 (32)

Financial Year	**Amount (£)**
1933-34	2,907,080
1934-35	2,819,179
1935-36	3,365,986
1936-37	2,116,311
1937-38	331,988
Total	*11,540,544*

Stevens may have included food relief in his definition of relief works, because the combined food relief and unemployment relief works expenditure for the five year period (1931-1936) equated to a similar figure.

The highest proportion of government expenditure on food relief was allocated by the Lang administration in 1931-1932, during perhaps the worst year of the depression. Also of importance is the allocation for same in 1939-1940, the highest amount since 1933-34, which reflected the onset of a second major slump.

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31. B.S.B. Stevens, (1935), *op. cit.*, 8.
32. NSW, Treasury, Special Bundle, *Unemployment Relief Ledgers,* AONSWK, 7/15035-7/15039; New South Wales, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Reports*.

2.5 Work Rationing:

The squeeze on public expenditure forced the State to introduce rationing of hours of employment. (33) Rationing in the NSW public service began in the second half of 1929 and peaked during 1930-1932. (34) While one study concluded that there was little part-time work or job sharing among the unemployed (35) there was a large amount of work rationing, particularly in the public sector. Rationing or "short time" (36) was commonplace in the NSW railways and tramways. In early 1930 the Bavin Government gave the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Engineers the option of having 400 of its members dismissed or agreeing that they work on a rationed basis, ie. each employee would not work one week every three months or less. (37) In July 1930 rationing of tramway workers became legal, with workers having a week's unpaid leave every 18 weeks in the Newcastle district and every eight weeks in the Sydney

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33. G. Anderson, "Unemployment and its Amelioration" in D.B. Copland (ed)., *An Economic Survey of Australia* (Philadelphia, American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1931), 177-178.
34. C. Forster, "Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s", in R.G. Gregory and N.G. Butlin (eds) *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), 298.
35. R.G. Gregory, L. Ho, L. McDermott, "Sharing the Burden: The Australian Labor Market in the 1930s", *Working Papers in Economic History*, Vol. 47. 1985, 29.
36. Labor Research and Information Bureau, *March of the Machine in Australia* (Sydney, Trades Hall, 1931), 3.
37. Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Engineers, "Returns of Membership", E99/15/3.

metropolitan district. (38) Rationing allowed ongoing employment for surplus officers targeted with redundancies and was necessary because of the introduction of the 96 hour fortnight and the reduced number of services due to the economic decline. In addition, the closure of the Sutherland-Cronulla line increased the number of surplus staff by 31 to 717, causing the frequency of rationing to be increased to one week in six in the metropolitan area. (39)

In the following years rationing prevented the dismissals of thousands of railway employees.

Table 2.4: Employees of the NSW Railways, 1930-1932 (40)

Date	**Employed Full Time**	**Rationed Work**	**Total**
30/06/30	9,221	26,852	36,073
30/06/31	3,052	34,162	37,198
30/06/32	13,270	23,713	36,983

Rationing had the effect of disguising the true level of unemployment, thereby lowering statistics of unemployment. (41) Official statistics did not include a question on the number of rationed workers, although it can be assumed that many of the 8.14 per cent of people who described themselves as "Part Time" in the *1933 Census* had been forced into rationed work.

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38. New South Wales, Transport Department, Correspondence Files, "Rationing of Work, 1931", 8/1493.
39. *loc. cit.*,
40. New South Wales, Government Railways and Tramways, *Report of the Commissioners for the year ending 30 June 1930, 1931, 1932* (Sydney, Government Printer)
41. *Economic and Trade Conditions in Australia to December 1930*, 1931, (Melbourne, Government Printer, 1930), 211.

Many private sector employers also introduced rationing as a means of avoiding large scale retrenchments. For example, in the second half of 1930 employees at the BHP workshops at Newcastle did not work every third week. (42) One study of the Metal Trades Industries, concluded that 4,000 members, or approximately half the total number of members were rationed to 26 hours a week between May 1931 and May 1932. (43)

The full extent of rationing cannot be calculated because of incomplete returns from employers. In mid 1932, however, the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (CBCS) estimated that 20 per cent of the Australian labour force went without one day's work every week. (44) There are no reasons to dispute this estimate, leaving the conclusion that rationing was a major characteristic of the NSW economy in the 1930s. In the second half of the '30s work rationing became more identified with relief workers. Amongst permanent employees the extent of rationing had fallen by 1936.

2.6 Decline in public sector employment:

All governments of the decade brought in reforms aimed at reducing public sector expenditure. In July 1930 Bavin reduced the salaries of public servants by 8.3 per cent

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42. Boilermakers Society of Australia, *Quarterly Reports* (October 1930), 410.
43. J.A. Merritt's study as cited in C. Forster, *op. cit.*, 298.
44. Cited in Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Unemployment: An International Problem*, A Report by a study group of members (London, Oxford University Press, 1935), 38. Section 6.8 of this thesis details the working hours and conditions of relief workers.

with a minimum of £300 per annum for married men and a rule that no adult officer was to be reduced below the basic wage. (45) In 1931 the Lang Government made a further cut, lifting the minimum salary reduction to 15 per cent, with the highest of 33.5 per cent on salaries over £1,500. (46) Lang also introduced a rebate scheme which was extended by the Stevens Government. (47)

As Table 2.6 highlights, government departments and authorities that employed the highest percentage of men on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) were the same employers who shed many full time positions in the early 1930s. Between 1929 and 1933 total public sector employment in NSW fell from 1,102,000 to 899,000. (48)

Table 2.5: Business Undertakings and Constructions, 1929-1937 (49)

Departments	**1929**	**1931**	**1932**	**1937**
Railways, Roads Transport Tramways	58,011	51,174	49,810	n/a
Maritime Services Board	1,232	729	619	1,130
Water Conservation Irrigation Commission	1,548	1,058	1,050	913
Main Roads	3,695	1,343	1,358	3,604
Water Sewerage Drainage	5,715	1,894	1,801	10,325

45. United Australia Party, *op. cit.,* 107.
46. *loc. cit.,*
47. *ibid.,* 108.
48. A. Barnard, N.G. Butlin and J.J. Pincus, "Public and Private Sector Employment in Australia, 1901-1974", *Australian Economic Review* (1977).
49. *loc. cit.,*

Much, if not all, of the decline in public sector employment occurred in the areas of business undertakings and construction. Between 1929/30 and 1931/32 employment in business undertakings fell by 15 per cent, while there was a massive 46 per cent reduction in road construction. (50) By contrast, administrative areas experienced a 10 per cent reduction over the same period. (51) The public sector bore the brunt of the depression. In aggregate terms, employees of the NSW Government decreased by 19,649 or nearly 18 per cent in the period 1929-1932 as the following table depicts.

Table 2.6: NSW Government Employees, 1929-1939 (selected years) (52)

Year ended	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
1929	97,803	12,354	110,157
1932	78,003	12,505	90,508
1933	75,884	12,580	88,464
1937	92,417	12,668	105,085
1938	92,539	12,854	105,393
1939	93,954	12,853	106,807

The figures are extremely important in light of Snooks' argument that large scale retrenchments in the public sector paved the way for the re-employment of many men on the ERWS, on lower wages and without the protection

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50. *Official Year Book of NSW*, 1939-1940, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1940), 604.
51. T. Hytten, "Australian Public Finance Since 1930" *Supplement to the Economic Record*, (March 1935), 128.
52. *loc. cit.*,

of conditions laid down by industrial awards. (53) The downscaling of the public sector is also reflected in departmental returns. For example, the expenditure of the Department of Main Roads (DMR) declined sharply after the depression's onset. The DMRs expenditure for the County of Cumberland and the Country Area's Main Road Fund fell from £3.8m in 1929/30 to £1.3m in 1931/32. (54)

2.7 Conclusions:

This chapter has demonstrated that on the eve of a decade of mass unemployment the State was ill prepared to provide relief to the unemployed. Mass unemployment forced the State to introduce a special tax to fund unemployment relief. This levy was crucial to funding the food relief and public works programs that will be outlined in Chapters Five and Six.

The policies of NSW Governments in the '30s differed in terms of expenditure limits. While Lang was prepared to base government policy solely on the dole, Stevens opted for a broader approach and expanded public works programs. Stevens was financially conservative in allocating funds

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53. G.D. Snooks, "Government Unemployment Relief in the 1930s: Aid or Hindrance to Recovery", in R.G. Gregory and N.G. Butlin (eds), *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 332-334.
54. Department of Main Roads, *Fourteenth Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 1939* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1939), 88.

for unemployment relief, and by not spending all the income derived from the Unemployment Relief Tax, was widely judged to be harsh. Chapters Five and Six will take up this theme by examining the human cost of Stevens' drive to cut unemployment relief expenditure.

Contemporaries, with the exception of economists, correctly accused the Stevens administration of being over zealous in applying the Permissible Income Regulations, particularly in regard to families. Correspondence to the NSW Chief Secretary and labour force statistics clearly indicates the impact of stringent unemployment policies pursued by Stevens.

Financial statistics show that Stevens used income from the URT to reduce the State's deficit. While the income from the URT and successive taxes was crucial to assisting many unemployed, more could have been done for the unemployed had Stevens distributed all the proceeds from these taxes. The unemployed were deprived because Stevens used a good proportion of income designated for unemployment relief to reduce the State's debt.

This chapter has also highlighted the high incidence of work rationing which acted to disguise the true level of unemployment. This was relevant in light of the inadequacy of contemporary statistics of the labour market, the theme of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: STATISTICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter examines the reliability of government, trade union and other unemployment statistics in the context of a changing labour force and the need to identify trends in mass unemployment, such as the age and sex composition of the unemployed and the districts most prone to unemployment. It will argue that despite mass unemployment and calls for greater details about the unemployed, there was a paucity of official statistics pertaining to the labour force and unemployment during the 1930s. Detailed statistics could have provided the State with a better picture of the extent of the economic crisis and would have made it less difficult for the State to avoid its responsibilities. But inadequate demographic data also impacted on the slow response by governments to relieve the unemployed.

The impact of contemporary attitudes in shaping the questions asked by statisticians is a second theme of this chapter. In developing a portrait of the unemployed it is helpful to start with a meaningful definition. This thesis takes Walker's definition of unemployment as a starting point:

> Unemployment is the enforced idleness of men, women and juveniles who want to work at the ruling rates of pay, but cannot find employment. (1)

The inability to find employment is the key aspect of this definition. However, this definition cannot adequately account for all the unemployed in the 1930s because many people were willing to work but discouraged because of contemporary attitudes or restrictions placed on who could work on government relief programs. Walker's definition also makes no account of women and men in outlying rural areas who were often prevented from registering for employment because of distance.

Other limitations of the 1930s' unemployment statistics include the influence of governments in the collection of statistics, the reliability and representativeness of trade union returns and the manipulation and distortion of unemployment statistics by politicians such as the United Australia Party (UAP) Premier, Bertram Stevens.

Prior to 1933 the principal records of employment and unemployment in NSW were those obtained from the decennial censuses. (2) Apart from census returns and statistics from a select number of trade unions, governments did not keep official unemployment statistics before the 1930s. Indeed, up until the Depression they had little reason to collect

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1. E.R. Walker, *Unemployment Policy: With Special Reference to Australia* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1936), 2.
2. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1939-40*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940) 33-34.

unemployment data in a systematic way. (3) One positive effect of mass unemployment in the 1930s was to motivate Australian statisticians to provide more accurate and detailed unemployment statistics. (4) Despite such incentive, statistics of the 1930s failed to grasp the extent of unemployment.

In regard to NSW and other parts of Australia:

> ...statistics are clearly deficient in regard to... reason for unemployment, duration of unemployment, occupation, industry, location, sex, age, whether actually working, willingness to accept work outside trade. (5)

The 1930s experience prompted discussion about who comprised the ranks of the unemployed, what constituted the "natural rate of unemployment" and the impact of the rise in the female participation rate. Prior to the Great Depression an unemployment rate of between three and five per cent was considered a normal rate, but a 20 per cent average unemployment rate in NSW during the 1930s paved the way for a significant rethink. With these comments in mind it is now proposed to analyse the nature of unemployment statistics.

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3. B. Dyster and D. Meredith, *Australia in the International Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Sydney, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 130.
4. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 63.
5. C. Forster, "Australian Unemployment, 1900-1940", *Economic Record*, Vol. 41, (September 1965), 426.

3.2 Distortions and Limitations:

Incomplete and inadequate labour force statistics were characteristic of many countries, including Australia, prior to the 1930s, leading to an understating of the number of unemployed persons. During the 1890s Depression the NSW Trades and Labour Council lamented the unreliability of unemployment statistics. (1) In NSW in the 1930s a large number of males, females and youth were excluded from labour force and unemployment statistics. This was due to ambiguous questions in unemployment surveys, recording and tabulating errors, and the policies of the Stevens Government to disguise the true levels of unemployment by excluding females from unemployment statistics.

Females bore the brunt of government attempts to downplay the magnitude of unemployment in the 1930s. Finding suitable employment in the 1930s was difficult for women, particularly outside major industrial centres where contemporary attitudes focused on preserving a male dominated workforce. As a result many women resumed full time household duties and did not describe themselves as unemployed. (7) In rural areas it was difficult to distinguish between "domestic duties" and working on the farm. Accurate data about the extent and duration of female

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6. Cited in E.A. Boehm, *Prosperity and Depression in Australia, 1887-1897* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), 47. J.A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* (New York, Harper and Row, 1978), 167.
7. A.G. Colley, "New South Wales Unemployment Statistics", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No. 1 (March 1939), 100.

unemployment did not exist and many women who combined employment with domestic duties, such as on dairy farms, did not receive wages and were excluded from labour force statistics. As a consequence they were often described as dependants. (8)

In the *1933 Commonwealth Census* females were discouraged from describing themselves as unemployed, particularly if their husbands were in permanent employment. This suited politicians such as Stevens who sought to conceal the true unemployment rate. Stevens admitted that the *1933 Census* recorded unemployed women as dependants and not as unemployed breadwinners. (9) The unreliability of female employment and unemployment statistics was both symptomatic of the general inadequacy of statistics and discrimination against women in employment. Stevens' exclusion of women from relief work schemes discouraged many women from registering for employment. By 1939 relief work was still not a right for women.

Many women were also excluded from the other main form of government relief, the dole, if another member of their family was receiving a dole order. (10) Because of the prevailing attitude which relegated women to "dependent

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8. L.F. Giblin, "The Census and Occupational Trends" in G.V. Portus, *What the Census Reveals* (Adelaide, F.W. Preece and Sons, 1936), 59. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1940-1941,* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 551.
9. NSW Department of Labour and Industry, *Report Upon Employment and Unemployment in New South Wales,* Issued by the Hon. J.M. Dunningham, MLA, Minister for Labour and Industry (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 4.
10. *ibid.,* 39.

status", the true number of females "wanting to work" and hence the real labour force and unemployment rates will probably never be known.

The total number of unemployed persons searching the countryside for employment is also unknown. However, sporadic references in reports of charitable bodies indicate that several thousand men and women travelled throughout NSW and "rode the rattler" in search of employment. (11) Unemployment statistics often did not include single men, some of whom were targeted as abusing the system and disqualified from receiving the dole.

Official unemployment statistics of the 1930s were at best a reflection of the conditions experienced by adult married males. Labor unions, unemployed worker organisations and prominent people regularly berated governments of the day for concealing the true number of unemployed persons. In one instance a prominent rural businessman expressed concern that many people in Cessnock, a coal mining town, were not registered as unemployed. He claimed that the region's official unemployment figure of 2,500 understated the true position by at least 500 men. (12) Other credible witnesses reported unemployment amongst

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11. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Annual Reports, 1930s* (Westmead, Sydney) Charity Organisation Society, *Annual Reports; Monthly*, 1930s. For an excellent account of the life of a track traveller see M. Masson, *Surviving the Dole Years: The 1930s - A personal story* (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1993).
12. NSW, Chief Secretary, Main Series of Inward Letters (CSIL), A33/1233 9/2414.

the coalminers of the South Maitland district at around 50 per cent, well above the Government's statistics. (13)

In other parts of NSW the ability to gain temporary work prevented people from registering for employment. (14) The education system acted to disguise unemployment. NSW and other Australian States encouraged potential members of the labour force to remain at school or enter technical education. (15)

3.3 1933 Census:

The most comprehensive national record of employment and unemployment during the Depression was the *1933 Census*, taken in June of that year. It was originally scheduled for 1931, but the sharp deterioration in the economy and large fall in the Federal Government's finances led to its postponement. The NSW population in the *Census* was 2,600,847 or 39.23 per cent of the national figure. NSW recorded 222,922 persons or 26.95 per cent of its labour force as unemployed. This break-up comprised 189,666 males (29.90 per cent) and 32,766 females (17.14 per cent). (16)

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13. *loc. cit.*, Evidence was presented by two medical doctors.
14. NSW Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Dental and Medical Services to the Unemployed," A33/6816 5/9108.
15. L.F. Giles, "Unemployment among young people in Australia", *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX1, No. 6 (June 1935), 815-817.
16. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June 1933* (Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1933) Vol. 111, 304. Although Aborigines were not officially counted in Australian census returns between 1911 and 1966 the *1933 Census* recorded male Aboriginal unemployment in NSW at 38.65 per cent and the female rate 34.55 per cent. See also, H.C. Green,

Table 3.1 shows that 71 per cent of unemployed males and 51 per cent of females had been without employment for more than a year in June 1933. (17)

Table 3.1: Duration of Unemployment, males and females, NSW, 1933.

	Percentage of Total	
Duration	**Males**	**Females**
Under 3 months	9.3	20.2
3-6 months	7.4	12.0
6-12 months	12.1	17.0
1-2 years	14.5	17.0
2-3 years	21.6	17.6
3-4 years	24.7	11.6
4 years and over	10.4	4.6

Unemployment among male wage earners was highest in the building trades (60 per cent), construction of roads and railways (53 per cent) and mining (41 per cent). An additional 50,614 males and 10,315 females were recorded as working part-time or engaged in sustenance work. (18) If

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"The Third Census of the Commonwealth of Australia", *Economic Record*, Vol. IX, No. 17 (December 1933), 242.

17. *Official Year Book of NSW, 1932-33*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1993), 779.

18. *ibid.*, 788; G. Withers, T. Endres and L. Parry, "Australian Historical Statistics", *Source Papers in Economic History*, Vol. 7, (1985), 34.

their part-time employment was due to the scarcity of full time employment then the NSW male unemployment rate in 1933 was 34.56 per cent and the female rate 19.32 per cent. The *1933 Census* adopted the *1921 Census* definition of an unemployed person as being unable to secure employment, temporarily laid-off from work, not actively seeking work or those who had lost their job because of permanent illness or disability. (19)

Most unemployed men and women listed the depression as the cause of their unemployment. Table 3.2 shows that nearly nine in ten males and more than seven in ten females listed "scarcity of work". (20)

Table 3.2: Unemployment in NSW, 1933, by cause (21)

Reason	**Male**	**Female**
Scarcity of work	169,583	25,319
Illness/accident	7,681	2,813
Voluntary unemployment	2,998	1,187
Industrial disputes	443	30
Not stated	8,971	3,247
Totals:	**189,666**	**32,776**

The second largest category were people who did not indicate their reason for unemployment. It is possible that some people's pride may have led them not to answer this question.

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19. G. Withers, T. Endres and L. Parry, *op. cit.*, 34.
20. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June 1933* (Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1933), 21, 304.
21. *loc. cit.*,

More than half the unemployed males and seven out of ten unemployed females in NSW lived in the Sydney metropolitan area. The slump in aggregate demand was most noticeable in the highly populated industrial and provincial areas. Another significant aspect is the higher percentage of unemployed women in metropolitan areas, indicative of the effects of the depression in forcing women in rural areas to resume unpaid household duties.

High population densities also resulted where cities were a first port of call for migrants. Internal migration also played a role. The search for employment in the decades leading up to the 1930s influenced internal migration. As a result the proportion of the NSW population living in metropolitan areas increased from 32 to 47 per cent between 1881 and 1931. (22)

The *1933 Census* included questions on part-time employment. But people in part-time employment were not advised as to whether to describe themselves as employed or unemployed. (23) This created confusion and some respondents indicated they were employed "part-time" when they were unemployed. As it was left to the individual to determine the distinction between full time and part time employment it is difficult to say how many were employed part-time due to choice or as a result of the economic

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22. Commonwealth of Australia, *Conference on Youth-Adult Employment: Short Summary of Proceedings* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939), 10-11.
23. T. Endres, M. Cook, "Concepts in Australian Unemployment Statistics to 1940", *Australian Economic Papers*, Vol. 22, no. 40 (1983), 72.

slump. (24) This major limitation of the *1933 Census* has left many unanswered questions about the 1930s labour market.

Likewise the *1933 Census* did not give any guidance as to how rationed and emergency relief workers should describe themselves, despite work rationing having occurred in the public and private sectors since 1929. To what extent unemployed males, receiving as few as seven hours work a week, registered as employed or unemployed is unknown. The Commonwealth Statistician reported that a number of persons who recorded themselves as part-time employed on relief work. (25)

The highest categories of part time employment for men were forestry (12.26 per cent), fishing and trapping (11.93 per cent), entertainment, sport and recreation (10.83 per cent) and industrial (10.76 per cent). (26) For women, the highest categories were entertainment, sport and recreation (10.62 per cent) and industrial (10.59 per cent) (27)

One advantage of the *1933 Census* over previous censuses was that it attempted a detailed classification of occupations, via three main headings, Industry, Occupation (ie. the actual job) and Grade of Employment.

The Commonwealth Statistician initially dismissed the possibility of respondents providing incorrect information. (28) But in 1940 the Federal Government announced revised

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24. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1933), 323.
25. *ibid., Statistician's Report*, Vol. 3, 247.
26. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1933), 325.
27. *loc. cit.,*
28. *loc. cit.,*

figures of the *1933 Census*. Some 27,697 males and 16,072 girls between the ages of 14 and 20 who had not obtained permanent positions at the time of the *Census* and had been excluded from labour force statistics were added to the unemployment numbers. (29) The Federal Government did not supply details as to how it derived the information which led to the revision. (30) A second adjustment was to transfer 8,048 persons from the status of employed to unemployed. Many of these people had not described themselves as unemployed because of the social and moral stigma. Taking these adjustments into consideration the revised Census statistics result in a NSW unemployment rate of 31.6 per cent.

Table 3.3: Revised 1933 Census statistics (31)

	Wage earners	**Unemployed**	**Total**	**Percentage Unemployed**
1933 Census	602,321	222,422	824,763	27.0
Adjusted	594,273	274,259	868,532	31.6

As previously indicated, the Great Depression was not the sole cause of unemployment. Approximately 15,000 people were unemployable because of sickness, accident and other causes. As such the number of unemployed in NSW in 1933 due to depression or industrial factors was 259,239 or 29.85

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29. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1940-41*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1943), 548.
30. C. Forster, "Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s: in R.G. Gregory, N.G. Butlin (eds)., *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 297.
31. Revised figures as per statistics supplied by the Commonwealth Government, *Labour Report* (34).

per cent. The *1933 Census* was taken at an abnormal time which may have produced special effects. Self employed persons who had been without an occupation for a considerable period probably recorded themselves as unemployed. (32) Yet, the Census did not account for all the unemployed. Many young people stayed at school longer, while a smaller number worked in family businesses without receiving wages. Also, the *Census* did not recognise unemployed women who returned to unpaid domestic duties. (33) Contemporary attitudes did not uphold a woman's right to work and after losing employment many women did not regard themselves as unemployed. (34)

Those potential breadwinners who had not been employed by the time of the Census were shown only under grade of employment as a separate group. (35)

Forster's analysis took into account participation rates, relief work and rationing and led to an upward revision of unemployment figures of the 1930s. He concluded that the NSW unemployment rate at its peak was 35 per cent, well above official figures. (36) Forster's estimate is probably closer to the mark than official figures, though he does not include track travellers who comprised a significant number of unemployed. While accurate figures of the number of travellers do not exist, their numbers, on

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32. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1939-1940*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940), 599.
33. J. Mackinolty (ed)., *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981), 102.
34. *ibid.*, 103.
35. L.F. Giblin, "The Census and Occupational Trends" in G. V. Portus (ed)., *What the Census Reveals* (Adelaide, F.W. Preece and Sons, 1936), 57.
36. C. Forster, (1988), *op. cit.*, 294-299.

top of the official unemployment rate of 33 per cent means that the unemployment rate in New South Wales in 1933 was quite possibly in the vicinity of 40 per cent.

3.4 Trade Union Returns:

Historically trade union records in several countries included data on the number and percentage of unemployed members. Early 20th century British trade union statistics gauged the extent of unemployment by the number of persons, predominantly males, in receipt of unemployment benefits. (37) Because some men were not eligible for unemployment benefits and the percentage of unionised members varied greatly from one industry to another, the reliability of trade union returns was questioned. (38) In America in the 1920s trade union unemployment statistics were strongly criticised because of the unreliability of securing regular reports, the absence of a set of standards to obtain such information and the lack of incentive for trade union officials to provide accurate reports. (39)

Similar sentiments were expressed when Australian trade unions began keeping records of unemployed members in 1910. Unemployment rates in NSW between 1910 and World War One were low. More than half the 78 unions (representing 45 per cent of unions) who submitted reports reported no

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37. A.C. Pigou, *The Theory of Unemployment* (London, Frank Cass and Co, New Impression, 1968), 20.
38. *loc. cit.*,
39. R. Meeker, "The dependability and meaning of unemployment and employment statistics in the United States", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. V111, No. 4 (July 1930), 392.

unemployed members. (40) Moreover unions did not envisage the public importance of such returns. By 1913 the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (CBCS) had elicited a higher return rate from union secretaries. The gradual rise in unemployment and encouragement from the CBCS prompted many unions to improve their collection of statistics.

Between the *1921 Census* and the *1933 Census* trade union returns were the main source of unemployment statistics in NSW. Trade union members could register as unemployed if they had been out of work for three or more days. Statistics of unemployment among union members were taken during the last week of the middle month of every quarter. (41) This sampling method was open to distortion particularly from the influence of seasonal factors on employment.

From their outset Australian trade union returns were a limited source of the extent of unemployment, a perception that remained during the 1930s. There were several reasons for the close examination of trade unions statistics. The CBCS failed to receive regular returns from some unions and unions covering unskilled workers often did not keep records. (42) Another initial limitation was that

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40. *Official Year Book Of New South Wales, 1911,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1911), 189. Commonwealth of Australia, *Report on Unemployment and Business Stability in Australia* (Development and Migration Commission, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1928), 8.
41. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.,* 8.
42. *Official Year Book of NSW, 1921,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1921), 557.

the returns were submitted on a year-end basis and thereby did not reflect trends within any one year. (43)

Between 1921 and 1927 there was a strong growth in the NSW trade union movement as membership rose from 263,487 to 356,333 or by 35.24 per cent. (44) Male membership constituted 84 per cent of the rise. But sluggish economic growth in 1927/28 and the severe economic downturn in 1929 and 1930 led to a sharp decline in trade union membership by the early thirties. Reflecting better employment opportunities, female trade union membership rose by 22.8 per cent between 1928-1936. By comparison male membership declined by 16 per cent, as reflected in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: NSW Trade Union Membership, 1926-1940 (45)

YEAR	**MALES**	**FEMALES**	**TOTAL**
1926	296,612	33,538	330,150
1927	317,465	38,868	356,333
1928	314,774	38,808	353,582
1929	300,808	40,159	340,967
1930	278,892	36,948	315,840
1931	253,277	39,372	292,649
1932	252,757	39,986	292,743
1933	250,297	40,789	291,086
1934	253,861	41,244	295,105
1935	266,481	44,804	311,285
1936	263,663	47,637	311,300
1937	278,064	51,298	329,362
1938	288,680	53,301	341,981
1939	290,275	53,916	344,191

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43. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Trade Unionism, Unemployment, Wages, Prices and Cost of Living in Australia, 1891-1912,* Labour and Industrial Branch, Report No 2. (Melbourne, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1913).
44. NSW Department of Labour and Industry, *Report of the Industrial Registrar, Friendly Societies and Trade Unions,* 30 June 1932, (Sydney, Government Printer), 18.
45. *loc. cit.,*

In the 1930s the number of union members was less than official statistics indicated because some unions retained unfinancial members on their registers. (46) Many had a high percentage of unfinancial members. For example, national membership of the Clothing Trades Industry fell from 18,728 in 1929 to 9,000 in 1931. And, more than half of the latter number were unfinancial. (47) A deputation from the Metal Trades Industries to Premier Lang in February 1931 reported unemployment averaging 47 per cent in the following unions:

Table 3.5: Unemployment among members of the Metal Trades, 1931 (48)

Union	**Percentage of union members unemployed**
Australian Engineering Union	25
Australian Society of Engineers	32
Federal Boilermakers' Society	56
Blacksmiths Society	31
Federated Ironworkers Assoc.	36
Federated Moulders Union	61
Storeman's Union	71
Sheetmetals Workers Union	61
Average Unemployment Rate	*47*

46. D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia* (2nd edition, Allen and Unwin, 1986), 27.
47. B. Ellem, *In Women's hands: A History of the Clothing Trades Unions in Australia* (The Modern History Series No. 10) (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1989), 165.
48. Jack Davison Collection, "Notes on Work for the Dole Schemes, 1932" Report to United Front Committee of Employed and Unemployed, Sydney 14 February 1932 P117/6.

Officially unemployment peaked at 33.2 per cent among NSW unionists in September 1933. (49) The hardest hit sector was manufacturing which recorded an unemployment rate of 35.1 per cent in the first quarter of 1934. (50) Indicative of NSW being most affected by the depression, trade union unemployment levels remained above the national average for the duration of the 1930s, as plotted in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Unemployment among Trade Unionists, 1927-1939 expressed as a percentage of total union members (51)

Year	**NSW**	**Australia**
1927	7.4	7.0
1928	11.3	10.8
1929	15.0	11.1
1930	21.7	19.3
1931	30.8	27.4
1932	32.5	29.0
1933	28.9	25.1
1934	24.7	20.5
1935	20.6	16.5
1936	15.4	12.2
1937	10.9	9.3
1938	9.9	8.7
1939	11.0	9.7

During the inter-war period doubts were expressed as to the accuracy of trade union unemployment rates. The 1926 Royal Commission on National Insurance concluded, in part,

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49. *NSW Statistical Bulletin*, (December 1933).
50. Australian Labor Party (NSW), *The Australian Labour Year Book, 1934-35*, (Sydney, Labor Daily Limited, 1935), 188.
51. *Official Year Book of NSW*, selected issues.

that NSW trade union unemployment figures "are said to include part time workers in addition to the wholly unemployed." (52) People working two or less days a week who described themselves as unemployed were not in fact unemployed according to the above criteria. However, there are no extant statistics of the number who voluntarily chose to work part-time but were listed as unemployed, as distinct from unemployed persons who reluctantly accepted part-time employment. In addition, trade union unemployment returns did not present a picture of the total number of unemployed. (53) The absence of complete records prevented some union secretaries from furnishing up-to-date returns. (54) Moreover, in a number of unions registers were kept, but many unemployed members failed to sign these registers and neglected to advise their union when they obtained employment. (55)

Concerns expressed in the 1920s about the accuracy and representative nature of union unemployment rates came into sharper focus in the 1930s when the State and the community sought greater detail as to the number and characteristics of the unemployed. Ronald Walker considered trade union statistics to be an inadequate sample of the total number of employees, because they did not include all branches of

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52. Cited in T. Endres, M. Cook, *op. cit.*, 11.
53. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *op. cit.*, 42.
54. *loc. cit.*, *Second Progress Report of the Royal Commission on National Insurance as* quoted in *Report on Unemployment*, 1928).
55. *Second Progress Report of the Royal Commission on National Insurance as* quoted in Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission,*op cit.*,

industry, agriculture or commerce. (56) Unions whose members were in regular employment, for example, public servants, did not submit returns. (57) In contrast, the building and engineering industries, which experienced less stable employment, supplied more returns. The accuracy of union unemployment statistics was inherently related to membership. Less than half Australia's unionists or one-fifth of the nation's employees regularly submitted returns. (58) In 1936 the Secretary of the NSW Labor Council reported that although 56 per cent of unions sent regular returns to the Federal Statistician, "there is a big unattached army of agricultural, pastoral and wharf labourers of which there is no record kept." (59) In addition, trade union returns contained little information about rural unemployment. (60)

The unequal and fluctuating membership of participating unions, the sex composition and different experiences of unemployment from quarter to quarter also impacted on the reliability of union statistics. (61) The bias in statistics towards male employees slightly diminished as the number of females in the workforce grew

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56. E.R. Walker, "The Unemployment Problem in Australia", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. XL, (1932), 211.
57. F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia", *International Labour Review* Vol. XXX, No.1 (July 1934), 25;
58. C. Forster, (1965), *op. cit.*, 430-431; Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 186.
59. King, Secretary, NSW Labor Council, 1936, Box 10 (144) NSW Labor Council.
60. Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 186.
61. *1933 Census*, XXV1, 303.

during the 1930s. By 1938 females represented one-sixth of union members. (62)

Trade union reports after 1927 no longer included information as to the reasons for members being unemployed. A meeting of Commonwealth and State Ministers in July 1933 agreed that the degree of reliance placed on trade union returns was uncertain. (63)

Contemporary criticism of trade union statistics also had a political base. The UAP Premier, Stevens claimed that in union circles it was well known "that union employment reports were apt to be loaded for political and other reasons." (64) Stevens was unable to produce any evidence for his claim. Nor did an examination of union records reveal any such evidence. Indeed, Australian governments during the 1930s were criticised for enforcing restrictive regulations which led to the exclusion of thousands of people from unemployment statistics. (65) Colin Forster who regarded trade union returns as being fairly accurate, concluded that "there was no outright hostility or intention to falsify" trade union records. (66) Moreover, as will be discussed in section 3.5, an examination of trade union records reveal a high degree of care taken by union secretaries to obtain and document accurate information and to record such information in union

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62. C. Forster, (1965), *op. cit.*, 430.
63. Cited in C. Forster, (1988) *op. cit.*, 293.
64. B.S.B. Stevens, *Employment and Relief of Unemployment* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 10.
65. NSW Labor Council Records, Box 12 (144).
66. C. Forster, (1965) *op. cit.*, 435.

records, membership registers and quarterly statistical returns to the CBCS. (67)

Despite the probability that trade union returns underestimated unemployment levels, throughout the '30s their returns of unemployment levels were higher than government sources, as illustrated in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Comparison of Trade Union and Government Unemployment Statistics, 1931-1938 (68)

Year	**Trade Union %**	**Stevens Government %**
1931	30.8	27.4
1932	32.5	29.0
1933	28.9	25.1
1934	24.7	20.5
1935	20.6	16.5
1936	15.4	12.2
1937	10.9	9.3
1938	9.9	8.7
1939	12.1	10.4

Higher trade union unemployment levels should not be interpreted as a conspiracy by union officials to talk down the role of the State in bringing about economic improvements. Both sets of figures probably understate the true level of unemployment, because of the absence of women and youth.

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67. This examination was based on surviving trade unions records held at the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour at the Australian National University (ABL) and the Mitchell Library of the State Library of New South Wales (MLNSW).
68. B.S.B. Stevens, Financial Statement, *Budget Speech for the Financial Year 1938-39,* 16; *NSW Industrial Gazette*, Vol. 56 (31 July 1939), 35. The 1939 figures are for September 1993. Note, Stevens figures as at July each year.

The 1930s debate about the reliability and representativeness of trade union returns has resurfaced in recent years. One argument supporting the general accuracy of trade union returns was the close similarity between Census returns and trade union statistics. For instance, the *1911 Census* reported a national unemployment rate of 4.53 per cent, compared to a national trade union rate of 4.67 per cent. (69) The *1933 Census* recorded Australia's unemployment rate at 22.9 per cent or 24.2 per cent (including relief workers) while trade unions at the same time recorded unemployed members at 25.7 and 25.1 per cent respectively. (70) These relatively close statistics refute contemporary and more recent views of the inaccuracy of trade unions statistics. Nevertheless, these statistics have not been able to persuade Geoffrey Blainey who concluded "there are enormous gaps between the (1933) Census and trade union figures and I am inclined to think that trade union figures weren't an accurate measure of unemployment". (71) There is no doubt that different reporting practices by union secretaries did result in some inaccurate and misleading returns. For instance some unions retained members on their books who were unemployed or had failed to pay union dues, while others struck them off.

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69. *ibid.*, 19.
70. C. Forster, (1988), *op. cit.*, 293.
71. G. Blainey's interview on Radio Station 3AR cited in A. Markus, "1984 or 1901? Immigration and 'some lessons' of Australian History in A. Markus and M.C. Ricklefs (eds)., *Surrender Australia - Essays in the study and uses of history: Geoffrey Blainey and Asian Immigration* (Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 25. See also G. Blainey, *The Blainey View* (Sydney, Australian Broadcasting Commission and MacMillan, 1982), 82-90.

Trade union returns also under-represented the level of unemployment because a large number of unemployed allowed their membership to lapse. (72) Overall, however, trade union records may be treated as accurate indicators of unemployment during the Great Depression.

3.5 New evidence supporting the accuracy of trade union returns:

An examination of the surviving archives of several trade unions revealed that their quarterly and annual reports to the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (CBCS) were more detailed than many contemporaries believed. (73) This was particularly the case where unions had permanent secretaries who closely monitored their members' employment conditions and recorded such information in unemployment registers. (74) For example, the Secretary of the Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage Employees' Association (MBWSSEA) made detailed notations in membership registers, such as "off work for three months", "joined salaried staff", or "left the union" in cases of unfinancial members. (75) Although financial membership of the MBWSSEA fell by 67.5 per cent between 1929 and mid 1933, its registers indicate that only about

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72. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 1936, 12.
73. The writer undertook this survey of surviving trade union records held at the ABL and MLNSW.
74. *Labour Report* No. 25 (1934), 103.
75. Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage Employees' Association Records, Box KV6599.

20 per cent of members left the union. (76) The fall led to a corresponding decline in annual contributions, from £4,344 to £1,299. (77) In its 1932 annual report to the Industrial Registrar the MBWSSEA overstated the number of members in employment by more than 50. (78)

The Baking Trades Union (NSW Branch) provided full details of its members as shown in Table 3.8:

Table 3.8: Membership of the Baking Trades Union (NSW) as at June 1932 (79)

Classification	**Number**	**Percentage**
Employed (city)	800	67.9
Employed (country)	60	5.1
Unemployed	224	19.0
Incapacitated	13	1.1
Union Pension	27	2.3
Lost trace of	49	4.2
Sick	5	0.4
TOTAL	**1,178**	**100%**

The significant classifications in Table 3.8 are the 19 per cent of unemployed members and the four per cent who had been "lost trace of", many probably left home in the desperate search for employment.

The NSW Branch of the Australian Boot Trades Employees Federation (ABTEF) was another union which kept detailed records and reported a sharp fall in membership during the Depression. As Table 3.9 depicts a rise in the ABTEF's

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76. *ibid.*, Annual Report 1932-33: Box KV6592.
77. *ibid.*, KV6548.
78. *loc. cit.*,
79. Adapted from Baking Trades Union (NSW Branch), *Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 1932*, T13/2/3.

total membership did not occur until 1938, due to an increase in female workers.

Table 3.9: Membership of the Australian Boot Trades Employees Federation (NSW Branch) 1927-1939 (80)

Year	**Male**	**Females**	**Total**
1927	3,452	2,105	5,557
1928	3,528	2,186	5,714
1929	3,612	2,305	5,917
1930	2,513	1,620	4,133
1931	2,416	1,350	3,766
1932	2,539	1,815	4,354
1933		*not recorded*	
1934	2,335	1,215	3,550
1935	2,352	1,215	3,450
1936	2,475	1,405	3,880
1937	2,317	1,682	3,999
1938	2,434	2,148	4,582
1939	2,483	2,280	4,763

The 11.8 per cent fall in total trade union membership between 1928 and 1933 did not account for all unemployed unionists because a high number of unfinancial unionists retained membership. This was due to the latitude of many union secretaries. Provision was also made for unemployed members to pay reduced subscriptions. (81) Some unfinancial members who retained contact with their union remained on the books. For example, a rural engineer who tendered his resignation to the Local Government Engineers' Association in 1932 was informed that his name would be kept on the register. (82) It was perhaps the intimacy of this all-male union of about 220 members which influenced the Executive's decision. Nevertheless, more than 30 per cent of that

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80. Australian Boot Trades Employees Federation (NSW), *Annual Returns under the Trade Union Act,* T4/27 ABL.
81. *Labour Report,* No. 25, (1934), 103.
82. *Australasian Engineer,* (7 May 1932).

union's members were in financial arrears in November 1932. (83)

In another case only half the members of the Federated Miscellaneous Union were financial, highlighted by Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Financial Members of the Federated Miscellaneous Union, 1933 - 1935. (84)

Year	**Members**	**Financial Members**	**Financial Members as aa a Percentage of all Members**
1933	3,350	1,578	47
1934	3,456	1,660	48
1935	3,528	1,784	51

In some instances unemployed members resigned from their union but re-applied after gaining employment. (85) Larger unions may have more readily accepted resignations of unfinancial members. Members who could not be traced were struck off. (86) Moreover, the magnitude of unemployment in some trades forced them to accept very high levels of unfinancial members. For example, unemployment amongst members of the Federated Boilermakers Union was more than 60 per cent by December 1931 (Table 3.11)

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83. *loc. cit.,*
84. Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union of Australia (NSW Branch), "Minutes". 1933-1935. T28.
85. Baking Trades Employees Federation of Australia (NSW Branch) Minutes. Arthur Sinclair re-applied for membership of the Baking Trades upon receiving a permanent job in 1936; T13/7/1.
86. Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia (Sydney Branch) *Quarterly Reports*, 1931.

Table 3.11: Membership of the Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia (Sydney Branch) 1929-1931 (87)

Quarter	**Fin. Members**	**Unfinancial Members**	**Total Members**	**Unfinancial Members as a percentage of all members**
Mar 1929	1,188	345	1,533	22.5
Jun 1929	1,263	335	1,598	20.9
Sep 1929	1,210	412	1,622	25.4
Dec 1929	1,193	437	1,630	26.8
Mar 1930	1,119	534	1,653	32.3
Jun 1930	981	615	1,596	32.3
Sep 1930	862	713	1,575	44.7
Dec 1930	802	771	1,573	49.0
Mar 1931	754	828	1,582	52.4
Jun 1931	711	841	1,552	52.4
Sep 1931	625	890	1,515	58.6
Dec 1931	587	953	1,540	61.8

Irrespective of the employment status of members, most union secretaries tried to be as accurate as possible. Workers without regular employment for several years often lost contact with their former union, which had a bearing on membership statistics. (88) Undoubtedly, some unemployed found jobs, perhaps in a different industry. But did their former union still count them as being unemployed? The evidence suggests that resignations of members were accepted when the person indicated they were leaving the trade in search of employment afield. (89) For example, when a shop delegate reported a member had been retrenched,

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87. *loc. cit.*,
88. NSW Labor Council, "Inter-State Conference of representatives of the unemployed organisations in the respective states of the Commonwealth of Australia", Convened by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, 30 October - 2 November 1939. Box 12 (144) NSW Labor Council Records.
89. Baking Trades Employees Federation of Australia (NSW Branch) "Executive Minutes". T13/7/1.

the Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union (SMWU) advised the member he was exempt from paying dues while unemployed. (90) These occurrences help to explain the upward discrepancy between the *1933 Census* statistics and those submitted by unions.

The reasons for members not renewing their membership varied. Reflecting the social attitudes of the period, one female nurse gave notice of her intention to resign from the NSW Nurses Association after she wed. (91) Throughout the 30s financial members of the Nurses Association accounted for less than 80 per cent. (92)

NSW trade unions in the thirties experienced the dual pressure of declining membership and a rising number of members whose dues were in arrears, as evidenced by the NSW Division of the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Drivers.

Table 3.12: Members in areas - Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Drivers (NSW) (93)

Year	**Number of members**	**Members in arrears**	**Percentage in arrears %**
1928	4,097	913	22
1929	3,968	850	21
1935	3,391	911	27

90. Sheet Metal Workers Union, Agriculture Implementation and Stovemaking Industrial Union of Australia (NSW Branch). E196/5/1.
91. New South Wales Nurses Association, "Minutes" 20 January 1936". A3/2.
92. *loc. cit.,*
93. Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Drivers (NSW) *Annual Reports*, E99/15/3 ABL.

While it has been argued that trade union unemployment statistics were a reliable indicator of unemployment, not all trade union secretaries displayed the same conscientious regard for obtaining accurate records of employment and unemployment. (94)

The exact number of unemployed unionists who relinquished their membership and therefore may have been excluded from trade union returns will never be known. Many unemployed unionists retained membership.

Despite mass unemployment, greater mobility caused by the search for employment and the general dislocation of society caused by the Depression, many trade unions kept detailed and accurate records of membership. These records form a very good source of the levels and trends of unemployment in the 1930s. Unions deserved to be commended for this role and the evidence presented in this section is a sharp rebuke to contemporaries and many historians who have criticised the value of trade union records.

3.6 Index of Employment and Unemployment:

A third major source of unemployment statistics in NSW, the Index of Employment and Unemployment, began in 1933 along with the special wages tax. The Stevens Government obtained a fair estimate of the labour force

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94. For example, some unions did not submit returns to the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, and a minority, provided approximate figures only.

by analysing the records of employers who remitted their wages tax. Table 3.13 depicts the quarterly unemployment rate as recorded in the NSW Index of Employment and Unemployment. It shows the gradual fall in the unemployment from 26.5 per cent in the June 1933 quarter to 8.3 per cent by the last quarter in 1936.

Table 3.13: NSW Index of Employment and Unemployment, 1933-1936. (95)

Year	**Percentage of Labour Force Unemployed (including relief workers)**
1933	
June	26.5
September	25.2
December	22.7
1934	
March	22.7
June	22.0
September	19.7
December	15.9
1935	
March	17.6
June	16.3
September	13.6
December	10.3
1936	
March	12.1
June	11.8
September	10.0
December	8.3

This Index had the advantage of recording nearly all wage and salary earners in employment where records were submitted to the NSW Government. (96) The Commonwealth

95. *ibid.*, 7.
96. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1939-1940,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940), 596.

Statistician regarded the Index as the most accurate record of unemployment in NSW. (97)

> The percentages of employment and unemployment... are believed to have a much greater degree of precision than is usually associated with such indexes. (98)

However, the accuracy of the NSW Index of Employment and Unemployment was limited due to the NSW Statistician estimating a 1.2 per cent increase in the labour force per annum. (99) Moreover, the Index did not include seasonal workers and women in domestic service who often received food and lodgings in return for work. The NSW Index of Employment and Unemployment indicated a more rapid recovery of employment than trade union returns, owing to the casual nature of some union records. (100) By June 1939 the Index recorded unemployment at 7.4 per cent, including all part-time relief workers counted as unemployed. (101)

3.7 State Labour Exchanges:

The primary functions of State Labour Exchanges (SLE) were to bring together people seeking employment and prospective employers, to encourage industrial training in skilled trades and to provide suitable training for vagrants and other persons unsuited for ordinary

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97. Statement to the Press, 11 October 1935.
98. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1939-1940*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940), 597.
99. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 68.
100. *loc. cit.*,
101. *New South Wales Industrial Gazette*, Vol. LV, (September 1939), 23.

employment. (102) Apart from Sydney, SLEs were located in the industrial cities of Lithgow, Newcastle, Wollongong and Broken Hill. In outlying areas agencies were established under the auspices of local businessmen with 393 agencies in operation by the mid 1930s. (103)

Persons over the age of 14 could register and to maintain registration they were required to report at least monthly. A person's position on a Register was normally determined by their date of registration. Some exceptions included call-ups for either skilled tradesman or persons residing in a given areas. Preference was also given to returned soldiers under the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Employment Act. (104)

In the 1920s many workers were suspicious of the SLEs and considered they paid attention primarily to the needs of employers. (105) This suspicion flowed through to attitudes of the unemployed in the 1930s. Another reason for not all unemployed persons registering with SLEs was the perception by many skilled workers that because labourers dominated registrations at SLEs there would be little chance of finding skilled employment. A high number of unemployed tradesmen exhausted other possibilities of employment before registering at SLEs. (106) In addition, a

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102. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1932-1933.* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1931), 782.
103. *ibid., 1935,*
104. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 21.
105. J.C. Doherty, *Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City* (Marrickville, Hale and Ironmonger, 1938), 68.
106. Commonwealth of Australia, *Second Report of the Royal Commission of National Insurance* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1938).

time lag between many registered unemployed gaining employment and advising the SLE, caused a distortion in the statistics. (107)

During the 1930s the SLEs recorded an enormous increase in males and females seeking employment, particularly in the Sydney metropolitan area which recorded about 60 per cent of total registrations. (108)

While statistics from SLEs formed the basis of the 1936 Employment Survey, Walker questioned their accuracy:

> ... with the exception of Queensland, figures from Labour exchanges were inadequate because only a small proportion of the unemployed would register at them. (109)

Nevertheless, in identifying and monitoring unemployment trends and areas of sluggish or rapid economic improvement, SLE statistics were important. By the late '30s any unemployed person who did not give a sufficient reason for not regularly reporting was removed from the Register. In addition, special staff regularly undertook investigations.

The number of unemployed registered at SLEs varied from one State to another. As the following table illustrates, adult male unemployment declined post 1933 until December 1937, before it again increased rapidly. By

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107. *Labour Report*, No. 30, (1939), 134.
108. *Official Year Books of New South Wales, 1930-1939*, (Sydney, Government Printer)
109. E.R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 64.

June 1939 there were 50,925 adult males registered for unemployment. (110)

Table 3.14: Registrations for Employment at State Labour Exchanges (NSW, 1925-1939) (111)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1925	40,701	4,583	45,284
1926	51,964	4,412	56,376
1927	51,065	5,186	56,261
1928	77,412	5,841	83,353
1929	67,024	5,606	72,630
1930	237,452	12,676	250,128
1931	249,311	20,541	269,852
1932	152,056	21,635	173,691
1933	152,573	35,214	187,787
1934	160,035	36,133	197,068
1935	115,189	11,552	126,741
1936	91,056	10,877	101,933
1937	75,125	9,446	84,671
1938	86,162	7,927	94,091
1939	82,874	12,588	95,462

3.8 Food Relief Statistics:

Another important indicator of unemployment was the number of people receiving food relief (or the dole). A record 609,010 applications, at a cost of £330,464, were recorded in April 1931 under the Lang Government. (112) Food relief was available to both men and women, though men comprised the bulk of recipients. The introduction of the

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110. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1940-1941* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1943), 557.
111. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer) These statistics should be taken as a guide. Discrepancies occurred in their publishing in *The New South Wales Industrial Gazette* and year-end figures in the *Official Year Book of New South Wales*. One possible explanation is that the same reporting format was not published in successive volumes of the *New South Wales Industrial Gazette*.
112. NSW, CSIL, A33/418 5/9073.

Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) led to a sharp fall in the number of men receiving the dole, as reflected in Table 3.15.

Table 3.15: Food Relief Recipients, 1933-1936 (113)

Date	**Men**	**Women and Juveniles**	**Total**
1933			
March	86,240	21,124	107,364
June	65,527	17,624	83,151
September	51,747	14,239	65,986
December	28,256	11,207	39,553
1934			
March	21,936	11,454	37,639
June	17,865	10,894	28,759
September	17,448	10,315	27,763
December	21,895	10,437	32,332
1935			
March	21,611	9,315	30,926
June	16,060	9,471	25,531
September	16,338	9,007	25,345
December	16,939	7,657*	24,596
1936			
March	18,508	6,951	25,459
June	18,202	6,786	24,988
September	25,169	7,171	32,340
November	20,736	7,414	28,150

* After December 1935 juveniles aged between 15 and 21 were not separately counted as receiving food relief, if they were resident in a household where a recipient drew relief for them. (114)

Table 3.15 also shows that the number of women receiving the dole did not drastically fall. This is

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113. Adapted from NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 31-32.
114. NSW, CSIL, A35/8297 12/7520.

because they were excluded from employment on the ERWS and in rural districts some women drew relief because their husbands were travelling in search of employment. At Taree in the State's north, women comprised 77 per cent of food relief recipients in the mid 30s. (115) But in industrial areas males dominated the total number of dole recipients. (116) In many metropolitan areas males received more than 85 per cent of dole rations. (117)

As a measure of unemployment, food relief statistics had several limitations which either inflated or understated the true number of unemployed persons. The Central Relief Bureau (CRB) said that food relief statistics concerning transfers, terminations of registrations and variations in relief prior to 1934 were not strictly accurate. (118) In an attempt to improve the collection and compilation of statistics the CRB sought the co-operation of government departments. The powerful Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) refused the request. The CRB then asked some trade unions to provide information as to whether applicants for food relief had been former members. (119) It was not until April 1934 that a concerted effort was made to improve statistics tabulated

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115. *ibid.*, A33/8394 5/9115.
116. In 1933, for example, 908 males, 171 juveniles and 97 females received food relief at Granville. NSW, CSIL, A33/8394 5/9115.
117. *loc. cit.*,
118. Sheet Metal Working, Agricultural Implementation and Stovemaking Industrial Union of Australia (NSW Branch) "Minutes, Office Files and General Records", 24 August 1934, E196/5/1.
119. NSW, CSIL, A34/6777 9/2326; A34/6777 5/9281;

by Food Relief Depots (FRD) with the CRB insisting on fortnightly returns. (120)

Leaving aside the compilation of statistics, the food relief system requires examination. Firstly, some people falsely claimed to be unemployed and drew food relief. (121) More regular and thorough checks helped to reduce such fraud, including the periodic call-up of relief cards to check that recipients were not exceeding their rations. (122) When the NSW Registrar General's Department undertook a survey of food relief recipients in 1934 it could only correctly identify 79 per cent. The remaining 21 per cent had provided an incorrect birth date or a false surname to the State Labour Exchange (SLE) or Police. (123)

Second, the total number of dole recipients did not always equate with the total number of unemployed. There were numerous complaints during the Bavin and Lang Governments of travellers drawing food at different towns However, double counting was offset by the large number of unemployed women and youth who did not receive the dole. (124) Third, a family's income was a barrier to receiving the dole. The income of any family member residing at the same address was included in the household income, and often led to the family being disqualified from receiving food relief. (125)

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120. *ibid.*, A34/6579 5/9280.
121. F.A. Bland, "A Note Upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Economic Record*, Vol. V111, (May, 1932), 99.
122. NSW, CSIL, A34/1052 5/9251.
123. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Food Relief for the Unemployed, 1928-1933", A30/3332 5/9208.1.
124. NSW, CSIL, A33/50 5/9073.
125. *ibid.*, A33/407 5/9073.

Fourth, as will be expanded upon in Chapter Five, the NSW Police Force held sole power in determining the eligibility of applicants for food relief outside of main industrial areas. On occasions the Police wrongly refused sustenance to genuine cases. Fifth, under the Stevens Government the NSW Police were encouraged to cut government expenditure by reducing the number of food relief recipients. As a result, the real number of unemployed was disguised by this overt government policy. In one case, a local constable reported that he would not issue any further food relief because the unemployed could look after themselves and they had expressed gratitude for the State's prior assistance. (126) It was unlikely that the unemployed concurred with the policeman's sentiments because in the previous six months, more than 30 unemployed had received a monthly food order. (127)

In respect to youth, the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) advised the newly formed Employment Research Committee (ERC) in 1934 that it only knew the number of youth receiving food relief who lived with their parents. (128) Youth living away from home but receiving food relief were therefore excluded from the Chief Secretary's returns and unemployment figures.

Some unemployed were refused food relief because they were allegedly addicted to drink, "fermented strife" or in the opinion of the government had refused to undertake

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126. *loc. cit.*,
127. NSW, CSIL, A34/1577 5/9253.
128. *ibid.*, A33/418 5/9073.

reasonable work. (129) Advocates for the unemployed claimed these persons were unfairly treated. In addition, people receiving age or invalid pensions were ineligible to receive food relief by virtue of the income received from these pensions.

On balance, the food relief system during the Stevens Government, far from being open to abuse and fraud, discriminated against a range of people who genuinely sought sustenance.

3.9 Other Surveys:

In a quest to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of mass unemployment the Stevens Government undertook a comprehensive survey of unemployed men registered at State Labour Exchanges (SLE). The 1936 survey was undertaken with a large degree of planning and precision and achieved a high response of 90 per cent of registered unemployed males and 70 per cent of registered unemployed women. (130) However, some isolated country localities returned only a small percentage of responses. (131)

The survey highlighted the rising number of long term unemployed. (LTU) Nearly three-quarters of respondents had been unemployed for two or more years. Some 41 per cent had been unemployed for five years or more and 12.22 per cent

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129. New South Wales, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 38.
130. *loc. cit.*,
131. *ibid.*, 43.

since the onset of the depression. (132) These grim statements can be compared to the *1933 Census* which showed that 71.2 per cent of males and 50.8 per cent of females were recorded as unemployed for a period of one year or more. (133) The 1936 Survey did not seek information on unemployed youths whose parents (often only one, the father) were in employment, nor did it approximate the number of unemployed women.

In 1937 the NSW Government's Vocational Guidance Bureau (VGB) undertook a smaller survey of unemployed young men living in the Sydney metropolitan area. (134) The 2,918 men were asked questions as to their educational standards, height and weight measurements and previous occupations. The survey's detailed analysis gave credence to the general reliability of the answers. Unfortunately the important question of duration of unemployment was not asked in this survey.

A similar Survey conducted in the Northern Coalfields area (ie. Newcastle, Cessnock, Lake Macquarie and Maitland) attracted 1,050 responses from young men aged between 18 and 25 and a further 647 juveniles between 14 and 18 years. (135)

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132. *ibid.*,
133. Australia, *Census, op. cit.*, Cited in NSW, Department of Labour and Industry (1937) *op. cit.*, 5.
134. *Report of the Vocational Guidance Survey of Unemployed Young Men*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938), 5.
135. *ibid.*, 31.

3.10 Political Manipulation of Unemployment Statistics:

The key issue of the '30s was mass unemployment. Non-Labor politicians attempted to disguise the prevailing level of unemployment by disseminating inaccurate statistics. While statistics of the period were neither accurate nor inclusive of all groups in NSW eg. women, this does not excuse politicians such as Stevens from issuing misleading and untrue statements about the extent of unemployment. In his defence, Stevens might have claimed that he inherited a inadequate system of recording unemployment and a community that largely frowned upon female employment. However, a decade of extraordinarily high unemployment provided successive governments and particularly Stevens with the opportunity to dramatically improve the collection and analysis of unemployment statistics and thus an opportunity to disseminate accurate information to the public. But women were rarely included and despite all the rhetoric about youth unemployment, official unemployment statistics did not fully encapsulate the number of young unemployed in NSW.

Upon taking office in May 1932 the Stevens Government claimed that 220,000 men were on the dole, yet official statistics indicated that only 168,098 people were receiving sustenance. (136) In 1933 some members of the

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136. United Australia Party, *op. cit.*, 93; NSW, CSIL, A35/2049 12/7513.

Stevens Government proclaimed that the worst of the depression was over. While unemployment had eased slightly from its peak a year earlier, large numbers of men and women remained without permanent or full time employment.

The ERWS provided rationed employment to many unemployed males, but it allowed politicians, specifically Stevens and his ministers, to manipulate unemployment figures. The rapid fall in the number of unemployed was due to a large number of unemployed men being transferred from food relief to various public works, a stricter eligibility criteria for food relief and a general lack of interest in discouraged workers by the Stevens Government. One year after introducing the ERWS the number of food relief recipients (FRR) had fallen from 83,151 to 28,759, while the number employed on relief works had increased by 41,419 to 75,648. (137) At this time Stevens and the NSW Unemployment Relief Council (URC) estimated the number of FRR at 24,000, (138) a huge fall from the 220,000 reported a year earlier. Even taking into account that 76,000 had received some part-time employment, eg. on the ERWS, the total unemployed including emergency relief workers (ERW) fell by 68,000 in little more than 12 months according to the SLE's and by 120,000 according to Stevens. While there may have been a small improvement in economic conditions in the period 1932-33, exemplified by a rise in private sector employment, the large decrease in FRR cannot be explained

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137. *Official Year Book of NSW, 1936-37,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 167.
138. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report*, 1933, 27.

by a combination of public works programs and new private sector employment.

By June 1936 over 80,000 people were receiving the dole or on relief works and by March 1938 the number was more than 50,000. (139)

Put simply, the Stevens Government excluded many unemployed from either the dole or work relief and thereby presented grossly distorted unemployment figures to the public and Parliament. Further evidence of the inaccuracy of Stevens' statements arises by comparing the *1933 Census* which put the number of males unemployed at 168,000, well above the combined number of 100,000 receiving some form of government assistance. (140) Despite the following advice neither Stevens or the URC changed their reporting practices:

> It is a general rule, but not inevitably, that persons receiving food relief are registered for employment, but persons registered for employment do not necessarily receive food relief. (141)

Stevens claimed that there were "many thousands more registered as unemployed, but who would not take the dole" because of their pride. (142) In October 1935 he claimed that only 3 per cent (or 15,000 men and their 10,000 women

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139. N. Wheatley, "NSW Relief Workers Struggle 1933-1936", in J.Roe, (ed)., *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives, 1901-1975* (Stanmore, Cassell, 1976), 193.
140. B.S.B. Stevens, *op. cit.*, 10-13.
141. NSW, CSIL, A35/384 12/7511.
142. United Australia Party, *op. cit.*, 37.

and children dependants) of the State's labour force relied on food relief. Stevens considered this a remarkable achievement, quoting a pre-depression unemployment rate of between five and eight per cent. (143) But he understated the unemployment rate because official Government statistics put the number of food relief recipients at 30,788 in October 1935. (144) Perhaps Stevens meant that only three per cent of the State's labour force were eligible for food relief? It seems hardly coincidental that Stevens' labour force and unemployment statistics were always in rounded numbers, as illustrated in Table 3.16.

Table 3.16: Official NSW Labour Force Statistics, 1932-1937

(145)

Year	**Labour Force**	**Employment**	**Unemployment**	**%**
June 32	800,000	540,000	260,000	32.50
June 33	810,000	594,000	216,000	26.70
June 34	820,000	640,000	180,000	21.95
June 35	830,000	695,000	135,000	16.27
June 36	841,000	742,000	99,000	11.77
June 37	856,000	800,000	56,000	6.54

The unemployment figures quoted in Table 3.16 do not accurately convey the level of unemployment. For example, by aggregating youth, female and male unemployment figures given in the 1936 Survey, the minimum number of registered

143. B.S.B. Stevens, *op. cit.*, 14.
144. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, (31 January 1938), 29.
145. *Financial Statement: Budget Speech for the Financial Year 1937-38*: the Unemployment figures include relief workers.

unemployed in June 1936 was 103,114, whereas Stevens referred to a maximum number of 99,000. (146)

Stevens did not include relief workers and he boasted that in the immediate years after the *1933 Census* his policies had reduced unemployment from more than 30 per cent to half the pre-depression level. (147) He also claimed that the economic outlook for the 8,000 men on food relief was favourable, although international events obviously lay well beyond his control. (148)

Mair, who succeeded Stevens, was equally capable of making misleading statements about the extent of unemployment. For example, he confidently stated in 1939 that "the State as a whole has completely recovered from the previous economic depression" despite there being more than 40,000 unemployed men. (149)

3.11 Conclusions:

Despite a pressing need for comprehensive statistics to better account for the course and impact of the Great Depression, labour force statistics of the 1930s were poorly collated, were an inadequate measure of mass unemployment and were open to distortion by politicians. No

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146. New South Wales, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937) *op. cit.*, 64-65.
147. *loc. cit.*,
148. *Financial Statement, Budget Speech for the Financial Year 1937-38*, 27-28.
149. NSW Legislative Assembly, *Reports of the Employment Council of NSW*, Alexander Mair, NSW Premier (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938). 205

set of data reflected the intensity of mass unemployment and the misery experienced by tens of thousands of people. But in the face of mass unemployment and repeated calls for a greater knowledge of the numbers and characteristics of the unemployed, Governments were in an ideal position to allocate more human and financial resources to upgrade contemporary statistics. They chose not to. Further, they failed to make greater use of the NSW Bureau of Census and Statistics, which was the ideal body to implement and oversee major employment and unemployment surveys.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion it is evident that the total unemployment rate in NSW was higher than contemporary figures indicated. The highest official rate of 33 per cent in 1933 did not include many unemployed women, youth and track travellers. It is highly plausible that unemployment levels in New South Wales peaked at approximately 40 per cent.

Political literature of the period conveniently relied on official statistics, such as the NSW Index of Employment and Unemployment. The *1933 Census* and trade union statistics were the most reliable contemporary statistics. As the Depression deepened there was a tendency to accept larger percentages of unemployment as normal or natural. (150) The duration of unemployment - the enormous growth of mass unemployment on a long term basis - was probably the most serious aspect of the thirties. Comparison of the *1933 Census* with trade union returns can be misleading because of their very different nature. Union statistics

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150. J.A. Garraty, *op. cit.*, 167.

underestimated the growth in unemployment in the depth of depression and the rise in employment when the economy began to improve. (151)

Overall, statistics of unemployment and employment failed to keep pace with the trends and changing nature of the 1930s labour force. (2) For example, the thousands of men and women who travelled in search of employment were ignored in every census or survey of the decade. The increasing number of women both in employment and seeking full or part-time work was overlooked. The statistics of the 1930s distorted both the extent and nature of women's employment. (153) In addition to weaknesses in the reporting and compiling of unemployment statistics in the 1930s there were problems in not seeking vital information, such as the duration of unemployment.

Authorities displayed little regard for the psychological aspects of a person recording themselves as unemployed. Socially, the unemployed were disparaged for their situation and for some this was a barrier preventing them from accurately completing statistical forms.

Moreover, incomplete unemployment statistics allowed the Stevens Government to downplay the extent of mass unemployment and to reduce unemployment relief policies

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151. C. Forster, *op. cit.*, (1988), 305.
152. A.G. Colley's 1939 review of unemployment statistics relied on the *1933 Census* and the 1936 Unemployment Survey. *Australian Quarterly*, No. 1 (March 1939).
153. J. Hurstfield, "Women's Unemployment in the 1930s: Some Comparisons with the 1980s", in S. Allan (ed)., *The Experience of Unemployment* (Hampshire, MacMillan, 1986), 32-34.

during a period when many thousands of unemployed and their dependants deserved government aid.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE UNEMPLOYED OF THE 1930s

4.1 Overview:

As outlined in Chapter Three the total number of unemployed and under-employed in the 1930s cannot be ascertained, due to the inadequacy of labour force and other statistics. It is possible, however, to overcome this limitation and to develop in broad terms a profile of those members of the labour force who typically comprised the bulk of the unemployed in the 1930s.

This chapter aims to define and analyse those people who experienced unemployment and particularly long term unemployment (LTU) in the 1930s. It will explain why some people were more likely to have been unemployed than others by focusing on characteristics such as age, sex, occupation, geographic regions and level of skills. Although several histories have detailed the plight and sufferings of unemployed in NSW during the Great Depression (1) there has been little analysis of the characteristics

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1. L. Fox (ed)., *Depression Down Under* (Potts Point, 1977); S.R. Gray, "Social Aspects of the Depression in Newcastle, 1929-1934", MA, University of Newcastle, 1981; S.R. Gray, *Newcastle in the Great Depression*, Newcastle History Monographs No. 11 (Newcastle, Council of the City of Newcastle, 1989; J. Mackinolty (ed)., *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981); P. Peter, "Social Aspects of the Unemployed in NSW, 1930-1934", PhD, Australian National University, 1964; L. Richardson, *The Bitter Years: Wollongong during the Great Depression* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1984); G.R.F. Spenceley, *The Depression Decade: commentary and*

of the unemployed in New South Wales. Unresolved questions include the extent to which the unemployed were a static or homogenous group during the 1930s and why did so many people miss out on regular employment for a decade.

4.2 High Risk Groups:

The risk of being unemployed in NSW in the early 1930s was particularly high for unskilled men aged between 21 and 30. Blue collar workers who felt the impact of increasing mechanisation and structural change in the 1920s, bore the initial brunt of the rapid decline of industry in 1929 and 1930. NSW consistently experienced the highest rates of unemployment in the 1930s. This was because its workers were relatively dependent for employment on capital goods industries such as building and construction, and industries such as mining and iron and steel production. (2) As a result, secondary industries which relied on these key industries suffered high rates of unemployment. As previously highlighted unemployment was a major problem in NSW in the 1920s and an increasing number of male workers experienced LTU in the second half of that decade. While 1920s statistics did not include information as to the duration of unemployment, anecdotal evidence points to the

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documents (Melbourne, Nelson, 1981); N. Wheatley, "The unemployed who kicked", MA, Macquarie University, 1976.

2. M. Tew, *Work and Welfare in Australia: Studies in Social Economics* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1951), 77-78.

State's increasing inability to secure regular employment for a growing body of men.

By the early '30s employment was virtually unobtainable to people with few or no skills who had become unemployed in the late 1920s or the early phase of the Great Depression. Once a person lost their job it was very difficult to find regular employment. Many unemployed drifted from casual jobs, relying on food relief or temporary work on various public works programs to support themselves. As employment on public works favoured married men, particularly those with several dependants, single males found it difficult to gain or retain unemployment relief. Furthermore, there is evidence of many young men being dismissed as they approached ages at which they would have to be paid adult wages. (3) Moreover, the true level of female unemployment did not ease because conservative governments refused to allow females to be employed on various public works programs.

The overriding cause of unemployment in the '30s was the worldwide depression and associated slump in aggregate demand. Another factor was the impact of technological change. In 1931 the Labor Council of NSW defined the unemployed as being either "temporarily" or "organically" unemployed. (4)

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3. Commonwealth of Australia, Development and Migration Commission, *Report On Unemployment and Business Stability in Australia* (Melbourne, Government Printer, 1928), 27; M. Tew, *op. cit.*, 79.
4. Labor Council of NSW, *Annual Report 1931,* (Sydney, 1931), 3.

> The second group constitutes the most serious problem. [They]... have been forced out of the industries in which they were engaged owing to the introduction of labour displacing machinery and more efficient methods of production. (5)

The scarcity of work led to intense competition and fierce rivalry. Although there had been some signs of discrimination in employment in the 1920s, such as the NSW Tramways giving preference to "Australian-born and British subjects over foreigners" (6), mass unemployment in the '30s increased such discrimination. Public sector employers gave preference to applicants who were Australian or of British birth. Working wives of employed men were berated for taking jobs away from men.

The unemployed experienced low self-esteem. Evidence from the United States and Australia confirms that so strong was the feeling of disgrace and shame attached to accepting the dole that many people explored other avenues of assistance before acknowledging their situation. (7) The unemployed desired anonymity and sought material assistance only when all other resources had been exhausted. There was also the concern that a growing number of unemployed in Australia in the early 1930s were prepared to accept a

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5. *op. cit.,*
6. NSW, Transport Department, Correspondence File, "Preference to Australians and British in employment", 8/1499.
7. NSW Mines Department, Special Bundle, "1931 Unemployment Report from the Minister for Agriculture to the NSW Minister for Mines," 19/2550.

lower standard of living. If this situation continued on an indefinite basis then:

> A pauper class would be bereft of the desire to help themselves [and would] look to the State and charitably disposed persons to provide for themselves and their families. (8)

Despite the overwhelming effects of unemployment, governments in Australia during the early years of the 1930s regarded unemployment as a passing phase. The emergence of high levels of unemployment during the Depression decade influenced the State. (9)

4.3 Age:

A crucial determinant and characteristic of unemployment in NSW in the 1930s was a person's age. Throughout the depression young people aged 16 to 21 were very prone to high levels of unemployment. The employment of juveniles (children under the age of 16) in certain classes of factories was subject to them obtaining a medical certificate. This provides a means of quantifying changes in the level of juvenile employment.

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8. *loc. cit.*,
9. W.S. Kent Hughes, "Unemployment Relief Administration in Victoria", *Australian Rhodes Review* No. 2 (1936), 102.

Table 4.1: Certificates issued to Children under 16 years of age in NSW, 1928-1935 (10)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1928	3,891	4,714	8,605
1929	3,974	5,160	9,134
1930	2,152	2,779	4,931
1931	1,619	3,375	4,994
1932	2,450	4,304	6,754
1933	2,568	4,404	6,972
1934	3,820	5,776	9,596
1935	5,319	6,563	11,882

Table 4.1 illustrates the sharp fall in certificates in the early part of the depression, and then a rise in certificates as employers took advantage of cheap labour, particularly young females. Between 1919 and 1931 the number of boys under the age of 16 seeking employment fell by 2,335 or 59.26 per cent, higher than the 1,785 or 34.59 per cent decline in young females. (11) The *1933 Census* revealed that unemployed youth (under 21 years of age) in NSW represented more than half the total number of youth in the same group throughout Australia. (12)

The proportion of juveniles employed in factories jumped from 22 per cent in 1921 to 28 per cent in 1929, before rising to 30 per cent in 1935. (13) The evidence

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10. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *Report Upon Employment and Unemployment in New South Wales*, Issued by the Hon. J.M. Dunningham, MLA, Minister for Labour and Industry (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 15.
11. See also Employment Council of New South Wales, *Report and Recommendations*, 1938, (Sydney, Government Printer), 23.
12. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June 1933* (Canberra, Government Printer), 1776.
13. New South Wales, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937) *op. cit.*, 63.

indicates that youth employment and opportunities for post school or trade employment were greatly restricted in the first half of the 1930s. At the onset of the depression, the number of juvenile youth suffered a fall in employment. Although youth represented seven per cent of total employees between 1926 and 1929, their numbers fell to 5.3 per cent by 1931. (14). Yet a year later youth employment had risen a full percentage point. (15) The reason for the fluctuations can be explained by socio-economic factors. When the economy contracted in 1929 there was less demand for older youth (eg. above the age of 16). Apart from decreasing production levels and hence less demand for labour, there was a perception that employers preferred to employ younger children. Parents reacted:

> There is an increasing tendency for parents to withdraw students from school at an earlier age to meet the unfortunate demands of employers for business under the age of 16. (16)

Lower rates of pay were certainly an incentive for hiring younger labour. For example, the award for junior females working as clerks in newspaper offices or drug stores was three-fifths of the rate for male juniors. (17)

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14. New South Wales, Employment Research Committee, *Report of the Operations*, "Age Conditions of Employment", (Department of Labour and Industry, Sydney, Government Printer, 1936), 27.
15. *loc. cit.*,
16. *loc. cit.*,
17. New South Wales, Employment Research Committee, *op. cit.*, "Age Conditions of Employment, 21, Appendix B).

Yet, lower wages for females did not extend across all industries, and varied within an industry according to a female's age. For example, some female shop assistants under the age of 17 earned more than males under 17. But upon turning 17, female shop assistants received a lower wage rate than males. (18)

The burden of unemployment also fell heavily on youth due to the closure of opportunities to enter the public service as junior clerks, teachers, and as apprentices. (19) There is considerable evidence that employers dismissed large number of youth between the ages of 19 and 21. (20) The "blind alley" nature of jobs provided little scope for young people to advance their career to adulthood. The depression exacerbated this situation. In the NSW public service the practice of dismissing messengers when they reached 16 years of age increased during the 1930s, particularly as the number of apprenticeship schemes shrank. (21) Evidence from public servants, labour exchange officials and other government officers confirmed that boys as young as 15 replaced older youth.

As a result 1,000 older youth joined the ranks of the Long Term Unemployed (LTU) each year. (22) For example, at the Clyde Engineering Works the majority of boys employed

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18. *ibid.*, 24.
19. F.A. Bland, *Selected Reprints in Government*, (Sydney, 1934), 2.
20. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 3.
21. E.R.Walker, R.B. Madgwick, *An Outline of Australian Economics*, Third Edition (Sydney, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1937), 107.
22. *loc. cit.*,

at 15 were sacked by the time they reached 21 resulting in very few adult process workers in that workshop, a situation reflected in many other metal industry factories. (23) In another case, a bread making plant at Balmain dismissed six tradesmen at £6/8/6 per week and four apprentices and replaced them with eight boys receiving between £1/8/- and £2/10/-. (24)

The prospect of retaining employment diminished as youth became older. The impact of such sackings was evident with men aged 20-24, representing 18 per cent of unemployed males in the *1933 Census*, as depicted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Unemployed Persons (NSW) 1933, by age group (25)

Percentage of Total Labour Force

Age Group	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Under 20	11.0	33.8	14.3
20-24	18.0	28.0	19.5
25-29	13.7	11.6	13.4
30-34	10.2	6.4	9.6
35-39	9.0	5.7	8.5
40-44	9.1	4.4	8.4
45-49	9.0	4.0	8.3
50-54	7.6	3.1	6.9
55-59	5.7	2.1	5.2
60-64	4.8	0.6	4.2
65 & over	1.9	0.3	1.7
TOTALS	**100**	**100**	**100**

23. G. Crane, "Youth and Unemployment", *Communist Review*, Vol. VI, No. 9 (September 1939), 522.
24. Labor Research and Information Bureau, *March of the Machine in Australia* (Sydney, Trades Hall, 1931), 15.
25. *1933 Census* quoted in NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937) *op. cit.*, 4.

If males aged 20 to 29 are grouped together it can be seen that they were most prone to unemployment. The comprehensive 1936 survey of unemployment revealed that over 28 per cent of unemployed men registered at State Labour Exchanges (SLE) were in this age group.

Table 4.3: Unemployed men (NSW) 1936, by age groups (26)

Age Group	**Number of men**	**Percentage of total number of unemployed men**
Under 21	515	0.78
21 to 24	8,503	12.84
25-29	10,394	15.69
30-34	8,421	12.71
35-39	7,596	11.47
40-44	6,934	10.47
45-49	7,385	11.15
50-54	6,648	10.04
55-59	5,354	8.08
60-64	3,705	5.59
65 and over	782	1.18
not stated	520	1.00
Total	**66,757**	**100%**

A second major wave of unemployment in 1937 prompted the Stevens Government to establish an Employment Council (EC). An EC report confirmed the widespread practice of dismissing 19, 20 and 21 young olds in the 1930s:

26. *ibid.*, 41.

> There is evidence that a very large proportion of the men now unemployed [aged 21-30] were in more of less regular employment as youths, but lost their employment on attaining age 18 to 21, being replaced by younger boys... (27)

Young people also faced strong competition for employment from those who remained at school from 1929 to 1931 in the hope of attaining employment. (28) Also, increasing mechanisation facilitated the employment of less educated and skilled people. Remaining longer at school or undertaking vocational study at technical college was no guarantee of employment. The number of school leavers unable to find employment rose from 6.6 per cent to 23 per cent between 1929 and 1932. (29) They and many of the youth employed just prior to the economic slump formed the bulk of unemployed youth in the early '30s. (30) There was little change as the decade progressed and a 1938 government study concluded there was a shortage of labour under the age of 18 and an oversupply above 18 years. (31)

Youth unemployment can be better understood by examination of several industries. In 1937 youth were prominent in factories (24.3 per cent of all male

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27. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 11.
28. G.R. Giles, "Unemployment among young people in Australia", *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX1, No. 6 (June 1935), 813.
29. F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia" *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX No. 1 (July 1934), 187.
30. G.R. Giles, *op. cit.*, 812.
31. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 9.

employees); registered retail shops (33.2 per cent) and wholesale (22.2 per cent). Pharmacies, newsagencies and service stations accounted for high numbers of youth. (32) Lower ratios of youth to adult men occurred in the mining sector, and government departments with the exception of the railways and tramways. (33)

One serious impact of youth unemployment in the 1930s was the emergence of high unemployment among males aged 21 - 30. The large number of retrenched youth each year meant that this group increased, at least until 1936, when signs of economic improvement demanded more young male labour. In 1933 a government committee optimistically predicted that up to half of the 25,000 youth leaving school would "be absorbed into industry". (34) Some other contemporaries expressed a less optimistic, and more realistic position. In the same year 12,108 youth or 40.2 per cent of those under the age of 21 had never been in employment. (35) The 1936 report on unemployment listed 14,914 unemployed females and males whose parents were unemployed. (36)

Successive government inquiries highlighted the serious nature of youth unemployment. One report stated:

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32. *ibid.*, Appendix B.
33. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 10.
34. New South Wales, Employment Research Committee, *op. cit.*, "Age Conditions of Employment", 7.
35. G.R. Giles, *op. cit.*, 815.
36. New South Wales, Department of Labor and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 40-41.

> ...the problem of juvenile unemployment is thus one of increasing magnitude and one of the major issues which the State has to face. (37)

Stevens responded by dividing the Sydney metropolitan area into 16 zones, establishing an unemployment register in each municipality and sponsoring the formation of the Young Citizens Association. (38) But the State did not allocate sufficient resources to properly come to terms with the magnitude of youth unemployment. Moreover, Stevens dismissed calls for the setting up of a separate government department to inquire into youth unemployment. (39)

Thus, the 1930s depression produced a generation of young people, predominantly males, who were either permanently unemployed or retrenched between the ages of 16 and 21 and thereafter remained unemployed, with the exception of casual work on public works, for most of the 1930s.

By the end of the 1930s youth remained the second largest group of unemployed persons, after men aged above 40 year of age.

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37. Employment Research Committee, *op. cit.*, "Age Conditions of Employment", 7.
38. NSW, URC, "Womens, Girls and Boys Advisory Committee, *Progress Report*, 23 December 1932. G.R. Giles, *op. cit.*, 816-819.
39. United Australia Party, Annual General Conference, 1933, "Preliminary Agenda, Motion from the Parramatta Younger Set."

4.4 Female Unemployment:

The sex of a person had both positive and negative effects on their prospect of obtaining and retaining employment. From an economic perspective, females were more likely to be employed during the 1930s economic depression because in many industries and occupations they were paid less for the same or similar type of work undertaken by males. For example, girls often replaced boys in retail shops and many branches of the clothing trade. (40) The employment of females was aided by the spread of mechanisation which allowed them to perform many of the duties, such as operating machinery, which previously were the domain of males. (41)

But the depression also exacerbated discrimination against female workers. Particularly in the public sector females were disparaged for allegedly working at the expense of male employment. Despite the Lang Government's attempt to promote the employment of women, reflected in the establishment of a sub-committee of the Unemployment Relief Council (URC) and the placement of 800 women by November 1931 (42), NSW governments throughout the 1930s remained hostile to the employment of women. Indeed it was Lang's Minister for Education who first restricted the

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40. NSW, Employment Research Committee, *op. cit.*, "Boy versus Girl Employment", 31.
41. *loc. cit.*,
42. New South Wales, Unemployment Relief Council, "Copies of Minutes, Meetings and Papers, 1930-932", Baddley to Lang, 2/1876.

employment of married women teachers. (43) More young male teacher graduates could be employed if married women were dismissed, he argued. J. Bremner has shown how vilification campaigns were mounted to portray employed women as being responsible for the Depression. (44) This reflected attitudes that women were not part of the permanent work force and that less or no sympathy should be afforded if they lost their jobs. (45) Labor and non-Labor Governments maintained a similar attitude to the employment of married women during the Depression decade. Despite facing opposition from the United Associations of Women (UA), the Stevens Government adopted Lang's policy and brought in legislation which led to 220 women being retrenched. (46) By 1935 the number of married women teachers in NSW had fallen to 284, from a peak of 671 in 1929. (47)

Trade unions supported the Labor Party's stance on married female employment. For example, the Secretary of the Printing Trades Union petitioned the Minister for Labour and Industry, to restrict females working overtime,

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43. P. Ranald, "Feminism and Class: The United Associations of Women and the Council of Action for Equal Pay in the Depression" in M. Beverge, M. James. C. Shute, *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, (Hale and Ironmonger, Sydney, 1982), 273.
44. J. Bremner, "In the case of equality: Muriel Heagnery and the position of Women in the Depression" in M. Beverge, M. James and C. Shute, *op. cit.*, 288.
45. J. Mackinolty, *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981), 110.
46. The Married Women (Teachers and Lecturers Act, 1932). See *NSW Auditor General's Report, 1932-33* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1933).
47. New South Wales, Teachers Federation, "Minutes, Correspondence" T15.

a move which "...would bring about a better distribution of work in the printing and cardboard industries." (48)

The Stevens Government sought to both employ males and promote their employment in the private sector. In December 1932 the NSW Government sponsored "Boy's Week" whereby 200 boys distributed 50,000 handbills to factories, shops, hotels and other businesses within a six mile radius of Sydney's General Post Office. (49) The handbill proclaimed: "I am one of Thirty Thousand Unemployed Boys and I need a Job. As a national duty and a social service GIVE THE BOY A CHANCE!" (50)

Lower wages for female workers had a bearing on the private sector hiring females, but had no effect on the NSW Public Service which preserved its traditional policy of restricting the employment of women. In a 1934 submission to the Employment Research Committee the NSW Public Service Board (PSB) reported than an entrance examination for girls seeking employment as clerks had not been held for many years. As such, only boys were eligible to be trained for public service administrative positions. (51) In 1938 the PSB upheld the Public Service Act of 1902 and restricted the intake of females to clerical divisions, such as shorthand and typing positions. This restriction gave

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48. Printing and Kindred Industries (NSW Branch) "Minutes and Financial Records". T39/83 17/08/33.
49. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Progress Report, Women, Girls' and Boys' Employment Committee," 23 December 1932, 4.
50. *ibid.*, phamplet attached.
51. NSW, Employment Research Committee, *op. cit.*, "Boy v. Girl Employment," 41.

preference to males in all other public service positions. (52) Further, the Employment Council was:

> ...directed specifically to find openings for young men who had missed the opportunity of being absorbed into industry during the period of business depression. (53)

The bias against females stemmed from the belief that females should not embark on a lifetime career. Instead, young females were hired for positions of a "purely routine character [which].... offer no prospect of advancement... [and who] have no intention of remaining indefinitely in the Service." (54) The PSB had no hesitation in enunciating its policy about the employment of females:

> It is the Board's policy, not to employ females where, having regard to all considerations, including the economic factor, it is in the public interest to employ males. The Board have not altered, and do not propose to alter their policy... (55)

The position of the PSB did not lead to a fall in the aggregate number of female employees, whose numbers remained remarkably steady throughout the 1930s, while the

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52. NSW, *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Public Service Board for the year ended 30 June 1938* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938), 12.
53. *ibid.*, 27.
54. *Forty-Third Annual Report of the Public Service Board*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1939), 13.
55. *loc. cit.*,

number of males employed by the NSW Government fell considerably in the early 1930s. As Table 4.5 shows there was a 22 per cent decline in full time male government employees between 1929 and 1933. By 1933 females represented 14.2 per cent of total NSW Government employees compared to 11.2 per cent four years earlier. However, as employment recovered males were hired in preference to females, so that by 1938 the female proportion of the government workforce had fallen to 12.2 per cent.

Table 4.4: Total NSW Government Employees, 1929-1940 (56)

Year ended	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
1929	97,803	12,354	110,157
1930	87,335	12,583	99,819
1931	81,848	12,766	94,614
1932	78,003	12,505	90,508
1933	75,884	12,580	88,464
1934	77,348	12,699	90,047
1935	82,230	12,695	94,925
1936	81,311	12,712	94,023
1937	92,417	12,688	105,085
1938	92,539	12,854	105,393
1939	93,954	12,853	106,807
1940	96,242	12,892	109,134

Across all sectors of the economy, the increase in female workers was most evident in administration and professional employment, with a 5.6 per cent increase recorded between 1921 and 1933. (57) Contrary to frequently expressed fears, the rise in married women in the workforce was less than half a percentage point. The NSW Statistician

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56. *Official Year Book of New South Wales 1939-1940*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940), 605.
57. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 21.

estimated that females represented 23.7 per cent of total wage earners in 1938, a very slight rise on 23 per cent in 1933 and 21.3 per cent in 1921. (58) Indeed, the upward trend in female employment was more pronounced in the 1920s. The combination of fewer jobs and stringent criticism of working females stemmed the rise in the 1930s.

Several women's groups also held the view that females should not displace males. In 1934 the Kensington and South Kensington Women's Branches of the United Australia Party (UAP) called on the Federal and State Governments to investigate and regulate female employment, especially instances where a woman's husband was employed. (59) To reduce the number of females in employment they also advocated a limit on the number of women in specific industries and that women undertaking similar position to men receive equal pay. (60)

The issue of equal pay to both sexes became a focus of community and economic debate during the 1930s. Two groups pushed for equal pay. Firstly, women who argued against the disparity in male and female wages. These women, often progressive minded, joined organisations such as the United Action (UA). A less progressive group, whose members comprised working class members of both sexes was the Council of Action for Equal Pay. (61) Secondly, some members of both sexes favoured equal pay as a means of

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58. *ibid.*, 20.
59. United Australia Party, Annual General Meeting, 1934, "Motion,".
60. *loc. cit.*,
61. For a good discussion of the Council of Action of Equal Pay see P. Ranald, *op. cit.*, 1982.

reducing the discrimination against men who in many industries had been priced out of the labour market by lower rates of pay for women. Women did not experience mass dismissals to the same degree as men because their lower rates of pay were an incentive for employers to retain their services. This second group pushed the question of equal pay at successive annual general meetings of the United Australia Party (UAP). People of the same ilk also proposed that once women married "they should resign their positions to enable more young people to gain employment." (62) The Forbes (central western NSW) branch adopted an even harder line, urging the NSW Government to replace women in the Education Department with men. (63)

Such attitudes persisted during the 1930s and gained credence from the strong support of the Stevens Government. For example, in 1937 Stevens introduced legislation which prohibited women and youth operating machines in certain industries. (64) His attempt in 1938 to block women gaining employment in the private sector failed because the inequity in female wages ensured that many private sector employers would continue to employ them. (65) Owners and managers of factories continued to employ women because they represented a lower cost. In the early 1930s a higher number of males, in relative terms, lost their jobs.

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62. United Australia Party, Annual General Conference, 1933,"Preliminary Agenda: Motion from the Haberfield Women's Branch"
63. *loc. cit.*,
64. Commonwealth of Australia, *Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly Upon the Employment of Youth in Industry* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1940), 482.
65. Commonwealth of Australia, *Conference on Youth-Adult Employment,* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939), 4.

Between 1928 and 1932 male employment in factories fell by 31.55 per cent, whereas female employment fell by only 20.88 per cent, as the following table depicts.

Table 4.5: NSW Factory Employees, 1928-1932 (66)

	NUMBER OF PERSONS			
YEAR	**MALE**	**FEMALE**	**TOTAL**	**FEMALES AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL**
1928	105,977	42,621	148,598	28.7
1929	103,347	41,528	144,875	28.7
1930	80,946	34,370	115,316	29.8
1931	72,532	33,721	106,253	31.7
1932	81,130	37,853	118,983	31.8

The 1936 Survey of 1,721 unemployed females recorded 30 per cent of women aged in their twenties as the largest group of unemployed. (67) In the previous three years of unemployment, the average period of receiving neither food relief nor relief work was 6.1 months. The average period for food relief was 25.5 months and one month for relief work. (68)

Overall, employment opportunities for women in industrial areas were less affected than for their male counterparts by the Great Depression. However, more conservative attitudes forced many women in rural areas to return to unpaid household duties.

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66. *Official Year Books of New South Wales*, selected issues.
67. New South Wales, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 58.
68. *loc. cit.*,

4.5 Level of Skills:

The unskilled or those with little or no employment experience fared badly during the Great Depression. In 1929 the unskilled and labourers represented about 80 per cent of persons (predominantly males) registered at State Labour Exchanges (SLE). (69) This proportion remained steady throughout the 1930s. Nearly a decade later there had been little change. A 1938 survey of unemployed men registered at SLEs in Sydney, Newcastle, Maitland, the northern Coalfields and the Wollongong District revealed that about two-thirds were suited only for unskilled employment. (70) The survey identified 18,068 as unskilled or virtually unskilled and a further 6,308 as semi-skilled. (71). A further 3 per cent were classified as unsuitable for any work owing to age or infirmity. (72)

The Report argued:

> Most of the unemployed are, therefore, not the rejects of industry, but the surplus men who apparently pass through adolescence without finding any permanent niche in industry. (73)

A year later, it was reported that at least 93 per cent of the unemployed were suited for unskilled employment

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69. *New South Wales Industrial Gazette*, selected issues.
70. H.M. Hawkins, Employment Statement, *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, 1938, (Sydney, Government Printer), 4-5.
71. Employment Council of New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 9.
72. *loc. cit.*,
73. *loc. cit.*,

only. (74) The Report must be treated with caution as there are no extant documents to prove its claims. This high number of unskilled unemployed workers was not regarded by the State as nearly so serious as skilled workers being unemployed.

Some unemployed, with backgrounds in various trades, registered as labourers because of the greater chance of receiving government or local authority employment. (75) By highlighting a high percentage of unskilled unemployed the 1938 and 1939 Reports contradicted the detailed 1936 survey, which found that 23,345 men or 36.2 per cent of those surveyed were "general labourers". (76)

It is useful to examine the occupations which consistently suffered high levels of unemployment during the early 1930s. Table 4.6 illustrates the levels of unemployment in key industries (in percentages).

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74. Employment Council of New South Wales, *General Progress Report*, June 1939, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer), 4.
75. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1940, Addendum No.3 as quoted in C. Forster, "Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s" in R.G. Gregory, N.G. Butlin (eds) *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 304.
76. New South Wales, Department of labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 50.

Table 4.6: Industry Occupations, NSW unemployed males, 1933

(77)

INDUSTRY	PERCENTAGE
Fishing and Trapping	20.07
Agricultural, Pastoral and Dairying	16.94
Forestry	18.37
Mining and Quarrying	41.77
Industrial	40.75
Transport/Communication	16.28
Commerce/Finance	19.85
Public Admin/Professional	13.95
Entertainment, Sport and Rec	26.03
Personal and Domestic	24.11

The highest levels of unemployment were recorded in heavy industries and the building sectors, particularly in industrial cities. (78) Factory employees of both sexes experienced high levels of unemployment after suffering a 30 per cent decline in total employment between 1928-29 and 1931-32. (79) In summary, unskilled workers were highly prone to unemployment in the Great Depression. The 1930s took away opportunities for many workers to gain formal trade qualifications and work related skills.

4.6 Long term unemployed:

The expression "long term unemployment" was used to describe people out of regular employment for several years. It came into existence during the 1930s but equally

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77. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June 1933*, Vol. 3 (Canberra, Government Printer, 1933), 308.
78. S. Garton, *Out of Luck: Poor Australians and Social Welfare, 1788-1988* (North Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1990), 126.
79. *Official Year Book of NSW, 1940-41*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1943), 553.

could have been used in the 1920s. The number of long term unemployed increased as the depression deepened.

Long term unemployment caused a low turnover of the unemployment pool in the 1930s. (80) The *1933 Census* showed that 63 per cent of unemployed males had been unemployed for more than one year, with nearly one-third for three years or more. (81) Women were in a better position, though 42 per cent had been unemployed for more than a year and 13 per cent for more than three years. (82) The interval since regular employment increased markedly as the depression wore on. The number of men unemployed for five years or longer represented 41 per cent of a 1936 survey (83) as depicted in the following table:

Table 4.7: Duration of Unemployment (NSW Males), 1936 (84)

Period	**Number Unemployed**	**Percentage of total**
Under 1 year	10,666	15.98
1 year but less than 2 years	56,091	84.02
2 years and over	49,603	74.30
3 years and over	44,107	66.07
4 years and over	35,487	53.16
5 years and over	27,350	40.97
6 years and over	17,706	26.53
7 years and over	8,155	12.22
8 years and over	4,399	6.59

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80. R.G. Gregory, V. Ho, and L. McDermott, "Sharing the Burden: The Australian Labour Market during the 1930s", in R. G. Gregory and N.G. Butlin (eds), *op. cit.*, 236.
81. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, op.cit.*, 314.
82. *loc. cit.*,
83. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 42.
84. *loc. cit.*,

Children from homes where unemployment affected one or both breadwinners were more likely to encounter unemployment than children of employed workers. One school reported that 60 per cent of children from homes where one or both parents were unemployed failed examinations, compared to a 40 per cent failure rate for children whose parents worked part-time, while all the children passed whose parents were employed. (85)

To what extent did unemployment become a family trait during the Depression? There were 220 male and 204 unemployed female dependants of 972 unemployed women in 1936. (86) Unfortunately the loss of primary records does not provide the opportunity to assess how many children were from the same spouse. Of the 45,119 unemployed men, there was a total of 6,729 male and 6,730 female unemployed dependants. (87)

Unemployment among trade unionists hovered slightly above 10 per cent from 1937 to 1940, although it peaked at 11.6 per cent in August 1939. (88). At the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, 48,915 adult men were registered at SLEs in 1939-40. Although the average length of unemployment had eased somewhat by 1939, Table 4.8 highlights the seriousness of mass unemployment as the decade came to a close.

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85. Unemployed Workers Movement, *Crimes Against the Unemployed* (Sydney, 1932), 4-6.
86. *ibid.*, 60.
87. *ibid.*, 42.
88. *Official Year Book of New South Wales* cited in C. Forster, "Australian Unemployment 1900-1940:, *Economic Record*, Vol. 41 (September 1956), 440.

Table 4.8: Duration of Unemployment (NSW Males), 1939 (89)

Period of Unemployment unemployed	**Number**
Under 1 week	456
1 week and under 2	2,543
2 weeks and under 3	3,284
3 weeks and under 4	2,891
4 weeks and under 2 months	10,978
2 months and under 3 months	7,835
3 months and under 4 months	7,616
4 months and under 5	5,192
5 months and under 6	3,417
6 months and under 7	5,989
7 months and under 8	3,318
8 months and under 9	2,153
9 months and under 10	2,135
10 months and under 11	1,692
11 months and under 12	1,058
12 months and under 15	7,094
15 months and under 18	1,492
18 months and under 21	2,337
21 months and under 2 years	567
2 years and under 3 years	3,481
3 years and under 4 years	2,349
4 years and over	7,990
Not stated	11,317
Never employed	1
Total	**89,195**

In Table 4.8 13,820 people or 15.5 per cent had been out of work for more than 2 years. By the end of the decade of mass unemployment the length of unemployment for males had fallen, yet it remained relatively very high.

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89. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *The National Register 1939: Interim Statistical Summary* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939), 30.

Table 4.9: A Comparison of Unemployment Duration, 1933, 1936 and 1939 (90)

Duration of unemployment	**1933**	**1936**	**1939**
	Percentage		
3 months or more	89	96	71
1 year	69	84	38
3 years or more	33	66	22

The above table highlights the large number of people who experienced LTU during the 1930s. The number of LTU men rose as the decade progressed. Among other things this led to a deterioration in living conditions. (91) Under-employment also caused many people to live in an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity. (92)

4.7 Location and living conditions:

Most unemployed people lived in metropolitan Sydney or in key industrial cities such as Wollongong and Newcastle. Cities and towns reliant on a principal industry such as

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90. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, op. cit.*, NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit.*, 19; Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *op. cit.*, 6.
91. A.G. Colley, "Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, 2 (June 1939), 100.
92. E.H. Burgmann, "The fight against poverty", *Morpeth Review* Vol. 11, No. 21 (1932), 8.

Broken Hill, Cessnock, Lithgow and Newcastle experienced the highest rates of unemployment. (93) The mining industry suffered high unemployment rates, particularly in the industrial cities of Newcastle, Broken Hill and Maitland. (94) The highest official non-metropolitan unemployment rate was 40 per cent recorded at Broken Hill in 1933. (95) The unemployed experienced long periods of unemployment at Broken Hill during the mid 30s.

Many unemployed families could not afford rents and were evicted from their homes. The Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM) sought to prevent such evictions and achieved some success up until the bloody scenes at Bankstown and Newtown in 1931. (96) The repressive force of the police early in the depression paved the way for less militant resistance as the depression deepened. The most volatile demonstrators were the single unemployed and the government broke up their concentration by shifting them to work camps out of city centres. (97) Across Sydney makeshift unemployment camps, tents and shanty homes

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93. P. Spearitt, "Depression Statistics" in J. Mackinolty, *op. cit.*, 199.
94. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, (31 January 1931), 36.
95. NSW, CSIL, A37/682 9/2407.
96. At both of these battles the police were victorious. The Newtown crowd was the largest spontanteous demonstration in Sydney during the Great Depression. For a detailed account of the anti-eviction campaign of the early 1930s see N. Wheatley, "Meeting them at the door; radicalism, militancy and the Sydney anti-eviction campaign in J. Row (ed)., *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger in association with the Sydney History Group, c. 1980)
97. S. Macintyre, "Australian responses to unemployment in the Last Depression" in J. Roe (ed).,*Unemployment: Are there lessons from history?* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1985), 26.

replaced regular housing for the poorest of the unemployed in the 1930s. (98) Many were ironically called "Happy Valley's" because despite the squalid and miserable conditions, these shanty towns represented some respite for unemployed tenants who had been evicted from their homes. The largest "Happy Valley" was at La Perouse in Sydney's south, which housed about 1,000 people in "appalling conditions". (99) At North Brighton more than 350 people, including 121 children sought refuge in tents and huts at Cook Park. (100) In south-west Sydney, homeless families built shacks at Macquarie Fields on the banks of the George's River while at Lidcombe hundreds lived in tents. (101)

In the large industrial city of Newcastle, which experienced high unemployment throughout the 1920s, "humpies" appeared on the city's outskirts in 1925 and remained for up to 20 years. (102)

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98. "Happy Valleys", particularly in industrial areas, were characterised by overcrowding, dystentery, whooping cough, fever and scurvy. M. Masson, *Surviving the Dole Years: The 1930s - A personal story* (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1993)
99. M. Masson, *op. cit.*, 65.
100. P. Geeves, J. Jervis, *Rockdale: Its beginning and development* (Sydney, Halstead Press, 1954), 176.
101. C. Liston, *Campbelltown: The Bicentennial History* (Council of the City of Campbelltown, Allen and Unwin, 1988, 191; S. Coupe, M. Andrews, *Was it only yesterday* (Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1986), 80. "Happy Valleys" existed in the Newcastle Region - more than 500 semi-permanent residents lived on the Rifle Range at Adamstown. Other places included Stockton, Nobby's Beach and around the Wollongong area. See M. Mason, *op. cit.*, 65
102. J.C. Docherty, *Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City* (Marrickville, Hale and Ironmonger, 1983), 72.

4.8 Conclusions:

Mass unemployment had devastating effects on the economy and people of NSW in the 1930s. It affected all age groups, both sexes and minority groups such as the Aborigines. Unskilled young males between 19 and 29 were at greatest risk during the Depression decade and represented one third of unemployed males. Many experienced long periods without any permanent employment. Once a person lost their job in the early 1930s it was very difficult to obtain another permanent position. The Depression not only dented their opportunities for employment, but severely restricted their chances of obtaining apprenticeships. At the same time a large number of young men entered "dead end" occupations that offered no future. The State did try to promote employment of young men but the depth of the depression meant that few employers took on apprentices until the second half of the decade.

Mass unemployment and the inability to pay rents forced many people, particularly families, to live as virtual squatters on public properties, such as parks and beaches.

Working women experienced discrimination and resentment. The view that many women took male positions was not supported by official statistics. Lower wages for females caught the attention of many private sector employers. However, their relative numbers were largely unchanged in metropolitan areas. By contrast, sentiments

about women working in rural areas were stronger and many women returned to unpaid domestic duties. Because of contemporary attitudes the high unemployment or underemployment rate among females, particularly in rural areas, was often ignored.

CHAPTER FIVE: FOOD RELIEF, 1929-1939

5.1 The State accepts greater responsibility:

Mass unemployment in the 1930s was a new phenomenon to Australian governments. It led to the disbursement of an unprecedented level of charitable aid, an extension of the State's social service activities and new policies to respond to chronic unemployment. This chapter examines the food relief or dole system during the Depression decade, particularly during the Stevens Government, 1932-1939.

Although regarded by some contemporaries as "the fatal attraction of the easy policy of relief" (1) the dole was a necessary and immediate form of assistance to the army of unemployed. As outlined in Chapter One, the State in the 1920s provided the dole in limited quantities in major industrial areas when unemployment averaged 10 per cent, a rate well in excess of the then three to five per cent natural rate of unemployment. The State's reluctance to be a major player in the provision of relief changed in the 1930s because of mass unemployment. Even the conservative Stevens Government was forced to continue the dole, though to fewer people, in a bid to maintain law and order.

Rising unemployment in 1929 caused the Bavin Government to embark on a two-fold policy of extending food relief and increasing employment to able-bodied men on State works. The New South Wales Benevolent Society

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1. S & B. Webb as quoted in F.A. Bland, "A Note upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Economic Record*, Vol. V111, (May 1932), 70.

(NSWBS), a major player in distributing sustenance, provided food to 15,000 men in 1929, a figure equalled in the first three months of 1930. (2) The NSWBS also erected temporary buildings and increased its number of inspectors, clerical and relief staff but found it increasingly difficult to serve the army of unemployed through a single outdoor relief depot. (3)

Bavin displayed greater responsibility by opening additional government food relief depots (FRD) across metropolitan Sydney - at Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Burwood, Granville, Hurstville, Liverpool, Manly, North Sydney, Parramatta, Rockdale and Ryde. (4) This decentralisation of food relief reduced the travelling distance and time for many unemployed. It also reflected the State's increasing control over the administration of food relief. (5) But the State also looked to private charities such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP), Salvation Army (SA) and local relief organisations to meet the surge in requests for food and other social services. Many municipalities and shires reacted to the deepening economic crisis by sponsoring and supporting local benevolent organisations.

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2. I.C. Hill, *Australia at the X Roads* (Sydney, Commercial Printing Company, 1930), 11.
3. Benevolent Society of New South Wales, (NSWBS), *Annual Report, 1930*, (Sydney, 1930), 6.
4. New South Wales, Chief Secretary, "Achievements of the Government, 1925-1932", 5/9213 AONSWC.
5. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *Report Upon Employment and Unemployment in New South Wales*, Issued by the Hon. J.M. Dunningham, MLA. (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 29.

In July 1929 government officials expressed concern that some unemployed were being assisted by a number of charities.

> Unfortunately, considerable over-lapping and unmistakable evidence of imposition at present exist, both in the collection of funds and the acceptance of relief.... (6)

Prompted by financial constraints Bavin attempted to regulate the activities of the increasing number of charities and their repeated demands for government funding. (7) The Government Relief (Administration) Act of June 1930 aimed to co-ordinate the activities of charities and check on persons in receipt of aid by establishing a central register. In September 1930 Bavin called together the major charities. (8) They were asked to limit assistance to clients in possession of a government relief card and to provide a monthly list of the names and

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6. NSW Treasury, Correspondence, General Series, 32/3653 10/22294.
7. F.A. Bland, "Unemployment Relief in Australia", *International Labour Review,* Vol. XXX, No. 1, (July 1934), 165.
8. Representatives of the following organisations attended the meeting: Church of England, Central Methodist Mission, New South Wales Benevolent Society, Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Sydney Rescue Work Society, City Night Refuge and Soup Kitchen, Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies, The Smith Family, Chief Secretary's Department, Department of Labour and Industry, Child Welfare Department, Widow's Pension Department and the Family Endowment Department. See NSW Treasury, Correspondence, General Series, 32/3653 10/22294.

addresses of clients. (9) Bavin threatened the charities that if they did not comply they would lose government funding. Reluctantly many charities agreed to co-operate. (10) However, the SVdP opposed the proposal because of its policies of client confidentiality and operating without State aid. It was thus unperturbed by Bavin's threat to withhold funds. Bavin's loss of government enabled other charities to opt out, so that by mid-1931 only the Smith Family, the NSWBS and the Returned Soldiers League continued to supply information to the government. (11) During the Depression the SVdP assisted the unemployed, homeless and poor irrespective of whether they held a government relief card. Its 247 branches were spread across NSW and represented the only non-government charitable body in many rural towns. (12) Throughout the 1930s non-Labour Governments insisted that charitable organisations furnish lists of clients and addresses when applying for annual grants. (13)

Unable to coerce the charities and in the face of mounting unemployment the NSW Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) took control of food relief in the

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9. NSW Chief Secretary's Correspondence, Main Series of letters (CSIL) are held at the Archives Office of New South Wales - City and Kingswood. B38/3941 9/2422.
10. *loc. cit.*,
11. NSW Treasury, Correspondence - General Series, 32/3653 10/22294. A thorough search of extant archives of the Chief Secretary's Department, the NSW Treasury and the NSW Premier's Department, failed to uncover the information that charities supplied to the Government. Further, the whereabouts of the Central Register of people in receipt of charitable aid is also unknown.
12. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *1934 Annual Report for NSW*, (Sydney, 1934).
13. NSW, CSIL, A34/10551 5/9298.

Industrial Area, ie. Sydney, Newcastle and the northern coalfields in September 1929. Bavin modified the system by issuing the unemployed with coupons to obtain bread and meat from the store of their choice, leaving the NSWBS to supply groceries in an "inner-zone" of suburbs in the immediate vicinity of Sydney. (14) The decision probably came as a relief to the NSWBS, which by the end of 1930 had assisted a record 150,000 people. (15) It represented the first step in downscaling the role of the NSWBS and symbolised the government's policy of taking a greater responsibility for unemployment relief.

The Lang Government, which succeeded Bavin, extended the State's role in providing unemployment relief and withdrew the NSWBS from distributing food. Thereafter, the NSWBS principally provided medical assistance. There is no doubt that the scale of unemployment motivated Bavin and Lang to accept greater responsibility for providing for the unemployed. Another factor was the State's desire to be directly responsible for the organisation of the food relief system.

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14. Benevolent Society of New South Wales, *Annual Report*, 1930, 6; R. Walker, "Mr Lang's Dole: the administration of food relief in New South Wales, 1930-1932", *Labour History*, No. 51. (1986), 74.
15. Benevolent Society of New South Wales, *Annual Report, 1930* (Sydney, 1930), 2.

5.2 Eligibility and Administration:

An important aspect of the food relief system was the eligibility criteria. In 1930 the Bavin Government passed the Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act which created the NSW Unemployment Relief Council (URC) and authorised the collection of a special tax on employed persons and businesses to pay for food relief. The Unemployment Relief Tax (URT) was first levied on individuals at a rate of 3d in the pound and on businesses from 1 July 1930. (16) On 1 January 1931 Lang increased the rate to 1s in the pound.

To be eligible for food relief or "susso" as the unemployed called it, a person had to be destitute, a resident of NSW for 12 months, unemployed for at least 14 days and registered at a SLE for 7 days. (17) NSW residents in indigent circumstances could receive "susso" even if they did not meet the residential qualification. (18)

Food relief was issued on a sliding scale so that larger families received a greater amount than individuals. The scales were increased by Bavin, Lang and Stevens. Table 5.1 illustrates the scales during the Lang (1931) and Stevens Governments (1933, 1934 and 1936)

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16. *Report of the Working of the Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act, 1930-32*, PRUA (Sydney, Government Printer, 1932).
17. NSW, CSIL, A35/618 12/7511.
18. *ibid.*, A37/688 12/7545.

Table 5.1: Food Relief Scales, 1933-1936 (19)

Scale	Family Unit	1933	1934	1936
A	Single Man	11/-	13/-	15/-
B	Married Couple	19/-	21/6	28/-
B1	Man, wife, 1 child	28/-	33/-	38/-
B2	Man, wife, 2 children	33/-	39/-	39/6
B3	Man, wife, 3 children	38/-	45/-	45/6
B4	Man, wife, 4 children	43/-	51/	51/6
B5	Man, wife, 5 children	48/-	57-	57/6
B6	Man, wife, 6 children	53/-	63/-	63/6
B7	Man, wife, 7 children	58/-	69/-	69/6
B8	Man, wife, 8 children	75/-		
B9	Man, wife, 9 children	81/6		

Eligibility for the dole was also determined by the income of the applicant and their families. Lang determined that two families or two branches of the one family living in the same household should be treated as two households. (20) His Chief Secretary, Mark Gosling, replaced "household" income with family income, so that the income of borders in homes was not included in a family's income. (21) However, this policy was not consistently applied by the Stevens administration.

Strict income limits often caused applicants to be ineligible for food relief because income from all other family members was counted and could total more than the prescribed limit. (22) Table 5.2 depicts the Permissible Income Regulations (PIR) introduced by the Lang Government in 1931.

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19. *ibid.*, A34/7775 5/9286; *ibid.*, A38/3495 12/7565; NSW Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit.*, 30.
20. Chief Secretary's Office, *Instructions for Guidance of Issuing Officers: 15 June 1931*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1931), 5.
21. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 72.
22. NSW, CSIL, A33/520 5/9075.

Table 5.2: Income Restrictions on Applicants for Food Relief During the Lang Government (23)

Scale	Income	Classification
A	20/-	Single Man
B_C	40/-	Man, Wife, One Child
D	50/-	Man, Wife, Two/Three Children
E	60/-	Man, Wife, Four Children
E	70/-	Man, Wife, Five Children
F	80/-	Man, Wife, Six Children
F	90/-	Man, Wife, Seven Children

10/- per fortnight for each additional child

The PIR regulated the amount of food relief according to family or household income. The PIR was particularly severe: a couple earning 40s a fortnight received food relief, whereas if their income was 41s they got nothing. (24) The Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM) was highly critical of the Lang Government for introducing the PIR "which was a further factor in placing the burden of the unemployed upon the backs of workers in industry..." (25)

Applicants also had to declare any social security payments, bank accounts, property, registered motor vehicles, gifts and rent from boarders. (26) One applicant was advised to hand in the number plate of her car and obtain a receipt before applying for the dole. (27)

The unemployed accused the State and police of forcing families to split up because the PIR restricted the amount of family income. Many single men left home so that their

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23. Chief Secretary's Office, *op. cit.*, 7.
24. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, provides a detailed account of the administration of food relief during the Lang administration.
25. R. Dixon, "The Australian Labor Movement", *The Labour Review*, Vol. 1, No. 14 (1933), 16.
26. NSW Premier's Department, "Requests for Food Relief, 1931", B31/108/712 7/5970; Chief Secretary's Office, *op. cit.*, 11-12.
27. *loc. cit.*,

parents could qualify for food relief. (28) One petition from the unemployed of Balmain urged the Stevens Government to provide young unemployed males with food relief even if other members of their family or their fathers' were employed on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS). (29) Food relief inspectors and the police investigated family members residing at more than one address. On one application for food relief, a constable wrote:

> ...this case is definitely one in which one of the family members is living apart to enable the remaining members to receive food relief... (30)

Dole applicants in rural areas were often encouraged to seek work, and if unsuccessful they then could qualify for food relief. (31) Lang's Chief Secretary authorised food relief to be distributed by police officers to farmers in destitute circumstances on the condition that any farmer already indebted to the Government's Rural Industries Branch would repay the value of the relief at a later date. (32) Farmers viewed this situation with disdain. They correctly pointed out that it was discriminatory to charge necessitous farmers for food relief when the majority of people in similar circumstances in Sydney and provincial industrial areas received food at no cost.

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28. NSW, CSIL, A34/7058 5/9283.
29. *ibid.*, A33/520 5/9075.
30 *ibid.*, A33/8311 5/9115.
31. *ibid.*, A35/7698 12/7520.
32. NSW, Cabinet Meeting Papers, "Statement for Cabinet", 15 May 1935. 9/3045.

Under Lang food relief became the prime depression policy. This decision was brought about by the growing resentment from the unemployed for a better deal than that provided by the Bavin Government, trade union opposition to under-award payments, especially on designated relief works, and the realisation that the URC had disproportionately allocated funds to rural districts.

Lang increased the value of rations by 25 per cent in June 1931. The unemployed received coupons which they exchanged in return for certain quantities of foodstuffs from the grocer, baker, butcher and milkman. The coupon system was criticised because some families required larger amounts of certain foods, while others received excessive amounts of food. (33) Previously, food orders were issued in coupons which could be negotiated with traders in each district and the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) paid the traders. Stevens altered the system by replacing coupons with an open order system which provided each family unit with a definite value, but the flexibility of choosing the proportion of bread, meat and groceries of the total order. (34) The purpose was to "provide a wider choice of foodstuffs and a more elastic spending capacity to recipients." (35)

The Depression brought a series of changes to administrative arrangements. In the early thirties the NSW Treasury was responsible for social services, but in

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33. NSW, CSIL, A35/2049 12/7513.
34. *NSW Budget Estimates 1933-34*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1933), 63, 66-67, 130.
35. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit.*, 30.

January 1933 the CSD took control of the statewide food relief system. The CSD allowed the Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) to administer the scheme in Sydney, Newcastle, Illawarra and Northern Coalfields, while the NSW Police Force were appointed in rural areas. (36)

A series of rules governed food relief depots (FRD). In some areas men and women received the dole at different times. For example, at the Ryde FRD men queued between 8.30 a.m and 10.30 a.m; women received sustenance between 10.30 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. (37) Nevertheless, there were numerous complaints that hundreds of food relief recipients travelled up to 10 miles in metropolitan areas and 20 miles in rural areas to obtain sustenance. (38) Representations by unemployed workers' groups, parliamentarians and local businessmen were ignored. (39) For example, Stevens ignored a petition from 26 unemployed Kurnell residents to establish a local RFD. With the support of a local storekeeper who had offered a room at no cost, a Kurnell FRD would have eased the burden on many unemployed who walked 14 miles "over swamps and sandhills" to Cronulla to obtain relief. (40)

The situation was little better in the Sydney metropolitan area, which throughout the decade comprised more than 60 per cent of the State's dole recipients. (41)

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36. NSW, CSIL, A35/2049 12/7513.
37. *ibid.*, A34/8334 5/9289A.
38. *ibid.*, A32/610 5/9003; A33/229 5/9070; A33/201 5/9070; A32/2987 5/9072.
39. *ibid.*, A32/1134 5/9070.
40. *ibid.*, A34/8821 5/9290.
41. On 1 July 1938 the numbers of food relief recipients were 20,245 in the Sydney metropolitan area; 3,824 in

There were variations in eligibility conditions for the dole. In country areas Police Officers considered the "circumstances of the individual applicant without regard to the same standards of income and eligibility that was applied in Industrial areas." (42) Despite the relaxing of rules in country districts, there is little evidence of the rural unemployed receiving larger amounts of relief or being any better off than the city counterparts.

The rules governing food relief changed under the different administrations. But Labor and non-Labor Governments would not publicly release details of the rules. (43) The unemployed were asked to enquire at their local police station to determine their eligibility or otherwise. Members of Parliament were also refused access to the rules governing the dole. (44) Stevens refused a request from the Mayfield Branch of the UWM because:

> ..of the amount of work necessary to compile such a set of regulations and that a precedent would be established... (45)

Such refusals exacerbated tensions between the unemployed and the authorities. The Stevens Government tried to patch up the situation by emphasising the benefits

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Newcastle/Maitland; 9,625 in country areas; a total of 33,694. *ibid.*, A37/1485 12/7547.

42. *ibid.*, A37/847 12/7546.
43. The rules governing the supply, distribution and eligibility for food relief were regularly updated and communicated in *Circulars* to police stations. *ibid.*, A32/633 5/9003.
44. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 75.
45. NSW, CSIL, A33/7618 5/9112.

of the discretionary powers vested in the police. (46) But this did little to appease the UWM or the army of unemployed.

This section introduced the eligibility criteria for people applying for the dole. The most influential factor was a family's income. A person's unemployment status was by itself insufficient reason to qualify them for the dole. Their total family income could make them ineligible. This highly contentious aspect of the dole system will be closely analysed later in this chapter.

5.3 Business of Food Relief:

Some of the surviving Chief Secretary's correspondence is concerned with the supply and distribution of food relief. Three distinct groups were involved in this process: suppliers, the unemployed and the police.

Under the Bavin Government the storekeeper submitting the lowest tender was granted the right to supply food. In November 1930 the Chief Secretary's Department modified the system to allow more than one storekeeper the opportunity to supply food. (47) A further modification of the food relief system in respect to the assets of farmers occurred in early 1931. While many farmers occupied large pieces of land and hence held valuable fixed assets, these were of little consequence to farming families who went without

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46. *loc. cit.,*
47. NSW, CSIL, A35/6636 12/7517. Asian shopkeepers who did not employ "white labour" were unable to tender or distribute the dole on behalf of the State. *ibid.* A32/687 5/9003.

food. Hence, farmers were put on the same terms as applicants in industrial areas.

The Depression brought strains in business relationships which had either not existed prior to the 1930s or had been containable. While in some areas storekeepers collaborated, there were numerous instances of disagreements and jealousies particularly in non-metropolitan areas when on occasions non-locals were appointed to supply food to the unemployed. At Thirroul, on the NSW South Coast, storekeepers protested when an external firm was awarded a contract to supply food. (48)

To a large degree traders and suppliers were regulated by the police. If the price of a trader's goods was more than the stipulated CSD price, then the police would transfer the right of supply to another trader. (49) Traders submitted their tenders to their local police officer, who recommended the lowest tenderer to the CSD. Police across the State regularly sought to lower the prices charged by traders. (50) Depending on the town and the number of suppliers, the depression either brought a regular stream of business to suppliers, or resulted in a degree of hardship to retailers not dissimilar to that experienced by the unemployed. In essence, it was the monopolistic nature of the system which caused so much anger towards the Bavin and Lang governments. In 1932 the Country Traders Association petitioned for new firms to be

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48. NSW, Chief Secretary, "Food Relief for the Unemployed, 1928-1933", A30/4743 5/9208.1.
49. NSW, CSIL, A33/314 5/9070.
50. *loc. cit.*,

given an opportunity to tender, and hopefully supply food. (51) These suppliers received support from the unemployed who urged the adoption of an open order system. (52) It was argued that traders and the unemployed could benefit from such a system. (53)

Again, the influence of the local police was crucial. In the small town of Urunga, near Coffs Harbour, the plea of a shopkeeper for an open-order system "..to bring about a greater measure of competition among those supplying the food relief orders..." was rejected by local police, because if adopted, "... each storekeeper knew which customers he would get and there would be no inducement to offer goods at cheaper prices than opposition stores." (54) Whether guardians of the closed shop or advocates of free supply, the police had the power to demand reductions in the prices of foodstuffs. (55) In contrast, a police constable at Nimitybelle supported a third shopkeeper supplying food because this would "tend to make competition keener and consequently a saving would be effected [sic]." (56)

On the NSW far north coast, storekeepers were accused of collaborating to submit the same high prices to supply food to the unemployed. (57) In towns served by one police officer the food relief system was entirely dependent on

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51. NSW, CSIL, A32/2562 5/9070.
52. *ibid.*, A32/5033 5/9070.
53. *ibid.*, A33/451 5/9073.
54. *ibid.*, A33/591 5/9073.
55. *ibid.*, A33/411 5/9072.
56. *ibid.*, A33/233 5/9071.
57. *ibid.*, A35/868 12/7512.

that person's presence. (58) His absence had the potential to throw the food relief system into chaos. The unemployed also made requests for money to purchase clothing for themselves and their families.(59)

Another way of reducing food relief expenditure was to disqualify men working on the ERWS from qualifying for food relief when they were not employed. Relief workers who worked two weeks and then had three weeks off considered themselves ineligible for the dole when they did not work. Local SLE managers said they could apply for food relief, but many unemployed believed their applications would be refused. In 1937 at Goulburn only 67 of the 108 men employed on the ERWS applied for food relief in the period they were not working.(60) After the introduction of the ERWS the issue of full sustenance during stand off periods was one of the main demands of the Central Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers.[61]

On occasions metropolitan food relief inspectors were less than subtle. One woman complained that an inspector had spoken very loudly in the passage way of her block of units, causing deep embarrassment. (62) This woman's attitude reflected a common anxiety of other people knowing their predicament.

In sum, government officials probably spent more time assessing tenders and appointing distributors of the dole,

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58. *ibid.*, A33/486 5/9074.
59. *ibid., 5/9282 is one of many boxes which contain many such applications.*
60. *ibid.*, A33/322 5/9072.
61. *The Beacon Light* No. 11 Issue 19 (1933)
62. NSW CSIL, A34/9487 5/9282.

then assessing whether people had been harshly excluded from the dole.

5.4 Role of the Police:

In the decade preceding the Great Depression some police gained experience in the distribution of the food relief system. The onset of mass unemployment meant that all officers outside the "Industrial" zone supervised the supply and distribution of the dole, and determined who received the dole. When police undertook investigations of applicants they obtained documents and anecdotal evidence about their character and financial status. Police reports were sprinkled with judgemental, and sometimes possibly defamatory statements. A constable at Kandos informed his superiors that:

> In my opinion had Lynch taken reasonable care of the money received, instead of drinking and wasting the money, as he is in the habit of doing, he would be in a much better position. (63)

Police sent monthly reports of the number of food relief recipients (FRRs) to the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) Rarely did an applicant receive the benefit of the doubt or escape the thorough checking process implemented by the police. Applicants unknown to police attended their closest police station to show cause

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63. *ibid.*, A33/7781 5/9112.

why they should receive assistance, be it food relief or other social services, eg. a pair of spectacles.[64]

The Government delegated authority to the police because they regarded them as being in the best position to ascertain a person's financial status and character.[65] Accordingly, police in rural districts were given full discretion to deal with each person on their merits.[66]

Upon receiving the tens of thousands of police reports relating to food relief or other social services, the CSD rarely rejected the recommendations of police. In 1933 the CSD's Under-Secretary reported his full confidence in the police.[67] Not everyone shared his view. During Lang's term of office, some rural branches of the Australian Labor Party expressed concerns on behalf of unemployed persons who had been refused the dole by the police. [68] A significant rise in complaints occurred during Stevens' term (1932-1939). Government officials at State Labour Exchanges were accused of harshly treating applicants. More frequently the unemployed made complaints about Police attitudes, inaction, prejudice, harshness and a reluctance to become involved in apparently genuine cases. [69] One applicant complained that a constable had given him a lower scale of food than his entitlement and had subjected him to "unbearable insults".[70]

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64. *ibid.*, A34/9313. 5/9287.
65. *ibid.*, A34/6644 5/9281.
66. *ibid.*, A33/520 5/9075.
67. *ibid.*, A33/529 5/9075.
68. *ibid.*, A32/892 5/9003.
69. *ibid.*, A33/6292 5/9108.
70. *ibid.*, A34/803 5/9250.

In a rare decision the CSD upheld the man's complaint and increased the food relief scale. To avoid further conflict between the applicant and the police officer, the Chief Secretary directed relief be paid to the applicant's wife.[71] With regards the policemen there is no record of any disciplinary action.

Soon after taking office Stevens introduced a 32 question application form and empowered police to refuse relief or issue it at a reduced scale even if the applicant's income did not exceed the maximum level.[72] Almost immediately the number of food relief recipients fell. The police were accused of working in collaboration with employers, of intimidating applicants and being more stringent in applying the PIR than food relief inspectors.[73] And the role of police in rural districts extended beyond food relief. They assessed applications for spectacles, surgical aids, clothing, boots, and free rail travel for medical appointments.[74] The CSD asked Police to investigate thoroughly the financial circumstances of each applicant and provide a written report, including a recommendation. For example:

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71. *loc. cit.*,
72. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 81.
73. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Doles and Dividends: An Analysis of the situation of the Unemployed and Relief Workers in New South Wales* (Sydney, 1933), 11.
74. NSW, CSIL, A34/10435; A34/10407; A34/10545; A34/10620; A34/10624 5/9298.

> They have no money in the Bank, no property and no relatives are in a position to assist them. Applicant is not known to the Police and from inquiries made nothing detrimental [about] her character can be ascertained. I am of the opinion that the assistance sought is warranted.[75]

A Cootamundra constable recommended against a man with a wife and six children receiving an artificial limb after his foot had been amputated because he had a sister living in Sydney who might be able to pay for the limb.[76]

Despite numerous reports of deep hardship, local police refused to approve rail passes to many unemployed.[77] After complaints that some unemployed and their families were not receiving dental, medical and hospital attention, the NSW Minister for Health said unemployed and relief workers in "impoverished circumstances" could call on their local police sergeant for medical services.

The response by police varied widely. The question of a person's political persuasion influenced recommendations by police. In one case an unemployed man was refused spectacles - not for lack of need - but because he was regarded as an "agitator" and an enemy of the Stevens Government.[78] The downside of giving police discretionary

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75. *ibid.*, A34/7094 5/9283.
76. *ibid.*, A34/977 5/9251.
77. *ibid.* A34/861; A34/866. 5/9250.
78. NSW, CSIL, A34/7616 5/9286. There were many other instances of unemployed with political affilitations being refused the dole.

powers was the many instances of individual officers being over zealous in applying the rules. One officer questioned whether an applicant with a wife and nine children under the age of 14 should receive family endowment and food relief.[79] The CSD took into consideration the large family and recommended against any reduction in scales. However, the final decision rested with the local police officer.[80] Such cases exacerbated tensions between police officers and the unemployed. [81] It also showed that some police did not have a good grasp of the rules or the spirit of the food relief legislation.

While the Police implemented the food relief system, policy issues remained firmly with the CSD. For example, police at Taree recommended that food relief be issued monthly, instead of fortnightly, so as to reduce the inconvenience on applicants with physical disabilities who travelled "excessive distances". [82] The Police also said they were well acquainted with the circumstances of most applicants and that a monthly issue would reduce their workload. However, the Office of Director of Government Relief rejected the request, saying that a monthly issue would leave police little chance of checking the earnings of applicants. [83]

In many parts of NSW the administration of food relief hindered police duties and "seriously interfered with the

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79. *ibid.*, A33/7630 5/9112.
80. *loc. cit.*,
81. NSW, CSIL, A37/4852 12/7550.
82. *ibid.*, A35/8297 12/7520.
83. *loc. cit.*, The Office of the Director of Government Relief came under the authority of the Chief Secretary's Department.

efficient working of the Police Stations". [84] Police disliked the extra administrative work imposed upon them and frequently asked to be relieved of such duties:

> The volume of food relief recipients, emergency relief workers in the Penrith district has increased to such an extent that it is an encroachment on Police time.... consideration should be given to Police being relieved of this extraneous work altogether.... [85]

Rural unemployed groups also petitioned the State to relieve the Police from administering the dole, preferring local community control or at worst the Department of Labour and Industry. [86] But Stevens turned down these requests. [87]

Governments of the 1930s, particularly Stevens viewed the NSW Police Force as the appropriate body to administer food relief. As the police were often the only public servants in many non-metropolitan towns, it was cost-efficient to give them the added responsibility of food relief, thereby reinforcing their authority in local communities and symbolising a deterrent to potential agitators.

Allegations of police harshness in implementing the food relief system can be partially offset by evidence which shows that some police were helpful to the

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84. NSW, CSIL, A35/10097 12/7522.
85. *ibid.*, A35/7618 12/7519.
86. *ibid.*, A32/753 5/9003.
87. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council of NSW, *Report of Annual Conference, June 1936* (Sydney, 1936), 19.

unemployed. At Tamworth police allowed the unemployed (predominantly adult men) to be absent on the days when the required statutory food relief forms had to be completed. Where coupons were signed by procuration the family unit, but not the absent applicant, received rations. [88] In another instance a constable travelled 30 miles to collect a destitute man before taking him to Inverell Public Hospital. [89]

Apart from a prominent involvement in rural areas, the police played an influential role in curbing unrest in industrial areas, principally Sydney. Organised groups of unemployed individuals at Parramatta, Ryde, Hurstville, Erskineville and the inner-city complained of harsh and brutal treatment by police.[90] The State Unemployed and Dole Workers Council, led the fight against the persecution and arrest of unemployed persons, by claiming they had been arrested for "no other reason than insisting upon their right to make public protest.." against the terrible dole conditions.[91] Apart from arresting demonstrators the police confiscated "working class literature" from the Domain. [92]

Despite acts of individual generosity, the fact that the food relief scheme was administered by the police - who were often unsympathetic to the task as well as to recipients - reduced its effectiveness. From the government's position, it was convenient, cost efficient

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88. NSW, CSIL, A33/233 5/9070.
89. *ibid.*, A34/8871 5/9290
90. NSW, Attorney General and Justice, Special Bundle, "Police Treatment of the Unemployed", 3710, 4376, 17130 5/7787.1.
91. *ibid.*, 18466 5/7787.1.
92. *ibid.*, 5269,11295 5/8887.1.

and useful to have the police as the chief distributors of the dole outside metropolitan areas. Moreover, the authority of the police was a deterrent to unemployed persons who might have been inclined to rebel against the food relief system. Put simply, applicants required the approval of local police to receive the dole.

5.5 Fraud and Indebtness:

Given the scarcity of employment and the desperation of many people to provide sustenance for their dependants and relatives, it is hardly surprising that an element of fraud characterised the food relief system of the 1930s. It is important to distinguish actual cases of fraud from trumped up cases that were politically motivated.

Examples of fraud surfaced in mid 1930 in the industrial city of Wollongong and nearby suburbs when single travellers defrauded the system by registering for food relief at several towns under different names. [93] A police investigation concluded that there was "a great deal of dishonesty among single men.. especially those in camps..." and in one fortnight eight offenders were convicted and received jail terms of between one and six months.[94]

All governments during the 1930s reduced the level of fraud operating in respect to food relief and the issue of

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93. NSW, Chief Secretary, "Food Relief for the Unemployed, 1928-1933", A30/3332 5/9208.1.
94. *loc. cit.*,

boots and clothing. [95] The claim by Stevens to have been the first Premier to significantly reduce fraud ignores the determination and achievements of the Lang Government in reducing fraud. Lang undertook reforms aimed at checking on the authenticity of applicants by conducting random checks of food relief depots (FRD). One major inspection of metropolitan FRDs in late 1930/early 1931 exposed major recording errors in the processing of applicants for the dole, a situation that left the system open to abuse. During one week in December 1930, many of the 2,446 signatures in the Coupon Book at the Marrickville Depot did not match signatures on cards.[96] Signatures on Coupons held at the Bankstown, Granville and Parramatta Depots were indecipherable. [97] Interviews with 900 food relief recipients at the Balmain Depot in January 1931 revealed no justification for 207 persons receiving sustenance. [98]

In early 1931 James Baddley, the NSW Minister for Labour and Industry, advised Premier Lang that:

> Regularly a number of applicants are being removed from the [food relief] list for fraud or misrepresentation ... there are numerous impositions not yet detected under the coupon system. [99]

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95. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Dental and Medical Services to the Unemployed", A34/12422; A35/2644 9/2412.1
96. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, "Miscellaneous File: Inspection of Depots, 1931", 2/5808.4.
97. *loc. cit.*,
98. *loc. cit.*,
99. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Copies of Minutes, Meetings and Papers", 2/8176.

In a bid to reduce imposition Lang established a Central Recording Bureau (CRB) under the auspices of the CSD on 6 May 1931. [100] All Government Departments were asked to supply information on persons receiving any form of social services. However, the Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) adopted a "policy of passive resistance" and would not co-operate with the Central Recording Bureau during the Lang administration. [101] Tensions between the CSD and the DLI spilled over into effectiveness of administering the dole.[102] The CRBs Commissioner advised the Treasury Under-Secretary that the DLI has deliberately defied Lang's approvals and set themselves up as a law under themselves. [103]

Such squabblings may have delayed the implementation of a co-ordinated system but it did not deter the determination of Lang and the CRB from reducing fraud. In early 1932 the Lang administration issued Identification Forms to the managers of 26 metropolitan SLEs. Their impact was to reduce the number of food relief recipients as illustrated in Table 5.3.

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100. It was located at 138 George Street North, Sydney and its name was later changed to the Central Relief Bureau.

101. NSW, Treasury, Correspondence - General Series, Treble to Under Secretary, Treasury 18 August 1931 32/3653 10/22294.

102. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 74; Under the Stevens Government Treble was appointed Director of Government Relief.

103. NSW, Treasury, *op. cit.*, 32/3653 10/22294

Table 5.3: Food Relief in the metropolitan area, 1931 [104]

Month	**Number of Food Orders Issued**	**Equivalent Weekly Issue rate**
January	no record	no record
February	259,722	64,930
March	267,063	66,765
April	313,947	62,789
May	272,189	68,047
June	222,308	55,577
July	247,875	49,575
August	176,458	44,114
September	225,471	45,094
October	175,801	43,950
November	166,304	41,576
December	167,073	41,768

Because unemployment was rising sharply in 1931 it can be concluded from Table 5.3 that Lang was successful in reducing a certain amount of "double banking" or "double-up", ie. people receiving more than one issue of food relief in the same week. Lang introduced Thursday as a uniform day for receipt of the dole. [105] This eliminated the previous loophole whereby travellers could receive rations at several towns on different days. [106]

Other evidence of fraud and serious doubts about the authenticity of some applicants for relief can be found in the returns of some private charities. For example, the Charity Organisation Society (COS) reported in 1932 that it had refused assistance to 1,080 applicants or 25 per cent of applicants.[107]

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104. *ibid.*, "Report on Co-ordination of Relief, 11 March 1932" 32/3653 10/22294.
105. NSW, CSIL, A32/852 5/9003.
106. *ibid.*, A32/650 5/9003.
107. Charity Organisation Society, *55th Annual Report*, (Sydney, 1932). This does not appear to have been the experience of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the

Soon after gaining power Stevens embarked on a concerted effort to bring to justice people who had defrauded the food relief system. [108] The Clerk of Petty Sessions at a Sydney Court House reported in 1934 that most people who had been caught obtaining food relief by false pretences had agreed to refund the misappropriated amounts.[109] In April 1933 the Chief Secretary, Harkness, asked the Police to undertake a random survey of 600 food relief recipients, comprising 500 recipients registered at the Sydney Bureau and 100 from Parramatta. [110] The results shocked Stevens. All recipients in the Guildford and Granville districts were bona fide. At Liverpool and Sydney, seven and 20 men respectively, should not have been receiving the dole, but there was insufficient evidence to prosecute. [111] Nevertheless, Police Inspector Sly recommended to the Government that it strictly enforce the rule that all recipients of food relief personally attend a food relief depot. Thus, women would no longer be able to draw on their husband's relief. [112] The small number of fraudulent cases confirmed the effectiveness of Stevens drive to reduce fraud, a program whose foundations had been well laid by Lang.

Officials in the Stevens Government claimed that the large reduction in fraud explained the drop in the State's

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1930s, whose *Annual Reports* did not make reference to fraudulent behaviour.

108. NSW, CSIL, A35/5219 12/7516; A33/6808 5/9108;

109. *ibid.*, A34/1085 5/9251

110. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Outstanding Receipts for Payment of Unemployed Food Relief, 1933", A33/10509 5/5404.2A33/10509 5/5404.2

111. *loc. cit.*,

112. *loc. cit.*,

expenditure on food relief.[113] Their definition of fraud extended to drunks and persons opposed to government policies, as distinct from those who consciously took actions to obtain food relief under false pretences. Both Anglo-Saxons and Aborigines were refused food relief on the grounds of perceived or actual problems associated with alcohol. [114]

Some unemployed took on extra work to make ends meet. For example, a police sergeant at Werris Creek, in explaining why he had refused the dole to one applicant, stated:

> .... he was one of the cunning types..earning money through droving, second hand deals....he would evade putting it down as earnings. [115]

The public played a role in reducing the amount of fraud. Police received anonymous tip offs from returned soldiers and persons such as "Fair Deal". [116] Two investigations of a Matraville man accused of being "...a big fat loafer, who never works for the dole" were dismissed. [117] Allegations against other people were not always proven in court, despite food relief officials regularly appearing on behalf of the prosecution.[118]

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113. NSW, CSIL, A33/418 5/9073; *ibid.*, A34/6792.
114. *ibid.*, A34/8907 5/9290; *ibid.*, A37/4852 12/7550.
115. *ibid.*, A35/10437 9/2420
116. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Food Relief Indebtness, 1929-1935", A34/13422 9/2412.1; NSW, CSIL, A34/934; A34/9228 5/9289A; NSW, CSIL, A34/6923 5/9282
117. NSW. CSIL, A34/5623, 5/9276.
118. *ibid.*, A34/7065 5/9283

Corruption also existed between some relief workers and their supervisors. Several men on the ERWS at Kogarah in Sydney received food and work at the same time, because at least one worker was making payments to the ganger.[119]

In relation to the distribution of clothing, the level of corruption appears to have been minimal. A special investigation of clothing issued by the Leichhardt Depot in 1934 identified that seven people out of a total of 500 should probably not have received clothing. They had been issued clothing not due to any "irregularities" but because of a "certain laxity... due to the pressure of work." [120]

At the direction of the Stevens Government the NSW Police Force took over the investigation of claims for food relief and applications for relief work in February 1936. The NSW Police Commissioner viewed the investigations as necessary:

> ...to eliminate the considerable amount of unscrupulous imposition which has been practiced by many people whose circumstances place them entirely outside the need for Government assistance. [121]

With the assistance of 100 extra Constables the NSW Police Force commenced investigations of food relief recipients in the Sydney metropolitan area. Investigations extended to other major industrial areas within a few

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119. *ibid.*, A34/9405 5/9292
120. *ibid.*, A34/1389 5/9252
121. *ibid.*, A37/847 12/7546

months. [122] Investigating officers checked reports of imposition, sought to verify the earnings of applicants from their employers and cross checked such earnings against those recorded in food relief declaration forms.[123] The Police Commissioner approved constables wearing plain clothes.[124] The unemployed resented the Police prying into their life. For a slightly different reason the CSD expressed concern because police in rural areas had traditionally used discretion in determining eligibility for food relief. [125] Nevertheless, Stevens continued to authorise regular investigations. Table 5.4 illustrates that in the 11 months ended December 1936, 81 per cent of 46,194 food relief applicants were entitled to food relief, more than 11 per cent were ineligible and a further five per cent of applicants had left their address, the majority of whom may well have provided a false address when drawing relief.[126]

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122. Wollongong (20 May 1936), Newcastle (2 July 1936) and the Northern coalfields districts, embracing Maitland, Kurri Kurri, Cessnock and Singleton. *ibid.*, A37/553 12/7545.
123. *loc. cit.*,
124. *ibid.*, A35/5263 12/7516
125. *ibid.*, A37/847 12/7546.
126. *ibid.*, A37/553 12/7545.

Table 5.4: Police Investigations of Food Relief Recipients, February-December 1936 in metropolitan areas [127]

Total number of FRR investigated	46,194
Number of FRR eligible	37,332
Number entitled to reduced scales	786
Claims not eligible	5,241
Left Address	2,157
Not known at address	676
Number of fraudulent cases	2,236

As these investigations continued the number of fraudulent cases diminished. After 1937, a large decline in unemployed persons making false statements led police to report such investigations on a monthly basis. In a bid to counter fraud in rural areas the Stevens Government requested police to act as agents of the State Labour Exchange. [128] The rationale was that the Police could provide more accurate records of the numbers of unemployed in rural districts, in contrast to "..the work presently done by private persons [which] is indifferently carried out.." [129] Their authority to issue special food orders remained "provided the financial position of the family warranted the provision of additional assistance." [130]

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127. *loc. cit.,*
128. NSW, CSIL, B37/1110 12/7553.
129. *loc. cit.,*
130. NSW, CSIL, A37/1963 12/7548.

Given mass unemployment and the desperation of thousands of people, the amount of fraud during the 1930s was minimal. It was contained by the policies of both the Lang and Stevens Governments.

5.6 Track Travellers:

During the 1890s Depression the terms "on the track" and "track traveller" originated in reference to itinerant persons or unemployed city and rural dwellers who left their homes in search of employment. [131] Rising unemployment in the 1920s led to an increase in the number of travellers, but the major exodus occurred as a result of mass unemployment in the early 1930s. Many men - both single and married - left Sydney in the hope of gaining employment in country areas. Many travelled extensive distances throughout New South Wales, with some venturing across state borders, particularly into Queensland where unemployment was not as acute.[132] Their main form of travel was rail, although travellers caught "riding the rattler" would be put of at the next town.

The *Statistician's Report for the 1933 Census*, confirmed that travelling was a common occurrence:

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131. A. Lawson, *op. cit.*, 30.
132. M.Page, R. Ingpen, *Aussie Battlers* (Adelaide, Rigby, 1982), 98

> Many town-dwellers roved the country districts as prospectors for minerals or as seekers of casual farm work or as applicants for locally-distributed government relief. [133]

The increasing desperation caused men, women and families to join the ranks of the track travellers. Many travellers were reported to be highly qualified. [134] Another reason for the large number of travellers was that the Permissible Income Regulations (PIR) had forced many employed young men and boys to leave home because their income disqualified their parents from receiving the dole. [135]

From the onset of the depression, travellers experienced difficulties obtaining food orders, particularly in industrial areas which suffered the highest levels of unemployment. The Bavin Government allowed single men to receive food relief for three weeks, before a fourth and final issue. [136] Females were not permitted to obtain travel food coupons and to qualify for regular relief a

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133. Australia, *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June 1993, Statistican's Report* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1933), 315.
134. B. Greaves, *The Story of Bathurst* (Second edition, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1964), 139. M. Masson, *Surviving the Dole Years: The 1930s - A personal story* (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1993), 72-73.
135. State Unemployed and Relief Worker's Council of NSW, *Report of Annual Conference, June 1936*, (Sydney, 1936), 5.
136. SLE Manager to Daceyville Branch President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, 2 June 1930

person had to be on an electoral roll. [137] Stevens introduced a rule that travellers had to be resident in an area for three months to qualify for food relief. [138] Many police officers strictly enforced this rule, though some overlooked it. [139] Officials in some rural districts acted more leniently and supplied food to track travellers for longer periods. Some latitude was given to youths under the age of 21 who had no home. They qualified for a Traveller's Pocket Card which entitled them to food relief in country districts. [140]

Other travellers were not so fortunate. A 21 year old man was refused rations at Lithgow because he had not been a resident for three months. The unlucky man indicated he had been a track traveller for the previous three years gaining food from the under-21-years system via a Traveller's Pocket Card. [141] When questions arose as to the undesirability of refusing food to travellers in destitute circumstances the Director of Government Relief requested Police to ensure that such persons completed a questionnaire, like other applicants, before relief was distributed. [142]

Travellers who prospected for minerals could obtain more than one week's rations. [143] But anyone with a reasonable chance of finding employment received only one

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137. NSW, CSIL, A33/322 5/9072. *ibid.*, A36/1392 12/7532.
138. *ibid.*, A35/8809 12/7521
139. *ibid.*, A34/7944 5/9287.
140. *ibid.*, A34/7647 5/9286.
141. *ibid.*, A37/3871 12/7549.
142. *ibid.*, A34/10664 5/9298.
143. *loc. cit.*,

week's rations. [144] Single men and women only received a dole docket if they were more than 45 miles from any family earnings. [145] Travellers who intended to settle in a particular district had to surrender their Pocket Card. [146]

As the unemployed desperately searched for employment, one government inspector commented:

> I was struck by the number of persons leaving Wollongong to proceed down the [south] coast without any definite plans or prospects of finding employment.[147]

While no official statistics of track travellers were taken in the 1930s, anecdotal evidence and localised accounts confirms a significant number, which rose as the depression deepened. In one week in October 1931, Police issued 11,681 track rations. [148] One contemporary estimated that 1,500 travellers received track rations each week in the 1930s. [149] Many more travelled at any one time. The number of travellers exceeded those receiving the dole because many were refused rations. A former track traveller recently wrote that half-a-million single men at various times were "on the track." [150]

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144. *loc. cit.*
145. M. Masson, *op. cit.*, 61
146. NSW, CSIL, A33/8246 5/9115
147. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Food Relief for the Unemployed, 1928-1933" A30/3332 5/9280.1.
148. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 78.
149. A.G. Colley, "Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No 2 (June 1939), 94.
150. A. Lawson, *op. cit.*, 30.

In 1930 the Maitland Benevolent Society reported assisting 702 travellers of all ages "who were worn out from tramping along the roads" in search of employment. [151] At Wollongong, single track travellers were given one week's ration and then told to seek employment elsewhere. [152] In instances where travellers did not have a pocket card or identification card, police undertook a thorough check of the applicant before food relief was issued. [153] In an effort to discourage the "aimless wanderings of young men" and an influx of unemployed persons from other States, the Stevens Government reduced the number of country towns issuing food relief to 89 in the mid 30s. [154] A regular time period, such as 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. was set aside each Thursday for rations to be distributed. [155] The Government also advised police that travellers should be moved on after a fortnight thereby ensuring that requests for clothing were not met. [156]

The official policy of the Stevens Government at the start of 1934 was that unemployed persons could settle in any district subject to them being able to satisfy the local police that they had a reasonable prospect of improving their position and that it would not be in their interests to move on in search of employment.[157] But the

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151. NSW, CSIL, A37/1170 12/7546.
152. NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Food Relief for the Unemployed, 1928-1933", A30/3332 5/9280.1
153. NSW, CSIL, A36/1392 12/7532
154. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 29.
155. Chief Secretary's Office, *op. cit.*, 11.
156. NSW CSIL, A34/6975 5/9282.
157. *ibid.*, A33/370 5/9245.

Government also gave Police the authority to move on any traveller who had spent longer than four weeks in a "track town." [158]

Because the State did not provide comprehensive unemployment relief, many track travellers were forced to seek food and clothing from charities. But local benevolent organisations such as the Broken Hill Benevolent Society could not meet the rising demands and feared, that if they did, they would be inundated.[159] Winter months increased the number of travellers. The President of the Social Service Committee at Manilla expressed concern that benevolent organisations did have the resources to provide for all the unemployed travellers:

> Many of these travellers are in dire need of assistance as far as boots and trousers are concerned and local service committees are only able to deal with local cases. [160]

One positive aspect related to travellers was a change in attitude by some charities towards single travellers. Just prior to the Depression, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, tendered the following evidence to the Royal Commission on National Insurance:

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158. *loc. cit.,*
159. NSW, CSIL, A37/1886 12/7547
160. *ibid.,* A34/6975 5/9282

> We do not like helping men, especially single men. As a rule they are very undesirable. When a man is out of work and we know that he is a decent fellow with a wife and children dependent on him, than that is a different thing altogether. [161]

The State's discrimination against single men in the 1930s influenced charities such as the SVdP to show compassion and by 1938 single men ineligible for State aid received food and shelter from the St. Vincent de Paul Society. [162]

The number of track travellers remained high until the end of the 1930s. In 1937 the Broken Hill Shire Council reported that a number of single and impoverished travellers had used empty tar drums to form makeshift accommodation. [163]

Because they associated with local unemployed in many towns track travellers were in a position to agitate for better conditions. Politicians were highly sensitive to the influx of travellers to their electorates. In 1935 some MPs in the Stevens Government expressed alarm at the

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161. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Second Report of Royal Commission on National Insurance, *Unemployment* (Melbourne, Government Printer, 1929): evidence tendered by William Coogan, Sydney President of the St. Vincent de Paul Society), 764.

162. F.S. Egan, *Society of St Vincent de Paul: 100 Years* (NSW Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Sydney, 1981); *Monthly,* Journal of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, (March 1938).

163. NSW, CSIL, A37/4626 12/7550. In 1937 the towns of Orange, Bathurst and Dubbo reported the weekly numbers of track travellers to be 40, 50 and 50 respectively, *ibid.,* A37/1784 12/7550.

possibility of travellers voting in their adopted districts. The Member for Wentworth claimed that unemployed people receiving the dole had deliberately migrated from Broken Hill to his electorate "so as to literally swell the numbers" against him. [164] Stevens responded swiftly by threatening to change the Electoral Act to prevent "the flooding of electorates in this way." [165]

However, the evidence suggests that the MPs and Stevens exaggerated the threat. One police constable advised his superiors that the Government's fears were unfounded:

> The only people receiving food relief in this patrol district are several old and middle aged women and two or three men who are unable to work. All able-bodied men who are unemployed receive assistance through the ERW scheme... [166]

Nevertheless, the police were instructed to discourage travellers from securing food relief in the rural electorate of Wentworth during the lead-up to the 1935 State election. [167]

Track travellers constituted a large number of doleys. Deplorable economic conditions and the inadequate nature of

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164. NSW, CSIL, A35/2032 12/7513.
165. *loc. cit.*, Stevens to Chaffy, 24 January 1935
166. *loc. cit.*,
167. *loc. cit.*, As the 1935 elections approached similar fears were expressed and the NSW Electoral Commissioner responded by asking police to be more strict when checking unemployed travellers who sought give electoral officers the power to rescind incorrect enrolments between the issue of writs and Polling Day.

the State's relief policies forced men, women and youth to travel the countryside in search of employment and conditions that were equal to or better than the dole. The large number of travellers reflected mass unemployment and the State's inability to provide adequate levels of relief. It also reflected the harshness of the system, in that young men were forced to leave home so that their parents could qualify for the dole. The characteristics and lifestyle of track travellers during the Great Depression is just one of many areas that requires further historical research.

5.7 A Harsh System:

The food relief system developed in tandem with the deepening economic crisis. For the greater part of 1929 and 1930 many people in non-metropolitan areas did not receive State aid in the form of food relief. The Lang Government opened up food relief across the State, yet it also introduced eligibility restrictions which primarily focused on a person's income. This means test generated further ill feeling between the unemployed and government officials. The inexperience of the latter often caused food relief to be unevenly and harshly applied. [168] Stevens successfully downscaled food relief and in doing so increased resentment towards the State. Food relief under Stevens was subject to

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168. E.R. Walker, R.B. Madgwick, *An Outline of Australian Economics*, Third Edition (Sydney, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1937), 318.

stricter expenditure limits and more thorough checking processes.

The dole provided the barest of relief. The basic dole for a married couple with a child represented one fifth of the current living wage. [169] If some income from casual work was added this family unit still only received half of the living wage.

Police recommendations for destitute persons to receive spectacles did not match their approach to food and other material assistance. [170] The large drop in food relief recipients after Stevens came to power resulted from a tightening of the Permissible Income Regulations (PIR) and the transfer of large numbers of men to the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS). In industrial areas the number receiving the dole fell from 112,507 in May 1932 to 28,582 in March 1935. In rural areas the police played an active role in cutting expenditure and the number of recipients fell from 47,591 to 4,806 during the same period. [171] However, this large fall did not equal the numbers employed on the ERWS or the relatively small percentage of fraudulent cases.

Could the State's financial restrictions adequately explain its refusal to provide relief to genuine applicants? No. Sufficient income was generated from the unemployment relief taxes to finance food relief (and the

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169. N.G. Butlin, A. Barnard, J.J. Pincus, (eds), *Government and Capitalism: Public and Private Choice in Twentieth Century Australia* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1982), 182.
170. NSW, CSIL, A34/6401 5/9280.
171. *ibid.*, A35/2049 12/7513.

ERWS) for larger numbers of unemployed. There was overwhelming evidence that Stevens harshly treated the unemployed. Chapter Two showed that a good proportion of the unemployment income raised each year was not expended on the unemployed. Such money could have been used to fund the State's unemployment relief programs for genuine applicants such as unemployed men, women and track travellers. Furthermore, under Stevens many dole applicants were wrongly and harshly treated. And, the bureaucracy, with the full support of Stevens, rejected most representations by opposition parliamentarians on behalf of constituents. [172]

When accused of harshly treating the unemployed the Police often sought shelter from the bureaucracy and the Stevens Government. Allegations by a Labor MLA, Tonge resulted in the Government securing written statements from the alleged victims which praised the gentle and courteous manner of the police investigating officers. [173] In the second half of the depression decade the Stevens Government often sought and received similar statements after the police had been accused of heavy handed tactics. [174]

Another question is the extent to which food relief averted starvation and suffering. Judging by the numbers who sought food from local benevolent societies and the Salvation Army, the dole did not meet the needs of many

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172. Labor MPs regularly petitioned on behalf of the unemployed. Foremost among them was the Member for Newcastle, Mr Booth. Most petitions were unsympathetically received and unsuccessful. *ibid.*, A34/8830 5/9290; A34/7057 5/9283; A34/8402 5/9289B

173. *ibid.*, A37/3767 12/7549.

174. *ibid.*, B37/2540 12/7534.

unemployed and their dependants. It was necessary for the dole system to be supplemented by assistance from local unemployed committees and charitable bodies. For example, the Canterbury-Bankstown Unemployed Committee received permission in mid 1934 to serve afternoon tea to women recipients of food relief at the Bankstown Food Relief Depot. [175]

To what extent were unemployed persons and their dependants with special needs adequately assisted? In an effort to reduce expenditure, particularly that which came under the collective heading of social services, Stevens reduced medical services to unemployed adults and their dependants. He made it difficult for pregnant women with unemployed husbands to obtain special foods. In one case special foods were discontinued when the husband of a sick woman received four weeks work in contrast to his usual two in seven weeks work. [176] Although the possession of a medical certificate was supposed to guarantee special foods to pregnant women for at least two months, officials in the Stevens Government often disregarded medical certificates.[177] And with little regard or legitimate motive special foods were discontinued. [178] In another instance, the SLE Manager at Balmain, without citing a reason, refused special foods to the mother of a sick two

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175. *ibid.*, A34/6420 5/9280.
176. *The Alert*, Official organ of the Ryde and Gladesville Unemployed and Relief Workers, Vol. 2, No. 18 (8 January 1936)
177. *ibid.*, A34/7450 5/9280; State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council, (1936), *op. cit.*, 5.
178. *ibid.*, A34/6452 5/9280

week old baby and a small girl suffering acute tonsillitis despite the submission of two medical certificates. [179]

Also, political representation forced the Stevens Government to transfer the officer-in-charge at the Granville Food Relief Depot (FRD) because he had questioned the competence of a local doctor who had requested special foods orders. [180] Such incidents caused sections of the medical profession to be at loggerheads with the Stevens Government. Stevens retaliated by sacking several medical practitioners who had increased the volume of special foods to very sick children. [181]

The harsh administration of food relief was also evident when the police refused both to count babies under one year of age as family members and to increase the amount of food rations. [182] This contradicted assurances from Stevens that babies under 12 months would receive special foods on the production of a certificate from a baby health care clinic or a doctor. ([183]) Doctors, unemployed organisations and Labor politicians made similar complaints. Medical opinion of the day pointed to a large number of babies and children suffering from malnutrition

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179. *The Clarion*, Official Organ of the Balmain Rozelle Unemployed and Relief Workers District Council, Vol. 2. No. 46 (27 November 1935).
180. NSW, CSIL, A33/8238 5/9115.*loc. cit.*, Doctors and nurses who examined people at State Labour Exchanges were critical of the harshness of the system and the lack of compassion displayed by officials.
181. *loc. cit.*,
182. NSW, CSIL, A34/981 5/9251.
183. F.A. Bland, "A Note Upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Economic Record,* Vol. V111 (May 1932), 96.

and undernourishment. (184) One nursing sister put the number of undernourished children in one area at 80 per cent. (185) Bureaucrats tended to ignore medical certificates despite the severity of undernourishment and the illness of many children. (186) One home for babies and children reported that nearly all the children admitted to it had devoured the food placed before them. (187)

In addition to refusing to issue special foods the Government was accused of distributing food slowly. In one case a child suffering rickets waited 12 days to receive special foods. (188) In 1936 the Stevens Government debarred all new applicants from special foods and made a large reduction in the number of existing issues. (189)

The PIR disqualified large numbers of unemployed from receiving food relief. (190) One case illustrates how this means test could adversely affect the unemployed. Although Mrs Edmund's husband was unemployed and they had eight children, one of whom was diagnosed as suffering from infantile paralysis, special foods for the sick child were refused because the family's total income marginally exceeded the PIR. This was because the State included

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184. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Report of Annual Conference, June 1936* (Sydney, 1936), 5.
185. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Doles and Dividends: An Analysis of the Situation of the Unemployed and relief workers in NSW* (Sydney, 1933), 9.
186. *The Clarion, op. cit.,* Vol.2, No. 34 (4 September 1935).
187. *loc. cit.,*
188. *loc. cit.,*
189. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *op. cit.,* 5.
190. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Annual Conference Report, 1934,* (Sydney, 1934), 1-4.

Family Endowment as part of their total income, despite regular and public denials by Stevens. (191)

A couple with six children under the age of 13 received no sympathy when the Director-General of Public Health, for unspecified reasons, refused extra pints of milk for the children. ([192])

Another strictly applied criterion concerned the employment of unemployed persons. [193] The Government refused "susso" to Mrs Cunningham of Mortlake because in return for maintaining a house she received lodgings and food, which the government defined as being equivalent to paid employment. (194)

On occasions the relief system was administered more leniently. Stevens approved special assistance at Christmas (1934 and 1935) in the form of an extra week's rations for doleys, extra work for Emergency Relief Workers (ERW) on the basis of family responsibilities and additional work for ordinary relief workers. [195] Primary products were distributed to families in need via a host a welfare agencies and local community groups, including the Country Women's Association, Salvation Army, Mayor's Unemployment Fund of broken Hill and the Unemployed League of Wyong.

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191. B.S.B. Stevens, *Employment and Relief of Unemployment* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 25-27. Excluding family endowment the combined fortnightly income of the eldest two employed children was 4/11/2, well below the PIR for a family that size of 5/5/0. *loc. cit.,*
192. NSW. CSIL, A34/890 5/9250.
193. Financial considerations strongly infuenced Stevens' definition of work.
194. *ibid.,* A34/7745 5/9286.
195. NSW, Cabinet Minute, 5 November 1936. 9/3028.1

(196) To commemorate the 1938 Coronation the Stevens Government granted a cash payment equal to one week's food relief or work to all food relief recipients and relief workers. Because of their transient nature, track travellers received a double issue of food relief. [197] Destitute people unable to attend their nearest hospital received free medical attention from doctors, provided they were not members of a Friendly Society. Stevens paid the doctors £5 a visit. [198]

Contemporary moral standards also impacted on the food relief system. George Sanderson, for example, was refused food relief because he lived with a married women and two children. [199]

Delays in receiving spectacles occurred regularly and often applicants had to re-apply. [200] Other aspects of the harsh nature of the system included the large number of unemployed who slipped through the Government's safety net. [201] The 1936 Report into NSW Unemployment found that 4.4 per cent or 2,935 men had received no government assistance

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196 .NSW, Chief Secretary, Special Bundle, "Distribution of Primary Products to needy Families, 1934-1937", A37/682 9/2407

197. NSW, CSIL, A37/1963 12/7548

198. *ibid.*, A34/7992 5/9287

199 NSW, CSIL, A34/7838 5/9287.

200. *ibid.*, A34/10620 5/9298. The Government's strict approach meant that in some cases applications were approved and later refused, because the government had taken six months to verify the person's impoverished circumstances. Despite the government's inadequate administration, applicants received little sympathy.

201. A.G. Colley, "Unemployment Relief in New South Wales" *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No.2, (June 1939), 94

- food relief or work - during the previous three year period. [202]

In sum, the food relief system provided basic assistance to a majority of the unemployed. Many people were wrongly ruled ineligible for the dole. Moreover, the strict eligibility criteria prevented many genuine unemployed from receiving State aid, during a period when there were few other sources of assistance. Whereas the Lang administration saw food relief as right, Stevens considered it a privilege.

5.8 Other Social Services:

State aid in the 1930s comprised more than the dole and employment on relief works. Government and non-government agencies distributed blankets, clothing, baby outfits, cash assistance and boots. However, the State's strict eligibility rules meant that many people did not qualify for such assistance. Moreover, the State failed to meet the pledge it made to provide adequate clothing to members of the community.

The State badly underestimated the extent of the depression. After distributing blankets in 1930-31 government officials said that demand would decline in the ensuing years.[203] In the following year the Charitable Relief Branch of the Lang Government distributed 9,148

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202. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 44
203. NSW, CSIL, A36/899 12/7531

blankets at a cost of £2,954. [204] Despite complaints from several branches of the Australian Labor Party and concerns that Lang endorsed the tactics of police when evicting destitute tenants, the unemployed received a better deal under the Lang administration than the Stevens Government.

In 1934, for example, the Charitable Relief Branch distributed 672 blankets, or less than 10 per cent of requests.[205] Throughout its term the Stevens Government rejected tens of thousands of applications for spectacles, clothing and boots. [206] For example, Mrs Costa of South Hurstville, was referred to her local food relief depot, after she pleaded for blankets for her family which included a husband and six children:

> ....I can assure you we are very cold at night...and I am using all kinds of things for warmth. [207]

Under the Stevens Government, applicants were checked through the Central Relief Bureau (CRB) before a decision was made. [208] Stevens tightened the value of assistance provided to charitable organisations. Citing the increase

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204. NSW Treasury, Correspondence - General Series, 33/4416 10/22303.
205. NSW, CSIL, A34/6728 5/9281. Applications received, 8034; applications approved 672. Many requests for blankets were turned down by the Stevens Government. Despite bleak winters, blankets were not supplied to many female applicants because they were not eligible for food relief or work on the ERWS. *ibid.*, A34/5612 5/9276
206. NSW, CSIL. Box 5/9282 is one of many archives boxes which contain large numbers of applications for spectacles from across the State
207. NSW, CSIL, A34/6435 5/9280
208. *ibid.*, A34/7633 5/9286

in assistance to poor families, he withdrew the Government's Christmas Cheer for the unemployed in 1933.[209]

If any relative of an applicant was in a position to assist the purchase of a pair of spectacles then the Government refused to provide aid. The rules governing the issue of clothing were biased towards recipients of food relief or people engaged on the ERWS. Other applicants were automatically refused clothing and footwear.[210] While this policy may have been designed to reduce the number of people in a slightly fortunate financial position from obtaining clothing and footwear, it also discriminated against women, Aborigines and track travellers who also missed out on either the dole or relief work. Anyone in receipt of Child Endowment was also ruled ineligible for clothing or footwear.[211] The Town Clerk of Lidcombe Municipality, for instance, pleaded with officials of the Stevens Government to provide boots and clothing to the destitute:

> ...many destitute people are sadly in want of clothing and are debarred from participating in the Department's relief scheme by reason that they receive Family Endowment.[212]

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209. *ibid.*, A34/9228 5/9291
210. *ibid.*, A34/6467 5/9280
211. *ibid.*, A33/7453 5/9111
212. *ibid.*, A33/8267 5/9115

Significantly, he added:

> ...it is contended that the Endowment received is for the benefit of the children themselves and not the parents. [213]

His plea fell on deaf ears.

There were also distribution problems in non-food relief. The unemployed unable to travel to the Government's Clothing Store in Sydney waited two to three weeks before their clothes arrived at a local FRD.[214] Calls for the distribution of clothing to be decentralised went largely unheeded.[215] Several municipal councils, including Lidcombe, offered to distribute clothing from their Town Hall.[216] But the SLEs retained responsibility for the distribution of clothing, while blankets were the responsibility of the CSD.[217]

Despite harshly treating many applicants the Stevens administration disseminated an abundance of statistics and propaganda to support its claim of being sympathetic and responsive to the needs of the unemployed. In the financial year ended June 1934, it claimed to have distributed 20,664 blankets. [218] By March 1935 Stevens claimed that 966,396 articles of clothing had been distributed since coming into office, including 137,961 boots for men, 30,805 (boys)

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213. *loc. cit.*,
214. *ibid.*, A33/7611 5/9112.
215. *ibid.*, A34/6519 5/9280.
216. *loc. cit.*,
217. *ibid.*, A34/6435 5/9280.
218. *ibid.*, A34/6728 5/9281

65,600 shoes (women) and 27,569 shoes for girls. [219] An attempt to verify these statistics was not possible because of the paucity of primary documents, and in the absence of rigorous analysis, there is some doubt as to the validity of these claims.

What is clear is that the Stevens Government pre-empted the economic recovery by claiming that improved economic conditions warranted a decline in the social services. For example, the number of baby kits issued in 1935 was 2,313, a large drop from the 5,471 in 1933. But the evidence demonstrates that reductions in social services created more distress to the unemployed.

At times the Stevens Government added a further eligibility criterion, namely the length of unemployment. When Stevens began to supply boots and clothing in July 1933, he imposed conditions that applicants had to be unemployed for at least 18 months and not in possession of more than one of the items they sought.[220] Nearly a year later this rule was relaxed to provide boots and clothing to persons unemployed for more than three months.

The ERWS infrastructure included 100 tradesmen who repaired boots.[221] Between June 1933 and September 1934 the Department of Labour and Industry (DLI) opened 50 boot repairing depots, the largest situated at Bankstown, Canterbury, Cessnock, Homebush, Kearsely, Lake Macquarie, Marrickville, Randwick and Rockdale. Some 34,000 men

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219. *ibid.*, A35/3559 12/7514
220. A35/6855; A33/6983 5/9108
221. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1933-34,* (Sydney,Government Printer), 29.

repaired 46,593 pairs of boots during the period.[222] But without warning Stevens ordered the closure of boot repairing depots in October 1934. The reasons given included the high cost of repairing a pair of boots (3s 6d), the improving economic situation and objections by the Master Boot Repairers Associations of Sydney, Newcastle and the South Coast about the impact of the boot repairing depots on the business viability of their members.[223]

The amount of clothing distributed by the Stevens Government was clearly inadequate and in many areas women "demanded blankets and a cash allowance for children's clothing." [224] At Wallsend the local relief workers' journal suggested that the boots and shoes of unemployed women and those of the wives and children of the unemployed should be repaired at the Boot Repairing Depots for no cost. [225]

The notion of the family unit was also emphasised in determining who received clothing. In one case an unemployed father was denied clothing on the basis that his 17 year old daughter was in employment.[226]
The State also gave cash assistance to unemployed and destitute families in the Sydney metropolitan area whose total family income was less than 10s a week.[227] Many used

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222. NSW, CSIL, A35/1408 12/7513.
223. *loc. cit.,*
224. *The Alert, op. cit.,* Vol. 1, No. 32 (10 April 1935).
225. *The Voice of the Unemployed,* Official organ of the Wallsend-Cardiff District Unemployed Relief Workers, Vol. 1 No. 8 (27 September 1934)
226. NSW, CSIL, A34/6636 5/9281.
227. Cash charitable assistance was designed to supplement food relief. NSW,CSIL A33/4416 10/22303; *ibid.,* A35/2049 12/7513.

the money to pay overdue rents. Only in exceptional circumstances did single people receive cash charitable assistance.[228] As illustrated in Table 5.5 the number of families receiving cash charitable assistance fell dramatically after Stevens came into government in May 1932.

Table 5.5: Charitable Assistance, 1932 [229]

Month	**Cases Paid**	**Cost of Payment (£)**
January	6,009	7,888
February	6,153	7,509
March	5,593	7,487
April	6,242	8,083
May	4,253	5,366
June	3,976	5,073
July	4,845	6,093
August	4,855	6,120
September	4,643	5,726
October	4,199	5,315
November	4,006	3,895
December	3,157	3,895

Stevens continued to tighten the system. Table 5.6 depicts the fall in the number of grants in the following years. In 1934, Stevens refused charitable assistance to 7,715 people. [230]

Table 5.6: Cash Charitable Assistance, 1933-35 [231]

Year	**Number of Grants**	**Cost £**
1933	40,774	58,334
1934	38,348	36,585
1935	21,912	25,182

228. *ibid.*, A37/1715 12/7547.
229. *ibid.*, A34/4853 5/9272
230. *ibid.*, A34/6728 5/9281.
231. *ibid.*, A34/2049 12/7513.

Mass unemployment placed additional pressure on tenants who comprised the majority of households. In the early years of the depression homelessness increased as many tenants fought evictions. To his credit, Stevens overturned the scant regard for low-cost housing by setting aside £200,000 for the housing of unemployed persons in 1934. This money was placed in a Homes for the Unemployed Trust, under the control of the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD). The Trust's responsibilities included the acquisition of land and the construction of low cost homes for the unemployed. [232] Larger families received preference. Due to the cost of transporting building materials to rural areas, the Trust built most homes in metropolitan Sydney or outlying suburbs where land was in abundance and cheaper. [233] Ready-built homes were reserved for married couples with three children. [234] Other factors influencing selection were the date of application, the degree of urgency and the general suitability of the applicant.

A typical home consisted of three bedrooms, a combined living room and kitchen, a front and rear verandah and a combined bathroom/laundry. [235] Despite the urgency of housing the destitute, the Trust moved very slowly in the

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232. *Fortieth Annual Report of the Public Service Board, 1936-1937*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 19
233. F.A. Bland, "Recent Housing Legislation in New South Wales",*Economic Record,* XIV (1938), 82.
234. *loc. cit.,*
235. *Report*, Homes for the Unemployed Trust, 1938, (Sydney, Government Printer), 1.

first two years. After 18 months it had expended less than a quarter of the funds allocated.[236] . By June 1936, 259 homes had been built, materials had been provided for 605 homes and the Trust had made grants to 745 people for temporary home repairs at a total cost of £79,792.[237] Some 27 cottages were built in Wollongong, but only after protracted delays in the delivery of building materials.[238] Some cottages built in Wollongong - valued at £180 - were criticised for being basic and having no ceilings. [239]

During 1937 a further 124 homes were constructed bringing the total number to 436. Some 1,500 families or 8,000 people had benefited under the Trust by 1937. [240] In the 1938 financial year an extra £100,000 was allocated to the Trust.[241]

Each home was sold under an agreement whereby the purchaser agreed to repay between 3s and 6s (including a 2 per cent interest component) on a weekly basis. [242] By June 1938 more than £25,000 had been repaid by the scheme's home owners. [243]

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236. *Homes for the Unemployed Trust for the year ending 30 December 1935*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 1. *Housing of the Unemployed (Grant) Act 30 June 1934*
237. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 33.
238. L. Richardson, *The Bitter Years; Wollongong During the Great Depression* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1984), 141.
239. *loc. cit.*,
240. *Homes for the Unemployed Trust, Report,* 1937, (Sydney, Government Printer), 1.
241. *Financial Statement: Budget Speech for the Financial Year 1937-1938*, 6.
242. Homes for the Unemployed Trust, *Report, 1939* (Sydney, Government Printer), 2.
243. F.A. Bland, *op. cit.*, 82.

With the fall in the official unemployment rate to 10 per cent in 1937, the Stevens Government took the opportunity to reorganise the administration of relief to the unemployed.[244] In August 1937 Food Relief Depots (FRD) in metropolitan areas and the coalfields were converted into Social Welfare Bureaux and operated in conjunction with SLEs. In the metropolitan area there were 22 bureaux with 74 assembly points.[245] Welfare officers supervised the depots with the assistance of departmental medical officers and nurses. Officers travelled to assembly points every second Thursday and distributed sustenance. The new bureaux were characterised by a more individual system of assessing benefits, a new system for the processing of special foods and a half-yearly clothing issue. [246] Placement Officers acquainted themselves with the registered unemployed persons and personally approached employers with the object of securing employment. [247]

Food relief became a component of the new broadly based Social Aid Service which incorporated medical benefits, services and supplied milk to infants. [248] Social Aid reflected a significant change in the attitude of

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244. If women, youth and track travellers were included, the unofficial unemployment rate could have been 15 per cent or more at this time.
245. NSW, CSIL, *ibid.*, B39/3250 12/7604
246. *ibid.*, A37/3447 12/7549.
247. H.M. Hawkins, "Unemployment": Statement prepared by the NSW Minister for Labour and Industry indicating the character and scope of the committee appointed to survey the problem of unemployment in New South Wales, *NSW Parliamentary Papers*,(1938), 4.
248. A.G. Colley, *op. cit.*, 89. NSW CSIL, A37/3447 12/7549

governments whereby unemployment relief was firmly incorporated as a government responsibility.[249]

Another fundamental change to the dole system was that the NSW Police Force no longer investigated imposition or fraud. However, the Police maintained their role as custodians of the dole in rural areas until the end of the decade. After reports that several unemployed at Port Kembla were "affected by alcohol" while waiting for the dole, the Director of Government Relief requested a Police Officer be in attendance. [250]

5.9 Conclusions:

All NSW Governments in the 1930s provided the dole as a means of relieving the mass unemployed. The onset of mass unemployment in 1929 forced the Bavin Government to extend food relief across the metropolitan area. Lang extended the dole throughout the State so that it became the major unemployment relief policy. Lang and the Labor movement regarded the dole as the only policy to ease the burden of mass unemployment because it immediately provided for the needs of the unemployed. By contrast, conservative governments, particularly Stevens, argued that the dole by itself did little to bring about a restoration of economic and public confidence. Accordingly, Stevens reduced the number of doleys by putting men to work on public works.

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249. N.G. Butlin, A. Barnard, J.J. Pincus, *op. cit.*, 183.
250. NSW, CSIL, A39/289 12/7582.

The food relief system partially fulfilled its role of providing sustenance to the unemployed. But it was an inadequate policy because it provided only a very basic standard of living and many people were disqualified from receiving the dole because of their income levels, transient nature, political activity or victimisation by government officials, including the police. This chapter has highlighted that many unemployed women, youth and track travellers did not receive the dole. They were the victims of the relentless drive by Stevens to decrease the cost of food relief and special foods.

Attitudes to the unemployed and a stringent budgetary outlook underpinned the policies of Stevens. Whereas Lang considered sustenance a right, without conditions, Stevens' view was that male unemployed workers should make a contribution to the State. The extent to which the unemployed worked for government aid will be detailed in Chapter Six.

All Governments used the services of the NSW Police Force to distribute the dole and investigate the validity of applicants. The presence of police acted to prevent social disorder. Through their role as distributors and regulators of food in non-metropolitan areas the authority of the NSW Police Force was reinforced and consolidated. It seems highly likely that the possibility of being refused the dole acted to quell many potential agitators. In the face of few options the unemployed reluctantly accepted their situation and the dole. In recent years some

historians have raised the question of whether the unemployed reluctantly accepted the dole, but in the case of NSW, it would seem that there were few other options.[251]

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251. See G.R.F. Spenceley, *The Depression Decade: commentary and documents* (Melbourne, Nelson, 1981)

CHAPTER SIX: PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMS

6.1 Introduction:

Employment creating public works date from the Tudor period in Britain. But the widespread adoption of State works did not occur until the late nineteenth century, when the British Government gave support to local authorities to organise public works. (1) Reflecting attitudes that the unemployed were responsible for their situation, outlays on public works were frowned upon in Britain in the early twentieth century. Under conditions of full employment, the British Treasury argued that public works diverted resources from private employment to public employment, instead of adding to the volume of employment. (2)

Public works also did not enjoy the support of neo-classical economists. Prior to the 1930s many academic economists condemned "made" work or public works. (3) In practical terms, though, public works were seen as a better alternative than food relief, because the latter did not result in any direct contribution to the development of the

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1. S. Glynn, P.G.A. Howells, "Unemployment in the 1930s: The Keynesian Solution Reconsidered", *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1 (March 1980), 32.
2. As quoted in E.R. Walker, "Public Works as a Recovery Measure", *Economic Record*, Vol. 11 (1935), 187.
3. R.A. Lester, "Emergency Employment in Theory and Practice", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 42 (1934), 466.

community. The Great Depression paved the way for public works becoming a significant component of total construction expenditure in many countries, such as the United States where expenditure on public works increased from 25 per cent of total construction in the 1920s to 42 per cent by 1933. (4)

International attitudes to public works, particularly British opinion had an influence on policy makers in Australia. Early this century NSW politicians were confronted with conflicting opinions as to merits of public works. One issue was whether public works provided infrastructure of a beneficial nature to the community. The Commonwealth Employment Committee expressed a commonly held view:

> We believe that the permanent solution of unemployment in this country can never be effectively achieved by means of Government grants to be expended on relief works. (5)

The Bruce Report argued that public works delivered few economic benefits to the community. (6)

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4. J.A. Maxwell, "Problems of Public Works Policy", *The Institute of Public Administration* Vol. 2, No. 1 (December 1938), 39.
5. New South Wales (NSW), Treasury, Correspondence - General Series, "Report of the Commonwealth Employment Committee for NSW, 1932", 32/11895 10/22298.
6. Commonwealth of Australia, *Preliminary Survey of the Economic Problem* (Bruce Report, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1932), 19.

> Unless the work is very carefully planned, the cost [of public works] is high, the work done is of little value and the effect on the morale of the workers is nearly as bad as that of idleness. (7)

The previous chapter demonstrated Stevens' opposition to an unlimited amount of food relief and in this chapter the focus is on the range of public works programs administered by his administration. The philosophy, nature, working conditions and effects of public works programs - ordinary public works (OPW), the emergency relief works scheme (ERWS) and rationed relief works (RRW) - which operated in the 1930s will be critically examined. From an economic viewpoint the aim of public works was to partly correct an imbalance in the business cycle by spreading public construction over time so as to offset declines in private expenditure by increasing public expenditure. (8) Public works had the capacity to create direct employment by employing men on rationed works and indirect employment through stimulating the creation or expansion of businesses which supplied food and materials to these men.

The magnitude of unemployment, despair and misery in the 1930s prompted a large degree of soul searching by community leaders, economists and politicians. Public works had been used spasmodically as a form of unemployment relief in NSW

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7. *loc. cit.*,
8. J.A. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, 40.

since the 1890s depression. In the 1930s Lang and the Labor movement rejected the argument that the unemployed should work for State aid. Stevens, by contrast, argued for the expansion of public works to gainfully employ the jobless and lead to a restoration in economic confidence.

6.2 Extension of Ordinary Public Works (OPW):

Government sponsored public works formed an instrumental part of the NSW Nationalist Government's (predecessor to the UAP) policy of tackling unemployment in the latter half of the 1920s. The Bavin Government extended ordinary public works (OPW) to many rural areas, with the Department of Main Roads supervising construction of roads and bridges. Conditions and hours of employment varied. Relief workers rotated every two weeks and worked a maximum of 40 hours in any week. (9) Wages were fixed on an hourly basis at the current rate of the living wage (82s.6d per week of 48 hours). Relief workers were grouped in gangs, depending on the number of unemployed. Married men and returned soldiers comprised the first gang and worked eight days a fortnight. The second gang - included single men - worked four days work a fortnight. (10) At Inverell and many other sites throughout

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9. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *Report Upon Employment and Unemployment in New South Wales*, Issued by the Hon. J.M. Dunningham, MLA, Minister for Labour and Industry (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1937), 24.
10. W.J. Strong, "Relief Works on the Culcairn-Walbondrie Road", *Main Roads*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (April 1931), 124.

the state the local agency of the State Labour Exchange (SLE) organised men into work gangs on a fortnightly basis. (11) In some outlying areas the unemployed received a week's work before being put off. (12)

Public works programs co-ordinated by the Bavin and Stevens Governments received strong support from many unemployed who preferred to work, rather than face the stigma of receiving sustenance. (13) But with limited finances the State was reluctant to introduce wide ranging public works schemes as it meant further borrowings at high interest rates. (14)

After the sharp rise in unemployment in 1929, the Bavin Government introduced the Unemployment Relief Tax (URT) to fund the expansion of the OPW and food relief. In conjunction with OPW, Bavin provided food relief, particularly in metropolitan areas. But sustenance alone could not meet the rising demand and Bavin favoured public works.

Following a request from the Federal Treasurer in June 1930, the Treasurer in the Bavin Government, Bertram Stevens, established an Unemployment Relief Council (URC) under the

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11. A.E. Taylor, "Relief Work on the Inverell-Auburn Vale Road", *Main Roads*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (April 1931), 126.
12. "Unemployed Relief Work on the Boggabri-Manilla Development Road", *Main Roads,* (September 1931), 9.
13. G.D. Snooks, "Government Unemployment Relief in the 1930s: Aid or Hindrance to Recovery?" in R.G. Gregory, N.G. Butlin (eds) *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 320.
14. N.G. Butlin, J.A. Barnard, J.J. Pincus (eds)., *Government and Capitalism: Public and Private Choice in Twentieth Century Australia* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1982), 182.

auspices of the NSW Premier's Department. (15) The URC implemented the Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act. As the life of URC covered the Bavin, Lang and Stevens Governments, its policies and priorities differed according to the government of the day, but it maintained a general continuity in terms of providing financial assistance for public works programs between 1930-1936.

Several prominent historians have dated the URC from 1932. (16) This is possibly because the URC first published an annual report in 1932. However, this report said that the "URC was originally established in 1930", a statement supported by archival material, such as minutes of meetings and grant allocations which date from June 1930. (17). The URC's chequered career may also be a reason for historians wrongly dating its origins. After Bavin left the URC in a bankrupt state in late 1930, Lang subsequently withdrew most of the URC's powers and significantly reduced its influence and profile. Lang's actions may explain why historians have dated the URC from the Stevens Government. [18]

The URC clearly outlined its policies and relationship to other government departments:

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15. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Minutes, Meetings and Papers", 2/8176.
16. G.D. Snooks, *op. cit.*, 317; B. Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression: a study of economic development and public policy in the 1920s and the 1930s* (Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1970), 337-338.
17. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1932-33* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer), 5.
18. In addition, the Unemployment Relief Council's *Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 1933* states it was formed in 1930.

> ...it was not intended to create a department to carry out the work of the URC, but to function through the various Government Departments and Authorities which had the machinery already in existence.. the URC staff - executive and personal - would be a "Clearing House" staff. [19]

The URC determined that works of a national, permanent and where possible of an immediately reproductive character would receive priority.[20] A senior public servant, Cyrus Tye, was appointed as the URC's Secretary and Executive Officer.[21] In the initial months it focused on providing employment on relief works. [22]

On 10 July 1930 the URC made its first allocation of £60,000 for works on developmental roads. Of the 26 Shires invited to participate, 24 accepted funds and work commenced in August 1930. [23] Preference was given to construction projects which would benefit the greatest number of unemployed men and those which promoted new settlements or increased production in areas which had been previously inaccessible. (24) The URC's main objectives were to

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19. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *op. cit., 2/8176*
20. *ibid.,* 7 July 1930.
21. Tye held this position during the URCs six year history.
22. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Minutes of Meeting", 17 July 1930. 2/7186.
23. A.G. Close, "Relief Works on Developmental Roads", *Main Roads,* Vol 11, No. 1, (September 1930), 8.
24. *ibid.,* 9.

formulate schemes for the absorption of the unemployed into public or private works, to finance re-education for the unemployed, to recommend unemployment relief expenditure from the special unemployment taxes and to assess the general prevailing economic conditions with a view to increasing efficiency and productivity.[25] Public Works included the construction of roads, bridges and tunnels in many non-metropolitan areas.

The Board of the URC comprised three State Ministers, two employers' and two union representatives, a technical adviser and Tye. It was funded by the URT which charged families and individuals at the rate of one shilling in the pound of net assessable income. [26] This proportional tax was collected on all types of income (except salaries and wages) including business, rents and interest on the amount of net assessable income.

The issue of paying relief workers award rates deeply divided the URC. Bavin, through his ministerial representatives, insisted that workers be paid on an hourly rate. The two employees' representatives advocated award wages, even if this resulted in a shorter working week for the employed.[27] Once public works were officially listed in the *Government Gazette,* the labourers engaged on such projects were exempt from the provisions of industrial awards

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25. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit., 23;* F.A. Bland, "A NOte Upon Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Economic Record,* Vol. V111 (May 1932), 95.
26. *NSW Industrial Gazette,* (31 July 1932), 438.
27. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *op. cit.,*

and agreements. The employees' representatives, Buckland and Bryant, claimed the Government had gazetted OPW as "declared relief works". They argued that such works would have been undertaken irrespective of the industrial depression and therefore labour on such should not receive reduced wages. [28] Further, work should not be rationed without interfering with the rates of pay. [29] Several months of haggling followed. The government-controlled URC remained firm and in protest Buckland and Bryant resigned, a decision that allowed Bavin to tighten his grip on the URC's workings.

The URC continued to allocate large sums of money for public works programs in rural districts. In its first five months the URC authorised relief works well in excess of the revenue raised by the URT. [30] Its role was not to make policy, but to be a puppet of the Bavin Government. For instance, when a Labor MP, Davidson, raised the issue of employing young males ruled ineligible for food relief, the URC said "that this matter should be left to the government to deal with as a matter of policy." [31]

The focus on funding rural projects increased during the second half of 1930. Unperturbed by a shortfall in income the URC continued to fund rural areas at a disproportionate level. Aware of his strong rural support, Bavin pushed for an

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28. *ibid.*, 14 August 1930
29. *loc. cit.*,
30. R. Walker, "Mr Lang's Dole: the administration of food relief in New South Wales, 1930-1932", *Labour History*, No. 51 (1986).
31. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Minutes of Meeting", 28 August 1930. 2/8176.

extension of relief programs "..as it is was essential that as much employment as possible should be provided between August and November 1930 when the full benefit of harvesting and shearing would become apparent." [32] Despite trying to shore up votes Bavin was convincingly defeated in the November 1930 election.

However, not all relief works were officially proclaimed and there is evidence of the URC assisting other works in rural areas. The Mumbulla Shire Council, for example, received a loan of about £5,000 from the URC for the construction of two bridges and one causeway. [33]

6.3 The Lang Approach:

The election of the Lang Government in November 1930 marked a turning point in government unemployment relief. A report commissioned by Lang showed that the URC had employed 20,000 adult men on part time employment and approved expenditure of £2,090,821 in its first five months, an amount clearly in excess of the £544,000 income from the URT. [34] The URC's Secretary noted the financial crisis:

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32. *loc. cit.*,
33. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Progress Reports on Public Works", 415 2/8177-2/8178.
34. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Report 4 November 1930"; J.T.Lang, *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Volume 124, 466 (16 December 1930).

> ...the funds at the disposal of the URC are so limited that the monies received are required to meet commitments for food relief and for the few [public] works which are in hand. [35]

Lang capitalised on the debt-ridden URC to push for a statewide dole system. He stripped the URC of many of its functions and dismissed the remaining non-ministerial board members. [36] Political accounts suggest Lang dismantled the URC because he shared the Labor movement's objection to public works as a relief measure. Without doubt Labor and Lang did oppose the "work for the dole scheme." [37] But the disastrous financial state of the URC also had a bearing on Lang's decision.[38]

Lang's Minister for Labour and Industry, James Baddley, strongly advocated the benefits of public works, particularly in the face of rising unemployment and the cost of the dole. He cited the increase in food relief recipients from 3,020 to 69,392 during 1930 as evidence of the burden on the State of financing the dole. [39] Baddley argued that the dole should be

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35. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, Tye to Lang 16 November 1931 2/8176.
36. F.A. Bland, *op. cit.*, 95.
37. Australian Labor Party, *The Australian Labor Year Book 1934-1935* (Sydney, Labor Daily Limited, 1935).
38. One of the few authors to agree with this scenario is J. McCarthy, "After Lang: 1932-1935" in Radi, H.,Spearritt, P. (eds), *Jack Lang* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, circa 1985), 122.
39. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Minutes of Meeting",

replaced by a vigorous, reproductive and developmental public works scheme.

The strain on resources was clearly evident and in June 1931 the URC withdrew unexpended balances on completed works and accounts approved but not accepted by municipal and shire councils. [40] At the end of 1931 the Lang Government granted £100,000 to the URC for extra public works. [41] The URC's meetings during the Lang administration were described rather harshly by one political opponent as "moribund". [42] At its 3 December 1931 meeting Lang attended as chairman. It is possible he attended earlier meetings, though surviving archival material records this as his first meeting.[43]

Baddley received strong support from Tye, who recommended that more money be committed to public works and semi-public works such as water supply and sewerage, water conservation, government buildings and mental institutions and schools. [44] Lang ignored their advice and ensured that the dole became the principal form of unemployment relief during the life of his government. Yet apart from the dole the Lang Government was almost devoid of constructive economic

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Baddley to Lang 8 January 1931 2/8176.

40. *ibid.*, "Draft Minutes" 30 June 1931.

41. *ibid.*, 23 November 1931

42. United Australia Party, *From Chaos to Order: being a summary of the achievements of the Stevens-Bruxner Government, May 13 1932 to May 11, 1935* (Published under the Authority of B.S.B. Stevens and M.F. Bruxner, circa 1935), 24.

43. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *op. cit.*, 3 December 1931.

44. *ibid.*, 1930-1932.

policies to relieve unemployment. [45]

According to Stevens, there were 661 men engaged on OPW at the time of Lang's sacking in May 1932, and the Lang Government had expended £1,520,420 on relief work. [46]

6.4 Initiatives by the Stevens Government:

On assuming office in May 1932 Stevens reluctantly continued Lang's unemployment relief policy of the dole, but he set out to reduce the numbers relying on food relief by revitalising public works schemes. With three in ten adult males unemployed, Stevens conceded the magnitude of the problem:

> The Government's objective... was not so much to provide work of a permanent value as to transfer men from a state of idleness and desperation to one of work and hope. [47]

Soon after Stevens took office the Commonwealth Employment Council provided a £600,000 loan for public works to be distributed among local bodies. In July 1932 Stevens introduced a scheme of rationed relief work with alternating periods of work. Unemployed men were more likely to be

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45. R. Walker, *op. cit.*, 82.
46. B.S.B. Stevens, *Employment and Relief of Unemployment* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1935), 4; United Australia Party, *op. cit.*, 24.
47. B.S.B. Stevens, *op. cit.*, 5.

employed if they had several dependants. The nature and location of the work and the employing body also had a bearing. [48] Funds for OPW were allocated by the NSW Unemployment Relief Council (URC) and other government departments. A disproportionate amount of funding for OPW was allocated to rural districts, reflecting powerful rural interests within the Stevens Government. As evidence of Stevens' commitment to OPW, £3m was allocated for OPW in 1932-33, more than four times the amount spent by the Lang Government in the previous year. [49] Stevens strongly advocated public works as the most constructive remedy to help lift the NSW economy out of depression. In addition, he aimed to revive industry and allow the unemployed to re-gain their positions under normal award conditions in the private sector. [50]

Yet, some years later, Stevens overlooked the importance of OPW during the governments of Bavin and Lang when he claimed:

> At the onset of the depression and until 1933 little was attempted in the way of unemployment relief beyond providing [food] relief. [51]

In April 1933 the Stevens Government introduced the

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48. NSW Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit.*, 24.
49. *ibid.*, 5.
50. *ibid.*, 8
51. Financial Statement: *Budget Speech for the financial year, 1937-1938*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 13.

Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) - based on a scheme operating in Queensland - to complement the existing OPW. Under the ERWS men were employed through Municipal and Shire Councils to work on projects that would not have normally been undertaken, because of competing priorities or financial costs. Such works included drainage systems, roads, swimming pools, recreation reserves, bridges and reclamation of land. As a result many country areas were opened up and developed and virgin land was made accessible and productive. [52] In metropolitan areas and country towns workers on the ERWS constructed streets, improved drainage and undertook an extensive scheme of concrete kerbing and guttering. [53]

Sutherland Council in Sydney's south was the first Council to adopt the scheme. [54] Other Councils to participate in the ERWS in its first three months are listed in Table 6.1:

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52. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Report of the Operations, 1935*,(Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 10.
53. *loc. cit.*
54. *Red Leader*, No. 88, (3 May 1933).

Table 6.1: Municipal Councils involved in the Emergency Relief Works Scheme, 1933 [55]

Council	**Number of men at commencement**	**Number employed 21 July 1933**
Dundas	40	38
Eastwood	57	53
Ermington	48	48
Holyroyd	619	565
Hornsby	479	392
Hunters Hill	136	127
Kogarah	778	601
Kuringai	337	292
Lane Cove	364	228
Leichhardt	1,305	1,147
Lidcombe	628	605
Manly	400	331
Marrickville	1,328	1,241
Mosman	170	170
North Sydney	1,392	1,259
Parramatta	432	369
Rockdale	1,046	858
Ryde	886	697
Sutherland	973	887
Warringah	758	701
Willoughby	864	785

Although Stevens publicly said that the NSW Scheme would transfer many unemployed adult males, from food relief to part-time employment, he privately placed a ceiling of 40,000 on the number of men who could be employed under the ERWS. [56] Stevens argued that the ERWS was a step in the right direction provided working standards were upheld and the "work was useful in the organic life of the State." [57]

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55. NSW, Chief Secretary, Main Series of Inward Letters (CSIL) A33/7100 5/9109.
56. NSW, Treasury Department, "Treasury Submissions to Sub-committee of Cabinet", 1933/15466 10/39864.
57. B.S.B. Stevens cited in E.H. Burgmann, *Justice for all: The case for the Unemployed and the Underemployed* (St. John's College Press, Morpeth, NSW, 1933).

Relief workers had to meet a strict criteria: be at least 21 years of age, unless married; have been unemployed for at least two weeks; registered at a State Labour Exchange (SLE) for at least seven days; resident in a district for three months; and included on the State electoral roll, and for most of the 1930s a means test was applied to the family's income. [58] The above criteria also excluded track travellers from the ERWS. At first Stevens restricted the ERWS to people eligible for food relief and whose income was below the Permissible Income Regulations (PIR). [59]

Applicants were required to report weekly to their agent, although in remote areas issuing officers had the discretion to allow applicants to report every three to four weeks. (60) Work was rationed according to each applicant's number of dependants. Table 6.2 illustrates the scales and hours of employment on this basis.

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58. NSW, CSIL, A33/7439 5/9111; NSW, Department of Labour and Industry (1937) *op. cit., 26.*
59. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1936-1937* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 691.
60. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, Emergency Relief Works Scheme, *Instructions for Guidance of Issuing Officers*,(Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 3.

Table 6.2: Scales for work relief eligibility, 1934 (61)

Scale		**Fortnightly Hours**	**Fortnightly Payments (£sd)**
A	Single man	14	1.1.10
B	Married man	24	1.17.5
B1	Married 1 child	30	2.6.9
B2	" 2	32	2.9.10
B3	3	36	2.16.1
B4	4	40	3.2.4
B5	5	44	3.8.6.
B6	6	48	3.14.9
B7	7	52	4.1.0
B8	8	56	4.7.3
B9	9	60	4.13.5

The ERWS was principally funded by revenue collected under the Unemployment Relief Tax (URT). In addition, municipal and shire councils paid for other expenses such as supervision, materials, transportation costs, tools, plant and workers compensation. During the early months of the scheme, many local government councils complained that they were paying too high a portion of the total costs. (62) For example, Warren Shire Council believed that the State Government was receiving sufficient income to absorb the costs that Councils were paying. (63) In July 1933 Stevens agreed to pay a five per cent subsidy to Councils and Shires to cover these costs. The subsidy was increased to 10 per cent in September 1933. (64)

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61. NSW, CSIL, A34/5210 5/9274.
62. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report 1933* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1933), 15.
63. NSW, Treasury Department, *op. cit.*, 1933/7460 10/39864.
64. United Australia Party, *op. cit.*, 26; NSW, Unemployment

After completing a period of work, married men waited one week and single men two weeks before they were eligible for food relief. (65) If relief workers had been dismissed without reason or for laziness they were refused food relief. (66) Upon adopting the ERWS a council was advanced a sum of money equivalent to their estimated fortnightly expenditure on relief wages. One hundred and ninety eight Councils employed a total of 29,299 men during the first six months of operation. (67) Yet some Councils refused to participate in the ERWS. (68)

Whereas the dole represented continuity for the unemployed, the ERWS offered little regularity because when a job finished relief workers had to move on in the vain hope of obtaining further work. Yet, in the first three months there was a complete transfer of men from the dole to the ERWS.

Relief Council, *Annual Report*, 1933-34 (Sydney, Government Printer, 1934), 26.

65. NSW, CSIL, A35/4745 12/7515.
66. *ibid.*, A35/4830 12/7515.
67. *ibid.*, A37/1485 12/7547.
68. Botany Council was the only Council in the South Sydney Region to adopt the Emergency Relief Works Scheme, see J. Jervis, L.R. Flack, *A Jubilee History of the Municipality of Botany, 1888-1938* (Sydney, W.C. Penfold, 1938), 252.

Table 6.3: Food Relief Recipients and men engaged on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme, May-July 1933 (69)

Approximate Number Food Relief Recipients:		
	5 May 1933	99,908
	7 July 1933	76,611
	Difference	*23,718*
Approximate Number ERWS		
	7 July 1933	23,718

However, given many men worked on a part-time basis, the wages they received were sometimes less than the dole. When the State abandoned the initial eligibility criteria that applicants must be in receipt of food relief the number of men employed on the ERWS rose from 22,365 to 39,177. (70) However, applicants still had to meet the strict requirements of the PIR and were required to sign a statement each fortnight stating their household or family income did not exceed a prescribed limit.

The bureaucracy closely supervised the ERWS and drew up a system of principles for the administration and control of the scheme such as the correlation of records kept by timekeepers and gangers with start work dockets and lists of workers from the Department of Labour and Industry. (71).

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69. NSW, CSIL, A33/7100 7/9109.
70. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, *op. cit.*, (1937), 22.
71. *Report of the Local Government Department*, (Sydney,

Another key principle of the ERWS was that Councils were to purchase materials from within NSW, except with the express permission of the Minister for Local Government. (72) This policy of protecting the interests of NSW was also reflected in the State's decision to exclude interstate travellers from unemployment relief and signified a closing of the NSW economy.

In its first year in office the Stevens Government authorised more than £5m in relief works. (73) Within two years 260 Councils were involved in the ERWS, including some councils who retained men on OPW via the Public Works Department. (74) When the number of men employed on ERWS peaked at 61,000 in June 1934, it was clear that mass unemployment had forced even Stevens to forsake his ceiling of 40,000 emergency relief workers. (75)

In the Newcastle region 2,192 men had received partial employment via the ERWS by December 1933; a year later the figure peaked 3,500. (76)

The Stevens Government responded to criticism that it had excluded many men from employment on public works by lifting the income limits applying to the ERWS in February

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Government Printer, 1935), 14.

72. *ibid., 1933,* 26.
73. B.S.B. Stevens, *op. cit.,* 25.
74. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report 1933-34, op. cit.,* 26.
75. *loc. cit.,*
76. S.R. Gray, *Newcastle in the Great Depression,* Newcastle History Monographs No. 11 (Newcastle, Council of the City of Newcastle, 1989), 27.

1935. The impact was dramatic. In the following six months the number of ERW applicants rose by 28.16 per cent. (77). Fearing a wages explosion Stevens persuaded Cabinet in August 1935 to reimpose the PIR in an attempt to cut down on the "abuses" which had crept into the system as a result of lifting the PIR. (78)

The unemployed in metropolitan areas received less employment on the ERWS than those in country districts and outer metropolitan areas. (79) Public works remained the favoured government policy to reduce unemployment and stimulate economic recovery. A sub-committee of the NSW Employment Research Committee (ERC) reported in 1934 that:

> ..this Committee affirms that at this juncture, an extension and acceleration of public works program as necessary to relieve unemployment and to assist the return of conditions favourable to the recovery of employment in private industry. (80)

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77. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry (1937), *op. cit.*, 24, 37.
78. NSW, Cabinet Papers "Unemployment Relief Work Scheme" Cabinet Decision, 28 August 1935, 9/3028.
79. N. Wheatley, "NSW Relief Workers Struggle, 1933-1936" in J.Roe (ed)., *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives, 1901-1975* (Stanmore, NSW, Cassell, 1976, 195
80. NSW, Employment Research Committee, *Report by the Special Research Sub-Committee*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1936), 49.

After three years of operation Stevens claimed £14,528,864 had been spent on the ERWS, as depicted in the following table. (81)

Table 6.4: Expenditure on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme, 1935

Department	*Amount (£)*
Metropolitan Water and Sewerage	1,648,361
Country Water and Sewerage	1,283,916
Drainage Works	1,787,098
Local Government Works	6,770,553
Development Road Works	1,005,511
Public Buildings	1,751,535
Advances to Settlers	980,107
Total	**14,528,864**

Yet, the above table illustrates that Stevens included advances to settlers as part of the ERWS.

By mid 1935 rising costs led several councils to call for increased funding from the State Government. Newcastle City Council led the agitation and received support from representatives of the North Western, Northern Rivers and New England districts. (82).

In addition to the ERWS the government also sponsored ORW and at 30 June 1935 the following number of men were employed under both schemes.

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81. B.S.B. Stevens, *op. cit.*, 8.
82. NSW Cabinet Papers, Statement to Cabinet, 2 July 1935. 9/3028.1.

Table 6.5: Schedule of public works: Emergency Relief Works Scheme and Ordinary Public Works, 1935 (83)

ERWS		
	139 Municipalities	32,229
	105 Shires	19,754
		51,983
OPW		
	Public Works Dept.	13,459
	MWSDB	3,211
	Transport Dept.	1,315
	Forestry Commission	1,970
	Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission	525
	Various authorities	5,210
	Total:	**77,673**

Approximately 83,000 Emergency Relief Workers (ERW) were employed during 1935, with 17,688 the average weekly number. (84) The NSW Police Force held significant power in determining eligibility for employment. Police officers made mistakes and discriminated against some applicants. [85] The overturning of a mistake normally took the intervention of local MP. In several cases the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) admitted that constables had not been fully conversant with the regulations governing the ERWS. (86) For example, at Harden a constable was in error when he refused work to 12

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83. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1935-1936* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 9.
84. G.H. Ince, *Report on Unemployment Insurance in Australia* (Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937).
85. There is evidence of men attached to unemployed workers groups being refused employment on the ERWS.
86. NSW, CSIL, A34/10477 5/9297.

Emergency Relief Workers (ERW). (87) Representatives of the unemployed, such as the Orange Council of Unemployed and Seasonal Workers, urged Stevens to withdraw the right of police to issue relief dockets. (88) But Stevens maintained the role of the police throughout the decade.

Indicative of the State's attitude towards single unemployed, it overhauled the employment of relief workers in March 1935. The new policy provided one week's work in five for single men and up to four in five weeks work for men with large families. (89)

The community preferred a system which brought no real stimulus to the private sector. One businessman commented when applying for a loan:

> The absorbing of the unemployed by municipal bodies and the Main Roads Board is a very temporary relief to a small number of the unemployed only, whilst being an added burden to the already over-taxed citizens. (90)

In 1934 the situation arose where two unemployed persons were elected as aldermen on municipal councils. Fearing a conflict of interest because the local ERWS was controlled by local councils, Stevens prohibited elected officials from

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87. *ibid.*, A34/6974 5/9282.
88. *ibid.*, A35/7729 12/7520.
89. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 24.
90. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, "Applications for loans to industry, 1932-1935", BL102 2/8180.2.

further participating in the ERWS. In lieu of work the men were eligible for food relief. (91)

6.5 Employment Conditions on the ERWS:

The onerous working conditions of relief workers became a central plank in the demands of the State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council (SURWC) and, to a lesser extent the ALP, for Stevens to abolish public works in favour of the dole. Many unemployed were induced to accept employment on the ERWS because of the intense poverty and misery created by mass unemployment and the paucity of the dole. (92) Despite the wages of relief workers being relatively higher than dole payments the official union movement, unemployed and relief workers groups and left wing groups opposed the concept of working for the dole.

> ...the Government through its pernicious Work for the Dole Scheme has handed over to the Water and Sewerage Department, Public Works Department etc. thousands of men who are performing work for which they receive very little, if any more than the value of rations they previously received. (93)

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91. NSW, CSIL, A34/9050 5/9298.
92. W.H. MacKenzie, M. Wade, *The Premier's Plan in Action, Relief Works into Industry, smashing of award wages and conditions* (Sydney, State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, 1936), 8.
93. *The Mattock*, Official Organ of the Lidcombe Emergency Relief Workers. Vol. 1 No. 16 (1933).

Labour organisations and unemployed groups supported relief workers particularly when they downed tools to protest poor working conditions. The filling-in of fever-ridden swamps at Homebush Bay and Dobroyd Point at Haberfield were two sites where workers struck for better conditions. (94) Relief Workers at Portland downed tools after management changed the commencing and finishing times. (95) In 1933 the Lidcombe Emergency Relief Workers complained that applicants had not been called up in alphabetical order, which delayed them receiving employment. (96) Moreover, many unemployed believed they were ineligible for the dole when they were not working on the ERWS. And nearly 400 relief workers and business people from Lidcombe signed a petition which was presented by a deputation to the NSW Minister for Labour and Industry. (97)

Relief workers who spoke out against conditions had their names taken off call-up lists. Their dependants were subject to harsh treatment. In the inner-Sydney suburbs of Newtown and Redfern the children and wives of men who had not accepted a call-up were refused urgent medical food orders, resulting in several fainting from sheer exhaustion. (98) The effect was to force relief workers to accept the conditions

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94. Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 188.
95. NSW, CSIL, A37/1755 12/7547.
96. Jack Davison Collection Correspondence regarding Emergency Relief Work Scheme, NSW, 1933-34. P117/7.
97. *loc. cit.*,
98. Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 188.

laid down by the Stevens Government. In other instances workers were black-listed. A man at Gulgong, for example, was told not to re-apply for relief work by the local constable because he had organised meetings of relief workers. (99)

Political representation was usually necessary before Stevens would investigate aspects of the ERWS, particularly the dismissal of relief workers. (100) Under pressure from their local associations some workers resigned their jobs in protest over poor conditions. (101) But by doing so they also forfeited their right (in the short term at least) to food relief.

Living and working conditions on Afforestation Camps were a constant source of discontent. Following an initial £25,000 grant in 1932-33, the Stevens Government outlaid another £200,000 in 1934 for Afforestation Camps, which were described by representatives of the unemployed and the Trades and Labor Council as "Concentration Camps" or "Slave Camps". (102) The duties of single men employed on Afforestation

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99. Gulgong is situated in the State's north-west. See a report in *The Clarion, Official Organ of the Employed and Unemployed of Five Dock and Drummoyne*, Vol.1. No. 30. (6 June 1934).
100. NSW, CSIL, A36/883 12/7531.
101. *ibid.*, A33/7497 5/9111.
102. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Doles and Dividends: An analysis of the situation of the unemployed and relief workers in New South Wales* (Sydney, Foreward Press Ltd, 1933), 4; NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1933-34*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1934), 24; Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 189. M. Masson, *Surviving the Dole Years: The 1930s - A Personal Story* (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1993), 60. *The Star*, Official Organ of the Leichardt-Lilyfield Unemployed and Relief Workers District Council, Vol. 2. No. 3 (18 September 1936).

Camps included forest thinning, firebreaks, road work and regeneration on 63 areas in the forestry districts of Tumut, Wagga, Moruya, Forbes, Dubbo, Wyong, Taree, Kempsey, Casino, Glen Innes and Narrabi. (103) Monthly returns indicate that at least 150 to 230 men were employed on Afforestation Camps. (104)

The conditions were often harsh and not surprisingly reports of injuries and deaths were common. Relief workers had the cost of blankets deducted from their first week's pay. (105) Moreover, the Stevens administration refused to disclose to the unemployed where they were being sent. (106) The State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council (SURWC) accused the Stevens Government of political motives for the camps:

> Camp schemes of relief employment serve the twofold purpose of railroading the unemployed out of settled districts, where there are facilities for political organisation, and, at the same time, of placing a supply of surplus labor at the disposal of wealthy country employers... (107)

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103. *loc. cit.*
104. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1932-33*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1933), 15.
105. *The Liberator, Journal of the Canterbury-Bankstown District Unemployed and Relief Workers Council*, Vol. 1 (1 June 1934).
106. Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 1934-35, 189.
107. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council (SURWC), *Report of Annual Conference*, (Sydney, 1936), 4.

This view was plausible given the low wage rates paid to relief workers and the fact that mass unemployment and the need for sustenance placed prospective employers in a powerful position.

The remote locations and poor working conditions of work sites influenced the response to government call-ups of relief workers. There were numerous instances of men refusing to work at Afforestation Camps due to a lack of facilities and climatic conditions. (108) The State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council (SURWC) called for better conditions, including the payment of award rates of pay, proper camping facilities, clean water and firewood and the right of travelling unemployed to remain in the town of their choice. (109) Those who refused a call-up had to tender a written statement to the Department of Labour and Industry outlining valid reasons, otherwise they were not issued with food relief. (110)

Local police often helped government officials to remove applicants' names from call-up lists who had not responded. Moreover, the Police were in a good position to know any unemployed who might have instigated or been involved in localised unemployed protests. Even in genuine cases of

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108. NSW, Public Works, Special Bundle, "Relief of Unemployment, 1939", RE11384 19/13436.2. "Anti-slave" camp committees held dances to raise funds for the unemployed who did not respond to call-ups. *Unity*, Official Organ of the South Coast District Unemployed and Relief Workers, Vol. 12, No. 2 (29 August 1935).
109. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, (1936), *op. cit.*, 20.
110. NSW, CSIL, A33/7065 5/9109.

hardship some police misunderstood their discretionary power and refused to allow unemployed men to work on relief works. In such instances political representation was necessary so that the officers could be advised of the correct policies. (111)

Table 6.6: Expenditure on Afforestation, 1932-1936 (112)

Financial Year	**Amount (£)**
1932-33	27,500
1933-34	225,000
1934-35	100,000
1935-36	226,000

The State responded to relief workers' complaints in several ways. Committees with representatives of workers and supervisors were set up in some areas. In other instances the State ignored complaints and labelled relief workers as lazy and militant. (113) Yet, apart from localised and at times spontaneous strikes there was no co-ordinated campaign to overturn the conditions imposed by the Stevens Government in respect to the ERWS, including afforestation camps. Government agents strictly applied the rules of the ERWS. In one instance a 20 year old son of a sick relief worker was refused the opportunity to work for his father and his family at West Wyalong. (114)

On occasions unemployed workers obtained employment on government jobs outside the ERWS. At Mittagong the Shire

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111. *ibid.*, A34/6974 5/9282.
112. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report, 1935-1936* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1936), 5.
113. NSW, CSIL, A36/883 12/7531.
114. *ibid.*, A35/6332 12/7518.

Council requested the government to exclude from PIR earnings received by men who worked one week in three or four on the construction of a road. (115) However, the ERWS remained the major unemployment relief policy. [116] At June 1935, 41,958 men employed on the ERWS represented nearly 70 per cent of the registered number of unemployed males in NSW. (117)

In sum, the ERWS was a harsh system, that provided limited employment and few skills. It discriminated against women and track travellers.

6.6 Dismantling of the ERWS:

Stevens requested the Minister for Labour, Industry and Public Works, and Local Government to "give very careful consideration" to gradually reducing the ERWS, particularly in districts where a small number of men were employed. (118) Despite a recommendation from the Employment Relief Committee (ERC) for the State to continue funding the ERWS the Stevens Government began transferring men from the ERWS to Ordinary Public Works (OPW) in January 1935. (119)

Inadequate planning preceded this transfer. Stevens ignored the important question of whether OPW could absorb all of the existing relief workers. One government official

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115. NSW, CSIL, A35/7648 12/7520.
116. This was the policy of the Stevens administration
117. NSW, Unemployment Council, *Annual Report, 1934-1935,* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1935), 19.
118. NSW Cabinet Papers "Unemployment Relief Work Scheme", 21 August 1935, 9/3028/1.
119. NSW, CSIL, A35/8649 12/7521. This transfer began initially in 21 Councils.

feared the transfer would lead to an increase in the number of applicants seeking cash charitable assistance. (120)

Cabinet discussed the implications of contracting the ERWS in favour of more full time proposals and decided to refer various alternative suggestions to a Special Committee set up to analyse the ERWS. (121)

Indicative of the dismantling of the ERWS the number of relief workers fell from 64,023 to 52,823 between July and November 1935. (122) Municipal Councils such as Kogarah, Rockdale and Bexley dismissed 2,329, 2,835 and 905 relief workers respectively. (123) Small rural towns were also pressured to discontinue their involvement in the ERWS. With the assistance of local police, the Chief Secretary's Department (CSD) advised Councils that the scheme did not appear to be warranted where small numbers of men were employed. (124) Although Stevens cited improving economic conditions as a factor influencing the gradual winding up of the ERWS, questions about the scheme's benefit also featured prominently:

> In many instances the value received for the money expended under the ERWS left very much to be desired. (125)

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120. *ibid.*, A35/8649 12/7521.
121. NSW Cabinet Papers, "Cabinet Meeting, 1 September 1939", 9/3028.1
122. *The Torch,* Journal of the St. George District Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, Vol.2 No. 35.
123. *loc. cit.*
124. NSW, CSIL, A35/7384 12/7519.
125. *Report of the Department of Works and Local Government, June 1937* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 74.

The Stevens Government also claimed that the continuance of the ERWS would have a detrimental impact on award conditions of employment on local government works, thereby encouraging payment of wages that were far below award rates. (126) This belief represented a sharp contrast from the policy of Bavin and Stevens to ignore award wages and appears to have been an economic excuse for dismantling the ERWS. Stevens also requested his Ministers in 1935 to investigate ways of transferring part of the rising wages bill on the ERWS to shires and municipalities. (127) For example, those municipalities or shires which operated separate schemes for the unemployed were targeted and their ERWS ceased. (128) Berrigan Shire Council claimed that its unemployment relief scheme was paid out of Council funds and not financed by the Special Wages tax. (129)

In mid 1936 Stevens disbanded the Unemployment Relief Council (URC). The URC's work had considerably decreased because of the completion of expenditures previously authorised, the improving economic conditions and the transfer of surplus funds to individual government departments. (130) This decision paralleled Stevens belief that intermittent employment on the ERWS should be

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126. *loc. cit.*
127. *loc. cit.*,
128. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, "Miscellaneous File, Relief Workers at Berrigen; Suggested Employment of returned soldiers track travellers, 1935", 2/5808.92.
129. *loc. cit.*
130. NSW, Unemployment Relief Council, *Annual Report 1935-1936*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1936), 4.

substituted by full time employment with appropriate adherence to wages and conditions as laid down by industrial awards. (131) To facilitate the dismantling of the ERWS Stevens transferred administrative responsibility from the Department of Labour and Industry to the Department of Works and Local Government.

Throughout 1936 positions on the ERWS continued to be converted into full time ordinary public works under award rates and conditions so that by the end of 1936 more than 70 municipalities and shires had discontinued their participation in ERWS. (132) However, the Government's confident predictions that the whole of the eligible unemployed would be absorbed into ordinary public works did not eventuate. At Moss Vale in the NSW Southern Highlands, the Public Works Department was unable to absorb all of the unemployed and succeeded in prompting the Government to re-introduce the ERWS. (133) In areas where OPW were not offered, the unemployed faced a delay in being approved for food relief. There was insufficient planning of the transfer of workers from the ERWS to OPW. The Director of Government Relief repeatedly warned that the downscaling of the ERWS would lead to a sharp increase in food relief recipients. One survey in metropolitan Sydney found that 79 per cent of ex-relief workers had moved directly on to the dole. (134). At

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131. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 24.
132. NSW, CSIL, A37/3233 12/7549.
133. NSW, CSIL, A37/2057 12/7548.
134. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937). *op.*

Cessnock 140 men a day joined the dole ranks in April 1936. (135)

Apart from a large number of relief workers being unable to find employment on OPW, others were refused the dole by police officers. (136) Many municipal and shire councils expressed the view that Stevens had shifted responsibility for relieving the unemployed onto them. A call-up of ex-relief workers by 32 municipal councils in September and October 1936 resulted in 28 per cent (1,546 men) failing to respond, indicative of a feeling that relief work would not be forthcoming. (137) By August 1937, 391 men remained employed on the ERWS in the metropolitan area. By mid-1938 only 2,500 men in Newcastle, Maitland and Wollongong were employed under the ERWS. (138) In 1939 the Government disqualified men from receiving work if they had been employed under the scheme within the previous 12 months. (139)

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cit., 35.
135. NSW, CSIL, A36/3024 12/7535.
136. *ibid.*, A37/2057 12/7548.
137. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 35.
138. NSW, CSIL, A37/1485 12/7547.
139. A.G. Colley, "New South Wales Unemployment Statistics", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No. 1 (March 1939), 95.

6.7 Rationed Relief Works:

Rationed work was a prominent feature of the NSW economy during the 1930s. Although the Stevens Government did not formally designate public works as rationed relief works (RRW) until 1936, rationing was the underlying basis of OPW and the ERWS, as evidenced by the limited amount of work which the unemployed received. Forster's conclusion that "..work rationing...was probably falling substantially by 1933" is not supported by the evidence from either the private or public sectors in NSW. (140)

On 1 September 1936 the Main Roads Department introduced a scheme to employ 2,200 single men who although working on the ERWS in the northern coalfields districts had received little training in any trade. The Stevens administration sponsored their employment on RRW because it feared the difficulty of transferring them directly from casual relief work to regular employment. (141) The men who had previously earned 15s a day on the ERWS, now worked 4 hours a day, six days a week and earned £2 1s. (142) Under this scheme the NSW Government paid the wages and the Department of Main Roads funded the cost of plant, materials, stores and haulage and supervision. (143).

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140. C. Forster, "Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s" in R.G. Gregory, N.G. Butlin (eds), *op. cit.*, 12.
141. *Main Roads*, "Work for Unemployed Single Men", Vol. 8, No. 3 (May 1937), 116.
142. *loc. cit.*,
143. *loc. cit.*,

Other former relief workers gained partial employment on RRW but many were forced back on to the dole.

Table 6.7: Men employed on various relief works, 1934-1938

(144)

Year	**ERWS**	**RRW**	**FR**	**TOTAL**
1934	63,016	so	28,979	91,995
1935	41,958	so	25,458	67,416
1936	46,561	so	24,947	71,508
1937	10,562	so	30,135	40,697
1938	2,514	14,134	33,694	50,342

Abbreviations:
ERWS: Emergency Relief Works Scheme
RRW: Rationed Relief Works
FR: Food Relief Recipients
so: Scheme not in operation

Table 6.7 illustrates the rise in food relief recipients in the second half of the 1930s. Between 1936 and 1937 the number of men employed under the ERWS fell from 46,561 to 10,562. (145) Men employed on RRW received paid full pay for working a 44 hour week but they did not receive award conditions. (146) "Key men" were engaged on a regular basis, being timekeepers and gangers, but the majority were employed as labourers on a rationed basis, according to the supply of labour. Single men worked two weeks in eight, married men with up to five dependants worked two weeks in four, married men with six of seven dependants worked six weeks in ten and

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144. NSW, CSIL, A37/1485 12/7547.
145. *Report of the Department of Works and Local Government for the year ended 30 June 1938* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938), 73-74.
146 NSW, Public Works Department, *op. cit.*, RE39/11509 19/13436.2.

men with more than seven dependants worked eight weeks in 10. (147) Other government instrumentalities also introduced RRW. (148)

The Government provided free daily transport to camps close to towns. Workers on outlying camps received free transport at the end of each rationed period. (149) The focus of RRW was on district works - such as highway construction, tourist roads, harbour works and forestry - which could benefit the community at large. (150) Rising unemployment and the lower cost of employing men on RRW led to the enlargement of camps for relief workers. An analysis of the cost of providing unemployed single men with the dole or RRW found there to be considerable savings and economic benefits if the Stevens Government extended relief works. To employ 2,400 married men on RRW in the metropolitan area cost £276,000, whereas the dole for the same number over the same period cost £338,400. (151) Moreover, the savings to the Government would increase depending on the number of men who refused the call-up. (152) Stevens extended RRW in metropolitan and rural areas in 1938 and 1939. In 1940 part time relief work was

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147. *Report of the Department of Works and Local Government for the year ended 30 June 1938* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938), 73-74.
148. NSW, CSIL, A34/6804 5/9282.
149. NSW, Public Works Department, *op. cit.*, RE39/11509 19/13436.2.
150. *Report of the Department of Works and Local Government for the year ended 30 June 1937* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1937), 75.
151. NSW, Public Works Department, *op. cit.*, RE39/11509 19/13436.2.
152. *loc. cit.*

gradually reduced and it ceased in March 1942.

6.8 Discrimination in employment:

The ERWS contained no provision for the employment of females. This was because the State considered women unable to carry out the heavy work and because of contemporary attitudes about working women. Yet, employed men and women contributed to the unemployed through payments to the various Unemployment Relief Taxes. During the 1930s some women were fortunate to obtain seasonal work in country areas or occasional casual employment in the city. (153) But the majority, including single parents, were excluded from public works - OPW, ERWS and RRW - under the Stevens Government.

Aborigines and travellers fared slightly better. The glimmer of employment attracted travellers to country districts. (154) Upon arrival travellers often experienced discrimination and were not employed without the approval of the SLE. (155) Local agents or police often restricted employment to locals and the impact of internal migration led to restrictions on who could qualify for relief.

At Nowra and Kiama on the NSW south coast the fear of "a

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153. J. Mackinolty, *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981), 104.
154. NSW, CSIL, A37/688 12/7545.
155. W.H. MacKenzie, M. Hyde, *The New Permissible Income Regulations commonly known as "PIR" mean for its victms, RIP, Stop this Starvation* (Sydney, State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, 19--); NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, Emergency Relief Works Scheme, *op. cit.*, 3.

large influx of persons from other parts of the State due to the commencement of work by the Main Roads Board.." led to a three months residential qualification being introduced. (156) At Braidwood the Shire Council reversed an earlier decision and prohibited travellers from participating in the ERWS because such participation tended to attract large numbers of "undesirable people." (157) At Manila, the Council decided that travellers would not be employed. (158)

On occasions single men were initially excluded from the ERWS and encouraged to gain employment on farms in rural areas. They were also eligible for call-up to work on Afforestation Camps. (159)

When some Aborigines applied to be employed on the ERWS, considerable debate arose between government officials. In October 1933 the Manager of the SLE ruled that Aborigines could be employed on the ERWS because they were required, where possible, to perform duties in return for the assistance provided to them. (160) The Police were unhappy with this ruling because they did not want Aborigines to leave Aboriginal Protection Reserves (APR). Sergeant Clarke of Condoboblin reported to his superiors that while he "was satisfied that the natives work well... they are spending their earnings either in hotels or purchasing unnecessary

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156. NSW, CSIL, A33/8246 5/9116.
157. *ibid.*, A37/2057 12/7548.
158. *ibid.*, A34/6975 5/9282.
159. *ibid.*, A35/6185 12/7518.
160. *ibid.*, A36/2527 12/7534.

items..." (161) Managers remained deeply concerned that Aborigines' earned an income. (162) One non-Aboriginal manager at an Aboriginal Station complained that the system allowed Aborigines to travel the countryside and obtain track rations up to three or four times a week, without undertaking any work in return. (163)

Individuals who regularly frequented hotels or held positions in unemployed and relief worker associations experienced difficulties maintaining their names on call-up lists. One applicant was refused work because he could be seen almost daily at hotels "where he apparently spends all, or most of his earnings." (164)

The ERWS provided positive discrimination to locals and returned soldiers. In country districts local residents received preference in employment. In a celebrated case, the Unemployment Relief Council refused to pay for the "repair of existing shops and the construction of new shops" after it discovered that few, if any, of the men employed on the ERWS were locals. (165) Preferential employment to Returned Soldiers and Sailors (166) discriminated against other applicants and created a large degree of resentment amongst locals. (167) At Gulgong in the State's north-west, such favouritism drew the ire of the trade union movement.

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161. *loc. cit.*,
162. *ibid.*, A37/375 12/7545.
163. *ibid.*, A38/3328 12/7566.
164. *ibid.*, A33/8736 5/9117.
165. *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, 5th Session, (1934-35).
166. NSW, CSIL, A37/2801 9/2420.
167. *ibid.*, A37/688 12/7545.

Returned soldiers received two shifts of work, while other workers received one. (168) The opportunity for extra relief work often drew howls of protest when gangs of returned soldiers received the majority of work. (169) The Federal Government also provided assistance to returned soldiers, including a Works and Service Grant for the purpose of alleviating distress during Christmas in 1934. (170) By late 1936 the NSW SLE had advised police that employment on the ERWS was only to be given to Returned Soldiers and Sailors. (171)

6.9 Criticisms of relief works:

At the heart of the trade union movement's concern about the ERWS and RRW was the philosophical problem of working for the dole and the abolition of the basic wage. (172) Because Stevens exempted relief works from industrial awards, wages were paid on an hourly basis at the rate of the current living wage set down by the Industrial Commission. The Stevens Government was accused of retrenching thousands of public servants to finance the ERWS. Contemporaries also protested about the tens of thousands of workers who were

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168. *The Courier*, Journal of the Western Districts Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, Vol. 1 No. 3 (21 November 1935).
169. *Courier*, Journal of the Mount Kembla Relief Workers (6 July 1934) N57/2006.
170. NSW, CSIL, A34/10502 9/9289.
171. NSW, CSIL, A37/2873 9/2420.
172. Australian Labor Party, *op. cit.*, 188.

rationed or sacked to make way for the introduction of lower relief work rates of pay into government and semi-government work. (173) A promise by Stevens "that no permanent hands would be dismissed or rationed to permit relief workers being employed," was rejected outright by several organisations including the State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council. (174)

In an address to delegates at the fifth Australasian Triennial Congress of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP), Fr. Eris O'Brien, a prominent Catholic priest, accused the Stevens Government of meeting its financial obligations:

> ...largely at the cost of placing men at half-time work on half-time wages... [it is] so often applauded, that unemployment has been considerably lessened in NSW, and the expenditure on government relief simultaneously reduced.
>
> Any State may easily pay its way by such financial conjuring, in which skill in ruthless mathematical calculation is required more than a sense and appreciation of justice. (175)

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173. W.H. MacKenzie, M. Hyde, *The Premier's Plan in Action, Relief Works into industry, smashing of award wages and conditions* (Sydney, State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, 1931), 9.
174. *loc. cit.*,
175. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Centenary Celebrations: Fifth Australasian Triennial Congress, 1933, Sydney* (Sydney, The Superior Council of Australasia, 1933), 11. Fr. O'Brien was later to become an Archbishop.

Through the URT the Stevens Government obtained a large amount of income to spend on public works. It chose not to spend a good portion of it. Stevens also saved money by reducing the number of food relief recipients (FRR). Some contemporaries have argued that insufficient money was spent on the ERWS. (176) In 1932-33 for example, £5.8m nationally was spent on public works whereas £100m would have been necessary to provide full time work for Australia's unemployed. A contrary view is that no government was able to devote scarce resources to unproductive forms of relief, such as sustenance payments for which useful work was not required. (177)

The rationing of work was a source of complaint of the unemployed and labour movement. Stevens claimed that conditions of the unemployed improved under the ERWS but organisations representing relief workers accused the Government of deliberately faking or cooking the figures. (178) On the other hand employment gave some men a feeling of self-worth and independence because they earned money in preference to receiving the dole. In some country areas dispute committees were set up to hear relief workers' grievances with their supervisors, ie. engineers or gangers. (179) A major limitation of the ERWS was that it employed men

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176. For example, Labor Council of NSW, Unemployed and Relief Workers Department, *Annual Report, 1939*, 4.
177. G.D. Snooks, *op. cit.*, 329.
178. *The Dawn*, N57/2008.
179. *Courier* Western Districts. 5/12/35 N57/2007.

irrespective of their skills and training. (180)

Issuing officers were instructed to be most sympathetic to destitute cases. (181) Only in exceptional cases did police or issuing officers waive the PIR. (182)

6.10 Public Works as a relief measure:

Public works were the favoured unemployment relief policy of non-Labor Governments. Stevens set out to eliminate the dole by providing limited employment to unemployed men. Within months of establishing the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) 22,365 men were on rationed employment. This figure rose to 40,000 by December 1933 and peaked at 72,373 in 1935. (183) While the ERWS may have been an anti-depression policy, it was a policy interlinked with food relief. The merit of the ERWS as an unemployment relief policy has received insufficient attention by historians.

The effectiveness of public works programs needs to be evaluated in the context of other Government policies, especially fiscal policy. There was little sense establishing or extending a public works program if at the same time ordinary government expenditures were sharply reduced. Public

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180. P. Geeves, *Rockdale: its beginning and development* (Sydney, Halstead Press, 1954), 176.
181. NSW, CSIL, A33/7745 5/9112.
182. Individual officers did waive the PIR in some cases involving returned soldiers.
183. *New South Wales Official Year Book, 1940-1941* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 558. NSW, Department of Labour and Industry, (1937), *op. cit.*, 22.

works could only be effective as an instrument for economic stabilisation if other parts of fiscal policy were in tandem. (184) In the context of NSW, Snooks has argued that employment on the ERWS was achieved by a corresponding reduction in those employed on ordinary relief works. (185) Because the ERWS was a substitute for OPW, the result was that this unemployment relief policy led to an increase in unemployment and a decrease in the number of full-time positions in the public sector. In concluding that the ERWS prevented starvation, Snooks also adds that it did not significantly reduce unemployment.

> The only way in which unemployment relief expenditure could have aided recovery was if full time public works had been maintained at existing levels when the relief schemes were initiated. (186)

This thesis agrees with Snooks' proposition. The Stevens administration did create many public sector jobs, yet it undermined this action by abolishing many full time positions in the public sector, thereby creating extra finances to employ men on the ERWS.

McCarthy put forward the view that the ERWS was not a deliberate government policy to depress wages (187) In

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184. J. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, 45.
185. G.D. Snooks, *op. cit.*, 330.
186. *ibid.*, 334.
187. J. McCarthy "After Lang: 1932-1935", in H. Radi, P. Spearritt (eds), *Jack Lang*, (Sydney, Hale and

contrast Lang believed that under award payments to emergency relief workers retarded economic activity. During the 1935 election campaign Lang advocated a policy of full-time work or full sustenance for the unemployed and the payment of full award rates and conditions for all ERW. (188) One contemporary commentator remarked that "the main consideration in relief measures has been, not the standard of living of the unemployed, but the minimising of expenditure on relief." (189) The effectiveness of the public works programs was largely influenced by the kind of employment, not merely the quantity of people employed. (190)

The Commonwealth and State's policy of spending freely on ordinary public works during the '20s, and severely economising during the '30s, intensified rather than relieved the problem of unemployment. (191) Responsibility for financing unemployment programs was primarily a responsibility for the NSW Government.

A range of public works programs provided rationed or limited employment to men during the 1930s. They received some monetary reward but few skills. The focus of public works changed from the 1920s to the 1930s. Income from the URT funded public works, but because Stevens did not fully expend all of this income, a complete cost-benefit analysis of public works as an unemployment relief policy cannot be

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Ironmonger, circa 1985), 182.
188. D. Clarke, *op. cit.*, 182.
189. A.G. Colley, *op. cit.*, 94.
190. J. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, 46.
191. Bank of NSW, *Circular*, Vol V11, No. 1 (12 April 1937).

calculated. Once mass unemployment was entrenched in NSW in the 1930s public works became the second of two important policies to relieve the unemployed.

As with the operation of the food relief system, the role of the police was crucial in determining the eligibility of applicants for public works and afforestation camps. Moreover, and in other ways, the police exercised a considerable degree of power over access to relief, and often disqualified applicants without cause.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NON-GOVERNMENT RELIEF TO THE UNEMPLOYED

7.1 Meeting the shortfall:

Chapters Five and Six outlined the inadequate and grudging nature of State aid, the dole and relief works, during the Stevens' administration. In the absence of national insurance or comprehensive State aid the unemployed turned to other sources to meet their basic requirements of clothing, food and shelter. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the alternative sources - charities, trade unions and left wing political groups - from which the unemployed could receive material relief and moral support. It will pay particular attention to the humanitarian role of Christian-based charities and local benevolent organisations that represented a lifeline to large numbers of unemployed workers and their families in cities, rural areas and on the track. Trade unions, by contrast, did not provide large quantities of aid, and left wing political groups focused on lobbying and agitating to improve the lot of the unemployed.

Private charities focused on providing material relief. An underlying theme of this chapter is that charities such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP) were driven by an unstinting commitment to help people in need, irrespective of their religious affiliation, and that the notion of the unemployed being asked or expected to reciprocate, such as by attending religious activities, rarely occurred and was not the aim of

charitable relief. In this regard, the role played by charities in New South Wales was rather different to that of their Victorian counterparts, as identified by Spenceley. (1)

There was certainly a need for many unemployed in NSW to receive either assistance for the first time, or supplementation. While we do not know how many eligible persons were refused government aid in the 1930s, the weight of anecdotal evidence points to many unemployed and their dependants being very dissatisfied with government relief policies, particularly during the Stevens administration. (2)

Individuals joined local unemployed and relief organisations to gain a better bargaining position with the State. (3) While these organisations had a better chance of obtaining a hearing with local and State government officials, their pleas were often ignored, and they turned to private charitable groups.

7.2 Trade Unions' Unemployment Relief Funds:

As outlined earlier in this thesis rising unemployment in the 1920s prompted several trade unions to set up unemployment

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1. Spenceley argued that charities in Melbourne during the Great Depression had the duals aims of relief of distress and preservation of the social order and to this extent could be regarded as agents of "social control". G.R.F. Spenceley, "Social Control, The Charity Organisation Society and the Evolution of Unemployment Relief Policy in Melbourne during the Depression of the 1930s," *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, 1986.
2. This is apparent from the large number of people who having been refused state aid wrote to New South Wales, Chief Secretary: See NSW, Chief Secretary's Main Series of Inward Letters (CSIL) at the City and Kingswood Offices of the Archives Office of New South Wales.
3. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Report of Annual Conference*, June 1936 (Sydney, 1936).

relief funds for their members. However, rising unemployment in the 1920s did not result in any effective or comprehensive response by the union movement. As such, mass unemployment in the 1930s caught the trade union movement off guard. As a token measure the NSW Trades and Labor Council (TLC) urged unions to set aside a room for the unemployed in 1929. (4) The internal Labor politics of the period, especially the split between Jack Lang's Labor and the Scullin Federal Labor Party dominated discussion at the TLC. Unemployment was a low priority. Only after unemployment had eased from its peak did the TLC establish an Unemployed and Relief Workers' Department in 1935. Overall the official union movement responded slowly to mass unemployment and provided a small amount of relief to unemployed members. (5)

Labour historians have largely overlooked the story of trade union unemployment relief funds and the question of whether the union movement should have provided higher levels of financial assistance to unemployed members. (6) Perhaps the devastating effects of the Depression left the union movement with few resources to assist members. But unemployment was not just a phenomena of the 1930s. And labour historians have also

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4. Milk and Ice-Carters and Dairymens Employees Union of NSW, "Minutes, Arbitration and Membership Records', 12/06/29.
5. C.E. Noble, R.W. Cottle, *Case Studies in Australian Economic Policy* (Melbourne, Cheshire, 1971), 213.
6. B. Ellem, *In Women's Hands: A History of the Clothing Trades Unions in Australia* (The Modern History Series, No. 10 (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1989; R.A. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement, 1920-1950* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1981) F. Waters, *Postal Unions and Politics: A History of the Amalgamated Postal Workers Union of Australia* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1978) are examples of detailed histories of individual unions which devote scant attention to this question.

failed to examine why the union movement responded so inadequately to unemployment in the 1920s and mass unemployment in the 1930s. The human dimensions of unemployment are but a footnote in many histories. Instead historiography has focused on political events, such as the dismissal of the Lang Government and the split between Langanites and the Federal Labor Party. (7) All in all, contemporary unions and labour historians have failed to account for the inadequacy of the official labour movement's relief efforts during the Great Depression.

Nevertheless, a small number of unions provided unemployment relief to their members. Some re-introduced unemployment funds, while others started from scratch. For example, the Newcastle Branch of the Boilermakers Union paid out £400 to unemployed members in the first half of 1929. (8) In 1929 580 unemployed members of the Furnishing Trades Society (FTS) received financial assistance. (9) The FTS asked for contributions to a Christmas Unemployment Fund in 1933. (10) The response by the NSW Felt Hatters Union (FHU) was well organised and flexible. In June 1930 the FHU met to discuss ways of establishing an Unemployment Fund (UF) for members. (11) Within weeks a Fund had begun, financed by a £150 loan from the Union's Federal Council and a levy on employed members

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7. G. Freundenberg, *Cause for Power: The Official History of the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Labor Party* (Leichhardt, NSW, Pluto Press, 1991),
8. Boilermakers Society (NSW Branch), *Quarterly Reports*, (July 1929), 88.
9. Furnishing Trades Society of NSW, "Membership Book 1929", T11/5.
10. *ibid.*, "Christmas Unemployment Fund", T11/14.
11. Federated Felt Hatters and Allied Trade Employees Association of Australia (NSW Branch), "Financial, General and Arbitration Records" E127/12/2.

according to a person's salary. (12) Increasing demands on the UF resulted in changes to the levies paid and eligibility for relief. Nevertheless, those members fortunate to obtain casual work could still receive assistance from their union provided their weekly income was less than £2. Reflecting the scarcity of funds and continuing demands for assistance the FHU further amended the rules in 1936, restricting assistance to members of at least one year's standing who had been unemployed for two weeks and who had notified the Union Secretary within three days of ceasing employment. (13) Assistance was provided 11 days after a member ceased employment.

The principle of employed trade union members contributing a portion of their income towards a fund for unemployed members was followed by other unions, including the NSW Branch of the Printing Industry Employees Union (PIEU) and the Furnishing Trades Society of NSW (FTS). As a result of a special levy on employed members, 411 unemployed PIEU members in Sydney received assistance in the second half of 1931. Between 1929 and 1933 PIEU members contributed £3,000 in special unemployment levies, representing three quarters of the value of relief paid to unemployed members. (14) The Sydney Branch of the Baking Trades Employees Federation in Australia (BTEF) raised £64 at Christmas in 1927. In July 1928 the BTEF considered an ongoing Unemployment Relief Fund. (15) However,

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12. This levy was in addition to the tax imposed by the NSW Government.
13. Federated Felt Hatters and Allied Trades Employees Association of Australia (NSW Branch), "Minutes of Monthly General Meeting" 13/10/36.
14. Printing and Industry Employees Union (NSW Branch) T39/83 Union Secretary to Dunningham.
15. *ibid.*, T13/3/2.

it was not until June 1930 that the BTEF introduced a minimum compulsory levy of 3s a month, with some members contributing up to £1. The "constant employed" (16) were asked to help members who had been rationed to one in nine week's work. (17) At least one member voiced opposition to a further burden on workers who were already paying the unemployment relief levy to the NSW Government. (18) As an inducement to contribute members were advised:

> Members employed today may be unemployed tomorrow. Therefore it is essential that such levy should be paid regularly every week, so that **when** you become unemployed you will be eligible to participate in the disbursement of the Fund. (19) [emphasis added]

Further advice read:

> ... if they want to avoid being prosecuted for arrears of subscriptions or [the] unemployment levy, and to avoid legal costs they should send in their remittances without delay.
> (20)

By January 1931 £297 had been collected despite opposition from some members who argued that unemployed and unfinancial

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16. Refers to members in permanent employment.
17. Baking Trades Employees Federation of Australia (NSW Branch), "Minutes of General Meeting", 31 May 1930, T13/2/2.
18. *loc. cit.*
19. Baking Trades Employees Federation of Australia (NSW Branch), *Circular* (September 1930).
20. *ibid.*, 9 October 1930.

members should not vote on a motion which if passed would provide them with financial support. (21) Debate continued for two years until the BTEF received a ruling from the NSW Industrial Registrar that all financial members, regardless of whether they were employed or not, could vote on a motion aimed at rendering assistance to the unemployed. (22) The Federated Coopers of Australia (NSW Branch) also struck a levy in the early 1930s which was in addition to mortality and subscription dues. (23)

These examples highlight the positive and beneficial role that some trade unions played in assisting unemployed members during the 1930s. But they do not typify the 1930s union movement, which like the State and major political parties, was caught unprepared and had no general policies to ease the burden that mass unemployment created.

The payment of levies by employed union members to finance trade union unemployment relief shows the generosity of some sections of the trade union movement. It was significant given that employed workers also made weekly contributions to the State's unemployment relief fund.

7.3 Role of Charitable Organisations:

With the State clearly unable to meet all demands for assistance, many unemployed relied on the services of private charitable organisations in the 1930s to provide sustenance,

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21. *ibid.*, Special Adjourned Meeting, 29/08/31.
22. *ibid.*, 22 June 1933 T13/3/4.
23. Federated Coopers of Australia (NSW Branch), "Minutes, Financial, General and Arbitration Records" E100/12.

shelter and on occasions work. Charitable groups in the 1930s can be classified into two distinct types. Firstly, charities that embodied a strong Christian ethos and which were attached to one of the major Christian denominations. For example, the non-clerical St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP) which was linked to the Catholic Church. The second category comprised local benevolent organisations, often organised around councils and shires, and sometimes called the Lady Mayoress Fund. Many were formed in spontaneous response to the Depression, and as such their size, motives and period of operation varied. Together, these charities and benevolent organisations experienced unprecedented demand during the 1930s and while they were not able to assist everyone, they did provide large quantities of material assistance to the unemployed and thereby met much of the government's shortfall in social services.

Many benevolent organisations were unprepared for mass unemployment. Their unpreparedness led to disagreements as to what form of relief they should provide and to whom. (24) Benevolent organisations tended to respond to the immediate needs of the unemployed and undertook little financial planning for the future. For example, some charities in rural areas, believing that unemployment would quickly dissipate, disbanded after the cold winter of 1930. (25) Public appeals for local benevolent societies often attracted support from the Mayor or Lady Mayoress and business or civic leaders. But the ongoing

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24. For example, the Citizens Relief Committee of Tamworth spent much of its time arguing about proposals for a soup kitchen and a shelter for homeless unemployed men. R. Milliss, *City on the Peel: A history of the Tamworth District, 1818-1976* (Sydney, Reed, 1980), 207.
25. *loc. cit.*, The Tamworth Relief Committee was one example.

crisis and the large number of travellers seeking aid placed heavy burdens on local relief organisations. More systematic methods of financing unemployment relief efforts were needed. For example, the Bathurst Citizens Relief Committee in 1929 collected 1s a week from anyone in permanent employment. (26) The scheme continued until the Bavin Government introduced the Unemployment Relief Tax (URT) in mid 1930.

Soup kitchens were more common in industrial areas, being run by branches of the SVdP and the SA, and some smaller benevolent societies. (27) Members of relief organisations received food on the basis of a numbering system. (28)

Most benevolent societies provided food and clothing, and occasionally money. Some specialised in the needs of their local areas, with care of babies and infants a priority. At Pyrmont, a poor working class suburb on the edge of Sydney, comprised of mainly second generation Australians of Irish heritage, destitute children received a mid-day meal and poor families and unemployed single men were separately housed in small homes. (29) Reflecting the scarcity of money, few charitable groups gave financial aid. With the spread of food relief, some municipal and shire councils set out to collect clothing, particularly for the colder months. (30) Town halls

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26. B. Greaves, *The Story of Bathurst,* Second Edition, (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1964), 139.
27. F.S. Egan, *Society of St. Vincent de Paul: 100 Years*; (Sydney, Society of St. Vincent de Paul NSW Council, 1981), 48; B. Boulton, *Booth's Drum: The Salvation Army in Australia, 1880-1980* (NSW, Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 130.
28. E. Russell, *Drummonye: A Western Suburb's History* (Drummonye, Council of the Municipality of Drummonye, 1971), 179.
29. Board of Social Study and Training in NSW, *Directory of Social Agencies in New South Wales* (Sydney, 1933).
30. R. Milliss, *op. cit.,* 207.

became depots for clothing and other donations. (31) Many restricted assistance to people living within the local municipality. (32)

Ironically, the number and value of grants to smaller benevolent societies declined as the depression worsened. Whereas Benevolent Societies received a total of £4,000 in 1929/30, only £1,500 was allocated in 1932/33. (33). The Pyrmont Food and Relief Fund was refused a grant of £200 in 1933. (34) The Stevens Government continued the philosophy of Bavin whereby charities were required to furnish a list of their clients and addresses before their applications for subsidies could be considered. (35) Responding to criticisms of a tightening in funds, Stevens argued that the decrease to benevolent societies was necessary because the State's expenditure on unemployment relief had increased. (36) The extent of unemployment and high levels of demand placed many benevolent societies in a difficult position. Government assistance was slow and meagre. The Stevens Government's desire to reduce public outlays resulted in many requests being refused. The Mascot Citizens Relief Committee symbolised the difficulties faced by benevolent organisations. By 1933 it could no longer rely on public subscriptions to finance its work, so it petitioned the State Government for a £500 grant.

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31. C. Liston, *Campbelltown: The Bicentennial History* (Council of the City of Campbelltown, Allen and Unwin, 1988), 190.
32. Board of Social Study and Training in NSW, *op. cit.*, 36. For example, the Alexandaria Distress Fund restricted relief to citizens of Alexandaria.
33. NSW, CSIL, A34/7748 5/9286.
34. NSW, Treasury, "Treasury Submissions to Sub-Committee of Cabinet, 1933-1936" 1933/15046 10/39864.
35. For example, the Lismore Ladies Benevolent Society. See NSW, CSIL, A34/9225.
36. *ibid.*, A35/10332 9/2420.

Stevens refused it and many other similar requests. (37) By 1937 Stevens had restricted the number of grants to the following:

Table 7.1 Financial Grants to Benevolent organisations, 1937 (38)

Organisation	**Amount (£)**
Newtown Mayor's Relief Fund	25
North Sydney Citizens Relief Society	25
Botany Relief Society	25
Ashfield Benevolent Society	50
Wollongong Benevolent Society	10
Wagga Wagga Benevolent Society	25
Bathurst Poor Relief Society	45
Grafton Benevolent Society	20
Goulburn Benevolent Society	73
TOTAL	**298**

In response to increasing destitution, Christian denominations opened hostels in Sydney to cater for travellers. But the relentless local demand often outstripped the amount of available accommodation, causing charitable groups to be unable to meet a large number of requests from locals and travellers. (39)

As the economic crisis deepened calls for assistance from Christian charities increased. Charity was very much based at a parish level, sponsored by the minister or priest, yet involving many of the faithful. The hierarchy of the major denominations seemed content for the collection and

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37. *ibid.*, A33/7090 5/9109.
38. *ibid.*, A37/2694 12/7548.
39. S.R. Gray, *Newcastle in the Great Depression*, Newcastle History Monographs, No. 11 (Newcastle, Council of the City of Newcastle, 1989), 60. M. Masson recalls the hostels were overcrowded with people who had never had a chance of regular employment to well educated people who had been dismissed from their jobs. See M. Masson, *Surviving the Dole Years: the 1930s - A Personal Story* (Kensington, University of New South Wales Press, 1993), 133.

distribution of relief to remain at a local level, ie. based around a parish, or organised by larger groups that did not come directly under the hierarchy's mandate. For example, in the Catholic Church, there was no move to set up an official body to co-ordinate unemployment relief because of the existence of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP) in so many parishes.

Indeed, the Catholic Church focused more attention on the likelihood of dissident secular groups attracting men and woman away from the Church. In 1931, for example, the Catholic Bishops of NSW issued a statement on the economic crisis which did not refer to unemployment relief policies but made a blunt warning that the Communist Party of Australia:

> has become more active in these troublesome times. Since its policy is openly atheistic we must issue a definite warning to our Catholic young men against associating with it (40)

With their revenue sharply reduced charities looked to other sources of income. A request from the Salvation Army (SA) for State aid was rejected by Stevens because it might set a precedent and encourage the SVdP. (41) This was yet another example of how Stevens distorted the truth, because the SVdP's philosophy precluded receipt of government money. (42) The

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40. *Joint Pastoral Address of the Catholic Bishops of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1931), 3.
41. NSW, CSIL, A37/3854 12/7549.
42. This policy officially continued until the 1960s, and today there are still some regions of the SdVP which do not accept government funding.

Depression also caused many voluntary members to abandon their benevolent activities and seek charitable aid. The SA was particularly affected with many of its "soldiers" out of work. The working-class dominated SVdP had a similar experience, with perhaps 1,000 NSW members unemployed in the early thirties. (43) To avoid a conflict of interest unemployed SVdP members resigned their membership so that they could be considered for aid. (44) But offsetting this trend was an increase in new members which precipitated a rise in the number of SVdP branches from 200 in 1929 to 247 in 1934. (45) A large drop in revenue reduced the level of assistance provided by the SVdP. Between 1928-29 and 1932-33 the SVdP income fell by £6,000 or 40 per cent. Its provision of services to the unemployed relied on donations to Poor Boxes in Catholic Churches as well as donations of blankets, clothes and boots which were supplied to thousands of unemployed individuals and families. The unemployed were visited in their homes, on park benches and in makeshift camps. The SVdP was a lifeline to thousands of people, particularly in non-metropolitan areas where it was often the only non-government charity. SVdP Branch members were urged to participate in community projects:

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43. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *50th Annual Report Sydney and Suburbs* (Westmead, Sydney, 1930), 5; SVdP, *4th Triennial Congress* (Brisbane, 1930); Society of St. Vincent de Paul, "Hospitals Visitation Committee" *Annual Report*, 1, (Westmead, Sydney, 1930).
44. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *51th Annual Report Sydney and Suburbs, 1931* (Westmead, Sydney, 1931), 4.
45. *ibid.*, 5.

> Every President should see that their Conference is represented by active, prudent and experienced men at all public meetings and on all public committees dealing with the issue of clothing or food for the needy supplied by the State Government.(46)

The SVdPs 247 Branches clothed 48,000 people and supplied 3,570 boots in 1934. (47) Although humility was firmly entrenched in the philosophy and constitution of the SVdP, its journal uncharacteristically proclaimed:

> There are many agencies, government and otherwise for procuring food relief...but none of any real value for those in need of clothing, including boots and blankets... (48)

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46. For clarification, the word Conference refers to a Branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Society of St. Vincent de Paul, *Public Help for Poor People* (Westmead, Sydney, 1935). The reference to male only members reflected the composition of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.
47. SVdP, *54th Annual Report Sydney and Suburbs, 1934* (Westmead, Sydney, 1934).
48. *Monthly,* Journal of the Society of SVdP (November 1935).

Table 7.2 Material Assistance provided by the SVdP (Sydney) 1927-1939 (49)

Year	**Active Members**	**Total Persons Assisted**	**Value of Material Assistance £**
1927	1,648	14,801	14,801
1928	1,982	17,600	17,600
1929	2,003	26,276	26,276
1930	2,089	50,437	24,368
1931	2,332	40,348	17,972
1932	2,212	36,348	15,615
1933	2,516	35,833	14,573
1934	2,355	35,211	13,408
1935	2,450	29,880	15,847
1936	2,514	27,900	15,678
1937	2,476	21,166	15,076
1939	2,319	26,526	17,541

Table 7.2 depicts the high level of demand and assistance provided by SVdP members in the Sydney metropolitan area during the decade of mass unemployment. It shows that in terms of number of people assisted, 1930 was the year when demand was highest. The value of material aid peaked at £26,276 in 1929. By way of comparison with the available statewide statistics, it can be seen that in 1933 the unemployed in Sydney made up about 70 per cent of the total number assisted throughout NSW.

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49. SVdP, *Report of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Australia in the Years 1930, 1933* (Westmead, Sydney) SVdP, *Annual Reports, Sydney and Suburbs, 1927-1939,* (Westmead, Sydney).

Table 7.3 NSW SVdP Activity, 1932-1935 (50)

Year	**Members**	**Persons Relieved**	**Total Expenditure £**
1932	4,094	48,564	19,875
1933	4,430	51,472	18,828
1934	4,280	49,719	18,187
1935	5,055	44,757	22,293

Government attitudes towards private charitable bodies oscillated during the '30s. The Bruce Report concluded that Governments should aim to feed the unemployed, while voluntary organisations were left to see that no one went cold. (51) But the reality was that the State did not allocate sufficient resources to feed the unemployed and it relied on many benevolent organisations to organise soup kitchens, arrange meals and provide shelter for the unemployed.

Non-Labor governments viewed charities as providing a worthwhile service, though care needed to be taken to ensure that the unemployed did not receive too much assistance. Food relief application forms contained questions about the range and value of assistance afforded by charitable organisations.

The Stevens Government's reduction in grants to charitable organisations may have been influenced by several cases of incompetence and corruption. The Secretary of the Punchbowl Unemployed and Relief Workers Club who misappropriated funds,

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50. SVdP, *Reports of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Australia* (Westmead, Sydney, selected reports). For largely financial reasons the SVdPs Superior, ie. National Council, did not publish a Report in 1930 or 1931).
51. Australia, *Preliminary Survey of the Economic Problem*, (Bruce Report, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1932), 19.

was convicted and ordered to repay them. (52) In another case, the Bondi-Waverley Unemployed League was forced to amend its rules to provide relief to all needy persons and not just members. Following investigation, the Chief Secretary's Department reduced the salary of the Secretary of the Broken Hill Benevolent Society from £60 to £26 per annum in 1937. (53) These isolated incidents were seized upon by Stevens and used as an excuse to cut funding.

7.4 Australian Employment Bureau:

Non-government bodies tried to obtain work for the unemployed through employment bureaux. The Central Methodist Mission, Erskineville Church of Christ, Fullerton Memorial Presbyterian Church (Sydney) and the Social Service Committee of the Church of England Men's Committee aided small numbers of unemployed through this process. (54) The success of employment bureaux depended on the enthusiasm of the volunteers who operated them. Because their activities spanned a small area they attracted the attention of employers only in those areas.

The Australian Employment Bureau (AEB) stood out from the rest because its services extended across Sydney and into non-metropolitan areas. This special project of the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVdP) commenced operation because of the Society's deep concerns about the insufficient and inadequate support provided to the unemployed. Rising levels of

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52. NSW, CSIL, B37/3836 12/7536.
53. *ibid.*, B37/3836 12/7536.
54. Board of Social Study and Training in New South Wales, *op. cit.*, 24.

homelessness, irregular employment on public works, the paucity of the dole and strict eligibility rules for State aid had forced many people to live in squalid and inhumane conditions. The SVDP believed the unemployed should receive more assistance and be motivated to find work. Although restricted by low finances - indicative of its efforts to aid the unemployed - the SVdP sought to identify and facilitate employment. In 1934 the SVdP's Sydney President said:

> The matter of unemployment is too big for the Society to undertake [itself]. Rather the Society will attend a joint meeting to co-operate and form a United Council. (55)

This meeting, held on 14 November 1934, included representatives of the Sydney Catholic Club, Southern Cross Unemployment Committee, Hibernian Society and the Catholic Guilds. All groups recognised the obstacle of financing an employment scheme. By August 1935 the SVdP had given up hope that other Catholic bodies, including the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, could help finance a scheme. (56) As the SVdP pondered its next move it discovered that a privately run employment bureau, the Australian Executive Employment Bureau (AEEB), was in financial difficulty. The concept of an employment bureau interested the SVdP and in mid 1935 it purchased the AEEB's assets and goodwill for £50. (57)

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55. SVdP, "Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney", November 1934.
56. SVdP, Particular Council of Sydney, "Minutes" 26 August 1935.
57. *loc. cit.*, The AEB was located at Scot Chambers, Hosking Place, close to Sydney's Central Business District. See

The SVdP changed the name to the Australian Employment Bureau (AEB) and modified it into an innovative central body which accepted applications for employment from men, women and youth and held information about employers and vacancies. Unlike the operations of the government-controlled SLE, the AEB encouraged personal contact with the unemployed and employers. Each SVdP Branch appointed an honorary employment officer whose tasks were to maintain regular contact with local unemployed and register their names, age and skills (where appropriate) with the not-for-profit AEB. Each registration was accompanied by a fee of 2s 6d, paid by the branch. Regular contributions were encouraged from Branches with larger balances. New registrations were marked "active" during the first two months and the branch that sponsored them paid their fares to attend job interviews. (58)

One of the AEB's early difficulties was to gain the trust of the unemployed. While negative attitudes towards the unemployed had largely dissipated by 1935, some unemployed chose to remain anonymous. Through the extensive Catholic parish network and the diligence of employment officers, many unemployed were encouraged to register and were successful in obtaining employment.

In its seven years of operation (1935-1942) the AEB was responsible for finding employment for 5,000 men, women and youth. Of the 2,600 - 3,200 registrations received a year, the AEB placed at least 35 per cent of unemployed in employment.

SVdP, *55th Annual Report of the St. Vincent de Paul Society Sydney and Suburbs*, (Westmead, Sydney, 1935), 9.

58. *ibid.*, 4 November 1935.

(59) The number was probably higher but some SVdP branches failed to communicate results. Upon receiving employment persons were asked to make a small financial donation to the AEB. Some did not advise the AEB while others repaid the SVdP in kind, eg. donations of clothing.

Through the AEB many destitute and unemployed people came in contact with the SVDP branches. The AEB was an innovative and practical organisation and represented a sharp change in traditional charitable aid.

Charities were the main non-government source of relief to the unemployed in the 1930s. Their role was crucial in averting widespread hunger and hardship.

7.5 State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council:

Several factors prompted the formation of groups of unemployed and relief workers during the 1930s. Firstly, there was a general disenchantment with the relatively low level of support provided by the NSW Labor Council which appeared preoccupied by internal disputes such as the control of radio station 2KY. (60) Secondly, there was a realisation that the existing Labor movement, embodied in trade unions, was unable to meet many of the needs of the unemployed. For these reasons many unemployed joined and participated in local unemployed and relief workers groups which were linked to an umbrella

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59. *Monthly*, selected issues; SVdP, Australian Employment Bureau, *Annual Report for 1941* (Sydney, 1941).
60. J. Stone, "Brazen Hussies and God's Police: Feminist Historiography and the Depression", *Hecate*, Vol. V11 no. 1 (1981), 7.

organisation, the State Unemployed and Relief Workers' Council (SURWC).

Because the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) endorsed the SURWC, the State Labor Party and the NSW Trades and Labor Council refused to support the SURWC even though it represented the largest group of unemployed workers for several years. In 1933 the SURWC received support from thousands of unemployed and relief workers - the majority did not become Communists or even sympathise with Communist philosophy - because of its moral support, political representation and leadership.

On a local level the SURWC promoted committees to represent the needs of the unemployed, doleys, relief workers or persons living in unemployed camps. Its close contact with local situations enabled unemployed and relief workers to be assisted in times of strike, victimisation, death or serious cases of hardship. (61) This assistance included material support, though by and large it was restricted to political advocacy and moral support.

The SURWC structure ensured grass roots representation, as shown below:

State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council

District Council

Local Councils

Job Committee

Gang Committee

Dole Workers

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61. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Report of Annual Conference, 27-29 June 1936* (Sydney, 1936), 1-6.

The Job Committee consisted of two delegates from each gang committee. Local Councils had wide ranging membership that included workers, unemployed relief workers and ration bureau committees. The SURWC also tried to block or reduce the number of evictions and published booklets such as *The Workers' Guide to the Courts* (62) which aimed to raise workers' knowledge of the law in relation to evictions, mortgages, hire-purchase agreements and summonses for debt. Each local and district councils had autonomy.

Some local councils grew out of the old Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM), others were initiated by delegates from the State Council, while the remainder - possibly the majority - were organised by rank and file unemployed and relief workers who had heard of similar groups. (63) At its first major conference in mid-1934 there was a high degree of tension between representatives of the Trades and Labor Council (TLC) and leading figures in the SURWC, notably the secretary Tom Payne. (64) The 204 SURWC delegates represented 68,000 unemployed and relief workers at the conference. Their numbers were sufficient to outweigh the disruptive tactics of the TLC which refused to endorse the SURWC. (65)

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62. Another publication by the State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council was *Doles and Dividends: An analysis of the situation of the unemployed and relief workers in New South Wales* (Sydney, Foreward Press Ltd, 1933).
63. N. Wheatley, "NSW Relief Workers Struggles 1933-1936" in J. Roe (ed)., *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives, 1901-1975* (Stanmore, NSW, Cassell, 1976) 195.
64 State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Annual Conference Report, 25-26 August 1934* (Sydney, 1934)
65. *loc. cit.,* In 1936 more than 260 delegates attended the SURWC Conference. See SUWRC, *Report of the Annual Conference, June 1936. op. cit.,* 2-5.

By December 1935 grass roots support from trade union members, relief workers and the unemployed had forced the TLC to recognise the SURWC as the official organisation representing unemployed and relief workers. Local unemployed groups published more than 30 newspapers and journals in the mid 1930s. (66) These publications afforded a medium through which the unemployed and their associations could communicate their experiences, grievances and demands. In a sense these newspapers acted as a mechanism by which anger and frustration could be vent without resorting to physical action. These developments signified both the prolonged nature of the depression and the ability of the unemployed to organise themselves into self-supporting local units.

The SURWC did not directly provide material assistance to the army of unemployed. But it did put up a very good defence of the rights of unemployed and rationed workers. Without this advocacy the lives of many unemployed during the depression decade may have been harder.

7.6 Unemployed Workers Movement:

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) worked through organisations such as the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM) in an effort to bring about a united front of workers. During the depression decade their efforts were focused on securing

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66. The publications (see Section 1.9 of the Bibliography) varied in size and included quarto,tabloid and broadsheet. Surviving issues of many of these publications are held at the Noel Butlin Archives at the Australian National University. A smaller number is held at Sydney's Mitchell Library.

improved conditions for the unemployed and relief workers. The UWM began in Melbourne in 1930 but its most rapid growth was in NSW where membership quickly rose to 35,000 members by June 1931. (67) At its height in 1934 it claimed a membership in NSW of 68,000 members. (68) It was also claimed that the UWM had 150,000 members in NSW and Victoria who formed part of the Militant Minority Movement. (69) Both figures may have been correct but judging by the CPA official membership figures at the time, it is unlikely that many UWM members were Communists. More importantly, many unemployed were sympathetic to the UWM because of frustration with the inadequate response by trade unions and the ALP. The UWM mounted a relentless campaign against evictions of unemployed and destitute families in 1931. It offered physical resistance to evictions and the seizure of furniture for unpaid debts in many areas. In Sydney suburbs such as Newtown, Leichhardt and Bankstown the UWM fought bloody battles with the police during the term of the Lang Government. (70) On "Bloody Friday", 19 June 1931, at least 27 people were badly injured and one or two fatally at Union Street, Newtown

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67. A. Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: a short history* (Stanford, California, Hoover Institution Press, 1969), 60; R. Dixon, "The Australian Labor Movement" *The Labour Review,* Vol. 1, No. 14 (October 1933), 16.
68. A. Davidson, *op. cit.,* 60.
69. Red International of Labor Unions - Australian Section - Minority Movement, *What is the Minority Movement?* (Sydney, Wright and Baker, 1931), 13.
70. R. Dixon, *op. cit., 13.* Unemployed Workers Movement, *Bloody Friday in Newtown* (Sydney, 1931). For a more recent account of the 1931 battles between unemployed tenants and the police see N. Wheatley, "Meeting them at the door; radicalism, militancy and the Sydney anti-eviction campaign of 1931" in J. Roe (ed)., *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in urban and social history* (Sydney, Hale and Ironmonger, 1980)

after UWM members clashed with police. (71) Such incidents served to confirm in the minds of already disillusioned unionists that the Lang Government had deserted them. Leaders of the UWM and CPA took heart from such incidents and accused reformist unions of being "social fascists" because of their dictatorial approach to labour issues.

In agitating for an improvement in the conditions of the unemployed, the UWM urged the government to increase the amount of unemployment relief and relax the rules governing eligibility. Both employed and unemployed workers were attracted to the UWM because they were often unable to take industrial action in the face of hostile governments, especially the Stevens Government. (72) Dixon, a leading contemporary commentator on the UWM claimed it was the only genuine fighting organisation of the unemployed. (73)

Membership of the CPA was not a precondition for UWM involvement, despite the support which the CPA gave to the activities of the UWM. One contemporary communist gave credit to the CPA for inspiring and bringing about the formation of the UWM. (74)

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71. A. Sharpe, *Nostalgic Australia: 1920s and 1930s* (Newport Beach, NSW, Dominion, 1985), 134.
72. I. Turner, *In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia, 1788-1988* (West Melbourne, Nelson, 1978), 87.
73. R. Dixon, "The Australian Labor movement - the socialisation movement", *The Labour Review*, Vol.2 No. 1 (February 1934).
74. *ibid.*, 16. There are differing opinions as to the extent to which the UWM mirrored the ideology of the CPA. W.J.Brown, *What happened to the Communist Party of Australia? Policies of the CPA leadership on trial* (Sydney, A. Grant, 1971) argued the UWM and other movements which flourished during the thirties were "much more than simply the CPA under a different name." In doing so he rejected the view of A. Davidson *op. cit.*, that the UWM shielded the CPA during the Great Depression.

Mass unemployment also prompted the formation of militant women's groups. Inspired by the CPA, 42 women met for the first conference of Unemployed Women in April 1931. It resolved that the State provide hostels for unemployed women, milk, free lunches and clothing for the unemployed and their children. (75) Comrade Mrs Burns in addressing the 1934 Conference of the SURWC urged women to boycott sewing circles in metropolitan areas in favour of receiving donations of material, making clothes and distributing them amongst the needy. (76) She aimed to draw women away from private charitable organisations because of Communist ideology that regarded any form of private charity as enabling governments to shirk their responsibilities. (77) At the 1936 Annual Conference of the SURWC a Woman's Bureau representative was elected.

The thirties was also a period of considerable upheaval for the NSW ALP. Apart from the split between Lang and Scullin, there was considerable internal upheaval such as the dispute over control of the ALP's publication *Labor Daily* and radio station 2KY. Much of this friction caused left wing unions and the UWM to demand a more radical response to the plight of the unemployed. In November 1932 the ALP held a special conference on unemployment. The most important resolution was the formation of local and district committees and a central council of Unemployed Labor Workers. (78) There is little

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75. J. Stevens, *Taking the Women Home: Work among women in the Communist Party of Australia* (Fitzroy, Sybylla Co-operative Press and Publications, 1987), 36.
76. State Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, (1934) *op. cit.*, 5.
77. *loc. cit.*,
78. Australian Labor Party (NSW), *Report of Unemployment Conference held at Trades Hall* (Sydney, November 1932).

evidence that this officially sanctioned movement got off the ground, because the CPA backed SURWC to a certain degree resembled the official Labor movement's resolution.

7.7 Militant Minority Movement of Australia:

In 1924 the CPA organised a conference of disaffected ALP members and unionists with the aim of setting up a "Left Wing Movement" to oppose reformist unionists. A lack of resources tempered initial enthusiasm. (79) A second attempt which placed more emphasis on achieving change through shop committees and the rank and file was successful in bringing about the Communist-inspired Militant Minority Movement (MMM). Its early priorities were to establish an independent organisation whose strong leadership could stand up against wage-cuts, longer working hours and unemployment. (80) It targeted disaffected and militant trade union members, who were almost exclusively from the rank and file. The MMM also opposed the capitalist offensive and the inept response by the ALP and Trade Unions to the growing problems of the unemployed. In 1927 the CPA merged the Trade Union Educational Leagues with the MMM. The Educational Leagues had unsuccessfully tried to educate workers on the concept of class struggle. (81) In addition, the MMM considered the Lang and Scullin Governments as "social fascists." (82)

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79. T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (Sydney, Stained Wattle, 1985), 42.
80. Red International of Labor Unions, *op. cit.*, 3.
81. A. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 37.
82. ibid., 7.

By 1928 the MMM was well established and played a strong and effective role in a number of unions, including the Miners' Federation. It was influential in Queensland, particularly around the waterside fronts of Brisbane. (83)

The MMM played an important role in the NSW coal lock-out of 1929. In 1930 the CPA encouraged the MMM to spread Communist ideas amongst workers. (84) In 1931 a revamped rank and file movement known as the Minority Movement (MM), attached to the Red International Labour Unions was launched. The MM organised workers on relief projects and won major rises for them. It also took control of the Pastoral Workers' Union, a small breakaway from the Australian Workers Union. (85) In the depths of the depression the MM's main success was to mobilise a large number of employed workers on the northern coalfields into action on behalf of the unemployed. This united front was against the "starvation" government of Stevens. (86) The MM success after 1933 was largely due to its new policy of united front action which avoided directly attacking moderate and reformist trade union leaders. (87) By the time of its second statewide conference in 1933, MM candidates had increased votes in several union ballots such as the Tramways Unions.

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83. In Brisbane the MMM published the *Militant Worker*.
84. There is debate about the extent to which the MMM was a communist controlled body. W.J. Brown *op. cit.*, believes that the composition of MMM members, including Communists, Labor Party members and non-party militants gave it a broad representation. *Workers Weekly* expressed another view: The influx of new members by way of the MMM will depend on the control and influence of the (Communist) Party gained through the exercise of correct leadership.
85. T. O'Lincoln, *op. cit.*, 44.
86. Minority Movement "NSW State Conference, April 1933".
87. A. Davidson, *op. cit.*, 58. The MM was also strong in Victoria and its first national conference was held in Ballarat in 1933.

MM members won union posts at a local level and the following year at a state level. (88) Its base support lay in NSW, particularly in the industrial cities of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. The MM was disbanded in the mid-1930s and replaced by communist "fractions" in the trade unions and Workers Defence Corps (WDC). Their role of WDC's was to protect picket lines, workers' demonstrations and any occasion where governments attempted to break-up organised responses to rising unemployment. (89) At Broken Hill *The Unemployed Militant* urged the unemployed to join the WDC and to stand up to the police who had dispersed demonstrators. (90)

Another group seeking radical change during the thirties was the Industrial Socialisation Movement (ISM). This group was not another political party. It aimed to work through the labour movement, noting that all authority rested with the rank and file. (91)

The deteriorating economic situation and industrial unrest on the northern coalfields encouraged the growth of left wing and militant ideologies. In the early days of the depression the CPA attempted to infiltrate the existing trade union movement via a number of groups, including the United front Committee, UWM and MMM.

During the lockout on the Northern Coalfield in 1931 the Workers International Relief claimed to have fed 2,500 school children for several months. (92)

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88. W.J.Brown, *op. cit.*, 65.
89. Red International of Labor Unions, *op. cit.*, 14.
90. *The Unemployed Militant*, Vol. 1 No. 14, (1931).
91. International Socialist Movement (ISM) part of Barker papers, MLNSW 739/30-31.
92. Workers International Revolution, "Appeal 1931". MLNSW.

In summary, left wing groups provided strong political and moral support to the mass unemployed. They provided little direct or on-going material aid, but their pressure and determination forced the Stevens Government to meet a number of pressing demands.

7.8 Conclusions:

This chapter has highlighted the important role of private charities in dispensing food, clothing and basic supplies to the unemployed during the 1930s. The fact that they did so without any expectation of reciprocity by the recipients places their actions in contrast to those of charitable bodies in Victoria at the same time. For this reason, it seems unlikely that the New South Wales charities were acting in a way which could be seen to be conforming to the model of "social control" put forward for Victoria by Spenceley. New South Wales charities, even those attached to major churches, operated under a decentralised system. There is clear evidence that they operated in isolation and did not co-ordinate their relief efforts. This gave charities a considerable degree of freedom, and made it possible for the state government to control who received non-government aid, in what quantities and how often. It is probable that the degree of autonomy exercised by the New South Wales charities was an important factor in the less "politicised" role which they played in that State compared to Victoria.

Of course, one disadvantage of the unco-ordinated and unstructured nature of private charitable groups in NSW was that it may have led to higher levels of fraud as individuals moved from one charity to the next. Informal networking did exist, but their was no official system to check on repeat applicants. It is thus not surprising that a number of benevolent groups imposed residential restrictions on who could obtain relief. Moreover, fraud made it difficult for charitable groups to meet requests from legitimate applicants.

In the case of the largest provider of non-government charitable relief - St. Vincent de Paul Society - relief was organised at a parish level and by virtue of its constitution - *The Rule* - branch members, rather than clerics or the hierarchy - made the all important decisions about the provision of unemployment relief.

Charities tied to fill the gap left by the inadequacy of State provision of unemployment relief, but they had insufficient resources to meet every need. Nevertheless, the efforts of charities did ease the burden of mass unemployment to some extent. Moreover, they moved beyond their traditional roles by setting up employment bureaux. The largest and most significant bureau was the Australian Employment Bureau which operated throughout Sydney and in some rural areas.

The available evidence indicated that charities such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society in NSW did not try to win over "new recruits" through their relief activities, in contrast to the Victorian charities. Nor were they as closely associated with the aims and policies of the State government. Why there were these differences between Australia's two major cities is

not completely certain, and a comparative analysis falls outside the scope of this thesis. But it would seem that a fruitful field for further research might be based on a comparison of the membership composition and links to the prevailing class structures of the major charities in the two states.

Rarely did Christian charities enter into political arguments of the day about the paucity of the State's unemployment relief policies. Advocacy for improved unemployment relief and better conditions for relief workers was taken up by militant groups, often linked or sympathetic to the cause of the Communist Party of Australia. Despite the overwhelming nature of unemployment and the pre-conditions for a change in the democratic system of government, there was no systematic attempt by left wing groups and/or the CPA to change the existing economic and social framework. Some historians have argued that the depression split the working class. Many unemployed feared they might lose their jobs if they agitated against the poor conditions and declining standards of living. (93)

An important consideration was the powerful role of the police who ensured that local outbreaks of discontent were quelled and law and order was maintained throughout the State. As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the police ultimately made decisions about who was eligible for the dole or relief work. Certaintly, there is evidence of the police refusing to give the dole to agitators. This was easy to achieve because of

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93. L.J. Louis, I. Turner, (eds), *The Depression of the 1930s* (Stanmore, NSW, Cassell, 1968), 5.

the Stevens Government's obsessive drive to cut public expenditure, particularly that associated with any form of unemployment relief.

It can also be argued that the relative calm in the 1930s was a result of attempts by groups such as the United Front to link the employed and unemployed being in some respects too successful. Many employed persons particularly in rural areas provided help to the unemployed to such an extent that revolutionary activity by unemployed was not necessary. Unemployed workers were never driven to such as degree of poverty that they became a revolutionary force.

Despite many of the prerequisites for revolutionary change - economic chaos, mass unemployment, increasing homelessness - neither the CPA nor any of its splinter groups, the UWM and the MM, were able to capitalise on the situation and cause for fundamental change. Although they had plenty of reason to complain, the unemployed of the 1930s did not vent their anger as a cohesive group. Sporadic protests, particularly with regards evictions and conditions on emergency public works, were quickly put down by the police. To this extent, then, the major charities contributed to this failure of the working class to erupt in revolutionary violence, by at least partially fulfilling the gap left by the government's efforts in social relief, they could be regarded as unwitting accomplishes of the State in its desire to maintain law and order. However, the unco-ordinated structure of the charitable bodies and their clear commitment to put provisions before proselytisation leaves them as doubtful contenders for the role of "social controllers" in the Melburnian sense.

CHAPTER EIGHT: NSW IN 1939

8.1 Rising Unemployment:

In the last years of the 1930s NSW faced the prospect of a second depression. Unemployment and long term unemployment had become chronic. In the Sydney metropolitan area the number of men registered at the State Labour Exchanges (SLE) rose from 23,648 in December 1937 to 28,647 in June 1939. (1) The number of unemployed women, young people and travellers also probably rose, however, very few such persons were recorded as unemployed because of the inadequacy of contemporary statistics. Higher unemployment was reflected in expenditure on food relief which rose 13 per cent from £1.26m to £1.41m between 1937-38 and 1938-39. (2) Many industries experienced the slump, with the production of coal falling sharply at Newcastle in 1938.

Again, as at the start of the 1930s, the State was very slow to respond to the recession and rising unemployment. Initially, the Stevens Government declined to provide extra placed on Rationed Relief Works (RRW). (3) But by November 1938 the State accepted the gravity of the situation and gazetted special relief works and rationed employment to half of the unemployed in industrial areas.

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1. *Official Year Book of New South Wales, 1940-41* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 557.
2. New South Wales, *Reports of the Auditor General, 1937-38, 1938-39, 1939-40* (Sydney, NSW Government Printer).
3. NSW Cabinet Papers, "Minute Paper" 15 September 1938 9/5111.3.

This work continued until March 1939, when the remaining half took up rationed employment. (4)

A worldwide recession in 1938 put a halt to the growth in exports while the intensification of sluggish domestic economic conditions led to a surge in the ranks of unemployed. Demand from employers in secondary industries fell after December 1938, causing a rise in unemployed skilled tradesmen. The primary cause of this slowing in demand was said to be the threat of war. Other factors included the fall in overseas prices of primary products, credit contraction and the increasing mechanisation of Australian industries. (5)

High unemployment was reflected in the number of food relief recipients which rose during 1939 as shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Food relief recipients 1939 (6)

Month	**Number of recipients**	**Weekly Cost including Special Foods (£)**
January	31,477	25,741
February	35,706	29,254
March	35,359	29,398
April	34,988	28,620
May	35,380	29,292
June	35,404	29,849
July	37,795	30,667
August	38,796	36,796
September	40,078	36,253
October	40,248	36,076
November	40,516	36,149
December	38,578	35,033

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4. *ibid.*, 28 November 1938.
5. Commonwealth of Australia, *Conference on Youth-Adult Employment*, Canberra 4-6 December 1939 (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939),
6. *NSW Industrial Gazette* Vol. VLI, (31 December 1939).

By March 1939 some 55,000 NSW people with 70,000 dependants were receiving some form of unemployment relief. (7) A few months later the Leader of the State Labor Party argued that official statistics of unemployed receiving the dole or relief work excluded unmarried males under 21 years, relief workers who had been "purged" for either unsatisfactory work or political activity, long term unemployed who the State defined as unemployable and people who became unemployed in 1938-1939 and who were debarred from obtaining the dole. (8)
In July 1939, 300 unemployed men in the inner-western suburbs of Sydney complained that they were forced back on to the dole after only six weeks relief work spread over three months. (9) At least 14,000 adult men were regarded as chronically unemployed at this time and another 20,000 found it difficult to maintain permanent employment. (10)

In total, some 40,000 unskilled men were considered to make up the natural unemployed. (11) Many had held positions up until the age of 18, 19 or 20 when they were dismissed in favour of younger (and cheaper) labour.

The Employment Committee's *Report* concluded:

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7. A.G. Colley, "Unemployment Relief in New South Wales", *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. X1, No. 2 (June 1939), 88.
8. NSW Labor Council, Subject Folders, "Mr Heffron's censure motion speech", manuscript, circa. July 1939, 2.
9. "Relief Work", *News South Wales Parliamentary Papers, 1938-1939*, (Sydney, Government Printer,1940), 39.
10. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, 490. Evidence tendered by Alfred Mander of the NSW Employment Council.
11. NSW Employment Council, *Reports and Recommendations*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1939), 5,9.

> Too many youth are employed in industries which offer them no prospect of continued employment as adults and in which they will be discharged at age 21 or earlier, without having acquired any skill or experience which will be of service in seeking employment as adults. (12)

Returns from NSW trade union secretaries reported an average unemployment rate of 12.1 per cent in the September 1939 quarter, as compared to the national figure of 10.4 per cent. (13)

The predominance of unemployed unskilled workers rose in the 1930s and by the close of the decade they were prevalent in both country and industrial areas. (14) But the emergence of long term unemployed in the 1930s comprised more than unskilled workers. Youth unemployment had become a perennial problem and with no signs of unemployment easing below 10 per cent the NSW Government ordered another enquiry into unemployment. (15) The Second World War was the factor that precipitated a fall in unemployment and by late 1940 the number of food relief recipients had fallen to below 1937 levels. By June 1941 there had been a further reduction of 55 per cent. (16)

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12. *ibid.*, 21.
13. *NSW Industrial Gazette*, Vol. LV1 (30 November 1939), 1450.
14. *ibid.*, 1451.
15. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit.*, 1.
16. *Official Year Book of NSW 1940-41*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 142.

Another disappointing feature was that statistics of the labour force had still not markedly improved in 1939. The implications were twofold. Because official statistics were incomplete they remained open to distortion and manipulation by politicians. Secondly, in the absence of a comprehensive base of statistics trade union statistics were again used at a barometer of unemployment levels. (17) One senior NSW official lamented that a systematic survey of the frequency of unemployment had not occurred by the close of the decade. (18) The stigma attached to unemployment resulted in some people not registering for work and hence being excluded from official statistics. Furthermore, a large number who worked either partially or intermittently were not recorded as unemployed.

The decade ended on a sour note with the NSW Premier Mair conceding that his government did not fully understand the complexities of youth unemployment. (19) There was also a realisation that unemployment had become a permanent - and possibly an inevitable - characteristic of the NSW economy. (20) One contemporary commentator remarked that unemployment was the "greatest social evil of the day." (21) With the exception of one or two specialised trades the NSW economy on the eve of the Second World War had no shortages of skilled tradesmen.

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17. Bank of NSW, *Circular*, Vol. V111 No. 2 (5 September 1938), 7.
18. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit.*, Evidence by Mander, 490.
19. Commonwealth of Australia, *Conference on Youth-Adult Employment: Short Summary of Proceedings* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939), 6.
20. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit.*, 5.
21. A.G. Colley, *ibid.*, 89.

The unemployed at the close of the 1930s can be grouped into a). the long term unskilled; b). young people leaving school in the early 1930s who had lost an opportunity to learn a trade or obtain permanent employment, and c). middle aged and older men who after losing their jobs were then considered too old to be re-employed. (22) After 1936 there was a substantial rise in the number of unemployed over the age of 40. (23)

The entry of Australia into the war against Germany in September 1939 produced a speedy and exogenous solution to the problem of unemployment which had confounded policy makers and politicians for more than a decade. The war interrupted the deepening depression in New South Wales. In the eyes of the NSW Labour Council:

> ...prior to the outbreak of war this country was already moving into a fresh phrase of the depression. (24)

The war caused a sharp fall in unemployment but long term unemployment remained a central aspect of the labour force. For example, a survey of 20,269 men registered at State Labour Exchanges in October 1940 concluded that almost half had been unemployed for over two and a half

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22. E.R. Walker, R.B. Madgwick, *An Outline of Australian Economics*, Third Edition, (Sydney, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1937).
23. *ibid.*, 315-316.
24. Labor Council of NSW, Unemployed and Relief Workers Council, *Fifth Annual Report 1939* (Sydney, 1939).

years. (25) Long term unemployment which evolved in the 1920s became embedded in the NSW economy as a result of mass unemployment in the 1930s.

Additionally, in July 1941 4.8 per cent of males in NSW, excluding those on war service, remained unemployed. (26)

8.2 National Register:

As the threat of war came closer in 1939 the Menzies Federal Government introduced the National Registration Act under which a register of men aged between 18 and 64 and their level of skills would be drawn up. Menzies considered such information vital to Australia's preparation for war. But he faced initially stiff opposition from the trade union movement which embarked on a concerted campaign to discredit the Act. The union movement was concerned about the compulsory nature of the Register (27) and feared that it: "...will inevitably lead to conscription of the workers of the Commonwealth both for industrial and military purposes." (28)

A special conference of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in June 1939, confirmed the union

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25. Cited in C. Forster, "Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s" in R.G. Gregory, N.G. Butlin, (eds), *Recovery from the Depression: Australia and the World Economy in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 300.
26. *Official Year Book of NSW, 1940-41*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1943), 548.
27. E.R. Walker, M.E. Riley, "Australia's War Economy", *Economic Record*, (December 1939), 171.
28. Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Resolution 21-23 (May 1939) E183/22/1.

movement's widespread opposition to the proposed *Register* and resolved to hold a national campaign of protest including a request that members not fill in the Census. (29) Some 70 Federal Unions supported the ACTU's call. The NSW Labor Council Secretary warned the Queensland President of the Australian Railways Union that: "...the danger does not lie in the Register itself but in its use.... such information can and will be put [to use] by the present pro-Fascist Federal Government." (30) Several pamphlets and handbills were distributed throughout the union movement and the community and a National Register Rejection Committee was established. (31) The NSW Labor Council emulated the ACTU's sentiments and urged members to oppose the National Register. (32) Despite widespread opposition and the likelihood of a low response to the Register, the ACTU under pressure from the Federal Labour Party's Executive, dropped its opposition to the Register in July 1939. This decision eased the pressure off the Menzies Government, who had faced a potentially small and perhaps inaccurate response.

For its part the Federal Government extended the closing date for the return of Census cards to 10 August

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29. Seamans Union of Australia (Sydney Branch), "Minutes", E183/22/1.
30. Australian Railways Union (National Office), Minutes and Papers, N5/858 19 May 1939, Crofts to Moroney.
31. See for example, T. Moroney, *The National Register Explained*, (Brisbane, 1939); Newcastle Trades Hall Council, 1939, *No Conscription: the Case against the National Register* (Newcastle, 1939); Australian Council of Trade Unions, *The Case Against the National Register*, (Carlton, Victoria, 1939).
32. Labor Council of NSW, Labor Research Bureau, *National Register Bill* (Sydney, 1939)

1939. (33) A very high response rate of 94.9 per cent was achieved in NSW, virtually on par with the national response rate. (34) The number of males who registered as unemployed in NSW was 97,185 or 15.4 per cent of males wage and salary earners. (35) Nationally, the male unemployment stood at 14.4 per cent. Both figures were a shock to the community and governments because they indicated a level of unemployment much higher than other contemporary sources of the labour force. Moreover, had the *Register* also surveyed unemployed women, youth and track travellers, the total unemployment rate might have exceeded 20 per cent. Information from the *Register* also pointed to other major concerns about the NSW labour force in the 1939. A quarter of men had been unemployed (apart from any work on government relief work) for two or more years. (36) Nearly 10 per cent of NSW males did not have an occupation. (37) The largest group of unemployed men were aged between 20 and 24 years.

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33. The original return date was 20 July 1939.
34. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (CBCS), *The National Register: Interim Statistical Summary, 1939* (Canberra, Government Printer, 1939), 29.
35. *ibid.,* 30.
36. *loc. cit.,* This figure includes 11,317 men who did not indicate their duration of unemployment.
37. *ibid.,* 12.

Table 8.2 Unemployment by Age Groups, Australia, 1939, Males (38)

Age Group	**Number of Unemployed**
18-19	10,782
20-24	37,904
25-29	33,413
30-34	26,329
35-39	23,356
40-44	18,920
45-49	20,358
50-54	20,824
55-59	18,376
60-64	13,600
not stated	226
Total	**224,088**

How accurate was the *National Register*? Statisticians from the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (CBCS) pointed out that no adjustments were made for the 5 per cent of NSW men who did not complete Census cards.(39) In its *Interim Report* the CBCS said that the number registered was not strictly comparable with the male population aged 18 to 65 years as at 30 June 1939.

> Analysis of its age distribution suggests that the number registered at age 18 is somewhat greater than the estimated male population of that age probably because of the inclusion of youths who had reached 18 years during the collection period.

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38. *ibid.*, 33.
39. *ibid,*

> The number registered at the age of 64 also appears appreciably less than the estimated number of that age. (40)

The 1939 *National Register* differed from previous Censuses in that it was not taken on a particular day. As such there is some doubt as to how the changing status of some men from unemployment to employment and vice versa was recorded given they had several weeks to complete the registration cards. (41)

However, these problems were minor ones and would not have had a major impact on the unemployment rate, and cannot, therefore, explain the large discrepancy between the high unemployment rate in the *Register* and statistics of unemployment recorded by the State Labour Exchanges and trade unions. In August 1939, 53,000 adult males were registered for work at SLEs and it estimated that an additional 9,000 were not registered. (42) Of the extra 33,185 men who registered as unemployed on the *National Register*, it is unlikely that they would have recorded themselves as unemployed in protest. There is no evidence of any previous protests against non-Labour Governments. And to falsely record themselves as unemployed could have been enticement for the Federal Government to enlist them in the armed forces.

Unlike the 1933 Census, the *National Register* gave relief workers clear directions as to their status. It also

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40. *loc. cit.*,
41. C. Forster, *op. cit.*, 292.
42. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit*, 490.

asked questions about the length of unemployment and the number of weeks a person had been out of work in the 12 months prior to registration. But there was no question on the causes of unemployment. (43)

The *National Register* - the first national measure of unemployment since the *1933 Census* - was far more representative than either trade union statistics or SLE statistics. It appears that the *National Register's* unemployment rates were an accurate reflection of the level of unemployment in NSW at that time.

It is important to bear in mind that the results of the *National Register* were not published in a final form. (44) At a later date revised unemployment figures were published. Including information obtained from other sources, the estimated NSW unemployment rate was revised downwards to 12 per cent. It is not clear how this calculation occurred or whether estimates were made for the 5 per cent of NSW men who did not return their registration cards. (45)

The exclusion of women from the *National Register* reflected contemporary attitudes which disparaged female employment and further highlights the inadequacy of

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43. T. Endres, M. Cook, "Concepts in Australian Unemployment Statistics to 1940", *Australian Economic Papers*, Vol. 22, No. 40 (1983); See also The Acts of Parliament, Nat. Reg, 1939, No. 11. 48-49.
44. Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *op. cit.,* This copy held by Australian Bureau of Statistics at its principal office in the Australian Capital Territory has a pencil note that "extensive alterations to text can be found in the copy at Kingston Store." However, the writer of this thesis was unable this latter copy.
45. *ibid.; Labour Report*, Vol. 34, (1944), 101.

unemployment statistics as the decade came to a close. Regrettably, calls by contemporaries for comprehensive statistical analysis of the unemployed went unheeded.(46)

8.3 Changed attitudes towards the unemployed:

Mass unemployment led to a sharp break in attitudes about the unemployed and the role of the State. There did, however, remain pockets of opinion that laid blame on the individual for unemployment. Moreover, the harsh nature of unemployment relief confirmed the reluctance of the State, particularly the Stevens administration, to provide comprehensive unemployment relief to its citizens.

The decade's last official inquiry into unemployment made very strong statements about the duty of the State to provide for the unemployed. It commented that unemployment would remain inevitable unless the community abandoned the "old, uncoordinated methods" of unemployment relief which were a legacy of 19th century individualism and laissez-faire. (47) This statement symbolised a change in the State's attitude and a recognition that a comprehensive system of unemployment relief should be instituted.

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46. See for instance E.E. Ward, "A Sample of unemployment in Victoria", *Economic Record*, Vol. XIV (1938).
47. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit.*, 1.

Moreover:

> The negative approach ... is to regard unemployment as the price we pay for economic progress. (48)

Mass unemployment in the 1930s caused a change in public attitudes. By 1939 unemployment was largely seen as a community responsibility, which required direct and substantial aid by the State. That aid consisted of sustenance and a range of social welfare benefits.

It was put forward that the problems of unemployment were complex and "that no single panacea can be advanced." (49) The *Select Committee* also urged the State to accept that the supply and demand for labour was governed by private industry operating more or less under competitive conditions, and that the "minimum error" or natural rate of unemployment was 5 per cent. (50)

> ...it would be Utopian to expect the present structure of industry to adjust itself to a condition of full employment, and it was aware that full employment does bring in its train peculiar problems associated with the elimination of the mobility of labour on which the present industrial system stands. (51)

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48. *loc. cit.,*
49. *loc. cit.,*
50. *ibid.,* 2.
51. *loc. cit.,*

The attitude of the unemployed about their predicament also changed during the 1930s. In desperation many unemployed accepted charitable assistance from either the State or private charity. The impoverished nature of many unemployed forced them to accept from both. It was claimed that by the end of the decade many young men accepted unemployment with a certain philosophical calm and fortitude. (52)

In regard to accepting a natural unemployment rate of 5 per cent, the *Select Committee* held that:

> If industry as now organised, cannot operate to a minimum of 5 per cent, it is the duty of the State either itself to rectify this error, to modify the industrial structure so that the error is reduced to such proportions and it can be handled by means of adequate ameliorative action. (53)

Advocates of relief work argued that sustenance should only be provided for an interim period, eg. a month, before the unemployed were placed on relief works which could benefit the community and preserve their morale. (54) Moreover, such work should allow the unemployed to retain their skills, although it was recognised that not all men could be employed in their chosen industry. (55)

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52. New South Wales, Department of Labour and Industry, *Report of the Vocational Guidance Survey of Unemployed Young Men*, (Sydney, Government Printer, 1938), 5.
53. *ibid., 6.*
54. Bank of NSW, *Circular*, Vol V111, No. 1 (28 March 1938), 8.
55. *ibid, 9.*

Indicative of changing attitudes were the views of one contemporary writer:

> It may be fairly argued that insofar as unemployment is an evil due to the defects of society itself, that therefore the community as a whole should bear the cost of insuring against the evil. (56)

The State's attitude changed in several respects. Firstly, it recognised a duty to promote continuity of employment to adult males and thereby diminish the number of "blind-alley" occupations. (57) The "excessive employment" of juvenile labour in numerous industries was a cause of high unemployment among males in their 20s. Secondly, chronic unemployment amongst unskilled workers was recognised as a problem by 1939, whereas a decade earlier governments had tended to ignore it.

In 1939 some commentators again drew the analogy between governments' insistence of high level of public works in the 1920s with high unemployment. One commentator argued that in prosperous times public works should be reduced, but expanded in less prosperous periods. (58)

Mass unemployment did not change everyone's attitudes. Some continued to believe that the unemployed were responsible for their predicament. The definition of

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56. H. Burton, "Political Issues in Australia To-Day", *Australian Rhodes Review*, No. 3, (1937), 16.
57. Alexander Mair, *Reports of the Employment Council of NSW*, (Sydney, NSW Government Printer, 1939), 9.
58. W.A. Merylees, "The Next Depression", *Australian Rhodes Review*, No. 4 (1939), 116.

unemployment rested on the concept of a natural rate of unemployment and ignored unemployed women and youth. (59) The Great Depression led to analysis of the problem of unemployment. Because intermittent and frictional unemployment could not be fully eliminated it was suggested that:

> ..as the State exists for the individual, it should step in to protect wage-earners who are penalised by that part of the State or private enterprise which functions imperfectly. (60)

Governments by 1939 had accepted a high level of unemployment and perhaps had become fatalistic about high unemployment because other policies seemed exhausted. Seasonal variations in the demand for labour and people "resting between jobs" were considered natural occurrences in the economic system. (61) This thesis has strongly questioned the extent to which governments provided relief to the unemployed. But it can be said that the initial shock of the Depression and the State's inability to stem mass unemployment influenced many governments to pledge "full employment" by the end of World War Two. (62)

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59. New South Wales, Legislative Assembly, *op. cit.*, 9.
60. *ibid.*, 3.
61. M. Tew, *Work and Welfare in Australia: Studies in Social Economics* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1951), 61.
62. *ibid.*, 84. See also P. Groenewegen, B. McFarlane, *A History of Australian Economic Thought* (London, Routledge, 1990), 130. The history of the move towards full employment is outside the scope of this thesis,

The State clearly failed to address mass unemployment in the 1930s. Unemployment relief in the forms of the dole and public works were a palliative response - and many people either did not qualify or were excluded from State aid. Those who did receive unemployment relief still experienced deep hardship. Irregular employment on public works and small dole rations made their lives pretty miserable.

There were other measures that the State could have implemented, such as an Unemployment Insurance Scheme (UIS). In the 1920s the State ignored suggestions to introduce an UIS. (63) Even the experience of mass unemployment in the 1930s did not sway either the NSW or Commonwealth Governments to introduce an UIS. Proposals for an UIS were as regular in the 1930s as in the previous decade but ironically became more difficult to introduce in the 1930s because the focus was clearly on relief policies to the mass unemployment. (64)

The Federal Government Report into Unemployment Insurance in 1937 prompted it to introduce the National Insurance Act of 1937/38, which aimed to provide guaranteed benefits in respect of sickness and incapacity. (65) The

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however, mention can be made of the Commonwealth of Australia, White Paper, *Full Employment in Australia* (1945).

63. G.L. Wood, "A Contemporary Advocate of National Insurance", in J.Roe, *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives, 1901-1976* (Stanmore, Cassell, 1976), 204-205.

64. D. McEvey, "Administrative Aspects of National Insurance", *Journal of the Institute of Public Administration*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1936), 106.

65. Commonwealth of Australia, *Report on Unemployment Insurance* (Ince Report, Canberra, Government Printer, 1937).

Act planned to initially insure 1.85 million people, therein providing benefits for up to 3.6 million men, women and children. (66) Reflecting the scarcity of jobs and contemporary attitudes it was proposed not to insure women. The drastically changed circumstances of the '30s provided governments with a way out. Yet, there was stiff opposition to an UIS from employers who claimed it would place additional burden on businesses, and groups on the political left who advocated that employers and the State should bear the cost of providing "workers maintenance at full wage rates during the period of his enforced idleness." (67)

The Leader of the Federal Labor Opposition John Curtin argued that an unemployment allowance should be paid to any person willing to work for whom neither the State nor the economic system provided employment. (68) But in the lead-up to the 1937 Federal election the conservative United Australia Party (UAP) abandoned the recommendations of the Ince Report. Curtin promised that if Labor gained power he would bring in legislation for a non-contributory UI for employees and the State initial contribution of £6m. (69)

While a greater sense of responsibility towards the unemployed had evolved by 1939, this was little comfort to

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66. *ibid.*, 107.
67. United Front Conference of Employed and Unemployed, *Minutes*, Sydney, 1932 ABL P117/6; see also report in *Round Table*, Vol. 113 (December 1937), 178-179.
68. J. Curtin "Occupational Trends" in G.V. Portus (ed)., *What the Census Reveals* (Adelaide, F.W. Preece and Sons, 1936), 167.
69. H. Burton, *op. cit.*, 15; *Round Table*, Vol. 116, (1937).

the thousands of men and women who experienced long spells of unemployment during the decade of mass unemployment.

The spasmodic and occasional government assistance of the 1920s was replaced in the 1930s by a broader system of government assistance in the form of the dole and/or public works. By the late '30s social aid incorporated other welfare assistance such as medical attention and clothes. In the opinion of one conservative economist, this led to the growth of a class of people who permanently relied on government welfare. (70) This view overlooked the extent to which long term unemployment (LTU) had become endemic in the NSW economy. Some members of the labour force were satisfied to look to the State for the relief of their needs, a perennial problem for most countries:

> In any country wherever State or private forms of charitable relief are administered, such a group is always to be found. (71)

In 1939 several deficiencies remained in government based policies. Because the State Labour Exchanges (SLE) continued to attract a large number of unskilled workers, employers did not take a great interest in the SLE's. One suggestion to overcome this problem was to make it compulsory for employers to notify the SLE when they intended to hire labour. (72) Public works were seen by

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70. F.A. Bland, *Government in Australia: Selected Readings* (Sydney, Government Printer c.1939), 172.
71. *loc. cit.*,
72. E.R. Walker, R.B. Madgwick, *op. cit.*, 311.

some economists as an important relief policy post-1939, provided that they were properly planned. They should be financed in prosperous years and undertaken in depression periods. (73)

8.4 1939 and Mass Unemployment in retrospect:

This thesis has demonstrated the inadequacy and harsh nature of unemployment relief policies in New South Wales during the 1930s Great Depression. In addition, it strongly questions the accuracy of "official" statistics such as the *1933 Census*. A more realistic estimate of total unemployment in NSW in 1933 was approximately 40 per cent. Many men, women and youth were not recorded as unemployed, nor did they qualify for either the dole or relief work. Yet, they experienced unemployment for long durations during the 1930s. In terms of the lives of many working men and women, NSW in the 1930s was a lost decade. They experienced unemployment on a scale and for a period of time unprecedented in Australia's history. The unemployed survived but at costs ranging from loss of skills and self esteem to undernourishment and human misery. They suffered because of the inadequacy of the State's relief programs - and the lesson for succeeding generations is that the State should provide far greater quantities of material relief to the unemployed.

Mass unemployment and the State's inability to care for the unemployed were central characteristics of the

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73. *ibid.*, 312.

1930s. Several parts of this thesis have discussed the inability of successive governments in NSW in the 1920s and 1930s to introduce unemployment insurance. The State lacked courage and the effect was to make life even more difficult for the unemployed. Conservative and Labor Governments were equally to blame for not introducing unemployment insurance. The Labor movement and the ALP did not push hard enough for the introduction of unemployment or social insurance in the 1920s. Such insurance would have eased the burden on the unemployed during the Great Depression and governments would have been able to better target finances to the unemployed and districts most affected. Likewise, the conservative governments of Bavin and Stevens' disregarded advice on the issue.

Faced with mass unemployment and a lack of funds to provide relief programs of any substance, the State imposed a new tax on the community and businesses. The Unemployment Relief Tax (URT) instituted by the Bavin Government and carried on by Lang, Stevens and Mair provided a significant additional source of revenue from which comprehensive unemployment relief could be financed. (74). The Lang administration allocated large and unprecedented sums of money to finance the dole. By contrast, Stevens record was meagre. Chapter Two demonstrated that at least 20 per cent of the URT raised during the Stevens administration was not spent on unemployment relief.

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74. The name changed during the course of the 1930s, but the intent remained.

While targeting the same needs the URT did not constitute an unemployment insurance scheme. It did, however, finance the State's two main forms of relief: cash (the dole) and a variety of public works programs. As outlined in Chapter Five food relief provided sustenance to tens of thousands of NSW people, but it was at best a short term emergency measure which provided less than the basic wage. Public works policies, too, were designed to alleviate unemployment. But they were subject to strict financial constraints and the whim of the Stevens Government.

By 1939 NSW workers remained uninsured and in no better condition than at the start of the decade. Public works were better organised by the late 1930s, though they did little to alleviate the misery and discontent experienced by many people in NSW. Moreover, public works provided workers with little incentive to improve productivity. The over-reliance on public works in more prosperous times, such as the 1920s, left the State with few options in periods of sudden and high unemployment. The 1930s Depression provides many lessons of how the State poorly responded to the crisis.

The State and the trade union movement were caught unprepared. They failed the unemployed because of their slow, partial and inadequate response to rising unemployment. The decades leading up to the 1930s help to account for why the Commonwealth and NSW Governments were so hopelessly prepared for the 1930s Depression. Prior to the Depression unemployment relief was a low priority and

the domain of private charitable bodies. The failure of governments to act when unemployment peaked at 12 per cent in the 1920s was also a reflection of the community's attitudes towards the unemployed. The growth in unemployment across nearly all occupations in the 1930s diluted the 1920s myth of the unskilled constituting the bulk of the unemployed. Nevertheless, in the 1920s there were ample warning signs of mass unemployment, ranging from double digit unemployment, structural and technological changes and a changing labour force evident by an increase in female workers. Even the rise in State expenditure on unemployment relief and the growth of private charities was insufficient to meet the demands of the mass unemployed.

Another lesson of early twentieth century New South Wales history is that the employment of thousands of unskilled males on public works, while not a direct cause of the Great Depression, did lead to the growth of the first large scale pool of unemployable men. This pre-existing ailment exacerbated mass unemployment. In the 1920s public facilities were constructed with little benefit to the worker in terms of skills or ongoing career development. When finances dried up in the late 1920s many workers had no skills or other possible avenues of regular employment.

Despite the severity of the depression, the Stevens Government did little more than to force the unemployed into a position of irregular employment on the Emergency Relief Works Scheme (ERWS) (See Chapter Six). In principle, many unemployed would have preferred to work rather than

receive the dole. But the terrible working conditions of the ERWS, particularly at Afforestation Camps, forced the unemployed to return to the meagre dole. Many did not qualify for the dole, which added to their hardship.

On a more positive note, some contemporaries believed that the Great Depression created a positive impact by forcing the people of NSW and Australia to realise their responsibilities to the unemployed, especially the young. (75) The experience of mass unemployment in the 1930s led to sustenance and/or public works becoming an essential component of social service administration. But relief programs in NSW in the 1930s were insufficient, inadequate and unable to address the needs of the mass unemployed. Not even the extreme situation of mass unemployment throughout the 1930s was sufficient to sway the State to provide comprehensive unemployment relief to all the unemployed.

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75. G.R. Giles, "Unemployment among young people in Australia" , *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXX1, No. 6 (June 1935), 812.

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  1936 (start 12/7531)
  1937 (start 12/7545)
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Furniture Trades Journal

International Labour Review

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1.9: UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' NEWSPAPERS

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