

The New Zealand Unemployed Workers Movement, 1931—1939

GISBORNE AND THE RELIEF WORKERS' STRIKE*

FROM the 1890s to the 1920s New Zealand's economy underwent a period of expansion, based on the continuously rising value of dairy products and meat exports. The growth rate had been sufficient for a modern economist to refer to these years as being that of New Zealand's 'take-off' period.¹ It is in this context that the impact of the depression on New Zealand must be calculated for, from 1929, world markets shrank and world trade dwindled, prices fell, and unemployment rose in every Western-style economy.

As New Zealand's income from exports went into decline, so the unemployment figures rose. According to K. Sinclair and J. Macrae, who note that the available statistics on unemployment are 'inconsistent and incomplete', unemployment reached, in July 1933, a height of some 16 per cent of the workforce.² Different methods of collecting and interpreting statistics make it unwise to compare this total with those of other Western-style economies. However, there can be little doubt that it represented a new level of unemployment in New Zealand. Further, it was both a psychological blow to a nation which had a well-earned reputation as a land of opportunity, and a new and bewildering experience for national leaders used to legislating for periods of boom or, at worst, mild recession.

The unexpected depth and length of the depression can be illustrated from the fact that although the first Report of the Unemployment Board, in 1931, reported that the Board had been empowered to provide for 'an anticipated maximum of 15,000 unemployed men', the official male unemployed figure reached 51,000 by June 1931 and had hardly fallen below that total by June 1936.³

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New Zealand could hardly turn to her traditional mentor, Great Britain, for advice in coping with the depression, for Britain was itself floundering in a deep recession. But George Forbes, Prime Minister from 1930, had learned a negative lesson from Britain, where he had seen the British unemployment insurance system in action.

In Britain a man could draw a state-provided benefit without having to work, and could even draw a 'dole' for which he had paid no contribution when his 'covenanted benefit' expired. Such procedures were rejected by Forbes, who believed in the no work — no pay principle.⁴ He also shared the then orthodox belief in firm government retrenchment and book-balancing in depressions. These beliefs were to find expression in the government's direction of the Unemployment Board.

The Board was to administer a system of relief work for unemployed men. Relief rates, set by the 1930 Unemployment Act at 14/- a day, were thrice cut early in 1931 so that by July a married man with two children, who lived in one of the four main centres, could only work for three weeks out of four for a maximum of 22/4d for each week's work.⁵

In 1932 the Forbes-led Coalition Government, elected in 1931, imposed further cuts in relief rates, and the Unemployment Board opened the first camps in which the unemployed single men were to live and work for a maximum of 10/- a week. At all times relief rates in secondary centres and rural areas were less than in the four centres; in Gisborne they were an average of 3/- a week less.⁶

For New Zealand then, the policy was to be no pay without work, the work to be of any kind available, and the men on relief could expect to see their rates of pay cut as 'retrenchment' demanded. The government's unemployment policy provoked a militant response, which was led by the National Unemployed Workers Movement. The N.U.W.M. was organized in 1931, following two conferences originally called by the Wellington Unemployed Workers Movement.⁷ At the second conference, the N.U.W.M. came into being as an organization with a number of militant demands, for example, an unemployment insurance scheme to be paid from company profits, or a £3 a week payment to the married unemployed.⁸

The N.U.W.M. was not a purely spontaneous creation of the New Zealand unemployed. It was engineered by left-wingers, and as ex-Communist Party leader S. Scott has written, was modelled on the British organization of the same name.⁹ The British N.U.W.M. had existed since 1921, and had organized national hunger marches in 1922, 1929, and 1930. As a Communist Party-influenced organization, it had attacked the Labour Party and the trade unions strongly enough to be repudiated by these bodies.¹⁰

The New Zealand N.U.W.M. was similarly associated with the national Communist Party. Scott claimed that the majority of N.U.W.M. members

were left-wing Labour Party supporters, although admitting that an early leader, James Edwards, was a Communist.¹¹ But the organization's first National Secretary was also a Communist Party member, and Powell's argument that one of the Communist Party's main difficulties with the N.U.W.M. was that it occasionally acted independently of the Party,¹² also suggests that the movement was, from its inception, closely connected to the Communist Party.

The Labour Party newspaper, the *New Zealand Worker*, was soon to attack the N.U.W.M. for its 'Communist Leanings'.¹³ The N.U.W.M.'s advocacy of direct action, strikes and defiance of Labour Party leadership directives, rapidly earned it the opposition of the trade union leadership.¹⁴

In 1932 the unemployment riots in Auckland, Dunedin and Wellington were followed by the gaoling of Communists for their alleged leading role in the riots, which were consequently blamed by press and judiciary on the Communist Party.¹⁵ The accusation that the Communists 'caused' the riots was somewhat simplistic, for in the same year similar riots occurred in areas as politically and socially disparate as Belfast and Birkenhead in the British Isles, and Perth in Western Australia.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the riots caused many of the unemployed to believe that the N.U.W.M. provoked violence, and to fear becoming participants in a confrontation like the Wellington riot, in which the police dispersed the crowd by 'laying about them with swift, deadly strokes . . . long batons thrusting and swinging'. Consequently they left the N.U.W.M.¹⁷

The backlash of the riots and the N.U.W.M.'s continuous sectarian opposition to the Labour Party and its fraternal organizations made it easy for a number of groups representing the non-Communist or pro-Labour Party unemployed to form in 1933, the National Union of the Unemployed (N.U.U.).¹⁸ By 1934 the N.U.U. was the stronger organization in the main centres, whilst the N.U.W.M. had also failed to make significant progress in the work camps.¹⁹ But the N.U.W.M. could hope to utilize anti-government sentiments in the secondary centres like Gisborne where resentment against lower relief rates existed.

Gisborne was an urban outpost amidst extensive sheep- and stock-rearing and dairying areas. It was among the nation's top ten ports and was the tenth ranking industrial centre by number of factories. Its industries served rural needs, and included butter factories, freezing works, and farm-implement factories. In the 1920s it had been a 'bustling, vigorous, free-spending, confident community'.²⁰ The town had no history of militancy. It had a Labour member of Parliament, D. W. Coleman, but he was a 'moderate and inoffensive' man who had been elected in 1931 when the Coalition vote had been split between two rival candidates.²¹ But Gisborne had been hard hit by unemployment, while the agricultural depression of falling prices was aggravated in 1931 and 1932 by snow, storms, drought and floods.²² The town's unemployment figures for the depression and its aftermath are given below.

Table One
Unemployment in Gisborne, 1930–1936

<i>Date</i>	<i>No. of Unemployed Males</i>
18 October 1930	100*
24 December 1930	250*
16 September 1931	1000*
8 October 1932	1686
7 October 1933	1130
6 October 1934	921
26 October 1935	966
9 May 1936	778

Sources: *Gisborne Times*, 18 October, 24 December 1930; 16 September 1931. A.J.H.R., 1933–1936, H-35.

* Approximate Figures

There are neither estimates available of men fully employed in Gisborne on schemes chargeable to the Unemployment Fund, nor of the town's official workforce. But a maximum unemployed total of 1,686 men out of a town population of no more than 16,000 is an indication of the severity of local unemployment.²³ However, a comparative view of Gisborne's situation is instructive. Gisborne was a prosperous, growing community undergoing an unavoidable setback. It could not be likened to the ravaged British towns of dying industries. It was not a Jarrow, not one of the towns of Tyneside or South Wales, which by 1934, when the peak of the British slump had passed, had unemployment rates from 50 to over 70 per cent.²⁴

Gisborne had been represented at the 1931 founding conference of the N.U.W.M. and it seems reasonable to date the Gisborne Unemployed Workers Movement (G.U.W.M.) at least from that conference.²⁵ The Gisborne movement adopted the N.U.W.M.'s objectives as its own, and had the local objective of providing 'social relaxation and enjoyment for members.'²⁶ Indeed, W. H. Oliver's only reference to the G.U.W.M. in his writings on the Gisborne area is to the demand by the Ladies' Section that the borough council allow them free use of the municipal croquet greens,²⁷ a demand consistent with the objective of relaxation. But the G.U.W.M. was not only interested in croquet; it had other, more pressing, issues at hand. In 1931, two of its leaders, W. Appleby and R. Waugh, brought a complaint about the hardships of local relief workers to the borough council.²⁸ A year later the group was quick to reassure Coleman and the town that it did not want 'any trouble or strife with shopkeepers' — there were to be no riots in Gisborne.²⁹

The group was functioning peacefully, against a background of a continued deterioration in the condition of the unemployed. In September 1932 unemployed men from secondary centres were allowed by the Board to work for longer than before, but at lower rates of pay, and Gisborne was informed that all single unemployed men and a balloted 50 married unemployed men, were to go to work camps.³⁰ The extent of unemploy-

ment strained charitable resources. The Gisborne Central Relief Committee, on which Appleby and Waugh sat, was giving relief rations to 3,000 people — 20 per cent of the town's population.³¹ The relief depot, which had been supported generously by all the town, was forced to close from October to December 1932, through lack of funds.³² In that same year Forbes told New Zealand that 'the worst is over'.³³ But national unemployment increased in 1933, although the situation in Gisborne improved slightly. In August 1933, the *Gisborne Times* drew attention to the hopeless condition of many of the town's unemployed, whilst Coleman complained that the Unemployment Board was decreasing relief work subsidies for Gisborne.³⁴ The Gisborne unemployed had little to be optimistic about.

Economic pressures brought the Gisborne unemployed into conflict with the Board and the government. In November 1933 the Board reduced its subsidies to the town for men employed on relief. Local relief rates were cut so that, for example, a single man could earn only a maximum of 7/6d a week. It was further proposed that, in the new year, some forty or so childless married men not in camps would do one week's work for 5/-, the equivalent of half a day's pay.³⁵ The proposals angered the unemployed and the G.U.W.M. reflected this anger. Articles denouncing their proposals were printed in the left-wing press, while a public meeting in opposition was held, with further meetings proposed for 1934.³⁶

As late as December 1933, the Communist Party had criticized the N.U.W.M. for its failures, including its inability to do well in the camps.³⁷ The Gisborne events were the N.U.W.M.'s chance to achieve national success. In 1932 and 1933 strikes of relief workers had taken place in Eastbourne and Hawke's Bay, but the N.U.W.M. had failed to gain nation-wide support for them. A 'hunger march' from Lower Hutt to Wellington in 1932, to support the Eastbourne men, had failed to cover the distance let alone attract a big enough following to animate the popular conscience.³⁸

The N.U.W.M. had advantages in Gisborne's case. There was no N.U.U. branch to provide a rival focus of attention. A meeting on 4 January 1934 attracted 300 people who supported the G.U.W.M.'s decision to call a strike starting that day.³⁹ A second strike meeting endorsed this decision, and the decision was backed not only by Appleby, Waugh and F. McComish, secretary of the N.U.W.M., but also by Coleman and E. Harris, secretary of the Gisborne Labour Party.⁴⁰ The strike was a desperate gamble, as the men's bargaining position was weak. But the comparatively harsh treatment of the Gisborne unemployed by the Board rallied wide sections of local society to their cause. Shopkeepers and businessmen gave food and goods to the strikers' relief organization which was soon distributing 300 loaves a day to strikers' families. One businessman paid for 1,000 loaves to be distributed.⁴¹

Was this cynical opportunism on behalf of small capitalists to whom

decreased relief rates meant less purchasing power? Such an answer would not explain why loss of purchasing power forced small owners and businessmen to support actively a strike by a militant minority group. Oliver has noted that Gisborne was one of those towns that had still only very recently been on the frontier of New Zealand and had not long been integrated into the national political culture.⁴² One can, then, see the communal backing for the strikers as a partial product of an isolated, peripheral town's reaction against domination by a political centre which devised relief rates which appeared to discriminate against secondary centres and rural areas. Further, Gisborne was small enough for inter-personal relations to matter, and the unemployed were not in that situation because of laziness but because of trade conditions; therefore they could be granted a communal solidarity.

The strikers had very little chance of success against an Unemployment Board which could and did terminate relief pay to any man who refused work.⁴³ The N.U.W.M. decided that it had to spread Gisborne's cause throughout the nation. It decided to call for a national relief workers' strike — an adventurist move considering the failure of previous attempts at such a strike — and a national hunger march. The latter, if it was to win the public support which the British marches did, would need the same 'extensive planning and organising'⁴⁴ which had made those marches a success. It was to be found wanting in these respects.

But the *Gisborne Times* of 22 January 1934 was able to report the start of an historic event — New Zealand's one and only national hunger march. It was led by the G.U.W.M. and attracted the support of some 300 people in Gisborne.⁴⁵ Officially, the marchers comprised only 35 Gisborne residents, together with 10 or 11 camp members. It was led by C. Jennings, while O. Gregory and J. McKay were the two representatives of the camp on the march's executive.⁴⁶ The march had a strict set of rules for the members, including the prohibition of 'disobedience, impudence, alcohol, insubordination' and had a 'rank and file court' to try offenders for violation of these rules.⁴⁷ In fact the marchers did little walking, but were transported between the towns through which they walked.⁴⁸ The march could not obtain the propagandist effect of its British counterparts, in which scarecrow-like figures plodded gamely and grimly through fog, rain and snow.

Under the G.U.W.M.'s red flag, the march made its first stop at 'Bartlett's hunger camp', where, ironically, 'a most acceptable lunch was provided'.⁴⁹ From that point the march's fortunes varied. At Wairoa, 300 to 400 people attended a successful meeting. At Napier, 'Comrade Bert' found billets for the marchers in local hotels. At Hastings, the Labour Party provided soft drinks and afternoon tea, and a meeting was held which went well until, as Jennings reported, 'Comrade Clancey attempted to sabotage an appeal made by myself'.⁵⁰ At Waipukurau, the marchers were forced to wait for billets until 'Comrade Mills of some newfangled, luke-warm organisation' was able to help them. Sympathetic Otaki farmers

gave the marchers a sheep and some potatoes but at Waipawa little interest was shown, 'the inhabitants being dead but unable to lay down'.⁵¹

The N.U.W.M. attempted to appeal to the widest possible public in its march propaganda. A chiliastic leaflet by the Palmerston North N.U.W.M. warned the Unemployment Board, which it accused of 'slowly murdering men, women, and children', that 'The Day of Reckoning is at hand'. It was addressed to the unlikely alliance of 'Comrades, Businessmen, Employed and Unemployed'.⁵²

Rhetoric being unable to outdo power, it was to be the Board which triumphed over the marchers. The N.U.W.M. had called for the national strike to commence on 5 February, the day when the marchers arrived in town. Upon their arrival, they were met by the Wellington Relief Workers Union and, on the following day, attended a mass meeting at the Trades Hall.⁵³ But they had not gained the national support they needed. On 6 February the *Dominion*, which three days before had made pointed editorial references to the British N.U.W.M.'s connexions to the British Communist Party, was able to print reports on the failure of the strike call from all areas of New Zealand.⁵⁴

The *Dominion* and other papers made play with such N.U.W.M. demands as full trade union pay or sustenance, but in fact the marchers' representatives were pressing W. Bromley, Labour representative on the Board, for far milder concessions. Messrs. Sim of the National Executive of the N.U.W.M. and McKay from the march were content to ask that the November 'cuts' be restored and that single men should be able to go to the camps if they so wanted. Bromley was unmoved by these pleas and offered no concessions at all.⁵⁵ Following their unsuccessful pleadings the marchers had to return home. The government allowed them free rail transport to Napier and road transport from there to Gisborne (in cattle trucks, according to Jennings).⁵⁶

The march had failed to generate mass support for a national strike and had gained the Gisborne unemployed no advantages from the meeting with Bromley. The strike ballot organized by the N.U.W.M. was later claimed to have won 8,500 votes from the unemployed who then numbered some 60,000. Opposed by the Labour Party, the unions and the N.U.U., the national strike never got off the ground.⁵⁷

The Gisborne strike had continued during the march, with considerable local sympathy, and the branch collected donations throughout the town and issued such foods as bread, tea and sugar to strikers' families.⁵⁸ A deputation from the borough council, the outlying Cook County Council, the R.S.A. and local shopkeepers went to Wellington to ask Unemployment Minister Adam Hamilton to allow relief rates in secondary centres be made equal to that of the cities. He had replied that to do so would attract men from farm work onto relief.⁵⁹ But even the anti-strike Gisborne branch of the Farmers Union was supporting the deputation's demands and sympathized with the local unemployed.⁶⁰ Having failed to

wring an inch of concession from the government or the Board, isolated and outgunned, the strike was unable to be maintained. It was extremely costly to the unemployed and had failed to obtain any results. On 21 February the G.U.W.M. officially called it off.⁶¹

In the face of failure there was little comradeship from the Left. The Communist Party had been attacking 'Coleman, M.P.' in the *Workers Weekly*; now it found the N.U.W.M. guilty of having too many 'reformist' members, of poor organization and of mismanaging the ballot.⁶²

The G.U.W.M. had previously been factionalized, during the 1933 mayoral elections, into a pro-Coleman group, led by Jennings, and into an anti-Coleman group, led by Appleby and Waugh, but it was Coleman's supporters who had been denigrated as the Communist sympathizers.⁶³ Following the march, the sides seemed to have changed viewpoints though the cleavage was re-opened. A report on the march by Jennings, which appeared in Labour's *New Zealand Worker*, praised the Labour Party and accused the Communist press of censoring the report which it had printed. Gregory denounced, and the G.U.W.M. officially suppressed, Jennings' report,⁶⁴ after which no more mention of him is to be found in group records. The fact that the G.U.W.M. had Communist associations but could still command a fairly large amount of public sympathy can be deduced from the attendance of 400 at the funeral of J. McKay Senr in January 1934. For McKay was an ex-member of the Gisborne Watersiders Union, the G.U.W.M., and the N.U.W.M. as well as the Communist Parties of Great Britain and New Zealand.⁶⁵

The march and strike had brought immediate, though transient, gains for both the N.U.W.M. and the G.U.W.M. Some of the unemployed, who had supported the strike call and who had previously been in the N.U.U., such as the Christchurch Unemployed Workers Association, now joined the N.U.W.M.⁶⁶ The G.U.W.M. similarly had a surge of increased membership. At the 1934 N.U.W.M. conference R. Thorne, a Gisborne delegate, boasted of the 300 men in the branch, and an undated membership roll, which gives some 355 names of men who were G.U.W.M. members, was probably produced in 1934, heyday of the G.U.W.M.⁶⁷

A few months after the march the Gisborne unemployed were given relief pay increases of 1/10d a week for single men, and 2/6d a week for married men. The Gisborne correspondent to the *Workers Weekly* rather cynically commented that this would make it 'hard to stir up the workers for a long time'.⁶⁸ But in July and August 1934 the group was involved in another, locally popular, protest against proposed rates of pay for relief workers on a scheme of improvement at a local airfield. 400 people attended a meeting to denounce the pay rates, at which N.U.W.M. organizer, M. Ormerod, spoke. The unemployed also had the broad support of the *Gisborne Times*, the R.S.A. and the Salvation Army.⁶⁹ However, the Unemployment Board killed the dispute, by abandoning the scheme, because Gisborne had spurned its 'generous assistance'.⁷⁰

With leading Communist L. Sim as its financial secretary, the N.U.W.M. worked in close alliance with the Communist Party. The latter organization, later in 1934, led the N.U.W.M. into supporting a campaign for a 'Workers Charter' of extreme demands, such as the abolition of all camps and of the industrial arbitration system, which had been, ironically, supposed to 'unite workers as a class'.⁷¹ Gregory was sent by the N.U.W.M. Executive on a national fund-raising tour, in which he tried to sell copies of the Charter. The tour involved hardships, for he had to 'spend one night in the open' and 'missed a few meals'.⁷² But by the year's end the N.U.W.M. admitted that the campaign had failed.⁷³ The Communists had a range of other outlets for militants like Gregory and his Gisborne comrades. It organized a Working Women's Alliance to which the Gisborne Ladies Section of the G.U.W.M. affiliated.⁷⁴ The Gisborne men were involved in an effort to organize a 'Committee against War and Fascism', which, early in 1935, was issuing invitations to a meeting, and being firmly rejected by a wide range of local political and social groups.⁷⁵

From 1935 onwards the N.U.W.M. and its branches were dying. A multitude of factors was operating against them. The objective conditions of large-scale unemployment and cuts in relief rates were disappearing. The depression was ending; in Gisborne, for example, sheep prices began to rise in 1935.⁷⁶ Increased prices meant increased national income. Improvements in relief conditions became economically feasible and also politically desirable, with a General Election due in 1935. The Unemployment Board's 1935 report contained a long list of improvements.⁷⁷ An increased relief scale for men on the main relief schemes had spread to secondary areas like Gisborne before 1935.⁷⁸

The N.U.W.M. tied its political fate to that of the Communist Party. At the local elections of 1935 the Communist candidates were mainly N.U.W.M. members and included two N.U.W.M. national executive members and two of the group's regional organizers.⁷⁹ The Communist Party was still toeing the Comintern line of treating Labour Parties as 'the main enemy (social fascism)'.⁸⁰ This view brought it into direct opposition with the wishes of the New Zealand people, who elected a Labour parliamentary majority (including Coleman) in 1935 and again in 1938. Labour's 1935 victory 'caused the unemployed to leave the N.U.W.M. in droves'.⁸¹ So too did such Labour policies as abolishing the Unemployment Board, employing relief workers at standard rates of pay, increasing sustenance payments and equalizing the sustenance rates in the secondary centres with those in the cities.⁸²

The N.U.W.M. asked the Labour Government to let it become the 'official' union of the unemployed but the Minister of Public Works, Richard Semple, preferred to let the New Zealand Workers Union recruit the 'unemployed' who worked in his department, whilst he denounced Communist influences amongst the unemployed. The Alliance of Labour simultaneously encouraged the General Labourers Union to recruit the

rest of the relief workers.⁸³ By 1939 the N.U.W.M. had ceased to exist as a national organization.⁸⁴

It had been predeceased by the G.U.W.M. Like the other N.U.W.M. branches it gradually lost its role as a substitute trade union and had both to disband its once popular sports teams and its social functions, although in 1936 it had still held weekly dances for the Communist *Workers Weekly*.⁸⁵ Nor did its political activities have any success. The group, with Labour Party consent, put forward W. Appleby and C. Goodson as local candidates in 1935. Their moderate campaign concentrated on the N.U.W.M.'s latest demand for a 10/- increase in all relief rates. But the two G.U.W.M. men came bottom of the polls.⁸⁶ The group's failure (despite Coleman's support) to prevent the eviction of Appleby from his home in mid-1935, for non-payment of rent, further demonstrated its growing impotence.⁸⁷ Thereafter it consisted of a few dedicated leaders, like Gregory, and a paper membership. It was reduced to passing protest motions but was incapable of initiating active campaigns. Only six members were present at the 1938 General Meeting and they decided that the group should begin to wind up its affairs.⁸⁸ On 23 October 1938, the last recorded meeting of the G.U.W.M. voted to send a wreath of red flowers to the funeral of a late member⁸⁹: a fitting conclusion to the group's own existence.

The N.U.W.M. had been one of the many organizations through which the Communist Party tried to spread its influence in the labour movement and by which it tried to gain recruits. It achieved little success in either direction during the 1930s. Party membership grew from 61 in 1928 to only 80 in 1932, and a 'bewildering frequency' of expulsions made membership a hazardous venture.⁹⁰ The Communists' hatred for the Labour Party, which was only finally moderated in 1936,⁹¹ also served to keep it in strict isolation from the mainstream of the labour movement.

There can be no doubt at all that the N.U.W.M.'s close connexions to the Communist Party adversely affected it. It did represent those militant unemployed who wished to take action against the government and the Board. It provided a substitute trade union milieu for unemployed unionists. Its political and social functions gave the unemployed something to believe in and something to do. Its activities countered the apathy to which the unemployed were always potentially subject; it enabled them to fight against the routine degradations of their condition. But for all its positive aspects, the N.U.W.M.'s association with the pro-Soviet, anti-Labour Communists lowered its appeal to the majority of New Zealanders. They showed their political preferences in 1935. Labour's victory was the death-knell of the N.U.W.M. The improved economic situation of the nation and the consequent decline in the numbers of the unemployed, combined with their recruitment into official unions and the new Government's relentless anti-Communism, ensured that the movement could not survive.

The N.U.W.M. had always been stronger in the secondary centres and rural areas,⁹² where relief rates had been lowest and Labour support weakest. Areas like Gisborne had provided the bulk of rank and file N.U.W.M. support. But branches such as these could only thrive when their political associations meant less to local communities than their immediate efforts on behalf of men who were unemployed through no fault of their own and whose families were therefore suffering as a consequence. Communal solidarity in the outlying areas could become strong enough to generate wide popular support for groups like the G.U.W.M. at times like those of the 1934 strike. But afterwards the groups became political sects. Their declining membership was drawn into one frantic and futile campaign after another — as though the leadership hoped that energy alone was enough to reinforce allegiance and to stave off the almost inevitable decay.

But even Gisborne's hard core of seemingly indefatigable militants could not resist the forces of change. As prosperity began to return to the town, as Labour began to develop the modern welfare state, the anger and bitterness caused by the depression diminished. There was no longer a place in Gisborne's political and social consensus for a small group of pro-Communist militants.

The G.U.W.M. had made New Zealand history by staging the country's only national hunger march. But the swiftly changing course of history destroyed the group and its national organization, by making them politically irrelevant and socio-economically anachronistic.

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NOTES

¹K. Berrill (ed.), *Economic Development with Special Reference to East Asia*, London, 1964, p. 235.

²K. Sinclair, J. Macrae, 'Unemployment in New Zealand during the Depression of the Late 1920s and Early 1930s', *Australian Economic History Review*, XV, 1 (March 1975), 36, 44.

³AJHR, 1931, H-35, p. 2 and *ibid.*, 1936, H-35, p. 7.

⁴R. M. Chapman, *The Political Scene*, Auckland, 1969, p. 10.

⁵J. A. Lee, *Socialism in New Zealand*, Wellington/London, 1938, p. 246.

⁶*ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

⁷P. G. Morris, 'Unemployed Organisations in New Zealand, 1926-1939', unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wellington, 1949, pp. 31-37.

⁸*ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

⁹S. Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, Auckland, 1960, p. 67.

¹⁰W. Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936*, London, 1973 ed., pp. 177-215.

¹¹Scott, p. 67.

¹²J. R. Powell, 'The History of a Working Class Party, 1918' unpublished Master's thesis, University of Wellington, 1949, p. 41.

¹³*ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴Morris, pp. 40-42.

- ¹⁵Powell, pp. 48–54.
- ¹⁶*Unemployed Struggles*, pp. 232–3, G. C. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, Nedlands, 1972, p. 150.
- ¹⁷Morris, p. 51; Powell, p. 52, citing the *Dominion*, 11 May 1932.
- ¹⁸Morris, pp. 57–58.
- ¹⁹*ibid.*, p. 76 and *Workers Weekly*, 12 December 1933.
- ²⁰W. H. Oliver, *Challenge and Response*, Gisborne, 1971, pp. 184–6.
- ²¹*ibid.*, p. 232.
- ²²*ibid.*, p. 216.
- ²³*The New Zealand Official Year Book, 1939*, Wellington 1938, p. 70, quotes the 1936 census figure of a population of 15,521 in 1936 for the Gisborne urban area (Maoris excluded), and a 1938 figure (including Maoris) of 16,200.
- ²⁴S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy*, London, 1969, p. 245.
- ²⁵Morris, pp. 36–37.
- ²⁶Minute Book, 28 February 1935–23 October 1938, list of objectives, n.p., n.d., McAra Collection, Folder Three.
- ²⁷W. H. Oliver, *Towards a New History?*, University of Otago, 1971, p. 25.
- ²⁸*Gisborne Times*, 16 September 1931.
- ²⁹*ibid.*, 19 April 1932.
- ³⁰*ibid.*, 2 and 7 September 1932.
- ³¹*ibid.*, 7 July 1932.
- ³²*ibid.*, 14 September 1932.
- ³³*ibid.*, 15 September 1932.
- ³⁴*ibid.*, 18 August 1933.
- ³⁵*ibid.*, 5 January 1934; *Workers Weekly*, 14 November, 19 December 1933.
- ³⁶For example in the *Workers Weekly*, 28 November 1933.
- ³⁷*Workers Weekly*, 12 December 1933.
- ³⁸Morris, pp. 42–43, 59–60.
- ³⁹*Gisborne Times*, 5 January 1934.
- ⁴⁰*ibid.*, 10 January 1934.
- ⁴¹*ibid.*, 19 January 1934.
- ⁴²*Towards a New History?*, passim.
- ⁴³*New Zealand Herald*, 10 January 1934.
- ⁴⁴W. Hannington, *Ten Lean Years*, London, 1940, p. 53.
- ⁴⁵*Gisborne Times*, 22 January 1934.
- ⁴⁶March report, n.p., n.d., McAra Collection, Folder One, and *Official Report of New Zealand Hunger Marchers*, Wellington, 1934, pp. 1–5.
- ⁴⁷*ibid.*, passim.
- ⁴⁸*ibid.*
- ⁴⁹*ibid.*
- ⁵⁰*ibid.*
- ⁵¹*ibid.*
- ⁵²Undated leaflet published by Palmerston North U.W.M., McAra Collection, Folder One.
- ⁵³*Dominion*, 7 February 1934; *Evening Post*, 5 February 1934.
- ⁵⁴*Dominion*, 3, 6, 7 February 1934.
- ⁵⁵*Dominion*, 7 February 1934.
- ⁵⁶*Official Report*, p. 11.
- ⁵⁷*Workers Weekly*, 20 March 1934; Morris, pp. 75–76.
- ⁵⁸*Workers Weekly*, 13 February 1934.
- ⁵⁹*New Zealand Herald*, 27 January 1934.
- ⁶⁰*Gisborne Times*, 22 February 1934.
- ⁶¹*ibid.*, 21 February 1934.
- ⁶²*Workers Weekly*, 13 February, 27 March 1934.
- ⁶³*Gisborne Times*, 9, 11 March, 21, 26 April, 4 May 1933.
- ⁶⁴Written comments by O. B. Y. Gregory on G.U.W.M.'s copy of the march report, McAra Collection, Folder One.
- ⁶⁵*Workers Weekly*, 30 January 1934.
- ⁶⁶Morris, p. 73, pp. 77–88.
- ⁶⁷*Report of N.U.W.M. Sixth Annual Conference*, Wellington, 1935, p. 5, and undated membership roll, McAra Collection, Folder One.
- ⁶⁸*Workers Weekly*, 23 June 1934.
- ⁶⁹*Gisborne Times*, 29, 30, 31 August 1934.

- ⁷⁰ibid., 21 September 1934.
- ⁷¹Scott, p. 82; Letters from L. Sim to O. B. Y. Gregory, 24 and 27 June 1934, McAra Collection, Folder One; Morris, p. 79; *The Workers' Charter*, Wellington, 1934, pp. 1-3.
- ⁷²Letters from A. E. Sergeant to Gregory, 25 July 1934 to 7 October 1934, passim, McAra Collection, Folder One.
- ⁷³Morris, p. 82; *Report of N.U.W.M. Fifth Annual Conference*, Wellington, 1934, pp. 1-4.
- ⁷⁴*Report on the National Conference of Working Women*, Wellington, 1934, pp. 1-8.
- ⁷⁵Letters to R. Thorne from: Gisborne L.R.C. 28 January 1935; Gisborne Labour Party, 5 February 1935; East Coast and Poverty Bay General Labourers Union, 14 February 1935; Gisborne R.S.A., 12 February 1935; Gisborne Y.M.C.A., 13 February 1935.
- ⁷⁶*Challenge and Response*, p. 217.
- ⁷⁷AJHR, 1935, H-35, pp. 16-19.
- ⁷⁸*Workers Weekly*, 15 September 1934.
- ⁷⁹*Workers Weekly*, 27 April 1935.
- ⁸⁰E. J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, London, 1973, p. 33.
- ⁸¹Morris, p. 87.
- ⁸²*Socialism in New Zealand*, pp. 247-8; AJHR, 1939, 11-A, pp. 3-7.
- ⁸³Morris, pp. 89-90, 102; *The Round Table*, XXVI, December 1935-September 1936, pp. 641-2; *Workers Weekly*, 15 February 1936.
- ⁸⁴Morris, p. 96.
- ⁸⁵Minutes of 24 February 1936 and 11 March 1935, Minute Book, 28 February 1935-23 October 1938, McAra Collection, Folder Three, and minutes of 18 November 1935, Minute Book, 20 May 1935-7 March 1938, ibid., Folder One.
- ⁸⁶*Gisborne Times*, 2 and 9 May 1935.
- ⁸⁷ibid., 5 and 12 June 1935.
- ⁸⁸Minutes of 30 March 1938, Minute Book, 28 February 1935-23 October 1938, ibid., Folder Three.
- ⁸⁹Minutes of 23 October 1938, ibid., Folder Three.
- ⁹⁰Powell, p. 60, H. Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1973, p. 159.
- ⁹¹Following L. Sim's visit to Moscow, during which he was instructed in the new 'Popular Front' line of the Comintern, Scott, p. 82.
- ⁹²For example, at the 1933 N.U.W.M. national conference, 20 of the 26 delegates were from the secondary centres or the rural areas, Powell, p. 73.