A history of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union

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CHAPTER SEVEN

DEPRESSION AND INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

1930–1939
(i) **CONTEXT**

Although neither the Australian economy nor the clothing industry enjoyed a boom in the later years of the 1920s, the difficulties of those years pale beside the ferocity of the Great Depression. Statistics can only hint at the nature of the tragedy that came to a climax between 1929 and 1932. The value of manufacturing fell by one-third in that time. In just one financial year, 1929/30 to 1930/31, Gross Domestic Product fell from £422.6 million to £388.1 million.¹ There was an 'official' unemployment rate of almost 30 per cent in 1932. Unemployment did not recede to single figures until 1937, although GDP had regained its 1928/29 level by 1933/34.²

The Depression had a catastrophic effect on the labour movement. Union membership fell by 18 per cent between 1929 and 1933.³ ALP Governments had been rejected in Federal, NSW and Victorian elections by the winter of 1932.⁴ The Party, the ACTU, and the Unions were unable to develop a policy let alone implement one. Conservatives were quick to provide Labor with ideas for reducing unemployment.

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2. ibid., see *Labour Report* for unemployment returns.
4. No government in office in 1929 survived the Depression except in Tasmania.
Although there were differences between the Chambers of Manufactures and Commerce over tariff policy, the general message was quite clear: reduce costs to encourage employment and reduce Government spending to allow private sector growth.5

State governments came under pressures that were of special concern to ACATU members because many people saw an immediate solution to the crisis in dismissing women workers or, at least, married women. Muriel Heagney, who was one of the leading critics of these views, emphasised that their implementation would merely shift the incidence of unemployment and that there were flaws in the logic anyway because of the sexual segregation of employment.6 Responses to the Depression were not, however, notable for their rationality. Campaigns against women in the press were matched in some unions. In Queensland, unions urged action against the employment of married women. The Labor Government resisted, as did the NSW Labor Government, when restrictions on female teachers were mooted. A ban on married women teachers became law under the conservatives in 1932.7 In other trades, 'sex-typing' worked in such a way that women were less affected than men by the slump. Some manufacturing and service industries employing mainly women contracted less than heavy

5. J. Hagan, ACTU, pp.57-60.
industries. Equally, anti-woman campaigns and discrimination in 'sustenance' payments inflicted immense hardship.8

Neither State nor Commonwealth governments embraced any positive responses to the Depression. The Scullin Government's initiative did not go much beyond tariff increases. It was, perhaps, a sign of the ALP's bewilderment that the Government allowed an emissary of the Bank of England, Sir Otto Niemeyer, to inquire into, and prescribe changes for, the Australian economy. He joined the chorus demanding wage cuts, balanced budgets and a reduction of overseas debt. Scullin seemed to agree with the principles of this strategy although it caused great argument in the labour movement.9

Early in 1931 the dispute came to a head. The Labor Premier of NSW, Jack Lang, announced his opposition to what was now known as the 'Premiers' Plan'. He proposed a reduction of interest rates, the abandonment of the gold standard, and repudiation of debts to British bondholders. A 'Lang Labor' group was formed in the Federal Parliament and, subsequently, the NSW Branch was expelled from the Party. Two months later, in May 1931, Joe Lyons led a right-wing group away from Scullin to join with conservatives to form the United Australia Party.


Meanwhile, the first fruits of the Premier's Plan had appeared. In January 1931, the Arbitration Court announced a ten per cent cut in wages for all workers under Federal Awards. The Unions were as bemused by the Depression as the politicians. Their response was of outrage - and inaction. The NSW Labor Council called for a General Strike but, when put to the ACTU, the motion was defeated.

The ACTU proposed a strategy that lay between Lang's and Scullin's. It called for cheaper credit, hours reductions and public works. The Scullin Government argued that, because its opponents controlled the Senate, the labour movement could not expect its policy to be enacted. In Victoria, the Hogan Labor Government was even less responsive to the wishes of the Unions. A group of left-wing unions established an Industrial Conference Committee, which began to organise for a rejection of the Premiers' Plan, and for the re-building of the Party.

The main conflict was in NSW, where the Lang and Scullin wings of the Party were engaged in a battle almost as fierce as that between labor and capital. It spilled into the Federal Parliament when Lang's men finally moved against Scullin. In November 1931, 'Stabber Jack' Beasley led them across the floor. The ALP was soundly beaten in the ensuing election in which Lang and Scullin candidates opposed each other and from which a 'Labor rat', Joe Lyons, emerged as Prime Minister. In May 1932, Lang was dismissed by the State Governor after the NSW Government defaulted on overseas and Commonwealth payments.

This signalled a further round of conflict within the Party. Lang had
a dictatorial grip on the Party through the so-called 'Inner Group' based in the Trades' Hall in Sydney. The Group's methods seemed uglier than ever with Lang out of power. Lang's great ability was as a 'deliverer': in opposition he could do nothing for the base of his support, the unions. Challenges to the Inner Group therefore began, not least from the Socialisation Units, demanding a three-year plan for the achievement of socialism. They had massive support in the Party and, for a time, held the upper hand. Although Lang was able to crush the Units, he was in constant conflict with the unions after 1936 and in 1939 he fell.

Labor had, therefore, failed in one way or another, very soon after the Depression struck. It was removed in NSW and Victoria as well as 'self-destructing' in the Federal Parliament. This sequence limited the options for unions. With conservatives in office everywhere they could not, as in other periods, switch their focus from State to Federal politics and Courts. The only break was the election of a Labor government in Queensland in 1932. A conservative dominance of South Australian politics was to last more than thirty years. Each Branch of the ACATU had, then, a different framework of political opportunity during the Depression. Thereafter they had Labor's exclusion in common - except in Queensland. Most unions were in a very weak industrial position. What options existed?

There were other challenges to Scullin's views, to Lang's populism and to the Units, most notably from the CPA. For communists, the Depression was surely the death throes of capitalism. Arbitration and
reformism had been exposed by the events of the early thirties. Their apologists were vigorously denounced as 'social fascists' by the CPA, hoping to build unity with the rank-and-file of the ALP and Unions. This policy - Third Period Communism - was founded as much on the perceived needs of the Comintern as of Australian workers and was a tragic failure. The rhetoric of the Third Period and the demand for ideological purity only isolated the CPA from the other structures of the labour movement. No sooner did the CPA change to a policy of working with reformist organisations than it achieved dramatic success in a range of Unions: Miners', Waterside Workers', the FIA and the NSW Teachers as well as some support in others.

Conservative responses, through the United Australia Party, were in line with the Premiers' Plan. In addition, changes came in tariff policy with the signing of the Ottawa Agreement in August, 1932. In return for preference for primary producers exporting to the UK, Australia conceded that it would protect only those industries with real potential. Although a promised tariff review had little impact, the Agreement later opened the way for easy dumping of off-season clothes on the Australian market.10

Fortunately, a recovery in employment began in the mid-1930s. This led the Unions back to the Arbitration Court with some hope of winning a restoration of the cut. Unions retained faith in Arbitration for a number of reasons. Printers looked back on the Depression of the

10. See FC, Minutes, 13 March 1934; MC, Minutes, 16–28 August 1937.
In the 1890s where, without arbitration, they had suffered badly; Engineers still felt that their Award offered some protection against employers.11 In general, unions were wedded to reformism. The only organisation to threaten the marriage was the CPA but Third Period Communism did not help the party's advance.

The Arbitration Court restored the cut between 1934 and 1937 by which time the ACTU had accepted that 'capacity to pay', not needs alone, would determine wages. The ACTU was thus more tied to capitalism than ever.12 Some of its constituent unions, though, were much less prepared to trust to arbitration alone as the economy picked up. The conservative Printers - though happy enough with capitalism - had rejected arbitration for collective bargaining by 1937; the AEU had to be wooed back to arbitration after being 'de-registered' for striking; the miners' in NSW remained opposed to the maintenance of capitalism, whilst its leaders cannily used both the strike and the Courts; and the FIA abandoned its traditional industrial and political moderation.13

The responses of these Unions are summarised here to suggest some of the options which could have been taken. As at any other time, choices could still be made. Equally, the role of unions in the 1930s

was conditioned by received tradition and, more clearly than before, economic and industrial change. For the ACATU's members, unemployment was but one problem in this decade. The industry changed more in and after the Depression than at any time since the introduction of the sewing machine.

II

If any industry would benefit from the Scullin Government's tariff increases, it would seem to have been clothing, for protection rates had doubled by the end of 1931 and a devaluation of the Australian pound provided further security against imports. The Union's officials had believed that added protection would help the trade. Unemployment statistics tend to confirm this. Textile, clothing and footwear returns were lower than the national average. Of most significance was that, by their actions, large manufacturers showed that the protection they received from imports was appreciated. It led to changes in the industry and the labour process. In the short-run, however, the industry did not withstand the effects of a declining national income.

In the final quarter of 1929, unemployment in the 'apparel trades' was 10 per cent. By the third quarter of 1931 it had risen to 27.4 per cent, its worst level in the decade. The effect of the Depression may also be gauged from the exaggerations which occurred in the usual

seasonal fluctuations. The first quarter of 1931, with 25.9 per cent unemployment, was more than double the comparable return for 1930. In all, during 1931 and 1932, the unemployment figures, quarter by quarter, were the worst recorded — then or since. Not until 1935 was unemployment in a usually boom quarter less than 10 per cent.15

Thus, growth in clothing employment, from the depths of the Depression, was slow. That unemployment remained high suggests that there may have been higher participation rates from about 1931/32 and that the clothing trades' unemployment was higher than boots' and textiles'. M. Power has suggested that textiles were recovering by 1931/32. It was one of the leaders of the recovery,16 with extraordinary employment growth in Victoria, from 6733 to 12,499 employees in the ten years to 1938/39.17

'Recovery' in the clothing trade was quite unlike this: employment rose after the Depression but not much beyond the levels achieved in the 1920s.

Any use of the accepted notion of 'depression and recovery' to describe the clothing trades in the 1930s must be jettisoned if there be any inference of substantial employment growth, but in another sense we may speak of recovery, perhaps even a boom.


Table 1  Victoria: Employment in main sections of the clothing industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1928/29</th>
<th>1930/31</th>
<th>1938/39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ready-made and Tailoring</td>
<td>8598</td>
<td>6312</td>
<td>8240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>8859</td>
<td>6588</td>
<td>9636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts, White-work etc</td>
<td>6666</td>
<td>4742</td>
<td>6285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: VYB

Table 2  NSW: Employment in main sections of the clothing industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1928/29</th>
<th>1930/31</th>
<th>1938/39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ready-made and Tailoring</td>
<td>11 299</td>
<td>6616</td>
<td>12 051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>3287</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts, White-work etc</td>
<td>4815</td>
<td>3676</td>
<td>6195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NSWSR

18. There is a difficulty with the 'shirts etc' category. From 1930/31, 'Handkerchiefs, ties and scarves' were included; from 1933/34, 'stays and corsets'. These were not listed prior to the respective years. In 1938/39 employment in shirts and white-work alone was only 4555 persons. The NSW statistics (Table 2) have all these categories throughout.

19. In both NSW and Victoria, the ready-made/tailoring sections reported their lowest level of employment in 1931/32 not the year used in the tables, 1930/31. In neither case is the difference sufficient to alter the picture presented in the discussion.
Table 3 Employment in the Clothing Industry in Queensland and South Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Queensland</th>
<th>South Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1928/29</td>
<td>1938/39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready-made and Tailoring</td>
<td>2916</td>
<td>3026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CYB, No.23, 1930; No.30, 1940.

As in other periods, there were significant variations between the States. The different paths of the industry in Queensland and South Australia reflected different economies: Queensland had the lowest returns for unemployment, South Australia the highest, being double Queensland's as late as 1935. The clothing trades of South Australia may appear stable over the decade but employment fell by a third from 1928/29 to 1930/31. In Queensland, in the same year, the decline was smaller, but still extraordinary, at about a quarter.20

The huge numbers thrown out of work in the Depression are perhaps clearer when the statistics are looked at in terms of absolute employment rather than relative unemployment. It is worth emphasising that employment did not recover well, let alone feature in the manufacturing boom of the late 1930s. If the end of the decade is compared with the nadir of the thirties, it would seem that there was

20. Totals for Ready-made and Tailoring and Dressmaking and Millinery from CYB, No.25, 1932.
a boom. For example, employment in the ready-made and tailoring trades of NSW was 82.1 per cent higher in 1939/39 than 1930/31 - but only 6.7 per cent above the levels of 1928/29. Employment in those trades and shirts in Victoria actually fell over the decade. 21

At constant prices, the value of output rose in five of the six sections of the industry in Victoria and NSW. When set against changes in employment, the changes are most striking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready-made and Tailoring</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td>+13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
<td>+12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts etc</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>+6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from VYB, NSWSR

21. Special attention should be given to the Victorian statistics because there is an anomaly in the VYB figures which is misleading. In addition to the detailed break-down of the industry, there are tables which review employment and output for industries as a whole over the previous decade. This seems an obvious starting point for analysis but the table entitled 'Dress (Exclusive of Boot)' bears no relation to the combined total of clothing categories. Knitted goods (textiles) have probably been included. The difference is most important because 'Dress ...' shows a large rise in employment in the 1930s, obscuring the changes in the clothing trade as defined by the ACATU's activities and the tables herein.

22. Calculated from VYB, NSWSR. Constant prices calculated from retail prices in CYB.
There were several indicators of change in the industry. In Victoria, the overall value of machinery and plant rose by about 20 per cent; in NSW by about a third in menswear. These changes, it should be reiterated, took place against the worst trade slump since the early 1890s. For the first time there is consistent evidence that capital was becoming concentrated and that mechanisation and economies-of-scale became universal. We may suppose that productivity increased in the 1920s; the evidence of industrial change for the 1930s is greater.

The amount of horse-power per factory roughly doubled and two especially significant indicators reversed trends of the 1920s. In each major State the average number of hands per factory rose and the access to the status of small master became harder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victoria 1928/29</th>
<th>Victoria 1938/39</th>
<th>NSW 1928/29</th>
<th>NSW 1938/39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ready-Made and Tailoring</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaking and Millinery</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts etc</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from VYB and NSWSR.

23. These statistics calculated from VYB and NSWSR.

24. ibid.

25. No details of the distribution of factory sizes are provided except for NSW.
In NSW, the proportion of working proprietors dropped in each section: to just 3.4 per cent of employees in 'menswear'; to 4.1 and 2.1 in the other sections. There are no such detailed statistics for Victoria after 1936/37 but the same trend was apparent. In one other most important respect the trades' changes were underscored. The marginal decline in the proportion of women employed continued except in NSW's shirt-trade where the level was constant and the menswear section where the 'femininity' of the workforce rose from 78.9 to 82.5 per cent, 1928/29 - 1938/39. This was now some six percentage points clear of the Victorian rate - in sharp contradiction to the traditions of the NSW Branch of the Union. The declining ratio of women employed in Victoria is the hardest trend to explain. By the end of the decade, other trades may have been established as more attractive or more women may have been employed as un-counted outworkers.

Union sources suggest some more detail of the working through of these changes, that is, in the labour process. In short, there were new machines, faster machines and more machines. The basic single and two-needle sewing-machine and button machines were joined by a great variety extending from high-speed plain sewers to most intricate automatic embroidery machines.

27. ibid.
There were now machines for 'tubular work' (sleeves and trousers) as well as machines able to do work once the sole domain of hand workers: from basting and tacking to finishing. Machinery was now applied to work previously seen as highly broken-up and in that sense, 'unskilled'.

Machinery increased output at all stages of production. The electric cutter, which had been used in Melbourne since about 1910, had only in the 1930s become fully proficient. It could now work on 100 garments at a time, doubling previous output. The most dramatic advances were in making-up, particularly of trousers, where task-specific machines were spreading. A great many jobs were replaced by machine: the button-sewing machine would see 800-900 buttons an hour; a handworker, about 60. From trouser pockets to buttons, from belt loops to flies, new machines replaced old, and new machines replaced hand labour.

When sent to the presser, garments would now be done on a range of specialised machines, as opposed to the single machine of the 1920s. Even pressers succumbed to the team system. In trouser making, the process of 'making through' was often abandoned. Instead, the trousers would be made by one 'team' on 'fronts', another on 'backs' and a third on 'seams'. It was a matter of debate as to whether the increased efficiency would allow for higher wages. It was quite clear, however, that in many factories, managements enjoyed unfettered rights of control. In others, these changes were sources of dispute.

29. ibid., pp.6-7.
30. ibid., pp.8-12.
Conflicts over methods of payment and of monitoring work were as important as changes in the work itself. In the early 1930s, clothing workers had their first encounter with the 'Bedaux system', a minutely specialised division of work timing and built upon it a system of bonus payments. Unions in NSW opposed it as being 'one of the most obnoxious systems of bonus payment'.

To some extent during, but more particularly after, the slump, clothing workers found that the nature of the industry was quickly changing. The changes began when workers were ill-placed to resist or moderate them. The Union's General Secretary was probably not exaggerating his feelings when he wrote, in 1933, that the industry was no longer a craft but 'a vicious system'. Ironically there is good cause to believe that the rise in tariffs - so favoured by the Union - lay behind the changes. Markets were more assured than ever before and the Unions, at least for a while, weak. The employers could now invest and become more efficient than earlier. It must be remembered that the industry remained a small-scale one - the changes were on a low base. It also remained very competitive. This led to further series of structural changes.

Sub-contracting had been increasing since the late-1920s. Indeed, the Union had won some formal control of it in the Award in 1928 but it

31. So described by the Labor Council and quoted in NSW Branch, Minutes, 27 April 1936.

32. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1933.
expanded thereafter as more and more 'emporiums' began to give their making-up out to sub-contractors. The origins of the development are obscure, but like all other attempts to cut costs it quickly caught on. It aimed at nothing less than subverting the Award, by-passing the Union and thus keeping profits high. Contractors were easy prey for retailers because the small master needed a constant cash flow to cover rent and hire-purchase costs. Contractors never built up stocks and were vulnerable in hard times. Sub-contracting allowed for the Award to be broken and all but necessitated it. They were not respondents to the Award. The emporiums, casting around for cheap tenders, created under these circumstances what Wallis called 'the will to sweat'. Muriel Heagney saw this as the greatest problem in the trade as the Union later came to accept.

The expansion of sub-contracting suggested that, despite the changes taking place in the industry, there still was no 'typical' employer. The trade remained divided between retailers and wholesalers, sub-contractors and outright 'sweaters'. Wallis' remark that contracting saw 'the helpless working for the helpless' underlined the contradictions within the Union. The Union could ally itself with big employer or small master - or neither. Many members would feel as many ties with a struggling boss as with workers elsewhere. These

33. A.R. Wallis, Submission to Arbitration Court, 1937, p.7. This account is drawn from this document; ANU, E138/69.
circumstances underpinned the Union's response not merely to the problem of contracting but to changes in society and industry in the 1930s. How the Union might react and what things members might think possible would be tried, too, in the context of an organisation which had had ten years of experience policing the state's Awards.

(ii) GROWTH, STRUCTURE AND POLICY

Unemployment and its supposed cure, wage reductions, were, with changes in work processes, the threats which confronted men and women in the clothing trades in the 1930s. Unemployment threatened their Union, wage cuts changed its nature. These developments and the conflicts which changes in work generated will be discussed in this section.

I 1930-33

In the early months of 1930, there were as many problems for the Union in Sydney as there had been in 1929. One of the major firms, Spectreman, dismissed its pressers and installed machines which were to be worked by non-union labour.36 The Branch, with unemployed pressers on its books, took no action. By the winter, the trade was flat. Murdochs dismissed 150 workers on 8 August and a further hundred in the following three weeks. Three other major firms had

36. NSW Branch, Minutes, 13 January 1930.
collapsed, causing another 300 job losses. Even the craft core of the Branch suffered: 60 to 70 pressers were unemployed.37

If Victoria's clothing industry had fared well in 1929, the following year brought the full force of the Depression. Secretary Wallis called for a report on unemployment only to hear almost immediately that a major firm had imposed wage cuts on a workforce fearful of dismissal. Organisers reported that there was 'practically no work in the place'. A belated strike was ineffective.38 Elsewhere, at Frieze Brothers, bonuses were cut and workers put on short-time. Work methods were to be investigated.39 On one day, at one firm, then, much of the conflict of the decade was anticipated. Unemployment returns masked the problem of short-time. This was underscored by organisers' reports that, in the twelve months since August 1929, Union shops had suffered badly. Whereas the 24 major stock factories had been employing an average of 2293 workers, only 1104 were now employed. Of these, a mere 252 were working full-time.40 Such was the nature of the trade's employment in the Depression.

In most Branches of the Union, income fell by about half from 1928 to 1931. Federal revenue fell by three-quarters; the bank balance to £45.41 There are no comprehensive figures for Depression membership

37. ibid., 11, 25 August 1930.
38. Vic Branch, Minutes, 13, 28 April, 5, 12, 19 May, 2 June 1930.
39. ibid., 7, 14 July 1930.
40. ibid., 18 August 1930.
but by 1931 the total financial membership was probably down from 1929's 18,728 to about 9,000, of whom less than 4,000 were financial members. Grand Council did not meet in 1931 or 1932. Branch officials only saw their inter-State colleagues at ACTU meetings. By 1932, however, there was some recovery in membership. In that year membership totalled 11,678.42

Financial difficulties and the wage cut of 1931 worsened divisions in the Union. On the eve of the worst of the Depression, Carter had called for the Branches to act more truly as one Union.43 Instead, long-standing problems were raised and divisions increased. At Council in 1930, NSW delegates referred to the lower costs of production in Victoria, implying that the Branch was not doing its job properly.44 Similarly, the South Australians believed that imports from other States were 'mainly' to blame for the trade's decline.45 Their response was framed accordingly - they wrote to employers to try to organise a campaign for having clothing needs met from local production. Employers instead suggested a wage-cut.46

42. See a review of membership in FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1948; and of income in ibid., 1943. From income 1928-32 it is possible to come to the estimates given of Union membership.
43. GC, Minutes, 19 February 1930. See also Chapter Six.
44. ibid., 17 February 1930. Fallon denied the implication, to which Wallis retorted: 'I would be stone, stark, staring mad if I did not take that meaning'.
45. SA Branch, Minutes, 30 January 1930.
46. ibid., 25 August, 17 November 1930.
Queensland officers sought a similar policy at least in relation to government clothing. They were similarly unsuccessful. Queensland was the only Branch to state its loyalty to the Federation (Victoria's was assumed) as the Depression deepened, but by the end of 1931 it, too, had decided that Federal action was pointless. The South Australian Branch had already come into conflict with Carter over correspondence and slackness in filing reports. In 1930, South Australia paid no fees; neither did NSW. By 1932 Queensland was reported 'broke' and, in all Branches, either the number or the remuneration of officials was being reduced. Victoria remained positive to the extent that Carter took on organising duties there but, in other ways, it was enmeshed in the retrenchment mentality of the Depression. Affiliation levels were cut, two clerks put on short-time and another dismissed.

In one sense, the Branch, like others, resembled nothing so much as the employers whom it criticised. In terms of defending its membership, there was some recognition that it must act differently from other unions. The MTHC, like its counterparts elsewhere,

47. Qld Branch, Minutes, 6, 11 December 1930; 1 April, 19 October 1931. Secretary Sparks remained in favour of paying Federal fees.

48. SA Branch, Minutes, 4 May 1931.

49. Vic Branch, Minutes, 1 September 1930; 9 February, 15 June 1932. Carter was highly critical of Fallon who did not provide the support that, as Federal President, he might have. Branch loyalties remained paramount.

50. See Correspondence, H. Carter to G. Carter, 2, 12, 19 February 1932; 11 February 1933.
discussed the employment of married women. The Branch rejected a motion excluding from jobs 'married women with husbands'.\textsuperscript{51} This seemed to translate into daily action, because there was no evident discrimination in the issuing of permits for outwork or low-wage work. Between 1930 and 1933, there was only one inquiry on the grounds that the applicant's husband was employed. It has been suggested, though, that in the factories cutters and foremen could - and did - discriminate against married women by not giving them proper amounts of work.\textsuperscript{52} For all women, conditions in the shops deteriorated as the Depression grew worse. Carter saw this as a threat not so much to women as workers but to women as mothers, mirroring the attitude which so often appeared in the Court's reasoning. He told Council in 1933 that women were being driven so hard that, after being in the trade, they were 'not fit to do justice to the reproduction of their kind'.\textsuperscript{53}

The defence of male workers remained most prominent, especially in NSW but even pressers there found that unionism was weak. By March 1932,

\textsuperscript{51} ibid., 22 August 1932.

\textsuperscript{52} See D. Benjamin, 'The Discrimination Against Women and Their Exploitation in the Clothing Trade During the Depression of 1929-1936', Second Women and Labour Conference, Papers, I. The Victorian Branch's policy was in the hands of the Secretary, Alf Wallis. See, Vic Branch, Minutes, 17 March 1930. This was perhaps fortunate given his views at the time. See, further, 'Arbitration'.

\textsuperscript{53} GC, General Secretary's Report, 1933.
the OK Card had been abandoned.\textsuperscript{54} It was no coincidence that Branch meetings were now being held less regularly. Queensland's Minutes reported that members would now 'do anything that the bosses want'.\textsuperscript{55}

The Victorians provided some relief to the rout during 1931 and 1932. At one firm a dozen members resisted wage-cuts. Their strike, in March 1931, had a twin significance. It was probably supported by communists because there was a report that the local unemployed organised a picket. This presaged patterns of subsequent resistance. Second, the strike preceded and, perhaps, fuelled an organising drive.\textsuperscript{56} Early in 1932, organisers reported that an increase in membership had been achieved through a drive in the dressmaking group. Unemployment in the industry still stood at over 22 per cent but Wallis believed that workers would be able to resist further wage-cuts.\textsuperscript{57} Elsewhere the Union approximated more to the NSW model. There was no meeting in South Australia for thirteen months from June 1931 and members were forced to work below Award rates.\textsuperscript{58} In Queensland, similar difficulties arose but the organising staff was at

\textsuperscript{54} NSW Branch, Minutes, 7 March 1932. See 27 October 1930, 16 March 1931 for attempts to retain a modified system.

\textsuperscript{55} Qld Branch, Minutes, 3 July 1931.

\textsuperscript{56} For the stoppage see Vic Branch, Minutes, 9 March 1931. The CPA provided much of the energy for unemployed movements. Coalitions between unionists and unemployed were, it might be suggested, all too rare.

\textsuperscript{57} ibid., 22, 29 February 1932. For unemployment rates, Labour Report, No.23.

\textsuperscript{58} SA Branch, Minutes, 11 July, 7 November 1932.
least reinforced with the appointment, in February 1932, of the office clerk, Olive Kenny, as a part-time organiser\textsuperscript{59} - the only female appointment for about ten years.

In Victoria, Wallis' prediction that direct action might be revived was proved true in July 1932 when four of the major firms announced wage cuts in line with the Court's cost-of-living adjustments. Resentment was exacerbated by the legacy of earlier conflicts over conditions and tasks and by rumours of an 'employers' OK Card', to check on and control the movement of workers. On 4 July the Branch had held a mass meeting to protest against the cuts. On Friday 8 July, some 500 to 600 workers, mostly women, went on strike\textsuperscript{60}.

Typically, strike action was seen in a fairly narrow way by the officials. By the following Monday, the Executive had ruled that no further stoppages take place; that, in effect, it be a 'strike-in-detail' as undertaken by the old craft unions. The CPA again had a role, through the Militant Minority Movement (MMM), which had established support in some clothing factories. The Branch Executive refused a Court order to instruct the workers to go back to their jobs, demanding that proper tasks be set first. In contrast, the MMM urged a widening of the dispute. This did not take place; most members seemed to accept the view of the Executive. No agreement was finalised until September, when the cost-of-living wage reduction

\textsuperscript{59} Qld Branch, Minutes, 1 February 1932. Perhaps some cheap labour? \textsuperscript{60} Vic Branch, Minutes, 11 July 1932.
was about halved. Award conditions guaranteed. It was also agreed that only half the prospective January reduction would apply. The best construction which could be put upon this was that it was a resolution which was less of a set-back than that being inflicted on other workers. For the women, though, the starting wages were much lower. Carter thought he could detect a psychological benefit; the strike 'would improve the Union to a considerable extent'.

If the response of some workers gave heart to Carter, the response of officials to the Depression dismayed him. His calls for Federal action still fell on deaf ears. At the end of 1932, the Federal body was further weakened by a decision in the Arbitration Court which took holiday pay away from members - despite Carter's confidence that the decision would be favourable. Fallon claimed that the Union had 'ceased to function'. A sharp exchange of letters followed. Finally, Carter decided to intervene in the affairs of the NSW Branch. His threat was withdrawn when a meeting of Grand Council was arranged for April 1933. Carter had not abandoned his commitment to arbitration and to the cause of centralism. Indeed, he approached Council with a demand for a 'fighting platform'.

61. ibid., 11, 18 July, 5 September 1932. See also The Working Woman, September 1932. The Union had no formal procedures for strike pay because of the constraints of the Arbitration Act.
63. 32 CAR 34.
64. Correspondence, H. Carter to G. Carter, 11 February, 6 March 1933; H. Carter to P. Fallon, 20 February 1933.
65. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1933.
Carter and the Federal power were, however, victims of the Depression and the Arbitration Court's wage cuts. Since 1930 Carter had criticised almost all Branch officials. Personal animosities were added to division and defeatism. Only Queensland opposed the Branches going out on their own in the State courts; only Queensland Secretary Sparks supported Carter at Grand Council as other delegates attacked Carter and unpicked the seam of any 'true amalgamation'.

Many powers of the Secretary were transferred to the Council, notably those over special audits and inspection of Branches. And a two-thirds majority of Management Committee was now required before there could be a Federal take-over of a Branch. In effect, the biggest Branches, NSW and Victoria, were freed from this threat, and, as Council delegates were responsible to their Branches, the transfer of powers from the Secretary to the Council was more devolutionary than it might at first appear.

The position of General Secretary was then considered. It was to be an honorary one, paid at only one guinea per year. Carter's income consisted of a half-rate from Council and a half from Victoria. This change signalled the effective dismissal of Herbert Carter. He immediately resigned. The honorarium was increased to £104 in 1934,

66. Qld Branch, Minutes, 4 March 1933.
67. GC, Minutes, 5, 6 April 1933.
68. ibid., 7 April 1933.
£260 in 1936. In other words, the changes were, in part, devices to get rid of Carter, to put him in a position where he had to resign. Equally, there were longer-term implications because there was to be no full-time Federal Secretary until 1939. Alf Wallis was appointed as the new Secretary, a post he held in conjunction with the Victorian leadership. In one sense, the rule changes formalised the actual situation exposed by the Depression — that, despite the intentions of 1924, no genuine amalgamation had been built. Because arbitration had failed clothing trades unionists, the Federal structure was deprived of even its limited role.

II 1933–39

At the same time as these changes in the Union, the worst of the Depression was passing. Indeed, at the Council meeting of 1933, Victoria was able to report its first credit balance for two-and-a-half years. Both major Branches recruited fewer members in 1933 than the year before but, thereafter, there was a consistent recovery in the strength of the Union. Recovery was partly due to an increase in employment; all branches of the industry had 'bottomed out' between 1930 and 1932. It was also due to Union organising — and it was signalled by changes in the structure of the industry and the labour process that posed new problems for unionists.

69. Ibid., 13 March 1934; FC, Minutes, 26 February 1937. The personal nature of the attacks is quite clear from the Minutes.
Revival was, however, uneven. In South Australia, the Branch held only three General Meetings from 1933 to 1935 whereas, in Queensland, the stronger economy and the election of a Labor government saw a recovery in the same period. Victoria organised a special campaign in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick. Muriel Heagney joined Organiser Ted Smith in research and recruiting work in the area. A public meeting denounced 'sweating' and workers were enrolled as members and were asked about tasks and piece-rates. This venture was evidently successful but it did not herald a wider policy of such community-based activity. Nor did any structural change take place to follow up Heagney's powerful arguments in favour of appointing a female organiser. Male unionists' reactions to the revelations of the inquiry were perhaps encapsulated in Smith's rationale for demanding better factory conditions: 'the girls of today are ... the mothers of tomorrow'.

In the Depression and the slow recovery, the role of women as 'activists' did not notably change. Over the whole decade the representation of women on Branch Committees altered a little, with a slight decline in South Australia and New South Wales, a slight increase in the other Branches. Leadership remained male. By 1939,

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70. SA Branch, Minutes, passim; Qld Branch, Minutes, 15 January, 17 December 1934; 29 July, 23 September 1935. Preference for unionists was introduced in Queensland. See below, 'Arbitration'.

71. Vic Branch, Minutes, 13 January 1936; M. Heagney, 'Special Report', 14 March 1936.

Queensland's Olive Kenny was the only female official; there was a fifteen year 'tradition' elsewhere that such jobs were men's alone. The Depression and the Federal changes had not altered the Branch structures. As the Union now began to grow, most Branches increased the size of their Committees but, by retaining the representation of cutters and tailors and pressers at one each whilst only affording one delegate to shirtworkers or, in some Branches, tailoresses, the male, craft, traditions were institutionalised. In newer areas, like 'examining' or fur work, men came through. Indeed, after 1934 there was no dress-making representation in NSW's committee.

Victorian income grew such that 1936 saw an all-time high. Federal income also reached new levels. By 1939, organisers had begun to check conditions in factories not covered by the Award - a far cry from the struggles of half-a-dozen years earlier. In NSW, meetings were still infrequent in 1935 but by then the Branch, and the Federation, had surpassed the membership levels of 1929. By 1939 the Branch could claim to be the Union's biggest with 13,347 members. The total, at 32,329, was the highest then recorded. Such growth suggests that the Union expanded more quickly than did employment: the Union grew by 72.6 per cent from 1929 to 1939; employment in the main sections by only 3.6 per cent. Union coverage

73. Vic Branch, Minutes, 14 December 1936; 24 July 1939; for Federal income, FC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1937.

74. See FC, Minutes, 12 April 1940. Fallon's ability to conjure up numbers to enhance NSW's size was, however, legendary. See GC, Minutes, 10 February 1930; FC, Minutes, 15 February 1937. Also interviews with J. Kenna, F. Peterson.
increased to about 60 per cent of workers. Only the South Australian Branch, battered by the weak trade and not helped by unfortunate losses of leaders, did not advance.

The recovery of the Union soon encouraged Wallis to think and act like a Federal official. In 1935 he considered a re-organisation of Union finances. In the previous year, the Victorian Branch had asked for a levy to raise funds for the Federation. Neither move yielded a result. The structure of the Union was little changed after 1933. In 1935, Council was re-designated Federal Council, completing the reverses since 1924 when moves for a 'true amalgamation' had begun. Representation at Council was kept under the dominance of large Branches when the membership required to send three delegates was increased by 500 to 2501. This showed a willingness to change the shape of the Union as its base changed. Other alterations were less rational, as Victorian delegates - or Wallis' 'bloody marionettes' as Fallon described them - argued with NSW officials over technicalities. The importance of these conflicts was that the status of the Federal Secretary was, again, reduced. Wallis was to attend Council as a Victorian delegate for as long as he remained Victorian

75. It must be reiterated that these figures are not precise. See Chapter Six.

76. Secretary G. Carter died in October 1936; Organiser T. Dwyer in February 1937.

77. Vic Branch, Minutes, 12 November 1934; GC, Minutes, 5 March 1935; see also GC, Federal Secretary's Report, 1934.

78. GC, Minutes, 7 March 1935.
Secretary. Partly in response, Victorians themselves undermined the Federal power. Although they agreed to a ruling that Federal delegates be bound by the majority of Council, at no stage did they put these particular changes before Branch meetings with any vigour.79

Growing differences between the Branches added to the structural tensions weakening Council. This was an important trend in the 1930s because, particularly in Unions led by the left, centralism was a dominant theme as in changes in the NSW Miners and the Federal Ironworkers.80 Centralism had been presaged in the ACATU in 1924 but there was little hope that it would re-emerge. Within Branches, 'control shifted towards the Executive, notably in Victoria where the example of other Branches was followed in appointing organisers 'at the pleasure of the Branch'.81

The Union's structure was, then, stable after 1933. So were the officers. Only South Australia was led by a different Secretary when the decade ended — and that change was brought about by the death of an incumbent. Within this inflexible framework there were varied reactions from some of the membership to economic and industrial change and consequent challenges to the 'function' if not the 'form' of the Union.

79. FC, Minutes, 15, 26 February 1937; SFC, Minutes, 10-29 May 1937; Vic Branch, Minutes, 26 April, 21 June 1937.

80. R. Gollan, The Coalminers, p.201; R. Murray and K. White, op.cit., pp.100-4

81. Vic Branch, Minutes, 7 March 1938.
There was a range of responses, different within and between Branches. After 1932, questions about the volume of employment were replaced by questions about its nature. In Victoria it was craftsmen who first revived questions of control. Most of Melbourne's cutters were unionists and they had decided to follow the example of pressers in NSW by introducing the OK Card. In 1933 a committee had organised a card system and had enquired into the wages and conditions of cutters. By the end of May, the Branch Committee was struggling to keep up with the cutters who had gone so far as to issue wage demands. Branch officials were anxious to keep control of events, fearing, no doubt, the disruption that a strike of cutters would cause. It seems that employers, too, were anxious, because the dispute was quickly resolved, and, by the end of the year, the cutters were averaging £4 10s 5d a week, that is 7s 5d over the award.82 This was not the end of the matter. In 1934, when the men were divided over the merits of the Card, Wallis opposed the system because such divisions damaged the Union's credibility. In April, the system was suspended.83 It was not revived until 1955. Wage advances proved easier to win than control.

Difficulties in the trade were more pressing in NSW - and more indicative of the problems ahead. In 1933 the NSW Branch began a three year struggle against the 'Bedaux System' when workers reported that they were being timed as they worked. The Branch condemned any

82. ibid., 15, 22 May, 12 June 1933. See also NSW Branch, Minutes, 22 May 1933; GC, Minutes, 9 March 1934.

83. Vic Branch, Minutes, 12 February, 5 March, 16, 30 April 1934.
such threat of re-organisation and speed-up as a breach of the Award.
The timings stopped, in the clothing trades, but similar innovations led to conflict in the metal trades in 1936. In the same year, David Jones – the Sydney firm in dispute with the Union in 1933 – was again suspected of introducing the Bedaux System of bonuses.84

Melbourne saw the most complete response to changes in the industry. In 1935, three of the major trouser-making firms, Ellisons, Frieze and Sackvilles, determined to increase their joint market share by reducing costs. They developed a system of trouser-making which was based on an enhanced division of labour and task-specific machinery. Where trousers had been almost 'made through', they would now be made by teams. One of the companies had been running the system as a trial; the full systems were to be introduced on Friday 15th March. Branch officials heard that a workers' committee at Sackvilles was 'definitely opposed to the new method', with its piece-rates for specific tasks on the front, backs and seaming of the trousers. The Branch officers called Wallis, who was in Launceston with Tasmanian officials, informing him that a strike was pending.

Wallis immediately called a meeting which voted to strike if the new system was introduced. On 15 March, 160 women workers met at the Trades' Hall, resolving to stay out until the system was withdrawn. A committee from the factories was formed to work with officials, and it

84. NSW Branch, Minutes, 14 August 1933; 26 April 1934; 27 April, 7 December 1936.
was agreed that there would be no resumption of duties without agreement from the strikers.\textsuperscript{85} At the outset, there were differences between the strikers and the officials. Thus, the first record of the stoppage that appears in the Minute mentioned that

\begin{quote}
women would not be obliged to waste time waiting for flies and button catches from the patent machines, loops from the looping machine and seam press
\end{quote}

and it went on to stress the question of rates of pay.\textsuperscript{86} A week later the Committee pledged itself to the women's cause, but saw that cause in terms of 'reasonable safeguards and ... proper rates of pay'.\textsuperscript{87}

The position of the workers becomes clear when Wallis' reactions were given. He stated that:

\begin{quote}
in every industry, everywhere, no union or strike had been able to prevent new methods and machines being introduced. Workers should not oppose 'the new method of manufacture and the new machines' but should 'prevent the worst features ... being applied and raise the price of labor'.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

As the strike went on, the questions of rates and tasks became more central to discussion.

\textsuperscript{85} This account is based upon 'Strike of Trouser Machinists', a report in the Branch holdings, UMA Box 32

\textsuperscript{86} Vic Branch, Minutes, 18 March 1935. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{87} ibid., 25 March 1935.

\textsuperscript{88} 'Wallis' Opinion on Strike', included with 'Strike of Trouser Machinists', n.d. Spelling as in original.
Elsewhere, different claims were being advanced. The Victorian organ of the CPA, *Workers' Voice*, called upon the strikers to resist the new methods and to try to expand the stoppage. A leaflet from the MMM's Clothing Trades' Group demanded that all workers be properly informed of the nature of the dispute. The only recorded extension of the stoppage took place when cutters and machinists at a small firm discovered that they were being asked to work on Frieze's goods. They refused to do so.

As in 1932, officials worked to limit the scope of the strike. There were two justifications for this, one of which was, perhaps, more a rationalisation than anything else. This was the claim that sectional differences within the Union posed a threat to the stoppage. Wallis claimed that coat-machinists were complaining that their plight was worse than that of the trouser-makers who could earn over-Award wages. Wallis was implying that other workers would not support a long stoppage and that, therefore, the less other members knew, the better. It could, equally, have been suggested that general dissatisfaction be the base for a widespread campaign. Second, despite the view of some unionists that the new methods were the weapons of the employers combined, it became clear that there was considerable division between the employers. One wanted a wage-cut, and another claimed a rise in earnings was likely; and, in

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89. *Workers' Voice*, 22 March 1935; Clothing Trades' MMM Group, undated leaflet.

90. 'Strike of Trouser Machinists'.
negotiations, different attitudes towards the Union emerged. In this way, then, attempts to divide employers and to restrict action to something resembling the strike-in-detail could be upheld as being a logical position. Whether this craft tradition could secure the Union's aim of control in the shops in the current industrial conditions was another question.91

Members of the MMM thought it could not and that general grievances demanded a wider response. There is little doubt that communists did play a leading role in the stoppage and that the MMM's propaganda showed a clear appreciation that division in the Union needed to be overcome, that traditional structures and policies needed change. Nevertheless, the great mass of women were neither communists nor were they consistently exposed to the communists' analysis of the industry. Just as the MMM was calling for an extension of the stoppage, agreement was imminent after the intervention of the Industrial Registrar. Bonuses would be paid, juniors would receive their due rates and, pending a final fixation of rates, workers would receive not less than their average weekly earnings since 1 January. The militants' difficulty in mobilising support was shown up by the voting on these negotiations. The Strike Committee accepted the terms by 6 to 3, a mass meeting by 59 to 19. Work would resume on 27 March.92

91. ibid.; see also 'Wallis' Opinion on Strike'.
92. 'Strike of Trouser Machinists'.
The new methods did not work well. Employers became angry - or confused - and by the middle of May there were discussions about the old methods. Some women were prepared to accept price reductions to keep the old system going.93 At the end of the month, the Branch meeting heard that 'most' trousers were indeed being made on the old system.94 There were further arguments about rates and there was another strike at Sackvilles.95 The failure of the new scheme which was, apparently, ill-conceived by employers and staunchly resisted by the women was quite extraordinary. However, it did not cause officials to alter their views of technological change, nor openly to enquire into just why the schemes did not work. There is every reason to believe that the women made sure the new methods did not work. Despite the limitations of 'official response', Wallis was probably genuine in writing that one of the benefits of the dispute was that 'it had bound the women together in the spirit of class'.96

Officers at no stage sought ways to build such a spirit - however much they might proclaim the value of unity. On many occasions officials bemoaned the inactivity of unionists. There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of their stated view, but when action was taken officials

93. ibid.; see also Vic Branch, Minutes, 29 April, 13 May 1935. A reduction in rates would not necessarily have meant reduced income, for it is clear that the payment schemes were quite different.

94. Vic Branch, Minutes, 23 May 1935.

95. ibid., 27 May, 17 June 1935.

96. 'Wallis' Opinion on Strike'.
were keen to control it. The Trouser Dispute of 1935, then, neatly encapsulates the two notions of control—control by combined workers over their work processes, control by officials over the membership.

In Victoria in the 1930s there were signs that this control would be exercised over the craft bastions of the Union. Previously, particularly in NSW, it could have been argued that the Union was exclusively the property of the male artisan. Employers rightly saw the cutting room as an area central to cost and control problems. Some attempts had been made to enforce changes there before the mid-1930s but the most serious seemed to be in 1937 at Sackvilles where a time-card system was planned. The men rejected what they saw as 'another attempt to pitt one man against another'.

A subsequent meeting of 100 or more cutters reiterated opposition to time-cards and began moves for wage increases. Instead, under 'official' pressure, the cutters resolved to help inculcate the spirit of trades' unionism into the shops. The Minute suggests, in language reminiscent of 'further organisation' that it was not an 'opportune' time to seek increases, that the shops were insufficiently unionised. Cutters were blamed for this state of affairs; they should have been more union-conscious. It is hard to believe that the men's position was threatened because of their isolation from other workers but there

97. Vic Branch, Minutes, 31 May 1937. Spelling as in original.
98. ibid., 21 July, 2 August 1937. Perhaps meaning as opposed to 'craft-conscious'.

is no doubt that, for once, officials restrained the craft section from 'going it alone'.

Wallis had, earlier, urged that there be militancy and unity in defence of Awards. One area of contradiction has been pinpointed; another lay in officials' views on the pace of work. They deplored practices like standing 'at the pressers' block waiting to grab the garment as soon as it was finished' — yet they regarded piece-work, which inevitably led to such activities, as all but necessary in the trade. They were, though, aware of the contradictions within the labour process of some of their members. 'Team leaders', it was stated, 'caused their own sweating. They knew enough about the work to fix their own tasks'. These workers - 'heads of table' — were part supervisor, part worker and, as such, in a dual position. They would not have been the only ones with such knowledge.

This suggests the important point that full 'scientific management' — in which the worker was excluded from planning and technical details — had not been established. It hints, too, at a reason for the success of the trouser-hands, and sometimes others, in resisting or modifying changes in the labour process.

Within the Branch it was, in the first place, cutters and pressers who responded to Wallis' call, with special meetings now beginning. There were no such meetings for women workers and no policies to

99. ibid., 10 May 1937.
100. ibid., 5 July 1937.
overcome the social and work-based constraints upon their 'militancy and unity'. The Minute emphasises threats to male workers - as in January 1938 when one employer tried to introduce a team system to cutting. It involved only two cutters but the Branch saw a dangerous precedent: such a division of labour would see the men's 'status lowered and wages reduced'. The men were confident that the nature of the industry would prevent the spread of such systems because most orders were small and had variations of size and style.102

Similar anxieties were manifested in Sydney where a meeting of 138 cutters demanded the abolition of task rates introduced recently and a return to pre-Depression conditions. The meeting emphasised that a cutter should work: 'by himself and ... not have the assistance of any other employee'.103

Through August 1938, a committee, and further meetings, planned a log of claims and rules of work, adopted - narrowly - an OK Card and resolved to enforce their new conditions. Should any cutter be dismissed for abiding by the resolution, the Branch would call stop-work meetings. When the Card and the new rules were introduced in mid-September, the results were disappointing. The rates worked out unevenly (mirroring employers' experience in Melbourne in the

101. ibid., 16 June 1937.
102. ibid., 26 January 1938. The employer wanted to have cutters doing only cutting, that is to say, marking-in and laying-up would be done by other workers or by teams of cutters.
103. NSW Branch, Minutes, 8 August 1938.
trouser-making dispute). Largely as a result, the Card lost favour and, even amongst cutters, resistance was undermined by division. 104

Technological change and modifications of work were less apparent in the smaller Branches although the South Australians encountered the spread of the pressing-machine to their State. Their response neatly summed up the problem. There was 'not a shadow of a doubt that they were coming here and we could do nothing to stop them'. 105 Officers hoped that the Award's clauses on task work would provide sufficient protection for workers on machines. 106 Even when Branches encountered similar problems, Union division remained. Council could not agree upon a policy for the general question of task work; individual Branches could not deal with the vague references in the Award to 'average capacity' as a guide to work loads and piece-rates. This weakness of definition meant that power relations in the factory, not arguments in the Court, decided the meaning of terms. And in some places, notably Pelaco, workers had no say at all in the fixing of rates. 107

Responses to industrial change were as uneven as the details of control. Alternatives to the Union's 'official' stance came from the CPA, through the MMM and, some women in larger factories. The MMM

104. ibid., 11, 22 August, 1, 8 September, 17, 18, 24 October 1938.

105. SA Branch, Minutes, 12 July 1937.

106. ibid., 27 September 1937.

107. See Vic Branch, Minutes, 6 June 1938 for Pelaco; FC, Minutes, 22, 23 February 1938.
seems to have been the main 'mobiliser' of women's opposition to change, but the CPA was unable to build a base of sufficient strength to challenge the traditions and policies of the Union in Victoria, far less in Queensland or South Australia. However, in the increasingly conservative and craft-dominated NSW Branch, the Party did find a more useful area in which to operate. There the challenge was not so much in the factories as in the Union itself with arguments at meetings about internal matters and foreign politics. The communists gave some strength to women in Victoria in direct action. In NSW, by 1939, they had achieved only the passing of resolutions on foreign affairs and the establishment of a picnic committee. Both might subsequently become bases for direct challenges. The ideological nature and impact of these developments will be considered further in discussing the ACATU's relationships in the labour movement.

If workers sometimes immediately opposed changes in the industry and if this made more explicit the assumptions of their union leaders, then there is also a sense in which we may speak of a formal 'Union policy'. This covered technology, hours, sub-contracting and protectionism. Much of the leadership's response was set out in a booklet published in 1935, the text of the Victorian Branch's submission to a State Parliament inquiry into the working week. In _A Shorter Working Week for the Clothing Trades' Workers_, the Union argued that, because of increased output through technological advance, the industry's workers could, and should, have a shorter working week. The origins of this line of thinking lay as much in the years of unemployment as of growth, but the pamphlet again and again
returned to the theme of cost cuts, increased efficiency and workers' contribution to the industry.

The argument was similar to that propounded by the NSW Miners' Federation which agreed to accept mechanization if shorter hours and safety measures were granted. Both Unions also saw a drastic cut in hours as a means to reducing unemployment. There were, though, immense differences between the respective industries and unions. The Miners had fought their employers tooth and nail for improved conditions. They had the tradition, structure and will to try to enforce changes. The 'apolitical', loosely-knit, Federal Council of the ACATU could not so act and its Branches were unwilling to do so. Improvements would come through allying with some employers and through showing the Arbitration Court that the Union was willing to accept change and abide by arbitration and negotiation. These responses run throughout the history.

Claims for reduced hours were embraced by most Unions. Some, like the Printers, used direct action, others relied on the ACTU. The Congress of 1927 demanded a forty-hour week but had little idea of how to achieve it in the face of the Court's hostility. The ACATU was


109. This view was explicitly stated in several Arbitration cases and Councils. See Chapters Five and Six and, below, 'Arbitration'.

similarly bemused; its view highlighted the weakness of Council. In 1936 Victorian delegates had demanded a general levy. In 1937 Council rejected a levy for the ACTU's hours campaign. NSW opposed the Victorian and South Australian move. Divisions led to inaction.\textsuperscript{111}

Action against sub-contracting was similarly retarded. In describing the industry, \textit{A Shorter Working Week} emphasised the growth of, and the difficulties posed by, the system. It caused anxiety in the main States throughout the decade and, by 1937, South Australia had begun to experience difficulties when one major firm had its work sent out to a plethora of small shops.\textsuperscript{112} Wallis wanted to expose those firms whose goods were made-up at below-Award rates by their contractors, whilst enlisting the support of firms not engaged in such a practice. Again, division thwarted the plan because the same firm might operate differently in different States. Fallon had been preparing prosecution of the Sydney branches of firms which, in Melbourne, the Union wanted to work with.\textsuperscript{113} It was, then, difficult to work out a policy at Branch level. The matter would have to be solved by recourse to the Court where, again, under the auspices of the state, some sort of alliances with major firms would be sought.

\textsuperscript{111} See FC, General Secretary's Report, 1927; Minutes 17 February 1937; see Vic Branch, Minutes, 21 December 1936 for the original demand. See below, 'Politics', for NSW Secretary Fallon's views on the ACTU.

\textsuperscript{112} See SA Branch, Minutes, 12 July 1937 for Myers' activities.

\textsuperscript{113} NSW Branch, Minutes, 30 November 1936; FC, Minutes, 25 February 1937.
The closeness of the bonds with some employers had its firmest origin, of course, in protectionism. Only once did failings of protectionism cause anxiety. In 1936/37 the dumping of Canadian frocks on the Australia market 'ruined' the domestic season. Wallis had prevailed upon the employers to approach the Government. Thus in the one instance of protection being an issue the Union was able, as its officers seemed to prefer, to keep its distance from the state and to have employers speak for 'the trade'. Protectionism was less a historical process than a heuristic device for this period.

By the end of the 1930s, much of the Union's tradition had been confirmed. The Union was, after 1933, less centrally organised than earlier but it was no less committed to the policies which had encouraged a weak amalgamation. It continued, although not without challenge, to try to work with the 'scientific employer'. However, in the Arbitration Court where the Union directed most of its attempts at redress, it found sustained opposition to some of the tenets of unionism.

(iii) ARBITRATION

The High Court's decision on the coverage of non-unionists and the material conditions of the early 1930s were inimical to Union control

114. FC, Minutes, 16(?) August 1937.
115. See Chapter Six
of the industry. Thus, protection of members from low-price labour was at least as important in the 1930s as at any other time. The Union first had to deal with the Court's decision on wage reductions. Only thereafter did it return to the problems of control and, later, of equal pay.

I 1930-1933

In March 1930 Federal Management Committee had resolved to give priority to policies to recover ground lost because of the ruling in the High Court. Tighter control of outwork and a claim for preference for unionists were discussed. When the Arbitration Court announced a uniform ten per cent cut in Federal minimum wages the ACATU set all other issues aside. Its response was typical of a range of unions. The two main Branches responded slightly differently from each other—and from majority opinion in their respective States. The NSW Branch promptly discountenanced the Labor Council's call for a General Strike and only then recorded a protest, urging the Scullin Government to assert its authority. On the same evening, 2 February 1931, a special meeting of the Victorian Branch drew between 350 and 400 members. The MTHC had not called for a strike; neither did the Branch, but members resolved upon a greater effort in the Union, resisting task increases and setting up a Union 'white list' of reputable employers.

116. MC, Minutes, 7 March 1930.

117. NSW Branch, Minutes, 2 February 1931; Vic Branch Minutes, 2 February 1931. The NSW Branch had in any case disaffiliated from the Labor Council in 1930. See below, 'Politics'.
The wage cut added immeasurably to the division which economic decline had engendered. NSW Secretary Fallon wrote to Carter of NSW's intention to withdraw from the Federal Court should the Lang Labor Government introduce favourable new industrial legislation in NSW.118 In Victoria, it was only the familiar limitations on the scope of Wages' Boards that held the Branch in line.119 In a Union built of and for Commonwealth Arbitration this separatism was scarcely surprising. The Union only retained any unity because of its preference claim. The Queensland Branch's view, that preference was essential for the survival of the Union,120 was only the most forceful statement of a general feeling.

The preference case had gone before Justice Drake-Brockman on 22 June. On 8 December, the Union's hopes were apparently fulfilled with a decision awarding 'absolute preference in respect of the female operatives' in firms with less than 50 employees.121 Drake-Brockman again illustrated the paternalism upon which the Union could draw.

The decision had been made, said the Judge

in the interests of social welfare ... for the purpose of preventing the exploitation of female labour.122

118. Correspondence, P. Fallon to H. Carter, 5 February 1931.

119. Vic Branch, Minutes, 1 June, 20 July, 12 October 1931; see also 9 February 1931 for Carter's denunciation of the 'parochial' NSW attitude.

120. Qld Branch, Minutes, 6 May 1931.

121. 31 CAR 435 at 439. In 1931/32 only 37 of 326 establishments in NSW (which alone has these statistics), in 'clothing and tailoring', employed more than 50 persons. They did, however, account for almost half the workers employed. See NSWSR 1931/32. 'Sweating' was commonly believed to be worse in the smaller firms; see 31 CAR 435 at 444.

122. 31 CAR 435 at 438.
He also stated that his original but disallowed intention of enforcing uniform conditions through coverage of non-unionists would have been a better policy. Even the new ruling was unacceptable to some firms. Sydney's Anthony Horderns appealed to the High Court for a stay in the order. The Court's agreement meant that the ACATU's success lasted but thirteen days. Ultimately the new clause was ruled 'bad in law' because the prescription for absolute preference was held to be beyond the powers of the Arbitration Court. A revised order of July 1932 restricted preference to the ready-made trade 'all other things being equal'. Drake-Brockman felt bound to observe that he thought the clause would be ineffective. Like many other aspects of the Union's awards, this clause did not give the control which it seemed to. Members and their officials would themselves have to determine its working.

This set-back to the 'preference cause' could only confirm the introversion of each Branch. The ten per cent cut had not yet 'flowed through' to the NSW State system and the populist leadership of the NSW Government seemed unlikely to enforce wage-reductions of its own. For women workers, the ten per cent wage-reduction was not the only cause for alarm. In 1930 Mr Justice Dethridge had cut the wages of female fruit-pickers thus depriving them of equal pay with men and in 1932 changes in classifications in the rubber workers' Award reduced women's earnings. It is noteworthy that the

123. ibid at 440.
124. 47 CLR 1.
125. 31 CAR 435 at 444.
126. E. Ryan and A. Conlon, op.cit., p.120.
ostensible reasons for the changes mirror the problems being encountered by clothing trades' unionists: firstly, the economic conditions of the 1930s (fruit pickers); second, the claimed de-skilling wrought by machinery (rubber workers). For women workers, then, there were, perhaps, special reasons to steer clear of the Commonwealth Court.

In March 1932, the NSW Branch was permitted to go to the State Court and in May the Victorians began to consider a return to the Wages Boards, if only because the employers might otherwise pre-empt them.127 Ironically, State action by NSW encouraged coverage of new areas. The Branch secured an Award for Number Two Group – previously the domain of the Women Workers' Union. Wage differentials between States were re-established: the NSW Award allowed £2 5s 6d for women, whereas under the Victorian Boards the 'all others' category was a mere £1 15s 7d, with machinists' rates from £2 0s 6d in dressmaking; £1 19s under the Clothing Board.128 How much the women in NSW could really gain is difficult to judge because the Award allowed the employer to fix his own piece-work rates provided such rates enable a competent worker to earn a journeywoman's weekly wage.129

127. NSW Branch, Minutes, 7 March 1932; Vic Branch, Minutes, 2, 16, 30 May 1932. It is not perfectly clear who permitted the NSW Branch so to act. The Minute refers only to a meeting of NSW and Victorian officials and Carter. No Management Committee decision or ballot of Councillors took place. This suggests that the smaller Branches were excluded from the process.

128. NSWIG, Vol.42, 12 August 1932; VGG, 2 March 1933 (Dressmaking); 28 January 1933 (Clothing); 23 February 1933 (Dyers and Cleaners); 2 March 1933 (Headwear). The NSW Award included a common-rule.

Even the formal acknowledgement of joint-fixation was thus removed by returning to local Courts.

Queensland was the only Branch to remain wholly 'pro-Federation'. While other Branches opted for State action, Queenslanders remained anxious about the difficulties of policing local awards and of dealing with inter-State competition. This was an unusual perspective in Queensland where unions were generally attracted to local tribunals because of Labor's parliamentary success. The threat posed by the AWU was one element in this situation. The resources of a Federal union could help combat the AWU's expansionism. Similarly, Federal activity took some of the arbitration burden off the shoulders of Branch officials. For some Branches, local action was a mistake. In South Australia, Courts continued to see the threat of inter-State competition as a reason for enforcing low wages. A minimum rate of just £1 13s was set for dressmakers.

Victorians became more convinced of the need for State action with the passage of time. Even Wallis urged that the Union's rules be more flexible in relation to Branch initiative. Carter, as Federal Secretary, was practically alone in supporting Federal action. His reasons were not purely grounded in a comparison of wage-rates. Operating under the Board's weakened unions, he claimed. Disaffected

130. Qld Branch, Minutes, 4 November 1932.
131. Quoted in SA Branch, Minutes, 16 October 1933.
132. GC, Minutes, 4 April 1933.
workers would turn to the States' Department of Labour, not to the Trades' Halls.\textsuperscript{133} Though the cut had been a great setback, officials should remember that, through Federal Unionism and the Arbitration Court, they had been 'able to get away from the crawling method surrounding the State Industrial Department'.\textsuperscript{134}

The cut led Carter to review the benefits of compulsory arbitration. He listed the forty-four hour week and the right to police the Award and he claimed a 'reasonable control of outdoor work'.\textsuperscript{135} This set of benefits was, however, strikingly similar to the claims Carter had made in 1920 when reviewing the Archer Award. Since then, few comparable advances could be claimed. The industry and the Union's traditions had worked against a negation of the principles of arbitration. Now, as in the Union's early years, officials looked for different forms of arbitration - in their States - or for legislative redress. Neither Carter's plea for central action nor the cries of militants elsewhere to reject all forms of arbitration found a hearing. When Carter was dismissed and the Union re-structured in 1933, a limiting and limited commitment to isolated action was cause and consequence.

\textbf{II 1933-1939}

In the depths of the Great Depression, the long-term problems of the

\textsuperscript{133}. Correspondence, H. Carter to W. Sparks, 2 December 1932.

\textsuperscript{134}. \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{135}. GC, General Secretary's Report, 1933.
industry still concerned some members. In 1932, one NSW organiser told the Branch that non-unionists were more of a problem than 'slackness' in the trade. 136 Nevertheless, Council stood by its rejection of Federal action until the second half of the decade. In 1934 Wallis estimated that 7000 respondents would be involved in a full log of claims, necessitating the expenditure of £450 on printing and postage. 137 In that year, Federal income was only £495. 138

Federal proceedings were undertaken because - as at the founding of the Union - State procedures became intolerable and, coincidentally, the Commonwealth's Courts embraced an 'expansionist' view of the Arbitration Act. The NSW Branch did not bother to seek State Awards for menswear, the South Australians were powerless to act alone and the Victorians were complaining about the administration of the Factory Act by 1934. 139 Even the Queensland Branch, prospering with that State's preference for unionists, remained loyal.

Late in 1935 the High Court ruled that the Commonwealth Arbitration Court could make awards covering non-unionists employed by respondents. Wallis promptly issued ballot papers to members of Council asking if he should proceed to have the industry brought into

136. Organiser W. Jones, NSW Branch, Minutes, 23 May 1932.

137. GC, General Secretary's Report 1934; see also GC, Minutes, 12 March 1934; 5 March 1935; MC, Minutes, 15-19 October 1934. Branches were slow in paying capitation.


139. Vic Branch, Minutes, 8 October 1934; 13 January, 31 August 1936. See also M. Heagney, E. Smith, 'Special Reports ...'
line with the precedent now established. Two of NSW's organisers argued that membership might fall - the reason being that there would be less incentive to join, or remain in, a union. The majority, however, wanted to push on. The application, for the ACATU's Awards to cover non-unionists, was granted, unopposed, in May 1936. In the wake of the AEU's victory in 1935, then, the Union's officials could hope that some measure of control might be won back.

Federal Council had already begun to discuss new demands to put before the Court. Wallis laid special emphasis on tightening the Awards' outwork clauses and dealing with the growing menace of sub-contracting. Although sub-contracting was not new, it is most striking that officials became concerned about it at precisely the moment when it became a means for employers to subvert the newest change in the regulation of the industry, that is, coverage of respondent's non-union employees. 'Control' would now mean thinking about respondents, not employees. There are few clearer, but many similar, instances of the immediate impact of the Arbitration Court - not in reforming the trade but in forcing its re-structuring such that profits could be maintained.

140. FC, Minutes, 2 March 1936. Wallis had, in the 1920s, been wary of a similar problem with compulsory unionism reducing union spirit if not numbers. Carter claimed, in 1931, that Wallis did not believe in preference; Correspondence, to W. Sparks, 2 November 1931.

141. 36 CAR 231.

142. For the AEU's case, see T. Sheridan, op.cit., pp.125-6.

143. FC, Minutes, 2 March 1936; NSW Branch, Minutes, 28 September 1936.
Relations with other unions, not employers, took precedence over prompt action on sub-contracting. At several meetings of Council and Management Committee in 1937 the difficult question of the AWU was discussed. The AWU, with relatively high wages through its State Award and with coverage of most industries in North Queensland, was a threat to the Branch's position. Some delegates felt that the ACATU should not interfere because wages would be cut. Sparks claimed that the ACATU knew the trade best and that other matters were as important as wages. The Queensland Branch wanted the best solution possible—an increase in Federal wages to match North Queensland rates, thus securing the ACATU's place in Queensland without risking the loss of jobs that inter-State competition might bring. Council decided that Queensland seek a special rate for the north. Nothing came of it and the issue was to recur for a long time.

Similarly, there were discussions with and about the ATWU and the Felt Hatters but in neither spirit nor fact did the traditions of amalgamation take hold. Ironically, just as the Union itself began to act again as a 'true amalgamation', the basis for Queensland separatism could be said to have been laid.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the way was prepared for a claim to deal with sub-contracting. Council had agreed to cite 70 to 80 representative respondents in a case which would deal only with

144. Qld Branch, Minutes, 19 April 1937.

145. FC, Minutes, 25 February 1937; also, for discussions, 22 February; SFC, Minutes, 14 May 1937.
sub-contracting and which would, in effect, be a trial run. Wallis produced an outstanding submission, analysing the state of the industry and the dangers in sub-contracting. He suggested that the outwork clauses in the 1928 Awards were doubly damned: they were inefficient, because employers were kept waiting while Union officials examined each application from an employer, and they were ineffective, because neither the Union nor the Registrar could keep pace with the increase in sub-contracting and outwork.

The Union proposed that respondents to the Award would issue permits to their sub-contractors and lodge their names with the Court and the Union. Respondents, as initiators of the contract, would be responsible for the conditions under which it was fulfilled. They, not the sub-contractors, would be responsible for breaches of the Awards. The Union would deal with respondents alone. This led to a second claim, clarifying the existing clauses. As the Union was policing an Award of the Court, it was only fair that sub-contractors should employ only Unionists.146

Drake-Brockman was as impressed with this claim as he was disappointed with employers' responses. After unsuccessful attempts at finding a compromise, the Awards were varied on 6 May 1938 - practically in terms of the Union's claim.147 There was no date for the commencement

146. A.R. Wallis, 'Submission ...'.

147. 39 CAR 251. To Wallis' analysis of the trade was added a series of attempts to divide the employers' front, a foray into Parliamentary redress through a deputation to Attorney-General Menzies, and the maintenance of good personal contacts with the Judge; (interview J. Kenna). The Union seemed, in the Court, to have found a way to allow Drake-Brockman to give a favourable verdict.
of the Variation because the Judge was hoping employers would make a contribution and because he was waiting for the Union to serve a claim on all respondents.

A full log of claims would be the first since those resulting in the Awards of 1928. Wallis was aware of the difficulties in trying to break the constraints of Court precedents, stressing that 'some new grounds must be discovered'. He believed that the long-standing grievance over payments for lost-time ('seasonality') should be properly analysed. The 'full' Awards were handed down in September 1939, setting the basic wage for women at 55.6 per cent of men's,\textsuperscript{148} exactly the same as that won in 1928. Indeed, the wage rates were the same, which meant something of a rise in real terms - after the vicissitudes of the Depression. Any assessment of work value would have distributed more to labour\textsuperscript{149} - as would meeting the claim for equal pay.

The Union's claim had, however, concentrated upon trying to control the industry, to ensure that such rates and conditions as the Court prescribed were enforced. The provisional 'outwork clauses' were now incorporated into the full Awards. Drake-Brockman re-affirmed their importance 'for the tightening up of provisions designed to prevent sweating in the industry'.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} 40 CAR 678, 747. Some matters were set aside for later consideration. See Chapter Eight.

\textsuperscript{149} See above, 'Context', for changes in the industry. Prices fell, 'C Series' from 167 to 153 (1911 = 100) in these years. See CYB No.55, 1969.

\textsuperscript{150} 40 CAR 678 at 680.
III Equal Pay 1930-1939

If the Union had found the Court to be an ally against the 'sweater' it was less fortunate in its fight for equal pay. More than this, its commitment to, and the nature of, the campaign for equal pay remained ambivalent. The equal pay issue was largely revived by the NSW Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP). Its leading advocate was Muriel Heagney who had founded an Equal Status Committee in Victoria in 1935 and who was the driving force behind the CAEP's establishment at a convention of 53 unions in 1937. From arguing that women had not 'caused' the unemployment of men in the Depression, Heagney had now come to emphasise that, apart from equal pay being a matter of equity, it was a matter of possibility: it would not mean, as the craftsmen argued, that women would lose their jobs. The sort of responses that the CAEP encountered from other Unions were comprehensively evinced with the ACATU: apathy, hostility, support.

The ACATU's NSW Branch showed no interest in the Clerks' Union's equal pay claim of 1937 nor in the establishment of the CAEP. When Federal Council discussed affiliation to the new organisation in 1938, philosophical differences between the leading officials emerged which, along with NSW hostility to some of the CAEP personnel, marred the debate and the nature of policy. Fallon rightly emphasised that

152. P. Ranald, _op.cit._, p.279.
153. Letters from the Clerks about the founding CAEP conference evoked no response. See NSW Branch, Minutes, 19 April, 28 June 1937.
'equal pay for equal work' was one of those slogans with which an employer could readily agree - the bosses would decide what 'equal work' meant. The slogan should be 'equal pay for the sexes'. Wallis moved quickly to suggest that whatever limitations it might have, the CAEP was the country's leading equal pay organisation and, as such, deserved support. Council agreed, appointing NSW's Fallon and Jones as delegates.

The equal pay issue itself was discussed over two days. Although the men of the Federal Council had similar backgrounds as craftsmen and, now, as paid officials, there was a considerable divergence of opinion - most notably between the Union's two leading figures, Alf Wallis and Peter Fallon: Wallis from the VSP, apparently a 'secularist' and, as his arguments showed, familiar with the work of Engels; Fallon an Irish-Australian, a Catholic with, now, little interest in political affairs.

Debate began in an 'uncomradely' way with Wallis accusing Fallon of seeing equal pay as a means to protecting men's jobs. Queensland's Bill Sparks saw nothing wrong with that: it was unjust to give women equal opportunities with the male, with those whom Fallon saw as the natural bread-winners. Wallis' views were, perhaps, unusual among male unionists. Equal pay, he believed, was part of a wider struggle. Refuting Sparks, he emphasised that to oppose equal pay was to support the structures built around capitalism and private property; in short, 'injustice'. No doubt it was precisely because of

154. FC, Minutes, 18, 21 February 1938.
the centrality of equal pay to a range of economic and cultural structures that other delegates opposed Wallis.

Fallon saw a threat to the greatest of all institutions - marriage. If marriage was destroyed, he said,

they destroyed the name of Mother.
Comrade Smith: (hear, hear)
Comrade Fallon said that no man would like to think that his Mother's purity, chastity and virginity had been assailed.155

No doubt amazed by the circumstances of the birth of the Union's Federal President, Wallis professed his inability to see the connection between these responses and an equal pay campaign. Wallis countered the criticisms by claiming that equal pay would allow marriage to be based wholly on affection, not on economic need.156 Wallis also thought (along with Engels) that there existed insuperable differences between men and women. He noted that, as industry changed, women could be better than men at some jobs because of their 'adeptness'. He also believed that technological change was undermining men's claims to sex-specific, better-paid, jobs. A belief in differences between the sexes might, on this reading, be turned to women's advantage - 'adeptness' should be rewarded. This view also implied a refutation of the claim that equal pay would protect men's jobs.

155. FC, Minutes, 21 February 1938. Spelling and punctuation as in original.

156. For similarities, see F. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Moscow, 1948 edition; 1977 printing), especially pp.81-2.
At Federal Council, the commitment to equal pay was less than convincing. The very meeting which agreed to affiliate to the CAEP highlighted this. It agreed to demand equal pay for women on pressing-machines.157 In the 1920s, the ATWU had used precisely this claim to keep male-exclusiveness alive.158 Thus even in unions with a majority of women enrolled, exclusivism and defensive arguments for equal pay could survive. The important aspect was not so much the total number of women in the trade but their status. Even the commitment to argue for equal pay in the Court was for basic wages alone, not for margins.

The equal pay debates revealed a lot about the divisions in the Union's structure and traditions. In Victoria, Wallis received a great deal of correspondence from Heagney and he implied that NSW officials should take up the cause more keenly.159 Wallis' assistant, Morrie Callard, was sceptical about the future because of what he called NSW's 'peculiar bias in political and industrial affairs'.160 In the year in which the ACATU's commitment to the CAEP began, that body resolved that it would be necessary to seek Constitutional change to give women the right to equal pay and equal opportunity.161 For the CAEP, then, it was debatable whether equal pay was an

157. FC, Minutes, 24 February 1938.
159. Correspondence, A.R. Wallis to Federal Council delegates, 14 January 1939. CAEP material is included in Wallis' working papers at ANU, E138/18/107.
160. Correspondence, M.A. Callard to A.R. Wallis, 24 January 1939.
'arbitration' matter. If Callard were right, and if the CAEP did move towards political agitation, equal pay might become even more divisive an issue for the ACATU. By 1939 with a new Award settled, equal pay seemed as remote as ever - both in terms of union principle and Arbitration Court thinking.

(iv) POLITICS

As a means of redressing grievances, political action remained a matter for individual Branches. In considering why this was so and in describing the nature of those politics it is possible to draw together some themes of the thesis and to consider what sort of a union the ACATU was or was becoming. The most pressing problem for delegates at Grand Council in 1930 seemed to be arbitration. Victorians called for Constitutional change in the wake of the High Court's decision on coverage of non-unionists. Council resolved to see how Labor would reform the Arbitration Act before any other moves were made. The defence of arbitration was the only issue which excited any formal political discussion. The Union's ACTU delegates were bound on one matter - rejection of the ACTU's affiliation to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat which had opposed the principles of compulsory arbitration. Throughout the decade there was no further discussion of political intervention. That the Federal Labor Party was confined to opposition from 1931 is part of the explanation but a more complete picture may be recovered from the Branches.

162 GC, Victorian Report, 1930; Minutes, 14, 18 February 1930. Victoria's Ted Smith was the only delegate to support the Secretariat. Billy Gibb, NSW, described it as a 'joke'.
In both main States, Labor governments were elected during the Depression. The Branches there became involved in factional conflicts about how the ALP should be organised and what it should try to achieve. The small Branches changed only a little from their disinclination to become active in politics. The South Australians withdrew from both the Trades and Labor Council and the ALP under apparent financial pressure. They re-affiliated with the Council in 1938 but quit the following year when fees were increased. At the end of the following year some members showed enthusiasm for joining up with the ALP. Without any apparent zeal, their Executive concurred. The Queensland Branch was more loyal to the movement, just as, for the most part, it was loyal to the Federal Union and the Federal Court. It had turned in on itself in the Depression, but members were less ambivalent than in South Australia about re-joining the ALP, doing so in January 1938. At no stage did either Branch record discussions of revolutionary politics.

In the two main Branches these issues were more clearly informed by external changes. Consequently, questions about the nature of unionism were clearer. The NSW Branch's enthusiasm for the Trades' Hall Reds may have been receding but a complete break with the Labor Council itself could hardly have been foreseen. The proximate cause of disaffiliation was delegates' disgust at the methods employed by

163. SA Branch, Minutes, 10 January, 8 August 1938; 13 March 1939; 3 January 1940.

164. Qld Branch, Minutes, 20 January 1938.
Garden and his associates at Labor's NSW Conference in 1930. If Garden was no longer acceptable, then the Labor Council itself would have been uncongenial because, throughout 1930, the CPA's Third Period policy was at its most vituperative. This, it has been suggested, led only to increased support for Lang. The Branch reflected this but it did not return to the Labor Council. In passing resolutions dealing with labour politics, the Branch all but summarised Lang's term of office. He was congratulated upon electoral success in October 1930, assured of support when the NSW ALP was expelled, backed in internal disputes in NSW and, finally, endorsed as against the State Governor's dismissal of him.

Lang became less attractive in defeat and the Branch could now face up to the fact that Garden and his henchmen in the Labor Council were the force behind Lang. It defended Jack Kilburn (of the Miners) against expulsion although more, perhaps, out of opposition to Garden than support for the left-wing Socialisation Units with which Kilburn was associated. Indeed, for a Union which so recently had numbered itself amongst the Trades' Hall Reds, the ACATU in NSW had quickly moved to a more conservative position, showing no interest in the Socialistaion Units' campaign to re-shape the ALP. In 1934 it quit the 'NSW ALP'

165. NSW Branch, Minutes, 26 May 1930.
166. F. Farrell, 'Dealing with the Communists', p.61.
167. NSW Branch, Minutes, 27 October 1930; 30 March, 20 July 1931; 18 April 1932.
altogether, to support instead Federal ALP policies. In fact, the level of political activity declined. There was certainly no action against Lang. This may not be surprising as it has been suggested that, as late as 1936, even the popular CPA leadership of the Miners' Federation could not afford to offend its large number of pro-Lang members. Elsewhere, shifts were taking place, for at that time in the FIA, a communist, Ernie Thornton, was elected over a Langite as General Secretary.

In 1936 the Branch began to discuss the structure of the labour movement and to send delegates to meet other anti-Lang unions. It stopped short, however, of affiliating to the Industrial Labour Party set up in 1939 to defeat Lang and it did not re-join the Labor Council until the 1940s. Part of the explanation for the quiescence, isolation and growing conservatism of the Branch seems to lie in the maintenance of the structures which had emerged in the 1920s with a craft emphasis within the Branch. Secretary Fallon's

168. NSW Branch, Minutes, 22 May, 19, 26 June 1933; 19 February 1934. It has also been suggested that Fallon's disappointment at not having secured appointment to the State Parliament's Upper House had poisoned his relations with the ALP, (interview, J. Kenna). Organiser Gibb went to the Upper House in 1931.

169. Correspondence, P. Fallon to A.R. Wallis, 4 May 1934, hints at this.


172. NSW Branch, Minutes, 31 August, 7 September 1936; 28 July, 2 August, 6 December 1937.

173. A wide range of unions did join, including the Printers and the Ironworkers. One of the Party's leading figures was R.J. Heffron, a former Victorian Branch ACATU organiser.
authority rested on this and, in turn, led to a changing political alignment. By the early part of 1931 Fallon was dismayed with both the ALP and the ACTU because of the failure of amendments to the Arbitration Act. That the ACTU did not hold a conference from February 1931 to September 1932 further upset the NSW Branch. It resolved that 'the ACTU does not function in the interest of the Unions'. In any case Fallon believed the ACTU to be made up of 'a lot of messers' and that their 'panacea for all working class evils [was] revolution'.

Accordingly, NSW moved, at Grand Council 1933, that the Union disaffiliate from the ACTU. Only one other Branch supported the motion, which was defeated by 5 votes to 4.

The Victorian Branch also changed in response to the fortunes of political and organised Labour. It changed, however, in quite different ways from NSW. At first there were some similarities: the Branch supported Lang against Federal Labor when Lang visited Melbourne in April 1931. The Victorian Branch of the ALP opposed the

175. NSW Branch, Minutes, 18 July 1932.
176. Fallon's description later in the 1930s; see FC, Minutes, 17 February 1937.
177. Correspondence, P. Fallon to H. Carter, 1 February 1933. This was, on any reading, a fanciful description and, as such, serves to underscore Fallon's conservatism.
178. GC, Minutes, 7 April 1933. The Minute does not record which delegate voted with NSW; it would have been either the anti-communist Sparks (Queensland) or the isolationist George Carter (South Australia).
visit and President Arthur Calwell threatened to expel any member who supported Lang. Despite these declarations, 10 000 people heard Lang speak at a meeting chaired by Alf Wallis.179

Subsequently, the Victorian Branch responded quite differently from NSW. Victorian involvement within the State's labour movement increased. Wallis was President of the MTHC in 1932180 and a leading figure in attempts to bring Premier Hogan's ALP Government into line with the unions. Union opposition to Government 'economies' and wage-cuts was focused in an 'Industrial Conference' which met in September 1931. It resolved, on the motion of Crofts (Gas Union; ACTU Secretary) and Wallis, that, if the ALP in Victoria supported the Premier's Plan, the Industrial Conference would back individual ALP candidates committed to the 'industrialists' policy. Wallis was elected to a committee which, it has been suggested, 'looked something like a potential counterpart to the ALP executive'.181 Scullin's defeat and the coming demise of the Hogan Government rendered the venture redundant but the 'industrialists' increased their strength in the Party and Wallis secured a place on the Party's State Executive.182 However, the Victorian Branch's politics were of no more use


180. Vic Branch, Minutes, 7 June 1932. Victoria's ties with the labour movement were highlighted by Wallis' being selected by the ACTU to go to Geneva in 1933 as a delegate to the International Labor Organisation. See GC, Minutes, 11 April 1933.


182. This account is based on L.J. Louis, op.cit., pp.128-40.
to the victims of the Depression than the NSW approach. Wallis admitted to such a failure in July 1931, telling the MTHC that in this time of crisis we have been unable to produce a policy that can in any effectively meet the requirements of the working class.183

What alternatives might there have been? Amongst the Union's officials no-one was willing to try to organise for their own Branch's practices to be accepted as a Federal norm. Some were, though, a little more loquacious than others. Bert Carter had urged the Union to be self-reliant, castigating NSW's hopes that Lang would serve them better than would Federal unionism. Carter felt sure that Lang would lose the first election he faced. Later on he disavowed much interest in the Victorian State election of 1932 in phraseology reminiscent of the IWW - politicians existed only to break promises. Carter's solution lay, as ever, in the maintenance of a truly industrial, pro-arbitration, Federal union.184 He thus opposed the opportunism of NSW, the revolutionary politics of the CPA and Victorian moves to control the ALP.

Under Fallon, it seemed that the NSW Branch might revert to an isolationist stand not seen since the PUNSW's heyday; he showed little enthusiasm for the Labor Council and ACTU and CAEP. It was, rather, the pressure from rank-and-file and organisers which kept the Branch active in any kind of political ventures.

183. Quoted, ibid., p.146.

184. Correspondence, H. Carter to G.A. Carter, 12 February 1932; to P. Fallon, 18 April 1932; to W. Sparks, 13 June 1932.
The main challenge to the Union's practice was from the CPA. This was a challenge to the assumptions upon which the Union was built: questions, not of choosing between types of arbitration, but 'why arbitration?' Similarly, questions not of pushing the ALP one way or another, but 'why reformism?' In one sense these were the questions actually put during the IWW's challenge in 1919. Here, the answers were different. Although the CPA's analysis of the nature of Depression was followed up by active organising in the MMM, the solution, revolutionary politics, made few advances in the ACATU.

Organisations close to or part of the CPA received little comfort from the ACATU. NSW declared against the Unemployed Workers' Movement 'or any outside body' and Victoria decided not to affiliate with the International Class War Prisoners' Aid. Similarly, the Victorians rejected ties with the Council Against War and Fascism; the NSW Branch, with International Labour Defence. Conversely, the Victorian Branch had something of a libertarian streak, for it supported MTHC Vice-President Payne who was criticised for belonging to the Council. Members in NSW occasionally defeated the Executive in discussions of international affairs. Resolutions covering the invasion of China by Japan, the Spanish Civil War and Indian independence were carried along communist lines. The clearest

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185. NSW Branch, Minutes, 31 March 1930; Vic Branch, Minutes, 24 March 1931.

186. Vic Branch, Minutes, 16, 23 September 1935; NSW Branch, Minutes, 4 November 1935; 6 July 1936 for sending of 'low-level delegates' and, later, postponement of the issue.

187. Vic Branch, Minutes, 28 October 1935.

188. NSW Branch, Minutes, 7 September 1936; 7 July, 8 November 1937.
opposition to communism was in Queensland where the Branch encouraged the distribution of anti-communist literature.\(^\text{189}\)

Political activities themselves seemed to be mainly determined by Branch traditions and by the course of events in the labour movement in each State. In the factories, however, the CPA was able to make some advances; and it is in the factories and the nature of the trade that both the success of, and constraints upon, alternatives to Labor and the Court may be discovered. Communist challenges to the Union were most conspicuous in the States with the biggest firms and most intense division of labour, that is, NSW and Victoria. Of these two, it was more successful in Victoria where shop-floor conflicts rather than union meetings were the starting point. Unlike massively capitalised industries such as mining, metals and shipping, the clothing trade in general remained relatively small-scale. The success that communists achieved in these other industries could not easily be matched in the clothing trade. It is notable that most of the communists and almost all of the workers they inspired were women. In the shops, the craft, and in the Union office, the 'arbitrationist' officials, all men, were able to work within a narrow field of options. The tension between men and women, 'craft' and 'mass', was rarely clearer.

The ACATU remained a pro-arbitration, ALP-union because for many other women, that is, in the smaller shops, and for officials' immediate tactical purposes, differences between employers remained as

\(^{189}\) Qld Branch, Minutes, 19 October, 13, 16 November 1936.
significant as the trend to bigger, more mechanised firms. The 'small master' could still seem like a suffering colleague, not a 'sweater'; the big employer, an ally against the 'fly-by-night' operator. The conditions of production were changing - but not sufficiently to fracture Union tradition and structure. The Union's politics remained reformist yet with sufficient division that each Branch kept to itself. Thus the 1907 style 'minimum-amalgamation' - the basis of Federal Council's 'apoliticism' - remained intact.

(v) SUMMARY

The title of this chapter, 'Depression and Industrial Change', has been chosen deliberately, in order to emphasise the distinctions between this account of the 1930s and the usual picture of 'Depression and Recovery'. The clothing trade did indeed recover but it did so through changes in the industry, not through employing more and more workers. The title also suggests that a distinction is drawn between the sorts of problems that the Union faced. To some extent, the dichotomy is unreal - industrial change never ceased - but it is possible to isolate the effects of the Depression upon the Union and the impact of industrial developments.

In terms of the concepts used throughout the thesis we may say that 'amalgamation', that is the closer unity of the Union, was 'undone' in 1933 but that this really amounted to a continuance of tradition, not a break in it. The ability of the Union, however structured, to control the trade was undermined by Depression and constrained by industrial change. Despite the evidence of capital's becoming more
concentrated, division between employers helped to sustain craft policies. In this regard, sub-contracting was especially important. Like union policy, this development could be explained by the nature of the industry and the role of the state. It worried unionists because it seemed to undermine control of the making of clothes whilst it encouraged officials to keep looking for the fair employer. No clear evidence exists but it is highly likely that the employers most opposed to sub-contracting would be those with heavy investments in machinery and 'modern methods'. To control the trade, officials might have to control any rank-and-file opposition to changes in the labor process. The fair, and efficient, employer had, in this view, to be courted under the aegis of the Court's concerns about efficiency no less than had the fair employer under Victorian protectionism.

These traditions and assumptions helped to keep the Union stable. Other contradictions were not resolved or discussed. Thus, despite the difficulties of reforming arbitration or achieving equal pay, the 'apoliticism' of Council remained intact. This could happen because the origins of the Union - arbitration - remained the Federation's raison d'être. In addition, the nature of Branch politics was important: they differed sufficiently from each other to proscribe the 'politicisation' of Council - but, crucially, they were in no case militant enough to challenge the assumptions on which Council was based. In its industrial strategies and internal structure, the Union remained a male-oriented, apolitical craft union, despite the fact that for more and more of its female membership some of the resultant policies could be shown to be inadequate for defending or improving wages, conditions and work practices.