

## Chapter Three

### **Let us be patient**

*Disciplining the Unemployed, 1892-93*

Let us be patient! These severe afflictions  
Not from the ground arise;  
But oftentimes celestial benedictions  
Assume this dark disguise.<sup>1</sup>

After Dwyer left Mittagong in early 1893 he only once briefly returned. Annie stayed until the end of the year, suspended in the failure that John hurried to escape. She had her own alienation to endure, as a penniless mother left in a small town to face the family creditors. Annie had none of the compensating social network John was able to access in Sydney through his participation in the Active Service Brigade, which he joined later in the year. The Brigade also gave John a way of expressing his ambitions and radical politics, easing the loss of self-esteem he suffered in Mittagong.

Before returning to the Dwyer family story, this chapter examines the search for work in depression Sydney, and compares the experience of two men - Joseph Creer, who would be asked to manage the unemployed on behalf of the state, and John Dwyer, attempting to find his own way out of unemployment. Observing Creer's work, Dwyer conceived of a role as an advocate and organiser of the unemployed: he would take their lack of a recognised social role and forge one of his own. Creer and Dwyer were both immigrant men from socially marginalised backgrounds, eager for

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<sup>1</sup>. *Help for the Poor and Afflicted*, Benevolent Society of NSW 1891, p.15. ML

success in their new country. They found themselves negotiating the worst economic crisis in the history of New South Wales, a crisis that spun their lives together, a fate neither had expected.

During the harsh years of the 1890s, the unemployed were earnestly enjoined by politicians and businessmen, bureaucrats and charities to be patient, to bear the search for work and sustenance without rancour or social upheaval. The Benevolent Society of NSW urged the impoverished working class to accept their fate. Longfellow's 'lesson of resignation' conveniently rationalised that human suffering could not be resolved on earth.<sup>2</sup> To be instructed to be patient is to be classified.<sup>3</sup> It is a way of organising 'the wild profusion of existing things', including human beings, into a stable social order.<sup>4</sup> Foucault argued that fundamental codes established 'for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing, and within which he will be at home.'<sup>5</sup> Settling the untidy profusion of the living does not simply involve a gentle appeal for their patient duty. In the contested space of an hierarchical, acquisitive society like New South Wales in the 1890s, a society under pressure, to be patient was to submit before implied and overt aggression. The very existence of the poor, the larrikin and the unemployed challenged elite values and the social structure. Marginalised and defiant, these categories of the lower social classes dangerously shadowed into the realm of the Other - the manly unemployed could be the idle loafer, the deserving poor the undeserving mendicant, The mocking larrikin a brutal criminal: all capable of

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2. *ibid.*

3. 'All social action flows through boundaries determined by classification schemes'.

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, Vintage Books 1985, p.193.

4. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Tavistock Publications, 1974, p.xv.

5. *ibid.*, p.xx.

uprising. Categories 'at once interior and foreign', that had be ameliorated or suppressed.<sup>6</sup>

Peter Gay argues that the innate aggression of the Victorian bourgeois could be channelled into ambition, fuelling an 'egotistical self-assertiveness'.<sup>7</sup> An elite of self-made men in New South Wales exulted in acquisitiveness as the natural expression of moral and material improvement in a young country. They were impatient to succeed and intolerant of challenges to their authority or to the ideological codes that justified their struggle and success. The colonial elite was an interconnecting network of individuals - the rich and powerful, but also those hungry for success and eager to please: a new network, milling up the social scale, renewing the elite. Joseph Creer's life was an essay in ingratiating ambition, at once deferential and aggressive. By 1893 Creer, as the Superintendent of the NSW Government Labour Bureau, had reached a relatively modest position of colonial prestige of which Dwyer could only dream. After a life-long roller-coaster ride, up and down the social and economic scale, Creer ironically found himself with substantial power over the lives of the Sydney unemployed - people who represented the fate he had fought so hard to avoid. As a boy Creer had been forced to fight his way out his indenture, and fight for his rights at work as an apprentice carpenter. As an ambitious emigrant from the Isle of Man, he was compelled to fight for his rights in the colony, struggling to build his own business. This was the world into which Joseph Creer had been thrown, the world in which from the very first, he was at home; he knew no other.

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6. *ibid.*, p.xxiv.

7. Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred*, Fontana Press 1995, pp. 6, 39.

## Every man for himself

If that man can live, so can I.

*Joseph Creer's Motto.*<sup>8</sup>

In 1842, Joseph Creer's father died. Just one day after the ten year old Joseph, the youngest of the family, watched his father lowered into his grave in the grounds of the Wesleyan church in St. Johns, the wife of his eldest brother arrived at the house, and demanded that Joseph and his mother immediately leave. Sixty years later, his mother's desperate efforts to forestall eviction were vividly impressed in Joseph's mind. 'I can well remember trotting by her side to Peel, Castletown, and Douglas, to hunt up papers and find out the conditions under which my father had signed over the property.'

The 79 year old Patrick Creer presided over a family divided by two marriages, and the lure of a solid inheritance. His extensive property holdings around St. Johns, one of the Isle of Man's larger towns, had all been bequeathed to his 'favourite' eldest son, John, Joseph's stepbrother. John Creer and his impatient wife failed to throw Joseph and his mother from the house, although the law upheld the will. A few years later, Joseph, by then an apprentice carpenter following the trade of his brothers, went to work for the son of his wealthy stepbrother in Liverpool, the nearest major west coast British city. Joseph's nephew, John Jabez Creer, 'was as close-fisted in dealing with me as it was possible for a man to be. Many and many a time I said to him, "Well, John, the very money you are paying me with is my father's, and ought to have

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<sup>8</sup>. Joseph Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, 1902, p.23. ML

been mine." We used to have very hot words over it. However, I had to submit to fate.<sup>9</sup>

Joseph unwillingly submitted: resentment and ambition seethed in him, as he made clear to a St. John's newspaperman who recorded his reminiscences in June 1902. The local boy made good returned triumphantly home, reciting his stories. Creer was so pleased with the results that he took a copy of the articles back to Australia, pasting the clippings into a small volume of vindication that found its way into the State Library of New South Wales. Like Dwyer, Joseph Creer believed his stories of injustice were worth preserving, although Creer could complete his tale with the emigrant's self-satisfied success.<sup>10</sup>

The reporter found Creer all of five feet four inches, with a sturdy liveliness in every motion, 'character essential in men who get on in the world.' His pleasant face expressed 'a power within', sustaining him through life's trials. An 1887 portrait conveys an impression of an alert and bushy faced terrier, with much of Creer's lower face disappearing beneath luxurious mutton chop sideburns and moustache.<sup>11</sup> At his father's death, Joseph's suddenly impoverished mother was forced to remove him from the local school. Young, small and physically weak, Joseph was indentured to Mister Lace, a tailor at a nearby village. Lace enticed him: 'Well, Joe! Would you like to go to the fair?' Excitedly, young Joe agreed, although they travelled no further than the local public house, where they met the alcoholic former village parson. Lace took Joseph into the pub, and the fallen clergyman drafted the indentures for

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<sup>9</sup>. *ibid.*, pp.1-2.

<sup>10</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>. *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 2 April 1887.

the price of a glass of rum. Lace then took him back to his mother, and she bound Joseph to Lace for five years under penalty of £20 if he absconded.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph delighted in recalling how he soon ran away from Lace's shop and persuaded the family doctor to sign a certificate releasing him from his indenture. 'You can go home', he waved the certificate at Lace, who had pursued his young servant to the home of Joseph's mother. 'I'm not going to be a tailor any longer.'<sup>13</sup> Joseph's precocious dismissal of Lace may seem a little too confident for a ten year old, but there is no doubt that Joseph needed all the confidence he could muster to face a harsh world. His stepbrother John liked to tell Joseph that he was useless. 'He used to think nothing of me, and say I would be worth for nothing, and I used to say to him I would be a better man than he was.'

Joseph's way to become someone was to learn the skills of the carpentry trade. He spent three years apprenticed to James Clague, dutifully copying his master's work. But when Clague 'began to get on in the world', building his business, he too became close-fisted, and 'anxious to make money. Most men do go that way.' Clague underpaid his staff, and let them work through unfed until eight at night, while he enjoyed a relaxed meal. Joseph encouraged his fellow workers to stand up to Clague but they hesitated before the confrontation. So he left Clague's shop and sailed for the mainland.<sup>14</sup>

By the mid 1850s Joseph was working in Liverpool, where he witnessed the collapse of the local economy when the Royal Navy, frustrated by

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12. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, pp.1-3.

13. *ibid.*, p.3

14. *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

delays in building troop ships for the Crimean War, withdrew the contracts and dispersed the work to other ports. The resulting poverty and starvation that he witnessed on Liverpool's streets 'frightened me out of England'. In March 1855 Joseph and his wife immigrated to New South Wales.<sup>15</sup> He found life in the colony tough, confirming the lessons he had already learned. In Sydney he met the builder John Sutherland, the future Minister for Public Works. Sutherland had no job for a young carpenter; only unsentimental advice. In this brash colony, with 'races of men from all parts of the world...it's every man for himself.' Sutherland cautioned, 'You must just fight your own way, and look after yourself. Maintain your rights, and allow no man to put upon you.' Creer acted on this advice 'ever since'.<sup>16</sup>

Creer was undaunted by the trials of colonial life, setting up his own successful carpentry business in Newcastle, one hundred miles north of Sydney, coping when the shop and all his stock burned to the ground, bouncing back into the auction trade. 'I was not at all afraid. I could see perfectly well that in a country like that any man with grit in him could succeed. I had any amount of determination.' He was elected as an alderman in 1875 and served as Mayor of Newcastle from 1881. In 1885 Creer entered the NSW Parliament as the Member for Northumberland in the protectionist interest.<sup>17</sup> He was 'always popular with the working classes', he assured the reporter. 'I used to advocate their rights, and all that.' In 1891 the Newcastle working classes evidently tired of his advocacy, and elected one of their own, Alfred Edden, a coal miner standing for Labour, to represent them in the Parliament. This political

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15. Creer *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, pp.5-6.

16. *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

17. Connolly, *Biographical Register of the NSW Parliament*, p.68.

setback coincided with the economic collapse that stripped him of his hard-won fortune. During the boom of the 1880s, 'it was as easy to make money as to go home to my meals'. The 'leading' Newcastle auctioneer, Creer was 'determined never to be beaten'. He built up between £13-14,000 from the business, selling out to his son and another partner, turning to land and mining speculation. 'I was carried away by the times. Everybody who had money to invest, invested in wild cat schemes, from day to day expecting we were going to make great fortunes. The boom lasted for a little time.' He lost almost everything when two companies in which he invested failed. 'Mrs. Creer and I could not muster £1 between us.'<sup>18</sup>

Creer liked to think of himself as a cocksure Manxman, always landing on his feet. Something had always turned up, although at 60 he was worried that advancing years left little time to provide for a comfortable retirement. 'My losses were so preying on me that I believed it would have killed me.' Memories of the suffering he had witnessed in Liverpool must have stirred. He was saved by an investment in politics. In February 1892 Creer was summoned to the office of the Premier of New South Wales, fellow protectionist Sir George Dibbs. Creer had known Dibbs since the early 1860s, when their ambitious paths apparently crossed in Newcastle. According to a letter of introduction Dibbs wrote for Creer's trip in 1902, Creer was a long and loyal supporter of the Premier.<sup>19</sup> A loyalty rather hastily rewarded in 1892, as an unguarded Creer boasted to the reporter. Dibbs asked Creer if he would take charge of the new

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<sup>18</sup>. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, pp.11-12; Coghlan describes the 'furious speculation' of the 1880s, and the willingness of banks to advance extravagant loans to fuel the speculators 'merry game'. TA Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, Vol.3, p.1642.

<sup>19</sup>. Dibbs ran the Newcastle branch of the family business 1859-1863. Dibbs 1902 letter also refers to a friendship going back 40 years. *Illustrated Sydney News*, 17 September 1892; Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, p.12.

Government Labour Bureau. 'What's a Labour Bureau?' Creer enquired. Dibbs responded, 'I don't know; but you have got to get rid of the unemployed in three months.' Creer persisted, 'What will I have to do?' 'You have only to sit and sign your name', Dibbs curtly added, to earn £7 or £8 per week (his salary was fixed at £400 pa, a comfortable sum; Bureau clerks were paid £133 pa<sup>20</sup>). Dibbs told Creer to jump in a cab 'and find premises as fast as you can, and as far away from me as you can.'

The first government-sponsored labour exchange in New South Wales, the Bureau was a reaction to the agitation of Sydney's labour movement for action in finding unemployed men jobs, and providing some temporary relief - beds and meals - to those jobless who needed such assistance. Presumably, Dibbs believed his old crony had the political skills, and the desperate personal need, to solve his problem for him. By April 1892, Creer was established as the Bureau's Superintendent and had set up operations in the Exhibition building in Prince Alfred Park, where his life would briefly intersect with a less well paid advocate of the unemployed, John Dwyer.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, *NSW Legislative Assembly, Votes & Proceedings*, 1892-93 Vol. VIII p.957.

21. Creer *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, p.12.

### Locating the submerged

When John Dwyer visited Sydney for two days in April 1892 his intention was to find 'the submerged', his description of the unemployed whose aspirations were suppressed beneath the social life of a 'great maritime capital'. Dwyer wandered awe-struck through Saturday night Sydney, amid the teeming crowds of 'unassuming back blockers' and 'loud and nasty larrikins'. While 'the British races predominated', Dwyer found, as Sutherland told Creer nearly forty years before, the 'ubiquitous Italians and the much abused chinkey, the jabbering Bengal, and the South African, French, Greek and Turk, Germans and Scandinavians'. The sea had brought them all to this new metropolis of trade and empire, promenading by the exotic arcades, 'palace emporiums' and clamouring billboards of Pitt and George Streets.<sup>22</sup>

Dwyer, like everyone else in the crowd, was enticed by Sydney and its insisting promises of entertainment and self-gratification. Amid the competing lights and signs, Dwyer found the Saturday Sydney crowd besotted with its own tawdry glamour, craving the distractions of the street. He could find few signs of the unemployed; there was 'little dullness or external signs of poverty'. He found most 'comfortably dressed'; ladies fashionably arrayed in 'monde and demi-monde in rich and costly attire, fearfully and wonderfully arranged, gentlemen in the severe and orthodox claw-hammer, and double-breasted white shirt, choker'. They all swept passed John Dwyer, from cabs and carriages into restaurants and theatres. The teetotaller frowned at the pubs and saloons

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22. *Mittagong Express*, 15 April 1892. Clipping in Dwyer Papers, ML MSS 2184/4. The 1891 census suggests that, at that time, NSW had a non-anglo-celtic minority of app. 4 per cent of the population. In Sydney, Dwyer would have encountered visiting sailors as well as residents; itself a characteristic of a cosmopolitan city. *NSW Statistical Register for 1894*, p.591.

doing a roaring trade. 'Who can tell of the ruin and woe manufactured in these gay and gilded private bars? Youths and maidens contaminated and ruined in body and soul, and our jails and hospitals daily repeat the question.'<sup>23</sup>

Dwyer soon located the submerged, about 300 unemployed men 'clustered around the Labour Bureau'.<sup>24</sup> Initially, Creer established the Government Labour Bureau in February 1892 in the Post Office stables off Castlereagh Street, a choice that indicated the Dibbs Government's lack of enthusiasm for an unprecedented attempt to regulate the labour market. Unemployment rose to at least 10% of the workforce by 1893, and in many industries the decline in jobs was far worse. Unskilled labourers, a vast pool of working class men in Sydney and the country, suffered the most, and their rate of unemployment was always much higher than that indicated by official statistics.<sup>25</sup> In pursuit of making the unemployed vanish, the Bureau was set the task of registering and finding them work - preferably, anywhere but Sydney.<sup>26</sup> There was little work for idle hands in the capital. Creer recalled that 'to avoid revolution he had to scatter the

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<sup>23</sup>. *Mittagong Express*, 15 April 1892.

<sup>24</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>. As Markey and Forster acknowledge, it is difficult to accurately assess the rate of unemployment in the early 1890s - official figures were rudimentary and often understated unemployment levels. Trade union figures provide some guide, but are incomplete and do not cover every union. Ray Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney 1988 pp.37-41; Colin Forster, 'Australian Unemployment 1900-40', *Economic Record*, Vol.41 No.95 1965, pp.427-29.

<sup>26</sup>. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, *NSW LA V&P 1892-93* Vol. VIII p.957. See also Tony Endres and Malcolm Cook, 'Administering "the unemployed difficulty": the NSW Government Labour Bureau 1892-1912', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol.XXVI No.1 March 1986, p.56.

unemployed over the country, giving them railway passes, and in that way saved the country from disaster'.<sup>27</sup>

Creer did not single-handedly save New South Wales from social revolution, but no doubt he helped prop up the Dibbs Government, seen to be doing something, at least in Sydney, about unemployment. The *Hummer*, the journal of the Wagga branch of the Amalgamated Shearers Union, suggested that in sending the unemployed into the country Creer 'might as well try to cure the rabbit plague in the Western District by scattering the animals all over the country'.<sup>28</sup> In its first six months of operations, 13,447 unemployed registered with the Bureau: work, mainly of a temporary nature, was found for only 5,867 of them. Creer felt that the simple opening of the Bureau had 'a good effect' on the unemployed.<sup>29</sup>

In April Dwyer found the Bureau in its new home in the grand space of the Exhibition building in Prince Alfred Park, on the southern fringe of the city. A choice forced by the sheer number of jobless - several hundred dossed down at night in the building, having nowhere else to go. Dwyer assessed the unemployed as predominantly 'bona fide working men out of employment, willing enough to work but unable to get any.' He observed their endless comings and goings, as the hopefuls set off to a firm who might be 'taking on', only to return dejected 'after a weary tramp on an empty stomach.' Dwyer moved from one listless group to another, listening to them debate the causes of unemployment and the measures that might ease the 'frightful congestion' of the labour market.

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<sup>27</sup>. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, p.22.

<sup>28</sup>. *Hummer*, 27 February 1892.

<sup>29</sup>. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, p.957.

Where Creer idly boasted of a good effect, Dwyer detected a sullen stoicism. 'It seemed to me that these men waiting and hoping - almost against hope - showed a patience and endurance in their miserable condition that must be commended by their bitterest opponents.' Their patience did not flare into anger and revolt. 'There was no disorder, no rows, only the quietly animated talk of the various knots around, and the solitary policeman standing idly contemplating the passers by seemed to have an easy billet.'<sup>30</sup>

Creer seemed to live in fear of the men provided with frugal sustenance and shelter in the Exhibition building. He found it 'no easy matter' to maintain control amongst them. They were strangers to 'compulsory bathing', and 'cleanliness was a terror.' Creer exerted control 'by firmness and a strict adherence to the rules, with the assistance of the Police'.<sup>31</sup> Creer melodramatically recalled that 'it was a wonder many a time that he was not killed, as some of the men were some of the greatest brutes possible to conceive, but when they found he was determined they did not harm him.' He contemplated carrying a revolver. One evening he had been intimidated by the presence of local larrikins, Redfern 'Pushers' by the door to the Exhibition building, 'a dangerous class of men' (in fact adolescents, by his own estimation, aged 16-19), who 'never fight single-handed.' During a visit to the Exhibition building by Governor Lord Jersey and Dibbs, the official party was 'hooted by the men'. Jersey suggested Creer arm himself; Dibbs prepared a selection of revolvers. Creer sensibly declined, 'because he might have shot somebody.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>. *Mittagong Express*, 15 April 1892.

<sup>31</sup>. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, p.957.

<sup>32</sup>. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, pp.22-3.

Some critics claimed that the unemployed were all shirkers, including Creer, who described 'many' of them as 'city habitual loafers'.<sup>33</sup> Dwyer acknowledged that a few were sundowners (traditionally, a swagman who arrived at a pastoral station too late to work but in time to get a meal; but increasingly a description of anyone said to be unwilling to work). He studied them carefully, and concluded that most had no alternative but to seek the Bureau's help and the hand of charity. A soup kitchen dispensed tea, cold soup, hard bread and a small quantity of meat to those issued a ticket.<sup>34</sup> During 1892 the Labour Bureau also issued 30,960 rations to Sydney's struggling poor, with an average 520 applicants assisted each week. The weekly ration was 3lb meat, 4lb bread, 1/4lb tea, 4lb sugar.<sup>35</sup> At night the unemployed dossed down in the Exhibition building, providing space for rest and scrutiny. Two hundred feet long, the semi-cylindrical iron roof of the building loomed forty feet above their sleeping heads. A gallery running the length of the interior also provided Dwyer - and no doubt Creer and his staff - with a commanding vantage point.<sup>36</sup>

Dwyer described the 'truly remarkable and striking scene' of 700 men in rows side by side the length of the Exhibition building floor. There were no beds; less than half had blankets. Newspapers did rough duty for rugs, boots for pillows. 'Here, as before, I noticed the absence of rowdyism or larrikinism of any sort.' He had studied the 'scores' of men filing passed him to get a meal ticket for the morning. 'There was a small percentage of loaferdom present.' He did not specify his criteria for discriminating the deserving from the loafer; presumably a judgement about personal appearance and 'character'. His observations apparently confirmed his

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33. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, p.957.

34. *Mittagong Express*, 15 April 1892.

35. Annual Report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1892, p.957.

36. William Dymock, *Dymock's Illustrated Guide to Sydney*, Dymock's 1897. p.50.

view that most wanted work, not charity. In the evening he watched as they filed back to rest, and the shifting rows fell silent and still. Dwyer observed the 'strange but pitiful scene' of men with nowhere else to go, dislocated from their families. 'How many a mother, many a father, far away, wondered and wondered how their boy was'. They had all travelled a long way, to a dark hall in Sydney.<sup>37</sup>

Creer kept the unemployed at a distance. He had few personal dealings with the men. The only senior member of Bureau staff who came into regular contact with the unemployed was the Bureau Secretary, Frank Bloxham. Six feet tall, Bloxham had apparently been selected for his physical presence.<sup>38</sup> He had the men's confidence; Creer did not, 'not because he means to be against the men, but because his nature is unsympathetic.' So James Smith, a disaffected ex-Bureau clerk, told an 1893 parliamentary enquiry into the Bureau's operations. Bloxham reflected the lack of sympathy of his boss. He could be capricious; marking men he disliked, Smith claimed, telling them the Bureau had no suitable work. Each morning, Bloxham asserted his control over the men, when he strode to the platform before the expectant hopeful, and read out letters from employers seeking workers for various jobs. He then took references from the applicants, and judged their fitness for the situation.<sup>39</sup>

Despite Creer's nervousness, most of the men seemed tolerant of this treatment. There was worse to be had from private labour exchanges, which often charged exorbitant fees on the promise of non-existent jobs

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<sup>37</sup>. *Mittagong Express*, 15 April 1892.

<sup>38</sup>. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, p.12.

<sup>39</sup>. Report from the Select Committee on the working of the Government Labour Bureau 1892-93, together with committee proceedings and evidence, June 1893, *NSW LA V&P Vol.8 1892-93* pp.1024-25.

(the Government Bureau did not charge fees).<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the men were used to the wait for work: by the gates of the Darling Harbour wool sheds, the railway workshops at Redfern, the wharves of Sussex Street and Circular Quay, the unemployed were compelled to wait. Currie, the manager of the Maritime Labour Bureau (run by the wharf employers), told the 1893 enquiry that it was customary for the men to wait from 6 am to 6 pm for a few hours work, loading or unloading ships. Asked if they were paid for waiting, Currie replied: 'certainly not'.<sup>41</sup> In the depression years of the 1890s, there was often only casual work to be had, and the Government Bureau could find little work for their long list of clients - over 18,000 unemployed registered with the Bureau during the course of 1893; few found permanent work.<sup>42</sup> Creer exaggerated the Bureau's success: Smith told the inquiry that Creer's reports often claimed that jobs obtained elsewhere were secured through the Bureau. Creer tried to cast Smith as an unreliable drunk, but he was unable to refute Smith's claim about the exaggerated reports.<sup>43</sup> Nor was Smith the only critic of the Bureau's treatment of the unemployed. William Schey told Parliament in November 1893 that the unemployed were dealt with by the Bureau in 'a way degrading to their self-respect'. A 'measure of courtesy' was absent; although he did not believe Creer to be 'hard-hearted', perhaps it was a matter of temperament, or 'brusqueness'.<sup>44</sup>

Creer had a ready rationalisation of his temperament. He explained to Dibbs, in a note published in Hansard, that while he was anxious to help the deserving poor, 'from my experience those who are ever ready to

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<sup>40</sup>. *ibid.*, pp.988-89.

<sup>41</sup>. *ibid.*, p.1005.

<sup>42</sup>. Endres & Cook, 'Administering "the unemployed difficulty"', p.62.

<sup>43</sup>. Select Committee report, pp.1024, 1028-29.

<sup>44</sup>. *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, 1893 Vol.68 p.3588.

complain at all they get, and what is done for them, are the least deserving among them.<sup>45</sup> Apparently complaining - speaking up for themselves - was a sufficient measure of the undeserving poor. The *Bulletin* caustically observed of Creer's statement that the Dibbs Government's 'pet official', needed reminding of the favours his 'political friends' had provided him, 'and of how the very persons he assumes such airs over are actually taxed to pay him?'<sup>46</sup>

Despite Smith's embarrassing evidence, the parliamentary enquiry found it difficult to shake Creer's satisfaction with the operations of the Bureau. Like Dwyer, Creer detected little spirit of revolt amongst the unemployed. Although unemployment had steadily worsened during 1892-93, the men were less 'discontented'. Creer claimed that this was directly attributable to the Bureau, and 'the good sense of the men'. Nothing was gained by 'revolutionary preaching'; they should 'bear their lot as peaceably as they can in the hope they may be employed. They see every day a number of men sent away, and they live in the hope that they also may get work. Hence the good order which they maintain.'<sup>47</sup> Despite their distress, the men invested great hope in the Bureau. In December 1894 a promise of Government jobs produced a rush on the Bureau office, and Creer was forced to address the restless crowd; 'he would do all he could to assist those who deserved it...but the men must be civil, quiet and orderly.' In response, the calmed men gave three cheers for the Labour Bureau.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps, as Dwyer suggested, the unemployed were waiting to be commended by their bitterest opponents for their diligent duty. The

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45. NSW PD 1893 Vol.68 p.1086.

46. *Bulletin*, 25 November 1893; 31 March 1894 .

47. NSW PD 1893 Vol.68, p.988.

48. *Evening News*, 5 December 1894.

parliamentary committee, dominated by labour parliamentarians and trade union witnesses, was less tolerant of the Bureau's failings. They felt that the 'present industrial distress' required more than a solitary Government Labour Bureau in Sydney. Many unionists would have agreed with the *Hummer's* assessment of the Bureau as a 'state-fed scab factory' that employers could call on to summon strike-breakers, or flood the pastoral industry labour market with surplus labour, a charge Creer and NSW Pastoralists' Union Secretary Whiteley King disputed.<sup>49</sup> Perversely, the Bureau encouraged the unemployed to concentrate in Sydney, then sent numbers of them back into the bush to congregate before the gates of pastoral stations - where plenty of the local unemployed were already waiting for a start.

The Committee recommended either scrapping the Bureau or significant expansion of its operations, with branches in country centres. Despite the committee's report, and two further parliamentary debates initiated by Labour in 1893 and 1894, the Bureau's operations persisted in much the same unsatisfactory way throughout the decade.<sup>50</sup> A branch network was established in thirty five country centres in March 1895. These 'offices' were manned by local clerks of the courts of petty sessions, who were expected to run an ad hoc labour exchange and report on local labour market conditions, while attending to their normal court duties, and an extensive range of additional functions.<sup>51</sup> The clerks' reports were often

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<sup>49.</sup> *Hummer*, 27 February 1892, p.1; Select Committee report, p.997.

<sup>50.</sup> The debates focused on the plight of the unemployed and the role of the Labour Bureau. *NSW PD* Vol.68 1893 p.1086, and Vol.75 1894 p.3573.

<sup>51.</sup> In country towns Clerks of Petty Sessions could be required to act as agents for the Registrar of Probates, the Curator of Intestate Estates, the Government Labour Bureau, the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Electoral Registrar. Other duties included issuing and serving summons, attending to court business, issuing licences to hawkers, fishermen and second-hand dealers and administering the Dog and Goat Act.

inadequate. Creer blandly observed that he feared the clerks did not 'take that interest in their work which they otherwise would', if they had been paid for this increased burden. Passing the buck to the clerks was another manifestation of the tokenism that had prompted the establishment of the Bureau in 1892.<sup>52</sup>

The parliamentary committee also suggested that the Bureau help unemployed women, although they took no evidence about the employment market for women in the colony. The Labour Bureau served only the needs of unemployed men, and the first registry for unemployed women was not opened until 1902. Women were marginalised in domestic service, the clothing industry, some areas of factory work, nursing and commercial laundries. The Government Statistician, Timothy Coghlan, believed that women in New South Wales had little cause to complain about the employment conditions of the early 1890s.<sup>53</sup> If Coghlan and the parliamentary committee had listened to Rose Summerfield, they might have understood that unemployment was no less urgent a problem for women than men. In 1893 Summerfield was well known to most of the committee members, certainly to Arthur Rae

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*Consolidated circulars issued by the Under-Secretary, Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, 1874-1915.* No.28 p.8.

<sup>52.</sup> *ibid.*, pp.967-68; Annual report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1895, NSWLA V&P Vol.5 1896 p.729; Annual report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1898, NSWLA V&P 1898 pp.8-9.

<sup>53.</sup> In 1895 Coghlan looked back over employment conditions since 1892, and concluded that the colony had weathered the 1892-93 depression quite well. He noted that only 28.4% of women were in employment during 1893, evidence of 'the superior lot of the Australian women', compared with European counterparts. Coghlan does not consider that many more women may have wanted work - either out of choice or economic necessity - but were unable to obtain it. Relying on official returns Coghlan also seriously underestimated the impact of unemployment (See fn.25). TA Coghlan, *A Statistical Survey of New South Wales*, Government Printer Sydney 1895, p.189.

and Hughie Langwell, who were also Shearer's Union officials. In 1892 Summerfield had been asked by the bush unions to help enrol women members, and her activities and speeches were regularly reported in the *Hummer*. In July 1892 'Rose Hummer' welcomed the union campaign; women will have 'the strength of numbers at their bidding'.<sup>54</sup> Summerfield also ran the Australian Workers' Labour Bureau at the Carrington Hall in Castlereagh Street. She specifically urged women seeking employment to register; no fee was charged. Employers of 'every class of Labor' were assured that they would be suited with 'superior servants'.<sup>55</sup> She travelled to Bourke in the far west of New South Wales, spreading 'the gospel of discontent', unionising laundry workers, and establishing branches of the Australian Women Workers Union and the Australian Socialist League, in which she was also active.<sup>56</sup>

None of these ambitious projects lasted long. Despite the backing of William Spence, President of both the Shearers' and General Labourer's Unions (which would amalgamate as the Australian Workers Union [AWU] in 1894) the campaign to enrol women workers lapsed after 1892.<sup>57</sup> The Australian Workers' Labour Bureau advertised once in the *Australian Workman* in November 1892; reports of subsequent activities have not survived. Organising women workers in the 1890s relied on the grudging goodwill of men, and Summerfield could not easily overcome their apathy or outright hostility. Summerfield's own report acknowledges that unionising the Bourke laundresses' resulted in them losing their jobs: the employer refused to tolerate unionists amongst his

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<sup>54.</sup> *Hummer*, 30 July 1892.

<sup>55.</sup> *Australian Workman*, 12 December 1892.

<sup>56.</sup> *ibid.*, 15 October 1892.

<sup>57.</sup> *Hummer*, 6 August 1892. There are no reports of ASU/GLU attempts to enrol women workers after 1892.

staff. The General Labourers Union office in Bourke stepped in to save what might have been a disastrous advertisement for organising local women, offering to establish a co-operative laundry and employing the sacked workers. Summerfield claimed that the women would be more 'happy and independent' working in the co-op laundry.<sup>58</sup>

Rose Summerfield was a gritty optimist, but she understood what she was up against: the workers themselves, and the conditions in which they laboured and lived. In a speech to an ASL audience in July 1892, Summerfield pleaded with workers to recognise that 'you have become accustomed to your position...you dreaded the sight of an agitator - a man who could...tell you what your position really was - a social slave.' Of the capitalist, she insisted 'you cannot blame them, you know. You let them do it.' Your 'masters' are 'your self-constituted owners', who have reaped the rewards of your harvest. Like Dwyer and Creer, Summerfield had observed the patience of the unemployed, watching a procession of unemployed men passing down George Street, 'wending their way to get a free meal - orderly, well-behaved fellows. My heart ached at the sight...men...having to eat what they couldn't earn, what they could not work for, and yet have to be thankful for it'. She had seen 'girl machines', worked too young into adulthood, shop girls with 'painful female complaints' from long hours standing, consumptive factory girls. 'How can ye bear, men and women, to be so patient under the toils...and bear it all without resistance?' She would not: 'Agitate! Agitate! I hope I'll die with that word on my lips.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>. *Australian Workman*, 15 October 1892.

<sup>59</sup>. Rose Summerfield, 'Master and Man', lecture delivered 17 July 1892 for the Australian Socialist League. Pamphlet printed by the *Hummer*, Wagga, 1892. ML.

Men and women had only their own resources and experiences to fall back on: they had to constitute themselves and their working lives as best they could. In the audience at Leigh House that Sunday night, listening to Rose Summerfield's feisty rousing, there might have been a young factory girl, or one of those bewildered and tired unemployed men, who wished for a measure of Rose Summerfield's resolve, and her belief that together they would create a new community, an 'industrial hive', with freedom, social equality and individual independence for man and woman.<sup>60</sup> Such hopeful men and women may have been there; the next day they would have returned to the factory and the Labour Bureau.

### **Sifting the unemployed**

In 1902 Creer bragged that in running the Bureau, 'I had carte blanche to do as I liked. I had to make my own rules and regulations as experience taught me.'<sup>61</sup> Despite his offhand claim to have advocated the rights of the working man 'and all that' as a Member of Parliament, Joseph Creer's experiences did not teach him solidarity with the hard-pressed working man. Stopped on the street by the begging unemployed of Liverpool, stunned by the sudden turn of fate that left them without work, Joseph Creer learnt: every man for himself. Where Summerfield wanted to draw the unemployed to her cause, almost to her own care, Creer drove them away with condemning and patronising words, casting them as illegitimate outsiders. To avoid empathy he trod a narrow path, strictly administering the Bureau, avoiding contact or involvement in the complexity of the life that waited for the unemployed outside the Bureau door.

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<sup>60</sup>. *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup>. Creer, *A Manx Australian's Reminiscences*, p.13.

In 1895 Creer brusquely reported that 'the Bureau does not interfere in the rate of wages or terms of employment. All it does is to bring employer and employee together, leaving it to the parties themselves to make their own arrangements'. He did casually note that the numerous letters sent by prospective employers displayed some 'tendency to reduction' in relation to wages.<sup>62</sup> The exploitation of the unemployed was not his problem: if that man can live, so can I, even if that meant living at the expense of another man, trading off the sufferings of the unemployed, tantalising them with a false hope of work. Dibbs was happy; the parliamentary committee, though hostile, was stymied, unable to crack Creer's confidence, or drive the Bureau or the Government to a more effective response to the unemployment crisis. Facing ruin, Creer had scrambled away from the scrap heap alone, clutching at Dibb's offer. More than physically fearing the loitering unemployed, Creer feared the failure they represented, and it had made him, as James Smith observed, unsympathetic. Joseph Creer had gone the way of most men.

When John Dwyer went to find the Sydney unemployed he brought a curious eye for the crowd, and ingrained values about race and class divisions, about lives of duty and lives squandered. He seemed intimidated by the busy physicality of the crowd, the loud and nasty larrikin, the fearfully arranged ladies and their severe and orthodox escorts, who stepped passed John Dwyer. He found and assessed the unemployed, those willing to shoulder their responsibility to find honest work and those who had fallen out of the struggle, or refused to acknowledge their responsibilities. Were they as deserving as himself? In his categorisation of the unemployed he studied along the meal line and from the high gallery, Dwyer's assessment differed little from Creer's, at

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<sup>62</sup>. Annual report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1895, p.731.

least in one significant respect: they both had a distaste for 'loafers'. Creer thought most of the unemployed were undeserving; Dwyer, only a few, though Dwyer had little patience with those few, nor interest in the experiences which might have disconnected the loafers from their duty to seek work, however impossible to find. As he had told a Mittagong Labour League meeting in 1891, he had no desire to aid 'the idler and the drunkard...if an able man would not work, let him starve.'<sup>63</sup>

Such attitudes towards sundowners and larrikins were apparently widely shared. Harry Furniss, who wrote *Australian Sketches* for the class who could afford to travel for pleasure, conceded that the sundowner, while 'one of the lowest types of humanity', was 'superior' to the larrikin. 'An idle, worthless, drunken ne'er-do-well, perhaps, but not the crafty, bullying blackguard that the larrikin is.'<sup>64</sup> Larrikins incited fear and repugnance. Gangs of idle youths, drunk and bellicose, blocked the paths of respectable persons, intimidated young women, hurled stones at unoffending people: larrikins were literally transgressors, whose threatening physical presence intersected with an insistence on good order and social cohesion. Easily roused, it was feared, from a band of insolent young men to the march of an angry mob.

Larrikins provoked a thirst for violent discipline from Justice Minister Richard O'Connor, who wanted the prison system to greet convicted larrikins with a flogging, hard labour, a plank bed and a bread and water diet. 'There are natures which it is impossible to reach except through

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<sup>63</sup>. See chapter one, p.17

<sup>64</sup>. Furniss's *Australian Sketches* was written as a popular account of colonial life, and it is likely that his views on larrikins and sundowners reflected the middle class values of his readers. H. Furniss, *Australian Sketches*, in A. Birch & D.S. Macmillan, *The Sydney Scene, 1788-1960*, Melbourne University Press, 1962. p.206.

their hides', he assured Parliament.<sup>65</sup> His Disorderly Conduct Suppression Bill proved too strong a medicine for his colleagues, although many of them shared his outrage at larrikin excess.<sup>66</sup>

Sundowners attracted only marginally less hostility. In Sydney, the natural habitat of the sundowner was the Domain, bedding down in the niches and crevices of rocks, adjusting their 'newspaper pyjamas'. Furniss mocked them: 'they were born tired, and have never been able to throw off the feeling'.<sup>67</sup> Labour parliamentarian William Schey knew how these loafers should be treated. Although a critic of the Labour Bureau's treatment of 'honest, decent, respectable men', Schey understood the difficult task the Bureau faced. It was hard to 'sift' the genuine unemployed from the 'large number' of the idle; and the idle must be shaken out, and confronted with work. While the Government had a duty to feed the poor, 'it is also the duty of the Government to give starving idleness a coffin and the necessary earth to cover it.'<sup>68</sup> Creer agreed: the class who would not work were the ones who gave most trouble at the Bureau. He regularly vilified their degeneration through strong drink into 'a nuisance and danger to society.' Creer told the

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<sup>65.</sup> *NSW PD*, Vol.76 1894-95, p.5084.

<sup>66.</sup> O'Connor failed at two attempts in 1892 and 1895 to have the bill passed by Parliament, although it was unanimously approved by O'Connor's peers in the conservative upper house, the Legislative Council, in 1892. Members took the opportunity to vent cherished explanations for the decline in colonial civilisation, suggesting that irresponsible parents, the secular education system or a lack of healthy outdoor activities cultivated 'rampant' larrikinism. *NSW PD*, Vol.60 1892-93, pp.931, 938-9; Vol.76 1895 p.5082.

<sup>67.</sup> Furniss, *Australian Sketches*, p.206.

<sup>68.</sup> *NSW PD*, 1894 Vol.75 p.3589.

government in 1895 that the obstinately idle must be presented with a sharp alternative: 'work or starve'<sup>69</sup>

Gay observes that 'the practice of invidious social comparisons is awash with aggressive impulses'.<sup>70</sup> What were the frustrations which stirred aggression in men like Dwyer, Creer, Schey and O'Connor? A resentment that somewhere, others were enjoying life without subjecting themselves to the relentless discipline of being honest, decent, respectable? That these imagined Others somehow avoided the strain of feeding a family, building a career? It is unlikely that they really believed that impoverished sundowners enjoyed a life of contented ease. Scape-goating the sundowner and the larrikin was an attempt at self-justification, not a quest for the truth. The ambitious middle class lawyer O'Connor was intolerant of 'rebellious and lawless spirits', whom he was determined to tame.<sup>71</sup> O'Connor's language expresses a compulsive need to forcefully reign over the wild profusion of the living. His thirst for physical punishment may have only been a difference of emphasis from his peers, who disciplined the poor in more 'subtle' ways - the callous treatment of the unemployed in the Government Labour Bureau or the relentless pursuit of the undeserving. Dwyer, Creer, and Schey were socially marginal men, influenced by prevailing notions of the hierarchy of work and society: men busy getting on had no time for the idle.<sup>72</sup> Dwyer

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<sup>69</sup>. Annual report of the Government Labour Bureau for 1895, *NSW LA V&P* Vol.5 1896 p.731.

<sup>70</sup>. Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred*, p.4.

<sup>71</sup>. *NSW PD* Vol.76 1895 p.5084.

<sup>72</sup>. The son of a London accountant's clerk, William Schey presumably imbued respectable values at home and in the City of London Middle Class School. For more details of Schey's career see the thesis conclusion. R.M. Audley, 'William Francis Schey', *ADB* Vol.11 Melbourne University Press 1988 p.535; T.A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, Vol.4 Macmillan 1969, p.2183.

doubted that his struggles would be rewarded, and so fought a battle with society and himself, and transferred a measure of his resentment to idlers and drunkards.

### **Living on the wind: John in Sydney, Annie in Mittagong**

John and Annie Dwyer were just two of the submerged struggling to survive the intensifying colonial depression, and by 1893 the need of a living income had literally pulled them apart. John travelled to Sydney in January 1893, and found work as a sculleryman on the *SS Monowai*, which did a regular run between Sydney and San Francisco.<sup>73</sup> The two return voyages he completed kept him away from Sydney and his family until late June, save for brief visit home between trips. Annie remained in Mittagong with the three children - a second son, Henry, was born in the local School of Arts on 15 February 1891.<sup>74</sup>

In July 1893 Annie wrote to John, almost a month after his return from the second voyage. She had just received his letter; she had been anxious to hear from him, and had already been expecting his return to Mittagong. 'I suppose you will come when you can.' Annie's letter perhaps indicates why John would not return again - immersed, as she was, in daily family difficulties, and the intractable financial problems generated by debts, including unpaid rent on the Green Hills home. Two year old Teddy (Henry was always known in the family by this shorthand version of his second name, Edward) had an abscess on his face that had broken a few days earlier. 'He has had five fits I suppose it is all his teeth I was going to take him to the Doctor but I could not borrow any cash.' The crisis had

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<sup>73</sup>. 'Family History of John Dwyer', p.1; John Dwyer, Seamen's Discharge Certificates, re service on *SS Monowai*; all items in Dwyer papers ML MSS 290 box 1.

<sup>74</sup>. 'Family History of John Dwyer', p.17.

passed; he was eating again.<sup>75</sup> In another letter she told him that she was keeping thirteen year old Lizzie home from school for good. 'Going to school hungry was more than she could bear you know her age and I must be careful of her for a little while I had to get her some medicine' (possibly an allusion to menstruation). She considered asking a Mr. Jones to take Dan on, but Jones refused. Dan was hardly a human being in Jones' eyes: simply a useless economic instrument. Dan was still at school, and as such his availability for work was severely limited. Jones added that 'he can get the state children and 5/- with them.'<sup>76</sup>

Motherhood, as Ellen Ross has observed, 'was all encompassing' for a working class woman raised in the traditional social roles of nineteenth century London. She had the responsibility to provide all the basic caring services on behalf of the children. Her love for them 'was expressed in work', and it was part of her function to supplement her husband's usually inadequate income by extracting work from the children, thus 'insuring household survival'.<sup>77</sup> In Mittagong Annie found her social role breaking down before the fact of poverty - she could not provide sufficient care; she could not send Dan or Lizzie out to work to bring in an income, nor painfully pass them on to a stranger's care, to reduce the family financial burden. She was in despair: 'I have been all over town trying to get work I might just as well stay at home.' Annie wanted to get out of Mittagong as soon as possible; she thought she might try to find work 'in service' in Sydney. She wanted to get out of Australia. She asked

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<sup>75</sup>. Annie Dwyer to John Dwyer, 17 July 1893 'family correspondence' Dwyer papers ML MSS 290 box 2.

<sup>76</sup>. *ibid.*, undated.

<sup>77</sup>. Ellen Ross, 'Labour and Love: Rediscovering London's Working Class Mothers, 1870-1918', in Jane Lewis (ed.), *Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, Basil Blackwell London, 1986, pp.74-85.

John to pass on her regards to a family friend, 'and tell him to keep single as long as he stays in Australia for a man can't keep himself here without having a family tell him I have had to beg for bread to keep life in the children.' She had sold John's overcoat to raise five shillings, a meagre and symbolic compensation for his failure to provide. 'Don't keep promising to send money when you know you can't.' Only a few weeks after her July letter, Annie realised John would not return to Mittagong. John was supposed to contact Edward Larkin, their landlord. 'You told me you would write to him and explain things to him so I have keep out of his way until he heard from you but I might have known you would take no more trouble when you was out of this yourself.'<sup>78</sup>

Far from being a source of trouble, Larkin was their best friend in the town. In early May Larkin promised John that he would look after Annie and the children in John's absence. He also told John that he had spoken to Hudspeth 'about some small account of yours.' He was satisfied to wait for payment. 'So make your mind easy concerning all your Mittagong affairs.'<sup>79</sup> The problem was, John seemed not to think about his 'Mittagong affairs' at all. Even if he did fret, it was apparent that there was little he could do pay the debts. Aside from small outstanding accounts, the Dwyer's main problem was the rent owed on Green Hills, and on the Bowral Road property that Dwyer rashly leased from the Mittagong Land Company in 1891. Larkin tried to help John negotiate with the company, although he refused to allow Annie to sell the family furniture. 'He claims them for rent', as Annie told John.<sup>80</sup> By December the bailiffs were knocking at the door, seeking unpaid rates and taxes. 'Larkins says I had

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<sup>78</sup>. Annie Dwyer to John Dwyer, 3 August 1893, 'family correspondence'.

<sup>79</sup>. Larkin to John Dwyer, 12 May 1893, *ibid*.

<sup>80</sup>. Annie Dwyer to John Dwyer, 3 August 1893, *ibid*.

better let them come the money must be paid. Just such a Christmas Box as I got last year.<sup>81</sup> By January 1894 Larkin was again advising Dwyer, who by that time was forced to face a Mittagong Land Company representative in the company's Sydney office. Larkin tried, 'privately and confidentially' to coach Dwyer through a plea: staying in Mittagong meant 'absolute starvation...if pressed your only alternative will be to seek the protection of the Insolvent Court.'<sup>82</sup> It must have worked: there is no surviving record of further action against Dwyer over the debt.

Annie and the children finally joined John in Sydney in December 1893, another battle that Annie endured alone. She sent Dan on ahead with some boxes of private possessions. She worried over his safety on the train: it is hard to imagine how she would have sent him away to Mr. Jones dubious care. She was upset about leaving 'Nigger', the family pet, behind. Lizzie, Teddy and herself would follow on 'the first cheap train.'<sup>83</sup> She had been trying to raise the price of the fares since August.<sup>84</sup> Annie was glad to escape the humiliating problems that had oppressed her in Mittagong - she once wrote that she had not seen Larkin for two weeks: 'I think we are wearing him out like everybody else.'<sup>85</sup>

Annie did not want John to return to sea, as he had apparently planned to do in July. 'You can't live on the wind no more than we can', she warned him. She understood his urge to escape the conditions that held them down, the restlessness triggered by leaving the London and St Katherine

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<sup>81</sup>. *ibid.*, 8 December 1893.

<sup>82</sup>. Larkin to Dwyer, 22/1/94, Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/2; Mittagong Land Company to Dwyer, 17 January 1894, Dwyer papers ML MSS 290 box 1.

<sup>83</sup> Annie Dwyer to John Dwyer, 23 December 1893, 'family correspondence'.

<sup>84</sup>. *ibid.*, 3 August 1893.

<sup>85</sup>. *ibid.*

Docks Company, his desperation to keep alive the immigrant dream. She had an instinct for the threat posed by John's liminal state, the dangers that might flow from staying in Sydney, a choice she feared even more than his life at sea. 'I should like you to be here or on ship anywhere out of Sydney.'<sup>86</sup>

Dwyer was poised between an old life and the new which had failed in Mittagong. He was separated from his family, travelling again but always circling back across the vast Pacific to Sydney, trying to find a way for his life to be recast in the turmoil of Sydney, the only social space now available to him. Annie was glad to hear that John was keeping away from strikers; 'they would only lead you into trouble'.<sup>87</sup> John's correspondence to Annie in Mittagong has not survived, but he was obviously sending her reports of the life he was making for himself, and the new friends he had found. By December, she was trying to adjust to the idea of John taking part in the management of a boarding house for unemployed men run by the Active Service Brigade, the radical political group that John had recently joined. 'I hope the place will prosper it will be good for the working man but how will the managers make it pay it seems such a small amount to charge for bed and breakfast.'<sup>88</sup> John had apparently told her of their intention to charge the unemployed only a few pennies a night, but he did not tell her everything. He withheld the knowledge that might have prompted her to veto his unfulfilled ambitions, his need to overcome scorn and marginality. 'I hope you do not mix up with the Tommy Dodd set Mr. Larkins says he thinks they will get in trouble if they are not very careful.'

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<sup>86</sup>. *ibid.*, 17 July 1893, for the notion of liminality see Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors*, Cornell University Press, London 1974, pp.231-2.

<sup>87</sup>. Annie Dwyer to John Dwyer, 17 July 1893, 'family correspondence'.

<sup>88</sup>. *ibid.*, 23 December 1893.

It was the Tommy Dodd set, the Active Service Brigade, to whom John had been magnetically drawn. The Brigade offered him a bridge over the threshold from one life to the next. Implied in Larkin's caution, and Annie's fear, was Robert Darnton's warning: all borders are dangerous. The ASB stirred society's fringe dwellers - the unemployed, the larrikin, the dissident, the drunk, the loafer, the mendicant - into political life, casting aside the appeal to be patient and threatening to dissolve society with an explicit rejection of its acquisitive values. The ASB provoked a fear amongst colonial authorities of these 'undomesticated' types, clichés of loathing, relegated to a classification beneath a fully respected humanity, as they milled in surly crowds before the doorways of the Labour Bureau, or gathered in parks or stalked the streets. 'When confronted with an alien way of organising experience...we sense the frailty of our own categories, and everything threatens to come undone.' The Brigade's challenge provided a focus for elite aggression, and 'an enemy defined as less than human may be annihilated.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>. 'Certain categories make our skin crawl because they slip in between categories..."nasty" rodents that live in houses yet remain outside the bounds of domestication.' Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*, pp.192-3.