



# Labour History Project

BULLETIN 64 - AUGUST 2015

**Workplace Culture and Union Militancy in the  
Freezing Works 1970s-1990s**

**From Class-Struggle to Neoliberal Narratives**

**New Zealand's Colonial Adventure in Samoa**

**The Passive Resisters' Union, 1912-1913**

**Union Family: James "Jimmy" Fulton**

**LHP Bulletin 64 - August 2015**

ISSN 1175-3064

The Labour History Project Inc.  
PO Box 27-425 Wellington  
Aotearoa New Zealand

For more information on LHP membership,  
activities, publications and news, check out our  
website: [www.lhp.org.nz](http://www.lhp.org.nz)

COVER: Freezing workers march from the  
Westfield Freezing Works to the Otahuhu  
District courthouse in support of 48 picketers  
arrested on trespass charges at Auckland  
International Airport the previous week.

Trevor Penman/Fairfax Media/Auckland Libraries

Footprints 02763.

DESIGN: Jared Davidson

## BULLETIN 64 - AUGUST 2015

**Contents**

## FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Editorial .....	4
Chair's Report .....	5
News round-up .....	6

RECENT AND CURRENT RESEARCH .....	14
-----------------------------------	----

## FEATURE ARTICLES

"Not Simply Bargaining Agents": Workplace Culture and Union Militancy in the Freezing Works 1970s-1990s .....	18
From Class-Struggle to Neoliberal Narratives: Redistributive movements in Aotearoa New Zealand .....	29
"This Mandate abrogates every principle... for which the soldiers... were told they were fighting": New Zealand's Colonial Adventure in Samoa .....	37
"The Military Strike is Now On!": The Passive Resisters' Union, 1912-1913 .....	46

## UNION FAMILY

James "Jimmy" Fulton .....	56
----------------------------	----

## REVIEWS

<i>Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies</i> .....	58
<i>Wellbeing Economics: Future Directions for New Zealand</i> .....	60
<i>Lines of Work: Stories of Jobs and Resistance</i> .....	62
Books noted .....	64

FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

## Editorial

We have a rather full issue for our readers this month. From First World War dissent conferences to historic site conservation to active research, labour history is clearly alive and well in 2015. LHP members and supporters have been active in most of these spheres, and there is much to look forward to with a number of projects planned for the coming year. I am indeed privileged to be an editor in a field with such a rich and voluminous output.

The inaugural “Another World is Possible” essay competition, held in 2013, was my first interaction with the LHP. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and so I was particularly excited to hear the announcement of the results of this year’s competition. Congratulations to the winners. I look forward to reading their essays, which will be published in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

Finally, I would like to thank Barry Pateman for his work on the Reviews section, and Marie Russell for her assistance with proofreading.

*Ciaran Doolin*  
*Editor*

## Chair's report

I am writing this report less than a week after being elected chair of the Labour History Project. I've been on the committee of the LHP since 2009 and I am excited to be taking over as chair.

I want to thank Jim McAloon for his excellent work as chair over the last few years. At the AGM, David Grant, a longstanding member of the committee and previous president, also stepped down from the committee. I want to welcome a number of new members to the committee: Anna Green, Ross Webb, Nicola Braid and Ciaran Doolin. I'm excited that I'm no longer part of the young cohort on the committee, given that I'm in my 30s.

The winners of both the Bert Roth Award and the essay competition were announced at the AGM. Congratulations to the winners. As a member of the panel of the Bert Roth Award, I am pleased to say that New Zealand labour history is in good health. The full report on the Bert Roth Award and the winning entries of the essay competition will be in the next issue.

In recent meetings, the committee has been talking about the role we could play in linking current and past struggles. At the AGM we were lucky enough to have a range of speakers on casualisation, past and present. Anna Green described how watersiders organised when their work was completely casual, Heleyni Pratley talked about Unite's effort to end zero-hour contracts and Sam Huggard gave an overview of current strategies to improve work. The discussion that followed was vigorous and interesting.

I am looking forward to a busy year for the Labour History Project; I know the committee has lots of exciting plans.

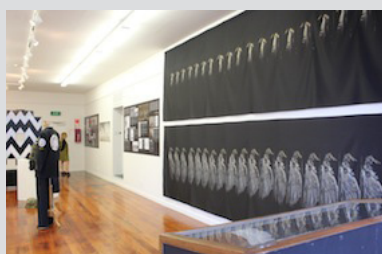
*Grace Millar*  
*Chairperson*



# News round-up

## ANZAC 2015 Dissent Centennial Commemorations: “Disrupting the Narrative” and “My Country Right or Wrong?”

By Peter Clayworth



Photos 1-3: Disrupting the Narrative Exhibition, Thistle Hall, Cuba Street, Wellington. 4: Stevan Eldred-Grigg speaking at the “Disrupting the Narrative” seminar, Anzac Day, 2015. 5: The Maori panel at the “Disrupting the Narrative” seminar (left to right) Tame Iti, Brett Graham, Teanu Tuiono, Gareth Seymour, Ati Teepa.

This year’s centennial of the landings at Gallipoli saw large public participation in the official ANZAC Day events. New Zealanders have a variety of personal reasons for taking part (or not participating), in such ceremonies. While the official centennial commemorations of the Great War of 1914-1918 have given some recognition to the range of views on the war, they have still leaned towards a nationalistic “nation-building” and pro-military interpretation. Two events held in Wellington over the weeks around ANZAC Day 2015 presented a number of alternative views on the First World War and how its legacy continues to affect the twenty-first century.

### *Disrupting the Narrative*

During the week leading up to ANZAC Day the Art Not War Collective held the exhibition “Disrupting the Narrative” at Wellington’s Thistle Hall. The exhibition was designed to present a counter-narrative to official war commemorations. It presented art works expressing critical and sceptical views on war and conflict, while telling stories of resistance and survival. The featured artists included Brett Graham, Tame Iti, the Mata Aho Collective, Bob Kerr, Elijah Winter, Bridget Reweti, and the Mr Sterile Assembly. A series of interpretive panels, with photographs and archival materials, set the art within the historical context of the war. The panels dealt with the issues of dissent within New Zealand before and during the war, including resistance from pacifists, anti-conscriptionists, labour activists, Irish nationalists and a range of Maori groups. The imperialist and racist nature of the war was described, including the roles of New Zealand troops in the invasion of Samoa and in suppression of indigenous resistance in Egypt and the Middle East. Prostitution, STDs and Ettie Rout’s safe sex campaigns were also discussed. The “Disrupting the Narrative” exhibition was sponsored by Quaker Peace and Service, the Peace and Disarmament Trust, and Creative New Zealand.

On ANZAC Day itself a well-attended “Disrupting the Narrative” seminar was held at Thistle Hall. The keynote speaker was Stevan Eldred-Grigg, author of *The Great Wrong War*. Stevan’s talk began with an overview of the role of empires before 1914, suggesting that the British Empire had been the most aggressive and expansionist of all. He discussed such brutal episodes as the British invasion of Somaliland, little known to the outside world at the time and largely forgotten now. He also discussed more well-known events such as the Allies’ carve-up of the Middle East after 1918. Stevan looked at New Zealand’s support for British imperialism during the Great War. A number of the events he described were completely new to me, such as the crushing of a revolt by Chinese labourers in Samoa and the involvement of New Zealand troops in the brutal suppression of a post-war uprising in Persia (Iran).

A panel from Peace Action Wellington examined a range of issues threatening peace in the modern world; issues that arose in many ways out of the legacy of the First World War. The panel, chaired by James Barber, consisted of Joel Cosgrove, Don Franks and Omar Kamoun. Omar's speech was particularly interesting, dealing with the First World War as seen from a Middle Eastern and Arabic perspective. The current Middle Eastern borders and power structures are a direct result of the situation created when Britain and France took over and dissected the former Ottoman Empire. In the process the British and French betrayed their erstwhile allies, those Arabs who had risen against the Turkish rulers. Omar pointed out that in establishing control over the Middle East, Britain and France supported conservative Arab leaders, rather than the many Arab activists who wanted to transform their own societies. The Arab world is still living with the consequences of the Western Allies' treachery at the end of the Great War.

A Labour History Project panel discussed various forms of resistance during the Great War. David Grant dealt with the pacifist resisters in New Zealand, examining the question of why this movement was in fact very small. David discussed the courage of the war resisters and the immense social and political opposition they faced up to. Grace Millar looked at the international situation, specifically strikes and uprisings that occurred around the world immediately before, during and after the war. These included strikes in Australia and the UK, the French army mutiny of 1917, the Russian revolutions of the same year, and the uprising in Germany of November 1918, which finally brought the war to an end. Peter Clayworth discussed the labour movement's resistance to conscription in New Zealand, based around the slogan "no conscription of men without conscription of wealth." He looked in particular at the industrial actions taken by the West Coast coal miners and at the state crackdown on labour leaders.

The final panel of the day presented a range of Maori perspectives. Chaired by Ati Teepa, the panel consisted of Tame Iti, Gareth Seymour, Brett Graham and Teanu Tuiono. Their wide-ranging discussion looked at the war within the broader context of the earlier New Zealand Wars of the 1840s and 1860s and at continued Maori resistance. The responses of different iwi to the First World War were in many ways tempered by their experiences of these earlier wars and the relationships established with the coloniser. The panelists pointed out that, while the state had sunk millions of dollars into the First World War commemorations, the commemorations of the Waikato and Tauranga Wars of 1863 and 1864 had largely been organised and carried out by iwi themselves. There was also some discussion of the state suppression of Rua Kenana, with contribution from the audience by a woman who was one of his descendants.

#### *My Country Right or Wrong?*

The seminar "My Country Right or Wrong?: An Aro Valley Contribution to the World War I Commemoration", lived up to its name in presenting community-focused views of the war. Held on Saturday 9 May, the seminar was organised by the Aro Valley Community Council, with financial support from the Wellington City Council. The seminar examined a variety of perspectives. Speakers considered national and local responses, keen supporters and strong opponents of

war and a range of views in between. The seminar was held in a quite crowded Aro Valley Community Hall.

Stevan Eldred-Grigg was once again the keynote speaker. This time he addressed the question of why the New Zealand government declared war and how the country's citizens responded to this. Stevan explained that the government's decision was based on two different concepts. On the one hand there was the pragmatic idea that New Zealand was dependent on Britain both as its major trading partner and as naval protector. On the other hand the majority of the Pakeha population had strong emotional ties to "Home" and many accepted the idea the war was to defend "British" ideals of freedom and democracy. Stevan maintained that while the majority of the population supported entering the war, many were not as eager as often portrayed. By 1918, however, criticism of the war and how it was being conducted had become widespread, particularly among working-class people such as the inhabitants of Aro Valley.

The first panel of the seminar looked at aspects of the war's national context. Tony Simpson discussed Colonel Malone, the commander of the Wellington regiment, who met his death on Chunuk Bair, Gallipoli. Tony argued that, while Malone was a patriotic soldier, he was also prepared to go against orders from higher command in order to save the lives of his men. David Parkyn examined the career of Harry Holland, socialist, anti-militarist and first leader of the Labour Party. During the war Holland was editor of the *Maoriland Worker* and a staunch opponent of war and conscription. Mark Derby discussed how different Maori communities reacted to the First World War, in particular those groups that refused to support it. Mark's talk concentrated on Rua Kenana's religious community among the Tuhoe of the Urewera. He described the police expedition to Rua's village of Maungapohatu, which resulted in Rua's arrest and the shooting of two of his followers.

The seminar's second panel took a local approach, giving a perspective on the war from how it affected Aro Valley. Peter Methven talked of the history of the Terrace Gaol, which occupied the site of what is now Te Aro School. Peter spoke of some of the staff and inmates of the gaol who joined up and went to war. He described the economic contribution the gaol made through its production of boots and clothing. Peter discussed significant dissidents, such as Archibald Baxter and Peter Fraser, who were held at the Terrace during the war. Jared Davidson described the career of the anarchist Philip Josephs, a one-time Aro Valley resident. Jared spoke of Josephs' socialist and anti-militarist campaigning, and of the repression applied to him during the war. The session was concluded by Robin Cohen and Denis Welch, who discussed art produced during the war by New Zealand artists, including some from Aro Valley. Once technical difficulties were overcome the talk was accompanied by some very interesting pictures. Robin and Denis argued that many of the artists began to use art as a form of protest against war.

A great feature throughout these talks was the high level of audience participation, with many interesting questions and comments. A fine communal fish and chip meal was shared in the evening followed by a very entertaining after-dinner



speech. Danyl McLauchlan, author of the novel *Unspeakable Secrets of the Aro Valley*, spoke of his adventures on an Australasian bus tour of Gallipoli, with both comic and serious commentary on war and remembrance.

On a sunny Sunday morning, 10th May, the activities were concluded with a very interesting walking tour of Aro Valley sites connected with the First World War. Sites included the Aro Valley School (site of the Terrace Gaol), Polhill Gully (a former rifle range) and the Mitchelltown war memorial. Our guide Tim Bollinger told many interesting tales from the war years, plus other gems from Aro Valley's long history of resistance to authority. At the war memorial Karen MacIntyre spoke of the stories of a number of the local men named there. These accounts came from research into local soldiers carried out by Elizabeth Plumridge.

Having attended the official ANZAC Day ceremony and the two "dissenting" seminars, I found the Aro Valley and Thistle Hall events refreshing counters to the official narrative. Both brought out important voices from the past that continue to need to be heard. My only complaint was that both seminars were heavily male-dominated in their speaking lineups. A stronger emphasis on women's views and women's history would have been valuable. Having said that I don't know what processes and difficulties the organisers of both events may have had to go through in organising their speaking lineups. Overall the Thistle Hall and Aro Valley events were entertaining, informative and extremely valuable forums for community involvement in promoting people's history.

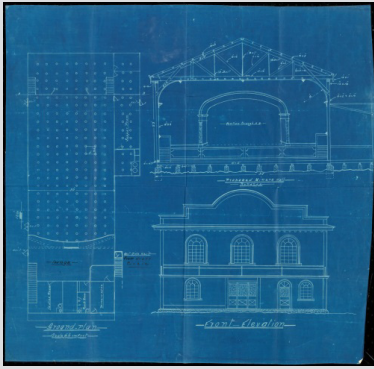
### **Runanga Miners' Hall Update: Lotteries Success, Community Engagement and a Special Supporter**

*By Angela Stratford, Runanga Miners' Hall Project Committee*

The first of our big news is: the Runanga Miners' Hall Trust restoration project (RMH) has been fantastically supported by Lotteries WWI, Environment and Heritage by the significant amount of \$400,000! This will allow us to carry forward with the next significant building tasks: site preparation, replacing the foundations, replacing the floor, and some structural repair.

Our structural engineers, Dunning Thornton, now have the go-ahead to complete the detailed planning needed for this work, and work will begin after the necessary consents have been obtained. This is a huge vote of confidence for the project from Lotteries, and the RMH Trust is grateful for its support.

We have also received the funding for our feasibility study, and the concept design for the new build, from Lotteries Community Facilities. The feasibility study needs to show that the finished building can sustain itself: that it will be used by the local and West Coast community as much as possible, by as many as possible, as often as possible. It also needs to give the RMH Trust assurance that the Hall can generate an income capable of delivering these goals.



Top: The blueprint for the 1937 Hall. It is possible that the original finished Hall was slightly different to this plan. Middle: Jo Hart with former Prime Minister Helen Clark. Above: Blair Buckman and Shane Dalton wield the tools as they prepare to remove the last of the stucco covering the south wall, revealing the original shiplap weatherboards. Photo: Les Holmes.

Speaking of community, we have been slowly but surely carrying out a consultation process to find out what Runanga and the wider community need from a local facility. This has most usefully been done in the good, old-fashioned way of face-to-face conversations, giving people a chance to share our vision for a vibrant and exciting venue to realise the promise of Runanga as a meeting place, a place offering inclusion, identity and solidarity. We have also just launched the online version via our Facebook site “Friends of Runanga Miners Hall” which is designed for a wider audience. Ideas have flowed quick and fast, and while we have done some initial analysis, we still have to go through all the feedback carefully to ensure we capture every possible idea. A highlight was the feedback from the senior students of Runanga School, which identified a great range of indoor and outdoor activities, including laser tag, a zorb ball, and—a bar. A milk bar, surely?

I had the privilege of attending the Museums Aotearoa conference on behalf of the Trust in Dunedin in early May. Recognising that to engage locals and visitors alike, the Hall needs to offer a world-class visitor experience and tell the stories of the Runanga community—its working-class history, its union history, its political history, its industrial history and its sporting history—using leading techniques. Dunedin is also a marvellous place to visit—I can recommend Otakou Marae, Larnach Castle, Olveston and First Church, as well as the city itself with its beautiful heritage buildings—and obligingly turned on temperatures of 23-24 degrees as part of the experience! The conference was wide-ranging and inspiring and offered a long list of insights and talking points for the RMH Trust, one being around the accessibility of the exhibitions—that the RMH is accessible intellectually and socially, as well as physically, to all people.

Some themes are emerging as we consider the wide range of information we have to share. One idea is “Conversations with Labour Prime Ministers” as we consider the motivations that led these individuals to put themselves forward as leaders of New Zealand. What did they expect to achieve? What visions did they have? How can current generations—often with fixed views, or worse, no views at all, of politics—relate to those people who help to take New Zealand in bold, new directions? Another idea borrows the concept of “Runanga: Home of Champions” and focuses on the extraordinary sporting achievements of members of the community over the decades. We have also been discussing the idea of the Hall as “the building that changed New Zealand”. Is this true? And can it once again be a place of debate, ideas and progress?

Finally, project committee member Jo Hart is returning to New Zealand after working in the education sector in Oman for several years. Stopping off at a socialism conference in Chicago, Jo decided to drop in on former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark at her job at the UN in New York. Miss Clark pledged her support for the RMH project, and the team is delighted to have such a prestigious expression of solidarity.

## Obituary: Peter Conway

*By Bill Rosenberg, Ross Wilson and Ross Teppett*



Peter Conway—deeply loved dad, partner, brother and son, highly-respected and talented trade unionist, economist, musician and community activist—died suddenly on 9 June after a 14-month struggle with a debilitating depressive illness. Peter’s long association with the trade union movement started in the late 1970s in Christchurch as the Assistant Secretary of the South Island Clothing Workers’ Union. He was also a highly accomplished musician—playing guitar and mandolin—and the writer of many songs with strong political and social justice narratives. He was very active in folk club circles and performed in a wide variety of venues and settings over the years—from prisons and protest rallies to clubs and concert halls.

Among his many jobs before joining the trade union movement were stints on a car assembly line and farm work. His university studies covered the diverse disciplines of accounting, economics and Marxian politics. His union activity gelled well with his community activism—like actions against the ’81 Springbok tour, increasing SIS powers or just fomenting of political dissent. Peter and his partner Liz travelled to Thatcher’s Britain—finding themselves in the middle of the miners’ strike. Peter worked at the Hounslow Trade Union Support Centre supporting miners and their families. This experience equipped Peter well for his return to New Zealand in 1986 which was in the grip of Rogernomics. He started working for the Distribution Workers Federation—which later became the National Distribution Union. There he honed his strategic thinking and decision-making skills—putting these to good use as the NDU Retail Secretary during the dark days of the Employment Contracts Act.

In 1999 he started working for the CTU as economist and director of policy—becoming secretary in 2008. Always strongly advocating for an economic system that worked for people first and foremost, Peter’s credibility, reputation and respect grew substantially across the union movement, government and business during his time with the CTU. On top of his union work Peter also held key leadership roles with Oxfam NZ (and International), NZ Trade and Enterprise, and UnionAID.

Among the many tributes that flowed following Peter’s death one stood out: It’s been said that Peter was “hard on issues, soft on people”. This captures the scope of his considerable intellect, strategic thinking, conscientiousness and compassion. While dearly missed, Peter would want his comrades and friends to continue to be “hard on issues” in the struggle for a fairer, more equitable and just world.

*Peter Conway was an LHP committee member.*

## Obituary: John Michael McKenzie

*By John Shennan*



*Above: Nurses march on Parliament in 1974*

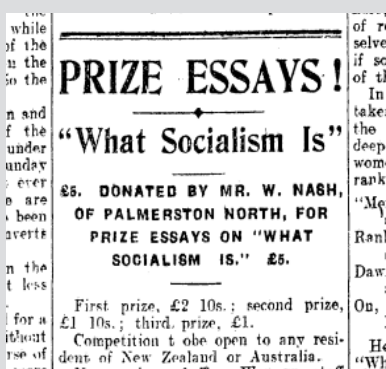
John McKenzie, a somewhat larger-than-life, colourful character who played a significant role in the PSA through the 1970s/80s, died on 8 April this year aged 86. John was an Australian with Greek ancestry and spent much of his childhood in an orphanage in Engadine in New South Wales. He first arrived in New Zealand in 1946 and lived in Invercargill working with racehorses but grew homesick and went back to Australia. He quickly returned however and based himself in Christchurch, obtaining work on the Railways. He was active in the union and from 1952 to 1957 was the Canterbury President of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. He then joined the Social Welfare Department and later recalled “I was the only person in Christchurch looking after the unemployed. I was only looking after five people”. Once again he became active in his union, this time the PSA, and became Chairperson of the Canterbury Section. This spanned the introduction of the State Services Act 1962 which was the biggest shake-up of the Public Service since the 1912 Act. John strongly opposed the introduction of occupational classification, in large measure because of the impact it would have on the unity of public servants.

In 1967 he accepted the position of Secretary/Organiser in the Christchurch office to replace Harry Strong as the PSA official covering the north of the South Island. Because of his rather mercurial personality in contrast to the more staid environment of the public service at the time, he was appointed on a probationary basis in case he caused so much consternation that he needed to be moved on. This probationary period lasted for many years. By the early 1970s more organising staff were employed in regional offices and his role was retitled “Regional Secretary”. In those times responsibility for certain occupational groups was devolved from the National Office in Wellington out to the regions and Christchurch was the base of the Dental Nurses’ national committee. These women were then employed by the Health Department and they had a long-standing grievance over salary relativities with Public Health Nurses. This led to the iconic march on Parliament of nurses in 1974 with John, the then-President Jack Batt and the then-General Secretary Dan Long at the helm (the only males in sight). This action was a huge success with the Prime Minister Norm Kirk intervening and agreeing to the PSA demands.

The Muldoon era was a time of union activity on a mass scale. Strikes and protest meetings were continuous—groups like typists and librarians went on strike, frequently for the first time in their lives. John was in his element. His strategic leadership was rated very highly across the trade union movement and he was a noted orator. He would have been happy to be described as a “rabble rouser”. He could use words to portray ideas clearly and meaningfully. He could also be extremely funny in his analogies; much of this talk would fail spectacularly to pass political correctness tests in today’s environment. He said at his retirement “I loved the job best when action was on and the PSA was in the thick of it. I had no greater time than when I was marching with the dental nurses....I believe in confrontation. I put it down to my Greek ancestry, of which I’m very proud”. He did not support the union programme of “Partnership for Quality”. John also

held elected local government positions in Heathcote.

John retired in 1992 as the PSA restructured in the aftermath of the State Sector Act and the Employment Contracts Act. He and his wife opened a jade and opal shop in the Christchurch Arts Centre which operated until the devastating earthquakes in 2011. John's sense of social justice remained strong even as his memory faded. At the rest home where he spent the final two years of his life, McKenzie was still concerned his carers were not being paid enough.



### **“Another World is Possible” Essay Competition 2015 Winners**

The judging panel for the second essay competition “Another World is Possible” delivered its decision in mid-July.

This competition was held for the first time in 2013, a century after labour leader (and later Prime Minister) Walter Nash held a similar competition in the union newspaper, the *Maoriland Worker*. The present-day essay competition is open to all New Zealand residents who are invited to write an essay of up to 1500 words on the theme of “Another World is Possible”. Cash prizes are given to the best essay, the runner-up, and the best by an entrant aged under 19. This year the prizes were generously sponsored by the Tertiary Education Union.

The December 2014 OECD report that ranked New Zealand as the most deeply affected by growing income inequality out of all developed countries set the tone for this year’s competition. It is quite a challenge to offer a vision of a future world without inequality and the strategies to get there in vivid language that appeals to and convinces an audience. Congratulations to all those who entered for taking up this challenge so whole-heartedly. The winners listed below were those who came closest to meeting all the essay requirements outlined above. These essays will be published on our website [www.lhp.org.nz](http://www.lhp.org.nz) and in the November issue of the *Bulletin*.

Over 19

#### **Winner: Adam Driver**

This was an innovative approach in which the use of the vignette draws the reader into an alternative space and opens up room to consider plans for reaching a “utopian” world. The vignette was compelling and beautifully written, allowing readers to “see a day of it” and therefore providing them with an aspiration before setting out the practicalities of reaching that vision: the creation of “industrial democracy”, recapturing humanism, and Kiwi socialism.

#### **Runner Up: Francisco Hernandez**

This essay succeeds mainly as a thought-experiment as to what a fairer and more compassionate political and economic reality might look like. By stepping through from dealing with “empty bellies”, to “an ownership society”, and finally to “people-powered politics”, the utopian vision is tempered by the realities of real world change (in particular with the realisation that change is slow). This



was a compelling case for a programme of major reform that would revolutionise our society.

*Under 19*

**Winner: Alexandra Orr**

This well-written essay suggests we tax the rich, and institute restorative justice and universal basic income to create an alternative society without inequality.

**Special mention: Molly Pottinger-Coombes**

Although not given an award, we would like to acknowledge Molly Pottinger-Coombes' essay as a beautifully-written dawning consciousness of privilege. We look forward to a future essay that considers a utopian alternative.

**People's History Symposium 2015**

The People's History event this year will be a one-day symposium on Sunday 1 November at Wellington Museum (formerly the Museum of Wellington City & Sea). The theme for the day is "Education—for freedom or conformity?" Inspired by the centenary of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the event is being organised by the Labour History Project, the Alexander Turnbull Library and Wellington Museum. Sessions on education past and present will include speakers, singing, and "history-on-speed". Speakers will consider whether educational institutions—such as libraries; museums; pre-schools, schools and universities; the media; and workers' education—were and are sites for liberation or conformity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire argued that education is never neutral; it either teaches people to conform to the system or it is a "practice of freedom":

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the "practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

—Richard Shaull (1999) drawing on Paulo Freire

Registration: Places are limited. To register please email:  
*joan.mccracken@dia.govt.nz*

Entry by donation. For further information, email:  
*marie.russell.nz@gmail.com*

# Recent and current research

## Rugby League and the New Zealand Trade Union Movement

By Ryan Bodman

While conducting research for my MA in 2011-2012, I had the opportunity to interview a number of unionists about their experiences in New Zealand's trade union movement. Over the course of these discussions, one topic popped up on a number of occasions without any prompting whatsoever. That topic was rugby league. In a particularly revealing conversation, Mark Gosche spoke of the game's connection with Auckland's trade union movement: "I knew Frank [Barnard of the Freezing Workers' Union] 'cause we played rugby league and rugby league was synonymous with unions.... Bill Andersen was involved with City Newton, Frank Barnard with Otahu, I played for Papatoe, Frank's son for Otahu".<sup>1</sup>

This connection between rugby league and organised labour reflected the sport's player-base. While the code has always played second-fiddle to rugby union on the national stage, throughout the 20th century rugby league was the dominant winter sport in pockets of the country where large industrial sites were the main source of employment. Accordingly, rugby league was the sport of choice on the Auckland, Taranaki and Wellington wharves; in the coal-mining districts of the West Coast and lower Waikato; in the working-class suburbs of Christchurch; and amongst freezing workers at the Waitara, Moerewa, Patea, Ocean Beach, Horotiu, Tomoana, Southdown and Westfield works.

As a result of the game's popularity in many working-class communities, a number of trade unionists and left-wing politicians were involved in rugby league. John McCullough chaired the inaugural meeting of the Addington Rugby League Club in 1913 and later served as the club's patron, while James K. Worrall, a member of the Passive Resisters' Union in his youth, served as the chairman and president of the Canterbury Rugby League throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>2</sup> John A. Lee was the president of the Auckland Rugby League from 1936-1941, and a number of Cabinet Ministers from the First Labour Government—including Walter Nash, Peter Fraser and Paddy Webb—were involved in the game.<sup>3</sup> Later in the century, Tom Skinner served as the secretary of the Auckland Rugby League Referees' Association and managed the Kiwis during their World Cup Series in Britain in 1960, while both Jim Knox and Bill Andersen were stalwarts of the City-Newton Club.<sup>4</sup>

The relationship between organised labour and rugby league is one of the themes that will run through *Rugby League: A New Zealand History*. A social, cultural and oral history of the game in New Zealand, this book will detail the marginalisation of rugby league from mainstream New Zealand as a result of sustained hostility from rugby union's governing bodies.<sup>5</sup> At the margins of society, the game became associated with working-class communities, the Catholic Church, the Kingitanga and other marginalised groups who embraced the sport as a source of cultural pride, community identity and self-sufficiency. The relationships that emerged between the game and these communities, as well as the class dynamics that underpinned the rugby league/rugby union divide, are central to

1. Mark Gosche, interviewed by Ryan Bodman, 6 January 2012.

2. John Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, Christchurch, 1987.

3. 'League Football', *Evening Post*, 3 March 1921, p.11; *International Rugby League: Australia versus West Coast*, Wednesday 21 September 1949, Victoria Park, Greymouth; Erik Olssen, *John A. Lee*, Dunedin, 1977, p.111; John Coffey and Bernie Wood, *Auckland: 100 Years of Rugby League: 1909-2009*, Wellington, 2009.

4. Tom Skinner, with John Berry, *Man to Man*, Christchurch, 1980, pp.182-184; Karl Andersen, interviewed by Ryan Bodman, 21 February 2014.

5. For a broader, and extremely interesting discussion of rugby league's marginalisation, see Mark Falcous, 'Rugby League in the National Imaginary of New Zealand', *Sport in History*, 27, 3 (2007), pp.423-466.

the story of rugby league in New Zealand and will feature prominently in *Rugby League: A New Zealand History*.

*Ryan Bodman is working on this book in his spare time, and hopes to have it published by late 2017, early 2018. You can contact Ryan at ryankb@gmail.com.*

### **Alexander Turnbull Library collections related to labour history**

*By Michael Brown*

The Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington has recently acquired the following labour history-related material:

*Papers relating to Communist and Socialist movements (MS-Group-2339)*

Collection of papers relating to international Communist and Socialist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Chiefly comprises British, Soviet, Australian, Irish, and American publications. Includes typescripts on issues of the day.

*Pearless, Reginald Lessel, 1887-1955: Photographs relating to the construction of Cobb Dam, Tasman Region (PAColl-10303)*

Photographs relating to the construction of the Cobb Dam, Tasman Region, taken circa 1940s-1950s by Mr Reginald Pearless, from Nelson, who worked as an engineer on the dam. Images feature construction scenes on the banks of the Cobb River, workers' camps, machinery, bridges, and a cable railway.

*Estate of Alice Fraser 1934-2004: Fraser family photographs (PAColl-10316)*

Photographs relating to the Fraser family, particularly to Peter Fraser when he was Prime Minister of New Zealand, his wife Janet, and his step-granddaughter Alice Janet Kemp Fraser. Images taken by a range of photographers, between 1902 and 1990.

*Butcher, David John, 1948- : Papers*

Papers relating mainly to Butcher's political career as a Labour Party MP. Includes newsletters, correspondence, newspaper clippings, ephemera, and other papers.

*Boock, David Yantub, 1885-1952: Illuminated address from Government Printing Office*

Illuminated address given to David Boock on his retirement from the Government Printing Office in March 1938. Issued by the Bookbinders' Chapel, a shopfloor association of workers in the bindery.

*Michael Brown is Curator Music at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, and a former LHP committee member.*

### Kumara Times Project

The *Kumara Times* Project aims to digitise one of New Zealand's goldfields newspapers and make it freely available on the Papers Past website.



The *Times* began publication as an afternoon daily in 1876, and continued for a further 40 years. It was published six days a week, and covered the minutiae of daily life in Kumara. Court, hospital, mining and Benevolent Society reports provide fascinating glimpses into a past community, along with items detailing Richard Seddon's political career from Mayor of Kumara to Premier of New Zealand.

Hokitika Museum holds the only known original copies, all of which have been copied to microfilm. Two copies of the microfilm exist, one in Hokitika Museum and one in the National Library. Digital copies will be made directly from the microfilm. Only the first 20 years are known to exist (1876–1896), however many issues are missing. A further aim of this project is to appeal to the public to fill in the missing gaps of this rarely-seen newspaper.

There are 13,722 pages to digitise at \$1.60 per page. This comes to a sum of \$21,000 of which National Library will pay half. For this project to go ahead, \$10,500 will need to be fundraised to cover half the costs.

If any reader knows of copies of the *Times* please contact the Hokitika Museum: 03 755 6898. For more information on the Project contact David Verrall: [davidverrall@clear.net.nz](mailto:davidverrall@clear.net.nz); 03 755 855.

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# “Not Simply Bargaining Agents”: Workplace Culture and Union Militancy in the Freezing Works 1970s-1990s

By Ross Webb



Freezing workers at Westfield, early 1970s. Frank Young, front-left. John Leckie Personal Collection.

Working together side-by-side for the common purpose brings out the innate humanity in people. A family atmosphere develops in some departments. And odd though it may seem this humanity is expressed in the union. Unions also embody such values as loyalty, comradeship, pride and independence from the employer. If unions were simply bargaining agents they would be coldly rational in their affairs. Often they are not, because of the human, emotional element.<sup>1</sup>

—Bruce Jesson, 1986

In the 1970s, freezing workers emerged as the most militant blue-collar workforce in the country, accounting for around half of working days lost to strikes and stoppages.<sup>2</sup> For freezing workers, union militancy and control over the workplace was central to their identity and featured prominently in the oral histories I conducted for my thesis.<sup>3</sup> Freezing workers frequently challenged employers' prerogatives and asserted their own control and autonomy on the job. Issues of heat, speed, unfair dismissals, and safety inspired stop-work meetings and wildcat strikes, while the negotiations around the Award regularly led to



protracted strike action. The strong connections between the workplace, union, community and family were key to the ability of freezing workers to hold out for long strikes and “take the big hits”.<sup>4</sup> Freezing worker militancy and union culture did not emerge simply from an intellectual or ideological perspective. Rather, it made sense to workers in the context of their day-to-day working lives and gave institutional power to their strong workplace culture, a sense of pride in their identity as freezing workers, loyalty to one another, and a sense of ownership over the job. Union culture found expression in stop-work meetings, wildcat strikes, picket lines and in “nerve” centres or strike committees organised during strikes with the aim of alleviating the impacts of the strike on families and building solidarity within the community.<sup>5</sup> Thus, unions in the freezing industry were, as Jesson suggests, not “simply bargaining agents”. The essay explores this militant tradition, which drew on a strong workplace and union culture. It aims to capture the “human, emotional element” of unionism in the industry and in doing so reveal what shaped and sustained unionism at a local level in the workplace, in the pub, on the picket line, in the resource centres and strike committees, in the community and the home, and even on the sports field.<sup>6</sup>

For much of the twentieth century, freezing workers occupied an important place within the New Zealand economy and a powerful position in the country's trade union movement.<sup>7</sup> By the 1960s and 1970s in particular, freezing workers exercised massive industrial power and gained a “well deserved” reputation for militancy.<sup>8</sup> As a result, government and media reactions throughout the twentieth century helped mould a public perception of freezing workers as a workforce disengaged from their work, strike-prone, overpaid, and greedy.<sup>9</sup> Because frozen-meat remained New Zealand's key export industry, strike action by freezing workers posed a direct threat to the so-called “national interest”, and thwarted the hard work of the farmer, popularly understood as the “backbone of the economy”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, freezing workers garnered the ire of farmers, the public, and the state, inspiring calls for anti-union legislation and leading to several instances of state intervention to clamp down on wildcat strikes and bring an end to protracted disputes.

While the popular image of the freezing workers for much of the twentieth century was that of a greedy and uncompromising workforce, oral histories tell a different story: one of camaraderie and community, of union pride and solidarity in the workplace and of community support during long strikes and hard times. In an industry dominated by speed, regimentation, and monotony, workers encountered and sustained a strong workplace culture. The casualised nature of the job, intergenerational employment, and the seasonality of the work all significantly shaped the rhythms of freezing worker life and the attitudes of the men and women in the industry, as did the brutal nature and physicality of the work. The workplace culture was distinctly working-class, masculine, and, in many ways, distinctly Maori. Indeed, ethnicity and gender played a role in the expression of this workplace culture at the same time that the workplace culture and occupational solidarity dissolved such distinction.

### *Workplace Culture*

For the many men and the few women who worked in the freezing works, noise, extremes of heat and cold, physically hard work, and a sense of boredom, were the defining aspect of the job. On the chain, workers repeatedly performed discrete cuts along a conveyor-like “dis-assembly line”.<sup>11</sup> Frank Barnard called it “filthy, soul-destroying, boring and dangerous”.<sup>12</sup> Henare O’Keefe began work at Tomoana freezing works in Hastings in 1971, recalled that the work was “bloody boring”. At the same time, however, it had its redeeming qualities:

Best thing about it was the people, of course. I loved the culture there. I loved the camaraderie, the whakawhanaungatanga, the closeness, the intimacy of it all... The camaraderie was the biggest thing. We worked together, we slept together, we socialised together—and there was 2,000 of us... It was a real family: an absolute, total family.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, while workers gained little satisfaction out of the work and had little control over the work process, they shaped the culture of the workplace to suit their own needs; they carved out a space for themselves that reflected agreed-upon values, rituals and traditions.

Workplace culture was established and maintained by workers through certain rituals, including through initiation, practical jokes, nicknames, conversation, support during hard times, and, most memorable for those I interviewed, singing. Intergenerational employment, a common practice in the works, also played a role in maintaining workplace culture. It was only after working for some time that freezing worker Jean Te Huia realised that many of the workers were indeed related to each other.

After a while working there and after getting to know the people that I worked beside, you realise that the person working beside you was the daughter of the guy on the other side, and there was the sister and brother of the person who worked on the detain rail; the guy down on the floor sweeping was her brother; his wife was on the other side; their mother was the cleaner; their father was the board walker and the union delegate. And you realise actually that it really was a family affair.... Generations of families worked there and were proud of their jobs and really put their heart and souls into it.... It was a community.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Jean Te Huia remembered how the “people made it fun” and, through conversation and humour, transformed the workplace into spaces of community, social and family life.<sup>15</sup>

[T]here were days where it was so boring, day after day, and so you found ways of keeping yourself interested and occupied on the chain. Lots of things were going on, even though it was a freezing worker chain and it was a kill chain, people were selling raffle tickets, people were having love affairs, guys were singing and dancing, people were telling jokes; women were showing off their latest jewellery items or talking about their night out. And so there was a whole range of activities going on at one time to

overcome the boredom—because it could get pretty damn boring. People made it fun. On every chain, there was a couple of jokers who kept the whole chain laughing.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, as Te Huia's testimony makes clear, the "separate worlds of work and home life" intersected, helping to build bonds of solidarity and community between workers.<sup>17</sup> As Te Huia recalled, "[i]t became a lifestyle thing where people became very personal to you; you knew about people's lives and their connections with each other".<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the workplace culture did not begin and end at the shed gates. It extended beyond the freezing works itself, spilling over into the community and social life of workers, while community and social life were, in turn, reflected and reinforced within the workplace. In many communities, the freezing works provided a hub for workers, not only as a place of work, but a site of social, community and family life. These connections were reinforced by intergenerational employment. The communities surrounding "the works" were distinctly working-class; workers shared not only a place of employment and occupation, but also the same social life centred around the pub and sports as well as ties of kinship, home and neighbourhood. For Jean Te Huia, the freezing works was "woven into the heart of Maori families". Tracey McIntosh, daughter of a freezing worker, has always said that the Westfield freezing works "is part of my whakapapa... in the same way I was snobbish about being Tuhoe through my mother, I was also snobbish about being Westfield through my father".<sup>19</sup> McIntosh claimed that the freezing works had a "strong culture" that "flowed from the industry into the home and back again, just constantly".<sup>20</sup> Henare O'Keefe reflected on the importance of the freezing works to the largely Maori and working-class suburb of Flaxmere in Hastings.

It employed most of the people here. It clothed our family, it housed us, it fed us. It furnished us, it educated us. It gave us a sense of value and affirmation and importance. It provided a social life for us here in Flaxmere, and others.<sup>21</sup>

It was "vital, absolutely vital", O'Keefe claimed, "as vital as the air that we breathe".<sup>22</sup> During difficult times, freezing workers often helped each other, setting up koha funds. Syd Taukamo claimed that "[i]f anything happened to a workmate they felt for that person as if it were his brother or sister... if one of your numbers went down, you felt it right where it hurts. And you felt the same way that person felt for his family".<sup>23</sup>

Workers took pride in the work and control over the job and the workplace. Tracey McIntosh explained that freezing workers "had a real autonomy in their workplace because they had jobs to do and they did them".<sup>24</sup> Outside of the work process, workers shaped their workplace to their own needs; this workplace culture operated "according to a set of collectively defined norms, values, benefits and obligations".<sup>25</sup> For many interviewed, this represented the real ownership or control by workers over their day-to-day working lives.<sup>26</sup> However, workplace

culture was not enough to assert control in the workplace and industry—though it provided the “raw material” for underpinning a strong formal organisation.<sup>27</sup>

### *Union Culture*

A number of key factors underpinned freezing worker militancy in the 1970s: their strategic position within the country’s largest export sector, the nature of the work itself, the long history of union activism alongside a strong workplace culture and an impressive structure of shed union leadership and department delegates. Under the Arbitration system, unions often had little incentive to develop activism within a workplace.<sup>28</sup> However, even during the “classic period” of the centralised arbitration system between the late 1930s to the late 1960s, freezing workers remained militant and bargained aggressively on the job.<sup>29</sup> In this way, freezing workers are an example of what Pat Walsh calls the “alternative model” to arbitration unions. The “alternative model” or “anti-arbitration” union “modified their posture towards arbitration in line with their ability to extract gains through direct bargaining outside the formal system”.<sup>30</sup> This model relied on both the strategic location of workers in the economy as well as membership solidarity and loyalty.<sup>31</sup> In their organisation, such unions maintained well-developed structures of regional officials and site delegates which ensured “the effective expression of workplace views and offered opportunities for membership participation in the union”.<sup>32</sup>

The control that workers held over the workplace, including the intergenerational employment, informal upskilling and the workplace culture, was reinforced by union control on the job. James Robb remembered that “there was an extraordinary degree of union control and pride in that control”.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in the oral history narratives, the union was not simply a bargaining agent, but maintained a strong presence and culture within the workplace. For Helen Mulrennan, while all unions were active in the 1970s, “it was sort of different” at the freezing works. “You really did feel like you had some power as a union.... The union was there. It was present”, she explained. John Leckie, too, recalled that the union “was not something that was remote”. Rather, the relevance of the union was “on a daily basis”:

It wasn’t just a matter of “here’s the new Award, here’s the new conditions, this has been organised for us”.... The role of the union was much more hands on in terms of responding, and being expected to respond, to the membership and their issues as they arose.<sup>34</sup>

Rank-and-file workers constructed strong local union cultures and insisted on control over the work and workplace and expressed pride in being “staunch” union members. As Henare O’Keefe recalled:

I was a staunch union person. Absolutely staunch. Totally for the people. Nothing else mattered as far as I was concerned. If it meant striking, then so be it.... We were very sceptical and suspicious of management. I really was.<sup>35</sup>

Union meetings were a space for union officials to inform the rank-and-file about the progress or lack of progress on Award negotiations, for the workforce to discuss workplace issues and initiate “homers” (discussed below). Meetings were also largely democratic and provided room for debates on issues. At Westfield, “they’d go for hours and hours”, Helen Mulrennan explained, “and [were] quite democratic. I’d never experienced that before—people talking at union meetings”.<sup>36</sup> Kevin Amanaki, who worked alongside his father at the works, recalled his father speaking up at meetings: “I had much respect for my Dad and his seniority in the works. He would stand up at the meetings and share his thoughts about the disputes”.<sup>37</sup> A worker at the Whakatu plant remembered the inclusion that the meetings fostered:

What I liked about working at the Works was that it gave you the chance to be part of the whole scene, in the union, in the meetings. No matter who you were you were allowed to get up and voice your opinion—silly or whatever, but you still had the chance to do it aye and that’s what I liked doing.<sup>38</sup>

Meetings were also educational and, as some recalled, entertaining. “They were always sort of fun”, claimed Robb, “even when they were discussing serious issues. People were kind of witty when they spoke”.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Maurice Davis claimed that the meetings were “amazing in terms of personalities”.<sup>40</sup> O’Keefe claimed that “you’ve never been in a meeting until you’ve been in a meeting with two thousand people and unionists. By golly, as a 17 or 18 year old, it was quite an education. I learnt a hell of a lot”.<sup>41</sup>

Flexing union muscle took many forms: over-time bans, load-out bans, go-slows, stop-work meetings, and strikes.<sup>42</sup> In late 1976, freezing workers across the country initiated a “load-out ban” in support of their claim for a travelling allowance for all members of the industry.<sup>43</sup> However, these kinds of actions occurred largely on a shed level. When Peter Gosche worked in the freezers, he and other workers adopted a go-slow to “get results”.<sup>44</sup> “Second-tier” bargaining also played a role in industrial action at a local, shed level and was far more relevant to the rank-and-file than national Award negotiations. In 1979, industrial relations scholar Don J. Turkington wrote that he was “amazed at just how peripheral the Award is in the day-to-day industrial relations of the industry”; it simply provided the “foundation”.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Peter Gosche recalled that “the union rank-and-file was pretty divorced from the Award talks”.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Award was the “minimum document”, according to Leckie, “and then if you could negotiate on your shed, you were free to negotiate anything below or above” the award rates and conditions.<sup>47</sup> For example, workers in the stockyards negotiated for “rain money rates” because their work was open to the weather. In the summer, too, stockyards workers negotiated shorts as part of the uniform, because the regular uniform was heavy denim. Workers negotiated walking time for some areas of the works that were far away from the smoko rooms which meant less time for smoko. “It sounds trivial”, Leckie explained, “but it’s not when you’re working in those conditions day in and day out”.<sup>48</sup>





Freezing workers march from the Westfield Freezing Works to the Otahuhu District courthouse in support of 48 picketers arrested on trespass charges at Auckland International Airport the previous week. Trevor Penman/Fairfax Media/Auckland Libraries Footprints 02763.

But the most common form of industrial action at a shed level was the “homer”, a one-day wildcat strike or protest stoppage, and a prominent feature of the oral history narratives. Mulrennan remembered the “homers” clearly. “That was unique to the freezing works”, she claimed. “It was sort of more wildcat. It was an excuse to say ‘fuck you’ and walk out”.<sup>49</sup> “Homers” occurred for a number of reasons: Workers also walked off the job for political and sentimental reasons or expressions of trade union solidarity. When Bob Marley died in 1981, Hawke’s Bay freezing works “came to a virtual standstill” as hundreds of Maori workers “stayed home to mourn their hero”, while in 1984, Westfield workers stopped work at midday “as a mark of respect to the memory of Ernie Abbott”, killed in the Wellington Trades Hall bombing.<sup>50</sup> Helen Mulrennan remembered that at the neighbouring plant Whakatu, workers walked off the job in a wildcat strike after a foreman called a Maori worker a “black bastard”.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, workers at Westfield walked off the job after rat-chewed meat was sent to the Pacific Islands from the freezers. “That was a show of solidarity”, claimed Mulrennan, “[because] there were a lot of Pacific Islanders working at Westfield”.<sup>52</sup> “Homers” were also used to reinforce union rules within the workplace as well as enforce safety. In March 1979, Tomoana workers walked off the job after the company used a foreman to do a freezing workers’ job in the stockyards; something the union considered as “non-union labour”.<sup>53</sup> In November of the same year, Tomoana workers walked off the job after it was revealed that the company had used mutton slaughterboard labourers to do a job normally done by the freezing hands.<sup>54</sup> John Leckie saw the homer as “assertion by workers of their autonomy and independence from the will of the company” and saw it as a pragmatic alternative to long strike action.<sup>55</sup>

Like workplace culture, union culture extended beyond the workplace. The organisation around strikes, for example, provides further insights into union culture outside the workplace as well the impact of strike action on the home and community of freezing workers.<sup>56</sup> Long strikes hit the pockets of the freezing workers hard, significantly impacted the home, and required the commitment of



Auckland freezing workers collecting food during the 1986 National Award Dispute.

*Manukau Courier*, 8 April 1986. Photographer Unknown /Fairfax Media/Manukau Research Library, Courier collection, box 27/5. Footprints 00583.

workers to hold out for long periods of time. George Rarere remembered vividly the organisation that occurred around long disputes: “Some of those strikes went for eight weeks. And what we did learn was to survive. We set up a ‘nerve centre’ and ran all our operations from there to look after our people....” Rarere explained that workers “had learnt how to survive over little issues” and were prepared for the longer strikes. “So we’d take the big hits, but we were always prepared for the big hits”.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Bill Hillman recalled that “If you went out, unless you were prepared, you were caught. Money wise, I mean. So you learnt that lesson early so that you don’t get caught again”.<sup>58</sup>

At Westfield, the union established “strike committees”, and called for volunteers from union shed meetings, while at Tomoana, organising revolved around what workers called a “nerve centre”. As Leckie explained, “there were many hands to the pump with a large workforce like that. I mean, we were all used to working together”.<sup>59</sup> Organising around the strike also involved the family and sometimes

considerable sacrifice. O’Keefe recalled: “When it came to strike action it was ‘one out, all out’. There was just no question.” McIntosh remembers the organising during strikes entering the home and the involvement of the family.

The food during strikes I remember well.... We had a car pit in our garage. We had a big basement, so it was a good place to set up [food parcels for families]; we had lots of people coming over.... And I remember Dad talking about what we needed to put in the food packs.... I can remember my mum and others being involved. I don’t know how helpful I was, I was young. But I guess dad thought it was important that we all help out.<sup>60</sup>

However, as O’keefe explained, “There was loyalty to the point at which your family suffered, with six to eight week strikes... some of those strikes really hurt”.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the idea that domestic impact was a potential weak point for workers was part of both union and management strategy.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, however, the 1970s and 1980s were difficult decades for freezing workers and their unions, operating against the backdrop of high inflation, economic stagnation, and recession caused by the combined impacts of the collapse in export prices, the oil shocks, and Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community.<sup>63</sup> As a result, companies’ efforts to maintain profits—by changing the organisation of the work, introducing technology and workplace discipline, and resisting concessions at the bargaining table—ran up sharply against freezing workers’ assertion of autonomy and a strong and militant union culture. The insecurities for workers in the meat industry caused by the recession was intensified by structural changes within the economy, including the deregulation of the meat industry in 1981 and the removal of Supplementary Minimum Prices (SMPs) for farmers in 1986. Closures, mergers and redundancy hit the industry on a massive scale, alongside attacks on working conditions and pay, the enforcement of new discipline, and the introduction of new technology in the workplace. The period witnessed at first an upturn in strike action by freezing workers in an attempt to protect themselves against the erosion of their wages and maintain autonomy in the workplace. But this militancy failed to survive into the late 1980s and 1990s as plants closed across the country and the state dismantled the “broadly supportive” system of industrial relations.<sup>64</sup> Between the 1970s and the 1990s, then, freezing workers sustained, attempted to defend, and then lost much of their power.

During this time, real wages for freezing workers declined, while defensive strike action for redundancy became more common. Between 1986 and 1990, the meat freezing industry workforce of 31,000 was cut in half. In 1988, 900 workers at Auckland’s Westfield freezing works were made redundant, while in 1994, Tomoana in Hastings closed its gates, leaving 1500 without work and without redundancy pay. My thesis explores the successful redundancy dispute at the Westfield freezing works as well the community campaigns to support unemployed workers in Hastings following the closure. Freezing workers, their unions, and communities had experience in sustaining and supporting workers and their families during drawn-out industrial disputes. This experience proved central when it came to industrial action for fair redundancy pay and the

establishment of resource centres following closure. In these struggles, freezing workers once again drew on a strong tradition of workplace and union culture—a tradition still visible in the current workforce and its unions. In 2012, AFFCO/Talley's locked out over 1,200 workers for twelve weeks in an effort to de-unionise plants. The Meat Workers' Union campaigned to end the lock out; their campaign slogan was "Workmates. Whanau. Community." More recently the union has launched a campaign called "Jobs that Count", a push against casualisation, the erosion of seniority protections, as well as highlighting the greater safety risks in the industry. Clearly, freezing workers and their communities continue to sustain themselves during drawn-out industrial action, assert their pride in their jobs, and underscore the values of camaraderie, union solidarity, and community.

*Ross Webb is a Wellington-based historian working for the Waitangi Tribunal.*

1. Bruce Jesson, "The Freezing Works Strike: The Paroxysm of an Industry in Crisis", *Metro*, July 1986, 75.
2. Commission of Inquiry into the Meat Industry, Wellington, 1974, 103.
3. Ross Webb, "'Your Livelihood is on the Line': Freezing Workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1973–1994" (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 2015).
4. Lucy Taksa, "Like a Bicycle, Forever Teetering between Individualism and Collectivism: Considering Community in Relation to Labour History", *Labour History*, no. 78, (2000): 7–32; Cybèle Locke, *Workers in the Margin: Union Radicals in Post-War New Zealand*, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012), 18, 156. 'Big hits' quote from: George Rarere, interviewed by Ross Webb, 2 September 2013.
5. Bruce Scates, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: The 1890 Maritime Strike in Australia and New Zealand", *Labour History*, no. 61, (1991): 70–87. John Leckie, "Women in Industrial Action: Some Female Profiles in a Redundancy Strike in Vestey's New Zealand Meat Works, 1988", *Labour History*, no. 61, (1991), 88–89.
6. Len Richardson makes a similar case in relation to mine workers' unions: Richardson, *Coal, Class and Community* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), vii.
7. The term "freezing works" and "freezing worker" is unique to New Zealand, where the meat is both processed, refrigerated, and exported. The equivalent in other part of the world is an "abattoir", "slaughterhouse", and "packinghouse", manned by "meat workers", "packinghouse workers" or "slaughterhouse workers".
8. Locke, *Workers in the Margin*, 39; Commission of Inquiry into the Meat Industry, Wellington, 1974, 103.
9. In 1981, Prime Minister Robert Muldoon described freezing workers as "intransigent", with "no loyalty", and "over-paid", and in 1988, the editor of the *New Zealand Meat Producer*, Anita Busby wrote that freezing workers "are generally regarded as the real villains" and cast as an "illiterate, unskilled lout who is out to grasp everything for himself and to hell with everyone else". Robert Muldoon, *My Way*, (Wellington: Reed, 1981), 124; *The New Zealand Meat Producer*, 16, no. 2 (January–March 1988): 2.
10. For a discussion of media representations of organised labour during this period, and in particular, in relation to the "national interests", see: Ryan Bodman, "'The Public Have Had a Gutsful And So Have We': The Alienation Of Organised Labour In New Zealand, 1968–1975", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 48, no. 1 (April 2014): 78–108. And for a discussion of the concept of farmers as the "backbone of the economy", see James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, (Auckland: Allen Lane, 2001), 146–156.
11. J.H.K. Inkson, "The Man on the Dis-Assembly Line: New Zealand Freezing Workers", *Journal of Sociology*, 13, no. 2 (1977): 2.
12. Barnard, quoted in: *The New Zealand Meat Producer*, 16, no. 2 (1988).
13. Henare O'Keefe, interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 September 2013.
14. *ibid.*
15. Emma Robertson, "'It was just a Real Camaraderie Thing': Socialising, Socialisation and Shopfloor Culture at the Rowntree Factory, York", in *Women and Work Culture, Britain c. 1850–1950*, eds., Krista Cowman and Louis A. Jackson, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 114.
16. Jean Te Huia, interviewed by Ross Webb, 3 September 2013.
17. Robertson, "'It was just a Real Camaraderie Thing'", 114.
18. Jean Te Huia, interviewed by Ross Webb, 3 September 2013.
19. Tracey McIntosh, interviewed by Ross Webb, Auckland, 16 January 2014.
20. Tracey McIntosh, "Living Southside", in *Almighty Auckland?*, eds., Ian Carter et al. (Palmerston North: Cengage Learning, 2004), 91.
21. Dane Giraud, (Director/Writer), (2011) "Henare O'Keefe: Te Tuatangata" [Documentary]
22. *ibid.*
23. Tainui Stephens (Director), (1991), *Black Singlet Legacy*, [Documentary]
24. Tracey McIntosh, interviewed by Ross Webb, 16 January, 2014.
25. Melissa Matutina Williams, "'Back-home' and Home in the City: Maori Migrations from Panguru to Auckland, 1930–70" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2010), 181.
26. Andrew Phillips, "Women on the Shop Floor: The Colchester Rag Trade, 1918–1950", *Oral History*, 22, no. 1, Working Lives (1994): 62.

27. Paul M. Taillon, *Good, Reliable, White Men: The Railroad Brotherhoods, 1877 – 1917* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 37.
28. Chris Briggs, "Strikes and Lockouts in the Antipodes: Neoliberal Convergence in Australia and New Zealand", in eds. Dribbusch et al., *Strikes around the world, 1968-2005*, (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), 175.
29. 'Classic period' from: Peter Franks and Melanie Nolan, "Rescuing the Federations of Labour from the Condescension of History", in *Unions in Common Cause: The New Zealand Federation of Labour 1937-88*, ed., Franks and Nolan (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2011), 36.
30. Michael Barry and Pat Walsh, "State Intervention and Trade Unions in New Zealand", *Labor Studies Journal*, 31, no. 4, (2004): 56, 60.
31. *ibid.*, 60
32. Pat Walsh, "The Legacy of '51", in David Grant, ed., *The Big Blue: Snapshots of the 1951 Waterfront Lockout*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2004), 152-153.
33. James Robb, interviewed by Ross Webb, 22 June 2013.
34. John Leckie interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 November 2013.
35. Henare O'Keefe, interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 September 2013.
36. Helen Mulrennan, interviewed by Ross Webb, 5 August 2013.
37. Kevin Amanaki, interviewed by Ross Webb, 14 September 2013.
38. Anonymous interview, cited in: Vera Keefe-Orsby, *Tihei Mauri Ora: The human stories of Whakatu. A qualitative study of involuntary job loss following the closure of the Whakatu Freezing Works* (Wellington, Te Ropu Rangahau a Eru Pomare, 2008), 33.
39. James Robb, interviewed by Ross Webb, 22 June 2013
40. Maurice Davis, interviewed by Ross Webb, 8 May 2014.
41. Henare O'Keefe, interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 September 2013.
42. Don J. Turkington, *Industrial Conflict: A Study of three New Zealand industries*, (Wellington: Methuen, 1976), 64.
43. *New Zealand Herald*, 19 November 1976. A "load-out" ban is "where workers refuse to dispatch a certain commodity or class of commodities". Don. J Turkington, *The Forms of Industrial Conflict*, (Wellington: Industrial Relations Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, 1976), 6.
44. Peter Gosche, interviewed by Ross Webb, 24 January 2014.
45. Cited in Bruce Curtis, "Producers, Processors and Markets: A Study of the Export Meat Industry in New Zealand" (PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1996), 157.
46. Peter Gosche, interviewed by Ross Webb, 24 January 2014.
47. John Leckie interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 November 2013.
48. *ibid.*
49. Helen Mulrennan, interviewed by Ross Webb, 5 August 2013.
50. Redmer Yska, *New Zealand Green: The Story of Marijuana in New Zealand* (Auckland: D. Bateman, 1990), 155; Auckland and Tomoana Freezing Workers' Union, Work Meeting Minutes, 2 April 1984, 92.
51. Helen Mulrennan, interviewed by Ross Webb, 5 August 2013.
52. Helen Mulrennan, interviewed by Ross Webb, 5 August 2013.
53. Stockyard workers had also recently had their over-time cut back. *Socialist Action*, 23 March 1979.
54. *Socialist Action*, 16 November 1979.
55. Leckie, "The Weddel Crown Redundancy Strike 1988: The dynamics of a dispute in the New Zealand Meat Industry" (Research essay, University of Auckland, 1990), 18.
56. Lucy Taksa, 'Pumping the Life-Blood into Politics and Place': Labour Culture and the Eveleigh Workshops", *Labour History*, no. 79 (2000): 18, 27.
57. George Rarere, interviewed by Ross Webb, 2 September 2013.
58. Bill Hillman, interviewed by Ross Webb, 20 June 2014.
59. John Leckie interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 November 2013.
60. *ibid.*
61. Henare O'Keefe, interviewed by Ross Webb, 1 September 2013.
62. Leckie, "Women in Industrial Action", 88-89.
63. Locke, *Workers in the Margins*, 81; Alan McRobie, "The Politics of Volatility, 1972-1991", in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2002), 385; James Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, 397.
64. Michael Barry and Pat Walsh, "State Intervention and Trade Unions in New Zealand", 62, 66; Ryan Bodman, "The Public Have Had a Gutsful and So Have We: The Alienation of Organised Labour in New Zealand, 1968-1984" (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2013), 1.



# From Class-Struggle to Neoliberal Narratives: Redistributive movements in Aotearoa New Zealand

*By Dylan Taylor and Sandra Grey*

Over the past two decades social movement scholars have argued that identity-based claims have come to dominate the realm of contentious politics. An examination of claims-making by redistributive movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand since 1968 illustrates the shift away from claims based on “economic divisions” to those centred on “social divisions”. However, the change is not a displacement of class by identity politics. The analysis of a selection of publications by a range of organisations representing workers, the unemployed, and the poor, signals that the shifting claims-making has been driven by larger trends in the political economy. Our analysis highlights the importance of studying social movements in a dialectical manner—one which seeks to understand how contention interacts with the external dynamics of the state and economy.

## *Class in the New Zealand Context*

Considerations of class and capitalism have all but disappeared from the field of contemporary social movement studies, and a similar trend can be witnessed within the wider terrain of academic work within New Zealand. The utility of “class” as a conceptual tool within New Zealand has been subject to “fashion”—and has been decidedly out of fashion for some time now.<sup>1</sup> We contend that considerations of class, economy and the state are important when considering the trajectory of social movements within New Zealand.

There have been two noteworthy studies of the changing class composition of New Zealand, both of which argue the working class still comprises the majority of the country’s population. Penelope J. M. Hayes has argued that by 2001—the period in which our study draws to a close—55.7% of the fulltime labour force was still “working class.”<sup>2</sup> While there has been a decline in the levels of people who can be designated as “working class” from the previous high of 86%, that the majority of the population still falls within this category signals, Hayes contends, its continued importance as an analytic category. Patrick Ongley shows that 58% of the workforce within New Zealand is still involved in the production, circulation and selling of goods—that is, the majority of the population is still working within a material economy (even if industrial production itself takes place predominantly offshore).<sup>3</sup>

Against this background, the absence of class-based analysis in academia is more a reflection of the demise of a working-class voice in institutions of economic and political power, than it is of a decline of its conceptual utility. The rightwards drift of the Labour party after 1984 and the passing of the Employment Contracts Act in 1991, which made union membership voluntary, dealt a decisive blow to organised labour. With the entrenchment of neoliberal—pro-employer—

approaches to the economy and labour relations within the New Zealand government, working-class aspirations and concerns were no longer reflected within the logics guiding the actions of the state in New Zealand. In New Zealand, as elsewhere in the developed world, the state became the instrument reserved for expressing the interests of a capital-focussed elite.

Alongside these points, it is also important to acknowledge that New Zealand, as with other core states, witnessed the emergence of new social movements within the timeframe studied.<sup>4</sup> It is of interest, then, within this context, to explore how redistributive social movements reacted to the changing economic and political climate.

It will be shown that redistributive social movements within New Zealand have, within the timeframe studied, eschewed “material claims” in their own publications, even though the relevance of these issues has not diminished in New Zealand (and, in fact, was heightened during the 1990s with the pain caused by structural adjustment under the Fourth National Government).

#### *Methodology and Data*

To explore the changing nature of New Zealand’s redistributive social movement organisations we have approached them through their articulatory practices—how they speak about their members and those they are making claims on behalf of, and who or what they present as their targets. We have examined multiple editions from 47 different social movement publications published in New Zealand since 1968. Given the broad timeframe, and that the aim of this paper was to understand shifts in the articulatory practices of movements, purposive sampling was sufficient. We chose clusters of publications, as these signalled moments of adaptation and change within movement organisations—of growth or contraction—which helped us examine the effects of the wider political economy upon these organisations.

<i>Time Block</i>	<i>Anti-Poverty Organisation Publications</i>	<i>Labour Movement Publications</i>
1968-70	4	12
1975-77		16
1977-79	10	
1980-83		15
1985-87	7	
1989-91		14
1991-93	13	
1997-99	8	25
2005-07	7	18
Total	49	100

*Table 1: Publications Analysed*

*The Impact of New Social Movements on Redistributive Movements within New Zealand*

The impact of new social movements, and associated issues relating to identity politics, was evident in the labour and anti-poverty movements' publications. There was an inclusion of claims from women, Maori, and other groups that indicated a shift in the narrative of the movements over the four decades.

	1968-70	1970-75	1980-82	1989-91	1997-99	2005-07
'All NZ'	3.2		9.1		13.7	3.6
LGBTQ*					1.9	
Maori			4.5			
Students	3.2			2.5	11.8	
Women	3.2	4.5	2.3	2.5	9.8	3.6
Unemployed				10	3.9	
Total	6.6	4.5	15.9	15	41.1	7.2

\* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer

*Table 2: The proportion (%) of claims made in labour movement publications on behalf of broad constituents, selected publications 1968-2007*

The inclusion of identity politics saw a move from the sole emphasis being on "workers" as a catch-all category within publications (the late 1960s), toward an inclusion of sub-categories such as "women workers" and "Maori workers" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, the *Federation of Labour Bulletin* reported,

This Committee is going to be a working one and this [is] what the Federation of Labour wants, so that women members in our afflicted Unions know that they have a voice through this Committee on matters affecting women's work and equality in the work force of New Zealand.<sup>5</sup>

And the Communist Party of New Zealand's *People's Voice* argued,

February 6 marks the 141st anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, a treaty that enabled the British colonialists to steal an entire country from its rightful owners, the Maori people. The Maori were driven off their land by force and fraud, just as the working people in Britain were driven off their land and forced to move to cities to be used as factory fodder during the industrial revolution. Waitangi Day is no cause for celebration, except for the monopolies such as Fletcher Challenge and Carter Holt, etc.<sup>6</sup>

But there was no simple displacement of material by post-material concerns within movement publications. The rise of claims on behalf of women, Maori and other identity groups, which were often centred on claims-making concerning the recognition of identity, never overrode the drive for redistribution. Rather, claims on behalf of women and Maori by the movements examined tended to centre on calls for the redistribution of resources. Few claims were made relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or queer issues, and none were made in

relation to the disabilities' sector, despite wider public movements on these issues from the mid-1970s.

While a discursive analysis cannot show the motivation of authors, a close reading of movement publications indicates the spirit in which the inclusion of identity claims was made: during the 1960s and 1970s labour movement publications repeatedly expressed their widespread belief in the strength of the working class. The *Bulletin* contended that,

The labour movement... is today the most vital potential power this planet has ever known, and its historic mission of emancipating the workers of the world from the thralldom of the ages is as certain of ultimate realisation as the setting of the sun.<sup>7</sup>

It was from this position of perceived strength, seemingly, that they felt able to address issues outside the immediate purview of the working-class men they had long represented.

However, the inclusion of identity groups in labour movement publications in the 1997 to 1999 period was not a sign of strength, it was a reaction to the fragmentation of the movement. The labour movement had lost the fight waged in the name of the working class through the 1980s. This class now had less salience as an identity to organise around, so movement organisations, it seems, were seeking to become attached to a wider constituency in an attempt to rebuild.

Alongside the limited number of claims made on behalf of women and Maori in the movement publications we studied, there were other changes taking place that can be linked to the “new social movements” of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While New Zealand’s labour movement had long taken interest in issues of peace and security,<sup>8</sup> there is an identifiable increase in claims around peace, anti-nuclear issues, and environmental issues in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

There also appeared to be a divide between socialist publications and those from unions with regard to the inclusion of new categories into the redistributive left. Mainstream union publications included claims for women workers from early in the period studied, but it was the more radical publications that led the way in claims-making for Maori. The motivations behind the inclusion of Maori demands and claims in union magazines were, arguably, more to do with seeing Maori as potential class allies than a unique constituency in their own right.<sup>9</sup> The labour movement’s attempt to reach out to Maori as they entered the 1980s was met with scepticism from some sections of the Maori protest movement.<sup>10</sup> The inclusion of “identity issues” within the union movement, following the emergence of new social movements, cannot be seen as a smooth process.

#### *The Fragmentation of Redistributive Movements in New Zealand*

Rising market or neoliberal narratives had more impact on the publications analysed than the influence of new social movements—underlining our argument that considerations of capitalism are needed to understand the development

of redistributive social movements. Throughout the four decades studied publications from the labour and anti-poverty movements continued to include “class” as a category and used class-based analysis; what changed, however, was *who* debated class and used class-based analysis during the timeframe studied. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, unions, as well as socialist and communist organisations, used class analysis and rhetoric within their publications. The *People’s Voice*, for example, argued that,

Workers’ power will beat the exploiters’ power before we can advance to a classless society. Which is the only road to security of job and a world without war and much shorter hours of work.<sup>11</sup>

While the publication of the Hotel, Hospital, Restaurant, & Related Trades Union reported,

You will find cruel exploitation from the employers right through the story and you will find the courageous spirit of workers. You will find Government action directed against us then, now, and in the future. You will also find two main worries in our present situation—the plight of Casuals, and the protection of Delegates.<sup>12</sup>

By the late 1990s, and into the early 2000s, the only publications that used rhetoric associated with “class” came from (the now very marginalised) socialist and communist organisations. While the organisations which make up the broad redistributive movement of New Zealand have always been fragmented and at times even highly polarised,<sup>13</sup> it seems this polarisation is exacerbated from the mid-1980s as the Fourth Labour Government implements its neoliberal programme.

In the first three blocks of publications reviewed (covering the years 1968 to 1982) the wide range of movement organisations associated with workers and the unemployed existed on the same continuum—they were mutually intelligible, sharing a vocabulary based around workers’ rights, class and capitalism (albeit with differing degrees of emphasis). For instance, the Federation of Labour spoke in the following manner when referring to its strategy for industrial relations:

It is a retaliatory attack... against capital. Instead of being on the back foot and warding off the blows of capital and trying to keep this job or that factory, we are endeavouring to go on the front foot and say to capital, “This is what you have got to do if you want to survive and operate in this country”<sup>14</sup>

This snapshot from the publications of the 1980s signals the existence of a broad-based “workers” movement in New Zealand which had, at the very least, a limited unity of purpose, analysis, and claims-making. From the 1990s onwards, however, the movement had become so divided that the unions and socialist/communist organisations ceased to speak the same language in their publications as can be seen in the quotes from the Federation of Labour and other organisations above.

In the final time block reviewed (2005-07) the remaining avowedly socialist/communist publications articulated a far-left position that bore no relation to the position of the union publications.

By the early 1990s the union publications had moved from articulating structural targets (capitalism or the state) and broad-based economic and societal issues (low wages, macroeconomic policy), to being focused on narrowed single-issue campaigns (such as wages at a particular worksite) and more individualised targets (such as a particular employer or a peak body such as the New Zealand Business Round Table). During the 1990s unions became wholly reactive to the actions of the state and market, no longer sharing the post-capitalist vision with the more radical organisations of the labour and socialist movements. In part this may reflect their analysis of the 1990s as a time in which their very existence was under attack.

While the partial displacement of “class” to the periphery of the labour movement was evident in the publications reviewed, the changes behind the displacement of class did not follow a simple downward trajectory from 1968 in relation to the ascendance of identity politics, nor from the 1980s when neoliberalism begins to dominate public debate. Publications in the late 1970s and early 1980s included repeated claims that the economic system of New Zealand was in crisis. As *People's Voice* put it,

Workers know that capitalism is in crisis. Workers know that capitalism cannot provide the jobs, the houses, the health care, the education that they demand.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly the Federation of Labour contended,

The working class stands undefeated and more powerful than at any time in its entire history and the ruling class is now forced into the confrontation that it has delayed since the end of the Second World War.<sup>16</sup>

Such analysis, holding that capitalism was in crisis and that a confrontation was coming between the working and capitalist classes, provides a strong sense that the labour movement felt it could be victorious. And, further, that the pre-existing lines of articulation, ones that acknowledged the existence of classes as distinct parties' active within the state were still relevant.

The loss of the “class” signifier and, outwardly, of the state-managed economy as the solution to the ills of capitalism, meant these movements were unable to advance new claims on behalf of their constituency—a constituency whose very existence was in question. Instead, much of the late 1980s and 1990s were spent by the labour and anti-poverty movements attempting to hold on to rights achieved in earlier decades. The *Service Worker*, for instance, warned its readers,

This is our last chance to protect what is rightfully ours. To allow the Government, the Business Roundtable and some employers to get their own way will drive this country into a Third World state. The Government's



policy of stealing away your rights would make some of history's fascists smile with glee<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, the *Socialist Review* called on its readers to hold the line:

Struggles by workers, Maori and students will continue to break out... The wildcat strike action by PSA members in Income Support last year, the Waiohuru occupation, recent protests over allowances by students and underfunding of childcare workers are all examples of the kind of fight back we need to build.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, what is evidenced from the social movement publications reviewed here is a narrowing of the political interest of the labour and anti-poverty movements—from broad structural change (often international in focus) to an advancement of individual agreements at particular worksites and advocacy on behalf of individual unemployed people.

In the 1960s and 1970s unions, socialist and communist organisations, and groups working with the poor, all discussed the need to provide a broad-based education concerning the machinations of capitalism, and a range of other issues, to their constituency. The *Road Transport Worker*, for example, held,

that every worker (and his wife) should endeavour to understand the economic and political set-up. When this happens the wage and salary earners will certainly fight more for their rights.<sup>19</sup>

While the *Bulletin* argued,

on the necessity for the highest development of Marxist theory in order to guide the practice of the revolutionary party, the conscious leadership of the working class.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, there seems to be a shift within the publications. Movement organisations now provided their constituencies with “information” (with some exceptions amongst the more radical publications). There is a less analytical, more “what’s on” approach within publications. There are shorter stories, more pictures, and at times an apparent rejection of any overtly political project. Organisers appeared to have less faith in what their constituency would be able to understand, or, perhaps they themselves had lost sight of the “big picture.” What we see here is the “successful” readjustment of organisations towards their constituency, one that encapsulates the neoliberal assumption that everyone is responsible for their own welfare, and that the negative and disruptive conditions engendered by capitalism can be ignored, or at least downplayed.

We have situated our study of New Zealand redistributive social movements against the political and economic changes which saw the country transition from a Keynesian/welfare state to a neoliberal one. Class has persisted as an objective category within New Zealand and class interests—and antagonisms—can also be discerned in the direction taken by country’s political system. Our

research explored the ways in which redistributive movements themselves (with the exception of some radical groups) came to downplay the role of class and capital within their own discourses. We found this shift was less to do with challenges from new social movements, and more to do with changes within the wider political and economic system. In short, these movements sought to fight the advent of neoliberalism on our shores, and lost. This loss is evident in the weakened form of address used by these movements when communicating to their constituency in the mid-2000s.

Social movements may have ceased to use terms relating to capital and class when addressing their constituency, but our analysis shows that those who study social movements should not follow suit. The trajectory of redistributive social movements within New Zealand is understandable only when viewed against the country's political and economic history. New class identities—as seen in such conjectured nascent forms as “the precariat” —are now seen as motivating factors behind resistance on a world-wide scale.<sup>21</sup> It is time to bring the concept of class back, along with capital and the state, in order to improve our analyses of social movements. Redistributive social movements, if they are to take the field again and successfully fight for a just and equitable world also need to reclaim these categories—these analytical weapons—of which they had been stripped following their earlier defeat.

*This article has been revised and reprinted, with permission, from New Zealand Sociology, Volume 29, Issue 3, 2014. Dylan Taylor is a teaching fellow at Victoria University School of Social and Cultural Studies. Sandra Grey is the National President of the Tertiary Education Union.*

- 
1. Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor, “Introduction: Bringing the Left Back In,” in *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, eds. Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002), 13.
  2. Hayes, working within the Marxist tradition, approached the question of class on an “objective level”—as determined by a person's economic position—arguing that “...there is no theoretical justification for arguing that a class in itself is defined by its collective consciousness or lack of it.” Penelope J. M. Hayes, “The End of Class? An Empirical Investigation into the Changing Composition of New Zealand's Class Structure, 1896–2001,” *New Zealand Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 56, 66.
  3. Patrick Ongley, “Reshaping the Division of Labour: Work and Class in New Zealand Since the 1980s” (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), 128.
  4. Dylan Taylor, “What's Left? An exploration of social movements, the Left and activism in New Zealand today” (Masters diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2008).
  5. *Federation of Labour Bulletin* 7, no. 11, March 1976, 4.
  6. *People's Voice* XXXVIII, no. 1, 29 July 1981, 1.
  7. *Federation of Labour Bulletin* 7, no. 11, March 1976, 2.
  8. Cybele Locke, *Workers in the Margins: Union Radicals in Post-War New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2012).
  9. Kerry Taylor, “‘Potential Allies of the Working Class’: The Communist Party of New Zealand and Maori, 1921-1952,” in *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, Moloney and Taylor, eds.
  10. See, for instance, Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland: Broadsheet, 1984).
  11. *People's Voice* XXXII, no. 24, 30 June 1975, 5.
  12. *New Zealand Hotel, Hospital, Restaurant, & Related Trades Union*, no. 2, May 1980, 2.
  13. For an examination of the relationship between unions and the unemployment movement see Locke, *Workers in the Margins*.
  14. *Federation Of Labour Bulletin*, no. 24, 24 March 1981, 4.
  15. *People's Voice* XXXIII, no. 24, 28 June 1976, 1.
  16. *Bulletin*, no. 42, January 1981, 1.
  17. *Service Worker*, March 1991, 16.
  18. *Socialist Review*, no. 1, June/July 1997, 9.
  19. *Road Transport Worker* 1, no. 4, May 1968, 1.
  20. *Bulletin*, no. 42, January 1981, 7.
  21. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).

# **“This Mandate abrogates every principle...for which the soldiers... were told they were fighting”: New Zealand’s Colonial Adventure in Samoa**

*By James Robb*



New Zealand troops arriving to annex Samoa for Britain, at the beginning of World War I, August 1914. Photographer: Malcolm Ross. Alexander Turnbull Library, reference: 1/4-017533-F.

Within a month of joining the war against Germany in 1914, New Zealand had seized its first colonial conquest from Germany. On 29 August 1914 troops from the New Zealand warships *Moeraki* and *Monowai* stepped ashore at Apia in western Samoa, and formally took possession of the German colony in the name of the British Empire. The colony was not defended by Germany; this takeover was accomplished without a shot being fired.<sup>1</sup>

The left wing of the union movement in New Zealand, organised in the ‘Red’ Federation of Labour, had long opposed capitalist militarism. The military forces

as well as police had been used to aid and protect strike-breakers on several occasions since the Maritime Strike of 1890. During the Great Strike of 1913—less than a year earlier—Navy sailors had paraded on the wharves with fixed bayonets and machine guns aimed at striking watersiders.<sup>2</sup> The annexation of Samoa posed a threat of a different kind: that of New Zealand troops being used to subjugate a sovereign people. The response to this event from the labour movement was far from clear, especially at first.

The western islands of Samoa had been a German colony since 1899, when Samoa was divided by agreement between the imperialist powers of Britain, Germany and the United States. Under this agreement, the United States took the smaller, eastern Tutuila Island in the Samoa group, while the island of Upolu to the west was awarded to Germany. Britain took the island of Sava'i to the west of Upolu, but immediately traded it to Germany in exchange for Germany relinquishing its claims to Solomon Islands, some West African territories and the Kingdom of Tonga. The people of Samoa were compelled to accept this arrangement as the price for ending the internal wars between clans which these same rival powers had stoked.<sup>3</sup> The early phase of this process was described by the Scottish writer (and active participant in the events) Robert Louis Stevenson, in his 1892 book called *A footnote to history: Eight years of trouble in Samoa*.<sup>4</sup>



Robert Louis Stevenson in Samoa in the 1890s. Photographer unknown, public domain

Samoa was one of a series of former German colonies taken and occupied by the allies in 1914. In November of that year, Australia grabbed the phosphate-rich Pacific island of Nauru and in December, the largest prize of all: the north-eastern part of the vast, resource-rich island of New Guinea (leaving the western half in the possession of Holland, an ally. The south-eastern part was already an Australian possession). Japan, an ally of Britain in the Great War, eyed the German colonies on the island of Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands and at Jiaozhou Bay on the coast of mainland China. (The old name for the capital of this German colony, Tsingtao, lives on as a brand of beer—the brewery was

established by a German and British consortium during the period of German occupation). Similar grabs took place in Africa: German Togoland (today's Togo) was invaded by British troops from neighbouring Gold Coast (Ghana) a few days before the invasion of Samoa. British and French troops invaded German Cameroon. South African troops invaded the German colony of South West Africa (Namibia).

German naval ships were in the vicinity of Samoa after the *Moeraki* and *Monowai* had returned to New Zealand, and could easily have re-taken the island, but they left it in New Zealand hands, and returned to Germany. Germany made relatively little effort to defend any of its Pacific territories militarily, (although it fought hard to defend its Chinese colony.) While Germany's need to expand its colonial possessions at the expense of the established empires was a major driving force of the war, the German government understood that the fate of the colonies would be decided mainly by the outcome of the war in Europe.

While there was relatively little violence associated with these annexations in 1914, they set the stage for major confrontations in the future, including some intense battles during the Second World War: 30,000 soldiers were to lose their lives in the battle for Saipan in 1944.



Namulau'ulu Lavaki Mamoe and other chiefs, aboard a German warship. Tattersall, Alfred James, 1866-1951 :Photographs of Samoa. Alexander Turnbull Library, reference: 1/2-020688-F.

The seizure of Samoa from Germany in 1914 took place against the will of the Samoan people. Since 1908 the Mau movement for self-determination of Samoa had won increasing support, despite punitive deportations of the leaders of this movement to Saipan by the German administration.<sup>5</sup> The new overlords from New Zealand would soon find themselves in direct confrontation with the Mau movement.

Of all the grabs for Germany's Asia-Pacific possessions early in the Great War, the most problematic for the allies were those involving China and the Chinese people. For China was already in revolutionary turmoil. The Qing dynasty had been overthrown by a popular revolt in 1911, the Chinese Republican Sun Yat-sen was in power, and anti-colonial sentiment was running high.

In the nineteenth century, as a consequence of military defeats by Britain and France, China had been forced to cede sovereignty of pieces of its major coastal cities to Britain, France, Germany, and later Japan, Russia, the United States and other powers. (Portugal had had the colony of Macau since the 16th century.)<sup>6</sup> These territories were the springboards for capitalist penetration of the Chinese hinterland by the competing imperial powers. They were directly administered by colonial troops and police of these powers, a colossal affront to Chinese national dignity. (Most of these territories were re-absorbed into China in the course of the second Chinese revolution—the last two being Hong Kong, which remained a British possession until 1997; and Macau which remained a Portuguese colony until 1999.)

When war was declared in August 1914, the Republic of China saw an opportunity to regain one of these concessions, and it immediately cancelled the 99-year lease on the German enclave at Tsingtao. Japan moved quickly to prevent China from regaining possession of the territory. On 23 August, Japan declared war on Germany and immediately besieged Tsingtao. Britain joined the attack. By November, the attackers had overwhelmed the German defenders, and the allies formally took possession of the colony on 16 November.<sup>7</sup> China itself declared war on Germany in 1917, and hoped to regain possession of Tsingtao with Germany's defeat, but the Treaty of Versailles awarded possession of all of Germany's Asia-Pacific colonies north of the equator to Japan, including Tsingtao. This decision in turn sparked the May 4th Movement, a renewed upsurge of anti-colonial agitation in China.<sup>8</sup>

It was not only the Chinese in China who were aroused by the 1911 revolution, but the Chinese diaspora throughout Asia and the Pacific. Chinese indentured labourers in the Dutch East Indies and Malaya had long supported the democratic movement and provided refuge and funds for Sun Yat-sen.<sup>9</sup> Like Britain and the competing imperialist powers, the German colonial rulers saw Samoa, Tsingtao, and their other Asia-Pacific possessions both as strategic re-fuelling and servicing bases for the German navy, and also as sources of raw materials for German industry. They set up plantations producing rubber, edible oils, especially coconut and palm oil, cocoa, and sugar in Samoa, the Solomons, and New Guinea.

Since the Samoan people, even after the German annexation, still had access to land to produce the food and shelter they needed, they felt no compulsion to work for wages on the plantations. They could earn more by producing their own copra and selling it to the German Trading and Plantation Company. The German colonists solved their labour problems by bringing indentured labourers from their other Pacific colonies: some 5700 workers were brought from the Solomons and New Guinea, on three-year indentures on wages of £5 a year. (Similar indenture arrangements were used to bring workers from Hawai'i





Tapping rubber trees in Samoa. Tattersall, Alfred James, 1866-1951 :Photographs of Samoa. Ref: 1/2-020691-F. Alexander Turnbull Library.

to work in agriculture on the Pacific coast of North America, from Solomon Islands and New Hebrides (Vanuatu) to the sugar plantations in Queensland, and Indian workers to work the sugar plantations of the British colony in Fiji.)

When that proved insufficient to meet the need for labour, indentured workers were recruited from China. Between 1903 and 1913 the German planters brought some 3,800 labourers to Samoa from the Kwangtung (Guangdong) province, on three-year indentures.<sup>10</sup> They were forbidden under the terms of their indenture from trading or owning land. They were paid a low wage of ten marks per month for a ten-hour day, with two Sundays off per month, and were not permitted to leave the plantation without permission. It was not long before the Governor had cause to complain to Berlin about “shockingly high death rate among [a planter’s] Chinese, complaints about wage deductions and brutal treatment by him.”<sup>11</sup>

The Chinese indentured labourers saw in the 1914 overthrow of the German colonial power an opening to fight for their rights. “The Chinese have killed one or two German residents, so strong measures have to be adopted to keep them in check”, reported the *Grey River Argus*.<sup>12</sup> The newspaper *New Zealand Truth*, reporting on the activities of the New Zealand occupation troops in its issue of 26 September, added as a footnote,

The only active service that fell to the lot of the invaders was the quelling of a Chinese rising against the Germans about 8 miles outside Apia. A detachment from 100 to 150 strong was ordered out with a squad of native police, to act as guides... arrived at the scene of operations they found SIXTEEN CHINAMEN IN REVOLT. The rebellion was quickly quelled, the rebels taken prisoners and marched back to camp.<sup>13</sup>

A few days later, the *Grey River Argus* reported,

The Chinese at Samoa appeared to be under the impression that the change of Government wiped out the offences of any of their fellow countrymen

who were in gaol, and finding that such was not the case, they tried to cause trouble. The facts as related by a member of the expeditionary force to his relatives in Auckland are that there are over 3,000 Chinese in Samoa, and the writer expresses the opinion that they may cause trouble to the authorities. He adds: — “It would not occasion any surprise if they were to break out into a revolt. On the third day after our arrival, about 100 Chinese made representation to the Governor (Colonel Logan) asking that now the Island had changed hands, the Chinese prisoners should be released from gaol, and on receiving a refusal they made a rush to open the door by force, but were repulsed with a few cracked heads.”<sup>14</sup>

The seizure of Samoa and the other German Pacific colonies in 1914 were some of the defining actions of the emerging imperialist powers of Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific, alongside the sending of Australasian troops to fight alongside of the British army in suppressing the Boer republic in South Africa, and the annexation by New Zealand of the Cook Islands and Niue in 1901. Since the 1890s Liberal Premier Richard Seddon had proclaimed New Zealand’s empire-building plans for acquiring Pacific island territories—including even Hawai’i, before the United States removed that group from their sights by taking possession of it in 1893—and the Reform government that succeeded it in 1912 had followed the same path.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the grabbing of Samoa was the muted response of the class-struggle wing of the labour movement. The Red Federation of Labour had for years conducted a campaign against capitalist militarism, centred on opposition to compulsory military training. Leaders of the Red Feds would soon be jailed for their opposition to conscription and to the war. So it seems somewhat strange that the *Maoriland Worker*, weekly newspaper of the class-struggle current in the labour movement, had little to say about the annexation of Samoa.

The first mention of Samoa is in the *Maoriland Worker* Issue of 9 September, a flippant note under the heading “Heard and Said”: “That the more one hears, of the unparalleled bravery of New Zealanders rushing the cocoa-nut trees at Samoa, the more impressed one becomes. That it is no small undertaking to risk the possibilities of a nut falling upon a conscript’s head.”<sup>16</sup>

In the September 23 issue we read:

The Czar is willing to sacrifice his last moujik in the capture of Berlin; the Kaiser was willing to sacrifice his last conscript in the capture of Paris; and [NZ Prime Minister] Bill Massey and [Attorney-General Alexander] Herdman were willing to sacrifice the last school-kid in capturing Samoa or any other old place. The valiant manner in which the Czar and the Kaiser and Bill Massey and Herdman stay at home and don’t sacrifice themselves is enough to send whirlwinds of admiration roaring down the world’s roadways.<sup>17</sup>

Thereafter, there is no further mention of Samoa until November, a report on conditions faced by the New Zealand troops.

In part, this silence was an indication of how thinly stretched was the Red Feds' leadership by the rush of events in 1914, in part also, almost certainly, the pressure of the war hysteria. At the outbreak of the war, Harry Holland, editor of the *Maoriland Worker*, was still in prison, serving a twelve-month sentence for sedition on account of a speech he gave during the 1913 waterfront strike. He was released on 15 August under a "war amnesty" and spent the next two weeks recovering, before returning to work as editor in September. On 12 September, there was an explosion that killed 43 miners at the Ralph coal mine in Huntly, which demanded the full attention of the labour movement.<sup>18</sup>



Harry Holland, leader of the Labour Party and MP for Buller, in 1922.  
Photographer: S.P. Andrew. Alexander Turnbull Library, reference: 1/1-018348-F.

However, in reading the literature of the period it seems clear that the Red Fed leaders had a fairly narrow conception of the question of capitalist militarism. Their emphasis is on militarism as a weapon against the working class at home, warning against the use of troops as strikebreakers, and war as a violation of international working-class solidarity. The idea of imperialist war as a predatory action against sovereign peoples was little discussed. It appears that even the left wing of the labour movement, those who had long opposed conscription to capitalist armies, acquiesced in the Samoan colonial adventure.

It was not long before Harry Holland attempted to address this weakness and build solidarity with the exploited labourers of the Pacific. In 1918 Holland spoke out against the plan to formally annex Samoa to New Zealand. In a pamphlet entitled *Samoa, a story that teems with tragedy*, he wrote in April 1918:

Today we are told by the advocates of annexation that the Samoans are quite incapable of governing themselves, and that this is one strong

reason why we should undertake their government.... If the government of Samoa is to be in the interests of the Samoans, they are quite able to attend to the matter. But if Samoa is to be controlled and administered so that the interests of the German, American or British traders will be the paramount consideration, it follows that the Samoans cannot be entrusted with the government.<sup>19</sup>

The pamphlet contained a short description of the series of imperialist intrigues, secret deals and treaties, interference in Samoan affairs, and outright acts of aggression that occurred throughout the 1880s and 1890s, drawing largely on Robert Louis Stevenson's book. The Samoan people grew increasingly impatient with the disregard of their interests, and the persecution and exiling of their chosen leaders, which culminated in a joint British-US naval bombardment of Apia in March 1899, and the agreement to partition the islands between the great powers.

Holland comments: "What strikes the reader is the way in which these territories and peoples were bartered with little or no consideration of their own wishes."<sup>20</sup>

Our local capitalists see in the troubled little islands a field for exploitation, and our militaristically-minded rulers know that if they can only make New Zealand an Imperialistic colonising agency, a much stronger case than at present exists could be made for the retention of Conscription and a permanent militarism.... when the War is over.<sup>21</sup>

The Labour Movement may be relied upon to stand firm in its opposition to the annexation of Samoa or any other country. It is true we do not want to see Western Samoa handed back to Germany.... We do not want to see Germany with a naval base in the Pacific; EQUALLY WE DO NOT WANT TO SEE ANY OTHER COUNTRY WITH A NAVAL BASE IN THE PACIFIC.... We maintain, what is self-evident, that no people whatever is good enough to hold any other people in subjection; that all peoples are capable of governing themselves according to their own genius and in the light of their own historical period....<sup>22</sup> We stand uncompromisingly for the principle of No Annexations....

Finally, we of the Labour movement will be found to be unanimous and emphatic in our insistence that the question of the future of Samoa must not be permitted to delay in any way the Peace settlement or prolong for a single day the present appalling slaughter of the world's best manhood.<sup>23</sup>

The Versailles Treaty signed at the end of the Great War awarded New Zealand a League of Nations Mandate to administer Western Samoa. Holland commented, "This Mandate abrogates every principle of Democracy and Self-determination for which the soldiers of New Zealand were told they were fighting."<sup>24</sup> Increasingly interested in the question of the indentured Chinese labourers in Samoa and the appalling conditions under which they worked, the following year he published a study of indentured labour in Fiji, Samoa, Queensland, and other places. Entitled *Indentured labour: Is it slavery?*, the pamphlet denounced the government's policy

in Samoa. "Instead of immediately taking advantage of the post-war situation to end indentured labour in Samoa, the Massey government lost no time in setting to work to perpetuate it for the greater profit of the planters."<sup>25</sup>

Holland had been elected to the New Zealand parliament in 1918. He took part in a parliamentary delegation to Fiji and Samoa early in 1920, brushing aside obstacles that were put up to prevent him speaking to striking workers in Fiji.

By that time, the New Zealand administration in Samoa was already in a deep political crisis. The worldwide influenza epidemic of 1918–19, brought to Samoa through administrative bungling and indifference by the New Zealand authorities, had claimed the lives of one-fifth of the population. The pro-independence agitation of the Mau was gaining mass support. Within less than a decade, there would be another military assault on the Samoans, this time with New Zealand troops gunning down supporters of Samoan self-determination. Once again, Holland would be in the forefront of solidarity with the Samoan struggle in New Zealand.

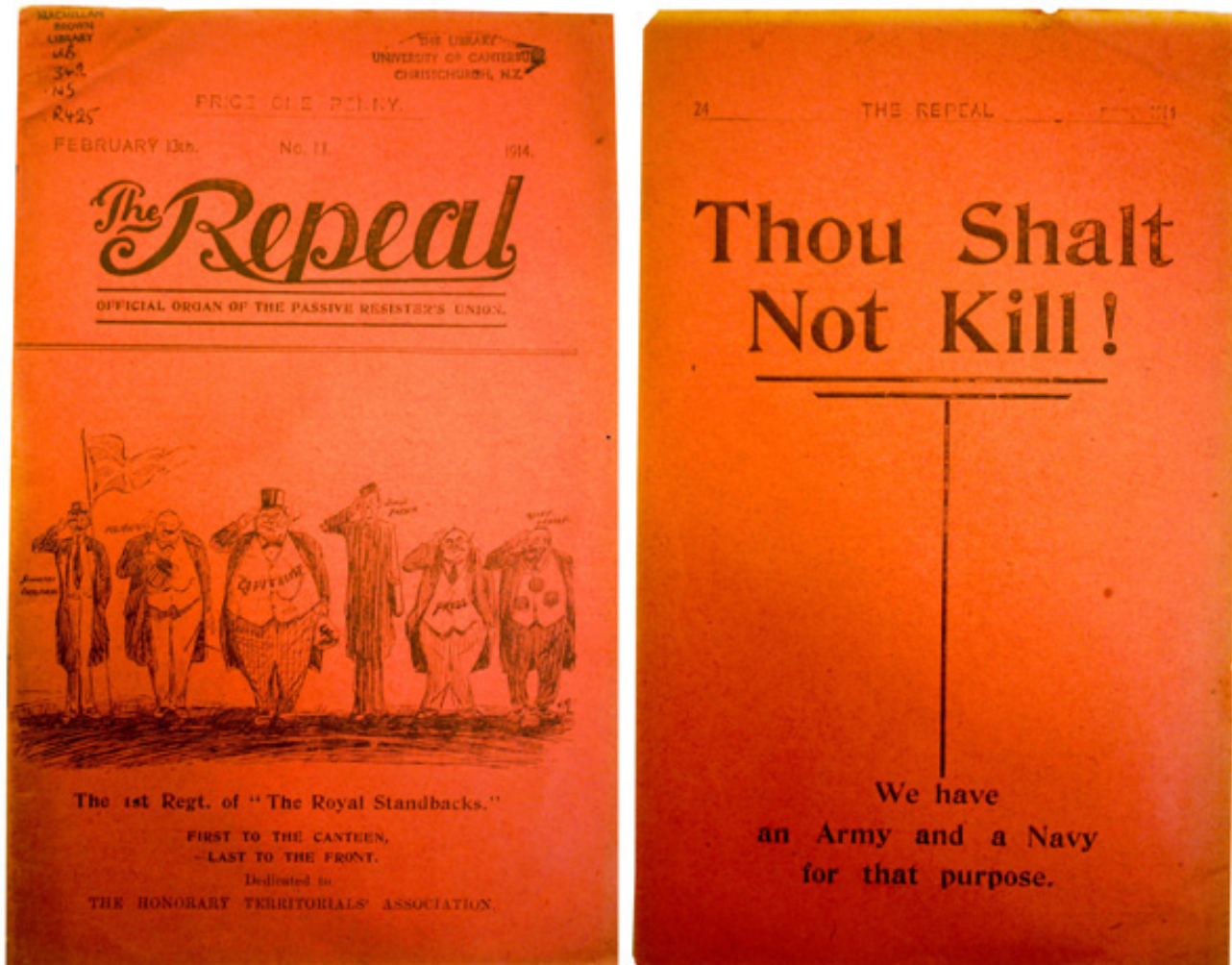
*James Robb is currently researching Harry Holland's life with a view to writing a new biography of Holland.*

- 
1. "Surrendered. Occupation of Samoa. The New Zealand Force Lands Unopposed," *Evening Post*, Wellington, 31 August 1914, 6.
  2. Herbert Otto Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand: Past and Present* (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1973), 38.
  3. Henry Edmund Holland, *Samoa, A Story that Teems With Tragedy* (Wellington: Maoriland Worker Printing and Publishing Company, 1918), 16.
  4. Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*, (Adelaide: University of Adelaide ebooks, 2014).
  5. "Samoan Exiles on Saipan 1905-1915," Talane.com, accessed 26 June 2015, <http://www.talane.com/-Samoan-Exiles-on-Saipan-1905-1915-/21588550>
  6. Susie B Gordon, "Unequal Legacies: The Story of China's Foreign Concessions and Treaty Ports," eChinaCities.com, 8 October 2010, accessed 26 June 2015, <http://www.echinacities.com/news/Unequal-Legacies-The-Story-of-Chinas-Foreign-Concessions-and-Treaty-Ports>
  7. "Capture of Tsing-Tau", *New Zealand Herald*, 24 November 1914, 6. (See also "Nauru Under Control - British Flag Hoisted" on same page.)
  8. Jonathan Fenby, *The Penguin history of modern China: the fall and rise of a great power, 1850 to the present* (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 2008), 141.
  9. Wu Xiao An, "Sun Yat-sen and the 1911 revolution in China and South East Asia," in Sun Yat-Sen, *Nanyang and the 1911 Revolution*, ed. Lai To Lee and Hock Guan Lee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), 250.
  10. Stewart Firth, "Governors versus Settlers: The Dispute over Chinese Labour in German Samoa," *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11, no. 2 (1977): 156.
  11. *Ibid.*, 163.
  12. "Our Men at Samoa," *Grey River Argus*, 2 October 1914, 6.
  13. "Soldiering in Samoa," *New Zealand Truth*, 26 September, 1914, 5.
  14. "Position at Samoa," *Grey River Argus*, 2 October 1914, 8.
  15. David Hamer, "Seddon, Richard John," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 12 February 2014, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s11/seddon-richard-john>
  16. "Heard and Said," *Maoriland Worker*, 9 September 1914, 1.
  17. "Personal and Political," *Maoriland Worker*, 23 September 1914, 2.
  18. "Huntly Explosion - Appalling Loss of Life," *Maoriland Worker*, 16 September 1914, 3.
  19. Holland, *Samoa, A Story that Teems With Tragedy*, 4.
  20. *Ibid.*, 16.
  21. *Ibid.*, 18.
  22. *Ibid.*, 19.
  23. *Ibid.*, 20.
  24. Henry Edmund Holland, *Indentured Labour - Is it Slavery?* (Greymouth: Grey River Argus Company, 1919), 1.
  25. *Ibid.*



# “The Military Strike Is Now On!”: The Passive Resisters’ Union, 1912-1913

By Ryan Bodman



The *Repeal*. Photograph of the original by Jared Davidson

*This is the first of a two-part article. The second part, “The Ripapa Affair: The Passive Resisters’ Union, 1913-1914”, will appear in the next issue of the Bulletin. Revised and reprinted with permission from Labour History, no. 107, November 2014.*

In late February 1912, nine members of the recently-formed Passive Resisters’ Union (PRU) were fined for refusing to comply with the compulsory military training (CMT) scheme. As PRU members, the young men had pledged to resist CMT “in defiance of all pains and penalties that may be imposed” and in line with this pledge they refused to pay their fines.<sup>1</sup> As a result, each man was sentenced to 21 days in prison. On Saturday 9 March 1912, a demonstration was held in Christchurch’s Cathedral Square to protest this ruling. The National Peace Council’s journal, the *Anti-Militarist*, described the demonstration as “easily eclipsing any meeting previously held by the anti-militarists”.<sup>2</sup> Speeches were



held and resolutions carried condemning CMT and a number of PRU members stood before the crowd and declared their intentions to maintain their defiance.

The protest carried over to the following day when a chartered train took hundreds of people—including PRU members, waterside workers, members of the Canterbury Women's Institute and others from the anti-militarist movement—to an open-air meeting at the gates of Lyttleton jail.<sup>3</sup> When the train arrived at Lyttleton, peace activists distributed 500 copies of the song “We’ll Set the Children Free”, which the 2,000 strong crowd sang to the tune of “John Brown’s Body”.<sup>4</sup>

This two-day demonstration is indicative of the PRU’s impact on the anti-militarist movement. Throughout 1910 and during its initial implementation in April 1911, CMT attracted opposition from various quarters as numerous groups from the peace and labour movements voiced their opposition to the policy. It was not until February 1912, however, with the formation of the PRU that an organisation began to disrupt the workings of the training scheme. PRU membership was restricted to those directly affected by CMT. As the state sought to enforce compliance upon all young men, members of the Union were inevitably brought into the fold. The passive resisters responded to the state’s coercive measures with a variety of direct-action tactics. The PRU’s employment of these tactics changed the trajectory of the anti-militarist movement, replacing the propaganda activities of peace and labour organisations with an approach that proved so successful that by early 1914, following almost two years of increasingly punitive measures, the state effectively abandoned its goal of securing the compliance of all young men. Despite this record, the integral role of the PRU to the achievements of the anti-CMT movement has not been considered in any depth.

A PRU branch operated in Australia and was led by the well-known peace activist Harry Flintoff.<sup>5</sup> In Australia, the PRU was a minor player in the broader anti-CMT movement. This reflected differences between the nations’ training schemes. In Australia, people who assisted young men to disrupt CMT were liable to be charged alongside the youths who directly opposed it.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, effective direct action against the policy was not the exclusive domain of the defaulter. In New Zealand, however, the state’s efforts to enforce compliance were directed at defaulters alone. In this context, a collective body of recalcitrant youths willing to bear the punishment for their opposition represented a particularly effective means of undermining CMT.

Accordingly, this article seeks to demonstrate that the success of the anti-CMT movement in New Zealand reflected the efficacy of the PRU’s tactical approach. By placing the organisation into its historical context, detailing the tactics that set it apart from the rest of the movement and outlining the organisation’s effectiveness at responding to the state’s increasingly punitive measures, the PRU will be placed at the forefront of New Zealand’s first anti-militarist movement.

#### *Direct action gets the goods*

The introduction of CMT in New Zealand represented an indirect response to the threat Germany posed to Britain’s long-held global hegemony. At the Imperial

Naval and Military Conference in London, in 1909, Britain called on its colonies to strengthen their defence capabilities in light of the growing spectre of a major European conflict.<sup>7</sup> The Defence Act 1909 was the New Zealand government's primary response to this directive. The Act abolished the nation's voluntary military force and required all males aged between 12 and 30 to register for compulsory military training. Males between the ages of 12 to 14 were to enrol in the Junior Cadets, "from 14 to 18 in the Senior Cadets, from 18 to 25 in the General Training Section and from 25 to 30 in the Reserve".<sup>8</sup> The territorial force, which represented the nation's primary defence force, incorporated members of the defunct voluntary force alongside men transferred from the General Training Section.<sup>9</sup>

The Act was first implemented in April 1911 when males aged between 14 and 20 were directed to register. By the end of the registration period—17 July 1911—the government had satisfied its quota of registrations, though 13,000 eligible youths had failed to comply. Of these defaulters, the vast majority were not overtly opposed to the policy and simply neglected to register; though a small minority were motivated by political or religious objections. Despite being heavily outnumbered by apathetic defaulters, the authorities targeted political and religious objectors. Of the first three offenders convicted and fined under the Defence Act, two, Harry Cooke of Christchurch and William Cornish of Wellington, were the sons of well-known socialists—William Cornish Sr and Fred Cooke—and opposed the policy on anti-militarist grounds. The young men maintained their defiance and refused to pay a £5 fine for non-registration. As a result, both Cooke and Cornish were sentenced to 21 days in prison.

Cooke and Cornish's belligerence marked the onset of direct action against CMT, though it did not represent the establishment of an opposition movement to the scheme. Organisations had campaigned against the policy as early as 1910, and the commencement of registrations in April 1911 resulted in a flurry of activity against the Defence Act. Particularly active at this early stage were the National Peace Council and the Federation of Labour, also known as the Red Feds. The Peace Council was led by two devout Christians—Louis P. Christie and Charles Mackie—who challenged CMT in a temperate, conciliatory tone. The organisation sought to appeal to middle-class New Zealanders by challenging the policy from a moral basis, focussing on the militarisation of youth and the immorality of camp life.<sup>10</sup> The Red Feds, meanwhile, presented the issue in terms of the class struggle. The organisation framed CMT as a form of state oppression and presented conscript armies as weapons of the ruling class.

Despite the philosophical gulf separating the two organisations, the Peace Council and the Red Feds adopted similar tactics to express their opposition to CMT. Lacking avenues through which to directly challenge the policy, both groups—and the anti-militarist movement generally—focussed on propaganda activities. The Peace Council and the Red Feds hosted public meetings and published articles and pamphlets outlining the perceived evils of the policy. This approach placed opposition to CMT at the forefront of the labour and peace movements and promoted activity therein. However, the impact of anti-militarists on the general public was significantly less evident. Following an anti-

militarist speaking tour of the South Island in mid-1911, Mackie noted that his audiences knew nothing about the anti-militarist movement, and most of them had not even heard of CMT.<sup>11</sup>

This situation rapidly changed following Cooke and Cornish's refusal to pay their fines. In the days following the young men's incarceration, a public meeting in Christchurch attracted almost 3,000 people. Mackie later suggested that this meeting served to advertise the anti-militarist cause and launch the movement.<sup>12</sup> Rather than indicating new-found popular opposition to CMT, much of the attention enjoyed by the movement at this time reflected public anxiety at the imprisonment of the young men. As historian James D. Milburn explains, "society at the time regarded the criminal as the lowest of the low, and the penal system was designed to treat them accordingly".<sup>13</sup> Active opponents of the Defence Act did not view the offences of Cooke and Cornish as equivalent to those committed by common criminals, and this was a position shared by a section of the public who, until that time, had shown little interest in CMT.<sup>14</sup>

As the issue attracted broader attention, the government was caught off-guard. The Defence Act did not legislate for prison terms and the young men's imprisonment reflected standard judicial procedure for the non-payment of fines. Accordingly, the incarceration of Cooke and Cornish came as a surprise to the government, and this surprise turned to alarm when the imprisonments attracted attention beyond the fringe anti-militarist movement. Less than six months out from a general election and with CMT enjoying support from both sides of the house, neither the Liberal Government nor the Reform Opposition wanted to see the issue politicised.<sup>15</sup> In turn, the government brought prosecutions to an end little more than a month after they had begun.

#### *The Passive Resisters' Union*

The cessation of prosecutions was short-lived. In early 1912, the re-elected Liberal Government recommenced prosecutions with renewed zeal, bringing charges against 100 young men in February alone. Included in this group was Harry Cooke, who was again convicted for failing to register; the Defence Act allowing for multiple charges for the same offence.<sup>16</sup> In response to the renewal of prosecutions, the Passive Resisters' Union was formed. Established by working-class youths apprenticed at Christchurch's Addington Railway Workshops, the Union's first meeting was held on 4 February 1912. Cooke was amongst the Union's first members, and James K. Worrall and Reg Williams were appointed joint-secretaries. Following the meeting, PRU members took part in a time-honoured tradition of left-wing political activists, pasting up posters under the cover of darkness. The following morning the Christchurch *Star* read: "the fences surrounding the... King Edward Barracks had been placarded with copies of a printed manifesto, urging all and sundry to oppose 'conscription,' and with a number of small square 'stickers' bearing such mottoes as 'Don't be a conscript, be a man,' 'Men, not pimps,' and 'The military strike is now on.'"<sup>17</sup> By the end of February, the Christchurch PRU boasted 200 members and branches were established throughout the country as young working-class men in Huntly, Waihi, the West Coast, Auckland and Wellington responded to the Union's call "to stand solidly with us against tyranny and oppression".<sup>18</sup>



PRU joint-secretary James Worrall (left) and his brother dressed in their best suits for a date in His Majesty's Court. On their lapels are the red and gold PRU badges that began to adorn the suits of young men charged under the Defence Act in early 1912. Photo of the original by Jared Davidson.

From the outset, the PRU was closely associated with various elements of the labour movement, sharing members with the Red Feds, the Socialist Party and the New Zealand branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or the Wobblies).<sup>19</sup> In turn, the Union's opposition to CMT echoed concerns already voiced by the socialist wing of the anti-militarist movement. Upon the establishment of a PRU local on the West Coast, a group of young miners declared: "we, the young men of Denniston, liable to serve under the Conscription Act of New Zealand, decline to comply with the regulations of the Act, because we recognise that all wars are a ruse of the capitalist class to set the workers of this country and the workers of other countries at each other's throats. We recognise no enemy than the hereditary enemy of our class, the employers of labour in this and other countries."<sup>20</sup>

Although its philosophical opposition aligned with the socialist wing of the anti-militarist movement, the PRU's tactical approach distinguished it from other

anti-CMT organisations. The Union sought to emulate the direct action tactics of Cooke and Cornish on a large scale. Central to achieving this goal was the policy of restricted membership. By restricting membership to those directly affected by the scheme, the Union's members were drawn exclusively from the demographic whose compliance was required for the success of CMT. All PRU members would inevitably be ordered to comply with the training scheme, and refusal to do so would result in state coercion to secure compliance. In response, PRU members hoped to maintain their defiance in order to expose the state's inability to enforce CMT. Throughout the remainder of 1912, the PRU demonstrated the efficacy of its tactical approach. By October 1912, 4,819 young men had been convicted under the Defence Act, and over 100 were imprisoned for refusing to pay their fines. As in the case of Cooke and Cornish, the imprisonment of young men alongside common criminals attracted additional publicity. In February 1912, following the imprisonment of nine passive resisters, the anti-militarist movement staged its largest protest to date, attracting close to 5,000 people over two days. A number of major newspapers—which consistently voiced support for CMT—also expressed concern. Reflecting on an alternative to civil jails, *The Press* suggested that “Strict military detention would undoubtedly be better than sending the defendants to gaol to herd with criminals”.<sup>21</sup>

By wilfully going to jail PRU members, like Cooke and Cornish before them, forced the issue of CMT back on to the public agenda. On this occasion the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, responded by commissioning a report. Written by the Minister of Justice, John Findlay, the report suggested that civil jails were not suitable accommodation for youths offending under the Defence Act. Findlay suggested that the government consider military detention as an alternative.<sup>22</sup> Ward supported these recommendations and noted his intention to remove from the Defence Act those elements of the policy “creating very strong antagonisms”.<sup>23</sup> Before he could act on this, however, the Liberal Government lost its narrow control of the House. In March 1912, Ward resigned as Prime Minister and his replacement, Thomas MacKenize, did likewise three months later. In July 1912, William Massey's Reform Government came to power and it was left to the new Minister of Defence, James Allen, to consider the report's findings.

Ultimately, Allen agreed with much of the report and oversaw the passage of the Defence Amendment Act in December 1912. This law introduced two major changes to the scheme. Firstly, it broadened and more clearly defined the rights of religious objectors to the policy; and secondly—and most importantly for the PRU—it prevented young men from serving time in civil jails.<sup>24</sup> The law empowered magistrates to retrieve unpaid fines through an attachment order—or garnishment—on the wages of the defaulter and gave magistrates the power to compel the offender's employer to comply with the ruling. If the defaulter somehow managed to avoid the fine, the Amendment Act specified that terms of incarceration were to be served in military barracks under military discipline.<sup>25</sup> The law thus strengthened the government's ability to enforce compliance under the Defence Act, while removing the potential for imprisonment; a punishment which, on two separate occasions, had attracted unwanted public scrutiny.



Some within the contemporary peace movement presented the Amendment Act as a victory. Quakers in London wrote a pamphlet describing the Defence Amendment Act as an “implicit confession of the failure of previous methods of dealing with those who refuse to serve”.<sup>26</sup> By willingly going to jail, the PRU placed the issue back on to the national agenda and the government responded with the Amendment Act. However, that Act was hardly worth celebrating as it significantly strengthened the government’s ability to secure the compliance of defaulters. Accordingly, as the Bill made its way through parliament, PRU members took the opportunity to publicise their intentions to continue their defiance. In a letter posted to every Member of Parliament, the passive resisters explained that the new law would do nothing to curb their opposition: “We have refused to obey the Defence Act because we cannot conscientiously comply with it, and we must state that in future, if the compulsory clauses are not repealed, we will again willingly bear the punishment.”<sup>27</sup>

#### *The Defence Amendment Act 1912*

Immediately following the passage of the Amendment Act, the authorities demonstrated their intention to silence the PRU by commencing a sustained campaign of persecution. Since its establishment in early 1912, the organisation had regularly held street meetings to inform the public of its activities and gain recruits for the Union and the anti-militarist movement generally. From the beginning of 1913, the authorities sought to shut these meetings down. In Canterbury and the West Coast—the regions where the PRU remained most active—the organisation’s meetings were constantly disrupted by the authorities. In Christchurch, for example, Reg Williams was arrested and jailed for “wilful blockage of traffic”. His summons form explained that he “deliver[ed] an address in a public place... in consequence whereof other persons were induced to congregate... so as to cause an obstruction”.<sup>28</sup> This charge was upheld in court even though another PRU member had hired a taxi and driven around the meeting to demonstrate that the traffic flow was not obstructed.

Persecution also became a feature of PRU members’ private lives. The Defence Amendment Act empowered magistrates to strip defiant young men of their civil rights and this punishment was used on several occasions.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, James Allen, who held both the Defence and Education portfolios, advocated the removal of education scholarships for young men who refused to comply with the Act.<sup>30</sup> In response to this threat, the PRU suggested that Allen’s goal was to keep the working class ignorant so they would obey their military rulers. The PRU—which viewed Allen’s dual ministerial responsibilities with irony—declared that they sought to make working people “internationalists instead of jingoes; men of peace, instead of ‘dogs of war’”.<sup>31</sup>

In response to this persecution, the PRU began publishing a monthly journal entitled *The Repeal*, so named to reflect the organisation’s primary goal of repealing the Defence Act.<sup>32</sup> Published from March 1913 to August 1914, the journal became a central tool in the Union’s campaign against CMT. It was distributed throughout major centres by PRU branches and other anti-militarist organisations, and posted to subscribers in numerous rural New Zealand towns—including Paparoa, Ngaruawahia and Hawera—and cities in the UK



*The Repeal* often contained content that mocked its political opponents. This cartoon, which appeared in the October 1913 edition of the journal, poked fun at what PRU members viewed as the misplaced loyalty of working-class patriots.

and Australia.<sup>33</sup> Reflecting the PRU's relationship with the labour movement, *The Repeal* often carried articles and cartoons from the FOL's *Maoriland Worker* and the IWW's *Industrial Worker*. Moreover, the journal's tone owed much to the irreverent humour of the Red Feds and the Wobblies, often containing content that satirically mocked the PRU's opponents.

The PRU published *The Repeal* to respond to persecution. All the while, prosecutions continued unabated. In the wake of the Amendment Act, the garnishee clause significantly reduced the ability of defaulters to avoid their fines. In turn, the government lauded the garnishment as a major success; Allen suggesting that without it, the "Defence Scheme... would be wrecked".<sup>34</sup> The PRU, however, viewed the policy as the government's most despicable move to date:

Tricky, subtle, and fraudulent, the garnishee is the most contemptible and cowardly plan yet invented to filch from the earner his earnings, from the toiler his rights, and from the citizen his liberties. By the garnishee the youth of this country is handed over, financially, to the military, who

have power to claim his wages, and reduce him to starvation, if he is not implicitly obedient and slavishly subservient to them.<sup>35</sup>

True to their pledge to resist the Defence Act “in defiance of all pains and penalties which may be imposed”, the PRU sought to circumvent the garnishment.<sup>36</sup> In March 1913, members of the Runanga PRU began to respond to fines under the Defence Act by going on strike. By forfeiting their pay, these young men evaded the attachment order on their wages and made the garnishee obsolete. This tactic proved so successful that, at a meeting of West Coast PRU branches in May 1913, the decision was made to extend it throughout the region.<sup>37</sup> The PRU established a strike fund to support those who took this action and the tactic proved similarly successful elsewhere. To avoid arrest, the striking defaulters would leave town and congregate in camps dotted throughout the West Coast’s dense bush. Supporters from town would then provide these camps with food, communication and supplies; an operation that was rekindled a few years later when men sought to avoid conscription during World War One.<sup>38</sup> Reporting on the efficacy of this tactic, a West Coast correspondent to the *Repeal* suggested that “the garnishee is absolutely useless for as soon as the boys are summoned they refuse to work.... if conscription is allowed to exist, it will not be the fault of the lads in this part of [Alexander] God-ley’s Own”.<sup>39</sup>

On occasion, however, striking PRU members made mistakes. In June 1913, five young men camping in the hills around Greymouth left their hide-out to support the electoral campaign of Paddy Webb. Upon their return to town, police recognised the young men and promptly arrested them. They were subsequently charged with avoiding the garnishee and all five were sentenced to 21 days military detention. Authorities transported the men to Fort Jervois military barracks, Ripapa Island, to serve their sentences.

*Ryan Bodman works as a contractor for the Waitangi Tribunal and is writing a social history of rugby league in New Zealand.*

- 
1. “Christchurch Day by Day,” *Ashburton Guardian*, 9 February 1912, 2.
  2. “Indignation Meetings,” *Anti-Militarist: A Journal of Protest and True Patriotism*, 1 April 1912, 12.
  3. Bert Roth, “Hell No We Won’t Go!,” *New Zealand Monthly Review*, XI, October 1970, 20.
  4. Untitled note, Bert Roth Papers, MS Group 0314, 82-213-02, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington; “We’ll Set the Children Free,” in Rona Bailey and Herbert Roth, *Shanties by the Way: A Selection of New Zealand Popular Songs and Ballads* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1977), 112–113.
  5. John Barrett, *Falling In: Australians and ‘Boy Conscription’, 1911–1915* (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1979), 91, 184.
  6. Peter Brock, *Against the Draft: Essays on Conscientious Objection from the Radical Reformation to the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 195–197.
  7. James D. Milburn, “New Zealand’s First Experiment with Compulsory Military Training” (MA thesis, Victoria University College, 1954), 51–53.
  8. R.L. Weitzel, “Pacifists and Anti-militarists, 1909–1914,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 7, no.2 (1973): 128–129.
  9. *Ibid.*, 128–129.
  10. Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988), 12.
  11. Weitzel, “Pacifists and Anti-militarists,” 130.
  12. Weitzel, “Pacifists and Anti-militarists,” 131.
  13. Milburn, “New Zealand’s First Experiment,” 68.
  14. Milburn, “New Zealand’s First Experiment,” 67.
  15. Untitled note, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS Papers 0445 X/5, ATL, Wellington.
  16. “Failing to Register,” *Press*, 21 February 1912, 3.

17. "Militant Anti-militarists," *Canterbury Star*, 5 February 1912, 2.
18. J.P Fletcher, *Conscription Under Camouflage: An Account of Compulsory Military Training in Australasia Down to the Outbreak of the Great War* (Adelaide: J.F. Hills, 1919), 112.
19. Bert Roth Papers, MS-Group-0314 94-106-29/09, ATL, Wellington; Stuart Moriarty-Patten, "A World to Win, A Hell to Loose': The Industrial Workers of the World in Early Twentieth Century New Zealand" (MA thesis, Massey University, 2012), 71.
20. "The Defence Act: A Denniston Protest," *Ashburton Guardian*, 8 February 1912, 2.
21. "The Premier and the Defence Act," *Press*, 16 March 1912, 4.
22. Weitzel, "Pacifists and Anti-militarists," 138.
23. Weitzel, "Pacifists and Anti-militarists," 138.
24. Weitzel, "Pacifists and Anti-militarists," 138.
25. T. C. Gregory, "Persecution or Prosecution?," *The Challenge Direct*, 2 April 1913, 2; Colonial Observer, *A Blot on the Empire: Conscription in New Zealand* (London: Peace Committee of the Society of Friends, 1913), 11.
26. Colonial Observer, *A Blot on the Empire*, 8.
27. "Passive Resisters Protest to Parliament," *Maoriland Worker*, 20 September 1912, 6.
28. Reginald Williams' Summons Form, 1 March 1913, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS Papers 0445 X/2, ATL, Wellington.
29. E.W. Plumridge, "Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914–1919" (MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979), 81.
30. "Hands Off the Schools," *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, 4–5.
31. "Hands Off the Schools," *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, 4–5.
32. 'Editorial', *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, 3.
33. PRU Subscription Book, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS papers 0445 X/1, ATL, Wellington.
34. "The Cost of Defence," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 9 April 1913, 6.
35. "The Garnishee," *Repeal*, July 10, 1913, 4.
36. "Christchurch Day by Day," *Ashburton Guardian*, 9 February 1912, 2.
37. "The Movement on the West Coast," *Repeal*, 10 June 1913, 17.
38. Baker, *King and Country Call*, 202–204.
39. "From the West Coast," *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, 5.

UNION FAMILY

## James “Jimmy” Fulton

*By Natalie McConnell*



This poem was written by my father, William Wallace McConnell, about my mother's grandfather James “Jimmy” Fulton (pictured above). James was a key member of the Waikato Miners' Union, a founding member of the Federation of Labour (known as the Red Feds), and a lifelong advocate of workers' rights.

My father tells me that the line “eight ton a day” was poetic license. He spoke to Harry Bell, former Chief Inspector of Mines, and Harry told him that eight tons would have been a good average output, and would mean you were working to rule. So Dad is sure that Jimmy would have been doing more. Also, the final verse had a change of tense made since my mother Edith and her brother Bill had a headstone placed over the grave of old Jimmy and their grandmother.

I am very proud of my great-grandfather and the work he did. His family paid a big price for his activism; he was away a lot, his views weren't always popular, and in the end he was black-listed from the mines so he had to start a new life as a dairy farmer.



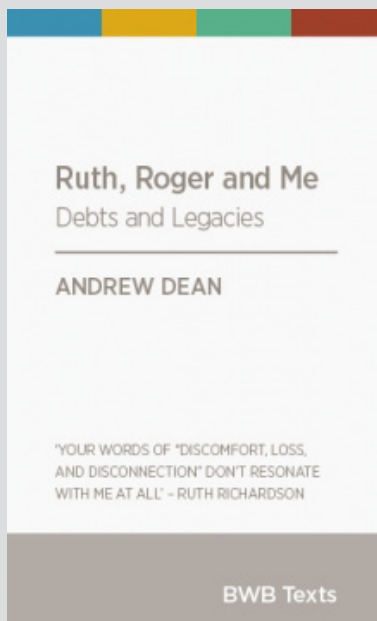
# Jim

By William Wallace McConnell

Down through Huntly the river winds. Past sacred Maori hills,  
beside the railway line.  
Men have come from every clime. Come to work the big Huntly mines  
Jim's come here from the old Tynneside. With men from the valley's,  
men from the Clyde  
He's five foot six, but he'll stand tall. We're mining men and we're brothers all  
There's a bosses bully on every shift. Get the better of him, you're on the  
last cage lift.  
Complain at all, you'll work a three foot seam. There will be water  
at your feet, creaking beams  
From bank to bank it's a ten hour day. Eight hours work, six shillings is the pay  
Jim puts salts in the scabs tea. Jim tried to kill the boss's bully.  
If someone is fired he calls it victimisation. He even talks of nationalisation  
Jim, Jim you better mind, Jim Jim you'll be down the line. We don't want  
socialists around our Huntly mines.  
Then there was trouble at Waihi. They worked in the gold mine there your see  
There's the dust and noise of the big battery. Count on a fifteen year working  
life expectancy  
But things went wrong at Waihi  
Before Evan's was killed, or was it assassination. Jim was one of the  
miners federation.  
They supported a strike that almost stopped this nation. They lasted twenty  
seven weeks on strike pay  
More than seventy of their leaders were locked away  
The coroner and the police all in the mine owners pay. It is a black mark  
against our justice to this day  
So they stopped for a day in Huntly town. To show that miners are brothers  
the world around  
Mine owners said, that suits us fine  
Union coffers are empty, they haven't a dime. We'll get rid of the socialists  
in our Huntly mines  
They're all locked out from that day. A thousand men, no strike pay.  
When kids go hungry, mothers say. Go back to work, strike another day.  
Soldiers bayonets will break any picket line. They've gone back to work in the  
Huntly mines.  
But Jim, Jim you are down the line. You and your union will never  
work again in a Huntly mine.  
Jim's on a farm out of Huntly town. To an eight ton a day man,  
it's a big comedown  
He's cutting scrub, learns to plough. He's from old Durham town,  
never milked a cow  
When the wind blows from the west you can smell the coal. And it's hard  
to farm when it's not in your soul.  
He's a commie and red fed to the folks around. And a hero forever in  
Huntly town.  
Jim tried to give a lot more than he got. But has slept more than forty years  
in an unmarked plot  
This is my story of a man I didn't see. Smaller and yet so much bigger than me.



# Reviews



## Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies

By Andrew Dean (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2014)

Reviewed by Barrie Sergeant

This review is reprinted with permission from [www.awsm.nz](http://www.awsm.nz)

When you look at the past 30 years in Aotearoa there might be some debate about which year stands out most as a turning point for economic policy. Strong candidates would have to be 1984 when neoliberal factions gained a clear ascendancy among the political parties. There was also 1987 but perhaps the roughest was 1991 and the year of the Mother of all Budgets. In that year National Party Minister of Finance Ruth Richardson took the initial work of the Labour Party under Lange and Douglas even further than they had ever dared. Unemployment, welfare and sickness benefits were slashed, the health system was re-structured and a savage Employment Contracts Act dealt to organised labour.

Anyone over 50 will have clear memories of the period prior to the neoliberal consensus. Whether they agree with the changes it has brought in or not, they at least have experience of something else. What of those who are younger? Having grown up under the current set-up and therefore having known no other way of doing things, do they just passively accept that this is all there can be? That the effects of the changes have been essentially positive? Do they see privatisation and market-driven methods as the sole valid option for running an economy? Perhaps many do, but fortunately there are countervailing voices prepared to question the dominant paradigm.

One of the young challengers is Andrew Dean, a PhD candidate and Rhodes scholar currently at Oxford. Dean's short work takes on the myths of neoliberalism. He does so from his personal perspective as someone who is among the "children" of the Mother of All Budgets. Now in his 20s, he grew up when the policies of Richardson and Douglas had their greatest influence on the country.

Dean's background is not as a trained economist and some could argue this is a serious fault when embarking on such a project. He doesn't claim to have undertaken his own economic research or to have made new breakthroughs in this field. His approach is that of a synthesist who has nevertheless done his homework. The writer has studied the work of local academics from various disciplines sympathetic to his own views such as Brian Easton, Jane Kelsey, Karen Nairn, Jane Higgins, Judith Sligo and international best-sellers such as *The Spirit Level*. In addition he demonstrates a knowledge of New Right ideologues such as Hayek, Isaiah Berlin and Charles Murray. This ideological mix is adroitly combined with official statistics from the NZ government that make for depressing reading and support his contention that the changes made have not been for the better.

Frankly the fact Dean is not an economist actually works in his favour. His style of writing is accessible to the general audience it is intended for and it's free of

1. Andrew Dean, *Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2014), 91.
2. *Ibid.*, 101-102.

heavy jargon. He doesn't cherry-pick low-hanging fruit, but focuses on a range of key sectors that were impacted by the changes such as health, housing and education. The fact he uses the government's own data carries a lot of weight. It is hard to deny the cold facts he puts together and as Dean himself says, the policies have had 30 years to play out so it's about time somebody pressed Richardson and her fellow travellers harder.

For those unmoved by dry statistical analysis, Dean also adds personal experience to the assortment of information he offers. He is honest enough to admit that in some ways he is not entirely representative of his generation. After all, as a Pakeha doing post-grad study at Oxford, he's not exactly a model of the underclass. Nevertheless experiences such as working with vulnerable children for a community agency in Ashburton and watching the effects of the health sector re-structuring on his local hospital where his parents worked, show his sympathies have not come about in an ivory tower.

Perhaps the strongest "personalised" section of Dean's work is based on interviews he was granted by two of the architects of the neoliberal landscape. One is not (surprisingly, given the book's title) with Roger Douglas, but Rod Carr. The latter held various positions in the power structure including jobs as Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank, leader of a taskforce that oversaw the re-structure of health funding and he was recently Vice-Chancellor of Canterbury University. Dean's encounter with Carr is marked by a good-natured bout of sparring and Carr himself proves rather nuanced in his assessment of the neoliberal agenda. In fact he is prepared to criticise elements of the present system, though retains a belief in the utility of discomfort to motivate the working population. By "discomfort" Dean means the idea that job insecurity and having to operate with limited resources will encourage people to work harder and more efficiently. Anyone at the receiving end of the precarious working environment that exists, won't find it difficult to take issue with Carr on that point!

More interesting and exponentially scarier is Dean's meeting with Ruth Richardson. Their interview only lasted 90 minutes but Dean says it flowed freely. She was hardly ambushed into it and his subject is certainly intelligent. The picture that emerges is akin to an encounter with a fanatical suburban cult leader in her lair. Unlike Carr she is not only largely non-reflective but utterly unapologetic regarding any of the damage caused by her actions. She even admits to being more extreme in her views in older age. As far as Richardson is concerned, the "problem" such as it was, was in not carrying the changes further. From an anarchist perspective the most revealing aspect of the interview is her admission that Labour and National have been two sides of the same coin or as she says "there was a natural baton pass" in how the various measures have been implemented over time.<sup>1</sup> While nominally offering different views, these parties which still dominate the mainstream political system merely disagree on minor aspects of how to run our lives.

Opponents of neoliberalism of various stripes can find much to praise in Dean's treatise but from an anarchist point of view there are sections where we probably have to part company with him. He correctly highlights the decline in youth

voting as an indication of disengagement with society at large. There is a definite degree of apathy out there. There is a crude form of what could be construed as “anarchism” that tells people not to vote and, outsiders would assume, views this youthful non-participatory trend in a favourable light. Correctly understood, there is an important difference between this straw figure version and the reality. We would not follow Dean in wishing to tackle neo-liberalism as a starting point for re-engagement and participation with the system. We don’t support apathy and a disengagement from politics any more than Dean does. Instead we see not voting as a positive element of a deeper project of informed political commitment to removing the system. We want to replace it with a democratic economy that we believe no alternative form of capitalist tinkering can provide.

As an English Lit major Dean has a finely-tuned ear for the bullshit and jargon that has accompanied neoliberalism. Establishment political discourse definitely “now sounds more like an advertising campaign for an insurance company—‘Vote Positive!’—than it does anything that would run the risk of changing the way we think and act”.<sup>2</sup> Listen to John Key and his minions and you will hear talk of “nudges”, “policy settings”, and finding the right “positioning”; as the author says, this is hardly inspiring stuff. So what does Dean offer as an alternative? In truth, not much and what little there is, is well-meaning but vague. He suggests the abandonment of a political philosophy that values discomfort, its replacement by greater economic participation, an end to anomie and atomisation and an increase in aroha. In fairness Dean admits to not being deeply politicised, he is in that sense still a child of Ruth and Roger rather than an orphan. His short essay does a lot of admirable work and is encouraging in showing that not all among his age cohort are apathetic. However, this isn’t a substantive blueprint to get us out of the current mess and it doesn’t claim to be. That important work remains to be done. In the meantime, Dean is worth reading as a reminder of how we got to where we are and how people have been personally impacted long-term by the Mother of All Budgets, a story with great merit in itself.

---

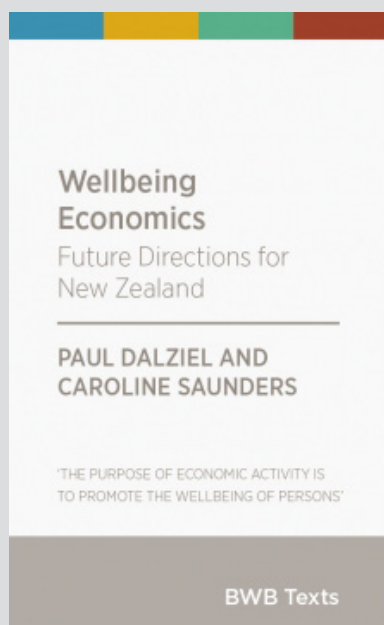
### **Wellbeing Economics: Future Directions for New Zealand**

*By Paul Dalziel and Caroline Saunders (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2014)*

*Reviewed by Ciaran Doolin*

The objective of this book is to reassert the principle that the “purpose of economic activity is to promote the wellbeing of persons.” It will perhaps strike the progressive reader as odd that such a book need be written at all—it is testament to the depth of ideological and institutional penetration of laissez-faire economics that policy makers, politicians and economists need to be reminded of core economic principles.

Underlying the contemporary obsession with GDP growth is the assumption that “growth is good for everyone”, a belief which persists across the political spectrum in New Zealand. However, within policy circles this assumption has long been understood to be flawed—though only recently have the consequences



been thoroughly documented.<sup>1</sup> For example, a 2001 Treasury working paper presented to the newly-elected Labour Government acknowledged:

Growth is very important and policy should take care not to undermine the productivity and dynamism of a healthy market economy. But the need for social cohesion means that the social consequences of growth should be predicted and built into policy thinking.<sup>2</sup>

As Dalziel and Saunders correctly identify, the “growth is good” orthodoxy precedes the reforms of the 1980s—since the late 1960s “export-led growth” has been a catchphrase of economic policy. They suggest a departure from the use of GDP growth as a (primary) measure of economic performance, instead positing that “it is improvements in wellbeing that count, not how the wellbeing is produced”—what they call “value-added growth”. Therefore they reject the “sharp distinction [that is drawn] between economic and social policy. The two policy areas are intimately connected. For example, better housing leads to better health; better health leads to better education; better education leads to better income; and better income leads back to better housing, creating a positive spiral of increasing economic and social wellbeing.”<sup>3</sup>

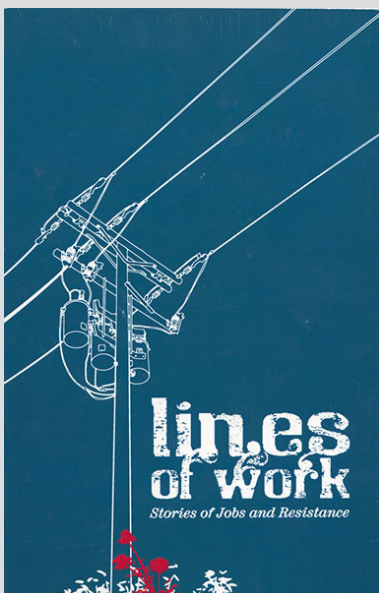
Crucially, the authors underline the importance of the agency of ordinary people in promoting wellbeing. They draw on time-use studies to demonstrate that many activities conventionally perceived as occurring outside the economic sphere make a substantial contribution to general wellbeing and should therefore be considered as equally important facets of the “economy”. Furthermore, a return to full employment is seen as a fundamental component of a future “wellbeing economy”. To achieve this they suggest a revitalisation of production for the domestic market. This idea has considerable merit. As economist Tim Hazledine notes our trade ratio<sup>4</sup> is quite low by international standards owing to our awkward location which makes trade expensive. “[W]e should not rely on it as our salvation”, Hazledine says, instead “production within New Zealand for New Zealanders must be backbone of our economy.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Dalziel and Saunders observe that “a strategy that focuses on exports for their own sake can be hostile to the principles of wellbeing economics.”<sup>6</sup>

What their thesis lacks is a strategy for transitioning to a “wellbeing economy”. One might contend that they are economists and the problem they are considering is economic—not social or political. However, the authors themselves place at the centre of their argument the proposition that the social and the economic are *inseparable*. Instead of appearing as a comprehensive programme of economic and social transformation—as they seemingly intended—their project comes off as one of reorientation; a series of policy prescriptions to be carried out, presumably, within existing policy institutions. Essentially, they do not adequately account for the stratification of power in society. If it were so straightforward to change tack, why have the economic mythologies they reject held sway for so long? It is not as if the deleterious effect of economic orthodoxies on wellbeing is poorly understood by policy makers or politicians. Establishment figures may choose to ignore these social realities—and no doubt many do—but such a reaction is just symptomatic of the problem: a deck that is stacked in favour of capital. Economic

1. Jonathan Boston, Simon Chapple, *Child Poverty in New Zealand* (Bridget Williams Books: Wellington, 2014); Max Rashbrooke ed., *Inequality A New Zealand Crisis* (Bridget Williams Books: Wellington, 2013).
2. Treasury, *Towards an Inclusive Economy*, Treasury Working Paper 01/15, Wellington 2001.
3. Paul Dalziel, Caroline Saunders, *Wellbeing Economics: Future Directions for New Zealand*, (Bridget Williams Books: Wellington, 2014), 40, 120.
4. The trade ratio is defined as the total value of trade as a fraction of total GDP.
5. Tim Hazledine, *Taking New Zealand Seriously: The Economics of Decency* (Harper Collins: Auckland, 1998), 33-34.
6. Dalziel and Saunders, 122.
7. *Ibid.*, 85-86.

and social change has a long history in New Zealand and there is no precedent for fundamental policy shifts in the absence of popular movements demanding change. In their brief discussion of the labour market, after extolling the virtues of wages regulated by market forces they acknowledge a “caveat”: “Labour markets seldom meet the requirements for perfect competition, but are buffeted by social forces and market power.”<sup>7</sup> They note that “Employees have traditionally looked to trade unions and professional associations to bargain”, and acknowledge the impact of the Employment Contracts Act 1991 in weakening that mechanism and decimating union membership. But the discussion is left hanging—there is no suggestion that this “caveat” might in fact present a potentially fatal impediment to the success of their project.

Despite some weaknesses, this is an important work that will make a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate around economic and social policy. It has much in common theoretically with Hazledine’s *Taking New Zealand Seriously* and adds further empirical weight to his thesis. *Wellbeing Economics* is recommended to all those who are interested in alternative visions for the future of New Zealand.



### **Lines of Work: Stories of Jobs and Resistance**

By Scott Nikolas Nappalos, ed. (Alberta, Canada: Black Cat Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Jared Davidson

*Lines of Work* is a fascinating, at times bleak and emotive volume of stories about work and its effect on our lives. How fitting then, that my review copy was waiting for me after my usual 20-minute trip home from work had stretched to four hours, thanks to the flooding in Wellington of 14 May. Work (with a little help from the weather) had kept me away from my loved ones even more than it already does on a day-to-day basis. That period after clocking out was clearly not my own time, but that of capital.

The thirty-two stories in *Lines Of Work* explore similar examples of contemporary working life. It brings together texts originally published on “Recomposition”, an online publication run by a collective of worker radicals based in the US and Canada. Written between 2009 and 2011, we hear from a range of people in various jobs, including non-profit organisations (which are no different from the rest). The writers are not professionals, and rightly so—the purpose of *Lines of Work* stems from a desire to link and explore the everyday experiences of people who work, as an organising tool. As we know, “the personal is political”, and *Lines of Work* is an example of a radical praxis that supports the power of discourse without drifting into a Foucauldian abyss.

“In the eyes of dominant culture and the opinions of political culture” writes editor Scott Nappalos in the Introduction, “stories play second fiddle. In political life, literature is at best an emotional tool for theory, something to motivate people around a cause or worse, simply pure entertainment.” Yet “looking at stories in that way is out of step with working life. The lives of working-class people are

filled with stories people share every day about their struggles, perspectives, and aspirations”.<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind, *Lines of Work* asks us to take a serious look at the way stories can help us build a better society. “There is something powerful in the process of someone who participates in struggle finding a voice to their experiences... reframing the role of stories requires us seeing this process as both part of being an active participant in social struggles, and as a way to participate”.<sup>2</sup> In doing so a transformation can occur, opening “up space for deeper work”.<sup>3</sup> Stories about work should be seen “not only for their beauty, tragedy, and motivating power in our lives, but also as a reflection of workers grappling with their world and creating new currents of counter-power autonomous from the dominance of capital and the State”.<sup>4</sup> Stories of work, therefore, are a “part of workers’ activity to understand and change their lot under capitalism... through storytelling, [the stories] draw out the lessons of workplace woes, offering new paths and perspectives for social change and a new world”.<sup>5</sup>

As another reviewer has pointed out, “a good amount of these jobs—finance, food service, clerical work, manufacturing bullets for imperialist wars—are not the seeds of a future society but a blight on the present one. There is no straight line from these jobs to a libertarian communist society, nor are most of them (except for the bullet factory, really), strategic ‘choke points’ of capital, as the present theories of circulation dictates that we seek out. A revolutionary struggle would be waged to eliminate these jobs, not to make them cooperative”.<sup>6</sup> Yet this is not necessarily the point of the book. While it may lack the “what next” element some readers crave, *Lines of Work* is a welcome addition to the subjective aspect of working-class experience that is often missing from theoretical accounts of struggle.

In *Lines of Work*, the stories are organised into three sections: resistance, time, and sleep. The theme of “resistance” “gives accounts of trying to correct problems at work, and collective lessons that came out of those struggles”.<sup>7</sup> What struck me about this section was the arbitrariness that so many workers have to deal with in their day-to-day work, from not being allowed to celebrate birthdays to managerial changes to a roster. These are not tales of general strikes or historic moments, but stories of little struggles: of the mundane yet important tasks that can either foster resistance or keep a workforce down. Some victories are shared, but so are many losses and regrets at what happened, or what could have been done differently.

“Time” was my favourite section and the largest in the book. It covers “the world of work, in all that it demands and takes from us”.<sup>8</sup> What this means is spelled out in rare, intimate detail, and in a way that instantly resonates (well, for me at least). Travel to and from work, repetitive on-the-job tasks, shitty customers, shitty bosses, sexism and difficult workplace conversations, racism, identity, class, job control, poor health, despair—are explored across workplaces totally different yet unsurprisingly the same. I light-heartedly explained this to a friend as “the commonalities of crappiness”. But in all seriousness, what is great about

1. Scott Nikolas Nappalos, ed., *Lines of Work: Stories of Jobs and Resistance* (Alberta, Canada: Black Cat Press, 2013), 1.

2. Ibid., 2.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 7.

5. Ibid., back cover.

6. J Frey, “Book Review: Lines of Work”, accessed 20 July 2015, <http://unityandstruggle.org/2014/03/23/lines-of-work/>.

7. Nappalos, *Lines of Work*, 7.

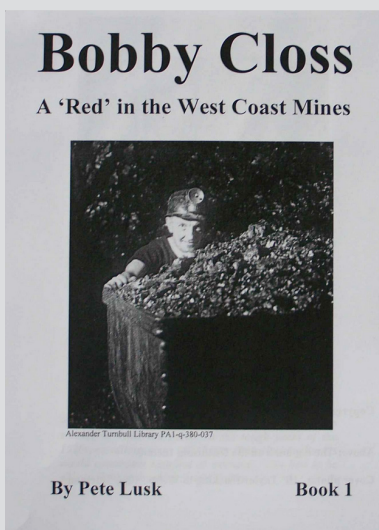
8. Ibid.

9. J Frey, “Book Review: Lines of Work”.



this book is how the stories connect the common elements of working life, and place our own experiences of work into an international context.

The section titled “Sleep and Dreams” shares examples of how capital invades what is supposedly our “own” time: our sleep. Who hasn’t dreamed about work? Had a nightmare of turning up to work a job they quit years ago? “Awaking from a work dream only to find one’s work day only beginning is perhaps one of the banal horrors shared most widely by the entire worldwide proletariat”.<sup>9</sup> These stories of dreams and (lack of) sleep are sad yet fascinating in their own right. But the underlining idea of un-free time and the reproduction of capital (in the form of what we do in between clocking out and signing in) is a strong critique of work as a separate activity of life—of alienation. It is the perfect way to end an engaging and highly readable expose of contemporary working life, and how unnatural the wage relation truly is.



## Books noted

*Bobby Closs: A 'Red' in the West Coast Mines*

By Pete Lusk

LHP member Pete Lusk has published a series of photo essays on West Coast coal miner and labour activist Bobby Closs. Order by emailing [luskcox@xtra.co.nz](mailto:luskcox@xtra.co.nz); writing to Pete Lusk, 14 Derby St, Westport, New Zealand; or purchase a Kindle edition online at [http://www.amazon.com/Bobby-Closs-Book-Coast-Mines-ebook/dp/B010JNWM4O/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1437372477&sr=1-3&keywords=pete+lusk](http://www.amazon.com/Bobby-Closs-Book-Coast-Mines-ebook/dp/B010JNWM4O/ref=sr_1_3?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1437372477&sr=1-3&keywords=pete+lusk).

*A Short History of the Unite Union in New Zealand*

By Mike Treen, *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, <http://links.org.au/node/3925>.



This history was prepared as part of the contribution by Unite Union to the international fast food workers’ meeting in New York in early May 2014. According to Treen, “Union officials and workers were fascinated by the story we were able to tell which in many ways was a prequel to the international campaign today.”

Barry Pateman is the Reviews Editor of the LHP Bulletin. If you have material you think we should review, or are interested in reviewing for us, then contact the reviews editor at [reviews@lhp.org.nz](mailto:reviews@lhp.org.nz)

# What is the Labour History Project?

The struggle for workers' rights has a long history in Aotearoa New Zealand. Trade unions and the fight for a fair society are important strands of our national story. Many major historical events have their roots in labour-related issues. These have also been key influences on national politics and the evolution of New Zealand society. Labour history connects New Zealand to the world. Work has been a prime factor in our migration history and local unions (and related groups) have important links overseas.

Much of New Zealand's labour history, however, remains undocumented and unpublished. The social history of work in New Zealand has been relatively neglected by historians. Without a more accessible labour heritage, we overlook important ways of understanding New Zealand's past and present, and vital perspectives on where we are heading.

In 1987 the Trade Union History Project (TUHP) was formed by historians, trade unionists and political activists to help document New Zealand labour history. Initially established with state funding, since 1991 the organisation has relied upon volunteer resources, donations, and occasional publishing grants. In 2008 the TUHP changed its name to the Labour History Project (LHP) to better reflect the range of member interests. The LHP is an energetic and independent incorporated society. It has over 150 individual and institutional members and maintains links with affiliated organisations such as the Auckland Labour History Group, trade unions, libraries, museums, academics, and counterpart groups overseas. It is the only national organisation dedicated to fostering New Zealand labour history and cultivating an important part of our collective memory. The Labour History Project has no affiliation with the New Zealand Labour Party or any other political party.

## Membership form

Yes, I want to become a member of the Labour History Project. Inc.

**Name:**

**Postal address:**

**Email address:**

Individual subscription (inc. GST)	\$30.00
Institution subscription (inc. GST)	\$75.00
Donation (inc. GST)	\$

Total (inc. GST)	\$
---------------------	----

Date:    /    /                      Signature:

**Please send cheque for total amount, with this form to:**

The Treasurer  
Labour History Project Inc.  
P O Box 27425  
Marion Square  
WELLINGTON 6141

**Or, credit LHP Bank Account No. 38 9012 0672630 00**

and email contact details to: [treasurer@lhp.org.nz](mailto:treasurer@lhp.org.nz)

For membership enquiries, email: [treasurer@lhp.org.nz](mailto:treasurer@lhp.org.nz). For general enquiries, please email: [secretary@lhp.org.nz](mailto:secretary@lhp.org.nz)



[www.lhp.org.nz](http://www.lhp.org.nz)