

Historical Consciousness and the Unemployed

INVOKING SYMBOLS FROM THE PAST TO PROTEST A CAUSE



Do you recall the thirties,
Do you hear the cries of old?
Was their struggle all for nothing,
Or will we just do what we're told?

Rise up people
With all your soul
No turning back
No work for dole.¹

THE DEPRESSION of the 1930s captured the imaginations of the unemployed in the 1980s who invoked images of the historical past to protest their cause. Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa, the national unemployed and beneficiaries' movement, was formed during the early 1980s in response to rising unemployment. A common catch-cry of Te Roopu Rawakore demonstrations was 'No Turning Back to the Wages and Conditions of the 1930s' (Figure 1). Conversely, organization in the '30s was held up as an example of what political action could achieve — as a symbol of community spirit. Articles in *Dole-drums*, the national newspaper for the unemployed, outlined conditions in the 1930s, and presented interviews with people aged in their seventies or eighties, who had experienced that time. Banners and songs created in the 1980s used slogans from the 1930s to highlight their political cause. Organizers also deconstructed historical images of the unemployed to 'make visible' the experiences of women and Maaori in the 1930s. Despite such actions, unemployed organizations of the 1930s held little historical meaning for Maaori unemployed in the 1980s. By contrast, symbols such as the Treaty of Waitangi invoked by Maaori to call attention to injustices were less defined by reference to a particular time period. Maaori unemployed maintained a separate protest tradition despite the occurrence of occasional sites of cross-cultural protest. The lack of a shared protest tradition for Maaori and Paakehaa unemployed involved in Te Roopu Rawakore made it difficult to create collective metaphors to sustain organization in the face of adverse circumstances, and the movement collapsed in the early 1990s.²

The location of sites of protest history, and the identification with past heroic struggles of the unemployed as a guide for future protest endeavours, has been described by Alan Howkins as 'celebratory'³ history. Celebratory histories are

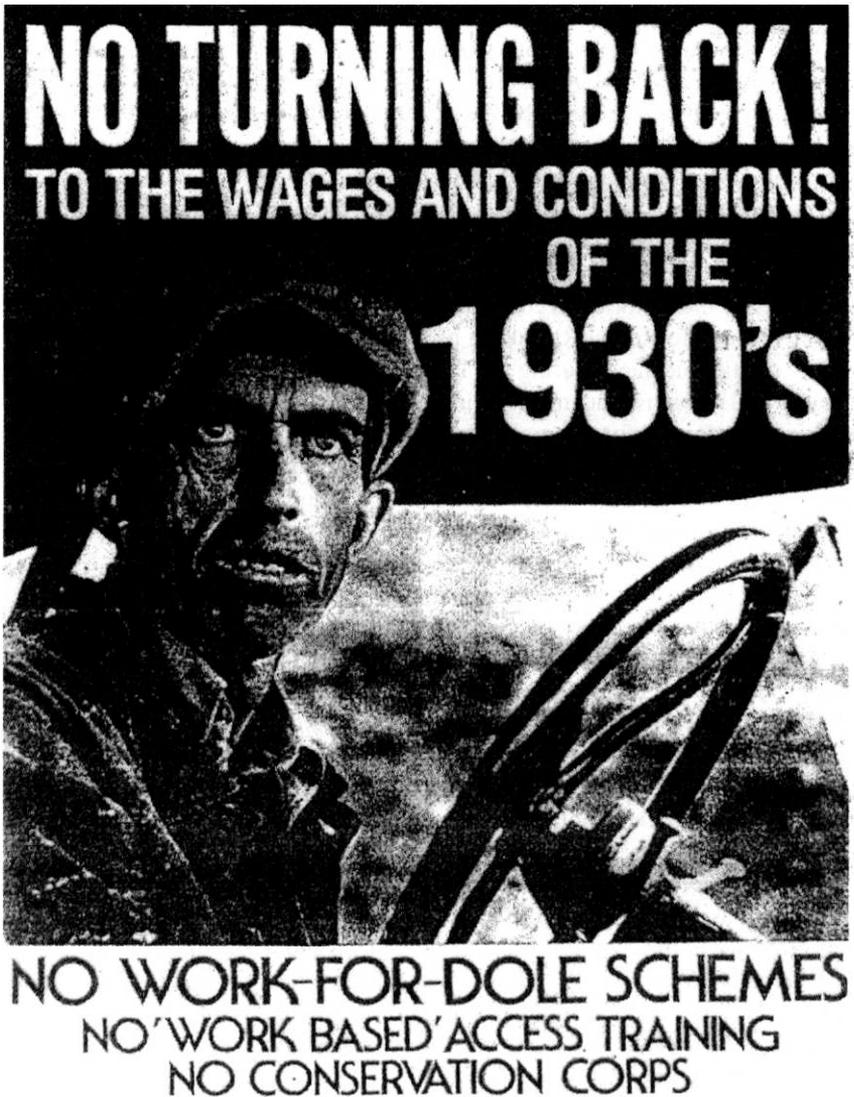


Figure 1: Looking back to the 1930s, *Dole-drums*, 70, July 1989, p.2.

'nostalgic and uncritical' referrals to past labour history, from which cultural artefacts become symbols of solidarity, joining the past with the present.⁴ Howkins uses Erik Hobsbawm's notion of the 'invention of tradition' to indicate the limitations of this approach to the historical past: 'they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant.'⁵ Yet, for many involved in Te Roopu Rawakore the past was regarded critically. The image of the depression-era male working-class hero did not fit comfortably

for unemployed women and Maaori involved in Te Roopu Rawakore. In fact, women questioned the invisibility of women and Maaori in that protest history and highlighted the discrimination that was experienced, such as the limited unemployment relief offered by the government during the early 1930s. While Marxist, feminist or civil rights literature influenced some members of unemployed groups, others used their experience of everyday life to form their own connections with the historical past. Thus, there was a two-edged approach, where symbols were sometimes used as weapons to fight for a cause and at other times deconstructed to gain recognition for those who had remained obscured in the historical record. Because people were historically conscious, the history of Te Roopu Rawakore itself was carefully documented, reflected upon at different stages during the 1980s, and preserved for future years.

The oral record is fundamentally important when re-evaluating the complexity of group cultures, for example, to access what unemployed understood as collective identity in different historical time frames and how the unemployed themselves conceived of political success or failure. Oral accounts allow for the exploration of political consciousness and the use of political symbolism as a tool of organization to bring about social change for the unemployed. Symbols were powerful weapons for raising people's consciousness on unemployment issues. How they were invoked depended upon the nature of the political culture within which an organizer was operating. Personalities such as Jim Edwards, who was involved in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement during the 1930s, became a symbol of justice for the unemployed because of his oratory skills. Sid Scott described Jim Edwards: 'At his best he was a real orator, a mass spell-binder of the top class It was partly something in him that he communicated to the emotions of the audience, something deeper than reason, but when inspired by his subject and his audience, he had a feeling for language and could use metaphors and figures of speech, drawing sometimes on his religious past, in a most effective fashion. I think it is not too much to say that his oratory was the creation of a mass movement and when that dwindled away, he dwindled away with it.'⁶ Thus, when Edwards was batoned by police as he rose to address a crowd of workers and unemployed gathered outside the Auckland Town Hall in April 1932, the crowd responded by rioting in Queen Street. Robyn Hyde described the event:

'Jim' Edwards, hero of the principal riot, the Thursday night affair of smashed windows and stolen goods, broke into the news first as a fiery speaker at meetings far redder in quality than the official Labour Party — prescribed pale pink pills by all its best quacks — would be likely to stomach. Since the Unemployed Workers had knit together in association, open-air meetings and processions on a minor scale became more or less fashionable Edwards' statement and that of the many who backed him up was that on mounting a low concrete parapet to make a speech of a thoroughly 'pacifying' nature, he was bludgeoned by a police official from behind. Bludgeoned, beyond question, he was: but whether he first provided considerably more provocation than he admits is, as I have said before, a matter on which one forms one's own opinion. The police may have owed him some regard for his intervention in Shortland Street a day before. On the other hand, no speech of Mr. Edwards' made at the London Street Theatre or open air meetings could have been described as pacifistic.⁷

In comparison, the reality for those who held leadership positions in Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa was that they were operating within a visual culture rather than an oral culture. Therefore, the images they conjured up to raise the public profile of the unemployed (who were largely absent from the streets) became even more important than the speeches they gave. Jane Stevens brought unemployment issues into the public eye at the Economic Summit Conference in August 1984. Although Stevens's speech to the conference was televised it was Stevens herself who became the public face of the unemployed. 'A Straight Talk From the Heart'⁸, 'Summit Star'⁹ and 'Symbol of Summit'¹⁰ were all headlines to articles reporting the speech of Te Roopu Rawakore's national coordinator. *Dole-drums* reported, 'Jane's address was included in the opening speeches and definitely made the greatest impact. It has been quoted as "the most moving speech of the Summit."' ¹¹ The *Auckland Star* said: 'That day she [Stevens] had made them all feel distinctly uncomfortable. In a passionate, angry speech, she pointed the finger at the well-fed of the summit and blamed them for the fact that she and thousands of others were unemployed It was punchy to the point of rudeness, and it made the 23-year-old at once the novelty and symbol of the summit.'¹² While Jim Edwards used his oratory skills in the streets to spellbind the masses, Jane Stevens created a media image of herself to publicize unemployment issues and the work of Te Roopu Rawakore. While she could use images of the 1930s to public effect, the actual tactics of unemployed organizers in the 1930s were less useful in the 1980s, because of the cultural, social, economic and technological differences of the times.

An article documenting the history of unemployment and the organization of the unemployed during the 1930s appeared in the first edition of *Dole-drums* in 1982. It posed the question: was history repeating itself?¹³ It emphasized the fact that women, Maaori and rural dwellers were discriminated against in terms of lesser or no access to unemployment relief. The following edition of *Dole-drums* continued this history lesson, focusing on the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM) itself and comparing the parallel demands of unemployed in the 1930s and the 1980s: 'no compulsory work schemes, no tax on the dole, no evictions, reduced rents, free medical care, work gear to be supplied free to temporary workers, higher benefit rates'.¹⁴ The stage was set for transhistorical solidarity of the unemployed.

There was a spate of interviews with 'old timers' who had experienced the Depression and been involved in the organization of the unemployed. Dev, from the Wellington Unemployed Workers' Union, recalled his involvement during the 1930s in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) and the activities of the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ). He compared the work schemes during the 1930s and the principle of no pay without work with the present:

Forestry got a tremendous boost from the fact that there were lots of unemployed. They gathered up single men and required that they go out there to forestry camps at 10 bob a week and some tucker, very bad living conditions. It was just to get them out of town and where they weren't subject to the attentions of people like the Communist Party You can create useless jobs like digging holes and filling them up again, and this was done, and seems to be happening again now. The main difference is that the jobs are kept

small, and gangs are not as permanent now as they were in those times. They keep them dispersed. And you don't have to go anywhere to get your money. The people aren't gathering together now. That's the thing that is different.¹⁵

These comparisons caught the imagination of unemployed in Auckland and were used to public effect. An article in *Dole-drums* reported: 'Say No To A Repeat of the 30s. The Auckland Regional Authority met last month to investigate ways of setting up works projects in the region. The Auckland Unemployed Rights Centre went along just to remind them about the 1930s and to keep the creation of shit and meaningless work out of the 80s.'¹⁶ A photograph showing depression-era temporary workers clearing a drainage ditch was juxtaposed with another of workers doing similar tasks in the 1980s (Figure 2).



Figure 2: *Dole-drums* captures the temporary work schemes of the 1930s and 1980s. *Dole-drums*, 12, June 1983, pp.4–5.

Joe Jones and Patsy Barry, from the Beneficiaries' Unemployed Movement in Hamilton, commented on the difficulty of organizing large numbers of unemployed together on the streets: 'The only difference with us and the thirties, the system learnt something out of the thirties and we learnt nothing. The system learnt never to have all the unemployed congregating in one area to collect their money.'¹⁷ Because unemployment benefits were deposited directly into people's bank accounts during the 1980s, it became difficult to organize large numbers of unemployed in one place. Opportunities to build groups and to gain support for protest actions had to be achieved through advertising at Department of Social Welfare offices or by gaining media attention. Dev recalled that whenever there was a deputation sent to the government on behalf of the unemployed during the 1930s, hundreds would accompany them in support. Public meetings of the unemployed were organized frequently by the CPNZ outside hospital boards and labour bureaux and the direction of the unemployed movement was established at those mass meetings. Dev lamented the fact that the numbers of

unemployed gathering to demand the right to work in the 1980s were few compared to the 1930s.¹⁸

A member of the Socialist Unity Party and the Auckland Combined Beneficiaries' Union, John Mitchell, reported on the development of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement during the 1930s and the relationship between the unemployed and the trade unions:

The UWM became highly politicised and its leadership made every effort to direct the actions of the unemployed against the government — the main enemy. Its most difficult task was to gain the support of the trade unions. Many of the unemployed had been and still were active unionists — especially seamen, watersiders and freezing workers. The bulk of these retained their union membership while being active members of the UWM. These workers took the struggle for union support for the unemployed into every possible area and eventually some success was achieved. . . . As one who, in the 1930s, experienced the intense and exhausting battle to win trade union support for the militant Unemployed Workers' Movement, I can testify that, had trade union support been forthcoming in the early days of the struggle, it could have brought about, much sooner than 1935, the defeat of the then hated government or at least ameliorated some of the atrocious conditions under which unemployed families were existing. While admitting that in many respects the trade union movement then did not have the organized strength of today, collective action coming from the major industrial unions ie seamen, watersiders, miners, freezing workers, would have struck a major blow against the government — the main enemy. I think that is a very important lesson to be learnt today.¹⁹

Mitchell wrote this in reaction to the deteriorating relationship between Te Roopu Rawakore and the trade union movement during 1984. His history lesson was that an electoral victory for the Labour party in 1984 would bring about immediate improvements for the unemployed, and thus, he encouraged Te Roopu Rawakore to support the policies of the trade unions and their canvassing for the Labour party.

John Robert Rae, who was 82 in 1985, had taken part in the Queen Street riot in 1932. He compared the Labour governments of the 1930s and the 1980s: 'There was a defeat of the government and the incoming Labour Government had a goal of socialising the means of production, distribution and exchange. This was an appealing objective, which gave the Labour Government sweeping victories. However, the position today is that the Labour Government has ratted on this objective and become a first class Tory government upholding the status quo and continuing the policy of the exploitation and harder measures under this government.'²⁰ If one compares the NUWM's decision to disband after 1935 (because its membership was satisfied with the first Labour government's unemployment measures) with Te Roopu Rawakore's controversial decision to condemn publicly the fourth Labour government's treatment of unemployed in 1985, one could conclude that Rae's sense of betrayal by the fourth Labour government was representative of the views of many people involved in Te Roopu Rawakore.

Simon Wallace, a member of the Auckland Unemployed Workers' Union, a group that opposed the formation of Te Roopu Rawakore, presented a report on Te Roopu Rawakore to the Auckland Trades Council in 1985. He compared the 1930s and 1980s and suggested that unemployment was a permanent feature of

people's social and economic lives in both decades. It was his opinion that 'Big Business' and the state sought to protect their own interests in a time of crisis by creating policies that resulted in increased unemployment, lower wages and deteriorating labour conditions. He viewed the 1930s as a time when male adults had experienced the world of work and had been unionized. Therefore, when they became unemployed, they were aware of the dangers presented when the labour movement and the unemployed worked against each other. Wallace regarded the 1980s as a time when large capital interests had learnt to target unemployment to certain sectors of society such as racial minorities, the young, women and those with disabilities, who had less power as marginalized groups. Therefore, he concluded that labour organizations should form strong alliances with these groups to change this situation.²¹

Jane Stevens replied to Wallace's comments by stating that, in both the 1930s and the 1980s, Maaori people, youth and women made up a large percentage of the unemployed. However, during the 1930s, racism and sexism were not recognized. This meant Maaori and women unemployed were treated as invisible, even though they were involved in the union movement and were politically conscious.²² Stevens rendered visible the past experiences of unemployed women and Maaori to validate her own experiences in the present. Wallace was using the historical past to undermine Stevens' position as the national co-ordinator of Te Roopu Rawakore by drawing attention to the fact that she was a young woman, without a long history in the workforce and without a trade union background. In reality, active leaders like Elsie Locke (née Farrelly), who formed the working women's committees in the 1930s, were of a similar ilk to Stevens, in terms of gender, youth and lack of experience of organizing.

Wallace constructed images of harmonious relations between unemployed and workers during the 1930s to justify his opinion that trade unions should direct the organization of the unemployed in the 1980s. Yet the similarities between the two decades, in terms of rivalries over who should control the organization of the unemployed, are significant because they indicate a lack of historical consciousness. There was a tendency by trade unionists to celebrate the past uncritically to maintain a sense of tradition. The failure of unemployed and trade unionists to form official alliances prevented the development of strong, cohesive unemployed movements in both decades. While the inability of the NUWM to forge a united front with workers was relieved, to some extent, by the first Labour government, which implemented policies to bring about full employment, this did not occur in 1984, and unemployment increased under the fourth Labour government. Despite the organizational strength of the trade unions during the 1980s, the refusal to recognise Te Roopu Rawakore as the official national organization representing the unemployed undermined the capabilities of both movements to bring about better conditions for workers and unemployed. Jane Stevens warned trade unionists about not taking the organization of unemployed groups seriously: 'When considering the organization of the unemployed it is important that unionists not forget the lessons of the past. During the last depression the trade union movement attempted to bypass a militant national unemployed organization and set up a rival movement. Despite some initial success this rival organization failed because the trade union movement was not in touch with the unemployed.'

Eventually they realised this and the original unemployed movement was recognised by the trade union movement. United they were able to make progress.²³

While the trade union leadership remained male-dominated in the 1980s, the national co-ordinators of Te Roopu Rawakore were predominantly women. The increasing movement of women into unemployed politics represented a shift in the numbers of women in the workforce; thus more women experienced unemployment. Although gender differences were not recognized structurally within Te Roopu Rawakore as racial or ethnic differences were, the number of women who played leadership roles was significant in terms of the creation of a culture that was conducive to the active participation of women in unemployed groups.

Joan Scott analysed the place of women in E.P. Thompson's book, *The Making of the English Working Class*. This text is important because Thompson conceived of class consciousness in economic and cultural terms, emphasized the importance of human agency in the making of working-class history and 'politics as the central meaning of that history'.²⁴ Scott argued that, despite Thompson's description of class as a universal concept, he constructed its meaning in gendered terms.²⁵ This was not acknowledged: 'as if singling out gender would introduce a presumption of natural difference that was discriminatory . . . Thompson's ideological commitment to equality ruled out special attention to sexual difference as a subject for discussion.'²⁶ The tradition of class as a universal concept posed difficulties for women during the 1980s who sought to reveal the real effect of sexual difference in terms of their experience of unemployment. Marg Jones, in an interview for *Dole-drums*, gave some valuable insights into changing attitudes towards work and the place of women within political movements:

We were very much involved in the marches, the running of the unemployed rooms [in the 1930s]. I think this was because women were politically conscious and knew it was a struggle of all workers. The main struggle was against sending the men, especially the married men away for three months. The wives at home would just book up bills at the local butcher and grocer. They'd always be behind, and have to struggle to survive from pay to pay.

At the moment women are only accepted in the workforce when there is a need. They are always the first to be sacked or made redundant. Working class women have always worked. My grandmother went to work when she was ten and my mother when she was twelve. I think attitudes to working women are improving and that's [sic] because of what women are doing about it — I think women still need equal opportunities and equal pay and childcare ought to be available more readily. I think that women who wish to stay at home should also be paid — they too are doing a job and a very arduous one at that.²⁷

Jones described the place of women within the NUWM as part of the 'struggle for all workers', which reflected her communist heritage, but also gave an indication of the attitudes of the majority of women who were politically active during the 1930s. Class struggle for women meant working alongside their men, without differentiation between the sexes. Women like Elsie Locke, Amelia

Cassie and Miriam Soljak were rare exceptions in their advocacy of the separate rights of women during the 1930s.²⁸ By the late 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of the women's liberation movement and challenges to the male-dominated hierarchy of the trade union movement, a gendered analysis of work became more prevalent, as was signalled by Jones's opinion of changing times for women. The location of active women in the historical past was an important process for unemployed women in order to justify their leadership roles in Te Roopu Rawakore and to demand respect for their organizational abilities.

In contrast, Maaori unemployed focused on different protest symbols as a basis for organizing. Hauraki Greenland wrote:

This redemption of history as the struggle for mana Maori motuhake (regeneration through autonomy) formed the ideological roots of radicalism. Such historical examples of Maori self-determination and rebellion such as Kingitanga, Kotahitanga, Hone Heke's chopping down of the flagpole at Waitangi [sic], the prophet cults and so forth gave an artificial coherence to the struggle for autonomy. In these earlier movements, Maori radicalism asserted its parallels and precedents alluding to a powerful metaphor portraying activists as products of inevitable historical trends. The combination of myth, symbol and history emphasized the distinctive nature and capability of Maori radical groups and their right to maintain those distinctions — usually by separatist and exclusionary tactics.²⁹

Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana advocated the equalization of economic and social conditions between Maaori and Paakehaa during the 1930s, while emphasizing the importance of retaining a sense of national Maaori identity across tribal boundaries. The Treaty of Waitangi became a symbol for Maaori justice in terms of equal opportunity, and Ratana followers called for its ratification. Ratana particularly appealed to Maaori who lacked status in their own communities, had little opportunity of employment, or were landless. Apirana Ngata represented the interests of tribal leaders who had maintained their rangatiratanga to some extent and had sufficient lands remaining in their possession to make land development schemes possible. The benefits he offered, in return for minimal wages for scheme workers, was the acceptance and promotion of Maaori tribal leaders who were given responsibility for the direction of the schemes in their particular tribal area. Therefore, Ngata and Ratana shared a desire to obtain political, social and cultural power for their people. It was not simply a question of finding employment for Maaori to increase their living standards but about accessing power by establishing economic bases, forms of political power and developing cultural bases (such as wharenui) which would sustain and encourage Maaori learning of their tribal/Maaori heritage. 'Mana Maaori motuhake' was sought by both Ngata and Ratana, despite philosophical and political differences of approach.

The Treaty of Waitangi remained a symbol of social justice for Maaori, and legitimated a demand for the redress of the historical effects of long-term land alienation, such as poor health, inadequate housing, poverty and unemployment. Matiu Rata resigned from the Labour party in November 1979 (ending the 40-year Ratana alliance with Labour) to form the Mana Motuhake party, but he continued the Ratana tradition of demanding the ratification of the Treaty of Waitangi. Mana Motuhake maintained a position of autonomy and asserted the necessity of official relationships with the state, such as bicultural institutions,

while advocating a unique Maaori political identity.³⁰ By naming his party *Mana Motuhake*, Rata invoked past symbols of Maaori nationhood to legitimize his break from the Labour party. *Ngaa Tamatoa* and the Waitangi Action Committee opposed the ratification of the Treaty, declaring the document a fraud because 'no amount of ratification can do away with racism and its consequences'.³¹ Maaori radicals drew attention to their demands for Maaori self-determination, or *tino rangatiratanga*, by negating the Treaty because it was being celebrated by the state as a symbol of racial harmony. However, the premise of recovering a distinct Maaori identity in an urban environment to bring about social and political emancipation, described as 'decolonizing the mind', had its historical roots in Maaori prophet cults and the teachings of Ratana.³² Part of this process involved the exclusion of Paakehaa from Maaori political activism and consciousness raising.³³ Tactical separatism was not unusual in the history of Maaori protest. What was more historically significant were protest organizations that sought to combine the strengths of both Maaori and Paakehaa.

The strands of continuity for Maaori between the 1930s and 1980s portray the importance of inherited protest traditions. For example, Mangamuka, in Hokianga, was a Ratana stronghold during the 1930s and, before that, a centre of protest against Wesleyanism; it is not surprising therefore that *Te Whare Awhina*, a Maaori unemployed group in Hokianga, played a central role in the formation of *Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa* in the 1980s. The name '*Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa*' was gifted from Mangamuka kaumaatua for the unemployed and beneficiaries' movement and it is highly significant that this was the early Maaori name given to the Labour party. Dooley Chapman (father of Huhana Oneroa and Cyril Chapman, active in *Te Whare Awhina*) was a self-taught communist; thus, Leninist ideology formed one of the bases for Huhana Oneroa's and Cyril Chapman's upbringings, alongside the traditions passed down by their Maaori grandmother who lay on the roads to prevent bulldozers from building public roads in the 1950s. Both traditions influenced Huhana's and Chapman's determination to advocate on behalf of unemployed during the 1980s.³⁴

The contacts between Maaori and the labour movement (trade unionists, Labour party members and communists) that occurred during the 1930s, however infrequent, laid the groundwork for continuing alliances in later years. For example, communists remained committed to supporting Maaori land rights at Takaparawha (Bastion Point). John Mitchell and Alex Drennan, members of the CPNZ who were active in unemployed politics during the 1930s, were both involved in building the palisade with Ngaati Whatua at Orakei marae in 1943, in an attempt to save remaining Ngaati Whatua lands.³⁵ The newsletter *Te Hokioi* advocated the formation of alliances with progressive elements of the working class, such as the trade unions and the Labour party, to prevent the further alienation of Maaori land in the late 1960s.³⁶ Both Willie Wilson, a Maaori member of the CPNZ who played a leadership role during the March Against Unemployment organized by *Te Roopu Rawakore* in 1988, and Cyril Chapman, who later became involved with *Te Whare Awhina*, were involved in the occupation of Bastion Point from 1977 to 1978, as were a range of other Paakehaa supporters. These connections were significant because they provided sites for the negotiation of class and Maaori sovereignty struggles.

Negotiation of differing ideologies in regard to protest were rare between Maaori and Paakehaa but did become more prevalent during the early 1980s. An early member of the Christchurch Unemployed Workers' Union, Peter Vink, recalled an early discussion about whether unemployment was a class or race issue at the Kaiwhaiki hui of work trusts and co-operatives in 1983:

People like Ripeka Evans and that in those early days [were] very radical. Wouldn't talk to us white guys. So there was a number of tensions going on there at Kaiwhaiki including Peter Lusk from the coast [West Coast of the South Island] who was an old CP guy from varsity days here at Canterbury and Peter raised the whole debate on whether the unemployment issue and the race issue were in fact a class issue or not. I remember that we debated that for hours at the Kaiwhaiki and it was dangerous ground because we were on a marae and there was a lot of Maaori people at the time who were saying we're being discriminated against because we're black not because we're working class. And Peter's argument always came back to the point that this is a class war, not anything else, and colour will come into it somewhere along the line but the class war is what counts. So there were some fairly heated debates.³⁷

A significant difference between the decades of the 1930s and 1980s was the formation of Te Roopu Rawakore as a dual structure for Maaori and Paakehaa unemployed, recognizing cultural difference within one organizational structure. Despite opposition from some Maaori and Paakehaa, Te Iwi Maaori Rawakore was set up from within Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa in an attempt to meet the specific needs of Maaori unemployed. Rather than have one or two representatives from each unemployed group attending national meetings, a structure was put in place to ensure that one representative from each group was Maaori. By the dual structure, representatives of unemployed sought to protect distinct cultural identities, while giving time to explore common interests of Maaori and Paakehaa unemployed, which could then become a focus for national campaigns. However, while these structures allowed for the recognition of cultural difference in terms of the experience of unemployment, they did not resolve the tensions that existed between the diverse range of groups that made up Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa, all of which made it difficult for the national co-ordinators to present a unified voice on unemployment issues to the public.

Cyril Chapman described the importance of maintaining separate identities for Maaori and Paakehaa unemployed while recognizing the unifying nature of shared experiences of economic dispossession:

There were some real challenges there as far as, well, why do we want to be separate and all that? . . . I 'spose in a way [it was] part of that realisation [that] it was important that, you know, the Maaori — tangata whenua — had something that was really tangata whenua driven — to come to the realisation that there were different approaches, different cultural perspectives. But at the same time knowing that we were all faced by the same monster: the taniwha is the same taniwha. We are all unemployed, we all get affected by unemployment in similar ways, you know, as far as the money side's concerned. And I 'spose the whole thing of, for us anyway, you know that thing of feeling comfortable, you know, about being and talking to your own — a really important part of the growing thing between people, basically eh? [For] Maaori and Paakehaa and anyone else who was involved.³⁸

While Maaori unemployed continued to demand the autonomy to determine employment initiatives for Maaori, Paakehaa continued to use images of the 1930s to increase the profile of the unemployed. Simon Lyndsay, national co-ordinator of Te Roopu Rawakore, addressed his first report to the Combined Trade Unions' national conference in October 1991. He voiced the strong opposition of Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa to the Community Task Force Scheme, which had been introduced in July, describing it as a 'dressed up relief scheme', which earned unemployed \$5 a day on top of their benefit.³⁹ Te Roopu Rawakore regarded this scheme as attacking workers' conditions and Lyndsay asked for union support to fight against its implementation and demand 'jobs with pay packets'.⁴⁰ He stated: 'Surely the 1930's proved that nothing will come right until we get our people working again . . . We worked our way out of the last depression, we must work our way out of this one.'⁴¹ Lyndsay advised the union movement to play an increasing role in the community and advocate for people's rights inside and outside the workplace because 'if the jobs disappear, so will the unions'.⁴² Lyndsay continued this theme in 1992 when he advocated:

There is little doubt that this past year [1991] will be regarded as one of the most traumatic since the 1930s. There is every indication that 1992 will be as difficult. We must play a key role in organizing for positive change, and the right for this and future generations to have a job and a decent standard of living. History is on our side — the Unemployed Movement has done this before. We must continue to strengthen our bonds in our communities, we must keep fighting for the powerless. Our strength lies with people, we must never forget this as the politicians have.⁴³

While these were powerful images for many Paakehaa who either remembered or inherited memories of the Depression, they did not have the same impact for Maaori.

Heiwari Piripi, from Te Whare Awhina, felt that what was lacking in Te Roopu Rawakore was an overview that embraced the common basis that brought together Maaori and Paakehaa unemployed. He felt they needed more time to focus on issues together before they separated into different caucus groups. Instead, people became captivated by their particular issues and those caucus groups took over. In his opinion, the main political kaupapa of Te Roopu Rawakore was neglected.⁴⁴ Difficulties arose when Maaori sought to face the contradictions of allying with a group of people, that is unemployed Paakehaa, who were the dominant culture in New Zealand society and who were only beginning to learn what it meant to be dispossessed economically and politically. Paakehaa faced the difficulty of defining who they were in relation to Maaori without playing the role of the colonizer, for example, by controlling the decision-making process in the organization, continuing to treat unemployed people as if they were all alike and by failing to share resources with Maaori. Maaori unemployed, who spoke in meetings of having experienced long-term economic, social and cultural injustice, found it difficult to organize with Paakehaa without turning their anger on those Paakehaa they sought to work with. Tensions at national meetings continued right through the 1980s, where people sought to allow identity difference while maintaining a cohesive national structure to represent the unemployed. In practice, it was difference, rather than unity, that dominated the agenda of the unemployed.⁴⁵

The lack of an historical precedent for an organization such as Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa meant it was necessary to create new symbols and metaphors that would embrace a number of ideologies of protest. Unfortunately, this did not occur. The images that Paakehaa unemployed embraced from the 1930s — the celebration of what collective action of the unemployed had achieved — were used to justify the organization of unemployed in the 1980s, when unemployment did not exist in the public consciousness. Organizers involved in Te Roopu Rawakore provoked a re-remembering of the impact of widespread economic and social hardship in the 1930s to encourage a more empathetic social response to the difficulties experienced by unemployed in the 1980s. However, despite the deconstruction of that history to locate the experiences of women and Maaori in the 1930s, those particular images of unemployed solidarity served little function or symbolic meaning for Maaori unemployed, and had serious limitations for women. Paakehaa women employed a two-edged approach; using history as a weapon to support their independent stance from the trade union movement, while simultaneously redefining the masculine image of the working-class hero to locate the historical experiences of unemployed women during the 1930s. Maaori unemployed continued to invoke symbols embedded in a culturally separate protest tradition, and demanded the right to work within a framework of *mana Maaori motuhake* or *tino rangatiratanga*. It became of central importance for unemployed women and Maaori to employ significantly different images to locate themselves within a protest tradition. However, this occurred at the expense of the creation of a coherent image of collective identity for unemployed. While there was some support from Paakehaa for the Treaty of Waitangi, as a symbol of justice, and a desire to redress the past and honour the treaty, it remained primarily a symbol of Maaori collective identity, rather than a symbol of partnership or a place of negotiation between two cultures.

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NOTES

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14 *Dole-drums*, 2, June 1982, p.2.

15 *Dole-drums*, 19, March 1984, p.9.

16 *Dole-drums*, 11, May 1983, p.5.

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25 *ibid.*, p.83.

26 *ibid.*, p.75.

27 *Dole-drums*, 25, September 1984, p.8.

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31 *ibid.*, pp.90–91.

32 *ibid.*, p.94.

33 *ibid.*, p.95.

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35 *New Zealand Tribune*, 339, 29 October 1984, pp.2–3.

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37 OI: Peter Vink, cb Karen Davis, Tape 38, Christchurch, 14 September 1993.

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