

THE Depression

TESTING THE NEW NATION

Winston Stradher



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The Depression: Testing the New Nation
by Winston Stadher

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Cover image: Unemployed men searching for work in Queensland during the Depression, ca. 1932.
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Introduction

This book on the 1930s Depression is divided into five parts, with each part having introductory material, source material and tasks to complete that are manageable and challenging for students.

Part 1 offers a brief overview of the Depression and a brainstorm activity.

Part 2 is a response of the people to the Depression with specific reference to the social aspects and hardships that were endured by the working classes. The causes of the Depression are mentioned and are divided into two categories – internal and external. In addition, concept maps have been included to explain the causes in diagrammatic form. The life experiences in urban and rural settings are explained through documents and diagrams. An intrinsic feature of the Depression was unemployment, and its effects on the population have been analysed. The roles of charitable organisations and women during the period are also examined.

Part 3 is a synopsis of the proposed cures and changes resulting from the Depression. The Theodore Plan, Premiers' Plan and Lang Plan are explained so that students can gain an understanding of the political decisions made by the Scullin Government. The emerging significance of the New Guard during this era is discussed. Finally, the notion of recovery and the importance of the manufacturing sector are noted.

Part 4 is a reflection on the social cohesion of Australian society during the Depression. Sport and entertainment were key elements in lifting the spirits of people during times of adversity. Also, a group that was neglected by and excluded from the mainstream Australian society were Aborigines.

Part 5 outlines the skills of the historian. Students are encouraged to use the quotes from historians in their own writing. An example of an essay has been included to demonstrate the principal components of an essay response through the process of writing constructive paragraphs.

Too often students spend long hours reading and researching material with little purpose or direction in mind. The first part of this book offers a specific format that will assist students to develop a greater level of clarity and understanding with their research so that reading, taking notes and writing summaries will be a meaningful exercise. The book encourages students to develop a sound knowledge of the 1930s Depression and enhances essential skills such as paragraph writing, using evidence, arriving at conclusions and developing concept maps to improve levels of retention.

I hope that both teachers and students will find this book a useful resource for teaching and studying the 1930s Depression in Australia.

Acknowledgements

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Part 1: Overview

What is the intention of this book?

The purpose of this book is to enable the student to gain an overview of the 1930s Depression that will be the basis for future and detailed investigations. It is a book that will offer a sufficient quantity of content and also expose the student to a variety of historical skills. Such skills are paramount to the student's understanding of historical concepts and they will place the student in good stead for future revision and preparation work for the final year exam.

The book will be comprised of:

1. Visual and written documents
2. Methods showing the student how to analyse such material
3. Student exercises to stimulate their thinking and reinforce their learning
4. The use of concept maps as a learning tool
5. Analysis of some of the social, economic and political content of the 1930s Depression
6. Evaluation of the groups that were included and excluded.

It is important that all the questions and student exercises are completed in the book so that a thorough understanding can be achieved. Having completed these tasks, it is essential that the student reinforces the learning by referring to the bibliography and selecting at least two text books and two websites. It is imperative that the student undertakes the appropriate readings from these sources and devises their own notes, concept maps and selects quotes that may be integrated into tasks of work. Note carefully: just copying from a text or other sources will be of little use.

Ask yourself these questions:

- What am I looking for in this chapter?
- What headings can I come up with?
- What questions can I ask about the readings?
- Can I show this information in the form of a concept map?
- Are there important quotes that I will be able to use later?
- What is the author trying to say in the chapter?
- Can I write a few short paragraphs on what the author is trying convey?
- Can I write a brief synopsis of the chapter?

What was the 1930s Depression?

To gain an understanding of the 1930s Depression we need to revisit the 1920s. This was a period when the economic growth of Australia was steadily developing, the availability of goods, overall consumer spending and employment were increasing. However, between 1925–1927 there were manufacturing slumps and the economy began to slow down. This was exacerbated further when the Bruce-Page government began to reduce expenditure on public works programs. Such a policy of fiscal reduction added to the problem of business closures and unemployment. Gradually, the Australian economy began to move into a recession, which meant that jobs were scarce as investment was declining and closures of business activity began to be imminent.

The economic crisis

The decline of the Australian economy did not start in October 1929 when the stock market crashed in New York; it stems back to 1927. From this time Australian manufacturing began to decline as consumption reduced. The Bruce-Page Federal Government and state governments continued to borrow funds from overseas lenders.

Geoffrey Bolton states that: 'Between 1919 – 1929 the overseas debt of Federal and State Government increased by 250 million pounds, and by the late twenties government borrowing

reached \$60 million a year.¹ Such borrowings as well as sound wheat and wool prices offered the Australian economy some stability but this was short-lived as large numbers of migrants were brought into the country. The number of unemployed increased from 31 000 per year to 47 000.² Workers found it difficult to find jobs, which led to industrial unrest between trade unions and employers. A series of strikes took place such as the Waterside Workers' Strike in 1928, the Transport Workers' Strike in 1929, and in the same year Judge Lukin of the Arbitration Court handed down an award that reduced wages and increased working hours. Such a decision caused timber workers to strike for six months but after this time they accepted the award. Geoffrey Bolton has pointed out that in 1929 four-and-half-million days were lost by workers due to strikes.³ The causes for such strikes by the working classes were twofold: firstly the reduction of wages and secondly the erosion of living standards sparked reactions by this group.

Australia's economic problems did not end here, as the dawn of the new decade of the 1930s led to a decline in export earnings, stagnant manufacturing and reduced government expenditure. By the early 1930s unemployment had risen to 29 per cent. Such economic conditions were unprecedented in Australia's short history and led to deplorable social conditions for the working classes in urban and rural areas all over Australia.

Henry Pook points out that the falling consumer demand for goods and services led to retrenchments of workers. Such workers had difficulty finding employment due to a lack of skill and the unavailability of jobs.⁴ Added to this economic problem was the crisis the government was confronted with. It had the obligation to pay interest to bondholders in England on the money that was borrowed. By paying such interest payments, the government was able to maintain an effective credit rating. However, opponents argued that such interest payments would have been of greater benefit to the country if they were spent on public works programs to create employment for the population.

The political response

James Scullin, the Prime Minister of Australia from 1929 to 1932, responded to the crisis as it arose but encountered internal political problems within his own party. The Labor Party at this time was in disarray, it had inexperienced ministers, did not have control of the Senate and was unable

to control the banks. By 1931, the government's revenue was declining and it required a solution to the wider economic crisis. It adopted a plan put forward by the Premiers. This Premiers' Plan advocated a reduction of government spending and the payment of interest on loans to overseas countries. The Scullin Government chose to follow its path and adopted the Premiers' Plan. This plan and the inability of the Scullin Government to reduce unemployment led to its demise in 1932, when it lost the federal election to the Lyons Government.

In an attempt to support the unemployed, the Scullin Government provided dole payments. In 1931 these payments were worth 70 cents a week for a single man and \$1.40 for a husband and wife, with an additional allowance of 70 cents for each child.⁵ These payments prevented the destitution and the loss of dignity that so often accompanied unemployment.

Unpopular policies and the Labor split – James Scullin

James Scullin was Prime Minister of Australia from 1929–1932. He had the working man's interest at heart, but during the Depression the economic conditions caused him to pursue policies that were unpopular.

- He chose not to embark on an extensive capital works program as this was inflationary



James Henry Scullin, Australian Prime Minister,
22 October 1929–6 January 1932.
NAA: A1200, L11185.

- He marginally increased social welfare payments
- He raised tariffs (taxes on imported goods became more expensive)
- He chose to pay back loan debts to British investors

The Scullin Government managed to increase social service payments, raise tariffs and cut back assisted immigration. But the internal political conflict within the ALP only added to Scullin's problems. The Labor Party split in 1931. Lyons and Fenton, two experienced ministers in the ALP, joined with the Nationalists to form the United Australia Party, and defeated the Scullin Government on 19 December 1931.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Scullin chose to pay back loan debts to British investors?
2. John Maynard Keynes, a prominent economist, advised the Scullin Government to embark on a capital works program. Why didn't Scullin pursue this advice?

The social response

The Depression had varying effects on the population of Australia during the 1930s. The people who had substantial savings in their bank accounts and were fortunate to retain their employment were able to live a comfortable life throughout the Depression. However, many others, who lost their jobs and had minimal savings, encountered horrendous difficulties in providing for their families.

In 1933, 392 435 people did not receive any income at all, while 875 503 people received less than fifty-two pounds per year.⁶ These low levels of income explain the hardship in paying rent and providing food and clothing for the family that was common to many thousands of people. At the time, the total population of Australia was 6 600 000 and 673 840 people were receiving sustenance payments.⁷

As families were evicted from their accommodation, shanty towns emerged. Happy Valley, the sandhills of La Perouse in Sydney, was one such town. There, many thousands of families built humpies to provide them with a modicum of shelter. Russell Ward points out that the staple diet of the children consisted of bread and dripping, lightly sprinkled with salt and pepper, or bread and treacle.⁸

In Redfern, the William Roberts family were evicted from their home into the street and could only have access to shanty towns that were common on the perimeter of Sydney and Melbourne. Life for such families was devastating. Throughout Australia, children experienced malnutrition. Diseases and illnesses, including whooping cough, diphtheria, ear infections, rheumatoid arthritis and tuberculosis, were common.



'William Roberts, an original Anzac, and his family evicted from their Redfern home into the street during the Depression' by Lethington Maitland. Hood Collection, State Library of New South Wales.

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TASK 1

Spend some time brainstorming ideas about the Depression.

While you are doing this, as a class or by yourself make sure that you record your ideas. As these ideas will be in a jumbled form, it would be beneficial to follow these steps.

- Write some sub-headings that have relevance to your ideas.
- Group your ideas under the sub-headings.
- Look for patterns and similarities in your brainstorm activity.

TASK 2

Under these headings, write key words and/or phrases about the 1930s Depression.

Political	Economic	Social

TASK 3

Now choose one or two aspects from each of the major headings (political, economic and social) and write a paragraph using general statements, supporting statements and evidence, and arrive at a conclusion. The length for each paragraph will need to be about a hundred words.

TASK 4

Write clear and concise definitions of the following terms:

Term	Definition
Depression	
Investment	
Tariff	
Bondholders	
Sustenance (susso)	
New Guard Movement	
Inflation	
Deflation	

Write brief notes on these leading figures of the Depression:

James Scullin	
Ted Theodore	
Jack Lang	
Otto Niemeyer	
Joseph Lyons	

Unemployment during the Depression

As the Depression got worse and unemployment reached the unprecedented level of 29 per cent in 1932, families whose breadwinner was unskilled experienced severe difficulties in day-to-day living and had to rely on charitable organisations for handouts to survive. Some ventured out and 'jumped the rattler' in an effort to find work in other towns.

Clive French points out that farmers became used to the sight of men seeking employment on their property and offered assistance to some.⁹ Life in the cities was just as desperate for the unemployed. Some people used their initiative by making cakes, biscuits and sweets, selling them on the footpath or by visiting homes.

Source 1: From *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 1931.



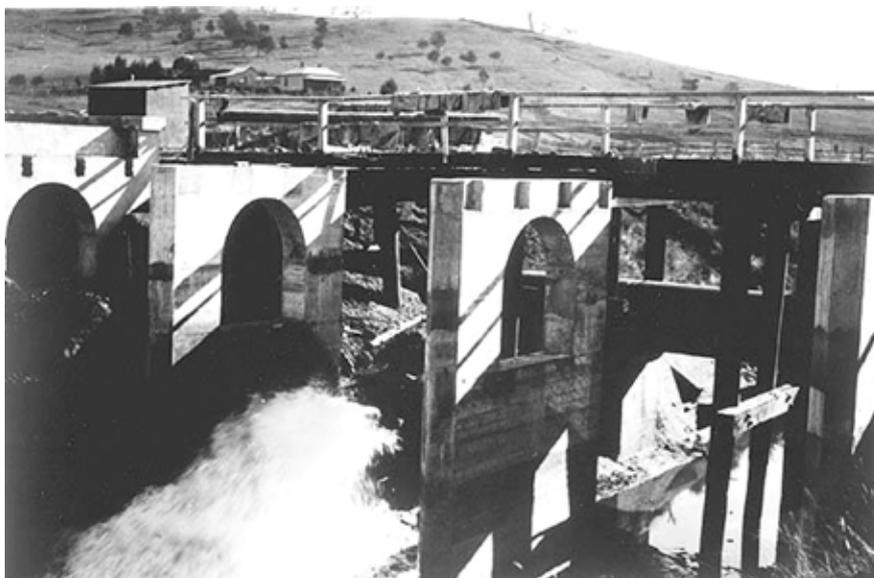
'Unemployed match-seller's sign: Please help me to "turn the corner" ...'
Hood collection, State Library of New South Wales.

Out of bed but what to? The drab routine of cleaning the bread tin and making a cup of tea for her lying in a troubled slumber, the effort to convince the kiddies that dripping is better for them than butter, the equally heroic effort to shave with a hopeless blade and jumping out of one's skin when the baker arrives, and not the landlord.

The routine continues in dread, anxiety and tears. For there is yet the landlord's man – most fearsome of all and one or two collectors whom are becoming impossible to placate. Then there is the gas account which the wife weeps over, and the impeding electric light bill. To stay at home seems effortless, to walk the streets without definite purpose is futile.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the concerns of this family?
2. What do you think the writer meant when he said: '... to walk the streets without definite purpose is futile?'
3. How could such despair and hopelessness of the unemployed be altered?



Sustenance projects for Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works during the Depression – bridge construction. nla.pic-an20865637-46
National Library of Australia.

Part 2: The response of Australians to the crisis: The social response

What do we mean by the term social?

The term social is the way human beings behave and interact with one another. In the context of the 1930s Depression students need to observe how people lived, their housing, food, entertainment, religious practices, dress, speech, education and health.

Source 2: From J.E. Tate, *Life in the 1930s*, The Jacaranda Press, Australia, 1976, p6. Housewife, Richmond (Vic).

We ate ordinary food; there were never any luxuries, like cakes ... because we did not have the money to buy them ... The cheaper cuts of meat ... could get steak for two shillings per pound or less. Two shillings bought enough meat for one meal at least ... A man would come to the door and sell you a basket of vegetables for a shilling. These would last all week...

By 1929 the only work experience my husband had was as a clerk with Ball and Welch ... He had to take a week off every third week.

Source 3: From Tate, *Life in the 1930s*, p7. Schoolgirl, Brighton (Vic). Her father was a teacher.

One of the main recollections of the Depression is of the constant discomfort of cold during the greater part of the year ... We piled coats on the bed to keep warm - or curtains or anything else we could lay hands on... we could never afford a fire during the day and did not always have one at night ... I know that children were often kept home from school because of lack of clothes ...

I thought it dreadful to see so many men on relief ... I never pass the Shrine of Remembrance without thinking of men on sustenance digging around it for the lawns.

QUESTIONS

1. What types of values and attitudes do you think the housewife and school girl would have had?
2. What evidence from the extracts can you give to support such a view?

What were the causes of the Depression?

The Depression in Australia was caused by a series of internal and external factors. Some of the internal factors were high overseas borrowing by the Bruce-Page Government in the 1920s. During this time, as goods were in abundance, consumers were living beyond their means by entering into hire-purchase agreements, which increased household debt. The business sector capitalised on the upsurge of consumer spending by expanding their industrial operations and borrowed money from banks and other willing lenders. This situation led to an oversupply of goods that caused prices to fall and benefit the consumer. But, these latter years of prosperity in the 1920s was short lived, as external factors began to exert pressure.

Internal causes:

The first internal cause of the Depression was the rapid growth in the 1920s that resulted in heavy borrowings by the Bruce-Page Government that amounted 200 million pounds at high

interest payments. The second internal cause was the oversupply of manufactured goods, which caused prices to fall and businesses to lose profits.

The third internal cause was the increasing number of imports coming into the country, which meant that money left the country. Also, local manufacturers had to compete with overseas imports and needed to be more competitive.

The fourth internal cause was the droughts of 1927 and 1929, which reduced primary exports.

External causes:

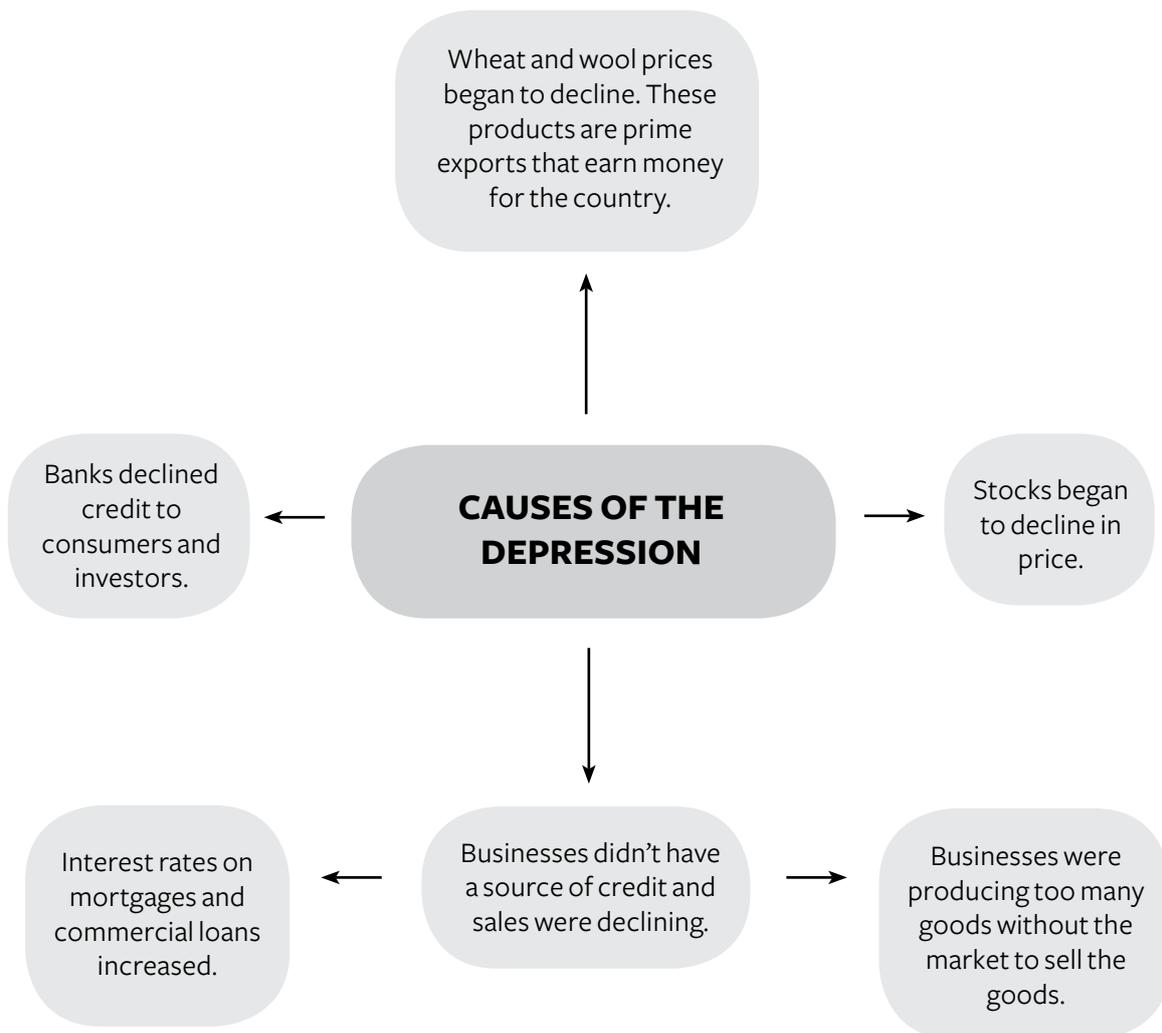
The first external cause was the reduction of wheat prices from 4/10 (48 cents) per bushel to 2/5 (24 cents) followed by the reduction of wool prices 1/6 (15 cents) per lb. in 1928, to 9d (8 cents) per lb. in 1930.

The second cause was the collapse of the stock market in America in October 1929. This crash resulted in a decline in loan money, public works programs ceased and unemployment began to increase as private investors began to close their businesses.

The third cause was the high customs duties on imports, which were increased even further.

Refer to the following concept map (Source 4) to enhance your understanding.

Source 4: Concept map

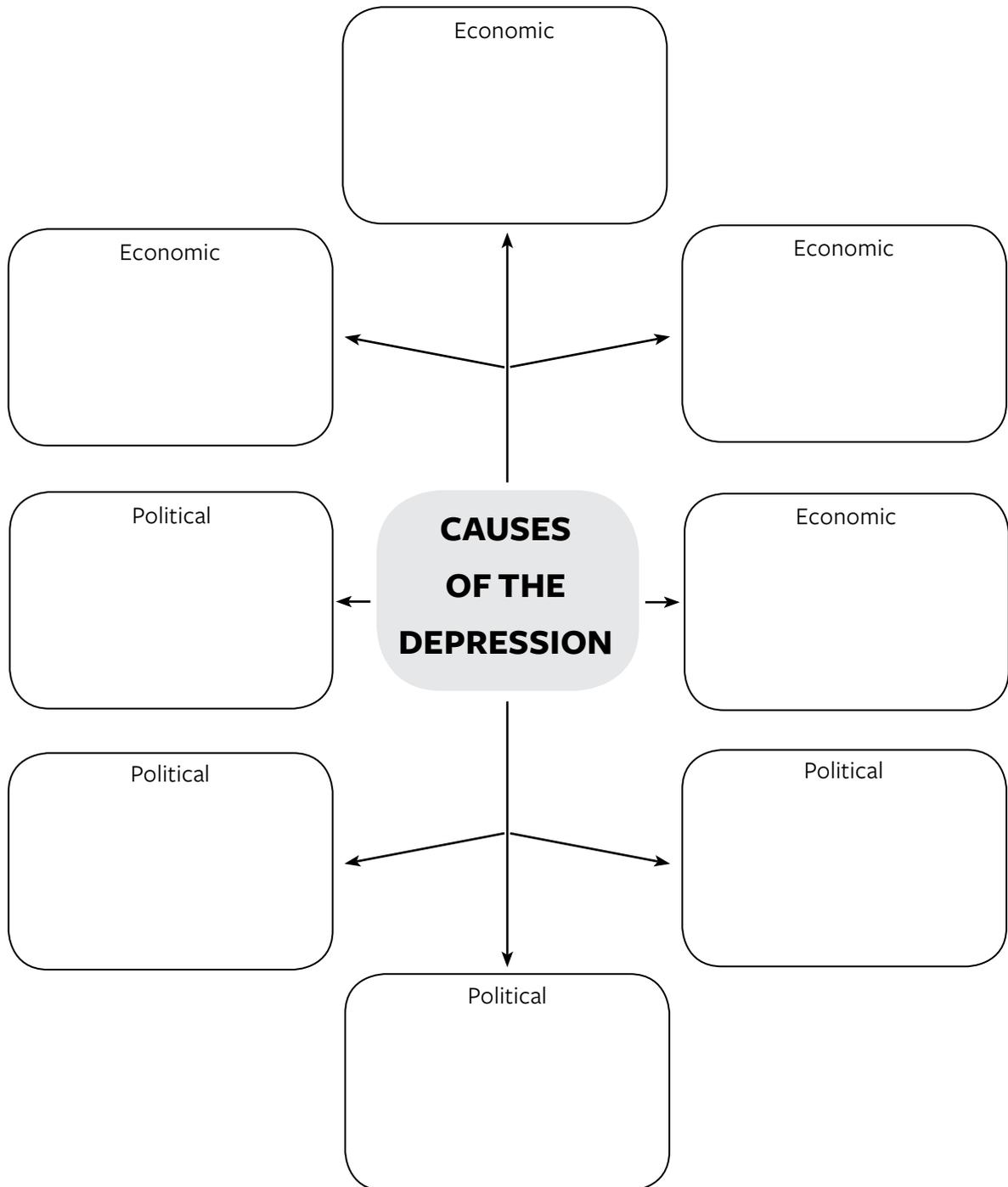


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TASK 5

Refer to Source 4

1. Using the headings 'Economic' and 'Political,' list as many causes of the Depression as you can under these headings in the diagram.
2. What lessons can future governments learn from the causes of the 1930s Depression?



Source 5: From Tate, *Life in the 1930s*, pp6–7.
Housewife Ascot Vale (Victoria).

I believe the cause of the Depression in Australia was the fact that we were too ready to beggar ourselves for England ... I think the government should have postponed paying the debt to England until it became economically possible to begin repayments.

My sympathies lay with the Labor Party because they gave a better deal to the man on low income ...

Bruce and his government acted unwisely during the twenties boom and laid the way for a deeper depression than may have otherwise occurred. He was out of touch with the working man. Latham was a vital and intelligent politician ... Scullin has been much maligned because of his inability to cope with the Depression. He was not one of the great Labor leaders like Curtin or Chifley. However, he failed to act positively. Lang's ideas on repudiation and social legislation were far in advance of his time. I had a great admiration for him. He did what he thought was right.

I think Sir Otto Niemeyer should have stayed in England. He had no right to tell Australians that they must economise to save Britain ... The Australian people were thrown to the wolves to save England.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the writer mean by the phrase '... we were too ready to beggar ourselves to England?'
2. What was her opinion of the Labor Party and James Scullin?

Life during the Depression

Life during the Depression was dependent on an individual's socio-economic status. The middle and upper classes survived the Depression as they had savings, employment and rent from properties. However, a significant proportion of the population had to rely on the 'susso' and handouts from charitable organisations. These points can be clearly supported by the research conducted by Drew Cottle, cited by John Case in Ray Willis, 1985, on the case study of Woollahra, a Sydney suburb. Cottle's findings suggest that the wealthy did not experience any inconvenience, as illustrated by the following extracts.

Source 6: From Drew Cottle, 'The Sydney Rich in the Great Depression,' Bowyangs, September–October 1979.

Mrs Eustace Molroyde, of Darling Point is taking two of her daughters (Joane and Norah) abroad this month. They will leave by the German liner *Oder*, and France will be their destination. They will probably spend about a year in Paris for the girls to perfect their French. Their future plans are uncertain, but it is doubtful if they will return to Sydney under three years.

Source 7: From Cottle, 'The Sydney Rich.'

An upper middle class family outlines their predicament: 'Mrs Pont, for example, was certainly aware of the Depression and her family was forced to draw upon its capital resources ... my father was a lawyer ... he didn't have a case in three years ... people simply couldn't afford his services.'

Source 8: From Cottle, 'The Sydney Rich.'

The fall in prices meant that their savings had appreciated in real terms ... The well to do began to respond by making alterations and additions to their homes at very low cost to themselves. Many built garages at a cost of 300 to 500 pounds. In fact during the period 1928–34 no fewer than 545 garages were built in Woollahra. In contrast to this, in a working class suburb of Redfern seven garages were built, and 6 of those were erected by petrol pump proprietors.

QUESTIONS

1. What comment can you make about Australian society during the 1930s based on the above evidence? Use the source and quote from the source.
2. How do you think the people of Redfern felt in relation to this disparity of wealth? (Source 8)
3. With reference to the above three pieces of evidence what do you think is the problematic nature of historical evidence?
4. To answer this question, you will need to be aware of the types of primary evidence that have been presented, the selective nature of the evidence by historians to promote their own objectives, the year of publication and the attitudes and values of that period. Does this have an influence on how a historian writes and analyses information?

The urban experience

As factories closed and employment became scarce in the working class suburb of Richmond during the 1930s, frustration and jealousy were apparent among those who lacked skills. Janet McCalman states that ‘As the Depression deepened, symptoms of moral decay appeared particularly by the youth of Richmond.’¹⁰ She claimed that these undesirables uprooted trees and shrubs in parks, removed grass from parks and gardens, broke pickets and electric lamps, and made several attempts to burn down council property. Also, organised sport such as cricket and football matches were disrupted as they would run on the field.

At the peak of the Depression, Janet McCalman states that 4000 people were unemployed in Richmond.¹¹ This high rate of unemployment led to extreme levels of poverty and hardship for many. Evictions, starvation and lack of hygiene were common problems that people living in poverty encountered.

David Potts’ compilation of interviews reinforces the problems and hardships that the unemployed endured during the Depression in urban areas around the country.¹² Those who were unable to find work relied on charity from private citizens, the Salvation Army and benevolent societies. Other forms of material assistance they received were second-hand clothes, packet food and sometimes cash handouts to help with rent and bills.

By 1932, Australia’s unemployment rate had risen to 29 per cent. Charitable organisations providing soup and other forms of sustenance found it difficult to cope with the large numbers with their meagre resources. In 1935, the Lyons Government set up depots to hand out relief coupons. The coupons were taken to local stores and were exchanged for matches, food, candles and soap. This was referred to as the ‘susso’ (sustenance), so that people who did not have any money to purchase food could get the susso and stay alive.

Source 9: From David Potts, *In and Out of Work: Personal Accounts of the 1930s*, HTAV, 1988, p17.

Mrs Colleen Flaherty (born 1907) lived in Moonee Ponds. Her husband was unemployed.

We weren’t bothered about getting the dole. We were glad to get it as we had children and we had to make sure they were looked after. We weren’t encouraged to get any work as even a few shillings threatened your chance to get the dole. It was reported to the dole office that I was earning five shillings [50 cents] cleaning houses and they told me I had to give it up. I was glad to, as the work was very hard, but I felt the five shillings was handy to feed and clothe the children.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the notion of work such an important facet in any society? Refer to the urban experiences in Richmond.

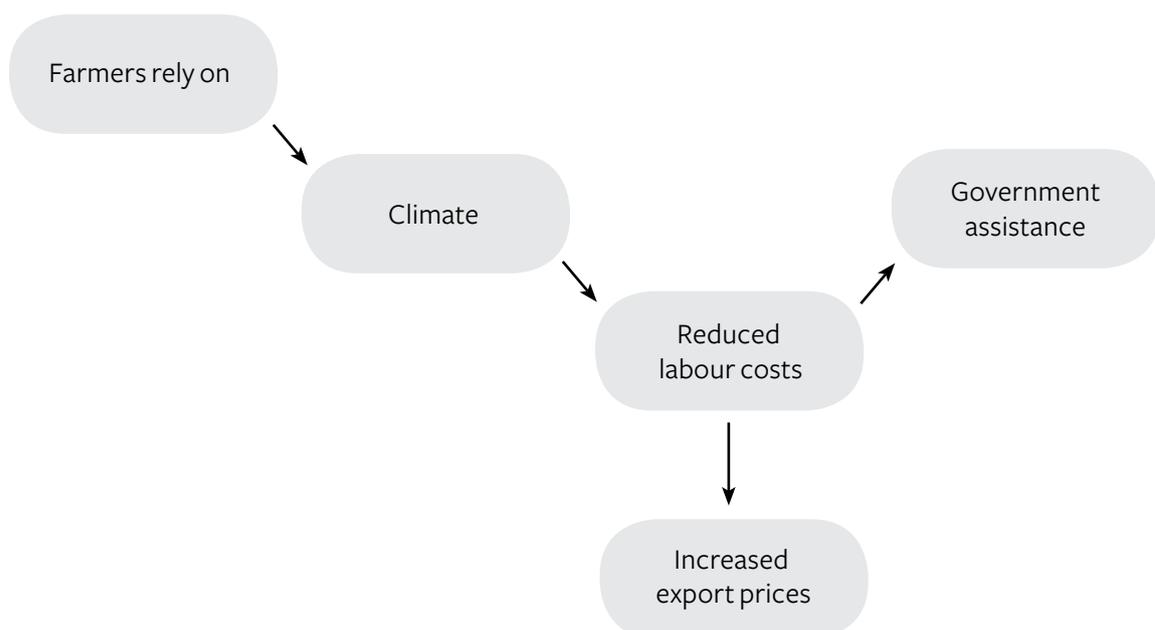


Schoolchildren line up for free issue of soup and a slice of bread.
Hood collection, State Library of New South Wales.

The rural experience

The Depression had a severe impact on the farming industry, which was dependent on many variables such as climate, markets, cost of materials and government decisions on the exchange rate. Most of these variables are beyond the control of a farmer. In 1930, a fruitful wheat crop was achieved by the farmers throughout the country but a sum of two shillings per bushell was the payment on the open market. This did not benefit the farmers. The government of the day agreed to pay four shillings for one year and three shillings the next.

The diagram below illustrates the precarious predicament the farmers endure each year.



Source 10: Adapted from K. Maynard, 'The Thirties: A Shared Social Experience,' in C. Pearce, et. al., *Representing Australian History*, Macmillan, 1992, pp205–206.

In 1930 the Farmers Relief Act was introduced in New South Wales. Each farmer received 75 pounds a year as a living allowance. About 1800 farmers received the benefit. Although this only equated to \$2.88 per week the money provided some assistance to struggling farmers. In 1931 The South Australian Farmers Relief Act granted financial assistance in the form of advances to be charged against the farmer's next crop. In 1931–32 the Federal Government provided the Bounty Yard Relief which involved assistance to wheat growers of 4 1/2 pence per bushel on all wheat produced that year. Queensland farmers received 4 pence from the state government as well as the Bounty Relief. In 1932 the newly elected Lyons Government introduced the Financial Relief Act which allowed states to give assistance to farmers even if they weren't growing wheat.

QUESTIONS

1. List the Acts that were introduced.
2. What was the underlying purpose of such Acts?
3. Do you think such financial assistance would have been viewed in a favourable light by the unemployed living in cities? Why?

Unemployment and its effects

Unemployment affected the working classes and some sections of the middle classes more than the upper classes in Australian society at the time of the Depression. The main reason for this was that the working classes and some middle class sectors of the population were unskilled in the type of occupations that they were involved in and did not have sufficient savings that they could live off.

Source 11: From Tate, *Life in the 1930s*.
Recollections of a butcher, Camberwell, Melbourne.

As I had always been able to get a job ... I had no sympathy for those individuals who stood in the 'susso' Queue every Friday throughout the Depression without ever trying to get a job. Many could have gone to Mansfield [Victoria] to cut scrub as my friend Jack did. At least that was better than just accepting help. I think ordinary individuals had no initiative to get another job once they lost one.

Source 12: From Tate, *Life in the 1930s*.

I was born in 1920 and spent my first twenty years on a small farm outside Melbourne.

... Living on a farm probably isolated us from the worst effects of the Depression, for we always had meat, eggs, milk, butter and fruit. Although swagmen were a common sight on the main road, our farm was too far from the road for them to come begging at the door. My relations in the city, whom we visited often, had secure occupations (for example, Country Roads Board engineer, army officer, electrician), so the wider family circle did not feel the physical effects of the Depression either.

Source 13: *The Sydney Sun*, 7 February 1930.

Several police were necessary to control 500 men and boys who applied at the factory of Nally Products Ltd, city, and stormed the place in response to an advertisement calling for six youths.

Source 14: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February 1930.

In answer to a three line advertisement offering employment to two girls experienced in bottling and labelling, 200 girls stormed the offices of Mr Knight, toilet preparations agent ... yesterday morning. Many were well educated and carried references from leading city firms. Some told pitiful tales of privations their families have been through owing to unemployment, and almost begged for the position.

It is clear from these pieces of evidence that the unemployed were perceived differently by individuals depending on their values, beliefs and the particular circumstances that they endured during these harsh times. It must also be noted that the weekly wage was reduced by the Industrial Commission from 4 pounds, 5 shillings (\$8.50) to 3 pounds, 12 shillings, 6 pence (\$7.25). Why do you think this was done?

QUESTIONS

1. Refer to Sources 12 and 13. Describe the feelings and attitudes the unemployed may have had during the times of the Depression.
2. Why do you think people living on farms would have been able to cope with the Depression in a more bearable way than those who lived in cities?

Charitable organisations

During the Depression there were many charitable groups that supported the public with food, garments and accommodation. In Victoria there were 174 charities and 154 of those were issuing relief.

Groups at the forefront of such programs were the Salvation Army, St Vincent De Paul Society and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence. Although during the Depression these charities acted on a non-judgemental basis and provided relief to the under-privileged, Cahill points out that, despite their admirable humanitarian intentions, they were unable to sustain the dignity and morale of the men seeking relief. Nevertheless, these charitable organisations were extremely helpful to many people who were in genuine need of food and clothing. State and federal governments were less forthcoming in providing relief work and unemployment benefits.

Wendy Lowenstein points out that the Salvation Army was famous for feeding all who came and was willing to provide help and assistance to anyone who wanted a meal. She cites the work of 'Hannah' a Salvation Army worker who says, 'I suppose you could say that most of these men were derelicts. But I don't like using that word. They were human beings, they had their own dignity. Many of them slept round the Yarra banks.'¹³

Lowenstein went on to ask Hannah, 'You delivered furniture and other things around the inner suburbs to people who needed help. What were these little inner suburban houses like?' Hannah's response was, 'They're hard to describe really. Dirty little houses, a lot of them. And they smelled to make you sick. You'd go in and be glad to get out. They were poor, poorness everywhere. But I treated them with respect.'¹⁴

QUESTIONS

1. The work of charitable organisations is highly commendable. Why do you think that governments offer such organisations little or no monetary assistance?
2. What values and attitudes would you need to have to become a worker for the Salvation Army? Do you think Hannah possessed such values and attitudes? Justify your answer.

The role of women during the Depression

It is only in recent years that the role of women has been documented and analysed by historians writing about the Depression in Australia. Janet McCalman, Wendy Lowenstein, Henry Pook and Judy Mackinolty are a few writers that have incorporated women's stories of the 1930s Depression.

To gain an understanding of women's experiences I will refer to the La Trobe University study on women in the Depression conducted by Judy Mackinolty and summarise some of this research that is cited by Henry Pook.

Source 15: Summary of J. Mackinolty, 'LaTrobe Study,' in *The Wasted Years*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

The social class women were born into or married into, determined their position and status in society. These women are referred to as the 'Unfettered Women', They lived in a palatial house with some having servants to do the household duties, while others took it upon themselves to operate the household in the absence of the breadwinner who would be a professional person hard at work. Mackinolty points out that these women paid for the doctor, were able to have extra money to spend on entertainment, visit the cinema, purchase new clothes and had plenty of food in the kitchen. The typical 'Unfettered Woman' would be young and enjoyed life.

...

The 'Modest Woman' whose husband would have been a semi-professional person such as a clerk, station master or project supervisor wasn't poor but her standard of living had dropped during the Depression. The Modest Woman would have up to four children, renting a house, accepting old clothes for herself, children and her husband.

...

Women whose husbands had lost their jobs experienced and endured the Depression with great difficulty and hardship. The stress and psychological trauma must have been demoralising to women, but their level of resilience was remarkable in situations of adversity. Mackinolty points out that those women who were fortunate enough to have employment were paid lower wages than men for the same work. Many women were young and unmarried. Those that were married and had employment were perceived with envy particularly by other non-working women. Also, Mackinolty points out that those women who had full time employment had to run a household as well. During this era it wasn't acceptable for men to be assisting with household duties as it was part of the fabric of society that such domestic duties was the domain of the female or servant and not the master of the household.

...

Mackinolty concludes that the experiences of both the unemployed man and his wife, although equally desperate, were considerably different.

The woman did have the opportunity to work if she could find work, but did not receive the same wage as her male counterpart. When she returned home her female role was delineated by society and she was responsible for looking after the children and running the household. This was perceived by women's groups as unjust and unfair. Also, a male could leave the household at any time and enjoy the company of his male friends but a female had to stay at home.

Muriel Heagney writes,

'No longer protected in the home as the appendage of a man, women consciously demand recognition of the fact that a woman's right to work rests not on the number of her dependants, nor on the fact that she does or does not compete with men, but in the absolute right of a free human being, a tax payer and a voter to economic independence.'¹⁵

QUESTIONS

1. What criticisms could you make of the way society was structured during the 1930s?
2. Explain the roles of men and women during the 1930s. Give evidence in your answer.
3. What were some of the differences between an unfettered woman and a working class woman?

| **Source 16:** From *Commonwealth Year Book*, 1935, p554.

Incomes of Australians 1933 (Figures are in pounds)	Bread-winners		
No income	308 747	83 688	392 435
Under 52 per annum	566 814	308 689	875 503
52 to 103 per annum	385 055	188 556	573 611
104 to 155 per annum	273 033	102 653	375 686
156 to 207 per annum	265 649	41 550	307 199
208 to 259 per annum	222 772	17 508	240 280
260 or over per annum	307 804	23 933	331 737
Not stated per annum	37 906	21 264	59 170
Total	2 367 780	787 841	3 155 621

QUESTIONS

Refer to the above table.

1. What conclusion can you arrive at in relation to the income distribution for males and females in 1933?
2. Which groups in society do you think these statistics would have any significance for? Why?

Part 3: The cures and changes: The political and economic response

The Theodore Plan

Ted Theodore was the Federal Treasurer for the Scullin government during 1929–1932. His plan for the country to come out of the Depression was that the government would need to inject 36 million pounds into the economy, increase spending on relief work, increase social service payments and pay back loans by instalments to the lenders. Such a plan required the co-operation of the banks and the approval of the Senate. Both groups failed to give approval to such a plan.

The Premiers' Plan

In June 1931 the Prime Minister met with state Premiers to consider the Premiers' Plan to overcome the great Depression. The main features of the plan were to increase taxes and provide additional revenue so that loans could be paid back, a balanced budget could be reached, government spending could be reduced by 20 per cent and interest rates could be substantially reduced to encourage private investors to borrow money and commence building and investment projects.¹⁶

This was a plan of deflation. It proposed extensive reductions in government expenditure rather than spending public money to create employment. This plan was accepted. It showed that the government was not going to escalate fiscal policy and increase inflation.



Portrait of Joseph Aloysius Lyons.
nla.pic-an12266314 National Library of Australia.

The Premiers' Plan was accepted by all the states except New South Wales. However, the Premiers' Plan did not solve the ills of the Scullin Government, as there were disagreements between the right- and left-wing factions within the Labor Party. This, ultimately, led to the Labor split in 1931.

Joseph Lyons, a member of the Labor Party, gained support from Labor ranks and formed the United Australia Party. On 19 December 1931, he contested the federal election and was successful in defeating the Scullin Government. Lyons went on to govern Australia until 1939. His plan for the remaining years of the Depression was to balance the budget, cut wages, cut government spending, reduce pensions and pay back Australia's loans.¹⁷

Source 17: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 December 1931.
Joseph Lyons and the 1931 Federal Election.

The United Australia Party ... welcomes this election. It gives us an opportunity of placing before the people the choice between sound, honest finance and government as against fantastic schemes of inflation ... If returned we will, therefore, proceed by every means within our power to balance the budget – in other words, to show that we can live within our income. This would immediately give to industry and business within Australia ... a sense of security which they have not enjoyed under the Scullin Administration. We will endeavour to make Australia an attractive field for investment of money.

... There is definite evidence, however, that the Scullin Government, if returned to office, does not intend to adhere to [the Premiers'] plan ... Mr Theodore is still determined upon demented schemes of inflation and the overthrow of our present system of banking. Inflation and the political control of banking must surely destroy any sound economic plan ... Inspired and directed from Moscow, the ugly serpent of Communism is becoming more active and aggressive in Australia. This movement is anti-Australian, anti-British, and anti-religious ... We shall use every effort within the law to deal with this menace ...

QUESTIONS

1. Outline the key features of the Theodore Plan and the Premiers' Plan.
2. Refer to Source 17. What was Joseph Lyons' view on economic policy?
3. Why do you think Lyons made reference to 'Communism' in this speech?

The Lang plan

John Thomas Lang was Premier of New South Wales from 1930 to 1932 and represented the Labor Party. He introduced significant pieces of legislation such as the widow's pension, worker's compensation and child endowment payments to mothers. When the Scullin Federal Government was seeking ideas to reduce the problem of unemployment, Jack Lang devised his own plan. He believed that the Federal Government had to spend money on public works programs to create employment.

He maintained that interest payments to British bondholders should be deferred and the funds injected into the economy to create jobs for the unemployed. This Keynesian style of economics was not shared by the Scullin Federal Government in the post-war period. Scullin was of the view that such a plan would have added to inflation and placed further strains on the economy.

The Premiers in the other states did not accept the Lang plan, but Lang continued to apply it in New South Wales, spending funds on relief projects and capital works programs. By doing this, he chose not to pay the British lenders their interest payments. The Scullin Federal Government did not want to have a blemish on its credit rating so it paid the debt, which amounted to 5 million pounds. The situation continued when the Lyons Federal Government was elected in 1932. However, in accordance with the Financial Enforcement Act 1932, the Federal Government redirected payments that were to be made to the Commonwealth Bank of New South Wales. Lang intervened and deposited the money in the New South Wales Treasury. As the Premier was breaking the law by adopting such an action, the Scullin Government and later the Lyons Government put pressure on the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Philip Game, to dismiss the Premier. On 13 May 1932 Lang was dismissed as Premier.

THE DEPRESSION: TESTING THE NEW NATION

Source 18: From B. Foott, *Dismissal of a Premier*, Morgan Publications, Sydney, 1968, p209. Letter from the Governor of New South Wales to Premier Lang, 12 May 1932.

Dear Mr Lang,

At our interview this afternoon you requested me to communicate my views by letter.

The position as I see it is that Ministers are committing a breach of the law. While you did not admit this, you did not deny it. Your case as I understand it is, that Ministers are determined on their action in order to carry on the essential services of the State.

Into the aspect of justification it is not, as I conceive it, my province to inquire. My position is that if my ministers are unable to carry on essential services without breaking the law, my plain duty is to endeavour to obtain Ministers who feel able to do so.

I have already pointed to you in my letter of the 12th instant, it is impossible for me to put the Crown in the position of being a party to an illegal action.

If Ministers are not prepared to abide by the law, then I must state without hesitation that it is their bounden duty, under the law and practice of the Constitution, to tender their resignations.

I await an early reply, as I am sure you will agree that the present position cannot be allowed to extend over the weekend.

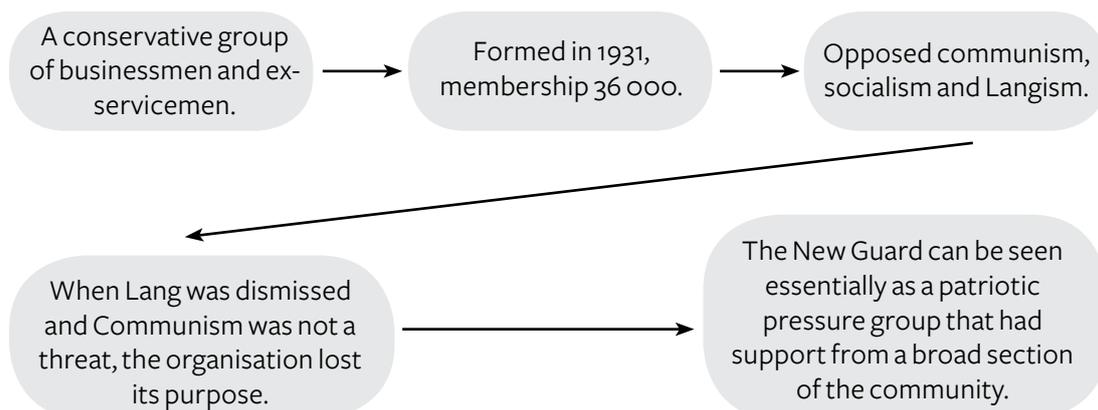
Philip Game
Governor

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the Federal Government did not support the Lang plan?
2. Why was Jack Lang dismissed?
3. Who was the Governor that dismissed Jack Lang?
4. What was the Governor's reasoning that caused him to dismiss Lang?

The New Guard

The New Guard was a right-wing group formed on 18 February 1931. Its founder was Eric Campbell. The purpose of such a group was to prevent the infiltration of Communist ideas into Australian politics. At its peak, the New Guard had a membership of 60 000 and held the following principles: total loyalty to the throne, fully supporting the values of the British Empire, encouraging honourable government, and supporting the rights and freedoms of the individual. In its declining years the leader of the New Guard, Eric Campbell, created a split in the movement by supporting Fascism and Nazism. However, by the mid-1930s its membership had declined and it was not a force that posed a threat to the fabric of Australian society.



Source 19: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 1931.

The newspaper reported on the New Guard rally at the Sydney Town Hall in this way:

Looking at the audience, one was swept back on a wave of memory to the camps and enlistment depots of 1914–15. Clerks, bank managers, labourers, small shop-keepers, accountants, barristers, a mixed audience, but all inspired by a wave of patriotic ardour.

Yet, despite its essentially ex-AIF leadership, the New Guard was not primarily a digger organisation. Rather, it represented the interests and values of the middle class who had built up informal organisations during the conflicts of World War I. These networks and experiences assisted them in taking action when they saw themselves threatened again in the 1920s and 1930s.

QUESTIONS

1. What effect did the New Guard have on the Scullin Government?
2. What caused the demise of the New Guard?
3. Refer to Source 19 and point out what the New Guard was trying to preserve.

Recovery

By the mid-thirties there were signs of economic recovery as investors began to have greater confidence in the economy. Also, banks began to lend more funds, which enabled investors to take more risks, expand their existing businesses to create new ones.

The farming sector began to export its wheat and wool to traditional markets. It is worth pointing out that Alan Shaw, 1973, suggests that the real recovery for Australia came through the manufacturing sector providing employment and placing goods in the shops for domestic and foreign consumption.¹⁸

Shaw elaborates by stating that:

'In 1931 Australia had 110 million sheep; in 1941, 125 million. Nor could the export of wheat production have sparked the recovery. The number of hectares under wheat production fell from 7.3 million in 1930–31 to 5.7 million in 1938–39. But the volume of manufacturing production, which increased by nearly 30 per cent between 1920–1929, again went up more than 40 per cent between 1929 and 1937.

*In 1928–29, 450,000 persons were employed in manufacturing; in 1931–32 there were 337,000 employed but in 1937–38 this had increased to 558,000 that were employed.'*¹⁹

Such a recovery came in the manufacturing sector particularly in metals such as iron, steel and in the chemical and textile industries. Even though manufacturing contributed greatly to the recovery from the Depression it relied heavily on rural products so that the whole manufacturing process could prosper.

The following diagram is an attempt to illustrate what happened after the recovery phase of the Depression.



THE DEPRESSION: TESTING THE NEW NATION

R. M. Crawford suggests that, '... The Depression brought greater health into the Australian economy. Inefficient industries went under and others learnt an increased efficiency. The fall in overseas credits made it necessary to buy less from outside and make more at home and the long-term effect was to stimulate renewed industrial expansion, aided by lower costs.'²⁰

M. Johnston points out that wage rates began to increase from 1935 to 1940. The average male rate in 1935 was 82 shillings and 10 pence, this had increased to 98 shillings and one penny by 1940.

The female rates of pay, although far lower than male wages, also increased. In 1935 the average female rate was 45 shillings. This had increased to 54 shillings and 3 pence by 1940.²¹

TASK 6

1. Refer to the quote by Shaw and make up your own concept map.
2. Summarise the view of one other author on the recovery of the Depression.

Part 4: The social cohesion of Australian society during the 1930s

Sport

Despite the troubles and tribulations the population had suffered during the Depression there was a time to enjoy favourite sporting pastimes such as cricket, football and horse racing.

Many people flocked to watch Sir Donald Bradman play cricket in all the cities around the country. He was a prolific scorer and completed his test career with a batting average of 99.94.

During the 1932–33 ‘Bodyline series’ the English captain Douglas Jardine instructed his bowlers to aim at the batsman’s body and head. Such tactics although legal were not in the spirit of the game. Some players were constantly hit on the body, including Bradman, and found it difficult to score runs. Many spectators were outraged at this un-sportsmanlike conduct by the English cricket team and their captain, Douglas Jardine. During the series it has been reported by commentators that diplomatic relations between the two countries were strained due to the ill feelings that eventuated.

Another popular form of sports entertainment that existed during the Depression was horse racing. The champion race horse Phar Lap sparked considerable controversy when he died on 5 April 1932. Source 22 provides an insight to the legendary status of Phar Lap.



Donald Bradman at the Adelaide Oval. nla.pic-an11555750
National Library of Australia.

Source 20: From *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 19 January 1933.
The Australian Cricket Board of Control’s cable to the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC)

Body line bowling assumed such proportions that the game will be in [disrepute ...] Causing intensely bitter feelings between the players [and potential injury ...] Unless stopped at once it is likely to upset the friendly relations existing between Australia and England.

Source 21: From F.M. Harpur, ‘Cricket Footprints in the Sands of Time, 1882–1933,’ LaTrobe Collection, State Library of Victoria.

This team [Jardine’s 1932–33] will go down in history as the inventor of the most cruel and un-sportsman like method which has ever come to Australia. We have had leg theory in tests before ... no one complained ... but we have never seen bowlers deliberately make the ball bounce, in order to hit the batsman and thus intimidate him whilst a packed field on the leg side hampered his play to protect himself without giving his wicket away.

| **Source 22:** *Herald*, 7 April 1932.

The sudden collapse and death of Phar Lap, the great Australian racehorse, continues to be the subject of intense public speculation. Opinion is growing that the horse did not die of acute indigestion, but as the result of some poison which was received in some manner at present a mystery.

Following the autopsy, Dr Neilson, the Australian Veterinary surgeon, [said] ... 'I saw the lining of his stomach and I know what it means when the lining is eaten away.'

QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Sir Donald Bradman and the 1930s Depression?
2. Sir Donald Bradman is an icon in Australia's history. Why is this so?
3. Why was Phar Lap admired by the people?
4. How do you account for the fact that people spent money at the races while there was a Depression on?
5. What did Prime Minister Lyons mean when he said, '... What is the use of winning a High Court decision and losing Phar Lap? The death of this wonderful horse is a great sporting tragedy.'

Entertainment

Other forms of entertainment that were growing in popularity were swing clubs, ballroom dancing and the cinema. It would be evident that middle- and upper-class groups in society, who had considerable savings and were able to keep their jobs, would have indulged in such pastimes. The working classes were being evicted, and struggled to find suitable employment so any such luxuries weren't available to them.

| **Source 23:** *Everyone's*, 3 July 1929.

A reported statement by Prime Minister Bruce:

We are facing more economic troubles now than ever before in Australia's history; tens of thousands of men and women are suffering through unemployment ... Surely, then, it is rather dreadful to see great queues of people waiting outside cinema palaces that have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to build. In the big cities you see them lined up even in the early morning ... And thousands of people spend much time and money at the race meetings, week after week. It is a thing that should be stirring the consciences of people in this country. If we could get people thinking more seriously things would not be nearly so bad as they are.

| **Source 24:** *Everyone's*, 14 May 1930.

Hoyts Theatres have offered to throw open their disused suburban houses as sleeping quarters for the homeless unemployed, provided that some social welfare will undertake the supervision of the buildings, and also supply the beds.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between the entertainment industry and the 1930s Depression?
2. Why do you think Prime Minister Bruce was concerned about the entertainment industry? (Source 23)
3. Why do you think Hoyts Theatres allowed the unemployed to use their disused suburban house? (Source 24)

Aborigines: The forgotten people

As in previous decades, the Aborigines of Australia were neglected and forgotten as a group of people living on Australian soil. Colonial governors, and later federal and state governments of all persuasions, were unable to recognise the Aboriginal peoples' cultural and spiritual needs. During the 1930s the responses the authorities put forward to the Aboriginal situation were policies of assimilation to be implemented by Christian missionary programs and adoptions of Aboriginal children to white foster families. More commonly we now refer to this group of Aboriginal people as the 'Stolen Generation.' The intention of such a policy was to assimilate Aborigines into mainstream modern society. In 1938, there were some Aboriginal activist groups that were formed to protest against this policy and make claims for land rights.

The date 26 January 1938 was a significant one to white Europeans as they celebrated 150 years of European settlement. However, to the Aborigines this date was regarded as a day of mourning by Aboriginal communities around the country.

Source 25: *Resolution of the Day of Mourning Conference*, from M. Anderson and P. Ashton, *Australia in the 20th Century*, Macmillan, Australia, 2004, p135.

We, representing the Aborigines of Australia, assembled in conference at Australia Hall, Sydney on the 26th Day of January 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the Whiteman's seizure of our country, hereby make protest against the callous treatment of our people by the Whiteman during the past 150 years, and we appeal to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, and we ask for a new policy which will raise our people to full citizen status and equality within the community.

Source 26: *The Abo Call Newspaper*, 1938, Abo Call, (ML MSS 1284/47), Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

... The Abo Call was designed to present the case for Aborigines from the point of view of Aborigines themselves.

Source 27: *White Settlement*, Abo Call, (ML MSS 1284/47), Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

White people immediately realised that we Aborigines have no reason to rejoice at the 150th Anniversary of white settlement in this continent.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the Scullin and Lyons governments neglected the Aboriginal people during the 1930s Depression?
2. What was the significance of the day of mourning to the Aborigines?
3. It is only in modern times that some historians are beginning to recognise the plight of the Aborigine during the Depression years. Why has the Aboriginal story been under-reported by historians for so long?

Case studies

Wendy Lowenstein's 1978 book, *Weevils in the Flour*, is an oral record of many case studies of a variety of people who lived through the 1930s Depression. She has interviewed a cross-section of Australian society that had survived the Depression and has documented accounts of their experiences, illustrating strength and weakness, compromise and servility, division and bonding, fear and despair. I have selected two case studies to analyse. Such studies can be referred to as evidence to support general and supporting statements in your studies.

Some of the key questions that you must ask about oral evidence is:

- Is the evidence reliable?
- What is the source of the evidence?
- Would there be problems with memory?
- Has the author acknowledged that recollections of events can be misinterpreted?
- Is it possible to get a true picture of the 1930s as the event took place?
- Were people from various social backgrounds selected so that a cross-section of the community can be gained?

The lives of some people during the Depression were devastated, as they could not find work and provide the basic necessities for their family. Lowenstein points out that the vast majority of the unemployed desperately wanted to work, earn money and gain self respect and purpose in life.

Some families that had paid employment experienced other problems such as the breadwinner coming home drunk everyday. This only added to the burden experienced by the rest of the family. The following case study is a reflection of this.

Source 28: From W. Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, Scribe Publications Australia, 1978, p131.
Jessie, clothing trades worker.

We were having a discussion about being a housewife. People said, 'But we aren't trained to do anything!'

I just looked at them! You trained yourself if you had any go in you at all. You went from one thing to another. If you didn't have drive and initiative you were out of work.

My father always had work, but mum and I had boarders, too, because he drank a lot and chased around after women. Early in the week the boarders' money was gone and mum would sometimes borrow the few bob that I had over from my meagre wages. Dad was a nasty drunk, too. He would threaten to cut our throats and we'd have to get mum out of the way. Of course with boarders you had no privacy at all. We lived behind a shop in Bridge Road, Richmond, and we kids slept in one bedroom with my parents to make room for the boarders.

Mum did everything for them. Washed, ironed, cut lunches, darned socks! And it was all much harder work in those days. She boiled up the wood copper, no washing machine.

Did you get the dole?

Oh no! When I was employed I handed in all my money at home and got perhaps a shilling back, and when I was unemployed my parents kept me. A teenage girl really couldn't manage without a family behind her.

Source 29: From Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p167.
Enid, primary school girl.

I started school in 1932 when I was five. The room was vast. There were folding doors which were opened to allow two rooms to be made into one. I don't know how the teachers managed. I remember in the fourth grade we had a teacher who was clearly

mentally disturbed. There were over fifty children in the grade, all divided into rows according to marks which were allotted in monthly arithmetic tests.

This teacher would rage up and down the platform screaming at the class, swinging her strap. There was a boy in the second bottom row. She would ask him a question and found he couldn't answer it. She would ask him again, by this time the boy was petrified ... She would scream at him ' Imbecile' and hit him with the strap over the head and shoulders. It was really terrible, she had no business in being in charge of children.

TASK 7

1. Why are Sources 28 and 29 valuable pieces of information?
2. How could you use such pieces of evidence and others from the work conducted by Wendy Lowenstein?
3. Devise your own concept maps for Sources 28 and 29.

Part 5: Skills of the historian

Historians' views on the Depression

This is a selection of historians' views on the Depression. It is by no means an exhaustive list and it needs to be added to so that further investigations and analysis can be conducted.

Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, 20th edition, Scribe Publications Melbourne, 1998, p11.

'One cannot question the hardships. The scars are there still, real tragedies of mind and body, the losses, the weevils in the flour. At the worst time, far more than one third of wage earners were unemployed, living on a tiny pittance, and on their wits. One asks why? Why did they just cop it? Despite the anger and fears the prevailing atmosphere was orderly. There was endurance and not revolt. On the whole the unemployed were passive, law abiding and busy with survival.'

J. Close, 'The Depression Decade', in R. Willis, et. al., *Issues in Australian History*, Longman Cheshire, Australia, 1982, p358.

'The Depression experience actually moved the ALP further away from socialism; the Depression produced Keynesian economic theory and this held out the hope that 'blind market forces' could be controlled by governments without resort to socialism.'

J. Close, 'The Depression Decade', in R. Willis, et., al., *Issues in Australian History*, Longman Cheshire, Australia, 1982, p360.

'The Depression thus provided a powerful stimulus to Australian industrialisation and by removing the excessive dependence on overseas capital that developed in the 1920s it helped to lay the foundation for comparatively stable long-term growth in the post-war period.'

J.E. Tate, *Life in the 1930s*, The Jacaranda Press, Australia, 1976, p64.

'Those who remembered the Depression were to assert that, although those had been hard times, there was more sharing and generosity and companionship than nowadays. They boast to their car-owning children how they had to walk several miles home from the tram terminus after a dance. They would comment on wastefulness of modern school children, and the excessive amounts spent by teenagers on clothes and amusements. These older people needed to justify their helplessness in the face of the calamities of the early 1930s and it was not surprising that they claimed their hardships gave them a sort of moral superiority.'

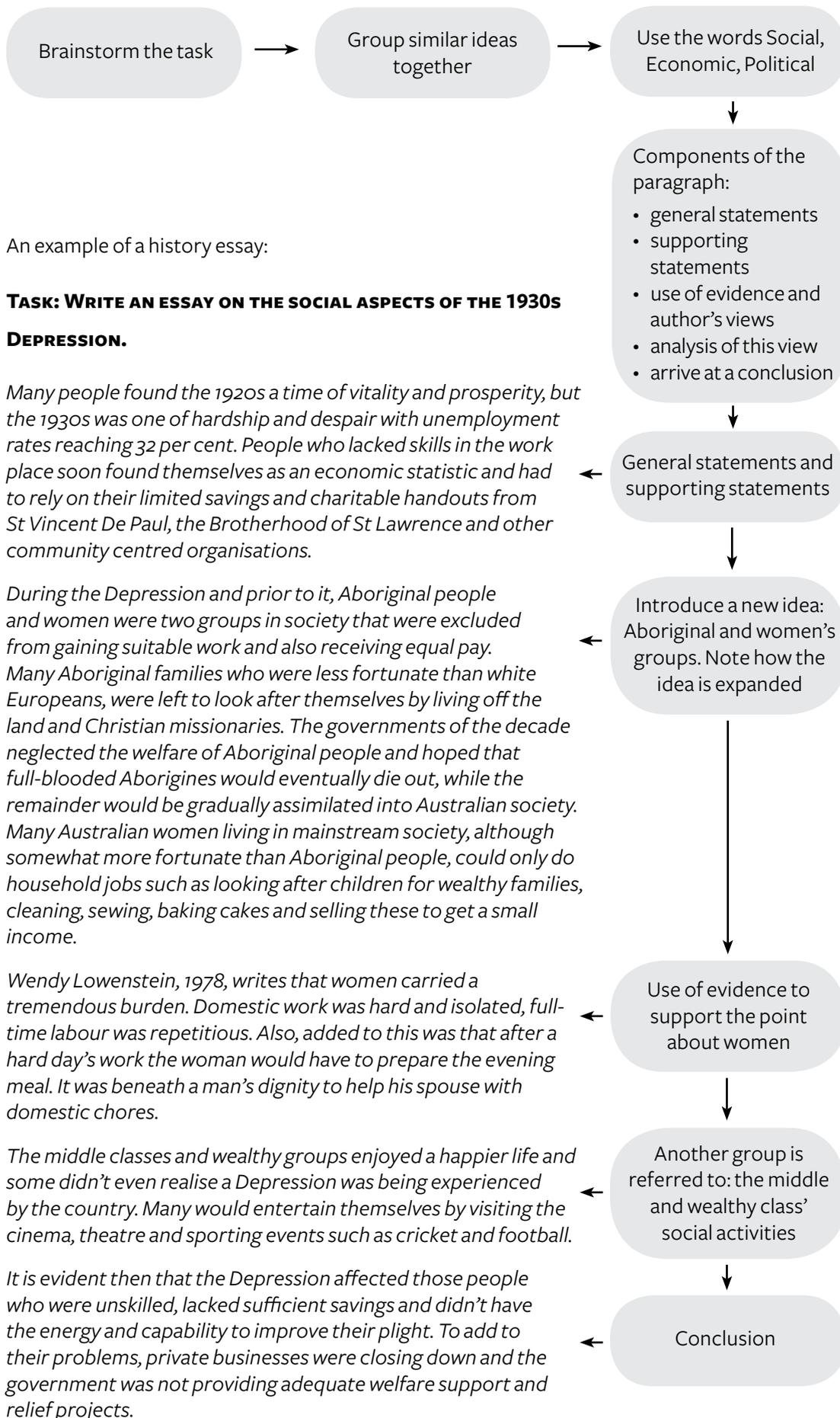
S. Cahill, *Emerging Identity, Revised Edition*, Heinemann Educational Australia, 1988, p278.

'It often took years for those who had suffered the worst physical deprivations to regain some measure of economic security. Simply regaining work did not automatically solve all these problems.'

Clive French, *A Senior Student's Guide to Australian History*, Methuen Australia, 1984, p300.

'The Depression had been hinted at in 1927 when Australia's export prices had begun to decline. The collapse of the New York Stock Market in 1929 had enormous consequences for Australia, as well as other nations, because overseas loan money dried up. Governments tackled the social problems haphazardly while at least 30 per cent of the workforce suffered general misery. Courage, compassion and fortitude surfaced along with greed, fear and frustration.'

The process of writing an effective essay



Structuring your essay

Reading the question

- Identify key words in the question
- Define important terms in the question
- Offer general statements that will give a global view of the question
- If the question asks you to agree or disagree you will need to outline the stance you have adopted.

Paragraphing

Paragraphs need to have the following:

1. General statements
2. Supporting statements
3. Evidence that is acknowledged
4. Analysis of the evidence
5. Arriving at a conclusion.

These five points form the basis of each paragraph in your essay. The statements you write must be related to the question. Each paragraph must have an argument supported with evidence that will be getting closer in answering the question.

Remember to refer to groups that have been included and excluded, and offer reasons for this.

Written expression

Your level of success will be determined by the clarity of your expression, and whether you can integrate evidence into your answer. It is paramount that you explain your ideas clearly and concisely.

Mention historians' names

It is important to mention historians names, but they must be mentioned in the right context and used to support or negate an earlier point or view. For example: 'The Depression had affected the lower working classes to a greater extent than other socio-economic groups. Lownstein and McCalman have both suggested that the lack of skills and education among the working classes was a major factor for the high level of unemployment within this group.'

Problematic nature of history

You need to outline that historians select what to include and what to exclude from their research and publications. This in itself becomes problematic as the reader is not presented with a full picture. The historians' own attitudes and values will determine what content will be included and excluded. For example, it is only in postmodern times that the role of women in history is being recognised and acknowledged as having made significant contributions to the development of the country. Another example are Indigenous Australians who were neglected and positioned as outcasts in a very rich country. The reconciliation movement of the nineties has promoted a greater consciousness among white Australians that the Indigenous people must be recognised as Australians citizens and treated fairly and justly.

Conclusion

- Sum up your main points. Do not re-write your introduction
- Offer your opinion
- Outline the notion of prominent historians pertinent to the study
- Make a few statements about what is to come.

Endnotes

1. G. Bolton, 'Depression in Australia', lecture given to teachers in 1964, HTAV, 1996.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. H. Pook, *Windows on our Past: Constructing Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, 196.
5. Bolton, *op.cit.*, 1996, 4
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About the author

Winston Stradher has taught Australian History for over ten years and has presented VCE Student lectures at Melbourne University conducted by the HTAV and was an examiner of student scripts in 1994. Currently he is teaching at Mentone Grammar and holds the position of Senior History Teacher.

This concise overview for the Depression for teachers and students includes background information and a collection of primary source documents on the impact of the Depression on Australian society.

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