A history of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union

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CHAPTER SIX
ARBITRATION AND REFORMISM
1920–1929
During the 1920s there was considerable growth in the Australian economy and, in particular, in manufacturing. Gross Domestic Product rose by over one-third from 1919/20 to 1928/29; the manufacturing component by over two-thirds. Manufacturing employment increased steadily until 1926/27. Conditions for consumer-goods were propitious: population rose by one million to 6.4 million. Prices began to fall in 1921 and were fairly stable thereafter. Even allowing for unemployment, real wages did not decline during the 1920s. Population became more concentrated in the cities so that markets for items like clothes were sustained by urbanisation, increased population and rising living standards. These conditions limited the appeal of radical solutions to workers' concerns. None of this is to suggest that this was a time of full employment. Indeed the lowest quarterly return for unemployment was 5.6 per cent in the very first quarter of the 1920s.

1. N.G. Butlin, *Australian Domestic Product*, p.461: 1919/20 £310.4m; 1928/29 £421.4m. The highest level of GDP in the 1920s was £440.4m in 1924/25.


4. ibid.

5. For quarterly unemployment returns for the 1920s see *Labour Report*, Nos.11-20.
Manufacturing growth was generally attributed to the trade protection barriers which were kept up by Federal governments. The War had provided a 'natural' protection for manufacturing. Because the importance of a manufacturing base had been demonstrated, it was widely believed that this protection should be maintained in the post-War years.\(^6\) The Hughes Government re-vamped the tariff structure, enacted anti-dumping legislation and set up a Tariff Board.

There were major increases in rates of protection. The Board was to review protectionism and, although it did not question the fundamentals of the tariff system, the Board caused some anxiety amongst manufacturers and unionists.\(^7\) This was particularly true after 1923 when a new Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, found himself reliant upon a new party representing farmers in the Federal Parliament.\(^8\) The rural sector and the Chambers of Commerce were in a position to exercise some restraint upon their bete noir, import controls. In any case, both the Board and the Arbitration Court were less than happy with the economic implications of protectionism. The Board believed that protectionism must not encourage the 'shelter of obsolete plant and methods'\(^9\) whilst Justice Higgins declared that modern equipment would be of benefit to the Australian consumer.\(^10\) Protectionism must not encourage inefficiency.

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8. First as the Progressive Party, then re-named the Country Party.
10. *ibid.*
The impact of protection is difficult to gauge. The value of imports of clothing and textiles declined through the decade but still created some anxiety in the Union. With political uncertainty and constant concern about costs, employers found these years to be less certain than a review of statistics suggests. Employers and the organised working class sought to re-define much of the debate in Australia about protection, arbitration and industry.

During the first dozen years of its existence, the FCT had been pulled one way and another by the competing standings of State and Federal arbitration systems and of the Branches of the ALP. In addition, there were organisations which challenged the assumptions upon which the Union had been founded. Protectionism seemed less assured in the 1920s than earlier, but arbitration was even more problematical. Political intervention by the Union was usually directed at constitutional change and protectionism under the Commonwealth and, in the States, at piece-meal reforms. Arbitration was the central issue not least because in the second half of the decade it came under attack from employers and their political parties. These attacks were at least as dangerous to the system as the OBU or the Communist Party. The politics of the FCT were to be more influenced by the need to defend arbitration from its conservative opponents than by a desire to join the revolutionaries in destroying it.

11. Imports: 1919/20 £80.7m; 1928/29 £66.7m. Source: CYB.
By 1920 the OBU had been ignored or rejected outright by most unions but, at first, the post-War economy did not encourage a sanguine view of capitalism's potential, with unemployment at 11.2 per cent in 1921. Challenges to capitalism and its systems of industrial regulation grew stronger and multiplied. A Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was formed in 1920, quickly establishing itself as a force in the Labor Council in Sydney. The OBU scheme for re-organising unions was revived, winning approval at an All-Australian Congress of Trade Unions in June 1921. The Congress also declared for the 'socialisation' of the means of production and, in October, the ALP's Federal Conference followed suit.

This was a great advance on Labor practice. A NSW Labor Government (1920-22) was adjudged unsatisfactory by many unions. Only in Queensland did the Party push for thorough reform. Federally, Labor was not called upon to enact the socialisation plank because the Party could not win government. In the National Parliament, as in Victoria's, the ALP remained in opposition until the very end of the decade. Under these circumstances the need for union action was correspondingly enhanced as were arguments about revolutionary options. However, divisions within the working-class movement and a return to relative prosperity undermined both the OBU and the CPA. The OBU's triumph of 1921 gave way to a tame ending in 1924 in the Arbitration Court where the OBU's new form, the Australasian Workers' Union, had sought registration.

The OBU's decline had been evident before 1923 as meetings became less frequent and supporters less obvious. In 1923 a national body built on pro-arbitration craft unions was formed, the Commonwealth Council of Federal Unions (CCFU). If this kind of organisation was industrially satisfactory to some, political success seemed also possible through reform. After winning the NSW elections in 1925 under Jack Lang, the ALP delivered a range of legislation including workers' compensation, child endowment and the 44-hour week. Legislating for the 44-hour week was especially significant given that hours campaigns had been a central theme of the industrial and political militancy of the early 1920s. Acceptance of Lang's legislation also demonstrated how that militancy had declined. The CPA had collapsed in Melbourne, it was struggling in Sydney, the OBU was but a memory and in almost all unions there was increasing apathy and easy satisfaction with Labor.

Militancy declined in other terms. Women's organisations made no advance on their position. Indeed, the rising affluence of the cities and the retreat of the exigencies of war reinforced the role of 'woman as mother' and housekeeper. In terms of both gender and class, then, the struggle for change became more difficult.

The Labor Party's claims to be the answer to the needs for change were not put to the test. From 1923 until 1929 Prime Minister Bruce and his allies held Parliamentary office. One of the central concerns of the Government was industrial efficiency. This was not new. Hughes had attempted to bring capital and labour together to resolve problems of industrial practice. Bruce intended to be more direct. Bruce saw militant unions and the arbitration system as the obstacles to economic progress. Fighting an election in 1925 on a 'law and order' platform, Bruce retained office and set about trying to weaken unions, make the Arbitration Court into a tool of economic regulation and abolish strike action. In 1926 the Government held a referendum to ask for increased Commonwealth powers. This was, in a sense, traditional Labor policy, and the CCFU supported it. Other bodies, including the Labor Council and Labor Party in NSW, and many unions were opposed to the idea that any good could be wrung from the change. They were 'less sanguine about achieving the birth of the Socialist Commonwealth with Bruce as midwife'.

Bruce managed to divide the labour movement but the proposal was defeated. Bruce's Government proceeded instead with changes to the Arbitration Act, allowing the Court a greater role in union affairs. These changes, enacted in 1928, added to amendments in 1926 which had purported to give the Court power to impose penalties on unions. The Government was not finished. The Transport Workers' Act (1928) attempted to break union power in the docks and another election was fought on industrial issues. The Conservatives triumphed but by 1929 strikes and lock-outs had brought chaos. In a last fling the

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abolition of arbitration was proposed. This was too much for the electorate. In October 1929 Labor won a Federal election.

Since its division over the referendum, the labour movement had become more united. A new body replaced the CCFU. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) was established in 1927 with support from Labor Councils, craft and industry unions and revolutionaries alike. When Bruce's onslaught reached its peak, there were calls for still closer union co-operation. This seemed all too necessary as unemployment posed at least as many problems as did the state. By 1929 economic management was the main expectation of the movement when it looked to its Federal Parliamentary leader, James Scullin. Labor's response was traditional. Tariffs were immediately raised to protect jobs. Unionists looked forward to other measures to counter the depression and then to the preservation and improvement of Commonwealth Arbitration.

The response of clothing trades' unionists to the political conflicts over arbitration and industrial efficiency was perhaps more complex than others because of the nature of the industry. The clothing trade was not in the forefront of manufacturing's expansion or of technological change. There were developments in the industry but the structure of the industry barely changed. In the 1920s, employment was unstable and the threats to arbitration of great moment. With the Tariff Board and the Court apparently sharing the Government's concern about manufacturing's efficiency, hopes of winning wage rises and protecting jobs might be in vain. Therefore, just as the Victorian
The tariff system had been the base for the 'fair employer' strategy, so Commonwealth protection might encourage alliances with the 'innovative employer'. This approach had indeed been hinted at by 1919.

In the 1920s the structure of the trade and changes in it varied greatly between the States and between sections. Employment levels give the first indication of this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Employment in Victoria and NSW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919/20</td>
<td>1928/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and Tailoring</td>
<td>9322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>9117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts and Underwear</td>
<td>6019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSWSR, VYB.

16. The States differed in the categorisation. In NSW 'clothing' and 'tailoring' were separated and there were subdivisions in dressmaking. Shirt trade statistics are difficult because of differences within and between the States. NSW had two divisions: one for shirts, ties and scarves; one for underclothing, whitework and corsets. These two divisions are totalled as one for the tables in this text. Victoria had one, less well described, category: 'underclothing and shirts', until the 1930s.
Table 2 Employment in Queensland and South Australia

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>South Australia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1919/20</td>
<td>1928/29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and Tailoring</td>
<td>3086</td>
<td>2916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>1243</td>
<td>678</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2318</td>
<td>1052</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2059</td>
<td>965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CYB

Across Australia, then, employment fell in most sections where the FCT organised; only the shirt and underwear trade and the NSW clothing section increased. Variations between the States were important, with dressmaking and millinery becoming more concentrated in Victoria. Conversely, the menswear section became more significant in NSW. There were also variations within States, most notably in NSW where the traditional focus of unionism, the order-tailoring trade, had a brief flurry of activity such that it accounted for over half the 'clothing and tailoring' section's employment in 1919/20. By 1928/29 it provided only 34.5 per cent.

The comparison of the years 1919/20 with 1928/29 obscures fluctuations between them. The expanding sectors - NSW's clothing and shirtwear

17. The smaller Branches organised in only these sections in 1920 although they began to expand later. There was no Branch in Western Australia or the territories. In the remaining state, Tasmania, a couple of hundred members were enrolled.

18. Calculated from NSWSR.
and Victoria's shirtwear - peaked in employment in 1926/27 and 1927/28. Other sectors did so as early as 1922/23. These features of the industry's structure underpinned much of the nature of the Union, especially differences between Branches.

Despite the variations in employment, the 'value of work done' fell in only one section in the two main States - NSW's dressmaking and millinery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Value of Work Done: £000 (1919/20 Prices)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919/ 1928/ 1920 1929 Change 1920 1929 Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing and Tailoring 3662 3719 +1.5% 3932 4524 +15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery 2864 3479 +21.1% 1456 1148 -21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts and Underwear 2375 3290 +38.5% 808 2259 +7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VYB, NSWSR

19. Unless otherwise indicated I have followed the NSWSR and VYB in using 'goods/articles manufactured or work done'. This is a measure of the value of output. Values of production were not then included in the sources.

20. Percentage calculation added. Prices calculated from CYB, retail prices.
These statistics reveal significant advances in output in most sectors, remembering that employment fell in some. If it seems clear that production per head must have risen dramatically there is, equally, good reason to treat these calculations with great care.21

In some respects the industry was either stable or 'moving' in apparently curious ways. The female proportion of the work-force changed little. Only in the tailoring section in NSW was there an increase, from 66.3 per cent to 69.1 per cent. In Victoria, the proportion of women actually declined in both dressmaking and shirtwear. In both cases the decline was more pronounced in the first half of the decade. In neither did it alter the dominance of female labour. It was a complex transformation. In dressmaking the proportion of women who were proprietors rose. In shirtmaking it fell so, in that trade, women were being pushed out of ownership and, perhaps, the craft sections.22

The rise in the percentage of workers who were working proprietors was a feature of all sections except shirts and underclothing. It was reflected in a fall in the average unit of production, that is in the number of hands per factory. The relative stability of the sexual balance of the work-force and the survival of the small concern were

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21. Because output values include light, fuel, power and materials, there is an extraordinary range of values which even calculations at constant prices cannot overcome. In the clothing trade there are, too, price variations as between fashion lines. We also need to know about hours worked, overtime, what conditions were like or indeed how hard people worked.

22. From VYB, NSWSR.
at odds with trends elsewhere in manufacturing. In NSW in 1919/20 there were 93 'slop' factories and 321 tailoring shops. By 1928/29 the respective totals were 241 and 291. The increase in 'slop' factories so outran the increase in employment that average factory size declined from 50.4 to 31.4 hands. Thus, in 1919/20, the greatest number of workers was employed in slop factories categorised as employing 51 to 100 hands; in 1928/29 it fell in the 21 to 50 category. Further, the number of factories employing 11 to 20 hands increased from 13 to 61.

If no more female labour was being used and if capital was not obviously becoming more concentrated—how did the industry's production increase? An answer is suggested by the continued increase in the application of electric power. In NSW, in ready-made wear, horse-power in use doubled; it advanced even more in shirtwear. In Victoria it had increased about 41 per cent by 1927/28 and almost 90 per cent in the two other main sections. There is no direct evidence of new sorts of machinery but some Union officials were impressed by 'the introduction of new machinery and new appliances'.

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23. This is significant in comparison with the forces shaping the politics and unions of other workers. See especially Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, Ch.10, for developments 1900 to 1921; and C. Forster, *Industrial Development*.

24. From NSWSR — by far the most detailed statistical source for any of the States.

25. *ibid.*; note that this is distinct from horse-power *available* in factories.

26. From VYB. The Victorian increases were on a higher base level.

This perhaps related more to improvement than innovation. Not until the 1930s were there thoroughgoing changes.

Union sources for changes in the labour process must be treated with care because perceived threats and reported alterations may reveal more about power within the Union than about change itself. Thus a claim in the NSW Branch that more and more women were being employed on 'men's work' deserves some circumspection. Were it the case, it would have sprung from relatively small changes in the tailoring trade. Similarly, there is a disproportionate amount of information about the introduction of machine-pressing and changes in methods of payments for pressers. Other comments by officials do, however, suggest an insight into the increased production of the 1920s: 'the quantities of work done by our women is astounding for the money received'.

Quantities of work was one theme of conflict through the 'task' system under which given amounts of work had to be done for the weekly wage. Women frequently demanded that 'work over the task' be paid at a higher rate, as a kind of over-time rate. Monies received were of concern not just in relation to economist considerations but as part of work practice. Piece-work, 'task and bonus wage' systems and other 'merit' schemes were tried by employers in their bid to reduce costs and remain competitive. The struggle over methods of payment was a recurrent theme in Australian manufacturing with constant pressure for

28. ibid. As in original.
the introduction of piece-rates where they did not apply. Incentive schemes became more practicable as products became more standardised and production runs longer. In clothing, neither condition always, or even often, applied. Employers therefore tried to introduce specific schemes in different trades to win cost benefits or to break workers' power.

The advance of machinery and, particularly, more and more electrically-powered machines, the amount of work done under new subdivisions and new forms of payment help to explain rising production in the industry. The unevenness of the application of these methods, the small size of firms and the division between sections and States, that is, in the structure of the industry, also suggest very real constraints upon any attempt to develop a nationwide industry union consciousness, far less working class-consciousness. Not even the Federal Award guaranteed uniform conditions. If universal minimum wage rates were now enforced, there were still differences in efficiency as between firms and States. Inter-State competition could therefore remain a threat to jobs in high-cost States.

There were allegations of inter-State 'dumping' of goods and low prices, and some indications that Victorian companies could produce clothes more cheaply than others because, amongst other things, Victorian textile mills produced cheaper material than others did.  

29. These problems are explained clearly in T. Sheridan, op.cit., pp.87-91.

Because its prices were so low, the modern shirt manufacturer, Pelaco, in Melbourne, caused anxiety as far afield as Brisbane. To compete, firms in Queensland were forced to sub-divide their shirt-making. The Queensland Branch's response was restrained by the fear of inter-State competition. Should the Union insist on full training and run the risk of pricing local firms out of the market? Similar questions of work process and output bedevilled other workers and officials. In short, the structure of the industry was at least as important as its labour processes. Workers tended to be divided from each other, Branch officers to misunderstand each other. Overall, there often seemed to be more unity with local employers than unionists in other States. The clothing trade expanded without substantial industrial change, without the more usual characteristics of a developed capitalism - concentrated capital and large groupings of increasingly homogenous labour. The state, through Commonwealth Arbitration, was the only substantial objective counter to fragmentation and division. The setting of Awards to cover more of the industry was, from 1920 to 1922, as much a part of the framework for the Union's development as the economic, industrial and political contexts.

The Victorian Branch moved quickly to try to bring the Number Two Group workers under conditions similar to those of the Archer Award. From the summer of 1919/20 a series of agreements was ratified as Wages Board Determinations. It was a propitious time to act for, in

31. See Vic Branch, Minutes, passim, 15 December 1919 - 6 April 1920.
the 'apparel trades', unemployment was at very low levels. Because the Archer rates were followed large increases in money wages were secured. The traditionally low-paid dressmaking trade was the most affected. Here the impact of arbitration seems to have been clearer than in the Number One Group. The average wages paid to adult females rose from 37s 8d to 45s 4d, in twelve months 1919/20. Average rates for shirt and underwear workers rose almost as much. The differential between the groups was closed by about half. For the first time, a Wages board Determination set rates above the average then being paid.

It is difficult to estimate the weight which should be given to arbitration, bargaining and the booming trade in explaining these rises. It should be noted that inflation undermined the benefits of increased money earnings. Prices in 1920 were 13.5 per cent higher than those of 1919. This still meant that dressmakers, under-clothing workers, and some shirt-hands had secured real increases but others, notably 'the average' worker under the Archer Award, had gained no real increase. Only six months into the term of the Award, the

32. In the 'clothing, hats, boots and textiles' category unemployment was just 1.7 per cent in the final quarter of 1919 and 0.7 and 2.0 per cent in the first two quarters of 1920. The corresponding aggregate levels were 5.2, 5.6, 6.2 per cent. Source: Labour Report, No.11.

33. Compare 'Factory Reports' for 1919 and 1920. See VPP, 1920, Second Session; 1921, Second Session. Clothing wages for women were 4s 8d to 6s 7d more than dressmaking wages in 1919; in 1920, 2s 4d higher.

34. This excludes the first Determination in the 1890s. The Shirt Board's rates, which took affect from 1 January 1920, were about 1 shilling above the 1919 average. See VGG, 8 December 1919.

35. The average wage for adult females rose about 11 per cent 1919-20. See 'Factory Reports'.

Victorian Branch recorded its 'complete dissatisfaction' with wages. Delays in arbitration procedure had been one problem; prices had increased rapidly whilst the Union's claims were being processed. A more ambitious claim would have been wise. By May 1920, Federal Management Committee had resolved that the Branches could take any action they saw fit. The issue of wages was, however, resolved at the Federal level in negotiation with employers. The outcome pleased both sides, largely because, as would be revealed in 1922, each put its own interpretation upon the agreement.

Following the precedent established in the Commonwealth Court, wages were to be adjusted at six-monthly intervals in line with the cost-of-living. The Archer rates were raised to 42s for women, 78s for men. There would be no decrease in the minimum wage in the future. With these wages satisfactorily adjusted, officials concentrated on two new claims. The decisions were not finalised until the middle of 1921. The Atterton Award merely extended the Archer Award's terms to cover new respondents. The Alley Award, was the first Commonwealth-wide regulation of Number Two Group.

The Court followed Justice Higgins' practice in fixing a woman's wage for work which is really women's work but ... [it would] not encourage

36. Vic Branch, Minutes, 19 April 1920.
37. MC, Minutes, 1 May 1920.
38. Other Awards were adjusted at quarterly intervals. There is no extant copy of the conference's proceedings. See Vic Branch, Minutes, 26 July 1920, and, for a subsequent account, 16 CAR 50 at 50-2.
employers to employ women at work which it considers men can reasonably claim to be men's work. 39

This was perhaps the clearest prescription yet for lower wages for women. However, there was no attempt to explain the rationale as Higgins had tried to do. Existing practice was confirmed. Female minimum rates were to match the Archer rates as adjusted: 45s 9d, or 54 per cent of the male rate. Similarly, margins were comparable with the prior Award. Women received from 1s 6d to 5s 6d over the minimum. Most men received 15s. Both caused dismay. 40 The tailors' rates nowhere near matched the Harvester equivalent; the women's rates gave them total wages less than half men's. In general, judges did not accept that margins should be adjusted for inflation. Justice Powers, who presided over the Alley case, had proved most hostile to any consideration of the Harvest case as a benchmark 41 and indeed was loathe to see any skill in the work done by women. 42

Despite its limitations the Award was accepted by the Union. The NSW Branch did not officially discuss it at all; the South Australians, having endured more tribulations with Wages Boards than had anyone else, enjoyed some union growth as a result of the Award. 43 The Victorians formally endorsed the Award after Wallis - who had opposed

39. 15 CAR 435 at 435.
40. See Vic Branch Minutes, 21 March, 13 June 1921.
43. SA Branch, Minutes, passim.
the Archer rates in 1919 - noted an 'abnormal slackness in the trade'. This move towards acquiescence with arbitration may well have been truly tactical, for unemployment in the first half of 1921 was indeed unusually high. Nevertheless there was no sign of the opposition to the principle of arbitration that there had been in 1919.

By the middle of 1921, then, the FCT had completed its 'first round' of arbitration. Its Awards covered respondents in five States and all sections of the industry, but its control was more apparent than real. The high turnover of firms and changes of trading names meant that many employers were not cited. There was neither preference for unionists nor a common rule for the industry. The Awards covered 'members of the claimant organisation', not all employees. In the factories, struggles would continue because the Court did not set down piece-work scales for workers under the Alley Award, preferring that each employer in conjunction with his or her employees, may fix his own piece-rates provided such rates enable a journeyman or journeywoman of average capacity ... to earn at least the minimum weekly wage.

This at once undermined the hopes of a universal set of prices between firms and left much open within them. 'Average capacity' could mean anything and 'in conjunction with' could mean nothing.

44. Vic Branch, Minutes, 21 March 1921. Unemployment was 12.8 and 8.4 per cent in the first two quarters of 1921 - an extraordinary change in just twelve months. National unemployment had declined, see Labour Report No.11.

45. 13 CAR 647 at 714.

46. 15 CAR 435 at 449.
The immediate benefit of the arbitration campaigns seemed to be in having wages adjusted for prices but the increases paid in August 1921 were the last before prices began to fall. By the end of the year, clothing manufacturers had signalled their intention to cut male wages by 6s and others in proportion. The Union's representatives argued that adjusted wages constituted the real minimums and could not, therefore, be reduced. Employers maintained that the rates set down in the first Awards were the real minimums. They were unimpressed with Union claims that workers had a moral right to enjoy advances in real wages having waited so long to 'catch-up' with prices. Early in 1922 the stage was set for a resolution of this conflict. How the Union reacted would partly depend upon the sorts of policies and structures which had been developed since the Archer Award.

(ii) **GROWTH, STRUCTURE AND POLICY 1920-23**

If the 'first round' of arbitration encouraged union growth, it did not appear to restrain industrial action. In Victoria and South Australia, where the Union grew most quickly, many members defended and extended their arbitration gains. By the end of 1921, the Victorian Branch numbered almost 9500 persons, the South Australians

47. 16 CAR 1010.
48. ibid.; see also CTG, passim.
over 1800. In all, there were perhaps 20,000 members. By 1923, however, all Branches were in decline and overall membership, at 17,510, was not much higher than it had been in 1919. Early in the decade it had seemed that the FCT's membership would not merely reflect the trade cycle, or be, in Carter's eloquent (and accurate) phrase, 'at the mercy of the employing class'. Strikes in Victoria brought employers' attention the widespread dissatisfaction with wages and in South Australia the officers had some difficulty in persuading members not to strike in 1920. Even in the relatively unorganised shirt-trade women stood by the Union when employers threatened dismissals.

The NSW Branch discussed the appointment of new organisers but was not as conspicuously energetic in the follow-up to the Award as other Branches. Its earlier disavowal of the OBU was to some extent reflected in a decline in industrial militancy. Within this tendency there were contradictions. Thus, in March 1920, the Branch carried a resolution favouring 'arbitration in preference to strikes', as an amendment to a motion declaring for arbitration as against 'direct

49. Membership figures are unreliable before 1923. Even then, there are variations between the figures supplied in Branch as against Federal reports. In this chapter, the numbers are for total, not financial, membership.

50. The Branch memberships were: Victoria, 8342; NSW, 5191; SA, 2459; Queensland, 1159; Tasmania, 359. See FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924.

51. Carter's timeless description of the tailors after the collapse of their Union in 1869.

52. Vic Branch, Minutes, 29 November 1920.
action'. The small change was significant. It represented a concern that a Federally-registered union could not condone strikes; equally it indicated a reliance upon the traditional measures of the craftsman: in the words of the Engineers' motto, 'Defence not Defiance'.

Under Jack Crombie, the Branch's main area of concern was indeed the 'craft' section of the industry. The problems of others, especially women workers, are barely recorded in surviving records of the Branch. The officials had great difficulty in controlling pressers - some of whom struck work to defend the Awards, most of whom were left to decide on a shop-by-shop basis how work would be paid. In 1921, pressers at one of Sydney's largest firms were faced with a new weekly wage system and the introduction of more machines. In April they went on strike but, soon afterwards, they agreed to abandon piece-work. There was little support in the Branch for the men but neither this nor the acceptance of wages meant that the numbers opposing piece-work were increasing. The will to resist employers did not seem very strong. Nor was it when time-cards were introduced at David Jones. The Branch accepted the firm's statement that the cards did not presage 'speed-up' but were merely to help with 'costings'. In re-organising work and introducing new technology, then, employers

53. NSW Branch, Minutes, 22 March 1920.
54. ibid., 12 January, 8 September 1920.
55. ibid., 18 April, 16 May, 20 July 1921. A move to declare the company 'black' was defeated.
56. ibid., 9, 23 August 1920.
encountered little resistance in NSW. The Branch could not even defend its gains: NSW organisers told Federal Council in 1921, that the Award was being broken 'all over the state'.

When the Branch did become active, its craft conservatism re-surfaced. Tailors, lamenting the number of women working in 'male areas', demanded that the Awards include a limitation on the total volume of female employment. At Federal Council, Carter ridiculed the claim, replying that there 'would not be sufficient tailors in existence to justify the claim'.

If the policies pursued by the NSW Branch did not bode well for its ability to defend the Award or build an active Union, neither did structural changes. By early 1920, the only female organiser, Wilcox, had left the Branch. She was not replaced. In the same year, the Branch agreed that organisers would be appointed 'at the pleasure of the Branch'. This was not extended to the Secretary whose administration of the Branch caused increasing anxiety. He did not attend Federal Council in 1921. In 1922, organisers Gibb and Murphy, Moore and Fallon laid official complaints which led to Carter's visiting Sydney and censuring Crombie. Complicated manoeuvres

57. FC, Minutes, 14 November 1921.
58. NSW Branch, Minutes, 28 February, 2 April, 31 October 1921.
59. FC, Minutes, 18 November 1921.
60. NSW Branch, Minutes, 27 January 1920.
61. ibid., 20 March 1922.
followed when the organisers resigned as sectional representatives on the Branch committee. Once more the FCT seemed to be in danger of breaking up because the remaining committee members vetoed a planned visit from Carter. Fallon and Gibb stood apart from Branch elections. On 15 January 1923 Crombie 'retired' and a week later Peter Fallon was elected Secretary. Carter was subsequently asked to help 'resuscitate the Branch'. Fallon brought NSW firmly back to the Federation, committed to further organisation. Gibb, who quickly regained his organiser's position, was personally committed to the ALP, being a member of its State Executive. New directions seemed to beckon.

During the NSW leadership crisis, the wages adjustment dispute had come to a climax. NSW members were fortunate the employers did not take the same line as they did in South Australia for the Branch was in no position to defend itself. By contrast, the Federation had been somewhat re-structured and within other Branches rank-and-file activity stimulated official response to changes in wages. The first impact of arbitration seems to have been to persuade Branches at last to put the Federal office on a more secure footing. Its share of the Union's income was increased, to 15 per cent and from April 1920 Carter was 'loaned' by the Victorian Branch for full-time Federal

62. ibid., 8 May, 19 June, 17 July, 16 October 1922.

63. FC, Minutes, 27 February, 2 March 1923 for Fallon's 'disgust at the administration that had taken place in the past'. See also Carter's 'Report' for what was an extremely bitter dispute surrounding the policing of the Awards and the execution of policy. See also NSW Branch, Minutes, 15 March, 7 May 1923.
duties. Federal Council's powers were increased when its Management Committee was given the right to set up an inquiry where Branches did not carry out Federal policy. Branch autonomy remained intact although Carter argued in 1921 that 'amalgamation of all branches with one central control would be a good thing'.

The major development which was signalled was further, not closer, unionism. As an expression of Council's desire to cover all clothing workers the Union was re-named the Federated Clothing and Allied Trades' Union (FCATU). This expansion included a geographic aspect - the addition of a Tasmanian Branch - and a constitutional one - in rule changes allowing furriers and tie-workers to join, as well as makers of umbrellas, tablecloths and sheets.

The Victorian Branch carried through the fullest discussion of these changes. It supported greater 'centralism' but did not forsake democratic traditions within. The appointment of officers clearly showed this. Some members, including Wallis, had not been happy when

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64. FCT, Rules, (1920), Rule 7. For Carter's appointment, see FC, Minutes, 11 March 1920; Vic Branch, Minutes, 6 April 1920.

65. FCT, Rules (1920), Rule 8. See also Vic Branch, Minutes, 15 December 1919; 19 March 1920.

66. FC, Minutes, 22 November 1921.

67. ibid., 15 November 1921.

68. ibid.; see also FCATU, Rules (1922), Rule 2. There was a considerable potential for overlap with the ATWU but the rules were registered.
temporary organisers were appointed in 1919 without an open ballot.69

In 1920 the question of 'non-trade' organisers was raised. Some opposition to such appointments was finally over-ridden when a prominent member, May Francis, argued that such opposition was a 'narrow-minded view ... [and] a stumbling block to working class progress'.70 A less controversial demand was that 'members of the Executive must be working in the trade'.71 This was readily carried.

The payment and nature of officials were contentious issues in most unions; in the FCATU these sorts of questions were complex in all Branches. It has been suggested that, in the 1920s, the women's movement went into a decline from which it did not recover until perhaps the 1960s.72 In the FCATU, if the original gains were slight, the decline was marked. In the early 1920s, each Branch had one woman organiser and most had a majority of women on their committees.73 In 1920, May Francis moved to secure equal pay for the organiser Miss Whitford. The question was put to a Branch meeting which rejected the claim by 52 votes to 75.74 Whitford remained as an organiser until

69. Vic Branch, Minutes, 6 October 1919.
70. ibid., 4 October 1920.
71. ibid., 18 October 1920. These questions would cause division for some time. The organiser appointed in 1920 was R.J. Heffron who had been a member of the IWW in New Zealand and the VSP in Melbourne. He was one of the figures in opposing J.T. Lang in the late 1930s and was NSW Premier 1959-64. Source: H. Radi, (et al., eds.), op.cit.
73. In no case did the proportions match the membership.
74. Vic Branch, Minutes, 12 July 1920; Brodney Papers.
1923 when she quit the Branch claiming that she was the 'lowest paid woman at the Trades' Hall. After her departure, another woman was not put on.

Similarly, in NSW, Wilcox had not been replaced under the Crombie administration. South Australia's organiser Mabel Gilbert quit the Union in 1922 and was replaced by a male. Women's 'official' place in the labour movement seemed to be marginalised, then, after the advances made by about 1920. Whether this affected, or reflected, the thinking of women in the shops and factories is unclear. As women's part in the Union's affairs seemed to be declining, there was an attack from without on the economic advances made by clothing workers. This attack was concentrated in South Australia and Victoria.

Although wage cuts were instituted through the Arbitration system, there was a wider assault on working conditions as Australian manufacturers tried to withstand an international slow-down of the economy. Miners and metal-workers suffered lock-out and retrenchment and the clothing trade too became an arena of conflict. When employers announced that wage cuts would be enforced, Victorian members decided to resist them. In February 1922, employers found that they could not enforce their will in Victoria. In South

75. Vic Branch, Minutes, 25 June 1923.
76. SA Branch, Minutes, 2 November 1922. Wilcox' departure is shrouded in mystery.
77. See above, 'Context'.
Australia when a strike appeared likely, the Branch Executive ordered that there be 'no cessation of work'. After declaring that a 'one week holiday' be taken if cuts took place, the NSW Executive retreated, resisted some calls for strikes and secured an agreement that employers would 're-instate' wages if no cuts were made in Victoria. Officials recognised that favourable conditions had assisted the generally successful resistance. In the first quarter of 1922, the industry's unemployment level was only 1.5 per cent; the national average was 9.2 per cent.

The Union attempted to sustain this resistance through the Court but Justice Powers ruled that male rates could be reduced from 87s 6d to 81s 6d and female rates in proportion. Officials hastily assured members that they had 'never knowingly agreed to any provision for reduction' and set about trying to maintain opposition to the cuts. May Francis argued that, in principle, the Union would now be better off without arbitration. She had few supporters although

78. SA Branch, Minutes, 16 February 1922; Vic Branch, Minutes, 13, 20 February 1922.
79. NSW Branch, Minutes, 20, 27 February, 3 March 1922.
80. MC, Minutes, 22 May 1922.
82. 16 CAR 50. This was the employers' claim.
83. CTG, 15 March 1922.
84. ibid., 15 April 1922; Vic Branch, Minutes, 20 February 1922; MC, Minutes, 22-24 May, 1922.
85. Vic Branch, Minutes, 20 March 1922.
Carter conceded that it had been 'a mere farce' to have gone to the Court to stop reductions. Wallis felt that the Court should completely change its approach to wage-fixing and analyse the value of work done. Carter later hinted that the original wages-adjustment clauses were ill-conceived. He, too, felt that with industrial advance, women's wages should be fundamentally re-thought.

Short-term considerations overcame any other policies, as the FCATU began to prepare new logs of claims precisely at the time new wage adjustments were due. Prices continued to fall in 1922 and wage reductions were to be enforced in August. The trade remained buoyant - as did the membership. In Melbourne, more than 1800 women attended mass meetings for the Number Two Group. Officials believed that this Group was the worse placed to resist cuts but, at the meeting, even the Minute-taker was excited by 'the largest and most enthusiastic' turn-out yet recorded. Subsequent sectional meetings pledged to support Union resistance. The results are unclear but workers had some success.

86. MC, Minutes, 22 May 1922.

87. H. Carter, 'History ...', p.3; see also notes in this file. For Wallis, see CTG, 15 May 1922.

88. The trade's unemployment in the September quarter of 1922 was, at 2.4 per cent, the lowest return for that quarter in the decade. Labour Report, No.13.

89. Vic Branch, Minutes, 7 August 1922.

90. CTG, 15 August 1922.
Adelaide was the centre of the dispute. On 2 August, as the Number Two Group was meeting in Melbourne, tailors in Adelaide decided to resist wage-cuts 'with all the means' possible. Female order-hands endorsed this decision, despite Branch Secretary George Carter's anxiety about strikes. At first, 500 workers walked out of the factories, claiming that the reductions in February should have been the last. On 21 August, about 1000 workers attended a special Branch meeting, 250 joined the Union and within a week there were perhaps 2000 clothing workers on strike. Bert Carter travelled to Adelaide to offer advice and encouragement; wage cuts, he argued, were to be resisted at any cost.

The Deputy-President of the Arbitration Court, Justice Webb, tried to get both sides to accept cuts for the time being. The Union refused - and rejected Webb's requirement that only the South Australian disputants be involved in discussion. The strike lasted about six weeks, irritating Webb who declared that 'the man who, in Australia, advocates a strike has got me absolutely puzzled' and dividing the Union, whose Management Committee censured South Australia and the Federal Secretary for acting without consulting others. NSW delegates

91. SA Branch, Minutes, 2, 3 August 1922.
92. ibid., 21 August 1922; CTG, 15 September 1922; Adelaide Advertiser, 12 August 1922. (Advertiser in clippings in UMA CATU Box 111).
93. Daily Herald, 12 August 1922. (UMA CATU Box 111) See also FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1923. Carter returned to Melbourne to meet the Federal Management Committee but he was asked back to Adelaide before the Committee assembled.
94. 15 CAR 541 at 546.
claimed that one Branch's interests were being put above those of the Federation. 95 Wallis resigned from the Committee to support instead the Victorian Branch which had provided over £2000 to South Australia. 96

The end of the dispute defused some of the criticism. On 8 September the parties went before the Court for interpretation of the Awards. Webb ruled that no changes could take place under the Archer (Number One) Group Award because the Award and variations to it had expired. Wages remained as at 15 May 1922, the date of expiry. Under the Alley and Atterton Awards, some reductions could take place. In the Alley (Dressmaking etc) Award, weekly wages and juvenile wages - but not piece-rates - could be reduced; under Atterton, only weekly wages. 97 To some extent the Union's claims were upheld.

At the following Federal Council meeting, in February 1923, Bert Carter made no apologies for encouraging the South Australian Branch. He felt 'harrassed' by NSW particularly because, he claimed, the South

95. MC, Minutes, 30 August, 1 September 1922. See also NSW Branch, Minutes, 21 August 1922.

96. Vic Branch, Minutes, 21 August, 13 September 1922.

97. 15 CAR 541 at 545, for a summary of the decision. The clauses in the Alley and Atterton Awards require close attention but their meaning is crystal clear. Why the South Australian employers misinterpreted them is curious. More important is why it was that they were the only ones to enforce a wide range of cuts. Presumably their more fragmented industry still found difficulties in competing with Victoria and NSW. This was only the beginning of anti-unionism amongst the Adelaide employers.
Australians had been in the front-line and the Union as a whole had been 'enhanced' by the dispute.98

The outcome of the strike tended to support this view. In October 1922, South Australian employers had applied for new reductions. Deputy-President Webb rejected the claim.98 Although some cuts followed, they were less than those sought by employers because Webb added the 'Powers 3 shillings' (an allowance for inflation) to the male wage. He criticised the 'absurd' differences between the Awards' adjustment clauses but introduced a further complexity of his own by not extending the 'prosperity allowance' to women. Their rates had become institutionalised at 54 per cent of men's. The Union's recourse to direct action had had some effect for Webb noted that he had 'a great repugnance to do anything that would irritate an industrial sore'.100

The employers' campaign was not, then, a success. The Union's growth and its changing structure seemed to be conducive to a new kind of organisation and a new consciousness amongst the membership. An 'Illuminated Address' was presented to the Victorian Branch by the South Australians.101 After a further visit to Adelaide, Herbert

98. FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1923.

99. 16 CAR 1010.

100. ibid., at 1010.

101. SA Branch 5, 6 October 1922. Bert Carter praised the South Australian's 'Comradeship and Determination' and 'the meeting closed with the singing of Solidarity'.
Carter was farewelled at the railway station by hundreds of women workers.

They sang songs and they cheered. The platform was one mass of flowers and streamers. It was a grand sight to behold.  

The extension of the Union from its craft base to a mass one, and a genuine commitment to united action would be necessary to defend gains made through the Courts let alone advance new demands. 'Access' was a key instance. Some employers so keenly resented union access to the work-place that Deputy-President Webb was to describe this as the 'most vexed question between the parties' when a new claim came before him. This threat to the FCATU's effectiveness prompted defiance in Victoria where members demanded a closer organisation of the union. In February 1923 a mass meeting of over 1600 members denounced employers' views on access and heard Federal Secretary Carter insist that genuine improvements in the standards of life, not mere wage adjustments were the workers' due. It was a stirring meeting for someone started to sing 'Solidarity Forever', and quite spontaneously hundreds of voices were singing 'The Union Makes Us Strong'. 

In the following months, despite increasing unemployment, there were several strikes by which wage-cuts were resisted, new firms brought

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103. 18 *CAR* 1032 at 1060.
104. Vic Branch, Minutes, 19 February 1923.
under Award rules and, with community support in the working-class suburb of Footscray, re-instatement of dismissed 'agitators' was won.106

In other Branches there was less cause for satisfaction. Within a year of the strike, the South Australian Executive was lamenting the 'apathy' of most unionists,107 whilst the new leadership in NSW blamed the level of imports for the unemployment that was increasingly concerning unionists. Wallis denounced too great a concern with imports which, he said, echoed the employers' 'catch-cry' when workers sought wage-increases. Carter believed most imports were speciality items, not in competition with Australian goods. There may well have been legitimate differences between the Branches here because the NSW trade was heavily concentrated in menswear and facing special problems. (Fallon believed that country people would not buy Australian suits.) Victorian officials, however, seemed to have mixed feelings about protectionism. Carter was wary of employers who might argue that wages should not be guaranteed by the tariff wall and who would thus break the traditional fair employer alliance. He was convinced that the Australian Textile Workers' Union (ATWU) was foolishly 'hand in glove' with employers.108

With jobs under threat in NSW and Adelaide, recruitment became

106. Vic Branch, Minutes, 2, 14, 28 May 1923; CTG, 15 May, 15 June 1923.

107. SA Branch, Minutes, 9 July 1923.

108. MC, Minutes, 7 August 1923 (Fallon); FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924 (Carter).
difficult. Fallon told Council in 1923 that Number Two Group 'would never make much progress', but Carter subsequently emphasised that it was not for Branches to say who would be in the FCATU. The Constitution covered almost all clothing workers. In all Branches, however, the Union's actual coverage remained limited and, from 1921, membership began to decline. The difficulties being experienced by some Branches encouraged a greater emphasis on arbitration. Even where there had been bursts of direct action, as in Victoria, the Union remained committed to the Court. Throughout the militancy of the early 1920s, Council had worked on new claims to replace the first round of awards. These claims aimed at improving immediate conditions and wages and at strengthening the Union's place in the industry.

By 1922, the employers had made the Arbitration Court into a battleground. Although most of the items in the first Awards had been settled by agreement, it now appeared that employers might serve their own log of claims. The Clothing Trades' Gazette warned of new 'extremists' in the Number Two Group of employers and of activities by the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures designed to free employers from what the Chamber saw as the 'existing oppression' of the Union's awards. The Union believed that employers intended to seek the

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109. FC, Minutes, 28 February 1923; 22 April 1924.
110. CTG, 15 July 1922.
111. ibid., 15 June 1922. The journal asked members: 'When you ... see your employer hard at work cranking up his Rolls Royce, do you really feel that he is a victim of your oppression?'
abolition of the 44 hour week - a feat achieved in other industries - and to make an assault on cutters by dividing marking the lays from cutting them and re-defining categories such that women would do some of the work at low wages.112

The Union's claims were organised more closely than in 1919-21. The two groups still had separate Awards but the cases ran as one. The Union's claims included improved allowances for lost time, higher margins for skill and a base wage for women equivalent to 57 per cent of men's. These parts of the claim were declared to be essential by Carter.113 The tensions between 'craft' and 'mass', men and women were underscored in that equal pay for 'men's work' was also emphasised. Clarification of the clauses governing factory access for officials and more stringent regulation of outwork were also sought. The Union recruited Muriel Heagney, a socialist feminist who had already worked for Federal unions as a researcher. The Victorians felt that her work was undermined by Justice Webb's decision that, in order to expedite the case, no oral evidence would be taken. Although unions were always critical of arbitration delays, Carter, and others, believed that Webb's edict had hurt their case.114

The preparation of the case had indeed involved a great deal of work.

112. ibid., 15 July 1922.
113. Vic Branch, Minutes, 19 March 1923.
114. ibid., 16 April, 11 June 1923; FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924. For Heagney, see J. Bremner, 'In the Cause of Equality: Muriel Heagney and the Position of Women in the Depression', in M. Bevege et al. (eds.), op.cit., pp.286-98. This was the beginning of a long association between the Union and Heagney.
Delays in Court procedure made for still more work. By the time the case began the Union had had to draw up further logs for new respondents. There were, then, four Awards handed down in December 1923. The main ones were the Andrews Award (Number One Group) and the ABY Award (Number Two Group). Evidently, the officials had become attuned to the Court's needs because Webb congratulated Carter for 'the thoroughness with which ... the claim had been prepared'. The results were not, however, correspondingly pleasing.

Webb declared that the Court 'would not depart from previous awards unless some substantial reason for doing so is disclosed'. The female minimum wage was set at 47s 6d, about 55 per cent of men's. Although Webb commented upon the low allowances for skill, and stated that the claim for an increase was 'irresistible', he believed that it was 'a pity that these wages were not adjusted in more propitious times' - for instance during the later years of the War. He awarded tailors a margin of 18s as against the 25 claimed and 15 obtaining. Female trouser-hands and vest-hands would only receive

115 18 CAR 1032.

116. Quoted, Daily Mail, 14 August 1923. (Newspaper clipping, UMA CATU, Box 111).

117. 18 CAR 1032 at 1036. Webb noted the female proportionate wage was really 57 per cent in 1919 but he did not award it. No reason was given; 1043.

118. ibid. at 1046-47.

119. ibid., at 1047.

120. The tailor's margin was 10s under the Archer Award. It was increased to 15s, by agreement, in March 1921.
a 3s margin. The claim had been for 10s. Tailors' skills were now rather better recognised than before this Award. The margin was about 21 per cent of the basic wage as against 15 per cent under Archer. In 1922, the engineering fitter's margin had been reduced to 24s (then 30 per cent of the base wage). All tradesmen had fallen below the Harvester judgment's proportions. Women's margins were only 6 per cent of their basic wage; that is, they were barely above the Archer levels about which there had been such hostility.121

The Court's refusal to recognise either the needs or skills of women was one side of the coin. The other was paternalism. It was due to the dangers of women and juveniles being exploited that the Awards' 'access clauses' were retained.122 Such benevolence was finely tuned: in Number One Group, access was for 'interviewing members of the Union', but in the Award for the dressmaking and allied trades, where more women and girls worked, access was allowed for 'interviewing employees on union matters'.123 In rejecting the employers' claims

121. See, for a summary of the fitter's margin, J. Hutson, *Six Wage Concepts* (Sydney, 1971), pp.232-5. Demands for increased margins to match price rises were always rejected, so tradesmen could feel aggrieved when, in 1921, margins were cut for economic reasons.

122. 18 CAR 1032 at 1060.

123. Emphasis added; compare ibid., at 1077 (Clause 98) with 1161 (Clause 109). Anomalies originated with the first Awards. Employers agreed to visits for policing the Award but Higgins added a rather vague clause with access 'for ... any union duties' (13 CAR 647 at 771 compare with 723-4). In Alley this was clarified - and the groundwork laid for Webb's differentiation - with a clause allowing union representatives to interview 'employees' (15 CAR 435 at 491).
for the abolition of the clauses, Webb was impressed by a petition organised by the Union and signed by 10,000 workers opposing employers' arguments that employees did not want lunch-time visits.\footnote{124}{18 CAR 1032 at 1053-4.}

In other parts of the Union claim, attempts to institutionalise control over where and how garments were made were unsuccessful. Amongst the claims rejected were that work done over the task-rate be paid at 20 per cent extra, that outwork be restricted to unionists, that preference of employment be given to FCATU members, and that annual leave be given.\footnote{125}{ibid., at 1050-1, 1056.}

Carter recorded his 'absolute disgust' at the Awards, blaming the disqualification of oral evidence, the apathy of the rank-and-file and the failings of previous officials. He believed that the Union could not 'turn down Arbitration' but should re-organise its structure. Carter did not specifically deal with the decline in militancy but he quite clearly believed that there must be some sort of institutional changes which would encourage 'respect' for the Union.\footnote{126}{FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924.} Perhaps the Union had hung on longer than most after the decline of post-war militancy elsewhere in the labour movement.\footnote{127}{This was 'already passing' by the end of 1921 according to I. Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, p.202.}

Now, like other unions, it might need new forms and practices.
In 1924 the Union was re-modelled along the lines frequently suggested by Carter and the Victorians. The changes owed much to the disappointments of the arbitration venture and the difficulties experienced in the industry in 1923. Name changes signalled the new direction. Federal Council became Grand Council, Federal Secretary the General Secretary and the 'Federated' union was re-named the Amalgamated Clothing and Allied Trades' Union (ACATU). The substance of the changes inhered in Grand Council's being given greater powers and, most specifically, the General Secretary's being given some of the authority previously vested in Management Committee. The Secretary was empowered to inquire into Branches, and call special meetings in them. To police the Award and deal with some of the technicalities of arbitration, greater independence was given to the General Secretary. Further, the General Secretary would no longer attend Council as a Branch delegate but would sit 'by virtue of office', with the same status as other delegates.

Although the General Secretary now seemed to be more powerful in relation to Council, that officer was still responsible to Council. In turn, Council's powers in relation to the Branches were enhanced, notably in the initiation of rule changes. However, ambiguities

128. FC, Minutes, 22-25, 28, 30 April 1924. The changes were seen as a move towards 'industrial unionism' when discussed in the Victorian Branch. (Vic Branch, Minutes, 23 June 1924).
remained. Councillors were elected by their respective Branches and were, ultimately, responsible to them. The one Federal officer - the General Secretary - was thus answerable to what was, in effect, a gathering of State delegates. There were still no national ballots, no researchers and no full-time Federal officers. Even Carter was, officially, still on loan from Victoria. The re-structuring of the Union had also to be carried through at Branch level. Carter had made a call for the establishment of shop committees to revitalise the Union's effort. There was to be a 'fighting fund' to aid recruitment of workers into the 'new', more truly 'amalgamated' Union.129

From the mid-1920s until the end of the decade, the ACATU's growth was limited and uneven, generally following employment trends. Membership peaked at 20,884 in 1927, having been up and down since 1924. By 1929 there were only 18,728 members. It is difficult to measure union coverage of the work-force but at no stage would it have been much more than one-third. By some common criteria, this might well have been a performance of some worth, that is amongst a work-force without wide craft traditions, with a large turnover of hands through casual and seasonal employment, with outworkers and with most workers employed in small firms. Further, there was not even preference for unionists, far less compulsory unionism, and no common rule. What remains striking, however, is that the ACATU did not make itself anything more of a numerical force in 1929 than in 1920.130

129. FC, Minutes, 30 April 1924.

130. It may have done so from about 1926-28 but not overall. In the sections that the union claimed to organise in the four mainland States its coverage was about one-third of the work-force.
When membership fell, the consequent decline in income debilitated response. Just as the Andrews and ABY Awards were being finalised, Victorian members reluctantly agreed to the closure of the Clothing Trades' Gazette.\(^\text{131}\) This sort of step was clearly at odds with the path suggested by Council. The relatively new NSW leadership set about the task in a more positive way, and was rewarded with a growth in membership of about 12 per cent between 1923 and 1925.\(^\text{132}\) In April 1924 a female organiser, Miss Houghton, was appointed. She was to concentrate on the Number Two Group. This was a difficult task because, in NSW, no Federal organisation had worked there, the Women Workers' Union had a hold in some places and because, with little experience of unionism, other workers were often apathetic. Houghton must have been a success because she was kept on after a three-month trial. However, she found herself faced with a wage-cut: her initial salary was the same as the male organisers', at £4 5s. From August 1924, it would be £2 16s 6d. She was paid this rate until 1925 when she returned to the trade. A male, Bill Jones, returned to organising as her replacement.\(^\text{133}\)

The contradictions in the role of women in working-class organisations were even more clearly spotlighted in Queensland during 1925. When

\(^{131}\) Vic Branch, Minutes, 26 November 1923. The proposal had first been put on 23 July but did not win approval until November.

\(^{132}\) Calculated from FC Federal Secretary's Report, 1924 and GC, General Secretary's Report, 1925. Overall employment in the NSW clothing trades was fairly stable 1923-25.

\(^{133}\) NSW Branch Minutes, 13, 28 April, 25 August 1924; 15 April 1925. There was also a renewed emphasis on country organising.
the Branch's only organiser, Miss Thorpe, resigned, one of the Executive members favoured the appointment of a woman - but only because of the implication for Branch finances. A woman could be paid less than a man, whereas 'if we put on a male Organiser, the man has to be offered a decent wage'. One of the tailoresses on the Executive insisted that another female would be 'best for the girls to get on with' but, after some discussion, it was decided that a male would be appointed. With Houghton and Thorpe now gone from their respective posts, the ACATU had no female officials, a position which endured through and beyond the 1920s.

The trend was not without challenge. In 1927 May Francis and a number of other Victorian members moved that a female organiser be appointed. Ex-Vice-President Lesbia Keogh moved the position be declared open for nominations. Francis later recalled that, sensing defeat, she moved an ironic amendment: 'a young attractive unmarried male organiser' should be appointed. The amendment was defeated and the motion carried but never put into effect. Francis shared the view of some of the Queensland women that some issues could be

134. Qld Branch, Minutes, 25 June 1925.
135. ibid., 25 June, 8, 21 July 1925. The appointee was W.H. (Bill) Sparks, a tailor. Within a year he had become Queensland Secretary (see below); he held the post until 1958.
136. Brodney Papers, Box 7/19. There is a full account of this meeting which is rather different from, although not in conflict with, the Branch Minutes. By the mid-1920s, Wallis and Francis had developed a mutual dislike. Francis later claimed (ibid.) that Wallis believed that women were in every way inferior to men. If this were the case, he had substantially different views by the 1930s. (See below, Chapter Seven, 'Arbitration').
discussed more freely between women. This was a position later held, and forcefully argued, by Muriel Heagney.

There were many cultural and economic constraints upon women's becoming candidates for union positions. Once they did so why were they still opposed? Explicit reasoning was rarely recorded. Neither in the Union's meetings nor in any other forums was the history of women as officials discussed. There were frequent references to the difficulties - some were more apparent than real - of organising women workers but very little about women as organisers. Carter once commented that although women could do the job, 'the strain' was a problem. There was no development of the questions implied by this. The Union reflected and reinforced existing practice. Thus, in the higher echelons of the Union there were fewer women than on the grade below: from about 50 per cent representation on committees, to a handful of organisers (before the mid-1920s) and no Branch Secretaries before 1954. There was no female delegate to Federal Council before 1943 and, to date, no female Federal Secretary.

137. ibid. See also Vic Branch, Minutes, 12, 19, 27 September 1927.


139. Qld Branch, Minutes, 2 June 1926.

140. This breakthrough was not, perhaps, what it seemed because the delegate, Olive Kenny, came through the Union office, not from the shop floor - as did the first Branch Secretary, Muriel Dosa (South Australia). This suggests a further set of questions about the role of 'non-trade' officials in this and other Unions.
In Victoria, the organisational problems of unionism became particularly acute in the years 1923-24 with a drop in employment of 2000 in the clothing sector. The administrative structure was re-vamped - but to no avail. In more ways than one the rank-and-file seemed to be quelled: a proposal for shop-committees did not get off the ground and, at the Branch meetings, the appointment of an 'outsider' as an organiser brought - for the first time - no opposition.141

In the shops, the Branch's control was diminishing. The joint-fixation of piece-rates was a particular problem. Wallis reported that since the ABY Award had been handed down it was pretty fair to say that practically every piece-worker in Melbourne had received no increase.142

The extent of the Branch's decline since its apparent strength of 1923 was a source of frustration to Carter who lamented the 'stereotyped' performance of the Union. 'It gave one spiritual indigestion to see Unions scratching around for a quorum'.143 There was little comfort for the members, either. In June 1924 the Executive recommended that the Branch not resist wage-adjustments.

141. Vic Branch, Minutes, 12 May, 10 June 1924. For employment see VVB 1922/23, 1923/24. Unemployment in the apparel trades in 1924 was the highest since the war. In the usually prosperous December quarter it was 11.4 per cent. (Source: Labour Report, No.16).

142. Vic Branch, Minutes, 4 February 1924.

143. ibid., 23 June 1924.
The Union should 'not support any of the members who cease work as a result of their wages being reduced'. President Harrison, Carter and Francis opposed the majority of the Executive. Francis asked for a reconsideration as because 'it would be a blot on the Union's books to have such a thing carried'.

Members agreed and a subsequent Executive meeting recommended 'wholehearted support'. Carter supported the motion but, this time, Wallis opposed it, arguing that he could not order some workers out on strike if others resisted. He believed this was divisive and that, with rising unemployment, a strike would be 'industrial suicide'. As usually happened, Wallis swayed the meeting. The recommendation was defeated. Nothing was put in its place. The policy was ... no policy.

This moderation was accompanied by tensions within the Executive and by growing centralism. Thus Wallis castigated Carter for raising the strike issue, earlier, before the Executive had discussed the matter and given a formal recommendation to the General Meeting. If Wallis seemed to be shifting his ground, so was Carter - in a different direction. He told NSW members that 'in 1924 he was far more militant than at any other period of his life'.

144. ibid.
145. ibid., 7 July 1924.
146. ibid., 10 June 1924. From August, Branch general meetings were held monthly as opposed to fortnightly.
147. NSW Branch, Minutes, 5 May 1924.
In the same period, that is after Federal Council 1924, the NSW Branch was far more innovative. Carter had urged the Branch's pressers to accept union discipline. Their response was most positive in setting up an 'OK Card System': jobs would only be taken through the Union office. If all was in order a card would be issued and the presser could then take up the job. When the Cutters' Union joined the ACATU in 1925 the card was extended to cutting. It had the indirect affect of creating a great deal of administrative work. It is most noticeable that, from the mid-1920s, the Branch's records reveal very little of the activities of any other group. Yet the most detailed analysis of the membership, which is for 1929, shows that only 25 per cent of the members were male, of whom, in turn, only 20 per cent were pressers: 322 out of 6248 members.

There was no apparent challenge to this craft dominance of the Branch. However, in Victoria, the question of Branch direction was fiercely contested. The appointment of a replacement organiser revived the debate over 'non-trade' officials and added to political divisions in the Branch. The successful candidate was Maurice Callard, of the Dental Workers' Union. He was another product of the

148. ibid., 19, 26 November, 3 December 1924.
149. ibid., 4 May 1926.
150. NSW Branch, Report, 1930, to GC, 1930 (GC Minutes). There were 1577 males in Sydney of whom 322 were pressers. There were a further 220 men merely defined as country members. Note that this proportion of male unionists was almost double Victoria's where 13.0 per cent of the members were men.
VSP. May Francis had her own nominee and objected to the handling of the appointment.151

Divisions within the Branch were not merely personal. They overlapped with policy and politics. Late in 1924, the Branch discontinued its association with the VSP's paper the Union Voice. The Branch had had a page of union material therein since the Gazette's abandonment. This move was discussed in terms of costs but political division may well have been a factor.152 Francis believed that this step was a wrong one. She urged that, at the very least, leaflets be issued to keep the members informed about union business.153

At the end of 1924, Wallis' report summarised the problems facing the Union, of which falling income was both cause and consequence. The organisers bemoaned the 'slackness' of trade, outwork, evasion of the access clause and increasing hostility of both bosses and workers to unionism.154 Membership had fallen by about one-third in 1924.155

The South Australian Branch faced similar problems: economic

151. Vic Branch, Minutes, 17, 21 July 1924. For Callard's family, see B. Walker, op.cit., p.140. Callard became Acting-Secretary in 1939 and was Federal Secretary 1944-50. Francis was about to help in re-forming the CPA in Melbourne.

152. Vic Branch, Minutes, 8, 22 December 1924. Ross was a prominent VSP member. There is a suggestion that the Branch took a page in the Voice to help keep the paper going. The Voice was a descendant of the VSP's Socialist. See B. Walker, op.cit., p.42.

153. Vic Branch, Minutes, 22 December 1924.

154. ibid., 27 January, 2 February 1925.

155. From 8342 to 5688; see FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1924; Vic Branch, Minutes, 9 February 1925.
difficulties encouraged restraint but necessitated activity. The slackness of trade led to the postponement of the appointment of an organiser for dressmaking.156

When the ACATU's first 'Grand Council' met in February 1925, most delegates found little about which to be enthusiastic. The restructured Union had made no significant advances. Carter tried to secure some uniformity in a number of policy areas. In his 'Report', he suggested action against piece-work. The only advantage of piece-rate systems, he said, was that printed and agreed schedules could be enforced. As against this, piece-work encouraged sweating, it made individuals see themselves as independent of each other, not part of a collective unit, it made it difficult to turn wage increases into increases in income and was difficult for Branches to control. In this context, Carter saw the arbitration framework as encouraging rank-and-file activity: a genuine agitation would be necessary to convince the Court that opposition to piece-work was not just the work of officials. But even Carter limited his opposition to piece-work, seeking its abolition 'wherever ... possible' without saying where that might be.157

Grand Council's delegates were most unlikely to agree with Carter. Of the most vocal Victorian Branch members, only President Harrison was totally opposed to piece-work. He had called it 'an obstacle to

156. SA Branch, Minutes, 25 August 1924.
157. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1925.
progress'. In 1919 Wallis had denounced the threat of 'wholesale introduction of piece-work into the factories' but in a Branch discussion in November 1924 he had more or less accepted it and moved for a rate to be established with a fair allowance for weekly output. In NSW there were similar tensions where pressers had frequently struck work in favour of piece-work. The NSW officials argued that piece-work systems provided for some control of the industry because the setting of rates guaranteed the Union a voice. They arrived at Grand Council claiming that their membership was 'constantly' demanding the setting of piece-rates.

Carter's call for action against piece-work could not have been more ill-starred. Yet, in other trades, it was at the head of the agenda. The MTHC was organising against piece-work at the same time as manufacturing employers were attempting to introduce it. Many other union officials would have agreed with Carter that there was always a chance of getting men and women to stick together to improve wages and conditions but while one encourages piece-work ... they act independently of one another ... and any chance that you have of engendering a reasonable degree of militancy into them, in my opinion, is lost.

In contrast, the NSW delegates saw the setting of a piece-rate as a panacea for the heavy work-loads being imposed upon the machinists in

158. Vic Branch, Minutes, 24 November 1924.
159. ibid., 19 May 1919, 24 November 1924.
160. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1925; Minutes, 26 February 1925.
161. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1925.
the ready-made trade. Fallon demanded that the Union ask the Arbitration Court 'to fix a piece-work rate in place of the employer'. Gibb believed this would give some 'control ... of the task and bonus system'.

Other delegates would not accept the motion as it stood because of their objections, in principle, to piece-work. Additions to the resolution attempted to resolve the conflict. Council decided that such rates as were fixed were only for the setting of tasks and that piece-work systems were not to be extended beyond those allowed for in present Awards. In this form the motion received unanimous support.

The debate encapsulated the problems encountered by unionists since the nineteenth-century and revealed a little more of how the ACATU was enmeshed in the arbitration framework, constrained by poor workshop control and problems of an inadequate policy. Wallis said that if the Union had effective shop committees none of these worries about output would be so serious. Yet the policy initiatives to create such structures had not been pushed through. Neither did he hold out much hope for increasing wages through the Court. Yet the resolution of the piece-work conflict was supposed to be delivered by arbitration. The demand that rates be calculated immediately suggests the question: 'how?' What would be the policy on timing, stop-watches and

162. GC, Minutes, 27 February 1925. Work beyond the task should be paid at 15 per cent over the usual rate, not merely pro rata.
163. ibid.
time-and-motion studies? Would the Union edge closer to collusion with the 'scientific' employer?

This was one of the first occasions upon which the Union's female membership base was used in discussing policy. NSW Organiser Gibb reminded delegates that this proposal was mainly for women, not for men. It would be alright to fight on other lines if the Union consisted of men in place of women.164

Gibb almost certainly meant that men could oppose payment methods to which they objected; women could not be mobilised so readily. This had not been the case in either South Australia or Victoria. By not encouraging shop committees and rank-and-file activity, the Branch Executives themselves debilitated women's collective strength. In another sense Gibb was quite right: the contemporaneous fight for piece-work was being waged through direct action by male pressers. What his analysis really emphasised was the division between the craft elites in cutting and pressing where, respectively wages and piece-work were favoured, and on the other hand, the mass of machinists.

This, then, returned the Union to the fundamental question of control. Even if piece-work were genuinely favoured by most women and even if it were introduced, the rates and their daily working would need the close attention of rank-and-file and officers. To set up and maintain piece-rates, pressers tried to use their own strength. For

164. ibid.
women, Grand Council sought the intervention of the state. This needs to be borne in mind in comparing the ACATU with other unions. The ACATU's response to changes in methods of payments was bound to be different from other unions because it was often the employers who tried to get rid of piece-work. In addition to this, there were differences within the Union because of different employers' plans and because of the dual nature of the Union. Whereas most historians have been able to see the craft unions opposing piece-work and the weaker ones accepting it, there is an internal contradiction in the attitude of the ACATU — a contradiction around the differences between craft and industry and the trade's sections. Grand Council produced no structural changes or initiatives to follow through the piece-work policy, relying solely on arbitration.

In other areas, there were different ways to advance, most notably in NSW where the Labor Government seemed likely to bring down policies of benefit to unionists. In that State the Union at last broadened its industrial base by amalgamating with the Cutters' Union. If this strengthened the male craft section, no concomitant alliance boosted membership in Number Two Group. The Women Workers' Union continued to organise there and to resist invitations to amalgamate. After

165. See for instance T. Sheridan, op.cit., pp.88-9; J. Hagan, ACTU, p.247. It is also true that union leaders could not always enforce opposition to piece-work. See R. Gollan, The Coalminers, pp.170-1. That the ACATU was at once a craft and an industry union makes the position especially interesting.

166. For the Cutters, see NSW Branch, Minutes, 27 July, 5 December 1925. Carter felt more could have been done with the WWU: see his Report to GC, 1925.
Grand Council, 1925, some expansion of the industry allowed the Branches more easily to undertake further organising. Additional organisers were appointed in NSW and South Australia and membership increased in all the Branches on the way to a decade-high of 20,884 in 1927. As had been the case for most of the previous years, the size of the membership directly followed the volume of employment. Within the industry and the Union, familiar problems did not abate with the return of relative prosperity.

Control of how garments were made was, if anything, more difficult than earlier. In NSW, President Carey, himself a presser, described the increase in machine-pressing as 'a very serious matter'. Tasks for pressers were re-set as part of an attempt to control the problem. In Queensland, the division of labour in shirt-making became more specialised and, therefore, posed familiar problems for the Union. The Branch procrastinated but finally decided to insist upon full apprenticeships to try to resist the breaking-up of a range of skills. For each Branch, similar changes necessitated internal cohesion. Here lay the importance of NSW's 'OK Card'. Direct control of members was sought. Similarly, a rule change in NSW that the Secretary, like organisers, would be appointed indefinitely rather than face re-election meant that Executive power increased.

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167. NSW Branch, Minutes, 3 July 1926 (Carey); 22 March, 4 May 1926 (tasks).

168. Qld Branch, Minutes, 15 September, 11 November 1925.

169. NSW Branch, Minutes, 22 February, 8 March 1926. Organisers had, since 1920, been appointed 'at the pleasure of the Branch'. Victoria followed suit - for the Secretary only - in 1928. The Rules empowered each Branch to decide if officers would be elected annually or appointed indefinitely. Rule 22 also described procedures for removal (FCATU, Rules (1922)).
Control of where garments were made was more problematical than anything else. NSW officials continued to bemoan the low prices of Victorian goods; outwork continued unchecked. Anxieties about jobs often undermined members' confidence. Even the pressers and cutters seemed to be increasingly circumspect about the viability of direct action. In 1926, when downward wage-adjustments seemed likely, officials rejected the suggestion that the craftsmen spearhead a campaign of resistance. There was little recorded discussion in NSW about the direction that the Branch should take.

In both Victoria and Queensland, the two years or so after Grand Council 1925 saw intense divisions over the ways in which the Union should proceed. In both States, vigorous factionalism in no way marred union growth. Indeed in Queensland, the Branch was revitalised by a change of leadership in 1926. This Branch, along with Victoria, provided most of the increased membership from 1925 to 1927. The Queensland Branch (1797 members in 1925) shared employers' concerns about outwork in 'the south' and inter-State competition. It apparently relied upon the Local Labour Department to enforce the Award. Carter believed that this was 'depending on a rotten reed'. Within the Branch there was a substantial faction opposed to Federal unionism, another group pushing for a more active union - and then

170. See GC, Minutes, 25 February, 5 March 1925.
171. NSW Branch, Minutes, 26 July 1926.
172. Qld Branch, Minutes, 15 September, 14 October 1925.
173. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1925.
there was Secretary A.A. Fullarton who, whilst a member of Federal Management Committee, manoeuvred himself into the Secretaryship of the Brisbane Chamber of Manufactures. This 'despicable and indeed dishonourable' act, as Carter called it, brought to a head the Branch's internal conflicts. With Federal backing, Organiser Bill Sparks became Secretary. An additional official was appointed in July 1926 and a country organiser in April 1927. Membership was 3045 by the end of that year.

The Victorian Branch's meetings were all but overwhelmed by acrimonious conflicts. For about eighteen months there was a running fight in which the main protagonists were Wallis and Francis. Greater political divisions undoubtedly underscored the conflict: Wallis, like many VSP members, was increasingly attracted to the Labor Party; Francis had joined the Melbourne Branch of the CPA. The disputes cannot be dealt with in detail here but, at several points, they relate to the central themes of this history and to the arguments being raised throughout the ACATU over an appropriate structure for the future of the Union.

Francis demanded vigorous action in the factories and 'open unionism'. Thus she insisted that the Pelaco company be unionised.

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175. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1926.

176. Qld Branch, Minutes, 2, 5, June 1926 for Sparks; 13 July 1926 for the organiser; 1 April 1927 for the country organiser.
despite its combination of anti-unionism and good earnings. Later, in October 1925, she accused organisers of using 'too much diplomacy' in their work. She found an ally in the tailors' delegate Charles Jewell who called for a revival of the ideals of unionism. Francis issued a list of plans to revive shop-floor interest. She was able to secure support for the publication of a leaflet, for attendance of stewards at meetings and for members to attend the meeting at which they would be officially enrolled. These initiatives, it should be noted, were at least as much in the craft tradition and in the spirit of Carter's calls for further Branch action, as they were the product of any communist planning.

She also opposed the increasing personal dominance of the Branch by Alf Wallis, urging instead that the whole executive assert itself. In one particular instance Wallis laid charges against a member on such apparently cursory evidence that Francis protested. Wallis resigned but the Executive refused to accept it. He remained Secretary.

Some of Francis' policies related specifically to women. She argued for special meetings for women members. This was accepted but not put into force. In other ways the Branch did encourage involvement. In February 1926, Carter and Jewell succeeded in moving for the

177. Vic Branch, Minutes, 9 March 1925.
178. ibid., 5, 12 October 1925.
179. ibid., 30 March 1925. Brodney Papers, Box 7/19L. See also Vic Branch, Minutes, 1 June, 24 August 1925.
re-establishment of fortnightly general meetings. Francis enjoyed less success. She criticised other members of the Executive for not seeing that her resolutions were carried out. The Executive, she believed, existed merely 'to say 'aye' to anything the officials like to say'.

In May 1926 she resigned from the Executive and in July her conflict with the leadership came to a head. She 'made some serious statements reflecting upon our Organiser, Mr F. Thomas'. She was also alleged to have described other organisers as 'pimps' and 'beery pots'. She was suspended from her position as a delegate to the MTHC but later she showed this was against the Union's rules. Wallis subsequently declined to draw up any charges against her. She was re-elected a delegate in 1927 and 1928, but finally lost a ballot in 1929.

It is all but impossible to describe these conflicts in anything but individual terms, but important issues were raised - and Francis could, on occasion, 'get the numbers'. It is, however, unlikely that there was a communist challenge in Victoria. Francis and her supporters were concerned to broaden the scope for democracy within the Branch and to strengthen the Union in the shops. At least in Victoria there was some success.

180. Vic Branch, Minutes, 15 February 1926.
181. ibid., 19 July 1926.
182. ibid., 26 July 1926.
183. ibid., 2, 9, 16 August, 6 September, 11 October 1926. See also Brodney papers, loc cit: Thomas was involved in a ballot which was found to be corrupt.
Despite the conflicts at union meetings, the Branch grew rapidly. Its membership increased from 5688 in 1924 to 8860 by the end of 1927. During this period employment was relatively stable, so union coverage of the work-force actually increased quite sharply. Because income had grown, the Branch's page in the *Union Voice* was restored and another organiser appointed.

Grand Council, 1927, insisted upon the further organisation of clothing workers. The NSW emphasis on Number One group and, within that, on craftsmen ran counter to the spirit, if not the letter, of Council's policy. The Victorians extended the coverage of Number Two group although at one stage even Wallis had considered ignoring it because of the costs. Fallon, in 1929, was more scathing. Speaking about tie-workers, he did not believe that it was necessary to organise those who 'did not think it worth their while' to join the Union. Immediately after Council, though, most Branches did advance. In Queensland and South Australia, attempts to organise outside the capital cities were made. In South Australia, the Branch

184. Employment in the three main sections rose from 23731 (1924/25) to 24603 (1927/28; calculated from VYB). As a proportion, Branch membership, 29 to 36 per cent.

185. Vic Branch, Minutes, 21, 28 March 1927.

186. GC, Minutes, 24, 25 February 1927.

187. Vic Branch, Minutes, 5, 12 July 1926; 14, 28 March, 5 April 1927 (expansion); 7, 11 June 1928 (Wallis. The suggestion was not taken up - or repeated).

188. GC, Minutes, 5 March 1929.
signed up textile workers who were keen to join the ACATU. However, Management Committee preferred to think about amalgamation with the ATWU. Eventually - and apparently reluctantly - the South Australian workers involved joined the ATWU. Unfortunately, amalgamation plans faltered.189

This setback did not cause much concern in the eastern States but the South Australian Branch had been in difficulties. It had been unable to increase its membership since 1925 - despite appointing a second organiser in 1926. If the larger Branches retained some control of the trade, the smaller Branches enjoyed less success. The OK Card did not survive 1927 in Queensland and country organising proved an expensive failure.190 The Queensland Branch was always in a difficult position because tailoring shops were thinly spread along its long coastline and, uniquely, there was a rival union, the AWU, which purported to organise almost all workers in the State's north. Queensland also seemed to be particularly vulnerable to trade fluctuations. All these factors achieved added significance in a Branch where Awards were always being compared with State Awards and which operated under relatively accommodating Labor Governments. Members might more readily ditch inter-State alliances than would others. Thus in 1928 under the stress of financial difficulties,

189. SA Branch, Minutes, 7 April - 9 July 1927; MC, Minutes, 29 November 1927.

190. Qld Branch, Minutes, 30 November 1927 (OK Card); 4, 8 August, 6 September, 30 November 1927 (Country organising - which produced more dissent than it did members).
members ignored Sparks' advice and declined to send a delegate to Federal Council.191

By now, Carter's hopes for a more centralised union structure seemed doomed. Arbitration procedures were so time-consuming that Carter had little time for anything else. When an award was handed down, the underlying problem of the Federation became clear: there was little besides arbitration business to occupy a Federal officer. After 1924 the only clear change in Carter's status was that in 1927, he became a full-time Federal official with an indefinite term of office - 'at the pleasure' of Council. Carter hoped that Council would set out objectives to which 'all Branches' would work and that the Union would become more centralised. At present it was an amalgamation in name only.192

Queensland's decision was but one sign of fragmentation in the Union. Fallon reiterated his concern at Victorian 'dumping' and at its production costs. Victorian delegates replied by criticising NSW attitudes to the defence of certain workers.193 This kind of squabbling did not augur well as employment continued falling. The Victorian Branch seemed to be holding up well with hints of a revival in direct action in some factories.194 Much to Fallon's disgust, the

191. ibid., 13 February 1928.
192. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1930. For the change in Carter's position: GC, Minutes, 25 February 1927.
193. MC, Minutes, 12 October, 28 November 1927; 7 September 1928; GC, Minutes, 6, 7 March 1928.
194. Vic Branch, Minutes, 23 January, 20 February 1928.
Branch did not, however, go ahead with the OK Card. In the winter of 1928 some of the craftsmen called for it but Wallis believed it would be 'inopportune' to introduce the card.\textsuperscript{195} Within a few months, both Queensland and South Australia had the card.\textsuperscript{196}

The pressers in NSW remained a contumacious set of unionists. A substantial number registered opposition to the card and to the Branch's attempts to control task rates. If the machine was one threat, the slowing trade was another. The Branch resolved on one of the oldest of craft devices: it would admit no more pressers.\textsuperscript{197} This decision, in November 1928, proved the apogee of the pressers' position. In 1929, the NSW Branch succeeded in making pressers' OK Cards a Federal policy,\textsuperscript{198} but within their own State, pressers found that unemployment overcame them. At the end of 1929, the Branch was obliged to reiterate the resolution closing the books.\textsuperscript{199} This suggests that by then, the Branch was unable to defend the workers to whom most energy had been devoted.

The decline in the trade was acute throughout Australia. By February 1929, the South Australians were telling Grand Council that their

\textsuperscript{195} ibid., 21, 28 May, 7 June 1928. For Fallon, see GC, 26 February 1929.

\textsuperscript{196} Qld Branch, Minutes, 22 February 1929; SA Branch, Minutes, 15 April 1929.

\textsuperscript{197} NSW Branch, Minutes, 20 August, 5 September, 17 October, 21 November 1929. The Card would be maintained.

\textsuperscript{198} GC, Minutes, 27 February, 6 March 1929.

\textsuperscript{199} NSW Branch, Minutes, 18 November 1929.
ready-made trade was practically 'non-existent'. In all States, membership was in decline. The only redeeming feature of the unionists' lot seemed to be the Award handed down in 1928. The Victorians believed that 'a new spirit [had] been created particularly in the dressmaking section of the Union'. Others seemed less sure of what had been achieved and how to defend it. In Queensland, an extraordinary argument broke out after the Branch President urged caution in prosecuting employers. Fistfights erupted when it was learned that he had appeared in a case against the Union. The minority view, that they should 'stick it into the boss' whenever possible rapidly achieved favour in light of the activities of the President, the 'treacherous hypocrite'.

In each of the Branches then, different industrial bases and divergent traditions led to different responses and to ill-defined attempts at resolving what sort of a union the ACATU should be. What most did agree upon and what held the Union together was the arbitration system.

200. GC, Minutes, 27 February 1929. See also SA Branch, Minutes, 11 November 1929.
201. GC, Minutes, 27 February 1929.
202. Qld Branch, Minutes, 6, 20 September 1929.
203. ibid., 20 September 1929.
204. ibid., 4 October 1929.
During the internal conflicts of the mid-1920s, the ACATU returned to the Arbitration Court to gain further coverage of the industry. No new claims were made. It was all Grand Council could do to keep pace with the turnover of firms and their changing trade names as well trying to secure Award coverage for new members. In November 1924, the Union secured four more Awards made in terms of the previous awards and set down to expire on the same day, 31 December 1925. Further delay saw another round of these 'roping-in' Awards in 1925. The NSW Branch was especially concerned by the delays because of the 'threat' of the Women Workers' Union's State Awards. Under these, wages for juveniles were higher than those set out in the ACATU's Awards. Grand Council therefore permitted NSW to apply for a State Award for, at least, dressmaking.

By the end of 1926 delays in the Commonwealth arbitration system were putting great pressure upon the Grand Council. Carter was obliged to emphasise that for all States except NSW, the Commonwealth was the place to seek benefits. Threats to the system from the Conservative Government and rumours of poor Awards being handed down did not deter


207. MC, Minutes, 29, 30 April 1926; GC, Minutes, 29, 30 July 1926.
Grand Council. Carter believed that the Union's new log of claims would soon come on for hearing.208

Delays in the system and threats to it seem only to have encouraged the ACATU to push on. This determination threatened to upset the Union's relationship with the rest of the labour movement because Justice Drake-Brockman was to hear the case. Drake-Brockman was a former President of the Central Council of Employers of Australia. His appointment so angered delegates to the inaugural ACTU Congress that the Congress resolved that no unions should appear before him.209

The Union simply ignored this.210 Arbitration was the policy, Drake-Brockman the tool. Of more concern to the Union might well have been Justice Beeby's Award ordering the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) to change its rules banning piece-work.211 Although the ACATU's Rules had no similar provision, the Union's claim included measures which might be seen as likely to constrain the employer's use of new work and payment systems.

The long-awaited case also involved claims for better control of outwork and sub-contracting, preference for unionists, weekly hiring


210. It was not discussed at a Federal level. See Vic Branch, Minutes, 2 May 1927. Hagan notes 'Drake-Brockman was not embarrassed by lack of patronage' (ACTU, p.88).

211. T. Sheridan, op.cit., p.102. (The ASE changed its name to AEU in 1920).
and annual leave. To enforce a universal set of conditions in the absence of a common rule, the Union wanted the Court to make the Award binding on all the employees of respondents, not merely on unionists.

The clearest break with past claims was that the Union claimed equal pay for the sexes. It claimed £5 per week as a minimum wage for both men and women. This demand had been agreed upon at Grand Council 1925; the same meeting which had discussed piece-work at such length. MTHC Secretary Holloway had attended that Council to urge the Union to take up an equal pay claim. (Ironically, the MTHC had refused to support an equal pay rally under Clothing Trades' auspices in 1913.)

Carter announced his opposition. Although he had done at least as much as any other official to organise women on genuine class lines, he could not see past the cost-based opposition to equal pay. Further, if any jobs were lost, male employment would fall. Fallon equivocated but the other NSW delegates supported the claim. Wallis moved that the claim for women should be the same as for men. He argued that the Union should be 'loyal to the decisions of our movement' and as a leading women's union should 'blaze the track'. The motion was carried by six votes to three with all the Victorian and NSW delegates in favour.

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212. GC, Minutes, 7, 9, 10 March 1925. See Vic Branch, Minutes, 2 September 1912, 4 August 1913 for the abandoned meetings.

213. GC, Minutes, 7, 9, 10 March 1925. Little detail was recorded. Wallis' position on equal pay became less ambivalent in the 1930s. See Chapter Seven.
means to preserve craft positions and subsequent lack of propaganda or organisational work clearly indicate that the Union's leadership was by no means committed to arguing for equal pay on the basis of justice.

The Awards were handed down on 1 March 1928. Equal pay was quickly rejected. Drake-Brockman could see no special reasons covering the industry why the usual practices adopted by the Court should be departed from in any particular.

The inexactitudes of 1919 had become precedents for the 1920s. Carter concluded that good propaganda had come from the claim (for which Muriel Heagney had again done a lot of work). No material advance followed despite a mass of detailed research into women's wages. The female minimum was set at £2 9s 6d, about 56 per cent of the men's rate, £4 9s.

There was no increase in margins. These remained at 18s (tailors) and 3s (female trouser and vest hands). This meant that the 'total wage' for women stayed a fraction under half the men's and that margins, as a percentage of the total wage, fell slightly. Compared to the Harvester ratio of 42 per cent and the 1922 fitter's margin of 30 per cent, the tailor's margin was 20.2 per cent of the base wage, the tailoress's 6.1 per cent.

214. 26 CAR 76; The ANA Award (Number One) and Arnall Award (Number Two).
215. ibid., at 89. As with Webb, J., in 1923 the rate was between 54 and 57 per cent of men's.
216. The fitter's margin, at 24s, did not vary between 1922 and 1935. The highest margin in the clothing trade was the order cutter's 28s. Stock cutters received 21s.
The Court rejected a range of claims including annual leave, preference, weekly hiring and labelling of goods.\textsuperscript{217} The sanitary condition of some shops caused such concern to the Judge that he incorporated State laws in the Award. The Union would, therefore, be able to police and enforce legislation. As in earlier rounds of Awards, the Court showed a specific concern at the 'deplorable conditions' under which women had to work.\textsuperscript{218}

This attitude may well have helped the Union, for Drake-Brockman accepted the Union's claim for a role in the factories. Access to factories in Number One group was put on the same footing as for Number Two; the six-hour warning of a visit could, with due cause, be suspended. Drake-Brockman emphasised that union officials were, in effect, officers of the Court:

\begin{quote}
Without their aid, there is no machinery in existence for the purpose of seeing the due observance ... of the Award.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

The new Awards were to apply to respondents

\begin{quote}
in respect of each and every person employed by them in the industry whether members of the [Union] ... or not ... 220
\end{quote}

This was an important breakthrough in protecting members from having

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{217} 26 CAR 76 at 90-2. In addition a claim for a forty-hour week was abandoned in the course of the hearing.
\textsuperscript{218} ibid., at 92.
\textsuperscript{219} ibid., at 91. Drake-Brockman believed that the 'very high standard of conduct' expected from officials acting in this capacity had been observed.
\textsuperscript{220} ibid., at 93.
\end{quote}
their job security undermined by non-unionists. Nevertheless it still fell far short of a common rule. The Union had still to make as many employers as it could respondents to the Award.

There were still difficulties in the shops. Tasks were to be fixed jointly by management and 'representatives' of workers.\(^{221}\) The Union was not guaranteed a place in this process. It still had to be fought for. The problem of what went on outside shops came under the closest control yet. Outworkers could not now do any work 'indoors'; and their employers' accounts were to be open to scrutiny. The major advance on the earlier regulations was that if sub-contractors were not respondents to the Award, they would have to secure a permit from the Union to do the work; such permit to be revocable without notice. Carter recorded his dismay at wage-levels, his satisfaction with other points.\(^{222}\) The Union, Grand Council stated, must build on the gains to ensure that tasks were not unfair.\(^{223}\) The Awards were only a couple of weeks old when Victorian members began to report that changes in tasks were undermining the Award and that some factories had a 'secret merit system' to speed-up workers. This would throw work records and pay schemes into confusion. Members were advised to keep clear records of work done.\(^{224}\)

\(^{221}\) ibid., at 109.

\(^{222}\) GC, General Secretary's Report, 1928.

\(^{223}\) GC, Minutes, 4, 13 March 1928.

\(^{224}\) Vic Branch, Minutes, 19 March 1928.
Officials found that one of the benefits of the Awards became something of a difficulty. In Victoria, the work-load in dealing with sub-contract permits was so great that the Branch Secretary was obliged to deal with all the applications without submitting them to the Executive. Meetings would otherwise have dealt with little else.\(^{225}\) By the end of 1928, 207 sub-contracting agreements and 202 outwork permits had been discussed. In addition, there had been 526 complaints under the Award.\(^{226}\) Federally, the business of arbitration still went on, with a new round of 'roping-in' claims.\(^{227}\) Grand Council delegates and Victorian officials thus found themselves as entangled with administration as the NSW leadership had been in policing its OK Card and maintaining the interests of its most articulate members. Now, the 'entanglement' was more clearly with the state.

The Arbitration Court continued to provide some relief and therefore to remain attractive. In a series of applications to vary the Award, small employers were excluded from sub-contracting, termination procedures were improved and 'secret' task rates were outlawed. At the same time, the mixed motives behind the equal pay drive were revealed. Some female coat-machinists were added to the 'male' rate

\(^{225}\) ibid., 7 June 1928 and July-October 1928.

\(^{226}\) ibid., 17 December 1928.

\(^{227}\) 27 CAR 218, 286.
of pay at £5 7s.228 By 1929 Carter was describing the Award, as varied, as a 'very good' one.229

Judge Drake-Brockman in the Arbitration Court was not, though, the be-all and end-all of the system of compulsory arbitration. In 1928, the High Court ruled that awards could not bind non-unionists. Grand Council heard that this was 'fatal' for its Awards but it resolved to carry on business in terms of its Awards.230 The South Australian Branch accordingly acted against legal advice to take a case against the 'American Dry Cleaning Company'. The company appealed to the High Court which ruled, in November 1929, that the Award was ultra vires insofar as it purported to bind non-unionists.231 The extension of the ACATU's coverage had not lasted much more than eighteen months. At the following meeting of Grand Council, the whole framework of arbitration was viewed less favourably than it had been for some time. Some delegates had previously called for changes in the Arbitration Act. They now found themselves in the majority.232 To achieve such changes, political activities and alliances with other organisations were needed.

228. 27 CAR 208. Sub-contractors would have to employ ten or more persons to where previous the limit had been only four.

229. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1929.

230. GC, Minutes, 1 March 1929.

231. SA Branch, Minutes, 16 July 1928; 43 CLR 29.

232. GC, Minutes, 13, 14 February 1930.
There was practically no special political activity in the early 1920s. All Branches were affiliated to their local Trades' Halls and to State Branches of the ALP. That little activity followed is hardly surprising: the Party remained ineffective in Victoria, in disorder in NSW and in opposition in the Federal Parliament. Its only sustained success was in Queensland. Much of the ACATU's interest in alliances with the ALP or other working-class bodies was tied to defending the arbitration system. Thus the Commonwealth Council of Federated Unions quickly drew the ACATU's support. The Union had affiliated with this organisation by March 1923 but it did not take an especially active part in the CCFU. This may well have reflected some uncertainty about its purpose. When the CCFU, along with the MTHC and the Federal ALP, pledged support for Bruce's referendum of 1926, the ACATU's lines of battle were drawn up. Only Carter and Fallon wanted the Union to support the referendum; some members of Grand Council argued that the ACATU should not have a policy at all but most agreed with Wallis that the Union should oppose the referendum (and, therefore, the CCFU).

If the CCFU had raised divisions in Grand Council, its demise and its successor did not. In 1927, Council closed ranks in the light of

233. The reference to affiliation is Vic Branch, Minutes, 19 March 1923.

234. GC, Minutes, 28, 29 July 1926; compare Vic Branch, Minutes, 21 June, 5 July 1927 for a vigorous exchange between Carter and Wallis.
Government threats to arbitration and to unionism. Delegates were dispatched to an All-Australian Trades' Union Congress set down for May. The Union decided to affiliate with the product of that Congress, the ACTU. This decision was not taken with unbridled enthusiasm. Carter believed that he could say without any fear of contradiction that generally speaking all those bodies [CCFU, AATUC, ACTU] overlook the women workers. All matters are entirely approached from the man's point of view and I think it is reasonable for me to state that our union stands out as requiring special attention ...

Because the ACTU was the 'recognised leading Federal body', the Union should swallow its anxieties and affiliate. Quite how the ACTU was believed to overlook women workers was not made plain. Carter (and his successors) generally meant that the Union's low income and bargaining position merited special consideration, rather than meaning by this analysis that other unions did not consider women's issues seriously. Later, however, officials were to be critical of the ACTU's inattention to equal pay campaigning. For the moment, the Union's leaders saw dangers in the union movement as well as from the state. Arbitration would not be abandoned. The Union had ignored the ACTU's call to boycott Drake-Brockman. In 1929 more ACTU protests at arbitration were ignored by Grand Council.

The Branches could perhaps be more positive in their outlook. The

235. GC, Minutes, 25 February 1927; 1 March 1928.
236. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1928.
237. GC, Minutes, 28 February 1929.
attractiveness of political intervention was clearly illustrated in NSW where the Branch developed an intense interest in the ALP following the election of the Lang Government in 1925. To be fair, some individuals had played a role in politics, not least Organiser Houghton, who had persuaded the Branch to affiliate with the ALP Women's Organising Committee, and Organiser Gibb, who had opposed the expulsion of communists from the ALP in 1923. Lang's Government encouraged wider action. In June 1925 the Branch, in effect, served a log of claims on the Government, demanding an inquiry into the running of the State Clothing Factory, new procedures for summoning employers, equal pay, a ban on outwork and changes in the policing of awards.

Lang's programme included the forty-four hour week and child endowments but it did not run as far ahead of arbitration practice as the Union's demands would have necessitated. The Branch had little influence within the Government - and less success with its demands. The Branch lined up with the militant unions supporting Lang but, like most of them, it found that the Government was not beholden to it. Nevertheless the Branch continued to support Lang in his interminable faction fights, joining the 'Trades Hall Reds' to defeat Lang's

238. NSW Branch, Minutes, 13 October 1924 (Houghton); 29 October 1923 (Gibb). Ironically it was Lang who had moved to expel the communists in 1923.

239. ibid., 29 June 1925.
conservative opponents. Gibb and Houghton, rather than Secretary Fallon, were the most vocal proponents of these alliances. To hold this position they must have had support in the Branch's General Meetings. It might also be noted that these activities can only have widened the divisions between the ACATU Branch and the Women Workers' Union. That Union's President, Kate Dwyer, had earlier supported an AWU challenge to Lang and she was consistently associated with positions on the right of the Party.

The political interventions of the Branch should not be exaggerated. The challenge of the CPA attracted little attention and alternatives to immediate arbitration gains were rarely considered. Fallon's support of the CCFU and his suspicion of the ACTU were more representative of the Branch's politics than the left-ALP alliances of Gibb and, early in the 1920s, Houghton.

In Victoria, political activity had to be rather different. There was no Government comparable to Lang's. Wallis' support of the 'socialisation objective' for the ALP in 1921 and Francis' militant intervention counted for less than did the immediate, industrial, context of the Branch's activities. This threatened to divide the

240. ibid., 20 September 1926, 3 May 1927.

241. There may well have been added piquancy, because it was Gibb who discovered a sliding panel in a ballot box provided by the AWU at the height of the faction fights. See J.T. Lang, I Remember (Sydney, 1956), pp.188, 198, 200.

Union from the MTHC on piece-work as much as arbitration did the Grand Council from the ACTU. The Branch finally acceded to the MTHC's anti-piece-work policy but no action resulted. In the 1920s, the myriad of competing ideologies of a few years earlier hardened into two positions, the anti-arbitrationist position of the CPA and the reformist ALP position. By 1927 the Branch was withdrawing from any association with the former.

The decade had begun with Organiser Wallis in opposition to arbitration and craft. It ended with Wallis as Secretary, urging members to support the ALP at the pending Federal elections because it would defend and improve arbitration. Francis had opposed this view because the ALP was 'just as likely to legislate badly for the workers as any other party'. Support for Labor seemed vindicated immediately after the Party won office. Tariffs were substantially raised. Jobs would be protected - and conditions would be underwritten by the new Awards.

In South Australia the Branch moved along in an apolitical groove, content even to ignore the questions of the CCFU, referenda and the

243. Vic Branch, Minutes, 18 July, 16 August, 21, 28 November, 5 December 1927.

244. This included quitting the Labor College, dropping its option on the CPA's Woman Worker and declining to support a CPA-member in dispute with her employer. See ibid., 19 September 1927; 21, 29 January, 27 May 1929.

245. ibid., 19 November 1928.

246. ibid., 2 December 1929.
ACTU.247 The Queensland Branch built ties with other unions, endorsed the Trades' Hall's attempts to tie politicians to it - but forsook the challenges of revolutionary doctrines.248 With a new set of Awards in force, and a Labor Government in office, the ACATU generally shared this view. The only point of real concern to officials was the ever growing level of national unemployment.

(v) SUMMARY

The 1920s have a unity of theme when the Union's history is related to the arbitration system. In 1920 opposition to the principle of arbitration was still to be found; in the following three or four years arbitration did not quell direct action. Strikes were, however, seen as defending arbitration's gains, and the general militancy of 1919 became what might be called a militant economism by 1923. At the end of the decade, the ACATU, like most other unions, was keen to defend the arbitration system from its conservative opponents.

After the early 1920s, both the Court and the Union confirmed and re-created a range of social practices. The Court recognised neither the skills nor the right to any job of women. To some extent this

247. SA Branch, Minutes, 5 July 1926; 14 February 1927.

248. Qld Branch, Minutes, 3 December 1925; 22 March 1926 for support for the TLC's policies. The Branch was consistently anti-Communist, from declining to send delegates to a 'Russian Celebration Committee' (14 October 1925) to supporting Communists' being removed from the Trades' Hall (21 January 1929).
helped the small 'craft section' of the Union. The Union, unevenly but generally, fell in with limitations upon women's work and union role and became more clearly oriented to the male crafts. In NSW these men felt especially threatened by machinery and women workers and had, by the end of the decade, abandoned both their political militancy and unionist expansionism. Generally, craft could retain its grip on the Union because there was little change in the structure of the industry.

Some options seemed to be closed off in the 'twenties and others to be consciously shut out. Thus the direct action of the early years was difficult to sustain as the trade declined; political options became confined to an apparently increasingly moderate view of the ALP. Within the Union, closer amalgamation was not followed through after 1924; in the shops, control could only be exercised with difficulty and with the support of the state. Thus, if the decade ended in apparent success - with a new Award and its variations and with the setting of higher tariffs - it could also be suggested that should the 'determinants' of unionism change, then contradictions within the ACATU might shatter this complacency. That is, should the state not 'deliver', should the industry change or economic decline continue, how would the Union then develop?