

Chapter Eight

Citizen Dwyer

Campaigning for the Right to Work, 1900-1914

Jack Dwyer doesn't believe in stone-breaking.¹

In the years before the First World War Dwyer embraced the notion of the 'citizens' committee' as a platform for the campaign to find a long-term solution to the problem of unemployment. Dwyer's new style of agitation reflected an awareness of the subtle change in Australian identity prompted by the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. In contrast to the very limited notion of the citizen, 'subjects of the Queen', incorporated into s.117 of the Australian Constitution, the term citizen was unofficially appropriated, 'positively or assertively, as an act of declaration, by persons claiming a right or claiming recognition'.²

Dwyer believed that the unemployed had long deserved both rights and recognition: fighting for them would also reflect well upon him. Dwyer would likely have been flattered by Labour Bureau superintendent Joseph Creer's sarcastic complaint that 'unemployed agitation is fast becoming a profession'.³ Dwyer had made a name for himself as an activist, as *Truth* acknowledged. That Jack Dwyer disliked the practice of the unemployed being drafted into useless stone-breaking was just one of number of pungent teases and taunts that peppered *Truth's* front page. *Truth* assumed familiarity with its target; a trade in Sydney intelligence, but you

¹ *Truth*, 24 July 1904.

² Helen Irving, *To Constitute A Nation*, Cambridge University Press, 1997 p.158.

³ Government Labour Bureau report for 1900, V&P LA 1900 p.731.

had to know the code. *Truth's* one-liner was probably all most readers needed to know about John Dwyer's unemployed agitation.

In pursuit of his ambitions, Dwyer inaugurated the League of the Unemployed, the Citizens' Committee on Unemployment and the Unemployed Citizens' Organising Committee; their activities seemed to blur into each other in the period 1903-1906. There was also the Citizens' National Movement to deal with the Unemployment Question, which Dwyer instituted in 1905. The citizens' committees directly co-opted political, business and community leaders into a campaign to promote the rights of the jobless and solutions to unemployment. Failure also spurred Dwyer's enthusiasm for the citizens' committee: during 1900-2 he tried to organise the Sydney unemployment through the State Labour Union. The frustrations of the SLU, and Dwyer's ambition to forge a public profile, led him to a wider stage of protest and organisation through the committees. Finally, Dwyer's Right to Work Movement of New South Wales was active during 1913-14 - a return to an SLU style of organisation, its tone sharpened by a pre-war militancy typified by the agitation of the Industrial Workers of the World. Dwyer flirted with the IWW's uncompromising reaction to harsh industrial conditions, and the protracted unemployment workers faced. In 1900, Joseph Creer extravagantly sang the praises of Federation, claiming that the simple fact of Australian nationhood would 'multiply and broaden the avenues of employment to the industrial classes.'⁴ In all the movements and committees Dwyer initiated, he never found that he lacked unemployed

⁴. *ibid.*

to organise from amongst the men drawn to his lodgings, or those waiting on the grudging relief provided by the Labour Bureau.⁵

The State Labour Union

On 27 July 1900 a 'largely attended meeting' of unemployed men at the Trades Hall formed the State Labour Union of New South Wales. The SLU organised to 'fight the battle of the unemployed'. The SLU advocated 'the principle of state employment' - the right of all citizens to be employed by the state, at a minimum wage of seven shillings a day, for a forty-eight hour week.⁶ Claiming that 'private employment is a ghastly failure', the SLU demanded 'immediate legislation against the Flour Millers Monopoly, the Wholesale Meat Ring and Rack Renters', and 'reasonable prices' for bread, meat and rent.⁷ The union also lobbied for reform of the operations of the Government Labour Bureau. The SLU wanted a say in the organisation of public works gangs, appropriate rates of pay for skill and the introduction of a rotation ballot system. By these reforms the SLU hoped that all the 5,487 unemployed men registered with the Bureau in 1900 would obtain work under a regular and equitable system, rather than at the whim of Bureau staff. The Executive Committee resolved to send a copy of these demands to the Lyne Government, Leader of the Opposition C.A. Lee, and the press. The SLU

5. Macintyre notes the 'the abundance of unskilled labour and the irregularity of employment' which plagued the working class in the early twentieth century. 'The most vulnerable workers were the casual and unskilled who drifted from one job to another and lived either in cheap lodgings or run-down rented accommodation.' Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol.4, 1901-1942*, Oxford University Press 1986, pp.46-7.

6. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July 1900.

7. 1901 SLU leaflet, Dwyer Papers ML MSS 2184/6.

also decided to hold weekly meetings at the Queen's statue to promote their cause amongst the unemployed.⁸

John Dwyer was elected president of the SLU. The first meeting to explore the possibility of forming a union of unemployed men was held in his premises at 704 George Street, just two days before the Trades Hall mass meeting.⁹ The formation of the SLU was Dwyer's initiative: his effective control of the SLU is apparent from the style of agitation that the union adopted, the familiar call for the right of all citizens to be employed by the state, and his own prominent role in the organisation. Although not SLU secretary, Dwyer kept control of the books and the accounts, often written up in his hand. The core SLU group was no more than about half a dozen men, some of whom had a long association with Dwyer - including the secretary, Tom Brown, and the treasurer William McNamara, the owner of the radical bookshop at 221^{1/2} Castlereagh Street.¹⁰

The scale of the SLU may have been small, but it provided a focus on the problems of the unemployed, and their attempts to negotiate the sullen bureaucratic apathy of the NSW Labour Bureau. Nearly a decade of managing the unemployed had only confirmed Bureau superintendent Joseph Creer's prejudices: he believed their unemployment was primarily their own fault. Able-bodied single men in Sydney, Creer felt, should be denied access to government sponsored relief work. Attracted by the pleasures of city life, the men refused to seek work in the country, where Creer claimed there was abundant employment. Creer also complained

8. Minutes of the State Labour Union, 11 August 1900, Dwyer Papers ML MSS 2184/6 item 1; *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1900.

9. Preamble to the 1901-2 constitution of the State Labourers Union, Dwyer Papers ML MSS 2184/6.

10. *ibid.*

that up to 25 per cent of those sent out to work by the Bureau abandoned it 'of their own accord.' Creer recommended that 'those who decline to remain at work...should be debarred from participating in other public works, and thus afford an opportunity to others more deserving.'¹¹

The men had their own perspective on the Bureau's operations, and through the SLU some of them found a voice. In July 1900 one Bureau client, Prentice, was selected for a Public Works Department construction gang. He left by train from Redfern station at 6.15 am to travel to Como, in Sydney's south, to locate the gang - a trip which included a six mile walk. The ganger did not turn up until 4.30 pm. There were neither tents nor tucker; he and his fellow workers had to make their own ad hoc credit arrangements with local butchers and bakers for the supply of food. When work finally began the next day, Prentice was 'excitably abused' by the ganger for incorrectly digging a trench - although the ganger had not given him any instruction about how the work should be carried out. After a few more days of discouragement and abuse Prentice left the gang. He approached the Bureau on three occasions to get his Labour Bureau ticket back. To prevent the men from 'double dipping' - obtaining other work - the men's tickets were held by the Department while they were in its employ. But the men could not seek new employment until the ticket was returned to the Labour Bureau - and sluggish administrative procedures invariably produced delays. In Prentice's case, he discovered that the Bureau would not return his ticket until 1 September - a punishment for leaving the gang. Through such petty and vindictive sanctions Creer's prejudices found their way into Bureau policy.¹²

11. Labour Bureau report for 1900.

12. SLU sub-committee on complaints, 15 August 1900. SLU Minutes.

The SLU was not the Labour Bureau's sole critic. By 1900, even Joseph Creer had to acknowledge the 'severely adverse' judgements made about its operations.¹³ A tide of parliamentary attack and public discontent led to the first major reorganisation of the Bureau's operations since 1892.¹⁴ In August four Labour Commissioners appointed by the Lyne Government took over the operations of a restructured Bureau. William Schey, the former Labor MLA who, with some insight, had observed the flaws in Creer's management style as early as 1893, was appointed chief commissioner. Creer was not appointed as a commissioner. The Bureau's procedures for registering and selecting the unemployed for work were reorganised; the commissioners found the old system of registration chaotic. They painted a grim picture of the ballot system - a Darwinian process of selection for relief employment with the Public Works Department. To participate in the ballot, the men had not only to be present in the Bureau's yard; it was also in the individual's interest to limit, as much as possible, the numbers of fellow unemployed participating in the ballot.

Very large numbers of men assembled in the Bureau yard, and most unseemly struggles took place from time to time. The rough element found a congenial opportunity of indulging in horseplay, which frequently culminated in actual violence; and in the struggle for place the weaker men naturally went to the wall, while self-respecting and orderly

¹³. Labour Bureau report for 1900.

¹⁴. Two adjournment debates in 1900 and 1901 highlighted public discontent with the performance of the Government Labour Bureau. In July 1900 an opposition MLA, the free trader John Haynes, melodramatically described the Labour Bureau as 'the white slave market of New South Wales', and 'almost helpless' in its efforts to alleviate chronic unemployment. *NSW PD*, Vol. 103 1900 p.900; Vol.4 1901 p.3965.

working men left the place in disgust. Though it was claimed for the system that it gave every man a fair chance of employment, in reality it had no such result...Duplication of tickets was practised, and men were known to boast that they had several tickets in different names in the one ballot.

Creer had a discretionary power to over-ride the ballot selection, if he felt a man was unsuitable (or, as many believed, if he had taken a dislike to that individual). In order to overcome these inequities, the commissioners abolished the ballot system, instead directly offering the unemployed work based on an assessment of their skills.¹⁵

Despite the changes, many of the bad habits of managing the unemployed, and stonewalling critics of the Bureau and government policy, endured under the new regime. A consistency of practice was also sharply symbolised by the sudden rehabilitation of Joseph Creer. Despite the sustained attacks on Bureau operations and his personal management of the unemployed, Creer was appointed as a Labour Commissioner in November 1901. At seventy years of age, Creer had managed one last remarkable comeback. Overlooked by the Lyne Government in 1900, Creer's belated appointment prompted the resignation of commissioner the Rev. William Carr-Smith, who attacked Creer's selection as a political act. The old protectionist was being looked after by his cronies in the Progressive (as the NSW Protectionists were renamed in 1901) government of Premier John See, particularly by E.W. O'Sullivan, the Minister for Public Works. Carr-Smith took pride in the new registration and selection system introduced by the commissioners on behalf of the

¹⁵. Labour Commissioners of New South Wales, annual report for the period ended 31 August 1901, *V&P LA* Vol.6 p.369.

unemployed; he feared that these procedures would be steadily undermined by political interference. He claimed that the Minister intervened to put forward the names of men to be given government work, displacing others already selected by the commissioners.¹⁶ He also stressed that Schey had a genuine empathy with the unemployed, and fairly administered the selection system - although Schey was obviously unable to defy the wishes of his Minister about Creer's appointment. Schey was also compromised: like Creer a decade earlier, Schey was a former protectionist MP and official of the National Protection Union, appointed following the loss of his parliamentary seat and subsequent business failure. The chief commissioner's job saved Schey from 'severe financial hardship'.¹⁷

The SLU actively sought political interference, urging the Government to intervene on behalf of specific cases and find work for its members. In November 1900 O'Sullivan responded by inviting the SLU to delegate two representatives to participate, with the Labour Commissioners, in the process of grading a group of men. The SLU could help select those eligible for the more physically demanding, and better paid public works projects, from those suitable only for lighter duties. O'Sullivan's shrewd ploy may have been a little too much for the SLU (and perhaps the commissioners, jealous of their authority). SLU representatives were being asked to assess the workplace value of their actual and potential members. Although the SLU duly dispatched two representatives, the experiment does not seem to have been repeated.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Worker*, 23 November 1901.

¹⁷ RM Audley, 'William Francis Schey', ADB Vol.11 MUP 1988 p.535.

¹⁸ SLU minutes, 1 & 6 November 1900; EW O'Sullivan to John Dwyer, 2 November 1900. Dwyer papers, ML MSS 290.

The Minister was not always so co-operative: during a meeting with an SLU delegation in late 1900, O'Sullivan threatened to investigate Dwyer's background - a threat that prompted Dwyer to offer his resignation as President, evidently believing that the Minister's hostility to him would undermine the SLU's effectiveness. The executive repudiated O'Sullivan's 'insinuations' about Dwyer, and expressed their 'implicit faith' in his integrity. Dwyer later asked O'Sullivan if he had conducted his inquiry; O'Sullivan blandly responded that he had done so, but 'had found nothing bad.' Implicit in Sullivan's threat and subsequent reassurance was an assertion of power, and the sanctions that he, as Minister, could exercise over Dwyer, the SLU and the unemployed. The SLU's leaders demanded political interference on behalf of their members, but they could not always control the consequences of attracting political attention.¹⁹

Challenges to Dwyer's and the SLU's legitimacy were not confined to the Government. In October 1900 Dwyer led a delegation of men to Schey after they had experienced long delays in payments for relief work. After the meeting an SLU delegate called on the men to join the union. The men were divided; some, Dwyer told the SLU executive, were 'opposed' to the SLU, presumably dissatisfied with the SLU's efforts (Dwyer did not explain the source of their hostility). Only twelve of them joined the union. Dwyer accompanied two of the men to a subsequent meeting with Schey in an attempt to recover their Labour Bureau tickets and obtain further work. Schey explained that their tickets were at the Bureau and that they would be sent to jobs 'almost immediately'. Schey then turned to Dwyer and commented, 'Mr. Dwyer knows that too, he could have told you about it.' Outside the meeting, one of the men accused Dwyer of

19. SLU minutes, 30 October, 1 & 27 November 1900.

interfering. He could have solved the problem without Dwyer's help - 'he was not married to govern my work.' A month later Tom Brown visited the Labour Bureau, and found 300 men waiting for work: he was only able to persuade eight of them to join the SLU.²⁰

The SLU's right to enrol the unemployed was also challenged within the labour movement. The SLU was not an affiliate of the Sydney Labor Council. The affiliated United Labourer's Protective Society claimed representation of 2,000 unemployed labourers (the overwhelming majority of unemployed men in Sydney), indeed 'every worker who does not come under the specific definition of a tradesman'.²¹ During the early 1900s the *Sydney Worker* reported the United Labourer's demands for an increased public works program and the abolition of the Labour Bureau, replacing it with a registry office in the Trades Hall with direct lines of communication to government departments.²² By contrast, the *Worker* was silent on the subject of the SLU. In December 1901 the *Worker* pointedly commented that 'the Labour Commissioners have asked the Sydney Labor Council to furnish a list of the Trade Unions which it recognises.'²³ The SLU approached Sam Smith MLA, the former Seamen's Union official, in an attempt to overcome the hostile attitude of *Worker* editor Hector Lamond, and the United Labourer's objections to the affiliation of the SLU with the Labor Council. Smith merely suggested writing to the Labor Council, explaining the SLU's position.²⁴

20. *ibid.*, 7 November 1900.

21. *Worker*, 19 December 1903.

22. *ibid.*, 28 July 1900 & 23 November 1901.

23. *ibid.*, 14 December 1901.

24. SLU minutes 13 December 1901.

In an attempt to more accurately identify its support base, the SLU became the State Labourers Union in August 1901. 'State Labour' union may also have been taken to imply some contest with the labour movement at a wider political level. The constitution adopted in August 1901 asserted that the SLU specifically represented 'those using the Government Labour Bureau in seeking employment as State Labourers or as State employees.'²⁵ The changes failed to win Labor Council support, and in January 1902 the SLU executive decided to take no further action in seeking the recognition of the Sydney Labor Council. By September the executive had decided to suspend the SLU's operations.²⁶ Sydney's unemployed, demoralised and penniless, were almost impossible for the marginalised SLU to effectively organise. A few years later Dwyer briefly revived the SLU, but soon gave up, finding his supporters 'a poor lot of creatures politically and socially'.²⁷

Dwyer inherited an SLU boarding house for unemployed men at 296 Sussex Street. Dwyer and the SLU came to an arrangement, which Dwyer typically described with his eye for detail and correct procedure, whereby the SLU paid Dwyer £26 9s 6d for goods valued at £8 9s 6d and goodwill of £15.²⁸ Dwyer would be the tenant of the new property and manager of the house, established with the goods purchased from Dwyer: 72 second hand blankets and 41 second hand stretchers, 1 chair, 4 lamps, an oil can, 2 tables, 1 tool box, a saw, an auger, a tomahawk and a hammer, 2 long stools, 1 saw horse, a wooden lime tub, a tin tub and three kerosene tins. The house provided accommodation for 1s 6d a night. Intoxicated and objectionable persons were refused admittance. A caretaker's position was

²⁵. Preamble to the 1901-2 constitution of the State Labourers Union.

²⁶. SLU minutes, 2 January & 5 September 1902.

²⁷. John Dwyer's diary, 10 February 1904, Dwyer papers ML MSS 290 box 1.

²⁸. *ibid.*, 12 December 1901.

advertised; there were 44 applicants, suggesting some continuing demand for the agitations of the SLU.²⁹ Dwyer apparently made a profit from the agreement (featuring the SLU's purchase of Dwyer's goods while leaving them in his possession), but he had also regularly paid cash advances into the SLU account to help prop up its struggling finances. It is unclear if he was ever reimbursed for these sums. Like the ASB's barracks, the SLU house struggled to break-even.³⁰ Dwyer's own struggle to maintain an income for his family was intimately connected with his identity as a radical agitator on behalf of the unemployed. Dwyer may have been often frustrated with the poor unemployed creatures whom he tried to rouse, but he shared their conditions, symbolised in the threadbare goods he accumulated in his years as a doss house manager - goods that could be easily gathered up and moved on. The Dwyers' had adjusted to the monotonously unsettled life of Sydney's poor and unemployed.

The citizens' committees on unemployment

After 1902 Dwyer took to campaigning for the unemployed and the right to work through a series of citizens' committees, agitating in the streets, in the Domain and in public halls. The community-based, non-industrial nature of the committees avoided direct conflict with the labour movement, and offered a wider stage of public protest. On 15 April 1904 Dwyer managed, through a dogged letter writing campaign, to persuade a range of prominent citizens to attend a public meeting sponsored by the Citizens' Committee on Unemployment to discuss solutions to the jobs

²⁹. *ibid.*, 12 February 1902.

³⁰. SLU financial accounts are not continuous for the period, nor complete - for example, although there are some entries relevant to the house at 296 Sussex Street, a reference in the accounts to the operations at the property notes: 'see other account book' - which has not survived. The surviving accounts can be found with the minutes in the Dwyer papers at ML MSS 2184/6.

crisis.³¹ The Lord Mayor of Sydney, S.E. Lees presided and several thousand citizens 'well filled' Sydney Town Hall.³²

They were not well-behaved: as the speakers rose to call on the Progressive Government of Premier John See to solve the unemployment problem, they were greeted with interjections from the crowd. Joseph Carruthers, the Leader of the Opposition in the NSW Parliament, said the government should settle people on the land. 'Industries of the soil' would provide work for skilled and unskilled city labour. Dwyer moved that the government immediately implement 'statesman-like measures', although he did not specify what these measures should be. When Tom Thrower, the Secretary of the Sydney Labor Council, tried to speak, he was challenged to produce Jim McGowen, the absent Labor leader. Thrower was shouted down as he tried to defend the Party. At other times, members of the official group on the stage hissed and groaned at remarks they disputed. Almost every speaker suffered taunts and catcalls, and often could not be heard. As the evening progressed, Labor MLA George Burgess said they were no nearer a solution than when they started; similar movements had failed. A.H. Moore, representing the NSW Employers Federation, was however successful with a motion recommending a further conference to assess the state of the labour market, and to seek means of providing relief for the unemployed.³³ The disruption seemed to indicate a suspicion by the

31. The difficulties of organising such a gathering can perhaps be best gauged by noting the number of refusals Dwyer received, including the NSW Governor; Cardinal Moran; former Premier George Reid; the NSW Attorney-General; Federal Labor MP Billy Hughes and Dr. Smith, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, who at least had the honesty to note that he did not feel competent to suggest practical remedies to the present lack of employment. Correspondence in the Dwyer papers, box 1, ML MSS 290.

32. Dwyer estimated an audience of 3,000. Dwyer diary, 15 April 1904.

33. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 1904.

audience that the assembled leaders had little interest in finding solutions for unemployment.

With elections due later in 1904, the NSW Government was reluctant to present itself as a sitting target for criticism over its failure to reduce the state's intractable unemployment. Public Works Minister O'Sullivan declined an invitation to attend the Town Hall meeting, although he later said that cabinet would 'carefully consider' any proposals put forward by the Committee - without promising to specifically implement any of them.³⁴ Two subsequent conferences - with representatives of political parties, business and the churches - met under the guidance of the Lord Mayor in a Town Hall room on 29 April and 10 May 1904 and reiterated the fractious confusion about the source and cure for unemployment evident at the mass meeting.³⁵ At the first conference, Dwyer claimed there were 10,000 unemployed in Sydney; he was contradicted by his colleague, Flinn, who insisted there were 20,000 'at least'. Officially, 4,775 men registered with the NSW Labour Bureau in 1904, although this figure was almost certainly a low estimate of the total number of unemployed.³⁶ Labor leader McGowen said they could only alleviate the 'present distress', and not expect to solve the unemployment question, to which Dwyer retorted: 'yes we can.' McGowen fatalistically replied that 'if they could do that they would do something that had been never done before.' By the second meeting the Lord Mayor was wondering aloud if it

³⁴. EW O'Sullivan to Dwyer, 14 and 28 April 1904, Dwyer papers ML MSS 290.

³⁵. *Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1904, 11 May 1904.

³⁶. Endres and Cook note that during 1902-05 it was Bureau policy to force all able-bodied registrants to participate in stone-breaking, a form of 'enforced casualisation' that artificially reduced the numbers of unemployed - and a policy of hard labour that might have also discouraged many of the unemployed from even registering with the Bureau. Endres & Cook, 'Administering "the unemployed difficulty": the NSW Government Labour Bureau 1892-1912', pp.66-67.

was worth holding further meetings. They concluded by agreeing to send a 'memorial' to the Government, urging the need for increased public works.³⁷

Despite these dispiriting displays of policy inertia and political gamesmanship, Dwyer continued to lobby the powerful to support his campaign. There were protests at the Statue and the Domain, deputations to the Premier and the Minister for Public Works. Governments soon tired of Dwyer's persistence. In June 1903 Premier Sir John See declined to receive any more deputations led by Dwyer, claiming that the Government was doing all it could to aid the unemployed. By August 1905, a year after assuming office, Premier Joseph Carruthers told Dwyer that he was also refusing further deputations, referring Dwyer to the Minister for Public Works or the Labour Commissioners.³⁸

Carruthers had prominently supported Dwyer's campaign while in opposition. Indeed, there is a possibility that in the months prior to the August 1904 NSW elections Dwyer allowed the activities of his committee to be manipulated to assist Carruthers' Liberals. The evidence - an exchange of notes between the two men - is ambiguous. On 25 November 1904 Dwyer wrote to Carruthers. Marked 'private', the draft seethes with sarcasm and resentment. 'May I be pardoned in writing as your heavy engagements preclude an interview'. Dwyer reminds Carruthers that 'I rendered some little political services to the Party of which you are the head while it was in Opposition and for which I have so far secured very little consideration.' Dwyer claimed that these political services involved

³⁷. *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1904.

³⁸. See to Dwyer, 19 June 1903; Carruthers to Dwyer, 14 August 1905. Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/7.

the neglect of his 'business concerns'. This and other unspecified 'troubles...impel me to seek for your favourable considerations for services rendered to the Party.'³⁹

It is difficult to specify Dwyer's services for Carruthers. During the 1904 NSW elections Dwyer organised a campaign by a businessman, John Lawler, to win the local electorate of King. The seat was held by Ernest Broughton, a Progressive MLA who, sniffing the changing political wind, swapped sides and joined the Liberals in 1903. Lawler, 'a man of independent means', styled himself as 'the genuine Independent, Progressive and Democratic candidate'.⁴⁰ Dwyer claimed that he agreed to act as Lawler's campaign manager after visiting Lawler's factory and satisfying himself that Lawler supported the Labor platform. Apparently believing that Broughton would be too difficult to defeat, the PLL did not run an endorsed candidate in King in 1904, although an 'Independent Labour' candidate, Daniel Green, did stand.⁴¹ The election result was a fiasco: Lawler polled just 57 votes, or 1.27% of the total. Soon after Dwyer was arrested on false pretences (fraud) charges brought by his humiliated candidate. A rich man's indulgent fantasy had been unceremoniously deflated, and Dwyer was a useful scapegoat. Represented on 19 October in Darlinghurst Court by Labor MLA and barrister William Holman, Dwyer successfully defended a charge that he had presented bad cheques to a local publican. Lawler believed Dwyer had 'sold' him to Broughton. He told the court he had seen Dwyer and Broughton laughing and talking together on polling day.⁴² Lawler's suspicions were proof of absolutely

³⁹. Dwyer to Carruthers, 25 November 1904, *ibid*.

⁴⁰. *Worker*, 30 July 1904; Lawler seems to have been part of the family business John Lawler and Sons, furniture manufacturers and importers. *Australian Workman*, 17 December 1892.

⁴¹. *Worker*, 30 July 1904.

⁴². *Evening News*, 19 October 1904; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1904.

nothing, although doubts about Dwyer's motivations are raised by the subsequent correspondence with Carruthers. Lawler, standing as a 'progressive' candidate on a platform similar to Labor's, may have split the working class vote - but to what end? There was no official Labor candidate, and Broughton easily won. As voting was a 'first past the post' system in 1904 (preferential voting was not introduced until 1918), the issue of directing Lawler's preferences to Broughton does not arise.⁴³ There had been nothing furtive about Lawler's campaign: Dwyer had used his own premises as the campaign rooms, with a prominent sign erected to that effect.

Dwyer's 25 November 1904 letter to Carruthers followed a conversation Dwyer had with the Premier 'at the Treasury' in the previous week. Dwyer probably intercepted Carruthers arriving or leaving the Premier's office in the Treasury building on Macquarie Street. Carruthers had apparently brushed Dwyer off with a promise to see him again in the 'near future'. Carruthers had already discouraged Dwyer's unspecified political assistance a few weeks earlier - possibly a demonstration in support of Carruthers efforts to help the unemployed.⁴⁴ Dwyer had opportunistically sought to build political capital with the man who

43. Lawler and Green polled very poorly (Green won only 105 votes), compared with Broughton's winning vote (2,154 votes, or 49.63% of the total). Broughton's nearest rival, the Ministerial candidate, achieved 1,704 votes. C.A. Hughes & B.D. Graham, *Voting for the NSW Legislative Assembly, 1890-1964*, Australian National University Canberra 1975, pp.111, 138; Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales, 1865-1965*, pp.203, 217.

44. Carruthers wrote in response to Dwyer's lost suggestion: 'I do not think it is wise to have any outside agitation on the matter mentioned. I prefer to fight it out with the house alone.' Only days before Carruthers' letter, both the Labor Party and independent MLA John Norton initiated adjournment debates on unemployment in the Legislative Assembly, critical of the Government's attempts to find work for the unemployed. Carruthers to Dwyer, 26 October 1904 Dwyer papers MSS 2184/1; *NSW PD*, 28 September and 18 October 1904, Vol. XV 1904 pp.338 & 767.

seemed likely to emerge as the Premier after the elections. It didn't work: with the election won, Carruthers dumped him.

Carruthers rejection may have also been based in satisfaction with a decline in Labour Bureau registrations - down to 1,883 for the year ended 30 June 1905. In that context, the Labour Commissioners felt encouraged to echo Creer's dismissal of the agitations of the 'chronic unemployed', the despair of 'the philanthropist and the sociologist', who 'meet at the Queen's Statue and in the Domain to voice the woes of the unemployed, and endeavour to charter their "wrongs" by the formation of a "permanent" organisation.'⁴⁵

Despite the turbulence and discouragements of his political activism, Dwyer persisted, and he seemed to find sufficient allies - and cases of distress - to justify his efforts, although the frustrations endured. There were further Town Hall meetings in 1905; Dwyer invited the high-profile English radical Tom Mann, living in Melbourne at the time, to address one of them, although Mann was unable to accept. Mann urged Dwyer to promote shorter working hours and 'industrial and agricultural settlements under state supervision' as solutions to unemployment.⁴⁶ A meeting on 16 August established the Citizens' National Unemployment Movement. Chaired by Dwyer, a gathering of 52 unemployed declared that it should be a 'statutory right' of every Australian citizen to be employed by a state government, or the Commonwealth. The meeting also resolved to begin an educational campaign in the press. Although

⁴⁵. 1905 Labour Commissioner's report, p.7, in *NSW Parliamentary Papers*, Vol.3 part 2, p.681. Anne O'Brien observes that in this period 'unemployment was not confined to the depression years but government assistance dried up as though it were.' O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, p.75.

⁴⁶. Tom Mann to John Dwyer, 28 September 1905, Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/7.

styled as a national campaign, the Movement's agenda remained predominantly focused on pressuring the NSW Government and the Sydney City Council for action. The Movement urged the Carruthers Government to expand public works, with the unemployed to be paid at a 'recognised living wage'. Perhaps with Dwyer's experience in mind, the Movement sought assistance for 'prospective settlers'. The Movement also called for an expansion of co-operative, village settlements, and in increase in forest thinning and scrub cutting. A deputation was organised to approach the NSW Minister for Public Works; the Lord Mayor of Sydney would be asked to chair future public meetings.⁴⁷

The Citizens' National Unemployment Movement included a number of women. Bertha McNamara was a member of the Movement's executive. Bertha was an active radical throughout the 1890s and into the new century, continuing to run McNamara's bookshop after the death of her husband William in 1903. Bertha was perhaps responsible for encouraging other women to become active in the movement executive, which included ten women and sixteen men.⁴⁸ Dwyer had previously shown little inclination to involve women in his campaigns, a reflection of the prevailing neglect of the needs of unemployed women in the period.⁴⁹

⁴⁷. Executive Committee Minutes of the Citizens' National Unemployment Movement, 16 August 1905, Dwyer papers, item 3 ML MSS 2184/7; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1905.

⁴⁸. Executive Committee roll, 23 August-30 November 1905, in Executive Committee Minutes of the Citizens' National Unemployment Movement.

⁴⁹. The NSW Labour Commissioners set up a separate registry for unemployed women in 1902, ten years after the establishment of the Labour Bureau. The Commissioners reported in 1905 that during its three years of operations, 8,064 women had applied for assistance: only 4,884 had been placed in work. They also noted that the Registry was not as widely

In October 1905 Dwyer and McNamara addressed an estimated crowd of 700 in the Domain.⁵⁰ In November she lobbied Carruthers in robust style. The executive committee minutes noted that 'a letter received by her from the Premier was a little improved as her previous letter demanded something definite otherwise *drastic* steps would undoubtedly ensue.' Mrs. Ladbrook told the same meeting that Mrs. Woolfe and herself had interviewed *Worker* editor Hector Lamond, who had rather vaguely offered to publish an occasional paragraph in support of their campaign, 'when any important suggestion should arise' (there is no evidence that he did so).⁵¹ Ward and Woolfe urged the executive to lobby Carruthers to provide Christmas work for the unemployed.⁵² In December Woolfe reported 'a very bad case of distress'. A husband and wife with five children were trying to survive on one and a half day's relief work each week: 'The people are absolutely starving.' Mrs. Ladbrook moved that a deputation wait on Labour Commissioner William Schey to allocate the husband more relief work.⁵³

Although Dwyer and his associates were seen as labour movement radicals, not all of Dwyer's left-wing contemporaries supported his campaigns. In April 1905 Heinrich Dierks, the secretary of the International Socialist Club, dissidents who split from the increasingly cautious Australian Socialist League in 1898, declined Dwyer's invitation for the club to participate in the Citizens' Committee on Unemployment.

known as it deserved to be, as it 'has never been advertised in any way'. 1905 Labour Commissioners report, pp.12-13.

⁵⁰. Executive Committee minutes, 23 October 1905.

⁵¹. *ibid.*, 30 November 1905.

⁵². *ibid.*, 6 November 1905.

⁵³. *ibid.*, 4 December 1905.

We cannot see the good of sitting on a committee composed of men who look upon the present state of society as a God ordained order of things and do everything in their power to maintain it...these men are not sincere in solving the problem.

Dierks declared that there was only one solution to unemployment: the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth, with the means of production, distribution and exchange in the hands of the people. The working class, acting alone, would solve unemployment, 'when it has intelligence enough to seize political power.' Although the apparently confident Dierks seemed to despair that this awakening would ever occur. 'If you corner a mouse, it will bite you, but man submits to anything, even being starved to death.'⁵⁴

Dierks posed a sharp challenge: what could Dwyer and his committees really do to assist the unemployed? Some answer to that can be found in Dwyer's efforts to help individual workers. In 1904 Walter Cashman was a 34 year old unemployed blacksmith, and one of Dwyer's lodgers. He decided to leave Sydney and go out 'on the wallaby' in search of work. At the end of August he wrote to Dwyer.⁵⁵ After a long trek north, taking odd jobs along the way - 'from one day to another I knew nothing of where I might be the following day' - Cashman arrived in Tamworth, and found work at McShane's Blacksmiths, Farriers and Engineers.

⁵⁴. H. Dierks to Dwyer, 6 April 1905, item 1 Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/7. For more information on the International Socialist Club see Verity Burgmann, *In Our Time*, p.100.

⁵⁵. WJ Cashman to Dwyer, 28 August 1904, Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/7 item 1.

I thought it was a splendid offer to have a place where I knew I was safe and could thereby become from a bag-man to a man of business as you are well aware I can do as long as I keep off the Beer and in place of tramping the roads.

Cashman was in Tamworth for the NSW elections in August 1904, and he told Dwyer that he had helped the protectionist Harry Levien get re-elected as the local Member of Parliament. Cashman attended an election meeting of 2,000 constituents conducted by Levien's Liberal opponent, John Garland. Cashman claimed that he asked Garland such 'damaging questions' that the chairman demanded that Cashman leave Garland alone. Amidst cheering for 'the wily old blacksmith', Cashman pressed on, challenging Garland to say what he was going to do for the country: 'I claimed while I had used only good citizenship common sense arguments I claimed to be heard and was heard.'

Cashman asked to be remembered 'to the boys around the Statue', and told Dwyer to tell them this part of the country was no good unless you had a trade. He angrily lashed those 'people and paper liars' who condemned the Sydney unemployed as loafers. 'Loafers do not do as I and hundreds of others I've met in my travels have done take it up and look for honest toil.' Cashman may have exaggerated his election influence, but the transformation in his self-esteem seemed real enough. Cashman expressed his gratitude for Dwyer's help, and assured Dwyer that he had taken the oath 'not to indulge'; he would give abstinence from the grog a full summer trial. Cashman had kept off the beer four months, 'and mean to continue'.

The job at McShane's apparently did not last. By 1905 Cashman was back in Sydney, and became secretary of the Citizens' National Unemployment Movement. On 18 September one of the unemployed left a note for him pinned to the door of the Movement's office in the Trades Hall. 'No bread in the house cupboard empty and no committee in the office to give a man any hope. Don't know what time will be back.' The note was an envelope that the anonymous visitor had torn open to scrawl his desperate message. It has found a place in Dwyer's papers with several other elusive fragments from the tenants of Dwyer's lodging house at 64-68 Forbes Street Woolloomooloo.

These fragments include the record of Louis Nistrie's citizenship. Nistrie was a 56 year old cook in 1911. Since at least 1908 he had fallen on the threadbare relief provided at Forbes Street. Nistrie was an unemployed member of the Hotel, Club, Restaurant and Caterer's Employees' Union. He was registered with the State Labour Bureau - his worn Bureau ticket for 1911 is also preserved. A 'native of Tuscany', his certificate of naturalization, issued by the Commonwealth of Australia on 29 August 1906, declared him to be 'entitled to all POLITICAL and other RIGHTS, POWERS AND PRIVILEGES, and becomes subject to all OBLIGATIONS to which a NATURAL-BORN BRITISH SUBJECT is entitled or subject in the Commonwealth.' Nistrie had dutifully registered and acknowledged his obligations as a subject. His identity as a citizen remained less fulfilled: few of those promised rights and privileges had been realised.⁵⁶

After a brief flourish, the Citizen's National Unemployment Movement collapsed back around Dwyer. On 17 April 1906 an executive committee meeting was attended only by Dwyer, Cashman and two others. A late

⁵⁶. The papers cited in this paragraph are in the Dwyer papers, box 3 ML MSS 290.

entry in May records a visit from detective Whalan, who inspected the Movement's books and took away a subscription list.⁵⁷ It was the first time since the mid 1890s that Dwyer noted Police interest in his political activities. By mid 1906 the vagaries of organising the unemployed, and contesting with a peculiar mixture of Labour Bureau hostility and public apathy about the fate of the unemployed, ensured that the Police would be little troubled by the Movement's potentially subversive activities.

Working with rebels: the Right to Work Movement & radical politics

In July 1913 Dwyer initiated the Right to Work Movement of New South Wales. The Movement sought to establish a permanent body in every State and Commonwealth electoral division, demanding a statutory 'right to work for each and all'. The Movement's motto was 'what we make we take'.⁵⁸ The Movement was directed by a six man executive, including Emil Graser, a member of the Hotel, Club, Restaurant and Caterer's Employees' Union, and a colleague of Dwyer's from the King PLL; Webb, a member of the Stewards and Cooks, and Parker, a member of the United Labourers. Perhaps given the difficulties Dwyer and the SLU had encountered with the labour movement in the past, there seems to have been some sensitivity to ensuring that all Right to Work Movement members were unionists, and that the Movement was not perceived as a threat to existing unions.⁵⁹ Dwyer was elected as the Movement's convenor. The Movement distributed handbills around Sydney to attract 'unemployed men' to the cause: 'he who would be free himself must strike the blow.' In August another notice was addressed to 'fellow wage

⁵⁷. Executive Committee minutes, Citizen's National Unemployment Movement, 17 April, 4 May 1906.

⁵⁸. Undated Right to Work Movement flier, Minutes of the Right to Work Movement, Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/13.

⁵⁹. Right to Work Movement minutes, 12 August 1913.

slaves', who were rhetorically asked, 'what Mr. Holman has done for you, if anything?'⁶⁰

By 1913 Labor had been in power in New South Wales for three years. William Holman, the pioneer LEL activist who had helped undermine Dwyer's attempt to become an LEL organiser in 1892, became NSW Premier in June 1913, following the retirement of Jim McGowen. Unemployment had eased in NSW during the years 1904-13, although concentrations of the unemployed and the poor remained in inner Sydney.⁶¹ The Labour Bureau reported a persistent oversupply of unskilled labourers during 1913-14, and urged them to avoid Sydney if searching for employment.⁶² As Sydney was the largest labour market in the State, this was rather like advising thirsty drinkers to patiently wait outside the pub.

The Right to Work Movement believed a Labor Government should make more determined efforts on behalf of the unemployed. Dwyer had remained a loyal member of the PLL since its inception, and probably felt he had some right to claim the Government's attention. In September 1913 Holman dismissed a request to receive a deputation made by Dwyer on behalf of the Movement. Dwyer wanted Holman to legislate to 'endorse the right to work principle.' The Premier's secretary said Mr. Holman's time was 'almost wholly occupied in the promotion of

⁶⁰. Right to Work Movement handbills, ML MSS 2184/13.

⁶¹. Endres & Cook note the decline in NSW unemployment over the period 1904-1911, from 4.5 per cent to 3.7 per cent. Forster estimates that unemployment rarely fell below 5 per cent in NSW during 1912-1914. Endres & Cook, 'Administering "the unemployed difficulty"', p.69n; Forster, 'Australian Unemployment 1900-40', p.447.

⁶². Report of the Director of Labour for the operations of the State Labour Bureau, *NSW Industrial Gazette*, January 1914 Vol.IV No.5 p.951.

schemes for the protection and advancement of the workers'. The Premier saw no need to receive a deputation.⁶³ Dwyer thought this was a 'most extraordinary epistle' from a Labor Premier. It was a matter of urgent public importance for Holman to see the Movement's representatives. The Movement had been trying to see Holman for two months, but as Dwyer retorted, 'you have side-stepped us all the time.'⁶⁴

The Right to Work Movement's agitations and frustrations followed a familiar pattern, although in contrast to Dwyer's previous campaigns, the Movement's rhetoric had a sharper, more confrontational tone, reflecting a rising working class militancy stirred by the provocative radicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World. The IWW declared that 'the working class and the employing class have nothing in common'. The 'Chicago' version of the IWW, which attracted support in Sydney, advocated that workers, reduced to the level of 'wage slaves' under capitalism, should slow down in the face of employer demands for increased productivity. The IWW also urged workers to commit acts of industrial sabotage.⁶⁵

George Reeve, who had served as the secretary of the Sydney Local of the IWW, joined the executive of the Right to Work Movement in July 1913,

⁶³. Holman to Dwyer, 14 August & 3 September 1913, Right to Work Movement correspondence, Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/14.

⁶⁴. Report of response to the Premier's correspondence, Right to Work Movement minutes, 6 September 1913.

⁶⁵. In 1908 the IWW in the United States split. A majority of IWW supporters who rejected political action in favour of 'industrial' tactics remained in control of the IWW's headquarters in Chicago. Those in favour of continued political action through the Socialist Labor Party withdrew under the leadership of the Daniel De Leon to Detroit. Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, the IWW in Australia*, Cambridge University Press 1995 p.12.

but resigned in September.⁶⁶ Like Dierks, Reeve's thought of himself as 'a Revolutionist [Reeve's emphasis] not ashamed of the stigma', who found he was unable to negotiate on behalf of the unemployed with a Labor government unwilling to confront capitalism. 'I feel that I could not work with any other men than rebels', he told Dwyer.⁶⁷ The minutes of the Right to Work Movement note some fitful attempts at co-operation between the Movement and the IWW, but IWW hostility to the Movement's methods was rarely far from the surface. In April 1914 the executive noted that the Movement and the IWW had conducted a 'well attended' Domain meeting the previous Sunday afternoon, at which Dwyer, Reeve and IWW leader Donald Grant spoke. That same evening they held a night meeting in Bathurst Street, disrupted by two IWW members who 'deprecated' the Right to Work Movement.⁶⁸

Dwyer was briefly involved with the IWW in 1911: in some ways, the IWW was a logical extension of Dwyer's commitment to a radical alternative to mainstream labourism, a tendency that seemed to intensify in the early twentieth century. During 1907-1909 Dwyer supported an Australian version of the Social Democratic Federation. Bertha McNamara and Emil Graser were also involved in the SDF, joined by a future Labor MLA for King, James Morrish. Dwyer was elected president.⁶⁹ The SDF promoted socialism within the labour movement, supported the cause of striking workers and the rights of the unemployed

⁶⁶. Reeve had been an official of the Sydney Local in 1912 but lost the position in a factional squabble. *ibid.*, p.36.

⁶⁷. Reeve to Dwyer, 5 September 1913, Right to Work Movement correspondence.

⁶⁸. Right to Work Movement minutes, 25 April 1914 .

⁶⁹. Minutes of the Social Democratic Federation, 29 August & 12 September 1907. Dwyer papers ML MSS 2184/8 Item 6.

and campaigned for a 'Rational Sunday' - a cause in which Dwyer took a personal interest.⁷⁰

A contrary mix of isolationism and the lingering appeal of the orthodox PLL plagued Dwyer's tentative militancy. In March 1909 the SDF tried to promote 'harmony' amongst the various Sydney socialist organisations. Dwyer argued that the SDF should approach the PLL, the IWW, the Socialist Labor Party, the 'Socialist Federation group' and the International Socialist Club to join together in a united May Day demonstration.⁷¹ A visitor to the meeting, a Mr. Barker,⁷² praised Dwyer's initiative, and promptly proceeded to condemn the Labor Party's attitude to the recent and bitter lock-out by BHP of its mining workforce at Broken Hill, after the miners refused to accept a 12.5 per cent wage reduction proposed by the company. Barker moved a motion of censure against William Holman and other Labor parliamentarians for their role. Holman had singled out the IWW for fomenting a destructive militancy amongst the miners; Harry Holland and Tom Mann had been arrested for arousing that militancy during the lock-out.⁷³ Barker was greeted with an embarrassed silence. No-one seconded or supported the motion. Instead, the meeting rather meekly expressed its sympathy with 'Holland, Tom Mann and others' involved in the dispute. At the next meeting Dwyer reported back that his attempts to promote a combined May Day

⁷⁰. SDF minutes, 10 October & 14 November 1907, 9 October 1908.

⁷¹. SDF minutes, c29 March 1909; the minutes are undated, but were signed off by Dwyer at the following meeting held on that date. The meeting was probably held a week before.

⁷². Not the IWW leader Tom Barker, who did not arrive in Australia until 1914. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp.70-1.

⁷³. Freudenberg, *Cause for Power*, p.83.

demonstration had met with 'no success'.⁷⁴ This attempt at unity was the last gasp of the SDF.

The next entries in the same minute book record Dwyer's attempt in 1911 to establish an IWW Local in Sydney. The IWW had previously organised in Sydney, as IWW clubs under the wing of the Socialist Labor Party, but its activities had lapsed.⁷⁵ Dwyer was presented with an opportunity to revive the IWW, effectively under his own control. For a few months the Local seemed to flourish, attracting the support of the IWW's Australian Administration in Adelaide.⁷⁶ A handful of Sydney members included Graser and Louis Nistrie, both residents of Dwyer's boarding house at 68 Forbes Street. Dwyer's attempt to place a personal stamp on the IWW's militancy included rewriting the IWW preamble, which he issued as an IWW handbill in November 1911, and signed by him as 'General Secretary'. Dwyer's delusions were soon deflated: the IWW leadership insisted on the recall and destruction of the handbill, disputing an assertion, that Dwyer had inserted, that the IWW entirely rejected political action.⁷⁷ Doubting Dwyer's claim that his Local had a viable membership, the IWW also demanded that he forward a list of members. Dwyer had ambitiously styled his Local as the 'IWW New South Wales branch', in defiance of prevailing IWW structures (a network of locals beneath an over-arching industrial department). He was instructed to liaise with another group of Sydney-based IWW supporters led by Harry Denford, who had intended to establish their own Local. Dwyer was

⁷⁴. SDF Minutes, 29 March 1909.

⁷⁵. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp.32-5.

⁷⁶. IWW Australian Administration, Adelaide to Dwyer, 13 October 1911. Dwyer Papers, IWW NSW Branch Correspondence, ML MSS 2184/8 Item 8.

⁷⁷. Copies of an amended IWW preamble and the offending handbill are in the minutes of the IWW NSW branch in the Dwyer Papers, ML MSS 2184 Item 6.

perhaps most upset by this last demand, claiming that Denford had a takeover in mind, not unity.⁷⁸ Dwyer briefly joined the new, merged Local (as 'corresponding secretary', playing second fiddle to secretary/treasurer Denford), but soon resigned. He told Denford to remove his name from the IWW membership list, 'as I have gone as far as I intended and now sever my brief connexion therewith absolutely'. He signed the letter 'For anarchist communism, which is about the only ideal worth anything.'⁷⁹

Dwyer did not stay long enough with the IWW to feel the strain of the IWW's injunctions to 'slow down' or embrace his 'right to be lazy', although he often felt disillusioned with Labor's faith in parliamentary politics.⁸⁰ Dwyer told IWW secretary Ted Moyle that the PLL lacked 'proletarian spirit' and that 'any Party that can send up train loads of armed police to Lithgow is a queer crowd to carry the flag of emancipation'. This was a reference to the McGowen Labor Government's suppression of a strike at the Hoskins Ironworks coal mine at Lithgow, which included the jailing of strike leaders.⁸¹

Dwyer regularly returned to that queer crowd's cause: only months earlier he had organised, as secretary of the King PLL, Morrish's successful 1910

78. Dwyer to IWW Adelaide, 7 November 1911; IWW Adelaide to Dwyer (undated response to Dwyer's letter), IWW NSW branch correspondence.

79. Dwyer to Denford, 28 November 1911, *ibid*; Dwyer's brief role as corresponding secretary was recorded in the *International Socialist*, which also ran an article in January 1912 by Denford, 'The IWW and Politics', repudiating Dwyer's handbill and advising readers to correspond directly with him. *International Socialist*, 2 December 1911, 13 January 1912.

80. For a discussion of the IWW's ideology see Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, chapter nine.

81. Dwyer to Moyle, 1 November 1911, IWW NSW branch correspondence. Holland accused the state and federal Labor governments, and the Sydney Labor Council, of 'organised scabbery' over the Lithgow strike. *International Socialist*, 9 September & 7 October 1911.

parliamentary campaign as the PLL candidate for King. The handbills announcing Morrish's campaign meetings are pasted like icons to the pages of the PLL volume, a record of Dwyer's faith in Labor politics.⁸² The whole premise of the Right to Work movement, as with the SLU and the citizen's committees, focused around stimulating a political response to the problem of unemployment. Officially, the IWW may have expressed a non-political stance, but Reeve's resignation from the Right to Work Movement captures the IWW's uncompromising disdain for labourism, and the hopes for unity and harmony that Dwyer entertained.⁸³ Implicitly, Reeve's disciplined militancy also challenged the delusions of 'anarchist communism', an ideology vague enough to cover the spectrum of left-wing radicalism, a space in which Dwyer could wander at will, free and isolated.

Dwyer found the mainstream labour movement unmoved by the Right to Work Movement's campaign. In October 1913 Dwyer interviewed several prominent union leaders about employment conditions. E.J. Kavanagh, the Secretary of the Sydney Labor Council, told Dwyer that he had no idea about the state of the labour market. 'He did not deal with the rank and file, only the officials.' Dwyer also visited the leaders of the

⁸². For the period 1908-1914 the PLL volume contains records attesting to Dwyer's consistent involvement in the King PLL. 'NSW Political Labour League, handbills, press cutting and platforms, 1891-1910', ML.

⁸³. Denford's article claimed that while the IWW was 'non-political', its members could join any political organisation which accepted two statements - 'the working class and the employing class have nothing in common' and 'Labour is entitled to all it produces'. *International Socialist*, 13 January 1912. For an analysis of Labor's embrace of labourism - parliamentary tactics and reformism - and the historiographical debate about the term, see T.H. Irving, 'Labourism, a political genealogy' and Neil Massey, 'A Century of Labourism and the State', both in *Labour History*, No.66 May 1994; T.H. Irving, 'The Roots of Parliamentary Socialism in Australia, 1850-1920', *Labour History*, No.67 November 1994.

Railway and General Labourers Union and the United Labourers Society, who expressed their satisfaction with job prospects. Vernon, the Secretary of the United Labourers, claimed there was plenty of work for those who wanted it, especially if they were willing to travel into the country.⁸⁴ In March 1914, as the energy of the Movement's unpaid supporters flagged, Dwyer wrote to the secretary of the NSW Parliamentary Labor Party Caucus and requested a donation to print literature advocating right to work principles. The caucus secretary acknowledged receipt of 'your interesting letter', but apparently caucus declined to fund a persistent critic of its performance, as no further response was sent.⁸⁵

Despite these discouragements, the Movement continued to defend workers with grievances over their treatment by the Labour Bureau. In September 1913 the executive took up the case of Peter Emslie, an elderly unemployed and unskilled worker who lived in Dwyer's Forbes Street lodgings. Emslie was having difficulty obtaining sensible relief work from the Bureau.⁸⁶ Like so many before him, Emslie had been sent by the Bureau on a long journey to a non-existent job - a train trip and a five mile walk to the Government Farm for boys at Mulgrove. When he arrived the promised dormitory steward's job, at ten shillings a week, was no longer on offer, 'owing to so few boys being at the farm' - a situation the Bureau could have checked before sending Emslie. He spent two days working long hours as a kitchen hand before packing it in; he did not receive any wages for his efforts.⁸⁷ The Movement was able to get some work for Emslie, gathering scrap galvanised iron at a factory at Randwick.

^{84.} *ibid.*, 18 October 1913.

^{85.} Dwyer and the Secretary, NSW Parliamentary Labor Party, 9 March & 11 March 1914, Right to Work Movement correspondence.

^{86.} Emslie to Dwyer, 22 September 1913, Right to Work Movement correspondence.

^{87.} Right to Work Movement minutes, 6 September 1913.

He lasted a single day, helping to load three-quarters of a ton of iron into two large carts. Emslie worked for eight hours and received two shillings.⁸⁸ A month later he had a little more luck with two days work as a handyman at a private home, 'Goldring' in Neutral Bay. Emslie told the Movement executive he had received 'good treatment' from the owner, Miss Cooper. The executive resolved to write to her, in appreciation of her 'humanitarian treatment and sense of social justice shown towards a working man.' In gratitude to the Movement, Emslie offered to pay a 'small subscription' from his unspecified but certainly slight earnings. Dwyer told him to wait until he had at least a full week's work.⁸⁹ Dwyer continued to make representations to the Bureau on behalf of Emslie. In response, superintendent Frank Brennan reported in November that:

Mr. Elmsie [sic] is an old man and is quite unfit for ordinary labouring work. Employment was found for him a few weeks since as a General Useful in a private house in Woollahra. The lady for whom he was engaged reported afterwards that Elmsie [sic] called and was given something to eat. He then stated that he would bring his clothes from town, and was given sixpence to pay his tram fare; but he did not again present himself.⁹⁰

The system could not empathise with men like Peter Emslie, a man expected to adjust to the discipline of presenting himself, although he was apparently surplus to requirements. Perhaps Emslie found it hard to accept that he had been reduced to little more than the charity of society

⁸⁸. *ibid.*, 21 September 1913.

⁸⁹. *ibid.*, 8 & 18 October 1913.

⁹⁰. Brennan to Dwyer, 9 October 1913, Right to Work Movement correspondence.

matrons. Emslie conveniently disappeared into the anonymity of the ageing unemployed.

A familiar pattern of decline marked the demise of the Right to Work Movement, with executive meetings only attended by two or three individuals. Graser was often unable to attend because he worked night shift as a cook. Others probably found it equally difficult to maintain a consistent commitment week in, week out. The executive met for the last time in May 1914.⁹¹

Dwyer insisted on a central role in the various committees and movements even if his isolationism detracted from the effectiveness of the organisation, and led him into desperate, if not pathetic, attempts to cultivate the favours of the powerful. An instinct for individualistic agitation was reinforced by Dwyer's own alienation - his inability to find work, or build a respected career. Despite his failings, Dwyer simply helped others, when he need not have done anything. Heinrich Dierks and George Reeve insisted upon disciplined working class mobilisation, but that could only occur when one individual found a way of reaching out to another; waiting for mass working class revelation only led into the despair of cringing workers that Dierks expressed. Dwyer shared Dierks frustration at times, complaining about the poor creatures drawn to his boarding houses. Dwyer's lodgers simply hoped for something better, and in pursuit of that cause they had nothing to offer but their good citizenship and a demand to be heard, those qualities that John Dwyer helped Walter Cashman find within himself.

⁹¹. Right to Work Movement minutes, 9 May 1914.