



The University of Newcastle
History Club
Department of History

**STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS
IN
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY**

No. 7

1982

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PREFACE

The 1982 issue of Student Research Papers continues the practice began last year of publishing the best first year essays on aspects of life and work in Newcastle 1938. As explained in the last issue, the History Department of the University, along with colleagues from the C.A.E., is involved in research and writing for the 1938 volume of The Australian Bicentennial History Project. We have been training selected students to interview Novocastrians about life in 1938 from an interview schedule arranged by the National Oral History Project connected with the 1938 volume.

Ten students were selected this year to carry out at least one interview (one student Barbara Gaudry interviewed four people) and then, on the basis of controlled background reading, to write an interpretative essay on the problems deriving from work (or the lack of it) which faced a family during 1938. The results, like last year, were varied and many of the same problems were encountered despite our ironing out many of the wrinkles associated with the 1981 project. These papers are valuable mainly as training exercises for our first year students. We have continued to publish them in this form because, in spite of their incomplete nature, they help to give outsiders a glimpse of the rhythms of private experience associated with life in Newcastle and the coalfields.

The papers by Gaudry and Owens deal with the lives of men in Newcastle heavy industry in 1938. Payne's paper also deals with that work experience but adds a dimension to do with the Anglican church and its handling of industrial issues. The effects of religion, of Primitive Methodism specifically, on the lifestyle and expectations of a mining family at Dudley is also highlighted in Curtis's essay. Finally, Deacon examines reflectively the meaning of a single person's life experience in 1938 within the wider pattern of 'history'.

These are tentative steps towards 'people's history'. We hope the Student Research Papers will contribute a little to the data for a social history of this area and with it, to the story of what it meant to be an Australian in 1938.

Sheilah Gray
Peter Hempenstall
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'IN A JOB' IN 1938:

A REFLECTION OF DEPRESSION EXPERIENCES

by Barbara Gaudry

Workers in the metal industries in Newcastle in 1938 faced a scene determined by the chronic depression conditions that had existed in the city for more than a decade. In this paper I will contrast the work experiences and attitudes of a skilled worker, Mr J, whose family connections and job training sheltered him from the harsh realities of the depression, with those of three other men who were not so fortunate. Mr J began his apprenticeship during the depression, and became a pattern maker, and member of a strong craft union: the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). The other interviewees became ironworkers, semi-skilled members of the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), which was devastated by the depression years. The experiences of the interviewees during the depression honed their attitudes and determined their work options and problems of employment in 1938.

To obtain an overview of the employment background of the interviewees, it is necessary to examine the position of metal workers during the depression. The depression period in Newcastle is notable for its length. For ironworkers the decades preceding the depression were marked by persistent under-employment and periodic chronic unemployment. The FIA, which covered the 'unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the metal manufacturing industries',¹ was a weak union hampered by very inadequate finances and employer victimization of its leaders and organizers. Its poorly paid and under-employed members were 'ever conscious that prevailing unemployment and their lack of skill made them easily replaceable'.² The union's problems were intensified during the depression and its membership declined markedly. Unemployment for metalworkers rose to over 30 per cent, with the level for ironworkers being higher than the other metal unions.³

During this time adults were replaced by low-paid juniors, illegal wage cuts occurred and 'skilled workers were downgraded into unskilled jobs made vacant by the dismissal of unskilled men'.⁴ The FIA did not have the financial resources to pay unemployment benefits to its members, nor to finance breach of award challenges in the courts. For many unemployed ironworkers the position was desperate. The dole provided by the state government reduced the recipients to poverty level and 'State sponsored relief schemes were not widespread until 1932'.⁵ Unemployment levels for ironworkers remained high well into the decade.

The members of the AEU were in a much stronger position. They were tradesmen whose skills were needed by industry, and they were protected by a strong craft union. The AEU, a wealthy union at the start of the depression, was probably the only union able to provide unemployment benefits to members throughout the depression. It paid out £360,000 throughout Australia between 1926-32.⁶ The union was also able to maintain the skilled award rates of its members by taking breach of award cases before the courts. Unemployment rates for the AEU peaked at 25.7 per cent

in 1931-32, and union membership had declined 20 per cent by 1933, after which recovery was rapid.⁷ However, during the depression working conditions of AEU members were eroded. 'Active unionists were usually the first to be retrenched...older men were sometimes sacked upon reaching an arbitrary age limit...and young men were often immediately dismissed upon completion of their apprenticeship'.⁸ Although the AEU could resort to legal challenges, strike action was impossible during the depression.

Mr J. began his working life in 1926 when he was fourteen years old. His dream of becoming an office worker was dashed because 'things were so bad money-wise'⁹ that his father put him to work on a fruit cart for 2/6 per week. During the year his father remarried and the new family connections had a profound effect on Mr J's life. His new step-grandfather was a foreman with Goninan and Co Ltd, and his two step-uncles also worked for that company. An invitation to become an apprentice patternmaker followed for the interviewee, and after two years in the stores he began his training in 1929. Although he had no desire to be a manual worker, fate was kind, for he soon grew to like his new job and it provided a haven from the severe effects of the depression. The work was interesting and as a qualified patternmaker Mr. J. enjoyed relatively high job security and monetary rewards.

After his apprenticeship Goninans kept him on for a year 'although most firms put their workers off straight away when there was no work'.¹⁰ In 1934 there was little work for patternmakers in Newcastle and Mr J. was forced into a migratory lifestyle for almost five years. Work was immediately available in Sydney with its large number of engineering shops and foundries. There he stayed with his aunt but returned to Newcastle whenever Goninans, or occasionally the BHP, telegraphed him that work was available. Mr. J. was eligible for unemployment pay from the AEU, but he chose to work in Sydney because 'when you are in the highest paid trade in the country you won't be happy with 10/- a week from the union'.¹¹

Despite the relative privileges of a sought-after trade, the forced migratory work pattern presented difficulties. The interviewee was 'unable to get continuity at any one firm...with a series of little jobs of three to six months in Sydney...and the remainder in Newcastle mainly at Goninans'.¹² The working hours were long, and with travel-time added, he often arrived home in Sydney close to 7 pm.¹³ Nor did he like Sydney. 'It was huge, everyone was a stranger to you'¹³ and he made no friends. He finally obtained permanent work with Goninans in 1939.

What then were Mr J's experiences of the depression? His family connections enabled him to get an apprenticeship in a trade that was interesting, well paid and provided constant work in hard times. His father and brother, both butchers, were also permanently employed, but his two sisters were not so fortunate. Neither ever had a job and went from home duties into marriage: an industrial town provided limited job opportunities for females even in more prosperous times. Trade apprenticeships in industry were not available and heavy work was a male domain. However the family was 'very fortunate with all the male members working and was able to get all that was needed'.¹⁴ Mr J's six or seven mates were not so lucky. When they left school they did not obtain apprenticeships and he 'cannot remember them ever having a job except for state relief work'.¹⁵ The interviewee was not personally aware of any other unemployed people, but he knew that hundreds of men waited at the BHP on call-up days hoping to get a job. His attitudes, developed by his family upbringing and work experience, are reflected in his total lack of interest in politics. When asked if the Government could have done more for the

unemployed he replied,

I was never interested in government or politics. The fact is I was working; maybe I was complacent, or just satisfied. I was working, I didn't have to worry about anyone else, why should I worry? If I had been out of work it would have been a different proposition.¹⁶

For Mr J. life at Goninans in 1938 was very pleasing. 'They were the best company to work for in Newcastle...they were a marvellous firm'.¹⁷ Unlike BHP, where he was told 'I was there to make patterns not to whistle',¹⁸ the work atmosphere was relaxed, and sufficient time was allowed for making the pattern. He thought the work conditions were good, although workers with catarrh or asthma were affected by the very fine timber dust in the pattern room. There was no lunch room or first aid station, nor any sick leave. Unemployment pay and annual leave were not provided by the company. Promotion opportunities existed and depended on seniority.

At lunch time the table tennis competition reigned supreme. Politics and union matters were not discussed, a pattern which Mr J. was familiar with from his home environment. 'Work conditions weren't ever discussed. There were no complaints, we did our job and went home'.¹⁹ According to the interviewee, this was not due to the unemployment situation, but 'because the men were satisfied with their wages and conditions...one thing I was pleased about in those days was that there were no strikes, there were no talks of strikes'.²⁰ In 1938 Mr J. was earning £6/19/- per week, £3 above the basic wage. His was the highest paid trade in the country and he was content with his lot.

The depression experiences of Mr T. were markedly different. In 1926 'he was on top of the world'²¹ earning £6/10/- per week as a qualified tradesman in the clothing trade. He had £120 in the bank, was second only to the manager on the promotion list, and was union delegate in a very happy 'family' workplace. When the depression hit the clothing trade in 1928 Mr T. and ninety girls were out of work.

Ten years of 'battling around for jobs'²² followed. A man 'who had never worked hard until then',²³ was glad to clean ships' bilges, shovel coal into trucks, load cases of bananas or work at any other casual jobs he could find. The times were very hard. At Sulphide Corporation, where he had his worst job, he saw men who had acid burns around their bodies shovelling fertilizer, and others who were suffering the effects of rock dust from inadequate ventilation. The men were afraid to complain in case this meant they would lose their jobs. Some of Mr T's jobs were for half a day, others were for a few months. During these ten years he cared for his mother who received a pension of £1 per week. With a weekly rent of 17/6 and the single man's dole at 5/- they were constantly in debt.

In 1938, Mr T., a former qualified tradesman and now aged 38 years, began work as an 'odd-jobs man'²⁴ at Goninans. At this time it was still 'very hard to get a job anywhere, and you had to know someone'.²⁵ Working conditions at Goninans were 'very bad'²⁶ with no lunch place or bath houses, and inadequate toilet facilities. The floors were of dirt and one building flooded in wet weather. However, the 'bosses' were very good. They had trained at Goninans and knew and understood the men. Mr T. was paid the basic wage of £3/19/- per week and worked an 8-3/4 hour day plus Saturday mornings. He became an overhead crane driver, which led not only to welcome overtime, but also to industrial deafness from the noise of the riveters working below.

The nature of his original trade profoundly affected the depression experiences and job opportunities for Mr T., and no doubt enhanced his sense of loyalty to Goninans with whom he finished his working days. He had great affection for the company. 'They were very good to the men and we helped them all we could'.²⁷ The company had finally provided him with job security.

The effects of the depression on the life of Mr A. were debilitating. The son of a share-farmer, and one of eight children, he left school in 1929, aged fifteen. For him 'there was no future'.²⁸ The family farm of 100 acres in western New South Wales was unable to support him, but provided a little seasonal work.

It was necessary to look elsewhere, but there were no jobs and there was nothing to train for. Thousands were walking about and things were so bad in the country you had to get out.... They were horrible years; you didn't know where to go or what to look for.... It destroyed your faith in the future. You had no objective...just aimlessly wandering around looking for work'.²⁹

Nine years of intermittent work followed; mainly seasonal farm work and occasionally government relief work. In 1938, when he was working on a Queensland banana plantation, a friend informed Mr A. about a job opportunity at Lysaght Pty Ltd. He moved to Newcastle, began work on the production line and earned £6/10/- per week. This company was almost totally unionised, having brought out a strong union workforce from the parent company in England.³⁰ When the work petered out Mr A. moved to Stewarts and Lloyds Pty Ltd which had opened in 1934. Throughout his first year he saw six to seven hundred men waiting at the gates for a vacancy. He found his size an advantage, for big men were selected to work the heavy machinery. In 1936 the Trades Hall Council reported that only 2 per cent of the men were unionised.³¹

The new company was well lit and had good amenities: eat houses, bath houses and a first aid room. However, the weekly wages were lower at £4/6/-, and the bonus system operated. Mr A. was very critical of this system, because while the 'speed-up' relaxed safety measures for the workers, it led to increased production at minimum cost for the company. The interviewee worked in a very hot environment where 'the men had to work half-an-hour on and half-an-hour off because of dehydration'.³² Furthermore, the noise of the heavy machinery led to industrial deafness in later years for Mr A. and many others. He found life on the production line 'soul destroying'. The worker was tied to the job and found it difficult even to go to the toilet because a relief worker had to be found to back up production. Shift work was very disruptive to the body clock, and later to family life. It was very difficult to establish a regular routine because of shift changes.³³

Although Mr A. found his production line worklife soul destroying, he feels he adapted to circumstances. Nine years of 'aimless wandering', his first real job at twenty four years of age, and no craft training severely limited his job options.³⁴ However, his upbringing and his depression experiences, developed in him a keen interest in politics and trade unionism and encouraged a 'militant attitude'. Mr A. became an ironworkers' organizer committed to improving the conditions and wages of the workers.³⁵

Mr H's experience was comparable. Most of his working life was spent as an ironworker and he was acutely aware of the problems this entailed. When he joined the BHP in 1924 a workmate asked him to join the FIA. He paid his 5/- union due and was warned 'not to tell because he would be sacked'.³⁶ According to the interviewee 'it was taboo to discuss work conditions or politics at work, because of the fear of dismissal or someone reporting to the boss'.³⁷ The BHP had a history of anti-union activity. It worked actively to suppress unionism. Men involved in union activity were dismissed, and a record of this was kept to prevent their re-employment by the BHP or its associated companies.³⁸ By 1936, only 25 per cent of the workers were trade unionists.³⁹

In 1926 Mr H. joined the Railways Department as a porter in the hope of finding the security and conditions of a 'government job'. The onset of the depression meant dismissal and two weeks' severance pay. Again he turned to BHP where he worked periodically until 1936. During slack times he was laid off and spent a total of three and a half years unemployed. The work conditions of this time reflect the impotent position of the trade unions. Mr H. reminisced:

The 48 hour week was spread over five and a half days. BHP ran a seven day roster with two days off per fortnight. The first day off could fall immediately after 'dog watch' and so become a wasted day. Shift workers received one penny an hour extra. There was no annual leave or sick pay. Safety equipment such as gloves, hats, boots and clothing were not provided. Many workers suffered health deterioration through the nature of their work.⁴⁰

In 1936 the interviewee moved to Stewarts and Lloyds, but was dismissed as a unionist, 'never to be employed again'.⁴¹ He moved to Commonwealth Steel Co Ltd where he worked as a furnace man for three years. Here the work was very heavy but not unhealthy, although it was necessary to take salt tablets because of the hot work. No protective clothing was provided by the company and the purchase of boots and clothing was a problem for Mr H. He wrapped his hands in hessian to protect them from the heat. The floors were of dirt, and no lunch rooms or bath houses were provided. The bonus system operated and junior workers were employed below the basic wage. In 1938 he was temporarily dismissed for refusing to work a faulty furnace.

The experiences of the workplace led to Mr H's strong allegiance to trade unionism. His experiences of the depression, heightened by his involvement with the Unemployed Workers' Movement, led to his 'disgust with the system' and a commitment to change.⁴²

For all of the interviewees the effects of the depression extended until 1938. An enforced migratory lifestyle still confronted Mr J. despite the financial rewards of the highest paid trade, and work conditions with which he was very content. For the other men the depression had been harsh; they had neither the skills nor training to negotiate in the workplace. 1938 was a watershed for two of them, for it represented permanent work after particularly long periods of unemployment. Work in 1938 was marked by a drop in status, work conditions and financial reward for Mr T., compared to his former heady days as a tradesman in the clothing trade. Life on the production line was soul destroying for Mr A., and for Mr H. there was no alternative to the continuing hard life of the ironworker. All of the problems of the non-craftsmen confronted these men in 1938, but at least they were 'in a job'.

FOOTNOTES

1. J.A. Merritt, "The Federated Ironworkers' Association in the depression", Labour History, No.21, p.48.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p.49.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, p.52.
6. G. Robinson, "Owing to the economic position: The Plight of Labour during the Great Depression", unpub. Honours Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1977, p.5.5.
7. T. Sheridan, Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia 1920-1972, Melbourne, 1975, p.106.
8. Ibid, p.112-3.
9. Interview with Mr. J., retired pattern maker, at Merewether, 27th and 28th July 1982, tape 1, side B, count 459.
10. Ibid, 1:A:255.
11. Ibid, 2:A:210. Note: The rate rose to £1 or 30/- later, according to the interviewee.
12. Ibid, 1:A:280.
13. Ibid, 1:A:373.
14. Ibid, 3:B:229.
15. Ibid, 3:A:192.
16. Ibid, 3:B:524.
17. Ibid, 2:B:19.
18. Ibid, 2:B:131.
19. Ibid, 2:A:164.
20. Ibid, 2:A:106.
21. Interview with Mr.T., retired overhead crane driver, at New Lambton, 16th August, 1982. (untaped interview).
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Interview with Mr.A., retired production line worker, at New Lambton, 12th August, 1982, (untaped interview).
29. Ibid.
30. Phone interview with Mr. McCarthy, FIA Official, 10/8/82.
31. The Workers Case Against the B.H.P., issued by the Trades Hall Council in 1936, p.11.
32. Mr. A., op.cit.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Interview with Mr.H., retired ironworker, at Merewether, 18th August, 1982, (untaped).
37. Ibid.
38. H.Hughes, The Australian Iron and Steel Industry 1848-1962, Melbourne, 1964, p.95.
39. Trades Hall Council, op.cit., p.11.
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41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.

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A TROUBLESHOOTER AND HIS ESTABLISHMENT CHURCH

by Murray Payne

Ever since Governor Phillip was instructed to give 'due observance to religion'¹ to the colony of New South Wales, the Church of England has dominated Australian church history and maintained a certain influence within our community. In 1938 as the largest religious group within Newcastle, the church claimed approximately 40% of the population as its adherents. In this industrial city the 'establishment church' attempted to grapple with industrial social problems such as unemployment in an indirect manner. Most of the Anglican churches were financially secure and had a conforming influence in their local community and especially within their youth work. The church's bishop was a man of stature who allowed a certain diversity of opinion to prevail despite the conservative nature of most church people. Since the majority of its members were industrialists, the church's success or failure depended largely on how it related to the working man. This paper is based on the reflections of Harold A., an industrial tradesman and active layman of the Anglican church in 1938.

Work at Stewart and Lloyds Ltd., (subsidiary of BHP), was very steady in 1938 as production was increasing rapidly. Harold A. was employed as a shift electrician and was nicknamed a 'troubleshooter', a man who could keep the welding machinery going so that production deadlines could be maintained.² This was very important to the employers in 1938 and for such electricians a generous bonus scheme operated to keep "breakdowns" to a minimum. Since the general recovery in BHP in 1933 production had gained a certain momentum due to increasing mechanisation. This was part of a deliberate speed-up programme by BHP which offered employees a bonus incentive for overtime work. Many trade unions did not welcome the speed-up rationalisation programme, which was enforced on workers. The Trades Hall Council pointed to its negative aspects: the low basic wage, the increasing accident rates and the general physical degeneration of ordinary workers were all attacked. According to trades unionists the management was able to take advantage of poor union membership to push through this programme.³ In contrast to this Trades Hall report, Harold A., both as a tradesman and a shop steward for his union, was able to describe the general working conditions and employer relationships as being "generally good".⁴ However, he did admit that on the factory floor there existed a "fairly distinctive division between tradesmen and non-tradesmen".⁵ There was some resentment felt against tradesmen because of their better working conditions deriving from their stronger trade union which enjoyed a greater access to management. It is easy to ignore the fact, even today, that there is this delineation of occupational status amongst factory floor workers. How much this extends outside the factory depends largely on individuals. Classification of workers' religious beliefs were often regarded as being indicative of their politics, and men would say "He's a 'tike' (Catholic) and a Laborite", or "He's a 'prod' and a Liberal".⁶ So to some extent a worker's religion was part of his identity.

In 1938 St. Philip's Anglican Church in Waratah had a large membership which attempted to fulfil the spiritual and social needs of its people within the community. The church was regarded as being 'typical' of many suburban parishes in that it funded itself adequately and was thought to⁷ exert a stabilising influence in this orderly upper middle class suburb. It had been served by a long list of competent ministers and was able to

afford a curate as well as a rector. In December 1937 the church was able to undertake a building programme to extend the church size and Bishop Batty was invited to bless the foundation stone of the extensions. The Bishop "congratulated the people of St. Philip's on the work they had undertaken and expressed his pleasure in the fact that the great majority of money necessary for the work was already in hand".⁸ The successful financial management of the parish by the church laypeople was no doubt indicative of their middle class background, and many industrial tradesmen of the parish earned above the average wage.⁹

During this time the church also catered for social needs of its members either within the church groups or by encouraging informal social gatherings. On such social occasions there was no alcohol available as the majority of the parish were temperance supporters. This was an unusual situation for, as J. Sloggett points out, the Church of England in Newcastle was not generally supportive towards the temperance movement, much to the annoyance of many non-conformist temperance supporters.¹⁰ Probably this exception was due to the tendency of the parish to identify with 'evangelical tradition'.

Although many women were active in church life in 1938, leadership was largely a male prerogative. Women in the parish were not only active in women's groups such as the Mothers' Union and the Women's Guild, but through these organisations they were expected to be the main fund raisers. "All the women in the Anglican Church raise the money and the men spend it!".¹¹ This statement on the role of women in the Anglican Church reinforces the view of sexual inequality that many perceived within the churches generally. It can be argued that the churches have regarded women as having "to fulfil a discrete and traditional function".¹² It appears that most women within Waratah parish were happy to keep within their "traditional function" and let their husbands stand for the parish parochial council. Although no women thought of standing for such positions, there were many husband and wife teams involved in the parish council's work. One woman, a Mrs. Spens, commenting in the Anglican national paper on a patronising report on the ministry of women, thought that "it might be for the advantage of the church to allow women more scope for the exercise of their gifts, and to attach more weight to their opinion".¹³ Along with the local parish, Newcastle diocese generally appeared to consider a woman's opinion to be of lesser importance than a man's, for in 1939 among the lay representatives in the Church's governing body, the Synod, there were no women.

The Anglican Church in 1938 played a large part in youth activities. Throughout the depression years and late into the 1930s, youth unemployment remained very high in industrial cities like Newcastle. Many of the parish clergy organised social welfare groups to help unemployed people with food and finance. Through its Synod the Anglican Church in Newcastle voiced its concern about youth unemployment and the need for increased government assistance. In 1937 it urged the Premier to introduce legislation to prevent the dismissal of young people from occupations due to age.¹⁴ Synod set up a committee to make recommendations and enquiries about this whole problem. Like many church leaders it was "convinced that the spiritual and moral deterioration of youth consequent upon unemployment is far more serious than any economic loss".¹⁵ Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s the Synod urged government action but its recommendations were largely ignored. At parish level, however, the church appeared to be more effective for it "provided a very necessary part of the activities for youth".¹⁶ The Church of England Boys' Society, the Girls' Friendly Society, Scouts, Guides and various recreational activities and programmes were provided for at many suburban parishes. Although

largely restricted to Anglican youth, they did provide activities for a wide range of children and teenagers. Being part of the largest church group in Newcastle the influence of these clubs had quite a marked effect on suburbs like Waratah. As many parents did not take annual holidays, the parish church organised holiday camps for children and young people. The churches generally, along with the YMCA organised all the sports events between the various church youth clubs before sports clubs themselves took over this role.¹⁷ "There was no trouble in filling the lists for these clubs, either!".¹⁷ This situation continued into the 1940s when, after the War, there again appeared an increased demand for youth activities.

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle was the first diocese in Australia to form a branch of the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF) but its life span was short. In his presidential address to Synod in 1936, Bishop Batty mentioned the formation of a branch of the ICF based on the Fellowship's methods of work in Britain. Its main aim was to "promote the study of social and industrial questions from the point of view of the Christian religion and in the light of its fundamental principles".¹⁸ The ICF sought to stimulate public discussion on complex matters which conflicted with the Christian faith. So its work was evangelistic and educational. In 1937 the organising secretary, Rev. R.S. Lee, reported that when he had visited many different centres, both rural and industrial, to preach or to lecture on Christianity and social and industrial problems he had found much interest. The ICF committee had also concentrated on arousing the public conscience on the plight of the unemployed.¹⁹ However, by 1938 the ICF committee secretary reported disappointing results. Although Lee had delivered a number of addresses which caused some interest at the time, any attempt to establish local centres for ICF work had failed. In trying to discern some reason for this failure, the committee made a perceptive comment on the apparent apathy of many church people towards social and industrial issues. The committee felt it "a very serious symptom of spiritual deadness that such an important aspect of the church's work should find so few active workers".²⁰ This symptom of "spiritual deadness" was much later identified in a report by the Diocese of Newcastle which showed the church losing members, particularly between the years 1937-1947.²¹ Harold A. felt that the ICF was largely just for academics and that it did not relate to the ordinary industrial worker.²² This appears to be correct, and along with other evidence shows the church was losing support, particularly amongst poorer working class people. In the 1920s this is also apparent in A. Walker's social survey of Cessnock, a coalmining town.²³ It is not surprising that in later years the ICF appears to have been abandoned by the church, for most industrialists perceived it to be largely an academic exercise.

Bishop Francis De Witt Batty was a man of great ability who made a significant contribution to the life of the church within the Diocese of Newcastle and within the wider Anglican Church in Australia. In Batty, the church "had not only a sound theologian, but also a political philosopher of no mean power".²⁴ Despite a certain shyness, Batty won the respect of many people for his fairness and academic ability. Like many church leaders he saw the problem of this turbulent period as being spiritual and not economic. To this end he sought to strengthen the church's organisation. Through his pragmatic approach in addresses and writing, he attempted to direct his laymen and clergy in political matters. A true conservative, Batty, along with many Anglican and Protestant churches, tended to support the non-Labor parties. A staunch churchman,

Batty kept his reforming zeal largely within the church structure and it is here that he was an active innovator in two areas. Firstly, within the area of the constitution of the church he wanted the Australian Church to be autonomous. Secondly, he encouraged the church to be more active and accomplished in religious broadcasting, and became a popular broadcaster himself. His addresses were broadcast locally and Harold A. felt that they did have an effect on the general churchman and possibly paved the way for improved ecumenical relations.²⁵ Batty's openness to different community groups and his attention to detail were evident in that he personally invited industrialists from the Trades Hall Council to hear his live broadcasts, and to have dialogue with him.²⁶ His personalised approach and kindness won him affection from individuals who got to know him personally. For Harold A., "He was one of the greats!"²⁷ Despite an openness of mind on many issues, Batty did not come to fully understand the need to allow the Communion times in most parishes to be more flexible so as to accommodate the industrial shift workers. This he failed to understand until much later in his career, and it indicated, perhaps, a lack of realism on his part towards industrial workers.

As S.R.Gray points out, not all the Newcastle Anglican clergy were in tune with Batty, but the comprehensive nature of the church allowed for individual clergy to follow an independent course.²⁸ Ernest Burgmann, warden of St. John's College, Morpeth, from 1925 to 1934, and Roy Lee, his vice-warden, were two such men. Although Burgmann left the diocese to become Bishop of Goulburn in 1934, many memories of his work among the unemployed and within theological and adult education remained in 1938. Strongly criticised for his 'socialist' views, his idealism encouraged many workers. Harold A. thought Bishop Burgmann was the first bishop who "seemed to produce for the Australian the idea that there could be an Australian culture for the church".²⁹ Lee, as the organising secretary for ICF, shared Burgmann's critical view of the capitalist system. He also shared with Burgmann a sympathy with the unemployed, and a desire for a more broadly based education programme for the clergy. When Burgmann left St. John's College, Lee was bypassed for the position of warden, for the more conservative T.M.Robinson. Remaining as vice-warden, Lee continued Burgmann's style of work through his addresses and writings. However, some conservative clergy found his 'socialist' ideas rather unpalatable, and this became obvious at a College Council meeting in 1938. By then a financial crisis had developed at the College, and the Council felt that they could not afford to employ another lecturer for the College. Robinson stated that he found it impossible to carry on with Lee as his only assistant, and expressed the opinion that Lee was not the right person to lecture students on biblical subjects or Christian doctrine.³⁰ Another member of the Council thought that Lee's services should be dispensed with, mainly on the grounds "(a) that his presence at the College is and always will be a source of unrest" and "(b) that his cost to College funds is too great".³¹ Not surprisingly in 1938 Lee left Newcastle for study leave in Britain where he remained to become a prominent figure in Anglican church life. With hindsight many people became aware of the valid contribution Lee had made as a social and theological thinker within the diocese of Newcastle.

For most Novacastrians like Harold A. the 'establishment church' in 1938 showed a diversity of character. This reflects the church's comprehensiveness, which has always been its strength, allowing a diversity of opinion within its structure. Considering the church's historical link with the State, and given its conservative support from business and professional people as well as industrial leaders during the depression years, it is not surprising then, that the Anglican Church reflected the status quo in Newcastle, and reacted against those who

threatened it. Although at parish level the church saw its task largely as having a moral influence in the community, its activities among the youth possibly had a palliative effect on the miseries of youth unemployment. Then, although Bishop Batty was respected as a man of strong leadership within the Newcastle community and the wider church, many working class people saw the church as being indifferent to their needs. S.R.Gray's criticism that the church as a whole did little to influence the government in favour of the depression victims, or to earn working class support for itself, is largely justifiable.³² However, the fact that some local attempts to meet the material and social needs of the depression victims were successful, should be kept in perspective. For Harold A., the failure of the church in general to come to grips with the city's industrial identity, and the needs of its workers, was a major disappointment. Unlike its counterpart in Britain, the Australian Anglican Church vision of society seemed to have diminished to become largely a reactionary and moralising force. However, for all its weaknesses and strengths the Anglican Church in 1938 showed a certain resilience in making a contribution to the life of the people in Newcastle.

FOOTNOTES

1. J.Woolmington, Religion in Early Australia, New England, 1976.
2. Interview with Harold A. tape 1. side A, count 361.
3. The Workers Case Against the BHP, Trades Hall Council Report 1936,
G.Bass, Secretary.
4. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 103.
5. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 093.
6. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 311.
7. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 229.
8. Newcastle Diocesan Churchman, February 1938, p.110.
9. Harold A. as an electrician, earned £10.0.0 per week, when the
average man's wage for 1938 was £4.15.0 per week.
10. J. Sloggett, 'Freedom, control or prohibition: a history of the temperance
movement in Newcastle and mining townships 1860-1901',
Honours Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1979, p.33.
11. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 244.
12. A.Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police, Melbourne, 1975, p.433.
13. W.Spens, 'The ministry of women: an address to the Church Union Council'.
The Australian Church Quarterly September 24, 1937, p.30.
14. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1937, p.99.
15. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1940, p.200.
16. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 152.
17. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 146.
18. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1936, p.92.
19. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1937, p.174.
20. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1938, p.169.
21. Diocese of Newcastle, 'Report on the Decline in Church-going', 1951.
22. Interview with Harold A., 13th August, 1982.
23. A.Walker, Coaltown: a Social Survey of Cessnock, Melbourne, 1948, chapter 4.
24. A.Elkin, The Diocese of Newcastle, Sydney 1955, p.678.
25. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 339.
26. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 369.
27. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 476.
28. S.R.Gray, "Social aspects of the depression in Newcastle 1929-1934".
M.A. Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1981.
29. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 509.
30. Minutes of St. John's College Council meeting, February 1938; St. John's
College correspondence (unpublished) 1st January 1931-
November 1939, Diocese of Newcastle Archives.
31. Ibid.
32. S.R.Gray, op.cit.

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STEEL OR STARVE

by Susan Owen

Mr. H's childhood during the 20's and 30's was filled with poverty and instability. His childhood unluckily coincided with troubled times for Newcastle's economy. J.C. Docherty asserts that "In June of 1933, 38% of the city's male workforce were either unemployed or partly unemployed".¹ Mr. H's father was unfortunately one of those statistics who found himself with the impossible task of raising a family of seven on little or no income. Because of these circumstances Mr. H. was withdrawn from school at the age of 14, after only eight years of regular schooling. He remembers with pride and regret the schoolmaster's dismay at losing such a promising student.² That Mr. H. was considered such a promising student was quite an accomplishment in itself, given the constant changing of accommodation the family was forced into by changing fortunes. Mr. H. remembers at least six different homes he inhabited as a child. One change in financial circumstances that Mr. H. remembers with glee was the introduction of the child endowment scheme.³ This was introduced by J. Lang in March 1927 and for Mr. H. it meant additions to his wardrobe. His wardrobe had hitherto comprised tee-shirt and shorts, nothing more. The poverty that Mr. H. experienced as a child did not diminish as he grew to manhood. As Sheilah Gray suggests "a picture of intermittent unemployment in Newcastle extending as far back as 1921, indicates that for many people the depression of the 1930's was only the coup de grace".⁴

The coup de grace came for Mr. H's family in February 1937 when once again the father was dismissed from the Newcastle steel works. In March of the same year at the age of 20 Mr. H. was offered an unskilled labourer's position with the same company. Mr. H. claims that it was the conscientious and loyal attitude shown by his father towards BHP that had motivated the company to make the offer of a job to himself.⁵ The responsibility of feeding and clothing a family of seven now rested heavily upon the shoulders of Mr. H. With a past steeped in poverty and instability, Mr. H. gratefully accepted a job with BHP, a job that was to last for almost forty years. This need for a secure existence that would meet the demands generated by ensuring a family's survival seems to have coloured the attitude of both Mr. H. and many of his fellow workers towards both employment and employer. There is evidence to suggest that employers took advantage of this vulnerability of the work force.

In 1938 under the guidance of Essington Lewis, "an industrial Churchill",⁶ "BHP's profit soared to £1,300,461, higher than any profit ever made by an Australian company".⁷ It is tempting to agree with the Trades Hall article published in 1936 that this unprecedented high profit was built "upon the sweat and blood of the metal workers".⁸ There is evidence that this rhetoric does have some truth in it. Helen Hughes notes that "throughout the 1930's labour conditions were favourable to the industry".⁹ The unemployment within Newcastle throughout the 1920's and 30's seems to have weakened the worker's position so greatly that it literally became a question of steel or starve. This factor, added to BHP's negative policy towards unionism,

made possible the continuation of profits paid for by the workers, most assuredly in sweat and too often in blood.

In 1938 Mr. H. was receiving from BHP a wage of £3.6s, "which was approximately 30% below the average weekly wages".¹⁰ Helen Hughes claims that in comparison with British and Continental steel wage rates, Australian wage rates were amongst the lowest during the depression and the slowest to rise after the depression. She asserts that in 1937 "Australian wage rates were still below those of 1929".¹¹ This is in spite of the fact that BHP "now had an impetus that nothing short of another nationwide slump could halt".¹² Another disadvantage that Mr. H. and many like him were forced to cope with was shift work. Mr. H. describes shift work as a "major social and family handicap".¹³ His own personal experience of shift work added to the experience of belonging to a family whose father was on continuous shift work for many years must stand him in good stead on this subject.

The forty-four hours of every week that Mr. H. spent within BHP were remarkable only for their dangers, exhaustion and poor working conditions. When asked about the conditions of his workplace, he responded, "we used to call it the abattoirs".¹⁴ The Trades Hall article concurs that "the works are commonly called the abattoirs by the Newcastle workers and that the number of accidents, both fatal and otherwise give point to the sobriquet used".¹⁵ F.R.E. Mauldon claims that "BHP's motto of safety first was sincere and effective".¹⁶ This conflicts with BHP's introduction of the Bedeaux Bonus system during the 30's. This system effectively aimed at increasing the productivity of the workers. The Trades Hall article claims that "the inevitable outcome of this incessant speed-up, despite elaborate safety first campaigns and devices, is a continually growing crop of accidents".¹⁷ It goes on, "the record number of accidents treated in one week at the Company's First Aid station up to the present time was 800".¹⁸ Mr. H. asserts that when first working at BHP the fatality rate was high.¹⁹ He felt the general attitude amongst his workmates towards the dangerous nature of their work to be one of apprehension and fear, lest they too should be incapacitated or killed. Nevertheless death or maiming was accepted as an integral hazard of their work.

The fear of maiming or death on the plant and the lack of quality of family life because of shift work were accepted as the lesser of two evils, the alternative being unemployment. If by chance a man proved himself loyal and conscientious then between a period of ten and fifty years he might find himself in a good position within BHP's hierarchy. But as Helen Hughes points out "the process of promotion was slow and uncertain and a man might never be selected for more rewarding work".²⁰ So not only was the present poor for steel workers in the 30's but the future looked equally bleak. The unions, the working man's usual avenue of appeal and support do not appear to have been very active within Newcastle at this time.

There are at least three factors that could explain the unions' relative inactivity, relative, that is, to places such as the "Wollongong area which had similar economic and social problems".²¹ Mr. H. claims that the union movement within BHP in 1938 was not a strong one.²² The Trades Hall article claims that "In the BHP steel works only 25% of the 4,671 workers are members of trade unions".²³ A. Trengove suggests that "The depression had shattered many unions, including the Federated Ironworker's Association and only a minority of BHP's employees were union members".²⁴ BHP actively pursued a policy of not hiring militant union labour. Helen Hughes suggests that the price paid for union involvement was high and lasting, "The works kept a record of men dismissed for union activity so that they would not be re-employed at the steelworks or by associated companies".²⁵ The unions, having been weakened by the depression were deliberately kept in a state of weakness and as Helen Hughes

comments "the pressure of unemployment outside the iron and steel industry reduced the number of industrial disputes and made the BHP's hostile attitude to unionism viable".²⁶ This appears to be one of the contributing factors to the working man's acceptance of dangerous and destructive work conditions.

A second factor seems to be the isolation that springs from a shift system of work. As Mr. H. mentioned, shift work is a handicap to both family and social life. The lack of contact and communication inherent in a shift worker's life could in part explain the non-identification of the average worker with the unions of this time. Mr. H. claims that the dinner break conversation would involve anything and everything except talk of work.²⁷ This lack of communication between the workers on important issues would have made solidarity impossible. Added to this separation within plant life was a similar separation in the worker's social life. The shift system of work is extremely disruptive to any social life and throughout the 30's this situation was worsened as individuals were forced by the depression to seek cheaper accommodation. This quite often entailed moving from one suburb to another. The necessity of movement from suburb to suburb did not encourage strong or lasting relationships and this isolation was aggravated by the lack of transport for the working man.

A third factor that cleaved the ranks of the workers was BHP's policy of promotion. Mr. H. claims that a job with BHP could mean a job for life if "you do the right thing".²⁸ Mr. H. was one of those men who showed "initiative" and gradually rose through the ranks. His slow but steady promotion could reflect not only his conscientiousness but also his political inactivity. Mr. H's sole concern was providing for his family and although he was a member of the union he was quick to point out that his membership was a token one and that his involvement was very limited. Mr. H. felt that his promotion from worker to staff made little difference to his relationships within the works. This he attributes to the respect he engendered amongst those who had previously been fellow workers. Other valued employees were not so lucky in their working relationships and Helen Hughes notes that the unions accused the company of "breaking social ties by staff appointment, setting workmen against each other".²⁹

Following a childhood of poverty Mr. H., like many others, accepted possible death, injury and the destruction of family life through shift-work for the weekly wage of £3.6s and there is no doubt that such men felt themselves to be the lucky ones. There were many examples of what happened for those who failed to find or keep employment. Helen Hughes claims that:

"Newcastle became a ghost town in the early 1930's as workers unable to keep up rent or house payments moved to shanty towns made of bags and corrugated iron on the outskirts of the town at Lake Macquarie".³⁰

The high unemployment in Newcastle made it possible for BHP to dominate a weakened workforce and adopt a stance towards unionism that would ensure the workforce remained weak. For men like Mr. H. BHP was a knight in shining armour, but with hindsight it could be said that BHP was slightly trampled in its dealings with its employees during the 30's.

FOOTNOTES

1. J.C. Docherty, "The second city: social and urban change in Newcastle", N.S.W. 1900-1929, Ph.D Thesis, A.N.U. 1977, p. 273.
2. Interview with Mr. H. taped Newcastle August 1981.
3. Interview.
4. S. Gray, " 'An evil long endured', Newcastle's depression", in Judy Mackinolty ed, The Wasted Years?, Sydney 1981, p.60.
5. Interview.
6. A. Trengove, 'What's Good for Australia!' The story of BHP, Stanmore 1975, p.144.
7. Ibid. p.158
8. "The Workers Case against the BHP". issued by the Trades Hall Council in 1936, p.7.
9. H. Hughes, The Australian Iron and Steel Industry, 1848-1969, Melbourne 1964, p.122.
10. Official Year Book of N.S.W. 1938.
11. H. Hughes, op.cit. p.122.
12. A. Trengove, op.cit. p.158
13. Interview.
14. Interview.
15. "The Workers Case against the BHP" op.cit. p.8.
16. F.R.E. Mauldon, A Study in Social Economics, the Hunter River Valley, N.S.W., Melbourne 1927, p.190.
17. "The Workers Case against the BHP" op.cit. p.8.
18. Ibid p.8.
19. Interview.
20. Helen Hughes, op.cit. p.96.
21. S. Gray, op.cit. p.74
22. Interview.
23. "The Workers Case against the BHP" op.cit. p.11
24. A. Trengove, op.cit. p.160
25. H. Hughes, op.cit. p.95
26. Ibid. p.122.
27. Interview.
28. Interview.
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ISLINGTON 1938: A SINGLE LIFE WITHIN GENERAL HISTORY

by Brett Deacon

Whether it is written by Clark, Turner or McQueen, 'left' history does not solve the problems of the story of the 'common man'. History by these writers usually becomes mono-causal or tends to give a single base for human activity. For instance, the fifth volume of Clark's A History of Australia stresses violence to the point of 'lunacy',¹ while McQueen pronounces a revolutionary stance.² All this makes one smile at the myth of objectivity. Moreover, it shows how dangerous general history can be when the student wishes to place the experience of individuals within a historical context.

"It is extremely difficult to rise from the apparent movement to the real movement of history and discover their intimate connection. There are indeed great difficulties in rising from the phenomenon of passion, oratory, Parliaments, elections and the like to the inner social gearing to discover in the latter the different interests of the large and the small bourgeois, of the peasants, artisans, the labourers, the priests, the soldiers, the bankers, the usurers and the mob".³

In historical writing, then, processes and wide movements must be seen as working upon people. Consequently, to take Labriola's points further, the link between the individual, community and the broader affairs of humanity must be established as real concerns in social history. Often, in the rush to obtain the 'causes' and the 'effects', historians miss the event itself. Yet, for the people of past ages the 'event itself' was the whole of history. Furthermore, the subjective outlook of these people must be considered. Every person is locked in time.⁴ Most live according to the times they are placed within. So, the question of writing effective social history revolves around the solution of the problem of empathy.

Before delving into the personal experience at the centre of this essay, a brief sketch of relevant broader events in the late 1930s is necessary. Alexander described the period as one of 'roads to recovery'.⁵ Moderate improvement after the depths of the depression was the keynote of 1938.⁶ Economic conditions, while not being as difficult as during the 1929-32 period, may still be described as 'tight' for many Australians, particularly the working class.⁷ The era has also been seen as one of 'momentous slow change'. However, for people in 1938 life did not appear to be undergoing this change. Economic life in cities often revolved around industrial work and its associated infrastructure. While wages increased during the late 1930s actual physical conditions in the inner suburbs deteriorated.⁸ Newcastle displayed these features. It was 'a heavily working class city dependent upon a single industry which was very sensitive to economic fluctuations'. In particular, Newcastle displayed a strong communal feeling, the people being 'essentially Novocastrian in character'.¹⁰

Into this picture we place an individual and her family. Mrs.G. was a member of a working class family of three. An interview with

Mrs.G. revealed that in 1938 their personal economic situation was 'bad' and 'grim'.¹¹ A partial explanation relates to the post-depression environment of the nation as a whole. Unemployment remained high¹² in a country which was still recovering from the 1929-32 crisis. As such, though, these facts tell little of the specific reasons why this family suffered hardships. Mrs.G. provides the necessary details:

"...naturally in that sort of position and economic conditions were bad and from my memory he (Mrs.G.'s father) seldom worked. In 1938 he ceased to work at all because of a heart condition brought about by wharf labouring because it was very heavy then, you had no machinery etc."¹³

So, a part of hardship was individual misfortune and the particular aspects of one job in 1938. Where does adversity lead individuals? Mrs.G. was given a great motivation to obtain money. Here, good fortune played a role. Historians sometimes forget that 'luck' is a determinant of events. Life for many is a combination of fortune and misfortune. While Mrs.G. was unlucky in having an unemployed father, she was able to obtain an office job through 'fortuitous circumstances'.¹⁴ So, while material life was generally hard for Mrs.G. it would be inaccurate to paint a picture of complete despair. History mixes 'good' and 'bad'.

Perhaps this fact may give an insight into the somewhat intangible aspects of human behaviour. One of the problems with the general historical explanation is that it deals with human motivation in too simple terms. A look at Mrs.G.'s situation might tempt one to conclude that she would rebel against any attempts to integrate her into the existing 'system'; pictures of Connell's 'working class mobilisation' come to mind.¹⁵ At best, we may expect to find a dissatisfaction with life and its concomitants. However, this was not the case. Mrs.G. fully accepted the chief socialization factor, the school, and even concluded that "the students got on very well with the teachers".¹⁶ Despite having such strong opinions Mrs.G. could not explain her conformity.¹⁷ An interpretation of interview material does not aid an explanation - Mrs.G.'s parents were 'fair',¹⁸ she had received corporal punishment and been kept in at school; teaching included 'authority'.¹⁹ Mrs.G.'s answer was that her feelings could not be put down to anything 'specific'.²⁰ Frequently, people cannot explain why they act. This leads the idea of historical causality into the field of the intangible.

People may act in a particular manner because they see no escape. Many aspects of life are 'taken for granted'. Subsequently, Mrs.G. explained much of the acceptance of life as it was in these terms. Corporal punishments were an expected part of the school routine for those children who misbehaved. Respect for an employer was 'a natural thing, a natural discipline of the day'.²¹ The value system which prevailed was 'a point in history'.²² People did not question ideas and thoughts. In this context, the effectiveness of a school system which de-emphasised innovation, at least for women, is vital.²³ Also, strict limitations upon outlook prevailed. There was no idea of moving out of the suburb, people being content to survive as and where they were; a conservative policy dominated whereby people did not take large risks.²⁴ Strict discipline, both at school and in the home²⁵ was a strong inducement for people to acquiesce in social norms. But it must be stressed that these factors should be combined with the rather more intangible explanations stated above.

Several more direct links between general trends and particular experiences may be established. The social/leisure activities of Mrs.G.'s

family were structured largely by the economic and social features of 1938. Having little employment, family members had a reasonable amount of leisure time.²⁶ Both determinants of behaviour were present in the walking journeys undertaken:

"...walking...bike racing was very popular and we always walked to Carrington for those...And we'd also regularly have hikes. All the family would go to that - carrying all the hampers".²⁷

Walking and sport were inexpensive pursuits. Also, the extended family played a role. An interesting point is that it was not a belief that only working class families had restrictions in these areas. Nearly everyone had to walk (or ride bikes) because 'at that time there were no motor cars'.²⁸ Other inexpensive forms of entertainment included community singing and talking.²⁹ These activities were an important part of social life and, as will be shown later, played a vital social role.

All of these activities had a definite communal facet. Even family recreations were large, the walks to Carrington including neighbours.³⁰ Community singing was a group event. Mrs.G. could remember gatherings at BHD for this as well as singing by groups of people in the households with pianos or pianolas.³¹ Talking was a nightly communal affair. People would 'come out onto their verandahs or talk over the fence'.³² Men would sit upon stools and converse while children played in the streets. In essence, then, the whole of the small community would gather each night, thereby developing a strong social atmosphere. One particular aspect of this was Friday night shopping:

"Friday night was a very social night for people who lived around our area because Beaumont Street in Hamilton...was a scene of great activity. We always walked down there. You met your relations and you met your friends, up and down each side of the street. You'd stand and you would talk to them... You'd have different bands on each corner (brass bands were very prevalent then). You would have your chocolate wheels..."³³

In 1938 a wider society was a very observable part of the individual's experience in the inner suburbs of Newcastle.

One of the positive aspects of the combination of influences was community supportiveness. Mrs.G. talked of 'a great spirit of helping people'.³⁴ People who were in work helped those who were not. Mrs.G. summed it up as: 'people cared'.³⁵ With a combination of difficult economic situations and a local community feeling, the community established mutual aid. More than general movements, these aspects of local community served to form the experience and determined the actions of individuals.

Also, this community had a profound effect upon value systems. Manners were highly prized. Mrs.G. used the cliché that children were expected to be 'seen and not heard'.³⁶ More than being a platitude, it was largely accomplished fact. Mrs.G. described herself as being 'shielded'.³⁷ The acceptance of a particular lifestyle indicates a conformity to the value system. What was this commitment?

It was one of social support, a type of practical socialism'. Mrs.G. talks of people with vegetable plots and poultry, sharing produce with other families.³⁸

Other ideas predominated. The people had an experience (non-experience is perhaps more apt) of the world which was dominated by the British empire. Here, Mrs.G. confirms the conclusions of Mr. McMahon Ball about the effects at that time of a British-dominated Australian news service.³⁹ Also, the complete assimilation of this value system could be seen in a poem written for a competition in 1938:

"Ye girls of British race
Famous for your beauty
Breed fast in all your grace
For this is your duty.
As Anzac gave in war
So daughters at your call
Will quick respond the more
To replace those that fall".⁴⁰

If any indication of class struggle is to be gleaned from 1938 it must be modified by the above factors. Far from living in smouldering discontent a working class 'looked up to professional people'.⁴¹ Mrs.G. stated that in many areas, such as domestic servants' employment, there was not a significant class situation. Domestic servants were 'included as one of the family' so that 'there was not an upstairs/downstairs' arrangement.⁴² One particular reason why the working class did not form as a unit was the community feeling within Newcastle. Mrs.G. described suburbs as being involved in rivalry - the 'Martins and the McCoys'.⁴³ It would only be at times of particular hardship that these differences would be transcended. Locality offset class.

Although Mrs.G. could not look upon 1938 as a happy time, the year could not be described as one of change, conflict or upheaval. Perhaps the best description of the life is that it was dominated by hardship, producing distinct social values, but no open rebellion as such:

"It (the community values) was just accepted.
I think it was a way of life at that time, and
of the economic times and of the area you were
living in...".⁴⁴

A difficult life, then, does not necessarily breed negative values or open violence.

Historical analysis should be wary of any single 'causality formula'. The interview with Mrs.G. indicates that general information, statistics, surmises and people's subjective formulations must be woven together. Only with this could something which approaches empathy be attained.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.Veliz's article "Bad History", Quadrant, May 1982, pp.21-26 (lunacy quote p.23).
 2. A New Britannia, Penguin 1975 edition, pp.13-14.
 3. Quoted by Don Watson in Brian Fitzpatrick Sydney, 1979, p.164.
 4. Manning Clark makes a similar point in the foreward to A New Britannia.
 5. F.Alexander, Australia Since Federation, 4th revised edition, Melbourne, 1980, p.102.
 6. Unemployment statistics for the years 1933-38 show this:

	Australia	N.S.W.
1934	20.5%	24.7%
1935	16.5%	20.6%
1936	12.2%	15.4%
1937	9.3%	10.9%
1938	8.7%	9.9%
- Quarterly Summary of Australian Statistics Nos.147-148
p.58.
7. Kylie Tennant's phrase, quoted by Connell and Irving in Class Structure in Australian History, Melbourne 1980, p.279.
 8. Ibid., pp.279-280.
 9. J.C.Docherty, 'The Second City: social and urban change in Newcastle, N.S.W., 1900-1929', Ph.D. thesis, ANU, 1977, p.282.
 10. P.Haslam, 'Notes on Newcastle 1938', Interview, Newcastle University Archives.
 11. Interview, tape 1, side 1, count 38-45.
 12. The level was 8.7% for Australia and 9.9% for N.S.W. Quarterly Summary of Australian Statistics Nos.159-174, p.58.
 13. Interview, tape 1:1, 38-45.
 14. Mrs.G. first obtained a job cleaning a shop. The family which lived next to this establishment owned a provendor's office. Mrs.G. became a friend of these people and obtained a job in this office. Interview, tape 1:1, 240-52.
 15. Connell & Irving, op.cit., p.188, chapter sub-title.
 16. Interview, tape 1:1, 99.
 17. Interview, tape 1:1, 105.
 18. Interview, tape 1:1, 440.
 19. Interview, tape 1:1, 99-111.
 20. Interview, tape 1:1, 90-99.
 21. Interview, tape 1:1, 437.
 22. Interview, tape 2:1, 130.
 23. Interview, tape 1:1, 60-90.
 24. Compare Student Research Papers in Australian History, No.6, 1981, p.29.
 25. Mrs.G. mentioned how men at this time were strict disciplinarians.
 26. Interview, tape 1:1, 325.
 27. Interview, tape 1:2, 745.
 28. Interview, tape 1:1.
 29. Interview, tape 1:2, 814. Mrs.G. stated that 'everyone had a Boomerang Songbook'. People would also talk in the evenings until 9 or 10 o'clock at night.
 30. Interview, tape 2:1, 40.
 31. Interview, tape 1:2, 814.
 32. Interview, tape 2:1, 75.
 33. Interview, tape 2:1, 27.
 34. Interview, tape 2:1, 100.
 35. Interview, tape 2:1, 105.
 36. Interview, tape 2:1, 160.
 37. Interview, tape 2:1, 155.

38. Interview, tape 2:1, 100-125.
39. Ball stated that since Australian news was dominated by British sources, Australians would hold a British-styled world view. F.K. Crowley, Modern Australia in Documents, vol.1, pp.599-600.
40. Quoted by Humphrey McQueen in Social Sketches of Australia 1888-1975, p.158.
41. Interview, tape 2:1, 245.
42. Interview, tape 1:1, 273. An important aspect of class is the subjective idea of the individual.
43. Interview, tape 2:1, 120.
44. Interview, tape 2:1, 115.

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WORK AND LIFE IN DUDLEY 1938:

EVERYTHING WAS ON THE UP AND UP

by Annette Curtis

An investigation of the problems deriving from work in 1938 through interviews with an old resident of Dudley, Mrs.A., reveals that, although life was difficult by modern standards, and problems were many, for Mrs.A., life, materially, was improving. Mrs.A. spent her childhood and grew to maturity in Dudley, an isolated, closely knit mining community where traditions and memories lingered.¹ Miriam Dixon claims that the entire woman is, so to speak, to be seen in the cradle of the child.² To understand the hardworking and conservative Mrs.A. in 1938 necessitates a brief look at her formative years.

Dudley Colliery is situated on the coast south of Newcastle and it began operations late in the 19th century. Dudley was encircled by natural as well as man made barriers, and was a thriving community.³ Until its closure in 1938 the colliery had been one of the most exhaustively worked mines in the Lower Hunter. Local men were able to seek work during slack times at the neighbouring Redhead or Burwood Collieries.⁴

Farmers and coal miners still lived a dawn to dusk existence in the early years of the twentieth century, interrupted by large meals cooked by their women folk.⁵ Mrs.A. was born into a farming family at Glen Innes in northern N.S.W., the only daughter of a family of five children. In 1909, when Mrs.A. was aged two, the family moved to Dudley to find work. They soon became established in the community. Mrs.A.'s father worked as the ostler at the Dudley Colliery, and her mother established a dairy farm to serve the local people. The ostler was responsible for the care of the pit horses. Each day began at 2.30 a.m. for the 12 year old Mrs.A., who helped to feed and prepare the horses with her father for a 7 a.m. start at the pit. She then helped her mother prepare breakfast and 'crib' - the food and drink for her father and brothers for the day - and finally, before going to school, delivered milk to neighbours. Mrs.A.'s life of work and service to her family was accepted without question, and she derived pleasure from being useful to her parents.⁶ Her early home had the basic necessities and, though poor, Mrs.A. always had plenty of good food (mostly home grown), and sufficient clothing. After completing her school life at Dudley Public School at 14 she stayed home to help her mother, as there were no job opportunities.

In 1925, aged 18, she married into a Primitive Methodist family, who had been pioneers in the district. Sons followed fathers to work in the mine and Mr.A. worked with his father and brothers from the age of 14.⁸ During the 19th century Newcastle mining communities had a preponderance of Primitive Methodists. This was largely due to the large number of coal miners who migrated from Northern England, particularly from the towns of Staffordshire,⁹ Durham and Northumberland where the Primitive Methodist faith originated. After the Dudley Colliery explosion of April 1898 the names of several victims were listed in the Newcastle Morning Herald as coming from Durham and as being of the Primitive Methodist faith.¹⁰

Methodism encouraged the individual to rationalise work through self-discipline; ideally "the labourer must be turned into his own slave driver". As well it was a religion which encouraged an apolitical and anti-radical lifestyle. Mrs. A., through her marriage, shared these meanings and evaluations derived from Methodism and they reinforced her conservatism in life.¹¹

British coal miners also brought to Australia traditions of co-operative societies, lodges and various other cultural institutions. They had all been founded and fostered for working class defence and provided centres of social cohesion.¹² The Rechabite Lodge was very active in Dudley and all Mrs. A.'s family were members. The Independent Order of Rechabites gained strength in Newcastle mining communities, and the first Tent was opened in Dudley in 1893.¹³ Its members abstained from alcohol, while juveniles received instruction in temperance, social enjoyment and sports.¹⁴ Mr. & Mrs. A. have never tasted any alcoholic drinks and attribute this to their allegiance to the Rechabite Order;¹⁵ no doubt there were also sound economic advantages for a poor family to abstain. P. Haslam recalls that he noticed an important social change in young people in 1938 as the influence of the Independent Order of Rechabites waned after a century of influence in Newcastle mining communities; and the powerful liquor interests advertised widely and supplied liquor efficiently in Newcastle.¹⁶

Three children were born to Mrs. A., two daughters and a son, aged 12, 10 and 3 in 1938. She felt fortunate to have had well behaved children who made little demands on the family finances. Her only aspirations for them were that they should grow up to be "honest and hard working like their father".¹⁷ Deductions were made for contributions to the ambulance and hospital fund through the Miners' Lodge so the family had no worry if medical attention was required. In the lives of coal miners' families, death or injury were ever present possibilities and danger their everyday companion. For the women folk fear for the safety of their men was an accepted part of family life.¹⁸ Mrs. A. recalls the horror she felt when several ambulances raced past her home in January 1926 to the Redhead Colliery where an explosion had occurred. Her husband had been working underground the day before and she felt relief to find he was safe, since he had been working above ground that day. At the time she was pregnant and confined to bed due to illness so she felt particularly vulnerable to the prospect of an early widowhood.¹⁹

From earliest times mine-owners had been indifferent to the health and safety of workers.²⁰ The coal industry in N.S.W. from 1914 to 1939 remained substantially unchanged and indifferent to the needs of the miners.²¹ Strikes and lock-outs were Mrs. A.'s experience year in year out in spite of the fact that Dudley Colliery had less industrial strife than the south Maitland coalfields. The Dudley Colliery miners were often levied from their pay²² by the Miners' Federation to assist their fellow unionists on strike. Women aided the miners in times of trouble particularly in the difficulties caused by long periods of economic distress.²³ In the year before the depression began, the mining industry had nearly a quarter of the work force living below subsistence level.²⁴ Mrs. A. recalled that many people were undernourished at this time.

Mrs. A.'s family was not affected as badly as others during the depression days in Dudley, receiving help through close relatives, local storekeepers' credit and the presence of two wage earners in the family (her brother-in-law lived with them). The family's life did not reflect the dreariness of the dark depression days even though Mrs. A.'s husband and brother-in-law were forced to do odd jobs as carriers.²⁵ A study in the 1970s of people who were voting for the first time during the depression years revealed that the depression did not affect markedly the attitudes of those who lived through it. It was seen by most of the interviewees as an external calamity, which may have acted as a unifying rather than a divisive influence. The depression affected all classes of people including many business men, professionals and farmers who lost their incomes; not all the unemployed were unionists. Instead of encouraging class conflict it may have made Australians aware of their common desperation.²⁶ Mrs. A. was aware of some instances of families losing their homes in Dudley during this time but knew of no one from her community living in unemployed camps in 1938.²⁷ An indicator of the importance of food to Dudley families in the 1930s can be seen in an advertisement by the local Methodist Church for a cooking competition in which the first four prizes were a bag of flour or food parcels, and subsequent prizes were silver spoons, etc.²⁸

The BHP Burwood mine in neighbouring Kahibah, where Mr. A. was employed in 1937, began to prepare for mechanization that year, when the Miners' Federation, under its militant communist leadership, was articulating its programme for the implementation of increased wages, safety and employment opportunities. Even though strikes were prevalent in these years and men lost wages, the adoption of the Miners' Federation programme received full support, as the problems and injustices were there for every mine worker to see.²⁹ The depression price for coal meant the miners were working long hours and Mr. A. recalls that the 1938 National Strike offered them an opportunity to rest from their labours.³⁰ Mr. A. did not lose time off work during the six week long strike, or receive any hostility from the men on strike, as he had become independent by venturing into business as a contract carrier for the Burwood Colliery. He was employed with his brother and brother-in-law digging the tunnel to replace the shaft at the Colliery to prepare for mechanisation. Mrs. A. thus saw her husband fully employed in the digging and removal of earth.

Though this time was good for the family materially, it was at the expense of normal family life. For the next three years Mr. A. and his employees slept on the job in the cab of his truck, which he borrowed, and worked seven days a week - day and night - digging the tunnel. It was a time of constant worry, tension and responsibility for Mrs. A. as she needed to have food prepared and ready for the men who might call in for a meal at any hour. To help at home in this routine her elder daughter left school at fourteen, while Mrs. A.'s ageing parents also needed constant care at their home.³¹

Mrs. A.'s family ideals were part of conservative sentiments present in Australian society in the 1930s.³² Joseph Lyons epitomised them as the hardworking, honest, kindly, unadventurous and devoted family man. He offered a sense of security as Prime Minister of Australia and his success lay in his simplicity and plainness.³³ It was a time of strict censorship laws, the Government assuming the role of sole interpreter of what was good for society.³⁴ Yet for all its dreariness,

the decade cannot be dismissed as one of complete stagnation.³⁵ The average man's style of living was made more comfortable, and a sense of opportunity returned.

Mr. & Mrs.A. were paying off their modest home in 1938 and contributed 15/- per week to the Starr Bowkett Building Society. They in fact won the draw in 1938 and this paid off their home entirely.³⁶ Home ownership was a bastion of the miners' system of self-defence, as the Premier Stevens told Parliament in 1937: "...the average man aspires to his own home, particularly the man in poor circumstances". Mrs.A. saw this sense of opportunity as the economy recovered and the N.S.W.'s budget balanced for the first time in a decade.³⁷ By 1938 the fully-employed man's purchasing power had recovered to exceed pre-depression levels.³⁸

Australians did more than recover material assets at this time. They showed the adaptability and resourcefulness in time of hardship,³⁹ which has been characteristic of many of the pioneering forefathers. Mrs. A. showed these traits as she adjusted to life at this time. The long arduous days of relentless toil were being rewarded for Mrs.A.'s family, but their conservatism made it difficult to change their life-style when financial circumstances improved. Mrs.A felt life was "on the up and up in 1938",⁴⁰ even though the family continued to work as laboriously as they always had.

A visit to Mrs.A.'s home is seen by her as an opportunity always to turn on a typical "miners spread" with food in abundance, reminiscent of a Geordie Supper. Her home is still decorated in the style of 1938 and little concession has been made to developments in furnishings since then. Her energies are still spent, as they were in 1938, in providing home cooked food and comforts for her family, and all others willing to share her hospitality.

Looking back on Mrs.A.'s life, her childhood, marriage and on 1938 it is relevant to make the following points about problems which had their origins in the work and employment of her family at that time. The work was hard, and the hours long. There was little time for leisure and demands on the family were heavy, particularly on the women folk. There was little time available to put into practise any radical actions, if indeed, her conservative attitudes were in any way affected by them. Even though, in her own words, "everything was on the up and up in 1938", with her home secure and her family well provided for, it was impossible for the family to break out of the long established routine of work before all else. Mrs.A. continued to work and live as she always had, though she was materially better off. She felt happy, usefully occupied and sure of her place in the society to which she belonged. Her problems were not diminished but she had a life that many in 1938 would have envied.

FOOTNOTES

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