

ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES, IDEOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION AND SMALL GROUP POLITICAL
PROTEST: A CASE STUDY OF AN
UNEMPLOYMENT PROTEST ORGANIZATION

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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JOHN M. KENNEDY



ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES, IDEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
AND SMALL GROUP POLITICAL PROTEST:
A CASE STUDY OF AN UNEMPLOYMENT PROTEST ORGANIZATION

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This is a participant-observation study of how links to various local reformist/radical protest organizations help to shape the ideology of a group formed to protest unemployment. The ideological orientation of this unemployment political action group is examined in relation to a network of political activist groups that constitute a 'radical horizon'. Participation in this network limits the development of political sectarian tendencies among the unemployed protest group under study. The horizon provides external ideological inputs that help to broaden the political worldview of the activists who compose the protest organization known as the Committee of the Unemployed (COUP). Furthermore, participation in the horizon serves to explain why the political worldview of these unemployed activists differ considerably from the political worldview of the unemployed in general.

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PREFACE

My period of research with the Committee of the Unemployed began with a phone call to Nora Wilson, a social action officer for the local Catholic archdiocese and a member of the group. This phone call, placed in April, 1983, began a two year period of research with the group, which was quite intensive for the first year, and somewhat less intensive for the second year. Concerning the phone call, I explained to Ms. Wilson who I was and that I was interested in doing an ethnography of the group. Ms. Wilson at the time suggested I should come to the next business meeting of COUP on April 23 at the Catholic Information Centre.

My prior knowledge of COUP consisted of having viewed a "Here and Now" CBC presentation on the public meeting that gave rise to COUP in St. John's and a conversation I had with a sociology graduate student who was a member of this group. When I arrived at the meeting, at which there were two dozen individuals present, I explained who I was to several individuals and stated my purpose in researching them. I had no problems whatsoever in being accepted by them and the only condition I wanted and was granted was that I would participate as a general member in the group but not as an executive member. The reason for refusing any

position was my belief that the line between researcher and activist would be made meaningless if I had input into matters of policy and strategy. Even when the group became much smaller and the distinction between formal executive and general membership became meaningless, I avoided making any comments in terms of advocating any strategy. My involvement in the group was limited to carrying out designated tasks such as making sure there were meeting halls for the group, participating in marches and demonstrations with them, and attending with them other meetings sponsored by other social action groups in St. John's.

Doing research on this group and its connections with other unemployment protest groups and left-wing social action groups was greatly facilitated by the mass of correspondence that COUP members accumulated. COUP members were able to build and maintain an information network with unemployment protest groups, anti-poverty associations, food banks, and various socialist societies throughout not only Canada but the United States and the British Isles as well. Furthermore, the group as a whole issued numerous press statements, reports, and publications. The documentary evidence provided more articulate, coherent statements of the ideology of these groups.

Aside from the collation of documents and correspondence, I did interviews with COUP members regarding various aspects of their association with the group. This included questions on previous and past association with either political or community groups, their work histories, how they define the group's aims, and its problems, how they regard the unemployed in general, and their explanation as to why unemployment exists and what should be done about it. Other field research included taking notes during business meetings of the groups, recording pertinent social conversations between members, and jotting down notes on phone conversations I had with group members.

Supplementing the participant-observation study of the group, a review was made of the literature concerning similar protest bodies and small contra-cultural sects. While I have argued that current unemployment protest groups are similar in terms of organization and rhetoric to other past and present anti-poverty organizations, there are differences that distinguish such bodies from sects. Such dissimilarities I contend are the result of these groups forming networks sharing a common ideological heritage. These networks, I argue, work against the isolation of the sect by providing structural support to these protest groups in times of crisis.

CHAPTER 1

IDEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION AND THE POLITICAL SECT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROTEST MOVEMENT

The extent to which political culture influences ideology is a subject for current analysis. However, many of the studies in this area have remained at the macro-level of theorization: for example, Weber's analysis of how Protestant religious values shaped the ideology of early capitalism; Gramsci's examination of how the ruling class obtains the ideological consent of the proletariat in order to rule, Brym's analysis of how blocked mobility patterns in Weimar Germany contributed to the rise of a more radicalized intelligentsia.¹ There have been fewer 'case' studies on how culture shapes ideology. In this regard Stuart Samuels study of how English political intellectuals and artists in the Thirties came to identify themselves with the working classes is one of the best in this field.² However, ethnographic studies in this area are few and far between, and fail to discuss certain key issues, such as the role associations or prior ideological belief may have in explaining entry patterns in contra-cultural organizations.

This is a case study of how a group of individuals whose ideological orientations are derived from a particular set of provincial organizations attempt to act as a vanguard political protest body for the unemployed of Newfoundland.

This unemployment protest body is a vanguard organization in the sense that it articulates on a regular basis political sentiments not usually advocated by the mass of unemployed people. This fact will be borne out in subsequent chapters. However, this vanguard anti-poverty organization is not a sect, in so far as its ideology is not an all inclusive vision which explains the evils of the world. Rather, as I will demonstrate, this unemployment protest group's political outlook is borrowed from active players who are also members of a well integrated local, extra-parliamentary social movement. Therefore I am concerned with the factors that help coalesce the political worldview of these politically minded unemployed individuals that compose the group, called the Committee of the Unemployed (COUP). Examining these factors requires an in-depth ethnographic study of this movement.

Ethnographic monographs written on small contra-cultural organizations are usually concerned with identifying the factors that separate the individuals who associate themselves with these sects from those who do not. More often than not such ethnographies are studies in the sociology of deviance and are primarily interested in uncovering the inherent pathologies that explain why these persons deviated from a fixed norm. Essentially this is the argument found in a corpus of such varied works on religious or political sects as Festinger (1957), Lofland (1966),

O'Toole (1977), and Wallis (1973), where the general thesis is one of how personal inclinations, while alienating to a large audience, are reinforced and rewarded in a "therapeutic" setting such as a cult or a political sect. Whatever the rejection of their beliefs and practices by members of the larger society, the sect members, within the confines of the movement, have their fears allayed, for they are in possession of a higher truth; for example scientific socialism or dianetics, or, for that matter, Marx's conception of a political sect. O'Toole's work on Marxist sectarians details the emphasis cult or sect members place on dogma.

"It is 'fanatical', adhering characteristically to "rigid dogma" or "rigid orthodoxy." Its members are self appointed defenders of "pure" doctrine, and thus is "narrowmindedly exclusive", recruiting only those deemed worthy of membership in this cognoscenti."

This formulation of a sect which Roger O'Toole adopts neatly encapsulates the dilemma of trying to retain ideological clarity unspoiled by contamination from outside realities or ideas. Consequently, given this conception of radical political movements, it is doubtful that small protest groups that are anti-capitalist in orientation such as the unemployment protest movement can ever attract a larger audience. This emphasis on ideological purity, as O'Toole asserts, cannot lead to active proselytization which seeks new recruits, for each new recruit presents a danger

of ideological non-conformity that can lead to schism.⁴ The threat of a schism caused by new heresy clearly prevents small, radical movements, whether "old left" or "new left" inspired, from growing into larger social movements that can actively challenge the status quo.

However, the sect designation, as applied to micro-political movements, may be too exclusive. Calling these movements 'sects' does not take into consideration the cultural milieu such organizations are born into. This may be the primary explanatory factor that accounts for why members are attracted to new organizations. Ideological predispositions or, as Brym (1980) suggests, blocked mobility patterns in periods of high unemployment serve as a more cogent reason for why people join what are essentially nascent political movements.⁵ O'Toole, in his study of Marxist sectarians rarely examines the larger universe of social class background for Marxist sect participants, or the role past political commitments, secondary associations, family background, ethnic background, or prior religious belief play in explaining the transformation of these individuals to Marxist sectarians.

Classic ethnographies of 'purely' esoteric religious sects, such as Lofland (1966), Festinger (1957), Wallis (1967) and Daner (1975), do try to account for ideological predisposition -- e.g., in the case of Daner explaining how hippie worldviews would predispose someone to become a

religious, ascetic (e.g. Krishna Consciousness), or Lofland noting the occult tourist trade of spiritualist bodies.⁶

Some studies on political movements such as American communism try to explain the role ethnicity plays in shaping the composition of the party. While O'Toole's work offers a valuable insight into how these radicals see the world, it really does not expose the process by which they came to view the world in such a light.

The Limits of O'Toole's Analysis Regarding Micro-Politics

The mark of success for radical social movements lies in the transition from micro- to macro-politics, i.e., moving from a small core of activists to a larger, sympathetic audience whose collective aims were and still are identical to that of the core group. Certainly this is the expressed aim of many activists in anti-poverty and unemployment protest groups (Cloward and Piven, 1977; West 81, Hertz, 81). For O'Toole this transition is rarely possible for radical sects because their insistence on ideological orthodoxy makes compromise unlikely. Attempts to attract new members are, he believes, intentionally designed to fail, thus insuring the sect's precarious vision of a future utopia and the role they will play in shaping this utopia:

"Sympathetic outsiders repeatedly exhibit shock and disbelief on being rebuffed, insulted, threatened and reduced to silence at internationalist

public meetings."⁷

"... Plausible though it is, a view of the S.L.P. members engaging in earnest proselytization and coming to terms with failure and disappointment by the construction of a rationalization which demonstrates their success is not supported by close analysis of the sect. Far from engaging in the energetic activity of which they boast, SLP members appear to be merely going through the motions of educational and propaganda activities, and indeed, seem to aim many such activities at targets which virtually guarantee their failure."

The "routinization of proselytization", in this case does determine why these bodies never go beyond being small political fringe groups. The ideology of these movements, besides being totally foreign to most members of the dominant society, is so cohesive that members can explain away and rationalize every troubling aspect of the larger society and decide that efforts at mass conversion are a waste of time.⁹ Being a moral elite basically translates into the view that individuals should aspire to become like us and prove themselves worthy of our acceptance. Selective membership requirements are the hallmark of the moral cognoscenti rather than open attempts at mass appeal.

O'Toole's analysis of fringe political movements suggests that these movements are just another variation on esoteric, millennial cults. What becomes clear is that political sects are at a disadvantage when it comes to

mobilizing resources for political change. Since sectarian tendencies preclude co-operation with outside interests, crucial support for movement building is otherwise sacrificed to preserve the sanctity of the sect's vision. Resource mobilization is not a significant problem for social movements, nascent, or otherwise that are integrated or belong to a community of associations that have similar goals and sympathies (see Snyder and Tilly, 1972). Such 'alliance networks' composed of small, decentralized groups working under the banner of radical or reformist political agendas include feminist, peace, ecological and the various groups that constitute the anti-poverty movement in Canada. The potential of these alliances for working together is great, considering [as I will demonstrate in the case of CQUP] most of these movements share similar goals and more often than not leading spokespersons for these groups are dual members of other social movement alliances. Such features are of an ad hoc nature and should not be considered as 'ideal typical' in any sense.

For the purpose of this study I conducted extensive field analysis with a group of primarily unemployed individuals who comprised a full employment organization. This field evidence is coupled with documentary evidence on other similar bodies. This research is supplemented by relevant texts concerned with the issue of poor peoples movements and their relation to the state. Given that these

unemployment protest bodies do articulate grievances concerning high unemployment, patterns of economic development, and state welfare policies, it's impossible not to discuss salient points dealing with the group/state relationship.

Comparison of Political Sect and Grass Root Movements

i) The Ad Hoc Features Of Unemployed Movements.

It is necessary to construct a list of features which can delineate this type of organization from a sect. "Grass roots" poverty bodies in their most recent form date from what has controversially been called "the rediscovery of poverty" period of the 1960s. During this period these agencies organized struggles to increase state welfare payments, the provision of public housing, and in certain parts of the United States organized campaigns to make various people eligible for welfare assistance.¹⁰ A focus on full employment became more predominant in the mid-Seventies and early 1980s as a direct result of recession and state-corporate cutbacks in hiring. A common thread running through these organizations was the social composition of these bodies. They were on the whole coalitions between 'intellectual' activists (i.e., social workers, academics, interested clergy, etc.) and the individuals directly affected by poverty and/or unemployment. Historical parallels may be drawn to

movements in Great Britain and North America, particularly in the 1930s, where groups of unemployed people were to a large degree organized by committed Marxists.¹¹ Historical evidence on these groups suggests that while unemployment 'councils' were numerous and succeeded in winning small concessions for the unemployed, they did not succeed in becoming a potent, well-established mass movement, despite claims by Cloward and Piven.¹² Bakke (1940, 1941) claims that such groups could not sustain themselves for a long period of time, given the transient nature of the unemployed.¹³ Most of these unemployed councils, according to Bakke, were usually run by a small group of activists.¹⁴

Another predominant feature linking poverty groups of the 1930s and more recent groups is found in the political outlook of the population segment whose interest they are trying to advance. Studies conducted by Bakke (1941), Jahoda (1937), Lazarfeld (1941), Scholzman and Verba (1978), Hayes and Nutman (1981), Brathwaite (1982), and others suggest that, while the unemployed have a heightened degree of class consciousness, this does not translate very often into systemic political action, outside of periodic outbursts of violence.¹⁵ The long term unemployed, these studies conclude, are social isolates who withdraw from organized community and political life, and alternate between blaming the system and themselves for their unemployment. If there is a political alternative which

current victims of unemployment could respond to, it may likely be some variant on fascism, if one accords some credence to links between social psychological indicators of the unemployed and the appeals of fascism.¹⁶ Such are the dilemmas which unemployed protest bodies are faced with.

ii) The Nature of External Reality vs Internal Reality:
Some Consideration on Sect-like Propensities

A social problem such as unemployment affects large numbers of people. Applying the term 'deviant' to organized groups of unemployed individuals is problematic. Organized unemployed deviate from the larger group of the unemployed, who can be best classified as anomic, in the fact that they are organized politically. But these bodies maintain lines of support to sympathetic generalized others (e.g., social democratic parties, labour bodies, mainstream churches, and progressive interest groups).¹⁷ This contrasts sharply with sects whose ideology negates any social ties or alliances with other social institutions (e.g., left political parties, the unions, or similar minded religious bodies, esoteric or not). Here we must emphasize that this is particularly true of organizations on the far left in North America who reject co-operation with centre-left bodies on the grounds that it stabilizes the bourgeois state. Interestingly enough, recent evidence on the activities of neo-fascist movements, especially in North America, also

seem to defy the political sect typology, which would require these organizations to be isolationist and refuse to compromise their ideological integrity by associating with other bodies. The far right it seems is highly inter-connected and coordinates activities, whether they be of a social, financial or para-military nature, despite ideological differences, no matter how major.¹⁸

One observation regarding current unemployment protest bodies is that they associate with other protest bodies (e.g. union led coalitions, peace movements, consumer groups). Unemployed people as a whole do not associate with these bodies. This observation will be borne out in a later chapter. Therefore these groups find themselves in a paradoxical situation. While claiming to speak for the unemployed as a movement, there is no movement of the unemployed to speak of. In many respects unemployment organizations fit Gramsci's analysis of movements that really do not have any followers:

"'Vanguards', without armies to back them up, 'commandos' without infantry or artillery, these too are transpositions from the language of rhetorical heroism - though vanguards and commandos as specialized functions within complex and regular organisms are quite another thing."

The unemployment protest body under study is essentially a vanguard without an army. As a result, a constant tension is maintained in these bodies regarding their capacity as spokespersons for the unemployed.

As compensation for lack of visible success in attracting the attention of the unemployed, certain features may appear within the group that exhibit some similarities to political sects. These similarities include:

- 1) Examples where a protest body provides an essentially "therapeutic" service for its members: a social outlet for ideological outsiders.
- 2) A compensatory belief in a doomsday scenario as a method of galvanizing reluctant potential members into political action.
- 3) All activities are sooner or later conducted by a small core of committed individuals who are also the most proficient at articulating an ideology.

However, there are other features that clearly separate grass roots movements of the unemployed or poor from political sects some of these are:

- 1) Vigorous proselytization is more common than routine proselytization, since such bodies have an educational component to their work.
- 2) To keep themselves established in the public eye, which is the main means of contact they have with their potential audience, all activities are designed to attract media attention. Without media coverage of their actions the contention that these bodies are a 'voice' for reluctant masses wears thin and creates a sense of anxiety about the group's role as it relates to its potential audience, in this case the unemployed.
- 3) Therefore these bodies have to capitalize on making the most of externally generated issues that are concerned with some aspect of unemployment.
- 4) Outside of media exposure, the only other source of contact these unemployed protest groups would have with the unemployed is through provision of direct services, e.g., in operating food and clothing banks or providing counseling services. While some unemployment groups are

capable of both delivering a media-conscientizing educational component and providing immediate material aid to the unemployed, the source of aid is usually the financial largesse of sympathetic bodies, particularly unions, and, in North America particularly, Christian Churches. Sometimes the state may provide such funds through make-work schemes.

Despite the services these bodies may provide, the common intention of unemployment-protest bodies is to organize the unemployed as a vocal force.²⁰

The Maintenance of an Ideology: An Evaluation of Support Mechanisms.

What separates the poverty-unemployment protest bodies from other well-established movements is their lack of a wider, sympathetic audience whose support can be counted on when needed. The organizations representing the unemployed are compelled, if they wish to continue their existence, to engage in activities that often serve mostly just to broadcast the fact that an organization does exist for the benefit of the unemployed. Efforts at being politically active, as well as some provision of direct material aid also have to be maintained, for they are the only links to the unemployed these bodies have, and for that matter the only method of recruitment. Legitimacy as a representative spokesperson for the unemployed is derived from these activities.

The role that beliefs play in these organizations must be examined as part of the ideological predisposition

of the individuals who compose these groups. It is not just a question of how heightened economic deprivation (e.g., the current economic recession) may lead to political discontent; otherwise there would be more cases of such organizations. While the individuals in these bodies may be unemployed, it is their past and current social relations that determine the political direction of these protest bodies. I contend that it is a larger oppositional culture that gives these bodies an ideological orientation that differs considerably from the mass unemployed. This cultural milieu, which I shall call a "radical horizon", sustains these proto-movements in times of crisis.

For the purpose of this study a "radical horizon" is defined as a local network of individuals who represent interest groups whose ideology is derived from new social movements such as the peace, feminist, and the development-ecology movement, and who are engaged in achieving some form of social transformation in politics, culture and the arts (here we include primarily the interest groups of the non-governmental sector). These ideological networks are prevalently issue-oriented in terms of content and are primarily based on loose associations of concerned citizens. Brym, Aptheker, and Touraine have noted the prevalence of left orientations in the educational system, the humanities, and the non-governmental sector. This has been an overall consistent rising trend since the post war

era in practically all of the industrialized west.²¹ However, as opposed to nations such as France and Italy, where members of these service sectors advocate radical political solutions, the political horizon is, as Brym notes for North America, more given to reformist politics. Either way, this horizon has to be considered a form of institutionalized leftism.²² In some respects the radical horizon supplants in a local context Gramsci's conception of the vanguard party. The role intellectuals of the radical horizon play in the ideological direction of proto-movements such as the unemployed movement is to create an oppositional political culture which members in these nascent bodies adopt as credible.

However, since the economic impetus for creating a mass movement of the unemployed is thwarted by the apolitical culture of the unemployed, the status of political organized unemployed protest bodies is shaky. The radical horizon, while capable of providing structural support to these bodies, cannot confer legitimacy upon these protest groups. Legitimacy in terms of being 'true' representatives of the unemployed is derived from association with broad segments of the unemployed.

The problem is, how does an unemployment protest activist define his or her role in a culture that seemingly rejects his or her efforts to radicalize it? I will show how, as perceptions of internal/external realities are

confronted; ideological perceptions are shaped through a process which can be best described not as conversion but as ideological maturation. By being "ideologically mature" I refer to a process whereby an individual in a common setting gradually develops a more comprehensive political worldview which can better place in perspective the underlying nature of various social and political events. "Conversion" as it is used in sociological examination of sects or political worldviews is wrongly extended to describe these groups. First of all, conversion denotes a radical, abrupt change, rejecting one dominant worldview in favour of a new inclusive worldview. This conception of conversion is appropriate for explaining the role mystics play in the development of religious sects. This conception of conversion is very much evident in D'Toole's analysis of Marxist micro-politics.

• Exposure to the ideology expounded by participants in the radical horizon and the confreres who work in these unemployment protest bodies is definitely a factor in enhancing the political development of unemployed protest activists, but it is not without certain obstacles. The goals that members of the radical horizon may articulate may not always be the same as unemployment protest activists, who may advocate what they deem as more pressing priorities. Therefore, while the radical horizon is instrumental in the shaping of movements that reflect

national concerns, e.g., unemployment, it does not control them per se, but rather exists in a tentative alliance with them. This tension is essentially between 'intellectuals' of the radical horizon and the concerned unemployed who compose the membership of these organizations, and is reflected primarily in questions of strategies to be pursued in terms of stimulating and attracting the unemployed. This tension often stems from how unemployed activists define the political problems of the unemployed as opposed to issues that reflect the nature of "class oppression" defined by the more ensconced members of the radical horizon. Ultimately it is a conflict based on control and leadership, more often than not based on the priorities of the radical horizon as it relates to local movements. The radical horizon, very much like the marxist, vanguard party does its best to make its concerns, whether they be feminist oppression or peace issues, the concerns of the unemployed protest proto-movement. Gramsci observes,

"Neglecting, or worse still despising, so-called spontaneous movements, i.e., failing to give them a conscious leadership or to raise them to a higher plane by inserting them into politics, may often have extremely serious consequences."²³

This is precisely what members of the radical horizon try to do despite the ramblings of the activist-unemployed. Documenting the role such a political culture plays in the shaping of an unemployment protest body is crucial to an

understanding of how radical social transformation can be achieved. More importantly it lifts such studies out of the realms of the sociology of deviance and places them where they properly belong, in the confines of political and activist-oriented sociology.

CHAPTER 2

THE CASE OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE UNEMPLOYED (COUP)

The Committee of the Unemployed as an organization never exceeded a strength of thirty people. In fact efforts aimed towards preventing a general decline of the group usually met with little or no success. This however was not a peculiar condition limited to this particular body. Correspondence with other similar organizations suggested that membership in these bodies was of a modest nature and attempts at mobilizing the unemployed in great numbers were met with indifference:

"a modest but active membership" -

Toronto Union of Unemployed Workers

"I do find that it is difficult for the unemployed people to organize because many of them have given up by feeling they are wrong and that it is their fault they are not working."

United Steel Workers of America Union
Coordinator for three Ontario unemployment
Committees (two in Sudbury and one in
Saulte Ste. Marie)

"Many of our core members went back to school or have moved away and the rest joined B.C.'s Solidarity Movement. We haven't really been active with unemployment issues since August."

Unemployed Workers
Union of Victoria

"If we are going to speak for the unemployed we should have a large membership." I'm resigned to the fact, were not going to get a large membership at this point."

Comments expressed by COUP member during an interview

These comments reflect recent studies on the lack of political militancy by the unemployed (Scholzman and Verba 1979, Leventman 1981, Krahn, Lowe and Tanner 1984). Furthermore, such observations suggest problems for bodies that seek to radicalize the unemployed. What is noteworthy about the aforementioned comments is their remarkable similarity. The insights of unemployed protest groups regarding the frustrations of organizing an apolitical mass overlap. These comments only serve to demonstrate the typicality of the group under study. Activists must square their expectations with current realities: namely, the non-militancy of the unemployed.

Findings

1) For the purpose of the study, core members, of which there were no more than ten, are individuals who because of duration, vocal input, and taking part in committee sponsored initiatives are designated as such. Interviewing, recorded notes of meetings, and collection of related documents have provided this researcher with an insight into the perception of these activists. What

emerges from the research from the researcher's point of view is a highly consistent consensus regarding selected categories of inquiry. Comments expressed in all three modes of data gathering were grouped under headings of perceptions of the political potential of the unemployed, strategies concerning group direction, and perceptions of unemployment vis a vis the political system.

ii) Observations regarding potential militancy of the Unemployed

Comments reflecting assumptions of the prospects for social unrest among the unemployed tended to vary over time. Particularly observations on the prospect for, or the lack of potential militancy, corresponded to the media's coverage of unemployment oriented issues. As one respondent, a thirty-year old former cook and labourer who had the idea of setting up the group, noted:

"The press did, for awhile, treat us as a voice of the unemployed."*

From the researcher's vantage point this seems to be an accurate observation. At its conception the group attracted considerable local media attention (i.e., press, radio, and television), television spots were arranged with the aforementioned individual to discuss the latest increase in unemployment figures. Another member of the committee

* This individual left the group after 2 year period but even after this person's departure (John Murray that is) the press still fulfilled this role.

was interviewed for an article on unemployment for a national magazine. Furthermore, members of COUP were asked to comment on consecutive federal budget and other significant economic happenings. Interestingly, one person was recruited into the group after his appearance on a national talk show where he discussed his unemployment. Subsequently this person made other television appearances, representing the unemployed. Such media attention was fairly prevalent during the first few months after COUP's inception. The Committee's relationship with the media faded within a few months, only to increase dramatically in 1984 and 1985 after the addition of newer members. COUP members would often receive perfunctory calls from the press for thirty second radio spots on their comments on the latest unemployment statistics.

In some respects the attention this group received reflected a rather constant fixation on the spectre of mass unemployment. This was particularly evident during the latter part of 1982 and 1983, when there was a dramatic increase nationally in the unemployment figures. This prompted increasing speculation on the possible social consequences of massive unemployment. This inevitably led to what Geoffrey Mungham referred to as a moral panic, where certain moral or social guardians of society believe or imagine that certain social phenomena (e.g., high unemployment) pose threats to the social order.

Unemployment as a political issue has become the property of not only all political parties in Canada, but the Churches and Labour Federations as well. Given this fixation, COUP bathed in a media limelight which was not of their own making, for they did little to actually warrant media attention.* Media exposure in their minds legitimated their early oft-stated claim that they were a voice of the unemployed.

Consequently, when media interest in COUP declined, a feeling of being used arose and this sentiment aroused doubts as to whether they could articulate for the unemployed, or even if they knew where the unemployed stood. This was evident in their comments on how the electronic media would not allow them to make comments.

John Murray, age 30, former chairperson of COUP:

"Look all they wanted was a human interest story. How I was barely surviving, not having an adequate diet according to the Canada food guide. You know living on Kraft macaroni dinners and that. I mean it was just a human interest story, you know, show the face of unemployment and admit, "yeah, unemployment, it's a crying shame. They didn't want to hear any comments on what can be done."

Field notes referring to C.B.C. interview
of informant which was conducted
outside a C.E.C. office

* Later COUP members, as indicated in chapter 4, became much more adept at manipulating the media.

Another COUP member reiterated similar experiences when he was interviewed following the creation of his Utopia Christian-Socialist party:

"I knew I didn't get a chance to speak my beliefs. They wanted me to play my guitar and sing a few songs from my boat."

Paul Janes, early thirties, part-time fisherman and labourer

One COUP member who presented a brief to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour noted that the C.B.C. did not want him to comment on the group.

"The interview was just straight forward - talk about my experience being unemployed how I had to move after I could not afford the rent. How I can't get a job, how nearly every one in my union local [IBEW] is unemployed. Naah, nothing about the group [referring to my question on why he did not state he was a member]

Jack Galsworthy age 47
unemployed electrician

Such unsatisfactory experiences with the media led to an increasing ambivalence in dealing with them. A television appearance was stalled by C.B.C. executives when John Murray wanted the stipulation on the interview that the C.B.C. would mention what COUP stood for and would comment on the resource manual, help guide for unemployed persons. Later Murray issued a warning to other COUP members to come to him before issuing any statement to the press.

Access to the media, especially in the fashion COUP dictated, never became a reality. Efforts designed to reach the unemployed and encourage them to join COUP were through the media. It was assumed at first that by having interviews and issuing numerous press releases COUP would become fairly well known as an advocacy-protest organization of the unemployed. The promotional activity undertaken by COUP never did attract the numbers the Committee expected. In many cases even the sight of a new person coming to a meeting was something to celebrate.

Lack of contact with the unemployed became increasingly apparent after the first three months of COUP's inception in March of 1983. Previously meetings were well attended, largely composed of individuals recruited from a public rally held in March. Explanations accounting for this non-expansion were voiced usually in the form of criticisms of the group as an entity, particularly that COUP members should be doing more.

I see the Committee as having lost a sense of direction. Without direction we are going nowhere, what we should seek is more contact with local groups, - network over issues of mutual concern, and have dealings with other provincial, socially progressive bodies."

Carl Hellyer,
grad student

"I mean, we did, we sent out 73 letters to various community groups - it was 73 wasn't it - Ken - to sound them out on the idea of sending participants to a

tent city demonstration to be held up on Confederation Hill - you know soup kitchens and education workshop. What was our response. None. Not even a single reply. I mean if the interest isn't there what can you do"

John Murray,
first chairperson of COUP

"I see COUP as a voice crying out in the political wilderness. Frankly I'm discouraged, when I came back from Labrador I expected to see this group having grown. Not decreased. I don't know maybe we do need more publicity"

Ken Downs, age 29
(later became chairperson of COUP)

What COUP needs to do is to provide services to the unemployed. We need better food-banks in the thirties there were cooperative vegetable gardens, COUP could look into the prospect of getting crown land for gardening. I mean we have people here like Noel R., who know how to organically farm. If not farm as I mentioned before we could get in to providing good, cheap clothing for kids, Nora's husband is a weaver and draper, we should use the resources that we have available."

Jane Crewe, age 30

Criticisms voiced in private to the interviewer were usually much harsher and more direct. Failure to reach and attract the unemployed was attributed to the personal characteristics of certain individuals. Lack of dynamic individuals and skilled administrators with

good credentials were the most cited reasons expressed personally to the researcher on several occasions as reasons for the non-expansion of the group. These criticisms were most evident from individuals who were on the periphery of COUP. Non-expansion, which more often than not meant lack of public exposure, did produce considerable tension between COUP members. Individuals on the periphery, who in many cases drifted away, came to see COUP as a clique that had its own reasons for staying together. This sentiment was best expressed by one member who noted that

"Coup is the result of one man's neurosis and one woman's obsession."

Noel Richard 40,
carpenter

Since group expansion was linked to establishing more contacts with the unemployed, numerous ideas were advanced by COUP members to achieve this end. Proposals included holding variety concerts with reduced rates for unemployed persons, handing out fliers to U.I. claimants at C.E.C. centres, and holding political debates between the three provincial political leaders. However, each new initiative failed to attract the expected recruits. Such efforts only attracted a few individuals who attended seminars. Confronted with the reality of declining enrollment and the prospect of few recruits in the foreseeable future, various explanations were proffered by

COUP members as a way of understanding what seemed to them an incongruous anomaly. These perceptions included numerous statements on the nature of the chronic unemployed, the main target group for mobilization by this body:

"Unemployed people are hard to organize anyway, they drift a lot, essentially they are hard to keep together. However I don't know how things can change for the unemployed if they don't ban together, it's the only way to put a face on it. It's a way of drawing attention to it. But how can you put a face on a drifting mass."

Sue Jones, 24
cocktail waitress

Another informant, who was with COUP for a period of five months and was a member of a previous provincial unemployment protest body, the Newfoundland Association for Full Employment, stated that the lack of militancy among the unemployed explains why organizations such as COUP can never expect to direct the unemployed in any political manner:

"COUP and for that matter any other group will be successful as the educational [the political] level of the unemployed goes up. Even the unions can't educate their people."

Noel Richards

Faced with the reality of a politically unmotivated mass, COUP members felt major external events could radically transform the apathy of the unemployed. While perceptions of the unemployed shifted from a rising radical

movement to an apathetic mass, all COUP members, even peripheral persons, believed that certain events could violently radicalize the unemployed. This scenario varied from person to person, but the conception of the unemployed remained the same: a violent spontaneous movement of the unemployed would appear after some calamitous event.

The unemployed will get militant if you have something similar to what is happening in B.C., ... government that just keeps cutting back on services, staff, welfare programs. Down the road sometime this year you'll see people demonstrating when this government [provincial] really starts cracking down to cover their loan payments to the banks, you know to reduce the deficit, then you'd see some action.

There were other variations on this 'spark that ignites a revolt' theme. Individuals who saw the causes of unemployment in a political dependency context believed that some sort of world depression, possibly caused by an international banking collapse stemming from default on third world loans, could initiate enormous social protest. Even members who envisioned such scenarios settled for less complex global theories of radical potential and expressed the opinion that changes in government could promote social unrest among the unemployed. They believed that the social actions of conservative governments could create an atmosphere where protest becomes more legitimate. Before the Mulroney conservative government was elected, various COUP members felt that since the conservatives would

introduce various 'belt-tightening measures', particularly in regard to unemployment insurance, there would be considerable protest. Opinions on the radical potential of the unemployed varied according to context. Formal interviews produced much more detailed accounts of the events that would lead the unemployed to large-scale protests. Conversations with members during business meetings or on social visits produced less detailed but obviously meaningful comments usually in the form of passing comments or quips such as "...Wait till Mulroney gets in and watch out", or rather general expressions as

"things are going to have to get a lot worse before they're going to better. Cause at the rate things are going every third person in this country is going to be unemployed over the next 5 years."

As members of COUP began to realize that the unemployed were not politically motivated, nevertheless these beliefs contributed to the feeling that COUP in the future could provide more of a leadership role to the newly radicalized unemployed. Organizations such as COUP, or other similar bodies, most COUP activists felt could direct such protest once it did arise. Furthermore, since some members of COUP defined COUP's role as a voice for the unemployed, this vanguard position was seen as more defensible in this light:

"Well, I suppose you can say we don't have many members, - well that's an understatement, well certainly a small but enthusiastic - no maybe not enthusiastic - definitely concerned and

a bit disillusioned membership at times who as a group try to speak out on behalf of the unemployed, who are not getting smaller mind you, but were still pretty much a voice crying out in the darkness with not too many people listening though someday if things get a lot worse - I don't see this country improving at all there will be more of a role for groups like us."

Jack, Galsworthy

COUP Strategies

Strategies were concerned with establishing more contact with the unemployed and increasing group effectiveness. Strategies intent on broadening contacts with the unemployed shifted several times, sometimes as a result of developments happening with other unemployment protest groups. Initially the idea behind COUP was to have a drop-in centre where the local unemployed could talk or engage in various social amenities. However, at the insistence of some employed social activists, it was proposed that COUP should have more of a political action and educational role as its mandate (I will explain how this happened in Chapter 3). While this was the commonly accepted role which group members acknowledged, there was considerable debate over this and other possible directions. Ideas included social centres, counseling services, daycare provisions, cooperative agricultural gardens, unemployed survival handbooks, and the possibility of COUP becoming a discussion - study group to analyse the consequences of lobbying versus demonstrating.

Some of these activities were dependent on Federal funding for a centre from which these activities could be initiated. Since federal money was not forthcoming in the amount desired to cover the operating costs, strategies shifted more towards political education, workshop-seminars, and the creation of study groups to release authoritative statements on the unemployment problem. While lack of funding prevented activities that could provide the kind of direct services to the unemployed which unemployment action bodies elsewhere undertook (e.g., food banks, legal services, etc.), orientation shifted towards activities whose nature can best be described as political activism. It is interesting to note that groups who attempt to organize the unemployed as a political force seem to perform a dual role of political activism and providing direct services to the unemployed. Certainly this was the case with COUP's predecessor, the Newfoundland Association for Full Employment (N.A.F.E.). For COUP members, if the money could be found then such services would be provided. Since lack of funding prevented this dual role from being fulfilled, all COUP activities centered on promoting political education of the unemployed. All these activities met with little or no success, and consequently after each activity a series of questions and rationalization always followed to explain what went wrong. Following the total lack of response to the proposed Confederation Hill Tent

City demonstration (COUP having received no replies from 73 provincial community groups, mainly rural development associations and unions), it was decided by COUP members to concentrate on organizing the local urban unemployed as opposed to rallying the rural unemployed. For a while it was thought by some COUP members, particularly the most articulate, that COUP could represent and speak as a voice for the entire Newfoundland unemployed. This idea was quickly abandoned after the Tent City idea collapsed. Attracting the local unemployed proved to be an even more difficult task.

Shortly after the Tent City collapse, which one member believed could have created a movement in June of 1983, it was decided that a public meeting should be held between community residents and a panel of unemployment "experts" (i.e., Social Assistance executives, Employment Development Counselors, COUP members, public officials, and representatives of the various social justice groups). Prior to this meeting, which was held in Mundy Pond, COUP members, most notably Jane Crewe, John Murray, and Nora Williams, convinced other members that the only way the unemployed could be reached was through going out and meeting them on the local level. Public meetings were to be arranged in areas characterized by exceedingly high unemployment, particularly Shea Heights, Mundy Pond, Virginia Park and the Flower Hill area of St. John's.

There was an assumption that the residents of these unemployment 'ghettos' would relish the chance of harassing these 'unemployment experts' and consequently would as a matter of course flock to the meetings. Preparation for the event meant inundating the entire Mundy Pond area with posters and fliers. Stores, homes, and public meeting places were all covered. When the meeting occurred only the officials and notaries showed; the only member of the general public who attended drove in from Seal Cove. Subsequently all other public meetings of this sort were cancelled. COUP members could not understand why no one came from the area, or for that matter any other part of the city, since it was a well publicized event, as these comments indicate:

"I cannot for the life of me figure out what went wrong; this whole area was covered with posters. I mean it can't be because of Chuck and Di being in town. What is it with these people are they afraid to show their faces or what."

Sue Jones, 24

"Let's keep this quiet. I don't want the press hearing about this one. Hell, we can always say it was a small but interesting, enthusiastic turnout if the press decides to ask us. I mean it's vague enough to mean anything." (the press subsequently did)

John Murray, chairperson COUP

"Maybe, the only way you can get these people (social welfare recipients) interested is speaking out and demanding a helluva lot more than what they're getting is by continually visiting these areas, and knocking on doors, having tea with these people and from there networking with their friends. That's the only way you can turn them into a social force."

Jane Crewe

"Too bloody, Jesus apathetic, they just don't care, that's what welfare does to you, look around they (referring to Mundy Pond residents) don't even take care of the housing they're given. God, I hated this place when I was a cop and I hate it now. We should have known better, We should have expected this [referring to the non-existent turnout]."

Jack Galsworthy

This pattern of shock, anger, denigrating the unemployed, and 'where-did-we-go-wrong? ritual' followed every COUP public debacle. The fault did not lie in the group but in the social characteristics of the unemployed, a social fact barely cognizant to COUP members at first. The public meetings were scrapped in favour of educational seminars and film showings pertaining to various aspects of unemployment. Some members thought that providing beneficial, educational lectures on job retraining, financial management, and so on, would be worthwhile and the unemployed would be interested. Implicit in this idea was the thought that the series could also attract new

members to the group. Unfortunately this proved not to be the case. The lecture series attracted no more than 12 participants for the entire series, despite being well advertised. The film series fared little better. COUP received a good turnout at one film, since it was a classic, the Grapes of Wrath, yet no one outside of COUP members showed for the other films. Needless to say the film series attracted no new members, or for that matter any of the latter activities.

Member Insights into COUP's History

Constant failure, despite the continual round of new activities, produced serious questioning regarding the nature of the organization. Discouragement with the apathy of the unemployed reached new heights with the dismal turnout for the lecture series and the remaining COUP members (circa spring of 1984) focussed their attention on COUP's history and in some respect tried to place COUP in a comparison with other unemployed protest bodies both past and present. With each successive unsuccessful activity comments were elicited on the perceived credibility of COUP. The 'credibility gap' first arose at an early business meeting of COUP in April of 1983 when older, male trade unionists voted to have an executive structure for the committee despite the objections of the younger COUP members who believed that imposing structure on COUP would stifle

member participation. For the older COUP members, having an executive political structure of chair, vice-president, secretary and treasurer was essentially a de rigueur attribute of all organizations (i.e., you needed it to be taken seriously). As time passed 'credibility' meant being seen as a viable voice for the unemployed, which meant establishing contact with the unemployed through various activities. The danger was to be seen as not being serious, or, as the phrase went, a 'tea-party'. This term grew out of a conversation with COUP members regarding COUP's predecessor, N.A.F.E., in which the researcher noted that in a conversation with a former N.A.F.E. member, the ex-member expressed dissatisfaction with the radicalness of N.A.F.E. by saying it was a 'Marxist-Leninist tea party headed up by S ----- and O -----'. Other COUP members particularly Tom Quigly, an unemployed teacher, expressed similar statements to the effect that NARE was a marxist talking shop and he felt that it was the radicalness of N.A.F.E. which prevented him from being a full fledged member.

A 'tea party' was something COUP members sought to avoid becoming at all costs; being a teaparty meant COUP no longer had any relevance to the unemployed. The lack of success with public activities and the poor reception of COUP's prepared statement engendered comments of being out of touch with the unemployed and that COUP had in fact

become a teaparty affair. To combat this potential status of non-relevancy new activities were always planned or discussed which would make the group relevant again in the eyes of the unemployed. Some of these activities included instigating a debate between the three provincial party leaders on reducing Newfoundland's unemployment and joining an anti-poverty taskforce that never coalesced.*

Yet despite engaging in activities to overcome the image of a 'tea party,' comments on the validity of the allusion were frequent. While COUP strived to prevent what N.A.F.E. and other radical economic protest bodies had become, i.e., teaparties, there were times when COUP members felt more N.A.F.E. radicals were needed to restore vibrancy to COUP.

"I hate to say it, but we need more commies, we need guys like N, J, B, G, to stir things up, not only in the group but around the whole province, I mean were going nowhere now, we're just a teaparty. I mean we talk about unemployment and world events at the meetings, do the same afterwords over a few beers. Yeah, I wish there were more commies around."

Conversation in which John Murray, Ken Downs, Nora Williams, Tom Quigley and Jane Crewe were arguing over the fate of the group.

* The premier's office turned down the idea.

2

This was followed up by a remark from Ken Downs:

"It seems that marxists-leninist tea parties do tend to get more members - who knows, maybe we should turn COUP into that kind of an outfit - even change the name, make it sound more radical."

In many respects this 'blood transfusion' argument of recruiting marxist, radical, skilled professional organizers as a device to rescue COUP from obscurity was quite consistent with the endless rounds of new group activities. Furthermore, one cannot deny the positive aspects of social reinforcement that group membership provided. Lack of success and diminished expectations for the future should have foretold a quick demise for the Committee, yet it persisted for well over an entire year. One consequence of the activity COUP members engaged in was that it served a latent function of a primarily therapeutic nature. The majority of individuals in COUP were chronically unemployed individuals whose experiences with being unemployed had made them bitter:

"The biggest mistake I made in my life was sixteen years ago when I decided to become an electrician instead of remaining a cop."

"Social Class. I don't know. I can guess it would be an adequate description to say my parents are middle-class, well certainly my father being a doctor, would be upper-middle class. Me, I belong to the superfluous class. I mean who needs me, I'm totally superfluous."

"I don't know the answer. If I did I would be working by now. There must be something wrong with me, maybe I'm screwed up. they [referring to COUP] wanted to turn the concept of unemployment, unemployed people into a class. They're priorities were screwed. I don't know maybe it's me.

"Actually, most people call me an asshole."

Distress over personal unemployment was to a degree offset by membership in the committee. Membership provided both social support in terms of friendship and an easing of the tension where individual unemployment is seen as personal failure. Defining personal unemployment as a result of defects in the socio-economic structure was to a degree derived and reinforced through identification with the political nature of COUP. The political nature of COUP (as indicated in Chapter 3) was derived from key individuals who were members of horizon groups. COUP members realized they were not alone in their efforts to organize the unemployed (through contact with similar bodies) and they were vaguely aware that there was a tradition of working class and unemployed protests that existed prior to COUP, not only provincially, but nationally. Lack of major visible successes only intensified feelings of individual self-doubt and denigration regarding individual status which in turn affected the future of COUP.

Defining personal unemployment as resulting from defects in the political system is still a rarity for many unemployed (Scholzman and Verba, 1978, Krahn, Lowe,

and Tanner 1984). The exceptions to the rule are unemployment that is directly attributable to mass shutdowns of industries (i.e., company's fault, not mine) or prior beliefs, experience, or shared realities that help define personal unemployment as being rooted in the political economy. Most COUP members outside of the tradesmen who left the group early in its history were well educated, fairly articulate, and had associations with various civic action bodies.* Later in Coup's history, its members become associated with various groups in the radical horizon of St. John's (see Chapter 3). In two cases, individuals had once belonged to a unemployed protest body and were members in two different marxist-leninist parties. As for political identities, core individuals identified themselves as being either socialist or social democratic, but overall COUP's outward political manifestations were quite similar to other Canadian unemployment protest groups, left-of centre non-partisan, but not to extreme:

"The LUUW is an organization, not affiliated to any political party, whose membership is open to all unemployed workers who agree with our demand for decent jobs and support the struggle we are carrying out to defend our rights."

"The Toronto Union of Unemployed Workers is a non-partisan political action group whose purpose is to organize unemployed workers."

* [I.E., NDP constituency associations, disarmament groups, native rights concerns, feminist bodies etc., the radical horizon of St. John's.]

"COUP from time to time engages in political activities ... COUP meets regularly and at these meetings a wide range of topics, is discussed from routine business to the discussion of possible solutions to unemployment ... COUP has sponsored a number of special public meetings, seminars and films related to the issue of unemployment. They have been designed as public education projects to stimulate discussion of unemployment."

A Short History of COUP
A.G.M. 1984

Continuous discussion on the causes of unemployment was a prevalent feature whenever two or more COUP members gathered. Part of this constant discussion stemmed from the fact that reducing or alleviating unemployment rested on an adequate knowledge of the subject. Over a period of time the COUP members who hung on became quite expert on the various facets of the unemployment problem. Members were acquainted with various official definitions of poverty, industrial development plans in Iceland, Laborems Excerens by John Paul II, the number of times Canada had signed international agreements supporting the right to full employment, and so on. Consequently COUP individuals were adept at offering detailed reasons for the causes of unemployment. Unemployment was defined in a fashion that borrowed a lot from Gunder Frank's adoption of dependency theory to local Newfoundland circumstances. Essentially, some COUP members subscribed to the theory that Newfoundland was systematically underdeveloped for the purpose of

enriching various metropole nations. As for global unemployment, only a few members of COUP were able to offer detailed explanations for the rise of unemployment in the capitalist industrial nations. Sometimes they might argue that a failure to modernize produces uncompetitive industries and the resulting low spending by threatened/or unemployed sectors of the working population contributes to increasing unemployment. At other times the same individuals would comment that unemployment has been increasing through the introduction of new technologies:

"It's a combination of many factors. Structure of world economy and the economic structure of this country mainly. A certain degree of unemployment is you see built into the capitalist system. What you have increasingly in Canada is corporate monopolization and the creation of oligopolies which drives out many small businesses. With this monopolization you get automation, which I think has eliminated certain clerical jobs I might have applied for.

Ken Downs

"What is unemployment so high? Part of it is computerization lapping up jobs. Poor government management of resources, no long term planning for industries. What the government should is to stabilize the rate of unemployment, actively try to bring it down - I mean we have space, resources, skilled people - I mean there's no excuse for it."

Sue Jones, age 24

"Unemployment, the cause for it rests - well its the fault of the multi-national capitalist system, simple as that."

Noel Richards

"Can't talk about it in economic terms. But where I'm coming from, social action, the priorities are mixed up, not with people, profits are to be maximized particularly in resource development, profits are siphoned off from the lesser resource rich areas by multi-nationals. Industry is capital intensive, rather than labour intensive, i.e., high unemployment. Politics plays a large part. Way our system is run on a four year basis politicians only offer short term solutions and there is a real lack of long term planning."

Nora Wilson

Solutions to the problem rested with the adoption of long-term industrial strategies, state controls on re-investment and capital outflows, bank nationalization, the creation of more worker-co-operatives, i.e., socialism. Even COUP members who did not identify themselves politically as socialist argued for greater state planning and control over the economy as a means of ensuring the public welfare. All members of the COUP core felt that the Canadian state should live up to its commitment to full employment; though members realized that even pursuing a policy of full employment would not totally eradicate the problem.

Micro-aspects of the political system: Job Creation

Government job creation programs, particularly the various federal make-work schemes, were derided by most COUP members as being only temporary band-aid solutions which mask the true extent of the problem. This was illustrated at an early COUP meeting in which there was a split between the tradesmen and the younger chronic unemployed over the merits of make-work schemes.

"What's wrong with make-work schemes, we should be actively going out and getting them. I mean some work is better than no work at all. What do the unemployed want, a job. It's money in the pocket."

James Welsh, 59
former COUP member,
St. John's District Labour Council

"Makework doesn't solve the problem. What we want, and must look for is how to create permanent, safe and secure long term jobs that give the people the feeling they're doing something worthwhile and what's more important that they are worthwhile."

Jane Crewe

"I know that. That's all fine and dandy and I believe government isn't doing enough. But what about all those people who are desperate for work. If we could get a few grants on the go, maybe COUP could hire some people."

James Welsh

"But we weren't set up as another job creation body, COUP exists to raise the issue and draw attention to the problem, it would be wrong

for the unemployed to perceive us in this light."

Jane Crewe
(other members expressed similar views at this point.)

COUP core members were correct in their assumption that some COUP members (the tradesmen, who were for all accounts apolitical) and outsiders saw COUP as a job creation agency. Yet for COUP to expand its activities it had to rely on federal make-work funding. Other similar unemployment bodies have sought and received federal monies for expansion purposes. While the funding was six times less than requested through the Canada Works program, COUP members decided to accept a \$14,700 sum, despite objections from a few members, to do an unemployment-survival handbook. The objections centered on the fact that by accepting federal funding COUP had in fact legitimized government's handling of the unemployment situation. This sudden turn-around was criticized severely by Jane Crewe; who had been very influential in the committee:

"By accepting \$14,700, or whatever the amount is, we have legitimized the state action. We're stifled in a way - we can't say the government turned us down therefore we can't criticize government programs we're a part of it now. I would have been far happier to see COUP holding a press conference in which we outlined our reasons for rejecting the money and give reasons for a dissolution of the Committee and disband but still work

together for a common purpose. It's sounds like going underground doesn't it?"

Interview Jané Crewe
Saturday, January 20, 1984

Other members did not see it this way, for them COUP was still an independent entity, not an extension of the state. Funding to the degree sufficient to permit the services COUP members wanted were unavailable from other sources, particularly the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. This rankled COUP members since they had been promised more than moral support. Federal funding was the only alternative. It was justified as providing a necessary, informative service to the unemployed and employing three members of COUP who desperately needed the work. The three individuals, John M, John G, and Ken D, held aspirations for the project at first, but as soon as difficulties were evident in the project's production, expressions such as the project is "a lark" or "I'm only doing this to get my stamps" became common. The acceptance of make-work funding consumed the efforts of the COUP members who worked on the project, and this produced inevitable back-biting, which hampered the direction of future COUP activities.

Conclusion

Social movement literature cites numerous examples of how millennial sects or political extremist sects can

remain highly active even though the changing historical situation has rendered the movements little more than historical oddities. Continued activity in the face of adversity, which is an accurate description of COUP existence as a protest group, is quite similar to the pattern for religious groups or sects. However, as opposed to the sect these unemployment groups have no fixed ideology which can be religiously adhered to. The ideology of COUP or other unemployed groups can be best described with the adage "begged, borrowed, or stolen". It is by no means the case that the ideology of these groups is characterized by rigid orthodoxy; in fact these groups can be quite flexible in how they react to external realities. In the case of COUP, when it became apparent that any effort would produce only limited results, COUP members began to view any attempt to create a movement of the unemployed as being unrealistic and settled for the less exalted role of being a watch-dog agency that would monitor and protest state action if necessary. COUP could act as a vanguard organization of the unemployed only if apocalyptic circumstances transformed the unemployed into a radical mass.

A constraining factor that limits the political potential of these groups is the unemployed status of the individuals who constitute organizations like COUP. Prolonged unemployment only intensifies the search to find work that will qualify for future unemployment insurance benefits. The possible political potential of

either independent or labour sponsored unemployed protest bodies may be lessened if activists have to migrate in order to find employment. In the case of COUP members, five individuals, either previous to or during the duration of the researcher's study, sought or found employment outside of the province. This employment was usually of a temporary nature, involving work on various construction projects or similar work involving some sort of manual labour. An earlier comment in the beginning of the chapter by an ex-unemployment protest activist in Victoria illustrates this fact. When certain COUP activists could not find employment, they returned to university or vocational colleges for educational upgrading.

State funding to these groups to operate centres, or to publish know-your-rights manuals for unemployed people [a fairly common practice] may actually prolong the existence of such bodies. Unfortunately, since make-work funding is of a temporary nature and further funding depends on previous results, it is conceivable that a certain amount of self-censorship occurs in applying for funding. In the case of COUP, N.A.F.E., and one other body, a national anti-poverty organization, time that could be spent on mobilization activities is devoted to the administration of the project.

Yet the potential for actual protest tends to vary with these bodies. While a populist socialist bias operates in these groups [i.e. profits before people, - "I have

liberal, marxist leanings", a comment of one COUP member] the rhetoric seems at times to be stronger than the action. While certain groups like L.U.U.W., the defunct N.A.F.E., and the O.U.W. (a Vancouver group) engage in confrontational tactics or staging sit-ins, leading demonstrations, or annoying patrons of firms that use non-union employment by singing pro-workers songs [the O.U.W.], others settle for less dramatic forms of protest. In the case of COUP, members only participated in one demonstration outside of a hotel holding a fisheries conference as a way of extending solidarity with Newfoundland fishermen. From that point on [March of 1983] COUP members, while freely admitting the need for more civil disobedience, voiced doubts about such events:

"I don't want to be a part of a freak show" or "look, we'll only be asked to leave again, or they will only call the cops and I'm not too crazy about spending a night in jail, I wouldn't be able to pay the fine even."

[hesitations that were voiced regarding Tent City demonstration and march]

Essentially, the hesitancy to demonstrate reflects the attempts by members of COUP to play a larger role as "a voice" for the unemployed. This political non-activity only changed two years later as COUP became smaller still, and only with the introduction of two new members, Arch Heywood and Stuart Bateson. However, since membership was small, any public demonstration would raise the usual questions about COUP's true size (see Chapter 6). Much of COUP's

political broadcasting was reflected in activities that they could easily control, such as issuing press statements or interviews with select members who would speak on behalf of the other COUP members. Changes in tactics, continual questioning of the unemployed, reluctance to engage in public questioning, the continuous round of new schemes, the frequent questioning of the group's credibility, all illustrated COUP's attempt to 'court and woo' the unemployed and create a more visible image for COUP as another vanguard capable of channelling the militancy of the unemployed. Even the decision not to demonstrate meant that some COUP members believed the organization's 'credibility' would be damaged when the general public, and the unemployed perceived COUP as a leftist fringe group. On two occasions COUP members John Murray and Jack Galsworthy mentioned that friends and acquaintances, even Galsworthy's union buddies, thought COUP was a joke, not to be taken seriously. Without the support of local unemployed individuals or greater backing from socially progressive bodies [organized labour], COUP did become mainly a left, theorizing body.

But the preoccupation with not becoming a "tea-party" still persists with COUP members to this day. How to be seen as an authentic organization of the unemployed still remains the greatest problem for COUP members.

CHAPTER 3

PATTERNS AND LINKAGES TO HORIZON ORGANIZATIONS AMONG THE COMMITTEE OF THE UNEMPLOYED

There are several points to note when examining how changes over time produce changes in group direction and attitudes. It is easy, particularly in studies relying on ethnographic evidence, to view a group or individual's worldview as being an isolated, closed system in which the larger world does not intrude. The Committee of the Unemployed (COUP) exists within its own particular universe, created by certain individuals, but is also part of a larger universe that impacts on the microcosm which is COUP. A sociological analysis will disclose the nature of the social relations linking the group and the outside world over a period of time. Giddens explains how social interaction is situated in certain time-space relations:

"When social analysts writing in this vein speak of systems of interaction as patterns, they have in mind, often in a fairly vague way, a sort of 'snapshot' of relations of social interaction. The flaw in this is exactly the same as that involved in the presumption of static stability: such a snapshot would not in fact reveal a pattern at all, because any patterns of interaction that exist are situated in time; only when examined over time do they form 'patterns' at all.

Chronologies are not neat. To discuss how a group of individuals acts over a period of time implies a linear progression of beginning and ending activities. This

is not a complete portrayal of life in the group. Members come and go, activities are always in process, and unanticipated events may happen with various consequences to the group. Such is the life of a small protest group. While I have divided the group's life span into semi-yearly 'chunks' of history for the benefit of the reader to create a sense of linear time, it should be noted that a certain degree of overlap occurs while discussing various events that bridge time periods.

Committee's Origins: January-March 1983

The committee of the Unemployed (COUP) was officially created March 3, 1983, at a public meeting in the St. John's area. Previous to that point COUP's future existence was planned by an assortment of unemployed individuals (who later became COUP members), social activists, and organized labour representatives. What brought these persons together were discussions between Nora Wilson,* Sr. J. Robertson, and John Murray regarding obtaining a drop-in centre for the unemployed.

Later conversations between Murray, various notaries and some unemployed individuals provided a more focussed direction for the group. Even before the public meeting, it was assumed that COUP should engage in political

* Names have been changed to insure confidentiality.

lobbying for the unemployed and to a lesser degree provide counseling services, particularly in terms of assisting UI or social assistance recipients in obtaining their benefits. From conversations with key informants it appears that this "political role" was predetermined by the first conversation Murray had with Nora Wilson, a social action coordinator (January, 1983). Wilson and other confreres a month previous to Murray's phone call were wondering when and if the unemployed were going to become more vocal. Shortly after, Wilson and Sr. Robertson were notified that an unemployed individual phoned the archbishop's office about a social centre for the unemployed.

Prior to the public meeting which formalized COUP as an entity, the core membership of the group was already apparent. Previous to the public meeting in March, John Murray, Nora Wilson, Ken Downs, Jane Crewe, and John Welsh were all original members on the steering committee which sought to create an organization to voice the demands of the unemployed. The public meeting only enlarged by twenty-three what was a pre-formed entity. For the most part this steering committee really created what to all intents and purposes was the Committee of the Unemployed. According to several respondents there seemed to be a general consensus among the individuals present on the steering committee that a future unemployed organization

would do political action work. When finally the committee was struck at this well attended meeting (audience totalled approximately 75 people), immediate activities were centered upon how COUP could best lobby for the unemployed, raise its public profile, and seek the immediate procurement of office space from which COUP members could conduct such activities. To accomplish these tasks a call went out from the steering committee for volunteers to come forward to help in these matters.

Organizational Aspects of the Committee of the Unemployed:
First Six Months: March-August 1983

With a membership of thirty individuals, most of whom were unemployed, it was felt by many members that sub-committees were the most efficient means of carrying out various activities. Initially these sub-committees were diligent in their duties, but when a formal executive was elected, coupled with the continual decline of the membership, these sub-committees began to fade; by June of 1983 only one committee remained, that being a tent-city planning committee composed of five individuals. Prior to the formation of a formal executive (April 1983) any "leader-like" activities -- e.g., chairing meetings, delegating authority, being a spokesperson to the media, -- were handled collectively by either Murray, Wilson, and/or Downs, with the approval of the members. However, when a formal executive of chair, vice-chair, treasurer, and

secretary were elected, Murray became the primary spokesperson for the group (later superseded by Ken Downs, Tom Quigley, and Arch Heywood consecutively). This transition from a rotating, informal leadership to a ratified, formal, structured leadership was not without friction.

There was a clash between the younger, more educated members who opted for the informal style and the older, trades-oriented members who preferred a formal executive. Galsworthy, Murray, and Welsh were most adamant in having a formal executive since it would establish, as they saw it, an air of credibility for the group. Crewe, Richards, Wilson, James, and Hellyer were the "anti-hierarchy" opponents to their idea. The creation of an executive they felt would only contribute to the organization becoming "soft", since members would be more inclined to leave all duties up to the executive to perform. Rotating duties, it was felt, would create a more responsible and competent membership, capable of carrying out any task. There seemed to be some merit to this idea, since the membership of COUP declined rapidly over a six month period.

During this six-month period, Nora Wilson, while not on the executive, proved more valuable than the labour representative, Jim Welsh, in enabling COUP to voice its concerns, mainly because of her association with the office of Catholic Social Action. Throughout COUP's

history (March 1983-August 1985) the membership received no material benefits (e.g., office space, money, xeroxing, mailouts) from the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, just "moral support".

The decline of the sub-committees in the first six months meant that the outcome of various activities (e.g., brief preparations, maintaining correspondence, organizing seminars or social events) depended wholly on the goodwill of the remaining members, for they were extremely committed to seeing the group survive. The money that COUP did receive came from both Oxfam and PLURA (an inter-faith social justice body). Money in this time period (first year of existence 1983-December 1984) for a drop-in centre was not forthcoming; federal funding for a centre was insufficient and there were no union contributions. It is certain the lack of a centre prevented any social welfare counseling from occurring.

During the researcher's association with COUP it was evident that the pressure to continue a job search among certain members (Downs, Quigley, Galsworthy, most notably) prevented the group from pursuing a more active role. Several key informants even in the first six months had to migrate to find employment (e.g., Toronto, Labrador). For others who could not find regular employment, under-the-table arrangements involving construction labour or 'charring' were quite common.

Organizational Aspects of the Committee: July 1983-September 1984.

With a diminished membership the variety of activities COUP could initiate was limited. Core membership during this period consisted of Downs, Quigley, Murray, Wilson, Crewe (intermittently), Janes, and Galsworthy. What activity that existed usually was initiated externally, COUP rarely initiated anything substantial except commentaries on federal or provincial budgets, seminars on job-seeking, and letter-writing campaigns (to other unemployed groups nation-wide).

Substantial time and effort was directed toward obtaining funding for the centre. This began in earnest around May of 1983, when application was first made under the NEEDS program. To facilitate support for the idea COUP members sought letters of support from various union and church officials on the matter, but to no avail.

Other activities in this period included the initiation of a handbook containing information of benefit for unemployed or social assistance recipients. The money for this project came from a Canada Works program which the Committee decided to put to that use. There is some evidence to suggest that the group's knowledge of how other unemployed organizations had done these handbooks contributed to COUP pursuing a similar goal.

These pursuits did little to increase COUP's visibility in the community nor for that matter to accomplish anything

FIGURE I

COUP participation in activities sponsored by radical/reformist organizations in the St. John's area

1. Newfoundland Association of Public Employees Motorcade Rally of Support April 1986.
2. All regular business meetings of the Coalition for Equality, the umbrella group linking almost all organizations in the local "radical horizon".
3. Day of Protest on Confederation Hill, March, 1985, by the newly created Coalition for Equality (a coalition of labour and non-governmental political and social lobbying groups).
4. Summer 1984 - July participation in the Newfoundland branch of the steering committee to launch the Peace Petition Campaign Caravan.
5. Solidarity support for the Fishermen's Union regarding the plight of inshore fishermen at the Holiday Inn, March, 1983.
6. Presentation by Ken Downs to a Peace Network meeting on Unemployment and its linkages to the various War Economies throughout Newfoundland history. July 1984.
7. Participation in the formation of the Coalition for the Self Determination of People (an umbrella group of peace, union, and indigenous peoples groups). February 1985.
8. Participation in Central American Week activities 1983-1984-1985.
9. Presentation of brief to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour Convention June 1983.
10. Presentation of Brief to conference sponsored by the Canadian Council on Social Development on Re-defining poverty, along with other local social planning, and social-human rights groups.
11. Founding member group of the Network Calendar (monthly publication listing the activities and events of "horizon members").

12. Sponsored a presentation and workshop conducted by Gatt-Fly. March 1985.

13. Participation as delegates to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Co-operatives Conference, May 1984.

14. Participation in the Oxfam fund-raising walk, June 1984.

In addition to these particular events COUP members occasionally went to the meetings and presentations conducted by other groups in the local "radical horizon". These ties to other organizations became further cemented as COUP members became members of these groups as well.

worthwhile. It was often the case that COUP was asked by external social agencies to participate in forums of various kinds, usually to endorse some common position lining up with disarmament groups or groups advocating political non-interference in Central America. There were fourteen occasions beginning with COUP's inception when the Committee was asked to participate in these events (see Figure 1). The consensus among members was that such events did not hurt COUP's interest, but it did little to advance what members felt were issues of concern to the unemployed. Furthermore, some COUP members, particularly Ken Downs and Arch Heywood, were of the opinion that the connection between American neo-colonialism in Latin America and unemployment in the province or the entire country for that matter was at best tenuous. Significantly, activists in these internationalist agencies (e.g., Oxfam, Latin America Support Group, Ploughsharers) felt that COUP members should realize that the struggle for the oppressed was a common, international conflict of which the local unemployed were only a part. Needless to say, many COUP members failed to recognize the plight of the unemployed in these theories of global class struggle and neo-colonialism:

"Look I don't believe it is our point to interfere politically in the internal affairs of another country - why do these groups like Oxfam or the Latin America Support Group persist in these activities, when was the last time they even did anything for the unemployed in Newfoundland. I know that people in

these countries getting a buck a day are taking jobs away from us and that those governments enforce such wage laws to compete against us. But what really can groups like them do to effect that kind of change."

Ken Downs

September 1984-December 1984

Continued inability to attract the unemployed often put the group perilously close to folding on more than one occasion. The initiation of new projects or the appearance of the rare, eager potential member meant the group lurched ahead. However, this sort of progress was usually of little consequence; projects aimed at gaining support from various agencies for COUP's efforts to either agitate or provide services for the unemployed met with little response. These unrewarding activities were frustrating for COUP members because they prevented them from having a role as a "voice of the unemployed." This changed when a coalition of unions and social justice agencies formed in October, 1984, to protest public sector wage freezes and state-corporate anti-union activities. The 'Coalition for Equality' as it became known, provided a vehicle that treated COUP as a representative for the province's unemployed. In one sense an external decision gave COUP a pre-eminent role as a spokesperson for the unemployed despite the fact that the unemployed had little contact with them.

Since the Coalition for Equality was formed on the

basis of trade and public sector union concerns, issues concerning the unemployed were 'put on the backburner' according to COUP members who attended business meetings of the Coalition. The unions, the members felt, paid lip service to the plight of the unemployed. This perception of the unions intensified after the communication workers' and the trawlermen's strikes were settled and the Coalition shifted attention to the problems of provincial unemployment. COUP members initially welcomed this decision, for it entailed a commitment of union funds to establish an unemployment action centre. Furthermore, such a decision, COUP members thought, would turn the Coalition into a mass pressure body to fight on behalf of the unemployed. The members who attended these business meetings (Ken Downs, Arch Heywood, and Nancy Janes) quickly had their suspicions regarding union intransigence towards helping the unemployed reaffirmed when various unions refused to provide operating funds for a centre, despite a well organized lobby attempt from COUP members.

The experiences with the 'Coalition' (particularly around the summer of 1985) made the remaining members of COUP (now numbering six, only having gathered two new members in 1985) cynical about attempts to initiate social change through mass bodies. The Coalition they felt was dominated by union concerns at the expense of non-union social concerns. While COUP members recognized that the

social action bodies provided organizational skills, fresh insights, and a broader potential mass base of support (each agency representing a certain population segment), a common belief among them was that the social action bodies were the junior partners in the Coalition. Major union leaders argued against the inclusion of some social agencies (e.g., Planned Parenthood), with representatives of other social agencies reluctantly siding with union heads in order to preserve the Coalition. Since the Coalition was the first major organized anti-state bloc in the post-confederation era, it is not surprising that issues regarded as potentially divisive were shelved to preserve internal organizational unity.

January 1985- Present

As membership declined, a large portion of the group's history can be characterized in terms of "crisis consciousness": the sole activity of the body was reacting to external events. The committee, particularly after its first year of existence, rarely initiated its own projects - e.g., unemployment forums or seminars on job re-training. However, participating in these outside-initiated activities proved sometimes to be beneficial to COUP, for they were granted recognition both by media and social action agencies as legitimate representatives of the unemployed.

It would be wrong to consider COUP essentially as a

FIGURE II

Patterns of Voluntary Associations among significant COUP members
within the Radical Horizon of St. John's

| | Employee of Horizon Organizations | Prior Membership COUP | After becoming COUP Member |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Ken Downs | Native Friendship Centre | Network Editorial Committee | Member of the Peace Network Peace Petition Campaign Caravan |
| Sue Jones | | Plougshares | |
| John Murrar | | Newfoundland Association for Full Employment Communist Party of Canada Marxist-Leninist | |
| Rhonda Joy | | Welfare Rights Action Group | |
| Noel Richards | | | Fisheries Support Group Newfoundland Association for Full Employment Labour Support Group Various Environmental Concerns |

| | Employee of Horizon Organizations | Prior Membership COUP | After becoming COUP Member |
|----------------|--|--|---|
| Jane Crewe | St. John's Oxfam Later United Church Council of Social Ministries | Labour Support Group Network Steering Committee | Ten Days For World Development |
| Nancy Janes | | Welfare Rights Action Group | Local Advocacy Group MUN Women's Centre |
| Stuart Bateson | | Committee for Peace and Justice in Ireland Labour Support Group | North Atlantic Peace Organization Committee member Coalition for Self Determination of Peoples |
| Nora Wilson | Catholic Social Action Commission | South African Support Group Women's Centre Transition House | Newfoundland & Labrador Human Rights Association Community Services Council Board Member |
| Karl Wilson | | Labour Support Group South African Support Group | |
| Jim Welsh | | St. John's District Labour Council Newfoundland Labrador Federation of Labour | |
| Arch Heywood | | Liberal Party Constituency Association | N.D.P. Party Member |

| Employee of Horizon Organizations | Prior Membership COUP | After becoming COUP Member |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Jane Skinner | Native Friendship Centre | Native Support Group |
| John Galsworthy | IBEW Local | Liberal Party Constituency Office |
| Tony Quigley | Catholic Social Action Commission Member | NDP Constituency Association |
| David Kenworth | Newfoundland Association for Full Employment | Neighborhood Defence Committee (Anti- Development Group) |
| | Labour Support Group | |

'lazy' action body. Activities aimed at attracting the attention of the unemployed, of which there were many, did not produce the desired results (i.e., it was not for lack of trying). More importantly, when examining how external decisions affected the group's behaviour it should be stressed that COUP was an integrated member of the local left political scene even before the Coalition existed. In fact many COUP members were members of other local protest bodies (see Figure II). Belonging to a network of left oriented social change bodies entailed a certain amount of "mutual-solidarity" support work.

At present, the Committee still maintains these links to the various left and peace movement coalitions and regularly corresponds with other unemployed organizations in mainland Canada. Currently, much of COUP's energy has been shaped and focussed by the Coalition for Equality. Membership in this body, which has opened doors for COUP members (establishing contacts that could prove useful), has meant a certain diminution regarding COUP's freedom in how it defines its strategies. Since the establishing of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment, many COUP activities center around Coalition debates on provincial handling of unemployment problems. The Royal Commission is the focus, as Coalition members see in it the provincial government's failure to develop credible policies that would reduce local unemployment.

FIGURE III

Membership Core Composition of COUP

1983-1985

(names changed to ensure confidentiality)

April 1983

*Ken Downs
*John Murray
*Nora Wilson
Carl Hellyer
*Jim Welsh
*Joyce Kilmer
*Noel Richards
Sue Jones
Jane Crewe
Tony Quigley
John Galsworthy
*Adrian Ryall
David Kenworth

October 1984

*Ken Downs
Tony Quigley
Nancy Janes
*John Murray
Arch Heywood
Rhonda Joy

December 1983

*Ken Downs
*John Murray
*Nora Wilson
*Jane Crewe
Nancy Janes
Tony Quigley
John Galsworthy

March 1984

*Ken Downs
*John Murray
Tony Quigley
Nancy Janes
*Nora Wilson
Rhonda Joy

January 1985 to present

Jane Skinner
Tony Quigley
*Ken Downs
Nancy Janes
Arch Heywood
Stuart Bateson

* Signifies original members

Given this situation, COUP activities, especially political agitation with the unemployed, were placed to a degree under Coalition auspices. COUP member Ken Downs, for example, was asked to participate in the writing of an unemployment pamphlet designed to inform Newfoundlanders on causes and solutions for mass unemployment. However, attempts to have drop-in centres established or holding Labour Day Marches in which the unemployed would participate were rejected, primarily by the union bloc in the Coalition. While COUP members presently believe their relationship with the Coalition has been one sided, they still remain a member in the Coalition.

Conclusion: An Overview of COUP's History

The Committee of the Unemployed of 1985, in terms of membership composition, is totally different from the COUP that existed in March of 1983. A body that originally composed 30 people now is a body of six (see Figure III), only one an original member. Despite a shrunken membership, they are in some respects more influential now than they were originally. Outside agencies, whether left-oriented internationalist bodies, the Coalition for Equality, media investigative teams, or the current Royal Commission, have sought out this body on various occasions to legitimate their own actions.

"I fully agree with the second last sentence of your letter: it is indeed time that the voice of the unemployed be heard for a change. We have been conducting personal interviews with a large sample of unemployed people to make sure that the opinions and ideas of the unemployed themselves are made known to us. This is also why at our public hearings we would like to hear your ideas and suggestions."

Reply Dated June 10, 1985, by Royal Commission to COUP members following a public letter to the Evening Telegram debating the need for such an enterprise.

In some respects, COUP members were uncomfortable with the role of being the 'voice of the unemployed'. This was particularly noticeable as the group shrank in size; members fielded questions from outsiders (usually curious representatives of other agencies) by purposely exaggerating the size of the membership. This deliberate lying must be seen in the context of COUP always trying to present a 'credible' image (after all they knew no one would take such a small group seriously). Such tactics were used to stress the fact that, while it may be hard to attract the unemployed, COUP still possessed enough members to be a credible body that was capable of various actions.

— As the membership declined, planning for various activities (especially by the autumn of 1984) proved to be nearly impossible. Activities such as writing presentations to the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment or holding demonstrations occupied every business meeting of the group. Sometimes decisions made by external bodies,

e.g., the Coalition for Equality, also affected the nature of certain COUP initiatives. Constant shifts in planning, whether from external demands or from individual members disagreeing over which path of action should be chosen, made any sort of long range planning chaotic. Presently the Committee still finds itself in this atmosphere of confusion. How it will respond to current realities remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: RECRUITMENT, IDEOLOGY AND EVALUATION OF TACTICS

Recruitment

The ideological direction or slant of organizations is a condition of the past associations of members, the strategies that are provided for organizing in a certain politico-institutional framework, and the size of the group. Size probably is more crucial than any other factor, in that the smaller the group is in terms of membership, the less likelihood there is of competing, disparate political worldviews. This is contrary to Robert Michels's "Iron Law of Oligarchy," where institutions, once achieving a certain membership, displace the expressed radical ideological goals in favour of manageable, organizational goals decreed by administrators in the organizations. This implies a separation of interests between leaders in an organization and general membership. In small protest groups the demarcation line between leader-like activity and general membership responsibilities is blurred. This is particularly evident in groups that are organized around issues of unemployment and poverty. Gerlach and Hine (1970), and Hertz, (1981) both note that the structural composition of left-oriented protest groups (particularly, as Hertz notes, poor people organizations) is very much characterized by a decentralized, cellular

organization linked by personal, structural, and ideological ties to other like minded groups. In this model the size of these organizations cannot be anything but small [sometimes to the consternation of group members who equate numbers with political vibrancy].

This model of the dynamics of poor peoples groups is evident in the previous chapter, where members of Canadian unemployment protest groups testify to the limited membership of their respective organizations. Similarly, the Committee of the Unemployed never had more than 30 members, and after the first 6-8 months always maintained a membership of around 8-12. Such shrinkage, it should be noted, corresponded to a rise in the expressed radicalism of the members who remained in COUP. This radicalization or ideological "maturation" is only possible in small groups where face-to-face contact can occur on a regular basis. The access individuals have to each other in these small unemployment protest bodies greatly facilitates ideological growth for it allows an easy exchange of news, ideas, correspondence, pamphlets and the happenings with other member organizations of the horizon. Whatever limitations these unemployment protest groups may have in mobilizing the unemployed, they do undoubtedly aid in the self-transformation of unemployed individuals, who come to define themselves in radical terms.

FIGURE IV

SOME EXAMPLES OF PAST POLITICAL/PROTEST
ACTIVITIES BY CORE COUP MEMBERS.

Noel Richard and John Murray were both members of the Newfoundland Association for Full Employment (circa 1979-1981).

Tony Quigley and more recently Art Heywood are members of the local N.D.P. constituency association.

Ken Downs and Jane Skinner have been associated with native rights issues.

Stuart Bateson is a member of a Committee for Justice and Peace in Ireland.

Nancy Janes and Rhonda Joy were both members in a welfare rights organization in St. John's previous to joining COUP.

Sue Jones previous to becoming a COUP member, was a Project Ploughshares member, a disarmament group.

n.b. It should be noted that none of these people were professional activists in the paid sense. All were unemployed for a considerable length of time before becoming COUP members.

Recruitment and Ideological Background

Recruitment to the organization is often on the basis of face to face meetings with others who tend to show similar outlooks on issues concerning social justice. More often than not, organizations such as COUP, or the welfare rights groups which Hertz and Cloward and Piven document, are interwoven with the membership of other groups on the horizon. This observation is not just limited to the professional activists who compose bodies like COUP, but even some of the unemployed individuals who constitute the membership. With the case of COUP particularly, two members belonged to a former full employment body, one to a peace group, two to a welfare rights group, two to a N.D.P. constituency association, two to a native friendship society and finally a member of a peace and justice in Ireland association (see Figure. IV). The founding of COUP essentially brought together a nucleus of politically minded unemployed or, more accurately, underemployed individuals. Prior ideological associations therefore help to a coalesce a common political outlook which group members externally project to outsiders. Since COUP and other similar bodies serve as outlets for ideological outsiders, the structure that such a setting provides allows for a far more coherent ideology to develop. The ideology of COUP, which I have described as a locally-adapted populist socialism, contains certain generic characteristics which can be identified.

Gerlach and Hine in their work People, Power and Change provide a definition of ideology which is well suited for analysis of ideological development in small protest groups. The function of an ideology in such a political setting should provide group members with standards defining their position as a protest body whose interest run counter to that of the dominant society. Such functions of an ideology therefore should include:

- 1) Providing a vision of a different future.
- 2) Giving participants a sense of self worth and power which is usually at variance with the social identities previously assigned to them.
- 3) Developing standards which defines one's utopia.
- 4) The positing of a certain standard of intolerance towards opposing viewpoints.

An outside observer reading an interview with a COUP member, in the Evening Telegram, or listening to a CBC or VOXM panel discussion on unemployment with COUP participants, would in all likelihood assume that COUP was a liberal reform social planning agency. Outside of a few sharp rebuttals to St. John's Board of Trade for their statements on how the Unemployment Insurance scheme should be cut back, it would be hard to detect that COUP was a left radical group. On some occasions press statements issued by COUP have been quite salutary of provincial government practices, e.g., increasing welfare payments. This public image of a credible social planning council with emphasis on reform, and not sharp attacks against capitalism, contrasts

with the image revealed during a regular business meeting of COUP. Radical invective and rhetoric with appropriate references to the ruling class, the capitalist state, neo-conservatism, corporatism, and other political and sociological terms are used quite liberally at COUP meetings. This is all the more surprising since none of the COUP members except two early members had read any contemporary marxist political sociology.* The rhetoric is borrowed from addresses by academics and visiting marxists who drop in occasionally at COUP meetings. While the rhetoric is borrowed and applied to COUP's social analysis, I do not want to suggest that COUP members are incapable of thinking on their own. In fact the analysis that COUP members apply is located by their identification of who the enemy is and the tactics which the enemy promulgates against the working people.

For the membership of COUP the enemy is the nexus between big business and the two states, federal and provincial -- particularly the role that the St. John's merchant class plays as intermediary between transnational 'big business' and the provincial government.

"The Committee of the Unemployed has submitted a list of recommendations to the provincial government on how to alleviate unemployment and "develop a more rational society."

*Both were graduate students in the arts.

The committee submitted its recommendations to the three party leaders Monday, but does not expect any of them to be instituted, "considering its right-wing, pro-big business mentality."

The Evening Telegram
November 15, 1985

COUP participants see this class-political nexus as being directly responsible for the underdevelopment of Newfoundland, hence the high level of unemployment. The stigma which the unemployed bear as being lazy U.I. scroungers is for COUP members directly attributable to the capitalist class. Since attracting the unemployed is difficult, as COUP members admit, it is COUP's duty to continually broadcast the fact that unemployment is a system fault, not a fault of the individual. Countering stereotypical attitudes through constant media access is for COUP members the first, practical step towards radicalizing the unemployed.

Since COUP feels negative images of the unemployed are fostered by the same individuals whose decisions help to create regional unemployment, the critiques engendered by COUP of this class take two forms, one for private consumption and one for public consumption. During COUP business meetings it was quite common to hear references of the ruling class as "glorified chocolate distributing manufacturing agents", targeting local businessmen associated with the Board of Trade. Attacks on the

capitalist class, whether public or private, were often aimed against local individuals, primarily because these individuals were the only close, obvious members of the capitalist class which one could put a face to, and hence were easier to attack. While COUP members were aware of the power of the individuals who control trans-national corporations, they were a faceless group that existed beyond Newfoundland, thus harder to attack. Any criticism of this class therefore came at the local level, particularly in response to statements made by key prominent business persons.

These attacks often took the form of matter of fact comments on the implication of adopting certain policies, which the Board of Trade or representatives of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business advocated. In these rebuttals [which were often letters to the editor] COUP took great pains to stress that changes, such as lengthening the qualifying time for individuals to claim unemployment insurance, would reduce consumption, thus setting off another round of unemployment. These critiques often had a chiding, chastising tone about them which suggested to local business persons [particularly in the retail trades] that their economic security depended on an unemployment insurance - social assistance clientele; in other words, they should know better than to make short-sighted comments. "For allegedly aware individuals, we find their

statements to be totally incredible," said Heywood.

He said it is patently obvious that the board had no concept of the present economic reality, employment or poverty.

He said any reduction in UI benefits would have a disastrous effect on the unemployed and would in turn have far reaching implications for the business community, because UI benefits are spent on consumer goods.

It is something of a paradox that business opposed government intervention in the economy while it is this intervention that keeps the private sector in business," said Heywood.

Evening Telegram
November 23, 1985.

It was felt that turning such private enterprise rationale statements inside out and analyzing their implications in a cool, matter of fact manner would only enhance COUP's reputation in the community as a public watchdog.

McLuhan once remarked that the media didn't like hot issues. The media was essentially a 'cool' medium, one that particularly didn't like to explore the ramifications of issues. It is obviously evident that COUP members sensed this fact after experiencing initial setbacks with the media. COUP members who were given the task of drafting press statements [Bateson, Downs, and Heywood usually] were always told prior to any COUP media release to 'tone down' the radical statements and 'touch up' the negative statements. Generally the use of marxist rhetoric and jargon was avoided in the issuing of any statements to the

press.

These critiques did serve the media's interest of always having an opposing viewpoint to draw upon and it provided them with access to unemployed individuals who could always be used by various profile stories on unemployment or poverty. Since the media [print and electronic] regarded COUP as the only organized representative of the unemployed around, COUP members made great efforts to fend off media queries about who they did represent. As the group became smaller, business meetings were not advertised and were just for members only, not outsiders. Any requests by media representatives to attend meetings as interested observers, were politely rejected by COUP members. It was felt by the respondents that if the media did know their true size [by January, 1986, there were six members] the media would not have anything to do with them. Therefore, whenever asked by any media representative about the organization's true size, COUP members would usually admit to 36 members. Furthermore, whenever a COUP individual would speak for the organization, he or she would do so as an executive of COUP speaking on behalf of the fictitious other members. Fortunately for COUP's sake, they did not merit investigative journalism.

Ideological Justification: Tactics and Reflection

These attempts at moderating their political stances to gain a greater public appreciation of their efforts to speak on behalf of the unemployed were a realistic strategy. Earlier I made the case that the radical horizon as it exists in various locales in North America essentially adopts a reformist platform. Attempts to initiate a radical agenda in the political process on a mass scale in North America, given the history of opposition to socialist organizing strategies, would prove futile. The horizon can only push for reformist solutions which are at best ameliorative.

Essentially this is the dilemma COUP confronts: it has to portray itself as reformist in nature, otherwise the group goes nowhere. Playing the media game may reduce the radical thrust of COUP's message, but it does guarantee air play, which is what COUP members earnestly want. The media provides, for all intents and purposes, contact on a mass basis with the audience they cannot reach through advertised meetings. When COUP as an entity does meet [and it still continues to do so, which makes it now one of the oldest of such groups in Canada], it has the air of a "marxist-leninist tea party", which COUP members once joked about and tried to avoid becoming. This aura of a marxist debating society is even extended to the political symbols created by core members; for instance the group's banner is

a variant on the hammer and sickle flag with the real acronym looking like a hammer and sickle. Furthermore, on any stationery issued by COUP the logo resembles the circular inscribed 'A' used by anarchists. This of course was deliberate strategy, since COUP participants identify and help in the struggle of working people. This included in many instances participation in picket lines for various strikes.*

COUP participants resent the 'marxist leninist' tea party tag, for they assume such a view of their efforts is a mark of failure [i.e., another left theorizing body that failed to stir the masses]. What COUP members do not realize is that when they engage in theorizing sessions on organizing the unemployed they are following in a tradition of socialist societies that have tried to radicalize the working classes. These 'praxis sessions' are vital if COUP hopes to somehow organize the unemployed to be more demanding of the state and to address their needs.

The public articulation of COUP's political analysis runs the risk of alienating their potential public. Media reporters cannot probe too far with their questioning of COUP's alternate strategies for job creation. On a few occasions where media representatives engaged COUP members in heated discussions over what societal changes COUP would prefer, COUP members admitted they would prefer to see a worker controlled society as opposed to the current system

of private enterprise.* (This occurred twice, once at an information picket of the Royal Commission Public Hearing on Provincial Unemployment and once on an open line show). On a few occasions in the printed media COUP did stress the need for community owned and workers controlled enterprises such as fish plants. However, this cannot be interpreted as wholly radical in terms of job creation, since there is a history of producer and worker co-operatives in Newfoundland.

"It encourages community and workers control of fish plants, the establishment of co-operative farming communities and community/workers controlled manufacturing industries .."

Evening Telegram
November 15, 1985

However, for an uninformed radio listener or television viewer or even a newspaper reader such statements suggest that COUP is a "communist" organization. Undoubtedly, it is to COUP's advantage to issue carefully worded press statements.

Evaluation of Tactics

In terms of a score sheet of successes and failures for organizational tactics to stir the unemployed, COUP would

* Some of this labour/solidarity work included being on NABET, NAPE, Hotel workers, and Brewery workers picket lines.

rank a dismal failure. The track record for other similar unemployment protest groups in Canada is no different. The only notable exception is the London Union of Unemployed Workers, which through confrontational tactics, including a sit in at the mayor's office, pressured civic authorities to increase welfare payment [circa spring 1984]. Tent city proposals, public forums, advertised meetings, film showings, unemployment coping self-help sessions, and information pickets did not stir the unemployed or attract members for that matter. Media exposure, while heightening COUP's public visibility, did nothing to increase COUP's membership rolls either. COUP, very much like the welfare rights organizations, that Cloward and Piven (1977), Hertz, (1984), and West (1981) document, strove for numbers as a means of creating political counter-weight that could represent as a mass the demands of the poor. Maintaining linkages with other unemployed protest bodies across Canada is an important part in developing a movement of the unemployed.

The idea of creating movements with interest counter to the dominant society runs into trouble when we examine the potential unemployed movement. Hertz, in her study of Minnesotan welfare rights organizations, observed that 'successful' welfare protest bodies could mobilize themselves right out of existence. Members in these agencies learned how to take advantage of what the public

welfare apparatus had to offer [e.g., education grants, research projects,, job training programs] and hence became more employable. Such circumstances that Hertz documents depend on the market conditions in a given area, but it is a factor that constrains the activity of unemployment protest groups. Since most of these agencies tend to be small, the employment of a few individuals could spell the end of a local chapter of this unemployed proto-movement. This has happened with two unemployment protest groups in Canada, one in New Westminster and in Saskatoon. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the occasional sporadic employment of some COUP members [particularly Galsworthy, Downs, Murray, and Quigley] definitely curtailed the activity of COUP whenever they were employed. The loss of two members, Jane Crewe and Nora Wilson, who found regular, full time employment as project officers for social action-research bodies certainly, did hurt the committee. These two members had the ability to access the resources of established institutions on the local horizon. The activity level of COUP rose again with the arrival of two new members, Arch Heywood, an unemployed laborer, and Stuart Bateson, an itinerant journalist.

Smallness may promote a swifter assimilation of radical ideas in a group session, but internal factors [e.g., possible employment of key unemployed individuals] can prevent these groups from getting larger. Therefore the idea of creating potential political counter-blocs drawn

from the ranks of the unemployed is unlikely. The political culture of the unemployed, though it breeds cynicism, does not generate a need to seek radical solutions through collective action.

Cloward and Piven have constantly argued [except as of late] the need for unemployed individuals to engage in disruptive acts of civil disobedience. According to Cloward and Piven (1971, 1977), a loose strata of activists and unemployed individuals [working and under-class unemployables] engaging in hit and run tactics with the state [sitins, demonstrations] could create the radical agenda-advocates for the poor are seeking (1977: pp. 320-324). With such tactics Cloward and Piven argue sufficient, blatant class polarization would occur with a clear socialist political agenda emerging, or there would be a greater provision of welfare-statist policies as a means of placating class conflict. Either way, these strategies advance the interests of the lower classes. Recently Cloward and Piven have settled on the electoral system [e.g., registering the unemployed and poor as voters] to create a class based re-alignment in American politics.

It is evident that while groups like COUP are composed initially of activists and unemployed people [with the paid activists in COUP leaving much later], the extent to which such organizations can engage in class disruptive activities is governed by the opportunities that are presented by the

larger social and political context in which they reside. Currently there is not much scope for political action among the unemployed in Canada. When committees or organizations of the unemployed are formed, they usually come after the fact: following some disturbance, shut down, or a media focussed scrutiny of the issues. In the case of currently existing independent and labour sponsored unemployment action groups, most were created during the height of the last major recession in 1982, when joblessness figures reached an unprecedented high not only in Canada, but the whole industrialized, capitalist world. Then, as Cloward and Piven note, much effort that could have been directed towards creating protest was channelled into organizing stable committee structures. The problem with Cloward and Piven's analysis is deciding which comes first: the protest or the protest structure. Their loose amalgam of activists and poor [i.e., unemployed] peoples coalitions can only come about in settings where the two camps can discuss what forms of political action are necessary so that the issues can be addressed and met in an adequate manner.

Unfortunately, as Guida West notes in her study of the National Welfare Rights Movement (West, 1981: pp. 336-372), external/non-poor activists can dominate the decision-making processes of poor peoples structures. However, this may be more a case of middle class activists controlling the funds donated by activists/reform-minded institutions [e.g.,

mainstream liberal Protestant Church bodies]. Currently the unemployed movement as it exists in Canada receives little funding, except from labour federation sponsored unemployed action centres, which are primarily located in Ontario and British Columbia. It is conceivable that if large scale funding to the independent unemployed protest groups did occur, their autonomy would be threatened.

Furthermore, if these groups had a larger membership, it is doubtful if they would be able to sustain their internal radical stances. Yet, if they wish to claim legitimacy as a voice for the unemployed, these groups would need more contact with the unemployed than they have now. Having more contact with the unemployed would present more organizational difficulties for anti-poverty groups. It is highly doubtful that any form of political action that concerns the unemployed or those receiving social assistance can be considered legitimate if there is no communication between the organizers and those they claim to represent. This is not to suggest that Robert Michel's "Iron Law of Oligarchy" does not operate, but social factors do limit the size of these protest organizations and a high degree of consensus democracy does reign.

These politically-minded unemployment groups want systematic changes in the economy leading to a society characterized by full employment. This still means building a movement of the unemployed. To date either opting for a

Cloward and Piven strategy, or creating a powerful extra-parliamentary protest lobby, is unfeasible given the strength of these unemployment bodies. Linkages with committees that seek job development in their communities or workers groups that engage in defensive actions designed to save jobs would be a first step in building such a movement. Coordinating such disparate groups of unemployed people so as to adopt a common plan of action remains a formidable task, but necessary activity if the organizations engaged in these struggles wish to create a huge class-based protest to private-sector rationalizations in the economy.

CHAPTER 5

THE FUTURE OF CONTEMPORARY PROTEST ACTIVITIES BY THE UNEMPLOYED

What about the fate of unemployment protest groups? Considering their very limited success in winning concessions for the unemployed and the transient nature of group membership, it is doubtful that any long range planning can occur. Given this fact, it is doubtful if they can coalesce into anything larger in terms of a social movement (barring a major economic disaster which would make unemployment more widespread than it is now). While the likelihood of a sudden great depression remains a possibility, it is just that. Assuming that subsequent western capitalist societies can stave off economic catastrophes, hence preventing sudden major social dislocations from occurring, then there is no need to expect a revolt among the unemployed.

Assuming this doomsday scenario does not take place, what is the fate of poor people and unemployment protest bodies? In many instances they will continue to carry on in one form or another, trying to attract the attention of the unemployed. Growth in these organizations will be a direct result of media focussed scrutiny of the subject, especially if there is an increase in the unemployment rolls. Since I have argued that access to the media is of vital importance in the self-promotion of groups such as

COUP, A.U.U.W., N.A.F.E., the O.U.W., a constant effort must be maintained to attract the interest of the media. A symbiotic relationship thus develops between the media and unemployment protest groups. The media in this process gain access to a steady source of unemployed persons for various "poverty" stories or an alternative opinion on the subject of mass unemployment, and the poverty organization gains a mass communications link to a potential audience of would-be supporters.

But this activity of constantly haranguing the media with potential news stories on some aspect of unemployment as a device to attract recruits is not such a productive strategy as it turns out. In an earlier chapter I stated the membership of most unemployment protest organizations is quite small, and in some cases the membership rolls are deliberately padded if there is media interest in the group. With this in mind, media propagandizing techniques employed by anti-poverty bodies are not an effective way to build up the membership roles. In the particular case of COUP there was a growing realization of this fact. Eventually attempts to contact the media were viewed as part of COUP's moral duty to speak out on issues that concerned the unemployed. Confined largely to these moral watch dog activities, which do not require a huge number of members, it is quite conceivable these groups can last a long time (long in this instance means anything over 2 years). A

larger membership, with a separation between a bureaucratic elite and general rank and file members, would prove clumsy in attempting to respond quickly to media stories.

The moral watch dog role is a quite effective function for a small protest organization to undertake. Though these unemployment action groups define themselves in a vanguard role as being representatives of the unemployed (which in many cases they are not), the media does view them as organized agents of the unemployed and they are reported as such. Therefore, with a minimal amount of effort (access to a telephone, stamps, and stationery) an anti-poverty group can become quite newsworthy if it wants to.

Obstacles for Growth

While unemployment protest organizations can be quite active in the media, it is highly unlikely that they will attract many members. Retention of members is a problem for these groups; in the case of COUP, once initial unemployed members realized it was not a job creation agency, they left after a few months. The funds these groups receive, which are limited (public funds, e.g., make work schemes), could never support any sustained job creation efforts.

Since funding is limited and job spin offs are few, it is not surprising that membership in these bodies is transient. Evidence, both past and present, suggests that there is a fair degree of movement in and out of

these protest organizations, depending on the availability of job opportunities. Consequently, it is hard to build up a solid membership base, and this prevents a regional or national alliance of the unemployed from ever consolidating their efforts.

While this is an internal factor inhibiting growth in local organizations of unemployed or poor peoples groups, the biggest obstacle to growth rests with the political culture of the mass unemployed. Even if unemployed protest groups wanted large memberships, it is unlikely, given current knowledge of unemployed culture, that this type of growth would occur. Unemployed people for various reasons are on the whole not willing to become politically active in a socialist sense, and the smallness of current poor peoples social justice groups reflects this fact. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the unemployed will, in sufficient numbers turn to radical, political remedies as a solution to their problems. It is too much of an ideological leap of faith to expect an unemployed person who has not been exposed to socialist politics and above all else wants a job to join a poor peoples protest group. Having some prior degree of ideological involvement in social justice or political causes still remains the best determinant of why unemployed individuals would join such protest organizations.

Hertz (1981) and Bakke (1940) indicate that it is a condition of fear that probably constrains unemployment

protest groups from growing -- fear in the sense that association with these bodies could possibly mean blockage of occupational betterment by the powers that be. Hertz, in her study of Minnesotan welfare mothers, noted a reluctance on the part of some to join or complain too loudly, mainly because of fear that state welfare authorities would suspend welfare payments. Similarly, Bakke, in his conversations with unemployed workers, noted that, while reasons were many and varied, a large number of American unemployed in the thirties refused to associate with unemployment clubs primarily because of their Marxist origins. Even COUP members took great pains, both initially and much later, to develop for themselves a 'credible' outward public image. While there was a greater tendency to radicalization in terms of explanations and analysis within COUP as time went on, this was in no way (unless unwittingly so) projected to outsiders. Statements to the press were deliberately censored, particularly when it came to obvious marxist inspired rhetoric. It was only by the efforts of inquisitive journalists that COUP members sometimes betrayed their utopian schemes for reorganizing the economy. This "fear of the left" was made all the more evident when on several occasions interested unemployed people came to me during COUP business meetings and personally asked if COUP was a communist group.

Unemployed Protest and the State

Currently, to talk of any existing poor people or unemployment protest group or alliance as a threat to either the provincial or federal state is ridiculous. First of all, they do not have the numbers, and their ties to the mass unemployed are few. How well these protest organizations hide their true strength really depends on how politicians perceive these groups -- that is, if they even perceive them at all. Some political leaders and their aides are aware of their existence. But how political representatives gauge the actions of these groups is unclear. There is little evidence of any negative statements regarding the activities of current unemployment social justice groups; they merit little attention from elected representatives. If these groups persist in their media activities and coordinate various confrontational tactics with organizations that are sympathetic to them, then certainly the activities of these groups can be embarrassing to political and state authorities. Extending the moral watchdog rôle by protesting loudly against, for instance, government cutbacks would be quite a feasible project for these groups. Finally, soliciting the help of other organizations in the radical horizon in these activities (i.e., sit ins, exposes or commentaries on political decisions) would demonstrate in the eyes of media and others that the unemployed have community backing for

their stands..

Cloward and Piven have maintained that relief efforts historically are applied to stem rising protest from the discontented classes²⁵. It is their contention that because of the introduction of relief measures and major public works programs in the thirties the American unemployed did not turn to more radical political solutions. Since unemployment as a political problem was mediated within the existing politico-economic framework in the United States, (i.e., the system finally did work) there was no need to opt for a radical alternative. The Canadian experience during the Great Depression showed the effects of not having a major public relief system in place to cope with the social dislocations that the catastrophe produced. Rioting, increased police surveillance, stock piling of tear gas, the establishment of armed forces supervised detention-work camps, and incidentally a rise in organized unemployed protest activities, were quite visible manifestations of the Canadian state's handling of the unemployment problem in the thirties.

In Newfoundland during the thirties the unemployment situation was not entirely different, except more extreme. The riots in 1932 by the unemployed precipitated the collapse of the elected government and paved the way for political administration by appointed fiat. Welfare-statist capitalism was a post-war phenomenon in Canada and primarily

was developed to stave off an expected economic recession that would come with the end of war effort. Furthermore, the unemployed in Canada, as Carl Cuneo noted, played no role in providing any political input to the shaping of the Unemployed Insurance Act of 1941²⁶.

The possibility of anticipated unrest, if not anything else, seemed to motivate the Canadian state to pursue full employment policies. In other words, it can be generally argued that the Canadian welfare state arose primarily because of fear of an economic depression and anticipation of social unrest.

To date there have been no systematic actions by the unemployed in North America, for that matter, in social democratic Western Europe.²⁷ Protest (for lack of a better word) has been sporadic and by no means systematic or regionally coordinated. Major protest, when it has occurred, is the result of state cut backs in the welfare apparatus, or occurs in response to corporate shut downs of one-industry towns. The broad coalition known as Operation Solidarity in British Columbia and the quickly organized nation-wide campaign against de-indexation of pension among workers and pensioners are recent examples of organized mass campaigns against state welfare cut backs.

Fear of the potential of the unemployed still remains. However, the creation of this 'moral panic' is not just limited to state elites, it is constantly being produced and

reinforced by commentaries, studies, and reports sponsored by various interested groups. These include not only the media, but the various social reform agencies, some left-oriented social scientists, and the mainstream social justice wings of the Churches. Unemployment, according to anti-poverty advocates, accounts for increases in crime, mental stress, depression, suicide, marital breakdown, alcoholism, and wife battering. The validity of these claims in many cases are suspect and more often than not are based on case records, not systematic survey techniques. Typical of these studies are works whose sources draw on either personal interviews with select unemployed individuals or the case files of various social reform agencies. Recent studies include works like Hayes and Nutman, Understanding the Unemployed, the 1978 Peoples Commission on Unemployment in Newfoundland, Now that we Burned Our Boats and the much publicized Canadian Mental Health Association work, Unemployment Its Impact on Body and Soul. Unwittingly, despite their intentions, such presentations of evidence portray an overtly negative image of the unemployed (usually dangerous) and avoid addressing the economic questions surrounding unemployment.

"What vested interest have these young people in perpetuating the values and the aspirations of a society that they feel has failed them? Alienated, the demoralized young people who are, at least, theoretically at the potential peak of their physical health and power, their energy, and the idealism,

are being lost to themselves and, more importantly, to society ... The long-term consequences are more ominous than the immediate. There is a cumulative impact and multiplier effect on the unemployed, and their society. These young men and women will evidence signs of psycho-social disintegration in the short run, and the delayed effects do not speak well for their future."²⁸

"Yet the fact remains the proportion of those who are unemployed reflect a higher incidence of marital breakdown, crime, suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse and social disobedience, let alone neurotic and psychotic behaviours ...

... If we are concerned today about the increase in incidence of crime, spousal abuse, vandalism, disrespect for tradition and authority, family disintegration, and all of the other social ills characterizing our troubled times, our failure to address the problems of today's unemployed will increase our difficulties in dealing with what will certainly become crises in our civilization tomorrow."²⁹

Certainly unemployment protest groups play on this image of the unemployed as potential political or social threat -- e.g., veiled threats, like "remember 1932"³⁰ in COUP press statements or "1 1/2 million people can't be ignored" by unemployed representatives recreating the Ottawa unemployment trek of 1935, or a panel of ordinary unemployed people arguing on a national CBC discussion special that only a revolution will solve the needs of the unemployed are typical of these threats. While these statements may be sociologically inaccurate (nothing currently indicates a

trend towards radicalization (of the unemployed), they are quite useful in terms of propaganda value for unemployment protest groups. In some respects, the "political threat" rhetoric of these groups is often an extension of the apocalyptic revolt scenario as stated in Chapter Two.

The Need to Overstate the Case: The Possible Future of Unemployed Protest in a Canadian Context.

Public warnings of dire consequences, exaggerations of true size, constant attempts to access the media, building various alliances, and the pursuit of numerous strategies to recruit members are essentially matter of life and death for these groups. Their survival and possibly their success as societal transformation agents rests on constant activity. Furthermore, these activists have to confront an apathetic mass which resists organizing. Faced by such difficulties, members in these groups can do little except to continue attempting to organize. Their 'finest hour' finally depends on a political or economic catastrophe. This would not only vindicate their own rhetoric, but as politically organized groups of unemployed individuals they would be in a great position to provide leadership.

However, if the state manages to control unemployment at a socially acceptable level, then unemployment will remain just a social problem and not a political problem that threatens the state. This is primarily done by

shifting some of the ~~burden~~ of responsibility for the unemployed. In this case the problem of unemployment is shifted from the political arena, to be mediated at the individual 'case' level by various reform and social work oriented agencies. Certainly it is to the state's financial advantage to let these reformist agencies take on the social service problems of the unemployed.

When the state no longer assumes full responsibility for unemployment it transfers the problem to charities, food banks, and social planning councils. While social planning councils and many anti-poverty groups may and do receive limited public grant funding, it would be inaccurate to describe these agencies as ideological extensions of the state. Certainly such organizations do provide input into public policy, but then so does every other organized societal segment. One must remember that social planning councils (the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Vanier Institute, the Toronto Metro Planning Council, even the Fraser Institute) and anti-poverty bodies are independently created, not state created. Often the financial resources provided by the state only provide for, as advocates of these associations attest to, band-aid solutions to the problem. One predominant reason why groups like COUP and other similar anti-poverty organizations cannot be considered as ideological extensions of the state is that they advocate political sentiments and solutions

that run counter to the interests of the dominant capitalist society. When this happens, the public perception of unemployment changes, especially the perception of who the unemployed are. Furthermore, such a perceptual change makes the work of struggling anti-poverty groups all the more difficult.

In this social work scenario, solutions to unemployment take the form of lobbying to overcome the economic deficiencies of problematic societal segments. Solutions to unemployment at this level still remain ameliorative; they do not impose a great financial strain on the state. These societal segments, particularly as defined by opinion shapers, include high school drop outs, unwed mothers, older workers who failed to retrain, and so on. In this perception of what should be done about unemployment, the political causes underlying unemployment are rarely discussed. Therefore any anti-poverty, poor peoples, welfare rights, or unemployment action group that seeks a radical solution to unemployment will not even receive a hearing. Given this developing state of affairs, education as to why unemployment is a political issue becomes ever more important for these groups. But the extent to which education, as opposed to more direct forms of political action, remains the focus of these groups is still dependent on external factors which they have little control of.

The Future

Class conflict in the traditional sense is always a possibility in discussions of the potentialities of unrest among the unemployed. The origins of future class conflict may lie in the state's ability or inability to stave off rising demands given a shrinking tax base. Coupled to this fact would be the increasing strain on non-governmental agencies to cope with the demands of the unemployed.³¹ This reality already alarms representatives of these institutions, as numerous press statements attest. Historically, when the efforts of even private relief failed in the past, unemployment became a political problem (roughly from the 16th century to the present era).³² Protest among the unemployed was visibly present in numerous forms (as opposed to today), and was regarded in light of state actions to control it as a threat to the social order. The same fears of the unemployed resurface with every subsequent recession and consequently it is the one weapon organized unemployment action groups can use to their advantage.

When this does not happen, and these organizations become stuck in the role of political educators for the unemployed, they will exhibit outwardly some of the tendencies of political sects as identified by O'Toole and others. But they will not be as restrictive in membership requirements as O'Toole suggest since much of their effort

is aimed at expanding their membership. Furthermore, these unemployment protest groups are often in alliance with other established social and economic reform groups. Recent social theories of "solidarity organization" and "resource mobilization", proposed by Charles Tilly and Anthony Oberschall, are reflected precisely in the organization of these alliances. The unemployment protest bodies are small, close knit groups which interact on a fairly regular basis with other protest groups over issues of mutual concern. These alliances allow for greater mobilization of resources for action (e.g., money, arms, press coverage) than is possible for groups that exist in total seclusion from sympathetic others.

The fate of the current Canadian unemployment - protest proto-movement, made up of groups like COUP, is dependent on external political factors. The role such organizations play in radicalizing the unemployed is, and will continue to be, structurally determined. (I say this since there is no evidence to suggest that the almost anomic culture of the unemployed is changing in the conventional radical direction.) Unfortunately for groups like COUP, a sense of social relevancy can only be achieved if the system fails. Otherwise they are relegated to the political fringes of Canadian society and will continue to remain there despite their attempts to be politically credible.

1. Robert J. Brym, Intellectuals and Politics, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1980, pp. 60-68.
2. Philip Rietted, On Intellectuals: Theoretical Studies, Case Studies, "English Intellectuals and Politics in the 1930's" by Stuart Samuels, Anchor Books, 1970, pp. 213-225.
3. Roger O'Toole, The Precipitous Path: Studies in Political Sects, Peter Martin Associates Ltd., p. 3.
4. ibid., p. 72.
5. Brym, p. 15.
6. John Lofland, Doomsday Cult: A Study of Conversion, Proselytization and Maintenance of Faith, Prentice Hall Inc., 1966, pp. 34-40.
7. O'Toole, p. 53.
8. Ibid., p. 72.
9. Ibid., p. 72.
10. Richard Cloward and Francis Fox Piven, Poor Peoples Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978.
12. Bakke and Samuels, Cloward and Piven all note the role members of the CP and other socialist parties played in unemployment councils and unemployed clubs (eg. Great Britain exclusively).
13. E. Wright Bakke, Citizens Without Work, Yale University Press, 1940, p. 72.

14. Ibid., p. 72.

15. Bakke had noted this had been similar both in America and England. Unemployed clubs according to Bakke most likely suffered from sparse attendance due to the social stigma attached to visiting such clubs.

15. Outbursts of violence have tended to be localized, historically reflected in areas characterized by virtually full unemployment, whether they be rural areas or inner city ghettos i.e. Toxteth in Liverpool; or Brixton in London. Failure to create a more coordinated struggle is sometimes as Cloward and Piven have noted (Poor Peoples Movement: How They Are Regulated) thwarted by the introduction of welfare measures by the state.

17. Some of this analysis is based on comparative studies of political situations in Weimar, Germany and contemporary Britain Jordan, Mass Unemployment and the Future of Britain (1982), p. 180. Sinfield, What Unemployment Means (1981), p. 122 notes the success of the National front in organizing unemployed inner city youth in Great Britain as a disturbing trend. Other studies, most notably Scholzman and Verba, Injury to Insult (1978), and Sinfield and Showler, The Workless State (1980), note that the long-term unemployed if given the chance would prefer to start their own small business. Scholzman and Verba note the unemployed tend to identify more strongly with the American Dream than other occupational segments.

18. Brym, theker, Touraine et al. have noted the rise of the bodies in contributing to institutionalized leftism, especially in the educational and non-governmental sectors of society.

19. Recent journalistic accounts have noted the inter-connectness of extremist right wing groups in North America. An anti-Klan demonstration in Greensboro, North Carolina (1980) was put down by members of the K.K.K. and the American Nazi Party. A group known as the Order was known to have links to a white supremacist religious body and a farmbelt survivalist network known as Posse Comitatus Village Voice Oct. 22 1985. Furthermore an alliance recently was exposed by Mother Jones magazine (January

1986) between the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon and the Christian Fundamentalist Right who accept considerable sums of money from Moon for the political campaigns of teaching New Right political candidates in the United States. What makes this case interesting is that the Christian Right is accepting money from a decidedly anti-Christian and anti-God body in terms of religious doctrine.

20. Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1978, p. 204.
21. This is a common, expressed statement of many Canadian unemployed organizations. The atypicality of these organizations and their rhetoric will be discussed in a later chapter.
22. Brym, p. 24.
23. Ibid., pp. 24-31.
24. Gramsci, Notebooks, p. 199.
26. Anthony Giddens, Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, structure, and contradiction, p. 202, University of California Press, Berkley.
25. Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. Regulating the Poort: The Function of Public Welfare Page 8.
26. Carl J. Cuneo. "State, Class and Reserve Labour: The Case of the Canadian Unemployment Insurance Act 1941." Canadian Review fo Sociology and Anthropology 16,2 1979, p. 170.
27. The poverty riots in Britain have received tremendous publicity over the past few years. Unemployment has been posited as the major cause for the riots by many social critics and certainly the urban areas in which the rioting occurred were characterized by exceedingly high unemployment but the role of other factors still remains unclear in these riots. Undue police harassment of minorities, racial tensions, over-crowding are also oft-cited reasons for the unrest. The inner-city riots may be a manifestation

of the rapid decline in social services and a general rise in discontent once something expected has been taken away. Further study would be more conclusive in this area.

28. S.V. Devine, "The Sociological and Social Effects of Youth Unemployment" as found in Unemployment: Its Impact on Body and Soul, Prepared by Sharon Kirsh, 1983 Canadian Mental Health Association.
29. Edward J. Mulawka "The Price of Youth Unemployment" Social Perspectives, Vol. 2, No. 3., Community Services Council, November 1983.
30. refers to the unemployed riots of 1932 which toppled responsible government in Newfoundland.
31. This seems to be true in American. Robert Taggart in his work Hardship: The Welfare Consequences of Labor Market Problems has shown that despite increases in transfer payments to the poor and working poor during the seventies the safety net became less effective in reducing poverty. In fact poverty actually grew thus placing greater strains on the safety net.
32. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. Regulating the Poor: The Function of Public Welfare. Page 8.

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