A Social History of the Unemployed in Adelaide
during the Great Depression.

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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December 1975
I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Date 3/8/76 Signed ...
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary ii
Acknowledgements iv
List of Tables v
Abbreviations

* * *
Introduction 1

Unemployment in Adelaide
1. The Extent of Unemployment 14
2. The Distribution of Unemployment 38

* 
Personal and Social Effects of Unemployment
3. Men Without Work 67
4. The Long-Unemployed 99

* 
The Material Standard of Welfare of the Unemployed
5. On the Dole 135
6. Getting By 170
7. Shelter 195

* 
The Single Unemployed and Dissent
8. The Single Unemployed 241
9. Political Consciousness and Dissent 269

* 
Epilogue 285

* * *
Bibliography 290
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

E.R. Broomhill
SUMMARY

This is a study of the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930's on those who were unemployed in Adelaide. The focus is upon what unemployment meant to those without work - upon the problems they faced and their responses to those problems. The study is concerned with defining the extent of unemployment and the characteristics of those affected, with the personal and social effects on the individual and with the material impact on the unemployed's standard of living.

The unemployed person faced a continual struggle to find adequate food, shelter, clothing, fuel and other necessities. In Adelaide, not only was the level of unemployment higher than in other states, but the material standard of living of those on the dole was lower. A great many experienced considerable material hardship as a result of inadequate relief provisions and the harsh policies pursued by many of the state and private institutions with which they were forced into contact. The ordering of priorities during the crisis made it clear that the welfare of the individual was generally subordinate to the over-riding concern for political stability, economic orthodoxy and the protection of established financial interests.

Another major aspect of this study is the means by which individual persons managed to survive in the face of these difficulties. In the process of their day-to-day struggle for survival, people often evolved a remarkable resourcefulness and became very skilled at finding simple ways of getting by. However, while the unemployed shared many problems in common there existed a considerable diversity in their experiences and in their responses to those experiences. In certain cases, their suburb of living was important since in some
working-class areas of Adelaide a real sense of community existed which provided support for the individual in distress. Important also was the person's class, status and family situation prior to his unemployment and the length of time he was unemployed. Many remained without work for several years and as the Depression lengthened it became evident that those who remained unemployed faced an increasingly more hostile environment as the remainder of society returned to "normality".

An important concern of the study is to explain the relative political quiescence of the unemployed. Those who were without work did not, in general, form a cohesive group. Cut off from work they tended to become isolated and apathetic. The series of extremely humiliating experiences which followed often destroyed the unemployed person's self confidence. As a result, the dominant response, particularly in the case of the long-term unemployed person was one of resignation and fatalistic acceptance of his situation. A certain number did not accept their situation and continued to struggle and resist the forces which threatened to overcome them. As a result of their passivity and resignation, the majority of the unemployed, however, were not inclined to become involved in political activity and, at best, sought personal rather than political methods of overcoming their problems. What political dissent that existed came mainly from single men who occupied the public-unemployed camps. Even with this group, however, political activity was limited to small demonstrations centred around minor grievances. Basically the unemployed were politically powerless and the state eventually had no trouble in dispelling any threat to "social order".
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of writing this thesis I spoke with many people about their experiences during the Depression in Adelaide. To each of these people I am greatly indebted. Their detailed and vivid recollections added warmth, depth and perspective to my perception of the society and the people I was writing about.

I wish to thank Dr. John Tregenza for his guidance and assistance while I carried out the research. I owe a special debt to Dr. Robert Dare whose encouragement and advice were enormously helpful to me throughout the writing of the thesis.

My thanks also to Richard Jasiowski who processed the photographs, to Margaret Mommers who typed transcripts of the interviews, to Margaret Kalleske who prepared a first draft and to Raylene Loney who quickly and skilfully typed the thesis.
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Unemployment among Members of Trade Unions, South Australia, 1923-38.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Duration of Unemployment - South Australia, June 30th 1933.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Unemployment among Trade Unionists in each State and Australia, 1923-38.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Unemployment Rates, Ten Countries, 1920-1940.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Migration Between Country and City in South Australia, 1924-33.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Income of Male Wage and Salary Earners - South Australia, June 1933.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Income of Female Wage and Salary Earners - South Australia, June 1933.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Income of Employers and Self-employed Persons - South Australia, June 1933.</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Unemployment by Industry in South Australia - June 1933.</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Houses Built in South Australia, 1912-37.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Unemployment in the Building Industry - South Australia, June 1933.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Employment and Income in Brick and Tile Manufacturing - South Australia, 1926-27 to 1935-36.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Persons Employed in Factories in South Australia, 1923-38.</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Employment and Wages in Various Manufacturing Industries in South Australia, 1926-27 to 1935-36.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Motor Bodies Produced by Holden's, 1926-27 to 1934-35.</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Employment and Income in Motor Body Building and Associated Trades - South Australia, 1926-27 to 1935-36.</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Occupations of Persons Registered at Government Labour Exchange - Adelaide, October, 1938.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Unemployment among Transport Workers in South Australia, June 1933.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.11 Unemployment among Clerical Workers - South Australia, June 1933. 56

2.12 Unemployment in the Retail Industry in South Australia, June 1933. 57

2.13 Persons Employed in Shops in the Metropolitan Area 1925-35. 58

2.14 Income of Professional Males in Australia, June 1933. 60

2.15 Number of Professional Males in South Australia, June 1933. 60

2.16 Unemployed Males according to Duration of Unemployment in Age Groups - South Australia, June 1933. 62

2.17 Male Wage and Salary Earners, Unemployed Men and Men on Rations in Age Groups. 63

4.1 Suicides - Adelaide and South Australia, 1921-39. 125

5.1 Relief provided by Childrens' Welfare and Public Relief Department in Adelaide Metropolitan Area, 1918-1930. 138

5.2 Number of Men receiving Relief in Adelaide, 1931-40. 140

5.3 Sustenance Rates (without work) in The Australian States, 1935. 143

5.4 Mean Weekly Expenditure of 476 Adelaide Families compared to the Value of Government Relief. 147

5.5 The Nutritional Value of the Rations compared to the Mean Daily Intake of a Survey Sample and the Standard set by a Medical Committee. 149

5.6 Number of Deaths in South Australia, 1921-39. 150

5.7 Average Heights and Weights of School Children by Ages, 1926-36. 154

6.1 Quarterly Convictions of Persons for obtaining Rations under False Pretences. 179

6.2 Cases Heard before Magistrates' Courts - Showing Numbers of Individual Offences - South Australia, 1926-38. 181

7.1 Distribution of Ownership of Sub-standard Houses. 213

7.2 Personal Details of Ten Mortgagors to the State Bank of S.A. 227

7.3 State Bank Housing Loans showing the Number of Arrears, 1927-40. 229
7.4 Causes of Arrears with the State Bank, February 1934. 231
7.5 Number of Properties reverting to the State Bank, 1927-42. 234
7.6 Amount of Arrears owed in excess of 15 by Debtors to the State Bank, 1930-40. 238
8.1 Number of Men receiving Rations in the Adelaide Metropolitan Area, 1931-41. 243
8.2 Number of Students aged 12 and over in South Australian Schools, 1927-33. 250
8.3 Number of Men receiving Unemployment Relief in Port Adelaide and the remainder of the Metropolitan Area, 1931-40. 262
9.1 Yearly attendances at Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery, Adelaide, 1925-37. 274
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.L.P.</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>A.P.P.</td>
<td>Australian (Commonwealth) Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<td>I.W.W.</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World</td>
</tr>
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<td>S.A.P.D.</td>
<td>South Australian Parliamentary Debates</td>
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<td>S.A.P.P.</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.R.C.</td>
<td>Unemployment Relief Council (South Australia)</td>
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INTRODUCTION
A Social History of the Unemployed

An increasing amount of research interest is being directed towards the period in Australia's history which is known as the "Depression" - the late 1920's and early thirties. The Depression has for a long time been the subject of close analysis by economists and economic historians, but until recently general historians of Australian society have, in the absence of detailed social research, been forced to rely largely upon impressionistic accounts of life and conditions during this time of hardship and crisis in Australian society. Within the past few years, however, several important studies have emerged. These include, in particular, an excellent collection of articles published as a special number of Labour History. Included in this collection are two studies which are concerned with workers within individual trade unions during the depression - Bruce Mitchell on the N.S.W. Teacher's Federation and Tom Sheridan on the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Two other studies of individual trade unions exist which are relevant to the depression period - an article by John Merritt on the Federated Ironworkers Association during the depression and J. Hagan's study of the Australian Printing Unions


3. Ibid., pp. 67-79.

4. Ibid., pp. 52-66.

These are complemented by Les Louis' analysis of the responses of the Victorian trade union movement as a whole during the depression. Louis, together with Ian Turner, has also published an interesting collection of political, economic and social documents from the period. Finally, Professor G. Bolton has recently published *A Fine Country to Starve In*. This is the most ambitious work yet attempted on the Depression in which Bolton has set out to write what he has described as a "social history" of Western Australia during the Depression.

Unpublished research on the Depression in Australia is not yet very substantial. Within South Australia, however, five postgraduate theses have been completed on the Depression period. Michael Thompson has analysed the response of government to Depression. John Lonie has examined the political and ideological responses of conservative forces in South Australia. Noel Wait has researched...
the reactions of newspapers and the police to disturbances and demonstrations in Adelaide. Don Hopgood has analysed certain aspects of the parliamentary political framework within which the Depression occurred in South Australia. Finally, Stephen Dyer has described the impact of the Depression on the rural sectors of the State.

However, in an article in *Labour History*, Merritt has quite correctly pointed out that one of the major deficiencies still remaining in the research carried out so far on the Depression is the lack of any thorough study of the economic and social characteristics of Australian depression unemployment. This is as true of the Depression in South Australia as in Australia as a whole. A major reason for this vacuum is that the social sciences were so poorly developed in Australia prior to World War II that no significant contemporary social study of the Depression was attempted. There was no Australian equivalent of the pioneering sociological research on poverty and unemployment carried out by Bakke, Elderton and the Lynds in America, and by Rowntree, Beveridge and the Pilgrim Trust in Britain.

The other important reason for the lack of social historical research on the unemployed is that, given this dearth of contemporary sociological and literary material in Australia, academic researchers have not been able to construct a social history from the sources which historians have traditionally relied upon. This problem, of course, is not unique to the study of the Depression. Source materials have always constituted the major problem for social historians seeking to record and analyse the life of the common man in history. Not only are social historical sources on the life of ordinary people scarce but those that do exist are often biased towards documenting the impact of events upon institutions or at best upon the few individuals who were prominent within these organisations.

In the face of similar situations in relation to other periods and events many social historians are now turning towards oral sources of historical information as one means of contributing to a more sociological analysis of the recent past. Oral sources

20. The closest thing to a social history of the period has been Phyllis Peter's Ph.D. thesis. Peter started out with aspirations of writing a social history: "I began this thesis with two main questions. In what ways did the Depression affect people's lives that it left them, so many sharp memories? Irrespective of their views in retrospect, how did they look at the Depression at that time and how did they respond to the events of those years"? She found, however, that the state of contemporary sources made the fulfilment of such aspirations very difficult: "My attempt to answer the first question has been partly frustrated by the dearth of source material. In seeking answers to the second, I have found a regrettable absence of first-hand evidence on 'folk attitude'. Unlike American governments, Australian governments did not set relief workers to carry out public opinion polls". As a result of this dearth of source material Peter was forced to limit her investigations to "organisational" responses to the Depression. P. Peter, Social Aspects of the Depression in N.S.W., 1930-34 (Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U. 1966), pp. IV-V.
can provide for the social historian information which he could not possibly expect to acquire through conventional written sources. Only very rarely is the historian fortunate enough to find documentary evidence of everyday life and of the impact of changes in political, social and economic circumstances on a working class family. Personal diaries and memoirs are generally the pastime of the wealthy and the educated and, even so, seldom present impressions of social life in anything like the detail or perspective that the social historian would like. Oral sources, however, offer to the social historian information on living conditions, customs, social structure, attitudes and social consciousness which he would not hope to acquire from documentary sources. One of the strengths of oral evidence is that it allows the social historian to acquire the "feel" of a period from the point of view of those he is writing about in the same sort of way that the technique of participant observation allows the sociologist to acquire increased understanding of his subject.

In this study I have attempted to focus on the unemployed themselves - on the impact of the Depression upon them and their response to unemployment. I have tried to resist the natural tendency that emerges from the type of source material most readily available to look at the unemployed indirectly through the organisations with which they came into contact. With this aim I have sought to use oral sources in an effort to reconstruct aspects of the everyday lives of those who were unemployed. Oral sources of information seem especially suited to research on the unemployed in Adelaide during the Depression years. In particular, interviewing is well suited to a local or regional study where it becomes feasible to interview a substantial number of people who experienced the same or similar
events and situations. In a wider study the ability of the historian to hear different impressions of the same phenomenon decreases. The Depression itself also seems to be an ideal subject for such a project, firstly because it is still recent enough for there to be a very large number of people alive with experiences and impressions to relate, and secondly, because the Depression was a very significant event in the lives of most people. It impinged personally on peoples' lives in a way that few other social phenomena ever could. Consequently, people generally have vivid and rich memories about the Depression to relate.

There is one very important limitation of oral sources which ought to be acknowledged. Interviewing people and recording their recollections is a very time-consuming business. There is firstly the problem of locating informants, contacting them, arranging the interview, carrying out the interview at one or more sessions and finally, and most time-consuming of all, preparing the transcript. Therefore, because it is so time-consuming if conducted by one individual historian, and because it is also essential that the historian devote far more of his time to research with traditional sources, there is little chance to carry out sufficient interviews to make the sample a fully representative one. Consequently, all that can be claimed from this project is that it is based upon the experiences of a certain number of people from various backgrounds who may not be completely representative of the total number of people who were unemployed. However, it must also be recognised that the same limitation applies equally, or even more, to conventional sources of social history. Information contained in diaries, parliamentary reports and debates, newspapers and the records of
institutions cannot be regarded as necessarily reflecting the living conditions or attitudes of the community as a whole. Such information is not sanctified simply because it has been written down and has survived, often accidentally.

One further qualification needs to be made. To provide an adequate historical analysis of any period or phenomenon, it is essential that oral sources are used in conjunction with other sources. It is extremely difficult to imagine any worthwhile historical investigation that could be dealt with satisfactorily entirely by interviewing. The social historian Asa Briggs made this point when he wrote: "Interviewing to me ... is part of a sequence, a single technique in a related cluster of techniques". It is in this way that I have attempted to use the oral recollections of those who were unemployed during the Depression. This then, is not an "oral history" of the Depression but a social history of those who were unemployed using the oral recollections of a number of people as one source amongst a network of other sources.

The Depression in Adelaide in Perspective

The concept of "the Depression of the 1930's", at least in the Australian context, is a little misleading. The term is generally applied to the period 1929-34 which has been portrayed by historians as the great economic crash following the boom of the 1920's. However, the twenties were nowhere near as prosperous for


22. See in particular the extract from D. Copland, Australia in the World Crisis, included in L. Louis and I. Turner, The Depression of the 1930's, Cassell, Melbourne, 1968, Chapter One.
the ordinary working person as have often been thought. As a result, the "Depression years" must be re-interpreted and seen not as a sudden rupture with the period preceding them but as a worsening of what had been a fairly depressed situation already experienced by the working class.

A new interpretation of the twenties has now emerged from the detailed studies of Butlin and Schedvin. The work of these economic historians suggest that the twenties ought not to be seen as a boom period at all but as a time of steady decline in growth rates and of stagnation in living standards. Butlin has shown that it was not until the late thirties that the per capita and per worker growth rates regained the levels achieved in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Schedvin has accused historians of concentrating on the form rather than the substance when analysing the twenties. The form was the arrival of the products of mass-consumer society, including the motor car, radio and talkie-pictures, resulting in part from the stepping up of the process of industrialisation within Australia. The substance, however, was a slowing down of real growth, rising unemployment and widespread poverty. The findings of the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage in 1920 demonstrated that hardship and destitution were features of the lives of many.


Australians in the post-war period. The conclusion of the Royal Commission was that the basic wage had declined in real value from the standard set by the Harvester judgement of 1907 and that to regain that standard it needed to be raised by more than 50%. In spite of these findings real wages did not markedly improve in the following decade. Schedvin has pointed out that per capita income fell heavily during the war and the rise in income in the period 1919-25 did nothing more than re-establish the average pre-war income level.

Throughout the twenties, unemployment was extensive. The number out of work reached a level well in excess of 10% during the early 1890's and then remained static at around 6.0% until World War I. Following the war, the numbers without work increased significantly. In September, 1921, the unemployment figures prepared by the Bureau of Census and Statistics indicated that 11.4% of all workers were unemployed throughout Australia. The Census of June,


27. The finding of the Royal Commission was that the basic wage ought to have been £5-16-1 in Adelaide at that time. Ibid., p. 58. The actual basic wage at the time was £3-15-0. South Australia, Industrial Reports, Vol. 13, 1934-5.


1921, had recorded an unemployment rate of 16.1% among industrial workers. High unemployment continued throughout the twenties and only once in the decade did the average yearly figure for Australia fall below 6%. The Report of the 1926 Royal Commission on National Insurance described the level of unemployment as having reached "disturbing proportions". A survey conducted by the Royal Commission among 200,000 trade unionists indicated that unemployment was running at just below 7% at that time.

During the twenties also there was a certain number of men, especially those engaged in industries which were partly of a seasonal nature, whose periods of employment alternated with periods of unemployment. For example, various rural industries required only seasonal labour. These included in the twenties shearing, fruit picking and timber-cutting. However, it is not generally recognised that many urban industries were similarly subject to seasonal variations in activity. This was observed by Walker who concluded that "clothing, automobiles, radio and the like are 'seasonal trades', and most industries making goods for consumers are subject to rush periods and consequent reactions at Christmas, Easter and other times throughout the year."

In some industries, and most notably in the building trade, employment for an individual working man amounted in reality

33. Ibid., p. 1415.
34. Ibid.
35. E.R. Walker, Unemployment Policy with Special Reference to Australia, Sydney, 1936, p. 5.
to a succession of jobs. Firms tended to hire and fire according to the particular job that was going at the time. It was unlikely that one job would require exactly the same number of men as the previous one and very few firms were prepared to "carry" men. Building construction work experienced severe restrictions in the wet winter months in addition to suffering from an overdependence on the prosperity of other industries. The Royal Commission on National Insurance concluded that only intermittent employment was available for a large part of the year among by far the majority of building construction workers.

The Depression ought to be seen, therefore, not in terms of the crash after the boom of the twenties, but rather as the low point of a continuous economic trough which began in the 1890's and lasted till World War II. Nevertheless, the period known as the Depression was distinctive in a number of important respects. One of the most important of these was in the level of unemployment. Although high unemployment was characteristic of the entire period from 1890-1939, it became significantly worse from the late twenties onwards.

In Adelaide, the situation was worse than elsewhere. The sudden and very drastic rise in unemployment which characterised the arrival of the Depression in all States occurred in Adelaide as

36. Ibid., p. 6.

37. Royal Commission on National Insurance, Op. cit., p. 1418. The Royal Commission stated that a depression had existed in the timber industry for a number of years prior to 1925 and that even in the iron, steel and engineering industries a large percentage of workers were unemployed.
early as mid-1927. To a very great extent this was the result of local developments within the South Australian economy. The twenties had produced in South Australia, as in the country as a whole, a major structural transference of capital and labour from the rural sector of the economy to the comparatively low short-term productivity of the secondary and tertiary sectors.\textsuperscript{38} An important and expensive effect of such a major shift to secondary industry in an already highly urbanised and partially affluent society was a demand for large-scale public investment in non-productive service assets. These included housing, electrical installations, telecommunications and, above all, railways. These assets were all costly and in the short-term provided little monetary return on investment. The South Australian government alone spent £11.4 million on upgrading its railways between 1923-4 and 1927-8.\textsuperscript{39} These expenditures required large-scale public borrowing of overseas capital, at the time available only on most unfavourable terms.\textsuperscript{40} Between 1919-29, Australia's overseas debt increased by £276 million.\textsuperscript{41} In South Australia, government spending and borrowing were, per capita, even higher than in other states.\textsuperscript{42} The early withdrawal of overseas finance in mid-1927, together with the simultaneous occurrence of a


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{40} C.B. Schedvin, \textit{Op. cit.}, pp. 6, 70-75, 96-100.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{42} M.J. Thompson, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 68. In 1930-31, South Australia's repayments of interest only on overseas loans amounted to 45% of the State's total income for that year.
severe local drought, produced depression conditions in South Australia two full years before the general downturn in 1929. By the end of 1927 the percentage of trade unionists shown as unemployed had reached 10.7% and was rising rapidly.43

Over the following decade unemployment became a harsh reality for more than one half of the workforce in Adelaide.44 This study is a social history of those who were unemployed. It is not concerned primarily with the economics of the Depression nor with the parliamentary politics of the period. These aspects of the Depression in South Australia have been analysed elsewhere.45 This is a study of what unemployment meant to the people affected - of the problems they faced and of their responses to these problems.

43. See Table 1.1 below.

44. The actual extent of unemployment in Adelaide is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 1
THE EXTENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT
Unemployment in South Australia grew steadily throughout 1928-29 after the sudden initial rise in 1927, but during 1930 the number out of work again jumped dramatically as a result of the international economic collapse. The trade union series of unemployment statistics prepared by the Bureau of Census and Statistics, indicated that by the end of 1930 almost 30% of the work force was unemployed. Table 1.1 shows the percentage of workers unemployed according to the trade union series in each quarter from 1923-38. According to the trade union series, unemployment in South Australia reached its peak in the third quarter of 1932 when 35.4% of trade unionists were without work.

By mid 1933 a majority of South Australians without work could be classified as the "long-unemployed". In Table 1.2 information from the Census of June, 1933 is shown which indicates that at that time over 70% of the unemployed had been totally without work for more than a year. Over 45% had been out of work for more than three years. As the Depression began to lift and employment opportunities appeared once more, the unemployment level very slowly began to fall. Nonetheless, by December, 1935, the trade union series indicated that there were still at least 17.6% of workers unemployed. A year later the figure was still above 10.0%. Therefore, at the end of 1936, over 8,000 men in Adelaide were still unemployed. Most of these had been without work for at least seven years and did not find work until after war had broken out in 1939-40.

In Adelaide, the level of unemployment continued to be higher throughout the Depression than in any other capital city. The trade union series prepared by the Bureau of Census and
TABLE 1.1

Unemployment among Members of Trade Unions,
South Australia, 1923-38
(per cent)

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>1st Quarter</th>
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<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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</tr>
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<td>8.4</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Period Unemployed</th>
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<th>Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 4 weeks</td>
<td>1,470</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks and under 1 year</td>
<td>8,945</td>
<td>2,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total under 1 year</td>
<td>10,415</td>
<td>2,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year and under 2 years</td>
<td>3,198</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years and under 3 years</td>
<td>5,469</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years and under 4 years</td>
<td>8,073</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years and over</td>
<td>7,648</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total over 1 year</td>
<td>24,388</td>
<td>2,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td>1,094</td>
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</table>

Statistics shows that South Australia maintained the highest level of unemployment continuously from late 1927 until early 1935. Table 1.3 shows the average level of unemployment in all states for each year from 1923-1938. In fact the level of unemployment in South Australia was amongst the highest recorded anywhere in the world. Unemployment statistics for Australia and nine other countries are shown in Table 1.4.

The Hidden Unemployed

The trade union series of unemployment statistics which has formed the basis of most assessments of Depression unemployment has at all times evoked controversy from economists concerning its accuracy and reliability. One economist has thought it so full of errors and distortions that he declared it unworthy of serious consultation. However, most economists have accepted it as at worst, a rough, and at best, an accurate, indicator of the level of unemployment. A point strongly in favour of the series


2. Professor L.F. Giblin in 1932 strongly defended the accuracy of the trade union series. He argued that the errors present mostly cancelled out. Economic Record, December 1932, p. 299. Much the same view was put by C. Forster, "Australian Unemployment 1900-40", Economic Record, September 1965, pp. 426-50. On the other hand the economist J.K.L. Gifford concluded that the series considerably underestimated the level of unemployment. Economic statistics for Australian Arbitration Courts, M.U.P., Economic Series, No. 3, 1928, p. 9. Such a view was also held by E.R. Walker, author of one of the major contemporary studies of the Depression: Unemployment Policy with Special Reference to Australia, Sydney, 1936, p. 12. The Bureau of Census and Statistics itself claimed that the series provided a very good index of the percentage of workers unemployed at any one time. See the evidence by the Commonwealth statistician, Mr. C.H. Wickens, to the Royal Commission on National Insurance, 1926, Paragraph 24, 139.
TABLE 1.3

Unemployment among Trade Unionists in each State and Australia, 1923-38

(per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
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Source: Australia, Labour Reports, 1923-38.
### TABLE 1.4

Unemployment Rates, Ten Countries, 1920-1940

(perm cent)

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>23.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
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</table>

undoubtedly is that a comprehensive international study of unemployment statistics concluded that the Australian trade union series appeared to be one of the best in the world.³ It found that the sample upon which the series was based was substantial, the range of industries covered was wide and that it produced figures which could be reliably compared over a long period of time.⁴

Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the figures shown by the trade union series significantly underestimate the genuine level of unemployment in Adelaide during the Depression. In part, this is the result of the trade union assessment being for the State as a whole where the level of unemployment was lower than in Adelaide itself. Of more importance, however, was a major flaw inherent in the series itself. That is, those occupations with the highest unemployment rate were generally the ones with the lowest union membership. Consequently, returns from trade unions were invariably biased towards skilled and semi-skilled workers and against unskilled workers who experienced by far the severest level of unemployment. Furthermore, this distortion became worse as the Depression continued. A survey of 2,000 unemployed men was conducted in 1937 by E.E. Ward. His conclusion was that it would be a generous estimate to say that 6% of these men were effective members


⁴. Ibid., p. 482.
of a union "in the sense that they would be included by a secretary who kept records". With the outbreak of war in 1939 all men between the ages of 18 and 64 were required to report for a national service register and an estimate of unemployment was made on the results of this. The figure arrived at as a result of this survey in July was about 25% higher than the trade union estimate in August.

The accuracy of the trade union series can be checked at another point by comparing it to the unemployment figures shown by the Australian Census of June, 1933. The Census estimated that at that time there were 26,490 men without work in the Adelaide metropolitan area. This amounted to almost exactly one-third (33.2%) of all male wage and salary earners in Adelaide. The trade union unemployment level would appear to be about 10% greater than that shown in the trade union series. However, the Census itself did not present a complete account of the level of unemployment in Adelaide and was inadequate in the following ways:

1. Throughout Australia, men and women who were unable to find work in the city during the Depression set off for the country in an attempt to find work. Some, like the characters of Kylie Tennant's novel The Battlers, "humped their bluey" from town to town, sleeping "out" and living off the land. Others followed the seasonal employment opportunities, from timber cutting in the

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South-East to fruit picking in the river districts. The number of men from Adelaide who headed for the country was probably less than from most other capital cities because there were no "track" rations given to men travelling from town to town as there were elsewhere. Furthermore, while during the twenties the country did offer an almost certain opportunity for the unemployed Adelaide men to obtain work, during the Depression work in the country was as hard to come by as in the city. One person who had been used to finding work in the country when none was available elsewhere described this change in the situation in the following way:

In the early twenties I was doing casual work in the country, mainly seasonal work. At one time you could get a job almost anywhere in the country. A particular train going up to Peterborough would have up to a dozen blokes. Each train going north would have a dozen blokes on it. For a while I was working at Renmark concreting water tanks.

Around 1928 there was still a lot of rural work if you knew how to operate. I did a regular tour in one year. I knew a chap who had a draught-horse stud and I could get some chaff-cutting that would take me through till after the harvest. Then I'd go grape-picking. About 1928-29 that almost cut out. There was no work at all in the country. The only work you could get was without wages - you could work for your food. Everybody was depressed at the time.

In spite of this, the number of men, and to a lesser extent women, who left Adelaide for the country was still considerable. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century


9. Interview with Mr. Tim Slater.

10. Mention is made of the large numbers of men "on the track" in both Zweck, op. cit., p. 12 and Henry, op. cit., p. 117.
the population of Adelaide had been continually increasing in proportion to the State as a whole. This process continued into the twenties - the percentage of South Australians living in Adelaide increasing from 45% in 1900 to 57% in 1928. Between 1924-27 "net-migration" from the country to Adelaide was directly responsible for an increase in the population of Adelaide of about 8,100 males and approximately the same number of females. During the period 1930-33, however, the male population of Adelaide decreased by approximately 10,200 directly as a result of migration from Adelaide to the country. During the same period the "net-migration" of females from Adelaide to the country was about 3,100.

**TABLE 1.5**

Migration Between Country and City in South Australia 1924-33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1924-27</th>
<th>1927-30</th>
<th>1930-33</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population increase/decrease in Adelaide</td>
<td>+21,331</td>
<td>+16,441</td>
<td>-4,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural net increase in Adelaide</td>
<td>+4,167</td>
<td>+4,167</td>
<td>+3,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase/decrease in Adelaide by migration to or from the State</td>
<td>+9,020</td>
<td>+3,180</td>
<td>-7,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated increase/decrease in Adelaide due to mobility between country and city</td>
<td>+8,144</td>
<td>+8,094</td>
<td>+1,543</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Statistical Registers, 1924-33.

11. Excess of immigrants over emigrants or vice-versa.
Therefore, between 1930 and 1933 over 10,000 more males and 3,000 more females left the city to go to the country than vice versa. This was a complete reversal of the trend prior to the Depression. If only 50% of these men had been unable to find work in the country (seemingly a conservative estimate), then an additional 5,000 must be added to the figures for those males normally resident in Adelaide who were unemployed in 1933. Clearly then, the Census statistics for the numbers as a result of the number of urban unemployed who were away seeking work in the country.\(^\text{12}\)

2. As a result of the Depression there were a certain number of young people who had left school but had not been able to find employment. Because these people had never been employed at any time, they tended not to classify themselves as unemployed on the Census form.\(^\text{13}\) The Bureau of Census and Statistics later added an extra 2.4% to the total percentage of Australian male wage and salary earners who were unemployed and 4.2% to the total female unemployed.\(^\text{14}\) If these same percentages are added to the figures for the Adelaide metropolitan area, then an extra 1,900

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12. It is likely that the idea motivating those who headed for the country was not simply that work might be more readily available there, but also that the country was a better place to be when times were hard. In the world-view of most South Australians in the thirties, even those resident in the city, the superiority of country life was simply taken for granted. It was probably a combination of these motives that caused one unemployed man to gather together his possessions in two horse-drawn wagons and to set off in September, 1930 with his wife and fifteen children for the Mt. Ogilvy goldfields some four hundred miles from Adelaide. A photo of Mr. Finn and his family appears in the Register News - Pictorial, 23 September, 1930, p. 12.


males and 1,300 females would have to be added to the number who are to be regarded as unemployed.

3. It is also likely that a small percentage of people who were in fact out of work at the time of the Census deliberately omitted to describe themselves as being unemployed. Unemployment has always been associated with a certain social and moral stigma in Australian society where the social values attached to work holds such an important place in the popular culture and morality. This was recognised by the Commonwealth Statistician who stated in the Census Report:

The grade 'unemployed' differs from other grades in the Census (with the possible exception of 'wage and salary earner employed part-time') in that, for the great majority of the persons to whom it is applied, it represents an undesirable status in which they normally do not expect to remain permanently.\(^15\)

Unfortunately, there seems no way that the number of people who reacted in this way to the Census might be estimated. The relatively small number of people who had been unemployed for only a short time suggests that the number would not have been great. It might be expected that anyone out of work for over a year would have had to face up to the unpleasant reality of being one of the "unemployed".

All in all, there are good reasons why the figures returned by the Census ought to be regarded not as providing a definitive assessment of unemployment during the Depression but rather a minimum estimate which most probably very significantly underestimated the extent of unemployment among employees. If hidden

\(^{15}\) Australia, Census, 1933, Statistician's Report, p. 303.
unemployment is taken into account then the actual level of
unemployment amongst male employees in Adelaide in June, 1933, was
probably in the order of 42%.16 It can be projected on the basis
of this figure that during the peak of Depression unemployment in
the third quarter of 1932 the actual number of men without work in
Adelaide was approximately 49.4% of all males in the work force.17

Partial Unemployment

One of the most serious aspects of the Depression, which
has gone very largely without notice, was the very great number of
people who experienced hardship through being underemployed during
the Depression years. At a time when the basic wage itself was
barely adequate to keep a family alive, any reduction at all in
overall income throughout the year was likely to produce consider-
able hardship.

It was common practice during the Depression for an
employee to be forced to work "short-time". Such a rationing of
the work which was available was looked upon favourably by most
employers as a means by which overhead costs could be cut with as
little reduction in actual output as possible. In some establish-

16. That is: Census figure for Adelaide males unemployed: 26,490
or 33.2%
Men in the country looking for work: 5,000 or 6.3%
Youths not recorded as unemployed: 1,900 or 2.4%
Totally actually unemployed: 33,390 or 41.9%

17. That is: Let the trade union figure for June 1933 be X%
" " real unemployment" " " Y%
" " trade union" " Sept 1932 " a%
" " real unemployment" " " b%

Then $b = \frac{Y \times a}{X} = \frac{41.9 \times 35.4}{30.0} = 49.4\%$
ments the introduction of short-time actually increased the profit margin of the firm as employees were expected to get through the equivalent of a full week's work in reduced time.\textsuperscript{18} Unions, and workers themselves, generally accepted short time as a necessary evil in order to share the work which was available amongst as many employees as possible. For example, when the \textit{Advertiser} amalgamated with the Register Pictorial in 1931 the management of the \textit{Advertiser} decided to dismiss 85 workers who had been made redundant by the amalgamation. A meeting of employees was called at which a decision was made by a vote of 146-39 to request the management to introduce work rationing instead of carrying out the dismissals.\textsuperscript{19}

The practice of work rationing was extensively used in almost every industry within both the public and private sectors of employment. The Government Engineering and Water Supply Department employed 556 men on two-thirds time till 1935.\textsuperscript{20} A

18. For example, the Company Secretary of a large retail store when asked how his staff were able to get over the work after retrenchments and short time had reduced their numbers, replied:

"At the present time it is rushed. If the other men were on they would not be rushed with work. Things would be done properly".

Q. "The real effect is increased pressure?"
A. "Yes."

Mr. C.J. Starling, Company Secretary of Crapp and Hawke, in evidence to the Living Wage Enquiry for Males 1930, typescript, Board of Industry, p. 265.


large number of men employed by the Municipal Tramways Trust were working three-quarters time. 21 Railway workers at the Islington Workshops worked a four day week in an attempt to cut down dismissals. 22 Retrenchments continued to be made by the hundreds nevertheless. Throughout the printing industry, part-time appears to have become the norm by 1931. For example, from the beginning of 1930 most staff at the *News* were working short-time. 23 The *Advertiser* operated a similar scheme also and during 1930 the Printing Industry Employees’ Union ceased providing unemployment benefits on the grounds that their members were working on part-time in “nearly all offices”. 24 In July, 1930, the employees of the South Australian Gas Company agreed to work part-time. Between that time and July, 1931, they generally worked four weeks in every five. 25 All outside staff of the Mitcham District Council were working two weeks out of every three. 26 Most other councils were operating on a similar basis.

In 1930 and 1931 the South Australian Board of Industry, whose responsibility it was to determine the State Living Wage,
conducted surveys which were designed to assess roughly the extent of the practice of short-time. The surveys obtained information relating to numbers employed and numbers working short-time since June, 1929 from twenty-three separate firms in four different industries. These surveys revealed that the practice of short-time had penetrated deeply into at least three of the four areas of employment included in the surveys. A calculation of the total amount of time lost within the twenty-three firms surveyed reveals that the average time lost by each person working short-time was approximately twelve hours per week or one-quarter of the average full working week.27

 Whatever the difficulties of putting a precise figure on the level of short-time employment, it is certain that it was wide-spread. Professor L.G. Melville of the Department of Economics at Adelaide University said in 1931:

One substantial factor that is omitted from unemployment figures is the amount of short-time that is worked. I do not know whether it is greater in South Australia than in the other States, but it is very serious.28

Such an opinion was also voiced by the Advertiser which commented in a leader in January 1931, that:

... in most avenues of employment the workers are participating in some form of division of work involving the loss of a considerable portion of each week.29

27. For further details see Ray Broomhill, "Underemployment in Adelaide during the Depression" in Labour History, No. 21, pp. 31-40.


29. Advertiser, 1 January, 1931.
A more specific estimate was advanced by the President of the South Australian branch of the A.L.P., Mr. Kneebone, who stated in 1931 that to his knowledge nearly one-third of the work-force were unemployed and one-third were on short-time. His first estimate proved to be in fact very close to the mark so perhaps he was not too far wrong with his second as well.

Another who has arrived at a similar estimation is Jack Blake, a person who was also actively involved with unions during the Depression. Blake has estimated that while between one-quarter and one-third of the work-force was unemployed, over one-half worked for half money or less. Although Blake was writing on the basis of his experience in N.S.W., it is reasonable to expect that since the Census showed N.S.W. and South Australia having very similar levels of short-time unemployment, the real figures would also have been roughly equal.

The accuracy of these estimates is supported by the evidence given by T.C. Stephens, the Garden Suburb Commissioner, to the Local Government Commission. Stephens estimated that in 1933 about 450 household heads were on short-time in Colonel Light Gardens. The Census of 1933 showed that there was a total of 1,403 male wage and salary earners in Colonel Light Gardens. Therefore, if Stephens' estimate of the number on short-time in

30. Ibid., 20 January, 1931.


Colonel Light Gardens was correct, then about 32% of all male employees (including those who were unemployed) were on short-time in that suburb. The Census revealed that the employment situation in Colonel Light Gardens corresponded very closely to the average for the whole metropolitan area. There were 32.6% of all male employees out of work in Colonel Light Gardens compared to 33.2% for the metropolitan area. Assuming that Mr. Stephens was correct in his estimate of the extent of short-time in Colonel Light Gardens, then it can be estimated that there were about 25,500 men working short-time throughout the whole metropolitan area in 1933. In other words, just under half (about 48%) of those who were not unemployed appear to have been working only part-time.

Loss of Income

A much clearer picture concerning the actual extent of hardship caused by the Depression is to be found in the information collected by the 1933 Census regarding personal income earned during the previous year. Statistics showing the income of male and female wage and salary earners are presented in Tables 1.6 and 1.7. These figures provide a unique opportunity to analyse the impact of both unemployment and under-employment on the overall yearly income of employees. Assuming that award wages were in fact mostly paid by employers, it can be concluded that those who earned less than the basic wage were either unemployed for some part of the year or working on short-time for part or whole of the year.

According to the Census, 67.7% of all male wage and salary earners in South Australia earned less than £155 in the
TABLE 1.6
Income of Male Wage and Salary Earners - South Australia,
June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th></th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th></th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16,890</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>16,890</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under £52</td>
<td>18,065</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>3,817</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>14,271</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>36,782</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£52-103</td>
<td>15,532</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>3,553</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>4,314</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>23,876</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£104-155</td>
<td>11,890</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2,156</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>1,316</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>15,512</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£156-207</td>
<td>16,123</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>17,334</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£208-259</td>
<td>11,054</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>11,273</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £260</td>
<td>13,616</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>13,715</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>87,003</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>10,623</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>37,816</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>136,757</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The basic wage for men in South Australia in 1932-33 was £163-16-0.

### TABLE 1.7

Income of Female Wage and Salary Earners - South Australia, June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Employed Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Part-time Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Unemployed Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Income</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,002</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>3,002</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under £52</td>
<td>14,910</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>1,732</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>2,337</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>19,259</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£52-103</td>
<td>10,845</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11,882</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£104-155</td>
<td>5,296</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5,387</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£156-207</td>
<td>2,117</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2,135</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£208-259</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £260</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34,431</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5,924</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>43,093</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The basic wage for women in South Australia in 1932-33 was £81-10-0 per year.

preceding twelve months. As the basic wage in South Australia throughout 1932-33 stood at £163-16-0, it seems that over two-thirds of all male workers earned less than the basic wage over the yearly period. Similarly, as the basic wage for female workers in 1933 was £81-18-0 per year, it seems that slightly over two-thirds of female wage and salary workers earned less than the female basic wage. The extent of economic hardship is even better illustrated by the discovery that there were 77,498 male wage and salary earners who earned less than £104 in the year. This means that over 55% of male employees earned, on average, less than £2 per week. Furthermore, over 38% earned less than £1 per week. The corresponding figures for women show a similar situation. Just over 50% of female wage and salary workers earned on average less than £1 per week.

These figures, of course, include a large number of persons who were unemployed, many of whom had been so for well over a full year. In order to gain some idea of the extent by which the Census underestimated unemployment, as well as of the extent of underemployment, the figures for those who were returned as being in employment at the time of the Census have been separated. It will be seen that of those who were classified as actually being in employment in 1933 (including those employed part-time) more than 55,000 or 56.4% of males and approximately 22,300 or 60.7% of females had earned less than their respective basic wages for the given yearly period. Furthermore, almost 40%

34. Ibid.
of males so classified earned less than £2 per week on average and just over 20% less than £1 per week. Approximately 45% of females so classified earned on average less than £1 per week.

Another aspect of hardship caused by loss of income which is hidden within the figures for unemployment is revealed by an examination of the income figures for those breadwinners who were not classified as wage and salary workers - employers and those classified as "working on own account". These figures are shown in Table 1.8.

From the income figures of those "working on own account" it must be deduced that this appeared to be usually a euphemism for "scratching as best one can". In South Australia, 74.5% of those men who said that they were working on their own earned less than £155 in the preceding year. Approximately two-thirds of women in the same category earned less than the female basic wage. Figures for the metropolitan area are not available but if it can be assumed that the distribution of income in this group was approximately the same as for the State as a whole then over 6,000 men and nearly 1,600 women who were employed on their "own account" earned less than their respective basic wages. As might have been expected, a good percentage of employers continued to earn incomes considerably in excess of the most highly paid employee. One-third of male employers were recorded by the Census as earning over £260 in the previous twelve months. On the other hand, 42.4% of male employers and approximately one-third of female employers earned less than the equivalent of the basic wage of their employees. The great majority of employers were, in fact, owners of small businesses, shops or factories. At the time of
**TABLE 1.8**

Income of Employers and Self-employed Persons - South Australia,  
June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Working on own account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Income</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under £52</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£52-103</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£104-155</td>
<td>3,426</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£156-207</td>
<td>2,782</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£208-259</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£260 &amp; over</td>
<td>6,830</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,497</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the Depression, 72% of factories employed less than ten people and 40% employed four persons or less.\textsuperscript{35} In the metropolitan area, 43% of shops were operated by their proprietor with no employed labour, 52% of shops had four employees or less and only 5% employed more than four persons.\textsuperscript{36} Reduced consumption and production caused by the Depression therefore brought reductions in income to large sections of the petty bourgeoisie - in particular to the smaller employers and people operating their own shops and businesses.\textsuperscript{37}

The impact of the Depression in Adelaide, therefore, was pervasive. Probably a majority of the population experienced unemployment at some stage. Many others were underemployed or suffered a considerable loss of income. Even those who remained in full employment were more likely than not to be subjected to the threat of retrenchment. The extent of the impact of the Depression and the resultant sense of insecurity that spread throughout society were important influences upon the overall effects of the Depression. There is no doubt, however, that the severest hardship fell upon the wage and salary earning class as a result of unemployment. It was the vast army of unemployed men and their families who, more than anyone else, bore the indelible scars that the Depression inflicted.

\textsuperscript{35} South Australia, \textit{Statistical Register}, Part V, Production, 1933.
\textsuperscript{36} Report of the Factories and Steamboilers Department, S.A.P.P., No. 46, 1931.
\textsuperscript{37} Not all the bourgeoisie suffered during the Depression, of course. A brief survey of the profits of a number of firms operating in South Australia from 1927-35 indicated that larger companies maintained profits throughout the period. The Depression gave further impetus to the already existing tendency for the growth of monopolies and larger companies at the expense of smaller ones. See an unpublished seminar paper: R. Broomhill, "Class and Occupation as Two Factors in Determining the Impact of the Depression of the Thirties", June 1973, History Office University of Adelaide. Also see Rylah, M., "National Income and Company Profits in Australia", \textit{Economic Record}, Vol. 14, 1938, pp. 98-104.
CHAPTER 2

THE DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYMENT
The 1920’s were very important years in the development of the Australian working class. In particular, there occurred during these years a major structural transference of labour from primary to manufacturing industry. An important result of this was a substantial increase in the size of the urban working class as country people came to Adelaide in their thousands and joined the industrial work force. Within existing secondary industry, profound changes occurred. Prior to the war, factory operations were small-scale and labour intensive. The twenties saw a rapid growth in heavy industries, in industrial technology and in the size of factories. By the mid 1920's over 56% of all factory workers were employed in establishments with fifty or more employees. Less than one-quarter worked in factories employing twenty persons or less.¹ By 1927 almost 45% were working in factories with over 100 employees.² As a result, for the first time a genuine industrial proletariat began to emerge in Adelaide during the twenties.

By the Depression period the single most important area of employment in Adelaide was industrial production. According to the 1933 Census, 41,293 men or 44.4% of all male wage and salary earners in Adelaide described their normal area of employment as industrial.³ It was partly because South Australia was so dependent upon manufacturing industries that this State was the earliest

2. Ibid., 1927, p. 800.
and worst affected by unemployment. As can be seen in Table 2.1, the highest level of unemployment in South Australia was overwhelmingly in the industrial sector within which 42.3% of all males normally employed were out of work in June, 1933.

**TABLE 2.1**

Unemployment by Industry in South Australia - June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wage &amp; Salary Earners</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>25,762</td>
<td>3,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>56,215</td>
<td>23,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; Communication</td>
<td>17,609</td>
<td>2,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce &amp; Finance</td>
<td>24,076</td>
<td>3,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration &amp; Professional</td>
<td>8,204</td>
<td>1,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment, Sport &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; Domestic Service</td>
<td>2,653</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Industry</td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>1,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>136,836</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,820</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The other major sources of employment in Adelaide were the white-collar tertiary industries - primarily commerce, finance and public administration (37,164 men or 33.4% of the work force) - and the blue-collar service industries - primarily transport and communication (11,235 men or 12.7% of the work force). Both of these

4. Figures for South Australia as a whole are shown because unemployment statistics for each industry were not available for Adelaide by itself.

sectors had close to 17% of male employees without work in June, 1933.

**Unemployment among Industrial Workers**

Within the industrial sector the three most important areas of employment prior to the Depression were the building industry, small manufacturing industries (clothing, agricultural implements and smallgoods) and, increasingly, the motor body building industry together with its "feeder" industries (Engineering firms, ironworks and foundries, etc.).

The Depression severely affected activities in each of these areas but without a doubt the severest impact was on the building trades. Some idea of the crippling effect of the Depression on building in South Australia can be obtained from the following table showing the number of houses built in the metropolitan area over the period from 1912-1937. In the mid 1920's something like 3,000 houses were being built in Adelaide each year but activity began to decline in late 1927 and by 1930 the bottom had completely fallen out of the trade. During 1931 only 51 houses, or less than 2% of the number built in 1926, were erected.

**TABLE 2.2**

Houses Built in South Australia, 1912-37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1912</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1929</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
<td>2,857</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>2,181</td>
<td>3,053</td>
<td>3,045</td>
<td>3,077</td>
<td>1,854</td>
<td>1,230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works, typescript exhibit used by the committee.
According to the Census, in June 1933, 63.6% of all wage and salary earners normally employed in the building industry were without work. Although this figure seems extremely high as it stands, it probably understates the actual number. Because the building industry was practically the first affected in South Australia many men would have been laid off from 1927 and been able to find jobs in another area. This was especially true of young persons under 21 who had not completed their apprenticeships. Many of these would not have classified themselves as building tradesmen but according to the last job they had. Table 2.2 suggests that the building industry expanded by at least one-third between 1920-26 but the Census of 1933 shows the number of workers in the building trades as almost exactly the same as in the Census of 1921. In other words, many must have left the industry for some other, possibly temporary, occupation after 1926. As Table 2.3 reveals, every trade connected with the building industry experienced a very high level of unemployment, but plasterers, bricklayers and painters were particularly prone to the risk of unemployment.

As might be expected, the ancillary industries to the building trade were likewise severely affected by the Depression. For example, employment in brick and tile manufacturing firms disappeared almost entirely. This industry, which employed over 900 persons in 1926-27, provided work for only 93 people in 1931-2. In theory this represents an unemployment level of 90%. At the same time the average wage paid to each person employed in this

6. See Table 3.3.
TABLE 2.3

Unemployment in the Building Industry - South Australia,
June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Wage &amp; Salary Earners</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>% Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stone-dressing</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklaying</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpentering</td>
<td>2,135</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>67.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plastering</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Installation</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>61.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undefined</td>
<td>1,271</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total building trades</td>
<td>7,256</td>
<td>4,634</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

industry was reduced by 60% between 1926-27 and 1931-2. Given that there was an average of 20% cut in award wages in all industries, these figures still suggest that almost all persons still employed in the manufacturing of bricks and tiles were working, on average, only about half-time.

TABLE 2.4
Employment and Income in Brick and Tile Manufacturing -
South Australia, 1926-27 to 1935-36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average no. of hands employed for year</th>
<th>1926-7</th>
<th>1929-30</th>
<th>1930-1</th>
<th>1931-2</th>
<th>1932-3</th>
<th>1933-4</th>
<th>1934-5</th>
<th>1935-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Index nos. (1926-27=100)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average salary or wage paid per employee per year</th>
<th>264.9</th>
<th>203.2</th>
<th>143.6</th>
<th>109.4</th>
<th>187.9</th>
<th>148.0</th>
<th>158.2</th>
<th>167.9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Index nos. (1926-27=100)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Statistical Registers, 1927-36.

The largest number of industrial workers in South Australia were employed in light secondary industry - the biggest sources of employment being in the manufacturing of clothing, agricultural implements, furniture, cabinet making and various small goods and other consumer products. The Chief Inspector of Factories' figures for employment in all factories in South Australia suggest that there were 40% fewer men and 33% fewer women employed in factories
in South Australia in 1931 compared to 1926.\textsuperscript{7} Allowing for the level of unemployment that existed in South Australia in 1926, this would suggest that there were probably between 45-50\% of males and 38-43\% of females, normally employed in factories, out of work in 1931.

Unemployment varied widely in level of severity in the various manufacturing industries. These fluctuations in the level of employment within a number of separate industries are shown in Table 2.6. Employers' Returns suggest that the worst industries were those involved in the production of agricultural implements and furniture.\textsuperscript{8} The agricultural implement industry was naturally enough badly affected by the rural Depression and in 1931-32 only 28\% of the number employed in 1926-27 were still working. Similarly household furniture was one of the first things that people in economic distress ceased buying. According to the figures shown by the Employers' Returns, 58\% of those employed in 1926-27 were out of work by 1931-32. Clothing and footwear were still near essentials during the Depression in the sense that anyone who had access to any money at all would purchase these as a high priority. The Returns from Employers show a drop in numbers employed of 44\% for both clothing and footwear production.

While the Depression, of course, produced a drop in the level of consumption of food, the ration system ensured that even those who were thoroughly destitute still were supplied with a certain amount of foodstuffs. In fact, the ration tickets could only be used to purchase foods so it is not surprising that employ-

\textsuperscript{7} See Table 2.5.

\textsuperscript{8} See Table 2.6.
### TABLE 2.5

Persons Employed in Factories in South Australia, 1923-38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>27,988</td>
<td>30,261</td>
<td>30,717</td>
<td>32,289</td>
<td>34,076</td>
<td>32,214</td>
<td>30,385</td>
<td>26,485</td>
<td>19,332</td>
<td>18,932</td>
<td>20,901</td>
<td>23,743</td>
<td>27,271</td>
<td>31,391</td>
<td>33,400</td>
<td>36,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of unemployment</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6,707</td>
<td>7,014</td>
<td>6,997</td>
<td>6,761</td>
<td>6,999</td>
<td>6,830</td>
<td>6,422</td>
<td>5,700</td>
<td>4,554</td>
<td>4,902</td>
<td>5,447</td>
<td>5,743</td>
<td>6,226</td>
<td>7,080</td>
<td>7,310</td>
<td>7,810</td>
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<tr>
<td>Index of employment</td>
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<td>104</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>116</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Statistical Register, Part V, Production, 1923-38.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average no. of hands</td>
<td>4,291</td>
<td>3,295</td>
<td>2,391</td>
<td>2,645</td>
<td>2,942</td>
<td>3,115</td>
<td>3,191</td>
<td>3,561</td>
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<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1926-27=100)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average yearly</td>
<td>£128.8</td>
<td>£130.7</td>
<td>£120.4</td>
<td>£101.1</td>
<td>£97.2</td>
<td>£95.4</td>
<td>£99.2</td>
<td>£94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wage per employee</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1926-27=100)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boots and Shoes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave. hands</td>
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<td>625</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>575</td>
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<td>Indices</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. Wage</td>
<td>£169.2</td>
<td>£164.6</td>
<td>£157.7</td>
<td>£139.0</td>
<td>£129.0</td>
<td>£129.5</td>
<td>£115.9</td>
<td>£115.5</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fertilizers (chemical)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. hands</td>
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<td>645</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>507</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave. Wage</td>
<td>£231.2</td>
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<td>£244.8</td>
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<td>Indices</td>
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<td>95</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jam, Pickles and Sauces</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave. hands</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>470</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave. Wage</td>
<td>£176.8</td>
<td>£173.9</td>
<td>£162.4</td>
<td>£138.1</td>
<td>£133.6</td>
<td>£139.4</td>
<td>£137.0</td>
<td>£140.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agricultural Implements</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. hands</td>
<td>1,465</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. Wage</td>
<td>£207.5</td>
<td>£226.6</td>
<td>£194.7</td>
<td>£153.6</td>
<td>£150.1</td>
<td>£135.3</td>
<td>£148.6</td>
<td>£162.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

.../Cont'd.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furniture and Cabinet-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. hands</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. Wage</td>
<td>£198.0</td>
<td>£198.4</td>
<td>£161.0</td>
<td>£154.6</td>
<td>£147.1</td>
<td>£151.8</td>
<td>£157.7</td>
<td>£165.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ment in the food manufacturing industry was somewhat higher than in others. The Employers' Returns indicate that less than 30% were out of work in this industry.

The third major area of industrial employment in South Australia was provided by the newly developed motor body building industry. This industry, which was only established in the early 'twenties, had by 1926 grown to the point where it directly employed four and a half thousand workers. Many other workers were employed in ancillary industries. Some idea of the impact of the Depression on these industries can be gained by looking at the numbers of motor bodies produced by Holden's over the period. This company, which was producing at the rate of over 50,000 bodies a year in 1926-27, produced only 3,245 bodies in 1931-32.

**TABLE 2.7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1926-7</th>
<th>1927-8</th>
<th>1928-9</th>
<th>1929-30</th>
<th>1930-31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bodies produced</td>
<td>53,737</td>
<td>38,450</td>
<td>38,818</td>
<td>21,821</td>
<td>4,821</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1931-32</th>
<th>1932-33</th>
<th>1933-34</th>
<th>1934-35</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bodies produced</td>
<td>3,245</td>
<td>8,222</td>
<td>14,133</td>
<td>24,329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Census of 1933 indicated that there were 24.2% men unemployed within this industry but given the information presented in

Table 2.7 this estimate is obviously unrealistic. Two points seem relevant. Firstly, by 1933 when the Census was taken, production had picked up considerably from what it had been in 1930-32. But more importantly, there were a large number of unskilled assembly line operators employed in this industry and many of these would probably not have specifically referred to the motor body building industry in describing their occupation on the Census return. A more realistic estimate is provided by the Employers' Returns which are shown in Table 2.8. According to this source, only 17% of the total number of persons employed in this industry in 1926-27 were still employed by 1931-32.

**TABLE 2.8**

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME IN MOTOR BODY BUILDING & ASSOCIATED TRADES - SOUTH AUSTRALIA, 1926-27 TO 1935-36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1926-7</th>
<th>1929-30</th>
<th>1930-1</th>
<th>1931-2</th>
<th>1932-3</th>
<th>1933-4</th>
<th>1934-5</th>
<th>1935-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands Employed</td>
<td>4,592</td>
<td>2,982</td>
<td>1,022</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>3,328</td>
<td>5,223</td>
<td>6,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices (1926-7=100)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Yearly Wage per Employee</td>
<td>£209.1</td>
<td>£206.1</td>
<td>£189.5</td>
<td>£175.9</td>
<td>£187.7</td>
<td>£176.6</td>
<td>£195.0</td>
<td>£188.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indices (1926-7=100)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Statistical Register, Part V, Production, 1927-36.

**Skilled and Unskilled Unemployment**

The likelihood of an unskilled worker becoming unemployed during the Depression was considerably higher than for the average skilled worker outside of the building industry. According to the
1933 Census, 9,971 men or 68.3% of the 14,626 men who described their normal occupation as "unskilled labourer" were at that time unemployed in South Australia. These alone represent just under one-third of the total number of unemployed in the State. As large as this sector of the unemployed was, it certainly ought not to be deduced that the impact of the Depression was not also extensive among skilled workers. Within industrial societies, normal economic fluctuations and cycles in employment are, in the main, confined to the unskilled sector of the work force. This was so in Australia. Unemployment through lack of work amongst the primarily skilled workers belonging to the A.E.U. rose above 3% only twice for brief periods during the period 1907-27. The average unemployment rate among A.E.U. workers during the period 1919-27 was 2.7% compared with an average of 7.8% among all metal unions (including mostly unskilled workers). What is particularly notable about the Depression is that over two-thirds of the huge number unemployed at the time of the 1933 Census were drawn from the skilled and semi-skilled, white-collar and professional sectors of the work force. In the Adelaide metropolitan area, A.E.U. membership fell from 1,322 in June, 1928, to 837 in June, 1933. This represents a decline in membership in the predominantly skilled union of almost 37% and indicates that even in a skilled

10. Excluding people engaged in the primary industries. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
### TABLE 2.9

**Occupations of Persons Registered at Government Labour Exchange - Adelaide, October, 1938**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>5,352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Painters</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Drivers</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters &amp; Joiners</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Machinists</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fitters</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheetmetal Workers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmiths</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welders</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimmers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carriage builders</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><em>6,405</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

occupation which had previously maintained a very high degree of job security, unemployment was widespread.

Nevertheless, a very great majority of those who remained unemployed in the later thirties were unskilled workers. When employment opportunities began to open up again from 1933 onwards, the demand was firstly for skilled tradesmen and then to a lesser extent for semi-skilled workers. Over 80% of persons registered at the State Labour Exchange in October, 1938, were classified as labourers. Table 2.9 shows that by then few tradesmen were still without work. A man without a trade, on the other hand, remained highly vulnerable to unemployment. Consequently, the worst hardships of long-term unemployment were inflicted primarily upon the unskilled sector of the working class.

**Unemployment amongst Workers in Service Industries**

Employment in the blue-collar service industries had expanded rapidly during the twenties. Huge amounts of government capital was spent on extending and improving the railways. Similarly, the coming of the motor vehicle led to the expansion of road transport as a source of employment. The sudden increase in the level of secondary industry also resulted in a considerable expansion of the work force in the power industries.

The Depression very quickly put many of these men out of work. In June, 1933, the Census indicated that 41.2% of persons

---


formally employed in carrying were unemployed. Railway employees were subjected to the highest rate of retrenchment in the State Public Service. The Census of 1933 also showed that approximately 9.0% of all workers normally employed by the Railways were out of work. This figure is certainly a very serious understatement of the real numbers. However, The Annual Reports of the South Australian Railway Commissioner show that in 1925-26 almost 14,000 men were employed in the Railways. By 1931-32 the number in employment had been reduced to less that 7,000. Since it was fairly unlikely that many of those dismissed would have found alternative employment, the true unemployment rate for railway workers was probably closer to 50%. Seamen seemed to be somewhat less affected by the Depression. One seaman interviewed said that a sailor could usually get aboard a ship without too much trouble. Even so, close to 20% were out of work in June, 1933. Wharf labourers often found it extremely difficult to regain their employment following the disturbances at the Port in 1928 and in 1933 over one-third were unemployed. Table 2.10 shows the 1933 Census figures for unemployment in these occupations.

17. Ibid.
19. The reason why this high figure was not shown in the Census was probably that unemployed railway workers tended to identify themselves by their specific skills (e.g. toolmakers) rather than as railway employees.
20. Interview with Mr. A.M. Shaw.
TABLE 2.10

Unemployment among Transport Workers South Australia (Males)
June, 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wage-earners</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>% Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Railways</td>
<td>6,180</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tramways</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Garages</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying</td>
<td>1,998</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost &amp; O/seas Shipping</td>
<td>2,358</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loading Vessels</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,584</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,824</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White-collar Unemployment

There is no doubt that the Depression had a very severe, sometimes traumatic, impact on a great many white-collar workers. For the white-collar employee, however, particularly one who held a government position, the nature of the impact of the Depression was more likely to take the form of a certain decrease in his income together with considerable psychological insecurity and pressure in his job situation rather than unemployment itself.

Employees in clerical positions together with shop employees were the most affected groups in the "white-collar" sector of the work force. Table 2.11 shows the figures returned by the 1933 Census for clerical workers. According to these figures it appears that 18% of males and 10.3% of females in clerical occupations were without work in June, 1933. The very small numbers of unemployed under "Banking" and "General Government Administrative" and the large numbers listed under "Clerk" are explained by a tendency for unemployed persons not to be specific about their previous occupation. Clerical workers employed in factories generally were very much more likely to face retrenchment than those in other areas of clerical employment. The numbers of clerical and accountancy workers who were employed in South Australian factories declined from 1,765 males and 859 females in 1926-27 to 1,123 males and 698 females. This represents a decline in numbers employed over the period of 37% for males and 19% for females. The corresponding percentage decline in the employment of skilled and unskilled workers in South Australian factories over the same period was 50% for males and 34% for females. Therefore, for male clerical workers employed in South Australian

factories, the likelihood of becoming unemployed was only a little
less than for manual workers.

| TABLE 2.11 |
| Unemployment among Clerical Workers - South Australia, June 1933 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage &amp; Salary Earners</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>% Unemployed</td>
<td>Wage &amp; Salary Earners</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>% Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>1,436</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks (industry undefined)</td>
<td>1,456</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. Govt. administrative</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5,184</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>1,144</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In Table 2.12 the 1933 Census returns of the numbers
unemployed in the Retail trade are shown. These figures suggest that
the very large number of people who were employed in this area were
generally less affected by unemployment than most other employees.
Of the 30,000 persons employed in retailing, approximately 18% of
males and 9% of females were out of work in June, 1933.

Although the Census does not indicate any significant
difference in the extent of unemployment within the various types
of shops, the annual government statistical returns for shop
employment indicate that people employed in the small suburban
corner stores were far more vulnerable to unemployment than those
in the large city stores. For example, persons employed in
confectionaries, fruit and vegetable stores, and typical "corner"
TABLE 2.12

Unemployment in Retail Industry in South Australia, June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage &amp; Salary Earners</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>2,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>2,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butchers</td>
<td>1,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>1,271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL IN COMMERCE</td>
<td>20,281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


shops, decreased from 477 to 256 between 1928 and 1931.22 On the other hand, figures available for the large city retail stores show a far smaller decline especially in the case of the largest of these. John Martin's who employed 1,118 persons in 1929 had decreased their numbers by only 7 by 1931. Myers had actually increased the number of their employees by 8%.23 Short-time was in practice in virtually all the large retail shops although the amount of time lost was less than the average elsewhere.24 The overall impact of the Depression on shop employees from 1925-35 can be gauged from the annual Shops' Reports which are summarised in Table 2.13. The increase shown in the number of shops is largely explained by inclusion of hawkers' "businessess" as shops. The


24. Ibid., See Chapter 1.
number of hawkers increased from 294 to 681 between 1929 and 1930.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Shops</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>6,204</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,648</td>
<td>5,218</td>
<td>20,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>6,353</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,637</td>
<td>5,641</td>
<td>20,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>7,427</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,310</td>
<td>5,879</td>
<td>22,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>6,998</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,558</td>
<td>5,521</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>7,485</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,611</td>
<td>5,880</td>
<td>22,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>7,967</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>5,123</td>
<td>21,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>8,283</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,745</td>
<td>4,803</td>
<td>21,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>8,269</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,952</td>
<td>4,869</td>
<td>22,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>8,411</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,021</td>
<td>5,374</td>
<td>22,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>8,294</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,614</td>
<td>5,646</td>
<td>23,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>8,324</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,801</td>
<td>5,948</td>
<td>23,385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Parliamentary Papers, No. 46, 1925-35.

Retrenchments were made in many sections of the State and Commonwealth Public Services. The Public Service Commissioner of South Australia in 1931 said that there had been dismissals in the Public Service generally.25 The actual extent of these dismissals were nowhere as great as were made elsewhere. The 1,810 persons in permanent employment with the State Public Service in 1926 had been reduced to 1,686 by 1931.26 This represented a

25. L.C. Hunkin in evidence given to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts on "The Finances of South Australia as affected by Federation", S.A.P.P., No. 73, 1931.

reduction of 7% in staff. These retrenchments were made firstly by enforcing early retirement and severely restricting new recruiting. Secondly, where actual dismissal was decided upon, the persons dismissed were those whose work was not satisfactory. An important side effect of this policy of course, was to give to anyone in any position of authority in the Public Service a great measure of power over subordinates. Short-time was extensively in practice in the Public Service.

Unemployment was not unknown amongst the professions although the majority of professional persons were either employers or self-employed so that any affect that the Depression had would not have been likely to result in unemployment. Table 2.14 showing the income of males working in six professions suggests that the Depression had a considerable impact on a certain number within each profession. Least affected were doctors in private practice. About 90% of such people earned in excess of double the basic wage during 1932-33. Approximately half of all lawyers and dentists were in a similar position although considerable numbers of each earned less than the basic wage. Approximately 36% of all Ministers of Religion earned in excess of £260 and about the same number earned less than the basic wage. Civil engineers, surveyors and architects all were quite severely affected by the extensive cut in government spending on public works and the general decline of the building industry. Table 2.14 shows that in South Australia there were a small number of persons from each of these occupations (with the exception of ministers of religion) who were actually forced to

27. S.A.P.P., No. 73, 1931.
### TABLE 2.14
Income of Professional Males in Australia, June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No income</th>
<th>Under £52</th>
<th>£52-£103</th>
<th>£104-£155</th>
<th>£156-£207</th>
<th>£208-£259</th>
<th>£260 &amp; over</th>
<th>Not stated</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers in pub. practice</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>3,905</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers of Religion</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>795</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>1,041</td>
<td>2,711</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors in priv. practice</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3,523</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists in priv. practice</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>2,095</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineers &amp; Surveyors</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australia, Census, 1933.

### TABLE 2.15
Number of Professional Males in South Australia, June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Persons</th>
<th>Number Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers of Religion</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineers &amp; Surveyors</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

abandon the practice of their profession.

Age and Unemployment

One of the important factors determining a man's likelihood of becoming unemployed was his age. Unemployment was very much more likely to be forced upon an older worker than a younger adult. At the other extreme, youths under 21 years were also extremely susceptible to unemployment. The age-group least subject to unemployment was 30-45 years. Workers in this age-group were more attractive to employers firstly because they were at the peak of their skill and fitness and secondly because family responsibilities provided them with high motivation for working hard without complaint.

The Census of 1933 indicated that not only did those over 50 years of age form a disproportionate percentage of the unemployed in general but that they were even more strongly represented amongst those who had been unemployed for over four years.28 While those over 50 represented 16.3% of men who had been unemployed for less than one year, they constituted almost one-quarter of those unemployed over four years. Conversely, those under thirty-five constituted 60% of those unemployed under one year but only 45% of those out of work for four years or more. Table 2.16 shows the number of men in each age group according to the length of time they had been out of work in June, 1933.

A survey conducted by the Unemployment Relief Council in 1937 of the ages of men still receiving rations at that time similarly found that persons over 50 years of age were significantly

28. See Table 2.16.
## TABLE 2.16

Unemployed Males according to Duration of Unemployment in Age Groups - South Australia, June 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Under 1 Year</th>
<th>1-2 Years</th>
<th>2-3 Years</th>
<th>3-4 Years</th>
<th>4 Years &amp; Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 20</td>
<td>1,590 15.3%</td>
<td>466 14.6%</td>
<td>501 9.2%</td>
<td>388 4.8%</td>
<td>187 2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>2,013 19.3%</td>
<td>651 20.4%</td>
<td>1,061 19.4%</td>
<td>1,402 17.4%</td>
<td>1,059 13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>1,453 14.0%</td>
<td>383 12.0%</td>
<td>739 13.5%</td>
<td>1,195 14.8%</td>
<td>1,314 17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>1,125 10.8%</td>
<td>319 10.0%</td>
<td>626 11.5%</td>
<td>949 11.7%</td>
<td>846 11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>869  8.3%</td>
<td>281  8.8%</td>
<td>521  9.5%</td>
<td>771  9.6%</td>
<td>753  9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>841  8.1%</td>
<td>261  8.2%</td>
<td>485  8.9%</td>
<td>819 10.1%</td>
<td>750  9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>814  7.8%</td>
<td>246  7.7%</td>
<td>478  8.7%</td>
<td>867 10.7%</td>
<td>824 10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>693  6.7%</td>
<td>218  6.8%</td>
<td>404  7.4%</td>
<td>687  8.5%</td>
<td>688  9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>519  5.0%</td>
<td>204  6.4%</td>
<td>326  6.0%</td>
<td>510  6.3%</td>
<td>624  8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>407  3.9%</td>
<td>145  4.5%</td>
<td>284  5.2%</td>
<td>431  5.3%</td>
<td>545  7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 64</td>
<td>74  0.7%</td>
<td>21  0.7%</td>
<td>31  0.6%</td>
<td>38  0.5%</td>
<td>35  0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** | **10,415 100.0%** | **3,198 100.0%** | **5,469 100.0%** | **8,073 100.0%** | **7,648 100.0%**

Source: **Australia, Census, 1933, Vol. 2, p. 1784-5.**
more heavily represented amongst the long unemployed than in the work force generally. Table 2.17 compares the numbers in each age group in the work force generally and the numbers who were unemployed in 1933 with the numbers shown still to be receiving rations in 1937. Those aged 50 and above clearly were more susceptible to unemployment and, once unemployed, found it more difficult to regain work.

**TABLE 2.17**

Male Wage and Salary Earners, Unemployed Men and Men on Rations in Age Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Wage and Salary Earners 1933</th>
<th>Unemployed in 1933</th>
<th>Receiving Rations in 1937</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number % of Total</td>
<td>Number % of Total</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Under 20</strong></td>
<td>19,263 14.1</td>
<td>4,297 11.4</td>
<td>13-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>22,143 16.2</td>
<td>6,678 17.7</td>
<td>22-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>18,412 13.5</td>
<td>5,361 14.2</td>
<td>26-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>15,434 11.3</td>
<td>4,061 10.7</td>
<td>31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>13,086 9.6</td>
<td>3,315 8.8</td>
<td>41-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>11,875 8.7</td>
<td>3,385 9.0</td>
<td>46-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>9,244 6.7</td>
<td>2,828 7.5</td>
<td>51-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>6,759 4.9</td>
<td>2,294 6.1</td>
<td>56-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>5,079 3.7</td>
<td>1,932 5.1</td>
<td>61-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>136,757 100.0</td>
<td>37,816 100.0</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In a study of unemployment among youths in Australia, G.R. Giles estimated that in 1931 approximately 60% of boys and girls
between the ages of 16-21 in South Australia were unemployed.\textsuperscript{29} Figures returned by the 1933 Census for those under 20 years appear to contradict Giles' estimate but, as has been pointed out before, the Census was seriously inadequate in estimating the level of unemployment in that age-group.\textsuperscript{30} The investigation of the ages of persons receiving relief in 1937, on the other hand, does indicate that those under 20 years were indeed very much more likely to be out of work than all but the oldest of workers. The explanation for the higher rate of unemployment among those under 20 years of age was simply that youths leaving school were almost automatically unemployed since very few jobs openings existed. Unemployment for older workers resulted usually from losing a job that they held. For a young person leaving school unemployment was his normal position unless he was fortunate enough to find a job. There existed the unusual situation, therefore, of employers often preferring youths under 20 years, since their wages were lower, but of unemployment still being higher amongst this group than amongst older workers.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Sex and Unemployment}

There were 4,681 females unemployed in Adelaide according to the Census of June, 1933.\textsuperscript{32} The percentage of unemployment

\begin{flushleft}

30. See Chapter 1 above.

31. Further details concerning the situation of unemployed youths are given in Chapter 8.

\end{flushleft}
among female wage and salary earners was 15.4% which suggests that the unemployment level among female workers was just under half that of male workers. However, these figures cannot be regarded as reliable. As a complete survey of female unemployment the Census was inadequate in that it did not include those women who were without work but who would have willingly accepted it if it was available. Throughout the twenties the percentage of married women entering the work force had been slowly rising. In addition, many women who would not have normally considered working found themselves in economic circumstances during the Depression where they would have gladly taken employment. Yet a married woman who was unable to find work was unlikely to describe herself as unemployed even if her family's financial security depended upon it. Her role in society, and her own perception of her role, was primarily as a housewife. Consequently, if she could not find work she was not regarded as unemployed in the Census survey, nor did she regard herself so. In the 1933 Census only 229 married women in South Australia described themselves as unemployed in spite of the fact that there were 116,798 married women in the state of which only 2,519 were in employment.  

In 1939 the Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works estimated that at least 10,000 more women in South Australia would have accepted employment if it were available. The Committee also presented the view in its report that employment for women in South Australia was at a very low level even in comparison with the

33. Ibid.

other States. This opinion is supported by the 1933 Census which showed that in the Adelaide metropolitan area only 18.3% of females were classified as wage and salary earners whereas the average for metropolitan areas throughout Australia was 20.6%. The corresponding figure for Melbourne was 23% and for Sydney 20%. Therefore, while the level of unemployment shown amongst women in South Australia seemed fairly consistent with the other States, the number of jobs offering for women was considerably lower in Adelaide. If the number of positions available per thousand of the female population in Adelaide had been equal to the average for Australia, over 3,300 more women could have been employed.

**Summary**

While there were people from virtually every section of society on the dole, the very great majority of the unemployed belonged to the working class. Of these, the largest single group were unskilled labourers. However, large numbers of skilled and unskilled workers were out of work and these, in fact, formed the majority of the unemployed in the early years of the Depression. In Adelaide the building industry was the worst affected by unemployment, although all secondary industries were affected severely. Amongst white collar workers unemployment was more selective but in the early period of the Depression almost one in five were out of work. Professional people were not as a group greatly affected by unemployment although small numbers of individuals from particular professions, especially those associated with the building industry, were unemployed. While age was a less important determinant of a person's likelihood of becoming unemployed than occupation, those under 20 years and over 50 years were particularly vulnerable to unemployment.
CHAPTER 3
MEN WITHOUT WORK
In various subtle ways, the routines of organised work have come to dominate the physical, social and psychological life of the individual person in twentieth century industrialised societies. For those who became unemployed during the Depression the effect of suddenly having this dominating influence removed from their lives was in most cases quite traumatic. It was a major challenge to their emotional and psychological well-being as well as to their previous standard of living.¹ The person who had been employed prior to the Depression and was then put out of work was forced to examine and usually dramatically re-arrange the order of his everyday life. Of course, the effect of losing work was not the same for each individual and several different factors were important in influencing the response of the person affected by unemployment.

A very important influence upon the initial effect of unemployment on the worker was the degree of abruptness with which he found that he was one of "the unemployed". Those who drifted into long term unemployment by way of a series of stages were far less likely to experience acute emotional stress than those who were confronted with the reality of being unemployed almost overnight. The period of adjustment that was involved was crucial in preparing the person for his new role and difficulties. To some extent this depended on the time when the person was first laid off. A number of the people interviewed were first put out of work in the middle or late twenties. The twenties had been a period of very unstable employment for a large portion of the workforce. One

¹ Details of the impact of unemployment on the material standard of living of people are given in Chapters 5-7.
person on returning from the War had started his own business in an industry that in the twenties underwent a major structural change. The transport industry suddenly became mechanised and from that point until the end of the twenties he found himself without regular employment. In an interview he recalled the various temporary jobs that he found during those years:

What job did you have when you came back from the War?

I took on carrying from Victor Harbour to Adelaide. At that time the bitumen only went as far as Edwardstown. I had a horse team on the road. I'd spent all my war money getting this team together. Then they put the bitumen through and as soon as they did that, motor lorries started and I packed up overnight. I sold out for practically nothing. Then I got a job with the Port Corporation. From then on you were scratching and saving. I got a bit of work wheat carrying, timber carrying, timber stacking, salt carrying, concrete mixing. When the electricity power house was being built at Osborne I was mixing concrete...[but this] was only temporary. It was seasonal work right through the twenties.

Significantly, a striking feature of the behaviour during the Depression of this person who had time to adjust to unemployment was the skilful and resourceful manner in which he adapted to the situation. The experience of other informants confirmed this.

Another person who had been employed since leaving school was retrenched from Elder Smiths in 1929. He immediately managed to find another job, which lasted only a few weeks, selling vacuum cleaners. After that it was a series of whatever jobs he could

2. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
3. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
pick up until he was put on at Holden's Motor Body Builders where his father was employed. At Holden's he was immediately put onto short-time. From having to stand down one week in three, the time soon came when he was idle more than he was working and had to call in to the factory each Monday to see if they wanted him. Gradually, work came less and less frequently until he stopped turning up at the factory gates and accepted the fact that he was unemployed.

At the beginning of the Depression, however, the majority of employees had experienced a long period of continuous employment. For many this was suddenly broken by retrenchment and a very long period without regular work of any sort followed. The normal lives of these people had not prepared them in any way for the series of shocks that unemployment brought. For all workers the effect of losing employment depended in large part on the meaning which work provided to their lives in normal times.

Work provided very different experiences and meanings for different persons. For the majority of people who became unemployed, work above all was the sole source of their economic security. Even those working people who existed at the bottom of the income scale possessed a form of security. To be sure of a regular income each week at least allowed the family to predict with some certainty the standard of living that they could aspire to. It provided a feeling of confidence that their future was secure and predictable. Of course, the economic security achieved by any working person was only relative since few were economically

self-sufficient and all were encouraged to aspire to a standard of living beyond their existing income. However, loss of employment, by taking away the little economic security that was experienced by the unskilled worker, exacerbated whatever feelings of insecurity already existed. Amongst better paid workers, and in particular amongst white-collar workers, the psychological impact of loss of employment was in many cases greater still since their aspirations for a higher living standard tended to give them a quite obsessive concern about economic security. Even middle-class persons who were neither unemployed nor underemployed during the Depression reduced their expenditure drastically and continued to be ultra-careful with money years after the Depression had passed.

Associated with the early stages of unemployment, therefore, was often an emotional state of acute anxiety. Anxiety invariably seemed to trap people into a vicious circle. During this time the unemployed person was generally actively engaged in the search for work but the more anxious the person was, the more disappointed he became when unable to find work. One person recalled that he developed insomnia as a result of anxiety. Night after night he would leave his wife asleep and go for long walks.

5. See for example, Abram Kardiner, "The role of economic security in the adaption of the individual", *The Family*, 17, October, 1936, pp. 187-97.

6. One person now earning a "five figure income" stated that he still turns off the lights in his house after others have left them on. He felt very strongly that he still hadn't acquired enough money yet to feel secure. Mr. J.D. Barrett in a telephone interview. This feeling was commonly expressed by those from a "middle class" background in particular.

7. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
At one time he made friends with the local policemen on the beat and would spend the night doing the rounds with them.

Worry and anxiety were characteristic responses even of those who had not been well off prior to the Depression. The following informant described the worries and fears which kept him awake at night while searching desperately for work during the day:

You were busy all the time because you would go out looking for work. But you knew you weren't going to get any because fellows were being put off. My father lived out at Colonel Light Gardens and he said: "Do you want a day's work digging a garden? Eight bob for the day". I had ridden my bike from Largs Bay to Colonel Light Gardens to dig up a garden - to dig up sour sobs for eight bob a day ... I rode about thirty miles.

Did you ever get depressed during these years?

You were depressed all the time because you knew that your wife was trying to get a meal on nothing and that she was depending on you to bring something home to cook or to eat. Your one thought was to get tucker for your kids and see that they went to bed with a full belly or that they got up with a full belly in the morning.

Did you worry much?

Yes. You would worry all the time. Well, how can I explain it? You would go to bed at night and think. I wonder what tomorrow is going to bring forth? That would go on from day to day. You were depressed yourself. The biggest depression was in yourself. Everyone was the same.8

The enthusiasm or desperation, with which the unemployed initially pursued employment can be illustrated by the story of

8. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
three men who on reading a report that work was available at Port
Victoria, immediately set out on the 130 mile trip from Adelaide
on their bicycles. Unfortunately, the report, which had been
printed in the *Advertiser*, proved to be unfounded and their cycling
was in vain.9 Such desperate endeavours in the search for work
became the subjects of much of the Depression's humour. One story
that apparently circulated widely was related by one informant:

> A chap that was walking down the wharves (at Port
Adelaide), saw them pull a body out of the river. He recognised who it was. He raced down to the
freezers (meat storage sheds) and said: "I want
a job". They said, "there is a no vacancy". "But I've
just seen a bloke pulled out of the river". "Yes",
they said, "but the bloke that saw him fall in got
his job".10

This story in slightly different form was related in
interviews by two different persons.11 However, one of these then
went on to tell the following true story about his father:

> One morning he was reading the paper - having his
breakfast. Suddenly, he swallowed his tea. My
mother said, "what's wrong?" He said, "poor old
Baldy is dead" - and he began to get ready to go
out. My mother said, "they won't expect anyone
this time of the morning". Father said, "I'm not
going to see his wife, I'm out for his job". He
had been promised the next opening at the Pipe
Works. He was taking no chances. This was a
government job. The job couldn't be filled until
the chap resigned or died. He walked straight
into the dead man's shoes.12

10. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
11. The other story was related in an interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
12. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
Hundreds of men outside Adelaide Town Hall waiting to apply for a few day's employment by the City Council under the Federal government's unemployment relief scheme. Advertiser, 3 March 1931.
The newspapers regularly contained stories of hundreds of men turning up for a single job that had been advertised.\textsuperscript{13} Almost every person interviewed had at least one story of how they turned up at a job advertised in the paper and found hundreds of men in front of them.\textsuperscript{14}

For most employees, however, work also had an importance far beyond simply an economic one. There exists considerable sociological evidence showing that even if the financial necessity to work is removed, only a minority of workers would choose to give it up.\textsuperscript{15} In a study of the function and meaning of work amongst 400 workers, Morse and Weiss asked the question:

\begin{quote}
If by some chance you inherited enough money to live comfortably without working, do you think you would work anyway or not?
\end{quote}

80\% replied that they would keep working.\textsuperscript{16} These results have been re-affirmed in several other studies including an Australian survey conducted by Oeser and Hammond in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{17} Here again,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} For example, see the \textit{Advertiser}, 22 January, 1931.
\item \textsuperscript{14} In these cases most waited in vain since whenever a job became available it was almost invariably allocated through personal contact rather than through formal application. According to people interviewed, more often than not, available jobs went to an unemployed relative or friend of the person responsible for the appointment. Two persons told of how they found positions through their fathers. Another recalled widespread petty corruption on the waterfront where job would go to those who drank with the foreman.
\item \textsuperscript{16} N. Morse and R. Weiss, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 192.
\item \textsuperscript{17} O.A. Oeser and S.B. Hammond, \textit{Social Structure and Personality in a City}, London, 1954; p. 227.
\end{itemize}
only a small minority stated that they would deliberately choose a full-time leisured life. Therefore, in industrial society, work plays an important part in fulfilling certain social and psychological needs of the individual other than providing economic security. Consequently, being unemployed meant more than just being poor. One person had been unemployed for some time but still spent every day on the streets looking for work. One day when he had come upon a small sum of money his wife purchased a lottery ticket with which she won a prize of £500. One might reasonably have expected the couple's immediate problems to have been solved. Instead, the wife immediately spent a substantial part of the money on buying a car for her husband so that he could more efficiently look for work. Clearly, the problem as perceived by this couple was not simply their poverty but the husband's unemployment itself. Their problems could not be solved by money alone but only by his re-employment.18

Many studies have demonstrated that in industrial societies work very often has little real intrinsic meaning in the lives of workers.19 The modern worker has commonly been described as

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18. This story was related by the wife in a telephone interview with the writer. She has requested that her name not be used.

alienated not only from his work itself and the product of his labour, but, because of this, also from his society and above all from his own inner potentialities - his humanity. Genuine work satisfaction as defined in the Renaissance and Socialist ideals is limited under the capitalist mode of production to "minuscule groups of privileged professionals and intellectuals". Amongst the remainder of workers the level of satisfaction derived from the job itself has been shown to be limited.

Nevertheless, work is important to the individual for several reasons. In the first place, the single most important reason for working for working class people, apart from the dominant economic one, has been shown to be the order that it gives to their lives. In normal times in industrial society, work plays a very important part in the day-to-day organisation of a worker's life. For most people it is the work rhythm which provides the pattern around which their life revolves. It very largely determines for them when they eat, when they rest and how they fill in the hours of each day. In a very real sense, the demands of his work situation usually prevents the working men from ever having to take effective responsibility for organising the rhythms of his existence.

20. See A. Tilgher, Work, What it has meant to Men through the Ages, New York, 1930.
When the workingman became unemployed in the 1930's, he found that those rhythms that disciplined and ordered his life so predictably had suddenly disappeared. In the very first instance some seemed able to relax and even quite enjoy the change from work routine. Their attitude was often that they were merely in the process of changing jobs. For others the trauma of being retrenched was too great to allow any such relaxation. In either case the desperate search for work soon began once the seriousness of the employment situation was realised or the initial shock wore off. In many cases, this search for work involved "doing the rounds" of the local sources of employment. "Doing the rounds" could in fact provide the unemployed person with a full week's work in itself. At this stage, therefore, men were not generally unoccupied.

Because of its dominating role in people's lives, work is usually one of the main pillars of an individual's sense of identity.25 It is often primarily through work that the person establishes his relationship with society and hence his definition of himself. Freud placed great emphasis on the role of work in binding the individual to his surrounding environment:

... work has a greater effect than any other technique of living in binding the individual more closely to reality; in his work he is at least securely attached to a part of reality, the human community.26


Work is a very important element in the overall socialisation process for the individual. Without work, people often find it very difficult to tie in with society, to establish a sense of social identity and of meaning to their lives. Similarly, for some men prior to the Depression, work was an important source of self-esteem. This was particularly so in the case of professional, white-collar and skilled workers who had spent a number of years training for their employment. These men, even if they did not derive personal satisfaction from their activities at work, could still feel a sense of pride and achievement at having mastered their trade. However, work tended to mean less in these terms to blue-collar and particularly to unskilled workers. A significant observation made by many studies of the meanings of work was that purely economic reasons were the sole work-motivating factors amongst unskilled workers far more often than amongst white-collar workers and skilled workers.

However, even without job fulfilment or status, regular employment provided the ordinary worker with the satisfaction that he was supporting his family by his own personal activity.

29. Ibid.
importance of the male's role as breadwinner to his own self-esteem was considerably greater in the 1930's than in the post-war years when increasingly married women became absorbed into the workforce and males became conditioned to sharing their previously almost exclusive role of breadwinner. Unemployment almost invariably had a profound effect on personal relationships within the family. The nature of this effect does not seem to have been consistent over all those affected, however. Many people interviewed said they felt that unemployment had little effect on, or even strengthened, their family's cohesion. One person told of an incident which illustrates how the feeling of protectiveness of parents to their children helped to keep the parents going during the Depression years:

My daughter was saying recently, every Sunday (when she was a child) she got up and there was always a little parcel - a little paper bag with a few lollies, a couple of cherries or a couple of apricots and a plum. They always said, "I wonder what we are going to get tomorrow morning for breakfast". It was like Father Christmas was coming to give this little parcel.

Every week? Where did you get these things from?

Marking at the rifle range we would get eight shillings and we would go to the market.

Why did you make those little parcels for your children?

To give them a little surprise. They used to be up every Sunday bright and early to see what their little surprise was going to be. They never asked and it never came into their heads where it came from. It was just like some little angel had come on Saturday night and left a little parcel for them.31

31. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
On the other hand, others were very definite that unemployment adversely affected relationships within the family:

Do you think the relationship between your parents was altered?

Yes, there was no doubt about it. There was always a constant feeling that Mum had against Dad in some way ... There was friction and moments of truth I think that came out at times.

Do you think your mother resented your Dad being out of work?

Yes, I think so.

What about the effect of the Depression on her? Do you think it affected her in the same way?

Yes, I think so because she was quite a proud woman in many ways, although she was brought up in a working family. She worked in the mills in England. I think she did resent the fact that she wasn't able to put on a front - wasn't able to mingle with the other people. 32

Studies in Britain, Europe and the United States similarly found that unemployment often brought increased tension into the home. 33 Elderton reported that quarrels became more frequent or

32. Interview with Mr. H. Fearn.

the father would just sit around morose and silent. The mother tended to become irritable from strain and unreasonable in her demands on the children. In certain cases, she began to doubt whether the husband was genuinely seeking work. As a result the father and older children often stayed away from home as much as possible. The father tended to become indifferent to his children and stopped playing with them.34

There seems to have been a fairly high incidence of man and wife living apart during the Depression. The 1933 Census showed that in South Australia there were over 12,000 or nearly 10.2% of all husbands and wives whose spouses were not living with them at the time of the survey.35 The same phenomenon has been commented upon by other studies also.36 Undoubtedly, in the case of South Australia, this is partly to be explained by the very large numbers of married men who went to the country in search of work. "Going to the country" could very well have been in some cases a rationalisation of the husband's need to get away from a family situation which was becoming increasingly tense and in which he was made to feel increasingly useless. In the home the man faced humiliation, degradation and loss of status. His roles as husband and father disintegrated. Being without work he was unable to fulfil his self-perceived role as breadwinner to the family. For many men, unemployment brought a feeling of uselessness and emasculation and these feelings were aggravated when the husband,

having nothing to occupy him, spent all day around the home. In such instances, his idleness was most blatantly obvious to his family. Overall, however, the most crucial factor in determining not only the extent of the impact of unemployment on the family but also the extent to which the family exerted a cushioning influence on the other effects of unemployment was the strength of the family structure prior to the Depression. In a major study of the unemployed family the sociologist Mirra Komarovsky concluded that "unemployment does not so much change the sentiments of the wife towards the husband, as it makes explicit the unsatisfactory sentiments that already existed prior to the Depression".37

In contrast, the wives of unemployed men generally appear to have coped with their situation considerably better than did their husbands. Within the family, unemployment tended to have quite different effects on husbands than on wives. The importance of the role of the woman in the home generally increased greatly during the Depression. Her skills as a wife, mother and housekeeper became indispensible in the unemployed family's struggle for survival. Elderton found that although food was scarce mothers boasted of their ability to feed their families on almost unbelievably small sums each week.38 In a strong contrast to the husband, the wife tended to feel that she was more needed by her

37. M. Komarovsky, Op. cit., p. 54. In another study, Angell reported that the crucial factors in determining the role and survival of the family when subjected to the strain of unemployment were the previous levels of integration and adaptability of these families. Furthermore, amongst those families which were well integrated and adaptable Angell found an increase in family unity and a strengthening of the family structure following unemployment. R.C. Angell, The Family Encounters the Depression, New York, 1936, pp. 260-3.

family. In several instances people interviewed commented on the important role that the wife or mother played in carrying the family through the difficult years of unemployment. In one interview with a husband and wife it was the woman who recalled the role played by her husband's mother within his family:

I can remember his mother telling me ... There was four of them - two boys and the father all out of work at the same time. The mother washed, did washing, and all the bones that came into the house through their bits of meat and such she'd sell that again to keep the men (especially the father) in tobacco - that type of thing ... She was a different type of person altogether to his father. She was sort of a gay person in her way. She liked fun. But his father was more withdrawn within himself. But she was a woman who would do anything to get a few shillings. She used to make all these pies and pasties [to sell] ... and that's how she helped to keep things going when they were all out of work.39

Another woman who came into very close contact with a large number of unemployed people through her employment in a large grocery chain-store which exchanged ration tickets for food made a similar comment about the different impact of men and women:

I think the men showed more ... Oh they looked more dejected. Their walk didn't have any spring in it. They were walking slouched as though, "what the hell", you know the sort of thing. The women never actually got to that stage. But I've though such a lot about it, even overnight [before this interview] ... they were walking slower and their faces were tight which now I know must have been tension - taut with nervous tension you know. I suppose wondering, you know, how much longer this was going to go on. Could they make ends meet? Could they struggle through even for a week or a day perhaps? But the men seemed to say - I don't know whether that's the right word to use. They looked more beaten than the women.40

39. Interview with Mr. C. Burgan.
40. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.
On the other hand, not all women coped so well with their husband’s unemployment. Several people interviewed gave examples of women close to them who experienced severe psychological stress. One person, whose family had been quite well off prior to the Depression, remembered that his mother was "crying more often than she was smiling". Another person’s wife experienced constant depression and neurotic symptoms:

In the Depression my wife became a nervous wreck. Her health was bad. She would go into Adelaide with a child in a pusher and all she had in her purse was three pence. That's all she had!

Later, he continued:

My wife would go to the Mile End shopping centre but she didn't have any money. We had money when we first got out of work, but we lived off that. We even sent off for a catalogue for furniture. We didn't realise that a Depression was coming. We were optimistic. People who haven't experienced this sort of thing cannot realise that it affects a woman more than a man, although it affects a man too, because he is worried about his wife.

Another person pointed out that while women generally may not have experienced a sense of role disintegration they were still subjected to worries and anxieties. One important anxiety was the continual fear of pregnancy when an addition to the family could not be afforded:

We never ever went out. Our three children were born during the Depression. No pill in those days, and most women lived in dread of becoming pregnant as we did not want any more mouths to feed.

41. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
42. Interview with Mr. A. Morrison.
43. Mrs. M.E. Bradshaw in a letter to the author.
Unemployment had a marked effect upon sexual relationship within the family. There was a very sudden and severe falling off in the birth rate with the onset of the Depression. Between 1928 and 1934 the annual number of births in South Australia dropped by 30%. While a similar decline occurred in all states, by the mid thirties the annual birth-rate in South Australia had become the lowest in Australia. This reflects a very close statistical correlation between the rising unemployment figures and the falling birth-rate. Some families undoubtedly took deliberate steps to limit the possibility of having further children while unemployed. Branson and Heinemann commented on the prevalence of coitus interruptus amongst unskilled workers in Britain in the 1930's. But other studies indicate that the fall in the birth-rate was to some extent a side effect of a decline in sexual activity amongst the unemployed. Of the 38 families studied by Komarovsky, 22 couples admitted to a decrease in the frequency of their sexual relations.

The Depression, and unemployment in particular, also produced a significant decline in the number of people getting married. The number of marriages taking place in South Australia declined by one-third between 1926 and 1931. The initial effect


of unemployment was clearly to discourage people on the verge of marrying from doing so. As the months went by and the economic situation did not show any sign of improvement, however, it seems as though people fairly quickly gave up waiting, since the marriage-rate returned to normal after 1933.

The experience of failure in his attempts to find work slowly began to break down all self-confidence in the unemployed person. Constant rejection by employers compounded the damage to the individual's self-image and self-esteem caused by unemployment itself. One contemporary sociologist, observing the reaction of men to unemployment, compared their response to that of a child who suffered parental rejection. A recurring comment made by many persons interviewed was that one of the worst things about becoming unemployed was the sudden realisation that they were dispensible. Many said this with considerable bitterness. It came as a great shock for these people to realise that their employers neither needed nor wanted them and that no-one else valued them highly enough to employ them when the chips were down. One of the major factors in leading workers to feel prior to their retrenchment that "it couldn't happen to me" was the subconscious belief, re-inforced by the mass-media, that only the lazy and the shiftless were unemployed. To be suddenly numbered amongst those unemployed came as a great shock to the person's self-confidence.

Work is an important source and symbol of social status.\textsuperscript{49} It is significant that in the Melbourne study of work satisfaction, although only a small minority stated they would choose a full-time leisured life, about a half expressed the feeling that they would like to attempt some other work.\textsuperscript{50} Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld have suggested that it is society's emphasis on work as the primary determinant of a person's status and prestige which is the main factor leading to the depressing effects of unemployment.\textsuperscript{51} However, the loss of status as a result of unemployment during the Depression varied considerably between workers in different occupations. Loss of status was felt more acutely amongst white-collar and professional workers than amongst blue-collar workers, and amongst skilled workers more than amongst unskilled. Many informants commented that those from white-collar and professional backgrounds often quickly disintegrated psychologically under the strain imposed by unemployment. One example was an English marine engineer who took his own life. The informant who recalled the incident remembered the difficulty this person had found in accepting the loss of status he felt as a result of his unemployment:

You mentioned before in passing that you expect there must have been people who went under. Did you see any of those people?

\textsuperscript{49} See E.W. Bakke, \textit{The Unemployed Worker}, New Haven, 1940, pp. 5-6.
Yes. The English gentleman [mentioned earlier in the interview], he took his own life. He went completely under. And, as I say, he was a man with an international marine engineer's ... well educated. I think sometimes that the finer bred people can't, can't just take it. Just can't accept it.

Do you think it's because they had come down such a long way?

That, that's it. That was it. He couldn't accept the degrading of his status in life. 52

However, humiliation and loss of status were experienced to some extent by all the unemployed. A critical stage often occurred at the point where they were forced to apply for government relief, more commonly known by Adelaide's unemployed as the dole, the chips, or "our crumbs". 53 Although there were several particularly harsh regulations in the administration of the relief system which made conditions for many of the unemployed much more unpleasant than they needed to have been, the rations did succeed in keeping thousands of people alive who would otherwise certainly have starved. 54 What was not taken into account by the administrators, politicians and bureaucrats who devised this method of providing relief to the unemployed was the feeling of utter degradation and humiliation which generally accompanied the unemployed person's decision to apply for his "chips". To be forced

52. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.

53. One informant insisted that relief was always referred to as "the chips". Another, however, recalled that among his own group the common expression was always: "I'm going down to collect my crumbs".

54. See Chapter 5 below.
to live off the government's handout was to most people a very
great humiliation. This feeling, which never penetrated into the
official reports, parliamentary debates and newspaper items on
the subject, dominated the recollections of those interviewed.
Many persons recalled the humiliation and suffering they experi-
enced when first applying for relief. One informant reported
that it took him several attempts to enter the relief office for
the first time. He waited for hours until there was nobody he
knew inside.55 Another recalled walking past the relief entrance
when he saw a friend coming down the street. After he had doubled
back and entered the building he found, to their mutual embarrass-
ment, his friend already inside applying for relief.56

In 1930 W.K. Hancock wrote that "Australian democracy
has come to look upon the State as a vast public utility whose
duty it is to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest
number".57 Popular attitudes towards government welfare assistance,
in Adelaide at least, suggest that Hancock's view was mistaken.
Although public welfare measures had been introduced in Australia
in many cases before they appeared anywhere else in the world,
the experience of the Depression demonstrates that it is a mistake
to believe that they were accepted by the population at large as
a right and not a charity.

Such negative attitudes to welfare provisions existed
among, and perhaps derived from, the dominant social class. Govern-
ment assistance of any sort was seen as discouraging the virtues

55. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
56. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
of thrift and hard work. However, these attitudes were also widely held among the working class. One working class person recalled the attitude which he and others had acquired towards government welfare:

The way I was brought up, it wasn't the right thing to do to accept this sort of thing. It was something you looked down upon if you were on the pension or had to get something for nothing.58

The same person recalled an incident that occurred while he, a young boy, was walking home with his father after having collected their fortnightly ration tickets. As they were walking, the boy took out and un-folded the large pink paper tickets they had collected and began to examine them. The father immediately chastised the lad saying, "Put those away. Don't let people see". The father's pride never allowed him to become the slightest bit "brazen" or blase about the tickets. He always felt shame that he was receiving "charity".

While such attitudes were commonly held by lower-working class persons and caused considerable psychological distress when they were forced to apply for the rations, those from occupations with higher social status experienced even greater and more lasting distress at having to live from government assistance. One person from a middle-class and extremely "respectable" background admitted that he had been prepared to steal before he was able to submit to the final loss of self-dignity and independence which he associated with applying for the rations:

58. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
By 1929 I'd been out of work for nearly three years. I had got a few odd jobs and was getting a few bob here and a few bob there - enough money to buy a little bit of frozen mutton. In fact we both got mutton sickness, the wife and I. This is all we had to eat. I'd pinch a loaf of bread occasionally from the baker when he left his cart or a bunch of carrots from the greengrocer, all sorts of things. I had to, otherwise we wouldn't have lived. I didn't want to go onto the rations - it was a terrible feeling, and Dad being in the Public Service, a well-respected man in the city. I felt that I couldn't do it. Until one day, I was in town, and I met two friends of mine, Eric and Frank Baker, whose father was dead, and had left a bit of money. They were college boys with their college badges on. They were hard doers. I said, "what are you fellows doing in town", and they said, "we're going around to the club". I said, "the club? Where is the club"? They said, "the welfare". I said, "the welfare"! They said, "Don't you go? Oh, come round with us". So I thought, I'll go and see. If these chaps can get rations - their mother's got plenty of cash - why shouldn't I. So I went around and saw the ropes, what had to be done. I didn't go in that day, but I went home and talked to my wife. She didn't like the idea, but I thought if the Bakers can get it, I'm going. So I went in, and who should I come before but Herbert Taylor and he was asking all the personal questions - how old my wife was? when we were married? where do you live? what is your religion? - a lot of things that were personal and shouldn't really have been asked. But he was a quizzer. Then he said "are you any relation to Mr. T.H. Prince"? I said, "Yes, that is my father", and he said, "Oh, well you shouldn't be getting any rations". He knew my father. I said, "Listen Sir, my father didn't marry my wife, not my father, and furthermore, I've got brothers and sisters in my father's keeping". He said, "all right, well, the police will be around to see you". I went home and told my wife and she was a bit upset. Next day around came the police; asked all the questions; checked up and made sure that all I said was right. A week later I went in and drew my rations - 8/4d, not in cash, in tickets, for meat, bread and so on.

The feelings of humiliation and degradation with which the

59. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
unemployed initially approached applying for government relief were further reinforced by their experiences with the bureaucratic processes surrounding the administration of the dole. After applying at the relief office the unemployed man was given a form which he had to have signed by a Justice of the Peace declaring that he was a destitute person. The applicant was then visited by his local policeman who reported to the Relief Office on his economic circumstances. Relief was withheld until all saleable assets disposed off. All bank savings had to be exhausted. One person who was given a lump sum payment when he was retrenched from his employment was required to prove that he had spent every penny of it before he was eligible for relief. In effect, therefore, the unemployed person had to become totally destitute before he could receive relief. Once he was receiving relief the unemployed man was likely to find that the ration ticket distribution system was highly regimented, impersonal and time-consuming. Relief recipients had to stand in long queues, often in the heat or the rain, for several hours in some cases. Before receiving their fortnightly tickets they were quizzed, often very aggressively, about any earnings they had made over the previous fortnight.

The humiliation and loss of dignity felt by the unemployed aroused an extraordinarily strong hostility towards the government clerical workers who administered the ration system. The unemployed

60. S.A.P.D., 1931, Vol. 1, p. 370. One person who had been a policeman during the Depression, described what happened: "The inspectors used to go around and visit the homes to see how they lived and enquire into all their personal affairs, rent or mortgage, debts, current accounts. If they came into the home and saw that you had a piano they would ask how long you have had that piano and whose was it. They would pick out artifacts and good paintings. If you had a car it was fatal". Interview with Mr. E. Spiers.

61. Interview with Mr. J.H. Catton.
Victoria Park racecourse where 7,000 unemployed men received a grant of £1 each as part of the preparation for South Australia's Jubilee celebrations. Advertiser, 3 May 1935.
were hypersensitive in their relationships with these government officials as a result of the humiliating experience they felt they were being subjected to. Some became very aggressive and two separate informants reported seeing government clerks struck by unemployed men. Almost every person interviewed expressed antagonistic feelings towards these clerks. One person's recollections were typical of the hostile attitude expressed by informants:

When my husband was ill I had to go and get the rations ... A big wharfie started a terrible row [with a clerk] so they said, "Everybody out. Come back after dinner". Some of them had been sitting there all the morning. He [the clerk] was a chap who would take his time. I told him one day, "I hope I see the day when you are down".62

In *The Great Australian Stupor*, Ronald Conway comments on the attitude shown by the unemployed towards the clerks who administered the dole:

The bitter reaction of most Australians to the Depression was in proportion to their blind belief that Australia was a land of milk and honey where poverty was just not allowed. This helps to account for the extraordinarily acrid and vindictive response of many of the unemployed to the State and Commonwealth relief measures of those years. As a small boy I accidentally witnessed some of the degrading effects of poverty on the unemployed at close range. The envy of the other man, the suspicion that one's neighbour might be getting a little more, emerged from behind the fading democratic pose and showed itself in the ugliest ways. Men and women who had prided themselves on their attitude of "live and let live" a few years before were now prepared to abuse even the ill-paid helpers who kept them from destitution.63

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62. Interview with Mrs. C.H. Catton.

Possibly there was some truth in Conway's assertion that the unemployed's behaviour stemmed from envy and resentment of those better off. To some extent, particularly amongst blue-collar workers, the attitude towards these government administrators was the result of intra-class antagonism. One person articulated an attitude that was implied by others:

"We had the impression that they thought we were down and outs and they were civil servants and they were a grade ahead of us. We were just ordinary workers — down and out. Good luck to them. They had never been out of work - in a government position. They used to snarl at you. "Any earnings"? And they would throw the ration tickets at you. Each ration ticket was worth 5/2 a week. You can imagine even when things were cheap how much 5/2 would buy in a week for a family."  

However, the full explanation for this attitude amongst the unemployed must also include the need felt by people to find someone or something to blame for their plight. Thus, the government officials acted as scapegoats in much the same way as scabs and migrants did. Partly also this was undoubtedly a mechanism which individuals could use to defend themselves against attacks on their ego-structure. They were in effect saying: "I am not lazy, inferior or useless. I feel so only because of the arrogant attitude of these people".

On the other hand, an important factor which ought not to be lost sight of was the actual attitude of the administrators themselves. There is no doubt that generally their attitude was arrogant and harsh. One official in particular was known to every person.

64. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
person who applied for relief at the Kintore Avenue depot:

There was one chap in particular called Old Mack. He was a real pig - as if he was giving the money out of his own pocket.65

A person who was unemployed during most of the Depression gave a vivid description of Mack and the ration distribution system:

I am embittered about the awful way things were done in Kintore Avenue. They had two rosters a day, five days a week. One parade on Saturdays. You would go there and there was a policeman and he stood by the building while you sat on the forms. The men would pass round a cigarette. There was a lot of comrade-ship. You went once a fortnight to get your rations and this policeman would yell out, "the J's" and the J's would walk in. I was one of them. There was one fellow called Mack, who was a terrible fellow. Black Mack. He would sit behind a desk and you would come in and he would say, "how much did you earn"? "Nothing", you would say. "Nothing"? he'd say, and he would look you up and down. He would make you feel very small. He would be getting paid to do this job and he would frighten most men into saying yes, they'd earned two bob, and if they said they earned this, they wouldn't get the rations.66

The behaviour of these administrators was typical of the response of public officials generally to a difficult situation. The impersonal image used by the bureaucrat in his relations with the public can be a self-defence mechanism by which he mediates the conflicting pressures exerted upon him by his superiors and by the public. By adhering strictly to the letter of the rules under which he is operating he avoids this conflict.67

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65. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
66. Interview with Mr. J. Jose.
Depression was a period of doubt and uncertainty and these conditions tend to produce more conformity and rigidity of mind, particularly amongst clerical workers. In the contemporary environment of economic depression and mass unemployment, the relief officers themselves must have been worried about their own jobs. Like many workers in similar situations, they tended to lessen this insecurity by asserting very forcefully in their own minds that all those who wanted work could get it and the unemployed were drawn only from the lazy and shiftless. In spite of obvious evidence to the contrary, a great deal was being written and spoken in Adelaide about the unemployed not really wanting work.

Furthermore, the tragic circumstances of thousands of people he was dealing with made it essential for the administrator's own psychological survival to divorce his emotions and feelings from his job. One person who came into contact daily with the unemployed in his job with a bank, said that he had been forced to become indifferent to their plight or he would have become too depressed himself to carry on with his work.68 Others undoubtedly over-reacted and became positively hostile to the unemployed. The strain that working amongst the unemployed involved, was revealed in the case of one clerk in the Unemployment Relief Office who, out of compassion, granted relief to a woman above the amount that she was entitled to. His action was discovered by his superiors and he was summoned for an explanation. When asked to account for his actions he replied simply, "I am guilty". As a result of his actions, the clerk was suspended from the State Public Service.

68. Interview with Mr. R. Potter.
Over the following weekend he took his own life.  

The unemployed's humiliating experiences with institutions did not end with the relief system. The unemployed individual was generally forced into contact with a whole network of unfamiliar relief agencies and government bureaucracies which further increased the loss of dignity already experienced by people who lost their jobs. One woman described the humiliation she felt when she had to visit the doctor provided for the unemployed:

We used to go to the Casualty Hospital here in the Port to see your doctor. There would be one doctor one side and one doctor the other side, and a big queue waiting out in the hot sun or the rain, it didn't make any difference to them. As you were called in there may have been a gentleman at the back of you, not a lady. But you still had to stand up in front of the doctor and tell the doctor. There was no room where you could speak confidentially to the doctor. You had to tell the doctor in front of everybody else and sometimes I would pull my chair up so that the gentleman at the back couldn't hear me. But then he [the doctor] wired the chair so that you couldn't move it.

The husband of this woman then proceeded to describe the shame they both had felt when they were forced to bury her father in a pauper's funeral. Her father died in 1930:

I don't know if you have ever seen a real pauper's funeral. I don't know if it applied today, but the undertaker only got ten pounds for burying them. The relatives could go but you didn't have enough to give him a proper burial. This happened on West Terrace. Her father died in the Adelaide Hospital. We had to go across and see the undertaker. He said I'll meet you at the West Terrace Cemetery at such a time. We are all waiting there, thinking naturally that a hearse.

69. Unemployment Relief Council, Minutes, 87-8, August 1931.
70. Interview with Mrs. J.H. Catton.
would come along. While I am sitting outside the keeper's office, a Ford car comes in and it has a bundle inside up to the hood and a black drape around it. The fellow came out and said go down to such and such a patch. I thought it was just across from the soldier's section and we went down there. The car had gone and there is this black box there, no shape or anything, just a plain box with no name on it. We fixed up for a Minister to be there and the keeper, the grave digger. They proceeded with the burial. You could see the coffins underneath. They had five or six in one grave. The government allowed ten pounds for that.

Mrs. J.H.C. (almost in tears). They rolled it up in an old blanket and they had a hook in the car and a beam going across. They had a very thick cord. They unhooked the box, it wasn't a coffin, we couldn't afford a coffin. He overtook so that you wouldn't see. [71]

One person related the resentment and hostility which he felt when offered charity with certain strings attached from his local minister:

Before the second lad was born, the local minister from the church came down. We invited him in and gave him tea and biscuits. He said, "do you need anything"? I said, "No, I don't want charity. All I want is some work". He said, "I can't do that for you." He said, "You must want something?" I said, "I don't want anything for myself. I want some flannelette for napkins for the coming baby and some cloth to make baby's underwear with." He said, "all right, I'll see what I can do. But we don't usually help anyone that doesn't go to church." I said, "you can get out of my house!" He came back a fortnight later ... He said to me, "I've got some socks for you and some underclothes and half a dozen pots of jam." I didn't want jam. My wife and I used to make a ton of jam. I thought, I'll take it and someone else can have it. He went and I opened up the parcel. All I could see were darns in underclothes and socks. When I opened them up they had this fellow's name on them. Why couldn't

[71. Ibid.]
Governor and Lady Hore-Ruthven distributing oranges to the children of the unemployed at Whitefield's Institute, Hindmarsh in 1931. From a photograph appearing in The Blossoms Cookery Book, Adelaide, 1931. (Compiled by Mrs. A.A. Drummond)
he have given it to me himself? Was he ashamed?
It was no good to me, it was only darns. I wasn't wearing clothes as bad as that. He had given me his old stuff — or given it to the church to give to me. 72

Although this person in fact had been so desperately short of clothes that he had gone without underwear, to be presented with obviously discarded clothing was a very great blow to his pride. Even though patched and mended clothing became the everyday wear of the out-of-work, the humiliation felt by those people could often never be erased. 73

72. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.

73. One person who was a young child during the Depression said she will never forget the look of anguish that appeared on her father's face when she mistook him in his ordinary clothes for a Guy collecting on Guy Fawkes day. Mrs. I.D. Hall in a letter to the author.
CHAPTER 4
THE LONG UNEMPLOYED
The vast majority of South Australians who were unemployed at all during the Depression were put out of work between mid 1927 and early 1931. At the end of the second quarter of 1927 the percentage of trade unionists recorded as unemployed was only 5.6%. By March, 1931, this figure had risen to 30.6% which was not very far short of the maximum of 35.4% recorded in September, 1932. In fact, the level of unemployment in Adelaide remained fairly steady for the three full years from 1931-33. By 1930 new employment opportunities in most trades were almost completely non-existent. This stage had been reached in certain trades, such as all those associated with the building industry, much earlier. From then on it was only very rarely that a permanent full-time position became available.

The Census of June, 1933, indicated that in South Australia at that time over 24,000 men, or 70.0% of the total number unemployed, had been, totally without work for more than a year.1 Over 15,500, or 45%, had been unemployed for more than three years. By mid 1933, then, a very large percentage of those without work could be classified as the "long-unemployed". Moreover, at the end of 1936 over 8,000 men in Adelaide were still unemployed and most of these had been without work for at least six or seven years.2

The problems, attitudes and responses of the long unemployed were very different from those of the newly out of work. In the first place, after a certain period of time, the unemployed person

1. Australia, Census, 1933, Vol. 2, pp. 1785-6. For further details see Table 1.2.
2. See Chapter 1 above.
was forced to confront directly the reality of his situation.
Initially, people generally assumed that their unemployment was a
temporary phenomenon. While their response may have been charac-
terised by a high level of anxiety, hyper-activity and insecurity, the
unemployed generally carried on with their normal pattern of
living with relatively few modifications. As time passed, the
person began to think of himself less in terms of being temporarily
out of work and more in terms of being "unemployed". The importance
of such a transition was crucial to the attitudes and behaviour of
those concerned.

The lives of the unemployed slowed down drastically as
they formed a pattern of living that was radically different from
that of their previous existence. At first, the unemployed person's
day was fully occupied with his continuous search for work. After
a time, however, it became obvious that there was little point in
continuing the search:

We would leave in the morning with 2 pieces of
bread with some dripping and pepper and salt on
it wrapped in a piece of paper. You didn't have
lunch-wraps or anything like that. It would be
newspaper. And we walked down to Holden's and
got there early in the morning. By the time the
gates opened at the side, there would be as many
as 2,000 men waiting. The gate would open and
the fellow would come out and say: you, you and
you. That's all for today. Three or four out
of a thousand or 2,000 men. You'd just turn
around and walk home.4

Some, for whom the boredom of life without work was almost unbear-
able, would often still go out looking for work after they became

3. The behaviour and attitudes of the unemployed upon losing
work is the subject of the preceding chapter.

4. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
absolutely convinced that they would not find it, just to relieve the unbearable monotony of doing nothing all day:

Did you continue looking for a job or did you give up after a while?

(Mr. B) No. Always went looking for a job ... Whenever you got wind of a job coming up, you'd more or less go out and hope to get it ... you'd go - day after day. Some days you mightn't feel too good and you mightn't go.

(Mrs. B) Didn't you use to go down fishing at the pier?

(Mr. B) Yes. I used to go fishing. And then, of course, we didn't have much money and had to use what fishing gear we had, and I had gone down quite a few times and caught a few fish and that sort of thing. But other times you'd just laze around. Perhaps you might feel like getting up and going somewhere and you'd go around and try these places. But you see the whole thing was they'd only put so many men on, and they wouldn't call for anymore until they wanted them. [The unemployed would do] anything to get away from the monotony of doing nothing, because it was monotonous doing nothing.

But the majority soon abandoned the hopeless and discouraging search for non-existent employment as a regular part of their daily activities. This does not necessarily mean that they lost interest in obtaining work but merely that they recognised that there was little point waiting outside the factory gates.

Unemployment did not provide the compensation of an increase in leisure time for those without work. In pre-industrial societies there seemed to be little differentiation between work and leisure. Agrarian life had a wholeness that largely disintegrated under the work discipline and division of labour of industrial

5. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. C. Burgan.
capitalism, But while work and leisure became clearly separate and distinct parts of a worker's life, the form of leisure that industrial man has evolved generally cannot exist without work. Margaret Mead has observed that in western culture people see leisure as something that is earned by work. Furthermore, the quality of one's work life affects the quality of one's leisure. For most workers, even in times of full employment, leisure activities provided little fulfilment. However, without work of any sort, "leisure" became a meaningless concept. What the unemployed worker, unused to organising his own life in normal times, faced was not a full day of leisure but a day without any organised activity to keep him interested and occupied. The monotony and meaninglessness of life on the dole was summarised by one person in these terms:

You were nothing. Each day followed the other. You had nothing. You woke in the morning, you weren't going to work; you had no money; you weren't going to get any money. You had soup for lunch and stew for tea.


9. Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
People in Rundle Street, Adelaide, gathered around a street singer. Advertiser, 29 January 1931. The caption beneath the photograph stated that this scene was repeated every few yards.
Significantly, the majority of people interviewed had great difficulty recalling anything specific that they used to do during the day when unemployed. Physical activity in general declined very sharply. In his study of the Depression, Bakke found that of all the varieties of activity pursued by families prior to unemployment, only walking, sitting around home, gardening and gossiping increased or at least did not decline markedly. All the major activities prior to unemployment including visiting clubs, films, excursions, and so on, declined very significantly.  

The Marienthal study concluded that the employed worker was able to fit more into his few spare hours than the unemployed person into his whole week.  

In Adelaide much of the unemployeds' time was spent in the streets - talking, watching others, and waiting for something to happen. One person, who was herself employed, recalled observing the behaviour of the unemployed men who gathered in Port Adelaide:

When you were working in Port Adelaide you would have been right in the heart of the city there. Did you observe unemployed men around the streets of Port Adelaide?

Yes

What sort of things would they be doing?


12. In the Marienthal study, a researcher positioned in an upper storey window plotted the path followed by men walking along the main street. It was found that each person stopped on average, three times to talk or just to stand and watch in the process of covering the 100 yards or so under observation. M. Jahoda, Op. cit., p. 67.
Standing around talking, sitting down, sitting down on the edges of the footpath talking, and they used to congregate over in the wharf area - I suppose looking and waiting, waiting for work and that sort of thing, you know, in groups and then walking along singly. The men looked more, much more dejected than the women. Now I can see them [still] and I don't know but I imagine now that they probably were tramping around all over the place looking for work and going home - nothing doing and no work sort of thing. But yes, they used to stand around in bunches, not drinking of course ... 13

One person who wrote to the Advertiser was moved and saddened by the sight of "so many good men and youths who can be seen in hundreds moving about like lost sheep in the city and suburbs". 14

Some men walked up to six or more miles each day in their round trip to the city or to Port Adelaide just to stand around all day on a street corner chatting with each other or just passively observing the city's activities:

The main thing in those days was to keep yourself occupied. There was so much time on your hands. The chap next door and I used to walk to the Port every day in the morning. Sometimes we would go down in the afternoon. We had to go there anyway to get a job. We would go and look around. I didn't get a job once ...

Did you walk down to the Port mainly for something to do?

Yes, mainly for something to do. There were no prospects for any jobs. We would go down and look at the boats.

13. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.
Did you meet friends?

Yes, workmates we would meet - not specifically to meet them but as we walked we ran into friends.\(^\text{15}\)

The commercial areas of Adelaide and Port Adelaide acted as magnets attracting large numbers of the unemployed during the day. They provided a form of a community centre where men could meet and fill in the day with others in the same situation, and thereby feel that they were not the only ones in such circumstances. Moreover, going to the city or the Port provided a routine which gave some order to the day even if only of a superficial sort.

The following person described his father's daily routine of getting up early, leaving the home, and returning about 5.00 p.m. He had obviously successfully established a pattern to life which bore some resemblance to his former working life:

He [father] got up in the morning first and quit the house before anyone else got up. I got up with him.

Where did he go?

Over to the Port. Everyone went over to the Port. Just like you go to Rundle Street now. It was the wharf and focal point ... If there was any excitement you were in it. There was no reason for you to go there.

What would he do when he got there?

Talk with 3 or 4 mates. Just stand in a group talking. Play cards for money. It might be his turn to go to the soup kitchens that day. In the afternoon he would get a book or something to read. He used to read a lot. There was nothing else to do ... He would always get back around 5.00. When I went to school I got up with him. Later on he

\(^{15}\) Interview with Mr. K. Douglas.
got up himself and quit the house. It got to the stage where he had 4 kids and he wouldn't get them anything.\(^1\)

As time progressed, the social activities that the unemployed engaged in steadily declined. There were several reasons why this tended to happen. To a large extent it was due simply to economic factors. The unemployed just could not afford to participate in activities or entertainment that involved the expenditure of money. Generally, social activities such as dances, films, excursions to the beach or elsewhere by public transport had to be greatly restricted. Similarly, membership of organisations that demanded payment of dues or fees were quickly allowed to lapse. Trade union memberships during the Depression declined by over one-third.\(^2\)

Although regular activities that involved the expenditure of money were the first to be given up, soon other activities as well began to fall by the wayside. People who had been active participants in groups and societies found it very difficult to maintain their association with them once they became unemployed. One person recalled how his mother, who had been an active member of the local Womens' Guild, had ceased attending meetings and social functions because she couldn't maintain the standard of dress of the others.\(^3\) Of course, a person's previous socio-economic status was a very important factor influencing such feelings of shame. A person of higher status would undoubtedly

\(^{16}\) Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
\(^{17}\) Australia, Labour Report, 1923-38.
\(^{18}\) Interview with Mr. H. Fearn.
have been more likely to feel inhibited from continuing social associations than a poor person used to appearing in somewhat shabby clothing.

Friendships and social contacts were subjected to considerable strain by unemployment. One person became embarrassed whenever he met one of his former friends who was still working because he felt that they were expecting him to "bite" them for a hand-out. Such feelings, which were commonly expressed by those who had been unemployed, illustrate the humiliation and loss of status felt by the unemployed. It was, in fact, usually the unemployed rather than their employed friends who broke off the relationship. Again, economic factors compounded the difficulty. A visit from friends meant providing some form of supper or refreshment. To not do so was really unthinkable since such hospitality would certainly be offered when the unemployed family returned the visit. This would only reinforce the feelings of humiliation present anyway. The entertainment of friends also meant increased expenditure on electricity and fuel. These were costs which the unemployed simply could not afford:

You mentioned before that you spent most of your time at home. You had just married. What was your social life?

(Mrs. F) We would go to the pictures when we had the money — up on Prospect Road.

(Mr. F) Yes. If we could get the money together, we used to go to the pictures.

(Mrs. F) We used to walk to our relations (in Walkerville).

19. Interview with Mr. J. Jose.
Yes, we would walk everywhere.

Did you have any friends of your own age?

Oh, a few people around. Lads I went to school with, but not close friends. We stuck to our relations. We used to go to Mum and Dad's - the wife's people - pretty frequently, didn't we?

Yes, I didn't know anyone down at Kilburn because I came from Medindie.

My Mum lived just opposite because my Dad died when I was two. And a couple of sisters were around. They used to bob in now and again. But apart from that there was not much social life because you couldn't have visitors.

When a sudden windfall came which might have made some sort of social activity or occasion possible, it was invariably spent on some more impersonal form of entertainment such as a visit to the pictures. A sudden acquisition of a few shillings could very adequately achieve this sort of social pleasure. It would not change the situation that prevented the family entertaining former friends. While it might have been possible to purchase enough food to entertain guests, it couldn't also repair the house, renew the furniture or replace old clothes and it was all of these as much as the shortage of food, lighting and fuel that inhibited the unemployed from inviting guests. Besides, what was the point of inviting old friends on a single occasion when it was quite clear that the friendship could not be kept going beyond that one occasion?

The social isolation of the unemployed was often made worse because of housing difficulties. 

20. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. W. Fuller.
alive became much more difficult when people were forced to move some distance from their former place of living. This invariably made social contact with former friends and relatives even harder, particularly since the cost of transport generally limited social life to an area within walking distance. For those people who were forced to shift residence regularly during the Depression there existed neither the time nor the motivation to develop close friendships with new neighbours. One couple who had just been married found themselves in a very precarious position when the firm for whom the husband had worked as a carpenter suddenly put him off "temporarily" in 1929. They lived off savings and the assistance of relatives for almost a year until eventually the firm "just packed up and went out of business". They were then forced to accept rations and look for cheaper accommodation. They shifted six or seven times in the seven years that the husband was unemployed - whenever in fact, they thought that they "could save a few shillings in rent" by doing so. With such frequent moves from place to place there was little opportunity for making friends. Visits, even to parents, were severely limited by the distances involved. When asked about their social life a fairly sparse picture emerged:

My parents were dead. My wife's parents were alive and she had younger brothers. We would go to her parents for tea on Sunday and have a game of cards, or to my relatives. As far as going out or having parties, we just couldn't afford it. If we wanted to go anywhere we used to walk. The kids would be put in a pram.21

21. Interview with Mr. R.K. Mr. K. has specifically asked that his name not be used in published material.
The social life of the unemployed was not as barren in certain suburbs as it was elsewhere. In a few districts a real sense of community existed prior to, and during the Depression. This was particularly in the working class area of Port Adelaide in which, more so than in any of the old nineteenth century "suburban villages" of Adelaide, a strong sense of identity and community had been retained. Such a community spirit also seems to have existed in the new working class suburb of Colonel Light Gardens and, to a lesser extent, in some of the inner suburban slum areas such as Brompton and Bowden.

Interviews with people who lived in Port Adelaide have made it evident that there existed there a sort of "village mentality". A tradition of neighbourhood friendliness and help in time of need had long been in existence. The community feeling which had always existed at the Port was accentuated by the fact that such a large number of people in the district were out of work. One of the results of this community feeling was that many of the psychological pressures, and particularly the sense of shame which usually accompanied unemployment, were not as strong. One person recalled that the family of the only person in his street who was employed used to deliberately assume a "hard-up" attitude in order not to offend his neighbours. This was in marked contrast with some suburbs on the other side of town where a family might have been the only one in the street whose breadwinner was unemployed. In such a circumstance, the experience of entering the local shop with a ration ticket was a very different one from doing it at the Port. One woman who lived in the more affluent suburb of Glenside remembered standing next to a child in the local butcher's shop
who asked for 6 pence worth of dog bones. The butcher, knowing the child's father to be unemployed replied sarcastically, "What, is mother having visitors this week-end?"

Port Adelaide and Colonel Light Gardens in particular, acted as community centres which provided some form of social activity for the unemployed and which counteracted to some extent the isolating effects of unemployment itself. In the new tightly-knit community that existed in the suburb of Colonel Light Gardens, weekly dances were held at the local Institute to raise money for welfare work and regular carnivals and sporting events were held at the local oval. Groups of men from the suburb searched for work in the city. Together, the unemployed men of the district, collected firewood in the hills and distributed it around the suburb. The Port as a long-established community provided services to the unemployed which were rarely available elsewhere. For example, an interdenominational organisation called the Port Adelaide Mens' Brotherhood was formed. This society organised various daytime activities such as regular lectures by retired sea captains. The Port Adelaide Central Mission, as well as distributing clothing, also bought a fishing boat called the Gertrude which was manned by continuously changing crews of

22. This story was related in a letter received by the writer from Mrs. M.E. Bradshaw.


24. Ibid.

25. Interview with Mr. H. Fearn.
unemployed men. The boat made regular fishing trips to the South-east of the state and the catch would be distributed free to the unemployed.26 The unemployed themselves organised a weekly athletics meeting and there were several unemployed football associations.27 Dances and "socials" were almost nightly occurrences and were always crowded.28 The entrance charge was 3d. but on occasions it was possible for the unemployed to enter without charge.

However, even in these suburbs, the psychological impact of unemployment was still strong. Shabby clothing could still inhibit social contacts even in Port Adelaide where everybody was thought to be in the same boat. One person described how her mother had felt unable to attend a social function until she found a respectable dress to wear:

... their main entertainment was euchre parties - not bridge - it was euchre in those days, and I think it used to be a shilling a night, of a Saturday night. Well, they [her parents] used to go; then they stopped going, and somebody came and said, "well, why aren't you going?" "Oh, a shilling's a shilling these days", you know, sort of thing. Then there was a special - some sort of special evening on - and I think it was the only time I saw my mother in tears, and ... Why was that?

26. Ibid.
27. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
Because she wanted to go. But it was very, oh, it was a terribly hot day. It was well over 100 and she didn't have anything pretty and cool enough to wear. And I know, I'll never forget as long as I live and she said "Oh, stop this foolish crying. There's some people that, who even haven't got a dress to wear". And I said "Oh, Mum, what about the material you got us down at the Semaphore". It was material that was 6 yards a yard and she made us little dresses for school ... And she put her arms around me and she said, "God love you", she said; You know because she wasn't old. And she said, "I think I will", and she walked from Largs North right down to Semaphore Road in all the heat. She walked back. She spent all the afternoon and she looked beautiful.29

Another person who lived in the Port recalled that some of his parent's friends stopped calling when his father lost his job.30

The majority of the long unemployed in time adjusted in most aspects of their lives to being unemployed and to the day-to-day routines of survival. In general, their attitude and state of mind was one of resignation to the situation that they found themselves in. Many people interviewed commented on the calmness and the resigned attitude that characterised the unemployed in Adelaide. The description of the long unemployed given by informants, such as the following person who was himself unemployed, contrasted with the almost hyper-active behaviour of people in the period immediately following their loss of employment:

I reckon that the (long) unemployed were the most docile, couldn't-care-less people. They just sat there. They had no reason to care because they had nothing to care for - no future. They were like zombies....31

29. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.
30. Interview with Mr. H. Fearn.
31. Interview with Mr. J. Jose.
Another person who worked for several years among the unemployed described the response of the long unemployed that he worked with in the following terms:

For 6 years I have been in close contact with unemployment and poverty in every shape and form. At times my heart has almost failed me when I have seen the utter misery and despair of those men and women who have to fight year after year. Men can stand up to it for a couple of years, but when it comes to 5, 6 and even 8 years their spirits break down. It depends on the type of man. Sometimes he is driven to desperation. We have known of cases of suicide. In other cases, it has resulted in terrible apathy. The manhood of these men has been filched from them. The main problem today is the apathy of those who have been so treated for years. I could quote hundreds of cases ....32

In the Marienthal study, the researchers described the attitude of the unemployed as one of:

... hopeless indifference coupled with the view that after all nothing can be done about unemployment, and therefore a relatively calm frame of mind; even occasional sparks of happiness alongside a denial of the future which no longer plays a part even in fantasy.33

However, to say that the long unemployed had adjusted to their situation and adopted an attitude of resignation does not mean that there was not unhappiness and suffering. One particularly sensitive observer of the unemployed referred to the misery that was just as important component of the attitude of resignation:

32. Evidence by Rev. A.C.L. Sanders to the Select Committee of Enquiry into Unemployment Relief Work, 1938, unpublished minutes held in the archives of the South Australian House of Assembly, p. 98.

33. M. Jahoda, op. cit., p. 53.
You'd see the despair taking over in a matter of time with trying to keep tidy, keep warm and that. And then the brightness used to go out of the mother’s eyes ... after a while there wasn't the - it seems as though they got to "oh this is my lot. I've just got to hear it," - but not grinning and bearing it, if you know what I mean - just bearing it. And gradually the despairing look took over from the bit of joyness that might have been there originally. It wore them down, naturally.

When you say "despair", do you mean "panic"?

No. No, not panicking. Despair - miserable; miserable and down; down-hearted as though things were going on for so long that they couldn't see an open gate to get over this situation.34

As the future became more and more gloomy it seems that the unemployed tended to think less and less about the future as reality. In certain instances, individuals seemed to discard the real world for one that was closer to fulfilling their former hopes and values. There exist quite a few examples of what might objectively be called "rash spending" amongst the unemployed. One person who worked as an arrears collector for a bank recalled one example of a person who compulsively bought home luxuries on hire purchase while out of work and extensively in debt. He would show these to the debt-collector with considerable pride. Evidently he was more concerned to demonstrate a certain social status to his creditors than his inability to pay. Less extreme but more popular forms of escapism which flourished during the Depression were the various competitions and other forms of gambling in existence. One person who carried out charitable work amongst the

34. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.
unemployed at Glanville, Brompton and Bowden told a Parliamentary committe in 1938 that such practices were extremely common:

I desire to instance a case during the depths of the Depression in 1933 when the News was running the "Obstinate artist competition". We estimated that there were between 3,000 and 4,000 unemployed in the Port Adelaide and Glanville district. There is no proper post-office at Glanville, it is a postal agency at a store. One weekend the woman at the store told me she took £80 in sixpenny stamps which were used as entrance fees ... That competition was purely a gamble. These poor devils got sixpence. Lord only knows where from and thought, "If I can only turn this into £100. Heavens I will be able to meet my debts and get the family a rig out ..." I have seen these poor wretches right in the slums of Bowden running with a bob in their hand to the betting shop to put on a horse. They thought "If it wins I will buy mother a new dress; she hasn't had one for seven years..." 35

Many of those interviewed stated that if they came upon a few unexpected shillings they would often spend it on the pictures. For 1/3d the unemployed person could spend the whole day inside a warm picture theatre. One person remembered that it was common for unemployed men to wait outside at interval and be given pass-out tickets by those emerging. 36 Talkies had just come to Adelaide and it seems that many of the unemployed tried escaping into the imported American dream-world of sumptuous materialism inhabited by Gary Cooper and Clara Bow. A minister who worked among the unemployed in Adelaide commented:


36. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
We give (the unemployed) what is necessary for his body but man is not body alone. He is a spirit and a mind. You have often heard the quotation about the unemployed person who took a leg of mutton and sold it so that he could go to the pictures. I am convinced that at times some of the unemployed need pictures more than food as an escape from their misery.37

But while the inclination of the unemployed person to indulge in these forms of escapism may have increased, unfortunately their capacity economically to do so was severely restricted. This was particularly so in the case of the drinking of alcohol. The consumption of alcohol in South Australia declined by almost one-half between 1927 and 1932.38 Similarly, convictions for drunkenness dropped by over 60%.39

The widespread existence of misery and hardship during the Depression led many to believe that the unemployed could become a potential threat to the existing social order. However, as will be discussed further later, political activism among the unemployed was at a very low level.40

The explanation for the lack of political involvement of the unemployed lies partly in the nature of the impact which unemployment made on the consciousness and outlook of those affected. Far from awakening the political consciousness of workers, unemployment tended to have a restricting and isolating effect. In

38. South Australia, Statistical Register, 1927-34.
39. Ibid.
40. See Chapter 9.
particular, the expectations of the unemployed were very closely related to the length of time that they had been without work. Various sociologists have shown that people living in poverty tend to have very low expectations for improvement. 41 Many of those who were unemployed in the 30's had actually spent their whole lives in a state of poverty or near poverty. One could expect that such an outlook was already present in the attitudes of these people even prior to the Depression. For many of those who were slightly better off prior to the Depression, unemployment quickly led to the acquisition of these characteristics. Runciman has demonstrated that an important contributing factor to the acquisition of attitudes of lowered expectations, resignation and fatalism amongst the poor is the limitation of their reference groups. 42

As the social life of the unemployed declined and the range of their contacts and activities became more and more restricted, there also took place a significant narrowing of their outlooks on life. 43 People became accustomed to owning less, doing less and even more importantly, expecting less. In confronting the problems presented by unemployment, the family had to look for ways of making economies in every aspect of their


42. W. Runciman, op. cit., Chap. 2.

43. A similar observation was made by Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld, "The Psychological Effects of Unemployment", Psychological Bulletin, 1938, 35(6), p. 378.
living pattern. Eventually, the life of the unemployed family stabilised on a lower economic plane which in fact soon became their normal living pattern. Since it became quite clear that there was no possibility of possessing many former necessities, people's desire to possess them tended to decline. Because very few others seemed to be much better off this was a much smoother process than it might otherwise have been. Since people did not feel relatively deprived, they became more readily resigned to a far lower standard of living. Undoubtedly also, such a widespread restriction of expectations was very greatly influenced by the "Depression consciousness" cultivated by public-opinion forming institutions and groups - particularly the press. So many of those people interviewed, when asked why the unemployed were so quiescent, replied with some variation on: "Well, everyone was in the same boat". To the unemployed person with very limited reference groups for comparison, and with no other means of finding out, it must indeed have seemed that everybody was as badly off as he or she.

At the basis of the unemployed's passivity was their inability to explain or understand the upheaval which they experienced in their milieu. There was no readily-available explanation which could be latched on to. There was, in most cases, no immediately identifiable scape-goat that could be attacked as the cause of their problems. To many it seemed as though the bottom had just fallen out of their world. The awareness that it was a world-wide catastrophe only intensified their feelings of helplessness and confusion. If governments and professional economists were unable to explain what was happening,
let alone do anything about it, what chance did they have of influencing events? The passive behaviour of the unemployed was evident even when they were confronted personally with minor officials who often made decisions against their interests. Such behaviour was commented upon by a person who at the age of twenty had been employed by the Savings Bank to visit the homes of those in arrears with mortgage payments for the purpose of accelerating payment of arrears:

My overwhelming impression was that the people were in a sort of state of resignation. I think that this was one of the results of the Depression that people in this situation who were unemployed or who faced staggering debts weren't prepared to buck or fight at all.

Would you say that the unemployed people that you came into contact with seemed to be coping with their situation or were they broken people?

Not broken. They were depressed while they were going about their tasks. They were resigned to the voice of authority, so they were coping to that extent, but they were not bucking ... If there was anything that was common to them, I would say that they were just prepared to accept what they were told ... They took it from the voice of authority that they had no other course but to do these things.44

In this respect the attitude of resignation that seems generally to have characterised the outlook of Adelaide's unemployed bears a significant resemblance to the phenomenon which Durkheim called anomie.45 Runciman, following Durkheim, refers to anomie as the vacuum of standards or values which results from

44. Interview with Mr. R. Potter.

the dislocation of a stable social context. Other sociologists have tended to discuss the same phenomenon under the broader label of alienation. Fromm describes alienation as "essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object." According to another sociologist this state can be induced by a series of rapid changes in which the everyday norms and values of a person's life are subjected to great stress and begin to disintegrate. Such an occurrence can lead to a person suddenly being overcome by feelings of total powerlessness over his environment and of the meaninglessness of his existence. As the gap between the person's former values and the reality of his new situation widens further, his behaviour is largely characterised by apathy, loneliness and over-conformity.

The experience of many of the unemployed seems to fit this model rather closely. The occurrence of unemployment, and the adaptations and rationalisations that invariably followed, brought a series of physical, economic and psychological shocks to the persons affected. For those people in particular who had been regularly employed during the twenties, unemployment presented a


48. E. Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, New York, 1966, p. 44.

very great threat to their previous attitudes, assumptions and world-view. The basic moral and economic values which guided most individuals' lives included a belief in the importance of honesty, of keeping out of debt, of avoiding charity and of maintaining a certain standard of living and status. Very quickly people found such beliefs came into direct conflict with the reality of their new economic situation. One person vividly recalled the traumatic effect on his mother when she first had to ask for credit from her grocer.50 Others experienced a disturbing conflict between their material needs and their moral values when they reached the point of having to apply for the dole.51 Generally speaking, when such conflicts arose, in order to survive, people were forced to contravene their former standards. Individuals found their traditional attitudes and social values negated by, or at least unsuitable to, their new economic and social situation. In response, it was common for the long unemployed to undergo periods of doubt, bewilderment, fear and eventually indifference. 52 The majority of the unemployed felt, and were, powerless to control the social and economic forces which had changed their lives. Therefore, rather than turning to political activity as a solution to their problems, most tended to spend

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50. Interview with Mr. K. Douglas.

51. See Chapter 3.

whatever energy they could muster on the problems of day-to-day survival with little thought of the future. Unemployment evoked individual rather than collective responses.

To the extent that political activity did occur among the unemployed it came mainly from single men. Amongst unemployed family men there was little political involvement. Apart from the feelings of isolation, uselessness, and emasculation associated with the psychological impact of unemployment, the married man had to consciously take into account the possible consequences of activism. Several people who were married when unemployed stated that the fear of arrest deterred them even from participating in demonstrations. This was a very real fear since they realised that if they were arrested their family would be deprived of their dole ration. As meagre as the dole was it was vitally important in the day-to-day struggle of many of the unemployed to survive. When asked whether he knew anything of the activities of the unemployed workers' associations one person replied: "I didn't know too much. I had a young family at the time so I kept away from all that trouble. There was a lot of trouble at the time." 53

Not all the unemployed managed to reach, or remain within, a state of resignation. While the attitude of the majority of the long unemployed could be described as resigned or apathetic, a significant minority did not succeed in making the "adjustment" necessary to reach this calm state of mind. Broadly speaking, these individuals could be termed the psychologically distressed.

53. Interview with Mr. Catton.
It is not possible to estimate accurately what proportion of the long unemployed were in this category. The Marienthal study estimated that 7% of their subjects were in such a state but this would most likely have been many fewer than existed in Adelaide because of the close-knit community that existed in the village of Marienthal.\(^5\) While information about this group is not abundantly available, something about them can be deduced by piecing together what is known of those of them that took the extreme step of taking their own lives.

Durkheim has demonstrated that the sociological basis of suicide is to be found not so much in economic hardship itself but rather in sudden economic disturbance.\(^5\) He observed that places with a very great deal of stable poverty often had a low suicide rate. On the other hand, a sudden jump in the suicide rate was likely to occur in any society when the economic situation suddenly changed either for better or for worse. Durkheim's hypothesis in fact seems to fit accurately the figures that exist for suicides in South Australia during the Depression shown in Table 4.1. The number of persons taking their lives remained fairly stable from 1921-27 but jumped significantly at the beginning of the Depression. The number seemed to drop again briefly during the depressed but stable economic years 1932 and 1933. However, with the beginnings of a recovery, when peoples' expectations and hopes began to rise, the figures also rose and, in fact, exceeded the highest figure for the entire Depression.

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### TABLE 4.1

SUICIDES - ADELAIDE AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA,
1921-39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Area</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rate per 1,000</th>
<th>Accidental or violent Deaths (b)</th>
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(a) figures for the metropolitan area were not separated after 1930.
(b) these figures do not include homicides or suicides.

Source: Australia, Bureau of Census and Statistics, Demography Bulletin, 1921-1939; and South Australia, Statistical Register, Part II, 1921-1930.
The same trend is also reflected in the statistics for accidental or violent death (excluding homicide and suicide). It is important to take these figures into account since probably a majority of suicides are never officially recorded as such.

Durkheim divided suicides into three types: egoist, altruist and anomic. Altruistic suicide is by far the least common and not generally affected by economic fluctuations. Egoistic suicide results basically from loneliness; when a person is not effectively integrated into a social group. Many examples of this type of suicide existed during the Depression, such as a 56 year old unemployed man who was found dead in his cottage late one Saturday night in 1932. He was living by himself and had just recently moved into a new district. Anomic suicide was the type which according to Durkheim resulted from the inability of individuals to adjust to social and economic change. Again, many examples occurred in Adelaide during the Depression as a result of unemployment. One example, was the English marine engineer mentioned previously who took his own life.

While unemployment forced a few to such a desperate solution it left many others in a similarly desperate state without any immediate solution. The figures for admissions to mental hospitals rose slightly over the Depression years. However, such statistics can give no real indication of the level of mental distress in existence during this period. By 1929 the hospitals

56. Advertiser, 17 October, 1932.
57. See Chapter 3.
were already hopelessly overcrowded. Parkside hospital, for example, with total accommodation for 1,100 in 1929 had patients numbering 1,362. Most people interviewed knew of someone who didn't stand up to the emotional strain. One person's wife suffered a complete nervous collapse. Another person's father became morose, depressed and almost impossible to live with. Still another person's neighbour spent a long time in a state of acute anxiety, eventually suffered a "nervous breakdown" and spent two or three weeks in a hospital.

While conclusive evidence on this point is not readily available, the evidence relating to the pattern of suicides suggests that those who experienced a psychological crisis would have been vulnerable in the period immediately following the initial economic impact of becoming unemployed. This may not have occurred, of course, for a year or so when dwindling resources forced a sudden drop in the person's standard of living and status. Similarly, another potential crisis point occurred when the unemployed person found the society around him beginning to recover. He then began to compare his situation with those who were better off and to feel relatively deprived. This might in turn have led to a psychological breakdown as seems to have happened with one 30 year old unemployed man who in July, 1937, called at a police watchhouse in the city. Crying bitterly, he asked to be locked up as he was "out of work and sick of everthing". He had been a signwriter but

60. This point is explored further at length in Chapter 6.
was without work for several years. He appears to have coped with unemployment for a long time but eventually he reached the point where he had become desperate and unable to cope any longer. He told the police:

I have a good wife and children and I hate to see them depending on rations. I want to work for them but it seems hopeless. I don't know what to do.62

On the other hand, many of the psychologically distressed did not necessarily experience a single severe crisis. The majority of the unemployed experienced a certain period of anxiety very shortly after becoming unemployed. Whereas most people fairly quickly adjusted to their situation, some were very slow, or never able to do so. These people experienced the Depression in a state of more or less continuous anxiety. In giving evidence to a Parliamentary Committee in 1938, Rev. Sanders, from the Brompton Mission, quoted many examples from his experience of people in a state of high anxiety and tension due to long term unemployment. One rather extreme example was that of a young man who was married with a small child:

When I first came into contact with him I thought him simply one of the unfortunate unemployed and, of course, helped him. I found, however, that he came to me again and again and that he was one of the demoralised men - his soul had died. His condition was pathetic. In appearance he was a decent fellow, but he was so demoralised that his nerves started to break and he became subject to nerve storms, during which, he admitted, that he

62. Ibid., 29 July, 1937.
I did not know what he did... Those cases are on the increase..., 63

A London study of unemployed persons referred to a psychiatric clinic in 1931-32 revealed these sorts of symptoms to be part of a fairly uniform pattern. 64 Most of these patients were found to have chronic neurosis in which hysteria predominated. Symptoms included, in particular, various combinations of anxiety, irritability, hypochondria and depression.

In contrast, a small percentage of unemployed people seemed not only to adjust to their situation but to take a far more positive attitude than one of simply resignation and apathy. Such a man when interviewed described how his whole life was geared to the active search for food for his family. Even forty years later he was able to recall precisely the weekly routine he followed in his search for the family's food. This routine did not allow him a spare minute so that far from suffering from boredom and apathy his time was fully occupied in the battle for his family's survival. 65 The attitude of many of those who went on the track seems to have been similar also. 66 A person in this situation generally avoided many of the most depressing stresses.


65. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye. This person's situation is discussed further in Chapter 6.

66. For further details regarding men on the track see Chapter 9. Similarly, the Unemployment Relief Council regularly received applications from individuals for assistance with some scheme by which they planned to become self-sufficient. See Minutes of the Unemployment Relief Council, 1930-43.
imposed by unemployment. A few people, therefore, seem to have achieved more than simply survival during their years of unemployment. These people succeeded in organising to some extent the patterns of their own existence. They became self-sufficient and in control of their own lives to an extent that was not usually possible even during times of normal employment.

Of course, it is not possible to state precisely the factors which determined each of these different responses amongst the long-term unemployed. However, in summary it is possible to say that the following five separate factors were each vital elements in influencing the response of a person to the problems and adaptations forced upon him by unemployment.

In the first place, the various types of response maintained by the unemployed were very closely related to the length of time they had been out of work. While individual differences must of course be allowed for, nevertheless the challenge of unemployment and the adjustments that it forced upon people tended to take the unemployed through a rather similar pattern of stages in their attitude to their situation. The most common pattern in the development of people's attitudes when they became unemployed seems to have been the following. Firstly, the unemployed worker was in a state of near shock at being retrenched. Although he knew people all around him were being laid off, he probably convinced himself that it couldn't happen to him. Nevertheless, he soon settled down to the task of looking for new employment. At this stage he was still highly optimistic and confident. The next stage arrived after the experience of weeks or months of looking for work unsuccessfully began to induce feelings of failure and pessimism.
At this stage the unemployed person began to suffer acute anxiety and depression. This was a very crucial stage psychologically. Up to this point his attitude could be described as unbroken. Gradually, however, the unemployed family probably began to accept the state of unemployment as normality and from this point on their attitude could be described as resigned. During this stage anxiety was reduced and although occasional fits of depression might recur, generally people's attitude was one of increasing apathy and adjustment to the situation. Once people reached such a state of resignation to their position and accepted unemployment as normality, all other things being equal, they could continue without too much further stress for many years. The most crucial stage in this process was the transition from the state of a high level of activity and anxiety to resignation. People who were unable or who took a long time to achieve this transition were the ones who have been classified as distressed. It was from this group that were drawn the people who ended up in mental hospitals and actual suicides and the unemployables.

The most explicit and thorough study of the stages of unemployment was carried out by Bakke in New Haven.67 Bakke observed the attitudes of twenty-four unemployed families over a period of eight years and concluded that the five clearly distinguishable stages that the unemployed went through.58 While Bakke was confident enough to state unequivocally that all 24 of his subjects went through each of these five stages in their attempts to solve the problems associated with unemployment, this study

68. Ibid., p. 174 ff.
cannot sustain such a confident conclusion. Not only does the information obtained from the Adelaide interviews suggest that it is not possible to distinguish such clear-cut divisions in the stages of unemployment but it also seems quite evident that not all people progressed through every stage. In particular, Bakke thinks of the various stages of unemployment in terms of continuum progressing towards adjustment. While sufficient evidence has been collected from the Adelaide study to confirm that this was very often the case, it very definitely wasn't in every case. A number of other factors intruded which significantly affected the responses of the unemployed to their situation.

In the case of those who did not adapt successfully to the problems presented by unemployment and who remained in a state of anxiety or distress, a crucial factor was often that person's own personality structure and especially his mental and emotional well-being prior to becoming unemployed. In the London Psychiatric Clinic study mentioned above, about half the unemployed patients with neuroses had demonstrated overt evidence of mental illness prior to unemployment. 69 This suggests that such persons were predisposed to such a condition but does not, of course, make any of the following factors any less crucial also.

The response of a person to unemployment was also very greatly influenced by the person's social and economic status prior to losing work. The person's status was important in a number of ways. Firstly, for the family who had enjoyed a relatively high standard of living when employed, unemployment required a much greater adjustment in their style of life than that forced on a

poorer family. For the family that had developed a life style based on the assumption that their income would be something like ten or more times what they received when unemployed, the modifications required to adapt were likely to be traumatic. For the family used to the problems of surviving just above the poverty line, unemployment meant just pulling in their belts a fraction further. Several persons interviewed, in contrast to others, pointed out that for them unemployment didn't make all that much impact on them because things had not been much better throughout the twenties. A certain percentage of those who became unemployed during the Depression had experienced unemployment at some stage during the twenties. 70 For these, unemployment came as far less of a shock and the time they took to adapt successfully was considerably less than for those to whom unemployment was a completely new experience.

Important also was the strength of the personal and social relationships within the person's life which potentially offered a degree of insulation from the worst effects of unemployment. Of these, the two most important were family and community. As has been shown, not all families were a source of security. In certain cases the tensions that arose within a family acted as a further strain on the psychological and emotional well-being of the unemployed man in particular. However, where the family was unified and happy prior to unemployment, it seems that the stresses of the outside world were cushioned to some extent. Similarly, the person's response was influenced by the community within which

70. This point is developed at some length in the preceding Chapter.
he lived in much the same way. To be unemployed in a community where almost everybody was in a similar situation was far more comfortable than to be the only person out of work in one's street.

Finally, a most important factor in determining the response of the individual was the material standard of living which unemployment had imposed upon him. There was a very close relationship between the resources of the individual and his attitude. Those interviewed who had been working part-time, who were able to find odd jobs here and there or who somehow managed to obtain a few extra shillings a week were clearly those with higher morale. At the other extreme, there were people whose plight was worsened by other economic and personal crises on top of unemployment. One such couple within the space of three weeks experienced the death of one child, the birth of another and the onset of a severe illness in the husband. Not surprisingly, their attitude seems to have been more distressed than that of the average person interviewed. The material impact of unemployment on the lives of those affected is explored in the following three chapters.

71. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. Catton.
CHAPTER 5
ON THE DOLE
To those who experienced unemployment, the Depression meant hard times. There was hardship and poverty during the Depression on a scale that had never been experienced before by the Australian working class. In South Australia, the situation was even worse than in other states. Not only was the Depression longer and the rate of unemployment higher, but in many ways those who were unemployed were comparatively worse off. The experiences of the long unemployed, therefore, can only be fully understood in terms of a response to a situation of physical deprivation and impoverishment. In the following three chapters some of the material problems faced by the unemployed are described, their efforts to cope with these problems are examined and an attempt is made to indicate and explain their different levels of success in doing so.

**Government Relief**

During the twenties, most of those who were unemployed sought no assistance from the government. Certainly the government did not encourage the unemployed to look to it for relief. Although unemployment was widespread, there was no special provision made for those affected. Wherever possible, the government expected private charitable organisations to provide assistance.

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1. Details of private charitable assistance available to the unemployed in the twenties is contained in W. Zweck, "Unemployment in S.A. during the Depression", Unpublished B.A. thesis, Adelaide University, 1964 and in M.J. Thompson, Government and Depression in South Australia, unpublished M.A. Thesis, Flinders University, 1972. A few unions made an attempt to provide benefits to unemployed members. These included the A.E.U. and the S.A. Printers Union. However, these attempts were only short-lived.
To the extent that government assistance was available at all to the unemployed it was provided under the same system of welfare provisions available to the destitute in general. The Childrens' Welfare and Public Relief Department provided rations to those deemed eligible which consisted of small quantities of rice, tea, oatmeal, raisins, jam and soap each week to the value of 2/4d. These goods had to be collected weekly by married men and fortnightly by single men from the Department's building on Kintore Ave. in the city. In addition, each person collected coupons entitling him or her to 4lbs of bread and \(1\frac{3}{4}\)lbs of meat. The total monetary value of these rations was 7/- per week for each adult and 5/- for each child. Throughout the Depression in South Australia, as in all states except Western Australia, rations continued to be paid in kind. Governments feared that if cash were supplied it might be mis-spent. Unemployed men who sought relief from the government were required to attend the State Labour Exchange each morning to see if any work was available. Any work that was available was distributed in a fixed order of preference firstly to returned soldiers, then to married men, then


3. Those living at Port Adelaide were able to collect their rations from a storekeeper in that area. However, people from all other suburbs were required to travel to the city.


5. See G. Bolton, A Fine Country to Starve In, University of Western Australia Press, 1972, p. 98.

to single men and finally to "foreigners." Those who could demonstrate to the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department that they were totally destitute were supplied with rations. Older destitute men were admitted to the Magill Home — an institution known prior to 1917 as the Destitute Asylum.

As unemployment began to rise during the immediate pre-Depression period it became more and more obvious that the existing welfare machinery was not able to cope. Table 5.1 shows that between June 1927 and June 1928 the number of persons in receipt of relief in the Adelaide metropolitan area increased by almost 400%. By far the majority of this increase came from persons who were unemployed. The number of unemployed family units receiving relief increased from 558 in mid 1927 to 4,427 in mid 1928 — an increase of just under 800%. In August 1928, the State Liberal Federation government responded to this crisis situation by ceasing to provide rations to single men other than to those who were living in the Port Adelaide area, where conditions for many were desperate. Clearly, this was a "head in the sand" attitude on the part of the rural-based conservative government which in the short-term was not unduly concerned about the extent of working class unemployment. However, it was obvious that, in the long-run, either party would have had to introduce a more adequate relief policy in order to maintain social order. Even with this

7. Ibid.
9. See the following chapter.
10. This point has been made and supported more fully by Thompson, Op. cit., P. 232.
TABLE 5.1

Relief provided by Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department in Adelaide Metropolitan Area, 1918-1930.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>&quot;Outdoor&quot; relief provided</th>
<th>Admissions to Magill Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918-19</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>1,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>1,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>1,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>1,355</td>
<td>2,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>1,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>1,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>1,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>2,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>2,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>7,983</td>
<td>5,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>8,469</td>
<td>6,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>12,756</td>
<td>9,334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australia, Parliamentary Papers, 1931, No. 23, p. 25.
restriction on eligibility for relief the number of unemployed families receiving relief had increased to 6,827 by June 1930,\textsuperscript{11} and the total number of persons receiving relief of all types had risen dramatically to 22,090.\textsuperscript{12}

Following its election to office in March 1930, the Hill Labor government quickly established an Unemployment Relief Council to take full responsibility for administering relief to the unemployed.\textsuperscript{13} Immediately the numbers applying for, and receiving, relief leapt to over 21,000 and remained at over 20,000 during 1931. The numbers then steadily declined throughout the thirties before stabilising at just under 5,000 from 1937 till the outbreak of war. In the early years of the Depression, the numbers receiving relief represented only a bare majority of the total number unemployed. However, as the Depression years advanced, the percentage of the unemployed receiving relief increased markedly.\textsuperscript{14} The numbers receiving relief in the Adelaide metropolitan area over the period 1931-40 are shown in Table 5.2.

The value of rations supplied to the unemployed was reduced almost immediately upon the establishment of the Unemployment Relief Council. Each adult then became entitled to food only to the value of 5/3d per week. The value of groceries obtainable was

\textsuperscript{11.} S.A.P.P., 1930, No. 23.

\textsuperscript{12.} See Table 5.1.

\textsuperscript{13.} For full details of the structure and operation of the U.R.C. see W. Zweck, \textit{Op. cit.}, and M.J. Thompson, \textit{Op. cit.}, Minutes of the meetings of the U.R.C. are held in the S.A. State Archives. (See Bibliography)

\textsuperscript{14.} This phenomenon is elaborated upon in the following chapter.
### TABLE 5.2

Number of Men receiving Relief in Adelaide 1931-40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quarter</td>
<td>21,054</td>
<td>17,711</td>
<td>14,541</td>
<td>12,275</td>
<td>9,206</td>
<td>6,596</td>
<td>4,929</td>
<td>3,743</td>
<td>3,880</td>
<td>3,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quarter</td>
<td>22,149</td>
<td>18,315</td>
<td>15,454</td>
<td>12,439</td>
<td>9,294</td>
<td>7,037</td>
<td>4,991</td>
<td>4,720</td>
<td>5,135</td>
<td>3,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quarter</td>
<td>21,504</td>
<td>16,933</td>
<td>14,384</td>
<td>11,702</td>
<td>8,358</td>
<td>6,729</td>
<td>5,087</td>
<td>4,711</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>1,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quarter</td>
<td>20,122</td>
<td>15,674</td>
<td>13,923</td>
<td>10,747</td>
<td>7,723</td>
<td>6,172</td>
<td>4,450</td>
<td>4,321</td>
<td>4,112</td>
<td>1,336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Quarterly reports of the Unemployment Relief Council 1931-41.
reduced from 2/8d to 2/5d, potatoes and onions were deleted from
the range of goods available and the supply of bread was reduced
from four to three loaves. Certain other commodities were added
to the range of groceries available and the recipient was entitled
to 6d of fresh fruit and vegetables which, if desired, could be
exchanged for fresh milk, bread or groceries. Children under 14
years received a half ration. This scale of relief supplies
continued almost unchanged until late 1935 when small increases
were introduced.

Although under the new arrangements many more people
received government assistance than before, regulations concerning
eligibility were still particularly stringent for the unemployed
person seeking relief. To be eligible for unemployment relief a
married man had to have been without work for four weeks. In the
case of a single man the waiting period was eight weeks. A
person was not recognised as being unemployed until he had registered
for employment with the Government Labour Exchange. He was then
required to report monthly to the Labour Exchange in order to
remain eligible for relief. While receiving relief the unemployed
person was allowed to earn only a small amount from other sources.
In the case of a single man this was 7/6d per week and for a
married man the maximum earnings allowed was 15/-.

15. Advertiser, 21 August, 1935. The monetary value of the dole
actually varied according to changes in prices. The U.R.C.
allocated certain quantities of each item per person and these
remained fixed and did not vary as prices changed.


18. Unemployment Relief Council, (hereafter U.R.C.) Minutes, 6
July, 1931.
above these amounts resulted in a reduction or even a withdrawal of rations. Earnings significantly above these amounts in any week resulted in the withdrawal of rations for a number of weeks. However, while there did exist a definite scale of reductions for income earned, in practice it appears that those administering the rations operated at times on a more arbitrary and harsher system. Inter-
views consistently revealed that those who were unemployed believed that there was no definite scale and that whether they were allowed rations or not was entirely up to the government officials. Many quoted stories of being refused rations, sometimes for several weeks, because they had earned quite small sums of money. A deputation of the unemployed which appeared before the Unemployment Relief Council in November 1931 complained of many such instances.19 Those on short-time were not eligible for relief at all.20

The relief provisions available to the unemployed in Adelaide did not compare favourably with those provided to the unemployed in the other states nor to those available elsewhere in the world. A survey of sustenance rates in the six Australian states in 1935 revealed that South Australia provided the lowest rates to both single and married men.21 The discrepancy between South Australia and the other states was greatest, however, in the value of rations provided to men with families. An unemployed married man with three children in South Australia received rations only to the value of 18/3d compared to the equivalent rates of 22/9d in N.S.W., 27/6d in Victoria and 35/- in W.A.. These rates are set

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20. U.R.C., Minutes, 6 July, 1931.
out in full in Table 5.3. There was little, if any, significant variation in the cost of living between South Australia and the other states during this period.22

**TABLE 5.3**

Sustenance Rates (without work) in the Australian States, 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Single Men</th>
<th>Married Men</th>
<th>Married Men with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s  d</td>
<td>s  d</td>
<td>One Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.S.W.</td>
<td>6  6</td>
<td>10  9</td>
<td>16  9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic.</td>
<td>10  0</td>
<td>17  0</td>
<td>20  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld.</td>
<td>7  6</td>
<td>16  0</td>
<td>19  6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.</td>
<td>5  3</td>
<td>10  6</td>
<td>13  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.A.</td>
<td>7  0</td>
<td>14  0</td>
<td>21  0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas.</td>
<td>10  0</td>
<td>18  0</td>
<td>21  3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. The rates for South Australia appearing in the Labour Report are not correct. The figures that appear in this table are the correct ones applying prior to September 1935. After that date the rate for each child varied according to age. Figures for the other states are correct.


In The Road to Wigan Pier, George Orwell portrayed the hardship of life on the dole in England as a continual struggle for survival. The same picture is conveyed by Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole and other contemporary British literature. In Branson and Heinemann's history of Britain in the thirties, the following image of the standard of living provided by relief is given:

22. Details of the cost of various items in each state are given for each year in the Labour Report.
Unemployment benefit was enough to keep the family from outright starvation but not very much else. It meant an unbalanced diet dominated by bread and margarine and tea with condensed milk, so that health began to deteriorate .... After a time it meant pawning blankets and selling off bits of furniture, getting into arrears with the rent and so on.23

And yet, the scale of British unemployment benefit payments was very considerably more generous than that which existed in Adelaide. In August 1931, the British scale was 17/- for a man, 9/- for his wife and 2/- for each child.24 In Adelaide at the same time, government relief was equivalent to 5/3d for a man, the same for his wife and 2/7d for each child. In real terms the discrepancy was even more marked since food was cheaper in Britain than in Australia.25

The monotony of the diet possible on the range of good provided by the rations was a recurring complaint of deputations representing the unemployed. The changes suggested ranged from the inclusion of small "luxuries" such as vinegar26 to an increase in


24. Ibid. Those in England who did not take part in the insurance benefit scheme received assistance through Public Assistance Committees. Here again, the British unemployed man was better off than his counterpart in Adelaide. To take one example, the Pilgrim Trust report quoted the case of an unemployed man with six children who was receiving 47/- a week - a typical payment for a family of that size. Pilgrim Trust, Men Without Work, Cambridge, 1938, p. 167. In Adelaide, a person in an identical situation would have only received relief to the value of 26/- per week.

25. Evidence on this point is given in U.R.C., Minutes, 121, 26 Nov. 1931.

26. Ibid., Min. 99, 4 September 1931.
the quality and quantity of the meat provided. For the major part of the Depression, poor quality mutton chops and sausages were the only meat provided to the unemployed. These chops were commonly referred to as "hockey sticks" or "kettle drum sticks". Almost without exception those interviewed complained of the quality of the meat and of its lack of variety. The largest demonstration during the entire Depression in Adelaide, known as the Beef Riot, occurred when over 2,000 unemployed marched in support of the introduction of beef into the rations.

Australians had never been forced to acquire the skill of turning very basic ingredients into interesting meals. Consequently, the meals eaten by the majority of the unemployed were very plain and monotonous. One informant recalled that his family lived on "stew, soup and sausages - and potatoes". Another remembered that the only variation in his family's meals was that as the days between ration issues passed the stews became more watery:

There was another thing I remember - Bruce's butcher shop. The meat in those days! If you were a cash paying customer, you got a different type of meat to what they called ration meat. It was different food. We existed, we never went short, because my mother was a good manager. She made stews. When the stews got a bit light she would add some water. You had to. At first we were able to have some nice stew but towards the end of the fortnight we would end up with water stew.

27. Ibid., Min. 168, 11 May 1932.
28. Interview with Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Catton.
29. Advertiser, 10 January 1931. For details see Chapter 9 below.
30. Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
31. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
The quantity of bread supplied on the rations, however, appears to have been comparatively more generous. Many recalled eating substantial quantities of bread and often literally survived on bread and dripping or jam while waiting for ration day to come around again. For some unknown reason, the only variety of jam obtainable on the ration order was plum. Several people commented upon this and one person said that he still is unable to look at a tin of plum jam without feeling sick.32

**Nutrition and Health**

More importantly than just being monotonous, however, the dole left the unemployed hungry. The quantity, quality and nutritional value of food provided by the rations was well below the diet enjoyed by working people in employment. The Commonwealth Nutrition Survey 1936-39 took a detailed survey of the dietary habits of 476 families in Adelaide over a period of one month.33 The cross-section of the population surveyed was drawn largely from the working class.34 Nearly two-thirds of the sample were earning between £3 (approximately the basic wage) and £5 per week.35 The finding of the survey was that the mean weekly expenditure on food per "adult male" in Adelaide was 10/2d.36 This amount was almost

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32. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
34. Ibid, Sixth Report, p. 6.
35. Only 2.1% of the sample were unemployed or earning below £2 per week. Ibid.
36. Ibid., pp. 9-11.
double the value of the food supplied to an unemployed person on rations between 1931-35. The mean weekly expenditure of a family with two children aged twelve and eight years was 32/8d\(^{37}\) compared with a ration diet valued at 15/9d for an equivalent unemployed family. A full comparison with the value of the dole is shown in Table 5.4:

**TABLE 5.4**

Mean weekly expenditure of 476 Adelaide families compared to the value of government relief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of Rations to 1931-35</th>
<th>Mean weekly expenditure of survey sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and wife</td>
<td>10/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 1 child (12yrs)</td>
<td>12/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 2 children (8yrs)</td>
<td>15/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 3 children (4yrs)</td>
<td>18/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The rations undoubtedly assisted in keeping thousands of people in Adelaide alive who could otherwise certainly have starved. For the greater part of the Depression period however, the relief provided to the unemployed itself did no more than to sustain life at a bare subsistence level. In 1938 a state government medical committee set out to prescribe a minimum desirable diet based on

existing food habits and customs. This nutritional standard is shown in Table 5.5 together with the maximum nutritional intake possible on the diet provided by government relief and the mean nutritional intake of the section of the Adelaide population included in the survey discussed above. The standard set by the committee must be considered low by modern standard of nutrition but, even so, the maximum nutritional intake potentially available to dole recipients was below this level. Furthermore, the maximum possible nutritional intake of those on rations was only three-quarters of the actual intake of those included in the Adelaide sample survey. Of course, few were likely to have actually made maximum use of their food ration. Numerous surveys of poverty have demonstrated that lower working class families not only eat less but also eat less nutritionally valuable foods. Evidence from interviews indicated that wives of unemployed men chose very carefully from the range of goods available in the rations, but also, that they often chose foods which tended to fill their families up rather than foods which nourished them.

38. See the Report of the Ration Scale Committee, S.A.P.P., 1938, No. 56. This committee was established in the wake of a nationwide controversy about Australian nutritional standards stirred up by the publication of two reports. The first was a League of Nations Report on Nutrition which, in a four-page reference to Australia, commented on the existence of malnutrition among children. Final Report of the Mixed Committee on the relation of Nutrition to Health, Agriculture and Economic Policy, August 1937, Geneva, pp. 307-10. The second was the Commonwealth Nutrition Survey referred to above which took extensive evidence in all states on the adequacy of dietary standards. As far as I am aware no researcher has yet made adequate use of this potentially valuable source of Australian social history.


40. See Ibid.

41. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter who worked in a shop where many unemployed people exchanged their ration tickets.

42. Interview with Mr. A. Briggs.
### TABLE 5.5

The Nutritional Value of the Rations compared to the Mean Daily Intake of a Survey Sample and the Standard Set by a Medical Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rations 1931-35 (per day)</th>
<th>Medical Committee standard 1938 (per day)</th>
<th>Mean daily intake of survey sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>calories</td>
<td>protein</td>
<td>calories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>2,737</td>
<td>89 gms</td>
<td>2,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and wife</td>
<td>5,474</td>
<td>178 gms</td>
<td>5,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 1 child (12yrs)</td>
<td>6,842</td>
<td>222 gms</td>
<td>8,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 2 children (8yrs)</td>
<td>8,210</td>
<td>266 gms</td>
<td>10,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man, wife and 3 children (4yrs)</td>
<td>9,578</td>
<td>310 gms</td>
<td>12,173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It can be seen from Table 5.5 that rations provided to children in South Australia were particularly inadequate. The nutritional value of rations provided to children of all ages was, even by the Committee's conservative standards, adequate only for a child of less than three years of age. Of course, children did not starve while adults were, more or less, adequately fed. The rations for a whole family were received as a whole and shared. In fact, many people interviewed commented on the fact that parents tended to go hungry themselves rather than deny adequate sustenance to their children. One general medical practitioner in a working class suburb stated that this was a common phenomenon:

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43. Again, children's rations compared even less favourably than adults with the nutritional intake of the children of those in the Adelaide survey.
I could quote numerous examples in which adults have gone without food in order to procure food suitable for sick children.\footnote{44}

Consequently, the effect of the grossly inadequate ration supply to children was to decrease the quantity and value of food per head in larger families. The larger the family the lower the nutritional value of food supplied by the rations per head.

The nutritional inadequacy of the rations produced a detrimental effect on the health of many of the unemployed. While few died directly from starvation, there is evidence of an increase in the death-rate during the Depression years as a result of diseases commonly associated with deprivation. Table 5.6 shows that there was a sudden overall rise in the number of deaths in South Australia with the onset of the Depression in 1927-28. Another, slightly greater, increase occurred again in 1934 when the number of deaths rose by 499:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>4,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>4,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>4,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>4,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>4,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>4,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>5,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>5,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>5,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>4,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>4,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>5,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>5,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>5,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>5,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>5,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>5,739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>5,184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: S.A. Statistical Register 1931 and 1940}

The increase in the number of deaths in these years derived primarily

\footnote{44. \textit{Advertiser}, 28 February, 1935.}
from diseases often associated with poverty. Rises occurred in
deaths resulting from whooping cough, bronchitis, pneumonia,
diseases of the respiratory system and tuberculosis. On the
other hand, deaths from most other causes declined throughout the
inter-war years. Furthermore, the numbers of infantile deaths,
which had been declining rapidly since the turn of the century,
increased markedly at the beginning of the Depression. 46 In 1931
it was reported that many babies born were unusually tiny due to
the lack of nourishment of their mothers. 47 In a report to the
Federal government on maternal and infant welfare in South Australia
in 1929, Dame Janet Campbell stated that there had occurred a
significant rise in the maternal mortality rate during the twenties. 48

The numbers of persons admitted to hospital in South
Australia rose quite sharply during the Depression. Between 1926-35
there was an increase of almost 50% in the number of persons treated
yearly in public hospitals. 49 However, the number of other persons
who required treatment but were unable to receive it was very large.
In 1931 it was reported in Parliament that 500 people were unable to
receive treatment at Adelaide Hospital because of overcrowding. 50
In 1933, over 1,000 people were unable to get beds when they needed
them. 51 Some patients were taken home in ambulances immediately

46. Ibid., 1939-40, Part II, p. 37.
49. South Australia, Statistical Register, 1936-37, Part II.
their operation was completed in order to make room for others.52

In spite of the protection of parents, there is considerable evidence that the health of many children suffered as a result of malnutrition and under-nourishment. The doctor previously quoted stated that such cases were extremely common in his district:

Among the unemployed in my district I see perhaps 1,500 patients each year, a very large number of whom are children, and the bulk of these children are showing signs of inadequate nourishment.53

The doctor put the blame for this situation on the nutritional inadequacy of the rations:

Regarding the rations themselves, none will complain of insufficient bread and meat, and in some cases they will admit that they have more bread than necessary. But these are to my mind the scientific weaknesses of the present scheme -

(1) Inability to obtain fresh milk in sufficient quantities;

(2) The amount allowed for fresh green vegetables and fresh fruit is insufficient.54

From as early in the Depression as 1930 there exists evidence of a significant level of malnutrition in children. In that year an examination by the medical branch of the Education Department of 3,325 school children in the southern and western section of the metropolitan area found that almost 15% of the children were suffering from malnutrition.55


54. Ibid.

55. Report of the Principal Medical Officer to the Education Department, S.A.P.P., 1930, No. 44, Appendix E, p. 29.
The medical committee which in 1938 investigated that ration scale submitted a table of statistics compiled by the Medical Branch of the Education Department (Table 5.7). The committee concluded that these statistics concerning the average height and weight of boys and girls over the period 1926-36 demonstrated that the rations had provided an adequate diet over that period: "It will be seen from this table that in practically every instance, the children gained in height and weight during the Depression period of 1930-35, when a large percentage of them were in receipt of sustenance."56 Upon examination, however, the statistics actually reveal that between the periods 1926-29 and 1930-35 there was an overall decrease in average weights in six of the nine boys' age-groups and in five of the nine girls' age-groups. The average weight of eleven year old girls fell from 81.6 lbs to 74.9 lbs during this period.

Clearly, in many ways, the rations were inadequate. Furthermore, the government knew them to be so. In 1931 the British Medical Association in Australia had recommended to the Hill Labor Government an increase in the existing rations scale.57 The recommendation was rejected as too expensive and the government reduced the ration scale instead.58 While the attitude of some individual members of the Labor Government was undoubtedly far more sympathetic to the hardship of the unemployed than that of the conservative politicians, quite evidently the dominating concern to reduce public expenditure over-rote the government's concern to


57. This was revealed by the President of the British Medical Association (South Australian Branch) in July 1935. Advertiser, 14 July 1935.

58. Ibid. See also U.R.C., Minutes, 118, 19 October 1931.
### TABLE 5.7

Average heights and weights of school children by ages, 1926-36.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1926-29</td>
<td>1930-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>83.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report of the Principal Medical Officer to the Education Department, S.A.P.P., 1930, No. 44, Appendix E.
maintain a certain living standard amongst all citizens. The establishment of unemployment relief did not mean that the unemployed were able to share the guaranteed minimum standards of living of society but simply that the government had made the unavoidable political decision that no person in South Australia could be allowed to openly starve. The Chairman and the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department articulated the main concern of the government when, replying to a question about the adequacy of unemployment relief, he said: "Nobody starves in South Australia".

The government's over-riding concern was more explicitly stated in 1931 when a request by the Premier for assistance with unemployment relief from the Commonwealth was prefaced with the comment that unless something was quickly done the government would face social disorder and possible revolution from the unemployed.

**Clothing**

At first, clothing was not a critical problem for the unemployed except perhaps in cases where someone had worn out an

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59. For fuller details of the parliamentary debates surrounding the establishment of the U.R.C., see W. Zweck, *Op. cit.*, and M.J. Thompson, *Op. cit.* Thompson claims that such a body would have been established no matter which party was returned at the 1930 elections, (p. 232). Thompson also makes the point that the Unemployment Relief Council received its money in the same way as other departments - that is, through the Treasury. Some members of the government had argued that it be independently funded through a special unemployment tax - as in the eastern states. Because it was forced to apply for money in the same way as other departments, it was subject to the same pressures to reduce expenditure. (pp. 235-6)

60. F.G. Byrne in evidence to the Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works, 1938.

61. Interview with Mr. L.C. Hunkin, Public Service Commissioner in South Australia during the 1930's and 1940's.
essential garment such as a winter coat and it could not be replaced. Usually, existing wardrobes kept people adequately clothed for quite a while. However, clothing soon began to wear out and the number of wearable garments reduced.

Footwear was one of the first to cause concern. Invariably, one of the major requests of the many deputations of the unemployed which called on the Unemployment Relief Council was to supply either boots or leather for repairing them. Leather footwear could usually be repaired relatively inexpensively, but the unemployed, having no other means of transport, did a great amount of walking. Several people interviewed stated that it was not at all uncommon to see barefooted children in the streets. In November 1931 a Labor parliamentarian stated that many children were attending school without shoes.62 One person who attended school in the working class suburb of Ethelton during the Depression remembered that only one boy out of 250 students had a pair of boots. They all went barefooted summer and winter.63 Sandshoes were commonly worn by the unemployed. When these wore out they were sewn up and lined with thick cardboard.64

For the long-unemployed, clothing often did become a critical problem, especially in winter. A Salvation Army minister who was working amongst the unemployed commented on the problems faced by people unable to replace deteriorating resources in a letter to the morning paper in 1933:


63. Related by Mr. L. Sellick in a letter to the author.

64. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter and also mentioned in a letter to the author from Mrs. B. Deland.
Colonel Arnott proceeded to quote examples of people almost totally lacking in clothing, boots and bedclothes, of a boy who had only girls' clothing to wear and of a father and son who shared a single pair of shoes. One person recalled that a common form of dress for children at Port Adelaide was simply a bag with holes for the head and arms. Most deputations of the unemployed included the supply of clothing as an urgent need in their lists of requests. It was reportedly common to see unemployed men in mid winter dressed only in tatty trousers, cotton shirts and sandshoes. For many of the unemployed the wearing of under-clothing had to be abandoned. Winter also brought grave problems in finding warm covering for beds. In many instances people had either to go without or to find some inexpensive substitute. One person remembered that:

Blankets and sheets were out of the question. We didn't have sheets for years. Well, to be honest, we had three bags sown together and covered them with some cretonne. My wife used to get some cretonne for 2/11d for a dozen yards.

66. Interview with Mr. A. Briggs.
67. One particular deputation, from the Unley Unemployed Workers' Movement, referred especially to the urgent need for boots, women's underclothing and blankets. U.R.C., Minutes, 101, 9 August, 1931.
68. Interviews with Mr. W. Fuller and Mr. J. Bassani.
69. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
The regularity with which deputations of the unemployed included blankets on their list of requests or demands from the government suggests that the experience of this person was a very common one among the unemployed.

Although the provision of clothing was not at any stage provided as part of the government ration system, a considerable quantity of clothing was distributed by both private charitable institutions and government. In June 1931 the State government made available £2,500 for footwear and clothing for the unemployed.\(^\text{70}\) The government later allotted £300 for footwear and material for clothing for the families of the unemployed at Port Adelaide due to the "deplorable conditions" existing there.\(^\text{71}\) At various times, large quantities of leather was distributed for the repair of shoes.\(^\text{72}\) In August 1933 the government again made available £4,900 for the purchase of women's and children's footwear and material for clothing. Following the election of the Liberal Federation government in 1933 a certain amount of clothing was given to the unemployed in return for work. However, those who were unable to work were required to find others to carry out the work for them before they could benefit.\(^\text{73}\) One family was unable to benefit because the father received the old age pension and though he was prepared to work this was "not permitted".\(^\text{74}\) In the early part of 1931 the Federal government also made available large quantities

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70. U.R.C., Minutes, 67, 24 June 1931.
71. Ibid, 77, 17 July 1931; and 81, 27 July 1931.
of boots and clothing to the unemployed. These were allocated in proportion to the unemployed in each district and were distributed by the Unemployment Relief Council or the police to the most deserving. At the same time the Federal Defence Department distributed a large quantity of part-worn military clothing. These garments consisted predominantly of tunics and great-coats from the War which had had the buttons removed and were dyed black or dark blue. This gave rise to the term "Scullin's Army" to describe the masses of unemployed men that could be seen roaming the city in black overcoats during the winter of 1931.

Clothing was also distributed by various charitable institutions. In spite of the humiliation which often accompanied this charity, the clothing provided proved of invaluable assistance to many individuals and families. One informant described the method by which such clothing was distributed and the value that it proved to his family:

What would you do for clothing?

Clothing was out of the question. Reverend Willaston from the Methodist Mission would get hand-me-downs and military tunics. He would give them out. Dyed blue but they were badly dyed and turned red. They would give them out at the back of the police station and there would be such a rush for them. I would grab a sleeve and someone else would grab a sleeve. We would finish up that we were lucky to get a sleeve each. [laughs]. Rev. Willaston was marvellous the way he used to give out clothing. Without him I don't know how I could have got on.

75. U.R.C., Minutes, 44, 17 April, 1931.

How many times did you go there for clothing?

You couldn't go very often. Sometimes he would come around and visit you, or send some of the mission women around.77

Inadequate clothing was a source of discomfort to the unemployed not only because it often meant going cold in winter but also because it labelled the wearer as destitute. While a family ate inadequately the outside world might never know. But they were unable to prevent friends and acquaintances knowing if their clothing was shabby. While many of those interviewed said that their embarrassment was lessened because "everyone" seemed to be shabbily dressed, it was quite evident that they all felt considerable shame and discomfort nevertheless. When asked what they used the additional money on if they had obtained a small windfall, the standard answer provided by those interviewed was clothing. Even when the family was eating inadequately they would use any spare money to attempt to make themselves appear respectable in public. One person said that he occasionally earned a few pounds by doing odd jobs. When asked what he would do with that money he replied: "Spend it between ourselves. Get a shirt or buy a pair of shoes for five bob - that sort of thing. Mum might buy a few things".78 Others reported doing the same thing.79

Indebtedness

Many of those who were unemployed for a considerable length of time resorted to the services of moneylenders in an

77. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
78. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.
79. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot and Mr. R. Reed.
attempt to solve their problems. The advertising techniques used by financiers played upon the anxieties experienced by the unemployed when they found themselves surrounded by debtors on all sides. The moneylenders' slogan was "get all your debts under one roof". This simplistic solution had a great appeal, particularly to those who felt continual shame at being in debt to the local butcher, greengrocer and so on. An employee of one of the largest moneylenders, Jack Dale Pty. Ltd., testified to a Parliamentary committee of enquiry into moneylender activities that the average loan made was about £5 and that most borrowers were, in fact, women. 80

In all, over seventy moneylenders were operating in Adelaide in the late thirties and some of these had opened branch offices. Considerable linkages and interconnections existed between these firms. For example, the South Australian Registrar of Companies testified before the Parliamentary committee that Mr. Harold Woodward, the owner of Jack Dale Pty. Ltd., also owned part or whole of Frank King Pty. Ltd., and James Wards Ltd. 81 In his testimony, the employee of Jack Dale Pty. Ltd. alleged that Woodward and the Manager of Jack Dale, Leo Papps (formerly Pappidakis), were also connected with South Australian Cash Orders Pty. Ltd. 82 This company in fact, was the owner of another two moneylending firms, Rundle Credits Ltd., and Thrift Accounts Ltd. The Managing Director of S.A. Cash Orders Pty. Ltd., a Mr. O.J.

81. Ibid., p. 681.
82. Ibid., 286ff.
O'Grady, had a controlling interest in both of these companies. S.A. Cash Orders Pty. Ltd., employed over sixty persons in its activities.

The committee received evidence which alleged that many of the unemployed were exploited by these firms. A report to the committee from the Police Department stated that "the charges of all moneylenders is excessive". An Adelaide detective pointed out to the committee that the rate of interest charged by certain moneylenders varied from 100% to 150%. One example was quoted of a loan obtained from the London Loan and Discount Co., owned by Mr. Jessel Cohen which when analysed was found to have an interest charge of 243% p.a. Another police officer explained the unemployed's willingness to pay such high interest rates partly in terms of the sense of shame and the consequent hesitancy with which they approached the moneylender:

In some cases, people, through unforeseen circumstances are forced to borrow money and I find that they are the class who have never stopped to think what rates of interest they are paying. It is not until someone points it out to them that they realise that they are paying considerably more interest than they anticipated when contracting for the loan.

The moneylender Cohen, when interviewed by the Committee, stated that he did not believe such interest rates to be excessive at all:

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83. Evidence by Mr. A.G.H. Briskham, South Australian Registrar of Companies, Ibid., pp. 522-3.
84. Document (unnumbered) contained in the minutes of evidence, Ibid.
86. Mr. P. Howard, Teacher, Ibid., p. 335.
87. Detective C. McGrath; Ibid., p. 358.
I have been in the business for 43 years and I say definitely that I am absolutely a poor man. I am not worth $10,000 although I have had a big business.

Apart from being a major shareholder of the firm and sharing directors fees of $1,000 per year Mr. Cohen also received a salary of $36 per year as manager.

The committee was also told that it was common practice for moneylenders to set a repayment rate which it was unlikely that the borrower could meet. When the person forfeited, the moneylender asked him to renew the loan with extra interest, sent him to another moneylender, usually a subsidiary firm, to raise the money to pay off the first debt, or seized valuable property which had been mortgaged.

The case of one particular woman demonstrates how those who turned to moneylenders could find themselves in an endless and vicious circle of indebtedness. This person first went to a moneylender (Frank King Pty. Ltd.) in 1932. She and her husband had fallen into financial difficulties as a result of his unemployment and were unable to adequately support their three children.

88. Mr. Jessel Cohen, Ibid., p. 642. $10,000 was equal to 60 times the annual basic wage in the late 1930's.
89. Ibid.
90. The South Australian Registrar of Companies alleged that some moneylenders even tricked nervous applicants into signing for more money than they actually received. Ibid., pp. 523-4.
91. Mr. J. Morris, Ibid., pp. 331-4; Mr. P. Howard, Ibid., p. 336; Mrs. A. Hoad, Ibid., p. 349.
92. Mr. A. Canning, Ibid., pp. 628-9; Mr. H.O. Newman, Ibid., p. 683.
93. One person dealing in antiques testified to the Parliamentary committee that seized furniture and other valuables were often sold to "dummies" in league with the moneylender at ridiculously low prices. She quoted one example of a $25 Persian rug which was sold by Kearns Bros., auctioneers, for $6. Mrs. A. Hoad, Ibid., p. 399.
94. Ibid., pp. 608-18.
children. Her husband became sick and had a nervous breakdown "owing to the War". It is possible that his unemployment also contributed to his breakdown. The woman's doctor had told her that she must not worry her husband unduly so rather than tell him that they were owing money she borrowed £3 from the moneylender. As a result she was to repay £4/5/- at 5/- per week over 25 weeks.

In the months following, her husband obtained employment on and off with the City Council but his income continued to be irregular because of his illness. She had repaid only 30/- when she was again in difficulties. The woman then went to another moneylender, Jack Dale Pty. Ltd., and borrowed £15, of which she used part to pay off previous debts. When again behind in her payments she was sent by Dale to another moneylender who renewed the loan and added further interest. Over the next six years the woman was shuffled back and forth between moneylenders, each time increasing the debt she owed, until finally she was taken to court as a bankrupt. She owed money to at least four moneylenders and in addition owed the grocer £14, the baker £4, time payment accounts for clothing of £40 and a further amount for hospital and medical bills.  

While it is not possible to estimate how many of the unemployed resorted to borrowing money in an attempt to solve their financial difficulties, it is clear that the number must have been substantial to keep seventy moneylending businesses operating.

Other Problems

While some of the unemployed were able to obtain small

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95. When asked how it all happened she replied: "I fell into debt in a small way at first and then it grew and I borrowed. That meant more money going out and I did not want my husband to know". Ibid., p. 612.
amounts of money from a variety of sources, and others temporarily delayed an inevitable crisis by borrowing, the majority faced the problems of day-to-day living with little or no income. Being without access to a normal weekly income, and without any relief in the form of cash from the government, caused a great many problems for the unemployed beyond those of providing food, clothing and remaining out of debt. Without money, almost every area of their normal pattern of living was disrupted since most of their previous needs and activities had invariably depended upon the expenditure of money. The largest single problem faced by the unemployed, other than those already described, was that of providing themselves and their families with shelter. This problem is discussed in detail in the following chapter. However, many people commented that one of the most unpleasant things about being unemployed was the myriad of small inconveniences and discomforts that it caused. Taken individually these may have seemed insignificant but together they made life miserable to those used to a certain style of life.

A very serious problem which was a continual source of discomfort to the unemployed was the lack of fuel and power for the home. Of fifteen deputations from various unemployed associations which approached the Unemployment Relief Council during 1931-32, twelve included in their list of requests items concerned with the supply of fuel and power. From mid 1931 onwards each family was supplied with 1 cwt. of wood per week as part of their rations. From 1935, an extra \( \frac{1}{2} \) cwt. a week was supplied during

96. Unemployment Relief Council, Minutes, 1931-32.
the winter months. \(^{97}\) This amount of firewood was far from adequate to meet the requirements of cooking, washing and, in the winter months, of providing warmth. One married couple recalled the continual worry that providing fuel for the home became:

(Wife): We never had any wood in the winter. We used to go and pick up coal along the railway lines so that we could have a fire. Many a time I went out in the paddocks in the rain trying to pick up dry pieces of boxthorn to cook a hot meal for the children.

Was this because what they gave you wasn't enough?

(Together): Oh, no! \([\text{It wasn't enough}]\)

(Wife): No. It was terrible. We only had a wood stove.

(Husband): People that had a gas stove, they used to allow them a mere pittance to get gas but that wasn't enough. When you couldn't pay your gas it was cut off. You were without nothing. We people with the wood stove were a bit better off. I used to go out ... we had no copper. I only had a little lean-to place. We had no inside copper. My wife used to boil the water for clothes in the kerosene tins, you know, the four gallon tins. I used to go out in the paddocks and get dry cow manure and burn it to save the wood for inside ... If you had earned a few bob and you went in \([\text{to get rations}]\), they would say to you, "any earnings?" "Yes, Ten bob". Right, you would lose a hundredweight of wood \([\text{a fortnight}]\). Never mind what you'd done with your ten bob. If you bought a bit of clothing it was too bad. If you earned a pound you would get no wood at all and if you earned any more than that they would cut your rations.\(^{98}\)

Those interviewed who had been unemployed were almost unanimous that fuel for cooking and heating was a continual worry to them.

An associated problem which made life a little more unpleasant for the unemployed was lighting. This became a problem

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98. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. W. Fuller.
very soon since electricity bills came every three months. If the bill was not paid the electricity supply was very soon cut off. The only real alternative source of lighting for the home was kerosene. Some people used kerosene lamps throughout the Depression. However, the cost of kerosene, although cheaper than electricity, was still beyond what could be afforded by many of the unemployed. To be left without any lighting meant either sitting in the darkness at night or going to bed at sunset. Neither were particularly cheerful alternatives for the unemployed.

Transport was another difficulty which the unemployed faced. Travelling on public transport was a luxury that the unemployed were rarely, if ever, able to afford. The yearly number of passengers travelling on railways in South Australia declined from 26 million to 15 million between 1926-7 and 1930-31. Numbers travelling on buses and trains similarly declined. Although there were close to 60,000 motor vehicles registered in the state, very few of them were used by the unemployed. In fact, the number of cars registered fell by 20% between 1929-31. Many of these 12,000 vehicles were kept unused in back yards. One person had purchased an expensive sports car in the twenties and was unable to sell it when he became unemployed. He ended up giving the car away on the condition that the "purchaser" pay the registration fees that were owing. This person charted his

99. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
100. South Australia, Statistical Register, Trade, Transport and Communication, 1927-32.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
changing economic fortune by his means of transport:

That is how things changed. We (he and his wife) went from a Chandler Sports model, a job that had cost me £595, down to a pony. Then we were walking for ages and ages. Then we bought two bikes. We went from bikes to a motor bike ... Then we gradually worked up through the second-hand motor cars to something better. 103

Walking was the primary means of transport for the unemployed and some covered quite a few miles each week. Every fortnight they were required to travel either to the city or to Port Adelaide to collect their rations. One person recalled regularly walking with his father from Prospect to the city to collect their rations. 104 Another walked from Enfield, a distance of six miles. 105 Each month the unemployed were required to report to the Labour Exchange and, of course, many spent hours each day walking in search of a job.

Being unemployed provided a multitude of other small inconveniences which together contributed to the overall unpleasantness of life on the dole. Women couldn't replace broken dishes and kitchen utensils. Men were unable to afford tobacco regularly and, for many, years went by without them being able to have a social drink at the pub. Family outings to most forms of public entertainment were often out of the question. A trip to the beach became impossible unless the sea was within walking distance. Few were able to afford newspapers and even the new medium of mass communication, the wireless, required the purchase of an annual broadcast listener's licence. 106

103. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
104. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
105. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.
106. That is, unless the person was prepared to risk prosecution. One person remembered waiting for dark each night before erecting his wireless antenna in the backyard. Interview
Of course, over-riding these smaller inconveniences was the fact that the unemployed were often hungry, badly nourished, poorly clothed, inadequately sheltered and poverty-stricken. Not all the unemployed were affected to the same extent, however, and in the following chapter an examination is made of the different factors which assisted or hindered their attempts to "make-do" and "get by".
CHAPTER 6
GETTING BY
While all those who became unemployed during the Depression faced many problems in common, the material impact of unemployment on their conditions of living varied considerably. At the one extreme were people who, though on the dole for many years, managed to achieve a degree of self-reliance and self-sufficiency which was quite remarkable. At the other extreme were people who lived in severe poverty and misery. Some became completely broken and a few did not survive the experience. However, the remainder of the unemployed, the great majority, did manage to survive in spite of a multitude of problems, physical and psychological, and of almost daily threats to their existence. Furthermore, while a certain number became totally destitute, the majority existed at a standard of living somewhat above total destitution. In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine the factors which influenced and determined the material standard of welfare at which the unemployed person existed.

The physical survival of a certain percentage of the unemployed must, of course, be attributed in part to the provision of food relief by the government. Even with the dole to assist, however, the struggle to survive was not an easy one. Consequently, it seems somewhat surprising to find that throughout the period 1931-35 the numbers actually receiving relief were far lower than the numbers unemployed. In June, 1933, the numbers receiving relief in Adelaide constituted only 58.3% of those shown to be unemployed by the Census.¹ Many persons, therefore, managed to survive, at least for some time, totally without the assistance of

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¹ Since the Census actually underestimated the numbers unemployed (see Chapter 1), this percentage was almost certainly even lower than stated.
The dole.

The reasons for the survival of the majority of the unemployed and the reasons why some existed at higher and some at lower standards of welfare were complex and are difficult to pinpoint precisely. There were several factors, however, that emerged from talking to those who had experienced unemployment, and from other sources, which were certainly of particular importance. These included the personal and psychological response of the unemployed person to his situation; the length of time that he had been unemployed; the material resources to cope with the impact of unemployment which he and his family possessed; and, finally, the commitments and responsibilities which he carried through his period of unemployment.

Of great importance in determining the material impact of unemployment was the psychological response of the person to being without work. There was certainly a very close correlation between physical destitution and psychological distress. However, it is not possible to generalise with certainty about the determining factor in this relationship. It appears likely that the two factors were interdependent. That is, year after year of worsening poverty led directly to psychological distress but the mental state of the unemployed person, in turn, led to greater material hardship for his family.

The importance of psychological responses to the material

2. See Chapter 4 above.
welfare of the unemployed was most explicitly evident in the case of those who managed to survive at a level above physical destitution. A very important, and in fact crucial, aspect of the struggle of these people to survive was, in almost every case, the resourcefulness which they evolved in coping with their problems. Even though these people were, on the whole, apathetic and resigned to their situation, they were not broken. At times they demonstrated a doggedness and resilience characteristic perhaps only of those fighting for their survival. Some of the unemployed did have to struggle in order to survive, and most did to make life bearable, since the food supplied by the rations was inadequate to maintain good health and welfare. Assistance with other essential needs such as clothing and shelter were not provided at all by the dole and the unemployed person was forced to find whatever means he could to get by.

The techniques developed by the unemployed for "getting by" were many and varied. In the first place, the living standard of the unemployed benefited enormously from any small amounts of money they could acquire to supplement the dole. This money could be used to purchase additional food, clothing or essential household items. It could also be used to appease a pressing landlord and so delay eviction. Many of those interviewed stated that they were able from time to time to acquire small amounts of money from odd jobs to supplement the rations. One person had a few hours work each week working as an illegal bookmaker's assistant in a hotel.4

3. See the preceding chapter.
4. Interview with Mr. R. Prince.
He also managed to make a little extra money every now and again by mending shoes and "a day's work gardening for somebody". The few shillings that the unemployed acquired by such means usually required the investment of an enormous amount of time and effort. Many of those interviewed reported having had some experience with door-to-door salesmanship on commission. One person recalled how he spent the whole week advertising the wares of a clothing store in return for the opportunity to work, and be paid for, Friday night and Saturday morning:

I was unemployed from 1929 to 1936 before I got any regular job - before I could say I have got x number of pounds coming in next Friday or whenever it was. I was doing bits and pieces during this period. It was nothing definite. It might be two or three weeks here, or a months somewhere else. I did have a period when I worked Friday nights and Saturday mornings in the men's wear store. Through the week I had to carry a case around from door to door more or less advertising.  

As might have been expected, door-to-door selling was not a very lucrative occupation during the Depression and most abandoned the attempt after a few weeks, although one person who was interviewed persevered and eventually made it his lifetime occupation.  

The stories of those who had been unemployed about "lurks" for making a little money during the Depression seemed to be never-ending. One person's father started a nursery in his backyard since he found that flowers were always in demand for funerals.  

5. Interview with Mr. R.K. who requested that he remain anonymous.  

6. A few of these men continued to make their "rounds" during the 1950's and 1960's throughout the suburbs of Adelaide.  

7. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
Another raised fowls and sold eggs around a well-to-do suburb. It was common at the time for people to be able to play a musical instrument. Several people interviewed said that they were able to earn a few shillings each week as musicians. A very common "lurk" for unemployed men was to join the citizens' militia. One person who had joined the militia recalled that the weekly parades and six-monthly camps provided a much welcomed boost to his income. In addition, he was able to ride his bicycle to the parade and claim the cost of public transport. He recalled: "When I came home [from a camp] with a couple of pounds, we were millionaires."

Another informant who had camped on the banks of the Torrens River, remembered that an added attraction of the militia was the free uniform and boots provided. One person recalled how he was given a shilling by an elderly neighbour to take her infirm cat to the veterinary surgeon to have it destroyed. Having need of the money himself, he believed social justice was better accomplished if he himself killed the cat and kept the shilling. Another obtained a few extra "bob" each week by scrounging old bones from a bone yard and selling them back to the yard's owner.

The records of the Savings Bank of South Australia concerning those in arrears with mortgage repayments were similarly

8. Interview with Mr. B. Winter.
9. For example Mr. C. Burgan, Mr. A. Tavender and Mr. H. Fearn.
10. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.
11. Interview with Mr. R. Reed.
12. Interview by telephone with a person who wished to remain anonymous.
13. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.
full of examples of people obtaining a few shillings from various sources. The most common source of income was clearly from odd jobs but other sources abounded. One person began manufacturing and selling a cleansing agent - without success.14 Several were raising poultry.15 Another was cultivating a tomato crop in the hope of selling it. One of the most important sources was financial assistance from working relatives or off-spring.16 However, one family's hopes in this regard were not fulfilled. This couple, who had twelve children, reported to the Savings Bank representative in July, 1932, that though the husband was unemployed they were sure that they could "meet their obligations" because the wife had "expectations" from her father. Unfortunately, by July, 1935 these "expectations" had not been fulfilled, and they were finally evicted and the house sold.17

While some of these schemes to raise money were conceived on a grand scale, such as the unemployed man who borrowed £54 from a moneylender and bought six cows to retail milk to his neighbours,18 the majority of the unemployed earned only a few pounds each year by such means. The Census of 1933 indicated that over 80% of the unemployed had earned less than £52 in the preceding year.19 The

15. Ibid.
16. See below.
18. Unemployment Relief Council, Minutes, 184, 18 November 1932. A government report in 1931 stated: "One very noticeable result of the unemployment problem is the number of residents in the vicinity of Adelaide who have purchased one or two cows and are retailing milk to their neighbours". S.A.P.P., No. 43, 1931, p. 27. Another government report recorded that the number of cows registered in the Adelaide metropolitan area increased from 3,957 in 1929 to 5,810 in 1933. S.A.P.P., No. 63, 1933, p. 52
records of the Savings Bank similarly suggested that while the majority of unemployed mortgagors were able to obtain a little money spasmodically from odd-jobs and various lurks the actual amount so earnt was relatively small. Nevertheless, for those who remained psychologically able to pursue a small monetary income to supplement their rations, the struggle to get by was made much easier.

Many of the unemployed were also able to directly supplement the food supplied by the dole by means of their own resourcefulness. One person, for example, used to ride up to sixty miles every weekend on his bicycle to trap rabbits. Others were able to make productive use of their own immediate environment. The spacious allotments upon which Adelaide's suburban homes were generally built, permitted the cultivation of quite extensive vegetable gardens. Almost without exception all of those interviewed had grown their own backyard vegetables. The products of these gardens added a very great deal not only to the quantity, but also to the quality, of the unemployed's diet. The garden was also important in giving the individual person something to keep him usefully occupied during the day. Many of those who were interviewed said that either they themselves or their fathers often spent the whole day in their garden. It was also very common, as has been seen, for productive animals, such as chickens, and even cows, to be kept in backyards. Of course, those who lived on exceptionally small allotments or who

20. Interview with Mr. W. Fuller.
21. For example, interview with Mr. A. Briggs.
were forced to shift residence regularly through inability to pay rent, were greatly disadvantaged by being unable to establish a productive garden.

In certain instances, charitable institutions were a welcome source of extra assistance used by the unemployed to supplement the dole. One informant and his father used to go once a week to a city soup kitchen to reduce the strain on the family's weekly rations.\(^{22}\) This did not appear to be a common pattern since most regarded attending a soup kitchen as a final stage in the process of degradation. Single men, of course, were forced to attend since rations were not generally supplied to them.\(^{23}\)

In many cases the unemployed supplemented meagre fuel supplies by collecting coal deposited on the railway tracks by steam trains. Two separate informants stated that they believed the engine drivers and coalmen had deliberately pitched coal onto the tracks for the unemployed.\(^{24}\) Those living near the sea gathered driftwood from the beach which was dried and used for burning.\(^{25}\) One person related the details of a very original technique for cooking which he said was very economical and widely used by the unemployed:

\[\ldots\] you would try and save a few pounds and keep your living down as much as possible. We used to cook with saw dust, you know. That was arranged in a can about the size of a gallon paint can with a round stick and a hole in the front, like the old chip bath heaters that we used to have, and a hole in the bottom - perhaps an inch or an inch and a half up from the bottom. You would fill the bottom up to this hole and you would pound it down

\(^{22}\) Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
\(^{23}\) See Chapter 8 below.
\(^{24}\) Interview with Mr. H. Fearn and Mr. & Mrs. J. Catton.
\(^{25}\) Interview with Mr. H. Fearn.
really tight. You had two sticks, one stick
going in the little hole in the front and the
other one in the centre of the tin. You
would fill that in and tap that down really
hard with sawdust and then pull the sticks
out carefully and it would leave a flue, and
you would put a bit of paper in the front and
light that and that would burn for perhaps two
or three hours - a beautiful steady flame.
You could make a stew or whatever you wanted
on this. We used to go on our bike to a saw
mill or joiner's shop and buy a bag of sawdust
and you would fill it yourself and you could
do quite a bit of cooking with this. This
would save you wood.26

In the face of extremely restrictive and harsh regulations surrounding the administration of the dole, many of the unemployed also found ways of "getting around" these regulations. In fact, "cheating on the dole" was one very common method of "getting by" described by those interviewed. The most common offence was failure to report earnings acquired by the unemployed person himself, his wife or his children.27 Typical of such offenders were two men who were charged in court in 1933 with receiving rations illegally following the discovery that their wives had been working under false names in a jam factory.28 When the Unemployment Relief Council carried out a random check of people receiving an allowance for the supply of gas for cooking instead of receiving firewood, it was found that 25% were not even connected to the gas supply.29 The number of people receiving rations "under false pretences" was a continual source of concern

26. Interview with Mr. R.K.
27. Unemployment Relief Council, Report, 30 July 1933. One person interviewed was arrested and given a severe fine for failing to report earnings.
28. Advertiser, 3 May 1933.
29. Unemployment Relief Council, Minutes, 58, 3 June 1931.
to the Unemployment Relief Council. By the introduction of extremely time-consuming checks on those receiving rations the Unemployment Relief Council was able to prosecute and convict almost 1,200 persons for obtaining rations illegally over the period 1931-41. Those who were not caught must have numbered many times this figure. Table 6.1 shows the quarterly and cumulative number of convictions of person obtaining rations illegally.

**TABLE 6.1**

Quarterly Convictions of Persons for obtaining Rations under False Pretences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1st Quarter</th>
<th>2nd Quarter</th>
<th>3rd Quarter</th>
<th>4th Quarter</th>
<th>CUMULATIVE TOTAL</th>
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<td>NA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>1933</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>977</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,044</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,177</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,190*</td>
<td>1,142*</td>
<td>1,192*</td>
<td>NA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*These figures are cumulative totals.

Source: Quarterly Reports of the Unemployment Relief Council (March, 1931 - September, 1941).

In their struggle to "make do", many of the unemployed also resorted to other methods which were outside the law. While the total number of cases heard by the Magistrate's Court in South Australia declined by almost one-third between 1927-31, these overall figures disguise a significant change which occurred in the type of criminal offence committed. Crimes against property,

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30. South Australia, Statistical Register, 1927-32.
in fact, increased by almost 100% between 1925-31. The individual convictions to increase most severely were "stealing fruit and vegetables", "larceny", "breaking and entering" and "unlawful possession". The decreases which actually lowered the overall crime rate occurred primarily in the categories of "offences against good order" and "other offences", being mainly contraventions of various licencing and other Acts. Offences committed against persons remained fairly static throughout the period. Details of these offences are shown in Table 6.2.

Generally, the offences committed by the unemployed were petty crimes. Orchards were raided by unemployed men and youths, floorboards and fences of vacant houses were torn up for fire-wood, and petty thieving from shops and factories was prevalent. In 1933 the Advertiser lamented the increase in petty crimes and the corresponding decline in the morality of the working class which it alleged resulted from the increase in idle time available to the unemployed:

The hard-working, well-paid man has neither time nor inclination for crime. For the idle hands, with little or nothing in them, the proverbial 'mischief' is likely to be found by the source of all evil.

A particularly common crime during the Depression was known as "snow-dropping" - the practice of stealing washing from backyard clotheslines. One unemployed man, arrested by the police, while walking along the Port Road at 4.00 a.m. carrying a bag of tools,


32. Advertiser, 2 February 1933, (Editorial).
### TABLE 6.2

Cases Heard before Magistrates' Courts - Showing

Numbers of Individual Offences - South Australia 1926-38

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Common assault</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>232</td>
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<td>Carnal knowledge</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Murder</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Rape</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offences Against Property</td>
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<td>Assault and robbery</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilful &amp; malicious damage</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>125</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stealing fruit &amp; vegetables</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>612</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breaking and entering</td>
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<td>232</td>
<td>281</td>
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<td>Unlawful possession</td>
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<td>299</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>317</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offences Against Good Order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
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<td>5,210</td>
<td>4,511</td>
<td>3,771</td>
<td>3,245</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idle &amp; disorderly</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>506</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Rogue and vagabond</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>98</td>
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<td>Insulting behaviour</td>
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<td>396</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>547</td>
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<td>Riotous behaviour</td>
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<td>311</td>
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Source: South Australia, Statistical Register, 1926-27 to 1938-39.
was found to have a whole roomful of stolen clothing at home.

There appears to have been a small percentage of the unemployed, even amongst those who had been without work for a long time, who not only got by through their own resourcefulness but actually thrived and became virtually self-sufficient. The following extract from an interview with a man, who was the father of five children and had been unemployed for nearly ten years during the Depression, indicates not only the hardship of the life that he and his family experienced but also a quite extraordinary resourcefulness and courage:

We would go down to the rifle range - that was our part-time work. We would go down on a Thursday morning and sit there from 9.00 a.m. until 12.00 noon. Then we would draw the raffle ticket to see who would get the job for the Saturday afternoon. You would go Saturday afternoon and be there until dark and you would get eight bob for that. At that time the Port market was open. You would go and get a shilling's worth of vegetables, which included a cabbage, three bunches of vegetables, turnips or parsnips and perhaps some cherries. My eight shillings went Saturday night. A shilling's worth of vegetables, shilling's worth of sausages and, if I could afford it, a tin of tobacco - a 2 oz. tin. At that time the freezer was down at the wharves - they used to kill the export lamb down there. They would say, "you can have all the lamb's tongues", but at the same time they would say, "don't touch those pig's heads" - then they'd walk away. Well, you always had your sugar bag on your bike - collecting food for your children. When you had a bag full of tongues, you'd pop in a pig's head and off you would run. My wife used to boil these pig's heads up.

Wood was a problem. Cargo boats would dump it outside Outer Harbour. When there was a strong wind blowing you would search the beach from Outer Harbour to Largs Bay looking for wood. When the boys were home from school, they had a little hand cart and they would load this up with wood.

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33. Advertiser, 3 May 1932.
At that time, it was survival of the fittest. I raided all the vegetable gardens. You would go for a ride in the afternoon. There were big heaps of trombones piled outside a fence, so you would pick this big trombone out. We would ride home through the back-streets and tonight we would have this trombone and the next morning the children would have trombone and mashed potatoes with a pot of meat.

[In 1932 I got some work with the Commonwealth for short periods] sometimes for three weeks at a time. When you got back you went to the ration place and they would ask you what you were earning for the past three weeks. The wages were about £4/11/- a week so you would get no rations for a month. Well, you had spent your money on food, bought a pair of trousers, boots for the kids and so you were starving for that month. Well, then you had to theven. Not theven - but you had to scrounge around to get things. You could get a reject lamb for five bob to split among two families. That was a luxury to get half a lamb. You would split it up. Things were cheap but you didn't have the money to buy anything. You would get a tin of plum jam for 5d. a tin. That was a fortune. The kids' breakfast consisted of a slice of brawn and a basin of flaked oats. Harrision from the milk depot used to give us a billy can of skimmed milk. They would be lined up like a bus queue. We had fowls. You would go the Port and see all the trucks coming in with wheat bags and if possible climb in and get some wheat to keep your fowls going. You were always concerned about tucker for your kids.

Did your children ever go hungry?

They went hungry. They were always hungry. They were undernourished and felt hungry all the time. There was no picking and choosing what they could have. You made the most of what you could get the most out of. For example, you would get a shilling worth of spuds and a big trombone and get them up in the morning with a big plate of porridge and a hot plate of mashed potatoes and trombone, and a slice of potted meat. They went to school with something in their stomachs. Then you would have to think what am I going to give them for tea. That was the problem all the time, how am I going to feed them, clothe them, they had second-hand clothes and hand-me-downs, what somebody had given them. They were just patch upon patch.

34. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
There is no evidence that this person was resigned to his situation at any stage during his years unemployed. He appears to have been continually active, even hyper-active, in his scrounging for food and other necessities. His mental state throughout the Depression appears to have been one of almost continuous anxiety such as normally characterised the unemployed only in the first stage of their "adaptation". He represents the type of person earlier characterised as psychologically "unbroken". Obviously, he was an extreme example of this type of person but interviews with others did strongly suggest that those who were closer to this type of psychological response were also those who were better equipped to "get by" in their material needs.

At the other extreme, of course, were those who appeared to have been psychologically "broken" by unemployment. These were those who experienced the worst physical hardship since their depressed psychological state generally prevented them from actively seeking ways of supplementing their rations. Unfortunately, little evidence exists concerning this group. However, those who had contact with the unemployed were aware of the connection between psychological depression and extreme physical hardship. Those who worked as representatives of the various banks often commented in their reports on the squalor in which the "hopeless" cases usually lived.36 A reporter who spent a considerable amount of time amongst the unemployed similarly described the physical and psychological misery which seemed to go hand in hand. This person quoted one house in particular which she described as "a

36. Interviews with Mr. R. Potter and Mr. G. Allen, and the inspectors reports in the records of the Savings Bank of South Australia and the State Bank of South Australia.
picture of desolation":

The mother was ill, unable to work, and her face had the utter hopelessness of one who has given in. This woman's husband was a driver, out of work for seven months. Everything in the house that could be pawned had gone to meet the needs of the children; the mother herself wore a wretched dress, with nothing underneath it.37

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Material hardship was also closely related to the extent and duration of the loss of employment experienced. Those who were fully unemployed were generally worse off than those who were underemployed. In general also, the material welfare of the unemployed deteriorated as time went by. The longer a person had been without work the worse his economic plight was likely to be. In large part this was due to the steady erosion of the few resources that the unemployed person or family had initially been able to rely upon - help from relatives, savings, their existing wardrobe of clothing, cooking utensils, and credit with the local stores. Gradually these resources dried up. Here, of course, the psychological attitude of the unemployed person himself was an important factor in determining how many new resources he could generate. But, for all the unemployed, new resources became harder to come by as time passed and, for the long-unemployed, the drive and energy required to search for new resources was slowly eroded.

There was usually a fairly clearly defined series of stages in the unemployed's declining material standard of living.

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37. Register News-Pictorial, 15 February 1929.
At first, unemployment was not likely to have made a very significant impact on the person's style of living except that the lack of income generally resulted in a curtailment of expenditure on certain luxuries normally enjoyed. In the early stages, the unemployed person rarely believed that he would be long without work. Most people seemed able to continue more or less normally for a certain time by making use of previously accumulated savings or by obtaining temporary income from some other source. Some, for example, were paid lump sums of money on their dismissal. Others were able to temporarily rely on relatives. Most, at least were able to afford normal essentials for a certain time after being retrenched.

Inevitably though, these other sources of income gradually dried up. As this happened it became necessary to reduce expenditure on what previously had been regarded as essentials. Worn-out clothing could no longer be replaced and the physical appearance of the unemployed began to make their economic situation obvious to others. At some stage during the first few months without work the unemployed person was faced with accounts for electricity or gas. If the person was renting or buying his house these payments ate very deeply into his financial reserves. Fairly soon, he was faced with rapidly accumulating arrears. In turn, expenditure on food had to be reduced, often drastically, as money and credit at the local shop ran out. The family often began to look to other sources of food. Backyard vegetable patches were a valuable but long-term help. In the shorter-term, it was usually necessary at this stage for the unemployed to consider applying for government rations. Once on rations the unemployed family's
standard of living stabilised but their problems were certainly far from solved. Life on the dole inevitably produced a wide range of problems with which the long-unemployed had to cope. But while the problems faced by the unemployed were in many instances similar, their standard of living certainly varied considerably.

A rather similar pattern had been reported by several contemporary Depression studies of unemployment in Britain, the United States and Europe. However, in this study of the unemployed in Adelaide, three distinct elements have been observed which were not reported in the contemporary studies.

Firstly, in Adelaide during the Depression, it is clear that real hardship was not confined to the long-unemployed. For those who were living at a level close to the poverty-line, any period of unemployment was sufficient to create considerable hardship. This was also true of those who became underemployed. At least one-third of the work-force were put onto short-time. For a worker to lose one-third or one-half of his weekly wage on top of a 20% cut in wages imposed by the Commonwealth Arbitration Court meant quite a drop in his standard of living. The hardship experienced by one family whose bread-winner was on short-time was revealed in a letter to the Advertiser written by a housewife from the working class suburb of Croydon who signed herself "Bon Soir":

What amuses "Janet Coles" spells tragedy for many of us, struggling to make ends meet and keep out of debt. We live in a State Bank house, the rent


39. See Chapter 1.
of which has not come down; when that is paid there is little left for food, clothing, books for school and upkeep of bike for dad to ride to work. I do not want to "grizzle", it does not help, and if the Federal Arbitration Court says we must be paid less, well that's all there is to it. But "Janet Coles" obviously lives on velvet or she would not write so ill-advisedly. Would she like to sit nightly for hours mending clothes by a smelly kerosene lamp, because she couldn't afford to keep the electric light going? Would she content herself to get up at half-past four to light a wood stove to get hubby's breakfast, because firewood runs out cheaper than gas? To sit for hours cutting up old clean rags for her girls' beds; to cover sugar bags with the cheapest of cretonne to make bed covering; to cut down milk to half a pint daily for four people; to make a pound of butter do a week (and cut dad's lunch into the bargain)? These are only a few of the things I have to do. I am not boosting myself as a housewifely example - no doubt there are scores of other mothers just as careful and thrifty as I. As for pictures, theatres or other amusements, they are as extinct as the dodo as far as our family knows. Our only entertainment is to hear Ada Wordie and her associates at the Sunday S.P.A. services.40

Secondly, there were many in Adelaide who experienced the problems of long-term unemployment before the Depression itself had begun. As has been indicated in earlier chapters, many workers were unemployed, either continuously or spasmodically, throughout the twenties.41 Consequently, by the time the "Depression" arrived, quite a large number of men had been unemployed for several years. In general, the plight of these families was ignored by the press and Parliament and little evidence exists of their situation. However, in February 1929, the Register published a series of articles on poverty in Port Adelaide. In these articles, Elizabeth

40. Advertiser, 9 February 1931.
41. See Introduction and Chapter 3.
Leigh documented evidence of severe hardship and suffering amongst the unemployed of that district:

The streets of Port Adelaide, which in a normal summer are full of brisk activity, have a deadly quiet these days.

In the homes there is no spectacular drama of poverty. The Government gives rations, which provides for bare sustenance, and the charitable of Port Adelaide do what they can, though many of them have suffered too.

The whole spectacle is something less sensational, more deading and gradual - the slow drift of decent working families down to slum conditions. Whole neighbourhoods of people owning nothing, crowding into small houses, two and three families to a house, dependent on private charity for all their needs beyond bare sustenance, have lost that sense of security which in Australia has hitherto kept those able to work from the terror of utter destitution. Beyond them is the prospect of a workless winter. 42

In the following articles, Leigh described scenes of extreme hardship which she found in the district. 43 She found cases of unemployed families living together to be extremely common. Physical and mental illness were found to be widespread. She noted in particular that hunger was widespread among the children of the Port:

The children in the Port Adelaide district know all about rations and how they are eked out; they most of them know the way to the pawnshop as surely as if they had lived for years in the slums of an older country ... Most of them are deep in the fascinating games of the pavement ... They were hungry all day yesterday, they may be hungry tomorrow; but meanwhile they take their pleasure with the

42. Register News-Pictorial, 9 February 1929.
43. Ibid., 11-15 February 1929.
philosophy of childhood.

It would be rash to assume from this absorption in tins and string that these children have no knowledge of the problems of their parents. Only part of their time is spent in the happy street; they belong to the hot, crowded weather-board and tin houses down back lanes and in poor streets.

Extreme poverty has marked most of the population in the Port Adelaide district. It has left its signs in their wretched clothing, in their bursting boots, and their anxious faces. But perhaps it is in the minds and the spirits of Port Adelaide children that its sign is most indelible.44

Since poverty was so widespread in Port Adelaide during the late 1920's it must surely have existed to some extent in other suburbs as well. Many workers throughout the metropolitan area of Adelaide experienced regular or intermittent unemployment during the 'twenties. Quite a few, therefore, had experienced the hardships of long term unemployment even before the Depression began.

The third point about the Adelaide situation is that, for those who were among the long unemployed, not only did their problems increase as a result of the length of time they had been without work, but also as a result of changes in society as the years went by. Being still unemployed while the society as a whole was recovering posed many extra problems for those who were unable to regain work. For example, as the Depression began to lift in the middle thirties, prices quickly began to rise. Food, clothing and housing costs in particular began to increase as the economy

44. Ibid., 14 February 1929.
recovered. As a result, the percentage of the unemployed who were receiving rations began to increase rapidly from about 1934 onwards. Prior to then, on average, just over half of the numbers estimated by the trade union series to be unemployed were on the dole. From 1934 onwards, however, the percentage of dole applicants increased until close to 90% were receiving rations.  

At the same time, there was considerably less sympathy in the community for those still without work in the middle and late thirties. There even appears to be some evidence that the unemployed began to be regarded as a public embarrassment which ought to be gotten rid of. As consciousness of the existence of unemployment declined, the activities of private charitable and governmental agencies for assisting the unemployed also declined. Credit became more difficult for the unemployed to obtain. Similarly, as house rents increased substantially once again landlords rarely allowed unemployed families to remain in houses which could now be let to people capable of paying regularly.

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45. See Table 5.2.

46. When asked why those who were still camping on the banks of the Torrens River were forcibly removed in 1937, a former politician replied: "When the moment came for them to be given the opportunity to possibly be accommodated in something better than that they were in, they became somewhat resentful - unwilling to move. It was then that the community started to feel that these people weren't really playing the game quite as well as we had expected ... And furthermore, we wanted to clean up what we could. Some of these spots weren't very good to witness in any community." Interview with Mr. N. Makin. See also Chapter 8.

47. See Chapter 7 below.
Another very important factor influencing the level of hardship experienced by the unemployed person, was the extent of the resources he possessed when he became unemployed. While very few of those who actually became unemployed were well enough off to remain unaffected by a long period without work, some were undoubtedly in a better position than others. In the first place, those who actually owned their own homes were free from the heavy weekly commitment for rent or mortgage repayments. Similarly, those with substantial financial assets or material possessions were better able to survive a limited period of unemployment. Of course, once these resources had been used these people were then in the same position, or worse, as others.

Some of the unemployed were better able to get by as a result of having members of their family who were able to find employment. Families in which the wife or one or more of the children were able to find work were considerably better off than others with no such financial income. The records of the Savings Bank of South Australia indicate that a few of the unemployed experienced less severe hardship as a result of one member of the family obtaining work. Of course, unemployment for young people was even higher than among adults and employment, even where available, often only lasted until they became eligible for adult wages. Similarly, there were few jobs available for women.

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48. See Chapter 7 below.

49. One informant claimed that the two years that he spent unemployed were really "like a holiday". Not surprisingly, his family was financially well-off. Telephone interview with an anonymous person.

50. See Chapter 8 below.
However, a certain number of the wives and offspring did find some form of work. One informant reported that she managed to find a waitressing position which not only provided her family with a small monetary income but also supplemented their weekly food supply since she was allowed to take home the leftovers. 51 Another person's single sister was a trainee teacher who brought home a weekly allowance of 25/-. This income proved invaluable to the family. 52

A family, particularly a large one, was, however, more generally a material burden to the unemployed than a resource. Large families were almost invariably worse off than smaller ones. This was clearly recognised by one government committee investigating the plight of those purchasing homes:

In the Thousand Homes development preference was granted to applicants with large families. In normal times the large family soon becomes an asset; if misfortune befalls the chief bread-winner the earnings of the children, as they grow up and go out to work may be counted on to assist in keeping the wolf from the door. But with the tremendous contraction of industry now experienced the more children of working age a family comprised, the greater was often its destitution. 53

How quickly a large family could be reduced to complete destitution is illustrated by the case of one family of nine in which the father had been unemployed for seventeen months prior to mid-1930. Their condition was described by the Mayoress of

51. Interview with Mrs. Hagger.
52. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
Adelaide in opening the Lord Mayor's Appeal for assistance to the unemployed. The family had been forced to sell all their furniture except their beds. The wife had only a singlet and a shabby wrap left as clothing. She had converted the remainder for the use of the children. Two of the children had no shoes at all. Three children slept in one double bed and two in each of the other single beds. The family had no bedclothes whatsoever.

The degree to which children were an advantage or a handicap depended partly on their ages. Parents who had children of school age were more often in a difficult situation since their children were not even potentially able to contribute to the family's income. On the other hand, those in their late forties and fifties often had children who were, potentially at least, able to contribute in some way to the support of the family.

Every unemployed person had particular commitments which added to the difficulties he faced in getting by. In general, by far the most important of these was the need to provide shelter for his family. The ways in which the unemployed coped with this problem were often crucial to their success in getting by and these are examined in the next chapter. Then, in the following chapter the problems of the single unemployed person are explored. The single person's commitments were usually less than those of married men but his problems were often just as great.

54. Advertiser, 9 August 1930.
CHAPTER 7

SHELTER
The arrival of the Depression quickly demonstrated how brittle had been many of the outward signs of prosperity in the twenties. This was particularly true in relation to the housing situation. When the personal impact of the Depression impinged upon the individual, whether in the form of unemployment, underemployment or simply reduced income, providing shelter for oneself and family immediately became a problem for all except those who owned a home freehold. Only one quarter of wage and salary earners in the metropolitan area were in this fortunate position.¹ A similar number of persons were in the process of purchasing their homes and the remainder, about half of all wage and salary earners, were living in rented accommodation. Amongst the unemployed, the percentage of home-owners was lower still. Only 18.5% of those shown to be unemployed by the 1933 Census actually owned their own home while slightly more were in the process of paying off a mortgage. Almost 60% of the unemployed were living in rented accommodation. In total, therefore, over four-fifths of the unemployed were committed to meeting weekly payments of some form for their accommodation. While those persons attempting to meet mortgages and those living in rented accommodation each faced very serious difficulties as a result of the Depression, their problems were quite different in nature and so deserve to be examined separately.

Unemployed Tenants

For the non-homeowning section of the working class in the 1920's, rent normally consumed a large sector of weekly income.

The Royal Commission on the Basic Wage set the average rent for a 5-roomed house in Adelaide in November 1920, at 19/6 per week. The basic wage for an adult male at the same time was £3/15/- per week. It is true that during the early years of the Depression, average house rents decreased by up to 30% on their pre-Depression levels so that for anyone who maintained their full income the cost of housing could possibly have been reduced. As has been seen, however, very few wage and salary earners did not experience at least some reduction of income. While the average rental for a 5-roomed house in 1920 represented 26% of the current basic wage, the equivalent rental in June 1933, represented 25.4% of the basic wage at that time. By December 1936, the average person was likely to be paying 31.1% of the basic wage for the rental of a 5-roomed house.

For the unemployed person, or the person with a greatly reduced income through working short-time, the position was often desperate. Rent was a recurring expense which had to be met each week even when little or no income was coming into the family. Since the government relief provided no assistance for housing, anyone who was on relief had little chance of meeting a regular weekly expenditure such as rental required.

The evidence available suggests that there existed considerable variation in the experiences of people in relation to this very serious problem. At the beginning of the Depression

3. From a table presented by J.W. Wainwright, the Auditor-General to the Building Act Enquiry Committee, 1940. Unpublished minutes of evidence, p. 3.
4. Ibid.
landlords were relatively quick to remove or evict tenants who were unable to pay. This had always tended to be the case in Adelaide where a shortage of rented housing was the norm. In 1929, a member of State Parliament referred to many cases of unemployed men and families being evicted. By 1931 it was reported in Parliament that there were at least 6,000 empty houses in the metropolitan area. It soon became obvious, however, that as more and more people became unemployed, most landlords had to accept an arrangement whereby unemployed or underemployed tenants paid as much as they were able. In 1932 the Advertiser told of one landlord who owned twenty-three houses but was only able to collect an average weekly sum of 6/- from each. In many cases, tenants were permitted to continue occupying a house for a certain time even if unable to pay any rent. One couple reported being allowed to stay in one place for quite a time before being asked to move:

You said you were renting a place during the Depression. How did you manage to pay the rent?

(Husband): We didn't pay any rent. You just had to go to the door and tell the same story.

(Wife): And he would come back every fortnight and we would still say we didn't have any.

5. Even prior to the twenties, the weighted average housing rental index numbers were consistently higher for Adelaide than for Melbourne. Australia, Labour Report, 1911-21. See also S.A.P.D., 1919, Vol. 1, p. 214.


9. The Advertiser told of another landlord who on a tour of 100 houses he owned at Port Adelaide, was able to collect a total of 12/6 in rent. Ibid.
(Husband): The government couldn't care less about rent. They told you. They even tell you that today ... They are there just to feed you. They are not worried about debts or rent.

But the landlord who owned your place was prepared to let you stay on?

(Wife): He wasn't very nice about it but he did let us stay on. He lived at Exeter. I used to say to him, "I don't see any chance of ever you getting anything because there is no job in sight". He said, "Oh well, you never know. There might be something next time". He would come every fortnight but there would never be anything. Well, he wasn't always that nice about it. That was still his place when we moved from Parker Street into Levy Street.

(Husband): No. That was the old fellow from Croydon. He used to come down from Croydon. He had the property but he couldn't get anything out of it. He couldn't get blood out of a stone! And, well, he used to go away discontented. But there wasn't much he could do about it.

Since, as Mr. Catton pointed out, the landlord could not hope to get blood out of a stone and there was little chance of finding other paying tenants, there was not much point in attempting to evict unemployed tenants. In fact, landlords realised that it was better to have a non-paying tenant in the house since no house could be left deserted without having its fence and floorboards removed for firewood and all moveable contents taken to be sold.

However, there were instances in this period of unemployed persons being badly treated by unscrupulous landlords. The most common cause of complaint from the unemployed resulted from landlords

10. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. Catton.

using legal provisions for obtaining distress for rent. Although, overall, these provisions were not generally used by landlords it was possible under the legal provisions surrounding the collection of rent arrears for a landlord to enter the premises of a tenant without notice, to take any goods found there and to sell those goods to recover his debt. During the Depression some landlords did begin to make use of this technique for recovering arrears. Furthermore, the Attorney-General stated in Parliament in 1931 that certain landlords were taking unfair advantage of their tenants' ignorance of the law. In particular, he reported incidents of bailiffs seizing and selling every item owned by the tenant for a fraction of their true worth. In one case, the debt owing was 22/6 but the bailiff sold goods whose genuine value was £9.

While many landlords did permit tenants to remain in their houses for a certain time without paying rent, there were few landlords who were prepared to write-off this unpaid rent. So, sooner or later, most of the unemployed owed so much in back rent that they were forced to move on. In many instances, tenants resorted to the "moonlight flit" in order to keep their furniture and other possessions in the face of demands for compensation for unpaid rent. Knowledge of this trick was very widespread amongst those interviewed and for one informant it was an accepted and regular part of his life:

12. One individual example reported in Parliament was that of a father of four children who returned home to find all his furniture had been seized for non-payment for rent, S.A.P.D., 1930, Vol. 1, p. 482. For other general references to the commonness of this practice see S.A.P.D., 1931, Vol. 1, p. 1669, and Vol. 2, p. 2434 and p. 2576.

Have you heard about the moonlight flit? It was practiced by all and sundry. When you leased a place and couldn't pay, you would look around for somewhere else and one afternoon we would come home from school and everything would be packed up and a chappy would come around with a horse and dray just after dark and he and Dad and Mum would pack everything on to this dray and off you would go to this other house. 14

In other instances, the move was initiated by the landlord himself if he felt that there might be some chance that his house could be rented to someone who could pay. Evictions became more and more common as the Depression years went by and a demand for rented accommodation returned. By the Census of June, 1933, the number of empty houses in the metropolitan area had decreased to 2,242 15 and by 1936 the housing market had returned to the state of acute shortage that had been normal during the twenties. 16 As a result, landlords found it much easier to let their properties. The first effect of this improvement in the housing market was to force rentals up. The average weekly rental of a five-roomed brick house in the metropolitan area rose by 29% from 16/- to 20/- between June 1933 and December 1936. 17 In certain cases, rents were increased from practically nothing to 25/- or more per week. 18

14. Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
17. Evidence by J. Wainwright the Auditor-General of S.A. to the Building Act Enquiry Committee 1940, Minutes of evidence, p. 3.
Many people who previously had managed to scrape together the low rental required in earlier years were now forced to look for cheaper accommodation. Naturally the situation of those who were still unemployed was considerably worsened. With the increased demand for housing, landlords were far less likely to tolerate non-paying tenants. A land agent was asked, when appearing before a government committee in 1934, what was the general response of landlords to tenants who through unemployment, short-time or loss of pay were not paying their full rent. He replied:

The majority of my clients have been exceptionally tolerant and have wiped off hundreds of pounds of arrears and have given the tenants a clean start again. For some years they have been satisfied to get what they can and be thankful. But now as houses are letting more readily, the tendency is to demand the full rent and ask the tenants to shift if they cannot pay.19

During a period of three months in late 1934, 109 evictions were reported,20 and a statement issued by the Conference of Unemployed Workers in September 1936 claimed that there had been 2,865 evictions since January of that year.21

During these years the newspapers and Parliamentary debates contained numerous references to individual cases of hardship resulting from evictions. One deserted or widowed mother with young

19. Mr. A.L. Dawe, Land agent, in evidence to the Advances for Home's Investigation Committee, 1934, p. 104. The same point was made in the Report of the Unemployment Relief Council, 30 September, 1934, p. 2.


21. Advertiser, 24 September 1936. The unemployed workers groups represented at this conference were in a position to know how many evictions were taking place since the great majority of their activities were in the area of attempting to prevent evictions.
children was reported sheltering in the Norwood Police cells after having been evicted. 22 The wife of an unemployed man who was searching for work in the country was evicted and then turned away by fourteen land agents because she had no rent book. 23 Two families with eleven children were evicted from a house they had been sharing in Port Adelaide and their furniture was stacked on the road outside the house by the bailiff. As a protest the families decided to live on the street until they obtained another house. The children were given to relatives and all four adults slept on the street in one double bed. They explained that they didn't have enough clothing to cover them in separate beds. 24 The families were later reported to be living on the beach at Largs Bay. 25

It was probably partly as a result of such incidents being given wide publicity that the government decided to provide a free removalist service to those evicted. An evictee could obtain assistance by contacting his Member of Parliament who would arrange through the Childrens Welfare and Public Relief Department to have a lorry shift the person's furniture. The Department would also pay the person's first week of rent in his new place of accommodation. 26

25. Ibid. Other reports of similar cases of hardship were given in S.A.P.D., 1933, Vol. 2, p. 2052; Ibid., 1936, Vol. 1, p. 896; Advertiser, 13 January, 1933.
Of course, this certainly was far from an adequate solution to the problems of the unemployed. In a letter to the Advertiser one person who signed himself "Retrenched Male Clerk" described the circular problems facing the unemployed:

Through this department [the C.W. & P.R.D.] the government pays moving expenses and the first week's rent providing the tenant, by 'hook or by crook' finds another house to move into. I am in the peculiar position of having been paid by the government to move into a government-owned house and am given to understand by the government that I cannot receive full rations and pay the rent as well; that I must keep my rent paid or get out; and now the government is taking the usual legal proceedings to put me out. When the fateful day arrives, the government will once again pay my moving expenses and the first week's rent to live in another landlord's house, but still with the proviso that I cannot receive full rations and pay the rent. This means that my family is to be hounded from pillar to post like hundreds of others, and that I must use criminal tactics to procure shelter.27

The position became so serious that in August 1934 the government finally decided to provide some assistance with rent to the unemployed. The Unemployment Relief Council arranged with State Government departments to provide one day's work per week for at least some of the unemployed to enable them to pay their rent.28

In order to obtain this work, the unemployed man had to have received an eviction order from his landlord. This naturally led to a rush of eviction orders being sought by landlords to enable their non-paying tenants to obtain a day's work and thus pay their rent. In some cases collaboration between landlord and tenant

27. Advertiser, 13 January 1933.
occurred to obtain a day’s wages for the tenant. In such cases the money was often shared by landlord and tenant. This scheme assisted a considerable number of the unemployed to provide shelter for their families in the later thirties. While the government was unable to provide a day’s work for all the unemployed, at any one time between 1935-39 about 1,200 men were receiving this assistance.

By March 1937, 41.8% of the married men in receipt of relief were participating to some extent in the rent work scheme.

Nevertheless, in spite of this limited assistance to some, for the long-term unemployed in general, the problem of providing adequate shelter became more difficult as the Depression began to lift. By the late thirties there existed a desperate shortage of houses in Adelaide. The building industry had by no means recovered and many of the slum dwellings which previously housed the unemployed had been condemned and demolished by local Councils. In 1939 Mr. Ross Payne, Secretary of the Central Council of the Unemployed, referred to what he termed "a wave of evictions" which were then taking place as a result of the shortage of rented accommodation:

Mr. Miles [State organiser of the Central Council of Unemployed Workers] and I visit the slum areas of Adelaide. We find slums of the worst type infested with all kinds of vermin and not fit for human habitation. A wave of evictions is going on because of non-payment of high rent. Where are

29. Although one informant said that this was common it was unlikely that it was, firstly because of the dominance of the landlord’s position and secondly because the government made efforts to check that the money was actually used for paying rent.


31. Ibid., 30 March, 1937.

these evicted people to go? They cannot get houses. The agents will not give them a house unless they can show that they can pay the rent and being unemployed they cannot do that. 33

Some of the places where those who had "no place to go" went have already been mentioned. In the worst cases, people simply slept on the streets, on the beach or sought refuge in police stations. Some made temporary homes in abandoned hovels. The more fortunate moved in with relatives or friends, often making conditions uncomfortably overcrowded, but at least finding shelter. Others went to the country. In South Australian society, there existed close links between town and country and few Adelaide residents did not have country relations. Several of the people interviewed spent several years in the later thirties with their relatives in the country. 34

One woman with her husband, moved into a mud hut in the Adelaide hills shortly after they were married. They found quite a sense of community in their rather spartan life in this unemployed colony:

From the beginning when we were first married, we married at Port Adelaide Methodist Church in 1935, and from there we went to this little humpy. This was built from saplings with mud in between them, into this little place. It didn't have glass in the windows but pieces of tin and I would poke them out with sticks to let fresh air in. It just had the ground with wheat bags all over it. That was the covering. There was a little bedroom place with the bed in one corner and a wardrobe and dressing table. An open fire-place to cook in. The kitchen was very small and that had saplings with hessian around and that was the wall. The roof was all kerosene tins opened out. That was our little place.

33. Evidence by Mr. Ross C. Payne, Secretary of the Central Council of Unemployed Workers, Trades Hall, to the Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works, 1939, p. 251.

34. For example, Mr. J. Bassani, Mrs. Hagger, and Mrs. O'Toole.
Where was this humpy exactly?

In Mylor onto the Echunga Road, a few miles into the bush were all these humpies. They were all people who had walked out of their homes during the depression and this is how they built to have a roof over their heads.

Why did they go into the hills?

There was nowhere else where you could get a house in those days. There were dozens of families moving out of Port Adelaide and various districts. With no home, if you couldn't pay your rent naturally the landlord would put you out. This is what went on. So eventually we built these little flats out here, we called them houses. You would put one or two rooms depending how big your families were. We only had the two. Our only way of getting water was the men used to make a yoke and put it on their shoulders, made from two kerosene tins, and go down to the creek and get water, and bring it up. I had a wash place which was to put two tubs on, that was made from saplings and I had ropes strung from one tree to another to hang the clothes on. I had a kerosene tin to boil the clothes in, that is how I used to charcoal in to iron with. My first experience of cooking was with an old fashioned colonial oven, with a fire on top and a little fire underneath. For pleasure we just went for walks from one town to another, anything up to eight miles.

Where did these other people live?

They lived in little huts all around within a distance.

On people's property?

No, it was bushland. I can't remember the name of the people that lived on the opposite side of the creek. The creek ran right around to silver lake. We were on this side of the road in these little humpy places. They looked very nice. After a while we would get a bit of whitewash or some lime and paint them over to make them nice and clean. Gradually you would clear a bit of the ground and have a garden here and there in it. We made it home.

Did you meet the other people around you?

Yes, we would help one another; On our rations in those days, if someone ran out of something, we would go to the next neighbour and ask if they would lend us whatever it was until we got the next rations.
A photograph of one of the mud houses built by the unemployed at Mylor in the Adelaide hills. *Advertiser*, 26 September 1936.
My husband would take odd jobs, doing a bit of gardening, cleaning out horse stables or cow yards and anything that could be got. But without getting money for it which even the business people were finding it hard to do then, he would bring home a pint of milk or half a dozen eggs. That helped to keep us going but even for two people it was a heavy struggle with the rations we got. We would go into the bush and find wood to be able to have fires and just go for walks wherever we could and this was our own bit of pleasure. My husband had been a dance band leader in his earlier years before I met him and he used to play clarinet, so he used to play the clarinet and the people in the little humpy near us, they were about five, they all had mouth organs, so we used to make a sing-song at night time around the camp fire. This was our pleasure, that was all we had. On top of that my husband used to be a boot repairer as well. I have known him to walk anything up to five or six miles just to get a pair of lady’s shoes to heel. He would get 1/3d. for that. He would get about 3/6d. for a pair of men’s boots and he would be able to buy a packet of cigarettes for that. That was all the money we were able to get. The butcher used to be very kind that came through Echunga and would perhaps give us a couple of ounces more of meat, just throw it on the scales and that was it. This way you would get that little bit more of meat and that would help us along. There were people across the river on the opposite side to where we lived, people by the name of Boate, they were market gardeners. If you wanted to come to the city and you had to get to the Adelaide High School, it would cost you a shilling to get there, you would get a ride down with the market gardener and you would get back that way. If he came back and he couldn’t sell all his produce, he would let us have some if we could get hold of sixpence, a sugar bag full. Whoever got a sugar bag full, would share it with the other fellows.35

Housing Standards and the Unemployed

By the late twenties it was commonly assumed that the housing conditions that existed in Australia were markedly superior to anything that existed in the "old world". Housing was seen as a

35. Interview with Mrs. McLean.
prime area in which national prosperity had been passed down the
social ladder. Such a view seemed to be evident in a passage
written by W.K. Hancock in 1930:

There are slums in Australian cities; but, just as
the Australian visitor to London or Glasgow will
be impressed by the dinginess in which the majority
of working people live, so will the English visitor
to Melbourne or Adelaide be impressed by the clean-
liness and the airiness, the decencies and even the
comforts of life, which seem to be within the reach
of all. And, as he passes from suburb to suburb,
he will be astonished at the broad spread of middle
class comfort, the apparent diffusion of a middling
prosperity through a great proportion of the city
population.36

For those, like Hancock, who spoke or wrote of the democratic
egalitarianism of Australian life, the steadily increasing
percentage of home-owners was a strong reinforcement for their view
that the Australian standard of living was second to none in the
world.

However, beneath this aura of self-confidence there exists
some evidence of a certain uneasiness. One senses this even in the
passage quoted above since Hancock felt obliged to preface his
comments by referring to the existence of slums. In 1914 the English
townplanner, Charles C. Reade, visited Adelaide on a lecture tour of
Australia.37 Reade scandalised the respectable citizens of Adelaide
by delivering a lecture titled: "Garden cities versus Adelaide slums
and suburbs". The lecture produced a response so indignant and
frantic that it suggested that he had raised a very sensitive subject.38

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of Adelaide, 1950, p. 52.
38. For an example of this response see the reply by the Acting Lord
Mayor in Salon, November 1914, p. 167. See also C.C. Reade,
Housing conditions for a large sector of the working class in Adelaide had never been of high standard. Part of the reason for the existence of poor housing conditions had been the mania for land speculation that had swept Adelaide in its early development - especially in the early 1880's. This, together with the lack of application of town planning principles, and very few restrictions on sub-division, ensured that in certain suburbs extremely small blocks were sub-divided for house building and slums inevitably developed.

But while slum housing did exist in Adelaide prior to the Depression there is no doubt that those houses that were already in poor condition generally got considerably worse and many that had previously provided reasonable accommodation deteriorated badly with years of neglect in the interim period. A parliamentary committee which was set up in 1937 to investigate sub-standard housing in Adelaide provided some insight into the extent of the effect of the Depression on the housing conditions of the unemployed.

This Committee carried out a survey of houses in the city of Adelaide and in seven suburbs. The survey was very largely limited to those areas of each of these suburbs which obviously contained a large percentage of sub-standard homes. It was, therefore, in no way a complete survey of sub-standard housing in the metropolitan area. In all, 7,454 dwellings were inspected and of these, 6,870

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40. South Australia, Building Act Enquiry Committee, First, Second and Final Reports, S.A.P.P., 1940, Nos. 30, 32 and 34.

41. Hindmarsh, Port Adelaide, Thebarton, St. Peters, Kensington and Norwood, Burnside and Unley.
were classified by the inspectors as being sub-standard. Of these, 4,616 were described as being undesirable for use for habitation because of their structural condition, bad state of repair or lack of amenities, 2,127 were described as being unfit for habitation and demolition was necessary; and 127 were regarded as even worse. The total number of occupants of these sub-standard dwellings was 26,298.42

The published findings of this committee leave no doubt that extremely poor housing conditions were endemic among working class suburbs in the thirties. Over 25% of all rented houses in the Adelaide metropolitan area were classified by the survey as slum dwellings. However, it ought to be emphasised that there can be no doubt that the report of the committee grossly understated how bad conditions really were. The survey did not attempt to cover every suburb and even in those that were included the survey was not always comprehensive.43 In areas where conditions were generally of a reasonable standard the survey was not as thorough as in slum areas. Similarly, many sub-standard houses were passed over because externally they appeared sound.44 The criteria by which houses were classified were unreasonably conservative. For example, a house could have been completely without either a bathroom or a wash-house and still receive an A-classification (fit for habitation). If there was some doubt about the classification of a dwelling, the higher category was always allocated.45 The report of the committee stated that more than one-half of the houses in the B-classification (undesirable for human habitation) were little

43. Ibid., Second Report, p. 7.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 8.
better in type or condition than those included in the C-classification (unfit for human habitation - demolition necessary).  

Not surprisingly, the occupants of these sub-standard dwellings were among the poorest in the community and included many who were unemployed. Even in the late thirties almost one-quarter of all male tenants of these houses were unemployed. Over 14% of occupants were pensioners and of the remainder the majority were unskilled workers. Significantly, however, one-third of workers described their normal occupation as skilled. The report of the committee noted that many of these "though possibly at one time 'skilled' workers, have, for one reason or another, ceased to enjoy regular employment in their avocations." As a result, "large numbers" of the occupants of these dwellings were reported to be earning very much below the basic wage.

46. Building Act Committee, Third Report, p. 11. Undoubtedly there was some truth in the explanation made by the committee for such a conservative analysis of their findings that they wished to ensure that their conclusions could not be regarded as impractical or as overstating the problems. Op. cit., p. 8.

47. Building Act Enquiry Committee, Third Report, p. 29.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid., Second Report; p. 34.

50. Ibid.
Few of the houses classified as sub-standard were owned by the persons occupying them. Over 80% of these dwellings were owned by people who did not live in them. At least one-half of all sub-standard houses were owned by persons who possessed three or more slum dwellings. Many of these persons owned far more than four such houses. One person owned as many as 162 sub-standard houses. Table 7.1 shows the distribution of ownership of these dwellings.

A considerable proportion of those who owned sub-standard dwellings in the late thirties had taken the opportunity provided by the Depression to acquire cheap properties. If it is true that during the early years of the Depression some of these landlords "carried" the unemployed, it is equally true that by the middle and late thirties they were beginning to enjoy the fruits of their investments. The immediate post-Depression period was ideally suited to the interests of slum landlords when a strong demand for housing returned. The Building Act Enquiry Committee concluded:

51. Of course this survey did not necessarily include the total number of houses owned by each person nor even the total number of slum dwellings owned. Furthermore, the compilers of this information chose to allocate these properties strictly on the basis of individual ownership despite the fact that it was regularly found that various members of a family appeared to be separate owners of a number of houses. Various members of one Adelaide family, for example, owned a total of 106 sub-standard houses and although they were all under the same management they were classified as separate holdings.

52. An analysis of the dates on which over 200 randomly chosen sub-standard dwellings last changed hands shows that there was definitely a market for these houses during the Depression years. Whereas 26.1% had last changed hands in the period 1936-40, 36.2% had last changed hands between 1926-35. Of course, some of those that changed hands in the former period may also have done so during the Depression years. Building Act Committee, Second Report, pp. 33-38.
TABLE 7.1

Distribution of Ownership of Sub-standard Houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons owned</th>
<th>1 house each</th>
<th>4 persons owned</th>
<th>16 houses each</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>971</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>591</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, 1,240 persons owned the houses they occupied.

Source: Building Act Enquiry Committee, Third Report, S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 44, p. 44.
... in very many cases the rate of return to owners of these sub-standard houses is excessive; and when it is taken into account that many of the houses are not merely undesirable for habitation but actually unfit to be used as dwellings at all, the conclusion is inescapable that such excessive rates of return are unjustifiable.53

Most of the dwellings classified as sub-standard had developed major structural defects prior to and during the Depression years which made them extremely unpleasant places in which to live. In one two-storied house in Brompton the occupants had been unable to venture into the upper rooms for two years owing to the dangerous state of the floors and stairs.54 It was quite common for floors to have gaping holes in the boards and for joists to be insecure owing to rot, damp or white ants. The Building Act Committee found unsound floors to be the rule rather than the exception in sub-standard houses. Over 80% of sub-standard houses had unsound floors.55 Similarly with walls and ceilings, defective constructions were to be found everywhere. Huge gaps

53. Building Act Enquiry Committee, Second Report, p. 42. One landlord who purchased four sub-standard houses in the City of Adelaide in 1934 for £112 was receiving in the late thirties a total weekly rental of £1/17/0 - a gross return per annum on capital of 85.9%. Another landlord who purchased four slum dwellings in Port Adelaide in 1935 for only £75 was by the late thirties receiving a gross return of 128.3% annually. While profits of this order were rather exceptional, though by no means unique, 45% of the sub-standard properties investigated by the Building Act Enquiry Committee were returning to their owners a gross annual return of in excess of 20% profit. 80% were returning in excess of 10%. Ibid., Third Report, pp. 33-38.


were commonly seen in the plaster and ceilings hung sagging from the supporting frameworks. In many houses of the row-dwelling type the middle rooms received no direct sunlight whatever. Quite commonly these rooms were used as children's bedrooms. Even in those rooms which had a single window facing onto the side of the house, the lack of light coming in could make for a very depressing environment in winter especially if the only window was close to the neighbouring house. Almost half the sub-standard houses were found to have inadequate natural lighting. One of the major causes of structural defects in sub-standard houses was the widespread existence of serious dampness. The majority of houses occupied during the thirties had been built when damp courses were not provided. This, together with the fact that during the Depression landlords rarely could, or would, keep the building adequately maintained, meant that more than two in every three sub-standard dwelling possessed dampness "to an appreciable degree". The older the suburb the higher the level of dampness in existence. The seriousness of widespread dampness in older houses ought not to be underestimated. It is very definitely an important factor in bad housing. Not only did it contribute to the general structural deterioration of the house and to the "musty, stale atmosphere" which was said to be endemic in the homes of the poor, but it undoubtedly further added to the poor health of the unemployed.

57. Ibid., p. 18.
59. Ibid.
Although many of the structural defects in these houses derived from the original construction itself, in many other cases they were the result of recent deterioration. The main cause of such defects was neglect on the part of landlords to carry out repairs and renovations when they became necessary. The report of the Committee stated:

It would not be unfair to say that many landlords do very little indeed in the way of repairs. Inspectors were constantly noticing repairs which tenants stated had remained unattended to for years. As regards many hundreds of houses of the poorest type, it may be said with certainty that repairs are only effected in the most niggardly and perfunctory manner. Owners of this class of property would generally acquiesce in what can only be called a slum standard as regards state of repair.62

A further contributing factor in poor housing conditions was the prevalence of vermin infestation.63 Fleas, cockroaches and other bugs were most commonly found. Often rooms were shut off and not used because they had been completely taken over by vermin. Rat infestation was not as common though certainly it existed. Just over one in five sub-standard houses were found to be vermin infested.64 The Committee stressed that because people were reluctant to admit to the presence of vermin in their homes this figure probably seriously underestimated its actual extent.65

In thousands of houses during the Depression basic conveniences were either non-existent or in terrible repair. For example, in the survey carried out by the Building Act Committee

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
alone there were 5,000 houses with defective privies. 66 In certain cases the old nineteenth century British practice of providing communal toilets for cottages and row-houses endured. Over 3,000 houses examined were without bathrooms of any sort and in the majority of older houses that did have a bathroom it was a temporary construct erected away from the house. 67 Two cases were found in North Adelaide where adjoining cottages shared a common bathroom with an entrance from either side. The only objection that either group of occupants seemed to have to this arrangement was that before using the bath one person said she had to eject the fowls of her neighbour. 68 Bath-heaters of any sort were virtually unknown in these sub-standard dwellings. 69 Only one in five of houses had a wash-house of any sort, and almost all of these were structurally defective. 70 Most washing was done outside in a portable copper over an open fire - often the "portable copper" being in effect a kerosene tin. Waste water was generally poured into the back yard. 71 Only 5% of houses surveyed had a kitchen sink. 72 Almost invariably the only water supply for a house was a tap in the open near the back verandah. Houses were discovered without any water supply whatsoever. 73 Very few houses

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68. Ibid., p. 25.
70. Ibid., p. 26-7.
73. Ibid., p. 28.
were without a cooking stove though in over a quarter the stove areas were in bad or defective condition and in addition since over a thousand houses were without either gas or electricity, many of these must have been wood stoves.\textsuperscript{74} In 1938 the Legacy Club of Adelaide found one family in which not even the most primitive stove existed:

A family living at Birkenhead, when visited, was found to be cooking outside in a hole in the sand, as the stove had fallen to bits. There were no doors in this little place, as long ago they had been used for firewood.\textsuperscript{75}

Overcrowding was a further contributing factor to unpleasant housing conditions in Adelaide and suburbs. In certain parts of the city and metropolitan area relatively high density living had always existed because of the manner in which sub-division had taken place and the consequent high rate of land use in certain parts of Adelaide, Bowden, Brompton, Hindmarsh and Thebarton in particular. In many cases, the backyards of houses were no larger than the floor space of a very small room.\textsuperscript{76} In addition there was always a shortage of houses in the metropolitan area which, especially prior to the beginning of the Advances for Homes Scheme, encouraged the habit of extended families occupying a single dwelling. The Depression further aggravated the situation. It was common practice for families to absorb other family members and, indeed, other families. The Lady Mayoress of Adelaide in 1931 reported visiting a four-roomed cottage


\textsuperscript{76} Building Act Committee, Second Report, p. 15.
in which three families were living together. There was hardly any furniture at all and several children were sleeping on bags spread over bare floor-boards.  

Where additional occupants had to be accommodated, the process was achieved in some cases simply by crowding more people into existing rooms, and in others by temporarily (or permanently) enclosing a verandah or by using outbuildings as sleeping quarters. It was particularly common to find old-age pensioners occupying either enclosed verandahs or outbuildings. One sub-standard dwelling of nine rooms in the eastern portion of the City was occupied by a housekeeper and 19 aged pensioners. A single little wood and iron shed at the side of the house was used as a bathroom. In the backyard were two lean-to sheds of wood and iron occupied by old men. One was 9 ft. x 5 ft. x 7 ft. high with no window. The tin shed in the backyard of a city cottage shown in the photograph on the following page was similarly occupied by a returned soldier who paid a separate rent of 6/- a week.

In determining the actual extent of overcrowding, the Building Act Enquiry Committee is of little use. This was partly because the criteria chosen to assess overcrowding were, by its own admission, unrealistic, and partly because by the late thirties the


78. See the photographs on the following pages of houses where this situation exists. The photographs are taken from the Second Report of the Building Act Enquiry Committee.


80. Hence the Committee could conclude that "Houses which are not technically overcrowded may get to be uncomfortably full and many instances were found where this was the case." Ibid., Third Report, p. 32.
Outbuildings in the backyard of a cottage in the eastern part of the city, occupied by a returned soldier who paid a separate rent of 6/- a week. Second Report of the Building Act Enquiry Committee, S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 32, p. 27.
Rear of two houses in Pirie Street, Adelaide, showing the yard on the right entirely occupied by sheds joining up with the enclosed verandah. Second Report of the Building Act Enquiry Committee, S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 32, p. 20.
worst of the overcrowding crisis had passed. If one chose as the minimum criterion for comfortable living the standard that there should be one bedroom for every two persons and that where there are three or more persons there should be some sort of common room in addition to the kitchen, then, according to the 1933 Census, there were approximately 20,000 houses in South Australia that were overcrowded. This suggests that well over one-quarter of people in the State were living in relatively overcrowded conditions. Furthermore, in the Adelaide metropolitan area over 9,000 persons were found to be "sleeping out" in mid-winter 1933.

Sociological studies of people in poverty have invariably concluded that very bad housing has a marked effect on people's health. Bad housing can contribute to ill-health when disease-carrying vermin are present, when basic sanitation is faulty or lacking, when inadequate lighting and ventilation exist, when inadequate or crowded sleeping conditions occur and when dampness or inadequate heating creates an unhealthy atmosphere. Many Adelaide women living in poorly heated and damp houses reported that their children were subject to frequent illnesses throughout these years. Diseases and illnesses which have been directly linked to these conditions include acute respiratory infections, certain infectious

82. Ibid., p. 2105.
83. It is in this area that the evidence of a casual link between bad housing and damaging effects on the individual is most conclusive. For example, see K. Coates and R. Silburn, Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen, Penguin, 1970; M. Harrington, The Other America, Penguin, 1963.
diseases of childhood (measles, chickenpox and whooping cough), minor digestive diseases and enteritis (typhoid, dysentery and diarrhoea), infectious and non-infectious diseases of the skin, pneumonia and tuberculosis. As well as actually causing disease, bad housing can indirectly undermine resistance to disease especially through the existence of poor lighting and bad ventilation and heating. Each of these was prevalent in a very large number of dwellings in Adelaide during the thirties and there is little doubt that they were important factors in contributing to the poor health experienced by the unemployed.

Poor housing also had an effect on the attitudes and behaviour of the unemployed. The Report of the Building Act Enquiry Committee provided a bleak and depressing picture of life in one of the thousands of sub-standard houses in Adelaide:

Even on the brightest days the houses are usually dark and uninviting. In most cases the interior is dingy and the walls and woodwork have not been attended to for years. Dust and plaster fall from the ceilings and walls, the floors are broken and uneven, and a housewife who attempts to keep such a house tidy and attractive faces an almost impossible task. There is usually nothing in the house or its surroundings in which the inmates can take any aesthetic interest and where, as so often occurs, the house is verminous, living conditions may become intolerable.


There were numerous families who were continuously mobile throughout the Depression - moving from one place to another - each house a little cheaper and a little worse in condition than the last. Unfortunately for those concerned this gradual descent into slum living reinforced a number of the worst effects of unemployment. In the first place, the act of moving to a strange environment, particularly one that was harsh, unpleasant and in which people were not able to maintain the living standards they were used to, seems very likely to have reinforced the anomie breakdown of people's basic points of reference and security initiated by unemployment itself. Moving house was in fact usually one of the first of many traumatic changes forced upon the unemployed. Secondly, in general, housing is one of the most important symbols of a family's social status. A move to a lower standard house was keenly felt as a very real sign of the loss of status resulting from unemployment. Even worse, from the viewpoint of those affected, was that a move into such squalid surroundings was concrete evidence of the seriousness of the position faced. In its demoralising effect on the individual, the decline into sub-standard housing had a similar effect to that of accepting government relief for the first time. It forced the unemployed person to realise the seriousness of his situation - a step which often led to either resignation or despair.

88 While persons living in a slum housing area might in many cases feel considerable attachment to and satisfaction in their immediate environment (see M. Fried and P. Gleicher, "Some sources of residential satisfaction in an urban slum," Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 27, No. 4, November 1961, pp. 305-15 and M. Young and P. Wilmott, Family and Kinship in East London, Free Press, Glencoe, 1957.) the unpleasant circumstances under which the unemployed were forced into slum housing in many cases seemed to have an over-riding influence on their attitudes.

89 See especially E.W. Bakke, Citizens Without Work, New Haven, 1940, p. 64.
this tended also to further increase the isolation of the unemployed. The continuation of social contacts, already made difficult by unemployment, became even more difficult when people were forced to move some distance from their former place of living. 90

There seems little doubt that during the Depression in Adelaide sub-standard housing was so prevalent that certain areas could only be termed slums. 91 This was in fact the conclusion of the Building Act Committee:

It cannot be denied that slum conditions exist, not only in the City of Adelaide, but also in Bowden, Brompton, Glenville, and other parts of the western suburbs as well as, to a lesser extent, in some of the eastern suburbs. 92

Various sociologists have shown that the environment lived in bears a very close and, at least in part, casual, relationship to the expectations of persons. In particular, people living in an environment of bad housing and abject poverty tend to have very low expectations of improvement. 93 Many of those who were unemployed in

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90. One important study of the effects of housing on health concluded that "any environment which tends to isolate an individual from others offers a stress that will lead to distinguishable personality changes." P.V. Lemkau, Mental Hygiene in Public Health, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1955, p. 381.

91. The term "slum" has been defined by one authority as housing which is "dilapidated, lacking in facilities, or overcrowded to a point that seriously interferes with health, safety, or the reasonable conduct of family life. Housing in an area where slums predominate is considered slum housing, even if otherwise satisfactory". A. Schorr, Op. cit., p. 2.


the thirties had actually spent their whole lives in a state of poverty and in a slum environment. Amongst these unemployed persons one would expect to find the characteristics of what Oscar Lewis calls the "culture of poverty" already present in their attitudes even prior to the Depression. However, resignation and apathy became the dominant response amongst the unemployed as a whole. Bad housing conditions, particularly within the context of a slum environment, undoubtedly contributed to the development of this response in those who had been slightly better off prior to the Depression.

Runciman has demonstrated that an important contributing factor to the acquisition of attitudes of resignation and fatalism amongst the poor is the limitation of their reference groups. The fact that slum areas acted to some extent as a magnet to the poorest exaggerated the tendency for the unemployed to form relatively tight groupings and for reference groups to be consequently limited.

On the other hand, where the unemployed were concentrated in slum areas there is evidence that the isolating effect of unemployment was not as strong as elsewhere. In fact within the

94. Lewis refers to the culture of poverty as a subculture of the Western social order. "It is both an adaption and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair that arise from the realisation by the members of the marginal communities in these societies of the improbability of their achieving success in terms of the prevailing values and goals ... The individual who grows up in this culture has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority." O. Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty", Scientific American, 215, No. 4, Oct. 1966, p. 21 and p. 23.


96. The 1933 Census showed that in the whole of the metropolitan area there were only 4,950 rented houses available for under 10/- per week. The majority of these (60%) were located in only four suburbs - Hindmarsh, Port Adelaide, Adelaide and Kensington. Australia, Census, 1933, Vol. 3, pp. 2111-12.
slum areas that were situated in Port Adelaide, Bowden, Brompton and in Adelaide itself a very real "esprit de corps" existed among the unemployed inhabitants. Consequently, while slum housing may have contributed to the bad health of the unemployed and to the widespread development of a fatalistic attitude to their situation, those living in these slum areas enjoyed a degree of integration with their immediate community which greatly assisted their struggle for survival.

Unemployed Home-Purchasers

The launching of the Advances for Homes Scheme in 1910 meant that a large number of working class families for the first time were able to buy their own homes. Throughout the years up until 1927 the number of working class homeowners continued to rise. Those who purchased homes in the early and middle twenties, particularly under the Thousand Homes Scheme, were largely skilled and semi-skilled working people, who were earning an income of between £220-300 per year. The cheaper housing obtainable under this scheme meant that a simple house could be constructed in the twenties for approximately £800. Finance for housing could generally be obtained by a working person up to about £625. This made the purchasing of a home quite an attractive proposition to many who previously would not have considered home-ownership possible.

97. See Chapter 4, "The Long-term Unemployed" above. A similar observation has been made by Lewis who investigated poverty in Puerto Rico and New York. He found that residents in clearly delineated slum neighbourhoods often have a sense of community similar to that characteristic of villagers in rural areas. O. Lewis, Op. cit., pp. 20-21; See also M. Fried and P. Gleicher, Ibid.

98. See Table 7.2 below.

99. R.R. Stuckey, Chairman of the State Bank Board of Management in evidence to the Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act, 1934, pp. 2-4.
In mid-1933 there were just in excess of 15,000 persons in Adelaide purchasing their homes by instalments. Of those home purchasers who were wage and salary earners, over 70% were in blue-collar occupations and slightly under 30% in white-collar positions. The majority of home purchasers were over 35 years of age. Approximately 53% were between 35-50 years of age, 33% were over 50 years and only 14% were under 35 years. Not surprisingly, therefore, the majority had begun families. Almost two-thirds had children under sixteen years and 20% had three children or more.

Table 7.2 gives certain other details of ten typical families who obtained housing loans from the State Bank of South Australia during the 1920's.

People in the socio-economic position occupied by the majority of these home purchasers obviously depended upon continuing employment. This was all the more true of the many purchasers who were committed to second mortgage repayments as well. In spite of these dangers, they were probably justified in supposing that they would be able to "meet their obligations and keep up payments regularly",


101. Three quarters of all home purchasers were wage and salary earners, 8% were self employed, 5% were employers and about 12% were pensioners, dependents, persons of private means and so on. Ibid.

102. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 2269.

103. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 2280.

104. A former employee of the Savings Bank of South Australia stated that it was common for the builder of a house to hold the second mortgage. Interview with Mr. R. Potter.
TABLE 7.2

Personal Details of Ten Mortgagors to the State Bank of S.A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Date on which loan secured</th>
<th>Locality of House</th>
<th>Occupation of Breadwinner</th>
<th>Salary at time of purchase</th>
<th>Size of family (at time of purchase)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Colonel Light Gdns.</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 2</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Flinders Pk.</td>
<td>Railways</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>3 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 3</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Colonel Light Gdns.</td>
<td>Storeman</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>5 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 4</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Colonel Light Gdns.</td>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>4 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 5</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Rosewater Gardens</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>2 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 6</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Colonel Light Gdns.</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>3 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 7</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Flinders Pk.</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>4 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 8</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Paringa Pk.</td>
<td>Pattern Maker</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>2 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 9</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>8 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 10</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Holmesdale</td>
<td>Storeman</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Files of the State Bank of South Australia.
as the Chairman of the State Bank later remarked.\footnote{105}

The onset of the Depression placed great stress on those purchasing homes. By June, 1930, one-third of all persons with homes mortgaged to the State Bank were already in arrears. Table 7.3 shows that the numbers in arrears continued to grow rapidly until in 1932-33 almost 9,000 persons, two out of every three mortgagors, were in arrears. The debt of each individual continued to grow until by 1933, over 4,500 persons were more than a year's payments in arrears with the State Bank.

The main cause of people getting into difficulty with their mortgage repayments was unemployment.\footnote{106} Of the 5,171 persons who were in arrears with the State Bank in February 1934, 2,385, or 46.1\% were in this situation directly as the result of unemployment. The Report of the Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act of 1934 pointed to the extreme difficulty faced by those who were unemployed in attempting to maintain their repayments:

For a while many unemployed householders by the expending of savings, sacrifices of insurances, borrowing, and the assistance of more fortunate relatives, managed to keep up the payment of instalments on the house, or part of them, but as time has gone on, these resources have largely dried up.\footnote{107}

\footnote{105} Mr. R.R. Stuckey in evidence to the Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act, 1934, transcript, p. 2.


\footnote{107} Ibid.
TABLE 7.3
State Bank Housing Loans showing the number of arrears, 1927-40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year ending June 30th</th>
<th>No. of loans made in each year</th>
<th>No. of loans current</th>
<th>Total no. of loans in arrears</th>
<th>No. of loans in arrears over £15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>1,187</td>
<td>15,087</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>15,307</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>15,510</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>15,837</td>
<td>5,243</td>
<td>33.11% 1,437 9.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15,521</td>
<td>7,886</td>
<td>50.81% 4,191 27.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>14,981</td>
<td>8,906</td>
<td>59.45% 6,184 41.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14,628</td>
<td>8,973</td>
<td>61.34% 8,973 61.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>10,639(1)</td>
<td>5,996</td>
<td>56.36% 4,731 44.47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>10,764</td>
<td>5,721</td>
<td>53.15% 4,507 41.87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>10,242</td>
<td>5,222</td>
<td>50.99% 4,148 40.50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>9,890</td>
<td>4,617</td>
<td>46.68% 3,687 37.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>9,711</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2,997 30.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>9,564</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2,570 26.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>9,289</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2,313 24.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) In 1934 a large number of loans were transferred to other Departments. In particular, War Service Homes were transferred to the Commonwealth War Service Homes Commissioner.

(2) There is obviously a mistake in the official report for this year. The number of persons in arrears for amounts in excess of £15 has also been given as the total number who were in arrears. The total number who were in arrears should be considerably in excess of 61%.

Source: Compiled from information in the Annual Reports of the South Australia, S.A.P.P., No. 25.
Almost as many were in arrears as a result of reduced income due to underemployment. The same committee also recognised the very great difficulties faced by those in this situation:

As regards the purchasers and mortgagors who have not experienced actual and prolonged unemployment, it would be true to say that the great majority have undergone a period of acute difficulty. Many had to stand down for weeks while the rationing of work to avoid dismissals was adjusted; more found that their employment had become intermittent, short-spells of work followed by an indefinite period of idleness. And for practically all, serious reductions in the rate of wages and diminution of earnings involved drastic readjustment of the standard of living to which they had become accustomed. 108

A total of 713 persons were also in difficulties as a result of either sickness or what the Committee termed a "hopeless" situation. Included in this group were those suffering from total incapacity through illness or old age, deserted wives and widows left with young children and totally inadequate means of support. 109

Undoubtedly, many persons in this category were in difficulties largely as a result of the impact of the Depression.

In those cases in which people were seriously in arrears with their mortgage repayments, unemployment was very clearly the numerically dominant cause. Table 7.4 showing the cause of arrears together with the amount owed indicates that two-thirds of those owing more than £100, or approximately two year's repayments, were unemployed. Similarly, over two-thirds of those in arrears as a result of unemployment owed more than £100 whereas only one-quarter of those in arrears as a result of other causes, owed as much.

108. Ibid., p. 7.
109. Ibid., p. 6.
**Table 7.4**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Arrears</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Reduced* Wages (etc.)</th>
<th>Sickness</th>
<th>Hopeless</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrears not exceeding £15</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £15 &amp; under £30</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £30 &amp; under £50</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £50 &amp; under £100</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £100 &amp; under £200</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over £200</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,385</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,073</strong></td>
<td><strong>292</strong></td>
<td><strong>421</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,171</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*"Reduced Wages (etc.)" includes loss of time and part-time work, reductions of wages and reduced income from small businesses etc.


Many of those who were in the process of purchasing homes when they became unemployed experienced considerable extra worry and stress as a result of this commitment. Whereas those who were renting homes were able to leave their debt behind them when they shifted, this was not possible if a person was bound by a mortgage. The Banks kept considerable pressure upon those in arrears. A representative of the Bank would call on those in arrears every few months to assess their capacity to increase repayments. This representative would examine the family's assets and income and fix a repayment rate that he felt the family could meet. A person who worked as one of these representatives recalled the approach which the Bank encouraged him to use:
If the man was out of work ... I would see him,
tell him who I was if he didn't realise that I
was from the Bank. I would tell him that I have
come to enquire into your financial position.
The position with your mortgage loan is as follows -
it is so much behind as far as the principle and
interest or regular quarterly payments is concerned.
You're so much behind with your rates and taxes.
We had arranged three months ago that you were going
to do this or try that. You have fallen behind or
you haven't met these payments. This is the
situation. If he was working: "Can you do better?
You haven't progressed". Or if he had progressed:
"How are you going? Can you do this? The place
needs painting. There is extensive cracking in two
of the rooms. What can you do?" Generally speaking,
they were amicable. I rarely had trouble.

Continued contact with such officials of the banks, men who were yet
other representatives of authority with whom the unemployed had to
deal, undoubtedly further contributed to their demoralisation.

In addition to the thousands of persons who were in
difficulties with arrears, there were many others who actually lost
their homes. The State Bank had been instructed by the government
to administer its duties under the Act with sympathy for those in
difficulties. In spite of this, it seems that the Bank's response
was influenced more by traditional business principles than by
humanitarian concerns. Unfortunately, the figures that are available
do not give an exact picture of how many persons' homes were reclaimed
by the State Bank but some idea can be obtained from the information
set out in Table 7.5 showing the number of reverted properties held
by the State Bank in each year. To discover how many people actually
lost their houses in each year, however, one really needs to know

110. Interview with Mr. R. Potter.

111. K.J. Taylor, "Australia's housing policy and programmes up to
the Second World War", M. Ec. thesis, Sydney University, 1961,
p. 146.
also the number that the State Bank disposed of by selling.
Unfortunately, these figures are only available for a few of the Depression years. It can be deduced that between July 1926 and June 1930 the State Bank reclaimed 405 properties and 439 properties between July 1937 and June 1942. Even assuming that the Bank was unable to resell a single house during the interim period, then the cumulative number of reverted properties held by the Bank still increased by at least 550. Therefore, between 1926-42 at least 1,400 properties reverted to the State Bank in South Australia. In the Adelaide metropolitan area, the number was certainly in excess of 1,200. These figures suggest that at least 10% of all persons purchasing homes with loans from the State Bank had their properties taken from them. Of those who fell into arrears over £15, almost one-quarter appear to have lost their homes.

While certain mortgagors to the Savings Bank of South Australia also lost their homes, no evidence was found of how many cases occurred. Certainly the percentage was not less than in the case of the State Bank. In addition, however, the Savings Bank adopted the practice of asking, or if necessary forcing, mortgagors to vacate their houses so that tenants could be put into the properties and the rent used to repay arrears. Of the Savings

112. See Table 7.5.

113. Of 100 Savings Bank files examined, 15 were sold up by the bank. Others of these were possibly also sold in the period from April 1933 - June 1935 for which no records exist.

114. A similar practice was used by the Co-operative Building Society. The managing director told a government committee: "Where the mortgagor is unemployed and unable to pay anything they are required to leave the house and it is let. If their position improves they might be allowed to return and resume their mortgage". Mr. A.R. Burnell in evidence to the Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act 1934, p. 89.
### TABLE 7.5

**Number of Properties reverting to the State Bank, 1927-42**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cumulative numbers of reverted properties not sold by the Bank</th>
<th>No. resold by Bank</th>
<th>Cumulative numbers in Metropolitan area</th>
<th>Number resold in Metropolitan area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1934 saw a change in the system of classification. There was actually an increase in the number of reverted properties in that year.

Source: Annual Reports of the State Bank of S.A. S.A.P.P., No. 25.
Bank files on persons in arrears examined, 27% of mortgagors were asked to vacate their homes at some stage between 1930-37. When asked where these people went, a former employee of the Savings Bank said:

I don't know. They would make their own arrangements. It was much more commonplace then to go to live with parents or brother or sister. There was so much more of that by comparison ... Some went bush, some finished up in shanty town, but most doubled-up ... went in with parents or others.115

A certain number of the unemployed simply walked out of their homes on their own initiative and abandoned their right to ownership. To some extent this occurred even in the late twenties. The annual report of the State Bank for 1929 referred to homes being abandoned by mortgagors who set off for the country in search of work.116 There were a number of cases in the files of the Savings Bank of South Australia which were closed between 1930-37 with the statement:

"House deserted. Whereabouts of owner unknown".

Of the sample of 100 files examined at least four were closed as a result of the owner abandoning the house.117 In Colonel Light Gardens in particular, the main location of dwellings built under the Thousand Homes Scheme, it was not uncommon for families to shift out during the night.118 However, no evidence has been found in the

115. Interview with Mr. R. Potter.
117. Records of the Savings Bank of South Australia, file numbers 36, 1011, 1031 and 1241. Some ambiguity exists in a number of other cases.
records of the State Bank as to how many cases of this occurred.
The reason that more people did not walk out of their homes was
the stated policies of the Banks that they would continue to pursue
the monies owned to them in such circumstances. 119

Generally, however, people stuck to the task of purchasing
their homes even though in many cases that task seemed to be
increasingly hopeless. Not only was almost every spare penny spent
on making payments to the bank, but at the same time people often
saw their debt continually increasing. Arrears accumulated at an
ever accelerating rate as the lending institutions applied the same
rate of interest to the arrears owing as was being paid on the loan
itself. 120 The situation of State Bank mortgagors at least 121
improved slightly in 1934 when the Crown Debtors Relief Act reduced
interest rates by ½% and provided that interest need no longer be
paid on overdue interest. 122 The Act also provided authorisation for
the State Bank to write off debts deemed to be irrecoverable. 123 As
a result, in 1937 the State Bank wrote-off £181,575/18/1 in outstanding
debts. Mortgagors' debts were adjusted according to the following
sliding scale: 124

Where interest was:

Between £25-£50, amount above £25 was written off
Between £50-£75, amount above £37/10/- was written off
Between £75-£100, amount above £50 was written off
Between £100-£150, amount above £75 was written off
Above £150, amount above £100 was written off

119. This point was made by Mr. L.T.R. Eitzen in evidence to the
Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act 1934, p. 64.
120. Ibid., p. 31.
121. No evidence has been found to suggest that the other lending
institutions provided any relief to mortgagors.
122. Interest was still payable on overdue principal.
123. State Bank of South Australia, Annual Report, S.A.P.P., 1937,
124. Ibid.
While individual mortgagors benefited from this adjustment, it produced at best only a marginal improvement of their position. Table 7.6 indicates that even after this adjustment there were still many people owing very large debts to the State Bank in the late thirties. In 1938 there were still over 2,500 mortgagors who were more than a year's payments in arrears.

By the mid-thirties, some found themselves owing more than they had initially borrowed, in spite of a continual struggle to make payments. For example, one person who borrowed £700 from the State Bank in 1925 found that nine years later he owed £770. In addition, he still owed £120 on a second mortgage. These enormous debts sooner or later had to be paid and in many cases caused further years of hardship and deprivation long after the person had regained employment.

A case history typical of the worst-off was that of a couple with two young daughters who borrowed £699 in 1925 to build a home in the working-class suburb of Flinders Park. The husband was employed as a blacksmith's striker at the Islington Railway workshop and his salary in 1925 was £228 per year - a little above the basic wage. In late 1927 he lost some time from work through illness and by May, 1928 he had fallen £8 in arrears with his repayments. At that time he was put off from Islington but managed to find employment on short-time at Holden's Motor Body Builders. He wrote to the Bank in 1928:

> Since I was in to see you a month ago, I was put off for a week and a day then we went back on

125. Investigation Committee on the Advances for Homes Act 1934, Minutes of Evidence, p. 65.
126. Records of the State Bank of South Australia, file number 1000/870.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Arrears</th>
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<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934*</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; £450 &quot; £500</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; £400 &quot; £450</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; £350 &quot; £400</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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<td>48</td>
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<td>428</td>
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<td>612</td>
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<td>623</td>
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<td>339</td>
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<td>379</td>
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<td>&quot; £150 &quot; £175</td>
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<td>396</td>
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<td>484</td>
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<td>146</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
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<td>122</td>
<td></td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total in excess of 15</td>
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<td>6,184</td>
<td>8,973</td>
<td>4,731</td>
<td>4,507</td>
<td>4,148</td>
<td>3,687</td>
<td>2,997</td>
<td>2,570</td>
<td>2,313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In 1934 a large number of loans were transferred to other government departments. In particular, War Service Homes were transferred to the Commonwealth War Service Homes Commission.

In June, 1929 he was again unemployed. Between then and October, 1935 the family was receiving rations spasmodically. The husband managed to earn a total of £105 from odd jobs and from this paid £6 to the Bank. In May 1930 a Bank inspector reported that the family had established extensive vegetable gardens at the back and front of the house. His report concluded: "Externally well-kept ... I think this case is genuine, everything is clean and tidy in the interior". Another report in July 1932, however, added disapprovingly that the husband spent most of his time in billiard rooms. From October, 1935 to January 1937, the husband, though still unemployed, earned £47 in odd jobs. During these sixteen months he had paid £34 to the Bank. Nevertheless, by August 1936 the total arrears owing to the Bank had grown to £375. £26 was owed in water rates and a similar amount for rates and taxes. Throughout the next three years he was able to make small weekly repayments from the earnings of his two daughters. At this stage, his health began to deteriorate but in 1942 he managed to obtain part-time work which provided £4/15/- per month. By this time, his wife had become ill and was in hospital and one of his daughters had become an invalid. Near the end of the war, things appeared to improve for the family. In 1949 the husband was earning £7 per week and by making substantial repayments to the Bank began to reduce the total debt which then stood at £616. Unfortunately, the husband's health deteriorated further and in July 1952, he died in his middle fifties. The house was finally paid off by the eldest daughter in 1966.
Although the debt of this family was greater than most, their experiences were typical. As the Depression lengthened, the situation of those who remained without work continued to worsen. The initial tolerance of the banks and private landlords quickly gave way to a much harsher attitude. This attitude, together with the acute shortage of housing in Adelaide and the refusal of the government to provide adequate relief for shelter, further contributed to the deterioration of the living standards of the long-unemployed.
CHAPTER 8
THE SINGLE UNEMPLOYED
Much of what has been said in the preceding chapters about the experiences of the unemployed in general applies equally to unmarried people who were without work. However, in a number of important respects the experiences of many of the single unemployed were quite distinctive. This chapter is concerned with those distinctive aspects.

Single people formed a very substantial proportion of the unemployed. In South Australia, men who had never been married comprised 48.2% of the total number who were unemployed and single women 91.3% of the total number of unemployed females at the time of the 1933 Census. Unemployment was in fact significantly higher among single wage and salary earners than among married workers - 29% of single workers were unemployed throughout the state compared to 25.5% of married workers. Of course, the actual number of unemployed persons who were in effect living as single men and women was considerably higher since there were 1,248 men and 255 women unemployed who were either widowed or divorced. In addition, throughout the State there were over 12,000 married couples who were living apart.

Unemployment was higher among single men than married men largely because preference was almost always given to a married man by the Government Labour Exchange, by the government as an employer.

2. Ibid.
3. 34.0% of widowed men and 43.5% of divorced men were unemployed. Ibid.
4. See Chapter One.
and by individual employers. A single man who lacked a skill, which a great many did since they were under 21 years, stood little chance of obtaining a job throughout the worst years of the Depression. Furthermore, the position of single men relative to married men appears to have worsened as the Depression years progressed. Table 8.1 shows the numbers of single and married men receiving rations in the Adelaide metropolitan area from 1931-40. The numbers of single unemployed are underestimated because of the predominance of single men amongst those who went to the country. Nevertheless, in relative terms it is clear that the percentage of single men amongst the unemployed increased sharply between 1932 and 1937.

The extremely high percentage of single persons among the total number of women classified by the 1933 Census as unemployed occurred primarily because married women were generally not counted as wage and salary earners or breadwinners unless they were actually in employment. Consequently, a married woman who lost her job reverted, in statistical terms, to being a housewife. However, many more single girls were probably in effect unemployed than the 5,410 recorded by the Census. In Chapter 1 it is shown that Adelaide provided many fewer jobs for females than the Eastern states. The 1933 Census revealed that there were 75,713 single females over 15 years of age, 21,001 widows and 672 divorced women in South Australia. Of these, only 40,300, or 41%, described themselves as wage and salary earners. It is likely, however, that

5. This point was made over and over again by informants who had been single when unemployed.

6. Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
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<td>4th</td>
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<td>9,130</td>
<td>4th</td>
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<td>5,206</td>
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<td>1932 1st Quarter</td>
<td>9,776</td>
<td>7,935</td>
<td>1937 1st Quarter</td>
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<td>1933 1st Quarter</td>
<td>8,150</td>
<td>6,391</td>
<td>1938 1st Quarter</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7,907</td>
<td>6,016</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>2,715</td>
<td>1,516</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934 1st Quarter</td>
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<td>5,081</td>
<td>1939 1st Quarter</td>
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<td>5,169</td>
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<td>3,076</td>
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<td>1,550</td>
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<td>1935 1st Quarter</td>
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<td>1940 1st Quarter</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4,235</td>
<td>3rd</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3,744</td>
<td>3,979</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>475</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Quarterly Reports of the Unemployment Relief Council, 1931-41.
many more would have eagerly accepted work were it available. By the 1930's it was regarded as normal that a girl would go out to work when she left school. Nevertheless, it is probably not valid to regard these persons as having been unemployed in the usual sense of the word. The great majority of females not earning a living were still employed in what had been prior to World War I the normal occupation of women - home duties. Girls who could not find employment when they left school, reverted to the pre-World War I custom of working in the home with their mothers.

Unemployment produced quite different experiences for those single persons living with their parents than for those attempting to live off their own resources. Single people living with their parents were far more likely to have coped with their unemployment with little trouble. Of course, in many cases the breadwinner of the family of the unemployed youth was still employed. In these circumstances, the unemployment of the offspring, while possibly a handicap to the family since he or she was not eligible for rations, was not likely to force a financial crisis. Where the father was also unemployed, the son or daughter was eligible for rations and thereby contributed to the family's income.

Because there were so many single people out of work there developed, in some areas, a level of social interaction which would never have occurred normally when work fully occupied the time of most youths. The weekday sporting activities that developed in the Port Adelaide area have already been mentioned. Similarly, youth clubs were started in other areas to occupy the time of young persons. More informal social activities developed in certain
instances also. Dances, parties and informal gatherings amongst young men and women were referred to by quite a few informants who had been single and unemployed. One woman recalled the social activities that were centred in her parents' home every Saturday night:

... we were fortunate in that we had a piano in our home... and I think it started at our place about having these parties Saturday nights - not costing anything. Only I think I mentioned to you that the girls would all bring something, a basket supper I thing they call it now, only it used to be called a plate supper. And the boys used to bring the "grog", which was all soft drink - lemonade, ginger beer and cola-beer. There was one lad who had a fiddle and he'd play and another lad rigged up a kit of drums somehow or another. Oh, the nostalgia! The kids would pooh-pooh the idea of it now I suppose but we used to have a ball - and every Saturday night. That went on for so long. One night it would be at somebody's place and the next night at the other one's place.

Those who had been unmarried while unemployed portrayed a totally different impression of what it was like personally to be out of work than those who had been married. The absence of the overwhelming feelings of responsibility for maintaining a family made the single person far less susceptible to anxiety and stress. In fact, for a young person, the freedom from what might normally have been a rather oppressive and boring work routine could provide opportunities for an enjoyable and even hedonistic existence. One person, while emphasising the hardship of his parents' experience and in particular his father's psychological distress, recalled that his own life at the time was relatively happy:

7. Interview with Mrs. J. Poynter.
The leading spokesman for business interests, individual bosses and the media seemed particularly fearful that the experience of unemployment would leave thousands of young persons unwilling to resume work when it again became available. The President of the South Australian Employers' Federation stated in his annual report for 1931, that he believed the unemployed were "losing the will to work" because of the dole. In a leader headed "What shall we do with our boys?" the News argued that if youths were not provided with "healthy occupation there is grave danger that they will drift into idle habits." A letter to the editor of the Advertiser made an appeal to employers to devise some method of "keeping them busy" even if it was not possible to pay them. Alternatively, the writer thought that possibly an hour or more of physical drill a day might suffice. The Advertiser itself was very worried about the problem. In an editorial in December, 1933, it warned that there was a need to combat idleness before it assumes the fatal form of a confirmed

8. Interview with Mr. J. Bassani.
habit" because "the young are threatened with a loss at once of a capacity and willingness to take their due place in industrial ranks." 12

In fact, returning to work could prove in many ways a difficult and unpleasant change in the former relatively free life-style of the unemployed youth. One person recalled that when he finally regained work he was almost tempted to give it up again:

... I didn't want it. I thought why should I work, because I had been out of work for so long ...

Why did you feel like that?

Because I was getting everything [I needed] - my meals and a couple of shillings to buy an extra shirt. I was living. Money didn't interest me because I didn't have any to spend. Once you had a bit in your pocket it was different. 13

However, even for single persons living at home, unemployment produced unpleasant consequences which generally made them more than ready to accept work once the opportunity came along. One man, whose wife had recalled pleasant memories of young people making their own fun, pointed out that as a single man he was constantly aware of his lack of money, his shabby clothes and his inability to invite a girl for an outing. 14 The same feelings were mentioned by others who had been single and unemployed. 15 The impact of the Depression was particularly evident in the decline in numbers of young people getting married. Marriages in South Australia per year declined in number by one-third between

12. Ibid., 22 December 1933.
13. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
14. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
15. Interview with Mr. J. Bassani and Mr. A. Tavender.
The initial effect of unemployment was clearly to discourage young people from marrying. It is interesting to note that the illegitimate birth-rate declined sharply during this period. Presumably, therefore, young people were not only putting off marriages but also avoiding relationships that were likely to produce marriage. As the months went by, however, it seems that people fairly quickly gave up waiting since the marriage-rate quickly returned to normal after 1933. Perhaps surprisingly, the illegitimate birth-rate did not return to its "normal" rate.

During the Depression years it was almost impossible for a young person to obtain an apprenticeship. Even when a youth was able to find a job, employers were rarely prepared to send him to trade classes. Those who were fortunate enough to find a job were also more than likely to be dismissed once they reached the age of twenty-one. Many youths, when unable to find a job or an apprenticeship, returned to school for an additional one, two or even three

17. Ibid., Nos. 48 and 50.
18. Since fewer were choosing to marry, it is not surprising that the percentage of brides who were pregnant increased significantly from 25.0% in 1926 to 31.1% in 1931 throughout Australia as a whole. See K.G. Basavarajappa, "Pre-marital pregnancies and ex-nuptial births in Australia, 1911-66" in Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 143-4.
19. It is possible of course, that increased abortions might have produced this fall in the illegitimate birth-rate but it seems impossible to find evidence on this question.
20. The number of apprentices in 1931 totalled only 12% of the number in 1927. Report of the Factories and Steam Boilers Department, S.A.P.D., No. 46, 1927-32.
22. Rev. Samuel Forsyth stated in evidence to the Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works that such a practice was extremely common amongst employers. Ibid., p. 57, See also S.A.P.D., 1936, Vol. 1, p. 59.
years after they normally would have left. Table 8.2 shows the number of students of each age over 12 years in South Australian schools during the period 1927-33. While there appears to have been fewer 14 year olds at school in 1931 and after, there was a very substantial rise in the numbers aged 15 and over. In the years prior to the Depression about 30% of students appear to have left immediately they turned 14 years. By 1931, however, this "dropout" rate had increased to 50% as youths were pressured by economic circumstances to search for work. On the other hand, prior to the Depression, about 80% of students had left school within the year after reaching 14 years. Clearly, the great majority of youths normally finished school in the December of the year in which they turned fourteen. However, in 1931 more than 50% returned to school owing to the employment situation. Schools were grossly overcrowded as a result.23

Large numbers of unemployed people, particularly single men, left the city in search of work in the country. However, the countryside very rarely provided anything resembling full employment for the man "on the track". At best, it provided temporary and spasmodic employment. Many were in fact able to find temporary employment with farmers but the work was usually from dawn to dusk and the pay did not exceed a few shillings a week. During the worst periods, many worked for their tucker alone and were glad to get it. Some followed the seasonal employment opportunities, from timber cutting in the south-east to fruit picking in the river districts. When not working, these men often grouped together in camps outside

23. See for example, Advertiser, 9 January 1931, 4 February 1931, 5 February 1931, 14 February 1931.
### TABLE 8.2

Numbers of Students aged 12 and over in South Australian Schools, 1927-33

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>1927</th>
<th>1928</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>9,513</td>
<td>9,653</td>
<td>9,166</td>
<td>8,940</td>
<td>8,798</td>
<td>9,543</td>
<td>9,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 &quot;</td>
<td>9,340</td>
<td>8,684</td>
<td>8,905</td>
<td>8,290</td>
<td>8,265</td>
<td>7,936</td>
<td>8,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 &quot;</td>
<td>6,201</td>
<td>5,916</td>
<td>6,199</td>
<td>5,396</td>
<td>4,664</td>
<td>4,183</td>
<td>4,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 &quot;</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>2,543</td>
<td>2,755</td>
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<td>2,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 &quot;</td>
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</table>

Source: South Australia, Statistical Register, 1933.
of country towns. One local country newspaper reported that camps of unemployed men, in a few cases with their families, were to be seen at nearly every point along the Murray River from below Blanchetown to above Renmark: "They vary from a pair of old frowsy blankets thrown on the ground to a neat little home on wheels."

Some, like the characters of Kylie Tennant's novel The Battlers, "humped their bluey" from town to town, sleeping "out" and living off the land. Generally, these "drifters" were not welcomed by the local townspeople and particularly not by the local policeman who generally attempted to push them on. In the mid-northern town of Peterborough the local policeman, kinder than most, established a swagman's shelter where men could camp for three days. Sergeant Wright gave each man a pair of rabbits to live off for his brief stay but then asked him to move on.

One popular route for transient unemployed men was along the Coorong towards Mt. Gambier and western Victoria. In June, 1932 the Advertiser reported, in an article headed "Freemasonry of Tramps: Copying America", the formation of a "Travellers' League" by men camped at Meningie on the Coorong. These men "demanded" the right to free railway rides, boots, blankets and higher dole payments. The paper stated that, during the summer, scores of "tramps" were to be found along the Coorong. These men started from Adelaide with the


25. For an exceptionally good account of the problems of men on the track in South Australia, and other States, see Frank Huelin, Keep Moving, Sydney, 1973.


idea of walking to Melbourne but fell in with others of "their brotherhood" and formed camps. These communities lived throughout the summer months on the plentiful supplies of rabbit, duck and fish provided by the Coorong. When winter came they moved on.28

Prospecting for gold was one common method by which single unemployed men attempted to maintain a livelihood. In mid-1932 the Chairman of the South Australian Unemployment Relief Council estimated that there were about 800 Adelaide men prospecting in the various parts of the State.29 The U.R.C., throughout the period 1930-33, was continually receiving requests for assistance for these miners. The Birdwood Relief Committee in May 1932, reported finding shocking conditions among the prospectors at Birdwood.30 A number of informants reported seeing large numbers of unemployed men all along the Torrens River from Birdwood in the Adelaide Hills down to the city. One person who allowed a number of these gold-seekers to camp on his Birdwood property recalled how many became almost permanent squatters:

I would estimate there would have been 50 campers prospecting for gold at Gold Point in the peak of the exodus from Adelaide but it was a floating population and the whole Torrens River, as far up as Gumeracha and Birdwood, had campers, all doing the same thing, looking for gold ... I should say 3 or 4 hundred on the whole would not be an overestimate ... Those who came ... found not only free rent but free meat. Rabbits were in plague proportions (before Myxo.). Most farms would supply milk

30. Ibid., 168, 11 May 1932 and 121, 27 October 1931.
very cheap, sometimes free (if a hand were lent) as he was receiving 5d. per gallon ... They were nice type of Australian manhood mainly, willing to work, but there just wasn't any. The locals didn't mind them camping on their properties and often able to help with foodstuffs such as apples and potatoes which did not pay even to pick up, let alone cart to Adelaide. Occasionally there would be someone who didn't know the rules and would steal or even "knock off a woolie" but I don't know of one case that got to the law. Some stayed several years and as the tents rotted out they were replaced with tins, old iron and cut open bitumen drums.31

Other likely areas right throughout the state attracted people hoping to strike it rich. Reports of unemployed men searching for gold also came to the U.R.C. from the Barossa Valley,32 and from Wadnaminga.33 A photograph in the Register News-Pictorial in September, 1930, shows one unemployed man who had gathered together his possessions in two canvas-covered, horse-drawn wagons and set off with his wife and fifteen children for the Mt. Ogilivy goldfields some 400 miles from Adelaide.34

The unemployed were particularly susceptible to "get rich quick" stories and this undoubtedly explains the attraction of gold-panning to some. However, for the majority of those several thousand

31. Letter from Mr. R.K. Amber.
32. U.R.C. Minutes, 121, 26 October 1931 and 109, 30 September 1931.
33. Ibid., 109, 30 September 1931.
34. Register News-Pictorial, 23 September 1930.
unemployed who headed for the country, getting rich or even getting a job was not their basic motivation. Fundamentally, the initial aim of some was to avoid being sent to the government's work camps. But it is likely that the idea motivating most of those who headed for the country was simply that the country was a better place to be when times were hard. In the world-view of most South Australians in the thirties, including those resident in the city, the superiority of country life was simply taken for granted. This attitude seemed to be typified in an article appearing in the Murray Pioneer in 1930 under the heading "The Road to Wambi" (near Swan Reach on the Murray):

Along this road a number of Adelaide's workless army were met - men, women and children. Some in carts pulled by old horses who plucked the long grass as they slowly moved along. They had left the city behind - sick of the slums and willing to work for their tucker if necessary. One woman, the mother of 5, said she could not bear the conditions at the Port any longer. Her husband had a few pounds put by and had bought a turn-out - horse and all for a fiver. Since leaving the city they had earned more money, doing a bit here and there, than they had earned in 6 months in Adelaide. At Wambi ... they had met a charitable woman who had baked a batch of bread for them and given them half a sheep. In return the Adelaide woman had done a day's washing on the farm.

Further along the track a party of young men were met. They hailed the writer and asked for a lift. Not one by the look of them liked work. It was noticed that at Wambi the police moved them on after they had become insulting to a couple of worthy farmers who stood eyeing them quietly. Some of Adelaide's poor type, one thought.36

The experiences of those interviewed suggests there was some truth

35. See Chapter 9 below.

in the belief that one could survive in the country more comfortably than in the city. Certainly, those on the track maintained a degree of independence not commonly found among the city unemployed. In addition, the comradeship found among their track companions and the generosity of certain farmers provided many unemployed travellers with warm memories which in later years far outweighed their memories of discomfort and hardship.

In the decades prior to the Depression there had been a strong and steady flow of population from the country to the city as the process of industrialisation quickened. Many who were resident in Adelaide when the Depression arrived were, in fact, only relatively recent arrivals in the city. Even many of those who were firmly established in Adelaide had relatives in the country. This was another reason, therefore, why many people in Adelaide decided to head for the country. In addition, it is possible that a psychological factor was important also. In his novel, titled *Keep Moving*, Frank Huelin observes that the majority of young men who went to the country showed a restless, even compulsive, urge to keep moving from place to place without any real reason to do so.37 This apparently neurotic impulse to be on the move seems to be comparable to the hyperactivity of the urban unemployed person in the initial stages of unemployment.

For unattached persons in the city who were unable, or chose not, to live with their families, unemployment generally led to problems and experiences very different to those of single persons living at home. Work and the family are the two basic institutions

37. A similar observation was made by an informant who served considerable time on the track. Interview with Mr. A. Ridland.
by which individuals are integrated into the wider society. Those who found themselves cut off from both by the Depression faced particular difficulties and problems.

The homeless unattached man certainly did not originate in the Depression. The swagman on the track and the city stiff were familiar characters in nineteenth century Australian life - particularly during the Depression of the 1890's. During the twenties such men were to be found in large numbers travelling in the South Australian countryside searching for work and inhabiting the parks and backstreets of Adelaide. These were the cast-offs from an industrialising capitalist society. They were men whose trade had disappeared following structural changes in the economy, who had physical or social disabilities which made it difficult for them to obtain work in their former trade, who were unskilled workers or who had grown too old to compete with younger men for the limited number of employment vacancies that existed. During the middle and late twenties the numbers of homeless single men around Adelaide grew quickly as unemployment rose. By 1927 the existing charitable facilities for accommodating single men without homes had been

38. See the Introduction above.

39. 60,000 Australian men were wounded in World War I. Many of these were unable to obtain employment upon their return to Australia. See for example George Johnston’s, My Brother Jack.
In mid 1927, a member of State Parliament reported inspecting a shed on the waterfront at Port Adelaide in which 80 unemployed men had made a home. A further 120 men had set up camp in the nearby swamps and bushes. A report in the I.W.W. newspaper Direct Action a year later indicated that these camps still existed and described the living conditions of the desperate men who occupied them. As the reporter approached the waterfront, he came upon:

... sheds in which the unemployed are forced to seek shelter, beneath rotten moulding roofs with the rats of the waterside for company. Into these dark, damp and draughty dens where the sunlight never enters and where the staircases and walls are sticky with moisture these unfortunate homeless unemployed are forced to eke out an existence on the miserable Government rations of 6d. per day, living skeletons of their former selves ... We wind our way along a muddy track to a quagmire set in the midst of a swamp and come to an alleged camp ... No sanitary arrangements are visible and one can hardly describe what an atmosphere pervades the place. Every necessity of physical cleanliness and mere decency is missing.

In November 1927, at least 60 men were reported to be sleeping on

40. These institutions included:

- The Salvation Army Aged Mens' Home - Linden Park
- Adelaide Central Methodist Mission
- Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission
- Brompton Central Methodist Mission
- Glenville Central Methodist Mission
- Adelaide City Mission
- St. Vincent de Paul Benevolent Society
- Hindmarsh Town Mission
- Chicago Mission Inc.
- Whitefield Institute - Hindmarsh

For further details see South Australia, Statistical Register, 1924-31.


42. Direct Action, 11 August 1928.
the banks of the Torrens River in Adelaide. In February, 1928, mounted police forcibly removed 40 men who had been camping behind the police barracks in the western parklands of the city and using empty rail carriages as sleeping quarters. In a letter to the Advertiser in June 1929, over 50 men who had formed an unemployed camp at Rosewater appealed to the public for aid:

Being unable to live on Government rations and receiving no help from the various charity funds the men of this camp have decided to appeal to the public for aid. There are over 50 men in the camp, most sleeping without blankets or crowded over fires all night for warmth and often without food.

The increasing numbers of unemployed men appearing around the city were a serious embarrassment to the Butler Liberal Government. Consequently, it attempted wherever possible to break up the camps formed by unemployed men and to force them into the country in search of work. In August, 1928, the government removed the provision of rations to all single men except those working for local councils or living in the Port Adelaide area. Later, over 160

43. Advertiser, 18 November 1927.
44. Ibid., 10 February 1928.
46. S.A.P.D., 1928, Vol. 1, p. 414. Presumably, the unemployed at Port Adelaide were far enough away from the city not to be an embarrassment. It is also possible that the unemployed at the Port may not have quietly accepted having their rations taken away.
unemployed single men who had been sheltering in the Exhibition Grounds on North Terrace were ordered to leave by the government. 47

The harassment of homeless single men who remained in the city continued until the defeat of the Butler government in April, 1930. With the election of the Hill Labor Government in South Australia in March 1930 the situation of the single unemployed improved somewhat for a short while. Elected largely as a result of its promises to face up to the employment problem, the A.L.P. government immediately established an Unemployment Relief Council to extend relief to all those without work and re-opened the Exhibition Building to the homeless unemployed. Sufficient men took advantage of this accommodation to require the establishment of two separate camps within the large building. The numbers occupying the Exhibition Building camps fluctuated between 400-450 during the first half of 1931. 48 Those who occupied these camps and all single men in the city who were without lodgings where they could prepare meals were given meal tickets for a cafe stipulated on the ticket. Each ticket provided a meal to the value of 8d., and the men were given two per day. Apart from those in the Exhibition Building, between 500-600 men were receiving meal tickets throughout 1931. 49

While these changes eased the desperate plight of many of the single unemployed, they certainly did not solve their problems. The provision of shelter, in particular, continued to be a major

48. Unemployment Relief Council, Quarterly Report, March 1931 and June 1931.
49. Ibid., September 1931 and December 1931.
problem for the unattached man. The Exhibition Building camp provided shelter for only a limited number. A number of others were sheltered in hostels and doss-houses run by charitable institutions, benevolent societies, private individuals and, occasionally, by the unemployed themselves. Over 60 men were living in a Church of England Hostel in Wright Street in Adelaide. Similar numbers occupied other homes all over the city and Port Adelaide. In February 1931 a member of the Unemployment Relief Council visited a house in Port Adelaide occupied by a large number of single men who appeared to have simply squatted in what had been an abandoned dwelling. He commented that he found the house clean though there were men sleeping in the bathroom and kitchen. He also reported, with some indignation, that he found some of the men still in bed at 9.30 a.m. and that a number of these appeared to be "undesirables and Communists".

Throughout the Depression, the proportion of single men among the unemployed at Port Adelaide was extraordinarily high. In March 1931, for example, there were 3,119 single unemployed men in Port Adelaide - 55% of all those unemployed in the area. Throughout the remainder of the metropolitan area, however, there were only 4,992 single men, or 34% of the total, unemployed. In the later years of the Depression, the percentage of single men in the

51. See U.R.C., Minutes, 38, 27 March 1931; 50, 4 May 1931; 52, 8 May 1931; 59, 5 June 1931; 135, 30 November 1931; 211, 24 May 1933.
52. U.R.C., Minutes, 21, 11 February 1931. This house was commented on also by M.J. Thompson, Op. cit., p. 243.
metropolitan area rose while the percentage at Port Adelaide remained consistently high. Comparative figures for the numbers of single and married men receiving relief at Port Adelaide and in the remainder of the metropolitan area from 1931-40 are shown in Table 8.3. There appear to be two main explanations for the large proportion of single unemployed in Port Adelaide. Firstly, in the more tightly-knit community of the Port the practice of giving priority to married men when dismissals were to be made or new men to be taken on was even more widely enforced. Secondly, fewer single unemployed men from the Port went to the country in search of work. The 1933 Census indicated that the ratio of single to married men in Port Adelaide was almost identical to that in the State as a whole, while in the remainder of the metropolitan area the percentage of single men had declined markedly. In the absence of any conclusive evidence on the reasons for this, one can only speculate that it was the result of the sense of community which bound people more closely to the district. Similarly, the point has already been made that the Port provided for young people activities and resources which were not as commonly available elsewhere.

In the city of Adelaide itself, men were camped in every conceivable place. As the numbers of unemployed grew, Adelaide's many parks and gardens became temporary camping sites. There was generally no permanence in these camps, since the police had instructions to move the men on. One former policeman, who had the job of chasing the unemployed from their temporary camps, told of his unpleasant memories of this task:

53. Australia, Census, 1933.
### TABLE 8.3

Number of Men receiving Unemployment Relief in Port Adelaide and the remainder of the Metropolitan Area, 1931-40.

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<td>190</td>
<td>124</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3rd &quot;</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
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Source: Quarterly Reports of the Unemployment Relief Council, 1931-41.
They had to shelter everywhere. We had come across men sleeping in lavatories, in parklands, in the ditches and in the sheds. In waterways around the public reserves. They would run around the town carrying a wheat bag. We knew by their habits where they were headed. No tea. Some slept in cemeteries, in empty houses and shops, in ceilings, lanes and doorways, banks of the Torrens, drainage pipes, empty railway coaches and railway yards. We used to have to go and clear them out. They resented it but it had to be done. There should have been better provision made for them. It was pathetic to urge them on.54

Although individual policemen may have been sympathetic to the unemployed, the law in general was not. Being homeless and poor in itself immediately made the single unemployed liable to arrest. One unemployed man was imprisoned in January, 1931, for three months simply for having been without sufficient means of support.55 Another man arrested at Port Adelaide and charged with having no visible means of support pointed out to the magistrate that it was not his fault that he was down and out: "I should have plenty of friends but they do not want to know me now."56 Shoplifting and pilfering, in particular, were dealt with very harshly by the courts. A youth who stole a pocket mirror from a woman at Medindie was sent to the Magill Reformatory for two years for his crime.57

54. Interview with Mr. E. Spiers.
55. Advertiser, 20 January 1931.
56. Port Adelaide News, 2 January 1931. In this case, the magistrate was more lenient and dismissed the charge.
57. The boy had been sleeping on the banks of the Torrens and existing on fish he was able to catch. Advertiser, 2 February 1931, and 10 February 1931.
Alcoholism was not generally found among the "new unemployed", partly because liquor was far beyond their economic reach, and arrests for drinking were few. However, drunkenness, where it occurred, was treated severely in the courts. Four men who were arrested when taking turns in swigs from a bottle of methylated spirits in Elder Park each received two months imprisonment.

Methylated spirits was commonly known among established city stiffs as the "white lady".

Within the city it became common to see street-musicians singing and playing on street corners. Buskers would attract very large crowds of people around them. Unfortunately for them, however, it seemed that usually the bulk of their audience were also unemployed and, therefore, not likely to be able to contribute much to the empty hat standing on the footpath. As one informant recalled, ration day was music day in the city streets:

A chap called Bastian used to play the violin and another one the cello. Their music was very beautiful. I listened to them for ages when I went to get the rations. Ration day was music day ... [laughs].

The playing and singing of these men soon attracted unfavourable

58. See Chapter 4 above.
59. Advertiser, 26 January 1931.
60. Ibid. See also Frank Huelin, Keep Moving, p. 180.
61. Many of these musicians formed groups and some even took to wandering around the suburbs playing on street corners. Others preferred to go it alone and some of these became the public "identities" of the Depression years, known to all. The best known of all was one whom people called Piccolo Pete. Psychologists might find some significance in the story repeated to me over and over again by informants that this ostensibly miserable character was actually incredibly wealthy.
62. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
attention from the authorities. Rundle Street traders complained bitterly that the musicians were having a detrimental effect on business. One woman shopper was reported to have said:

I feel almost wicked to be buying these goods when those men on the footpath singing seem to be in so much want.63

The Adelaide City Council immediately instructed police to remove all musicians from the streets.64 The state government quickly amended Council by-laws to prohibit street-singers and musicians entirely from the city.65

A few more permanent camps of homeless unemployed men did continue to exist throughout the Depression. The largest and most permanent of these were a series of camps along the banks of the Torrens River. Estimates of the number of men camped on the Torrens at different times varied between 100 and 200.66 These men had built huts and humpies at various points from the back of the Adelaide Zoo around to the City Weir - a distance of about one and a half miles. The majority of these huts were constructed from old scrap iron, kerosene tins and hessian bags.67 Many turned their humpies into quite established dwellings. They installed relatively damp-proof floors and even built solid fire-places within the huts for cooking. As a result of a police report concerning the

63. Advertiser, 29 January 1931.
64. Ibid.
66. For example, the Annual Report of the City of Adelaide, 1931-32, estimated the number at that time at around 150 (page 19).
67. Interview with Mr. E. Spiers.
Hessian huts occupied by homeless men on the south bank of the Torrens river, behind the Zoological Gardens - June 1930. From a photograph held by the State Archives of South Australia.
The river Torrens in flood, September 1931, showing huts occupied by the unemployed behind the Zoological Gardens. From a photograph held by the State Archives of South Australia.
establishment of fireplaces, all those on the Torrens who had facilities for cooking lost their right to obtain meal tickets to certain cafes and they were granted rations instead.\(^6\) A City Council report in 1932 indicated that the camps were kept extremely tidy by the men.\(^6\) The Local Board of Health provided three toilets at various points for the men and these were inspected twice a week by a health official. Regular inspections also revealed no serious illness among these campers.\(^7\)

In mid-1931 the number of campers on the banks of the Torrens appeared to be increasing and the Government resolved to move those in humpies into the Exhibition Building with the aim of having all the single men in the one area. However, the South Australian Council of Churches successfully intervened on behalf of the Torrens campers arguing that these men were more respectable than those in the Exhibition camp. There was, in fact, very little spirit left in the Torrens campers to cause trouble. In this sense, they were more "respectable". Those who erected semi-permanent dwellings were those who had become resigned to their situation and were prepared to settle down to becoming "city stiffs". They differed from those who permanently occupied doss-house accommodation

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68. U.R.C., Minutes, 119, 21 October 1931.

69. "The camps are excellently kept and are a credit to the campers". City of Adelaide, Annual Report, 1931-32, p. 19. Mr. E. Spiers pointed out that because the men had to do their own cooking they were continually searching the river area for rubbish to use as fuel.

70. City of Adelaide, Ibid.
only in the small sense of independence which they managed to preserve. Many remained in these huts for years in spite of periodic flooding by the river and attempts by the authorities to remove them. The remaining 34 men were finally removed in April, 1938, by the City Council. 71

71. See Advertiser, 3 February 1938, 12 March 1938, 29 March, 1938, 31 March 1938, 1 April, 1938, 12 April 1938. Reference to the remaining campers was also made by Dr. A.R. Southwood, Chairman, Central Board of Health in evidence to the Building Act Enquiry Committee, Op. cit., p. 80.
CHAPTER 9

POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND DISSENT
When the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in January 1931 handed down its unprecedented decision to cut wages by 10%, the union representatives and workers present in the courtroom gathered together and sang the Red Flag. Throughout the room shouts of "thieves" rang out. Before leaving the court the workers rose and gave three loud cheers for the coming social revolution.¹

The coming of the Depression led many people to believe that social revolution was a very real possibility in Australia. To those left of the A.L.P. the Depression was a triumphant confirmation and vindication of what they had been predicting for many years - the inevitable collapse of Capitalism. Within the context of the recent revolution in Russia and the widespread poverty of the 'twenties it would have been difficult for the Socialist left to have seen the Depression as anything other than the fulfilment of Marx's predictions of the progressive disintegration of Capitalism and the intensification of the class struggle. Throughout the Depression the two major revolutionary groups in Adelaide, the I.W.W. and the Communist Party, concentrated their efforts on organising the unemployed. They were confident that the inevitable overthrow of Capitalism would begin with the rise of revolutionary consciousness amongst the thousands of men who had been thrown out of work by the crisis.²


2. For a full discussion of this point and a detailed analysis of the response of left-wing groups to the Depression, particularly in South Australia, see P. Morrison, "The Australian Radical - Socialist Tradition and the Australian Communist Party 1920-39", a doctoral thesis shortly to be submitted at the University of Adelaide. I am indebted to the author of the thesis for permitting me to read an early draft. See also J. Blake, "The Early Thirties", Arena, No. 25, 1971, pp. 43-52.
The revolution of course did not materialise and considering the very large numbers out of work there was relatively little disruption of social order. Several reasons for this can be identified. In the first place, the unemployed themselves wielded no power in the economy. Without jobs they were totally without bargaining power. Furthermore, the unemployed received little support from trade unions. Union membership declined rapidly as the result of unemployment but, more importantly, unions demonstrated a strong reluctance to take up the grievances of the unemployed. On one occasion members of the South Australian Trades and Labor Council spent an anxious night till dawn besieged in the Trades Hall by angry unemployed men. The T.L.C. had refused to support the unemployeds' call for strike action following the arrest of several men during the Beef Riot. Throughout the Depression workers and the unemployed were divided by suspicion and hostility. Union officials were fully absorbed protecting the declining living standards of their own members, and the unemployed represented a threat, both to the jobs and the wages of employed workers. Even when solidarity existed

3. Trade union membership in South Australia declined from almost 80,000 in 1926 to 54,000 in 1932. Australia, Labour Reports, 1926-34.


5. Advertiser, 12 January, 1931. From then on the unemployed were denied the use of the Trades Hall for meetings.
between unions and the unemployed, little was achieved since, as
the Depression lengthened, the unions themselves became almost
totally ineffective. In South Australia in 1933 there occurred
only a single strike for the entire year. Even this was lost by
the union. 6

Since the unemployed wielded no power in the economy the
only real threat to the social order was the possibility of mass
action in the streets. However, with the possible exception of the
Beef Riot, 7 on no occasion did the unemployed turn out in sufficient
numbers or with sufficient determination to pose a threat to the
authorities. In part, the explanation for this was the psychological
impact of unemployment itself which left the individual isolated and
demoralised. This aspect of the effect of unemployment has been
discussed in an earlier chapter. On the other hand, the issues which
actually succeeded in stirring up large numbers of demonstrators were
clearly bread and butter grievances such as caused the Beef Riot.
Had there been undeniable cases of starvation the situation may well
have been different, but even in Adelaide the dole provided by the
government was sufficient to prevent that happening. As it was,
people were generally not desperate nor angry enough to run the risk
of losing their rations by involving themselves in political activism.
In Adelaide, the I.W.W. and the Communist Party never succeeded in
attaining a large membership. 8 Neither did they have a great deal of

6. In the 15 strikes that occurred between 1930 and 1933 not one was
won by the unions. Australia, Labour Reports, 1930-34.
7. A description of the Beef Riot is given later in this chapter.
success in broadening the political consciousness of the unemployed. The situation was further diffused by the existence of a Labor government. It is arguable that only a Labor government could have introduced such repressive measures without provoking large-scale civil disturbances.

The only real threat to law and order came from the single unemployed and the unemployed of Port Adelaide. These groups created disturbances continually from 1928 till 1931. Their increasing militancy was a continual source of concern to the Hill Labor Government which was as anxious as its predecessor to be rid of the "unemployment problem", or at least for it to remain out of the public eye. But throughout these early years of the Depression this section of the unemployed continued to remind both government and public of its presence.

The unemployed occupying the Exhibition Building, in particular, tended to be those who were not resigned to their situation. These were the men who were likely to be "agitators" or who at least might be willing to join in a demonstration for better conditions. They had not yet had their spirits broken and were not prepared to accept rejection from society without a fight. Deputations from the camps regularly waited upon the government with requests and demands for improvements to conditions. These demands ranged from the supplying of blankets and leather for boot repairs to the provision of work for all the unemployed. The frequency of these deputations

9. This had clearly been the concern of the Labor government even under the Gunn Ministry, 1924-27. A member of that Cabinet, R.S. Richards, stated in Parliament that a meal ticket system had been introduced "in order that we should not have these queues waiting around the offices for sustenance". S.A.P.D., 1927, 2 August 1927.

10. U.R.C., Minutes, 66, 22 June 1931; 89, 17 August, 1931.
and demonstrations prompted the government to move the ration distribution depot from its location in Molton Street, close by the office of the Premier in the Treasury Building, to Kintore Avenue. The aim of this move was to reduce the frequency of unemployed deputations to the government. One of the specific complaints of the men was that they were required to vacate the camps during the day. As a result, they were forced to spend the day roaming the city. In winter they needed to seek some dry spot for protection against the rain and cold. Many spent hour after hour in the Public Library, Art Gallery and Museum close by their camps on North Terrace. Attendances at these institutions increased greatly during these years as a result of the influx of unemployed men sheltering from the cold and damp, and perhaps from the boredom of life on the dole as well. Annual attendance figures for these institutions are shown in Table 9.1.

Another source of unrest among the men was the quality of food supplied by the cafes where their meal tickets could be used. Two of the cafes appear to have provided very reasonable meals for the men and were popular. Three other cafes, however, brought continuous complaints from the unemployed. At one time the Unemployment Relief Council received a petition from 757 men asking that the Salvation Army kitchen's contract be cancelled. Following

11. Interview with Mr. L.C. Hunkin who was South Australian Public Service Commissioner.

12. These were the Wattle Cafe and the California Cafe. U.R.C., Minutes, 48, 29 April, 1931.

13. This was not the first time that the Salvation Army had been the focus of criticism from the unemployed. On 3 June 1930, a free meal kitchen opened by the Salvation Army in the West End of Adelaide was declared black by about 200 unemployed who prevented others from entering. The men argued that it was the duty of the government and not charitable organisations to feed the unemployed. This black ban collapsed within two days as hunger overcame political principles and no further "trouble" occurred. Advertiser, 4 July 1930; S.A.P.D., 1930, Vol. 1, p. 131.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public Library</th>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Art Gallery</th>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>162,196</td>
<td>74,757</td>
<td>77,194</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>161,017</td>
<td>65,886</td>
<td>76,993</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>170,845</td>
<td>99,415</td>
<td>85,782</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>190,253</td>
<td>100,840</td>
<td>94,423</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>196,714</td>
<td>100,673</td>
<td>88,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>216,000</td>
<td>102,192</td>
<td>85,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>232,106</td>
<td>96,336</td>
<td>74,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>231,002</td>
<td>91,964</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>230,034</td>
<td>108,044</td>
<td>86,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>218,566</td>
<td>102,551</td>
<td>78,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>196,541</td>
<td>109,603</td>
<td>88,766</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>182,204</td>
<td>97,540</td>
<td>64,372</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>181,018</td>
<td>100,446</td>
<td>66,229</td>
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an inspection the Council cancelled the contracts of both the Salvation Army and the Express Cafe. The contracts were subsequently reinstated when the Employer's Federation representative on the Council threatened to resign over the issue.

Conditions within the camps themselves were described by the men as being filthy. When one of the occupants died, his mates organised a series of meetings during which they claimed that his death was the result of conditions in the camp. One of the "ringleaders" of this group was of particular concern to the Unemployment Relief Council. He was reported by police to have made a speech at the ration depot in Kintore Avenue during which he said:

I told you people that No. 2 Camp is what I have already said - a human pigsty and before winter you will see another 50 men die through filthy conditions. We will march in a body at the funeral of our comrade.

The Unemployment Relief Council attempted to move this man from the camp but found he had too much support among his companions. Strong feelings against "scabs" also indicated a high level of class consciousness and solidarity among the men of the Exhibition camps. Two men who appear to have acted as scab labourers during the waterfront disputes at Port Adelaide were evicted from the camps by the occupants. They applied to the Unemployment Relief Council in May

14. U.R.C., Minutes, 8 April 1931.
15. The other cafe subject to frequent complaints was Cominos Cafe. This was reported to have a kitchen in a very dirty state, bread was stale and mildewy, tables were wiped with a dirty, greasy cloth, and eating utensils were only dipped in a tin of water after use. U.R.C., Minutes, 37, 23 March, 1931; 84, 3 August 1931.
16. Ibid., 41, 13 April 1931.
17. Ibid.
1931 for protection since, they said, they were afraid to go back to the Exhibition camp. 18

The existence of a higher level of class consciousness and political activism among the men in the unemployed camps is not difficult to explain. These men, who were gathered together in a single group, did not feel as isolated, withdrawn and useless as the married man whose confidence was sapped by the feeling that he was unable to take care of his family. Men in these camps were far more aware of the social dimensions of the problem of unemployment since they were physically surrounded by so many in a similar situation. There arose out of this awareness a sense of group solidarity. In addition, they shared a common set of specific grievances which made it relatively easy for the few articulate and politically active men amongst them to educate and organise the rest. Finally, these men were not inhibited from taking part in political activities by the fear that arrest would mean the withdrawal of the dole from their families. 19

The fact that there were over 3,000 single unemployed men in Port Adelaide in 1931 meant that the threat to "order" was potentially much greater in that area. To some extent this potential seemed to be realised for a time. The whole Port area was simmering from the time of the nationwide 1928 conflict between the shipowners and wharf-labourers. 20 The bosses employed scab labour in an attempt

18. Ibid., 49, 1 May 1931; and 50, 4 May 1931.
19. This was a very real fear inhibiting political activity. See Chapter 4 above.
Troopers on guard at Robinson Bridge, Port Adelaide, during the waterside workers' strike, September 27, 1928. From a photograph held by the State Archives of South Australia.
to break the South Australian Branch of the Waterside Workers' Union.\(^{21}\) The Adelaide business community organised a temporary army of four battalions, over 3,000 men, called the Citizens' Defence Brigade to prevent the union men from removing the "volunteers".\(^{22}\) This Defence Brigade consisted largely of "professional men, farmers and students".\(^{23}\) The government released civil servants for duty and many business firms did the same. They were issued with packs, rifles and side-arms and moved into three camps in the Port area. During the month of September 1928, a series of often bloody skirmishes occurred between Port Adelaide workers, police and the Citizens' Defence Brigade.\(^{24}\)

Trouble continued to brew following the defeat of the waterside workers' strike in October, 1928. "Volunteers" continued to be employed on the wharf while over 1,500 union wharf labourers were unemployed.\(^{25}\) Scabs were clearly identified and harassed. On many occasions police were required to protect them from huge crowds of unemployed men.\(^{26}\) Many incidents occurred where fire-arms were discharged or other weapons used to inflict severe injuries.\(^{27}\) At least one death resulted directly from this violence.\(^{28}\) The situation became so inflammatory in lat 1928 and 1929 that rioting broke out at

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27. For example, see *Advertiser*, 15 January 1929; 18 January 1929; 19 January 1929; 5 June 1930; 28 September 1928.
28. *Advertiser*, 9 and 12 October 1928. An unemployed waterside worker was stabbed by an Italian volunteer. 10,000 people marched up the Port Road to the Cheltenham Cemetery for the funeral.
almost any excuse. On numerous occasions crowds of unemployed men varying between 500 and 3,000 clashed with volunteers and police. The tension was heightened by the attitude of the police who, according to the South Australian Worker, at the slightest provocation would "ride recklessly along the footpaths, [and] charge into crowds partly composed of women out shopping with their children ..."29

A number of quite large demonstrations had also been held by the unemployed in Adelaide from 1927 to the early part of 1930. In July 1927, 400 unemployed marched on the Lord Mayor's office.30 Mounted troopers with batons dispersed the crowd. On May Day 1929, a procession of 700 unemployed wearing red flowers and ribbons marched through Adelaide singing revolutionary songs.31 Over 2,500 unemployed rallied in Victoria Square on 4 September 1929 to condemn the failure of Labor politicians, including Lionel Hill, the Leader of the Party, to participate in an earlier demonstration.32 From the re-establishment of the city camps in mid 1930, however, the single unemployed in Adelaide began to work in closer liaison with the unionists and unemployed of Port Adelaide. This collaboration was largely the product of the growing strength of I.W.W. and Communist leadership within both groups.33 A number of quite large joint demonstrations took place

31. Ibid., pp. 74-5.
32. Ibid., p. 77.
during the remainder of 1930 and in 1931 as a result of this co-operation. Three well-attended demonstrations were organised by the Communist Party in July, August and September 1930.

In each case placards were carried bearing the specific grievances of both groups.

By far the largest and most violent demonstration of the entire Depression occurred on Friday, 9th January 1931. This demonstration, which came to be known as the Beef Riot, was something of a watershed in the deterioration of relations between the Labor government and the Adelaide unemployed. A march was organised to protest over the government's decision to replace beef with mutton on all ration tickets. This was a grievance of genuine concern to the unemployed since mutton was regarded as considerably inferior and of less value as it usually contained a percentage of bone.

Approximately 1,000 men, women and children marched from Port Adelaide with banners, placards and red flags. They were joined at the top of the Port Road by another 1,000 unemployed Adelaide men who had marched from the Labour Exchange in Molton Street.

34. *Advertiser*, 29 July 1930.
35. Ibid., 2 August 1930.
36. Ibid., 2 September 1930.
38. The following account of the Beef Riot is based on reports from the following sources: *Advertiser*, 10 January 1931; *News*, 9 January 1931; *Register News-Pictorial*, 10 January 1931; J. Playford, *Op. Cit.*, and interviews with several people present at the riot.
39. The participation of the Adelaide single men was largely an expression of solidarity and sympathy since they were not directly affected by the rations.
Over 2,000 unemployed men marching down King William St. to the Treasury Building. The men were protesting against the removal of beef from the rations. A battle between police and demonstrators that followed became known as the Beef Riot. Advertiser, 10 January 1931.
The leaders of the demonstrations against the removal of beef from the rations. *Advertiser*, 10 January 1931.
Police using horses and motorcycles disperse the remaining demonstrators following the battle known as the Beef Riot. *Advertiser*, 10 January 1931.
"revolutionary songs" and shouting "We Want Beef", they then marched past Parliament House, turned down King William Street and headed for the Treasury Building. There, they stopped with the intention of sending a deputation to interview the Premier, Lionel Hill, in his office. The police, who were waiting for the demonstrators, refused to allow them into the building. Blows were struck and in a moment mounted troopers, motorcycle police and uniformed and plain-clothed constables, were battling with the angry crowd. The police used their long-batons and motorcycles as weapons and the unemployed retaliated with wooden spikes, banner poles and "missiles". Severe fighting lasted for about twenty minutes with "blood flowing freely on both sides". After being beaten back, about half the demonstrators re-assembled around Colonel Light's statue which was then located in Victoria Square. The police then made another charge and finally dispersed the group. Sporadic street fighting continued for another half an hour. As a result of the battle, twelve men were arrested and seventeen were admitted to hospital including ten policemen.

The repercussions of the riot were enormous. In the first place, it seemed to act as a catalyst of the growing political activism of many of the young unemployed. On the night following the riot 2,000 unemployed demonstrated in Port Adelaide against the Hill government and the violence of the police. Fighting again broke

40. Advertiser, 10 January 1931.
41. J. Playford, Op. cit., p. 95. Six of those arrested were members of the Communist Party.
42. Advertiser, 10 January 1931.
out and several arrests were made. Early the following week, a large crowd of unemployed men presented a long list of demands to the Chief Secretary. These included specific references to the beef issue and the release of gaolled demonstrators but also included a demand for the socialisation of all industries. A further indication of the growing political activism among the unemployed on broader issues occurred on 21 January when the rightist Citizens League organisation attempted to hold a meeting in the Port Adelaide Town Hall. The hall was packed out but a large percentage were what the *Advertiser* termed "the Communist section of the audience." When the official conductor attempted to begin the meeting with patriotic songs, the audience insisted on singing the Red Flag "with great volume from all parts of the hall". A young man from the audience leapt onto the stage with a single bound and led the enthusiastic singing. When the official speakers attempted to make themselves heard they were drowned out with interjections and "boo-hoos". Another young man, "gesticulating excitedly", shouted "Communism is leading the world and don't you make any mistake". The meeting closed with the audience again singing the Red Flag before leaving.

The increasing militancy of the unemployed also had an influence upon the State authorities. Police observation of the occupants of the unemployed camps became increasingly close. Six days after the Beef Riot, police made a surprise raid on the quarters of

44. *Advertiser*, 13 January 1931.
the single unemployed in the Exhibition Building at 7.00 in the morning. Their mission, it was stated, was to confiscate any firearms or other weapons found on the premises.\textsuperscript{47} None was found but this was the first stage of a long campaign of harassment by the police against the leaders of the unemployed.\textsuperscript{48} Herbert Reimann, one of the men arrested in the Beef Riot was deported to Danzig before he had completed his fifteen month gaol term.\textsuperscript{49} In February 1931, the Commissioner of Police, Brigadier Leane, informed the Labor government that in future the police would prevent all demonstrations and disperse crowds immediately.\textsuperscript{50} So effective was the police campaign that the Communist Party had become quite ineffective by the end of 1931. The few enthusiastic and skilled members who had been so active previously were either in gaol or had fled interstate.\textsuperscript{51}

While it appears that this campaign was conceived and directed by the State Police Commissioner himself - a particularly enthusiastic defender of the existing social order\textsuperscript{52} - there is no doubt that the Labor government itself came to perceive the unemployed men more and more as a threat to their own interests and to the

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 15 January 1931.

\textsuperscript{48} For further details see P. Morrison, "The Australian radical-socialist tradition and the Australian Communist Party 1920-39", a doctoral thesis shortly to be submitted at the University of Adelaide.

\textsuperscript{49} Advertiser, 4 April 1932.

\textsuperscript{50} Advertiser, 13 February 1931.


\textsuperscript{52} In July 1930, Leane apparently became convinced that the revolution was imminent. He immediately placed all motorised units on alert in preparation for the attempted uprising which was to be signalled by the cutting off of Adelaide's electricity supply, S.A. Police File No. 1588, S.A. Archives, GR6.5 - quoted by P. Morrison, Op. cit.
interests of social order. The Premier, Lionel Hill, was known to have an extremely limited ability to grasp economic problems. From a very early stage a number of important local business leaders cultivated a close relationship with Hill for the express purpose of influencing the behaviour of the Labor government. The editor of the Advertiser, Sir Lloyed Dumas, while privately contemptuous of Hill, exerted an extraordinary influence over his thinking. Hill was also known to have consulted weekly with Sir Walter Young, a director of Elder Smith's pastoralist company. As a result of this influence, Hill became a leading advocate of the conservative Premiers' Plan as a solution to the Depression. Hill's political stance on this issue led him into direct confrontation with the State Labor movement. An attempt to expel him from the A.L.P. in March 1931, narrowly failed. Under pressure from the left, Hill moved further right and became more alienated from the rank and file of the Labor movement and from the unemployed, in particular. In September 1930, Hill had introduced a Public Safety Preservation Act which gave extraordinary powers to the police to deal with any potential threat to social order. In introducing the Act to Parliament, Hill stated that its purpose was to "smash Communism". In August 1931, Hill and his entire Cabinet were expelled from the A.L.P.

54. Ibid.
55. Interview with Mr. L.C. Hunkein.
56. Advertiser, 12 March 1931.
Following the disturbances at the time of the Beef Riot, the government resolved to move the single unemployed out of the city. With this in mind, the Unemployment Relief Council was instructed to set up isolated work camps in the country to which the unemployed could be sent. Camps were initially prepared at Forest Reserve and Mt. Crawford. By October, the camps were ready and the government announced that it intended to close the single men's camps as soon as possible. In the middle of that month, a notice was erected within the Exhibition camps, to the effect that every man must make application for work at Mt. Crawford. Those who did not register had their meal tickets stopped and were debarred from further relief. In mid November, the Exhibition Building camps were closed. To ensure that those who went to the country work camps did not return to the city, the government made it clear that they would not be entitled to rations in the city. Later, the government developed a scheme in co-operation with farmers whereby many of the remaining single men in the city were told they must accept country work on farms for 10/- per week or lose their relief. In December 1934, over 900 young men were engaged in this scheme.

59. U.R.C., Minutes, 66, 22 June 1931.
60. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 130, 18 November 1931.
64. Ibid.
These camps actually provided work for only a minority of the unemployed. The four camps which were operating in May 1932, provided accommodation for a total of only 400 men.68 It can be seen from Table 8.1 that in terms of the total number of single unemployed men in Adelaide, the impact of these camps was minimal. Nevertheless, in terms of the government's aim of reducing the threat to social order this move proved to be remarkably successful. Those who were most likely to cause "trouble" either were dispatched to isolated work camps where they could be kept under close supervision or more often themselves decided to head for the country or the eastern states.

Thus, even where a degree of militancy existed among the unemployed there was not a serious revolutionary challenge to the existing order. On the whole, political activity was limited to small demonstrations centred around minor grievances. Basically, the unemployed were politically powerless and the state eventually had no trouble in dispelling any threat to "social order".

68. Advertiser, 5 May 1932.
EPILOGUE
Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

[K. Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte]

The Depression left many scars on those who experienced unemployment. It often took years for those who experienced the worst physical deprivations to regain a measure of economic security. Simply regaining work did not in itself automatically solve all their problems. Those in particular who had been without work for a long time faced a steady uphill struggle to get back on their feet. Many had lost most of their former possessions. After struggling for years to keep up mortgage payments, a large number had their homes sold by the banks in the later years of the Depression. Often those who managed to retain their homes were in a worse position. With interest being charged on their arrears many owed more on their homes than they had originally borrowed. They then faced uncomfortable severe repayment rates for quite a few years merely to regain the position they were at when the Depression began. Some found themselves extensively in debt to moneylenders. Older workers, particularly those who were forced to an early retirement, often experienced a miserable and poverty-stricken old-age.

The Depression may have produced a number of "self-made" men who attribute their success to being forced to start out on

their own, but for every such story of success there are hundreds of stories of frustration and thwarted ambition. Many young workers who would normally have taken an apprenticeship were prevented from doing so. Without a trade qualification their chances of obtaining a skilled job in later years were considerably reduced. The acute shortage of skilled tradesmen that was experienced in Australia during the post-war industrial expansion programme is directly attributable to the Depression.

A certain number of workers were rendered unemployed by the Depression. One who spent several years assisting the unemployed observed that the number of unemployables rose drastically in the late thirties.² For most, however, the long-term effects of unemployment were not as severe as in these extreme cases. There was, of course, some degree of difficulty in adjustment immediately upon returning to employment but generally the emotional instability associated with unemployment disappeared remarkably quickly. One person noticed a rapid improvement in the morale of his father, who had been unemployed for five years, when the family left Adelaide and went to stay with relatives on York Peninsula where they made a comfortable living from fishing. The father had been bitter and morose in Adelaide but returned to his old self when he again became gainfully employed. Beneath the surface, however, unemployment had left scars that were deep and lasting. The attitude of those interviewed to their experiences left no doubt on this point. Almost all said that it had profoundly affected their lives. "It left a

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² A.C.L. Sanders in evidence to the Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works, p. 107.
scar ... It will always be there" was a typical comment. The majority said they felt resentful and bitter about their experience. One person said that he had been waiting for 40 years to get things off his chest. This in fact appeared to be the motive of most of those who contacted me following my appeal in a newspaper for people to interview. The Depression was still at the forefront of these peoples' consciousness and many clearly felt a need, and even a compulsion, to talk about it.

Above all, it was the lingering bitterness which stood out. In some cases, this sense of bitterness did not have a clear focus:

"I was bitter. I wasn't bitter against anybody - just at the world at large. I had a chip on my shoulder." 4

Quite a few said that they didn't blame anything or anyone for what happened. A common attitude was: There was nothing anybody could do. We were all in the same boat". Others, however, acquired a degree of political consciousness as a result of the Depression:

The Depression created within me a feeling of hatred towards big combines - big business people like General Motors. It is a silly thing for me to say because I worked there from 1934 till 1959 but every penny I ever had at Holdens, I gave them twopence back. In the early days you were their slave really. It did create a bitterness in my heart and I said I would never forget the Depression days. It printed things on my mind. 5

3. Interview with Mr. A. Willmot.
4. Interview with Mr. A. Tavender.
5. Interview with Mr. K. Douglas.
A further observable long-term effect of unemployment was a concern, sometimes even an obsession, with economic security. Almost without exception those interviewed had occupied a single job uninterrupted since the War. One person's father remained in the same position from 1939 till his retirement in the mid 1960's. He himself has occupied his present job for over 25 years. This was quite typical of the experience of most of those interviewed.

Seen in context, the period 1914-45 was one of social and economic dislocation in Australian society. Apart from the personal and social disturbances resulting from a period of basic structural change in the economy, Australians experienced within the short space of thirty years involvement in two world wars and a major Depression. The overall impact of the Depression itself can only be fully understood within this context. The dislocation and upheaval created by The First World War raised hopes and expectations in peoples' minds. These expectations did not come to fulfilment for the majority of the population in the twenties. One person interviewed clearly articulated the disillusionment which characterised the twenties.

I had no idea what the War was going to be like when I went away. I never thought I'd be away four years. We were given the impression that we were going to come home to milk and honey. They told us we had won the War and Australia belongs to you. You got the impression that you were the heroes of the War. But when you came home and your 60 days leave was over you found that things were just as bad as when you went away. Things were a damn-sight worse than

6. Interview with Mr. A. Briggs.

7. Concern for material security was shown in numerous other ways by informants. One person stated that it was only in very recent times that he has been able to bring himself to buy on credit.
they were in 1914. 1914 was a drought and that's how they got so many volunteers to go to the war... We thought when we came home things would be beautiful. When our leave was finished we realised that things weren't a damn bit different from when we went away.

Then came the Depression and the heroes of the Great War became the outcasts of the society they had believed they were fighting for. The resentment felt by the unemployed was further exacerbated by the ease and speed with which the country mobilized when war again broke out in 1939. Many people interviewed expressed very bitter feelings that the government was so quickly able to eliminate the unemployment which it previously had claimed it was powerless to control.

The Depression has had a clearly discernible long-term effect on the later lives of those who were unemployed. However, it's impact has been far more pervasive than this. The Depression was a traumatic experience for those who lived through it. It personally affected the majority of the population. Probably one-half, or more, of all workers in Adelaide were unemployed at some stage during the late twenties and early thirties. At least one-half of the remainder were underemployed. Even amongst the fully employed there were few who were able to feel that their jobs were secure. The Depression has profoundly influenced the consciousness and behaviour of a whole generation. Furthermore, through the family, it has been a dominant influence on the consciousness of the succeeding generation. One might reasonably expect that the experience of the Depression generation will remain a significant influence on the future development of Australian society.

8. Interview with Mr. W.G. Waye.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliography is divided as follows:

I Official and Statistical.
II Archives.
III Theses and Manuscripts.
IV Newspapers, Journals and Periodicals.
V Oral Sources and Private Letters.
VI Books, Pamphlets and Articles.
   (i) South Australian and Australian.
   (ii) Other.

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I OFFICIAL AND STATISTICAL

A. South Australia

Extensive use is made in the thesis of the printed Parliamentary papers of the state. Most useful were the official reports of various government and parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions. In addition, the transcripts of evidence taken by these committees and Royal Commissions were found to contain a great deal of information about the unemployed. Transcripts of evidence taken were sometimes published in the Parliamentary Papers with the main report. More often, however, the evidence was not printed and remains in typed transcript form only. The great majority of this material is held in the archives of one or other of the Houses of the South Australian Parliament. The most useful of these reports were:

Royal Commission on the Finances of South Australia as Affected by Federation. Report.  
S.A.P.P., 1929, No. 54.

Committee of Enquiry into Education. Report.  
S.A.P.P., 1931, No. 69.

Commonwealth Joint Committee of Public Accounts on the Finances of South Australia as Affected by Federation. Report together with Full Transcript of Evidence.  
S.A.P.P., 1931, No. 73.

Select Committee on the Mortgagors' Relief Act. Report.  
S.A.P.P., 1931, No. 61.

Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)  
These records are held by the State Bank of South Australia.
Report of the Ration Scale Committee.
S.A.P.P., 1938, No. 56.

Select Committee on Unemployment Relief Works. Report.
S.A.P.P., 1939, No. 34.

Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)
South Australian Parliamentary Archives.

Building Act Enquiry Committee. Reports.
S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 30. (First Progress Report).
S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 32. (Second Progress Report).
S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 34. (Third and Final Report).

Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)
These records are held in the Government Reporting Department at Parliament House, Adelaide.

Select Committee on the Moneylenders Bill. Report.
S.A.P.P., 1940, No. 41.

Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)
South Australian Parliamentary Archives.

Unemployment Relief Council. Quarterly Reports, 1931-41.
Only two reports of the Council were printed. The rest are held in the S.A. Parliamentary Archives (Legislative Council).

In addition the following sources provided extensive statistical information on South Australian society in the inter-war period.

Adelaide Municipal Yearbook.
S.A.P.P., No. 4.
S.A.P.P., No. 23.
Annual Report of the Factories and Steamboilers Department.
S.A.P.P., No. 46.

Statistical Register of South Australia.

B. Australia

The following papers of the Australian (Commonwealth) Parliament were of use:

Royal Commission on the Basic Wage. Report.
A.P.P., 1920, No.
Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)
A copy of the evidence taken in Adelaide is now held in the research collection of University of Adelaide Library.


Transcript of Evidence. (Unpublished)
This Royal Commission interviewed a large number of witnesses, including 22 from South Australia, on the problem of unemployment. A printed copy of this evidence is held by the University of Adelaide Library.

Royal Commission on Child Endowment or Family Allowances. Report.
A.P.P., 1929, Vol. II, pp. 1285-1388. This Royal Commission took evidence from 24 witnesses in Adelaide but a thorough search failed to locate the transcripts of this evidence.

Advisory Council on Nutrition. Reports.
A.P.P., 1937-38-39-40, Vol. IV, pp. 253-426. The final report was the only one printed. Bound copies of all six reports are held in the Medical Library, University of Adelaide.

In obtaining statistical information on the extent and distribution of unemployment, wages, cost of living estimates, structure of the population, and so on, the following publications of the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics have been extensively used:

Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1921.
Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933.
Commonwealth Year Books.
Demography Bulletins.
Labour Reports.
Production Bulletins.
Trade Unionism, Unemployment, Wages, Prices, and Cost of Living in Australia, 1891-1912.

II ARCHIVES

Papers of the Childrens' Welfare and Public Relief Department of South Australia.

Only a small selection of the records of this department survive. These are held in the South Australian State Archives under the files of the Department of Community Welfare. (GRG 29)
Papers of the Education Department of South Australia.
Extensive records of this department are held in the South Australian State Archives (GRG 18). Unfortunately the files are not well organised. Those of most interest were the correspondence files GRG 18/2.

Papers of Samuel Forsyth.
Forsyth (1881-1960) was a Methodist Minister and founder of the Kuitpo Colony for unemployed men. His papers are held in the South Australian State Archives (PRG 8) and contain some excellent photographs of the unemployed who were sent to Kuitpo Colony.

Records of the Adelaide City Mission.
These records are held in the South Australian Archives and cover the period 1867-1955. They proved to be of only limited use.

Records of the Savings Bank of South Australia.
These records proved to be extremely valuable and were used extensively. Of particular value was a journal of the sub-committee for interest arrears which contains a running file on those who were in arrears on their mortgage payments. This file is complete for the periods from January 1931 - April 1933 and from June 1935 - June 1937. A detailed study of 10% of all files held was made. This amounted to 129 individual case histories of people in arrears. These records are held at the main office of the Savings Bank of South Australia.

Records of the State Bank of South Australia.
These records contain extensive information on the life histories of the unemployed. However, files on those in arrears were not arranged separately and consequently the information contained on the unemployed was not as accessible as in the case of the Savings Bank records.

Records of the South Australian Board of Industry.
particularly valuable were transcripts of evidence taken by the Board in its Living Wage Enquiries - for males in 1930, 1931, 1933 and 1935 and for females in 1930 and 1931. These records are held in the South Australian Industrial Court.

Records of the United Trades and Labor Council of South Australia.
Held in the South Australian State Archives (SRG 1).

Unemployment Relief Council, Minutes, 1930-43, 5 volumes.
These records are held in the South Australian Archives under the files of the State Lands Department (GRG 35/64). They proved to be an extremely valuable source for the period 1930-31 but thereafter their quality declined markedly.

* III THESES AND MANUSCRIPTS


Thompson, M.J., "Government and Depression in South Australia, 1927-34", M.A., Flinders University, 1972.


IV NEWSPAPERS, JOURNALS AND PERIODICALS

The main daily newspapers used were the following:

The Advertiser.

The News.

The Register (later the News Register-Pictorial).

Other newspapers which proved useful included:

Direct Action (fortnightly).
This was the organ of the Adelaide branch of the Industrial Workers of the World. It was published between 1928-30 and edited by E.A. Dickenson.

Labor Advocate (weekly).
This was the official A.L.P. newspaper. It began in 1932 and changed its name after 1935 to the Herald.

South Australian Worker (weekly).
This was the organ of the Lang Labor Party in South Australia. It was edited by Douglas Bardolph and for a time was sponsored by the Trades and Labor Council.

Other journals, gazettes and yearly reports used included:

The A.R.U. Gazette (monthly).
The Journal of the S.A. branch of the Australian Railway Workers Union.


The Printing Industry Employees Union of Australia (S.A. branch).


Solidarity.

V ORAL SOURCES AND PRIVATE LETTERS

From June to December in 1973 I interviewed a number of people about their experiences during the Depression in Adelaide. These interviews have proven of immense value, not only in the vast amount of information which they provided about the experiences of these people and of the unemployed generally, but also in helping me to obtain at least a glimmer of what people felt and experienced when they became one of "the unemployed". The majority of people interviewed contacted me following an article on my research which appeared in the Advertiser. An appeal in that article to people who had been unemployed during the Depression resulted in almost 100 calls. All of these people were
interviewed, sometimes at length, on the telephone. From these, I selected a sample to interview in depth. I also obtained a few informants from other sources. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were made from the recordings. The tapes (in cassette form) are in my possession. The transcripts will be deposited in the South Australian State Archives in due course. Transcripts were made of interviews with the following people:

Mr. J. Bassani  
Mr. W.G. Bourne  
Mr. A. Briggs  
Mr. and Mrs. C. Burgan  
Mr. and Mrs. J.H. Catton  
Rev. and Mrs. N. Crawford  
Mr. A. Cys  
Mr. K. Douglas  
Mr. H. Fearn  
Mr. W. Fuller  
Mrs. A.J.M. Hagger  
Mr. L. Hunkin  
Mr. L.L. Jones  
Mr. J. Jose  
Mr. R.K.  
Mr. T. Lancey  
Mrs. L.M. Leslie  
Mrs. E. McLean  
Mr. N. Makin  
Mr. A.J.G. Morrison  
Mrs. D.A. O'Toole  
Mr. R. Potter  
Mrs. J. Poynter  
Mr. R. Prince  
Mr. R. Reed  
Mr. A.T. Ridland  
Mr. A.M. Shaw  
Mr. T. Slater  
Mr. E.F. Spiers  
Mr. A. Tavender  
Mr. H. Taylor  
Mr. W.G. Waye  
Mr. A.J. Willmot  
Mr. B. Winter  

*This person has requested that his name not be used,

Letters were received from the following people about their experiences during the Depression years,

Mr. R.K. Amber  
Mrs. M.E. Bradshaw  
Mrs. I. Charlesworth  
"A Cockey" (anonymous)  
Mrs. B. Deland  
Mrs. J. Finger  
Mrs. I.D. Hall  
Mrs. E. Kelly  
Mr. E.A. Millwood  
Mr. L. Sellick  

*
VI  BOOKS, PAMPHLETS AND ARTICLES

(i) South Australian and Australian


Barnett, F.O. and Burt, W.O., Housing the Australian Nation, Melbourne, 1942.


Chomley, A., Production and Purchasing Power, Melbourne, 1931.


Copland, D.B., Australia in the World Crisis, 1929-33, Cambridge, 1934.


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Hancock, W.K., Australia, Brisbane, 1966.


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Shann, E. and Copland, D.B. (eds), The Crisis in Australian Finance 1929 to 1931, Sydney, 1931.


(ii) Other


Bakke, E.W., *Unemployed Worker*, New Haven, 1940.


Elderton, M., Case Studies of Unemployment, Philadelphia, 1931.


Hannington, W., A Short History of the Unemployed, London, 1938.

Hannington, W., Ten Lean Years, London, 1940.


Komarovsky, M., The Unemployed Man and His Family: The Effect of Unemployment upon the Status of the Man in 59 Families, New York, 1940.


Lewis, O., La Vida, New York, 1966.


