

COMMUNISTS AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

IN TASMANIA

1930 - 1935

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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 and belief, the thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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NOTES REGARDING DIGITISED VERSION – AUGUST 2014

To increase accessibility of this text, I have digitised it using OCR software for uploading to the University of Tasmania's E-prints site. While the process has been generally accurate, minor errors may have passed un-noticed. I have kept to the original pagination to preserve referencing, but this has resulted in unusual line breaks at the end of many pages.

Wasily Tkaczuk

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.T.U.	Australian Council of. Trade Unions
A.L.P.	Australian Labor Party
A.W.U.	Australian Workers' Union
COMINTERN	The Third International (Communist International)
C.P.A.	Communist Party of Australia
F.O.S.U.	Friends of the Soviet Union
H.C.C.	Hobart City Council
H.T.H.C.	Hobart Trades Hall Council
I.W.W.	Industrial Workers of the World
L.C.C.	Launceston City Council
L.T.H.C.	Launceston Trades Hall Council
M.A.W.A.F.	Movement Against War and Fascism
M.M.M.	Militant Minority Movement
O.B.U.	One Big Union
R.I.L.U.	Red International of Labour Unions
R.S.S.I.L.A.	Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League of Australia
R.S.L.	Returned Servicemen's League
Toc H	Talbot House. A benevolent society of ex-servicemen originally based in that house
U.C.W.U.	Unemployed and Casual Workers' Union
U.S.M.	Unemployed Social Movement
U.W.M.	Unemployed Workers' Movement
W.D.C.	Workers' Defence Corps
W.E.A.	Workers' Educational Association

CHAPTER 1.I N T R O D U C T I O N

How does one go about ridding society of its obvious evils, that is, the great contrasts between rich and poor, the privileged and the deprived and even the healthy and the sick? By the late nineteenth century a wide spectrum of European, and indeed world, thought had come to identify these evils with the capitalist mode of production, a tribute certainly to the analysis of society provided by Marx and Engels, but, more than that, an admission that if the capitalist mode of production could be overthrown and replaced by a new social order in which the worker no longer had seized from him the products of his labour by exploiters, there would be sufficient of the better things of life for all men. Men would become equal and even the division into healthy and sick might be to a large extent eliminated, for so many health problems were attributed to the squalid conditions in which the poor lived and their inability to afford medical care.

Capitalism needed to be overthrown. To that extent Marx and Engels and numerous other writers gained widespread support, even among many of those who lived comfortably from the benefits of capitalist society. But among those who held this basic agreement a division became evident between those who felt that the desired end could be achieved by reform, carried out by means of parliaments, trade unions and more or less legal pressure on capitalism, and those who felt that the exploited, toiling masses should seize political power with complete disregard for the established laws of society, which anyway were,

according to Marx and Engels, merely expressions of the prevailing capitalist mode of production, and to establish by force the new social order, that is, a socialist society. The choice was between revolution and reform.

The October Revolution in Russia linked "communism" to "violent revolution" so strongly that, for the next twenty years at least, to call someone a communist was to insinuate that he stood for the violent, illegal overthrow of the existing social order. Undoubtedly, there were many men who thought of themselves as communists but did not advocate such radical means, at least not immediately. Nevertheless, the directives issued by the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920, which strictly laid down Leninist guidelines which had to be followed before any party could call itself a Communist Party, made certain that any party affiliated to the Comintern linked itself automatically with the type of violent revolution experienced in Russia. Those guidelines will be discussed later.<sup>1</sup> For the present it is sufficient to say that members of a Communist Party in Australia were, because of their Comintern affiliation, committed to revolution rather than reform.

There was a branch of the Communist Party of Australia (C.P.A.) in Tasmania and it made its presence felt in various ways during the Great Depression of the 1930's. R. Gollan and A. Davidson, historians of the C.P.A., describe the attempts of that party to use the Depression to improve its position by direct proselytizing and by the establishment of "front" organizations.<sup>2</sup> Because of the general

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<sup>1</sup> *Infra*, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, A, *The Communist Party of Australia: a short history*, Stanford Cal., 1969, Hoover Institute Press.  
Gollan, R., *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955*, Canberra, 1975, ANU Press.

nature of their work and because of the apparent lack of detailed study on communism in Tasmania they ignore Tasmanian manifestations of the C.P.A. - although Davidson mentions that the C.P.A. was still weak in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania by early 1935.<sup>3</sup> I would agree that the C.P.A. was numerically weak in Tasmania during the worst part of the Depression, that is, from 1930 to 1935, but I shall attempt to show that despite its size the party was of some importance in Tasmania in that it aroused public opinion, mostly against itself. On many occasions it showed forth in the criticism levelled against itself by various individuals and organizations, the conservative nature of those individuals and organizations and it highlighted the dilemma faced by the Labor Party with regard to unemployment and socialism. I will attempt to show that most of the analysis made by Gollan and Davidson, regarding the C.P.A. generally, also applied to the Tasmanian District in particular. I shall also attempt to explain any notable discrepancies between the activities, ideology and policy of the party in Tasmania and what Gollan and Davidson maintain was the general rule for Australia.

My approach will necessarily be hampered by the problem of limited source material. Davidson and Gollan had access to a considerable variety of primary sources regarding the C.P.A., including minute books of the party, trade unions and conferences - correspondence between the C.P.A. and individuals and other organizations, diaries of individual communists, pamphlets issued both by the C.P.A. and by organizations attacking it, party constitutions and training manuals,

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<sup>3</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.65. Also Cloudsdale, M., *Tasmania & Unemployment 1930-33*, 1975, unpublished B.A. (Hons.) thesis, University of Tasmania, devotes a chapter to communists but examines them primarily in the context of unemployment as offering a challenge to Tasmanian society.

manifestos and newspapers and periodicals published by the party and its "front" organizations.

While it would be foolish to claim that none of the same type of material regarding the C.P.A. in Tasmania is any longer in existence, the present writer was unable to find any party records held in Tasmania, the local party archives being stated to contain records no older than the 1950's. With much time and searching it should be possible to locate at least some party records or to locate individuals who might be able to give accurate information relating to, for example, the size of the party. It is possible that a survey of mainland C.P.A. publications such as *Workers' Weekly*, which was distributed by C.P.A. and U.W.M. in Tasmania, might provide more substantial information than that available in Tasmania.<sup>4</sup> All of the sources used by the present writer were prone to anti-communist bias and the communists said as much.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that at least parts of the proceedings at meetings, organized by communists and attended by the daily press, were often reported verbatim, with accompanying editorial comment making disparaging remarks or offering accusations against the communists, and such reports have given the present writer considerable information of a fairly reliable nature, regarding the C.P.A. and "fronts" in Tasmania.<sup>6</sup> Other reliable information comes from minutes of the Trades Hall councils and A.L.P. This is chiefly in the form of acknowledgment of correspondence received from the C.P.A. and "front" organizations, and of motions put forward by known communists in the councils. The limitations of the sources used by the present writer have made it

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<sup>4</sup> *Mercury*, 12/6/31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/2/31.

<sup>6</sup> For example, White's "red flag" remarks. *Infra* p.56 and footnote 11.

necessary to make many assumptions and inferences. These will be indicated as far as possible in the course of the text.

In order to deal with communism in Tasmania in the Depression it will be necessary to outline the development of socialism and radical socialism in Australia up to the formation of the C.P.A. in 1920 and the development of the C.P.A. up to, and including, the period to be studied in detail and to relate this to the rest of the Australian labour movement during that period, especially the Labor Party and the trade unions.

In Australia, capitalism had been criticised since the late 19th Century but the working class movement was dominated by the Australian Labor Party which, based on the British Labor Party, sought to achieve by legal means or, at worst, semi-legal means such as strikes, the betterment of life for the working class. Labor Party policy in the pre-federation colonies and after federation, in the states and on a national level, tended to fluctuate from rather vague sentiments to quite clear expressions of socialist aspirations.<sup>7</sup>

The Russian Revolution was for all Australian socialists a fact in relation to which they had to develop their own position but only a minority actually identified with it.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this minority was of some importance in influencing the stated Labor Party objectives and, conversely, those stated objectives were to be important in establishing the position of the radical minority who were faced with problems akin to those faced by the European radical socialists, that

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<sup>7</sup> Crisp, L.F., *The Australian Federal Labor Party 1901-1951*, Melbourne 1965, Longmans Green and Co., p.270, and *infra*, p.95. Because the Depression period was one in which schism occurred within the Labor Party, I will normally use "Labor Party" rather than "A.L.P."

<sup>8</sup> Gollan, *op. cit.*, p.1.

is, they had to decide the nature of the Labor Party, that is, whether it was bourgeois, petty-bourgeois or proletarian, and whether to ally with, or infiltrate, the Labor Party or whether to become, and remain, completely independent, and generally, how to operate in an Australian context. This interaction between the Labor Party and radical minority groups makes it necessary to trace the development of both simultaneously in the period in which the Communist Party of Australia was born, and it will also be necessary, in following the development of the C.P.A. up to 1935, to keep in touch with simultaneous developments in the Labor Party.

Radical socialists in Australia before 1920 operated in and about the Labor Party and the trades unions and outside these in their own parties, and sometimes belonged to all three.<sup>9</sup> They consisted of a variety of doctrinal groups. Before 1900 they were mostly Bellamist or Fabian. After 1900 more became Marxists of a crude variety obtained from the U.S.A., which was more syndicalist and anti-parliamentary.<sup>10</sup> World War I brought out into the open a few dissidents, pacifists, socialists and the I.W.W. who opposed Australian involvement in the war, and this involvement and the conscription it necessitated did result in considerable divisions in Australian society.<sup>11</sup> Membership in radical socialist organizations remained small, though the circulation of socialist literature became relatively large. Many socialists decided they could not compromise their principles by being members of the A.L.P., which they saw as non-socialist, and set up party organizations in competition with it. Others hoped to convert it from within

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<sup>9</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Conan, *op.cit.*, p.1.

and considerable debate ensued between the two groups.<sup>12</sup> Until 1923 the A.L.P. rules only excluded as members persons who belonged to non-labour parties, so that conversion from within and development of separate parties could be carried on with relative ease by the same individuals.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from the division in Australia caused by the actual involvement in the war, the war could be used as evidence of the destructiveness of capitalist society and helped spread the view that it needed to be replaced, so that the debate between reform and revolution tended to become a real issue in Australia and this was made even more real by the Russian revolution, which came as a surprise to Australian radicals.<sup>14</sup> Some saw it as justification for building up working class solidarity by forming One Big Union (O.B.U.), others promoted theories of an impending catastrophic capitalist collapse, others again used it as proof of the futility of parliamentary means and co-operation with the Labor Party.<sup>15</sup> Those who saw the success of the Bolsheviks as a good example to be followed set out to form a Communist Party, but little precise information was available about the October revolution for the first few years and until theoretical and organizational lines were drawn up, a broad area of opinion was anxious to call itself communist. In 1920, a socialist not satisfied with the Labor Party could join any one of at least eight socialist political groups, or six aiming to re-organize the trade union movement in a revolutionary direction and "each believed itself to be the single and unique repository of socialist truth."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.3.

Russian ideas and methods were most acceptable with parties that had refused Labor Party co-operation and parliamentary activity and with a militant group within the Labor Party, especially those who were disillusioned with the failure of the O.B.U. proposals, but the Russian revolution did not unify factions which sought to be recognized as the Australian Section of the Third International (Comintern). In 1920 Comintern adopted a detailed plan of organization, outlining twenty-one conditions which any party seeking membership had to meet. This was to sort out those with a Bolshevik view of revolutionary theory and tactics from those who had intermediate views or those of the now denounced Second International. An aspiring member party must accept the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and denounce capitalists and reformists in the socialist movement who, by rejecting the dictatorship of the proletariat, made themselves assistants to the bourgeoisie. Such a view was the product of a belief that in the near future civil war in Europe and America would result from the class struggle, so that the party must be tightly organized and capable of illegal activity. Members of Comintern were to call themselves the Communist Party of their respective countries, accept the decisions of Comintern, and adopt a centralised system of organization based on "democratic centralism". Support must be given to colonial liberation movements and iron discipline enforced, with exclusion of those who did not accept party policy and organizational principles, with an especially careful watch to be kept on members who were members of parliament.<sup>17</sup> It was to this version of communist orthodoxy that the Communist Party of Australia (C.P.A.), formed on 30th October, 1920, had to conform,<sup>17</sup> but three groups

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4 & 5.

were present in the initial party, firstly Australian Socialist Party members who were well read in Marxist theory but who had few trade union contacts; secondly there were militant trade union members led by Garden to whom theory was less important than action; and finally there were former I.W.W. activists who during the war had campaigned against capitalism and now rejected political action as a means of establishing a socialist society. This third group had seen a mass industrial union movement as the means to achieve socialism, but had been led by government repression and the example of the Russian revolution, to seek to join a Communist Party.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime the mass of the labour movement became heavily influenced by radical ideas and the O.B.U. campaign and the holding in 1921, of an All Australian Congress of Trade Unions resulted. O.B.U. began in 1918 as an attempt to abolish capitalism and establish socialism by a union of all workers in one class conscious economic organization to take and hold the means of production, with this organization to be capable of political acts.<sup>19</sup> The O.B.U. idea did not succeed, partly due to the conservative influence of the Australian Workers' Union (A.W.U.) whose officials were not only afraid of the revolutionary talk of those advocating O.B.U., but saw the A.W.U. itself as being the One Big Union so that all unionists ought to join its ranks.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the demand of Comintern that reformism must be rejected by Communist Parties, the infant C.P.A. tended to adopt the traditional stance of Australian radical socialism both in policy and party organization. Party branches were determined regionally, held regular meetings, had their own leader who periodically contacted other branches or

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7 & 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

the central executive, annual conferences were held and democratic procedure followed at meetings and conferences, and criticism of the executive was allowed. The party only gave lip service to the Bolshevik type of organization and in fact its policy and organization was diametrically opposed to those insisted on by the Comintern, which demanded "democratic centralism" by which, after a decision was made, by the central body of the party, it had to be carried out without question by the lower ranks, and any dispute over policy had to precede the decision.<sup>21</sup> Early C.P.A. policy was an amalgam of O.B.U. ideas and a garbled Leninism, so that the C.P.A. still toyed with the idea that socialism could be introduced by parliamentary means, and tended to work within the Labour Party, hoping to convert it to "pure socialism".<sup>22</sup>

The peak of such reformism, and in fact the furthest swing to the left taken by the Australian trade union movement as a whole, and thus the Labor Party, took place in the All Australian Congress of Trade Unions in 1921, called by the federal executive of the A.L.P. to try and promote solidarity between the A.L.P. and the trade unions.<sup>23</sup> This congress took upon itself to recommend an entire new statement of objective for the A.L.P., simplified down to "The socialization of industry, production, distribution and exchange", followed by a statement of methods to attain that objective, calling for non-parliamentary as well as parliamentary means to achieve socialism, and the management of nationalized industries and the economy by worker control. Worker education was to prepare for this and "all schools of working class thought" ought be admitted to the party.

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<sup>21</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp.13-15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12 & p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.10.

This objective was adopted by the A.L.P. conference but strong dissent was received from some quarters, especially Theodore, who later became Federal Treasurer, who said it would discredit twenty years of party work and would end the labour movement and in fact ought to be called communism.<sup>24</sup>

Within the next two years this height of socialist achievement was gradually eroded away. The congress had also attempted to implement O.B.U. but this was effectively blocked by 1924, when an attempt at such a union was refused registration.<sup>25</sup> The socialization objective of the A.L.P. was relegated to obscurity in favour of "the cultivation of Australian sentiment".<sup>26</sup> The reasons for these failures are given by Gollan as factionalism, the return of a moderate prosperity in most industries (coal was a notable exception) even though unemployment did not drop below 8%, and an overall growth especially in secondary industry.<sup>27</sup> A short boom occurred, with a peak in 1926-27, which was big enough to undermine arguments that capitalism was in a state of crisis.<sup>28</sup> The C.P.A. had not grown and in 1924 its members were excluded from the A.L.P. despite initial gain in New South Wales where it effectively controlled the trade unions and the New South Wales Labor Council.<sup>29</sup> This New South Wales position was lost in 1925 when the C.P.A. showed disastrous election results, and that state succumbed to the radical sounding oratory of Lang.<sup>30</sup> The position was not aided by the reactionary nature of the press, which used the Russian revolution as a convenient means to condemn all socialist ideas and actions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Crisp, *op.cit.*, pp.279-280.

<sup>25</sup> Callan, *op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp.26-27.

<sup>30</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Part of the reason for the expulsion of C.P.A. members from the A.L.P. was Comintern policy, which, with the possibility of world revolution receding, had instructed the C.P.A. in 1922 to seek a "united front" with the A.L.P. and this was to be achieved, Comintern instructed, by a conference consisting of five A.L.P. delegates and three from the C.P.A. Such a disproportionate figure was unacceptable to the A.L.P., and by late 1923 the belief grew that the C.P.A. was out to destroy the A.L.P.<sup>32</sup> Davidson maintains Comintern policy almost destroyed the C.P.A. in the 1920's, especially over the "united front" policy.<sup>33</sup> There was also a decline in worker interest in the Russian revolution and revolutionary sloganizing.<sup>34</sup> With the expulsion from the A.L.P., the C.P.A. decided with equally little success, to work among the rank and file of union members, but membership declined, so while there had been 750 members in 1922, by 1925 this had declined to 280, and there were moves to disband the party.<sup>35</sup>

From 1926 to 1928 the C.P.A. limited its role to propagandizing which was, in effect, a demonstration of its inability to effect Comintern recommendations, and a reversion to the traditional role of Australian radical socialists.<sup>36</sup> By this stage the main expression of Australian radical socialism was in the trade unions, with some unions motivated towards international contacts.<sup>37</sup> In 1927 the Australian Council of Trade Unions (A.C.T.U.) was formed, with a socialization objective similar to the 1921 A.L.P. objective, and it tried to change the union movement from a craft to an industrial basis, with centralized

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<sup>32</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp.29-31.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33 and Gollan, p.14.

<sup>36</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.35.+

<sup>37</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.14

control of industrial disputes, and it became heir to O.B.U.<sup>38</sup>

The A.C.T.U. expressed itself against the "White Australia" policy, and affiliated with the Pan Pacific Secretariat, an organization of labour movements in countries bordering on the Pacific, set up on Comintern advice, though the affiliation was not due to C.P.A. influence but to general ideas of international co-operation spreading amongst the left wing of the trade union movement.<sup>39</sup> This organization promoted anti-imperialism and broadcast the danger of a new World War, and the A.C.T.U. authorised the *Pan Pacific Worker* which publicised such courses.<sup>40</sup> Because of the furore raised by this paper and the dealings of C.P.A. member Jack Ryan, who was A.C.T.U. delegate to Pan Pacific Secretariat, pressure was brought to bear by the A.L.P. and especially the A.W.U. to have the A.C.T.U. dis-affiliated from the Pan Pacific Secretariat, this being achieved by 1930, largely by the promotion of anti-Asiatic racism.<sup>41</sup>

The C.P.A. at the end of the 1920's was forced, by low membership and Labor Party bans on communist members, to restrict its open activities to propaganda, and it had largely to ignore the Comintern demand for "democratic centralism". The aim was to educate the workers to the concept of class struggle. This was to be done through newspapers such as the *Workers' Weekly* and an unsuccessful attempt to set up Trade Union Educational Leagues. A youth training programme also failed, though classes in Marxism for existing members did have some success.<sup>42</sup>

The inability to keep to Comintern rulings was further demonstrated by the 1928 publication of a C.P.A. training manual,

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38 *Ibid.*, p.14.

39 *Ibid.*, p.15. and Gollan, *op.cit.*, pp.15-17.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 15 & 16.

41 Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.36,

42 Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp.36-37.

which was more Second International than Comintern in flavour, and which mis-represented Australian socialist history and had a very lenient attitude towards the Labor Party.

The depression hit Australia hard, despite the hopes placed in her favoured trading position with Britain, and there was a need to reduce imports and depress the internal Australian economy to meet bills in London.<sup>43</sup> By 1932, one third of the workforce was unemployed. Prime Minister S.M. Bruce attributed economic problems to the high cost of production, which must therefore be lowered. This resulted in a struggle with the trade unions, and the big disputes of 1928-29 were caused by attempts to reduce working conditions for timberworkers, watersiders and coalminers. Legislation forced the workers to resume and seriously weakened the unions, with arrests of union leaders who attempted to stop "blacklegging". In general, the trade union movement was unable to defend the standard of living against the combined attacks of government, employers and the operations of the market.<sup>44</sup> Though the A.L.P. won government in 1929, it was forced to tackle the problem in the same manner as the previous government, for it had "no theoretical equipment, inclination or power to seek socialist solutions" and because it was, in the eyes of the leftists, defending a crisis-ridden capitalist economy, it had to adopt the policies of its political opponents.<sup>45</sup> There were two alternatives open to the government, either to stimulate the economy by monetary or other means or to reduce spending by the government and cut wages and other incomes, and, due to pressure by the business community and prevailing economic theory,

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<sup>43</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, pp.19-20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

the second alternative was chosen.<sup>46</sup> The resulting attempts to reduce the standard of living split the labour movement, with Lyons and Lang breaking away separately from the A.L.P. Lang advocated the most radical solution: a default on interest payments on British loans, and because of his radical language received significant support from the left and the full hatred of the right.

The A.L.P. was open to accusations that it was not carrying out its own policy, for it had often stated at conferences that unemployment was inherent in capitalism, yet now it was forced to follow policies resulting in unemployment. This partly resulted in wider working class support for socialism, especially in the New South Wales Labor Party, but Lang did not support this move and blocked proposals to implement socialism within three years.<sup>47</sup> This resulted in some Labor Party left wingers moving away to join the C.P.A.<sup>48</sup>

The Depression came as no surprise to communists generally, and it had been predicted by the 6th Congress of Comintern, with Stalin especially making political capital of the fact that he had predicted it in his attack on the notion of Trotsky and others that capitalism had stabilized itself.<sup>49</sup> New strategy and tactics were set up for communist parties in capitalist countries. This assumed there was no real difference between democracy and fascism, so there was no point in defending systems of representative government and civil rights. Socialism was the only alternative to fascism. The "united front from above", that is, the making of alliances with political parties, was to be abandoned, to be replaced by a "united front from below", that is,

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20, Davidson, p.44.

a union of the working class under communist leadership. The workers needed to be educated and shown that all who claimed to be socialists, but were not communists, were misleading the workers. The more left these "socialists" were, the more dangerous to the working class, and the ultimate term of abuse became "social fascist".<sup>50</sup> The full force of this new attitude reached Australia late in 1929, and resulted in open opposition to the Labor Party, which was now labelled "social fascist".<sup>51</sup> Official Australian Communists historians, according to Gollan, claim the C.P.A. did not adopt this new attitude till in late 1929 a new leadership replaced "right wing opportunists" who had gained control of the party, but Gollan maintains the displaced leadership had begun moving towards the new outlook, in response to changing conditions in Australia, even before it was adopted by Comintern, and their defeat was due to factional struggle, not real policy differences. The significance of the new leadership was that it was made up of unquestioning adherents of Stalin.<sup>52</sup>

There was now a "Bolshevisation" of the C.P.A., with a more rigid structure being adopted. Members belonged to a nucleus, preferably in the factory in which they worked, but these could be based on the neighbourhood in which they resided. Members of nuclei elected delegates to a sectional conference, which set up a sectional committee, and elected delegates to a district conference, which elected a district committee and appointed delegates to the triennial party conference. There were nine districts, of which Tasmania was District 8. District conference was to elect a District Committee and delegates to the Party Congress, which would elect a Central Committee from which a Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat would be chosen. The Central Committee was in

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<sup>50</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

theory the most important, but was subordinate to the Comintern executive, although in practice it ruled the party. Closer contact was established with Comintern, which resulted in some rebelliousness in the states at first, but by 1935, "democratic centralism" had been established.<sup>53</sup>

A need was seen to establish a mass party based on factories, and the aim of the Orgburo was to establish factory cells, although by 1932 this had been reported a failure, partly because the same few activists were involved in too many party organizations and had to attend too many meetings, and were unable to keep a close watch on new members or keep their interest, so that there was a high turnover of members. There was also the problem that workers feared for their jobs in the Depression atmosphere and feared, with much justification, that open party membership would lose them their jobs, and it was not until secrecy was established for factory cells in 1934 that this strategy began to show results.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from direct proselytizing, which tended to isolate the communists from the great majority of workers because of their violent denunciations, the main effort of the C.P.A. was in the establishment of "fronts". According to the Comintern instructions laid down in 1926, these were to be "nominally independent [from the party] but controlled by the party to serve as a bridge to the masses", and were supposed to be the result of spontaneous popular pressure, so the aim was for communists to conceal their role as initiators of these. The communists were supposed to recruit members from the "fronts" and ensure that the "fronts" supported policies promoted by the communist

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<sup>53</sup> Davidson, *op. cit.*, p.53.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

movement. Launching a "front" was a delicate business and, where possible, party members with prominent names or military decorations were chosen to launch the "front". Non-members could achieve the same purpose if they were sympathetic to communism or at least did not fear communism.<sup>55</sup>

The two most important "fronts" were the Militant Minority Movement (M.M.M.) and the Unemployed Workers' Movement (U.W.M.). M.M.M. was essentially a faction in the trade unions which expounded the general policy of the C.P.A., that is, that the leaders of the Labor Party and trade unions were "social fascist", and that the unions needed rank and file control. Occasionally, for example, in the Miners' Federation, M.M.M. emerged as an alternative union leadership, leading local struggles against employers, attacking passive union leaders and demanding militant action. Such leadership tended, in the long term, to establish communists in positions in all levels of union organization, especially as the depression began to lift.<sup>56</sup> M.M.M. tended especially to lose ground in 1932 and 1933 due to R.I.L.U. (Red International League of Unions) demands to push for a general strike at a time when workers were hard put just to hold their jobs. After 1933 the M.M.M. fared better, due to a discarding of the policies of the fifth R.I.L.U. Congress and Comintern, but also because they became better organized.<sup>57</sup> The temporary abandonment in 1933 by Comintern of its "social fascism" stance, in favour of a new "united front" effort, resulted in a more moderate approach by the C.P.A., and this appealed to the workers. Also committees which were formed by M.M.M.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>56</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.31.

<sup>57</sup> Davidson, *op. cit.*, p.58.

to rectify particular grievances soon became semi-permanent, with regular meetings to co-ordinate activity and to prepare for trade union meetings. Because of this, even when M.M.M. people were in the minority, as was the case in most unions, they could get proposals adopted because of the disorganization of their opponents. Such openings later led to high positions in the unions, although they made few inroads into very conservative unions such as A.W.U.<sup>58</sup>

One reaction of unionists and their officials was to avoid the unemployed like the plague: they were a threat to their own jobs.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, U.W.M. and M.M.M. (whose membership often overlapped) stated a class position; that all workers had common interests which could be protected by united action. Though reality often fell short of high ideals, U.W.M. and M.M.M. united with the unemployed in organizing self-help, resisting evictions and advocating free speech, so that militants confronted authorities who wished to keep the unemployed out of sight and mind.<sup>60</sup> There were, nevertheless, Labor Party and trade union unemployed organizations but U.W.M. outshone them in its outspokenness and activism, its members often going to jail for barricading and other offences. This aroused public sympathy and gave U.W.M. notoriety.<sup>61</sup> U.W.M. suffered a temporary decline in 1932 and 1933 because of excessive hostility to Labor Party members but grew again in 1934, when it moved to a policy of co-operation with other bodies of unemployed, and claimed 68,000 members in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>62</sup> There were two other "fronts" that attained some degree of

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.58-60.

<sup>59</sup> Conan, *op.cit.*, p.31.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

<sup>61</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.60.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

success. "Friends of the Soviet Union (F.O.S.U.) was formed in September 1930, and initially neglected by the C.P.A. until 1932 when it began to grow, so that by 1935 its journal had a circulation of 20,000 and membership was claimed at 7,500. The Movement Against War and Fascism (M.A.W.A.F.), developed out of the unsuccessful League Against Fascism in 1933 and grew on the fear of Hitler and World War, which appeared especially after 1933 and 1934. The peak of its success was in late 1934 with the calling by M.A.W.A.F. of an Anti-War Congress and the attempt by the federal government to prevent entry to Czech writer Egon Kisch and New Zealand delegate Gerald Griffin.<sup>63</sup> This enabled a public outcry to be made, and the communists were able to put themselves forward as champions of democracy, even if this anticipated Comintern directives.

The various other "fronts" set up all failed, either because they attempted to compete with well-established organizations or because they were irrelevant to Australia. Some amalgamated with other "fronts", for example the "Hands off India" committees were absorbed into M.A.W.A.F. The Class War Prisoners' Aid and the United Front against Fascism became the International Labour Defence, the party's legal service which was often called on to defend arrested members of other "fronts".<sup>64</sup> The party was able to recruit through the "fronts" and grew from 249 in 1928 to 1,116 in 1931.<sup>65</sup> Despite communist belief that the Depression would move the mass of workers to the left and towards a revolutionary solution to their problems, membership did not exceed 3,000 by 1934, of whom 200 were women.<sup>66</sup> The community in general

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53, the figures excluded Districts 6, 7 and 8 smallest of C.P.A. districts.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

moved to the right, turning to businessmen instead of the proletariat for a solution to their problems.<sup>67</sup> The lack of real growth in the party was partly due to the rigidity given to the party by "democratic centralism" and Comintern directives, especially the branding of the Labor Party as "Social fascist", for the C.P.A. overzealously attacked rank and file Labor Party members as "social fascist" when in fact the directives were meant to condemn the Labor leadership as deceiving the rank and file. Rank and file Labor Party members who were disillusioned with their party thus tended to find the C.P.A. equally distasteful, and added to this was the gap between their socialist reformism and the insistence on violent revolution now being pushed by the Comintern.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the small number of actual C.P.A. members, the party had some influence over a large number of people, and in 1934 its Senate candidates grossed 74,000 votes. The weekly papers in districts 1, 4 and 6 had a combined circulation of 30,000, and "front" newspapers circulated up to 60,000 per week in New South Wales alone. Total membership in the three biggest fronts, U.W.M., F.O.S.U. and M.A.W.A.F. was several thousand, and though M.M.M. never had more than 3,000 in its hard core, of whom 50% were communists, many trade union executive positions were controlled by C.P.A. through M.M.M.<sup>69</sup>

As part of the attempt to organize the anti-fascist movement, the "social fascist" attitude towards the Labor Party was dropped in 1933 in accordance with Comintern instructions and the party made formal "united front" approaches towards the Labor Party from 1933 onwards, but this was seen by that party as no more than a gesture and received

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<sup>67</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp.62, 63.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

with hostility. The general feeling in the C.P.A. was that a "united front" could only be built from below, in factories and industries, among the unemployed and small farmers, and in working class organizations.<sup>70</sup>

From the foregoing summary of the C.P.A. in the depression there emerge three basic aspects from which a local manifestation of the C.P.A. can be tackled, firstly the party itself, its structure, strategy, tactics and so on, secondly the "front" organizations established by the party, and finally, contact with and reaction from political and other groups in the community. There will necessarily be some overlapping in dealing with the party from these viewpoints and this may itself reflect the fact that it was the same very small group of activists who were involved in both the basic party and the "front" organizations.

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<sup>70</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, pp. 43-44.

CHAPTER 2.THE PARTY

There is, as yet, no evidence that Tasmania played a role in the formation and early development of the C.P.A., although Tasmania, during World War I, had had its share of radicals, including Clifford Hall, a Marxist, who was strongly opposed to what he called a capitalist war.<sup>1</sup> There had been I.W.W. activity in Tasmania which included G.W. Mahoney, whose name will recur in relation to Tasmanian communism.<sup>2</sup> When the C.P.A. was formed in 1920, branches were established in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, but Davidson, who reports this, does not mention a Tasmanian branch and says that even these branches soon declined, with the Western Australian and South Australian branches disappearing altogether.<sup>3</sup> Tasmania did have its share of left wing radical socialists, who pushed for the O.B.U. idea, and in fact a special state conference of the A.L.P. made Tasmania the first state to accept the socialization objective proposed for the A.L.P. by the All Australian Congress of Trade Unions in 1921, despite the fact that this required a two-thirds majority.<sup>4</sup> However, attempts by Tasmanian radicals to consolidate this victory showed that by 1922 the tide had turned against the militants, a controversy arose, and E. Dwyer-Gray, G.W. Mahoney, S. Champ and A.E. Kaye were expelled from the Labor Party for their

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<sup>1</sup> Lake, M., *A Divided Society*, Melbourne 1975, Melb.Uni.Press, pp. 32 and 139.

<sup>2</sup> Lake, *op.cit.*, *passim*, and Sir Alfred White interview Hobart, 9/9/76.

<sup>3</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> McRae, M.D., "The Tasmanian Labour Party and the Trade Unions, 1903-1923", in *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, Vol.5, December 1963, p.11.

attacks made on the Executive for its failure to implement the 1921 objective.<sup>5</sup> Mahoney and Kaye both were to be associated with communists in the 1930's, and while Dwyer-Gray took a more openly anti-communist line in the 1930's, he nevertheless was accused of pro-communist sympathies because of his contacts with the unemployed.<sup>6</sup> By 1923 the radical period of the Tasmanian Labor Party had ended, and the party was dominated by the parliamentary wing, which remained the case throughout the 1920's and early 1930's.<sup>7</sup>

The indications are that radicalism which had been evident among militant unionists such as Mahoney, Kaye and Dwyer-Gray, remained very much in the background during the minor boom of the mid 1920's. Nevertheless there is some evidence that the radicals of the early 1920's and earlier remained outspoken right through to the beginning of the depression, in that G.W. Mahoney was leading deputations of unemployed to the premier and the Hobart City Council (H.C.C.) as early as May 1928.<sup>8</sup> Kaye was taking a radical stance against the parliamentary Labor Party as late as 1935, when at a meeting of several organizations at Launceston to discuss the campaign for a rent allowance for the unemployed, he denounced, in front of Labor Party delegates, the state Labor government as a capitalist government and the state as a class state. He was also a founding member of the Anti-war Council.<sup>9</sup> It is probable that further research would indicate activity of a similar nature in the late 1920's. Mahoney had also spoken out at public meetings held under the auspices of the Hobart Trades Hall Council

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Mercury*, 3/7/31, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> *McRae, op.cit.*,

<sup>8</sup> *Mercury*, 28/5/28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/8/34, p.5,  
12/3/35 & *infra.*, p.83.

H.T.H.C.) and the Labor Party in support of the locked out New South Wales miners.<sup>10</sup> Such radicalism, however, does not indicate the active presence of a branch of the C.P.A., and it was not until the beginning of the 1930's that Tasmania was listed as a district of the party. This was only after the C.P.A. as a whole took a new line of action in response to the depression.<sup>11</sup>

There is some difficulty in establishing a date for the formation of the Tasmanian District of the C.P.A., as no party records were available to the present writer.<sup>12</sup>

It may be that if a party was already openly operating in the early months of 1930, it was not reported simply because of editorial policy in the daily press. It was not till June 1930 that *The Mercury* first insinuated communism was being preached in Hobart, and then it refers to an individual, D.T. Duncan, and his role in the organization of the unemployed, and there is no direct reference to a branch of the C.P.A.<sup>13</sup> There is no such reference until January 1931 when *The Mercury* reports an appeal made to a crowded meeting of the unemployed in Launceston by "D. Duncan, of Hobart, secretary of the Tasmanian branch of the Communist Party", who urged the unemployed to become militant and class conscious. The capitalist class had denied them even the right to live, and they could not expect the government to help them, so they must help themselves. With that object in view the Unemployed Workers' Movement had been formed.<sup>14</sup> This report is particularly helpful, for it indicates the connection between Duncan and the

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 20/1/30, p.10.

<sup>11</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.53 *et passim* and footnote 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Supra*, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Mercury*, 4/6/30.

<sup>14</sup> *Mercury*, 31/1/31.

C.P.A. and the formation of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (U.W.M.) in Tasmania, both in Hobart and Launceston, and since the first references to U.W.M. are well back into 1930, and Duncan is already reported as being involved in U.W.M. at that date, it can safely be assumed that the Tasmanian branch of the C.P.A. was in existence at least early in 1930, if not earlier. This is based on it being able to establish a branch of U.W.M. almost as soon as U.W.M. was established. U.W.M. was formed on the mainland in April 1930, in accordance with C.P.A. policy to establish "fronts", and the first evidence of its establishment in Tasmania seems to be a letter received from it by the H.T.H.C. early in June asking that it be allowed to have representatives on that Council.<sup>15</sup>

The same sort of evidence can be used to show that the C.P.A. was already established in Launceston possibly as early as January 1930. The outbreak of a fire in a Launceston hardware store the morning after Duncan had addressed the unemployed, brought accusations that the fire was either the work of communists or had been lit by somebody driven to extremism by speeches made by Duncan and others.<sup>16</sup> Such insinuations were attacked by W. Daft and L. Norris. Daft spoke of attempts to link the fires to the "communist unemployed movement" and advocated the formation of a Workers' Defence Corps to face up to such charges. He accused the press of trying to outlaw and make criminals of the militant sections of the unemployed and the Communist Party. A.W.M. White said that the unemployed had the option to choose between the Union Jack and the Red Flag, the one symbolising capitalism, the other

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<sup>15</sup> Minutes, H.T.H.C., 5/6/30.

<sup>16</sup> *Mercury*, 2/2/31, p.5, *Examiner*, 6/2/31, *et passim*.

working class freedom.<sup>17</sup> The speakers thus publicly linked the U.W.M. with the C.P.A., though the first really formal evidence of their membership of that party is a letter received by the Launceston Trades Hall Council (L.T.H.C.) in March 1931 signed by W. Daft, "secretary of the Communist Party" asking for assistance in obtaining freedom of speech and freedom of the press.<sup>18</sup> As Duncan has already been reported as being secretary of the Tasmanian branch of the C.P.A., and since a letter was received by *Voice*, the A.L.P. newspaper, in February 1931 asking for assistance on the freedom of speech issue, signed by Duncan as "secretary of the Hobart Unit of the Communist Party of Australia", it must be assumed that Daft was secretary of the Launceston Unit, and that Duncan was also secretary of the Tasmanian branch of the C.P.A.<sup>19</sup>

Daft had been reported as being involved in the organization of the unemployed even before U.W.M. had been formed on the mainland, and as early as January 1930, was addressing meetings of unemployed on the causes of unemployment.<sup>20</sup> As early as February that year, he was making radical speeches to the unemployed which indicate he was most probably already a member of the C.P.A. He claimed capitalistic Australia was in its death struggle and could only exist by a sacrifice of the workers. Australia could not sell its main products, wool and wheat. The capitalist constitution was a barrier between the workers and their living, and the colonies were competing with Britain in production. He urged that the unemployed observe International

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<sup>17</sup> *Mercury*, 7/2/31. See also *infra* p.56 and footnote for actual wording of *The Mercury* report.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, L.T.H.C., 13/3/31.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes H.T.H.C., 14/2/31. The organization of the C.P.A. into districts, sections and nuclei was apparently not affected till later. *Infra*. p.39.

<sup>20</sup> *Mercury*, 23/1/30.

Unemployment Day the following Wednesday, so that they could demonstrate their solidarity and voice their protest against the capitalist system which caused unemployment. The indications are, therefore, that the C.P.A. was established in Tasmania as early as 1929.

In the second half of 1930, accusations by *The Mercury* that the organization of the unemployed was in the hands of communists or Bolsheviks grew more frequent, and in a supreme court hearing of a conspiracy charge relating to the misspending of unemployment relief funds brought forward chiefly as the result of U.W.M. pressure, R.J. Brooks, secretary of the Hobart U.W.M., was asked by a defending attorney, evidently in an attempt to discredit him, "You're known as Bolshevik Brooks, aren't you?"<sup>21</sup> Such insinuation grew more heated as a result of the posting of U.W.M. handbills, which were denounced as scurrilous and outrageous.<sup>22</sup> Certainly the tone of U.W.M. speeches and the literature published and banners carried in rallies did nothing to dispel accusations that it was a communist organization. The use of red cloth for banners and the singing of "The Red Flag" in the rooms of the Chief Secretary of Tasmania, C.E. James, at Launceston on the occasion of a delegation of unemployed meeting the minister, contributed to this impression.<sup>23</sup> An outbreak of five fires in Hobart in December 1930 brought attempts by *The Mercury* to connect the fires with the recent spate of "seditious literature", and the fires were attributed to the "king's enemies", although, as was the case with the Launceston fire in February 1931, it was allowed that weak minded persons might have been influenced by the literature. It was stated that the men who had influenced "the workers up to the point of justifying, and even condoning, the criminal destruction of property, could not have got a

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<sup>21</sup> *Mercury*, 29/9/30.

<sup>22</sup> *Mercury*, 20/11/30, p.5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 12/12/30, p.11.

hearing had not the ground been prepared for them by certain Labor politicians who spared nobody in their fury, like the Athenian Sophists against Socrates". Lang, Theodore and the State Leader of the Opposition, A.G. Ogilvie, were mentioned "though these would no doubt be horrified at any suggestion that they have any sympathy with communists and anarchists".<sup>24</sup> By the end of 1930 the public had been made well aware that communism had come to Tasmania, and apparently because of the large hearing communist speakers received at meetings of the unemployed, it was seen, at least in the wake of the Hobart fires, as a threat to law and order and property. *The Mercury* appealed "to Tasmanian workers to see the dangers of the paths along which their leaders were cajoling them".<sup>25</sup> The fact that a fireman was killed by a falling wall at the site of one of the Hobart fires added to the severity of the accusations, and this incident was mentioned in an editorial regarding the connection between the Launceston fire and "the making of revolutionary speeches and the distribution of revolutionary literature."<sup>26</sup>

During 1931 and 1932, much publicity was achieved for the C.P.A. in Tasmania by the holding of public meetings in streets and parks. Since apart from the establishment of "fronts", the open running of a C.P.A. senate candidate in 1934 and the publication of literature, this seems to have been the chief attempt by the C.P.A. to establish a mass based party in Tasmania, such meetings are worth a more detailed examination.

It was never clearly established by the daily newspapers

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17/12/30, pp. 7 & 10; 18/12/30, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18/12/30, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/2/31, p.5.

whether such meetings were C.P.A. public meetings or held under the auspices of U.W.M. They can be distinguished from the regular meetings of U.W.M. held, at least for the first part of 1931, in the Trades Halls at Hobart and Launceston. Press reports regarding Launceston meetings tend to be the most confusing, for U.W.M. met at the Trades Hall on Friday afternoons, and the street or park meetings were held on Friday nights. If any of the meetings were held under C.P.A. auspices, press (and public) confusion regarding this fact probably arose partly as a result of the fact that the same persons who were most outspoken at U.W.M. meetings were also the organizers and *speakers* of the public meetings. One result was the "front" organizations in Tasmania were easily recognized for what they were, that is, communist led and inspired, despite the intention of Comintern when it proposed the "front" strategy, that the communists were to keep their role as initiators carefully hidden.<sup>27</sup>

It seems likely from press reports that meetings in public places were at first openly communist meetings. Certainly criticism of the meetings, particularly in letters to the editors, branded them as such, and this was the case with regard to the street meeting in Launceston addressed by Duncan the night before the fire which brought the accusation that the meeting had been responsible for the fire.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand a week later, such a meeting was reported as being addressed by "leaders of the unemployed movement", and even though the speakers explained how communism would solve the problem of unemployment and it was reported that communists at the meeting sang "The Red Flag" in reply to an anti-communist group singing the National Anthem, Daft

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<sup>27</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.55.

<sup>28</sup> *Examiner*, 6/2/31.

at a meeting of U.W.M. earlier the same day claimed persons were trying to link the fires in Hobart and Launceston with "the communist unemployment movement". This seems to indicate that no clear distinction was made at some of the meetings at least, between U.W.M. and the C.P.A.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this lack of clarification in the press led to White, speaking at a U.W.M. meeting at the end of February 1931, being forced to point out that U.W.M. was quite distinct from the Communist Party.<sup>30</sup>

That the public understood the street and park meetings to be Communist Party meetings, and indeed that it was the intention of the Party that such meetings were to be public meetings of the C.P.A. rather than the U.W.M., is evident from a letter received in February by the Workers' Educational Association from the Hobart Unit of the C.P.A. and signed by Duncan as secretary. The letter was discussed at the state conference of W.E.A. and urged W.E.A. co-operation in a protest to the state government over the suppression of free speech and freedom of the press. The letter complained that applications to the Police Department for the party to hold street meetings had been refused. Since earlier requests by the unemployed for the same purpose had also been refused, such refusals could be regarded as part of a general scheme by the employing class to suppress all activity on the part of the working class so that attacks on the standard of living could be carried out and the voice of the ever-increasing number of unemployed could be stifled. The trend showed, he claimed, that suppression would eventually be expanded to any organization criticizing the existing order of society or its institutions, so the matter was of importance

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<sup>29</sup> *Mercury*, 7/2/31.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 28/2/31.

to the whole labour movement. He said that the sale of working class literature at Sunday meetings on the Domain had been suppressed, in spite of the fact that such sales had gone on for many months (presumably such meetings were C.P.A. public meetings). Some sympathy was given to Duncan's request at the W.E.A. conference, and a delegate pointed out that the Communist Party had been holding meetings in Launceston for some weeks away from traffic, and if the police were asked to permit meetings in quiet streets, doubtless they would concur.<sup>31</sup> It would seem that the public meetings both in Launceston and Hobart were intended as C.P.A. public meetings. Confusion over the nature of the meetings, especially those in Launceston, may have been largely the result of inaccurate reporting.

An incident not related to the public meetings on Anzac Day 1931, when a body of militia and returned servicemen tore down red flags being flown from a house occupied by Daft and White in Launceston, caused increasing confrontation between the communists and a group consisting largely of ex-servicemen and militia, so that public reaction to the communists became rather adverse following what was seen as an insult to those who had given their lives.<sup>32</sup> Editorial comment was that the communists had been very indiscreet and provocative in their Anzac Day action, and in order to avoid such confrontation in future, the law ought to be applied so that if the communists were to hold meetings, they should hold them in some quiet spot, perhaps near the river.<sup>33</sup> The publicity forced the police to act and regular arrests were a feature of the latter half of 1931, with Daft, W.C. Atto, C. Brown,

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 25/2/31, p.2.

<sup>32</sup> *Mercury*, 27/4/31,

<sup>33</sup> *Examiner*, 29/4/31, p.6, and *Mercury*, 27/4/31, p.6.

W.J. Mullins, L.J. Norris, L.J. Taylor, G. Cinnamon, A.W.M. White and H.J. Drinkwater being charged on different occasions with breaches of Council By-Laws relating to permits for holding meetings in parks, and with obstruction of traffic for street meetings.<sup>34</sup>

Though attempts were made to carry on meetings regardless and through the publicity attached to the arrests, to elicit sympathy for "prisoner comrades", and though on one occasion the communists beat the law by the clever stratagem of speaking from a boat moored off Launceston's Royal Park, the official refusal to grant permission for such meetings seems to have won the day, and from September 1931, no further meetings of a public nature were reported in Launceston. Instead, a "Freedom of Speech" campaign was carried on with some vigour, so that the communists could now pose as the champions of free speech. The formation of a Freedom of Speech League will be dealt with in discussion of "front" organizations.<sup>35</sup>

The most direct attack on the public meetings came in May 1932 when Robert Knox and Edwin James Ellis were charged with sedition "in consequence of alleged inflammatory speeches said to be part of the May Day celebrations of communists at Hobart".<sup>36</sup> The content of the speeches will be discussed later but for the present, the importance of this was that it was the last public meeting reported in the daily press as an actual communist meeting up to the end of 1935.<sup>37</sup> There is some inconclusive evidence that after this date public meetings were held or

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<sup>34</sup> Police Record, Court of Petty Sessions, Launceston. *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> *Infra*, p.78.

<sup>36</sup> *Mercury*, 7/5/32, p.9.

<sup>37</sup> *Infra*. p.37.

permission for them was requested, in the name of the U.W.M. rather than that of the C.P.A. In July 1932 a deputation from the Launceston Freedom of Speech League apparently asked, with little success, for permission for U.W.M. to hold public meetings at Cornwall Square, Launceston.<sup>38</sup> A further refusal in August was accompanied by a comment by an alderman that it was really only the communists who wanted to air their views.<sup>39</sup> In Hobart, a meeting of what was reported as the "United Workers' Movement" was apparently a meeting of U.W.M. to celebrate May Day 1933, and was connected by *The Mercury* with the May Day 1932 meeting resulting in the sedition charges.<sup>40</sup> It was the last such meeting recorded by the newspapers, although after that date there were from time to time mass meetings of the unemployed under the same leaders to discuss particular issues, and apparently not of a regular nature. The confusion regarding the true nature of meetings reported as communist meetings was present even at the May Day 1932 meeting at which persons were reported to be carrying a large red banner bearing the letters "UWM".

Presumably the object of public meetings was to build up a mass base for the party which, according to Comintern policy, was now supposed to act in direct competition to the "social fascist" A.L.P.<sup>41</sup> There is no doubt that the meetings drew considerable crowds, although contradictory reports as to numbers present indicate suspect reporting. A meeting shortly after the Anzac Day incident of 1931 in Launceston was reported by *The Mercury* as drawing 2,000, while *The Examiner* estimated the crowd at 500. The size of the crowd was attributed to rumours regarding an expected confrontation between the communists and the returned soldiers, and the expectation was justified when a troop of

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<sup>38</sup> *Mercury*, 13/7/32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/8/32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/5/33.

<sup>41</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.42.

between 100 and 200 such men marched out from a building and delivered an ultimatum in the name of "God, King and Country" threatening "decisive action" if any further communist meetings were held in Launceston. It is reasonable to assume that much of the crowd, very often reported at over 200 at other such meetings, consisted of curious onlookers. No doubt even this would have been satisfying to the communists, in that they might hope to convert the uncommitted.

Much of the content of speeches at such meetings seems to have been quite plain communism and revolutionism. In February 1931, Daft and White spoke on the economic basis of the problems of the world. Labour-saving devices brought over-production and unemployment so that workers could not afford to buy back what they had produced. Capitalism could never solve the problem. The communists intended to solve it by taking over the means of production, and to produce for use, not profit.<sup>42</sup> That suggestions were made that revolution was the means to achieve this can only be inferred from reports of meetings held in 1931, and the evidence for this is that criticism was made of "seditious utterances" and "anarchical propaganda".<sup>43</sup> It was also suggested the communists had attacked the British flag.<sup>44</sup> A good indication of the type of material being put forward comes from a report of a meeting of the L.T.H.C. in April 1931, shortly after the Anzac Day incident, at which U.W.M. was denied further use of the Trades Hall for meetings because of its communist leadership, and because of the anti-A.L.P. speeches being made by communists. A delegate said that while "some good working class material" was being put over at the street meetings,

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<sup>42</sup> *Mercury*, 7/2/31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 18/4/31, p.7 and *Examiner*, 10/1/31.

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury*, 6/2/31, and *infra* p.56 esp. footnote.

the communists were speaking in opposition to Labor regarding the forthcoming state elections and advocating that ballot papers be made invalid by writing "Communist" over them. White, who was present as a U.W.M. delegate, was questioned regarding the matter and replied, "We don't agree with the Labor platform. We don't think the workers would be worse off under a Nationalist government or better off under a Labor one. We regard the Labor Party as the reactionary party in the road of the emancipation of the workers. The Labor Party is well on the way to elimination. Then we will be face to face with the Nationalist Party only." Another delegate said "you would set up a couple like Lenin and Trotsky at the head, set them up like kings and everybody do what they say". White replied, "Yes, we back that up".<sup>45</sup> Presumably this attitude towards the Labor Party had been broadcast at the public meetings. It would be a direct result of the implementation of the "social fascist" attitude to the A.L.P. at that stage being followed by the Central Committee of the C.P.A.<sup>46</sup>

In a House of Assembly adjournment on the subject of freedom of speech, Mr. Ockerby, M.H.A., said the communists wanted not freedom of speech but licence to abuse, blaspheme and preach sedition.<sup>47</sup> Once arrests had begun, talk regarding the right of free speech took up much of the agenda and criticism of poor conditions at the Hobart gaol was added.<sup>48</sup> In August 1931, L.J. Taylor spoke of war as class conflict, making the rich wealthier and the poor destitute. White spoke of conditions in Russia and claimed that there was no unemployment there. He likened the gaoling of Launceston communists to Governor

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<sup>45</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31.

<sup>46</sup> *Supra*, p.16.

<sup>47</sup> *Mercury*, 30/7/31.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 17/8/31, p.5.

Arthur's gaoling of Andrew Bent for freedom of the press.<sup>49</sup>

The sedition case against Knox and Ellis in 1932 gives the most interesting example of communist oratory. One of the speakers referred to the King, the Pope and police as "parasites and scabs" and "other terms unpublishable", according to a correspondent.<sup>50</sup> In what was reported to be the first prosecution of its kind since the World War, Knox and Ellis were charged with knowingly publishing words with 1) an intent to bring the sovereign into contempt, 2) an intention of raising dissatisfaction among His Majesty's subjects, and 3) an intention of promoting a feeling of enmity and ill-will between different classes of His Majesty's subjects. Knox was alleged to have said, "I advise you to steal, not individually but in organized bodies. The police are allowing themselves to be prostituted by capitalists and politicians. They are not men, they have no mentality, only brawn and muscle. Any men who would throw little children into the street and in the rain are not men and you cannot call them men. They are only fit to baton people."<sup>51</sup> Such remarks seem to have been directed primarily at the unemployed. The crowd was described by witnesses as being mixed, including a number of unemployed and working class people, and a group of returned soldiers to whom hostile remarks were directed by the speaker.<sup>52</sup> The speakers at the May Day 1933 meeting apparently devoted most of their time to discussion of disunity within the ranks of U.W.M.

Some aspects of C.P.A. organization in Tasmania have already been noticed in that in 1931 there were groups called units in

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 24/8/31

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/5/32, p.6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 25/5/32.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Launceston and Hobart.<sup>53</sup> There is no direct evidence that a unit existed on the north-west coast. There is little to show communists were active in that region although in 1933, a delegate to the state conference of the R.S.S.I.L.A. said that at Burnie there were men "definitely employed from Moscow", who had distributed anti-Anzac Day and anti-Empire propaganda at Burnie.<sup>54</sup> This complaint was made at a time when such material was being distributed by communists in Launceston, and the literature in Burnie may have been distributed by Launceston communists or by a Burnie group. The former conclusion is supported by the fact that in 1935, speaking in reply to criticism that delegates purporting to represent Burnie and Devonport at a state conference of unemployed organizations did not represent those districts, Daft said that at a 1934 conference of the unemployed at Launceston, it had been agreed that representatives of the Launceston unemployed would speak on behalf of those from the north-west coast, if they had no representative. No reply had been received from the north-west to a request to send delegates, so J. Shelley and W.J. Mullins had represented Devonport and Burnie respectively. If no U.W.M. leaders could be found at Burnie or Devonport by Daft and company, it is likely that the same sort of situation applied in the C.P.A., so that if there were any members of the C.P.A. in that region, they would probably have been members of the Launceston unit, section or nucleus.

In the sources viewed by the present writer, the only references to formal C.P.A. structure occur in early 1931, and although later letters from the C.P.A. were received by the L.T.H.C. these were simply

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<sup>53</sup> *Supra*, p. 27

<sup>54</sup> *Mercury*, 5/6/33, p.5.

recorded as letters from the Communist Party, and give an indication as to the implementation of a "democratic centralist" structure in Tasmania. That White should apparently accept Trotsky alongside Lenin as a Communist hero is an indication that by late April 1931 the new Comintern line, which apart from the insistence on "democratic centralism" also insisted on Stalinism and the reviling of Trotsky, had not yet filtered down to the Launceston level of the C.P.A.<sup>55</sup> Davidson maintains that the "bolshevisation" of the C.P.A. under the leadership of Moore only began later in 1931 and took three years to fully implement.<sup>56</sup>

Duncan was reported in February 1931 as being "secretary of the Tasmanian Branch of the C.P.A."<sup>57</sup> It was seen that the "bolshevisation" of the party involved a structure of nuclei, sections and districts, so that reference to "branches" and "units" in Tasmania seems to indicate the new system had not been implemented early in 1931, assuming acceptance of the new names was part of acceptance of "democratic centralism", 1931 style. Whether the complete new structure of nuclei, sectional conferences, sectional committees, district conferences and district committees could have been fully implemented in Tasmania once accepted by the C.P.A. as a whole, would depend on the size of the C.P.A. in Tasmania, and this is particularly problematic.

Though it will later be maintained that U.W.M. leadership remained in the hands of the communists, even if one includes all who took an active part in U.W.M. meetings, those arrested for public speaking at Launceston, those charged in relation to the distribution of

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<sup>55</sup> *Supra*, p.35, and *Examiner*, 30/4/31.

<sup>56</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.53.

<sup>57</sup> *Mercury*, 31/1/31.

literature, and names such as Duncan openly associated with the C.P.A., at best a list of approximately 130 names is the result. It is hardly likely that even a majority of those who spoke out at U.W.M. meetings would be communists. Perhaps from the sources available to the present writer the list would be more safely set at a few dozen. On the other hand it may have been that the majority of C.P.A. members hid their membership. One hardly wants to give much weight to a claim by an anti-communist deputation from the Reform League that there were 150 communists in Launceston.<sup>58</sup> A claim in 1932 by Edward Brooker, who was to become a Labor member of state parliament in 1934, that there were more communists than there had previously been thought to be in Hobart is even less helpful.<sup>59</sup> He was speaking at a meeting held to try and combat unemployment which at present was breeding a "communist spirit". Yet the fact that in 1934, Daft, as the only Tasmanian C.P.A. candidate in the federal elections, won approximately 800 votes, is indicative of widespread support, especially as his policy was closely stated in the daily press.<sup>60</sup> If Davidson's figures for Australia as a whole can be extrapolated down to a Tasmanian level, then the 74,000 votes won while there were only 3,000 party members in the country as a whole would mean at 25:1 member:fellow traveller ratio, so that in Tasmania one might expect to find 30 to 40 members.<sup>61</sup> Such an extrapolation is an extremely dissatisfactory method of calculating the size of the C.P.A. in Tasmania. While one would expect a small party size in Tasmania, possibly too small to implement the new structure, party size and structure shall have to be left to further research.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 10/12/31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 27/4/32, p.9.

<sup>60</sup> *Infra*, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Supra*, p. 21.

Whether or not numbers were sufficient to fully implement the new structure, there are three indications that the C.P.A. leaders in Tasmania were ready to support the new "bolshevisation" when it was finally clarified to them. In late March 1931, Duncan, speaking at a meeting to set up a Militant Minority Movement (M.M.M.) in Tasmania, spoke of the need to "down the social-fascist Scullin government", and the "social-fascism" theory was part of the new hard line originating in the 1928 Comintern congress and now being used to prove charges of "right wing deviationism" against the older leadership of the C.P.A. Duncan either may have already given allegiance to the Stalinists or was inclined to that school of thought. The second hint also came from Duncan in June 1931 when in answer to charges that U.W.M. was part of the C.P.A., he said it "could not be a section of the party because of the disciplinary form of the Communist Party". The U.W.M. was responsible to the working class only. The party supported all or any working class organization which endeavoured to improve the position of the working class.<sup>62</sup> From this it may be inferred that Duncan's idea of the C.P.A. was of a strongly disciplined, tightly organized party along the new "democratic centralist" lines. Perhaps his use of the word "section" is a hint of the reorganization of party structure in Tasmania. Thirdly, when Daft stood for the senate in 1934, he expressed an attitude of complete obedience to the Central Committee of the party.<sup>63</sup> This is a strong indication that by that date "democratic centralism" was fairly well established in Tasmania.

Because of the C.P.A. intention to move away from the traditional Australian socialist role of propagandising and little activity, the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 16/6/31, p.6.

<sup>63</sup> *Infra*, p.47.

role of propaganda in Tasmania needs examining.<sup>64</sup> Firstly, the public meetings already discussed, if anything, reflect a continuation of old trends, along with a mixture of the new hard line, especially in the attacks on the Labor Party. It may be that the full implementation of the "hard line" of the new Australian leaders, along with the problems of sedition charges and meeting places, was responsible for the abandonment of such meetings if they, and not just press reports about them, ceased, for the meetings exposed as communists key persons in the "fronts" and this was contrary to Comintern instructions.<sup>65</sup> Propaganda however, was not entirely abandoned by the C.P.A., and was to be used as an instrument to establish the mass based party, and Davidson gives an impressive list of publications and circulation statistics for C.P.A. and "front" publications on the mainland.<sup>66</sup>

In Tasmania the C.P.A. mobilised the printed word in three ways: firstly through letters to the editors of the daily newspapers and the Labor weekly *Voice* (and one might also include reports published in those newspapers on communist activity, which were more often unfavourable than not); secondly, through the sale and distribution of mainland literature; and finally through the printing of posters, news-sheets and slogans. Of the first kind, no letters bearing the signature of the C.P.A. were published in the daily press and even *Voice* restricted itself to a letter from Duncan on the issue of Freedom of Speech.<sup>67</sup> Various letters were published in *The Mercury* and *The Examiner* written by communists but bearing either the name of a "front" such as U.W.M. or the name of no organization at all.

The distribution of *The Workers' Weekly*, a Sydney based organ

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<sup>64</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.48.

<sup>65</sup> *Supra*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.65

<sup>67</sup> *Voice*, 14/2/31, p.6.

of the C.P.A., was used as evidence by R.A. Mead of Glenorchy that U.W.M. was party to the communist movement, and Duncan's reply to this charge has already been discussed.<sup>68</sup> In defending the distribution of *The Workers' Weekly* and directions that U.W.M. send news to that paper, R.J. Brooks said *The Workers' Weekly* could seek industrial news from anywhere, just as could *The Mercury*. It was the only decent labour paper coming to Tasmania.<sup>69</sup> This indicates that at that stage, no Tasmanian C.P.A. or "front" publication was undertaken. Duncan's February 1931 letter to the W.E.A. complaining of the suppression of the sale of working class literature at the Domain on Sundays probably refers to *The Workers' Weekly* and possibly standard communist works as well.

Even as early as 1930, local publications had been appearing, although these were at first apparently U.W.M. posters regarding the Beaconsfield forestry plantation relief job at which it was claimed men were being forced to work at conditions amounting to slavery.<sup>70</sup> The posters had radical content, for they were described as "scurrilous" and "seditious", and complaints were soon made that they were disfiguring public property. The mayor of Launceston thought that apart from disfigurement of property, the posters contained material for two other charges against the printers and distributors.<sup>71</sup> One of these was probably the printing of a paper without the printer's name and address thereon, and a charge of this nature was laid in March 1931. The offending posters included one criticising the government's wage slashing policy.<sup>72</sup> In Hobart too, "seditious literature" had been

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<sup>68</sup> *Supra*, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> *Mercury*, 12/6/31.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/8/30.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/11/30, p.5 and 22/11/30 p.7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 18/12/30, p.7.

circulating, with the result that insinuations were made that the December 1930 fires in Hobart were lit by persons of weak mind influenced by it.<sup>73</sup>

Handbills distributed as part of the anti-Labor Party policy of the C.P.A. during the 1931 state election campaign resulted in L.J. Taylor being charged with a breach of the Electoral Act, The hand bills which said "Workers of Launceston - The State Elections - Write Communism across your ballot and Build up a Workers' Party", bore no signature, and this was the offence.<sup>74</sup>

Late in 1931 a newspaper or newsletter, *The Militant*, was being published in Launceston, which the Reform League referred to as "seditious and dirty literature" which ridiculed King and Deity and had criticised the Mayor for his refusal to allow the communists to use the parks for meetings.<sup>75</sup> In August 1932, Daft, R.S. Jones, A.G. Sherriff, S.F.J. Wilson, W.E. Newling and L.J. Norris were charged with exhibiting a news sheet without the printer's name and address, although there is no indication as to the content of the news sheet.<sup>76</sup> In May 1933 "highly offensive propaganda reflecting on the sacredness of Anzac Day" appeared on lamp posts in Launceston streets. This followed "similar revolutionary matter calling upon textile workers to strike". The propaganda had also appeared on rocks in the Cataract Gorge.<sup>77</sup> The 1933 state conference of the R.S.S.I.L.A. was particularly upset by the posting of communist material on the War Memorial at Burnie on Anzac Day and the distribution of similar material on Empire Day, and the state government was urged to take action. A delegate, E.E. von Bibra of Launceston, said communism had recently been suppressed in

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 29/11/30, p.7.

<sup>74</sup> *Mercury*, 26/6/31, p.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 11/12/31, p.7.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/8/32, p.7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/5/33, p.5.

that town but there was still the lamp post news. He said that the Act was not strong enough to prosecute.<sup>78</sup>

In 1934 and 1935 a news sheet known as *Vanguard* was printed in Launceston, though it is not known whether this appeared on a regular basis. It was small enough to glue to lamp posts and W.C. Atto was charged with defacement of property on two occasions for this, and S.F.J. Wilson on one occasion.<sup>79</sup> Undoubtedly there would have been much more literature printed than has been mentioned in the newspapers and Police Record, but unfortunately none of this material seems to be extant.

Printed matter was distributed by hand, by pushing under doors, and by pasting in public places. Distribution took place at U.W.M. meetings and to the general public, and presumably it was offered at the public meetings in Launceston as it had been at the Domain in Hobart.<sup>80</sup> At a U.W.M. meeting in Launceston in February 1931, slips of paper bearing slogans such as "Refute the Filthy Lies and Tyranny of the Press", "Workers, join in the party of your class", "War and Revolution threaten civilization", and "Join the Communists and Fight for Freedom", were circulated.<sup>81</sup>

Among the literature being circulated was election material and it has already been seen that in 1931 "election material" meant advocacy of the informal vote for the state elections held in May. In December 1931, a meeting on the Hobart Domain marked the opening of the C.P.A. federal election campaign. Though the C.P.A. does not seem to have run candidates in Tasmania in that election, the meeting ran for

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/6/33, p.5. Von Bibra was Mayor of Launceston in 1935.

<sup>79</sup> Launceston Court of Petty Sessions, 9/5/34 and 14/5/35.

<sup>80</sup> *Mercury*, 28/2/31, p.2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 21/3/31.

over three hours and included bitter denunciations of the Labor Party and United Australia Party. The platform was: better conditions for the unemployed; no further wage reductions; the abolition of the wages tax; the repudiation of war debts and the debts of bondholders; unemployment insurance at full rates in the form of a tax upon employers; free light, fuel, bus and tram for the unemployed; the abolition of evictions; the seven hour day and five day week; the abolition of the capitalistic system; and banks and insurance offices to be run in the interests of the employed. Such a platform represents a reformist tendency in a revolutionary party.<sup>82</sup> Whether the communists felt they could win an election or whether they felt violent revolution had to happen is unclear. Denouncement of the Labor Party during the depression was not primarily for its sometimes stated reformist plans for socialization but for its defence of the capitalist system at a time when that system was showing its greatest weakness. For this the Labor Party was branded "social fascist" and accused of deceiving the workers.

As early as June 1933 efforts were made by the C.P.A. in Tasmania to implement a new "united front" with the Labor Party. The L.T.H.C. decided to inform the communists that they saw no reason to depart from a previous decision regarding linking up with them.<sup>83</sup> This accorded with Labor Party response to such approaches throughout Australia, and having received the rebuff, the C.P.A. fielded its own senate candidates in all states in 1934. In Tasmania the rebuff meant more than this. One of the reasons Labor Premier Ogilvie gave for his refusal to accept communists on a government unemployment committee

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/12/31, p.9.

<sup>83</sup> Minutes L.T.H.C., 21/6/33.

was the advocacy by communists of informal voting in the 1934 state election.<sup>84</sup>

Daft was the only Tasmanian C.P.A. candidate in the 1934 senate election. His policy in a nutshell was "The only way out of the crisis for the toiling masses is the revolutionary way - the way of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Soviet power". Yet, here he was, standing for parliament in the best reformist tradition! Daft explained that he did not think he would be able to achieve much in parliament if elected. He was standing not because of personal desires but because he was selected by the party and claimed he was threatened with victimisation because he was standing as a communist. "Because I am a soldier of the revolution, however, it is my job to carry out the work for which I have been selected ... I would point out that should I be elected to the Senate, the Central Committee of my party will draw my salary and I will be paid only at the rate of wages ruling in whatever industry I was working before I got into parliament. I could at any time be expelled by that Central Committee, after which, although still in parliament, I would receive no salary at all." Other parties contesting the election did not provide a solution to the troubles of the workers and placed burdens of crisis on the workers, the farmers and the middle class, while preserving the profits of the rich. The Communist Party had a programme and solution only for the exploited masses and it was necessary to resist with utmost determination any reduction in living standards. Whether the Nationalist or Labor governments were in power, the cuts in workers' wages were just as bitter.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Infra*, p.69, and *Mercury*, 11/12/34.

<sup>85</sup> *Mercury*, 21/8/34, p.9.

The actual policy was divided into two areas. The first consisted of demands "that could be realized within the existing system" and were:

- 1) six hour day for all workers in industry;
- 2) £5 minimum weekly wage
- 3) unemployment insurance at the expense of capitalist profits;
- 4) a minimum of £2 weekly for invalid, old age, widow and war pensions; and
- 5) the cancellation of all debts and interest payable by toiling farmers.

The second group were to be the first acts of a revolutionary soviet government. They would be:

- 1) to proceed immediately and without compensation to expropriate all banks, insurance companies, large enterprises, railways and big department stores and convert them into socialist property;
- 2) to annul the debts workers owe banks, capitalists and landlords;
- 3) to cancel the public debt payable to overseas and Australian bond holders, and to abolish all existing taxes imposed by the Federal and State governments;
- 4) to expropriate the houses and residence belonging to the rich and transfer them to the unemployed and those workers who are badly housed; and to provide workers' rest homes, sanatoriums etc;
- and 6) to conclude a fraternal alliance with the Soviet Union and Soviet China, to arm all toilers and create a mighty revolutionary Red Army to destroy all attempts at intervention and all efforts of the capitalist class to restore its power.

The only question Daft was reported as answering related to public hospitals. No Tasmanian government had properly recognized the function of public hospitals which had a rotten administration and were no better than gaols.<sup>86</sup> Daft won approximately 800 votes from the 129,300 persons on the roll. There were approximately 19,700 informal votes.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/9/34.

He lost his deposit.<sup>88</sup> The voting figures nevertheless represent what amounts to a considerable support for the above policies which were really quite bluntly revolutionary. The election policy statements and the "fronts" are the best indication of the ideology and strategy of the C.P.A. in Tasmania in the early 1930's.

Apart from the holding of public meetings, the distribution of literature and the fielding of parliamentary candidates, there have come to light some activities of the communists in Tasmania which gained them considerable publicity but which probably did the party more harm than good by arousing adverse public reaction. It is also difficult to see how they could have been a part of any definite strategy, in that they aroused negative response from the parties they were directed against and could hardly have improved the chances of C.P.A. becoming a popular party. These activities included the disruption of Labor Party election meetings, which could only have added to the view that communists were so bigoted and narrow-minded that they could not let the other side have a say.<sup>89</sup> Despite criticisms voiced at the L.T.H.C. that by attacking Labor they were supporting the Nationalists, communists were reported as heckling at Nationalist election meetings in February 1931, and in May 1931 they also disrupted a meeting addressed by Chief Secretary C.E. James. The nature of the latter meeting is not known, but the communists made interjections and at the conclusion of the meeting sang "The Red Flag".<sup>90</sup> The other action likely to be damaging to the C.P.A. public image was the "desecration" of Anzac Day 1931.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, this action was designed to emphasize the

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<sup>88</sup> Interview, Sir Alfred White, Hobart, 9/9/76.

<sup>89</sup> *Mercury*, 30/4/31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/5/31, p.7, and *Examiner*, 6/2/31 for the election meeting.

<sup>91</sup> *Mercury*, 27/4/31 and *Examiner*, 27/4/31.

point that those who had fought for their countries in 1915 had now been abandoned to their fate. This was a consequence of the capitalist system. Whether or not the action assured more support for the communists among the unemployed could only be determined by interviewing former unemployed, a task which remains to be done. That U.W.M., under the leadership of known communists, achieved consistent support after April 1931 would seem to indicate the unemployed were sympathetic to such views. On the other hand, the rallying of ex-servicemen and others against the communists also resulted from the incident.

The 1934 electoral campaign resulted in Atto being charged with defacement of public property for the appearance of an electoral poster, authorised by him, on a railway hoarding in Hobart. Atto claimed that the prosecution was of a political nature, and this highlights the general problem of official measures taken against the communists in Tasmania.<sup>92</sup> This will be examined later in relation to the establishment of a Freedom of Speech League as a "front" organization. Some measures other than the prevention of public meetings were taken.

The most blatantly obvious measure taken was the "offering" to A.W. White of an "assisted" passage back to England. The Chief Secretary, C.F. James, said White had applied for assistance and had not been invited to leave the country, but according to White the offer had been made through the Superintendent of Police, H.P. Hynes, and negative pressure had been brought to bear in that the city council and the government had refused to help him find housing.<sup>93</sup> The incident met with mixed reaction from the community, one correspondent bidding White good riddance, another expressing disgust that the "hard up"

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<sup>92</sup> *Mercury*, 3/10/34, p.6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 3/2/32, p.5, and 4/2/32, p.5.

government could afford to pay White's fares when it claimed it had no money to help the unemployed.<sup>94</sup> Other complaints were made by the communists from time to time that their outspokenness had resulted in persecution in that charitable organizations had been instructed not to give clothing and other supplies to communists.<sup>95</sup>

Despite von Bibra's assertion in 1933 that communism had recently been suppressed in Launceston, the very continuation of printed publications which had caused the issue of communism to be raised at the R.S.S.I.L.A. State Conference proved his statement to be unfounded and at the very most, state and local government action had only succeeded in halting public meetings held in the name of the Communist Party, and "front" activity continued.<sup>96</sup> There is in any event some possibility that the disappearance of the more spectacular type of public meeting may have resulted from a more highly disciplined, rational approach to the preaching of communism in Tasmania, or it might possibly be connected with the new "united front" approach of the Comintern. During the 1934 electoral campaign, there is no evidence that official harassment succeed in disrupting Daft's campaign or meetings and even Atto's conviction for defacement of property came well after the nation went to the polls. Even the "fronts" seem to have had considerable success in 1934 and 1935 as will be seen in the next chapter.

The 1933 report of the Central Committee of the C.P.A. published in part by *The Mercury* made claims of which some may also be applied to Tasmania. A claim that a series of successes had been achieved in preparing the working class for revolution would apply in a limited sense to Tasmania where support for the C.P.A. was on the increase, as

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/2/32, p.6, and 9/3/32.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/2/32.

<sup>96</sup> *Supra*, pp. 34 and 44 and *infra*, Chapter 3.

the 1934 election results demonstrate. A claim for success in the organization of the working class on a factory basis is not so easily substantiated for Tasmania. On the other hand, in Tasmania, as on the mainland, success could be claimed in the organization of the unemployed for relief and against evictions, and more success was to be achieved in this field after 1933. The C.P.A. claimed success in mass action against the New South Wales New Guard, but no such organization thrived in Tasmania, although in June 1931 a request for greater police protection was received from "a movement originated recently to curb the activities of Communists".<sup>97</sup> This was probably connected with the organized attempts by ex-servicemen and others in Launceston to rid the city of communists, especially after the "desecration" of Anzac Day in 1931.<sup>98</sup> Despite the successes claimed by the C.P.A., the report admitted with reference to its aim of transforming the C.P.A. into a mass party, that "the party is still isolated from the basic masses of the Australian working class".<sup>99</sup> This applied in Tasmania too, and it was only by a lessening of the emphasis on the communist nature of "front" organizations that any real success was achieved in mass organization and such success seems to have reached its height in 1935.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Mercury*, 15/6431, p.5.

<sup>98</sup> *Supra*, p. 32 and *infra*, pp.102 -104.

<sup>99</sup> *Mercury*, 17/1/33, p.5.

<sup>100</sup> *Infra*, pp. 70-73.

## CHAPTER 3.

THE "FRONTS"

As part of the effort to establish a "united front from below", Comintern instructed member parties to set up "front" organizations and gave specific instructions regarding the setting up of such organizations. It has been seen that this involved using persons of high standing in the community to lend an air of respectability to the organization, and the concealment of the role of the communists as initiators and real controllers of the "fronts".<sup>1</sup> In Tasmania a number of "fronts" were set up and they played a more important part in establishing communist influence in the community, than did the central party organization. It has already been seen that for one of the "fronts" at least, that is the Unemployed Workers' Movement (U.W.M.) the principle that the role of communists as initiators and controllers be concealed was not adhered to and, despite statements to the contrary by members of the executive of that organization, U.W.M. was consistently seen as communist-orientated by the press.<sup>2</sup>

U.W.M. was, without doubt, the most successful of the "fronts" in Tasmania during the Depression years and the best reported by the daily newspapers. It has already been seen that U.W.M. was formed in Tasmania very soon after it began on the mainland.<sup>3</sup> It was referred to by that name as early as June 1930, when application was made to the H.T.H.C. that the unemployed, through the U.W.M., be represented on that council.<sup>4</sup> U.W.M. was not the first organization of unemployed in Tasmania and there is some possibility that the "front" policy of

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<sup>1</sup> *Supra*, p.17.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra*, pp.30,41 and *Mercury*, 28/2/31.

<sup>3</sup> *Supra*, p.26.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes H.T.H.C. 5/6/30.

communist organization of the unemployed, under the auspices of public figures, was being implemented before U.W.M. as such was founded in that, as early as January 1930, meetings of the unemployed were being chaired by a Labour member of parliament for Bass, V.J. Shaw, M.H.A. A committee was formed at one of these meetings "on the principle that there is strength in union" indicating that attempts would be made to organize the unemployed along unionist lines.

There is no firm evidence that such pre-U.W.M. organization was initiated by the communists, though Daft and R.S. Jones were pushing political lines such as anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism and internationalism at the meetings as early as February 1930, when a motion was carried urging the unemployed to attend a special meeting on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> February, to mark International Unemployment Day and to demonstrate their solidarity and voice their protest "against this social system of capitalism which is causing unemployment".<sup>5</sup> This motion, especially, indicates connections with communism which has always been renowned for calling for "International Days of Solidarity" for various causes.

That organization of the unemployed was under way, well before the formation of U.W.M., is evident from remarks at a meeting of unemployed in Hobart in June, 1930. A speaker demanded that the whole of the H.C.C. meet the whole body of the unemployed. This had been done in 1928 and seemed to be the only way to get results.<sup>6</sup> A newspaper editorial in May 1930 gives the impression of considerable continuity in unemployed organization. It claimed that a mass meeting of Hobart unemployed, under the auspices of the "Unemployed Workers' Committee"

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<sup>5</sup> *Mercury*, 22/2/30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/6/30.

presumably the committee of the U.W.M.) of which Duncan was president and R.J. Brooks secretary, was rigged. "Year after year, demonstrations of a similar kind are given and it is a curious and instructive fact that, among the leaders, certain names almost invariably appear. Would it be unfair to ask whether some of these men ever work or intend to work?"<sup>7</sup> Whether such remarks were intended to refer to Brooks and Duncan, who later were closely associated with the C.P.A., is not known and, even if they were, it would not prove that these men were actually communists before 1930. The editorial brought a response from H. Drinkwater in Launceston, who said the statements in the article were probably quite true, in that the men who took an active part in connection with the needs of the working class were more often unemployed. It was quite right that the average agitator was always out to agitate. No boss would give him, Drinkwater, a job and those who took part in unemployed activities had been out of work for years.<sup>8</sup> There is some doubt as to whether Drinkwater was clearly a communist, as well as an agitator, at this stage in that, in September 1930, he voiced the rather chauvinistic criticism that foreigners were being employed at Queenstown in preference to local men.<sup>9</sup> Even Daft had a very un-communistic response to this criticism. The great number of foreigners in Tasmania was the fault of the Bruce government, which extended an open invitation to other countries to send workmen here to compete with Australians, the object being to force down local working conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Once the U.W.M. as such was established in Tasmania some effort

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 29/5/30, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/5/30, p.14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6/9/30, p.7.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/11/30, p.7.

was made to follow Comintern rules, particularly with respect to organizing under the auspices of important personages and affiliating with the local Trades Hall Councils. Both the Launceston and Hobart branches of U.W.M. had a member of parliament associated with them and, in both cases, these were Labor Party members of the House of Assembly. In Launceston V.J. Shaw, M.H.A., on numerous occasions up until April 1931, chaired meetings of the unemployed at the Launceston Trades Hall and introduced deputations of the unemployed to the L.C.C., the Premier, the Chief Secretary and the Minister for Lands and Works. However, when the communist nature of the U.W.M. became apparent to the public, and the Anzac Day 1931 incident caused public outcry against the communists, his open association with U.W.M. seems to have ended. In Shaw's case, his association with the organization of the unemployed was evident as early as January 1930. There is no direct evidence that Shaw was a communist, although he chaired U.W.M. meetings at which openly communist statements were reported as being made by Daft, White and others, including White's remarks about following the red flag rather than the Union Jack, and Shaw is not recorded as having criticized such remarks.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw was connected with the radical group of Tasmanian unionists who had been branded "Bolshevik Labourites" as early as 1918 for their support of O.B.U.<sup>12</sup> His association with U.W.M. brought particularly strong criticism in the wake of the Launceston fire in February 1931. A correspondent to *The Examiner* quoted the A.L.P. rulebook as

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/2/31 and *supra*, p.25. The actual wording of the Mercury report was: "White: The red flag was the symbol of the martyrdom of the workers. The unemployed had the option to choose the Union Jack or the red flag, the one symbolic of capitalism, the other of working-class freedom".

<sup>12</sup> Lake, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

stating that "no member of the Communist Party may become a member of the A.L.P." and that "if any member of the Labor Party ... shall express views or intentions calculated to bring into contempt or disrupt the party ... or shall do any act or thing calculated to injure the party, the general executive may call upon such member .., to show cause why he should not be expelled from the party." The writer claimed that Shaw, by his association with declared communists, was bringing the party into contempt and disrepute. He claimed that the communists were making a tool of Shaw for the express purpose of discrediting the Labor Party under the excuse of assisting the unemployed.<sup>13</sup> Shaw's reply was that he was simply trying to do what one man could to help the unfortunate men who were in distress because they were unemployed.<sup>14</sup> The same correspondent, in a further letter, said that if Shaw was true to his pledge as an industrialist, he should induce the unemployed to place their troubles under the care of Trades Hall officials.<sup>15</sup>

In Hobart, G.W. Mahoney, one of the radicals of 1921, became the most important name associated with U.W.M. Mahoney had remained a radical voice during the 1920's and in 1928 there was discussion by the H.T.H.C. regarding his re-admission to that body, following his earlier expulsion.<sup>16</sup> Although he was not elected to Parliament until May, 1931, he must have had some considerable standing in the Labor Party in 1930 to be selected for parliament. He carried out a similar role for the U.W.M. in Hobart to that of Shaw in Launceston. Though his attitudes were generally more conciliatory than those of Duncan, Knox and others, he nevertheless was critical of government and H.C.C. attitudes towards the unemployed. He remained associated with the

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<sup>13</sup> *Examiner*, 18/2/31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/2/31, p.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Minutes*, H.T.H.C., 16/6/28

U.W.M. throughout 1931, his chief role being to introduce deputations of unemployed to state and local government authorities. This remained the case in 1932 and, although by late 1932 he was no longer being reported in association with U.W.M., in 1933 he spoke out against the "Work for Sustenance" scheme.<sup>17</sup> He was not re-elected to the House of Assembly in June 1934, but became the Denison member of the House of Representatives later that year and, in 1934, was recorded as having addressed the House of Representatives on Tasmania's handicaps and unemployment, and in 1935, he approached the Minister for Defence for allocation of any surplus clothing for Tasmanian unemployed.<sup>18</sup>

In both Hobart and Launceston U.W.M. attempted to get representation on the respective Trades Hall Councils on an equal footing with member unions, it being hoped that this would give it added respectability. The Trades Hall Councils were reluctant to give full member status to the U.W.M. and, at first, delegates were received subject to certain restrictions. In Hobart these included the requirement that the delegates be members of an affiliated union, while in Launceston delegates could attend for thirty minutes only and, during that time, must keep to matters concerning unemployment.<sup>19</sup> Duncan was reluctant to accept the ruling of the H.T.H.C. as he was a member of the A.W.U. and therefore not eligible, as A.W.U. was not a member of H.T.H.C. Presumably Duncan was not a member of the A.W.U. by choice for he vehemently denounced it, on this occasion, as "one of the most corrupt organizations in Australia".<sup>20</sup> Among the benefits of co-operation with the Trades Hall Councils were the lessening of likelihood that those councils would operate their own unemployment organization

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<sup>17</sup> *Mercury*, 13/6/33, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14/11.34,p.5 and 19/6/35, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes H.T.H.C., 5/6/30 and minutes L.T.H.C.,

<sup>20</sup> *Mercury*, 13/6/30, p.10.

in rivalry to U.W.M., and the use of the Trades Hall buildings in both Launceston and Hobart for meetings.

In Hobart, representation of U.W.M. on the H.T.H.C. was lost through Duncan's criticism of the H.T.H.C. after a motion, calling for a one day General Strike to protest the treatment being meted out to the unemployed, lapsed for want of a seconder. He called the H.T.H.C. cowardly "as they treated an important matter with silent contempt".<sup>21</sup> Though the representation was later restored, the H.T.H.C, even paying some of the administrative costs of the U.W.M., a motion by R.J. Brooks that such delegates be received in May, 1932, also lapsed for want of a seconder, indicating that relations had again deteriorated.<sup>22</sup> What is most surprising is that U.W.M. accounts were approved for payment in July 1931, even after *The Mercury* had reported on the relations between U.W.M. and the L.T.H.C. and the attitude of Launceston U.W.M. leaders towards the Labor Party.<sup>23</sup> The reasons for the new breach between the two organizations have not yet come to light but they were serious enough for the H.T.H.C. to withdraw from the U.W.M. their use of a meeting room at the Trades Hall.<sup>24</sup> This occurred at the end of 1931 and, because at this time there was a federal election campaign under way, it may have been due to the attitudes expressed by communists in the U.W.M. towards the Labor Party.

It was just such criticism by Launceston U.W.M. leaders, during the state election campaign in 1931, that lost the Launceston U.W.M. the use of the Trades Hall building as a meeting place, and ended U.W.M. representation on the L.T.H.C. The breach was expressed

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<sup>21</sup> *Mercury*, 26/3/31, p.10

<sup>22</sup> Minutes H.T.H.C. 8/5/32 and *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/7/31

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/1/32.

in the form of a motion which claimed that the delegates of the U.W.M. were not representing the cause of the unemployed but were using the council and the building for the purpose of communist propaganda.<sup>25</sup> At the same meeting criticism was made of the anti-Labor Party material being brought forth by the communists and it was presumably this, rather than the communistic beliefs of the delegates, who had been known to be communists for some time, that prompted the closure of the Trades Hall to the U.W.M.<sup>26</sup>

In an attempt to place the control of the unemployed in more moderate hands, the L.T.H.C. formed its own unemployment committee.<sup>27</sup> The committee apparently did not achieve any startling success. One of its first decisions was that unemployment was primarily a government responsibility.<sup>28</sup> By late June, the best it had done was to write to various states to find out Trades Hall and Labor Party approaches to unemployment in those states.<sup>29</sup> In July a motion calling for a mass meeting of unemployed was lost.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, not all forms of recognition had been withdrawn from U.W.M., in that letters were still being formally received from that body.<sup>31</sup> In September, a mass meeting held by the L.T.H.C. unemployment committee proved disastrous for that committee when the chairman of the meeting was deposed and replaced by U.W.M. leaders, who accused the L.T.H.C. of trying to smash the U.W.M. A motion of no confidence in the Trades Hall Unemployment Committee was carried by the meeting.<sup>32</sup>

After the failure of the L.T.H.C. Unemployment Committee to

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<sup>25</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31.

<sup>26</sup> *Supra*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes L.T.H.C. 20/5/31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/6/31

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/7/31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1931 *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> *Mercury*, 12/9/31

gain mass support a more conciliatory attitude was adopted by U.W.M. towards the L.T.H.C. Firstly, the communist nature of U.W.M. was denied. U.W.M. was not the "... communist movement but the militant workers' organization".<sup>33</sup> By mid-October 1931, U.W.M. had re-applied for the use of the Trades Hall building although permission was not granted.<sup>34</sup> By February, 1932, delegates from the U.W.M. were being received by the L.T.H.C. and, in March 1932, a basis of co-operation, whereby U.W.M. and L.T.H.C. Unemployment Committee members dealt with business on a joint basis, was established.<sup>35</sup> Use of the Trades Hall building for meetings remained restricted to meetings on a joint basis at which various bodies, including the L.T.H.C. and U.W.M., were represented and this did not result in another deposition of the chairman, presumably because the L.T.H.C. took care to allow use of the building only on its own conditions.<sup>36</sup> By 1934, when this sort of practice was still evident, there seems to have been a shift of U.W.M. policy, all over the state, regarding co-operation with other organizations of unemployed. This will be further discussed later.<sup>37</sup>

In Hobart the position was much the same. After 1932, correspondence was formally received from U.W.M. by the H.T.H.C., but representation was not allowed nor was the use of meeting rooms, so that U.W.M. became centred on the Victoria Tea Rooms.<sup>38</sup> In Hobart also, the claim of U.W.M. to be the sole representatives of the unemployed was softened so that, by 1934, conferences of various unemployed organizations were possible.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Mercury*, 14/9/31, p.5.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes L.T.H.C., 14/10/31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1932 passim.

<sup>36</sup> *Mercury*, 30/9/33, p.7, and 13/3/34, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> *Infra*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>38</sup> *Mercury*, 10/9/32 & 22/6/33. Sometimes known as Victoria Hall, *ibid.*, 24/10/34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 24/10/34.

U.W.M. did not at first successfully conceal the fact that it was a "front" organized by the C.P.A. and, in 1931, as has been seen, public statements by Duncan, speaking as secretary of the Tasmanian Branch of the C.P.A. regarding the reasons for organizing the U.W.M., as well as the exposure of the connections between U.W.M. and the communist newspaper, *Workers' Weekly*, added to public awareness of the communist aspect of U.W.M.<sup>40</sup>

The failure to keep to Comintern directives resulted in the undermining of the basic strategy for "front" organizations, in that it forced public figures, such as members of parliament, who had been encouraged to take part and thus give respectability to the U.W.M., to play down their role in that body so that, in Launceston, Shaw seems to have dropped altogether any direct association with U.W.M. The failure, by C.P.A. members of U.W.M. to distinguish between C.P.A. attitudes to the Labor Party and the necessarily more conciliatory attitude that U.W.M. strategy should have dictated, resulted in the loss of close contacts with the Trades Hall Councils and the loss of meeting rooms.

Such action showed, particularly in the case of Launceston, that U.W.M. had strong support among the unemployed and the loss of meeting places meant that now U.W.M. could claim that, since police and local government authorities were just as reluctant to grant it meeting places as they were regarding the C.P.A., there was room for a Freedom of Speech League to prevent the voice of the unemployed, and not just communists, from being silenced. Nevertheless, the failure to clearly distinguish U.W.M. from the C.P.A. did not accord with the directives regarding the setting up of U.W.M. and, as early as September 1931, a statement was made denying that any members of the

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<sup>40</sup> *Supra*, pp. 25 & 43 and *Mercury*, 31/1/31 and 12/6/31.

Launceston U.W.M. executive were, or had been members of the Communist Party.<sup>41</sup> This statement was made by R. Stephens, whose name does not arise in direct connection with the C.P.A. between 1930 and 1935, so it may be assumed that a conscious effort was being made to follow the Comintern directives. Apparently there was a shortage of reliable men, who had not openly been associated with communism, to take such executive positions. In 1932, Daft, Norris and Brown, all of whom had been tried in 1931 on charges relating to the law being broken at C.P.A. meetings, represented the U.W.M. at a joint meeting with the L.T.H.C. Unemployment Committee.<sup>42</sup>

Davidson reported that, on an Australian basis, U.W.M. suffered a temporary decline in 1932 and 1933, because of excessive hostility to A.L.P. members, and this was only overcome in 1934 when a new policy of co-operation with other unemployed bodies was applied.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, no statistics, regarding U.W.M. membership in Tasmania, have come to hand. What does seem certain is that rival attempts to organize the unemployed did not show any great success until 1934 and it has already been seen that U.W.M. leaders enjoyed the confidence of a large body of unemployed in 1932. In 1933 a demonstration of a radical nature against the "Work for Sustenance" scheme, at which red flags were carried and an effigy of Chief Secretary, C.E. James, burnt, had the support of about 200 unemployed.<sup>44</sup> If there was any decline in membership, this could be linked with the lack of a large meeting room in which to hold regular meetings, though this problem had been solved by September, 1932, in Hobart and may have been solved earlier. What

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<sup>41</sup> *Mercury*, 15/9/31.

<sup>42</sup> *Minutes*, L.T.H.C., 10/4/32.

<sup>43</sup> *Supra*, p.21; Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> *Mercury*, 1/8/33, p.5.

is evident is that co-operation with other bodies, unemployed and otherwise, was on the increase, especially after the introduction of "Work for Sustenance" in 1933, and the communist nature of U.W.M. was far less evident after 1933 than it had been in 1931.

"Work for Sustenance", though introduced in 1933 by Chief Secretary C.E. James as something novel whereby the unemployed did an amount of work, proportional to the dole they received, in fact differed little from the earlier relief jobs against which the U.W.M. had been protesting as early as 1930. The basic criticism in both cases was that such schemes represented a long term attack on the standard of living of the working class. The most common criticism offered to the U.W.M., when it spoke out against such schemes, was that times were hard and it was better to accept work at reduced wages and conditions than to be completely out of work. Protests regarding the Beaconsfield forestry plantation relief job brought editorial comment that the unemployed were likely to alienate sympathy by their actions, indeed several organizations contributing to unemployment relief were already pulling out.<sup>45</sup> One of the criticisms regarding relief jobs was that the men were not receiving adequate nourishment because of the low wages, yet they were expected to work hard for the little they did get.<sup>46</sup> The early criticism of the Beaconsfield job was that, after travelling and camping costs were deducted from the already low wage, there was virtually nothing left to take home and the men would be better off simply receiving the rations they had been eligible for before they went on the job.<sup>47</sup> The men had no choice but to accept the relief work offered. If they did not, rations would be cut off

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<sup>45</sup> *Mercury*, 28/8/30.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/6/33, p.5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/7/30 *et passim*.

anyway.<sup>48</sup> As was seen, accusations of sedition were first made regarding literature protesting against the Beaconsfield conditions.<sup>49</sup>

In 1933 the new scheme met with the same opposition. It was attacked as degrading and as overtaxing undernourished men. Because the scheme made no provision for rent, it put the sustenance worker in the position where he had no legal right to shelter in that, if he was employed (as he would be under the scheme) and yet unable to pay rent, he would be in a far greater danger of being evicted. Further, the scheme did not provide a clothing allowance, so that sustenance workers would not be able to replace clothing worn out at work. The most serious criticism was that public works would be done by sustenance workers, thus putting more council and government employees out of work and, on that basis, the scheme could be seen as a long term attack on the standard of living of the working class.<sup>50</sup>

Protest against the "Work for Sustenance" scheme brought some renewed U.W.M. co-operation with Trades Hall and Labor Party representatives, who agreed that the scheme threatened permanent employees. The scheme undercut the basic wage and threatened other rights, obtained by union action over the years, such as Workers' Compensation.<sup>51</sup> Conferences of unemployed, at which Trades Hall, union and Labor Party delegates were present, demanded that "Work for Sustenance" be upgraded to payment of the basic wage, in cash and not partly in rations, that allowances be made for clothing, electricity and rent, that the level of permissible income, at which sustenance was cut off, be raised, and that sustenance workers ought not to be forced to do

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 16/8/30, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Supra*, p. 43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/6/33, p.5

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/7/33, p.5, and 20/3/34, p.5.

work that could be done by permanent employees.<sup>52</sup>

Despite protests, by U.W.M. and Labor Party members and the Trades Hall Councils, the scheme went ahead and the work was described by one individual as "soul destroying", often involving such purposeless tasks as shifting piles of sand from one corner of a yard to another and back again.<sup>53</sup>

In mid 1934, the Labor Party won government in Tasmania and became responsible for the scheme and, although it indulged in more purposeful projects such as the construction of the Mount Wellington road, it was slow to implement promises regarding rent allowances and the basic wage, so that, by September 1935, there was still plenty for unemployed organizations to complain about. The complaints at that time were that the government had failed to implement a rent allowance and that evictions of the unemployed, always a controversial issue, were still going on. Sustenance workers were being forced to join unions, particularly the A.W.U., when they had been on the job only a short while, and to pay a prohibitively high union fee. Payments of sustenance were still being made partly in kind. The permissible income level was still too low. Medical treatment for the unemployed was "barbarous". Where relief workers had to camp, camp conditions were poor. Delegates at a conference of unemployed organizations, at which the criticisms were made, denounced the Labor government as consisting of traitors who had made false statements to win seats and, now that the seats were won, the unemployment could "go to ---".<sup>54</sup>

The rent issue highlights an ongoing U.W.M. activity, that is,

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 13/3/34, p.5.

<sup>53</sup> Interview, Sir Alfred White, Hobart, 9/9/76.

<sup>54</sup> *Mercury*, 19/9/35 and 20/9/35, p.2. *et passim*

the campaign against evictions. Following the mainland pattern, indeed striving to emulate it, U.W.M. was advocating the use of physical force, with regard to evictions, as early as June, 1930.<sup>55</sup> By 1932, evictions were the most sensational aspect of U.W.M. activity. When an eviction notice had been served, U.W.M. would be notified and the house would be barricaded, or the evicted person moved back in, or a vacant dwelling commandeered by U.W.M.<sup>56</sup> On occasions, an eviction would be followed by a procession through the streets in which U.W.M. members would carry the victims' furniture, as well as placards bearing radical slogans, to emphasize the plight of the unemployed.<sup>57</sup> On one occasion an evicted family spent the night in the street, to emphasize its plight, before being moved into a house commandeered by the U.W.M.<sup>58</sup> Communists and U.W.M. leaders often were the victims of evictions. Their names appear frequently in the Police Record, as being proceeded against for arrears of rent. This was probably because they were more ready than others to fight the issue to its logical conclusion and suffer a kind of martyrdom to give added publicity to their cause. Daft, White, Norris, Wilson, Drinkwater and Cinnamon, whose names have been mentioned in relation to the C.P.A. and U.W.M., all were proceeded against from time to time for arrears of rent or for trespassing, the charge related to commandeering of houses.<sup>59</sup> Such charges were forthcoming as early as 1931 and as late as 1935. In Hobart, the names of prominent U.W.M. leaders did not appear on such charges but the same tactics were used. A case in Hobart in 1934 went to the Supreme Court. An important principle was

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 19/6/30, p.7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/3/32, p.7; 25/5/34, p.7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 15/1/32, p.5, 23/4/32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 18/3/32, p.8.

<sup>59</sup> Police Record, Launceston Court of Petty Sessions; 1930-35, *passim*.

involved in the hearing; "whether a self-appointed body, set up in the interests of the unemployed or anybody else, should be able to find a loophole in the law by which it can seize a house and install a family, apparently with no intention of paying rent.<sup>60</sup>

Rival organizations of unemployed became a real issue in late 1934 and throughout 1935. This may have been due to a split in the ranks of the unemployed now that there was a Labor government, in that considerable U.W.M. protest had been directed against the Nationalist government, and this view is supported by the tendency of the government to favour more conservative organizations of unemployed in 1935. As has been seen, attempts had been made as early as 1931 to set up Trades Hall bodies in opposition to U.W.M., but these were not apparently a great success. When R.A. Mead, speaking on behalf of the Glenorchy unemployed, attempted to make an issue of communist control of U.W.M., in June 1931, his efforts must have failed in the long term for, in late 1934 and 1935, the Glenorchy unemployed were still organized under the leadership of R.G. Trayling who had been chairman of U.W.M. in Hobart in 1931 and was among those repudiated by Mead.<sup>61</sup> In December 1934, this organization was referred to as the Glenorchy U.W.M. and the association of Trayling with the Hobart U.W.M., and its successor the Unemployed and Casual Workers' Union (U.C.W.U.), continued throughout 1935.<sup>62</sup> Branches of the U.W.M. were reported at Burnie and Devonport by Daft in March, 1934, but, judging by the repudiation of Launceston U.W.M. leaders acting as representatives of the Devonport unemployed in September 1935, by members of the "Devonport unemployed

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<sup>60</sup> *Mercury*, 27/6/34, p.5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 10/6/31, 11/6/31, 12/6/31 and 18/7/31, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/12/34, p.5, and *infra*, p. 70.

organization", U.W.M. was not established successfully there as a "front" organization.

By October 1934, an organization known as the Unemployed Social Movement (U.S.N.) had appeared in Hobart under the leadership of W.E. White and G. Collis, who seem to have had connections with Douglas Credit and Toc H respectively, both non-communist organizations. Apparently U.S.N. had government approval.<sup>63</sup>

In the last quarter of 1934, U.S.M., the Hobart U.W.M. and the Glenorchy U.W.M. were meeting together on a regular basis for joint action.<sup>64</sup> A delegation from this regular conference met the Premier, A.G. Ogilvie, regarding the appointing of representatives of the unemployed to the Government Unemployment Committee. The Premier had indicated that in no circumstances would he allow any communist to be a member of that Committee. He was dissatisfied with the attitude of the communists at the last elections, where they had advocated informal voting.<sup>65</sup>

The attitude of the Premier evidently was directed at U.W.M. for, after the meeting at which this was reported, no further mention is made of U.W.M. at Hobart and, by April 1935, U.C.W.U. had made its first appearance in press reports. The personnel of this body were all individuals who had not previously been associated in newspaper reports with U.W.M., although two U.C.W.U. delegates to the September 1935, State Conference of Unemployed organizations had possible connections with U.W.M., in that one had been involved in an eviction

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 24/10/34, p.2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/12/34, p.5, 11/12/34, 18/12/34.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 11/12/34.

case associated with U.W.M. and the other may have taken part in a U.W.M. deputation in 1930. It seems likely that U.C.W.U. was an effort by U.W.M. to reorganize without open communist connections, and U.C.W.U. remained in close contact with U.W.M. in other parts of the state.

Early in 1935, U.C.W.U. co-operated with U.S.M., in a body known as the Unemployed Central Council, in assembling a petition to the government for a rent allowance.<sup>66</sup> By August that year a rift had occurred and U.C.W.U. declared that the Unemployed Central Council did not represent the unemployed of southern Tasmania. The issue of representation on the Government Unemployment Committee seems to have been the problem. The government had apparently changed its mind about accepting P.J. Walker, secretary of U.C.W.U., as the representative for southern Tasmania, and had instead recognized the Unemployed Central Council.<sup>67</sup> That Council was now rejected by all bodies except U.S.M., whose leaders made up its executive, and one other un-named organization.<sup>68</sup>

The government decision may have been made through suspicion that U.C.W.U. was communist inspired. Certainly, by the end of August 1935, such suspicions had some basis, in that U.C.W.U. protested against the Federal government ban on working-class literature and against the threat of war in Abyssinia.<sup>69</sup> Criticism of these motions in the press brought a defence of U.C.W.U. by Trayling, who also answered a charge that U.C.W.U. was a bogus organization by stating that U.C.W.U.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1/6/35, p.10, 27/7.35, 3/6/35, p.2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/8.35, p.9.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12/8/35, p.5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30/8/35, p.3.

was "... a very strong body of Hobart unemployed supported by the Glenorchy Unemployed organization and the Launceston U.W.M., the two biggest unemployed organizations outside Hobart. In unemployed affairs, these bodies constitute a powerful alliance."<sup>70</sup>

In order to settle the dispute and to demonstrate the solidarity of the unemployed, a state-wide conference of unemployed organizations was held in September 1935, at the Hobart Town Hall. It has been seen that this conference, attended by delegates of U.S.M., came out with radical criticism of the government.<sup>71</sup> It has also been seen that delegates claiming to be from Burnie and Devonport were, in fact, from the Launceston U.W.M. and the Launceston-North-West Coast group consisted of familiar names, including Daft, Shelley and Mullins, so the communist element seems to have been strong. The A.W.U. came in for strong criticism. Daft described it as a "blackleg, scabbing organization used by employers to smash unionism" and said that A.W.U. bureaucracy was trying to smash militancy in Tasmania. Mullins said that all thought of parliamentary action had left his mind. He would support neither party. Motions protesting against war and demanding League of Nations sanctions against Italy were carried, as was one against the Federal government's action in suppressing working class literature. Daft said the Federal government had singled out the C.P.A. and F.O.S.U. for its first attacks on working class organizations. A State Central Unemployed Council was formed and Daft, Mullins, Walker, Allen and Trayling were among the seven original executive members, so that known radicals held the majority.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/9/35, p.2.

<sup>71</sup> *Supra*, p.66.

<sup>72</sup> *Supra*, p.38, and *Mercury*, 19/9/35, p.8 and p.12, 21/9/35. pp. 13 and 21. 20/9/35, pp. 2, 7 and 10.

The conference was followed by criticism of its radical stance and A.W.U. state secretary H. Nichol said, in reference to the conference, that communists were using the unemployed as a platform to attack the government and A.W.U.<sup>73</sup> The Premier agreed with the Devonport repudiation of their supposed delegates, saying: "to communists and their avowed adherents we offer no apology and we leave them to seek political support from whence they secure their finance to carry on their propaganda."<sup>74</sup> Daft and Mullins responded with a joint statement in which Mullins said that neither he, nor any official of the State Council of Unemployed executive, was a member of the Communist Party and this despite Daft's remarks at the conference regarding the C.P.A. and F.O.S.U.<sup>75</sup>

Ogilvie was unwilling to accept the State Council of Unemployed as being representative of the unemployed and, when a big demonstration of sustenance workers forced him to receive a delegation from that body, he said he would accept a committee to co-operate with the government if it was elected by secret ballot. Such a ballot was held, conducted by officers of the Social Services Department, but did not succeed in eliminating the more radical voices, and Trayling, Walker and three known U.C.W.U. members were among the eight elected to the committee.<sup>76</sup>

The State Council of Unemployed of 1935 itself seems to have been a "front" organization, largely along the lines of the original Comintern directives, although there is no indication that it used persons of any great standing in "respectable" circles for added

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/9/35, p.7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 24/9/35, p.9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 28/9/35, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 15/12/35, p.9; 17/10/35, p.9; 7/11/35,p.7

respectability. If it is to be considered as a "front" it indicates flexibility in "front" organization by 1935 and that decisions as to "front" organization could be made on a district level within the C.P.A. Its radical stance and the passing of radical motions, its boast that it represented several organizations of unemployed and the concealment of communism among its members, show that it had learned some lessons from the single, openly communist organization approach of the early Tasmanian U.W.M. That even a secret ballot in 1935 should return radical unemployed leaders is indicative of the high degree of confidence the rank and file of the unemployed had in the radicals. Davidson's remark, that U.W.M. throughout Australia achieved increased success in 1934 and 1935, seems to apply equally to Tasmania and, despite the fact that this meant, in Hobart at least, the abandonment of the original name, U.W.M. lived on under new names and showed, by its calling of several hundred sustenance workers off their jobs in October 1935, that it was a thriving organization, undamaged by opposition from the Labor government and with genuine grievances around which the unemployed could be rallied.

None of the other "front" organizations achieved mass support or mass publicity. Militant Minority Movement (M.M.M.), seen by Davidson as one of the two most important "fronts" in Australia (the other was U.W.M.), does not seem to have flourished at all.<sup>77</sup> M.M.M. at least had a definite starting point in Tasmania. In March 1931, Duncan called a meeting of interested persons at the Hobart Trades Hall to discuss formation of a Militant Minority Movement in Tasmania. Only eight persons attended. Already, in this opening move, can be

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<sup>77</sup> *Supra*, p.18, and Davidson, *op.cit.*, 56.

seen a departure from the Comintern provisions for "fronts" in that Duncan, who was known to the public as C.P.A. secretary, should be calling and chairing the meeting. The objects of the organization were stated as: rank and file control of unions; the cleansing of unions of the bosses' agents; the organization of a strike against arbitration; the formation of joint committees with the U.W.M.; to fight capitalism and its agents, the A.L.P. politicians; and the setting up of councils of action and the keeping of highly paid officials out of the committee. Further aims were: to fight against war dangers; to defend the Soviet Union; to down the Social Fascist Scullin government; and to build up the M.M.M. for the dangers ahead. The M.M.M. was also to operate in association with a Workers' Defence Corps. The meeting was told that committees were already formed in various industries and the members of the jam workers' committee at the Henry Jones & Co. factory had been served with the following demands by M.M.M. in order to preserve their interests and those of the industrial workers:

- (i) full double rates for overtime
- (ii) full pay for short time working
- (iii) full wages during periods of accident or disability
- (iv) free overalls, clogs and rubber boots for jam room
- (v) equal pay for equal work for men, women and children
- (vi) while out of work, unemployment relief at £3.0.0 for man and wife, and 10/- per child, and 12. 0.0 for single men and women
- (vii) no night work for women
- (viii) fifteen minutes break at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.
- (ix) the abolition of child labour

- (x) a minimum of £5.10.0 per week
- (xi) seven hours of day work and six hours of night
- (xii) work in a five day week
- (xiii) the abolition of all wage taxes
- (xiv) the right to strike
- (xv) the election of a rank and file committee on the job.

N. Raucie said that the workers had been let down by the trade unions and that M.M.M. had to defend the interests of the workers and continue the fight against the present trade union movement. Its ultimate aim was to do away with capitalism and bring about the advent of socialism. Those present joined the movement and arranged to have regular meetings.<sup>78</sup>

Nothing further was reported in the daily press about factory committees in Hobart. There is very little evidence that the M.M.M., as such, remained in existence for any length of time, although it was reported in August 1931, that M.M.M. consisted of four persons.<sup>79</sup> There is scant evidence that communism had much influence in Tasmanian unions and this lack of influence is supported by the quiet attitudes of both the L.T.H.C. and H.T.H.C. Communists seem to have controlled the Coachmakers' Union in Hobart. R.J. Brooks was its delegate on the H.T.H.C. and, as has been seen, his radical motions tended to lapse, for want of seconding, on that body.<sup>80</sup> F.J. Walker, who in 1931 was secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation in Hobart, later became a leader of U.C.W.U., and delegates of the Watersiders had been expected at Duncan's M.M.M. inaugural meeting, but were reported as being unable

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<sup>78</sup> *Examiner*, 27/3/31, p.7.

<sup>79</sup> *The Voice*, 8/8/31, p.8.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes H.T.H.C., 5/3/31, 6/8/31, 5/5/32.

attend due to work.<sup>81</sup> Communism may have had some influence in that union. Knox, who faced sedition charges in 1932, seems to have had W.W.F. connections.<sup>82</sup> In Launceston, Daft was attempting to organize mill workers in 1931, but was apparently unable to establish contact, cells or nuclei inside the mills, because communists were reported as making speeches, outside the gates, in which they criticized trade union officials and the union movement.<sup>83</sup>

In August 1932, a textile worker's strike, affecting several Launceston mills, proved the inability of the communists to act effectively in factories in Launceston. At a mass meeting of textile workers L.J. Norris moved "that this meeting of unionists consider drawing into the struggle all organizations of a working class character, whether unionists or non-unionists, and particularly so as regards the minority movement, and that it be a recommendation that representatives of these organizations be empowered to attend all meetings of textile and other workers in relation to the strike".<sup>84</sup> The L.T.H.C. disputes committee ruled that as it was simply a delegate body of the L.T.H.C., it could not delegate its authority nor vary its personnel or constitution. The principle upon which the Trades Hall Council existed, and was governed, was the acceptance of majority decisions. Accordingly, while it respected the rights of minorities, it offered no corner for a minority movement to operate within the organization.<sup>85</sup> Despite the rebuff, which indicates that M.M.M. was not successfully established in Launceston and had to try to become effective by such a subterfuge, the fact that the motion was passed by the mass meeting

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<sup>81</sup> *Examiner*, 27/3/31, p.7.

<sup>82</sup> *Voice*, 2/5/31, p.5, and *Mercury*, 7/5/32, p.9.

<sup>83</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31.

<sup>84</sup> *Mercury*, 25/8/32.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/8/32, p.5.

indicates the large support that communists, such as Norris, could muster in Launceston. Though it might be argued that, in this case, the textile workers did not know that Norris was a communist, Norris had received plenty of publicity in connection with the C.P.A. and U.W.M. and it is probable that he was recognized by the meeting for what he was.

The last recorded mention of M.M.M. was in July 1934, and then there was no indication that it was actually in existence in Tasmania. A critic of the Anti-War Movement being set up in Launceston claimed that, like M.M.M. and Friends of the Soviet Union (F.O.S.U.), it was communist promoted and led.<sup>86</sup> Whether communists had any success in gaining control of unions in Tasmania after 1935 would require further research but there are hints that unionism was to be the focus of communist attention in the later 1930s. The 1935 clash with A.W.U. might be a sign of this, and later in the 1930s, Bill Morrow, who was spoken of as a communist, came to prominence in the Australian Railways Union at Launceston, especially over a clash with Premier Ogilvie, who was reported to have refused even to speak to Morrow. Morrow later became a senator.<sup>87</sup> It seems certain that any successful union ventures did not result from the setting up of M.M.M. and this may have been due to the M.M.M. policy of calling for a general strike, which on the mainland impeded M.M.M. progress at a time when workers who had jobs had to be very quiet to keep them.<sup>88</sup>

A Workers' Defence Corps (W.D.C.) was advocated at Launceston

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/7/34.

<sup>87</sup> *Infra*, p.109, and interviews J. Reynolds, E. Reece, and B. Lacey, History IIIId. Joint Research Project, Uni. of Tas., 1975.

<sup>88</sup> *Supra*, p.18.

in December 1930, following the arrest of twenty-six leaders of U.W.M. in New South Wales. The reason given for the establishment of a similar body in Tasmania was that evictions were on the increase and these needed to be fought against.<sup>89</sup> The fact that "... persons were trying to link up the communist unemployed movement with the fires [in Hobart, and Launceston in December 1930 and February 1931]" was given as added reason for the setting up of W.D.C. but, as this argument was made a month after such an organization had supposedly been set up, it looks as though the body already set up had not begun to function, and the reality of W.D.C. was that it was simply the communist leaders of U.W.M. working through another name.<sup>90</sup> The mainland concept of enrolling lawyers in such an organization, does not seem to have succeeded. After the initial calls for W.D.C. the idea seems to have been abandoned, the eviction struggle being carried on in the name of U.W.M. Perhaps this reflects a lack of leadership among Tasmanian communists so that, because the same leader would have had to run W.D.C. as well as U.W.M., a separate organization was purposeless.

More success was achieved with a Freedom of Speech League and here less emphasis was placed on the leadership by Communists and U.W.M. men. Certainly, appeals were made by the C.P.A. in Tasmania for assistance in the struggle for freedom of speech, including the letter already mentioned from Duncan to the Workers' Educational Association.<sup>91</sup> This meeting gave the communists some sympathy, provided they kept within the law, and resolved that "any arbitrary repression of the liberties of speech and the publication of any matter

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<sup>89</sup> *Mercury*, 10/1/31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 10/1/31, W.D.C. formed and 7/2/31 called for again.

<sup>91</sup> *Supra*, p.31 and *Mercury*, 25/2/31, p.2.

dealing with political, social or economic conditions is contrary to the spirit and practice of a free democracy." Labor politicians were among those at the meeting. The L.T.H.C., as early as March 1931, declared itself in favour of free speech for all and unrestricted rights to read working class literature of any kind, although it added that it did not wish to ally itself with the Communist Party.<sup>92</sup> The imprisonment of Launceston communists brought a similar response from the H.T.H.C.<sup>93</sup>

The L.T.H.C. remained sympathetic to the question of public speaking rights in Launceston and endeavoured, on several occasions, to obtain the use of a park for the communists, although care was taken to distinguish such action from alliance with communists. It was apparently felt that Launceston should have some place, like Hobart's Domain, where speakers of any persuasion could, without special permission, hold public meetings and distribute literature. Even the editor of *The Examiner* argued as much. If they were given some quiet spot, away from busy streets, they could preach without creating a nuisance and without drawing crowds of onlookers curious to see if they would be arrested.<sup>94</sup>

In July 1931, V.J. Shaw, M.H.A., moved an adjournment of the House of Assembly, to bring attention to the freedom of speech issue, and was supported by Labor members, G.W. Mahoney, E. Dwyer-Gray and Major Davies.<sup>95</sup> In April 1932, a Freedom of Speech League was formed in Launceston at a meeting held under the auspices of the L.T.H.C.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Minutes, L.T.H.C., 18/3/31.

<sup>93</sup> Minutes, H.T.H.C., 2/7/31.

<sup>94</sup> *Examiner*, 29/4/31, p.6, and 23/5/31.

<sup>95</sup> *Mercury*, 30/7/31.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 15/4/32, p.10.

This League made representations to the L.T.H.C. for the use of parks for public meetings, H.C. Barnard and C.A. Lamp of the L.T.H.C. taking part in such efforts.<sup>97</sup> The prosecution of Knox, for sedition, brought a further motion from the H.T.H.C., which condemned the prosecution as an attack on the workers of Tasmania, designed to prevent the expression of working class views.<sup>98</sup> The Launceston City Council did not back down from its hard line, regarding the use of parks, and nothing more was heard of the Freedom of Speech League, although, in November 1935, J. McDonald, M.L.C., at a meeting of the L.T.H.C., said that there should be no ban on any literature other than immoral literature. He was speaking regarding moves by the Federal government to have the C.P.A. and F.O.S.U. declared illegal organizations and not referring to any suppression of free speech in a Tasmanian context. He went on to say, "Progress in Russia has been in the interests not only of the working class of Russia but of the working class of the world". A committee was appointed to counter the Federal government moves.<sup>99</sup>

McDonald's remarks highlight the activities of another "front" in Tasmania, Friends of the Soviet Union (F.O.S.U.). In the case of F.O.S.U. there is no direct evidence connecting it with Tasmanian communists but Davidson says F.O.S.U. was founded by C.P.A., on the mainland in 1930, so it is likely that, like other "fronts" in Tasmania, F.O.S.U. was initiated and organized by communists.<sup>100</sup>

Much had been said about the Soviet Union by the Tasmanian press, from articles in *The Examiner*, exposing the horrors of life in

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 12/7/32.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes, H.T.H.C., 2/6/32

<sup>99</sup> *Mercury*, 7/11/35, p.7.

<sup>100</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.61.

that country, to reprints in *The Voice* of Soviet Information Bureau articles on the achievements of Soviet Russia.<sup>101</sup> The Soviet Union had its sympathisers apart from communists and U.W.M. leaders, who included Pro-Soviet attitudes in their outlook as a matter of course. The foundation meeting of M.M.M. expressed friendliness towards the Soviet Union, as did Daft in his Senate electoral campaign.<sup>102</sup> The only direct reference to a Tasmanian Branch of F.O.S.U. that has so far come to light was a mention in the minutes of H.T.H.C. that a letter had been received from the Tasmanian branch of F.O.S.U. Because of the widespread interest in the Soviet Union, one might expect such an organization to have achieved some following. There is, however, no readily available evidence to support that conclusion.

The collapse of the German Communist Party in 1933, and the subsequent Comintern call for its sections to re-establish relations with Labor parties in a new "united front", filtered down to the Tasmanian level with approaches to the L.T.H.C. for joint action with the C.P.A. These were rejected.<sup>103</sup> The Labor Party had developed a firm stance against the C.P.A.<sup>104</sup> C.P.A. reaction to Labor Party rejection of such overtures on the mainland was to establish the Movement against War and Fascism (M.A.W.A.F.). In Tasmania, though pacifist sentiment was often expressed, M.A.W.A.F. was not reported as such, although an Anti-War Council and an Anti-Fascist Council were separately reported as existing. This was not until 1933. Before that time, speakers at U.W.M. and communist meetings had connected war

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<sup>101</sup> *Voice*, 24/1/31.

<sup>102</sup> *Supra*, p.74 on M.M.M. and p.48, Senate election.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes L.T.H.C., 21/6/33.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes A.L.P. State Conf. 25/4/35 and Minutes Tas. A.L.P. Executive, 6/12/34.

with Imperialism and capitalism and opposition to war was expressed as one of the aims of M.M.M.<sup>105</sup> The flying of the red flag on Anzac Day 1931, in Launceston, may be viewed as a communist demonstration against imperialistic war and was followed in May by a letter to *The Examiner*, signed "A.W. White, ex 336 SBAC, British Army", which contrasted the "senseless slaughter of Gallipoli" with the talk of "glory" generally made on Anzac Day (White had been one of the communists involved in the Anzac Day incident). More conservative organizations also voiced anti-war opinions, perhaps as part of the on-going tradition of pacifist dissent which originated in World War I. *The Voice*,<sup>106</sup> of which Dwyer-Gray was editor, occasionally ran anti-war articles. After Anzac Day 1932, the L.T.H.C. carried a motion which pointed out that Anzac Day should be a day of remembrance, not celebration.<sup>107</sup>

Definite anti-fascist opinion may have been communist originated and R.J. Brooks moved motions against war, fascism and imperialism in the H.T.H.C. in April 1933, all of which were carried.

The first mention of "front"-type anti-war and anti-fascist organization was in January 1934, when both H.T.H.C. and L.T.H.C. received letters from an Anti-Fascist Council.<sup>108</sup> The L.T.H.C. letter resulted in the carrying of a motion protesting against the Reichstag fire trial. As was the case with F.O.S.U., there is no direct link of the Anti-Fascist Council with the names of known communists. Because M.A.W.A.F. had already been established by the C.P.A. on the mainland, and because of similarities with known Tasmanian "fronts" it may be safely assumed that the Anti-Fascist Council was another

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<sup>105</sup> *Mercury*, 7/2/31, and *supra*, p.74.

<sup>106</sup> *Voice*, 22/8/31.

<sup>107</sup> Minutes, L.T.H.C., 27/4/32.

<sup>108</sup> Minutes, H.T.H.C., 4/1/34 and *Mercury*, 4/1/34.

"front" of the C.P.A. In August of the same year a meeting, which formed an Anti-War Council, was poorly attended.<sup>109</sup> Delegates from the C.P.A., Douglas Credit and the Henry George League attended. The Council was to affiliate with the International Anti-War League. The "front" policy, of using well-known names, was reflected at this meeting where the veteran radical A.E. Kaye, was appointed, along with the communist, S.F.J. Wilson, to organize the next meeting. Even before the Council was founded, a critic had "exposed" it as being a communist organization.<sup>110</sup> Like other "fronts" these two seem to have dwindled away rapidly and, although anti-war and anti-fascist opinions were expressed and motions carried at U.W.M. and U.C.W.U. meetings, as well as at the State Conference of unemployed organizations in 1935, separate organized "fronts" in this field seem to have failed.<sup>111</sup> Public opinion on the matter was growing, however, and an anti-war faction developed in the L.T.H.C., supported by V.J. Shaw, M.H.A., who felt war caused workers to suffer.<sup>112</sup>

Like anti-war and anti-fascist sentiment, anti-imperialism was expressed at U.W.M. and C.P.A. meetings and, in March 1933, L.T.H.C. received a letter from a League Against Imperialism. The only other mention of this organization seems to have been by the critic who "exposed" the Anti-War Council as communist. He said that the Council was the same group as the former League Against Imperialism, indicating that by July, 1934, this organization was defunct.<sup>113</sup> It, too, seems

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/8/34.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/7/34.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/8/34, p.5; 7/12/34; 30/8/35, p.3; 21/9/35, p.13.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 19/9/35, p.10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/7/34.

to have had an unsuccessful career in Tasmania.

Successful "front" action in Tasmania seems to have been restricted to U.W.M., if success is to be measured in terms of viable organizations. Nevertheless, the material to be dealt with by other "fronts" was propagated so that anti-war, anti-fascist, pro-free speech, anti-imperialism, pro-Soviet and generally militant opinion was fairly widely expressed and was not restricted to the leaders of

C.P.A. and U.W.M. That the other "fronts" were not successfully established as such may be due to a general shortage of non-communist radicals prepared to lead such organizations and who were not already involved in other organizations which took up a lot of time. On the other hand it may be that, because communists were so openly connected with most of the organizations, individuals were wary of having their names connected with them, especially in view of the attack on Shaw in 1931 for his association with communists. Finally, there is the fact that, of all the issues brought before Tasmanian society by the "front" organizations, unemployment was the only one which directly, immediately and vitally affected thousands of Tasmanians. This influence was both direct and indirect. A large number of persons, because of the misery in which they lived, expressed dissatisfaction which could be harnessed by enterprising organizers such as the U.W.M. leaders. Indirectly, it aided conservative attitudes among the rest of the working class. They saw the wretchedness of the unemployed and the need to hold on to their own jobs. Radicalism might threaten such jobs. It seems to have been the case that the most outspoken left-wing union leaders were unemployed. Brooks, Allen and Walker, who seem to have been the only openly communist or pro-communist trade

union leaders or delegates to the Trades Hall Councils, were all unemployed.

CHAPTER 4.SOME RESPONSES TO THE COMMUNISTS

The presence of an active communist minority in Tasmania meant that individuals and organizations within the community had to decide on the correct attitude towards such a party. Often enough, their decisions were assisted by open hostility towards them by the communists.

Because of its claim to be a working class party, the Labor Party had to establish its position with regard to the communists who also claimed that distinction, with the added proviso that they were the only real working class party. Relations between the two parties, as has been shown, were generally strained but there was a tendency for pro-left wing members of the Labor Party to be in some way associated with the communists even at a time when C.P.A. policy was to denounce the A.L.P. and its state branches as "social fascist".

Relations between the Labor Party and the extreme left wing were always something of a difficulty especially because of the shifting stance of the Labor Party regarding a socialization objective and internationalism, but also because the extremists often advocated revolutionary means to achieve socialization, and the Labor Party contained a more conservative element opposed to such means. Relations with socialist parties to the left depended on which group was dominant within the Labor Party. At times when a more conservative element was dominant, extreme left wingers would be forced to leave the party if they wanted to express radical views.

The C.P.A. had other problems as well regarding the A.L.P. Comintern directives had advocated "united front" policies after it had become apparent that world revolution was not to come in the early 1920s, but had imposed such ludicrous conditions for such a "united front" that the belief became prevalent within the Labor Party that the C.P.A. was out to destroy it, and partly because of Comintern directives, rules were made in 1924 forbidding communists from being A.L.P. members.<sup>1</sup> At the same time a more conservative element gained ascendancy in the Labor Party, as was evident in Tasmania with the shift of party control away from the radical industrialists into the hands of the more conservative political group which had founded the party there.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Tasmanian Labor Party was in opposition from 1928 to 1934, the performance of the Scullin Federal Labor government affected the party in Tasmania as well, so that the splits which rent the party on a national basis also disrupted it in Tasmania. Tasmania, like the rest of the nation, suffered severe unemployment and saw the unedifying spectacle of a supposedly working class government following policies which increased unemployment and decreased working class living standards.<sup>3</sup> The Lang solution of default on interest payments to overseas lenders, also had support in Tasmania so that at the time of the 1934 state election, practically the whole parliamentary Labor Party was opposed to reunion with the Federal Party which was still split over the Lang issue. T.M. Jude, secretary of the Tasmanian branch of the A.W.U., was one of only two or three persons standing

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-31, and p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> McRae, *op.cit.*, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, pp. 24-25.

as Federal Labor candidates in opposition to the pro-Lang group in that election.<sup>4</sup>

It was at this divided party that accusations of "social fascism" were directed. It is difficult to establish exactly when the rift between the Labor Party and the communists became an important enough issue in Tasmania to warrant Labor Party members dissociating themselves publicly from communists. C.P.A. membership for the whole of Australia had declined to 280 by 1925. A.L.P. rules against communism must have been very much a non-issue during the years immediately preceding the Great Depression, especially in Tasmania, where, even after the outbreak of the Depression, C.P.A. membership seems to have been very small.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it was because there was no Tasmanian precedent for conflict between communists as such and the Labor Party that it was not until early 1931 that it became a public issue. It may also be that it was not until late 1930 that there was any public mention of a Communist Party in Tasmania at all.<sup>6</sup> If this was the case there would be no problem arising from Labor Party men speaking to the unemployed alongside men later known to be communists, or leading deputations from organizations controlled by those men. That only vague notions were available in late 1930 to distinguish communists from Labor Party leftists is given weight by the editorial in *The Mercury* in December 1930, which attributed the fires to persons influenced by the preaching of sedition and destruction. This was a direct consequence, it was claimed, of members of parliament and others "preaching the doctrine that the root of all difficulties and troubles is to be found in capitalism". The editorial went on to

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<sup>4</sup> *Mercury*, 12/5/34, p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *Supra*, p.40.

<sup>6</sup> *Supra*, p.25.

name some of those members of parliament: Lang, Theodore and Ogilvie.

If it was possible as late as December 1930 to closely link "seditious utterances", made by persons later identified as communists, with the mild socialism followed by the Labor Party, by February 1931 the situation had changed considerably. For one thing, the daily press had already publicly identified Duncan as a communist and had associated the leaders of the Launceston U.W.M. with him.<sup>7</sup> There had also begun, in Launceston, street meetings held under the auspices of the C.P.A.<sup>8</sup> The first public indication came in the previously mentioned letter to *The Examiner* quoting the anti-communist section of the A.L.P. rule book and censuring V.J. Shaw, M.H.A., for his association with known communists.<sup>9</sup> The writer, who signed himself "Anti-Red" said "... I and other Laborites want to know what the A.L.P. executive is going to do about the matter ... is it going to tell Mr. Shaw to become conversant with the rules of the A.L.P. and seek better company?"<sup>10</sup> In a second letter five days later, the same writer went further, "... From enquiries made of men well up in the movement, I have gathered that Mr. Shaw has contravened Rule 15, portion of which reads ' ... or shall do any act or thing calculated to injure the party.'<sup>11</sup> While there is no proof that "Anti-Red" really did have associates "well up in the movement", the letter itself must have brought to the attention of Northern Tasmanian Labor people the implications of association with communists.

That this challenge was not immediately taken seriously by all Labor men is evident from the report on the W.E.A. state conference

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<sup>7</sup> *Supra*, p. 25 and *Mercury*, 31/1/31

<sup>8</sup> *Supra*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>9</sup> *Supra*, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Examiner*, 10/2/31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/2/31, p.9.

a few days later. Some were against co-operation with communists in the matter of freedom of speech. These included H.A. Nichols, M.L.C., F.R. Edwards, M.L.C., and James Counsel, while Dwyer-Cray, W. Pott, C.R. Baker, N.H. Eyre, S.F. Limbrick, W.A. Woods and C.A. Lamp, while not supporting the Communist Party, agreed with the argument that restriction on communist literature might be used by extreme conservatives to restrict Labor Party left wing voices. Of course, to come out in favour of free speech for those of any persuasion was not to condone contacts between Labor Party members and communists, and it may have been that the Labor Party was already moving towards a firmly anti-communist position in Tasmania.

In early 1931 it was not so much the revolutionary nature of communist attitudes that rankled with Labor Party men. Indeed, at the W.E.A. conference, W.A. Woods, M.H.A., said that some Labor Party speeches might be termed revolutionary. This is supported by an editorial in *The Voice* in January 1931 in which the editor, Dwyer-Gray, was criticizing the Federal Labor government for allowing the 10% wage cut to occur under a supposedly working class government. Referring to the Arbitration Court, he went on to say "... if that is law, then the sooner we defeat law, the better".<sup>12</sup> Evidently little was made of Shaw's association with the known communists of U.W.M. until other factors were brought to bear, apart from the fact of their communism and the revolutionary nature of their views, for during the month following "Anti-Red's" letter, Shaw continued to preside over meetings of U.W.M. and to lead its deputations.<sup>13</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that the dominant note of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Voice*, 31/1/31.

<sup>13</sup> *Mercury*, 7/3/31, p.7 and *Examiner*, 31/3/31.

Labor Party in Tasmania in the early years of the depression was radical socialism, and were it not for the necessity of the C.P.A. in Tasmania to follow Comintern instructions and reject joint approaches with the Labor Party, instead branding them "social fascist", co-operation between the two bodies may have grown further, perhaps even resulting in a very strong communist element within the Labor Party. The radicalism within the A.L.P. is most clearly demonstrated by the attitudes of Shaw and Mahoney towards co-operation with communists in U.W.M., but is also clear in Dwyer-Gray's editorials in *The Voice*. The tendency of *The Voice* was to push a radical line which seems to have been a mixture of socialism and Lang radicalism, and may have emanated from an insufficient understanding among Tasmanian Labor Party members of the nature of Lang's approach. Such confusion about Lang was widespread, with Lang being accused variously of communism and fascism by left and right wing opponents. Lang had achieved some public support by taking steps that could be described as socialist, but in reality held a confused position that in his most radical phase was closer to the "native radicals" or Douglas Credit.<sup>14</sup>

*The Voice* consistently attacked the Scullin government for its permitting the increase of unemployment and the decrease in living standards, and saw it as a paradox that capitalism was collapsing due to its inherent defects while Labor was in retreat.<sup>15</sup> It came out in support of Lang's plan to default on interest payments, and seems to have expressed a majority view of the Labor Party, for the Tasmanian Labor Party joined in the revolt from the Federal Labor Party which

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<sup>14</sup> Jupp, J., *Australian Party Politics*, Melbourne, 1968, Melb.Uni. Press, p.96, and Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>15</sup> *Voice*, 29/8/31.

was in chaos as a result of the lack of Labor confidence in the Scullin ministry.<sup>16</sup> Even as late as June 1934, when Labor won government in Tasmania, reunion had not been achieved with the Federal Labor Party, so that *The Mercury* was able to brand the Tasmanian Labor Party as a Lang party at a time when Lang was in retreat in New South Wales.

The pro-Lang attitudes were accompanied by a swing towards socialism. The 1932 state conference of the Labor Party came out with a resolution to give prominence to the socialization plank of the party platform, and apparently the conference decided that capitalism had failed.<sup>17</sup> The strongly socialist attitude would fit in with prevalent views that what Lang was doing in New South Wales was in the name of socialism.<sup>18</sup>

That Tasmanian Laborites were strongly socialist in the early depression and that on that basis they had no real fight with communists, is evident from the first public confrontation recorded by the press between members of the strongly Laborite L.T.H.C. and delegates of U.W.M. known to be communists in April 1931. A.J. Davies, before going on to criticize the communists, admitted they were putting over some good working class material at their meetings.<sup>19</sup>

The real confrontation between the Labor Party and the communists was over the attacks made on the Labor Party by communists, and not over questions regarding capitalism and socialism. In Tasmania, no effort was made by the communists to exploit the rift between the Federal Labor Party and the local branch, and all alike were branded

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 31/10/31, and 28/5/32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29/3/32.

<sup>18</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.14.

<sup>19</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31.

"social fascist". Davidson's remark, that the failure to distinguish between Labor leadership and rank and file membership of the Labor Party damaged the progress of the C.P.A., certainly seems to apply in this context.<sup>20</sup> The exact beginning of open criticism of the Labor Party in Tasmania is difficult to pinpoint. The term "social fascism" does not seem to have been used a great deal before February 1931, when Norris is recorded as applying it to the proposed system of camps for the unemployed at relief projects. He said such schemes were called "social fascist" in the U.S.A., and the criticism was against the Nationalist government which was advocating them, not the Labor opposition.<sup>21</sup> Norris does not seem to have been aware of the Comintern intentions regarding the application of the word, for surely the Nationalist government could be openly branded "fascist" rather than "social fascist", which term was meant for deceptively socialist parties, meaning the Labor Party.

There is no readily available evidence to show that the term "social fascist" was used against the Tasmanian Labor Party early in 1931, but the attitudes associated with it were very obvious. As was seen, the communists went out of their way to disrupt Labor election meetings for the forthcoming state elections, so that by the end of April such disruption and the distribution of anti-Labor literature advocating the informal vote was important enough to fragment relations between U.W.M. and the L.T.H.C.<sup>22</sup> The L.T.H.C. delegates tried to point out to White, the communist U.W.M. delegate, that the attitude of his party was inconsistent because, although V.J. Shaw, M.H.A.,

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<sup>20</sup> Davidson, *op.cit.*, pp. 62-63, et *supra*, p.21.

<sup>21</sup> *Mercury*, 7/2/31.

<sup>22</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31 et *supra*, p. 35.

was closely co-operating with U.W.M. in working for the unemployed, they were advocating an election policy which if followed would lose Shaw his seat. White's reply was that there was nobody he admired more than Shaw, who was the shining light of the Labor Party, "... but that is a personal view. He is a member of the Labor Party, and we are opposed to the Labor platform. We cannot individualise or discriminate".<sup>23</sup> The refusal to individualise, or discriminate, highlights precisely Davidson's remark about the failure to distinguish between A.L.P. leadership and rank and file membership, a kind of "prophets do not come out of Galilee" approach.

The discussion at the L.T.H.C. meeting brought editorial comment from *The Examiner*. "Why the sudden change (in attitude to the communists)? Because of the election, and the Labor Party has been caught sleeping." The editor did not go so far as to try and accuse Labor of riding the wave of public opinion against the communists which had resulted from the Anzac Day incident a few days earlier, although he may have hoped the public would get that impression.

Whether it was the isolation of north from south or whether it was that the Labor Party simply could not afford not to attend, a conference on unemployment held at the Hobart Trades Hall in July 1931 was attended by prominent Laborites, both from the political wing and the H.T.H.C., including Dwyer-Gray, J.J. Dwyer, M.H.A., W. Pott, E. Brooker, P. Walters, J. Lewis and P. O'Neill.<sup>24</sup> The conference had been proposed by U.W.M. and was to consist of delegates from U.W.M., H.T.H.C., A.L.P. Leagues and trade unions, as well as interested

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<sup>23</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/31 and *Mercury*, 30/4/31.

<sup>24</sup> *Mercury*, 2/7/31, p.10.

individuals. The conference caused some controversy especially as a result of a report in *The Mercury* that a motion, criticising capitalism and maintaining that the only solution to the problem of unemployment was for unemployed and workers to co-operate and struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' state, had been carried unanimously. A correspondent criticised "Dwyer-Gray and his pro-Russian friends" and said, regarding a public rally at the Domain proposed by the meeting, that "... it is certainly to be expected that the authorities will exercise the strictest supervision over the activity of these enemies of our social and political life".<sup>25</sup> Dwyer-Gray was forced to write in reply that the "overthrow of capitalism" motion had not been carried unanimously, and Pott in particular had felt it might be misconstrued. He went on to openly repudiate the communist way to socialism. "The A.L.P. objective contemplates the abolition, not the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a co-operative commonwealth by constitutional means. To relieve unemployment ... nobody need imagine we are going to have a barricade revolution".<sup>26</sup>

The conference attempted to become a semi-permanent arrangement and meetings were held until early August when confrontation between the more extreme group with which Mahoney continued to associate himself, and the more conservative group caused U.W.M. to dissociate itself from the conference.<sup>27</sup> Part of the cause of ill-feeling leading to this was the attitude of U.W.M. that it should be able to add as many members as it liked to deputations arranged by the conference.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 3/7/31 p.6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/7/31, p.3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6/8/31, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 18/7/31, p.3.

A similar pattern in Launceston added to ill feeling between communists and Trades Hall delegates in that city.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly before the conference collapsed, V.J. Shaw, M.H.A., moved his adjournment in the House of Assembly to draw attention to the Launceston freedom of speech issue. Despite the impending collapse of the unemployed conference, all five Labor members who spoke for the adjournment were in favour of free speech for the communists although they were careful to point out that it was not that they supported communists but a principle was involved. Dwyer-Gray said that the communists should not be allowed to make martyrs of themselves, while Mahoney said that freedom of speech was one of the basic principles of the constitution.<sup>30</sup>

There was no reported public response by the Tasmanian Labor Party to the C.P.A. denunciation of both factions of the Labor Party (Lang and Federal) in its 1932 Federal election platform put forward at Hobart in December 1931.<sup>31</sup> This is unfortunate because the communists had a moral advantage over the Labor Party because of the division. Would the Lang-inclined group in Tasmania come out and attack the communists for their criticism of the "social fascist" Federal Labor Party?

1931 was the most interesting year in regard to relations between the Labor Party and the communists. That some association between the Trades Halls and the communists continued after that year may have been due to the left-inclined attitudes of some Trades Hall delegates, and this also seems to have been the case with Shaw and

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/7/31, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 30/7/31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/12/31, p.9.

Mahoney who still from time to time associated with U.W.M. or "front" activities. It may also have reflected a moral need on behalf of the Councils to demonstrate they were doing something for the unemployed, and if they could not successfully launch their own unemployment organizations, this necessarily meant some liaison with U.W.M. which, until 1934 at least, seems to have been the only effective unemployed organization.

By 1933, the earlier repudiation of communism by individuals in the Labor Party had spread to a repudiation at conference level. In what looks like a response to early communist probes for a new "united front", the conference carried a motion that "this conference and the Tasmanian Labor Party stands for unity, but the Communist Party has no faith in democracy. It believes in dictatorship ... This conference denounces violence and disavows all association with communism".<sup>32</sup> That Dwyer-Gray proposed the motion is an indication that his changing views on socialism and communism might be used as a barometer of the majority opinion in the Tasmanian Labor Party (although his attitude on communism in its party and revolutionary form remained basically fixed). His attitudes seem to have shifted regularly. In August 1932, he was quoting Marx regarding capitalism's self-destruction.<sup>33</sup> It has already been seen that in 1932 he was advocating a Lang plan for Tasmania.<sup>34</sup> In April 1933, he went so far away from the Marxist formulation of socialism as to claim that the world crisis was moral and only incidentally economic.<sup>35</sup> By March 1934 he had apparently become enamoured with Douglasite ideas sweeping the state, for he devoted considerable attention to discussion of

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<sup>32</sup> Minutes A.L.P. state conference, 25/4/33.

<sup>33</sup> *The Voice*, 13/8/32.

<sup>34</sup> *Supra*, p.91.

<sup>35</sup> *Voice*, 1/4/33.

community credit, to be achieved through a revised version of the Commonwealth Bank.<sup>36</sup> Frequent references to Douglas Credit were made in *The Voice* about this time. Dwyer-Gray hailed the 1934 state election victory of Douglasite candidates as "... the beginning of the end for the present system."<sup>37</sup> Several of the members of Ogilvie's Labor government expressed Douglasite views, and it has already been seen that Ogilvie, rather than recognize representatives from the communist led U.W.M., preferred to deal with U.S.N. and Unemployed Central Council delegates, and these bodies had close connections with G.S. Carruthers, an independent Douglas Credit candidate who, by siding with Labor, helped Ogilvie establish a government.<sup>38</sup>

A conclusion to be drawn from this is that the Labor Party had no clear cut views on socialism, and that the communist criticism that the Labor Party simply did not have the theoretical equipment to implement socialist solutions, seems to hold for Tasmania.<sup>39</sup> If Dwyer-Gray is taken as representative of the Labor Party (though admittedly he stood more to the left of the party than some), his varying mixture of Marxism, Langism, Douglas Credit and other more or less socialist traditions, along with a considerable slice of Christianity, shows the difficulty of establishing the exact position of the Labor Party with regard to socialism. The only clear trends seem to have been a rejection of party type communism and violent revolution, and opposition to the very conservative Nationalists.

Perhaps it was fortunate for the communists that the Labor Party rejected "united front" overtures. The result was a continuation of

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3/3/34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 16/6/34.

<sup>38</sup> *Mercury*, 20/7/35, p.9.

<sup>39</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.24.

criticisms of the Labor Party in the 1934 state and federal elections. This gave Ogilvie the excuse he needed to be selective about who he accepted as representatives of the unemployed.<sup>40</sup> For the communists it meant that when the government did not immediately begin to implement election promises such as a rent allowance, it would not be disloyal to any alliance to publicly criticise the government. The unemployed had a vested interest in a rent allowance and the unedifying spectacle resulted, of mass meetings of working class unemployed criticizing a supposedly working class Labor government.<sup>41</sup>

Strong criticism of the Ogilvie government had also occurred at the state conference of unemployed organizations in September 1935 and the alternative organization of unemployed through Douglasite and Toc H leaders must have suffered a blow when the Douglasite members of the Labor Party were brought into line at the 1935 state conference of the Labor Party, by an emphasis on party rules regarding membership of other parties. This seems to have been a demonstration of the same hard facts faced by the Federal Scullin government in 1928. Theorising was all very well while in opposition. Once in power, Labor governments had to face the fact that they governed a capitalist state. Inevitably they decided to manage by making the best of the capitalist system rather than attempting to move radically towards socialism or whatever other elixir was prominent in the party at that time.

The communists had one fact in their favour throughout their relations with the Labor Party in Tasmania. To the public they must have appeared consistently opposed to that party, and, unlike the

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<sup>40</sup> *Mercury*, 11/12/34 and 24/9/35, p.9.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 15/10/35, p.9.

Labor Party, they always advocated the same solution to the problems of society, that is, communism. During the worst part of the Depression, unemployment was a consistent problem among the working class. If the communists could never hope to win government in Tasmania, they were always in a position to criticize the government, whether it was Nationalist or Labor, especially regarding unemployment. It followed, therefore, that the unemployed tended to rally around communist leaders rather than the Labor Party. It would be unrealistic, however, to push this view too far. The C.P.A. in Tasmania won 800 votes in 1934 but there were approximately 3,500 unemployed. Whether or not the unemployed supported communist leaders of the unemployed organizations, a great majority of them must have held more moderate political views than those leaders.

Because positive anti-communist activity seems to have concentrated among ex-servicemen and militia, they make an interesting example of extreme conservative responses to communism. While groups such as the R.S.S.I.L.A claimed to be non-political, their responses to communism resulted in members coming out with pro-Empire, pro-monarchy, and even pro-fascist statements.

Part of the Leninist approach to the Russian revolution had been to condemn World War I as an imperialist war. Lenin had hoped that the horror of the war would be seen as resulting from capitalism and imperialism and that it would trigger off revolutions in other countries as well as Russia. Even after the realization by Comintern that world revolution would not occur in the early 1920s, the concept of international working class solidarity was still encouraged, and inherent in this was a clash with the concepts of national loyalty

and service to the flag inherent among a great number of those who had served in the Great War. Criticism of the war as imperialist and capitalist was tantamount to saying that those who had given their lives had done so in the service not of right, but of folly. The World War, and especially Gallipoli, played an important part in Australia's self-image, and it is not surprising that the communists were soon accused of preaching sedition. The conflict over Australia's role in the war was quickly seen as a continuation of old issues which had divided Tasmanian society during and immediately after the war, with suggestions that measures like the War Precautions Act be revived to prevent "... a worse calamity than war with foreign nations, to wit, a state of civil war or revolution". The suggestion was made by a correspondent to *The Examiner* who was criticizing White for offering the workers a clear-cut choice between the Union Jack, standing for capitalism, and the red flag, standing for working class freedom.<sup>42</sup>

An early indication of the strife to come was the wording of a banner carried in a demonstration of unemployed in August 1930 which read, "Heroes in 1914, Paupers in 1930".<sup>43</sup> This suggested that the country owed more than unemployment to those who had suffered the horrors of war. Daft and others, who organized the demonstration, attributed unemployment and poverty to capitalism and other banners carried in the procession said as much. By November the same year, *The Mercury* was already attacking the literature issued in the name of the unemployed regarding the Beaconsfield forestry relief works

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<sup>42</sup> *Examiner*, 6/2/31 and *Mercury*, 7/2/31.

<sup>43</sup> *Mercury*, 23/8/30.

as "seditious".<sup>44</sup> In the wake of the December 1930 fires in Hobart, *The Mercury* attributed the fires to "the king's enemies", going on to link them with radical leaders of the unemployed and Labor Party politicians.

February 1931 saw very clear statements by communists on the war question reported in the press, along with the first public indications of organized opposition to such sentiments. At a U.W.M. meeting, a motion was carried denouncing the proposal to establish a camp for unemployed single men at Beaconsfield as "... part of the imperialistic warlike preparation to create a military psychology in the minds of the younger men" .<sup>45</sup> Daft said that there had been a tremendous amount of jingoism propagated in the press recently, and Baden-Powell (the founder of the Boy Scouts) was coming [to Tasmania] to pump imperialistic dope into the people.

It was at a street meeting later the same day that White made his attack on the Union Jack, and towards the end of the meeting a section of the crowd drowned out the speakers by singing the National Anthem.<sup>46</sup> Whether this section came to the meeting as an organized body is unknown. The insinuations, especially in *The Mercury*, that the big fire in Launceston a week earlier had been the result of speeches at a similar meeting, no doubt attracted the large crowd present, and the singing of the anthem could have resulted from a lead by one or two individuals. Nevertheless, after that date organized anti-communist protest appeared at the street meetings. Such protest was no doubt stimulated by letters to the press such as one published in late March 1931 signed "Freedom within Limits".<sup>47</sup> This writer said

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 22/11/30, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7/2/31 47.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Examiner*, 23/3/31, p.5.

that those who had styled themselves communists had given vent to disloyal utterances and spoken contemptibly of "... our King, our Empire and our Flag". He saw this as an insult to patriots and said it was time to protest against the apathy that allowed this abuse.

Probably the biggest incentive for the rallying of anti-communists, and the one which gave it its military orientation, was the Anzac Day incident in 1931. Apparently, earlier in the week before Anzac Day, "disparaging remarks" had been made against the returned soldiers by communist speakers at a street meeting. Somebody took the trouble to write a letter to the R.S.L. that the red flag and certain literature was being displayed at the house occupied by Daft and White. A meeting of soldiers, past and present, was addressed by speakers who said that the red flag stood in opposition to all that was sacred, and its display on Anzac Day was an insult to the Union Jack and those who had fallen. Some even suggested that the communists be thrown in the river. About 80 ex-servicemen and large numbers of militia, formed up in ranks and marched to the house, took the flags amid minor hostilities, and later marched to the Anzac Day Sports and burned the flags.<sup>48</sup> The sequel came a week later with a further organized rally of military men against the communists at a street meeting at which the previously mentioned threatening ultimatum was read.<sup>49</sup>

In the following weeks, somewhat hysterical attitudes seem to have prevailed. Firstly, an organization, possibly originating in the above mentioned rallies and formed "... to curb the activities of

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27/4/31 and *Mercury*, 27/4/31

<sup>49</sup> *Supra*, p.35 and *Mercury*, 2/5/31, p.7.

avowed communists", felt threatened enough to request greater police protection. In view of the probably small numbers of communists in Tasmania, this might seem rather ludicrous.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, from the discussion at the L.T.H.C. meeting at which the communists were reproached for their attitude to the Labor Party, it seems that the communists were well versed in smear tactics, and it may be this threat that the anti-communists had in mind.<sup>51</sup> The other possibly hysterical attitude was summed up by a Nationalist member, Murphy, in the debate on Shaw's Freedom of Speech adjournment in the House of Assembly. He said that the L.C.C. was justified in its refusal to permit communists to speak in reserves because recent incidents had shown the danger of a riot.<sup>52</sup> Whether hysterical or not, the excuse was a convenient one and used by the L.C.C. which had among its aldermen, men like E.E. Von Bibra, who also spoke out against the communists at the 1933 R.S.S.I.L.A. state conference.

What became of the anti-communist organization is unknown. There is no readily available evidence to connect it with a Reform League deputation to the L.C.C. at the end of 1931 which threatened to emulate the New Guard of New South Wales, if communists were allowed the use of the reserves.<sup>53</sup> The para-military suggestions may indicate that the organization of returned and present soldiers was intended. On Anzac Day 1932, a large crowd of returned soldiers and others gathered at Daft's house, evidently expecting action, but Daft was apparently able to placate the crowd by explaining that he and the Communist Party were not antagonistic to the spirit of Anzac Day, which

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<sup>50</sup> *Supra*, p.40 on possible numbers in Tas. C.P.A.

<sup>51</sup> *Examiner*, 30/4/41.

<sup>52</sup> *Mercury*, 30/7/31.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11/12/31, p.5.

represented something of a *volte-face* for Daft.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the military men were enough satisfied to hear Daft repudiate his earlier position. Daft explained that the placards, barbed wire and other defences had been erected in defiance of, and as a precaution against, the eviction contemplated by the owner of the house.

There is no available evidence to connect the pressing of sedition charges against Knox in May 1932 with direct pressure by ex-servicemen.<sup>55</sup> The charge was reported as the first of its kind in Australia since the Great War, and on this basis it might be connected with the revival, by some sections of the community, of wartime opinions against those who attacked Australia's role in the war.

Evidently Anzac Day 1933 brought a spate of anti-Anzac literature at Launceston and Burnie, bringing response from Chief Secretary C.E. James who reported that he had urged the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Police to take action.<sup>56</sup> That James was connected with the returned servicemen is evident from his association with Toc H. an ex-servicemen's organization.<sup>57</sup> The renewal of the issue brought comment at the state conference of the R.S.S.I.L.A. in May 1933.<sup>58</sup> C.D. Horne of Burnie, attacking the "disloyal" literature, said the "diggers" should not allow it to go on without forming some definite policy to "... kick it out of the country". Col. H. Foster of Campbell Town went so far as to urge that those who had fought for their country should also fight communism as was being done in Italy, Germany and other countries. Whether he or others present realized the implications of such an expression of sympathy for fascist regimes

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/4/32, p.5.

<sup>55</sup> *Supra*, p. 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Mercury*, 1/5/33, p.5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 2/6/32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5/6/33, p.5 and *Supra*, p. 44.

is not known. Others, including von Bibra, spoke in favour of the strengthening of the law, and a motion was proposed to amend the disqualification rules of the organization so as to refuse admission to ex-servicemen who were communists.

Despite the attack by G.W. Mahoney, M.H.A., on the R.S.L. sponsored Civil Patrol, set up in Hobart in 1932, as being like the New Guard and an insult to the police, there is no evidence that the Civil Patrol did anything to justify the "New Guard" allegation.<sup>59</sup> Though "law and order" was its aim, this did not apparently take the shape of anti-communist activity, but resulted in Civil Patrol night-watchmen keeping an eye on the properties of subscribers and generally assisting in police patrol duties.

If there is any evidence at all of conflict between the communists and returned servicemen after 1933, it is in the organization of the unemployed, where U.W.M. was now challenged by the rival U.S.M. under the leadership of G. Collis who was associated with the management of Toc H welfare projects such as a rest room for the unemployed, a club for single and unemployed girls, and the Toc H canteen.<sup>60</sup> The setting up of such projects may or may not represent a conscious effort on behalf of returned servicemen involved in Toc H to wrest the loyalty of the unemployed away from U.W.M. The girls' club in particular associated together the Laborite W. Pott, Collis and the Douglas Credit advocate, G.S. Carruthers, in a single committee under the auspices of Toc H, and it may be that further studies in this direction could reveal some interesting connections between the Labor Party and these other groups.

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<sup>59</sup> *Mercury*, 29/9/32.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/6/33, p.3, 4/8/33, p.8 and 16/8/33.

That the R.S.S.I.L.A. came out with a pro-fascist statement against communists is not an indication that fascism had arrived in Tasmania. It is more likely an example of the type of indirect support fascists might have received were they to have come out into the open in Tasmania. What it probably reflects most clearly is the lack of understanding of the nature of fascism that allowed it to become such a force in Europe between the wars. Such views did not necessarily produce fascism but they are certainly the type of sentiment fascists in Europe mobilized in their own cause. They do not necessarily reflect a lack of sympathy for the unemployed among ex-servicemen, for it is probable that many unemployed ex-servicemen supported these sentiments. A body of 150 unemployed who called themselves "loyal workers" rallied behind H.C. Barber, M.H.A., a Nationalist, at Launceston saying they were prepared to do any sort of work, go anywhere and accept the rates of pay offered by the government.<sup>61</sup>

As was the case with the Labor Party, attempts at organization by returned servicemen, first as a direct challenge to the communists, then as an attempt to win over the bulk of the active unemployed from their communist leaders, seem to have failed. The end of the first may have been due to a discreet withdrawal by communists from open confrontation, in favour of concentrating on literature and the organization of the unemployed. The second was probably due to the fact that despite good intentions and noble gestures, organizations of ex-servicemen could do no more than the Labor Party to eliminate unemployment in the short term. Nor could they criticize the Nationalist or Labor governments without expressing views which might force them to

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/11/31.

admit that many of the contentions of the communists were well founded. In any case both R.S.S.I.L.A. and Toc H purported to be strictly non-political and perhaps Dwyer-Gray's editorial comment on the failure of the Premier's Unemployment Committee in 1933 expressed a real truth. "The complete failure of the ... committee shows the uselessness of trying to do anything about unemployment without action along political lines".<sup>62</sup>

The response to the communists by the Trades Hall Councils, and thus by and large by their affiliated unions, has been dealt with in several contexts already, and so may be ignored as a separate topic. Instead, the relations of the conservative A.W.U. with the communists are of some interest. As was seen, Duncan had earlier been repudiated as a delegate of U.W.M. by H.T.H.C. on account of his being a member only of the non-affiliated A.W.U., which he proceeded to denounce.<sup>63</sup> A.W.U. had been persistently anti-communist on an Australian basis throughout the 1920s and its pressure on the A.L.P. had resulted in the failure of O.B.U. and the ending of Australian involvement in the Pan-Pacific Secretariat.<sup>64</sup> A.W.U. had also kept out of enthusiasm for Lang and for the A.L.P. socialization objective and resisted M.M.M. inroads with almost absolute success,<sup>65</sup> As it was one of the largest unions in Australia, this either reflects the conservative nature of a large proportion of the working class, or it may indicate some truth in Duncan's accusation of massive bureaucratization.<sup>66</sup> The accusation was to be repeated by Daft in 1935.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Voice*, 26/8/33.

<sup>63</sup> *Supra*, p. 58,

<sup>64</sup> *Supra*, p. 13,

<sup>65</sup> *Supra*, pp. 11,15 and 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Supra*, p. 71,

<sup>67</sup> *Mercury*, 20/9/35, p.12.

In Tasmania, too, A.W.U. was conservative to the point of controversy. This arose especially over the candidacy of T.M. Jude, state secretary of the A.W.U., for the House of Assembly in the 1934 elections. Jude was an endorsed Federal Labor candidate and stood in opposition to Tasmanian Labor candidates and was outspoken against Lang Labor which he accused the Tasmanian Labor Party of following, as did *The Mercury*.<sup>68</sup> He was not elected, but at the time Langism was still regarded as radicalism, and A.W.U. once again showed its conservatism by Jude's candidacy.

In 1930 Jude had denied Duncan's rather general criticism and denounced his attack as irresponsible.<sup>69</sup> In 1935 when the next open clash between A.W.U. and communists in Tasmania occurred, the charges levelled by Walker, Mullins, Daft and others were rather more specific. There was, it was claimed, a deal between the government and the A.W.U., whereby relief workers on such jobs as the Andover-Nala rail deviation, and the Tarraleah Hydro-electricity project were forced to join the A.W.U. and pay the stiff fee of £11.5.0 when they had only been on the site a very short time. Coercion of the men was claimed.<sup>70</sup> The government admitted its principle was that every man on a government job should become a unionist but said the men were given a three month, period of grace and then had to make a down-payment of 5/- only. The response to the government statement was a general attack on A.W.U. by Mullins, Daft, Shelley and Walker. Mullins said that on principle he would not join "... that scabby organization". Daft said A.W.U. was being used by employers to smash unionism and to "fleece" sustenance workers. Its bureaucracy cost £50,000 per year. Shelley added that

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 12/5/34, p.6 and May 1934, *passim*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 19/6/30, p 10

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 19/9/35, p.9.

whatever A.W.U. had been in the past, it had now gone over to the "boss class". Walker said A.W.U. had been used as a strike breaker.<sup>71</sup>

The repudiation of the conference by the Devonport unemployed included a dissociation by that body from attacks made on the government and A.W.U.<sup>72</sup> Jude's successor as state secretary of the A.W.U., H. Nichol, replied to the attack by pointing out that the men who had made the attack at the conference were communists who were using the unemployed, and labelled them traitors, though he did not specify what they had betrayed.<sup>73</sup> A.W.U., he claimed, had not coerced the men on relief jobs. It had banned "communists and traitors" from membership and was the greatest workers' fighting force in Australia. A threat by Howard, one of the U.C.W.U. delegates at the conference, to declare the relief jobs "black", was a challenge to the full force of the A.W.U., which would give them (presumably the communists) the same treatment as it gave the scabs of the 1890s.

The debate continued with a reply by Daft and Mullins, who denied a remark by J.C. Lamont of the Queensland A.W.U., that Tasmania had produced more "scabs" than any other state combined, and ridiculed the A.W.U. for having to go back 24 years and more to justify themselves as standing against "scabbing".<sup>74</sup> It was in the meantime that A.W.U. had become most corrupt. Daft and Mullins cited the New South Wales mining strike of the late 1920s to prove that A.W.U. had indulged in "scabbing" with the connivance of the mine owners. Other examples were given as well. Daft and Mullins concluded by denying they were members of the Communist Party. It is remarkable that this denial did not draw press comment. Perhaps the editors felt the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/9/35, p.12.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/9/35, p.13.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/9/35, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 20/9/35, p.10.

denial was sufficiently ridiculous to require no further comment. It has already been suggested that it is highly unlikely that Daft was no longer a communist by late 1935, only a year after his senate candidacy.<sup>75</sup>

The denial marked the end of the public debate between A.W.U. and the unemployed leaders. The A.W.U. clash of 1935 is perhaps an indication that in Tasmania, as on the mainland, unions were to take the place of the organized unemployed as the main field of communist activity among the workers (as opposed to anti-war and anti-fascist "front" activity which encompassed members of all parts of society).<sup>76</sup> The apparently favourable position A.W.U. enjoyed in relation to the Labor government in that compulsory unionism gave it a huge boost in members, the disciplining of Douglas Credit members of the government and the tough line taken by Ogilvie towards the organized unemployed, all reflect the gradual reconciliation of the Tasmanian Labor Party with the party on an Australian basis. The reconciliation was partly a matter of necessity, as the Ogilvie government was somewhat dependent on the vote of Becker, a Federal Labor member of the government. Lang had been repudiated and his plan was not to be adopted by the Tasmanian government even though it had found sympathy among its members. It had been A.W.U. pressure in the 1920s that had so often forced the A.L.P. to take a firmly anti-communist line. While the Labor government in Tasmania showed no signs of taking a pro-communist line, the apparent reconciliation with A.W.U. might at least indicate that in future the Tasmanian Labor Party would be even less likely to show sympathy to communists.

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<sup>75</sup> *Supra*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>76</sup> Gollan, *op.cit.*, p.77 *et passim*. Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.88 *et passim*.

The response of the community to the communists has been examined from the point of view of a non-communist working class party, a conservative union claiming to be a working class organization, and a conservative group not necessarily limited to one organization and not seeing itself as necessarily working class at all, that is the ex-servicemen. Limitations of time prevent the present writer from examining the responses of other community groups. No doubt a study of Nationalist Party attitudes would be of interest, although in many cases individuals in that Party held the same opinions as seem to have dominated the organized ex-servicemen and the debate on Shaw's adjournment is evidence of this.<sup>77</sup> Something of the same response seems to have prevailed in the municipal councils. An interesting area of study would be church attitudes to the communists. In general attitudes of groups in the community to the communists ranged from caution, with the possibility of limited co-operation at times, to complete and utter lack of sympathy, and no organization openly expressed itself as favouring communists, their ideas and their methods.

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<sup>77</sup> *Supra*, p.104 and *Mercury*, 30/7/31.

CHAPTER 5.CONCLUSION:  
COMMUNISM AND THE DEPRESSION:  
TASMANIA AND AUSTRALIA

The aim of this work was to show that, if it was weak in numbers, the C.P.A. in Tasmania during the Depression was of some importance and generally conformed to the trends followed by the C.P.A. on an Australian basis. To establish this Australian basis, recent works by Gollan and Davidson on the history of the C.P.A. were used. It will be useful to recount their basic findings for the worst Depression period, 1930-1935.

The basic government and business response to the Depression in Australia was to try and meet economic problems by lowering the cost of production. This necessitated cheaper government and lower wages and an increase of unemployment and hardship. The Scullin Labor Government could not improve on this and the result was a split in Labor ranks. There also followed a proliferation of economic theories, which aimed to explain the Depression and offered solutions to it, and the Lang plan and Douglas Credit represent two of these.

The C.P.A. saw the opportunity offered by the Depression and, at the same time, received specific instructions from Comintern on how to tackle the opportunity. The approach was to be the establishment of "front" organizations on a large scale, the implementation of Stalinism and "democratic centralism", and the repudiation of the Labor Party and other socialists as "social fascists".

Though quite a number of "fronts" were set up, only two achieved any real importance early in the Depression, that is, M.M.M. and U.W.M., while another two, F.O.S.U. and M.A.W.A.F., became more

relevant from late 1934 and thrived especially as the fear of a new European War grew.<sup>1</sup>

U.W.M. achieved a large membership and was an important recruiting ground for party members. M.M.M., while it remained numerically small, was able to establish control over many upper and lower echelon trade union positions and, as the Depression eased, this was to be of considerable importance in establishing C.P.A. control over several important trade unions.

Party and "front" growth was hampered in some ways by the "hard line" attitude against the Labor Party and other socialists, which did not distinguish between working class members of these bodies and their supposedly "social fascist" leaders. "Democratic centralism", M.M.M. calls for a general strike, the insistence on violent revolution and a shortage of experienced leaders also hampered C.P.A. growth in the early 1930s, but despite these setbacks, the Depression period was definitely one of growth for the party. Despite the lessening of emphasis on the traditional propagandizing role of Australian socialists, the period saw a vast growth in literature output and circulation both in the name of the party and by the "fronts", and this also contributed to party growth. The large number of votes won by C.P.A. election candidates was partly a result of effective propaganda.

Both writers note a definite change of attitude after 1933. Before 1933, strongly isolationist attitudes divided the C.P.A. from the Labor Party and other groups. After 1933, although "united front" approaches were rejected by the Labor Party, the lessening of attacks on that party and the growth of co-operation between U.W.M. and other bodies of unemployed tended to repair some of the damage extreme

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<sup>1</sup> For glossary of abbreviations see *supra*, p. (v).

isolationism had caused.

How does Tasmania bear up to these findings? Certainly, Tasmania suffered no less than other states from wage cuts and unemployment and unemployment figures reached 30% in 1932 and declined only slowly.<sup>2</sup> As was seen in the last chapter, divisions in the Labor Party were also manifested in Tasmania as were the economic theories such as the Lang plan and Douglas Credit, which were put forward in an attempt to break the grip of the Depression on the nation and especially on the Labor Party.

The C.P.A. response in Tasmania, as on the mainland, was to establish "fronts", as was seen in the second chapter, and although it has not been firmly established that Stalinism and "democratic centralism" were effectively implemented in Tasmania there is, nevertheless, good evidence to support that conclusion, as was seen in the first chapter. Daft's 1934 position of complete submission to the authority of the Central Committee of the C.P.A. is the best evidence for this.

The C.P.A. acceptance of the Stalinist "social fascism" theory was certainly made manifest in Tasmania in that, from early 1931, the Labor Party in Tasmania was complaining of communist attacks on its election candidates and the enmity between the organizations continued at least until 1935.

Successful "front" activity was limited to U.W.M. While this does not quite match the situation for Australia as a whole, where M.M.M. remained small but influential, it must be remembered that M.M.M. membership, as a whole, did not exceed 3,000 and it is possible that, on a per capita basis, this would have left too small and

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<sup>2</sup> *Mercury*, 12/10/35, p.13. The figures are trade union figures and these, for June 1933, tend to read slightly higher than those of the Census of June 1933 but the margin is only about 1%.

decentralised a group in Tasmania for it to be viable in that state. Despite this, there were communists in trade unions, and the number would increase as unemployment dropped, so that the role played by M.M.M. on the mainland, in infiltrating communists into trade unions, was carried out in Tasmania by individuals in the C.P.A. and U.W.M. Pro-Russian and anti-war and anti-fascist sentiment was also present in Tasmania, and, while once again small numbers and decentralisation may have prevented the success of formal "front" organizations for those purposes, there was support for the aims put forward by those "fronts" on the mainland and Daft and others encouraged such support, especially among the unemployed. In this context it is interesting that, even by 1937, when the war threat was much greater, E.M. Higgins, a former member of the Central Committee of the C.P.A. who was then living in Tasmania, found it impossible to establish a branch of a Peace Council in Tasmania due to public apathy and ignorance.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps these factors were also among the reasons for the apparent failure of anti-war, anti-fascist and pro-Soviet "fronts" before 1935.

In Tasmania, the strong criticism of the Labor Party did cause some setbacks, particularly in the loss of Trades Hall premises for U.W.M., and, despite the general C.P.A. policy shift regarding the Labor Party after 1933, such criticism was still evident: in the 1934 State elections and at the 1935 conference of unemployed organizations. It may have been the early manifestation of such criticism which ensured that of the "fronts", only U.W.M. thrived, for the other "fronts" required the co-operation of unionists and Labor Party members and perhaps the Tasmanian communists were just too well known, owing to

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<sup>3</sup> Roe, M., *E.M. Higgins: A Marxist in Tasmania 1936-38* unpublished paper, Uni. of. Tas., 1976.

the small size of the community, for this to be possible. After U.W.M. proved to be the sole going concern, non co-operation with the Labor Party, when it won government, could even be considered an advantage because the Labor government could then be attacked for its attitude towards the unemployed. If this was pursued as a policy, it would have been a risky business in the longer term for the communists at a time when unemployment was beginning to decline.

Too little is known of the implementation of "democratic centralism" in Tasmania to give any indication as to whether it hampered party progress in that State. The shortage of experienced leaders, which on the mainland caused problems in the training of recruits, was important in Tasmania for another reason. It meant that attempts to launch "fronts" were always associated with the same few names, so that those organizations were rapidly associated with communists.

That the party grew in Tasmania in the early 1930s cannot be firmly proven from the available evidence, although the continuing influence of communist leaders among the unemployed might be expected to show some result.

As on the mainland, attempts were made to propagandize, although apart from the circulation of mainland produced literature, this was on a small scale, in accordance with the apparent size of the party in Tasmania. Apparently only one election candidate was fielded in Tasmanian by the C.P.A. between 1930 and 1935 and, once again, this may be due to the smallness of the party in Tasmania. The considerable vote Daft won in 1934 testifies to the strength of that small party.

As was said above, mainland attempts to end C.P.A. isolationism

after 1933, though emulated in Tasmania, met with the same lack of success reported on the mainland and the earlier attitude of open criticism of the Labor Party seems to have followed the rebuff. This differs slightly from the mainland approach and may have been due to the heavy dependence of Tasmanian communists on the unemployment issue. The growth of co-operation between U.W.M. and its successor in Hobart, U.C.W.U., and other organizations of unemployed was, however, evident and matched similar trends reported on the mainland.

The similarities of the C.P.A. in Tasmania to the party on an Australian basis, as described by Gollan and Davidson, are themselves evidence that Tasmania was closely following the party on the mainland and drew on the mainland trends for inspiration. The futile attempts to set up "fronts" which existed on the mainland support this conclusion and point to the special difficulties experienced by the party in Tasmania. These were largely in the area of the small size and decentralization of the Tasmanian community. This would mean a proportionally small membership and also a proportionally small leadership so that a multiplicity of organizations would be difficult to staff and the same few individuals would be seen to be instrumental in all those organizations. Because of the small size of the community, it would have been more difficult for party members to retain anonymity and this was damaging to the "front" policy of hidden communist participation. It also meant that employed workers would be reluctant to join the party for fear of losing their jobs. The lack of anonymity may have been partly due to the personalities of communist leaders. Duncan, in particular, seems to have been outspoken to an extent that clearly revealed the connection between U.W.M. and the C.P.A.

The C.P.A. was, despite its small numbers, important in Tasmania during the period 1930-35. It aroused public opinion, drew big crowds to its meetings and demonstrated, in particular, the conservative attitudes dominant among municipal councils and ex-servicemen's organizations and also among members of the Nationalist Government. More important, however, was the relationship between the C.P.A. and the Labor Party and Trades Hall Councils, which together purported to be the voice of the labour movement. The response of these groups to the C.P.A. in Tasmania revealed the divisions within the Labor Party and its unstable and diverse attitudes to the question of socialization and, in particular, to short and long term solutions to unemployment. Not that the Labor Party made any policy changes or commitments as a result of C.P.A. pressures, apart from a definite repudiation of the C.P.A. and its more revolutionary ideas. The active presence of communists in the community did result in attempts by more conservative Labor Party members to discipline those who were inclined to sympathise with the communists.

Unemployment was the most important issue of the Great Depression. It was this that divided the Labor Party and resulted in the greatest disillusionment with the Labor Party among the workers. Already, by 1930, the A.L.P. was in disarray over the question of economic policy by which to tackle the issue, and critics, such as the communists, could claim that only the Bolshevik solution would work. With so many unemployed in a desperate position, it is not surprising that a great many chose to support leaders who offered something different to the apparently bankrupt policy of the Labor Party. For this reason, the communists in Tasmania made their presence felt most successfully in the organization of the unemployed and,

because of the great number of unemployed in Tasmania, it follows that whoever lead them was in a position of considerable importance in the state. Despite the distaste with which Labor Party leaders viewed the communists, they were forced to negotiate with them from time to time if only to prove that they were interested in the unemployed section of the working class.

The communists were to remain important, through their organization of the unemployed, as long as there was genuine immediate hardship among the unemployed. The failure of the Labor Party to immediately implement such promises as a rent allowance after it won government in 1934 meant that, for at least another year, communist leaders could hold the confidence of the unemployed.

The Ogilvie Labor government, despite communist claims to the contrary, was attempting to tackle the problem of unemployment, largely through the extension of relief works, and by 1935 employment was being gradually restored. It is to be expected that this would have resulted in the decline of unemployed organizations after 1935 and this was indeed the case on an Australian basis. Because nobody has yet attempted a study of communism in Tasmania for the period after 1935, it can only be assumed that this was the case in Tasmania as well. There are hints that communist activity in the trade unions was more important in the late 1930s.

Communism was an important force in Tasmanian society during the Great Depression. Large numbers of those who suffered most from the Depression blamed their troubles on capitalism and were ready to support those who wished to overthrow it by reform or even by revolution. With the Labor Party in disarray, this mean that the C.P.A.

was able to provide an alternative leadership, especially through the "front" organization, U.W.M. This followed similar trends on the mainland, with the individual characteristics of the Tasmanian activity of the C.P.A. and its "fronts" being provided mainly by the small size, isolation and decentralization of the Tasmanian community.

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