



**lhp bulletin**

**shape** shifting

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

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## Editorial

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
 Are full of passionate intensity.  
*The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats

We do live in volatile times. A heatwave in the Arctic is followed by a rare snowfall in Blackball. The 229th mass shooting for the year takes place in the US, Boris begins his clowning in the UK and a television actor takes the helm in the Ukraine. This volatility begins to agitate the comparatively genteel field of labour history and is reflected in this issue.

Our chair reports from the AGM that the organisation is in good shape; the Bert Roth Award had a fine field of entries; there is news of an art exhibition of interest and a report of some important research underway by Ross Webb. There are two rewarding articles: a splendid piece of storytelling by Peter Clayworth and a very useful contextualising of the problem of Mori scabs in the early part of last century by James Robb.

But "the centre does not hold" and we move into the agitation of the climate crisis. I was asked to provide a report on the Blackball Mayday which, as an eleven-year-old schoolstrike4climate activist confronted a seventy year old extractivist who tried to silence her, provided a moment of epiphany for this participant: this is a life and death struggle.

This leads into a consideration of the issues facing working people and the need for a Just Transition. Bill Bradford provides an overview before E t organiser, Jen Natoli, gives a report from Taranaki, where experience is creating consciousness. One of her delegates, Sean Hindson, then provides some words from the heart. This is labour history in its inception and some Europeans in the P2P movement are seeing a shift as profound, and as complex as the Industrial Revolution, with a different paradigm from the market or the state being forged.

We are in the realm of image making, so a homage to the work of art in working life sculptor, Phill Rooke follows, before we return to some sort of normality with book reviews. [Paul Maunder](#)

# Chair's Report for 2019

This report comes from the 2019 LHP AGM, held on 16 July at Wellington Museum.

I want to begin by acknowledging the incredible work of the Labour History Project Committee – Dan Bartlett, Russell Campbell, Peter Clayworth, Jared Davidson, Ciaran Doolan, Richard Hill, Emma Kelly, Claire-Louise McCurdy, Therese O'Connell, Matariki Roche, Marie Russell, Ross Teppett, Sue Shone and Ross Webb. Thank you all for your talents, enthusiasm and storytelling. Dan left the Committee for Christchurch, but has continued to offer his copy editing and reviewing skills from the South. It is with great sadness we farewell Richard Hill, Emma Kelly and Marie Russell from the Committee. Richard, your historical knowledge of our organisation is beyond compare and we will miss your wisdom. Emma, thank you for your editorial talents, your sparkle and archival advice, and Marie for your calm logic and strategic questions.

Labour History Project work continues to centre on the Labour History Project *Bulletin*. Paul Maunder became the *Bulletin* editor in early 2018 and has brought together a diverse array of insightful labour history work. One of Paul's excellent initiatives has been including interviews with retiring trade unionists – Maxine Gay and Robert Reid in Issue 73, and Bill Bradford in Issue 75. With Ross Webb's leadership, the News and Reviews sections of the *Bulletin* have become substantial, containing many excellent suggestions for all you avid labour history readers. Ross Webb, Emma Kelly and I edited the 2018 Special-themed *Bulletin* – Pay Equity and Equal Employment Opportunity. Given it was 125 years since New Zealand women were enfranchised, it was an appropriate moment to explore such a theme – how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. I want to thank all our contributors to the *Bulletin* – article, news and reviews writers, copyeditors, and of course, the continuing fantastic design work of Jared Davidson.

This year we decided our Special Theme would be – Winning Ways. We are interested in the methods unions and community organisations have utilised in their successful struggles to improve the lives of working people. For example, the weekend, the abolition of child labour, the eight-hour day, pay equity, health and safety regulations, accident compensation, guaranteed meal breaks, sick pay, paid holidays, nuclear free New Zealand, and so forth. Some are rights we take for granted; others have been thoroughly eroded; all were won in struggles

where trade unions and community allies played a leading role.

Judging the 2018 Bert Roth Award for labour history has kept Claire-Louise, Ross Webb, Jared Davidson and me very busy. It is a fantastic opportunity to review the wealth of talent out there.

Jared Davidson did a superb job of redesigning the LHP website, which not only looks beautiful but is well-structured so it is easy to find the information you are looking for. Jared also continues to keep the LHP lively on Facebook, sharing many varied and fascinating labour history images, news and views items, and has taken up the task of doing so on Twitter as well.

Last year we mentioned our new project as a Committee was the creation of a graphic history that tells our labour history from an array of image-led perspectives. Ex-LHP Committee member Michael Brown, who with Mat Tait produced graphic tales in *The Heading Dog Who Split in Half: Legends and Tall Tales from New Zealand*, shared his expertise on the art of producing a graphic work. Our Committee held a workshop to brainstorm story-board ideas and we are next inviting artists to collaborate with us on graphic ideas. This exciting project is on its way.

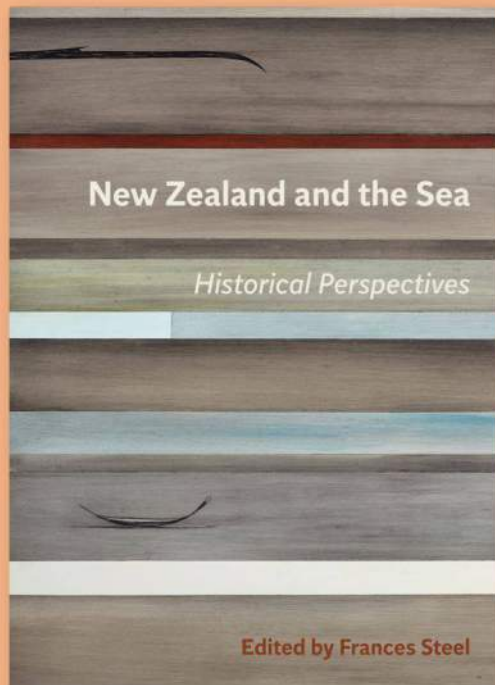
I want to warmly thank Claire-Louise for her administrative work and Russell Campbell for keeping track of our funds and members. I also want to acknowledge Russell's work of overseeing the funds that enable Rebecca Macfie to write a biography of Helen Kelly. Thank you both; I couldn't do the Chair work without you.

And finally, I want to thank you – our members – who sustain and inspire the work we do. Voluntary work in the after-hours of our day is not always easy, and on behalf of the LHP Committee, I want to acknowledge all of you who have sent supportive emails, ideas, questions, labour history work and comradeship. It keeps us connected in the work we do.

Kia kaha Labour History Project.

In solidarity,  
Cybele Locke

## Bert Roth Award for Labour History



### Bert Roth Award for Labour History 2019 WINNER

David Haines and Jonathan West  
'Crew Cultures in the Tasman World'  
Francis Steele ed., *New Zealand and the  
Sea: Historical Perspectives*

Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2018



The Bert Roth award, named for the late historian, is presented annually by the Labour History Project to the work that best depicts the history of work and resistance in New Zealand. The year 2018 was a strong year for labour history in New Zealand. As the shortlist below shows, the history of work and of struggles against exploitation by individuals and movements shows up in a diverse range of publications, innovative uses of social media, novels and film. From whalers in the 1830s Tasman evading and resisting authority to sex workers in the present fighting for decriminalization, the shortlist demonstrates that labour history is alive and well in New Zealand.

### Shortlist

**David Haines and Jonathan West**, 'Crew Cultures in the Tasman World' in Francis Steele, ed., *New Zealand and the Sea: Historical Perspectives* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books)

**Caren Wilton**, *My Body My Business: NZ Sex Workers in an Era of Change* (Dunedin: Otago University Press)

**Grace Millar**, 'Waterfronts and homes, 1900-1970' in Francis Steele, ed., *New Zealand and the Sea* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books)

**Ian Dougherty**, *Pulpit Radical: The Story of New Zealand Social Campaigner Rutherford Waddell* (Dunedin, Saddle Hill Press)

**Gerry Hill**, *The Cooks and Stewards Union: A Memoir* (Self-published)

**Kim Workman**, *Journey Towards Justice* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books)

**John Wilson**, *Local Lives: A History of Addington* (Christchurch: Addington Neighbourhood Association)

**Peter Attwell**, *The Hill of Memory* (Auckland, Mente Corde Manu)

**Peter Clayworth**, 'An Agitator Abroad: P. H. Hickey, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, 1900-1930', in Greg Patmore and Shelton Stromquist, *Frontiers of Labor: Comparative Histories of the United States and Australia* (Illinois: Illinois University Press)

**Alexander Turnbull Library**, *James Cox, Life 100 Years Ago* ([https://twitter.com/cox\\_diary](https://twitter.com/cox_diary))

**Heperi Mita (director)**, *Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Film Industry*

We have awarded the 2019 Bert Roth Award for Labour History to **David Haines** and **Jonathan West**, for their excellent chapter in *New Zealand and the Sea*, edited by Francis Steele. 'Crew cultures in the Tasman world' provides a 'people's history' of those who worked across the Tasman sea from the 1830s onwards. This excellent article ticks all the boxes for the Bert Roth Award: it details exploitation and people's efforts to challenge such

exploitation; it gives voice to those whose stories remain out of view or marginal in traditional histories, and it is written in an engaging and accessible way. The early nineteenth century saw the British Empire's "rage for order", which included the control and discipline of "recalcitrant maritime labour." Haines and West focus on the 'men, and some women, who laboured aboard colonial ships and at shore-based camps on the Tasman's margins' and the "efforts of maritime workers to resist and elude authority." This chapter also demonstrates how satire and humour, the "hallmarks of labour solidarity the world over", were utilised alongside many other forms of resistance: "talking back, feigning illness and refusing to work, coordinated desertion, mutiny and violence." Haines and West convincingly demonstrate that controlling unruly maritime labour was a key pretext for those who advocated British acquisition of Aotearoa. This is a fantastic, beautifully researched, historically-grounded chapter, with juicy examples that give us a sense of people's lives in the Tasman maritime world.

Another innovative study that details working lives is our runner-up for the award. *My Body My Business* by **Caren Wilton** is a revelatory compilation of oral history interviews with eleven former and current sex workers, covering a wide range of personal and political stories across class, ethnic and gender binaries. From the daily experiences of sex work to the organising efforts of the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective and the decriminalisation of the industry in 2003, the reader is given an intimate insight into a world still stigmatised and seen as 'a world apart'. Yet as Caren Wilton notes, it is a world both ordinary and extraordinary. As work, it has its own stresses, struggles, and solidarities. Yet like all workers, those interviewed grapple with the often-mundane aspects "of parenting, of friendship, of money, of love." In doing so, Wilton succeeds in her goal to increase understanding, lessen the stigma of sex work, and document the impacts of decriminalisation on those involved. By sharing the unheard voices of the workers themselves, complete with stunning photography by Madeline Slavick, *My Body My Business* is an engaging and eye-opening account of life and work within the New Zealand sex industry.

**Grace Millar's** 'Waterfronts and homes, 1900-1970', another essay in *New Zealand and the Sea*, challenges us to look beyond the waterfront as a discreet world of work, to domestic spaces – workers' homes – and how homes shaped and were shaped by waterfront work across the

twentieth century. The unpredictability of the sea, of ships and therefore of waterfront work meant waterfront workers lived close to ports, in tight-knit working-class communities that suffered from poor housing conditions. Decisions to take militant action at work were governed by how issues impacted households – precarious work, unsafe conditions, work clothes covered in obnoxious substances such as lampblack. Millar draws on oral history to give us crucial insights into the ways households and communities governed when worksite disputes began, how strike-breaking was defined, and when disputes were ended.

Another book on our shortlist detailing struggles against exploitations is **Ian Dougherty's** *Pulpit Radical: The Story of New Zealand Social Campaigner Rutherford Waddell*. The name Rutherford Waddell, if recognised at all today, is likely to be associated with a sermon on "the sin of cheapness" which triggered a royal commission on sweated labour that led to legislation improving the conditions of working people in New Zealand. Feminists might make a connection with the name Harriet Morison and the founding of the Tailoresses' Union. Born in Ulster in the mid-nineteenth century, Rutherford Waddell emigrated to New Zealand as a Presbyterian minister in 1877. In this biography, Ian Dougherty sets out to establish, comprehensively and in detail, that Rutherford Waddell's long life of commitment and campaigning ranged far more widely than labour issues. He lists the "remarkable array of (Waddell's) campaigns and causes" in his final chapter: 'economic reform, labour reform, poverty, housing, trade unionism, penal reform, eugenics, votes for women, Irish home rule, free education, kindergartens, technical education, prohibition, gambling, censorship, church union, religious education, Presbyterian parishes employing deaconesses and supporting their own overseas missionaries, conservation, game bird importation, and the popularisation of literature'. The book paints a vivid portrait of a remarkable man, both visionary and of his time. The accounts of many of the campaigns have direct relevance to working class history, but the three (of twenty-nine) chapters concerned with the sermon and its consequences, *The Sin of Cheapness* (1881); *The Tailoresses' Union* and *The Sweating Commission* (1890) are a major contribution to New Zealand's labour history. Dougherty's research is extensive; it seems unlikely that there is any relevant primary source he has not located, including the great many written by Rutherford Waddell himself. As a core resource on

conditions of work and employment for women and men in the new colony, the formation of the first female union in New Zealand, and the legislation that resulted from the royal commission, these chapters, at least, are essential reading.

During the period immediately after Waddell's campaigns, Pat Hickey was travelling the world, learning and spreading the gospel of industrial unionism, as told by **Peter Clayworth** in 'An Agitator Abroad: P. H. Hickey, Industrial Unionism, and Socialism in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia, 1900–1930'. In this fine rendering of the life of Patrick Hodgens Hickey, Peter Clayworth explores the importance of transnational mobility in spreading ideas of revolutionary industrial unionism and socialism at the turn of the twentieth century. Hickey's travels as an itinerant worker in America, and a miner in Bingham Canyon, Utah, during a period of intense class conflict, led him to join the Western Federation of Miners and Socialist Party of America. Hickey brought the two-pronged revolutionary industrial and political strategy home with him to Blackball and Runanga mining communities in New Zealand, and with Australian activists Paddy Webb and Bob Semple helped form the Red Fed – the New Zealand Federation of Labour. When Hickey became disillusioned with the IWW, and the lack of united anti-war effort, he drew on transnational networks to establish his family in Melbourne in 1915. The family would cross the Tasman twice more before Hickey died in 1930. Peter Clayworth pays careful attention to both the revolutionary possibilities of migrant transnational networks but also their limitation to white, English-speaking workers.

Alongside biography, autobiography and memoir provide key insights into the lives of campaigners for social justice. The list of the Cooks and Stewards Union and the Seamen's Union's accomplishments is extensive, and it's great to have them captured and condensed by this book by **Gerry Hill**, former Auckland Branch Secretary of the Union and later an elected official of the New Zealand Seafarers Union. Well-illustrated with images, *The Cooks and Stewards Union: A 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. Hill writes from the heart, with an activist's passion, and with a unionist's sense of solidarity to his contemporaries and accountability to those who came before. Similarly, **Kim Workman's** memoir, *Journey*

*Towards Justice* is an engaging, highly readable account by a campaigner for restorative justice and prison reform. The memoir details more than Workman's work in these areas, however. The book details Workman's life as a jazz musician, a policeman, a public servant in the Ombudsman's office, State Services Commission, Corrections, and in Mori Affairs. But the focus is on Workman's life on the job. Along the way, Workman encountered racism and a broken prison system which in turn inspired him to become an advocate for justice reform.

The history of local communities has always been a strong strand in New Zealand labour history. *Local Lives: A History of Addington* by long-time journalist **John Wilson** and the Addington Neighbourhood Association is a well-published, lavishly-illustrated 'history from the bottom up' of Addington, a unique working-class suburb of Christchurch. Beginning with an account of tangata whenua, this readable book guides us through themes of class, place, work, war, religion, sport, crime and others that wove their way through the community of Addington. From the origins of street names to the daily experience of working in the Addington Railway Workshops, *Local Lives* successfully combines industrial heritage with human stories of place. The outcome of 14 years work, this book is an encyclopaedic yet accessible guide to working-class Addington that will undoubtedly be a useful source for years to come.

We have also included a creative work in our shortlist with **Peter Attwell's** *The Hill of Memory*. This novel about the 1913 waterfront strike is an engaging starting place for young (and older) adults concerned about how little they know of New Zealand's labour history. The story is told from the remembered experience of 17-year old Johnnie Hargreaves, and his best mate Joe whose brothers are watersiders and union members, striking for greater surety of employment and improved working conditions. The boys' presence at the battle of Buckle Street and the 'riot' in Post Office Square changes from observation to action as they are caught up in the conflict between strikers and 'Massey's Cossacks', the farmers on horseback the government brought in from rural areas to break the strike. Discrepancies between accounts of the strike in the newspapers and in the *Maoriland Worker* make Johnnie suspicious of the accuracy of the reports from the front as the novel continues into World War One, documenting the fates of the strikers, Joe's brothers and Johnnie's sister Hetty, who was engaged to one of

Joe's brothers. Life-long guilt from the consequences of their planned action motivates the elderly Johnnie to confront the past half a century later and record the events of 1913 and its aftermath for his daughter. This device enables the author to describe social and political changes as part of the narrative. An impressively detailed picture of living and working conditions in 1913, and a survey of New Zealand's history across the first half of the twentieth century – conditions on the wharves, the impact of the strike, World War One, the founding of the Labour Party, the Influenza epidemic, the 1935 election of a Labour government, the 1951 lockout – is created, embedded in the lives and actions of the characters in the novel.

For the first time, we have included a twitter account in the shortlist. *James Cox: Life 100 Years Ago* is an innovative project – part of WW100 'Life 100 Years Ago' – and is a fine example of how social media can be used for historical and archival ends. Using the unique, miniature-sized diaries of rural labourer James Cox, the [Alexander Turnbull Library](#) shared daily extracts on Twitter in 'real time', as if Cox himself was sending the tweets. Tweets such as "I walked to Carterton and back. I got my first months pension" and "I did some more mowing today both morning and afternoon. I was not too well... Anderson and Peter mow also and we are getting it down. Anderson does most of the work" were linked to digitised images of the original diaries. The result was a highly engaging, ever-changing account of the life of an itinerant worker during the years of the First World War for an entirely new audience, especially students.

Lastly, we have included the film *Merata*, a beautiful documentary that tells the story of the life and career of Merata Mita. Mita made landmark documentary films such as *Patu!* (1983), *Bastion Point Day 507* (1980); she also contributed to films that documented some of the key industrial disputes of the day, including the Mangere Bridge dispute and Kinleith. Her feature film *Mauri* (1988) is the first in Aotearoa New Zealand solely directed by a M ori woman. After Mita's death, her youngest son, [Heperi Mita](#), explored her very extensive archive; the film documents his own discovery of his mother's early life and work. *Merata* is full of unseen archival footage, including Mita's appearance on a 1977 Television production, *M ori Women in a P keh World*, where she details the difficulties of raising a family alone in the city in the late 1970s. *Merata* is very much a whanau story: Heperi films his older siblings telling their

stories of the sacrifices involved in her career as a filmmaker, especially in her early career: the political backlash and the impact on the home of police brutality during the filming of *Patu!*. It is also an international story celebrating Merata Mita's contribution to indigenous film-making around the world.

The award was judged by [Cybèle Locke](#), [Claire-Louise McCurdy](#), [Jared Davidson](#) and [Ross Webb](#).



## News and events

### 'The Future of Work' at the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, 03 Aug – 17 Nov 2019. Free entry

This exhibition at the Dowse may be of interest to readers of the *Bulletin*. A description of the exhibition from the Dowse website follows:

Featuring Liz Allan, Berwick Street Collective, Bruce Connew, Harun Farocki, Kauri Hawkins, Fiona Jack, Darcy Lange, Elisabeth Pointon, Public Share, Deborah Rundle, Allan Sekula & Noël Burch, John Vea, Peter Wareing, 'The Future of Work' looks at the changing nature of our working lives and the impact of ever-increasing automation and globalization. The exhibition includes archival material about industry in Lower Hutt and features a range of artists whose practices address labour, work culture and collective action.

Lower Hutt is a working class city, a place with a long history as a site of trade and manufacturing. In the nineteenth century, three industries in particular came to drive the local economy: the woollen mills, the meat works, and the railway workshops. Alongside these, in the twentieth century factories such as Unilever, Griffins and Ford blossomed, employing many thousands of local workers. Following the closure of the majority of these businesses, the focus in recent times has shifted for the city towards light industry, research and innovation.

In conjunction with burgeoning industry over the years, Lower Hutt led the way with demands for workers' rights. It was Petone carpenter Samuel Parnell who fought for the 8-hour working day, and several moments of union action in Lower Hutt have been critical, such as the Petone Woollen Mill strike of 1890 – the most prolonged to have occurred in New Zealand at the time.

Today, the world of work is vastly different to the past era of businesses founded on manual production processes. The impact of the digital age and potential for automation has significantly altered the way that we communicate, live and work. Coupled with this, ever-growing globalization and the accelerated flow of capital, products and labour has led to unpredictable and unstable markets.

As our working conditions continue to change rapidly, workers are under greater pressure, working under precarious contracts that claim to provide flexibility yet offer little security, and an expectation that we are

available 24/7. This has resulted in an expansion of inequality and escalating health, housing and social issues.

'The Future of Work' presents a context for labour and activism through the history of Lower Hutt. It provides historical material and narratives as a way to understand the practices of contemporary artists who are concerned with aspects of work and how these shifts impact on individuals, families and communities.

### The Industrial Unionist online

The latest addition to the National Library's Papers Past website is the *Industrial Unionist*. Researchers can now keyword search, browse and download articles for free at <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/industrial-unionist>. The following is from the National Library's entry on the *Industrial Unionist*:

The *Industrial Unionist* was the newspaper of the New Zealand branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the 'Wobblies'. The IWW was established in America in 1905 by a group of unionists unhappy with the American Federation of Labour (AFL). The group who established the IWW were a mix of socialists, anarchists and radical unionists. One of those present at the establishment of the IWW was New Zealand-born William Trautmann, who became the founding General-Secretary.

In contrast to the AFL, the IWW welcomed all workers, no matter what gender or race. Rather than working for a better deal within the capitalist system, the IWW aimed to overthrow capitalism. As the preamble to the IWW constitution stated, 'The working class and the employing class have nothing in common...Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.' (1 March 1913:1) The IWW favoured direct action over political negotiation and promoted the idea of a worldwide 'One Big Union'.

During the same period, some New Zealand unions were beginning to push against the collective arbitration system, established by the government in 1894, and industrial unionism as promoted by the IWW influenced their thinking. The first New Zealand branch of the IWW

was established in Wellington in December 1907 and followed by one in Christchurch in 1910. In 1911 the Auckland branch was established, encouraged by a recently arrived Canadian IWW member, John Benjamin King. It was this branch, known as the Local Recruiting Union 1, that began publishing the *Industrial Unionist* on 1 February 1913.

The first issue of the *Industrial Unionist* stated that it was collectively run by five volunteers. Frank Hanlon and Alex Holdsworth were the editors; Bill Murdoch was the business manager, and the other volunteers were Percy Short and T. Woodward.

Regular contributors to the paper included Tom Barker, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Spanwire', and the fishmonger Charles T. (Charlie) Reeve. A notable feature of the *Industrial Unionist* were the articles written in te reo M ori by painter and licensed interpreter Percy Short. His articles encouraged M ori to join the IWW and also, after the Waihi Strike of 1912, urged M ori to not act as strike breakers. The *Industrial Unionist* also contained reports from the Australian branches of the IWW, and reprinted extracts from well-known anarchist or socialist writers. As part of their anti-capitalist policies, they did not look for paid advertising and only printed advertisements for their own or other socialist publications.

By August 1913, the makeup of the committee had changed, with Englishman Charlie Blackburn and W. Patterson replacing Woodward and Murdoch. Holdsworth left New Zealand during 1913, as his mother was ill back in England. Around this time the editor's name, as printed in the paper, was changed to "A. Block", a pseudonym that was also used in the Australian IWW newspaper *Direct Action* to protect the editor from being arrested.

The *Industrial Unionist* came out monthly until the Great Strike began in October 1913. It then published an issue every two to three days, until the final issue of 29 November 1913. During this period the paper printed an average of 5,000 copies per issue. At the height of the strike, around 16,000 workers were out, and special constables were brought in to break it up, often using violence against the strikers.

By December 1913, the strike petered out, after the government arrested the main strike leaders in mid-

November. A number of well-known IWW members left the country, including Reeve and Barker. It's not known what happened to editor Frank Hanlon, although he appears to have been living in Sydney in 1916. Despite the positive predictions published in the paper on 29 November, which confidently stated that the "backbone of [the] strike [is] firmer than ever" (29 November 1913:20, p.1) in the end that was the last issue and the *Industrial Unionist* quietly folded.

The National Library would like to thank Jared Davidson for his assistance with this essay.

### **Halt All Racist Tours (HART) at 50: The Power of Protest Symposium**

For sixteen years from 1969 to 1985, HART's campaign against participation in racist South African sport shook and changed our society, taking New Zealand into a new and different national and international consciousness. Fifty years on from the movement's foundation, join us for a symposium reflecting on the important place HART holds in New Zealand history. What is the role, limits, and shape of protest and dissent in New Zealand today? What are the current human rights challenges facing New Zealand? Speakers include: Trevor Richards, Sue Bradford, Bob Burgess, Linda Burgess, Morgan Godfery, Moana Jackson, John Minto, Rosslyn Noonan, Dave Wickham, and Simon Wilson.

Saturday 12 October 2019, 9.30am - 1.30pm at the Auditorium, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna M tauranga, 70 Molesworth St, Wellington.

Admission: \$10 payable in cash at the door. Register at: <https://bit.ly/2ZkynoN>. Queries: [max.nichol@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:max.nichol@vuw.ac.nz)

### **The 2019 Rona Bailey Memorial Lecture: Dean Parker, 'Two Tickets To Barbarism'**

Dean Parker will talk about growing up in Napier, what he learnt in London from Trotskyists and Irish republicans, joining the Socialist Unity Party back in New Zealand, the formation of the NZ Writers' Guild and its affiliation to the Federation of Labour, and then the politics of writing and the writing of politics.

Thursday 17 October 2019, 5.30pm at the Auditorium, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. Koha.

# Research

## 'Organised Labour and Politics, 1975-1991' by Ross Webb

LHP committee member Ross Webb has commenced a PhD thesis at Victoria University of Wellington.

During the economic crisis of the 1970s and the neoliberal response to that crisis after 1984, organised labour in New Zealand was forced to reckon with a swiftly changing political and economic environment. An ongoing global recession, accelerating inflation and rising unemployment, and several confrontations with Robert Muldoon's National Government (1975-1984) was quickly followed by rapid neoliberal market reforms under the Fourth Labour Government (1984-1990) and the deregulation of the labour market in 1991 under the National government. These developments, which had international parallels across western nations, heralded the beginning of emerging trends in the world of work: falling union membership, labour's declining share of income, rising income inequality, and increasingly precarious employment. It has resulted in organised labour's declining size, bargaining power, and political influence since the 1980s.

This thesis traces the relationship between organised labour and the government between 1975 and 1991, spanning the long and crucial period between the first election of Muldoon and the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act. In its assessment of organised labour, the thesis focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on the Federation of Labour (FoL), the peak union body for much of the period covered. While the FoL represented private sector workers, it dominated trade union affairs and union-government relations for the period more generally. It commanded the attention of political leaders, mobilised vast alliances of working New Zealanders in campaigns to defend living standards and wages, and to challenge government policy. More broadly, organised labour was a major force in national social, political and economic life in the 1970s and 1980s, a role that has been underplayed in the historical writing on the period. With its focus on politics, the thesis addresses how organised labour at a national level interacted with prime ministers, ministers of labour and party politics, a topic for which there is surprisingly little analysis. However, while the focus is primarily on high-level politics, it also assesses how these developments coalesced on the ground for workers across the country.



Protesters at Parliament listening to Federation of Labour leader Jim Knox, 1979. Dominion post (Newspaper): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post and Dominion newspapers. Ref: EP/1979/1748/17-F. Alexander Turnbull Library

While scholars have detailed isolated aspects of the FoL's story during these decades, there is no thorough analysis of how the organisation responded to the numerous challenges of the day, such as inflation, unemployment, government-imposed wage restraint, restructuring of industries, changing public attitudes, and major free-market reforms. Where the scholarship does address these issues, it is defined by sweeping and often critical generalisations. While one strand of literature treats the economic changes of the period, and with it the decline of organised labour, as necessary and inevitable, another strand is largely critical of how organised labour and the FoL responded, presenting these decades as a history of missed opportunities and failed leadership. At the same time, the political history of these decades often downplays the significance of organised labour. In contrast, this thesis aims to move beyond the traditional questions of what organised labour ought to have done and instead seeks to understand and assess the important role that organised labour and the FoL did play in political and economic life, its successes, its failures and its limitations. In doing so, this thesis provides the first general account that details how the Federation of Labour in particular, and organised labour in general, operated during these difficult decades of recession and neoliberal reforms, placing the labour history of the period in dialogue with political and economic history.

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"TRAMWAY STRIKE." MASS MEETING NEWTON PARK.  
S. C. SMITH. PHOTO: 1:2:12. P. 90.

# Wellington Tramways Strike 1912

## Peter Clayworth

The public transport woes plaguing Wellington over the last year are no new phenomena. In the early months of 1912 New Zealand's capital city was brought to a standstill by a tramways dispute that threatened to escalate into a general strike. The 1912 Tramways strike was over what remains a topical issue: workplace bullying. Wellington's trams, the city's principle form of public transport, were owned by the Wellington City Council and operated by the Wellington City Tramways Department. For some time Wellington's motormen and conductors had felt a growing sense of anger and frustration over what they saw as the high-handed and insulting behaviour of a particular ticket inspector, Inspector G. Fuller.

In late 1911, Fuller accused conductor George White of having altered his waybill, indicating White had sold the same ticket twice. White was dismissed, but appealed to the Tramways Appeal Board. The Board upheld White's appeal on the grounds of insufficient evidence.<sup>1</sup> Following White's reinstatement a Tramways' Union meeting voted unanimously to call for Fuller's dismissal, "on account of his very questionable methods..."<sup>2</sup>

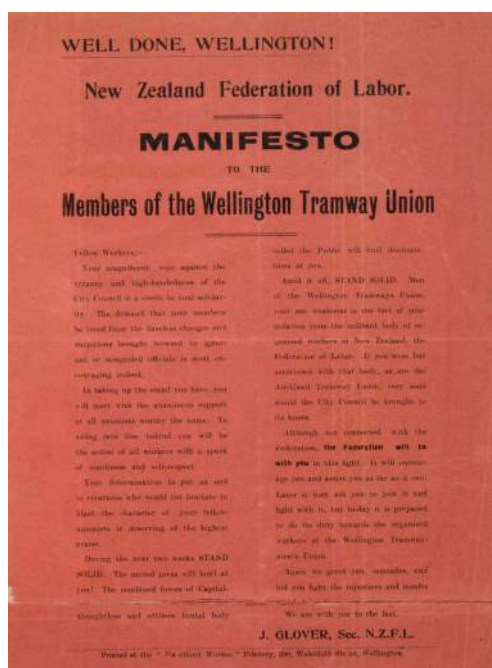
The City Council's Tramways Committee discussed the union's complaint and recommended that Fuller be moved into a different position in the Tramways Department, due to his "want of tact" as an inspector.<sup>3</sup> The December 1911 meeting of the Wellington City Council, decided no action would be taken until the first City Council meeting in January of the new year.<sup>4</sup> The tramway workers were outraged that the City Council had put off making any decision. They were further incensed by comments made by Stuart Richardson, manager of the city's Tramways and Electricity Department. Richardson alleged that there was "a considerable amount of malpractice" among the tram conductors, which only efficient officers like Fuller could stamp out. The Tramways union members met on Sunday afternoon, Christmas Eve, voting unanimously to strike from New Year's Day if Fuller was not removed by 31 December.<sup>5</sup>

The early 1910s were a time of heightened industrial unrest, but for the Wellington Tramways Union, a strike threat was a radical move. The Wellington trammies were not members of the militant New Zealand Federation of Labour (NZFoL), the Red Feds. Instead they were affiliated to the moderate Wellington Trades and Labour Council (TLC) and remained registered under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. This made it illegal for them to strike while an agreement was in force, laying them open to being fined by the Arbitration Court. Clearly their indignation over Fuller meant the Wellington trammies were prepared to risk prosecution.

An emergency meeting was called between union representatives and Wellington's mayor, Tim Wilford, who was sympathetic to their cause. The union agreed to withdraw the strike threat in return for the City Council holding a public inquiry into the Fuller case. Wilford then departed to the UK, for specialist medical treatment, leaving the Acting Mayor, Councillor John Smith, to sort out the city's tramway problems.<sup>6</sup> The public inquiry soon fell through due to a dispute over representation by legal counsel. At the next meeting of the Wellington City Council, on 25 January, a majority of councillors voted Inspector Fuller should remain in his current position. The Tramways Union secretary, Alex Sutherland accused the Council of bowing to the influence of the Wellington Employers' Association. He stated that the issue was now simply one of capital against labour. The union had already held a strike ballot, with members voting overwhelmingly in favour of strike action if Fuller was not removed from his position.<sup>7</sup>

The reaction of the press was predictable. The *Dominion*, supporters of the anti-union Reform Party, and the slightly less conservative *Evening Post* both argued that the City Council's weakness in dealing with the union had helped create the problem. The *New Zealand Times*, a supporter of the governing Liberal Party and the arbitration system, held that the strike was a union attempt to dictate to Wellington's citizens on how their tramways should be run. The newspapers now declared that the City Council must stand firm as this was a

struggle over whether the citizens or the Tramways Union controlled the city and its public transport system.<sup>8</sup> The only non-labour paper supporting the Tramways' Union was the populist muckraker *NZ Truth*, which portrayed Fuller as a serial character assassin, besmirching the names of honest workers.<sup>9</sup>



New Zealand Federation of Labor: Manifesto to members of the Wellington Tramway Union [1912]. Eph-B-LABOUR-1912-01, Alexander Turnbull Library.

The only Federation of Labour leaders in Wellington at the time of the dispute were Pat Hickey and Bob Ross, respectively the sub-editor and editor of Red Fed newspaper the *Maoriland Worker*, along with the NZFoL secretary, John Glover. They knew the Federation had to show its solidarity with workers taking direct action. Incensed by what they saw as the contempt of the Wellington City Council towards the tramwaymen, the federationists produced a manifesto declaring the Federation's strong support for a tramwaymen's strike. The manifesto congratulated the tramwaymen on their "magnificent vote against the tyranny and high-handedness of the City Council", and declared, "We are with you to the last." The manifesto was distributed to the tramway workers, with copies sent to the Wellington newspapers. The *Evening Post* was outraged by the manifesto's militant language and even more by the fact it was printed on red paper. The red pamphlet led to the *Evening Post* dubbing the NZFoL as the "Red Federation", soon abbreviated to the "Red Feds."<sup>10</sup>

A significant number of Wellington unionists saw the tramwaymen's stand as a just fight for the dignity of the workingman. The usually moderate Wellington TLC, along with most of its member unions, joined the NZFoL in expressing their support if the trammies chose to strike. Given that the TLCs and the NZFoL were bitter rivals, it was remarkable that the two organisations were jointly backing an arbitration union about to undertake an illegal strike.<sup>11</sup> On Tuesday 30 January, representatives of the Wellington Tramways Union executive, the NZFoL, the Wellington TLC and other Wellington unions spoke to morning and evening meetings of Tramway unionists at the union's Mansfield street club rooms. Some of the more moderate union leaders urged the tramwaymen to give 14 days notice, but most speakers urged the men to take immediate strike action. The trammies decided to hold a stop work meeting from 2pm to 4.30pm the next day, bringing all Wellington's trams to a halt. The men would then vote on whether the strike would begin immediately or in two weeks' time.<sup>12</sup>

Wellington's travelling public waited with great trepidation for the vote, aware that a tram strike would have a huge impact on commuting workers and shoppers. The trams were Wellington's main form of inner city transport. Buses were scarce, while the regular use of horse-drawn cabs and motor taxis was beyond the finances of most working-class people. While many working people travelled by bicycle and a few by motorbike, the private motorcar remained a luxury item for the better-off middle class. The Wellington papers reported that the potential tram shutdown was a far bigger topic of public conversation than the still unresolved question of who would become the Government following the recent 1911 'hung' election.<sup>13</sup>

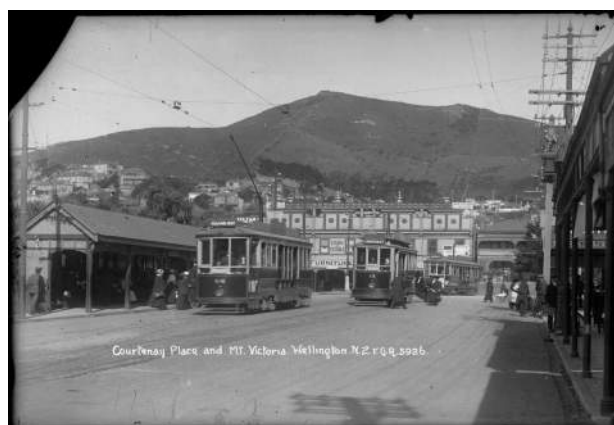
On Wednesday afternoon the tramwaymen converged on Trades Hall, Lower Cuba street. The trams were brought in from all round the city, congregating in the vicinity of Lambton Station. A total of seventy five trams were left parked nose to tail along Lambton Quay, Thorndon Quay, Mulgrave Street and Jervois Quay. The motormen immobilised their trams as they left, taking the handles, a detachable part of the driving mechanism. While the unionists were taking no chances, a recently passed law stated only certified motormen could be tram motormen. As all the certified men in Wellington were members of the Wellington Tramways Union, the council could not legally operate the trams during a strike.<sup>14</sup>

A large number of people gathered to watch the trammies arrive, with the regular Wellington Wednesday half-holiday helping boost the crowd's numbers. There was considerable sympathy for the tramwaymen, who were cheered by wharfies and office workers as they made their way to Trades Hall. Inspector Fuller, arriving on one of the last trams, was greeted with jeers from the crowd before disappearing into the Tramway Department offices. With too many tram workers to fit into Trades Hall, the meeting was adjourned to nearby King's Theatre in Courtenay Place. A large crowd gathered outside the Theatre, anxious to learn of the men's decision. The trammies voted almost unanimously to strike immediately and stay out until Fuller was removed. On emerging from the meeting they proceeded to drive all the trams back into their sheds, bringing Wellington's public transport system to a standstill.<sup>15</sup>

The effect of the strike was immediate. The first thing many people noticed was the relative quiet, without the usual tram traffic din. Many regular shoppers had ignored fears of a strike and come into town for the end-of-season sales. They now had to trudge home with their purchases, but the sales continued to be well attended throughout the duration of the strike. Some of the better-off citizens hired cabs and taxis to get home; a crowd was reported to have jeered Inspector Fuller as he rode past in a taxi. With a pleasant summer evening, most people decided to walk. On the first day the novelty aspect gave an almost festive air to events, with large groups of commuters walking in company. Pedestrians walked through the Kilbirnie, Hataitai and Karori tunnels, normally forbidden to foot traffic. Wellington's keen theatre goers walked miles in and out of town on the first night of the strike, as the famous English actor, H. B. Irving, was appearing as Hamlet at the Opera House.<sup>16</sup>

Wellington was blessed with a run of good weather during the strike, making the new walking life-style much easier to cope with. The majority of regular tram users walked but a range of other solutions were devised. Enterprising owners of drays set up a cheap transport service to the outer suburbs, touting for business in the evenings outside theatres and hotels. Commuters hitched lifts on milk carts and butcher's vans. Cycling underwent a boom and more motorbikes were seen on the streets. Inner city restaurants did well out of the strike, as many city workers, who normally caught the tram home for lunch, were forced to stay in town. The shopkeepers of Newtown were also happy with the strike, as local

shoppers stayed closer to home. The Newtown tram depot's resident cat was less happy, as it was lonely with only a few watchmen for company, rather than the usual crowd of friendly tramwaymen. In a new and modern twist, pioneering movie entrepreneur, Thomas West filmed incidents from the strike. 'The Tramway Strike' played at King's Theatre, Courtenay Place, with Wellingtonians flocking to see themselves on the big screen.<sup>17</sup>



Electric trams, Courtenay Place, Wellington. Date: c. 1910  
Ref: 1/2-007722-G, Alexander Turnbull Library.

A Tramways Strike Committee was formed that included the Tramways Union executive, along with representatives of the Wellington TLC, plus Hickey and Ross from the NZFoL. A series of negotiations between the Strike Committee and the City Council over the next few days produced no results. On Sunday the Strike Committee and representatives of most of Wellington's unions met at Trades Hall. This meeting agreed that the Wellington Employers' Association was behind the City Council's stand. The unionists accused the Council of using public funds to combat the strike. The union representatives pledged unanimously that, if called on, they would urge their members to strike in support of the tramwaymen. An ultimatum was issued demanding a City Council response to the union's demands by noon on Monday. If the Council remained intransigent there was now the threat of a general strike.<sup>18</sup>

A mass meeting of strikers and their supporters was held at the Basin Reserve on Sunday afternoon. The fine, warm weather helped draw a crowd of 5,000 people, who turned out in their Sunday best. Tom Young, of the Seamen's Union, spoke about the failure to get a satisfactory agreement and the call for a general strike, drawing an enthusiastic response from the crowd. The



Mass meeting during tramway strike, Newtown Park, Wellington. Date: 1 February 1912. Ref: 1/1-019774-G10, Alexander Turnbull Library.

meeting voted in favour of a motion from Jack Carey of the Hotel Workers Union, that the Council sign the union's terms of agreement or resign. Pat Hickey, seconding the motion, argued that only once the public started backing the workers' struggle for justice, should strikers start considering the public's convenience. He raised the possibility of a general strike not just in Wellington, but around the country.<sup>19</sup>

As a general strike started to look like a real possibility, the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, decided it was time to intervene. Following the results of the recent 1911 election Ward was still scrambling to pull together enough MPs for his Liberal Party to retain power. His position remained precarious in early February 1912, but Ward assumed he retained enough prestige to broker an agreement. On Monday morning the prime minister conducted shuttle diplomacy between the City Council and the Strike Committee. Ward played up the drama of the occasion, arriving at the Town Hall in an expensive motor vehicle. He then drove up to the Trades Hall, less than a block away in lower Cuba Street. After a short

interval Ward emerged, smiling to the crowd that had gathered outside, and drove back to the Town Hall. The Strike Committee members, taking less of a grand-standing approach, walked the short distance to the Town Hall, where a large crowd were congregating.<sup>20</sup>

After about half an hour, Ward, the city councillors and the Strike Committee representatives appeared at the Town Hall steps, with Sir Joseph announcing that an agreement had been reached to end the strike. Fuller was to be transferred to another part of the Tramway Service, where he would not be working with union members, while the City Council pledged there would be no victimisation of strikers. The Strike Committee then put the terms of the agreement to the striking unionists at a 3pm meeting at the King's Theatre. Another large crowd gathered outside in anticipation of the result. Following two hours of discussion, Hickey came out of the theatre to announce the unionists had voted unanimously to accept the terms and go back to work. The tramwaymen and their supporters regarded the strike as a complete victory.<sup>21</sup>





Bluff and Bungle (Ward intervenes). *NZ Truth*, 10/02/12 p.5

The tramways victory appeared to show that the NZFoL and the industrial unionists were on the right track with their support for unified industrial direct action. There were, however, special circumstances that might have sounded a warning to anyone who saw the tramways strike as a model case. The united action of the NZFoL and the Wellington TLC was the key to the strike's success. The differences between the two labour peak bodies were, however, too deep-seated for that moment of solidarity to last. The Fuller case had raised the ire of a large number of Wellington unionists, but the resulting solidarity was only possible because the dispute was based around issues a broad range of unionists could easily understand and identify with. This would not be the case a few months later at Waihi, when the Red Fed affiliated Waihi Miners' Union, struck in opposition to the formation of a breakaway arbitrationist union. Many TLCs and other moderate unionists strongly opposed the Waihi miners' actions, refusing to give them any support. This lack of solidarity was an important factor behind the tragic defeat of the Waihi strike that November, which in turn helped drive the events leading into the Great Strike of the following year.

1. *NZ Truth*, 16 Dec 1911, 6; Alex Sutherland, Sec Tramways Union, to Wellington Town Clerk, 8 Jan 1912, Wellington City Archives (WCA).
2. Alex Sutherland, Sec Tramways Union, to Stuart Richardson Electrical Engineer & Manager, Tramways and Electricity Dept. Wellington City Corp., 8 Jan 1912, WCA.
3. S. Richardson to Tramways Committee 15 Dec 1911; Tramways Committee notes 19 Dec 1911, WCA.
4. *Evening Post*, 20 Dec 1911, 2.
5. A. Sutherland to S. Richardson, 26 Dec 1911, WCA.
6. A. Sutherland to Town Clerk 8 Jan 1912, WCA.
7. *NZ Times*, 5 Jan 1912, 1, 26 Jan 1912, 1, 27 Jan 1912, 1; *Evening Post*, 5 Jan 1912, 3, 26 Jan 1912, 5, 8, 27 Jan 1912, 7; *Dominion*, 26 Jan 1912, 5, 27 Jan 1912, 4.
8. e.g. *Dominion*, 22 Dec 1911, 4; *Evening Post*, 28 Dec 1911, 6; *NZ Times*, 27 Jan 1912, 4.
9. e.g. *NZ Truth*, 16 Dec 1911, 6; 13 Jan 1912, 5. See also R. Yska, *Truth: the Rise and Fall of the People's Paper* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2010), 46-48.
10. NZ Federation of Labour Manifesto, 26 Jan 1912 in *Evening Post*, 7 Jan 1912, 7; P. H. Hickey, "Red" *Fed Memoirs* (Wellington: NZ Worker Print, 1925), 47-48.
11. *Evening Post*, 30 Jan 1912, 8; *Dominion*, 31 Jan 1912, 5; *NZ Times*, 31 Jan 1912, 1.
12. *NZ Times*, 31 Jan 1912, 1; *Dominion*, 31 Jan 1912, 5; *Evening Post*, 30 Jan 1912, 8.
13. e.g. *Dominion*, 29 Jan 1912, 5.
14. *Dominion*, 26 Jan 1912, 5; 1 Jan 1912, 6; *NZ Truth*, 3 Jan 1912, 5, *Evening Post*, 26 Jan 1912, 3, 31 Jan 1912, 8; *NZ Times*, 31 Jan 1912, 1.
15. *NZ Times*, 1 Jan 1912, 1; *NZ Truth*, 3 Jan 1912, 5; Hickey, "Red" *Fed Memoirs*, 48.
16. *NZ Truth*, 3 Feb 1912, 5; *NZ Times*, 1 Feb 1912, 1, 5; *Dominion*, 1 Feb 1912, 5-6; *Evening Post*, 1 Feb 1912, 7-8; 5 Feb 1912, 7.
17. *Dominion*, 1 Feb 1912, 5; 3 Feb 1912, 5; 6 Feb 1912, 6, 8; *Evening Post*, 2 Feb 1912, 8; 3 Feb 1912, 6, 9, 8 Feb 1912, 11.
18. *NZ Times*, 5 Feb 1912, 1; *NZ Truth*, 10 Feb 1912, 1.
19. *NZ Times*, 5 Feb 1912, 1, 5; *Dominion*, 5 Feb 1912, 5; *Evening Post*, 5 Feb 1912, 3, 7.
20. *Evening Post*, 5 Feb 1912, 8; *NZ Times*, 6 Feb 1912, 1; *Dominion*, 6 Feb 1912, 5; *NZ Truth*, 10 Feb 1912, 1, 6.
21. *Evening Post*, 5 Feb 1912, 8; *NZ Times*, 6 Feb 1912, 1; *Dominion*, 6 Feb 1912, 5; *NZ Truth*, 10 Feb 1912, 1, 6; *Maoriland Worker*, 9 Feb 1912, 5.



Strikebreakers at Waihi carrying the Union Jack, 1912 (detail, see page 21).  
Waihi Arts Centre and Museum

# How the Red Feds responded to “Half-caste Maori” strikebreakers at Waihi and Huntly

## James Robb

*Note: In quoting historic documents, I have not attempted to modernise their Anglicised spelling and usage of M ori words, offensive as some of these things may seem today. The English language of the time, loaded as it was with racist terms and concepts – like ‘half-caste’ – and the mangling of the M ori language, were very much part of the problem that the workers in this story had to navigate, and need to be seen in their original form in order to understand and appreciate the situation.*

The six-month-long strike at the Waihi gold mine in 1912 was the longest and most hard-fought class battle fought on New Zealand soil to that date. It pitted the Waihi Miners’ Union and the wider class-struggle-led union movement of which it was part, the ‘Red’ Federation of Labour, against the gold mine owners, the employers organisations nationwide, the capitalist press, the police and justice systems, the government, the pro-Arbitration majority of the trade unions, a scab union set up by the bosses, and, towards the end, employer-organised thugs and strike-breakers. Among the last category were a significant number of M ori.

Pukewa hill, on which the Waihi gold mine was established, had been w hi tapu belonging to the Ng ti Hako hap , one of the Tainui peoples of the Hauraki plains. The first gold prospectors who began tunnelling into the quartz outcrop in 1878 quickly discovered this when they were confronted with a group of M ori angrily protesting their desecration of an ancient burial site.<sup>1</sup>

Under M ori stewardship, the Hauraki plains had been a bountiful wetland. Its rivers, harakeke marshes, and forests of giant kahikatea (up to 60 metres tall and with trunks 2 metres in diameter), abundant with kerer , fish, and eels, supported a large M ori population. Rivers were the highways of communication – the Waihou River (named the Thames River by European explorer James Cook because of its resemblance to the great Thames River flowing through London) was navigable as far south as Matamata.

Following the alienation of the land through raupatu [confiscation] and purchase after the land wars of the 1860s, the wetland was drained and its rich peat soils transformed into dairy farms for European settlers; the Waihou River silted up and became the filthy dairying-effluent-laden drain it is today. The great kahikatea forests were cut down; the kahikatea timber was made into butter boxes – one of the greatest of the many acts of environmental devastation that accompanied European settlement.<sup>2</sup> M ori landholdings were reduced to the less productive m nuka-scrub-covered hills to the east, and when gold was discovered there, they were lost too. Allotment of European farms and settlement and the draining of the wetlands had begun not long before the time of the Waihi strike.

In that period M ori had little reason to make common cause with the labour movement. The confiscations of their best land (and further purchases under duress) had destroyed their commercial farming which had supplied food to the urban colonists. M ori were pushed to a bare subsistence on the rural margins, excluded from access to the cheap credit available to settler-farmers and thus from the means to develop these remaining lands on an equal basis.

The labour movement itself had only recently emerged from this colonial enterprise; during its first two decades of existence it was locked in close political alliance with the Liberal Party government, which ruled from 1890 to 1912 and was responsible for the most rapid phase of alienation of M ori land.

In 1912 M ori were an almost entirely rural people, excluded from the urban trades, and thereby also largely excluded from the union movement. They remained a significant component of the working class in semi-rural industries such as flax-milling, and as shearers and labourers on European-owned farms, as well as in such work as construction of roads and farm buildings and draining the swamps. However, with a few exceptions (notably the shearers and flaxmill workers) these rural



M ori labourers digging drainage ditches Hauraki plains, with remnants of kahikatea forests in background. Ohinemuri Regional History Journals.

workers were beyond the reach of the unions – at least until the rise of the Red Feds from 1906.

For the gold miners at Waihi, there was much at stake in the strike that began in May 1912. They were defending the union which had won significant improvements in safety and health conditions in the mine. The union had forced the bosses to end the divisive system of competitive contracting that pitted miner against miner. For four months, the Waihi strikers succeeded in keeping the mine closed and the town quiet, while the mine owners made no move to open it with scabs. The bosses were hoping to starve the miners back to work.

When the starvation strategy failed, the mine bosses and their government moved to incite violent incidents by means of police provocations and arrests. By October, some 45 strikers had been hauled before the courts and carted off to prison in Auckland, including the entire local union leadership. More were arrested over the next few weeks until there were more than 70 miners jailed. On 2 October, the gold mining company announced that they would be re-opening the mine with scabs.

Only a small number of strike-breakers appeared for work on that morning, while a large number of Federationist miners and their families turned out to denounce them as scabs and traitors to their class.<sup>3</sup> The strike-breakers included a group of about twenty who had already been working the battery at Waikino for a week or so. Federation leader Robert Semple described this early strike-breaking effort: "Just now, at Waikino, they had got a few old men and overgrown Maori boys on the job, and in ordinary circumstances the company wouldn't give

these ancients and boys a job. There was no chance of the miners turning to. No miners could be got to scab."<sup>4</sup>

If the reference to "overgrown Maori boys" had a whiff of racist condescension about it, Semple was not alone. Other Federation leaders expressed their contempt of the strike-breakers in such terms. Peter Fraser, speaking in the name of the Federation, telegraphed to the press from Waihi about the first day of the scab operation, "Great success here. Only four miners by occupation, three of them employed surface, returned [to work]. Twenty others drafted from Waikino, mostly Maori boys and derelicts. Great enthusiasm. Crowds of workers and their wives everywhere."<sup>5</sup> The *Maoriland Worker*, voice of the Federation of Labour, described the first day's strikebreakers in similar terms.<sup>6</sup>

The *Maoriland Worker* recognised the grave threat to working class interests posed by the efforts to recruit M ori strikers – although their statement also reveals a noticeable blindness regarding the status of M ori. An editorial on the push to break the strike includes the following:

"We feel impelled to make brief reference to the detestable entrapping of Maoris into bosses' strike-breaking lackeys. We have hitherto rejoiced in the non-existence of the colour line in this country, and speak only because we are seriously concerned lest other days should know not Joseph [a Biblical reference to a story in Exodus, where a new king of Egypt who 'knew not Joseph' began systematically enslaving and oppressing the Jews]. Maoris have been duped and deceived into service as union-smasher.

"On this point, what are the parliamentary representatives of the Maori race doing that they should sit silently inactive while emissaries of the employers are travelling among the Maoris and by every possible device practically kidnapping some of them into scabbery? Have these parliamentary representatives no pride in the continued good name of their people that, they do not indignantly resent the tainting of them with the indelible tarnish of strikebreaking? Do they understand what it will mean racially if once the workers are made to regard the Maoris as potential industrial blacklegs?"<sup>7</sup>

One indication of where it could lead was an incident where a M ori travelling towards Paeroa near Waihi by train, with two P keh companions, was assumed to be a

strike-breaker by a Federationist travelling in the same carriage, and threatened with a pistol to his head. His p keh companions were left unmolested. The case eventually led to a conviction of the Federationist.<sup>8</sup>

The M ori Members of Parliament at this time were pirana Ngata, Te Rangi H roa, James Carroll and Taare Parata, all aligned with the Liberal Party, and M ui P mare, who was a minister without portfolio in the Reform government that took office in July 1912. On 1 November, as public pressure mounted against the unjust jailing of the 70 Waihi strikers, there was a parliamentary discussion and vote on releasing the strikers. James Carroll, Te Rangi H roa, and Taare Parata favoured immediate release, while M ui P mare voted with the majority to keep them in jail for a year. pirana Ngata's vote is not recorded.

The number of strikebreakers slowly increased each day. Pickets greeted the arrival of the scabs at the mine entrance with boos and shouting, and on at least one occasion "Maori war cries."<sup>9</sup> Each individual who scabbed was 'followed-up' by a group of picketing strikers and their wives shouting insults as they returned home. Although a small number of unionists broke ranks, the increased number of scabs was due mainly to the recruitment of strike-breakers brought into the district from Auckland and other places. Their assignment was not to mine the rock, but rather, to provoke violent clashes with the unionists. And by the unionists' own accounts, an increasing proportion of these thugs were M ori.

The union leadership recognised the danger, but was at a loss to explain it or combat it.

After the mine re-opened on 2 October, the number of police, strike-breakers and thugs brought in to Waihi grew rapidly, and the pushing and shoving on the streets between them and the union-loyal miners became more violent.

"One of the most prominent workers who signed on at the Waihi Company's mine on the first day of the resumption of work is a six-footer Maori, who is well known as the 'white hope'. He is a most combative individual, fears no man, and has challenged all and sundry to 'have a go.' His arrival at Waikino was marked by rather a dramatic incident. Instead of getting out of the train at the railway station proper he disembarked in



Strikebreakers at Waihi carrying the Union Jack, 1912, including a number who are clearly M ori. Waihi Arts Centre and Museum

the Waihi Company's yard. The strike pickets pointed out to him that that spot was not a station. The visitor replied that he had arrived at his destination and was going to work. That settled it, and the 'fat was in the fire' immediately.

"When getting his traps together a pair of blood-stained boxing gloves tumbled out, which acted in a somewhat soothing manner upon the pickets, who by this time were frankly reeling off their several and varied opinions at the Maorilander's advent. When he arrived by the company's train on the morning of the 2nd inst., he took up a position on one of the tip heads in full view of the crowd below, and executed a Maori haka in fine style."<sup>10</sup>

Further details about this individual were added by the *Auckland Star*: "The police have had many anxious moments in watching their dusky charge. He hails from Paeroa way, and is said to be an ex-college boy."<sup>11</sup>

The fact that this man was called the "white hope" might seem incongruous at first glance, since he was M ori, not 'white.' In the historical context, it is more easily understood.

Jack Johnson, a Black American boxer, had won the title of World Heavyweight Champion in 1908, in a fight in Sydney, Australia, and held the title for seven years. Johnson had to overcome the huge racist obstacles of the Jim Crow era; his victory upturned racist conventions about racial segregation and the inferiority of Black people, and inspired Black people across the globe. Johnson married a white woman and opened an unsegregated night club. For the seven years of his reign as champion, white supremacists longed in vain for a

"Great White Hope", a white boxer who could defeat Johnson and "put the African in his rightful place."

It appears that a similar longing for a fighter who would put the rebellious Waihi workers 'in their rightful place' motivated the enthusiastic description of this strikebreaker as the 'white hope'.

The Waihi strike ended abruptly in early November, not by the company successfully resuming mining operations with the labour of strike-breakers, but through a violent assault on the union of the miners by the scabs and thugs. On 12 November a crowd of armed scabs, with the active support of the police, forced their way into the Union hall, routing a small number of unionist defenders, and took possession of it. In the melee, one cop took a gunshot wound and a striker defending the hall, an Engine Driver named Frederick Evans, was beaten to death by the cops and thugs. The triumphant scabs then took possession of the streets as well, and again with the full cooperation of the police, drove the unionists out of town by means of guns, batons, and kerosene and matches.

By that time, according to the union, M ori made up a majority of those entering the mine each day. Some weeks later Herbert Kennedy, the union president appointed after the first president was jailed, testified in court that "To the best of his belief the statement in connection with his reference that two-thirds of the workers in the mines were half-caste Maoris, and that the pahs in the Thames had been circularised to obtain them, was correct. He counted 158 men going to work on a certain day, and he estimated that over 100 of them were half-castes... He had seen a circular from one of the pahs offering men work. He did not know the author of the circular. The circular in question was printed in the Maori tongue. He did not know Maori, but it was read out to him by a Maori."<sup>12</sup>

The M ori strikebreakers played a prominent role in the court cases relating to the assaults and violence of the last days of the strike. Harry Holland reported in the *Maoriland Worker* that "The *Worker* representative counted 25 Maoris, mostly half-breeds, in the vicinity of the court, at a time when about a hundred persons in all were present... When the court opened on Wednesday the big Maori who carries the nickname of the 'Snake Charmer' occupied a chair inside the railing, and near him sat Mr. Barry, the mine superintendent. The big

Maori held a big pipe in his hand and wore a big scab badge in the lapel of his coat. On the previous day, when the union vice-president, McLennan, sat inside the rail, he was ordered out by the police, who even refused to let him stand outside the rail near the union's solicitor."<sup>13</sup>

These developments were quite shocking to the unionists, and their first attempts to account for the phenomenon of M ori strikebreaking were lamentable. Even Harry Holland, who had a proud record of fighting racism – he had strenuously opposed the White Australia policy, and denounced the racist and chauvinistic policy of the union movement towards the Kanaka labourers in the Queensland sugar plantations – nonetheless fell back on the reactionary language of racial purity when attempting to explain it.

Holland's book about the strike, co-authored with *Maoriland Worker* editor Bob Ross and Frank O'Flynn, *The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike*,<sup>14</sup> contains the following passage: "The gold-owners circularised the Maori pahs, and held out inducements to the Maoris to scab, and they enmeshed a multiplicity of half-castes and quadroons and octoroons but scarcely any full-bloods. 'The full-blood Maori never scab,' said a venerable chief. 'It is only when he get the white blood in him he scab.' And so, with toughs and thugs and gun-men from the cities, Maori half-breeds and tribal outcasts from the pahs, and those physical and moral degenerates among the whites who figure as professional scabs, the companies made up that fearsome aggregation that the capitalist press, the hireling lawyers, law-makers, and law administrators found so much dull and humorless satisfaction in deferring to as 'the workers.'"

In the language of racial purity, quadroons and octoroons are the terms for quarter-blood and eighth-blood respectively. Reading this passage today, it is hard to believe that the unnamed 'venerable chief,' with his imperfect English, was anything but an expression of Holland's own historically-conditioned ignorance. After another century of intermarriage between M ori and p keh , the listing of fractions of racial blood as an explanation of anything can only appear to modern readers as both ridiculous and offensive.

But it was ignorance, rather than prejudice. The weird and essentially racist contortions the Federation side were forced to engage in to explain M ori strikebreaking, despite the fact that they "rejoiced in the non-existence of

the colour line in this country", can be traced to their blindness to the national oppression faced by M ori.

It was true that, due to their military dominance at the time of the founding of the New Zealand colony and for many years afterwards, M ori enjoyed formal equality under the law. It was true that this was a far more favourable situation than that faced by Black Americans under Jim Crow law, or Australian Aborigines under the laws of 'terra nullius,' or Africans in the Cape Colony. It was true that this placed the entire working class in New Zealand in a more favourable position than workers in those countries. Those facts were certainly worth rejoicing.

But it was not true that M ori enjoyed equality or freedom from national oppression. The strikebreaking by M ori at Waihi had brought the newly-developing labour movement face to face with the fact of the dispossession and discrimination against M ori in New Zealand society. The nature of the national oppression of M ori was something that the Red Fed leaders had yet to learn. They were, however, capable of learning and, in the further course of the struggle, they did learn.

Meanwhile, the problem was not about to disappear.

When the first batch of arrested unionists from Waihi were transported to jail in Auckland, some large demonstrations in solidarity with them were held, including a march by 3,000 workers from the Auckland waterfront, who met the boat carrying the prisoners at the wharf and marched alongside them to the jail.<sup>15</sup> On the same day, at the coal-mining centre of Huntly in the Waikato region, the miners stopped work for a day in protest.

The Huntly coal bosses then raised the stakes, locking out the miners there, and sacking the union executive in the mine. With the defeat of the strike at Waihi, they looked to press their advantage at Huntly, and attempted to organise a scab union in the mines. As at Waihi, they sought to recruit local M ori into this effort.<sup>16</sup>

This was more difficult for the bosses than at Waihi, mainly because among the members of the Federationist union there were some M ori coal miners. A report from Huntly in the *Maoriland Worker* on 1 November reads: "Rumor through from Maoris that 30 had joined new union, they having been told 25 pakeha had already

joined. October 21. 5.30 a.m. Six members visited Maori pah to ascertain truth of rumor and persuade them to refrain from work. At 6.30 a constable arrived. A slight scene ensued owing to the attitude adopted by the constable, who is evidently new to this kind of work. Five Maoris essayed to go to work. The constable rode across the river with them, the pah being on the opposite side of the river from the mines. A big crowd met the Maoris on the town side. There was no demonstration; simply a silent stare... October 24. Two Maoris turned out to work. The Maori members of the Union brought inside pressure to bear on their fellows to cease work; the two at work are not Huntly natives, we are led to believe."<sup>17</sup>

Once again, the *Maoriland Worker* raised the alarm about the danger this situation presented to M ori as well as unionists. "To what depths will the hirelings of Capitalism sink to gain their foul, filthy, dastardly, deadly ends! Social opinions, political opinions, national opinions and religious opinions are used with the chief end of dividing the workers among themselves that they may defeat themselves. But this subtle slimy, snake-like, treacherous act at Huntly to create a color line in New Zealand by estranging the pakeha and Maori ranks as the most despicable of all treacherous acts aimed at a noble race by unscrupulous pakehas. Create a color line here and confiscation of native reserves follows as night follows day, while the extinction of another noble race will soon follow."<sup>18</sup>

The scab union was eventually formed at Huntly, and registered under the Arbitration Act with 93 members in early November. Under the terms of the Arbitration Act, this then became the legally recognised union for all the miners, despite the fact that a far larger number had chosen to de-register and join the Federation. The Huntly coal miners were now in the same position as the Waihi miners.<sup>19</sup>

But the Huntly coalfield happened to be located in the Waikato, at the heart of the K ngitanga (King Movement), the centre from where some of the most determined resistance to colonial encroachment on M ori land had been led for the past half-century. The traditions and spirit of the K ngitanga resistance were still very much alive at this time. In the midst of the union struggle at Huntly coal mines, the third M ori king, Mahuta T whiao, died on 9 November, and his son Te Rata Mahuta became the new king two weeks later.



Te Rata Mahuta, left, with Kngitanga officials on visit to King George of England 1914. Auckland War Memorial Museum Tamaki Paenga Hira Reference: GN672-1n18

Te Rata must have had a sense of what was happening in the nearby coal mines. An article in the *Maoriland Worker* dated 6 December reads, "Few are the kings of these modern days who rely on loyalty and love as the foundation and support of their thrones. In this respect Te Rata the Maori King, is king of them all. It is interesting to note that the white wage-slaves and the native Kaimahi resident here and working in the mines have a staunch friend in Te Rata. During the recent cessation of coal-getting in Huntly, Walsh [organiser of the scab union – JR] endeavoured to organise scabs among the Maoris. He succeeded in getting six on promise of big pay. The pickets reasoned with them and one returned. Te Rata saw the president and secretary of the union and promised to intercede; he did: result, no Maori scabs."<sup>20</sup>

I don't know the names of the union president and secretary who took the initiative of speaking to King Te Rata. Most probably they were among the union executive sacked for demonstrating their solidarity with the Waihi workers, and subsequently forced by the blacklisting to leave Huntly. The names of the M ori rank and file union coalminers, who also played such a key part, are also unknown. They deserve greater recognition, as does Te Rata himself, for this act. It was perhaps the first occasion that a central leader of the M ori people had openly aligned himself with the fighting union movement in New Zealand.

After a couple of years of back and forth victories and setbacks, the fighting union at the Huntly coal mines was defeated despite their efforts (with tragic results a short time later.) But the alliance between the M ori people and the working class that was formed in the heat of that struggle proved more durable. It developed, strengthened and spread over the next twenty years.

In part this was based on a common opposition to the World War and conscription. Te Rata opposed military conscription, as did Holland, Fraser, Webb and all the leading Red Feds. Te Rata's younger brothers were among the Waikato M ori targeted by a campaign of persecution on account of their opposition to conscription; one of them was imprisoned at Narrow Neck naval base along with a number of other objectors to conscription. Beyond the Waikato, the alliance later deepened in the R tana movement of the 1920s and thirties. Harry Holland played a part in cementing this alliance, which lasted in one form or another for seventy years.

As far as I am aware, in more than a hundred years since that time there has not been another instance of strike-breaking in which M ori played such a prominent role.

James Robb is presently completing a biography of Harry Holland, the early twentieth-century labour movement militant in Australia and New Zealand. He writes a blog on working class history and politics at <https://convincingreasons.wordpress.com>.

1. See Roche, *The Red and the Gold*, 12-14 for more detail of this incident.
2. See Ng Uruora, *the Groves of Life*, by Geoff Park, for more on the destruction of the lowland forests.
3. *Poverty Bay Herald*, 3 October 1912, 5.
4. *NZ Truth*, 28 September, 7.
5. *Evening Post*, 2 October, 8.
6. *Maoriland Worker*, 11 October, 5.
7. *Ibid*, 4.
8. *Auckland Star*, 23 October, 5; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 30 October, 2.
9. *Thames Star*, 8 October, 2.
10. *Poverty Bay Herald*, 26 October, 5.
11. *Auckland Star*, 24 October, 5.
12. *Wanganui Herald*, 27 November, 5.
13. *Maoriland Worker*, 6 December, 1.
14. Holland, Ross, and "Ballot Box", *The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike*, 94.
15. *NZ Times*, 19 September, 1.
16. *NZ Herald*, 19 October, 8.
17. *Maoriland Worker*, 1 November, 4.
18. *Maoriland Worker*, 8 November, 4.
19. *NZ Times*, 4 November, 7.
20. *Maoriland Worker*, 6 December, 4.



## Mayday in Blackball

### Paul Maunder



Christchurch School Strike 4 Climate activists speak at the Mayday Forum in Blackball

Mahi Tupuna, the Blackball Museum of Working Class History, which is maintained by donations from unions, has always had the kaupapa that as a small institution in an isolated region, it must endeavour to retain the spirit of the past it celebrates by playing the role of an activist organisation.

It therefore annually mounts an exhibition on a political or union topic, it runs a schools programme which teaches the value of collectivism and it helps look after Unions West Coast. It has recently set up Te Puawai Co-operative Society as an incubator for co-op ventures. Most importantly it runs a comprehensive programme of activities each Mayday, including debates, choir items,

marches and forums on topics of local interest. Of late these forums have focused on the transition economy, specifically geared to the Coast and the Museum has begun to partner with Unions West Coast and the local Green and Labour Party branches in running the event.

This year saw the biggest Mayday yet with over 100 people in attendance, with the forum topic being climate change. The day started with Te Puawai Co-operative's shareholders giving the go ahead for the board to facilitate the establishing of a Blackball-based shuttle and relocation service co-op for the Paparua Great Walk.

By lunchtime, the hall was reaching capacity point for Mario Alzugaray, the Cuban ambassador to brief the gathering on current US imperialist moves in Central and South America and the situation in Venezuela.

With the arrival of Climate Minister, James Shaw and Agriculture Minister and local MP, Damien O'Connor, the forum on climate change was under way.

Blackball resident, Te Whaea Ireland, welcomed Lisa Tumahai, Ng i Tahu kaiwhakahaere, who then spoke of the research and preparations for climate change the iwi are making: movements toward sustainability, guaranteeing of power supply, confronting dairying issues, and contemplating relocation of some marae and other facilities. They are thinking of a time span of 500 years. "It is our task to hold the land for succeeding generations", she said.

James Shaw then spoke of the Zero Carbon Bill and its implications, emphasising that there were many voices to be listened to in terms of impact, but that it was an absolutely necessary move.

West Coast Regional Council chairperson, Andrew Robb spoke of the difficulties faced at the local level as coping with climate change brought additional expense, balked at by the ratepayer. Grey District mayor, Tony Kokshoorn, said the provincial growth fund had promise but the question remained of how to turn promises into sustainable jobs.

Three young people from the Christchurch branch of the Students Strike 4 Climate movement then gave passionate statements about the need for immediate action, the need to stop the slow pussyfooting of government and local bodies scared of electoral backlash. "It is our future at stake", they said. They received a standing ovation.

One of a small group of extractivists then saw fit to insult these young people by calling them brainwashed. The rest of the room was flabbergasted, but one of the students, aged 12, confronted him. "We've done our research and we will not be silenced", she said.

For a moment the issue was crystal clear: the forces of death confronted by the forces of life.

A short service to mark Workers Memorial Day was conducted by Garth Elliott of E t union, with a wreath laid by Lorna Crane from the Labour Party, before the young people opened the new exhibition on climate change, a creative response to the issue by students from Lake Brunner, Barrytown and Karoro Schools.

The day finished with a march through town to the Community Centre Hall for the final performance of Kiwi/Possum's play about dairying, *Whenua/DP4Lot173* to an appreciative audience, followed by dinner.

It was then a moment of political life in a region which lacks the broad spectrum of political culture. In the following days a newspaper debate over the climate crisis and extractivism took place. The museum board has decided however, that these forums, which involve 'speaking to power' have perhaps run their course and that what is required is an educating of local activists at a deeper level. Next Mayday will see then, a more rigorous day long discussion of transition, with unionists and community activists being invited from Taranaki to share their experience.

A couple of years ago when the Newcastle Union Choir sang at Blackball as part of its tour, they commented that it would be a wonderful shift of hegemony if every small town in Australasia similarly celebrated its working class past, rather than focusing on Great Wars 'for freedom' (or whatever it's currently called).

We were therefore gratified to hear of the moves to open a museum at Trades Hall.

# Just Transition - an overview

## Bill Bradford

We are facing the possibility of a complete breakdown of the ecosystem that supports human life on this planet. While it is difficult to accurately predict timelines, or the exact form the crisis we call climate change will take, we are certainly looking at a level of economic chaos and social dislocation never experienced before.

Despite the scientific consensus, governments have been slow to accept the need to deal with the crisis. Even when they do, they appear incapable of acting with the urgency required, or pushing for the fundamental changes that are necessary.

The message from scientists has taken a long time to be understood by the public and there are powerful interests in favour of continuing business as usual. This group includes governments and political parties that are aware of the problem but are so committed to orthodox economic policy they refuse to go beyond its constraints. It also includes businesses and investors who have a large stake in the polluting industries and speculators who profit from disasters.

A favourite tactic of these groups is to argue that while we must make some changes, we must maintain economic policies within existing fiscal parameters. Farmers are particularly vociferous, insisting that they prop up the whole economy and no policies that deviate from 'business as usual' for them should be implemented. Media debate is usually similarly framed in terms of what can be done without upsetting the current economic paradigm.

Large polluters are also fond of suggesting new technology will magically solve all our problems if we patiently wait for it to come on stream.

The above groups are adept at setting people against each other and one of their favourite tactics around climate change is to play the part of defenders of the working class, opposing actions on the basis it will cost jobs. This fear of job losses is politically potent and politicians including Trump in the USA, Morrison in Australia and Bolsonaro in Brazil have used these fears to propel themselves into power over some of the largest carbon

emitting economies in the world, undoing what little progress these countries have made to combat climate change and undermining international agreements.

In activist and union circles there is an increasing understanding that capitalism, with its underlying need for perpetual growth, and its prioritising of the generation of profits regardless of consequences, is the major cause of climate change.

Just Transition is a framework advocating a range of actions designed to protect workers' jobs and livelihoods while economies are shifting to sustainable production methods which will moderate climate change and protect biodiversity.

Te Kauae Kaimahi, The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (CTU) has a well developed Just Transition policy. The complete policy can be seen at <http://www.union.org.nz/just-transition/>

CTU Secretary Sam Huggard describes the policy as being designed to attract broad buy in. He says its three main strands are investment in new industries, a planned transition for workers and social security.

Some progress has been made on the first of these strands, with work towards the formation of New Zealand Green Investment Finance Ltd being underway. The idea is to use a \$100 million start-up capital injection from the government to attract private investment in low emissions industries. Regardless of some of its more controversial aspects the Provincial Growth Fund can also, to some extent, be viewed as fitting in with investment in new industries.

The second area of a Just Transition would involve providing a range of measures of support for workers having to transfer from jobs in high emissions industry to more sustainable employment. This support could include the provision of training, protecting income, assistance with housing and any other measure that would ensure the transition is as smooth and painless as possible. No real progress has been made in terms of safeguarding workers interests in this area.

The third aspect of the CTU's Just Transition strategy is the need for a fair and adequate social security system. In the likely eventuality that climate change results in major economic disruption and a sequence of environmental disasters, even those who are financially secure at present could find themselves without income. A reliable welfare system, including a form of Basic Income, will be essential to prevent extreme hardship for many. However, changing demographics combined with mean spirited neo liberal economics have left our social security system fragmented, unfair and inadequate to meet people's needs, let alone deal with any crisis in the future.

The CTU had representation on the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) set up by the government to review the welfare system and the Group's recommendations were an opportunity to revamp the social security system, to make it fit for purpose for those who need it now, and to provide the protection people will need during any transition forced through climate change. Disappointingly, the government opted to make only a few minor changes to the existing system instead of the comprehensive overhaul recommended.

Thus the government has been willing to help build resilience in the face of climate change where it will benefit capital and provide new arenas for investors, but has not shown a similar commitment when it comes to looking after the well-being of workers and others on low incomes.

This highlights the risk that the debate around Just Transition and climate change becomes simply about new industries while taking no account of what happens to affected workers or the need for a fundamentally improved approach to social security.

The only real example of union involvement in a Just Transition process in this country so far has been in Taranaki, and this has revealed these issues with some clarity (see page 30 of this *Bulletin*).

Unions are also supporting other actions around climate change in Aotearoa New Zealand. A student strike is planned for 22 September 2019 as part of an international movement by young people frustrated at the inaction of politicians and the students have called on workers to support them. The CTU has responded and individual unions will take actions in support, including

holding stop work meetings to discuss climate change and offering logistical assistance.

Unions also support the growing activism at local government level where there is increasing pressure on local authorities to declare a climate emergency.

With the clock ticking remorselessly on climate change, the resistance of those in power to making significant change can raise the question of whether it is too late for a Just Transition and whether activities should be focussed on direct political action instead.

There is an interesting debate on this question between Tazio Muller, Senior Advisor for Climate Justice and Energy Democracy, Rosa-Luxemburg – Stiftung <https://medium.com/just-transitions/mueller-fc3f434025cc> and Annabella Rosemberg, International Programme Director for Greenpeace, previously the climate and environment officer for the International Trade Union Confederation <https://medium.com/just-transitions/the-hidden-pitfalls-of-the-just-transition-narrative-a-response-39c4ed0c0624> on the Just Transitions Online Forum.

Muller suggests there are no examples of rapid, sector-level Just Transitions that are considered actually fair and just by those dependent on extractive industries. He says that the examples used in discussions are small scale and far from just or rapid.

He raises doubt over the planning capacities, even of states equipped with complex data managing technologies, to put in place the innumerable molecular processes that are involved in the emergence of complex economic sectors in the little time we have left to do this. He concludes that we should be focussing on how to avoid catastrophic climate change and that discussions premised on being able to have it both ways, protecting the climate and protecting or generating jobs, are a waste of time, allowing us to avoid the fact hard choices have to be made.

Annabella Rosemberg disagrees. She says just because a Just Transition has never taken place doesn't mean it can never happen. This would be inconsistent with human ingenuity and our capacity for radical social innovation. She points out that power shifts have shown us that history is not simply a continuation of the past and that

radical mobilisations can bring about profound or revolutionary change.

Rosemberg says bad policies are the result of collusion between irresponsible governments and greedy corporations, not the result of demands for a Just Transition by workers and communities. Walking away from a policy of Just Transition is simply to buy into the cynical discourse that uses the excuse of the risk of job losses and accompanying social issues to justify inaction.

Our own experience here in Aotearoa New Zealand tells us that workers have never been able to rely on governments to protect and promote their interests. Progressive change, whether it is the introduction of sick leave, holiday pay, reasonable hours of work or statutory minimum wages, nearly always flows from the actions of organised workers through their unions and the building of public support for the cause.

Put simply, Just Transition should be a mechanism for building resistance to the ways in which government and business do their best to make workers carry the blame and shoulder the full burden of climate change while avoiding responsibility for their own actions. It is true that the clock is ticking but taking the time to build a movement based on strong alliances of those whom governments and corporations choose to disregard can never be a waste of time.

Even if events overtake Just Transition objectives and short-term struggles are lost, the linking of communities, unions and activist organisations around the Just Transition narrative will contribute to ongoing organising for a fair and just society and a healthy planet.

# Exploring Just Transition on the ground in Taranaki

## Jen Natoli, E tū organiser



E tū delegates who were very active in the Taranaki 2050 Just Transition workshops at the Just Transition Summit in New Plymouth with PM Ardern.

There are no jobs on a dead planet. But our planet is still alive at the moment, so what happens when the job you do is threatened right now?

That's what many working people, particularly E tū members, thought in April 2018 when PM Ardern announced a ban on all new Taranaki offshore oil and gas permits. Workers directly employed and directly-tied to the oil and gas industry in Taranaki can be forgiven for feeling blindsided by this announcement, but to PM Ardern's credit, she agreed to front a stop work meeting for E tū members to answer questions.

That visit to Taranaki kicked off a chain of events, starting with the creation of the Just Transitions Unit of

MBIE and funding of Venture Taranaki to engage in a process with our community.

Taranaki had the highest wealth per capita of any region in NZ until earlier this year. Largely, this is because of oil and gas. Oil and gas has a 40-year history in our region, and you can't miss the corresponding sponsorship and funding of our community. WOMAD? Sponsored by Todd Energy. Aquatic Centres? Sponsored by Todd Energy. What's in the Taranaki Hard Core logo? Oil and gas and agriculture. From events to sports to community, Taranaki is quite literally branded by oil and gas. Most of the oil and gas sites around Taranaki even have te reo names and the sector provides valuable jobs for Māori working people.

So it's not surprising that people in our community were shaken by this announcement and have loyalty to the sector. Even school strikers for climate talk about the fact that their whānau's livelihood depends on oil and gas. So while they are striking for our society to take rapid and radical steps to reduce emissions, they are conscious that the transition away from high emissions work must be just.

E t got early agreement to be involved in all stakeholder meetings with local and central government following the announcement. That involvement partially contributed to the public and transparent, ground-up community engagement process that spanned February and March 2019.

From 2016 until 2018, local government, iwi and business had closed meetings to develop an economic strategy for our region that diversified our economy so it became less reliant on just oil and gas and agriculture. Tapuae Roa as the process was called, identified strategies and plans around renewable energy, tourism, food and, with iwi settlements coming, "Mori Economy." But, crucially, this process did not involve any working people, unions or the larger community.

Many of the same players from Tapuae Roa were involved in the local 'lead' group for Just Transition (dubbed, for better or worse, "Taranaki 2050"), with the addition of community organisations and unions. But E t understood the importance of having rank-and-file members involved.

E t developed an EREL course about just transition participation that a small group of our local delegates attended in January 2019. Those delegates then committed to attending some of the "work groups" in February/March. Getting their employers to release them on pay to attend was not easy, and we had a mixed reaction to requesting release. The employers who had the best relationships with their on-site delegates, and those who had the most to gain/lose, went above and beyond to encourage their staff to attend and facilitated paid time off. Those who did not feel the process was relevant, or had lacklustre relationships with our union, allowed delegates to use their own leave entitlements.

Our delegates' commitment is impressive and those who needed to, used their own leave to attend the community hui and the May, Just Transition Summit. At the hui, our

delegates networked, influenced and even ended up leading groups.

E t had a large delegation at the Just Transition summit and made an impression. We networked with other unions who attended (FIRST Union, NZEI, PPTA, PSA and others) and New Plymouth Mayor Neil Holdom even gave us a 'shout out' on some media and at the start of day two.

So where are we at now? The Summit was simply to launch the draft roadmap and report from our local efforts. It is highly likely the processes we used and the report/roadmap will form a basis for such transition efforts across Aotearoa. And the community hui were simply the start. Now it's time to get more concrete about the pathways our region will start down and how we will make the 5 pillars of a just transition real in Taranaki.

E t is being asked by unions across Aotearoa and even in other parts of the world how we're doing this, and the short answer is "figuring it out as we go" with some amazing support from NZCTU and trans-Tasman solidarity from the likes of Apheda (Union Aid Australia). The Just Transition Centre (ITUC), combined with key touchstones achieved during the Paris Agreement by the UN, ILO standards and other international efforts provides good steers to us here locally. However, each region that faces transition needs to ensure the process stays true to local values and communities.

Any movement that aims to radically change society, be it economically, socially or otherwise, must build alliances with organisations that may not all share the same views. Locally, we have tried not to make enemies early, regardless of how dissimilar our views may be. This has turned into a strength for our local process: to have the chair of the NZ Petroleum lobby working and discussing possibilities alongside the activists from Climate Justice groups is a powerful image. Our diverse and open public hui created uncomfortable spaces, but as we discovered, almost everyone shares enough of the same values that we could find some common ground.

We have faced resistance at every step:

- Members resisted coming along to meet PM Ardern and discuss why she made the announcement and what she'd do to ensure the transition was just;
- Employers whose investors scattered after the

announcement resisted participating;

- Local people of influence resisted any moves to open the meetings to the public;
- Some of those involved with Tapuae Roa resisted doing another economic strategy after just finalising one;
- Local stakeholders resisted having any more than one union voice at the table;
- Some employers resisted releasing delegates to participate;
- Local environmental activists resisted engaging in the process;
- Some employers resisted having “unions” as a distinct pillar of just transition;
- Some stakeholders resisted the idea of using the word 'just' for our transition;
- Some stakeholders (from industry to union members!) resist the idea that climate change is real;
- Government resisted the idea of funding organisations to do more community and worker engagement;
- Government resists the idea of funding our process more fully to increase participation;
- Some members resist the idea of embracing the opportunities we have, positively and proactively;
- Some unions due to workload and clashing priorities resisted getting involved and resisted getting delegates/members involved;
- Etc, etc

But we have also built and strengthened relationships along the way. We have allies across community organisations, student strikers and youth, business, local government and hapū. Our alliances are formed on the basis of shared values and vision for Taranaki's future. Our alliances are deep when we focus on future generations – our tamariki and mokopuna. That is what drives our mahi and forms our bonds.

For the local lead group, the majority would say our key drivers are opportunities for investment, jobs and government policy. But we are innovating within and beyond those spaces to look at other models to ensure a just transition. Because this is not just about those directly affected in the extractive industries – it's about all of us here. If we are going to redesign our economy, we need to understand the views of the people who are most disaffected by our current economy: unemployed (or unpaid) workers, youth, hapū, low waged, women, people of colour. If we have an opportunity to steer our region in a better direction, then why not design something where no one is left behind?

That kind of system takes resources, so innovating around worker and community investment initiatives will be important as well as investment in local job creation.

What could a just transition look like for a union member directly linked to extraction? It could look like early retirement and payout of full superannuation. It could look like fully paid, fully funded retraining programs locally to have a seamless transition into low emission local jobs. It could look like replacing a percentage of annual income with reduced days/hours of work and shares in the company. If we are going to have a just transition in the next decade, all options need to be on the table for all parties, and workers need to be materially resourced and empowered to design their own transition.

But our work goes beyond what happens to individuals currently in our Taranaki industries, because our view is longer term: Taranaki 2050 (and beyond). So we need to invest in all levels of education to ensure the workers of tomorrow have a say in designing what work looks like for them. Does it look like maintaining incomes (or at least living standards) but only working 20 hours per week, and volunteering 20 hours per week in civics and your local community? What social safety nets need to support such a radical change to how our society views work and functions?

Fundamentally, our approach has been to look beyond supporting individual union members because our societal and economic transformation will directly and disproportionately impact children who are now in school or who haven't been born yet. But if we leave individual workers behind, then we are undermining our kaupapa. So both elements are interdependent.



# Time

## Sean Hindson, E tū delegate

We have time, right now – we all have time. I say this because we have time in the form of the moment we are in together; right now.

It's the 'right now' that we all share, regardless of our beliefs, our fear, our worries, our hopes or our views on the world.

We can take this 'right now' to acknowledge that we are vulnerable, acknowledge that we have made mistakes, acknowledge that we have to (not need to) but have to, come together.

The planet we belong to is screaming at us, demanding change. It is showing us through fires, typhoons, flood and storms that we have to change. The planet is demanding change, it's demanding it because it too is vulnerable.

Being vulnerable, as we and the planet are is the catalyst for change.

I have been in discussion with people who deny the fact that the world is changing. I have had the 'what ifs' thrust upon me. I have had my conversations cut short by those people who refuse to acknowledge the absolute certainty that the impact of humans has transformed our earth.

These people seem to be strong momentarily but are essentially oblivious to the change that is required by us all to enhance the lives of the generations of youth that we will entrust this earth to.

Those of us that are aware of our collective vulnerability are the humans already forging greater change, fighting by looking inwards and having an awareness of the fear we all have, shifting the way we think and allowing ourselves the courage to think differently.

Take a moment to think about the courage it takes, undiluted courage to know that vulnerability is a strength.

The first steps are already being taken around the world, in New Zealand the Just Transition was, in my mind an acknowledgment of that vulnerability that can be such a strength.

So where do workers and people tie into this?

At the foundation, at the core, workers are the ones who will essentially have the power to change these mindsets.

We have to change ourselves. It is painful to look in the mirror, acknowledge our faults and be true to ourselves and each other.

Workers mostly have more to worry about than the long term future. When we work together, truly work together, we shift those mind sets, force those businesses that do not allow workers to have standards of living that afford them the ability to think compassionately about more than just the immediate future... then we shift the world.

That is the key.

Workers in our regions should be in a position where they can think about the long term future while acknowledging and appreciating the moment they are in.

This ability comes with equal standards of pay, training and that most precious of assets... time. Time to share moments with community, family and friends. Time to converse and be open with those that surround you.

I personally reckon we have known this for a very long time, my question is why has it taken so long for businesses to allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to care in a truly honest and deep way?

After all, time marches on for businesses too. No one is exempt from the effects of what we are doing to our ourselves and our environments, because our environments are, in the end, ourselves.

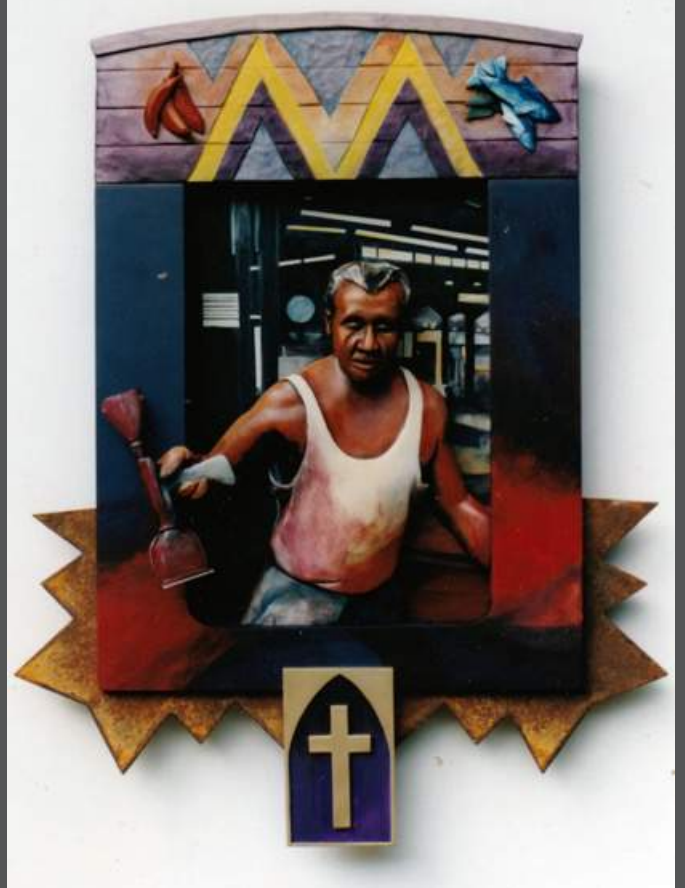
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# Art in Working Life - the sculpture of Phill Rooke

## Paul Maunder



Walter Benjamin in his famous essay *The Author as Producer* stated that the socialist artist, rather than just saying the right thing or exhibiting the right tendency, must change the means and mode of art production. It is, from this point of view, useless to be producing 'revolutionary' works for the middle class gallery or the middle class bookcase. Instead the mode of production must be collectivised and situated within the workers' economy and social life. This is often not well understood in left circles.

It is worthwhile then to celebrate the work of Auckland-based artist, Phill Rooke, who worked for an initial period as an art in working life artist in the UK and then in Australia, when there were, unbelievably, for a period, arts officers attached to trade unions. Phill worked in factories, studying the movements of the workers and then, in dialogue with them created sculptures, before funding for that field dried up with the arrival of the New Right.



Arriving in New Zealand in the 1990s, Phill then turned to working within geographic communities, creating works that often told the history of that community, with an emphasis on the contribution made by the working class. These works would then be permanently displayed in a communal space e.g. the Grey Lynn Community Centre.

Unfortunately funding for the community art field was also marginalised when the NZ Arts Council was restructured in 1994. From there it has all been creative industries with an emphasis on tourism, corporate partnerships and the art sector as a PR arm of government.

Phill now creates icons for the individual buyer.

But his work continues to celebrate the physical process of the working person, that ability, past and present, to create and to alter, the physical world in which we live. Of course, the natural environment is the wider context in which this human physical activity takes place. As part of this paradigm there is the physical creation of the work of art; the sculpture or painting or drawing being the work of the artist as worker.



This celebration of process has a strong spiritual quality, a wonder and an awe, in the same way that the painting or sculpting of the nativity, as a celebration of God becoming part of the physical world, is filled with wonder and awe.

Rooke's later sculptures accordingly have the physical shape and presence of the icon.

But, of course, while the working person creates and alters the physical world, under capitalism, the fruits of his or her labours are owned by the capitalist, and this is the source of the revolutionary impulse. In the same way that Christ was rejected and his physical presence murdered, this being the subject of religious art, the worker is alienated from his or her work. There is a resonance here for Rooke; a tension and knowledge that underlies his work, with the natural world often echoing this tension – birds as well as symbolising liberty have the paranoia necessary for survival.

The paradigm behind Rooke's work inevitably involves a critique of the mainstream art world, which celebrates subjective, individualist 'works of genius', which then

become a commodity for the investor. Art is privatised, with criticism a reading for the market, and the creation of importance being a part of marketing. This extended into the cold war, with abstract expressionism, as a movement, being funded by the CIA in an ideological battle against the social realism of the USSR. This has morphed into post modernism as the culture of neoliberalism or late capitalism. Diversity leads to the need for niche marketed commodities, both in the shopping mall and the gallery.

In this global cultural narrative, it is easy for Rooke's work to be marginalised (Marxist, religious and community oriented), a nostalgia, in the same way as the worker or the working class are seen as nostalgic concepts. Yet that is simply untrue. Anyone who works with or closely observes a builder or plumber or sawmiller or digger driver or gardener at work will see the pride that remains, the pride of making or healing a house or making a road or cycleway or landscape, the pride in making the world a better place. But the tensions remain of who ultimately owns the results of the work.

Accordingly, those basic physical processes that Rooke celebrates, in his icons, constitutes a necessary reminder of what is at stake, both materially, socially and spiritually.

#### IMAGES

1. A mill worker.
2. La Passionara, the celebrated activist in the Spanish Civil War.
3. Polynesian brickmaker, detail from a community sculpture.
4. Sculpture made with workers in a sawmill in Australia.
5. Portrait of Nurse Una Wilson, a NZ nurse in the Spanish Civil War.
6. Detail of sculpture.
- 7-8. Images from a project on an oil rig.



## Reviews

Greg Patmore and Shelton Stromquist, eds., *Frontiers of Labor: Comparative Histories of the United States and Australia* (University of Illinois Press, 2018)

Reviewed by Ross Webb

The genres of comparative, transnational and global histories have seen an emerging popularity in the last decade, especially among scholars in the field of settler-colonialism. While labour historians have arguably always had an international outlook when addressing topics such as labour, radicalism and socialist networks across the old and new worlds, the field has developed in new ways that inform more recent labour scholarship. This edited collection, from Illinois University Press' 'The Working Class in American History', bringing together US and Australian labour historians, as well as one New Zealand scholar (the Labour History Project's own Peter Clayworth), adds to this emerging literature. The collection emerged out of a series of conferences: the Labor and Working-Class History Association (LAWCHA) conference held in New York in 2013 and a 2015 conference in Sydney. As a New Zealand reader, I constantly thought of the parallels that the New Zealand story could add to this collection. And outside of Clayworth's piece, New Zealand features rarely in this book. This is understandable, given the focus.

The editors of the collection, the Australian Greg Patmore and US historian Shelton Stromquist explain that the two nations had long been recognised as "fertile fields for comparative histories"; these are frontier societies, with considerable natural resources and no feudal heritage. "Their patterns of European settlement at the expense of indigenous peoples", Patmore and Stromquist write, "their early colonial heritage, the imprint of Anglo-Saxon law and custom, and the development of liberal democratic institutions are obvious points of comparison. Transportation and extractive industries of continental scope played a significant role in the economic development and class formation of both (1)." The editors also note the significant divergences: the composition of their working-classes, labour relations and politics. Yet the focus of this collection is on the "transnational influences that cross-fertilized the histories of the two countries (1)."

Patmore and Stromquist introduce the book with a sweeping and highly readable overview of both the labour historiography of each nation, the key developments in transnational history and, importantly, the similarities

and differences in the trajectory of each nation's story of organised labour, capitalist development and politics. They note, for example, that the long period of industrialisation in the US was marked by intense and violent class and race polarisation, which they see as a "by-product of its legacy of slavery and an employer class determined to resist unionization." Meanwhile, while such conflict was also a feature of Australia as its economy industrialised, its working-class was less racially/ethnically diverse and it benefited from an early system of government-regulated arbitration. Such a system "provided a degree of security for most organised workers and a measure of relative industrial peace that was largely absent in the United States." Yet the two nation's historical trajectories begin to converge to some degree in the period after the Second World War, the editors note, and especially in the period after the 1970s when the state, supported by employers, pursued neoliberal economic reforms that saw sharp reduction in the bargaining power, size and the political influence of organised labour.

The book covers an enormous amount in a short space. Divided into six sections, each including from two to four essays, the collection addresses repression and political countermobilization during the Great War, varieties of labour coercion, ethnicity and class identity (with a focus on Irish diaspora), working class collective action and labour regulation, economic democracy and working-class institutions, and transnational working-class politics. Part 1 focuses on the First World War and is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the war during the centennial years. Robin Archer explores opposition to compulsion, while Verity Burgmann and Jeffrey A. Johnson detail the experience of the far left and opposition to the war more generally. Burgmann and Johnson conclude that on both sides of the Pacific, "those who sought to keep the working class out of the trenches suffered greatly for their principles." They also note that these were transnational movements from the beginning, yet "they could not escape their nations" and the circumstances of the countries in which "they propounded their views provided the parameters that shaped the antimilitarist campaigns they conducted." Thus, the US antimilitarist movement operated in a country with weak labour laws and an immensely powerful military industrial complex, while the labour movement in Australia was in a far better position, industrially and politically to challenge the war time state. Following on from this, Shelton Stromquist looks at

municipal and socialist politics during the war, while Diane Kirby details the role of women in wartime law-making and the prosecution of dissenters. Once again, in the story of resistance to conscription and war, the New Zealand comparison continued to come to mind. Ryan Bodman's work on the passive resisters' union or Jared Davidson's work on wartime censorship are ripe for comparative histories in this collection.

Part 2 details coerced labour from the early settlements of each country—including indentured service, convict labour and slavery—to late twentieth century union avoidance in the meat industry. Jennie Jepperson's essay is particularly interesting, examining indentured servitude in Virginia and convict labour in Australia. Marjorie A. Jerrard and Patrick O'Leary's essay on union avoidance in the meat industry details the various anti-union strategies in an industry known for poor working conditions, low pay and not so cordial relations between management and trade union; they note the 'convergence' between the US and Australian meat industry. Jerrard and O'Leary note the attempts to restrict or avoid trade union influence by shifting plant locations, using alternative workforces, manipulating the regulatory environment, and developing alternative labour restriction practices. Once again, the comparisons with New Zealand's meat industry are strikingly similar. Part three of the book details the Irish diaspora and class identity. Elizabeth Malcolm and Dianne Hall detail the role of Catholic Irish in the Australian labour movement, while James R. Barrett focuses on Irish Americans in the labour movement. These scholars note the divergences, especially on the context of Irish republicanism. Support for the movement was strong in the US, while in Australia the ties to Britain remained a complicating factor.

Part four and five focuses on collective action, regulation and institutions. Bradley Bowden and Peta Stevenson-Clarke explore labour conflict on the railroads in Queensland and the Northern US plains between the 1880s and 1900 while Nathan Wise's piece 'Comparative Mutinies' looks at war service as work in the Marine Volunteers Infantry Regiment, 1863, and the Australian Imperial Force, 1918. Scott Stephenson's essay, entitled 'How to Build a Trade Union Oligarchy', details the process of union bureaucratisation, and the inhibiting of the formation of strong occupational communities and union democracy. Analysing the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Australian Workers Union (AWU),

Stephenson explains that each "tied themselves to a moderate reformist political party and a system of peaceful industrial bargaining that did not involve ordinary members", while the leaders "became a new elite, with more in common with the employers, than with the workers in their own unions." Also in this section is Benjamin Huf's exploration of the relationship between labour and welfare during the "liberal hegemony of the 1930s", and Greg Patmore's and Nikola Balnave's essay on consumer co-operatives.

Finally, Part five looks at transnational working-class networks and connections by tracing the story of movements and people between Australia and the US (as well as New Zealand), from anarchist movements to the lives of key figures such as Patrick Hickey, as told by Peter Clayworth, to Harry Bridges, as told by Robert Cherny.

There are, however, several topics that are noticeably absent. The topic of gender, the experience of women (outside of Diane Kirby's essay), indigenous people, immigration and the history of African American, Chinese and latino workers. Moreover, the focus is heavily weighted towards the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Outside of Jerrard and O'Leary's piece on union avoidance strategies in the Australian and US meat industry, there are few essays that stray into the 1970s. While the editors note in the introduction the differences in the period before 1945 and the convergence after 1945, as both nations pursued market reforms, this is not a theme developed in the essays. Indeed, alongside the story of union decline and neoliberalism, each nation has a story of rank and file resistance in the 1970s, political activism (such as Peter Cole and Peter Limb's excellent work on organised labour and the anti-apartheid movement in the US and Australia), and the turn towards the 'organising model' among retail and service workers. We need more work on these topics. But, as the editors note, the book only "scratches the surface of the rich possibilities awaiting transnational and comparative research."

Overall, the book avoids a common feature of some edited collections that emerge from conference papers: the feeling that the essays are scrambled together without much of a thread throughout. This is not the case for *Frontier of Labor*. A strength of the book is the way the editors group the essays into themes and pull together these themes in both the introduction and conclusion.

The introduction provides a broad sweeping overview of each nation's labour history trajectory while the conclusion addresses the major question that hangs over all comparative histories: why compare? What do we learn from comparison? 'Comparative history provides an opportunity', write the editors, "for scholars to move beyond national boundaries and reflect on their own societies in new light (347)." This is a thought-provoking book that raises many important questions. New Zealand scholars should join the conversation.

Jared Davidson, *Dead Letters: Censorship and Subversion in New Zealand 1914-1920* (Otago University Press, 2019)  
 Review by Matariki Roche and Emma Jean Kelly

This incredible book almost makes you wish that Thomas Pynchon's secret underground (and fictional) postal service from his novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) actually existed. In Pynchon's alternate universe, the letters of the colourful characters that feature in Jared Davidson's *Dead Letters* could have been received by lovers, mates, friends and comrades. But the irony, not lost on Davidson, is that without a censorship which operated extensively during wartime, and after, and the state's interception of these letters, we never would have met the Andersons, dairy farmers writing Bolshevik poetry, the pigeon thought to be carrying secrets, or Marie Weitzl, one of the "only Germans among the worms."

The censorship and surveillance of British mail had deep roots, going back to the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century a number of British citizens complained to the authorities when they learned that their mail was being read by the Chief Censor. Some believed as British subjects in New Zealand this should not be able to happen, and that it would not happen if they were at 'home.' In general however, people appeared to trust that their mail would reach its destination without being tampered with – and this is itself an interesting aspect of the thinking of the populace at that time, where war regulations allowed the government enormous powers to interfere in the lives of private citizens, whether that be to insist they fight in the First World War, to regulate their relationships or to ensure they did no damage to the apparatus of the state.

And despite this, there is a feeling of uncovering treasure in this book. Davidson clearly feels that charge of

electricity as he uncovers each new gem from the archive of censored letters which were never delivered. As an archivist himself, Davidson has an intimate knowledge of the materials kept in the government records system, and he has a talent for bringing these dead letters to life.

Many of those surveilled were aware that censorship was in practice, and tried various ways to evade the authorities. Invisible inks were made illegal at this time, but Davidson describes baking soda being used as a homemade version of invisible writing material. The postal service was the only way for these people to communicate with loved ones and colleagues. It is difficult perhaps for many people to imagine only one way to communicate with friends who were not in your immediate vicinity; and that your relationships could be directly impacted upon by the state which chooses to censor and surveil its citizens.

For example, Davidson describes the story of Hjelmar Dannevell, naturopath and supposed cross-dresser, who was interned on Somes/Matiu Island as an enemy alien. It was accusations from a society primed to scapegoat, coupled with letters from society women in which their affection for her is clearly stated, that led to her incarceration. Her internment on Somes/Matiu Island lasted only two months before she suffered a breakdown of some description. Prior to this she was a doctor at the Lahmann Home, Miramar, a naturopathic and holistic centre opened by Prime Minister Massey himself two years before the outbreak of war. A fear of lesbianism and independent women was intense at the time, as Davidson writes:

"Not long after Hjelmar's arrest, such a stance was taken to the extreme in Britain when MP Noel Billing claimed that Germany possessed a 'Black Book' of forty-seven-thousand English men and women' involved in lesbianism and other so-called deviant acts. According to Billing, the British Empire was about to collapse from within – one blackmail at a time. Billing argued that 'in lesbian ecstasy the most sacred secrets of State were threatened' (174)."

Davidson is an extraordinary researcher; he has found out everything he can about each of the subjects he focuses on in the book. Each chapter covers a particular letter, or set of letters, and then describes and examines the life of that person as an individual, but extrapolates to wider movements and practices of the time. The



Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies as they were commonly known), the Federation of Labour (Red Feds), German socialists, working-class unionists, Irish Nationalists and anarchist booksellers all feature in this book, which seeks to tell the story 'from the bottom up' of working peoples' experience of censorship.

This is a work with a careful feminist methodology. Davidson ensures that women's experience of war, of work, of family life and politics is not just nodded to but focussed upon through the stories of Hjelmar, Marie Weitzel, a farmer, mother and activist, and Laura Anderson, a middle class and educated woman who chooses to live and work as a farmer in Swanson with her husband who is prone to utopian visions. It is Laura's letter to a cousin which opens the chapter on her and her husband's lives. Davidson asks:

"What did Laura make of Carl's revelations? How did it affect their relationship? It's clear she was a loyal scribe, for it was Laura who wrote out reams of Carl's poetry into bound volumes that survive to this day...Was she playing her role as a faithful wife, as was expected of her, or was Laura a fellow traveller – and not just in the communist sense? (234)"

One of the most charming things about this serious and wide ranging volume is the small detail which Davidson includes. For example, the fact that to this day the track to Carl and Laura's farm in Swanson is still called 'Anderson's Track', or that he and his family cleaned the grave of Auckland watersider, Berthold Charles Richard Matzke, who was interned and died at Featherston Camp, because he and his wife Florence had no offspring of their own to maintain it for them.

Davidson offers an opportunity to consider the past, how the state has and does surveil its citizens, what that means for working class people in the past and the future, but also creates the space for us to consider what else might be in the archives, just waiting for the right person to bring the past to life. This is labour history at its best, joyful and also respectful of those whose lives are revealed here. Davidson contacted families to ensure they were aware of his project, and in some cases they were able to see letters he had found which they never knew existed. Some offered him articles and other pieces of information he would not have otherwise seen. And some even came to the book launch on 7 March 2019 at Unity Books in Wellington; there can be no better

endorsement for a flaxroots history than the families of those described being there to support the author of such a rich and fascinating volume.

After the terrorist attack on two Christchurch mosques on the 15 March 2019, some of the very questions raised by this book regarding letters written one hundred years ago are still present and pertinent. New Zealanders were sending about 6 million letters per week during the period 1914-1920 – an extraordinary amount compared to today, yet Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and other social media platforms as well as more traditional email formats will be proportional in ensuring many millions of communications each year. But who decides which letters, topics or people are surveilled and who are not? At the Wellington Vigil held for Christchurch on 17 March 2019 at the Basin Reserve in Wellington, a speaker pointed out that the Linwood Mosque congregation had been surveilled by the New Zealand Government for twenty years while white supremacists were not. While in the early twentieth century it was Irish Nationalist, Mori, unionist, working class and opinionated women who were being surveilled. If the censorship of white supremacists with dreams of racial purity and murderous tendencies were a priority at the time, perhaps the history of the twentieth century may have been quite different.

Lola Ridge, with an introduction by Michelle Leggott, *Verses* (Quale Press: US, 2019)

Reviewed by Mark Derby

Poetry appears rarely in this publication, but it was once a constant feature of New Zealand periodicals, including those of the labour movement. Comic verses, satirical jingles and uplifting odes appeared in papers such as the *Maoriland Worker* as well as more mainstream dailies and weeklies. Labour leader Harry Holland published a collection of his (albeit somewhat mediocre) verses under the title *Red Roses on the Highway*. They read quaintly to us today but were evidently meaningful to a working population that cherished literacy and its promises of a freer and finer future.

Around the dawn of the twentieth century Lola Ridge, a young Hokitika woman married to a hard-drinking goldminer, began writing her way out of a life she found narrow and dissatisfying. She fired off poems and short stories, sometimes illustrated with her own drawings, to

various NZ and Australian periodicals, one of which, the *Sydney Bulletin*, survives to this day. Her subject matter, typically, was the bush and mountain landscape that surrounded her, affairs of the heart, lost or dying children, and spiritually inflected epics of nationhood ('On Zealandia!') She also wrote several 'Songs of the Sluicers'; poetic observations, sometimes in dialect, of her local goldmining community.

To my uninformed ear, their thumping rhythms, earnest rhymes and often grandiose vocabulary and images place these verses in a sentimental late-Victorian tradition that I find dated and difficult to appreciate. In their own day, however, they were widely published and much admired, and their author was ranked among the best of her Antipodean contemporaries.

With her sights set on wider cultural horizons, in 1905 Ridge packaged up more than 40 of her poems and posted them to AG Stephens, the influential literary editor of the *Bulletin*, for publication as a book. These handwritten works were then typed, edited and annotated, and followed Stephens from office to office throughout his career, but the collection remained unpublished at the time of Ridge's death in 1941.

This posthumous edition, from a small and experimental US press, is based on typescripts held among Stephens' papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. It benefits greatly from an astute introduction by Michelle Leggott of Auckland University's English Department. This is sprinkled with occasional Eng. Lit. terms ('holograph', 'Imagist') that I understood only dimly, but provides a very insightful and valuable guide to these otherwise stylistically challenging works.

As a recent biography of Ridge (reviewed in the LHP *Bulletin* 73, August 2018) makes clear, she was in no way deterred by Stephens' failure to publish her early work in book form. With startling determination and self-belief, Lola Ridge escaped New Zealand in 1907 for more propitious locales. Along the way she abandoned her first husband, their child and much of her former identity, including her New Zealand upbringing. She eventually established herself in New York in the centre of a thriving cabal of anarchists, freethinkers and avant gardists of the arts and letters. The poems she wrote and published there were unrhymed, daring in form and vehemently radical in content, and to me they still sound thrillingly modern.

Lola Ridge is gaining a posthumous reputation that matches and even exceeds the one she held in her lifetime. A new biography is appearing soon and may help to clarify why she eventually repudiated the years, from about age four to 24, that she spent in New Zealand. Until then, this collection of her early verses establishes that those years were nonetheless vitally formative for a powerful and original writer developing her craft. We must be grateful to Michelle Leggott for her persistence in championing this long-unheard but highly distinctive and trenchant poetic voice.

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:

Individuals: \$30

Institutions: \$75

Membership is valid for the financial year 1 April – 31 March. To pay online, our bank account details are:

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