

**lhp bulletin** In the dark age in which we are living under the new world order, the sharing of pain is one of the essential pre-conditions for a refinding of dignity and hope. Much pain is unshareable, but the will to share pain is shareable. And from that inevitably inadequate sharing comes resistance. To forget oneself, to identify with a stranger to the point of fully recognising her or him, is to defy necessity and in this defiance, even if small and quiet, there is a power which cannot be measured by the limits of the 'natural order'. John Berger, The Shape of a Pocket

# Contents

## FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Editorial .....	3
Chairs Report .....	4
News & events .....	5

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### Community and Union Organising

<i>A short memoir from Bill Bradford</i> .....	11
The Public Service Association and WWI <i>John Shennan</i> .....	15
Brian Wood: A community-based historian <i>Paul Maunder</i> .....	21

## REVIEWS

### *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes*

<i>Paul Maunder</i> .....	23
Bill Direen & Guests: <i>M. J. Savage Song Cycle;</i> <i>World War 1, 2, 3; The Hospital Pass</i> <i>Peter Clayworth</i> .....	24
<i>The Cooks and Stewards Union: A Memoir</i> <i>Dan Bartlett</i> .....	26

## OBITUARIES

### Raymond Frank Grover

<i>Peter Clayworth</i> .....	28
Jane Paul <i>Peter Clayworth</i> .....	30

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## Editorial

March 15th was an extraordinary and horrific day and can, for me, only be comprehended within the framework of performance studies, that paradigm which analyses real life events as performance, with roles, entrances and exits, scenes, sets etc.

It began with the much awaited performance of students, both locally and internationally, going on strike from school to demand action on climate change, for they and their children and their grandchildren will bear the burden of coping with an increasingly volatile planet. As they assembled in town squares with their placards and their chants, it was a performance that was about to bring the hopeful prospect of a coming activist generation demanding structural change.

But they were upstaged by the lone performance of a fascist, white supremacist appearing from nowhere and massacring worshippers in two Christchurch mosques. I was in Christchurch at the ambulance hub changing the Coast transfer vehicle when all hell broke loose. The ambos and police then performed their service roles, followed by emergency hospital staff.

The reaction began as a national and international performance of outrage, grief and solidarity with the Muslim community, with moments of *communitas*, that feeling of democratic togetherness which transcends normal, daily structures; the text of the performance a rejection of paranoia and hostility toward the other. It constituted a Utopian surge toward an encompassing, compassionate and diverse society, where issues are solved through negotiation and consensus, and a rejection of those who seek power through performances arousing hostility and paranoia – that growing number of neo fascist politicians and populist parties. Jacinda Ardern, with head covered in solidarity, gave a superb performance which embodied this Utopian ideal, achieving, at moments, a sacred persona. By the end of the week, the Muslim community and its religious leaders had taken centre stage, revealing a spiritual certainty and humility around which non Muslims gathered in solidarity.

Suddenly the students' performance and these performances were linked, for we know there will be climate refugees wanting refuge and we know where the refugees will be coming from, so that, on this occasion, we were rehearsing the future.

But as the flowers wilted and people went back to the performance of daily life, there were questions to be asked. Why does anyone want an automatic rifle? Useful for culling wallabies is about the only half sensible answer I received – the government moved swiftly and the wallabies will have to be dealt with some other way. Registers of guns as well as owners? Of course. Could/should we have somehow picked up on this level of alienation, on this intent? If so, how?

And then the question of the role of social media, or anti-social media. It is, in itself, other, in not requiring real presence, and it also excites performance - as other. Live streaming seems to encourage the extreme: paedophilia, rape, brawls, massacres... out of control performances. Is it able to be controlled without getting rid of the free flow of information?

There is the question of the performances produced by historical and sociological genre: the performances of imperialism, the performances of religious fanaticism, the performances of patriarchy, and their remaining sediments in current society. Can we cleanse society of these sediments without reframing social life into an aestheticism mainly able to be practised by the privileged?

And then capitalism and the alienation of turning everything into commodity (resource, process, culture), including human labour, which separates the human being from herself, as well as the environment from itself. Workers have always experienced the contradiction of being made other, daily, as they perform on the factory floor or in the office, and have fought for a better wage for being made other, and for reasonable conditions of otherness. They have also had to fight other alienations such as racism and sexism, experiencing *communitas* on the picket line.

Marxists write effectively about alienation for they know it is at the heart of capitalism. Of late, environmentalists have been reading *Das Kapital*, sensing science and ethics is getting them nowhere and the reason lies in the economic structure.

So, labour history is not some marginal interest, but stories and performances of alienation and contradiction from the past and near present, which need to be shared.

Paul Maunder

## Chair's Report



It has been a number of weeks now since people of Islamic faith were massacred as they gathered together to worship in Christchurch. In its immediate aftermath, the LHP Committee wrote to you in profound sorrow and love: The reality of such hatred and violence living amongst us is difficult to bear, but we must face it, listen to and support Muslim communities and take action to challenge racism in its multiple forms. As historians, we should centre Muslim perspectives, as well as name and confront white supremacy in our past and present.

And we continue to stand behind these words. It is important we think systemically about racism in our society and I highly recommend reading Faisal Al-Asaad's 'Post-Massacre Reality: Why We Shouldn't Move On' in *The Pantograph Punch*, to assist in this thinking.

This year our historical theme is 'Winning Ways', the campaigns, big and small, we have won: The Weekend; the abolition of child labour; the three eights—eight hours work, eight hours leisure and eight hours sleep; pay equity, health and safety regulations; accident

compensation; guaranteed meal breaks; paid holidays; sick leave; nuclear free New Zealand, and so forth. Some are rights we take for granted; others are being eroded by neo-liberal policies; some wins are incomplete, but all were won in struggles where trade unions and community allies played a leading role. In 2019, at our AGM, at the Rona Bailey lecture and in our special-themed November *Bulletin*, we want to review the methods unions and community organisations have utilised in their successful struggles to improve the lives of working people.

As always, we welcome your contributions to our 'Winning Ways' labour history theme.

In solidarity,  
Cybele Locke



## News and events

### Book Launch for 'Dead Letters: Censorship and Subversion in New Zealand 1914-1920' by Jared Davidson, March 7, 2019, Unity Books

The following account of the launch was provided by Dani Henke of Unity Books Wellington, with some alterations. Thank you to Dani Henke/Unity Books Wellington for permission to reprint.



It was a lively crowd who gathered on Thursday, March 7, for the launch of Jared Davidson's book *Dead Letters: Censorship and Subversion in New Zealand 1914-1920*. Rachel Scott, co-publisher at Otago University Press, warmly opened the evening with a few anecdotes and much praise. Professor Charlotte Macdonald spoke about *Dead Letters'* historical value as well as its place in our current world climate, and her remarks are printed below.

Laughter and applause rippled through the crowd numerous times while Jared spoke about the journey that led to the creation of *Dead Letters*, acknowledging the families of letter writers included in the book, descendants of anti-war farmers, socialists, lovers, and people who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was an incredible turnout; some folks came from as far north as Auckland and as far south as Christchurch. After Unity's own Marion Castree wrapped up the night's speakers with a fist in the air, Jared autographed books and chatted with guests.

#### *The Book—From Otago University*

In 1918, from deep within the West Coast bush, a miner on the run from the military wrote a letter to his sweetheart. Two months later he was in jail. Like millions of others, his letter had been steamed open by a

team of censors shrouded in secrecy. Using their confiscated mail as a starting point, *Dead Letters: Censorship and subversion in New Zealand 1914-1920* reveals the remarkable stories of people caught in the web of wartime surveillance.

Among them were a feisty German-born socialist, a Norwegian watersider, an affectionate Irish nationalist, a love-struck miner, an aspiring Maxim Gorky, a cross-dressing doctor, a nameless rural labourer, an avid letter writer with a hatred of war, and two mystical dairy farmers with a poetic bent. Military censorship within New Zealand meant that their letters were stopped, confiscated and filed away, sealed and unread for over 100 years. Until now.

Intimate and engaging, this dramatic narrative weaves together the personal and political, bringing to light the reality of wartime censorship. In an age of growing state power, new forms of surveillance and control, and fragility of the right to privacy and freedom of opinion, *Dead Letters* is a startling reminder that we have been here before.

#### *The Author*

An archivist by day and labour historian by night, Jared Davidson is an award-winning writer based in Wellington, New Zealand. He is the author of *Remains to Be Seen* and *Sewing Freedom*, a curator of the exhibition *He Tohu*, and an active committee member of the Labour History Project. Through social biography and history from below, Jared explores the lives of people often overlooked by traditional histories—from working-class radicals of the early twentieth century to prison convicts of the nineteenth.

#### *Professor Charlotte MacDonald's launch speech*

Thank you to Charlotte for sharing her notes and giving us permission to reprint them here.

It is a great pleasure to be launching this tough and dangerous book into the world. *Dead Letters*. It is the most un-dead book I have had the pleasure to read in advance. So if you think you are coming to a zombie event, you are out of luck! Jared's book has several important things to say: things about history, things about the world we live in today. At its heart is the story of the extensive and systematic censorship of private letters that took place in New Zealand between 1914-1920. In itself a remarkable tale.

One of those things is about privacy. Most of us think—assume even—that our private communications are inviolate. What we put in the post, say to each other in private, stays there. That it is not subject to discovery by the Official Information Act and not liable to end up in the hands of a Minister in the Beehive. But here is a book based precisely on a breach of that promise—that trust—that the carrier of such a letter, the Post Office, will convey a letter from its writer to its addressee.

Perhaps now, in the early twenty-first century, we are living through the erosion of that notion; moving into an era that may prove to be the most un-private of all time. CCTV, Facebook, smart motorways that harvest our cellphones to provide to places and powers we often don't know with a vast and highly detailed stream of information. What Jared's book had me thinking about is how these modern notions of privacy, including identity theft (the most invasive) represent forms of individualised property—individualised anxiety. Whereas the privacy that Jared is talking about in *Dead Letters* is more a collective entity—and a collective threat.

*Dead Letters* arises from a cache of letters intercepted by censors—the wonderfully named 'Secret Registry'—whose job it was to identify dangerous letters and stop them reaching their destination. Letters deemed dangerous to collective security—not just because they were a threat to the war effort, but also to the authority of the state at a more general level.

Who lies behind these letters? Their writers – those who sealed the envelopes? An extraordinary array of people—more surprising than I expected—and I feel I have tramped the corners of early twentieth century dissident New Zealand pretty well. Here are lefties, Bolsheviks, anarchists, 'enemy aliens' (as those with German names or suspected affinities were termed—tragically including Professor Von Zedlitz), lovers—in the wrong place, and original thinkers, thinking too originally for 1914-20 officials. It is inspiring and intriguing to see so many people challenging orthodoxies, trying to work out a better way to run the world than those in charge of the bloody (and profitable) carnage that was World War One.

The book gives us a map of dissent. Not just the actual conventional maps—those at the beginning of the book where the postal routes flow like veins across the body of the nation—but links connecting dissenters. It takes us to those hotbeds of Aotearoa New Zealand—its political

and socially subversive cells: Waitara, Eketahuna, Mangonui, Swanson, Raetihi (always more than skin deep), Bunnythorpe. Marvellous!

And the book exposes something that I think we have rather too thoroughly forgotten (yet contemporaries of all stripes would have been starkly aware of): that is the sharp difference between the political tenor of life 'at home' in NZ and that across the Tasman in Australia through those years 1914-1918/1920. Australia was wracked by conscription debates. NZ was much more quiescent at the parallel stage. The political turbulence of the World War One years has disappeared beneath pieties of war memorials and grief, and a too sanctified centenary.

There is much to ponder, to learn, to enjoy, to be appalled by – and to think about in *Dead Letters*: the role of surveillance, spying—often thought of as the second oldest profession—and how it functions in a modern democracy; what rights do citizens have in regard to freedom, privacy, protection in an 'information state' where information can be both the basis of citizen rights, but also used to negate or limit such rights? And how does universal literacy interconnect with such information systems—the very existence of large scale correspondences running through government-run postal services?

Jared's *Dead Letters* makes the history and the contemporary question vibrant and very much alive—the un-dead is very much in our midst. We are in Jared's debt for his great work of research, of writing, and of all that it takes to get a book between covers.

Buy the book, spread the word!

You can grab a copy at most book stores or online at:  
[https://www.otago.ac.nz/press/books/otago706351.html!](https://www.otago.ac.nz/press/books/otago706351.html)

## Top Auckland Actors ask: WHO KILLED BLAIR PEACH?



Who killed Blair Peach? Officer E, F, G, H, I or J?

On Easter Monday Aucklanders had the chance to hear two of New Zealand's leading actors immersing themselves in the life and death of New Zealander, Blair Peach. Forty years ago, on April 23, St George's Day 1979, a 33-year-old from Napier was murdered. This was Blair Peach. He was protesting against a far-right neo-Nazi march through an immigrant London suburb. His murderer was one of six policemen who attacked the protestors.

No one has ever been charged.

At the coroner's inquest, the six officers were referred to by the initials above, although their names were well known and plastered on Wanted posters all over London. In a suppressed internal police investigation the names were listed in order of suspicion. The startling thing

about that order is the one who was most mentioned round New Zealand circles as the killer, officer "F", PC Chalky White, was listed last. PC White was known to have kept a selection of coshes in his police locker and Blair Peach died from a blow to the skull made using something other than a standard baton.

Following decades of campaigning by friends and family, the suppressed police investigation was made public and it, and its cross-examination of the six suspects, is at the heart of *Who Killed Blair Peach?*, a unique documentary show performed by Michael Hurst and Donogh Rees. Hurst is fresh from his triumph in the Auckland Theatre Company's season of Tom Scott's *The Daylight Atheist*. Rees starred with him in *Hercules and Xena* and did a three-year run on Shortland Street.

*Who Killed Blair Peach?* at the Grey Lynn RSC, was a one-off performance. The reading included scripted accounts of Blair Peach's life in Napier and then in London where he was a teacher at a special needs school in the East End. The rise of the far-right National Front in England and the efforts to counter it by socialist groups was described. Events on the day of the murder were also laid out; police were cross-examined.

In 1979 the six officers cross-examined in *Who Killed Blair Peach?* were members of the Special Patrol Group, the UK's elite riot squad. All were inside a police van that pulled into Beachcroft Ave, Southall. They jumped out of the van with the intention of dispersing protestors. Blair Peach was then struck on the head and killed. Fourteen witnesses saw who did it: a policeman. The internal police investigation agreed with the witnesses. The subsequent coroner's court, however, ruled death by misadventure.

The coroner ruled the internal police report inadmissible, then went further. In the process of directing the jury, he dismissed what he termed as two "extremist" theories of the cause of death. One extremist theory, he claimed, was that a fellow-protestor bent on creating a martyr could have done it. This extraordinary claim was a pure invention of the coroner, something off the top of his head to balance out the second extremist theory he was about to dismiss—that the police could have done it. That second theory was the central finding of the police's own investigation.



## Short film about Harriet Morison: Fighting for Fairness



ABOVE LEFT: Harriet Morison. Detail from 1/2-016362-C, Alexander Turnbull Library. ABOVE RIGHT: From left, Bailey Palmer (Editor), Caitlin Lynch (Director), Anna Cottrell (Co-producer) and Eileen Brown (Co-producer).

Harriet Morison leaves an important legacy, as a unionist suffragist and feminist and an example of the strong connections between women workers and their fight for women's rights in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 1890, in Dunedin, Harriet Morison became the Secretary of the Tailoress' Union. It was the first union to represent female workers in New Zealand.

This short film brings to life the role Harriet Morison played in mobilising working-class women in Dunedin to sign the 1893 suffrage petition and improving the appalling conditions of work for women in factories and in home work.

The film has clips from her speeches, newspapers of the day and parliamentary processes. The film draws a connection between 1890s and contemporary campaigns for pay equity in Aotearoa/New Zealand, focusing on the achievement of equal pay for care and support workers.

The film's director, Caitlin Lynch, is a Masters student in film at Victoria University. Documentary filmmaker Anna Cottrell, AC Productions, helped as co-producer. The background music is from local Wellington union choir, Choir Choir Pants on Fire.

The Council of Trade Unions was proud to play a strong role in developing and supporting this film. The film was undertaken with funding from the Ministry for Women's 125 Suffrage fund, Whakatū Wāhine, and with additional support from New Zealand unions.

You can watch the film online at:

<http://www.union.org.nz/harriet-morison-fighting-for-fairness/>



## Keystrokes Per Minute: The Women in the Public Service Typing Pool from 1945 until the Present Day— Oral History



Story Collective is embarking on a project to capture the oral history of the untold story of women's vital role in New Zealand's political and administrative history. Details of the project, from the Story Collective Website, are reproduced below:

The Public Service has for many decades relied entirely on the work of women employed in the typing pool and related jobs. This oral history records their highly skilled work, the way they adapted to changes in technology, and the status of their profession since 1945.

### *Background*

Throughout the post WW11 period, the New Zealand Public Service relied on the work of women employed in the typing pool and associated administrative activities.

For most of this period, these women worked largely in collective groups or "pools" located in each State department. In addition, many were engaged or promoted from the typing pool, from time to time, as the secretaries and personal assistants to senior managers in those agencies.

Although rarely acknowledged, without their work the Public Service and executive Ministers to whom the Service was accountable could not have operated.

Using various modes of document production such as shorthand-based typing, typing from handwritten notes, dictaphone typing and word processing, as well as event

managing and providing a range of support services for the managers, the women from the typing pool were indispensable to the operation of the Public Service—and, indeed the wider public.

Virtually no other public servants were trained in or competent to undertake the widely varied tasks carried out by these comparatively low paid women.

### *Why is this important?*

It's 2019 and gender pay inequity still exists, and still the lack of status accorded to much of women's work means major issues for our societal wellbeing.

Recording and publishing this oral history will enable the voices and experiences of women from the Public Service Typing Pools since 1945 to join the dots for today's audiences when we ask ourselves: "How did we get here?"

The unheard voices of women's experiences of inequity and sexism through the ages, their interrupted and disrupted education, the power of class and religious bias, are so often unspoken and therefore unchallenged.

### *Join the Mailing List*

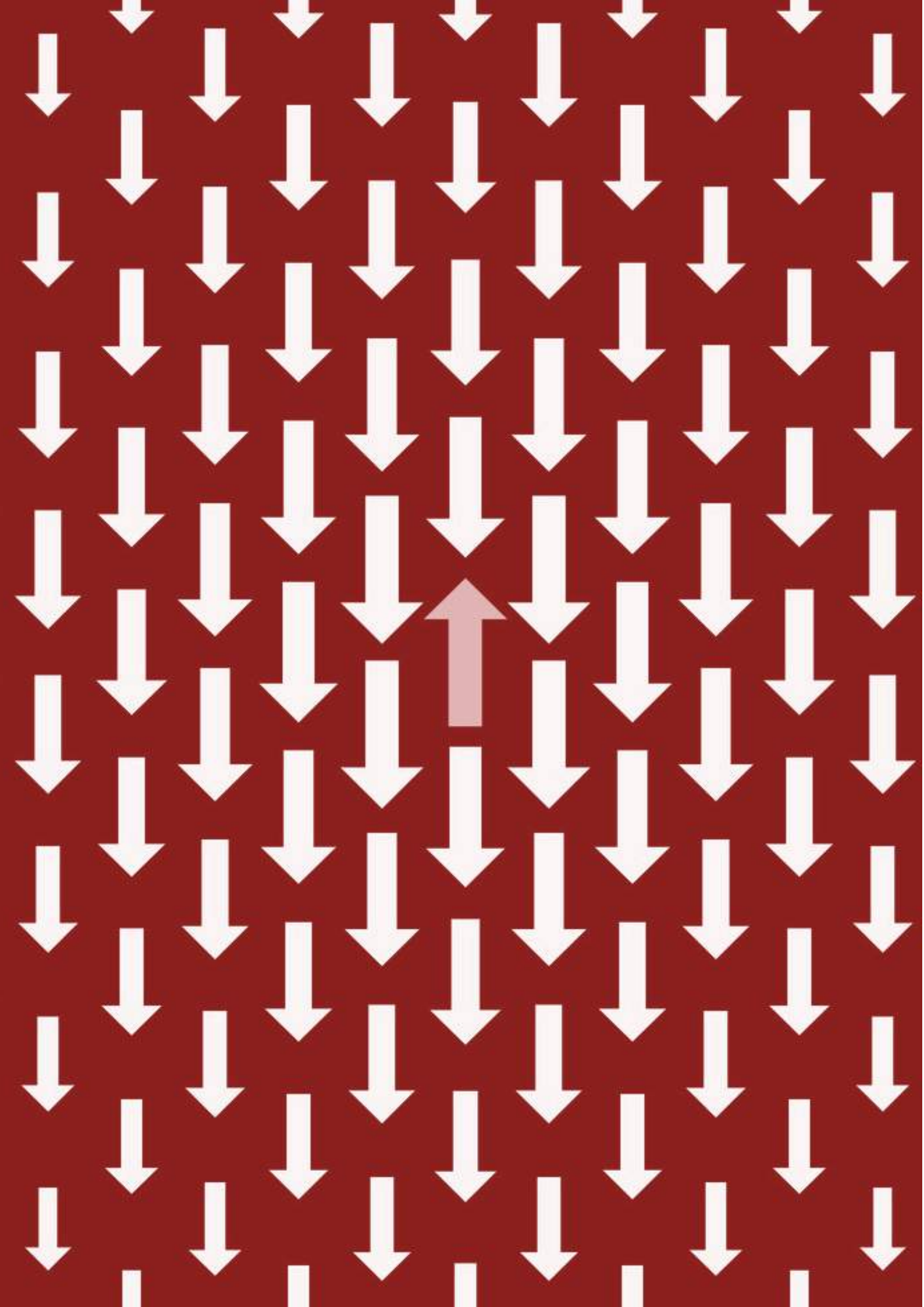
Did you work for a Public Service Typing Pool between 1945 and today?

We are interested to hear from typists, shorthand typists, secretaries, and modern era administrators about your experience of being in the 'typing pool'.

We want to record your story, as these are our stories.

You can register your interest at:

<https://www.keystrokes.storycollective.nz/home>



## Community and Union Organising

### A short memoir from Bill Bradford

In keeping with our policy of catching up with union organisers as they retire, I suggested an interview with Bill Bradford. In my experience, he is one of the most astute political minds in the country. Instead of an interview, he wrote the following kōrero.



I was born in 1952 and grew up at Kāwhia, a small town on the west coast of the North Island, west of Hamilton. The population was predominantly Māori and the relationship between Māori and the land was always very apparent, as were the politics that dispossessed them in their own land.

It was a period when many rural Māori were being encouraged to move to the city to meet the labour demands of an expanding economy. Other kids in my class would suddenly disappear to Auckland or Hamilton and I used to wonder at how all this worked. Their houses were left empty and often their land unattended. Usually this was because it was no longer economic for them to farm the land and they had no access to capital, but I didn't really understand this at the time.

There was no visible union presence and my main knowledge about them was from newspaper articles which were usually negative. A lot of local farmers were very anti-union, blaming the workers for the industrial disputes that flared up in the freezing works and in the transport and supply chains.

My father had a small farm but also had to work off-farm a lot of the time. I am not sure what he thought of unions at the time. He did not rage against them like some, but he did not come out in support of them either. However, he had very strong feelings on other social justice issues. He had spent the war fighting the Japanese in the Pacific and was very anti-war. He was president of the local Returned and Services Association (RSA) and spoke out openly against our involvement in Vietnam. I think he passed on a natural inclination to take the side of the underdog and a dislike of war.

I began work as a shepherd on a Taumarunui sheep station, then moved on to several other employers over the next couple of years. Farmers have generally always been very bad employers, expecting long hours and hard work for very little pay. Although there was theoretically an award that covered us, it was set so low that every ad, even from the meanest farmer, boasted that they paid "above award wages." There was no contact with anyone from any union and it would have taken a lot of dedication to track the union down and take part in any activities. Generally, we were isolated and exploited, which was just the way a government who put farming above all else wanted it to stay.

When I was eighteen or so I went to the United Kingdom. My first jobs there were on farms because that is what I knew. The jobs were all temporary, but I was paid union rates. It was a shock to discover that not only was I paid for every hour I worked but any hours greater than 45 a week attracted penal rates. In New Zealand we had always been told it was impossible to pay overtime, or even have a union on farms because it was impossible to run a farm around set hours of work and overtime rates, yet here it was, treated as entirely normal. I have been a union supporter ever since.

When I returned to New Zealand, I was a member of whatever union covered the work I was doing and became a delegate while working on a Project Employment Programme work scheme sometime in the 1970s.

I moved to the Hokianga and had further exposure to Māori land issues and became friends with several Māori activists, supporting them in minor ways, but still not being deeply involved or an activist myself. My politics were still very undeveloped, and I did not have a structural understanding of how society worked.

On New Year's Eve of 1979 I met Sue in the Russell pub—I had been working on a fishing boat there—and she began to explain capitalism from a Marxist perspective. I was also exposed to feminism and had many of the views I had held, either consciously or subconsciously, challenged.

In 1980 I became involved in anti-Springbok tour activities and learned a great deal about the nature of our society during the 1981 tour. I was arrested many times and by the time it had ended I was thoroughly radicalised.

In 1983 I was part of a group that formed the Auckland Unemployed Workers' Rights Centre, which soon established itself both as an authentic voice for the unemployed in the area but also as an organising base for radical political discussion and protest.

Sometime later I joined the Workers Communist League (WCL).

The WCL provided a political home and organising base that was specifically Marxist as opposed to the broader movement activities in the Springbok Tour or around unemployment. It was a place where wider questions could be looked at and discussed as well as analysis of current events and activities. The WCL was a very important part of my life for a while. It was through study groups with other members that I learnt to look at what was going on around me through a Marxist lens. The discussions we had on race, gender and class were particularly relevant at the time and still are. I also made life-long friends and political allies that have reappeared in various political struggles throughout my life.

In 1986 I got a job as an organiser with the Northern Local Body Officers' Union. This union had about 11,000 members working in local government in the geographic area from Kaitaia to Gisborne. I had responsibility for all the Electric Power Boards (since privatised) in that area as well as some territorial local authorities and hospital boards.

Several other organisers and I had a major falling out with that union after I had been there a few years and we all had to get other jobs. The others all did but no union wanted me, so I went back to organising the unemployed. This was one of the best things that ever happened to me and I probably did more useful work there than at any other time in my working life.

The introduction of Rogernomics by the Labour Government in the 1980s was undoubtedly the nastiest betrayal of working class New Zealanders in this country's history because it was carried out by a party that had been formed to further the interests of workers. It left communities shattered and demoralised—easy prey for the National governments that followed and applied a blowtorch to the union movement.

The formation of the Auckland Peoples Centre was a response to the conditions in the late 1980s when it appeared there would be no end to the destruction created by neoliberal politicians of both major parties. The thinking behind it was simple. Governments were handing over the wealth created by generations of working New Zealanders to a few of their mates. They were also cutting back on the means of survival for workers and the unemployed. One way of fighting back was to own the services we needed directly so they could not sell them off at a stroke of a pen. We began building a range of services that were in the ownership of the people who used them by setting up a series of trusts and linking them under the umbrella of the Peoples Centre.

This had some success and was an extremely enriching experience in many ways. At its peak it was providing health and other services to some 10,000 people from centres in Auckland Central, Manurewa and Māngere. The Auckland Unemployed Workers' Rights Centre was one arm and continued to provide a voice for those damaged most by neoliberalism.

Ultimately it collapsed, although the health services continue to operate.



The Peoples Centre experience highlighted two things for me:

- The incredible possibilities of organising at a community level and how that organising might take place in a socialist society.

- The limitations of organising against a hostile state and the need for community (and union) organising to be linked to political organising, and supported by government.

The union movement was being severely tested at this time, in fact it had become fragmented over leadership betrayal during the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act. Most unions were not coping well with the impact of that Act. Relationships were often fraught, with some unions doggedly remaining loyal to the traitorous Labour Party, ironically using the same excuses as Roger Douglas did for introducing his brand of economics—“there is no alternative.” The dynamics of the union movement are never static and each union has its own set of priorities, levels of democracy and political direction. At different times several unions made significant financial contributions to various Peoples Centre projects once the sectarian divisions that blighted its early period disappeared. In the early days of the Unemployed Workers’ Rights Centre sectarian rivalries caused a great deal of difficulty in unemployed organisations, particularly those between the Socialist Unity Party and the WCL.

Following the winding up of the Peoples Centre I did journalism training and worked as a media officer for the Problem Gambling Foundation for a few years.

The National Distribution Union (now FIRST Union) was undergoing significant changes, including a change of leadership in 2007 and I got a job with them doing media work, writing the union paper and supporting new recruitment drives and Greenfields organising.

I could see enormous opportunities in building the union. Some of the older organisers had become dispirited and were missing opportunities for recruiting new members, but younger organisers were convinced a lot more could be done and sensed a hunger for union support among workers that was not being tapped into. I soon became immersed in trying to work out how best to organise in Greenfields situations. I took part in a

campaign to recruit in The Warehouse which had a yellow, company-financed union that was not meeting workers’ needs. The campaign was very successful, resulting in a collective agreement with the NDU with much improved pay and conditions.

I ended up being very much focused on building membership. Some of the lessons from that period were:

- Workplace access provisions for unions were relatively good in New Zealand compared with the rest of the world, but too often unions and organisers were not taking advantage of them and allowing employers to turn them away when they had no right to do so. Recruiting campaigns have a greater chance of success if an organiser can talk individually to each worker for at least 15-20 minutes. Using the access provisions set down in law as a starting point I would always negotiate an access protocol that meant we got time to speak to each worker without interruption.



Bill Bradford outside Bunnings during a Greenfields campaign.

- Speed is important, so that the employer has less time to counter organise and workers can see it is really possible to get change. In nearly every case there will be a few really important issues to deal with like rates of pay, pay scales, hours of work and rosters. It is better to get significant changes in some of these areas and get a collective agreement in place that can be built on in the future than to spend months or years trying to get the perfect agreement.

- Communications. From the first conversation workers should know the process that will be followed, what their role in it will be, what their legal rights are and the next steps the union will take. Updates, both face to face and

through written communications, should be very regular in the first period on a new site, when workers are particularly vulnerable to employer pressure to resign.

— The union should not make promises it can't keep. Workers need to be given a realistic assessment of what they are up against, but also given examples of how difficulties have been overcome elsewhere.

— Act on issues around bullying or other problems immediately. You don't need to have a collective agreement in place to start organising around issues.

There is a real hunger for union membership in many places and workers will join if the recruiter/organiser is confident, knowledgeable, respectful and determined.

Unions are as necessary now as they have ever been. There are no other organisations that are likely to build the capacity to put a stop to the worst of capitalist behaviour. I think unions are in the early stages of a resurgence. Although many workers in modern workplaces don't really know what a union is they soon see how important they are if a conversation is held with them.

Many younger organisers have never known the defeats an earlier generation went through and are far more confident talking to un-unionized workers and signing them up.

A new generation is taking leadership. The process is too slow in some cases but no matter how well ensconced they may be old leaders can't beat time.

Traditionally unions have operated most successfully when they can find partners or allies in the parliamentary arena. Although many unionists are still loathe to admit it they don't have such partners here, or in most other countries either. Credibility is important and unions do themselves no favours when they support the Labour Party. For the first fifty years of its existence Labour did many things that improved the lot of workers. For the last forty it has been neoliberal. So for nearly half of its existence it has served the ruling class and acted against the interests of workers. It is honest to say that Labour is not as bad as the Tories but that is as far as it goes.

If the union movement is to thrive and grow, one of the biggest challenges the new generation of union leaders will face is how to forge new and different political alliances and help develop political movements that serve the working class.

At its most basic level unionism is about working-class people realising that they do have an enemy who is out to get them, and that banding together is their best chance of at least surviving, and hopefully building better lives. That's why the idea of collectivism is so powerful and why people keep banding together, even in very repressive situations.

# The Public Service Association and WWI

## John Shennan

John Shennan is now retired and lives in Palmerston North. He was a union activist and official in both the Auckland and Gisborne Shop Employees' Union and the Public Service Association from 1972 to 2017. John was the long-serving Convenor of "Unions Manawatu" and still organises Workers' Memorial Day events, the annual Myanmar Young Leaders visit to the Manawatu, and the local unions radio show, "Calling All Workers."

The Public Service Association (PSA) became a legal entity on 31 October 1913, replacing the Civil Service Association which had become ineffective and moribund. Less than 12 months later (August 1914), New Zealand entered the First World War and the PSA faced unprecedented complications and stresses as the war impacted on the public service and the employment arrangements of its members.

The Public Service Act had only been passed in 1912 so was still being implemented when war broke out. The war created a whole set of unexpected needs arising from the government's role in managing the war effort. Some core issues that were still unresolved in 1914 meant that the PSA and the Public Service Commissioner (Donald Robertson) were in conflict and this continued. For example, the Act had moved the appointment and direct control of public servants away from government ministers to the Commissioner. However, in 1918 the government created the Repatriation Department, administered by a board of cabinet ministers, which would appoint all staff, thereby re-establishing political control. The employment of large numbers of temporary staff was also seen by the PSA as having dangerous consequences.

In 1914 there were 5312 public servants on the permanent staff and the PSA had 3000 members. By 1916, the PSA had 4030 members. When conscription was introduced that year, 1,319 public servants were overseas with the Expeditionary Force, equivalent to 45 per cent of the single men of military age in the public service. Over the course of the war, 3,165 public servants served in the armed services and 414 were killed in action or died of wounds.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, the New Zealand

Education Institute history shows there were 2,000 men in the total education service (pupil teachers to university lecturers) in 1914. By December 1917, 902 had enlisted and 150 had been killed. The Post Office Union (PTOA) history reports: "Membership continued to rise, reaching 7,520 in 1918, including 1618 with the Expeditionary Force."<sup>2</sup> In addition, the influenza epidemic in late 1918 killed 114 public servants.

Unions in New Zealand kept enlisted members on their rolls and the PSA (and PTOA) ensured copies of their union newspaper were sent overseas to YMCA facilities where servicemen went for rest and recreation from the battlefield. The union papers also regularly printed letters from members at the front which (under strict censorship requirements) gave reports on their experiences, usually of a cheery, positive nature.

A review of the *PSA Journal* through the war years shows the organisation was focussed on local issues affecting the NZ Public Service and the war was by no means the primary concern for the union. Many unions found war-related issues to be significant causes for industrial militancy. Conscription was an issue that divided New Zealand society (although not to the extent as in Australia) and unions such as the Miners, Waterside Workers and the Seamen were vociferous opponents.<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister of the time, Bill Massey, was well known to hold anti-union positions and had led the attack on the Miners' Union in Waihi in the very recent past. So the nascent labour movement was a significant component of anti-war activity. This was not the case with the Public Service unions (with some exceptions in the Railways) and the *PSA Journal* never strayed into controversy or opposition to the war and the war effort. The few articles that talk about the reasons for the war were patriotic in nature.

In March 1915, the *PSA Journal* first mentioned public servants in Whanganui and Otago who had enlisted, together with a report on the farewells and gifts given by their work mates. The first report of a public servant killed at the front appeared in June 1915, specifically, Major Price from the Public Trust. In the same issue



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**THE PUBLIC SERVICE JOURNAL**

Vol. 2.—No. 12.—20th December, 1915.



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there was a report on the award of the Distinguished Conduct Medal to a Public Works Department employee Corporal Salmons. A regular feature in subsequent issues of the *Journal* was the “Roll of Honour” listing members who had been killed, were missing or had been wounded. The Sections (PSA regional branches) had a monthly report printed in each *Journal* and from mid-1915 onwards most make mention of members and delegates who had enlisted. In 1916 it was recorded that of the twelve officers of the Public Trust office staff in Auckland eligible for enlistment, ten had enlisted, of whom nine had gone on active service and, as of that date, one had been wounded and one had been killed.

A suggestion to lobby government for a specific memorial to killed and wounded public servants was mooted but did not come to fruition, although a Roll of Honour was included in the new Christchurch Government Buildings with some seventy names.

The Public Service Commissioner introduced new requirements for promotion relating to the attainment of qualifications and this occasioned some letters to the *Journal* from members who felt they would be disadvantaged. In response, a letter from a soldier fighting in Gallipoli was printed in the September 1915 *Journal* which pointed out the disadvantages of war service:

“Sir, I sympathise with Perplexed Candidate very much, but what about the Civil Servant who enlisted and dropped all swot right in the midst of his studies for his final subject. After the long tour, the open road, the changing scene, the glamour of the East, the Orient, the heat of the desert, the wide spaces, the fatigue of marching, the reaction of the wild charges, the loss of his mate, and the monotony of lying day after day for weeks and months in the trenches whilst never a Turk dare raise his head except at night, how will the C.S. soldier settle down to swot new subjects required by alteration of Regulations? Well never mind. Whilst here there is the possibility of only one examination—the last. If he survive and return I am afraid the C.S. will see him no more. The open breeds the desire for the open. Come along and forget swot. July 16 1915. Geo. J. Russell.”

The Southland Section report of the same month recorded the death of their chairman’s only son at Gallipoli:

“We feel sure that it is a solace to him in his troubles to know that his son died fighting nobly for his Country as so many others of our gallant New Zealand lads have done.”

The editorial of the November 1915 *Journal* was the first statement by the PSA of its “political” position on the war:

“After fifteen months of slaughter and destruction the intensity of the struggle has not decreased, peace with honour is not yet in sight, nor can its advent be calculated. Although the conflict has extended in area, and the number of our enemies is magnified, our confidence of victory for the Allies is more profound than at the outset. That confidence is founded on a knowledge of the characteristics of the British race, together with the bravery and determination displayed by the soldiers of those nations who are fighting with us in the cause of liberty against military despotism...Men in all ranks of the Service have responded freely to the call, and each day sees new names added to the list of recruits. There are those of us who must remain behind for good reasons, but we know that the spirit of true patriotism, that sense of duty owing to King and Country, is intense and general in the Service, and that many willing ones chafe under disabilities which debar them from active participation.”

These articles underline the unquestioning support the PSA, as an organisation, gave to the war effort; patriotism was resplendent.

In December 1915 there was a mention in the *Journal* of a request for assistance from an unnamed Wellington public servant who had been suspended from employment for alleged use of “disloyal and seditious utterances.” The Executive refused the request.

Upon the outbreak of war various patriotic funds were established to raise money for the war effort, particularly to fund comforts for servicemen (tobacco, chocolate, rest and recreation facilities), ambulances. Also popular was financial support to the Belgian people who had suffered German invasion, one of the causes of British Empire involvement in the war. A Public Service Fund was created and fundraising activities commenced. This brought about the first controversy for the PSA relating to the war. It was the union’s view that fundraising should be voluntary and preferably organised by the

union itself rather than management. However, when a call was made for public servants to donate the equivalent of one day's pay per month for three months to the Empire Defence Fund, some Departmental Heads arranged a schedule to be drawn up in each office with the name of the employee, the amount representing that person's one day's pay, and a column for the worker's signature. This was left on a counter or table open to the purview of all the staff. The PSA made strong representations to the Commission to have this practise banned. The debate rolled on for some time until the Public Service Fund was dismantled in favour of supporting local funds instead. The *Journal* notes: "This fund has been supported in a very lukewarm manner in most departments during the last 3 months" and suggested the poorest staff members tended to donate the most.

As the war progressed, PSA delegates in various regions became very involved in fundraising for the Carnival Queen competitions. I quote from Peter Cooke's chapter in *New Zealand Society at War*:

"Such events occurred frequently in towns and cities, and often involved a parade, a series of events at a park to which the parade led, and a pageant of female virtues based around the Carnival Queen concept. In these, several popular young women were nominated as "queens" to various causes, whose supporters then feverishly promoted them and raised money (through "two-penny votes"). The causes each queen stood for could be industry sectors, towns in a province, sports codes, or arms for His Majesty's Imperial Forces. The queen whose committee raised the most money would be the winner, and all money raised would go to the principal cause."<sup>4</sup>

A public service queen was nominated in a number of carnivals (Canterbury, Wellington, Otago and Southland is a partial list and there were others). The organisation of the activity in each area was undertaken by the PSA delegates and the various articles show that this required considerable time and effort. Initially it was done with great enthusiasm but as early as 1916 the *Journal* report from the Wellington Section notes: "No doubt members are fairly sick of carnivals by this time..."

The Canterbury Public Service Queen had come last.

Mr. Thomas Cassidy, a liftman at the Government Insurance Office, sought and received endorsement from the Executive for his campaign to collect a thousand walking sticks for wounded servicemen. Some months later the *Journal* reported he had raised 212 pounds 7 shillings and 11 pence toward his goal.

One of the claims made by the PSA on behalf of members serving in the forces was for military service pay to be topped up to the salary they received in the Public Service. This had been done in Australia, in New Zealand Local Government and by many private companies. The argument was that the families of serving public servants were severely disadvantaged by needing to exist on such meagre incomes. The Government refused to agree to this payment.

As well, by 1916 the PSA was loudly complaining about increased workloads and increased overtime (without compensation) caused by the loss of men to overseas service. Prior to the war inflation had been negligible but this changed dramatically in wartime, putting a severe strain on the standard of living of all workers. Some private sector unions engaged in strike action to obtain pay increases. While the PSA stated unequivocally that they were not going to seek economic gain for members during the war, which would create additional cost on the Government, they argued that a war bonus was justified as part recognition of their extra effort. This was achieved in April 1916 with 15 pounds paid to married officers with a lesser amount to single officers and less again to under 18-year-olds. These flat rate payments continued to March 1919. The bonus payments were always too little, too late, and there is no doubt that public servants suffered a real reduction in living standards throughout the course of the war. It is estimated that the cost of living had risen by 62.4% in that period.

The vexed question of retaining promotion and appeal rights for public servants in the armed forces, and thereby ensuring that those who did not go overseas were not advantaged, was the cause of much angst:

"By 1916 it had been decided to consider officers absent with the Expeditionary Force as applicants for any vacancies in their own departments which would be promotions for them, while applications from single men eligible for military service were not considered."<sup>5</sup>

This meant that a person taking up a position which a serviceman had been selected for would be a temporary employee. This continued to cause difficulties for some time after 1918. It continued to disadvantage servicemen as they could not apply for promotion through transfer to another Department.

The war also opened up employment opportunities for women. The Public Service had been a male preserve and few women were engaged. Women were barred from the Public Service Entrance examinations and their appointment was restricted “to such vacancies only as in the opinion of the Commissioner are suitable for girls.” On marriage, female officers had to resign and from 1914 a lower pay rate for women was established. But the war temporarily reversed Robertson’s (P.S. Commissioner) deliberate policy of restricting the employment opportunities for women in the public service.

As soon as the war ended the women employed on a temporary basis were dismissed to make room for returning servicemen. Before the war, 1,826 women had been employed and by March 1918, 4,153 were in permanent and temporary positions. The 1914 PSA Conference voted: “That female employees of equal competence with male employees receive equal treatment as to pay and privileges” and two women delegates were added to the union executive.

In summary, the war had been a real threat to the newly established PSA, which was trying valiantly to live and grow in the face of an anti-union government, a paternalistic Public Service Commissioner (“a crusty, authoritarian personality, whose contact with the outside world was through a curling ear trumpet”<sup>6</sup>) in an industry with no strong union identity. The first staff member employed by the PSA, General Secretary Frank Millar, started in 1918. The fundamental arrangements for public service conditions of employment were being evolved with no certainty of a successful outcome. The PSA also set down the first principles of the campaign that would define its legacy – equal pay, which it achieved in 1960, twelve years before the private sector and, as a follow on, pay equity, which remains a primary goal today.

1. Alan Henderson, *The Quest for Efficiency: the Origins of the State Services Commission* (Wellington: State Services Commission, 1990).
2. Bert Roth, *Along the Line: 100 Years of Post Office Unionism* (Wellington: NZ Post Office Union, 1990).
3. Erik Olssen in *New Zealand Society at War 1914-1918*, ed. Steven Loveridge (Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2016).
4. Peter Cooke, in *New Zealand Society at War 1914-1918*.
5. Henderson, *The Quest for Efficiency*.
6. Bert Roth, *Remedy For Present Evils: A History of the Public Service Association from 1890* (Wellington: Public Service Association, 1987).





# Brian Wood: A community-based historian

## An interview with Paul Maunder

I have known Brian since moving to Blackball and his role as a community-based historian has been considerable. I wondered then, about that role, and its relationship to the academy.

### Let's begin with some background:

*Brian:* I was born in 1933 in Westport on 5 November. In my childhood I became acquainted with the hostility of people of Irish descent toward the celebration of Guy Fawkes Day. I went to Westport Technical College, which had evolved from Westport District High School. I started in 1947. It had a shrewd and able headmaster, J.D. McDonald, who liked the name, "college." The technical side included growing night school classes—a proto polytechnic which for better or for worse took over the School of Mines. It was the sole high school in Westport apart from a Catholic school for girls. I went through to seventh form and was the only seventh form student [equivalent of Year 13 today]. I sat English 1 in anticipation of going to university and also did some geographical research about the West Coast. We had a good geography teacher, Allan Lake, who was in touch with the local union and Labour Party people.

I went to Canterbury University. Basically everyone in Westport who got through to the seventh form went to university. The numbers weren't great, one or two each year. Not many arts people, mainly science. I did a BA and half a BSc, taking geology, chemistry, geography, history, economics, botany and political science. Toward the end, I turned to sport and socialisation, but I got my BA then went to teachers college in 1956. My first two years of teaching were at Gisborne Boys' High School. One of my university flatmates recommended his old school. I really appreciated having contact with Māori. I was teaching history and social studies which, unlike the history curriculum, had an element of local studies. I learned about Te Kooti and Poverty Bay and the history of land ownership. I went on marae and had Māori students in the rugby team I coached. I saw their educational problems and was consulted about mixed-race marriages; remember, this was the 1950s. It was interesting coming from Westport where there were few Māori. Being

brought up in the Buller I had an awareness of religious division and labour problems but not race issues.

I came back to Westport for my country service and spent four years under my old headmaster and coaching the First XV. I became interested in researching West Coast history and spent weekends in Greymouth consulting the *Grey River Argus*, and at times staying with Barry Williams, the Adult Education man on the West Coast. He travelled throughout the Coast organising many classes and events. I was always interested in West Coast history and the role of the workers in West Coast politics. I focused on the Buller workers because Pat O'Farrell had done the Grey District. I interviewed people who'd been involved with some of the old timers in the Labour Party and union movement, or those who, like members of the Cumming family, had been on the Legislative Council. I made copious notes from the *Grey River Argus*. In later years there was a substantial thesis written on the Denniston Miners' Union and my notes were helpful to the writer. I also shared information with Bert Roth. These notes still exist in a box called "Buller." I would occasionally be given some archival material rescued from houses or halls; something lying in a back office somewhere, for example, notes from the first Arbitration Case held in Denniston in 1896, quite possibly the only record in existence. I eventually sent this material to the Alexander Turnbull Library.

**So, this becomes a role for the local historian: to rescue local material, to ensure the material is not lost and is retained for future use?**

Yes. As a result of local research.

I then went to Naenae College in Lower Hutt in 1963. While there I continued some research in the Turnbull, but teaching is of course, a full time job. I became more informed with regard to the local history of Lower Hutt and some of the social problems of the place. I survived a slow learner class, some of them from Epuni Boys' Home. I didn't teach history at Naenae, but social studies and geography. I was there three years. Then I went to Spotswood College in New Plymouth as head of history.

It had a very good headmaster, Alex McPhail, who was a fellow historian. I was there for five years and became familiar with the Māori history and the land wars. The school was close to Omoto, an interesting archaeological site. I wasn't researching, just finding out. At both these schools I was also involved in drama productions, an extra curricula activity I found very rewarding.

After that I returned to the Coast as senior master (Deputy Principal) at Greymouth High School. I became part of the West Coast Historic Places Trust and that eventually led me to a research exercise regarding the Brunner Mine site. The national organisation had decided that the Brunner site was important, so I took leave of absence for a year to do research for the Trust. I moved to Christchurch and was able to use the archives there. I also went through newspaper records. I came back to Greymouth and became acting headmaster, then deputy principal when the principal returned. During this time, in the 1970s and 1980s, curriculum changes saw New Zealand history and local history receiving more recognition at fifth and seventh form levels and I started to introduce local history into these courses and to advocate for the development of this strand of the curriculum nationally. There was some resistance to this at Canterbury University.

**That becomes a second role then: to facilitate and to advocate the teaching of local history at senior levels in high schools and to incorporate it into New Zealand and global history?**

Yes. Local history resonates in a wider context. I retired in 1993 and became a resident of Blackball. I had begun researching a book on the Brunner Mine disaster when I was in Christchurch. I self published the book in 1996 and received a ready market at the centenary commemoration of the disaster for which it had been written. I'd written material before this for Historic Places Trust Publications, e.g. Historic Buildings of New Zealand and an article on Blackball for *The Past Today*.

While I was teaching at Greymouth, a Brunner restoration project had begun. Former school students were involved in the clean up of the site, which turned into a PEP programme on summer holidays. I also contributed chapters to Historic Places Trust publications and wrote *Coal Gorge and the Brunner Suspension Bridge*, a heritage and environmental study for publication in 2004, when the new bridge opened. This

project had required archival research to determine the bridge's new form.

That was followed by the Blackball '08 commemoration and a further book. While in Blackball I helped with material for a Blackball poetry book, *Blackball Beckons*. There was also the task of saving the Community Centre building from private enterprise.

**This becomes a third role for the local historian: the preservation of local historical sites and the writing of informative books about the site and events associated with these sites?**

Yes. My writing is a cross between history and journalism. It's not academic in the traditional sense, but wanting to be as accessible as possible. I hope it is well researched. It also takes into account national and global history. There's been extensive writing of regional coal mining history and as the miners were a global workforce even in the 19th century, it is interesting to compare cultures and politics. I'm currently researching a book on the causes of coal mining disasters in New Zealand. It has been important in my career to examine the purposes of historical writing.

**So, a final role might be to look at the psyche of a locality?**

Possibly. I've got a lot of material for a book on West Coast identity. I was interested in writing about it. I have a lot of material on the Irish, my own ancestral material as well, but suddenly there's something about the West Coast I've been rejecting, some facets of the psyche that I'm resistant to, the parochialism, a narrowness and a materialism, that's off putting. Of course there's some virtues, the collectivism and so on. So I'm sitting on this one. Identity can be a protective mechanism. A substantial regional history of the West Coast has yet to be written. I would like to write it but time will not allow. Maybe I've worked on the margins of the academy but I've never been marginalised. Academics have always been supportive. In return I've helped them with local seminars and other events. It has been a mutual dialogue between university, government department and the community.

# Reviews

## *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes*

Edited by Laurajane Smith, Paul A. Shackel and Gary Campbell (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2011)

Reviewed by Paul Maunder

This book seems to have slipped by its likely New Zealand readership so I thought it useful, retrospectively, to write a review and thereby bring it to the notice of the Bulletin whānau.

Heritage is a generalised social construct, in the editors' words encompassing "not only tangible artefacts, buildings, places, sites and monuments, but also intangible traditions, commemorations, festivals, artwork, song and literature." In this collection their focus therefore, is not so much on working class history, but on "the positive uses that heritage is being put to by working class people, communities and organisations in the present."

They introduce us to a term used in heritage studies, namely Authorized Heritage Discourse, which "deifies the great and the good, the beautiful and the old." UK heritage is often associated with castles and aristocrats, fine costumes and furniture and the lives of a cultural elite and disdains other sectors of society, especially the working class with its past of "relations of production, labour process and class conflict" and often unpleasant physical depository of slag heaps, redundant factories and so on.

It is interesting to reflect whether New Zealand has an Authorized Heritage Discourse. In Pākehā culture there is certainly an emphasis on war memorials, early settler architectural remains, certain events such as the first shipment of refrigerated meat, some ship wrecks, some key sporting moments and so on. Whether the heritage construct has relevance to Māori culture would seem debatable, but this is not for me to judge.

But the general thrust of the collection, that working class heritage is marginalised, is true here, as argued in my own contribution. I detailed the 1990s neoliberalism casting of heritage as part of the creative industries, leading to the formulating of regional "brands" and the providing of increasingly sophisticated consumer opportunities, especially for tourists. This created great difficulty in our attempt to set up a museum of working class history in Blackball, especially when the trend was allied with postmodernism which sees working-class

heritage as inextricably linked to the discredited Marxist metanarrative. The project also revealed a cronyism in the sector, with funding advisors and consultants easily changing roles so that state funds are generally not reaching communities but circulating, like a lot of aid money, within a state/corporate/local capitalist circle.

This international collection includes studies of heritage projects focusing on industrial upheavals such as the 1984/85 miners' strike in Britain, with mining communities rethinking the strike as their cultural heritage and reclaiming the history of the strike as something to be proud of. They have restored events such as the Durham Miners' Gala which now features union banners and re-established links with the wider labour and trade union movement. The communities have also sought access to the considerable BBC footage of the struggle and combined it with local recordings.

From the US comes a story of the struggle to control the public memory of the Haymarket riot which gave birth to Mayday. This has involved controversy over the variety of memorials to the event. From the US as well, comes the fascinating story of the Blair Mountain battlefield, which saw the largest worker versus establishment violence in US labour history. There are rich archaeological finds and there is a current battle with a mining company which wishes to remove the mountain top and thus destroy the site of memory and the archaeological remains of the battle. Heritage becomes very politicised.

Returning to the UK there are working-class heritage issues in areas where the past has been about a local white working class whereas the present British working class is multi-ethnic. How is this issue resolved? And then, local historians create tensions with academic historians when they uncover paradoxes which don't fit class-conflict patterns, for example, when a relatively benevolent company operated in a Virginian mill town in a feudal manner, allowing hunting and gathering on company land thereby creating a commons. It was appreciated by the workers who then remained non-unionised. Racial tensions can be simplified as well by the academics, even the role of the KKK. "When authoring their own histories, communities sometimes meet rejection or condescension from professional historians. "These guys want to tell, not listen," comments a towns person.

An essay examines the value of the working class

autobiography, a genre which was encouraged by the *New Left Review* in the 1960s as part of a radical “history from below.” This in turn has created debate as to the validity of the material when used in academic writing compared to the “hard facts” found in official documentation and archives. The writers point out that there is a natural tendency to think of autobiography as “the realm of elites and the famous” whereas there has been a long tradition of autobiographical writing by working-class people. Some of this is by trade union officials, but there are also works by those who remained ordinary workers, with an astonishing number emanating from the railway industry. And some of the writing is very good, capturing “the profound sense of desire and excitement about work” as well as enabling us to feel “the emotional ties that bind workers together.” The writer argues that this autobiographical writing is a valued form of working class heritage, offering “a powerful counter to the trivialising effects of celebrity culture by validating the importance of everyday life.”

The collection then expands to consider, for example, past Swedish attempts to create a specific working-class literature antagonistic to bourgeois writing, but the resulting work then failing to be integrated into the national literary heritage. Of late this has been rectified, but the integration has taken place within the framework of identity politics rather than the logic of class politics. The former framework has been somewhat grudgingly accepted as long as “the fundamental distinction between class politics and the politics of recognition of identity is upheld.”

This logically leads to essays on socialist songbooks and working-class songs more generally, giving some fascinating background to some of the better known and the history of their performance, especially the history of the Red Flag at UK Labour Party Conferences. And then there is a category: working-class poetry.

Finally there is discussion with regard to the place of the commemoration, focusing on the complex history of commemorations of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, with the ongoing need to reinvent these heritage events as political and social contexts change. This resonated with me as in *Blackball* we are constantly needing to reinvent the meaning of the '08 strike as a moment of labour heritage. All in all, it is a fascinating and worthwhile collection of essays and one I recommend to the labour historian.

**Bill Direen & Guests: *M. J. Savage Song Cycle; World War 1, 2, 3; The Hospital Pass***

Audio Foundation Auckland, Friday 18 May 2018

Reviewed by Peter Clayworth

Despite the central and often dramatic role labour history has played in shaping the cultures of New Zealand, it remains relatively unusual to see an artistic performance placing that history in the centre of the stage. A show Bill Direen and his guests performed in May, June and November 2018 at a number of venues around the country showed just what can be done when art engages with the history of workers. I was fortunate enough to attend one of these performances while visiting Auckland last May. As a long-time fan of Bill Direen, and as an occasional labour historian, it was a delight to see a performance combining music, poetry and film to examine subjects central to the history of New Zealand’s working people.

Bill Direen is a multi-talented New Zealand musician, song-writer, poet, novelist and performer, who achieved what might be called cult status in the late '70s and early '80s and has continued to work on an eclectic range of projects ever since. While he may not be as widely known as many New Zealand artists, Direen fans tend to be an utterly devoted group. I can vouch for the fact that no two Bill Direen performances are ever the same—he is a gift that keeps on giving. Bill’s most well-known incarnation was as lead singer of the *Bilders*, a group consisting of the musicians he brought together for a particular album, gig and tour. The *Bilders*’ legendary 1985 song “Alligator Song” (a.k.a. “Do the Alligator”) would have been a No. 1 hit if we lived in a world where justice prevailed. For anyone unfamiliar with Bill, I recommend watching the 2017 Simon Ogston documentary film *Bill Direen: A Memory of Others* and also the youtube clip of “the Alligator Song.”

The three part title of “M. J. Savage Song Cycle; World War 1, 2, 3; The Hospital Pass” reflects the three inter-related sections of this performance piece. In each section, songs and poetry were interspersed with improvised music from Bill’s guests—a range of very talented artists co-ordinated by jazz musician Steve Courneane. On a sparse but effective stage setting, Bill used a range of very simple props, including a battered travelling-salesman-style suitcase and a large supply of red and black balloons, to augment his music and words. A series of contemporary documentary film clips played



in the background for each section. “M. J. Savage Song Cycle” was accompanied by film showing the conditions of the Depression; “World War 1, 2, 3” was augmented by footage from the battlefields of the Great War and “The Hospital Pass” was backed by film of rugby games from the 1920s.

The show loosely followed incidents in the life of William M. Direen, Bill’s Otago-born grandfather, who lived through the Great War, then played rugby in the 1920s, only to be thrown out of work and into the relief camps in the 1930s, as he struggled to support his family of eight. The “M. J. Savage Song Cycle” opened the performance. Despite being set at the height of the Depression, it expressed the optimism felt by a great number of New Zealand’s working people on the election of the first Labour Government. Song titles such as “Build the Ideal” and “Put a Little Sugar in Your Pocket Friend” reflected this feeling, although I could not help but think there was a mixture of hope and cynicism in the lyrics of “Comrade Joe” (addressed to Comrade Michael Joe Savage, not Comrade Joe Stalin). All but one of the songs were written in the 1980s by Bill and the late great New Zealand poet and playwright Alan Brunton (1948-2002). Some of these had been previously performed by Brunton’s legendary theatre troupe, *Red Mole*. The only song in this section not written by Brunton and Direen was “Song of the Unemployed”, penned by an anonymous worker in 1932.

The song “Be a Soldier in the War” referred to workers’ involvement in the campaign to bring fairness, equality and prosperity to a world ravaged by capitalism. At the same time, it provided a link to the background of many struggling workers and unemployed of the 1930s, as a substantial number had been soldiers in an earlier and more pointless conflict, the Great War. One such veteran was Bill’s grandfather, William. Through several more songs the audience were taken further back in time to the Great War—to Egypt, France and the Western Front. As set out in the show’s programme: “The spotlight shifts from ensemble improvisations to short brackets of songs dealing with relevant topics.” The songs and improvisations, which included translations from French and German, incorporated material from a range of turn-of -the-century writers. A skim through the titles indicates the scope of the “relevant topics” and the international spread of the sources:

“Recruitment: Trentham” by Corporal E. F. Luks (1916);  
 “Crime and the brothels: On the Street” by A. Bruant (1889);  
 “L. H. B.” from a poem by Katherine Mansfield on the death of her brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp, in 1916;  
 “The Belgian Miserere” and “Sing in this Prison” adapted from Bertholt Brecht;  
 “The Somme”, including texts by Guillaume Apollinaire and Louis Aragon;  
 “The Gravedigger” by George Brassens;  
 “Execution/ Resistane/ Desertion” including material from Mahatma Gandhi;  
 “The Deserter” by Boris Vian;  
 “Ballad of the Hanged” by François Villon.

As the titles indicate, the performance took the war experience from the exhilaration of initial recruitment, into the worlds of mass destruction and loss, with a final emphasis on resistance, desertion and the coercive power of the military and the state.

The final section of the performance, “The Hospital Pass”, looked at the links between war and rugby. This was set in the 1920s, the era of the All Black team dubbed the “Invincibles”. Improvised music was combined with film of 1920s rugby games. The argument seemed to be that soldiers literally or figuratively went through a “hospital”—a process of recovery from war that involved participation in a highly combative, masculine-identified, form of sport. How successful this recovery was is a question open to debate. To once again quote from the programme,

“Did rugby become a kind of substitute for battle, a means of somehow objectifying the unthinkable, of moving from the decimation of populations and the denigration of culture to the building of a better society? Or was the emergent game of rugby with its masculine team spirit and metaphors of Darwinian prowess and readiness to exploit “the bounce”, an apt symbol for the doomed prosperity of the 1920s, and perhaps of capitalism itself?”

Bill’s own fine performance was enhanced by contributions from Andrew McCully (piano); Stuart Porter (saxophone); Steve Cournane (percussion); Walter Henry Meung (Electronic sound); Joel Vinsen (guitar); John Bell (vibes, trumpet, noises); Paul Buckton (guitar); Immi Paterson-Harkness (guitar); and Crystal Choi

(piano, vocals). Sam Longmore was in charge of lighting and sound.

For this reviewer it was a real pleasure to attend an intelligent and enjoyable performance that concentrated on the history of working people. The legacy of Michael Joseph Savage, the impact and memory of the Great War, along with the place of rugby in our culture, are all topics that have elements of myth, as well as history, woven around them. It seems utterly appropriate that artists should tackle such subjects and invite us all to re-examine them.

### ***The Cooks and Stewards Union: A Memoir***

By Gerry Hill (Self-published, 2018)

Reviewed by Dan Bartlett

As a kid growing up in the 1980s, I can distinctly remember my father telling the story of the “ferry workers’ union”, and how they had “held us up for hours” on a holiday crossing. Apparently Mum and Dad (and an infant me) were stranded on the wharf while a dispute was settled concerning “overcooked chips.” I got older, and I heard the story repeated. I began to question what was starting to sound like an urban myth: I’d hear the same story told by different whānau members, but the dispute always revolved around a different—but, curiously, always food-related—mundanity: burnt chips (again); cold pies; stale sandwiches. Dad and the rest of the whānau have voted Labour their entire lives, so I didn’t suspect a political bias, yet something always smelt slightly off about their allegations. Thankfully, Gerry Hill’s new book, *The Cooks and Stewards Union: A Memoir*, goes some way towards putting these rumours to rest:

“There was a common view among the public that the Cooks and Stewards were troublesome. In fact, the Union was misrepresented in the media, and turned into something of a bogeyman ... In reports of the atrocious weather and often dangerous conditions in the Cook Strait, what is not often mentioned is that the Cooks and Stewards performed with merit in looking after the travelling public ... [and] in the late 1970s, the Union moved award talks away from late in the year to April in an attempt to reduce the possibility of disruptions during the summer school holidays.”

Indeed, John McLeod, General Secretary of the New Zealand Merchant Service Guild from 1987 to 2002, says that “[i]t was never the Union’s intention to use school holidays as a lever ... In reality, freight was more important to Railways’ bottom line, disrupting freight sailings was a compelling target,” and Ray Munro, who helped establish the rail ferry service in 1962, suggests that “the number of sailings lost to industrial issues amounted to little more than 1%” for the period 1980–87.

The list of the Cooks and Stewards Union’s and the Seamen’s Union’s accomplishments is extensive, and it’s great to have them captured and condensed by this book. One notable achievement was the establishment of a retirement and welfare superannuation scheme in 1972. “Initially a death benefit was payable at \$8,000 at \$2 per week, which ended the days of shipboard collections for the family of members who died ... The scheme was developed in 1975 as a member contribution scheme and employer contribution. In 1989, the members contributed 4% and the employers 8%, with all members having their own account ... the scheme was worth \$60,000,000.”

There are excellent images peppered throughout the book. I particularly enjoyed the Union Line’s 1971 Christmas menu, serving up unassuming Kiwi classics such as baked kumara, cauliflower with cheese sauce, and “Tropical Fruit Salad and Jelly, with Ice Cream.” There’s a great photograph of a Christmas do aboard the cargo ship *Koani* and some classic shots of unionists on the picket line throughout the decades.

If I had a criticism, it would be the lack of reference notes; as an historian, I’m always wanting to find where a certain piece of information came from in the hope of discovering further insights. The author wears his political views on his sleeve when reflecting on the Muldoon-era. Hill describes the National government in the 1970s as “running an incoherent economic policy, causing deep divisions in the country” and, in unashamedly colourful language, Hill asserts that in 1983 the Muldoon government “could not have been further up the United States President Ronald Reagan’s rectum,” and he recalls when the Labour government announced the sale of the Shipping Corporation in 1988 and “the shit hit the fan.” These sudden slips into colloquial language can be jarring for the reader. However, and to be fair, Hill’s book is a memoir and it

doesn't claim to be a historical tome, so my quibbles around referencing and language are minor.

Including a section about his father, the unionist Toby Hill, is a lovely touch. A self-educated man who became National Secretary of the Waterside Workers at only 27, Toby was renowned for his negotiating skills: "He was the force to be reckoned with whenever we met the Cement Company in negotiations, and all credit to him, he kept us up generally with current wages and conditions."

This memoir captures many important stories from a union that was first established in a Port Chalmers' pub in 1884; it was one of Aotearoa New Zealand's first national unions, and it stood strong for 105 years. Gerry Hill writes from the heart, with an activist's passion, and with a unionist's sense of solidarity with his contemporaries and accountability to those who came before. Kia kaha Gerry! Solidarity forever.

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

## Obituaries



### Raymond Frank Grover

4 July 1931- 23 January 2019

By Peter Clayworth

Ray Grover was a novelist, archivist and historian, with a strong interest in labour history. In his role as Chief Archivist from 1981 to 1991, Ray was instrumental in expanding and strengthening the role of National Archives (as Archives New Zealand was then known). This has, of course been of great value to historians and other researchers ever since. Ray's novels, works of "documented historical fiction" were in themselves of great benefit to students of New Zealand history. These books were in fact meticulously researched historical works presented through fictional narrators.

Ray was born in 1931, the eldest of four children. His mother had the full-time job of housewife and mother, while his father worked as an itinerant country school teacher. Ray therefore lived in a range of country areas, in the process becoming steeped in New Zealand history. The Grovers lived in Whangaroa, Oromahoe (near Pahiā), Matamata and Taumaranui. Ray learned the local history of early Māori-Pākehā encounters in Northland, the Kaimai area and the Whanganui River. He devoured any books he could get hold of on New Zealand history. Ray also became fascinated by the intertwined subjects of war and resistance to war, something he attributed in

part to growing up surrounded by the events of the Second World War. In his last year at school, Ray read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, from which he became enamoured with the idea of fiction derived from authentic evidence of the past.

In the early 1950s, after surviving several years boarding at Wanganui Technical College, Ray went to Victoria University College (as it then was) majoring in political science. While his parents were supporting his three siblings on a school teacher's meagre salary, Ray paid his own way through university with money he earned from the freezing works, wool stores, truck driving and the other casual labour that was available at that time for the would-be student. Rather than complete a Masters, he headed off to the UK for his big O.E., including work in bars and nightclubs in Soho, deliveries for Selfridges and working on a hydro-electric scheme near Inverness. After two and a half years in Britain, the British authorities began to take an interest in Ray—as a New Zealander he was a British subject and therefore liable for National Service. As Ray described it the British conscription standards were lower than those in New Zealand, where his poor eye-sight excluded him from Compulsory Military Service. Ray's fascination with military history did not extend to wishing to serve in the British Army, so he decided to make his way back to New Zealand.

Ray travelled overland through Turkey, (where he worked for a while with a French archaeologist), Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, India, finally taking ship from Colombo in Sri Lanka for Australia and making his way back to New Zealand. He later remarked on the great friendliness of people in countries where it would now be very difficult for Westerners to travel and his anger over what the West has done in that part of the world. Ray returned to New Zealand in 1956 and got a job as a truck driver, working to construct the power lines between Hamner and Nelson. One of his workmates, a Korean War veteran, was the inspiration for his first novel. *This was Another Man's Role*, published in 1967, the story of a war veteran who ends up committing murder.

To work on the novel Ray moved to Wellington, where he made a living as a gas meter reader. He also began the pattern of research that he developed for his later novels. With the help of a friendly Justice Department official, Ray studied the files of men hanged during the 1950s, an exercise he described as dispiriting but exposing him to stories he would otherwise never have known. In



between novel writing and reading gas meters, Ray mixed with the small Bohemian scene of late 1950s Wellington, associating with such luminaries as Maurice Gee, Marilyn Duckworth and Louis Johnson.

Ray found work at the Alexander Turnbull Library and remained there for 20 years, the last 10 as Deputy Librarian. This was followed by two years as librarian for the Auckland College of Education and then his appointment in 1981 as Chief Archivist for National Archives. At this time Archives was underfunded, had a staff of 18 and was based in makeshift premises at Vivian Street. By the time Ray retired 10 years later, Archives had a staff of 50, had set up proper archives training and had moved to its current premises at Mulgrave Street. Ray had been a strong advocate for the value of archives as the public memory that holds government to account. He continued to hold this stance throughout his life and maintained that the position of archives had regressed with the National Government's flawed policy of incorporating archives into Internal Affairs.

Ray's interest in writing historical novels was sparked by his time at the Alexander Turnbull Library, surrounded by records of the past. He was drawn to the story of Te Rangihaeata, after seeing Charles Heaphy's watercolour portrait of the Ngāti Toa chief. Realising that he did not have the knowledge, imagination and experience to tell the story from a Māori perspective, Ray chose as his narrator Jack Niccol, a whaler and publican who married a prominent Ngāti Toa woman and was one of the few Pākehā with a good word to say for Te Rangihaeata. *Cork of War: Ngāti Toa and the British mission* was published in 1982. Solidly based on thorough research, the novel told the story of early colonisation as an act of violent appropriation by a European power. The book told of plenty of sex, drink, and bad behaviour on all sides, but in particular shone a light on the misdeeds of the Wakefields and the British Government.

I personally owe Ray a great debt for *Cork of War*, which I read in 1985, when I was a semi-employed drop-out from an unfinished zoology degree. I had an interest in history, but thought New Zealand history was generally pretty dull compared to the rest of the world. Ray's book, which went into the warts-and-all dodgy behaviour of Pākehā and Māori, as well as examining the violence of colonialism, convinced me that this country has a fascinating history. By a long and twisted path I ended up becoming a New Zealand historian and making a living

as such. One of the signposts on that twisted path was Ray Grover's *Cork of War*.

Ray went on to write two more historical novels, *March to the Sound of the Guns*, published in 2008, and *Province of Danger*, published in late 2018. These two works were once again based on careful research. They are each told by a number of different narrators, describing events of war, peace and class struggle from a range of perspectives. *March to the Sound of the Guns* concentrates on the New Zealand experience of the Great War, but starts with the events of the 1913 strike. *Province of Danger* takes the survivors from *March to the Sound of the Guns* through the 1920s and '30s with the depression and the rise of fascism. Ray examines class struggle, the rebuilding of lives shattered by war, the opposition to fascism and the trials of New Zealand's small pacifist movement. While the characters are all New Zealanders, some of the book's action takes place in the UK, Nazi Germany and in the Spanish Civil War. The struggle against fascism and against war is then carried into the Second World War, with the last part of the book dealing with post-war New Zealand, the 1951 waterfront dispute and finishing with protests against the Vietnam War.

One of the main characters in the two books, the socialist activist and soldier, Jim McDonnell, is loosely based on Charlie Riley. Riley was a left-wing activist who fought and was wounded in both World Wars and in the Spanish Civil War. Originally a Cockney, Riley spent much of his life in New Zealand where he was involved in many industrial struggles. He later donated his personal papers to the Turnbull Library, which led Ray to track him down to his home in Naenae and record an extensive interview for the Turnbull's oral history collection.

Ray had an ongoing interest in labour history and the history of left wing activism and resistance to authority in New Zealand. This was shown by the fact that his novels based around the World Wars also looked at pacifism, anti-militarism and at the labour struggles that went on in New Zealand from the 1910s through to the 1950s. Ray was an active supporter of the Labour History Project and often attended seminars and conferences. In 2017 he presented a paper on William Nimot, the only frontline New Zealand soldier to desert to the Germans in the First World War. A version of the paper, another of Ray's works of "documented historical fiction", was published in the December 2018 edition of the *Journal of New*

*Zealand Studies*, along with an essay in which Ray explored his method of writing about historical events. Ray was survived by his former wife Janny Hammond, son Tom, daughter-in-law Linda and much loved grandchildren Amelia and Aidan. Janny Hammond is a name our readers will recognise from her 1981 co-authored (with Bert Roth) book *Toil and Trouble: The Struggle for a Better Life in New Zealand*.

I close with two quotes from historians who were among Ray's many friends. David Young, writing in 2015, described Ray as: "A shrewd judge of character and a strategic thinker, in his books and in his life he has been a defender of common decencies, the levelling power of rugby and the spirit of equality that made New Zealand the country it was before economic rationalism cast its spell."

Mark Derby's farewell to Ray: "Ray regarded history as literature and vice versa. He was a great guy who wrote some fine books. Haere ra, e hoa, ki tua o te arai. Moe mai ra, takoto mai ra, okioki e."

Emma Kelly, Interview with Ray Grover, 31 January 2011.

David Young, "Ray Grover: Archivist and novelist," *Phanzine* 21, no. 2 (2015).

Ray Grover, "History is the Plot," *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 27 (2018).

Peter Clayworth, Email to Labour History Project Committee and Mark Derby, 25 January 2019.

Mark Derby, Email to Labour History Project Committee, 25 January 2019.



Jane Paul (right)

## Jane Paul, Film Archivist

28 February 1958-13 November 2018

By Peter Clayworth

The recent death of film archivist, Jane Paul, after a short and sudden illness was a great loss to all who knew and worked with her. It was also a great loss to New Zealand's film history, labour history and public history. In her 31 years working at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision and its predecessor, the New Zealand Film Archive, Jane worked on a range of projects that preserved and publicised the film history of New Zealand's working people.

When Jane began work at the NZ Film Archive in 1986, her first job was in film conservation, repairing vulnerable nitrate film. She went on to work as a researcher and cataloguer. From 1992 to 1999, Jane was manager of the Last Film Search, a project to locate and preserve at-risk film of social and historical importance around New Zealand. The Search uncovered many short films on aspects of New Zealand workers' lives and labour.

Building on the success of the Great Film Search, Jane went on to manage the Travelling Film Show and subsequent programmes of community film screenings.

Jane took historic films, including those unearthed in the Film Search, to their communities of origin. Films were shown around the country, including in remote rural areas, to local audiences gathered in theatres, community halls, schools, marae and tents. Jane also led the Reel Life in Rural New Zealand screening programme, which took film of rural life and work out into country communities. This included the Woolshed Tour of 2012, when films were shown in a series of historic woolsheds throughout New Zealand.

Jane's many other professional achievements included a 1998 Winston Churchill fellowship, allowing her to research and locate New Zealand films in UK and US film archives. This led to the repatriation of many New Zealand film taonga. In 2010 Jane worked with Christchurch's Free Theatre to present *The Marvellous Corricks* at the New Zealand International Film Festival. This combination of live performance and restored early film recreated the experience of the travelling film and theatre shows of the years before 1914. Jane also helped record the history of New Zealand film making by recording many interviews with amateur and professional film makers, which are now held in the Ngā Taonga archive.

As the daughter of publishers Janet and Blackwood Paul, Jane came from a background that combined artistic, literary and progressive interests. She was a strong supporter of the Labour History Project, in which her partner Alex Burton played a very active role. Our strongest sympathies go out to Alex and to all Jane's whānau and many friends.



The struggles of working people have a long and significant history in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Labour History Project (formerly the Trade Union History Project) is an organisation dedicated to researching, recording, preserving and promoting this working-class history.

Formed in 1987 and made up of individual and institutional members, the Labour History Project organises seminars and conferences (such as the biennial Rona Bailey Memorial Lecture), publishes the LHP Bulletin, maintains the Bert Roth Award for Labour History, and supports a wide range of related projects (books, research, exhibitions, documentary films, archive projects and oral histories). The committee of the LHP is based in Wellington.

**Interested in becoming a member?** By joining the Labour History Project you will be supporting the promotion of working-class history, receive the LHP Bulletin three times a year, and keep up-to-date with the latest news, reviews and events. Membership fees are:

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