"We are but little children meek
On pick and shovel all the week
The more we do the more we may
It makes no difference to our pay.

Ah hell!" (1)

This 'hymn' from one of the Relief Workers' journals of 1935 suggests the sense of futility and hopelessness experienced by the relief workers in the depression. The relief worker was employed on unskilled laboring jobs -- roadmaking, afforestation and other 'public improvement' schemes -- often in areas far from home, usually under degrading, unpleasant and insanitary conditions, with no security of employment. The pay was minimally better than the current dole rate (and in some cases worse), especially after fares and other expenses were deducted, and was far below the basic wage. Relief workers were isolated from the trade union movement, which throughout the '30s showed little real attempt to organise the unemployed; geographical isolation and the intermittent nature of the work made organisation difficult for relief workers.

Yet by 1936 there was a large degree of organisation among relief workers, who were able by their efforts to win recognition and support from the trade union movement, and, more importantly, to establish some measure of control over their abominable working conditions. This is all the more extraordinary in view of their lack of any bargaining strength, for the work was unnecessary, in the sense that it had only been instituted to get them off the dole, there was a large reserve army of unemployed to take the place of strikers or dismissed workers, and dissenters could be struck off the dole, leaving their families completely helpless.

The relief workers' struggles have been largely ignored by historians; even those who wonder why resentment and dissatisfaction were not expressed more strongly in the depression (2) ignore one of the most significant protest movements of the decade.

It was significant because it was a rank and file organisation of workers who were outside the Arbitration system; once a job was declared 'Relief Work,' awards were suspended and there was no legal and accepted organisation through which workers could demand their rights. Indeed, they had no rights. Most studies of the Australian labor movement concentrate on the actions of the trade union bureaucracy, and the unions' attempts to force their demands through the Arbitration Court; strike action is an adjunct to court action. For the relief workers, the only weapon was the strike, or threatened strike. Again, many historians study only those strikes which result in success, or which arouse widespread militancy and agitation (such as the timber and mining strikes of the late '20s). Relief workers' agitations were usually highly localised; the gains won were restricted to that area; and relief workers won no recognition of their main demand, for full work at award wages. Yet the workers were successful in improving their conditions and in gaining some control over the job. Most importantly, they improved the status of the relief workers, they forced the government and the community to concede that they were not rightless navvies, not bums supported by charity, but workers with at least some of the rights traditionally accorded to Australian unionists. Thus, by forcing the implementation of margins for skilled labor, or morning teatime, they won more than the mere face value of these concessions.

By 1933 politicians were triumphantly proclaiming that the depression was over and prosperity was at hand; unfortunately, many historians seem to have accepted their claims, and the thousands who remained out of work up to the end of the decade have been forgotten. In NSW there were still over 80,000 on the dole or relief work in June 1936, and more than 50,000 in March 1938. (3)

One paper of the unemployed asked, 'Have we skidded in turning the corner?',' and a cartoon depicted a top-hatted gentleman and a group of unemployed dancing in a never-ending circle around the 'Raspberry Bush of Prosperity.' (4)

Scullin declared that Lyons' avowals of prosperity only increased the despair of the workers. (5)
The unemployed and militant papers of the '30s portray unemployment as an inherent part of the capitalist system, and the thousands unemployed in the mid-'30s must have seen little escape from the alternation of the dole and relief work. In 1936, 66,702 males registered at the NSW Labor Exchange were asked their employment record over the last three years. The average experience was 29 months unemployment, 5 ¼ months with a private employer, and five weeks on government or council work (excluding relief work).

In the 29 months of unemployment, the average worker spent 17% months on relief work, 6% months on food relief, and 4 ½ months without any relief. Most of those registered were unskilled. (6)

While my main concern here is with the relief workers' organisations and struggles which followed the widespread introduction of relief work in 1933, it is necessary briefly to outline the development both of government policy and of the unemployed movement. In 1930 the Nationalist government of NSW levied a special tax of 3d in the pound on workers' wages (raised by Lang to 1/- in the pound) to provide an Unemployment Relief Fund. An Unemployment Relief Council was formed to "formulate schemes for the absorption in any public works or private enterprises of persons out of employment."

The Prevention and Relief of Unemployment Act stated that when the Governor declared any work to be "a work provided for the relief of unemployment, all wages hours and mode, terms and conditions of employment of any person employed upon such work shall be such as the Minister may from time to time direct ... notwithstanding the conditions of employment, whether statutory or otherwise, or of any award or industrial agreement."

Thus traditional trade union principles of award rates and arbitration were abrogated.

When Lang succeeded Bavin in 1930, pressure from unions and the unemployed forced him to curtail special relief works, which were reintroduced by the Stevens government in 1932.

Businessmen, churchmen and community leaders continually berated the dole system: the moral fibre of the unemployed was being sapped by charity, and society was getting no recompense for its tax money. In an effort to cut down the number on the dole, Stevens reduced its value and introduced a widespread system of Emergency Relief Works in May 1933. Under this system, the Relief Fund paid the wages of men employed by local councils on public works, and councils paid the costs of the operation. Within a year, the number of "dOLers" had been reduced from 83,151 to 28,759, and the number of relief workers had risen from 34,229 to 75,648. (7)

In 1936 Emergency Relief Works were reduced in favor of rationed employment in government works departments, and more were forced back on to the dole.

To be eligible for relief, either the dole or relief work, the worker had to have been unemployed for two weeks prior to making an application for relief, and had to be registered at a Labor Exchange for seven days.

The Permissible Incomes Regulations rendered many unemployed ineligible for the dole for the total weekly income of the applicant's family had to be below a very low point on an income scale (to May 1934, a man, wife and one child were allowed an income of one pound a week). Although the relief worker received more than the man on the dole, payment was still pitiful. In August 1933, the NSW basic wage for a man, wife and one child was 3pds.8/6, Stevens having reduced Lang's basic wage in 1932. The dole with a wife and child received 14/- a week, and the relief work 1pd.0/3 for 13 hours' work. The number of hours worked was increased according to the number of dependents, as was the scale of permissible extra income. Hours and wages were slightly increased in May 1934 and wages were increased again in 1935, but, when wages were highest, the single man made only 12/- a week and the married man with one child only 1pd.5/7. Out of this, the relief worker had to pay for fares, clothing and rent, as well as food.

By 1935, there were at least two large organisations of relief workers, as well as numerous unaffiliated local groups. One of the main difficulties in studying this movement is that groups were often ephemeral, for relief workers were continually moved from job to job, and records do not reveal the extent of the movement. The established press was determined to show that prosperity had returned, and after 1932 gave scant space to the workless, and even the communist press, after about 1933, tended to stress the importance of the struggles within the unions, to the neglect of the relief workers. Yet the records that do exist reveal militant and active locals throughout the inner industrial areas, on the northern and southern coalfields, in Broken Hill and in country areas such as Dubbo and...
Orange. Again, the records mainly note the activities of the successful groups. No exact estimate of the extent or success of relief work organisation can be made. Yet a fairly cursory examination of relief workers' journals, communist papers and daily newspapers reveals evidence of at least a couple of hundred protests ranging from strikes lasting more than a month and drawing in a large number of workers from an area, to small stoppages. In almost every case, at least some demands were met. One indication of their effectiveness is the introduction by municipal councils of committees at which relief workers could press their claims.

It is only too easy to generalise about the grievances and actions of unemployed and relief workers, and to regard them as a stable and homogeneous group. But experiences differed greatly, as did attitudes towards relief work itself. The unemployed in the inner Sydney suburbs spent much less time on relief work than those in country and outer metropolitan areas. Single men were often sent to relief camps. In some areas local men, or returned soldiers, or married men, might be given preference. In some areas, the relief workers' organisation might grow out of the old Unemployed Workers' Movement groups, in some it was initiated by visiting delegates from the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers, in some it was a non-political group with moderate demands. Most of the groups, however, seem to have been organised spontaneously by rank and file workers on the jobs, who, after hearing of the actions of other relief workers, would organise a local and then ask for affiliation with the main body.

From the introduction of the P.R.U. Act in 1930, the Communist Party consistently attacked the principle of "Work for the Dole," and warned that it would lead to the introduction of "Economic Conscription" for private enterprise, and that the government hoped to form an "Army of Scabs." Relief work, however, was not introduced on a large scale until 1933, and the demands of the communist U.W.M. and other unemployed groups in the period 1930-33 centred mainly around anomalies in the dole system. Trade union leaders in this early period, while preventing Lang from reducing the basic wage or suspending awards, seem to have been negligent of the threat posed by relief works. Concerned as they were almost solely with preventing the further undermining of the position of their employed members, they left the organisation of the unemployed to the C.P.

Labor ideology and the trade union structure was such that even in militant unions the officials were left with most of the decision-making, and officials were unable and even unwilling to adopt new tactics to meet depression conditions, or new methods of organisation, to include the unemployed. Similarly the unemployed were so deeply imbued with the Australian traditions of arbitration and dependence on union officials that it was difficult to organise them, or to encourage them to action on their own behalf. In late 1931, discussing the drift away from the U.W.M., Kavanagh pointed out that "the mass psychology is one of pathetic dependence on some official or leader," that there was no tradition of struggle outside the legal framework, and that the unemployed were reluctant to take part in illegal demonstrations.

A country worker in 1934 blamed the bad organisation of bush workers on "the criminal folly of arbitration, combined with the deliberate betrayal ... by the A.W.U. officials." (8)

Although a number of mass protests against the dole and evictions did occur in the early years of the depression, they usually relied on the initiative and organising skill of the militant leaders. In the Glebe Dole Strike of 1932 mass support grew from 200 to 1000 in a few days, but quickly dwindled when the C.P. withdrew its leadership, and when other militant leaders, exhausted by arrests and police bashings, failed to exert continual pressure. (10) The unemployed were extremely hard to organise; they had little in common except unemployment, and their only common meeting ground was the dole dump. Unemployment was for many a new and disorienting experience, and morale was low.

With the change to relief work, however, the situation for the unemployed was at least familiar, if still depressing. There was a focus for organisation, the work gang, despite the rapid turnover within the gangs, and the unemployed could use the traditional methods of protest. It seems that morale was higher among relief workers, and they were more confident of their rights and their ability to fight for them. By 1935-36 the trade union leaders had realised the dangers of economic conscription, especially after the introduction of relief work to railways and other industries, and gave recognition and support to the relief workers' demands, again raising their determination to fight. The struggle was
predominantly organised, however, by rank and file workers.

The introduction of Emergency Relief Work in May 1933 gave a new impetus to the dwindling Unemployed movement, which was manifested in a sudden growth of relief workers' organisations.

The main relief workers' organisation was the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. (11) In 1932, the C.P., under instruction from the Red International of Labor Unions, had merged the local U.W. M. groups into a broader system of local united front councils, which were linked with a state council. This was an attempt to broaden the base of the unemployed movement, for the U.W. M. militants had alienated support in some areas.

It seems from the unemployed newspapers of late 1933 that many of these local councils affiliated to form District Councils of Unemployed and Relief Workers, which were in turn linked with the State Council. The few unemployed newspapers that remain suggest that by late '33 this system of organisation encompassed most of the Sydney metropolitan area, although of course the support for these councils may be overstated.

The weekly paper of N. 6 District, which covered the St. George area of Mortdale, Hurstville, Kogarah, Bexley and Rockdale claimed a weekly circulation of 5000. (12) "The Vanguard," paper of No. 3 District Council (Camperdown, Newtown, Darlington, Erskineville, St. Peters and Marrickville) refers to the activities of councils in Manly-Warringah, Cumberland, Sutherland, Balmain-Rozelle, Canterbury-Bankstown, North Sydney and Newtown. (13) Papers were produced by groups in Lidcombe, Randwick, and Five dock-Drummoyne, the latter claiming a circulation of 3000. (14) While the central group on the State Council were usually communists, (15) the local and district councils seem to have been non-sectarian and fairly representative of the rank-and-file workers.

The councils were linked by their common support of the State Council's demands.

These ranged from the main demand of "full award rates and conditions at full-time rates of employment" to more immediate appeals for four weeks' work before Christmas, full relief sustenance during stand-off periods, a rent allowance and the prevention of evictions, and payment on the job at cessation of work. (16) The State Conference held in August 1934 was attended by 204 delegates from throughout NSW, and claimed to be representative of 68,000 workers. (17) This figure does seem overstated, for in June 1934 there were 28,759 on the dole and 75,648 on relief work. (18)

However, the State Council did build a broad base of support, and the 1936 Conference was attended by 301 delegates, representing 81 local branches, 10 District Councils 40 jobs and 11 women's organisations, as well as fraternal delegates from churches, municipal councils and the Sydney and Newcastle Labor Councils. (19)

While the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was the largest organisation, there were at least two others, and many unaffiliated groups. The Dole Workers' Union, formed by the Trades and Labor Council, seems to have been ineffectual, and by 1934 the Labor Council was supporting the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. (20) The Unemployed and Relief Workers' Union, which had branches in Balmain, Lane Cove, Marrickville, Leichhardt, Daceyville, Waterloo and North Sydney, claimed a membership of 600 in early 1935, and the Balmain branch alone had over 200 members in August 1935. (21) This union was formed by a group of expelled or disaffected communists led by Jack Sylvester, and though its demands were essentially those of the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers, it was denied support by the Trades and Labor Council. This ban and the sectarian struggles severely hampered its progress, for communist speakers agitated against it. (22)

The Employed and Unemployed Workers' Association of Cabra-Vale is typical of the more moderate groups which were not affiliated with the State Council. Whilst it demanded award rates for relief workers and "the total abolition of work for the dole in its present form" (my italics) it did not oppose the principle of relief work and gladly reported that the scheme at Cabra-Vale was to be continued. (23)

One of the main organisational difficulties faced by militants in the early years of the depression was that the unemployed generally did see the work as relief in the full sense of the word. A campaign "Against-Work-for-Dole" was instituted by the C.P. but although committees were set up in such areas as Newcastle and Goulburn (24) the campaign was negative in intent and had little success. The militants were forced to realise that "those opposed to relief work on principle ... cannot
take up an attitude of ‘splendid isolation’ ... All the militant minority can do under the circumstances is to try at all times to influence the majority against this particular form of exploitation. They must go on to the jobs with the others and unceasingly urge the necessity of fighting for better conditions. The whole task of the minority is to show their fellow workers how relief work can be turned into permanent work, by organised effort.” (25) The State Council pointed out that the starting point for building organisation was around particular everyday demands, although “many of us at times feel that such matters are too frivolous ... Many would suggest substituting some more solid demands, such as fulltime work at award rates.” (26)

If I have concentrated so far on the organisational aspects of the movement to the neglect of the struggle of the relief workers themselves, it is largely an attempt to correct the bias of earlier studies, and to suggest the widespread and diverse nature of the movement. Davidson makes no mention of the Relief Workers’ Council or the united front councils of the employed and unemployed, but claims a temporary resurgence of the U.W.M. in 1934-35, which then declined. He states “it survived until the war because the fear of unemployment lasted longer than unemployment.” (27) The point is that unemployment lasted much longer than is generally believed. Not only have the organisations and struggles of the relief workers been neglected, but the very existence of unemployed and relief workers after the supposed return to prosperity in 1933 or ’34 has been ignored.

Perhaps the most significant strikes were those in which the relief workers expressed their class solidarity with the employed workers. The Broken Hill unemployed, in 1934 and 1935, successfully resisted attempts to force them to work at rates that undercut those of the municipal employees; because of their militancy and the support of the Barrier Industrial Council “the Government did not attempt to force them to accept, nor did it stand any off the dole for refusing ... work.” (28) The West Wallsend relief workers’ strike began when 680 relief workers struck against the government’s attempts to speed up the work. The strike demands quickly broadened, and the strikers’ demands for the “non-application of the Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Preference Act, inasmuch as it violates the principles of trade unionism” won them the support of the trade unions, mines and work-shops. This Act provided that employers should give preference to returned servicemen despite the regulations of any industrial agreement or award. (29)

Relief work struggles were most successful when backed by the support of the unions or the community. By 1935 unions were more conscious of the relief work threat, and rather belatedly responded to the unemployed workers’ call for unity. The Labor Council called a conference in April, to be attended by two delegates from every union, two from the Railway Shop Committees, and one from every relief workers’ council affiliated to the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers. (30) The unions realised the danger when Kirby, a member of the Water and Sewerage Employees’ Union employed at award rates, was informed suddenly that his work was now declared “relief work” and would be paid at relief work rates.

The Arbitration Court ruled that “once any work was declared ‘relief work’ then the award no longer applied.” The Labor Council directed that employed and unemployed should fight the introduction of relief work to railway and tramway services, and began a campaign against the undermining of awards and dismissals of workers. It also called for an extra day’s work per week for relief workers, a dole increase and rent allowance. (31)

Many strikes or protests were initiated over the issue of margins for skilled labor, which was seen as a basic union principle. A number of extra marginal rates were cut in early 1935, and the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers solicited the aid of the unions and Labor Council, and called for struggle in all districts. (32) A large and successful strike, lasting at least three weeks, erupted at Como when the penny-an-hour margin for spawling was discontinued. A rank and file committee of 40 men and women was established, under the leadership of the State Council, and the support of local residents, relief workers and the Shire Council was won. (33) Under the relief work system, local councils, as the employers, had to enforce the wage decisions of the government, although at times they were more in sympathy with the workers. As a result of the Como agitation five municipal councils requested the government to grant award margins and conditions to rockchoppers. (34) The relief workers’ protests often had a “snowballing” effect; militancy over an issue
of margins or conditions would lead to dis-
missals, the demands would be broadened to
include reinstatement of the sacked workers,
and a more viable and self-confident organi-
zation would develop. Many strikes began over
the victimisation of certain workers.

The relief workers at Banksia were put to
work in a filthy, stagnant sewerage channel.
All work stopped when two men were un-
able to continue because of the conditions.
When the ganger was sacked for refusing to
force the men into the channel 200 relief
workers went on strike, receiving the support
of the gang that was sent to replace them. A
rank and file committee of 30 was formed to
organise relief, propaganda and social commit-
tees, and the support of the local relief work-
ers' council was won. The new demands in-
cluded the payment of fares. (35)

Seventy Bellambi relief workers went on
strike for three and a half days over unhealthy
job conditions and the "speeding-up" tactics
of the Public Works Department; when some
minor concessions were made they returned
to work. When they were not allowed to
make up the time lost, and the ganger was
sacked for refusing to speed up the work, all
but one worker went on strike again. By this
time the morale and determination of the
men was high, and the strikers were well or-
organised and militant. The rank and file job
committee was enlarged to include relief,
propaganda and entertainment committees,
and public support was won at mass meetings.
Strikers' representatives spoke at meetings
throughout the South Coast area, and relief
committees were established at Thirroul and
Fairy Meadow. The women were brought in
to the struggle. After two weeks all but three
of the men remained on strike, and after three
weeks their demands were granted. (36)

Relief workers were sometimes able to en-
force their demands just by the threat of a
strike. When four men were sacked at Merry-
lands a representative of the Dole Workers'
Council and four workers visited 10 gangs in
the area. All gangs stopped work and marched
to the Mayor's office, and a stopwork meet-
ing and march were planned for next day.
The men were reinstated. (37)

The importance of strikes such as these
must be measured by more than just the con-
cessions won. The secretary of the Bellambi
Strike Committee noted that "quite a num-
ber of men have revealed organising and speak-
ing ability of no mean order. The Bellambi
men and their comrades throughout the dist-

district have learned much from this struggle,
and face the future with a confidence greatly
strengthened." (38) Significant also was the
democratic organisation of the struggle.

Workers were often successful in enforcing
better job facilities, for conditions were in-
describably vile. There was often no sanitat-
ion or an inadequate water supply, and work-
ers were not issued with boots for trench
work. Accidents were common, as many
workers were inexperienced. (39) One paper
noted: "There are hundreds of men working
for the dole who are not in a fit state of heal-
th to do manual work." (40) (A doleworker
died at Fivedock after being forced to work
drenching rain. He had been out of work
for two years and his health was undermined.)
(41) Even the most minor matters of clean-
liness and safety had to be fought for: first
aid kits, shelter sheds, sanitary accommoda-
tion, boots, coverings for water tins, morning
tea time, drinking mugs and water bags. (42)

Single men were often forced into country
relief work camps, and were cut off the dole
and relief work if they refused. Workers from
Fivedock and Drummoyne who refused af-
forestation work because of the long distanc-
es involved were left destitute. (43) The State
Council noted that this scheme "served the
twofold purpose of railroading the unemploy-
ed out of settled districts, where there are
facilities for organisation, and ... of placing
a supply of surplus labor at the disposal of
wealthy country employers, who advance
their claim for cheap labor under the slogan
"Shortage of workers in rural districts"." (44)
Mass protests, such as the ones at Lithgow
and Bathurst, were of no avail. (45) Condit-
ions were, if possible, worse than usual. At a
camp at Bowning (near Yass) young Sydney
men were employed on the roads. One ac-
count noted: "The tents are too close to each
other. The lavatory pit is situated at about
eight or nine yards from the camp... In wet
weather the vicinity of the camp is a bog-hole
and the water runs through the tents. The
men work 30 hours per week in five days of
six hours. Wages are 2pds:8/6 per week! There
are no marginal rates for skilled labor... Work-
ers receive no compensation if they are injur-
ed." (46) No wonder they were referred to as
"Slave Camps." The situation was particularly
disorienting for city workers, who had to ad-
apt to the country conditions as well as the
loneliness of separation.

The camp workers were isolated, and it was
hard to organise the necessary publicity and
community support for a strike. However, attempts by the Pastoral Workers' Industrial Union (a breakaway group in opposition to the A.W.U.) to organise Bushworkers' Committees had some success, and even if their demands were largely neglected, their morale was lifted. Committees were established at Orange, Bourke, Armidale, Uralla, Moree, Walgett, Quambone, Coonamble and Cassilis, and were able to win some concessions.

It has only been within the scope of this article to deal with the movement up to 1936. After then, the movement seems to have dwindled, for relief works were curtailed and in 1937 and 1938 there were more on the dole than on relief work. Further study needs to be done, right to the end of the decade. In March 1940 a group called the Unemployed Workers' Union distributed a paper among the Glebe, Paddington and metropolitan unemployed.

By 1936 most local organisations seem to have been drawn into the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers' net. The Northern Provincial Council coordinated the work of 50 locals through five District Councils; the South Coast District Council linked a dozen locals; 20 locals were affiliated with the Western District Council; in the metropolitan area there were five District Councils and 50 locals.

The movement could point to half a dozen large successes in 1935-36. The Concord West Swamp Job strike, lasting five weeks, won a 20% increase in food relief and a 20% increase in relief work, costing the government 800,000 pounds. West Wallsend workers brought about the discontinuation of the preference for ex-servicemen in obtaining relief work. There were big strikes at Corrimal, Dubbo and Finley, a campaign for award wages at Maitland, and a successful fight against the introduction of "slave camps" in the Blaxland shire. Petersham workers held a successful campaign against the closing down of relief works and mass dismissals. Newcastle workers won full representation on the Labor Council, and organised 12 radio broadcasts to publicise their demands.

Just as important were the minor concessions won on the job. But the success of the movement should not be overstated, though it is tempting to do so if only to prove that this forgotten movement really existed. Relief workers were unable to enforce their demand for full-time work, conditions on many jobs remained bad, and pay was still miserably low. The victories must be measured against the injuries sustained: many militants were arrested, convicted, and bashed, and many were thrown off the dole for some time for refusing to work.

The most significant point about the movement is the organisation itself. The depression was an unfamiliar, disorienting and alienating experience; the unemployed were forced into dependence on government and private charity and in the early years seem largely to have accepted their fate. Although militant eviction fights and demonstrations occurred, they were instigated by communists and the rank and file unemployed showed little initiative or inclination to organise themselves. Although relief workers, by their exclusion from the arbitration system, had no official rights, by demanding concessions over margins and conditions they asserted their right as workers to some control over the job. The unemployed finally established themselves as part of the organised labor movement instead of powerless charity bums.

Equally important is the movement's manner of organisation, which was characterised by local autonomy and rank and file control. Although CP fractions and the communist organisers on the State Council played a leading role in some agitations (such as the West Wallsend strike), the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers was no communist puppet front but a genuine united front of relief workers, unions and some sections of the community. Most locals seem to have grown out of an ad hoc committee instituted to fight some grievance; self-confidence and determination to fight would grow, spurred on by reports from other areas, a permanent group would be formed and affiliation with other groups sought. The State Council produced a blueprint of how organisation should be built, stressing that the job committee should only suggest action: "The final decision must rest with the rank and file."

Although the State Council sometimes assisted a struggle, most seem to have been initiated and managed by the rank and file. Jobs were too numerous and too scattered for the State Council to maintain any tight control.

Finally, no matter what the success or lasting importance of the organisation was, the movement is significant as one of the few cases in 20th-century Australian history of workers organising a struggle outside the confines of the arbitration system.
1. Redlight! Organ of the Unemployed and Relief Workers’ Union. Undated, 1935.
4. The Tocsin, journal of the Balmain Unemployed Workers’ Movement, 6/1/1933.
5. Sydney Morning Herald, 12/7/1934, p. 10.
11. Also called, at various times, the Central Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers.
12. The Torch, vol. 1 no. 11, 29/8/33; vol. 1 no. 15, 24/11/33.
14. The Mattock (Lidcombe Emergency Relief Workers) Vol.1, No. 16, 23/11/33; The Beacon Light (Randwick District Council of Unemployed) 25/11/33; The Clarion (Employed and Unemployed of Five Dock and Drummoyne) 24/11/33.
15. Tom Payne seems the main organiser; also W. H. McKenzie and Matt Hade.
16. The Clarion; The Beacon Light.
17. How We Fight, n.d., pub. by T. Payne for the State Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers.
25. The Tocsin, 14/2/35, p. 3.
27. A. Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia, 1969, pp. 60-61, 84. By 1934 the U.W.M. as such was defunct in NSW, and the State Council of U&RW was not just a regrouping under another name.
28. WW, 1/5/34, p. 6; 15/6/34, p. 5; 24/7/34, p. 10; 8/2/35, p. 5.
30. WW, 15/3/35, p. 5.
33. WW, 25/1/35, p. 6; 1/2/35, p. 5.
34. WW, 1/2/35, p. 5.
35. WW, 21/9/34, p. 6.
36. WW, 22/6/34, p. 6; 29/6/34, p. 1; 20/7/34, p. 1.
37. WW, 1/9/33, p. 1. For other strikes on this issue see ibid. 13/7/34, p. 6 (Holroyd); 9/3/34 (Merrylands); 15/9/33, p. 4; 19/1/34, p. 4 (Granville -- 700 men); 15/2/35, p. 6 (Corrimal); 8/3/35, p. 5 (Botany); 24/11/33, p. 1 (Manly); 15/2/35, p. 4 (Orange).
38. WW, 20/7/34.
40. The Beacon Light, 25/11/33, p. 2.
41. ibid., 28/7/33, p. 4.
42. ibid., p. 4; WW, 29/9/33, p. 2; WW, 16/11/34, p. 5; Redlight!, WW, 15/2/35, p. 4.
43. The Tocsin, 22/11/34, p. 2.
45. WW, 8/5/34, p. 6, and 11/5/34, p. 5.
46. The United Bushworker, official organ of the PWIU, 20/8/34, p. 4.
48. ibid., 26/11/34, p. 2; 5/9/34, p. 3.
49. NSW Year Book, 1936-37, p. 167. (June 1937: Dole, 30,135; Relief work, 24,976. March 1938: Dole, 30,811; Relief work, 19,943.)
50. The Voice of the Jobless, 7/3/1940.
54. e.g., WW, 15/9/33, p. 4; 15/2/35, p. 6; 22/2/35, p. 5; 23/2/34, p. 6; 20/10/33, p. 3; 29/9/33, p. 4.
55. WW, 22/2/35, p. 6. Granville workers, following a successful campaign for the restoration of Special Food Orders, held a meeting to organise a group on State Council lines.
56. T. Payne, How We Fight, 1934, p. 5.