

'You didn't admit you were hard up': Working-class Notions of Moral Community

Leanne Blackley
Independent Historian

Colin Warrington lived through the Depression period. He remembers:

If someone was worse off than another family you would go and help them. You'd look after each other....Everybody looked after each other...¹

For many working-class people, like Colin, helping people 'in bad circumstances' is an aspect of working-class life that they celebrate. It forms part of working-class collective memory. Anne O'Brien notes, in her study of the NSW poor, how help from the 'community – whether extended family, friends or neighbours' was a practice endorsed because people recognised 'such a lot could easily be theirs'.² Working-class people were reliant on each other for their survival and this fostered a culture of mutual help and assistance.

The informal practice of assisting family and friends was incorporated into a number of formal working-class associations and societies. Friendly Societies, Co-operative Societies, and the Women's Auxiliaries all embraced ideas like mutuality, association, community service, fellowship, self-help and improvement, and they represented an extension of the working-class culture of mutual help into the broader community. This paper considers firstly the idea of mutual help amongst the working class, and secondly the above organisations and their operations in Wollongong between 1921 and 1954.

In providing much needed goods and services to the community these organisations occupied a significant position in society. They fulfilled obligations that either the family often failed to accomplish, or the State refused to perform, adequately or not at all. Such organisations demonstrate the capacity of working-class people to deal with their hardships in enterprising ways. Sexual divisions of labour at home and in paid work were generally replicated in the structures and practices of these organisations. Sometimes, though, particularly in organisations intimately concerned with the family economy, it was precisely these divisions that ensured women greater opportunities for initiative and activity. In organisations reliant on links with paid work, these chances were greatly reduced.

Social Morality and the Working Class

The Friendly Societies, Co-operative Societies, and Women's Auxiliaries were all created by working-class people, or had working-class people as their primary focus. As these organisations evolved they were not always exclusively working class in orientation or membership, yet their pursuits and purposes were based on a vision that was broadly socialist and collectivist. This vision was informed by a heterogeneous but closely related set of discourses dealing with the individual and their moral responsibilities to society or the collective.³ The term 'social morality', as used by social theorist Bill Jordan, is used here to conceptualise these various discourses. Jordan uses the term 'moral relations' to describe those social relations that are 'distinct from economic ones', and which involve 'altruism – a willingness to abandon self-interest for the sake of a duty to someone else'. He identifies the duties of people to 'fellow citizens' as their 'moral responsibilities'.⁴ He states explicitly that social morality is not about 'constant principles and institutions', but rather is subject to change.⁵ This is an important point,

which enables us to understand the success of particular institutions at certain times, but also allows us to explain their demise or transformation over time.

A framework which provided a sense of social and historical change was essential to understanding the views of Colin Warrington, and of many others like him. Supporting each other was a recurrent theme in the interviews and numerous kinds of contemporary evidence. The frequency with which the issue was raised indicated there was something more happening than simply 'sentimentalising the past'.⁶ An explanation that went beyond the idea that people were yearning for the past and lamenting its loss was necessary. Examining the social conditions in which these working-class people lived not only offers such an explanation but also allows us to avoid notions of working-class people being inherently moral. It is possible to draw connections between the social circumstances and the relations that were formed as a result.

The Depression and the Second World War are the common threads woven through the lives of working-class people in Wollongong between 1921 and 1954. These events were never distant from an individual's experience, often strongly structuring their memories and their story telling. Remembering living in the Flinders Street camp during the Depression, Matt Hogan said he 'appreciated the friendship' that was created among people who had nothing and how they all worked 'together to help one another'.⁷ Sennett and Cobb suggest the Depression 'is remembered as a social disaster that disrupted lives', and its scale was such that the individual was powerless.⁸ Any responsibility that individuals felt for their circumstances was sometimes obliterated, and in the case of Matt Hogan it was replaced with a sense of community and togetherness.

Some individuals occasionally felt tensions in confronting a society influenced by Depression and war. Dolly Potter, who worked for many years in the Miners' Women's Auxiliary doing welfare work, asserts: 'You didn't admit you were hard up'. Providing and receiving assistance, whether formal or informal, was subject to a complex set of rules, obligations and feelings. In her opinion, to admit being 'hard up' was embarrassing for both those providing the help and those receiving it.⁹ Both the recipient and the provider of assistance needed to ensure that a sense of dignity and self-worth was maintained in the process. Sennett and Cobb argued that, whilst being an individual 'has historic connotations of self-reliance, confidence, self-affirmation', people have constantly to balance this with the knowledge that a dependence on each other is a necessity for satisfying personal needs and desires.¹⁰

Thinking historically about how social morality operates also has implications for understanding gender relations. In Wollongong, between 1921 and 1954, the sexual division of labour in the home and in paid work greatly determined men's and women's capacity for shaping moral relations in the community. Men had a permanent relationship with paid work and this ensured that they dominated the political and industrial scene. Women's lives, on the other hand, were shaped by the family and home experience. This stark division meant women gained some authority on issues that related to the home, family, and care of children. Cora Baldock has noted how voluntary activities replaced paid work for women, and that maintaining such activities relied on 'the continuation of

women's position in domestic labour'.¹¹ They provided also a means whereby women engaged in social life outside the home, and contributed to a broader social morality in community life.

As the following will show, these ways of thinking about social morality, including its execution and division along gendered lines, also shaped the formal organisations which set out to direct moral relations amongst the working class in Wollongong in this period.

Friendly Societies and Lodges

"Doing good" by each other was at the heart of the Friendly Societies. Their origins are mixed, but they were linked with similar organisations in Britain. The friendly society tradition is connected with late medieval and early modern Europe, where family and kinship were important elements in defining the notion of fraternity.¹² Friendly societies evoked these links with antiquity in order to establish a feeling of permanence amongst their members and validate their own credentials.¹³ Sick pay and assistance with medical care and funerals formed the key aspects of modern friendly societies, with members expecting an allowance when sick, and a benefit for the widow in the event of death.¹⁴ This allowance was a 'legacy of the whip-round', where kin, neighbours or workers helped friends in time of need.¹⁵ Friendly societies institutionalised an informal process, with members contributing in return for benefits that were administered subject to elaborate rules and regulations.¹⁶

While the friendly society tradition originated in Britain, similar associations were evident in Australia by the early nineteenth century. In 1930 approximately 44 per cent of Australians were members of such societies, with a slightly higher 47 per cent of New South Welshmen regarding membership of a friendly society as worthwhile.¹⁷ Membership was high because the Commonwealth government did not administer sickness benefits until 1945 and friendly societies were the only insurance the ordinary person had against sickness and incapacity.¹⁸

The perils of long days in the mines, and later, in the steelworks, meant friendly societies were an attractive proposition to Illawarra workers keen to guarantee the support and sustenance of their families. The first friendly society was established in the Illawarra in 1878, at Bulli-Woonona. It was called the Pride of the Illawarra branch and belonged to the Grand United Order of Oddfellows (GUOOF). The Bulli-Woonona branch was also instrumental in establishing other GUOOF branches in areas like Helensburgh and Wollongong. In 1926 the GUOOF was healthy and robust.¹⁹ In mid-1927 the GUOOF reported steady progress in the Illawarra district, with most lodges receiving new members at every meeting and new lodges being formed.²⁰

Green and Cromwell note that it was mostly 'the male breadwinner', the husband or father, who took out membership of the friendly society.²¹ Women were not excluded and in some instances were actively encouraged to join. In 1926, addressing the Bulli-Woonona branch of the GUOOF, Brother Casley said that 'females are also privileged to join', and moreover, 'would be greatly welcomed'. Brother Babidge joined with Casley in emphasising that 'branches were open to females', with 'a special scale' for them.²² As membership figures do not provide such detail for the Illawarra, it is unclear how many women actually accepted this invitation. According to a 1928 valuation report of the GUOOF for the whole of NSW, there were 35 154 male members and only 4847 female members.²³ Given the marked sexual division of labour in the Illawarra, it is likely the gender imbalance in membership was even greater.

Membership types, and the scale of contributions and benefits paid, indicate that invitations to join were informed directly by ideas reflecting the sexual division of labour. In its

1937 'Rules and Regulations', the GUOOF included certain membership categories demonstrating that women were frequently regarded as different.²⁴ Often, there was also a disparity between the benefits that men and women received.²⁵

Sometimes discrimination along gender lines was more explicit when Societies had to account for their revenue and expenses. A 1928 valuation report for the GUOOF reported that the society was in deficit.²⁶ The 'heavy mining sickness experience' and the 'heavy female sickness experience' were the two 'chief reasons' given in accounting for the deficit.²⁷ Remedies to reduce these costs included not paying sick pay to miners who were 'in receipt of Worker's Compensation', and not paying female members for 'diseases or disorders of the generative organs'.²⁸ In this instance, miners experiencing serious injuries from paid work found little relief from their own friendly societies and women became targets because of the burdens they endured as a result of their biology.

Procedures adopted by friendly society lodges also reveal that women's participation was minimal, or, circumscribed in such a way that it conformed with the sexual division of labour. Attempting to encapsulate the fraternal spirit in song, the GUOOF rules said lodge meetings should commence with an 'opening ode' sung to *Auld Lang Syne* which spoke about 'Friendship, Love and Truth...Among a band of Brothers'.²⁹ While 'Friendship, Love and Truth' were stressed it was a fraternal spirit that existed only amongst 'a band of brothers'. The meeting was conducted in keeping with strict rules and guidelines that became rituals. The seating arrangements were designed according to a special floor plan that facilitated the practice and maintenance of these rituals. The opening of the meeting was followed by an elaborate initiation ceremony for new members, a report on members who were sick or in 'distress', then general business and lastly the closing of the lodge. The closing was marked by song.

The initiation ceremony confirmed the gendered nature of the Societies. The rules stated that the chair of the ceremony should use 'the masculine gender', although it was stated that officers should use their 'discretion to alter suitably if female candidates or both male and female' were being initiated. No change, however, was considered necessary when the word Brethren was used, as it 'may reasonably be considered in the broad sense to apply to both sexes' and therefore it 'needs no correction'. Members were informed upon entry: 'In whatever rank or station a man is placed, from the prince to the peasant, he who fulfils the relative duties of sociability and humanity is truly an Oddfellow'.³⁰ Women may have been welcomed as members, but the meeting processes, and the language used conveyed a different impression. Commitment to the Society implied respectability and masculinity, which were intertwined and inseparable. Women had little place in such a domain.

The emphasis on a particular form of masculinity occurred because Friendly Societies had direct links with paid work, particularly men's paid work. Arduous labour and poor occupational health and safety practices made Friendly society membership either a necessity, or at the very least a sensible option for the working man in this period. The sexual division of labour that featured strongly in the community generally was replicated in the Friendly Societies' organisational structures and processes.

Social activities, however, were a feature of Friendly Societies, and it appears this was where the few women played a part. Social occasions served to foster a sense of togetherness, and this was highlighted to new recruits: 'Attendance at Lodge promotes social feelings; the members become better acquainted with each other and a good understanding is cultivated'.³¹ In January 1921, Brother Power, from the Wollongong lodge, said that in the year just gone he had been out on 156 evenings, attending functions at

the Lodge.³² Women were frequently thanked for their efforts at these social occasions.³³ In May 1926 Mrs Simpson was acknowledged when she served a 'dainty tea with homemade scones' at a meeting of the Loyal Corrimal branch of the Manchester Unity Oddfellows Lodge. The tea was in honour of Bro. A. Presser 'who recently took unto himself a wife [sic]'.³⁴ Regular lodge meetings were supplemented by 'Ladies' Nights' with dancing and supper.³⁵ Ladies' nights reaffirm the existence of a clear sexual division of labour and underline how masculinised the regular lodge meetings were.

Friendly Societies still exist today as non-profit organisations, but in a substantially modified form. Instead of providing basic needs, they now supply benefits and services in addition to those institutionalised by the state.³⁶ Clawson suggests that a change in the social relations of men and women and the advent of new sources of entertainment together contributed to their decline.³⁷ The advent of the welfare state and the provision of health services by government were also influential. They removed the need for ordinary people to provide for themselves through mutual aid, and the history of Friendly Societies from then on is one of gradual decline.³⁸

Co-operatives

For the May Day essay competition in 1940, fourteen year old Jessie Bell submitted an essay on the Co-operative Movement. In it she said that the aim of co-operation was 'to eliminate the middleman and his profits'. She suggested it was 'a great boon to the working class' and 'a great benefit to the public'. According to her, membership of the co-operative spelt 'a banking account' with 'the dividends shared being an excellent means of encouraging thrift'. Co-operation, she argued, was the 'only hope of financial security and independence' for working-class people.³⁹ In Bell's opinion the Co-operative movement was an active and practical way for workers to help themselves, providing additional money or sustenance above and beyond wages. Co-operation was not a form of welfare because it embodied a spirit of agency and action not necessarily associated with charity. It was a positive and purposeful way for working-class people to challenge, or at the very least question the demands of capitalism. But it was also much more than this: as N. Barou said of the co-operative movement in Britain, 'social and moral motives' were as much an inspiration for co-operation 'as economic aims'.⁴⁰

The Co-operative movement had its origins in Britain.⁴¹ In 1844, the Rochdale Pioneers Co-operative Society started and this is regarded by many as the "official" beginning of the co-operative movement.⁴² It was this British tradition that formed the basis for co-operation in Australia.

Ray Markey argues that, although the Co-operative stores never gained wide spread support amongst the Australian working class, they were particularly strong in Australian mining communities.⁴³ Broken Hill, Lithgow, Newcastle and Wollongong are indicative of this tradition.⁴⁴ Tom Marshall, a Co-operative representative, linked the British tradition with the Australian movement in his address in 1927, at the Woonona Co-operative annual picnic. He talked of his recent visit to England, noting the 'rapid strides co-operation had made there'. Illawarra residents, he argued, 'were now deriving the benefit from that great institution', 'for every three families who arrived here from England, two of them had been connected with the great co-operative movement on the other side...'.⁴⁵

The Illawarra Society had made steady, but successful progress since it opened in 1896 at Woonona. Although it owed the banks in 1922, by 1927 the bank owed the society. In 1927 the Society had 4 branches and 2,710 members.⁴⁶ Eight years later the number of branches had doubled and, according to the Society, had become 'The Only Union Store on the South Coast' and also had Australia's largest bakery.⁴⁷ In 1954 it still maintained

eight branches and a membership of 6065.⁴⁸

When advertising its goods and services the Woonona Co-operative Society emphasised that it was 'established by the workers for the workers'. Its slogan was 'EACH FOR ALL AND ALL FOR EACH',⁴⁹ and it was this communal idea that endeared the Co-operative to many working people. Dolly Potter said 'they were working people' at the Co-operative and 'when a strike was on they used to help us, they used to stand by us'. It was this moral conviction and sense of responsibility to the working-class members of the community that defined the Co-operative and all that it stood for.⁵⁰

Co-operation offered obvious benefits to the individual as well as the collective. Mr P. France would have agreed that co-operation was 'the salvation of the worker', as he bought land and built houses with the dividends he received. Mr Mascord had been married for ten years and managed to save money from his dividend and interest. The Co-operative Society's Secretary Mr W. Lindsay said that, while others might argue 'they were invading the citadel of private enterprise', he believed strongly that 'the workers had just as much right as anybody else to run a business for themselves'. Mr T. Silcocks agreed with Lindsay, adding 'that they held no animosity against private enterprise; they were in business for themselves...'.⁵¹ A British study of 2000 co-operative members estimated that over 50 per cent joined only to save money. Co-operation provided families with an 'easy and convenient way of saving', something many working people dependent on wages were unable to do.⁵²

The Co-operative affirmed its association and practical commitment to the workers in ways other than supplying groceries and dividends to shareholders. It was a regular participant at May Day activities, always entering floats in the march, donating food stuffs for the picnic and prizes for the day's events.⁵³ It was also a source of employment.⁵⁴ The decent treatment of workers was also a central plank of the Co-operative's working-class credentials. Looking after its employees was one way the society 'established by the workers for the workers' could differentiate itself from capitalists.

The provision of food and other consumables constituted the core function of the Co-operative society. Women were pivotal to the success of the Co-operative because the responsibilities of buying and budgeting for food lay largely with them. Despite their importance in the daily operations of the Co-operative, few women, if any, held executive positions within the Society.⁵⁵

To assess the role of women according to the positions they held in the Co-operative's executive, however, is misleading. The activities of women in the Co-operative were largely confined to the Women's Guilds which operated as separate groups within the Society. Seemingly outside the main arena of decision-making, the Women's Guilds maintained an active and vigorous presence in the life of the Co-operative Society.⁵⁶

Women's Guilds were always present and very active at various social and fund-raising occasions for the Society. Such events provided an opportunity for Co-operative members and employees to gather together and further develop the spirit of co-operation. The 1927 Co-operative Society procession and picnic in Bulli Park was one example. The President of the Co-operative's education committee, Mr L.A. Fowler, thanked the women for the 'great help they had rendered' on the picnic day. During his address, Fowler was reported as saying that:

... he had done many a hard day's work in the pit, but he was prepared to state that the ladies had worked harder for this picnic than ever he had.

Fowler's sentiments were endorsed with cheers from the crowd.⁵⁷ Of course, women's efforts were not always acknowledged in such striking terms. Slight recognition

probably occurred often, though, because these kinds of activities constituted much of the Guild's work and also conformed most closely to the existing sexual division of labour. Women worked tirelessly at organising social function and raising funds, but it was these activities that were acknowledged the least, because they were the most expected by both men and women.

A sexual division of labour that associated women with the family and home did not always mean they were powerless and ineffectual. On the contrary, their special link with home and family allowed them to speak out with a degree of authority on issues related to these areas.⁵⁸ Daily shopping at the Co-operative Store and managing the family budget meant that these women knew in a very practical way the benefits of Co-operation.

The contribution the Co-operative Women's Guilds made in times of distress was particularly noteworthy. In 1942 the various Guilds throughout the region reported at length on their activities for the war effort. Wollongong Guild stressed that 'many of our members are active in other war work'.⁵⁹ These kinds of efforts extended beyond the bounds of war, although still in keeping with the sexual division of labour. Certain actions and protests by the Guilds were permissible because their members were mothers and wives, and therefore the moral guardians and carers of the society.

The significance of the Co-operative Society and of the Women's Guilds associated with it faded in the 1960s. The burgeoning consumerist culture from the 1950s onwards, which saw the establishment of the 'supermarket', also helped seal the fate of the co-operatives.⁶⁰ Dolly Potter remembers how 'the big stores came in and was putting the prices down low'. She laments that 'they couldn't compete' and the need for working-class people to monitor their family budgets won out.⁶¹

Markey and Wells suggest that the demise of the Co-operatives is also linked to the 'decline of the close-knit, mutually self-supporting working class communities'.⁶² The co-operative spirit in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s had been based on the idea that working-class people were willing to offer their support, because they were confident the Co-operative would stand by them when times were hard. The affluence of the 1950s, however, meant hard times were fewer and further between. Problems were obvious as early as 1946, when Albert Southern, from the Woonona Co-operative, urged the working class to give more support to the Movement. Referring to the assistance that was given by the Co-operative during the 1945 strike, he said the co-operative had 'backed them in their recent struggles', but he wanted to know what the working class 'would do now when the going was good'.⁶³ Southern got his answer in the 1960s as the Co-operative societies closed.

Women's Auxiliaries

In 1938, a poem signed by Cecil S. Watts appeared in the miners newspaper *Common Cause*:

Along the Illawarra, 'twist [sic] the mountains and the sea,
There's a new factor growing – it's the Strike Auxiliary.
It thrives where each pit head mars the pleasant scene,
Like a smutty giant finger-print deep pressed into the
green.
There's singing and dancing and picnics to be planned;
There's a thousand thoughts to strengthen each fighting-
demand;
There's a long struggle shaping, and the final victory
Is the guiding objective of the Strike Auxiliary.
In lowly little villages they plant for better things,
And a surer hope, a greater strength, each new
dawning brings;

For it's no longer Jack and Joan, it is united "WE"...
Oh, Comrades, toast the Ladies of the Strike Auxiliary!⁶⁴

As for so many of the working-class organisations already discussed, the bedrock of the Miners' Women's Auxiliaries was the idea of mutual aid and collective effort.⁶⁵ Watts dismissed any divisions between 'Jack and Joan' by emphasising the unity between male miners and the ladies' auxiliary. Yet, the ladies' auxiliary demonstrates both the replication of the sexual division of labour, and at the same time the capacity for women to have a voice on questions of social morality.

The Miners' Women's Auxiliaries originated in the Wonthaggi region, after a strike in 1934.⁶⁶ The formation of a national body came with the formation of a branch at Cessnock in August 1938. The South Coast miners' wives followed in the footsteps of their northern friends in September 1939.⁶⁷

Members of the Women's Auxiliaries on the South Coast said that most of the auxiliaries 'were formed...around a strike'. Auxiliaries assisted by providing 'parcels to aid the families, children's entertainment, welfare work around the strike'.⁶⁸ In October 1939 the Coledale Miners' Women's Auxiliary declared in its annual report, that the Auxiliary raised relief for the distressed during the miners' strike'. Help was not always confined to the miners either. Coledale women had also given aid to the WWF.⁶⁹

Disputes and strikes were not the only concerns that impelled the auxiliaries to act. Auxiliary women said that 'what they did after they were formed didn't always relate to the mine'. The auxiliaries were concerned with 'community welfare work' and 'social questions that affect women and children'.⁷⁰ The Kembla Miners' Women's Auxiliary organised hospital visits to sick miners or their family members. Donations were given to those who were sick and remained at home, and sometimes in place of money, flowers or fruit were given.⁷¹ Auxiliaries battled against financial constraints, surviving largely on their own fund-raising efforts. They received support from the Miners' Lodges when they visited the 'stump' (where the union officials collected the dues) and conducted a raffle or had a collection for people 'in bad circumstances'.⁷² Assistance also extended into the community and was not restricted to miners and their families.⁷³

Like the Guilds' women, the Miners' Auxiliaries were not content just to pass motions and send off letters; they were frequently compelled into action. The question of price increases was one issue that stirred their passions, as it did in many women's organisations at this time.⁷⁴ In October 1950, auxiliary women 'voiced their indignation at high prices' via a deputation to the Wollongong Local Prices Officer, Mr Gibson. Housewives going about their business in the street joined the auxiliary women after they leafleted the street seeking support. The auxiliary women even attracted the attention of a police sergeant who was sent 'to break up a disturbance'. When he arrived, however, he failed to take any action, wishing the deputation well and going on his way, stating: 'it's time something was done about the rising prices'. Upon gaining entry to Gibson's office, the 25 women issued their demands. After an unsatisfactory result, they resolved to take the matter to their local members of parliament.⁷⁵

On meeting with the local politicians, the women outlined to them instances where prices were increased above the pegged prices. One woman alleged that butchers sold them mutton instead of lamb. Dolly Potter, the President of the South Bulli-Corrimal Auxiliary, called for firm action saying: 'A £5 fine is nothing for these people'. Potter proposed that shop keepers be forced to close for a week, arguing that only then would they 'get something done'. The

Auxiliary women left the meeting contemplating the formation of 'vigilante committees'.⁷⁶ Demands and protests of this kind were permissible because the issue of food prices,

the purchasing of food and budgeting for the family economy were regarded primarily as women's concerns.

The idea that women were the carers and responsible for the well being of the family guaranteed that they were given greater scope on these and related issues. Dolly Potter said that in times of sickness or financial need 'there was a great *great* need for the auxiliary women to approach women, whereas the men couldn't'. Social assumptions about both gender and human dignity and pride meant there was an informal, but nevertheless 'proper', process to be followed both by the group or individual providing assistance and by those who were in receipt of such assistance. People would not necessarily approach the auxiliary for assistance directly; rather 'a neighbour or somebody would hear about it' and in turn the auxiliary would provide assistance. Many women found it very difficult to accept assistance. For instance, when the auxiliary helped a woman by providing her with shoes for her children that she could not afford, she became, as Dolly recalled, 'very indignant' and later repaid the auxiliary as she 'insisted' she would.⁷⁷

Other auxiliaries of women existed amongst sections of the Wollongong labour movement. But while not the first women's auxiliary, the Miners' Women's Auxiliaries are amongst the best known of these auxiliaries.⁷⁸ They belonged to a network of groups which offered women a public role within the limits of the existing sexual division of labour and the social assumptions of the period. In the late 1950s, Norman MacKenzie noted in his research how the majority of women participating in community activities belonged to 'sex-segregated bodies' or 'ladies' auxiliaries', which often represented an extension of their familial role.⁷⁹ This kind of women's participation was evident in Wollongong. During the Second World War, for instance, many women's organisations came to the fore offering the familial skills learnt as wives and mothers. In 1942, a Wollongong 'Onlooker' complained during a procession about the number of women's organisations.⁸⁰ Dolly Potter said many of the women were in both the Guilds, Auxiliaries and various other groups. The functions of these groups were distinct, yet sometimes for particular causes they joined forces.⁸¹

Importantly, working-class women's organisations sought to marry in practical ways their concerns as women and as working-class people. Wollongong's radical Housewives' Association was a case in point. Barbara Curthoys and Audrey McDonald note how the Wollongong branch of the NSW Housewives' Association was expelled from its parent branch in 1940, due to the influence of CPA members. This contradicted the NSW Housewives' Association's eligibility criteria, which stated that members could not belong to 'a Communist, Fascist, Nazi or any other organisation opposed to the British Empire'.⁸² After the expulsion, Wollongong women gathered together to form a Democratic Housewives' Association. Mrs Curnuck said the Association 'was determined to work in the interests of all', but 'particularly the working class'. She said they 'were vitally concerned with the price of goods rather than one's political beliefs'. Although the parent body emphasised the need for patriotism and loyalty, Curnuck argued 'the most patriotic thing we can do is to see that the working man has enough to eat'.⁸³

Women's groups prospered throughout this period. The voices of women were heard because they raised issues mainly under the umbrella of women, family and children; however, their actions probably had an unexpected consequence. According to Sally Bowen, groups like the auxiliary 'played a role in making the women more politically aware'.⁸⁴ They spoke passionately on issues of genuine concern to women of this period. Certainly, it was a time in which conservative views of women reigned, but it was also a time when challenges were made, even if in keeping with the sexual division of labour that existed at the time. In playing this role,

women did see themselves as part of the struggle – for working-class women and men. This was of course not without tensions. Dolly Potter became enraged during a dispute, when a representative from the Miners' Federation said 'We want the women behind us'. She remembers: 'I stood up and I said "We're not behind you, nor in front, we're going to be beside you"'.⁸⁵ Her sense of social morality was informed by a working-class feminism that recognised certain divisions between men and women, but at the same time sought unity between the two.

The Miners' Women's Auxiliary is still active in the Illawarra, although its function and purpose have been transformed. By 1952, the National Council of the Auxiliaries had 'ceased to function'. Existing auxiliaries were noticeably 'small in number'. Many of their functions and policies were covered by the UAW, to which they were affiliated. In 1954 four auxiliaries existed in the Northern coalfields and two covered the South Coast.⁸⁶ This decline was just beginning through the 1950s, accelerating into the 1960s. Changes in paid work, and greater participation by women, meant that increasingly fewer women contributed to organisations like the Auxiliaries.⁸⁷ Married women's efforts in the period between 1921 and 1954 depended on their relative exclusion from paid work, and this was beginning to change.

The fulfilment of one's social morality occurred along gendered lines in formal and institutionalised ways. Working-class women were authorities on managing the family budgets and caring for children, and this authority enabled them to maintain links between family and community in a broad sense. Their active role in both the Co-operative Societies and the Women's Auxiliaries confirmed that the existence of a marked sexual division of labour allowed them to make public statements on issues of which men had little knowledge. In contrast, the Friendly Societies offered little if any scope for women's participation, since their place in the community was forged through paid work, and in Wollongong this meant limited participation by women.

Ironically, in the 1960s and 1970s, the realisation of greater opportunities for married women in paid work undermined organisations like the Women's Co-operative Guilds and the Women's Auxiliaries.⁸⁸ The task of supplementing men's organisations with women's groups offering much needed aid and support was soon scorned by a new wave of feminists. Women's Liberation adopted a different political agenda and attacked this kind of volunteer work. They argued that their methods were more sophisticated and more capable of furthering the cause of women.

Rhetoric employing the notions of co-operation, mutuality, community and moral obligation has become common place amongst governments of late twentieth century capitalist societies. The shift to the community has now become a justification for downgrading of public services, state welfare provisions and institutional care.⁸⁹ Although community was central to the working-class people of Wollongong, its present usage is the antithesis of what they strove for in earlier decades.

Endnotes

- 1 Davis, *Our Memories*, 29.
- 2 A. O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: The Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988, 31.
- 3 An indication of some of these discourses can be found in P. Beilharz, *Transforming Labor: Labour Tradition and the Labour Decade*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, chapter 2. Here Beilharz discusses notions such as liberalism, collectivism, socialism, romanticism, labourism, modernity and the enlightenment. In some way or other all these notions have contributed to discussions of the individual and the collective and their association with

- ideas about mutual help, progress, self improvement, co-operation etc.
- 4 B. Jordan, *The Common Good: Citizenship, Morality and Self-Interest*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford, 1989, 13, 67-68.
 - 5 Jordan, 182.
 - 6 Cox, 36.
 - 7 Interview with Matt Hogan, 22/2/1996.
 - 8 Sennett and Cobb, 31-33.
 - 9 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
 - 10 Sennett and Cobb, 66-67 and 266.
 - 11 C.V. Baldock, 'Volunteer Work as Work: Some Theoretical Considerations', in C. V. Baldock, and B. Cass (eds), *Women, Social Welfare and the State*, second edition, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1988, 289 and 291.
 - 12 Clawson, 22.
 - 13 P.H.J.H. Gosden, *Self Help: Voluntary Associations in 19th-century Britain*, Barnes and Noble Books, New York, 1974, 3.
 - 14 Gosden, 15.
 - 15 D.G. Green and L.G. Cromwell, *Mutual Aid or Welfare State: Australia's Friendly Societies*, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1984, 45.
 - 16 Green and Cromwell, 14.
 - 17 Green and Cromwell, 14.
 - 18 Kewley, 265.
 - 19 *Illawarra Mercury*, 21/5/1926.
 - 20 *South Coast Times*, 10/6/1927.
 - 21 Green and Cromwell, 13.
 - 22 *Illawarra Mercury*, 21/5/1926.
 - 23 UWA, D9/1/2, box 1, GUOOF Miners' friend Lodge, Balgownie, 'GUOOF Valuation Report as at 30th June 1928'.
 - 24 UWA, D9/3/7, GUOOF 'Rules and Regulations', 1937, p.76.
 - 25 UWA, D9/3/7, GUOOF 'Rules and Regulations', 1937, p.77-78.
 - 26 It is unclear what branches were included in this report. The document is located in the archival records belonging to the GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge of Balgownie at the University of Wollongong. This fact, coupled with the the reasons given for the deficit (i.e. mining), indicate that the issue was of concern to members of the Balgownie branch however.
 - 27 UWA, D9/1/2, Box 1, GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge, Balgownie, GRAND UNITED ORDER OF ODDFELLOWS valuation Report as at 30/6/1928.
 - 28 UWA, D9/1/2, Box 1, GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge, Balgownie, GRAND UNITED ORDER OF ODDFELLOWS valuation Report as at 30/6/1928.
 - 29 UWA, D9/3/4b, GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge Balgownie, *Branch Ritual and Funeral Oration*, published by the Committee of Management, N.S.W., 1935, page 16.
 - 30 UWA, D9/3/4b, GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge Balgownie, *Branch Ritual and Funeral Oration*, published by the Committee of Management, N.S.W., 1935, page 24.
 - 31 UWA, D9/3/4b, GUOOF Miners' Friend Lodge Balgownie, *Branch Ritual and Funeral Oration*, published by the Committee of Management, N.S.W., 1935, page.25.
 - 32 *South Coast Times*, 21/1/1921.
 - 33 *South Coast Times*, 12/4/1940.
 - 34 *Illawarra Mercury*, 21/5/1926.
 - 35 *Illawarra Mercury*, 20/4/1928; and *South Coast Times*, 15/9/1939. The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (Mt. Pleasant Lodge, no.119) noted funds were collected from members for social evenings and ladies nights - See UWA, D51, Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, Mt Pleasant Lodge, no.119, Minutes, 6/3/1926.
 - 36 See Green and Cromwell, 177-188, for an account of Friendly Societies up to the 1980s.
 - 37 Clawson, 262-263.
 - 38 Green and Cromwell, 178.
 - 39 UWA, D22 May Day Committee Records, D22/7/1, Copy of Essay of 'The Co-operative Movement', written by Jessie Bell, Woonona, 14 years, 1940.
 - 40 N. Barou, (ed) *The Co-operative Movement in Labour Britain*, Fabian Society, London, 1948, 7.
 - 41 A. Durr, 'William King of Brighton: Co-operation's Prophet?', in S. Yeo, (ed) *New Views of Co-operation*, Routledge, London, 1988, 19-20.
 - 42 J.A. Hough, 'The Co-operative Movement and Retail Distribution', in Barou, 30-31.
 - 43 R. Markey, 'New South Wales Trade Unions and the 'Co-operative Principle' in the 1890s', *Labour History*, no.49, november 1985, 51.
 - 44 Markey refers to Newcastle. During my research for my thesis, a person from Lithgow wrote to the editor of the *Illawarra Mercury* in search of source material to assist with the writing of the Lithgow Co-operative Society's history. Broken Hill is mentioned in a reference in the *South Coast Times*, 10/5/1946.
 - 45 *South Coast Times*, 25/3/1927.
 - 46 *South Coast Times*, 8/4/1927. This membership was divided between various branches, with 1039 at the Woonona branch, 965 at the Corrimal branch, 290 at Balgownie, and lastly 490 at Coledale.
 - 47 NBAC, N57/2031, J. Normington-Rawling's Deposit, *Unity*, 29/8/1935.
 - 48 *Illawarra Mercury*, 6/1/1954, 2.
 - 49 NBAC, N57/2031, J. Normington-Rawling's Deposit, *Unity*, 29/8/1935.
 - 50 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
 - 51 *South Coast Times*, 20/5/1927.
 - 52 Barou, 10.
 - 53 *South Coast Times*, 9/5/1930 and *Common Cause*, 19/3/1938, 8.
 - 54 Interview with Lilly and Bill Critcher, 26/2/1996.
 - 55 *South Coast Times*, 14/10/1921 and 20/5/1927.
 - 56 *South Coast Times*, 9/5/1930.
 - 57 *South Coast Times*, 25/3/1927.
 - 58 *South Coast Times*, 5/9/1930.
 - 59 *South Coast Times*, 9/4/1943.
 - 60 Markey and Wells, in Hagan and Wells, 93-94.
 - 61 Barou, 12.
 - 62 Markey and Wells, in Hagan and Wells, 94.
 - 63 *South Coast Times*, 10/5/1946.
 - 64 *Common Cause*, 17/12/1938, 1.
 - 65 UWA, D20/2/2, Miners' Women's Auxiliaries, Constitution of the Australian Miners Women's Auxiliary, undated.
 - 66 Stevens, 58.
 - 67 Stevens, 58-59.
 - 68 UWA, Oral History T3, Miners' Women Auxiliaries: Mesdames Bowen, Kaye, Martin and Wilson, Interviewed by Baiba Irving, 11/2/1974.
 - 69 *Common Cause*, 7/10/1939, 5.
 - 70 UWA, Oral History T3, Miners' Women Auxiliaries: Mesdames Bowen, Kaye, Martin and Wilson, Interviewed by Baiba Irving, 11/2/1974.
 - 71 UWA, D20/4/1/1, Miners' Women's Auxiliaries, Kembla Minutes, 20/1/1954 and 14/3/1954.
 - 72 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
 - 73 *Illawarra Mercury*, 24/9/1954, 7.
 - 74 B. Curthoys and A. McDonald, *More Than a Hat and Glove Brigade: The Story of the Union of Australian Women*, Bookpress, Sydney, 1996. Curthoys and McDonald raise this issue throughout their book, which deals mostly with the post war period. Of course Judith Smart has discussed the issue of protests by women over

- food and prices for an earlier period. See J. Smart, 'Feminists, Food and the Fair Price: The Cost of living Demonstrations in Melbourne, August-September 1917', in J. Damousi and M. Lake, (eds) *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, 274-301.
- 75 UWA, D20/2/3, Miners' Women's Auxiliaries, Corrimal-South Bulli Women's Auxiliary-Press Clippings 1960-1973, *Common Cause*, 14/10/1950, 2.
- 76 UWA, D20/2/3, Miners' Women's Auxiliaries, Corrimal-South Bulli Women's Auxiliary-Press Clippings 1960-1973, *Illawarra Mercury*, 28/10/1950.
- 77 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
- 78 The first women's auxiliaries were associated with the Australian Railways Union. See A. Fulton, 'Kerosene Tins, Cakes, and Communists - The Women's Auxiliary Movement of the Australian Railways Union in New South Wales between 1934 and 1938', BA Honours Thesis, Australian National University, 1988.
- 79 N. MacKenzie, *Women in Australia*, F.W. Cheshire, Canberra, 1962, 292 and 320.
- 80 *Illawarra Mercury*, 30/1/1942.
- 81 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
- 82 Curthoys and McDonald, 2. See also P. Ranald, 'Women's Organisations and the Issue of Communism', in A. Curthoys, and J. Merritt, (eds) *Better Dead Than Red, Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959*, Volume 2, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1986, 41. Ranald notes how particularly in the postwar period the issue of communism created tensions within women's organisations.
- 83 *South Coast Times*, 12/4/1940.
- 84 UWA, Oral History T3, Miners' Women Auxiliaries: Mesdames Bowen, Kaye, Martin and Wilson, Interviewed by Baiba Irving, 11/2/1974.
- 85 Interview with Dolly Potter and Sally Bowen, 29/1/1996.
- 86 UWA, D20/2/2, South Coast Miners' Women's Auxiliaries, Letter from Noreen Hewett, Miners Federation, Sydney, to 'Joyce', 29/10/1952.
- 87 Curthoys and McDonald, chapter 13.
- 88 The demise or transformation of these women's groups perhaps also indicates some tentative answers to Cora Baldock's speculations about 'what would happen to women's incentive to take up volunteer work as a regular, dependable work activity if truly equal opportunities for women existed in the paid labour market, and if the structural and ideological divisions between 'home-makers' and 'breadwinners' were eradicated.' See Baldock in Baldock and Cass, 291.
- 89 See Jordan, 156. He suggests that it is women who will be the biggest losers with this usurpation of the notion of community.