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Crisis of moral authority

The Ladies Benevolent Societies in the Victorian welfare field, 1920-1939

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June 2002

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Australian National University
I declare that authorship of this thesis is my own and that acknowledgement of other sources has been provided where appropriate.

Janine Bush
June 2002
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Abstract

The central concern of this thesis is with the decline in authority of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the welfare field in Victoria in the 1920s and 1930s. The authority of the Societies drew heavily on a form of cultural capital that was highly regarded and valued in a late nineteenth and early twentieth century state of capitalism. The focus of this thesis is on the interaction between that established authority, as it was practised in the field of charity and benevolence, and the changing nature of the welfare field in the 1920s and 1930s, framed more around the emerging professionalism of social work and the ethics of social citizenship.

Importantly, women did not lose their authority in the welfare field in this transition. Middle class women continued to hold a position of authority within the changing field of welfare as agents, providers and ‘experts’. Yet the Ladies Benevolent Societies were increasingly marginalised in the shift from moral to professional authority.

Previous studies of this process of marginalisation have employed concepts of ‘maternalism’ and ‘collective identity’ to account for the ‘failure’ of the Benevolent Societies. In seeking a more active account of this transference of authority, I have adapted the sociological concept of ‘habitus’ to develop an understanding of the part resistant, part adaptive nature of the Ladies Benevolent Societies between the wars as it related to their practice of welfare and their moral authority. I argue that the habitus of the Societies was a combination of their class, gender and religious persuasion, reflecting a specific historical moment and within a specific historical context. The value of the cultural capital the Societies possessed, in the form of welfare practices based on individual moral reform, declined in value as the welfare field underwent a transition towards ‘modernity’. This in turn resulted in a decline in their social capital. While the Societies made efforts to maintain their authority, their habitus prevented them from fully embracing modern practices of welfare even though some aspects of their practices—in the areas of class and gender, and a moral ethos—continued in influence, or at least remained residual themes into the rise of the ‘welfare state’ and beyond.

This thesis is based on a close reading of the minutes and case records of the Benevolent Societies, and seeks to understand their work in its context and resilience.
## Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Formation of Presbyterian Female Visiting Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Presbyterian Ladies Benevolent Society renamed the Melbourne Female Visiting Society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Melbourne Female Visiting Society renamed the Melbourne Female Benevolent Society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Melbourne Female Benevolent Society renamed the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Victoria becomes a self-governing colony.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Formation of the Williamstown Ladies Benevolent Society—the first offspring of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Formation of Charity Organisation Society in Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>Economic recession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Introduction of old age pensions in Victoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Introduction of national Old Age and Invalid Pensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Lawson Ministry (National) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Passage of the <em>Hospitals and Charities Act</em>, and subsequent formation of Charities Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Lawson-Allan Ministry (National-Country Coalition) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 1924</td>
<td>Lawson Ministry (National) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 1924</td>
<td>Peacock Ministry (National) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1924</td>
<td>Prendergast Ministry (National) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1924</td>
<td>Allan-Peacock Ministry (Country-National Coalition) formed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Inspector of Charities, Robert J. Love, travels to England, Canada and the United States to learn of international welfare developments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>Proposal to standardise relief provision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Proposal to introduce central registry of welfare recipients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1927</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Child Endowment appointed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Hogan Ministry (Labor) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 1928</td>
<td>Central Council of Ladies Benevolent Societies established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1929</td>
<td>McPherson Ministry (National) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1929</td>
<td>Victorian Institute of Almoners established (later changed to the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1929</td>
<td>Training course for almoners established in Victoria. Arrival of Agnes Macintyre to undertake role of ‘Directress of Training’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Hogan Ministry (Labor) formed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 1930</td>
<td>Unemployment Relief Act introduced by Labor Government in Victoria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 1931</td>
<td>Appointment of Board of Inquiry into Social Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1931</td>
<td>Unemployment Relief Amendment Act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1932</td>
<td>Argyle-Allan Ministry (United Australia Party-Country Coalition) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 1932</td>
<td>Unemployment Relief (Amendment) Act.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 1933</td>
<td>Minister for Sustenance, Wilfred S. Kent Hughes, introduces new policy distinguishing between benevolent and sustenance cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Training course for general social workers established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1933</td>
<td>Victorian Council of Social Training appointed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Appointment of Jocelyn Hyslop as Director of Training on the Victorian Council of Social Training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society appoints a Younger Set.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apr 1935</td>
<td>Dunstan Ministry (Country) formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Victorian Association of Social Workers established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Widows pension introduced following the passage of the Maintenance (Widowed Mothers) Act.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1939  Amalgamation of Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies and the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies.
Chapter One

Social change, authority and the Ladies Benevolent Societies

Social service providers in Victoria faced increasing pressure from social and economic reformers to adopt an agenda of welfare reform during the interwar years. Welfare practices underwent a major transformation in response to this pressure. The 1920s and 1930s were characterised by increased government intervention in welfare, moves to centralise and standardise relief provision, and the appointment of trained ‘experts’ in social service. These were dramatic reforms. They challenged a tradition of philanthropy based upon individual moral reform. The departure from values associated with this tradition was not easy for many welfare providers. Indeed, the transition that led to the adoption of ‘modern’ welfare practices was not a smooth one. Welfare reform had a profound effect upon the authority and status of many welfare providers—in particular the influential and highly regarded Ladies Benevolent Societies.

In their role among the leading welfare providers in Victoria, the Societies exercised considerable authority upon other welfare providers and their clients. Notably, they operated alongside prominent men within the welfare system, who recognised and accepted their authority. The Societies comprised a network of women’s charitable organisations that was dispersed across the metropolitan and country districts in Victoria, peaking in the early 1930s at more than one hundred and fifty Societies. Committed to their belief in individual moral reform as a means to social progress and the alleviation of poverty, the Societies resisted the changes that were occurring. They became aware, however, that in not adapting to change they risked losing recognition as an authority in welfare provision. Despite new efforts to incorporate change, the Societies’ position of authority declined. This study examines the loss of authority experienced by the Societies in a climate of welfare reform.

My thesis seeks to resolve the following historical problem: why could the Ladies Benevolent Societies not sustain their authority in the welfare field during the interwar years? Emerging from this problem are three further questions. What was the nature of authority experienced by this network of women’s organisations? Secondly, how did they attain such influence in the Victorian welfare field specifically? Finally, why was it in the 1920s and 1930s that their authority waned? In answering these questions, I encountered a

1 Victorian Year Books, 1929-1933.
methodological problem. How could I resolve the historical issue of the Societies' declining authority and also effectively balance in my analysis the structural changes and the Societies' response to these changes? This chapter outlines how I address the broader historical problem through a consideration of the questions raised above. I also discuss the implications of the particular methodology I adopt to analyse the Societies' changing experience of authority in the interwar years.

I argue that the Societies' crisis of authority was a consequence of their initial resistance to the efforts of welfare reformers to modernise welfare practices in the 1920s and 1930s. Critical in understanding the Societies' changing experience of authority, then, is an analysis of the reasons underlying their resistance to change during the 1920s and into the early 1930s. This resistance was associated with a commitment to traditional welfare practices and the values associated with these practices. Equally vital to understanding the Societies' diminished authority is an analysis of the structural shifts occurring in the welfare field—a shift away from traditional values towards modern ideals of social progress that focused on reforming the social mind and introducing efficient, scientific welfare practices. These changes contributed to the gradual loss of recognition for welfare practices associated with individual moral reform. Importantly, it was traditional welfare practices that first lost recognition, not the Societies per se. Indeed, during the 1920s the Societies were initially encouraged to adopt welfare reforms and to maintain their influential position in the provision of social welfare. This thesis is concerned with why the Societies resisted this 'opportunity' and the consequences of their resistance.

I address the methodological dilemma of interlinking the structural shifts in welfare and the Societies' agency in resisting change by focusing on the Societies' cultural practices—that is, the form of welfare they practised. This emphasis on cultural practices has two purposes. Firstly, it enables me to address the paradoxical nature of the Societies' resistance to change by analysing what their welfare practices reflect about the Societies' values and beliefs, and about the strength of their commitment to 'tradition'. Secondly, by examining the nature of welfare practices recognised and valued within the welfare field, I demonstrate the process of transition towards a 'modern' welfare system.

This thesis suggests that the Societies' welfare practices were a form of 'cultural capital' and were crucial to their recognised position of authority within the welfare field. Why were the Societies' practices so important to the recognition of their authority? As indicated above, an analysis of the nature of the Societies' authority is essential in order to comprehend how their influence in the welfare field declined. In doing this, an explanation
of how I understand the process of recognising authority is critical. I will argue that the Societies' welfare practices were at the core of their authority. What were the Societies' welfare practices? In what sense were these practices 'cultural capital'? What is cultural capital?

Firstly, a definition of the concept of 'capital' is necessary in order to understand its derivative 'cultural capital'. ‘Capital’ provides a useful tool for analysing the recognition of the Societies’ authority in the welfare field. The ultimate aim of those who participate in a 'field'—such as the welfare field—is to strive for dominance, for maximum power. The Ladies Benevolent Societies sought to secure their authority in the Victorian welfare field as a primary welfare provider through recognition from other participants. To achieve this, the Societies needed to possess legitimate and desirable capital within the field. Capital must be considered legitimate before it can be capitalised upon. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes how this process of recognition occurs:

[A]gents are distributed in the overall social space, in the first dimension according to the global volume of capital they possess, in the second dimension according to the composition of their capital, that is, according to the relative weight in their overall capital of the various forms of capital, especially economic and cultural, and in the third dimension according to the evolution in time of the volume and composition of their capital, that is, according to their trajectory in social space.  

The Societies possessed a volume and composition of capital that enabled them to exercise authority as welfare providers within the welfare field from the mid-nineteenth century into the 1920s. Bourdieu identifies three forms of capital—economic, cultural and social—which are interlinked and can only be understood in connection with each other. As a network of women’s organisations, the Societies’ cultural capital was a particularly important component of the forms of capital they possessed, and is the key to understanding the recognition of their authority.

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3 Bourdieu 'What makes a social class?', p.4.
4 The Ladies Benevolent Societies also possessed the necessary social and economic capital to secure their authority. I discuss their social capital later in this chapter. Economic capital is the most material form of capital. It includes monetary assets, income, wealth and financial inheritances. Bourdieu describes economic capital as being 'at the root of all other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root, in other words—but only in the last analysis—at the root of their effects'. P. Bourdieu (1986) 'The forms of capital', in J. G. Richardson (ed.) Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, p.252. The Societies' economic capital was at the root of their overall capital—they received a large government subsidy, they relied also on private subscriptions and on the contributions of individual members. As women's organisations, the Societies' economic capital was largely connected to their social capital.
Cultural capital is complex and can exist in any one of three forms—embodied, institutionalised and objectified. I suggest the Societies' cultural capital was embodied, which is a 'form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body'. Leslie McCall emphasises the significance of embodied cultural capital for understanding the role of women in the social relations of modern capitalist society. In a similar vein, feminist theorist Toril Moi points out that the concept of cultural capital provides a valuable way of understanding how women can attain a position of influence and authority in the absence of distinct economic or social capital. Rosemary Pringle, in her analysis of gender and authority in the medical profession, used the concept of cultural capital to argue the importance of time in the medical field, suggesting it is the most valued cultural capital that doctors can have. Desley Deacon, in her historical study of women working in the bureaucracy, also considered cultural capital a useful analytical tool. Deacon found it valuable for analysing the rise to power of the 'new middle class', suggesting that 'the value of cultural capital for the new middle class is something that is actively fought for through the process of social closure and credentialism'. In this thesis, I use cultural capital as a means of understanding the significance of accepted welfare practices in the Victorian welfare field, and how this recognition enabled a body of women to attain a position of impressive authority.

The nature of the Societies' practice of welfare provision offers valuable insight into their self-perception, their role in society and their understanding of this society. The Societies' cultural capital reflected their values and their moral code. Determining why their welfare practices were recognised and legitimated within the welfare system by other organisations, by business, by government and by the recipients of welfare provision also provides an indication about how others perceived the role of white, Protestant, middle class women in welfare. It is my contention that the Societies were highly regarded by government and other agents in the welfare field. The Societies' authority was not lost without a struggle, both on their own part and on the part of their (often male) supporters. The Societies had good reason to believe they could sustain their authority: they had

successfully resisted change in the past and they had a strong network of support for their practices.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the Societies had gained valuable social capital and good working relations with other participants in the welfare field.\textsuperscript{10} Social capital, or relational capital, is defined as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to ... membership in a group ... which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word'.\textsuperscript{11} As with all their forms of capital, the Societies' possession of social capital was influenced by their gender. As women, members of the Societies were dependent upon the social relation of marriage in ways that members of men's organisations were not. The marital connections of Society members were often influential in their success in creating alliances with other influential agents within the welfare field. The Societies, however, were also successful in securing alliances independently of these means. In performing their welfare practices, they interacted with government, business, other charitable organisations, the police, tradespeople and church organisations. These social relations were vital to the legitimacy of their welfare practices.

The Societies' practices involved a process of investigation that relied upon their perceived good judgement and respectable character. Members 'visited' applicants for relief and, using their moral discretion, determined whether a client was 'deserving' of relief and, if so, the nature of the relief provided and the imposition of any moral obligations contingent on the recipient's continued grant of assistance. This approach to welfare provision was integral to how the Societies understood their purpose. Their practice was informed by a code of morals; a specific understanding of respectability and a belief in the way society could be improved through the provision of relief to the poor. Their welfare practices were an embodied form of cultural capital acquired through their socialisation and initiation in the decades following the Societies' formation. This embodiment was a complex combination of dispositions influenced by their gender, class, religion and beliefs based on a value system specific to the era in which they emerged—that is, a period in which evangelicalism was a driving force.\textsuperscript{12} The Societies of the 1920s and 1930s had inherited their cultural capital from their predecessors. In Victoria, the Societies' welfare


\textsuperscript{11} Bourdieu 'The forms of capital', pp.248-49.

\textsuperscript{12} The importance of evangelicalism is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.
practices had gained recognition in the nineteenth century. These highly valued practices proved to be remarkably durable.

Having acquired valuable and recognised social and cultural capital, the Societies successfully assumed a position of ‘moral’ authority in the welfare field. Many feminist historians have acknowledged that women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries possessed a form of ‘female moral authority’ or ‘female superiority’ in the sphere of welfare provision.13 These historians suggest that a combination of Christian moralism, class positioning and feminine identity contributed to women’s authority in philanthropy. Alongside these historians, I suggest that the Societies’ influence in welfare emerged from a form of ‘moral authority’. The concept of moral authority provides a starting point from which to understand the Societies’ experience of authority.

How, then, does the concept of cultural capital assist in an analysis of the Societies’ resistance to change? The key to understanding this resistance is in the ‘embodied’ nature of the Societies’ ‘long-lasting dispositions’ of their collective ‘mind and body’. The Societies’ founding ethos was successfully carried from the 1840s into the 1920s. It therefore provides the basis from which to assess the strength of continuity in the Societies’ organisational culture. The period in which the Societies emerged was critical to their experience of authority. In a metaphorical sense, as a body of organisations, the Societies’ ‘lifetime’ began in the 1840s—they were socialised, for example, in an era when evangelicalism and a belief in a moral mission was a dominant influence. The Societies’ beginnings marked them, leaving an imprint of their origins on their self-perception as organisations of women of particular class status, Christian beliefs and moral values. The remarkable commitment to the Societies’ particular style of welfare was sustained by several generations of women.14 Crucial to my thesis is the idea that the nature of the Societies’ socialisation was vital to how they responded to and perceived the changes


occurring in the 1920s and 1930s. Their resistance to change was affected by their fundamental beliefs about welfare and the 'game of welfare' they were familiar with.

Bourdieu's 'habitus' is a valuable concept for analysing the Societies’ experience of change and how their internalised understandings of the purpose of their welfare practices led them, at times, to struggle in accepting change and, later, to have difficulty in adapting to welfare reform. Bourdieu suggests that the 'habitus—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product'. In the 1920s, the Societies were a 'product' of their past, of the nineteenth century. Within the welfare field their founding ethos contributed to the Societies becoming an 'active presence' of the period from which they emerged. This is not to suggest the Societies were unchanged relics of the past. They were prepared to change their practices in order to sustain authority, yet only within the context of their long-held understanding of their purpose. In the 1920s, the Societies’ welfare practices reflected the social conditions of the mid-nineteenth century, of colonial Victoria, and embodied the attitudes of that period when the middle class perceived individual moral reform as an important objective in the goal of social progress.

Habitus is complex, and at its simplest has been described as a 'feel for the game'. This idea of a 'feel' for the 'game' of welfare accounts for actions and behaviours that are motivated by habit as opposed to carefully considered actions. Habitus is a useful concept for discussing the Societies’ agency precisely because of this emphasis on habitual behaviour. Indeed, their resistance to change was a combination of a well-considered rejection of new welfare methods and the habitual continuation of welfare practices that

15 Habitus is a set of dispositions that generate practices and perceptions, a 'practical sense' which inclines participants 'to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules'. See R. Johnson (1993) 'Editor's introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on art, literature and culture', in R. Johnson (ed.) The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature, Cambridge: Polity Press, p.5; C. Lury (1996) Consumer culture, Cambridge: Polity Press, Chapter 4. Habitus is a long process of inculcation that begins in early childhood and that results in a set of dispositions that become a 'second sense'. These dispositions are durable in that they last the lifetime of an agent. They are transposable in that they may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity. They reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired and they have the ability to generate practices adjusted to specific situations. See Johnson 'Editor's introduction', p.5; J. B. Thompson (1991) 'Editor's introduction', in J. B. Thompson (ed.) Language and Symbolic Power, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.12-13.


17 Notably, I consider 'habitus' more useful than 'collective identity' in this study of the Societies' experience of authority because of this emphasis on the habitual. Collective identity—when defined as 'a shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place'—is too conscious to provide an explanation of the Societies' experience. A. Melucci (1995) 'The process of collective identity', in H. Johnston and B. Klandermans (eds.) Social movements and culture, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.44.
reflected internal belief systems consistent with the Societies' organisational culture. The Societies' efforts to adapt to welfare reform were frequently hindered because they consistently resorted to familiar practices that reflected their habitus. The nature of the welfare reforms revealed an important shift in the dominant ideology, evident in the declining value of the moral mission of the nineteenth century.

In the 1920s and 1930s, 'traditional' forms of welfare (or 'philanthropy') were increasingly discarded in favour of methods that represented a 'modern' system of welfare (or the 'welfare state'). This latter system of welfare differed primarily in the nature of the welfare practices it recognised and the ideologies those practices reflected. Alongside this shift in social values towards the science and reason of 'modernity', changes to the funding and administration of social welfare during the 1920s and 1930s were critical to the Societies' experiences. In the interwar years, welfare reformers advocated more efficient and scientific welfare provision, increased government intervention to assist in centralised and coordinated practices and the introduction of trained professionals who would implement welfare practices with the object of reforming the mind (as opposed to the morals) of welfare recipients.

In welfare history, it is widely accepted that after philanthropy came the 'welfare state'. Put simply, this was when state provision became the characteristic method of welfare provision and governments assumed primary responsibility for welfare. In their study of the Australian welfare state in the twentieth century, Garton and McCallum argue that there was a continuing thread that linked many characteristics of philanthropy to the structures of the 'welfare state' that emerged in the 1940s. My research supports this argument, as there was no distinct moment in Victoria when 'philanthropy' ceased to exist and was replaced by the 'welfare state'. There was considerable overlap between the two systems of welfare. The 1920s and 1930s were decades of debate and transition concerning

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18 For the purposes of this thesis, I use the concept of habitus in a collective sense to account for the network of Societies. Sociologists have acknowledged the benefits of using the concept of habitus in the field of institutional analysis. See M. Schmidt (1997) 'Habitus revisited', American Behavioral Scientist, 40(4), pp.444-453.


21 Garton and McCallum 'Workers' welfare', p.129.
who was responsible for funding and administering welfare provision and how to deliver those services most effectively. New and different methods were on trial.

The concept of ‘field’ helps to account for this transition and represents the sphere of welfare as a space of both continuities and disjunctures.22 Notably, ‘field’ is a dynamic concept in that the structure of a field changes as the various positions of actors within it alter.23 In a sense, these shifts are an evolving process. Yet change within a field can occur more rapidly when confronted by crisis. As I discuss in Chapter Two, two severe economic depressions (in the 1890s and the 1930s) created the conditions necessary for dramatic change in a field that was increasingly receptive to ideas of welfare reform.24 The first depression led to a shift in thinking and to a questioning of traditional welfare practices. The second depression saw the implementation of a series of welfare reforms that reflected this shift in thinking.

The Societies had been initiated into and had acquired their moral authority in a system of ‘philanthropy’ that was unique to Victoria.25 The ‘outdoor relief’ scheme in the colony was controlled by institutions and organisations that were largely government-funded, but independently managed.26 Government had little influence on the activities of these organisations, such as the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Outdoor relief differed in other colonies. In South Australia, for example, charitable relief was largely the business of government.27 In New South Wales, charity was centralised, with one large benevolent organisation dominating the sphere and maintaining a close link to the government.28

22 A field is ‘a space in which a game takes place, a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions who are competing for the same stake’. Quoted in T. Moi ‘Appropriating Bourdieu’, p.1021. Field is a system of competitive relations, a site of struggle in which actors strive to achieve power and dominance. For instance, some actors seek to change dominant structures and others seek to defend the status quo. All participants, however, must believe in the game they are playing and in the value of what is at stake. By the very act of engaging in the struggle, agents silently and mutually demonstrate their recognition of the rules of the game. See also P. Bourdieu (1993) The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature, Edited and introduced by R. Johnson, Cambridge: Polity Press, p.162; Thompson, ‘Editor’s introduction’; Moi ‘Appropriating Bourdieu’, p.1020.

23 Field is deeply interrelated with the concept of habitus. To enter a field an agent must possess the habitus which predisposes her or him to enter that field and not another. See Johnson ‘Editor’s introduction’, p.8.


27 Garton Out of luck, p.47.

28 Garton Out of luck, p.47.
Queensland and Tasmania, things were different again: there were few charities and the provision of material aid often rested with the police.29

Victoria was strongly opposed to government involvement in charity, and the Victorian government (in terms of charitable policy) was the least interventionist of all colonial administrations in Australia.30 The colony was determined to avoid the introduction of any system that resembled the British Poor Law. In comparison with other colonies, Victoria's philanthropic sphere was less centralised and charitable responsibility fell upon specialist, local organisations.31 The Ladies Benevolent Societies were vital to the operations of outdoor relief in Victoria and formed the largest network of independently managed, government-funded organisations in outdoor charitable relief.32 In view of the importance of this sector to philanthropy in Victoria, the Societies' experience of authority surpassed that of their female counterparts in other colonies. With the structural shifts occurring in the welfare field, the Societies therefore had much to lose.

The struggle between the morality associated with tradition and the science of modernity took place within the middle class, amongst those who claimed authority within the welfare field. These participants included charitable bodies (such as the Ladies Benevolent Societies), the government (at state and local levels), statutory bodies, hospitals, churches, and various other voluntary organisations. Gender issues were implicit within this struggle. Some women, notably those involved with the Societies, defended traditional welfare practices and other women, particularly young women with professional aspirations, were strong in their support for welfare reform. Yet these lines of support were never so simple or clear-cut. Some individual members of the Societies engaged in advocating new methods, while others remained strongly allied with traditional methods. Understanding these seeming contradictions is important in unravelling why the Societies could not sustain their position of authority.

My study contributes to two historical discussions—welfare history and the history of women's involvement in welfare. In its focus on a body of influential women in a changing welfare context, this thesis is a feminist welfare history that explores the Societies' experience as agents in a system of social provision. While I draw upon earlier histories of women's influence in the sphere of charity, the methodology through which I analyse the

29 Garton Out of luck, p.47.
31 Garton Out of luck, p.46; Gleeson 'A public space for women', p.196.
Societies’ experience differs significantly from previous feminist histories of charitable women. The view I take relates largely to the modernisation of the welfare field, the consequences of this transition for the Societies and their response to the changes. Critical to my analysis, therefore, has been the work of Kereen Reiger and Desley Deacon. Both reflect on the consequences of the changing culture of industrial capitalist societies. Reiger analyses the effects of modernisation on the Australian family from 1880 to 1940 and, particularly, how the emerging class of experts attempted to ‘rationalise’ the domestic world. Also concerned with this new class of professionals, Deacon’s history focuses on the struggle for a modern, rationalised, public personnel system and the emergence of a strong, interventionist state. I seek to contribute to this historical literature with a specific focus on the experiences of an important institution of the ‘old world’—the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Why could their authority not be translated to the new culture of the welfare field?

A gendered perspective is clearly important in understanding the Societies’ experience of authority in welfare provision. As women-only organisations, their ‘femaleness’ was critical to the work they engaged in and to the authority they acquired. My understanding of the concept of gender is reflected most accurately by historian Joan W. Scott’s definition:

The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power, but the direction of change is not necessarily one way.

Research by feminist historians has often supported arguments that women possessed a form of ‘caring’ or maternal power—that they had an impressive capacity to influence policy decisions that affected women’s welfare. Maternalism, or ‘public motherhood’, is a

35 Reiger The disenchantment of the home, p.3.
36 Deacon Managing gender, p.15.
slippery concept. Broadly speaking, the suggestion is that through the use of ideologies and discourses that capitalised on an identity as mothers, wives and homemakers, women were active in the attempts of many nations to ensure that women’s rights and interests were considered in the formation of welfare policies.39

This thesis, however, resists using an explanation based entirely around shifts in gender ideology to account for the Societies’ loss of authority in the 1920s and 1930s. Scott’s definition of gender already seeks to break down the binary opposition between the meaning of male and female to provide space for diversity within gender. Other feminist historians have also attempted to overcome the inadequacies of the conceptual dualism often associated with gender analyses.40 I support these efforts to acknowledge that differences between and among women are important in understanding social relations, and in keeping with this, I view the Societies as specifically composed of white, middle class, Protestant women. Women outside that group did not share the Societies’ experience of gendered authority. Aspects other than gender also conditioned the Societies’ experience.

Two central factors have influenced my decision not to adopt a solely gendered perspective on the Societies’ experience of authority in the interwar decades. Firstly, relations between the Societies and the men they interacted with cannot be interpreted as a reflection of straightforward power relations between the genders. I believe these relations were more complex than such an interpretation would suggest. I seek to interpret the Societies’ authority in a way that allows for women to be in conflict with each other and that acknowledges collaboration between women and men. Notably, valuable support for the Societies’ influential position within the welfare system often came from prominent men within Victoria. Secondly, the Societies’ authority over working class women and the Societies’ conflicts with women of their own class undermine an explanation based entirely upon gender.

39 Koven & Michel Mothers of a new world.

The concept of class, alongside gender, is critical to understanding the Societies’ experience of authority. I consider class as a historical phenomenon that influenced their gender authority. I adopt E. P. Thompson’s classic definition which interprets class ‘not as a “structure”, nor even as a “category”, but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships’.\(^1\) The Societies’ capacity to assert authority over their female clients was critical to their work as welfare providers. Some feminist historians have acknowledged this relationship, and have tended to focus on its ‘maternalist’ or ‘caring’ nature.\(^2\) It is my opinion, however, that the Societies’ gendered authority did not always manifest itself in a nurturing capacity, and that the class component of their relationship with their female clients needs to be considered in a way that also accounts for their self-interest and desire to maintain class difference. For example, feminist theorist Toril Moi suggests:

> we may try to see both class and gender as belonging to the ‘whole social field’ without specifying a fixed and unchangeable hierarchy between them. The advantage of such an approach is that it enables us to escape a futile dogmatism which would declare the absolute primacy of class over gender or of gender over class. Instead we might be able to seize the complex variability of these social factors as well as the way in which they influence and modify each other in different social contexts.\(^3\)

I support Moi’s proposition and believe it is important to consider both a class and gendered perspective in understanding the Societies’ experience of authority. Indeed, as my thesis demonstrates, class relations were vital to the Societies’ authority being legitimated by other established and recognised (and often male-dominated) organisations.

Struggles for authority that occurred amongst women of similar class status in the 1920s and 1930s point to the need for an understanding of the Societies’ authority that extends beyond its gendered and classed dimension to include a dimension that accounts for the significance of the Societies’ origins. I have already alluded to the significance of the Societies’ founding ethos. Understanding this ethos is vital in an analysis of how the Societies sustained their influential position prior to the 1920s and how their practices had endured for so many decades. It is also essential in analysing how their authority declined and enabled a new generation of young women of similar social background to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the Societies’ waning moral authority to assert a


\(^2\) For example, see Wilkinson ‘The selfless and the helpless’; Fildes, Marks & Marland *Women and children first*.

\(^3\) Moi ‘Appropriating Bourdieu’, p.1035.
position of professional authority in the changed welfare field. In adopting the concepts of cultural capital and habitus to explain the Societies' experience of authority, it is possible to account for the interdependencies of the dimensions I have outlined above.

Influential in my study is the work of theorist and sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Despite his important contribution to cultural studies, Bourdieu's work has not yet been widely acknowledged in historical literature nor by feminist historians of women's philanthropy. Bonnell and Hunt, in their analysis of the influence of cultural studies on history, suggest that in historiography there is no parallel to what Bourdieu has done for sociology. Cultural historian Craig Calhoun, however, considers that Bourdieu can be adapted and used by historians. In his discussion of Bourdieu's potential to contribute to historical analysis, Calhoun notes that Bourdieu is neither clearly postmodernist (though possibly poststructuralist) nor modernist. Rather, he potentially offers a 'third path between universalism and particularism, rationalism and universalism, modernism and postmodernism'.

As a 'third path', Bourdieu's conceptual framework appealed to me as a useful means for linking structure and agency. Bourdieu's theory offers a way of reconceptualising the Societies' agency in developing and sustaining (but also eventually losing) their authority through locating their activities within a specific context of change—the welfare field. To achieve this reconceptualisation, it is necessary to use a well-defined set of conceptual terms, appropriated from a range of fields, but particularly from Bourdieu. Without the terminology, I risk losing the clarity necessary to a multivalent approach to authority. I consider that Bourdieu's concepts nonetheless provide the scope for developing a new way of understanding how the Ladies Benevolent Societies experienced the changes that were occurring in the welfare field in Victoria in the interwar decades and how they subsequently lost their dominant role in welfare provision.

While I have found Bourdieu's theory valuable, his work does have shortcomings. Two main criticisms of Bourdieu's conceptual framework need to be addressed. Firstly, what are the implications of using Bourdieu to discuss historical change? Some critics have claimed that Bourdieu neglects change or struggle. Craig Calhoun challenges this criticism.

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and analyses at length how Bourdieu's work can be used to discuss change. He suggests that

The issue is not ... whether Bourdieu neglects change or struggle; he does not, but rather pays attention to both. The issue is how to describe a change so basic that it calls for different categories of analysis.\(^{46}\)

In this thesis, the 'basic' change is the shift from the traditional to the modern. In a sense Bourdieu's theory is one of reproduction, 'centrally concerned with how the various practical projects of different people, the struggles in which they engage, and the relations of power which push and pull them nonetheless to reproduce the field of relations of which they are a part'.\(^{47}\) Bourdieu wanted 'to show that reproduction was the result of what people did, intentionally and rationally, even when reproduction was not itself their intention'.\(^{48}\) Indeed, an important objective of this thesis is a consideration of underlying continuities in the welfare field. The moral tones that continue to influence contemporary discussions of welfare, for example, have their roots in the nineteenth century.\(^{49}\)

But how does a Bourdieuian analysis conceive of change? If the production of habitus 'requires an extremely elaborate social process of education',\(^{50}\) how and when can change happen? In such an analysis change is precipitated by critique and occurs at a point of crisis. This is consistent with the first model of change that my thesis adopts, in that the Victorian welfare field after 1850 experienced two key points of economic and social crisis. As I have discussed, the reformist agenda that was given momentum by the Depression of the 1890s influenced an emerging generation of new thinkers and players in the welfare field—players whose habitus was formed in the 1890s and whose ideas were to mature by the 1930s. They were in a position to take advantage of the second crisis point—the Depression of the early 1930s. At this point the shift from traditional to modern welfare practices finally took hold—change occurred. The first model of change, therefore, points to two moments of change that had important implications for the Societies' authority.

The second model of change I identify is influenced by another aspect of change—that of the changing response of the Societies to change itself. Calhoun suggests that 'Bourdieu's theory does imply dynamism, but crucially, it does so at the level of the strategic actor ... that is, the motive force of social life is the pursuit of distinction, profit,

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46 Calhoun 'Habitus, field and capital', p.66.
47 Calhoun 'Habitus, field and capital', p.72.
48 Calhoun 'Habitus, field and capital', p.72.
50 Moi 'Appropriating Bourdieu', p.1030.
power, wealth and so on'. Both the Societies and their successors—professional social workers—were in pursuit of recognition of their authority in the welfare field. Both manoeuvred, in accordance with their habitus, to respond to events that were occurring and to attempt to position themselves most favourably to take advantage of opportunities that were presented. For the Societies in the mid-1930s, however, the consequences of their resistance to change in the 1920s and early 1930s meant their later efforts to conform to change were not successful. Recognition of their authority had already begun to decline.

Perhaps more controversial, and linked with the above criticisms of Bourdieu, is the question: what are the implications of using his categories for feminist history? With its focus on the declining authority of an influential body of women’s organisations, and sub-theme of women’s conflicting relationships, how is my thesis a feminist analysis? What are the implications of the implicit suggestion that relations of power tend to be reproduced? These concerns may raise the question of whether gendered definitions of authority are sufficiently at the forefront of my thesis. Have I adequately considered how the transition from voluntarism to the welfare state affected women’s overall power and status?

As I have emphasised, in speaking of change I do not use a model that focuses on shifts in gender ideology. Other feminist histories have directly sought to address the shift from voluntarism to professionalism in the context of changing gender ideologies increasingly empowering women in the public sphere. At a time when women in western societies were supposedly gaining educational, legal and political rights, women in positions of influence—such as the Societies—were experiencing a decline in their authority. My concern is to address how and why that happened in relation to changing social and political contexts, without giving primacy to one factor over another.

To uncover the nature of the Societies’ founding ethos and how they perceived their purpose, I use their organisational records. These records consist of detailed minutes and annual reports. I focus on the three largest organisations within the network—the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies and the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies—for two reasons. Firstly, the records of these Societies were the most detailed, regular and extensive. From these records I have gained an insight into their membership, their internal organisation, the qualities valued in their members and the issues that concerned the Societies. The

51 Calhoun ‘Habitus, field and capital’, p.70.
1920s and 1930s were decades of dramatic change and the Societies’ welfare practices were the subject of considerable debate amongst their members. From these lengthy discussions, I have determined the values that informed their practices, how they interacted with their clients, and the duties of their members. These records, therefore, contained valuable information on the nature of the Societies’ cultural capital. I focused on these three influential Societies, secondly, because they actively interacted with other prominent agents in the welfare field, including other charitable bodies, politicians and the government. I have sought to discover who was important in legitimating the Societies’ authority and how the Societies engaged with others. These were crucial factors in their social capital.

Of equal significance in determining the nature of the Societies’ social and cultural capital was uncovering how others in the field perceived the Societies and their welfare practices. I have examined official government records for information on the government’s interaction with the Societies. Contained within these files was valuable information concerning the activities of the Societies and their recognised role within the welfare field. The Societies were also considered in debates on policy-making. I therefore found the Victorian parliamentary papers useful for locating the Societies within the field, and further determining the extent of their social and cultural capital. The Societies’ activities, and events occurring in the welfare field, were controversial and the subject of press attention. The newspapers of the period, particularly the conservative *Argus*, are a valuable source of information and provided social and cultural context for the events occurring in the welfare field.

The Societies’ authority over their clients was particularly notable, yet in this thesis I do not specifically address the reciprocal relationship between the Societies and their clients. While I am interested in this relationship, I was not successful in acquiring the necessary sources to undertake an extensive analysis. Nonetheless, the attitude of the Societies towards their clients is evident in the records. Determining the attitude of the clients toward the visitors of the Societies has been less easy to uncover. Historians of philanthropy have noted the difficulty in accounting for the client’s agency in their relationship with welfare providers.53 It is possible, on occasion, to derive some idea of this from the Societies’ minutes. These minutes, however, are obviously written from the perspective of the Societies. Their interpretation of the behaviour and comments of clients was influenced by this perspective and by their outlook on society. There are occasions when the opinions of individuals who interacted with members of the Societies were

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recorded and I have taken advantage of this. While the relationship between the Societies and their clients cannot be addressed in depth, the moments of tense relations that occurred during the interwar decades can be alluded to. On the occasions when their authority over their clients came into question, the Societies tended to record it, or an account was often reported in the newspapers.

Notably, the Societies in their 'unostentatious' and 'unassuming' ways did not promote their work to the same extent that their professional counterparts were to do. Indeed, this trait was an aspect of their habitus. Consequently, I have relied heavily upon a very close reading of the text of their organisational records. Fortunately, because the Societies' records are so detailed, I have discovered considerable information about their institutional identity. However, I have found that the de-personalised nature of these records diverted attention away from the influence of individuals on the Societies' activities. The correspondence contained within government files, alongside newspapers' accounts of events, proved particularly valuable in filling some of these gaps.

As a body of women-only organisations, the Societies possessed a degree of authority in the welfare field that has been underrated by many welfare historians. Many feminist histories of women's charitable organisations have studied New South Wales and other states, where their work generally occurred within 'ladies auxiliaries' of male dominated organisations, and have tended to focus on the nineteenth century. The Societies' prominent role in Victoria emphasises the significance of women in the welfare field and therefore makes them a particularly useful subject of analysis.

To account for the significance of the Societies' heritage, in the next two chapters I reflect upon how they were 'socialised' within the welfare field and how their welfare practices were developed. Chapters Two and Three analyse the two models of change that are at the core of my thesis—the structures of the welfare field and the Societies' agency. Chapter Two outlines the context in which the Societies emerged, providing a basis for understanding the welfare field in the 1920s and 1930s. It discusses the transitional nature of the field. The chapter sets the scene by defining the field as a site of struggle in which

54 For example, see G. Spenceley (1980) 'Charity relief in Melbourne: the early years of the 1930s Depression', Monash Papers in Economic History, No. 8, Monash University; G. Spenceley (1986) 'Social control, the Charity Organisation Society and the evolution of unemployment relief policy in Melbourne during the Depression of the 1930s', Historical Studies, 22, pp.252-251; Dickey No charity there, R. J. Lawrence (1965) Professional social work in Australia, Canberra: Australian National University.

55 Godden "'The work for them, and the glory for us!'", pp.84-102; Godden Philanthropy and the woman's sphere; H. Jones (1994) In her own name A history of women in South Australia from 1836, Kent Town: Wakefield Press; Windschuttle "'Feeding the poor and sapping their strength', pp.53-80; Windschuttle 'Women and the origins of colonial philanthropy', pp.10-31.
welfare providers competed for authority. Chapter Three provides the framework from which to understand the enduring authority exercised by the Societies in the welfare field. Reflecting upon their origins, I discuss their moral authority and its continued relevance in the 1920s. I argue that the Societies' welfare practices were significant in the process of legitimating this authority, and formed valuable cultural capital.

Chapters Four to Seven are concerned with linking these two models of change. In a discussion of the Societies' cultural practices in specific circumstances, these chapters link the structures of the welfare field with the agency of the Societies. In Chapter Four, I discuss how the Societies responded to the push for welfare reform in the 1920s. While generally resistant to change, they were receptive to some new ideas. Chapter Five focuses on the unemployment crisis caused by the 1930s Depression, and the resulting crisis in the Societies' authority. The Societies' resistance to change and their consequent actions during the early 1930s led to the loss of significant support from their allies and peers, which in turn affected their perceived legitimacy. In Chapter Six, I turn to how the Societies' declining social capital affected other fields of welfare activity in which they had enjoyed authority—namely, welfare for women and children. This chapter examines the significance of external factors in legitimating the Societies' authority. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the final challenge to the Societies—the professionalisation of social work. This forced the relevance of their welfare practices into question, in a field in which they had been valued for nearly a century.

This thesis resists a progressive teleology by focusing on a body of women who have often been ignored by feminist historians due to their embarrassing conservatism and their role in oppressing the working classes. The Ladies Benevolent Societies, however, were a vital component in the Victorian welfare field—both as women and as representatives of the middle class. In this thesis, I acknowledge their significance in the early twentieth century. In discussing their declining influence, I also allude to the changing nature of the welfare field in the 1920s and 1930s and how the changes that occurred during these decades paved the way for the greater involvement of Federal and State Governments in the welfare field in the 1940s. Despite these shifts in ideology and practice, underlying my thesis is a suggestion that the changed welfare practices also demonstrate a moral continuity that is reflected in present day practices and present day concerns with welfare dependency. In the Conclusion I briefly turn my attention to the current agenda of welfare reform. In this climate of restructuring welfare, compositions of social capital are changing, as is the value of cultural capital in the welfare field. I therefore consider it an
important moment to reflect on our welfare history and to remember the context and the shortcomings of the moralistic approaches to welfare associated with the Societies.
Chapter Two

The Victorian welfare field
A site of transition

The transitional nature of the welfare field in Victoria from the late 1880s to the 1930s was associated with shifts that were occurring in the broader social and political context. The welfare field, being structurally related to the broader social field, was affected by the transformation within the capitalist system, both nationally and internationally. Historians have noted the gradual process of change between 1870 and 1940 that resulted in the broader structural transformation of the capitalist system.¹ In Australia, the transition involved a move away from a traditional, colonial society to a more advanced, or ‘modern’, state of capitalism.² Although urban growth, industrialisation and economic pressure contributed to the perceived need for change, this transition was not solely caused by the practical considerations induced by material pressures. Interconnected with these considerations were broader ideological shifts away from laissez-faire doctrines of the mid-nineteenth century and the influence of evangelicalism.

This chapter has three main objectives. Firstly, I discuss the nature of the welfare field in Victoria at the time the Ladies Benevolent Societies originated. What conditions existed to enable the Societies’ to acquire and to sustain authority within this male-dominated field in a period in which they had no formal political, educational or legal rights? The Societies’ Christianity, class and gender were important dimensions in a welfare field that recognised and valued certain protestant religious views, class interests and gender qualities. The Societies were valued because their beliefs and practices reflected the dominant values of the era. Understanding the nature of this era within the welfare field in Victoria is therefore important. Social progress through individual moral reform was a dominant ideology at the time when the Societies emerged. I introduce the Ladies Benevolent Societies, explain their origins within this context of ‘traditional’ moral values and the conditions that were ripe for the legitimation of their authority.

² Reiger *The disenchantment of the home*, p.2.
Secondly, I discuss the structural shifts that occurred within the welfare field from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s. What was the nature of the ideological shift that began to influence the welfare field in the late nineteenth century? I discuss the shift away from evangelical traditions of morality towards the science and reason of modernity, and how this important ideological transition affected approaches to welfare provision. I also consider what the consequences were for the Societies, whose authority was reflected through their welfare practices. Parallel to these ideological shifts in the welfare field were changes in gender ideology from the 1850s to the 1920s, and the consequences for women’s status in Australia. As discussed in Chapter One, however, because these changes did not directly affect the Societies’ experience of authority, I make only implicit reference to them in this chapter.

Thirdly, within this focus on the transitional nature of the welfare field, I emphasise two key moments of social and economic change (within the broader context of gradual transition) that are critical to understanding the Societies’ changing experience of authority in the interwar years. These moments revolved around two depressions—firstly, the depression experienced in the 1890s and secondly, and most importantly, the economic crisis of the 1930s. Both depressions had important consequences regarding how social provision was perceived within the welfare field. The ramification was a changed perspective regarding the relevance of the Societies’ traditional welfare practices to the welfare field. It is necessary to understand the process of change that had been set in motion prior to the interwar years in order to fully comprehend attitudes to welfare reform in the 1920s and how the 1930s Depression affected the Societies.

The origins of the welfare field

The mid-nineteenth century was characterised by the influence of the evangelical movement. Evangelicalism was a religious movement of Protestant Christians that was at the height of its popularity in the 1840s and 1850s, just at the time Victoria was colonised. Evangelicalism encompassed a variety of religious denominations, including Anglicanism, Presbyterianism and Methodism. Evangelicalism, however, was more than simply a religious movement. Its influence filtered through to the social, moral and political levels of society. According to David Bebbington, the convictions and attitudes associated with evangelicalism are revealed by four characteristics: biblicism, conversionism, activism, and crucicentrism. The term ‘biblicism’ refers to a particular regard for the Bible, a ‘reliance on the Bible as the ultimate religious authority’.
'Conversionism' is related to a belief that lives need to be changed to achieve salvation. 'Activism' describes an 'energetic, individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement'. Finally, 'crucicentrism' refers to the 'focus of evangelicals on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of essential Christianity'.

One of the primary influences of evangelicalism was the aim of instructing the population in good morals, to change lives to bring about a better society. Morality here refers to concern with the goodness or badness of the human character, or with principles of what is right or wrong in behavioural conduct, and their social or secular (as well as religious) implications. Progress towards the goal of eradicating poverty could be achieved if good morals were practised. In Australia evangelicalism was, on the whole, a movement of the middle class and therefore interpretations of correct moral behaviour were based on a classed understanding of good morals. The British initially introduced evangelicalism to Australia. Following this, evangelicalism continued to evolve and was nourished by the arrival of more people in Australia. In the late eighteenth century, the power of evangelicals in Britain was in its ascendancy. Evangelicalism and capitalism were connected—to protect their capital and dominant position within society, the middle class wished to defuse any revolutionary potential amongst the working classes. Religion was often considered an acceptable way of achieving this by turning the focus of the working class to its own individual salvation and away from working conditions. Evangelicalism promoted religion in precisely this way, its influence extending beyond religion and into the social and political realm.

One notable avenue into which this extension manifested itself was philanthropy. Through philanthropic activities, the middle class could carry out its moralising mission without a complete reliance upon religion. The nature of philanthropy enabled the middle class to enter the homes of the destitute, of people who may or may not have been inclined to attend church services, with the object of providing charitable assistance. Philanthropy in the mid-nineteenth century operated on a power relation between the provider of welfare relief and the recipient. In order to receive assistance, the recipient had to prove deserving of such help. The philanthropist insisted on

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6 Piggin 'The American and British contributions to evangelicalism', p.295.
indications of morality and respectability as proof that the recipient was deserving. Signs of drunkenness, thriftlessness, questionable work ethic and immoral sexual conduct were indications that respectability and morality were lacking. Through this relationship, the middle class was in a position to educate and instruct the working class towards virtue and industry. Through philanthropy, the middle class attempted to convert the recipients of relief to a better life, a middle class way of life.

Importantly, women’s perceived innate moral qualities were considered compatible with the moral objectives of evangelicalism. In the mid-nineteenth century there was a general acceptance that women ‘naturally’ possessed morality, modesty, attentiveness, intuition, humility, gentleness, patience, sensitivity, perceptiveness, compassion, tactfulness, practicality, kindness and a self-sacrificing nature. In a study on women and philanthropy, F. K. Prochaska claims that:

From their domestic citadel, women could make forays to spread that tenderness and purity, thought to be the essence of female character, through society.7

Women, therefore, were the ideal moral missionaries precisely because of their female virtues. The obvious outlet for their missionary purpose was philanthropy—working with those in need. As Banks argues in her analysis of the three ‘faces of feminism’, the evangelical ‘face’ was a conservative influence on the feminist and social reform movements.8 Despite this seeming conservatism, women associated with philanthropy came to wield significant influence based on their femininity. Historians have suggested that through charity women attained ‘social power’.9 This was certainly the experience of women associated with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. I develop this link between women and charity further in Chapter Three.

Philanthropy and evangelicalism were essential to the operations of the welfare field in the nineteenth century. As historians have established, Victoria took great pride in the fact that it had not established a Poor Law.10 The welfare field that emerged in Victoria in the nineteenth century was largely developed from the British model, with the exception being the absence of a Poor Law. The 1834 Poor Law was based on the premise that poverty was caused by individual moral failure and that the establishment of workhouses would successfully instruct the poor in appropriate moral conduct.

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7 Prochaska Women and philanthropy, p.7.
before reintroducing them to society.\textsuperscript{11} The government had no desire for direct responsibility in the welfare field in Victoria.\textsuperscript{12} Charitable organisations were solely responsible for moral instruction to the poor. A Poor Law would imply government responsibility, and once the government began to exercise a role within this field, subsequent assumptions were likely to emerge that the poor had a right to relief. Whilst no Poor Law existed, neither did rights to assistance.\textsuperscript{13} Another reason for not instituting a Poor Law was the belief that in Melbourne in the mid-1800s there was no need for government intervention.\textsuperscript{14} Unlike Britain, as the \textit{Victorian Year Book} was wont to say, 'there is no poor law in Victoria, nor is one required, as happily poverty does not exist here in the same sense as in the countries of the old world'.\textsuperscript{15} Brendan Gleeson, in a study of women and charity in colonial Melbourne, suggests the colony of Victoria was the most strongly opposed to government intervention, thus preferring to provide funding to self-managed organisations like the Ladies Benevolent Societies.\textsuperscript{16}

In Victoria, the welfare field in the nineteenth century was dominated by the view that poverty was caused by individual moral failings rather than by any faults of the social and economic structures of society. The destitute were considered by charitable organisations as individually responsible for their own plight and therefore were expected to overcome their hardship by embracing good morals, hard work, temperance and thriftiness. This understanding was strongly influenced by evangelical and religious attitudes of the time. Charitable organisations were of the view that government relief would have a demoralising effect upon the recipient and were also concerned that such relief might 'dry up the springs of charity'. They feared that once an individual felt he or she was entitled to relief as a right, this person's initiative would gradually decline, resulting in dependence on charity, and the loss of any sense of a work ethic. Such an abandonment of the work ethic would pose a serious threat to the system of capitalism, not to mention the social progress of society. Opposition to the Poor Law also came from British evangelicals in the late nineteenth century, who believed that it undermined the ethic of self-help.\textsuperscript{17} These criticisms confirmed to middle class evangelicals in Victoria that the absence of a Poor Law in the colony was positive.

\textsuperscript{13} Kennedy 'Charity and ideology in colonial Victoria', p.63.
\textsuperscript{14} Kennedy 'Charity and ideology in colonial Victoria', pp.51-59.
\textsuperscript{15} This statement was recorded in \textit{Victorian Year Books} of the 1880s.
\textsuperscript{16} Gleeson 'A public space for women', pp.195-96.
\textsuperscript{17} Garton 'Rights and duties', p.25.
Recent welfare historians have noted that in Victoria alliances were formed between charitable organisations and governments in the mid-nineteenth century to ensure minimal government involvement. Charitable organisations were self-managed and not accountable to government. They provided welfare relief to those in need, alongside moral instruction and in return received government funding to assist them financially in this task. In her study on the formation of child welfare policy in Victoria, Donella Jaggs explains that:

Such an arrangement was highly acceptable to governments and charities alike, since it retained the principle that society had a duty to the unfortunate while offering governments the advantages of discretionary decision-making, local responsibility for local problems and cheap administration. The charities on their side received government recognition and a degree of support from the public purse. 18

In Victoria, the government successfully created an arrangement of this nature in the 1850s with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The activities of charitable organisations were reported in the Victorian Year Book up to the 1890s under a section titled ‘Religious, Moral, and Intellectual Progress’. This title reveals the dominant attitude to social progress. The government had faith in the capacity of charitable organisations to contribute to social progress through the moral reform of their clients and, as I will argue, of women being involved in that ‘good’ work.

Conditions for recognition in the Victorian welfare field

In 1855, the colony of Victoria became self-governing and local municipalities were established. In the 1850s, cultural and social change was occurring within the colony as it adapted to an expanding population. The gold rushes were partly the cause of the increase in population and the wave of immigration experienced by the colony. Increased industrialisation and the promise of employment also contributed to the demographic shift. Destitution became more pronounced within the colony as increasing numbers of gold prospectors failed to find their fortunes and struggled to maintain an existence in the absence of an income. Large numbers of women and children had to fend for themselves when their husbands left them in search of fortune and the pursuit of independence. 19 Christina Twomey has argued that wife desertion was one of the major causes of distress in the colony of Victoria. 20 In dealing with

distress therefore, charitable organisations were frequently confronted with poverty caused through the desertion of wives and families.

Charitable organisations were recognised within the colony as the main agents responsible for the provision of relief to the poor. There were two separate fields within the Victorian welfare field: outdoor and indoor relief. Indoor relief was of an institutional nature. Institutions had been established during the second half of the nineteenth century to house destitute citizens. These included orphanages, mental 'asylums', homes for women and the elderly, workhouses and reformatory schools administered by private charities, many of which received funding from the government.

Outdoor relief, on the other hand, involved the provision of relief outside such institutions. This was the sphere of responsibility of a range of charitable organisations and is the focus of this study. The recipients of this relief tended to live in their own homes—varying from a rented room, a house, a shack or a tent. Recipients of charity were visited by members of charitable organisations within the space of their home. Of the outdoor relief agencies, the Ladies Benevolent Societies possessed the greatest authority, with church organised charities and the Salvation Army also occupying influential positions within the welfare field. In most suburban districts in Melbourne and in Victorian country districts there existed a local Ladies Benevolent Society, comprising an expansive network of women’s organisations.

It is important to ask why the Ladies Benevolent Societies, in particular, were successful in acquiring such an influential position? The distinctive nature of the Victorian welfare field—with its localised approach to charity relief and the proliferation of small, specialised organisations—enabled the Societies to attain authority in the provision of welfare well before other organisations emerged. Other women's organisations were established in a later period to deal with specific problems. For example, in 1862 the Discharged Prisoner’s Aid Society emerged to assist female prisoners integrate into the community. The Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society was founded by Selina Sutherland and became the authority on 'child rescue' in the colony. From 1887, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union specialised in

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21 Twomey "Without natural protectors", p.34.
curing society of the 'evils' of alcoholism. Also in the 1880s, the Melbourne District Nursing Society began tending to the 'sick poor' in Victoria. In 1901, the National Council of Women, an umbrella organisation, took up the legislative concerns of its affiliated members. Other organisations involved in the provision of relief including the Salvation Army, the Catholic aligned Society of St Vincent de Paul and other church-based societies also performed similar work to the Ladies Benevolent Societies, yet on a smaller scale. According to statistics used by Shurlee Swain in her history of charity in the 1890s, in this decade the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society took 46.3% of all new referrals for unemployment relief.24

The network of Ladies Benevolent Societies emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. On 26 August 1845 the Female Presbyterian Visiting Society was formed in association with the Presbyterian Scots Church in Melbourne. The first decade of the Society’s existence was a particularly formative period and the Society experimented with different names in an effort to define itself. Formed in association with the Scots Church, it embodied the attitudes to social progress and religious values of the Presbyterian community at the time. This was a blend between the more radical ideas of the community, voiced by John Dunmore Lang, and the values associated with the Calvinist-Protestant ethic, and espoused by Lang’s successor, Reverend Dill Macky. In relation to the other denominations of the period, Presbyterians were considered quite radical in their views, supporting the universal franchise, Australian nationalism and the creation of an egalitarian republic. Presbyterianism, while not as socially conservative as Anglicanism, also espoused the Protestant ethic of hard work, thrift, temperance and acceptable moral values. The middle class was a dominant force within Presbyterianism and attempted to impose these ethics upon the working class.25

The formal connection between the Society and the Church was not sustained. Recognising that government funding would be more beneficial to them than the Church’s financial support, in 1847 the Society removed ‘Presbyterian’ from its name. It became the Melbourne Female Visiting Society. After several name changes, in 1851 the Society came to be known as the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. For the Society, securing a position of authority required aligning with the most influential bodies within the welfare field. Its non-denominational status enabled it to do this.26

The dominant trend in the nineteenth century was increasingly a morality based upon

24 Swain The Victorian charity network.

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secular reason as opposed to any religious versions. Notably, however, the severing of formal ties between the Society and the Church did not lead to a loss of religious identity. The Society was to remain on close terms with Protestant denominations in Victoria and remained a Protestant body. Anglicans, Methodists, and those from smaller Protestant denominations were welcomed on the committee of the Society.

The most prominent committee members of the Melbourne Society were often married to clergymen, further revealing the religious connections of the organisation. In the 1880s, for example, the president of the Society, Jessie Cairns was the widow of the late Reverend Adam Cairns of Chalmers' Presbyterian Church. Of the three vice-presidents, Rhind, Turnbull and Dawborn, the latter was married to an Anglican vicar. Catholics, on the other hand, were not encouraged to become members of the Society's committee, and generally had their own charities. In the 1880s, the Catholic Ladies Association of Charity was formed, which directly challenged the (Protestant) Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. Initially, however, the Catholic Association approached the Melbourne Society with the proposal that the Association might become a Catholic branch of the Society. The proposal was rejected, with the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society stating 'That the constitution and rules of the Society utterly precluded the Committee's entertaining the propositions submitted to them by the Committee of the Roman Catholic Ladies' Visiting Society, inasmuch as no denominational difference is recognised by this Society, either in the relief of the poor, or in the election of members of the Committee'. Notably, however, non-denominational 'Anglo Saxon Protestants ... always predominated on the Committee'.

The Society's claim to offer assistance to all who requested relief, regardless of their religious affiliations, was associated with their missionary approach. The women of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society were of the view that anyone could achieve salvation, even Catholics. The 'deserving' nature of the client was a far more important determinant than religious persuasion in the decision surrounding whether or not to provide help.

The Society's welfare practices continued to be based upon the perception of self-sacrificing members who were earnest and sympathetic in their work and who sought to aid the destitute in achieving salvation. The Society's objectives were not altered when they separated from the Church, and remained influenced by Protestant values. While the explicit biblicism and crucicentrism of evangelicalism did not directly influence the

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27 Hogan The sectarian strand, p.75.
28 Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society (1895) Women's work during fifty years, 1845-1895, Melbourne, pp.32-33.
29 Kennedy 'Poor relief in Melbourne', p.256.
Society’s welfare practices, they retained a commitment to conversionism and activism in a secularised sense. Pioneered by Presbyterians, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society embraced evangelical attitudes towards dealing with poverty. The Society attained a sense of self-importance, considering itself an alternative to the ‘costly machinery’ of a Poor Law.\(^{30}\) It believed itself to be participating in a process that would lead members of society to embrace good and moral lifestyles, ultimately reducing poverty, increasing productivity and creating a better society. Over the next eighty to ninety years the Societies continued to reflect proudly upon their religious heritage and on ‘those God-fearing—but otherwise fearless—Caledonian colonists’ who created the first Society.\(^ {31}\)

The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was the blueprint from which other Ladies Benevolent Societies were created. In 1855 there was a recognition that one Society could not cope alone with increasing destitution in Victoria. Williamstown was the first suburb to establish its own separate Society. The main reasons for this included the difficulty the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society experienced in accessing Williamstown to conduct relief work and the greater number of cases requiring assistance in the central Melbourne area. The rules and constitution of the Williamstown Society were based on the Melbourne Society. A similar pattern occurred in the following years with the emergence of several more Societies in other suburbs. This marked the beginning of a network of Ladies Benevolent Societies consisting of at least twenty Societies by the 1880s, and peaking at over one hundred and fifty by the 1930s.\(^ {32}\) The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society remained the most prominent and influential within the network, having established its position of authority in outdoor relief in Melbourne during the 1850s.\(^ {33}\)

The Societies practised a method of welfare relief that was generally referred to as ‘district visiting’.\(^ {34}\) Each Society had a number of ‘lady’ members who were assigned to a district within the area the Society covered. This tended to vary, but often consisted of a few blocks within a suburb. The ‘lady visitor’ of the Society would be responsible for calling in on the homes of the Society’s clients. Politicians, police, doctors and the clergy referred clients to the Society’s services when they came into contact with

\(^{30}\) MLBS *Women’s work during fifty years*, p.44.  
\(^{32}\) *Victorian Year Books*, 1920-1939.  
\(^{33}\) Kennedy ‘Poor relief in Melbourne’, p.257.  
individuals and families—usually women and children—in need of assistance. The 'visitor' would inquire into the circumstances of the client, whilst also carefully observing their living conditions. She would survey the cleanliness of the home, the appearance of the children, signs of alcohol use, and she would observe the behaviour of the client. Often she would obtain a police report to check the validity of the client’s statement.

Following these inquiries and observations, the Society visitor would use her own discretion to determine whether the client should receive assistance. If the client or family appeared respectable, the visitor generally considered the case deserving of material aid and she would grant assistance suited to the individual needs of the case. This was generally some form of 'relief in kind'—a grocery order, clothing or a supply of firewood. Sometimes the client had an isolated problem and only required help on one occasion. Other clients required ongoing assistance. In these latter cases particularly, the visitor’s assistance tended to include some form of moral instruction in how to conduct their behaviour and how to improve their economic situation. For example:

The visitors strove to impress upon parents the duty and necessity of sending their children to school, and urged upon them the practice of cleanliness and order. The Society’s solutions focused on encouraging greater thrift and cleanliness and discouraging the use of alcohol and gambling. In becoming more respectable, recipients of welfare would succeed in becoming model citizens and contribute to social progress in their role as parents and employees. In Chapter Three, I discuss the welfare practices of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in greater depth.

The Societies worked closely with other participants in the Victorian welfare field, including the government, municipalities, statutory bodies, other charity organisations, churches, police and the recipients of welfare relief. These participants each had their own role within the field that was recognised and understood. They shared an understanding of the spoken and unspoken rules of the welfare field. These rules varied according to the position of the participants in the field. For example, the Societies and the recipients of their charity were aware that their position in the field differed and that they abided by different guidelines. The clients of welfare relief did what they could to gain the assistance they needed. The Societies, on the other hand, focused on ensuring that their clients did not impose on them or become dependent on

35 For more information on the recommendation system, see Garton Out of luck, pp.51-54.
36 MLBS Women’s work during fifty years, pp.42-43.
their help, thereby contributing to broader social progress. Competition existed between church organised charities, the Ladies Benevolent Societies and charities created for specific causes, such as the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Each sustained a belief that their own methods were the most effective for achieving the desired moral reform. The organisations also struggled against each other for government funding. The acquisition of funds was an indication of status and authority within the welfare field, providing legitimation of welfare practices. By 1890, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society stated that 'the value and importance of the work rendered by the Ladies' Benevolent Societies had, during the past few years, been more clearly recognised by the Government, so that no difficulty was now experienced by this Society in obtaining the yearly grant'.

Receiving the government's support and recognition was critical in legitimating the Society's welfare practices. A relationship between the government and the Societies was first established in the mid-nineteenth century. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society first approached the government with a request for financial assistance in 1850. In 1932, when this funding came under threat, Edith S. Abbott (in an article in the Argus) reflected on the origins of the alliance between the government and the Society. Quoted was a letter from the Secretary of the Society, Helen Forbes, to the government in 1850. Forbes wrote that she enclosed a copy of the society's last report, from which Your Honor may judge of the society's operations; and I would remark that, were its income enlarged, there is almost as unlimited scope for further benevolent efforts.

The Society emphasised the potential for a need to be met through the work it was doing, its contribution to the community and the benefits of an alliance between the government and the Society. The government responded with an offer of assistance in 'unclaimed poundage'. Initially, therefore, the financial support from the government was informal—that is, the financial assistance the Society relied upon was an indeterminate contribution from the government after other financial commitments were met. In 1856 the Society succeeded in achieving formal recognition of the alliance it sought with government and became the principal public relieving agency when annual subsidisation was granted. This annual funding comprised three quarters of its annual income in the late 1800s.
By the 1890s there were several Ladies Benevolent Societies operating in the welfare field and the alliance between the Societies and the government was well established. Within the network of Societies, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was most heavily subsidised by the government. In the early years of the Societies’ existence, the Melbourne Society was the largest of the network, its welfare practices covering the broadest area. As the original organisation it also carried the greatest prestige amongst the Societies and in the eyes of the government. Other Societies tended to be viewed as branches of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Societies. For each £1 subscribed from the general public, the Society received £2:10:0 from the government.\textsuperscript{42} In 1890-91, the Societies, as a group, were receiving about 30 per cent of their income from the government.\textsuperscript{43} By the 1920s and 1930s, government funding averaged about 25 per cent of the Societies’ receipts.\textsuperscript{44} In addition to the legitimacy the Societies received from the private sector in subscriptions and donations, the financial alliance with the government formally legitimated the position of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the welfare field. The arrangement was a mutually beneficial one. For the government it avoided direct responsibility in welfare provision and for the Societies it legitimated their authority in the welfare field. Importantly, the government’s legitimation of the Societies’ authority in welfare provision was based upon its confidence that they were the appropriate body to undertake the work. The government valued their cultural capital.

Throughout the nineteenth century the government was able to sustain its minimal involvement in the welfare field. It held considerable influence, however, in determining the nature of welfare practices in its position as a major distributor of funds. Members of Parliament, when faced with a case requiring welfare relief, would generally pass it on to one of the appropriate charitable organisations. This provided them with the opportunity within the welfare field to show their recognition of those organisations whose methods they approved of. The local councils and municipalities also had very little direct involvement, and like the Victorian government, tended to hand over cases of welfare relief to the charities. The police too were active in this process of legitimation and recognition, and informed charity organisations of cases in need, as were churches that did not engage in their own charity activities.\textsuperscript{45} I will

\textsuperscript{42} Swain The Victorian charity network, p.49.
\textsuperscript{43} Victorian Year Book, 1890-91.
\textsuperscript{45} See Garton Out of luck, pp.51-54; Recommendations were made by subscribers, which for the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the 1800s included the Lord Mayor, the Governor, 'leading citizens',
discuss this process of legitimation and its significance in determining authority in welfare provision further in Chapter Three.

**Challenging the philanthropic tradition**

In the late nineteenth century a social crisis provoked a challenge to this established tradition of welfare practice and, therefore, to the Societies' tradition of authority. A severe economic depression catapulted the welfare field into a state where conditions were ripe for change. Existing disillusionment with welfare practices was forced to the forefront of attention in Victoria. Welfare historian, Richard Kennedy, describes the causes of the depression as clear-cut: 'British capital inflow stopped and export income declined, leaving the colony hopelessly over-committed on domestic expenditure and overseas interest payments'.

The economic depression reached its peak in the early 1890s and created a condition of mass unemployment leading to record numbers of people in desperate need of help. The welfare field was not built to manage such large-scale destitution, and confidence in its coping capacity quickly diminished.

The hostility to direct government intervention and the accompanying fear that citizens would believe they were entitled to relief began to change in response to this challenge, as did (in a more general sense) relations between governments and citizens. Mass unemployment and large-scale destitution made apparent the limitations of the charity network. In Australia advocates of modern welfare practices argued that it was the government's duty to ensure the welfare of its citizens. Given the incapacity of charities to achieve this, the government should intervene. Government had the capacity to achieve centralisation of welfare planning to coordinate large-scale welfare provision.

In a history of the development of British social policy, Jose Harris considers that similar trends in Britain were a manifestation of the shift amongst modernists towards the perceived benefits of active, participatory citizenship. Rather than creating the belief that citizens had a right to relief, modernists hoped that the

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46 Kennedy *Charity warfare*, p.150.
increased involvement of government would lead to a reciprocal relationship between the citizen and the state. That is, a 'benefit was allowable (even a state benefit) if it took place within an ethical context (that is, a reciprocal personal relationship between giver and receiver) and if its end was rational (that is, the promotion of independent citizenship in the recipient').

New ideas regarding the government's responsibility in welfare were accompanied by changing attitudes towards social progress. While the dominant view of social progress continued to be upon the moral reform of the individual, views on the nature of 'moral reform' were changing. Rather than a focus upon moral behaviour and conduct, social reformers began to emphasise the importance of the mind in reforming individuals. This tended to extend beyond the individual, to a concern with 'bringing the social mind into order'. It was a shift away from the influence of evangelicals, a secularisation that involved a 'search for a “modernist” reformulation of (or an ethical substitute for) traditional Christianity'.

Stephen Garton explains the influence of this movement within Australia:

A new emphasis on mental forces, drives and mental will fostered concepts of dynamic psychology and the belief that such forces needed to be mastered to ensure social progress. These views were married to an optimistic progressivism that favoured social engineering as the basis for reform.

The moralism of evangelicalism, which encouraged the working classes to seek individual salvation through good moral conduct, was gradually substituted by a new secular focus that emphasised the importance of the individual's psychological well-being. In a study on the government of subjectivities, Nikolas Rose argues the significance of the psychological sciences in enabling governments to operate on subjectivity in the twentieth century. He states that 'citizens of a liberal democracy are to regulate themselves' and that 'through self-inspection, self-problematization, self-monitoring and confession, we evaluate ourselves according to the criteria provided for use by others'. Rose argues further that 'the government of the soul depends on our recognition of ourselves as ideally and potentially certain sorts of persons'. Importantly, what he suggests is that, as with personal goals of individual salvation, individuals in modern society are encouraged to seek self-awareness and self-understanding to improve themselves and their enjoyment of life. Reforming the mind

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50 Harris 'Political thought and the welfare state', pp.132-33.
51 Harris 'Political thought and the welfare state', p.129.
52 Harris 'Political thought and the welfare state', p.124.
55 Rose Governing the soul, p.11.
was encouraged as a personal responsibility, with individuals seeking psychological stability in the same way they had once strived to achieve respectability.

Advocating social reform based upon these modern ideas was a new, professional group that was emerging within the middle class. Alongside new ideas came new methods. The professional class, or advocates of 'technical rationalism', consisted of trained specialists and technical experts. It was their desire to introduce 'scientific', psychological, technical and perceivably more efficient, effective methods for dealing with social issues, such as housing, health, poverty and unemployment. Although these changes were occurring on an international scale, there was not one general experience of transformation. Victoria experienced its own unique version of transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' welfare field. Most notably, despite some minor concrete changes, the shifts from the late 1880s to 1920 occurred more at an ideological level than at a practical level. The shift towards modern ideas in Victoria did not immediately equate to support for increased government responsibility. As I discuss below, support for modern ideas in Victoria was initially enthusiasm for a more scientific, reasoned approach to welfare, and did not extend to a desire for government intervention. Even this was not uncomplicated. Organisations that had been valued in an evangelical era, such as the Ladies Benevolent Societies, were threatened by this move towards secularisation.

Problems with welfare practices had been acknowledged prior to the 1890s. Two royal commissions into charitable institutions prior to the depression, one in 1862 and another in 1870-71, however, had been shelved, ignoring emerging problems in the welfare field. Despite revealing financial troubles and poor management amongst charitable organisations, the conclusions were that the welfare field and the charitable organisations that operated within it were satisfactory. Indeed, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was congratulated for having protected Melbourne from the Poor Law. Not everyone dismissed the concerns raised by the royal commissions. Social reformers were growing increasingly critical of conditions in the welfare field, particularly in regard to the management of charities.

The challenge to established traditions of welfare was led by the Charity Organisation Society (COS). The COS was a male dominated organisation that was based on its British counterpart of the same name, founded in 1869. In Britain the

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56 Reiger *The disenchchantment of the home*, p.2.
58 Kennedy *Charity warfare*, pp.35-37
COS was one of the major channels through which the movement for social reform based on ‘modern’ ideas found expression. In Victoria the COS was to become the dominant voice through which this vision was expressed. In 1887, Edward Morris, a professor of English at the University of Melbourne, founded the COS in Melbourne. It sought to ‘organise charity’ through a membership that represented a broad section of the Victorian welfare community. This membership included doctors, government officials, reverends, hospital executives and businessmen. According to the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, the COS ‘intimated the desire to work in accord with this Society’. Two representatives of the Society were elected as the only women members. In his history of the COS, Kennedy comments that considering the importance of women in the welfare field, they were notably under-represented on the COS Council. Yet it is also worthwhile bearing in mind that the Societies were not entirely supportive of the COS objective of organising charity. The COS aimed to eliminate ‘indiscriminate giving’, which it considered most charitable organisations to be guilty of, and ‘imposition on the charitable’. Both of these problems within the welfare field in Victoria were believed, by the COS, to be the cause of the ‘social cancer of “pauperism”’.

The challenge to the welfare field instigated by the COS involved a strategy of change that was based upon a new, ‘modern’ approach to welfare. This strategy was compatible with trends towards modernism in the broader social field. The COS encouraged a shift away from the evangelical moralism of charity towards charity based upon scientific reason, uniform standards and efficiency. Notably, however, the COS remained opposed to direct government intervention in this planning. It saw itself as the appropriate authority for bringing about and carrying out welfare reform. The COS proposed the coordination of charitable organisations and institutions into an efficient, voluntary system, and the implementation of strict methods of inquiry into deserving and undeserving cases—a task that it was prepared to undertake itself.

The challenge was, on the whole, directed at the Ladies Benevolent Societies who were representative of a tradition of welfare practice the COS opposed. In his history of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society in colonial Victoria, Brendan Gleeson

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59 Harris 'Political thought and the welfare state', p.121.
60 MLBS 'Women's work during fifty years', p.48.
61 Kennedy 'Charity warfare', p.92.
63 Garton 'Rights and duties', p.30.
64 Hyslop, The social reform movement, p.50.
65 Kennedy 'Poor relief in Melbourne', p.257; Kennedy 'Charity and ideology in colonial Victoria', p.71.
argues that the COS was, from its outset, 'determined to break the power of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, and enforce the rule of scientific charity'. Kennedy also comments that 'the MLBS stood as the great citadel of Melbourne's outdoor relief, which the COS must infiltrate, capture, or batter down if it were ever successfully to control the city's poor relief and repress “indiscriminate charity”'. Notably, this challenge to the Societies was directed against their traditional, moralistic welfare practices.

The depression of the 1890s provided the COS with the opportunity to challenge traditional welfare practices and to attempt to introduce its 'scientific charity'. The COS pursued two main strategies in its critique of the Ladies Benevolent Societies' welfare practices. The first involved a determination to organise the Societies, along with other charitable organisations, into a more rational, efficient system to prevent the duplication of welfare activities. To achieve this, it advocated a federation of the Societies to be controlled by a Central Board of Benevolence, which would allocate funds. The scheme envisaged by the COS was a board that would receive the government subsidy for benevolent relief and distribute it proportionately amongst the Ladies Benevolent Societies. In 1892, there was a notable inequity in the distribution of these funds. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society received the bulk of government funding. The proposed central board would also employ officers to investigate applicants for relief, institute a central registry to maintain a record of recipients of relief, and supervise the Societies. The proposal was opposed by the Societies who were suspicious of any attempts to undermine their welfare practices. Kennedy explains that '[t]ogether they formed an impassable barrier'. The Central Board of Benevolence did not eventuate in the 1890s. The government was inactive on the issue and the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society worked behind the scenes, in collusion with politicians and important church members, to dismantle the scheme.

The second strategy in the COS' challenge was its proposed reform of welfare relief practised by the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The COS suggested the introduction of a scheme of 'friendly visiting' or, in other words, a move to professionalise social work. Friendly visiting involved the visitor acting as a 'friend and adviser' to relief applicants. Rather than merely dispensing doles, the friendly

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67 Kennedy Charity warfare, p.137.
68 Kennedy Charity warfare, p.180.
69 Kennedy Charity warfare, p.180.
70 Kennedy Charity warfare, pp.197-98.
71 Gleeson 'A public space for women', p.203.
visitor would dispense advice. The aim of the district visitor was to reform the client through wise advice, tender and careful support, and guidance towards a position of independence and industry.\textsuperscript{72} The point of departure between the Societies’ ‘district visiting’ and the proposed ‘friendly visiting’ was in the nature of the advice to be provided and the level of commitment to the client. Where the district visitor ceased to assist a client when they were considered no longer in financial need, the friendly visitor would not leave a case until convinced the client was in a position of comparative independence. In assisting the client to achieve this degree of independence, the advice offered by the friendly visitor differed in its moral focus, turning to the client’s mind. In addition it claimed to be more practical and efficient.\textsuperscript{73} The Ladies Benevolent Societies were opposed to the scheme of friendly visiting. They believed in the efficacy of their welfare practices and they were committed to their vision of social progress. Without the Societies’ support, the COS had little chance of instituting its reform of welfare practices. The Societies were a formidable opponent, secure in their authority within the welfare field. The Societies were fortunate in their possession of strong social capital. The COS, on the other hand, was in the process of attempting to acquire the valuable alliances and social networks necessary in assuming a position of authority. In Kennedy’s somewhat patronising terms, the women of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Societies were to ‘prove harder to dominate than a Professorial Board. They mastered Morris’.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite the lack of success experienced by the COS in its efforts to introduce welfare reform in the 1890s, its challenge marked the beginning of a campaign that aimed to modernise the welfare field in Victoria. The original participants of the field, including the Ladies Benevolent Societies, could no longer enjoy an unquestioned position of authority. The COS had created doubt in the mind of some politicians about the methods of relief used in Victoria. Were they the most effective way to deal with poverty and dependence on charity? Were they contributing to social progress? The debates of the 1890s were to resurface in the 1920s and 1930s. There was a striking similarity in many of the changes advocated by the COS in the 1890s to those associated with proposed welfare reforms in 1931, which I discuss later in this chapter. Where the COS was successful in the 1890s, therefore, was in bringing the established welfare field into a state of critical reflection.

\textsuperscript{72} Swain \textit{The Victorian charity network}, p.38.
\textsuperscript{73} Kennedy \textit{Charity warfare}, p.202.
\textsuperscript{74} Kennedy \textit{Charity warfare}, p.137.
The 1890s Depression and the declining influence of evangelicalism

At the turn of the century the welfare field had largely recovered from the depression. On the whole, the field emerged physically unscathed, resuming familiar modes of operation. It remained 'remarkably intact' and experienced no fundamental changes. In spirit, however, the welfare field was scarred and questions about the inefficiencies of welfare practices lingered. This questioning was influenced by the broader secular shift in attitudes to social reform. In 1901, the introduction of old age pensions in Victoria marked the changing role of government within the welfare field. Although the position of the Societies did not change, the depression had influenced attitudes regarding the government's responsibility to its citizens. Indeed, the introduction of government benefits indicated shifting conceptions of citizenship. With the pension in Victoria established on a non-contributory basis, funded from consolidated revenue, came a new language of citizenship. A strict set of eligibility requirements ensured that the pension retained a sense of privilege for citizens requiring welfare, based upon their moral conduct. For example, wife desertion, imprisonment and prior convictions for drunkenness, all disqualified an applicant from entitlement to a pension. The Societies' role as district visitors and distributors of relief remained unchanged. This represented a continuation of traditional welfare practices and the associated philosophy of social progress based on individual moral reform. What the introduction of the old age pension does reveal, however, is the transitional nature of the welfare field in the decades following the depression of the 1890s.

Importantly the Ladies Benevolent Societies were successful in maintaining a prominent role in the welfare field during the 1890s, despite the declining influence of evangelical beliefs. The Societies responded to subtle shifts in the welfare field by adopting a defensive position. They began to develop a dialogue of 'tradition', by the 1920s, was embedded in their practice. For example, in 1895, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society made the following statement:

[n]ow that the fiftieth year of the Society's existence was reached, the Committee felt, on looking back to past trials and difficulties, that the Society had, under Divine Providence, successfully surmounted them all, retaining, as they believed, the confidence of the Government and of the public mainly through persevering in the wise system established in 1845, of which experience had tested the suitability and worth.

75 Kewley Social security in Australia, p.27; Swain The Victorian charity network, p.98.
76 Garton 'Rights and duties', pp.32-34.
77 Victorian Year Book, 1907-1908, p.345.
78 MLBS Women's work during fifty years, pp.57-58.
This commitment to tradition, however, did not prevent the Societies from discussing the potential for improvement of their welfare practices—so long as this improvement was contained within their understanding of social progress. The Societies were, therefore, open to the possibility of compromise and change in ways that did not threaten this understanding. In other words, in adapting their practices, the Societies were not prepared to reconsider the evangelical values on which their work was based. In the two decades following the depression of the 1890s, the Societies made important adjustments in their welfare practices in an effort to compromise and therefore stabilise their position within the field without compromising their deep-set morals and values.

In 1895, the Societies instigated a tentative alliance with their opponent, the Charity Organisation Society. While the COS was supportive of modern methods, like the Societies, it remained opposed to any increase in government responsibility in the welfare field. This was an important similarity and enabled the organisations to join forces to put into effect a reform that resembled the functions of the Central Board of Benevolence that had been proposed by the COS during the depression. This was an informal system of registration for welfare recipients aimed at centralising welfare practices. The scheme operated initially with the support of seven Ladies Benevolent Societies.\(^79\) It meant that the COS could interrogate cases and pass them on to the Societies. In turn, the Societies could consult with the COS, if they ever needed additional opinions on how they might deal with a particular case. This alliance worked, to some extent, to smooth tensions between the Societies and the COS. Creating an alliance with the COS, albeit a fragile one, was beneficial to both parties. The COS could continue its tactics of questioning welfare practices and the Ladies Benevolent Societies could feel secure that a working relationship with their adversary would keep the critique of the COS at bay. The Societies attained an appearance of cooperation whilst not compromising their welfare practices nor the fundamental values underpinning these practices.

The Societies continued to demonstrate a willingness to make the necessary shifts and manoeuvres to sustain authority within the welfare field. A new guard of younger women had moved through the ranks of the Societies, possibly influencing the degree to which these changes were supported. Despite their continued commitment to traditional welfare practices, these women had embodied some of the shifts in women’s political and educational status. These younger women had been socialised in a period in which (white, middle class) women were permitted to study towards a degree at the University of Melbourne, in which (white) women were granted the right to vote and in

\(^79\) Kennedy *Charity warfare*, p.196.
which attitudes towards women were changing.\textsuperscript{80} Their idea of women’s role in society was likely to have differed from that held by the founding members of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. Yet their involvement in the Societies and their support for the founding ethos of the Societies indicates a continued commitment to the conservative, evangelical traditions that the Societies were associated with. I elaborate upon these issues in Chapter Three.

In 1911, the Ladies Benevolent Societies made important decisions in an effort to organise more effectively and to protect their tradition of welfare practices. They responded with the establishment of a representative association of Societies. In May 1911, the formation of the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies was proposed. The President of the Kew Ladies Benevolent Society, Janie B. Kerr, was a prominent figure in the proceedings that considered the proposal. She believed

that it would materially increase the efficiency of Ladies Benevolent Societies, as well as add to their influence if an Association were formed comprising all the Ladies Benevolent Societies, say to commence with, in the Metropolitan area, and that the advantages arising from the interchange of thought and experience, and cooperative action, which the formation of such an Association would facilitate, are apparent.\textsuperscript{81}

The central aim in establishing the Association was to retain the Societies’ influential position within the welfare field, and potentially to expand this influence. One of the perceived advantages of the Association was in its ‘educative value to individual members and societies and the general public, particularly in reference to administration, the financial needs of societies and questions of social reform upon which they would speak with authority … from practical experience’.\textsuperscript{82}

The Association aimed to provide the Societies with greater recognition of their legitimate role within the welfare field. In presenting a unified front, the Societies ‘might be influential in securing much needed legislation’.\textsuperscript{83} The nature of this legislation was not elaborated upon. The important point was that the Societies were aware of the trend towards legislative measures for implementing welfare reform, as evidenced by the old age pension, and intended to influence the shape of any future legislation to ensure it conformed with their principles of welfare provision. It is possible that the Association’s desire to influence legislation was influenced by women’s

\textsuperscript{80} Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly Creating a nation, pp. 156-58, 171, 176, 185.
\textsuperscript{81} 29 May 1911, Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies (VALBS), Minutes.
\textsuperscript{82} 29 May 1911, VALBS, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{83} 29 May 1911, VALBS, Minutes.
recent political enfranchisement. Yet not too much can be made of this suggestion given that the Societies had been involved in political lobbying from their inception.84

Individual Societies were assured that the formation of the new body would not threaten their independence and that the Association would not interfere in their relief work. The proposal was not about the amalgamation of the Societies and '[t]he Association would not interfere, in any degree, with the complete freedom and independence of individual societies, nor seek in any sense to exercise any authority over them'.85 Importantly, the development of the Association was initiated by the Societies themselves and was to be administered by them. In choosing to be affiliated with the Association, the Societies received representation on the Association's board. The fact that individual Societies would retain complete autonomy appealed to them. Through the Association, therefore, the Societies were represented within the welfare field as a unified network. At the same time, the individual Societies continued to operate independently of each other, experiencing no interference in their practices of welfare relief. In Chapters Three and Four, I touch upon the significance of individual autonomy in the work of the Societies.

The Societies' welfare practices, however, did receive some attention in the proposal to introduce the Association. One of the considered advantages of an Association of Societies was that it 'might ... lead to the adoption of improved methods of work'.86 The Societies continually sought to reduce the number of cases of imposition and fraud. This was a suggestion, however, that welfare practices could be improved. It was an admission that they were not completely effective. It also reveals that the Societies were prepared to consider changes in their welfare practices in order to maintain a position of authority within the welfare field. Indeed, they began to alter their language, using terms such as 'cooperative action', which was a noteworthy change in view of their individualised approach to charity. Again, it is important to emphasise that their core moral values remained unchanged through this process of adjustment.

Also in 1911, the Societies again appeared willing to cooperate more fully with the COS. Following the initial challenge to their loose organisation in the 1890s, the COS continued to pressure the Societies to organise themselves more efficiently. It regularly presented proposals to 'secure better organisation of work of the Ladies' Benevolent

84 MLBS Women's work during fifty years, p.40.
85 29 May 1911, VALBS, Minutes.
86 29 May 1911, VALBS, Minutes.
Societies'. In 1911, a meeting was convened by the COS with the Societies. Thirteen Societies attended and twenty-five Societies agreed to cooperate formalising the system of central registration the COS and the Societies had informally practised since 1895. The Societies, however, had reservations about intensifying their cooperation with the COS. When two years later in 1913 it attempted to inaugurate its ‘Confidential Registration of Assistance’, the COS noted with disappointment that ‘support was not accorded as promised’. The achievement of a formal system of central registration remained out of reach. The Societies continued to resist welfare reform, despite their willingness to make a concession with the introduction of the Association and an informal system of consultation with the COS in relief work. It is likely that the Societies were not prepared to hand the COS the necessary authority to implement its central registration.

Importantly, therefore, the Societies revealed a willingness to consider changes to their organisation and to adapt to changing conditions in the welfare field. These shifts were cautious ones and at no point indicated a change in the moral values that were crucial to the work they did. Notably, however, the changes that occurred in the welfare field had not involved any fundamental shifts in values. New ideas had been toyed with, yet a commitment to social progress based on individual moral reform remained at the core of the welfare field. The challenge for the Societies was to come in the early 1930s. What follows here is a brief outline of the nature of change that was sought as a response to the crisis of the 1930s Depression—the second key moment of change that occurred in the welfare field. In Chapter Four I discuss in greater detail the Societies’ response to the shifts in ideology that occurred in the 1920s. In addition, in Chapter Five I discuss at length the efforts to provide welfare to large numbers of the unemployed.

87 ‘Historical survey’, c1929, Public Records Office (PRO), Series (S) 4523/R1, Unit (U) 65, Item 622.
88 ‘Historical survey’, c1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
The 1930s Depression—a key moment in welfare reform

[The question of social services is very important; in fact it is one of the greatest problems that confront us to-day. Recognizing that fact, I believe the time has arrived when the social service activities should be placed on a scientific basis.]

John Holland, MLA, 1931

In the early 1930s in Victoria, the attention of members of parliament, business and the community again turned to the issue of welfare reform. The economic and industrial depression of the 1930s caused large-scale unemployment, which in mid-1932 peaked at twenty-seven percent. This was an increase of nearly twenty percent in less than three years. Unprecedented numbers of unemployed women and men were in desperate need of welfare assistance. Existing structures that dealt with unemployment, based on the evangelical tradition of philanthropy, proved incapable of coping with mass destitution. Concern about the inadequacies of welfare practices had gained momentum during the 1920s and the Depression provided the catalyst for change, putting welfare reform firmly on the agenda. The subject was debated at length in Parliament in 1931. Current welfare practices were obviously inadequate for meeting the needs of economically disadvantaged citizens in an unemployment crisis. Many people in desperate need of assistance could not receive relief because charities lacked the human and financial resources. This clearly had consequences for the Ladies Benevolent Societies—the central provider of welfare relief.

In October 1931, John Holland of the Labor Party put a motion to the Legislative Assembly that proposed the establishment of a Parliamentary Select Committee to inquire into social services in Victoria. Holland was passionate about the need for welfare reform. Convinced that social service was one of the ‘greatest problems that confront us today’, he claimed ‘it is time that we ... evolved a solution’ to the ‘added burden to social service’. Holland believed that the

main causes of this condition of affairs are the mechanization of industry and the rapid displacement of men and women for whom no positions will be available, because sufficient new industries will not be established in Victoria, or in Australia generally, to absorb them.

89 1 October 1931, Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), Assembly (A), Volume 186, p.3362.
90 Based on the unemployment statistics of members of trade unions, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Reports, 1929-1933.
92 1 October 1931, VPD(A), Vol.186, p.3362.
The effects of modernisation on industry alongside the changing nature of the workforce pointed to the need for a more coordinated and efficient field of social services. Holland envisaged a state of long-term unemployment, as industry sought greater efficiency through the use of machinery, reducing the need for the employment of workers. With no end in sight to the condition of mass unemployment, he considered welfare reform vital. A solution to the obvious inadequacies of the welfare field was urgent.

Holland proposed an inquiry into five aspects of social service. Firstly, the inquiry would analyse the costs of social service to provide an indication of how much money various bodies participating in the welfare field contributed to the provision of welfare relief. Secondly, the introduction of a scheme to coordinate social service activities would be considered by the Inquiry. Holland suggested interviewing numerous charitable organisations to learn of possible directions for establishing a scheme of coordination. The primary goal was to introduce a central register in order to maintain a record of people in receipt of charitable assistance. Coordination amongst charitable organisations could then be achieved by providing them access to knowledge of charity recipients. The introduction of a uniform basis for measuring amounts of relief provision was also considered by Holland as necessary in this scheme of coordination. Such a reform would both discourage dependency and keep the costs of social service to a minimum through the prevention of 'indiscriminate giving'. Related to this was the third area of inquiry, which proposed an analysis of possible methods to prevent imposition and duplication of effort or overlapping. More efficient coordination amongst welfare bodies (through the proposed system of central registration) and more efficient distribution (through the standardisation of relief) would lead to the prevention of overlapping and fraud. Ultimately this would improve cost efficiency.

The fourth area of the proposed investigation would look into the need for correctional institutions to provide technical training, which was believed to 'develop the brain'. Holland explained that the 'man who otherwise would become simply a waster would, on leaving the correctional institution, become a social unit'. A 'social unit' had the capacity to contribute to the efficiency of industry, offering technical knowledge as an 'expert machinist'. Finally, the inquiry would investigate the introduction of training for social workers within the welfare field. The employment of 'experts' in social work would enable the proposed welfare reforms to be successfully
established, through the implementation of special knowledge and skills. In sum, the
'investigation would prove that we can prevent a great deal of waste by concentration
and co-ordination'.95 The objective would be a modern welfare field adapted to meet
the needs of modern society. The implications of these proposed changes for the
Societies are discussed in depth in later chapters.

A Board of Inquiry was established to investigate the first three issues Holland
had raised. The Board devoted February and March of 1932 to the collection of
'evidence of experienced social workers'.96 Interviews with three representatives of the
Ladies Benevolent Societies, and also the Charities Board, the Charity Organisation
Society, the Salvation Army and the Unemployed Girls Relief Fund (an initiative of the
Societies) received considerable press attention.97 The Board asked questions
concerning costs of expenditure, the extent of 'relief in kind' as opposed to cash relief,
the nature of the welfare practices of the organisations, the extent of cooperation with
other organisations, the views of the organisations in regard to the defects of
government and voluntary approaches to social services, their suggestions for
improvements to the welfare field and their opinions on the introduction of a 'social
service exchange' or system of central registration, training for social workers and
changes to unemployment relief provision.98 All areas of the initial proposal for inquiry
were incorporated into the questionnaire, in the hope that these might be later revisited
in a full report on social service activities in Victoria.

It is important here to briefly reflect on the implications of the Depression in the
broader context of welfare reform. In doing so, I set the stage for understanding the
context of change in which the Societies attempted to sustain their authority. I have
suggested that confidence in philanthropic approaches to welfare dramatically declined.
Modern, secular ideas, on the other hand, gained support as many politicians looked to
different approaches to resolve the crisis in welfare provision. Such a dramatic change
in ideologies underpinning the context of welfare provision was to have a profound
effect upon the Societies' role and experience of authority in the welfare field. The
Societies were not prevented from taking opportunities. Notably, however, the
dominant values underlying the welfare field were shifting and the Societies were
confronted by the need to change to survive. As the following chapter reveals

95 1 October 1931, VPD(A), Vol.186, p.3362.
96  Argus, 1 June 1932.
97  Argus, 27 January 1932, 3 February 1932, 10 February 1932, 24 February 1932, 2 March 1932, 16
98 23 February 1932, Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Societies (MLBS), Minutes; 17 March 1932,
VALBS, Minutes; Evidence prepared by Mrs G. G. Henderson, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65,
Item 622; Statement prepared by Inspector of Charities for Social Services Committee, 26 January 1932,
PRO, S4523/R1, U20, Item 102.
however, the marriage of their moral values to an evangelical tradition of welfare was a critical aspect of the Societies' authority. The challenge they confronted posed a profound threat to their self-perception and beliefs in social progress.

The 1931 parliamentary inquiry into social services provides a useful case study from which to identify the nature of the changes that were under consideration at this time and what these changes reflect about the broader shift in welfare ideology. In an early draft of its report in April 1932, the Board stated its opinion that

[I]t is urgently desirable that a greater degree of co-operation among these organisations should be instituted, and that their activities should be systematised from such points of view of investigation, records and standards of relief. The Board considers that an efficient system could be built up which would gradually eliminate the imposition and the duplication of effort that exists today, and which would lessen the tendency to create a pauper class.99

This modern, systematised and efficient system, in the view of the Board, could be achieved through the centralisation of welfare activities. In addition to benefiting welfare organisations through improved coordination, the Board also perceived the reformed welfare system renewing commitment to the goal of preventing dependency on charity relief. The Board made two recommendations to pursue this reform of coordination. Firstly, within each municipal district a 'local central committee representative of all relief giving agencies in the district' should be appointed. The Board anticipated that these committees would work in close connection with local municipal councils. Secondly, a central Metropolitan Welfare Council would be established on which each local central committee would secure representation.100

To further achieve coordination, the introduction of a 'social service exchange', or 'social index', (previously known as 'central registration') was supported by the Board of Inquiry. It explained that it

has been much impressed by the general consensus of opinion among experienced social workers in favor of the introduction of a confidential Social Index for the metropolitan area. Such an index is now regarded as an essential factor in the relief organisation of countless urban communities throughout the world where family welfare work has been developed to a high stage of efficiency.101

For the Board of Inquiry, efficiency was an important goal. It viewed favourably any welfare reform that promised to achieve it. In particular, the Board considered a

99 Evidence by Henderson, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622, p.6.
100 Evidence by Henderson, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622, p.6.
101 Evidence by Henderson, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622, p.7.
systematic scheme of indexing recipients of welfare would lead to the smooth operation of welfare practices. The index was a proposed record of information about welfare clients in the form of an alphabetical card index, with the names of families and individuals containing a 'wealth of information'. The index would enable welfare agencies to interact more effectively and would be a preventative measure against overlapping in welfare relief.102

The Board officially submitted an interim report to the government in June 1932 setting out its suggested reforms. This report and the discussions that preceded it reveal the perceived need for large-scale welfare reform in the early 1930s and the government's new responsibility in directing this reform process. The Depression was a catalyst and created a sense of urgency for change. The desire for welfare reform had been in existence for more than thirty years. This ambition was a manifestation of a broader level of transition, a shift away from 'traditional' practices associated with philanthropy. Yet as the consultations of the 1932 inquiry reveal, 'traditional' providers still remained the core of the social welfare system into the 1930s, and were themselves agents in the process of change.

A site of transition

In conclusion, this chapter has made three points that are essential to understanding the context in which the Societies successfully acquired and sustained authority in welfare provision. Firstly, the conditions that existed in the 1840s and 1850s in Victoria enabled the Ladies Benevolent Societies to assume this position of authority in Victoria.103 The distinctive nature of the Victorian welfare field, with its localised approach and specialised organisations, enabled the Societies to secure a niche within the field as providers of welfare relief. A belief in the social progress of society through individual moral reform was the evangelical core of the welfare field. Within this view of social progress, the role of middle class, Protestant women in the work of charity was highly regarded and valued by male-dominated interests due to women's perceived feminine virtues and innate moral qualities. The Societies, in particular, had the capacity, alongside the recognised qualities, to develop welfare practices that sought to achieve the social goals that were consistent with the dominant views of the era. This timing, and the resulting legitimation of the Societies' moral authority, is a key theme of the following chapter.

102 Evidence by Henderson, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622, p.7.
103 The nature of this authority is the central focus of the following chapter.
The second point I have emphasised in this chapter is the increasingly transitional nature of the welfare field from the 1870s. This transition was a gradual process of questioning traditional welfare practices and the values upon which those practices had evolved. Reforming the ‘social mind’ with the assistance of experts, as opposed to reforming the moral behaviour of the individual with the interference of the evangelical, was increasingly given greater credence as the solution to society’s ills. This process of questioning posed a threat to the Ladies Benevolent Societies, which had acquired recognition and authority as moral missionaries in their provision of welfare relief.

The Depressions of the 1890s and 1930s were two key moments of social and economic crisis that brought about the catalyst for change in the Victorian welfare field. The 1890s Depression caused many social reformers to seriously challenge the system. Questions about the efficacy of traditional welfare practices and the relevance of evangelical moral values continued to linger after the crisis had subsided. This represented an important shift in the mentality of those philanthropists, politicians and businessmen who were open to the ‘modern’ ideas. The Depression of the 1930s brought concerns about traditional welfare practices to the forefront of the social agenda yet again. Ideas of centralising and standardising welfare practices were not new. There was a sense of *deja vu* about the circumstances of mass unemployment and destitution that many in Victoria faced and a desire to bring about the practical changes that seemed necessary to cope with it. The questioning of the 1890s was transformed in the 1930s into a push for welfare reform. I discuss the consequences of this climate of change for the Ladies Benevolent Societies in later chapters.
Chapter Three

A tradition of authority
Ladies, welfare and cultural capital

Providence would seem ... to take a hand in the game of sustaining life in stranded women, for there were many other pioneers of their sex in positions of independence willing and able to assist them.1

Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, 1945

On 15 February 1927, the Secretary of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society ‘reported calling on a case sent from the Treasury though not recommended by Mr Meek [of the Charities Board], application having been made to him through Dr Maloney. The Hon. Wallace suggesting this as a suitable case for a compassionate allowance’.2 Having been advised of the case of Mrs Coutts and her 36 year old son, the Secretary undertook to investigate on behalf of the Society. She reported that the son had ‘just been discharged from the Melb. (Auxiliary) Hospital and certainly required assistance’. The Secretary was of the opinion, however, that ‘Mrs Coutts herself appeared to be of a doubtful type and did not impress one as being very reliable’.3 Despite the official recommendation for assistance, the Society possessed the authority to determine whether the client was ‘deserving’ of assistance, and if it so deemed, how the client would be helped. In the case of Mrs Coutts and her son, the Secretary of the Society was not impressed by what she observed. Indeed, Mrs Coutts ‘appeared’ lacking in respectability, but in view of the son’s obvious need, the Society agreed to further investigate. Responsibility was delegated to Mrs Gillespie, ‘who kindly undertook to visit’ the case.

Following a visit to Mrs Coutts, Mrs Gillespie granted assistance. A weekly cheque for rent assistance and a grocery order were provided. Mrs Gillespie, however, placed conditions upon the continuation of this help. Mrs Coutts was obliged to visit the office of the Society each week in person to ‘show receipt of rent in rent book ... failing which no cheque to be sent’.4 Mrs Gillespie was unconvinced that her client could exercise thriftiness and possibly had suspicions that the rent assistance might be spent in ways that were unintended by the Society, potentially leading to further calls for help. Aware that her character had been considered questionable, Mrs Coutts wrote a letter of gratitude to the Society for its help, thereby attempting to prove her respectability. She also fulfilled

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2 15 February 1927, Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society (MLBS), Minutes.
3 15 February 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
4 15 March 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
her obligation of attending the office of the Society with her proof of rent payment. In the six months she received help from the Society, there was no further comment upon Mrs Coutts’ character in the Society’s minutes—neither positive nor negative. She possibly overcame the initial negative judgements.

This example is typical of much of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society’s welfare practices in the 1920s, and reflects its concern with morality and respectability. This concern was at the core of the network of Societies’ authority and is the focus of this chapter—its enduring experience of authority in the welfare field. The Societies’ authority was based on a tradition of welfare practices—that encompassed the evangelical belief that social progress would be achieved through individual moral reform. In their voluntary work, therefore, the Societies provided assistance not only of a material form, but also dispensed moral advice and exercised moral judgements. It was this moral aspect of their relief that most characterised the Societies.

In this chapter, in order to understand the Societies’ experiences in the 1920s and 1930s, I spend some time reflecting on the Societies’ development in the mid-nineteenth century. I discuss their commitment to the welfare practices they developed in the 1840s and 1850s and their sense of obligation to the community in their role as providers of social welfare. Understanding the strength of this commitment is essential. It was sustained by an organisational culture that became self-perpetuating over time. The code of morals and concern with respectability that the Societies demonstrated in the 1850s continued to characterise their practices in the 1920s. The changes social reformers sought during the interwar years directly targeted these moralistic approaches to welfare. The Societies’ initial response to external pressure to change their welfare practices in the 1920s was influenced by their organisational culture. This chapter addresses how the Societies’ ‘founding ethos’—or habitus—was sustained into the 1920s and why it was such a powerful force in their resistance to change.

The strength of this founding ethos had been critical to the Societies’ enduring authority from the mid-nineteenth century into the 1920s. Their welfare practices in the twenties still reflected the social conditions of the 1840s and 1850s, the era in which they were socialised into the ‘game’ of welfare. I use the concept of habitus, in a collective sense, as a means of understanding this process of socialisation experienced by the Societies and the continuing influence of this through their ‘lifetime’. To understand the power of the Societies’ habitus, an analysis of their organisational culture is critical. From the 1840s, several generations of women who believed in social progress through individual moral reform contributed to the replication of the Societies’ organisational ethos. The reproduction of this moral ethos reveals a steadfast commitment over several
generations to a constitution that incorporated the Societies' values. The Societies' welfare practices remained remarkably intact, with minimal change from the 1840s to the 1920s. It is this fact that I am concerned with in this chapter.

Moral authority and the Societies' welfare practices

I have suggested that at the core of the Societies' authority was the moralism that informed their welfare practices. What follows, therefore, is a discussion of the Societies' moral attitudes. In addition, I consider the widespread recognition of their role in social welfare provision, which reveals a confidence within the welfare field in the Societies' moral superiority. The Societies' cultural capital, or welfare practices, existed in the form of long-lasting dispositions of their collective 'mind' and 'body', which were partly manifested in their individual constitutions and partly through unwritten codes. Embedded within the Societies' organisational culture, therefore, was a code of morals and a related understanding of respectability that was inherited from their socialisation in the mid-nineteenth century.

A distinction between the concepts of morality and respectability is important in understanding the moral authority of the Societies. Morality is concerned with the goodness or badness of the human character, or with principles of what is right or wrong in conduct. It is less superficial than respectability and not necessarily an observable phenomenon. Respectability, on the other hand, is based more on appearances and is about attaining a moderately good social standing, and being proper in appearance or behaviour. The connections and cross-over between the two concepts are apparent. Respectable appearances could be used to make assumptions about an individual's sense of morality. In a history of the English middle classes, Marilyn Strathern draws out the connection between respectability and morality, stating that 'the capacity for moral conduct [was] evinced outwardly in respectable behaviour. External respectability displayed internal morality'. Although the primary focus of their welfare practices was on morality, the Societies were dependent upon outward displays of respectability in exercising moral judgements. Indeed, for evangelicals the association of manners with morals was important.

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In the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, many social reformers in Victoria considered that the road to social progress was through the moral improvement of citizens. In Chapter Two I argued that for evangelicals philanthropy was an important avenue in the encouragement of these beliefs surrounding social reform. Within this tradition of philanthropy, evangelicals were convinced that women possessed the appropriate attributes to engage in welfare provision. They considered that women ‘naturally’ possessed the Christian virtues of morality, respectability and compassion—they were unscathed by the harsh realities of the ‘public’ world. The ideal of woman as ‘moral saviour’ was influential in many western societies and reached its fullest development at the close of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century.8 The pursuit of social and moral reform was considered an acceptable extension of the domestic role women were expected to pursue.9 Several historians have acknowledged the appeal of evangelicalism to ‘womanly instincts’.10

Charity work, in particular, required the compassion, generosity and self-sacrifice that women ‘naturally’ possessed. Belief in the moral purity and ‘good’ nature of women formed the basis of the ‘ideal of female superiority’.11 This ideal was one that both men and women believed in and, at times, used as a means to their separate ends. For men, it was often a means for ensuring women were confined to the domestic sphere. For women, it proved to be a means of extending the boundaries of the home into the public sphere. Originally, women often showed their interest in charitable work by involving themselves in men’s charitable institutions, which generally meant subordinating themselves to men.12 As their work in the field became more acceptable, they began forming their own organisations. In a study on women and philanthropy in Britain, F. K. Prochaska states, ‘Christianity confirmed what nature decreed: women had a rightful and important place in the charitable world’.13

11 Term used by Banks Faces of feminism, ch.6.
12 Swain ‘Women and philanthropy’, p.6; Windschuttle “‘Feeding the poor and sapping their strength’”, p.55.
13 Prochaska Women and philanthropy, p.17.
In the nineteenth century, the members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies were considered by their male peers to be women of moral purity and were associated with the virtues of sensitivity, wisdom and insight. In the philanthropic tradition, these qualities were vital in exercising judgements and making decisions in welfare provision. In the 1920s these ‘womanly’ attributes continued to be highly valued by participants in the welfare field. In 1921, at the annual meeting of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, the Mayor and local politicians expressed their appreciation of the women’s special aptitude for charitable work. Their male peers complimented the ‘earnest’ and ‘sympathetic’ personalities of the Societies’ visitors. In 1925, similar sentiments continued to be expressed, when Dr Bates, a guest speaker at the Melbourne Society’s annual meeting, stated that: ‘A good woman did honorary work well, besides giving alms in an entirely friendly way’. In 1926, a local councillor described the women of the Societies as ‘ministering angels’ — the feminine qualities of their Christian pursuits receiving acknowledgement. Such comments were not uncommon. The possession of morality and respectability were necessary to carry out charity work and the Societies were perceived to embody such qualities.

Not all women possessed moral purity, however. In her study on the efforts of working class women to ‘become respectable’, Beverley Skeggs explains that ‘[r]espectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not. But only some groups were considered to be capable of being moral, others were seen to be in need of control’. Women of the middle class possessed morality by virtue of their class positioning. The middle class, moral missionary nature of women’s charitable organisations, often led to ‘[d]omesticity, the ideal of the emergent and often evangelical middle class, [being] presented as the ... model to which other women should aspire’. Charitable women, therefore, imposed their views of respectability on working class women. They sought to encourage ‘daughters of the poor’ to be ‘trained as servants or good wives’ by imposing their moral advice. The women of the Ladies Benevolent Societies were confident in the correctness of their morals and beliefs, thereby justifying the necessity of their charitable work to themselves and others.

14 Argus, 28 September 1921.
15 15 December 1925, MLBS, Minutes.
16 Argus, 3 June 1926.
20 Hall ‘Victorian domestic ideology’, p.28.
The Societies' conception of their class positioning was interrelated with how they perceived themselves as women. This can be seen in their adoption of the term 'ladies' in their name. The Societies were obviously organisations of women, but they sought to emphasise the type and class of women they perceived themselves to be in the title of the organisation. They considered themselves to be ladies. What might the term 'lady' have meant to the women of the Society? Leisure was an important prerequisite for being a lady. The leisure to engage in charity work was an indication of status—a statement of the obvious leisure time a woman could afford. Middle class women gained respectability and status by becoming a member of a charity. Charity work was a form of socially acceptable behaviour for 'ladies'. Beverley Kingston suggests that women in colonial Australia aspired to the ideal of being a lady for it was considered superior to being labelled a 'female' or a 'woman'. She believes that Australian colonial women, experiencing feelings of inferiority, sought to achieve a certain status of lady that was the equivalent to the titled position in Britain.21 Judith Godden also argues that the concept of lady was class based and that “[l]adies” were distinguishable from “women” and “females” by a lifestyle that implied gentility, the availability of leisure and, most importantly, prosperity’.22 The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society sought to become the type of charity that appealed to women of social standing and in the 1920s was reluctant to remove 'ladies' from its name.23 Like other women's charitable organisations, they appointed a patroness, generally a woman of status such as the wife of the Lord Mayor.24

The women of the Societies believed they had a special calling to benevolent work. This faith in themselves was frequently reiterated by them and was reflected in their self-perception. Even in the late 1930s, the Societies continued to promote their work as 'constant' and 'unselfish', an 'honorary service' that was often 'unacclaimed', suggesting that few realised the 'good deeds these voluntary workers perform in an unostentatious way'.25 The Societies accepted acknowledgement from men in government and business of their importance in welfare provision and fully embraced their moral authority.

As evidenced by their political agenda, the Ladies Benevolent Societies possessed a specific understanding of morality and a perceived ability to recognise it in others. Indeed, they considered themselves to be moral—they were recognised by others as moral, and in turn accepted this portrayal of themselves. Although their morality had a particular

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22 Godden 'Portrait of a lady', p.33.
23 3 September 1926, 9 September 1930, 23 September 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
24 Windschuttle “Feeding the poor and sapping their strength”, p.60.
25 'Ladies Benevolent Societies: Fine help given to hospital service', Hospital Magazine, April 1937, p.27.
application according to specific situations, in general it encompassed attitudes towards marital status, sexual conduct, parenthood, responsibility and honesty. The Societies considered that morality could be observed by outward indicators of these factors which the visitors paid heed to in their investigations of clients. For example, a respectable married man was one who was hardworking and thrifty, and therefore responsible in regard to family obligations, and who did not drink or gamble, further indicating responsible attitudes. 26 A respectable woman with children, for example, was one who was married, who dressed sensibly (indicating a proper attitude to sexual conduct), who did not curse, nor shy from domestic chores, the latter revealing her interest in raising her children in a healthy environment. 27 This classification required close observations of those who applied for relief, and also of those who were in receipt of assistance. It was also open to individual discretion. Each case was unique.

The Ladies Benevolent Societies were aware of the gap between the tool of respectability that they used to measure morality, and the elusive nature of the latter. The women of the Societies were aware of the potential of applicants to manipulate the Societies through cunning. Conceivably, the client who appeared outwardly 'respectable' was in reality what the Societies considered quite immoral. The outcome was the Societies' obsessive concern with the possibility of being imposed upon or taken advantage of by fraudulent, immoral clients, which motivated an 'investigative' approach to relief provision, discussed later in this chapter. 28 This concern with 'imposture' was fuelled by their economic circumstances. The Societies' finances were generally a source of anxiety, which I discuss in greater detail in later chapters. They could not afford to be handing out 'undeserved' funds. More pressing, however, was the Societies' commitment to an ideal of a society composed of moral citizens. The existence of dishonesty in certain cases was always a reminder that immorality, sin and evil continued to permeate society.

The recipients of charitable relief were generally not seen to be either completely moral or respectable. The Societies believed that the destitute position of their clients was connected with their morals. They aimed therefore to instruct and advise their clients in how to improve their morals and how to become more respectable. What this would ultimately achieve, in their view, was the removal of destitution by the moral improvement of society, and ultimately a more sightly world. There was never any intention of reducing the imbalance between classes. The Societies wanted to eradicate poverty, the ugliness

26 See for example, 6 December 1927, MLBS, Minutes; MLBS, Annual Report, 1921-1922.
27 For example, see 29 July 1924, MLBS, Minutes; Commonwealth of Australia, Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, R. J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 1928-29, pp.1151-55.
associated with it and the dissatisfaction, and potential hostility and revolutionary fervour, of the destitute. It was expected that class differences would remain.

The Societies' practice of relief was vaguely stated in their objectives. At the first meeting of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society in 1845 the following goals were established:

The objects of this society shall be to relieve the wants of the poor, particularly females, by supplying them with clothes, food, and other necessaries. Primary attention shall be paid to the sick, and to poor women in confinements. 29

These objectives were to form a framework by which other Societies adopted welfare practices. Relieving the 'wants of the poor'—that is, their palliative approach to welfare—was undertaken individually in a system of district visiting, discussed in Chapter Two. The visitors of the Societies enjoyed a large degree of independence and autonomy in their work with clients. Visitors assumed responsibility for the provision of relief within a designated district, in which they possessed complete autonomy. Their casework involved investigating requests for relief by personally interviewing each applicant. In visiting applicants in their homes, the visitor would determine, using her own discretion, whether a case was deserving or 'unworthy' of assistance. This involved a series of probing questions that the individual visitor might consider necessary, relating to various aspects of the client's domestic habits and lifestyle. If the case was seen to be deserving, the visitor would prescribe the type of relief she thought appropriate in the circumstances. Interviewing clients at the office was another form of visiting. In the 1920s, a shortage of members meant that not all clients could be visited in their homes and some were instructed to attend the office. 30

The freedom visitors were granted in their district and with their individual cases continued into the 1920s. There were some general guidelines, however, which visitors were expected to follow. The written by-laws were:

To prevent imposition no relief shall be given exceeding the sum of 2/6 previous to visiting.
Visitors shall see their cases fortnightly and visit them in their homes as often as they deem it necessary.
No relief shall be given for medical attendance or funeral expenses. 31

The first and third of these guidelines were specific rules. The first indicates their preoccupation with the possibility of the immoral client imposing upon the Societies'
generosity. The third by-law was a simple rule that specified their limitations in relief provision. The second guideline is particularly interesting. It granted the visitor with the privilege of entering the home of a client as frequently as she felt was necessary. In her role as moral missionary, unlimited access to her client was important. Respecting the privacy of that client was rarely a consideration. Once 'on the books', the client was at the mercy of the visitor. How the visitor conducted herself once in the client's home was not the subject of any rules. Her conduct could become the subject of discussion, however, if there was concern amongst the members about her visiting. In one such case in 1926, a recipient reported a visiting member to the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. A complaint from the client led to the accusation that she 'had been unfeeling in the treatment of her case'.32 The President of the Society and another member of the Executive discussed the circumstances with the accused visitor—Mrs Solly. Although she defended herself, Mrs Solly agreed to make herself available for two hours every morning to interview cases. That is, she was instructed to make herself more accessible to recipients requiring assistance.

How a Society district visitor conducted her visits to clients and determined the entitlement of relief was a skill she gained over time, with practice and the advice of other more experienced members and leaders within the Societies. The members of Societies claimed they 'are always willing and ready to assist newcomers to the ranks'.33 To a certain extent the rules the visitors were to abide by were unspoken codes. Once accepted as a new visitor with the potential to 'play the game'—recommended by someone aware of the unwritten rules and provided some informal training—the visitor was largely left on her own to determine what needed to be done. As a woman of a specific class and religious background, it was expected that she would possess the appropriate morals to carry out her work. She would understand the Societies' attitude towards the recipients they assisted. The Societies believed it was the moral failure of these people that resulted in their inability to cope rather than the failure of economic and social structures within society. They focused, therefore, on the individual's behaviour and the specific circumstances of that person when providing assistance. The assistance provided by the Societies varied considerably, depending upon the individual case. Each case was treated on its merits. The Societies aimed to help a person or family to regain a position of independence, thereby avoiding chronic dependence upon the charity and goodwill of the Societies.

With a maximum of fifty members at any given time, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society had a busy schedule of providing relief to individuals and families in

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32 9 November 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
33 Mrs E. M. Tilley (1938) 'Benevolent Societies' fine efforts', Hospital Magazine, p.28.
need. In the 1920s, the scope of the Society’s work had expanded beyond its early beginnings:

Originally formed to assist women and children in distress, the work now done goes infinitely beyond those aims. Many people think that a Ladies’ Benevolent Society gives a dole of groceries, wood, meat, milk, and there its work begins and ends.34

The initial goal of the Society to ‘relieve the wants of the poor … by supplying them with clothes, food, and other necessaries’ was expanded to include the provision of rent assistance, contributions to travel expenses to locations where work might be gained, purchase of equipment to enable an applicant to pursue employment opportunities, contributions to medical needs and assisting clients to secure an old or invalid pension. Notably, however, the underlying values that motivated the Society remained intact as its work expanded. Moral judgements were still central to its practices, which remained palliative, with little or no emphasis on preventative measures. Grocery orders remained the primary source of assistance provided by the Society, due to its concern that cash payments might be used to purchase alcohol or tobacco, or even be gambled away.

In the 1920s, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society opened its office from 10 o’clock each morning, five days a week. On those days, from ‘10 o’clock to 4 there is continuous interviewing of applicants for assistance’.35 Within the office requests for assistance ‘come from various sources’. Correspondence and incoming phone calls alerting the Society of the need for its help came from various other participants within the welfare field—including the government, the Charity Organisation Society, the New Settler’s League, the Health Bureau and various church organisations. In addition, the ‘Probation Officers and Police Women … acquaint the Society of such [cases of distress], so that it can help them’.36 The majority of cases, however, were made known to the Society by the government through a referral system.37

Close cooperation with these other participants was important in the Society’s work. On 22 November 1927, for example, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society received a ‘[Letter from the Treasury re the case of John Bell … asking if assistance might be granted to this case’. The Society took on the case and proceeded with an investigation. The ensuing report explained that:

This man met with a very bad accident and has just returned from the Hospital. A friend is keeping him, but is unable to continue to do so, unless he is helped.

37 1924-1929, MLBS, Minutes; Garton Out of luck, p.51.
financially. The Doctor states that it will be twelve months before he can work. The Committee decided that efforts might be made to obtain an Invalid Pension for this case, and in the meantime relief could be given. A letter had been written to Mr Bond MLA asking to whom such payments should be made.38

In assisting John Bell, the Society interacted with several bodies. It contacted the hospital and the doctor caring for Bell to confirm the story and determine the ‘worthiness’ of the case. Following this, it made inquiries into the possibilities of securing a pension for the man, possibly to avoid taking responsibility for the case itself. Having initiated the case, the government continued to receive advice from the Society regarding the client’s progress. John Bell was informed of the options that were open to him. He was granted £1 weekly as a compassionate allowance—the equivalent of the pension he would receive. In a meeting the Society explained that it ‘is quite improbable that the Invalid pension would be granted in this case, as the injury is not permanent, but the Committee thought it should be applied for’.39 In the event that Bell’s application was unsuccessful, the Society would provide an ongoing allowance in lieu of a pension.

For those in receipt of relief, the Societies’ welfare practices meant allowing the women of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, and other Societies, into their homes on a fortnightly basis, or coming under their scrutiny in the office of the Society. Given the individual visitor’s autonomy, the recipient could have no prior expectations as to what assistance might be provided. Ultimately the nature of the relief granted depended upon the approach and the temperament of the visitor in their district. As discussed, the form of relief differed according to each individual application and generally consisted of food, clothing and firewood. Although members generally opposed the provision of cash relief, sometimes it was considered necessary to deviate from this rule. Such assistance was often arranged on a loan basis to be repaid by the recipient over an agreed period of time.

The relief the Societies provided was often the bare minimum necessary to assist a person or family to survive. Sometimes it would be extended only once or twice to help a recipient through a difficult period. For other clients, such assistance was an ongoing commitment and relief was provided on a weekly basis—the compassionate allowance. When this situation appeared a long-term prospect, however, a Society would often commit itself to finding an alternative solution, which might involve institutionalising the client in an asylum or paying their fare to emigrate to a different state.40 In one case, for example, the Melbourne Society commented that ‘it would be wiser to spend the money in

38 22 November 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
39 22 November 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
paying fares than to keep the case on the books'. In the case of Marie Louis, a French woman, the Society arranged for her ‘naturalisation’ to render her eligible for a pension and to relieve itself of responsibility. Any solutions or advice the Societies offered were directed at assisting these people to cope more effectively within the capitalist system by improving their moral standards, becoming more thrifty, working harder and depriving themselves of the pleasures of drinking and gambling. The Societies never questioned the economic and social structures of capitalism itself. They took it upon themselves to become moral missionaries, hoping to save people from destitution by instructing them on the correct way to live and, therefore, to help them, and society, avoid the pitfalls of poverty. For those considered beyond help, the obvious answer was to recognise the hopelessness of the case. The Societies accepted they had limitations in their role as moral saviours.

Ladies and moral authority

Despite having expanded in scope, the Societies’ welfare practices in the 1920s continued to resemble those developed in the 1850s. This can be seen in the statement made by the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society in 1927 that its object was

\[\text{to relieve the wants of the poor, especially women and children, by supplying them with clothing, boots, food, fuel and other necessaries.}\]

During a period of over seventy years, the object of the Societies and the strategy for achieving this purpose had barely changed. Most notably, underlying the Societies’ welfare practices in the 1920s was an almost identical moral code to that which influenced the Melbourne Society’s central purpose in the mid-nineteenth century. The Societies sustained their methods and their belief in their welfare practices over seven decades despite the obvious changes in membership and the external shifts in attitudes towards the role and responsibility of government in welfare and the increasing support for social reform that I discussed in Chapter Two. The Society members of the different eras—that is, the 1850s and the 1920s—had been exposed to different social issues. The status of women had changed dramatically by the 1920s and questions had been raised regarding attitudes towards poverty following the 1890s depression. Yet in the 1920s, the Ladies Benevolent Societies continued to attract women who were committed to the Societies’ moral mission. This continuity was central to the Societies’ enduring authority, and this perpetual was made possible by two vital factors. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Two,
external recognition in Victoria of the Societies' belief in individual moral reform was essential to their position of authority. Secondly, the Societies' organisational culture was crucial to the Societies' internal continuity and the embedded values that were the foundation of their welfare practices and their moral authority.

In sustaining their organisational culture, an important objective of the Societies was to ensure that appropriate women were appointed as members of their organisation—women who would be committed to safeguarding the tradition of benevolent relief and carrying it into the future. The survival of the Societies' moral authority was contingent upon the nature of their membership. The appointment of members, therefore, was an important process. Visitors were granted a large degree of autonomy in their work and the Societies needed confidence in the individual members who carried out this work. Furthermore, the addition of members to the Societies, although highly desirable, was a potentially threatening process. Pierre Bourdieu outlines the types of concerns experienced by members of a group when contemplating new members:

Each member of the group is instituted as a custodian of the limits of the group ... Through the introduction of new members into a family, a clan, or a club, the whole definition of the group—ie, its fines, its boundaries, its identity—is put at stake, exposed to redefinition, alteration, adulteration.44

There was always the looming possibility that the Societies' understanding of themselves and their role in the welfare field might be redefined rather than replicated when new members joined. Visitors of the Societies, therefore, were carefully selected. Whatever the individual motivations of the visitor, the Societies needed to be sure that once appointed she would demonstrate loyalty to the organisation and commitment to its welfare practices. In securing the loyalty and commitment of their members, the Societies' organisational culture was successfully reproduced over several decades.

Generally the Societies felt safe appointing middle class, Christian women of European ancestry. Individually, the women the Societies were composed of tended to be dependent upon their family and marital arrangements to secure social positioning. They were often wealthy women. Despite being a possible indicator of appropriate moral standards, women married to clergymen were generally not wealthy and were often less desirable on the committees of the Societies.45 In addition to clergymen, the husbands of married Society members were prominent individuals in the community, such as

45 11 February 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
businessmen, lawyers, politicians and doctors.\textsuperscript{46} For example, the husband of Gertrude Woinarski was a physician and surgeon, Jessie Henderson's husband was an auctioneer and estate and financial agent,\textsuperscript{47} and Laura Lister was married to a Commonwealth member of Parliament.\textsuperscript{48} Woinarski and Henderson were to become central players in the welfare field during the 1920s and 1930s. Family and educational backgrounds were also significant in the social capital of individual members of the Societies. For example, Henderson was the daughter of a successful land agent and educated at a girls' academy in Hobart.\textsuperscript{49} Edith Kernot, a highly regarded member of the Societies, was educated at a girls' school and was musically gifted. Her musical talent brought her into contact with the Ladies Benevolent Societies at the young age of eight, when she performed at one of their charity concerts, which she continued to do throughout the course of her life.\textsuperscript{50} Henderson, Lister and Kernot all served time as members of the male-dominated Charities Board during the course of their involvement with the Societies.

The wealth and status of the members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies were recognised within society. They were 'women of leisure' who were not compelled to work outside the domestic sphere to contribute to the family income. Furthermore, for those who employed domestic servants, housework was minimal. With considerable spare time, particularly from the age of forty onwards, once their children had grown, these women were able to contribute to the efforts of philanthropic organisations.\textsuperscript{51} The voluntary nature of their contributions was particularly important, demonstrating that they did not need to secure an income, indicating that they were women of leisure and that they acted according to duty or conscience. For the individual women themselves, gaining membership with a Ladies Benevolent Society was considered an important social achievement.

Yet the motivations for joining a Ladies Benevolent Society were not simply about securing social status. Benevolent work was not easy, it was often time-consuming and physically demanding. In her study of women's philanthropy in the nineteenth century, Anne Summers claims that '[n]ot every well-meaning woman was capable of entering the

\textsuperscript{49} Trembath, ‘Jessie Henderson’, p.256.
\textsuperscript{50} Diane Langmore, 'Edith Kernot', \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography}, Volume 15, pp.11-12.

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Many women feared the working classes and their clients, particularly the men. In entering their homes they entered the unknown. 

Discussing the involvement of charitable women in social policy development in Britain, Jane Lewis argues the reasons for women’s involvement in charity were complex. It is probable that a combination of factors contributed to women’s ambition to become members of a Ladies Benevolent Society. These factors included a desire to strive toward the ideal of femininity, to fulfil duty obligations arising from Christian motivations, to alleviate guilt felt by their class position, to perform a service to the community and to achieve greater social status.

The caution exercised by the Societies in their appointment of visitors was particularly important in view of their emphasis on the individual in their welfare practices—both in regard to the autonomy of the visitor and the relationship of the visitor with the client. The significance placed upon the individual was characteristic of both the evangelical movement and trends in capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century. Kathleen Heasman suggests that:

[A] burning concern of the Evangelicals for the state of the soul had a further effect upon the nature of their social work. Each particular person was of infinite worth. Thus they tended to adopt an individualistic attitude to the work they did... Their concern was centred upon the individual and his [or her] family.

Prochaska also connects this emphasis on the individual with evangelical influences and notes the parallels with the nature of capitalism at the time: ‘The enormous influence of the evangelicals... was not unconnected with their individualistic ethic: that each person worked out his or her own salvation was very much in accord with the laissez-faire ethos of the secular world.’ A focus on the individual permeated the Societies’ organisational culture, and was reflected in their welfare practices. Visitors judged the needs of the individual client on their own merits. The Societies could afford to grant their visitors the necessary autonomy in view of the cautious procedures practiced in selecting their members. The visitors’ individual accountability was more broadly connected with a group ethos with which she was expected to conform.

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52 Summers ‘A home from home’, p.42.
53 Summers ‘A home from home’, p.42.
56 Heasman Evangelicals in action, p.20.
57 Prochaska Women and philanthropy, p.8.
The visitor of the Ladies Benevolent Societies could never escape the fact that she was part of a collective. One of her essential duties as a Society member was to attend fortnightly meetings, some of which might last up to five hours. At these meetings she would report on cases she had assisted during the intervening period. Listening to the cases of other members and reporting her own cases was the key moment at which she demonstrated her conformity both to the written and unspoken rules of the organisation. No formal mechanism existed to monitor her work and she was largely left to her own devices. Yet her work could come under the scrutiny of other members. At these meetings the visitor could also learn what was required of her in benevolent work by putting her cases before the committee and listening to how other members dealt with their clients. A commitment to attending meetings was necessary to the sense of unity within and amongst the Societies. The importance placed on attendance at meetings, for example, was stressed in 1936 at a meeting of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. The Executive Committee expressed concern at the lack of attendance by members and reminded them of By-Law 7, which ruled that ‘[a]ny member absent from three successive meetings without leave of absence or explanation shall cease to be a member’.

During the 1920s and 1930s the Societies were continually seeking new members due to a constant shortage of visitors. They claimed that ‘it appears to be difficult to enrol new helpers in this work’. Many women found the work too time-consuming and tiring. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society explained that often ‘the work is hard and depressing’. The members of the Societies claimed they ‘worked for the works sake’, despite inadequate funds and the often ‘humiliating’ nature of the work. The shortage of members created difficulties for those existing visitors of the Societies. Any increase in recipients meant an increased workload for visitors. Despite the problems caused by these shortages, the Societies continued to exercise caution in their appointment of visitors. Some women who expressed interest in joining the Society, were not considered acceptable as members. The Societies would not lower their standards for the recruitment of visitors and remained selective in granting the nod of approval. The appointment of visitors was carefully monitored through the rules of Societies. One rule stated: ‘No member shall have the privilege of proposing a new member to fill any vacancy unless she

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58 Gleeson 'A public space for women', p.197; Swain 'Poor people in Melbourne', p.104.
59 4 February 1937, MLBS, Minutes.
60 MLBS, Constitution and Rules, c1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
61 'Ladies Benevolent Societies', p. 28.
63 MLBS, 84th Annual Report, 1929-1930.
64 Argus, 12 July 1929, p.10.
herself has been a member for at least six months'. 65 This ensured that women were initiated into the organisation and its culture, understanding unspoken codes, before receiving the 'privilege' to suggest the appointment of any women to the Society that she considered appropriate.

While the Societies were prepared to advertise vacancies in administrative and clerical positions, such methods were not used to attract visitors. 66 Recommendation to a Society by a reputable person, and not necessarily a Society member, was essential. 67 The ministers of local churches were considered by the Societies as precisely the kind of reputable person entitled to make such a judgement. In 1926, for example, a member of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society reported that three clergymen 'would be interested in supplying names of parishioners who would make good visitors'. 68 At the same time, however, during the interwar years the Societies were reluctant to appoint more than a set quota of church representatives, such as sisters and deaconesses. 69 Despite possessing the necessary personal qualities, it was undesirable for a Society to be represented largely through church workers. 70 Women of the clergy or married to the clergy potentially lowered the status of the Societies and, as I discuss in later chapters, the Societies did not want to represent one specific church denomination. 71 The Societies also gave consideration to the appointment of visitors suggested by local members of parliament, the Mayor and local city councils, which suggests they sustained some alliances by providing favours to individuals of social standing. 72 Members of the Societies themselves also approached women they believed would be valuable on their committee, though not always with success. 73

The Societies' commitment to appointing a specific type of 'lady' to their membership is revealed in the following example. In March 1936 a woman who had worked with the Carlton Police for thirteen years approached the Melbourne Society seeking a position as a visitor. Her request was declined. Despite the shortage of members, the Society instructed its secretary to write 'thanking Mrs English for her offer, but explaining that at present there was no vacancy on the Committee, and that the work was of a different nature than that in use by the police force'. 74 Mrs English's status, and

65 Constitution and Rules, c1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
66 21 June 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
67 16 July 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
68 14 September 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
69 5 October 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
70 11 February 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
71 Swain 'Poor people in Melbourne', p.105.
72 12 October 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
73 12 October 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
74 31 March 1936, MLBS, Minutes.
the related judgement of her personality, was the central issue in this rejection. One might assume that a police woman would be in a good position to adapt to the work done by the Society. Her police work provided her with experience in dealing with the type of clients the Society assisted. Indeed, the Melbourne Society had acknowledged that the 'Probation Officers and Police Women are especially helpful, and come into contact with most distressing cases'.\textsuperscript{75} Mrs English's work with the police could also be considered advantageous, providing her with a potential sensitivity to cases of imposition and fraud. The undertone of the rejection of Mrs English's request to join the Society was that her social background was inappropriate and that she lacked the desired respectability of a Society member. In 1935, Elsie Baker, a Society lady, proudly stated to the \textit{Argus} that members of committees were carefully selected.\textsuperscript{76}

The Societies' methods of recruitment were recognised by others, yet not always approved of. James Murphy, MLA, a member of the Labor Party, stated in 1933 that 'I understand that if a vacancy occurs the ladies have the power to appoint one of their friends'.\textsuperscript{77} He considered that these methods of recruitment provided evidence that the Societies were not representative of the community they were assisting, and argued that 'the management of the Societies should be re-organized to provide for representation of the workers of the community'.\textsuperscript{78} For the Societies, however, their methods of appointing members were essential to the reproduction of their moral ethos and to a sense of continuity in their self-perception through their organisational culture. They were not dissuaded by this pressure and remained committed to their tradition of membership.

Women in the Societies who held prominent positions were especially important in ensuring this tradition of continuity. The Societies were hierarchical in nature. Members of the Executive held great sway in the decision making process and were involved in discussions on issues before they were addressed with the General Committee. Women in executive positions represented the epitome of the ideal charitable woman. Possessing the qualities that were considered essential in the visitor, they provided role models. As women of perceived wisdom, they offered advice and suggestions to members concerned about their casework, or to members needing advice on other issues that arose in the work of benevolent relief.

In addition to possessing the virtues of femininity, members of the Executive were older women who had a long association with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The Societies believed that women had more to offer later in life when they were mature, wise

\textsuperscript{75} MLBS, 79\textsuperscript{th} Annual Report, 1924-25.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Argus}, 20 September 1935, p.12.
\textsuperscript{77} 5 October 1933, \textit{Victoria\textperiodcentered Parlimentary Debates (VPD), Assembly (A)}, Volume 192, p.1760.
\textsuperscript{78} 5 October 1933, \textit{VPD (A)}, Vol.192, p.1760.
and experienced. This respect for women in their later years was characteristic of women's organisations of the nineteenth century. In her study of Sydney philanthropist Helen Fell, Judith Godden argues 'it appears that women were not considered fit for public responsibilities until they were middle-aged, and so only then did they have the confidence that came from public activities'. The Ladies Benevolent Societies carried this respect for middle-aged and older women into the twentieth century and continued to be influenced by the significance of personal experience in the interwar years.

Positions of leadership were held in high esteem. Membership of the executive committees of the Societies was considered a 'privilege' and only those members with many years of experience in benevolent work were nominated to such positions. In March 1937, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society debated the significance of length of membership on the Executive. A suggested addition to the rules proposed '[t]hat no member of Committee be eligible for Executive office unless she shall have been on the Committee for three years'. Agreement on the issue was not unanimous, with one member expressing that such a rule 'appeared to show a "want of confidence"'. Some members were of the view that such stringent rules on loyalty of service were outmoded and increasingly irrelevant to the appointment of leaders in the Society in the 1930s. Most, however, agreed that 'faithful service should be a factor in addition to ability' and the new rule was introduced. The support for loyal service indicated a commitment to a tradition of leadership. The new measure was a protection of organisational culture against the changing climate in personnel amongst welfare providers, which I discuss in Chapter Seven. Prior to the introduction of this formal rule, the women who were elected President of the Society had generally been associated with the organisation for a number of years. Mrs W. Johns, who was President from 1927 to 1934, had joined the Society in 1905. Gertrude Woinarski held the position of Secretary from 1928 into the 1940s. She had been a member of the Society for twenty-five years before her appointment as Secretary.

During this debate over length of service in March 1937, a second addition to the rules was proposed. It revealed the members' desire to offer greater honour to those who had served as President of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. The motion was passed that 'any retiring President be made Vice-President for the year following her retirement', thereby encouraging ex-Presidents to maintain a prominent role and special input into decision making. Not only was the position of President prestigious, it was
also considered a significant responsibility, difficult and demanding at times, and therefore deserving of reward for service. When the retiring President, Mrs McInerny, was offered congratulations and appreciation of her work in 1926, it was expressed that the ‘Committee realised that more than ordinary knowledge and ability were requisite for such a position and the constant calls upon time and energy were very great’.

A Society member needed to possess ‘wisdom’ and ‘dignity’ to assume the responsibilities associated with the Presidency. Mrs Gillespie was nominated as President and was given a vote of confidence from Mrs McInerny who stated that if she accepted the position, the ‘[m]embers of Committee would be thoroughly satisfied that the right woman was in the right place’. Mrs Gillespie, however, declined the offer, stating her regret at being unable to accept the President’s position, yet thanking them for the ‘honour done to her’.

The contribution of a strong organisational culture to the replication of the Societies’ moral ethos enabled them to successfully develop a tradition of welfare practices from the time of their inception and to carry these practices into the future. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society’s approach to welfare relief was developed and refined in the first ten years of its existence. This approach was practised in much the same fashion into the 1920s. The Societies were committed to this approach not only as a contribution to the community, but also for what it represented as a tradition. Their welfare practices were integral to their self-perception and to how they portrayed themselves to others. By the interwar years, the Societies had developed a loyalty to this tradition and to their founding ethos. They felt in 1938, for example, that the Societies ‘owe it to the plucky women of the past to carry on the torch they lit so long ago’. Indeed the Societies’ loyalty to tradition can also be seen as a form of resistance to changes that questioned ‘ladies’ being moral leaders. Bearing in mind the Societies’ organisational culture and welfare practices, the following discussion provides an illustration of their conservative practices in operation.

**Moral guardians of the family—restoration of the home**

The Ladies Benevolent Societies were upholders of the status quo. They held the institution of the family in high regard in their welfare practices. In his study on the making and breaking of the Australian family, Michael Gilding defines the concept of family as representing ‘a sociopolitical ordering of kinship and co-residence in order to

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84 21 August 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
85 3 September 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
86 28 September 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
87 Tilley ‘Benevolent Societies’ fine efforts’, p.28.
affix relations of obligation and dependence'. The understanding of these relations in the 1920s and 1930s were that women were dependent on men, and that men in return were obliged to provide an income. The Societies' welfare practices were premised on the continuation of these relations of dependence and obligation. Within this context, they asserted their moral authority, attempting to influence cultural norms and to sustain a belief in the institution of the family. Not surprisingly, the Societies opposed welfare reforms that threatened to destabilise the family in its habitual form.

In 1925, the Societies had stated explicitly that their primary objective was to assist in cases 'only where there are women and children'. They were prepared to assist men, but only where women and children would benefit from such help. Generally, the Societies only assisted women with family responsibilities, women who were maintaining a home. In the provision of relief to women and children, the Societies' welfare practices were based on the belief that women's role in society was to maintain the home—both as mother and wife. Marriage was an indication of respectability for women and therefore single women were also affected by this understanding of women's position in society. Single women were expected to strive for respectability by securing a marriage proposition. In their welfare practices, therefore, the Societies aimed to encourage women's capacity as mothers to enable them to nurture present and future generation of workers and good citizens. That is, the Societies supported women’s role as primary carers of their husbands and children.

The Societies were perceived by influential men in government and business to possess a knowledge of the family that was unique to women. In 1927, Robert J. Love, a prominent figure in the welfare field, considered that social service work was 'pre-eminently women’s field of work', especially 'in those activities which had to do with the home and the care of children'. Politicians were equally supportive, with one member of Parliament stating in 1928 that 'the Societies are a boon to the worker, who is sometimes a widow, sometimes a deserted wife, and sometimes a man out of work for some period, and whose children are starving ... these charitable organizations ... are endeavouring to help needy people to help themselves'.

Concern for the well-being of children—the future generation and therefore the nation's 'greatest asset'—was widely held, with politicians and other charitable organisations often turning their attention to the fate of children. Raising children in a

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89 21 July 1925, MLBS, Minutes.
91 *Argus*, 25 July 1933.
healthy environment was important. Ensuring the family could achieve the good moral
upbringing of children therefore was essential. In its Annual Report of 1927, the Charities
Board stressed the significance of the family in the work of charity. I discuss the role of
the Board and its relationship with the Societies in greater depth in Chapter Four. Briefly,
the Board was an important statutory authority formed in the early 1920s to coordinate
welfare activity amongst charitable organisations. Its opinions on welfare practices were
influential within the welfare field. The Board claimed that:

The object of philanthropic workers must be towards cleaning up our country ... All methods of advice and encouragement, supplemented in extreme cases by
pressure, must be brought to bear on individuals, and family bonds must be
maintained together with family obligations to the fullest capacity so that re-
establishment of the home is the greater concern and disintegration the last
resort.93

To secure the right surroundings for raising children, the family had to be kept together
and in 'normal' conditions—presumably meaning in a situation of no poverty. These
carens were reiterated in 1928, when the Board expressed that the aim of social service
was to 'restore homes to their normal conditions'.94 The Societies were committed to this
restoration of the home. In 1935, for example, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society
explained that it 'had always been the desire of Society workers to rehabilitate families'.95

In comparison with men, the morality of women was generally considered less
questionable.96 Women tended to be viewed with greater sympathy than the male
breadwinner. For men there were high expectations of securing an income to keep the
family home well provided for. The destitute position of some women could often be
blamed upon a deserting husband, the death of a husband, the sickness of the
breadwinner, the inability of the breadwinner to find employment, the imprisonment of
the husband and the loss of income through a husband's immoral tendencies, such as
drinking and gambling. Indeed, women who made an effort to distance themselves from
the immoral influence of a husband who drank, gambled or abused his wife, were often
treated kindly by the Societies. Their dependence on the Ladies Benevolent Societies was
considered more beneficial to the community than their potential moral degradation
through exposure and dependence upon an immoral husband. Furthermore, dependence
on the Societies was often considered temporary. These women were encouraged to find
their own means of income.

93 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1927.
94 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1162.
95 29 October 1935, MLBS, Minutes.
96 J. Roe (1988) 'The end is where we start from: Women and welfare since 1901', in C. V. Baldock and
The case of Mrs Hyne reveals the room for discretion in the Societies' approach to assisting women and children. Mrs Hyne was found to have applied to the Society under a false name. Ordinarily, visitors frowned upon such dishonesty, resulting in the loss of her sympathy and support. In the case of Mrs Hyne, however, her ‘imposition’ was overlooked when it was discovered that she was attempting to escape difficult circumstances. In the face of this, it was recognised that Mrs Hyne had successfully taken steps to create a better existence for herself:

the husband a R.S. [returned soldier] but she had left him as he was a confirmed drunkard. She had been able to keep herself for a time by making clothes for children—the bailiffs had seized table and machine. Temporary help given in this case.97

The children were an important consideration. The Society approved of Mrs Hyne’s efforts to secure a more morally healthy upbringing for her children. Her fear of being labelled ‘unrespectable’ in having no husband or provider was the probable cause of her initial dishonesty regarding her name, which was considered understandable. The Society did not follow the usual course of action for dealing with imposters, which was to place charges. Instead it chose to give Mrs Hyne a second chance to make the best of her decision to leave her alcoholic husband and to provide her children a better chance in life. This woman could be ‘saved’ by the Society’s assistance. This was an obvious exception to the type of fraudulent behaviour that the Societies generally disapproved of and went to great lengths in their welfare practices to prevent.

The Societies believed women were vital to the smooth functioning of the home environment and their welfare practices were flexible in order to encourage a strong female presence in the home. The perceived value of a woman’s presence in the home is revealed in the following case. On 12 February 1929, a client, Mr Mifsud, who was out of work and whose wife was in a convalescent home, approached the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society for assistance with the payment of a gas bill. The position was described as ‘desperate’. Gertrude Woinarski visited the case and explained to her colleagues that the man ‘became mentally deranged temporarily, and a tragedy was narrowly averted’.98 Woinarski determined that Mr Mifsud was not coping well during his wife’s absence. She arranged, therefore, to have her ‘returned to him’ from the convalescent home, where she quite possibly had not recovered from an illness. The Society believed Mr Mifsud would cope more adequately with the nurturing presence of his wife. A year later, the Society visited the case again when the Mifsud family was confronted by financial distress. Mrs Blagdon, a visitor from the Hawthorn Ladies Benevolent Society, had ‘interested herself in

97 20 July 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
98 12 February 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
this case, of which she thinks very highly’. 99 She ‘reported having called personally at Mifsud’s residence … and being greatly impressed with the cleanliness and attention given to the home’.100 With the wife’s return, the family had been ‘rehabilitated’ and ‘normal’ conditions resumed. Mrs Mifsud was clearly viewed by the Society as an important presence and at the centre of wellbeing in the home. Without her, her husband could not adequately manage the home. When she was there, the house was clean and respectable, and Mr Mifsud had the support from which to fulfil his obligations as a breadwinner should he secure employment.

The Societies also assisted large numbers of women independently of the family context—in particular deserted women, widows and older women. This assistance was often in the form of the compassionate allowance. These allowances were generally ongoing, in a similar sense to a pension. The Societies received special funding from the Treasury to provide these allowances.101 The amounts provided, however, were often not sufficient for the recipient to live on. The compassionate allowance was not a fixed amount, and in keeping with the methods of the Societies, allowances varied from case to case. They were not based upon a means test as pensions were, but rather upon the visitor’s judgement of the client’s perceived need. Compassionate allowances were granted to those clients considered in a ‘helpless’ position, such as the aged and the invalid. Many had already been refused an Old Age and Invalid Pension through failure to meet the eligibility requirements. For example, the client might not meet the twenty year residential requirement for an old age pension, such as Mrs Macpherson, who in 1928 had ‘only been in Australia’ for fifteen years and was therefore granted a compassionate allowance due to her ineligibility for a pension.102

Compassionate allowances were often granted to older women, usually widowed, who ‘although not yet in the sixties, are virtually placed on the “scrap heap”’.103 A woman had to be sixty years of age to receive an Old Age Pension. The Societies were sympathetic towards women applicants of ‘advanced years’ who did not meet the age requirement for a government pension. The compassionate allowance, however, was not restricted by age. Although unfixed, the amounts paid in compassionate allowances were usually the equivalent to the pension—£1 weekly.104 It was available ‘to various persons not eligible for pensions, yet not young enough to work; or they may be young, but in ill-

99 28 January 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
100 28 January 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
101 Minutes of the Charities Board, 31 October 1923, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49.
102 28 August 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
104 For example, see 10 May 1927, 19 July 1927, 18 December 1928, 15 January 1929, MLBS, Minutes; Victorian Year Books, 1927-28, 1929-30.
health'. In all applications for compassionate allowances, the Society made a personal investigation into the exact nature of the situation. As with other cases these women were expected to meet a criterion of respectability and to conform to behaviour considered by the Societies as appropriate for women. The Societies would obtain a ‘police report in the usual manner’ to provide a character reference in cases that were not referred by a ‘respectable’ member of the public, such as a politician, judge or reverend. Having determined a woman was of good character and after inquiries revealed that she had tried all possible avenues before approaching the Society—calling upon relatives or friends for help—a compassionate allowance would usually be granted.

In the provision of assistance to women, the Societies were particularly concerned by the possible effects that hardship might have upon their morality. Despite being considered less susceptible to immoral influences than men, working class women were perceived as more at risk of demoralisation than women of the Societies’ class and status. A major task for the Societies, therefore, was to prevent the demoralisation of women. Poverty and despair caused by the loss of the primary breadwinner were the ingredients for a potential decline in respectability and morality. Like all applicants, therefore, female applicants were exposed to the moral assessment of the Society visitor. They were subjected to expectations of conforming to an ideal of respectability. The Societies provided, or refused, relief in accordance with their own understanding of these concepts. When coming across a ‘very intoxicated’ Mrs Holmes, for example, the visitor, Mrs Bevan, ‘refused to help her further’.

Determining how to assist mothers in poverty was a primary concern for the Societies. They hoped to help keep families together, for the sake of children. They also wanted to ensure that children were raised in a positive moral environment. These underlying considerations formed the basis of the Societies’ inquiries. Women left to fend alone were susceptible to immoral influences. Striking the ideal balance between sustaining the family bond and protecting children from immoral behaviour—such as drinking, gambling, swearing, dishonesty and sexual promiscuity—was a difficult task for the visitor from the Societies. At what point should the children be removed from their mother’s care? Did the mother nurture a home environment in which a child could be ‘properly’ raised? When did the mother’s perceived immoral behaviour have negative consequences upon the child’s moral development? At one of its fortnightly meetings in 1933, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society expressed concern about the ‘distressing cases in

106 Roe ‘The end is where we start from’, p.3.
107 28 June 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
which women of questionable character were still allowed to retain possession of their children.\textsuperscript{109} They were reluctant, however, to prematurely remove children from their home environment and were therefore cautious in making such recommendations.

Sexual promiscuity perceived by the Societies to be a particular behavioural trait from which children needed to be shielded. Vera B. was one such woman from whom the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society felt her children should be protected. At the fortnightly meeting on 8 June 1937:

Mrs Martin reported the case of Vera B. who has already had one child, ... another expected in three months ... Vera B. is attending the V.D. clinic, and is not working at present, though, prior to this, was engaged at a laundry. The Committee were greatly perturbed at this condition of things and advised Mrs Martin to place the facts before Policewoman Cleary, in the hope of getting some action relative to placing the woman under supervision, and thus protecting the prospective infant and the public.\textsuperscript{110}

There was no mention of Vera B.'s marital status. Nor was there any mention of the father of either the child or the unborn child. She was one of the few women who was referred to by her first name, which leads me to speculate that she might have been an unmarried mother. Vera B. was the mother, and in the Societies' view, the important moral influence upon her children. In view of her attendance at the VD clinic, and her perceived sexual misconduct, this woman was not considered a suitable guardian of her own children. She was the type of client who, without employment and a means of income, might venture into prostitution. To prevent this, police supervision was viewed as necessary.

In the case of Mrs Mousely, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was clear in how it dealt with 'immoral' women. In 1933 her case was discussed at length. Mrs Mousely was 'unfavourably' known to the Society under a different name. She had three children, each fathered by a different man. In addition to this, the woman was 'thriftless', unable to keep up her rent payments and, consequently, was facing eviction. The case had been passed on by the Sustenance Department, which had been paying her rent for six weeks, and 'now refused to do anything further'. The pressing concern for the Society when they approached this case was the children. Little sympathy was expressed for Mrs Mousely. With her 'being of immoral character, it was considered inadvisable that these children, the eldest of whom is eleven years of age, should be left with the mother'.\textsuperscript{111} Maintaining the bond of family in this case was of less concern to the Society than the children's continued exposure to their mother's lack of moral fibre. Ensuring a respectable

\textsuperscript{109} 13 June 1933, MLBS, Minutes.  
\textsuperscript{110} 8 June 1937, MLBS, Minutes.  
\textsuperscript{111} 4 April 1933, MLBS, Minutes.
environment for the children was vital. In the assessment of Mrs Mousely, the factors that counted were, firstly, that she was sexually promiscuous (evidenced by the fact that each child had a different father) and, secondly, that she was of dishonest character (she used false names and lied to obtain welfare relief). The best course of action, in the Society’s opinion, was to have her children removed from her care.

These cases were amongst those that the Societies attempted to avoid. Single women who had borne a child outside marriage, also known as ‘fallen’ women, were generally considered outside the scope of the Societies. With their focus essentially on maintaining the family, the Societies preferred not to concern themselves with the plight of the ‘immoral’ single woman. They readily assisted deserving single women—those who had been deserted or widowed. The unmarried mother, however, had already ‘fallen’ and was therefore considered immoral and beyond salvation. She was best left in the hands of other institutions and organisations whose objective was to address the future of the children of these women, such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. In the 1920s and 1930s, adoption was increasingly viewed as the solution to this ‘problem’. In 1932, for example, prominent Society member, Jessie Henderson, ‘strongly advocated child adoption’.

The Societies were also accustomed to dealing with the married unemployed man—the family provider. Although originally associated with the provision of relief to women and children, the Societies’ role as moral guardians of the family led to concern about the potential effects of unemployment on women and children. When unemployment was high, the consequences for women were a primary consideration for the Societies:

In many cases the women have stepped into the breach and have attempted the threefold job of wage-earner, wife and mother. Many have broken down under the strain.

The status of the male breadwinner, therefore, was as much a concern to them as the provision of relief to his family. Unemployment relief was central to the Societies’ welfare practices, or cultural capital. To them, the goal of social progress through individual moral reform relied heavily upon sustaining and improving the work ethic of the working class. Unemployment, directly and indirectly, led to other social problems and potential dependence on charity. Alongside unemployment of the main breadwinner often came the destitution of wives, children, the elderly and the disabled.

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113 *Argus*, 16 March 1932.
114 *Argus*, 2 March 1929.
The Societies' concern about the effects of unemployment went beyond a desire to prevent the extension of their services. Once an unemployed worker had resorted to calling upon the generosity of the charitable, the potential for dependence upon the goodwill of others would be heightened. Maintaining a work ethic and a sense of responsibility to the family among working class men was essential to the operations of capitalism. Regular work provided a family with regular income and the capacity to raise a future generation of workers. It diverted the attention of the working class from developing a sense of dissatisfaction, and helped to prevent social unrest. Regular employment promoted a sense of self-help, a sense of responsibility and led to the development of good morals. Unemployment, on the other hand, threatened such positive developments by removing the regularity of work, damaging the confidence of the worker and potentially leading to feelings of resentment.

The unemployed feared the power the Societies held over their economic well-being and were often hostile to the degree of intervention resorted to by the Societies. For example, one man responded to two visitors from the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society by throwing the food parcel they had provided in the street, shouting after them: 'here's your charity. Take it and your investigations somewhere else'. The charity that was administered by the Societies had long been viewed with suspicion and hostility by sections of the unemployed, which was recognised by members of the government. In 1922, Mr Prendergast, the leader of the Victorian Labor Party at the time, stated that with regard to the relief by the Ladies Benevolent Societies, it is known that many persons object to the examination to which they are subjected ... there are many persons who will not accept assistance from these societies in view of the questioning on the part of those who distribute relief. The Societies were not deterred by such comments. They believed in their practice of unemployment relief and had faith in their moral authority. They considered that those they helped could not always appreciate what the Societies offered them. In 1927, Mrs Gillespie, of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, 'thanked the members for their work, more especially as in very many instances, it was very thankless and visitors were subjected to a great deal of misunderstanding'. Yet despite such misunderstandings, the members of the Societies continued to believe they could save the unemployed, and in doing this they were providing a service to society. Yet, the Societies were also fearful of the potential power of the unemployed and sought to prevent the unemployed's dissatisfaction and hostility to conditions of unemployment.

115 Quoted in Garton Out of luck, p.121.
118 20 December 1927, MLBS, Minutes.
Assisting the unemployed was, therefore, a delicate matter. The aim was to discourage dependence upon charity, yet to provide assistance to those in financial distress. Determining how to provide this assistance necessitated careful investigation into cases to discover ‘the real cause of their difficulties’. Discovering the ‘real cause’ behind an application for relief had several purposes, all intertwined with discouraging the ‘loafer’ and the ‘professional beggar’. The loafer was dependent upon charity, having lost the will to work. Considering them lazy and irresponsible, the Societies worked to rehabilitate such members of society back into the workforce through moral instruction. The professional beggar was a particular concern. Clever and immoral, this category of recipient was the type who ‘imposed’ upon charity through fraudulent claims.

The suspicion of imposition and fraud on the goodwill of the Societies, and the associated poor morals, motivated ‘the meticulous care that was shown in investigating each case’ resulting in what was described as a ‘long exhaustive cross-examination’. In the case of the unemployed relief applicant, the Society visitor would consider whether the applicant was made redundant, and if so, under what circumstances. Had the applicant been involved in any misdemeanours? If so, what was the nature of these wrong-doings? They might be a potential ‘imposter’ on a Society, or become a ‘professional beggar’. Did the applicant resign willingly, and if so, for what reasons? Why had the applicant not arranged a replacement job? In such cases, the Societies would guard against the potential ‘loafer’. Or was the applicant genuinely in need of relief, having found himself unemployed through no fault of his own? The queries seemed endless, yet were vital to the Societies’ approach and in the 1920s were generally applauded by government, business and other participants in the welfare field.

A tradition of moral authority

The Societies’ concerns for the morality of their clients and the influence of immorality on innocent children, in particular, were concerns that had existed for them since their inception in the 1850s. The welfare practices that emerged in response to these concerns involved a complex procedure of responding to calls for assistance, investigating the worthiness of the potential recipient and providing moral guidance to those who received the material aid of the Societies. These practices were widely recognised and valued by prominent men in the welfare field and were therefore critical to the Societies’ experience of authority. Despite the resistance of many recipients to the interference of the Societies, the widespread approval of their welfare practices (alongside the Societies sense of self-
importance and commitment to the values underlying their practices), contributed to the practices becoming embedded in the Societies' organisational culture.

This organisational culture was a manifestation of the Societies' habitus, or 'founding ethos', and contributed to the ongoing commitment of Society members to their welfare practices. This enabled them to be replicated over decades with minimal change—irrespective of changes external to the Societies and of membership changes within the Societies. Indeed, the appointment of members and the processes of initiation contributed to embedding welfare practices within the organisational culture. The Societies became an institution of sorts, independent of the individual membership within them. They represented a certain code of practice and many women aspired to be involved in the work of the Societies. Over several decades, the Societies' welfare practices became embedded in the organisational culture and consequently became 'habitual' as the culture replicated itself through the individual members commitment to the 'institution' of the Societies.

This commitment to the institution of the Societies came into question by certain individual members of the Societies in the late 1920s and 1930s, women who were responding to external pressures for change that they perceived threatened the existence of this powerful network of women's organisations. These women attempted to change the 'habits' of an institution that had come to pride itself on its heritage and everything that that heritage encompassed in values and beliefs. The Societies' response to change, and the internal conflicts that emerged as a consequence of this response, is the focus of the following chapters.
Chapter Four

Sustaining Authority

New welfare practices in the 1920s

Previous chapters have established that prior to 1920 the Ladies Benevolent Societies held a position of moral authority in the welfare field based upon their welfare practices, which reflected their habitus—the values inherent within their founding ethos. I argued that the condition necessary for the legitimation of the Societies' authority was a tradition of philanthropy which encapsulated the Evangelical notion of social progress through individual moral reform and a belief in middle class women's moral purity. I have indicated, however, that traditional understandings of social progress came into question in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Modern ideas of reforming the collective, social mind and introducing rational social and economic policies received increasing attention as alternatives to the goal of social progress. These ideas were kept in balance with the enduring 'capital' that supported the Ladies Benevolent Societies well into the twentieth century.

In this chapter my focus is on the 1920s, a decade characterised by debate. In tracing the relevant debates of the decade, this chapter does not always follow a clear chronology. The key debates occurring in those years overlapped at times. In these years there was a renewed effort by advocates of welfare reform—politicians, bureaucrats and prominent individuals in private charity—to intensify the pressure for change that had been simmering since the 1890s. Maintaining a watch on international trends and shifts occurring in the broader social and political fields, modernists argued for a more efficient, economic, 'scientific' welfare field based upon technical skill and expertise. Those who favoured reform pushed for centralised welfare planning, uniform welfare practices focused on preventative methods, and increased government responsibility in the coordination of the welfare field. The introduction of modern welfare practices would create a welfare field to meet the needs of modern society.

The Ladies Benevolent Societies were agents in this process of welfare reform, both in their resistance to change and in their desire to secure a new form of authority amidst such change. Many aspects of their behaviour were seemingly inconsistent in their struggle to adapt to welfare reform. This struggle was manifested in internal conflict. Some Societies retained a commitment to the tradition of moral authority they had exercised for several decades and the associated values that were reflected in their welfare practices. The strength of their belief in individual moral reform became apparent in the midst of efforts to coordinate and reform the welfare field. At the same time, some Societies toyed with
ideas of welfare reform. Aware of a potential new avenue for the expansion of the Societies' influence, they sought a new form of authority based on modern welfare practices. Accepting change required some receptiveness to modern understandings of social progress and some efforts to acquire new cultural capital.

Two prominent members of the Societies were particularly active in advocating a new form of authority for the Societies in the welfare field—Jessie Henderson and Gertrude Woinarski. Henderson was a highly regarded and well respected member of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, having had a long history of involvement with them. In 1891, at the age of 25, Henderson had joined the Hawthorn Society. This was also the year she married George Gabriel Henderson, an estate and financial agent, which was followed by a busy period raising her six children. Alongside her involvement with the Ladies Benevolent Societies, Henderson became involved with many other women's organisations in her mid-forties. She was a founding member of the Housewives Association of Victoria, she served as the president of the Melbourne District Nursing Society from 1923 to 1947, and she was on the executive of the National Council of Women of Victoria for over twenty years. Henderson was a strong advocate for the equal treatment of women in the sphere of welfare work. She was supportive of reforms to welfare practices. In particular, she advocated reforms that would secure a central role for the Societies in the welfare field of the future, stating in 1929 that the 'Benevolent Societies have had the germ of advancement lying dormant for a long time; it is now developing strongly and vigorously'.

In the 1920s, Jessie Henderson was increasingly of the view that the present conditions of relief work were chaotic. She foresaw great potential for the Ladies Benevolent Societies in a more coordinated welfare field, and hoped that it would not be long before a better understanding of their work came into existence. Henderson, it could be argued, possessed values that were akin to more 'modern' welfare practices based on the achievement of social progress through science, technology and an emphasis on the psychological well-being of citizens. She believed that 'applied social science' should be implemented to assess the anxieties in the home, the health of children and the improvement of education. Open-minded and receptive to new ideas, she saw advantages in training social workers, favoured the introduction of reforms that would 'systematise'

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2. Letter from J. Henderson to E. Bleazby, 24 October 1929, Public Records Office (PRO) Series (S) 4523/R1, Unit (U) 60, Item 563.
3. 28 February 1929, Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Societies (MLBS), Minutes.
4. *Argus*, 1 April, 1921, p.6.
the welfare system, and advocated increased government involvement in the welfare field. Henderson envisaged a role for the Societies in these reforms and sought to bring changes in women's status into the realm of welfare work. Highly respected within the field of Societies, she held an influential position and the potential to achieve her goals. A significant goal in her push for change was not only convincing other prominent agents in welfare of her vision for the Societies, but also other women who worked within the Societies and who were resistant to change.

Henderson argued that the Societies had never received 'proper' recognition of their role in the welfare field. She made the point that 'with their experience and knowledge and the advice it was in their power to give, [the Societies] had never under the old conditions been given their proper place in the philanthropic world'. Despite the obvious authority of the Societies, debate surrounding the introduction of many welfare reforms was to force the memory and understanding of this authority into question. Henderson's argument that the Societies had never received proper recognition queried the memory of their having held an influential and prominent position in the welfare field for more than half a century. Here was an attempt on the part of Henderson and her supporters to create a new memory of the Societies' position and role within the field. The process required a changed understanding of themselves, for the new, properly recognised position of the Societies was to involve an acceptance of new welfare practices, or cultural capital, based on a modern understanding of social progress. In order to achieve this, Henderson was aware of the need to make an effort to dissociate from welfare practices associated with the nineteenth century.

Gertrude Woinarski, the Secretary of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, stood alongside Henderson in support of her visions and ideas. Woinarski joined the Society in 1901, at the age of 28. Like Henderson, she was admired and respected amongst members of the Societies, politicians and other participants in the welfare field. In 1926, Woinarski secured the position of Secretary, and following this she spent considerable time interacting with other agents within the welfare field. One member of parliament commented in the Legislative Assembly that '[s]he is one of the finest women who do work of [a charitable] nature. She is rendering immense service ... This lady can be fully trusted ..., and the workers have confidence in her'. Within the network of Societies, Woinarski played a prominent role. The characteristics that she was most admired for, and that were frequently commented upon, were her 'tact', 'wisdom', her 'kindly manner' and her 'good judgement'. These qualities were those associated with traditional welfare practices—of good women carrying out the work of benevolence.

5 Argus, 1 June 1929.
6 23 December 1929, Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), Assembly (A), Volume 181, p.629.
Woinarski's support for securing a new form of authority for the Societies is interesting in view of her continued commitment to traditional welfare practices. She was representative of the fluctuating and inconsistent ideas and behaviour that often characterised the Societies in the interwar years. Woinarski had been initiated into their organisational culture. In 1929, she gave evidence to the Royal Commission into Child Endowment as a representative of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. Her evidence reveals her changing attitudes on the causes of poverty, the most effective welfare practices and the Societies' role in the welfare field. She believed that people sought help from the Societies because 'they never obtain a proper outlook on life—they simply exist'. Through the moral missionary approach of the Societies, benevolent women could help their clients to gain a 'proper outlook on life'. Indeed, the Societies were experienced in instructing the poor on manners, moral conduct and proper behaviour. Woinarski's reflection on the client's 'outlook on life', however, reveals a concern with the mind and psychology of those who 'simply exist'. Notably, she was interested in the Societies adopting a more considered approach to welfare provision—that is, she believed 'relief should be curative rather than palliative'. Woinarski did not expand upon her views on curative relief, but what is evident is her belief that welfare provision needed to extend beyond its present limitations of relieving need based on the respectability of clients. While she did not abandon such notions, she was prepared to reassess her views on welfare practices.

Woinarski was aware of the significance of the changes occurring in the welfare field and was open to exploring alternative directions for the Societies. She recognised that 'for some time the organisation of benevolent societies has been criticised by the workers themselves'. She believed it was no longer appropriate for the Societies to retain individual autonomy, stating it was 'mistaken policy to regard every unit as a distinct unit'. She considered that the dogmatic assertion of individual autonomy prevented the achievement of cooperation amongst charitable organisations. Woinarski was aware that to sustain authority, the Societies needed to adapt to change, stating 'I think the time has come when some coordination is necessary'. By the late 1920s, she was prepared to adopt modern ideas concerning welfare reform. That is, she was open to accepting different visions of social progress than those that aspired to individual moral reform. She

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7 I discuss the Societies' involvement in the debate surrounding this issue in Chapter Six.
8 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, R. J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 1928-29, p.1153.
9 Argus, 28 February 1929, p.7.
10 Argus, 28 February 1929, p.7.
11 Argus, 28 February 1929, p.7.
was not averse to notions of reforming the collective mind through a scheme of coordinated welfare practices.

**Charities Board—agent of welfare reform**

In the early 1920s, Henderson’s strength of commitment to welfare reform first became evident in her support for the introduction of a controversial Charities Board. In August 1920, she expressed her view on the Hospitals and Charities Bill which contained provisions for the proposed Board:

> Charity legislation is largely experimental, but, in the interests of philanthropic work in Victoria, may I urge that the bill be given a chance, and that side issues be not allowed to endanger a measure which might be productive of much benefit to the community.  

The Treasurer, Sir William McPherson, of the conservative National Party, proposed the Board’s formation. The primary objective was to coordinate welfare activities through a central body that would administer funding and overlook the work of charitable organisations. McPherson stated that ‘the question of charity reform has been prominently before the public of this State for not less than thirty years’. In proposing the Charities Board, he claimed ‘I believe in effecting economies’. McPherson’s proposal emerged from a concern with too much waste and extravagance in the welfare field. He believed that through coordination, the problems of overlapping and imposition on the welfare system could be effectively dealt with. He stated that ‘I do feel that if [the Charities Board] is put into operation we shall have a very much better system than we have at the present time’. While McPherson couched the new legislation in terms of reducing the Treasury’s responsibility, the reality was that the Minister would retain the ultimate authority in decisions proposed by the Charities Board. The Board, however, was to be invested with considerable authority. McPherson stated that ‘[t]o make the Board more important, we are giving it statutory power’.

Controversy surrounded the proposed legislation, raising concerns that it ‘will lead to an undue interference by the Government’. The Charities Bill represented a direction in

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13 Argus, 27 August 1920.
14 4 August 1920, VPD (A), Vol.155, p.605; Argus, 5 August 1920.
15 4 August 1920, VPD (A), Vol.155, p.618.
16 4 August 1920, VPD (A), Vol.155, p.618.
18 4 August 1920, VPD (A), Vol.155, p.615.
government that for progressives and traditionalists within conservative circles was the cause of considerable conflict. Conservative politics in the 1920s were rife with factionalism. Indeed, Victorian politics were generally unstable during this period. Eight separate ministries formed governments from 1923 to 1929, of which six were conservative coalitions. Traditionalists in government, business and charitable organisations opposed the Charities Bill. Preoccupation with the perceived evils of government intervention was at the forefront of this opposition. On the whole, in the early 1920s, the platforms of traditional conservatives in Victoria were based on opposition to socialism and increased taxation.20

Representatives of a new conservative middle class, however, sought to create a new social order, aiming to establish a political party that would ‘protect the interests of “unorganised” people in the community who were neither blue-collar workers nor wealthy employers’.21 These ‘progressive’ conservatives were dissatisfied with the condition of politics in Victoria. Conservative in their desire to preserve existing political institutions, these new politicians were also progressive in their desire for increased government intervention and planning to achieve greater efficiency in public financing. Wilfred S. Kent Hughes and Robert G. Menzies were two important figures in this movement for a new political order. Kent Hughes was to play an important role in the welfare field, which I discuss in Chapter Five. Viewing the increased intervention of government on social issues favourably, these progressives believed in the advantages of centralised systems of welfare planning, anticipating greater coordination and efficiency in welfare provision.22 They were therefore supportive of reforms such as the new Charities Board.

Traditionalists, on the other hand, were fearful of how new government responsibilities might affect the social and political order. These concerns were highlighted in the debates. The conservative newspaper, the Argus, was active in fostering the concerns of traditionalists, stating:

the politicians’ itch to have a hand in every organisation which handles money has led to an agitation for the Government administration of charity ... Possibly the present Ministry will administer the bill, if it should become law, with sympathy and intelligence; but in the hands of a Labour [sic] Ministry it would lead to chaotic conditions, and probably to the choking of the well-springs of private benevolence. The measure looks very like a sop to the Labour Party.23

23 Argus, 5 August 1920.
Traditionalists were confident that conservative politicians would use the new Charities Board to sustain the capitalist system. Their hesitations regarding the Bill's passage centred around how a Labor ministry might take advantage of this shift towards greater government intervention. In the context of an active international socialist movement, the fear of the 'red menace' was heightened, and Labor's sympathies for communism were a perceived threat. Concerns of government intervention, however, ran deeper than fears of how the Labor Party might use such a measure. In a later editorial, the Argus stated that 'at the present time magnificent work is being done gratuitously by private individuals, and it is being done efficiently'. The Argus attacked the Bill, stating that the 'spirit of charity is a very precious possession in a community, and ought to be jealously safeguarded'. The work of welfare relief was far better administered by these organisations than 'in an atmosphere of irksome official direction at every turn'.

The introduction of a body such as the Charities Board was a threat to the evangelical tradition of philanthropy that had successfully avoided government interference in the welfare field. It represented the modernist trend in social planning, which traditionalists opposed. McPherson defended the Bill and assured its opponents that in proposing the Board, there was no intention to discourage charitable workers from maintaining an important role within the community. A traditionalist himself, it is interesting that McPherson could see the potential in creating a central body through which welfare planning could occur. His support for this progressive reform was indicative of the vacillating attitudes surrounding the controversial issue of government intervention. McPherson possibly consoled himself with the thought that the Charities Board did not represent direct government intervention. Importantly, the Board would encourage coordination and the development of efficient welfare practices. The outcome would be a cost effective system that aimed to address the problem of poverty. One thing most progressives and traditionalists could agree upon was the need for tighter spending and greater cost efficiency. Modernity and charity were not mutually exclusive.

Henderson was not alone amongst the Ladies Benevolent Societies in her support for the Charities Board. Despite their general opposition to government intervention and their concern with protecting charitable interests, on the whole the Societies favoured a Board. Indeed, Henderson stated:

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24 Argus, 5 August 1920.
25 Argus, 9 August 1920.
26 Argus, 11 August 1920.
The fact that so little criticism has been levelled against the bill from the 170 or more societies in existence in this state which will come under its provisions should augur well for its passage through Parliament.\textsuperscript{27}

The Societies were encouraged by comments from McPherson and other members of government who emphasised a continued role for the Societies in the event of the legislation's enactment. Mr Edgar, MLC, for example, favoured the introduction of a Charities Board, commenting that 'so long as the direct control was left in the hands of independent women and their committees, the best result for the money expended would be obtained'.\textsuperscript{28} In the 1890s, the Societies were unprepared to hand over such authority to the male-dominated Charity Organisation Society. In June 1922, however, when debate continued on the issue, the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies passed a resolution stating it ‘approves in the main of the Hospitals and Charities Bill introduced by Mr McPherson, MLA, Treasurer’.\textsuperscript{29} The greatest cause for concern amongst the Societies was in the representation of women on the proposed Charities Board.

McPherson proposed to appoint two women members to a Board of fourteen members. He claimed that:

I am convinced that it is a wise plan to have women on this Board. There are a number of matters connected with these institutions which can be looked after very much better by women than by men ... I am satisfied that putting two women on the Board will be highly advantageous.\textsuperscript{30}

Whilst McPherson was somewhat patronising in his gesture to include women on the Board, it was at least some recognition of women’s authority in the welfare field. The Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies, however, was not satisfied with the gesture and was ‘of opinion that a larger number of women on the board is desirable in view of the number of women engaged in charitable work’.\textsuperscript{31} Jessie Henderson agreed that there should be more women and expressed her view that one third of the members of the Charities Board should be women.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1922, after considerable debate, the government passed the \textit{Hospitals and Charities Act}, which provided for the establishment of a Charities Board.\textsuperscript{33} The formation of the

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Argus}, 27 August 1920.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Argus}, 17 November 1921.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Argus}, 16 June 1922.


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Argus}, 16 June 1922.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Argus}, 16 June 1922.

\textsuperscript{33} Hospitals were also to fall within the scope of the proposed legislation. The inclusion of hospitals and charities in the legislation indicated the broad nature of coordination that advocates of the Bill envisaged. Prior to the 1920s, there were no ‘public’ hospitals in the present sense. Hospitals were funded by a mixture
Board was a significant achievement for advocates of modern welfare practices. It represented a new direction in the welfare field. The Board was to become a key agent in the process of welfare reform. The successful passage of the legislation marked the beginning of a centralised system of welfare planning in Victoria. The Board's objectives focused on the achievement of more efficient coordination of welfare providers in the field. It was authorised to report to the Minister with its opinions on those institutions or Benevolent Societies it considered entitled to subsidy. A Hospitals and Charities Fund was created through the provisions of the Act. The Board suggested the amount of money it considered these organisations should be allocated. The Inspector of Charities, directly responsible to both the Board and the Treasury, undertook the role of advising the government on funding for charitable organisations. The aim was efficient and cost-effective spending on welfare.

The Board was also expected to make recommendations for reforming welfare practices in the hope of minimising duplication of effort and improving efficiency in welfare provision. Related to this was its role as adviser on social welfare legislation. In this task, the Board was empowered to make any inquiries into subsidised charitable institutions or societies that it considered necessary. The Board's interpretation of its responsibilities was 'supervising and systematising the work of all those agencies which give relief in sickness, distress and destitution in every form, and which derive their income in whole or in part from private contributions, thus covering the whole field of public hospitals and philanthropic organisations'. The Board and the government were to develop a close working relationship, yet as distinctly separate bodies with differing roles. Notably the Board was critical in preventing government intervention in welfare provision. The Board became a central participant in the welfare field, securing a position of authority.

Charitable women, however, had not succeeded in securing greater representation on the Board. Two women were appointed members of the new Charities Board—Jessie Henderson, representing metropolitan charities other than hospitals, and Laura Lister, representing country charities other than hospitals. Henderson took her responsibilities as a Board member seriously, attending almost every meeting of the Board, and was actively involved in the pursuit of welfare reform. Laura Lister, the daughter of a clergyman, was married to John H. Lister, of the Nationalist Party and member of the House of Representatives from 1917 to 1929. Unlike Henderson, Lister's involvement with the
Board was rarely commented on in the newspapers. Welfare activities in country districts were possibly of less interest to the press than those occurring in the inner city. Or perhaps she was less active in promoting women's charitable work. Certainly, Henderson emerges as the more powerful leader of reform within the Ladies Benevolent Societies.

The Charities Board worked closely with the Ladies Benevolent Societies and Henderson was an important figure in fostering the relationship. Securing this alliance was vital to the Societies' possession of social capital. The relationship, however, was tenuous. The Board was committed to welfare reform, yet many Societies retained a commitment to traditional welfare practices. This unusual alliance, however, characterised the inconsistencies of the welfare field during the interwar years. Henderson's role as a Board member, alongside her influence within the Societies and the support she received from Gertrude Woinarski, enabled her to make progress in her objective of pursuing a new avenue for the Societies in the changing welfare field.

To sustain authority in the welfare field, the Societies needed legitimation from other key players. Encouraging a good working relationship with the Charities Board was critical. To successfully implement reform, the Board also needed the Societies’ support. Maintaining this support would require patience and diplomacy on the Board's part. Some Societies were prepared to cooperate. They demonstrated a willingness to question their welfare practices in the face of major welfare reform and a desire to sustain authority within the field. In the early years following the Board's formation, however, many Societies often proved resistant to change. This resistance emphasised to the Board the need for caution in its relations with this important apparatus in welfare provision. Replacing the Societies was not a consideration—they possessed valuable knowledge, alliances and cultural capital. Their emphasis on individual moral reform remained valid in the 1920s.

A new image

As the avenue through which the Charities Board envisaged welfare reform, the Societies needed to be presented as more 'modern'. The first of the Board's proposed welfare reforms, therefore, involved creating a new image for the Societies. In its Annual Report of 1926, the Board recommended a change to the Societies' name, which was a remnant of the past. Rather than 'ladies benevolent societies' the Board proposed they call themselves 'local relief organisations', claiming that the original 'title does not correctly convey present-day ideas in regard to the relief of distress'.36 'Local relief organisations', on the

36 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1926.
other hand, encapsulated what the Board was seeking and also something of the gender 'neutrality' characteristic of professionalisation, which I will discuss in Chapter Seven.

For the Societies, however, their connection with the past was important. Their name was critical in defining their understanding of themselves and their welfare practices. The name changes that occurred during the first ten years of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society's existence was a crucial part of a process 'socialisation' and in the development of its founding ethos. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the first important change had occurred with the cutting of the umbilical cord with the Presbyterian Church. The second notable alteration was the replacement of 'female' with 'ladies' to portray its important social standing. The suggested change in 1926 was from a name that had defined the Societies for seventy-five years. Accepting a new title was a serious issue for the Societies, and one that was not taken lightly.

In June 1926, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society gave consideration to changing its name to the Melbourne Women's Relief Society. The Society clearly intended to maintain its identity as a women's organisation. Yet it struggled with the idea of changing this from 'ladies' to 'women'. The members of the Melbourne Society were, on the whole, opposed to the proposal, as Mr Warren Kerr acknowledged in his address to the Society's annual meeting: 'The Extract from Ruskin on the cover of this year's Annual Report would show that the general feeling was not altogether one of assent to this proposal'. This extract explained how the original name was chosen with deliberate regard to the meaning of the words, as indicated by the following references ...: — 'Lady means "breadgiver" or "loafgiver". The title has reference not only to the bread which is given to the household but the bread broken among the multitudes. A lady has legal claim to her title only so far as she communicates that help to the poor representatives of her Master, which women were once permitted to extend to the Master Himself.—(Ruskin). Benevolent—Bene - well, good. Volo - I wish'.

Despite the pressure from the Charities Board, the Societies did not change their name. The Argus reported that '[a]s the society has been in existence for 80 years, the members are strongly opposed to the suggestion'. The Societies retained a commitment to their heritage in their present understanding of themselves as ladies. Nor were they prepared to leave behind their connection with the virtuous work of 'benevolence' to do 'relief' work. Furthermore, the name change suggested a shift away from their evangelical origins and their associated goals of individual moral reform and social progress. A new name portraying the Societies as 'relief organisations' would require a reconsideration of the

37 3 September 1926, MLBS, Minutes.
38 Argus, 1 September 1926.
39 Argus, 1 September 1926.
nature of their authority. Were they prepared to abandon their moral missionary approach and embrace the scientific values underlying new welfare practices that were being proposed? In 1926, the Ladies Benevolent Societies were not ready to make such a transition, as discussed below.

The move to encourage a re-naming of the Societies occurred alongside increasing criticism of their welfare practices. To a large extent the Societies were forced to respond to the kind of critique advanced by the Charity Organisation Society in its pamphlet 'The Other Half', which warned of 'instances in which families have made a profession of living on large-hearted, but too credulous, people ... and give ample proof of the care that should be taken to make proper inquiry before affording relief even to the apparently most deserving case'. The COS challenged the relevance of individual moral reform and the focus on respectability in welfare practices that were particularly associated with women and the Societies. It promoted 'scientific' techniques of welfare based on systematic, efficient and scientifically formulated methods. The COS had long opposed the authority of the Societies in the welfare field and in the 1920s remained vocal in its criticisms.

From the comments made by the Societies, it seems the Charities Board was also critical of their work, particularly their financial management. Janie B. Kerr, President of the Kew Ladies Benevolent Societies, was notably expressive in her defence, stating that it was 'adverse, unjust, and untrue criticism of the work of the benevolent societies'. Kerr’s acrimony was fuelled by the publication of the Charities Board’s proposals for welfare reform in the press, proposals that the Societies were not informed of. In her criticism of the Board’s handling of the issue, Kerr outlined the possible consequences for the Societies:

Such criticism had already adversely affected the work of more than one society with regard to subscriptions and the stand of some of the people helped, and she considered it unthinkable that such work as the societies were doing in the relief of dire necessity should be hampered in this way, especially as most of the charges could be proved to be unfounded.

Kerr was concerned that the criticisms of the Societies’ welfare practices would have a negative effect upon their authority within the welfare field. Mrs Stewart, representing the Oakleigh Ladies Benevolent Society, claimed that while her society did not wish to question the authority of the board, it did resent the fact that the first it knew of the criticism was its appearance in the press. She wished that there might be a better

40 Argus, 23 June 1926, p.22.
41 Argus, 26 June 1926, p.35.
42 Argus, 26 June 1926, p.35.
understanding between the board and the benevolent societies'. In order to sustain their authority, the Societies were reminded of the importance of sustaining good working relations with the Charities Board. The alliance with the Board was proving crucial to their social capital.

Jessie Henderson also contributed to the debate, representing the Hawthorn Ladies Benevolent Society and in her role as a member of the Charities Board. Her dual loyalties became evident and were manifested in her desire to achieve modernisation within the Societies. She stated that while she did not know 'of a finer body of women than those engaged in benevolent society work', she also knew 'of no finer body of men than those who comprised the Charities Board'. Henderson was less convinced that the criticism of the Societies would have negative consequences. She commented that '[i]n spite of doing harm, the criticism might do good in arousing members from the contentment with the conditions that had been forced upon them, and to a realisation of the need for a sound association to co-ordinate their work'. Henderson's sympathy for the Charities Board's criticisms was to contribute later to tense relations with members of the Societies who strongly defended traditional welfare practices.

**Agenda for welfare reform**

From 1926, the Charities Board became more active in its promotion of new welfare practices and improved systematisation and coordination within the field. With the Board's intention to achieve reform through the Societies, the implications for them were significant. Robert J. Love, the Inspector of Charities, was the driving force behind many of these reforms. Love had been the Secretary and Superintendent of the Children's Hospital in Victoria for fifteen years. With this history of involvement in charity and hospital work, he was viewed as a good choice for the position of Inspector of Charities.

In 1926, Love embarked on travels to New Zealand, Britain, Canada and the United States to learn of developments in welfare practices. In light of his discoveries, Love became convinced that welfare practices in Victoria demanded attention. The Charities Board became more receptive to new ideas regarding welfare practices. Whilst noting that many overseas practices were 'chaotic' and generally conducted at the local level, Love was adamant that certain changes to the welfare field in Victoria were necessary to create a

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43 *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p.35.
44 *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p.35.
45 *Argus*, 26 June 1926, p.35.
46 *Argus*, 14 February 1923, p.18.
pioneering and 'world leader' status in the international welfare field. The reforms considered by the Inspector to be worthy of attention were those that promised improved coordination and greater efficiency and those which aimed to reduce poverty. These included a central registry of benevolent cases, uniform methods of welfare relief and the professional training of welfare workers. Having introduced the Charities Board, the welfare field in Victoria, in Love's opinion, was internationally competitive and progressive:

It is interesting to note that, in a survey of philanthropic activities of the world, there is no other country which has a central controlling body, like the Charities Board, to ensure proper system and co-ordination of effort amongst the various types of philanthropic organizations and to act in an expert advisory capacity on all details. The Hospitals and Charities Act of Victoria is regarded in other places as one of the most progressive pieces of philanthropic legislation enacted.

In view of the existence of this 'progressive' body, Love was convinced Victoria could achieve the welfare reforms he envisaged. The Charities Board would act in an 'expert' capacity as an adviser on the 'systematisation' and 'coordination' of those that came under its jurisdiction, including the Societies.

There was a notable similarity between proposals for welfare reform in the 1920s and those suggested in the 1890s by the Charity Organisation Society, which I discussed in Chapter Two. Modernising welfare practices through the introduction of a uniform basis of relief and the coordination of the perceived chaotic organisation of charitable organisations in the welfare field remained the primary objective of the COS. Long-held dissatisfaction with the Societies' welfare practices had persisted and the COS felt action was necessary. Whilst the COS stressed its methods rested 'firmly on individualism, and are strongly opposed to mass treatment', it resented the Societies' unscientific approach and their lack of coordination.

In conferences held in 1919-20 and 1924-25 on the 'Better Organisation of Relief', the COS determined that changes to the Societies' methods were necessary. At the first conference, it concluded that the 'present administration of charity work in Melbourne is unsatisfactory'. The resolutions passed by the COS focused on concerns with the Societies' welfare practices. As the authority in outdoor relief, the Societies were a major target of the COS' proposed reforms. At the second conference in 1924-25, a more

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47 Letter from Robert J. Love to Mr Atlee Hunt, August 1927, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49.
48 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1928.
49 S. Greig Smith (1938) 'Convincing proof of voluntary charitable system's value—Essential to the people's welfare: Charity Organisation Society's place in the community', Hospital Magazine, p.23.
50 Better Organisation of Relief, Report of Conferences, 1919-20 and 1924-25, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
rigorous attitude towards the methods of the Societies was noticeable. Of the eight resolutions, three suggested specific reforms to the Societies' loose organisation and to their welfare practices.\textsuperscript{51}

The COS had supported the introduction of a Charities Board in 1923.\textsuperscript{52} Good relations between the COS and the Charities Board were to prove important, yet at times difficult to achieve. Both were of the view that the Societies' welfare practices were in need of overhaul. Both were aware of the potential challenge the Societies might present to the implementation of reform. The COS and the Board recognised the commitment of the other to welfare reform, yet often found they were engaged in struggles over authority. Many of the responsibilities of the Charities Board conflicted with the desired sphere of responsibility sought by the COS since its inception. During the interwar years, Stanley Greig Smith, the Secretary of the COS, was an influential figure in the organisation and within the welfare field. In the years he served as Secretary, Greig Smith was committed to the objectives of the organisation—to 'scientific' charity. He desired the coordination of welfare provision, the systematisation of welfare practices and the introduction of 'experts' to implement these objectives. An alliance with the Charities Board held the promise of achieving this vision.

Despite the power struggles between the COS and the Charities Board, they gradually developed an alliance during the 1920s. The COS recognised the advantages in cooperating with the Board and the subsequent need for compromise. The Charities Board recorded the following comments of Greig Smith in 1930:

Mr Smith said the Board might rely on COS cooperation. He felt that much of past antagonism to COS had disappeared or been dispelled. He felt that non-success of COS efforts in past 20 years to establish a Central Bureau was due to misunderstanding but if Ch Bd stood behind a new effort much good was likely to be accomplished.\textsuperscript{53}

Where the COS had been seen in a negative light by many participants in the welfare field following its challenge in the 1890s, by the late 1920s there was an increasing interest in what it had to say. This interest depended, however, on the preparedness of the COS to cooperate with the Charities Board. The Board insisted that the COS must not cause trouble. This was reflected in the notes of the Inspector of Charities from a meeting between himself and the Secretary of the COS: 'I pointed out to Mr Smith the damage done to any effort to establish a Central Agency by the expression of intolerant views and

\textsuperscript{51} Better Organisation of Relief, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
\textsuperscript{52} Argus, 7 August 1920; Greig Smith, 'Voluntary charitable system's value', p.23.
\textsuperscript{53} Note for file, 31 March 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
harmful criticism. He agreed that there may have been cause for complaint in the past but felt sure a better understanding now existed'.

**Standardisation of Relief**

The first major reform the Charities Board attempted to introduce, with the cooperation of the COS, was the standardisation of welfare relief in the late 1920s. The objective of this proposal was a uniform formulation of welfare provision and the target was the network of Ladies Benevolent Societies. The Societies' welfare practices focused upon the specific needs of the individual, which often resulted in wide discrepancies in the amounts of relief provided. Each visitor investigated her clients independently and determined the needs of each recipient using her own moral discretion. The outcome of this was frequently diverse, with amounts of relief varying widely. Clients had no rights and were therefore dependent upon the individual judgement and goodwill of the visitor who assisted them.

The COS and the Charities Board claimed that standardising relief would remove these discrepancies by introducing a uniform formula based on a proportion of the basic wage. The dual objective was to ensure recipients received adequate help while charitable organisations did not give away more money than was necessary. The COS persisted in its belief that much of the problem lay with good natured women who were too generous in their assistance. While at first glance it might appear that the COS was engaging in efforts to oust women from the work of welfare provision, a closer examination reveals a more complex picture. Those who undertook investigations on behalf of the COS were generally women. It was not women the COS objected to, but the nature of the Societies' welfare practices.

The COS first advocated the standardisation of the Societies' relief provision in its conferences of 1919-20 and 1924-25. It masked the need for reform in rhetoric that claimed fairness to the recipient. The underlying motives, however, concerned a desire for efficiency, economics and 'scientific' methods of distributing relief. The COS suggested 'that relieving agencies be urged to co-operate in the formation of a special committee, including medical and scientific experts, with a view to devising a scheme for the standardisation of relief'. The COS proposed itself as the coordinating organisation for such a scheme. It resolved 'that the C.O.S. be asked to undertake the duty of convening each autumn a conference of relief-giving agencies with a view to devising a practical and

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54 Note for file, 31 March 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
56 Better Organisation of Relief, PRO, S4523/P1, U65, Item 622.
co-ordinated plan for relieving distress in Melbourne in each ensuing winter'. The COS presented these recommendations to the Charities Board. The Societies, however, were not prepared to relinquish their authority to the COS so readily.

In September 1926, the Charities Board presented a proposal for standardising welfare practices to the Societies for their consideration. Whilst this proposal was not initially acted upon, it is useful to consider what the Board had in mind. The Board desired to tread carefully, aware of the Societies' value within the welfare field. The Board emphasised its confidence in the Societies, revealing that its welfare reforms based on 'modern ideas' aimed to build on already existing structures of welfare. In doing this, it hoped to allay the Societies' fears, whilst stressing the need for reform:

In no class of charitable organization is there greater need for cooperation ... It is proposed in the coming year to revise the conditions under which local relief is afforded. This should not be construed as an inference that the Board has no confidence in the work of the existing committees. On the contrary, it is desired to emphasise that this class of work can be most sympathetically and satisfactorily administered by those philanthropic women who are devoting so much time, care and attention to the assistance of the distressed poor.

The Charities Board remained convinced that the Societies were the most appropriate organisation to be undertaking the work of welfare relief and was fully prepared to acknowledge their authority. Unlike the COS, the Board continued to value the personal qualities of the Societies, particularly those associated with their feminine identity—their perceived capacity to 'nurture' the poor. Although influenced by, and interested in, the arguments for modern practices, the Board retained its confidence in established, traditional welfare practices in the late 1920s. A complete shift away from these would have been too radical for the Board.

The issue of standardising relief required, of course, that a 'standard' be agreed upon. What the Charities Board envisaged was a 'uniform method of governing the degree of relief to be afforded and to ensure that such relief meets the real needs'. Determining what these 'real needs' were was part of the problem, and the Board recognised that the 'degree of relief to be afforded is a debated matter all over the world'. The Board had a specific concept in mind, which it stated in its 1927 Annual Report:

In some places the object is merely to enable people to carry on, but this is quite unsound, for the aim must be to stimulate the individual by care of physical needs in conjunction with moral help by the Society, and this is ... the only rational

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57 Better Organisation of Relief, PRO, S4523/P1, U65, Item 622.
58 Argus, 20 September 1926.
59 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1926.
60 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1926.
method, always provided that the constant aim is to obviate the need for relief at the earliest moment. 61

Clearly the Board in the late 1920s continued to embrace individual moral reform. Standardisation of relief, in the Board’s view, could enhance the traditional methods of the Societies with a more rational, systematic approach. In this sense, the Board aimed to introduce a modern, ‘curative’ approach to welfare relief—to which it felt standardisation would contribute. It sought to encourage curative welfare practices amongst the Societies, thus ensuring that each case was still investigated in the face of a new standard of relief. Concern existed that for some cases the standard might prove more than they ‘needed’ and that the work ethic, strongly promoted for so long within the welfare field, might be jeopardised. With the Societies’ continued authority, however, the Board hoped the work ethic would be sustained.

There were inconsistencies in the Board’s rhetoric on standardising relief. On some occasions the Inspector of Charities appeared critical of the traditional welfare practices associated with the Societies. Importantly, when this appeared to be the case, the Inspector did not attack the Societies themselves:

The method of giving local relief can, I think, be best done by the local ladies committees. I do not think there is any form of distribution of local relief that can be better done than by the Ladies Benevolent Societies, but the old idea of local relief, whilst it apparently fitted in with the times, where a lady visitor went to a house and distributed food or money has changed, and there has to be a more scientific distribution of relief ... there will have to be uniformity. 62

Whilst the Societies’ welfare practices were suitable in the past, the Charities Board was increasingly of the view that they had become redundant. The Board began to question the moral authority associated with traditional practices. It struggled to achieve a balance between the ‘scientific distribution of relief’ whilst simultaneously relying on the ‘moral help’ of the Societies. Yet, the Board did not wish to completely abandon a moralistic approach to welfare. Furthermore, the Societies remained a valuable component of the welfare field’s apparatus and were far from redundant. Love emphasised his faith in their ability to adapt and move with the times. The network of Societies had developed the necessary social relations with the community to successfully carry out its work and was widely recognised within the welfare field. Replacing such a network would involve a considerable amount of time, effort and money. It seemed less troublesome to promote new and modern methods within the existing field of Societies. Determining how to achieve this proved problematic.

61 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1927.
62 Notes of conference with representatives of Ladies Benevolent Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/P1, U60, Item 563.
The Charities Board did not push the Societies too hard in its desire for welfare reform. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the Board had an agenda that aimed to encourage the Societies to implement a standard of relief independently, thereby sustaining its non-interventionist approach and acknowledging the authority of the Societies. The Board proposed a new body to represent the Societies, with ties to the Charities Board. Invested in this new representative body would be the power to implement welfare reform. This move would release the Charities Board from direct responsibility for instituting the standard of relief Love had been promoting since his overseas travels in 1926. For the COS, however, this approach to the Societies was not active enough and it decided to intervene in order to bring about the standardisation of relief.

In April 1928, the Secretary of the COS, Stanley Greig Smith, attended a meeting of the most prominent of the Societies, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. The debate that ensued revealed the latter Society's discomfort with the proposal to standardise relief. Its largest concern was the possible effect upon the autonomy enjoyed by visitors of the Society. At the meeting attended by Greig Smith, a Society member proposed an official basis of relief and a suggested rate. A lengthy debate amongst the members followed. Like the COS and the Charities Board, the Society was divided over what constituted 'need'. For the Society 'need' was best determined by the individual visitor after an investigation of the specific case. Yet, some members considered a standard an achievable and desirable outcome and suggested varying amounts. The difficulty of achieving a standard was still acknowledged. One member said that the difficulty of arriving at any standardization was due to the different attitude taken by each visitor as to the requisite amount of relief. What to one member might seem generous, to another would seem the reverse. She was inclined to favour some basic standard, but realized the difficulty of such a step.

A standard would mean that, to some extent, individual members were denied the freedom to exercise their personal judgement. The Societies would be required to comply with a uniform amount despite their personal view concerning the individual needs of the case. Other members refused to even engage in the debate, being of 'the opinion that it was impossible to form a basis, that every case must be taken on its merits'. Introducing a standard threw into question the individualistic approach that was embedded in the Societies' welfare practices. Whilst members could consciously understand the

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63 In its 1928 Annual Report, the Charities Board left the issue of standardising relief to the organisations themselves by suggesting that one of the most important reasons for the formation of a Central Council of Ladies Benevolent Societies was to address the issue of establishing a uniform base for relief.
64 Peel 'Defining the deserving'.
65 24 April 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
66 24 April 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
shortcomings of this emphasis on the individual, it was vital to their understanding of themselves and how they had traditionally practiced welfare.

When Greig Smith left the Society’s meeting, debate resumed and a vote was taken on the proposed uniform base of relief. The focus of the debate was on the financial and economic concerns that were at the core of the proposals. There was some agreement amongst members of the Society that the variation in expenditure on relief by visitors was a cause for concern. What were considered excessive amounts of relief provided by certain visitors had recently come to the attention of the Society. Other members argued that the aim of a Ladies Benevolent Society was to retain people in good health, not merely to display a small budget. Although this latter goal was an important objective, as benevolent women they associated themselves with qualities of warm-hearted generosity, not cold, efficient economics. Financial considerations were the domain of men. Indeed, in 1930 the Society debated a proposal to form an advisory body of men to provide the Societies with advice on financial matters. With the reassurance that ‘having men purely in an advisory capacity would not interfere in any way with the internal management of the Benevolent Society’, it was agreed to involve men in the Society in this capacity.

In their role as nurturers of the poor, the women of the Society struggled with the concept of standardising relief as a means to keep their finances in check. When the motion to introduce a uniform rate of relief was put to the vote, a counter proposal was forwarded suggesting that no change be made and that visitors continue to determine the provision of relief on the merits of the individual case. The second proposal was passed with seventeen members voting in its favour and nine voting for the initial motion. The Society, in other words, voted with a majority to retain the individual autonomy of its visitors. A standard of relief would undermine this autonomy. The fact that the vote was not unanimous does, however, reveal that the Society was torn between clutching its past and recognising the need for change.

The divisions within the Societies over protecting the independence of the visitors were a source of irritation to the COS and the Charities Board. The Societies’ refusal to cooperate was precisely what the COS had been battling against for four decades. Greig Smith had expressed his frustration at the slow pace of reform:

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67 13 March 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
68 9 September 1930, 23 September 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
69 24 April 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
Mr Greig Smith said that standardization of relief had been a matter greatly discussed for many years, and it certainly seemed advisable that a more general feeling on this matter should exist among the benevolent societies.  

The Charities Board also became critical of the Societies following their refusal to reach a decision to standardise welfare relief. At a conference between the Societies and the Charities Board in August 1928 to introduce a new, representative body of Societies, which I discuss later in this chapter, the Board made known its desire for a reform to introduce a uniform amount of relief. The issue of standardising welfare relief was discussed at length. When the Societies claimed that their methods were the equivalent to a standard, the Inspector of Charities took objection. Love argued 'we have no evidence to show there is a scientific computation of the amount of relief. 10/- may be ample, but we do not know how it is arrived at. I am afraid we think in terms of our courage. There is no scientific computation'. The Inspector insisted that the Societies justify their decision not to introduce a 'scientific computation' of amounts of relief, which was what he believed a 'standard' would necessarily be based upon. For Love, such a computation involved 'the question of the minimum standard of living [which] is, I think, the commencement of a decision as to how much relief will be given to a family'. Clearly, Love agreed with the COS on the need for a 'formula'.

When some members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies at this conference argued that an application for relief had to be assessed according to the individual merits of the case, the Inspector’s disapproval was apparent. He stated: ‘We want to know what is the guiding principle in interpreting merit into relief. We cannot criticise these Societies, but we do not know what they think merit is’. When the representative of the Prahran, South Yarra and Toorak Ladies Benevolent Society, Mrs Rollason, argued ‘we do our best’, Love stated that the Societies ‘best’ was limited because they did not have the power to investigate into the causes of need, and that without such knowledge, ‘we will never be able to get curative measures undertaken. What you are doing at present is merely palliative, and not anything in a curative way’. The core of the Boards’ issues with the Societies’ welfare practices was revealed. The type of ‘curative’ methods the Societies believed they practised—that is, through their moral advice—were not perceived by Love in the same light. For Love, a curative form of welfare would begin with a uniform base, calculated on the minimum standard of living. 

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70 24 April 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
71 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
72 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
73 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
74 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
The Societies were aware they faced a trend that challenged the value of their welfare practices—their cultural capital. They had experienced a similar challenge in the 1890s and sustained authority in welfare provision. In some respects, they probably felt they could achieve this again. In their desire for new cultural capital, however, the Societies were prepared to compromise in the 1920s, and the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society led the way. In November 1928, the Society revisited the issue of standardising relief. The concern about the large discrepancies between districts and the amount of relief being provided by visitors was again prominent and the Society believed it could benefit from a uniform base of relief. A standard was agreed upon with a minimum of fuss—5s. for a ‘man and his wife’ and 2s.6d. for the first child. There was no indication, however, that the Society had used any ‘formula’ or ‘scientific computation’ to arrive at this standard.

Compromising was not easy for the Societies. While they made efforts to adapt to standardising welfare relief, the Societies’ ingrained habits of practising welfare frequently led them to revert to old methods. The strength of the Societies’ founding ethos led to their difficulty in accepting the core values that lay behind the reform—a reform that aimed to impose a scientific standard, removing the focus from the individuality of the client’s perceived need to an impersonal focus on ‘objective’ criteria of need. Nurturing the poor remained important to many Society members’ understanding of their benevolent work, and achieving this in compliance with a standard amount of relief was difficult to conceptualise. In April 1931 the issue of a uniform amount was raised at the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society’s fortnightly meeting. The Society claimed that there continued to be ‘striking differences in the amounts expended’ by visitors. The standard was not always appropriate to the individual case, and visitors chose to deviate from this standard. Determining a uniform amount of relief had not occurred in the way the COS or the Charities Board had hoped.

A new representative Council

The Charities Board was aware that the Societies resented interference and suggested a new central body of Societies with the task of introducing welfare reform, proposing the formation of a Central Council of Victorian Ladies Benevolent Societies at a conference of Societies in August 1928. The Council of Societies was to be incorporated under the Hospitals and Charities Act, and was to be part of a broader effort to coordinate and systematise the welfare field. The Charities Board explained that the Council of Societies would be a ‘properly constituted body’ that would ‘ensure continuity of principle and

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75 20 November 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
76 27 April 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
policy' and thereby enable 'properly systematised curative measures for relief of local stress' to be carried out.\(^{77}\) That is, as a centrally organised body, the Council of Societies would be the foundation from which modern welfare practices could be introduced—contributing to the systematisation of chaotic and inefficient traditions of welfare relief. Love believed that 'a Central Council is the first requirement before any kind of reform of the system of local relief can be brought about'.\(^{78}\) Through such a Council, methods of relief could be standardised, a central registry of recipients established and social workers trained in the skills of welfare practices.

The Board anticipated opposition on two levels, which it took into consideration when promoting the new representative body. Firstly, while the Council of Societies appeared to represent an empowerment of the Societies in the welfare field, its incorporation under the *Hospitals and Charities Act* was an indication that the Societies would lose a degree of independence. Love made a point, therefore, of emphasising that the individual autonomy of each Society would be retained. In February 1929, for example, he outlined his hopes that 'the time would come when the whole of the philanthropic and social organisations with points of contact would, without undermining the individual right of self-government, be working as one complete whole'.\(^{79}\) To work as 'one complete whole', however, some degree of compromise by individual Societies would be necessary. The Charities Board considered the proposed Council of Societies an ideal solution—it offered the Societies their independence and continued authority in the welfare field, whilst simultaneously creating a new central, coordinating body that would aid in the introduction of welfare reform.

Secondly, the proposed Council of Societies was an almost identical body to the already existing Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies. In Chapter Two, I discussed the nature of the Association which was formed in 1911. To counteract any opposition, the Charities Board argued that:

> The Victorian Ladies Benevolent Association [sic] has really no power. They act in a friendly way to their branches, but have no real power, and unless there is some recognised body—a Central Council or any other scheme which may be agreed upon—nothing definite can be done.\(^ {80}\)

Love was suggesting that the Association lacked the necessary recognition, but that with the formation of the Council this situation would be resolved. He was insistent that the

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\(^{77}\) *Argus*, 16 February 1929.

\(^{78}\) Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.

\(^{79}\) *Argus*, 16 February 1929.

\(^{80}\) Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
time had arrived for a new body and that the old organisation, whilst previously important, had outlived its purpose:

I do not want, in anything I say to be regarded as belittling the efforts of any individual Society, or of the Association. I think there is a great deal of commendation due to them for what they have done, but they have not had a body to take up the big matters of policy that I think should be undertaken.81

The proposed Council of Societies, therefore, would replace the Association and be granted the necessary legislative power that the Association had lacked, enabling the Societies to carry out their work more effectively.82 In 1928, he reiterated his belief that 'for local relief the best thing that I have seen anywhere is the position here where the Ladies Benevolent Society are the controlling authority; I think that anything that would undermine that or depart from that would be a grave mistake'.83

In his efforts to highlight the advantages for the Societies in accepting the proposed Council, Love emphasised the increased authority it would secure them. Financially, it was argued, the Societies would benefit. The Council of Societies itself would coordinate and administer a general fund.84 This central body of Societies would be empowered to take and hold large sums of money for disbursement to Societies at the appropriate time of need.85 In addition, the Council of Societies would have the authority within the welfare field to acquire more funding for the Societies. Love explained that 'there is the question of some Societies being short of funds apart from Government subsidy. No one Society could make a general appeal, but a Central Council could'.86 This appealed to some of the smaller Societies. Mrs Stewart of the Oakleigh Ladies Benevolent Society, for example, believed that 'the [financial] needs of the small Societies ... had made it imperative that there should be a central organisation with greater power and standing'.87 The Charities Board also argued that the social capital of the Societies would be expanded. A corporate body would take on the role of spokesperson for the Societies. They would experience greater influence in legislative matters concerning issues such as unemployment relief and pensions for the aged, the invalid and widows. Their cultural capital would be increased through the improvement of their welfare practices and their adoption of modern methods.

81 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
82 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1926.
83 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, 1928-29, p.1163.
84 Argus, 2 March 1929.
85 Argus, 16 February 1929.
86 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
87 Argus, 16 February 1929.
Despite the Board’s assurances, a small, but influential, minority of Societies that remained committed to the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies, strongly opposed the proposed Council of Societies. The debate surrounding the Council’s introduction was to split the network of Ladies Benevolent Societies into two hostile camps, which both desired sustaining the authority of the Societies in the welfare field. How they envisaged achieving this continued authority differed for the two opposing camps. For those connected with the Association, it involved a continuing commitment to traditional welfare practices and their tradition of moral authority. The supporters of the new Council of Societies, however, were prepared to question the nature of their authority and to develop a new form of authority based upon emerging ideas influencing the desire to reform welfare practices.

**A new form of authority? The formation of the Council of Societies**

Jessie Henderson supported the formation of the Council of Societies and was active in promoting the benefits the Societies would experience from its introduction. She argued it held the potential for securing the new form of authority she envisaged. The Council would enable the Societies to acquire vital new cultural capital. Henderson was convinced that in adopting modern welfare practices the Societies could achieve more than merely sustaining their authority. She believed that they could secure an even more highly regarded position by adding to the volume of their cultural capital. The proposed Council of Societies would create the ‘machinery for better work’ of the Societies.  

The Council would have an educational role in the training of social workers, providing inspiration for legislation and undertaking research on welfare practices alongside other bodies, such as the trade unions, municipal associations and employers.

Gertrude Woinarski was equally supportive of the Council. As a representative of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, she stated that ‘[m]y Society feels that this will be the beginning of preliminary work which will eventually result in the reorganisation of the whole process of giving relief’. The proposed Council adopted the emerging language associated with new welfare practices and embraced modern values associated with the expert, skill and the ‘science’ of welfare. The shift towards centralisation and the likely introduction of a Central Index of welfare recipients all pointed to the increased authority for the body appointed responsible for the maintenance of such an Index. The Charities Board, the COS and the Ladies Benevolent Societies all considered themselves

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88 Henderson to Bleazby, 24 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
89 Argus, 1 June 1929. See also G. Spenceley (1980), 'Charity relief in Melbourne: The early years of the 1930s Depression', Monash Papers in Economic History, No. 8, Monash University, p.22
90 Argus, 28 February 1929, p.7.
the most appropriate body to administer the Central Index. Henderson was determined that the Societies would be granted this authority. The Council of Societies would provide the necessary apparatus for this Index. It would also represent the first step towards the 'proper' recognition of the Societies.

With the support of Henderson, Woinarski, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society and the smaller Societies for a properly recognised, central body of Societies, the proposed Council of Societies secured the votes necessary for its introduction. In October 1928, at the annual meeting of the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies, Jessie Henderson, with Gertrude Woinarski's support, proposed that 'it was essential in the best interests of the work of ladies benevolent societies that there should be a central council, constituted in a proper form, and incorporated under the Hospitals and Charities Act'. The recommendation was passed with a vote of 26 in favour and 9 in opposition.

A decision was made to form a temporary executive that would assume responsibility for drafting the constitution and rules of the new Council of Societies. This executive was to consist of representatives from twelve different Societies, including two country members. In choosing a President for the Council, Woinarski commented to Love that it 'would be lamentable should anyone other than Mrs Henderson become the first President'. Love agreed, yet expressed uncertainty in regard to her response, considering her numerous commitments to other organisations. Henderson, however, readily took on the position, determined to see the Council of Societies secure the authority within the welfare field that she envisaged. Her objective was not to prove an easy one.

Defending the tradition—the Association's opposition

The greatest threat to the future of the Council of Societies came from within the network of Societies itself. The nine opposing Societies were to prove a formidable barrier to the unification of the Societies under the Council. This small faction of Societies, which remained associated with the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies, was convinced that the Council represented a threat to traditional welfare practices. It was therefore a threat to the nature of the Societies' authority, based upon respect and morality. The Association—that is, the remaining nine Societies that did not support the establishment of the Council—was opposed to the direction in which the Council intended...
to take the Societies and therefore refused to amalgamate with the new body. While the core of the differences lay in differing values, the conflict was heightened by personal differences.

In April 1929, the sub-committee that drafted the constitution and rules of the new Council of Societies presented four proposed objectives. These were, firstly, to represent Societies on questions of legislation related to welfare, secondly, to receive money for its special fund from which it would disburse amounts to individual Societies, thirdly, to ‘consider and deal with all matters of common interest to the Societies’, and, finally, to ‘do any other thing which may be deemed essential for the purpose of ensuring coordinated efficiency in the work of Societies’. 94 These goals were almost identical to those of the pre-existing Association. The only objective that the Association did not aspire to was the special fund. In its view, the financial autonomy of the Societies was crucial to their independence. The Association, however, did aim to ‘promote suitable legislation’, to encourage the ‘interchange of thought and experience’ between Societies through regular conferences, and to aim for the ‘more efficient carrying on of their work’. 95

Despite the apparent similarities in the objectives of the two bodies, however, there were critical differences. Why would two bodies with seemingly the same purpose, and representing the same organisations, refuse to amalgamate? The key difference between the Association and the Council was in the nature of the welfare practices they advocated and the values underlying these. That is, the Association remained committed to the Societies’ founding ethos and its Evangelical mission. The Council, on the other hand, was open to changing this ethos to incorporate modern and secular values that advocated scientific, preventative welfare practices. Where the Council saw the future of the Societies through the creation of a new form of authority that combined the Societies’ moralism with modern welfare practices, the Association remained committed to an authority based entirely upon individual moral reform. The Association was not prepared to lose its memory and was strongly resistant to change. Indeed it resented the Council’s seeming willingness to discard of its heritage.

There were two key figures who led the opposition of the Association in 1929—Elizabeth Bleazby and Janie B. Kerr. Biographical information about these two women has proved difficult to find. Bleazby, at the age of 69, was the President of the Association. Kerr, 67, was the President of the Kew Ladies Benevolent Society, and had been a founding member of the Association in 1911. Their strong personal connections to

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94 Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies (CCVBS), 1st Annual Report, 1930.
95 VALBS, Constitution and Rules, c1928.
the Association may have influenced their concern with the organisation's fate. There was more to their opposition, however, than a fear of the Association's demise or the loss of their influence as prominent individuals within the field of Societies. The executive of the proposed Council of Societies was to be elected from the membership of the Association. Bleazby and Kerr were almost certain to secure prominent positions within the new body. Both had been involved in the discussions surrounding the introduction of the Council of Societies.\textsuperscript{96} The main cause of their concern was the Council's explicit support for modern welfare practices that were sympathetic to 'scientific' reason, and that placed less weight on the individual recipients moral worth.

In May 1929, a month after the draft constitution and rules of the Societies were presented to the Charities Board, the opposition of the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies became apparent. I will refer to this faction as the Association. It passed a resolution declaring its intention to continue operating. It stated:

that at a meeting of representatives of several of the Societies who were unable to accept the Constitution and Rules of the Central Council of Victorian Ladies Benevolent Societies held this afternoon, it was decided that the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies be carried on as formerly.\textsuperscript{97}

In her statement explaining the Kew Ladies Benevolent Society's decision not to affiliate with the Council of Societies, Janie B. Kerr expressed general concern that the intention of the Council of Societies was to shift away from the traditional welfare practices. Kerr considered that the Council was moving towards a centralised, systematic, clinical approach to welfare, removing the personal element that the Societies had long been associated with.\textsuperscript{98} The Association questioned the need for a Council of Societies, stating it was 'unable to see that any good purpose can be served by the Central Council that could not just as well be served by the Association'.\textsuperscript{99}

The Association objected to the Council on four key issues. The loss of financial autonomy of the Societies was a major concern. The Association believed the cost of running the Council would be expensive and might lead to the Societies incurring additional costs. This was in addition to the view that the suggested membership fees were too high.\textsuperscript{100} The Association considered interference in the financial administration of individual Societies posed a serious threat to their independence. This individual autonomy, as discussed in Chapter Three, was crucial to their understanding of themselves.
Each Society practiced welfare relief at a local level without interference. In their affiliation with the Association, Societies experienced the benefits of interacting in a forum where they could engage with other Societies. The Association, however, did not intervene in the way they operated, respecting their independence. The Council of Societies, particularly with its proposed central fund, represented the type of interventionist approach that the Association opposed.

A second reason behind the Association’s opposition to the Council of Societies was the belief that its aims would overlap with the work of the Charity Organisation Society. The Council intended to introduce a central registry of welfare recipients and to encourage the training of social workers. The perceived connection between the COS and the Council of Societies is revealing. The COS, as discussed, had long been associated with modern, scientific approaches to welfare. There was a history of tension between the Societies and the COS. In 1929, the Association accused the Ladies Benevolent Societies’ new representative body of an overlap with the COS in the nature of their work. Old hostilities and the defence of traditional welfare practices contributed to the Association’s inability to accept the shift in focus by the Council of Societies. The Association did not warm to the idea of a Central Index, nor was it enthusiastic about the role of paid and trained social workers.

Indeed, the Association’s suspicion of professional social workers was the core of another of its objections to the Council of Societies. The Association claimed that ‘there is a strong feeling that no paid supervising or investigating agents should be employed to inquire into the work of the Societies. The Societies have nothing to hide and welcome inquiries but they would resent these inquiries being made by paid agents’. Here again, the Association desired to protect the autonomy of the individual Societies from interference into their work. They were a body of ‘voluntary’ charitable workers who had a long history of involvement in welfare relief. The Association felt that the Societies were owed the confidence in their ability to continue to carry out this task without being subject to investigation of their methods by ‘professionals’ who lacked experience and the ‘personal touch’. In Chapter Seven I take up the issue of the Societies’ defence of their voluntarism in the debate to introduce training for social workers.

Finally, the Association pointed to the Council’s proposed methods to reduce imposition and fraud, in particular the central registry of welfare recipients. It considered such efforts to be futile—a waste of time and resources. One of the objectives of the

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101 Note for file, c29 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
102 Note for file, c29 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
Association was ‘to minimise the evils of overlapping and imposition’.\textsuperscript{103} It believed, however, that ‘no system of registration will prevent a certain amount of imposition’.\textsuperscript{104} The Association argued that there would always be a number of people who would outwit the Societies and others who provided welfare. Changing welfare practices for this purpose in its view, therefore, would solve nothing and merely prove a costly pursuit. Given that there would always be duplication of effort and imposition, the Association believed the only approach was to attempt to minimise it. It claimed the Societies were already successfully engaged in minimising these evils.

The Association’s opposition posed a threat to the future of the Council of Societies. Woinarski raised the most immediate concern when she pointed out ‘it is possible that if two bodies claim the representation of Ladies Benevolent Societies, it might be the cause of confusion in the minds of the public’.\textsuperscript{105} On the surface, the objectives of the Council and the Association appeared the same. The differences lay in their commitment to welfare practices that were associated with different ideals and that were representative of two increasingly distinct bodies characterised by a different ethos. The moral ethos of the Association harked back to the Evangelicalism of the 1850s. On the other hand, the Council was increasingly characterised by an ethos that was reflective of the dominant social and cultural influences of the early 1930s—that is, a secular, ‘scientific’ ethos. What the public saw, however, were two similar bodies, representing the same organisations, struggling for position in the welfare field. Consideration of the potential effect of such a struggle was important for the Council of Societies if it were to achieve the recognition it sought as a legitimate body.

The Charities Board was equally disturbed by the conflict. Its efforts to create conditions more conducive to reform were again in the process of being thwarted. The Board made its dissatisfaction with the situation apparent to the Societies. In a letter to Gertrude Woinarski, who was appointed Secretary of the Council of Societies, the new Inspector of Charities, Cecil L. McVilly, wrote that: ‘By direction I am to advise you that having in mind difficulties which have been experienced in Victoria through two organisations claiming to do similar work the Board views with disfavour any proposal of duplication’.\textsuperscript{106} He therefore suggested a conference between the two hostile bodies, with a view to resolving the differences. The only resolution the Board was prepared to accept, however, was the abolition of the Association and its amalgamation with the Council of Societies. The conference would be held in late October 1929.

\textsuperscript{103} VALBS, Constitution and Rules, c1928.
\textsuperscript{104} Note for file, c29 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\textsuperscript{105} Letter from G. Woinarski to R. J. Love, 6 June 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\textsuperscript{106} Letter from R. J. Love to G. Woinarski, 13 June 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
As the conference drew nearer, the power struggle between the Association and the Council of Societies intensified. Determined in its resistance to the Council, the Association sought new allies. In mid-October, it sent a deputation to the Premier, Sir William McPherson. The Association argued that welfare practices were better administered by local suburban organisations than by a Central Council of Societies.\(^\text{107}\) The Premier offered these Societies acknowledgement of his support, stating his agreement that the individual Societies ‘do well enough’ and providing his reassurance that the Societies which remained with the Association would continue to receive their grants from the Ministry.\(^\text{108}\) The deputation and the Premier’s comments received press attention. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, McPherson was a traditional conservative and was essentially interested in the more cost-efficient allocation of subsidy. He was not convinced of the need for the extensive welfare reform advocated by Love, Henderson and Woinarski. Interestingly, whilst many traditionalists favoured the efficiency welfare reformers sought, they struggled with the broader shifts away from philanthropic traditions.

The Premier’s support for the Association’s continued legitimacy caused much concern for the Council of Societies. The power struggle was potentially harmful to the Council, particularly in light of the publicity surrounding the Premier’s support. Jessie Henderson’s initial response was to make a statement to the press in protest of the Premier’s interference. She emphasised the inconsistency in the Association’s actions—it had initially supported the introduction of a Council of Societies. She attempted to clarify some of the negative comments that the Association made about the role of the Council. Henderson claimed that the Council had no intention of interfering with the individual autonomy of the Societies.\(^\text{109}\) She also commented that she was ‘much concerned at the situation which had arisen as a result of the commendation by the Premier of the action by those Societies which had remained outside the council and also of his statement that the council was a new thing to him’.\(^\text{110}\) There had been no secrecy surrounding the Council’s formation.

Secondly, Henderson chose to work behind the scenes to diffuse the struggle. In a letter to Elizabeth Bleazby, she raised a number of issues that concerned her. She was mindful of the often negative portrayal of charitable workers in the public eye and the

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\(^\text{107}\) Argus, 16 October 1929, 17 October 1929.

\(^\text{108}\) Argus, 17 October 1929; Spenceley, ‘Charity relief in Melbourne’, pp.22-23.

\(^\text{109}\) Argus, 17 October 1929.

\(^\text{110}\) Argus, 26 October 1929.
consequent effects the division could have on future financial appeals. As economic conditions deteriorated in Victoria, this was a key concern:

The time for raising money is surely unpropitious enough without adding to it disunion. We all realise I am sure that the least friction means the greatest efficiency—the force of a united appeal would have an increased claim to consideration both by the public and the government. The existence of two separate organisations doing work which implies no different aim is confusing to citizens.\(^\text{111}\)

She feared that the recognition the Council of Societies had so confidently aimed to secure would not be realised due to the continuing conflict amongst the Societies. Henderson was concerned the division amongst the Societies would affect their future authority in the field. She commented:

With the creation of a Central Council I do not want to see the work divided into two hostile camps (even though one be large and the other small), with an atmosphere of ill-will and estrangement—a chasm between them such as has not existed before in the history of Benevolent Society work…
There exists, I feel sure, the basis of genuine union, mutual respect, respect of every Society for the earnest ... work of the others.\(^\text{112}\)

Henderson was concerned that conflicting personalities were potentially aggravating an already grim situation. This led her to approach Elizabeth Bleazby in confidence. Henderson stated ‘I am forced to the conclusion that our work is being hampered by personalities. This is a heavy blow to [the] prestige of [our] work in [the] popular mind’.\(^\text{113}\)
In her letter, Henderson suggested that ‘we both resign our positions as Presidents, that we plead for all Societies to affiliate with the Central Council, that we ask for a new President to be appointed to the Central Council and refuse to accept nominations ourselves’. Henderson considered this move as a worthwhile sacrifice for the cause of the work:

I venture to predict that some day we shall have the proud consciousness of knowing that we have done a greater work by resigning than by remaining in office. That we may produce cooperative spirit and bring about a better recognition of Benevolent Society work by the Government, Municipalities and the public is my earnest desire.\(^\text{114}\)

Bleazby, however, had a different vision. She remained opposed to the changes the Council of Societies represented—despite Henderson’s appeal to the heritage of the work. The conflict was sustained. Henderson’s efforts to work behind the scenes to mend the rift were unsuccessful. For Bleazby there was more at stake than her position as President.

\(^{111}\) Henderson to Bleazby, 24 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\(^{112}\) Henderson to Bleazby, 24 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\(^{113}\) Henderson to Bleazby, 24 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\(^{114}\) Henderson to Bleazby, 24 October 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
She opposed what the Council sought to achieve and she felt a need to defend the tradition of moralistic welfare practices long associated with the Societies, ignoring Henderson’s concerns about the future of the Societies. Bleazby stubbornly held onto a vision of the Societies as moral missionaries and sustained her belief that the Council threatened their moral authority.

In late October 1929, following the intensification of the struggle, the conference initiated by the Charities Board went ahead. The Board was committed to the introduction of the Council as a necessary body to institute its desired welfare reforms. In attendance were representatives from the Association, the Council of Societies and the Charities Board. Anxious to resolve the differences between the two opposing bodies, the Board went to great lengths to address what it saw as the three major issues of concern to the Association. Firstly, the perceived threat to the Societies’ individual autonomy was discussed, with particular attention paid to the financial aspect. The Board confirmed that all Societies would be granted the opportunity to contribute to decisions made by the Council through their representation on its board. Secondly, the Charities Board responded to the Association’s objections to a system of a state-wide ‘central registration’ or Central Index. For such a scheme to have maximum effectiveness it would need to embrace ‘all organisations doing similar work. It is necessary, however, that the work of Ladies Benevolent Societies first be coordinated, their cases registered and policy developed before the large proposal could be proceeded with’.115

Finally, the issue of the necessity for a completely new body was confronted. The Charities Board exercised caution in its response. It agreed that it could be ‘seen that the Central Council is actually a development of the VALBS, clothed in a new name and with extended powers’.116 As far as the Board was concerned, however, the Association was an ineffective body. The Board suggested it did not receive recognition from the Government, municipalities and the public that a body of its size, doing the work it did, deserved to receive. The Association, claimed the Charities Board, was itself aware of this. Recognising the desire of Ladies Benevolent Societies to ‘systematise the work and coordinate the efforts of individual societies ... and acting on this understanding the Board agreed to a reorganisation of the existing body in such a way that its objects and usefulness could be enlarged and a new title adopted’.117 The Council of Societies was clearly, therefore, beneficial to all Societies involved and what they ultimately wanted. It provided the opportunity to acquire new cultural capital and secure greater recognition for the

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115 Letter from C. L. McVilly to affiliates of VALBS, 16 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
116 McVilly to affiliates of VALBS, 16 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
117 McVilly to affiliates of VALBS, 16 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
Societies through the development of a new form of authority—based on a new, scientific, professional ethos—in the welfare field. Considering the obvious benefits, the Board expressed its confidence that the ‘relatively small differences of opinion’ between the two bodies could be overcome.\(^{118}\)

The Association, however, was not convinced by what the Charities Board had to say. It resolved ‘that in the opinion of this meeting the central council is unnecessary, as we are sure that the VALBS can do all that is required to ensure efficiency in the work of the Societies’.\(^{119}\) The Association made a public declaration of its intention to continue operating with six affiliated Societies. Four of these remaining Societies—Footscray, Richmond, East Melbourne, and South Melbourne—were ‘working in four of the largest industrial suburbs’.\(^{120}\) Notably, three Societies left the Association during the course of the struggle. The Association retained a commitment to traditional welfare practices and opposed the Council of Societies’ open suggestion to reform those practices. It was not prepared to alter its understanding of the Societies’ role in a changing welfare field.

The field of Societies did not recover from the rift of 1928-29. The 1930s saw the Societies separated into two hostile bodies that claimed to represent the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The Association continued to exist and work towards the goal of individual moral reform. The Council began operating in association with the Charities Board striving to achieve welfare reform. In 1933 the *Age*, in a report on the Annual Meeting of the Central Council, stated that there would be an amalgamation of the Association and the Council. The Association, however, remained opposed to any suggested amalgamations, commenting that ‘the conditions of five years ago when the question of a Central Council was being discussed had not altered. That the Societies affiliated with the Association were still of the opinion that a Central Council was an unnecessary expense’.\(^{121}\) This disunity amongst the Societies was to remain throughout the 1930s with negative consequences for sustaining their authority in the welfare field.

**Sustaining authority in the welfare field**

During the 1920s, the Ladies Benevolent Societies responded to the increased pressure for welfare reform with a mixture of resistance and willingness to adapt. The internal divisions that erupted were a manifestation of the struggle to cope with the effects of change upon the Societies’ understanding of their purpose. Whilst in favour of centralised planning to

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\(^{118}\) McVilly to affiliates of VALBS, 16 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.

\(^{119}\) *Age*, 30 November 1929.

\(^{120}\) *Age*, 30 November 1929.

\(^{121}\) 20 April 1933, VALBS, Minutes.
coordinate general welfare practices through a Charities Board, some Societies were opposed to similar planning for the Societies' welfare practices. Welfare reforms recommended by the Board, such as the proposed standard of relief, indicated a shift away from individual moralism, which concerned some Societies. Equally disturbing for some were the attempts to move away from classed forms of authority, revealed in the Board's attempts to change the names of the Societies, removing 'ladies' from the title. The greatest threat to some Societies came with the proposal to introduce a new, representative body—a body whose goals were not traditional and which sought to develop new cultural capital. At this point, a number of Societies strongly resisted, refusing to give any further consideration to the changes recommended to welfare practices. The commitment to the Societies' founding ethos was more strongly embedded for those Societies that remained affiliated with the Association than for those Societies that were willing to question their self-perception and their purpose in the welfare field.

This resistance thwarted efforts by Jessie Henderson and Gertrude Woinarski to create a new form of authority for the Societies through the Council of Societies. They appreciated the magnitude of the push for welfare reform. They anticipated its likely effect on the Societies and were of the view that the network of Societies could benefit by making the effort to adapt to reform. While Henderson and Woinarski were unsuccessful in the late 1920s in bringing about a new understanding of the Societies' authority, they did not abandon hope of creating a future for the Societies in the changing welfare field. With internal differences within the network of Societies remaining throughout the 1930s, these ongoing conflicts made the achievement of this objective extremely difficult. On the eve of the 1930s, the network of Societies was unstable, suffering from internal conflict and fears for their future. In addition to internal strife, the Societies existed in tension with the Charities Board and the COS. The Depression of the 1930s was to further challenge the Societies' instability and lead to a crisis of authority. It introduced a new prominent player in the welfare field—the government.
Chapter Five

Crisis of Authority

Unemployment relief and the Depression

Unemployment means mentally dwarfed, morally warped, physically undeveloped, spiritually bankrupted children ... Unemployment means everything that makes man lower than the beasts, and turns more women into prostitutes ... The unemployment problem is the greatest problem of our day ... ¹

George Lamb, Member of Parliament, 1935

As moral guardians of the family, the Societies' provision of relief to the unemployed was essential to their work. Unemployment was a fragile state in which the worker was seen to teeter on the edge of either being rehabilitated back into the workforce or declining into a condition of despair and hopelessness. The need for moral intervention at this point was considered crucial to the tradition of philanthropy. Here the Societies could be moral saviours, implementing welfare practices that aimed 'to discourage the loafer and the professional beggar'.² Preventing idleness and dependence upon charity was vital if a cycle of poverty was to be avoided. Once individuals had resorted to the life of the 'loafer' it was feared their children would inherit their decayed morals. Assisting the unemployed was the key to the prevention of this decline. Through the rehabilitation of the unemployed, the family could be saved. Once reinstated into the workforce, the breadwinner would maintain a sense of responsibility and a work ethic that would be passed on to future generations. To the Societies this ethic went hand in hand with good morals—work was always the ultimate salvation.

In the early 1930s, the unemployment crisis caused by the Depression was the catalyst for a major challenge to the tradition of philanthropy that had been brewing for decades, altering accepted understandings of unemployment. In 1928 unemployment had increased to nearly eleven percent from six percent in 1920.³ Two years later, the figure had risen to almost eighteen percent. In 1930, the government intervened to deal with the unemployment crisis with the Unemployment Relief Act. On the surface, government intervention initially appeared to change very little. Historians such as Geoff Spenceley have suggested in Victoria this intervention was little more than a re-labelling of old ways.⁴ In this chapter, I argue that government unemployment relief represented a significant shift towards 'modern' welfare practices, despite its seemingly temporary nature and its

¹ 13 June 1935, Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), Assembly (A), Volume 196, p.705.
⁴ G. Spenceley (1986) 'Social control, the Charity Organisation Society and the evolution of unemployment relief policy in Melbourne during the Depression of the 1930s', Historical Studies, 22, p.239.
continuity with the past. Despite the government's initial attempts to retain minimal involvement, the Act was a step towards centralised government welfare planning. It altered the relationship between the government, welfare recipients and welfare providers. Expectations of welfare recipients changed with the passage of the legislation. Cooperation and coordinated welfare practices became the government's primary goal in an effort to achieve greater cost efficiency.

The Ladies Benevolent Societies were affected by these changed understandings and shifting relationships. On the eve of the Depression they were still well poised to attain a new form of authority in the changed welfare field that encompassed both modern and traditional welfare practices. They possessed valuable social capital and were held in high esteem by the government and the Charities Board. For the Societies, the passage of the Unemployment Relief Act in 1930 simultaneously held both hope and fear for their future in the welfare field. The scheme of unemployment relief instituted by the legislation offered the Societies an opportunity to assume a new position of authority. To seize the opportunity, the Societies needed to acquire new social and cultural capital. That is, to be effective in the new scheme of unemployment relief, the Societies needed to interact cooperatively with other welfare providers and reassess their existing alliances, particularly with the government. They also needed to be open to different welfare practices, which required a receptiveness to new understandings of unemployment based on socio-economic interpretations. Structural explanations for the condition of unemployment gained broad-based support.

The changes required of the Societies went deeper than merely implementing new practices and developing new alliances. Achieving these goals meant being open to the values associated with new welfare practices. While the more progressive Societies were receptive to new ideas for adopting modern welfare practices, the broader network of Societies struggled to depart from habits acquired over several decades. These were habits associated with a belief in individual moral reform as the key to social progress. To reassess their understandings of their alliances and their welfare practices, the Societies needed to question their self-perception and their purpose—for example, how willing were they to embrace a preventative role with less emphasis on moral reform? In this chapter, my general focus is on the Societies' response to the unemployment crisis and their efforts to assume a new position of authority. I argue that they struggled to adapt in the early stages of the Depression and made little effort to reassess their role in the welfare field. This reluctance to adapt led to a crisis in their authority. By the time they were prepared to seriously reconsider their approach, it was too late. The Societies were to emerge from the Depression with a changed position in the welfare field.
The unemployment crisis—finding a solution

By 1930, the Societies' moral authority in unemployment relief had long been recognised. An alliance between the government and the Ladies Benevolent Societies in unemployment relief was developed in the 1890s. During seasons when unemployment was high, the government would provide special funds to private charity to assist in relief efforts. Generally this would cover a four month period over the winter season. This arrangement between the Societies and the government was maintained into the 1920s. In the decade following the First World War, Victoria experienced a steady increase in unemployment which led to several government calls on the Societies. In 1925, the Treasurer, Sir Alexander Peacock, expressed his gratitude for the Societies' efforts in that year and for the 'public spirit and good citizenship of the ladies acting on the Committees who so willingly and efficiently came to the assistance of the Government'. The Societies accepted the acknowledgement of their authority and readily assumed additional responsibilities in the provision of unemployment relief. Their authority was based on the recognition of their moralistic approach to unemployment relief which I discussed in Chapter Three. In its 1927-28 Annual Report, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, expressed that '[t]his Committee appreciates the confidence placed in it by the Government, as evidenced by the arrangements made for the extra expenditure'.

In 1928 and 1929, however, the Societies struggled to cope under this arrangement with the government. Their finances were stretched by increasing demands for assistance from the unemployed. Additional government funding proved increasingly difficult to secure. In November 1928, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society 'considered [it] necessary to emphasise the serious condition of things by taking [the] extreme step of closing the doors'. The Society believed the distress it had witnessed over the past twelve months was the greatest experienced in sixty years. Its actions received the immediate attention of the Premier, Sir William McPherson, who 'was most sympathetic and desired the work to be resumed immediately, promising to give £2,000 straightaway, and to be responsible for overdraft later, when finances were better'. Hope remained that conditions would improve. Conditions worsened, however, and the Melbourne Society repeated its threats of closure in March, April and August of 1929 alongside demands for

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6 Swain *The Victorian charity network*, pp.19-20.
8 15 September 1925, MLBS, Minutes.
10 20 November 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
11 23 November 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
large scale government assistance. In April and August these threats were carried through, forcing the government to address the problem. The strength of the protest by the Society indicated the extremity of the situation. In April 1929, one member of the Society had stated that 'it was a necessity to close down in order to convince the public of the crying need for relief in so many families'. Smaller Societies, including Richmond and Oakleigh, also ceased operations.

Threatening closure was an option the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society did not take lightly. Such action had the potential to create hostility with valued subscribers amongst the business community and the public. For the Societies, sustaining this social capital was vital to their continued authority. In August 1929, when considering its difficult financial position, the Melbourne Society initially determined that 'in view of the assistance which had been given by firms, it would be practically breaking faith with them to discontinue relief'. Two weeks later, however, financial matters worsened for the Society and it opted to close its doors. Its protest was directed at the government and the public. The Society wished to emphasise the gravity of the situation in an appeal to the public for additional funding. Mrs J. W. Mackenzie, who organised the appeal for the Society, stated that '[w]e women are finding the work beyond our powers. The strain of such intense relief work is breaking us down and I appeal to you to come to our aid'. She also revealed her opinion that

our system is open to condemnation, but at present is the only way to keep those thousands of poor persons from starving. We give charity instead of the opportunity to work and so are taking away from the families their greatest asset, independence.

The Society retained its commitment to preventing dependence on charity and was of the view that resorting to charity on any occasion was a threat to independence and the work ethic. In 1929, however, the Societies began to accept that for many people there were no alternatives—jobs were scarce. Yet the Societies could not afford to deal with the unemployment crisis without additional assistance.

The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society’s pressure on the government to take responsibility for the unemployment problem is evidence of a shift in the Society’s thinking. It put greater emphasis than ever before on the government’s responsibility for

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12 12 March 1929, 9 April 1929, 27 August 1929, MLBS, Minutes; Argus, 2 March 1929, 12 April 1929, 29 August 1929.
13 9 April 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
15 13 August 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
16 Argus, 2 March 1929.
17 Argus, 2 March 1929.
the employment shortage and the resulting economic distress, giving some credence to structural causes. The Society also began to question the view that individuals were responsible for their own well-being and that through moral reform they could be saved. In a condition of mass unemployment, a person of respectable character and good moral conduct could not be assured of sustaining employment. While in 1925 the Society was of the view that 'the “chronic” always happens along if there is a whisper of Government aid', in 1929 it became less concerned with the potential for dependence and more focused on providing assistance to those who were obviously ‘victims’ of circumstances beyond their control. In April 1929, Gertrude Woinarski, the Secretary of the Society, stated that ‘it is absurd to say that in this country any able-bodied man who is willing to work can find work—the work is not to be found.’

The Society believed the government’s responsibility was to equip those authorised to provide unemployment relief with adequate funding. It did not consider that this responsibility should extend to the actual provision of relief. While the Melbourne Society’s pressure on the government in April 1929 secured them additional finances, Gertrude Woinarski emphasised that although '[t]he Ministry has been very generous, ... it must be remembered that we are really doing its work ... Continuous unemployment has brought about the situation'. Blaming the government enabled the Society to divert any criticisms of its shortcomings to the government, who was responsible for the unemployment crisis and, hence, responsible for the circumstances the Societies confronted. The Societies were not alone in their belief that the government should intervene. During 1929, the unemployed revealed their dissatisfaction with the government’s lack of response to the unemployment problem. They became increasingly militant, marching in protest and sending deputations to the Premier.

In December 1929, a Labor government replaced the conservative Nationalist government and confronted increasing pressure from the public to intervene in the unemployment situation. Despite its intentions to address the problem, the new government was in an awkward position. Strong resistance to government intervention by traditionalists made its task extremely difficult. Labor did not hold a majority in the Legislative Assembly and was faced with a hostile upper house. Intervening to provide emergency government relief to the unemployed did not prove easy. The Legislative Council opposed increased taxation and stalled debate on relief legislation. To overcome

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19 Argus, 12 April 1929.
20 Argus, 12 April 1929.
the obstruction of the Council, the Labor government was forced to introduce conservative legislation for unemployment relief. The eventual passage of the *Unemployment Relief Act* in 1930 resulted in the government assuming minimal responsibility for provision of relief to the unemployed. The legislation, on the whole, left the existing structures of the welfare field intact. The Act was a buffer, an emergency measure, and therefore temporary in nature. It created a government Unemployment Relief Fund, from which the government proposed to provide 'works for the relief of unemployment and ... sustenance for persons out of employment'.\(^{23}\) Despite its conservative nature, the legislation was an important step in the direction of central welfare planning.

The government's changed responsibilities altered the dynamic of its relationship with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The legislation contained a provision which officially recognised the Societies' authority in unemployment relief.\(^{24}\) The government initially expected to sustain minimal involvement by assuming responsibility for planning and delegating the actual task of unemployment relief to private charity. A sub-section of the legislation stated that: 'All sustenance under this Act shall be distributed through such charitable organizations and benevolent societies as are approved in writing by the Charities Board of Victoria'.\(^{25}\) The Charities Board was clear that it considered the Ladies Benevolent Societies the 'proper agency' to be employed in the distribution of relief.\(^{26}\) There were two consequences for the Societies. On the one hand, they were provided with an opportunity to secure a new position of authority in the welfare field. Yet they had also entered into a contract with government. In the early 1930s, it became evident that the government's expectations of the Societies had changed. Importantly, the nature of the Societies' authority had changed through a shift in the composition of their social capital.

**A new form of authority?—the practice of unemployment relief**

In mid-1930, the Societies assumed their responsibility as primary distributors of 'sustenance' under the provisions of the *Unemployment Relief Act*. Initially, the Societies embarked on the work of sustenance distribution willingly and enthusiastically. They were committed to assisting the government in work that the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society considered to be 'so important, [that] all other business be suspended'.\(^{27}\) In the first months, the procedures for unemployment relief barely changed. Unemployed

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23 *Unemployment Relief Act*, 1930, no. 3866, p.49.
24 G. Spenceley (1980), 'Charity relief in Melbourne: the early years of the 1930s Depression', *Monash Papers in Economic History*, No. 8, Monash University, p.27.
25 *Unemployment Relief Act*, p.50.
27 17 June 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
married men in need of relief for their families applied to the Societies for sustenance.\textsuperscript{28} Following an inquiry by the local Society to determine whether the applicant was genuine and relief justified, a grocery order would be granted. This would then be presented by the recipient to the local grocer, who received payment from the Treasury. This practice of unemployment relief, or 'sustenance' provision, resembled earlier Society efforts to assist the government in unemployment relief. There was an emphasis on investigation and the Societies possessed the necessary apparatus to successfully undertake the work.\textsuperscript{29} The \textit{Argus}, reporting on the organisation of sustenance in the days following the introduction of the new government scheme, stated that '[t]he necessity for careful investigation of the circumstances of all applicants for sustenance, in order to prevent imposition was emphasised by Kiernan [the Minister for Sustenance].\textsuperscript{30}

The legislation had succeeded in its passage because it did not represent a challenge to recognised welfare practices and, therefore, appeared to retain accepted understandings of citizenship rights. The new government unemployment provision had not created a right to relief, which many traditionalists associated with government intervention. Rather, a reciprocal relationship had been established. Those in receipt of welfare either had to undergo investigation to receive relief, in keeping with traditional welfare practices, or had to work to claim their benefit. The recipient was under an obligation to sustain independence from charity. Importantly, however, the shift in attitude that led to the government's intervention, and the implication that it was responsible for the unemployment crisis, had altered the relationship between the unemployed and the government. The suggestion that the unemployed should be rehabilitated into the workforce through individual moral reform was inconsistent with the changed understanding of responsibilities for unemployment. These shifts in understanding were to alter the cultural capital valued in unemployment relief. The traditional expectations of the unemployed held by the Societies in their welfare practices became increasingly irrelevant. To sustain their authority, the Societies needed to realign their outlook to remain consistent with changing ideas and cooperate with other welfare bodies.

\textbf{Centralised welfare planning—social capital and government sustenance}

The most obvious change that resulted from the passage of the \textit{Unemployment Relief Act} was the altered organisation of sustenance distribution.\textsuperscript{31} A centralised system of government planning was established with the Act. The Societies became part of a broader

\textsuperscript{28} In Chapter Six, I discuss the relief provisions to unemployed women, for whom the provisions under the legislation were inadequate.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Argus}, 19 June 1930, p.12.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Argus}, 19 June 1930, p.12.

\textsuperscript{31} See Diagram 1 in the Appendix.
government scheme of unemployment relief. They were to distribute sustenance in cooperation with local Unemployment Relief Committees in suburban districts. The committees would be coordinated by the State Relief Committee, formed under the provisions of the relief legislation and directly funded by the government. The personnel on the board of the Committee included three representatives of government departments, and representatives of the Trades Hall, the Ladies Benevolent Societies, the National Council of Women and the women's branch of the Labor Party. Notably women were strongly represented on the Committee's board. Jessie Henderson was the representative for the Societies. The State Relief Committee assumed authority as the central distributing body for commodities. It did not deal with individual cases. This task was left to the local Unemployment Relief Committees. These local committees generally comprised representatives of the Societies, municipal councils and other charitable organisations operating in the district. On the whole, the local Ladies Benevolent Societies formed the core of the committees. In recognition of the Societies' authority in the practice of unemployment relief, the Charities Board had made it clear that the 'Ladies' Benevolent Societies should be the nucleus of all local committees distributing relief'.

In the eighteen months following the introduction of the Unemployment Relief Act, the Societies' social capital, or alliances within the welfare field, shifted dramatically. This shift had important consequences for the Societies' position of authority in the field. Initially empowered as the nucleus of the committees, the Societies needed to coordinate with other welfare providers to successfully sustain their authority. Maintaining an alliance with the government was also vital for the Societies to effectively perform the task of sustenance distribution. So too was establishing good relations with the unemployed. In each of these relations, however, the Societies came into conflict during the first six months after the Act was introduced. The result was a deterioration in their social capital. This breakdown of relations was significant in the Societies' crisis of authority and I will therefore address these conflicts in some detail.

The Societies' alliance with the government revolved around issues of finances, which was a legacy of their relationship in the past. The alliance was severely strained by the financial arrangement in the distribution of unemployment relief. To perform the task of distributing sustenance, the Societies insisted on adequate funding. When the government announced its allocations for distributing sustenance under the Unemployment Relief Fund, the Societies were disappointed by the amount they were to receive. They had entered into an agreement with the government in good faith, receiving no indication of the costs the government expected to contribute. In June 1930, the

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32 State Relief Committee 'Items for discussion at proposed conference with Mr Kieman', cJanuary 1931, Public Records Office (PRO), Series (S) 4523/R1, Unit (U) 17, Item 78.
33 Louis Trade unions and the Depression, p.165.
government allocated £130,000 for the Societies’ sustenance distribution. They were outraged and claimed the amount was insufficient. In the financial year 1929-30, Victoria’s 145 Societies had revealed their obvious inability to stretch £92,500 to provide relief to their clients, of which the government contribution had been £36,200. In the following year, unemployment increased from eleven to nearly eighteen percent, with every indication that conditions would worsen over the winter months. In the Societies’ opinion, the government’s allocation was far from satisfactory.

It quickly became apparent that the Societies did not have the resources to address the needs of vast numbers of unemployed. For example, the Brunswick Ladies Benevolent Society was spending nearly £1,500 per week in sustenance payments, yet it was only receiving £750 per month in government funding. This grant was expected to stretch to 727 applicants. The Northcote Ladies Benevolent Society had 1,125 unemployed people to provide for on a grant of £125. The Societies protested against this financial situation by resorting to the strategy they had successfully implemented in 1928 and 1929—the suspension of unemployment relief. On 21 June 1930, one week into the new scheme of unemployment relief, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society and other Societies in the metropolitan area temporarily suspended the distribution of sustenance, leaving the State Ministry in a ‘dilemma’ and without the necessary means to continue the sustenance payments. With the Societies forming the nucleus of the Unemployment Relief Committees, their importance in sustenance distribution was highlighted by this protest. The Societies stated they would reconsider their position before taking on further financial responsibility.

Previous protests had forced the government to address the financial concerns of the Societies. On this occasion, however, it had little sympathy for their position. The government considered the passage of the Unemployment Relief Act had altered its obligation to the Societies and, in turn, the Societies’ duty to the government. The Act served as a contract, altering the nature of their alliance. This perceived agreement influenced the government’s attitude towards the Societies and how it interacted with them. Not having consulted the Societies, however, the ‘contract’ was based on assumptions and unspoken rules. The government expected the Societies to perform the task of sustenance distribution under the provisions of the Act. It was paying them to do its work.

The Argus reported on the event revealing its interpretation of the contract between the Societies and the government. It explained that the government had not received a

34 Victorian Year Books, 1929-30.
35 Argus, 23 June 1930; Age, 9 July 1930.
36 Argus, 21 June 1930, p.22.
37 Argus, 21 June 1930, p.22.
direct report that the distribution had been suspended, but if this had occurred the
Premier, E. J. Hogan, was of the view that they had broken the law under sub-section 7(6).
Firstly, the government expected to be consulted on the Societies’ intentions, which they
had failed to do. Secondly, the government claimed that as organisations authorised by
the Charities Board to distribute sustenance, they had a duty to continue to the work.
Hogan’s response was quoted:

Virtually, it [the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society] had gone on strike. In the
industrial world when a body of men went on strike, their payments ceased. It
would be interesting to know whether the same condition would be applied to
those who had decided that the benevolent societies should not continue the
distribution.38

This statement is revealing. Despite being a voluntary body of organisations, the Societies
were under a perceived obligation to conduct the work of sustenance distribution
following the passage of the Unemployment Relief Act. They were bound by an agreement.
Yet the Societies’ action also demonstrated the limitations of this agreement. The
government was powerless to do anything. It was not in a position to force the women to
continue distributing relief. Nor could the government direct any other body to take over
the work of the Societies in view of the provisions of the Act. The result was that the
Premier could not indicate what action could be taken if the Societies continued in their
refusal to distribute sustenance payments.39

The Societies were unimpressed with their protest being equated to strike action.
Elizabeth Thomas, the Secretary of the Essendon Ladies Benevolent Societies and
executive member of the Council of Societies, responded to the claim that the Societies
had gone on strike in a letter to the editor of the Argus. She stated:

The Premier (Mr Hogan) has thought fit to make some very unfair criticism of the
Ladies Benevolent Societies, in connection with unemployment sustenance, and in
your issue of to-day he leads readers to infer that these ladies are a body of paid
government officials.40

As voluntary, charitable workers the Societies resented the implication that they were ‘paid
government officials’. Indeed, such a suggestion challenged their voluntarism and their
associated understanding of themselves. The Societies perceived themselves as
independent, private organisations. They were not an extension of the government.

Only one week into the new arrangement for unemployment relief and the alliance
between the government and the Societies was tested. The working relationship between

38 Argus, 21 June 1930, p.22.
39 Argus, 21 June 1930, p.22.
40 Argus, 23 June 1930, p.7.
the women of the Societies and the government came into question. What obligations existed between them and how were these to be interpreted? Did the unemployment relief legislation bind the Societies to assist the government regardless of the conditions? Could the Societies honour their welfare practices when they felt their work was being compromised by government demands? To what extent did the Societies view their involvement in unemployment relief as a ‘duty’? The Societies did not hesitate to make their disapproval known. Thomas went on to express her disappointment with the government:

The Premier forgot that he was dealing not with men, but with committees of women who understand the purchasing power of 1/-, and who realised the absolute impossibility of continuing under conditions which simply made a farce of the whole scheme. Ladies Benevolent Societies, recognising the desperate plight of the country, had gone into this scheme in all good faith to render the Government assistance or advice in their power, but have received no help but only insults and misrepresentations, this latest utterance of Mr Hogan being the culmination. 41

With no consultation to formalise the arrangement that existed between the Societies and the government, hostilities emerged due to misunderstandings resulting from this lack of communication. An absence of understanding characterised perceived obligations. Asserting the Societies’ moral authority, Thomas demanded an apology from the government and some indication that a workable scheme would be formulated before the Societies resumed the work of sustenance distribution. 42 For the Societies to maximise the opportunity offered by their new role in the government scheme, they needed to develop a new understanding of their alliance with the government. There was a sense of a reciprocal arrangement, yet it remained undefined and led to tensions between the two parties.

The tensions were to remain despite the resolution of the conflict between the government and the Societies a week later. The Societies reconsidered their position and returned to their duties in the distribution of sustenance with no concessions from the government, which was a significant backdown. The government emphasised that there would be no increase in the funding of sustenance payments. 43 The Societies’ decision to continue sustenance distribution with no concessions was a demonstration of their self-sacrificing generosity. The work needed to be done and they were prepared to serve the government, despite the difficult conditions and inadequate funding. The conflict over funding, however, marked an important shift in the dynamic between the government and the Societies. The Societies’ authority had been seriously questioned.

41 Argus, 23 June 1930, p.7.
42 Argus, 23 June 1930, p.7.
43 Argus, 24 June 1930, p.9.
Having resumed their work without additional funding, the Societies were forced to alter their practice of unemployment relief to prevent further financial liability. They decided to distribute their monthly grant in weekly sums. When the weekly amount was expended they would cease distribution. This was far from an ideal outcome, particularly for the unemployed. The already unstable relationship between the Societies and the unemployed was further weakened by this development. The deterioration of relations with the unemployed was another important factor in the Societies’ declining social capital, which had implications for their overall authority. On 27 June 1930, more than 1,000 unemployed unionists gathered in a demonstration to express their dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of sustenance distribution. They confronted the government with their grievances, aware that the Societies had already unsuccessfully protested. In a deputation to the Premier they claimed that sustenance payments were inadequate. In addition to this, many unemployed could not even be assured of receiving a sustenance dole when they had been forced out of work. They demanded that provision of work or full sustenance be instituted.

This was precisely the type of social unrest that both the government and the Societies had wanted to avoid. The Unemployment Relief Act had resulted in a sense of a right to relief amongst the unemployed. Preventing future disruptions amongst the unemployed became a strong objective, particularly for the government. The government devoted its attention and its funds to the creation of work opportunities. It aimed to expand its work for the dole scheme. The government anticipated that relieving the unemployed of their idleness would dissipate their rising dissatisfaction with conditions. The unemployed, however, became increasingly militant in late 1930. The Societies were in a position to develop an alliance with the unemployed. Both were dissatisfied with the government. Yet the Societies did not attempt to improve their relations with the unemployed. Crucial to their understanding of themselves was a sense of difference from the working class. The Societies considered themselves superior and above collaboration with the unemployed. Indeed, rather than cooperate they succeeded in further antagonising recipients of sustenance. Tension surrounding sustenance inadequacies led to tensions at relief depots and a fear of the unemployed amongst the Societies.

44 Argus, 24 June 1930, p.16.
46 Argus, 23 June 1930, p.7; Louis Trade unions and the Depression, p.164.
47 Louis Trade unions and the Depression, p.167.
In a cost saving measure intended to stretch the government funds further, the Ladies Benevolent Societies devised a new scheme of sustenance distribution. In July 1930 the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society approached the Charities Board with a suggestion that the distribution of sustenance be made ‘in kind’ to replace the system of grocery orders. The Society proposed a ‘wholesale’ approach, whereby a central store would be established to distribute food, clothing and wood supplies. These goods would be purchased wholesale and distributed to the unemployed as parcels of groceries in replacement of the grocery orders. The Melbourne Society claimed that the suggested method would save a considerable amount of money. It would also serve as a preventative measure, ensuring the unemployed did not develop a reliance upon more flexible forms of relief, such as the grocery order. Avoiding dependence on welfare remained a priority for the Society, and crucial to its vision of social progress. The Society, fearing a loss of the work ethic, perceived a need to guard against any development of a sense of a right to relief. The Charities Board had no objections to the Society’s proposed scheme and stated that it would ‘leave it to [the] Society to decide. There is danger of political interference but [the] idea is good’.

The Board was aware of the tension between the Societies and the government, yet retained its faith in the Societies’ authority on welfare practices.

With the encouragement of the Charities Board, in October 1930 the Melbourne Society put its proposed plan into action. The reaction to the new scheme revealed to other participants of the welfare field how out of touch the Societies were with the needs of the unemployed. The unemployed needed flexibility in the relief they received. The sustenance dole did not take their individual needs into account and therefore the unemployed preferred a system of grocery orders to the receipt of indiscriminate packages of wholesale goods. On 20 October, there was a demonstration of a large number of unemployed men and women from the suburbs of North Melbourne and Carlton at the Premier’s office, which was reported as being ‘noisy and hostile’ and necessitated police involvement as some men attempted to ‘rush’ the Minister and arrests were made. In a deputation to the Minister for Sustenance the unemployed demanded work, and ‘if that was not available, for a system of sustenance acceptable to the men and removed from the hands of the charitable organisations’. There were similar protests in Richmond, Brunswick and Footscray.

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48 Note for file, c28 July 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
49 Argus, 21 October 1930, p.7. For more information on troubles between the unemployed and the councils, the Societies and the government, see McCalman Struggletown, pp.157-61; Spenceley ‘Assessing the responses of unemployed’, pp.78-79; Louis Trade unions and the Depression, p.169.
50 Quoted in Spenceley ‘Social control’, p.244.
51 For a more detailed accounts of the events that occurred in Richmond, see J. McCalman Struggletown, pp.160-61.
Historian L. J. Louis suggests that the daily newspapers downplayed the actual numbers involved in these demonstrations in their own protest against the actions of the unemployed.\footnote{Louis \textit{Trade unions and the Depression}, p.169.} Indeed, the \textit{Argus} made apparent its disapproval of the unemployed's behaviour in its report on the demonstration. It stated:

> Instead of giving the new system designed for their benefit a trial, persons offered sustenance had refused to accept the parcels, and in consequence a large quantity of perishable goods which had cost a large sum of money had been wasted. The action of the unemployed was indefensible and foolish. The food should have been used for their children instead of being wasted.\footnote{\textit{Argus}, 21 October 1930, p.7.}

In Chapter Four I suggested that the \textit{Argus} was a voice for the traditional middle class. It supported the scheme devised by the Societies. The middle classes were growing more fearful of the increasing sense of a right to relief amongst the unemployed and the increasing militancy resorted to when those expectations were not met. The \textit{Argus} reflected this fear through its disapproval and attempted to assert that sustenance should be viewed by the unemployed as a privilege, not a right. As a privilege, unemployment relief should be received gratefully by the unemployed. Their protests demonstrated a lack of appreciation and an expectation of assistance, an expectation which many believed they were not entitled to.

Following the demonstration, however, the Minister for Sustenance, Esmond Kiernan, chose to accede to the demands of the unemployed. He agreed to speak with the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society and have the sustenance distribution revert to a system of grocery orders. Not only did this indicate a changing welfare relationship between the unemployed and the government, it also demonstrated the changed relations between the government and the Societies. The protest exacerbated concerns that the Societies' welfare practices were no longer suited to contemporary society. The Societies' authority in the practice of unemployment relief was under question with this obvious shift in social capital. The government was increasingly prepared to step in and overturn the Societies' decisions. The support and recognition for their role in the welfare field the Societies had become so accustomed to could no longer be relied upon.

The resulting tension with the unemployed made the Societies' work more difficult. In December 1930, thirty members of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society approached the Inspector of Charities to address the problem. The women of the Society sought some form of protection from the unemployed:

> Generally the ladies made it clear that they were most anxious to assist in the work in the whole of the metropolitan area but unless they were given some assurance
of relief from the distressing episodes which have occurred recently they feel they should withdraw altogether and confine their operations to benevolent society work only.  

There was no mention of what these ‘distressing episodes’ were, but at relief depots, angry members of the unemployed possibly expressed their frustrations to the privileged women of the Societies. Clearly these episodes were extremely disturbing to the women of the Melbourne Society. They feared the unemployed and the consequences of their increased expectation of a right to unemployment relief. The Societies could no longer expect subservience and gratitude from recipients. Nor had they encouraged improved relations with the unemployed in these changed conditions.

The relations of the Societies with members on the Unemployment Relief Committees were also often tense and difficult. This was the third significant factor that contributed to the Societies’ declining social capital. The Societies were initially willing to work cooperatively with other bodies in forming Unemployment Relief Committees. This cooperation was vital to their social capital and continuing authority. The Societies were accepted by other bodies as the nucleus of the relief committees and new alliances were formed. The State Relief Committee reported that:

[I]n most of the centres where subsidiary Relief Committees have been created ..., generally speaking, the proposition of a composite committee, the nucleus of which, in almost every case, was the Ladies’ Benevolent Society, was welcomed and was, without exception, regarded as a solution of the difficulties under which the Ladies’ Benevolent Society had been laboring for many months previously owing to the magnitude of the task it was expected to perform with a staff totally inadequate to satisfactorily accomplish its undertaking.

Guaranteed their authority in the provision of unemployment relief, the Societies were prepared to work with others in the formation of the emergency relief committees. The Societies expected to be held in high regard by those they worked with, anticipating their authority in welfare provision would receive the recognition they felt it deserved. They hoped to be listened to and to provide advice and assistance in distributing sustenance in cooperation with other welfare providers.

The Societies, however, were confronted by declining relations with other participants in sustenance distribution—from local government to bodies representing the unemployed. Cooperation amongst welfare providers did not occur as originally intended. Organisations represented on the Unemployment Relief Committees existed in

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54 Note for file, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
55 ‘Items for discussion’, cJanuary 1931, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
56 Argus, 23 June 1930, p.7.
competition with each other, rather than in collaboration.\textsuperscript{57} In November 1930, in a meeting with the Charities Board, the Minister for Sustenance stated his belief that the Societies were the cause of the conflicts within the committees:

\[\text{[M]any of the difficulties arising in certain districts had been due to lack of appreciation by the Ladies Benevolent Societies of the fact that there were vast differences between unemployment relief and benevolent relief and that in the former case the cooperation of the mayor and local councils and other organisations was extremely desirable.}\textsuperscript{58}\]

Kiernan considered that cooperation could not come about without the adoption of modern welfare practices based on the new understanding of unemployment. The ‘vast differences’ between sustenance and benevolent relief centred on the shift away from individual moral reform as the solution to the current unemployment crisis. The government had acknowledged that the causes were structural. Continuing to berate the unemployed for the predicament they found themselves in would resolve nothing. The Societies’ frequent insistence on finding fault with the unemployed was not conducive to improving the situation. Nor was it of any help in cooperating with other members of Unemployed Relief Committees who were committed to seeking alternative solutions and to improving morale. Furthermore, the continued assertion of individual autonomy in the provision of unemployment relief was a barrier to cooperation.

The refusal of some Societies to cooperate with other bodies became a central concern in sustenance distribution in 1931. The government believed the key to implementing effective new welfare practices was in cooperation amongst welfare bodies on the relief committees. Improved coordination was part of the government’s broader strategy of central welfare planning. In the distribution of sustenance, the Societies’ frequent reluctance to cooperate was a potential barrier to dealing with a crisis situation. Indeed, it was claimed by the coordinating State Relief Committee that ‘the situation which has to be met today … is almost without precedent in this State, and calls for more than ordinary effort if the community is to do what would appear to be its plain duty’\textsuperscript{59}.

The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, however, refuted Kiernan’s accusations that the Societies were the main problem. It claimed that ‘the main difficulty has been the permitted interference of the unemployed themselves, Trades Unions and other interested persons’\textsuperscript{60}. The Societies struggled to cooperate with those bodies representing the interests of the unemployed. They were not prepared to reassess their classed self-

\textsuperscript{57} Evidence prepared by Mr G. G. Henderson, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
\textsuperscript{58} Notes arising out of interview with Honorable R. L. Kiernan, MLC, 14 November 1930, PRO, 4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
\textsuperscript{59} Letter from State Relief Committee to municipal councils, 9 August 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
\textsuperscript{60} Note for file, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
perception and lower their social standards by working with the unemployed. Coordination could not be achieved while the unemployed were entitled to representation on Unemployment Relief Committees. The Melbourne Society argued that 'they would not assist if members of the unemployed themselves were in any way to take part and if they were not controlled'. 61 Again the Society resorted to its strategy of threatening to withdraw its cooperation if it did not receive the concessions it demanded. The threat, however, was lame. The government became increasingly intolerant of the inability of the Societies to interact with others who were equally prepared to volunteer their time and services. The Charities Board, however, maintained an important role in coordinating the efforts of the relief committees and was more sympathetic to the Societies' grievances. The Board defended the Societies' involvement and sought to encourage cooperation through different means.

In the Brighton district, for example, issues surrounding the lack of cooperation between the unemployed and the local Society arose in December 1930, illustrating the growing concern with the Societies' refusal to cooperate and the subsequent barrier they posed to central planning. The local Society did not interact with the local Unemployed Association. The Secretary of the Brighton Society, and Secretary of the conservative Association of Societies, Miss Jeffreson, 'mentioned the local unemployed committee ... did not deal with the Benevolent Society'. 62 This lack of cooperation in the district created concern for coordinating bodies, including the Charities Board and the State Relief Committee. The Committee stated that 'it would appear that some organisation is necessary in the Brighton district'. 63 The Brighton Unemployed Association expressed its grievances with the local Society to the State Relief Committee. The Unemployed Association considered the Society strict and insensitive to the needs of the unemployed in its relief practice. Representatives of the Unemployed Association had informed the State Relief Committee there were between 500 and 600 unemployed citizens in the district who required assistance. They objected to the Society's role in providing this relief and consequently had no desire to cooperate. Examples of the methods objected to were described by the Association. It was mentioned that when representatives applied for assistance from the local Ladies Benevolent Society, one of them was requested to sell his horse and another one, with his wife, was requested to sell the bicycle belonging to each and stated that while they were in urgent need of assistance, if they sold their horse and their bicycles they would not be able to replace them for a long time. 64

61 Note for file, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U88, Item 847.
62 Letter from W. R. Bunker, Secretary, State Relief Committee, to C. L. McVilly, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
63 Bunker to McVilly, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
64 Bunker to McVilly, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
Despite the local unemployed's grievances, the Charities Board overlooked them in its report on coordination in the Brighton district. The Inspector of Charities determined, after meeting with Miss Jeffreson, that 'I do not think it is necessary to register or recognise the Brighton Unemployed Association, but I have asked Miss Jeffreson to coopt the services of a few reliable members of the association and join them to her own committee'.

The local Society, therefore, was to remain the core of the local Unemployment Relief Committee and exercise authority over representatives of the unemployed. The Charities Board condoned the Society's refusal to cooperate with the unemployed and their insensitivity to the unemployed's conditions. The Society was seen to be effectively cooperating with the local municipal council in sustenance distribution, and the Board considered those relations worth encouraging rather than forcing relations with the unemployed. On this occasion, the local Society successfully overcame the critique of its uncooperative behaviour due to its strong social alliances with the Board and local government. The fact that the Societies were coming under the scrutiny of central bodies, however, indicated the growing dissatisfaction with their capacity for cooperation.

Problems regarding cooperation were possibly not always the fault of the Societies, yet the tendency was to look to them when troubles arose. For example, in September 1930 the Labor ministry became concerned at the 'failure of the State Relief Committee to work with the Ladies Benevolent Societies'. While the Societies could possibly have contributed to the Committee's 'failure' to work with them, the government's primary preoccupation was with encouraging welfare providers to overcome their differences and work together harmoniously and it increasingly viewed the Societies as a barrier to cooperation. Indications of efforts to compromise met with approval. On another occasion in November 1930, the Minister for Sustenance claimed that the Ladies Benevolent Society was the cause of cooperation difficulties in the Geelong district. Investigations by the Charities Board revealed that it 'was apparently the desire of the Mother Hubbard Cupboard Committee to exclude the Benevolent Society from active participation in unemployment relief distribution or of meeting it in conference on matters of policy concerning the method of relief'. No information on the nature of this committee was provided, but its actions were frowned upon. These actions were not conducive to the goal of cooperation. It seems likely, however, that the Societies themselves were doing little to foster good relations and subsequently alienated themselves on many local Relief Committees.

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65 Letter from C. L. McVilly to W. R. Bunker, 19 December 1930, PRO S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
66 Bunker to McVilly, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
67 23 September 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
68 Bunker to McVilly, 17 December 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U17, Item 78.
During 1931, conflicts and difficulties within the Unemployment Relief Committees continued. Many Societies remained stubborn in their attitude towards desirable methods of sustenance distribution. This led to more frequent disputes between the Societies and the Unemployment Relief Committees. The extent of cooperation expected of the Societies was unprecedented and they struggled to develop good relations. They considered themselves best suited to the task and were accustomed to their position of authority in unemployment relief. The Societies were exasperated by the lack of support they received when attempting to implement what they considered the most appropriate methods of distribution. In its 1930-31 Annual Report, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society commented that:

It is still a matter for deep regret that the ideal co-ordination of relief work has not yet been accomplished. It is the conviction of experienced workers in social service, that, could this reform be established and supplies of money, clothing, etc., be distributed through one centre in each municipality ... the type of mendicant, who successfully duplicates assistance ... would be restrained. 69

The Melbourne Society did desire coordination and could see its potential benefits. Yet it continued to assert its authority in welfare provision. The Society claimed that it ‘was very necessary for the Benevolent Societies to hold their position as the chief distributing agent [and] that it was clearly noted that in order to do so there would have to be closer cooperation with representatives of other existing relieving agencies’. 70

Other members of the Committees, however, did not enthusiastically embrace the prospect of the Societies assuming the position of ‘chief distributing agent’. In Heidelberg, for example, the local Unemployment Relief Committee ‘agreed to cooperate with the Benevolent Society, but not as an adjunct of the Benevolent Society’. 71 Despite the Societies’ desire for continued authority and awareness of the importance of social capital to sustain their position, other bodies were increasingly resistant to the Societies’ influence. The Societies’ commitment to their founding ethos was an important factor in their refusal to cooperate. They had grown to expect a certain degree of recognition of their authority. While they could appreciate the need to collaborate with others, doing so without the acknowledgement of their authority potentially threatened their self-perception. They were reluctant to embrace new understandings of the structural causes of unemployment. They were also resistant to altering their welfare practices to reflect these new ideas. They continued to assert their moral authority, despite the increasing denial of its validity in unemployment relief. Notably, the strongest resistance to change came from those

70 9 September 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
71 23 September 1930, MLBS, Minutes.
Societies associated with the Association of Societies—such as the Brighton Ladies Benevolent Society. An important consequence of this refusal to adapt was the loss of the government's initial confidence in the Societies as the agent through which it hoped to introduce changed measures of unemployment relief. The government became increasingly disillusioned with the Societies' lack of capability to respond positively to change. Its desire for coordination was a priority and in 1931 the government began to consider alternative structures for conducting sustenance distribution.

The push for centralised welfare planning—the Social Service Exchange

A social service exchange is a means whereby welfare workers meet the need for team work in modern social effort. 

Charities Board, Annual Report, 1930.

The Labor government was determined to resolve the problems arising from the evident lack of coordination in the field of unemployment relief. As discussed in Chapter Two, a Parliamentary Select Committee was appointed in October 1931 to investigate the issue of welfare reform and improved coordination in the field. The central finding of this committee's report, presented to the government in June 1932, was the urgent need for greater cooperation amongst organisations engaged in social services and the systematisation of their activities in investigation, records and amounts of relief provided.72

Crucial to the coordination of welfare activities and social service providers was the 'social index' or 'social service exchange'. The index was the proposed systematisation of registering recipients of welfare to prevent fraud and duplication of effort amongst welfare providers, aimed at greater cost efficiency. Some reflection on the origins of this 'modern' scheme is necessary to understand the desire for its introduction in the early 1930s.

Supporters of centralised planning for welfare had advocated a social service exchange since the late nineteenth century and had continually faced obstruction from the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The Charity Organisation Society had been vocal in its support since the 1890s. Despite attempts to introduce a central registry, and its occasional success in gaining support, nothing firm ever came of these efforts. The Societies contributed to its failure, never fully embracing the scheme.73 In the 1920s, the central registry continued to be sought after by the COS. In its first Annual Report of 1923-24, the Charities Board also expressed its intention to consider a scheme of registration.74 Jessie Henderson, in her role as a member of the Charities Board, pursued

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72 Letter from the Charities Board to the Premier, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
this interest in a central registry and submitted a proposal to the Board in May 1926.\footnote{Minutes of Charities Board meeting, 25 May 1926, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49.} Later that year, the Ladies Benevolent Societies were approached with a request for their views on the issue of organising local relief. Their response to this request revealed three schools of thought amongst them on a scheme of central registration. There were some Societies 'which entirely oppose suggested reform', some 'which consider it an excellent idea for other societies but is not applicable to them' and those 'which will agree to the whole of the suggestions'.\footnote{Minutes of Charities Board meeting, 13 October 1926, 2 December 1926, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49.} In August 1927, the Inspector of Charities, Robert J. Love, explained that '[t]he central register for Benevolent Cases is almost universal in [America] and we will just have to instal it, in spite of the objections of some of the women on the Ladies Benevolent Societies'.\footnote{Letter from Love to Atlee Hunt, August 1927, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49.} The ongoing resistance of the Societies was challenged.

In 1929, however, those Societies affiliated with the new Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies, under Henderson's presidency, expressed their support for the central register and actively sought its introduction in collaboration with the Charities Board. The Board needed support, having been denied approval by the Treasury in 1928 to introduce its proposed central registry due to lack of information about the scheme.\footnote{Proposal for Central Registration, c1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622; Minutes of Charities Board meeting, 8 February 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U10, Item 49; Letter from the Treasurer (E. J. Hogan) to Charities Board, 19 March 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.} In November 1929, Gertrude Woinarski in her role as Secretary of the Council of Societies, wrote to the Board requesting the introduction of a register, stating that the Council is of the opinion that the time has come for Central Registration of all persons receiving assistance from public funds, as the multiplicity of social agents, without coordination, of its various parts is having a detrimental effect on relief work.\footnote{Letter from G. Woinarski to C. L. McVilly, 13 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.}

Perhaps in an effort to demonstrate the extent of their willingness to embrace this modern approach to welfare coordination, Woinarski explained the Council 'is of the opinion that registration is purely the function of the Charities Board ... [i]t being the only body that will secure the willing cooperation of all voluntary workers'.\footnote{Woinarski to McVilly, 13 November 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.} The Council itself was aware, through experience, of the barrier certain Societies posed to reform. It believed the Board had the legal authority to compel bodies to comply, given its statutory power. Compulsion was considered likely to secure full cooperation. The Board also had the resources to finance salaries for the increased administration that would be incurred with the introduction of the register. Furthermore, the Council preferred the Charities Board to its long time opponent, the COS, as an agent that might administer central registration.
From the mid-1920s to 1930, there was a notable change in the nature of the register welfare providers sought to introduce. Also cooperating with the Charities Board, the COS explained that the old plan for a register based on the prevention of overlapping was negative. A new and positive plan was the 'social service exchange' which would provide 'the means by which welfare workers strive together for the best interests of those whom they are trying to help'. Instead of merely 'registering' a case, organisations would 'enquire' into the client's circumstances. The difference in the terms was important:

An enquiry is, of course, tantamount to a registration, but to speak of 'enquiry' places emphasis on the essential service of the Exchange—the asking of a question and the giving of an answer—whereas 'registration' is more suggestive of a formal office routine.

The exchange, as 'impersonal as a library catalogue, merely tells the enquiring agent where the information can be got'. Ultimately it would serve as 'a protection to those whom it records as it saves them from the needless humiliation of repeated investigations'. Not only would the Exchange improve cost efficiency and foster effective cooperation, it would also have social benefits for the recipients of welfare. The COS, however, questioned the general standard of welfare work in Melbourne, asking—'Is Melbourne's machinery for the relief of destitution sufficiently efficient, up-to-date and organised to fit in smoothly with the additional equipment represented by a Social Service Exchange?'?

The Parliament's Board of Inquiry, appointed in 1931, did not think the machinery was sufficiently modern. In January 1932 in Melbourne, there were one hundred and ninety-four Unemployment Relief Committees, eighty-nine Ladies Benevolent Societies and forty-seven other charitable committees all attempting to assist in the provision of unemployment relief. To coordinate this wide array of welfare providers, cooperation was vital. So too were other welfare reforms considered by the Board of Inquiry, including standardised welfare practices and the appointment of 'experts' to administer it with their special knowledge. In 1932, there was a notable shift in the nature of cultural capital valued within the welfare field. While welfare reformers in Victoria did not completely abandon tradition, they did look with optimism and hope at modern methods of achieving social progress based on an acceptance of the structural explanations of poverty, especially unemployment.

In her evidence to the Board of Inquiry, Jessie Henderson argued for the establishment of a compulsory system of central registration, to prevent the 'tendency for

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81 Notes on the Social Service Exchange by S. Greig Smith, April 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
82 Social Service Exchange, April 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
83 Social Service Exchange, April 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
84 Social Service Exchange, April 1930, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
85 Argus, 27 January 1932.
the various charitable organisations to be in competition with one another'. The Council of Societies retracted its statement of two years earlier that the Charities Board should undertake the administration of the central registry. Henderson stated that the ‘Central Council [of Victorian Benevolent Societies] wished to ask that they be empowered to undertake this work’. Aware in 1932 that the Societies’ authority was in crisis, Henderson wished to assert a new position for them within the welfare field. She continued to believe in their capacity to acquire new cultural capital, despite the rift that had occurred amongst the Societies in 1929 and the Societies’ conflicts within the Relief Committees distributing government sustenance.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Parliamentary Select Committee recommended a scheme of registration, suggesting two possible methods. One focused on coordinating local relief through local indices for each city, municipality or shire, and the second suggested the introduction of one large central index for the entire metropolitan area. Cecil L. McVilly, the Inspector of Charities, preferred the former, arguing that the coordination of local effort needed to be the first objective. Confidential discussions with the Minister for Sustenance, Wilfred S. Kent Hughes, in August 1932, however, put these plans on hold. McVilly was advised to take no action on the index. Kent Hughes had in mind his own strategy for coordination and central welfare planning.

**A new apparatus—the Public Assistance Committees**

When the United Australia Party was voted into office in May 1932 dramatic changes to sustenance distribution were envisaged. The new Minister for Sustenance, Kent Hughes, MLA, was one of an emerging strain of politicians that embraced a new style of politics that focused more on political ideology than pragmatism. Kent Hughes had been involved in the inception of the Young Nationalist Organisation, which was influenced by the fascist ideologies of Mussolini. To Kent Hughes, fascism ‘endeavours to avoid the egotistical attitude of laissez faire and also the inertia of Socialism’. In March 1931, he made it clear that he was striving towards a new political order, that the time for change had arrived:

86 Evidence prepared Henderson, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
87 Conference between representatives of Central Council and Charities Board, 4 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
88 Charities Board to Premier, 12 August 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
89 Charities Board to Premier, 12 August 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
90 Under Treasurer (State Treasury) to C. L. McVilly, 30 August 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
Today the younger men, like the majority of the people, are in revolt, not against the older politicians, but against the older political order. The machinery has been slowed down until it barely functions, resulting in disastrous effects to the country.

Kent Hughes was also strongly anti-Labor, and joined force with other non-Laborites to strengthen opposition to the Labor movement. Unification was achieved in September of 1930 when the Country Party and Country Progressives merged to become the United Country Party. Interestingly, however, the appeal of fascism was not confined to politicians of conservative parties. Kiernan’s faith in conventional political solutions had been destroyed by his experiences as Minister for Sustenance. His reassessment of his political views led to an admiration for Mussolini and a belief that the ‘only way to overcome “vile and vulnerable” capitalism was the establishment of a corporate state in which the employer and employee would combine to bring about a “planned economy”’.

Kent Hughes’ beliefs were to strongly influence his portfolio as Minister for Sustenance. He aimed to conduct an overhaul of relief legislation and bring about a more efficient, coordinated system of unemployment relief—a modern, centrally planned welfare field. He was of the opinion that current practices of relief did little more than extend charitable help from chronic dependents of charity to those unemployed whose need resulted from the Depression. He decided that ‘reform must separate the unemployable and other permanent “charity dependents” from the temporarily unemployed’. Although Kent Hughes’ ideas were not new to Victoria, his strategy for administering these reforms was new. To achieve the separation of ‘charity dependents’ from the unemployed, Kent Hughes sought the cooperation of municipal councils. He envisaged local government assuming the responsibility of relief, taking it out of the hands of the Ladies Benevolent Societies who had proved incapable of contributing to a planned welfare system. Despite some initial opposition, Kent Hughes secured the support of the municipal councils.

To resolve the tensions in the Unemployment Relief Committees and improve coordination, a new Unemployment Relief Bill was introduced by the government which contained provisions to reorganise unemployment relief. Members of parliament, of all political persuasions, had expressed their dissatisfaction with the condition of sustenance distribution, agreeing with Thomas Hayes of the Labor Party, who stated that those involved in the provision of unemployment relief ‘are all working from different angles’.

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93 Quoted in Howard, *Kent Hughes*, pp.57-58.
96 Howard, *Kent Hughes*, p.61.
To resolve this difficulty and encourage coordination, the Unemployment Relief Committees were to be replaced by the Public Assistance Committees.

There were two underlying objectives of the proposed legislation that had connotations for the Societies' position in the welfare field. Firstly, the establishment of the Public Assistance Committees was an attempt to create a new apparatus of welfare relief bodies, undermining the authority of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in unemployment relief. In their place, local government would assume new responsibilities in the field. Sub-section 7(6) of the Unemployment Relief Act 1930, which had led to the formation of Unemployment Relief Committees, was replaced by section 11 in the new Bill. This permitted the appointment of a Public Assistance Committee by the council of every municipality. These Committees were to be composed of not more than two-thirds of members of the council and ‘the remaining members of the said committee shall, as far as may be, be appointed from persons having experience in the distribution of charitable relief'. These new Committees were to perform the same duties as their predecessors. Where they differed, however, was in their proposed constitution. The Societies would no longer form the nucleus of the Committees. As ‘public' Committees, it was proposed that the core of these bodies would be largely bureaucratic.

Secondly, the government would be authorised with more power to directly intervene in the practices of unemployment relief. The 1930 Act had authorised the Charities Board with the power to dismiss or remove any of the Unemployment Relief Committees. In September 1932, however, the Charities Board learned that it would no longer have the necessary legal powers to force welfare providers to comply with a scheme of central registration. This discovery had consequences for the Board's authority in welfare planning. More effective coordination and planning would be achieved through increased government responsibility. The proposed amendment to the legislation gave the Minister for Sustenance control over the appointment and dismissal of Public Assistance Committees. With this authority, the government was in a position to resolve conflicts over sustenance distribution, such as the disturbances over funding that had occurred in 1930. The government was also empowered to intervene in the operations of the committees to reduce conflict, to instigate new welfare practices and to encourage cooperation and coordination of effort.

Not surprisingly, the Societies were concerned with how these changes effected their position within the welfare field, particularly their social capital. The Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies addressed this issue at a meeting in September 1932:

98 Unemployment Relief (Administration) Act, 1932, no. 4079, p.214.
99 Letter from C. L. McVilly to Crown Solicitor, 12 August 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622; Letter from Crown Solicitor to McVilly, 12 September 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
As the Bill at present provides for no Social Service Representative it was moved that we send a recommendation to the Minister that one be included.\(^{100}\)

Indeed, the Public Assistance Committees proposed in the Bill did not require the appointment of a 'social service representative', or member of a recognised charitable organisation, on their board. The Council of Societies was of the view that the Societies should remain incorporated in the unemployment relief legislation as social service representatives. Aware that they were being written out of the field of unemployment relief, the Societies protested. Their loss of official authority in sustenance distribution would affect their position within the broader welfare field. In October 1932, the Council of Societies passed a resolution 'that each member of the Central Council write to their respective member of Parliament that it include the Benevolent Societies in their New Relief Bill'.\(^{101}\)

The efforts of the Central Council of Societies were unsuccessful. In December 1932 the *Unemployment Relief (Administration) Act* was passed by the government with no inclusion of the Societies.\(^{102}\) To compensate for their reduced role in unemployment relief, a sub-section was included which provided that '[a]ny institution or benevolent society ... feeling aggrieved by reason of having no, or no sufficient, representation on the said committee, may appeal to the Minister who may direct the council to provide for such representation of the institution or society on the said committee as he thinks proper.'\(^{103}\) Following this the President of the Central Council of Societies provided advice to the Societies in how to proceed in regard to the new committees:

> Can I now suggest that in the formation of public assistance committees every benevolent society should insist on being generously represented and that if dissatisfied with our representation we should make an appeal to the Minister.\(^{104}\)

To secure their position within the field of unemployment relief, having lost official recognition, the Societies could only aim to have a strong presence on the new committees, something they had become accustomed to in participating with the Unemployment Relief Committees. They were aware of the significance of acquiring social capital in the face of these changes.

The Societies had no choice but to comply with the new legislation. In February 1933, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society liaised with the City Council to make

\(^{100}\) 30 September 1932, Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies (CCVBS), Minutes.

\(^{101}\) 28 October 1932, CCVBS, Minutes.

\(^{102}\) See Diagram 2 in the Appendix.

\(^{103}\) *Unemployment Relief (Administration) Act*, p.215.

\(^{104}\) Argus, 1 April 1933.
arrangements for the formation of a Public Assistance Committee. By the end of the month a Committee had been established and 'forty-four members had been selected, all of whom, with the exception of the Kensington and Flemington Society, are members of the MLBS'.\(^{105}\) Initially the Societies had no difficulty securing strong representation on the committees. They possessed the necessary apparatus to carry out widescale relief efforts. The Melbourne Society commented that it 'was hoped that a strong representation would also be made in Fitzroy and Collingwood'.\(^{106}\) The Council of Societies endeavoured to keep informed of how its affiliated Societies felt about the representation they had on Public Assistance Committees. It was prepared to approach the Minister at any time a Society felt a lack of representation.

Clearly, however, the future of the Societies in the welfare field was threatened by this change. The Societies lost official recognition. They were no longer authorised to undertake the provision of government unemployment relief. The Charities Board acknowledged this shift in the Societies' authority. In its 1933 Annual Report, the Board addressed the effects of the *Unemployment Relief (Administration) Act* 1932 on the Societies. The Board was aware that the legislation threatened the future of the Societies:

> The creation of Public Assistance Committees, the authorising of collections for unemployment relief purposes, and the activities of the State Relief Committee have rendered the work of Ladies Benevolent Societies in their legitimate sphere extremely difficult by competition in collection in the field from which the Societies usually obtain required assistance.\(^{107}\)

The Charities Board did not think the new arrangements were feasible. Although open to change and experimenting with new approaches, the Board was concerned by the level of involvement the government had assumed. Like the Societies, the Board was possibly concerned for its own future. These changes represented developments in a direction that the Board feared. It argued that the 'position is obviously unsound and should be rectified, otherwise many Societies will be forced out of their existence and the care of the poor will become entirely a governmental responsibility'.\(^{108}\) The government had not completely assumed responsibility for the relief of the unemployed. The legislation, however, with its expanded role for the government, had taken a direction which some had not expected nor approved of. The legislation had been initially regarded as an emergency measure. It was now apparent that there would be no turning back.

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\(^{105}\) 21 February 1933, MLBS, Minutes.
\(^{106}\) 21 March 1933, MLBS, Minutes.
Shifting responsibilities—sustenance and benevolence

In September 1933, Kent Hughes instigated the second stage of his strategy to overhaul unemployment relief. This reform was to have important implications for the composition of the Societies' cultural capital, or welfare practices. The municipalities had assumed their new role in the Public Assistance Committees. Kent Hughes' proposed policy suggested a new distinction between categories of unemployment relief recipients and a shift in responsibilities amongst bodies providing assistance. The unemployed were to be divided into two distinct categories—'unemployables' and 'the unemployed'. The unemployed would be eligible for sustenance and the 'unemployables' for benevolent relief. The Societies would be responsible for 'benevolent cases' and the government Department of Sustenance would assist 'sustenance cases'. This shift towards more specialised spheres of unemployment relief had a significant effect on the Societies' authority in the welfare field. It was a separation between a personal approach to welfare that drew on traditional moral values and an efficient, scientific approach that relied on skilled expertise and an understanding of the social mind and social problems. The reform involved a major reshuffle of cases between the Department and the Ladies Benevolent Societies that was referred to as the 'transfer of cases'. Some cases would be transferred from the Societies to the Department of Sustenance and vice versa. Currently both the Societies and the Public Assistance Committees were engaged in unsystematic unemployment relief, still operating on the principles of the old scheme.

This reorganisation of unemployment relief required a redefinition of sustenance and benevolent cases. During the depression the unemployed fell into one broad category. Sustenance cases 'were those whose condition of need was due solely to “unemployment”'. Benevolent cases were those due to sickness, old age and partially unemployed'. Under the new policy, benevolent cases became those who were considered 'unemployable'. This term was not new. Previously unemployables had been defined as 'alcoholics, methylated spirits drinkers, drug addicts, and others who elect to live on the bounty of voluntary charity'. In 1933, a 'modern' definition replaced this old understanding. There were separate definitions for men and women. Unemployable men were:

(a) Aged men who could not stand the rigours of ordinary employment; (b) men who are suffering from various ailments and could not stand ordinary employment; (c) men who at every opportunity evade work.

The definition for unemployable women included those who had responsibilities in the home—the need to care for children, home and husbands. Also considered unemployable

109 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
110 Charities Board to Premier, 12 April 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
111 Argus, 4 September 1933.
were women ‘unable to accept work on account of low skill, low intellect and poor
strength’ and ‘those of low morale and intellect, single with children, and who would not
accept work’. 112

Unemployable cases were to be transferred from the responsibility of the Sustenance
Department to the Ladies Benevolent Societies, whose moral authority retained some
recognition. They were to embark upon the task of morally rehabilitating as many of these
welfare recipients back into the workforce as possible. Those unable to be rehabilitated
were to be assisted with benevolent relief to provide them with the means of survival. In
other words, the Societies continued to practise their traditional methods of relief in
assisting the unemployable with some pressure to adopt the modern understanding of
‘unemployable’. Each case would be assessed on its individual merits and treated
accordingly. The Department of Sustenance, on the other hand, would provide assistance
to the more obvious ‘deserving’ unemployed where all that was required was a sustenance
‘dole’ and a minimum of ‘personal touch’. It administered a standard of relief based on a
calculation of the basic wage and assumed the administration of modern welfare practices.

Kent Hughes desired a continuing role for the Societies in the changed field of
unemployment relief, yet also wished to see the cessation of their involvement in relief to
those whose unemployment was caused by the Depression. In a sense, he wanted to
reward them for longevity of service to the community. Kent Hughes commented that
‘[a]s the Ladies Benevolent Societies have been working for more than 50 years it is
considered that an opportunity should be given to them to take a definite place in the
organisation of relief’. 113 In proposing the new scheme to the Societies, Kent Hughes,
expressed his opinion that it was

a step forward in Social Service organisation. Although the ministry had
standardised all forms of relief, there was still room for voluntary organisations
and he had tried to give the Benevolent Societies a big job in which personal touch
and service would count more than money. 114

In addition to a reward for service, Kent Hughes perceived an ongoing need for the
contribution of private charity to the government’s scheme of unemployment relief. The
Societies’ welfare practices retained some value in cultural capital for their moral emphasis
and methods of investigation. Some clients considered unemployable would potentially be
rehabilitated into the workforce through moral reform. Many, however, would simply
benefit from the sympathy and generosity that characterised the Societies. While the
‘personal touch’ and moral missionary role of the Societies continued to have its place in

112 Argus, 4 September 1933.
113 Argus, 9 November 1933.
114 6 September 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
the changing welfare field the moment of opportunity to secure new positioning as primary welfare providers had passed. Politicians and bureaucrats were less inclined to look to the Societies as agents of change in the practice of unemployment relief.

The proposed new distinction between the ‘unemployed’ and the ‘unemployables’ and the division in responsibility for providing them assistance was an explicit statement in regard to who society considered degenerate and without hope. Gertrude Woinarski acknowledged that being labelled ‘unemployable’ was bound ‘to have a demoralising effect because benevolent societies were regarded as the last resort of those unable to support themselves’. In late 1933 the Societies began to accept their new role as a body of organisations that dealt with that element of society considered beyond hope.

Response to the ‘transfer of cases’

I strongly object to any portion of the money raised by taxation for unemployment relief being diverted to organizations which in the scheme of things have no right to be in existence because their period of usefulness is past ... Those societies will give the men some measure of relief, but will not rehabilitate them as useful members of society.  

John Holland (MLA, Victorian Labor Party)

Kent Hughes’ suggested policy to transfer ‘unemployable’ cases to the Societies in 1933 was not unanimously supported. Some politicians opposed the Societies receiving any duties under the new scheme of distinguishing cases of unemployment. They believed that damage would be done if the Societies retained responsibilities within the welfare field. These parliamentarians were outspoken in their disappointment at the decision to transfer cases to the Societies, seeking to destroy their authority. John Joseph Holland, MLA, a member of the Labor Party, was one of the strongest opponents to the transfer of cases. As I discussed in Chapter Two, he was an advocate of welfare reform and instigated the formation of the select committee into social services in 1931. Holland made his opposition to a continued role for the Societies evident in the Assembly:

I object to this, because we are setting up something like the bad old system of poor laws that operated in England ... [T]hat section of the community, that through no fault of its own, but through unemployment or sickness, ... are to be transferred from the Sustenance Branch to be subject to the indignities of the methods largely adopted by the ladies’ benevolent societies in different districts.

Confidence in the Societies’ authority had waned significantly. Where before the Depression their moralistic welfare practices had been praised in parliament, by 1933 they

115 Argus, 2 December 1933.
116 5 October 1933, VPD (A), Vol.192, p.1753.
117 5 October 1933, VPD (A), Vol.192, p.1750.
were condemned by many. The Act of 1932 had led many to believe that the new administration of unemployment relief would undermine the authority of the Societies, and disappointment that the Societies would maintain a presence in relief to the unemployed became evident.

Tolerance for the Societies' traditional welfare practices reached a low-point in the early 1930s. Their moralistic practices and emphasis on investigation had significantly deteriorated in value as cultural capital. Largely unchanged, their practices were not considered appropriate in a condition of mass unemployment caused by economic and social conditions. Increasingly the Societies' welfare practices were considered outdated in modern society. In October 1933, Holland expressed his exasperation with the Societies' continued attempts to morally reform applicants for unemployment relief. He commented:

They submit the applicants to a third degree examination, and want to delve into their private lives. The applicants are asked 'How many children have you?' Then officials turn round and say, 'You have too many. Have you no knowledge of the use of contraceptives?' That is not for the society to inquire about; it is a moral matter between a man and his wife. 118

In Holland's opinion, the Societies had failed to acknowledge the changed conditions, the obvious structural causes of unemployment, which made the focus on morality and respectability irrelevant. The moral conduct of welfare recipients was no longer the concern of the welfare providers. Instead the concern was with their morale and psychological well-being. Modern welfare practices based upon this new focus were becoming highly regarded within the welfare field. In Chapter Seven I discuss in greater detail the emergence of these new welfare practices and the importance of training 'experts' in the field to conduct specific inquiries that would rehabilitate the unemployed in the workforce. This approach came to be known as 'case work'.

Holland continued his attack on the Societies, stating that:

'Case work' must mystify the average member of a ladies benevolent society ... The ladies benevolent societies are expected to do this case work, but that is impossible because they have not the necessary knowledge and experience. The work requires the attention of specially trained officers. 119

Case work involved understanding the psychology of the unemployed. It required specific knowledge and expertise that policy-makers did not consider members of the Societies possessed. Rather, paid government officials were better positioned than members of the Societies to carry out the task of unemployment relief. Thomas Hayes, of the Labor Party,
stated that 'I hope the Government will see that those societies are brought under Government control. The Sustenance Branch has efficient officers, who visit the homes of the unemployed and ascertain the actual position in each instance. It is not possible for members of the ladies' benevolent societies to conduct investigations in the same way'.

The Societies' practice of unemployment relief was associated with individual moralism based on behavioural conduct and personal respectability. Holland, Hayes and other advocates of modern welfare practices did not foresee a future for these practices in the provision of welfare relief, not even to 'unemployables'.

Government involvement in the provision of welfare to the unemployed had become institutionalised. Previously considered an emergency measure, the government's increased responsibility had secured it a new place in the welfare field, revealing changed values. The government's continued involvement would occur through the Sustenance Branch of the Department of Labour. The Branch 'has trained a large number of men in the duty of investigating and dealing with cases of distressed unemployed, and it now has in its service a body of trained officers'. For the newly trained social worker the objective was to concentrate on rehabilitation of the unemployed by improving their morale through methods of psychology rather than providing instruction in moral conduct. Those who supported the government's new role in the welfare field were insistent that 'establishment should continue to deal with these cases', and that officers should continue to be trained to become 'skilled in social service activities'.

In September 1933, the Inspector of Charities, Cecil L. McVilly, had discussed the proposed 'transfer of cases' with the Societies. The object of modernising their welfare practices had not been abandoned by the Charities Board. McVilly explained that the transfer was 'a move toward centralisation of relief in each particular district until we get relief moving toward a common centre'. The Societies' proposed new role in assisting 'unemployables' was outlined in thirteen points. With centralisation being the main objective, the cooperation of the Societies was emphasised in the new policy. They were expected to maintain proper records using approved standard forms, to work in cooperation with the Public Assistance Committees, to consult the central registry of recipients and to conform to approved casework methods. The Societies were to accept the Public Assistance Committees as the determining authority for eligibility in unemployment relief. The Council of Societies was to assume a central role as the distributing agent for government grants. Finally, the policy agreement insisted that the Societies assume responsibility for their own debts. The government refused to invite

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120 5 October 1933, VPD (A), Vol.192, p.1757.
121 5 October 1933, VPD (A), Vol.192, p.1755.
122 5 October 1933, VPD (A), Vol.192, p.1751.
123 Argus, 19 September 1933.
future pressure from the Societies to provide additional funding. In the sphere of unemployment relief, the Societies were in the process of losing their authority and independence in how they conducted their welfare practices.

In October 1933, Kent Hughes’ policy of separating ‘benevolent’ and ‘sustenance’ cases of unemployment went ahead. Despite the vocal opposition of some members of parliament, the local councils and other participants in the welfare field to the methods of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, the Societies were to undertake responsibility for ‘benevolent’ or ‘unemployable’ cases for which they would receive special government funding and were expected to conform to the policy agreement outlined above. The Societies unanimously agreed to accept the proposal. There were two reasons behind this. Firstly, they needed some form of recognition following the changes of the Depression. Earlier in 1933, Elsie Tilley, President of the Council of Societies, had ‘made a plea for recognition of the status of benevolent societies’. The proposed policy of transferring cases to the Societies was considered a response to this plea and was ‘an acknowledgment that the voluntary workers on the BS [Benevolent Societies] are an asset which mean much to the community’. The Societies recognised that the ‘Sustenance Dept [sic] is now a large govt concern and despite all this, once again BS are asked to undertake distribution of relief to the genuine unemployable’. The government had discovered a way to sustain confidence in the Societies following the chaotic crisis management of the previous three years, albeit in a very different sense. The Societies shifted outside the sphere of help to the deserving and were to exercise authority in a new field of welfare reserved for modern ‘charity’, a sphere that involved the provision of material help and sympathy and that was less focused on reform. The second reason motivating their acceptance of the proposal was that ‘a refusal to accept the proposals ... would leave the government no alternative but to create other organisations ... [T]he whole future of the Benevolent Societies was bound up in this matter’. If they desired the recognition they sought, they had little choice but to accept the proposal.

The Societies received all benevolent cases from the Sustenance Branch and sent any sustenance cases on their books to the Branch. They also provided assistance to those applicants who were awaiting assistance from the Branch. This was considered an additional burden to the Societies. The Council of Societies considered the position on transferred cases ‘obscure’. It also claimed the grants to individual Societies were not adequate. Despite agreeing to the new scheme, the Societies were not completely

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124 Argus, 19 September 1933.
125 Argus, 1 April 1933.
126 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
127 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
128 Argus, 19 September 1933.
129 CCVBS, 5th Annual Report, 1933-34.
satisfied with the arrangement. It clearly represented a shift in their authority, with their cultural capital declining markedly in its value. The opportunity to acquire new cultural capital in unemployment relief was restricted by the new scheme. They were channelled out of relief to the unemployed and subsequently had little reason to acquire new knowledge and skills in welfare practices.

In an attempt to prevent further changes to the Societies’ sphere of responsibilities and any further deterioration in their authority, the Council of Societies decided to set some clear boundaries. It passed a resolution stating ‘[t]hat it was eminently desired that Benevolent Societies should remain under the control and jurisdiction of the Charities Board, free from political influence’. The Societies sought an authority that was independent from the government, despite having agreed to undertake responsibility for the ‘unemployable’ and accepting government funds. The Council of Societies also wanted to foster good relations with the government and desired to cooperate with other bodies involved in unemployment relief. Whilst emphasising its association with the Charities Board, it expressed the ‘hope that the members of Benevolent Societies will endeavour to use their influence to bring about a good, workable understanding between the Public Assistance Committee, formed by the Minister for Sustenance, under the Unemployment Relief Act, and the Benevolent Societies, under the Charities Act’.

Eighteen months into the new scheme of unemployment relief, the Ladies Benevolent Societies expressed their dissatisfaction with its administration. In June 1935, the Societies sent a deputation to the Minister for Sustenance, claiming that the old system was better. That is, the Societies preferred the scheme when they were the nucleus of the committees distributing relief. The President of the Council of Societies, Elsie Tilley, led the protest and claimed that the cost of administration had increased with the new system. Previously the Societies had administered the entire system themselves:

In the past, under the two systems of relief, payment in money and in orders, the benevolent societies had handled the whole of the relief work when it had been much more complicated than it was at present.

The protest was a final attempt to regain lost ground. The Societies resented the loss of their authority in unemployment relief. Their efforts were futile, however. There was no turning back. The new apparatus of Public Assistance Committees that administered sustenance to the unemployed had effectively assumed the work previously handled by the Ladies Benevolent Societies.

130 CCVBS, 5th Annual Report, 1933-34.
131 CCVBS, 5th Annual Report, 1933-34.
132 Argus, 22 June 1935.
Concerns amongst traditional charitable organisations were expressed at the potential effects of the new scheme of government sustenance on the self-reliance of individuals. These bodies were supportive of the Societies' protests. The Charity Organisation Society and the National Council of Women attended the annual meeting of the Camberwell Ladies Benevolent Society in 1935 and addressed their concerns at the recent developments in welfare relief. Greig Smith, the Secretary of the COS, stated his fears for the future of the work of the Ladies Benevolent Societies who 'had been doing invaluable social work for 90 years'. He concluded that:

It might be said that this is a generation which knows not Caesar ... It is inclined to think that the needs of distressed humanity can be dealt with on a basis laid down by act of Parliament and Legislative regulations. Personally, I think that this threatens the self-reliance of the individual in the community. This is the opinion of every thoughtful social worker.

Old foes were finding common ground. The COS and the Ladies Benevolent Societies agreed that the shift to government responsibility for unemployment relief would have negative consequences, and envisaged a growing dependence upon government welfare.

**Crisis of authority**

The introduction of unemployment legislation dramatically altered the social capital possessed by the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the welfare field. The shifts in obligations and expectations that occurred were significant and lack of consultation led to misunderstandings. In the government's opinion, the need for cooperation was considered vital to the organisation of unemployment relief. While prepared in rhetoric to cooperate, initially the Societies struggled in practice to achieve the desired levels of cooperation. In their position of authority in the Unemployment Relief Committees, the government considered responsibility for cooperation rested with the Societies. Not only did the Societies come under scrutiny in their uncooperative efforts, but they were also blamed when other bodies made cooperation difficult. Coordination was essential to the operations of modern welfare practices. The government and other participants in the welfare field discovered that the Societies could not occupy the position of authority in the way that had been envisaged.

Nor did the Societies demonstrate the required adaptability to new welfare practices that emerged in unemployment relief during the Depression. These years were a turning point in the acceptance of ideas underlying the new welfare practices that had been promoted in the 1920s. This acceptance involved a move away from the understanding

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133 *Argus*, 9 August 1935.
134 *Argus*, 9 August 1935.
that the unemployed were responsible for their plight. Although the Societies were influenced by these changing attitudes, this was not reflected in their welfare practices. The Societies continued to practise unemployment relief in largely the same manner they always had. Their cultural capital, therefore, remained essentially the same. The value of this cultural capital declined significantly in the years 1930 to 1933. In addition to the increasingly tense relations within the field, the Societies subsequently experienced a crisis of authority, which was the result of their reduced 'volume' of overall capital.

By 1932 the government had successfully undermined the Societies' authority in unemployment relief with the passage of the Unemployment Relief Amendment Act. Interlinked with other forms of welfare relief, this crisis of authority was felt in other spheres of welfare practiced by the Societies. In the following chapter I turn to a sphere of welfare practice that was left largely untouched by the government, yet equally affected by modernisation—the welfare of women and children.
Chapter Six

Declining authority

Relief for women and children

In Chapter Five, I paid specific attention to the Ladies Benevolent Societies' experience of the changes occurring in social welfare provision in the 1920s and 1930s, with particular regard to the issue of unemployment relief. I discussed how the events of the Depression in that sphere led to a crisis of authority for the Societies—their social capital declined and the value of their cultural capital came into question. In this chapter, I alter the lens to focus on another area in which the Societies were viewed as legitimate players in the welfare field—the welfare of women and children. Within this sphere of welfare the Societies also experienced the deteriorating value of their overall capital, which contributed to their diminished authority.

From their inception, the Societies had been recognised as the most adept body to engage in relief to women and children, a field in which their welfare practices were particularly valued. They were women, and they were often mothers and wives. They were seen by their male peers to possess an understanding of the home and its moral upkeep that was unique to them as charitable women of the middle class. A focus on the role of women as mothers and wives was central to the approach of the Societies in welfare relief. Their welfare practices aimed to prevent the demoralisation of women experiencing economic hardship, thereby morally protecting the children in their care, and 'saving' the nation's 'greatest asset'—the future generation.

During the interwar decades, the Societies' relied upon external recognition of the value of their welfare practices. In the 1930s the significance of this recognition from government, politicians and business was revealed. This recognition was connected with broader social and political values. The value of the Societies' welfare practices could only be sustained if they revealed a commitment to contemporary trends in social attitudes and policies, despite the importance of their gender in women's welfare. By the early 1930s, some Societies had demonstrated a willingness to adapt and, at times, to embrace changes that were analogous with the broader transition to a 'modern' approach to welfare. This was particularly notable in the field of welfare to women and children. What these Societies were to discover was that their peers were often inflexible in how they perceived the Societies. By the mid-1930s, the government had become the central force in the welfare field. The government, in particular, had difficulties accepting that the Societies were capable of adapting to change.
Admittedly, the Societies did not adapt to change as readily as some welfare reformers would have liked. As discussed in previous chapters, for the majority of the 1920s many Societies struggled in their response to pressure to change. Their tradition of welfare practices and the associated goals of social progress, were deeply embedded in their organisational culture and were at times habitually practiced. The Societies, however, held a strong desire to retain a position of authority in the welfare field. I have established that prominent individuals within some Societies—particularly Jessie Henderson—saw the potential for new authority by embracing ideas associated with welfare reform, notably those which encouraged technical expertise and which viewed welfare as a social science. More specifically, Henderson pursued the modernisation of the Societies within the field of welfare to women and children. She sought to encourage other Societies to acknowledge the opportunity to pursue a new avenue in women’s welfare work and to involve themselves in new initiatives.

In this chapter I explore the Societies’ involvement in three key events which demonstrate their changing attitudes—a proposal to introduce child endowment, an employment movement for young women and widows pensions in Victoria. The contribution of prominent Society members, including Henderson, Gertrude Woinarski and Nellie Ibbott, in these events is notable. These women sought to influence the Societies to adapt to the changes in broader social and political trends occurring in welfare policy. I discuss the contributions of these prominent individuals to broader debates in women and children’s welfare. I also address how Henderson attempted to acquire new cultural capital for the Societies by working closely with other progressives to establish an innovative scheme designed to help unemployed young women during the Depression. In the 1930s, the Societies demonstrated a new acceptance of government intervention when the government proposed a pension for widows. This chapter seeks to establish the changing attitudes of the Societies. I begin by illustrating the Societies’ views on welfare to women and children in the late 1920s.

Child Endowment

The Societies’ cultural capital in the provision of welfare to women and children continued to be highly valued in the late 1920s. The relevance of their welfare practices to broader social attitudes to welfare was evident in their support for the ideas that underlay the final recommendations of the Royal Commission on Child Endowment in 1929. The Societies’ values aligned with the dominant attitudes of the day. In 1929, opposition to government intervention in social provision was prevalent amongst politicians and the business community. The consequences of such intervention would be increased welfare dependency and the loss of a sense of personal responsibility that was vital to the work
ethic. The Societies sought the continuation of welfare practices that were conducive to this sense of responsibility, particularly in parenting. Their views were evident in the Societies’ contribution to discussions on the possible introduction of a national scheme of child endowment. The broad acceptance in the business and political community of the values that underlay the Societies’ welfare practices revealed their continued relevance in the welfare field in the late 1920s and their authority on welfare issues concerning women and children. Not only was their gender significant in their cultural capital, so too were their traditional social and political values.

The introduction of child endowment had been under consideration for more than a decade. Pronatalist concerns about the low birth rate in Australia, government efforts to institutionalise wage restraints, desires to alleviate child poverty and feminist interest in reconceptualising women’s citizenship all emerged as reasons for the introduction of a scheme of child endowment. Earlier proposals for introducing child endowment met with opposition from many fronts, including the labour movement and trade unions, which perceived it as an attack on the living wage. The majority of employers in the industrial and rural sectors were opposed to a scheme of child endowment because it potentially threatened their ability to keep wages low. Furthermore, conservatives (including the Ladies Benevolent Societies) feared that such an allowance ‘would undermine parental responsibility and the spirit of self help’. The result was that all early attempts to introduce child endowment had failed.

In 1927, a scheme of child endowment was successfully introduced in New South Wales. The scheme was successful because various interest groups acknowledged they could benefit from its implementation. On this occasion Labor and trade unions supported the scheme, recognising its potential to supplement the basic wage. Employers, on the other hand, believed the measure would be a valuable mechanism for wage restriction. Women of the NSW labour movement applauded the new policy. They had been lobbying for the introduction of child endowment since 1918. The policy was an important step in their campaign for women’s economic independence. Women from non-party voluntary organisations also considered the introduction of child endowment a positive development. Although less concerned with pursuing women’s economic independence, they recognised the policy had valuable implications for child welfare.

In 1927, following pressure from the Labor opposition, a key encounter occurred when the Bruce-Page Federal Government appointed a Royal Commission to consider the introduction of a scheme of child endowment on a Commonwealth scale. The purpose of the Commission was to inquire into the feasibility of such a scheme. The Commission was also concerned with the type of model that might be adopted if child endowment was introduced. The debate on the endowment involved hundreds of people from a range of interest groups with diverse opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. The majority of participants were associated with charity organisations, women's voluntary associations, trade unions and employer groups, whose voices were considered important for a variety of reasons.

Women representing progressive and traditional interests and conservative and radical political values were invited to provide evidence to the Royal Commission. In this forum the divergences of opinion amongst women on child endowment and what it represented were evident. Women were not united in their response to the proposal, despite their perceived gender interests. Different social and political values influenced their view on what benefits might be achieved through child endowment and, for some, what problems it could present. To locate the Ladies Benevolent Societies within the discussions, it is worth giving consideration to some of the differing opinions amongst women.

Some women, for example, were focused on doing what they could to achieve women's economic independence. Women of the labour movement were notable in their support for this objective. Important for them was a distinction between an endowment for motherhood and a child allowance. They supported a 'motherhood endowment', which they perceived would be a payment to mothers that granted recognition of their service to the nation. Labor women viewed this payment as the equivalent to a wage for women. It was, therefore, closely related to their campaign for equal pay and for women's economic independence. An endowment for mothers was a new understanding of women's position in society embraced by many women with left-wing political values.

'Child endowment', on the other hand, was a less radical concept, and was connected to the principle of the basic wage. Large numbers of women who disagreed with the concept of a payment for motherhood were supportive of the concept of the

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4 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, R. J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 1928-29.
5 Lake 'The independence of women'.
6 Lake 'The independence of women'.
child endowment. The endowment was an amount payable to the primary caregiver (which was usually the mother) as an allowance for each child, designed to supplement the basic wage. Child endowment was seen as an important step in the improvement of child welfare. Many advocates viewed it as an investment, believing it would lead to the growth of strong and healthy youth, with beneficial results for the nation.

The Ladies Benevolent Societies, on the other hand, were less committed to either of these goals. They were not proponents of the push for women's economic independence. Rather they were advocates of the traditional family unit and the relations of obligation and dependence that sustained it. They were opposed to welfare reforms that threatened to destabilise the institution of the family. Furthermore, while they supported improvements to child welfare, they remained committed to their traditional, conservative views on social policy and were opposed to the level of government intervention a child endowment would necessitate. The scheme of child endowment, with its suggestion of community responsibility for economic hardship, was contrary to their beliefs of individual responsibility for poverty. With child endowment likely to invite government intervention, many conservatives considered it suspiciously socialist in character.

Alongside other conservative women's organisations, the Societies were hesitant in supporting the introduction of child endowment, despite arguments that suggested it would improve child welfare and have positive benefits for the nation's future generations. The conservative National Council of Women (NCW) had been apprehensive about supporting a scheme of child endowment, and most of the State branches did not do so until the mid-1920s. While supportive of child endowment, Isobel Fidler of the NSW branch of the NCW acknowledged to the Commission that there 'is naturally divergence of opinion among the groups on so difficult a question as child endowment'.

Despite the eventual endorsement of the principle of child endowment by the NCW, a degree of uncertainty remained. This uncertainty was apparent in the evidence of Eleanor Glencross, of the Victorian NCW, to the Royal Commission: ‘The State of New South Wales ... has received very little benefit from the scheme as far as I can see. It is so hemmed round with difficulties that many women who are entitled to it are not applying for it’. Glencross explained that ‘we feel that the obstacles in the way of [a federal scheme of child endowment] ... are very great, and we realise the difficulties’. Interested in what other women's organisations had to say in regard to the introduction of child endowment,

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7 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, pp.1097-1103, 1151-1155.
9 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.251.
10 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, pp.637, 636.
the President of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, Mrs J. Gillespie, attended Glencross’s ‘examination’ by the Royal Commission. In its decision to oppose child endowment, the Society agreed with Glencross that there were problems inherent in the introduction of the scheme.

The Societies felt that the obstacles child endowment presented could not be resolved. They were given the opportunity to voice their opinion on the issue. In response to an invitation to provide a statement by the Royal Commission, Gertrude Woinarski represented the Societies and gave evidence on 23 May 1928. She stated that this ‘Society feels that it cannot endorse such a proposition’. In its Annual Report, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society expressed that:

Although of the opinion that under existing conditions it is almost impossible for a man earning the basic wage to maintain a large family without some form of assistance, this Society felt the Child Endowment Scheme was one which it could not whole-heartedly support.

Despite her awareness of some of the potential benefits of the scheme, Woinarski explained that the Societies opposed the country becoming ‘crippled with a further increased cost of taxation’. The Societies’ key concern lay with the potential effects of increased government intervention on the responsibility of parents and the potential effects on social progress. The struggling individual or family was not their primary concern. Rather, prevention of dependence on welfare was the ultimate object. Government intervention would only lead to greater dependence. In the Societies’ opinion, people should be responsible for their own welfare. The ‘unemployable’ were in such a condition due to their ‘home life and upbringing’, not as a consequence of economic and structural causes. Woinarski considered that much poverty was due to the incompetence of families. The Society considered therefore that ‘responsibility should be thrown on the parents’, not the government.

Woinarski’s evidence, however, revealed that her opinions on issues of welfare provision were wavering. Although she held traditional attitudes to government intervention, her views were undergoing change. She believed there was a need for reform, yet she had not fully developed her ideas on the nature of the reform she supported. Her uncertainty became apparent in her evidence and the Commissioners drew

11 13 March 1928, Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society (MLBS), Minutes.
12 25 October 1927, 28 February 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
13 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1151.
15 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1151.
16 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1155.
17 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1155.
attention to her lack of conviction in her opposition to the idea of a child endowment. Woinarski stated the Societies would consider a scheme of child endowment, but only if it threw ‘the cost of maintenance equally upon the employer and employee’. Their greatest opposition to the scheme of child endowment was the likely role of government. Woinarski indicated that the Societies were willing to consider new welfare practices that proposed to help families raise children in a healthy environment, thereby aiding social progress. For the Societies, however, such a scheme would only work on a reciprocal basis—recipients had to contribute something in return for what they received. Government handouts could only have detrimental consequences.

In the event of a scheme of child endowment becoming a reality, Woinarski expressed that the Societies would prefer for the mother to receive the payment. At the same time, Woinarski made it clear that the Societies were concerned about the mother’s ability to use such a payment to the best interests of her children. This revealed Woinarski’s desire to give consideration to new ideas of welfare, but also her obvious discomfort with the possible consequences. Woinarski argued that ‘as we have proved in our work, the fact remains that in many cases the money is not expended in the legitimate way, and that payment made to the mother may prove to be a source of contention in the home’. This belief that working class families were incompetent and unable to manage their homes was the underlying reason for the Societies’ preference for relief in kind over cash payments. A government scheme would potentially result in the provision of cash relief. In the late 1920s, the Societies continued to identify themselves in opposition to the working class. They considered themselves superior. They believed themselves to be competent and knowledgeable about financial management of the home. The existing scheme of welfare provision practised by the Societies where they judged individual need remained their favoured method. Despite the possible benefits of child endowment, the Societies had not been won over by supporting arguments for its introduction with the government as the proposed benefactor.

Jessie Henderson also gave evidence at the Royal Commission. Influential in the network of Ladies Benevolent Societies, her support for child endowment was significant. She sought to encourage the Societies to see the advantages of the proposed scheme and to embrace the values associated with it. Despite her extensive involvement with the Societies and the Charities Board, Henderson attended the inquiry as a representative of the Melbourne District Nursing Society, of which she was the President. In early 1928, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies had not yet come into existence. Henderson’s views on child endowment were more progressive and less politically

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conservative than those held by Woinarski. She was interested in the ideas of the emerging generation of welfare workers and she had sympathies for the labour movement. Henderson advocated the introduction of a scheme of child endowment and wished to see the payment made directly to the mother. Henderson did not explicitly advocate a ‘motherhood endowment’ to secure the economic independence of women, yet she did support women’s empowerment. She believed this could be achieved within the domestic sphere. Like Woinarski, Henderson was a supporter of the traditional family unit and women’s role within it.

Henderson claimed that the ‘advantages of the endowment of children in my opinion would mean an increase in the status and efficiency of motherhood and would mean a higher standard of home-keeping.’ In some senses what Henderson was advocating was the professionalisation of motherhood. In return for an allowance for home-keeping, mothers would become more efficient and improve their skills in the household. This was not an uncommon argument amongst women’s organisations of the period. While this was not about a payment for motherhood—as advocated by Labor women—it bore some resemblance. Isabel Fidler, of the NSW National Council of Women, stated that: ‘Under the present system the woman as a rule is dependent upon her husband, but if the endowment were paid to the mother it would be a recognition of her responsibility for the welfare and upbringing of her children; in that way the art of home-making would be regarded as a definite profession’.

With increased knowledge and skills, mothers would be better positioned to raise their children in a healthy environment—Henderson considered that the ‘well-born child is a valuable asset’. Henderson had sympathies with pronatalists, stating her view that ‘with proper provision [families] would be relieved of anxiety, and would bear more children’.

In view of Henderson’s influential and prominent role within the Ladies Benevolent Societies from late 1928 into the mid-1930s, her views on the scheme of child endowment were important. She addressed some of the Societies’ concerns on government intervention and parental responsibility. For Henderson, the effects of increased taxation were not an issue:

I am of the opinion that so much of the taxation paid in Australia is indirect taxation ... and that the married man who buys more than the single man pays an altogether disproportionate amount of burden of taxation. Therefore, it is

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20 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1098.
21 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.258.
22 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1098.
23 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1098.
reasonable that some of it should be handed back to him in the form of an endowment for his children.\textsuperscript{24}

Henderson's political values were more progressive than most women in the Societies. She looked to structural causes of poverty and advocated government intervention to 'solve some of the social and economic problems by which we are now confronted'. Henderson was not concerned by the arguments that child endowment would 'weaken family ties'. The amount provided by an allowance, in her opinion, would not relieve the male breadwinner of his responsibility to provide an income. The amount 'will be calculated with a view to making the difference between distress and decent maintenance'.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1929, despite the increasing popularity of progressive views such as Henderson's, the dominant political and social values of the period remained associated with approaches connected to late nineteenth and early twentieth century laissez faire capitalism, such as those adhered to by the Ladies Benevolent Societies. To the disappointment of supporters, the Majority Report of the Royal Commission recommended against a scheme of child endowment, and the Government accepted this Report. The recommendations of the Majority Report can be broken into four central concerns. Firstly, the Commissioners of the report—Chairman Thomas O'Halloran, Ivor Evans and Stephen Mills—considered the Commonwealth government did not have the necessary power to establish a scheme of child endowment. To gain this power, they were of the opinion that an amendment to Section 128 of the Constitution was necessary.\textsuperscript{26} Secondly, the findings of the inquiry provided evidence, in the Commissioners' opinions, that such intervention was undesirable. Government intervention would result in 'disastrous reactions' to the additional taxation necessary to finance the scheme. The proposal that industry shoulder the financial burden would have equally disastrous consequences. These consequences included the danger of increased unemployment and an increased cost of living. Thirdly, the Commissioners determined that there was no need for child endowment in the first place. They believed the inquiry had established that wages were sufficient and that the composition of the basic wage, determined on the family unit, was an adequate provision for dependent children. Further, in the event that child endowment were introduced, the effects upon the family would be negative: 'Parental responsibility would be weakened, incentive to effort reduced, and the sense of unity of interest between parents lessened'.\textsuperscript{27}

The concern that the family might be destabilised was paramount. Finally, the Commissioners considered that the funds which might be used in a scheme of child

\textsuperscript{24} Royal Commission on Child Endowment, \textit{Minutes of Evidence}, p.1098.
\textsuperscript{25} Royal Commission on Child Endowment, \textit{Minutes of Evidence}, p.1098.
\textsuperscript{26} Report of the Royal Commission on Child Endowment or Family Allowances, Government Printer, Canberra, 1928, pp.15, 91.
\textsuperscript{27} Report on Child Endowment, p.9.
endowment would be better directed into the 'extension and perfecting of existing social services'.

The Commissioners placed most weight on the opinions of other male dominated interest groups, particularly employers. An ardent supporter of laissez faire, Thomas Ashworth of the Victorian branch of the Employers' Federation expressed concern about the potential damage that an 'extreme regulative policy' would have on industry. Employers used the Royal Commission to express their strong opposition to a system of family allowances. Underlying their opposition was a fear of the socialist nature of the proposed scheme of allowances. Ashworth revealed such concerns when he stated his belief that the proposal was of a 'revolutionary character'. This redirection of the debate reinforced the connection of child endowment with wage policy, which, to some extent, diverted the discussion away from welfare and gender issues.

The outcome of the Royal Commission into a scheme of child endowment was one which the majority of Societies supported and approved of in 1929. They possessed the values of the dominant and most influential interest groups of the time, including employers and politicians. The Societies' gendered interests were not their only concerns in the proposal to introduce child endowment. In 1929, dominant interest groups continued to support a social order based on nineteenth century conceptions of social progress. The Societies' authority was based on these values and they remained relevant to the broader social order of the late 1920s. The Societies' opinions, however, were not as steadfast as they had been in the past. Sympathy for modern concerns in welfare were notable in Woinarski's submission to the inquiry, yet remained undeveloped. Henderson's more developed progressive views were particularly evident in the discussions on child endowment. Emerging as an influential figure in the network of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, she was a crucial player in the attempt to modernise the Societies' welfare practices, especially in the field of welfare to women and children.

**Girls Employment Movement**

Jessie Henderson's influence on the Ladies Benevolent Societies and their traditional welfare practices in women's welfare peaked in her efforts to create a new sphere of involvement for the Societies in women's unemployment relief. Her most notable association with the Societies was through her Presidency of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies. In 1928, with the problem of unemployment growing and
showing no signs of improvement, Henderson began to concern herself with declining morale of young people—the future generation. Her views on social progress focused on reforming the social mind, helping to improve the condition of morale and psychological well-being of this new generation of workers. She foresaw an opportunity to merge these views with the traditional work of the Societies. Her focus, more particularly, was on the unemployment of young single women. Henderson attempted to broaden the attitudes of the Societies and thus help them adapt to change, thereby altering their cultural capital and maintaining its value in the welfare field.

In July 1928, in her role as a member of the Charities Board, Henderson alongside the Secretary of the Charity Organisation Society, Stanley Greig Smith, approached the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society in regard to the problem of unemployed single adolescent girls, those aged from 14 to 21.32 Both Henderson and Greig Smith were of the ‘opinion that a tremendous amount of unemployment was prevalent amongst single girls and that in hundreds of cases help was probably needed’.33 They suggested the launch of an appeal to create funds to tackle the problem. Gertrude Woinarski, although noting that the Melbourne Society had had little to do with the problem, agreed to join in an appeal to raise money from the public to address unemployment amongst adolescent girls.34 As discussed, the Societies were not accustomed to providing assistance to single women. They were, however, committed to helping out in crises, such as high unemployment. They were also interested in sustaining good relationships within the welfare field, and Henderson was clearly an important figure in her association with the Charities Board and had a long history of involvement with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Woinarski was receptive to the need for change and was therefore open to Henderson’s ideas.

By August 1928, the issue of the unemployed single adolescent girl had received a degree of attention that led to a special relief effort by the government. The government approached the Melbourne Society to undertake the work. The Society’s apparatus and authority in emergency relief efforts was valued. Although relief to single women was generally the responsibility of the Charity Organisation Society, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society’s involvement was valuable due to their gender and history of welfare work. The Society believed the problem was a temporary matter and would only involve about a month of work.35 The extra work was not considered a major addition to its other commitments. The Society believed the cause of the trouble was that married women

32 In this period, adolescent girls and young women up to the age of 21 were frequently referred to as ‘girls’.
33 17 July 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
34 17 July 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
35 14 August 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
were employed in good positions and prevented single women from securing jobs, thus revealing its traditional views regarding the family unit.\textsuperscript{36}

The problem, however, was not that easily resolved. Two years later, in June 1930, Muriel Heagney, in association with the Trades Hall, reported that the situation concerning unemployed single girls was unsatisfactory. Heagney, who has since become well known for her trade unionism and as a campaigner for women’s equal pay, was a member of the Central Council of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party. Her report stated that the ‘arrangement by the Government for relief by the Charity Organisation Society at Exhibition Street, Melbourne, for single women living with strangers [or homeless women], is entirely unsatisfactory’\textsuperscript{37}. The ‘inquisitorial methods’ of the COS alongside the inconvenience to those girls and women living in outer Melbourne were strongly protested against. The report also stated that the ‘position of unemployed women is desperate’. It recommended that a ‘separate section of the Relief Organisation should be immediately constituted to deal with women’.\textsuperscript{38}

In early 1930, Henderson and Heagney, with their overlapping concerns, formed an unlikely alliance on the issue of relief to single women—both were of the view that the situation urgently demanded attention. With Henderson’s connections in the Charities Board and as President of the newly formed Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies, alongside Heagney’s connections in the Labor Party, who were in government, the potential for success was heightened. In August 1930, the Council of Societies officially established a scheme to provide relief to young unemployed women, aged from 14 to 18, which was funded by the government. Henderson and Heagney were to sustain their personal involvement in the movement for nearly three years. Heagney’s involvement revealed a strong commitment to the goals of the new scheme. She was condemned by left-wing women’s organisations as a ‘charity-monger’, berated for working with the Ladies Benevolent Societies.\textsuperscript{39}

The scheme emerged out of concern that the Depression would have detrimental effects on the youth of society—their future career prospects looked bleak and many feared that they would become disillusioned. Initially known as the Girl’s Week Fund, the scheme changed its name in 1931 to the Unemployed Girls Relief Movement and then

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} 14 August 1928, MLBS, Minutes.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Trade Union Women’s Committee, Report Re Sustenance for Unemployed Women, Trades Hall, Melbourne, June 1930.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Report on Sustenance for Unemployed Women.
\end{itemize}
again in 1932 to the Girls Employment and Welfare Movement. These name changes indicate the shifting attitudes in approaches to welfare relief in those years. With the introduction of social work courses in Victoria and efforts to professionalise welfare practices, the movement for unemployed girls worked to ensure its image reflected contemporary trends. It was a conscious effort to dissociate from charity. I will refer to it as the Girls Employment Movement.

The Girls Employment Movement was an adjunct of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies. It relied heavily upon the support and involvement of members of the individual branches of the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Applicants for assistance from the Movement had to undergo a personal investigation by visitors of the Societies. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was actively involved, stating in its Annual Report of 1931-32 that in addition to the usual calls on the Society, plus representation on the local relief committees, many of its members were ‘actively associated with the giving of relief to unemployed and homeless girls’. This involved visiting and distributing sustenance payments. The Girls Employment Movement presented its annual report to the Council of Societies and issues associated with its administration were addressed in the Council’s meetings. The Movement, however, was a new form of organisation and retained some separateness from the Societies, despite their significance to its operations. It drew upon their social capital, yet made a conscious effort to create new cultural and social capital. Henderson considered the Movement was an important new direction in welfare relief for the Societies. Indeed, the successful introduction of the Movement was a significant achievement in her attempt to secure a new form of authority for the Societies in the welfare field—in this case focusing specially on women’s welfare.

Once accepted into the scheme, young women were provided with an allowance in return for their work in centres that were established and supervised by a special committee of management. There were nine members on this committee, seven of whom were executive members of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies. The two remaining members were Heagney, the organising Secretary, and Mr A. E. Monk, the Assistant Secretary of the Trades Hall. The Labor connections are noteworthy and reveal Henderson’s desire to encourage the Societies to create new social capital in left-wing political circles. There were about twenty work centres scattered across Melbourne.

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40 Letter from C. L. McVilly to N. Ibbott, 10 July 1934, Public Records Office (PRO), Series (S) 4523/R1, Unit (U) 60, Item 563.
41 MLBS, 86th Annual Report, 1931-32.
43 Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies (CCVBS), Minutes, 1930-1939.
districts, including Carlton, Collingwood, Richmond, Brunswick, Hawthorn and Geelong.\textsuperscript{45} In addition to the Central Office and cutting room, the centres were located in local schools, town halls and parish centres. These locations were secured through cooperation with municipal councils, the Education Department, church authorities and proprietors of halls and businesses. Within the centres the women worked with supervisors who were chosen from amongst the ranks of the unemployed women by the women themselves.\textsuperscript{46} The supervisors received the same rates of pay, but tended to work a six day week. Most of the women worked one day a week in return for a sustenance payment of 7s.6d. A ‘man and his wife’ were entitled to 8s.6d. in sustenance payments without a work requirement.\textsuperscript{47}

The work involved making garments for the unemployed, which were passed on to local Unemployment Relief Committees for distribution, and for the girls themselves. In 1931, a jam factory was also opened in Collingwood to supply jam to the unemployed and to provide further work for unemployed girls.\textsuperscript{48} In 1932, there were an estimated 11 to 12 thousand unemployed young women in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{49} At the peak of the Girls Employment Movement in late 1931, there were about 4,500 women working at the Centres.\textsuperscript{50} In developing these work centres, the Movement claimed that ‘provision has now been made against real destitution so far as unemployed girls and women are concerned’.\textsuperscript{51} The Movement extended its relief to girls ‘in trouble’—deserted single mothers and women before the courts charged with prostitution.\textsuperscript{52}

The Movement did not limit itself to merely providing work for these single unemployed women. It was also concerned with the health and physical well-being of those who attended the centres. In 1932, many recognised that as a result of the prolonged Depression and the inadequacies of Sustenance, alongside poor housing and bad diets, malnutrition was becoming more prevalent. The Movement noted that ‘the girls ... appear to be of a lower grade physically than those who attended last year’.\textsuperscript{53} In an effort to keep a check on the health of the young women attending the Centres, initially a nurse was employed by the Girls Employment Movement to visit any girls who could not work due to illness. From April 1931, however, this changed and the Melbourne District

\textsuperscript{45} Report on Relief of Unemployed Girls, August 1930-July 31st, 1932, presented to the Annual Meeting of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies.
\textsuperscript{46} Report on Relief of Unemployed Girls, 1930-1932.
\textsuperscript{47} Victorian Year Book, 1930-31.
\textsuperscript{48} Argus, 4 February 1931.
\textsuperscript{49} Report on Sustenance for Unemployed Women.
\textsuperscript{50} Report on Relief of Unemployed Girls, August 1930-July 31st, 1931.
\textsuperscript{51} Unemployed Girls Relief Fund, Annual Report, 1930-31, p.8.
\textsuperscript{52} Foley The women’s movement, p.347.
\textsuperscript{53} Unemployed Girls Welfare Movement, Annual Report, 1931-32.
Nursing Society, which Jessie Henderson presided over, assumed the responsibility of visiting those girls unable to work due to illness. The Girls Employment Movement embraced cooperation between welfare agencies and thereby took advantage of the social capital of those members involved in the Movement. The visiting nurse from the District Nursing Society would ensure that those who were sick received proper treatment, referral and advice. As an additional safeguard in promoting the good health of the young women, a daily three course meal was provided for one hundred and thirty homeless girls, with preference being given to those considered in greatest need.

The Girls Employment Movement also initiated an educational course for adolescent girls attending the Centres. The Movement claimed that '[t]he problem of the younger girls leaving school with little or no prospects of absorption into industry [as a result of the depression], causes the members of the Sub-Committee much concern, and an effort was made to make special provision for them'. With the support of the government, a course was established that 'embraces the usual subjects of Domestic Arts, including housewifery, cookery, physical culture, together with tuition in English literature, drawing, singing, elocution, etc'. Single unemployed adolescent girls who chose to attend a training course were entitled to the same sustenance payments as those who attended the work centres. The Girls Employment Movement was proud of this initiative, stating that it 'regards this phase of its work as of fundamental importance, and believes that this experiment in dealing with unemployed adolescents is worthy of expansion'.

The Movement provided special assistance to 'homeless' adolescent girls. These tended to be girls who could not live with their families and were forced to live with 'strangers'. In May 1931, an inquiry commissioned by the Minister for Sustenance, Robert Williams, gave consideration to the establishment of a hostel for adolescents who were homeless. While lack of financial support for this initiative meant that it was unsuccessful, the idea was never fully abandoned. The Girls Employment Movement created an alternative to the hostel, providing a supplementary allowance and boarding house accommodation to those girls who were homeless. This scheme was achieved through the support of managers of hostels, boarding houses and private individuals, further indicating the valuable social capital possessed by the Society members on the committee of the Girls Employment Movement.

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57 Argus, 8 May 1931.
The Movement enabled the Ladies Benevolent Societies, through the Central Council of Societies, to pursue a separate sphere of responsibility in the newly emerging field of unemployment relief. It was an innovative movement that attempted to shift away from traditional welfare practices. The Girls Employment Movement did not involve simple handouts of charity and moral advice. It was a scheme of educational instruction, information on health issues and the provision of employment training and housing for those without appropriate accommodation. The Movement was an initiative that held great potential in the development of a field of welfare work to be administered specifically by women for women. This was recognised by its President, Jessie Henderson, and Secretary, Muriel Heagney, who stated that '[t]he supervisors of the Work Centres and the staff of the Central Office are rendering magnificent service in building up a women's co-operative movement which, in our opinion, is without parallel in Australia'. Heagney and Henderson were aware that the scheme was innovative in the field of women's welfare and that it had scope for expansion. The Chief Secretary, Tom Tunnecliffe, considered it a 'revelation of proper organisation'.

Jessie Henderson explained that 'the whole idea underlying the unemployed girls movement had been to save the girls from the demoralising effect of such a system'. Henderson referred to the system of sustenance payments to the unemployed. One member of parliament, Mr Burnett Gray, stated his approval of the 'excellent work' of the organising committee of the Girls Employment Movement. He believed that in the absence of such efforts many 'girls run great moral dangers in having nothing to do'. Henderson agreed and expressed her opinion that without a life of 'regular supervised routine ... [t]he girls are easily influenced and many go astray and are later found in refuges and maternity homes'. In providing single unemployed women with 'some occupation' in the form of training, education and work, these moral risks were seen to be reduced. Henderson's views on keeping young women occupied, aligned with her support for work-for-the-dole schemes to 'retain the self-respect and independence of the unemployed'. The goals of the Girls Employment Movement were sympathetic to the broader objectives and attitudes of most of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, which secured their continuing support for the scheme.

Yet many adolescent girls who were assisted by the scheme were not appreciative of the moral intervention of the women who worked with the Council of Societies. To this

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61 Argus, 10 September 1931.
62 Argus, 15 February 1932.
64 Evidence prepared by Mrs G. G. Henderson, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
65 Evidence by Henderson, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U65, Item 622.
extent the Ladies Benevolent Societies were not in step with the direction of reform. The girls often complained to Muriel Heagney of the intrusive methods used by the women of the Ladies Benevolent Societies:

The Benev [women from benevolent organisations] started to give relief but girls came to Muriel and complained about the way they were third degreed. One said she practically looked under my bed to see if there was a man there.66

There were some obvious tensions in regard to the moralising tendencies of the women of the Ladies Benevolent Societies. They had specific attitudes and opinions as to how adolescent girls should conduct their lives. Not only did they see their role as providing education, training and work experience, the women of the Societies also considered it their responsibility to instruct young women on what they believed to be appropriate forms of moral and respectable behaviour. Rather than encouraging independence, Society members felt a more important duty was to morally instruct the young women on retaining their self-respect. The women of the Societies often revealed they were out of touch with the younger generation of women they worked with.

The Girls Employment Movement was not given the whole-hearted support of all Ladies Benevolent Societies. The internal divisions caused by the rift between the Council of Societies and the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies caused difficulties. A small faction of Societies affiliated with the Association did not fully support the Movement. These Societies did what they could to make its operations difficult. Some members of the Societies thought the scheme an unnecessary expense. In May 1931, for example, Mrs Gaylor of the Port Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society stated that the girls in the centres often found there was nothing to do and gave up on them.67 In the same month, the Association advised its affiliates not to follow any instructions that Jessie Henderson forwarded to individual branches of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in regard to the Girls Employment Movement.68 No reason was stated, but it seems likely that the Association opposed the new direction the Council of Societies was moving in. Furthermore, the tense relations caused by the split in the network of Societies in 1929 possibly left the Association resentful and prepared to undermine the initiatives of the new Council of Societies. This refusal of the Societies affiliated with the Association to cooperate with the scheme for helping unemployed girls created occasional difficulties for the Movement. For example, in 1932 the local Society in Richmond refused to undertake the task of providing payment for homeless single women. On this occasion, the Council of Societies was forced to employ someone to carry out this

66 No date, Bertha Walker, papers, MS1072, manuscripts, State Library of Victoria.
67 *Argus*, 21 May 1931.
68 21 May 1931, Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies (VALBS), Minutes.
During the peak of the Movement, it found this lack of support a nuisance and an additional expense.

The challenge from government

When the Girls Employment Movement was introduced, Labor was the governing political party in Victoria. In addition to funds from public donations, the Movement received a government grant, which in 1930-31 amounted to £1,500 per week. With the large input from government, the Movement was required to submit an annual report and was not entirely free from government intervention. The future of the scheme was to be reliant upon the continued support of the government, which in the Movement's early stages was strong, as evidenced by comments made in parliament and by government officials. The Girls Employment Movement made the effort to acknowledge this support in its Annual Report of 1930-31: 'No limitation has ever been placed by the Government on the help available for “Homeless” girls, and every application for assistance to unemployed girls belonging to families in which all were unemployed is granted immediately.'

Despite the progressive nature of the scheme, the Girls Employment Movement was affected by shifts occurring within government circles. Responding to external pressures, the Sustenance Department began to instigate changes in relief arrangements for single unemployed women in accordance with the Unemployment Relief Amendment Act of December 1931. In late 1931, the Hogan government was experiencing tensions over approaches to economic recovery and relations with trade unions. At the Federal level, the Labor Party was defeated as a result of similar tensions. In efforts to regain the confidence of the public, the Labor Party in Victoria became more stringent in its provision for the unemployed—particularly unemployed women. The Sustenance Department attempted to gain greater control of charitable efforts, including the work of the Girls Employment Movement, and, secondly, attempted to enhance the work requirements of the unemployed.

The changes to unemployment relief for adolescent girls increased the amount of work expected of them from one to two days a week, with no increase in the sustenance payments. Jessie Henderson stated that the Committee of the Girls Employment Movement 'desired to protest against the rates prescribed by the Act, which could only be described as the worst form of sweating ever experienced in Victoria.' Her greatest
concern was the ‘psychological effect on the girls, who, in spite of all their hardships, had maintained an excellent spirit. Established on a constructive basis the system of relief had created an atmosphere of mutual service and self-help, and the changes were fraught with the gravest danger'.

Rather than having the positive effect envisaged by the government of keeping the girls occupied and out of moral danger, in the view of the Girls Employment Movement, the changes were more likely to cause discontent and demoralisation.

The second change emerging from the amended legislation required ‘homeless’ single women to apply to the Sustenance Department as opposed to the Girls Employment Movement. The government was taking its responsibilities and ability to intervene to a new and unanticipated level. Previously the government had desired to intervene solely at a financial level. Twelve months later, however, it felt that more direct intervention would lead to more effective relief efforts. This involved centralising the work of relief in the Sustenance Department. The obvious outcome was that when applying for assistance, male government officials would investigate unemployed homeless adolescent girls. Henderson and Heagney were strongly opposed to this. They argued that there were women who were trained and suitable for that type of work, and that women investigators should be appointed to undertake the interviews and investigations of homeless single women.

Henderson argued that ‘no difficulty would be experienced in replacing the men by efficient women investigators’. She stated that the principle involved was vital.

On 12 February 1932, a special committee of the Girls Employment Movement sent a deputation to the Minister for Sustenance to protest the changes. The Minister acceded to one of the demands made by the committee. He agreed to revert to the old system of payment for single homeless women working at the centres. This meant that these women would continue to receive their full payment in cash as opposed to the proposed system of providing 7/6d. in cash and 5s. in a grocery order. Yet this was not one of the central issues the Movement was confronting. The women would still be required to work two days per week in the centres and to make applications for assistance to the Sustenance Department rather than the Girls Employment Movement. The increased control of the government department led to the discontent of the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Visitors of the Societies complained that there was a lack of communication between the inspectors.

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73 Argus, 28 January 1932.
74 Argus, 15 February 1932.
75 Argus, 15 February 1932.
76 Argus, 15 February 1932.
77 Argus, 18 February 1932.
and the visitors. It was not, in their view, a satisfactory approach. The potential for overlapping was as great as ever.

In May 1932, a conservative government, the United Australia Party, was voted into office. The new Minister for Sustenance, Wilfred S. Kent Hughes, MLA, immediately began to withdraw government support for the Girls Employment Movement. Kent Hughes assumed his ministerial responsibilities in the Sustenance Department and with him came his vision of change, discussed in Chapter Five. The future of the Girls Employment Movement became uncertain. With his focus on the body responsible for the Movement—the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies—Kent Hughes viewed the scheme as a charitable organisation. He failed to recognise its innovative nature and its shift away from traditional welfare practices. Or if he did, he was strongly opposed to the involvement of Labor interests, represented by Muriel Heagney. By June, it became apparent that the government intended to take control of the Movement’s administration. This was opposed by many of the Societies, who believed that the Council of Societies should control the Movement. Such concerns were ignored and a proposal was made ‘to transfer the direction’ of the Girls Employment Movement to the Sustenance Department. Kent Hughes did not do this dramatically, but instead chose to gradually shift the responsibilities to the government. He needed to ensure that he had gained adequate support for his moves.

Kent Hughes undertook a series of changes to reform the Movement soon after he assumed his responsibilities as Minister for Sustenance. In July 1932, despite protest, he replaced the committee that administered the Movement with a new advisory committee that consisted of members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies and members of parliament. The Minister was to control the Movement. This enabled Kent Hughes to begin implementing the changes he desired, at the pace that suited him. In December 1932, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies received a letter from Kent Hughes which explained that the services of the Superintendent of the Movement, Muriel Heagney, would no longer be required. Her position was to expire at the end of January 1933. Heagney’s association with the Labor Party was quite likely a determining factor in the decision. Indeed, Heagney herself believed that her replacement by a conservative member of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, Elsie Tilley, was in keeping with Kent Hughes’ conservative leanings.
On the surface Kent Hughes’ proposal seemed to indicate the continued value of the Societies’ traditional cultural capital. With Heagney no longer in a position of authority, Kent Hughes instructed that the executive of the Council of Societies were ‘to take over the whole movement and formulate a scheme of reconstruction.’ Those Societies associated with the Council, however, protested these changes. They sought to maintain the Movement’s status as a separate body with its own committee of management. Their protests, however, were not influential and met with little success. The Minister’s suggested changes went ahead. While it promised the Council increased authority with these new responsibilities, the proposed reconstruction represented an important shift in the Movement’s direction. The Societies’ authority in other spheres of welfare activity was declining and through its increased association with them, the Movement had minimal chances of success. Many Societies recognised the need to pursue the original direction the Movement had advocated—that of a broad-based cooperative movement that drew upon a range of expertise. The underlying motive of Kent Hughes’ proposed change, however, seemed to be a desire to make the Movement redundant by associating it with the Ladies Benevolent Societies and removing its independent status.

The proposed shift in control of the Movement led to debate in the Legislative Assembly regarding its nature and its status. Was it a charity? In his contribution to the debate, Maurice Blackburn, of the Victorian Labor Party, had strong opinions on the topic. He believed that the issue surrounded a broader concern:

We are treading the tortuous path between two perils. One is the peril of administration by the State and treating those assisted as monsters, and the peril of administration by those persons who treat the unemployed as objects of charity ... A change will dissipate a lot of excellent work, will shatter a fine organisation, and create in the minds of the girls that they are thrown back on the old basis of State control or of management by a charitable organization.

Blackburn had strong socialist leanings. He had been active for a long time in the Victorian Socialist Party. In the 1920s he revealed that he was sympathetic to the communist movement, and was strongly opposed to Mussolini’s fascism. Like Kent Hughes, he was a politician who embraced a new style. His most fundamental political aim was the ‘preservation and enlargement of personal freedom’. Maurice Blackburn was
also sympathetic to women's rights. In 1926, he succeeded in passing legislation he had drafted to remove discriminations against women in public affairs and professions.  

Others were less convinced that the Girls Employment Movement was not a charitable organisation, in view of its original connections with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. One member of parliament drew attention to the fact that the Movement had been under the management of the Societies since its inception.  

Blackburn responded that this was irrelevant given that the Movement had functioned as a separate body. Furthermore, what was important was that 'much good work has been accomplished by the women who have been in charge of the bureau, which deals only with women. He [Kent Hughes] will, I hope, decide to allow the control to remain in the hands of the skilful, calm, and sympathetic management which has been in charge since the institution was inaugurated more than twelve months ago'. Blackburn anticipated that Heagney's role in the Movement would be challenged and argued for the Movement to retain its independent status. He was aware of its innovative nature within the welfare field and the threat posed by the loss of its independence.

In their objective to create a new sphere of welfare work for women, those involved in the Girls Employment Movement had made a conscious effort for the Movement to be seen as a separate body—as a body of women looking after women with its own committee of management. The Council of Societies had also instigated the Boys Employment Movement as a separate body, yet felt it should be managed by men. The problems the community faced in regard to the unemployed adolescent boy were seen to differ from those raised by the problem of the unemployed single woman. Where the moral dangers faced by women tended to be in regard to unwanted pregnancy, prostitution, begging and idleness, the unemployed adolescent boy posed other dangers to the community at large. In addition to begging and idleness, the adolescent boy might turn to crime or be swayed by the arguments of communists. The increase in prison sentences amongst young people was perceived to be directly attributable to the Depression. The Council of Societies believed these problems were best left to men.

In the same vein, the Council of Societies considered the problems associated with unemployment amongst single young women to be a field of concern best dealt with by

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90 Blackburn E.eyaskere 'Maurice Blackburn', p.311.
95 *Argus*, 9 September 1932, 29 November 1932.
96 *Argus*, 29 November 1932.
women. Notably, as I discuss in more depth in Chapter Seven, this gender specific view was associated with a traditional approach to welfare that identified women as possessing specific values. It was a contrast to the emerging gender neutral views associated with new professional approaches to welfare. In September 1932, Jessie Henderson again pressed the matter of employing women inspectors to investigate cases of homeless and single unemployed women. The Council of Societies had moved that 'the Govt be informed that in the opinion of the Central Council, Women Inspectors should be appointed to visit women'. 97 At the following meeting of the Central Council of Societies, two women inspectors were recommended for appointment to a position with the Sustenance Department. There was no mention, however, of any further action taken. Unfortunately, therefore, I cannot say if the resolution was successful. What it does indicate, however, was the extent of the Council’s commitment to women’s welfare being dealt with by women—both at an individual level (with the appointment of women inspectors) and at an organisational level (with the control of the Girls Employment Movement resting with a body of women). Jessie Henderson was adamant in her belief that ‘the time had come when women must be looked after by women’. 98 Others supported her sentiments. Mr Prendergast, MLA, of the Labor Party, for example, stated that ‘the management of women, especially those who are unemployed, should be undertaken by women’. 99

The support of members of the Labor Party proved little help to the Girls Employment Movement. In June 1933, it suffered further cutbacks. The work centres were to be closed in line with a new focus for the Movement. Kent Hughes determined that the Movement would only deal with cases of extreme hardship and homeless single women. 100 The government aimed to ‘rid itself of its responsibility to them’. 101 It also created a new committee considered representative of all women’s organisations interested in women’s welfare in line with other efforts to centralise welfare practices. 102 In addition to members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies were representatives of the National Council of Women, the Country Women’s Association and the Young Women’s Christian Association. Kent Hughes stated that ‘the women’s organisations had asked for wider representation and closer cooperation with the Ministry in this work, and the appointment of this committee was the first step in an endeavour to accede to that request’. 103 Although Kent Hughes had initially commented in April 1933 that he hoped the work of the Girls Employment Movement would be continued, by December of the same year he was
quoted as saying that ‘the plan was not altogether successful as it was found that even after the girls had been trained they refused work offered’.\textsuperscript{104}

Members of the original Girls Employment Movement accepted, on the whole, that Kent Hughes, a publicly avowed conservative, was the cause of the changes. Muriel Heagney claimed that there were further dimensions to his opposition to the Movement:

From the outset, Mr Kent Hughes was frankly unsympathetic towards unemployed women. He held the opinion, and expressed it freely, that whilst domestic work was available at any wage, under any conditions anywhere in Victoria, the Government was not obliged to provide assistance for unemployed women.\textsuperscript{105}

Indeed, this appeared to be the case. There was a growing shortage of trained domestic workers in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{106} The training of unemployed women in ‘domestic arts’ gained momentum, with courses being established in the schools of domestic sciences in Melbourne. Kent Hughes had no tolerance for women who were unwilling to train for domestic service. The Sustenance Department pressured single unemployed women to undertake training, threatening to de-register those who refused to undertake the course.\textsuperscript{107} Claims that there was an abundance of domestic work available led Kent Hughes to believe that unemployment for young women was not an issue. Furthermore, there appeared to be fewer women registered with the Girls Employment Movement. In its report, however, the Movement stated that on the surface it appeared that there were fewer single unemployed women requiring help because the eligibility requirements had changed. This had led to a drop in the number of applicants, rather than an increase in positions of employment.\textsuperscript{108} Kent Hughes was insistent that women’s employment threatened opportunities for men. He stated that ‘often girls are engaged for a short period, and during that time they may destroy the opportunity youths may have of starting on trade or industry, which may be their life’s work’.\textsuperscript{109}

By late 1937, the government had completely withdrawn its support for the Movement. It claimed there was no unemployment amongst adolescent girls.\textsuperscript{110} The welfare of single unemployed women was taken over by the Council of Societies. While the Societies were to retain responsibility in this sphere of welfare, their hopes for a new authority in women’s welfare were dashed. With no recognition of the problem, there was no perceived need to address it. Muriel Heagney continued to argue that there was a need

\textsuperscript{104} Argus, 1 April 1933, 9 December 1933.
\textsuperscript{105} Heagney Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs? pp.110-111.
\textsuperscript{106} Argus, 20 October 1932.
\textsuperscript{107} Argus, 13 January 1933, 13 January 1933.
\textsuperscript{108} Report on Relief of Unemployed Girls, 1930-1932.
\textsuperscript{109} Argus, 13 June 1931, VPD(/A), Vol.196, p.707.
\textsuperscript{110} 19 November 1937, 24 June 1938, 22 July 1938, 29 August 1938, 13 October 1938, CCVBS, Minutes.
to provide welfare for the unemployed girl, stating that this 'need for such a service continues to be as great as ever'. She claimed it would be best handled by ‘young women with business training and industrial experience, and provide adequate maintenance, clothing and necessary social services, as well as training for employment combined with facilities for finding work’. Heagney would not admit defeat and pursued acknowledgement of the problem of the unemployed girl and sought the support of professionals. In the late 1930s, the professionalisation of social work was well under way, which I discuss in Chapter Seven.

Although the women involved in the Girls Employment Movement were anxious for its work to continue, obstacles prevented it from gaining the recognition it sought. The Movement held the promise of the beginnings of a separate sphere for women’s welfare, a new form of authority. Its formation revealed an awareness of the changes that were occurring in the broader welfare field, and a preparedness to adapt with innovative schemes based on the cooperation of women’s organisations. Notably, the goal of separate spheres can be seen as both a continuation and a sharp departure from the welfare practices of the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Often, the women of the Societies continued to impose their moral judgement on the recipients of relief. Yet they were also open to adopting the modern welfare practices that the founders of the Movement advocated.

The supportive involvement of the majority of Societies for the Movement again reveals their preparedness by the early 1930s to adapt to the pressure for welfare reform and to attempt to acquire new cultural capital. The Movement embraced new approaches to welfare practices, whilst maintaining a respect for traditional methods. Yet it did not succeed in acquiring the necessary capital to sustain its existence and to secure its authority in the field. From 1932, the conservative Argyle government refused to provide the support the Movement requested and needed, denying the existence of women’s unemployment problems. Without adequate funding and the necessary support from the government, the Movement was not in a position to continue in the way Henderson and Heagney envisaged. Instead it was affected by a series of external factors and concerns that included fears of women taking men’s jobs, shortage of government funding and broader ambitions for a shift to a new political order, one where the government held responsibility for welfare planning and welfare provision and determined the areas of welfare worthy of government intervention.

chapter six

Widows Pension

In 1936, the welfare of women and children was addressed in the Legislative Assembly in Victoria. Under debate was the introduction of a scheme of widows pensions. Government intervention in welfare practices, the fear of women taking men's jobs and the changing role of charities were all vital issues to this debate. On previous occasions the interests of male-dominated governments and business had worked against arguments for improved conditions for women's welfare, for example preventing the introduction of child endowment. In 1936 a shift in attitudes led to a more favourable reception to the introduction of widows pensions. In some respects, by this stage of the 1930s, the opinions of the Ladies Benevolent Societies had become redundant. They had lost considerable influence and social capital in the welfare field. Yet many Societies had come to support government intervention in welfare provision for widows, demonstrating their attempts to sustain social capital and authority in the field by adapting to change, through acceptance of their reduced responsibilities.

In 1925, an act was passed in New South Wales to introduce a pension for widows. The following year widows could apply to receive a pension. No other state followed suit. In Victoria, the dominant view was that the current legislation for ‘boarding-out’ children was adequate to assist families without a wage earner. Widowed women with children could either find work or receive relief from the Child Welfare Department or approach the Ladies Benevolent Societies for a compassionate allowance. Charities continued to suggest that deserted and widowed mothers find additional work. In the early 1920s, destitute women with children were encouraged to work, to support themselves, and to be self-reliant. The Board of Inquiry into the boarding-out scheme in 1921 implied this:

Where mothers are capable of doing outside work, which is now much more liberally paid than formerly (and is readily obtainable), and it is quite clear they can do it without detriment to their little ones, they should be required to do their part in lightening the State's burden.

112 ‘Boarding-out’ was a scheme where women unable to support their children could apply to the police court for maintenance. If the application was approved, her child would be admitted to State guardianship, on the grounds of destitution, thus institutionalising her dependence on the state in place of her husband. The mother would then be permitted an allowance to maintain her child. For more information see J. Ramsland (1974) ‘The development of the boarding-out systems in Australia: A series of welfare experiments in child care, 1860-1910’, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, 60(3), pp.186-98; D. Jaggs (1991) Asylum to action—Family action 1851-1991: A history of services and policy development for families in times of vulnerability, Oakleigh, Victoria: Family Action, ch.5; S. Garton (1990) Out of luck: Poor Australians and social welfare, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp.91-95.


114 Board of Inquiry into the Boarding Out of Neglected Children; the Administration of the Children’s Maintenance Act, etc, Report, Victorian Parliamentary Papers, 1921, p.6.
Women generally secured work as typists, seamstresses, waitresses, shop assistants and domestic servants, thus contributing to the continued gender segregation of the workforce.\textsuperscript{115} The suggestion that women leave their homes to secure an income was paradoxical considering the dominant view of the early 1920s that women’s primary role in society was associated with their maternal contribution. The protection of this role had long been advocated. When the prevention of government responsibility could be achieved by encouraging women to work, however, women’s maternal responsibilities became less important. In the absence of a male wage earner, pensions for women were generally opposed.

There were exceptions. Not all interested bodies in the welfare field were opposed to the introduction of a widows pension in Victoria. Advocates of a pension for widows, particularly those associated with the Labor Party, expressed their disappointment that Victoria was not likely to introduce such a measure in the foreseeable future. In 1927, John Holland, of the Labor Party, stated

\begin{quote}
I regret that we have not in this State a widows' pension scheme such as in operation in New South Wales ... The pensions enable the mothers to remain in their homes and give to their children the care and attention which is necessary for their proper bringing up. The mother’s place is in the home.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

Holland was particularly disapproving of the fact that mothers were being forced to work when they should be in the home raising the future generation of citizens. As discussed in previous chapters, Holland was also a strong advocate of welfare reform and encouraged increased government responsibility in the welfare field. His views received little attention at the time. Victoria remained committed to its traditional approach to welfare relief—that is, largely opposed to government intervention.

The Depression led to changed attitudes on government intervention in welfare provision following the successful introduction of the \textit{Unemployment Relief Act}, discussed in Chapter Five. When the unemployed were deemed in need through no fault of their own, government relief provision was acceptable. This shift in attitude to the government’s responsibility for citizens did not immediately result in altered approaches towards deserted and widowed women. Women were entitled to some assistance from the government during the Depression, but only if unemployed. Many women were deserted during those


years while their husbands went in search of work. These women were not entitled to any special benefits. They could approach the local Ladies Benevolent Society or apply to the Child Welfare Department for a boarding-out allowance if they had children. As mentioned, however, during the Depression years the Societies were under extreme financial pressure and often could not provide adequate assistance to their clients. The Societies proved unsuccessful in gaining additional government funding to deal with the crisis. By 1934, however, members of parliament were beginning to draw attention to the plight of the widowed and deserted woman, with one member suggesting that the Sustenance Branch should extend its duty to deserted wives and widowed women.117

The prospect of a widows pension did not receive serious attention until July 1936, when a member of the Labor Party, Bert Cremean, recommended to the Legislative Assembly that a scheme of widows pensions be considered. Cremean, a staunch Catholic, was an influential member of the right-wing political faction of the Labor Party in Victoria. John Holland, also of the right-wing faction, seconded the proposal forwarded by Cremean. Cremean chose not to introduce a Bill, for he was certain it would be defeated.118 Instead he proposed a discussion on the concept of providing a government pension for widows. Cremean believed the time was long overdue for the introduction of a widows pension. He and his supporters centred the debate on three major themes. These related to broader themes of the 1920s and 1930s—the obsession with population growth in Australia and the perceived need to improve the human quality of the population, changing conceptions of citizenship rights, and the position of women in the workforce and in the home.

One theme of the discussions was the need to secure the future of the nation through raising a healthy and morally upright generation of citizens. This was related, in some respects, to eugenic notions of improving the human quality of the population. In achieving this objective, the future of the nation would be secured.119 Its success depended upon a future of healthy and morally upright children. The argument was forwarded that a widows pension would remove the fear of malnutrition, would enable women to uphold a ‘decent standard’ in their homes and stimulate ‘family solidarity and self-reliance’, thereby aiding in the development of ‘wholesome personalities’.120 This would result in widescale benefits, for a ‘nation’s greatness depends on the character of its citizens, and the children of to-day will be the men and women of to-morrow’. Furthermore, supporters of the

pension stated, 'We believe that children are the State's greatest asset and they should be definitely and carefully guarded'.

The second theme raised by advocates of the widows pension was the obligation of the state to provide relief to widows whose poverty was circumstantial. Cremean stated in his address:

It is an accepted principle of modern philosophy that the community must take care of those people who, under pressure of circumstances, are unable effectively to hold their own in the increasingly strenuous battle of life, and, in accordance with that principle, the State and the Commonwealth Governments have, from time to time, instituted schemes for the assistance of men, women, and children who are unfortunately placed in the social scale.

The emphasis was on the government's responsibility to do what was 'humane' and 'just'. This was connected with attitudes of social progress. Harold Cohen, MLA, expressed his belief that the issue was removed from party politics and that consideration needed to be given to 'whether the particular scheme proposed fits in with the general scheme of social betterment which will inevitably have to be considered if we are to continue progressing as any civilized community must progress'. Those who favoured the introduction of the widows pension argued that social services should be extended as a right, a 'natural right', that such services were an 'obligation of the state,' and that the pension should be introduced in the name of 'justice and humanity'.

Connected to this was the future of charitable organisations and, of course, the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Mr Jewell, MLA, envisaged that the introduction of a widows pension would replace the work of charitable organisations in this sphere:

The charitable institutions are doing their best to assist widows and their families, but their efforts are limited. A widows' pension scheme would relieve the charitable institutions of the responsibility of trying to help many poor families and to enable them to devote their work to other deserving classes.

The extensive role of the Societies in the welfare field was changing. Their social and cultural capital was increasingly valued in a different context—in an emerging field of modern charity. Connected with this was the increasing belief of politicians that the Societies' role was increasingly irrelevant within the welfare field.

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The compassionate allowance, that had been available to many who were not eligible for pensions or other forms of government assistance, lost government funding when the McPherson government was in office in 1929.\textsuperscript{126} The Societies were not, therefore, able to assist to the extent they had done in the past. Politicians were aware that the 'members of the Ladies Benevolent Society are straining their resources to the utmost'.\textsuperscript{127} There were many references to the fact that old avenues of assistance were no longer available due to the financial difficulties of the Societies. Advocates of government intervention believed that charitable organisations should no longer be at the core of the welfare field. The Societies themselves were well aware of the changed conditions, noting that 'during these past tragic years, we have had to face larger responsibilities with less financial support'.\textsuperscript{128}

The third theme the debate revolved around was the belief that a woman's place was in the home. This was interconnected with fears of women taking men's jobs, concerns that had largely contributed to the cuts in funding to the Girls Employment Movement. In a slightly more positive respect, these concerns contributed to women receiving a social right to a pension when deprived of the primary breadwinner in the home. Many who argued for the introduction of a pension for widows believed that it should also be extended to deserted women. John Holland emphasised the Labor Party's belief that mothers performed a service to the state:

\begin{quote}
The Labour movement considers that the right of the mother to be supported should be regarded from the point of view of her capacity as a servant of the State, inasmuch as in bringing up her children she renders the State a service that she only is fully competent to perform.\textsuperscript{129}
\end{quote}

Support for the argument that a mother's role should receive recognition as a service to the community, however, served as a means to emphasise that women's position was in the home, not in the workforce. Providing women with the economic independence sought by women's activists during the 1928 discussions on child endowment was not the objective of Victorian politicians.\textsuperscript{130} Rather they wanted to ensure that 'a mother is not compelled by circumstances to become the breadwinner of the home'.\textsuperscript{131} Present conditions meant that in 'many cases, under the existing system, a family receives assistance, but the mother has still to go out to work'.\textsuperscript{132} A mother having to enter the workforce was deplorable: 'It is not right that the mother of a family should have to go

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{126} 16 July 1936, \textit{VPD(A)}, Vol.199, p.400.
\bibitem{128} MLBS, 91\textsuperscript{st} \textit{Annual Report}, 1936-1937.
\bibitem{131} 16 July 1936, \textit{VPD(A)}, Vol.199, p.393.
\end{thebibliography}
out to work. Her duty is to her children. They will be the future citizens of the State, and it is her duty to mould their characters. The introduction of a widows pension would prevent women from having to work to sustain her family. It would provide her the right to receive a government benefit. It would do this, however, with the reinforcement of her role in society—that is, as a mother confined to the domestic sphere. With the new pension, the ‘widow will receive an amount that will enable her to remain at home, and maintain her respectability. Her task is to bring up a family ... to guide her children to a standard of reputable citizenship'. As a woman, with inherently good morals, her rightful place was in the home, raising her children. Her role was not in the workforce, competing with men for scarce employment.

Interestingly, many Societies supported a scheme of widows pensions. This seemed to contradict their history of strong opposition to government intervention in the welfare field. Cremean’s proposal led to the appointment of a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly to inquire into the feasibility of a scheme of widows pensions in August 1936. The Societies received a questionnaire from the Committee asking them to express their opinions in regard to widows pensions and to advise the Committee if they were in favour of such a scheme. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society reported that ‘[m]embers were unanimous in stating their approval of this scheme’. This support revealed a significant shift from their hostility to government intervention in welfare to women and children in the decade following the Royal Commission on Child Endowment. Gertrude Woinarski made a visit to the Select Committee and commented that in her view ‘some good must result from their investigations’. Notably, however, support for widows pensions was in keeping with the Societies’ support for the traditional family and the encouragement of parental responsibility for the good moral upbringing of their children. In 1936, the widows pension was not a radical concept.

Some members suggested that the Societies make an effort to become involved in the provision of widows pensions. Nellie Ibbott, at a meeting of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies, put to members that ‘the committee be asked to consider the proposition of undertaking the work of Widows’ Pensions’. The members were instructed to pass the suggestion by the committees of the Societies they represented. Ibbott was one of the younger members of the Council of Societies, being only 47 years old in 1936. She was an enthusiastic community worker, evidenced by her election to the Heidelberg Shire Council in 1928. She was later to become the first woman to hold
mayoral office when she was elected in 1943. In February 1937, Ibbott elaborated on her ideas for the Societies' involvement in the widows pension scheme. She suggested that we make an offer to the Government to undertake the work, pointing out that the Benevolent Societies were in the best position to know and judge the case, the amount being entirely inadequate, and in no way solving the problem as Benevolent Societies would have to continue help now given.

Her enthusiasm for the extension of the Societies' role through their involvement in the provision of widows pensions was not shared by all members of the Council of Societies. It is possible that the continued lack of support from the government had left many feeling defeated. One member of the Council of Societies argued that 'it was definitely work which should be undertaken by the Children's Welfare Department, as all records were in that office'. By 1937, many within the Societies had come to accept that their authority in the welfare field had declined. They acknowledged that child welfare and the provision of government relief should be undertaken by government officials. The Societies were adapting to a new role in the welfare field, accepting their position as modern charitable organisations, concerned less with the 'deserving' poor, for whom the government increasingly accepted responsibility.

The Maintenance (Widowed Mothers) Act was passed in late 1937. It did not contain a provision for the Ladies Benevolent Societies to undertake the work. The Act was to be administered by the Child Welfare Department. Only widowed women with children were to be eligible for the pension, that is, 'any widowed mother who is receiving or is eligible to receive assistance from the Children's Welfare Department in respect of her child'. Arguments for the inclusion of deserted women in the provision of assistance were overlooked, possibly influenced by claims that this would encourage wife desertion. Following the introduction of widows pensions in Victoria, many argued for extension of the legislation to include widows with no children. Nellie Ibbott was a strong advocate of such an amendment. In the event of such an amendment being made, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society requested that it become the 'responsible authority'. There were no alterations of this nature made to the Act, however, and the Societies' role was not extended. The Societies' authority in the welfare of women and children had become more specialised by the late 1930s. They provided welfare specifically to deserted, aged and unemployed women—those women who were not in receipt of government benefits.

139 26 February 1937, CCVBS, Minutes.
140 28 February 1937, CCVBS, Minutes.
142 13 October 1938, 26 May 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
143 9 September 1938, MLBS, Minutes.
Diminished authority

During the 1930s, the Ladies Benevolent Societies demonstrated their capacity to adapt to changes in the welfare field that reflected a major shift from traditional laissez faire values to modern ideas of government intervention and centralised welfare planning. These shifts were not easy for the Societies, which had long been associated with the notion of social progress based on individual moral reform. The Societies had initially been resistant to government intervention, which was revealed in the 1928 debate regarding the proposals to introduce child endowment. They strongly adhered to their traditional beliefs that government handouts would have potentially damaging effects on the individual's sense of responsibility (in this case, proving detrimental to parental responsibility). Yet, it was also evident that some of the more influential members of the Societies were beginning to waver in their commitment to values associated with traditional welfare practices. This uncertainty created an appearance of inconsistency and lack of conviction in the Societies' beliefs.

Jessie Henderson, however, channelled her progressive views into the development of new programs that the Societies could be associated with. She revealed the scope for the Societies to create a new niche within the sphere of women's welfare—a sphere in which they had always experienced credibility as women assisting women. Henderson and Heagney's innovative scheme had great potential for the Societies to develop a new form of authority based upon the changed values in the welfare field of the 1930s. The majority of Societies revealed their willingness to support the Girls Employment Movement to cooperate in an effort to ensure its success—despite, at times, imposing their unpopular moralistic attitudes on the young women receiving their assistance. Not all Societies, however, were supportive of the scheme. Those affiliated with the Association remained skeptical and attempted to hinder the efforts to make it a uniform, coordinated Movement. By far the greatest threat to the Movement, however, was the conservative government that came into office in 1933. Despite its modern, coordinated approach and its efforts to establish itself separately from the Societies (while taking advantage of their apparatus), the Minister for Sustenance gradually dismantled the Movement. Although seemingly modern, the Movement had been somewhat traditional in its gender-specific approach. Women's organisations became increasingly less popular in the gender-neutral space of professional welfare. In addition, the Movement's demise was sealed when Kent Hughes exploited fears emerging from the Depression that women would take men's jobs.

Changing attitudes to women and employment, which emerged with the scarcity of jobs led to a reinforcement of traditional family roles and stereotypes that sought to
prevent women from taking men's jobs. Paradoxically, while the exploitation of these fears led to a rapid loss of support for the Girls Employment Movement, it also led to the attainment of the important goal of introducing a widows pension in the state of Victoria. The belief that women should be in the home raising the future generation of children was essential in gaining support for the principle underlying the widows pension and was important in many, including the Societies, overcoming their resistance to government intervention in social welfare policy. The concerns the Societies had pursued in the domain of benevolence and morality for so many decades had been resolutely taken over by the domain of politics and economics. In 1936, the Societies were no longer resisting government intervention, revealing a degree of resignation to their changed positioning in the welfare field and their need to adapt or perish. The Societies were yet to confront their greatest challenge, however. In the 1930s a new generation of social workers, advocating training and professionalisation, questioned the relevance of the Societies within the welfare field. This is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Seven

The struggle for cultural authority

Valuing new forms of cultural capital and welfare practices

I want to see, in time, a group of social workers spring from this urgently needed movement that will challenge the present social policy, bring about intensive cooperation of all uplifting effort, on a scientific basis that will allow of no waste, no overlapping of energy, time and money in developing a healthier, saner, happier state of society in this country.¹

Jocelyn Hyslop (Director of Training, Board of Social Studies), 1937

Contested understandings of welfare practices accompanied increasing pressures for welfare reform in the 1930s. The Depression had provided the catalyst for change and put welfare reform firmly on the agenda. In 1930, the Victorian government had intervened in the welfare field on an unprecedented scale. Following the government's new level of involvement in welfare provision came a new demand for professional social workers—trained and paid. This demand for a new type of welfare worker led to a struggle for cultural authority amongst the benevolent workers of the Ladies Benevolent Societies and professional social workers. The focal point of the struggle was the nature of welfare practices valued in the welfare field—traditional versus modern. Emerging from this struggle were competing interests over who was best qualified to implement these welfare practices. The Societies were accustomed to their authority as the primary welfare providers in the Victorian welfare field. They aimed to keep 'aflame the torch lit nearly a century ago for future generations'.²

The concept of the trained social worker was not new. In Victoria, the origins of the 'profession' of social work date back to the 1890s. In 1896, the Charity Organisation Society in London introduced training for social workers. The Society in Melbourne sought the same goal. In the mid-1890s, the terms 'charity worker' and 'district visitor' gradually began to be used interchangeably with the term 'social worker'.³ In the 1920s, the terminology remained fluid. The Ladies Benevolent Societies referred to themselves in several ways, depending upon the context. They were 'charitable workers' when reflecting upon their heritage and when a broad term was required. They were 'benevolent workers' when engaging with others on issues revolving around the distribution of sustenance and

¹ Newspaper clipping, 6 November 1937, Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), Box 20/S.03.
² Mrs E. M. Tilley (1938) 'Benevolent Societies' fine efforts', Hospital Magazine, August, p.27.
specific welfare practices. They were ‘voluntary social workers’ when discussing issues concerning the training of social workers.

The Societies’ willingness to refer to themselves as ‘voluntary social workers’ reveals a degree of openness to reform. Adopting the term ‘social worker’ to describe their welfare practices suggested a readiness to consider new forms of authority in the welfare field. Prefacing social worker with ‘voluntary’ indicated the Societies’ preparedness to accommodate the ‘professionalisation of benevolence’ advocated by the Charities Board.4 In this chapter, I trace the emergence of the new generation of social workers in the 1920s. They emerged in two distinct phases—hospital social workers and general social workers—which I address separately and chronologically. I discuss these phases in the context of the social workers’ interactions with the benevolent workers of the Societies. The Societies’ moralistic ethos, their emphasis on age and experience and their voluntarism were aspects of their habitus—or founding ethos—that were crucial to their self-perception and their work. During the 1930s, however, while women retained their prominence, trained expertise, youth and objectivity became increasingly valued in the field of welfare provision. In response, the Societies’ sphere of responsibility was channeled into an emerging field of modern charity where their cultural capital retained value.

Almonry—a new profession

In previous chapters I established that the Charities Board attempted to intensify the pressure for change during the 1920s. The Board sought a coordinated, centrally planned welfare field, striving for efficiency and economy. Linking the work of charities and hospitals was important within this agenda of reform. The Board wished to pursue the connection between poor health and the cycle of poverty. To achieve this objective, the appointment of trained experts in social service work was required. Trained medical social workers would be vital in bringing about a coordination of welfare and hospital services to implement new methods of addressing the cycle of poverty. The Board envisaged the Ladies Benevolent Societies assuming a prominent role in these welfare reforms. The Societies would retain authority as primary welfare providers, yet would be linked to the medical field through the almoner, or medical social worker. The Societies would contribute to the project of ‘preventative’ social work through the adoption of new welfare practices, coordinating their work with almoners. A training course would be introduced for medical social workers to provide them with the necessary specialist knowledge and skills to effectively perform the task of prevention and coordination of effort.

The work of the almoner would force a link between hospitals and charities, a link sought by the Charities Board. Almonry would be vital to a system of central welfare planning. In 1927, the Charities Board was of the view that ‘[h]ospital service is inseparable from the general problems of health and is closely interwoven with the diversity of conditions and social life’. Hospitals at the time were still essentially ‘charitable institutions maintained “by the benevolence of the public and professions for paupers”’. Within the welfare field the interconnectedness of poor health, nutrition and poverty was an increasingly important consideration both in the planning and provision of welfare. In his study on medical politics and the Australian government, James A. Gillespie argues the interwar years saw health care emerge as a national political issue. He comments that ‘public health policy was a shift from the policing functions of sanitary reform towards modifying the behaviour of individuals through education and other forms of social control’. Emerging in the 1920s, the desire to implement preventative methods received greater attention in the Depression years, as unemployment relief often failed to meet the minimum nutritional needs of the unemployed and their families. For the Charities Board, coordinating the skills of the almoner with the welfare practices of the benevolent worker would potentially revolutionise welfare practices.

A distinction between curative and palliative welfare practices distinguished the ‘expert’ from the ‘amateur’. ‘Palliative’ methods merely provided material aid to people in need and were associated with the amateur. The modern approach to welfare, on the other hand, aimed to discover the causes of this need and to base welfare provision on the most effective ways of preventing future calls upon welfare bodies. The expert would practice both curative and preventative methods of welfare provision. Increasingly, the Charities Board encouraged the introduction of trained experts to tackle these social questions, particularly in preventative methods. Having acquired the appropriate training, almoners would possess the specialist knowledge that the Board desired in the sphere of medical social work. The Board considered the Societies might adopt a more curative approach that would enable them to work effectively with the almoner.

The Inspector of Charities, Robert J. Love, was a strong advocate of medical social work. Following his overseas travels in 1926 he sought to encourage the expansion of almonry in Victoria. In its Annual Report of 1927, the Charities Board expressed Love’s interest in following international trends in social work:

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5 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1927.
6 Kennedy Charity warfare, p.102.
8 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.75; Gillespie, The price of health, p.49.
Accepting that almoner and social worker mean the same thing (Britain and Canadian [sic], respectively), and having seen what each country is doing, it is obviously essential to introduce a system which will meet the special requirements of Victoria.9

Other countries were incorporating the work of the medical social worker into the structures of the welfare field. Almonry was gaining worldwide recognition in the 1920s and was representative of the modern trend in welfare practices.

Having gained the attention of welfare reformists in Victoria, medical social work was significant in laying foundations for the professional authority of social workers. Almoners worked in close cooperation with public hospitals, yet their practices were distinct from the work of nurses.10 Their primary role was to assist patients in their recovery to good health in cooperation with medical and nursing staff. Almonry also emerged as an attempt to prevent imposition on the hospital out-patient system and to educate the ‘sick poor’ in health.11 Almoners aimed to discover the causes of patients’ problems with a view to preventing their further dependence on charity. Their duties were to be implemented in close cooperation with bodies outside the hospital, including government departments and charitable bodies.

The Charities Board assured the Ladies Benevolent Societies that by introducing an almoner scheme it had no intention of removing voluntary effort from the system. To the contrary, it anticipated drawing on the Societies’ authority in welfare provision.12 The almoner would work alongside the Societies on issues of medical health. Love explained:

Do not think that the Almoner is going to undermine the work of the committees, these must continue to be the main body for local relief, but they must be assisted by a thoroughly trained social worker.13

The Societies’ social connections would be important in encouraging a coordinated system of almonry. In the scheme envisaged by the Board, the almoner would interview each patient admitted to hospital and make ‘close inquiry into his physical and social condition, and if there be any consequential or other distress in his family, the organisation which can supply the particular need is advised’.14 If the almoner determined that the patient’s poor health was related to his or her economic position or home environment, the case would

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9 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1927.
10 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.74.
11 Kennedy Charity warfare, p.102.
12 Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, R. J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, 1928-29.
13 Notes of conference with representatives of Ladies Benevolent Societies, 3 August 1928, Public Records Office (PRO), Series (S) 4523/R1, Unit (U) 60, Item 563.
be referred to the appropriate organisation, often the local Society, with a recommendation for benevolent assistance.

The Board further proposed that each Society, or a group of smaller Societies, should appoint 'as a salaried officer a trained and experienced almoner, who will be able to furnish the committee with all the facts of the case as viewed by an expert observer'. In the medical field, the almoner gained new authority in referring cases to the Societies and working closely with them. The Societies, in turn, would retain authority in the broader field of welfare provision and gain new social capital through an alliance with almoners. Revealingly, Love commented that in appointing almoners to the Societies, 'the idea is to make them [the Societies] a curative help to the community'. In further indicating the new claims for preventative professional expertise, Love added that where the members of the Societies leaned towards being a little 'tender-hearted' and easily misled, 'if you have an Almoner, a man cannot bluff'.

In November 1928, the Charities Board officially proposed that an almoner scheme be introduced in Victoria, and established a committee in March 1929 to develop a scheme. The committee comprised seven representatives of interested organisations, including Queen Victoria Hospital, Women's Hospital, Melbourne Hospital Almoner Department, Melbourne District Nursing Society, Charity Organisation Society and the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. Aside from Stanley Greig Smith of the Charity Organisation Society, the representatives on the committee were all women. Gertrude Woinarski represented the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. Emerging from the committee was the Victorian Institute of Almoners in May 1929. Its objects were to 'spread throughout the community a knowledge of almonry', to 'encourage the appointment of almoners by institutions and benevolent societies', to 'arrange a course of training in almonry', and to 'prescribe and conduct examinations and to confer a diploma' in almonry. Its goals, therefore, were to introduce a new profession and to acquire social capital through cooperation with old and established organisations in the welfare field. A representative of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies was appointed to the new Institute of Almoners.

Specialist training was vital to the establishment of almonry as a recognised profession. The Institute of Almoners introduced the first training course for social

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16 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563; Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Minutes of Evidence, p.1163.
17 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
18 Need for an almoner system in Victoria, 26 November 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U22, Item 135.
workers in Melbourne in 1929, developed by Agnes Macintyre, of St. Thomas’ Hospital in London. Victoria relied heavily upon the expertise of British social workers in establishing its own training courses. Macintyre arrived in August 1929 and assumed her role as ‘Directress of Training’. She was considered a ‘woman of quiet, reserved, but strong personality’.

Macintyre was aware of the emerging tensions between the trained social worker and the benevolent worker, which she had experienced in Britain. She attempted to defuse it in Victoria by emphasising the different spheres of responsibility between the two streams of social work:

[Almonry in no sense sets up a new charity. It is essentially hospital work, its purpose being to augment the skill and care of the medical staff by endeavouring to ensure that the after conditions as far as possible are such as will enable the patient to benefit by that skill and care and otherwise to assist the medical staff in cases were information required would be difficult to obtain by the doctor himself.

Like the Charities Board, Macintyre stressed the continuing need for benevolent workers. ‘We can absorb as much voluntary assistance as we get’, she said. ‘There will always be work that only voluntary services can cover. The aim of our department is to cover that aspect of social welfare that can be done only by those who have been trained to do the work in a particular way to achieve particular results’. From all avenues, the Ladies Benevolent Societies received the assurance that their services would not be made redundant with the introduction of special training for social workers. Almonry was a separate, yet complementary, field of social work associated with the medical field.

The initial training course for medical social workers involved both a practical and a theoretical stream. The Institute of Almoners stated that it was necessary to recognise that the course of study was in its infancy and was therefore ‘largely tentative and experimental, and may have to be modified, restricted or extended as experience may suggest’. The Institute gained the support of educational institutions in Melbourne which were prepared to offer courses in theoretical instruction. These included lectures by the University of Melbourne, the Workers’ Education Association and the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Education. The courses included economics, psychology and physiology, public health and domestic economy. The practical training was to be provided by the

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19 Also spelt McIntyre. I will use the spelling Macintyre.
20 Argus, 7 November 1931.
21 Argus, 7 November 1931 [my emphasis].
22 Argus, 7 November 1931.
23 Victorian Institute of Almoners, 1st Annual Report, June 1930.
24 Victorian Institute of Almoners, 1st Annual Report, June 1930; R. Hoban (1963) The future development of social studies courses in the Australian universities, University of Melbourne, p.75.
Almoner Department of the Melbourne Hospital and the Charity Organisation Society and, later, other 'approved welfare agencies'. In initially the duration of the course was two years.

In these early stages, the principal duties of trained almoners required a close working relationship with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The almoners were expected 'to acquire a knowledge of the home or other extra-hospital conditions of patients for the use of the hospital staff and in achieving this 'to co-operate with other agencies in the provision of any requisite ordered'. With the cooperation of the Societies, the almoner was to 'deal with patients' difficulties at home, either real or imaginary, in order to contribute towards their ease of mind and consequent recovery'. The almoner's new focus on problems of the mind was evident, which differed from the Societies' focus on morality and respectability. In an effort to ward off hostility to the scheme by the Societies, the Charities Board continued to reassure them that their position would not be threatened by the introduction of almoners. The Societies' cooperation was vital to the success of the scheme.

The Societies' were initially concerned, however, that the introduction of almonry might lead to men dominating social work. They resisted any change in the understanding that social work was a woman's vocation. The focus on training, expertise and objectivity in almonry were qualities that were traditionally associated with men. Ensuring that women retained prominence over men in the field of social work had required constant vigilance by women's organisations, including the Societies. In the 1920s, concerns for women’s status in welfare were increasing. In 1923, Jessie Henderson, in her Presidential speech to the National Council of Women of Victoria stated that:

There was rapidly growing among men a jealousy of women’s work, and a refusal to allow them a share in positions of power and responsibility. There were many activities in which women were engaged and as far as the spade work was concerned women were allowed a free hand in all social welfare work, in charity, politics and religion, but when it came to the positions of real power and responsibility opposition was shown at once.

Henderson recognised that women could not always attain the positions of status and recognition they sought. She was determined, however, that there was no going back. The

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25 'The Work of the Hospital Almoner', pamphlet issued by the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners, c1937.

26 Notes on Suggested Almoner Scheme, May 1929, PRO, S4523/R1, U22, Item 127.


28 Need for almoner system, 26 November 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U22, Item 135.


30 22 March 1923, National Council of Women, Victoria (NCWV), Minutes.
Societies expressed their concern to the Inspector of Charities that women's role might be threatened by the developments in medical social work. Despite the presence of nurses in the field of medicine, the medical profession was traditionally associated with male expertise. The field was one in which women struggled to gain recognition. With the recent overlapping of issues concerning hospitals and charities, medical social work potentially threatened women's unique authority in the field of social work. Love assured them, however, that the almoners appointed to the Societies would be women. The Charities Board maintained the belief that women administered relief work most sympathetically and satisfactorily.

Having received reassurance of their own stable position within the welfare field and the continued importance of women's role in social work, the Societies were prepared to support the new almoner scheme and expressed their willingness to cooperate. In May 1929, Gertrude Woinarski explained the proposed scheme of almonry to the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. In response, the Executive Committee suggested that 'more time should be given during the meeting of the General Committee' to 'stimulating the interest of the members in other organizations in which [medical social] work might coordinate with that of this Society,' and 'less [time] to the reporting of purely individual and ordinary [benevolent] cases'. In October 1929, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society invited Agnes Macintyre to attend its fortnightly meeting to further discuss with members the nature of the almonry scheme, the proposed course of training for almoners and how she anticipated cooperation between almoners and the Societies. Macintyre explained the 'mission of the Almoner was to report to the relieving agency the necessity for certain treatment coupled with a request that this might be made possible'. She stated that she would 'provide ... the visitors [of the Societies] with details of any case known to them attending the Hospital'. The Melbourne Society revealed its willingness to adapt to changes in the field.

The scheme of almonry presented the Societies with the opportunity to expand their welfare practices, to develop new allowances, to assert their importance and to seek new positioning in the changing welfare field. The Societies needed to adopt new 'preventative' welfare practices in order to cooperate with the almoners. Almoners were trained in these new methods of welfare provision. For example, a course was offered on 'the relation

31 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
33 Conference with representatives of Societies, 3 August 1928, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
34 Charities Board, Annual Report, 1926.
35 21 May 1929, Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society (MLBS), Minutes.
36 8 October 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
37 8 October 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
between social welfare and disease’, which was ‘designed to clarify the student’s mind on certain facts in relation to the diagnosis and cause of disease, so that she may intelligently approach related medical social problems’. One scheme in which Macintyre envisaged the Societies’ involvement was ‘special dieting’ cases. The almoner would ‘arrange for patients to obtain assistance in reference to special diets or extra nourishment when their circumstances might prevent continuance of this treatment’. In cases of diabetes, gastric ulcers and malnutrition, patients were often prescribed a special diet. For people without the means to purchase such a diet, the Almoner’s Department proposed that the Societies provide the necessary assistance. These methods were associated with the shift in public health towards a social hygiene model, building on the Societies’ established sympathy towards cases in which sickness was the cause of poverty. The Society visitor would ensure the outpatient had the means to follow a special diet, and ensure that the diet was followed, thereby contributing to the prevention of ill-health through malnutrition and poor diet.

Despite the enthusiasm of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society to coordinate its work with almoners and to potentially acquire additional authority, external factors limited its involvement in the scheme. The Society ‘explained that in the present financial circumstances it would be impossible for Benevolent Societies to give the help suggested by Miss Macintyre’. By late 1929 the Societies were under extreme financial pressure resulting from the rapid increase in unemployment caused by the Depression. This economic strain did not lessen for a number of years. The consequence was that most Societies from 1929 to 1933 diverted the majority of their resources to the task of assisting the unemployed in connection with the government scheme of sustenance. The Societies were not in a position to fully involve themselves in the almoner scheme, regardless of their desire to engage in this new and interesting approach to welfare relief. Regret was expressed by the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society in its Annual Report that it could not work more closely with the almoners:

The new Almoner Department at the Melbourne Hospital has done much in keeping us acquainted with the progress of patients sent for treatment. The Committee takes this opportunity of expressing appreciation of Miss McIntyre’s [sic] unfailing courtesy, and regrets exceedingly the inability, owing to lack of funds, to help her as regards special dieting of patients, etc.

The Society was aware of the potential benefits of the new almoner scheme, and the opportunities it presented for the expansion of its efforts through cooperation with the almoners. It was never opposed to involving itself in the scheme.

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38 ‘The Work of the Hospital Almoner’.
39 ‘The Work of the Hospital Almoner’.
40 8 October 1929, MLBS, Minutes.
41 MLBS, 84th Annual Report, 1929-1930.
Hope remained within the Almoner’s Department that cooperation with the Society could eventually be achieved. Yet practicalities meant seeking help elsewhere if the Societies were unable to cooperate. Faced with this prospect, the Societies made an effort to work with almoners, despite their financial pressures. Members of the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society agreed to undertake any cases requiring special diets that arose in the district they were responsible for. The final arrangement was that the ‘first visit was made to the home personally by the Almoner’ and the Society would arrange for a visitor to continue calling on the case, to ensure special diets were followed, and would report to the almoner on a monthly basis. This confidence in the Societies and their continued authority in the welfare field was further revealed when the Institute of Almoner’s requested that the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society provide its own practical training to almoners. The Society was open to cooperation, and agreed to take on two almoners for training in its office in August 1933.

Assisting almoners in special diet cases caused problems for the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society during the 1930s. No defined methods were in operation and the work was time consuming and involved endless consultations with other organisations. Numerous interactions over cases of ‘special nourishment’ occurred between hospital Almoner Departments, the Charity Organisation Society and the Ladies Benevolent Society. In February 1934, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society decided to ‘eliminate’ help to special nourishment cases, particularly in view of its ‘grave financial position’. The Charities Board was determined to see the Society remained involved with the almoners and requested that help to these cases be continued, with promises of financial assistance.

The work continued, as did the complaints by the Societies at the way they were handled. Almoners often consulted visitors about cases before advising the central office of the Society, which did not facilitate open consultation and cooperation. The Society was dissatisfied with the way the cases were dealt with financially when it became aware of clients who spent money on necessities other than food items. This dissatisfaction was the source of many conversations between the Almoner’s Departments of various hospitals and the Societies in 1934 and 1935 as the two bodies sought to reach agreement.

42 22 March 1932, 20 September 1932, MLBS, Minutes.
43 18 October 1932, MLBS, Minutes.
44 18 October 1932, MLBS, Minutes.
45 29 August 1933, MLBS, Minutes.
46 24 January 1933, 6 February 1934, 20 February 1934, MLBS, Minutes.
47 12 June 1934, MLBS, Minutes.
48 8 January 1935, 22 January 1935, MLBS, Minutes.
49 22 March 1935, MLBS, Minutes.
and a compromise on methods of cooperation. Importantly, the Societies revealed their preparedness to engage in these discussions and to work with almoners to develop new welfare practices.

The introduction of the almoner scheme was an important development in the process of welfare reform. Almonry represented the introduction of the first professional social workers. While they were connected with the welfare field, the almoners' authority was primarily recognised within the medical field. Through cooperation with the Charities Board and the Societies, they secured vital capital in achieving this authority. The Societies were integral to the almoners' success. As a separate sphere of social work, almoners did not represent a threat to the Societies' authority. To the contrary, almoners recognised this authority and provided the Societies the potential to build upon this authority through the development of new welfare practices. Together, the Societies and almoners cooperated to form a new alliance. The full potential of this was not realised due to external circumstances, particularly the strain on the Societies' finances. Indeed, their inability to fully cooperate with the almoners, due to their involvement in unemployment relief, led to their vulnerability when future initiatives for professionalisation were pursued in the welfare field during the thirties.

The professionalisation of benevolence

In addition to the scheme of almonry, an important component of the Charities Board's program for welfare reform was the introduction of paid experts in welfare provision—trained general social workers. Although related to the profession of almonry, general social work occurred in a different sphere and was considerably closer to the work of the Societies. Indeed, it could conceivably be viewed as an effort to professionalise benevolent work.50 In addition to efforts to encourage training for Society members, there was considerable overlapping between the benevolent work the Societies were accustomed to performing and the work the proposed trained social workers would undertake. To avoid confusion I will therefore refer to the former as benevolent work and the latter as social work. In 1935, there were no Victorian trained social workers appointed to paid positions. Those working in welfare provision were either benevolent workers, social workers internationally 'imported' or internationally trained Australian social workers.51 In the first half of the 1930s, considerable debate occurred over who would comprise the body of paid social workers that government departments, the Charities Board and some voluntary organisations sought to appoint.

50 Kunzel Fallen women, problem girls, p.4.
51 Hoban Social studies courses, p.66.
The formation of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies in 1928 was a necessary part of the agenda to introduce trained social work as a component of the welfare field. One of the objectives of the Council of Societies was to encourage the introduction of training for social work. The Charities Board, with which the Council of Societies was incorporated, encouraged the professionalisation of benevolence—that is, it envisaged Society members becoming trained social workers alongside the appointment of external social workers. The Board sought to reform the welfare field from within. At the same time, the Council of Societies aimed to secure a new form of authority for the Societies within the emerging welfare field and was open to the prospect of acquiring professional authority. The introduction of training for social work was therefore strongly supported by the Council of Societies in connection with this objective. It believed the Societies would benefit from such an initiative.

In its first Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 1930, the Council of Societies stated that '[i]t is the intention of the Council in the forthcoming year to introduce "tutorials" with a view to more efficient social service'. With the Societies' new responsibilities in the government unemployment relief scheme, these tutorials did not eventuate. The Council's interest in educating social workers, however, did not wane. In March 1931, it proposed that a course of study be established for general social workers. A resolution was passed, which stated:

That, recognising the need for training in social science, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies approach the University with a request that the necessary steps be taken without delay to provide a course of study for all who feel their need of such a knowledge.

Amidst the atmosphere of change, the Council foresaw an opportunity in training social workers to create the new niche it sought for the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the welfare field. Possessing social capital and long-held authority within the field, the Council believed the Societies were well-positioned to undertake the training of social workers.

The President of the Council of Societies, Jessie Henderson, was at the forefront of the push to encourage training for social workers. To achieve welfare reform, technical expertise in welfare practices was increasingly necessary. Henderson maintained that 'lack of trained assistance prevents us from applying modern methods'. In advocating the introduction of training for social workers, Henderson explicitly stated her vision of the Societies' continuing, yet different, authority in the changing welfare field:

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52 See Chapter Three.
53 Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies (CCVBS), 1st Annual Report, year ended 30 June 1930.
54 Argus, 28 March 1931.
55 G. G. Henderson to Board of Social Services, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/P1, U65, Item 622.
I am of the opinion that the paid worker would be of considerable value and since I recommend that the local Benevolent Society act as the Distress or Relief Committee of the local Council I suggest she be the servant of the Benevolent Society with her office in the Town Hall, and the salary be provided by the Municipal Council.56

In Henderson’s vision, professional social workers would be women and would work closely with the Societies, which would assume greater responsibility in the welfare field. She envisaged a coordinated scheme in which local government, social workers and benevolent workers would work together harmoniously. The Societies’ authority would be recognised within this scheme. The professional social worker would provide advice to the Societies and work under their authority, yet receive their payment from local government, to avoid additional expense for the Societies.

The greatest challenge to the Council’s proposals to expand the scope of the Societies through involvement in a new training course, however, was often from within the network of Societies. The introduction of training for general social workers raised questions about the Societies’ own welfare practices. Why was formal training necessary? If training were essential to the performance of social work, would the members of the Societies be required to undertake training? The influential Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was uncertain of its position and wavered in its support for training. As the original organisation for benevolent relief in Victoria, the Society represented tradition. Yet the Society was not opposed to change. It cooperated with the almoner scheme, it supported the Girls Employment Movement and it willingly acknowledged the government’s responsibility for the unemployment problem in 1929. The Society was concerned, however, by the implications of training and the values associated with it. It represented a major shift away from traditional methods of appointing visitors and passing on skills of benevolence. The trained social worker would also expect payment for services, which questioned the value benevolent workers placed on their voluntarism.

These hesitations were revealed in evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee into Social Services in 1931. The Society ‘felt that the position [on training] hardly applied to women of mature years who had been and were still doing Relief Work’.57 The significance of experience in benevolent work and the valued contribution of mature women were to be ongoing themes for the Societies in the move to incorporate trained social workers in the welfare field. The women of the Society feared the possibility of having to undergo the indignity of a training course after years of firsthand experience in the work of benevolence. Whilst this was partly an issue of pride, the perceived need for

56 Henderson to Board of Social Services, 23 February 1932, PRO, S4523/P1, U65, Item 622.
57 17 November 1931, MLBS, Minutes.
formal training also questioned the Societies' self-perception. Professional training was not a part of this self-image. A training course for social work might call into question the welfare practices traditionally associated with the Ladies Benevolent Societies. What statement was being made about the inherent virtues and good qualities that women 'naturally' possessed and which were incorporated in benevolent work? How would training benefit those women with a natural disposition for social work (who were the only women the Society appointed as members)?

The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society was receptive to the reassurances of the Charities Board and members of parliament. The Society's interest in adapting to welfare reform was revealed in its comment that it was 'the general opinion that lectures [associated with a training course], if interesting, might prove helpful'. Whilst the Society struggled to cope with the ongoing high unemployment levels, it cautiously acknowledged that there might be benefits in listening to the suggestions and new ideas of trained social workers. For trained social workers, this reluctant interest in specialist knowledge from the most influential Society was an indication of a potential alliance and the possible basis for cooperation. Benevolent workers had not rejected outright the professional social worker. The desire for cooperation between traditional and modern women's organisations was characteristic of the early 1930s. The Societies revealed a preparedness to adapt in the face of change, despite the challenge to their self-perception, to their work and to their founding ethos. At the same time, they had to confront the reluctance of their (generally male) peers to acknowledge their willingness to move with the times.

**Government views on social work training**

In his proposal for the Parliamentary Select Committee into Social Services discussed in earlier chapters, John Holland, MLA, of the Labor Party explained his vision for the introduction of social work training and its place within the welfare field. He acknowledged the need for the Societies' continuing role in the reformed welfare system as voluntary welfare providers:

> I believe in voluntary effort which can be supplemented by the Government ... I would never suggest the abolition, or even the curtailment, of the voluntary organizations with which Government assistance could be co-ordinated. So many problems have developed as the result of destitution, poverty, and distress, that the situation requires special skill and training to deal with it.

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58 17 November 1931, MLBS, Minutes.
60 1 October 1931, *Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), Assembly (A)*, Volume 186, p.3369.
While Holland was explicit in his desire to maintain voluntary organisations within the welfare field, he clearly envisaged trained social workers adopting a new and important position in welfare provision. Where almoners had no intention of encroaching on the Societies’ sphere of welfare activity, the same did not apply for trained general social workers. Holland wanted to see professional social workers who ‘will go out and try to understand the ills of society, but not with a desire of just giving charitable relief’.\textsuperscript{61} Advocates of welfare reform continued to stress the need for preventative welfare practices to be adopted. Holland expressed his hope that trained social workers ‘will endeavour to analyse each case for the purpose of building the person up and restoring him to society as a useful social unit’.\textsuperscript{62} This preventative approach was not one traditionally associated with the Societies. While maintaining the Societies’ involvement was considered important by Holland, due to the continued relevance of their moralism, the government increasingly sought to exercise its authority over the Societies to bring about coordination of welfare effort.

In his evidence to the inquiry, the Inspector of Charities, Cecil L. McVilly, stressed the need to exercise caution with the voluntary sector in welfare reform initiatives. He agreed with the sentiment of the Lord Mayor that ‘there must be no discouragement of the great army of voluntary workers throughout the community’.\textsuperscript{63} The necessity for maintaining good relations with the voluntary sector was clearly recognised by McVilly. In January 1932, he made the point that:

\begin{quote}
Action to disturb existing organisations—very many of them old-established, with recognised functions and traditions which ensure a large measure of voluntary support— ... is undesirable and impracticable.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

In early 1932, if the benevolent workers ceased to operate within the welfare system, there was no apparatus to replace it. The government relied heavily upon Ladies Benevolent Societies, through the granting of large subsidies, to carry out the work of welfare relief. Yet the government was increasingly swayed by arguments encouraging training for social workers and stressed that it hoped ‘to attract the best class of men and women to adopt social service work as a vocation’.\textsuperscript{65} By late 1932, the new conservative government had implemented a policy with a careful strategy to replace the apparatus of Societies with a bureaucratic one—an apparatus which would encourage the services of trained social workers.\textsuperscript{66} The need to exercise caution in dealings with the Societies subsequently became less important. The Societies’ unstable positioning in the welfare field in 1933 was

\textsuperscript{61} 1 October 1931, VPD(A), Vol.186, p.3369.
\textsuperscript{62} 1 October 1931, VPD(A), Vol.186, pp.3369-70.
\textsuperscript{63} Argus, 6 June 1931, p.5.
\textsuperscript{64} Argus, 27 January 1932, p.8.
\textsuperscript{65} 1 October 1931, VPD(A), Vol.186, p.3369.
\textsuperscript{66} See Chapter Five for more information on these changes.
to become the basis from which social workers asserted a new professional authority in the field.

The founding ethos of a new generation of social workers

A new generation of social workers challenged the Societies' moral authority in the thirties. This generation of predominantly young, single women were determined to distance themselves from the heritage of benevolent work created by the Societies. To achieve this they sought legitimation of their own cultural capital—their own welfare practices. These practices were informed by their founding ethos—the new generation of social workers identified with the ‘expert’, with the movement for professionalisation of skilled occupations, with 'the day of specialists'. The 1930s was a decade in which social workers attempted to define their objectives in connection with broader cultural and social influences within the welfare field.

This shift towards a new generation of social workers occurred alongside a parallel shift in the social field towards what has been labelled the ‘new middle class’. The new middle class

- do not make things. They supervise, record and keep track of what others produce. They provide technical and personal services, and teach others how to do things. In addition, they handle ideas, and are the chief interpreters, creators and disseminators of knowledge.

Professionalism was associated with the ‘narrative of academic entrepreneurship’—degrees, examinations, the award of credentials—and institution building—the establishment of associations, the creation of journals. It was 'a story of technical and cultural gatekeeping'. These technical and personal services became the core of the new middle class’s cultural capital. It was this capital that the new generation of social workers aimed to demonstrate that it possessed by contributing to the coordination of welfare practices, providing 'systematic' welfare provision and offering expert advice on the conditions of welfare recipients. This cultural capital was valued within the profession of social work. Increasing the value of this capital in the Victorian welfare field was a means to enhancing the authority of professional social workers.

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67 Speech by Mr J. D. G. Medley, 10 May 1939, AASW, Box 20/S.04.
69 Deacon Managing gender, p.4.
70 Kunzel Fallen women, problem girls, p.38.
The emerging middle class was part of a broader effort to ‘reshape the culture of industrial capitalist societies’. Interrelated was the increase in government intervention in social policy. New attitudes emerged towards government responsibility for relief provision to the economically disadvantaged. Belief in the right of citizens to receive relief when confronted by hardship beyond their control increased during the course of the Depression. This new emphasis on the government’s role in welfare provision was connected to the emergence of the new middle class. In a study on women’s work in the bureaucracy, Desley Deacon argues that ‘state support is vital to the professional project’. The government provided the new professionals with employment as investigators in sustenance relief. With its increased involvement in the provision of relief, the government needed a body of workers to carry out the task. Following the amendments to the *Unemployment Relief Act* in 1932 and the restructuring of relief provision, the government’s demand for paid professionals increased.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the founding ethos of the Ladies Benevolent Societies and argued that even into the 1920s and 1930s they remained a ‘product’ of the nineteenth century, the ‘active present’ of their past. Their founding ethos was a manifestation of values that had been influential amongst the ‘old’ middle class in the mid-nineteenth century. While the Societies’ authority in the welfare field was associated with the ideology of separate spheres for women and men, the qualities associated with professionalism—technical expertise, skills, objectivity, rationality—were not conventionally associated with women. Nor was paid work. As members of the ‘old middle class’, and as women, visitors of the Societies defined their status through their leisure and through their voluntary contribution to charitable organisations, alongside the professional and financial position of the men in their lives.

Like the Societies, the founding ethos of the professional social workers was based on a combination of aspects of their classed interests and their feminine identity, both of which were specific to their generation. Unlike the Societies, their religious beliefs were less significant to their self-perception. Members of the new middle class were ‘frequently of Nonconformist, but increasingly secular, background’ and ‘came from families of the colonial urban middle class in which values of sobriety and diligence were accompanied by aspirations for worldly advancement’. For this emerging social group, formal education and special skills promised greater prestige and power than their parents had held.

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72 Deacon *Managing gender*, p.8; see also Lawrence *Professional social work in Australia*, p.3.
73 Walkowitz ‘The making of a feminine professional identity’, p.1051.
74 Reiger *The disenchantment of the home*, p.212.
75 Reiger *The disenchantment of the home*, p.212.
generation of social workers was generally composed of young women in their twenties and thirties, who were of a similar social background to the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Indeed, some were the daughters of women involved in the Societies. They aimed to move beyond the ideology of separate spheres and therefore identified as women in ways that differed from their mothers. These young women were receptive to, and sought to embrace, 'modern' ideas and attitudes of the early twentieth century which meant departing from the tradition of social work that had dominated for several decades. They were often raised in the aftermath of the 1890s Depression and had been influenced by arguments that welfare reform was essential to social progress. A declining faith in the moral reform of the individual as a means to social progress was notable in the 1930s. In its place was an emerging enthusiasm for social progress through scientific reason and a new focus on the psychological well-being of the individual and, more broadly, a concern with the social mind.

With their emphasis on training, skill and expertise, social workers differed from the benevolent worker, whose work was based on 'essentially human emotions and religious beliefs'. In 1932, the Charities Board described benevolent workers as 'people with a surplus of time or money, or both, [who] busy themselves with some form of social welfare'. Trained social workers, on the other hand, possessed special knowledge through their training and undertook their work as a profession. The appointment of trained social workers would make up for the shortcomings of benevolent workers. Initially, the government hoped that social workers and benevolent workers would work together to 'restore' individuals to society as 'useful units', combining their different assets to achieve valuable outcomes. Social workers, however, sought autonomy from benevolent workers and a struggle for cultural authority gained momentum. Establishing their own training course was important in their drive for professional authority.

Acquiring social capital—developing social partnerships

For the new generation of social workers, special knowledge, skills and credentials were vital to their understanding of themselves. A priority, therefore, was the establishment of a training course for general social workers. They followed the example set by almoners who had paved the way. Advocates for trained social workers allied with almoners in establishing a course of training. In June 1931, the Institute of Almoners and the Council for Mental Hygiene instigated discussions with officials from the University of Melbourne.

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76 Statement prepared by Inspector of Charities for Social Services Committee, 26 January 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U20, Item 102; see also, A. Woollacott (1998) 'From moral to professional authority: Secularism, social work, and middle-class women's self-construction in World War I Britain', *Journal of Women's History*, 10(2), p.92.
77 Statement by Inspector of Charities, 26 January 1932, PRO, S4523/R1, U20, Item 102.
The Institute and the Council suggested the establishment of a course for social workers.\footnote{Argus, 3 June 1931.} Resulting from these discussions was a suggested meeting amongst social service organisations to discuss a university course for social work.

Jessie Henderson, representing the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies, was one of six signatories on the letter of invitation to interested organisations. Representatives of the organisations that participated in the meeting included the President of the Charity Organisation Society, Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, the Director of Education, the President of the Young Women’s Christian Association and the Lord Mayor. The meeting represented ‘the high water mark in the movement to bring about an institute for a course of social service study and diploma which should be available to all and was essential to some social workers’.\footnote{Argus, 6 June 1931.} The outcome of this important meeting in June 1931 was a strategy of action based on three objectives. These objectives were, firstly, the ‘urgent need for specially adapted training for those undertaking all branches of social work’, secondly, that the training should include theoretical courses on fundamental subjects and ‘practical training in the form of field work in approved institutions of various types’ and, thirdly, that a committee should be appointed to investigate the possibilities of achieving these goals.\footnote{Argus, 6 June 1931.} Agreement was reached by participants at the meeting that the proposed committee be composed of the six individuals who called the meeting, plus two educational committees from the Institute of Almoners and the Council of Mental Hygiene.

In October 1932 a second landmark meeting was held on the issue of introducing a training course. The committee on training for social work met with a sub-committee from the professorial board of the University of Melbourne. Representatives at the meeting agreed that a course of social work training be established and made available to prospective students in 1933.\footnote{Argus, 28 December 1932.} They also proposed that a board of social training, to be linked with the University, should be appointed to determine the appropriate subjects for inclusion in the course. The Educational Workers Association and the University of Melbourne would be consulted in this process and would help to determine the examination requirements. With regard to practical training in the course, the committee ‘hoped that adequate provision for this can be made with such State and voluntary agencies as are in a position to provide the desired guidance and experience’.\footnote{Argus, 28 December 1932.} This would bring Melbourne into line with Sydney, where a course of this nature had been in existence.
for three years.83 The committee’s goal was to see the course included in the official University program.84

Despite these hopeful beginnings, the University of Melbourne was hesitant in providing full support for the introduction of the course. The committee was disappointed at the discovery that ‘University authorities ... have not felt prepared to establish such a scheme of training as was desired’.85 The committee had hoped to introduce a two year training course in social science, resulting in a diploma to provide ‘a background of knowledge of economic, industrial, and social conditions’. The proposed course would also give instruction ‘in the sources of governmental and voluntary relief, the principles of giving relief, and methods of social care work’.86 The committee’s response to the University’s hesitancy was to proceed with the introduction of an independent training course. It appointed a Victorian Council of Social Training that was to comprise of at least forty members. Represented on the Council were a wide range of welfare organisations, churches, university professors and government departments. These included members of the Charity Organisation Society, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies and the Ladies Benevolent Societies. The purpose of the Council of Social Training was ‘to give systematic help and interest to those originally responsible for the formation of the committee’.87

The course of training sought ‘to equip men and women to attack the problems of society with understanding and knowledge—knowledge of social history, economics, political theory, social philosophy, psychology, physiology—and practical acquaintance with social legislation and the arrangements resulting therefrom’.88 The Victorian Council of Training managed to secure cooperation from the University of Melbourne.89 A selection of university courses were included in the Diploma of Social Work. Despite continued attempts by the Board of Social Studies in the 1930s to gain university status, however, this was not achieved until the early 1940s. Completion of the diploma took two years—with one year devoted to theoretical courses and one year of practical training. The course of study in almonry was integrated into this diploma, and required an extra year of training with the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almonry.

83 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.34.
84 Argus, 28 December 1932.
85 Argus, 23 February 1933.
86 Argus, 17 June 1933.
87 Argus, 17 June 1933.
89 Hoban Social studies courses, p.75.
In 1934, the Victorian Council of Social Training was successful in appointing an internationally renowned social worker as its Director of Training—Jocelyn Hyslop. She had been educated in London as a social worker and psychiatrist, specialising in mental health. R. J. Lawrence summarised her personality: 'Highly intelligent and energetic, she could hold the attention of any audience, but her fluctuations in mood and cutting wit did occasionally cause difficulties with students and agencies'.90 In a report upon her arrival in Australia, the Argus commented that '[p]ossessed of great charm of manner and of very definite personality, Miss Hyslop has covered a wide field of social service'.91 Hyslop represented a new professional face in social work. She was appointed to undertake the role of securing authority for social workers: ‘A pioneer’s opportunity, therefore, awaits Miss Hyslop in moulding the training of Melbourne’s future social workers’.92 Hyslop became a prominent voice for the Council of Social Training and aimed to advance the profession of social work in Victoria.

Hyslop made it clear she believed that ‘[s]ocial work in Australia must, in the future, take its place amongst the professions’.93 Her ambitions for social work extended beyond cooperation with benevolent workers. Hyslop did not see advantages in encouraging these workers to adapt to the changes in welfare provision. She began to question the relevance of benevolent workers in the welfare field:

To what extent is state and voluntary relief wasted through inexpert administration? How far can preventive and constructive work be done? Can an altogether wider conception of the aims and ideals of social work be attempted?94

Hyslop advocated preventative social work as the solution to society’s ills.95 She emphasised the fact that professional social workers underwent special training to develop an understanding of the causes of poverty, and to learn methods to overcome this. The focus remained on the individual and that individual’s capacity to exist within the capitalist system. The difference of trained social workers from benevolent workers was in the methods they practised. Where the Ladies Benevolent Societies focused on helping the recipient to help him or herself through offering moral advice and domestic education, plus material assistance, the new generation of social workers focused on the individual’s psychological well-being. This involved helping clients to adjust their attitudes or to see their position from a different angle that would enable them to cope more successfully within capitalist society.

90 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.51.
91 Argus, 8 December 1934.
92 Argus, 18 July 1934.
93 Draft document, c1934, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
94 Draft document, c1934, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
In a description of what trained social workers do, the Victorian Council for Social Training explained that '[t]hrough always endeavouring to find out the cause of people’s difficulties, the trained worker can often help them to help themselves, thus providing the most satisfactory and permanent solution to any problem'. In 1937, Jocelyn Hyslop gave an example of the type of social work she advocated:

A woman went to a social worker and she said she was at her wits end to find the weeks rent. The worker counted out the money and put it on the table in front of the woman. Then the woman began to talk. The social worker listened for an hour—‘skilled listening’ Miss Hyslop called it. In the end the worker found that the woman’s problem wasn’t the rent basically at all. She had other and bigger personal problems, but had never had a skilled listener to tell them to. It didn’t take another hour for the worker to unravel the woman’s real problems. And in the end, when the woman rose to leave, she left behind the rent money untouched on the table.

The emphasis on ‘skilled listening’ was important in distinguishing the professional from the amateur. Benevolent workers were less inclined to listen, or to even suggest that listening was an important part of their approach. They believed they could determine a recipient’s problems by asking probing questions and observing character types to discover immoral tendencies. They aimed to discover the surface traits of respectability and deserving need. The social worker, on the other hand, immersed in the social sciences of mental and physical hygiene, psychology and behaviour, sought to probe the attitudes and anxieties they saw behind cases of social inefficiency.

A new avenue—training for social work

The Societies were not completely opposed to the benefits of formal training for social workers. As I suggested, the more progressive women associated with the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies made an effort to advocate training for Society members. In 1933 the Council of Societies went so far as to take credit for the introduction of the course—‘the Social Science Course now being held is due largely to the action of the CCVBS and as many members as possible should take advantage’. It went on to encourage other Societies to ‘draw the attention of its members to the value of such training with a view to appointing, in the future, a trained Social Worker to its own society’. Jessie Henderson and other members of the Council of Societies were clearly excited by the possibilities this training course had for the future of the Societies and for women as social workers. In June 1933, in reporting on the new course, Henderson
claimed that ‘a new avenue was opened for women’.\textsuperscript{100} While urging members of the Societies to undertake training and to appoint professional social workers, the Council retained an emphasis upon the special insight and knowledge of benevolent workers.\textsuperscript{101} Elsie Tilley, as President of the Council, suggested that the organisation be used as a training ground for students, further extending the potential for the Societies to assist with the introduction of the training course and to enable the special qualities to be passed on.\textsuperscript{102}

In April 1934, the Societies revealed their willingness to appoint professional social workers in an effort to adapt to change and to gain an understanding of new welfare practices. The Societies, however, had to rely on government assistance for funding to pay the salary of a trained social worker. The Secretary of the Council of Societies, Nellie Ibbott, made a request for additional administrative funding, stating that ‘[i]t is most desirable and necessary that a trained social worker be appointed who can organise the local Benevolent Societies and be in a position to render that assistance which is so often requested’.\textsuperscript{103} Ibbott strongly favoured the Societies working closely with professionals and saw benefits in cooperation. The request for funding, however, was denied. Cecil L. McVilly, the Inspector of Charities, provided minimal explanation for this, stating that ‘[u]nder these circumstances, it is regretted that your application must be declined’.\textsuperscript{104} The circumstances were not explained, but were possibly due to the Depression and scarce funding. The efforts of the Council of Societies to appoint professional social workers were thwarted. The Societies were not financially in a position, therefore, to gain new cultural capital through access to the special knowledge of the social workers. The only alternative was for their members to undertake training themselves, which many were reluctant to do.

Not all Societies were as supportive of the training course as the Council of Societies. As mentioned, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society had initially been intrigued by the potential benefits of listening to trained social workers’ opinions. In the midst of discussions on the introduction of training and experiencing a crisis of authority in unemployment relief in 1932, the influential Society had retracted its earlier expression of interest in lectures on welfare work, rejecting any perceived benefits of cooperation between social workers and benevolent workers. The Society stated it ‘does not favour the introduction of paid trained workers on a committee of experienced voluntary workers’.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{100} 6 June 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{101} Letter from N. Ibbott to C. L. McVilly, 28 July 1933, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\textsuperscript{102} 6 June 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{103} Letter from N. Ibbott to C. L. McVilly, 30 April 1934, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\textsuperscript{104} Letter from C. L. McVilly to N. Ibbott, 10 May 1934, PRO, S4523/R1, U60, Item 563.
\textsuperscript{105} 23 February 1932, MLBS, Minutes.
The distinction made by the Society between the two types of workers is important—'paid' and 'trained' versus 'experienced' and 'voluntary'. This pointed to the different cultural capital associated with what were becoming two distinct streams of social welfare work. The two forms of cultural capital were notably generational in nature.

Many Societies were opposed to the idea of paying workers to undertake a vocation that, in their view, was done out of the goodness of their hearts. Social work as a paid profession threatened such an approach. Furthermore, within such a vocation, which was also seen as a calling, of what benefit was formal training? Women who had a calling for benevolent work built upon this 'natural' capacity through experience, not through formal education. One Society member, Elsie Baker, expressed in April 1934:

Most advocates of this training place too much importance on mere qualifications of the course of training, whereas the real and absolutely necessary qualification of the trainee is inherent, that of personality, in which is contained tact, sympathy, broad vision, and psychological insight. These noble and necessary attributes cannot result from training, no matter how intensive the course. They must be inherited. If young trainees take up the benevolent work of social service as a mere means of earning a livelihood more harm than good will result.106

Baker exposed the difficulty Society members had in accepting the new emphasis upon credentials. She also emphasised the potential dangers of social workers receiving payment for services. Baker feared the consequences upon the benevolent motives of the social worker if she received money. Would the paid worker continue to possess tact and sympathy? Or would her concerns become less than benevolent and more attuned to the benefits of receiving a wage and spending it on frivolities? Even the social worker fell into the realm of the Societies' moral assessment.

In retaliation, advocates of social work originally stressed that the work was a 'calling' and that it was generally women who possessed the qualities for such work. The nature of the work—a helping profession—was considered by politicians and members of the Charities Board to require the qualities of generosity, sympathy, and tact. Introducing training for social work could not remove the need to continue encouraging such qualities. The strong emphasis on the gendered nature of the social worker remained. Women continued to be valued for their natural tendency to be sympathetic and generous. In 1931, for example, John Holland commented that:

We must recognize that the work of social service is a definite calling. People who have kind hearts may be trying to carry out their duties in managerial and organizing positions, particularly in social service work. Persons occupying them must be kind-hearted, but must be able to weigh all the evidence available and act

106 *Argus*, 29 November 1934, p.15.
so that justice is done to the community as well as to the person applying for relief.\textsuperscript{107}

While stating the need for social workers who were efficient in administration and objective in their analysis of the needs of welfare recipients, Holland and other advocates of welfare reform also claimed that generosity of spirit, a sympathetic nature and a kind heart were critical to the work of welfare. Social work would benefit from the continued involvement of women. It would also benefit from greater efficiency and moving with the times. The professional social worker promised to contribute this efficiency to the welfare field.

In their interactions with the Societies, the new social workers were also immersed in a struggle of their own. On the one hand, they wanted to cooperate with these experienced and highly regarded benevolent workers. Yet, they also sought an understanding of themselves which was divorced from tradition, and therefore rebelled against their predecessors. While social workers therefore often defined themselves in opposition to the benevolent worker, they also acknowledged a need for certain traditionally feminine personal characteristics long associated with the benevolent worker. The social worker's feminine identity retained some weight on the importance of these personal qualities. For women to remain the authority in the profession, the need to emphasise feminine qualities continued to be important. Jocelyn Hyslop stressed this, claiming that '[t]act, in addition to training, is vitally necessary'.\textsuperscript{108} Leslie Henderson made it clear that '[t]he board will not accept students, no matter how good their paper qualifications may be, if it considers their personality to be unsuited to social work'.\textsuperscript{109} Leslie was the daughter of Jessie Henderson. She was appointed as one of Victoria's first almoners, and was representative of this new generation of social workers. Although almonry had developed separately from general social work, the two professions were closely associated, both desiring similar personal and professional qualities.

Daniel J. Walkowitz has pointed to the paradoxical situation that many professional women faced in their attempt to identify with qualities traditionally regarded as polar opposites—as masculine and feminine qualities.\textsuperscript{110} The Victorian Council of Social Training and the new generation of social workers stressed that whilst the traditional feminine qualities the benevolent worker had to offer were valuable and important, alone they were not enough. Women social workers were attempting to reconfigure their

\textsuperscript{107} 1 October 1931, \textit{VPD(A)}, Vol.186, p.3371.
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Argus}, 22 July 1936.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Argus}, 29 November 1934, p.15.
\textsuperscript{110} Walkowitz 'The making of a feminine professional identity', p.1051; Kunzel \textit{Fallen women, problem girls}, pp.37, 46-47.
feminine identity to encompass the qualities of professionalism—objectivity, neutrality and rationalism. In discussing the nature of social work, the Training Council stated that:

It is increasingly realised that social work is a fine art. To carry it out wisely and constructively, to envision its far reaching consequences, and to have the right attitude of mind towards society and its progress, the social worker should be equipped with special knowledge and training, in addition to the necessary qualities of goodwill, tact and sympathy. Experience is also a necessary qualification, but without training is not sufficient.111

Who better to carry out such work than women? Within the welfare field, politicians, charitable organisations and the government had long accepted the premise that the tactful, sympathetic and generous nature of women gave them the predisposition to undertake the task of social provision in society. Women were therefore encouraged to pursue professional training. The Institute of Hospital Almoners, for example, stated ‘[i]t is clear that women of character and personality are required, and that they will need a special training’.112 With the appropriate training, women could build upon these natural tendencies and gain the knowledge and expertise that would better enable them to prevent imposition. Social work was still perceived as a woman’s profession.113

Importantly, however, the nature of this ‘woman’s profession’ was to differ from the traditional associations of women’s involvement in welfare provision. Social workers sought to create a new identity as women—as professional women. The new generation did not envisage a continuation of separate spheres for men and women within the welfare field. They aimed to work more closely with men. They sought recognition as ‘professionals’, based on a criterion of expertise defined by men. Leslie Henderson’s comments upon the suitability of women to social work differed from her mother’s sentiments:

Social work, whether paid or unpaid, is usually regarded as an ideal occupation for women. The greater part of it is probably better handled by women than men, but certain parts of it can be handled only by men. Officers in control of institutions for men and boys must obviously be men. Sustenance work also provides a good field for male social workers.114

Leslie sought to work cooperatively with men in a new way. While she still anticipated different spheres of expertise for men and women, she was not so adamant that social work should be exclusively a female profession. The new social workers were reconfiguring their feminine identity. They were to identify with the traditional ‘male’

111 Draft document, c1931, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
112 ‘The Work of the Hospital Almoner’.
113 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.82.
qualities of objectivity, rationality and expertise. As professionals, they were social engineers, whose neutrality was achieved through their commitment to empiricism.

Age, experience and voluntarism

The qualities essential for a welfare worker, whether voluntary or otherwise, ... are, broadly: —Unselfishness, sympathy and understanding, tact and perspicacity, a sense of proportion, a sense of humour. These qualities are abundantly evident in many members of the ladies' benevolent societies. It appears to be difficult to enrol new helpers in this work, so often sad and hopeless, yet ever and anon relieved by glimpses of heroism, by touches of humour, and, above all, by the restoration of independence and happiness to those who were in distress.

A challenge to the younger women! Are they lacking in these qualities? Will they allow to go out of existence this noble work; this heritage of service, in doing which earlier generations of women sacrificed so much?115

Elsie Tilley (President, Council of Societies) 1937

In December 1933, several Ladies Benevolent Societies reflected on their position within the welfare field at a meeting of the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies.116 The Societies recognised that the effects of mass unemployment had damaged their position of authority in the field. The President of the Council of Societies, Elsie Tilley, determined that the Societies needed to take action to ensure their continued place within the welfare field. One important objective, in Tilley's view, was the appointment of a new generation of young women who would prepare to take over the work of the older women in the Societies:

I cannot see our future very clearly until we have some women ready to take the place of so many of us who have borne the heat and burden of the day. My earnest plea is that those who may hear us ask for recruits, will come forward and cheer us by forming Benevolent Societies, giving youth and strength and hope to a wonderful and brave body of tired and not too young voluntary workers.117

In response to this a resolution was passed by the Council 'that the benefit of the first hand knowledge and insight gained by Benevolent Societies into the lives and needs of those in distress is of vital importance and of inestimable value in the interest of relief work'.118 It was necessary to pass this knowledge and insight on to a generation of younger women. With the emergence of the trained social worker, the Societies felt a need to assert their traditional voluntary welfare practices. Rather than being replaced by a new generation of professionals, the Societies wanted to ensure the continuation of their voluntary approach through their organisational culture.

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116 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
117 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
118 28 July 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
A series of resolutions were passed in late 1933 to provide a strategy to achieve the enrolment of greater numbers of young women:

That a sprinkling of young and educated women be invited to join each Benevolent Society affiliated with the CCVBS
That the present is recognised as the time in which 'movement' is necessary and therefore the help of young women willing to prepare for leadership is eminently desirable.
That the Central Council call a meeting in the new year when each BS [Benevolent Society] endeavour to bring along 2 or 3 young members.  

The Council of Societies had visions of developing a new vocational path for women through the network of Ladies Benevolent Societies. They believed there were benefits to the appointment of educated women. This did not specify social work training, but indicated the Societies wanted to attract intelligent young women. They acknowledged that youth and fresh new ideas were valuable. For optimists amongst the Societies the climate of change within the welfare field was viewed as an opportune moment to further secure the positioning of the Societies within the field and to create a new focus for them. They were aware of the extent of the changes, yet not defeated by this. They were still prepared to adapt.

The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society embarked upon an initiative to encourage young women to join the Society in line with this strategy. It formed an auxiliary which was named the 'Younger Set'. In 1935, the Society reported that the meeting of the Younger Set had been successful with twenty-six women in attendance.  

The main objective of the auxiliary was to 'substantially increase the financial position of the Society'. This involved activities such as card parties and dances. The Younger Set initially proposed to have regular monthly meetings which would be reported to the Melbourne Society. Despite the initial enthusiasm of Society members in having a group of young women involved with the organisation, the Younger Set soon drifted into insignificance.

The Society wanted a body of young women to prepare for leadership, yet it was not willing to provide the necessary time and attention to successfully achieve this. It did not assume a mentoring role. Having encouraged young women to join the Society as an auxiliary, the Melbourne Society let the responsibility for the future of the Younger Set rest with the young women. In July 1937, the President of the Society expressed disappointment at the lack of knowledge concerning the activities of the Younger Set. The Executive were interested to learn as much as the Secretary was in a position (unofficially) to tell them of the aim of the Younger Set for the

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119 1 December 1933, CCVBS, Minutes.
120 19 March 1935, MLBS, Minutes.
Little communication existed between the young women on the auxiliary, and their efforts were rarely reported upon. There is no record of any attempts to offer instruction in benevolent work to the Set, although this might have occurred on an informal basis between individual visitors and members of the Set. In 1935, it seemed that the main interest in the Younger Set was the ‘hope for financial assistance through this avenue’. Nor did this change with time. In its 1936-37 Annual Report, the Melbourne Society revealed its focus on the potential of the Set to contribute financially. It stated that ‘[t]he Younger Set give promise of becoming a great strength to us, having already established a constructive scheme of work which will, in a short time, extend and be of great financial assistance’. The Society was clearly more interested in what it could gain from the efforts of the younger women than in preparing them for the leadership envisaged by the Council of Societies in 1933. One member, Mrs Desailly, ‘expressed her opinion that it would be encouraging to the Younger Set if they could have representation on the Committee’. This suggestion, however, did not receive further consideration and the women of the Younger Set were not appointed positions on the Committee. The Set was never awarded a position of status within the Society.

At the same time, the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society continued to acknowledge the need for the involvement of younger women in voluntary social work. In 1938, Gertrude Woinarski addressed the Council of Societies and emphasized the need for young women who were willing to do the work, and expressed the hope that, in the near future, all benevolent workers would be bound together, and thus able to do their great work more effectively.

As established in Chapter Three, the Ladies Benevolent Societies found that ‘it appears to be difficult to enrol new helpers in this work’. In 1938, the President of the Council of Societies, Elsie Tilley, stated that their members ‘are always willing and ready to assist newcomers to the ranks. They appeal to the younger women to come forward and volunteer to carry on the work in the service of the community’. This desire for fresh blood and the difficulties experienced in acquiring it were trends occurring internationally.
amongst women-only organisations. While many young women could be individually appointed through personal contacts, the appointment of large numbers of young women was likely to have challenged the Societies' traditional methods of membership selection. To acquire the experience valued by the Societies meant the investment of long periods of time. Elsie Baker, an outspoken defender of the methods of the benevolent workers, stated that:

Members of benevolent committees are in a position to judge and discriminate as to what should be done for cases applying for assistance. They are trained workers, with the best training that can be given—years of experience.

One of the hangovers from their founding ethos and its subsequent influence on their attitudes to women's role in the public sphere was an idea that women had more to offer later in life when they were considered more mature, wise and experienced and their maternal responsibilities were behind them.

The focus upon age and experience was central to the struggle for authority between benevolent women and social workers. Once considered an advantage in their work, the age of benevolent workers of the Societies became a key point that social workers and their supporters chose to focus upon in criticisms of the Societies. In a society where youth was becoming increasingly valued, this characteristic of the Societies was to be used against them. By 1933, John Holland, previously a supporter of benevolent work and a defender of the Societies' role in the welfare field, became critical of their work on account of their age:

The ladies benevolent societies are expected to do ... case work, but that is impossible because they have not the necessary knowledge and experience. The work requires the attention of specially trained officers ... Yet it is proposed to ask that the work be done by people who are well advanced in years—I say that with all due respect to old age—and are not capable of understanding the particular cases proposed to be put in their care.

129 Rupp Worlds of women, pp.62, 83.
133 5 October 1933, VPD(A), Vol.192, p.1752.
The nature of ‘experience’ valued in the welfare field was changing. A social worker needed ‘specialist training’, part of which was training in the field. The age of the women working for the Societies was seen to inhibit their understanding of the new problems that society confronted and the new solutions that were required to overcome them. The generational divergence between social workers and benevolent workers was representative of a broader cultural shift in the nature of the women’s organisations involved in health and welfare professions. Women were moving away from separate women’s organisations and increasingly attempting to integrate themselves into the ‘male-dominated mainstream’ of professionalism. Women’s organisations were increasingly seen as old-fashioned.

In 1935, the debate over the age of social workers became more intense when it hit the pages of the newspapers. The women themselves engaged in a public discussion on issues associated with age and welfare work. In a provocative article by ‘Vesta’ in the Argus, she stated that:

The day of the expert is upon us, and the services are already being called upon for many of the duties hitherto carried out by voluntary workers. Even in those undertakings in which expert workers do not yet seem to be required it is generally recognised that younger and more receptive and resourceful minds are needed to cope with modern problems ... The day of the elderly woman in social service is almost over ... We must now turn to new ideas about the place of elderly women in the social scheme.

Again, it was emphasised that women of advanced years did not have the capacity to understand the problems of the new, modern era and associated welfare practices. Benevolent workers were increasingly considered outdated in their methods and of little use to modern society. As older citizens, the suggestion was that women of the Societies were incapable of adapting to change, and should therefore leave the work of welfare relief to younger women.

There were strong protests and angry responses from members of the Ladies Benevolent Societies to Vesta’s suggestion that women of mature age should be found a new role in the welfare field. Janie B. Kerr, of the Kew Society, responded in a letter to the editor on 24 May 1935. Notably, Kerr was associated with the Victorian Association

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136 Rupp *Worlds of women*, pp.62, 102; Kunzel *Fallen women, problem girls*, p.44.
of Ladies Benevolent Societies and continued to be a strong advocate of traditional welfare practices. Her comments are worth quoting at length:

[W]hen Vesta makes the ... statement that the day of the elderly woman in social service is over I must protest. She thinks that every organisation experiences that ‘women fail to realise that their work has grown beyond their capacity’, and that experts must take their place. To find a place for elderly women in the social scheme she suggests bridge or sewing and needlework! What a prospect for the women of intellect who mainly compose that large body of honorary workers ... As I regard modern youth, I should judge that with all the expert training available they would not accomplish what the older experience, enthusiasm, and sacrifice have brought about in the past ... That women's organisations have not always gained their objectives is not because of their inefficiency, but is rather the fault of the legislation and a prejudicial and conservative community. Women, I judge, will not so readily be relegated to fancy work, domesticity or games of cards.

Many of the women of the Societies were offended by the suggestion that their age made them incapable of continuing their work in the welfare field. Of the benevolent women for whom I discovered biographical information, it was evident that most were aged from their late forties to seventies. This was not uncommon in women's organisations of the time. Despite their initial efforts to cooperate with young women, the Societies found themselves under attack. They were subject to broader trends of enthusiasm for youth and the declining respect for age and life experience in society.

Connected with the tradition of women-only organisations was the importance of voluntarism, which I established in Chapter Three. For the women of the Societies, the voluntary nature of their welfare practices was significant. Voluntarism was vital to their self-perception and had been an important component of their cultural capital. It had long been associated with women's involvement in charity. Participating voluntarily in the work of benevolence was an indication of the self-sacrificing and generous nature of women, who willingly devoted their time to their charitable work. This voluntaristic approach to benevolent work was fundamental to its existence and to the place of women within the welfare field. Voluntarism was also vital to the ideology of separate spheres. ‘Ladies’ did not engage in paid labour. As I have established, social standing was measured by the amount of leisure time a woman could afford. Separate spheres also ensured that men had dominance within the worldly affairs of the public sphere—in government, in business, in the church. Women, on the other hand, could achieve moral authority in the sphere of voluntary work—in nursing, in teaching, in charity.

138 See Chapter Four for a discussion of Kerr's involvement in the rift between the Council of Societies and the Association.
139 Argus, 24 May 1935, p.
140 Foley The women's movement, p.370.
141 Reiger The disenchantment of the home, p.216.
Unperturbed by the Societies' defensive stance, Hyslop went to great lengths to assert professionalism over voluntarism. In 1937, Hyslop stressed that the voluntary approach was no longer valued in what had become a more modern welfare field. Professional social workers attacked the 'amateur' social worker. They claimed the Ladies Benevolent Societies lacked the 'right attitude of mind towards society and its progress'. In a controversial and provocative article in the *Sun* newspaper in 1937, titled 'These Women Plan a Revolution', the opinions of this new generation were made apparent. Alan Moyle began with an opening paragraph that stated:

> High up in a new city building a little group of women is getting ready for a revolution. They are out to challenge a social policy that they say is outdated and antediluvian.

The criticism did not end there:

> They are sounding the knell of the amateur social worker—that warm-hearted but untrained section of the community that has grown up around the hospital and benevolent system. If the Victorian Council for Social Training has its way every citizen doing charitable work will cease to be an amateur and become a scientist in human aid.

> These women say that charity in the past has begun at the wrong end of the stick.\(^{142}\)

Jocelyn Hyslop was quoted as saying: 'Our training lets us in behind the problem ... and that key should be in the hand of every social worker. All charitable work is inadequate unless you get down to the root causes'.\(^{143}\) This was an obvious attack on voluntary benevolent workers—most notably the Ladies Benevolent Societies. It claimed that the Societies had been 'wrong' in their approach, that they were 'outdated' in their methods, and that they needed to undergo training to improve their welfare practices. Preventative methods were the key to success. The Societies' palliative practices could never achieve the desired rehabilitation of welfare recipients.

Not surprisingly, the Ladies Benevolent Societies responded angrily to the article. The Melbourne Society stated that 'it was a very destructive criticism levelled against the Voluntary Social Worker'.\(^{144}\) It demanded an apology, which was later received. The tension that this created, however, did not dissipate. In the following twelve months a series of articles in the *Argus* debated the advantages of a system of trained workers, countered by articles which defended benevolent workers.\(^{145}\) Previous efforts by professional social workers to cooperate with the Societies and to create a harmonious working relationship had ceased to be a priority. Although somewhat tactless, the article in

\(^{142}\) *Sun*, 6 November 1937.

\(^{143}\) *Sun*, 6 November 1937.

\(^{144}\) 9 November 1937, MLBS, Minutes.

\(^{145}\) For example, *Argus*, 6 April 1938, 13 April 1938, 22 October 1938.
the Sun was pointing to a reality. The Societies' authority was in decline. It was not the Societies themselves that were generally considered the problem, but the values they were associated with and the welfare practices they had long implemented.

**Resistance to cultural shifts**

Disillusionment with the work of the Ladies Benevolent Societies, however, was not a foregone conclusion. Traditionalists, or the 'old' middle class, continued to favour the voluntary welfare practices of private charitable organisations and the traditional non-governmental approach they characterised. The struggle between professional social workers and benevolent workers over effective welfare practices was representative of the broader cultural shift that was occurring towards a state of modern capitalism and the perceived need for modern welfare practices. Expanding population, increased urbanisation and the recent unemployment crisis all contributed to a greater need for welfare services. Modernists pressured the government to intervene more directly in the welfare of its citizens. The increase in government responsibility for welfare was accompanied by an increase in paid professionals to conduct the work of welfare provision on the government's behalf. A parallel struggle for authority between the 'old' and 'new' middle classes was occurring within this emerging social field. The Societies, therefore, had a core of supporters. In the mid-1930s, traditionalists expressed concern that 'the present feeling among benevolent society workers is one of discouragement'.

Clifden H. A. Edgar, MLC, of the conservative United Australia Party, for example, expressed that:

> There is a general feeling that unless an understanding be reached, the work will have to be handed over to the Government. This would be deplorable, for the work is not merely a matter of money. It depends upon a word of cheer, and women's watchfulness over the interests of mothers and children. I maintain that that is far above all considerations of money.\(^1\)

The demise of the Societies represented more than merely the end of an era for a network of women's organisations. The Societies were an entrenched component of a broader scheme of welfare and social attitudes.

In view of the concern amongst traditionalists and the 'old' middle class regarding the increased intervention of government, there were pockets of support for the Societies that came from a variety of unexpected sources. The Charity Organisation Society, a long-time adversary, began to defend the Societies' work. In Chapter Two I revealed that from the 1890s the COS had sought to convince the Societies to adopt more scientific welfare practices or, failing that, to break their authority. The COS, however, became concerned

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\(^{146}\) _Argus_, 31 May 1935.  
\(^{147}\) _Argus_, 31 May 1935.
with the direction the welfare field was moving in. It was not particularly bothered with
the future of the Societies. It did fear, however, what the changes represented at a broader
level. Ardent supporter of scientific methods of relief, Stanley Greig Smith, the Secretary
of the COS, was concerned by the extent of government involvement in social work and
welfare relief and with the direction that social work was taking.

The Argus reported comments made by Greig Smith in August 1935, following a
speech he gave at the annual meeting of the Camberwell Ladies Benevolent Society:

Fears that the self-reliance of individuals was threatened by the growing tendency
to entrust benevolent work to departments acting under Government legislation
instead of to voluntary benevolent organisations was expressed by the secretary of
the Charity Organisation Society (Mr Greig Smith).148

Clearly Greig Smith had fears for the future of his own organisation. When faced with
radical change, Greig Smith and the Societies became aware of the similarities in their
organisations. The COS favoured scientific welfare practices and had been frustrated over
the years by the Societies continually thwarting its attempts to introduce measures to
achieve ‘scientific charity’. Yet, the COS was more hostile to government intervention
than to the irritations caused by the Societies. Ultimately the Societies and the COS were
committed to a similar common core of values. As noted in Chapter Five, Greig Smith
expressed his concern about the government’s tendency to resolve ‘the needs of distressed
humanity’ through legislative measures. He strongly objected to this approach, which he
believed threatened ‘the self-reliance of the individual in the community’.149 Greig Smith
continued to involve himself in the development of professional social work whilst
opposing increased government responsibility. In 1936, he was prominent in the
formation of the Victorian Association of Social Workers.

Trained social workers, however, were benefiting from the introduction of
government legislation. Government departments required the services of paid social
workers and were fast becoming an important employer of professionals in Australia.
Greig Smith commented that the trend in Victoria affecting the position of the benevolent
worker was an international phenomenon and that the Ladies Benevolent Societies were
therefore not alone in the challenge they faced.150 In New South Wales and Queensland,
State governments had intervened in unemployment relief. In NSW an association for
professional social workers was formed in 1936. Social workers from other states across
Australia were joining these associations in NSW and Victoria.151

148 Argus, 8 August 1935.
149 Argus, 8 August 1935. See Chapter Five.
150 Argus, 6 November 1936.
151 Lawrence Professional social work in Australia, p.77.
At the same time, the Charities Board and other influential bodies within the welfare field revealed their preparedness to move with the trend towards professionalism. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Hawthorn Ladies Benevolent Society in 1935, Dr J. Newman Morris, chairman of the committee of the Charities Board controlling metropolitan charities, stated that ‘[p]hilanthropy to-day is not merely a matter of the heart; it is much more a matter of the head, of knowledge, and of the proper methods of applying that knowledge’.\textsuperscript{152} Newman Morris, who also served as a representative on many medical boards, increasingly became an advocate of greater involvement by professional social workers. In 1936, he commented on the drawbacks of traditional voluntary welfare practices:

The old plan of giving merely material aid to those in need had long since come to be regarded as purely palliative, a temporary measure. The trained social worker was in a position, not only to see that material aid was provided, but in individual cases to help correct the maladjustment to the social life of the community that had created the need for assistance. Such work was of a very delicate and responsible nature, requiring wide knowledge and deep understanding. Such knowledge came only with training of a very high standard.\textsuperscript{153}

Participants in the welfare field were aware that the Ladies Benevolent Societies did not base their work on such training. The Societies represented a tradition of women’s voluntary welfare work. Criticism of the ‘old plan’ and enthusiasm for the ‘high standards’ and ‘proper methods’ associated with professional social workers became statements against the welfare practised by the Societies. Furthermore, Newman Morris pointed out that trained social workers were well positioned to take on all duties of welfare provision—from determining the client’s problem to ascribing treatment and providing ‘material aid’. His views implied that the Societies were redundant in the task of welfare relief.

By the late 1930s, the Societies sensed they had lost the battle to sustain the value of their long recognised welfare practices. Their authority in the welfare field had declined considerably from its heights in 1930. In the midst of public discussions held by the Argus on the new profession of social work, the Societies’ efforts of a decade ago were reflected upon with fondness, as new fears began to emerge about the potential loss of good motivations in the field of social work. Not all hope had been lost for the Societies. Could the qualities of benevolent workers continue to receive the recognition many desired for them? ‘Vesta’ wrote with some nostalgia in her regular column for women in the Argus:

It will have to be admitted that there will be a real loss to the community if the spirit that has animated our social workers in the past is ever lost. The human sympathy, the sound judgement, and the unselfish personal efforts of these

\textsuperscript{152} Argus, 20 August 1935.
\textsuperscript{153} Argus, 22 May 1936, 25 June 1936.
workers have had an effect which cannot be well measured. They have sweetened
the relation of those who lack to those who have it in their power to help. They
have ministered to contentment and made for personal happiness among the very
poor. They have encouraged thrift and pluck, and discouraged wastefulness and
resentment and the tendency to imposition. The value of the work done by these
voluntary workers has been recognised by Governments and by the great charity
trusts.\textsuperscript{154}

Traditionalists maintained a belief that the work of the Societies continued to hold a place
within the welfare field. The qualities associated with their work remained relevant.
Although these qualities were encouraged within training courses for professional social
workers, traditionalists were not convinced that these technical experts had the capacity to
exhibit sympathy, tact and generosity in their work.

Nor had the Societies given up trying to establish a new form of authority. Jessie
Henderson, in particular, continued to push for the Societies' recognition. In June 1937
she put to the Victorian Council of Social Training a suggestion 'to enlarge the
representation on the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies under the title of
Council of Welfare Workers'.\textsuperscript{155} She advocated a 'closer alliance between State and
Voluntary effort'. Henderson explained that the Council of Societies 'has awakened to the
necessity of including members, both trained and voluntary, who are competent to meet
modern conditions and requirements'. She acknowledged the significance of the growth in
social work and the opening it had created for new careers and professions. In
recommending closer cooperation between social work bodies, Henderson did not shy
from reflecting critically on the work of the Societies. She stated her awareness that they
necessarily had to act in collusion with other bodies in the welfare field. She expressed her
understanding that:

\begin{quote}
The re-action of the individual case left uncared for or insufficiently cared for by
the Department or Society responsible for its relief re-acts on the public health
and welfare of the community.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

Henderson acknowledged the need for modern, preventative methods for the Societies to
cooperate in providing the appropriate welfare practices. She questioned the sensibility of
the Societies retaining their independence, and stated that '[t]he present time is a period of
transiting for Voluntary Associations'. Whilst asking the trained social workers to 'cast off
all prejudices', Henderson proposed that it be accepted that 'all forms of social service are
interdependent', 'that the need exists for a higher standard of preparation for social work'
and 'that a council of Welfare be formed'.\textsuperscript{157} Henderson did not achieve the outcome she

\begin{footnotes}
\item[154] Argus, 13 April 1938, p.6.
\item[155] Circular from Ella M. Boyland, Secretary, Council of Societies, to Ladies Benevolent Societies, 29 June 1937, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
\item[156] Circular from Boyland to Societies, 29 June 1937, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
\item[157] Circular from Boyland to Societies, 29 June 1937, AASW, Box 20/S.01.
\end{footnotes}
desired in the 1930s. The Societies themselves, however, did go to some lengths to fulfil her desire for improved cooperation.

In May 1939, the first of a series of meetings took place to consider an amalgamation of the three central bodies which claimed to represent the Ladies Benevolent Societies—the Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies, the Central Council of Victorian Benevolent Societies and the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society. The Inspector of Charities, McVilly, acted as a mediator in the discussions that led to this meeting.\textsuperscript{158} McVilly ‘had definitely expressed his desire for the widening of the work of Benevolent Societies and said that to obtain this the amalgamation was essential’. He also warned that ‘Benevolent work must advance rapidly immediately or die out. Other bodies would step in and do the work’.\textsuperscript{159} Amalgamation was essential. After several suggestions of possible names, Victorian Social Service was agreed upon.\textsuperscript{160} Amongst its new objectives, the new body would create a hostel for aged women, and extend the activities of the Girls Employment Movement by establishing a factory for women to work and earn money. It would also seek representation on the Board of Social Training and the Institute of Almoners.\textsuperscript{161}

Securing amalgamation, however, did not prove easy. The Victorian Association of Ladies Benevolent Societies created difficulties. It preferred that the Melbourne Society and the Council of Societies become affiliated with the Association as opposed to an amalgamation. The President of the Council of Societies, Elsie Tilley, was willing to resign herself to the possibility that the ‘Central Council would have to be prepared to lose its identity for one year, and work under the Victorian Association of Ladies’ Benevolent Societies’.\textsuperscript{162} Jessie Henderson was also aware that this was potentially the only way to bring about a reunion of the Societies and she determined that the best thing to do was to ‘bury the hatchet and carry on’.\textsuperscript{163} On 27 October 1939, amalgamation was formally achieved when the Council of Societies affiliated with the Association. The Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society also affiliated with the Association, yet continued to operate as an independent body, as did other Societies in Victoria. The committee was a compromise of executive members from the Council, Association and the Melbourne Society.\textsuperscript{164} For the more progressive Council of Societies, this was not the most ideal outcome. The Association’s president, Elizabeth Bleazby was appointed as the President of the new body. Bleazby, aged seventy-three, remained committed to traditional welfare practices.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] 9 May 1939, MLBS, Minutes.
\item[159] 28 April 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
\item[160] 16 June 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
\item[161] 16 June 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
\item[162] 6 October 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
\item[163] 22 October 1939, CCVBS, Minutes.
\item[164] 16 November 1939, VALBS, Minutes.
\end{footnotes}
This commitment was given a new and stronger base from which to be asserted. Bleazby did, however, make a gesture in her acceptance speech to 'the advantages of co-operation and understanding in the work being undertaken by such a representative body of social workers'.

This assertion of traditionalism occurred in the face of the rapidly expanding numbers of professional social workers who were committed to modern welfare practices. The facts were evident. Professional social workers were becoming integral to welfare provision in Victoria. From 1935 there was a noticeable growth in the numbers of trained social workers, who had established a strong base from which to establish a position of authority. In 1935, there were eight almoners working in seven hospitals. By 1940, this had increased to fifteen. There were also three almoners working for the Society for Crippled Children. In 1935, there were no trained general social workers employed in Victoria. Those undertaking the training course, however, were able to work with the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, the Charity Organisation Society, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Sustenance Branch and the Almoners Departments of three hospitals. By 1940, there were twelve trained social workers employed. Aside from one local government appointment at the City Council Health Department, the remaining eleven were employed by charitable bodies, such as the Red Cross, the Blind Association and the Cripples' Society. Not one Ladies Benevolent Society had appointed a trained social worker. The only effort to incorporate the work of social workers was made by the Camberwell Society, which provided work for a student under guidance.

By 1940, the Ladies Benevolent Societies were struggling to maintain recognition in the Victorian welfare field. Their authority had declined markedly during the 1930s. They were unsuccessful in their efforts to reassert a position of authority within the changing welfare field. Despite the successful amalgamation of the Societies, it had not occurred in the manner desired by the more progressive members of the Societies, such as Jessie Henderson, Gertrude Woinarski and Nellie Ibbott. These women were keen to push the Societies in the direction of modern welfare practices and to cooperate more closely with the expanding network of professional social workers. Henderson took advantage of her contacts and role on the Board of Social Training to pursue this agenda. In the end, however, amalgamating the divided and disunited network of Societies was to prove essential. These women could not overcome the strength of commitment of a band of women who clung tightly to their heritage and to a tradition of welfare. The perceived success in reuniting the Societies was not to provide the base from which to mend the rifts

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165 7 December 1939, VALBS Minutes.
166 Summary of Charities Board's work in the development of social work, 19 August 1940, PRO, S4523/R1, U22, Item 127.
167 Development of social work, 19 August 1940, PRO, S4523/R1, U22, Item 127.
that had developed between the benevolent workers and social workers during the 1930s. The decade contributed to the continuation of future tensions between trained and voluntary social workers. At the same time, however, for both types of social workers there was some desire to secure a cooperative relationship based upon mutual respect.
Conclusion

Social change and moral continuity

Modernists are apt to look back and regard Melbourne's early days as something apart from present times ... Changes occur no less in the world of philanthropy than elsewhere, and throughout this record of one hundred years' service there is very markedly to be traced the desire to face altered conditions with altered methods. The history of voluntary service is in itself a history of the years through which it has ministered, and a history of the times.¹

Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, 1945

This thesis has demonstrated that in 1939 the Ladies Benevolent Societies no longer enjoyed the degree of authority in the welfare field they were accustomed to in 1920. I have argued that a major cause of this loss of moral authority was the Societies' initial resistance during the 1920s and early 1930s to pressure from government and the Charities Board to embrace an agenda of welfare reform. I have suggested that underlying this resistance was the Societies' commitment to their founding ethos and internalised understanding of their purpose in contributing to social progress. The durability of the values and dispositions the Societies had gained from their cultural history stayed with many of the individual Societies as they moved into the new context of the modern welfare field. Consequently these Societies could not adapt to the new game of welfare—that is, the values and explanations within this new cultural field did not make sense to them. Despite the social and economic upheaval of the Depression and the dramatic changes this triggered within the welfare field, the Societies' habitus survived these changes and sustained a continuity of meaning. They remained committed to the idea of individual moral reform as the means to social progress.

The structural and ideological transition that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s in the Victorian welfare field was a complex blend of change and continuity. In these closing pages I briefly discuss the significance of these changes within the welfare field and reflect upon the meaning of the continuities that were sustained within that climate of transition. Three key changes in perspective are at the core of this thesis. These changes reflect the transition from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' understanding of welfare, and the consequent shift in the cultural practices valued in the field. Firstly, during the interwar years there was a broad rejection within the welfare field of the traditional idea held by the Societies that improving the morals and accountability of the individual would lead to social progress. This was replaced by a new rational focus on reforming the 'social mind'. This approach

to reform and social progress would be achieved through the appointment of experts who had received training at an appropriate school of social studies.² New forms of cultural capital based on professional expertise were increasingly valued. Professionals in the welfare field were ‘social workers’ defined specifically—in the language of the 1941 Interim Report—as ‘women who have been trained at a school of social studies’.³ Women were to continue to play a vital role in the welfare field in the provision of welfare services, with a new emphasis on efficiency, knowledge and insight gained through study and training.⁴

Secondly, and relatedly, perspectives on social progress were influenced by the modern focus on the needs of the social collective as opposed to the traditional concern with individual accountability. This was reflected in a shift in the nature of welfare practices, or cultural capital, that were valued in the welfare field. Welfare reformists sought to introduce uniform, standard methods of welfare relief. In doing this, the welfare provider would no longer exercise personal judgement and discretion regarding the individual needs of the case—a practice that the Societies were committed to. Instead, a ‘scientifically calculated’ standard amount would be provided only to those applicants deemed eligible (in accordance with an objective policy document that outlined the eligibility criteria).

Thirdly, during the interwar years there was a distinct shift away from laissez faire, non-interventionist values. This changed perspective led to increased support for the centralised approach that a government apparatus was perceived to be capable of providing. This culminated in 1939 with the Federal Government’s introduction of the first Department of Social Services. The department represented the new trend of government responsibility for welfare planning and the diminished authority of specialist, localised organisations such as the Ladies Benevolent Societies. Connected to the desire for centralisation of welfare planning were new initiatives in welfare provision and the funding of welfare. In response to reports of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security appointed in 1941, the Federal Government initiated a series of welfare reforms, including the introduction of Child Endowment in 1941, Widows Pensions in 1942 and Unemployment and Sickness Benefits in 1944. These reforms raised questions of citizens’ ‘rights’ to relief.

Historians have debated at length the consequences of the Federal Government’s new authority in the welfare field in the 1940s. Was it a major shift towards a new ‘social

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² Second Interim Report from the Joint Committee on Social Security, 1942, Australian Archives, CP6/2/1, 87.
³ Second Interim Report, pp.4, 9, 11.
citizenship'? In a sense it seemed that developments in the provision of non-contributory welfare benefits created a new entitlement to relief. Yet historians have recognised that there were continuities in the changed welfare field. Jill Roe comments that 'old distinctions between deserving and undeserving were perpetuated in the new legislation'. Stephen Garton argues that powerful discourses of self-help and the work ethic continued to permeate the welfare field, thereby indicating significant continuities between traditions of philanthropy and modern 'welfare states'. It is debatable whether the expectation of welfare assistance became a right of citizenship. Garton suggests it did not.

From the 1940s to the present, the dominant view of economists and governments has been that full employment is the best safeguard against poverty. The new system of government social welfare was generally interpreted as a safety net for those who could not participate in the workforce due to unfortunate circumstances. Charitable organisations, such as the Ladies Benevolent Societies, would continue to fulfil a role by providing assistance to those who fell outside this safety net. Strong community resentment towards recipients of welfare (whose benefits were paid by revenue raised from income tax) contributed to the development of an administrative apparatus that sought to monitor the system and ensure that only those deemed eligible were granted welfare assistance. Community concern with welfare cheats and those who 'bludged off' the system intensified in the 1970s when the Labor government expanded the scope of welfare programs, briefly diverting from the ideology of full employment to one of social justice. The government response to this concern was what historians have termed 'the retreat from the welfare state': in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Liberal government responded to community intolerance of the unemployed by making access to benefits more difficult; the Labor government that was elected in the 1980s refused to expand government welfare programs and 'instead revived the tradition of the earlier Curtin and Chifley administrations—full employment and the welfare safety net'. These attitudes contributed to the 'transition and structural re-shaping' of the welfare field during the

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6 Roe *Social policy in Australia*, p.224.
8 Garton 'Workers' welfare', p.129.
9 Garton *Out of luck*, pp.135, 169.
12 Garton *Out of luck*, pp.136, 154-57.
1990s that was 'more in tune with the economic liberal doctrines of laissez faire and individualism than the collective'.

Distinctions between deserving and undeserving, alongside these discourses of self-help and the work ethic, have persisted from the nineteenth century into current discussions on welfare issues. Responses to welfare dependency reflect this continuity: from the Societies' fear of the 'professional loafer' and the imposter in the 1920s to the current government's obsession with the 'dole bludger' and the welfare cheat. For over a century, this fear-based response has influenced the implementation of policies that aim to 'reform' (either individually or collectively) those people who are considered reliant on income support and who do not comply with the work ethic. While dramatic, the shift from moral to professional authority in the welfare field did not result in any radical new perspectives on the needs of welfare recipients nor on what constitutes or is valued as paid work. Despite changes in the personnel who administer welfare policies, a new focus on the collective and the increased role of government in welfare, the objective of accountability remained a dominant theme through the transition. This theme continues to influence attitudes towards welfare policies and the ongoing concern with those perceived to be 'undeserving'.

Preventing people from defrauding the system and from falling into welfare dependency is a major concern of the current Federal government. Trends of 'reinvention' and 'innovation' in the welfare field are showing their colours under the Liberal Government's welfare reform policy. A Discussion Paper to the Senate in 1999 titled 'The challenge of welfare dependency in the 21st Century' recommended the reform of Australia's welfare system. The theme of welfare dependency clearly remains strong. In the opinion of The Australian, the direction of the proposed reform was clear—'Government is shifting the philosophy behind welfare from that of entitlement to a privilege and increasingly one that has to be earned'. A government initiated report, titled 'Participation Support for a More Equitable Society', claims that there 'needs to be a shift in focus from simply meeting people's immediate financial needs to helping them maximise social and economic participation over the longer term'.

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In contemporary debates, welfare policy emphasises the necessity to encourage conformity amongst those people who are long term unemployed and to rehabilitate those who are perceived as reliant on income support, including those whose work is not valued as a ‘profession’ and therefore does not generate an income (such as parenting). The current government is considering what reforms need to be implemented to deal with the ‘disengagement from the paid workforce which leads to long-term reliance on income support, [and that] can be harmful for individuals, their families and for the communities in which they live’. Discouraging non-compliance has been the central objective of welfare reform. An important direction within this objective has been to impose an increasingly punitive approach to those who do not play the game. A new focus on the imperative of individual participation and mutual obligation is another response to this objective. So too are increasing efforts to make access to government benefits more difficult. The values underlying these ideas bear a remarkable similarity to those that sustained the welfare practices of the Ladies Benevolent Societies in the 1920s.

I have suggested that the shift to modern welfare practices during the interwar years was a gradual process of transition. During this formative period of the modern welfare field, some deep-set values and moral beliefs at the core of traditional philanthropy were sown into the emerging new practices. Acknowledging the continuities in the welfare field enables an understanding of why the Ladies Benevolent Societies were initially encouraged to embrace the new and modern methods of welfare emerging in the 1920s. While viewed as ‘traditional’ in their values, the Societies were seen to hold the necessary knowledge of welfare dependency that would be valued in a welfare system that still sought to reform those perceived as reliant on income support. The shifts in the welfare field during that period were significant. The transition did not, however, represent a radical departure from the goal of reforming the loafer or dole bludger as a means to eradicating welfare dependency. Rather, the shift was in the method of achieving this objective.

The moral continuity that distinguishes between deserving and undeserving and that instils an irrational fear of welfare dependency in the community has its roots in nineteenth century evangelical morality. An analysis of the habitus of the organisations and individuals that have possessed cultural authority within the Victorian welfare field during specific periods would provide the basis for gaining insight into the embedded nature of particular values and morals that have continued to influence welfare policy. Who has possessed this cultural authority in the welfare field? How did they sustain it? Particularly important, who is likely to acquire or sustain authority in the present climate of transition.

19 Interim Report, Participation support, p.7.
and what will this mean for those caught in a cycle of economic disadvantage? For example, some organisations within the community sector have gained the trust of economically disadvantaged citizens and view welfare dependency from a different perspective to the government. Do these organisations possess cultural authority? If so, what is the nature of this authority and can it be sustained or expanded in the face of transition? Furthermore, if they succeed, how might this influence the direction of welfare policy?

Australia presently stands on the brink of major welfare reform. Academics researching the current social transformation within the welfare field are looking to the concepts of civil society, social and cultural capital in their analyses of the trend towards an increasing authority attributed to the voluntary and community sector in welfare provision. It seems a crucial moment to look to the organisational ethos, or habitus, that generates these forms of capital, particularly the cultural capital, of those organisations seeking authority within the welfare field. With the new emphasis on self-help and the increased value of the voluntary and community sectors’ cultural and social capital within the welfare field, it is a vital time to remember the shortcomings of welfare in the past, and the moralism welfare reformers struggled to leave behind in the 1930s. To what extent does this moralism continue to influence the cultural capital of those organisations likely to secure new authority in the welfare field? How will the ‘accountability’ of the community, government and business sectors in the provision of welfare services prevent further stigmatising of the disadvantaged? It is not simply that we are rerunning the debates of the 1920s and 1930s, but more that we are realising the extent to which those debates have continued, unresolved, within the ‘game’ of welfare.

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Appendix

Diagram 1  Sustenance distribution under the Unemployment Relief Act, 1930.

Diagram 2  Sustenance distribution under the Unemployment Relief (Amendment) Act, 1932
Diagram 1: Sustenance distribution under the *Unemployment Relief Act*, 1930

Government Funds

Charities Board

Central Council of LBS

State Relief Committee

Local Municipal Councils

Ladies Benevolent Societies

Unemployment Relief Committees

Benevolent Relief

Sustenance Distribution
Diagram 2: Sustenance distribution under the Unemployment Relief (Amendment) Act, 1932

- Government Funds
  - Charities Board
    - Central Council of LBS
    - Ladies Benevolent Societies
      - Benevolent relief or unemployable cases
  - Unemployment Relief Fund
    - Local Municipal Councils
      - Public Assistance Committees
      - Sustenance or 'employable' cases
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