Labour Movement Youth Organisation and Policy 
in Eastern Australia, c. 1918 - c. 1939

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at the Australian National University

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This thesis is my own original work
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### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AEU</td>
<td>Amalgamated Engineering Union</td>
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<td>ALLY</td>
<td>Australian Labor League of Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>ARU</td>
<td>Australian Railways Union</td>
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<td>ASP</td>
<td>Australian Socialist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWGE</td>
<td>Australian Women’s Guild of Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWU</td>
<td>Australian Workers Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>AYC</td>
<td>Australian Youth Council</td>
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<td>BEM</td>
<td>Boy’s Employment Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia</td>
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<td>DIS</td>
<td>Domestic Immigration Society</td>
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<td>EYL</td>
<td>Eureka Youth League</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIA</td>
<td>Federated Ironworkers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOSU</td>
<td>Friends of the Soviet Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILP</td>
<td>Independent Labour Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWW</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Communist Party of Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAI</td>
<td>League against Imperialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNU</td>
<td>League of Nations Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>LYD</td>
<td>League of Young Democrats</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAWF</td>
<td>Movement against War and Fascism</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>Male Confectioners Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMM</td>
<td>Militant Minority Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTEA</td>
<td>Metal Trades Employers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MUR</td>
<td>Melbourne University Rifles</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCBSSS</td>
<td>National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUR</td>
<td>National Union of Railwaymen</td>
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<tr>
<td>PQS</td>
<td>Public Questions Society</td>
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<td>PSQS</td>
<td>Public and Social Questions Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>RRR</td>
<td>Railway Refreshment Rooms</td>
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<td>RSI</td>
<td>Red Sports International</td>
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<td>RSL</td>
<td>Returned Services League</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWSI</td>
<td>Socialist Workers Sports International</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWM</td>
<td>Unemployed Workers Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCAW</td>
<td>Victorian Council against War</td>
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VLLG

VLGY Victorian Labor Guild of Youth
VSL Victorian Socialist League
VSP Victorian Socialist Party
VSPSS Victorian Socialist Party Sunday School
WIR Workers International Relief
WSF Workers Sports Federation
YCA Young Citizens Association
YCC Young Comrades Club
YCCA Youth Camp Colony Association
YCI Young Communist International
YCL Young Communist League
YMCA Young Men's Christian Association
YSI Young Socialist International
YWCA Young Women's Christian Association

A note on citation

Throughout the text, except for journal articles, only the name of the author and title of publication are cited. Details of publishers, place and year of publication, are to be found in the bibliography. This also applies to theses whose titles are given in inverted commas.
Abstract

Labour youth organisations in the period 1918 to 1939 have only recently emerged in memoirs, been mentioned as a by-product of women's studies, or partially re-discovered through the development of labour history. Communist initiatives, as the most enduring and self-consciously counter-hegemonic, form a central strand in this thesis, yet they are just one part of a far broader tradition.

From 1903 to 1928 Socialist Sunday Schools preached a secular gospel of humanity and love. Opposition to the Great War by Quakers and pacifists led to the formation of a Children's Peace Army. A Brisbane Labor Girls Club, founded in 1919, spread the doctrine of 'One Big Union' and in 1925 University Labour Clubs began building socialist enclaves in the midst of bourgeois privilege. Early Labor Party youth organisations in Victoria and New South Wales served as a step-ladder to individual political careers or, alternatively, were motivated by belief that the ALP's bureaucratic structure might somehow be influenced in a socialist direction from within.

Trade unions and Trades Hall Councils also responded, formulating policy to deal with the erosion of traditional apprenticeship or, as the Depression lifted, to ease the plight of a 'lost generation', seemingly destined to a future of low pay and 'blind alley' jobs.

A more diffused ideology of youth grew out of events the labour movement felt unable to ignore: the survival of jingoism and militarism in the school curriculum after 'the war to end all wars'; continuation of juvenile military training in the 1920s; the possible effect of child migration and the rapid growth of the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, YMCA and other 'capitalist' youth movements.

Trade unions hoped to recruit young people and the ALP expected their vote at twenty-one, yet the labour movement feared the economic competition of youth in the workplace and suspected that its intervention in party politics might have turbulent results. Communist strategy, based on an imported Leninist model, bore only partial relationship to how Australian working class youth actually resisted bourgeois socialisation. These ambiguities account for the vacillating, intermittent characteristics of so many labour youth initiatives and their failure to seriously challenge establishment-sponsored organisations.
Introduction
The first labour youth organisation in Australia, launched in 1903 by the Melbourne Social Democratic Party, coincided with a phase of intense activity focused on urban youth. Middle class reformers regarded working class children as subject to moral and physical degeneration, more prone to delinquency and therefore in need of special care and discipline. Voluntary 'child-saving' palliatives ranged from kindergartens and creches, to new youth movements designed to eradicate larrikinism, instil obedience and 'keep them off the streets'. An increasingly interventionist State created children's courts, reformatories and military cadet training. It also imposed stricter enforcement of compulsory education and the licensing of street trading. The early twentieth century reformers influenced legislation to protect juveniles from employers' exploitation, but were concerned primarily to foster a particular notion of childhood and adolescence, by policing the interface produced by the division of labour between two previously linked spheres of life, the kinship and occupational systems.

Socialists suspected that in helping to ameliorate the conditions created by an unequal distribution of wealth, these reforms left the root cause of inequality untouched. A uniform labour movement response, however, is hard to pin down. The political 'institutionalisation of labour intellectuals' may have led to an undue reliance on the State as problem solver, but the rank-and-file held more ambivalent views. The evil of capitalism was not that it imposed a particular family form, but that it did not allow the material conditions for its existence. The State and philanthropists were

2 G. Davison, 'The city-bred child and urban reform in Melbourne 1900-1940', in P. Williams (ed), Social Process and the City, p.145.
concerned about the ultimate productivity of labour, whereas working class families concentrated on immediate survival. Child labour therefore retained its significance, even after a majority won a 'living wage'.

Opposition to coercion and supervision by the State came to be interpreted as evidence of anti-social behaviour on the part of adolescents at large, thereby justifying further protective legislation. A reinforcing cycle of organisation and resistance continued for almost two decades after 1914, until new models of childhood and adolescence became more widely accepted.

A burgeoning market in popular fiction making the adventure magazine an integral element of childhood, constituted another facet of bourgeois socialisation at the turn of the century. Using the powerful ideology of athleticism and the genre of the great public school, imported and indigenous publications encouraged ideals of service to the British Empire. Character training in this context meant 'playing the game' both on and off the field. Thrill-packed 'penny dreadfuls' and school novels projected images of youth and subsequent adulthood which contained the seeds of imperial conquest and consolidation, in military, ethical and cultural terms.

Labour youth organisations challenged these trends and posed a radical alternative. They were a novel form of political action, emerging as the need for proletarian youth to show loyalty to its own class assumed greater importance. Labour youth 'Leagues' and 'Guilds' initially borrowed the

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5 Ibid, p.47.

language of Camelot or later, as 'Sections' and 'Units', exhibited the influence of a Sovietised form of Taylorism. But they also implied the necessity of making a deeper impact on the modern electorate and that the transition to socialism depended on the education of a new generation. Young people who joined, a small minority of the total age group, experienced political events more acutely than their contemporaries. A handful who committed themselves to the struggle as a way of life in their teens were the vanguard of a generation. The way they defined their situation, not by fashion but by history, led them to carry forward their repudiation of capitalism, seeking to transmit it to their successors.

A history of the development of Communist, Labor and trade union youth organisation to 1939 is the central theme of this thesis. But to clarify, I distinguish between initiatives in the 1920s and 30s and devote a separate chapter to student Labour Clubs whose heyday spanned both decades. Before 1914 the Labor Party was too preoccupied with the problems of winning office to worry much about a social group with no vote. Early youth initiatives, therefore, were confined to those dissident sects which, by adopting an alternative life style, hoped to build the structure of a new society within the shell of the old. For this reason I include the Victorian Socialist Party Sunday School, even though its formation pre-dates my research by twelve years. Its longevity and seminal relationship to both the Communist Sunday Schools and Victorian Labor Guild of Youth is an additional factor. The pacifist Children's Peace Army, the first youthful response to a specifically national issue - the conscription controversy - was also indebted to it in various ways.

One of the most striking features of the 1920s is the speed with which the Boys Brigade, Girls Life Brigade, Scouts and Guides - products of an

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Edwardian zeal in preparing the armies of the future - assumed the mantle of international peace and understanding. The Left, which might have expected to occupy this space, was caught off balance. Once the drive to increase membership of Communist youth organisations ground to a halt, alienation took the place of revolutionary elan. Despair, or retreat, into self-conscious aestheticism represented an alternative culture 'in itself', but not a youth movement 'for itself'. What makes the Victorian Labor Guild of Youth so interesting is the head-on collision in its ranks between bohemianism and aspiring political activism. Both tendencies acknowledged the powerlessness of youth, but the latter wanted to do something about it. For these young people it was not a matter of intellectual confrontation between two contrasted accounts of the present defined by age, but the need to identify with a more permanent less marginalised group - the organised working class.

Compared to the relatively apolitical generation of the twenties, several characteristics of youth organisations in the thirties stand out. Firstly, the somewhat nebulous not very successful student and youth sections of the Left take on a new more vigorous shape. With unemployment, economic crisis, nascent fascism and approaching war, one finds a general move towards unity. 'Peace' and 'planning' become key words while, under the impact of Roosevelt's projects for the American jobless, Australian youth are encouraged to demand 'a new deal'. Some groups became affiliated to the Australian Youth Council - an umbrella organisation loosely linked to the Communist People's Front. But for others, among the majority of young people with no formal contact with the Left, awareness of the advance of fascism in Europe and Asia became inescapable as the decade drew to a close.\(^8\)

\(^8\) See J. Kingsmill, *The Innocent - Growing up in Bondi in the 1920s and 1930s*, pp.200-201.
I also explore two related areas: the development of a labour ideology of youth and the origins of trade union youth policy. In connection with the former, John Plamenatz's definition of ideology as a set of simple, closely related attitudes or beliefs, seems the most apt. One already finds a series of arguments about youth in labour journals by 1914, but the Great War crystallised them into definite issues. For controversies centred on the politics of schooling, I refer to the research of Libby Connors, and of B. Bessant and A. Spaull and for background information on the post-1918 Citizen Militia, to C. Neumann. Trade union youth policy remained amorphous for much of the inter-war period, although industrialisation had changed the nature of work, increasing the distance between childhood and the average competent adult worker. Youth still retained its traditional invisibility for some unions, but in certain sectors which I outline a response is discernible, especially by the late 1930s.

Industrial conurbations like those on the eastern seaboard where most of my examples originate, present us with a blurred and discontinuous structure of age spans. When speaking of youth in this setting, therefore, I refer to the transition from child to adult status, bounded approximately at either pole by school entry at the age of five and the right to vote at twenty-one. Youthfulness in politics, however, is a touchy subject and one easily identified area of battle with party bureaucracies has concerned the precise limits to be attached to this elastic term. Some Left-wing children's organisations in my survey absorbed infants below the age of five years, while

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Labour Clubs and ALP Younger Sets recruited members up to their mid-thirties.

A further problem - the absence of an effective theory of resistance - is closely linked with factors inhibiting growth and involvement. Most labour youth organisations were predicated on narrow, ill-defined concepts of adolescent rebellion. Their members were treated as junior adults who, it was expected, would vote and join unions in the traditional manner when they were old enough. The impulse of young people to a sexual life was only acknowledged obliquely and their spontaneity found little sympathy in a male-dominated labour movement. In an oral history of working class childhood, Stephen Humphries has indicated just how broad the parameters of a theory of resistance could be. Street gangs, truancy, school strikes, social crime, promiscuous sexual behaviour etc, were for him not signs of deprivation or delinquency, but of revolt against a stultifying code of conformity imposed by an ascendant middle class. I seek to apply this model to Australia, examining militia camp 'break-outs', 'factory-storming' by jobless youth, parent-aided school boycotts and youth strikes. But I take issue with Humphries on one point, namely that any of these modes of resistance was necessarily class based.

It is true that most of Humphries' informants came from working class backgrounds, but this is not the same thing. The transitional position of urban youth, its powerlessness as the reserve army of the unemployed or cheap disposable labour of Fordist society, produced strategies and responses different to those of the adult working class. Even when young workers went on strike and the similarities were greatest, it was frequently the occasion for them joining a union, rather than a result of union organisa-

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13 S. Humphries, _Hooligans or Rebels_.

14 Ibid., pp.1-27.
tion. These characteristics, I contend, make E. P. Thompson's work on the eighteenth century crowd, or George Rude's theories of pre-industrial popular protests, better starting points for analysis than the conventional marxist framework of class struggle.

My personal interest in the thesis topic arises from ten years activity in Left-wing youth politics. Since 1920 successive generations of Young Communists had grappled with the task of building a broadly based young workers movement, and mine was no exception. In the early 1970s I took part in a struggle to persuade the British Trades Union Congress to convene an annual youth conference. The Young Communist League also initiated a regional network of Trades Council youth affairs sub-committees and I was elected chairperson of the one in Leicester. Our sub-committee organised social events, union recruitment weeks and drafted a local policy document on conditions of youth in industry. It also operated a drop-in centre for unemployed youth, offering free recreational facilities, job information and advice on benefits rights.

That these and other campaigns were waged without detailed knowledge of what had gone before constituted a major weakness. We knew from the reminiscences of older comrades that a Left-wing youth tradition existed, yet labour movement histories barely mentioned it. I was intrigued by this paradox and also wondered why, as the role of women in the labour force emerged from obscurity, youth still remained hidden from history. At the New University of Ulster from 1981-84, I attended lectures by Dr John Springhall whose work on youth movements in the British Empire and

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16 G. Rudé, Ideology and Popular Protest.
Dominions, provoked further thought. Later, when the opportunity arose, I welcomed the prospect of confronting the enigma of why the long-awaited Left response to the YMCA, Girls Guides and Boy Scouts, failed to maintain its impetus.

Explanatory literature related to this problem, even at an international level, is meagre. As with Australian sources, one either finds a lacuna, or fragmentary diaspora of information. John Springhall's research on the political dimensions of youth protest between the wars, and Arthur Marwick's earlier work on the same subject, provide some background material. Australian youth organisations in the Laborite tradition during the 1920s were mostly based on British precursors mentioned in these studies. Similarly, H. Gruber's essay on the life of Willi Munzenberg, founder of the Young Communist International, gives information on the revolutionary strand. By the Comintern Third Congress of 1921, Munzenberg had abandoned his earlier view of youth as a creative, inspirational, autonomous force within the movement. His insistence that it now serve as the well disciplined foot soldiers of the revolution directed from above had disastrous results, not least in Australia where the Young Communist League and its associated Sunday Schools became virtually extinct by 1924.

17 J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*.


The founders of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History in 1961 had little to say about labour youth. To date in the Society's journal *Labour History*, only three articles have appeared under this heading for the inter-war years. Robin Gollan, in his examination of Australian Communism and the labour movement, omitted the Young Communist League entirely and A. Davidson's history of the CPA gave children's organisations only a paragraph. There is a little more writing on student Labour Clubs by scholars for whom the milieu is familiar. Brian Fitzpatrick, who until his death in 1965, personified the Left in Australian historiography, may have served as a model in this respect. In the mid-1920s at Melbourne University he had helped pioneer student politics, long before the Professorial Board considered such practices apposite.

The work of self-educated activists yields richer gleanings. Bertha Walker encompassed the Victorian Socialist Party Sunday School in her survey of the Melbourne labour movement, as did Edgar Ross in another

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22 R. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*.


25 D. Watson, *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life*.

26 B. Walker, *Solidarity Forever*. 
retrospective study,\textsuperscript{27} followed by a biography of his father R. S. Ross.\textsuperscript{28} John Sendy, a former Communist Party functionary, gave the Victorian Labor Guild of Youth less anecdotal treatment in a recent biography of Ralph Gibson.\textsuperscript{29} Audrey Blake's stories and documents of the 1930s\textsuperscript{30} remain the most comprehensive account of the Young Communist League, although some of Wendy Lowenstein's informants illustrate more fully the events which impelled young people into political activity at this time.\textsuperscript{31} Oriel Gray's 'Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman'\textsuperscript{32} and Amirah Inglis' autobiographical 'un-Australian childhood'\textsuperscript{33} reveal the part played by Left-wing parents in this process.

Feminists and others concerned with creating an urban-based women's history have described the trauma and exploitation suffered by young people embarking on working life.\textsuperscript{34} But not all of these writers anticipating the end result of their work, have linked the goals of sex and age desegregation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} E. Ross, Of Storm and Struggle.
\item \textsuperscript{28} E. Ross, These Things Shall Be!.
\item \textsuperscript{29} R. Sendy, Ralph Gibson: An Extraordinary Communist.
\item \textsuperscript{30} A. Blake, A Proletarian Life.
\item \textsuperscript{31} W. Lowenstein, Weevils in the Flour.
\item \textsuperscript{32} O. Gray, Exit Left.
\item \textsuperscript{33} A. Inglis, Amirah: An un-Australian Childhood.
together so emphatically as Ann Curthoys. As women responded to industrialisation, moving from domestic service into better paid factory work, this problem bedeviled them. Because most were single their jobs were seen as temporary - a stopgap preceding marriage, supposedly confined to those without dependants. Girls living at home cost their parents just as much to maintain, yet boys as future bread-winners were paid more. As Fabian and Loh have shown, these differentials divided juveniles in the same industry or firm.

Although labour youth organisations catered for both sexes, the movement’s broader ideology mirrored these inequalities. Due to the segregation of cheap female labour into 'women's industries' by 1918, the debate about apprenticeship revolved almost exclusively around boys. The same is true of controversies over military cadet training, child migration and the Boy Scouts. My research reflects this bias, but I attempt to redress it in two ways. Firstly by describing the often pivotal role of women as educators and organisers in labour youth initiatives and secondly by noting their co-participation in youthful acts of rebellion, a factor already alluded to by Sabine Willis in her work on the Parramatta Industrial School for Girls.

In the literature cited above, only Audrey Blake has offered reasons why Australian labour youth organisations failed to recruit a mass membership. In the most durable of these - the Young Communist League - women enjoyed parity with men and were always well represented on its district and national committees. But this was nullified in Blake’s opinion by the

36 Ibid, p.91.
37 S. Fabian and M. Loh, Children in Australia, p.108.
38 S. Willis, 'Made to be moral - at Parramatta Girls' School, 1989-1923', in J. Roe (ed) Twentieth Century Sydney, p.181, 186 and 189.
YCL’s dismissal of feminism as a bourgeois aberration. Positive discrimination in favour of young proletarians had some favourable results, but the YCL’s crude theoretical class reductionism led to a kind of inverted snobbery, making it hard for those of non working class origin to participate. One would not fault her analysis, but what of the deficiencies in Left-wing pedagogical theory as the Socialist Sunday Schools withered away? Blake has asserted ‘our approach was governed by Lenin’s writings on youth’, but were such constructs valid in Australia? I return to these points again in my concluding chapter.

The radical press has proved a rich source of information. Some journals featured regular reports of youth activity, while general articles reveal a more diffused ideology of youth. Labour youth organisations usually had their own magazines which, although intermittent, occasionally attained high levels of content and presentation. Pamphlet literature is less abundant, but the Normington Rawlings Collection does contain some examples. The conservative press either tended to sensationalise labour youth initiatives, or expressed its outrage at their temerity in challenging the hegemony of establishment-sponsored movements.

The Young Communist League and Australian Youth Council attracted considerable police surveillance. Dossiers compiled by the Commonwealth Attorney General’s Investigation Branch are therefore another useful source, as are letters of complaint from private citizens in the correspondence files of State Premiers and Commonwealth Prime Ministers.

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39 A. Blake, op.cit., p.88.
40 Ibid, p.123.
41 Ibid, p.74.
42 Archives of Business and Labour, ANU, Canberra.
43 Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
Manuscript material also yields evidence, particularly the papers of Guido Baracchi and Adela Pankhurst Walsh in the National Library of Australia and the un-published notes of Noel Counihan, to which I obtained access. Whenever possible I also include oral evidence.

There was, I believe, a deeply rooted ambiguity in the labour movement's relationship with youth. By the 1930s right-wing leaders incorporated young people within a broader repertoire of rallying calls for the creation of consciousness and solidarity, yet always harboured reservations about fighting wholeheartedly on their behalf. Even as the movement's political wing made tentative moves towards separate structures for youth, unions fearful of dilution and economic competition clung to an outmoded division of labour which perpetuated the subaltern position of juveniles on the shopfloor. Fully mobilising youthful idealism meant moving beyond a purely economic interpretation of the Depression. It entailed challenging a closely circumscribed freedom which stressed conformism and respectability as desirable attitudes among the younger generation. Although the Communist Party accepted these requirements in theory, it too ignored glaring anomalies. On young people's individual rights, just as with women's emancipation, it tended to avoid issues which might upset the status quo inside working class families. The Labor Party, having grasped the fissiparous nature of youth sections and even more reluctant to question the political and cultural orthodoxies of the times, sought to channel the energies of its younger members into less controversial realms of leisure and sport.

44 Private collection of Pat Counihan, Melbourne. Hereafter referred to as, Noel Counihan, un-published notes.

45 See J. Stevens, Taking the Revolution Home, p.44.
Chapter 1

Labour Youth Organisations in the 1920s
i The Victorian Socialist Party Sunday School

The formation of the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP) in 1906 was the work of Tom Mann (1856-1941). Mann had won a reputation as a militant in the London dock strike of 1889 and as national secretary of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). In 1897 he retired and became a publican, but emerged five years later to conduct a lecture and research tour of New Zealand. He arrived in Melbourne in September 1902 at the invitation of various Australian Labor organisations.\(^1\) His energy in delivering twelve speeches in two days for the Political Labor Council persuaded the ALP that he was the ideal person to help it build strong branches in country areas. Mann accepted the challenge and worked relentlessly at this until 1905 when, despairing of the Labor Party, he resigned and resolved to promote a more determined socialist party in Victoria.\(^2\)

P. J. O'Farrell has stated that Tom Mann introduced the concept of Socialist Sunday Schools from Britain.\(^3\) He offers no proof of this but it seems likely, as Tom and Elsie Mann actively supported the Melbourne Social Democratic Party (SDP). This was formed in 1902 by members of the Victorian Socialist League (VSL) who, having been the left wing conscience of the Labor Party since 1897, had grown disillusioned. In June 1903 women in the SDP began a 'Socialist Lyceum' for children on Sunday afternoons.\(^4\) Tom Mann's other venture, the Political and Social Questions Society (PSQS) soon outgrew its origins as a research group. By its first half yearly meeting in February 1906, the PSQS had become a propaganda organisation

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4. V. Burgmann, op.cit., p.133.
in its own right, with a choir, Boys Band and Sunday School. When it reconstituted itself as the VSP in April of that year, the new party continued the Sunday School under its own name.

The Victorian Socialist Party Sunday School (VSPSS) first met in a cellar in Collins Street, Melbourne, moving later to the Socialist Halls on Elizabeth and Exhibition Streets and finally to the Ball Room of the Trades Hall Council. It commenced with fifty pupils and by its first anniversary had achieved a regular attendance of one hundred. At times in its history the School had two hundred members, with branches in the suburbs of Prahran, Preston, Hawthorn, Footscray and the country town of Trafalgar. The VSP's example inspired similar experiments. Socialists in Kalgoorlie opened a Sunday School in January 1908 and in May 1911 friends of the VSP in Broken Hill followed suit. During the Great War the De Leonist Socialist Labor Party in Sydney ran a Sunday School in Auburn, which met above the Granville Co-operative store. In 1919 members of the VSP in the mining town of Wonthaggi enrolled eighty pupils in another Socialist Sunday School.

The VSPSS recruited young people between the ages of six and sixteen years. New members subscribed to the following: 'I am sorry there is so much suffering through poverty. I believe socialism will cure this evil and make it possible for all to be happy.' The Sunday School was part of a larger 'Young Comrades Contingent' which came to include a Socialist Girls

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5 G. Osborne, 'Tom Mann his Australian Experience 1902-1910', p.35.

6 B. Walker, Solidarity Forever!, op.cit., p.35.

7 Socialist, 12 May 1911.

8 R. H. Long papers, Box 383/5c, M.S. 57033, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.

9 Socialist, 10 January 1919.

10 B. Walker, op.cit., p.35.
Calisthenics Club, formed in 1914, and a study class named after John Ruskin where older children were encouraged to 'step out' and taught how to speak in public.\textsuperscript{11} On reaching sixteen, adolescents joined the Young Socialist or 'Peace' Crusaders - a movement introduced by the VSP to counter the 'insidious effects' of the Boy Scouts.\textsuperscript{12}

The VSPSS drew much of its inspiration from kindred organisations in Britain. A pamphlet by the Glasgow ILP activist Lizzie Glazier entitled \textit{Socialist Sunday Schools - What are they?} was brought to Melbourne in 1907 by George Brooks, a Yorkshireman who came to settle attracted by VSP comradeship.\textsuperscript{13} By 1921 the VSP modelled its School on the aims and objectives of the co-ordinating National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools (NCBSSS) which it published in its weekly paper the \textit{Socialist}. It is necessary to reflect on this connection as it enables us to understand more fully the ideology of Australian Socialist Sunday Schools.

F. Reid has likened these structures to a labour sect, cognate with the Labour Church, but organisationally and geographically distinct from it.\textsuperscript{14} In his \textit{Primitive Rebels} (1959), E. J. Hobsbawm has defined labour sects as 'proletarian organisations and aspirations ... expressed through religious ideology'; Reid accepts this, but also asserts that Socialist Sunday Schools represent an extension of the working class sectarian tradition beyond the 19th century within which Hobsbawm seems to confine it.\textsuperscript{15} If we discount Chartist experiments, the first Socialist Sunday Schools occurred in Manchester where, in 1893, John Trevor, a lapsed Unitarian minister and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} G. Osborne, \textit{op.cit.}, p.125.
\item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Socialist}, 22 April 1921.
\item \textsuperscript{13} G. Osborne, \textit{op.cit.}, p.125.
\item \textsuperscript{14} F. Reid, \textit{op.cit.}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.20.
\end{itemize}
founder of the Labour Church movement, proposed that children who joined Cinderella Clubs be taught as well as fed. Cinderella Clubs were an ILP attempt to feed the ragged infants of the Lancashire textile towns. They were the brain-child of Robert Blatchford, socialist author of *Merrie England*, with whose help Trevor opened the first Cinderella Sunday School.

Labour Churches championed the abolition of 'Commercial Slavery' and challenged the social presuppositions of conventional Christianity. Members of the ILP sometimes used their pulpits to propagate the political message that human suffering resulted from bad social organisation, rather than from personal sin. Melbourne had its own Labour Church in the 1890s presided over by the Reverend Archibald Turnbull, with a congregation including leading figures in the Victorian Socialist League. When members of the VSL formed the SDP and later followed Mann into the VSP, they no doubt brought aspects of their devotional experience with them. When Turnbull died in 1901, the Unitarian minister Frederick Sinclaire kept the torch alight in his Free Religious Fellowship, a venue frequented by the socialist, literary and intellectual avant-garde of Melbourne. The family of Minnie Long, superintendent of the VSPSS for much of its duration, was closely associated with Sinclaire's church at Upwey, as was Mrs Yatala Ovendon, a rationalist who also taught at the Sunday School in the 1920s.

Labour Church Sunday schools trained their pupils in the mental processes necessary to comprehend the world, in order that they might

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18 B. Walker, op.cit., p.44.
combat some of the social evils that stunted their lives. One finds traces of this rationalist approach in the educational philosophy of the first adult mentor of the VSPSS, who reported in the Socialist under the pseudonym 'Uncle Remus'. 'Remus' understood the contradiction inherent in giving children an ethical upbringing free of bias, and the desire to cultivate young socialists. He believed that care, candour and curiosity were the guiding principles of study and that it was wrong to be a socialist just because one's parents held those views. 'Remus' wanted children to consider the merits of socialism but thought they should be free to decide for themselves.

James Keir Hardie introduced the language of traditional Christian ethics into British Socialist Sunday Schools. A Member of Parliament since 1892 and the owner-editor of the ILP Labour Leader, he launched a children's 'Crusaders Club' through this newspaper in 1893, dedicated to the principle that human beings are created to enjoy life and that any thing hindering this is wrong and sinful. In 1895 Hardie began to cajole his colleagues in the ILP to volunteer as teachers, to lead a thousand or more children who responded. One of his Glaswegian disciples, Archie McArthur, used Hardie's Crusaders column to preach the message that love was the cardinal virtue. Young socialists had to build 'the City of Love' in their own hearts and then, by degrees, extend it to the rest of the world.

Within a short time Socialist Sunday School teachers came to speak of their

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19 F. Reid, op.cit., p.22.
21 Ibid., pp.129-130. Hewitt speculates that 'Remus' may have been Bernard O'Dowd.
22 F. Reid, op.cit., p.23.
23 Ibid., p.25.
beliefs not only as a system of ethics, but as a religion, thus confusing terms in a manner which shocked orthodox theologians.

Bob Ross exemplified these traits in Australia. When Tom Mann returned to England in 1910, the VSP invited Ross, who was then active in left wing journalism at Broken Hill, to take over as Party secretary and editor of the Socialist. From then on the VSP carried the stamp of Ross's personality and idealism.24 As a boy he had attended the South Brisbane Baptist Sunday School and his later courtship of Ethel Slaughter, whom he married in 1900 at the age of twenty-seven, also took place in church and temperance circles. Although he later grew sceptical of the existence of God, Ross nevertheless retained a great respect for the Bible as 'beautifully written' and quoted passages from it throughout his life. He also acknowledged the validity of 'Christian principles' and readily accepted the affinity of socialists with the dedication of religious people. His sons Lloyd and Edgar both attended the VSPSS and Sinclaire, with whom he maintained a friendly rapport, often lectured at the Party’s Socialist Hall.25

The weekly meeting of the VSPSS was essentially a devotional exercise, intended to cultivate emotions appropriate to the co-operative way of life. Its format hardly changed across the years. The children sang an opening song, often to the tune of a popular hymn, and then recited the Ten Commandments of Socialism - a plagiarism of the 'Socialist Precepts' introduced into British Socialist Sunday Schools in 1901.26 A child or teacher then read a lesson and the School broke up into classes. These bore the names 'Red Flag', 'Karl Marx', 'Liberty', 'Freedom', 'Democratic' and 'International'. Subjects taught included elocution, history, mythology and

24 E. Ross, These Things Shall Be, op.cit., p.72.
25 Ibid., p.115.
26 F. Reid, op.cit., p.32.
Esperanto and the teachers read stories drawing a political moral. Two American primers, Socialist Readings for Children by John Spargo and Nature Talks on Economics by Caroline Nelson were widely used. The proceedings concluded with a roll-call, collection and closing song, followed by a 'Declaration' which the whole School intoned:

We desire to be just and loving to all our fellow men and women, to work together as brothers and sisters, to be kind to every living creature and so to help form a New Society, with Justice as its foundation and Love as its law.  

The quality of prayer is unmistakable in this, and ritual also played an important part. Despite the cautionary note sounded by 'Uncle Remus', children were literally inducted into the movement at birth when they were 'dedicated' to the cause at Socialist baptisms conducted before the assembled School. Such ceremonies are reminiscent of those obvious sources of cohesion in Christian churches, used as a means of binding the life of a family to the life of an association.  

Ross, having received the baby from its parents on a cushion decorated in red, would express the hope that it might grow into citizenship of the Co-operative Commonwealth. To the refrain of 'The Red Flag', the baby would then be given a small memento - often a scarlet ribbon with its name and baptismal date in gold lettering - and welcomed as the youngest socialist in Australia.  

When Tom Mann performed the first baptism, the Melbourne Argus thundered 'there is scarcely a family in the community which will not feel itself wounded and outraged at this sacramental travesty'.  

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29 Socialist, 12 March 1920.
30 Argus, 23 July 1907.
such baptisms in the early 1920s evoked hardly any comment at all outside the Party.

Aware of the rise of jingoism, the VSP affiliated the Sunday School to the Second International's Federation of Young People's Organisations founded in 1907, and encouraged the pupils to correspond with their counterparts overseas. The School's closest foreign links were with New Zealand and its Socialist Sunday Schools in Wellington and Palmeiston North. On Empire Day 1908 the pupils gave out copies of Marie Pitt's anti-imperialist poem 'Salute the Flag' outside Melbourne schools. She and her fellow poet Bernard O'Dowd had joined the VSP so that their verse might be 'directed to the shaping of the new world'. Like Keir Hardie who had visited Australia the year previously, the VSP in 1911 opposed the introduction of boy conscription. Yet it still hesitated to advocate open resistance. Instead the VSP executive instructed the Sunday School teachers to tell the pupils of the futility of refusing to enlist and to advise them 'to propagate our principles in the ranks'.

The Sunday School took a more active part in the 1916 anti-conscription campaign. Lloyd Edmunds, who joined the VSPSS at the age of six in 1912, remembered it as an exciting time. He recalled the astonishment of passers-by when he and other children handed out leaflets against Australian involvement in the war. On more than one occasion members of the Sunday School were chased from the Yarra Bank to their headquarters by angry soldiers and other pro-conscriptionists. Having prepared for this in advance, the children and teachers would throw down chunks of scrap

31 B. Walker, op.cit., p.41.
32 Socialist, 23 August 1909.
33 J. Barrett, Falling In: Australians and Boy Conscription 1911-15, p.89.
metal from above to repulse their pursuers as they tried to rush the stairs.34

Cecilia John, a VSP member who supported international arbitration as a means of preventing war, waged her own battle against military indoctrination of the young in July 1917 by launching a Children’s Peace Army. This developed as a fringe activity of the pacifist Women’s Peace Army, in which she held the position of organising secretary. The Children’s Peace Army had branches in Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane but could never boast of a mass membership. Its main usefulness was in persuading parents to take part in socialist and pacifist campaigns to purge text books and the State school curriculum of aspects which tended to glorify war.35

Much VSPSS activity revolved around festivals and commemorative days which needed intensive planning. When the School re-convened each March after its summer recess, work began immediately preparing for May Day. The VSP celebrated this differently from the rest of the labour movement for whom, until the 1930s, the Eight Hour Day processions took precedence. The VSP observed May Day regardless of when it fell and tried to evoke a legendary time ‘when children were happy, their youthful innocence not strangled by the soot and smoke of the factory system’.36 Some years boys in the VSPSS marched in red Garibaldi jackets and white knickerbockers, while the girls wore white dresses with red sashes.37 From 1922 to 1928 a Sunday School tableau festooned with greenery mounted on the back of motor lorry provided the main attraction. The irony of holding an event

36 Socialist, 3 May 1912.
37 G. C. Hewitt, op.cit., p.133.
associated with spring in the northern hemisphere during autumn in Melbourne seems to have escaped the organisers completely.

The VSP put children on a pedestal, very much in the way Edwardian middle-class families paraded the accomplishments of their offspring. May Day at the Yarra Bank was a time of adult speech making, but this was preceded traditionally by a special 'service' devoted to the Sunday School. It began with a salute to the Red Flag as the emblem of internationalism, followed by a keynote oration by a senior pupil and recitations of poetry and song. The repertoire of the School included 'England Arise' by Edward Carpenter (altered to 'Toilers Arise' in the VSP Song Book), 'The March of the Workers' by William Morris and songs with Australian themes by Bernard O'Dowd or Marie Pitt. The children concluded with Maypole dancing and then crowned their May Queen whose photograph subsequently appeared in the Socialist. Edgar Ross who participated has described this ritual as 'in the traditional style of England in the Middle Ages'.

Nostalgia for the trappings of a vanished English pastoralism may seem obscurantist today, but such yearnings were not yet extinct among anglophiles in the working class movement of Victoria.

The Sunday School supported other public meetings in the course of a year; it helped decorate stalls at the Party's Christmas Fair and assumed a major responsibility for the entertainment at the VSP's anniversary celebrations. At these events the pupils usually sang an Esperanto song or specially composed cantata, but otherwise their annual input varied. In 1921, at the Party's sixteenth anniversary, the School made a highly elaborate contribution. The younger children gave an exposition of ballet dancing and acrobatics, while the Socialist Girls Calisthenics Club performed a 'French

38 E. Ross, op.cit., p.76.

39 For these items in the programme of Eight Hour and Labor Day celebrations see, for example, Labor Call, 24 February 1927.
Cavalier Display', complete with white wigs, fencing swords and decorative costumes. In 1924 they staged an historical sketch depicting the exploitation of juveniles under the early English factory system, but by the twenty-second anniversary in 1927, when they joined with adults in presenting an 'All Red Concert', the School had virtually lost its separate identity.

Preparations for social events detracted from the School's educational role and led to tensions. In March 1920 a deputation of teachers complained to the VSP executive committee about the continual disruption of the curriculum. They demanded that they be consulted in future before pupils were taken away from classes and asked for the School to be made financially autonomous. Intense debate raged at this time over the relevance of the Russian revolution to working class politics in Australia and in 1920 three VSPSS teachers - Guido Baracchi, Adela Pankhurst Walsh and A. Dockerty - left to join the newly formed Communist Party.

Among their converts Socialist Sunday School attracted professional teachers and academics who, frustrated by the impoverished barrenness of much of the State School system found in them an opportunity to experiment. Adela Pankhurst Walsh who taught intermittently at the VSPSS between 1917 and 1925 had originally trained as a teacher and worked briefly in a Manchester elementary school before being distracted into full time suffragist work. Guido Baracchi who held classes on 'the Precepts of Communism' for the Young Socialist Crusaders had been a rebellious student and thorn in the side of the authorities at Melbourne University. Some subjects required special skills, such as Esperanto taught by Miss

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40 Victorian Socialist Party minute book, MS 564/1/6, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

41 Steads Review, 1 February 1929.

42 B. Walker, op cit., p.143.
Adamson, or calisthenics by A. E. Lorback, a member of the Victorian College of Gymnastics. But teaching at the VSPSS was mainly a family affair, dominated at particular times by the Laidlers, Ovendons or Callards, stalwarts of considerable ability but usually lacking in formal qualifications. Perhaps because of the prevalence of amateur activists - a characteristic in common with American Socialist Sunday Schools - we discover no great profusion of pamphlet literature similar to that produced in the same period by affiliates of the NCBSSS.

The activities of the VSPSS may be traced through the 'Party Chronicles' column of the Socialist but not, alas, through any consistent publication of its own. The Dawn (fig. 1), a monthly newsletter for children edited by Adela Pankhurst Walsh, appeared in September 1917 but was short lived. It condemned the war and tried to give a political slant to popular fables and fairy tales. But although it ceased publication in February 1919, the Dawn is of interest as more than just an example of socialist ephemera. Forced to clarify her aims in the second edition, its editor declared that it had no religious doctrine to preach, but a morality big enough to include all religions. The Dawn would 'make socialists of the young', but also instil 'something wider in spirit than sect or creed, broad-based on the rights of all mankind'. This secular non-sectarian perspective reminds one of Comte's Religion of Humanity, which taught that moral duties are owed to

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43 Socialist, 16 March 1917.


45 Dawn, October 1917.
all mankind rather than simply to the workers as a class. The Positivist, F. J. Gould, propagated this philosophy in the British Socialist Sunday School movement and, as P. J. O'Farrell has noted, it won adherents in Australia.  

A blend of rationalist liberalism and transcendental idealism, traces of it may be discerned in *A Child's Prayer to Parents and Teachers* - a Sunday School primer published by the VSP in April 1920.

The VSPSS owed much to the dedication of its superintendent Minnie Isabel Long, described by K. J. Kenafick as 'a woman of somewhat dominating disposition'. Minnie Long lived with her brother R. H. (Dick) Long, a poet, at 203 Bluff Road, Sandringham. Their house, set in the middle of a large block of land, became a Mecca for Melbourne socialists. Here the Sunday School children could spend balmy days, or go out on trips with Dick, their gear packed on the back of his pet donkey. The Longs presided over an alternative life style at Bluff Road in which Australian culture, vegetarianism and a 'back to nature' ethos flourished. Minnie Long resigned from the Sunday School in 1925 when she went to Britain to attend a conference of the War Resisters International. Her failure to become re-involved on her return could have been connected with her adoption of Eric Haslem, an orphaned child.

The continuity of an organisation depends upon its ability to reproduce a new leadership from its own ranks. In youth movements this will typically include young adults - those best equipped to keep the lines of

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47 N57/1529, Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University, Canberra.


49 Ibid.

communication open to the younger generation. The heyday of the VSPSS co-incided with a period of expansion and confidence in its parent body. As the VSP's membership contracted, the Sunday School could no longer regenerate itself in a natural way. It failed to replace those teachers it lost through retirement or political defection and found it hard to retain the loyalty of senior pupils beyond puberty.

The Young Socialist Crusaders were the first to succumb to a sense of anomie. From the little we know of them they seem to have practised a back-to-nature cult at the VSP's camp site at Emerald in the Dandenongs, but never elaborated it as a theory. The Socialist recorded their picnics, dances and moonlight boat trips after the Great War, but little else. A final mention in May 1920 is of a meeting at Collingwood where they discussed 'The Evolution of our songs from Lullaby to Ragtime' with particular reference to the 'marxian axiom' that 'the machine controls the man and not man the machine'. The collapse of the Young Socialist Crusaders must have left young people over sixteen in the Party rudderless, but even before this happened impatience with adult cliquishness had produced two adolescent sub-groups. The 'Jokers' and the 'Gay Gordons', who rejected the family atmosphere and went off camping on their own, tended to be frowned on as young rebels by the VSP establishment.

The Socialist chose to ignore signs of decay and insisted, even at the end, that the quality of instruction and level of participation in the Sunday School was as high as at any time in its history. In fact during its final three years after 1925, the acute shortage of teachers delayed the School's annual re-opening while the reduced number of pupils made it difficult to

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51 Socialist, 14 May 1920.
52 B. Walker, op.cit., p.43.
53 Socialist, 11 June 1927.
mount the same level of performances at Party events as in the past. With its out-moded language and rituals, the School had become a closed community of believers. A Young People's Dramatic Club launched in June 1925, enjoyed a brief vogue, but by December 1926 most of its devotees had transferred their allegiance to the newly formed Victorian Labor Guild of Youth. Because of their rarity and isolation Socialist Sunday Schools in Australia were never formed into regional 'Unions' as in Britain and America. This denied them the benefits of co-ordination and a forum for discussing new educational initiatives.

The VSP believed that conversion to socialism required moral regeneration as well as an intellectual grasp of history and economics. In such a broad church it is perhaps understandable that no agreement could be reached on any single definition of the terms 'socialism' or 'morality'. The problem was that none of the contending theories in the Party sufficed to shift it from its course. While the VSP remained open to revolutionary ideas - indeed Bob Ross considered himself a marxist - it stayed tied to the apron strings of the ALP, a party that preached conciliation and rejected the class struggle. One suspects that young people graduating from the Sunday School amidst the industrial militancy and impending Depression of the late 1920s sensed this contradiction and sought out a less equivocal path for themselves.

Members of the VSPSS who later achieved prominence in the labour movement include Roy Cameron, Secretary of the Miscellaneous Workers Union; Lloyd Edmunds who fought with the International Brigades in Spain; Ron Hurd, Secretary of the Seamens Union in Western Australia and Edgar Ross who, as editor of the Barrier Daily Truth and Common

54 Union Voice, 19 March 1927.
55 See Union Voice, 20 June 1925 and Labor Youth, December 1926.
Cause, continued a family tradition of service to working class journalism. These and other individuals remind one of Antonio Gramsci’s ‘organic intellectuals’. Indeed, Teitlebaum and Reese, observing a similar process in America, appeal to us to judge the fledgling but ultimately unsuccessful Socialist Sunday School movement in precisely this light. But the VSPSS also blazed a trail and established a tradition that could be built on. W. P. Easman, a Scottish migrant steeped in its practices, took them into the Communist Party of Australia, whose secretary he became after leaving the VSP in 1920. Muriel Heagney, who launched the Victorian Labor Guild of Youth in 1926, initially sought the advice of Minnie Long, while Alf Lorback still taught gymnastics to young socialists at the Melbourne headquarters of the League of Young Democrats in 1939.

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56 K. Teitelbaum and W. Reese, op.cit., p.429.
The fragmentation on the Left of the Australian labour movement in 1920 made it appear an unlikely place for the birth of a communist youth movement. A socialist disillusioned with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) might have chosen any of six political groupings equally determined to reorganise the trade unions in a revolutionary direction. But although their common inspiration, the Russian Revolution, could not end factionalism, it did provide a single focus for those organisations which wished to declare themselves communist. To make this avowal it was necessary to seek recognition as the Australian section of the Third International, or Comintern. Founded in Moscow in 1919, the Comintern regarded itself as the legitimate successor of Marx's First International. Acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a willingness to denounce the 'reformist' leaders of the Second International was the *sine qua non* of Comintern affiliation. In the eyes of the Bolsheviks, the Second International's failure to oppose the Great War had rendered it politically bankrupt.

During 1919 and the first half of 1920 two small but well established working class parties considered affiliation. The Victorian Socialist Party (VSP), torn by proposals that it reject the parliamentary road and promote violent revolution, eventually opted to work within the ALP and asked those of its members who disagreed to leave the party.2 The Australian Socialist Party (ASP), based mainly in Sydney, resolved that permanent social and political gains were impossible under capitalism and voted to join the Comintern.

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1 R. Gollan, op.cit., p.3.
2 A. Davidson, op.cit., p.7.
Those who gathered at the ASP Hall in Sydney on 30 October 1920 to form the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) included former members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and a group of so-called trade union reds who belonged to a militant faction inside the ALP. The reds had their power base in the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council and its secretary, Jock Garden, acted as their foremost spokesman. The leaders of the ASP acknowledged the importance of strong trade union links, but regarded the reds as inept in matters of marxist theory. They favoured open competition with the ALP for working class support, while the reds insisted on observing the Comintern's recommendation of a united front. These incompatible positions, together with Garden's jockeying for power, produced an almost immediate split. The two Communist Parties that emerged in December 1920 identified themselves from the locality in which their headquarters was situated. The Trades Hall reds commenced operations from a Communist Hall on Sussex Street, while the rump of the former ASP retained its previous base on Liverpool Street.

The investigation branch of the Commonwealth Attorney General's department\(^3\) believed that the formation of a Communist youth movement in Australia had suffered a severe setback due to the rift between the two rival parties.\(^4\) Nevertheless, on 3 June 1921 the *Communist*, organ of the Sussex Street party, announced that Adela Pankhurst Walsh intended to hold a Communist Sunday School each week at 119 Rawson Chambers, Sydney, to assist the children of party members and other 'young rebels' towards an understanding of 'the position of their class'.\(^5\) On 10 July the

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\(^3\) Hereafter referred to as the CAG investigation branch.


\(^5\) *Communist*, 3 June 1921.
Melbourne branch of the Sussex Street party opened another school under the supervision of A. Dockerty, a former secretary of the VSP Socialist Sunday School. He was assisted by Mrs Nellie Rickie, who represented the Theatrical Employees Union on Melbourne Trades Hall Council.  

Adela Pankhurst Walsh was the most renowned of the small group of adults who led the embryonic Communist youth movement. A daughter of the famous English suffragette family, she had travelled to Australia in 1915 and became active in the VSP. In 1917 she married Tom Walsh, secretary of the Seamen’s Union and became a foundation member of the CPA in 1920. During the Great War she campaigned against conscription in Vida Goldstein’s Women’s Political Association, re-named the Women’s Peace Army. Her perception of socialism had always been child-centred. Writing in Steads Review in 1928, she recalled how it had first appealed to her as ‘the gospel of the children … the triumph of the innocents whom the Herod of capitalism slays’. Adela Pankhurst Walsh’s commitment lasted only a few months as she left the Party before the fusion of the two rival factions. She later claimed that the Sussex Street Communists has rejected her ‘pacifist idealism’ and had criticised a ‘Pageant of History’ she planned for the School, showing how ‘the spirit of love’ had prevailed through the ages.

Police files contain biographical details of some of the more obscure figures who continued her work. Members of the Russian Association grouped around the Brisbane paper Knowledge and Unity were actively involved. M. J. Fagin, a former IWW official born in Russia in 1875 helped

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6 Communist, 1 July 1921.

7 Adela Pankhurst Walsh papers, Folder 86, MS 2123/9, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

8 Labor Daily, 19 January 1929.
in Sydney as did Krasnik, choir-master to the Russian Choral Society. A Scotland Yard report in the files of the CAG investigation branch mentioned another helper, Mrs J. Allison as one of two agents of the Young Communist International in Australia. Hedwig Weitzel, born in New Zealand of German parents, joined the group early in 1922. She came to Sydney after losing her post as a trainee teacher in Wellington, following publicity over a court conviction for selling anti-war literature on the streets. Through the Sunday School she met and married Hector Ross, another young adult helper. Both later became leading functionaries in the Sydney CPA.

In Brisbane Nicholai Lagutin helped form a Proletarian Sunday School in January 1922, and later tried to consolidate a branch of the Young Communist League (YCL) which grew out of it. A Russian emigre and friend of Peter Simonoff, the Soviet Consul General, the CAG investigation branch regarded Lagutin as the most dangerous fanatic in Queensland. They alleged he carried a revolver, had a mania for secret organisations and was adept at printing seditious literature. A leaflet Lagutin produced for young military trainees hints at his anarchist and IWW past:

Kings, Queens and rulers are parasites and only rule for the interests of the master class. They are always out to crush you and make you the underdogs ... we want you to be under our direction. You will believe in only one war and that is the class war, as there is nothing in common with you and the master

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9 Summary of Communism Vol. 1. op.cit.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
class. Always study and practise direct action, as this is the most effective weapon for use against the capitalist.\textsuperscript{13}

Communist and Proletarian Sunday Schools were formed at the instigation of the Young Communist International (YCI) to neutralise 'the pernicious nationally-chauvinistic influence of the bourgeois schools'. Founded in Berlin in November 1919 as the youth movement of the Comintern, the YCI traced its origin to a wartime conference of socialist youth, held in Berne, Switzerland at Easter 1915 attended by delegates from neutral and belligerent countries. Supported by the Bolsheviks, this gathering signalled a dual revolt against militarism and the passivity of the International Federation of Socialist Youth - supposedly the youth wing of the Second International, but in reality a loose amalgam without any joint political programme or activity. The Berne conference designated a date in September as International Youth Day on which, for the remainder of the war, it held strikes and other protests for peace co-ordinated through its journal, Die Jugend Internationale.\textsuperscript{14}

The manifesto of the Young Communist International, first published in Australia in November 1921, emphasised the continuity of this tradition. It urged working class youth to throw off the shackles of disfranchisement, wage slavery and mental drudgery and win political freedom. It was the historical task of the present generation to realise the world revolution, the material conditions for which had already matured. Young workers needed to shed all traces of apathy and utilise every instrument of revolutionary class warfare in the struggle, including armed resistance.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Summary of Communism Vol.1, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{14} W. Munzenberg, 'Socialist-Communist Youth during the War' Communist, 1 December 1927, pp.14-17.

\textsuperscript{15} Communist, 11 November 1921.
In July 1921 the Sussex Street party held a Children's Night of songs and recitations at the Concordia Hall, Sydney to raise funds for famine relief in Soviet Russia. Communist children were joined by pupils of the Granville Socialist Sunday School, in which Jock Garden and Mrs Allison were influential. They may have taken this Socialist Labor Party venture under their wing during the universal euphoria on the Left for the Russian Revolution, as Alice C. Cogan appears to have done with another Socialist Sunday School at Broken Hill. Cogan, who had links with the VSP and Women's Peace Army, was listed by Scotland Yard as the second agent of the Young Communist International in Australia.

The leaders of the Sydney Communist Sunday School generally kept aloof from rival Socialist children's organisations, castigating their 'muddling ideas' and non-political 'humanitarian' education. One of their early communications to the Young Communist International insisted:

...educational work among the young proletariat was negligible prior to the formation of the YCL ... Communists practically had to launch the movement themselves.

Convinced their work heralded 'the dawn of rebel youth', the Sunday School's adult mentors were apt to exaggerate the originality of their project. In fact they owed a debt to the VSP and to a tradition of propaganda among boy conscripts established by the ASP and IWW before the Great War.

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16 Communist, 8 July 1921, see also the Sydney Sun, 2 May 1920.

17 Summary of Communism Vol. 1, op.cit.

18 Young Communist, February 1923.

19 Summary of Communism Vol. 1, op.cit.

20 J. Barrett, op.cit., pp. 92-93.
In its first month the Sydney Communist Sunday School enrolled thirty pupils between the ages of eight and seventeen years. To spur them on during the week, some were asked to prepare topical 'lectureettes', to be followed by questions and discussion. By the early 1920s theories of education and child development in vogue at first among professionals, had begun to be imported from America. Some of these entered the philosophy of the Sunday School. Adela Pankhurst Walsh enthused over the adoption of a series of classes on industrial and social history, designed for children by Katherine E. Dopp, lecturer in Education at the University of Chicago.\(^\text{21}\) Mrs Allison, who wrote articles on child psychology in the *Communist*, urged Sunday School teachers not to replicate the repressive methods used in State day schools. She believed 'iron discipline' had no place in the 'scientific training' of young people as this interfered with the child's 'natural method of spontaneous development'.\(^\text{22}\)

Early in 1922, in a quest for more spacious accommodation, the Sunday School moved to the Communist Hall on Sussex Street. Its syllabus could now be expanded to include ballet dancing, physical culture classes and a choir. An appeal to comrades and friends to help assemble a library suitable for young people stressed that it must not include

... inane tales of love sick youths and beautiful maidens, of heroes and villains and other crass nonsense that goes to make up the sum total of the literature that is ladelled out to the youth of today by 'Bourgeois' writers.\(^\text{23}\)

The teachers, anxious that their pupils learned about Communism by first absorbing the most advanced aspects of contemporary culture, orgran-

\(^{21}\) *Communist*, 7 October 1921.

\(^{22}\) *Communist*, 1 September 1922.

\(^{23}\) *Communist*, 5 May 1922.
ised trips to art galleries and museums. They also attached great importance to games and political education out of doors. On 10 September 1922 a Communist 'Youth Day' was held in the Domain. This had the two-fold objective of demonstrating the collective progress of the children and the ability of the Sunday School to work in public on its own.24

The adult Sunday School Committee held that the primary goal of revolutionary education was to inculcate a spirit of audacity in the child, to awaken feelings of independence and responsibility, combined with a sense of solidarity.25 The Committee assured parents that it had no intention of producing a group of 'political intellectuals'. But rather, by giving children a thorough grounding in history, economics and sociology, they hoped to create cadres capable of applying their knowledge 'for the benefit of their fellows in the everyday struggle'.26

A critique of contemporary State education underpinned this approach. Hedwig Weitzel elaborated it in an article on 'Education in Australia' which appeared in the Young Communist International's Bulletin for Leaders of Communist Children's Groups. She commenced by attacking the hypocrisy of modern education which paid lip-service to instilling 'enobling ideals', while training the children of the poor to 'jump at the word of command'. Weitzel invited the sceptical to visit any large Sydney school and witness for themselves how stultifying routine played a central role in enforcing obedience. From the moment they entered the system mental and physical punishment was employed to deter children from voicing contradictory views to those of the authorities. She further accused

24 Communist, 29 September 1922.
25 Communist, 20 October 1922.
26 Ibid.
State schools of being deliberately out of touch with the lives of those they regimented and failing to provide a satisfactory explanation of social inequality.27

Pronouncements of this kind alarmed newspaper editors and conservative politicians. The Sydney Sun fired the first round in a continuing campaign, when it implied that Communist education disturbed innocent youth by stressing the sad and sordid aspects of life.28 Albert Bruntnell, who held Parramatta for the Nationalists, expressed similar views during the New South Wales State elections of March 1922 after which he became Minister for Public Instruction in the National-Progressive Party government headed by Sir George Fuller. A staunch Methodist who portrayed the British Empire as 'standing white and clean on the summit of civilisation', he claimed that 'extremists' who had conquered the Labor Party were in league with 'certain socialistic proletarian Sunday Schools', where children were taught that patriotism was 'international black-legging'. Bruntnell singled out several couplets, supposedly in common use, as particularly objectionable:

We the rebel children sing, perish every Count and King.
We've a world to save and win in the revolution.

And:

Dividends rent and interest, chicanery, lies and brag.
These are the gods of the Empire, their symbol the British flag.29

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28 For a reference to this article, but no specific date see, Young Communist, January 1923.

29 Sydney Morning Herald, 8 May 1922.
Cartoonists like Will Donald of the *Australian Worker* made fun of Bruntnell's obsession, (fig. 2) which he shared with Thomas John Ley who entered the controversy in May 1922. Ley was now Minister of Justice in the Fuller ministry. One of Ley's first priorities was to draft a bill for the prevention of seditious teaching to children. He accused Communist Sunday Schools of 'white-anting the Empire' and 'raising a race of criminals and dis-loyalists'. Fear of 'Red' subversion was a world-wide phenomenon in the years immediately following the Russian revolution. Ley alluded to this when he mentioned a 'Christian Counter-Communist Crusade' in Britain with similar aims. His bill advocated severe penalties in New South Wales, 'to prevent the minds of young Australians being polluted'.

Ley may have been privy to reports by the CAG investigation branch which became obsessed with finding examples of blasphemy in the curriculum of Communist Sunday Schools. Yet in failing to prepare his case rigorously he got hopelessly entangled and emerged as something of a laughing stock. Jock Garden replied to Ley's wild allegations about the contents of a so-called 'Communist Catechism' for children. He accused the Minister of acting hysterically and claimed his real motive had been to create a climate of moral panic in order to justify a campaign of mob violence against the labour movement. The *Australian Worker* printed the catechism in full as part of Garden's rebuttal. It was in fact the VSP Sunday School's 'Ten Commandments of Socialism' under another name,

30 *Worker*, 25 May 1922.

31 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 May 1922.

32 Summary of Communism Vol. 1, op.cit.
Figure 2

Albert Bruntnell's extreme patriotism and somewhat irrational fear of subversion, made him a figure of fun in the labour press.

(Australian Worker, 20 September 1922).
originally borrowed by that party from a handbook of the National Council of British Socialist Sunday Schools:

Love your school fellows who will be your fellow workmen in life.

Love learning which is the food of the mind; be grateful to your teachers as to your parents.

Make every day holy with good and useful deeds and kindly action.

Honour good men; be courteous to all men; bow down to none.

Do not hate or speak evil of anyone, but stand up for your rights and resist oppression.

Do not be cowardly; be a friend to the weak and love justice.

Remember that all good things of the earth are produced by labour; whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.

Observe and think in order to discover the truth; do not believe what is contrary to reason and never deceive yourself or others.

Do not think that he who loves his country must hate or despise other nations, or wish for war which is a remnant of barbarism.

Look forward to the day when all men will be free citizens of one fatherland and live together as brothers in peace and righteousness.\(^{33}\)

Ley allowed his seditious teachings bill to lapse, but Bruntnell, as Minister of Education, used the furore as a pretext to introduce a flag-saluting ceremony and oath of allegiance into State schools. I deal with this in a separate chapter on labour attempts to alter the school curriculum. I also touch on proposals to introduce an oath of loyalty for teacher applicants, one of several measures to combat Communist influence in

\(^{33}\) *Australian Worker*, 1 June 1922.
schools introduced in 1932-33 by D. H. Drummond, New South Wales Minister of Education in B. S. B. Stevens' UAP-Country Party government.

Contacts with the Young Communist International were strengthened at the end of 1922 when an Australian delegate attended the YCI's third congress. This was almost certainly Tom Payne, a twenty-four year old Balmain bootmaker who accompanied Jock Garden to the fourth congress of the Comintern. In August 1922 the Sussex Street party had obtained sole recognition as Comintern affiliate and thereafter absorbed its Liverpool Street rival. During their stay in Moscow, Trotsky appealed to Payne and Garden to launch a fully-fledged Young Communist League on their return. The gist of his remarks, published in the Communist, was that young people were the barometer of a country's political development and to win their sympathy would ensure future control of the Commonwealth.34

The CPA had already begun to form a Young Communist League in October 1922 when it commenced publication of the Young Communist. This appeared as a supplement to the Party's weekly paper. It was edited by Hedwig Weitzel and bore the figure of a truculent small boy waving a red flag on its front page. (fig 3) At first its content reflected politically diverse views. Articles by Maud Woodbury, an elderly woman once active in the Socialist Labor Party, were written in a flowery exuberant style reminiscent of much late 19th and early 20th century socialist oratory. For a time she regaled her 'dear young comrades' with descriptions of her garden in Cessnock, the glory of the bush when wattle was in bloom, or the curative properties of fresh air.35

34 Summary of Communism Vol. 1, op.cit.
35 Young Communist, October 1922.


FREEDOM!

Nature is now awakening to new life, and signs of spring and summer are all around us. It is a time in the life of every human being which resembles spring, and they are those days when the school doors closed behind us for the last time. Our bands filled with very plans for our future, we counted the days until the gray school wall should vanish and we should be free!

Well do I remember, a sermon which we heard when leaving school. The old headmaster told us, of how when ships leave port they are exposed to every storm and how, if the man at the wheel makes the slightest mistake, the ship will perish on the rocks. He told us we were all alike, that the ship and the crew. They all should be saved.

And what was the Right Way? Today I know it was the wrong one, as you can see by taking the life of most of our school children.

Dear children! You are mostly so happy when you escape from the walls of the schoolroom. "Free at last!" You have your plans for the future, but most of you, though they would like to go on and learn something better, are, forced to work in the factories, for your parents need the help you are capable of giving them. Your ambition is to save, and you have escaped from the rule of the schoolmaster, you will have to endure a much severer and longer one, that of your employer. You are in chains again.

And even during your childhood, how did you run through the streets working hard from morning till night for other people, so that they were too tired to take much notice of you. Perhaps for a few hours on Sundays they could attend to you, but mostly you grew up as the children of the working class do grow up, "school"—"childhood"—neglected—knowing little of care or love.

And then you went to school. Weak, un-grounded, you were little able to attend to what you were being taught. And what were you taught? A little reading and writing, and arithmetic: a good deal of religion and patriotism, when the kings and queens were born, and when they died, what heroic deeds they (their!) did, and how their states loved them! And that was all.

A scientific account of our lives and the history of mankind was never given us. You were never taught that things were ever so different a while back, and that they were changing all the time. But you were taught, all the more, a blind and stupid belief in obedience to the present authorities. You were taught to believe them perfect.

How different was it with the rich people's children! They do not know what it is to wait a book, or food, or clothes. They have grown up in beautiful mansions, surrounded with gardens. They have better clothes to wear; they are taught all the best things and learn much more than we can in our own miserable schools. They can remain at school until they are sixteen, and then go to the University. It does not matter whether they are as stupid as blocks of wood. Their parents can pay for their education.

"You, meanwhile, are standing at your table or bench in factory or workshop. Every day, a ceaseless battle. You wear shabby clothes, sleep in wretched damp holes and breathe in all the poisons at the atmosphere of the factory. Very soon you realize that this is not your expected freedom. Your hopes and plans are even.

School children! You are at the beginning of a new life, wherein no religion or schoolmaster, to be as sheep, never to break out of the old path, always to be quiet and peaceful citizens, who consider everything right, which comes from the Government! Never to think about the misery of your class, which you can see all around you! Never to wonder why some of the workers starve and all have hardships now and again, while the idle rich have the best of everything there is, though they never work for it! Always be "contented," when the boss tells you to be so! Always to regard ourselves as the "lower" class, because we were taught to do so! Always to be happy because we have a wretched shilling for the pictures or for a slice of bread!

But the other way is a freedom way. It may be long, but we see our position; we know what must be done, and we are filled with hope and determination. The depression of ignorance, which weighs down many of the workers, is not ours. We can never despair.

The working youth of this country will not find it hard to understand the way to change. They will decide to work together to break the chains of slavery, which are loaded on the workers, and they will fight until there are no longer rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, but the working class owning the earth.

We, young workers, do not stand alone. Hundreds of thousands all over the world are joined as we are, in the Communist Parties or the Young Communist leagues, for now we realize that we must fight alongside our fathers and mothers for the foundation of our class.

We are the strongest, biggest class. Therefore, though we have a few set-backs owing to our lack of organization, we must fight.

To all our young workers, who want freedom, we appeal. Join us! We need you to help us, and to tell you how to help yourself.

Shall you complain who feed the world? Who clothe the world?
Who house the world?

Shall you complain who are the world? Or what the world may do?
As from this hour, you see your power. The world must follow you.

The world's life hangs on your right hand! Your strong right hand! Your skilled right hand!

Shall you complain who are the world? Or what the world may do?
As from this hour, you see your power. The world's life hangs on your right hand!

The power that lies in you! Stand all as one! See justice done!
Believe and Diao and Do.

Figure 3

Young Communist, published by the CPA, appeared from October 1922 to August 1923 as a monthly supplement in the Party paper, Communist.
Hedwig Weitzel's editorials often gave the impression she intended pandering to larrikinism. In the first edition she set her sights on children who had grown up 'under-nourished, denied, beaten', the 'desperate, furtive eyed', those 'without reverence for the law', for they alone might be expected to become 'fighters in the revolutionary class war'.\(^{36}\) Weitzel returned to this theme when she discussed the life style of Sydney's 'city sparrows', children forced to survive on the streets by petty theft.\(^{37}\) Her preoccupation with this segment of youth perhaps represented an echo of an anarchist obsession with the declassed, transmitted by those Wobblies who joined the CPA with an eye to winning it for syndicalism.

The Young Communist International's assessment of the first edition of the *Young Communist* was far from flattering. It conceded that it might have been excellent for enlightening parents, but found it totally unsuitable for children. Most of the articles were above their heads and failed to argue the Communist point of view succinctly. There was too much talk about 'beautiful nature' and not enough about why some children had to live in slums. The YCI considered it a mistake to help children forget their misery, rather they had to be told in simple terms why inequality existed and how to change it.\(^{38}\) The Sunday School Committee made strenuous attempts to improve the *Young Communist*, by including reports and anecdotes sent in by readers and publishing short stories, poems and jokes with a political message. Accounts of industrial accidents in the iron trades, the low pay of waitresses at Randwick or boys at Alexanders Shoe Shine Parlours, tell us

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36 Ibid.

37 *Young Communist*, July 1923.

38 *Young Communist*, March 1923.
something of the occupations of Sydney young communists, or the workers
they had contact with.

In February 1923 the Young Communist published a draft manifesto,
constitution and working programme for a Young Communist League of
Australia. The manifesto described the intolerable privations suffered by
the workers of various countries and noted that even in Australia men
who had fought for their country could now be found starving in the
streets. Social change, it predicted, would never be achieved through the
Labor Party, which helped perpetuate the system. Nor would long-term
benefits accrue through arbitration courts, co-operative societies, profit
sharing schemes, or other 'sops of the master class'.

Under its constitution YCL membership was open to all between the
ages of fourteen and twenty-six who agreed to abide by its rules and paid a
1/- initiation fee. The YCL would have a democratic centralist structure, in
which primary units of no less than five members were to be subject to the
decisions of higher committees. Youthful autonomy insisted on by Lenin
in The Youth International (1916) was only partially implemented. The
constitution stated that the YCL Central Executive, while carrying out a pro-
gramme decided at its own annual conference, would still 'remain under
the direction of the Communist Party'. A similarity of structure between
the two organisations and a system of 'exchange representation' guaranteed
this relationship at all levels.

Although the working programme mentioned sales of the Young
Communist and the value of attending weekly study circles on marxism, it
placed a new emphasis on trade union work. This reflected the priorities of
the YCI third congress and its slogan 'to the masses'. The attention of

39 Young Communist, February 1923.

40 Ibid.
Communist youth leagues was now directed away from purely propaganda activity to winning young workers by organising them on the basis of their daily struggles.\textsuperscript{41} The working programme acknowledged that in Australia the unions possessed no special structures to attract young people, but warned of creating internal dissention 'on a question of age'. It restricted the role of the YCL to that of an auxiliary recruiting agency. Only when it had cajoled sufficient numbers of young workers into joining an appropriate trade union might it commence the fight 'to win them full equality'.\textsuperscript{42}

An inaugural meeting of the YCL at the Communist Hall on 15 March 1923 accepted these proposals. It also received greetings from a newly formed YCL Branch in Brisbane. The adults on the Sydney Sunday School Committee agreed to continue running that organisation separately, but some consented to serve on the new YCL Central Executive.\textsuperscript{43} Commenting on the launch of the Young Communist League, the director of the CAG investigation branch felt that 'such rubbish' would not be taken seriously by even the most immature of Australian youth. He may have thought these assurances were called for in reporting to his superior, as he informed his agents that the YCL 'might easily become harmful to the young and impressionable'. If membership growth in Sydney led to the formation of a YCL District Committee they were to inform him immediately.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} T. Wohlforth (ed), \textit{A History of the International Socialist Youth Movement}, pp. 22-25.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Young Communist}, February 1923.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Young Communist}, March 1923.

\textsuperscript{44} Summary of Communism Vol. 1, op.cit.
The early YCL's intention to 'keep as much in line with the Communist Party's policy as possible' seems to have been fully reciprocated. The branch committee minutes of Sydney CPA for 1922-23 reveal that adults regarded their youth movement as merely a useful appendage for leafleting and selling newspapers. Like their contemporaries on the opposite wing of the labour movement, Communists saw young people as a potentially malleable weapon in the hands of the employing class. Inevitably, older contributors to the Young Communist made this view explicit:

Get into the only youth organisation in existence that can help you in the present struggle ... you will then be of assistance to adult workers, instead of being as you are now while unorganised, just a tool in the hands of the boss; for with your cheaper labour he can force your fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters out of work, or can force them to accept lower wages and longer hours.

In August 1923 the re-named CPA Workers Weekly announced suspension of the Young Communist on grounds of cost and its replacement by a single page on youth affairs. Although a setback, the YCL put a brave face on the situation. It was soon to publish its first pamphlet, The Child of the Worker which, using material gleaned primarily from American sources, exposed the worst abuses of juvenile labour. The YCL also claimed that individual propaganda in the workshops and unions had already met with 'encouraging results' and its latest recruits showed 'great enthusiasm and earnestness'. A free speech campaign led by the CPA soon put this to the test. It arose out of the unexpected brutality of the

45 Communist Party of Australia Sydney branch minutes, 1922-23, MS 3000, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

46 Young Communist, October 1922.

47 Workers Weekly, 7 September 1923.
police who, following a Communist demonstration against unemployment, broke up a street meeting outside the New South Wales Parliament. The police issued eleven summonses and seven of the accused, having refused to pay fines, received terms of imprisonment. The CPA announced that it would defy the ban by holding weekly meetings every Friday and Sunday nights in the vicinity of Parliament House.48

Young Communists condemned the police response of continuing to issue summonses as 'fascisti methods' and held that it had sinister connotations following so closely the return of Sir George Fuller from Italy, where he had met Mussolini.49 A total of five Young Communists defied the courts and joined a larger 'Red Group' in Long Bay gaol. Hector Ross, incarcerated amidst the prison's 'maze of gloomy corridors and dingy ill-lighted cells', spent his days picking oakum or mopping up puddles in the exercise yard, filled again immediately by the next shower.50 The free speech struggle ended in October 1923 when city officials agreed to negotiate. A face-saving formula enabled them to claim a review had been necessary due to traffic congestion, but they accepted that street corner meetings might once again be resumed.

Brisbane YCL maintained only nominal contact with the Central Executive in Sydney and exhibited a certain reluctance to honour its commitments. When it failed to forward its initiation fees on time it pleaded 'heavy financial obligations', arguing that it had first to build up a reserve fund of its own and a larger following. Nor could it supply regular reports for the Young Communist as its members were all too busy

48 Workers Weekly, 17 August 1923.

49 For reference to Fuller's admiration of Mussolini see, M. Cathcart, Defending the National Tuckshop, p.33.

50 Workers Weekly, 7 September 1923.
'working up to their necks inside other organisations'. Its outside contacts were one of Brisbane YCL's strengths. The Proletarian Sunday School, out of which it grew, had been a collective effort involving other labour movement bodies. The YCL upheld this tradition maintaining contact with the Brisbane Labour Girls Club, and the Valley Football Club, which passed a motion to assist the YCL in various ways.

In both centres the YCL targeted groups of young people it considered particularly rebellious or resentful. Its members leafleted juvenile military trainees, apprehending them on their way to night parades and drill. In January 1924 Sydney YCL held a conference on child migrants and the need to organise the hundreds arriving under the provisions of the 1922 Empire Settlement Act. These initiatives addressed contemporary issues but actually joining the YCL must still have seemed an onerous prospect. Apart from an occasional social and, belatedly, some ball games and gymnastics, the YCL shunned most of the pleasures that made life worth living. One need not delve far through its literature to discover a dogmatic repudiation of cheap fiction, cinema halls, racecourses, 'Sunshine Club' outings for slum children and even Christmas dismissed one-sidedly as 'a festival for the boss'.

By April 1924 it had become apparent that a repetitive diet of education had led the YCL into a blind alley. A doleful report in the *Workers Weekly* confessed:

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51 *Young Communist*, April 1923.
52 See Chapter 4 i.
53 *Young Communist*, April 1923.
54 *Young Communist*, January 1923.
Our membership increased slowly, but the continual study of working class propaganda seemed to stop our progress, due to the fact that the young workers whom we came in contact with could not adapt themselves to the studies which we decided was necessary to make them fit and able propagandists on behalf of the working class.\(^\text{55}\)

At some point between April 1924 and July 1927 YCL activity ceased altogether. The Communist Sunday Schools also withered away, beginning with the one in Melbourne which collapsed in 1922 when the first attempt to consolidate a Communist Party branch in that city also had to be abandoned.\(^\text{56}\) The period was not entirely devoid of experiment. A few Communists continued to grapple with the problem of reviving a youth movement, or at least with putting forward the programme of the party inside other labour youth organisations. Adela Pankhurst Walsh rejoined the VSP when she returned to Melbourne and in May 1924 the *Union Voice* reported that she had assumed the position of organiser at its children's Sunday School.\(^\text{57}\) I enumerate the various links between the CPA and the ALP's Victorian Labor Guild of Youth (1926-28) in a separate chapter on that organisation.

The vicissitudes faced by the Communist Party between 1923-25 explain the temporary abandonment of its youth work. Until June 1923 the CPA's policy of 'boring from within' the ALP had met with considerable success. It had secured probationary affiliation in New South Wales, where the ALP had also committed itself to a socialist programme. But in October 1923, due to a determined struggle by J. T. Lang and P. F. Loughlin, the New South Wales ALP reversed its decision on Communist affiliation, claiming

\(^{55}\) *Workers Weekly*, 5 April 1924.


\(^{57}\) *Union Voice*, 15 May 1924.
that the rules of the party did not allow members to have dual loyalties. Cast out of the ALP and plagued by internal strife, the CPA's influence in the working class movement dwindled to almost nothing. When the Bruce Page government amended the Crimes Act at the end of 1925, after months of industrial turmoil on the waterfront, the CPA or what remained of it, prepared itself if necessary to go underground.

At the CPA Conference in 1925 Jack Kavanagh was prominent in a new leadership which emerged. Born in Ireland, he had emigrated to Canada where he played an active role in left-wing politics, but had only recently arrived in Australia. Kavanagh's faction scorned the 'liquidationists', those like Garden in Sydney and Baracchi in Melbourne who wanted to dissolve the Communist Party in order to continue the struggle from within the ALP and the unions, to transform them in a Left direction. Kavanagh rallied members who opposed this position and in 1926 he became editor of the *Workers Weekly*. His more orthodox Leninist formula which stressed the separate identity of the CPA and the intensive political education of its cadres, favoured the re-birth of a Communist youth movement.

In December 1925 the Sydney District Committee of the CPA resolved to re-form a children's group. A month later in the *Workers Weekly*, Kavanagh appealed for a more widespread revival of youth activity to act as an antidote to 'the scab-herding tendencies' of the YMCA and 'the doctrines of submission to capitalism' preached by the Boy Scouts. The CAG


59 Special File No. 42, Bundle 94, Item 64, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

60 F. Farrell, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

61 *Workers Weekly*, 29 January 1926.
investigation branch noted that early in 1926 Nicholai Lagutin had contacted the CPA Central Committee requesting that William Rust, General Secretary of the British Young Communist League, be brought to Australia to help revive the YCL. Rust's imprisonment during the British General Strike apparently put paid to this plan.62

Communists in Sydney responded to Kavanagh's appeal by launching a Young Comrades Club in September 1926. This was open to young people under the age of sixteen and the club adopted Harry Politt, a foundation member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, as its patron. Over the next eighteen months the CPA opened similar clubs at Lithgow, Brisbane, Cairns and Melbourne. Young Comrades Clubs were modelled on the Young Pioneers - the children's organisation of the Soviet Communist Party. Members had red and white uniforms and for trips to the beach, a large red star sewn onto their swimming costumes. Their repertoire of revolutionary songs, rendered lustily at picnics and other outdoor events, attracted considerable public curiosity.63

Joy Barrington, a young adult organiser of the club in Sydney, believed that its political style reflected a new precocity in the Australian child. The 'charming child' had given way to 'the fine fellow', who would no longer stand apart and stare at adults with his thumb in his mouth, but eagerly join in their conversations. She thought that parents who kept children tied to their apron strings were sadly behind the times.64 Adult supervision was less pronounced in the Young Comrades Clubs, with the children themselves taking a more direct role in the running of their own

63 Workers Weekly, 19 November 1926.
64 Labor Youth, April 1927.
affairs. In Sydney the membership was divided into five teams along the lines of the Boy Scout patrol system, but with elected 'physical culture captains' who took charge of fitness exercises and reported on individual progress. Members also took turns to be secretary and shared the task of looking after the club's library and play equipment.

In common with several trade union journals, the *Workers Weekly* encouraged children's correspondence on a page devoted to 'The Young Comrade' (fig.4). A kindly 'uncle' evaluated the children's letters, which were often rich in observation and spontaneous social comment. The page sponsored competition essays on 'The differences between the lives of workers and bosses children' and 'What a Young Comrade should do during a strike'. An anonymous writer even broached the taboo subject of 'How We are Born', to circumvent the reticence of 'Mr and Mrs Darken' who allegedly were too narrow minded to discuss the meaning of life with their children.65

Newspapers and conservative politicians again waxed loud in their condemnation. The *Sydney Morning Herald* accused the Young Comrades Clubs of teaching children 'the psychology of mob oratory'. It also cited a recruiting leaflet brought to its attention by a Nationalist politician, which told school pupils that a 'gosling' was a child who believed everything the teacher said and whose sole ambition was to join the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides. 'Don't be a Gosling, be a Young Comrade', the leaflet concluded.66

The Goslings (1924), by the American author Upton Sinclair, enjoyed a considerable vogue on the Australian Left in the mid-1920s. It purported to unmask the hidden capitalist manipulation of the public school system and

65 *Workers Weekly*, 9 September 1927.

66 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 September 1927.
Young Comrade, a single page supplement appeared in the CPA's Workers Weekly on nine occasions between April and December 1927.
its revelations caused some concern in conservative circles. A Nationalist representative for Upper Yarra in the Victorian Legislative Assembly went to the length of asking the Premier what steps he would take to protect school children, should the Young Comrades Clubs disseminate excerpts of this propaganda in that State.\textsuperscript{67}

The revival of the Young Communist League owed much to the educational work of the Young Comrades Clubs. Bertha Laidler graduated to the YCL via this route, becoming president of a new branch with ten members, formed in Melbourne in July 1927.\textsuperscript{68} After just over a year as a Young Comrade in Sydney, Jimmy McPhee joined a re-constituted branch of the YCL there in October 1927. Both branches remained tentative for a time and the one in Sydney was reported to still 'languish in an undeveloped state' at the eighth Annual Conference of the CPA in 1928.\textsuperscript{69} But neither collapsed entirely and in the early 1930s they provided a nucleus around which YCL District Committees were built up.

Towards the end of the 1920s the Communist Party began to assess its work amongst children and young people. No textual evidence of these discussions has survived, but we can still piece together some of the pitfalls the CPA failed to avoid. The party paid little attention to training a body of cadres to be in charge of its youth movement. There was a constant fluctuation of leaders and many who offered their services were accepted on trust, regardless of their suitability. Any difficulties arising in the children's movement were supposed to be resolved in close consultation with the YCL. The Young Communist International prescribed this sensible proce-

\textsuperscript{67} Argus, 13 October 1927.

\textsuperscript{68} Special File No. 42, Australian Archives, ACT Branch, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
dure, but it broke down in Australia because the YCL remained more unstable than the children's sections it was supposed to lead. The early YCL also contented itself with the role of faithful auxiliary to the Party, instead of developing its own independent style of work.

The geographical isolation of the Communist Sunday Schools and YCL branches posed another problem. Barely in touch with each other, they remained tiny exclusive organisations. The family character of the Young Comrades Clubs is at once apparent. Fifty per cent of the letters and articles on 'The Young Comrade' page of the *Workers Weekly*, in its nine editions from April to December 1927, came in from children in just four Communist families. After an Australian attended the third congress of the Young Communist International in 1922, the YCL sent no other fraternal delegates abroad until the early 1930s or at least none that were acknowledged as such.\(^70\) This lack of contact meant that the Young Communist International was ignorant of the living and working conditions of Australian youth. As late as 1929 it still lumped together colonial and semi-colonial countries like India and China with Dominions such as Australia and New Zealand. It also assumed that the exploitation of child labour, endemic in the first two countries, was a problem common to all.\(^71\)

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70 Hector Ross visited the Soviet Union in 1926, but apparently not on behalf of the YCL, see *Workers Weekly*, 13 August 1926.

The Clerks Union proposed the formation of a Victorian Labor Guild of Youth (VLGY) in a resolution to the Annual Conference of the Victorian ALP at Easter 1926. The idea was unanimously approved and the Conference appointed a special Youth Movement Committee to canvass recruits, draft a provisional charter of aims and objectives and organise a founding meeting. The Central Executive of the Victorian ALP donated £25 towards the wages of an honorary secretary and seconded Muriel Heagney to fill the position.1 Born in Brisbane in 1885, Muriel Heagney came from a solid Labor background. Her father was a foundation member of the ALP and became secretary of the Victorian Central Executive after the family moved to Melbourne. Muriel trained as a primary school teacher but soon abandoned this profession. In 1909 she was elected to the ALP Women’s Central Organising Committee. During the Great War she worked as a clerk in the Defence Department and from 1919-20 as an investigator for the Federated Unions in their submission to the Royal Commission on the basic wage. She travelled in Europe from 1923 to 1925, meeting Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb, but also visiting Berlin and the Soviet Union, from which she returned favourably impressed.2

Muriel Heagney defined her role on the Youth Movement Committee as an intermediary between different generations, but also as a staunch upholder of Labor Party principles. Those who helped her steer the VLGY into existence were almost all adults, including a sprinkling of party notables such as the MLAs Jack Holland and Maurice Blackburn. To ALP families and unions with a predominantly juvenile membership they circulated a

1 N. W. Saffin, op.cit., p.38.

four page pamphlet entitled *The Labor Guild of Youth: What it is!*. It stated that the Guild had been inspired by similar experiments overseas - possibly a reference to the British Labour Party which had just launched its own League of Youth. The founders of the Guild hoped to emulate the success of the Boy Scouts, the Toc H and the YMCA, yet at the same time emphasised the uniqueness of their own approach:

> Every other organisation has been handed down to them ready made by older folk. But here is a glorious opportunity for youth to make and mould an organisation of its own conception of what is necessary for a complete and happy social life.\(^3\)

The Charter of the VLGY offered membership to all under twenty-five who accepted the principles and ideals of Labor. Those who joined were divided into senior and junior groups, above and below the age of sixteen, but all were enrolled in a Central Guild of Youth administered by an elected Council. The Charter stressed the importance of political education, but the Guild would also promote music, drama, art and literature through sub-committees and attract young workers through a broader programme of recreation and entertainment.\(^4\)

Prominent laborites vied with one another in their enthusiasm for the project. E. J. Hogan, leader of the Victorian ALP, hailed 'the advent of youth' with its fresh outlook as 'a vital new force in politics'.\(^5\) J. F. Chapple, General President of the ARU, thought that more young people in the public arena would 'satisfy an age old want' as 'greybeards' had always bungled the nation's affairs.\(^6\) Despite these paeans of praise, the ALP's attitude towards young people was still paternalistic. At the inaugural

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3 Merrifield Collection, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.

4 Labor Youth, December 1926, p.33.

5 Ibid., p.28.

6 Ibid., p.21.
meeting of the VLGY on 19 October 1926, the Charter was presented as virtually a fait accompli. It gave the Guild limited powers to draft its own 'internal by-laws', but these had to conform with the standing orders of ALP branches. A clause which allowed tutors and organisers to remain in office over twenty-five enabled Muriel Heagney to keep the pivotal position of treasurer-secretary, even though she was forty-one years of age.

These restrictions caused resentment. A few timid souls thought adult supervision was necessary until the VLGY found its feet, but the majority of members united in a bid to remove Muriel Heagney at the first opportunity. In February 1927 a VLGY 'Constitutional Committee' demanded that the organisation be totally under the control of youth and that the functions of secretary and treasurer be separated. It insisted that the Guild had little in common with the average ALP branch and therefore ought to be free to define its own rules. Nor had the ALP Central Executive any right to intervene, as the VLGY had no representation on that body.

The leaders of the ALP eventually made some concessions to these demands, but they clearly regarded Muriel Heagney's presence in the VLGY as a kind of guarantee. Mary Lazarus, a young school teacher elected vice-president of the Guild, complained that although Labor youth in Australia knew of similar movements overseas, they were ignorant of what their foreign comrades were thinking. With her European contacts, Muriel Heagney must have known of the crisis then current in the Young Socialist International. When VLGY members succeeded in removing her at their annual general meeting in July 1927, she continued to operate as secretary of

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8 Minute Book of the Labor Guild of Youth, 2 February 1927, Merrifield Collection, op.cit.
9 Labor Youth, December 1926, p.3.
the ALP Youth Movement Committee. In raising funds for the VLGY and controlling their flow, this adult body retained important regulatory powers.\(^\text{10}\)

Developments overseas fuelled the ALP hierarchy's mistrust of youth. Since its formation in 1923 the Young Socialist International (YSI) had been plagued by internal strife. An affiliated membership originally 250,000 strong had dwindled to 195,000 by mid-1927. Its sections in Germany, Belgium and Holland had declined by fifty per cent, while the Italian Young Socialists had been disbanded altogether due to the fascist terror. In Britain, membership of the Independent Labour Party Guild of Youth, founded in 1924, fell from 10,000 at the beginning of 1926 to a mere 1,327 members in April of the following year.\(^\text{11}\) Traumatic events like the British General Strike or the Vienna insurrection of July 1927 produced splits and defections but the activities of Left oppositional groups inside the YSI's main affiliates caused the greatest damage. These openly flirted with the Young Communist Leagues, contributed to their publications and to the embarrassment of most Social Democratic parties, worked with Communists in united-front committees.\(^\text{12}\)

In Australia where the possibility of Communist infiltration was only slight, the situation appeared completely different. Nevertheless, some members of the VLGY were influenced indirectly by the Russian revolution, or were heir to a more diffused 'workerist' sentiment which preceded it by more than a decade. In early 20th century poster art, faith in the imminent seizure of power by the working class was symbolised by the proletarian

\(^{10}\) Minute Book of the Labor Guild of Youth, Addendum to the Financial Report, 27 April 1927, Merrifield Collection, op.cit.

\(^{11}\) A. Marwick, op.cit., p.46.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., pp.45-46.
giant, depicted as a Prometheus breaking his chains. This image, in suitably youthful form, silhouetted against an aestheticised background of smoking factory chimneys in the dawn, made up the cover of the Guild's quarterly journal Labor Youth (fig 5). Some had favoured 'Revolt' as a name for the publication, a sentiment expressed in verse by Winston Rhodes on the flyleaf of the first issue:

O youth with a song in thy heart and a passion of hope in thy breast
Lover-like flushed with a longing for melody vibrant in life
Thou of the vanguard of liberty, dreaming vague dreams of unrest
Breathing the spirit of Brotherhood, spending thy Springtime in strife
Visionary rebel art thou
(Born with revolt on thy brow)
Keep thou the gleam of the dawn
Sil'vring thy full-noted horn
Ready to pass undefiled to the Youth of the ages unborn.13

A student at Melbourne University, Winston Rhodes was influenced by expressionism, that peculiarly German literary phenomenon with its obsessive analysis of the conflict between generations and emphasis on the primacy of spiritual values, as against the base materialism of Mammon or Marx.14 Other contributors to Labor Youth assumed a similar air of romantic revolutionism, or defended that other expressionist tenet - the artist as outcast foe of society, yet potential liberator of the inarticulate but equally despised masses. 'The Song of the Wanderer', a poem by Ralph Gibson, student President of the Guild, typified a vague detached internationalism prevalent in contemporary youth culture, but soon destined to be replaced by a more committed outlook focused on specific local economic and social problems.

Figure 5

Labor Youth, December 1926. A well produced journal, the first of two editions. Its cover, designed by the art student Rona Bogg, used colour - the first labour youth publication to do so until the AYC’s Young Australia in 1937-38.
In the interim these bohemian pursuits provoked internecine squabbling and made the VLGY look like a snobbish clique to some outsiders.\textsuperscript{15} Working class recruits joined for quite mundane reasons - to meet members of the opposite sex or, in the case of aspiring lunch-break politicians, as the first step on the ladder to recognition in the ALP. In his survey of the Guild's minute book, N. W. Saffin has detected a rift between rival 'cultural' and 'entertainment' blocs.\textsuperscript{16} This conflict over the VLGY's programme reflected very different educational backgrounds and social expectations. It was, in part, an antagonism between young workers and students, although neither made up a politically homogeneous group. To illustrate, when Frank Courtney, a young plumber, denied that industrial workers wanted 'culture', Eileen Sinclair, a dressmaker, disagreed. She thought it was precisely the lack of culture and the labour movement's stark utilitarian image that deterred girls in her trade from being associated with it.\textsuperscript{17}

Some members found the eloquence of students and young teachers alienating, or resented their monopoly of key positions. Others who had not yet assumed entrenched positions became alarmed at the ferocity with which opposing points of view were expressed. Ivy Withecomb, a graduate of the VSP Sunday School, invoked Milton's plea for 'a little more generous prudence, a little more forbearance of one another and some grain of charity' in dealing with differences.\textsuperscript{18} Muriel Heagney also acted as peace maker, claiming that in Soviet Russia all who did socially useful labour

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Guido Barrachi papers, Folder 2, MS 5241, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} N. W. Saffin, op.cit., p.40.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Labor Youth, December 1926, p.11.
\end{itemize}
were classed as workers. She accepted that University and State High School students were more advantaged than those who entered industry at fourteen, but thought all young people drawn into the Guild ought to work together without discrimination.\textsuperscript{19}

The VLGY is unique among the ephemeral left wing youth organisations of the 1920s in bequeathing a full list of the names, age and occupations of its founding members. These were printed in a 'Roll of Honor' in the first edition of \textit{Labor Youth}. By December 1926 the Guild had enrolled forty-six girls and sixty-seven boys, with an average age of twenty. Skilled manual workers predominated but teachers, students and clerical workers, occupations associated with the middle classes, made up forty-five per cent of the total. Teachers and students held two out of three offices on the Guild's Central Executive and the chairmanship of five out of six of its cultural and political sub-committees.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite these problems the political and social life of the VLGY was extremely rich and varied. Professional politicians gave freely of their time, adding to the intellectual fare on offer. Tom Tunnecliffe MLA and J. H. Scullin, soon to be Prime Minister, both spoke at Guild meetings. Debates were held at first before home audiences, but later the Guild met outside bodies such as the Constitutional Club, or the junior section of the Victorian Teachers Union. With growing confidence VLGY members debated the desirability of motherhood endowment, the merits of the arbitration system, or whether profit sharing would reduce industrial unrest.\textsuperscript{21} The Guild demonstrated its support for peace and international understanding by

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\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Minute Book of the Labor Guild of Youth}, 17 November 1926, Merrifield Collection, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Labor Youth}, December 1926, p.32.
forming an Esperanto circle and sending delegates to meetings of the World Disarmament Movement.\textsuperscript{22} Among the subjects recommended for study circle activity by the Guild Central Executive, 'The New Capitalism' inspired the most thorough investigation. Under the chairmanship of Winston Rhodes, a band of enthusiasts studied the principles of industrial efficiency pioneered by the American Quaker F. W. 'Speedy' Taylor, and visited the Pelaco shirt factory in Richmond to see it operating in practice.

Examples of injustice at work prompted several girls to submit articles to \textit{Labor Youth}. Complaints about the unnecessary length of apprenticeships, or the lack of a transitional period between school and work, passed without comment. But when a lone voice attempted to discuss feminism it provoked a sarcastic male response. Alice Stewart, a University student, depicted housework as depressing and uncreative. Married women without a wage were degraded by having to rely on their husbands to 'keep' them. Social decay she insisted would only be arrested when women achieved equal economic status. Their place was neither in the home, nor in 'decorative idleness', but out in the community with men doing useful work. Alice Stewart looked forward to the 'socialised home' of the future, where child-rearing would be undertaken by specially trained persons as a career and spacious people's hostels replace the innumerable congested dwellings.\textsuperscript{23}

A move by the Guild to broaden debate by having Nationalist politicians address them led Muriel Heagney to refer the matter to the ALP who promptly vetoed it. Similar difficulties arose with the Communist Party, although Muriel Heagney proved less obstructive here, constrained no doubt by her sympathy towards the Soviet Union. In January 1927 the

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Melbourne CPA invited the Guild to support a speech night commemorating the death of Lenin and celebrations later in the year to mark the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. As neither function impinged on its own programme, the Guild's left wing faction easily dismissed allegations that participation might offend the ALP or Trades Hall Council. Objections were overruled again in 1928 when a small VLGY contingent took part in a CPA May Day event.

These overtures represented the limit of direct contact between the two organisations, but the Communist Party continued to exert an influence through fellow travellers in the Trades Hall Council and ALP. Percy Laidler, a member of the Council's Executive, and Guido Baracchi, a labour intellectual, had organised the inaugural meeting of the Communist Party in Melbourne. When this collapsed in 1922 they set up the Labor Propaganda group which used the Trades Hall Council to promote left wing policies and laid the ideological basis for re-constituting a Communist Party branch in 1924. The Trades Hall Council offered the VLGY a meeting place and when the latter discussed its political allegiances, Laidler spoke putting 'The Case for the Left'. He and Baracchi were active in the Victorian Labor College, a body which supplied the VLGY with a tutor in 1928 to lead a study circle on 'The Materialist Concept of History'. Bert Payne who spoke regularly at VLGY camps and meetings was removed as secretary of the Collingwood ALP in August 1928 because of his Communist sympathies.

Several articles in Labor Youth strayed from an orthodox ALP perspective. Henrietta Baracchi who wrote on 'Labor youth in Germany' told how the Social Democratic youth movement there, in defiance of party

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24 Communist Review, June 1937, p.50.

25 N. W. Saffin, op.cit., p.41.

26 Argus, 23 August 1928.
leaders, paid tribute to Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Leibknecht, Communists murdered by the military during the Berlin 'Spartakist' rising. Henrietta had spent two years in Germany from 1922-23 with her husband Guido, who had worked on the Comintern journal Inprecorr. She related her experiences during the abortive Communist insurrection in Hamburg, in the Proletarische Geshundheitsdeinst - a first aid unit for street fighters run by the Young Communist League.

The avant-garde experimentalism in the arts in the early years of the Russian revolution influenced other contributors. An editorial in the first edition of Labor Youth praised the mass literacy drives organised by Anatol Lunarcharsky, the Soviet Commissar for Education. Ivy Ferrie, a young worker, wrote enthusiastically about Soviet cinema, contrasting its collective heroes in films like Eisenstein's 'The Battleship Potemkin' with her perception of the decadence and militarism of the American film industry.

The Guild's use of drama helped to unite its socially variegated membership and proved popular with the ALP, whose branches incorporated performances in their own social activity. Some VLGY members understood the theatre's potential as propaganda. Alan Jones, a student who had visited England, described the work of the London Labour Dramatic Federation, with its affiliated societies and directors of international repute. Henrietta Baracchi wanted the Guild to develop an

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29 Labor Youth, April 1927, p.11.
Australasian version of Sprechor - the political speaking choirs she had seen used to great dramatic effect by the German Young Communist League.\textsuperscript{31}

The Guild's three dramatic groups combined their resources to produce 'The First Distiller', a temperance comedy by Tolstoy followed by 'The Patriots', a play about the ultimate victory of pacifism by the English socialist Wilfred Wellock. 'The Patriots' was not a success. Its shallow plot, overladen with caricatures, made for poor theatre as well as poor propaganda. Winston Rhodes, who agonised over the proper relation between the two, decided that in order not to 'expose sacred beliefs to the destructive fire of ridicule', the Guild should avoid bad art like the plague.\textsuperscript{32} After staging the second act of John Galsworthy's 'Strife', the dramatic groups attempted no further political themes. Thereafter they succumbed to the wishes of the 'entertainment bloc' with one act plays and light-hearted comedies such as 'Hyacinth Halvey', 'Wurzel Flummery' and 'Mrs Jupp Obliges'.\textsuperscript{33}

Other forms of home made entertainment under gradual erosion by radio and cinema flourished in the VLGY. Inspired by the Flemington ALP youth choir, the Guild had its own musical group. Lloyd Edmunds, who played the cornet, organised this and had song sheets printed. Renditions of 'The Red Flag' and 'Are Ye Willing to Work and to Wait', accompanied by piano, flute and violin, formed part of the Guild's fortnightly meetings. Monthly dances at the Trades Hall were rarely a financial success, but trips to the beach, or outings at weekends and holidays to the home and gardens of Minnie and Dick Long at Sandringham, were always well attended.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Labor Youth, April 1927, p.14.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p.15.

\textsuperscript{33} N. W. Saffin, op.cit., p.40.

\textsuperscript{34} K. J. Kenafick, op.cit.
Across its short span the VLGY maintained few outside contacts, nor did it try to build bridges to other young people through sport. In April 1927 it sent delegates to the first meeting of 'Youths Own Open Forum', sponsored by the YMCA, the Toc H and Youth Advance Australia Society. The Forum was to have provided an opportunity to debate youth problems, but when only twenty responded, including eight of its own members, the Guild withdrew in disgust.\(^{35}\) After several requests in 1928, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection obtained fifteen minutes to address one of the Guild's meetings. When they asked for a little more time, the anti-vivisectionists were brusquely informed that any extension would be impossible.\(^{36}\)

Its failure to consolidate and sustain initial membership growth contributed to the collapse of the VLGY at the end of 1928. At its peak in mid-1927, the Guild had about one hundred and fifty members, with a third or more in attendance at most meetings. Figures for 1928 seem not to have been kept, but the Guild's minute book records a progressive slump in attendance down to twenty or even less. A children's junior Guild operated for a time and local branches of senior members met at Box Hill and St Kilda. These offshoots were considerably hampered by lack of suitable meeting places and the indecisiveness of the Guild Central Executive who could never decide whether suburban groups would enhance growth or detract from a single, strong, central organisation.

Former participants speak highly today of Muriel Heagney's organisational skills.\(^{37}\) These attributes were lost to the Guild when she was

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35 Minute Book of the Labor Guild of Youth, 13 April 1927, Merrifield Collection, op.cit.

36 Ibid., 25 July 1928.

removed from office in July 1927, while the acrimony this entailed further alienated those trade unions with whom she had contact. The Operative Painters Union, the Saddlers and Leather Dressers, the Federated Engine Drivers and the Textile Workers Union had originally promised the Guild 'every assistance and co-operation'. But when internal squabbling broke out, most of them adopted a cautious 'wait and see' policy. While it met in their vicinity at the Trades Hall Council, the Guild was still invited to harangue union meetings. But even this uncertain method of recruitment ceased in April 1928 when the Guild moved to a new venue at the Free Religious Fellowship on Flinders Street.

Charles Silver, a High School student, tried to reverse the VLGY's growing isolation by proposing that links with the ALP and Trades Hall Council be renewed through formal affiliation. He also suggested that the Guild widen its recruitment base by extending its upper age limit to twenty-eight. Neither of these proposals obtained significant support. Relations between the VLGY and adult movement remained tense, even when the State Labor Party Conference at Easter 1928 consented to grant it equal representation on the Youth Movement Committee. The lukewarm reception this received and the time that elapsed before the Guild actually elected delegates, suggest that its loyalties had become deeply divided.

As the various study circles and sub-committees fell into disuse the Guild lost its inner dynamism and bickering between Right and Left resumed. Labor loyalists were disgusted when friendly resolutions were sent to the Communist Party and a portrait of Karl Marx was obtained and hung in the Guild's meeting room. If these gestures represented a left wing victory, it proved a pyrrhic one. Lloyd Edmunds has recalled that towards

38 Labor Call, 21 October 1926.

39 Minute Book of the Labor Guild of Youth, 18 April 1928, Merrifield Collection, op.cit.
the end of 1928 members just seemed to drift away haphazardly in different directions. Some were enticed into helping prolong the life of the VSP Sunday School for a few more months. Others, like Judah Waten, who had established a friendship with Percy Laidler’s daughter Bertha, probably found the new Melbourne YCL a pole of attraction, but some participants who embraced Communism insist that the process was still a comparatively gradual one. Ralph Gibson’s conversion via an interlude in the British student Labour Federation and Socialist Society at Manchester University, is amply documented by his biographer John Sendy.

Labor youth initiatives were not terminated after the VLGY’s collapse, although subsequent experiments tended to be directed from above and allowed less autonomy. At the State ALP Easter Conference in 1930, Jean Daley, secretary of the Women’s Central Organising Committee and a veteran of the Victorian Socialist Party, persuaded delegates to endorse the launch of a Labor Social and Sports Guild. This venture enlisted working class girls, had contact with the Socialist Workers Sports International and by April 1931 claimed 800 - 1,000 attending its physical cultural classes. Labor sports organisations were denied most of the private funding and press reportage available to their ‘non-political’ rivals, while the economic crisis made it difficult for ALP branches to make up these deficiencies. In March 1935 after J. J. Holland MLA became President of the ALP, the Guild was re-constituted as the Labor Sports and Cultural Federation of Victoria. It

41 Guido Barrachi papers, Folder 44, op. cit.
43 J. Sendy, op. cit., pp.27-42.
44 Labor Call, 9 April 1931.
now catered for both sexes and, having placed itself on a firmer footing in 1936 by soliciting union donations, accepted their players even where they were not individual members of the Labor Party.\textsuperscript{45} In 1941, under the rubric 'The Labor Club for the Labor Youth', the Federation re-introduced political debate.\textsuperscript{46}

Muriel Heagney's continuing interest in youth led her to organise a 'Girls Week' fund in August 1930, which raised £5,000 to inaugurate an Unemployed Girls Relief Movement. With Heagney as secretary and the sponsorship of a Labor government in Victoria until May 1932, the movement opened twenty-one centres where jobless girls produced hosiery goods and home-made jam at a wage of 7/6d per day. The promotion of a spirit of 'harmony and mutual service' in these enterprises led to vilification in the Communist press and the label 'social fascist'.\textsuperscript{47} The movement's real impact, however, may be gauged from the 10,000 applications it received across a two year period, when the estimated total of unemployed females in Melbourne stood at between eleven and twelve thousand.\textsuperscript{48} At their peak in the spring of 1931, its centres employed 4,500 girls a week, of whom 1,100 were classified as homeless.\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Workers Weekly}, 16 March 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Labor Sports and Cultural Federation of Victoria, Ref.1/2/1/9, Melbourne University Archives.
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{Working Woman}, 1 August 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{48} M. Heagney, \textit{Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?}, p.117.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Chapter 2

University Labour Clubs,

1925-35
Students who founded university Labour Clubs constituted the left wing of the 'gilded youth' or 'bright young things' - a phenomenon invented by the British press in 1924 and thereafter periodically revived. Whether or not they came from affluent backgrounds they were nevertheless considered a privileged group, spearheading more progressive attitudes to morals and ideas. Don Watson first explored this terrain in Australia, illuminating the process whereby a fragment of the student population rejected the university ethos, to embark on what Ian Turner has called their 'guilt-ridden attempt to transform society'. In this chapter I intend to update earlier work by incorporating and critically evaluating recent insights by Colin Jory and Michael Cathcart. I will also explore the origins of that dichotomy touched on by Robin Gollan when he wrote of student politics in the mid 1940s, that while the Left at Melbourne contributed to the intellectual life of the community their contemporaries at Sydney placed their faith in organisation and regarded themselves as tough political operators.

When students at the University of Sydney decided to form a Labour Club in April 1925 and others at Melbourne followed suit, they drew a good deal of their inspiration from British university life. Liberal and Conservative Clubs were formed at Cambridge in the 1880s and the first

3 I. Turner, 'Intellectuals in Australian Life', op.cit.
4 See C. H. Jory, The Campion Society and M. Cathcart, Defending the National Tuckshop.
Students Representative Councils appeared in Scottish universities. Before the Great War university socialism took its lead from Cambridge, but afterwards Oxford made the running. A University Labour Club formed there in 1919 remained robust enough in 1921 to host the launch of a national University Labour Federation. Student unions and student journalism made their debuts at this time. Cambridge undergraduates launched the magazine Cocoon in March 1921, changing its name shortly afterwards to Youth. Student conferences held in London that year resulted in the National Union of Students, a discreet and respectable organisation in its early days, concerned mainly with student travel and accommodation.

A trend towards forming similar bodies in Australia during the 1920s reflected the growth of indigenous pressure groups, themselves the product of a developing industrial society. A Public Questions Society (PQS), formed in 1918 at Melbourne University, helped reactivate political debate after the war. Like a similar body founded at Sydney University in 1923, it was run by members of staff and a few ex-servicemen who as students were untypically mature and politically conscious. They sought to bring the universities into contact with the outside world, but their passionate liberalism provided no guarantee against censorship. A 1920 issue of the Melbourne PQS journal Both Sides lamented that alone among university societies it had to submit for the approval of the Professorial Board not only the names of the leaders of its study circles, but a list of subjects also.

Public Questions Societies provided the main variation in a student outlook still overwhelmingly conservative. By making the declaration of

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7 A. Marwick, op.cit., p.39.

8 P. Coleman, Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition, p.111.
political ideologies acceptable they helped to bring political clubs a step nearer. But despite the debts they owed them, Labour Clubs symbolised a revolt against this abstract style of debate. Arthur Marwick has talked of an irrevocable 'law of the leftward drift' at work in progressive youth circles in the 1920s. Those students who succumbed in Australia sought an organisation capable to taking decisions, able to challenge an academic milieu which seemed to foster aloofness and enforced unwritten, allegedly time-honoured codes of 'correct' student behaviour.

The Labour Club at Sydney had its origins in an informal group of ALP supporters who met at the beginning of 1925 under the auspices of the University Union. In April of that year when Malcolm McDonald, son of the British Labour politician Ramsay McDonald, came to Australia in a debating team from Oxford University, they decided to act. To 'scoop' the official dinner for the Oxford debaters and simultaneously launch a Labour Club, socialist students held a separate function of their own. McDonald presumably co-operated, but an invitation to Labor candidates in the State Parliament election to address them caused the greatest uproar. Angry letters in the student press later insisted that the University stand aloof 'from all political engineering'. This response failed to dampen enthusiasm. The Labour Club proceeded to enroll its first members from the faculties of Arts, Science and Economics, with a sprinkling of part-time students who attended evening courses.

Whereas Melbourne University Labour Club shunned direct party affiliation, in Sydney a close relationship existed with the ALP until 1934. Sydney Labour Club played an active role in the State and Federal elections.

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9 A. Marwick, op.cit., p.40.
10 C. H. Jory, op.cit., p.29.
11 A. Barcan, op.cit., p.2.
of 1925, but its affinity made it vulnerable to vicissitudes in local party politics. The militant industrialists who supported Lang, and the Labor lobby from the country electorates who mounted a challenge to him in 1926, each had their adherents in the Labour Club. A decline which set in after only eighteen months may be attributed to the struggle between representatives of these outside factions.\(^{12}\) The Club eventually recovered, although it had to be reconstituted in 1931.

Equally short-lived at its inception, Melbourne Labour Club played a more significant role in student affairs and the intellectual life of the University. Some of the rather exclusive band who gathered to launch the Club in the winter of 1925 served on the editorial board of the student journal *Farrago* or had won office in the Students Representative Council. At first no consensus existed among them. The Fabianism espoused by their secretary Macmahon Ball, active in the Student Christian Movement, probably exerted the strongest influence. Of its inner circle, Brian Fitzpatrick alone had acquired some understanding of marxism,\(^{13}\) while Ralph Gibson, later a Communist functionary, believed that socialism had everywhere repudiated the totalitarianism of the Soviet regime.\(^{14}\)

Through their articles in *Farrago* these and other members of the Club succeeded in turning polite debates on the Seamen's strike of 1925 and the British General Strike of 1926 into major controversies. Contact with an earlier generation of socialists strengthened their radicalism. Clem Lazarus and P. D. Phillips, ex-servicemen who tutored at the University, introduced the concept that war had exposed the old order and thrown capitalism into doubt. R. S. Ross, secretary of the Victorian Socialist Party, met members of

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) D. Watson, *Brian Fitzpatrick : A Radical Life*, p.21.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
the Labour Club through his student son Lloyd, entertained them at the Cafe Latin and introduced them to other activists of his generation who spoke at the Club's early meetings.

Although Farrago concluded in 1928 that the heyday of the political clubs was over, the economic collapse transformed the situation virtually overnight. Three years later in a volte-face Farrago lamented student desertion of 'the mad follies of Commencement' for the 'sterner turbulent domain of party politics'. Unprecedented poverty led to widespread questioning of the social system. Universities became part of the intellectual ferment that was unleashed and, as the facade of detachment crumbled, political clubs started to revive.

In research into the Campion Society - the spearhead of Catholic social militancy between the wars - Colin Jury has insisted that the Labour Club at Melbourne displayed a fascination with marxism as early as March 1930. This assertion, apparently based on reports in Farrago or the press, is contradicted by other sources. Ralph Gibson has acknowledged that Charles Silver, a young Communist, played a vital role in reconstituting the Club in 1930, but he also points to Herbert Burton, its adult president, as another driving force. A member of staff and a convinced social democrat, Burton wielded considerable influence. As a founder of the Club he upheld its original Fabianism, a tradition for which he was prepared to fight. When Gibson resumed contact with the Club in 1932, having obtained an MA at Manchester University, Burton was still stubbornly waging a rearguard action against marxist influences.

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16 Ibid.
17 R. Gibson, The People Stand Up, p.45.
Although the situation altered, at Commencement in 1932 the Labour Club had only four members out of a total undergraduate population of 2,000.  

At Easter that year it invited Esmond Higgins of the CPA Central Committee to lead a series of discussions on marxism at its annual conference. Thirty attended and points of difference between communists and parliamentary socialists were debated for the first time. A report later appeared in the Club's new journal *Proletariat*.  

This marked the ascendency of communist influence at Melbourne, but it was never as monolithic or the Labour Club as 'ideologically marxist in complexion' as Jory suggests. Student communists had a reputation for advancing a line which was not always that of the Central Committee. In fact J. B. Miles, the General Secretary of the CPA, regretted that *Proletariat* had been 'thrown open to all comers' without editorial criticism. If not openly hostile to, its student members, the CPA in the early 1930s usually dismissed 'the university breed of socialists' as a fairly 'pale pink and harmless lot'.

John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney, was something of an exception. Well known to left wing students as unofficial theoretical advisor to the Communist Party and president of the University Freethought Society, he became an honoured contributor to *Proletariat*. Anderson, who arrived in Sydney from Scotland in 1927, had aligned with the CPA at a moment when, under the leadership of Jack

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18 W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.189.
19 *Proletariat*, April 1932.
20 W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.195.
21 *Workers Weekly*, 29 April 1932.
Kavanagh, it encouraged genuine theoretical debate. For a time Anderson accepted the 'third period' dogma introduced by the new Moxon-Miles-Sharkey leadership, but he soon clashed with Miles over the interpretation of Leninism.

Anderson took exception to Miles' implied strictures on the right of Proletariat to freely express divergent views. He accused him of sectarianism - not only for demanding a single line in the journal - but for failing to see that students were best radicalised 'not by the mechanical repetition of marxist phrases', but by being encouraged to think their own way forward from liberalism independently. When these points led to counter-criticism, Anderson incorporated his reply in a third article for Proletariat. The unusual and clandestine rejection of this contribution led to his break with the CPA. Anderson's biographer has stated that Geoff Sawer, the editor of Proletariat, did not see the article originally but assumed Anderson had first submitted it for scrutiny by communists in the Club. Years later Sawer discovered that another student, H. Alwyn Lee, who he described as 'a behind the scenes fixer for the Communist Party' had intercepted the article, assisted in a private censorship meeting on it and concurred in the verdict 'to the flames'.

Anderson's fate ought not merely to be dismissed as typical of that which so often awaits academics who become embroiled in undergraduate political intrigue. His article, later published in full by the Sydney University Freethought Society, presented a telling critique of 'third period' communism. Anderson upheld Lenin's dictum that alliances between the working class and other social groups concerned with emancipation was not just a tactical question, but central to the development of class conscious-

24 Ibid., pp.97-98.
25 Ibid.
ness. His insistence on rigorous independent thought also threatened the narrow view of student clubs as recruiting machinery for the party. Anderson must have appeared to sanction that perennially dangerous moment when youth organisations begin to assert their own line on policy against that of the adult establishment.26

The ease with which supporters of J. B. Miles smoothed the controversy over suggests that other socialists in the Labour Club were either in ignorance or lacked the stomach for a fight. Some wilted before the doctrinal conviction of 'third period' communism and the excuses they offered to disguise their complicity retain a hollow ring. When a copy of Anderson's article eventually came into his possession, Sawer responded that even had he seen it first, to avoid the danger of factionalism, he still would not have published it in full.27

Anderson's logic dictated that Melbourne Labour Club link student politics with struggles outside, in a revolutionary reconstruction of relations between 'town and gown'. Proletariat professed more modest aims. The Labour Club, it explained had no desire even to convert the University, but merely hoped to save 'a few low working class fellows' who had somehow crept in on scholarships and prevent them being engulfed 'in that insatiable bourgeois maw'. Proletariat represented the efforts of a small group, 'soaked in middle class ideas' to struggle towards a socialist ideology. It might in time find a way of connecting the University with 'the proletarian heart of society', but was not over-optimistic. Its editors doubted whether anyone would read Proletariat or if it would 'disturb by so much as a ripple the immemorial tranquility of the University mind'.28

26 A. Marwick, op.cit., p.45.
28 Proletariat, April 1932.
Sales of the first issue at 4,000 copies were higher than expected. They later fell to around 2,000 but the closure of the journal in 1935 was a tactical rather than financial move. Although in its sectarian phase Proletariat alienated many of the freethought radicals at Sydney, its relevance to Australia’s intellectual history may be gauged by a list of its contributors. They include Ralph and Quentin Gibson, Guido Baracchi, Aileen Palmer and Katharine Susannah Prichard. Far from indifference, Proletariat triggered a furious right wing reaction. This had its centre in the All for Australia League and the student militia unit, the Melbourne University Rifles (MUR). Nor did Farrago stand aloof. In attacking the Left, a protagonist of the Labour Club claimed that it had descended to the level of 'the muddy mouth-piece of a group of indignant football supporters'.

Sam White, a freshman just arrived at the University in 1932, became a special target. His reputation as a marxist schoolboy at Wesley College had preceded him and one can imagine how his precocious demeanour irritated more conservative students. The artist and young Communist, Noel Counihan, who had already met White and became his friend, had initially found his language 'too rhetorical'. White's manner had 'assumed too much', he had talked 'rather pontifically for his age ... stabbing points home emphatically with his cigarette'. Already a member of the Communist Party, White immediately joined the Labour Club and had the effrontery during his first term to interrupt a lecture by Professor Ernest Scott, to declare that Scott understood history 'as profoundly as a retired Indian Army colonel'. Scott patently derived great satisfaction later when White was heckled at a meeting of the Historical Society. When a reporter

29 The University Riots, p.3.
30 Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.
31 M. Cathcart, op.cit., p.54.
from the Melbourne *Sun* sensing a story made inquiries, Bainbridge, the University Registrar, confided that in 'extreme cases' in the past loyalist students had found the lake 'useful'.

Some days later a section of the audience at the Debating Society tried to assault White. Professor W. E. Agar, who witnessed the incident, called it 'the rottenest thing that ever happened at the University'. Noel Counihan later arranged for a Labour Club lecture to be protected by the Workers Defence Corps - a group of class conscious unemployed who normally guarded Communist Party public meetings. When a mob of robust young oarsmen and footballers tried to rush the Club's platform, six shabby 'sussos' in the audience barred their way, handing out black eyes and bruised faces to any student who dared approach nearer. The following day a mob of students hauled White out of the refectory, frog-marched him down to the lake and ducked him to the cheers of a thousand onlookers. When Geoff Vellacott, a theology student, tried to intervene, he too was seized and thrown into the lake. Before being released the victims were made to stand knee deep in the muddy water and sing 'God Save the King'. Other members of the Labour Club sought refuge, barricading themselves for safety inside the editorial office of *Farrago*.

The editors of *Proletariat* made no comment on the duckings at first, except to insert a photograph of the incident in the July issue with the caption 'dialectic of the fascist' (fig.6). *Proletariat* later attributed the high

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32 *The University Riots*, op.cit., p.5.
33 Ibid.
34 Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.
Figure 6

Dialectic of the fascist
Proletariat, July 1932
number of medical and engineering students in the mob to the isolation of
their faculties from the mainstream of university life. Subjected to 'mental
drudgery of a mechanical kind' or prevented from 'obtaining any glimpse of
horizons wider than their respective professions', they were bound to be
'prone to fascist sympathies'.

Conservative students continued their campaign using administrative
methods. In August 1932 the right wing executive of the Students
Representative Council refused to publish the Melbourne University
Magazine, on the grounds that this annual offering of literary taste and
talent had 'a decidedly marxist bias'. The Council even passed a motion
that Communism was a forbidden topic at the University, but found it diffi-
cult to enforce in practice. When Professor Anderson on a visit to
Melbourne agreed to address the Labour Club on 'Communist theory'
hundreds of students flocked to the largest lecture theatre to hear him break
the ban.

Members of the Labour Club regarded their opponents as 'mighty
exponents of the foxtrot, the drop-kick and the googly' but deficient in
debate, which required some stirring of their 'long atrophied thought
processes'. Called on to defend the proposition that 'the suppression of
the working class is essential to capitalist government', the Labour Club
easily routed the University Young Nationalists. Sam White and Ralph
Gibson were formidable on these occasions, marshalling an impressive

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36 Proletariat, September 1932.
37 Argus, 9 August 1932.
38 W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.189.
39 The University Riots, op.cit., p.3.
40 Proletariat, October 1933.
array of facts. In August 1934 Wilfred Kent Hughes MLA declined to affirm 'that fascism will solve the crisis', with the excuse that he would not be made the Aunt Sally of any 'Communist club'. The Melbourne University Rifles also refused when challenged by the Student Council Against War, in which the Labour Club was influential. They replied that they were not a debating society - a response Proletariat construed as 'We prefer bullets to arguments'.

Proletariat made the growth of fascism a recurrent theme. Ralph Gibson warned of a slide towards authoritarianism in Australia, citing attacks on democratic rights by the Victorian police under their leader Brigadier General Blamey. Gibson discerned incipient fascism in police violence against the Unemployed Workers Movement, the use of spies and provocateurs inside working class organisations and government bans on sections of the labour press. Proletariat feared that fascism might emerge in the University as more than a current of opinion, but this proved unfounded. Students who held extreme right wing views tended to work within established bodies, rather than create new ones of their own.

Bob Santamaria was the leading sympathiser with fascism at Melbourne University. A catholic intellectual of Italian parents, he justified his support for the corporate state with reference to the decline of the west and of morality in general. Santamaria led study circles on 'the radical principle at work in Italy' and lectured on 'the revolutionary aspects of fascism' to the revived Public Questions Society. His audiences included

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41 Proletariat, August 1934.
42 Ibid.
43 Proletariat, June 1933.
44 Proletariat, August 1934.
young catholics from lower middle and working class backgrounds. The first of their generation to enter Melbourne University in significant numbers, they were highly conscious of their position as outsiders. Niall Brennan has described the fascination the 'distributist' theories of Belloc and Chesterton held for some of them, as an extension of their ghetto mentality, a path that took them far to the right.\(^{45}\)

Research by Andrew Moore and more recently by Michael Cathcart has confirmed that the Melbourne University Rifles were considered the shock-troops of the White Army. This proto-fascist organisation, founded in 1923 by General Sir Brudenell White, was part of a secret long term contingency plan for counter revolutionary activity. In 1930 it was re-named the League of National Security.\(^{46}\) Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Clarebrough, commanding officer of the MUR from 1927 to 1934, was a regional commander in the White Army. In April 1931 Inspector Browne of the Melbourne Bureau of the Investigation Branch reported that the MUR harboured other White Army supporters. When the unit applied to increase its strength from 100 to 150 men, Browne remained sceptical. He considered it not wholly due to a desire to serve in the Defence Forces, 'but rather to propaganda of the League of National Security among University students'.\(^{47}\)

The Labour Club's agitation against war received an unexpected fillip in February 1933. After undergraduates at an Oxford Union debate voted by 275 to 153 that 'this house will in no circumstances fight for King and country, world-wide publicity ensued. A similar debate at Melbourne University revealed a strong pacifist current among the majority who

\(^{45}\) W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.194.

\(^{46}\) A. Moore, 'Guns Across the Yarra', in Sydney Labour History Group (eds), What Rough Beast, p.22.

\(^{47}\) M. Cathcart, op.cit., p.51.
opposed violence as an instrument of imperial policy. Although Proletariat acknowledged the longevity of this tradition, it initially adopted a condescending attitude. Pacifist students, it warned, would eventually learn that their philosophy aided military preparations, because its denial of all resistance and struggle excluded the working class whose opposition was the most effective bulwark against war.48

The Labour Club modified its stance a little in April 1933 after sending delegates to the founding conference of the Victorian Council Against War (VCAW). Like a similar body in New South Wales, this organisation drew its inspiration from the Comintern sponsored World Congress Against War, held at Amsterdam in August 1932. When the VCAW called for local activity, the Labour Club transformed the almost moribund Student Council Against War into a broader University Anti-War Committee. The Student Christian Movement joined, but this united-front venture was not an immediate success. Proletariat complained that most students treated militarism as an abstraction. Endless debate about the causes of war, or the rights and wrongs of violent methods etc, had not prevented a single bullet being made, transported or fired.49

This assessment reflected the unease some left wing students experienced with their new allies. Yet in the long run, as an academic outpost of the VCAW, the University Anti-War Committee fulfilled a useful role. Its members protested at the militarist tone of the University Anzac Day ceremony and moved motions of indignation at the Students Representative Council. Proletariat recalled the role of the University during the Great War, especially the contribution made to the war effort by the faculties of

48 Proletariat, June 1933.

49 Proletariat, August 1934.
medicine and science. In June 1934 seventy seven Cambridge University academics signed a statement of opposition to the use of scientific research in war preparations. Proletariat published this and the Anti-War Committee sought to launch a similar movement at Melbourne. Noel Counihan, using a thinly disguised pseudonym, contributed one of several anti-militarist covers for the magazine at this time (fig 7). Due to this agitation students - once seen on the streets only in those outbreaks of cultured larrikinism, the Commencement day parades - now started door-knocking with peace petitions, or took part in anti-war demonstrations. The press reported them marching in their gowns, with slogans proclaiming 'scholarships not battleships' and 'war means cultural barbarism'.

In the 1930s several characteristics distinguished Sydney University from its sister academy in Melbourne. It was more conservative, with the Union run like a semi-private club, serving as a centre of undergraduate social life and guardian of traditional values. Unlike Melbourne, Sydney had no debating society. Instead, debates were conducted at formal dress and dinner nights of the Union. The event of the year was the awarding of the Rhodes scholarships, to which the student newspaper Honi Soit attached great importance. From these differences, Colin Jory has wrongly asserted that the ideological conflict that raged at Melbourne was absent at Sydney. He also erred, as I will show, by stating that the development of a Communist current there would have been difficult, due to the hostility of Professor Anderson.

50 Ibid.
51 Argus, 2 August 1934.
53 Ibid.
Figure 7

Noel Counihan, anti-militarist cover, (Proletariat, June 1933)
The second founding of Sydney Labour Club coincided with a general burgeoning of student activity. At commencement in 1931 several new societies emerged including, for debating purposes, Communist, Socialist, Laissez-Faire and Conservative parties. These made their debut at a Union night debate on 1 April when the motion was 'that Socialism is a dangerous fallacy'. The Union Recorder later revelled in the divisions this caused on the Left. It told how a section of the Socialist party in 'a truly astounding volte-face', abandoned its allies and joined with Conservatives in favour of the motion. The political identity of the defectors was not revealed, but one can make an educated guess. They were, in all probability, disgruntled Scullin supporters who opposed the Lang-planners in the bitter war between State and Federal leaderships of the Labor Party in the aftermath of the October 1930 elections in New South Wales.

Socialist students returned to the fray at another Union night debate later in the Lent term with a proposal that the Board 'accommodate meetings conducted by political groups'. When this was carried they gave notice of their intention to launch a Labour Club. Members of Lang's government agreed to address the inaugural meeting on 21 April, persuaded by two academics who were involved - C. E. Martin, former MLA for Young and J. O. A. Bourke, a founder of the Labour Educational League. An estimated 700 students attended, mainly to heckle. Chairs were overturned and quantities of what was described as 'tear gas' were released. The speeches of Chief Secretary Mark Gosling and Minister of Justice J. Lamaro were inaudible.

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54 A. Barcan, op.cit., p.4.
56 A. Barcan, op.cit., p.2.
ble due to persistent cat-calls and foot-stamping. When Bourke put the motion that a Labour Club be formed, it was defeated by a large majority.\textsuperscript{57}

Undeterred by this second debacle a few enthusiasts began holding discussions in the Philosophy room at the University. Honi Soit initially gave them headlines of the 'Ghastly Red Plot' variety, so that when these Labour Club meetings were open, the minutes invariably described them as 'stormy'. Nevertheless, the Club managed to enrol 130 members in its first three months, mainly from the Faculty of Law. From the outset, its leaders were determined to wield an influence in undergraduate affairs, an objective related to their parliamentary aspirations according to student critics in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{58} In the Union elections of October 1931 the Labour Club fielded twelve candidates and also contested the presidency. It promised to remove the Union from the control of the Senate, to introduce preferential voting, cut Union charges and administrative costs and provide more social facilities.\textsuperscript{59} Although a record number polled that year, no Labour Club candidate secured election.

An alliance of Lang-planners and Socialisationists in Sydney Labour Club effectively excluded other tendencies at least until 1934. Students who backed Lang adhered to a scheme formulated by the New South Wales ALP to deal with the economic crisis. Contrary to the Premiers' Plan backed by Sir Otto Niemeyer of the Bank of England, it proposed that Australia should pay no further interest to British bond holders until the scale of its foreign debt had been reduced. The Lang plan, as it became known, also recommended that interest on internal loans be reduced and that the Commonwealth abandon the gold standard. When the government of

\textsuperscript{57} Sydney Morning Herald, 22 April 1931.

\textsuperscript{58} Proletariat, August 1934.

\textsuperscript{59} Argus, 9 August 1932.
New South Wales defaulted on interest payments in April 1931, the federal government took court action to recover the amount due. The ALP federal leadership also acted by convening a special conference which expelled the New South Wales executive. Henceforth there were two Labor parties in the State, with the majority adhering to Lang in defiance of the Federal ALP.60

Students who supported Socialisation put their faith in an eclectic critique of capitalism, believing that through propaganda and experience of suffering a class conscious proletariat would emerge. In February 1930 the New South Wales ALP Metropolitan Conference agreed to form Socialisation Units to this end and the ALP State Conference in 1931 adopted a plan to achieve socialism within three years. While the Socialisationists talked in generalities, Lang gave them a free hand, but a specific time table easily identified by opponents with the Soviet Five Year Plan, was another matter. By adept manoeuvre, Lang succeeded in having the three year plan recommitted and defeated. In 1934 he managed to disband the Socialisation Units as well.61

In August 1931, however, both factions in the Labour Club proposed that it formally affiliate with the Lang Labor Party. To qualify they drafted new rules which virtually debarred anyone who dissented. A handful of members put up a token resistance, but the majority succumbed to the superficially attractive proposal of incorporation. Hardly a genuine youth organisation at all, given the preponderance of staff and graduates, the Labour Club now surrendered its independent status. At the State Conference of the Lang party at Easter 1932, it obtained official recognition as a branch, with full voting powers and the right to elect conference delegates.

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61 Ibid.
Thereafter the agenda at its meetings became hopelessly bogged down in routine party business. Membership of the Labour Club also declined as non-aligned students drifted away. Some joined the Politics Club, founded in July 1932, or the Freethought Society, generally considered the most 'Communist'. Professor Anderson gave vent to their frustration. He had originally hoped that the Labour Club would present a range of working class political theories, but instead it had become part of a machine, part of the regular political system of the country in whose corruption it shared.

Communist students at Sydney were neither as capable nor as numerous as their counterparts in Melbourne, but their inability to make inroads had little to do with Anderson. It was the unusual plurality of progressive opinion at the University before 1934 that had such a debilitating effect on the advocates of 'third period' communism. Although its sectarianism remained anathema to him, Anderson bore no personal grudge after his break with the CPA. On the contrary, his criticism of censorship as undemocratic led him to intervene on one occasion to prevent a lantern lecture in the Great Hall on the Soviet Union being broken up by a hostile mob of 'King and Country' undergraduates.

Far from discouraging marxism, Anderson was a forceful exponent of it, joining the Trotskyist Workers Party of Australia in 1933 and remaining active until 1937. Writing in the Militant he raised issues such as the Soviet show trials and the 1933 defeat of the German Communists - taboo subjects for years afterwards to more orthodox marxists. Yet his dedication to 'the

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62 A. Barcan, op.cit., pp.5-6.
63 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1932.
64 A. J. Baker, op.cit., p.95.
65 Ibid., p.107.
widest possible extension of knowledge in all subjects' remained unimpaired, even when this required accommodating people with whom he profoundly disagreed. At the height of the Stalinist purges the Andersonian Freethought Society provided a University platform for Lance Sharkey, chairman of the CPA, who spoke on 'The Political History of Leon Trotsky, 1927-1937'.

The yearly influx of new students helped to rejuvenate the Labour Club. At its annual meeting in mid 1932 members voted to form a University Socialisation Unit and thereafter the Club moved steadily to the Left. There is some evidence that student supporters of the CPA aided this process through infiltration. Reports of the Labour Club in Honi Soit from mid 1933 onwards certainly indicate a growing preoccupation with united-front activity. In June of that year the Club joined forces with the Freethought Society, the League of Nations Union and the Student Christian Movement in an Anti-War Committee analogous to that at Melbourne. Communist speakers such as Esmond Higgins, Jean Devanny, and R. Normington Rawlings, editor of War What For, were also invited more frequently. But a spirit of liberal fair-mindedness still prevailed. A feeling that both sides of any argument ought to be put enabled the renegade Adela Pankhurst Walsh to address the Club and even Antonio Baccarini, president of the Dante Alighieri Society, a body increasingly involved in spreading fascist propaganda.

When Lang suppressed the Socialisation Units in April 1934, the Labour Club called an emergency meeting to consider a drastic restatement of its aims. Its members condemned the State Labor Party as 'one which

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66 A. Barcan, op.cit., p.7.
67 Ibid., p.4.
68 G. Cresciani, Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, p.144.
seeks to maintain the present order' and voted for disaffiliation. The Club now vowed to repudiate 'all tinkering with the outworn system' and opened its ranks to any student who accepted 'collective ownership as a desirable means of production', whether 'Lang-planners, Socialisationists, Communists or Christian Socialists'. To further distance themselves from the Labor Party, the members changed the name of their organisation to the Socialist Club and in July, taking their cue from Melbourne, launched a theoretical journal of their own, the Student.

On 1 September 1935 six student organisations attended the National Conference on Youth Problems in Sydney, initiated by the Young Communist League. Sydney University was represented by the League of Nations Union, the Socialist Club and the Evangelical Union. There were also delegates from Melbourne University Labour Club, the Radical Club of the University of Queensland and the Student Christian Movement. Alex Jolly, a young Communist studying medicine at Melbourne, outlined the economic difficulties students confronted and their restricted job prospects after graduation. He appealed for the formation of an Australian Student League to tackle these problems and aid the mobilisation against fascism and war.

For more than an year Proletariat had reported student activities in three States. It now proposed that all university progressives pool their resources to fund a single mass circulation journal, the Australian Student.

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69 Proletariat, August 1934.

70 Ibid.

71 Honi Soit, 11 July 1934.

72 See Chapter 5 iv.

73 Proletariat, October-December 1935.
to be launched early in 1936. The final edition of *Proletariat* in December 1935 claimed that the Student League had passed the point of conjecture. Provisional committees poised to build a national entity already existed in Melbourne and in New South Wales, at Sydney, Newcastle and Broken Hill. The League would enroll High School pupils and those at Technical Colleges, as well as university students. Its political aims, as defined by *Proletariat*, were synonymous with those of the Australian People's Front, within which it would be integrated. For the next two years radical students grappled with this project, but with little success. Insufficient finance and a waning interest in politics as the effects of the Depression wore off, both took their toll. Yet the broader concept of a Student League implied a national union, as the following illustrates:

The League should conduct intensive research into the economic conditions of students and graduates, it should give assistance to students during their courses and obtain suitable employment for them after graduation; through propaganda and the strength of organised numbers, it must demand increased expenditure on education, more scholarships, lower fees, more money for research, more employment for teachers and so on.\(^74\)

This vision retained its validity until another generation of activists returned to it.

\(^{74}\) Ibid.
Chapter 3

Towards a labour ideology of youth
Attempts to Reform the School Curriculum

In a world without radio or television, where newspapers still lacked mass circulation, schooling became an important agent of political socialisation. By the early twentieth century state schools had become relatively efficient in their task of indoctrinating children into the imperial culture. A product of the intervention of Australian colonial governments into the sphere of elementary schooling, the first real test of these 'Seedplots of Empire loyalty', came with the outbreak of the Great War. Education Departments now intensified their efforts to put over the message of self-sacrifice and citizenship. Teachers were instructed to correlate their lessons with the war, while the schools became important units in relief work and national fund-raising drives.

Contrary to patriotic expectations, the war did not bring unity to Australia. Class and political divisions which surfaced during the conscription referenda re-emerged over the next two decades. The Bolshevik revolution which inspired Australia's socialists deeply alarmed leading Nationalists and other pillars of the establishment, especially as it coincided with a challenge to British authority posed by Irish republicanism. The so-called boom period of the 1920s and the later privations of the Depression made up the backdrop to a bitter ideological conflict between Left and Right, in which the schools and their curricula became one of the battlegrounds.

It was not until 1917 that Labor parliamentary leaders acknowledged a widespread interest inside their own party in what was taught at school. The annual conference of the New South Wales Labor Party that year called for changes in the curriculum to provide more efficient education on 'the economic and other forces in social life nationally and internationally' and

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1 M. McKernan, The Australian People and the Great War, pp.43-64.
to place before children 'the potent factors making for peace and war'. In 1919 the Victorian Labor Party conference adopted a similar stance, influenced by the Australian Peace Alliance which had just issued several leaflets accusing the State Education Department of 'promoting the doctrines of hatred, fear and revenge' through the content of school books and papers.

At the end of the Great War some parents objected to the teaching of History and English in a way that promoted a world view governed by 'great events' and 'great personalities', one which seemed to ignore the social changes brought about by ordinary people through collective action. The left wing of the Labor and trade union movement regarded State education 'simply as machinery for capitalistic and imperialistic propaganda', an edifice they longed to dismantle in a single dramatic blow:

Let the children be told the facts about Royal families with all their record of murders and immoralities. Let them be told of the growth of the Empire by means of the Bible, bullet and rum bottle among bemused blackfellows. Let them be told of the enslavement of Ireland by bloodshed, rapine and rack-renting. Let them be told of the 'birth stains' of Australia, when she was found convenient as a cesspit for England's convicts.

The Queensland Worker campaigned against 'bellicose' traits in education, which it defined as 'a deification of Mars, the canonisation of Kings and the treatment of history as a story of Royalty'. The 1920 Labor Party Conference in that State had taken a similar line, criticising aspects of the curriculum which 'tended to glorify war and fostered the nation's prejudices'. In calling for 'a new and true Australian history', the Worker noted

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2 B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.10.
3 Ibid.
4 L. Connors, op.cit., p.46.
5 See for example, Labor Call, 1 June 1922.
6 Worker, 3 March 1921.
7 Ibid.
that the Queensland Teachers Association also wanted more texts introduced, with a direct bearing on local development.

The *Worker* based its 'dinkum patriotism' on the first clause in Labor's objective - 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of a self-reliant community' - aims in its view, fully compatible with internationalism and the goal of 'an era when the war drums throb no longer'. National sentiment, properly understood, upheld national individuality and this, in all its many-sidedness was what socialists hoped to achieve.

Anti-militarism and anti-imperialism in Queensland had, since 1916, reflected the ideological dissonance between Labor moderates and militants. Temporarily in the latter camp in the early 1920s, the Australian Workers Union lobbied with other organisations to have aspects of the curriculum altered. Most of the deputations it led received the same negative response, in that the Queensland Department of Public Instruction refused to accept that any trace of class or ideological bias existed in schooling. In October 1924 after a stormy debate in the State Parliament, Francis Brennan, the Labor Minister for Public Instruction, promised to 'exclude from the school books anything likely to inflame the minds of the young with an ambition for war'. But he understood the political cost of this concession, adding in the same breath that newspapers had twisted his remarks in order to turn relatives of men who had lost their lives against him.

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8 Ibid.


10 L. Connors, op.cit., p.46.

11 *Worker*, 20 October 1924.
A version of history that elevated great individuals was highly political, not only in the choice of what constituted greatness, but in the way it divided the world into the strong and the weak - those whose deeds made history and those it depicted as passive. Politicians and military commanders such as Pitt, Nelson and Wellington were extolled in school history books for their innate ability to rule, while their portraits and those of other famous Britishers adorned classroom walls. The Queensland King and Empire Alliance, a coalition of pro-imperial societies, fully understood the issues at stake. They too lobbied the Department of Public Instruction asking that 'hero-worship' of outstanding personalities remain, as otherwise the schools would become 'training grounds for pacifists'. Their remonstrances met with greater sympathy. In 1930 the syllabus instructions for history still told teachers to make certain great men and events 'stand out like mountain peaks' above the level of men and events of lesser importance.

Labour militants also concentrated their fire on certain rituals that had survived, or been specially created for children in the aftermath of the war. Empire Day, observed in Australian State schools since 1905, was characterised in the 1920s by its racial, imperial and sabre-rattling overtones. Loyalty ceremonies continued to mark the commencement of the school week and controversy over their retention became something of a political football over the decade. From 1917 onwards State school children in Victoria had to salute 'the Union Jack or the Australian flag, whichever may be available'. This directive came at a time when polarisation in the community had increased, as if ministers saw the schools as part of the

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12 L. Connors, op.cit., p.45.
13 Ibid., p.43.
14 Ibid., p.62.
15 M. McKernan, op.cit., pp.60-61.
government's apparatus of propaganda. A similar edict confirmed the practice in Queensland schools in 1919 and those of New South Wales in 1922.

During the Great War most schools, other than those of Catholic denomination, had abandoned even a facade of neutrality. Afterwards, even when the full extent of casualties became known, headmasters who had called for conscription long before it became a matter for public debate, continued to rationalise the slaughter. These sentiments were particularly rife on Anzac Day, a commemoration in which the schools were incorporated. If this was not enough, children had before them other reminders of war. Rolls of Honour recalling the sacrifice of former pupils occupied a prominent place in most high schools. After the war, military trophies were hung or exhibited beside them - a morbid and visible expression of the desire for tokens of triumph.

The Peace Council of New South Wales recorded a single victory against war trophies in 1920, when it managed to have them banned from schools. The Labor Minister of Education, T. D. Mutch, confirmed in Parliament that he had prohibited the exhibition of captured machine guns and other weapons in school grounds, adding that they were the last thing that ought to be displayed before impressionable minds. Ahead of his time in other respects, Mutch also conducted a sympathetic dialogue with school pupils about the relevance of home work. But minor changes were vulnerable in State politics. When a Nationalist government assumed office in April 1922 it promptly annulled Mutch's earlier decision.

16 Ibid., p.62.
18 Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July 1920 and Argus, 19 July 1920.
19 Australian Worker, 12 July 1922.
The Prince of Wales' tour in 1920 demonstrated to labour activists how easily school pupils could be mobilised behind slogans of loyalty to monarchy and the Empire. The immediate reaction of dozens of ALP and trade union branches was to play no official part in the welcome festivities. The purpose of the Prince's visit, timed propitiously just after the return of the Dominion troops, was widely known. The conservative establishment hoped that a visit by this 'missionary of Empire' would help promote social cohesion and defuse some of the obvious political tensions in Australian society - especially if people of all classes and creeds acclaimed the Prince's arrival in unison.20 Children were to be at the centre of every reception for the royal visitor. With time off from school they were to line the route or perform physical training displays in his honour.

The Queensland Teachers Association caused a storm of indignation when it reminded its members that participation in large scale training displays during the Prince's visit would contravene union policy. Numerous accidents had occurred in the past and the Association appealed to parents to consider the stress and added responsibility its members shouldered in marshalling these events.21 The Worker was more explicit: teachers resented having to supervise displays because they regarded the long hours of overtime as a form of 'sweating'. It reminded parents that they too would have to bear the extra expense of special clothes for their children to display in. The Worker concluded:

There is grovel and servility and sycophancy in super-abundance among adults to suit the Prince and his press agents. Let the children be protected in this one instance and later it may be possible to protect them in others.22

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21 Brisbane Telegraph, 31 May 1920.
22 Worker, 10 June 1920.
Trades Hall Councils in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane called on workers to keep their children at home and for funds earmarked to welcome the Prince to be spent on relieving local poverty instead. But once it transpired that few Labor parliamentarians intended observing a boycott, most opposition evaporated. In Queensland the Labor Minister of Public Instruction held aloof while a committee of civic notables led by the Mayor of Brisbane, undermined the decision of the Teachers Association by encouraging a 'loyalist' rebellion in their ranks.

A display by 6,000 children on Melbourne cricket ground on 31 May 1920 foreshadowed the type of reception the Prince received elsewhere. Girls in blue and white costumes performed routine work in physical culture, while boys drilled to a system approved by the militia. At the climax all knelt as the band played 'God Save the Prince of Wales'. The Victorian Socialist Party railed against 'such abject protestation before a symbol of imperialism', but could offer no antidote to such 'ethical distracting of working class childhood' other than the pious hope that some Labor member would raise the issue in the Victorian Legislature.

The public acclaim given to monarchy seemed to vindicate a narrow sectarian view of loyalty, yet among ordinary people new concepts of nationhood were germinating. The Prince's farewell speech to Australian children from HMS Renown, extolled the virtue of loyalty to the Union Jack - a notion totally at odds with the ALP's 'Fighting Platform' which called for complete self-government without Imperial interference.

24 Brisbane Telegraph, 31 May 1920 and 31 May 1920.
25 Argus, 1 June 1920.
26 Socialist, 18 June 1920.
27 Worker, 1 May 1924.
noted this anachronism when it accused the schools of inculcating 'a last century creed of loyalty to England' which ignored the increase of Australian pride and sentiment.\textsuperscript{28} The Sydney ALP Labor News also attributed 'the fragility of school taught loyalty' to its 'exotic roots' and doubted whether teachers would succeed in exalting a country very few Australian children had ever seen.\textsuperscript{29}

Official resistance to the slightest change in the curriculum mirrored a vague though widespread fear in conservative circles that the schools had failed to produce their full quota of conforming citizens. If something was not done these people believed the ties of sentiment to the British Empire would become weaker in every successive generation. Peter Board, the Director of Education in New South Wales and Keith Murdoch, the prominent journalist, both voiced misgivings of this kind.\textsuperscript{30} Matters came to a head in 1921 after a group of Sydney unionists on a May Day procession publicly tore up and burnt a Union Jack. Empire Day speeches three weeks later were thick with denunciations and eighteen municipalities petitioned the Labor government, declaring:

\ldots no greater blow can be dealt to the element responsible for the insult to our flag on May Day, than it being part of the education of every child in our Public schools to honour and respect the flag that protects them.\textsuperscript{31}

In May 1922 after the election of a Nationalist State government, Albert Bruntnell, Minister for Education, announced the introduction of a loyalty ceremony. On the first day of each week pupils in all State schools were to be formed into a hollow square around a flagstaff and made to recite: 'I

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Worker}, 10 June 1924.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Labor News}, 10 June 1922.

\textsuperscript{30} B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.6.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p.7.
honour my God, I serve my King, I salute my Flag’. They were then to sing a stanza of the National Anthem before marching off to their classrooms.\textsuperscript{32} Some teachers who relished the prospect of ceremonial had 'Flag Captains' elected from their pupils as 'the highest honour the school can confer'.\textsuperscript{33} But the Teachers Federation as a whole objected, informing Bruntnell that their loyalty was unquestioned and there was no need for a special ceremony.\textsuperscript{34}

The Trades and Labor Council of New South Wales somewhat ineffectually tried to get its affiliates to instruct their children to boycott the ceremony. It added bitterly that it would have been more relevant had the 'flag-flopping jingoes' fed the half starved ill-clad children of the 13,000 unemployed returned soldiers, instead of trying to 'manufacture patriotism'.\textsuperscript{35} As secretary of the Trades Hall Council, Jock Garden declared that 'to force this nauseating mixture down the throats of helpless children' was 'the hallmark of the Prussian junker', for 'the God of Christianity knows no country, no King and no flag'. Moreover, as far as he knew, Australia was the only self-governing state in the world which found itself in the humiliating position of having to bow down to another flag placed in a superior position over its own.\textsuperscript{36}

Bruntnell’s failure to make clear whether the Australian flag or the Union Jack had to be saluted and his contradictory remarks on the subject delighted his adversaries. Initially though he had the support of the conservative press which echoed his determination to develop in the young

\textsuperscript{32} Sydney Morning Herald, 5 May 1922.  
\textsuperscript{33} Education, September 1922.  
\textsuperscript{34} B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.8.  
\textsuperscript{35} Australian Worker, 17 May 1922.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
'sentiments of love and service to the state'. But as time elapsed a strong reaction gained momentum against schools being used as an instrument of Nationalist propaganda. Teachers, students and academics in the New South Wales ALP resumed a critique of the school curriculum through the Labor Educational League, founded in 1927. Similarly, individuals from professional and middle-class backgrounds who upheld humanitarian values, embarked on their own quest to kindle a love of peace in Australian youth via the League of Nations Union.

At the annual conference of the New South Wales ALP in 1928, the Labor Educational League attacked the one-sided presentation of facts in school history books, asserting that they were lacking in scientific method and excluded much of significance. In their treatment of 'the ruthless achievements of the ruling class of England', for example, they left pupils with the false impression that the welfare of this 'small, fortunate section of society', coincided with the good of the nation as a whole. Esther Wait, a member of the League who developed these arguments further, alleged that most history books failed to do justice to the labour movement. In one school reader, its hundred or more years of development merited just a quarter of the space devoted to a description of the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. Having conducted research into the content of school magazines, the League was disparaging about the amount of 'King Worship' and 'War Propaganda' it found. The cartoons that accompanied its findings, published in union journals, like the Railroad were equally uncompromising (fig.8).

37 B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.8.
38 Ibid., p.11.
39 Railroad, 10 February 1931.
HE WANTS YOUR CHILDREN

He wants your children.

Railroad, 10 February 1930

Figure 8

He wants your children,
Railroad, 10 February 1930
In 1930 the New South Wales Labor Party inserted a paragraph into its Rules and Constitution providing, once it was elected, for the removal of 'imperialistic bias' from the syllabus of schools and 'the substitution thereof of the struggles of the working class in history and present day society'.\textsuperscript{40} Left-wing agitation had achieved as much in Queensland by 1924, but the practical results were just as meagre. Leaders of the ALP made fiery speeches in opposition and paid lip-service to militant resolutions, but once in office usually observed more traditional forms of governance.\textsuperscript{41}

The fundamental nature of the challenge posed by the Labor Educational League made it unlikely that any Labor minister would implement its proposals, short of overturning the school curriculum. Making the flag ceremony voluntary, or altering its emphasis as several State Labor governments attempted to do, was a relatively simple act of administration. Attacking accepted beliefs in the classroom and promoting an alternative ideology, seemed much more threatening. Here Labor would have faced not only the resistance of Nationalist politicians, but the opposition of Education Department officials who resented political interference in professional affairs and regarded any new departure as a threat to their own positions.\textsuperscript{42}

Attempts to remain neutral led to bitter protest. A. W. Thompson, representing the Milk and Ice Carters Union at the New South Wales ALP Easter Conference in 1932, criticised William Davies, the Labor Minister of Education, for continuing to permit patriotic speeches in schools on Empire Day. He alleged that junior teachers who refused to co-operate and would not salute the flag had been victimised by 'jingoistic headmasters'. To warm

\textsuperscript{40} B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.11.

\textsuperscript{41} R. Evans, op.cit., pp.140-141.

\textsuperscript{42} B. Bessant and A. Spaull, op.cit., p.11.
applause, he declared that if Davies continued 'flouting the will of the membership', then the Labor Party should remove him and appoint someone with sufficient courage to implement its decisions. A report by the ALP educational advisory committee lent weight to Thompson's complaint. It noted sardonically that it was difficult to understand how the singing of 'Rule Britannia' and Kipling's 'Recessional', with its reference to foreigners as 'lesser breeds without the law', could be compatible with the Minister's recommendation that Empire Day be devoted to peace propaganda.

The League of Nations Union (LNU) adopted a more subtle approach, cultivating an aura of respectability which soon won it influential support. It was founded in Britain in 1918 with the specific aim of mobilising public opinion behind the League of Nations. Through collective security and disarmament its leaders believed the world might be spared the horrors of another war. They stressed the importance of reaching the young by having their message spread inside educational institutions. This process commenced in Australia in 1923 when members of the LNU persuaded Gibson, the acting Prime Minister, to support their representations to the various Departments of Education. From modest beginnings they could eventually boast that 'scarcely a child left school without some knowledge of the League'.

Because the LNU recruited across the political spectrum, the labour movement originally mistrusted it. Yet by acquiescing with established school ceremonies instead of confronting them head on, it managed to carve out a niche for a more humane alternative. It hardly inculcated prole-

43 Sydney Morning Herald, 28 March 1932.
44 Ibid.
tarian values, but it did encourage school pupils to look beyond their immediate horizons. Through the bridge-head it established in the curriculum it pioneered debate on foreign affairs and sowed the seeds of international understanding in an environment where previously there had been none.

Inside their unions a handful of left-wing teachers had always criticised patriotic rituals and ceremonies, although to do so openly meant putting their careers in jeopardy. In 1932, mindful perhaps of the returned soldiers lobby in its ranks, the executive committee of the New South Wales Teachers Federation refused to be drawn on the question of the flag ceremony or Empire Day. Instead, by advertising LNU activities in its journal *Education*, the Federation assisted a transformation already afoot. Whereas during the early post-war years education gazettes carried pages of instruction to teachers about Empire and Anzac Day ceremonies, by the late 1920s these had dwindled to a few column inches, while information about events associated with the League of Nations Union was becoming more detailed.

In her work on Queensland schools between the wars, Libby Connors has rightly pointed to the Junior Red Cross, the prefect system and remnants of the militia’s junior cadets as bodies through which children learned the order giver/order taker roles among themselves, functions which she insists simultaneously fragmented notions of pupil solidarity. Yet compared with the regimentation of pupils in the early post-war years, the scope afforded for personal and group initiative by junior branches of the

46 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May 1932.
47 Ibid.
49 L. Connors, op.cit., p.53.
LNU provided at least a compensatory force.\textsuperscript{50} Despite its political naivety, the 1932 'Peace Vote' taken in 1,024 schools in New South Wales in support of the Geneva Disarmament conference, was an important exercise in democratic participation. To understand the shift of values taking place we need only compare a patriotic display on the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1924 with an LNU 'Pageant of Youth' at Newcastle in 1933. At the climax of the former 8,000 children made up the motif of a battleship; in the latter 5,000 pupils formed a tableau which spelt the word 'PEACE'.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} P. Harrison-Mattley, op.cit., pp.12-14.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, see also Sydney Morning Herald, 24 May 1924.
Opposition to boy conscription, 1918-1929

The passionate advocacy of William Morris Hughes, founder of the non-party National Defence League, carried all before it at the 1908 Labor Party federal conference. Obsessed with racial purity, Hughes regarded compulsory military training as a necessary means of keeping Australia white. By emphasising the danger of an Asian threat, he and his supporters allayed doubts about militarism and convinced a majority of the need for a Citizen Defence Force.\(^1\) The rank-and-file, however, refused to be placated. Miners on the northern coalfields of New South Wales protested at the 'hare-brained murder scheme of the so-called Labor Party' and resolved by 3,359 votes to 1,882 to oppose the 'brutal measure' to their utmost.\(^2\) Their journal Common Cause, still upheld these principles in 1924 (fig. 9). Other unionists affiliated to the ALP who recalled the role of the defence forces in the shearer strikes of the 1890s, also sought guarantees. At the 1912 Labor Party federal conference they demanded that the Defence Act be amended to state that citizen soldiers were not to be called upon 'to interfere with workers engaged in an industrial dispute'.

The system of compulsory military training introduced by the Fisher Labor government in 1912 remained in force until 1929, albeit on a more modest scale than first envisaged. On Lord Kitchener's advice, boys aged between twelve and fourteen were registered as junior cadets at school. Until June 1922 when the Nationalist government ceased to fund them, they received ninety hours physical training annually, with provision for

\(^1\) R. Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia, p.199.

\(^2\) H. McQueen, Social Sketches of Australia 1888-1975, p.77.
Figure 9

The 'Refining' of Mug, Junior

Common Cause, 14 May 1924
some miniature rifle instruction. Senior cadets aged fourteen to eighteen trained at drill halls one night per week and on Saturday afternoons. At eighteen boys entered the Citizen Militia for three years. Their employers released them for training one day per week and allowed them to attend an annual camp.

Although based on the Swiss model the system was hardly universal, in that it discriminated against those who lived in densely settled areas of population. Boys in various occupations qualified for exemption, but rural youth who lived more than five miles from the nearest drill hall made up the largest category. Juvenile hostility towards compulsory military training remained a factor throughout. During the first three years of the scheme 27,479 'drill-shirkers' appeared before the courts and 5,732 boys went to prison.

Secular and religious opposition to boy conscription is well documented up to the Great War, but most historians break off at that point. Those who touch on the 1920s describe the closure of training schemes and reduction in the number of cadets from 127,000 in 1921 to 47,931 in 1928. But the decade was also characterised by a kind of tacit alliance which united the labour Left and firms with a high proportion of boy workers. The former opposed boy conscription on ideological grounds, the latter when it led to disorganisation and harmed the rate of profit. With its renewed isolationism, this probably accounts for the continuity of Labor's defence policy after

3 Military Board of Administration, CRS A2653, Item Vol. 2, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

4 K. S. Inglis, 'Conscription in Peace and War, 1911-1945', in R. Forward and B. Reece, (eds), Conscription in Australia, p.27.

5 H. McQueen, op.cit., p.77.

6 For an allusion to this in the labour press, see Labor Call, 27 January 1921.
the federal conference of 1919, which voted to repeal the compulsory clauses in the Defence Act. The need to make economies was apparent when the federal ALP won office in 1929, but Prime Minister Scullin's decision to suspend the compulsory militia could conceivably have been influenced by juvenile antipathy. Official figures show that the tally of senior cadets listed as 'missing' in the quota for Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, rose from 2.5 per cent in 1923 to six per cent in 1928.7

Pending re-organisation of the Australian military forces and the results of the Washington Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, training for the Citizen Militia was virtually suspended for two years after the war. Soon after its resumption in 1920, a proposal to place eighteen year olds in seventy day camps during their first twelve months in the militia galvanised the Left into action. The Melbourne ALP Labor Call described the camps as 'a synonym for disease, immorality and vice'.8 Speaking on behalf of the Victorian ALP in the House of Representatives, D. C. McGrath reminded members about 'incidents of a most revolting and serious nature' under investigation at Broadmeadows military camp.9 E. J. Hogan, a Melbourne Labor MLA, also made veiled references to homosexuality and advised parents to 'refuse to risk the contamination of their children' in training camps.10 Fears of this kind had been raised somewhat earlier in the New Zealand labour movement by H. E. Holland in Boy Conscription and Camp Morality (1919).

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7 See Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, Numbers 16-23.
8 Labor Call, 27 January 1921.
9 Labor Call, 28 December 1920.
10 Labor Call, 14 April 1921.
Having raised a similar hue and cry in Sydney, the Australian Peace Alliance expressed delight in April 1921 when Sir Joseph Cook informed it that the Defence Department had decided to abandon the scheme.\textsuperscript{11} It seems likely, however, that the unpopularity of the camps in business circles was the crucial factor in their being rescinded. Cadet training aided the discipline needed in modern factories up to a point, but Labor critics and military observers were in agreement about one thing - employers universally detested giving boys time off.\textsuperscript{12} The Newcastle Morning Herald, a mouthpiece for local owners and manufacturers, expressed their reservations perfectly. It praised militia training as an antidote to 'youthful irresponsibility', but opposed seventy day camps, pointing to the 'dire economic consequences' should thousands of young workers be absent from their jobs for weeks at a time.\textsuperscript{13}

Many cadets resented compulsory attendance at a drill hall on Saturday afternoons. A spate of complaints in the Melbourne press at the beginning of 1921 illustrates the reason why. One 'unfortunate trainee' with parades on alternative weekends found himself debarred from sports clubs and unable to gain selection in a cricket team.\textsuperscript{14} Another boy who expressed 'all the willingness in the world' to spend time training for his country, thought it unfair that his evening technical classes were disrupted week after week by compulsory parades.\textsuperscript{15} An indignant parent informed the Argus that the 'mania for Saturday drilling' would destroy 'the digger spirit'. How many thousands of young men who had never handled a rifle in their lives,

\textsuperscript{12} I. D Chapman, \textit{Iven G. Mackey Citizen and Soldier}, p.133.
\textsuperscript{13} Newcastle Morning Herald, 14 March 1921.
\textsuperscript{14} Argus, 14 February 1921.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
he asked rhetorically, had demonstrated on the battlefield that it was not a matter of 'drill, drill, drill to make a fighter'.

In 1922 the Nationalist government made fundamental cuts in the training programme, but voluntary and official attempts to make what remained of the system more attractive, failed dismally. In some localities the Australian Natives Association and the Returned Soldiers League organised citizen committees to provide entertainment for senior cadets, who now commenced at the age of sixteen. The Defence Department authorised championship sports meetings and gave prizes for military band competitions. It even mooted forming 'girls associations' linked with training units to entice older boys - a scheme condemned by the Chelsea branch of the ALP in Melbourne as a snare 'to sugar coat the pill of militarism'.

It is significant, in his summary of military training in the 1920s that John Barrett no longer attempts to defend his thesis advanced for the period 1911-15, that working class boys mostly enjoyed drilling. As one of Barrett's informants admitted, public enthusiasm for anything military was at a low ebb after the Great War and officers and NCOs knew it. There was so little co-operation from trainees in one tough Brisbane suburb that the company sergeant-major, although promoted to second lieutenant, was glad to give it all up when he moved out of the training area. In Newcastle officers never went alone in trams on parade nights, they preferred to walk. Gangs of youths thought it great sport to corner one of them and subject him to insults in front of other passengers.

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16 Ibid.
17 Labour Call, 21 April 1921.
18 J. Barrett, op.cit., p.3.
19 Ibid., p.270.
20 I. D. Chapman, op.cit., p.133.
With influential bodies like the Australian Catholic Federation calling for regulations governing drill to be altered, boys who defied the law did so with growing impunity. Some who appeared in court flatly refused to drill under any circumstances. Others pleaded that they had grown out of their uniforms, or that games in the open air were more beneficial. Inundated with dozens of 'drill-shirkers', a magistrate at the South Melbourne court threatened to impose prison sentences rather than give the option of a fine.\(^{21}\) At a trial of twenty drill defaulters in the Brisbane suburb of Toowong, the magistrate sided with the accused. He thought the law on Saturday drill was a mistake and ought to be abolished, as boys would naturally ignore it.\(^{22}\)

The Melbourne \textit{Socialist}, the Brisbane AWU \textit{Worker} and its Sydney counterpart the \textit{Australian Worker} all featured reports of drill offenders who were made to serve periods of up to thirty days detention. Three hundred boys from various parts of Victoria were held under these conditions at Broadmeadows camp in May 1923.\(^{23}\) By the end of the 1920s prosecutions for the citizen forces as a whole were running at between one and two thousand per annum, but these official figures were deceptive.\(^{24}\) For the vast majority of defaulters who made a nominal effort, there were extra drills at the end of each training year at which lost time could be made up. This procedure was designed to limit the number of prosecutions for being absent without leave and thereby reduce the criticism of compulsory training.\(^{25}\)

\(^{21}\) \textit{Argus}, 4 November 1921.

\(^{22}\) \textit{Argus}, 22 May 1923.

\(^{23}\) \textit{Argus}, 3 May 1923.

\(^{24}\) C. Neumann, op.cit., p.126.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
Senior cadets often complained of excessive unpaid travelling time to and from parades and rifle ranges. Unions took action on this in only a few isolated instances. In March 1921 the Newcastle Colliery Employees Federation negotiated a special travelling allowance for boys employed by the Scottish-Australian Mining Company.26 In June of the same year the Sydney District Council of the Amalgamated Engineering Union made representations to the Defence Department on the same issue.27 In theory employers were supposed to make up any deficit between militia pay and award rates when young workers took time off to attend annual camps. Some did, but union indifference or lack of organisation enabled others to elude this responsibility.28

Collective acts of defiance were common at annual militia camps whose duration was extended from six to eight days in 1924. The press reported these outbreaks but usually took the side of the authorities who tried to minimise their effect. In April 1924 the news editor of the Melbourne Argus 'carpeted' Edgar Ross, then a young reporter, for his sympathetic coverage of a strike by thirty cadets in camp at Seymour.29 A subsequent report gave prominence to the camp commanding officer who described the incident as 'trivial' and entirely the result of misunderstanding.30

Tainted or poorly cooked food often led to strikes or camp break-outs. Trainees at Liverpool camp near Sydney in March 1926 walked out en masse

26 Newcastle Morning Herald, 14 March 1921.
27 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, June 1921.
28 A. F. Howells, Against the Stream, p.6.
29 E. Ross, Of Storm and Struggle, p.16.
30 Argus, 3 April 1924.
and went into town to look for an alternative, complaining that their food was 'fly-blown'.\textsuperscript{31} Their resolve may have been strengthened by reports of a strike of 120 trainees at Seacliffe camp near Adelaide who had taken similar action a week earlier.\textsuperscript{32} A revolt at Maryborough, Queensland, in May 1927 led to a Military Court of Inquiry. The \textit{Worker} told how five hundred trainees refused to continue a route march and broke ranks, discharging their blank cartridges in a defiant manner. They later returned complaining about the state of their feet, 'verminous food' and a system of excessive fines for petty offences in the camp.\textsuperscript{33} At Rutherford camp, West Maitland, in October 1928, eighteen boys refused to drill and others arrived late on parade in protest at the state of their rations.\textsuperscript{34}

The reminiscences of A. F. Howells, who enjoyed his stint in the militia during the 1920s, provide some insight into this form of youth protest. The mob that Howells congregated with at Liverpool camp were pretty poor material from a military point of view. It harboured too many who, if pushed hard enough, would instinctively 'kick against the pricks'. On one occasion they pelted tainted food at the unfortunate cooks and an orderly officer who tried to intervene. On another, when they found the straw in their palliasses was lousy, they piled it up on the parade ground, urinated on it and set it on fire making a terrible stench in the vicinity of the officers' mess:

Such rebellious un-British behaviour would never have occurred with voluntary trainees; they would have paraded and protested in a proper manner. But we were conscripted young workers. Even those of us like myself who considered themselves loyal to the eyebrows ... reacted when it came to the crunch on instinct.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Argus}, 27 March 1926.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Argus}, 18 March 1926.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Worker}, 11 May 1927.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 8 October 1928.
We had no leader who organised it. We just did it. If somebody who was suspected of being a Red had suggested it he would in all probability have had his face bashed in - or worse.\footnote{A. F. Howells, op.cit., p.8.}

It is difficult to ascertain how much parental support this type of protest received. The \textit{Australian Worker}, commenting on a strike at an unspecified camp in Victoria in April 1926, complained that most fathers of boy trainees, having rejected conscription for themselves in 1917, were taking the injustice done to their sons lying down. It was not enough to hope that when Labor captured federal power compulsory training would be abolished. The system needed to be continually stigmatised at every Labor gathering, and the people constantly reminded of 'the cowardly iniquity of this imported curse'.\footnote{Australian Worker, 14 April 1926.} The Sydney ALP \textit{Labor Daily} criticised the lack of medical care in the camps after an accident at an incinerator led to the death of a trainee aged twenty. It alleged there was only one ambulance in the whole of the Metropolitan Military District and that doctors assigned to the camps regarded it 'as a sort of holiday jaunt, with the welfare of the trainees entirely a matter of secondary importance'.\footnote{Labor Daily, 5 April 1928.}

Although the suspension of compulsory military training in November 1929 resulted partly from the need to make economies, Scullin's biographer has asserted that it was essentially the action of a sincere idealistic man who had been horrified by the bloodshed of the Great War.\footnote{J. Robertson, J. J. Scullin, A Political Biography, p.215.} It no doubt helped in fending off critics that a voluntary militia was supposed to save £150,000 without throwing large numbers out of work. Officially the new scheme reduced the number of citizen soldiers to 35,000 but the real figure fell below this. To left wingers like the Commonwealth Attorney
General, Frank Brennan, these cuts were not a matter for regret. Addressing the League of Nations in Geneva, he declared proudly that his government had 'drawn a pen through the whole schedule of military expenditure with unprecedented firmness', thus reversing a policy which had existed in Australia for twenty five years of 'compelling the youth to learn the art of war'.

Officers like Iven Mackay, the hero of Lone Pine, for whom the Citizen Militia had become an all-consuming passion, regarded the suspension of boy conscription as capitulation to pacifism and appeasement. An official report on the abandonment of cadet training in the Royal Australian Navy adopted a similar position. Its author alleged that, despite a stance of hostility to the Labor Party in public, the Communist Party had secretly acclaimed Scullin's measures:

... because it has come to realise the futility of infecting boys with marxist ideas who from their late childhood onwards, have been instilled with the best traditions of the Naval services in an environment free from class consciousness.

The report concluded that Communists favoured a system of near adult entry as this focussed exclusively on boys in their late teens. From a military standpoint these were far from satisfactory as some had already come into contact with militant unions, 'or formed opinions on the vexed matter of the relation of employer to employee - opinions no doubt in many instances somewhat distorted'.

39 K. S. Inglis, op.cit., p.47.
40 I. D. Chapman, op.cit., p.133.
41 Special Files of the Anti-War Movement, CRS A467, Item SF 42, Bundle 94, Item 64, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
42 Ibid.
Some ALP branches thought Scullin might renege but once the government made budget alterations in the new financial year rank-and-file attention turned elsewhere. When the United Australia Party led by J. A. Lyons came to power in December 1931 no legal barrier prevented the restoration of compulsory training. Lacking a majority in the Senate, the previous Labor administration had been unable to actually repeal the relevant clauses in the Defence Act. The Amalgamated Engineering Union feared that Lyons, in league with 'a coterie of brass hats', might take advantage of the situation.43 In the depression, however, there was no question of a reversal of policy; on the contrary, further cuts soon became necessary.

Once voluntary training had been introduced the Labor Party took little further interest in juveniles who joined the militia. Recruiting officers in the late 1930s complained that some ALP municipal councils were unsympathetic towards them, but this was a minor irritant.44 Only the Young Communist League continued to direct propaganda at the militia. It based this agitation on the premise that the final struggle for a Soviet Australia would inevitably be a violent one.45 The Legion of Christian Youth46 reacted in November 1938 after a conference of United Australia Party Younger Sets urged the Lyons government to re-introduce universal military training. The Legion alleged that the traditional military outlook of 'theirs not to reason why' killed individual initiative and independence. It claimed that compulsory training induced a state of mind which regarded

43 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, April 1936.

44 Newcastle Morning Herald, 26 September 1936.


46 See Chapter 5 iv.
war as inevitable and anyway, the modern military required small bodies of highly skilled technicians rather than large imperfectly trained armies.\textsuperscript{47}

Labor Party leaders who feared the possibility of another world conflict \textbf{were determined} in this eventuality that Australia would defend its own shores and not be coaxed into sending troops abroad. They put their faith in a workers' boycott of war, but refused to join the Communists either in trying to seduce the militia from its allegiance, or in building a broadly based anti-war coalition.\textsuperscript{48} The Victorian ALP's desire to keep control over its members in the peace movement led it to launch a 'Labor Anti-War Committee' in 1934. Starved of initiative, this largely cosmetic organisation could do little more than express a few vague pacifist sentiments and issue statements condemning some proposed amendments to the Crimes Act.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Railroad}, 15 November 1938.

\textsuperscript{48} D. J. Rose, op.cit., p.56.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.58.
Imperial politicians after 1918 regarded migration as part of the process of bringing the Empire closer together. But behind their vision of imperial brotherhood lay other motives. Britain wanted a self-sufficient Empire, bound together by trade and common racial ties. But it also had over-population problems and, as Australian employers needed labour, the time seemed ripe for co-operation. An emphasis on land settlement was linked to hopes that the demand for British manufactured goods in the Dominions could be stimulated, while increased primary production there would pay for these, and also liquidate loans spent on development.¹ Juvenile migration featured centrally in these plans, a measure its advocates defended by taking analogies from nature. Just as a young shrub could be more easily moved and transplanted, young people were said to possess similar attributes.²

British governments were now prepared to play a major role in assisting Empire migration. To cushion young people from unemployment due to rapid post-war demobilisation, the Overseas Settlement Committee in 1919 recommended free or reduced passages to juvenile migrants.³ By 1922 the cessation of a brief economic boom made the problem even more acute. Although a demand for young land workers existed in the Dominions, Britain was unable to meet it from its own surplus which was mainly city bred. The Empire Settlement Act of May 1922 eased the situation by introducing collective nomination, a scheme which enabled Empire-wide volun-

1 M. de Lepervanche, 'Australian Immigrants, 1788-1940: Desired and Unwanted', in E. L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism, p.96.

2 Youth the Invaluable Factor in Migration, pp.2-3.

3 A. G. Scholes, Education for Empire Settlement, p.73.
tary societies to sponsor groups of young migrants. The Act also made migrant training schemes in Britain eligible for state aid. By the end of 1923, with the help of several voluntary bodies, three farming centres were able to teach agricultural skills to 1,000 boys annually. Between 1927 and 1929 seven municipal training centres opened, increasing the capacity by a further 1,700.4

Apart from the Dreadnought Trust in New South Wales, there had been little juvenile migration to eastern Australia before the Great War.5 The Dreadnought Trust was established in 1909 with funds of £45,000 - half of a sum raised by public subscription to buy a battleship for the British Navy. When the Imperial Premiers' Conference decided to support the policy of maintaining a fleet in Australian waters, alternative uses for the money were canvassed. Although the Trust arose out of this quest, its real origins, like other 'lads for the land' schemes, lay in an idealised vision of a return to the natural economy, promoted by race bigots and agrarian populists.6

The Dreadnought Trust accommodated 'worthy British boys' at Scheyville Agricultural Training Farm in the Hawkesbury River district and later found them work on the land. By the outbreak of war 1,787 'Dreadnaught boys' had been settled in this way. When the Trust recommenced activities in 1921 it opened four other training farms at Grafton, Glen Innes, Wollongbar and Cowra through which, with Scheyville, a

4 Ibid., p.82.

5 Two hundred and forty boy migrants were settled in Victoria between 1912 and 1913, see Argus, 24 February 1928.

6 J. Shields, 'A Dangerous Age : Bourgeois Philanthropy, the State and the young unemployed in New South Wales in the 1930s', Sydney Labour History Group, (eds), What Rough Beast, p.107.
further 5,488 boys passed by the end of 1929. Donald Winch found Scheyville 'rough as bags' in 1922, with only 'damn wooden doors to sleep on'. Harold Rawson encountered a similar regime in 1925 but thought it necessary, 'as fellows had far worse conditions when they got out to jobs, far worse'.

In 1921 Dr Barnardo's Homes opened a receiving centre for child migrants in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield. The Society also purchased Mowbray Park at Picton early in 1928 and developed it as a training home for farm work and domestic duties. Between 1921 and 1929 these two centres catered for 891 boys and girls. The churches in New South Wales also acted as migration agencies, nominating juveniles through the YMCA in Britain. In Victoria, the Salvation Army played a similar role. Between 1922 and 1927, 13,978 children aged between twelve and eighteen years arrived unaccompanied in Australia. The overwhelming majority were immediately placed in pre-selected employment.

Commonwealth and State authorities increased the range of schemes on offer. In 1923 the New South Wales government passed the Juvenile Migrants Apprenticeship Act. Its rigid conditions of indenture, often entered into before the employer and juvenile had met, bound both parties for three years. The Queensland government incorporated similar rules into a Farm Apprenticeship System, also introduced in 1923. It restricted

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8 New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection, TRC 2301, INT 93, p.35, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
9 Ibid., INT 95, p.10.
10 A. Scholes, op.cit., p.143.
11 Ibid., p.83.
12 Ibid., pp.140-141.
this to boys aged between sixteen and nineteen, selected by the Commonwealth authorities in London. Initially it agreed to accept a quota of one hundred boys a month.\textsuperscript{13}

The enthusiasm shown for these plans by the farming lobby did not extend to the Australian labour movement. Labor leaders like Charlton, Scullin and Fenton were not blind to the need for a rapidly growing population, but they were always strongly influenced by the trade unions who, in the main, were implacably hostile.\textsuperscript{14} The Australian Workers Union (AWU), still basically a reflection of the rural labour force, is a prime example. Many of its members at some point in their lives had felt threatened by cheaper Asian or 'coloured' labour. Unable to forget, they became a bastion of the White Australia Policy which stood for immigration restrictions based on race. The AWU extended its veto to juvenile migrants because it feared their competition would jeopardise the living standards of adult workers. G. Buckland, secretary of the union's Sydney branch, described it as:

... more detestable than other forms of immigration. Men are capable of shifting and thinking for themselves and are less likely to be imposed upon, but it is not so with a boy of immature judgement and imagination that can be played upon, who falls an easy victim of those who are out to enlist him in the interests of the 'little pay and lot of experience' farmer in this country.\textsuperscript{15}

In February 1923 Buckland wrote to the British Labour Party leader, Ramsay Macdonald, asserting that juvenile migration was intended to bring about a further reduction in wages. Even before its inception, he argued, Australian unions had been unable to enforce award rates in rural areas,

\textsuperscript{13} Argus, 31 July 1922.
\textsuperscript{14} G. Greenwood, \textit{Australia a Social and Political History}, p.315.
\textsuperscript{15} Argus, 5 April 1924.
due to anomalies in the arbitration laws. Sir Joseph Cook, the Commonwealth High Commissioner in London, dismissed Buckland's allegations as 'sinister, lying propaganda'. The war of words continued when the AWU's Brisbane journal the Worker accused the Commonwealth government of 'tricking boys to Australia' by disseminating 'highly coloured fairy tales'. It made this claim in a review of the pamphlet Australia's Offer to the British Boy, an example of the sometimes misleading information that emanated from Australia House in the 1920s.

The pamphlet described Australia as a rich land where the government helped young migrants and guaranteed them a basic wage which would soon enable them to become their own masters. They would find 'no dreary hopeless toil' there, but work so plentiful a boy need never fear unemployment again. As further inducement the pamphlet held out the prospect of adventure, hunting and sport. The nearest it came to reality was a caution that an immigrant lad must take the rough with the smooth and not get over-anxious about the standard of his sleeping accommodation on the farm. The Worker noted sardonically that as 'cheap labour slave' for the squatters, a boy had also to drudge from dawn to dusk for 'a few bob a week' and up to fourteen hours a day in the hot summer months.

Certainly Beatrice Macdonald, who organised the placing-out of the first group of Barnardo's children in New South Wales, discovered

... so many people who will pitch a most plausible tale, or write a charming description of themselves and their households, but

16 Argus, 23 February 1924.
17 Argus, 7 February 1924.
18 Argus, 27 February 1924.
19 Ibid.
upon visiting them and making the fullest enquiries, prove to be not fit in any way to be the employers of young boys and girls.\textsuperscript{20}

Delayed payment seems to have been as great a hazard as low pay. Dreadnought boys in 1929 were instructed to insist on regular wages, as one of sixteen 'Points to Remember' on a list issued to them by the New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry.\textsuperscript{21}

Because their sponsors were not over zealous about distinguishing between different schemes, considerable confusion ensued. Many Dreadnought boys were under a misapprehension that, like other juveniles sent out by the Migration and Settlement Office, they too would receive the minimum wage of 10/- a week plus board. Some boys arrived unprepared for compulsory deductions to re-pay the cost of their passage, so even those who immediately qualified for the wages advertised became disgruntled, especially when they were left with as little as 4/- per week.\textsuperscript{22} Some came with only the vaguest idea of what to expect. Henry Field who went to Scheyville in 1925 had thought travelling to Australia would be 'just like going camping' and 'if I don't like it I can easy hop back home again'.\textsuperscript{23} Harold Rawson recalled that the literature he had read in London made it sound much easier to acquire land and a farm than it turned out in practice.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} Prime Ministers Department, Immigration encouragement, CRS A154/14, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

\textsuperscript{21} Prime Ministers Correspondence Files, CRS A458, Item 5, 154/17, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

\textsuperscript{22} Prime Ministers Correspondence File : Immigration encouragement New South Wales, CRS A461, Item G349/1/7, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

\textsuperscript{23} New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection, op.cit., INT 18, p.24.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., INT 95, p.32.
In 1923 officials at Australia House in London stated that young migrants who trained in Australia could eventually expect work at wages of between £1 and £1.10s a week - a somewhat higher rate than for boys who trained in Britain. This was a concession to Dominion farmers who looked more favourably on native training schemes. They often regarded boys who had trained in Britain as having an exaggerated idea of their own attainments. They also thought them less adaptable and less inclined to do as they were told.\textsuperscript{25} Trade unions knew of the wage differentials between the two groups, but neglected to agitate against them. Such a possibility had not escaped Sir George Fuller, the Premier of New South Wales, who did all in his power to keep the two categories of young migrants apart. In September 1922 he requested the Commonwealth Prime Minister that Dreadnought boys be brought to Australia in separate ships 'as otherwise discontent will be created'.\textsuperscript{26}

Incidents had already occurred that year at Glen Innes and Scheyville. Angry that they were not to receive pay while training and denied access to their £2 'landing money', boys at both farms had absconded. An English visitor who spoke to one of the runaways conducted his own enquiry into conditions at Scheyville. The young migrants there complained of inadequate food and lack of bed linen and washing facilities. Some alleged they were being held at the farm against their will, until they refunded the £8 loaned to them towards the cost of their passage.\textsuperscript{27} Conditions remained inferior to those at Cowra and Wollongbar and in 1925 the Scheyville boys went on strike. They objected to the removal of porridge from the menu

\textsuperscript{25} G. F. Plant, \textit{Overseas Settlement}, p.143.

\textsuperscript{26} CRS 461, Item G349/1/7, Australian Archives, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{27} Sun, 10 May 1922.
and, although castigated as 'the scum of England' by the manager, eventually won the day.\textsuperscript{28}

The Domestic Immigration Society (DIS), launched in 1923 by Beatrice Macdonald, was the main organisation through which girl migrants, aged between sixteen and twenty, entered Australia. The DIS was supported by the recently formed Country Women's Association of New South Wales. It also won the backing of the Women Assistants Association, part of the New South Wales Teachers Federation.\textsuperscript{29} Like the AWU, the Teachers Federation had members in country towns, but it took a totally different attitude to imported domestic labour. Its journal \textit{Education} praised the DIS and talked poignantly of 'help foreshadowed'. It portrayed the wives of farmers as 'growing old before their time and literally breaking down', through their solitary drudgery in the home.\textsuperscript{30}

Unlike female State wards - that other source of cheap domestic labour - DIS girls were protected by the Juvenile Migrants Apprenticeship Act. After three months training in Sydney they were placed out in groups, near to a local DIS committee responsible for their after care. Beatrice Macdonald was determined their training would commence on the voyage out. Each contingent travelled in a specially partitioned section of the ship under the supervision of a matron. On the journey the girls did sewing and knitting and cleaned the ship's silver and glassware. A holiday mood was discouraged and their individual behaviour was closely monitored. The \textit{Worker} denounced this treatment as offensive and alleged that by the time the girls

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{28} New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection, op.cit., INT 18, p.39.
\bibitem{29} CRS 154/14, op.cit., Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
\bibitem{30} \textit{Education}, 15 March 1924.
\end{thebibliography}
'hit the shore' they were well and truly 'branded and ticketed'.31 Fears that indiscriminate mixing aboard ship might corrupt the morals of girl migrants were not confined to their middle-class sponsors. Walter Atkinson, a Domain radical and supporter of the ALP section of the Returned Soldiers and Sailors League, who travelled to Sydney on the 'Ballarat' in 1925, held similar prudish views.32

The conservative and labour press were diametrically opposed in their reporting of the arrival of young migrants. The former invariably stressed their 'fine', 'healthy', 'sturdy' physique. The Argus described the first group of Barnado's children as 'keen and alert' and mentioned their reputation on the voyage for 'obedience and intelligence'.33 The Melbourne ALP Labor Call, on the other hand, lamented the dumping of more 'lunatics and the outpourings of refuges and homes of neglected children'.34 Opponents of child migration exploited any hint of physical or mental disability. When the authorities deported a boy with contracted tendons in his hand and a mentally ill girl in September 1923, Mark Gosling, a Sydney Labor MLA, made what political capital he could from the incident.35 These tactics lent credence to the 'racial hygiene' or eugenics lobby. This largely middle-class movement which drew on traditional bourgeois concerns with reforming

31 Worker, 15 May 1924.


33 Argus, 18 October 1921.

34 Labor Call, 3 May 1923.

35 Argus, 4 September 1923.
the family life of the working class, sought to control the multiplication of
the 'unfit' and those it branded 'of low grade mentality'.

Circumstantial evidence indicated that medically unfit migrants were
slipping through the net. The Federal Health Department which undertook
examination of arrivals, had no similar control over applicants for immi-
ration in Britain. This put the onus on the Australian authorities to give
unfit migrants the benefit of the doubt. Medical certificates filled out by
British doctors did not require them to test for mental illness. Applicants
had only state that to the best of their knowledge they were not
insane. Some employers also discovered belatedly that girls sent out from Britain as
domestic servants were pregnant, as tests for this condition were not carried
out on single women.

Pressed by critics, the Federal Director General of Health announced in
June 1927 that many of these 'sources of error' had been removed. Unlike
Canada, Australia attracted little pauper migration and the safeguards it
demanded looked impressive in theory. Australia House required refer-
ences as to the moral as well as physical calibre of juvenile candidates.
Whenever possible, in the case of Barnardo's children, the health records of
their parents were checked as well, in order to disclose any hereditary condi-
tions likely to contribute to their failure overseas. The advocates of child
migration stressed these rules but, as I will show later, the stringency of
supply often led them to be waived in practice.

37 CRS A458, Item 5, 154/17, op.cit., Australian Archives.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 A. Scholes, op.cit., p.149.
Even the most arduous tests failed to prevent loneliness, disappointment and home sickness. The plight of a destitute young migrant at Cowra made headlines in the London Daily Mail in August 1923, while rumours of suicide and ill-treatment led British Labour MPs to ask questions in the House of Commons in June of the following year. Interviewed by the Sydney Morning Herald, a former Under Secretary for Labour and Industry to the New South Wales government confirmed that a boy settler had committed suicide in April 1923 and that there had been two other cases in South Australia the same year. He hastened to add that police enquiries had satisfied his department 'that there was nothing in the (first) boy's employment to justify such action', as the farmer he had worked for was 'a man of excellent repute'.

*Common Cause*, the journal of the miners section of the Workers Industrial Union of Australia, deemed this to be irrelevant:

It is not so much in actual physical cruelty as in jibes and taunts at his crude clumsy ways of dealing with his strange Australian conditions that the new arrival's life might be made unbearable, and knowing no other escape through his ignorance of the country, suicide might seem the only possible remedy.

It went on to speculate that the native born Australian boy would 'jump the rattler' into another State to escape his tormentors. But, because fear of the law and a dread of doing anything unconventional had been so instilled into the minds of British boys, those who became unhappy would feel hopelessly trapped and afraid to protest.

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41 Sun Pictorial, 22 August 1923.
42 Common Cause, 10 July 1924.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
Some young migrants did experience an over critical attitude towards them in the community. Arthur Willis, a Dreadnought boy who trained at Cowra in 1922, encountered resentment as soon as he took up full-time employment. Several of his fellow workers told him 'in no uncertain terms' that he was not wanted. He also recalled that because farmers knew that boys like him were 'stranded', even the good ones refused to pay them a penny more than they had to. Yet official statistics published in 1926 show that young migrants were just as capable of voting with their feet as anyone else. Over a two year period until the Juvenile Migrants Apprenticeship Act was repealed, twenty per cent of boys and girls indentured under it absconded, and a third of these could not be traced.

The New Settlers League, under the presidency of Sir Arthur Rickard (1868-1948), a real estate developer, and the Anzac Fellowship of Women, led by the strongly feminist but rabidly patriotic Dr Mary Booth (1869-1956), sought to help young migrants and tried to create an *esprit de corps* among them. The latter published the *Boy Settler*, a monthly magazine with a circulation of around 500, as a contribution to maintaining 'our own British stock' and counteracting communism. It featured only positive reports from boys with good employers who had adapted easily to life in the bush. But one is still struck by its lists of relatives trying to re-establish contact, or the fatalities it reported, of boys accidentally shot, drowned or crushed beneath boulders. The labour press carried stories of its own in the

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45 New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Collection, op.cit., INT 17, p.5.

46 A. G. Scholes, op.cit., p.141.


48 See for example, *Boy Settler*, November 1925.
genre 'Worked to Death: Fate of young immigrant'. These may have been extreme cases, but the Director of Migration and Settlement at Australia House also regretted that some employers refused to make 'reasonable allowances to new arrivals' and worked them as hard as Australians who had done the same job for years. Reports that boys were left to sleep in stables and barns made parents reluctant to allow their children to leave home. In May 1924 the National Conference of Labour Women called for a ban on the emigration of juveniles from Poor Law and charitable institutions in Britain, until satisfactory arrangements for receiving them had been made in Australia.

The Big Brother Movement, founded by Richard Linton in 1924, aimed to redress some of these problems. Born in New Zealand, Linton had arrived in Australia at the age of twenty in 1899. He joined the Sydney firm of Middows Brothers Ltd, paper and machinery merchants, and rose rapidly to become its managing director. His plan was that each member of the Big Brother Movement would undertake to look after a boy from Britain. The citizen would meet his 'Little Brother' on arrival, receive him during the holidays and advise him in his career. Linton's scheme combined Empire loyalty with class conciliation. Sir William Brunton, president of the movement, explained that 'Big Brothers' were recruited from:

... the higher clerical occupations, through business, commerce and the learned professions, to what is our closest equivalent to a leisured wealthy class ... The artisan is not represented in the

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49 See for example, Workers Weekly, 15 July 1931.
50 CRS CP 211/2, Bundle 106, Part 2, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
51 Australian Worker, 30 July 1924.
53 G. F Plant, op.cit., p.149.
movement and will not be represented until organised labour adopts a more cordial attitude towards migration schemes generally.54

When the Big Brother Movement asked for the support of municipal councils in March 1925, the ALP refused to help. Labor members of the Collingwood and Richmond Councils in Melbourne condemned a system which 'bestowed solicitude on imported boys', while ignoring the increasing unemployment of Australians. They claimed that 'Little Brothers' who had returned to the city were already competing with local boys for dead-end jobs.55 This oft-repeated drift-back theory is verified by a survey of ninety former Dreadnought boys carried out in the 1970s. Only fifteen per cent of this sample were still engaged in rural pursuits, or had been until their retirement.56

Labor MLAs attacked Linton in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, which he entered in 1927 at Nationalist member for Boroondara. They depicted him as the founder of 'the greatest sweating system ever invented' and as 'a self-advertising theorist who knew nothing of country conditions.57 Linton counter-attacked, pointing to divisions in the labour camp. He alleged that an official of Melbourne Trades Hall Council had described wages established by the Big Brother Movement as high, compared with the average for school leavers. Linton argued that his system of juvenile migration was the only humane one and he listed the British Labour Party as one of its strongest supporters.58

54 CRS A436/1, Item 46/5/6, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
55 Argus, 18 March 1925 and 31 March 1925.
56 G. Sherington, op.cit., p.107.
57 Argus, 12 August 1928.
58 Ibid.
The Australian labour movement had great difficulty refuting the barrage of statistics that the Big Brother Movement released. It appeared to have lulled the fears of British parents and claimed that less than two per cent of the 1,515 boys it had brought out down to 30 September 1928 had been absolute failures. Linton boasted that after only twelve months on the land some boys were earning as much as £2.15s per week plus their keep, while others had taken up share farming on their own account. These and other triumphs were included in *Little Brothers in Australia*, a pamphlet distributed in Britain. On the surface they looked impressive, but a glimpse at the private correspondence which passed between officials of the movement in Melbourne and its agents in London reveals a somewhat different picture.

In a memorandum to Sir George Fairbairn, chairman of the London committee, Sir William Brunton regretted that many boy migrants had been 'a sore disappointment' to their 'Big Brothers' and to individual employers. Brunton felt personally embarrassed at having to accept responsibility for boys whose lack of character and training made them unlikely to be *persona grata* in the homes of their hosts. He wrote that the movement in Australia had experienced great difficulty with 'lower class lads' who, in the interval between leaving school and migrating, had acquired habits and views which rendered them 'unamenable to control'.

Linton had hoped to attract British public school boys or, at the very least, working class lads who had attained the VI standard in elementary education. Unfortunately he was soon unable to pick and choose. By 1927 the supply of juvenile labour had started to dry up. The Commonwealth

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59 A. G. Scholes, op.cit., p.145.
60 *Argus*, 12 August 1928.
61 CRS A436/1, Item 46/5/6, op.cit.
High Commissioner that year informed the Australian Prime Minister of his 'great difficulty' securing boys, despite an extensive advertising campaign.\textsuperscript{62} The London \textit{Sunday Times} attributed the lack of applicants to the absorbent capacity of British industry and a low birth rate in the final year of the Great War.\textsuperscript{63} In this situation the various migration agencies must have felt sorely tempted to forget their own guide-lines. That the Big Brother Movement succumbed is confirmed by an un-signed report appended to Brunton's memorandum, lamenting the inclusion of increasing numbers of 'black sheep', 'half-wits' and 'weedy and weakly specimens' in shipments from Britain.\textsuperscript{64}

Other factors added to the problems of recruiting. Officials at Australia House complained incessantly about 'the handicap of the cash barrier'. Juveniles considering migration often opted for Canada or New Zealand, as these countries granted them a free passage.\textsuperscript{65} Another hurdle was that most migrant training schemes in Australia commenced at the age of sixteen. British school leavers who obtained a job at fourteen were usually reluctant to consider other options later on. Negative impressions of Australia also filtered through and had an effect. Young migrants were exhorted by their host organisations to write cheerful letters home, but not everyone complied. Agents of the Big Brother Movement in London complained of 'everlasting reports which are against Australian interests in this country', including strikes and 'injurious rural wage awards'.\textsuperscript{66} Articles in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} CRS A436, Item G349/1/7, op.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{63} \textit{Sunday Times}, 14 July 1929.
\item \textsuperscript{64} CRS A436/1, Item 46/5/6, op.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Department of the Interior Correspondence Files, CRS A1, Item 32/7540, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
the British press alleged that due to the operation of the basic wage at twenty-one in New South Wales, juvenile migrants were invariably discharged on reaching that age.  

Out of a total of 1,439 boys who emigrated to Australia in 1929, 492 returned to Britain the same year. Some had no aptitude for rural life, or complained that farmers had been unable to raise their wages as the effects of the Depression began to be felt. As domestic resistance to immigration grew in Australia, the conservative press featured more reports of immigrant youths begging food, sleeping rough, or charged with vagrancy and theft. In January 1930 the Scullin Labor government suspended active recruitment of juveniles in Britain. This decision was soon rescinded, but during the Depression many of the foremost advocates of Empire settlement re-directed their efforts towards rural employment schemes for Australian youth from the cities.

When young migrants started to arrive in large numbers, common sense ought to have dictated that Australian trade unions at least try to educate them about local conditions. The Young Communist League suggested this, but I have found no evidence of it being put into practice. Juvenile migrants were not an easily targeted group, even at their port of entry. Most spent only a day in Sydney or Melbourne before departing to more remote locations. The Sydney arrivals were usually given a lecture and 'bun fight' by the Anzac Fellowship of Women, followed by ginger ale

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 See for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 2 February 1928 or, Argus, 21 February 1929.
70 J. Shields, op.cit., p.163.
71 Young Communist, 6 July 1923.
and songs of home around the piano at the Empire Service Club. After various ports of call, most young migrants had no money left for anything else, so they surrendered tamely to this type of reception.

Australian labour opponents of juvenile migration never enjoyed the whole-hearted support of the British Labour Party. The Commonwealth Attorney General's Investigation Branch knew of the British Young Communist League's attempts to alert intending migrants to the real conditions on Australian farms.\(^72\) The Big Brother Movement in London also complained that socialist controlled School Boards were unsympathetic towards its efforts.\(^73\) But these sporadic un-co-ordinated protests were mere pin pricks. The British Trades Union Congress fully supported the work of the Overseas Settlement Committee, while Labour Party enthusiasts for migration like J. Wignall MP, even made trips to Australia to try to persuade working class audiences of the correctness of British policy.\(^74\) When the British Labour Party briefly held office in 1924, it made no fundamental changes. All that can be said of it, compared to out-and-out imperialists, is that it was marginally more critical of the conditions under which new settlers might have to live and work, especially in regard to children.\(^75\)

\(^{72}\) Summary of Communism Vol. 1, June 1922 - December 1923, CRS A6122 325/6/8/3, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

\(^{73}\) Sydney Morning Herald, 14 December 1928.

\(^{74}\) Argus, 29 March 1924.

\(^{75}\) G. F. Plant, op.cit., p.132.
One aspect of the widespread revulsion against militarism in the aftermath of the Great War was that some working class parents were reluctant to allow their children to join uniformed youth movements. They viewed the Boy Scouts in particular with suspicion because of the pro-imperialist content of Baden Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1908), whose basic assumptions remained fundamentally unchanged in later editions. In the post-war climate of industrial turmoil, allegations arose that the Boy Scouts were a strike-breaking, employer supported organisation with fascist tendencies. Trade unionists, whose standards of living depended on strong workplace unity, resented the Scout movement's pretensions to abolish social divisions and denounced it as an exercise in class conciliation. By the late 1930s the Boy Scouts were labelled 'harmless', but until then critics in the labour press had described them as 'pernicious' and 'insidious'. These adjectives conjure up visions of ruling class incursion on a terrain once considered the sole preserve of the labour movement. This survey will examine the degree to which such fears were justified. It will also conclude with some thoughts on that paradox so galling to the Left, that while Scouting prospered between the wars, embryonic socialist youth movements mostly floundered.

The first Scout troops in New South Wales and Victoria were formed in 1908, a year after Baden Powell's experimental camp on Brownsea Island in Poole harbour. The *Boys Own Paper* helped convey the ideas of Scouting from Britain to Australia. In Sydney, T. R. Roydhouse, editor of the *Sunday Times*, collected a group of boys into a patrol at Waverley in March and by the end of the year had established eleven troops with 1,200 Scouts involved. In the patriotic fervour following the relief of Mafeking, the *Sunday Times* had organised an appeal in appreciation of Baden Powell
and Roydhouse later travelled to England to present his hero with a ceremonial sword and scabbard. As a result the two men continued to correspond. Another publicist, Donald McDonald of the Argus, assisted in Melbourne where a troop was formed at East St Kilda in May and later known as the 1st Caulfield.

Scoutmasters Associations quickly sprang up in both states, but a viable organisation took longer to emerge in Victoria due to conflict over an appropriate constitution. In 1911 E. G. Lister, the first chief commissioner in the State, broke away from the official body to form the Australian Imperial Boy Scouts. Lister, a lieutenant in the militia, emphasised the importance of drill and military style manoeuvres. The Scouts under his command were re-admitted to the official movement in 1925 after the enactment of a Boys Scouts Protective Bill by the Federal Parliament. Thereafter the movement grew rapidly. By 1928 there were 16,636 Scouts in Victoria, 13,500 in New South Wales and 41,039 in the whole of Australia.

Some schools and universities established their own troops and Rover crews, but responses to Scouting varied. Studies of Melbourne show that recruitment was far higher in middle class suburbs and that working class entrants came mainly from the families of skilled craftsmen and artisans. In Youth, Empire and Society, John Springhall has talked of a siege mentality in early Scouting, a fear of 'toughs' trespassing on the sacred space of the meeting place or camp site. Juvenile street gangs certainly treated Boy Scouts with hostility. In the Sydney suburb of Leichhardt before

1 Scouting in New South Wales, 7 February 1982.
2 Commonwealth Attorney General Correspondence file: Boy Scouts, CRS A2863, Item 1924/31, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
4 J. Springhall, Youth, Empire and Society, pp.102-103.
the Great War, a Scout patrol meeting in an old cellar had to run a gauntlet of derisive chants from local larrikins. Late-comers were only admitted if it was 'all clear' outside and each Scout had to learn a special call to attract attention if he was attacked.5

Incidents of this kind persisted into the 1920s and beyond. Fighting broke out at the all-Australian Boy Scout Corroboree in Melbourne in January 1923, when boys from the 'Coffin' push invaded the site. They were repulsed with the aid of a well-directed fire hose, but a few days later the Moore Street push returned armed with sticks and crowbars and put several Scouts in hospital.6 At Albury in November 1930 Scouts were enticed out of their hall by a local push who threw stones onto its tin roof. In the melee that ensued their Scoutmaster was knocked unconscious by a blow to the head with a piece of picket fence.7

Left-wing members of the ALP in some localities also tried to obstruct the expansion of Scouting. Laborites on Brisbane City Council in July 1927 vehemently resisted a proposal to lease a piece of land to the Hamilton Boy Scouts, to enable them to build a hall.8 Similar objections were raised by Labor councillors at Bulli in the Illawarra in April 1928,9 and on Collingwood Council in Melbourne in December 1933.10 Labour animosity towards the Boy Scouts rested on four main propositions: that the Scouts were potentially a strike-breaking organisation, that Scouting was an ideological training ground for the advocates of industrial peace, that

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5 Scouting in New South Wales, May 1969.
6 Argus, 9 January 1923 and 15 January 1923.
7 Sydney Morning Herald, 28 November 1930.
8 Worker, 27 July 1927.
9 W. Mitchell and G. Sherington, Growing up in the Illawarra, pp.92-93.
10 Argus, 6 December 1933.
Scouting undermined trade union bargaining power by encouraging child migration, and that the Boy Scouts were militaristic and identified politically with the ruling class.

The Committee of the Council - the controlling body of the Boy Scout movement in Britain - had arrived at a policy on strikes in May 1919. Its Headquarters Gazette stipulated that as a non-political organisation, the Boy Scouts should not be involved in breaking 'any ordinary commercial strike', although a Scoutmaster might offer the help of his troop, 'where any recognised public authority required voluntary workers' to avoid 'grave danger and public inconvenience' arising from an industrial dispute. A railway strike in Britain a few months later provided such an opportunity and Baden Powell later wrote that the Scouts who intervened had acquitted themselves 'with conspicuous zeal and effect'.

Over the next decade the Australian labour press reported several similar incidents. In October 1920, Sea Scouts on the Isle of Wight helped break a strike of municipal gas workers. Scouts were used to maintain essential services during the British General Strike of 1926. A strike of postal workers in Shanghai in October 1928 was broken with the aid of 400 Boy Scouts, mostly British, White Russian, Japanese and American. And again in 1930, Japanese Boy Scouts intervened during a strike of Tokyo tram workers. The indignation felt by labour militants in Australia is illustrated by oral evidence collected from Jim Comerford who was stripped of his badges and expelled from the Kurri Kurri Boy Scouts for daring, while

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11 K. Orr, op.cit., p.265.
12 Ibid.
13 Labor Daily, 8 December 1928.
giving a patrol report, to read out a resolution drafted by his father, condemning the incident at Shanghai.\textsuperscript{14}

That Baden Powell's own sympathy was against striking can be seen from an account of a dispute he witnessed in Australia during his world tour of 1912. The following appeared as part of an article in the \textit{Scout} and was later re-published in his book \textit{Boy Scouts Beyond the Seas}:

Last year a lot of townies in Brisbane were persuaded to go on strike about nothing by a few fellows who had the gift of talking. The townies listened and believed every word, instead of doing the manly thing and hearing the other side of the question. They went on strike and, as the police and military were weak, they began to get rowdy. But the Governor knew his men. He sent word round the country that he wanted a few good loyal men to help him and the bushmen came pouring in from all parts. They brought all their own food and equipment with them and they settled the trouble in very quick time.\textsuperscript{15}

Here we find all the traditional bourgeois stereotypes of strikers. They are naive, gullible and un-manly. The complex causes of a dispute in which forty-three unions took part are trivialised to the point of being about nothing at all. The real role of the 'bushmen' - armed strike-breakers who were used to physically intimidate the locked-out workers of the Brisbane Tramways Company,\textsuperscript{16} - is glossed over with a few breezy euphemisms worthy of the \textit{Boys Own Paper}.

In his quest to develop good citizenship and mould the character of boys, Baden Powell placed great emphasis on loyalty. A Scout was to be loyal to his King, his country and employers and defend them against all enemies, including anyone who spoke badly of them. These obligations overrode loyalty to one's class, or even parents, who were not originally

\textsuperscript{14} Jim Comerford interview, Newcastle, 18 May 1987.

\textsuperscript{15} R. Baden Powell, \textit{Boy Scouts beyond the Seas}, pp.140-141.

\textsuperscript{16} R. Evans, op.cit., pp.16-18
included in the wording of the second Scout Law. Nowhere in the writings of Baden Powell is there any recognition that a clash of loyalties might possibly occur. Common Cause, the journal of the miners section of the Workers Industrial Union of Australia, created such a situation hypothetically in its children's page of September 1923. It described how Billy Jarvis and his Scout troop were persuaded to help run a local newspaper, closed due to a strike. Billy's father, one of the strikers, attempted to explain the contradictions in the Second Scout Law:

If a working class lad was loyal to his employers he was disloyal to his parents who were ground down by the masters. If he wanted to be loyal to his parents he could not be loyal to his King and country which was based on the robbery of the weak and helpless. Everyone had to choose one loyalty and stick to it and he asked Billy to choose loyalty to the working class.18

Although senior boys at some Sydney private schools volunteered as 'loyalist workers' during the 1917 general strike in New South Wales, juvenile strike-breaking was never common between the wars. When it occurred, such as during the Melbourne police strike of 1923, university students rather than Boy Scouts acted as scabs. One reason was the low age of the average Australian Boy Scout. Scouting benefited from the contraction and eventual abolition of compulsory military training, but until 1929 the cadet and militia responsibilities of part-time boy soldiers confined the majority of its recruits to those below the age of sixteen.19

The labour movement was on firmer ground when it accused the Boy Scout movement of advocating industrial peace. By the end of the Great War Baden Powell had accepted that the betterment of the working

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18 Common Cause, 12 September 1923.
class was a high priority of peace time reconstruction. But he thought this could somehow be achieved by humanising the employer to the extent of sympathy and fair dealing with his employees, and by educating the workers to understand that in serving their country's commercial interests, they were also serving their own.\(^\text{20}\)

In the early 1920s the *Young Australian*, a Sydney Boy Scout magazine, openly proclaimed Scouting as an antidote to the vice of class consciousness, acquired by the young due to bad parental example.\(^\text{21}\) Scout-masters also boasted of the number of firms that would employ none but their boys as messengers and junior clerks. The Melbourne Scout headquarters ran its own job bureau to fill these vacancies and attributed the movement's high reputation among employers to the role Boy Scouts had played in the Great War, attached to Red Cross Societies and recruiting committees.\(^\text{22}\) The *Young Australian* claimed that Scouts employed in Sydney offices were 'infinitely superior to those haughty young gentlemen who in the past condescended to answer the manager's bell'.\(^\text{23}\) Should a boy be exploited at work, the *Australian Scout Handbook*, published in 1922, had a simple remedy. In most cases he could leave and go elsewhere. The world was wide and there was no need to quarrel about money, but before absenting himself a Scout ought to give even a bad employer proper notice.\(^\text{24}\)

Lord Somers, Governor General and Chief Scout of Victoria, enshrined the principles of class conciliation in a permanent camp for boys


\(^{21}\) *Young Australian*, 5 May 1923.

\(^{22}\) *Argus*, 24 January 1922.

\(^{23}\) *Young Australian*, 24 March 1923.

named after him. Held first at Anglesea near Melbourne in January 1930, it was later moved to a spot near the coast at Balnarring East. Here for one week, boys from diverse social backgrounds ate, played sport and discussed together. The Melbourne *Sun* summed up the political aims of the project at the end of the first camp:

Much of the bitterness and strife which have disfigured the industrial history of the Commonwealth, particularly in recent years, would have been avoided if the opposing parties had absorbed the simple lessons taught by the boys' camps. Many a dispute would have been settled at a round-table conference in a frank and generous discussion of the issues involved. The get-together movement ... has been proven an unqualified success with the boys. How much greater would this be if labour and capital gave it a sincere trial?25

Proposals of this kind and the aura of elitism surrounding the Scouts, infuriated labour militants. Cartoonists in union journals like *Common Cause* and the *Railroad* depicted Boy Scouts well into the 1930s as un-Australian goody-goodies, detestable prigs, or bosses' informers liable to dob-in a mate. The Brisbane *Worker* concluded that from a stock breeder's point of view those who joined the Scouts:

... would mostly be classed as culls. It is nearly all too skinny in the leg, too hollow in the chest, too narrow in the brow and too vacuous in the countenance to pass any even mediocre standard of either physical or mental fitness.26

Children in the Sydney Young Comrades Club, run by the CPA, learned a piece of 'Bolshevised verse' entitled 'Black Sheep', which they chanted whenever an opportunity arose:

Ba! Ba! Boy Scout, don't you be a fool,  
Waving bosses banners, acting as his tool,  
Do your good deed daily - come along with me,  
Be another comrade in the YCC.27

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25 *Sun*, 27 January 1930.
26 *Worker*, 27 July 1927.
27 *Workers Weekly*, 4 November 1927.
The manner in which their influential patrons sought railway and steamship concessions for the Boy Scouts, or promoted them as the semi-official representatives of Australian youth abroad, caused some annoyance in non-labour circles. Finding itself edged out of a delegation to the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, the Young Australia League protested to the Commonwealth Prime Minister. It pointed out that its own inauguration by J. J. Simons in 1905 pre-dated the formation of the Boy Scouts and that as the pioneer of ‘Education through Travel’ it, rather than they, ought to be recognised as the authentic national voice of youth.28

Boy Scout sponsorship of juvenile migration led to further criticism. Between 1922 and 1928, under the Empire Settlement Act, 3,400 British Boy Scouts arrived in Australia, a majority of the 5,000 settled in the Dominions by Imperial Scout headquarters. Juvenile migrants were mainly destined for farms, where many suffered from loneliness or were used as cheap labour. The Australian Workers Union exposed the worse examples of exploitation, but virtually the whole labour movement condemned these schemes.

In Victoria where a distinctly Scouting scheme of settlement emerged, any objections were peremptorily cast aside. The Victorian Scout in January 1927 blamed previous problems on 'the deplorably deficient moral standards' of ordinary boy migrants and their 'somewhat loose' method of selection. Farmers requiring Boy Scouts might apply in confidence, safe in the knowledge that those sent out to them would possess 'a character well above average', combined with qualities of 'initiative, honesty, loyalty, thrift and courage'.29 By May 1928 the Melbourne Scout

28 Prime Minister's Department Correspondence File, 'Boy Scouts Assistance to', CRS A461, Item A355/1/2 Part 1, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
29 Victorian Scout, 1 January 1927.
bureau was placing an average of fifteen boys a month in this way, yet these arrangements were never really a success. In the end it was with some relief that Scout settlement schemes were suspended in the face of growing Australian resistance to migration and worsening economic conditions.

Allegations that the Boy Scout movement was militaristic reached a peak during the Chief Scout's second visit to Australia in 1931. Baden Powell's critics referred to the war time edition of *Scouting for Boys*, where he had urged young men to become good rifle shots and praised Scout training as a sound basis for military preparedness. Yet when the resources of the War Office were his to command, he opposed any combination of cadet training with Scouting. In the immediate post-war period Baden Powell advocated a more positive imperialism of 'Peace Scouting' and denied ever fostering 'a bloodthirsty and warlike spirit'.

His change of heart may have been influenced by a number of traumatic defections, beginning in 1916 when the Quaker Ernest Westlake split away to form the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry. He was followed in 1920 by John Hargrave, a charismatic London Scout leader known as 'White Fox', who founded the Kibbo Kift Kindred. In 1925 left wing members of the Kindred led by Leslie Paul broke away to form the Co-operative Woodcraft Folk. The reverberations of this were so faint in the Southern Hemisphere as to be almost inaudible. Australian Communists conceded that Baden Powell had personally toned down his earlier jingoism, but chose to

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32 I have found no evidence of these dissident organisations in Australia, although a branch of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry was established in New Zealand. See P. Wilkinson, 'English Youth Movements 1908-30', *Journal of Contemporary History* No. 2, April 1969, p.19.
dismiss this as a clever ploy, describing him as 'a bulwark of capitalism, donning the cloak of angel of peace'.

General Sir John Monash, vice-president of the Victorian Scout Association, was the most distinguished member of a military caste, present at all levels of Australian Scouting. This was perhaps inevitable in a society which, as early as 1911, had embraced the cadet system and in which Scouting had had to find a niche. In his book on boy conscription, John Barrett has noted how Scoutmasters in three states lent their halls for military drill and encouraged the recruitment of cadet NCOs from senior boys in their troops.

There is a mass of circumstantial evidence supporting claims of a military bias. Scouts took part in Empire and Remembrance Day parades, they were taught to march, salute and to honour the flag. They learned semaphore and morse code. The uniforms of both Victorian Scout movements in the early 1920s were flamboyant, with brass buttons, elaborate shoulder piping and decorative lanyards. During commemoration week at the University of Sydney in 1924, Boy Scouts formed an armed guard as the colours were paraded through the Great Hall. From 1923 onwards, Scout troops were allowed to draw camping equipment from military depots and charge it to the Defence Department. In 1927 at the opening of the Federal Parliament in Canberra, Boy Scouts who acted as

33 Workers Weekly, 6 February 1931.
34 J. Barrett, op.cit., p.154.
35 Argus, 22 May 1923.
36 Common Cause, May 1924.
runners and messengers were, by special request, subject to the discipline of the military.37

The ideology of Scouting was undoubtedly conservative, albeit sometimes confused and incoherent at troop level. Graham McInnes who joined the 1st Toorak Scouts in the mid-1920s, described his Scoutmaster's philosophy as 'an amazing hodge podge of half developed social theories, religious cum-sexual mumbo jumbo and patriotic scoundrelisms'.38 Interestingly these traits seem to have been just as strong in the Girl Guides. In a letter to the Victorian Guide magazine Matilda in June 1936, Rosemary Heath complained that their St Georges Day parades reeked with militarism. She objected to the way a movement professing peace and goodwill actually extolled war. She claimed that many 'younger intellectuals among the Guiders' were increasingly dissatisfied with the reactionary stand taken by their leaders on these matters.39

The Australian Scout movement made no attempt to hide its links with the rich and powerful. In May 1928 Monash publicly praised the investment of the business community in Scouting as 'insurance towards the stability of the social structure'.40 In New South Wales the industrialist Sir Kelso King was chairman of the Scout Association, while A. S. Hoskins of Australian Iron and Steel gave generously to build Scout halls and establish camp sites.41 Sydney stores like Anthony Horderns and Mark Foys, who had pioneered Taylorist welfare schemes to win the

37 Prime Minister's Department Correspondence File: Boy Scouts Assistance to, CRS A461, Item A355/1/2, Part 1, and CP698/6, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

38 G. McInnes, The Road to Gundagai, p.157.

39 Matilda, June 1936.

40 Argus, 5 May 1928.

41 W. Mitchell and G. Sherington, op.cit., p.92.
compliance of their juvenile workforces, donated window space and lent their auditoriums for Boy Scout and Girl Guide badge displays. The mere association of these names with Scouting was proof enough to labour militants as to where its loyalties lay.

Baden Powell's visit to Australia in 1931 represented a watershed for his left wing critics. Trades Hall Councils in Sydney and the Illawarra passed resolutions of protest and indignation. The Young Communist League, who vowed to prevent him landing, covered Sydney with posters denouncing Scouting as fascist and imperialistic. A large contingent of police stood by when Baden Powell came ashore from the 'Mamara' on 17 March, but the expected demonstrations failed to take place and a protest rally in the Domain fizzled out due to 'lack of attention to organisational detail'. The following day Lord and Lady Baden Powell reviewed a march past of 8,000 Cubs, Scouts and Guides at Randwick and in the evening attended a reception hosted by Mark Gosling, the Chief Secretary in Lang's Labor government. Gosling made several complimentary remarks about Scouting, for which he was soundly rebuked a few days later when delegates converged in Sydney for a Metropolitan Labor Conference.

The Australian labour press had often discussed the more dubious aspects of Baden Powell's career. It knew of his exploits as a spy in the 1880s in Germany and Czarist Russia and had denounced his unacknowledged use of Ernest Thompson Seton's work in the first edition of Scouting for Boys. Seton had developed a system of woodcraft training based on the North American Red Indians. He had lectured and held camps to

43 Young Worker, April 1931.
44 Sydney Morning Herald, 20 March 1931.
45 Common Cause, 11 May 1923.
demonstrate his theories to English audiences several years before Baden Powell's camp on Brownsea Island. The doubtful military value of Mafeking also seems to have been common knowledge. During a heated debate over a Scout hall on Collingwood Council in 1933, Councillor Marshall, a Boer War veteran, denounced Baden Powell as a scheming self-publicist and the siege of Mafeking as a sham and a disgrace. The problem with these revelations, however, was that most of them focused on the pre-1918 period and made no allowance for the Chief Scout's renowned elasticity of thinking.

Post-war Scouting with its rhetoric of international brotherhood had adapted well to a milieu where the League of Nations Union had begun to subtly influence the curriculum in hundreds of schools. For the first time in the late 1920s and early 30s trade unionists with direct experience of Scouting began to correct some of the more simplistic allegations in labour journals. Alan Hanson of the ARU Enfield sub-branch denied that boys were trained as 'gun-fodder' in the Scouts. In a series of letters published in the Railroad, he challenged critics to state what values they upheld, if they objected to loyalty, thrift and helping others. Hanson argued that if Scouting was 'militarist' because it taught boys to fall in line and march four abreast, then so too were the annual Eight Hour Day processions where trade unionists marched in a similar fashion.

Activists like Hanson who had grown more accustomed to mass youth organisations, understood that Scouting's wealthy supporters were usually more keen on its imperial possibilities than the average member at grass roots level. Those whose children had joined knew that sport, the band and the annual camp were the main attractions and that drilling was

46 Argus, 6 December 1933.
47 Railroad, 10 January 1931.
usually regarded as a tedious concession to authority. Far from passively absorbing the British public school ethos embodied in the Scout Law and Promise, working class boys who joined viewed aspects of it, and the grand pretensions of certain Scoutmasters, with a healthy cynicism.\footnote{S. Humphries, op.cit., p.134.}

When the Australian Communist Party adopted a popular front strategy in 1935, it dealt another blow to old assumptions. The \textit{Workers Weekly}, which had once urged young militants to join the Boy Scouts in order to carry out 'work of a disintegrative nature from within', now listed them as potential allies against fascism. The evidence for this was slight, but the content of Australian Boy Scout magazines did change subtly in the 1930s. Amidst perennial articles on camping and woodcraft, one finds the occasional thoughtful piece on the social role of youth movements, or the causes of poverty and unemployment.\footnote{See for example, \textit{Victorian Scout}, 15 June 1931, or \textit{Scouting in New South Wales}, 1 May 1938.} A similar process is discernible in some Anglican and non-conformist youth movements, but unlike these organisations the Boy Scouts could never be enticed into the Australian Youth Council, a body through which the Young Communist League promoted aspects of its ideology.\footnote{See Chapter 5 iv.}

The effects of the Great Depression compelled the Australian Boy Scout movement to respond, but it did so in a manner approved by its founder. In \textit{Rovering to Success} (1922), Baden Powell had accepted the need for welfare work as a facet of citizenship training, but he strongly implied that the Scout movement itself had no responsibility to initiate social reform or see it carried through.\footnote{R. Baden Powell, \textit{Rovering to Success}, p.140.} In Melbourne Graham Taylor, a
Rover Scout leader, designed a system of 'Co-operative Scouting' to aid troops in poorer neighbourhoods. Designed to give practical meaning to the fourth Scout Law on brotherhood, it was in fact a kind of internal charity, providing funds for games equipment, uniforms and summer camps.\footnote{Victorian Scout, 15 April 1931 and 15 June 1931.} Taylor supplemented this in 1932 by launching the Port Melbourne Scout Settlement, a combination of welfare and youth work to bring the benefits of Scouting to an underprivileged area. Melbourne Rotarians busied themselves raising funds for the project and their President, Angus Mitchell, described it as 'a fine antidote to Communism'.\footnote{Victorian Scout, 15 September 1932.}

Although an occasional Boy Scout journal might indulge itself a little when a previously doctrinaire unionist relented,\footnote{See for example Corroboree Advertiser, 1 January 1937.} the more astute publications had always distinguished between 'the great majority of honest citizens who follow the cause of Labor' and a minority who subscribed 'to the principles of the 'Red' element'.\footnote{Victorian Scout, 8 January 1931.} But the arrival of an uneasy truce between the labour movement and the Boy Scouts still left unanswered the question of why the latter attracted members in tens of thousands, when the various labour youth movements struggled to retain at best a few hundred adherents.

Left-wing youth organisations were notoriously sectarian, whereas the Boy Scouts consciously drew on the resources of other movements to become established. Some of the first troops in Australia were formed by the Boys Brigade, YMCA or Salvation Army. The social activity provided by left wing youth organisations was usually peripheral to their main
activities, offered as a kind of reward for enduring hours of tedious political routine. Baden Powell, on the other hand, made variety and enjoyment central to his project. He also, by and large, resisted the temptation to preach elevating matter to young people straight away as, in his view, this would simply frighten off the more spirited.

Left-wing youth organisations never fully reflected the different ages and changing capacities of their members. In the most successful of them, one finds only a fraction of the rich programme offered by the Scouts. After the demise of Socialist Sunday Schools, the Left neglected the use of ritual. Young Communists in the 1920s had their own oath and catechism, but no equivalent to the subtle changes in uniforms, or the elaborate investitures and going up ceremonies of the Cubs and Scouts. Working class youth knew about ritual from their most rudimentary unit - the street gang - most of which had some form of initiation test or ceremony.\textsuperscript{56} The Left paid little attention to larrikin spontaneity, yet in 1941 Baden Powell claimed that the patrol system was really nothing more than putting boys into permanent gangs, something they were already familiar with.

Left-wing youth organisations were more democratic and also usually composed of both males and females, but their relationship with adults left much to be desired. They ought to have been able to rely on the resources of the trade union movement, but this was rarely the case. When the Scout movement discussed divided loyalties in the 1930s, Baden Powell claimed it was not an issue for young workers as trade unions seldom bothered to recruit them anyway.\textsuperscript{57} Having promoted youth organisations, Labor and Communist parties often abandoned them to their own

\textsuperscript{56} A. R. Crane, 'Pre-adolescent gangs and the Moral Development of Children', \textit{British Journal of Educational Psychology}, Vol. xxviii, 1958, p.203.

\textsuperscript{57} M. Rosenthal, op.cit., pp. 114-115
devices, intervening only if they were on the point of extinction, or had become a political embarrassment. With their nominal adult leadership and parents committees who guaranteed them sound financial backing, Boy Scout troops got the best of both worlds. The troop meeting imparted a sense of the collective, while the patrol system left room for individual development and the autonomy required by groups of mates.

We forget today the original novelty of Scouting, or that it could appear as rebellion. One early devotee thought that it 'took the side of the natural, inquisitive, adventuring boy against the repressive schoolmaster, the moralizing parson and the coddling parent'.\(^{58}\) Like the Toc H motto 'Abandon Rank', Baden Powell's criticism of the absurdities of the English class system lent Scouting a deceptively progressive and innovatory gloss. While the Left uncritically embraced industrial development, Scouting with its advocacy of direct contact with the out of doors, came much closer to the cult of nature which marked so much of the thinking of youth movements in the 1920s and 30s.

With its auxiliary camping movement and understanding of the need to use flags, banners, emblems and colour, the Young Communist League of the late 1930s is perhaps an exception.\(^{59}\) It even worked briefly with the Boy Scouts during the Second World War when the two organisations were represented on the Associated Youth Committee of the National Fitness Council.\(^{60}\) But the Scouts appear to have been unhappy in this rare alliance. One is reminded of John Hargrave's comments about the character traits promoted by Scouting, shortly before he broke away to form the Kibbo Kift Kindred. Hargrave asserted that Baden Powell had nurtured

\(^{58}\) L. Paul, op.cit., p. 53.

\(^{59}\) See Communist Review, March 1937.

\(^{60}\) See Chapter 5 iv.
a movement of followers and conformists, but there were times that called for people ready to initiate social change.\textsuperscript{61} No wonder, when a former Young Communist looked back to the Associated Youth Committee, he recalled that the Scouts had treated the Left 'like a piece of stale fish'.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} M. Rosenthal, op.cit., pp.245-252.

\textsuperscript{62} D. Maunders, \textit{Keeping them off the streets}, pp.77-78.
Chapter 4

Trade Unions and youth,
1918-1939
i. Young People at Work

Young people who entered the workforce between the wars had to negotiate a world in which many people exploited their timidity and inexperience. Most left school at 14 but some obtained exemption and started work earlier. The New South Wales Factory and Shop Act of 1912, introduced to curb excessive overtime, left other abuses of child labour untouched. The Royal Commissioners who framed it seemed more concerned about the morality of juvenile workers than their state of health or rates of pay.¹ Young people were in constant demand as cheap labour. The Factory and Shop Act Reports for Sydney firms show that the proportion of workers aged 21 and under increased from 29.9 per cent of the total in 1919 to 34.8 per cent in 1939. The percentage of boys and girls between 16 and 21 was roughly equal, but girls outnumbered boys by a ratio of almost two to one in the 14 to 16 age group.²

In 1935 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary for Employment revealed that of the total women in the workforce, the proportion of juveniles under 16 had risen between 1911 and 1933-4 from 43.1 to 55.1 per cent.³ In terms of health these workers were often the most at risk. Girls operating power machines in the Sydney clothing trades were reduced to nervous wrecks by the time they left to get married.⁴ Witnesses at the Commonwealth Royal Commission on Health in 1925 stated that adolescent girls working in factories were particularly prone to gynaecological ailments

² Ibid., p.37.
³ M. White, Education and Youth Employment in Australia During the Great Depression, p.26.
⁴ P. Spearritt, op.cit., p.39.
and problems associated with childbirth, because the work they did was too heavy.\textsuperscript{5} Factory girls were the lowest paid of all in the inter-war years, receiving as little as 12s 6d and rarely more than 40s per week. Until the Federated Clerks Union took up the cudgels in 1937, most unions ignored gender-based differentials in juvenile rates of pay.\textsuperscript{6}

Girls from respectable working class families often entered factory life as sexual innocents. Not having learnt the facts of life at home, their ignorance and fear of dismissal made them vulnerable to harassment. Alan Marshall’s description of the trials of Leila, an eighteen year old at a Melbourne footwear factory in the 1930s\textsuperscript{7} was far from fictional in real life, as Janet McCalman verified in her interviews with women in the suburb of Richmond.\textsuperscript{8}

In the 1920s the growing manufacturing industry provided the most jobs for boys in bicycle, radio, electrical, motor car and metal factories. Commerce also expanded and some girls aimed at office work, but the majority found employment in the clothing, footwear, retailing and confectionery trades or, in declining numbers, as domestic servants. Only a minority of boys obtained craft apprenticeships, a sphere in which girls were generally excluded. In New South Wales, 35.5 per cent of male school leavers entered unskilled occupations in 1929.\textsuperscript{9} These jobs initially paid better than apprenticeships, but labourers ran the risk of being trapped in the seasonal economy. Young people who found employment in large shops

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{6} The Victorian Manufacturing Grocers Union is an isolated exception, see the Brisbane Worker, 26 June 1924.

\textsuperscript{7} A. Marshall, \textit{How Beautiful Are Thy Feet}, p.54.

\textsuperscript{8} J. McCalman, op.cit., p.125.

\textsuperscript{9} M. White, op.cit., p.5.
and city firms usually had the best working conditions, but many of the
smaller factories in the inner suburbs were notorious for their old and
dangerous machinery, appalling toilet facilities and scant protection against
heat and cold.\textsuperscript{10} Allegations persisted in the late 1930s that firms like these
in the Sydney clothing trades employed 'sweated' girl labour and used
intimidatory tactics to prevent juveniles joining a union.\textsuperscript{11}

During the 1920s, the anti-capitalist sentiment that had once animated
large sections of the labour movement began to wither away. Economic
stability fostered the myth that 'Fordism' had rendered the socialist ideal
obsolete and that the system would go on improving to the advantage of
worker and employer alike.\textsuperscript{12} It had always been assumed that young people
would gravitate towards the labour movement, therefore, when the boom
ended it came as a shock to discover that a whole generation was largely
ignorant of trade union traditions. 'Caveman' writing in the Sydney
Amalgamated Printing Trade Union Review of October 1928, recalled
nostalgically how tradesmen formally had taught their apprentices not only
a craft, but also the principles and duties of unionism. Modern youth knew
nothing of the struggles to win recognition from the bosses and took all the
hard won benefits for granted.\textsuperscript{13} L. J. Louis has noted that trade union
officials in Victoria held similar views.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} J. McCalman, op.cit., p.125.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 22 September 1938. Evidence of P. Fallon,
secretary of the Federated Clothing and Allied Trades Union, given to
the Conciliation Commissioner.

\textsuperscript{12} L. J. Louis, Trade Unions and the Depression : A Study of Victoria 1930-
1932, p.12.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Amalgamated Printing Trade Union Review}, October 1928.

\textsuperscript{14} L. J. Louis, op.cit., p.145.
Craft unions recruited juveniles primarily for tactical reasons, to control their numbers and reduce their competition. Even the New South Wales Miners Federation, which had a reputation better than most for resisting dismissal at 21, maintained a strict system of seniority for those who graduated to jobs as face workers. Male officials negotiated awards and policed the industrial status quo, but they rarely challenged the subaltern position of young people within it. Where youth issues were uppermost Trades and Labor Councils took a lead, as did women organisers (a new innovative force) or unions where the Left had gained a foothold.

In Brisbane during the early 1920s a Labor Girls Club strove to impart a socialist and trade union education. It was founded in September 1919 by Margaret Thorp, a Quaker who welcomed the Russian revolution and used her position as Assistant Inspector of Factories in Queensland to advance the ideals of militant unionism. Kate Sauer and Dorothy Lane, members of the Queensland Socialist League, also played an active part. The Club met in Kent's Building in Adelaide Street and had the support of the Trades Hall Council which allowed it to use that venue for dances. For a fee of 3d, the Club provided a variety of social activities for the 60 or so girls who joined. The debates it held on 'A Girl's Part in Social Reconstruction' or 'Comradeship and its Relation to Unionism', reflected a desire to remove artificial barriers:

Divisions between one grade of worker and another disappear in Club comradeship, such as the idea of shop girl superiority to factory girl, or office girl to shop girl, etc.

The Club also discussed topics such as 'who makes the better wife, a home girl or a business girl?', and to show that it was not exclusive, held social evenings once a quarter to which girls were free to invite male

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15 Worker, 26 February 1920.

16 Ibid.
friends. Margaret Thorp used the Club to preach the gospel of One Big Union. This concept arose out of the 1917 general strike in New South Wales and spread rapidly to other states. In the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, its advocates rejected arbitration and parliamentary politics. They believed a well organised general strike could overthrow the capitalist system and usher in a new social order based on workers control. As a product of industrial struggle, the Brisbane Labor Girls Club has some similarity to the first 'Proletarian' Sunday School in Glasgow, founded in 1911 by T. Anderson, a militant trade unionist.

The trade union movement had traditionally devoted some attention to the children of its members. Sports and competitions for them featured centrally at annual picnics, Eight Hour and Labor Day celebrations whose heyday in the 1920s coincided with that of the works outing. Union journals often had a children's corner or correspondence column like that in the AWU's Australian Worker, edited by the writer Mary Gilmore from 1908 to 1931. Gilmore actively encouraged children as 'the subscribers of the future', claiming that for them to see their letters in print was 'an adventure equivalent to a journey into a new world'.

Child labour, now of decreasing importance, was mainly concentrated on part time work in the interstices of the economy. A residual debate on the subject in the labour press tended to focus on the detrimental effects of seasonal work on the education of school children, with general denunciation of farmers and vignerons who used it in defiance of State or Federal

17 I. Turner, In Union is Strength, pp.69-70.
18 F. Reid, op.cit., p.33.
19 Australian Worker, 3 August 1927.
20 Australian Worker, 12 July 1922
awards. With the Depression, however, the practice of employing children partially revived. At the New South Wales ALP Easter Conference in 1929 a delegate from the Milk and Ice Carters Union told how school children employed to milk cows and deliver dairy products were so exhausted by early rising that they fell asleep at their classroom desks.

Similar allegations were made again in June 1939, when the Victorian Shop Assistants Union denounced 'child sweating' in back street establishments of the Melbourne rope, textile and clothing trades.

In 1932-3 and 1934-5 two branches of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) established Younger Sets. The union's political orientation favoured such experiments. In 1931 it affiliated to the Comintern sponsored Red International of Labor Unions, one of the few Australian organisations to do so. In 1934 the ARU set up Women's Auxiliaries for the wives and daughters of its members. These provided support during industrial disputes, but also took up political and social issues beyond the scope of union policy. The ARU journal Railroad had a column 'For Young Comrades' and the union's General Secretary J. F. Chappie was sympathetic, having been chairman of the Victorian ALP Youth Movement Organising Committee.

At Hornsby, north of Sydney, the membership of an ARU Younger Set consisted of young trade unionists and the sons and daughters of union members. Its all female committee intended to promote a working class

21 Argus, 12 April 1924.
22 Labor Daily, 1 April 1929.
23 Guardian, 24 June 1939.
25 J. Stevens, op.cit., p.57.
26 See Chapter 1 iii.
psychology among young people', but soon succumbed to more hedonistic impulses. Five months after its inauguration, at an annual general meeting in March 1933, the Younger Set by majority vote became the Hornsby ARU Social Club.27 The Sutherland branch of the ARU on the southern outskirts of Sydney maintained a stricter regime. Its Younger Set of fifty children aged between 3 and 13, had weekly classes on Robert Tressell's socialist novel, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.28 Alice Holloway who founded the Younger Set in May 1934 was president of the union branch, State secretary of the Women's Auxiliaries and a member of the Communist Party.29 Under her leadership the children enjoyed picnics, Christmas parties and concerts, but were also instilled with a sense of pride as members of a pioneer working class educational group.30

These isolated structures were not emulated by other unions, but they may have set a precedent for the ARU's sponsorship of a Central Council of Railway Youth in the early years of the Second World War. This was not the result of women's auxiliaries, nor bestowed from above by union officials. It emerged out of a struggle of young workers themselves, as Audrey Blake has explained using an excerpt from one of their bulletins:

A lead ... has been given by the lads at Newport who established organization to safeguard their working conditions. They held meetings and placed their claims before their unions and Railway Classification Board. As a result ... they were successful in gaining a six shillings increase in the living allowance, a war loading for apprentices and lads, and proficiency allowance ... All this was merely a beginning ... And so the Central Council of Railway Youth was formed. The Council covers the needs of all young

27 Railroad, 10 March 1933.
28 Railroad, 10 July 1934.
29 J. Stevens, op.cit., p.93.
30 Railroad, 10 January 1935.
people throughout the length and breadth of the railway service. It has representatives from the girls, apprentices, lad labourers, lad clerks and lad porters. It consists of a large committee controlling all activities, ... with sub-committees for sport, social and educational activities.\textsuperscript{31}

Campaigns to recruit or involve young workers remained a novelty in the 1930s, the perennial claim for the right to negotiate on behalf of juveniles being, for the most part, still paralleled by a persistent neglect of their organisation. Much of the blame lay with an older generation of unionists who had experienced virtually no industrial rites of passage themselves. In 1902, for example, it had not seemed unusual for Bill Morrow, then only fourteen but already in the AWU, to help organise railway construction workers.\textsuperscript{32} Activists like him were only too willing to encourage young people, but on a purely individual basis. In January 1933 two members of the Lidcombe ALP Younger Set, both aged nineteen, attained the positions of secretary and vice-president of the Hotel Waitresses and Club Union.\textsuperscript{33} The first stirrings of political consciousness may have been a factor here, but young people probably felt less inhibited about standing for election where their fellow workers were roughly the same age. When Thelma Prior started at Holeproof's hosiery factory in the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick in 1936, only the forewoman was married and the other girls thought people old at thirty. Although her father warned she'd be 'thrown in the river by the establishment', Thelma joined the Textile Workers Union and became an effective shop steward at fifteen.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} A. Blake, \textit{A Proletarian Life}, pp.79-80.

\textsuperscript{32} A. Johnson, \textit{Fly a Rebel Flag}, p.17).

\textsuperscript{33} Labor Daily, 6 January 1933.

\textsuperscript{34} T. Prior, 'My forty-Five Years in Industry', in M. Bevege, M. James, C. Shute (eds), op.cit., p.125.
Awareness that structural changes in industry were creating additional demand for semi-skilled labour made some unions wary of juveniles. In 1929 the Timberworkers Union had understood the potential for competition inherent in the radically altered ratios of boys to men imposed by the Lukin award. The Federated Ironworkers Association (FIA) also feared that repetitive production and piecework in the metal trades would reduce the need for adult workers. Its suspicions were confirmed in March 1930 when Justice Beeby of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court allowed the introduction of juveniles 'in all occupations for which apprenticeship is not provided'. Beeby based the wages of juniors on experience rather than age, but as these were well below the adult rate they placed the majority of the FIA's members as a severe disadvantage. In order to modify their competition the FIA decided to organise juniors and by 1939 had recruited 2,500 in New South Wales. The Sheet Metal Working Union followed suit but ran into problems where firms deliberately hired juniors for only a few weeks and then dismissed them to employ a new lot.

A dispute at Commonwealth Telegraph Supplies Ltd, Sydney in 1935 demonstrates the advantage the FIA hoped to gain by absorbing juniors. When the firm tried to increase a ratio of 55 juniors to 11 adults, the union's state secretary brought all the employees out on strike. Due to a closed shop the firm backed down, but often in these confrontations the FIA had to give ground. A survey of 40 New South Wales metal products factories taken in 1939, illustrates its predicament. Adults among the labourers and

35 Labor Daily, 6 March 1929.


38 Workers Weekly, 9 August 1935.
process workers in these firms outnumbered juniors in only one case.\textsuperscript{39} The size of the problem made the FIA eager to have juvenile employment regulated by the arbitration courts. It was not only trying to stop boys doing men's work, but fighting to protect its own junior members from undue exploitation in so-called 'blind-alley' jobs.\textsuperscript{40}

Two historians have recently asserted that welfare schemes and fringe benefits created a major obstacle to union growth in industries employing large numbers of young people.\textsuperscript{41} In New South Wales a mere five per cent of the 20,000 workers in retailing belonged to the Shop Assistants Union in 1907 and only ten per cent in 1931.\textsuperscript{42} After the Great War, on the advice of industrial psychologists, firms like Anthony Horderns and David Jones began to invest in the physical and mental welfare of their employees. House magazines helped induct junior staff into the firm's practices and philosophy, while a proliferation of clubs and sports teams induced them to identify with their workplace during leisure time. Girls proved highly susceptible to this form of social control, especially when the paternalist rhetoric of 'the happy family firm' meshed with schemes to protect their health as 'the mothers of tomorrow'.\textsuperscript{43}

The Pelaco shirt factory in Melbourne developed these techniques to a fine art. James Law, its managing director, set out quite consciously to avoid union intervention by providing a host of welfare benefits for his staff of 500

\textsuperscript{39} J. A. Merritt, op.cit., pp.247-248.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{42} G. Reekie, op.cit., p.11.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p.16.
- mainly girls under 21. Law defended piecework, alleging that modern girls regarded employment as a transition to marriage and wanted jobs where they could make the most money in the quickest time.\textsuperscript{44} The Textile Workers Union was perplexed by the air of bonhomie the firm radiated. Its \textit{Clothing Trades Gazette} of September 1922 warned workers not to mistake the better conditions at Pelaco for philanthropy, as it paid the bosses to keep them compliant. Unfortunately this attack backfired. When union officials next visited the firm they were counted out by the girls. Despite further attempts at recruitment in the 1920s and 30s, only a minority of Pelaco workers ever joined the union.\textsuperscript{45}

Trade union youth initiatives in the late 1930s were influenced indirectly by the Commonwealth Government Premiers Conference on youth employment in February 1937, and calls for improvements in juvenile pay and conditions made by the Australian Youth Council.\textsuperscript{46} When a New South Wales Hotel, Club and Restaurants award came up for review in 1937, the Australian Railways Union decided to intervene. For more than a decade its organisers had complained of the exploitation of Railway Refreshment Room (RRR) workers. The Railways Department employed approximately 500 girls in their teens, at thirty refreshment rooms and tea and pie stalls across the state. Whether or not they actually lived-in, each girl had 19s per week deducted from an average wage of 40s, to cover board and lodging in a departmental cottage. To be on duty when trains arrived, the girls had to work broken shifts of eight hours spread over much longer periods. Rosters of 15 to 21 hours were common, interspersed by irregular

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{44} R. Frances, op.cit., p.110.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p.111.
\item\textsuperscript{46} \textit{See Chapter 5 iv.}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
rest and meal breaks. Boys employed as 'junior usefuls' at railway stations were subjected to similar conditions.

Lloyd Ross, a member of the Communist Party, editor of Railroad and ARU state secretary, launched a recruitment drive to enrol these workers. But it was Eileen Powell, 'booked-off' as special organiser, who toured the state, meticulously gathered information and presented the union's claim at the Industrial Commission - the first woman ever to do so.\(^{47}\) Eileen Powell left school at 14 in 1927, took a course in shorthand and obtained her first real job as an assistant on the ALP Labor Daily. She later worked at Sydney Trades and Labor Council as secretary to the ALP state organiser. In 1937 she moved to Transport House to work as a typist for the ARU, but gradually assumed responsibility for Railroad, including editing its women's page.\(^{48}\)

Although the RRR case dragged on until December 1939, Eileen Powell kept up the pressure using the press to expose some of the worst conditions at country stations. The ARU also published Life and Work in the RRR (fig. 10), a pamphlet based on the girls' experiences. It described their cramped accommodation, lack of sleep and snatched meals. It told how sub-managers who were 'notoriously economical and tyrannical' made them do extra duties without pay during rest periods.\(^{49}\) The Industrial Commission finally accepted Eileen Powell's submission that girls in the RRR were being 'robbed of the bloom of youth'. A new award limited broken shifts to 14 hours, with overtime payments after 10 hours; board and lodging deductions were abolished for those who lived out and the quality of meals

\(^{47}\) Eileen Powell interview, Sydney, 29 April 1989.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) L. Ross, (ed), Life and Work in the RRR, pp.11-12.
Figure 10

Life and Work in the RRR,
(Eileen Powell, private collection)
served to the girls was improved; all grades received wage increases of up to 9s per week.  

The widespread practice of dismissing youths at 21 led to several unofficial strikes in the New South Wales mining industry. Stoppages occurred at Richmond Main on the northern coalfield in February 1932 and at Abermain near Cessnock a month later. Miners at Corrimal on the south coast went on strike in February 1934 in support of a youth who, at 21, was given the option of the sack, or retention on boy's wages. Juveniles in the industry were usually employed as 'clippers', attaching skips of coal to the heavy cable of the endless haulage. Awareness of their pivotal role in the smooth running of the pit made them a highly cohesive group. When two Communists, W. Orr and C. Nelson, became general secretary and acting president of the Miners Federation in 1934, they set about reversing the policies of their predecessors who, they alleged, had tamely accepted employer-imposed solutions for an industry in crisis.

In the mining areas of New South Wales there were approximately 2,000 males of 20 years or under registered as unemployed. Orr and Nelson regarded the loss of juvenile jobs and seniority rights as a product of mechanisation. In the 'first round' of a log of claims in 1937, they promised not to beg for the retention of 'a couple of youth here and a few more there', but to press the employers for fundamental changes in the running of the industry. In June after 'stay-down' strikes and demonstrations the Federation won a wage increase, but further progress on 'the youth issue'  

50 Daily News, 12 December 1939.  
51 Red Leader, 5 February 1932 and 8 April 1932.  
52 Red Leader, 14 February 1934.  
53 R. Gollan, The Coal Miners of New South Wales, p.163.  
54 Ibid., p.218.
had to wait a 'second round' of negotiations in 1938-9. The Industrial Commission eventually conceded that increased productivity enabled the mining industry to support early retirement. In 1940 the Commonwealth Arbitration Court granted a 40 hour week and the Coal and Shale Mine Workers Compensation Act of 1941 let 1,700 miners over 60 retire, to make way for younger men.55

Sydney Trades and Labor Council produced the most comprehensive youth policy during the 1930s. This resulted from a debate in May 1937, after which the Council appointed a sub-committee to formulate 'protective measures' for youth in industry. Delegates had expressed concern when the Premiers Conference on youth employment recommended £2,000,000 be set aside for job creation, but the Federal Government cut this to a mere £200,000.56 When the sub-committee reported back in August it focused on youth in the 18 to 25 age group who, having been unemployed for several years, were 'too old for jobs requiring unskilled labour, yet unfitted for skilled work'.57 It argued that a rehabilitation scheme, previously agreed to by the Federal Government, ought to include: raising the school leaving age to 16, with a maintenance grant of 15s per week after the age of 14; jobs to be created through a programme of public works, with award wages and conditions; skill training available to all, under trade union supervision; a six hour day for young workers below the age of 21; guaranteed employment for one year at the full journeyman's rate on completion of an apprenticeship.58 The policy reflected the dissatisfaction of unions in the metal trades where it called for the abolition of the 'experience' clause in

56 Common Cause, 8 May 1937.
57 Railroad, 17 August 1937.
58 Ibid.
awards covering unapprenticed juniors and sought government action to redress the balance in firms where the proportion of juniors far exceeded that of adults.

In its advocacy of equal pay for boys and girls Sydney Trades and Labor Council was innovatory. Its policy implicitly acknowledged the efforts of the Federated Clerks Union which had launched a Council of Action for Equal Pay in May 1937. This campaign dealt a blow to the myth that the employment of women was a contributory factor in the unemployment of men. Developing a theme advanced by Mureen Heagney in *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs?* (1935), it argued that women’s occupations traditionally were less affected by unemployment, but that raising their wages to achieve parity with men would help alleviate family poverty.59 Despite the obvious financial benefits, many young girls suspected that wage equality would lead to their automatic replacement by men. The Council for Equal Pay knew of this and produced a special pamphlet to allay their fears. It was able to demonstrate that a new award which, in October 1937, had introduced a measure of equal pay for shop assistants in New South Wales, had not resulted in the expected dismissals.60

A. C. McAlpine, assistant secretary of the Trades and Labor Council, emphasised the beneficial effect of a six hour day. There were 391,000 young industrial workers under 21 in Australia and a reduction of their hours of work would create approximately 25 per cent more jobs per hundred of them, thereby allowing the absorption of the 35,000 unemployed youth aged between 14 and 25. McAlpine also claimed that raising the school leaving age

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59 J. Stevens, op.cit., pp.67-68.

60 Ref T4/14/7, Archives of Business and Labour, ANU, Canberra.
age to 16 would immediately take nearly 8,000 boys and girls out of the job market in New South Wales.61

The youth policy of Melbourne Trades Hall Council focussed exclusively on the threat to conventional apprenticeship posed by the introduction of a trainee learner system. When the Country Progressive Party led by Sir Albert Dunstan came to power in Victoria in 1935, it depended on Labor support. In return for helping keep the United Australia Party out of office, Dunstan allowed the ALP to influence aspects of industrial policy, including a Youth Employment Council. This body, established in October 1936 with State and Federal government funding, received 7,108 applications for training from unemployed youth in the 18-25 age group. Duplicating a scheme already operational in New South Wales, the Council recommended 1,600 for an eighteen month period of trade training. Having attained fifty per cent efficiency in various skills, the trainees were then placed out with suitable employers and paid journeymen's rates.62

As one of sixty organisations consulted, Melbourne Trades Hall Council viewed the scheme with growing trepidation and, in January 1938, convened a conference of 'all unions in the apprenticeship trades' to plan resistance to it.63 In the final analysis, however, it could do little more than place its dissatisfaction on record. It regarded the trainee learner scheme as prejudicial to the interests of craft apprentices, a negation of 'the ratio principle' fixed by appropriate tribunals and a source of future unemployment for skilled artisans. As an alternative, it called on the Australian Congress of Trade Unions to press for a Federal Bureau of Vocational and Industrial Guidance, to check the absorptive capacity of all industries;

61 Railroad, 17 August 1937.

62 Minutes of Melbourne Trades Hall Council Executive, 7 February 1938, Ref 1/2/1/9, Melbourne University Archives.

63 Ibid., 27 January 1938.
compel employers to take their full quota of apprentices; classify trades according to the educational standards required and provide each apprentice with accurate information on the prospects of a particular industry.\textsuperscript{64}

Proposals of this kind were not confined to the labour movement, but they needed government action across the board in economic and social policy, with more than marginal financial support for initiatives in the different states. While a general acceptance of the need to expand secondary industry existed, some of the other requirements were only met during or after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 3 March 1938.

\textsuperscript{65} M. White, op.cit., pp.56-59.
The 1920s are usually regarded as an age of reform in apprentice training with the introduction of improved planning coupled with major advances in the provision of technical education. Empowered by the 1912 Industrial Arbitration Act under which it was able to determine the hours, wages and conditions of apprentices, the New South Wales Board of Trade in 1922 produced a report highly critical of trade training facilities. The outcome was the establishment of Conciliation Committees to oversee training arrangements. These functioned in tandem with Trade Advisory Committees which James Nagel, the State's Superintendent of Technical Education, had begun in 1914 to assist with the planning of technical classes for indentured apprentices.\(^1\)

In 1924 Queensland formed an Apprentice Executive with similar responsibilities, with Group Apprenticeship Committees in each trade. Indentures in all states provided for compulsory attendance at technical colleges. In Queensland this entailed four hours per week of daytime instruction and two hours in the evening. By 1939 New South Wales was the only State where no provision existed for attendance in the employer's time.\(^2\) In Victoria the 1915 Factories and Shops Act conferred on its Wages Boards certain responsibilities for apprentice training, but these loose arrangements were completely overhauled in 1928 when the State Government set up an Apprentice Commission as part of its Department of

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1 M. White, op.cit., p.22.
Labour. Employers and trade unions made representations to this body, chaired by the State Superintendent of Technical Education.  

The creation of State apprenticeship authorities indicated an attempt to bring some order into an increasingly confused area of industrial law. With the diversification of industry a bewildering variety of State awards each had its own apprentice provisions, and the whole situation was further complicated by the progressive intrusion of the Commonwealth after the High Court decisions in the Engineers case of 1920 and the forty-four hour week case of 1926.  

Apprentice indentures everywhere settled into a common pattern of five years during the 1920s. This reflected union industrial demands rather than any planned manpower policy. For the previous quarter of a century employer groups had fought a rearguard action to delay or water down legislation controlling apprenticeship and many felt the new constraints were positively vindictive. They resented what they saw as excessive technical education and complained that existing controls failed to accommodate changes in industry brought about by automation. Technical modifications necessary for competitive survival reduced the need for highly skilled craftsmen. Semi-skilled industrial training, much of it given on the job, became a higher priority than conventional apprenticeship.  

This reasoning ran though major reports on technical training in the inter-war period, but the craft unions refused to accept its logic. An exclusively male preserve in most trades, they defended apprenticeship not only as a traditional method of skill acquisition, but as a cherished sign of continuity between different generations in the same trade. Apprenticeship itself

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3 M. White, op.cit., p.22.
5 M. White, op.cit., p.23.
was a process, consisting of a series of rites of passage marking the ascension of a boy from the ranks of the unskilled, his absorption into the craft community and eventually, on serving his time, reaching manhood. Each stage was marked symbolically: initiation through the pranks of older apprentices; assimilation through the journeyman’s use of boys as lookouts for foremen and finally by the ritual associated with the completion of five years 'probationary servitude' which greatly fortified a sense of pride and superiority in trademen's minds.

In this case study I discuss attitudes towards apprenticeship in the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) based primarily on information taken from its monthly journal. The metal industry between the wars is of interest as the location of a concerted employer assault on the traditional concept of apprenticeship. In September 1933 the New South Wales Apprentice Commissioner allowed the Metal Trades Employers Association (MTEA) to introduce a category of 'unapprenticed learners'. To introduce this scheme the employers posed as reforming modernisers, anxious to provide more jobs for youth by dismantling old fashioned restrictive practices. The AEU's predicament has contemporary parallels. It demonstrates how little room for manoeuvre trade unions possess in economic recession, when their previously negotiated defences come under attack. The AEU's indecisiveness stemmed from its historical ambivalence towards juvenile labour. It aspired to recruit apprentices and yet, with the employers, had a vested interest in perpetuating their subaltern status on the shopfloor.

In his history of the AEU, T. Sheridan has singled out juvenile labour as one of the major contentious issues faced by the union before the Second

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6 T. Sheridan, Mindful Militants, p.20.
World War. In the expansionary 1920s, management in the metal industry complained of a shortage of skilled labour, but in the Depression it pursued a policy of dilution. Firms severely 'rationed' apprentices and to further cut costs, increased the ratio of unskilled junior workers. By failing to counter this with a systematic recruitment drive, the AEU left itself open to attack. The MTEA was able to take the initiative in 1933, bypassing the federal court on the question of unindentured learners, because most young people in this category were, or would be likely to be, unorganised and hence by law not covered by awards the court handed down.

The AEU knew of the anomaly of respondent employers not being bound by Federal awards in the case of non-unionists, but did little to rectify it. Under its rules an apprentice might only join the union in his final year, usually at the age of nineteen. In 1922, however, the Australian AEU waived this condition and allowed apprentices to join in their first year as probationers and transfer to full membership later. This brought them under Federal awards where they qualified for extra benefits. In 1934 the union resolved to enlist juveniles in a systematic manner. Up until then it had let its divisional organising delegates recruit apprentices, while amicably allowing the Federated Ironworkers Association to enrol other junior process workers.

There is abundant evidence, both before and after 1934, of employer resistance whenever the AEU approached apprentices. Whether in a single firm or, at the behest of the MTEA in several, a common desire to maintain the individualised status of the apprentice is evident. This level of control

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7 Ibid., pp.123-124.
8 Ibid., p.126.
9 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, June 1924.
10 T. Sheridan, op.cit., p.128.
assumed added importance for factory managements when new technical processes made the apprentice less of a learner and more of a highly specialised productive boy worker.\textsuperscript{11} In June 1920, the AEU organising delegate in northern Queensland complained that sugar mills in the Mackay district forced boys into signing agreements not to join the union during their apprenticeship. He insisted that a clause be inserted into the State award making this practice illegal.\textsuperscript{12}

Often when a firm suspected a recruiting drive it would try to circumvent the union by appealing directly to parents. For indentured boys to join the AEU parents had first to give their consent in writing which many were reluctant to do.\textsuperscript{13} Some firms demanded a cash premium for training, or exploited a natural desire by parents to see boys safely through their 'time' without trouble. One Sydney employer who contacted parents in January 1922, alleged that the engineering unions had been striving for years to prevent boys learning the trade. It alluded to older workers trying to 'unsettle apprentices' and advised that in the case of boys, union membership was a waste of time and money, as the obligations it imposed conflicted with the terms of their indentures as civil contracts.\textsuperscript{14}

The AEU replied that it had only sought to restrict apprentices to ensure that their ratio to journeymen guaranteed them proper instruction. The firm in question had 120 apprentices but only 27 skilled mechanics. This violated a Federal award which limited apprentices to one for every


\textsuperscript{12} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, June 1920.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, June 1924.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, January 1922.
three journeymen. The AEU stated flatly that under such conditions, lads had no chance of learning a trade. It further accused employers of seeking to minimise the Federal award, by forcing the unions to use the courts to obtain apprentice benefits already provided for. The AEU cautioned parents that indentures were only legal if they conformed with civil law. Some of the 'fanciful conditions' it had seen included of late represented a futile attempt 'to coerce boys into a false position on the plea of shop discipline'.

The problem persisted in Melbourne, for in 1932 the AEU instructed its shop stewards to contact probationary apprentices so that it might inspect their indentures as they were drawn up, to challenge any illegal content.

Apprentices who joined the AEU often risked the wrath of their employer. Managements often turned vicious, looking for any excuse to lay such boys off. In 1924 the union dealt with several cases of victimisation in Sydney and Newcastle. In January 1926 the Melbourne firm of Harman and Co singled out apprentice recruits for 'special treatment'. The AEU's organising delegate noted that this was usually done and that the firm had raised every conceivable obstacle before paying the boys their proper entitlements. Firms disciplined their apprentices by having them summoned before a Board of Trade inquiry with the power to cancel their indentures or, more informally, by allowing foremen to use abusive language or even physically assault them. More subtle techniques of persuasion were also

15 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, May 1921.
16 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, January 1922.
18 See AEU Monthly Journal and Report, July, August, October and November 1924.
used. In May 1937 the AEU accused the Sydney Cockatoo Dock and Engineering Company of conspiring to turn apprentices against it, by inviting them out to dinner parties and the theatre.\textsuperscript{21}

The legal provisions relating to apprentices often caused confusion on the shopfloor and placed an added burden on the AEU's full-time organising delegates. When called in they had no choice, yet one suspects the average official preferred to steer clear of this troubled area whenever he could. In February 1925 the union's Sydney organising delegate reported that the local branch had decided no advantage would be gained by enrolling youths employed by the Electric Meter Manufacturing Company.\textsuperscript{22} The tone of a divisional report in June 1936 suggests that similar reluctance was rife in Melbourne:

> It is a serious reflection upon those members, (and there are a large number), who never attempt by stating the case for the union to induce the apprentice to join up, and in more cases than I care to think of, advise the lad to wait until he has finished his apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{23}

Among the myriad of abuses of State and Federal awards the AEU investigated, three areas of technical education, training and pay stand out. Although apprentices supposedly enjoyed protection under each of these headings, the AEU's Monthly Reports indicate that employers frequently flouted the law and got away scot free. Some found legal loopholes; others were able to avoid their obligations because State apprentice authorities lacked the political will to confront them, or a sufficiently large inspectorate to enforce the law.

\textsuperscript{20} AEU Monthly Journal and Report, January 1936

\textsuperscript{21} AEU Monthly Journal and Report, May 1937.

\textsuperscript{22} AEU Monthly Journal and Report, February 1925.

\textsuperscript{23} AEU Monthly Journal and Report, June 1936.
Technical education in Australia developed out of the needs of the mining industry, although by the 1920s Technical Colleges rather than 'Schools of Mines' had become the main centres of this type of education. The Sydney Technical College ran courses supplementary to practical skills in industry, as did similar institutions at Broken Hill, Newcastle and smaller provincial towns. In Victoria thirty-three Technical Schools operated at the senior level in 1925, the principal one being the Melbourne Working Men's College. Apprentices provided the main source of students in both States, although to a lesser extent in Victoria where students on a particular course had not necessarily to be employed in the same trade.24

To discourage boys from attending Technical College, some employers insisted they made up the time lost on other days, or refused to make proper financial restitution. Firms were entitled to deduct wages each week for the half day at Technical College, but on production of a certificate of attendance were supposed to reimburse the apprentice in full. Some firms simply refused to pay, or delayed until the last moment. In the mid-1930s the AEU still had to threaten, or take these employers to court to recover wages, just as it had done a decade earlier.25

Firms that objected to off the job technical training alleged that colleges were out of touch with the practical requirements of the trade, or that apprentices already had all the instruction that was necessary in the shop. This was a fallacy in the early days of apprentice authorities, when small firms sometimes indentured boys without the facilities to train them. The burgeoning garage and motor trade appears to have been a black spot for

24 C. Forster, op.cit., p.186.
this, especially in Queensland. The AEU investigated other cases in Sydney in the late 1920s and early 30s, compelling it to seek the transfer of apprentices involved and assistance from the Board of Trade to prevent such abuses happening again.

The low cost of apprentice and juvenile labour more than compensated for any deficiencies in its productivity, which explains why firms were constantly tempted to employ more of these workers than they were entitled to. Those taken to task by the AEU over a ten year period invariably put forward the same arguments to justify the practice. Most denied exploiting apprentices as cheap labour, but all maintained they had work on certain contracts which was essentially that of boys, where they dared not put a man or otherwise the firm would be unable to compete.

Murray-Smith and Dare have asserted that a persistent tendency existed in the inter-war years for the legal minimum wage for apprentices to become the maximum, thus deflecting the incentive to acquire skills. This is confirmed by the AEU’s Monthly Reports which list dozens of cases where apprentices were denied holiday or overtime pay, or received wages below the prescribed rate. In New South Wales the basic wage of apprentices fluctuated very little. Board of Trade regulations enforced in June 1921 gave first year apprentices indentured between their fourteenth and

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26 See AEU Monthly Journal and Report, October 1923 and December 1924.


28 Compare for example AEU Monthly Journal and Report, May 1921 with January 1931.

29 S. Murray-Smith and A. J. Dare, op.cit., p.135.

sixteenth years, 15/- per week rising to 45/- per week in the last six months of their final year.\textsuperscript{31} A Federal award for the metal trades handed down in August 1934 gave first year apprentices 16/3d per week, rising to 53/4d for the whole of their final year.\textsuperscript{32}

Mechanisation in the metal trades is usually associated with the decomposition of the generic craft of engineer into the distinct trades of turner and fitter. But the new technical processes led to even further specialisation. Boys became proficient at drilling, milling, slotting and bandsawing after only a few days training on these machines. These jobs were usually reserved for apprentices, but in October 1923 the Sydney MTEA successfully applied to the State Industrial Arbitration Court to introduce unskilled juniors on certain types of light process work.\textsuperscript{33} This was the first of several sorties by the employers that heralded a decisive test of strength.

Although Sydney AEU talked about 'putting up a fight' its leaders still maintained their faith in arbitration, leaving the rank and file in the work places affected to organise whatever resistance they could.\textsuperscript{34} Statistics in the \textit{Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia} suggest that most employers failed to make sweeping changes overnight. On the contrary a real increase in the number of juveniles aged between fourteen and sixteen years occurred much later between 1931 and 1939. As Sheridan has noted,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, June 1921.
\item \textsuperscript{32} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, August 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{AEU Monthly Journal and Report}, October 1923.
\item \textsuperscript{34} For an outline of the AEU's attitude towards industrial arbitration, see J. Hutson, 'The Amalgamated Engineering Union and Arbitration in the 1920s', \textit{Labour History}, No. 14, May 1968.
\end{itemize}
the proportion of young metal workers in the above category increased in that decade from 2.3 per cent of the workforce to 4.2 per cent.\(^{35}\)

While factory order books remained full the AEU still managed to control the supply of qualified labour using if need be the threat of localised industrial action. In April 1925 confronted with unskilled juniors on machines previously operated by apprentices, unions at Dobson and Franks Ltd, Sydney went on strike, compelling the firm to dismiss this labour.\(^{36}\) The AEU successfully adopted similar tactics at the Sydney firm of Dobson and Wormalds Ltd in November 1926, where the management introduced juniors in contravention of a 1923 award. The unexpected solidarity of the unskilled juniors is an interesting feature of this strike. Aware of their invidious position, they refused to carry out work done by the striking fitters and thus entered into dispute with the firm themselves.\(^{37}\)

This type of resistance depended on a buoyant economy; when the labour market became glutted employers resumed their agitation to hire whom they pleased. They were given the green light in March 1930 when Mr Justice Beeby of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court handed down the first Federal award covering all major unions in metal manufacturing. Beeby believed that the pre-depression slump had been the result of outdated production methods and that a new wage structure based on the value of individual jobs was, with repetitive production, a pre-requisite for stability.\(^{38}\) Politicians and social workers were extremely worried about unemployed youth, but Beeby's desire to reduce the cost of production led

\(^{35}\) Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, Vols. 15-33.

\(^{36}\) AEU Monthly Journal and Report, April 1925.

\(^{37}\) AEU Monthly Journal and Report, November 1926.

him to abolish restrictions placed on junior labour and allow its introduction 'in all occupations for which apprenticeship is provided'.

During the Depression the MTEA imposed a virtual suspension of the apprenticeship system, while seeking to vary existing awards in order to alter the tenure of trainees in the future. In an application to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in May 1933, the MTEA claimed that the prevailing economic uncertainty made it unreasonable for employers to enter into binding contracts over a period of years. It therefore sought permission to introduce a category of 'unapprenticed learners' into metal manufacturing in New South Wales. Unlike indentured youths, these trainees would enter the industry in late adolescence, need not serve a full five years and could be laid off during slack periods. Although the Court refused to sanction this scheme, it did agree that whenever indentures were drawn up, a clause might be inserted stating that if an employer was unable to supply work due to financial difficulty, an apprenticeship could be suspended for an agreed period, or even cancelled altogether in extreme circumstances.

Federal awards took precedence over those of State Industrial Courts, except where non-unionists were concerned. Taking advantage of this, the MTEA applied to the New South Wales Apprentice Commissioner for a variation of the State Engineers Award, to allow the introduction of learners. Several voluntary bodies supported the application, while the Technical Teachers Association who might have joined the AEU in objecting, remained divided. In September 1933 the Commissioner granted the MTEA's request, citing as precedents a similar scheme in Britain and the

39 Ibid.

40 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, June 1933.

41 Education, 15 October 1932.
1,000 apprentices without contracts already employed by the New South Wales Railway Commissioners.42

Having consulted with other unions in the metal trades, the AEU managed to secure a High Court decision in March 1935 which prohibited learners in any industry covered by a Federal award. Unfortunately this ruling coincided with Beeby's hearing of evidence from the employers in the Metal Trades Case of that year. Having listened to their pleas, Beeby nullified the AEU's litigation by reversing an earlier decision of the Full Court not to allow learners. He also suggested his award might be similarly varied in other states to permit the simultaneous operation of the indenture and learner systems.43 Six months after Beeby's ruling the AEU's organising delegate in Sydney reported that certain firms had rushed to employ extra juniors, but without any semblance of the agreed ratio to adults. He concluded glumly that their average age and physique brought vividly to mind 'the treatment of juveniles during the industrial revolution of the 19th century'.44

The AEU had not merely lost on a technicality, it had suffered a tactical defeat at the hand of the employers who, before doing battle, had carefully prepared their ground. Whenever the MTEA presented its case, it provided seemingly irrefutable evidence that conventional apprenticeship was disappearing. Between 1927 and 1932 the numbers of indentures registered in New South Wales decreased from 1,981 to 274. The metal trades suffered a corresponding decline. Apprentice numbers in engineering fell from 451 to 31; in boilermaking from 89 to 1 and in moulding from 44 to 6.45

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42 Australian Worker, 20 September 1933.
43 T. Sheridan, op.cit., p.126.
45 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 July 1933.
MTEA argued that the indentured system led to confusion and cost, due to legal tangles associated with the conflict between arbitration awards and apprenticeship as a civil contract. The AEU probably suffered embarrassment on this point, given that some of its own members had been reluctant to recruit apprentices on precisely these grounds.

When the employers cited trends in youth culture to justify the learner system, the AEU was on thoroughly unfamiliar terrain. The MTEA alleged that modern youth failed to respond to discipline and took advantage of the security afforded by indentures to make less effort than workers whose jobs depended on good conduct. It fictitiously depicted firms under the indenture system as denuded of all punitive powers, a situation supposedly unique when compared with other forms of tutelage. The desire of firms to jettison binding contracts was a natural corollary of skill fragmentation and the recession. Paternalism no longer paid, but the issue could not be argued in quite those terms. Public sympathy for the unemployed school leavers of 1930-1934 remained high and employers found it a convenient device. The chairman of the MTEA implied that if the learner system was not adopted, a projected 2,000 new jobs for juveniles in the industry would automatically be placed in jeopardy.

Allegations of apprentice indolence were not supported by the facts, but the AEU, who still used the laborious and inefficient method of sending out questionnaires to obtain data, failed to respond in time to have any effect. It was more prompt in May 1936 when, fearing the imminent introduction of the learner system into Melbourne factories, it published extracts from the

46 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 May 1933.
47 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, June 1933.
48 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 May 1933.
49 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, August 1934.
annual report of the Victorian Apprentice Commission. This was based on returns from firms spanning eight trade groups with a total of 1,404 indentured apprentices. Classification of their progress revealed that employers found eighty-four per cent 'good' to 'excellent', slightly more than fifteen per cent 'fair' and less than one per cent 'poor'. Out of the total, sixty per cent of apprentices had not been absent for a single day over the previous twelve months.50

These figures suggest a diligent compliant workforce, as indeed one would expect from boys who were not free agents. Contrary to what the MTEA said, the Board of Trade and Apprentice Commissions laid down strict procedure to deal with any misdemeanours,51 while the new learner system was even more rigorously policed. Families of apprentices had to forego a significant increase in income until they completed their training - unlike the majority of unskilled juveniles who chased after quick money immediately. Therefore apprentices who larked about suffered not only the wrath of the firm, but parental displeasure as well, given the sacrifices involved.

Alan McKinlay has depicted the growth of strike action in the workplace behaviour of apprentices as a significant indicator of their proletarianisation.52 For the reasons above, hardly any tradition of this kind existed in Australia during the 1930s. Most engineering apprentices still lived in a kind of limbo. They were officially encouraged to join the AEU but deprived of full rights until they reached the age of nineteen. The AEU expected them to show solidarity with journeymen in industrial disputes


51 For New South Wales Board of Trade Regulations see, AEU Monthly Journal and Report, April 1925.

52 A. McKinlay, op.cit., p.3.
but, by agreement, never withdrew them from the workplace. Yet as atomised non-union workers, apprentices could be of immense strategic importance to employers. When Evans Deakins Ltd of Brisbane used apprentices as strike-breakers during a dispute in January 1937, the AEU divisional organising delegate described it as 'an event unique in the history of unionism'. A more common occurrence, one the AEU complained of bitterly in 1938, was for employers to force apprentices into compulsory overtime during strikes, in order to offset the fall in production.

Early in 1938 the New South Wales government, which already operated its own Youth Employment Trainee Scheme, applied for a twelve month variation in the Federal Metal Trades Award to introduce apprentices on four year contracts, aged from nineteen to twenty-five. Despite union opposition Beeby granted this on the grounds that entrants would in all probability be young men who had missed their normal opportunity to become indentured due to the Depression. In April 1938 the Full Court granted an application to extend the scheme to the boot and shoe, timber, printing, clothing and coachmaking trades. A similar scheme launched by the Victorian government had barely got underway before the outbreak of war. Only the tightness of the skilled labour market, linked to the expansion of the defence industry, prevented the influx of juniors from creating serious competition with engineering craftsmen. In 1941 due to wartime dilution, the court agreed to abandon both the trainee and learner systems. Their joint impact, however, in New South Wales the State most affected

54 AEU Monthly Journal and Report, September 1938.
55 T. Sheridan, op.cit., p.128.
56 Ibid.
meant that only 2,900 apprentices out of a total of 11,100 in all industries, were engaged under indentures between 1934 and 1943.57

Because the AEU never fully mobilised apprentices, it could not rely on their corporate support. A youth section in the union like the Glasgow AEU Youth Guild of 1928, or the various English AEU Youth Fellowships of the 1930s, only emerged in Australia during the Second World War. These groups were easier to launch in Britain because of its far higher scale of operations in metal manufacture. Firms like Fairfields of Govan, whose five hundred boys virtually precipitated the 1937 Clyde apprentice strike, were exceptional in Australia.58 Apprentices here were much more dispersed, far fewer in number and usually served their time in much smaller workshops. In 1920-21 forty per cent of Australian metal workers were in establishments of less than a hundred employees, a proportion unchanged in 1967-68.59 Apprentices' conditions nevertheless evoked some comment in the wider community. A report to the annual conference of the New South Wales Congregational Union in 1938 claimed they were treated as 'absolute slaves, sacrificed to the gods of efficiency and profit'.60 It told how boys who started work at 8 am had to rush off at the end of the day, often without a meal, to attend evening courses. Returning home as late as 10 pm, many had no time for a normal cultural and social life.

Despite union tardiness, some rudimentary forms of apprenticeship organisation existed in the 1930s, especially in larger workplaces. In October 1934 apprentices at the Randwick workshops of the Tramway Trust in Sydney, formed a Junior Defence Committee to fight proposed cuts in their

57 Ibid., p.129.
58 A. McKinlay, op.cit., pp.10-11.
59 T. Sheridan, op.cit., p.2.
free travel allowance.\textsuperscript{61} Two years later when this concession again came under threat, they drafted a protest petition and threatened to hold stopwork meetings.\textsuperscript{62} In April 1937 apprentice boilermakers at the Eveleigh railway workshops, Sydney held a meeting to discuss long-standing defects in their training schedule and elected a deputation to see the management to get the matter rectified.\textsuperscript{63}

Apprentices also evolved a corporate identity where large numbers congregated on day-release, or for evening classes. Early forms of organisation cemented unity within a single craft. In the 1920s, for example, the Sydney Technical College Printing Students Association held an annual sports day where 'Comps' and 'Letterpress' vied in keen but friendly rivalry for possession of various 'Cups'.\textsuperscript{64} Associations based on craft and profession, equally in evidence at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, may have been a factor in the slow development of more orthodox student unions. A Past and Present Students Association, formed in 1923, battled against apathy at the re-named Melbourne Technical College until 1936. Its meagre gains and complete failure to cater for the needs of female students, have been outlined by Murray-Smith and Dare.\textsuperscript{65} A real union with power to negotiate on their behalf only emerged in June 1939 when 1,000 students petitioned the College Council to provide them with a properly equipped office and better sports facilities. The political orientation of those leading this agitation can, perhaps, be discerned from the allegiance of the union's news-sheet \textit{Technic}, first published in September 1939. Until it was

\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Workers Weekly}, 26 October 1934.

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Workers Weekly}, 7 July 1936.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Workers Weekly}, 9 April 1937.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Amalgamated Printing Trades Review}, November-December 1928.

\textsuperscript{65} S. Murray-Smith and A. J. Dare, op.cit., pp.163-165.
prohibited by the Vice Principal, Technic supported the Victorian branch of the Australian Youth Council, a body whose Communist affinities led to its own banning in August 1940.66

66 Attorney General Correspondence Files, CRS A472, Item W1642, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
iii Youth on strike

The 'narrowness' of the Australian outlook on 'the nature and significance of industrial conflict', mentioned by Iremonger, Merritt and Osborne in 1973, still includes a paucity of historical information about juvenile protest in the workplace. At first glance the reason for this appears obvious. There were no industry-wide youth strikes in Australia between the wars, comparable say to the March 1937 Clyde apprentice movement which spread to other areas of Britain between August and October of that year. John Gollan's pamphlet on these outbreaks is mainly a propaganda treatise for the British Young Communist League. Its presence in the Normington Rawlings collection, however, suggests that his Australian contemporaries digested its contents. If so, it can hardly have been of much use to them. There were dozens of youth strikes in Australia between the wars, but with different characteristics to those in Britain. Participants were mainly semi-skilled, or unskilled workers, with girls often the most militant, displaying a high degree of solidarity and determination. Australian youth strikes were essentially guerrilla engagements - fought by small groups acting independently of each other - never a mass movement, even potentially, until 1944.

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2 J. Gollan, Why Youth Strikes.

3 The term 'girl' was, and often still is, misused to describe working women. In the examples where I use it, sources indicate that a majority so described were young females under the age of twenty-one.

4 I allude to the 1944 nation-wide stop-work meetings of apprentices, see Conclusion.
Having reclaimed 'larking about' and absenteeism as youthful rebellion against trivial rules and the grinding monotony of work, Stephen Humphries omits to discuss industrial youth strikes or to speculate whether the behaviour of those involved differed from that of adults in similar circumstances. Between 1933 and 1939 the number of male and female factory employees in Australia increased by 75 per cent, while 'lollipop capitalists' literally filled their factories with young workers. Discipline was 'just like school', but memories of the worst years of the depression allegedly deterred most labourers from complaining. The following examples of youth on strike - by no means an exhaustive record - do not challenge this image of juvenile acquiescence, but they may lead us to ponder whether it was punctuated by moments of revolt, more frequently than has hitherto been acknowledged.

Strike measurements compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics list the frequency of disputes, their duration and the number of participants, but tell us nothing about the age of those involved and make guess-work difficult by lumping together very different industrial categories. After 1933 the number of strikes increased, but time lost - two or three days or less on average - was only a fraction of that for the period 1913 to 1930. Most strikes by young people lasted a few hours, or a day or two at most, while the fickle interest of the press often makes it impossible to determine their outcome. The Bureau's statistics on the other hand relate only to stoppages of

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5 S. Humphries, op.cit., p.143.

6 T. Prior in M. Bevege, M. James, C. Shute (eds) op.cit., p.125.


8 D. Plowman, S. Deery, C. Fisher (eds), Australian Industrial Relations, pp.50-51.
ten working days or more and exclude firms that employed less than ten people.

Of all strikes in Australia between 1921 and 1940, those about wages, hours and holidays amount to only 28.5 per cent, compared with a combined total of 71.5 per cent over managerial policy, working conditions, trade unionism, or other causes. The youth strikes in this sample broadly conform to the above pattern, but juveniles often had an agenda of their own. Although life in factory suburbs imposed strong pressures to conform, young workers seem to have been less reconciled to long hours and more prone to act impetuously in response to injustice or petty slights. Like their elders, young people's motives for striking were often multi-causal and their aims primarily defensive. They seldom challenged inequalities in the factory system based on age or gender, which justified lower pay, or restricted female access to training. Young workers might strike in support of a victimised union representative, yet in general had a far less rigidly delineated sense of loyalty than adults.

Strikes occurred at Whybrow and Company, Abbotsford, Melbourne in January 1926 and MacRae Knitting Mills, Newtown, Sydney in December 1937 when young workers sprang to the defence of popular supervisors. In firms with large numbers of unorganised juveniles, the roles of sympathetic supervisor and unofficial shop steward sometimes became blurred. Another example occurred at Narm Sandshoes, South Brisbane, a subsidiary of North Australian Rubber Mills. When girls here joined the Australian Workers Union in March 1926 their forewoman supported

9 Ibid., p.52.

10 See for example a strike of girls at Metal Manufacturers, Port Kembla, Australian Worker, 23 July 1924, or a strike by girls at H. M. Leggo Pty, Bendigo, Victoria, Argus, 10 January 1925.

11 Argus, 23 January 1926 and Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1937.
them, claiming that a Board of Trade award was justified. In an ensuing dispute to win union recognition, AWU officials were amazed at the tenacity of the girls. The Brisbane Worker carried a photograph of their daily 'picket guard', by which they attempted to persuade a handful of scabs to join them on strike (fig. 11).

Amicable relations with supervisory staff were not the norm everywhere. Writing of her adolescence in Melbourne clothing factories in the early 1930s, D. Benjamin recalled that management was very strict. 'Pacers' were employed to keep up the speed and a forewoman docked the girls a quarter of an hour's pay if they were a few moments late, or stayed in the toilet longer than five minutes. Despite pressure of this kind some young people resisted. In January 1927 ball boys in the championships of the New South Wales Lawn Tennis Association stopped work because of the 'haughty demeanour' of officials and some players towards them. In April 1928 messenger boys employed by the Sydney Green Cap Company rebelled against a system of petty fines, restrictions on talking to each other in the office and cuts in their tram allowance.

Wages fell everywhere in the Depression, but when order books were full and their firms worked to tight schedules, young workers gained an enhanced perception of their own worth. Speeding-up combined with the 'vile abuse' of a manager provoked girls at Finelys Shoe Factory, Newtown to strike in February 1934. Hurt feelings and a refusal to tolerate sexist innuendo was equally evident in a successful one hour stoppage by girls at

12 Worker, 25 March 1926.
13 D. Benjamin, op.cit., p.316.
14 Australian Worker, 26 January 1927.
15 Workers Weekly, 6 April 1928.
16 Red Leader, 8 February 1934.
Cirl pickets during the strike at the Narm Rubber Factories, South Brisbane—a strike remarkable for the youth and enthusiasm of those who participated in it. (Photo by courtesy of "Daily Standard.")

Figure 11.

The 'picket guard', Narm Sandshoes,
(Worker, 1 April 1926)
Miller's Rope Works, Brunswick in June 1939. In August 1937 two hundred and fifty girls at Silknit Australia, Camperdown walked out, alleging that a temporary forewoman was too strict. The firm exonerated her but the girls remained adamant. The forewoman finally resigned giving the excuse that she could 'no longer stand the strain'.

Young people also resented working weekend or evening shifts. Strikes against the introduction of these rosters occurred at the Alexandria Spinning Mills, Sydney in July 1936, and at Nally Ltd, the Glebe plastic moulders, in September of the same year. Press reports of both strikes emphasised the financial remuneration obtained through union intervention. Yet one suspects that free time was of more importance than money and that these stoppages happened in the first place because unsocial hours disrupted courting rituals or other forms of leisure activity.

Firms that obtained advance warning of a strike often tried to overawe young workers by calling in the police. In June 1935 the Stirling Battery Factory, Arnscliffe, Sydney summoned a contingent who obligingly herded forty boys back to work, after first preventing their leaders from holding a protest meeting. Hardies Rubber Company, another Sydney employer of juveniles used similar tactics. In June 1930 police escorted scabs during a strike by girl workers and issued cautions to prevent mass-picketing. In November 1937 the firm again invited police onto its premises to intimidate girl strikers returning to collect their back pay. When Hardies threatened

17 Guardian, 10 June 1939.
18 Sydney Morning Herald, 31 August 1937.
19 Workers Weekly, 26 July 1935.
20 Workers Weekly, 15 September 1936.
21 Young Worker, 10 June 1935.
22 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 June 1930.
once more to invoke the provisions of the Crimes Act, the Rubber Workers Union accused them of coercing young people by ‘promoting a psychology of fear’.  

The combative spirit of the Hardies girls won them much praise. The ARU’s Railroad saw in their struggle ‘all the vitality of youth rising against injustice’, while Sydney Trades and Labor Council agreed to give them ‘moral and financial support’. Backing of this kind was often crucial, as the solidarity of adult workers in the same firm could not always be relied upon. In 1930 when the Trades and Labor Council negotiated on behalf of the Hardies girls it was hamstrung by this problem. When the firm finally called its bluff, challenging it to bring out adults in other departments in sympathy, a strike of three weeks duration collapsed abruptly.

Adult perceptions of youth issues as trivial or secondary undermined union cohesion. Generational divisions emerged during a strike by two hundred boys at the Crown Crystal Glass Works, Waterloo, Sydney. This dispute for a 5/- wage increase commenced on 29 November 1932 and ended three weeks later with a return to work pending arbitration. As none of the strikers was in a union, the firm dismissed them and advertised for sixty new boys to take their place. Feelings ran high because skilled blowers in the Glass Workers Union initially accepted the replacement labour. The strikers assaulted scabs in the streets, or ambushed cars provided by the firm to take replacements past the picket line. These so-called 'basher gang methods', sanctimoniously condemned by the press, grew even more daring:

Six of the boys ... crept round to the rear of the glassworks. They scrambled over the fence and entered the building where several of the new youths were working. They approached two of the boys and fiercely attacked them. Some men who were at work nearby did not interfere. The strikers then hustled the boys off the premises.27

Having helped settle this strike, the Trades and Labor Council intervened again in October 1937 when Associated Newspapers Ltd, owners of the Sydney Sun, advertised for 1,000 school pupils as paid volunteers to help break a strike of newsboys. This dispute arose out of the company's reduction of 1/2 d on the newsboys' commission of 2 1/2 d per dozen papers sold, but the anger it unleashed had been fuelled by years of exploitation. Union journals in the 1920s had made newsboys objects of great sympathy but not, alas, of organisation. Juvenile street traders in Sydney had no equivalent of the Melbourne Newsboys Society to afford them aid and protection. A Newsboys Association arising out of a strike of several weeks duration in 1907, had, allegedly, been undermined by Lady Fairfax, the wife of one of the owners of the Sydney Morning Herald, who sponsored a local branch of the Boys Brigade.28 Children of school age and boys in their late teens had to stand on street corners until late at night, or jump on and off moving trams to make the necessary sales. In 1933 a working week of sixty hours to make the princely sum of 25/- had been quite common.29

The police found it virtually impossible to protect the volunteer sellers, for whenever roving bands of newsboys encountered one alone they exacted summary justice on the spot. Fights broke out at Circular Quay, Bondi Junction and dozens of other news stands. Tobacconists displaying newspapers declared 'black' had their shop fronts daubed or windows broken. At

27 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 December 1932.
28 Red Leader, 14 February 1934.
29 Red Leader, 6 December 1933.
West Kogarah striking newsboys hijacked a lorry containing bundles of the *Sun* and set them alight in the middle of the street.\(^{30}\) Co-operation between the newsboys and the Retail Newsagents Association, who were also in dispute, soon enforced a return to the status quo. Associated Newspapers capitulated after three days, making the feeble excuse that the strike had been an 'unfortunate misunderstanding'.

The use of functional violence was not an exclusively male prerogative. At Goulburn, New South Wales, in January 1934, girls at the woollen mill of Amalgamated Textiles Ltd forcibly entered a hotel room in pursuit of a young operative who refused to join them on strike. They later besieged the local police station, together with some boys who had joined them, demanding that eight of their number arrested for over-zealous picketing be released.\(^{31}\) The mill management was perplexed by the impulsiveness of the strikers. Having received a telegram from workers at the company's mill at Orange asking them to support a strike there, the girls had simply stopped work and left without even bothering to state their demands.\(^{32}\) The near-riot that characterised this dispute illustrates how the absence of union controls on the shop floor could produce an authority vacuum, leading to the emergence of more volatile forms of leadership.

A majority of strikes in this sample occurred in the spring and summer months, when industrial extensions of 'wagging' school may have been tempting. Watty Doig, employed at the Wonthaggi State Coal mine, Victoria in the 1930s recalled how, on a beautiful sunny day when the tide was on the turn and the fish were leaping, one of the young wheelers would tip out his billy and the rest would follow suit, '... that was it! There was no

\(^{30}\) *Labor Daily*, 1 October 1937 and 2 October 1937.

\(^{31}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1934.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
work that day ... you couldn't work without the wheelers'. Extremes of temperature made other jobs unbearable. Heat was a factor in a strike of young Sydney street cleaners who, in January 1927, put up stout resistance against 'heavy departmental odds' when wearing a uniform at work became compulsory. It may also have had some bearing on the militancy of girls at Hardies Rubber Company whose iron roof, according to one of them, made the factory 'hell on earth in summer'. A cohesive juvenile workforce at Holeproof's, Brunswick, where similar conditions prevailed, actually forced the firm to make extensive alterations.

Stopping work could be an exhilarating experience and some young strikers expressed delight at the way traditional constraints were suddenly reversed. The Argus was aghast at 'the spirit of indifference' displayed by juveniles on strike at the Perdriau Rubber Company, Sydney in February 1925. Having withdrawn to a rented picture theatre and successfully clarified their demands, they cleared the floor, an improvised orchestra struck up and 'jazzing' ensued for the remainder of the day. A similar air of joie de vie pervaded a youth strike over extra unpaid holiday leave at the Sydney radio firm of Stromberg Carlson in December 1937. It involved three hundred boys, all non-unionists, who nevertheless accepted an offer by O'Neill, president of the Ironworkers Federation to negotiate on their behalf. The firm's managing director sought to achieve a rapid return to work by a combination of bullying and cajolery, but underestimated the spirit of defiance these outbreaks could invoke. At an outdoor meeting,

33 W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.58.
34 Australian Worker, 26 January 1927.
35 Working Woman, October 1931.
36 T. Prior in M. Bevege, M. James, C. Shute, op.cit., p.125.
37 Argus, 26 February 1925.
when threats had failed, he protested that he really only had the boys' best interests at heart. This met with derision, while several strikers indulged in the 'unique luxury' of telling their boss to shut up.38

Young workers also engaged in passive resistance. In a week long dispute at the Perdriaau Rubber Factory, Sydney in November 1928, successive shifts of girls sat still at their benches and refused to work. Their grievance was about physical exhaustion. The girls wanted a new line of shoes mounted on heavy lasts to be more evenly distributed around the factory.39 A group of young people in the spinning room of Donarchy's Rope Works, Geelong, Victoria took similar action in August 1932. After holding an impromptu meeting, they collectively ignored new instructions that machinery be started two minutes early each day, prior to opening time in the morning and again after lunch.40

By the mid 1930s, Sydney Trades and Labor Council’s reputation for dealing with these revolts made even establishment-sponsored job agencies vulnerable. Faced with speeding-up in October 1936, boys and girls from the Young Citizens Association assembling cardboard containers for Alexander Phillip and Company Ltd, left in a body for Sydney Trades Hall Council to discuss their grievances with union officials.41 Union mediation in youth strikes sometimes brought a flood of new recruits, but evidence of other outside interference is comparatively rare.

The Young Communist League had its industrial baptism of fire in 1928 when the Sydney Green Cap Messenger boys accepted an offer of help and its secretary Jimmy McPhee was arrested outside the firm, picketing to

38  Workers Weekly, 17 December 1937.
39  Woman Worker, 7 November 1928.
40  Red Leader, 31 August 1932.
41  Sydney Morning Herald, 7 October 1936.
'hold the job against scabs'. One also suspects that youth bulletins and Communist 'concentration' work at Wallace Swinton's hosiery factory, Sydney and Stromberg Carlson may have been a secondary factor in youth strikes there in 1935 and 1937. The Left could certainly make some response where it had members in the workplace concerned. An example occurred in July 1938 when Sydney Young Communists collected funds for caddies at the East Lakes Golf Club, on strike against a deduction of 3d for 'insurance' out of their pay of 2/- per round. Most youth strikes, however, had already ended long before solidarity could be offered. The protracted Crown Crystal Glass Works dispute of 1932 is an isolated exception.

Members of the Communist-led Militant Minority Movement (MMM) joined pickets outside this firm but they were never well received. Although the Red Leader attributed the strikers' reticence to their fear of police intimidation, this was beside the point. Advice offered in MMM leaflets raised issues that were potentially counter-productive, or not strictly germane to the strike. They told the glass boys to take no notice of union officials as these were more concerned with protecting branch funds than the interests of the rank and file. The Red Leader depicted J. S. Garden, secretary of the Trades and Labor Council, as arriving just as management was showing signs of weakening, in order to reinforce the policy of trade union officialdom 'that of attempting to tone down the demands of the strikers'. It also alleged that Garden had recommended the boys accept a

42 Workers Weekly, 6 April 1928.
43 Workers Weekly, 22 July 1938.
44 Attorney-General's Department, File No. 192, Ref. CRS A.432, 33/192, Australian National Archives, ACT Branch.
45 Red Leader, 7 December 1932.
compromise payment of 2/6d from the firm - an inaccuracy it reluctantly retracted in a subsequent edition.46

Although larrikin tendencies often surfaced in these strikes, the average participant seems to have remained as 'disgustingly loyal' as the young A. F. Howells who eschewed politics and normally tried to keep 'pretty sweet' with his boss.47 A behavioural pattern of spontaneity, violence, carnival and near rioting, however, betrays the hallmark of George Rudé's 'traditional' groups, 'as yet not evolved into identifiable social classes'.48 As 'industrial serfs', still 'in the process of proletarianisation',49 young workers appear to re-capitulate earlier stages of class struggle. Some part of their stock of ideas - appeals for solidarity, the necessity of picketing, recourse to union officials as mediators, etc - is superimposed or borrowed from the parent culture. But this 'derived' element in youth strikes always interrelates or overlaps with a less structured 'inherent' strand, based on pre-industrial experience.50

Scenes of mayhem in which the press revelled are, like that of the suburban push, a form of rucking or 'messing-up' - yet with a qualitative difference. Direct action by young workers highlighted their economic importance to the system. During the strike at Narm Sandshoes in 1926, production fell from 3,500 to 360 pairs of shoes a day.51 These revolts signalled to managements, often still dazed or reluctant to negotiate, that a formerly atomised group had united for the purpose of collective bargain-

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46 Red Leader, 21 December 1932.
48 G. Rudé, op.cit., p.28.
49 A. McKinlay, op.cit., p.3.
50 G. Rudé, op.cit., p.28.
51 Worker, 1 April 1926.
ing. Similarly, when labour journalists acknowledged 'Juvenile Solidarity' or praised 'Boys of the union breed', they contradicted pessimists in the movement who held that modern youth lacked the mettle to confront the bosses as their generation had done.
Chapter 5

Labour youth organisations in the 1930s
In the October 1927 State elections in New South Wales Lang's Labor government lost its majority and Thomas Bavin, leader of the Nationalists was elected coalition premier. This defeat led to a debate in the ALP about its failure to attract young voters. Some of the sharpest criticism came from rank-and-file members who, having organised public meetings and sat at polling booths, had witnessed at first hand the political indifference of young people. While they acknowledged the physical vigour of Australian youth they deplored a tendency 'to snatch at shadows and ignore the substance'.\(^1\) Young clerks and typists in particular were 'too snobbish', heedless that their beneficial conditions had been won by Labor pioneers and needed to be maintained by constant effort and vigilance.\(^2\) 'Observer', Millers Point, thought loss of 'the flapper vote' had been significant and blamed the Party's electoral decline on its failure to counter an air of 'anti-Labor sentiment', engendered in many of the shops and offices where these young women worked.\(^3\)

Having consulted 'several live wires', Mrs F. Connop of the ALP Women's Central Organising Committee concluded that the party had 'grown whiskers'. It had forgotten that 'dry politics' was unsuitable for the young mind and that 'the best of fowl becomes unpalatable if not properly dished-up'. She suggested a conference of Labor leagues and union officials be convened, to draw up rules for young ALP debating and musical societies, which might also stage mock parliaments and hold dances and lectures. Their summer picnics she thought would make 'excellent propaganda', with banded vehicles conveying Labor youngsters through the various

\(^1\) Labor Daily, 21 October 1927.
\(^2\) Labor Daily, 23 December 1927.
\(^3\) Ibid.
electorates en route to the beaches. William Dockerill who had campaigned in Campsie blamed the tory press for poisoning the minds of young voters. He thought the remedy lay in better agitational literature, but conceded that 'the social side' also needed developing.

Since its launch by a union consortium in 1924, the Sydney Labor Daily had run a Saturday column, 'For the Young Folk', while its women's page reported early Labor youth initiatives. During the industrial unrest of 1929 and in the months preceding the October 1930 State elections, some metropolitan ALP branches staged youth debates or tried to motivate the children of their members by offering prizes for essays with a political theme. In January 1929 Darlinghurst ALP founded the Labor League of Youth. Based on a British precursor, it proved short lived, although the branch had originally hoped the League would qualify young people to manage the affairs of the State and aid their intellectual development. In June 1929 the Newtown District ALP Timberworkers Relief Committee attempted to tap the hedonism of working class youth. It attracted over one hundred to a Juvenile Labor Ball - a formula repeated a month later by Sydney Trades and Labor Council to raise additional funds for the strikers and their families.

ALP Younger Sets were inspired by these experiments, but the idea of recruiting young people through the provision of entertainment, or utilising their energy for fund-raising, originated outside the labour movement. By the late 1920s the women's page of the Labor Daily regularly listed the

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4 Labor Daily, 21 October 1927.
6 Labor Daily, 26 March 1929.
7 Labor Daily, 23 January 1929.
8 Labor Daily, 6 July 1929.
charity work of Younger Sets attached to the Sydney Hospital Auxiliaries, the Renwick Babies Hospital and other voluntary bodies. The New South Wales Country Women’s Association established Younger Sets in 1926 while the Junior Red Cross traced their lineage to patriotic collections in schools at the outbreak of the Great War. Nor was the Labor Party unique in using this type of activity to enhance its electoralism. The United Australia Party formed Younger Sets at approximately the same time and later, in 1932-34, the Douglas Social Credit Party also.

Maud Casey, aged 20, a university student and daughter of a Labor JP, formed the first ALP Younger Set at Coogee in February 1930. Under her presidency it embarked on a fund-raising drive and agreed to work for local party candidates during elections. Within a month the Younger Set enrolled thirty members, organised a surfing party and had planned a programme of socials, including a house party to raise funds for the northern miners of New South Wales, locked out by their employers. With missionary zeal and special permission of the ALP Central Executive, Maud Casey described her scheme at other Labor league meetings with the result that six more Younger Sets were inaugurated between April and October 1930. By August 1932 the total had risen to twenty-four, mainly situated in the eastern and northern suburbs of Sydney.

As youth organisations they represented a facet of Laborite hegemony in new expanding electorates, where the party hoped they would 'create a healthy physical, mental and social activity among all sections'. For municipal income relative to metropolitan standards, the eastern suburbs

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9 M. McKernan, op.cit., p.48.
10 Labor Daily, 18 February 1930.
11 Labor Daily, 23 August 1932.
12 Labor Daily, 16 July 1932.
were rich in both aggregate and per capita terms. With one or two exceptions, the high level of owner occupancy and the phenomenon of 'the affluent tenant' had, by the late 1920s, consolidated the lower middle class characteristics of these areas.\textsuperscript{13} ALP Younger Sets still existed at Coogee, Bondi, Clovelly, Waverley, Randwick, Daceyville and Botany in 1935-6, after most had disappeared elsewhere. The cultural ethos of the movement originated here - a youthful blend of the middle class desire to create one's own entertainment and the do-it-yourself philosophy which permeated thought and activity in the Depression years.

When the New South Wales ALP Central Executive assumed responsibility for youth affairs in July 1932, factional manoeuvring influenced its decision. In May, Sir Philip Game, the State Governor, had dismissed Lang for breaches of Federal law and in the June 1932 elections the ALP suffered another resounding defeat. The subsequent period was one of policy review and party re-organisation, but it also marked a decisive phase in the power struggle between Lang's Inner Group and the Socialisation Units.\textsuperscript{14} By the ALP's Easter Conference of 1931 the original founders of the Socialisation movement had been swamped by a mass of new converts, predominantly working class and mainly young. Poverty and the dole made them yearn for political action not just to alleviate, but to end forever the miseries of capitalism.\textsuperscript{15} Robert Cooksey has described the war of attrition that ensued when the Lang group intervened to contain these impetuous advocates of 'socialism in our time'.\textsuperscript{16} Yet he omits to place the leadership's encourage-

\textsuperscript{13} M. Kelly, 'Pleasure and profit : the eastern suburbs come of age', in J. Roe (ed), Twentieth Century Sydney : Studies in Urban and Social History, p.11.

\textsuperscript{14} For a description of the origin, policy and history of the Socialisation movement, see Chapter 2 i.

\textsuperscript{15} R. Cooksey, Lang and Socialism, p.24.
ment of the Younger Sets in the same context. Having the numbers on the Executive and holding the key officers’ positions was crucial for party management, but the Inner Group recognised the need to control more diverse centres of power. A spontaneous youth movement, left to its own devices or the whim of individual electorates might have become a threat, had it not been nurtured and properly chaperoned in time.

Adroitly manipulated, the Younger Sets always espoused the same reformist principles as the Labor Party, with its purely academic adherence to socialism. A few engaged in political debate, but this was always peripheral to a hectic social whirl of carnival dances, ‘whoopee’ parties, mystery hikes, beauty queen contests and beach picnics. In March 1932 the Labor Daily offered its full co-operation to the Younger Sets. One may surmise that Norman McCauley had something to do with this. A close associate of Lang, he had joined the paper in 1931 and became its editor in September 1932. McCauley’s brother Harold, director of publicity while Lang was premier and regarded as the leader’s eminence grise, was an influential figure in formulating Inner Group strategy. Socialisation Committee members like J. B. Sweeney and C. E. Martin attended when Younger Sets at Ryde, Balmain, Rozelle East and Marrickville discussed the objective, but they attempted no deeper infiltration. Indeed, by December 1932 the Socialisationists had decided to organise Sunday Schools of their own, a move regarded as highly controversial in the ALP and a direct challenge to the Lang faction’s policy on youth.

Their Constitution pledged ALP Younger Sets to promote ‘social harmony’ and ‘good fellowship’, to bring a little joy into the lives of the

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16 Ibid.
17 Labor Daily, 4 March 1932.
18 H. Radi and P. Spearritt (eds), Jack Lang, p.63.
19 Sydney Morning Herald, 30 December 1932.
long-term unemployed and help those in distress.\textsuperscript{20} They also amplified the Lang personality cult, but this represented the limit of their ideological commitment. Unlike the Young Communist League which stoically avoided 'charity outfits', they were often the mainstay of broadly-based Citizens Relief Committees. This was the case at Newtown in March 1931, also at Ryde and Enfield where ALP Younger Sets were instrumental in organising parties of volunteers to collect food and clothing and distribute it to needy families.\textsuperscript{21} In appealing for the support of all sporting, social, commercial and religious bodies in their immediate vicinity, they were careful to stress that their endeavours were strictly 'non-political'.\textsuperscript{22}

Alison Gurney of Willoughby typified hundreds of young people on the fringes of the party who now came forward. Her parents had been in the ALP all their lives but she had never taken part, regarding its activities as the monopoly of men and a few elderly women. She thought young people naturally sought social enjoyment and congenial companionship, but if the labour movement failed to provide this they would automatically look elsewhere.\textsuperscript{23} Labor Party secretaries soon realised the importance of having a contingent of enthusiastic young people at their disposal. During the State elections of June 1932, the Younger Sets in East Sydney gave 'valuable assistance', while at Drummoyne where thirty sat at polling booths, they donated the cost of hiring a car to bring supporters out to vote.\textsuperscript{24} In Labor’s

\textsuperscript{20} Labor Daily, 15 July 1931.

\textsuperscript{21} Labor Daily, 4 June 1930 and 16 July 1930.

\textsuperscript{22} Labor Daily, 4 June 1930.

\textsuperscript{23} Labor Daily, 5 March 1932.

\textsuperscript{24} Labor Daily, 9 July 1932.
big procession to the Domain on the eve of the poll the Younger Sets made up 'a picturesque unit' in their football blazers and vigoro uniforms.\textsuperscript{25}

To encourage greater contact between the Younger Sets, the ALP Central Executive planned a 'monster mystery hike'. Weekend hiking, imported from England via Victoria, had suddenly become all the rage. F. J. Palmer \& Sons, the Pitt Street store, sponsored the first 'community' and 'mystery' hikes until Sam Lands, the jewellers, took over.\textsuperscript{26} On a single Sunday in August 1932 nine special trains left Central Station carrying 5,655 young people for a ramble from Stanwell Park to Coledale.\textsuperscript{27} Press reports of a 'Ramblers Rights Movement' in Britain lent these outings added excitement. In April and September that year grouse moors in Derbyshire had been the scene of mass trespass and fighting, when ramblers defied police and keepers and demanded enactment of an Access to Mountains bill.\textsuperscript{28} Some ALP leaders hoped to associate their party with the new craze, by forming Bushwalking Clubs and using the Labor Daily as a backer. Inclement weather ruined a first attempt in September 1932, but Concord, Maroubra and several other Younger Sets took up the pastime for a while until, in 1933, enthusiasm for these mass excursions gradually faded.

Once it assumed control the State ALP sought to impose uniformity. In August 1932 it assembled delegates from twenty-four Younger Sets at the Trades Hall to draft a standard Constitution and elect a provisional Central Committee. P. J. Keller, New South Wales President of the ALP, harangued them. For him the raison d'être of the Younger Sets was to provide a new

\textsuperscript{25} Labor Daily, 1 June 1932.

\textsuperscript{26} P. Pallin, Never Truly Lost, p.40.

\textsuperscript{27} Labor Daily, 7 August 1932.

\textsuperscript{28} D. Prynn, 'The Clarion Clubs, Rambling and Holiday Associations in Britain since the 1890s', Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 11, No. 2-3, July 1976, p.70.
cadre, capable of taking up political campaigning work as older members passed on. District Committees were established in Sydney, with Divisional structures beyond in regions like the Illawarra where by February 1933 there were 352 members in four Younger Sets at Bulli, Corrimal, Port Kembla and Wollongong. The movement also established outposts at Goulburn, Lithgow, Penrith and smaller country towns such as Coonamble, Cootamundra, Moree, Parkes and Young. Each branch decided its own subscription. For example, Balmain charged 6d entry fee, with a weekly payment of 2d per member. Younger Sets with large followings tried to maintain a delicate balance between business and informality. Redfern, over 200 strong by March 1933, combined its fortnightly meetings at the local Town Hall with a social evening. After a secretary's report and financial statement, members adjourned for a night of dancing, parlour games and euchre for prizes.

The ALP insisted on an age limit of thirty and tried to restrict the Younger Sets to those who had already joined the Party. This ruling was often modified in the electorates, or even ignored completely. The secretary of Drummoyne Younger Set which enrolled 200 members in three months, attributed this to an upper age limit of thirty-six, access to a good orchestra and 'a capable committee of young people in control'. This may have been an allusion to those Labor leagues which tried to foist adult manage

29 Labor Daily, 23 August 1932.
30 Labor Daily, 17 February 1933.
31 Labor Daily, 22 March 1933.
32 Labor Daily, 16 July 1932.
33 Labor Daily, 9 July 1932.
ment committees on their Younger Sets.\textsuperscript{34} The use of visual emblems aided the emergence of a corporate identity. Out canvassing, Coogee ALP Younger Set had its own rosette, but by November 1932 all Sydney members could purchase a blue and white enamel badge consisting of a shield and heraldic scrolls (fig 12), later used as the central motif on a satin pennant designed by the Stanmore Younger Set (fig 13).

Younger Sets described as 'progressive' by the Labor Daily acquired their own club room, piano or ukelele orchestra. Often they enjoyed better facilities than the Labor Party. Some were influenced by a burgeoning amateur repertory movement in Sydney whose left wing featured the Socialisationist 'Theatre of the Hammer' and Communist inspired 'New Theatre'.\textsuperscript{35} Daceyville with 340 members boasted a dramatic society and had sufficient resources by 1934 to lease the Dacey Garden Theatre for twelve months as its headquarters.\textsuperscript{36} Bigger branches derived their inner dynamism from an alliance of older teenagers with time on their hands, and young adults whose single status or courtship had become protracted due to exigencies of the Depression. Most fielded cricket, football and vigoro teams, competed in the ALP Younger Sets Tennis Association, or entered swimmers in an annual gala championship for the 'Lang challenge cup'.\textsuperscript{37} Picnics in the summer months enabled sporting prowess to be demonstrated. One at Casula on Australia Day 1933 had a programme of twenty-eight events. Competitors and their friends arrived in a special train festooned in blue and white streamers, with banners on the sides proclaim

\textsuperscript{34} For example, see the case of Ashbury ALP, Labor Daily, 1 December 1931.

\textsuperscript{35} Labor Daily, 28 June 1932. See also A. Bain, 'Brighter Days? Challenges to live theatre in the thirties', in J. Roe (ed) op.cit., p.47.

\textsuperscript{36} Labor Daily, 16 February 1934.

\textsuperscript{37} Labor Daily, 3 January 1934.
Figure 12.

ALP Younger Sets Badge,
(Labor Daily, 25 November 1932)

Figure 13.

Eileen Powell with Stanmore ALP Younger Set pennant, February 1933,
(Eileen Powell, private collection)
John Springhall has asserted that Social Democratic parties between the wars only tolerated affiliated youth groups while they stayed loyal, uncritical and non-political. Local party management committees thought they should stick to dances and socials and leave serious politics to their elders and betters. Similar attitudes existed in Australia, but this kind of analysis takes us only so far. Without an independent journal or programme of their own the Younger Sets remained an appendage of Lang's apparatus, but their provision of popular recreational outlets can, in the context of the times, be construed as an implicitly political act. In the early 1930s the lifestyle of 'the modern girl', whose role models included the glamorous stars of the movie screen, came in for special criticism from pulpit and conservative press. Michael Hogan has argued that the 'Sydney-style' Roman Catholic hierarchy was more pragmatic and benign, but other establishment figures with access to the national media like Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane, took every opportunity to castigate the supposed social sins of young women.

It would be misleading to depict the sons and daughters of Labor Councillors, Aldermen, JPs and MLAs - so often the ones in leading positions - as young rebels. Yet by sanctioning the right of youth to enjoy itself, the Younger Sets took a definite stand against wowserism. They also

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38 Labor Daily, 28 January 1933.


41 R. Campbell, Heroes and Lovers, p.29.
offered females a milieu where they could assert themselves. By 1933 when the ALP had fifty-two Younger Sets in thirty-four metropolitan and country electorates, women occupied the position of secretary in at least thirty-six per cent. In some instances, such as at Lithgow, they were also a majority on Younger Set social committees. Eileen Powell, described by the Labor Daily as 'the most promising young woman in the labour movement', joined the Stanmore ALP Younger Set shortly after its formation. Two years earlier in 1930 at the age of seventeen, she had addressed up to three public meetings per day for Labor in its State election campaign. Similarly in March 1933 Constance Clancy, aged nineteen, a member of the Paddington ALP Younger Set was elected treasurer of her local party and a delegate to the East Sydney Federal Council of the ALP. If these examples suggest that Younger Sets and some Labor leagues had begun to acknowledge the abilities of girls and young women, they still need to be kept in perspective. On a different level, the socially imitative nature of Laborite leisure activity reinforced, rather than challenged, traditional female roles.

Gala dances to inaugurate a Younger Set or as part of its monthly programme initially attracted crowds of 3-500. They were popular because they provided cheap entertainment close to home and a means of contact between branches. By the early 1930s Sydney's tramway network was extensive and the eastern suburbs were especially well served. The convenience of travel to adjoining neighbourhoods explains why Younger Set

42 Labor Daily Year Book 1933, Ref P.15/1/22, Archives of Business and Labour ANU.
43 Labor Daily, 30 June 1933.
44 Labor Daily, 24 October 1930.
45 Labor Daily, 6 March 1933.
46 M. Kelly in J. Roe (ed), op.cit., p.6.
functions here were proportionately better attended, compared say with the two annual Combined ALP Younger Set dances held in the city centre at Mark Foy's Empress Ballroom.

Dances gave members a common point of identification and an infallible topic of conversation. They also raised funds for ALP electoral work and let youthful aspirants to the party leadership demonstrate their organisational skills in a constructive manner. Labor MLAs who exerted some control through their patronage of Younger Sets, came as guests of honour entering to acclamation down an avenue of dancers. Keen rivalry existed between the larger Younger Sets, with each electorate committee seeking to outdo the other in its originality. A 'White Night in Venice' dance, held by Rozelle East Younger Set, featured novelty performances of the 'Gondolier Glide' and the 'Waltz of the Lanterns'.47 Other attractions included mock weddings and smoking contests. Some organisers went to inordinate lengths to achieve the right effect. Guests at the first Bush Dance of the Lidcombe ALP Younger Set found the ballroom totally transformed:

On entering the hall one glimpsed through miniture gum trees leading to a shack behind which a full moon was rising and a sign post on which was printed 'The Road to Gundagai'. A kookaburra perched confidently on the sign post at the foot of which was a sundowners swag with a cattle dog sitting on guard.48

Children in fancy dress, often official mascots, advertised the dances (fig 14), while the Labor Daily aping society fashion columnists described the apparel of female participants - their apricot georgette, shell pink satin, black velvet, midnight blue lace, etc.49 Girls were expected to 'look nice' and had to enter competitions for 'the prettiest ankle'. These demands imposed

47 Labor Daily, 10 January 1933.
48 Labor Daily, 7 March 1933.
49 See for example, Labor Daily, 9 November 1932.
Little Merle and Irene Lyons, who will be present at the Redfern Town Hall to-night at the Redfern Younger Set's dance.

Figure 14.

Will Be There!

(Labor Daily, 26 September 1933)
considerable financial strain. Valerie Budd, secretary of the Botany ALP Younger Set, complained that in order to buy an evening frock and decent stockings, many working girls went without lunches.\footnote{Red Leader, 8 May 1935.} Dancing catered for young people's need for social experimentation and risk-taking in a casual environment, but stereotypes of women still persisted. 'Most Popular Girl' contests had long been passé at these events, but in October 1934 at the first Combined ALP Younger Sets Ball, twenty-five 'debutantes' with accompanying 'maids of honour' were presented to Mrs J. A. Beasley, wife of a Labor leader in the Federal parliament.\footnote{Labor Daily, 14 October 1933.} Similar rituals were commonplace at annual dances organised by Sydney's masonic lodges and Catholic churches.

In February 1934 the ALP embarked on a subtle re-orientation of the Younger Sets. Social activity continued, but annual general meetings that year laid greater emphasis on reading circles and debating.\footnote{See for example, Lithgow, Labor Daily, 21 February 1934; Rockdale, Labor Daily, 4 April 1934; Ryde and Balmain, Labor Daily, 4 April 1934.} A. C. Paddison, a publicist in Lang's entourage who wrote in the Labor Daily under the pseudonym 'Solomon Brigg', considered that once the methods of fascist organisations in Europe were understood the necessity of political education could no longer be ignored. Youth abroad had been cleverly deceived by spurious appeals to its passions, offers of glamorous adventure, military displays and ostentatious uniforms, but above all by roseate promises of full employment at a time of economic stagnation. Paddison warned that Mussolini had marched on Rome at the head of battalions of young Italians, Hitler had declared Nazism a youth movement, while in

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\footnote{Red Leader, 8 May 1935.}
\footnote{Labor Daily, 14 October 1933.}
\footnote{See for example, Lithgow, Labor Daily, 21 February 1934; Rockdale, Labor Daily, 4 April 1934; Ryde and Balmain, Labor Daily, 4 April 1934.}
Britain the fascist demagogue Sir Oswald Mosley was busy combing the colleges and universities for youthful adherents.\textsuperscript{53}

Paddison was vague as to where a comparable threat would come from in Australia, but nevertheless warned the labour movement to be on its guard. The ALP Younger Sets had done important work, but the party must further mobilise young people. He wanted a detailed analysis of the objectives of Labor wherever young members could be gathered together. Moreover, to generate an even broader awareness, the party needed to hold lunch time discussion groups for young workers, conducted by 'carefully selected leaders'. To supply the young mind with 'constant accessions of outstanding current contributions by Socialist thinkers', the ALP required a circulating library system of its own.\textsuperscript{54} Paddison, who admired the British Labour Party's League of Youth and its journal the \textit{New Nation}, wanted the Younger Sets re-modelled along similar lines. Founded in 1926 the League was then undergoing one of its periodic bouts of reinvigoration. Its brief honeymoon with the Labour Party, however, was soon shattered when, as a contribution to gathering socialist confusion over foreign policy and rearmament, League delegates at the Southport Conference of 1935 advocated denouncing all wars as 'capitalist'.\textsuperscript{55}

Paddison's proposals mirrored current thinking in the Inner Group, but like earlier plans to devote a special page in the \textit{Labor Daily} to youth issues, they never reached fruition. Despite official rhetoric an indecisive 'on-again, off-again' attitude prevailed. At the New South Wales ALP Easter Conference of 1934 Lang's keynote oration focused on the plight of a 'lost generation' whose independence had been exploited, only to be cast

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Labor Daily}, 10 February 1934.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} A. Marwick, \textit{op.cit.}, p.46.
aside when vested interests had had their way. Youth, he claimed, grew impatıent of old men sitting in control of political parties, old men manipu-
lating the financial system and old men whose ideas, belonging to a previous age, barred every door through which it hoped to enter into full manhood.\textsuperscript{56} Taking Lang's speech, the Labor Daily portrayed the movement literally leading youth by the hand down the road to social security, by way of a planned economy (fig 15). If it shirked this responsibility, the paper warned, the whole edifice of reformist politics could crumble. A neglected generation that had already forced dramatic changes elsewhere in the world might do the same in Australia, perhaps by-passing parliamentary institutions.\textsuperscript{57}

Having reached a peak in mid 1933, the ALP Younger Set movement gradually began to lose impetus. Some branches like Tempe-St Peters over-
reached themselves financially,\textsuperscript{58} while others no doubt grew weary of the continual struggle to satisfy a fickle demand for novelties. The larger Sets had originally kept waiting lists, but by early 1935 a mere six applications to join at Rockdale was thought worthy of mention, while 250 at a dance at Botany had become 'a record' and 'something of an achievement'.\textsuperscript{59} Had the ALP leadership jettisoned its paternalism and let them branch out in other directions, it might still have ensured the vitality of those Younger Sets that remained. Instead it grew more insistent. Where once it had hesitated to burden them 'with any hard and fast plans',\textsuperscript{60} it now exhorted them to 'shoulder their full share of responsibility' in building the Party's

\textsuperscript{56} Labor Daily, 2 April 1934.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Labor Daily, 5 June 1933.

\textsuperscript{59} Labor Daily, 11 February 1935.

\textsuperscript{60} Labor Daily, 4 August 1932.
The First Steps

Mr. Lang, addressing the Easter Conference, declared that the Labor Movement must find a place in the scheme of things for the dispossessed youth of the Commonwealth — the neglected generation.

Figure 15.

The First Steps,

(Labor Daily, 2 April 1934)
1934 Federal Election Fighting Fund. Demand for more cash failed to revive jaded appetites. Although the Labor Daily tried feverishly to kindle enthusiasm, offering prizes of ten, six and four guineas, only eleven branches took part in a 'Miss Younger Set 1934' competition, billed as the youth movement's main means of raising campaign funds.

In October 1934 after the Socialisation threat had receded the ALP Central Executive in New South Wales received United Front proposals from the Communist Party of Australia. As part of these anti-fascist overtures, the Young Communist League approached the ALP Younger Sets for 'an alliance of toiling youth'. It appealed for joint initiatives on campaigning in schools, factories and universities. Communist and Labor youth also needed unity to improve juvenile rates of pay, remedy defects in the apprenticeship system and oppose the 'slave camp' conditions on afforestation schemes for unemployed youth. When these advances were rebuffed, the YCL considered clandestine 'penetration' of the ALP Younger Sets to win over their rank-and-file to an Australian People's Front position.

The Labor leadership's decision in February 1935 to transform its youth wing into an all-embracing ALP Sports Federation must be seen in this context, although some pressure came from the Younger Sets themselves. In altering the name and emphasis of its youth movement, the ALP by implication defined more precisely what it could and could not do. Embracing the ideology of competitive athleticism probably brought the

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61 Labor Daily, 21 March 1934.
62 Labor Daily, 1 October 1934.
63 Workers Weekly, 16 November 1934.
64 Workers Weekly, 14 December 1934.
65 Labor Daily, 22 January 1935.
Labor hierarchy similar rewards to those of the great private schools where, after the introduction of sport, masters and boys found a common interest mitigating the view that they were natural enemies.66

Although it never achieved the same longevity as its Victorian counterpart, the ALP Sports Federation in New South Wales soon offered its members vigoro, tennis, golf and swimming. These competitions and tournaments eclipsed those of the Younger Sets, which were not disbanded but simply left to wither away. The ALP Central Executive now depended on an optimistic if indirect approach, as its Annual Report for 1935-6 explained:

Contact made in this way with the young people would, to some extent, familiarise them with the political workings of the Party, and perhaps eventually they would become active members of our branches, or at least strong supporters of the Party’s policy.67

In October 1937 J. J. Curtin, Federal leader of the ALP, outlined four spheres of life in which the needs of young people were paramount - education, vocational guidance, employment and the rational use of leisure.68 He urged that the States adapt their educational systems to new needs, so that training for work could be assured through a definite plan. Without specification, he advocated raising the school leaving age and implied that every girl and boy on entering employment, should have the right to release to attend a Technical School or Commercial College. For those who had already left school in the preceding decade and to whom industrial training


68 Young Australian, October 1937.
had been denied, he advocated a system of vocational schemes similar to those devised for returned soldiers. Curtin argued that the utilisation of manpower as part of a national policy was better than the subsidisation of idleness.\textsuperscript{69}

An emphasis on planning, inter-State co-ordination and the necessity of Commonwealth funding, coincided with demands being made in the trade union movement. The problem remained, however, that regardless of prompting from bodies like the New South Wales Miners Federation\textsuperscript{70} the ALP Federal leadership had no intention of giving its policy statements immediate meaning, by mobilising Curtin's 'legion of youth to whom the future is beckoning', in a nation-wide movement.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} See Common Cause, 1 May 1937.
From 1931 onwards, the Communist Party of Australia delegated responsibility for building a children's movement to the Young Communist League. The CPA continued to make some contribution through the Educational Worker and the Working Woman, both edited by Hettie Ross (nee Weitzel) but these journals focused on broader aspects of child welfare and juvenile employment. The Young Comrades Clubs having declined, the YCL National Committee formed a Young Pioneers department in April 1931, consisting of six of its members who began to specialise in this type of agitation. Laurie Aarons, still at school although often a truant, nominally led the department, but Beryl Glendenning, a more experienced nineteen year old actually took charge.¹

Fundamental changes in this sphere of political work were decided at the Fifth International Conference of Leaders of Communist Children's Organisations, convened in Moscow in September 1929. These deliberations were reported in a lengthy thesis entitled The Road to Mass Organisation of Proletarian Children which offered a blueprint for extricating the international children's groups from a situation of crisis first diagnosed by the Fifth Congress of the Young Communist International in 1928. The thesis berated Young Communist Leagues for neglecting to train leaders with the necessary skills to work among children. It blamed a situation of atrophy and regression in many countries on 'the application of dry as dust methods'. Many communist children's groups had degenerated into educational classes, instead of acting as 'exponents of militancy'. Others imitated the

¹ Laurie Aarons interview, Sydney, 15 October 1987.
rigid procedures of adult organisations, or wrongly assumed the mantle of 'children's political parties'.

The thesis claimed that economic rationalisation in the capitalist world had produced a higher demand in industry for child labour. This, it argued, induced children to become involved in the class struggle earlier. Political questions arose in the classroom also, because here too the capitalists sought to influence the younger generation and enlist their support for a new imperialist war. The thesis pointed to the prevalence of military cadet training in schools as proof of this. It also claimed that strikes by school pupils in Germany, Poland and America were conclusive evidence of the radicalisation of children, but criticised Communist parties for not taking these struggles seriously.

The Young Communist International at this time pursued a policy of total confrontation. It required that 'a sharp course' be taken against 'the bourgeois school'. Communist children were instructed to organise boycotts of jingoistic teachers and to instigate and lead strikes of school pupils if these failed to occur spontaneously. It encouraged children to engage in acts of defiance against 'bourgeois holidays and customs' and challenge parents who were 'politically backward' or 'duped by religious or petty bourgeois prejudices'. Just as the Comintern's 'new course' demanded 'factory nuclei' to mobilise adult workers, the Young Communist International urged its affiliates to form units of the Young Pioneers, based on the Soviet model, wherever children were 'exploited and oppressed', or organised on a mass basis 'under capitalist influence'.

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2 The Road to Mass Organisations of Proletarian Children, p.27.
3 Ibid., p.12.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
To inaugurate the Young Pioneers of Australia, Sydney YCL invited children aged between four and fourteen to attend a protest picnic in the Botanical Gardens on 6 May 1931, against the official observation of Empire Day by 'parsons and other lackeys of the boss class'. In ensuing weeks the YCL systematically canvassed Communist Party families for members and recruited children brought by their parents to meetings of the Unemployed Workers Movement. By June it had formed three Young Pioneer units in Sydney at Glebe, Hurstville and Bankstown, with twenty, eleven and seven members respectively. They met on Sunday mornings in members' homes, with pianists and physical culture instructors provided by the women's department of the CPA. The Young Pioneers adopted the motto 'Always Ready', a parody of the Boy Scout slogan 'Be Prepared' and a portent of their determination to aid the working class in times of struggle.

In a letter to Melbourne YCL, Aarons and Glendenning emphasised the importance of acting circumspectly when approaching school pupils. A Party member's child at a Sydney school had already suffered victimisation, therefore it was vital at a school 'under concentration' to proceed cautiously. Communist children ought first to elect a school committee in secret and draft a set of demands. Later when the group had consolidated itself it could begin taking up the small grievances of pupils, exposing tyrannical teachers, calling for abolition of corporal punishment etc. In the preparatory phase, however, the task of leafleting or talking to other pupils ought to be carried out by older YCL members, or by Young Pioneers from another school.

Australian Young Pioneers intended to exacerbate tensions present in the classroom and their meetings prepared them for this. A State school

6 Young Worker, 1 May 1931.

7 CRS A467, Item SF 42, Bundle 94, Item 64, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
pupil who wrote to the Working Woman explained how a militant temperament was created:

We Pioneers at Ryde put on a play called 'The School Strike' which the audience liked very much. In the play all the children in the school went on strike because the teacher wanted to cane two of them for having 'Young Workers' in their possession. They won their strike and the kids were not caned.  

Attempts to expose the political bias of the educational system proved much harder in practice, especially as the Young Pioneers had little time for the instinctive response of ordinary pupils, who either accepted the inculcation of conformist modes of conduct or resisted by the non-political means of ridicule, indifference or escape. Invariably their reports of inconclusive political conversations betrayed a supercilious attitude. At Hurstville South Public School the Young Pioneers found 'only a few pupils who were sympathetic to the cause of the workers', while the majority were 'saturated with bourgeois propaganda' and unwilling to accept that Communism differed from the image of it portrayed of it in the press. They were shocked to discover that most school pupils supported the political parties their parents voted for, even through they personally were unable to distinguish between Nationalist or Labor. The Young Pioneers tried to arouse a sense of outrage about indices of child poverty and malnutrition, but this also fell on stony ground:

Once we asked a certain girl why 'God' allowed children to starve? The answer was that 'God' gave trials to everyone. We were informed by another pupil that Communists take girls away from their mothers who never see them again.

Young Pioneers indulged in verbal battles with hostile teachers who they considered as ill-informed and politically backward as the majority of

8 Working Woman, September 1934.
9 Red Leader, 5 February 1932.
10 Ibid.
pupils. This involved considerable risk as contemporary accounts of working class schooling indicate that recalcitrant children were often beaten and terrorised into submission.\textsuperscript{11} Michael Telford, aged eight, was sternly admonished by a teacher for wearing an anti-imperialist badge on his lapel and cautioned that unless he was a Russian, he should not appear in class with it on again.\textsuperscript{12} Incensed by 'lying statements' about the Soviet Union, Vida Wessel, a Binnaway Young Pioneer, repeatedly interjected until she was compelled to leave school 'as a protest against the slurs that were indirectly levelled against me because my father is a Communist'.\textsuperscript{13} At an Empire Day ceremony in a Melbourne school an eleven year old interrupted her teacher's peroration when he told the class how fortunate they were to live under the Union Jack, rather than the hammer and sickle:

Then I lost my temper and cried 'To Hell with the British Empire', I shouted, 'Don't you know that the Soviet Union is the only land where children are treated any way decently'. 'Here', said the teacher 'We have had just about enough of you'. Then he sent for the Head who gave me six hard cuts across my sit upon. Thus was capitalist brutality inflicted on me - a female child.\textsuperscript{14}

In the winter of 1931 the Young Pioneers distributed leaflets, replete with smudges and spelling mistakes, outside several Sydney schools. At the Penshurst and Dumbleton public schools they urged pupils to protest and ridicule their teachers whenever the school attempted to glorify war, whether at morning assemblies or on days of remembrance. Pupils were asked to join a demonstration on 1 August, no longer Wattle Day for the

\textsuperscript{12} Young Worker, 15 July 1931.
\textsuperscript{13} Young Worker, 1 October 1931.
\textsuperscript{14} Workers Weekly, 26 May 1933.
Communist Party who re-named it 'Anti-Imperialist War Day'.\textsuperscript{15} Sydney school records contain letters of complaint to the police from the headmasters of Hurstville South and Forest Lodge, Glebe when the Young Pioneers painted political slogans a foot high on the outer walls of both these schools.\textsuperscript{16}

The role of Young Pioneers at open air public meetings and demonstrations of the Communist Party led to more hostile comment. A reporter who covered a meeting in the Sydney Domain where they addressed the crowd wrote of the 'halting voices of the young orators' punctuated by 'embarrassing lapses of memory' as they struggled 'to pour forth the poison with which their childish immature minds had been filled'.\textsuperscript{17} Another recoiled at the 'shrill voices' of Communist children on a demonstration he attended who intermittently chanted a species of war cry: 'Will we fight? We say Yes! Bolsheviki, Bolsheviki, Yes, Yes, Yes'.\textsuperscript{18} Adela Pankhurst Walsh, now rabidly anti-Communist and a leading light in the right wing Australian Women's Guild of Empire (AWGE), painted a more temperate picture of the Young Pioneers:

Children marched in front carefully dressed in smart white frocks and suits with their little red berets perched on top of rosy faces and bright eyes and rosy lips. A healthy happy crowd of youngsters with sturdy legs and splendid lung action.\textsuperscript{19}

This deceptively friendly description paved the way for the AWGE's unremitting theme - namely that these happy robust Australian infants were infinitely better off than the 'vice-ridden, verminous, emaciated'

\textsuperscript{15} Sydney Morning Herald, 1 August 1931.
\textsuperscript{16} File 5.15920, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney.
\textsuperscript{17} Sydney Morning Herald, 29 February 1932.
\textsuperscript{18} Sydney Morning Herald, 7 March 1932.
\textsuperscript{19} Empire Gazette, 25 November 1931.
children of the Soviet Union who, enmeshed by their 'deluded' parents, were destined for an early grave.  

Taking their lead from the AWGE, several conservative pressure groups raised a hue and cry against the 'Communist defilement' of children. The proto-fascist New Guard, founded by Eric Campbell, picketed the first Young Pioneer camp beside the Georges River, aided by individuals in the RSL. The Sane Democracy League and the Women's Loyalty League mobilised twenty-eight Parents and Citizens Associations in Sydney to demand that the dissemination of Communist literature to school children be made illegal. Outraged indignation and wildly exaggerated claims characterised the campaign. Adding to the climate of moral panic, the Melbourne Argus and the Sydney Morning Herald both carried unsubstantiated reports of 'Communist Party classes' for children. At one of these in the town of Cooyal, two hundred miles north of Sydney, little girls had allegedly been given 'immoral literature' to read and encouraged to fling darts at a picture of Christ hung on the wall.

Adela Pankhurst Walsh was more astute than some right wing lobbyists. She regarded the individuals who ran the Communist children's movement as 'extremely crude' and thought the main danger to school pupils under the Lang government came from the Labor Education League. She suspected that this group of left-wing teachers and academics intended to subvert the School Magazine - a reader supplied to all

20 Ibid.
21 Laurie Aarons interview, Sydney, 15 October 1987.
23 See Argus, 2 November 1931 and Sydney Morning Herald, 29 February 1932.
24 Adela Pankhurst Walsh papers, MS 2123/4, Folder 39, Australian National Library, Canberra.
pupils by the New South Wales Department of Education - by purging its content of anything other than scientific facts:

... to obviate all danger of the children's minds being taken from the class struggle by the mental relief which fiction, fairy tales, etc, supply.25

This possibility receded in 1932 when B. S. Stevens became Premier of New South Wales in a UAP-Country Party government pledged to take action against 'the Communist menace'. In September 1932 Stevens forwarded a report on the Young Pioneers to J. A. Lyons, the Commonwealth Prime Minister. He enclosed an anti-war leaflet distributed to school pupils at Hurstville, with the recommendation that Lyons take 'any action considered desirable'.26 Acting on the advice of the Attorney General, Lyons replied that the Young Pioneers had made hardly any headway in recruitment and that to institute proceedings against them would hand the Communist Party a propaganda coup.27 As this issue affected the education of children, Lyons advised that it was the duty of individual State governments to intervene. This set in train a series of events which culminated in a strike of pupils at a Sydney school - the only incident of its kind in Australia where the Young Pioneers were involved.

D. H. Drummond, Minister of Education in Stevens' government, duly announced that he intended to promulgate regulations making it obligatory that all teachers participate in the weekly school ceremony of saluting the flag. New applicants to the teaching profession would also be required to

25 Ibid.
26 CRS A467, Item SF 7, Bundle 20, Item 61, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
27 Ibid.
swear an oath of allegiance to the King.\(^{28}\) By these means he hoped to weed out 'subversives' who would no longer be permitted to remain on the teaching staff of the Department. Drummond's officials were not happy with these plans. They informed him he had no power under the Public Instruction Act of 1880 to compel teachers to take part in flag saluting ceremonies. If he persisted, a legal challenge would almost certainly ensue, forcing the Department onto the defensive. In the matter of an oath of allegiance, or dismissal of a teacher on the grounds of his or her political beliefs, similar questions arose.\(^{29}\)

Drummond used the bogey of Communist infiltration as a pretext for ignoring this advice. Having been informed by the Under Secretary of the Premier's Department about a complaint against a 'Communist' teacher, he set the disciplinary wheels in motion. Drummond's test case centred on Beatrice Taylor, a member of the New South Wales Teachers Federal Council, who taught at Paddington State school. Having obtained leave, she returned to Sydney in December 1932 following a study tour of the Soviet Union funded in part by the Educational Workers League - a front organisation of the Communist Party.\(^{30}\) When Miss Taylor declined to cancel a series of public lectures on her trip, Drummond suspended her, citing 'misconduct and willful disobedience' as defined by the Public Service Act.\(^{31}\)

The campaign to reinstate Beatrice Taylor became a crusade against victimisation and a defence of the civil rights of public servants. The organisers of a protest meeting at the Sydney Railway and Tramway Institute on

\(^{28}\) File 5/17255, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Sydney Morning Herald, 5 January 1933.
24 January 1933, claimed that representatives from 278 unions and other organisations were present. This gathering elected a 'Beatrice Taylor Defence Committee' and resolved to call a strike of pupils and a demonstration of parents at her school on the first day of term after the long vacation. A delegate from Manly ALP interjected to say that as a 'loyal citizen' he would be sad to see Australian children take part, but the remainder of his remarks became inaudible in a chorus of hoots and jeers.

The strike had at least one antecedent. Parents at Highlands School, Sandford, Queensland, had also withdrawn their children in August 1927 to win the reinstatement of a popular headmaster. L. C. Rodd, a teacher whose own school at Coonabarabran did not resume until a week after the Sydney ones, helped organise the Paddington boycott, assisted by his wife of a few weeks, the writer Kylie Tennant. Members of the YCL and Young Pioneers gave out leaflets in the vicinity of the school and spoke from the platform of other hastily arranged protest rallies at Paddington Town Hall and the Rozelle Tram Depot. Police kept the school under close scrutiny for some days preceding the strike and on the day itself a contingent thirty strong filled the playground, while a score of plain clothes detectives mingled with the demonstrators assembled outside.

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32 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January 1933.
33 Ibid.
34 Labor Daily, 26 August 1927.
36 Workers Weekly, 3 February 1933.
The *Workers Weekly* praised the response of local people, given the short notice and threats of intimidation by the New Guard. The police, however, remained firmly in control. One group formed a phalanx either side of the school gate, while another jostled onlookers provocatively. Some anxious mothers who escorted returning pupils were ushered through the crowds, but children who came to demonstrate their support for Miss Taylor were kept at a distance by the police, or had their placards confiscated. A deputation from the Defence Committee briefly gained admission to inquire of the headmaster about the attitude of his staff towards Miss Taylor's suspension. An intrepid youth also managed to penetrate the cordon for a moment, tossing a handful of small slips of paper into the playground. A wild scramble ensued for these leaflets on which was emblazoned:

*Children of the Paddington Public School: Tubby Stevens sacked our teacher. We won't go to school till our teacher's back! Issued by the Paddington School Unit, Young Pioneers of Australia.*

Reporting on a counter-demonstration at the school mounted by the AWGE and Women's Loyalty League, the *Young Worker* stated that Adela Pankhurst Walsh had originally intended to harangue the crowd, but had apparently changed her mind when faced with the hostility of several working class women. She was perhaps the fluent and highly voluble lady observed by a reporter of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who walked briskly down the street muttering loudly, 'I'm a good Australian I am. No Communism for me', leaving him with the strong impression that she had just 'crossed swords with someone on the Soviet form of Government'.

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37 Ibid.
38 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February 1933.
39 *Young Worker*, 15 February 1933.
40 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February 1933.
The strike helped galvanise interest in Beatrice Taylor's case and demonstrated the breadth of community support she enjoyed. Anxious to prove that the 'Communist boycott' had failed, the Sydney Morning Herald interviewed parents who 'resented all the fuss', or who kept 'discreetly silent' about the political aspects of the dispute. Eager to protect the reputation of his school, the headmaster of Paddington claimed that attendance had been only a little less than normal for any re-opening day. These exceptions and denials, however, could not alter the facts. The Workers Weekly boasted of 'depleted classes', reduced to half their normal size, while the YCL claimed that one third to a half of the 1,500 pupils had obeyed the call to strike.

After the drama, a Public Service Board enquiry which met two days later on 3 February 1933, proved something of an anti-climax. In his thesis on public school teachers organisations in New South Wales, Bruce Mitchell has speculated that the pressure exerted by the Beatrice Taylor Defence Committee ensured that the Public Service Board made a rational judgement in her case. This may have been a contributory factor, but hardly the central one. Having listened to Clive Evatt, who represented Miss Taylor, the Board accepted that a public servant had no obligation to obey an order which did not relate to his or her employment. When the Board reinstated Miss Taylor it did so on the basis of the legal weakness of the Department of Education's case - as indeed Drummond's officials had suspected it would.

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Young Worker, 15 February 1933.
44 B. Mitchell, op.cit., p.303.
The *Young Worker* hailed the decision as a victory for united-front action. It dubbed Paddington, inaccurately, as 'Australia's first school strike', promised it would not be the last and resolved to be better organised leading other confrontations in the future.\(^{45}\) This scenario was unrealistic for two reasons. Firstly, the type of protest the YCL hoped to lead - strikes by pupils acting unilaterally - was an extremely rare phenomenon in Australia, compared to some other countries. Secondly, although there were only four Communist teachers and two other known adult sympathisers in schools across New South Wales,\(^ {46}\) they seem to have subtly influenced CPA policy in a way that undermined the official ultra-leftism of the Young Communist International.

Already by the end of 1932, the *Educational Worker* proposed a united-front of parent, teacher and child to achieve educational advance. It specifically advised working class mothers against taking direct action when teachers meted out harsh punishment to their children. Flying into a rage and making a scene had been tried many times and yet caning was as rife as ever. Teachers, it explained, were also under pressure due to large classes, unsuitable buildings and financial stringency. Many of them were unaware that the children they punished were already weakened by malnutrition brought about by 'dole conditions'. Caning was abhorrent, but it advised mothers to go quietly to the teacher, let him or her know that they understood the difficulties, but endeavour to get the teacher to see theirs. Only by co-operating with teachers and working through the proper channels of the Parents and Citizens Associations could they hope to improve the system.

Beside this more moderate approach, the classroom confrontations some Young Pioneers had indulged in now looked anarchic. They had, in

\(^{45}\) *Young Worker*, 15 February 1933.

\(^{46}\) File 5/17255, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney.
any case, been part of a tradition of militant individualism rather than a product of collective pupil protest. Hurling a slate or a bottle of ink at a teacher, breaking his glasses or even punching him on the jaw might, like the loss of political temper, appear legitimate to older labour activists who had done much the same thing in their school days before the Great War.47 By December 1934, however, such behaviour threatened the concept of a Popular Front. A District Conference of Sydney YCL reminded Young Pioneers who were present that the majority of teachers were members of the working class and it was therefore an error to treat them as enemies.48

Units of the Young Pioneers continued to be established, but they gradually abandoned the angry didactic language of the third period - a kind of Comintern pidgin - and organised more sport, outdoor pursuits and political study. Books like The Red Comet by Geoffrey Trease were widely read. This educational travelogue enabled young readers to draw political conclusions from facts, figures and descriptions of Soviet life. The Red Corner Book used cartoons to convey the message that in the Depression police, priests and capitalists kept everyone in their place. These imports from Martin Lawrence, the British Communist Party publisher, were part of a vital burgeoning of children's literature on the Australian Left between 1932 and 1937, despite nearly 200 books on the Federal Government's banned list.49

No doubt by the end of the 1930s many Communist children reacted in the same way as Amirah Inglis, who learned to lead a double life. At school she was an obedient Australian girl, but at home a satisfactory daughter of

48 Workers Weekly, 14 December 1934.
European Jewish Communists. When home values and school values clashed, her conscience would tell her she should be arguing against some position or defending another, carrying the banner forward or holding it higher. Yet in fact, as she confessed, she mostly did nothing.\textsuperscript{50}

The Young Communist International's call for pupil strikes corresponded to Australian conditions in only one respect. Between the wars a very real contradiction existed between the needs of some working class communities and the bureaucratic apparatus of Departments of Education. School Committees in Victoria and Parents and Citizens Associations in New South Wales gained official recognition in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{51} These voluntary organisations traditionally raised funds for the purchase of equipment and teaching aids, but some fought for greater community control over education, or even withdrew their children from school \textit{en masse} to put pressure on the authorities when normal methods of consultation broke down.

Strikes instigated by pupils alone tended to be extremely short, often collapsing after a few hours as a result of the coercive action of a combination of teachers, attendance officers and the police. I have found only one example of this kind, a classroom rebellion against harsh punishment by pupils at the Maffra State School, Victoria in April 1921. This is on record only because the pupils appealed to the School Committee who in turn asked for a departmental enquiry.\textsuperscript{52} Parent instigated school strikes were often better organised, of longer duration and attracted considerably more publicity.

\textsuperscript{50} A. Inglis, \textit{Amirah : An Un-Australian Childhood}, p.83.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Australian Encyclopedia}, Vol.4, p.454.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Argus}, 28 April 1921.
Overcrowded, dilapidated school buildings were a frequent cause of complaint, sometimes accompanied with threats of a strike. When plans for a new brick building were continually delayed, parents at Edithvale State school in Victoria led a strike of pupils in April 1923. At Lake Cargelligo, New South Wales in March 1924, a decision to strike against insanitary conditions at the local school was taken by the largest public meeting in the town's history. In June 1926 when the Victorian Department of Education refused to meet a deputation to discuss overcrowding at Glenhuntly State school, parents also withdrew their children. Complaints about the distance children travelled to school and their health and safety led to strikes in 1937 at Terry Hills, Sydney and Maryborough, Victoria.

The Communist Party exploited these antagonisms, especially when working class recreational demands clashed with official priorities. At Lithgow in 1927 it appealed to local people to keep every child at home on May Day after the Minister of Education refused to grant a one day school holiday, requested by organisers of a labour movement event. At Kurri Kurri in New South Wales these acts of defiance were a regular occurrence on May Day with triumphant evidence of depleted attendance appearing in Common Cause (fig 16). Jim Comerford remembered marching exuberantly past the local school with parental support, shouting 'scabs' at the few children of shopkeepers and businessmen who attended as usual. In the

53 Argus, 7 April 1923.
54 Argus, 19 March 1924.
55 Argus, 12 June 1926.
56 See Sydney Morning Herald, 8 November 1937 and 1 December 1937.
57 Workers Weekly, 29 April 1927.
Figure 16.

How Kurri Public School looked on May Day,

(Common Cause, 15 May 1924)
highly charged atmosphere of the 1930 lock-out on the northern coalfields thousands of school children stayed at home. The *Workers Weekly* announced they were on strike because 'the May Day demonstration was of more importance to them than the edict of a government department'.^59 It failed to mention the lure of motor cycle racing on the showground at Cessnock, or other non-political inducements like the 5,000 bags of fruit and lollies distributed free of charge to children, by the May Day Committee.^60

Finally, the Communist Party included children in the highly elaborate infrastructure it built up in the Hunter Valley - one of the very few places where it effectively challenged the ALP.^61 Children's tableaux were a familiar theme on May Day in this region. The Kurri miners lodges included the schools by launching a children's essay competition to promote May Day as a proletarian holiday. In 1938 eight public, primary and convent schools took part, submitting 114 entries on topics such as 'The Power of the Unions', 'The Overthrow of Capitalism' and 'Solidarity and Emancipation'.^62 This counter-hegemonic activity did not preclude more militant action. During a protracted dispute of unemployed relief workers at West Wallsend in August 1935 parents, acting on the advice of the Communist Party, withdrew their children from the local school to put added pressure on Lake Macquarie Shire Council to intervene. The children allegedly refused to end their strike 'until their fathers were given food'.^63

^59 *Workers Weekly*, 9 May 1930.

^60 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate*, 2 May 1930.


^62 *Common Cause*, 21 May 1938.

^63 *Trade Union Leader*, September 1935.
The world outlook of the Young Communist movement was determined in most details for the next seven years by the Fifth Congress of the Young Communist International (YCI) held in Moscow in August 1928. There is no indication of an Australian being present, but the political line it adopted coincided with that of the Comintern Sixth Congress, a position advanced in the CPA by L. Sharkey and J. B. Miles whose faction gained ascendancy in 1929. Disciples of the new doctrine alleged that the radicalisation of the masses was assured, but it was the responsibility of Communists to ensure that they were theoretically and organisationally equipped to take advantage of the impending revolutionary situation. The Comintern predicted that in a general period of capitalist collapse the parties of the bourgeoisie would lose the support of the masses as the latter turned increasingly to the Left. Other working class parties, the Comintern prophesied, would seek to keep alive the illusion that capitalism could be reformed, in order to discourage the masses from attempting to overthrow it by force.¹

According to the YCI the 'third period' which capitalism had entered would be a hard one for youth. The system's temporary economic stability could no longer be maintained except by brutal repression of the working class and wholesale substitution of cheaper youth for adult labour. Their intensified exploitation increased the political importance of young workers. In some countries, the YCI noted, they were already showing themselves conscious of their revolutionary role through a wave of youth strikes, often waged under YCL leadership.²

² M. McCarthy, Generation in Revolt, p.18.
One of the principal complaints of the Young Communist International was that the masses of working class youth were still under bourgeois influence. Excluding the Soviet Komosol, the YCI had only 100,000 young people affiliated and that figure included 40,000 members of the Chinese YCL. Although this world total remained fairly constant, its personnel changed continually. The chief task of the Young Communist Leagues in the phase of instability approaching was to intensify the struggle against the threat of an imperialist war directed at the Soviet Union. Building an industrial base and mobilising young workers through the Red Sport International were given equal priority.

The Australian YCL conducted some agitation among young strikers during a nine month dispute in the timber industry in 1929, but its scale of operations remained diminutive until 1931. Paradoxically, though, it benefitted from the factional struggle for control of the CPA. The Young Comrades Clubs - a product of the Kavanagh line of 'popularising the basic ideas of class struggle' - gave the YCL a trickle of recruits, while the front organisations that proliferated after the Sharkey-Miles takeover provided a sphere in which Young Communists could gain political experience.

By 1931 the Comintern had instructed its affiliates to abandon formal alliances with other working class organisations in favour of a 'united-front of the masses from below'. Like other Communist parties, the CPA refused to distinguish between 'bourgeois democracy' and fascism. It branded the ALP 'social fascist', accused the Labor leadership of deliberately misleading the masses and declared a war of 'class against class' to expose their perfidy. Equally sectarian, the Young Communist International told its national

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3 Ibid., p.129.
sections to secretly join 'bourgeois youth organisations' and work towards their 'liquidation' from within.™

Due to the Australian Communist Party's continuing 'preparation for illegality', joining the YCL became unnecessarily complicated. When Audrey Blake applied in Melbourne in 1931 at the age of fifteen, she had to endure the scrutiny of an all male 'exam commission' who questioned her about her proletarian background and attitude towards Trotskyism.™ Vic Bird who joined the YCL in Newcastle in 1930 also felt intimidated by his first contact with Communists. He attended an education class conducted by a ferocious looking wharfie who, striving to express himself in unfamiliar marxist jargon, repeatedly struck the table for emphasis with a stevedore's hook.™

Such was the mood of the Communist Party that it refused to seek permission to hold demonstrations. To have done so would have been to concede that the authorities had the power to deny the streets to the masses. Members of the YCL adopted the same air of zealous naivete. On a demonstration against landlord evictions of unemployed families, Patricia Devanny, a nineteen year old YCLer, was arrested for allegedly assaulting two policemen. Detained in Long Bay Jail, she immediately went on hunger strike, regarding it as her first test as a working class fighter and proof of her Communist convictions.™ Arrested on an earlier demonstration, Beryl Glendenning, also in Sydney YCL, had been subjected to more subtle intimidation. The police threatened her with incarceration in a 'home' and brought a charge of being 'idle and disorderly with no visible means of

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5 A. Blake, A Proletarian Life, pp.91-92.
6 Vic Bird interview, Newcastle, 18 May 1987.
7 Workers Weekly, 19 December 1930.
support' - a legal device commonly used for the apprehension of prostitutes.®

Beryl Glendenning's spirit of self-denial reminds one of Ostrovsky's young communist hero Pavel, in the Soviet novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (1924). Urging the YCL on to even greater sacrifices, she alleged:

... the Sydney membership is devoid of the fighting instincts that should come from the masses at this period and has assumed the ideological form of a friendly society or matrimonial association. What they should bear in mind is what Lenin said: 'Sex and politics won't mingle'.

Glendenning's attitude contradicted a contemporary myth spread by the bourgeois press, that the Communist movement was a sort of free love institution, a hot-bed of unrestricted sensuality. If some Sydney YCL'ers put politics above courting, this austere fashion failed to catch on in Melbourne. Audrey Blake recalled feeling 'a sense of solid achievement' having lost her virginity at fifteen to a 'gentle loving young man' in the YCL who shared in the deed.

Melbourne Young Communist League and its periphery included several young people interested in anti-capitalist art and literature. In 1930 Judah Waten, Huffshi Hurwitz and others published one issue of *Strife*, a magazine inspired by the American radical review *New Masses*, edited by Mike Gold. Noel Counihan (1913-1986), probably Australia's first genuinely revolutionary artist, had friends in this circle. He worked in a Melbourne textile warehouse but lost his job in 1932 for his political agitation. By then he had joined the YCL and briefly attended classes at the National Gallery

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8 **Workers Weekly**, 18 July 1930.

9 **Workers Weekly**, 12 December 1930.

10 M. McCarthy, op.cit., p.13.

11 A. Blake, op.cit., p.13.
School. Counihan helped found the Workers Art Clubs which were based on principles similar to those of the Soviet Proletkult movement and offered ordinary people a chance to participate in literary activity and the visual arts.\(^\text{12}\)

Counihan has left uniquely detailed descriptions of Young Communists. Sam Newman, the branch secretary of Melbourne YCL, a serious boy with dark smouldering eyes, taught him to shed his emotionalism and think in disciplined party terms. Solly Solloman, a thick set youth contemptuous of 'petty bourgeois intellectuals', had an habitual cigarette clenched between his lips which barely moved when he spoke. 'Shorty' Pattulo, only five feet in height, had immense physical courage. Once during a factory gate meeting he and Counihan were trapped against a high brick wall by a hostile policeman and a crowd of belligerent foremen. Pattulo was totally unafraid. With fists clenched and head held high he challenged them to fight, either individually or all together. Nobody dared step forward.\(^\text{13}\)

Counihan was amazed at the erudition and worldly knowledge of his young comrades. They knew so much about recent world history, about political and military events, economics and imperialism. The conversations he had with them filled important gaps in his education and led him to delve more deeply into questions of marxism and philosophy. These working class boys and girls constantly pressed him for explanations of his own artistic aims and method. While he disagreed with their functionalist utilitarian approach, Counihan was nevertheless impressed with the way

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\(^{12}\) R. Haese, Rebels and Precursors, pp.148-149.

\(^{13}\) Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.
they attempted to grapple with the problem of art and society using the works of G. Plekhanov and Upton Sinclair.\textsuperscript{14}

The YCL's National Conference in Sydney at Easter 1931 declared 'relentless war on a tendency to work where it is easier' and denounced those in its ranks who indulged in 'exclusive concentration on the unemployed to the detriment of young workers'.\textsuperscript{15} Although the launch of a 'Young Workers Charter' held centre stage, the majority of the YCL's 2-300 members were unemployed. The composition of its National Committee reflected this. Those with jobs, like Patricia Devanny who worked in a store, or Wally Robertson, a fibrous plasterer, were exceptional. Leading cadres unable to obtain sustenance had to periodically cease activity and go off in search of work.\textsuperscript{16} The wide dispersal of YCL branches at Brisbane, Kurri, Newcastle, Sydney, Broken Hill, Melbourne, Port Adelaide and Perth added to the problem of co-ordination.

The economic crisis of the early 1930s had a devastating effect on the job prospects of school leavers. Official estimates produced by the New South Wales Education Department in 1932 put the level of unemployment among boys leaving State schools at 23.2 per cent, compared with an average of 5.5 per cent for the period 1923-29.\textsuperscript{17} This figure, however, is somewhat distorted by a lack of accurate statistics for girls. The annual reports of the Minister for Public Instruction concealed the real level of unemployment by listing 'home duties' as a separate occupation. This category accounted for 69 per cent of girl school leavers in 1928 and 79 per cent in 1931. If combined

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Young Worker, April 1931.

\textsuperscript{16} Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.

\textsuperscript{17} J. Shields, 'A dangerous age : Bourgeois philanthropy, the state and the young unemployed in New South Wales in the 1930s', What Rough Beast, p.153.
with those for boys, these indices point to a real level of unemployment for this group in excess of 40 per cent.\(^{18}\)

The Young Communist League had no option but to direct some of its resources into the Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM). Launched by the Communist Party in April 1930, the UWM claimed a membership of 31,000 in the three eastern states by 1931 and 68,000 at the end of 1934.\(^{19}\) Where a YCL branch existed in the same locality, the UWM often came under pressure to cater for youth. In 1931 the New South Wales UWM set up Youth Sections at Kurri and Lithgow, followed by Youth Commissions in 1933 in the Sydney suburbs of Mortdale and Balmain. In June 1934 after conferences of unemployed youth at Weston and Newcastle, the Northern District Council of Unemployed and Relief Workers also set up a Provisional Youth Committee.\(^{20}\) In Melbourne the YCL had members in the Fitzroy Unemployed Single Men's Group and in two girls' sports teams linked to the UWM in Fitzroy and Preston.\(^{21}\)

Unemployed youth represented an easily targeted group. They congregated daily in the inner suburbs and city centres where casual employment and a proliferation of charities afforded them most relief. Unlike young workers they were not divided by differences of pay or skill. They shared specific grievances which, potentially, made it easy for a few politically conscious individuals in their midst to educate and organise the rest. Girls under twenty-one found it virtually impossible to obtain relief payments, while a boy of fourteen or more, to secure the adult rate, had either to be married or satisfy the dole inspector that he had no parents within forty

\(^{18}\) M. White, op.cit., pp.21-22.

\(^{19}\) A. Davidson, op.cit., p.60.

\(^{20}\) Young Worker, June 1934.

\(^{21}\) Revolt, 10 July 1931 and 27 July 1931.
miles radius claiming benefit on his behalf. Relief allowances under the Permissible Incomes Regulations had a low age limit which meant that the burden of provision fell on the family. Rather than be an encumbrance, many young people left home in search of work. To qualify for track rations they had to cover certain distances, therefore train-jumping or 'riding the rattler' assumed epidemic proportions.

Through UWM Youth Sections the YCL hoped to impart a rudimentary political awareness to jobless boys and girls, while simultaneously extending its own recruitment base. The *Young Worker*, first published by the YCL in March 1931, provides no clue as to why most Youth Sections were so tenuous and short-lived, but self-indulgence and political immaturity are probable causes. Approximately fifty attended the inauguration of the UWM Youth Section at Kurri, summoned by a YCLer who went around the town ringing a hand bell. Before this captive audience YCL speakers embarked upon an economic analysis of capitalism, followed by a diatribe on the necessity of revolution. Jim Comerford, one of those who spoke, judged that the majority present must have been 'bored bloody stiff'. He admitted that he had been intent on 'putting on an act to show how clever I was compared to everyone else'.

The Balmain Youth Commission of the UWM operated more constructively. It demanded free use of the swimming baths for the unemployed and when told by the local authority that this was 'more of a luxury than a necessity' mobilised young people to occupy the Council Chambers in protest. Under YCL tutelage in 1933 unemployed youth in Balmain

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22 J. Shields, op.cit., p.155.


fielded their own side in the junior Rugby League competitions. The YCL also helped form the Bankstown Unemployed Working Girls Sports Club. Members of this organisation were photographed marching behind their banner on the Sydney Trades Hall Council May Day procession in 1932, wearing sun-shades and distinctive white sports outfits.\[^{25}\]

Whenever the UWM tried to prevent an eviction the YCL assisted as a point of honour. Sympathisers would barricade themselves inside the home of an unemployed family and fight off police and bailiffs. These confrontations were later dignified in the Communist press as 'the battle of Bankstown' or 'the battle of Newtown'. One of Wendy Lowenstein's informants described young participants as 'the shock troops, daredevils and bush-rangers of the movement'.\[^{26}\] Some of them lived together communally squatting in derelict houses in the inner suburbs. They prided themselves on being the first in action, combining ideological convictions with a larrikin love of a punch-up.\[^{27}\] Sydney YCLers were the first to be jailed. Jimmy McPhee and Noel Eatock received sentences of eighteen months and two and a half years respectively, for resisting evictions and assaulting the police.\[^{28}\]

In Melbourne, where demonstrations of the unemployed were broken up by a special 'political squad', a deep hatred of the police developed. The police had traditionally responded to the violence of inner city pushes like the 'Grey Caps' or the 'Flying Eagles' with a violence of their own. Given extra-legal powers to deal with the 'Bolshevist threat', some constables

\[^{25}\] Railroad, 10 May 1932.

\[^{26}\] W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.215.

\[^{27}\] N. Wheatley, 'Meeting them at the door : radicalism, militancy and the Sydney anti-eviction campaign of 1931' in J. Roe, (ed), Twentieth Century Sydney, p.217.

\[^{28}\] Australian Labor Defender, 20 September 1933.
simply transferred their animosity to the young unemployed.\(^{29}\) As individuals on both sides came to recognise each other, grudges became highly personalised. The YCL alleged that the police regularly 'framed' its members, or made unprovoked attacks on them. Forcibly removing young people from demonstrations by 'frog-marching' them away was a common tactic employed by the police to intimidate (fig. 17).

In 1932 the right to free speech became central to Melbourne UWM's campaigning. In order to freely address an open air meeting in Brunswick, Noel Counihan had himself locked in a cage improvised from an old passenger lift. 'Shorty' Pattulo, assigned to create a diversion while the cage was drawn into place, was pursued by the police and shot in the thigh.\(^{30}\) The UWM remembered this outrage and took its revenge when the opportunity arose. Almost a year later a young worker wielding a cricket bat waylaid Pattulo's assailant, Constable Ward, as he left a demonstration and 'gave him what he deserved'.\(^{31}\)

Incidents of this kind led the Melbourne Argus to accuse the UWM of 'inducing despairing youth to wreck the social order'.\(^{32}\) The Melbourne Herald alleged that 'foreign agitators' were active amidst the juvenile unemployed and that Young Communists had infiltrated the La Trobe Street dole shelter.\(^{33}\) If the spectre of political manipulation invoked panic, the press found an even more alarming phenomenon in 'factory storming'. These spontaneous occupations sometimes occurred when frustration

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\(^{29}\) Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.

\(^{30}\) Australian Labor Defender, 20 September 1933.

\(^{31}\) Young Worker, September 1933.


\(^{33}\) Ibid.
Young worker arrested at a recent unemployed demonstration in Melbourne.

Figure 17.

Arrest at Melbourne demonstration of the unemployed,

(Australian Labor Defender, September 1933)
boiled over in the huge queues that formed outside firms advertising for junior labour. The invasion of Nally Products Ltd, Sydney by a crowd of three hundred youths in February 1930, or the chaos at Grimes Garages, Sydney in July 1933 when five hundred youths rushed onto its premises are typical examples.34

Conservatives understood the threat posed by embittered youths and acted to circumvent it. In August 1931 R. H. Swainson, a Sydney Rotarian, launched the Young Citizens Association. Its stated object was to provide work and recreational facilities for unemployed juveniles - aims which won it the support of figures prominent in the churches, big business and State politics.35 But its hidden agenda sought to address the anticipated calamity of non-surveillance of the young and counter those 'who disseminate nefarious doctrines opposed to the present order'.36 In November 1932 the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce founded a similar Boys Employment Movement (BEM). Those who ran it neatly combined their class and political loyalties by campaigning for special legislation to enable firms to employ greater numbers of young people below award rates as 'an insurance against Communism'.37

Broadcasts by the Young Citizens Association on Radio 2UW, Sydney appealed to employers to offer young people jobs and so restore lost hope. The Young Worker poured scorn on this initiative, describing hope as pure illusion under a chaotic system destined for the same fate as Humpty Dumpty.38 Melbourne YCL denounced the State government afforestation

34 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 February 1930 and 28 July 1933.
36 Ibid.
37 Australian Worker, June 1933.
38 Young Worker, December 1933.
schemes as an extension of a 'work for the dole' policy. It regarded compulsory rural labour camps like those at Noojee and Bendigo for boys aged sixteen to eighteen, as 'fascistation' - a prelude to more openly military institutions for use in a new imperialist war. These fears had some foundation. Below the surface of philanthropic compassion in Australia, there were some who floated the possibility of quarantining the young from less politically desirable elements around them. Necessity forced Young Communists to enter camps for single men, or use the hostels and dining rooms where dole coupons had to be exchanged for food and shelter. But they intended to organise from within and turn collective experiences of poverty into political exposure of the system.

Melbourne YCL's hostility to 'charity outfits' led it to try to capture control of the Boys Employment Movement (BEM). By adept manoeuvre it succeeded in dominating several of the BEM's suburban branches prior to the annual general meeting of the city organisation. The secretary of Melbourne BEM first became suspicious when he received several motions insisting that youths employed on State relief schemes be paid the basic rate irrespective of age. His own investigations which he made known at the annual general meeting, indicated 'a vile plot' to turn the BEM into 'a militant Youth Section'.

The YCL organised several camps of its own for the juvenile unemployed, but failed to make any lasting political impact among them. Its forces were too small and dispersed and its outlook too dogmatic and severe. The YCL's District organisation, especially in Sydney, suffered from the

39 Communist Review, September 1934.
40 M. White, op.cit., pp.211-212.
41 See for example Young Worker, October 1931 and September 1934.
42 Argus, 8 November 1932.
continual disruption, purging and purification so typical of 'third period' Communist politics. Added to this, some of its best cadres vanished for months at a time, serving terms of imprisonment for petty larceny or similar crimes of poverty. Others fled inter-state, hoping to elude the law and escape the consequences of the UWM's confrontational strategy.\textsuperscript{43}

The Communist Party made some attempt to alleviate the child poverty that was widespread in the Depression. One can judge its extent from a report in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} early in 1930, that in the suburb of Balmain alone there were 2,000 children in a state of semi-starvation.\textsuperscript{44} The CPA aided these victims of unemployment through the Australian section of the Workers International Relief (WIR), an organisation originally founded by the Comintern to assist persecuted German Communists after the abortive revolution of 1923-4. A children's camp at Speers Point, New South Wales at Christmas 1932 is typical of a host of similar ventures. Newcastle and District WIR persuaded Miners Lodges to strike a levy to help fund the camp and shops were approached for donations of food. Volunteers went door-to-door borrowing camping equipment and a timber merchant gave enough material for the WIR to construct a ramshackle dining hall on the camp site.\textsuperscript{45}

Although the YCL intended to build a strong base among young workers, the vulnerability of its few factory units continued to be a major problem. The YCL's 'conquest of the shop' followed a pattern established by the Militant Minority Movement (MMM). Founded by the Communist Party in March 1930, this drew much of its support from rank-and-file animosity towards full-time union officials. The MMM openly preached

\textsuperscript{43} Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.

\textsuperscript{44} N. Wheatley in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), \textit{op.cit.}, p.223.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Red Leader}, 21 December 1932.
class war and advocated use of the strike weapon in union bargaining, rather than relying on arbitration. By 1932 it had an estimated 1,000 members in 'factory nuclei' and a total strength equal to about 12 per cent of all organised workers in Australia.46

The YCL tried to tap this potential through MMM Youth Sections, but had little success. In February 1934 it claimed active groups in the Sydney engineering, baking and textile unions, but admitted that YCL'ers there had still not formulated a policy for these trades, or rallied more than a handful of young workers around them.47 Nor had the YCL 'Young Workers Charter' much influence in the labour movement, except as an abstract statement of policy. It called for equal pay for equal work regardless of gender; a six hour day for all young workers with no compulsory overtime; trade training on demand up to the age of sixteen, with a 15/- per week maintenance allowance for those who chose to stay on at school.48 Periodically updated, by 1933 the Charter included: exemption of juveniles from night work, the abolition of piecework and more rigid enforcement of laws prohibiting child labour.

In 1933 YCL District Committees issued clear guidelines for establishing factory units. Branches had first to set up a 'concentration group' of two or three reliable members, one of whom ought ideally to be already employed at the factory in question. They would then make regular visits to sell the Young Worker, give out leaflets and hold lunch time meetings. Once a sympathiser had been identified every effort would be made to draw that young person into the YCL.49 When it had detailed knowledge of

46 F. Farrell, op.cit., p.188.
47 Young Worker, February 1934.
48 Young Worker, March 1931.
49 Young Worker, January 1934.
conditions at a firm the YCL produced a factory bulletin. By 1934 several of these had appeared in Sydney. Members and supporters produced the Needle Point at Wallace Swinton's hosiery factory, the Radio Call at Stromberg Carlson's and the Rebel at Stirling Henry and Dawson's. In Melbourne a YCL factory unit at Eclipse Radio issued the Broadcaster.

The format and frequency of these publications was often erratic. Jimmy McPhee, commenting on the slipshod attitude of the person responsible for this task at Wallace Swinton's, showed the frustration that YCL District Committee members like him felt:

Previously the comrade in charge of this used to talk about the importance of factory work and when asked how things were going would reply 'splendid'. Is the paper coming out? Soon! How many contacts have you interviewed? We called on two or three but they were out. Have you been to see So-and-So? Well we haven't got a bike. How much factory news have you got? None yet, but ...  

Factory propaganda sometimes brought results, but firms often used it as a pretext to weed out trouble makers. In July 1932 after a youth bulletin criticised their 'slave driver tactics', management at Stromberg Carlson launched a witch-hunt to discover its authors. They interrogated fifteen young workers, sacked two and assembled the remainder of the factory to hear a lecture on obedience. Dismissals followed when a youth bulletin circulated at Dawson's Canister Works in Annandale, Sydney, in November 1933, although the firm later acted on a number of demands it had listed. Wallace Swinton's made similar concessions in February 1934 after the

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50 Young Worker, February 1934.
51 Young Worker, August 1934.
52 Red Leader, 13 July 1932.
53 Red Leader, 29 November 1933.
Needle Point called for improved toilet facilities, but five girls suspected of being ring-leaders lost their jobs.54

Communists at the Victorian State coal mine at Wonthaggi evolved a more viable youth structure during a protracted dispute there in 1934. Early in the strike the Minority Movement organised a Youth Section thirty strong, which held football matches, gymnasium classes and ran a sports club.55 When the strike ended the Youth Section became an official sub-committee of the local Miners Federation. It met regularly to discuss the welfare of young miners and elected a youth delegate to represent them on the union executive. Wonthaggi MMM's initiative broke new ground. It established unions as better places to organise young workers, with adult allies and funds that might be used for social and educational purposes. The MMM’s Red Leader still advocated ‘action on the job’ to win youth demands, but in February 1935 when the CPA line changed, it too adopted a union-oriented approach.

Because young workers and unemployed youth generally preferred sport to politics, the Young Communist League had to provide it in order to retain their enthusiasm and make them class conscious.56 Yet it made little effort to understand this aspect of youth culture at anything other than a superficial level. The Young Worker deplored the way capitalism had made sport ‘a matter of business and personal gain’. It argued that new values were needed in sport, emphasising the pleasure of playing rather than the prize at the end of the game.57 These were standard Soviet tenets, but the Australian YCL said hardly anything about the emerging beach and

54 Red Leader, 21 February 1934.
55 Red Leader, 27 June 1934.
56 CRS A472/1, Item W1972, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
57 Young Worker, August 1933.
surf cult, or the role of the champion in sport, personified by figures like Don Bradman. Of the English cricket tour of Australia in 1933-3, it merely noted that the comradeship of 'red competitors' on and off the pitch would make incidents like the bodyline bowling controversy impossible in the future.\(^5\)

'Red Sport' came to Australia belatedly compared to most European and some Asian and Latin American countries. Sydney Communists set up a branch of the Workers Sports Federation (WSF) in June 1931 and their counterparts in Melbourne followed suit two months later.\(^5\) The Australian WSF affiliated to the Comintern-sponsored Red Sports International (RSI), founded in Moscow in 1921. The RSI sought to liberate proletarian youth from its physical and mental shackles and isolate it from bourgeois influences. Obedient to the dogma of 'class against class', it adopted a hostile stance towards the Socialist Workers Sports International (SWSI) with which most Social Democratic parties had links. The RSI opposed the SWSI's political neutrality and accused it of collaboration with the exploiters by promoting 'class conciliation' through sport.\(^\)\(^\)\(^6\)

At its Fourth Bureau Session in 1923, the Young Communist International had adopted a definitive resolution on sport. It alleged that working class youth absorbed ruling class values via sports news in the bourgeois press, through the facilities provided by pro-establishment youth movements like the YMCA and Boy Scouts, or by membership of factory sports clubs. It denounced the latter as 'boss subsidised' and claimed they 'doped' the workers, making it easier to impose wage cuts and rationalisa-

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58 Ibid.
59 *Young Worker*, August 1931.
tion. These bodies were doubly pernicious to the YCI because they reproduced generations of sporting 'specialists' who were incapable of taking an interest in the social issues that really mattered. It followed that revolutionaries had either to shun these organisations, or enter them and carry out disruptive activity. This absurd directive was seldom put into practice in Australia. Patricia Devanny got as far as joining Sydney YWCA to 'have a look round' but her reconnaissance proved counter-productive. Through it she developed an interest in rowing, with the result that she was lost to the YCL on Saturday afternoons.

Sydney WSF made its greatest impact on working class girls - a group attracted in large numbers to factory sides like the Arnott Girls Baseball Club, the Davis Gelatine Vigoro Team, or the Lustre Girls Hockey Club. The WSF excelled at vigoro - a game which combined elements of baseball and cricket. By October 1932, it had twenty-two female vigoro teams, compared to six male cricket teams. In addition to cycling and hiking clubs Sydney WSF also had a girls' gymnasium. This held weekly training sessions and staged public displays, combining mat work and pyramid building with a political message. At an Anti-War Ball at the Palladium in October 1933, girl gymnasts performed like 'a highly trained ballet' bearing placards inscribed 'Not Rifles and Death but Life and Gymnasiums' and 'Use War Money for Workers Sports'.

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61 S. Jones, Sport, Politics and the Working Class, pp.77-78.
62 J. Stephens, op.cit., p.95.
64 CRS A 472/1, Item W1972, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
65 Young Worker, October 1933.
WSF recruitment followed established procedure. In 1933 the District Secretariat of Melbourne YCL instructed all units to systematically visit factories at lunch times and have conversations with young workers playing games outside. They were to explain the WSF's aims of 'player control', 'sex equality' and anti-commercialism and urge them to enter a factory team in one of its competitions. The YCL played a greater role in the WSF than any other Communist front organisation. In June 1934, for example, virtually all members of the Sydney WSF executive committee were young people. In Melbourne the YCL put most of its effort into supporting WSF summer camps, a trend still evident in 1940 according to police surveillance.

The Australian Young Communist League fulfilled its internationalist duties through the Youth Sections of the Friends of the Soviet Union (FOSU) and the League Against Imperialism (LAI). Founded by the CPA in September 1930, FOSU claimed 2,000 members at the end of 1932 and nearly 7,000 in 1935. During the Depression the Soviet Union's reputation as 'a society without unemployment' found some acknowledgement. Between 1932 and 1935 the circulation of FOSU's monthly journal Soviets Today rose from 12,500 to 20,000. FOSU's concerts, lectures and anniversary events attracted students, young artists and intellectuals eager to explore new, more cosmopolitan ways of living. Audrey Blake, just out of Melbourne Girls High School in 1931, enjoyed the 'political colour' and 'great vigour' of FOSU's Saturday night dances held in a disused factory in A'Beckett Street.

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66 CRS A 472/1, Item W1972, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
67 Young Worker, June 1934.
68 CRS A 472/1, Item W1972, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
70 A. Inglis, Amirah : An un-Australian Childhood, p.48.
Their informal 'do-your-own-thing' atmosphere set them apart from Rechabite Lodge socials or the raffish glamour of the Green Mill:

There would be young people ... shaving up pieces of candle to make the floor 'fast'. They would sprinkle some kerosene soaked in sawdust, then one or two of them would run and do a slide along the floor and declare 'it's fast enough'.

A FOSU Youth Section formed in August 1932 had a steering committee of eleven and supporters in most suburbs in Melbourne. It gave out leaflets about the sporting and educational facilities available to Soviet youth, organised dances and socials and held a weekly physical culture class for members. The *Young Worker* published articles on the enlistment of Soviet youth in 'shock brigades', to combat rural illiteracy or help surpass production targets set under the Five Year Plan. The need to build solidarity with the Soviet Union, depicted as under threat from hostile capitalist states or White Guard conspiracies, underpinned these propaganda drives. A revival of International Youth Day, first observed by the Australian YCL in 1923 and traditionally marked by a meeting or rally, enabled the message to reach a slightly wider audience.

The YCL in Sydney worked chiefly through the Youth Section of the League Against Imperialism. This tiny group met at the offices of the LAI on George Street for a weekly study circle. As an off-shoot of the Workers International Relief, the LAI initiated solidarity campaigns with revolutionary movements in the Pacific, including Fiji and Australia's 'own empire' New Guinea. It supported the Chinese Red Army against the Kuomintang

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71 A. Blake, op.cit., p.16.
72 Soviets Today, September 1932.
73 See for example, *Young Worker*, July 1931 or November 1931.
74 For the origins of this event see Chapter 1 ii.
and condemned Japanese incursions in Manchuria.\textsuperscript{75} The LAI Youth Section leafleted members of the Citizen Militia, calling on them to refuse to serve, should the Scullin government embroil Australia in this conflict. In the winter of 1932 it produced a \textit{Youth Bulletin Against Imperialism} which promoted inter-racial unity and argued for the eradication of terms like 'dago' and 'nigger' from the vocabulary of working class youth. It hailed Aboriginal people as 'class brothers' and 'real Australians', for they alone in the initial phase of white settlement had born the brunt of the 'rapacious onslaught of Imperialism'.\textsuperscript{76}

The intensive activity of the Young Communist League during the 'third period' had little result. Its outward plurality, with Youth Sections spanning the various Communist-led 'front' organisations, hid the fact that with the exception of the Workers Sports Federation, the same individuals formed the backbone of the membership in each. For the Communist Party, these years were a time of growth. Its cadres increased from 300 at the beginning of 1930 to 2,824 at the end of 1934. R. Dixon, assistant general secretary and one of the more lucid expositors of Party policy, believed that the CPA had finally left behind its days as a small socialist sect and won wide support among the people.\textsuperscript{77} But as Central Committee representative on the YCL National Committee, he was much less sanguine. Compared with the CPA’s leadership of 'an increasingly radicalised working class', an 'abnormal situation' existed in the YCL.

By April 1933 YCL membership had fallen to below 200. Dixon attributed this to 'isolation from the masses of young workers' and

\textsuperscript{75} F. Farrell, op.cit., pp.212-214.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Youth Bulletin Against Imperialism} No. 3, August 1932.

\textsuperscript{77} R. Gibson, \textit{The People Stand Up}, p.38.
'rampant opportunist sectarianism'. Divisions in Sydney had led to brawling at the YCL District Conference in March 1933, when rival factions accused each other of being 'disruptors' and 'police agents'. Matters continued to deteriorate. Over a year later one of Sydney YCL's larger groups, the Ultimo-Leichhardt Section, ran no political education classes, had little influence in 'bourgeois youth organisations' and only one sports club under its direct influence. The sole redeeming feature was that the YCL national leadership had re-established contact with the Young Communist International. In January 1931, having taken elaborate precautions to disguise her real destination, Patricia Devanny attended a YCI course in Moscow on Marxist-Leninist theory, including some instruction in urban street fighting techniques. This had no bearing on local conditions, but when the Young Communist International altered course in conformity with the Comintern Seventh Congress, its Australian section came under additional pressure to end its seclusion by building an all-embracing anti-fascist 'Youth Front'.

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78 *Workers Weekly*, 28 April 1933.

79 *Young Worker*, March 1933.

80 *Workers Weekly*, 30 November 1934.

81 J. Stephens, op.cit., p.94.
Between 1935 and 1939 the Young Communist League of Australia underwent an important transformation. From a tiny sectarian organisation of 200, its membership increased to around 1,500. It established large branches with club facilities in two States and trained a viable leadership at district and national levels. After 1935 the YCL forged alliances. It worked closely with Christian youth movements for peace and within a wider anti-fascist 'Youth Front'. Through this front it alerted young people to authoritarian trends in society and popularised a charter of progressive youth demands. As an extension of these activities the YCL re-constituted itself in 1939, becoming the League of Young Democrats in Victoria and the Australian Labor League of Youth in New South Wales.

These developments arose out of an official change of course that Communist policy experienced world-wide after the Comintern Seventh Congress which met in Moscow from July to August 1935. Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian who had won world acclaim in 1933 for his defence of those accused of burning the German Reichstag, gave the keynote report. In a major reversal of the 'third period' line, he declared that Social Democratic parties were no longer the central bastion of capitalism, but allies in the defence of democracy. Fascism triumphant in Italy and Germany and on the ascendant elsewhere, was the principal enemy of the working class and the main danger to world peace. Communists therefore had a duty to resist it wherever it arose in the domestic politics of a particular country. They had to do this by taking the lead in building popular fronts, consisting of all groups and individuals opposed to fascism, irrespective of their class or political affiliations.1

1 R. Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, pp.42-43
At the Sixth Congress of the Young Communist International in September 1935, Dimitrov stressed the importance of winning 'toiling youth' to the popular front. Although fascism masqueraded as the party of youth and action, its gains were not irreversible. The masses of anti-fascist youth were interested in re-grouping, if only the Young Communist Leagues grasped the opportunity. Dimitrov urged them to stop living 'the secluded life of sectarians' and cease trying to be 'a Communist party of youth'. Young Communists had to evolve a style of work that brought them into closer proximity with the educational, sports and cultural organisations of working class youth.2

Michal Wolf, a Hungarian functionary of the Young Communist International, responded to Dimitrov's proposals. He accepted that the internal life of many Young Communist Leagues alienated new recruits. The endless routine made impossibly high demands on their leisure time and prevented them living in the way young people normally lived. Wolf proposed that the narrow cell structure of the Young Communist movement be replaced by 'mass Youth Leagues'. These needed to be 'non-party' in orientation, acquire 'a definite national character', be bold, independent, speak the same vivid language as the younger generation and fight for its democratic rights and liberties.

Prejudices against 'non-fascist bourgeois youth', such as the Boy Scouts and YMCA, had to be abandoned. Similar conditions applied to other youth organisations within the labour movement. Dimitrov had encouraged Communist and Social Democratic youth to combine their forces and Wolf gave examples of where this had happened. He cited Spain and France, also Britain where the ILP Guild of Youth in 1934 had applied for affiliation to

2 Communist Review, August 1936.
the Young Communist International. Wolf regarded closer relations between proletarian youth movements as vital to their leadership of a wider democratic alliance.

The Melbourne Congress of the Movement Against War and Fascism, (MAWF) held in November 1934 marked a crucial turning point in Australia. Solidarity with Egon Kisch, a visiting Czech writer and delegate persecuted by the Federal government, became a test-case of democracy. United-front proposals to the ALP by the Communist Party in December 1934 also indicated a change of course. In April 1934 the Young Communist League had initiated a broadly based League of Youth Against War and Fascism under the auspices of the Victorian MAWF. Young Communists in Sydney followed suit and in March and July 1935 the YCL in both States held joint anti-war meetings with the Douglas Social Credit Youth Movement, the Christian Youth Committee for Peace and the University League of Nations Union. These overtures, reported in a new series of the Young Worker (fig. 18) were inspired by news of an American Youth Congress Movement, a YCL anti-fascist front in the USA which claimed to represent 1,300,000 young people.

Harry Torr, editor of the YCL Young Worker first applied Dimitrov's thesis to youth politics in Australia in an article in the Communist Review of November 1935. Torr held the CPA responsible for the YCL's lack of development. He had often encountered adult communists who refused 'to be bothered by the kids', or who dismissed them as 'hopeless', because 'all

3 Communist Review, April 1936.
5 CRS A467, Bundle 94, Item 64, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
6 Young Worker, 10 April 1935, 10 July 1935 and 10 September 1935.
7 Communist Review, August 1936.
WORKERS! STOP THE WAR!

CONSCRIPTION IN GERMANY AND ITALY
PREVENT IT IN AUSTRALIA

The preparations for another world war are now plain to everyone.

England, having supported Germany's rearmament, now uses that as an excuse for spending £43,000,000 on armaments herself. Hitler conscripts half a million men; Italy follows with a million.

In Australia, the youth are faced again with the threat of compulsory military training, and organisation and struggle against this danger is an urgent matter for every one of us.

The beginnings have been made in this direction.

The Sydney "Sun" recently suggested "military colonies" for the unemployed youth.

STATE-WIDE RALLY IN JULY

A conference of youth against war and Fascism was held at the Adyar Hall, Sydney, on March 2.

Representatives were present from the University League of Nations Union, the Douglas Credit Youth Movement, Y.C.L., State Council Against War and Fascism, and other working-class organisations. There was also a member of the U.A.P. Younger Set present, although he did not officially represent that body.

A state council was elected from the representatives of these various organisations, and is beginning to develop organisation leading to a united rally of youth, to be held in Sydney in July.

All organisations and individuals opposed to war and Fascism are needed to co-operate to make this rally a success!

See that there are country delegates!

Rally against the danger of war, the threat of conscription!

Textile Workers' Conditions Organise To Improve

The textile workers of Victoria are facing more and more attacks from the bosses. Although it is not twelve months since the young workers were given a mild wage-cut, to-day an intensified drive towards speed-up is taking place. This drive takes a variety of forms.

At Staley and Staley's, the girls in the circular department have a red disc hung in the centre of the room. If any girl wants to leave the room she must take the disc. This means that only one girl can leave the room at a time.

At the Prestige Mill, which, by the way, was supposed to have the "best" conditions, because they pro-(Continued on page 8, col. 3)

Kisch DID land, and he DID leave Australia a free man!

Photo shows Melbourne Y.C.L.-ers at his farewell, attended by 6000.

Figure 18.

Young Worker, 10 April 1935. First published by the YCL in March 1931, it appeared intermittently until late 1937.
they think about is sport and jazz'.8 Torr thought the best chance of forming a united working class youth organisation was through a single labour sports association, combined with 'a drive to unionise youth'.9 But certain 'native peculiarities' placed obstacles in the YCL's path. No other Socialist youth movement existed in Australia, let alone one laying claims to be marxist. Torr ignored the ALP Younger Sets in New South Wales, towards whom the YCL had made some perfunctory advances.10 Their lack of resemblance to European sections of the Young Socialist International probably accounted for his silence.

At the outset of the popular front the YCL attempted to become a mass movement in its own right. To attract recruits it began combining political education and public work with sport and recreation.11 In 1936 it amalgamated its smaller units into branches and encouraged them to promote a club atmosphere at their meetings. Sectarians protested that it was impossible to associate non-communist youth with the YCL in this way, but branches that took the initiative were inundated with potential recruits. Richmond YCL in Melbourne opened a club with only an old pair of boxing gloves as equipment, yet within a few weeks it attracted 350 young people to its first fancy dress ball.12 A similar club in Carlton made an impact through factory gate meetings, slogan 'paint-ups' and 'concentration work' among the young unemployed.13 By the end of 1938 the YCL city head

8 Communist Review, November 1935.
9 Communist Review, March 1936.
10 Workers Weekly, 14 December 1934.
11 Workers Weekly, 19 March 1937.
12 Communist Review, May 1936.
quarters in Sydney boasted a fife band and a 12 foot sailing skiff on the harbour among its attractions.\textsuperscript{14} In Melbourne the YCL's premises consisted of two floors in Tattersall's building in Swanston Street. It had a cafe, two gymnasiums and a billiards room. Volunteers ran classes on twenty-six different topics and the club fielded a variety of sports teams at weekends.\textsuperscript{15}

In the mid-1930s there was little development of youth clubs, especially in the crowded metropolitan suburbs. Those that catered for both sexes, or even specifically for girls, were comparatively rare until the early years of the war.\textsuperscript{16} In this respect YCL clubs differed markedly, encouraging girls to play an equal role. In Melbourne they had their own gymnasium, basketball and cricket teams and a dress-making class to help supplement low incomes. By 1939 fashion nights had become part of the club's regular entertainment.\textsuperscript{17}

The austere trend in personal dress noted by Noel Counihan in his earlier observation of Young Communists\textsuperscript{18} no longer applied - at least not for girls. Audrey Blake's impression of herself at this time was of 'spare, tailored elegance', wearing slacks and a jacket to match which she thought 'quite revolutionary'. These, with two suits in grey and tweed, were purchased on a YCL functionary's wage of a pound a week from Jesus, a marvellous Spanish tailor at the top of Bourke Street. Other girls in

\textsuperscript{14} Workers Weekly, 18 October 1938.

\textsuperscript{15} K. C. Miller, \textit{A New Deal for Youth}, p.17.

\textsuperscript{16} D. Maunders, op.cit., pp.36-38.

\textsuperscript{17} Workers Voice, 25 March 1939.

\textsuperscript{18} Noel Counihan, unpublished notes.
Melbourne YCL patronised him too, because he made such good looking clothes.19

In New South Wales, the Youth Camp Colony Association (YCCA), founded by Alex Shaw in 1934, brought the YCL into contact with large numbers of young people.20 Inspired by the organised camping movement in the USA, the YCCA provided holiday camps at the lowest possible cost for young workers of both sexes. With up to 750 at each camp, an elected committee ensured 'proper decorum' and shared out duties equally. The YCL introduced a political element at camp-fire concerts, but advertisements for the holidays claimed that informal dress and outdoor pursuits would, by themselves, 'engender the love of freedom which is vital to democracy'.21

The Workers Sports Federation fulfilled a similar role in Victoria. On two occasions in 1938 and 1939 it catered for 3,000 campers at Daylesford. The YCL duplicated its own propaganda at these camps and openly canvassed for members.22 A memorandum to the Commonwealth Attorney General, dated 23 August 1940, from the Victorian Publicity Censor, described the League of Young Democrats as 'in the forefront of the Youth hike and Hostel movements'.23 This referred to the Workers Sports Federation's construction of 'Australia's first Youth Hostel' in the Dandenong ranges, a project begun in 1939 and completed a year later.24

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19 A. Blake, A Proletarian Life, p.118.
20 Bill Callen Correspondence, 18 April 1988.
21 Young Australia, October 1937.
22 Guardian, 12 August 1939.
23 SP 109/3/1, 316/03, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
24 The New Deal for Youth Bulletin, April 1940.
Its rapprochement with popular culture enabled the YCL to speak more effectively for a generation emerging from the Depression. As the slump receded, it became possible to enjoy life more, but not all sections of the community responded alike. Intolerance still existed and, if literary censorship is any guide, a degree of puritanism also. In March 1936 the Sydney Council of Churches complained to the Stevens government about 'Sabbath breaking'. It objected to the supposed effect of sporting fixtures on Sunday School attendances. The YCL and the Workers Weekly responded by forming a Sunday Freedom League, which acted as a watch-dog to prevent any further capitulation to wowserism. When Bondi council insisted male bathers wear full length costumes instead of trunks, YCL members defied the ban and leafleted other beach users to do likewise.

The industrial work of the YCL also underwent a transformation in the late 1930s. Its slogan 'every youth a unionist' encapsulated a more positive approach than grumbling about the neglect of union officials from afar. It was in the unions that the adult Left now made its greatest impact. As the economy slowly and unevenly recovered, trade union activists who had suffered wage cuts and defeat, fought to restore what had been lost. In this climate Communists began to win leading positions in powerful unions, aided by the reputation they had won as courageous fighters for the rank-and-file and the unemployed. With the help of these individuals the YCL established several union youth structures between 1940 and 1942. The activities of the Central Council of Railway Youth, the AEU, Ironworkers,

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26 Workers Weekly, 6 March 1936.

27 Laurie Aarons interview, Sydney, 15 October 1987.

Federated Clerks and Carpenters Union Youth Committees take us beyond
the chronological scope of this thesis, but they are located within it concept-
ually.

Paul Moline, a Sydney communist who used the alias 'Wallen', first
discussed union youth structures in the CPA's *Trade Union Leader* of April
1936. These had been the subject of debate in Britain at the Annual
Conference of Trades Councils in 1935. A Youth Trades Council in Bristol
had organised several successful social events for young workers. The AEU
Youth Fellowships had engaged in similar work elsewhere, while in
London a Youth Advisory Council of the National Union of Clerks had
targeted young office workers, enticing them into membership with a
programme of sport and weekend camping and cycling trips. Moline
believed these methods could easily be employed in Australia. He suggested
the formation of Youth Fellowships in every union branch, with a Youth
Advisory Committee wherever a number of branches existed in the same
area. He also recommended that Trades and Labour Councils set up youth
sections. Moline foresaw the Australian Congress of Trade Unions giving
these structures cohesion through a standing committee on youth affairs,
capable of leading industry-wide recruitment campaigns.

We can reconstruct the industrial work of the Young Communist
League in microcosm, using the bulletin of a Melbourne factory unit,
distributed between August 1935 and January 1938. Its title, *Mac's Mince*, is a
parody of 'Max Mints', one of the 1,100 lines of confectionery produced at
MacRobertson's in Fitzroy. The 'Great White City', named after its owner,
Sir Macpherson Robertson, employed 2,524 workers in 1934, the largest

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29 *Trade Union Leader*, April 1936

30 Ibid.
operation of its kind in the Commonwealth. Mac's Mince agitated for better conditions and advertised meetings of the Male Confectioners Union (MCU) which drew the bulk of its members from the firm's mainly juvenile workforce. Robertson had always looked benignly on unionism, observing a closed shop from 1919, but a division of labour which led to separate male and female unions worked in the firm's favour.

The branch secretary of the MCU resented the YCL's intervention and did all he could to delay implementing the resolutions they passed at union meetings. The YCL suggested electing a shop committee in each factory in the MacRobertson complex and ending the 'fatal division' between male and female confectioners by amalgamating the two unions. The YCL also pressed for a 44 hour week. Of all industries employing women, only the Confectioners, Food Preservers and Manufacturing Grocers still worked 48 hours in 1936. Mac's Mince demanded provision of a lunch room and abolition of the 'birthday book' in which management entered names as a preliminary to the sack at 21. To get their grievances across, its authors occasionally broke into verse:

Once again a lavatory, all choc-a-block,
Up above Smith's an unsavoury spot;
Wake up Mac, take heed of our call
Fix it up properly, once and for all.32

The YCL's work in the MCU was generally effective. In September 1936 MacRobertson's granted a 44 hour week and at the end of the month the Left made gains in the MCU elections. The YCL's formation and control of the union's Sports and Social Committee contributed to this result. Its cinema nights, football teams and gymnasium classes were another means

32 Mac's Mince, 2 April 1936.
of mobilising inactive young members. The YCL made inroads elsewhere, particularly in the Melbourne textile trades, but its emphasis remained on organisation. Although the Australian labour press reviewed *Youth in British Industry* (1937) by John Gollan, General Secretary of the British YCL, it inspired no local survey of any comparison. Until publication of *A New Deal for Youth* in 1939, the YCL produced no really comprehensive pamphlet on the problems confronting working class youth.

The YCL's first attempt to unite young workers, students and unemployed youth in the Australian Peoples Front took the form of a National Conference on Youth Problems. This met on 1 September 1935 at Transport House in Sydney and representatives of thirty-nine organisations from three States attended. The Conference unanimously approved a resolution condemning war. It also adopted a declaration asserting the rights of Australian youth to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'.

Australia is exalted as the land of the 'Young and Free', yet on every hand we see this freedom being destroyed. Legislation is introduced curtailing our freedom of speech, press and assemblage. Workers who strike for a living wage are met with persecution. These we affirm are evidences of tyranny, which are opposed to the traditions of Australian Freedom. We are determined to realise in actuality the ideals of a Free Australia.34

Delegates pledged themselves to combat fascism by building an Australian Youth Congress Movement.35 A second conference in Melbourne in April 1936 discarded this name with its American connotations, in favour of the more laconic and descriptive 'Youth Front'.36

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33 Mac's Mince, 23 April 1936 and 7 May 1936.
34 Proletariat, October-December 1935.
35 Young Worker, 10 September 1935.
36 Australian Student, 13 May 1936.
Christian youth attended both conferences. The YMCA had a long tradition of debating social and political issues and its involvement in the peace movement grew with the rise of fascism.\(^{37}\) The Student Christian Movement, active in Australia since 1898, had a similar record at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. In New South Wales the Anglican Christian Youth Committee for Peace merged in 1935 with the Combined Churches Debating Federation to form the Legion of Christian Youth. Under its president E. H. Burgmann, the Bishop of Goulburn, it campaigned for peace, slum clearance and improved child welfare facilities.\(^{38}\) Also involved, but less prominently, were the Toc H, the Society of Young Friends and the Young People's Department of the Baptists.

The Youth Front sent Anne Hooper, a member of the Student Christian Movement, to attend an International Youth Congress for Peace organised by the League of Nations Union and held in Geneva in August 1936. On her return she pressed for a broader body than the Youth Front, to ensure that an Australian attended a second congress in the United States, proposed for 1938.\(^{39}\) With the aid of Reverend W. G. Coughlan the Australian Youth Council (AYC) was launched in October 1936. Coughlan's concern for youth arose out of his experience of a coal-mining town hard hit by the Depression - Corrimal, where he was rector from 1932 to 1934. Like Burgmann and a handful of other Anglican clerics in New South Wales, he insisted that the true gospel was concerned more with social justice than with charity and individual salvation.\(^{40}\)

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40 J. Mansfield, op.cit., p.413.
Coughlan's marxist leanings made the Council suspect in some quarters. The Young People's Department of the Congregational Union thought it possessed 'an unmistakably political flavour' and worried lest its appeal to Christian youth proved more potent than that which bound them to the churches. As president of the AYC, Coughlan tried to quell these doubts, but his articles in the labour press were less restrained. He believed youth was being shaken out of its apathy by the growth of 'anti-democratic ideas' and 'the sinister possibility of being drawn into the military machine'. Coughlan wanted the AYC to be a forum, but also an instrument for action.

When the AYC began to organise a National Youth Congress scheduled for January 1938, Communists rallied in support. Taking the Congress slogan 'Peace, Freedom, Progress, Life', the YCL launched Young Australia, a monthly magazine through which it hoped to mobilise democratic youth. Paul Moline acted as editor, while Coughlan served on its board of directors. The Workers Weekly prophesised that it would be 'full of pep and punch', but kept discreetly silent about the YCL's involvement. The breadth of support for Young Australia was impressive. A. J. Dalziel, secretary of the Legion of Christian Youth, wrote articles in it as did Tom Laing, once active in the Sydney Parks and Playgrounds movement. In the first edition of October 1937, Federal politicians explained 'What my Party will do for you', while a lively 'Youth in Action' column let readers reply with their own news and views. Young Australia also enlisted the support of sporting personalities, professional journalists and novelists. Its imaginative style

41 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 October 1936.
42 See for example, Railroad, 18 June 1937.
43 Workers Weekly, 17 September 1937.
enabled it to extol the alliance of democratic youth without using leftist rhetoric. Sadly, however, the magazine ran out of finance and failed to appear after the AYC Congress in January 1938.

The AYC National Youth Congress coincided with the sesquicentennial and was advertised as 'a thoughtful survey of Australia's march to nationhood'.44 Eighty-three delegates from twenty-three organisations attended at the Presbyterian Fellowship Camp at Thornleigh, near Sydney. Policy making occurred in discussion groups on topics such as religion, international relations, economics and working conditions. A social justice group exhibited the strongest YCL influence, but a radical mood pervaded the whole Congress. Delegates demanded equal pay for women and shorter hours for all 14-16 year olds in the workforce, although a majority doubted whether young people could lead a happy life under the capitalist system.45 The Congress also pledged its support for peace and elected five delegates to attend a second world Youth Congress at Vassar College, New York State in August 1938.

The Young Communist League ensured that fascist intervention in the Spanish Civil War appeared on the agenda of the Youth Congress. A resolution condemned Hitler's and Mussolini's aid to Franco as a threat to world peace. It asked the Australian government to do all in its power to encourage the withdrawal of foreign military units and accord the beleaguered Spanish Republic full legal recognition.46 In May 1938 the YCL in Sydney held a 'Youth Rally for Spain' in the Domain, while in Melbourne its girl members made children's clothes to be included with a consignment of tinned milk, one of several collected by the YCL. Shipments of this kind

44 Young Australia, December 1937.
45 D. Maunders, op.cit., pp.343-344.
46 A. Inglis, Australians and the Spanish Civil War, p.74.
were destined for Spanish children's colonies like the one run by Esme Odgers from Sydney, who worked for the Republican government caring for the orphaned and those endangered by bombing.47

In the mid 1930s the YCL still tried, as part of its own independent anti-war activity, to win over young workers who joined the Citizen Militia. One of its leaflets, issued in Melbourne, probably in 1935 or 1936, reveals a detailed knowledge of the type of grievance these part-time soldiers might have held. It urged them to consider all parades as a call upon their time for which payment should be made. It advised them to fight for wage parity with regular soldiers who earned 8/- per day, compared to their 9d per night and 1/6 for Saturday afternoons. It criticised inadequacies in the clothing allowance. New recruits received a uniform and boots, but those who were unemployed needed a free issue of underclothes and socks, items on which military drill exerted considerable wear and tear. The leaflet also called for the repeal of regulations under which equipment lost or rendered unserviceable had to be replaced by militiamen at their own expense.48

In July 1936, in a bid to boost the strength of the militia, the Lyons government announced a substantial rise in pay. It also promised to make militia uniforms more attractive and transform drill halls into centres of sporting and athletic activity. Although the YCL had called for the first of these improvements it still denounced 'Honest Joe' and his cabinet as 'unscrupulous enough to play upon the distress of younger people to lure them to their destruction'.49 Eddie Ward, a Labor member of the House of Representatives, made similar allegations, yet unemployed youth actually

47 Workers Weekly, 15 April 1938 and 24 May 1938. See also Workers Voice, 25 March 1939.

48 CRS A467, Special File, Bundle 21, Item 2, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

49 Workers Weekly, 21 July 1936.
had little incentive to do part-time militia training as an alternative to relief work. Most States refused to ignore militia earnings when paying sustenance and, although this gradually changed, some continued to make deductions until 1939.50

YCL involvement in the broader peace and anti-fascist movement did not lead to rapid membership growth. Its leaders were still striving to find a way forward in this area in 1938, when Audrey Blake returned from Moscow after a year as Australian representative in the Young Communist International. Before leaving the USSR she had spoken to Otto Kuusinen, a Comintern functionary with responsibility for youth, whose keen interest in British politics extended to the Empire and Dominions.\(^{51}\) Kuusinen urged the Australian YCL to either merge with Labor youth or open its ranks wider to young democrats. Audrey Blake has correctly depicted the YCL's decision to re-constitute as a corollary of its need to organise young people against fascism.\(^{52}\) But the desire to create a milieu where marxist ideas could be considered on their merits rather than peremptorily dismissed on non-intellectual grounds, must also have been an important factor.

The situation in the New South Wales Labor Party favoured an experiment of this type from early 1938 onwards. Although a Party conference in 1936 had healed the rift between Lang and the ALP Federal Executive, old animosities still lingered. An industrial faction who opposed the machine politics of the Lang leadership fought on to restore inner-party democracy. Labor Party members who found the CPA's united-front programme attractive allied with communists who had secretly joined the ALP and were

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50 C. Neumann, op.cit., p.140.

51 J. Jupp, The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941, pp.48-49.

52 A. Blake, op.cit., p.77.
active in the industrial faction's affairs. When the Unity Conference of August 1939 swept Lang and his group from power, the ALP State Executive came under strong Communist influence.

The YCL in New South Wales simultaneously 'penetrated' the ALP Younger Sets, which the industrialists had attempted to revive. Bill Callen, who joined the YCL in 1935 and became its State Secretary, commenced activity of this kind in 1938. In February 1939 the YCL closed its Sydney headquarters and merged with a newly formed ALP Central Youth Club. The Youth Camp Colony Association at the same time applied to become the camping section of the State ALP. On 16 April 1939, a conference of the ALP Younger Sets launched the Australian Labor League of Youth (ALLY). Its constitution allowed 'all young friends of Labor' to join, while any outside organisation supportive of ALLY's aims could affiliate. At the time of their merger the strength of the YCL was 120, compared with 30 in the ALP Younger Sets. By May 1940 membership of ALLY had risen to approximately 700.

In Victoria, where prospects for work inside the ALP were less favourable, the inauguration of the League of Young Democrats (LYD) took place openly. On 30 May 1939, at the end of a three day State conference, the YCL formally disbanded. Ken Miller, aged 25, active in the AYC, was elected secretary of LYD, with Audrey Blake as president. In a public session attended by 1,500 people, the conference adopted a nine point programme later embodied in the pamphlet, A New Deal for Youth. Audrey Blake

53 R. Gollan, op.cit., p.74.
54 Ibid., p.91.
55 Bill Callen correspondence, 18 April 1988.
56 CRS A472/1, Item W1642, Australian Archives, ACT Branch
57 Ibid.
informed the Melbourne Argus that the LYD's programme was 'not specifically communistic', but expressed the immediate needs of the majority of Australian youth.58

A New Deal for Youth located radical demands within a national context. Its pictorial imagery portrayed proletarian youth as inheritors of a native pioneer tradition (fig. 19). But it left the reader in no doubt that low pay, unemployment and dead-end jobs, put this heritage in jeopardy. The pamphlet coincided with an Australian Youth Council campaign which led to the appointment of a New South Wales Parliamentary Select Committee on 6 June 1939 to report on youth employment.59 The AYC manoeuvred the Select Committee into accepting submissions from its affiliates. When the Committee reported back it supported their evidence, particularly on dismissal at 21 and the need for daylight technical training.60 The League of Young Democrats used A New Deal for Youth to exert comparable pressure on a Victorian Department of Labour inquiry which, by August 1939, had embarked on a similar task.

On the outbreak of war, Young Communists turned their attention to opposing military conscription. At first they gave the war conditional support, but later changed their position when the CPA classified it as 'imperialist' and called for a people's peace. In September 1939 ALLY backed 'all measures to destroy Hitler fascism', but regarded the defence of Australia as paramount, only grudgingly conceding support for a voluntary expeditionary force abroad if the need arose.61 ALLY also opposed the Federal Government's use of emergency powers to impose three months

58 Argus, 31 May 1939.
59 Bill Callen correspondence, 18 April 1988.
61 Common Cause, 30 September 1939.
THREE months in sailing ships—becalmed in the doldrums, gale-torn in the roaring forties—but still they came, hardy men and women to the new Land of the South, Australia. Opportunity. Hope. FREEDOM. A NEW WORLD FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

They cleared the virgin bush. They founded the great cities of to-day. What once was sandy waste and scrub is now a waving field of corn. What once was a four weeks' trip by bullock wagon made twice a year is now a four hours' run by car made every day.

28,000 miles of endless steel railway lines.

115,000,000 sheep. Food and clothing for the world.

They explored the vast inland. They dug into the hard earth. Gold, steel, coal—INDUSTRY. 26,000 factories producing £500,000,000 worth of goods a year.

They came from England, Scotland, Ireland, and other countries where as yet the worker had no vote. Some were sent here deported. Trades unionism was their crime.

No prison, no convict country could hold their independent spirit—the jail regime was smashed, the Southern cross meant freedom. They fought at Eureka, they built the unions, they won the eight-hour day. Parliament, self-government, free education.

They, our forefathers, were the pioneers. We young Australians are their children. For us they built this country, gnarled their hands, slaved, fought. This land—3,000,000 square miles of it—is our heritage.

ITS FUTURE BELONGS TO US—BUT

Figure 19.

Our Country,

(A New Deal for Youth, April 1939)
compulsory service in the militia for un-married men. Moreover, it questioned why young soldiers who were considered physically fit to fight at 18 were still denied a vote.\textsuperscript{62} Ken Miller thought the Menzies government hardly differed from the external enemy, and might indeed collaborate with it if Australia were invaded.\textsuperscript{63}

ALLY and the LYD attempted to have these issues debated at Youth Parliaments which were now in vogue with the Australian Youth Council. David Maunders, who has interviewed some former participants, describes an amicable working relationship in the AYC. He has stated that individual communists were held in high esteem, even by those who did not share their revolutionary views.\textsuperscript{64} This interpretation seems reasonable for the period 1936 to 1939, but one wonders to what degree loyalties became strained during the phoney war.

There was little support in the wider community for the Communist Party's passive defeatism, although some acknowledged its resistance to the censorship and attacks on civil liberties in the wake of the National Security Act.\textsuperscript{65} On 15 June 1940, a month after decisive German gains in Europe, the Menzies government gazetted regulations giving it further powers to declare any organisation unlawful and prevent its members from meeting.\textsuperscript{66} The Communist Party, whose premises were promptly raided, became the first victim. As semi-autonomous bodies, ALLY and the LYD

\textsuperscript{62} Common Cause, 28 October 1939.

\textsuperscript{63} CRS A472/1, item W1642, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

\textsuperscript{64} D. Maunders, op.cit., p.345.

\textsuperscript{65} D. Horne, The Education of Young Donald, p.236.

\textsuperscript{66} R. Gollan, op.cit., p.96.
were not yet included in the ban, but they came under increased surveillance.

The National Security Regulations were used next to ban a Youth Parliament called by the Victorian branch of the AYC for 10 August 1940. Its innocuous aims included: to learn how democracy works; to give youth of every class and belief a chance to exchange opinions and arrive at a definite understanding of the problems facing them; to show the State and nation that young people are not afraid of the times, but will stand up and triumph over all obstacles. Twenty-three organisations were due to take part and debate four bills on education, external affairs, social and economic issues and health and education. Ten minutes before the Youth Parliament was scheduled to begin, the Minister of the Unitarian Church East Melbourne was informed by the police that his premises could no longer be used for the purpose advertised, as the AYC was now an illegal organisation.

In taking this action W. M. Hughes, the Commonwealth Attorney General, appears to have accepted the advice of Bernard Cronin, the Victorian State Censor. Cronin regularly reported on the LYD to Inspector Browne, Head of the Melbourne Bureau of the Investigation Branch. In July 1940 Cronin deduced communist manipulation of the AYC from an article in the LYD magazine Challenge, which reported Audrey Blake's efforts to mobilise Melbourne organisations in support of the Youth Parliament. Hughes also used the Parliament's bill on external affairs as a pretext to impose a ban because, in Leninist terms, it attributed the causes of the war to imperialist rivalries.

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67 Attorney General Correspondence Files, CRS A472, item W110, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

68 D. Maunders, op.cit., p.349.

69 CRS A472, item W1642, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.

70 CRS A472, item W110, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
Hughes easily rode out the ensuing storm, making the occasional placatory gesture. The Legion of Christian Youth stood firm, but most other AYC affiliates broke ranks. The New South Wales Council of Religious Education, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Wesley College Debating Society, Melbourne immediately severed links. Some adult youth leaders had always vacillated and their response was predictable. *Young Australia* had once described them as 'a clutch set at neutral in a well tuned car, preventing progress no matter how hard the motor roared'.\(^{71}\) In Sydney the isolated AYC left-wing tried to fight the ban through a Youth Freedom Committee. To placate the remainder, Hughes conceded that 'certain estimable bodies' associated with the AYC had done 'wonderful work', but had been in need of his intervention as 'innocent victims of communist intrigue'.\(^{72}\)

R. Wilson, General Secretary of the YMCA, refuted this but in terms which indicate not everyone in the AYC regarded themselves as part of a popular front. He knew of 'irresponsible young radicals', but insisted the YMCA had always kept control and 'definitely did not allow the tail to wag the dog'. Wilson reminded Hughes that shortly before its disbandment the AYC had 'refused to support any move having in it the slightest suggestion of disloyalty'. He thought the AYC's wartime aims were 'a harmless kind of effort' and called for the ban to be lifted 'with the exception of bodies which may in any way be communistic or un-patriotic'.\(^{73}\)

Coughlan, writing in the *Church Standard*, sought to refute the 'hoary charge of white-anting'. In his opinion the offending Youth Parliament bill had as much to do with Christian pacifists as atheistic communists.

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71 *Young Australia*, January 1938.
72 *Canberra Times*, 13 August 1940.
73 CRS A472, Item W110, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
Coughlan derided 'the technique of non-participation' as 'a poor travesty of Christian adventure'. If the influence of the churches in the AYC had waned, it was because they had failed to pull their weight. At the end of the 1930s the Church Standard had been a consistent critic of the Stevens and Lyons governments, for their incipient fascist tendencies and failure to cope with unemployment. It is indicative of the altered political climate that its editor now berated Coughlan for naivete, protesting that any further contact with Young Communists would be tantamount to 'sending unprotected children into a scarlet fever ward to mix with the patients'.

The illegality of the AYC failed to deprive Young Communists of allies. In Melbourne some younger clerics and members of the YMCA adopted a stance similar to that of Coughlan. The LYD, in any case, had members working secretly in at least four Christian youth organisations. Most young people in the Anglican and non-conformist churches were unaware of the ban, and the protest of those who knew of it was muted. A delegate to the Sydney Youth Freedom Committee alleged that Christian youth of her acquaintance all supported the AYC, but had been given an ultimatum by the elders of their church to have nothing further to do with it.

Working under cover of a so-called National Youth Assembly, ALLY convened another Youth Parliament in Sydney at Easter 1941. It was the largest of its kind with delegates from eighty-eight organisations. The LYD

74 SP 109/3/1, 316/03, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
75 J. Mansfield, op.cit., p.426.
76 SP 109/3/1, 316/03, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
78 Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, Investigation Branch Reports, CRS A432, Item 43/1138, Australian Archives, ACT Branch.
79 Ibid.
was present but unable to participate openly having been declared illegal six weeks earlier. Donald Horne, a dilettante leftist representing the University of Sydney Students' Council, felt a thrill of 'romantic seriousness' in proximity to outlawed and underground organisations. Although he knew of the Parliament's 'Stalinist' organisers, he joined the battle against 'a small commando' of Catholic youth who tried to disrupt the business and made an unsuccessful assault on the content of a post-war reconstruction bill.\(^{80}\)

The majority of delegates, however, expressed a high level of unanimity in debates on education, physical fitness and youth employment. Members of trade union youth committees and technical college student unions played a prominent role for the first time.

The mid-1940s and early 50s saw the Australian Young Communist movement at its zenith. Its fortunes changed in 1941 when the Soviet Union entered the war on the allied side, making it an unequivocally anti-fascist conflict. In December 1941, to bypass the Federal Government ban, the League of Young Democrats combined with the Australian Labor League of Youth to form the Eureka Youth League (EYL). The EYL worked in radically different circumstances, among young people whose horizons and expectations had been further heightened by the war. It also had links with the troops through 'Friends of the Services' clubs, which it established in many localities.\(^{81}\)

By deciding to negotiate in the imperfect world of political reality, the Eureka Youth League crossed another rubicon. The Left had initially denounced the Associated Youth Committee, established by the Commonwealth National Fitness Act of 1941, as a sop for the banning of the Australian Youth Council. After the election of the Curtin Labor

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80 D. Horne, op.cit., p.236 and p.263.
81 A. Blake, A Proletarian Life, p.82.
government, however, it was given a role in maintaining wartime morale and its scope extended to foster consultation with all voluntary youth organisations. The EYL seized the opportunity to have a say in determining national youth policy and even briefly received funding, before its expulsion at the height of the Cold War.

The Eureka Youth League benefitted from the experience of key individuals, whose leadership in some cases spanned almost two decades. Their qualities combined infinite attention to detail, with complete mastery of communist work in broad movements. The tactics they employed rendered them open to accusations of manipulation, yet their allies were seldom dupes. On the other hand, most conservative politicians who cast such aspersions clearly had few scruples themselves about suspending the democratic process, especially when the free play of ideas seemed not to be operating in their favour.

82 D. Maunders, *Keeping them off the Streets*, pp.81-82.
Conclusion
None of the labour youth organisations in this thesis ever challenged the virtual monopoly enjoyed by establishment-sponsored youth movements. Nor could they equal their comparatively uninterrupted growth. At the end of Chapter 3, I dealt with some of the intrinsic reasons for this. I now focus on the Left’s inability to respond to specific social trends, discuss the limitations of a theoretical analysis of youth based on Lenin’s writings and explore some voluntary and government responses to 'the problem of youth' in the 1930s which the Left might have exploited politically. But first it is necessary to view these lost opportunities in the wider context of a crisis, or breakdown of labour hegemony.

The Italian marxist Antonio Gramsci was almost unknown in Australia during the 1920s and 30s, yet his transformation of hegemony from a strategy (as in Lenin) to a concept for understanding and changing society, has particular relevance. Gramsci argued that for a class to be politically hegemonic, it had to progress beyond immediate 'economic-corporate' issues and emerge as the 'national-popular' representative of a broader bloc of social forces. It followed that the relation between capital and labour was more than a basic antagonism of two contending classes, but involved other groups and social forces. Through their system of alliances, each side sought to disorganise the other and alter the balance of alignment in its own favour. Once it achieved power, a hegemonic class consolidated its position, transmitting dominant ideas and values via key institutions in which subordinate classes were incorporated. Agencies seeking to shape youthful behaviour by means of coercion or consent may, therefore, be seen in such a framework - part of Gramsci’s powerful network of 'fortresses and earthworks' standing behind the capitalist state.

1 R. Simon, Gramsci’s Political Thought, pp.22-25.
2 Ibid.
To win a protracted 'war of position' on this terrain and achieve national leadership, a rising class had to respond to the popular and democratic aspirations of the people and to struggles which, like those of youth and students, do not arise directly out of the relations of production. In forging an ideological synthesis to unite these diverse forces, the unique historical conditions of each country had also to be taken into consideration. Applying these criteria, we can see that while the Left attempted to shape an adequate response to young people, the mainstream of the Australian labour movement clearly failed at both the 'economic-corporate' and 'national-popular' levels.

The labour press might have reached a wider audience among young people had it fully utilised new technology. A noticeable feature of the 1930s is the way that children's columns in daily newspapers used radio to extend their reach. The Melbourne Age featured 'Chatterbox Corner News' in association with 3AW's programme for children, while Radio 2GB in Sydney had its own Youth Club, complete with badge, secret signs and a theme song. The Melbourne Argus exploited improved communications made possible by air travel. For the price of a 2d stamp to London, its young readers could become a 'Link of Empire', receiving a letter from a penfriend there after three months had elapsed.

The labour movement responded in a patchy un-coordinated manner. At Wonthaggi, Victoria in the 1920s, a Miners Union picture theatre successfully competed with the town's Plaza cinema for the allegiance of local

3 Ibid.


5 Ibid.
children. By 1938 in Sydney the Labor Party radio 2KY allowed young people access to the microphone on Thursday nights 'to tell gripping stories of their struggles, their disappointments, their hopes and the great fun they have with life'. 'Googles', a full page comic strip for children appeared in the Railroad. The ARU's answer to Ginger Meggs, 'Googles' poked fun at Boy Scouts and got the better of various authority figures most weeks in the early 1930s. But these examples tend to be exceptional. Other initiatives such as a page 'For the Children of the NUR', which the Railway Advocate commenced in January 1938, look drab and unimaginative beside their mass-circulation rivals.

The Labor Party's adoption of a socialist objective in October 1921 marked the apex of its post-war radical impulse. Afterwards it functioned solely in an electoral milieu. Here among its suburban Labor leagues where a plethora of interest groups competed, youth politics had a low priority. Nor did much stimulus come from overseas, as the ALP's contact with the Labour and Socialist International became increasingly sporadic from the 1920s onward. ALP Younger Sets in New South Wales arose in a pragmatic fashion in response to the Party's domestic needs. It seems somewhat paradoxical, therefore, that these least consciously hegemonic organisations came closest to a formula for growth applicable in late adolescence, when defections from 'non-political' youth movements were most noticeable.

ALP Younger Sets broke with a long standing patriarchal tradition that treated boys and their interests as paramount. They acknowledged resurgent

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8 See for example, Railroad, 10 April 1931, or 10 October 1933.

9 See Railway Advocate, 15 January 1938.

10 F. Farrell, op.cit., p.163.
ideals of femininity and glamour which, it has been argued, ought not to be seen as a retreat from female emancipation, but indicative of a new freedom and rebellion against old values.\textsuperscript{11} Younger Sets promoted swimming and tennis - sports in which girls excelled - but also tapped a strong sense of community loyalty present in both sexes. Most working class youth in the early 1930s identified with a particular suburb rather than the great city, a pattern of life expressed in fanatical devotion to local sporting personalities and events.\textsuperscript{12} Joining an ALP Younger Set admitted one to a coterie of amateur players and enthusiasts, but without having to endure the 'hard-sell' techniques of the Communist-led Workers Sports Federation. A lecture or discussion at the outset or conclusion of games had a way of repelling the very people the movement was desperately seeking to attract.\textsuperscript{13}

By avoiding these pitfalls ALP Younger Sets and Sports Federations drew in far greater numbers, but their socialist content was deplorably weak. Events and fixtures ended to renditions of 'Advance Australia Fair', rather than the 'Red Flag'. Labor sport not only borrowed the regalia of bourgeois athleticism - the blazers, badges, cups and shields - it mirrored the competitive nature of society and uncritically reproduced other elements of capitalist ideology, such as hero-worship. Heightened involvement in sport during the 1930s suggests that the Labor hierarchy had become increasingly aware of its importance in working people's lives. But, if European precedents are

\textsuperscript{11} B. Cameron, 'The Flappers', Second Women and Labour Conference Papers, pp.200-201.

\textsuperscript{12} W. Lowenstein, op.cit., p.10.

any guide, undue emphasis on sport as a party youth activity suggests that it may have served as a substitute for political and sexual satisfaction.\textsuperscript{14}

The Left's neglect of juvenile sexuality contrasts with a deluge of material calling for abstinence, published by the Father and Son Welfare Movement, the White Cross League and the Australasian Catholic Truth Society. This conservative-religious lobby originated in the 1880s, parallel to a liberal reform movement - a loose amalgam of upper middle class professionals who pioneered sex education as a subject worthy of rational consideration.\textsuperscript{15} David Walker has explored a simultaneous linking of larrikinism and unbridled sexuality - a belief that gangs of urban youth who appeared not to know their place, were highly susceptible to 'vile lowering tendencies'.\textsuperscript{16} Some moral campaigners described attempts to foist 'social purity' on to working class youth as 'the struggle of the age', equating the outcome with the general 'well being of the state'.\textsuperscript{17}

Without a sexual political programme of its own, the Left vacillated between liberal sex reform and trying to prove that it was just as 'moral' as the bourgeoisie. The Communist \textit{Workers Weekly} and the ARU's \textit{Railroad} occasionally gave the educational/enlightenment lobby coverage\textsuperscript{18} but these re-printed articles were not especially radical. The sex reformers believed in educating parents and youth leaders and their work revealed the impact of psychology, but they reacted negatively to Freud's insights on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} K. Reiger, op.cit., pp.178-179.
\item \textsuperscript{16} D. Walker, 'Youth on Trial : The Mt Rennie Case', \textit{Labour History}, No.50, May 1986, p.32.
\item \textsuperscript{17} K. Reiger, op.cit., pp.181 and 191.
\item \textsuperscript{18} See \textit{Workers Weekly}, 9 September 1927, or \textit{Railroad}, 10 August 1930 and 10 January 1931.
\end{itemize}
childhood sexuality. Their textbooks on 'the facts of life' ignored homosexuality and treated masturbation as evil, a threat to virility, sanity and sight. Sex as pleasure had virtually no place in their discourse; procreation had become nameable, but only within the limited framework of marriage.

Frank Grose, Sydney YMCA Director of Boys Work, considered 'facts of sex' important for adolescents, although they could become 'useless and dangerous', if teaching them resulted in a lack of 'self-control and pure thoughts'.

Not surprisingly many young people remained ignorant or confused. An article in the AYC magazine Young Australia protested 'I want the truth about sex!'. The writer Alice Sherman complained that she had spent a considerable amount of time with boys, read the latest pamphlets, seen films, attended philosophical discussions on marriage and free love, yet still felt she knew nothing about sex. Girls who had intercourse risked ostracism if their parents found out, or they became pregnant. Those who appeared before children's courts in the early 1920s were often committed to institutions regardless of other factors, if suspected of having venereal disease. As late as 1945 a majority of girls at the Parramatta Industrial School were said to have habitually 'given indication of abnormal erotic interest'. Similarly at the Gosford Farm Home for Boys, a high proportion of inmates deemed 'uncontrollable' had previously engaged in 'vice and crime'.

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20 K. Reiger, op.cit., p.188.
21 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1927.
23 S. Willis, op.cit., p.186.
24 Ibid.
Had the Young Communist League’s theory of resistance encompassed rebellious sexual behaviour, politicising the issue might for once have given it the edge over ‘bourgeois’ youth organisations. But such a course would also have entailed risk, by supplying ammunition to an army of wowsers. Given the strong moral bridges that linked Protestantism and Communism, adults in the party too would almost certainly have raised objections. Boys and girls were expected to maintain the standards of behaviour and morality laid down by their elders. Parents still carefully monitored their children’s friends and activities and insisted that youth organisations supervise them in a respectable manner. For some young people the cinema seemed a good way to learn about sex. At the ‘flicks’ one could fantasize about Hollywood film stars and study the technique of ‘long kissing’. Communists professed to have no time for such diversions. At the Kurri Kurri School of Arts where they waged a battle to influence the curriculum, CPA members had condemned the School for frittering money on movies, which were 'the altar of Mammon' and 'the biggest stumbling block that distracts the minds of the younger generation'.

In Der Sexuelle Kampf der Jugend (1932), Wilhelm Reich, a left-wing psycho-analyst, had urged the German Communist Party to fight for sexual liberation in order ‘to create an emotional bond between youth and the cause of all the workers’. He recognised that a high proportion of girls and boys joined the YCL for the same subjective reasons they frequented

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26 A. Metcalf, op.cit., p.64.


28 Ibid., p.65.

dance halls - to search for a sexual partner. Where young people engaged in futile squabbles with obstructive parents, Reich advocated open debate, maintaining that adults found it harder to justify sexually repressive attitudes if challenged in public.\(^{30}\) This, together with his suggestion that the German YCL organise sex counselling sessions, infuriated certain party functionaries and contributed to Reich's expulsion from the KPD in February 1933.

Recurrent themes in Weimar novels point to a loss of faith in parental and educational authority fueling adolescent rebellion,\(^{31}\) but no similar cataclysm shook Australian society. Despite an initial increase in the divorce rate, male domination in the family emerged relatively unscathed after the Great War and may even have been enhanced by the Anzac myth.\(^{32}\) The prevailing approach to sexuality in the Communist Party of Australia was that the matter was a purely private and personal one and any problems would somehow be resolved 'after the revolution'.\(^{33}\)

The CPA exhibited similar reluctance to probe the causes of truancy, described by one investigator as 'the first overt expression of defiance to authority'.\(^{34}\) By 1940 in metropolitan Melbourne, 3,460 pupils were absent without reason from a school population of 150,000.\(^{35}\) Comparative statistics are not easily obtainable, but a South Australian study suggested that truancy increased during the Depression, despite exemption clauses in

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32 M. McKernan, op.cit., pp.222-223.
33 J. Stevens, op.cit., p.12.
34 A. Muhl, *Truants : Culprits or Victims?*, p.5.
35 Ibid.
the Education Acts. Given Lenin's dictum that 'without knowledge the workers are defenceless, with knowledge they are a force', one can well imagine the attitude towards pupils who, in an apparently reckless manner, rejected the benefits of a system on which, whatever its political defects, Communist parents placed a high value. Like rowdyism, brooding hostility, or unfeigned boredom, flight from the classroom had about it a tinge of anarchy that could not be condoned.

Truants: Culprits or Victims? by Anita Muhl, published by the Left Book Club of Victoria in January 1942, illustrates once more a tendency by the CPA to rely on professional opinion in the absence of party policy. Some children interviewed by Muhl lived in poverty and truanted to help supplement family income, yet she chose to dismiss this as 'not an important factor'. Like most psychologists of the time, Muhl underestimated social conditions and attempted to isolate the truant's particular pathology, discerning 'low natural intelligence' in a majority of her sample of one hundred cases.

Using 600 prosecution files compiled by the South Australian Compulsory Branch in the 1920s and 30s, Philip Cashen has concluded that rather than a form of delinquency, truancy was a characteristic response by children to a system which labelled them as failures. As in school strikes, parental collusion was common as there seemed to be little positive

37 V. I. Lenin, On Youth, p.18.
38 For an example of the attitude of Communist parents towards education, see A. Inglis, op.cit., p.79.
39 A. Muhl, op.cit., p.6.
40 Ibid.
relationship between education and opportunity. By running errands or doing chores in the home, truants often released adults to take up, or retain paid work.\textsuperscript{41} Outwitting School Attendance Officers became a way of life for some families, but the continual subterfuge it entailed had no place in contemporary theories of class struggle.

Communists had had no scruples about mobilising larrikinism in the 'third period', but their attitudes changed by 1939. When the police arrested teenage gang members for refusing to pay fares on Sydney trams, the Australian Labor League of Youth attributed the delinquent behaviour of these 'young hoodlums' to deprived economic backgrounds and a lack of outdoor playground facilities.\textsuperscript{42} With the sporting opportunities available in the Soviet Union quoted for good measure, ALLY's reductionist reasoning may have sounded convincing, but it overlooked the effects of dependency and social marginalisation. Despite his reactionary stance on sex education, Frank Grose of Sydney YMCA had dealt with similar problems more perceptively in 1927, focusing on adolescent yearning for more responsibility and a sense of power, coupled with the desire 'not only ... to see things move, but to have some part in their moving'.\textsuperscript{43}

Although Young Communists prided themselves on belonging to a theoretically-based movement, youth politics was not especially well served by the classical texts. In \textit{Das Kapital} (1867), Marx had dwelt on the exploitation of child labour under early capitalism, and Engels, in \textit{The Housing Question} (1887), had predicted the pre-eminence of youth in 'a party of innovators'. But the strategic concept of youth as a social force allied to the working class only emerged between 1895 and 1923 in a series of articles,

\textsuperscript{41} P. Cashen, op.cit., p.23.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Common Cause}, 4 November 1939.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 10 September 1927.
letters and speeches by Lenin.\textsuperscript{44} As leader of the Bolshevik October Revolution, Lenin’s stature in the world communist movement was unsurpassed, but innumerable problems arose out of an uncritical application of his ideas in conditions beyond his purview.

In Russia from the 1870s young people of the wealthier classes had formed secret societies, engaged in acts of political terrorism, and tried to educate the masses to overthrow Tsarist autocracy. In the prelude to the 1905 Revolution, Lenin discussed the correct tactics to be pursued by University and High School students who took part in strikes and demonstrations.\textsuperscript{45} In a country where, to use Gramscian terms, ‘the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous’,\textsuperscript{46} student fraternities were virtually the only youth organisations allowed. In western Europe the situation was radically different, yet Lenin’s analysis of the youth movement there was confined mainly to the anti-militarist work of the young socialist leagues,\textsuperscript{47} some of whom later during the Great War realigned around Die Jugend Internationale.\textsuperscript{48}

When Lenin appealed to Communist youth in 1920 to ‘unite the entire young generation’,\textsuperscript{49} he offered no advice on how to proceed in countries where a host of rival secular and Christian youth movements already existed. Consequently, some Young Communist Leagues acted as if they would soon supplant these bodies entirely as the Soviet Komsomol had done. Sectarianism of this kind took nearly fifteen years to reverse. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} See V. I. Lenin, op.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p.76.
\item \textsuperscript{46} R. Simon, op.cit., p.28.
\item \textsuperscript{47} V. I. Lenin, op.cit., pp.141-143.
\item \textsuperscript{48} See Chapter 1 i.
\item \textsuperscript{49} V. I. Lenin, op.cit., p.226.
\end{itemize}
Australia the YCL learnt through practice - not from Lenin - that it could ally with the Douglas Social Credit Younger Sets who also considered themselves anti-capitalist, or with Baptist and Methodist youth, heir to a participatory and pacifist non-conformist tradition.

The Tasks of the Youth Leagues (1920), a speech to the Third Congress of the Komsomol published as a pamphlet, enjoyed wide popularity outside of Russia. Although Lenin had limited its scope to '... what the youth organisations in a socialist republic should be like', followers abroad were unable to resist a more general application. For example, his criticism of 'the old schools' as places of 'ceaseless drilling and grinding', might have seemed valid to someone who had experienced the Australian State School system in the 1920s. Lenin's appeal to the YCL to organise itself as a task force and set an example of training and discipline, also struck a responsive note. Young Communists had to plan their political activity in such a manner that anyone, regardless of political belief, could see they were the ones showing the way forward.

Some of Lenin's tactics worked in Australia, but they needed to be supplemented by local analysis. An indigenous labour ideology of youth existed, but it lacked cohesion and remained at a largely defensive and oppositional level. Labour youth organisations enriched it through their activities, but none had any conception of the ideology as a whole. Until publication of A New Deal for Youth in 1939, the Australian YCL lagged behind its British counterpart in the application of marxist theory. Influenced by a series of overseas models, Australian Young Communists eventually found a niche in the national psyche under the banner of

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50 Ibid., p.215.
51 Ibid., p.217.
52 Ibid., p.228.
Eureka. Sydney YCL opened a club under this name in 1936, but the quest for authenticity only gained real momentum after 1941, when a Shock Brigade Movement led by Young Communists fought to increase wartime production, eliminate absenteeism and mobilised city youth to go into the country to help bring in the harvest.53.

Through the Australian People's Front the YCL established contact with a new cadre of professionals who, as full-time youth workers, exerted a more flexible and progressive influence than the official philosophy of the movements to which they belonged. Melbourne YMCA staff are one example while in New South Wales young clerics in the Legion of Christian Youth far surpassed the YCL in their attempts to eradicate slum housing. Prior to the sesquicentennial they put pressure on J. M. Dunningham, Minister in charge of the Celebrations, to show tourists the slum 'lowlights' as well as the 'highlights' of Sydney.54 At Port Kembla the Legion's South Coast branch adopted an anti-capitalist stance, exposing the 'Jungle' conditions in a shanty town where Broken Hill Proprietary's riggers and construction workers lived.55

But the tacit support of liberal progressives was no substitute for a politically oriented ALP youth movement. Campaigns launched by the Australian Youth Council consequently lacked that dynamic evident abroad where, in London and on Clydeside, the YCL and Labour League of Youth jointly opposed the British Union of Fascists and united in aid of the Spanish Republican cause.56 The Spanish Civil War had a catalytic effect in Australia, but on a much smaller scale while simultaneously exacerbating

53 A. Blake, op.cit., pp.81-82.
54 Young Australia, January 1938.
55 Ibid.
sectarian divisions. As the conflict intensified Catholicism was swept by a wave of anti-Communism, leading it to depict the Franco revolt as a crusade against resurgent atheism. Roman Catholic schools took up the refrain, especially in Victoria, as did the Catholic Young Men's Society and Campion Society debaters in the universities.\(^57\)

In attempting to politicise unemployed youth, Communists were countered by formidable opponents. According to early twentieth century trends, the Depression should have led to increased state action, but a host of private organisations initially took the field instead, determined to ensure reproduction of a socially integrated labour force. In 1934 the Sydney Young Citizens Associations had a membership of 7,000 and claimed contact with 24,000 young people at the end of 1937.\(^58\) Between May 1932 and June 1940 the New South Wales Rural Employment Scheme for Boys placed a total of 5,712 on farms, safe from the perceived threats of dole dependence and subversive intrigue.\(^59\) But although the YCA system in particular looked impressive, John Shields has claimed that its geographical spread shows that proportionately fewer of the Association's branches existed in Sydney's inner city and other working class areas, than among the suburban respectability of the north, east and inner-west.\(^60\) His findings suggest that behind a facade, establishment-sponsored work experience programmes hardly differed from organisations like the Scouts, Guides, YMCA and YWCA, who catered mainly for aspiring working and lower middle-class youth.

\(^{57}\) C. Jory, op.cit., pp.80-85.
\(^{58}\) J. Shields, op.cit., p.160.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp.163-168.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., p.161.
David Maunders, however, whose research concentrates on Victoria, has argued that youth workers in the Depression were acutely aware of class and saw the need for a varied response to unemployed juveniles from different backgrounds. But other than citing a Vocational Child Guidance Clinic founded by the Melbourne Newsboys Society in 1931 and a day time training scheme opened in 1932 by the Boys Employment Movement and YMCA, he offers little proof to support his argument. What does appear clear though is how, under the leadership of Rotarians who seem to have been equally active in Sydney and Melbourne, various youth organisations co-operated during the crisis. Even the Scouts who usually insulated their members from these questions, took part in the 1937 Youth Employment Survey sponsored by the Victorian State Government.

Youth leaders in the Girls Guides and YWCA may, implicitly, have challenged or modified the dominant value system to accept an increasingly wider role for women. Staff recruitment by the YWCA offered selected members access to a managerial career with a network of Australian and international opportunities. But the increasingly professional image projected by this type of organisation made other young people enrolled elsewhere more conscious of disparities. A girl in a Young People's Fellowship at a Sydney church complained of youth leaders there who indulged in 'long-winded discourses' and 'talked at' members rather than with them. Young Australia, which had interviewed her, concluded:

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61 D. Maunders, op.cit., p.189.
62 Ibid., p.192.
63 See J. Shields, op.cit., p.159, also Victorian Scout, 15 September 1932.
64 Victorian Scout, 15 February 1937.
65 Young Australia, January 1938.
There are far too many young people's groups in the same position. Dear old ladies and well meaning old men, absolutely out of touch with the point of view of youth, are endeavouring to run young people's groups as they were run 'in the good old days'.

Despite its headquarters being the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, Melbourne YMCA eventually admitted the unpopularity of its other youth programmes based on suburban churches. Funding, expertise and facilities were not evenly spread. Graham Taylor's scheme of 'Co-operative Scouting' sought to redress similar inequalities derived from social class and neighbourhood, that existed between Melbourne Scout troops.

By 1937 the New South Wales government had begun to resume its integrationist responsibilities. In that year the Young Citizens Associations were absorbed by the Department of Labour into a new departmental placement section. This heralded a major reorientation of state strategy for the management of juvenile labour, crowned by the new scientism of industrial psychology - vocational guidance. Government resources were also deployed through a chain of Police Boys Clubs, with the aim of establishing 'safe Boyhood' and 'sound Citizenship'. Peter Board, at the end of his career as Director of Education, had called for something of the sort, so that where schooling ceased the state might continue the process of inculcating a sense of social responsibility.

But even with these transitional measures, 'the problem of youth' remained far from solution. Reconciling the young to a life of wage labour entailed not one, but a string of hazardous critical junctures. Boys who

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66 Ibid.
67 D. Maunders, op.cit., p.437.
68 See Chapter 3 iv.
69 J. Shields, op.cit., p.169.
70 Ibid., p.170.
eluded existing provisions might go on the track, but unemployed girls whose freedom of movement was restricted by their sex, usually remained at home. Parents sometimes encouraged them to stay on at school, or take business courses in typing, shorthand or accountancy. These skills supposedly increased their value to prospective employers, yet at every turn they encountered individuals like R. H. Swainson, secretary of the Young Citizens Associations, who made no secret of his view that girls had no place in paid labour. In the job market domestic service, where hours and conditions were awful, was the only area where vacancies went begging. One suspects that those confident aware young women - some of whom found scope for their abilities in the YCL or ALP Younger Sets - felt the contradiction between rising expectations and limited opportunity most acutely. Indeed, the chasm between the two was still a source of frustration to school leavers in the 1950s and 60s, according to a study by Michael Carter.

After the 1937 Premiers Conference State and Federal authorities knew that a renaissance was necessary if the young were not to be radicalised by the prospect of never sharing the fruits of returning prosperity. Nobody contested that the only comprehensive solution lay in a general economic recovery, but in the interim social harmony required that youth be given training to enhance its job prospects. A resurrection of the image of technical education therefore permeated most of the debates on reform. The number of students in technical colleges in New South Wales and Victoria

72 Eileen Powell interview, Sydney, 29 April 1989.
75 M. Carter, Into Work, pp.11-38.
doubled between 1932 and 1938 to 30,865 and 21,127 respectively. Some improvements were made after 1935, but technical education was still associated with ancient, grimy, poverty-stricken buildings and starved finances. Junior technical schools had become a dumping ground for young people considered incapable of more prestigious education leading to the better jobs. If anything the situation worsened during the war years when, in spite of Commonwealth government funding, buildings and equipment continued to deteriorate.

Here, in technical education - where young people from numerous trades congregated and hopes were highest - Young Communists made their first issue-based breakthrough. Apprentices and trainees had long been dissatisfied with the extended hours night school classes entailed, resulting in fatigue and a high level of examination failure. So in April 1944 when the Carlton branch of the Eureka Youth League in Melbourne issued a call for day-time technical training, a venue for one hundred could not accommodate the 2,000 who responded. At an overflow meeting the Melbourne Apprentices Committee emerged with an EYL woman, Julie Dye, in the leading role. A greater range of activities ensued, re-activating trade union youth sections formed some years previously, but drawing in other groups of young workers. The movement which became national and eventually won most of its demands, involved trade union leaders, educationalist and health workers. But more significantly it instigated stopwork meetings of apprentices, the first ever on that scale in Australia.

It was now clear that a Young Communist organisation

76 M. White, op.cit., pp.53-54.
77 Ibid., p.55.
78 A. Blake, op.cit., pp.82-83.
79 Ibid, p.83.
launched twenty-four years earlier, had not merely survived where similar experiments failed, but had finally come of age.
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