INTRODUCTION

This study confronts a problem in labour history revolving around the place of women in the paid workforce which has been present in western society since industrialisation, which in Australia's case dates from the 1860s and 1870s. This problem emerges forcefully over one critical debate: the rate for women's wages compared with that of men's. An analysis of the Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) 1937-1948, brings into focus the complex questions associated with the issue. Women's place in the paid workforce had to be reconciled with their assigned primary role in society as wives and mothers and the designated duty of the male as the family breadwinner who had an unassailable right to paid employment at higher rates of pay than women.

It was clear during the period of early industrialisation that many male trade unionists would have preferred to have excluded women from the paid workforce as far as possible, since they represented a source of unfair competition where employers were prepared to make maximum use of their cheaper labour, particularly in industries such as clothing and textiles. Rather than excluding women, it has been argued that male unionists instead managed to restrict women to a narrow range of employment and to deny them access to skilled positions by allowing only young men to become apprenticed in the majority of trades. Trade unions existed to protect the interests of their predominantly male employees, regarding women as temporary workers.

only, with little concern for long term gains. The interests of the male worker, therefore, were paramount.

The preparedness of employers to exploit the cheap labour of women contributed to tensions between men and women in paid employment, coming to the fore at the turn of the century. A solution to this exploitation of female labour lay in the attainment of equal pay, yet the majority of trade unions expressed little interest in the issue: they preferred to exclude women from the male workplace wherever possible. Those women in the trade union movement concerned with improving female working conditions were anxious to achieve equal pay as a means of gaining economic equality for women. They found it difficult, however, to gain prominence for such concerns within the union movement, and harder still to win the degree of sympathy that could have underwritten structural change.

A study of the CAEP demonstrates that these issues were still unresolved during the 1930s and 1940s and while workers in some unions saw the advantages of gaining equal pay, the majority stood aloof.

The CAEP, the first organisation in Australia to lobby solely on the platform of equal pay, focuses upon an issue of major concern to both women and men in the paid workforce. Such a concentration on a question central in women's history is part of a recent departure from the traditional concerns of labour historians who until the early 1970s tended to concentrate on the study of institutions, including unions and the Australian Labor Party (ALP), in which women,
or women's special interests rarely rated extended analysis. With
the resurgence of the feminist movement during the 1970s, historians
such as Anne Summers, Beverley Kingston and Miriam Dixson expressed
the view that a new social history was required to explain the op-
pression of women and reveal their contribution to the history of
social structures and thus to the history of societies. Interest in
women's experience in the paid workforce has been sustained into the
1980s and is now considered an increasingly significant area of re-
search in its own right. Without such work, John Merritt has
argued, it was impossible to answer questions that were central to
mainstream history. Two examples cited were Ray Markey who investi-
gated the role of cheap female labour in the process of capital accu-
mulation in the Australian manufacturing industry as it developed
with tariff protection. Ann Curthoys contributed to a general dis-
cussion of the relationship between the sexual division of labour in
the paid workforce and in the home. Her analysis places Margaret

2. Some examples are: H.V. Evatt, Australian Labour Leader: the
Story of W.A. Holman and the Labour Movement. Angus and Robert-
son, Sydney, 1940. Brian Fitzpatrick, A Short History of the
Australian Labour Movement. Rawson, Melbourne, 1944. Robin
Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics. A Study of Eastern

3. Anne Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police. The Colonization
Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann. Women and Work
Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia, 1788-1975. Ring-
wood, 1976. See also John Merritt, "Labour History", in G.
Osborne and W.F. Mandle (eds), New History. Allen and Unwin,
Sydney, 1982, p.3.

4. For instance: Kay Hargreaves, Women at Work. Penguin, Ringwood
1982. Anne Game and Rosemary Pringle, Gender at Work. Allen and
Unwin, Sydney, 1983. Edna Ryan, Two-thirds of a Man: Women and
Arbitration in New South Wales 1902-8. Hale & Iremonger,
Sydney, 1984.
Power's discussion in a broader explanatory framework, linking questions about the workforce to questions relating to the family.

Concentration on the issue of equal pay places women and the value accorded their paid labour at the centre of the argument. Other issues arise from consideration of the question. The male view of his position in the paid workforce in relation to women is highlighted together with the strength of the ideology of motherhood. Such issues can scarcely be discarded as marginal, a criticism sometimes levelled at the subject matter chosen by writers of "women's" history.

The CAEP has previously attracted scholarly interest, but has not yet been the focus of a major study. Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon mentioned the organisation in their work, Gentle Invaders. Australian Women at Work 1788-1974, which considered how women came to be paid low wages for such a long period of time and the extent to which the sex-segregated nature of the workforce contributed to this situation. They focused upon two major elements of women's position in paid employment and noted Muriel Heagney's efforts through the CAEP to "chip away" at the trade union movement, putting in the ground work which led to "showy but unfortunately shortlived resolutions in favour of equal pay and opportunity". Ryan and Conlon's analysis occupied only


6. Kay Daniels, "Women's History" in Osborne and Mandle (eds), New History, p.43.

7. Ryan and Conlon, Gentle Invaders, p.121.
a very small portion of the volume, although they demonstrated acute awareness of the problems labour women faced. My study of the CAEP analyses its organisation and tactics within the broad framework that Ryan and Conlon have encompassed, informed by other brief studies of interest.

In an article-length theoretically interesting piece, Penny Johnson considered the CAEP with respect to gender and class. She used the CAEP as a case study to highlight the Marxist feminist theoretical explanations of gender divisions in the paid workforce. She dismissed the "reserve army" thesis as inadequate as a means of explaining women's position in the paid labour force, arguing that it ignored the sex-segregated nature of the workplace. Labour segmentation theory was more applicable to the situation of women in paid employment. In her view the war situation brought into sharp focus the issues involved and for a short time it appeared that the old attitudes and prejudices could be swept aside.


9. This theory maintained that the labour market could be divided vertically, according to differentiations in the occupational hierarchy, and horizontally according to different types of occupations. The workers placed in these categories were historically determined by race, ethnicity, sex and skill. This segmentation operated primarily for the benefit of capital, but capital's requirements did not ensure that women should remain in the lower sections of the labour market and in the lowly paid occupational sectors. This was due to other factors such as pre-existing gender ideologies and division of labour under capitalism, to women's failure to organise industrially and to their relative inability to gain access to "skill". Theresa Brennan, "Women at Work" in Journal of Australian Political Economy, no.1, 1977.
Johnson drew attention to the patriarchal attitudes of the Arbitration Court, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Women's Employment Board (WEB) which was established in March 1942 to determine the wage rates of women taking up positions previously designated male. She pinpointed the tension within the CAEP between the feminist and trade union attitudes to equal pay, contending that the differing views on the question provided the organisation with its dynamism yet at the same time sowed the seeds of its demise. The class perspective is analysed through the differing approaches of the United Associations of Women (UAW) and the CAEP to the implementation of equal pay.

My stance is to analyse the CAEP as a pressure group from its inception to its demise, seeking to persuade the government to accede to its request. Muriel Heagney's influence as the prime instigator of the equal pay organisation is investigated as she epitomises the problems that labour women encountered when attempting to focus upon industrial issues which were of concern to women. I consider the means by which the CAEP attempted to realise its goal, emphasising the weight of the opposition it confronted and the fact that the trade unions intended to maintain the supremacy of the male worker, relegating women's concerns to second place. I draw attention to the role of the Government as an employer of female labour anxious to curtail costs, thereby demonstrating that its priorities were those of private employers who resisted the pressure for equal pay at every opportunity.

Whilst not challenging Johnson's arguments, accepting that the ideological tension within the CAEP together with the disagreements
with the UAW were obstacles to success, I contend that Muriel Heagney's dislike of Jessie Street, the President of the UAW further exacerbated the situation to the point where the CAEP regarded the middle-class feminist organisation as one of its enemies. My analysis is therefore informed by Johnson's insights, but I offer a detailed exposition of the CAEP's attempts to realise its goal in a society which was unprepared to accord women equality in the paid workforce. My contention is that the majority of women accepted the principle that a male had a greater right to paid employment and higher wages than a female.

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Three other studies which referred to aspects of the CAEP and Muriel Heagney, pointed to the role of the Arbitration Court in the perpetuation of the sexual division of the paid workforce, the different approaches to the issue of equal pay demonstrated by the UAW and the CAEP, which informed Johnson's work, and the influence of Muriel Heagney and her efforts to achieve equal pay in an environment that was not always supportive. Penny Ryan and Tim Rowse, in their article 'Women, Arbitration and the Family' and Patricia Ranald in her piece, 'Feminism and Class' have touched upon important aspects of the CAEP which placed limits upon its ability to achieve its aims. Jennie Bremner, too, in her publication, 'In the Cause of Equality', high-

lighted the limits to which Heagney was subject by her total devotion to the labour movement. I expand upon the issues they have raised, while not disputing their overall claims, but qualifying some.

An earlier struggle for equal pay researched by Melanie Raymond demonstrated clearly the attitude of male Labor Party and trade union officials to attempts by women in the labour movement to secure a share of power. She has drawn a convincing picture of a labour movement dominated by males who believed that women should defer to their greater wisdom and experience and not attempt any action which might destroy the unity of the party. The minutes of the Women's Trade Union Convention of 1913 exposed male attitudes to equal pay. While male delegates expressed abhorrence at the exploitation of female labour, they believed that women were less efficient workers than men. In Raymond's view male opposition to equal pay arose from a sexual and social ideology which necessarily held the economic interests of male workers to be paramount. My analysis of the CAEP will maintain that this situation still existed in the 1930s and 1940s.

An analysis of the CAEP as a pressure group allows insights into its organisation, ideology, membership, leadership and finances to


ascertain how these elements assisted its cause or contributed to its lack of success.

My argument is that the struggle of the CAEP to realise its aims exposes the difficulties that women faced in the labour movement when they canvassed support for issues which were of particular concern to the female workforce. The CAEP's failure to accomplish its aims lay in the determination of male interests to preserve their privileged position in the paid workforce. Whilst the "ideology of motherhood" prevailed in the community with the male deemed to be the breadwinner in a family, women's right to paid employment could be disputed and therefore their industrial concerns accorded a low priority, as women themselves did not display sufficient interest. The rights of the male worker were to be secured over those of the female. As a pressure group the CAEP failed to attract the bulk of the union movement to its cause: not all union members subscribed to the CAEP aim of equal pay as a means of securing social justice for women workers. The organisation was restricted by limited resources in terms of personnel, time and money.

Chapter one sets the scene for the establishment of the CAEP by discussing attitudes in general to the position of women in the workforce and the definite sex-segregation of the workplace restricting women to a narrow range of employment. It examines also the question of how this equal pay body evolved from the trade union movement rather than from the feminists, pinpointing the significance of Muriel Heagney. The aims, organisations, ideology, membership and finances of the CAEP are discussed.
Chapter two traces the attempts the CAEP made between 1937 and the end of 1941 to effect its aims by applying pressure to governments, making submissions to the Arbitration Court, holding conferences, publishing leaflets and interviewing candidates for Federal elections to ascertain their attitudes towards equal pay. It considers the effect the onset of World War II, with its implications for the workforce, had on the tactics of the CAEP.

Chapter three focuses upon the years 1942 to 1944, when the impetus for the fight for equal pay was lost due to the establishment of the WEP and the problems it posed for the CAEP in terms of its members disagreeing on the extent to which the WEP met the expectations of those agitating for equal pay. Dissension within the organisation on questions such as co-operation with other bodies working for equal pay diverted its energies from vigorous, direct lobbying for the cause.

Chapter four outlines the decline of the organisation between 1945 and 1948 and reflects upon the opposition Muriel Heagney and the CAEP encountered during the course of its existence. Heagney's influence on the organisation is assessed and it is ultimately suggested that the general attitude towards women's participation in the paid workforce which was inextricably linked with their biological role as parents required modification before the goal of equal pay could be realised.
CHAPTER 1

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CAEP

Muriel Heagney must have left the Sargents Meeting Rooms in Market Street, Sydney, on 22 May 1937 satisfied finally that a body dedicated to working for equal pay was to be established. The New South Wales branch of the Federated Clerks' Union called the Equal Pay Conference which affirmed that equal pay for the sexes was a necessary social reform, justified by every consideration of ethics and social justice and capable of immediate application.

The Equal Pay Conference was a culmination of work performed by Muriel Heagney and other feminists on equal pay in addition to a political struggle that had emerged in the Clerks' Union. The national leadership of the Clerks' Union at a conference earlier in the 1930s had adopted a policy of equal pay "to enable men to get jobs". Communists in the New South Wales Branch of the union, Jean Thompson, Rod Hall and John Hughes, led a campaign for an alternative policy based on one rate for the job. Heagney arrived in Sydney in time to be co-opted on to the Clerks' Union Equal Pay Committee before the Equal Pay Conference. The Conference decided that a Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) was to be instituted to conduct a campaign of propaganda and agitation to implement the policy of Equal Pay for the Sexes. To


accomplish this aim an Organising Committee, comprising the Equal Pay Committee responsible for organising the Conference together with the elected members was to establish the Council.

The Organising Committee met at the Chelsea Book Club on 9 June 1937 at 8 p.m. Mr W.E.R. Bates, President of the Clerks' Union, took the Chair. The committee comprised sixteen members from the following organisations: Mrs M. Beirnes from the Australian Women's Movement, Grace L. Scobie and Ruby Rich of the Feminist Club, Jessie Street of the United Associations of Women, Miss H. F. Bennett from the Women's Union of Service, Jean F. Arnott and Charles Drummond of the Public Service Association, Mr S. Ford from the Food Preservers' Union, Mr J. McDowell of the State Unemployed Council. Muriel Heagney, Mr W. E. Rhodes, Mr B.H. McClure, Mr A.E. Evers and John Hughes were the Federated Clerks' Union representatives. Eileen Powell represented the Australian Railways' Union.

The Organising Committee's recommendations, which originated from the Equal Pay Committee of the Clerks' Union, on the structure and composition of the CAEP, were adopted by the CAEP at its first meeting on 14 July 1937 at 8 p.m. at Sargents.

The CAEP's aims began with the statement that women should have the right to earn their living in industry, the professions and the public service and it intended to gain for all workers the legal right to equal occupational wage rates based on the nature of the job

4. Ibid.


and not the sex of the worker. To achieve this aim it urged the enactment of federal and state legislation to provide an increase in the adult female base rate which was fifty-four per cent of the male rate, to equality with the adult male rate. Equal margins for skill and responsibility for male and female workers, irrespective of the ruling base rate for either sex, were to be achieved. Equality of opportunity was to be gained by the removal from the statutes of all clauses which disqualified or limited the entry, training and advancement of women in any occupation or vocation. All unemployed workers were to receive equal rights and benefits, irrespective of sex. Restrictions on the employment of married women were to be removed and their right to economic independence was to be recognised. In the event of the failure to achieve immediately the full male rate, a Clause B made provision for the female base rate to be improved to a greater proportion progressively, so that the rates for men and women would be the same within a relatively short period.

Although the question of equal pay had been raised by both feminists and trade union organisations earlier in the twentieth century, the CAEP was the first group in Australia's history to lobby solely for equal pay for the sexes. The reasons for the establishment of such a Council at this particular time and the fact that the initiative was taken by a trade union rather than a feminist organisation require examination. An overview of the position of women in


8. The Case for Equal Pay, 1940. CAEP leaflet no.2.

the workforce and their place in the labour movement is necessary, however, before such an examination may occur.

In the 1930s, as in earlier decades, women's position in the Australian workforce was considered to be temporary despite the fact that at least thirty per cent of women were workers at any particular time during the first half of the twentieth century. The prevailing "ideology of motherhood" maintained that a woman's role in life was dependent upon her biological attributes; as the bearers of children, it was expected that most women would marry, produce and rear children and maintain the family home, which was to be the haven for the male breadwinner. Therefore, women were more likely to participate in the workforce on a short-term, intermittent or part-time basis. They were employed in a narrow range of occupations such as domestic service, clothing, textile and food industries. Within the working-class family the man's income was the important one. Therefore it was the male who acquired and protected skills and organised for increased pay and improved working conditions.

The union movement reflected these attitudes. When women moved into industry, they were paid at approximately half the male rate. It was argued that since women were physically weaker than men, they were incapable of performing all tasks that were required of men. Unions worked to ensure that women remained in a narrow range of industries and did not compete with men for the same jobs. They


12. Ibid.
endeavoured to protect male workers from the competition of cheap female labour. Justice Henry Bournes Higgins of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration entrenched the view of the male as breadwinner in the Harvester case of 1907 by determining a "living wage" on the basis of the needs of a man, wife and three children. A man was to be paid sufficient money to enable him to support his family in frugal comfort. Conversely, the assumption was that a woman would require less money to maintain herself in reasonable comfort as she was not usually the breadwinner. The Commission defined jobs according to sex. The Mildura Fruit Pickers' Case of 1912 set the precedent. Justice Higgins ruled that women would be paid the male rate if the job was usually performed by a man. Work normally executed by women would be valued at just over fifty per cent of the male rate.

The Harvester decision of 1907 and the Mildura Fruit Pickers' Case of 1912 were to make the goal of equal pay a difficult one to achieve as the notion of the male as the breadwinner was challenged neither by employers nor by unionists.

Nonetheless, some women who were active in the labour movement, such as Ellen Mulcahy (Women Bookbinders' Union), Sara Lewis (Secretary of Female Hotel Club, Restaurant and Caterers Employees' Union) and Minnie Felstead (Secretary of the Domestic Workers' Union) recognised the importance of women being organised industrially to achieve improved working conditions as they were aware of the apathy of their

male leaders to the problems of female workers. They started by encouraging women to become representatives of female workers within male dominated unions. In 1910 the Shirt and Collarmakers' Union, the Dressmakers', the White Workers', the Confectioners' and the Women Bookbinders' Unions were formed. A female section of the Federated Clerks' Union was established in 1911. By the end of 1912, thirty-one forums existed for the representation of female workers either as independent unions, as female sections of an existing male-dominated union or as women acting as representatives within a male union. After building a power-base among women workers they lobbied the Executive Committees of the Labor Party and the Trades Hall to permit women to exert greater influence and to act with greater autonomy within the labour movement. The Labor Party was eventually forced to consider the question of equal pay after the Commercial Clerks' Wages Board handed down a decision granting equal pay for female clerks and typists. This was a claim lodged by the Federated Clerks' Union in 1912 to protect men's wages and jobs from the encroachment of increasing numbers of women in that industry. The demand for equal pay became greater when the Clerks' Wages Board decision was overturned on appeal by Justice Cussen in February 1913. Sara Lewis and her supporters then organised for an Equal Pay Convention to be held in Melbourne in 1913. This was the first time the Labor Party had met


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.
to formulate a policy on equal pay. Lewis believed the aim of the Convention was to pass a motion that a Bill providing for women to receive equal pay should be introduced into the State parliament and that the word "sex" should be eliminated from the Factories Act. The Convention, however, supposedly a women's assembly, was stacked by male representatives who were opposed to equal pay. These men dominated the proceedings and despite the efforts of Lewis and Felstead, the motion was ultimately defeated by fourteen votes to six. These Labor women's agitation for equal pay led to them being informed by the Party Executive that the Women's Organising Committee (WOC) had no constitutional standing and was a "bogus body". They were ordered to cease functioning immediately. Muriel Heagney was a member of the WOC and attended the equal pay convention.

As it became increasingly obvious that women would continue to participate in the paid workforce in greater numbers, unions comprising a large female membership demonstrated interest in the question of equal pay. They could be relied upon to support its implementation as a means of excluding women from the workforce, as men would always be employed in preference to women if their rates of pay were identical, they believed. In 1919 the Arbitration Court awarded equal pay to a few women in the clothing trades where it was considered men could be driven out of employment. In 1926, when Mr Justice Webb refused an equal pay claim by the Federated Liquor and Allied Trades Employees' Union on behalf of barmaids and barmen, he said:

I can understand an equal wage being awarded in an industry where it is desired to push women out of the employment. But that object is disclaimed in this industry. 21

Again in 1928, Mr Justice Drake-Brockman refused an equal pay claim from the Amalgamated Clothing and Allied Trades Union of Australia, stating that he saw no reason to depart from the usual practices of the Court.

Therefore it would appear that the only justification for a union to apply for equal pay was as an attempt to exclude women from employment. The majority of unions acted primarily in the interests of their male workers who were assumed to have a greater right to a job than female workers. Ann Curthoys argued that this was a perfectly logical attitude as it was the male who earned the higher income, for he would be more likely to be in continuous employment and support a family financially. It was more important, therefore, for the male rather than the female worker to acquire and protect skills, and to organise for increased pay and working conditions. She maintained that the class struggle over men's skills, wage levels and job security was sharper than that over women's job security, status and pay. In practice, this often meant protecting men's jobs from inroads made by women who, because of their cheapness, undermined the male wage levels. She argued therefore, that the desire of male workers to exclude women from "male occupations" was not merely the result of male sexism.


22. Ibid.

but a logical consequence of the man having to support dependants, which was ultimately a consequence of the ideology of motherhood which both sexes shared.

The economic depression of 1929-1933, with its high levels of unemployment heightened the concerns of those who believed that women were ousting men from the workplace because of their lower labour costs. However, it was the building and construction industry, a major employer of men, which suffered worst from the economic downturn, rather than the female dominated industries of clothing and confectionery. This occurrence assists in refuting the "reserve army" thesis which maintains that women form a reserve army of labour which is expelled in an economic crisis. The female labour force continued to increase slowly during the depression while the labour force actually declined in 1930 and 1931 and participation rates of men fell.

According to the economist Margaret Power the sex-typing of occupations is crucial to an explanation of why the depression created greater unemployment for males than females. Most women were employed in the service industries and the manufacturing of light consumer goods. Unemployment was less severe for domestic servants, shop assistants and clerical workers though many women worked only part-time or at reduced wages. Women factory workers were employed in light industries: eighty-six per cent in textiles, clothing, food,


26. Ibid.
drink, tobacco, paper, stationery, printing and bookbinding.

Nonetheless, the prevailing belief of the time held that women were taking men's jobs, and that therefore they were responsible for the worsening male unemployment. Women workers, the less organised segment of the labour force, were the obvious scapegoats of this period. The Sydney Morning Herald mounted a campaign to discourage women from seeking employment and the Women's Weekly pursued a similar course. Hostility was institutionalised in the practices of trade unions and government officials. Trade union opposition to women workers usually took the form of demands for equal pay. During the depression trade union moves to oust women from the workforce gathered strength. In Queensland the trade unions campaigned against married women wage-earners, but were to exempt unhappily married women. Married women were dismissed from state teaching services. In Victoria, a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly was instructed to inquire into the effect of the increasing ratio of femininity in industry on male employment and whether equal pay should not be introduced in many industries.

The ACTU, the highest level of the trade union movement in Australia, reflected the attitudes of its members and represented the


30. Ibid.

most highly skilled and organised section of the workforce. These sections of the working class accepted the middle-class ideal of the family with the woman firmly entrenched in the home. The majority of trade union officials implicitly believed in the ideology of the family wage concept and were loath to recognise the contribution women made to industrial life. However, at the 1937 Basic Wage Enquiry, the ACTU presented for the first time its case for equal pay, requesting as a first step, for all female wages to be fixed at sixty per cent of the male rate in place of the existing fifty to fifty-four per cent. This action represented an acknowledgement of the need to agitate for equal pay as a means of protecting the rights of male workers.

An answer to one question seems apparent here. The CAEP was the union movement's reaction to the problem. Nonetheless, the question is more complicated when we consider the role of Muriel Heagney in the establishment of the CAEP. She was both a trade unionist and feminist. Muriel Heagney was born in Brisbane in 1885. Her father, Pat Heagney, was an early member of the Australian Workers' Union. He was a publican and later a carpenter. Her mother was Annie Agnes, born Currie. The family moved to Melbourne at the turn of the century. Pat Heagney was a founding member of the Richmond branch of the Victorian Political Labor Council in 1902 and later assumed the position of secretary of the central executive between 1904 and 1910. Muriel was educated at a Richmond convent and subsequently became a primary school teacher. She worked as a teacher until 1915, when she quit, stating that she disliked the job. Her next position was as a clerk.

for the Defence Department and there being no female rate, she received equal pay.

Muriel Heagney's involvement in the labour movement began in 1906 when she joined the Richmond branch of the Political Labor Council and continued for most of her long life. By 1909 she was a delegate to the Women's Organising Committee and attended the first Victorian Labor Women's Conference in July 1909 at the Victorian Trades Hall. Forty-eight delegates from all over Victoria attended. Her Labor Party and union credentials were formidable. As a member of the Clerks' Union in both Victoria and New South Wales she was a delegate to the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, an executive member of the union in both states, a delegate to the ALP conference and member of the central executive of both states. She was prominent in the women's section of the ALP, becoming President of the Labor Women's 34 Federal Executive from 1929-30.

Heagney represented the Australian labour movement overseas. In 1925 she attended the first British Commonwealth Labor Conference in London as a delegate of the federal ALP and Victorian Trades Unions. She represented the Victorian ALP and Victorian and New South Wales trade unions at the first pan-Pacific Women's Conference at Honolulu 35 in 1928. Earlier, as Secretary of the Australian Relief Fund for Stricken Europe in 1921-23, Muriel travelled to Russia, then Geneva, where she worked briefly for the International Labour Organisation.


34. Career of Muriel Heagney, CRS M1415, Item H, Pt.2, Box 25, Australian Archives, Canberra, A.C.T.


Her commitment to an improvement in women's working conditions was evident in her representation of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the Metal Trades Unions on a government Committee of Inquiry into the employment of women in the iron trades at Sunshine, Victoria in 1927 and she represented the federal unions before the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage for all states, 1919-1920. She obviously felt that she could make a greater contribution by being elected to parliament, as she contested the Booroondara by-election in 1933, but was unsuccessful, a usual result for any woman candidate.

Ideologically, Muriel Heagney would be aligned with the socialists of the early twentieth century as she appeared to espouse the ideals of Frederic Engels and Auguste Bebel in their attitude to the "woman question". She believed that economic equality was a necessary prerequisite for women's liberation and quoted Engels in her submission to the Arbitration Court on behalf of the Clothing Trades Union in 1927. She stated that it was primarily a demand for complete economic independence for women workers and a frank declaration that a woman's contribution to production was equally valuable to that of a man. She quoted history stating that in the most primitive societies woman enjoyed equality but as our civilisation developed she lost all her rights and sank so deeply into subjugation that by the sixth century A.D. even her right to the possession of a soul was seriously disputed. She then gradually managed to improve her position

38. Ibid.
by ceaseless striving until the present when she enjoyed equal rights in most spheres of life. The notable exception to this situation was industry, but woman was slowly but surely making progress there.

It was Heagney's contention that the prerogative of a woman to economic independence must be recognised, as every worker had the right to enjoy the highest possible standard of living in her own right and not merely share in the pleasures and comforts through the beneficence of her menfolk. The basic wage did not satisfy the needs of a man, wife and three children. It was not based on the ascertained cost of living, but was in fact a single man's wage. In the process of specialisation and development of machinery, inequality in physical powers ceased to reflect itself in productive capacity and women in many sections of manufacturing were equal if not superior to men as factors in wealth production. Finally, she asserted that a large number of women had dependants and made immeasurable sacrifices to meet the obligations society forced upon them.

Heagney's concern for the economic situation of women was evident in the formation of the Unemployed Girls' Relief Movement in 1930, which established sewing centres where women worked for unemployed families in return for a relief allowance. Many unemployed people received no benefit, particularly women. In her book Are Women Taking Men's Jobs, Heagney stated that although about twenty-eight

40. Clothing Trades Union Claim for Equal Basic Wage for Men and Women, 1927. Cost of Living Memorandum by Muriel Heagney. Heagney Papers, MS 9106, Box 1159/1(a). La Trobe Library

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p.3.
per cent of unemployed men received government sustenance, only about 43
three per cent of unemployed women were granted such payments.

To counter propaganda against the employment of women, Heagney
wrote her book. In it she systematically set out the working condi-
tions of women in all trades and professions and demonstrated starkly 44
the unsatisfactory conditions under which women laboured. She empha-
sised again women's right to economic independence. Through the pub-
lication of this volume equal pay became a national issue and provided
the impetus for the establishment of the CAEP in July 1937.

Although a feminist, Heagney chose to fight for women's economic
equality within the labour movement and demonstrated disdain for
middle-class feminists whom she believed did not understand the needs
of working women. She distinguished working women from those engaged
in "leisure activities", noting that they usually held their meetings
during the day, thus excluding women who were in paid employment from
participating in such groups. In this stance she resembled the posi-
tion taken by German and French socialist women in the early twentieth
century who refused to co-operate with bourgeois feminists who accord-
ing to Clara Zetkin, a German socialist, shared the class interests of 45
the capitalists. The issue of domestic servants was one on which
working-class women could not agree with the middle- and upper-class
women. In Australia, feminist organisations emphasised their non-party
political status and believed that the gender division in society was

44. Ibid.
 paramount over class allegiance. Labor women posed the different interests of men and women as being contained within the common, long-term working-class political struggle. In the United Kingdom an alliance was struck between the feminists and labour. This was dependent upon the Labour Party making a commitment to women's suffrage.

However, Heagney became a member of the United Associations (UAW), a feminist organisation, when she went to Sydney in 1936 and was elected to the council in 1937 and was also one of the leaders of the Like Conditions of Work Committee. Therefore it appeared that she was prepared to co-operate with middle-class women's groups in order to further the interests of women workers. She was to disagree later with the President of the UAW on the most appropriate means of achieving equal pay and subsequently looked upon the UAW as an enemy of the CAEP.

As a female member of the labour movement Muriel Heagney was destined to suffer the frustrations of other women who sought to fight for women's rights within that forum. Nevertheless she remained loyal to it and continued to seek support for her aims. Jennie Bremner argues that her links with the labour movement both assisted and hampered her efforts. Had she not been part of the labour movement, she would not have gained the support of the unions to establish the CAEP. Yet, while she remained closely tied to the unions and the ALP she was constrained from using her considerable organisational skills

46. Sowerwine, "The Socialist Women's Movement from 1850 to 1940", in Bridenthal, Koonz and Stuart (eds), Becoming Visible: Women in European History, p.413.

47. Winifred Mitchell, 50 Years of Feminist Achievement, UAW, Sydney, 1979, p.20.
to politicise and mobilise women against the forces of anti-feminism. Such action would have inevitably involved her in a confrontation with union officialdom, argues Bremner.

Bremner maintains that Heagney saw equal pay as the pivotal reform upon which all others would depend. It was "the most momentous question that has confronted the women of all races for generations". Heagney believed that occupational rates would achieve economic emancipation, which would in turn liberate women socially and politically. Wage inequality was the basic obstacle to equality of status and opportunity. She stated too that complete equality of the sexes was only possible in a socialist society. Bremner argues that Heagney's belief in wage equality as the solution to all women's problems was naive or exaggerated and wonders how acutely Heagney really located the sources of female oppression. Her purportedly narrow conception of sexual inequality failed to demonstrate how "the rate for the job" would overcome sex segregation in the workforce: Heagney seemed to believe that this was simply a matter of removing "all the legal and formal barriers that prevented women competing with men on equal terms in all occupations". Nonetheless her strong belief in the concept that occupational rates were the solution to women's


49. Ibid., p.298.


51. Ibid., p.185.

52. Ibid.

problems of inequality led her to dedicate large amounts of time and energy to the cause, and she would brook no compromise.

As has been indicated, Heagney at times attempted to co-operate with middle-class feminists and was a member of the UAW for a period, although she remained sceptical of its ability to understand the needs of working women. The UAW counted among its aims the achievement of equal pay. This organisation was formed in 1929 by Jessie Street, who was a member of a wealthy pioneering family and married Kenneth Street, a barrister who ultimately achieved the position of Chief Justice of New South Wales. The UAW was an amalgamation of three conservative feminist groups: the Women’s Service Club, the New South Wales Women Voters’ Association and the Women’s League of New South Wales. Its membership comprised self-employed professional or semi-professional women in addition to those who were not engaged in a paid occupation, but who were married to employers or professionals. Jessie Street conducted her own business and employed servants to manage her domestic affairs. She was free therefore to pursue her public interests in a manner not known to working-class women.

The UAW’s ideology was consistent with middle-class feminist organisations, emphasising its non-party political stance with the aim of uniting women of all political persuasions to support feminist issues. Feminism cut across class lines and political differences, the UAW believed. It argued that all occupations and opportunities should be available to women and maintained that women’s lower status and earning power were socially imposed and bore no relation to biology or nature. Changes in education, legislation, arbitration, custom and practice could achieve equality between men and women. The UAW’s
vision of social change was in the tradition of the Victorian liberal John Stuart Mill. At the same time women were accorded a special role as nurturers of children and homemakers who were entitled to economic independence from their husbands. A married woman's right to work was defended as a matter of principle. However, it was also maintained that if married women who worked at home received their own incomes, few would wish to enter the paid workforce. The UAW sought to raise the status of domestic work as a career for young women through formal training and improved conditions for domestic servants. This aim was clearly in opposition to trade union women who would be reluctant to recommend domestic work to any young woman.

The UAW advocated equal pay. In 1935 it favoured an equal but lower basic wage for men and women, calculated on the needs of two adults and one child. Child endowment was to be provided for other children, funded by taxation of employers. In 1936 it changed its policy to support a minimum wage based on the needs of two adults, with child endowment to cover all children. The trade union movement opposed these policies on the basis that they recommended a lowering of the existing basic wage which was already considered too low. In 1937 the UAW suggested that the female basic wage be increased from fifty-four per cent of the male rate to sixty per cent and increased thereafter by five per cent per annum.

The UAW was not the first feminist group in Australia to espouse equal pay. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), established

54. Ranald, "Feminism and Class", in Bevege, James and Shute (eds), Worth Her Salt, p.276.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., p.277.
in 1887, had become involved in a range of social issues relating to women's social position. In 1893 it had begun to advocate equal pay "as a matter of justice for both sexes". The WCTU's interest in the issue was sharpened by the depression of the 1890s which had increased both the prevalence and severity of "sweating". So meagre were the wages in the clothing trades that the WCTU feared them to be a direct cause of immorality, forcing women into prostitution to supplement their grossly inadequate pay. This theme was echoed by Angela Booth, an activist and promoter of eugenics in the 1920s, who argued for equal pay as a means of preventing women from stooping to prostitution. Her contention was that as women had only two marketable assets, their labour and their sex, equal pay would eliminate "the sale of woman's sex, in marriage or out of it".

It is evident then, that feminists regarded equal pay as necessary for both economic and moral reasons. Nonetheless, by the 1930s, feminist groups had achieved no greater success than any other organisations interested in the achievement of equal pay for the sexes and they had not really attempted to forge links with working-class women in the factories, although Jessie Street became conscious of the need to co-operate with women of all social classes if they were to achieve their aims. Therefore, the existence of an organisation devoted solely to the issue of equal pay was one in which feminists


58. Grant McBurnie, 'Angela Booth: The Importance of Being Well Bred', in Lake and Kelly (eds), Double Time, p.316.

could participate. Nevertheless class differences and the personalities of Muriel Heagney and Jessie Street made it difficult for the middle-class feminists and the labour women to maintain a united front in the fight for equal pay.

At the establishment of the CAEP, feminist groups affiliated with it, although its major support was forthcoming from the trade union movement. Nonetheless it is important to realise that it did not receive the wholehearted support of all trade unions. It was noted that fifty-three organisations affiliated with the CAEP. In 1930, 362 unions were recorded as existing in Australia. Not all of the organisations which co-operated with the CAEP were unions; therefore just over ten per cent of unions were represented on the CAEP. Although only a relatively small percentage of unions demonstrated interest in the issue, differing views were discernible on the need to achieve equal pay. Councillor Cramer representing the Sydney City Council presented the "male" view when he indicated that his support for equal pay rested on the belief that it was a means whereby women could be removed from industry to secure jobs for unemployed youth.

On the other hand, Muriel Heagney, delegate of the Clerks' Union, and Jean Arnott, representing the Public Service Association, regarded equal pay as a question of social justice. A resolution was passed that equal pay was deemed to be a necessary social reform and that a deputation comprising one delegate from every organisation with sup-


62. Ibid.
porting prominent citizens should arrange to wait upon the leaders of the federal and state governments to place before them certain proposals that the respective Arbitration Acts be amended immediately to provide for occupational rates in all awards and industrial agreements and that such scales of wages or salaries were not conditioned by the sex of the employees.

The CAEP was organised on formal lines. It was to elect Joint Presidents, a man and a woman, with a Secretary, Assistant Secretary and a Treasurer. All positions were honorary. The Council was to comprise four Commissions with convenors and would include the whole personnel of the CAEP. There was provision for each Commission to be divided into committees charged with the responsibility of handling any part of its functions. Reports of committees were to be made to its Commission and refined before final presentation to the full Council. The Commissions were Organisation, Finance, Publicity and Research. The Organisation Commission's brief was to establish sub-committees in the suburbs and other areas; to arrange public meetings in conjunction with sympathetic organisations; to prepare leaflets and petitions and to organise a large mass public meeting for demonstration; it was to consider the possibility of factory and office meetings; to prepare demands on all political parties and to arrange a combined deputation to the Government.

The Finance Commission's role was to "provide the sinews of war and its functions so obvious as to require little amplification". It

64. Minutes of meeting of Organising Committee, 9 June 1937, Heagney Papers, MS9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-1940. Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library
was to ensure that the CAEP received sufficient funds to support its activities and to maintain its finances in acceptable order."

The Publicity Commission's tasks were to prepare continuous statements to the press; to use the broadcast network, to advertise the activities of other committees by publishing meeting dates and to produce relevant reports and information on the issue of equal pay. It should aim to gain maximum publicity for the cause.

The Research Commission's aim was to be representative of each industry in which women were employed and its first task was to compile a questionnaire for despatch to all organisations and public bodies, the information from which was to assist the Committee with the compilation of valuable material. Members of the Commission were to collect data from such sources as Statistical Reports, Commonwealth Arbitration Commission Reports, New South Wales Industrial Reports, Parliamentary Papers, trade union experience and books on women in industry. The essential material for the CAEP's propaganda was to emanate from this body. The following subjects were the issues of highest priority: protective legislation, prohibitions on women's labour, exemptions, women in men's industries, men in women's industries, juvenile employment, opportunity, status and pay in the public service, Russian women in industry. The Equal Pay Committee of the Clerks' Union stressed that the trade union movement was the basis of the organisation, so it was important for the CAEP to work to strengthen those organisations.

65. Minutes of meeting of Organising Committee, 9 June 1937, op.cit.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
The CAEP's aims were ambitious, given the voluntary nature of the organisation. However, it did manage to collect much evidence which was used by trade unions in equal pay submissions to the Arbitration Court. It was to be in this area that Muriel Heagney's previous involvement in the issue proved most valuable. Nonetheless, it would never have the resources in manpower or money to achieve its program.

It was noted that at the first meeting of the CAEP, over thirty organisations were represented. Nevertheless a closer examination of the elected office bearers and members of Commissions indicated that a smaller number were actively involved. The Public Service Association, the Clerks' Union, the Teachers' Federation, the United Associations of Women, the Textile Workers', the Rubber Workers', the Postal Workers', the Australian Railways' and the Food Preservers' Unions were all represented. Therefore, it indicated that those unions which counted a large number of women as members were most committed to the cause, whether for reasons of social justice or for the protection of male jobs. Muriel Heagney argued that male workers' conditions could be eroded by the cheap labour of women. This, therefore, was a most convincing reason for male unionists to support equal pay. It was recorded that between 1919 and 1939 the clothing and textile industry accounted for more than half of all female factory workers in Sydney. That industry was one of the few in which


females outnumbered males. By 1949 sixty-six per cent were women.
In 1939 sixty per cent of female clothing workers belonged to unions in New South Wales. Women were employed in the areas of food and drink, printing/paper, electrical apparatus in addition to the clothing and textiles.

The Clerks' Union had in addition to Muriel Heagney as Joint President, a representative on most Commissions. A. E. Evers on Finance, John Hughes on Publicity and Muriel Heagney on Research. Subsequent presidents and secretaries were members of the founding organisations. Una Ellison, the inaugural secretary, was a member of the Equal Status Committee of the Teachers' Federation. Nerida Cohen, a barrister and member of the UAW was elected Assistant Secretary/Treasurer. Joan Bourne, a member of the New South Wales Public Service Association, assumed the position of secretary when Una Ellison resigned in March 1938 due to ill health. Muriel Heagney became secretary in September 1939 and remained in the position until the CAEP's demise. Therefore, it would appear that in its initial stages the most prominent members of the CAEP represented "white collar"


71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., p.34.

73. Robert Day, Joint President from 1940 to its demise, was a member of the Rubber Workers' Union, Eileen Powell, a member of the Australian Railways' Union, Lucy Woodcock from the Teachers' Federation, Charles Drummond was a member of the Public Service Association and Agnes (Topsy) Small was a delegate of the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union.

unions. However, there were exceptions. Agnes (Topsy) Small, who became a Joint President in 1939 with Charles Drummond of the Public Service Association, represented the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union. She, with her two children having been evicted from different houses five times during the Depression, had experienced hardship and was aware of the need for women to achieve improved working conditions including equal pay. Nonetheless, her commitment to the union was such that she would never work on union meeting night. She was eventually elected to the Union Executive and in 1940 became an organiser. Eileen Powell had worked energetically within her union, the Australian Railways', to have women's issues taken seriously. According to the information of Joyce Stevens, Powell had transformed the women's page of the union paper, Rail Road, from conservative tokenism to one that publicised the activities of the auxiliaries, advocated equal pay and defended married women's right to paid work. She was a member of the Communist Party of Australia but severed her connection with it during the first part of World War II. Therefore, these women brought commitment and experience in industry to the CAEP. Small stepped down from the presidency of the CAEP in 1940, however, to concentrate on her union work and Powell left the position in 1942 to accept a government position.

76. Ibid., p.60.
77. Ibid., p.93.
Lucy Woodcock assumed the position of Joint President with Robert Day at the Fifth Annual General Meeting of the CAEP. She held this office until the organisation ceased to function. She brought with her experience in her union, and commitment to women's issues to the CAEP. Woodcock was a founding member of the New South Wales Teachers' Federation in 1919 and was elected to the union executive in 1924. She assumed the position of senior Vice-President from 1933 and became President of the Australian Teachers' Federation in 1932. She represented the Teachers' Federation on the Labour Council of New South Wales and the ACTU. She was a member of the first Trade Union Equal Pay Committee and a founding member of the CAEP. As a member of the UAW as well, she has been described as a trade unionist who found it proper to join with those regarded by some trade unionists as middle-class, in the pursuit of common goals.

The initial convenors of the Four Commissions were Robert Day, Finance, John Hughes, Publicity, Muriel Heagney, Research, and Eileen Powell, Organisation. All were union representatives, therefore guaranteeing that union personnel dominated the Executive. However, Ruby Rich and Nerida Cohen were members of the Research Commission with Lucy Woodcock. Jessie Street was on the Organisation Commission, thereby demonstrating a solid commitment by the feminists to the activities of the CAEP. Therefore it was evident that members of


80. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 14 July 1937. Heagney Papers, MS 9106, CAEP Minute Book 1937-1940. Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library
the labour movement interested in the issues of equal pay were prepared to co-operate initially with the feminists in pursuit of their common aim. Nevertheless, the CAEP claim for the "rate for the job" was not supported by the whole union movement, with some unions opposed to any form of equal pay, believing that women should stay out of industry. Others supported the principle of "equal pay for equal work", not considering women capable of equal performance with men in the work-place.

The composition of the CAEP is interesting in that it comprised both men and women, yet women such as Muriel Heagney, Lucy Woodcock, Una Ellison, Eileen Powell and Flo Davis were the campaigning activists. This opinion can be justified in view of the experience and commitment that these women brought to the movement for equal pay. The men appeared to be less prominent in their contributions to meetings and the tasks they undertook. Muriel Heagney was the mainstay of the organisation and was responsible for the implementation of policy over the longest period of time. As Joint President and then Secretary-Treasurer from 1939, she devoted a large percentage of her time to CAEP activities despite her full-time position with the Queensland Tourist Bureau and later as organiser for the Amalgamated Engineering Union. The fact that women assumed such a


82. Stevens, Taking the Revolution Home, p.69.

83. This is not to say that the men did not contribute by attending meetings as representatives of both their unions and in their capacity as CAEP members. They also chaired CAEP meetings. Heagney Papers, MS 9106, CAEP Minute Books 1937-1940, 1940-1942, 1943-1947. Boxes 1165/3, 1166/1, 1166/2. La Trobe Library.
high profile in a predominantly trade union based organisation was a surprising phenomenon.

It may be contended that the CAEP's central ideological position was that of Muriel Heagney. In its literature the CAEP claimed that the achievement of equal pay would raise the living standards of the whole community because female wage and salary earners existed in most families. It would eliminate many anomalies and injustices which resulted from the existing systems of wage fixation; release additional purchasing power that would benefit everyone by creating consumer demand and thereby increasing employment; provide an incentive for women to develop their latent talents for the benefit of society and improve their social and physical well-being. It argued that unequal wage rates denied the democratic principle of equality of the sexes; deprived the woman worker of full payment for her work while exposing the male worker to the unfair competition of underpaid female labour; lowered male wage rates and standards; ignored the fact that many women were breadwinners and underestimated women's value to society as both paid and unpaid workers. In its first leaflet the CAEP argued that women should not fear dismissal from their jobs if equal pay were awarded to them, provided that they were competent workers. It then cited cases where equal pay had been granted and women had not lost their positions. The October 1937 Award which granted a measure of equal pay for shop assistants had not resulted in the dismissal of female workers in that industry twelve months later. Countries such as Russia and the United States were quoted as being more advanced than Australia in the equality of treatment of

84. The Case for Equal Pay. CAEP leaflet, no.2, 1940.
women. Initial male hostility to women in industry had almost been eliminated, it argued, and it was the task of women themselves

...to do all they can to bring about equal pay and abolish the last prejudice to their equality of ability and therefore just demand for equal pay. Will they have the courage to do it? 85

The CAEP recognised then that it was up to women themselves to achieve the aim of equal pay. However, this was to prove difficult to effect.

Although the official CAEP ideology was a feminist one, with its emphasis on the right of women to economic independence, a just wage and the improvement of working conditions for all people, there were trade unions within the organisation which subscribed to the view that equal pay would secure men's jobs so that men would not be subject to unfair competition from the cheap labour of women. It was assumed that men would always be employed in preference to women if they were paid at the same rate. The two attitudes to the question of equal pay meant that the potential for dissension existed at the outset. Penny Johnson argued that while the differing views on the reasons for the achievement of equal pay gave the CAEP its dynamism, 86 this difference at the same time sowed the seeds of its demise.

In addition to its elected office bearers, the CAEP was to comprise affiliated organisations which paid one pound annually per thousand members. This payment entitled them to send two credentialed


delegates to meetings. This provision was difficult for such small organisations as the UAW or the Women's Union of Service and the Australian Women's movement to meet. The UAW sought a reduction in the affiliation fee and the Union of Women's Service was unable to affiliate. The Women Justices Association and the Social Credit Movement found themselves in the same situation.

CAEP meetings were to be held monthly in the evenings with those of the Executive held between a regular monthly meeting. The Council was the highest authority and the Executive was empowered to implement its will. The Executive officers, the Joint Presidents and the Secretary, were permitted to act and report back to the next Council meeting. It was the task of the Joint Presidents to preside at all meetings to preserve order and decorum, and so exercise authority in conducting the business of the Council. They had the power jointly or severally to convene special meetings of the Council or the Executive.

The CAEP intended to establish branches in all states. These did not eventuate, although plans were formulated to establish a branch in Brisbane at the February 1939 meeting of the Council. George Weir, the other first Joint President was to assist when he travelled to

87. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 14 July 1937. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-1940, Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.

88. UAW records for 1933-1939 indicated that there were about one hundred full members, with twenty to fifty more individuals and organisations receiving only literature.


90. Minutes of Executive Meeting, 5 Dec. 1939. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-1949, Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.
Brisbane in May 1939. A CAEP was formed in Newcastle under the auspices of the Newcastle Labour Council. A proposal to form a Victorian branch fostered by the Melbourne Trades Hall Council was discussed at the April 1941 CAEP meeting. Each union was requested to create an Equal Status Committee from which one member could be appointed to sit on the Research Commission.

It was apparent that the CAEP branches in other states did not materialise as people with sufficient commitment and time to devote to the cause were not available. In a letter to A.G. Alanson, Secretary of the Australian Teachers' Federation, Heagney stated that CAEP branches were formed in Brisbane and Newcastle, but had not functioned well because no suitable Honorary Secretary was forthcoming to donate the necessary time to the organisation. She asserted that this situation led to the New South Wales' CAEP functioning almost as a federal organisation conducting campaigns for the whole of Australia from Sydney. She did refer to the fact that feminist organisations in some of the other states set up Councils on Equal Pay with different policies from those of the CAEP. The role of Muriel Heagney in the CAEP was vital; she was prepared to allocate a large amount


92. Minutes of 4th Annual General Meeting, 15 July 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942, Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

93. Minutes of CAEP meeting, 21 April 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942, Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

94. Ibid.

95. Letter to A.G. Alanson, Secretary of the Australian Teachers' Federation from Muriel Heagney, 22 April 1942. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. Correspondence Box 1168/5. La Trobe Library.
of her time to CAEP business, although she apologised constantly for not replying to correspondence promptly, citing lack of time as her reason. In correspondence with Ruby Rich, Heagney in referring to offers of support which were not acted upon immediately, complained that this was the drawback of a purely voluntary organisation. With so much to do and so few willing helpers every offer of assistance could not be pursued. She had been apparently unable to accept offers of assistance from the Newcastle women.

The CAEP as a single-issue pressure group aimed to maximise the pressure it could exert on governments, employers, the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and to educate the community generally, to secure equal pay for the sexes. It was still careful to encourage its affiliated organisations to continue to work for this aim through negotiation in the workplace with the CAEP offering support through its research and publicity commissions. Its organisation reflected its aim to act on many fronts to achieve its goal; its emphasis however was on propaganda. Flo Davis, a member of the CAEP, stated that its main task was to propagandise. It produced reams of information supplying reasons why women should receive equal pay and in which industries women already received it. She maintained that such information was very important since the ideology of the family wage was strong, both among many women and in the male-dominated union movement. She pointed out that it was a small body with not all unions involved. Heagney, in a letter to Maloney, Secretary of the


97. Stevens, Taking the Revolution Home, p.69.
Boot Employees' Union, explained that the CAEP was to concentrate on research, agitation and propaganda in various forms. Heagney was also careful to ensure that the CAEP confined its attendance at meetings to those which discussed equal pay and was able to assert in July 1941 that the organisation's success was due to the fact that they made the CAEP as broad as possible in terms of co-operation and that they confined their activities to matters definitely related to equal pay, refusing to be drawn into any factions or to take any action that could tie up the movement, no matter how helpful they might appear.

The fact that all executive positions were unpaid is an indication of the level of the CAEP's financial resources. It received its funds from its affiliated organisations on the basis of two guineas per two thousand members. By September 1937, its official correspondence paper listed forty-two organisations. These bodies were divided into sections: Labour Councils, employees' organisations and others. The first affiliation fees recorded in the minutes

98. Letter to Maloney, Secretary of the Boot Employees' Union, from Muriel Heagney, 9 Oct. 1937. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. Correspondence Box 1167/1. La Trobe Library.


100. The Labour Councils listed were Sydney, Newcastle, Goulburn and Wollongong. The employees' organisations comprised the Clerks' Union, Public Service Association, Teachers' Federation, Australian Journalists' Association, Australian Railways' Union, Bakers, Boot Trades, Bread Carters, Coal & Shale Employees' Federation, Coachmakers' Union, Electrical Trades, Food Preservers, Furnishing Trades, Glass Workers, Hairdressers, Hotel Employees Liquor Trades, Maritime Services - Clerical, Milk and Ice Carters, Miscellaneous Workers, Pastrycooks, Postal Workers, Amalgamated Printing Trades, Railway and Tramway Officers, Rubber Workers,
were seven guineas from the Public Service Association, two guineas from the Clerks' Union, the Furnishing Trades and the Baking Trades Employees' Union. One guinea was received from the Sheet Metal Workers' Union and the United Associations of Women.

In addition to affiliation fees, unions made donations for specific projects or to defray the cost of a particular campaign. For example, if the CAEP assisted a union in an application for equal pay before the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, the costs would be met by the union concerned. The Clerks' Union met the costs of their applications in 1937 and 1940. Donations received varied from one guinea to twenty pounds. The Printing Trades Employees' Industrial Union donated ten pounds towards the printing fund. Other unions made general donations occasionally. It was recorded that the Postal Workers' Union made a donation of £2-2-0 to the CAEP to assist with the production of leaflet number two. The Women's Assistant

100. cont.


102. Minutes of CAEP meetings, November 1937 and December 1940. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Books 1937-1940, 1940-1942. Boxes 1165/3 and 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

103. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 17 Feb. 1942. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.
Teachers' Association gave five pounds. However, it was noted in February 1939 that the CAEP was seventy-five pounds in debt as a result of its petition campaign. For 1937-38, affiliation fees, annual contributions and donations amounted to £119-13-6. Therefore the CAEP was never to have access to large financial resources, a disadvantage for any pressure group.

However, a picture emerges of a relatively small pressure group, relying upon the voluntary help of dedicated members to achieve the aim of the rate for the job. Its major support derived from the trade union movement which had access to larger financial resources than the smaller feminist organisations. Nevertheless, it was logical that such a group emerged from the union movement with Muriel Heagney as its prime instigator. She was committed to labour principles, believing that justice for women could be achieved through the unions, although she had been a member of the middle-class feminist UAW. No doubt this act was part of her strategy to work on all fronts to attain her aims.

An assessment of the founding members of the CAEP indicated that the more radical members of the unions were strongly represented and co-operated with middle-class feminists. The ideology of the CAEP was a feminist one although not all affiliates subscribed to the prevailing view.

The CAEP's organisation was formal with annual elections of office bearers and regular monthly meetings of the full Council and Executive. The Commissions were to meet when necessary. Delegates from affiliated organisations were officially credentialled which entitled them to vote at Council gatherings. Observers were permitted to attend meetings. Its books were audited annually and accounts presented for approval for payment at each monthly assembly.

The CAEP was to employ the traditional tactics of pressure groups in the attempt to realise its aims. Nevertheless, the sustained opposition it experienced over ten years from groups which wielded greater power in the political process were to ensure that it did not realise "the rate for the job".

The following chapters endeavour to demonstrate the means by which the CAEP attempted to achieve its goal. It sets out generally the tactics which pressure groups apply to realise their aims, depending upon their resources, ideology, commitment of members and general acceptance by the Government and the community. An investigation of the CAEP's methods allows insight into the attitudes of members of governments, trade unions, the Arbitration Court and employers to the question of equal pay and highlights the difficulties experienced by women in the labour movement attempting to realise feminist aims.
CHAPTER 2

EARLY YEARS AND THE COMING OF WAR,

1939-1941

The CAEP from its inception in 1937 aimed to mount a campaign which would focus on attempts to persuade the Federal Government to provide equal pay through legislation. Simultaneously the CAEP would work to educate the community on the rights of women to be accorded equal status in the workforce with men and in turn encourage others to place pressure upon the Government to accede to its requests. It was to encourage and assist individual unions to negotiate for equal pay with employers and before the Arbitration Court. The advent of World War II initially appeared to assist the cause with the dismantling of the sex segregation of the workforce through men enlisting in the armed forces and women taking up work from which they were previously barred. Disagreements within the CAEP over the best methods to achieve equal pay hindered their efforts and ultimately its members underestimated the strength of the family ideology. The establishment of the Women's Employment Board demonstrated clearly that the interests of the male worker would be safeguarded at the expense of women workers and that issues affecting women employees would continue to be accorded a low priority in the labour movement despite the energetic efforts of experienced women trade unionists, particularly Muriel Heagney to redress the balance.

The CAEP's aim was to secure equal pay for the sexes or "the rate for the job", a straightforward aim. Nonetheless, the realisation of
this goal required a rejection of wage-fixing principles which had been followed since 1907 and a preparedness by the Government, the A.C.T.U. and employers to accept the idea in addition to a general change in the community's attitude to women and their position in the workforce.

In September 1937, the CAEP, through its initial Joint Presidents, Muriel Heagney and George Weir, contacted the Prime Minister Joseph Lyons to advise him of the formation of the organisation, its aims and its intention to send a delegation to wait upon the leaders of the Federal and State governments to place before them their proposals for the government to legislate for equal pay. However, the Prime Minister indicated that he was not willing to receive the delegation, and instead requested the CAEP to submit a written argument. The CAEP acceded to this request, presenting a detailed case on why equal pay should be implemented. It appears that the Council continued to receive a similar response to all its submissions to the Prime Minister, other ministers and secretaries of departments requesting the Government to legislate for equal pay. The standard reply received from the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department indicated


3. Letter to the Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, from George Weir and Muriel Heagney. 30 September 1937. Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.
that "full consideration would be given to the matter". The CAEP continued to communicate with the Prime Minister, informing him of its plan to issue a public statement embodying the views of the leaders of the political parties on equal pay. He was given the opportunity to expand on his previous written statement on the matter.

After the death of Joseph Lyons in April 1939, the CAEP corresponded with the new Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, requesting him to make a statement in reply to the Council's request for the Government's policy on women's work. The matter was to assume greater importance as women moved into industry to replace men who enlisted in the armed forces with the declaration that Australia was at war with Germany from 3 September 1939. The Prime Minister's Department requested information from the Attorney-General's Department, which had to be reminded of the need for an answer to the question. The reply from the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department indicated that he was reluctant to say anything on the matter because Heagney "reported replies given verbally". The reply that was eventually sent

4. Letter from F. Strahan, Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department, to Muriel Heagney and George Weir, 17 Oct. 1937. Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.


7. Equal Pay For Men and Women 1936-1943 A461. Q351/1/1. Memo was dated 4 Dec. 1939 and the Prime Minister's Dept. was still awaiting a reply on 14 December. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

8. Memoranduum from the Secretary, Attorney-General's Department, to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department. 22 Dec. 1939. Equal Pay For Men and Women 1936-1943 A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.
was the standard one emanating from government departments, that the
Government left the question of the remuneration of women to the Con-
ciliation and Arbitration Courts and the Public Service Arbitrator.

The official reply was a consistent one from the Attorney-Gen-
eral's Department on the question of equal pay. Thomas C. Brennan, the
Acting Attorney-General adopted the same view when requested to com-
ment on the proposition advanced by the Federated Liquor and Allied
Trades Employees' Union that the principle of equal pay for the sexes
be adopted by the Government in 1936.

The Arbitration Court has followed the principle that women
should be paid men's rates of wages if they are employed on
work usually recognised as men's work. I agree with that
principle but the general application of the principle of
equal pay for the sexes in all branches of industry is, to
my mind, unthinkable. I do not believe that the Union's
request should be treated seriously. 10

In March 1941 the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department
sought advice from the Secretary of the Department of Labour and
National Service on the matter of women's rates of pay with regard to
their employment in positions previously occupied by men. The reply
from the Secretary, Roland Wilson, was predictable:

If it is thought that a reply is desirable, I should suggest
that Miss Heagney be informed that the important difficult
issues raised by the exceptional entry of women into in-
dustry and the national services in war-time are being care-
fully considered by the Government. She might be reminded
that many of the questions at issue are for the decision of

9. Letter to Muriel Heagney from the Secretary, Prime Minister's
   Department, 6 Feb. 1940. Equal Pay For Men and Women 1936-1943.
   A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

10. Letter to Minister for Health and Repatriation from Acting
    Attorney-General, 30 Aug. 1936. A432 36/792. Australian Archives,
    A.C.T.
the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and not for the Executive. 11

It was apparent that the United Australia Party Government would resist the pressure to legislate for equal pay. A submission presented to Cabinet in June 1941 by Harold Holt, Minister for Labour and National Service in the Menzies Government, provided evidence of that Department's attitude to the question of equal pay. It recommended that the principle of "equal pay for equal work" should not be accepted. It advised the Ministry of Munitions to continue its policy of creating new jobs for women at female rates of pay for as long as possible. However, it would be in the Government's interests to support the removal of restrictions on the employment of women and then raise their wages. The Public Service Board should be requested to provide a policy on how to increase female employment in the Public Service and it was suggested that the Department of Labour and National Service explore the means of removing restrictions on women's employment in industry generally. However, the recommendation was for the fixing of rates of pay for women to be left to the various Arbitration authorities:

These recommendations were aimed to help direct the activities of women's organisations interested in this question from misguided but embarrassing propaganda in favour of equal pay for equal work to constructive activities which would ultimately bring them more substantial and lasting benefits. 12

11. Memorandum to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department from Roland Wilson, Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service, 2 April 1941. Equal Pay for Men and women 1936-1943 A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

It was evident that the CAEP propaganda forced the Government to take some action as Holt mentioned that a fairly vocal agitation for equal pay existed and referred to the active campaign of the CAEP. He noted that the ALP federal platform included equal pay as one of its objectives and that a conference of twenty-four federal unions with women members requested the ACTU to present a case to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to raise the female basic wage rate to that of the male. It was significant that he referred to the fact that as a large employer of female labour, the Commonwealth Government, had a substantial financial interest in the question. Nonetheless, the Government had to set an example to industry in its treatment of its female employees by adopting a consistent approach. However, he emphasised the point that the Arbitration Court had been dealing with women’s wages since 1913, therefore it was advisable for the government not to contemplate any action which might affect the prestige of that Court.

The evidence suggests that the Government was aware of the campaign for equal pay, but was prepared to resist the pressure. Nonetheless it was willing to make adjustments to placate the agitators and to encourage more women to work in industry to assist the war effort. It constantly presented the view that the determination of wages was the function of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. It could be confident that while the concept of the family wage remained the basis for the award of the basic wage, the Arbitration Court would not grant equal pay to women. Governments were advised continually by senior public servants not to discuss the

policy on equal pay.

On his elevation to the Prime Ministership in October 1941, after the defeat of the Fadden Government on the floor of the House of Representatives, John Curtin, who as leader of the Opposition had stated that the ALP would implement equal pay when in government, received a memorandum from the Acting Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service:

The extent to which female labour is employed in industry and war service and the determination of appropriate wages for the work on which they are employed is a matter for the several arbitration authorities concerned. In regard to the basic wage for females it is noted from press reports that the ACTU proposes to submit the matter at an early date for consideration of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration. 15

Once again, the new Prime Minister was informed of the "official" attitude to the question of equal pay.

It would appear that the campaign for equal pay was enjoying some success by the middle of 1941, with the Government having to take into account the CAEP's activities and the influence it was asserting on the A.C.T.U. Nevertheless, it was apparent from the outset that the government departments were reluctant to assist the cause. The CAEP made a request to the Minister for Labour and Industry to provide information on a number of matters pertaining to women's wages and conditions of work in the Public Service. The Attorney-General's Department advised the Secretary of the Department of Labour and Industry,

14. Memorandum for the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department from Roland Wilson, Secretary, Dept. of Labour and National Service, June 1942. Equal Pay for Men and Women 1936-1943 A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

15. Memorandum for the Prime Minister from the Acting Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service, 28 Oct. 1941. Equal Pay for Men and Women 1936-1943 A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.
George Knowles, that the required information would entail considerable research by a professional officer and much of the material requested was unavailable to the department. It could not therefore justify assigning an officer to such work. This advice was duly accepted by George Knowles, who directed Muriel Heagney to consult Commonwealth publications to find answers to the questions posed.

Although the CAEP kept the Government informed of its activities and consistently requested it to legislate for equal pay or to supply information, the secretaries of the appropriate departments were reluctant to assist. The Attorney-General's Department was consistent in its advice to the Prime Minister's and the Department of Labour and Industry, later National Service, that the question of equal pay was not a matter to be determined by the Government. This view was readily accepted by Ministers and Prime Ministers. This fact was particularly disappointing with respect to John Curtin, who as Leader of the Opposition, had pledged to implement equal pay for the sexes.

In its policy to assert its influence as broadly as possible, the CAEP attempted to enlist the support of sympathetic members of parliament in order to ensure that the matter was raised there. While the amendments to the New South Wales Industrial Arbitration Act were being debated in the Parliament in October 1937, all members of the Legislative Assembly were circularised, urging them to take action to

16. Minute Paper to Secretary, Department of Labour and Industry from Secretary, Attorney-General's Department, 4 May 1939. Equal Pay For Men and Women, A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

17. Letter to Muriel Heagney from George S. Knowles, Secretary, Department of Labour and Industry, 9 May 1939. Equal Pay For Men and Women A461 Q351/1/1. Australian Archives, A.C.T.

secure an equal basic wage for men and women. Both Heagney and Weir watched the proceedings and were pleased to note that most members who spoke referred to the question of equal pay and endorsed the proposition of improving the position of women in industry by lessening the difference between male and female basic wages. They reported that if the Bill had not been guillotined, amendments that would have guaranteed an increase in women's basic wage would have been passed. In fact, however, the injustices of the former system of wage fixation were perpetuated as the percentage disparity between male and female rates remained even though the general wage level was raised. Provision was made for unions to approach the Industrial Commission to seek a higher base rate.

The decision to circulate the petition requesting the Commonwealth Parliament to amend the Constitution to insert the provision for equal pay was another strategy of the CAEP. The plan was to collect one million signatures representing one-quarter of the electors. Such a large number of signatures would force the Federal Parliament to consider the matter seriously, the CAEP Executive believed. Federal and state members of Parliament were requested to co-operate in the circulation of petitions in their respective electorates. The assistance of individual unions was sought through their CAEP representatives. Twenty thousand forms were printed at a cost of £32-10-0. Ten thousand of the forms were circulated, with requests for large


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.
numbers from the Railway and Tramway Officers' Association, the Textile Workers' Union and the Christian Socialist Movement. In Victoria the Clothing Trades Union and the Clerks' Union promised support. The Western Australian branches of the Shop Assistants' Union, the Teachers and the Clerks offered assistance. Heagney assumed the position of Director of the Petition Campaign. Publicity for the petition was forthcoming from the Labor Daily and Woman. The Housewives Association assisted with the distribution of forms. Correspondence received from the Federal Section of the Trades and Labour Councils, however, indicated that it would be unable to assist with the distribution of the petition owing to lack of time. Nonetheless it fully supported the campaign. Ultimately the million signatures were never collected and the petition was not presented to the Parliament. It was recorded in the CAEP minutes that women working in the Public Service and elsewhere were not prepared to sign the petition for fear of losing their jobs.


24. Ibid.


27. Ibid.

Norman Makin, Secretary of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and a strong supporter of equal pay, intended to move the following motion in the House of Representatives in August 1941:

In the opinion of this House, discrimination by reason of differences of sex between workers is economically indefensible and is inconsistent with the Australian principle of equality and that consequently the Government should forthwith apply this principle of equality in all civil and defence departments by according equal wages, salaries and allowances to men and women employed upon work of the same class. 29

Unfortunately the motion was never put as the Parliament's business was interrupted on the resignation of Robert Gordon Menzies in August 1941. By 7 October 1941, John Curtin was Prime Minister as two government supporters were unhappy with Arthur Fadden, the Country Party leader as Prime Minister. They decided to cross the floor and vote with the Opposition on amendments to the budget.

The CAEP believed that election campaigns offered it an opportunity to highlight the equal pay question. It sent questionnaires to all candidates during both the 1937 and 1940 federal election campaigns to ascertain their views on equal pay. Before the 1937 election the CAEP sent out over two hundred and fifty circulars and published statements made by the three parliamentary leaders on equal pay. The Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, merely reiterated the bureaucratic argument that tribunals existed in Australia for the purpose of fixing rates of wages and conditions of labour in industries throughout Australia. The question of female wage rates had been before the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration which was competent to deal with the matter. Similarly, the Commonwealth Public Service Arbi-

29. Minutes of the Fourth Annual General Meeting, 15 July 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.
trator was responsible for the pay scales of public servants. It would therefore be inappropriate for the Commonwealth Government to take the initiative in the matter.

John Curtin, federal leader of the ALP presented the view that the Commonwealth Labor Party

...acknowledges the absolute equality of giving to women the same wages and status to those of men in respect of occupations generally. It is our intention to take the necessary steps to amend the law so that such discrimination as is now practised may no longer subsist. The laws involved include the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act and the Commonwealth Public Service Act. We undertake to make such amendments as are necessary to apply the principle of equal pay wherever the Commonwealth has jurisdiction.

The view of Earle Page, the leader of the Country Party, was that the matter was one to be dealt with by the Commonwealth Public Service Arbitrator and the Commonwealth Public Service Board. However, he had no objections to any decision arrived at by the aforementioned bodies. Outside the Commonwealth Public Service, the matter was one for the Courts.

Curtin's statement was an encouraging one for the CAEP. Nonetheless, it was apparent that the conservative parties would do little to implement equal pay when in government, although individual parliamentarians declared their support for the cause. Sir Frederick Stewart and Percy Spender, both members of the United Australia Party (UAP) indicated their agreement with the aims of the CAEP in their answers to the 1937 pre-election questionnaire. Maurice Blackburn, a federal Labor member of Parliament also declared his support for the achieve-

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
ment of equal pay.

The same procedure was adopted for the 1940 election campaign. Questionnaires were sent out to every candidate and special letters were addressed to the leaders of the three major political parties requesting a statement of policy on the issue of equal pay. John Curtin was the only one to reply, re-iterating the 1937 policy. It was reported that many individual Labor and Independent candidates supported equal pay, whilst only a few UAP and Country Party candidates gave positive replies.

It was evident, therefore, that the CAEP was prepared to maintain pressure on individual candidates and political parties to use their influence to encourage the Government to legislate for equal pay. It also assisted unions in their submissions before the State Industrial Courts and the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. In October 1937 it sought leave to intervene in the Public Service Association's application for a higher base rate for permanent and temporary clerical women. A barrister, C.E. Martin, placed the CAEP submissions before the New South Wales Industrial Commission. He argued that the percentage under the Industrial Arbitration (Amendment) Act 1937 re Crown Employees Clerical (Women) and Crown Employees Temporary (Female) award should be one hundred in respect of the female base rate.


35. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, November 1937. Heagney Papers, MS9106. CAEP Minute Book, 1937-1940, Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.
The problem that existed in the Public Service was explained to the Feminist Club by George Weir. The fact that women could be employed at lower rates of pay than men allowed female labour to be exploited, which then had the automatic effect of lowering the male standard. The Public Service Board of New South Wales was increasingly employing women as temporaries at lower rates than permanent officers. In 1921 there were one hundred and ninety-four temporary females in clerical positions. By 1937 the number had increased to one thousand and eighty-two. A move was made to reduce the award range for male clerical officers as the Public Service Board could employ a temporary female to do their work. He expressed the concern that if the Board achieved success in reducing the male clerical award, there would be an immediate application to reduce the female rate by the same amount to maintain the ratio. Therefore the question of unequal pay rates required prompt attention.

In early 1939 the CAEP combined with those organisations with claims for equal pay before the New South Wales Industrial Commission to be represented by one counsel. George Weir, a former Joint


37. The unions involved were the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Australian Textile Workers Union, the Federated Rubber Workers Union of Australia, the Sheet Metal Workers Union of Australia, the Hotel, Club, Restaurant, Cafeterias, Tearooms and Boarding House Employees Union of New South Wales, the Food Preservers Union of Australia (NSW Branch), the Public School Teachers Federation, N.S.W., the Public Service Association of New South Wales, the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union of Australia, NSW Branch, the Amalgamated Hospitals, Homes and Laboratories Association of New South Wales and the Hairdressers and Wigmakers Employees Union of New South Wales.

President of the CAEP represented them. This arrangement was made with the assistance of John Hughes through the New South Wales Labour Council. The unions represented agreed to meet the costs. As the CAEP had prepared a substantial amount of evidence, a sub-committee was formed comprising Executive members of the CAEP and representatives of larger unions such as the Clerks and the Teachers Federation. The case was not heard until June 1940 by Mr Justice Webb. Muriel Heagney was called as an expert witness and submitted evidence dealing broadly with the applications of the principle of equal pay in clerical and other occupations. Her personal experience and opinion were supported by research and reports of Australian and overseas authorities. The Attorney-General of New South Wales intervened as an employer with the New South Wales Chamber of Manufacturers, the Retail Traders Association and the Employers Federation.

The application was stood over with the Judges considering the matter raised by the employers' counsel with regard to the continuance of the hearing in view of the war situation. Australia had declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. Although the outcome was disappointing the CAEP Executive felt that important issues were raised for the first time in that jurisdiction and that the Court allowed the union witnesses sufficient latitude to facilitate the presentation of their point of view. The way was left open to have the case restored to the list at an appropriate time. Heagney remarked that the Bench at last appeared to face the question that payment should be on a job basis.

38. CAEP Third Annual Report and Financial Statement, op.cit.

As part of its strategy to achieve its aims, the CAEP indicated its willingness to co-operate with other groups espousing the cause of equal pay and included feminist organisations among its affiliates. However, the UAW posed continual problems for the CAEP in its attempts to present a united approach to the achievement of equal pay. Members of the UAW participated actively in the formation of the Council and accepted the principle of the rate for the job. Yet the UAW's declared policy on equal pay was that it could be gained gradually by increasing the female rate immediately from fifty-four to sixty per cent of the male rate and then increased thereafter by five per cent per annum until the full rate was attained. The UAW maintained its right to act independently of the CAEP on the issue of equal pay. The first source of tension occurred at the 1937 Application to the New South Wales Industrial Commission on behalf of the Public Service Association for an equal minimum wage for men and women. The CAEP assisted with the case. Nerida Cohen appeared for the UAW and argued for a gradual percentage increase which would be easier for industry to sustain. The CAEP was displeased with this apparent public difference of views on the implementation of equal pay and arranged a special meeting to consider the matter.

Street defended the UAW's action, declaring that the organisation was entitled to present its view which was not in conflict with that of the CAEP and that if the Equal Pay Council wished to be the sole negotiator, prior arrangements should have been made. She asserted

40. Ranald, "Feminism and Class", in Bevege, James and Shute (eds), Worth her Salt. Women at Work in Australia, p.282.

too that Clause B of the CAEP's aims gave them full authority to follow their policy. Heagney claimed, however, that Clause B applied only if Clause A failed. She considered that the equal pay cause was weakened if two constituent bodies appeared in the same place advocating different proposals. Street maintained that gradual increases were the definite policy of the UAW and if this was not acceptable, they were willing to leave. The UAW's policy was defeated at the CAEP Annual Conference in 1939 and the UAW temporarily withdrew from the CAEP in order to put its position publicly.

The UAW argued its case through the newspapers. Jessie Street's contention was that the demand for immediate equal pay would force employers out of business, thereby increasing unemployment for men and women. The UAW's gradualist approach would alleviate that problem. Agnes Small, Joint President of the CAEP, countered Street's argument with the assertion that it demonstrated more concern for employers' profits than for equal pay.

The action most irritating to Heagney was delivered when Street and Cohen, representing the UAW, attempted to intervene in the Basic Wage hearing in Melbourne in November 1940. They wished to put their policy of sixty per cent plus five per cent quarterly increases until

42. Minutes of CAEP Special Meeting, 3 Mar. 1938. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-40. Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.

43. Ibid.

44. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, April 1939. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-1940. Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.


equal pay was achieved. They had not consulted the unions, and the Arbitration Court refused to admit them. They received much publicity, however, with the *Melbourne Herald* reporting the incident. This action infuriated Heagney who described their appearance at the hearing as "stupid". She claimed that the unions intended to put the case for equal pay in one step and that the UAW's intervention weakened the unions' case. It has been argued that the unions had no such intentions and that the UAW's intervention gained valuable publicity for the equal pay struggle. Nevertheless, women's wages were not mentioned at the hearing. The UAW withdrew its application from the CAEP in November 1939.

It was unfortunate that the two organisations were unable to reach a compromise. Nevertheless, Jessie Street was as strong a personality as Muriel Heagney with equally firm views. Muriel Heagney seemed to harbour a personal dislike of Jessie Street. It was not only Heagney who disapproved of the UAW's behaviour, however. All those who were involved with the presentation of the Public Service Association's case evinced displeasure at the actions of Street and Cohen.

47. Ranald, "Feminism and Class" in Bevege, James and Shute (eds), *Worth Her Salt*, p.282.


The fact that these organisations were unable to co-operate did not assist the equal pay cause in the long run, although others would argue that their disagreement kept the issue alive. Peter Sekuless argued that the discord within the equal pay movement promoted their cause. He claims that it was Jessie Street and Nerida Cohen's appearance at the Arbitration Court that prompted the action of the unions to officially recognise the equal pay lobby within its own ranks.

The CAEP was aware of the need to make maximum use of the media to publicise the issue and produced monthly press notes for the information of organisations co-operating with the equal pay body. They were sent regularly to the editors of trade union journals in the hope that relevant information would be published. The Publicity Commission released all CAEP decisions to the press, some of which were published. It received publicity for its 1941 Conference on Women and Children in Industry in War Time. The focus of the article, however, was on Muriel Heagney. A CAEP report indicated that it was pleased with the constructive articles which had appeared in various newspapers and in views expressed on the radio. During 1938 the cause of equal pay was depicted in a cartoon in the Sun and in an article in the Daily Telegraph.

53. Sekuless, Jessie Street: a Rewarding but Unrewarded Life, p.82.


55. The Sun, Sydney, 24 June 1941.

The CAEP published its own series of pamphlets, the first one appearing in 1938. It argued that if women worked hard they were in no danger of losing their jobs if equal pay was granted. Leaflet no.2 entitled the *Case for Equal Pay* set out the aims of the CAEP and mentioned prominent parliamentarians and government ministers who supported the cause. It stated the social consequences of unequal pay rates and explained how equal pay would be of benefit to all. A very comprehensive one, entitled *Are Women Paid Men's Rates?* appeared in 1942. It set out the situation with regard to equal pay in other countries and described the history of the CAEP and its successes.

With the declaration of War on 3 September 1939 by the Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, the composition of the workforce was about to change. Men left their civilian employment to join the defence forces and women were encouraged to enter the paid workforce to replace the men. Between 1939 and 1941, over 94,000 women entered the workforce moving mainly into defence production. Unions, intent upon preserving the dominance of the male worker, were reluctant to accept women moving out of their defined areas in the workplace. Nonetheless, as it became apparent that women would continue to move into male dominated jobs, the unions decided it was in their interests to agitate for equal pay to ensure that male wages would not be eroded. This situation was to provide a great impetus to the equal pay cause in one respect; nonetheless, it posed problems.

57. "Can Girls Hold Their Place in Industry?" CAEP Leaflet no.1.
The union movement, however, like the rest of Australia, was slow to recognise the significance of the war situation. The Government had been unprepared for war and was obliged to make a large financial commitment to the purchase of defence equipment, up to 308 million dollars in 1941-1942. Robert Menzies, the Prime Minister, suggested that Australians should continue their usual business soon after the advent of the war. People still attended the races, for example. Workers, seeing improvement in profits, struck for higher wages. The Government itself was divided and when John Curtin agreed to the formation of an Advisory War Council after the September 1940 election, Menzies set off for London. He returned in May 1941 to an unrest in his party that culminated in his resignation in August 1941.

During 1940, the CAEP complained that the unions were not playing their part in the equal pay struggle. A policy was required to re-awaken them to their responsibilities in the matter. It was suggested that CAEP affiliates attend union meetings to address members on the vital importance of equal pay in the wartime period. The CAEP's Third Annual Report recorded that there had been no further recognition of the principle of equal pay by any Australian legislature or industrial tribunal. Nonetheless, steady progress was evident in the consolidation of forces in the fight for economic equality for men and women. It was noted that the Commonwealth Council of the Amalga-


62. Ibid.

63. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 16 April 1940. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1937-1940, Box 1165/3. La Trobe Library.

64. Ibid.
mated Engineering Union, the Federal Executive of the Postal Workers' Union and the Federated Clerks' Union had contributed generously to funds and formally agreed to co-operate in the struggle.

The war situation provided a different set of circumstances in which the CAEP had to fight for equal pay. It was not now merely a matter of educating the community on the question, and assisting with equal pay submissions to the Arbitration Court. It needed to act swiftly to ensure that women received the male rate of pay when undertaking work previously performed by men. It was obvious that the war provided a boost to the equal pay cause once unions realised that it was in their interest to support it as a means of guaranteeing the long-term security of male workers.

The CAEP moved quickly to ensure that women who were replacing men in the workforce were paid the male rate. In October 1939, the Finance Committee of the Sydney Municipal Council suggested that women who replaced men who enlisted in the defence forces be paid at a lower rate. Heagney communicated promptly with the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the Council informing them of the need to pay women the male rate. The full Council ultimately decided to accept the Heagney view and the full salary was paid. Similar action was taken in co-operation with the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union in respect to the Hotel Australia when it was reported that men were being replaced by women at lower rates of pay. When the Government announced its in-


66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.
tention to employ women as wireless operators and teleprinters in the RAAF at two-thirds of the male rate, Heagney circularised all members of Parliament appealing for their support of equal pay for these positions. To maintain the pressure, seventy-three telegrams were sent to all members of the House of Representatives and received replies pledging co-operation from ten. However the CAEP was less successful in dealing with the Government as an employer. Those in power remained firm in their commitment to unequal rates for women in the defence forces. In answer to questions asked in Parliament about the nature of the work of the women employed in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, John McEwen stated that there was no difference in the nature of the work of men and women wireless operators employed on ground wireless duties, neither was there any difference in the nature of the work of men and women teleprinter operators. The CAEP sought assistance from the Labour Council of New South Wales, requesting it to carry a resolution to persuade the federal MPs to demand from the Government equal rates for all women enlisted in the defence forces.

It was obvious then that larger numbers of women were accepting jobs previously not available to them. By 1941 a number of unions considered that the situation required some action. In April 1941 a conference of twenty-four federal unions comprising women members was held in Melbourne to consider the issue of the employment of women in

68. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 18 Mar. 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Books 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

69. Extract from Hansard - House of Representatives, March 1941.

70. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 18 Mar. 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Books 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.
in occupations usually reserved for men. Muriel Heagney attended as a delegate of the New South Wales branch of the Clerks' Union. She succeeded in having the CAEP's policy incorporated into the ACTU's platform at the National Congress in June of that year. The decision was made that the ACTU would approach the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and the Commonwealth Parliament to secure the implementation of equal pay through the legislature and the judiciary. Heagney believed that the ACTU endorsement of CAEP principles would clear the way "for definite and immediate political and industrial action of an uncompromising character".

The ACTU Executive, however, remained more difficult to convince of the need for equal pay. The conferences on the subject had been convened because of union pressure and the equal pay resolutions were never acted upon by the Executive. Charlie Crofts, Secretary of the ACTU, claimed in January 1942 that the Executive had laid down that equal pay should prevail when women performed men's jobs, but when men were available, they should be employed and the women dismissed.

When asked about provisions made for redundant female workers, Crofts

71. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 15 April 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

72. Minutes of CAEP Meeting, 20 April 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

73. Fourth Annual Report of the CAEP, July 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.

74. Letter, Muriel Heagney to Charlie Crofts, Secretary of the ACTU, 4 June 1941. Heagney Papers, MS9106. CAEP Correspondence. Box 1169/2. La Trobe Library.

replied that the matter had not been considered. Therefore, it was apparent that women were to be temporary workers in the wartime emergency. E.C. McGrath typified the trade unionist view of women workers when he expressed the opinion that after the war there would be no place for women in industry and that they would return to their rightful place in the home, rebuilding family life.

The obvious patriarchal attitudes of the ACTU Executive allowed it to give minimal support to the interests of working women and even prompted it to deliberately obstruct efforts to gain equal pay. In November 1941 at the International Labor Organisation Conference in New York, Muriel Heagney had her credentials revoked by the ACTU. This action prevented her from addressing the conference to achieve the adoption of her equal pay resolution. The ACTU Executive's view of the male as the legitimate worker would guarantee that industrial issues of concern to women workers would remain a low priority.

The by-election for the federal seat of Boothby in South Australia in May 1941 presented the CAEP with a further opportunity to focus upon the question of equal pay in the political context. Consistent with its action in the election campaigns of 1937 and 1940, a letter and questionnaire were sent to the Labor candidate, T.E. Lawton and the UAP candidate Dr Price to ascertain their views on equal pay. Women constituted a majority of over eight thousand in the electorate.

76. Minutes of Unofficial Conference of Industrial Unions concerned with Women in War Industries. Trades Hall, Melbourne, op.cit.


78. Letter to E.J. Holloway from Muriel Heagney, 2 July 1942. Heagney Papers, MS9106. Correspondence Box 1168/7. La Trobe Library.
Lawton agreed to support the CAEP policy; the Government candidate, however, was non-committal. The Labor Women's Committee and the Women's Electoral League (non-party) and the Adelaide News and the Sydney Sun newspaper staffs co-operated to arouse interest in equal pay as an issue in the campaign.

The existence of the war inspired the CAEP to hold conferences addressing the question of women and children in industry in wartime. The first of these was held on 10 August 1940 and acclaimed a success with more than one hundred delegates and observers from industrial unions and other organisations in attendance. Unions, including the Amalgamated Engineering, the Sheet Metal Workers, the Ironworkers and the Brick, Tile and Pottery, all representing the so-called "male" trades, participated. The presence of these unions represented an upsurge of interest in the equal pay question. Resolutions were submitted demanding equal rates based upon the existing male rate for the job where women and youths were required to replace male labour in any sphere and deploring the prevailing exploitation of youthful labour. A demand was made for the prohibition of overtime for workers under eighteen years of age. The CAEP was to implement the decisions of the conference.

The second conference was held on 2 August 1941 and Robert Day, Joint President of the CAEP, opened with the statement that four years earlier, when the CAEP was established, the main interest in the equal pay movement derived from women's unions and from light industries.

79. CAEP Fourth Annual Report and Financial Statement. 15 July 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.
80. Ibid.
Now workers in all areas were threatened with the competition of underpaid female labour, however, and felt the time was opportune for seeking increased support from trade unions in the work of the CAEP. He made reference to the forty credentialled organisations. Albert Monk, President of the ACTU, by means of a lettergram, wished the conference success and stated that anomalies in the difference of pay between men and women performing the same work in industries and services associated with wartime were becoming more apparent. The ACTU Executive was considering presenting a case to the Arbitration Court.

Representatives from different unions offered help in furthering the decisions of the conference and P. Fallon, Secretary of the Clothing Trades Union, maintained that his union had always advocated and claimed equal pay. The clothing trades had suffered badly by the introduction of cheap female labour. The Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union spokesperson reported that employers were attempting to replace men who joined the A.I.F. by women and to pay them lower rates of pay.

Muriel Heagney defended the women who were prepared to work at two-thirds of the male rate as it was an improvement on the usual fifty-four per cent. She stated in her forthright manner that the responsibility for undercutting must be attributed to the whole trade union movement which had been indifferent to the issue and allowed low rates to prevail. She argued that if small sections of women were forced out of the predominantly male industries through the issue of

81. CAEP Minutes of Second Conference on Women and Children in Industry in Wartime, 2 Aug. 1941. Heagney Papers, MS 9106. CAEP Minute Book, 1940-1942. Box 1166/1. La Trobe Library.
equal pay, they would find employment elsewhere that would be at least equal to the work and pay lost. The solution lay not in excluding women from unions with the aim of preventing them from working in industry, but in organising the women workers to support the aims of equal status and equal pay through the fixation of the rate for the job, irrespective of the sex of the worker. She contended that women's wages were lower than men's because they lacked the power of collective bargaining. If women were strongly organised in trade unions, they would be in a position to demand higher industrial standards. Heagney was looking, therefore, to raise the status of women within the unions and to persuade male unionists of the need to achieve this aim.

Resolutions were passed to urge all affiliated organisations to work to abolish differentiation in male and female rates from awards, to oppose the introduction of females into positions usually filled by males until the male rates were agreed to by employers and to ensure that women employed in the defence forces would be paid the full male wage.

Eileen Powell, Joint President of the CAEP, concluded by expressing satisfaction at the support of the trade union movement in the fight for equal pay, emphasising the fact that unions should not oppose the entry of women into industry, but insist on equal pay and status for them as the Gas Employees' Union had done. Total opposition had failed to exclude women, but they had entered at lower rates of pay.

82. CAEP Minutes of Second Conference on Women and Children in Industry in Wartime, op.cit.

83. Ibid.
From the speeches of Heagney and Powell, it appeared that they still needed to convince a number of unions of the necessity of seeing women workers as legitimate members of the workforce, entitled to equal pay and conditions. Therefore they had a major task to accomplish with their affiliated organisations before achieving success with any others. Nonetheless, their optimism was obvious when they stated:

We believe we are now on the eve of victory and hope that our next annual report will be a record of the accomplishment of our objective in many spheres of service and in industry. 84

The CAEP continued to place pressure on a wide range of groups in order to achieve its aims. However the existence of the war forced it to concentrate on the immediate issue of ensuring that women moving into jobs previously performed by men received the "male" rate. Undoubtedly, members of the CAEP believed that once this task was accomplished, the precedent would be set and work towards a general wage rise in the so-called "female" industries could proceed. Nonetheless, the increased support the CAEP gained during this period consisted of unions who saw the granting of equal pay as a temporary measure to secure the wage rates of men who would eventually return to civilian life. This factor would continue to pose a problem as the CAEP's aims were long term. It persisted in the belief that its best hope lay in the preparedness of the Government to legislate for equal pay under the provisions of the National Security Act of September 1939 which gave the Government the power to control both the property and

services of all Australians. A Labor Government in Canberra from October 1941 increased the optimism of the CAEP. However, no decision had been made by December 1941 when the bombing of Pearl Harbour brought the realisation that the war was close at hand.

Seemingly on the brink of victory, the CAEP was to have its hopes dashed by the establishment of the Women's Employment Board, which was to preserve the sex differentiation of the workforce and to confirm that any decisions made in relation to women's wages were for the duration of the war. It had to contend with differing views on the WEB within its own organisation and Muriel Heagney was to suffer attacks on her attitudes and organisation of the CAEP. The following chapter examines the means by which the CAEP attempted to meet new challenges and changed circumstances, while still trying to achieve its goal.
